

PEOPLE'S PERCEPTION ON LGBTQ THROUGHOUT THE CHANGING TIMES

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Abstract

Human history has always been diverse and enriching – with changing times, cultures changed and so did the mentality and view of people. And as these changes occurred, humans' knowledge about things increased and slowly, we developed as a species with a varied variation. Every individual is said to be unique and yet connected with a community – and yet, many a time, such uniqueness is shamed upon and viewed as 'not normal.' With 'normal' being nothing more than the majority or more commonly seen traits, actual uniqueness is frowned upon and determined as unholy by many religions – one of such aspects being the different gender identity and sexuality of people. Due to such a narrow and rigid mentality, the LGBTQ community has been shunned for many years – so much so that even history overlooked any person with queer character and overwritten it in a way to fit their standards of what is 'normal.'

In this research paper, we will be exploring the meaning of concepts like gender identity and sexual orientation and what the differences between them are, along with studying the history behind them and how queer people were viewed in the past. This paper will also highlight the legal aspect of homosexuality alongside how the media portrays the LGBTQ community; let it be through films, serials or celebrities who are a part of this community. We would also analyse some common stereotypes against the queer community alongside the mistreatment they have to face from society; the cause of such ill-treatment would also be thoroughly analysed. And in the end, we will also discuss some suggestions regarding making society a friendlier place for the queer community.

Keywords

LGBTQ, homosexuality, queer community, sexual orientation, and gender identity

Research Question

How are people with different gender identity and sexual orientation perceived by society and are they accepted by everyone?

Objectives

- To highlight the different social norms and social etiquettes required to be incorporated in daily lives to help the LGBTQ community;
- To briefly study the history of the LGBTQ;
- To analyse and study the current perspective of the general public on the LGBTQ community;
- To study how media represents the LGBTQ community and if it is biased;
- To study the legalization of homosexuality and homosexual marriages in different countries.

Hypothesis

The LGBTQ community is still not accepted worldwide due to the unawareness of the general population regarding anything related to the queer community.

Research Methodology

This is a qualitative report and the materials collected in the paper are retrieved from secondary sources of data, such as articles, journals, books and research papers.

Introduction

Diversity and individuality – some of the features that humanity has celebrated forever and yet discriminated against at the same time. Such can be easily noticed with the example of how society treats the members of the LGBTQ community. On one hand, where some countries not only readily accepted the individuals with varying sexualities but also gave them legal rights alongside the others; many countries, on the other hand, even refuse to accept the existence of the queer community, let alone giving them equal rights. This, in turn, caused many casualties in the queer community and led to a certain kind of fear among the people regarding the different sexualities and gender identities. However, that does not mean that all hope is lost or that the LGBTQ community shall never be accepted; it only means, that it is a slow process and unfortunately, it may take time before the queer people can be accepted completely into society. However, the question still stands – how can we normalise the acceptance of LGBTQ in society? Well, the answer is simple; by spreading awareness of what exactly is LGBTQ and what gender identity, and sexual orientation means and stands

for. Once people are more aware of what the queer people stand for, they would be more open to the idea of accepting and understanding them. This also brings in a new question – what is sexual orientation and gender identity and are those the same thing? No, sexual orientation and gender identity are two very different concepts; although, they are interrelated. Gender or gender identity can be described as a label or term (regarding gender) that an individual associates themselves with; in simpler terms, it is an individual's personal sense of gender and how they express themselves. Gender identity is not only limited to male or female; it also extends to more complex concepts like transgender which includes individuals who either do not associate with their assigned birth sex or are fluid with their association of gender. Agender, gender-fluid and many such categories come under the umbrella term of transgender and are considered to be a vital part of gender identity.

Meanwhile, sexual orientation refers to an individual's identity regarding whom they are attracted to – male, females and/or transgenders. It includes the labels like heterosexual, homosexual, polysexual, asexual, etc which helps describe the sexual attraction of an individual towards other people. In simpler terms, it deals with an individual's sexual identity rather than their sense of gender like in gender identity. People with different sexual orientation and gender identity include and form the LGBTQ community; which stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and many more like Asexual, pansexual, etc, as opposed to the general belief of it only consisting of Lesbians and gays. It is an all-inclusive community for everyone with a different sexual and gender identity than what is considered the 'normal'; even those who are still questioning their sexualities. Unfortunately, most of the general population is unaware of the rest of what consists of the LGBTQ+ community other than lesbians, gays and maybe transgenders. Most of the media around the globe also fails to portray the side of the other uncommon genders and/or sexual orientations, and even history has been noticed to be overlooking the people with different sexual orientations. This causes many to believe that LGBTQ is a very recent concept, which cannot be any further from the truth than it already is; especially when its presence can be seen deep-rooted in the ancient mythology and folktales, along with historical monuments and pictures.

