

Accepting the Legal LGBT Visuals of Culture

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Abstract: *In the contemporary global and political scenario, social media plays a significant role in shaping the social, cultural and communal edifice of a nation. It has now become the strongest and easiest means of communication through which people can share their opinions and thoughts regardless of any barriers. Social media and popular culture has a pivotal role in constructing the concepts of gender identity, gender expression and socialization process. Homosexuality is widely portrayed and analysed in visual forms from different perspectives. Many contemporary films and advertisements deconstruct the social stereotypes and stigmas associated with homosexuality. However, the orthodox and patriarchal society that still exist today maintains an aversion towards the homosexual community and excludes them from family, social events and cultural festivals. This paper attempts to analyse the vivid portrayals of the lesbian, gay, transgender and queer folk in cinema and other visual forms. Also, it throws light on how media and films help in creating different cultural and gender identities. However, in the real world, the homophobic attitude of the society restricts the homosexuals from exposing themselves to the society. In this, background the visual forms plays a vital role in promoting the LGBT rights and relations.*

Keywords: *Homosexuality, lesbian, gay, Indian legal system, community.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Human sexuality is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that is defined by the behavioural, emotional and physical state of an individual. A person's sexuality is influenced by his/her genetic and hormonal dialectics. Variations in this can lead to conditions like homosexuality, heterosexuality, or bisexuality. Many communities all over the world treats homosexuality as a taboo subject, and India is not an exception. This paper considers various visual forms like short films and advertisements that deals with the concepts of lesbian and gays acceptances in our community. Myntralaunched a digital campaign on 28th May 2015 titled ANOUK- Bold is beautiful – The visit supporting the LGBT community .This digital campaign was directed by ShamikSen Gupta a prominent figure in Indian advertising industry .This ad is set in the background of Northern India, and supports the lesbian relationship between two girls who are getting ready to convince their parents about their relation. Similarly, the United Nations human rights office launched a Bollywood musical video title 'The Welcome' to promote UN Free and Equal campaign.

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This video of two -and –a-half minutes was launched in a press conference in Mumbai, in the presence of many prominent figures like Miss India Celina Jaitly, actor Imran Khan, transgender activist Laxmi Narayan Tripathi and Ashok Row Kavi who is a gay and founder of Humsafar Trust. It is the first UN- Bollywood musical video launched for the freedom and equal privileges for the LGBT community. In another campaign, McDonald's Taiwan branch had done an advertisement for the McCafe featuring a young man confessing to his father that he is a homosexual. This ad is 90 seconds long and shows the complex emotional relationship between a father and the son. This paper looks deep into the acceptances of LGBT community in various parts of the world.

II. OBJECTIVE

The major objective of this study is to understand and analyse the problems faced by the homosexual community and their struggles to gain their rights and acceptances in the society. Even after many laws are established for supporting them, they are still kept as a marginalized group, and tagged 'abnormal'. They face discrimination and isolation from their own family members. Social and communal exclusion is one chief crisis that they have to face. They are deprived of gender identity and social identity and are subjected to constant abuse and humiliation. This further leads them into a traumatic mental situation which may result in a lack of self-esteem and self-confidence.

III. HYPOTHESIS

This paper explores the fundamental issues faced by the homosexual community all over the world. The LGBT community was formed with the intention of supporting and fighting for the civil rights of these particular marginalized strata of society. Among all other countries, France was the first European country to decriminalize homosexual acts and sections of law. Later, few countries including India followed this path in amending homosexual acts, providing them with the rights to freedom and expression. But still, they are most often treated brutally by the public. At present, there are many researches and reform activities going on in the field of LGBT community, demanding their social conceding and rights. Even though there are world-wide reform movements, many countries of Africa, Middle East, and central Asia has not yet taken initiatives to annihilate their anti-gay legislation. Therefore, this subject of research is very much relevant in the context of contemporary LGBT struggles.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research study is an attempt to explore the identity of homosexual community and their acceptance all around the world. This survey incorporates descriptive and graphical



