

A PRIMER TO CATALOGUING QUEER MATERIAL
-QAMRA experience



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INTRODUCTION

This primer has been updated in 2025 with an addendum, to reflect that we are changing our way of working because we are implementing ArchivesSpace, an open source web-based archives information management system. We have decided to adopt ArchivesSpace as it will allow us to create online, linked finding aids with which we will make our material more accessible. This means that we lose a little flexibility in terms of cataloguing, as ArchivesSpace has rules that follow the DACS.

Since this primer was first written in 2021, QAMRA has acquired a lot of new material. Each set of material has required different ways of approaching preservation, access, and cataloguing. To give some examples: The litigation papers and courtroom documents, now called the Queer Legal Collection, is currently being catalogued and will eventually be digitized and published online. Because legal documents have a structure and a logic, we are trying to follow that. Sometimes that causes problems with ArchivesSpace; DACS is an American organization and uses American legal terminology, meaning that their controlled value lists do not encompass legal words that we use in India – an example being the word “advocate”. Additionally, legal cases have particular and established citational practices, but ArchivesSpace’s structure does not allow us to create a new searchable field for the names of judges, or alternative ways of citing the cases. There are, of course, workarounds: We are able to use “Note” fields to solve some of these issues. Despite these challenges, ArchivesSpace offers us the major benefit of not only being able to put this finding aid online in an easy and flexible way, it also lets users search our collections through keywords, meaning that hitherto unseen connections between material will be discoverable. We hope that this will lead to new avenues of research, understanding, and access.

While the implementation of ArchivesSpace may seem like merely a new technical challenge, it heralds a new approach for QAMRA: It is giving us a focus on access. QAMRA’s primary work thus far has been, and remains, preservation; the preservation of documents, files, and items toward the preservation of a larger history. We are now expanding our work and energy to also improving access to our material. Though we remain cautious about digitization and access to facsimiles of material for privacy reasons, we hope that expanding access to our catalogues through online access with ArchivesSpace will allow the general public a better insight into what material is contained in QAMRA.

- As archivists, it is not our job to determine how the material we care for is understood. Our vocation is to allow interpretation by others in the present and the future, whose viewpoints we cannot imagine. It is with this in mind that we attempt to expand access to our catalogue, to our methods (by writing this primer), and to our material.

BACKGROUND: WHO WE ARE

The Queer Archive for Memory Reflection and Activism (QAMRA) is a multimedia archival project which aims to chronicle and preserve the stories of communities marginalised on the basis of gender and sexuality in India.

QAMRA aims to aid efforts in queer rights activism and advocacy, as well as acting as a resource base for students, educators, artists, and scholars working in the area of gender and sexuality. As a repository of narratives, its aim is to enable and further conversations around the history, present, and future of the Indian LGBTQIA+ community.

The archive contains a diverse set of materials, including raw video footage, photographs, newspaper clippings in multiple languages, legal documents and notes, and personal artefacts and memorabilia. The materials engage with the notion of history in unique ways, representing not just visible narratives of violence and legal victory, but also capturing deeply personal negotiations with experience and identity. The materials have been collected over a period of close to two decades, by community members, community-run organisations, queer-rights activists, lawyers, and individuals who have participated in or been allied with dialogues on queer-rights.

QAMRA has been envisaged as a primarily physical archive—a space that is dedicated to practices and dialogues around the documentation and preservation of India's contemporary queer history.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Started as conversations with different archives and archivists, this primer has now evolved into a text. Ponni Arasu recognised the need for an Indian queer archive and propelled us on this journey. Between 2017 and 2021, we consulted different documents and persons to come up with a format of archival description unique to QAMRA. Inspiring conversations with historian and activist, Saleem Kidwai, started us off on the process of cataloguing. Further, informing us were the Expert Group on Archival Description (EGAD), General International Standard Archival Description (ISAD(G)) and the Manual for Small Archives. The structure of our catalogue also borrows from that of GALA Queer Archive (GALA), South Africa.

We were also fortunate to visit various types of archives, both institutional and community run archives, and participate in international archiving conferences such as the 13th Forum Expanded at Berlinale 2018 and ALMS Berlin 2019. These conferences introduced us to many Queer and other archives in the Global North. Our thanks to Anuja Gupta, Ashwini Ailawadi and Sujata Winfield for allowing us to catalogue the papers of Siddhartha Gautam. Subsequent discussions included Vivek Divan, around presenting some of the material at the Brudner Prize 2019 memorial lecture held at Yale University and New York city.

We are thankful to the generosity of many archivists who gave us their valuable time and expertise, and feedback on our material. Our sincere thanks to Svati Shah for making these visits happen. A list of archives and archivists visited and consulted is appended at the end of this document

Arvind Narrain, Deeptha Rao VN, Prasoon Joshi, Niruj Mohan Ramanujam and Venkat Srinivasan have regularly dialogued with us, allowing us to articulate our own standards and politics. Multiple volunteers and interns have worked at QAMRA over the years, on whose experience this document rests.

Siddarth S Ganesh

T Jayashree

Shalom Gauri

Bangalore

December 2021

THE PRIMER

This text aims to map the processes employed at QAMRA while acquiring, sorting through, cataloguing, digitising, and curating the collections housed in the archive. It is a documentation of our experiences of working with and preserving archival records under our charge.

QAMRA has been envisioned as a **living archive**—a repository of community memories and narratives that are used to engender conversations through active involvement with scholars, researchers, activists, and the general public. Our responsibility is as much to the present, as it is to the past, and indeed the future. As such, considerations about protecting the material under our aegis are forefront: appropriate techniques of preservation, privacy and consent, security from political retribution, and functionality of digitising.

Diverse multimedia materials constitute the different collections in the archive, each of which are at varying stages of being catalogued (translated as necessary) and curated:

1. **Raw video footage** – shot by T. Jayashree over two decades, chronicles the growth of the LGBTQIA+ movement in Bangalore, and in India, set within the larger context of (her) human rights work. Most of the interviews and events filmed have been transcribed.
2. **Newspaper Clippings** – donated by Sangama, a Bangalore-based human rights organisation defending the rights of working class queer people and sex workers, the clippings were part of Sangama's Documentation Project started in 1999. Articles from newspapers, magazines, and periodicals were snipped from their original publications and pasted onto sheets of paper. A wide range of topics from gender and sexuality to the Narmada Bachao Andolan have been selected from publications in six languages Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Hindi and English. This series is a part of the larger Sangama collection and is undergoing cataloguing and translation.

3. Organisational documents – official documents of the intersectional human rights collective, Sabrang; Sangama and its daughter community based organisations (CBOs) Vividha, Samara and Karnataka Sexuality Forum (KSF), record the development of, and the projects undertaken by non-governmental organisations implicated in the creation and nurturing of a politicised queer community. Items have been identified into separate series within the collection.

4. Ephemera – present across collections, they capture brief instants of vivid memory, both collective and personal. These include posters, pamphlets, brochures, stickers, booklets, fact sheets, schedules and programmes, first drafts of texts; and in the more personal domain, memorabilia and artefacts accumulated by individuals, for example, in the Arvind Narrain Collection.

5. Litigation Papers and Courtroom Documents – QAMRA enjoys the unique privilege of housing the set of official documents, petitions, affidavits, orders, and texts filed as written submissions during the two decade long saga of litigating against Sec 377 of the Indian Penal Code. The entire collection has been catalogued, and is in the process of being catalogued further up to the item level. This collection was received from the office of advocate Jawahar Raja, who was involved in litigating on behalf of queer citizens.

6. Crisis cases – ‘crisis case’ is a term borrowed from Sangama, which refers to the NGO’s involvement in providing emergency aid (legal aid, assistance at police stations, protection of individuals when necessary, human rights counsel) to queer individuals who find themselves in conflict with the state, police, society, family and other individuals. They constitute a set of documents and photos that merit an astute consideration of privacy and access. A mixture of public and private documents make up this collection, which includes FIRs, Witness Statements, Court Orders, Charge

Sheets, Bail applications, letters to police personnel, Police Endorsements, Post-mortem Reports, Cemetery Reports, hand written letters seeking aid addressed to NGOs, Medical Certificates, Legal Notices, and photos of concerned individuals. This collection has been catalogued up to the item level, and will be translated as time permits. Digitising this collection remains a conundrum because of concerns over the privacy of the people represented in the material, and the safety of the material itself.

7. Academic articles – A wide range of scholarly authorship has been donated to the archive by multiple individuals. They are part of a larger collection (example: papers on genital surgery of Inter-sexed individuals are a part of the Arvind Narrain Collection); and form a collection by an individual (example: Rumi Harish's, previously known as Sumathi Murthy, course material). Granting public access to these will involve navigating through copyright regulations.

8. Informational booklets – QAMRA is in possession of booklets published by the Alternative Law Forum, each of which makes legal knowledge accessible to the public. Examples include Right To Love, on the Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India judgment that read down Sec 377 IPC; Towards Gender Inclusivity by Sunil Mohan and Sumathi Murthy now known as Rumi Harish; and, Preamble – A Brief Introduction, on the Preamble of the Indian Constitution.

Each of these sets of material require unique methods of processing, cataloguing and curating. In the following sections, these will be elaborated upon (with examples when relevant) and the hurdles we encountered in theory and praxis.

a. PROCESS OF ACQUISITION

How does material come to be housed in the archive?

An archive can acquire its collections in a few ways. This stage/process is termed **acquisition**. When items are being acquired, special attention is paid to recording all available details about its **provenance**, that is, its origin. This includes information about the chronology of the collection, people involved in creating it, places of origin of the items in the collection, the original order in which the items were placed, and the story of how/why this collection was constituted. This information is crucial to the cataloguing and curation of the collection, and will be fed into a detailed **archival description** of the collection (see section on Cataloguing).

The most common form of archival acquisition is through donation by individuals or organisations. These donations can be of different prefigured formats: on loan for a fixed duration of time after which it will be returned; on permanent loan; transferring complete ownership and copyrights over material to the archive (in case the individual/institute is the author); giving the archive exclusive rights over some of the material and imposing temporal/access restrictions on others.

QAMRA was born out of three nodal collections which pre-existed with individuals and organisations. The need to preserve and make them accessible to a larger public is the *raison d'être* for the queer archive in Bengaluru. For these and other collections that have since been acquired, ownership status is being negotiated. Some of the collections at QAMRA have been acquired on permanent loans; temporal restrictions on the material are being discussed. We recognise that due to the sensitive nature of some of our collections, and in the interest of protecting the identity and privacy of some individuals who feature in the material, we might have to impose restrictions on access until, and even after the right consent has been obtained. For more information on gift/loan deed forms, see our policy document.

Archives can also take an active interest in pursuing individuals/organisations to obtain

material from them for their significance in their respective fields. Thus, archives are actors constantly involved in broadening meanings and systems of knowledge entering their fold. It took a decade of conversations and explication of our positionality to Siddhartha Gautam's sisters before we were allowed access to and the right to archive some of his belongings. Anuja Gupta, Siddhartha's sister, speaking at QAMRA Talks II said, *"personally for myself, how the archives can become a way where I can allow somebody else to remember, and maybe stop remembering in a certain way...because there's a burden to remembering, which I feel I have been carrying—remembering in this very public way. While wanting someone else to take over, I was struggling with the whole issue of proprietorship, of who actually has the right to remember."*

Building on this train of thought, Sujata Winfield, another of Siddhartha's sisters continued, *"what QAMRA is doing, provides a solace in that sense, that here you have people committed both to the memory of Siddharth, but also to the memory of everyone else, like Famila, everyone else who has been a part of the movement, to make everyone aware of it, to make us study how they did their little thing. Letting go of Siddharth's memories to the archive, letting go to somebody who is as involved as they are, we feel that Siddharth's legacy will be safe and move forward as much as is possible."*

QAMRA bears testament to archiving being a responsibility not taken lightly. Being an archive of queer communities constantly challenges us to rethink how multiple narratives can be democratically represented and preserved to contribute towards humanising and rendering history—and knowledge—more subjective.

How to handle a collection once it is at the archive?

This text speaks for the processes at use in a **physical archive**, where the material is preserved; digitising is used as a tool, and is not the telos of archival preservation. Hence, the following sections will not be representative of methods practised in **digital archives**, or **born digital archives**.

Archival standards today fit into a broad international standard. The Expert Group on Archival Description (EGAD) of the International Council on Archives has released a model for description. The General International Standard Archival Description (ISAD(G)) is another text that proposes a standardised method of archival description. The Manual for Small Archives is yet another source that makes archival standards available. QAMRA has consulted these in the process of creating a system of description unique to itself.

The provenance of the collection is the context within which one begins to understand and work with the collection. At QAMRA, our interaction with the material can be broadly classified into five steps:

- ! Physical Sorting
- ! Cataloguing
- ! Preservation
- ! Digitising
- ! Final Arrangement

The material can arrive at the archive in any form depending on its materiality—packed in boxes, documents stashed in files, in a weird jumble where there is no order to it, or neatly sorted and already inventoried by the donors.

b. PHYSICAL SORTING

Physical sorting allows archivists to understand the character of each collection, this is often the first time they're handling the collection in its entirety. Sorting through the material, an inventory is made which forms the crude beginnings of the catalogue of the collection. At this stage, each item is identified and its physical condition noted—information necessary to

prioritise digitisation.

The decision on which order the items in the collection will be placed in is informed by the process of sorting. If the collection has been organised in a specific way by the donor, and this logic contributes to curatorial flow and efficacy of access, the original order is maintained. For example, the Arvind Narrain Collection has been catalogued respecting original order, the arrangement in which it was received by the archive. With the Sangama Documentation Project Series, the items were segregated by theme and organised chronologically within folders. During the process of being packed and transported, the contents of a few folders got jumbled. We decided then to do away with thematic segregation and rearrange the clippings only chronologically during cataloguing.

Sorting allows the archivist to also identify original material from duplicates (possibly) present within collections. A duplicate could be a photocopy of an original item (letters, posters, articles etc.), or multiple 'originals' of the same item (25 of the same posters, 4 signed copies of the same letter etc.). In the former, it is quite clear which the original is, and in the latter, the copy which is in the best physical condition, devoid of damage, is identified as the original. The other originals, and the photocopies are considered duplicates and separated from the main collection. These duplicates can be produced instead of the original when requested for viewing or consultation for research.

While sorting, the collection is inventoried in the archive for the first time. Each item is assigned a serial number within the collection (if applicable. For example, the Sangama Documentation Series has thousands of clippings, assigning serial numbers to which is a waste of time and resources. So, each folder, if it didn't already have a number, was assigned one for identification purposes.), its title recorded, the number of copies of each item noted, and a comment about the physical condition of the items added. These basic points will direct plans of cataloguing and digitising in the future. This inventory is not the catalogue, and only serves

as an index which the archivist refers to until the collection has been catalogued. Often it is hand written.

c. CATALOGUING

The **catalogue** of a collection is a document that records precise details about the collection and the constituent individual items. The catalogue has two main sections—**archival description** and **item description**.

