

Anthology of true stories
of parents of gays
Edited by Bindumadhav Khire
Assisted by Aditya Joshi

Beautiful People



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Parents of Gays

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English Translation of the
Marathi Book "Manachiye Gunti"
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INTRODUCTION

I grew up in a middle-class, orthodox, religious family in Pune. At puberty, I began to get romantically and physically attracted to men. (I did not know the word 'gay' or 'homosexual' at that time). I was distressed when I realized that, unlike my friends, I had no sexual feelings for women. I used to consider my sexual attraction to men as a sin. This affected my self-esteem and aspirations. I lost my self-confidence. I started hating myself. I became depressed and thought of committing suicide. Being ashamed of my sexuality and afraid of the stigma and discrimination I would face if I were to reveal my sexuality, I did not reveal it to anyone. Later, I married a woman. But the marriage ended in divorce a year later.

During 1996-1999, when I was in U.S. (I was a computer engineer and worked there for a while), I sought the help of 'Trikone', a support group for Gays and Lesbians in San Francisco. I met many Indian gay men in this group. My journey of self-acceptance began in their company. I felt a huge burden lift off me; my personality underwent a radical transformation. I returned to Pune, in the beginning of 2000.

My family was planning a second marriage for me (at that time, they did not know that I was gay). On coming to Pune, I told them the truth at once. They were shocked. My mother consulted 'sadhus' (holy men / seers). My father said that having a son like me was the result of his sins from his last birth! I took my mother to a psychiatrist. He counseled my mother and said there was nothing

wrong with me. That was when her hopes, that I would change, began to wane. When she saw there was no option, she began to make an effort to understand and accept me.

Today, she accepts me completely and is proud of the work that I do. My father does not discuss these issues with me. But he does not oppose me either.

After coming back to Pune, I resigned from my job after a while. In September 2002, I set up an organization called 'Samapathik Trust' to work on the rights of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgenders and Intersex (LGBTI) communities.

During my work I noticed a glaring lack of Marathi language content on these issues. So, I wrote books in Marathi - 'Partner', 'Indradhanu - Samalaingikateche Vividh Rang' (Rainbow - Different Hues of Homosexuality), 'Laingik Shikshan, Laingikata, HIV/AIDS Helpline Margadarshika' (Manual for running a Helpline on Sex Education, Sexuality, HIV/AIDS), 'Manavi Laingikata-Ek Prathamik Olakh' (Human Sexuality - An Introduction).

The objective of writing these books was to help change the mindset of mainstream society towards LGBTI (L-Lesbian, Gay-Gay, B-Bisexual, T-Transgender, I-Intersex) communities.

On 11th December 2011, our Trust-'Samapathik' organized Pune's first LGBTI 'Pride Walk'. After this event, I decided to compile a set of books in Marathi-

- 'Antaranga'- Anthology of True stories of Gays.
- 'Manachiye Gunti'- Anthology of True

stories of Parents of Gays.

- 'Saptaranga'- Anthology of True stories of Transgenders and Tritiyapanthis.
- 'Intersex Ek Prathamik Olakh'- Intersex:An

Introduction.

The anthology of true stories of parents of gays – 'Manachiye Gunti' was published in Marathi in March 2013.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Since the publication of the parents' anthology in Marathi, many people have asked me for an English translation of the book. But since I was busy with other anthologies, I was unable to take up the work. Two years ago, a doctor (who is closeted) approached me and expressed his desire to do something for the LGBTI community. I suggested that he prepare the first draft of the translation of the book. Diligently, he delivered the first draft. Later, Aditya Joshi from IIT Bombay expressed his interest in preparing the second draft. He said the Marathi book had helped his parents to accept him. After Aditya finished the second draft, I worked on the final draft.

During the translation, I suggested to Aditya the idea of adding the interview of his parents (taken by Aditya) in the book. Aditya and his parents graciously agreed. So, in addition to the stories in the Marathi version of the book, the English version has the interview of Aditya's mom and dad. The English version also has the statements given by Indian Psychiatric Society and World Psychiatric Association on sexual

orientation.

Shobhana Kumar, founder of 'Queer-Ink', expressed a desire to bring out an e-edition of the book. Samapathik Trust decided to bring out a limited hard-copy edition. Finally, in November 2016, we have the English translation ready.

I sincerely hope parents of gays and lesbians will find the book useful in assisting them to accept and love their child.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Being Gay

On reaching adolescence, every person feels sexual and emotional attraction towards someone. This sexual and emotional need to form a long-term sexual relationship with a person of a particular biological sex is called that person's 'sexual orientation'.

If the person feels emotional and sexual attraction only for members of the opposite sex, it is called 'heterosexual orientation'. Many men feel sexually and emotionally attracted to women only, while many women feel sexually and emotionally attracted to men only. (the word 'straight' is oftentimes used to denote heterosexual orientation).

If a person feels emotional and sexual attraction for members of both the sexes, it is called 'bisexual orientation'. Some men feel sexually and emotionally attracted to men as well as women. Similarly, some women feel sexually and emotionally attracted to men and women.

If a person feels emotional and sexual attraction for members of the same sex only, it is called 'homosexual orientation'. Some men feel sexually and emotionally attracted to men only. Similarly, some women feel sexually and emotionally attracted to women only (these women are called 'Lesbians'). The word 'gay' is more commonly used than the word 'homosexual'. There are many other synonyms used for 'homosexual', but they express hate and ridicule, e.g. 'fag', 'fruit', 'pansy'.

In Marathi the word for homosexual is 'Samalingi'. There are many synonyms in Marathi for the word 'homosexual'. All such words, however, express ridicule or hate, e.g., 'gaandu', 'bulya', 'bulgya'.

It is important to understand that anatomically Gays and Bisexuals are not different from Heterosexuals. The difference lies in their sexual orientation.

There is a difference between being Gay and being a Transgender. A Transgender is a person whose gender identity is different from the person's biological sex. i.e. A Male to Female Transgender (who has not undergone SRS-Sex Reassignment Surgery) is a person who is anatomically male but the person's sense of gender (gender identity) is that of a female. (Example-Hijaras are a community of Male to Female Transgenders). A Female to Male Transgender (who has not undergone SRS-Sex Reassignment Surgery) is a person who is anatomically female but the person's sense of gender (gender identity) is that of a male. So when a person says he/she is gay

it means the person has a homosexual sexual orientation. Whereas when a person says he/she is a Transgender it means that the person's gender identity is different from her/his biological sex.

Coming to terms with our sexuality

For most gay people, coming to terms with their sexuality is not easy. Knowing that being gay is regarded as a sin or a stigma, most persons decide not to disclose their sexuality to anyone. This act of keeping one's sexuality secret is called 'living in the closet'. Many gays feel deeply ashamed of their sexuality; ending up living a sad, painful, hypocritical life, pretending to be heterosexual. But some gay men and women refuse to live a life of hypocrisy. They feel that they need to be honest about their sexuality and hence decide to 'come out'. 'Coming out' means disclosing your sexuality to someone. Many 'test the waters' by first 'coming out' to their friends or distant relatives. The last and the most painful step is 'coming out' to their parents. Some are terrified of the fury their parents would unleash on them. But most are afraid of 'coming out' to their parents, because they love their parents very much and know that revealing the secret will cause their parents a lot of pain. They desperately want their parents to understand this issue and accept them.

When I told my mother that I was gay, she had no knowledge about this issue. When I came out, I had strong support in the form of gay friends and organizations working with gay people. Sadly, my mom had no such support system to rely on.

Fearing the reactions of relatives and society, she could not talk about it to anyone and hence found it extremely difficult to cope with my revelation. She had no way of knowing how other parents of gay youths had faced the situation; the pain and anguish that they had undergone; the time it took for them to recover from the shock. Despite this lack of a support system, my mom struggled to accept me and today she is my strongest ally.

When someone tells his/her parents that he/she is gay, parents go through a deep trauma. Belonging to a different generation, they are ignorant about this issue. Many have grown up with an orthodox background. Faced with such a situation, parents feel lonely and isolated. They badly need support, but they have no one whom they can turn to.

Many religious texts regard homosexuality as a sin. All religions seem to agree with one another on this point. So, many religious parents regard homosexuality as a sin.

Some believe that men who have low male hormones and high female hormones become gay. This is a myth. Scientific studies have found no evidence showing differential hormone levels between heterosexual and homosexual men.

Many believe that homosexual intercourse is not seen in nature and hence, it is unnatural. This is incorrect. Homosexual intercourse is observed in many animals and birds.

Some parents believe that homosexuality is a western trend or fad, and did not exist in India. These parents forget (or likely have not been told) that homosexual intercourse is mentioned in many

ancient Indian texts such as 'Manu Smriti', 'Narad Smriti', 'Kamasutra'. Sculptures in some ancient temples depict homosexual intercourse. Homosexuality is not a western import. What came from the west is the awareness about human rights, and the inspiration from their movements for gay rights.

Some believe that men become gay as a result of sexual abuse in childhood. This is a myth. Many gays (including me) have never been sexually abused.

Parents have many such and similar misconceptions, questions, doubts and concerns. But they do not know whom to seek answers from.

Some seek out astrologers and 'sadhus'. This obviously does not help. Some consult psychiatrists. But because many psychiatrists are homophobic (i.e. they hate homosexuals), they misguide these parents, stating that their child can be cured if he/she 'cooperates', despite knowing that Indian Psychiatric Society (IPS) and World Psychiatric Association (WPA) do not regard homosexuality as a disorder. This adversely affects the gay person and the problem gets worse, as parents feel that their child is not 'cooperating'.

Over the last ten years, innumerable such cases came to my attention. So, I decided to compile the true stories of parents of gays, as a form of support to parents in assisting them to accept their child's sexuality. I approached many parents, but the response from parents was poor. Many parents had accepted their gay children, but were not ready to speak or write about it. So, I could compile very few stories for this book.

With the passing years, more and more gays are coming out to people around them. They have openly started demanding their rights, telling the world that they are human beings like others. They have a right to live with dignity, just like anybody else. But before the world accepts them, these gay youths want acceptance from the people who are close to them. When your family is supportive, it is easy to take on the world. But who does one turn to when your own family does not support you? This book is a small step towards creating such a valuable support for parents of gay children.

IDENTITY OF PARENTS

While compiling the stories, parents were advised that those who were open to giving their real names could do so. However, the ones who desired not to reveal their real names were advised to write under aliases.

The writers were expected to have lived in Maharashtra for a minimum of five years, so that a reflection of the cultural background of Maharashtra could be seen through their stories.

Honesty was considered paramount for these stories.

A consent letter was obtained from each parent for publishing the story.

Bindumadhav Khire
November 2016



NOTE OF THANKS

MARATHI VERSION

I have received assistance from many people while writing this book. First and foremost, my sincere thanks to those parents, brothers and sisters who wrote about their experiences for this book. It was an emotionally painful experience for most of them. Mrs. Meera (Neha's mom) told me that when she sat down to write the Marathi story she went through a lot of pain in reliving her trauma. But recently, she said, "When I went through the English translation of my story, I did not feel the pain I felt when I first wrote my story in Marathi. It is a good indication of the distance I have traveled since the Marathi version".

Dr. Bhooshan Shukla gave me an interview on medical matters for this book. Bhanupratap Barge, ACP, gave me an interview on legal matters. Vivek Raj Anand took the time out to write a preface, in which he has written about his parents and Ashok Raw Kavi's mother.

Neelam Nagvekar designed the cover for the Marathi book. Chandrashekhar Begampure prepared the lay-out and Arvind Narayan, David assisted me on legal matters. While I was busy writing the Marathi book, Tinesh Chopade (then Project Director of Samapathik Trust) ably managed the work of the Trust.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

For the English translation, a closeted doctor who does not wish to be named, did the first draft of the English translation. Aditya Joshi did the second draft and I did the final draft. Parikshit Shete helped me with DTP.

Shobhna Kumar founder of 'Queer-Ink' expressed interest in bringing out an e-edition of the book.

Joseph M. Pinto did the editing and proof-reading of the book.

Ashok Row Kavi (President of The Humsafar Trust), Vivek Raj Anand (CEO of The Humsafar Trust), Radheshyam Jadhav (Editor-Infrastructure and Development, Times of India), have been my strong supporters in this project.

My deepest gratitude towards them all.

Before the book went for publication I felt that the statements of Indian Psychiatric Society (IPS) and world Psychiatric Association (WPA) should be given in the appendices.

My sincere thanks to Dr. G. V. Prasad Rao (President of IPS) and Dr. Dinesh Bhugra (President of WPA) for providing these statements at my request for use in the Curative Petition on the IPC 377 case currently pending in the Supreme Court.

Bindumadhav Khire.
November 2016



PREFACE

Growing up, some of us go through the journey of realizing that we are gay and eventually accept our sexuality. Some of us choose not to tread this path of acceptance. But I think, it is inevitable. There is a point in our lives when we face the question 'Who am I?' and the answer is to tell yourself with honesty, "I am gay."

Facing this truth can happen at any phase of life, at any age. Some accept the truth early, while others need more time. But, in the end, we have to face the truth.

Accepting yourself begins with telling yourself that it is 'okay' to be gay. This is followed by several questions, 'What will happen if my parents get to know?', 'How will they react?', 'What will my friends think of me?', 'Will folks at office / college make fun of me?' It is but natural to think of these questions, but if you have accepted the truth about your sexuality, then there is no reason to feel guilty about it. If we accept that nature has created us and that we are a part of nature; if we accept that our sexual orientation is different but we are not 'deviant' or 'perverts'; if we accept that we are just like everyone else, then our way of looking at the world, while answering these questions, also changes. We begin to talk openly about these issues.

Our parents are an integral part of our lives. We love them and it is our duty to tell them the truth. We know that the truth will be painful for them, but we hope that they will understand and continue to love us. They will need time to accept

our sexual orientation but eventually they will. Just as it took us time to accept ourselves in our journey, it is natural that they too are going to need some time.

I make it a point to tell the young LGBT ('L'-Lesbian, 'G'-Gay, 'B'-Bisexual, 'T'-Transgender) who come out to their parents, "You have travelled the journey of self-acceptance. Now you should hold the hands of your parents, as they are doing their journey of coming to terms with your sexuality. Whether they are willing or unwilling to take the first steps towards accepting you, they love you and they need you, as this journey was unexpected and they were not mentally prepared for it. Their journey is not theirs alone. We share this journey with them."