History of sexuality

Despite what one may think, the concept of LGBTQ is not a new one – how this community was viewed varies from culture to culture but in almost all cultures, there is some depiction;

let it be positive or negative. However, the depiction, at times, is not very clear due to the lack of distinction between basic concepts like gender identification and sexual orientation. This, in turn, resulted in the formation of very vague imagery about the community that was still overlooked by many historians and the current population. In Indian culture, the most common and available evidence of this can be seen through the folktales and mythological texts where the gender of humans, as well as many spirits, were stated as fluid in texts; that is, their genders were either vaguely mentioned or they were not treated with any constant pronouns. The most famous example of this would be Princess *Amba* from Mahabharata, a princess whose life was ruined by *Bhishm*, a prominent character from the epic. She later gained the boon of killing *Bhishm* in her next life by being born as a transgender (trans-male, to be more precise). The same epic also portrayed another character named *Budh*, the God of understanding (the difference between good and bad), who was cursed to be born genderless due to their mother's infidelity. In a way, one can claim them to be agender and not be wrong. Furthermore, this genderless God is portrayed to be married to *Ila*, who was previously a prince but turned princesses in special circumstances; which, in itself, could be interpreted as the portrayal of either transgender or gender-fluid¹.

Moreover, in other ancient texts like *Kamasutra*, not only is homosexuality mentioned and portrayed alongside heterosexuality, but it is also normalised and not portrayed in a negative light. Even some religious Hindu texts like *Rigveda* is interpreted by many philosophers in correlation to homosexuality or transgenders due to some of its texts². In other Asian cultures like China, homosexuality was more directly mentioned through tales like that of God *Tu'er Shen*, who is said to be the God of homosexual affections. His tale originates from the Fujian district of China, where he was born as a mortal man during the Qing dynasty and was sentenced to death by beating due to him being caught peeping on an inspector with whom he fell in love with. However, since his crime was that one of love, the underworld officials decided to right the injustice by appointing him as the God and safeguard of love and sex between homosexual people³. Alongside this, numerous Gods, as well as spirits and deities in Chinese mythological tales, were portrayed to engage in same-sex relations. Many Gods were

¹ Vanita, Ruth; Kidwai, Saleem. 2001. *Same-sex love in India: readings from literature and history*. Palgrave Macmillan.

² Cush, Denise; Robinson, Catherine; York, Michael. 2012. *Encyclopedia of Hinduism*. Routledge. Pp. 354.

³ Yuan Mei, *What the Master Would Not Discuss*, Szonyi 1998, pp. 1–25.

associated with homosexuality, bisexuality and transgenderism, like Chou Wang, Lan Cai, Shan Gu, and Yu the Great⁴.

Japan, meanwhile, has its tales portraying homosexuality; one of which tells how once due to a conflict with her brother, the sun goddess Amaterasu *Omi Kami* decided to stay in a cave depriving the earth of light and life. To lure her out of the cave, the deity of humour and dance 'transgendered' and danced in front of the cave, exposing her breasts and vagina while inviting the sun goddess to admire them. Once the sun goddess stepped out of the cave, the deity *Ishi Kore* reflected her sunlight to create an intriguing combination with the dance which fascinated the sun goddess and while she admired the dance, the entrance of the cave was closed⁵. In other cultures, like in Africa, the creator of the universe is mostly represented as a transgender God who gave birth to the Sun God and Moon Goddess. Furthermore, *Wadjwere* the God of the Nile, the delta was a male depicting attributes of female such as breasts to symbolize the fertility the river provided. Even older civilizations like Aztec or Mayan depicted the existence of homosexual relations and non-binary genders through the stories of gods, spirits, and other creatures⁶. Hence, this depicts how the concept of LGBTQ is not a new one, rather a more defined one now. Previously, while it existed as only a vague concept, now it is defined and categorised into more labels and terms for the convenience and validity of the members of the queer community.

