



Bengali actor Rii poses for The Pleasure Project, and (right and below) more images from their campaigns



Putting sexy back in sex

The UK- and India-based The Pleasure Project aims to reduce STDs by improving people's sex lives. **BY MANAVI SIDDHANTI**

"I'm in a quiet corner in this bookstore in New Delhi. I am slightly tipsy and aroused by the erotic images showing on a projector screen. I glance at a man in the corner. He smiles at me. I smile back. I start to touch myself. I can tell he is aroused. He starts to touch himself. We stare at each other, engrossed in our mutual masturbation. Suddenly we notice the room is silent. We have an audience. I decide to stop. I got shy."

"You BLUE tree, wet dark and mossy carpet! So so moist, cool, you thick trunk! And millions of your blue blue flowers, falling, anointing my nakedness!"

— Anonymous fantasies posted at a recent Pleasure evening held at a Delhi bookstore

Not too long ago UK-based public health specialist Anne Philpott wondered whether the clinical approach favoured by a majority of public health specialists when it came to spreading the message of safe sex was the right way to go about it. Public health professionals, says Philpott, overlooked the reason why people have sex in the first place: for pleasure. So, about seven years ago, she started The Pleasure Project, an educational, advocacy and research initiative based out of offices in the UK and India, that promotes safer sex that feels good.

TPP works with NGOs, erotic media producers and media outlets besides providing

training and consultancy to counselors who are looking to adopt "a more sex-positive approach to their work." It also hosts discussions and fantasy open mic events in various cities across the world including Delhi frequently.

Keeping in mind that guilt is synonymous with sex, The Pleasure Project doesn't really add to existing stereotypes. "We are unusual in that we address the issues of making sure safe sex messages are delivered in a sexy way — something that is rare to find. Our recent series of fantasy readings (in Delhi) included fantasies about sexy food, open air solo sex and getting wet in the monsoon, all of which carry no risk of sexually transmitted diseases but can be very hot," says Philpott, who

is based in New Delhi. "I think we all need some more pleasure in our lives and especially good, safe sex. India has a rich heritage to draw on and many people to work with."

But how does one know where to draw the line? "Well, if you want to tell your mum how you love putting a dash of lube on your G-Spot in the morning, it may make her lose her

appetite. But I also love the joy that comes from sharing pleasures and fantasies. Our events... are like a group lust fest without any sex." The idea, says Philpott, 40, is to make men and women realise that everyone of us has fantasies and have dreamt about waterfall sex, sofa sex and such like. "The problem lies not with being horny, or having a fetish — but forcing your sexuality on someone is not sexy, so we make sure we discuss that (at our events) often."

TPP recently published the second edition of *The Global Mapping of Pleasure*, a document that identifies organisations and projects across the globe that put pleasure first in HIV prevention, and erotic media that promote safe sex. "It includes many examples from India — from sex workers using the Kama Sutra to show clients how to have safe non-penetrative sex, to selling condoms in a sexy way," says Philpott. The mapping unearthed several eye-openers including Masturbathons in Europe (yes, it is what it sounds like), and an (almost) naked party at Oberlin College in the US.

What about porn and its impact on sex? "Our take is that porn could do more to be creative as regards safer sex. More and more people have access to the Internet — estimates say that five percent of all downloads are porn and that means in India people have got unprecedented access to sexual imagery that they have never had before. That's got to be having an impact on their views of sex and how they are having sex."

For more action, indulgence and reading, visit thepleasureproject.org; thepleasureproject.org/wordpress; [facebook.com/pages/The-Pleasure-Project](https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Pleasure-Project)

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