

# Human interest

## ALLOWED TO BE GAY!!!

Same-sex couples moving in next door, there are gay parents at PTA meetings. Are we ready for this cultural transmutation, wonders *Ketaki Khedekar*.

India has always kept pace with latest developments be it, technology, engineering or fashion. Now, the largest democracy in the world has legally recognized a minority community that has been existent on its land for innumerable years.

The Delhi High court, in a historic judgment against the 149-year old law (Section 377 of IPC) has legalized sex between consensual adults of the same gender. Thus, sexual acts of any nature - vaginal, anal or oral - between consensual adults within the privacy of their homes will not be considered as a criminal offence. Following this move, India has become the 127th country in the world to decriminalize homosexuality while 80 nations across the world still consider it as an offence.

Homosexuality has always existed in the Indian culture. Even the Mahabharata has a reference of Shikhandi being a trans-gender. Quite a few Rajasthani and Mogul paintings also depict homosexual encounters.

However, with the passage of time, marriage came to be frozen as a notion that occurs only amidst those of different sex. The concept of homosexuality, so accepted in the days of yore, came to be brushed under the carpet.

From the time we are children, we're taught to associate marriage and sex as what occurs only between men and women. So, in the face of this predicament, the question remains, how do we alter mind set all of a sudden?

### Let us understand homosexuality...

The dictionary meaning of 'homosexual' states that a homosexual is a person who is attracted to members of his or her own sex and with whom he usually (not always) has sexual contact.

A seemingly innocuous description of yet another societal phenomenon, one might say? But apparently, the repercussions to the utterance of the mere word homosexual are potent enough to raise several eyebrows, even in today's day and age.

Homosexuality is generally considered a taboo subject by the Indian civil society. Public discussions of homosexuality in India have been reticent by the fact that basically, sexuality in any form is rarely discussed openly.

On a superficial level, if someone tries to be friendly with a gay/bisexual, there are people who say, "Well, not a big deal, sexuality is only one aspect of life". But, there always remains a hidden queasiness beneath that veneer of acceptance.

Most people giggle and gossip if they see a person looking or behaving 'unnaturally' or to be more politically correct, effeminate. 'Bailia' is what people call them. Similar reactions are elicited on seeing two girls or two guys cooing up to each other, more than socially sanctioned.

The homosexual community has thus been a subject of immense ridicule for years now and it was, to restore this thus-lost dignity that the community has been fighting to win back for the last eight years.

"With Section 377 getting legalized we won't be a subject of gossip any more. Homosexual marriages will be looked upon with dignity. One thing should be remembered that acceptance promotes healing and healthy behaviour. There are no as such ill-effects of homosexual relations if conducted with proper medical precautions, of course. I see a day when there would be gay marriages and parents would be inviting people for the marriages. And people would be coming to these marriages." affirms Dr. Harish Shetty, psychiatrist, L. H. Hiranandani Hospital.

### A path strewn with roses... or thorns yet?

Dr. Shetty's hopeful attitude is indeed a heartening one. However, the question originally raised at the beginning of this discussion, still lingers. Will legalizing the norm, lead to a spontaneous and easy acceptance of the same?



Image courtesy : Google

Indian culture is radically different than the Western culture; we still believe in living jointly with our parents. When a son gets married, he brings a bahu home. So, today are we ready to change that fact and accept it if that son brings home a *jamaai*?! The reaction of actor Satish Shah's character to a similar quandary supposedly placed before him in the film *Kal Ho Naa Ho* by his son played by Saif Ali Khan makes for interesting study on the topic. Is our society indeed ready to accept this cultural upheaval that has come hurtling towards it?

*"I see a day when there would be gay marriages and parents would be inviting people for the celebrations. And people would be coming to these marriages."*

*- Dr. Harish Shetty*

Even today many families 'treat' homosexuality by qualifying it as a mental illness. 'Treatments' from (often dubious) sources such as *vaid*s, magicians, *Babas*, *gurus*, priests, *maulvis* and exorcists are resorted to, in the hope that the devil of homosexuality will get exorcised. If 'treatments' fails, the homosexual 'patients' are emotionally blackmailed. If that option also doesn't work then they strike a deal with their gay children to allow them to do their bidding in privacy but behave 'normally' when in public and get married. India and many other Asian countries lag far behind the Western nations as far as their approval and acceptance of homosexuality is concerned. Parents simply marry off their sons and daughters to people of the opposite sex sometimes unknowing of and sometimes despite knowing their child's alternate leanings-thus leaving them to carry the burden of an unwanted relationship on their shoulders for the rest of their lives.

