

How do we accommodate this aspect in Sen's model? Only by specifying the home consumption (HC, to use Sen's notation) function appropriately. If rigidities in preferences have to be incorporated to obtain gross complementarity or gross substitutability between the two commodities throughout the range, the import demand function has to show price elasticity of demand for imports which is either constant or showing contrary to normal behaviour with respect to the exchange rate. Under both these circumstances, the import demand function has to be non-linear in e . On the other hand, a generalised specification of the import demand function should allow for the normal behaviour of the price elasticity which can be done through a linear function in e . It is possible to make a choice between these two alternative forms of the demand functions with the help of well established econometric tests.

However, at this stage, it may be pointed out that the set of data available on exchange rates, imports and import prices for most of the developing countries are likely to have some inherent bias arising out of the initial position of inelastic imports with comfortable forex situation. By experience or the 'gut feelings' of the policy-makers, if it is well accepted in a nation that their imports are price inelastic and that devaluation in a narrow range may be contractionary, the most preferred policy would be to revalue the currency in real terms if not in nominal terms. Thus, most of the developing nations were fond of holding their nominal exchange rate fixed irrespective of large positive differences in their inflation rates over those of their major trading partners. This made their real effective exchange rates appreciate considerably. This might have been perceived very beneficial because if devaluations were indeed contractionary, the revaluations would be expansionary by the same logic. However, this situation is obviously not sustainable in the long run when growing trade deficits resulting from the policy of revaluation make the currency so overvalued as to pose a major threat to the monetary and fiscal stability of the system.¹ Sen's analysis of Cooper's hypothesis helps us understand better the rationale for the policy of tacit effective revaluation followed by several developing nations. However, his conclusion that the 'maxi' devaluations may be contractionary, does not come out of his model unless abnormal demand and supply conditions are explicitly considered.

Notes

- 1 It is important to note that the two goods can be uniquely defined as gross complements only when both the cross price elasticities are negative. This may not always occur [for details see Dholakia and Oza 1996:145n]. On the other hand, Sen unnecessarily recommends

that the cross price elasticity obtained from the econometric estimation of the import demand function can serve the purpose for testing gross complementarity! Cross price elasticity in the import demand function is the partial percentage change in the import demand with respect to the price of the home goods, while Sen's model requires the estimate of the other cross price elasticity, viz. the partial percentage change in the demand for home goods with respect to the exchange rate.

- 2 The aspect of the elasticity of export supply is assumed away by Sen for simplicity and expositional convenience. His conclusion on 'Maxi' devaluation would, however, require this aspect also to be explicitly considered.

Thus, it is not only the import demand function but also the export supply function which needs to be estimated.

- 3 It may be pointed out here that several developing countries had highly overvalued currencies before implementing the 'conditionalities', the rate of overvaluation often being in three digits and sometimes even in four digits (e.g. Ghana and Uganda)!

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Homosexuality: Against Hubris

A Suneetha

H SRIKANTH's (*EPW*, April 13) rejoinder to Vimal Balasubrahmanyam (*EPW*, February 3) raises a host of issues related to human sexuality, right to sexual orientation, as well as civil and human rights, which need careful consideration. The attempt made here does not claim to address all the issues and aims only at contesting the various premises on which Srikanth's article is based and outlining its implications for the democratic spirit that underlies the civil liberties movement(s) in India.

Reacting to VB's advocacy of the rights of the homosexuals in India and her criticism of the unsympathetic attitude of the Left towards their rights, Srikanth says that every expression of sexuality should be evaluated on the basis of the larger needs of the society for reproduction and as homosexuality in no way contributes to be healthy reproduction of the society, it should be rejected. Consequently, it should not be viewed as a civil liberties issue but as a problem of medical health. Moreover, these persons who give exaggerated importance to their sexual needs rather than to the emancipation of our society are asking for privileges and should be discouraged so as to protect our healthy reproductive practices.