The following is a sample format of QAMRA's Archival Description:

SAMPLE ARCHIVAL DESCRIPTION Sangama collection SD 0001-3 Collection Summary: Sangama is an organisation based in Bangalore, dedicated to protecting the rights of sexual minorities, sex workers and people living with HIV. Elavarthi Manohar established Sangama in 1999 when he was awarded the MacArthur fellowship. Started as a documentation and resource centre, it evolved into a behemoth organisation involved in crisis intervention and HIV/AIDS prevention at the grassroots level while simultaneously supporting the judicial battle against Sec 377 IPC. Empowerment of working class queer persons has been its long-time goal, which oversaw the creation of several Community Based Organisations (CBOs) such as Vividha, Samara, LesBiT, Sadhane, and Karnataka Sexual Minorities Forum. The Sangama collection consists of correspondence, crisis cases, audio and video recordings, the documentation project; financial, administrative, and organisational documents; pamphlets, brochures, press releases, booklets, scholarly articles, and reports collected over the years 1999-2014. Note on the Collection: Sangama's documentation project was involved in collecting articles from newspapers and magazines every day to feed a growing bank of resource material on themes related to gender, sexuality, human rights, and violence. The Sangama Newspaper collection contains everyday news material from regional and national dailies, periodicals, and magazines, preserved in three major languages —English, Kannada, and Tamil from the years 1992 to 2009. This catalogue contains items in the English language only. Scope and Content The collection is arranged in chronological order from 1992 to 2009. The collection was constituted by cutting out articles from their original publications and then pasting them individually on sheets of paper, each of which were then dated. The types of items included are reports, long-form articles, advertisements, op-ed pieces, photo essays, captioned images, television schedules, and literature and cinema reviews. (local and abroad) Scope of material: The collection constitutes a rich database that can be employed for fact checking, conducting surveys and research. The wide array of publications covered provides a substantial textual body for an analysis of the media of the time, to chart the varying attitudes towards issues of gender and sexuality, and their portrayal across regional and national media. (Approximate Number of boxes: 60, Number of files: 300) Subject Topics The Newspaper Collection contains newspaper and magazine clippings across a wide range of topics— Women's Rights, Children's Rights, Caste, Class, Sexuality, Society, Culture, Law, Reproduction, Alternative Families, the Narmado Bachao Andolan, HIV/AIDS, Female Trafficking, Dowry Harassment, Violence, Gender, Economics, Wildlife, Human Rights, Cinema, Art, Literature, Censorship, Rape, Education, Police, and Protests. Administrative Information
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Creator: QAMRA

Provenance: Sangama (sangama.org) This collection is on loan to QAMRA from SANGAMA

Arrangement :

The collection is arranged in ascending chronological order, with separate folders for the months as necessary. The articles are further identifiable by the category assigned to them based on their contents, and the key words associated with them.

The Sangama Newspaper Collection is stored in acid-free boxes. Inside the boxes, the articles are sorted by month and placed in acid-free folders. The original chronological ordering is upheld as much as possible in the arrangement of this collection.

(Box-folder-inside contents; Anything that received special attention that year)

Archival description typically includes:

- ! **Title** – name of collection.
- ! **Date** – Includes **date span** and **date of acquisition**. Date span is the chronological range of the collection. Date of acquisition is the date on which the collection was acquired by the archive. An important piece of information in recording the archive's process of acquisition.
- ! **Catalogued by/ Finding aid prepared by** – the name of the person who catalogued the collection. This can be useful to back-reference the treatment of the collection in the archive.
- ! **Collection summary** – it can be of two types: administrative for organisations, and biographical for individuals. The Sangama Collection has administrative history on the background information of Sangama and their projects; the Arvind Narrain Collection has biographical information about Arvind Narrain and the history of the constitution of the collection.
- ! **Scope of content and material** – the types of material in the collection, and how the collection can be employed in diverse projects.
- ! **Subject topics** – themes and topics covered by the collection and items.
- ! **Restrictions** – if any temporal/access restrictions have been imposed on the collection.

- ! **Administrative information** – creator, owner, provenance, accession number.
- ! **Arrangement** – description of the organisation of the items in boxes/trays/folders/files as necessary. Techniques of preservation can be briefly summarised here as well.

As of now, QAMRA works towards describing every collection up to the item level. Many archives decide not to do so as per their prerogatives. **Item description** aims to record all available information for each individual item. The details included vary depending on the items, but it categorically includes:

- ! **Accession number** – primary identification number associated with each item. It normally includes alphabets and numerals. The accession number of each item is an extension of the accession number of the collection. In QAMRA's system, the alphabets denote the name of the collection/series, and the numerals denote the identification number of each collection/series/item respectively. Though there are guidelines on creating accession numbers, each archive develops its own system, including encoded details about the year of acquisition, type of material, series etc. The accession number should allow every item to be uniquely identified through its alphanumeric composition.
- ! **Pre-assigned number** – identification numbers assigned to collections that haven't yet been processed.
- ! **Date** – the date on which the item was created. Different types of dates can be recorded: for material from events that span more than a day (for example, film festivals) a **date range** is recorded, which could cover anywhere from two days to two months; **incomplete dates** can be of various formats where only the day and month are known but not the year, or only the month and year are known (which is the case for many

publication dates), or just the year is recorded as the date associated with the item.

- ! **Owner** – usually the donor of the collection, unless ownership has been implicitly transferred to the archive.
- ! **Author/Publication** – if relevant to the type of item.
- ! **Title** – name of the item.
- ! **Language** – if any text appears on or with the item.
- ! **Number of pages** – if relevant.
- ! **Number of copies** – of the item, specifies the number of duplicates apart from original.
- ! **Topic** – themes engaged with by the item.
- ! **Key words** – will function as tag words, making the digital searching of the item easier.
At QAMRA, we enter as many key words as identifiable, for example, names of people, places, events, organisations, countries, catch phrases, important themes. Often the key words overlap with the Topic column, but these function as two different levels of informational organisation and the repetition does no harm.
- ! **Physical condition** – a comment on the physical state of the item and whether it needs to be digitised as soon as possible for preservation.

For sample archival and item descriptions, see Annexure A

Cataloguing involves the process of compiling the catalogue, locating each item within its collection and establishing a relationship between the archive and its collections. Cataloguing, Preserving, and Final Arrangement often happen simultaneously as the archivist handles items individually before housing them in the arrangement the collection will be stored in.

Various people working as volunteers, interns and employees have had a part in cataloguing the collections in QAMRA. Cataloguing has primarily happened on the **Excel** and **Word/OpenOffice** software. **Excel spreadsheets** have been our medium of choice for the item descriptions of the humongous Sangama Documentation Series because of its capacity to include 'n' number of rows and columns, making for a better concentration and interpretation of data.

However, Excel has also been the software that threw the most number of bugs at us, hampering our cataloguing efforts and making it more time consuming. While transferring excel sheets from one computer to another, and often from one version of the software to another, the data on the sheets underwent unexpected reformatting and corruption. The most commonly affected were date columns, with data entered for days and years getting changed, by a margin of -5 to +5 days/years. Our chosen date format, dd-mm-yyyy, would also regularly get switched up, with no way of predicting when or why these random changes occurred. The data entered in the text columns, in the title column specifically, became victim to erroneous multiple repetitions within the same cell regularly including sets of random characters. Compiling the master list of the Sangama Documentation catalogue became an arduous procedure with entered data having to be triple checked. To prevent any further corruption of data, a decision was taken to move all the excel sheets to a computer with the latest version of Excel, exclusively on which the final catalogues of this, and other collections would be compiled.

Shalom Gauri worked on the transcription of T. Jayashree's video footage, the following is a note by her on the practicalities of the task:

Transcription is (also) the most time-taking part of the work. Even with the use of Otter.ai software, there were often many edits to be made and the work usually involved repeated rewinding of the recording. In cases where the preliminary transcription had already been done

however, my job was fairly easy and merely involved making minor edits and grammatical corrections to the document.

Word/OpenOffice were the digital tools of choice for compiling item descriptions of collections that were more text heavy and required relatively fewer columns. The Arvind Narrain Collection, the Litigation Documents, and the Crisis Cases Series have been catalogued on Word/OpenOffice. Tables of not more than 5-6 columns and the required number of rows were drawn up to enter data.

The item description of each of these collections has differences responding to the needs of the respective items. QAMRA is an archive of multilingual material, and it comes as no surprise that a 'language' column finds its way into most of our catalogues. For the Sangama Documentation Series this is a vital column, especially so because some of the titles of articles in Kannada, Tamil, and Hindi have been translated into English. On the catalogue, only the English version of their titles features. Any user would need the information in the 'language' column to figure out if they have the necessary linguistic competences to access the original articles. This is also true for the Crisis Cases Collection, where titles from Kannada have been similarly translated into English. On the contrary, the Litigation Documents are all in English, invalidating the need for a 'language' column.

Initially, we thought it prudent to have an 'owner' column for the Sangama Documentation Series. Realising that the column was a redundant repetition of the word 'Sangama', it was clear that there was no mixed or transfer of ownership in this collection. This negated the need for a column dedicated to ownership, whose removal decluttered the excel sheets. Comparably, the Arvind Narrain Collection does not need an 'owner' column as the entire collection is under his unique ownership. The idea of this column can be debated in the context of the Litigation Documents—these are all public documents created by judicial processes ungoverned by personal ownership laws. The collection was donated by advocate Jawahar Raja, but can he

stake a claim of ownership?

Determining ownership of some of the material is an ethical conundrum. 'Third party ownership' takes a new meaning in the archive across material in which an individual is mentioned, but said individual is not the direct owner/donor of the material. T. Jayashree's Video Collection has many interviews in which speakers name and discuss other people. Before making these videos public, we are trying to figure out whether consent has to be obtained from all people mentioned in addition to the speaker. So far, discussions about this with other archivists and legal experts have yielded mixed answers.

The 'key words' column was conceived with the idea that it would help refine searches made through a search engine when the catalogues were made available through an online platform such as ArchivesSpace. Nevertheless, the column has already proved useful during the process of cataloguing. In the Sangama Documentation Series, when we needed to verify data entered, but could not remember the article specifically beyond where it happened or who was involved, a search in the 'key words' column turned out to be an efficient way of identifying the required article.

Shalom Gauri explains her process of compiling key words for the video footage she was transcribing, which became a learning experience for her:

When I began work on this collection, I had only a handful of key words in mind - I knew cases, people, and broad topics would be important to mention and in the first few interviews, listed only a few potential tags. As I listened to more and more of the interviews however, newer patterns and commonalities began to emerge. People were talking not only about 377, Naz and Koushal but also about the "Shyam Divan Moment" in court, generational differences in activism, film festivals and queer theory. I soon required new categories of Place and Organisation names, of Theorists being mentioned and of Landmark moments in the movement. Key wording was however, undoubtedly the most engaging part of the work.

This is indicative of the kind of work key-wording involves across the different collections. As more material is catalogued, newer categories, thematic markers, and phrases (example: violence against women, alternative family, systematic rape, AIDS awareness etc.) were added to the ever growing list.

Our key word construction takes the following syntax:

- ! Singular form of the noun, unless the plural is specifically used, is usually selected as the key word.
- ! The nominal forms of verbs are used, not the conjugated verbal forms.
- ! Prepositions are normally excluded. If they figure in titles or phrases, these are retained unedited.
- ! Every key word is capitalised and separated by commas.

The archival description of each collection was entered on Word/OpenOffice. These usually sprawl over 2-3 pages, and form the first few pages of the same document which contains the item description of collections on Word/OpenOffice. For other collections, the archival description and item description exist as two different documents in different file formats. Usually, we prefer to begin with the item description of a collection which aids the archivist in familiarising themselves with the subtleties of each collection—based on this, a more nuanced archival description can be written once all the items have been catalogued. (For examples of types of catalogues and video transcript, refer to Annexure B.)

At this stage of the process, once the applicable columns have been drawn up to begin the item description, one confronts the assignment of **accession numbers**. The Arvind Narrain Collection would be a good example to call upon to demonstrate how a digitised collection can be organised. Let's say that the accession number of the collection is AN-0000, where 'AN'

stands for Arvind Narrain, and the following 0s are replaced with alpha-numerals to denote individual items. A further layer of information can be added into the number to identify internal series. A **series** can be imagined as a micro-collection within the collection that explores a particular theme/time period in the larger context of the collection. Consider that 9 series have been identified in the AN Collection, each series then would have an accession number of the following format: AN-1S-0000, where the first four characters denote 'Arvind Narrain-1 Series.' Items within each series would be identified by the following four characters.

The first series in the AN Collection has been digitised. The scans of these items need to be linked to them in the catalogue. A simple way of doing this, we found, was to have the file names of each scan be the accession number of the respective item. Since the entire collection has not yet been digitised, we haven't yet added the series code into the accession numbers. For now, they read as AN-0001, for the first item of the first series in the AN Collection. While compiling the final version of the catalogue for these items, the prior 'serial number' column in the item description was replaced with the 'accession number' column. Items, their description, and their digital copies are all distinctly identifiable and interlinked, making dossier organisational imbroglio evitable.

Catalogue could also refer to an **archive's catalogue**, which is compiled by collating the catalogues of its collections. An extravagant archive catalogue might include both archival and item descriptions of each collection. Customarily however, item descriptions are left out of this document for purposes of brevity. Users might be granted access to full collection catalogues upon formal request if they haven't been made available online.

As aforementioned, cataloguing often occurs multilaterally with preservation, digitisation, and final arrangement. Different archives operate these steps variously as defined by their disposition.

ARCHIVSPACE: A NEW METHOD OF CATALOGUING

Addendum to the QAMRA Primer: Implementing ArchivesSpace

This addendum to the QAMRA primer was written by Mira Brunner and Anusha George in December 2025. Its purpose is to document QAMRA's initial experience implementing ArchivesSpace, an open-source, web-based archival database system. QAMRA adopted ArchivesSpace in order to create a searchable, linked online finding aid for its collections. The decision to use ArchivesSpace over other available systems was guided by several considerations: its open-source nature; the ability to host it on a local server rather than in the cloud, ensuring greater data privacy; and its capacity to manage multiple levels of access, allowing QAMRA to catalogue material internally without making all information publicly available.