However, it does not mean that the older generations did not respect or validated the queer community. We can find clear evidence of the role of the eunuch in the courts of many Asian emperors. Also, the role of transgender was high in the Mughal harem as they did not allow entry to men other than the young prince or the emperor. Many emperors were even suspected to have sexual relations with the transgenders and other males as well, causing many historians to believe many Mughal emperors to be bisexual. Unfortunately, it was during the British colonial period that homosexuality was criminalized and labelled as 'against the law of nature' throughout the world. The whole homophile attitude of the world seemed to be stripped down and discarded as the conservative view of the British colonial government was preached, which was defined by their rigid Christian religious beliefs.

⁴ Werner, Edward T. C. 2008. *Myths and Legends of China*. BiblioBazaar, LLC.

⁵ Conner, Randy P.; Sparks, David Hatfield and Sparks, Mariya. 1998. *Cassell's Encyclopedia of Queer Myth, Symbol and Spirit*. UK: Cassell.

⁶ Conner, Randy P.; Sparks, David Hatfield. 2004. *Queering Creole spiritual traditions: lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender participation in African-inspired traditions in the Americas*. Haworth Press.

Due to such drastic change, the representation of the queer community in the ancient texts and stories, no matter how vague those seemed to be, were overlooked and overwritten to fit the 'normal' perspective. Moreover, the criminalisation of homosexuality dragged the status of the queer community even further down as their very existence was criminalised and held as unnatural as equivalent to bestiality or child prostitution. In addition to this, some tales portrayed the negative connotation to their existence and painted misguided superstition more than anything, leading many to believe homosexuality and transgenderism to be nothing more than sickness or possession of some 'evil spirits', whose traces can still be seen in the current times.

Current Perspective

As mentioned earlier, while LGBTQ may not be a new concept, its re-emergence still took the world by surprise – unfortunately not as a pleasant one in the beginning as many riots and hate crimes against people with different sexual identities increased day by day all over the globe. It took the world years to even decriminalise homosexuality – with Asiatic countries like India, which is the biggest democracy in the world with over 1.3 billion people inhabiting there, decriminalising homosexuality very recently in 2018. Meanwhile, there are still many countries, especially in the continent of Africa, where not only is same-sex relations criminalised, but also punishable by death.

However, in countries like Canada, Germany, the USA, France, Spain, Brazil, Argentina and Australia, not only is homosexuality legal but so is same-sex marriages and adoptions. Meanwhile, in countries like Japan, India and Poland, homosexuality is legalised, but yet to be given the same rights as any other heterosexual couples. In fact, regarding this, there has recently been several petitions filed in the Supreme Court of India for legalising the marriage between homosexuals and the case is currently ongoing. This, in turn, proves to us that with changing times, people's mentality is also changing, and several countries are slowly opting for a softer approach regarding the LGBTQ. However, this does not account for how unaware many of the people still are about the queer community; despite the LGBTQ being out of the closet for many years, trying their best to fight for their rights and acknowledgement of their very existence.

Even with all this progress, there's still a lot of issues the LGBTQ community has to face in the modern era, which includes 'minor' issues like misgendering, transphobic/homophobic jokes and comments, discrimination, bullying, harassment, etc to severe issues like murder, rape, assault, hate crimes and conversion therapies. Every single one of these issues affects the mental as well as the emotional well-being of a queer person, if not physical. Unfortunately, many of the issues listed under the former categories are not even considered crime or assault in many nations, making the transphobic/homophobic people get away with little to no repercussions while the victims are left traumatized and mentally unstable because of their actions.

According to several studies done by Suicide Prevention Resource Center, 5 to 10% of LGBTQ youth have attempted suicide at least once, which is a staggering 1.5 to 3 times higher than heterosexual youth⁷. Not to mention, the homosexual accounted for in these studies were the ones who were out with their sexuality; there are still many such people who are a part of the queer community and commit or attempt to commit suicide while they are still not out in the open with their sexualities. Thus, this makes the numbers even more alarming if we consider the un-closeted queer members as well. Moreover, in a more recent study done by an American-based LGBTQ youth crisis intervention and suicide prevention organization called the Trevor Project in 2020, 48% of LGBTQ youth reported engaging in self-harm in the past twelve months, including over 60% of transgender and nonbinary youth of the 40,000 people participating for the survey. Meanwhile, 40% of LGBTQ respondents seriously considered attempting suicide, of which 52% of them were transgender and nonbinary youth. 21% of the transgender and nonbinary youth even attempted suicide in the past twelve months as opposed to the 11% of the cis-gender youth⁸.

