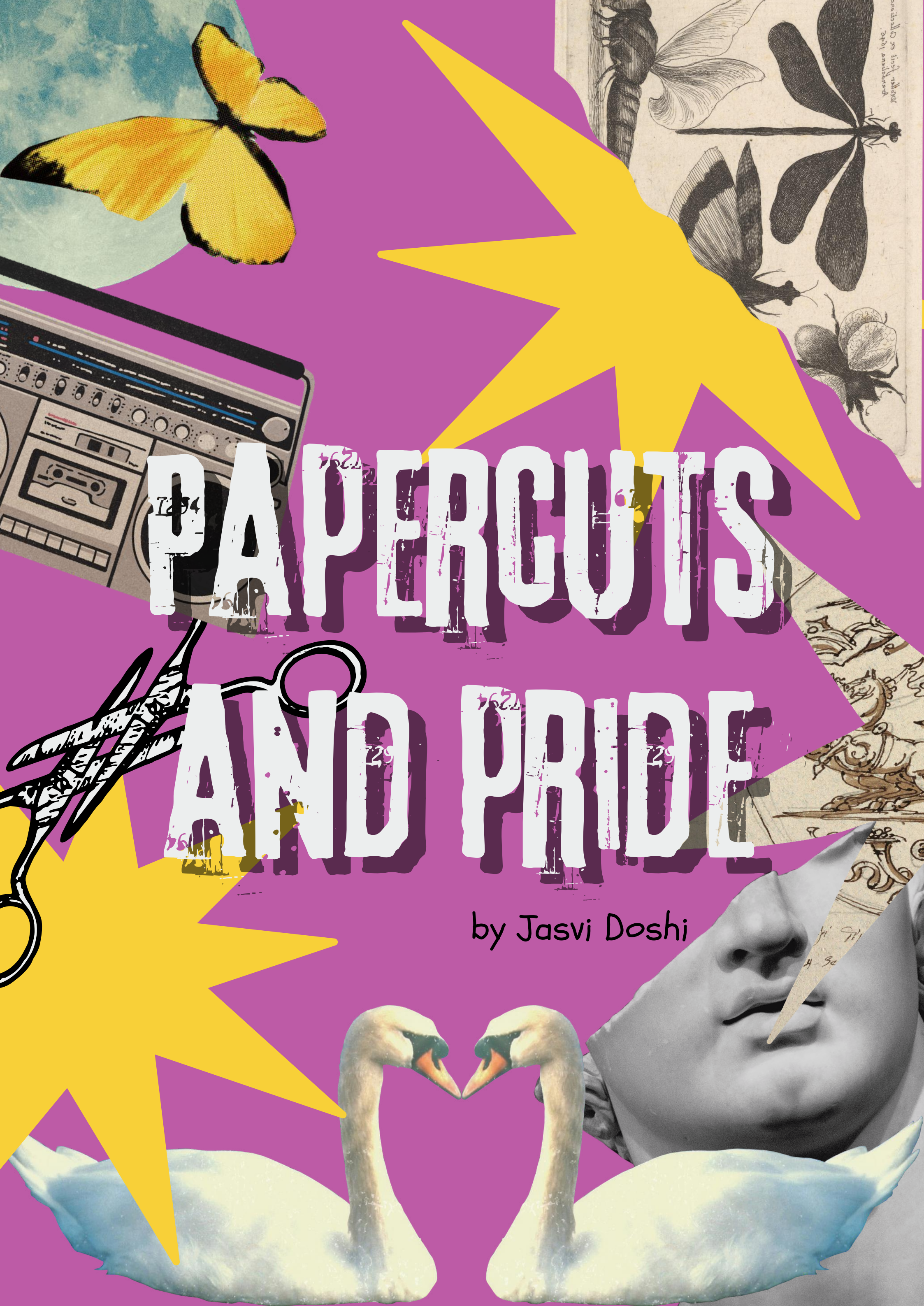


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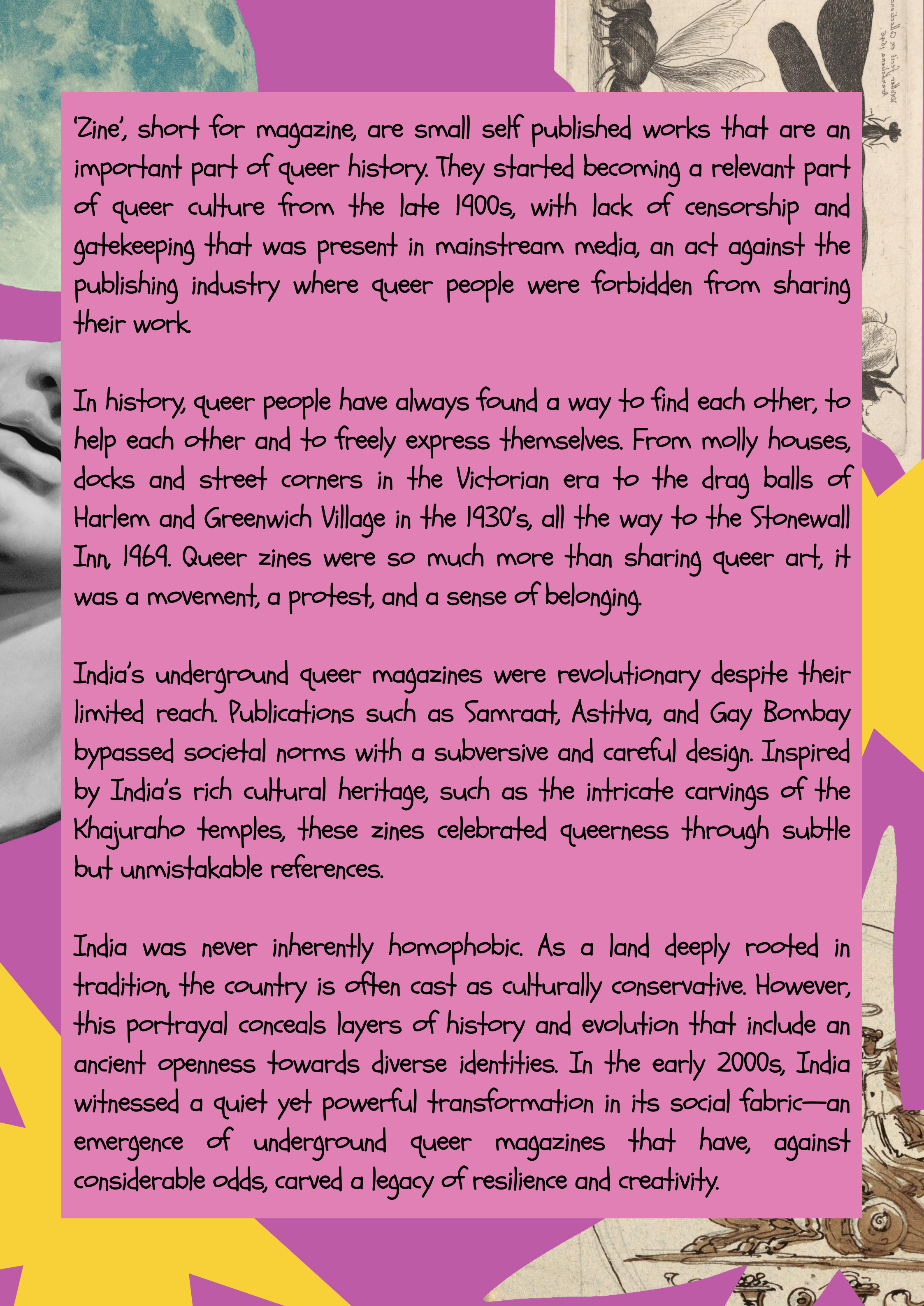
EDITION 4