Working with ArchivesSpace proved to be an extended process of discovery, experimentation, and persistence. The software operates according to a specific internal logic and set of structural assumptions that require close attention. How to use the program is, in theory, fairly simple: For each entry, a set of information must be filled out. These entries can be linked together hierarchically, from collection to item level. This can be done in bulk, using a pre-formatted spreadsheet. Much of the learning occurred through trial and error while preparing bulk uploads, encountering opaque error messages, revising spreadsheets, and repeating the process until records were successfully uploaded.

Over time, it became clear that ArchivesSpace offers both flexibility and constraint. While it allows archivists to make meaningful decisions about how a collection's structure is represented, it also enforces limits through controlled value lists and standards that do not always align with the linguistic or contextual needs of QAMRA's collections. For instance, the legal terminology recognized by ArchivesSpace differs in significant ways from the terminology used within QAMRA's Queer Legal Collection, as the system relies on standards and controlled vocabularies defined by the Society of American Archivists. At the same time, the ability to revisit and revise published records made it possible for the catalogue to improve incrementally, becoming more accurate and robust with each iteration.

This learning process unfolded alongside the work of establishing hierarchical relationships for two major collections: the Maya Sharma and Indira Pathak Collection (MSIP) and the Queer Legal Collection (QLC). Each collection required distinct arrangement and presented different intellectual and technical challenges. Determining how these collections should exist within a larger digital catalogue required sustained engagement with the materials themselves,

careful study of their internal logic and original order, and deliberate decisions about how best to translate that structure into a system that demands clarity and consistency. The ArchivesSpace bulk import template is how this process can be managed. Learning to use it effectively required understanding the sensitivity of individual fields, the relationships between rows, and how minor formatting inconsistencies could cause uploads to fail. Each successful import clarified how the system “thinks,” while each failed attempt prompted closer examination of both the data and the software’s structural requirements.

The MSIP collection entered QAMRA documented but not preserved to archival standards. Before cataloguing could begin, the physical materials required stabilization. Metal fasteners were removed, non-archival folders were replaced, and materials were rehoused in archival-quality storage. Once the collection was physically stabilized, it became possible to clearly identify its internal structure and to organize it in a way that aligned its physical and digital forms. This correspondence ensures that items can be located efficiently through the catalogue. The subsequent phase—arrangement, description, and preparation for digital representation—unfolded over many months. Only after this sustained period of work could the collection be shaped into a form suitable for bulk import. The publication of the MSIP catalogue in ArchivesSpace thus represents not only a completed technical task, but the culmination of extensive preservation and substantial intellectual work.

The Queer Legal Collection followed a more complex trajectory. Originally conceived as the “377 Collection,” focused on Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, it expanded significantly as additional materials documenting broader queer legal struggles were acquired. This expansion required a fundamental reframing of the collection. The original structure no longer reflected its scope, and the existing catalogue had to be dismantled and rebuilt. Materials were renumbered, reorganized chronologically, and placed within a newly developed hierarchy that could accommodate the collection’s broader historical and legal context. Understanding and cataloguing these materials required close reading and interpretation of each case, as well as careful assignment of subjects that captured both legal and social significance. Throughout this process, practical challenges emerged, including missing or misfiled documents, unsorted materials awaiting contextualization, and a structure that had to be reconstructed almost entirely from scratch.

These challenges were compounded by the physical condition of the storage environment. Boxes were damaged or partially empty, silverfish were discovered in the space, and there was a shortage of archival-quality containers. Preservation therefore became inseparable from cataloguing work. New protocols were introduced, including regular cleaning cycles, routine monitoring of insect traps, the placement of silica gel packets in all boxes, and the use of diatomaceous earth along the perimeter of the storage room and within key drawers. These

measures significantly improved storage conditions and allowed the intellectual and technical work on the collection to proceed more securely.

One of the most persistent difficulties in the QLC was the renumbering of EAD IDs. The original numbering system, designed for a much smaller collection, became a source of confusion as the collection expanded. Items appeared in the catalogue but could not be easily located physically, creating difficulties for staff and interns alike. Identifying the source of this problem took nearly six months. Once diagnosed, it required a comprehensive reorganization of both the physical materials and the digital records. The resulting hierarchy is now stable and coherent, allowing the collection to continue growing without repeating earlier structural issues.

At present, the Queer Legal Collection has been catalogued in ArchivesSpace to the subseries level. Item-level description will be completed in the next phase of work, marking a significant step toward establishing a comprehensive archive of queer legal history. Alongside these structural challenges, the collection also revealed linguistic limitations within ArchivesSpace, particularly in relation to how ArchivesSpace keeps track of individuals and their roles; the technical language for these agent relator terms. In several cases, system-supported terms such as “Complainant” were used in place of more contextually appropriate terms like “Petitioner,” while other roles—especially those relating to attorneys, counsel, and advocates—have to be added manually after upload due to the constraints of the controlled vocabulary.

Across both collections, the development of a digital archive has required sustained engagement with materials, systems, and preservation practices simultaneously. It has involved problem-solving at the intersection of content, software, and physical care, while also supporting interns through the interpretive challenges of legal and archival work. The result is a functioning catalogue and an infrastructure that evolves through use, revision, and ongoing reflection on the relationship between technology, history, and the material record.

The implementation of ArchivesSpace has required QAMRA to critically reassess its cataloguing practices. Because the software defines the parameters of data collection and organization, it necessitates both adaptation to and negotiation with standardization. On the one hand, QAMRA must align its thinking with the structures imposed by ArchivesSpace, finding ways to express what we consider important within an existing framework rather than creating entirely new data fields. On the other hand, the system’s limitations require careful navigation in order to represent collections faithfully and make them legible to researchers. This ongoing process of working within and around standardization remains central to QAMRA’s approach to building an accessible and ethically grounded digital archive

d. PRESERVATION

The first and most ancient duty of archives has been the preservation of material relegated to them. Preservation techniques have been evolving as long as the archive has, adapting to every new technological advancement. Contemporary consensus on the propitious preservation techniques for the kind of material at QAMRA rests on **acid-free storage**. Certain steps are taken to care for the material before it is subjected to acid-free storage.

Any corrosive material found in the items are removed. QAMRA contains a trove of documents and other paper-based records which are sensitive to damage caused by the deterioration of binding agents used. Over the two decades these items have already survived, things such as stapler pins, ball pins, and metal paper clips used to hold them together have already rusted and begun to eat away at the paper. As a result, they are removed from archival records upon being spotted. Staples that hold booklets together at the spine have been left in their original place for now, while we debate how these items are going to age in the archive.

A binding agent peculiar to the Litigation Documents are the Treasury tags used to thread together substantial stacks of documents. Some of the metal clips, resembling shoelace aglets have similarly begun to corrode and have been removed. Several other untarnished ones have been kept in place until permanent acid-free storage is made possible for this collection.

Depending on how the items might have been stored by the donors and upon reception by the archive, certain steps might have to be taken to shift items into more hospitable receptacles. We discovered that a certain type of thick plastic sleeve used to hold printed material was fusing together with the paper, eroding layers of fibre and ink from the surface. Any material found in such plastic sleeves were immediately removed and relocated to less erosive plastic sleeves if absolutely necessary.

The Sangama Newspaper Clippings and Organisational Documents were organised by the donor in cardboard folders with a metal filing mechanism inside holding the material in place.

Though advantageous for holding thick stacks of papers, the metal filing mechanism clamping down on the paper made it incredibly fragile. The metal was further prone to corrosion, damaging the material and making the removal of said material precarious. We received more than a hundred such folders full of material which were stacked in a cupboard while awaiting further processing. The following anecdote brings to attention that even temporary storage of material needs to be done with utmost care as the material is prone to damage by unforeseen circumstances.

Following months of inactivity and closure of the archive space during the first Covid-19 Lockdown in 2020, we reopened the cupboard which contained around 30 such folders. The folders and the material inside were riddled with black mould as a result of rain water having seeped into the wall and further into the material inside the cupboard built into the wall. Reacting with haste, all the folders were removed from the cupboard. Wearing masks and gloves, we cleaned the exterior of the folders with a duster to remove as much mould as possible. Next, the damp, mouldy material inside was removed from the folders and the folders discarded. Again with the duster, the documents were cleaned of any visible mould. Then, they were dried under strong sunlight for not more than an hour. Once dry, any remaining mould was dusted off again. The material was then wrapped in used paper to protect their edges and bound using twine to retain the segregation that had been previously achieved by the folders. Much of these documents are still awaiting cataloguing and translation, and have been moved to a better insulated cupboard.

The entire Litigation Documents Collection has been stored in Godrej steel almirahs, along with the Arvind Narrain Collection, and Siddharth Narrain Collection. These provide a naturally moisture resistant and dust free space well suited for archival storage. Many other documents have been placed on open shelved racks and enclosed in plastic sheets to keep them away from the elements.

The hard-drives that contain T. Jayashree's video footage, cables, computers and other electronic equipment at use in the archive have been stored in moisture resistant wooden cupboards. As a multi-generational multi-media archive, QAMRA has audio-visual material on floppy disks, CDs, DVDs, VHS Tapes, and born digital content stored on hard-drives. Already, we have phased out of the technology that can read floppy disks, which begs the question of how technological advancements over the following decades might hamper accessing content on hard-drives. At the moment, QAMRA has the equipment necessary to read old technologies, with the intent of allowing users to experience the material in its native format.

The Sangama Documentation Series, all other printed and handwritten material on paper is naturally of high acid content. This causes the browning of paper and the progressive increase in paper fragility. The objective with such material in our physical archive is to prolong their shelf life as long as possible, and to digitise material at risk of imminent loss.

Extending the shelf life of high acid content material can be achieved by adopting acid-free storage techniques. These include housing the material in folders/boxes made with attention to their chemical composition—they are leached of all their acid content. Depending on the type of material being stored, acid-free boxes/folders can even have a coating of a chemical buffer on the inside, to prevent any chemicals from the material rubbing onto them. Storing in acid-free containers slows down the acid induced breakdown of the material.

QAMRA is building towards full acid-free preservation for the necessary material. This would include around a thousand acid-free boxes and twice, if not more, as many folders. Acid-free material is expensive, and at present needs to be imported. India as yet doesn't have a domestic producer. We are exploring ecologically sustainable and local acid-free options. Presently, only the Crisis Cases Collection, and part of the Sangama Newspaper Collection have had acid-free storage applied to them. For a note on their organisation, See Final Arrangement.

e . Digitisation

Other than content that is digital by nature (video footage), QAMRA has digitised barely a fraction of our collections. This is due to our predilection for being a primarily physical archive, an embodiment of space that can literally and figuratively host conversations and further research. Compounded with this is the fact that sustaining a digitisation drive of all our material requires consistent human and financial resources over extended periods of time. Even with our excellent scanner which is capable of scanning hundreds of pages in a minute, the project will unfold only over months, maybe years. At the moment, Series 1 of the Arvind Narrain Collection has been digitised. Any other digitisation was undertaken to be able display certain artefacts at talks/lectures/events.

Akin to cataloguing, digitisation has been tackled by different people.

Tech specifications of our scanner:

Manufacturer: CZUR

Model: ET16 PLUS

Version: Europe (EU)

Highest Resolution: 4608*3456

The user interface with the scanner is relatively simple and consists of the following steps:

- ! Roll out the black mat, and place the main body of the scanner at the indentation cut out of the mat.
- ! Attach the lights to the main body, about halfway up. This is a delicate step, and the lights click into their port magnetically. The attachment however remains fragile.
- ! Connect Scanner to computer and power source.

- ! Connect finger pad/ foot pad, depending on requirement, from the scanner to the computer. This is not obligatory.
- ! Application 'CZUR Scanner' needs to be downloaded, installed, and the device recognised by it.
- ! Start new scan.
- ! Place objects on the black mat.
- ! It is recommended to manually draw a scanning box around the object on the computer rather than allow the software to control this. This results in better control over the final scan images.
- ! You can use either the finger pad/foot pad to give the command to scan. Or use the button with the camera icon at the pedestal of the scanner.
- ! Each scan is registered as a separate image at this stage, on the Scanner application.
- ! Once scanning is complete, there are a few options to export them as Word (OCR), Excel (OCR), PDF, or TIFF files. In the pdf format—each image can be exported as an individual pdf, all images together as a single pdf, or you can select which images are to be exported together as a pdf. These options are all useful and have been used differently. The third option is the most commonly used, to stitch together separate pdfs of different multi-page/multi-scan items.
- ! Once exported, the pdfs can be found in the destination folder of your choice on the computer.

Note: These steps are for the iOS computers being used in the archive. The steps might vary for other operating systems.

It might be pertinent to explain the choice of the word 'digitisation' in this text over the now in

vogue ‘digitalisation.’ Digitalisation denotes not just a digitisation of material but a transformation into a digital focused interface between the archive and its users. As our priority remains physical interaction with our material and communities in lieu of a digital approach, ‘digitalising’ would overstate the nature of work being done in QAMRA. Nonetheless, this does not mean that we do not aspire towards digitising our physical collections. We will follow a tiered approach, granting online access to our collections as and when necessary/possible.

For an independent archive like ours, one of the major hurdles to digitising is the funding necessary to pay for host servers on the long run. It has become essential that financial planning for archives take into account the high costs of sustaining a web domain and server space. A workaround that surfaces is using open source software and open source web servers. The best ways to avail of these are being discussed among the archiving community in South Asia.

Cataloguing, preservation, and digitising culminate with the final arrangement every collection is placed in.

f. FINAL ARRANGEMENT

The final arrangement of a collection happens at two interdependent levels that function as the **levels of arrangement** and **physical final arrangement**.

Levels of arrangement is a system of classification that defines the organisation of all collections in the archive. The one adopted by QAMRA takes the following format:

Repository

Group

Series

Sub series

File

Item

Adapted from: Manual for Small Archives

This system allows every collection, irrespective of size, to be organised up to the item level. However, depending on the internal order or imposed order of each collection, certain levels of classification can be omitted. Physical final arrangement of each collection corresponds to its preservation needs and adheres to the above outlined levels of arrangement. As determined by the materiality of each collection, the physical final arrangement varies.

An example of this taxonomy from the archive: QAMRA is the *Repository* for all collections. The Sangama Collection is the Manuscript/Record *Group*. We use the word 'collection' to refer to the *Group*. The Sangama Documentation Series is a *Series* under this Collection. Other Series include Crisis Cases, Organisational Documents, and Ephemera. Taking the example of the Sangama Documentation Series, *Sub-Series* are identified based on type of media. Newspapers, Magazine, Periodicals, and Newsletters are the different Sub-Series. The Newspaper Sub-Series is further divided into *Files*. Each year covered is said to constitute a *File*. 1999, a *File*, is constituted of different numerically coded components. 1999AEnglish, 1999BKannada, 1999CTamil, 1999DHindi, and 1999EMalayalam together form the 1999 *File*. Then, each individual article would be identified as an *Item*.