These numbers depict how the queer youth have become more mentally unstable due to the oppression and discrimination they have faced. This fact was further backed by the same study done by Trevor Project, which reported that 29% of LGBTQ participants had experienced homelessness or been kicked out, while 1 in every 3 LGBTQ participants reported having been physically threatened or harmed in their lifetime due to their differing

⁷ Sprc.org. 2011. *Suicide Risk and Prevention for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth*. Available at: https://sprc.org/sites/default/files/migrate/library/SPRC_LGBT_Youth.pdf [Accessed on 28 March 2021].

⁸ Thetrevorproject.org. 2020. *The Trevor Project National Survey 2020*. Available at: <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2020/?section=Suicide-Mental-Health> [Accessed 28 March 2021]

identity. Other issues like death threats, laws against the queer community, homophobia, transphobia, aggression, unsympathetic social environments, lack of social acceptance, hate crime and fetishization should also be highlighted as many are not aware of these issues faced by people with different sexual orientation and gender identity.

However, on a positive note, there also has been a huge change in the trends and social norms regarding the queer community; let it be the gradual normalization of the queer people in the media and entertainment industry or even the slowly (but present) representation in movies, serials as well as modern books. Gender neutralization of makeup, dresses and all types of clothes has also facilitated an open-mindedness throughout society. This is also fuelled by the esteemed celebration of the Pride Month and Pride walks done throughout the world, where not only the LGBTQ community comes down to celebrate their stance, but so does the allies (the non-LGBTQ people who support the queer community) as they step forward to celebrate their identities after so many years of repression. Society is slowly becoming more and more accepting with each passing year – however, acceptance does not equate to knowledge or awareness, which unfortunately causes internalized homophobia and transphobia that people don't seem to catch. Most of the population is only aware of the lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenders; ignoring a whole other spectrum of asexuals, pansexuals and other queer labels that consists within the LGBTQ+ community. This is mostly caused by a lack of proper representation of the queer community in any kind of media and books – including the history where any historical figure affiliated with the LGBTQ community is either removed or overlooked.

The media's biased portrayals and support of stereotypes further pushed back such sexualities, making them feel even more unrecognised and underrepresented in the modern era. Thankfully enough, media is slowly rectifying itself and picking up on this as well; finally giving the queer community the representation they deserve. However, how accurate or positive it is, still stands as a question.

Media's preferences and perspective

In recent years, as technology advanced greatly and social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram emerged, many things have changed. One of the most drastic changes that has taken place is the slow replacement of the traditional media by the digital one – let it

be the television or the newspapers, traditional/conventional media are slowly being replaced by the digital platforms due to their wide and comparatively cheap usage. Television is replaced by online streaming platforms like Twitch, YouTube or Netflix, while newspapers and magazines are replaced by online news sites and news channels on YouTube and other digital sites.

With such a drastic change, the view of the world has slowly changed too, with how our consumption of media has not only increased, but also turned wider as well – the palate for our knowledge has been increased more than ever before, and this also included the knowledge about the minority groups and communities like the LGBTQ community. And as the presence of such digital media increases over the world, the veil over the LGBTQ slowly uplifts as it comes to the visibility of even the developing and undeveloped countries.

This, in turn, not only helped the spread of awareness among the general population of those regions but also helped the reach of the minority groups increase; enabling them to amplify their voices against any unjust committed to their members. And as their voices were heard, the traditional media too slowly opted to try to keep up with the digital one – gradually basing off a common road for both types of media.

Beyond this, the newer generation got access to information like never before; providing them with a platform to not only find more about themselves but also more like-minded people, helping them clear their doubts and come to terms with their identity – let it be their gender, sexual or any other case of identity. The internet, especially social media, helped with the normalization of differing sexualities and gradually breaking the toxic gender norms and stereotyping that many minority groups faced, not just the queer community.

Many social networking sites like Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube have taken several initiatives in the past few years to make the queer community feel more accepted; some of those steps included the introduction of pride-themed frames and stickers as a way to express oneself and updated gender options in Profile, along with hosting events and hashtags in support of the queer community and to spread awareness about them to their users.

