

Addressing LGBTQ Community Issues Through News And News Articles In Language Newspapers of Pune City

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The Supreme Court of India in its judgment dated 6th September 2018 said, 'Section 377 is unconstitutional as it infringed on the fundamental rights of autonomy, intimacy, and identity, thus legalising homosexuality in India.'

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Research question

Are language newspapers addressing issues of LGBTQ community in Pune city?

Research methodology

For this topic research methodology is Qualitative. Interviews of LGBTQ community members, EGOs, Doctors, Media personalities, social activists, and legal advisors were conducted. Few have allowed quoting their names and few like to be anonymous. Four questions were asked to media personalities of language newspapers in Pune city, which include editor, news editor, chief reporter and reporters. Language news papers considered for this paper are Maharashtra Times, Sakal, Lokmat, Pudhari, Prabhat and Kesari.

Issues of LGBTQ community

Before going to issues of LGBTQ community, we have to understand terminology or long forms.

L and **G** are used for homosexuals. **L** stands for Lesbians and **G** stands for Gays. Both are also called as homosexual man or woman.

B stands for Bisexual. They can have affection with both the sex.

T stands for Transgender. They can be transmen and transwomen.

Q stands for Queer. This means they are still exploring their sexuality.

Few issues are common to all of them and some are different to LGB and T. In this paper common and few different issues are discussed.

Common issues follow:

1. Social acceptance
2. Job opportunities and work environment
3. Health related issues and insurance.

Social acceptance: It is observed that our society is orthodox about sexuality or sexual desire. The Supreme Court of India, in its judgment says, 'In the garb of social morality, the members of the LGBT community must not be outlawed or given a step-motherly treatment of malefactor by the society. If this happens or if such a treatment to the LGBT community is allowed to persist, then the constitutional courts, which are under the obligation to protect the fundamental rights, would be failing in the discharge of their duty. A failure to do so would reduce the citizenry rights to a cipher.' (Judgment of writ petition (criminal) no. 76 of 2016, The Supreme Court of India, Sept. 6, 2018 (122-80))

The society has a frame of do's and don'ts. Any thing out of the frame activity or which is not moral as per the society; is rejected or ill treated. Male and female is a straight division of gender in our society. Transgender community is its best example. To accept the transgender community within the

society and to give them humanly rights, The Supreme Court of India has to give a judgment. (NALSA case, (2014) 5 SCC 438); but today also transgender community struggles for social acceptance.

This is the case with transgender, which are known to the society for long years. Social acceptance becomes more and more difficult to LGB members. These relations are not at all accepted by the society ((LGBT discrimination report, Compiled by Weave consulting, December 2011). Mr. Bindumadhav Khire is a well known LGBTQ right activist from Pune. He started Pune Pride march from December 2011. Approx 50 individuals, including supporters and well wishers took part in this march. In 2019 rally, approx 1000 individuals were present. The increased number was because of Section 377 rule by The Supreme Court of India. Gay individuals are more 'out' than Lesbians. It is again because of gender bias observed in the society. They choose to keep quiet; because of social burden. They cannot speak up or convey their desire or gender approach to their own family.

Most importantly sexual desire or identity is not only related to physical relations. It is a state of mind. If an individual feels comfortable or secured or loves same sex individual, it is a natural process, which is now accepted by scientists (Dawn Ennis, Forbs, August 30, 2019). It is as normal as 'straight' couples. 'The natural identity of an individual should be treated to be absolutely essential to his being. What nature gives is natural. That is called nature within.' (SC, 6-4).

Social acceptance has very much importance for the community to live a tension free and proud life in the society.

Job opportunities and work environment: Job opportunities are limited for transgender. Main reason is lack of education. It is again related to social acceptance and Hijra community rituals. A petition was filed in Bombay High Court for reservation in Government jobs for transgender (28th March 2022). Anil Ukrande a community member have made placements of 26 transgender individuals in two years (2020-2021). It was a very tough job for him. Because of low educational qualification, jobs offered were of house maid, telephone operator, helper etc.

LGB community has less issues about job opportunities till they 'speak out' their sexual identity. The companies or officials of companies are biased about LGBs, says Anil. Work environment for LGB in companies in metro cities is now quite open. They are well accepted in the work environment.