Thus far, mostly English Newspaper Clippings have been catalogued and placed in final arrangement. Chronologically sorted, acid free folders manufactured by Auroville, Pondicherry have been used to separate the months. Some folders contain half a month's clippings and others contain 4 months' clippings, depending on the number of clippings documented from each month. These folders will eventually be organised inside acid free boxes. The idea is that each year will be divided into 4-5 individual boxes. The folders have been labelled, and the boxes will be too. The boxes then can be housed inside cupboards/almirahs/open shelves. Some Kannada and Tamil clippings have also been arranged in a comparable manner though they haven't been catalogued yet. This will make their cataloguing easier as one will not have to bother with placing them in a chronological order.

Final arrangement for the Litigation Documents will involve removing them from the cardboard folders they were sent in and replacing these with acid free folders within boxes. Series have already been identified within this collection, respecting chronology and original order.

The Arvind Narrain collection will be an experiment in figuring out the intricacies of final arrangement for a wide array of materials as the collection contains documents, ephemera, photos, memorabilia and artefacts. We are working under the assumption that the folder-box system might be the most forward approach to this collection as well.

The final arrangement of digital content will mimic a similar application of the levels of arrangement, wherein, they will be placed in Chinese boxed folders on the hard drives. An aspect to the final arrangement of digital content and the digital final arrangement of physical material we are yet to embark upon is that of cross-referencing. We are researching tools that will allow us to cross-reference people, places, events, and ideas present across collections. For example, Arvind Narrain has a collection of his own, is mentioned in interviews by others, shows up in the Sabrang Collection, features in articles in the Sangama Documentation Series,

and appears in some of the Litigation Documents. We plan to develop an approach that can cross-reference across collections and media.

g. T. Jayashree's Video Collection, Series 1: Visual Material of the 377 Litigation Process – Shalom Gauri

I began work on this series in the first week of December, 2020. It is a collection of 51 videos, taken over the span of nine years from 2011 to 2020. The collection includes interviews with lawyers, activists, historians and members of the queer community, as well as footage of meetings and protests that happened along the way. My work involved acquiring, sorting and cataloguing the series. Given the multimedia nature of this collection, the process I had to follow differed somewhat from that of handling physical collections. This primer is a reconstruction of that process as I recall the steps that I took as well as those I wish I had taken while handling the material. It may be broadly classified in four steps:

- Acquisition
- Sorting
- Cataloging
- Preservation and final arrangement

a. Acquisition

In accordance with our archival policy, the first step was ensuring that T. Jayashree had obtained **release forms** from each of the individuals and organisations featured in her collection. Then, a **deed of gift form** was signed by T. Jayashree, giving QAMRA exclusive rights over some of the material and imposing temporal access restrictions on others. Once this was done, special attention had to be paid to recording all available details about the collection's provenance. This includes information about:

- Chronology of the collection

- People involved in creating it
- Places of origin of the items in the collection,
- Original order in which the items were placed,
- Story of how/why this collection was created.

This information is crucial to the cataloguing and curation of the collection, and will be fed into a detailed archival description of the collection later on (see section on Cataloguing).

b. Sorting

As with the sorting of physical material, this stage allowed me to first familiarise myself with the content and understand the collection in all its complexity. I received the material as a set of 33 folders on a hard disk, each containing audio files of particular interviews/events. Some were still in tape format, in segments of 11:54s each, while others had been merged into a single file of one or two hour duration. Some of the folders also had transcripts previously drafted by interns who handled the material before me. The original arrangement was largely chronological, with files of each interview/meeting grouped into folders according to location. See sample below:

1) Voices + Lawyers Int@Sidey's House 2011	Sidey's House 2011	Draft transcript + 7 audio files
2) Blore 2011 377 Case Meeting UTC	UTC Meeting 2011	41 audio files
3) Blore 2013 Osho	Osho Blore, 2013	10 audio files
	Ramki, Chennai 2013	1 complete audio file
	Annirudh + Parents, Chennai 2013	Draft transcript + 1 complete audio file
4) 3/6 Chennai 2013	Mangai, Chennai 2013	1 complete audio file
	Ponni, Chennai 2013	1 complete audio file
	Sunil Book Release, Blore 2013	4 audio files

I began by listening to the clips in each file, completing and editing the transcription where necessary, and also taking notes that would later inform my writing of the item descriptions. This was the main bulk of the work and took considerable time as I had to go slow with each clip, pausing the tape every few seconds to transcribe and take notes. Although I did them simultaneously, this process is probably better understood as three separate tasks:

1. Transcription

This is essentially the process of converting speech from the audio/video files into written text. It can be done manually or through the use of artificial intelligence applications such as Otter.ai. Unfortunately, even with the use of Otter.ai the process tends to involve much manual editing, especially when it comes to names, deciphering accents, and capturing gestures, phrases or implied meaning. In cases where the preliminary transcription had already been done however, my job was fairly easy and merely involved making minor edits and grammatical corrections to the document.

In cases where non-English languages were used, this stage also involved translation into English for which I had help from other colleagues at QAMRA.

2. Taking notes

Given that this collection was to have fairly detailed and comprehensive item descriptions, note taking of salient points and chronology was an absolute must. This greatly aided my later work during the cataloguing stage. In some cases, I also took down quotes - although not all of them came to use, I found that it helped while titling different segments of the interviews/meetings.

3. Creating a draft of keywords

Keywords are assigned to each item in order to aid digital searching of QAMRA's material and to highlight for users the topics covered in each interview/meeting.

It is difficult to finalise keywords in advance before first understanding the material completely, so it helps to maintain a list of all the keywords that come to mind while handling a particular item. I found it useful to be indiscriminate with this, writing down anything and everything that came to mind. This allows you to capture a more detailed picture of the material rather than limit yourself to broad thematic categories.

I created this draft on a google spreadsheet, noting down keywords under different categories. Alongside each keyword, I maintained a column of files names for which these keywords were intended. See sample below:

Topics		Legal References		People	
Keyword	Item	Keyword	Item	Keyword	Item
HIV/AIDS	Voices Lawyers + Osho + Ramki + Bavikatte + Anjali G +	Koushal case, 2013	Voices Lawyers + Osho + Ramki + Aniruddhan + Ponni + GAY + saleem +	Anand Grover	Voices Lawyers + Bhan + Vivek 16 + A&M + G&S + Shyam + Tripti + VD
Sex Work	Voices Lawyers + Ramki + Tripti + Akkai + Chayanika	Naz, 2009	Voices Lawyers + Osho + Ramki + Aniruddhan + Ponni + GAY + saleem + VD	Justice Kirby	Voices Lawyers + Vivek 16 + Shyam + Tripti + VD
Privacy	Voices Lawyers + Ponni + Anjali G + Bhatia + Grover +	Lawrence v Wades Texas	Voices Lawyers + Bhatia + VD	Justice Cameron	Voices Lawyers + Vivek 16 + Shyam + Tripti + VD

These keywords were later finalised during the cataloguing stage.

In retrospect there are a few things that would have saved a lot of time and effort if done at this stage. The first is finalising the transcript format. While the transcript itself is written in accordance with the QAMRA style sheet, it is important also to determine the final formatting of the transcript as well as a few ground rules. The formatting includes concerns such as spacing, use of columns, headings and font. The ground rules include details such as:

1. Including timestamps at one minute intervals
2. Including visual and tonal cues in brackets - e.g: (laughs), (shrugs), (pauses)
3. Indicating use of Non-English language after name of the speaker
4. New paragraphs whenever the speaker changes. Include timestamp, name/initials of the speaker, and use of Non-English language if necessary. - e.g: “01:50:34 Jayashree (in Kannada):”

Finalising these beforehand ensures that a standard is followed for all transcripts.

Similarly there is a need to finalise the video/audio format that will be uploaded. This is important to do at the initial stage because the transcript timestamps have to match that of the audio file being uploaded. You cannot for instance have timestamps referring to tape files of 11:54 seconds each while the final audio file uploaded is a single two hour clip.

c. Cataloguing

Since I was working on a series within a collection, my work at this stage included only item descriptions.

While some archives choose not to include item descriptions at all, at QAMRA we take a call depending on the collection in question. The nature of material, the form in which it will be made available to users, and a realistic appraisal of the amount of work required for detailed item descriptions are some of the factors we take into consideration. With the Sangama collection of newspaper clippings for instance, it was decided that item level descriptions (summaries of each clipping) would be both time-staking and not particularly helpful. A detailed series description and item level key-wording made more sense instead. With the T. Jayashree collection however, given that each interview could be considered a subject of study in and of itself, we felt that detailed item descriptions would prove useful for users.

Item description aims to record all available information for each individual item. The details

vary depending on the items, but it categorically includes:

Accession number – primary identification number associated with each item. It normally includes alphabets and numerals. The accession number of each item is an extension of the accession number of the collection. In QAMRA's system, the alphabets denote the name of the collection/series, and the numerals denote the identification number of each collection/series/item respectively. Though there are guidelines on creating accession numbers, each archive develops its own system, including encoded details about the year of acquisition, type of material, series etc. The accession number should allow every item to be uniquely identified through its alphanumeric composition.

In the case of this series, the accession numbers are TJ (provenance) - AV (form) - 01 (series) - .01 to .51 (item).

Title - either title of the event/protest/meeting or the name of the person being interviewed, along with the year of interview.

For example: 'Interview with Arvind Narrain, 2016' or 'Post Koushal Strategy Meeting at UTC, 2013'.

Date – the date on which the item was created.

Interviewee/speaker – names of those being interviewed/those speaking at the event

Interviewer/host – names of those conducting the interview/hosting the event

Camera - name of those who did the camera work

Place of interview - location (includes building, city, state)

For example: Mangai's House, Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

Format - generally each file contains multiple items in different formats. These are listed here as video, sound, text etc.

Extent - of the transcript and the files.

Language(s) -

Number of copies - of the item, specifies the number of duplicates apart from original.

Biographical information - of those being interviewed/speaking and those conducting the interview/hosting the event. Includes photographs when available.

Physical location - of the original files, based on final arrangement of the material.

Table of contents - brief 2-300 word summary of the interview/meeting or description of the protest/event.

Interview segments - chronological break up of the content along with timestamps to identify each segment. Could include a brief two line summary of each section.

Keywords - will function to categorise the item and aid digital searching. Can include different categories, for instance: Topic, Names, Places, Events, etc.

Finalising the keywords involves reviewing the sheet created in the previous sorting stage. Similar keywords are merged - for instance Cases, Acts, Committee Reports, Judgements were all clubbed under a Legal References category. Spellings and formatting is double checked. And edits are made to each corresponding item description.

The transcripts themselves are also reviewed and edited for grammatical errors, spellings, formatting and translation. All non-English languages are translated and transcribed to English.

A finding aid is created. This includes writing a historical or biographical note regarding the

creator of the material, a brief introduction to the entire series, and a listing of the files in the series, along with item wise keywords.

In the case of this series, we decided to maintain the chronological flow of the original arrangement but break it up into three sub series: interviews, events/meetings, and protests/campaigns. The resulting arrangement therefore looks like this:

- **Group**: “T. Jayashree’s Video collection”

- **Series I**: “Visual Material of the 377 Litigation Process”

- **Sub series I**: “Interviews”

- **Sub series II**: “Events/meetings”

- **Sub series III**: “Protests/campaigns”

- **Files**: 51 in total

- **Items**: refers to each individual audio, video, transcript file.

d. Preservation

Long term preservation of all the video material requires them to be transferred to LTO tapes , which will be done in the future.

h. CONCLUSION

The only generalisation one can make here is that of the importance of catering to the needs of the material. Archival Standards for description, care, metadata, and preservation exist, yet these should be considered guidelines and not mandates. The material dictates all; standards have to be bent to accommodate archival records and not the other way round.

Discussions with other archives have only supported this view, with each archive developing their own semi-unique systems. The biggest hindrance to applying archival standards, especially those of preservation, is funding—only archives backed by financially well off

institutions/individuals have the wherewithal to stick to the rules.

Homogenisation as a by-product of the implementation of archival standards puts the unique identity of each archive at a risk of loss, accompanied by the erasure of distinctive knowledge systems that are employed across cultures. Responding to this is the need to challenge the hegemony of Western archival standards being popularised all over the planet. This leads us to the recognition that archives are not just sites of historicisation but are artefacts of history themselves.

SOURCES

Manual For Small Archives: <https://aabc.ca/media/6069/manualforsmallarchives.pdf>

Expert Group on Archival Description online resources: <https://www.ica.org/en/egad-resources>

General International Standard Archival Description

QAMRA Talks II: <https://vimeo.com/522182423>

GALA Archival Guide: <https://gala.co.za/archive/gala-archiving-guide/>

Interference Archives: <https://interferencearchive.org/our-mission/>

Milli Consortium: <https://www.milli.link/>

LIST OF ARCHIVES/ ARCHIVISTS CONSULTED:

1. Dr. Grame Reid, Founder GALA South Africa & Human Rights Watch NYC.
2. Dr. Birgit Bosold, Schwules Museum, Berlin.
3. Keval Harie, GALA South Africa.
4. Shannon O'Neill, Curator Tamiment-Wagner Collections, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, NYU.
5. Martha Tenney, Barnard Archives & Special Collections, Barnard Library.
6. Zakiya Collier, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, NYPL.
7. Samip Mallick, South Asian American digital Archive. (SAADA)
8. Timothy Young, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University.
9. Bonnie Gordon & Ryan Buckley, Interference Archive, Brooklyn.
10. Michael Simonson, Leo Baeck Institute, NYC.
11. Mary Rader, South Asian studies Librarian, University of Texas, Austin USA.
12. Richard Fung & Kim Tomczack, Vtape, Toronto, Canada.

ANNEXURE A : Sample Archival & Item Description

Archival Description of the 377 litigation Documents:

Section 377 Litigation Collection.

QAMRA

Email: qamraarchive@gmail.com URL: <http://www.qamra.in>

Finding aid prepared by T. Jayashree & Maya Ram (Nov 2019) and Siddarth Ganesh (March 2021).

Descriptive Summary

Creator: QAMRA

Title: Sec 377 litigation

Date Span: 1994 - 2018

Collection Summary: Documentation of the judicial proceedings conducted at the High Court of Delhi and The Supreme Court of India from 1994 to 2018 for the decriminalisation of homosexuality in India by reading down the Sec 377 of the Indian Penal Code (hereafter IPC) as unconstitutional.

Scope and Content : Notwithstanding their status as public documents, litigation papers are not easily accessible by all. This curated collection breaks down the legalese and presents 25 years' worth of courtroom papers in five series (primarily in English) that can be perused by anybody. This collection has unique value to multidisciplinary academic research in legal studies, public policy, queer/gender theory, social movement theory, history, subaltern studies, anthropology, sociology, human rights, psychology/psychiatry, and journalism. It offers an uncensored view of the judicial proceedings that govern citizenship and human rights in India.