This prompted the traditional entertainment media like serials and movies to be more inclusive of queer people, which contributed a lot to the minds of general people as well. However initially, the LGBTQ people were almost always avoided being cast or even

represented in the glaringly conservative film industry; and even when they did show up, they were given very insignificant minor roles that were only present for the momentary comic relief. Not to mention, they were often portrayed as very stereotypical gays where the male characters acted with prominent ‘feminine’ characteristics and overtly flirted with other males who acted disgusted or afraid of them.

And due to the fact that knowledge about these was very scarce in the earlier times, this negative representation is what people consumed and thought was real. This made people think homosexuality and other queer spectrum see as a joke or something to ridicule – making them feel even more left out and unnatural than they were already treated as. This caused genuine representation of the queer community on the screen to be present with a certain kind of awkward air. One such film was ‘*Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga*’ which was the first mainstream LGBT movie since the lifting of Section 377. In this film, the main character was a girl named Sweety who romanticized the idea of being married – but once she grew up, she realized that she couldn’t bring herself to even think of a future with a man; but rather dreamt as well as fell in love with a woman. While initially, her father did not take the news well, he realised that she’s the same daughter he’s loved all along.

Many people appreciated this sweet movie with open arms; however, at the same time, many didn’t. Many people even mentioned in their reviews of the film that they had felt an awkward atmosphere in the theatres as they watched the film. They had come expecting to watch a rom-com movie with a beautiful wedding and an amazing couple, which it did had – however, the ‘unusual’ couple disappointed a lot of the audience⁹.

Meanwhile, the case of another film ‘*Laxmi*’, starring the famous actor Akshay Kumar as the main protagonist, dealt with spirits and transgenders in a very stereotypical manner that caused an uproar among the LGBTQ community. In the said film, things took for a strange course when Kumar’s character Asif, suddenly took on feminine mannerisms, transforming completely into a ‘transwoman’ due to being possessed by one – who was out to extract some kind of revenge.

⁹ Behal, A., 2018. *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga: Internet hails first mainstream film on same-sex love*. India Today. Available at: <https://www.indiatoday.in/trending-news/story/ek-ladki-ko-dekha-toh-aisa-laga-internet-hails-first-mainstream-film-on-same-sex-love-1419070-2018-12-28> { Accessed 29 March 2021 }

Laxmi Bomb, the said ghost, then attempted to convey to the audience that she is trying to undo all the stereotypes held against women and transwomen through Asif, whose body she was possessing. He(She?) then proceeded to unabashedly wear a saree as well as make-up while walking with stereotypical hip swings, talking in female pronouns, and even going the extra mile to wear bangles – as if to portray that wearing them did not emasculate him as he tried breaking the gender norms. ‘Tried’ being the keyword here¹⁰.

Furthermore, all it did was further increase the prejudice that women, as well as transwomen, were trying hard to combat today. There’s more sexism than gender upliftment in the way he walked, talked, looked, and just generally behaved in the movie. Not only was it blatantly stereotypical, but femininity was reduced to only a niche way of acting and movements that not only came as mocking but rather derogatory, especially for the transwomen part of the LGBTQ community.

The major issue of all this is that these kinds of films, unfortunately, end up representing the people of the queer community; thus, making a negative and rather stereotypical notion growing the minds of the cis-gender people who then neither respect nor understand the LGBTQ and their struggles. These kinds of misrepresentation often result in more harm than good – unfortunately, even the filmmakers don’t seem to understand these are they force their cis-gendered view of the trans-people over to the audience.

However, this can still be counted as an improvement than before – instead of ignoring or making fun of the LGBTQ community, they are not only being acknowledged but slowly given the limelight in the films. The narratives are slowly shifting, and even if some films misrepresent the community, they still are better than no representation at all. Most of the current generation, furthermore, seems to discover about the LGBTQ community from traditional media like films, news, books and serials as well as modern social media like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Reddit and Discord. With such a high number of people discovering about the queer community from the media, it becomes even more important for proper representation of the people with different gender identities and sexual orientation. Not only would it help to quash the age-old stereotypes but would also help

¹⁰ Jha, M. and Holland, O., 2020. *'Laxmii' critics say Bollywood blockbuster offers a problematic transgender portrayal*. CNN. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/laxmii-bollywood-film-transgender/index.html> [Accessed 29 March 2021]

promote a general understanding and acceptance among the population; especially now when homosexuality is legal in over more than half of the world.