PAPER CUTS

AND PRIDE

by Jasvi Doshi

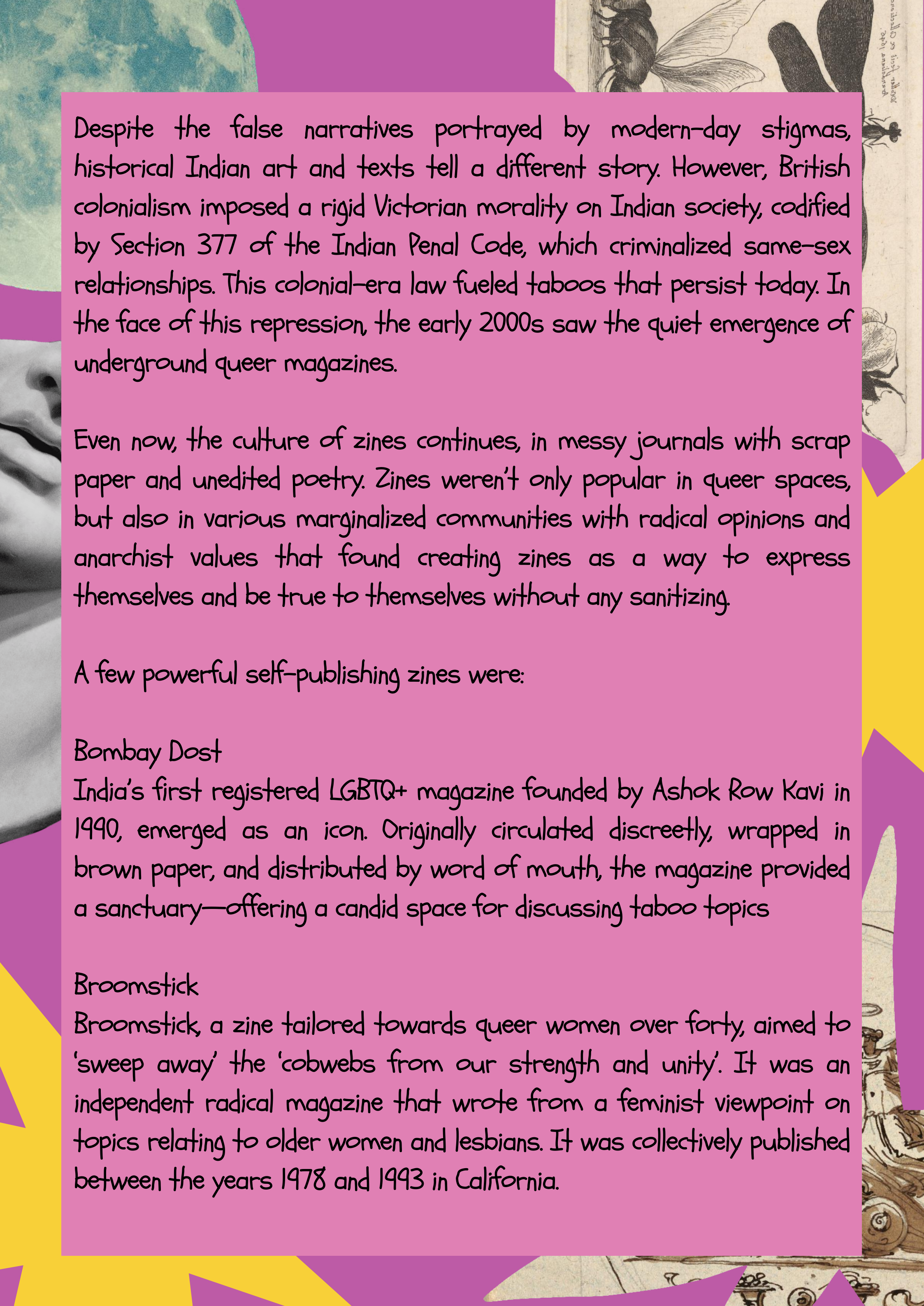


'Zine', short for magazine, are small self published works that are an important part of queer history. They started becoming a relevant part of queer culture from the late 1900s, with lack of censorship and gatekeeping that was present in mainstream media, an act against the publishing industry where queer people were forbidden from sharing their work.

In history, queer people have always found a way to find each other, to help each other and to freely express themselves. From molly houses, docks and street corners in the Victorian era to the drag balls of Harlem and Greenwich Village in the 1930's, all the way to the Stonewall Inn, 1969. Queer zines were so much more than sharing queer art, it was a movement, a protest, and a sense of belonging.

India's underground queer magazines were revolutionary despite their limited reach. Publications such as Samraat, Astitva, and Gay Bombay bypassed societal norms with a subversive and careful design. Inspired by India's rich cultural heritage, such as the intricate carvings of the Khajuraho temples, these zines celebrated queerness through subtle but unmistakable references.

India was never inherently homophobic. As a land deeply rooted in tradition, the country is often cast as culturally conservative. However, this portrayal conceals layers of history and evolution that include an ancient openness towards diverse identities. In the early 2000s, India witnessed a quiet yet powerful transformation in its social fabric—an emergence of underground queer magazines that have, against considerable odds, carved a legacy of resilience and creativity.



Despite the false narratives portrayed by modern-day stigmas, historical Indian art and texts tell a different story. However, British colonialism imposed a rigid Victorian morality on Indian society, codified by Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which criminalized same-sex relationships. This colonial-era law fueled taboos that persist today. In the face of this repression, the early 2000s saw the quiet emergence of underground queer magazines.

Even now, the culture of zines continues, in messy journals with scrap paper and unedited poetry. Zines weren't only popular in queer spaces, but also in various marginalized communities with radical opinions and anarchist values that found creating zines as a way to express themselves and be true to themselves without any sanitizing.

A few powerful self-publishing zines were:

Bombay Dost