The Collection is arranged in five series by type. Series I: Court documents, Series II: Research and writings Series III: Ephemera, Series IV: New paper articles, Series V: Video

Restrictions

Some of the affidavits are redacted, for reference use only.

Details of shelves : 2 Metal Almirahs

Subject Topics:

IPC section 377, Indian Legal system, Homosexuality, LGBTQI, Justice, Human Rights, Law, Advocacy.

Administrative Information

Creator: QAMRA

Provenance: This collection has material in multi media format. The court documents and research material came to QAMRA from the legal offices of Alternative Law Forum, Bangalore and Jawahar Raja's Chambers, New Delhi. The audio visual material is from T Jayashree's Collection, Ephemera and Newspaper articles are from multiple sources comprising of individuals and organisations.

Preferred Citation: QAMRA, Section 377 litigation collection.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged in five series by type. Series I: Court documents, Series II: Research and writings, Series III: Ephemera, Series IV: Newspaper Articles, Series V: Video

Text in quotations at the beginning of the file title means that the original folder and folder title has been preserved. The usage of original folders was upheld as much as possible in the arrangement of this collection.

Series I Court Documents BOX 1 LP 0001A

ABVA

Papers 1994-2001 4 files

The AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan (ABVA), founded in New Delhi in 1988, initiated the HIV/AIDS activism movement in India. In 1991, the group published *Less Than Gay: A Citizen's Report on the Status of Homosexuality in India*, making them the pioneer of gay rights in the country calling for the decriminalisation of homosexuality, and civil rights for all sexual minorities. ABVA filed the first petition challenging the constitutionality of Sec 377 IPC in the Delhi High Court in 1994. This collection is under the ownership of Anuja Gupta, member of ABVA, one of the original petitioners, and founder of RAHI.

Series I Court Documents BOX 2 LP 0001B

Naz Foundation v. Govt. Of NCT of Delhi

Papers 2001-2009 1 box and 5 folders.

Naz Foundation (India) Trust (hereafter Naz) was established in Delhi in 1994, with the aim of working for communities at high risk of HIV infection. Naz reinvigorated the movement to repeal Sec 377 IPC by filing a petition in the Delhi High Court in 2001 calling for the decriminalisation of homosexual intercourse between consenting adults. The Delhi High Court dismissed the petition in 2003, declaring an academic challenge to the law as insufficient locus standi. Naz then appealed to the Supreme Court of India against the High Court's dismissal, and was found by the Supreme Court to have the necessary standing to file the Public Interest Litigation. The case was remanded back to the High Court for reconsideration. The Naz judgment of 2009 is a landmark decision of the

Delhi High Court which read down Sec 377 IPC, stating that criminalisation of consensual homosexual intercourse violated the rights to dignity and privacy, and the right to life and liberty.

Series I Court Documents BOX 3 LP 0001C

Suresh Kumar Koushal v. Naz Foundation

Papers 2009-2013 1 box and 5 folders.

Several Special Leave Petitions (SPL's) were filed by individuals and organisations in the Supreme Court of India, challenging the Delhi High Court's judgment in Naz (2009). Voices Against 377, a coalition of twelve women's rights, child rights and LGBT groups; mental health professionals, academics, parents of LGBTQ+ persons, and Naz presented a united front in support of the 2009 judgment. Affidavits from queer people across the nation were filed by Voices Against 377 to lend weight to their argument. On 11/12/2013, the Supreme Court of India in Suresh Kumar Koushal v. Naz Foundation, decided in favour of upholding the constitutionality of Sec 377, overturning the

Delhi High Court judgment in Naz (2009), thus re-criminalising queer lives.

Series I Court Documents BOX 4 LP 0001D

Curative Writ Petitions in the matter of Naz Foundation v. Suresh Kumar Koushal

Papers, 2014- 2019, 1 box and 5 folders.

Naz petitioners in 2014 filed a curative petition challenging the Supreme Court's judgment in 2013. They persuaded the court to hear the petition in open court with oral submissions. Curative petitions were further filed by mental health professionals (Dr. Shekhar Seshadri, Vinay Chandran, and others) and parents of LGBTQ+ persons (Minna Saran and others). Naz was allowed to withdraw its curative petitions in 2019, in light of the 2018 judgment in Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India which struck down Sec 377 IPC.

Series I Court Documents BOX 5 LP 0001E

Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India

Papers, 2016-2018, 1 box and 5 folders.

Navtej Singh Johar, Sunil Mehra, Ritu Dalmia, Aman Nath, Keshav Suri, and Ayesha Kapur, filed a new writ petition in 2016, challenging the constitutionality of Sec 377 IPC. On 6/08/2018, the Supreme Court of India in Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India decided that certain portions of Sec 377 IPC were indeed unconstitutional. The judgment reinforced the idea that LGBTQ+ individuals were full citizens under the law.

SERIES II Research & writing LP 0002

Collection: Section 377 Litigation Collection.

Series II: Research and Writing

papers, articles and book chapters.

The arguments presented both for and against the decriminalisation of homosexuality in India during the judicial proceedings were constructed on meticulous research. This collection contains the diverse material drawn upon to elaborate their arguments in court: academic articles, research papers, surveys, books, reports, judicial precedents, news coverage, medical and psychological research, international accords and guiding principles, corporate employment policies, and hand written research notes. The collection reveals the nuances of preparing the written and oral submissions for court.

This collection is contained in 1 box and has 72 items.

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Sample of Item Description from 377 Litigation Collection:

	SERIES 1: Court Documents		2001-2009
	BOX #2: Naz Foundation v. NCT of Delhi (Delhi HC and SC)		
File #	ITEM	Page Number	DATE
1.2.1	Petitions		
1.2.1.1	WP No. 7455 of 2001 filed by Naz Foundation Volume 1		2001 - 2005
	Writ Petition	1 - 74	
	Application for impeachment (JACK)	75-107	
	Application for summoning petitioner for cross-examination (JACK)	108-184	
	Counter Affidavit of Respondent No. 5	185-188	
	C.M. Number 10822/04		
	Application by JACK asking for the name of their advocate Ravishankar Kumar to be added in the orders of 02/09/04	189-208	
	Petitioner's Application for review	213-236	
	Application by petitioner for change in authorised representative/change of address etc	237-243	
	Miscellaneous applications by Petitioner	244-249	
	Reply affidavit of respondent nos. 4 and 5	250-253	
	Amended Memo of parties	254-255	
	Additional affidavit of JACK	256-278	
	Rejoinder affidavit of JACK to the reply filed by NACO	279-310	

1.2.1.2	WP No. 7455 of 2001 filed by Naz Foundation Volume 2		2006
	C.M. Number 12505/06	311-424	
	Application under order 1 rule 10 on behalf of BP Singhal		
	Rejoinder to counter affidavit of Respondent No. 5 on behalf of the petitioner	425-444	
	Rejoinder to counter affidavit of the intervener JACK	445-469	
	List of documents filed by JACK	470-479	
	Counter affidavit of BP Singhal	480-593	

ANNEXURE B : Sample Catalogue and video transcript.

i. Sangama Documentation Series Catalogue (on Excel)

A30											
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1	Accession Number	Pre-Assigned Number	Type of Writing	Publication/ Author	Date	Title	Language	Topic	Key Words	REMARKS	DIGI-Y/N
2											
3			Newspaper clipping, Image	Bangalore Mirror, Sheela Ramanathan	03/03/2009	Pickles in the spring time	English	Food & Beverage, Business, Culture	India, Mumbai, Food, Culture, Mango Pickle, Yadu Manga, Business, Pickle Tycoon		
4											
4			Newspaper clipping, Image	The Times of India (Bangalore)	03/03/2009	Women ask top cop to act	English	Women, Society, Gender, Protest, Police, Violence, Education, Law	inisa, bangalore, Karnataka women's Forum, Samanatha Mahila Jagriti, Fearless Kamataka, Farnaz Wahid, Taslim Zakib, Mount Carmel College, Commissioner of Police Shankar Bidari, Women, Public Safety, Violence Against Women, Protest		
5											
5			Newspaper clipping, Image	The Hindu (Bangalore)	03/03/2009	'Provide safety to women'	English	Women, Society, Gender, Protest, Police, Violence, Education, Law	inisa, bangalore, Karnataka women's Forum, Samanatha Mahila Jagriti, Fearless Kamataka, Farnaz Wahid, Mount Carmel College, Alternative Law Forum, Aarti Mundkur, Commissioner of Police Shankar Bidari, Women, Public Safety, Violence Against Women, Protest		
6											
6			Newspaper clipping, Image	DNA (Bangalore), Vaishali Chandra	05/03/2009	Attacks spawn a web of fury	English	Women, Society, Gender, Protest, Police, Violence, Education, Law, Internet	Kolkata, Kamataka Women's Forum, Samanatha Mahila Jagriti, Fearless Kamataka/ Nirbhaya Kamataka, FK/NK, NGO, Jasmeen Patheja, Blank Noise, Mount Carmel College, Commissioner of Police Shankar Bidari, Women, Public Safety, Violence Against Women, Protest, Take Back The Night, Attacks on Women in Kamataka Petition, Bisakha Datta, Eve-Teasing, Solidarity, www.beware.in		
7											
7			Newspaper clipping, Images (2 articles)	DNA (Bangalore) Anantha Subramanyam, A. Veeramani, Mohan Kumar B.N., Selvaprasadh L., Preetha S. Kumar	09/03/2009	(1)Safety in Numbers (2)How Bangalore's women reclaimed the night	English	Women, Gender, Protest, Violence, Police, Human Rights, Culture, Society, Theatre	International Women's Day, Sexual Harassment, Gendered Violence, Take Back the Night Campaign, Social Conceptions, Gender Stereotypes, Social Commentary, Fearless Kamataka/ Nirbhaya Kamataka, FK/NK, Maara, Poster, Vimochana, Zainab Bawa, Blank Noise, Vimochana, Alternative Law Forum, Arvind Narayan, Madhumita Kumar Rajan, Margaret Thatcher		
8											
8			Newspaper clipping, Image	The Hindu (Bangalore)	09/03/2009	How people can help women in distress	English	Women, Gender, Protest, Violence, Police, Human Rights, Culture, Society, Theatre	inisa, bangalore, Women's rights, International Women's Day, Sexual Harassment, Gendered Violence, Take Back the Night Campaign, Social Conceptions, Gender Stereotypes, Social Commentary, Fearless Kamataka, Maara, Poster, Vimochana, Zainab Bawa		
9											
9									Women, Gender, Kamataka FK/NK Maara		

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ii. Sample from T Jayashree's Video collection: Description of Anuja Gupta's Interview.

Anuja Gupta, Delhi 2013

The interview was conducted by T. Jayashree on Sept 2013, at RAHI Foundation, New Delhi. It was filmed by Girjashankar Vohra on SONY HD camera.

This interview is part of the series of video interviews that documents the journey of various activists, lawyers and others involved in the litigation process to decriminalise homosexuality in India.

Anuja Gupta is the founder and executive director of RAHI (Recovering and Healing from Incest) Foundation, India's first incest/child sexual abuse response organisation.

Description

In this conversation, Anuja Gupta recalls her early years of engagement with HIV/AIDs prevention and the work of ABVA. From the time of its formation to the laborious process of drafting their petition, she lays out a detailed timeline of its growth, rise and eventual dissolution.

Speaking from the perspective of her work against Child Sexual Abuse, Gupta then reflects on Section 377 and the need for POCSO. She describes her address at the IGLHRC and the Siddharth Gautam Film Festivals, remarking on the process of repeatedly having to chart new territory.

Gupta concludes on a more personal note, first describing her family and the manner in which Siddharth introduced her to political activism before explaining her need to move away from his field of work.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction and Early Activism

Early 1990's HIV/AIDs activism and the formation of ABVA following Siddharth's return from the U.S. Diverse group of volunteers, weekly meetings. 'Sexuality' then a very new term, difficulty of having conversations around condoms, sex, gender for the first time. Issue of stigma around high risk groups.

2. Drafting the ABVA petition

Tihar Jail incident with Kiran Bedi. Less Than Gay report. Drafting process and rounds of discussion, legal advice, laboured decision-making. Issue of hiring a high-profile lawyer.

3. Period after Siddharth's Death

Political fervour and the brief period of heightened involvement from multiple people. Eventual breaking up of the group. ABVA's work as a means of remembering and grieving.

4. Reading 377 from a CSA perspective

Without Sec.377 at the time there was no law to address sexual abuse of young boys. Need for a separate law before doing away with this one.

5. "A Lot of Firsts"

Address at the IGLHRC in 1994. First testimony of police harassment in the name of 377. Publication of the Less Than Gay report and case in the Press Council of India against it's classifying as pornography. 'Friends of Siddharth' Film Festival and difficulty with finding venues, deciding on names, and accessing films.

6. Moving on

Pawar Dhall's festival in Calcutta, BQFF in Bangalore. Reflections on the necessary process of

take over by the next generation of activists. The film 'Khush' and Dominic D'souza. Need to move away.

7. Personal Journey and Family

Family background and lack of political exposure or involvement. Staying with Siddharth in Delhi. ABVA as a personal learning ground. Family's response to Siddharth and Anuja's fields of work.

Potential Subject Tags

Cases/Committees/Reports/Publications: Naz, ABVA Petition, POCSO, Justice Verma Committee Report, Less Than Gay report, Bombay Dost

People: Siddharth Gautam, Ashwini Ailawadi, Shobha Agarwal, Dr. Sahani, Sister Shalini, Rajesh Talwar, Soli Sorabjee, Arun, Jagadish, Sujata, Pawar Dal, Dominic D'souza, Shivanand Khan, Kiran Bedi, Ronald Reagan

Places/Organisations/Institutions: Naz Foundation, ABVA, RAHI Foundation, Mohan Singh Coffee House, International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, Nehru Place, DePaul's Connaught Place, Max Mueller Bhavan, British Council, Press Council of India, Tihar Jail, United States,

Topics: HIV/AIDs, Sexuality, Child Rights, 377, Film Festivals, Police Brutality, Child Sexual Abuse, Family, 'Friends of Siddharth Film Festival'.