representations to understand the attitude of society towards their community. Though they have been harassed and assaulted by the general public still they manage to find a place in the dominant heterosexual society. In many parts of USA, Latin America, Mexico, and Europe, homosexuality is gradually being accepted after centuries of struggles and awareness campaigns. The first book referred is written by Kevin Jennings titled as *Always My Child* which has successfully dealt with a day to day struggles of a youth facing identity issues. This book also gives an awareness to every parents to provide comfort and support to children who faces identity issues. This book focuses that if a child turns to be a gay, lesbian or transgender they faces a plenty of problems within themselves. Even the society around them will start taking advantage of their insecure feelings. Therefore this book gives a dutiful message that the support and care given to these children by their parents is their great strength to face the outside world. This book helps the parents to understand their LGBT children and for guiding their children to respect themselves. History of sexuality is the next reviewed book which is written by Michel Foucault which speaks about the evolution of homosexuality from the background of Christianity. Since this book was closely connected to religion the author has shown a great guts and brave attitude to shown up the physical desire of latest decades. This book dares to face many challenges during the publishing. Reference to another famous book which has got many remarkable achievements in the field of literature is titled as *From the Closet to the Courtroom*. This book is written by Professor Carlos A. Bell based on sexual awareness and Gay Rights. This book is like a case study with a narrative section which includes the victims person life such as marriage, family, struggles, their lawyers, case and finally gives the insight of the legal journey. Yet there are still many fights for their homosexuality rights in various countries hence the same sex marriages are punishable and illegal. But the most sorrowful condition is that, even the countries that have passed the laws in favour of these LGBT community are not ready to accept them completely and still they only have a partial recognition.

V. ANALYSIS AND MAJOR FINDINGS

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 testifies that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" (United Nations, Article 1). The LGBT community has now gained worldwide recognition. Many reputed NGOs and governmental institutions work for the welfare of this community. During 1990s gay people were considered 'abnormal' and homosexuality was believed to a state of mental illness. In 2013, United Nations conducted the Free and Equal campaign to raise awareness against the homophobia and transphobia among the public and also to decrease the violence and discrimination towards LGBT community. Its objective is stated as "to disseminate messages from the United Nations in support of LGBT equality and acceptance and countering prejudice and harmful stereotypes directed at LGBT people, in both traditional and social media" ¹(United Nations, UN Free and Equal Campaign). More than twenty-five countries have already accepted the same-sex marriage. But in India, the prevalence of Section 377 of the constitution, which was

introduced during the British rule, had restricted same-sex marriage for years stating it as against the order of nature. But on 6th September 2018, the Supreme Court of India decriminalized homosexuality by disclosing section 377 as illegitimate /unlawful. "The Bench, led by Chief Justice of India Deepak Misra unanimously held that criminalization of private consensual sexual conduct between adults of the same sex under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code was clearly unconstitutional" ²(Rajagopal, The Hindu). This proved to be one of India's most historic and progressive verdicts, and a landmark decision in the history of Indian gay rights movements. All over the world the LGBT are subjected to discrimination and were believed to be criminals. There are many films, short films and advertisements which portrays this kind of relations. Yet our Indian society had not changed a lot even though the Supreme Court had made many rules in support of the LGBT community. In most of the rural parts of India, same-sex marriages are not still accepted, and are faced by harsh religious and communal opposition. Barack Hussein Obama who is the first African American who served as the 44th president of United States during the celebration of LGBT pride month, which is celebrated on 26th June in remember of Stonewall Riot of 1969 states that; "When all Americans are treated as equal, no matter who they are or whom they love, we are all more free" ³(Goldman). The graph below shows the percentage of the predominant heterosexual individuals who finds the homosexual groups as dishonourable. Even now, there are large number of people who are not ready to accept homosexual couples as their neighbours. Therefore, these group of people leads a life of constant discrimination and fear.