While growing up, I shared a strong bond with my mother. She was my strong support and, in every way, she instilled confidence in me. She was an avid reader. This knowledge made her wise and understanding. She knew English, Marathi, Hindi and Gujarati languages and so she used to read the best literature available in all these languages. She would often speak about issues concerning women. She always said that women do not have a status equal to men in our society and they get fewer opportunities. This conclusion came from her experience, because she had financially supported her family since the age of 16. She gave tuitions to support her brother who was studying engineering. She taught me to respect women and treat them as equals. Frankly, I am at a loss to describe my bonding with her. For me, she was the best mother in the world but I still could not tell her

that I was gay. At the age of 21, I could not tell her that my best friend was actually my boyfriend of nearly three years.

She would often ask me, 'Don't you have a girlfriend?' But I was never interested in girls. I would tell her that all my female friends are just good friends and many of them are like my 'rakhi' sisters. She would laugh and say, 'Look beyond your best friend and find yourself a girlfriend'.

I clearly remember the day when my boyfriend and I had a big fight. I came home, and went to our bedroom (five of us in our family would share a one-room-kitchen flat - kitchen converted into bedroom). I began to cry. My mother came in. Placing my head on her lap, she asked me, "What happened?" I told her about the fight. She heard me out and said nothing for the next couple of minutes. Finally, she asked, "What does he mean to you?" I was caught unawares. I was bewildered. Even at this point, I could not tell her the truth. I said, "He is my closest friend in the whole world". She said, "If he is your closest 'friend', that's okay. But if he is more than a close friend, then life is not going to be easy for you. This world will not support you, accept you". I said nothing, but continued crying. Running her fingers through my hair, she said, "Arrey paagal, rotaa kyun hai, sab theek ho jayega" (Why are you crying? Things will work out well !)

That afternoon, my relationship with my mother became even stronger.

My mother's support gave me the courage to accept myself. The topic of my being 'gay' never came up again. Unfortunately, my mother passed away in a few years.

My boyfriend got married to a woman. Our relationship of nine years ended. This was the worst phase of my life. With whom could I have shared my pain? My family was pressurizing me to get married, but I knew that I would never get married to a woman.

I graduated from a business school in Mumbai in 1991. My boyfriend was married. My mother was no more. I was 30. I was gay. And I had no option but to face life.

In the beginning, I told my brother. I simply walked into his office, sat next to him and said, "Bhai, how would you react if I told you I was gay?" He was shocked. This hadn't occurred to him in his wildest dreams. Frankly, I was his younger brother and also his hero. Most of my close female friends were good-looking and he always thought I was having affairs with them and that I was having a lot of fun. He took some time to recover and said, "Be that as it may, you will always remain close to me, like Karan (his son)". However, he added, "Don't tell this to dad or my wife, as of now". In years to come he spoke to his wife and children about my sexuality. My sexual orientation does not affect our relationship in any way.

I always shared a stormy relationship with my father. We were two strong-headed people and he would insist that I should agree with whatever he said. We often had fights and my mother would play the peace-maker. Dialogue between us started only after my mother's death. That was when I realized that my father loved me. Sometime in 1998, 'Bombay Times' featured a photograph of Ashok Row Kavi (Chairperson of The Humsafar

Trust) with a cheque of 7,500 US Dollars given by 'ET Foundation'. My father saw this picture and asked my brother, "Isn't this the same guy who is friends with Vivek?" My brother responded in the affirmative. My father replied, "Oh, then there's no point in trying to get him married." From that day onwards, my father started making efforts to accept me.

We started connecting and in one of our conversations, my father told me that BEING GAY was a non-issue for him, but when you realize that your son is gay you embark on a journey of understanding. When he saw our play 'Ek Madhavbaug' he told me that he could identify with the mother's feelings in the play, but for the first time he realized what I had been through in my life and thus this play remained very close to his heart.

He always refrained from giving interviews in media with a simple rationale that if he loved the color Yellow and his son loved Blue, why should he defend to the outside world that Blue is as natural as Yellow? However, around two years ago he spoke to a newspaper on IPC Section 377 where he was quoted that, along with changes in outdated laws, there was a crucial need to get rid of the outdated norms of our society. He had shared his first-ever interview in the media with his family and friends.

Each year he would drop by at the Kashish Film Festival, not so much for the films but just to meet and catch up with all of us. He welcomed and looked forward to my friends coming to our home and spending time with them. He hoped that some day I would find a good partner and get married. He did not care about the law or social acceptance. He

believed that once he was gone, I would be left alone and he would be happier if I had someone in life who would be with me long after he was gone.

I was once his child, when he held my hand, and during the last two years he was my child and I did not leave his hand till the end. He passed away in May 2016. His dream of seeing me married remained unfulfilled. But his desire to see me happy is fulfilled.

My parents are my inspiration. I know that this process of acceptance is not easy, but it is not impossible either.

Over the years, I have told every one around me that I am gay. Not out of necessity but because I love them. I came out to my sister, my friends, who in turn spoke to their children. The process of coming out is unending and continues all through our lives.

When the Delhi High Court gave its verdict on 2nd July 2009 (regarding IPC Section 377), The Times of India carried my interview. My neighbors read it and asked my sister-in-law about my sexuality. My brother told her, "Tell them, Vivek is our brother... and that is the most important thing for us!". Around the same time, my sister sat with my 13 year-old nephew and asked him to see one of my interviews on YouTube; later he walked up to her and asked her- what is the big deal about Vivek being gay? In our family, discussions on gay issues are like any other issue that needs to be discussed.

This has been my journey and of the people close to me. I am lucky that I had parents who accepted me, friends who supported me. Their *parents accepted me too. Here, I must mention

Amma. We affectionately call Ashok Row Kavi (India's first LGBT activist) 'Amma' but here when I mention Amma it is his mother. She was Amma to all of us as well.

When I met her for the first time, she smiled sweetly and asked, "New friend?" "Yes", I said. We spoke for a while. Then she said, "You are better than Ashok's other friends." I felt very happy. I was held in such good esteem!

Little did I know that this was a nice little trick she played on everyone. She loved to get information and gossip about the gay community and especially about Ashok's private life! She would call me occasionally and inquire about the gay couples we knew. But her inquiry was often covert. She would ask, "Hey, that guy hasn't come home in a while. Is everything ok?" And then I would tell her what was happening in their lives. She knew the art of extracting information from people so well that, much later, I realized that I had become a spy for her.

I remember that, around 2000, Ashok was in a relationship with a man whom Amma did not approve of. She would talk to me, for hours, over the phone about the relationship. She would tell me that she did not like that person with cat's eyes (She never named that person). She would tell me, "Tell Ashok, beware of people with cat's eyes!" Later when I realized that I had become a spy for her, I stopped giving her inside information. She became disappointed with me and, one day, bluntly told me, "You have become just like Ashok's other friends!" I laughed loudly. I was not the only one. All of Ashok's friends had been her spies some time or the other.

She loved talking to Ashok's friends, but she was a strict woman. She never took anything lying down from anyone. She never let anyone cross the line. The best example is an incident where a political leader came to their house and told her, "Ashok has been telling everyone that he is gay. Ask him not to use his family name in future." She told him politely, "Please leave." But added, "Have some tea before you go." Such was Amma!

These are positive experiences that came my way, where parents accepted their gay children but... often I also saw that not all my friends were as fortunate. I have seen a range of reactions from their parents. I have seen various grades of acceptance: complete acceptance, partial acceptance, rejection. I have seen parents pressurizing their children to get married, even after their children had come out to them. I have seen suggestions given: "Get married and you'll be fine". I have seen children being cursed, being beaten up, being disowned, being thrown out of homes. All this is painful for the parents but even more painful for the children. Who will the children turn to, if their parents don't support them? I have seen this stress taking a heavy toll on the physical and mental well-being of parents and children alike.

I hope that this book will help parents and their gay children to understand each other. At the end, I will only say, "I love my parents and it is because of them that I am what I am." And this is exactly why I feel that parents of every gay child should make a sincere effort to understand their child. Irrespective of whether their child is gay,

lesbian, bisexual or transgender, they must take a step forward towards acceptance of their child.

I dedicate this preface to all parents trying to understand and accept their gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender children.

Vivek Raj Anand
CEO
The Humsafar Trust, Mumbai

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MEDICAL MATTERS

Homosexuality is just a variant of sexuality. It is different from the norm (heterosexuality) but it is not a disorder. The Indian Psychiatric Society (IPS) and World Psychiatric Association (WPA) have given statements to that effect. These statements are given in Appendix (A) and (B).

ICD-10 (International Statistical Classification of Diseases) and DSM-V (Diagnostics & Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) do not list homosexuality as a pathology.

Interview of Dr. Bhooshan Shukla

(M.D., DNB, MRCPsych]

Dr. Bhooshan Shukla is a renowned psychiatrist. For more than 15 years, he has worked on issues related to sexuality. He has worked in England in the National Health Service for four years. Since 2008, he practises in Pune.

Q: Please tell us about the basics of sexuality.

A: We all should note that no one is responsible for your sexuality. Neither your parents nor anybody else has any role in forming your sexuality. Your sexuality can be inconvenient for you. But frankly you cannot do anything about it.

An individual's sexuality can be divided into four parts. To make this easy to understand, I am simplifying and hence scientifically it may not be cent percent accurate.

1. Gonads of boys/girls - Whether the individual has "testes" or "ovaries" and their functioning may be termed as the Gonad dimension.

2. External Genitalia of boys/girls - This may be termed as the Physical dimension.
3. The Gender Identity of the boy or girl - This means: after reaching puberty, whether they identify themselves as a boy or girl; this is the Gender Identity Dimension.
4. After attaining puberty, whether the person is sexually attracted to men or women or both is the Sexual Orientation Dimension.

These four dimensions are not related to one another. Generally, 80% of people have congruence in all these dimensions. This means the chromosomes of the individual, their genitalia, their gender identity and their sexual orientation are congruent. This uniformity or congruence is termed as 'a male' or 'a female'. But there are so many grey areas in these dimensions, forget about lay people, even most doctors fail to understand these grey areas. In short, I feel no one should claim that he/she knows everything about these complexities.

Q. Can we change the sexual orientation or gender identity by medications, counseling, threats or punishment?

A. No. We cannot change either the sexual orientation or gender identity. In fact, attempting this adversely affects the self-worth of that individual (which is already poor). We do not achieve anything by this approach.

Some people feel that, with time, sexual orientation can change. One must remember that, as we grow older, our concepts of sexual desire, sexual pleasure do change. Sexuality is ever changing (dynamic / fluid). I do not think there is

any individual who has exactly the same identical sexuality today, as he had ten years ago. If there is someone of this kind, then I have to say that he is living a pathetic life. It is important to understand that, when I say 'fluid', I do not mean that everything changes or can be changed. To give an analogy - a river is 'fluid', which means that the quantity of water in the river, the fish in the river, the rate at which it is flowing, etc, will change; but that does not mean that the banks of the river can be swapped nor will a river become the sea.

Q. Is parental upbringing responsible for the child's sexuality?

A. Parents wonder whether their child's upbringing is the cause of their child's sexuality. The answer to this question is a definite "No!". There is absolutely no co-relation between the upbringing of an individual and his/her sexuality.

Many parents ask me: "What can we do to change the sexuality of our children?" My answer is that nothing can be done. Parents like to strongly believe that they have a major influence over molding their children. But this does not extend to molding their sexuality, especially sexual orientation or gender identity of their children.

Going further, I say that those sexualities which are considered as 'sexual minorities' are "biologically-driven" and cannot be influenced by the external world. This has been proved scientifically, time and again. Parents should realize that it is natural for them to feel sad, when they learn about their child's sexuality; feel pain that their child is different from others. They have my full sympathy. But to believe that, "I am responsible

for my child's sexuality and I can somehow change it" is simply not true.

Q. What would you like to say to parents who desire to have grand-children?

A. Many parents say that they are willing accept this fact; but still want their children to get married and have children, as a moral/social duty or obligation. Most parents expect this from their children.

I feel this term 'duty' is also very 'fluid'. Parents argue, "Is it wrong for us to have such expectations (of having grand-children) from our child?" If you want a blunt answer, I say, "Yes. It is wrong." Because, as parents, are we able to fulfill each and every demand and expectation of our child? We must realize that no relationship would last, if it is based on expectations and their fulfillment. Many of us believe in God and have a lot of expectations from Him/Her. But does our faith end, if these are not met? Of course, not! Many try to bribe God. But does it work?

Parents should not expect the fulfillment of their expectations, based on what the majority expects. With the intention of making the child conform to majority view, they blackmail their children, force their own wrong ideas on them and make their child's life miserable. In addition, after a forced marriage, his or her partner too suffers, as there is absolutely no bond of love and longing between the two. After marriage, if they have children, then these children suffer too. Will you marry your heterosexual daughter with a gay man? Or a heterosexual son to a lesbian? Then why do you apply one yardstick for your gay child and another for a heterosexual child? Why this

hypocrisy? This is how we keep on bringing more and more people within this orbit of pain and misery.

Q. What are the limitations on parents in our orthodox society?

A. While practicing as a psychiatrist, I see that many parents (especially mothers) try their best to understand and support their children. But at the same time, I see that some children have unrealistic expectations from their parents. Parents have a difficult time understanding sexuality issues, as they are three generations behind their children. If we consider one generation to be of 7-10 years, then these children are three generations ahead of their parents. It is too unrealistic to expect that parents, who are three generations behind their children, should understand this concept of sexuality completely. With maturity, you will realize that no individual can fully understand another individual. Acceptance by parents is one thing, but insisting that they should understand their gay children completely is expecting too much.

Some gay youths say - now that our parents have accepted us, we have the absolute freedom to behave as we wish; parents should not only accept us but should also “support” us. If parents can do this, well and good. But some parents find this difficult. It is very important to note that, with great difficulty and effort, they are trying to understand and accept you. This is a big step forward. If they are trying hard to accept you, you as children should also respect their efforts and give credit where due. If you think your parents are not “supporting” you,

then you should move out of the house, stay independently and live your lifestyle. But there are some gay people who, despite being adults, remain completely financially dependent on parents; show no intention of letting go of the benefits of remaining part of the family but, at the same time keep on complaining that their parents are not providing sufficient “support”. I do not accept this attitude.

Complete your studies, become self-sufficient, stay independently and then live your own life-style. If a boy or a girl is willing to stay independently, then parents should not insist that their child stay with them. Both need to understand that, if they have to stay together, there will have to be compromises made by both sides. The situation is tough and challenging. But both, parents and children, should handle this pragmatically.

Q. Should gays/lesbians suppress their sexuality and try to live a heterosexual lifestyle, for the sake of their parents and society?