Date: Sept 2013 **Location:** RAHI, New Delhi

Contents: Anuja Gupta interview

Format: HD **Transcribed by:** Maya Ali Katz & Shalom Gouri

Clip #1

00:00:00

Anuja: I am Anuja Gupta. Currently I am the founder and executive director of Raahi Foundation working on child sexual abuse mostly with adult women survivors of incest and CSA. That's my current job. I'm a trainer, educator and therapist in the area. So that's what I do right now. In my last avatar, I have been activist around HIV/AIDS as well as queer issues. Then of course it was not called queer. Those were early 90s that I got involved with this, when, you know, lesbian and gay were the only terms being used, not even bisexual actually that came much later. So, that's my involvement with ABVA mostly through my brother Siddharth Gautam who was, who is quite well known now as a gay activist and he passed away in 1992. So just before that, and after he passed away, I was involved with ABVA and its activities. A fair amount of activism around queer issues from, I think, 1992 to 2000, I was involved in that.

00:01:19

Jayashree: When was ABVA formed?

00:01:21

Anuja: ABVA was in fact formed, I think, in 1989 or maybe a little later, I think 1990, 1989-1990. I remember one conversation, this was because when my brother came back, Siddharth came back from the US, you know he spoke about how HIV is going to be a major issue in India. It hadn't yet hit India at that time and he was in the United States at that time and Ronald Regan was there and a lot of persecution of gay people and was happening. It was being called a gay disease. (00:02:00) He sort of came back and said that HIV is going to hit India big way and

people are going to be persecuted including gay people so let's set up a group. He got together a bunch, he met different people, got together a bunch of people who then came together to form ABVA. I think it was around 1990. I do remember a train journey from Calcutta to Delhi that I was taking with my brother and he was trying to think of a name for the group. So that's how I remember it was like, he was saying should it be an English name, should it be a Hindi name? So that's how AIDS Bhedhbhav Virodhi Andolan came up. They thought of a name and so around that time.

00:02:42

Jayashree: So it was basically a voluntary effort.

00:02:45

Anuja: Totally. Totally voluntary effort and of a very diverse group of people that came together. One blood donor, somebody who is working with in the red light area, then a nun, which was sister Shalini and Dr. Sahani who was, you know, a doctor working with people with Leprosy at that time, also a Gandhian. So a very diverse group of people came together. I think Siddharth also had that way of bringing different kinds of people together. And I think then they spoke about this issue and the fact that activism around this is going to be really really important. So that's how they came together and of course, as you possibly know, that the meetings were held every Wednesday at Mohan Singh Place Coffee House, right on top. So that was for I think for the next 10 years, the haunt for ABVA and a lot of us who then got involved with it.

00:03:43

Jayashree: So that time when we started talking about AIDS but then it's also about sexuality. So was it difficult to talk about sexuality at that time?

00:03:55

Anuja: Ya, see I wasn't that much involved... I mean I used to of course when the group started,

I used to visit once in a while and Siddharth was the one very much involved in it and I think sexuality as a term was in fact introduced in India at that time and some of us who got involved in this work, we ourselves didn't know what sexuality meant in a way or the use of that term was not that easy for us either. (00:04:27) Talking about sex and sexuality was something that really came up as a result of the HIV/AIDS sort of coming into India and people becoming concerned about it and having to talk about it that terms like sexuality became a part of our vocabulary, we struggled with okay what do we do with this term, what does it mean, do any of us know about sexuality, our own sexuality – what have we, have we ever explored that. We in fact became suddenly in a position to talk to others about sexuality and sex when we ourselves had never grown up doing that. (00:05:08) So those struggles were always there. And then as women, how can you out and talk about sex and sexuality or talk about condom use to people. So sometimes when we would have gatherings and you know, I remember, Shivanand Khan came once with a big dildo and he said this is how you, you know sort of put a, do a condom demonstration and we are really talking about 92... 92 we were all like what do we do with this? And this is absolutely like how do we handle our own feelings around this and how do you then actually go out and talk to people about it? (00:05:43) And because of... personally because of my own involvement with my brother and around these issues, around gender issues, around just gay issues in general and because Siddharth was also gay, so you know, we had a lot of gay parties at home and a lot of, you know, people of all different kinds coming whether they were drag queens or you know whatever, so lot of parties. So I was, you know, getting more comfortable with issues like these. So it became easier... it wasn't that difficult to talk about it but definitely it was something we had to grapple with in those days and how do you put it to the public? So, I don't know...

00:06:25

Jayashree: And this was also pre-globalisation. There was no internet...

00:06:32

Anuja: Of course. Right, exactly...you know, so...

00:06:35

Jayashree: So, I want to take you back a moment there to say... these conversations you had with your brother, was it difficult for him that time because he'd just come from abroad. Was it seen as something he was bringing from the west? When he's saying we need to do this... which is true because he's seen what's going on, we should not repeat that mistake but how did that get perceived here?

00:06:54

Anuja: You are talking about HIV/AIDS as well as sexuality...

00:06:58

Jayashree: Because they are intermeshed because afterwards the focus became sex workers – women sex workers right? So this was just before that shift happened. So I just wanted to understand that.

00:07:10

Anuja: So I think from whatever I remember, you know, in that time, one was because of ABVA got formed, and I think Siddharth's original work was to talk to this group of people and convince them and talk to them about the fact that this was not an American item that is being you know, brought here. But that this is a virus that is going to spread. So I think once the group got into it, got formed, then there was group strength to talk about. (00:07:38) So there was just not one voice Siddharth's voice talking about how important something like this is and I think he had struggles and he, you know in terms of introducing to a particular, a group like this, issues even around sexuality and gay, lesbian sexuality at that time and we're talking about 1990-91 when really not much was happening. There was Bombay Dost, but other than

that... you know these ABVA people who got together were regular people from all kinds of backgrounds not only, and not necessarily people who have, you know, either even were very well educated or had ever studied abroad for that matter. (00:08:17) So this was all new at that point. So I know that he had some sort of struggle to first convince them. But you know, it was quite remarkable and he always spoke about how remarkable and how grateful he was to this particular group to actually listen to him and you know engage with these issues and then take it up, you know, as a cause, you know, these have to be fought. (00:08:44) And of course HIV/AIDS was considered you know, as something that is never going to happen in India and that is an import from the west and you can't be talking about issues like this over here. And because it was linked to sex work, and then gay men, in a way in the beginning, then blood donors came in later as a high risk group though, you know, because blood donors was not that difficult because they are not like, there was no shame and you know, stigma... I mean a different kind of stigma was involved but not like the kind that was involved with sex workers and gay men. (00:09:25) So, ya from what I remember, these were the early kind of struggles and you know, how do you... not only how do you introduce these groups as high risk groups for HIV/AIDS but also how you delink HIV/AIDS from these groups? And you know, to make it a larger issue. So it was quite a delicate task to be done at that time. That you know that sex workers would become high risk group, but you don't want the politics and the political kind of challenge was that you don't want them to be targeted as high risk group, yet you want condoms to be distributed or you know, clean needles for blood donors and you know, no harassment of gay men. So in a way we were creating the high risks groups but we were also saying that they shouldn't be targeted. So I think those were some of the early challenges from as far as I remember. I wasn't into it as much, you know, when Siddharth was still alive but. And of course, after that, after 92, I have been quite involved. I know you want me to go sort of...

00:10:43

Jayashree: So what prompted the petition? So initially you were talking to the group...

00:10:48

Anuja: So the petition I think, in 94, I think that we put it in, was it 93 or 94.. was you know, the tihar jail thing. When there were prisoners in Tihar Jail and Kiran Bedi sort of refused condom distribution. She was in charge of Tihar Jail at that time and she refused condom distribution to male prisoners saying that it would encourage homosexuality. And I think, so that new item or that when we came to know about that, that was one of the issues that ABVA wanted to take up because it targeted, it involved not just HIV/AIDS but also homosexuality in the way homosexuality was perceived. (00:11:33) So the whole point that male prisoners would be denied access to condoms because of what they perceive as homosexual sex was basically the issue and I think Kiran Bedi was at that time very vociferous about not involving and saying that homosexuality is against Indian culture and we can't allow condoms to be distributed because then everybody is going to have sex... you know all the men will have sex with each other. So that was what prompted a petition and of course the fact that gays, homosexual sex – sodomy, though unfortunately sodomy is called homosexual sex which is not true really was illegal through 377. So she had made all these connections and I think that is what prompted ABVA at that time to take this case up.

00:12:30

Jayashree: So when Siddharth started the work, did section 377 even enter the debate, discussion.

00:12:35

Anuja: Ya, I think so. And if you read 'Less than Gay', it talks about 377 quite a lot and what a draconian law it is. There is quite an analysis he's given, I think, piece on 377 even in Less than Gay. And I think one of the things that also struck me was you know, how they spoke about,

how ABVA spoke about, you know the fact that lesbian women are not talked about when we are talking about 377 and they are even more invisible. I mean they are not even visible enough to be targeted or to be discriminated against. So these were quite a lot of debates around 377 and how it absolutely needs to be struck down. So the first petition that ABVA filed, it was to strike down 377. It was not for reading down of 377. It was to completely strike it down and taking, as I said, the Tihar Jail case...

00:13:36

Jayashree: So what was the process, the drafting process of this petition.

00:13:39

Anuja: ABVA everything went through like, you know, rounds and rounds and rounds of discussions over many many days and lots of arguments and lots of fights. I am not remembering too much. I don't think there were any sort of disagreements on the fact that this needs to be done. I think the group was amongst itself very clear that this is something that we need to respond to. (00:14:03) So there were no disagreements on that per say. But you know, not a word or a pen was lifted or a word was written in ABVA without like you know, tearing everything apart and just threadbare looking at the issue and talking about it from all possible angles and you know... So that was very much part of the process in the beginning, you know, to.. And we had a lawyer in the group, Shobha Agarwal and so that made it... so the legal issues were brought in and how do you actually file a petition and what should be, what should it be, what should be looking at, what could be the repercussions of something like this. (00:14:45) Unfortunately I don't remember too much of the, you know, details of actually the content of our discussion but I remember many many nights and many many days being spent on before the petition was even put in, in terms of how we should do it. And then of course, assigning responsibilities on who's going to do it and how do we begin to research on something like this and as I was mentioning earlier, there was Shobha Agarwal, there was Dr. Sahani, there was me

and there was Ashwini – we sort of became the team to draft the petition at that time and my sister, Sujata, she lives in the United States, and she is a lawyer. (00:15:29) So she was very involved, we involved her. She was very involved in this and she sort of looked up a lot of case... a lot of statutes in different states in the United States where similar things would have happened and you know there were anti-homosexual laws in those states and you know, what condom distribution, you know, within prisons, you know what was the status of condom distribution within prisons. Where there any cases that we could look at and we could learn from and we could actually include some clauses from there. (00:16:05) So she did a whole lot of research, she would keep sending. Again, those were not days of internet or email so she would post like piles of sort of packets of all these cases that she had looked up and you know, send it to us and we would make photocopies and xerox's they were called that time. That was, you know, part of the process in Shobha's house in Asaf Ali Road. We have spent many nights, you know, working on this and sleeping there and getting up and working and talking and... So that was part of the drafting, you know, of the petition, looking at other petitions. Shobha, being a lawyer, the language and all was not a problem like how to put it in a legal kind of a language. I think one of the biggest discussions that I remember that was happening at that time was mostly related to who's going to fight this case. Within ABVA we had Shobha Agarwal and I think she or who? Somebody else pulled in another lawyer called Rajesh Talwar. (00:17:07) He also was involved in ABVA. Those days used to be like people would come, get involved, leave, you know, there were a lot of people coming and going, involved in ABVA even if not part of the core group. So Rajesh Talwar was one of them. And I think there were a lot of heated discussions and one of the disagreements that happened was related to who's going to actually fight the case and Dr. Sahini was the one who was really really adamant and when Dr. Sahini got adamant, you know, you could fight and you could tear your hair but ultimately, unless he was convinced things would not move. (0:17:44) But so, he was like very adamant that we don't want a high profile lawyer and we are an activist group and we will fight this from within

ourselves. And Shobha and Rajesh are the ones who are going to fight the case and there were a lot of other people, a lot of us and a lot of other people who said that this is a very critical case, we can't afford to lose it. So maybe we need to keep, you know, this politics aside about it all has to be us and you know, we can only send letters in a postcard, and we'll not use a phone, we'll not use that kind of stringent, sort of, activist rules that we had at that time that we should not really apply to this because it's really important that this petition goes through and this case is not lost. (00:18:35) Petition is at least accepted. You know those days it's like will this petition be even accepted or will it get thrown out. So, that a lot of disagreement around getting a good you know, sort of a legal person with a good legal reputation because even the fact that somebody who has a standing in the high court that person's reputation will also add to the value of the case. So that was some of the arguments that we were making and the other side was talking about how, you know this is how activists do things and we will not hire. So ultimately we did not hire in the first round and from what I remember and you know, we were there in the court when the cases were, when it was, you know, presented or whatever, and you know, I think it get thrown out the first time from what I remember and then we refiled the petition. (00:19:35) I'm not 100% sure about this but I am remembering something like this. And the second time round, I think we decided that we should get somebody else to do this and that's the time we got Soli Sarabji to do this petition for, I mean, to fight the case for us and I remember myself, I was part of the team from ABVA that went to his office to speak to him and say, you know, we want you on this case and he was actually in fact quite open really. There was no sort of thing, and then he took it on. So it goes much to his credit and this is still 94-95, or 93 to 94 or, you know, around that time, 93 to 95, he took up the case and I don't know what happened. We didn't really win the case.

00:20:26

Jayashree: Did the government file a response to your petition? What did they say, if they did...

00:20:32

Anuja: I think the first time they threw it out, the second time... No, I don't think they filed the, the government, no. I... I don't think so. I mean actually I don't remember. If there is, it should be in the archives somewhere because I know the copy of the petition I should have somewhere. I should have. I have to look out my... you know, my archives now. I'm not remembering that. I think Shobha, if you ever contact her, would be a really good person or maybe somebody else from ABVA would remember.

00:21:05

Jayashree: And when the petition eventually got dismissed, that was in the year 99? 2000 I think?

00:21:12

Anuja: I don't remember. Our original petition?

00:21:14

Jayashree: Because it was in the dock for a while. Because the Naz Petition and your petition the gap is only 8months.

00:21:22

Anuja: Only eight months huh? Naaz filed in 99 is it?

00:21:25

Jayashree: No, I think 2000 or 2001... So I think January this was dismissed and Naz... December they filed or something like November they filed something like that. So, when it was dismissed, it was many years later. So, what happened in interim to the group?