The first premise of the article is that of heterosexual behaviour as the only normal sexual behaviour. With this premise Srikanth sets out to examine the reasons for the existence of homosexuality. Defining homosexuals as persons who deviate from the practice of "normal" sexuality due to "biological imbalances" or the lack of "access to healthy heterosexual relations for a long time", or due to the rigidity of the gender categories, he claims that they can be cured of this practice through education, counselling or medical treatment. It can only be a substitute for heterosexual relationships when the latter are not available, but should be discarded as soon as they do become available.

Secondly, he argues that all sexual practices should be guided by the larger needs of the society, i.e., the stage of social development. It is the social necessity, i.e., reproduction of the species that determines the sexual relations in a society and any expression of sexuality outside the strict needs of reproduction is perverse or "deviant". According to this argument human society has left all the undesirable sexual practices such as polygamy, incest, polyandry as backward and unsuited to its social organisation and has decided on monogamous sexual relations, i.e., heterosexual relations within marriage, as the only desirable practice. As such, any support to homosexuality amounts to giving support to such archaic practices as "caste, sati, incest". Apart from the persons who are biologically not suited to heterosexuality, persons who choose homosexuality by choice are "perverts" and pose a great danger to the "normal" monogamous practices, by not centring their sexual behaviour round reproduction.

Consequently, civil libertarians and Marxists who are politically progressive should make efforts to "correct" them. Supporting their claims for rights would amount to legitimising their sexual orientation. Marxists, who should judge everything from the systematic point of view, should treat such practices as harmful to the society and if need arises should not hesitate to use force against them.

I would argue that the 'normality' of the heterosexual practices is a highly constructed one and even granting the 'abnormality' of homosexual practice, they do not deserve the treatment that Srikanth has in store for them. Second, I would argue that the link between sexuality and reproduction is a problematic one. Third, it is pointed out that arguing against homosexuality on the grounds of 'progress' is an absolutely authoritarian.

The belief that heterosexual behaviour is natural to human beings equates biological sex with the gender of human beings. The role of culture in the making of 'women' and 'men' out of female and male beings is hardly acknowledged. Gender socialisation which starts in infancy continues in all spheres of life and structures the lives of women and men to suit the roles the society has carved out for them. The categories 'men' and 'women' are defined as excluding each other. Their 'biologically' defined gender identities largely determine the expression of sexualities of men and women. The single most important aspect of this gender construction is the subordination of females to males. This subordination is eroticised in many to 'naturalise' as well as 'normalise' the heterosexual behaviour. Women and men are allowed and encouraged to express heterosexual impulses only. Thus among various cultures, the stronger the gender differentiation, the more the structures against homosexuality will be.

The definition and construction of sexuality and sexual behaviour is a major component in the subordination of women to men in all patriarchal cultures. It is this linkage between heterosexuality and women's subordination that the radical feminists have pointed out. The choice of lesbianism as a political weapon has to be understood in this context. Though the merits of this choice are open to debate what it makes clear is the oppressive nature of compulsive heterosexuality. Rather than concluding that homosexuality arises due to the inequalities that exist in the heterosexual relationships today as Srikanth argues, they have pointed out that the privileging of heterosexual behaviour plays a major role in obstructing the political bonding among women. Moreover, the separation of homosexuals as a separate category of persons has occurred in the context where capitalism was taking roots, and when the family became an important structural component of emerging capitalist relations. Heterosexual family became the basic unit on which capitalist relations were shaped. Marxist-feminists in the west have extensively analysed these relations between patriarchy and capitalism in the west. Heterosexual relations and the organisation of these relations into families is needed by capitalism for the reproduction of labour power. Similarly, patriarchal subordination of women in families is also necessary to keep the value of women's labour-power low, to use women as a reserve labour force. The rigid boundaries between masculinity and femininity are thus constantly constructed, maintained, naturalised and reinforced and only heterosexuality comes to

be considered as 'normal' sexual behaviour. Thus, the concept of homosexual is a relatively recent idea, only hundred years old. As Anthony Giddens points out, "only in the last hundred years has homosexual activity been considered something that a certain type of person does – a category of abnormality and deviance constructed in *opposition* to the category of the 'normal heterosexuality' [Giddens 1989, emphasis added].