Health related issues and insurance: Sex education, safe sex, sex related issues other than HIV have to be addressed between community. It is more related to transgender, says Anil. Anil also works as community coordinator for health related issues for transgender.

Expectations from language newspapers

- 1 Understanding terminologies
- 2 Help to create social awareness among readers.
- 3 Raise voice on inequality and biases in the society.
- 4 Publish news or news articles about gender identity and identity crises.

Why language newspapers is selected?

There are three answers for this question.

- 1 There is a perception that English language newspapers cover more bold news and they always gave good publicity to LGBTQ community and Marathi language newspapers are more conservative
- 2 Readership numbers are high of language newspapers in Pune city. They are 28,91,000 p.m. as compared to 2,34,000 p.m. of English language newspapers. (IRS 2019, Q4, May 8, 2020).
- 3 Social media reflects mindset of common people. If an LGBTQ community member posts any issue or opinion, it is judged by his gender identity or sexuality. The community have close groups; but open platform is annoying, trolling and misbehaving, says a lesbian (who want to be anonymous.)

These three answers impose importance of language newspapers for LGBTQ community.

Questions asked to language media representatives and LGBTQ activist:

1. Are you aware of LGBTQ movement in the city?
2. Do you publish news or news article about LGBTQ community?
3. How often you publish such stories?
4. Do you think, regional newspaper can create awareness between citizens about LGBTQ community and it can lead to social equality?

Taking the issues and problems faced by LGBTQ community, the answers were reflecting the society.

The findings are:

1. Language newspaper representatives in Pune are aware of LGBTQ movement in the city.
2. They publish news or news articles about the community.
3. Except one newspaper others publish news about the community as per activities or when if issue arises. In the month of April, one news was published. A lesbian couple asks for legal protection from their families. Pune based lawyer VikasShinde helped them to register a MoU in Pune city.
4. Regional or language newspaper may create awareness between citizens about the community and it may lead to social equality.
5. There is a clear gap between language newspapers in the city and LGBTQ community.
6. The community also needs spoke person, who is well read and aware of history, various legal matters and current issues. Who can brief the media any issue in detail, with proper legal and scientific knowledge.
7. Maharashtra Times has taken lead in publishing special stories of LGBTQ community. They published a column 'out and proud' twice in a week for a year (2019-2020). The column was influenced by Times of India; but stories are not translated. They created their own network in the community. News and news articles were based on the information given by active members of community, NGOs, activists, doctors, lawyers etc. Special surveys were done. After the column we can notice some stories about happenings in community are arriving in Maharashtra Times. A story was published on September 27, 2021 in the 'Personalities of Pune' column. Anil Urkunde was featured in that story. He is 'open'. His work for LGBTQ community was penned by Ms. KarunaPuri, reporter of Maharashtra Times.

Conclusion

There are issues of LGBTQ community which have to be addressed by the society. Equality is prominent. In a civil society one should not be ill treated or ignored or looked down because of sexual desire or identity. All have same rights and equality is the main concern of the constitution of India.

Language newspaper can play a key role. They can help the community for social acceptance. If an individual belongs to LGBTQ community, that does not mean that, it is abnormal. Language newspapers can put forth this in scientific way to its readers. Apart from activities or issues of community, following can be done:

1. Featuring personalities
2. Taking note of social work done by or for the community
3. Focusing of education of transgender
4. Awareness about laws and rules
5. Health column can feature general health and mental health of the community.

This all requires filling in the gap between community and media. Workshops and one to one dialogue between media personalities and community members is essential. Workshops for media houses, journalists, working journalist union can help to understand the community in a better way.

Mr. BindumadhavKhire, with his NGO 'Binduqueer rights foundation' is organizing workshops for media schools from last 10 years. Marathwadamitramandals Journalism and Mass communication department and Ranade institute's department of communication and journalism are conducting the workshops for their students. 'We have observed the change in attitude and thought process of the students for these years. If they come across any story related to community, they reach out to us. Ask about details and try to give correct information with facts and right terminologies,' he adds.

LGBTQ is a small community; but publishing news or news articles about it is not related to number of readers or total readership. Equality is more important and this can bring ray of hope to their lives. Workshops and interactions for media houses can help to bring the change.

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