India's first registered LGBTQ+ magazine founded by Ashok Row Kavi in 1990, emerged as an icon. Originally circulated discreetly, wrapped in brown paper, and distributed by word of mouth, the magazine provided a sanctuary—offering a candid space for discussing taboo topics

Broomstick

Broomstick, a zine tailored towards queer women over forty, aimed to 'sweep away' the 'cobwebs from our strength and unity'. It was an independent radical magazine that wrote from a feminist viewpoint on topics relating to older women and lesbians. It was collectively published between the years 1978 and 1993 in California.



Scripts

Seven years later, in 1998, Lesbians and Bisexuals in Action (LABIA), a Mumbai-based collective for lesbians, bisexuals, and trans folks, began publishing *Scripts*, a zine that centered the voices of queer women. While narratives of elite cis gay men dominated *Bombay Dost* and the gay scene in Indian metropolitan cities, *Scripts* carved out a space to reimagine queer love—not just for and by queer women but also beyond the confines of the gender binary.

The Daily Plague

Another example of a zine in which guided the queer community through times of pure desperation, is *The Daily Plague* (DTP). This was an Australian fanzine that provided support for queer people living with AIDS and how to live with it. Whilst other zines during this era focused on the science and political ideology this zine provided emotional solidarity and support to those affected. It is likely that this zine created a community for those who were living with the disease and it is known to provide humour and humanity to the scene.

By Manya Khimasia

Forbidden Love

How Queer Love Has Survived in the Shadows



Love has always been a powerful force, one that has been the source of numerous tales, defying boundaries, challenging norms, persisting even in the face of oppression, and giving people hope. For centuries, queer love has been forced into the shadows, something that could put you behind the bars when you were alive. After you die, you could be condemned to 'hell'. Yet, despite it all, LGBTQ+ communities have preserved their culture, their stories, and their love in secret, creating a rich, resilient legacy that continues to thrive today. As it was never just a phase for any of them.

Ancient texts and records often obscured same-sex love, rewriting or censoring it to fit dominant moral codes. Yet, traces remain. The passionate poetry of Sappho, written on the Greek island of Lesbos over 2,500 years ago, celebrated love between women. The oddly close 'friendship' between Khnumhotep and Niankhhknum in ancient Egypt.