A. I am asked this question many times. If you look at the way our society, our civilization is evolving you will realize that this attitude does not go with it. The days when a person sacrificed his sexuality for social acceptance are slowly but surely coming to an end. It's like insisting that every child of mine should be a doctor or an engineer. We are seeing casteism getting eradicated; women are becoming empowered. So we cannot be orthodox, when it comes to sexuality. That would be foolish. You will simply end up hurting your children. This constant focus on the child's sexuality, efforts to change it or make it fit into a societal norm, makes the child

obsessed with his sexuality. I think that is the biggest tragedy of all.

At no point in time is your entire being represented by your sexuality. For sexual minorities, this always remains a big issue because they are unable to see life beyond sexuality. This means that their entire universe, whether it be about self-realization or career in any field - social, economic or political- is invariably tied to and limited to their sexuality. This can happen with most people at the beginning of adulthood. But some get fixated with this mind set and that is harmful. For them sexuality is the beginning and the end of everything. Parents are obsessed with their sexuality; society is obsessed with their sexuality. So it logically follows that gay children remain obsessed with their sexuality. They don't get a chance to develop into full, complete human beings. Struggling their entire lives to fit into one or other sexual mould, they are unable to be human; experience life like any other human being. But it is possible for parents to help avoid this tragedy. I am aware that this is not easy for you. It is easy to talk about it, but if parents will not do this for their child, who will?



LEGAL MATTERS

Christian religion had great influence on British laws. Since homosexuality is considered a “sin” in Christianity, it became an offence in British law. When the British ruled India, homosexual intercourse became a crime under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) Section 377. According to this law, non-procreative intercourse, even when performed by adults with mutual consent and in private, became a crime. This law did not take into account whether the partners were adults or a minor was involved and whether the act took place by mutual consent or not. It applied to everyone.

The prejudice of our society towards homosexuals, the abuse of IPC377 for extortion, led “Naz Foundation India” and “Lawyers Collective” to file a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the Delhi High Court in 2001. This PIL called for a reading down of IPC377, by pleading for the exclusion of consenting adults from its purview.

This case went on for eight years. On 2nd July 2009, Hon'ble Chief Justice A.P. Shah and Justice S. Murlidhar gave a historical verdict, stating that IPC377 is a violation of fundamental rights guaranteed by our Constitution. The late Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had desired that all Indian citizens should get equal rights. Therefore, denying gays their fundamental rights is an injustice to them. (The judgment stated that, an adult having intercourse with a minor with or without the minor's consent, will continue to be a crime).

Some religious leaders and individuals

challenged this judgment in the Supreme Court. On 11th December 2013, the Supreme Court struck down the Delhi High Court judgment and stated that it would leave it to Parliament to decide the future of IPC377. This was a big setback to the LGBT community. Against this judgment a Curative Petition has been filed in the Supreme Court. Since constitutional issues are involved a five-judge bench of the Supreme Court will decide the constitutional validity of IPC377. This is where the case stands, as of October 2016.

Interview of Bhanupratap Barge, ACP

Bhanupratap Barge, ACP has been in the police force for more than 20 years. While working in Mumbai, he was associated with many successful operations against terrorists and smugglers of illicit drugs. He has received many awards for his outstanding service.

This interview was taken when he was Sr. Police Inspector, in charge of the Social Security Department, Pune Police Commissioner's Office. During the translation of the book he was promoted to ACP and was the head of ATS, Pune.

Q. Please tell us about the type of cases related to gays/lesbians that are handled by the Social Security Department, Pune?

A. Many times, family members are not aware that a member of the family is gay and he/she gets blackmailed. In such cases, the individual should take the help of this department.

If an adult is sexually harassing or blackmailing another adult or forcing him (for sex),

we can take action on that person as per IPC provisions.

But, if the victim is a minor then, we do not deal with him; we cannot even call him here (to this department). We refer the case to the “Child Welfare Committee” (CWC) and appropriate measures are then taken by them.

However, at police stations, we do not receive many complaints related to gay issues. Sometimes, police do not know how to act on these complaints, what legal action needs to be taken and how to guide the complainant. Since the Social Security Department is experienced in dealing with a variety of such issues, we can guide them about what they should do or avoid doing. We are also in contact with many NGOs like yours. When we need more information, say, on the latest court judgments or government stand, we approach NGOs like yours for assistance.

Q. Generally when do you get cases under IPC377?

A. If two adult males are engaged in intercourse with mutual consent and in private, then we will not get such complaints under IPC377. But if intercourse takes place without consent or if an adult has sexual intercourse with a minor (even if the minor is consenting for the act), then we will accept such cases under IPC377 and investigate them.

Q. What precautions should be taken by gays?

A. Gays must ensure that sexual contacts happen between adults, with mutual consent and in private. If the contacts are not legally permissible,

then we will be forced to take action, irrespective of whether the person is gay or straight. I would like to emphasize one more point here. These contacts/relations should not result in any communal conflict. Communal harmony has to be maintained.

Q. How can NGOs work with the Social Security Department?

A. NGOs like yours have a responsibility to create public awareness about the Social Security Department and to educate people about seeking support from our department.

If you organize conferences, seminars, discussions on these issues, we will certainly participate and explain the role of this department. Homosexuality is not a disease; there is no need to shun or abhor a gay person. Those in the police department who are sensitive to this issue can explain things to the public. Our society will realize that some policemen are also liberal/open-minded. It is not only NGOs who stand up for these issues; but some police officers too have a broad-minded perspective.



INTERVIEW OF ADITYA'S PARENTS

Aditya is a 29 year old gay man. He is pursuing his PhD at IIT Bombay. He had the following conversation with his parents in May 2016.

Aditya: Aai (*mom*), tell me about your childhood.

Aai: I had an ordinary childhood. My father was a government doctor. Because of his periodic transfers, we would relocate to different cities every three years. We lived in a village, so I studied in an ordinary Marathi medium school. My parents wanted one child with them to keep them company. So I stayed with my parents, while my siblings studied in schools in other towns/cities with other relatives.

I was always the topper in my class. However, my father would remark that this was because I was in a small village school and so didn't have much competition. But I never felt bad about it. Looking back, I feel that I lost a lot because I studied in a village school. I wanted to be a doctor, just like my brother. But then, because I studied in a village, I was not fluent in English and so didn't have confidence.

In my childhood, we had no TV and would pass time playing simple games. We didn't interact with boys; girls would play in a different group. So, I had a different, but nice childhood.

Aaditya: Baba (dad), now tell me about your childhood.

Baba: When I was young, we stayed in Kalyan until my second standard schooling. We shifted to Dombivli in my third standard. We had no electricity at home in Dombivli. So, in the evening, we used lanterns. Initially, I was schooled in Balak Mandir; then in a high school until 11th standard. From 5th to 11th standard, barring exceptions, I was the topper in my class. I remember I was awarded a prize cup for standing first in my school in 11th standard exam. After 11th standard, I studied for a year (called FY Science) at Elphinstone College. With my father's support, I was able to stay in a hostel. I got to experience what living in a hostel feels like. Then, after my FY Science exam, I prepared for the IIT entrance exam through a coaching class. I managed to secure a good score and got admission in Civil Engineering at IIT. Five years later, I became a Civil Engineer! Since I was the eldest among siblings, my father expected me to take up a job and start supporting the family. He never directly spoke to me about it, but he had mentioned this to a few of our relatives. Accordingly, I took up a job.

Aaditya: What do you remember about my childhood?

Aai: I clearly remember your childhood. You would play at home and especially enjoyed playing in the kitchen. You also liked watching TV with us. Actually, you used to be more with me than with

your dad. You would go out with me everywhere. When you were a child, you would always carry a handbag. You would never step out without it. The bag contained your book, a pen, etc. Wherever we went, say, to your aunt's place, you would pull out all your things from the bag, and engage yourself with something, say sketching, scribbling etc... You always insisted on carrying the bag yourself and would never let anyone touch it. You and your siblings never fought amongst yourselves.

Aditya: Oh really? (Laughs)

Aai: Yes, maybe because you would be at home and your elder brother would spend his time outdoors in sports. You were very studious and did not like sports. You and your cousin, Anupama, were good friends. You would play together. The two of you would take bedsheets from around the house and make playhouses at home or enact plays, make films on Handy-Cam. This went on until 4th-5th standard.

You were always a good student. When you secured 97% in Senior KG, I was proud of you. I even told your school principal, "Oh my God, he's got 97% !!!" But then he said to me, "He is intelligent. He will score even more in years to come."

Aaditya: ...and after I grew up?

Aai: After your 7th-8th standard, you became engrossed in your studies. Sometimes your friends Sriharsha or Bhagyashree would visit us.

I had no complaints about you from school and your confidence in your studies continued in the 10th standard. So, although I had enrolled you in a renowned private tuition, you were not inclined to go there. On our request the teacher, Mrs. Damle, refunded the fees paid saying, “If he does not wish to come for the tuition, let us not force him to do so”. Incidentally, you scored the highest marks in Mathematics among all students without attending any coaching class.

When you were in Engineering, my mother would come to stay with us. When I would step out to market, etc, you would take care of her. She used to watch TV, while you sat next to her and studied.

Aditya: Now I will fast forward to 2012. When I told you both that I was gay, what did you feel?

Aai: Frankly, at that moment, I had no idea what 'gay' meant. Before this, some time ago, you had given us a story (*it had a gay theme*) to read. I had read it. When you told me, I realized why you had given me the story. For the last four years, before 2012, you would often tell us, “I don't want to get married”. Or you would walk up to me and say, “I want to tell you something”, and then keep quiet. This often confused me. I wondered what the problem was. I wondered, did he have a heart-break? Or did he decline a girl's proposal, thinking I would not approve of her? When you came out to us, suddenly everything became crystal clear.

Yes, we were shocked. But more than shocked, we were worried. How would things turn

out for you? What kind of problems would you have to face? For now, we are there to support you. Who will take care of you after us? I think it was your confidence that made me introspect. Neha (my daughter-in-law - your elder brother's wife) spoke to me. "Aai, why don't you see this from his point of view?"

It was then that I slowly began to realize that something very different had happened in my life. My darling child would have to lead a different kind of life than what I had dreamt. We had lived a conventional, orthodox life: children grow up, get educated, get a job, then we get them married and step aside. But, this was something totally different! How would he live? How would life turn out for him? I believe that when a boy or a girl is born, there is a partner born for him or her to take care of each other. Yes, I have consciously used the word 'partner'. In the past, I would have said, "There is a girl born for him." God always makes us in pairs, after all!

Aditya: Baba you had visited a psychiatrist, right? Tell me something about that visit.

Baba: After you told us, I took a long time to accept this reality. I thought this was a fad, a habit that you got into because you stayed at a hostel in IIT. I wrote down your case history and went to a famous psychiatrist in Mumbai. He told me, "Some people are born this way. They cannot be changed at all. This is not an illness, so there is no way to treat it. Let him live his life the way he wants and support

him in whatever way you can.”

Aditya: Mom, how did your opinion about homosexuality change?

Aai: In the beginning, I tried to understand what 'gay' meant. When Baba told me what the psychiatrist had stated: that this cannot be changed, I started thinking about acceptance. I decided that I would stand by you and support you. Frankly, I did not talk to many people about this subject. I introspected and talked to you a couple of times. More important than how I wanted you to live your life, was how you wanted to live it yourself. Amidst all this, I was worried about how your father would take this; I didn't want him to get depressed and dejected. I thought about how I could convince him to accept this.

Aditya: As you know, I have created content, ie, videos, etc, for Saathi, IIT Bombay. It was featured in newspapers as well. How does reading all that affect you?

Aai: Your video has helped me get clarity on the subject. In the beginning, when I saw your video on 'YouTube', where you talked about being gay, I worried about how our neighbors, relatives would react. All of them used to praise you when you were a child. Now that your current status is out, would their perception of you change? I still feel a bit scared about whether people will accept you. For me, all that's important is that my son trusted me and confided in me, told me the secret! Frankly, now that you have some videos on 'Youtube', none

of our relatives talk to me about getting you married. All of them are on 'Facebook' and 'Whatsapp', so it is most likely that they already know by now! Isn't that nice?! That way, I don't need to tell anyone.

Baba: You see, the needs and desires of our children and the love they expect from us is all that we care about. As we all know, parents won't be with their children forever. So while we are together, we must live our lives happily, supporting each other as much as we can.

Aai: Not only after your child has come out to you ... but also when your kids are growing up. I feel that when gay or lesbian children are growing up, they undergo a lot of stress. So, parents should be watchful and attentive to the child's needs, support them in coming to terms with their sexuality and assist in building their self-confidence.

Aditya: Aai, you had written an article called 'Pillu' for Saathi. It was the first time you wrote about me being gay. So, how different was it in 2012 when I had just come out and in 2015 when you wrote the article?

Aai: The year 2012 was confusing for me: What is going on? Is this right? Will I be able to do the right thing? What is the right thing to do?

In 2015 it was different. In that article, I described how you came out to us and knew that I had done the right thing by supporting you.

Baba: When the three of us went to watch the Marathi play 'Ek Madhavbaug', I was a bit nervous.

But after we saw it, I made up my mind that I would support you, without any reservations whatsoever. Our world consists of the three of us and that's all that matters now.

Aditya: What do you want to say to parents, whose children have just come out to them?

Aai: I say, stay quiet for a few days. Give it a thought. Then, talk to your child about it. Gather more information from other sources like Internet, NGOs. Do not give undue importance to relatives and neighbors. Let your child focus on whatever work he/she is doing. Don't harass him/her with questions like, 'Can this change?'

In fact, this got me thinking that children, who grow up in cities, can at least talk to us about it. What about gays living in the villages? Some of them may have run away, some may have committed suicide! How would they find their way? So, parents whose child has come out to them should be content that their child trusts them and is honest about his/her sexuality. We have heard of politicians who support their children who are involved in thefts, brawls and rapes. Unlike such children, our child is not a bad person. In fact, our child is good and his/her sexuality is just a part of his/her personality. The child has not harmed anyone; is not the villain. We do not disown our children, if they are unable to fulfill our every single desire, so in this case, why should we do so?

Baba: Definitely not. In fact, in such cases, parents should accept the child and the child should have

the full trust and support of his parents. Society is rapidly changing and gay children are coming out to their parents. It's a really good thing. I am confident that in the next 15-20 years, our society will be free of any discrimination and misconceptions about gays!

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ANIL (Harshavardhan's Dad)

I grew up in a small town. We were a nuclear family: my parents and three siblings. My father was a doctor and my mother a housewife. I was the eldest with two younger sisters. We studied in a Marathi medium school. My older sister and I did a decent job in school. But my youngest sister stood second in the Board in 10th standard as well as first in the 12th standard! I vividly remember her felicitation ceremonies and her photographs in newspapers, her radio interviews (there was no TV then).

