

Queer Approach to Homosexuality in Indian Culture

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Abstract

Today homosexuality and queer identity is acceptable in more Indian youths than before, but still when it comes topics families, home or even school, acceptance to their sexuality and also freedom to express it openly is of constant struggle. To a society which is bound by strict and rigid norms culturally and socially, especially which dictates the terms and conditions of careers, education, marriage and even the family after, it becomes really difficult to not follow the main stream. Despite the symbol given for progressive acceptance of homosexuality rights in India, it is really difficult to understand and watch the reaction of society when it comes to accepting it culturally. In recent research, it is observed that, major stagnation to the acceptance of the rights are due to the ignorance of families altogether. Lack of support from family can be depressing and may effect mental and physical health. Theoretically, most educated people seems to accept and support alternate sexuality and gender identities, when it comes to day to day behaviour, but there is an urgent need to change the reality when it comes to a larger picture. This research paper analysis the Indian families and Indian culture all together in homosexual context which is an important layer of family and society but are kept under cover successfully. A queer approach to homosexuality in India is required to bring it near to main stream and uncover it.

Keywords: Critical and Culture Studies, Gender, LGBT, Indian Society, Communication

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Introduction

India is one of the world's oldest civilisations and also one of the most populated countries. India being a vast country refers collectively to thousand of distinct and unique cultures when it comes to different religion and communities. India's language, religion, dance, beliefs, music, architecture and even food differs from place to place. Sometime even a small distance covered can make a vast difference in how people live and interact. Indian culture is actually several millennium years old is labelled as amalgamation of several cultures and is spread across the Indian subcontinent. Indian culture being so diverse has got different cuisine, different philosophy and so has made an impact across the world in many different ways.

Throughout the history of India, culture seems to be heavily influenced by the Dharmic religion. They are mostly credited with shaping the philosophy, literature, architecture, art and music of the culture of country. India is one of the most religious and ethnically diverse country in the world, but along with it India has also got deep religious society and cultural values. Here, religion plays an important role in life of an individual. Even being secular, Hinduism is found at majority of the places. Hindu people dominates the population of the country as a whole.

Entering the English language in 16th, the meaning of queer was "strange", "odd", "peculiar", or "eccentric". The word referred to something which is suspicious or "not quite right", or to a person with mild derangement or who exhibits socially inappropriate behaviour. A Northern English expression, "There's no so queer as folk," meaning, "There is nothing as strange as people", employs this meaning. (Urban Dictionary. (2017). Urban Dictionary: queer. [online] Available at: <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=queer> [Accessed 27 Apr. 2017]).

Relating meaning to queer includes unwell feelings or something which can be questioned or can be suspicious. "Queer Street" was a term used to denote financial problems in United Kingdom.

Homosexuality is usually described as a persistent and predominant sexual attraction to a persons of one's own gender - men attracted towards men and women being attracted towards women. But many a times, not every person who experience same sex attraction are read to be identified themselves as gay or a lesbian. Sexual orientation is a way of referring to the direction of a person's predominant sexual attraction over time. We usually call a person homosexual if they seem to have attraction towards the same sex and the person who is attracted towards opposite are said to be heterosexual person. Different aspects are affected when we talk about homosexuality as a whole. There feelings, Behaviour, Identity, way of living especially their choice of living is different which is sometimes a problem for people.

(exodusglobalalliance.org. (2017). What is Homosexuality?. [online] Available at: <http://www.exodusglobalalliance.org/whatishomosexualityp95.php> [Accessed 27 Apr. 2017].)

Indian Society is hierarchical in nature. Whether you shift to any part of country or try to learn the society after dividing it into caste, culture, creed, nature, people or social group, India has ranked every person based on some essential qualities that an individual possesses. Although India is politically a democratic nation which talks about complete equality but still talks about societal hierarchy when it comes to caste groups, individuals. Caste are primarily associated with Hinduism, but there are other caste which also exist here like Muslims, Indian Christians and other religion communities. Within every religion or area people do know their relative ranking and how they individually represent their caste and behaviour constantly based on it.

(Asia Society. (2017). *Indian Society and Ways of Living*. [online] Available at: <http://asiasociety.org/education/indian-society-and-ways-living> [Accessed 29 Apr. 2017].)

Brief about the project:

The research started with a broad topics like Critical Culture, Gender and Communication, which led to various discussion points. Eventually, the research reached to a point on sensitising Indian society on LGBT.

There are many problems in the country which are general and are faced by everyone around. But as the society is divided into caste and religion, we also happened to divide the society and people in the society by their sexuality. This is where the problem arises. Just because there is categorisation in people based on their sexual choices we decide to judge them, and so we decide to deal with the similar problems in a very different way.