Even in the repressive Victorian era, figures like Anne Lister, a landowner in England, kept coded diaries detailing her relationships with women. But for every story that survives, countless others were lost. Many queer people lived double lives, forced into heterosexual marriages or religious vows to avoid suspicion. Some found fleeting moments of freedom in underground spaces—secret bars, private salons, or hidden gatherings where they could be themselves without fear. Some who were brave enough to speak out were erased from history and tortured during their time on earth. When direct expression was dangerous, queer communities developed coded ways to communicate.

Polari, a slang language used by gay men in Britain, allowed them to speak openly in public without being understood by outsiders. In the United States of America, the hanky code—where coloured handkerchiefs signalled romantic interests—became a discreet way to navigate desire.

Even fashion and gestures served as signals: a certain way of walking, a lingering glance, a wave of a fan, or a strategically placed piece of jewellery were all ways to show that their self could never be completely hidden. The arts helped their creators express their true selves without fear of persecution. Despite laws like Britain's Buggery Act (1533) or the later Paragraph 175 in Germany, which criminalized homosexuality, queer people created safe spaces even if it was just for a night.

In the early 20th century, underground drag balls in Harlem and Berlin's cabarets offered peace to their attendees. The infamous Stonewall Riots of 1969, sparked by police raids on a gay bar in New York, marked a turning point, proving that people were done hiding who they were. Yet, even as activism grew, the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and 90s brought new devastation and more erasure for the community. Governments ignored the crisis, causing thousands to succumb to their demise unnoticed. But the community fought back, preserving memories through art, activism, and oral histories.

Today, many countries have made progress in LGBTQ+ rights, with marriage equality and anti-discrimination laws in place. But that does not mean we ignore the fact that queer love is still forbidden in over 60 nations, some punishable by death. Even in more accepting societies, subtle forms of erasure still persist, history books that omit queer figures, families that reject their LGBTQ+ members, people who pretend to be an ally but haven't grown comfortable with the idea of a queer friend and media that still stereotypes queer relationships.

This is not just a story of oppression, it's a testament to survival. It's the whispered confessions between lovers in darkened rooms, the defiant kiss at a protest, the chain of stories passed down through generations. Queer love was never truly hidden; it was just waiting for the world to see it. and LGBTQ+ people have always found ways to say, 'We are here. We have always been here.' Now they refuse to be silenced any longer.

THE GAY “PLAGUE”

by Pari Dedhia



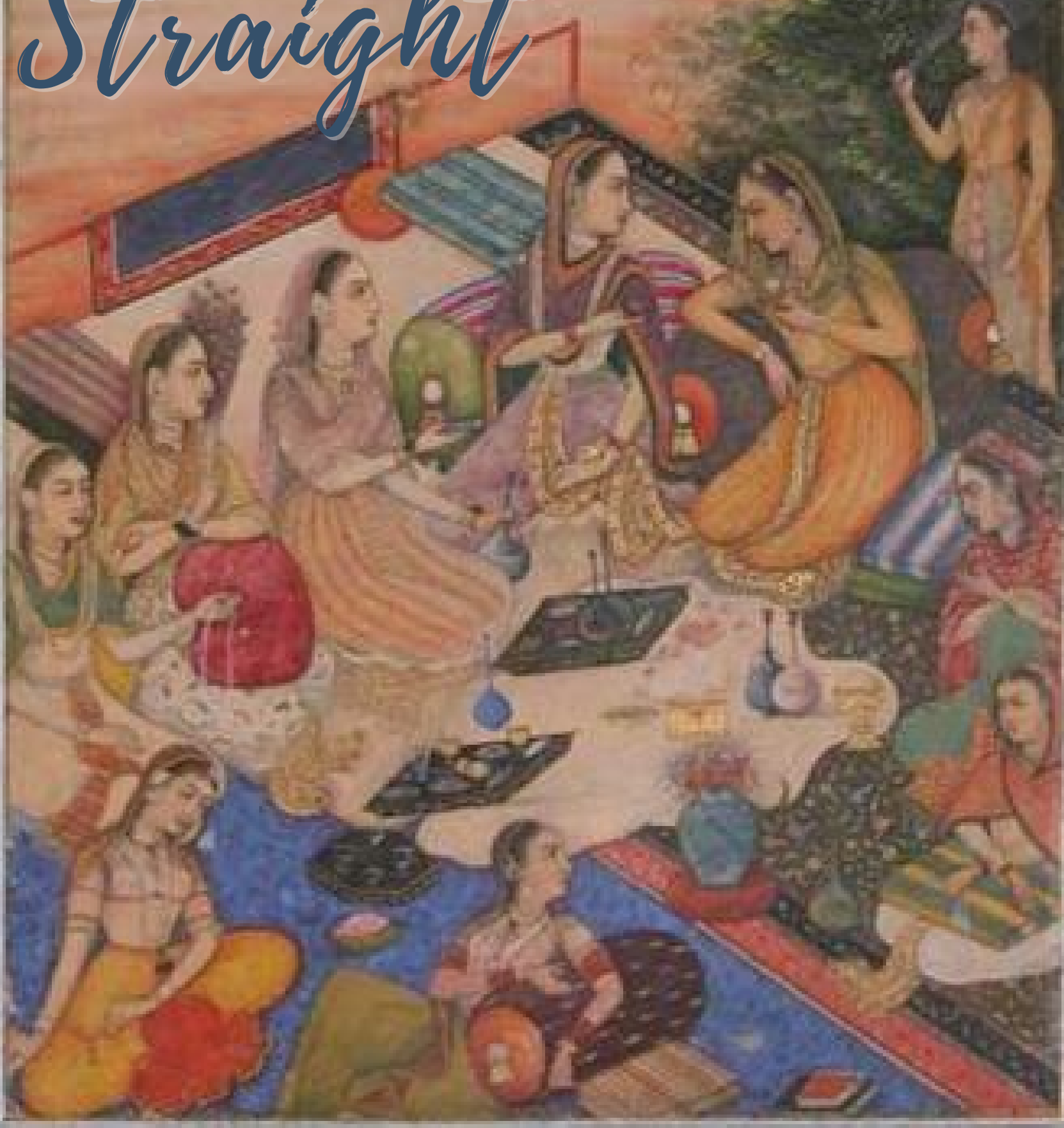
The 1980s hit America with a terrifying new disease that started as a mysterious illness affecting gay men in New York, San Francisco and spiraled into a full-blown health crisis. This disease was later named AIDS. It entered the gay community and that's when society lost all humanity. Hospitals turned patients away. Families disowned their sons. The government didn't take any action. The media called it the "gay plague." With no cure, no support, and no public concern, men were dying and suffering, left to endure this in guilt and loneliness.