Various myths that support this 'deviance' are constructed. The most popular myths are that homosexuals are more sexual, that homosexuals desire to the members of the opposite sex, that a person is either a homosexual or a heterosexual and most potently that homosexuals as a group are psychologically maladjusted, the last of which Srikanth also expresses. Mark Freedman, who has done a comprehensive study on the psychological dimension of homosexual and heterosexual women says "(T)here are no significant differences in rated psychological adjustment between the groups of homosexually oriented and heterosexually oriented women...Nor were the homosexually oriented women any more neurotic or variable in their psychological functioning than the heterosexually oriented control-group members...the homosexually oriented women were functioning significantly better psychologically in many areas..." [Petras 1978].

Any discussion of sexuality that intends to propose a unitary mode of 'sexual coexistence' cannot afford to ignore this 'constructedness' of 'monogamousness' of the existing heterosexual relations. And it is in this context that any discussion on homosexuality should be firmly placed.

That the organisation of sexuality into oppressive heterosexual families is neither of historically immutable reality nor a desirable one is brought home by the protests of persons with homosexual orientation throughout the world today. Homosexuals, gay and lesbian challenge the boundaries imposed by patriarchal social structures on the sexuality of both men and women. By exploring and expressing alternate forms of sexuality that have always been integral part of 'normal', but suppressed human sexuality, they 'normalise' the relationship among men and women.

RELATION BETWEEN REPRODUCTION AND SEXUAL ACTIVITY

Apart from the extremely limited conception of sexuality what is more troubling is the authoritarian tone this article adopts towards expression of sexuality in the mask of 'progressivism'. It assumes that men and women should exercise their sexuality only in the interests of procreation and that it should be according to the needs of the

society, i.e., procreancy (expressed by Srikanth as reproduction). That this 'necessary' relationship posited between sexuality and procreancy is neither necessary nor desirable as such became evident in the course of human history.

Srikanth seems to fear that the society might not be able to reproduce itself if homosexual relationships become dominant. This is implicit in his accusation of Vimal Balasubramanyam that she wants to encourage these practices by advocating homosexual's rights to sexual orientation. Apart from the ill-founded nature of such fear it is his understanding of reproduction which is more troubling.

Homosexual practices always coexisted with heterosexual practices in most cultures and they never hindered the process of biological reproduction. In fact evidence points out that tribes resorted to homosexuality as a measure of population control. There exist some tribes in which homosexuality is institutionalised and coexists with institutionalised heterosexuality.

Coming to reproduction, Srikanth seems to assume that it happens automatically and naturally, with the willing co-operation of women and men in the process of procreation. This unproblematic assumption does not acknowledge the oppression of women that is a constitutive element in the process of human reproduction. Reproduction involves both biological reproduction (child-bearing, that is, biologically done by women) as well as human reproduction (i.e., child-rearing, which has been historically done by women but is not 'natural' in the sense of being 'biological'). The reproductive power of women has been historically controlled by men in all patriarchal cultures. It is only in recent times that women have been partially freed from this control due to technological advances in contraception and gained relative autonomy in the exercise of their sexuality. Though this has not given them total autonomy, nevertheless the loosening of the link between reproduction and sexuality constitutes a progressive step for women. This recognised autonomy in fact paved the way for the development of individualistic behaviour and tolerant attitude towards homosexual behaviour too. It would be counterproductive to reimpose this value at this stage of technological development where human beings have moved out of the realm of necessity of the linkage between sexuality and procreation, especially for women.