When all else fails, there is the punishment of excommunication and banishment. Very few people accept their loved ones being gay/lesbian.

The basic problem in India when it comes to sex talks or sexuality it is the age old battle between the generations, that dissuades any free and uninhibited conversation on the issue.

### A silver lining to the dark cloud

However, attitudes are showing a positive shift in recent times. The present generation seems to be quite liberal and humanist on such issues. In the past few years the overall attitude towards the presence of homosexuality in society, has undergone a remarkable change, especially because of the media and Bollywood. Movies like *Dostana*, *My Brother Nikhil*, and *Page 3* have well portrayed the realities and plight of gays/lesbians. The media and the film fraternity has actively been a part of discussion about the entire issue several times.

While it might be long before society open-heartedly accepts homosexuality as a part of its fabric; *vis-à-vis* forced marriages, the legalizing of Section 377 comes as a good move because it might hopefully stop people from at

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least getting into such forced and unwanted relationships. It might also stop parents from forcing their kids into such marriages just to gain societal acceptance; because ultimately, no one has the right to thus spoil any person's life.

*"We need to be accepted as one of you"*

Legalizing homosexual relationships has given it a legal acceptability and is hoping to acquire for it, social respectability. Seeking public acceptance to their relationships, the homosexuals are only asking legitimacy to something that is only 'natural'. Homosexuals are also human beings and deserve to be treated like one. They too have the right to live and choose. People should understand that gays/lesbians are as normal as the person next door.

"Gays are just people searching for a partner to share their happiness and sorrow with; just that they find it in a person of the same sex. Also, it's not just about sex; it's about the comfort level. It's good that the government has finally realized that whatever we are doing is not wrong", says Mario, a homosexual.

However, despite the legal nod, there still are some who're against the ruling. Everyone is at liberty to have an opinion, but that does not mean being

unreasonable in the arguments. In order to show their disagreement, some communities have said that homosexuality is a 'western concept' and thus unacceptable in India.

We are not talking about bringing in a Victoria's Secrets' new lingerie in public. We are talking about someone's sexual orientation. It is nowhere related to any religious or communal sentiments. What people need to understand is that as far as emotions are concerned, heterosexuals and homosexuals are no different. The only difference is that the former lives in peace while the latter lives under duress.

The need of the hour is for the society (more than the court of law) to accord acceptance to homosexuals. It'll not happen overnight but if we all decide to take one step ahead each, it also won't remain a far-fetched dream for our homosexual brethren who're only looking for a loving glance and a comforting hand from us.

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## Railway runs towards health!

Mumbai Railway Department sets up a health care centre to take care of those injured in accidents finds *Bhawana Ukey*



Pic: Friday Team

The Mumbai Rail department has finally woken up to its commuters' safety. Proof in point being it establishing a health care centre (HCC) at a much-frequented stations in the city.

This HCC which has been set up at Dadar station will help people get treatment in case of emergencies. Qualified doctors will be available at this centre to provide treatment.

Everyday a huge number of local trains run on the Suburban, Western and Central railway lines. Mumbai has the highest density of local trains in the world. For Mumbai's increasing population, the railways continue to be the most convenient mode of mass transport.

### Flashback

26/7 was a natural disaster; 7/11 and 26/11 were terrorist activities; but what about those accidents which take place every day due to individual carelessness; especially in the railways?

It is for helping commuters in these emergencies that the railway has made this facility.

### What officers say

Mr. S.S. Gupta, Chief PRO, Mumbai Railway commented about the health care centre saying, "It is going through legal formalities. We've got approval from the High Court but the Supreme Court's confirmation is awaited. Only after getting that can we convey further information."

However, it is strange that other Western Railway stations officials are unaware of this activity. Mr. Rajendra Prasad, former Station Superintendent at Bandra said, "We don't know anything about this centre but we do provide first-aid facilities to injured people and in case of emergency send them to the nearest hospital."

### Why?

The major reasons for rail accidents are, people falling down from the trains while travelling. Another reason is, people crossing the railway tracks instead of using the overhead bridge.

Another problem is that of snatching the chains from the neck of women or snatching their bags, thus causing many accidents as well.

### What to do

It is difficult to stop these things immediately but if we take requisite precautions and measures, one day we'll be able to stop this menace.

Railway has started taking measures to help us commuters and we need to co-operate with them.

It is as much the duty of a commuter to understand and take safety measures while travelling in local trains. As it is said 'prevention is better than cure.'

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