Amongst this, when society abandoned humankind over something as small as sexuality, one group within the LGBTQ+ community refused to be bystanders, lesbians. When most of the world ignored the AIDS epidemic or blamed it on the victims, Lesbian women, particularly nurses and activists, stepped up. This was the start of a new revolution.

They sat beside dying men when even doctors wouldn't touch them. They changed bedsheets, held their hands, cleaned wounds, and provided care not just medically, but emotionally, fighting from society for humanity. They organized blood drives, educated the public, raised funds, and fought for government attention. Groups like the Lesbian Avengers, ACT UP, and the Lesbian Herstory Archives created awareness against this.

This is why the "L" in LGBTQ+ comes first. It's not just alphabetical. It's symbolic. It's a tribute to all the lesbian women who led with love and care when others led with fear. In death and abandonment, they showed up stronger and powerful than ever. The order of letters is a reminder: when gay men were dying, it was lesbians who protected them because, at the end of the day, it wasn't about who you love but about how you love. Once again, it was women who gave new life to these dying souls because in times of crisis, it wasn't about identity, it was about unity. That's the kind of history we should remember every Pride Month.

**INDIA
WASN'T
ALWAYS THIS
*Straight***



by Trisha Sharma

History remembers only what it's told to remember. And for centuries, queerness in India was not just forgotten: it was buried, rewritten, exiled from temples, scriptures, poems, and homes. We were told that queerness was foreign, a Western infection, smuggled in through colonial rule or modern media. But that's a lie dressed as law. Long before the British criminalized "unnatural offences" in 1861, queerness shimmered in Sanskrit verses, danced in temple reliefs, and spoke through the mouths of poets and saints. It was never hidden... until someone decided it should be.

Far from being a recent or foreign phenomenon, expressions of queer desire and gender variance were visibly woven into India's religious, literary, and artistic traditions for centuries. In Hindu mythology, deities such as Ardhanarishvara, a blend of Shiva and Parvati, symbolize the sacred union of masculine and feminine energies not as opposites, but as an indivisible whole. Similarly, the Mahabharata features Shikhandi, born female but raised and later transformed into a man, who plays a crucial role in the Kurukshetra war, portraying a rare early depiction of gender transition in classical literature. These stories are not marginal; they form part of the mainstream mythological canon and were widely told across India. Scholars such as Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai argue that such narratives reflect a broader premodern Indian worldview where sexual and gender diversity was accepted as part of the cosmic and social order.

Queer expression wasn't limited to stories and myth, it was carved into stone. The famous temples at Khajuraho (in Madhya Pradesh) and Konark (in Odisha), built between the 10th and 13th centuries, show clear depictions of same-sex intimacy. You'll find men embracing other men, women in sensual poses with other women, and scenes that suggest queer relationships as part of everyday life.

These images are placed alongside carvings of heterosexual couples, which tells us that queer desire wasn't seen as unnatural or shameful. These temples celebrated kama as one of life's important goals, and that all kinds of desire were accepted. Since these temples were built by royal dynasties and not by rebellious groups, they show that queer love once had a visible and even spiritual place in Indian society.

Poetry, acting as a microcosm of society, was also a principle method of expression and exploration. In 18th and 19th century Lucknow, a genre called Rekhti emerged which consisted of works written by male poets, but in the voice of women, often describing romantic and erotic relationships between women. These poems talked about love in kitchens, courtyards, festivals; ordinary places made extraordinary by longing. At the same time, in Sufi traditions across North India, poets used spiritual longing as a way to express love that often crossed gender lines. Many Sufi poems speak of the beloved using male pronouns, even when written by men, blurring the lines between divine and earthly love.