Of course, there isn't enough representation of the queer community over the media as any heterosexual couple, but we are getting there – with one film at a time. Even with limited media focused on the queer characters, most of the population at least is now aware of their existence – which is a good start, if one compares it from before. And if proper representation like this continues, then a great feat can be achieved in equalizing the rights of the queer people with the cis-gender people.

Legality of sexuality

Despite the evident traces of LGBTQ throughout history; let it be through folktales, mythology or actual historical events, all traces of it were either ignored or overwritten in a way to fit the 'normal' narrative brought on by the rigid Christian beliefs, which were popularised during the British colonization. And due to this very rigidity, homosexuality was criminalized altogether in almost all of the world; something which took more than a century for some countries to reverse back.

With such a law in place, homosexuality was not only treated as something illegal and 'against nature', but also unholy and sinful, making the narrative so against it that the oppression of people with different sexuality or gender identity was almost ingrained in the very mentality of the society. By the time the revolution arrived, and this mentality was challenged, it had already been over a century. Currently, more than half of the world has decriminalised homosexuality – unfortunately, there are still 73 countries in the Middle East, Africa and Southwest Asia that are yet to do so, according to Equaldex, a collaborative LGBT rights website¹¹. Many of those nations have life imprisonment or even the death penalty as the punishment rewarded to the people caught in the 'crime' of homosexuality.

Moreover, even though homosexuality is legalised in so many nations, same-sex marriage is yet to be legalised in many of the countries still; in fact, many countries like India itself hasn't yet legalised basic rights like adoption, marriage or even entry into the military. On top of it, things like discrimination against people with different gender and sexual identity or

¹¹ Equaldex.com. *Equaldex: The Collaborative LGBT Rights Knowledge Base*. Available at: <https://www.equaldex.com/> [Accessed 30 March 2021]

Conversion therapy, which is the immoral pseudoscientific practice of ‘changing’ someone’s gender identity or sexual orientation through psychological, mental, physical or spiritual ‘intervention’ are not yet banned or declared illegal despite these being proved to not only be harmful to one’s mental and psychological state but for their physical state as well¹².

This, in the end, proves that much is yet to be done when it comes to equalizing the rights for people with different gender identity and sexual orientation – especially if we take India as an example for that. While homosexuality is legalised in India since September of 2018, many other laws and rights are yet to be established while crime against LGBTQ people increases day by day. Since people are not accustomed to such change and the ‘homosexuality is against nature’ mentality is still ingrained in society, the LGBTQ community is still shamed and questioned for their identity in India. Although, that does not mean that the LGBTQ is not supported or accepted at all; they are supported by many and even the Indian Judiciary are taking progressive steps towards their empowerment.

However, the question that arises here is whether the same progressive steps are opted by the government of the said nation – while the Judiciary is working hard at giving the LGBTQ community their deserved rights, the legislature also tries as such through the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2019 which was enacted to protect the rights of the transgender community by prohibiting discrimination against them with regards to employment, education, healthcare, access to government or private establishments. Though, instead of empowering the transgender community, the bill highlighted even more how the community is oppressed and dehumanised by not only the society but the legislature of the very nation as well.

The bill disregards the right of an individual to determine their own gender identity by highlighting that the change in gender identity in official documents can only be done so if the individual has gone through sex reassignment surgery certified by the District Magistrate. This not only takes away the basic human right of autonomy and privacy of a person but also leaves them further open to harassment by the officials. This also takes away the right to decide if they even want a sex reassignment surgery or not, from the trans person’s hand¹³.

¹² Drescher, Jack; Zucker, Kenneth, 2006, *Ex-Gay Research: Analyzing the Spitzer Study and Its Relation to Science, Religion, Politics, and Culture*, New York: Harrington Park Press, pp. 126.