My father was an atheist (or at least agnostic). My mother was unsure about her stand on the issue. After her marriage, she completed her BA through a correspondence course. With her help, my father set up a maternity home and ran it for 10-12 years. The maternity home saw nearly a thousand deliveries. Our home had a place to say our prayers but we did not conduct any elaborate religious rituals. Though Brahmins, we cooked non-vegetarian food at home. My father was a teetotaler; he didn't chew tobacco; I remember seeing him smoking only once. Our family was economically stable. Our childhood was ordinary. My father had a calm disposition, so he went about life at a simple, steady pace.

On the other hand, my mother was emotional. She was fond of music and literature. She had the radio playing in the background, while she worked at home. She had a deep understanding of Indian classical music. It was because of her that we started recognizing some ragas. We learnt from

her how to correlate a raga with a film song or a popular Marathi song, based on the raga. In this way, we started understanding the characteristics of the raga. We began to love music. During our school days, we three siblings underwent training in Hindustani classical music. I feel my middle sister should have become a popular singer. But that was not to be. She has a melodious voice, but sometimes, things just don't happen the way we want them to.

In addition to music, our family was fond of reading. We were exposed to all kinds of literature. During those days, there used to be a 'mobile library'. A gentleman (actually, he was my friend's father) would come home with a stack of magazines. We would get two magazines: current edition of one and an old edition of another. 'Hans', 'Naval', 'Mohini', 'Buvaa', 'Amrut', 'Vasudha', 'Maaher', 'Lalana' were some of these magazines. 'Apsara', 'Rambha', 'Painjan' were magazines with 'romantic' content in them. They contained sensual descriptions like 'And then he held her in his arms and placed his lips on hers'. My mother didn't like my reading these magazines. "Why are you reading this sleaze?", she would scold me.

We also subscribed to weeklies like 'Sobat' and 'Maanus'. The content in these magazines was different from the ones listed above. I loved reading 'Monty's Double' and 'Sink the Bismarck' series that would appear in 'Maanus'. Around this time, I enrolled myself into a Marathi library, and became a voracious reader. I was a rapid reader. I once finished reading a big tome (most probably B.M. Purandare's 'Raja Shivachhatrapati') end-to-end in

no time. My mother did not believe this. I had to challenge her to examine me on the book. She did – and I passed!

I realized how a book can mesmerize when I read 'The Godfather'. I was then doing my last year of engineering. Characters like Vito Corleone, Michael Corleone enthralled me. On one hand, I felt guilty that a book on crime had so appealed to me but the nuanced portrayal of intelligence and emotions had engrossed me completely. Later, the trilogy of movies based on the book also became my favorite.

I was fond of sports too. In our small town, we played games like 'kabbadi' and 'khokho'. As I became engrossed in sports, my interest in studying music dwindled. Some of our friends formed a cricket team. I was a good player, an aggressive batsman. But, when I relocated to the city for a job I had to give up cricket.

So, I became an engineer and came to the city for work. My father had built a house in the city. Initially, I worked for a large-scale industry but could not sustain my interest. I wanted to set up my own business. So I quit my job and set up a small-scale factory in partnership with a friend. Around this time, I got married.

It was an arranged marriage. I mean, it wasn't a 'love marriage'. My wife Sulabha (I call her 'Sulu') is an engineer herself. She was working when we got married. Within a year after our marriage, I left my job and started my factory. Sulu continued to work for around 10 years. She had to work, since I was not making much money at that time. It was her salary that sustained our household. I worked

very hard in the factory. In the beginning, nothing turned out right. My business partner and I are both engineers, but business is a different ball game. Despite the difficulties, I enjoyed working in the factory. Every day would bring new challenges, new problems! I was young and healthy. I was on a high, in the pursuit of making it big. All I could think of was – the factory.

Around this time, Harshavardhan (I call him Harshu) was born. In her last phase of pregnancy, Sulu went to her mother's place. So, Harshu and his mother stayed at his grandmother's place for the first few weeks after delivery. I was by Sulu's side, when Harshu was born. When I saw the birth of my baby I was at a complete loss for words. I do not remember how I felt. I was happy for sure; but I am unable to recollect my feelings of that time. To be frank, I have but faint memories of the time. Is this due to my memory which with age is fading? Or is it due to my involvement with and worries of running the factory which dominated all aspects of my life at that time? I really can't say.

Today, looking back, I realize that I (or maybe Sulu too) had found it difficult to adjust to the idea of a married life. I had not got used to the idea of an 'arranged' marriage. Despite this, everything was going great. We had a son two years into the marriage; that says it all, doesn't it?! I had developed a negative impression about marriage and, in particular, the unjust limitations on the freedom of women after marriage. This had created a kind of complex in my mind. Back in my village, I had accompanied my friends to their 'chaha-pohe' meeting (the first meeting where a girl and her

family meets the guy and his family). The groom-to-be would become a butt of jokes; the jokes naughty.

Just three weeks before I got married, my sister got married. I had been a witness to the trials that my family underwent from the day they decided to get her married to the day she actually got married. My sister, as a person, is extraordinary. But in this 'marriage-bazaar' I saw her being humiliated, time and again, solely because she was a woman and not a man. I was wise enough to know that Indian patriarchal society was to blame for this attitude. I had developed an antipathy to arranged marriage. I did not want my wife-to-be to undergo similar humiliation during her marriage. I had a pile of envelopes at home from prospective alliances. Each had a photograph of a girl. I cannot express what I felt seeing these photos. I voiced my feelings to my family. They understood my point of view. But then, all they had to say was, "This is how it is. Can you suggest an alternative?" They were right too. "You are free to find your partner. Is there anyone?" was a question I had no answer to. As a man I was 10 years past the eligible age. Then, I had an irresistible desire to be with a woman. Every woman seemed alluring. But, obviously, how could one marry every woman? To fulfill 'that' desire, wedding was the only approved way and the only woman one could do it with was one's wife. But my mind was unwilling to accept this fact. All these conflicts were present in an amorphous form then. But I am much more eloquent about my dilemma now than I was back then.

I vividly remember Harshu's childhood. When he was born, my parents were living in our

native town. At that time, my paternal aunt lived in one part of our bungalow, my uncle in another, and we in the third. So, Harshu grew up in a sort of joint family. Sometime later, my uncle relocated to a new place and my middle sister came to stay in his place. Her son Varun was a little more than a year older than Harshu. So, Harshu and Varun were almost siblings. Harshu was cute as a child: a plump, happy baby and playful too. We shared a great bond. Holding him in my arms, with his head on my shoulder, I would walk around our terrace to put him to sleep. It brought me so much joy! Since Sulu and I both worked during the week, Harshu would stay at a crèche, since he was barely four months old. He adjusted to the crèche very well. 'Dighebai' who ran the day care center loved kids. The children would call her 'Digheaaai' (Dighe mom). Harshu didn't feel lonely at the crèche. Those four years that he spent at the crèche were certainly the formative years of his life.

When Harshu was growing up, the one person who had a great influence on him was my paternal aunt. We would call her 'Jiji'. She was almost 60 when Harshu was born. They were both fond of each other. Every day at around 4 pm, Jiji would bring Harshu back home in his pram from the crèche. She would affectionately call him 'Gotyaa' (Even today, I often call Harshu, 'Gotyaa'). Often, he would sleep over at Jiji's.

Initially, we got him admitted to a school near our house. But Sulu was of the opinion that we should transfer him to a particular famous English medium school in the city. Getting admission in the school was tough. We got the school's admission

form for the first standard. Harshu was called for an interview. We were confident that he would be selected. But during the interview, Harshu refused to speak. They showed him a picture of a cat and asked him to identify it. "Mouse", he replied! Naturally, he did not get admission in that school. So, he continued in the old school for the first and second standard. In a way it benefited us as commuting was a non-issue. But for the third standard, Sulu again made him appear for the entrance examination of the English medium school. This time around, he had to first give a written exam and then an interview. He got selected and Sulu's dream came true.

Time flew by. This new school had a tall building, a large playground. Harshu enjoyed these seven years (3rd to 10th standard) a lot. He would initially go to school in an autorickshaw. Later, he started cycling to school. He was good at studies. He was successful in the Mathematics examination conducted by the 'Mathematics Teachers' Association' for seventh standard students. His success was noted in a newspaper as well! He missed the coveted 'National Talent Search' scholarship by a whisker.

Harshu is creative too. He used to sketch very well as a child. His handwriting was beautiful too. (The word 'was' is on purpose here. Nowadays he badly scribbles). He did not pursue sketching because of his interest in music. But music is close to his heart. An old lady 'Daate aaji' lived in our housing society. She formed a singers group of kids, and taught them 'Geet Ramayan' i.e. songs based on the religious epic 'Ramayan'. Harshu was a part of

that group. This marked his introduction to music. Later, he honed his musical talent.

It would be correct to say that music is the most important aspect of his life (and his personality too). Today, he can present 'vilambit khyal' (Hindustani Classical) in a concert. Since he has a good grounding of classical music, he is good at singing 'Sugam Sangeet' (light music) too. His notes are clear and accurate. His voice roves over a wide range. As a child, the moment he returned from school he would start singing. Everyone at home would appreciatively say, "Oh, gavai buva has come home". When it comes to singing, he is not shy. Singing comes to him naturally. He once told me that it was due to his talent in music that he made many friendships.

Since his childhood, Harshu has had a sensitive personality. I mean, some boys are a terror, but Harshu was quiet and disciplined. Rarely did he throw tantrums. But if he did then he would refuse to relent. I remember on one such occasion, I lost my cool and slapped his butt. He kept staring at me with wide eyes. My slap had left a red mark on his tender buttocks. I felt ashamed of my act. We silently suffer innumerable, injustices quietly in our society. But I had hit my innocent son for a mere tantrum. I never hit Harshu again.

Harshu was not fond of sports. I often wanted him to excel at some game. I remember sitting him beside me and lovingly asking him once, "Harshu, what is your favorite sport?" I expected him to answer- 'tennis' or 'cricket'. (Although Harshu was not into sports, he enjoyed watching Wimbledon and other tennis tournaments on TV. I remember

that Steffi Graf and Monica Seles were his favorite players). But how did Harshu respond? “Rock or Soil” (A game played by toddlers in Maharashtra).

I love going on treks with my friends. Some of them bring their children with them. Once, before going on a trek to the Himalayas I had asked Harshu whether he would like to come with me. His answer was a question, “Are there toilets there?” But later, after he went to college, he grew fond of trekking. Harshu is tough and physically fit. Mentally too he is a strong person. We have seen his strength of will several times.

I do not remember too many details of the 8-10 years of Harshu's school-days. I was totally engrossed in my work. After overcoming the initial ups and downs, my business was now doing well.

I do not know why, but around the time Harshu was in the 7th standard, I started to lose interest in my work. I do not know whether this was due to depression or fatigue after a long and exhausting struggle of establishing my business. So I decided to retire from the business. My business partners, my family, my friends were all stunned by this decision. Everyone tried to talk me into changing my mind. Everyone asked me, 'What would you do after retirement?' I used to reply vaguely, “I will think of something”. To cut a long story short, Sulu showed willingness to take my place and the crisis passed. Sulu's decision was indeed brave.

Harshu's education had gone on well. He never gave us any cause for complaint. He got 87% in 10th standard. He passed his 10th standard exam and took admission for the 11th standard (Science).

Having moved from a school to college, he enjoyed himself thoroughly. He passed his eleventh standard exam (11th standard is fairly noncritical) and entered into the 12th standard, the crucial academic year.

At the end of his 11th standard, we began to discuss about his career. Harshu liked Mathematics and was also good at it. So, he had opted for Math (leaving Biology as an optional subject). So we assumed that he would opt for Engineering. (He had once proposed that he wanted to pursue his career in singing. We somehow managed to convince him that he could pursue singing and formal education side-by-side. He needn't give up education for the sake of singing.) At the start of his 12th standard, I told him that if engineering was what he wanted, he should set his sights on IIT. I used to order course material from Brilliant Academy for him. But he would put it away, without evening opening the envelopes. He had a room to himself, and when home he would often spend time alone in his room, after locking it from inside. We never thought it objectionable.

He finished his 12th standard. I don't remember whether he had applied for IIT entrance exam that year. While we were discussing his future, he announced that he wanted to drop out for a year to prepare for IIT. He studied diligently for a year and secured admission in IIT. We were overjoyed by his success.

He got quickly accustomed to the environment at IIT. He used to stay at the IIT hostel. He made new friends there. He was doing well in studies and in addition he also took part in extra-

curricular activities. Needless to add, he was pursuing his singing too.

When Harshu was in his fourth year of engineering and had come home for holidays, he called Sulu and me to the living room. With a serious demeanor, he told us, "I need to tell you something". He had just returned from a camp. The objective of the camp had been to enhance the understanding of youths about themselves, our society, country and life in general. In the camp, there had been a session to create awareness about sexuality. Harshu began describing this session to us. At the end of the session, the organizers asked everyone, "Would anyone like to say something?" Harshu had put up his hand and had said, "I am unsure of my sexuality. I do not think I am heterosexual." I was surprised to hear Harshu say this. I asked him, "Are you sure about what you are saying?". He nodded in the affirmative. Sulu also asked him a few questions. I am unable to recollect those questions now.

Harshu's declaration raised up a storm in my mind. I had limited knowledge on the subject. But it was completely unexpected for me that this subject would enter my life in this manner. In those days, Harshu was staying in the hostel so, after a couple of days, he left for his hostel. Sulu had convinced herself that this must be some passing fancy and that he would be fine after some time. But I did not believe so. I do not remember our conversations with Harshu in their entirety over the next two years following his revelation. I don't clearly remember the exact date of his coming out either.

Two years passed. After his graduation, he

decided not to take up a job immediately. The projects he had done as a student had made a big impact on his mind. For the next two years, he decided to work in different sectors to gain an insight into various issues. He stayed in different places: Thane, Nashik and a few small villages. During these two years, Sulu and I were worried about his future. He would visit home only occasionally and so, there was not much communication between us. However, his work exposed him to diverse environments. He had spent a decade in a convent school and then IIT. In comparison, his exposure during the next few years was to a radically different milieu. He got to see our country: complete with its social realities, political setups and functioning of the government machinery. He was better able to understand the influence of caste, poverty, and superstitions. During this time, he made lots of friends. They would discuss the Indian Constitution, The Right to Information Act, sustainable model of growth, Lokpal Bill, etc. He became an avid reader, reading up on serious subjects.

On this background, Sulu and I were trying to come to terms with his coming out. We tried to obtain information on this topic from newspapers and magazines. But I was unsure if the information was reliable and accurate. I was not sure if I could talk about this topic in my circles. But whatever little I had grasped, I had understood that this was absolutely natural. Hence evaluating his sexuality as right or wrong, good or bad was meaningless. Just like it is meaningless to evaluate whether a left-handed person is good or bad or whether it is right

or wrong.