What we've covered is only a glimpse into India's rich queer past. Queerness appeared in temple carvings, mythology, poetry but also in folk theatre, Tantric texts, and festivals like Koovagam, where trans identities were celebrated in ritual. Communities like Hijras, Aravanis, and Jogappas held respected spiritual and social roles before colonial laws criminalized and marginalized them. These histories show that gender and sexual diversity weren't exceptions, they were part of the fabric of life. In today's India, reclaiming these roots isn't nostalgia. It's a way to remind ourselves and others that queerness here is not new. It's ancient, continuous, and deeply ours.

by Sunayna Mathur

THE ART BEHIND THE GLAMOUR



Before identity, there is often only the ache of absence. Not just of belonging, but of being. For many queer and trans individuals, life before discovery feels like static: a muted world where nothing quite fits. There's no language for discomfort. Only numbness where joy should be.

A trans performer once said, "Before drag, I didn't know how to explain what I was feeling. I just knew I never felt like myself. When I started doing drag, it was the first time I looked in the mirror and thought, 'That's me.' It gave me a way to figure out who I was without needing to have all the answers right away."

For some, that shift doesn't come all at once. It starts with trying something new. Maybe makeup. Maybe a wig. Maybe just standing a little differently. Drag becomes a way to explore, to play with identity without pressure. And in that process, many people find parts of themselves they hadn't seen clearly before. They feel more comfortable, more confident, more like themselves. It's not about becoming someone else. It's about feeling more at home in your own skin, even if it's just for a night.

Drag is often misunderstood. To outsiders, it might seem like parody, exaggeration, or play. And it is. But beneath the sparkle, drag is rebellion. It is an act of defiance against the roles we're assigned and a reclamation of the ones we choose. Drag is not limited to queer men performing femininity. It is not only for trans people or those questioning gender. It is an open invitation to anyone who has ever felt trapped in expectations or told they are too much. In drag, being too much becomes a place to begin. At its heart, drag is a conversation with yourself, the version of you that was always there, just never allowed to speak.

Drag isn't just about how someone looks. It's about what they're saying through what they wear, how they move, and how they carry themselves. Every performance tells a story, even when no words are spoken. A costume might be a tribute, a memory, or something they've always dreamed of wearing. Drag allows people to express parts of themselves that don't always get seen in everyday life. And often, that stage becomes the only place where they get to tell their story exactly how they want to.

For a lot of people, drag is where they feel gender euphoria for the first time. Not because they're pretending, but because they're finally not. It gives them a glimpse of who they are when no one's expectations are weighing them down. A nonbinary person might try out both masculinity and femininity onstage and realize they don't have to choose just one. A cis man might uncover a softness he never gave himself permission to show. Drag lets people try things on not just clothes, but parts of themselves they've never had room for. It helps make sense of things that didn't always have words.

And while drag plays with gender, it isn't just about gender. It can be a protest, a celebration, or just a really good time. It's a space where people can turn all the things they've been through, the names they were called, the rules they were forced to follow, into something powerful. For many performers, drag isn't just about looking good. It's about healing and reclaiming the space they needed to express themselves.

And when the show ends, when the makeup's off and the stage lights fade, a lot of that strength stays. Drag might start as a costume, but what people find through it is a voice, a sense of self, maybe even a little peace. Not every answer gets figured out in a single performance, but something shifts. They stand a little taller. They speak a little louder. Because for once, they didn't have to hide who they were. They got to be it



**DEAR CHOSEN
ANCESTORS,**

**sorry for
ghosting
you**

**by
Anonymous**

Dear chosen ancestors,

I think I owe you an explanation.

It took me longer than I'd admit to find you:

the dog eared corners of borrowed books, the discrete hand-hold that meant something yet exceeded words.

You, who weren't given the right to love,

And you who loved anyway, with your hearts out on your sleeve like armour.

I didn't always know I was looking for you.

Sometimes I mistook it for envy of the girl with chipped black nail polish who read Sylvia Plath like scripture

or the teacher who rolled up her sleeves and made chalk dust look like magic.

Sometimes it felt like I was haunted, gently.

Desire moved like a draft through rooms I didn't have words for.

I'd catch it in the hush of a library aisle,

or in a phrase I underlined without knowing why.

Even my voice betrayed me, softening at the edges when I said her name, like it knew something I hadn't admitted yet.

There are days when queerness feels like muscle memory, something my body knows better than my brain.

Like how I still hesitate before holding her hand in public, even when no one's looking.

Like how my voice shifts ever so slightly when I'm back home, smoothing out the edges they might question.

You fought so I wouldn't have to hide. And yet, sometimes I find myself tucking my joy in at the corners, just in case.

I don't think that makes me less brave.

Maybe it just makes me yours,

still learning the language of my own freedom, one syllable at a time.

Yours in pride,

Another daughter of the revolution.

By Anonymous



I KISSED A GIRL



I was thirteen when I realized I liked girls. It wasn't confusing or dramatic. It felt obvious. Natural. Like the truth had always been there and I had just now turned on the light.

What didn't feel obvious was the other part. The part where I didn't like boys. That was harder to say. Harder to even think.

I told myself I was bisexual. That made sense, or at least it was easier to explain. It felt safer. I thought, of course I like boys, everyone does. Girls like boys. Boys like girls. That is how it has always been.

But I was wrong.

What I was feeling was not attraction. It was an expectation. I copied crushes because everyone had them. I acted like I cared about male attention because that's what girls were supposed to do. Even when it felt hollow. Even when I felt nothing.

That's what compulsory heterosexuality does. It is the assumption that straightness is natural and everything else is a deviation. It tells you what to want before you are old enough to know what desire even feels like.