Research Statement:

Sensitising people to treat LGBT equally for the similar problems they face like straight people.

Creating an awareness on the general and common problems that are faced by everyone but are ignored or dealt very differently just because of categorisation.

Research Method:

Many people are found guilty for the discrimination that is usually done against LGBT youths, whether intentionally or unintentionally. LGBT youths are already facing quite many problems in their life and then discrimination from the others make their sufferings unbearable at times, They face daily discrimination from society, peers, family and even their friends, school teachers and administration. The statistics sometimes are overwhelming which shows how LGBT youth lack support and guidance on every step when they need and this also proves how much they are clearly affected in other ways too. The affected ways even include the rate at which they are abused, neglected or discriminated. Majorly research indicates that more parents want their kids to be straight or behave and live a life of straight even if they are identified as gays and even schools prefer straight above gays and this is why they get affected to the core. There are major roles which

could be played by parents or teachers and in turn can help LGBT youth live a normal life.

(York College / The City University of New York. (2017). How Are LGBT Youths Affected by Discrimination and What Can Schools Do to Help?. [online] Available at: <https://www.york.cuny.edu/academics/writing-program/the-york-scholar-1/volume-5-fall-2008/how-are-lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-lgbt-youths-affected-by-discrimination-and> [Accessed 29 Apr. 2017].)

1. Definition to Indian society

India as a land of various religions lets you explore various aspects of social life. Diversity is found everywhere whether be ethnic, linguistic, regional, economic, religious, class and caste groups but still we always talk about unity in diversity. Differences between north India and south India are pretty significant, especially in systems of marriage and kinship. India being a country of royals, it has a rich family structure with a patrilineal background. This helps people understand the family members in a better way and also how to treat them. The best way to understand this is by understanding a structure of a joint family.

In India, the family structure which has been followed since times of patrilineal family and this is the major reason that the culture and traditions of India is still rich. Mostly a joint family has three or four matrilineally related generations. They all cooperate and live together under one roof. This is actually a good thing in a way, it helps family to grow strong mentally, physically or economically, and majorly the children are also able to learn the traditions and values from their grandparents and elders. This is the best way to make children learn about bonding and respect. Indian families have always given importance to the structure, even after urbanisation or modernisation and even influence of westernisation on India, the basic structure of Indian families are still the same and they value keeping those traditions forward and forever.

2. Indian philosophy

Indian or Hindu Philosophy is classified into 9 schools, which are classified into 2 schools majorly. 6 orthodox schools (astika) and 3 heterodox schools (nastika). This difference between these two branches is all based on Vedas. Orthodox schools recognise the authority of Vedas while heterodox schools do not believe in it. Out of these nine, eight are atheistic as there is no place for God. Only Uttara Mimamsa, which is also called Vendanta, has a place for God in it.

Six Orthodox Schools(Classical Schools)

- Sankhya Philosophy
- Yoga Philosophy
- Nyaya Philosophy
- Vaisheshik Philosophy
- Purva mimamsa (mimamsa)
- Uttara Mimamsa (Vedanta)

Three Heterodox Schools of Indian Philosophy

Carvaka

Buddhist Philosophy

Jain Philosophy

Ajivika Philosophy

These are the different but all together forms a solid Indian philosophy structure and we Indians live upto it.

(York College / The City University of New York. (2017). How Are LGBT Youths Affected by Discrimination and What Can Schools Do to Help?. [online] Available at: <https://www.york.cuny.edu/academics/writing-program/the-york-scholar-1/volume-5-fall-2008/how-are-lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-lgbt-youths-affected-by-discrimination-and> [Accessed 29 Apr. 2017].)

3. LGBT in India

LGBT people in India i.e Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender face legal and social difficult to another level as compared to non-LGBT people in India. In India, sexual activity between people of same gender is considered illegal and also this is the major reason that same-sex couples are not acceptable in India and so are not allowed to be legally married or obtain civil partnership. India, do recognise Hijras or transgender as the third gender, which are said to be separate from men or women. Indians finally came forward in the year of 2009 with there first ever Pride Parade in Delhi, Bangalore and Kolkata.

Same sex marriages are not legal in India and so are not recognised by Indian government. Same sex couples are offered more limited rights such as civil union or a domestic partnership in India final in 2011 after which both the couples started receiving life threats from their friends and families which became a major issue and that made Indian government think again about the decision taken.

The state of Tamil Nadu and Kerala are the first ever states to introduce Hijras or transgender welfare policy. According to this policy the transgender are allowed to use the sex reassigned Surgery program, housing facility, various citizenship documents and also admissions to various government colleges and schools and can go through normal education system without discrimination. They are entitled for full scholarship program like any other straight person and can live a normal life or take help through formation self-help groups for saving and initiative there income generation programs.