¹³ The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill 2019, available at <http://socialjustice.nic.in/writereaddata/UploadFile/TG%20bill%20gazette.pdf> [Accessed 30 March 2021]

Furthermore, the bill prescribes the punishment for sexual abuse against any trans person for only two years imprisonment, which is way less severe when compared to a similar kind of offence against females that would attract a serious punishment extending up to seven years imprisonment. This can not only be interpreted as discriminatory but also ignorant. The bill also ignores the discrimination and abuse faced by a trans-person within their own family, making them leave their family and join trans-community where like-minded people not only support them but help them grow within their own identity. However, the bill disentitles such running away; thus, leaving rehabilitation centres as the only option for the trans-people, which are very hard to get access to due to them being so hard to find.

Therefore, it can be concluded that on one hand where the courts are taking progressive steps to empower and uphold the rights of the LGBTQ community, on the other hand, the legislature is invalidating the same rights. A similar can be seen in the recent hearing where several pending petitions on same-sex marriages have been heard and the government has expressed its opinion opposing the petitions. The government expressed in its opinion that any interference by a court in the marital statute based on personal laws will create 'havoc' in society and will run afoul of the intent of Parliament in framing the laws. It also said a fundamental right cannot be an 'untrammelled right' and can't override other constitutional principles. Along with this, the government also highlighted marriage as a 'sacred' bond only possible between a biological man and a biological woman capable of producing children, strongly opposing the validation of same-sex marital unions¹⁴.

With the next hearing schedule further in the future, one can only hope that the Court makes the right decision to grant the LGBTQ community the rights they deserve. However, what does give the nation hope is how the Judiciary is actively trying to get the Indian society to recognise the LGBTQ people's rights through several cases; one such was where the Madras High Court not only gave protection to the lesbian couple but also allotted an LGBTQ issues specialist counsellor for the couple's parents to help them understand and accept their daughters' relationship¹⁵. These steps not only help normalizing queer people but also grab

¹⁴ Ahsan, S., 2021. *Centre opposes same-sex marriage in Delhi HC, says not comparable with 'Indian family unit concept'*. The Indian Express. Available at: <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/same-sex-marriages-legal-recognition-centre-7204303/> [Accessed 31 March 2021]

¹⁵ Upadhyay, S., 2021. *Same-Sex Relationships- 'I Am Trying to Break My Own Preconceived Notions': Madras High Court Judge*. Livelaw. in. Available at: <https://www.livelaw.in/news-updates/same-sex-relationships-preconceived-notions-madras-high-court-judge-anand-venkatesh-171919> [Accessed 31 March 2021]

the attention of the public and force them to acknowledge the existence of the LGBTQ community who were ignored and isolated for so many years. But grabbing the attention of the general population is still not enough if proper awareness is not spread among them.

In the end, the first step to bring in any kind of change would be by teaching everyone what exactly rights stand for an individual, regardless of their sexuality or gender identity. Legal, as well as political maturity, would help a lot in speeding up the process of acquiring equal rights for not only the LGBTQ community but also other minor communities in the world.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Due to the increase in media coverage and the gradual spread of awareness about the LGBTQ community, many legal as well social changes have been noticed in several countries – India being one of them, with recent decriminalization and now, the hearing about the legalization of same-sex marriages. With even more time, hopefully, more awareness would spread among the general population and acceptance of the queer community would be much easier and natural than in the previous times.

However, how can an individual of the society help in this process? Well, one can start by researching more about the queer community and teach people around them as well – this will not only help to stop spreading misinformation about the LGBTQ community but would also help to correct the stereotypes and make people see the error in their ways. Other than that, stopping oneself as well as people around them using homophobic and transphobic terms and normalizing the concepts about sexualities and gender identities like preferred pronouns may help society be a lot more LGBTQ friendly than it is right now.

Introducing social etiquettes like asking one's 'preferred pronouns' may stand as a very beneficial and significant step as it'll help integrate queer culture in our society. Preferred pronouns, in this context, means the pronouns preferred or used by an individual for themselves, which helps to normalize the concept of different gender identities. This social etiquette can be most seen to be used by LGBTQ allies on their social media profile, where they mention their preferred pronouns to show their support to the queer community as well as to normalize the aspect of asking and using such pronouns for an individual.

In conclusion, this portrays that the queer community is widespread and the people who know someone from the LGBTQ community are not only more open-minded and amiable but also more ready for changes. And even though there are still many people who disagree with the very existence of the LGBTQ community, they are very minor in number – especially in comparison to the loud majority who are slowly leading the future of humanity into a more accepting path. And while there is still a long way to go in the path of equalizing rights for the queer community, every effort counts – no matter how small.

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