When I came out as a lesbian, I thought I was done pretending. I thought I had finally figured it out. But compphet does not disappear just because you name it. It stays. In the way you measure your worth. In the way you dress. In the way you wonder if you are still desirable even when you no longer care who finds you attractive.





That is where the work of decentering men begins.

It is one thing to not want men. It is another to unlearn the idea that you still need them. In your sense of self. In your approval ratings.

Being a lesbian means you are not performing for them anymore. Not flirting for safety. Not laughing to make them comfortable. Not shaping your personality around being liked.

And that is a very specific kind of freedom.

It is quiet at first. Sometimes it feels like absence. You notice how much of your life used to revolve around men without you ever meaning it to. You realize that most love stories you grew up with were not meant for you. That the world doesn't know what to do with women who want other women and no one else.

But then it grows. You start to feel whole without a male gaze telling you who you are. You start to build love from scratch, from softness, from depth, from choice.

Being a lesbian in a world that worships men is lonely sometimes. It can be tiring to explain yourself. To exist outside what people are used to. But it is also powerful.

Because once you stop centering men, you realize you were never missing anything. You were just waiting to come home to yourself.





Born This Way

By Ebaa Chougle

Intersexuality is a biological condition that is often misunderstood by most people, including those within the LGBTQ+ community. In basic terms, intersex refers to the physical and biological traits present at birth, such as chromosomes, hormones, or genitalia, that do not fit typical definitions of male or female. However, the social stigma surrounding these identities forces intersex individuals to live anything but a basic life.

Intersexuality is an umbrella term for people born with variations that do not conform to the binary norms of gender. Society often views this natural diversity as unnatural simply because it is unfamiliar. When a large number of people are unaware of something, that lack of awareness often turns into ignorance. The silence around intersex identities does not just reflect stigma — it creates it.

A common misconception is the confusion between being intersex and being transgender. These identities are not the same. A transgender person identifies with a gender different from the one assigned to them at birth and may choose to undergo medical procedures during or after puberty. An intersex person, on the other hand, is born with their identity, traits, and body. Being intersex is not about transitioning — it is about being born outside the rigid categories that society tries to impose.

Ethical Dilemma and Bodily Autonomy

The lives of intersex individuals are often marked by decisions made without their consent. For years, parents and doctors have chosen to perform irreversible surgeries on intersex infants in an attempt to "normalize" their bodies. These decisions take away the individual's right to choose how they want to exist in the world. Every person deserves the freedom to decide how they are perceived and to have control over their own body.

In India, transgender rights have been recognized and the identity has been legally acknowledged as a third gender. However, the rights of intersex people are still in question. Ongoing discussions focus on the ethics of early medical interventions and the discrimination they continue to face.

The way forward is simple but urgent. Intersex individuals must have the right to bodily autonomy and informed consent. They deserve access to respectful medical care that prioritizes their health and agency. Unnecessary surgeries, especially on children, should be avoided unless medically essential. Decisions about one's body should belong to the person living in it.

The Path Forward

Harmful stereotypes and dismissive attitudes grow from ignorance. The only way to dismantle them is through awareness, empathy, and open dialogue. Intersex people deserve to live without shame, without silence, and without fear. Creating inclusive spaces starts with understanding and continues with advocacy. Their existence is not a problem to be fixed — it is a part of the human experience that deserves recognition, respect, and protection.



Silent Longing

By Amelia Kingston

In shadows deep, I hide away,
A silent truth I long to say.
Behind a wall of fear and doubt,
A voice within tries to shout.