These thoughts made me cope with his coming out with minimum pain. But having said that, am I not accepting that I was indeed troubled by it? Why should this trouble me at all? Would I be troubled if my son were left-handed? Yes. But that would be because I know exactly what the issues with being left-handed mean or it would be easy to find about it. But this is extremely difficult in Harshu's case. In fact, it was difficult for us to even understand what he meant by saying he is gay. Does it mean that he is physically attracted to a man? In the same way a man feels physically attracted to a woman? But how is it possible? During intercourse, a man becomes one with a woman. Does Harshu experience the same with a man? But how exactly will he experience it?

The questions that crowded my mind and troubled me were not just biological in nature. I had questions with moral and cultural dimensions as well. The first question was: should we tell people that Harshu is gay? As his father, it was essential that I know more about the subject. But what do I tell the people from whom I was seeking this information? That I wanted it just out of curiosity? If they asked, "What do you want it for?" what do I reply? Harshu is of marriageable age. Many of my friends' children are married. The topic of Harshu's marriage does come up. When are you getting Harshu married? Till now I would laugh and say, "It's for him to decide. Why don't you ask him yourself?" Harshu would reply, "What's the hurry? Don't you like to see me happy?"

In this new situation, these questions

assumed a different dimension. Usually, marriage is an accepted mode of satisfying one's sexual desires. But what is the acceptable mode of satisfying Harshu's sexual desires? Leaving aside the 'acceptable' part, what was the way for Harshu to satiate his desire? Since I have spent my life in severe regulation of male-female associations, I well know the effects of suppression of sexual desires. How would a gay person satisfy his sexual needs? I read a few articles on these issues and also discussed with Harshu whenever I got the opportunity. Of course, such opportunities were few and far between.

Harshu is doing well now. He has decided to join our business. This decision has made Sulu and me happy. Harshu too is getting a hang of the work.

Meanwhile, I spoke to some experts but did not find concrete information. I am sure a lot of information on the subject is available. I am sure I will get a lot of information from the Internet or books. I guess my efforts have been inadequate.

But how would information help? Why are heterosexual people heterosexual? Why is a woman a woman or a man a man? What are the answers to these questions? This is how it is? What other answer is possible? Maybe, the details can be clarified using the concept of 'XX' or 'XY' chromosomes. But, what is the answer to why is it this way? Why are there two biological sexes? Why are we not unisex? Or why only two biological sexes? Why not four? Why are heterosexual people attracted only to people of opposite biological sex? Why does sexual attraction lead to intercourse? Why does intercourse lead to conception? Why

should only a woman conceive and not a man? Or maybe, why is that not optional? These questions have no answer. Even if there is, it is how Nature (or God) wants it to be, that's it.

Recently, Harshu got to know a gay youth through 'Chat'. For the time being, the youth is staying abroad. But when in India, he had visited us once. It felt nice meeting and talking to him. He seemed intelligent and well-mannered. He spoke well too. I gifted him two books from my personal collection.

I feel that such youths should meet each other frequently. Their parents too should meet each other frequently. Parents should discuss how they can make the lives of their children happy and safe. I have never met parents of gay people yet.

But I feel I should ascertain that Harshu is indeed homosexual through some scientific way. Once I mentioned this to Harshu. He looked at me like he would at an idiot, and said, "Baba, how can such things be ascertained? Can you ascertain that you are heterosexual?" I had nothing to say. Do I know how my own sexuality can be ascertained? It is not an easy topic.

Harshu is intelligent, well-educated. Our financial situation is good. I am sure he will live a good life. Are heterosexual people happy all their lives? The popular proverb, "A marriage is a 'laddoo' (an Indian sweet), the one who eats it repents, so also the one who doesn't" has some truth to it. In the end, each one of us has to bear the cross of his/her own life.

I think the solution lies in Harshu finding a same-sex partner. The criteria that apply for a

heterosexual partner apply for a homosexual partner as well. They too, should have dating sites and marriage bureaus. They could get into a live-in relationship. They may form a relationship and after a while separate just like any other heterosexual couple. Everything is possible. They should be given the freedom and opportunities to explore and seek their partners. And in this, I feel parents must stand by their children.

Some days ago, Harshu told me that Sulu and I should agree with some issues, in principle. His partner will obviously be a man, but he has told us clearly that he will be the one to decide who that person will be and I have accepted that. He has also told me that he may have to experiment to find out the right partner. He will need to invite dates to the house. I have completely agreed to it.

Sulu and I are exploring a whole new world. I am composed and firm; but Sulu is extremely distressed. She does not express herself. But I can see that she is shattered from within. She loves Harshu a lot. When Harshu was born, she had ascertained that his body, his hands, legs, fingers were all okay. She had a lot of expectations of how her son should be, what he should become. Harshu too had never let her down. He got admitted to a convent school. He learned music. He cleared the tough IIT exam and brought us immense joy.

But, I won't lie. I may be composed and firm, but I worry whether my lovely child will be happy. But there is one big plus point. Harshu is comfortable with his sexuality. I do not know how well other kids cope with being gay (because I don't know any such people, except the one friend

mentioned above). But Harshu has accepted himself completely. He is doing great. He has a lot of ambition. To my surprise, he has a lot of female friends too!

They say that left-handed people are different, in a good way. They have beautiful handwriting. They do well in Arts and Sports. Similarly I am sure that gay people like Harshu must have special skills. I feel that these 'special skills' will support and guide them for the rest of their lives.

Ignorance and myths about homosexuality must be dispelled. Knowing that they are a minority, we should do whatever we can to protect and nurture them. Their needs should not be ignored. Discriminating against them in any way is a violation of their fundamental rights of Equality and Freedom. I cannot stress enough that discriminating against them in any manner is a blot on humanity.



MEERA (Neha's Mom)

The year was 2009. Our daughter had gone to the UK for her MBA. After the initial adjustments of living in a foreign land, she had got engrossed in her studies. In India, her father and I were making plans for her marriage.

The prospective groom was our friend's son. Well-educated, well-behaved and an acquaintance too. It was a perfect alliance. I would occasionally talk to my daughter about her marriage plans over the phone. But her reactions were often cold. It had got me worried, but then my husband would quell my fears, saying, "Obviously, a girl is going to be shy when her parents talk to her about her marriage".

When I told my daughter that we were about to send her horoscope to our friend (whose son was the prospective groom), she started crying over the phone. I was perplexed. Heart racing, I sensed that, despite being close to each other, there was a distance between us.

After a long pause, I started talking. "Do you like someone else? Do you not want to get married yet? Don't worry, don't get depressed. This is about your life. We will not compel you to do anything, you don't want to do", I assured her. But at the same time, I sensed that something was amiss. Slowly she calmed down. Now, the second shock was about to hit me. When terrorists carry out 2-3 bomb blasts together, although all of them are terrifying, you don't feel so shocked when you hear of the second or third bomb blast, as you are mentally prepared. I experienced something similar. In a low voice, she said, "I am physically attracted to women and not to

men. Such girls are called 'lesbians'. I am one. You and dad might find this terrible, but what can I really do about it?"

I had heard the word 'homosexual' about 30 years ago, when studying psychology in college. But the information provided then on homosexuality was little, and that too was in the book on 'Abnormal Psychology'. Since then I had always thought that this was a disorder.

She continued speaking, "The world is full of hate for people like us. We are considered different from the rest. Straight people leave no stone unturned to ridicule us; make fun of us. At the food joint where I work, everyone makes fun of me. If someone praises my work, my being a lesbian is immediately brought up and the praise gives way to ridicule. I am frustrated. I don't feel like living. I don't feel interest in anything."

Fear gripped me. I thought I would faint at that very moment. I sat up, tried to compose myself. At this moment my daughter needed me and her father more than ever. If I cried now, who would take care of my baby, living in agony so far away from us? Indian cricketer, Vijay Merchant had once said, "Irrespective of how a ball is bowled, it must be played well with all your strength". This strength plays a crucial role in situations we face in life. That day, God gave me that strength and guided me. My inner voice told me to tell her, "You are not alone. We are all with you. Our family - dad, you and I are three points of a triangle. If one point ceases to exist, we as a family will cease to exist!"

I told her, "We don't know much about lesbians, gays, etc. We are really ignorant in these

matters. Can you try to collect and send us some information? You will be finishing your course shortly. During this time, please take care of yourself. Involve yourself in your studies. You like music, don't you? Spend some time in learning it. Remember there are other people around us who are in more agony than we are. This is life, we have to face it as it comes! You do not need to continue doing that job. Keep in touch with us.” We also offered to visit her. But she calmed down and agreed to take care of herself.

Meanwhile, I saw a TV show called 'Yaala Jeevan Aise Naav' ('This is Life'), hosted by Renuka Shahane. An episode featured the interview of gay activist, Bindumadhav Khire. I told my daughter about this interview. She saw the interview on 'YouTube' and her negative perspective began to change.

When our daughter returned to India, we contacted Bindumadhav Khire. He answered several questions that had troubled me and our daughter. Then, I also read the Marathi book 'Indradhanu' ('The Rainbow-Different Hues of Homosexuality') that Khire had authored. I slowly started to feel relieved.

We gathered social and scientific information on the subject. I came to know that around 5% people in the world are gay. We realized that this is not a 'problem' but just a different way of living.

The counselor at the UK university assisted

Neha and referred her to a support institute called 'Stonewall'. I had a feeling that she will stay in UK for good and involve herself in social work. But she preferred returning to her people back home, rather than staying in an environment that was homophobic.

I have often wondered if sending her to UK for her MBA was a mistake. Although same-sex relationships are legal in England, a culture of hate and fear is cultivated in the minds of children living there. My sister-in-law is a doctor and lives in England. Many doctors of her acquaintance make fun of gays.

Before leaving for UK, Neha visited a gynecologist and told us, "I am normal". We thought she must have done that because medical assistance must be expensive in UK.

Neha had many friends as a child. She did very well in school. But, when she was growing up, she went through a lot of pain, all alone. It troubles me, even now, that we were unaware of her turmoil, unable to support her then.

I wonder, why did she not talk to me or her father when she was growing up? Probably, because she must have felt scared of our reaction. But I guess, we were totally ignorant about this subject at that time.

When children reach puberty, they undergo physical and psychological changes. I feel if sexuality education is given to them at adolescence, then they will have no animosity towards gay

children. They will not tease or ridicule these children, but become sensitive towards those who are different from them.

I think it is important that elders too should change their mind set. It may seem like an impossible wish, but I believe it can happen – slowly but surely. Let us not have irrational expectations from our children. Instead, let us accept them as they are.

People believe that gays are promiscuous, because they do not have marriage restrictions. I feel if same-sex marriages are approved, we will see a lot of monogamous same-sex relationships.

I read in a book that two gay penguins adopted a baby penguin and lovingly took care of it. If animals and birds can be so loving, surely it is equally true for human beings too.

I hope that, as society progresses, the population of 95% heterosexuals will accept a 5% gay population. The challenge is about using our strengths and skills to educate, sensitize and get acceptance from the majority. Of course, this change will not happen in a single day. It took a long time for social revolutions, like education for women, abolition of sati, widow re-marriage to succeed in India. This change should be brought about gradually, by staying within the legal framework.

My best wishes to activists who work on these issues! I wish to contribute to the cause in any way possible and hope to receive their guidance on related matters.



SHAKUNTALA (Bindumadhav's Mom)

I feel life is indeed a novel and, while we spend our life in pursuit of happiness, we face sorrow in the most unexpected ways. Little did I know that I would be facing a huge crisis in my otherwise simple straight-forward life.

I was born in a middle-class family in Pune. Having grown-up in a joint family, neither my siblings nor I were pampered by our parents. In fact, in the olden days, there was no pampering of children. Period. Our joint family of twelve included my grandfather, my parents, three siblings (the fourth one was born later), uncle, aunt, their three children and a bachelor uncle. My grandfather was a post-master. My father and uncle worked in Military Accounts. Because of our large family, our financial condition was poor. Therefore, although my brother studied in a renowned school, my sister, cousins and I had to study in a municipal school till the fourth standard.

My sister and I passed our 11th standard examination (in those times it was called Matriculation exam) from a secondary school. In those days, it was not the norm to educate girls; but both my grandfather and father were broad-minded. My mother was supportive too. Her mother (my grandmother) had passed away when my mother was only eleven months old. She grew up in a small village with her grandmother. There, she could hardly study till the third standard. Soon after this, my grandfather brought her to Pune and got her married at the age of thirteen. Because my mother could not continue her studies, she was

keen and determined that we, her daughters, should study. She never forced us to help her in household work. Instead, she encouraged us to pursue our studies, as per our liking. I completed my graduation in Science and my sister completed hers in Arts. Eventually, both of us got married to men chosen for us by our parents.

I was working, before and after marriage. I did not have a child until four years of being married. My in-laws were greedy; happy that I was working and earning for them. But when I became pregnant, I gave up my job. This did not go down well with them. As their income dwindled, the harassment started. There would be arguments over petty issues. My parents were a very strong support for me during those difficult times. I endured a late and very difficult delivery which left me very weak. Matters reach a head and after the birth of my son, we separated from my in-laws.

Now we had nothing and had to start from scratch. Gradually we started buying household goods and started our new life. Eventually, I became pregnant again. Around this time, my father passed away suddenly. This was a great loss for me.

After my younger daughter was born, I decided to work again to make both ends meet. But it was not easy to get a job at the age of thirty-five. Therefore, I first completed B.Ed. on a government scholarship and started working as a teacher in the same school where I was educated. There were two reasons for choosing a teacher's job. One, it would support us financially. Second, I could spend time with my children during the Diwali and summer vacations. My world was restricted to my job,

family, children and close relatives. My only aim in life then was to focus on imparting good cultural values to my children and educating them.

As a child, my son was fair and chubby. Everyone loved to play with him. But he was also short-tempered. On the other hand, my daughter had a calm disposition. Being born in a religious orthodox family, both my children were religious and God-fearing. On Saturdays, my son used to visit the Hanuman temple near our home to give offerings of oil and agarbattis. For a while, he also became the devotee of Sai Baba. But as he grew older, his faith waned, to the extent that he became almost an atheist. Due to his attitude, I too slowly cut down on religious ceremonies like 'Satyanarayan Puja' etc, which we would observe annually at home.

My children were bright in studies. My son wanted to be a doctor, but he could not fulfill this ambition, as he was unable to secure adequate marks in the twelfth standard examination. So he pursued computer engineering in a private college. This meant that we had to spend a lot on his education. So after matriculation, my daughter pursued her diploma instead of going for engineering.