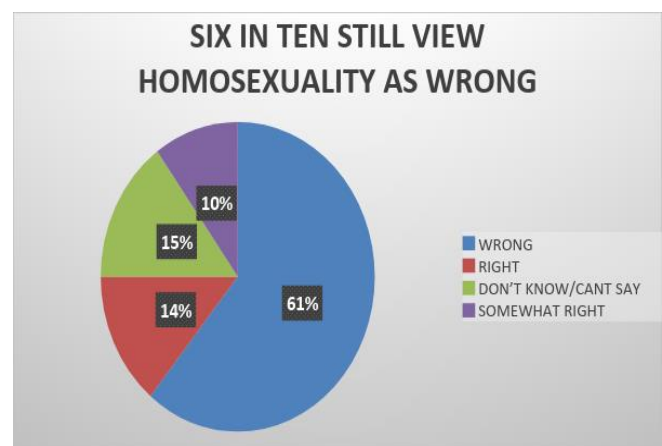


Figure1. Six in Ten Still View Homosexuality as Wrong (Rukmini .S, Live mint)

The famous Malayalam short film *Ivide* written and directed by Reshma Sivakumar portrays the friendship and life of two young women who are at their teenage. The character Joe is going through peer pressure and also finds it difficult to convey her feelings or emotions to anyone around her. Joe finds it burdensome because she believes her love is not 'normal' when compared to others around her. Usually, the society, we live in consider Heterosexuals to be straight. A man who fancies a woman or a woman who fancies a man is normal and straight. But here Joe's feeling will be labelled as 'abnormal'.

There are also many other labels used to address the homosexuals, like pansexual/pan to refer to the people who fancy members of the same gender. Both the lesbian and gay community's experiences different forms of victimization which may lead to several mental issues like anxiety, distress and depression, and even suicidal tendency. In the short film *Ivde* this mental stress is clearly portrayed. Joe, as a young beautiful teenager is forced by her parents for a marriage to a well settled man of a reputed family in the society. But here, Joe is unable to express her inner feelings to her parents that she is a homosexual. Though she may seem as a bold smart girl, she is reluctant to express her inner self to her parents. Like any other woman, she too finds it hard to survive in this situation. She finds herself in a suffocated space and finds it extremely hard to move on. The film headway as Joe reaches her best friend Aami's apartment to open up herself. But still Joe seems to be confused and uneasy to convey her homosexuality even to her intimate friend. The factor that pulls Joe back is that she is worried about the backlash of the society in which she lives and how they all are going to take it once they come to know that she is a lesbian. This Malayalam short film deals with exhaustion of wanting to be accepted and also the fear of being excluded by her family and loved ones. Joe's friend Aami was able to understand Joe's struggles and feelings, her reluctance and uneasiness to open up her issues. Therefore, Aami comforts her and gives her the strength to move forward. Aami helps Joe to recognize her true identity and she assures that society is not a factor that determines the identity of a person. When she speaks about her sexuality to Aami, Joe says that "I'm afraid whether I'm a lesbian". In these words of Joe, one could recognize the difficulties and uneasiness that she faces. Yet on the other side, Aami consoles her friend and tells her that whatever changes may happen to her, everything will continue to be the same between them irrespective of the social attitude. But what makes Aami shocked is that Joe has her feelings for her best friend Aami itself. Here we could see that Aami doesn't react violently nor shouts at her friend. Rather, Aami accepts her identity and kisses on her lips. Here viewers might doubt whether Aami is also homosexual, but this question is not relevant here because one's identity or their action is their personal choice. An individual is always free to do anything that he or she feels right until and unless it is against the law. This might be called by our society as "abnormal" and "unnatural" for the fact that they have a different outlook which doesn't agree with the sexual choice of others. Everyone in neither this world nor the society have a complete awareness about their surroundings. In a society an individual's existence is more significant when compared to the other social factors. To express oneself one never has to feel hesitate rather he or she should be proud to choose their identity whether if they are heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual. Nowadays people are bolder and more confident to open up their feelings just like teenagers of this term exhibit their identity through their styles and haircuts. Similarly, to express one's feeling is not a hurdle in this modern world; rather, it is a factor of self-respect. Thus, the society should understand that sexuality of an individual is his/her private life and personal choice, and it is not a sin to choose a partner from the same gender. Accepting Homosexuals as one among us is not a sin. Through such a great action actually we are giving every individual the freedom to express themselves. Homosexual relations