Homosexual intercourse was made a criminal offence under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860. This made offence to people from the community which made them start a foundation Naz Foundation which helps the LGBT fight against government against private, adult, consensual, and non commercial same sex conduct to be in a direct violation of fundamental rights provided by Indian Constitution.

4. Happenings at Schools

Suicide is the leading cause of death among gay and lesbian youths. Gay and lesbian youths are 2 to 6 times more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual youth. Over 30% of all reported teen suicides each year are committed by gay and lesbian youths. . . . Gays and lesbians are at much higher risk than the heterosexual population for alcohol and drug abuse. Approximately 30% of both the lesbian and gay male populations have problems with alcohol. Gay and lesbian youth are at greater risk for school failure than heterosexual children.

(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1989, as cited in "Today's Gay Youth," n.d., n.p. [Accessed 29 Apr. 2017])

Substantially higher proportions of homosexual people use alcohol, marijuana or cocaine than is the case in the general population. (McKirnan & Peterson, 1989, as cited in "Today's Gay Youth," n.d., n.p. [Accessed 29 Apr. 2017])

Approximately 28% of gay and lesbian youths drop out of high school because of discomfort (due to verbal and physical abuse) in the school environment. (Remafedi, 1987, as cited in "Today's Gay Youth," n.d., n.p. [Accessed 29 Apr. 2017])

Gay and lesbian youths' discomfort stems from fear of name calling and physical harm. (Eversole, n.d, as cited in "Today's Gay Youth," n.d., n.p. [Accessed 29 Apr. 2017])

5. Types of Discrimination

Major comments that LGBT youth face on a daily basis follows : "I hate gays and they should be actually banned form the country." "Get way from me, you faggot, I can not stand the sight of you." "These queers make my stomach turn." These are just few examples of what goes in the life of an LGBT community person on day to day life. "Faggot" is often a word used by antigay peers to terrorise LGBT youth. These words are used usually in a negative sense to express something which is either stupid or uncool (Human Rights Watch, 2001, p.35 [Accessed 29 Apr. 2017]). When this occurs, it shows an even greater discrimination sign towards LGBT youths. LGBT youth are neglected by their parents on a major basis which should have been the first every touch point for them and approximately quarter of them are forced to leave there homes and move out to live separately. This in turn creates a state of loneliness and isolation and discomfort in their lives and they are not easy at trusting others. Some of the LGBT youth are are verbally and physically abused by there parents, which is not helping them in any way. Needless to say, parents, families, teachers at school play a major part in actually making this discrimination start and making them feel that loneliness in life.

The inmates at school are other major part of discrimination happening against the LGBT youth. Are schools actually able to understand the situation? Are they ready to take actions which are required? In common words, Are they ready to teach humanity to every kind of students coming to that place? These are various question which arrises when we talk about LGBT community attending schools and college.

These are major reasons on why these LGBT community has got a major high rates of depression or suicide or even suicide attempts because, it's not easy for people to accept them and when they are not accepted they feel the loneliness and also the need to revolt against or take actions which sometimes give them a minute away from reality or even sometimes cost them there lives.

6. Effects of discrimination

LGBT youth endure hostile verbal and physical harassment that can be excruciating for them (Human Rights Watch, 2001,p. 35 [Accessed 29 Apr. 2017]). People who were interviewed during the survey held by Human Rights Watch said, even when we are scared of physical and sexual abuse, the words like “faggot”, “queer”, or “dyke”, daily are still destructive to major level.

Even a young gay person happened to say and informed the reason of him dropping out of the program and he said “Just because I am gay that does not mean I am stupid”. I hear “that's so gay” as you say “that's so stupid” which I am not. Over 25% of LGBT youth are school dropouts because they feel they don't belong there and that's the major part of there failure and this is because they are not ready for the discrimination at the that early age and the the discrimination that happens there make school atmosphere unbearable for them. The studies have shown that LGBT youth have got greater failure at academic than heterosexual students. Moreover they don't involve in much of student activity and have got very little dedication to school agendas because isn't a place they feel safe, healthy or productive. Therefore, they live there school life with more fear of physical, emotional or sexual abuse which reduces there productivity and normal bringing up.