Eventually, my son completed his computer engineering and my daughter her diploma. After a few small jobs, she started working in a telephone company. However, my son had to relocate to Chennai for his first job. This was the first time that he was going to live alone, away from us. Initially, I worried a lot, but soon realized that he could stay on his own.

About fifteen months later, my son told us that he was going to resign from the job. He returned to Pune. He started working in Pune. But since most of his friends were going to the US for a job, he too started applying for a job in the US. In those days, we did not even have a telephone. Because of the time gap of 10 to 12 hours between US (West Coast) and India, his interviews used to take place at night. He would borrow his friends' office keys and use their office for the telephonic interviews. Eventually, he got selected and he left for US. At that time, his father was in Hyderabad for a conference. I was worried about his traveling overseas. I heaved a sigh of relief when his friend came over to our place the next day and told us that my son had safely reached US.

This was the happy phase of my life. My daughter was working and my son was in US. Later when we got a phone and my son used to phone us every week. About this time, we started scouting for a prospective groom for our daughter, but she would not approve of any of the boys. This caused us a lot of heartache. After a year or more, our son came to India for two weeks. We were happy. A few months after he returned to US, he informed us on phone that he had chosen a girl for himself. She was from Pune. We were not pleased with his decision, as we had different expectations from his wife-to-be. But we thought of his happiness and, hoping that he will settle down, accepted his decision.

At this time, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I got operated immediately but did not disclose this to my son, as I knew that this would upset and disturb him. Since I did not speak to him

on phone on the couple of times that he called, he got suspicious and requested his friend to visit our house. That was how he came to know about my illness. I was under the impression that cancer patients do not live long. Both my children were still unmarried. I blamed myself for having failed in my duties as a mother. I became depressed. But knowing that at least my son was getting married in my lifetime, I gathered courage. While undergoing chemotherapy, I managed to do the invitations for my son's wedding and simultaneously intensified my efforts to find a match for my daughter.

But as the saying goes, "Man proposes, God disposes". My son came to India for the marriage, but got divorced soon after the marriage. This was a big shock for us and made the task of finding a groom for our daughter even more difficult. We could notice a distinct change in the attitude of people who knew us. This was a huge trauma for my husband. He was so disturbed that he took leave for one month from office and stayed at home, refusing to interact with anyone outside the family.

After my son went back to the US, things slowly settled down. Optimism being an integral part of human nature, I tried to convince my son to get re-married. I went to US and stayed with him for three months, hoping to relieve his loneliness. On returning to India, some of our relatives suggested a few prospective brides for my son. I discussed this with him on phone, but he very firmly refused to get re-married. In fact, he threatened us that he would not return to India, if he was forced to do so.

This was the first divorce in our family and, therefore, we were upset. However, we wanted our

son to return to India and stay with us. So we promised him that we will not compel him for marriage and asked him to come back. Accordingly, he returned to India for good and started working in the Mumbai branch of his US company.

We were hoping that at least now we can get on with our lives smoothly. But alas! Soon after coming back he told us that he was gay. We were absolutely devastated. He disclosed this reality to his sister initially and then to both of us. We were stunned. We just didn't know how to react to this calamity! I wondered why God-fearing people like us had to face disaster after disaster. I started blaming myself. I must have done something wrong. His father said, "This boy is a punishment for the sins we have committed in our past lives. My parents were heretics. Hence, I have been punished in this manner." After this, my husband did not discuss this subject again.

I could not discuss this matter with anyone, including my close relatives. How would people react? Will I be able to find a groom for my daughter? These thoughts obsessed me. I firmly told my son not to disclose his secret to others, till my daughter got married. He agreed.

Soon, due to God's grace, my daughter got married. But I was still concerned about my son's future. Although he said he was gay, my mind was not ready to accept this. I was hoping that he must be confused or, because he had lived in the US, he must have been misled. I tried to convince him a lot and even took him to a 'sadhu', but in vain. Finally, at my son's suggestion, as a last hope, I decided to visit a psychiatrist. But the psychiatrist spoke in my

son's favor. He said, "Some of us like oranges, while others like apples; so one cannot say that one is right and the other is wrong."

Initially, I was furious with this explanation. But slowly I began thinking from my son's point of view. As I saw some movies and read books on this subject, my opposition to my son became less intense. I insisted with my son that he adopt a child, so that he would have a definite aim in life. But as he intensely disliked children, he totally ignored my suggestion.

He soon gave up his job. He formed a Trust and started working full-time for it. I was against his work, as I was concerned about his financial stability. However, my son was adamant and ignored me.

Later, he started writing books on this subject. The review of his first book was published in "Sakal" (a popular Marathi newspaper). Since this book was about homosexuality, I was apprehensive that people would know that my son was gay. I had many arguments with my son on this issue. "You have disclosed this fact to us, why do you need to make this public? Is this something you tell everyone?" But again, he refused to listen. Stubbornly, he went ahead with his work.

After some time, he started a helpline for gay men. He gave an interview on television and disclosed his sexuality on TV. Now that the secret was completely out, we got very worried. Neighbors, relatives came to know but no one spoke openly on this subject. This was suffocating for us. But gradually, we calmed down.

Initially, my son used to work alone. He was

attempting to build confidence and self-esteem in gay men. He started receiving phone calls from various parts of Maharashtra. Gay youths could not speak about their sexuality or express their feelings, at home or outside. They didn't know how to 'come out' to their parents who insisted on them getting married. My son tried to support such youths. One day, when a parent of a gay youth spoke to me on phone and thanked me, I felt proud of my son. Slowly, I started realizing the importance of his social work.

Because of a liberal environment in US, gay youths there are able to live their lifestyle. But in India, due to a conservative environment, gays feel suffocated.

A couple of years ago, some parents of gays and some psychiatrists filed affidavits in the Supreme Court, stating that IPC377 deprive gays of their freedom. Due to this law, they cannot live with dignity and respect. We stated that IPC377 should not apply to consenting adults. I too filed such an affidavit in the Supreme Court, with the hope of seeking justice for many boys and girls, like my own son.

Sadly, the Supreme Court reversed the judgment given by the Delhi High Court. A Curative Petition has been filed which is pending in the Supreme Court. I hope that this time the verdict will be given in favor of these boys and girls, so that they can live with pride and dignity.

On my son's personal front, a while ago, he got into a relationship with a gay man. He brought this boyfriend home to meet me. Just when I was hoping that finally my son will be happy and settle

down, the relationship broke up. My son became sad and severely depressed. It took a few months for him to recover. Eventually, he came out of this depression and commenced work again with the same grit and determination.

It's more than 14 years since my son started his Trust. Today, looking back, I feel I may not have got the love and affection of a daughter-in-law and grandchildren which every mother desires. But seeing my son help others like him makes me contented and proud.

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KANCHAN KARANI (Nitin's Mom)

I was born in Mumbai. Our family consisted of my parents, three brothers and me. We were a typical middle-class family. We believed in God, but were not religious. As a girl, I did not have special restrictions. I could pursue my own education and career, according to my own wish; no one opposed me in these matters. Despite this liberal background, sexuality was never discussed in our home.

Eventually, my eldest brother went abroad for a job. He was soon followed by another brother. So finally it fell on my father to look after the family. His earnings were inadequate to support us. Despite this, after I completed my S.S.C., my father said, "If you want to pursue further studies, I am willing to pay for it." But I was not keen on pursuing further studies. I enrolled myself in an Employment Exchange Bureau and, through it, I got a job in a factory. Later on, I worked in a telephone exchange for nearly two-and-a-half years.

Soon my parents were on the lookout for a groom for me. In those days, the girl's choice of groom was seldom taken into account. When to get married, with whom to get married -- these were decisions taken by the elders in the family. I got married at the age of 21 years. My in-laws approved of the marriage, but on the condition that I give up my job after marriage. It is difficult for me to say what I felt about giving up my job as, in those days,

girls had no say in these matters and had to obey the elders in the family.

After my marriage, I stayed with my in-laws in Mumbai. As is true for most newly-wed girls, it took some time to get adjusted to the new milieu, but eventually I did. But my mother-in-law and I did not get along too well. So my husband used to take me for outings on Sundays. This continued even after Nitin was born. After he was six months old, we started taking Nitin with us as well. Both of us and my parents doted on him.

Nitin was a stubborn child. He managed to get whatever he wanted by hook or crook. He would throw tantrums, cry and even roll on the floor, crying till he got what he wanted! Even today, I remember his stubborn behavior. Another peculiar thing about him is that he is a person of few words. Even today he does not speak much.

I never gave too much thought as to what career Nitin should choose for himself. We gave him complete freedom in this matter. His father was keen that Nitin should assist him in his professional work. So, he worked with his father for 5-6 years. But one fine day, out of the blue, he told us, "I am not interested in the family business. I want to pursue journalism instead". Nitin was adamant. Although his father and I were upset with his decision, we could not force him to continue with his dad's profession; neither did we wish to do so.

While he was working with his father, the thought of getting Nitin married had crossed my

mind. We had not discussed this with him, but his father and I used to talk about it. Whenever we noticed a single girl amongst our relatives, we used to judge her as a prospective bride.

In 1994, we shifted to a new place. It was around six months later, while cleaning up Nitin's cupboard, that I found some magazines – “Trikone”, “Bombay Dost” – and some newspaper cuttings. With curiosity, I opened these magazines, saw the photographs inside and started reading one of the magazines. I realized that the content was strange and unusual. I started to wonder as to what these magazines were doing in Nitin's cupboard. I had no clue that he was gay at the time. I became confused and anxious. What is going on here? Nitin had never spoken to us about this issue.

I informed my husband that I had found these magazines in Nitin's cupboard (I cannot recall the words I used to explain this to him). But he was not interested in seeing those magazines. In fact, he completely ignored me and assured me, “Don't worry. Everything will be alright.” But I was restless. Having seen this reaction from my husband, I avoided discussing this issue with him thereafter.

Then I spoke directly to Nitin. I asked him, “What are these magazines doing in your cupboard?” But he counter-questioned me, “Why do you think they are there in my cupboard?” I was at a loss for words but then he said, “... because I am gay”. But I did not understand what he meant by: “I

am gay". What did he mean? I didn't have any understanding of the implication of this statement on his life. Nitin asked me, "How come you don't understand? Both of us have together watched English serials like 'Dynasty' that have gay characters." But I felt that seeing a gay character in an English serial and realizing that your son is gay are two totally different things. I was struggling to understand and digest the fact that Nitin is gay. Nitin had thought that once he had disclosed his sexuality to me, I would understand. On the contrary, I was totally confused.

After this conversation, I became even more upset and restless. I was in a dilemma, unsure with whom to discuss this delicate and sensitive issue! Finally, I decided to speak to my niece and her husband. On the phone, I disclosed the facts to them and told them, "I am absolutely lost. Can you please come home?" I had complete faith in them that they would not disclose this to anyone. They came home and I told them everything that had happened. They were shocked. But they seemed to have more knowledge on this subject. Both of them comforted me, saying, "There are some people who are gay and it is okay!"

Without the support of my relatives during this difficult period, I would have suffered much more. When Nitin came home that evening, they talked to him. I was unable to follow what they were discussing. But I got the message that some men are attracted to men, instead of women.

Later, Nitin gave me some copies of “Bombay Dost” magazine to read, so that I could understand this subject better. I started reading these magazines. Sometimes, he talked to me about other gay men.

We also learnt that Nitin was involved in activism for the rights of gay people. I was worried about how people would react. Initially, we were not aware of Nitin's involvement with gay activism. When The Humsafar Trust organized India's first gay conference in Mumbai, Nitin told us that he is going to Mahabaleshwar with his friends. I believed him. Later on, after we came to know that he is gay, we learnt that he had attended this conference.

Nitin and I had many discussions on this subject, but never an argument or a tiff. A few arguments did take place between Nitin and his father. His father opposed his views on sexuality and would say, “This is not right”. His father used to ask me to convince Nitin to get married. Tell him, “Everything will be ok. Have faith in God.” But I knew that Nitin would not change.

I did not visit any psychiatrist, but being concerned about Nitin's future I visited an astrologer. One of them assured me: “Nitin will get married after the age of 30”. I felt relieved and hoped that everything would turn out alright. Later on, I went to one more astrologer. She studied Nitin's horoscope and told me, “Nitin is like a girl”. I wondered how she came to know, as I had not disclosed anything about Nitin to her.

Initially, I thought that being gay meant that he is impotent and unable to have intercourse with a girl. But this was not true. There was absolutely no physical deficiency with Nitin, so I wondered why he could not marry a girl. He used to tell me that physically and sexually he is perfectly normal but that he has no emotional and sexual attraction towards women; he is interested in men and so will have a relationship with a man only. I used to struggle to accept this reality: if Nitin is perfectly normal, then why should he not get married to a woman?

Gradually, I realized that he will never marry a woman. He will not have a family like other men do. He will not have children, and I will never have the pleasure of becoming a grandmother. This made me sad for a while, but slowly I accepted this reality.

At social gatherings, our extended family and friends used to suggest that we get Nitin married. I didn't know what to say! I would avoid further discussion by saying that Nitin is not willing. But one day, Nitin himself told some of our relatives the truth. So they stopped asking questions.

One day he said, "Gay Bombay has arranged a 'Parents of Gays' meeting. If you are interested I will take you with me. It may help you to better understand this subject." I went. It was attended by 20-25 gay men and 5-6 parents of gays.

A gay couple was also present at the meeting. They were living together. Everyone knew about

their relationship and, together, they used to attend social functions like weddings. This was the first time I met a gay couple. A few months later, a similar meeting was held in our home.

Sometime later, one of his friends started visiting our house. Initially, Nitin introduced him to me as a friend. But slowly I realized that he was not just a friend but a boyfriend. He used to stay over and sleep in Nitin's bedroom. I told Nitin that I was against all this. But he was adamant and didn't listen to me.

A year later they had a break-up. Later on, he had another relationship, but that too did not last long. I did not discuss the relationship with him. In fact, to tell you the truth, I was happy with this break-up. The fact that his boyfriend would not visit our home again was a relief for me.

For the past seven years, he has been in another relationship. I did not approve of his boyfriend visiting our house and Nitin could not stay without him, so Nitin decided to move out and stay with his boyfriend. I was deeply hurt and disturbed by his decision. As our only son, should he not stay with us? For the next two months, we hardly spoke. Even if he had been straight, I would not have liked that he should stay separately with his wife. Even more than the fact that he has a boyfriend, that his boyfriend is much younger than him was more distressing for me. I was not willing to allow his boyfriend to stay in our house. At the same time, I did not want my son to leave our home

and stay away from us. But given these two choices, I preferred that Nitin stay separately with his boyfriend.