depicted in a normal way can be taken as the best examples to promote LGBT rights. The advertisement of Myntra, ANOUK: Bold is Beautiful – The Visit depicts Homosexual relation in a well and respectable manner. All the three videos, which came under the category of advertisement: 'Bold is Beautiful' deals with idea of single parenting and celebrating singleness and homosexuality. 'The Visit' which is a small video which comes under this ad directed by Shamik Sengupta depicts a lesbian relationship in a simple and normal way. The two women presented in this ad decide to express their relation to their parents. One of them is really worried about the other woman's family because she belongs to the south India and they are too traditional about the customs and concept of marriage. The video does not show what happens later, or the reaction of their families, but still it creates a kind of positive thought in the minds of the viewers. The idea of togetherness and choice of life is depicted naturally through that ad. Their relation is depicted in such a way which triggers only positive aspects about homosexuality. Our society has a set of rules and concepts about different matter and we are not supposed to break those rules and when someone tries to change these rules society starts to criticize and underrate them. If personally individuals are able to change the way we view certain things then most of the subjects that we consider as taboo will be disappeared from our society. The public are ready to accept only the idea of heterosexuality and consider all other relations apart from these aspects as abnormal. The matter of how society will watch us this comes as a major concern in many cases and it's the main reason lesbian couples are mainly facing struggles during the time to open up to their parents, They fear about the reactions and they try to suppress themselves and it can even cause both physical and mental illness. "Love is a family value." With this statement as a motto the United Nations Human Rights presented a Bollywood music video *The Welcome* celebrating gay relationships. The video is thought provoking and influential. It tries to depict a 'Free and Equal' world and can be considered as an impressive reminder that shows us everyone must be warmly welcomed by the family, no matter who they are and whom they love. The video is very rich and warm in its mood of presentation. The music and the celebrative visuals creates a kind joy in our mind set where the family is ready to welcome one of the family member and his special friend. The special friend is brought into light in a surprising way and the first reaction is of the family is a confused expression; but the very next moment, they will accept the Gay couple and Grandmother of that family gives blessings to them and the celebration continues. In a very warm way they welcomed that idea of choice and it made a beautiful reminder about the freedom of individuality. We know that it will not be simple as portrayed in that video but still it creates a kind of positive vibes which provokes us to think about a change in the views of our society. This video can be considered as a celebration of sameness, and as a message of humanity and love. Thus, it could be said that visual forms are the strongest medium through which we are able to share different thoughts. In the essay *Self Reliance*, Emerson gives out his idea about society as "Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to