Physical abuse against LGBT usually is because of the negligence mainly from school. Human Rights Watch reports that physical assault are reported after interviewing many of the LGBT youth, which had an enormous psychological impact on them, mainly because of these physical abuse was the result of mainly avoiding or neglecting the constant verbal and non physical harassment. For example, a lesbian student from school was reported saying that the verbal comments or harassment went on for seven months which finally became the reason that the person got the guts to abuse her physically. There are cases where a seventh grade was beaten up by anti-gay guys and then again hit by a beer bottle in tenth grade when he had to crawl to near by friend's place to get help. These people are so used to these kinds of harassment that they did not even turn back to see who did that, because they are accustomed to what is happening around and with them. Many of the LGBT people are reported with problems like depression, sleeplessness, excessive sleep, lots of appetite, or the the feel of hopelessness, or everything all together which has played with there physical and mental health in a very bad manner. There are cases when kids are to that stage that they decide to not it anymore and decide to skip school or avoid any contact with the world to avoid the harassment. It is mentally and physically exhausting to attend school and go through the same torture regularly. LGBT youth have more chances of alcohol or substance abuse than that of heterosexual youth. Roughly, one third of the LGBT people go through alcohol problem or drugs. It has become a habit of drinking to the point of passing out or just to feel normal is what they do. The lack of support

from people around special the people who mean a lot like parents or teachers at school get them to the level that they lose all hopes and that's when they are in search of alternate methods to feel happy or even normal.

FINAL:

Final Poetry for the video:

We are the people of the world
the member of a family
We are the part of a family
the collective the masses
WE are YOU

We are ready for a tragedy
We are ready for an action
We stand in queues with no proper reaction

We want grand movies
But have no time to live a normal life
We enjoy good drama
But run away from others trauma

We fight for causes
stand up in the street
We fight for clauses
but walk by the false decrees

We want to be nameless
to be blameless
to be honest, we are just shameless

we talk about love
Yet eye a perfect figure
We know our spirits are naked and free
yet judge flesh and bones like figurine

We talk about modernisation about education
Yet blame our disgusting actions on the clothes worn

Debates, chat shows, running in herds
No opinion of our own
Like, copy, copy, paste, pasted, shared
with online indulgence of our own

We talk about freedom of expression

& yet can not support a simple cause of action
We like, we love, but still don't obstruct
& decide to stand by when someone weak is thrashed

We talk about modern values, change of thoughts
but still follow patriarchy where woman have no chance at all
Our movies, our life, say love is holier than thou
yet label some sex to be out of natural limits or so

WE the effervescent WE
WE are YOU

Prototyping and testing: (Accept/Reject/Change)

(Change)

The prototype is made with a narration and a video with abstract montage shots. The video started with the narration defined below where I am talking about the general problems that an LGBT problem face. So the video was made in a way that the narration only was talking about the general problems which everyone faces but the shoot was done in a way that I tried showing gender fluidity as in a case showing that a person is at the end a HUMAN BEING rather than categorising the person it is better to deal with the same problem in a same manner.

Analysis

The video couldn't convert my message as the audio was not that clear and also the montage created at times were going out of the context in a very different way and so it was required to make the video to start making sense in itself and so the video needs

Conclusion

A campaign which will work to sensitise Indian society for equal rights for LGBT. This campaign has got different phases and each phase is targeting different section of the society.

1. At the time of the launch, a video with common problems is launched which targets the society as a whole and just after the launch a CHALLENGE is launched on Facebook to get the campaign viral.
2. 5 days after the first video, is the time when we launch second video which targets the YOUTH, while targeting the youth we can use the digital media since youth is usually exposed more to digital media and that is actually the major part where we target the masses from the same age group. The same time as youth are more open to use merchandising, we launch the merchandise which stands for LGBT.

3. 5 days after the second step of the campaign, we add another target audience to the list where we target family and teachers because education is major part of everyone's life. And getting equal education is each citizen's right. The target audience here are more into the generation which prefer reading news papers and listen to radio. Best way to target the audience is by radio and news paper.

4. 5 days after the third step of the campaign, we add another target audience to the list where we target medical representatives and doctors because health is everything that you have and which will help you achieve something in life. And getting proper health service is everyone's rights and hindrance to it should be taken care of. The target audience here are more into the generation which prefer reading news papers and listen to radio. Best way to target the audience is by radio and news paper.

5. 5 days after the fourth step of the campaign, we add another target audience to the list where we target police officials and legal results because for a proper rights we need to be treated equally. The target audience here are more into the generation which prefer reading news papers and listen to radio. Best way to target the audience is by radio and news paper.

Plan

1. Common Problems video - Launching challenge

5 days after that

2. Video launch

- Target Audience - Friends/Colleague

- Merchandising

- **5 days after that**

3. Radio Jingle / Posters

- Target Audience - Family/Teacher - Radio Jingle

- Poster

- **5 days after that**

4. Radio Jingle / Poster

- Target Audience - Family/Teacher - Radio Jingle

- Poster

- **5 days after that**

5. Radio Jingle / Poster

- Target Audience - Family/Teacher - Radio Jingle

- Poster

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