Looking at Nitin's current relationship, I wonder – will this relationship last? What would happen, if they have a break-up? After one of the previous relationships ended, Nitin had become depressed. I cannot see him suffer like this. I worry about his future. Will he be happy in his life at all?

But then I also look at the positive side and think optimistically that his current relationship is now nearly seven years old; both of them are 'settled'. If this relationship lasts, he will be happy and I won't have to worry. But then again their age difference makes me wonder. On the other hand, as this is natural, I have to accept whatever destiny has to offer! We must support our son come what may. Parents must make efforts to accept their children even if it is a challenge.

Nitin asks me, "If I had not been your only child, would you have accepted me?" I haven't accepted Nitin because he is my only child. If I had a couple of other children, I would still have accepted him. Whether I am a mother of a single child or more, how can a mother discriminate between her own children?



SHAMA (Shahid's Mom)

I have two children, a son and a daughter. Since my husband and I were both educated, we ensured good education for both of them. After completing their tenth standard, both of them took admission in S.P. College, Pune.

My son enjoyed watching movies. He loved cooking and used to make delicious chicken. He was bright in studies. He loved languages and fancied blackboard and chalks. Whenever anyone would ask him, "What toy would you like?" he would instantly demand, "Bring me a box of chalks". He learnt German in school and developed a deep liking for the language.

His father was doing a job and had also completed the first two years of law studies (LLB). He wanted his son to become a lawyer, but my son told his father, "I am not interested in Law. I want to pursue advanced studies in German". Due to our educational background, we allowed our son to pursue the vocation of his choice. However, my daughter was keen to study Law and took admission in a Law school. Later, my son was awarded a scholarship and went to Germany.

His father resigned from his job and completed the third year of Law. After getting his law degree, he worked for a while as an assistant in a law firm and later on started his own practice in which he prospered.

My son returned from Germany and then went to Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in Delhi for further studies. An incident occurred amongst the students there. Our son called us, "There are

some fights going on here, please come immediately. I don't want to stay here anymore". Scared, we immediately caught a flight to Delhi. It was then that we got to know, not from our son but from others, that something (*read: sex*) had happened between the boys there and that resulted in a fight. Privately, my husband assured me, "Don't worry. Such incidents happen among boys in the army and hostels". But what we were unsure of was whether our son willingly had sex or whether he was coerced into it. I did not have a good opinion of people of Delhi and felt that they must have forced themselves on my son and that had led him to call us in distress. (We later learnt that this was a part of ragging and that one of the boys in the hostel had forced himself on our son.)

We then cancelled his admission at JNU and brought him back to Pune. He got admission in another institution in Pune and resumed his education. He was again awarded a scholarship and went to Germany for a year. Till then, we were not aware that he was gay.

I think his father would have accepted him; he was a liberal person. But his father never got to know about his sexuality. He had an untimely death at the age of 49. When he had his first heart attack, we took him to Ruby Hall Clinic. Then he underwent bypass surgery at Leelavati Hospital (Mumbai). We spent a lot of money on his treatment. He returned home, but three months later, he suffered another heart attack. We immediately took him to Ruby Hall, but sadly he passed away.

Religion states that the eldest daughter's

wedding must be performed within a year of her father's death. Accordingly, our daughter got married.

Sometime later, my son told his sister that he was gay. Then she told me. She did this disclosure gently and gradually. I do not recollect her exact words. It was then that I remembered the JNU incident. We had grown up in an environment where our only exposure to non-heterosexuals were the 'hijaras' seen on the street. We were not even aware that gay people exist. In Islam, these issues are not discussed. In spite of this, my daughter and I accepted him. She said to me, "Mumma, it's not his fault! He is my brother and I will support him". I wanted my son's sexuality to remain a secret, especially from our relatives. But he started working on these issues. Despite my apprehensions, I did not prevent him from outing himself to others.

Last year, he bought a flat and moved there. I visit him on Sundays, carry a few household items to his house that he needs. He insists that I should stay with him, but frankly, I only feel comfortable in my old house. I find it difficult to sleep in new surroundings. My family members, my mother-in-law, my sisters-in-law are my neighbors and I enjoy their company. I look after my grandson which takes a lot of my time. I love both my son and daughter very much.

I once told my son, "I accept you as you are, I have no complaints". I believe that neither my husband nor I, nor my son are at fault. It is God's wish. The truth must be accepted. My son is not deficient in any way at all. He is a good human

being. (while saying this, she broke into tears). He will complete his Ph.D in the next two months.

I am proud of my son. He has a great deal of self-respect and is a self-reliant man. He treats me and his sister very well. He has never caused us any trouble. I will always be with him in all his joys and sorrows. I have accepted him one hundred percent! I thank God for gifting me such a virtuous son. (Incidentally, just then, 'Azaan' was heard.) She said, "See! I am speaking the truth!"

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ANAMIKA (Akshay's Mom)

When my son came out to me, my memories of his childhood flashed by before my eyes: his soft demeanor, feminine temperament, his empathy (especially with women); his way of looking at various issues, his intuition in quickly understanding my point of view. Suddenly, everything became crystal clear.

I have three children: an elder daughter and two sons. Their father was an orthodox, religious Brahmin. We were often hurt by his head-strong, obstinate behavior. Naturally, my children started disliking him. They developed an intense animosity towards him. Akshay, my second child, was afraid of him and kept out of his way.

As a child, Akshay enjoyed playing with girls. They would play games like 'bhaatukli' and 'baahula-baahuliche lagna' (games generally played by girls). These girls were his elder sister's friends. He was a quiet child. It was probably the outcome of the suffocating, orthodox atmosphere at home. Kids in school would make fun of him but he could not talk about it to anyone, especially not to his father. He now tells me that he could not share any of his thoughts and feelings with us, when his father was alive. It distresses me when I think of the ordeal my son went through. How lonely and suffocated he must have felt, back then! But, at the same time, I also ask myself: had he told me who he was, would I have accepted him, back then?

I am a typical homemaker from a middle-class family, who diligently follows the customs and religious rituals of her family; whose only desire is

to work for the fulfillment of responsibilities of educating and marrying off her children. So after my daughter got married, I turned my attention to my son. Family members, relatives, acquaintances started discussing about his marriage. I was happy and looked forward to the idea of soon becoming a mother-in-law.

And then one day, my younger son told me about Akshay. I hesitantly asked Akshay, if he wanted to tell me something. Initially, he was reluctant but then added that he wanted to tell me something. When he told me he was gay, I was devastated. Akshay said, "I am attracted to men. Why should I deceive a woman and destroy her life? If I get married to a woman, to please you or our relatives and subsequently get divorced, wouldn't it be a lot more problematic for you?" He was right, but it took some time for me to come to terms with the news that he was gay. My younger son came to my aid. He educated me on this subject and became my support.

It was around this time that Akshay started a support group for gay men called "Prayatna". I attended a few of their meetings and films. He also organized a parents' meet where a couple of parents spoke in support of their gay children. On hearing these parents speak, other parents in the audience also began sharing their experiences. Seeing their parents standing by them, their children felt relieved. It helped alleviate their anxiety and fears.

It was that day that I began to think: Are these boys or their parents at fault? No. These boys have the same kind of romantic feelings as other men

and women. The only difference is that these feelings are towards persons of the same biological sex. But will our orthodox society accept them? Will these children be accepted into mainstream society? Will they be able to stay together as couples and get married (gay-marriage)?

I pray to God that all these children find a partner of their choice. Many may oppose this; but at least parents of these gay children must firmly stand by them. Only then can these boys face society confidently and with pride. In short, we need to strive hard to bring about a revolution on this issue. Of course, this will take some time, but while on this journey, I have only this to tell all gay persons, "Say with pride that you are gay!"

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PRALHAD (Akshay's Brother)

I remember that day vividly. I was to appear for the Engineering Entrance Examination. My examination center was in Baroda. I left Pune for the exam. But something was bothering me. I had found a book in my brother's cupboard 'The Boyfriend'. I was reading a Chemistry book but, over and over again, my thoughts circled back to that book. When the train arrived in Mumbai, I could not resist asking my brother (Dada), "Who gave you this book, 'The Boyfriend'?" Slightly taken aback, he composed himself and casually responded, "A friend". I nodded my head and replied, "Ok. So he has given this book to you so that you can understand 'their' lives right?" Startled, he mumbled a 'Yes' in response. But I could sense that something was amiss. I kept quiet and continued reading.

Finally, our train reached Baroda. We reached our hotel. After settling down in the hotel room, I went straight for my brother's mobile phone and began checking his SMSs. I read some messages which were unsettling for me. However, since I was to appear for an important exam next day, I got back to studying, albeit with many questions in my mind.

When I returned from my exam the next day, I got hold of Dada's phone again. Rechecked the SMSs. I began reflecting on the past. Dada, a person of few words; firm in his opinions. I remembered his talks with me on self-realization and independence. I recollected his fondness for fashion, his special connection with mom; he could

anticipate her thoughts, his holding our father responsible for the below-average financial condition of our family; his love for English; his desire to visit Europe, America. I remembered an unforgettable incident! While we were at my friends place, his sister had mocked my brother, called him a 'sissy' because of his effeminate manners. Furious, I had created a ruckus at their place and had calmly returned home. These memories flooded my mind and I became emotional.

We started our return journey, but my mind was busy searching for answers. In the past, on a pornographic website, I had accidentally come across a photograph of two men having sex. I had thought to myself, "What is going on here? Do these men believe that there are no women left on the planet? Or is this act a blind imitation of the bourgeois materialistic western culture?" Later, I read somewhere that such people are called gay. I also came to know that there are some people who are bisexual.

We reached home. Both of us were extremely tired after the long journey. I lay down on my bed, but suddenly got up and went to Dada's room. I looked into his eyes and asked him directly, "Dada, are you gay?" The unexpectedness of the question took him aback. But then he gathered courage and said, "Yes, I am gay". I asked him again, "Are you sure that you are gay? Or are you bisexual?" I got the same reply again. "I said I am gay!". Both of us became emotional. In tears, we hugged each other. I assured Dada, "Don't worry, I am with you. Come what may, I will stand by your side."

Days passed. Our elder sister got married. It was now Dada's turn. Everybody started pressurizing him to get married. He was around 27-28 years old. At that time, I was studying in the first year of Engineering. Our relatives had intensified their efforts to get him married and were thinking of taking the help of marriage bureaus. I could empathize with Dada's situation. I knew that soon Dada would have to come out. I started gathering information on the subject from the Internet. I read up on same-sex relationships in other countries; the historical aspects about gay marriages, gay laws and the contemporary movement for queer rights. I also tried to understand the implication of IPC377 (which criminalizes same-sex intercourse).

Around this time, my eldest sister saw some material on homosexual relationships on our computer. Angrily, she questioned mom about it. I was present at this discussion. She cried a lot and voiced her concern: was her brother 'like that'?

And then one day, I told mom. She was completely shaken. After a few days, she spoke to Dada about it. With some difficulty, he opened his heart to mom. She was devastated. She had dreamt of a happy wedding and family life for her eldest, good-looking and intelligent son. Suddenly, all her dreams were shattered.

One evening, when I returned home from college, she hugged me and started crying. I talked to her and consoled her. My Mom was a liberal and progressive lady. Battling all odds, she had raised her children with determination in adverse financial conditions. Now she was old and needed my support.

When I told her that Dada was not impotent, she suggested that we should get him married. I was, however, firmly opposed to this idea, “No. I will not allow such deception. Even if the girl is told of Dada's sexuality before marriage, such a marriage would be completely wrong. If a gay man had married my sister, would you have been ok with it? A marriage is a beautiful relationship; both the partners must have attraction and affection towards each other. If this relation is based on such a big lie, then it will surely not last long. This will totally ruin Dada's life and also the life of the girl he marries. Would you want this to happen?”

She kept quiet, thought for a while and asked, “Who will look after him in his old age? Who will take care of him?” I replied, “Don't worry, I will take care of my brother”. She then asked, “What do we do if you face difficulty in getting married, because of your brother's sexuality? I said, “I am sure there is at least one girl who will understand Dada. All of you, including my brother, are an integral part of my life. I will definitely disclose this fact (about Dada's sexuality) to my would-be life partner, before getting married”.

As I write this story, I want to underline that my gay brother has significantly contributed to changing my perspective towards women, for the better. Perhaps gay men understand women better than straight men or maybe they are just more sensitive towards them. Possibly, gay men in the role of brothers, brother-in-laws or friends may turn out to be good mediators in straight relationships to help straight couples come closer.



SHEETAL SAMUDRA-DESHMUKH (Sameer's Sister)

My elder brother Sameer and I grew up in an average middle class family. Although our financial condition was not good, we were happy and content. Both our parents were working, so Sameer used to take care of me. A strong bond of friendship and affection developed between us.

We were influenced by the typical Brahmin culture at home. We used to celebrate Hindu festivals like Ganesh festival, etc. However, the ambience was not too orthodox. We had friendly relations with our parents. Father was a strict disciplinarian but we were friendly with our mother.

While growing up, I used to often hear the famous Marathi song in which the sister would ask her brother to get her a fair and lovely sister-in-law. The prevalent social norms led me to believe that eventually Sameer will get married to such a girl. I had no idea about gays or that Sameer was one.

Sameer disclosed his sexuality to me a few months after I got married. My initial reaction was of complete shock. A thousand thoughts crossed my mind. Is my brother unable to have intercourse? Is he a Hijara? Is there any treatment available? I warned him, "Do not disclose this to mom and dad!"

Using the internet, I started gathering information on the subject. I felt relieved when I realized that there are many gay people in the world. But I was concerned about Sameer. I read a book ('Hey dukha kuna janmache') authored by Mangala Athalekar on this subject and was greatly

influenced by it, as this was the first Marathi book I had read on this subject. I browsed through the 'Gay Bombay' website. By reading and discussing with Sameer I gained a lot of information on the subject. I hardly knew any gays in India, but I met many of them when I came to the U.S. I feel that acceptance takes time; it doesn't happen overnight. I believe my love for Sameer and my growing faith and confidence in him helped me accept him.

Here I must say that my husband Parag Deshmukh contributed a lot in this process of acceptance. In the beginning, he too did not know anything about this issue. Sameer had to explain everything to him. But after knowing the facts, he fully supported Sameer. His support was vital for me because, without his support, I wouldn't have been able to completely accept Sameer. My husband said, "We should not discriminate against a person on the basis of religion, caste, gender or sexuality. We should try to understand the person as a human being". His progressive views helped maintain a healthy ambience in our house.