00:21:41

Anuja: To the group what happened is it kind of fell apart okay, in the interim. It took a while to do that but, say Siddharth passed away in January 1992 and my own understanding of, you

know, the group as it was at that time, was that Siddharth was quite a key factor in bringing people together and remaining, you know, though everyone was extremely active and had a totally equal role even in the writing of 'Less Than Gay' though Siddharth actually wrote the entire book himself and it was a lot of his own life's work, and you know, that went into the writing of Less Than Gay, but you know the discussions which took place, everyone equally contributed. ISI, in Lodhi Road we used to have discussions on Less Than Gay. (00:22:30) So everyone was equally engaged, involved and certainly it was not something that only Siddharth could have done on his own and the support of the group was extremely crucial to all the activism. I mean the whole group was crucial to the activism at that stage. But you know, what happened when Siddharth died, one was ABVA saw a bit of a high, you know, the next like three years from 92 to 95 when a lot of us, like me being Siddharth's sister and a lot of very close friends of Siddharth from all over the world, especially the ones in Delhi got extremely involved with ABVA okay because it was something which was so critical.. such a crucial part of Siddharth's life and activism in the last few years and Siddharth had this way of sort of infecting everyone with what he was doing, you know, so all the people he knew, knew about ABVA, knew about what was happening and knew about this(00:23:34)... So a lot of people got involved with ABVA. So there was like a period of, you know, like going up and they sort, you know something that comes from I mean there is a sort of a political fervour because those times politics and activism was quite different, you know, and there was a certain way of activism which is really quite lost now. There was a high to doing that kind of activism. Plus, there was the energy and the fervour of Siddharth and his memory that people wanted to associate with. So I think both these things came together and saw this, you know, energy in ABVA for the next three years. But unfortunately then after that as a lot of people who got involved at that time, because of Siddharth, really then went their own way. (00:24:37) And very slowly the group started, you know, getting sort of broken up and the meetings always happened for a long time like I don't know till how recently but for a very very long time, you

know, the Wednesday meeting at the same time, at the same venue happened but people attending became fewer and fewer and I think the disagreement between the group members became more and more and more and more unpleasant and without.. This is my understanding and maybe I am biased because Siddharth was my brother, but I think Siddharth, you know had he been there, you know, I could see the nature of activism and the group would have changed because Siddharth was somebody who was very clued on to what needs... in fact, he was quite a visionary and you know, to sort of be able to change according to what the trend is, what the moment requires. So maybe the 'Khatar' kind of or you know the really rigid kind of activism of the previous days would probably have changed its tone and tenor the group but I have a sense that the group would not have fallen apart. It may have evolved into something else or you know, may be another way of doing things. So that's what I, you know, truly believe. (00:25:58)

Had he been there, of course a lot of things in the queer movement would have been very very different today. But then I have often thought of, you know, what would have happened if Siddharth was there, you know, would things have moved faster, would things have happened in a different way, we can't say that. But the group fell apart. Basically, I think around 1996 or so... from there. I also moved away because I started my own work and of course I had several reasons for moving away one of them was, you know like, I think a lot of involvement with ABVA of Siddharth's friends and even somebody like me, was in, as I mentioned, like part of remembering Siddharth and part of being engaged with the issues with which he engaged with as a way of keeping connected to him.(00:26:54) And in a way as a way of grieving really. And then grieving as you know has its phases and you know, this is something which everyone needed at that particular time or I can't speak for everyone but I can speak for myself certainly, to be involved in something that Siddharth was important to him. And as you sort of move to different phases of grieving and then you realise that your life can't be about what was important to the other person, the person who is dead. It has to be about what is important to you and I think... And then of course the other thing was then people started moving out of

town and you know, going off to different cities or abroad to live. (00:27:39) So I think people, sort of started, I am talking about people who were not part of the core group you know initially, who started also moving away and then the core group, you know, started having disagreements and fights and then ABVA was not, you know, any more the kind of place, maybe activism nature had changed and then we all went into like I started my own group, and you know, there was a lot of fights about funded vs non-funded and you know, in a way, all these agreements and disagreements used to happen a lot during ABVA. Of course no funding was like the real and core, you know, because it was not, it was a forum in a way, so it's not like, you know, but the politics was literally like, we will not take money, we will do only what... we will only take buses and we will only not make phone calls but only Re.1 coin... you know that kind of postcard communication, you know that kind of stuff. So I think then a lot of us who then started other work or moved away, I think the group sort of slowly started...

00:28:47

Jayashree: When the petition was dismissed, were you around? Did you get to know?

00:28:51

Anuja: I came to know about it but really at that time then it had already become something that was, you know, we had sort of moved away as a group. So there was not one particular or two particular people, I think, maybe Shobha and Sahini, and Arun, Jagadish maybe sort of were together for a bit, you know, looking, tracing the petition. I can't speak for Shobha and Sahini till how long they actually traced it but... No, I was not part of that so as a group we never responded. As ABVA, we never either mourned that it was thrown out or celebrated that, you know, when like, we had of course celebrated when we did put it into court but yeah, it kind of fell apart. So these were some of the petition related memories.

00:29:46

Jayashree: It's interesting that you then got involved working with child... children, issues

related to children and their protection. So one of the things with Section 377 is also about child abuse. And that's one of the reasons when Voices Against 377 got involved they said we have to talk about the reading now. So looking from that perspective, what is your comment on what happened in the court and high court judgment and...

00:30:17

Anuja: Of course its just interesting that I got involved in working on child sexual abuse. It was certainly not in my mind at the time I was involved with ABVA and that petition. We hadn't, you know, in our discussions we were, we said we should have this law struck down. Child sexual abuse was not in our mind at all. So it was not an issue at that time though later I found some diaries of Siddharth in which he had started talking about sexual abuse of children going to be a very important issue. But it was not a part of our discussion or part of our knowledge in a very active manner while we were talking about striking it down. So later what came up. I think even child sexual abuse, when I started Rahi or Ashwini and me started Rahi in 1996, we were really the, one of the first organisations, we were certainly the first child sexual abuse organisation. You know child sexual abuse was not in anyone's... it was not in public memory at that particular time. So the fact that Rahi started and child sexual abuse started being talking about and started becoming an issue as more people subsequently started getting involved. It became an issue for the next petition you know, because then we came to know that ya, sodomy, if you are talking about sodomy, then we're also really talking about kids, you know boys, or even girls actually who may be anally... of course for girls of course there was another law. (00:31:56) So for boys and therefore striking down is perhaps not the answer because the, you know, as you know the IPC, only, the rape law only covered girls and you know, then we are left with nothing to cover sexual abuse of boys. But I think it was a lot because child sexual abuse, you know sort of, the work started, we started talking about it, Rahi itself did a lot of work to raise awareness in the initial years of working on child sexual abuse and because it started becoming something that came in the public domain, it became something to really

consider hard during the second petition and I think that was a decision taken that till we have a law that is actually going to deal with sexual abuse of boys, you know, we can't afford to remove, I mean to strike it down. So let's just ask for decriminalization of adult consensual sex which, you know, was fine at that time. But of course at the time when the 2009 judgment came, 2009 right? (00:33:15) The judgment came, by that time we were already working on law against child sexual abuse. Of course the law just got passed last year in 2012. So I think it really, it made sense at that point to strategically, to do, you know, talk about not striking it down but the problem remains that you still need to just get rid of this damn law. It's like worthless and it's really not a nice thing to have. So, what does one do now? Do you like now start you know talking about removing it because, you know, you need that kind of energy, you need a movement, you know, to do that. I am not sure what's going to happen, you know, around that anymore but once, because this POCSO which is Protection of Children from Sexual Offences got passed last year and it's a gender neutral law for both victims and as well as abusers, you really don't need 377 anymore, at all. But I am not sure who's going to fight to now repeal it.

00:34:21

Jayashree: Are you following... What would... What is your impression the Supreme Court will come up with?

00:34:27

Anuja: I mean, I am not following it very closely to be honest. I am very hopeful, you know. You know I think this is a moment in time where shifts are happening okay, and we've also had the Justice Verma Committee report which has been quite path breaking. I mean, I can't, we can't, I don't know one can say but my sense is that it will be a very favourable judgment. It's a sense, maybe it's just a hope more than that but it is a different time now and I think we have seen a lot of progressive legislation or atleast talk around this and the 2009 judgment itself was so

brilliant in its analysis and the way its been talked about. It would be difficult to not get that through but it's one of those things you can't, you can't say till it really happens. So...

00:35:33

Jayashree: Could you share with us your addressing the UN assembly. That was in 96 you went?

00:35:41

Anuja: It wasn't the UN Assembly. No, that was in 94 I think. We had just put in the petition and I think 93-94, I think 94 I have to look up my notes. It wasn't the UN Assembly but it was the IGLHRC - the International Gay Lesbian Human Rights Commission that had organised in New York a parallel UN kind of convention, not far away from the UN Headquarters when the UN was celebrating 50 years, something like that, so to talk about human rights violations of gay and lesbian people from across the world. So, I got an invite through somebody somebody to present over there in terms of linking up, talking... You know, because of my background of working with HIV/AIDS as well as being involved in the gay and lesbian movement at that particular time and I think both Ashwini and me, we remember spending nights preparing my presentation and what we wanted to talk about and just before that an incident had happened where, you know, when my brother was alive I used to go cruising with him very often cause whenever he would go... not whenever, often he would go and if he was in the mood he would say come along and we would go and D Pauls used to be the Connaught Place cruising joint at that time. (00:37:09) In fact, where he was cruising the night before he, just a few hours before, the night before he died and similarly Nehru Place, Nehru Park was on Sundays a cruising joint. I happen to be there with another friend at that time. Ashwini was there but he had just left and there was this police, I had just noticed that the police had caught one young gay boy and they were really harassing him and then I sort of stepped in and you know, basically saw and told them... they talked about 377 and I said no that's not true because he's not doing anything, you're just using that to harass him. (00:38:00) So somehow that incident happened, that boy

got left off. So I used that incident as a way to begin talking about, you know, the police harassment of gay people. I think mostly that was my presentation looking at harassment, this random sort of picking up of gay boys from public places and police harassment, around that using 377 as an example even quite inappropriately because obviously for 377 you need to have anal sex and you can't just pick up but playing on the fear of gay boys, of being identified because even now, but those days definitely, you know, families never knew and people were all secretly gay and cruising and certainly nobody could afford to get caught and be put in prison and their families be called in. So obviously police were extorting money, they were raping gay boys, you know, under the fear of illegally using 377. So that was what my presentation to the...

00:39:12

Jayashree: I think it was one of the first kinds of testimony from India right?

00:39:17

Anuja: Ya right.

00:39:19

Jayashree: So you have a copy of that?

00:39:20

Anuja: Ya, I have a copy of that, I have photographs of that. I have a lot of... and I remember that we'd gone around in Ashwini's scooter used drive that time you know, and we'd taken some... some other person had taken some photographs of us which showed these vans of Delhi police which says, even Delhi police slogan has – “with you, for you, always” – so I had taken that photograph and I had said that we don't want Delhi police to be with us, you know, always. At all... So we sort of turned it around and spoke about that in the context of how police harassment of gay people. (00:40:02) So ya, I think I was involved and both Ashwini and me and ABVA, we were involved in a lot of firsts related to these issues. I'm not sure if you know that

Less Than Gay was once in Sunday Magazine, it was printed, picture of Less Than Gay was printed in, as part of, on an article along with magazines that were pornographic. And this was also way back in 93 or 94. So a picture of Less Than Gay was also there in that article spoke about how pornography is being sold, pornography is being this thing. And in fact we had gone to the Press Council of India to protest against this and we filed a case against... and I remember I had fought that case with, at the Press Council representing ABVA and I think everyone at ABVA decided that I should be the one to do it because, for whatever reason, but it was in a way for me a very emotional thing to do because I had seen Siddharth write and grieve and go mad and be elated over every single word of Less Than Gay and seeing him through that process for several months of him spending nights... so I think.. anyway, so that was again one of things that happened and Press Council of course cleared it off, of it being pornography. (00:41:29) Vir Sanghvi was in charge of Sunday Magazine at that time and he was completely dismissive of us activists and you know, that kind of thing. I possibly have a copy of that petition as well and then of course, as you know, in 1993, we sort of started the Siddharth Gautam Film Festival, the Friends of Siddharth, it was called the Friends of Siddharth Film Festival which in fact ran from 1993 to 2003, for about 10 years. So that also was a first at that time. That was also, you know, we had, you know there were early days, okay. I remember at least for the first, almost nine years, or eight to nine years, we had great difficulty in finding a venue to show these films, to show gay films, let's say. (00:42:29) I know that we call the film festival HIV/AIDS and Sexuality, we had discussions around whether we should use the word gay, lesbian, maybe bisexual had started coming in at that time or whatever but you know gay, lesbian. It was a gay and lesbian film festival but we couldn't call it that and we would not get venues to actually do it if we called it that. Those were struggles, sexuality obviously sort of went through as a name but certainly gay and lesbian would have not been able to have a public screening. Public in the sense that we still did our early screenings in Max Mueller Bhavan for several years and then the British Council. (00:43:07) And we had to sort of

personally convince them about the material that we were showing and and you know that it is not pornographic and it is around these issues but because this was Max Mueller Bhavan, British Council and you know people who are there you know were sort of associated, I mean had some issue, knowledge of these issues you know they allowed us you know they were good and they are allowed us to sort of do that. I mean anyway I have a lot to say on the film festivals but you know that once again one of the first. Before. Now there are a lot of film festivals, you mentioned the one in Bangalore and you know of course a lot of film festivals are happening now but I think you know the... (00:43:56) What we were trying to do through that film festival was of course first remember Siddharth but also to provide a forum where issues like this could be discussed and talked about and also a forum for gay people to talk and feel safe around that. so we used to have these things about nobody can take photographs and if you speak to a journalist then you have to be outside the room or outside the venue and we don't want any journalist to take photographs of people. So all those things we were sort of able to maintain it as a space where gay people can come in say what they need to say but also we at the same time wanted it to be a space where these issues could reach out to the mainstream. you know so how to create that sort of balance that we just don't want only gay and lesbian people in the audience but we also want people who are non gay or heterosexual rather to be there. (00:44:57) That was the idea of the festival as well. but of course then over the years, more and more people sort of came and of course we had great difficulty in finding films. The first few years we only got, my sister again, Sujatha would send us films from abroad and they were all American films we would show then because Indian films on this issue were not made and then slowly 1 film and then 1 film and then of course we had group of us who would sit down and watch these really terrible gay and lesbian films to come up with... and our discussions used to be like you know should we put this film through because it's a really terrible film, we don't want to watch more than 5 minutes but we have to do this for the movement and we have to actually like show a film because otherwise however bad it is least it is bringing up the issues

we want to discuss. We used to have these struggles and then over the years slowly towards the last few years of the film festival. (00:46:02) Then... you know, more Indian films were being made and then the Friends of Siddharth group also sort of, you know, dispersed in a way and towards the end it was mostly Ashwini and me who were holding the film festival together at least in the last year or so. And that also sort of ended because a) we couldn't keep doing it. We'd already started other work but also because times had changed and many more groups and many more people and, you know, perhaps one didn't need a festival like that anymore but what one needed were queer groups themselves to actually come up with festivals which is what began to happen as activism, you know, re-sort of started or took another shape. So..