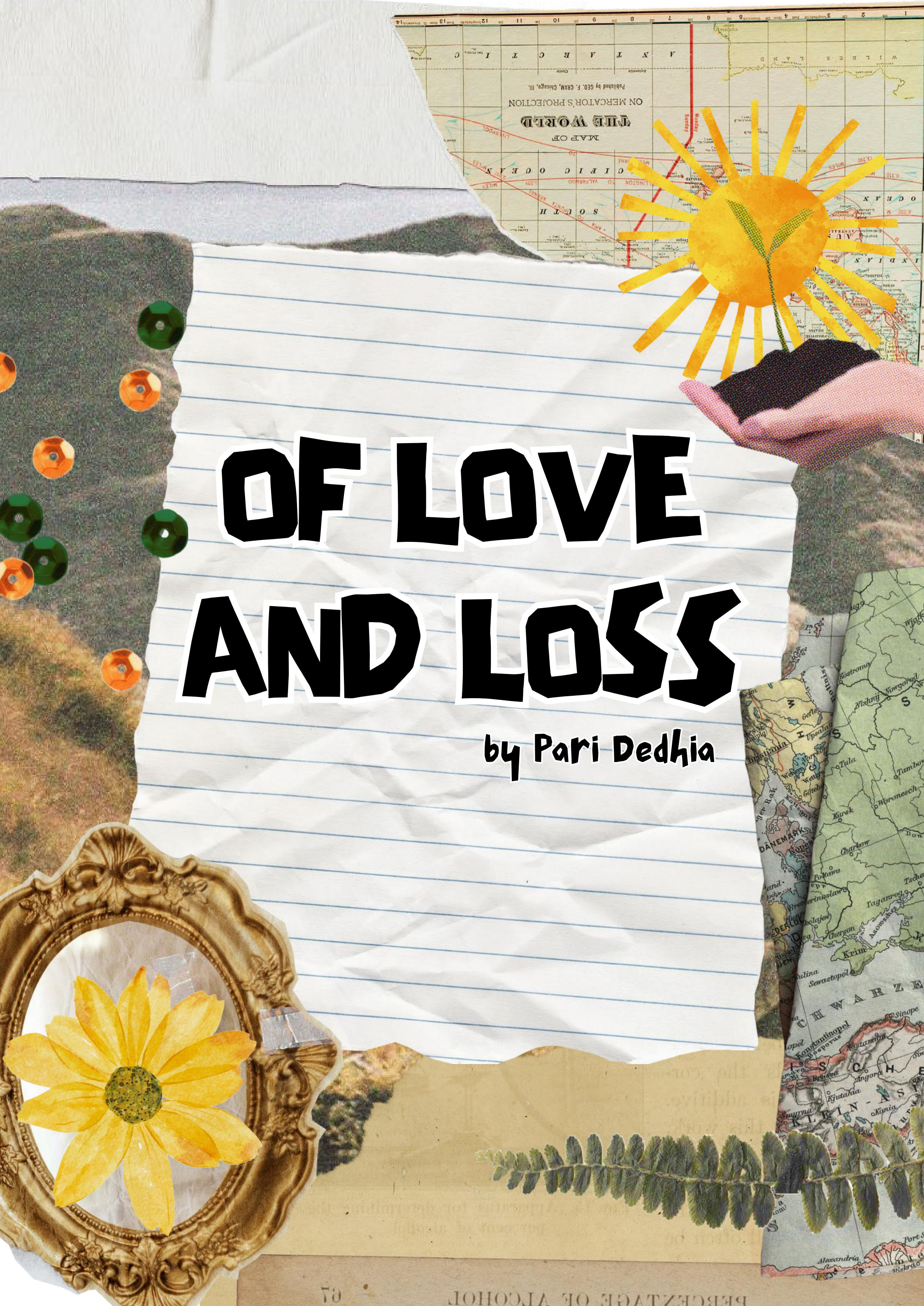
Some stare with eyes unkind and cold,
Their words like chains, so heavy and
old.
Yet in my heart, a fire burns bright,
A longing for the honest light.

For someday soon, I hope they'll see
The true me, brave and free.

I yearn to step into the sun,
But to my head they hold a gun
To show the world who I truly am.
For I am more than just a lamb

To break these walls, to let me be,
The person I was born to be.
Though shadows whisper, "Stay in your
place,"
My spirit seeks a rightful space.

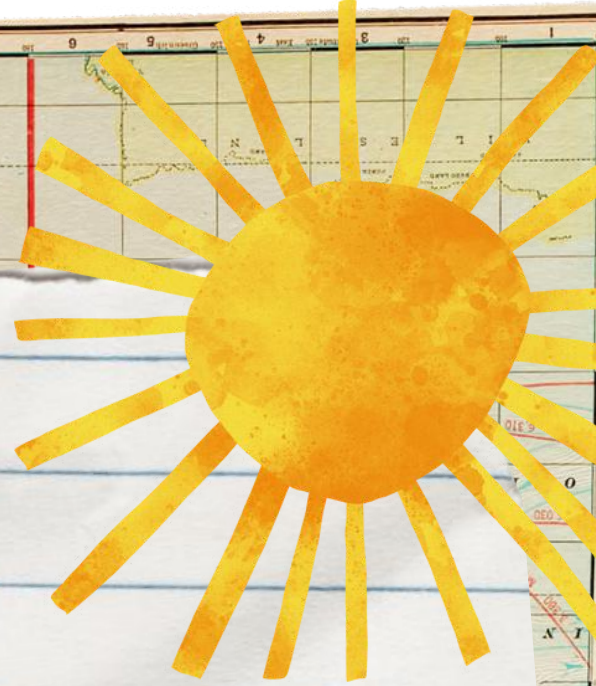
For someday soon, I hope they'll see
The true me, brave and free.



OF LOVE AND LOSS

by Pari Dedhia

People left to die on the streets,
Men who loved, was that their misdeed?



Government, families, society they once knew
Shunned them, asking, "who are you?"

Blood-stained sheets, untouched and bare,
No hands left to offer care.

That's when she stepped up.
That's when she spoke up.

The care they took,
The help they gave
Would never fade
Would never fade.



From being the first of us
To saving the last of us
It's her who helped them through.

But remember the cost:
Pride was born
Of love and loss.



BENDING TIME



By Manya Khimasia

**I'd carve the clock with trembling hands,
Split its face, unwind its bands.
I'd turn the gears against their rhyme,
If it meant I could steal back time.**

**I'd chase the sun, reverse its glow,
Drag the moon where rivers flow.
I'd pull the stars from where they're pinned,
To find the moment you still lived.**

**I'd dig through years, through soil, through stone,
To hear your voice, to bring you home.
I'd bargain with the heavens, the earth, the sea,
To have you here, to set you free.**

**I'd break the rules of life and death,
Steal you back with every breath.
I'd twist the threads of fate, reweave,
If it meant you'd never leave.**

**But time is cruel, it bends, it breaks,
It gives, it takes, it never waits.
And though I'd give my soul, my all,
I can't undo that final call.**

**So here I stand, with empty hands,
A child who dreams, who understands
That love outlives the ticking chime,
But I'd still bend the world to have you one more time.**

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