surrender the liberty and culture of the eater.” Yet there are many brands coming forward to doing promotions in support of LGBT rights only for personal gains but still there are some genuine cases. ‘McDonald’s knows how to attract protests-this time from anti-gay religious groups’-states the magazine Business Insider. McDonald’s Taiwan created and posted an ad for McCafe which portrays young boy’s meeting with his father. It is a 90- second video which presents an emotional moment between a father and a son at a cafe and the son passes a coffee cup to his dad reading ‘I like boys’ and father first withdraws from the table and seems to be upset and son becomes really emotional . After a while the father comes back and picks up the same cup and modifies the sentence like ‘I accept that you like boys.’ This video was highly promoted by many people at same time there were many comments which opposed the main message or idea of this ad. There were many demands to boycott McDonald’s for this ad but still social media response to the ad has been overwhelming and encouraging. It can be considered as immense effort in changing the mind-set of people, and world itself. When this video was released, it didn’t receive a heart-warming appreciation. There were many critics who argued that it is creating a bad impact on the next generation. There was also another ad by McDonald’s “Come as You Are” in promotion gay community. This 48- second campaign shows a young man looking his class photo and speaking to one of his friend through the mobile phone, from his conversation the audience could make out that he is speaking to one of his friend who is a male, and the conversation reveals that they are having a deep bond and they are gay couples. Yet what makes this ad different from the previous gay campaign of McDonalds is that here the young man never reveals its sexual identity to his dad rather he hang up the call as his father approaches him. The reason for not revealing his homosexual identity is not shown in this ad. Therefore McDonalds promotes this ad with a caption that it’s a place where people can be free to be themselves. This too made many comments as the earlier one mentioned here anyway both the ads were a medium which helped at least some people to think in a different way. The biggest mistake of our society is that we still have a tinge of homophobia and the main reason behind all the negative interrogation about this matter. Through education we are able to brought changes in the society it is needed to provide awareness and promotion classes regarding LGBT rights and through that we will provide freedom to many individuals to explore themselves. In order to this we have to change the homophobic attitude that is present in everyone’s mind. Boy George, who is a famous English singer and songwriter, says that “There is this illusion that homosexuals have sex and heterosexuals fall in love. That’s completely untrue. Everybody wants to be loved”⁴ (Dr.Mugisha) .This statements cannot be considered genuine, because every heterosexual relation can’t be considered as pure love. Nor every homosexual relationship can be underrated as the outcome of mere lust. In fact, social activists argue that homosexual relationships are more secure in the sense that there won’t be any male superiority complex or female possessiveness. We talk about equality, celebrate equality and also fight for it but when it comes to gender and LGBT rights there will be many concerns which makes many obstacles for the freedom of everyone. As Hubert H .Humphrey states that “Equality Means Equality for All- no

exceptions, no ‘Yes, But’s’, no asterisked footnotes imposing limits”⁵(Schwartz). But still our society is not ready to accept it. Growing up as a lesbian, gay or transgender means their life will be not so easy even though there will be many people or laws to protect them .They will be always facing many struggles and criticism but still they have to be protected and they have to come up towards the front row. Every single transgender or gay child when born in India or any other parts of the world they are mistreated firstly from their family itself and then they are misused or manipulated by the society. Here as per the survey the graph shows the percentage of acceptance level of homosexual community from year 1982 to 2014.

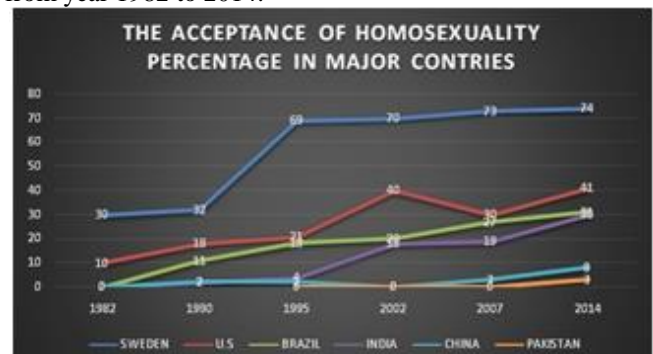


Figure 2. The Acceptances of Homosexuality Percentage in Six Major Countries (Rukmini.s, live mint)

VI. CONCLUSION

In the contemporary society, there are many instances and opportunities which provides a space for the gay and lesbian communities. The public awareness about their rights and freedom has resulted in their social acceptance and their lifestyle conditions are slowly improving. Still, a major part of the homosexual community is not brought to the mainstream and their identities are kept hidden. Even the people from this groups remarks that they are treated badly and harassed. Religious institutions play a major role is alienating homosexuals in the society. Religious preachers and priests call it a sin and brand them as evil. They have protested against the decriminalization of section 377. However, ultimately it all narrows down to the personal choice of an individual. The identity of a person is established by himself; neither the society nor religion has the authority to question the fundamental rights guaranteed to a person by the constitution.

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