00:46:50

Jayashree: I think last year the Calcutta group did it no?

00:46:53

Anuja: Calcutta group is doing it for a very long time. In fact, calcutta group is doing from almost the time the Delhi one stopped because one of the person leading it in Calcutta, somebody called Pawan Dhal, he's also been very extremely involved in, at a grassroots level this Indian lesbian and now queer movement and he was a very close friend of Siddharth, though he had met him just once before Siddharth died but he was very inspired by Siddharth, a young person at that time, so he's been doing this film festival and now he's sort of made it a part of the work of his organisation's work and they take it to many rural areas of, you know, Bengal. So he's managed to sustain it which is excellent and you know then of course different issues now transgender and all those issues. You know earlier it was simple gay and lesbian. Now, it's become like more complex and...

00:47:49

Jayashree: and many more..

00:47:50

Anuja: Ya.

00:47:51

Jayashree: It's also interesting that when you were tapering off, starting to do your own other things, within a few years there was another surge from a very different... maybe the next generation.

00:48:04

Anuja: Ya, and you know that's the, that's what you hope happens and that's what needs to happen and that's what will happen. I mean all movements will have the same kind of a history, you know, their early days and early sort of maybe pioneers or whatever you call movement who do a certain level of work, you know. And then whether there is a gap or not that really constitutes the... not only the history, but the DNA, the past DNA of the movement. So even if there is a gap, you know whatever is happening next is really building on this because somebody else has already done some work for you or for this issue you know, and broken ground, you know, on this. And then therefore provided a platform for other people to come up.

00:49:04

Jayashree: So parallelly this Dominic D'Souza story was also happening right? Lawyer collective fought his case in Bombay... was there any kind of linkages at that point which was happening?

00:49:16

Anuja: Definitely like that was which protest? I am not remembering, there were so many protests when Siddharth was still alive. I mean well ABVA was well when Siddharth was personally in touch with Dominic and ABVA was in touch with Dominic, the days when he got incarcerated and he was getting harassed or whatever was happening to him to sort of include him in whatever was happening in Delhi. And I think Dominic did come and, I am not remembering whether he came to the protest, now I'm sort of sort of not remembering because

of what I do remember yes, I think Dominic died, I think Siddharth died before Dominic and Dominic was supposed to come to meet Siddharth and it was .. and I know before Siddharth died there was going to be protest or may be it was for the release of Less Than Gay because we, ABVA did a, what do you call it, a press conference for the release of Less Than Gay, which was interesting as a press conference because people came but they didn't quite know how to handle the material and even journalists didn't quite know, sort of, ask or answer questions. (00:50:43) But I think from what I am remembering though I am not 100% sure that Siddharth was trying to, well know, but Siddharth died few months later, but was trying to get Dominic and his mother to come to Delhi for a protest to say how important their voices are and the importance of his voice and his mother's voices, a parent. To talk about what is the first hand experience of, you know, being discriminated against because of HIV. So yes, I mean I am saying that because you asked me if there was a very vital connection between ABVA, Siddharth and Dominic and what was happening to him at that particular time. And then I think Dominic and Siddharth sort of died within a couple of months of each other. Not remembering, I think Siddharth died first, and I remember, I think Dominic's mother got in touch with me or Dominic himself got in touch, sent a letter, you know, talking about you know, whatever, how Siddharth died whatever and all that. Then there was Khush, I don't know if you remember, the film Khush? That was also something that was, I think, one of the first films made in India capturing the stories of gay and lesbian people and Siddharth was there in that film though he came in silhouette.

00:52:12

Jayashree: Trying to get hold of a copy but we're not able to get...

00:52:14

Anuja: I have a copy. Got a copy of that. So, ya, we have quite a lot of copies (?) archive of all the

films we showed in our film festival over the years. So, anyway, Khush was also one of the firsts. Siddharth was there in silhouette. Actually at that time because he was not out to my family at least.

00:52:41

Jayashree: So you must have been very young?

00:52:47

Anuja: I must have been very young! I was like... I was older than Siddharth, I was Siddharth's older sister. Ya, I think all this, not that young actually, I was in my 30s at that time. I think when Siddharth died I was 30 or 31 at that time. So you know, those years, all the 30s... When I was in my 30s went to the altar of ABVA and gay activism, you know, not all of it. And then subsequently I started of course my own work. I mean, my own work in the sense that, when I was involved with this, it was very much my passion and my work but as I said, you know, later it was like well, am I just sort of, you know, its Siddharth's flag and his work that I am holding, you know, and perhaps I need to just move away and look at who I am rather than Siddharth's sister doing this work. (00:53:47) So that's why I somehow say my work and that work. I was very much part of that. They were very thrilling days, I have to say, because you know you were doing things that had never been done before and there's a high to something like that and you're bringing out issues that are so difficult and ABVA was a great place to be in at that time. And activism as I've said earlier was different. And then I got involved, both Ashwini and me were very much. (00:54:18) We met there actually, that's how we met and you know then also started talking about sexual abuse and child sexual abuse and Ashwini those days used be an addiction counsellor and he was getting a lot of women at that time coming to him, partners of alcoholics or daughters of alcoholics at that time who were talking about experiences of child sexual abuse and then he said, why don't you do something about this kind of a thing. Then we in fact both took up a cause that was again pioneering because nobody had ever done

it before. So I think some training with ABVA was helpful for me to sort of...

00:54:58

Jayashree: It's also like a circle, you know. If you look back, it all feeds into each other and then kind of...

00:55:05

Anuja: Sort of, ya. So, that's it. I don't know if I have anything else to say.

00:55:15

Jayashree: So when you look back... Would you, because when you talked... A lot of young people now... now there's a lot of information, much easier to do a lot of things but there's a lot of diffidence.

00:55:13

Anuja: Lot of diffidence?

00:55:31

Jayashree: You see that. I teach at a Journalism school and the first thing these students come and say, but ma'm is it safe for me to go there at 7 o'clock and report? You know, it's like, there's also this different kind of fear that's setting in now. But you know, in those days, late 80s and 90s, when there's hardly any traffic on the roads and Delhi was such a scary place to begin with, but somewhere you saw a lot of younger people doing things, the university was very very vibrant. So what was the, you said earlier that your brother was an inspiration for you, but before that, and he was younger to you as well, so... personally what do you think propelled you to this kind of work and ?

00:56:14

Anuja: Propelled me?

00:56:17

Jayashree: Ya..

00:56:22

Anuja: I mean, you know, if I look at myself, I would just, you are talking about what kind of work - ABVA activism or generally?

00:56:29

Jayashree: Generally, being part of this civil society and you know...

00:56:33

Anuja: I mean for me, it was just Siddharth. You know, I have no other politically correct or politically very, you know, very intelligent answer sort of to give. For me it was a clear cut, totally related to my brother and what he was doing, you know because I had... I had just come to live in Delhi with Siddharth, you know, in 1991, 1990 - 31st December I remember. And I was not somebody who was even remotely aware okay, of anything political or what you call civil society or any form of activism either in terms of my knowledge or my understanding, my perspective or any exposure to anything like this. I was like this: a baniya girl from a conservative marwadi, not marwadi but conservative almost marwadi calcutta family who had never been allowed to step out, never been allowed to meet boys and never been allowed to do anything ok? Not allowed to study a lot. My grandfather said you know, we won't send you, let you go to school MA because it's a co-ed university. (00:57:43) So I never studied actually beyond.. So I am coming from that kind of family. Siddharth was the person from our family. One he was a boy, so it made it easier for him. But he was the person who was like our eyes to the outside world and all these kinds of activities and he would write when, you know, to us about it and we're saying okay what is this world? I used to tell myself, he would talk about gay and lesbian stuff, he would talk about feminist issues which I was remotely, completely far away from. I had no clue. I didn't even perhaps know what feminism was or anything like that. (00:58:16) So he was the one who would, you know, was exposing us to all these kinds of things.

And then living with him one year in Delhi.. like he had friends from, you know, intellectuals to hijras to drag queens to academics, you know and all of them would be coming to our place and there were discussions and there were, you know. A lot of his friends are very much involved in the feminist movement now, you know. So those discussions were a lot happening when I was living with him and I was like, you know, used to sort of listen and say, Oh my God, you know, it was just like a totally, you know sort of a totally different world. I was in fact living in France. I had got married to a French guy, you know. (00:58:56) So I moved from Calcutta to France, you know, no political understanding of anything and then my marriage broke up, I came, I thought, this was 1990, you know, when divorce is like not a concept and marrying a foreigner and all that. Then Siddharth says you come stay with me cause I thought conservative family in Calcutta, how will I stay? So that's how this happened and you know, I would be in my mini skirts and he would be like talking about activism and... you know like these two things sort of you know kind of came together. (00:59:30) So I would say literally for my own involvement, in at least activism, it has been entirely because of Siddharth. While he was alive, I was not, I mean I would always wait for him to come back from ABVA meetings, I would wait for him to come back home anyway because he always had a lot of stories and but I would just, I was a bystander, you know, sort of listening and it was like the proud sister or you know talking. Just watching his life, you know.. and this was part of his life, it was never part of mine and I think I often wonder if he actually hadn't died, then I would have not been even doing what I am doing right now. I don't know what I would have been doing. (01:00:13) I used to teach French, teaching there or may be I would have.. he would have pulled.. he had a way... you know Siddharth had a way, you know you could be a rickshaw driver but he would talk politics, I mean he would talk politically and in, you know but sort of tailored towards what that person would understand. Okay.. so he literally had a way of pulling all of us in – his family, you know, whether it's my sister, my mother, you know me, into his world in a way that we became very much a part of it. So somehow my initial activism and this thing, I am not able to divest it from

him. My work on child sexual abuse of course is different in which Ashwini has been a very big... has played a very big role for it, for several reasons for it to start. And of course my ABVA days can be counted as the sort my political learning activist, activist learning ground in a way, which obviously came into use a lot when I started working on child sexual abuse but you know..

01:01:26

Jayashree: So what is your extended family's reaction to all this work?

01:01:29

Anuja: Siddharth's work or this gay work and all that?

01:01:31

Jayashree: Your work.

01:01:33

Anuja: I think I got, while Siddharth was there, he was not out to my family, he was going to get, come out at every trip we would take within he sort of died, before he could come out. So he was not talking too much about gay, you know, those were not TV journalism days, you see, so you didn't need to know what he was doing in Delhi. So I don't think, see my mother was very engaged, and if you were speaking to my mother, she used to, Siddharth would take her to all kinds of parties and all kinds of people dressed in drag and my mother, you know, would just wonder what was happening but other than that there was not much talk about this gay and lesbian thing, you know, in the family before he died. (01:02:21) So there was no extended family reaction to anything except that fact that we are a business class family and my father was always very upset with him that though, why are you doing all this nonsense work and you should be just, you know, coming and joining and family business and I think that was one of Siddharth's greatest struggles at that time with my family and my dad, you know. (01:02:43) Of course he was a lawyer with, at those days he was still studying and he just practised law for a

year before he died. But, after he died and I got involved, and then slowly his photographs started coming out in newspapers and talking about that police station protest when a photograph came out, and Ashwini was there and in fact he lost his job as a result of that picture coming out in the newspaper holding these gay placards and all that. I think you know Siddharth had died and that was like a, you know, turned my family away. We're a big joint family and I think my family was so broken that they did not, they were just happy that somebody was doing what Siddharth was doing. Okay, that I was doing what they were doing. (01:03:35) I don't think they were really relating, I mean they were just happy that my photograph is coming out in the newspaper. But what the placard said, I don't think they could connect, you know, at all. So I think in that sense there was no sense, they were very worried about me because I decided to stay on alone in Delhi even after Siddharth died. But other than that, they have been always extremely encouraging and which has been surprising coming from a family that's so conservative, you know, so so conservative that they have been extremely good about involvement in gay issues and... I have to say that it's not like I was very forthright all the time when I went there to talk to everyone or engage everyone, you know, Siddharth would do that and you know, but still, I mean then slowly things started coming on television. (01:04:36) Earlier days I would come on television giving interviews in front of a protest or you know, on gay and lesbian issues or HIV/AIDS or whatever. So it's not like they didn't see me but I think they were just happy that you know, oh, you know like all my family members would come and sit in the drawing room and watch because I am coming or you know, something. So... but so I actually, I don't think anyone in my family really knows, really openly whether they know, its not really been talked about, about Siddharth being gay at all. We recently did a program last year to sort of commemorate his 20th death anniversary which was a program in Calcutta, and friends came from a lot of places and some of them spoke about Siddharth being gay and a lot of my family members were there but you know, they understood what they understood. My mother of course, you know, knows but my dad really doesn't have

much of an idea. (01:05:38) So they were, it's more like, it's out of ignorance that they were absolutely okay, you know, with what we were doing and even related to child sexual abuse, you know. They're not like why are you taking this up or... They're unhappy that I don't make loads of money, you know, but that I've got involved in this kind of work but other than that, no. I mean they're very proud and they're very happy with everything I've been doing.

01:06:06

Jayashree: A lot of things have changed a lot in the last 10years no? So..

01:06:10

Anuja: Things are changing very... I mean even from my work, from the time I started RAHI to now, both of us started RAHI to now, there is such a change in child sexual abuse related work. So... So that's it. I don't know what else...

01:06:28

Jayashree: Thank you Anuja. Simply lovely. I will be doing one more round after the Supreme Court verdict comes and I think by the end of the year we should have some plan in place for what to do with all this material and how do we go about it? And it would be wonderful if we can just archive whatever you have, and some digital form. And even the ones you want to keep, just keep it in a way that it can be accessible and please come when we have another meeting. We'll let you know.

01:07:03

Anuja: Theek hai. Sounds good.

01:07:05

Jayashree: In fact around that time when you mentioned DePaul, there was a journalist who did a story about....

01:07:13

Anuja: I have all old clippings and things like that so we can...

01:07:16

Jayashree: Because I was in college, school when that came out and I remember this whole conversation and my father saying that, you know, the India Coffee House used to be in that big ground, and that became Palika Bazaar, and as kids we were taken there. And then he would say that that had become the haunt and then there were a lot of harassment there. So, if you are saying that how the coming of palika actually made it very unsafe and all that. But, ya, it was there and you know... I was in school and you were not supposed to... I remember reading Dorian Grey and my father said, why are you reading this, this is not a book that you should read now... So I was in 9th standard or something... But, things were there here and there.

01:08:04

Anuja: So we've really been part of what is now history. Of course at that time you know one never knew like that we were making history, you know, in some way, but I guess that's how history is made. So...

01:08:22

Jayashree: Can we speak to Ashwini, very briefly?

01:08:24

Anuja: Ashwini?