Similarly, the positing of a societal mode of proper sexual orientation on the assumption that sexuality should be exercised according to the reproductive needs of the society depending upon the stage of development of the human societies can be dangerous in other ways. Religious insti-

tutions apart, since their inception, states have always sought to control the sexuality of women, and in the state-centered societies of many ex-colonial countries Asia and Africa it was amounted to go giving control on women's sexuality (also of men belonging to lower socio-economic categories) and reproduction to the dominant interests in the society. The disastrous consequences for women which resulted due to the population policies adopted by many governments in these countries are only too well known.

What is pointed out here is that just when both some women and men are able to break out of the boundaries that patriarchy imposes on the expression of their sexuality as a result of multifarious struggles on all its aspects exposing its various pretensions regarding sexuality and reproduction, it would be reactionary to put the clock back to assume the same pretensions in the name of progress. Srikanth's notion of progress is a linear one that ignores important historical realities. Without taking into consideration the complexities involved in sexuality of women and men it would be irresponsible and frivolous to argue against homosexuality on the grounds of backwardness and abnormality.

IS RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION A BOURGEOIS PRIVILEGE?

As pointed above homosexuality has existed in all cultures and has even been institutionalised in some. Its acceptance and tolerance depended not on societal needs for procreation but on the extent of gender differentiation and acceptance of various modes of sexual behaviour as part of normal human sexual behaviour. When Vimal Subrahmanyam argues for the rights of the homosexuals what she is pleading for is this acceptance of sexual relations between persons of same sex as normal. A human deprivation is expressed in the language of rights only when it is not recognised as such and is aimed at the removal of such deprivation. When homosexuals protest on the streets what they are fighting for is not that all the heterosexuals should turn into homosexuals but that their sexual orientation should not form the basis for discrimination and deprivation of their rights. They demand that homosexuality be accepted as normal. They demand that a person's sexual orientation be considered a private matter of that individual, a private matter of purely personal choice that does not have any bearing on the other aspects of their lives. Just as a person's heterosexual orientation 'privileges' them to go about life unhindered, a person with homosexual orientation should also be able to live her/his life.

Though Srikanth's arguments against the rights of homosexuals on the grounds that

it is an imported practice of the decadent bourgeoisie and that it is non-existent among 'working' classes can be easily dismissed as flimsy, his later argument that they do not contribute to social emancipation needs a thorough rebuttal. Apart from the puritanical attitude towards sexual behaviour implicit in this argument what is more problematic is the role he visualises for civil liberties organisations. Admitting that homosexuals should not be deprived of their rights which are constitutionally guaranteed, he says that civil liberties organisations can take up this task but questions VB as to whether she has this in mind when she is asking for their rights. Implicit in this argument is the assumption that the rights of homosexuals can be protected and fought for without questioning the underlying reasons for the deprivation of their rights. It would amount to saying that discrimination against women and dalits can be fought without questioning patriarchy and caste.

Moreover, one should be wary of the argument that gay and lesbian movements do not in any way contribute to social emancipation. We should remember that demands for the rights of women and dalits were met by similar reactions in the beginning on the part of some self-proclaimed marxists in this country. Civil liberties movement which draws its inspiration from the larger democratic movements takes up issues regarding the deprivation and discrimination with the understanding that underlying

systems of domination have to be opposed. Whether or not the civil liberties movement in the country takes up the issue of the rights of the homosexuals, asking it to do so in the manner Srikanth prescribes would be surely undermining the spirit of civil liberties in the country.

Just as removing all kinds of discrimination based on 'sex, race, class, sexual orientation, etc', as well as preservation and spread of democratic values is a task of civil libertarians, offering a critique of existing relations has been the task of the leftists, of all varieties. Orthodox varieties of Marxism have been deterministic in their analysis and authoritarian in their politics, and Srikanth's exposition of homosexuality falls exactly into this category and comes dangerously close to the various expressions of 'homophobia' prevalent in the west. That it should come in the guise of 'Marxism', while being Marxist neither in content nor in method is unfortunate to say the least. Though it is no secret that 'sexuality' has been a subject of taboo even among the Indian marxists, it comes as a rude shock to find such an ill-informed and authoritarian exposition from a self-proclaimed marxist.

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