In India, I had not met a single gay person. All around us were heterosexual couples, so the concept of homosexuality felt strange. I realize now that I became more comfortable with this concept after coming to the US. Meeting many gays and lesbians helped to dissipate the initial feeling of discomfort. While studying MBA, I came to know that "domestic partner benefits" are included in HR (Human Resource) policies of large corporations for same-sex couples. In my university, there is a 'Gay and Straight Alliance' group. I regularly participate in various programs organized by this

group. Many companies take part in the Annual Gay Pride Parade that is organized in our city. I participated in the Washington DC and Indiana Pride Parades.

Initially, I was worried about Sameer. Would he be able to withstand the opposition of our society? Would he be ostracized? Would people criticize him? And above all, if he gets into a relationship with a man and starts living with him, would people accept this? However, all these worries were laid to rest on my coming to the US. I realized this is a liberal nation and his decision is not considered a wrong or a crime. Each and every individual has a right to be happy. As long as your lifestyle does not hurt anyone, no one has a right to suppress you.

I re-collect an incident about one of my close friends. She got divorced soon after her marriage. Her husband was gay. He had not disclosed his sexuality to the girl and had married her due to societal and parental expectations. I have witnessed the trauma that my friend had to go through. I think it is wrong to blame all those gay men and women who get married, because we and our society force them to do so. Unfortunately, everyone does not have the courage to oppose society. Happily, Sameer had the courage to be honest about his sexuality.

It's been more than eight years since Sameer disclosed his sexuality to me. Today, I am not bothered about how our relatives or friends will react on coming to know of Sameer's sexuality. During these years, I have learnt a lot, read a lot and have also met many people. I have stopped

differentiating between 'gay' and 'straight'. Years ago, I had warned my brother against disclosing his sexuality to our parents; now I am at the forefront, telling the world that it is ok to be gay. It is different, but not strange. I don't insist that everyone accept this fact immediately, but before hating or criticizing the gay community, I urge them to make an effort to understand and empathize.

My parents took a long time to accept Sameer's sexuality. Our father did not insist that he get married. But, our mom took the news hard. She had a lot of difficulty in getting adjusted. Even today, she is still struggling to come to terms with this fact. Mom took him to many psychiatrists. Due to her religious nature, she also met many sadhus / spiritual guides. She was hoping that, with some treatment, Sameer would become heterosexual. We kept on explaining to her the scientific views on homosexuality, telling her that homosexuality is natural and that it cannot be altered.

I feel everyone has a different comfort level about this delicate subject. Everyone tries to understand this issue, according to his/her own intellect, understanding and effort. It is but natural for every mother to desire that her son's life should be like all heterosexual people.

Soon after disclosing his sexuality, Sameer informed me that he had a boyfriend. Without letting our parents know, I went on the terrace of our house (in Pune) and spoke to his boyfriend Amit on the phone for the first time. Initially, it felt a bit strange but since we were speaking in Marathi, I quickly became comfortable chatting with him. I started interacting with him on the phone and

gradually got to know him better. I met him when he visited India. It felt nice to see Sameer's affection for Amit. I saw how much they cared for each other! Rephrasing a famous Marathi poem written by Mangesh Padgaonker: "Love is love; Gay love and Straight love are alike."

I got to know Amit well after coming to US. Initially, although Sameer, Amit and I used to stay in different states, we used to visit each other once in 3-4 months. During vacations, we would stay together. This gave me many opportunities to interact with Amit. I got to see how both of them were happy in each other's company. A few years later, we started staying close to each other and, therefore, we could spend a lot more time together. Amit became a good friend. He also went on to become the 'darling uncle' of my children. He would pamper them, but at the same time he would also discipline them.

Initially, I was not sure how long Sameer and Amit would stay together; but gradually I realized that both of them deeply loved each other. Theirs was not a casual relationship, but a long-term one, a decision taken after careful consideration by both of them.

My parents took long to accept Amit; actually, my mother took longer. My father and Amit get along very well. My mother likes Amit as a person, but finds it difficult to accept him as her son's boyfriend. She is still hopeful that there will be some miracle and Sameer will develop attraction for girls and will eventually get married to a girl. We constantly do what we can to explain the facts to her, but she is still hopeful.

My parents continually worry about the reaction from our relatives and society. Considering their age, their anxiety and concerns are understandable. Today, I am young, enthusiastic and staying in the US, so it is easy for me to say that one should ignore others. However, understandably, Indian parents find this hard.

Some of our relatives know about the relationship between Sameer and Amit. Most of them do not oppose us, but at the same time they don't support us either. Sameer and Amit have been together for more than eight years, but it is still difficult to get social acceptance for their relationship in India. I really feel sad.

Many married heterosexual couples do not love each other, but still continue their married life as a formality, either for the sake of their children or in fear of society. Without any such compulsion, Sameer and Amit have been in a relationship for a long time. I think this is ample evidence of how much they love and care for each other! Having gone through thick and thin, the relationship between Sameer and Amit is now stronger than ever. Today I want to stay connected only with the people who really care about all of us. Looking back, I think I have changed a lot over the last few years.

Its not just me; happily, things are changing in India too. There is a palpable change in our society's attitude towards this subject. Some groups like "Quest Prayatna" and organizations like "Samapathik Trust" are constantly making efforts to create a positive environment in our society. It takes time for society to adjust; to change. We all know that traditions like 'sati'; widows having their

head shorn, following their husband's death; ban on educating women, took a long time and lots of efforts to get abolished. But eventually, these progressive changes did take place and got accepted. Similarly, accepting gays is also the need of the hour. I am certain that in spite of the current opposition, society will gradually accept this change too.

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Appendix (A) – Selected Resources

The Indian Psychiatric Society's Position Statement on same-sex attraction, orientation, behavior and life style

Modern medicine and psychiatry, since the 1970's have abandoned pathologizing same-sex orientation and behavior. The World Health Organization accepts same-sex orientation as a normal variant of human sexuality. The United Nations Human Rights Council values Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) rights.

India's Supreme Court recently issued a ruling against human rights by reinstating a law that bans gay sex by restoring Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. The prevalent circumstances and recent controversies in India suggests the need for clarity and hence this position statement.

The Indian Psychiatric Society recognizes the universality of same-sex expression, across cultures. It holds the position that homosexual orientation per se does not imply any objective psychological dysfunction or impairments in judgement, stability and vocational capabilities. The Indian Psychiatric Society considers same-sex attraction, orientation and behavior as normal variants of human sexuality. It recognizes the multi-factorial causation of human sexuality, orientation, behavior and lifestyles. It acknowledges the lack of scientific efficacy of

treatments, which attempt to change sexual orientation and highlights the harm and adverse effects of such therapies.

The Indian Psychiatric Society acknowledges social stigma and consequent discrimination of people with same-sex orientation. It recognizes that the difficulties they face are a significant cause for their distress and call for the provision of adequate mental health support.

The Indian Psychiatric Society supports the need to de-criminalize same-sex orientation and behavior and to recognize LGBT rights to include human, civil and political rights. It supports efforts at seeking the repeal of Section 377 IPC as the 19th century law has no place in the 21st century democracy. It supports the legal recognition of same-sex relationships, civil unions and marriage, adoption and parenting. It also supports anti-bullying legislation, anti-discrimination student, employment and housing laws, immigration equality, equal age of consent law and hate crime laws providing enhanced criminal penalties for prejudice-motivated violence against LGBT people. The Indian Psychiatric Society supports government efforts and encourages Parliament to leave a lasting legacy of progress by repealing Section 377 IPC.

1st March 2016

Dr. G. Prasad Rao,
President

The Indian Psychiatric Society

(Note: The letter also provides the details of references used therein. These have not been listed here.)

Appendix (B) – Selected Resources

WPA Position Statement on Gender Identity and Same-Sex Orientation, Attraction, and Behaviours

Background

Recent controversies in many countries suggest a need for clarity on same-sex orientation, attraction, and behavior (formerly referred to as homosexuality).

Along with other international organizations, World Psychiatric Association (WPA) considers sexual orientation to be innate and determined by biological, psychological, development and social factors.

Over 50 years ago, Kinsey et al (1948) documented a diversity of sexual behavior among people. Surprisingly for the time, he described that for over 10% of individuals this included same-sex sexual behaviours. Subsequent population research has demonstrated approximately 4% of people identify with a same-sex sexual orientation (e.g. gay, lesbian, and bisexual orientations). Another 0.5% identify with a gender identity other than the gender assigned at birth (e.g., transgender) (Gates 2011). Globally, this equates to over 250 million individuals.

Psychiatrists have a social responsibility to advocate for a reduction in social inequalities for all individuals, including inequalities related to gender identity and sexual orientation.

Despite an unfortunate history of perpetuating stigma and discrimination, it has been decades since modern medicine abandoned pathologising same-sex orientation and behaviour (APA 1980) The World Health Organization (WHO) accepts same-sex orientation as a normal variant of human sexuality (WHO 1992). The United Nations Human Rights Council (2012) values Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) rights. In two major diagnostic and classification systems (International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10) and DSM-5), same sex sexual orientation, attraction, and behavior and gender identity are not seen as pathologies (WHO 1993, APA 2013).

There is considerable research evidence to suggest that sexual behaviours and sexual fluidity depend upon a number of factors (Ventriglio et al 2016). Furthermore, it has been shown conclusively that LGBT individuals show higher than expected rates of psychiatric disorders (Levounis et al 2012, Kalra et al 2015), and once their rights and equality are recognized these rates start to drop (Gonzales 2014, Hatzenbuehler et al 2009, 2012 Padula et al 2015).

People with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities may have grounds for exploring therapeutic options to help them live more comfortably, reduce distress, cope with structural discrimination, and develop a greater degree of acceptance of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Such principles apply to any individual who experiences distress relating to an aspect of their

identity, including heterosexual individuals.

WPA believes strongly in evidence-based treatment. There is no sound scientific evidence that innate sexual orientation can be changed. Furthermore, so-called treatments of homosexuality can create a setting in which prejudice and discrimination flourish, and they can be potentially harmful (Rao and Jacob 2012). The provision of any intervention purporting to “treat” something that is not a disorder is wholly unethical.

Action

1. The World Psychiatric Association (WPA) holds the view that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals are and should be regarded as valued members of society, who have exactly the same rights and responsibilities as all other citizens. This includes equal access to healthcare and the rights and responsibilities that go along with living in a civilized society.

2. WPA recognizes the universality of same-sex expression, across cultures. It holds the position that homosexual orientation per se does not imply any objective psychological dysfunction or impairments in judgement, stability, or vocational capabilities.

3. WPA considers same-sex attraction, orientation, and behavior as normal variants of human sexuality. It recognizes the multi-factorial causation of human sexuality, orientation, behavior, and lifestyle. It acknowledges the lack of scientific efficacy of treatments that attempt to change sexual orientation and highlights the harm and adverse

effects of such “therapies”.

4. WPA acknowledges social stigma and consequent discrimination of people with same-sex orientation and transgender gender identity. It recognizes that the difficulties they face are a significant cause of their distress and calls for the provision of adequate mental health support.

5. WPA supports the need to de-criminalize same-sex orientation and behavior and transgender gender identity, and to recognize LGBT rights to include human, civil and political rights. It also supports anti-bullying legislation; anti-discrimination student, employment and housing laws; immigration equality; equal age of consent laws; and hate crime laws providing enhanced criminal penalties for prejudice-motivated violence against LGBT people.

6. WPA emphasizes the need for research on and the development of evidence-based medical and social interventions that support the mental health of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals.

The writing group was led by Professor Dinesh Bhugra and constituted Drs Kristen Eckstrand (USA), Petros Levounis (USA), Anindya Kar (India), Kenneth R Javate (Phillippines).

Geneva, March 2016

Dinesh Bhugra
President

World Psychiatric Association

(Note: The letter also provides the details of references used therein. These have not been listed here.)

Appendix C – Selected Resources

English Books

1. Less Than Gay. Published by ABVA (AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan).
2. The Right That Dares to Speak its Name. Published by Alternative Law Forum, Bengaluru.
3. Same Sex Love In India. Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai. Published by Macmillan.
4. 'Jaya'. Devdatta Pattanaik.
5. Queer Science. Use and Abuse of Research into Homosexuality. Simon Le Vay. The MIT Press.
6. Biological Exuberance. Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity. Bruce Bagemihl. Stonewall Inn Editions.

English Magazines

1. Bombay Dost.
2. Gaylaxy (e-magazine).

Films

1. Project 'Bolo'. Director Shridhar Rangayan. <http://www.solarispictures.com>
2. Short Film – 'Aavahan – Voices from the Fringe'. By Samapathik Trust.
3. Feature Film 'My Brother Nikhil'. Directed by Onir.
4. Feature Film 'Quest'. Director: Amol Palekar.
5. 'Youtube' - 'Saathi Connect' (Videos)

Marathi Books

Author: Bindumadhav Khire. Published by Samapathik Trust, Pune.

Books on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Issues

- Indradhanu – Samalaingikateche Vividh Ranga (Rainbow -Different Hues of Homosexuality).
- Antaranga (Anthology of true stories of Gays and Lesbians)
- Partner (a gay-themed novella).
- Saptaranga (Anthology of true stories of Transgenders and Tritiyapanthis)
- Intersex – Ek prathamik olakh (Intersex – an Introduction)
- Manachiye Gunti (Anthology of true stories of Parents of Gays).

Books on Sexuality

- Manavi Laingikata – Ek Prathamik Olakh (Human Sexuality – an Introduction)
- Laingik Shikshan, Laingikata, HIV/AIDS helpline margadarshika (Manual for running a helpline on sex education, sexuality and HIV/AIDS).

Queer-Ink

‘Queer-Ink’ is a book store in Mumbai where Books, Magazines, Films on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex issues are available for sale.

these can be purchased on-line from:

<http://www.queer-ink.com>

Organizations

Pune

1. Samapathik Trust
Email: samapathik@hotmail.com
(Contact: Bindumadhav Khire)
<http://www.samapathik.org>
Facebook Page: Samapathik-Trust-Pune

Mumbai

1. The Humsafar Trust
Email: info@humsafar.org
<http://www.humsafar.org>

Note: For organizations in other areas, please get in touch with the above organizations. They can guide you to the nearest organization in your area.





Editor : Bindumadhav Khire

I hope that this book will help parents and their gay children to understand each other. At the end, I will only say, "I love my parents and it is because of them that I am what I am." And this is exactly why I feel that parents of every gay child should make a sincere effort to understand their child. Irrespective of whether their child is gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender, they must take a step forward towards acceptance of their child.

Vivek Raj Anand
CEO
The Humsafar Trust



SAMAPATHIK TRUST, PUNE