



FRIEDRICH NAUMANN
FOUNDATION For Freedom.

South Asia

BORN WITH PRIDE



Publication Credits

Publisher

Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom for South Asia
6, Special Institutional Area
USO Marg, Block A, Qutab Institutional Area
New Delhi 110067
India

 /freiheit.org/south-asia

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Date

April 2023

Notes on using this publication

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Disclaimer: The coffee table book employs various acronyms that are a part of the author's personal story, and these acronyms are specific to certain countries and reflect the author's choices, not necessarily the editorial stance of Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF) Regional Office, South Asia.

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Foreword



I am thrilled to introduce this beautiful coffee table book, which captures the essence of the 'Born With Pride' regional conference organized in Kathmandu, on 27- 28 September 2022. This conference is a platform for the LGBTQIA+ community to share their stories of resilience, struggle, and success. It is a place where we can come together to celebrate our diversity, share our experiences, and inspire one another to continue the fight for equality.

In this book, we have collected stories from 22 LGBTQIA+ individuals primarily from South Asia. Each story is a testament to the strength and courage of the human spirit. From coming out to family and friends to navigating discrimination and harassment, grappling with social rejection and invisibility, these individuals have faced tremendous obstacles in their lives. Yet, through it all, they have persevered and found success, happiness, and love.

As you read these stories, you will be inspired by the bravery and determination of these individuals. You will see the challenges they have faced and the triumphs they have achieved. You will also gain insight into the struggles that the LGBTQIA+ community faces in South Asia and around the world. Nevertheless, most importantly, you will see the power of community and the importance of coming together to support one another. Through their stories, these individuals show us that we are not alone and that together, we can create a better world for all members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

I want to thank everyone who contributed to this book, from the authors to the editors to the filmmakers Gautam Dhimal and Sabin Basnet. Your hard work and dedication have made this book a reality, and I am grateful for your contribution to the LGBTQIA+ community. I would also like to express my sincere grati-

tude to our partners – SamriddhiFoundation, the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Kathmandu, the German-Nepal Friendship Association, and Junge Liberale (JuLis), for their support and participation during the Born With Pride Conference in Kathmandu.

I hope that this coffee table book will serve as a source of inspiration and pride for all who read it. Let us continue to celebrate our diversity and stand together in the fight for equality. Born with pride, we will continue to make progress towards a more just and inclusive world.



Dr Carsten Klein
Head, Regional Office South Asia
Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom South Asia

Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF) is a Liberal foundation working in the area of economic freedom, human rights, good governance and a free market economy across 65 countries worldwide. In South Asia, we have offices in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. Additionally, we work with partners in Nepal. We organize many activities, conferences and webinars on various issues that are in line with our core values and principles.

Testimonials from our partners



Embassy
of the Federal Republic of Germany
Kathmandu



Sabrina Schmidt Koschella, Consul and Head of Administration

In Nepal, we enjoy liberal anti-discriminatory and progressive laws on LGBTI issues. However, the reality for LGBTI persons is still very different. With increased visibility, advocacy, education and role models shaping public opinion, slowly, people's mind-set will change. As current Co-Chair of the Equal Rights Coalition and as part of our Feminist Foreign Policy, the German Embassy in Kathmandu is promoting LGBTI rights and awareness in Nepal.



SAMRIDDHI
FOUNDATION



Deependra Chaulagain, Director of Operations & Outreach, Nepal

The 'Born with Pride' conference held in Nepal in 2022 was a resounding success, bringing together individuals from the queer community, activists, and allies to promote the rights and celebrate the diversity of this community. Through panel discussions, workshops, and performances, the event created a safe space for LGBTQIA+ individuals and marked a significant step towards a more inclusive and accepting society.



Alka Khanal, Vice-Chair, German Nepal Friendship Association Cologne, Germany

The LGBT community in South Asia was addressed through Born with Pride, drawing attention to the challenges faced by the LGBT community in this region. It gave visibility to the courageous work of activists from individual countries who shared their stories.

This will help raise awareness in societies of South Asian countries. We are honoured to be part of this synergy and, humbly, would like to express our appreciation to the FNS and its team for their tireless efforts to find ways to create social understanding and awareness of LGBTB issues in populations. Our special thanks go to Dr. Carsten Klein and his team Coalition and as part of our Feminist Foreign Policy, the German Embassy in Kathmandu is promoting LGBTI rights and awareness in Nepal.



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South Asia

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2022







Photo Credits: Aaditya Rai, Nepal

BREAKING BARRIERS: THE STORY OF A GAY BURN SURVIVOR

I am a gay man, a burn survivor, and I have a physical disability on the left side of my body. I was raised in an orphanage where I experienced a lot of bullying and was given derogatory nicknames. I faced sexual harassment and discrimination by boys. I was an easy target for them because of my fragility and lack of a voice. I had no support. The harassment and bullying continued throughout my schooling years. My feminine nature made me an easy target, and even my school teacher used to tease me by imitating me and calling me a “one-hand lady.” It was challenging for me to exist in that environment and endure emotional and physical harassment due to my disability. Bullying and discrimination were twice as difficult to bear.

People always found ways to discriminate against me and put me in difficult situations. Since childhood, I faced constant challenges, and the hellish period continued even after graduating from school.



Aditya
Rai



Nepal

After graduating from School, I learned about the Blue Diamond Society (BDS) through a radio program. Initially, I went to the BDS for counselling. Through self-discovery and understanding my own feelings, I realized that I am a gay man. I then decided to come out in the media, hoping that people, including the boys from the orphanage, the wardens, teachers, and friends, would understand what I was going through and accept me. However, to my dismay, after coming out in the media as a gay man with a disability, I was shocked to see how many heterosexual people distanced themselves from me. They stopped talking to me or completely ignored me.

Every day, people display derogatory behaviour towards me due to my disability and condition. The community sees me as a burden. I am fighting for my identity within the LGBTI community because, strangely enough, they don't accept me as one of their own either. Every day is very challenging due to my financial situation, and I cannot afford higher education. Finding a decent place to stay is also difficult. Renting a room becomes a task in itself, as owners often inquire about my income and place of work.



Neither the LGBTI community, the government, nor any organizations address intersectional issues. Within the LGBTI community, there are youth who belong to the community but also live with disabilities. Why doesn't anyone support or raise their voice for us? We are hardly given any opportunities, and inclusivity is rarely discussed. Instead, we face hatred and rejection.

The visibility of disabled LGBTI individuals is minimal because neither the community nor organizations want to work on our behalf. There is no funding, acceptance, or highlighted stories to bring the issue of disabled LGBTI individuals into the mainstream. Therefore, I took it upon myself to advocate for LGBTI rights. Even within the community, it is difficult for them to accept me.

Nevertheless, I continue to fight for my existence and acceptance within the LGBTI community, society, and among friends. I face numerous challenges every day. In 2018, I resumed my studies for my bachelor's degree. Currently, I work at the Blue Diamond Society in the LGBTI Rights Project as a Program Officer. I am also the President of Rainbow Disability Nepal (RDN), an organization working for the human rights of disabled LGBTI individuals. RDN is the first loose network that empowers disabled LGBTI youths to be accountable, establish acceptance, and promote inclusion for disabled LGBTI individuals in Nepal. I will continue to advocate for our community's issues and work for the betterment of the disabled LGBTI sector.

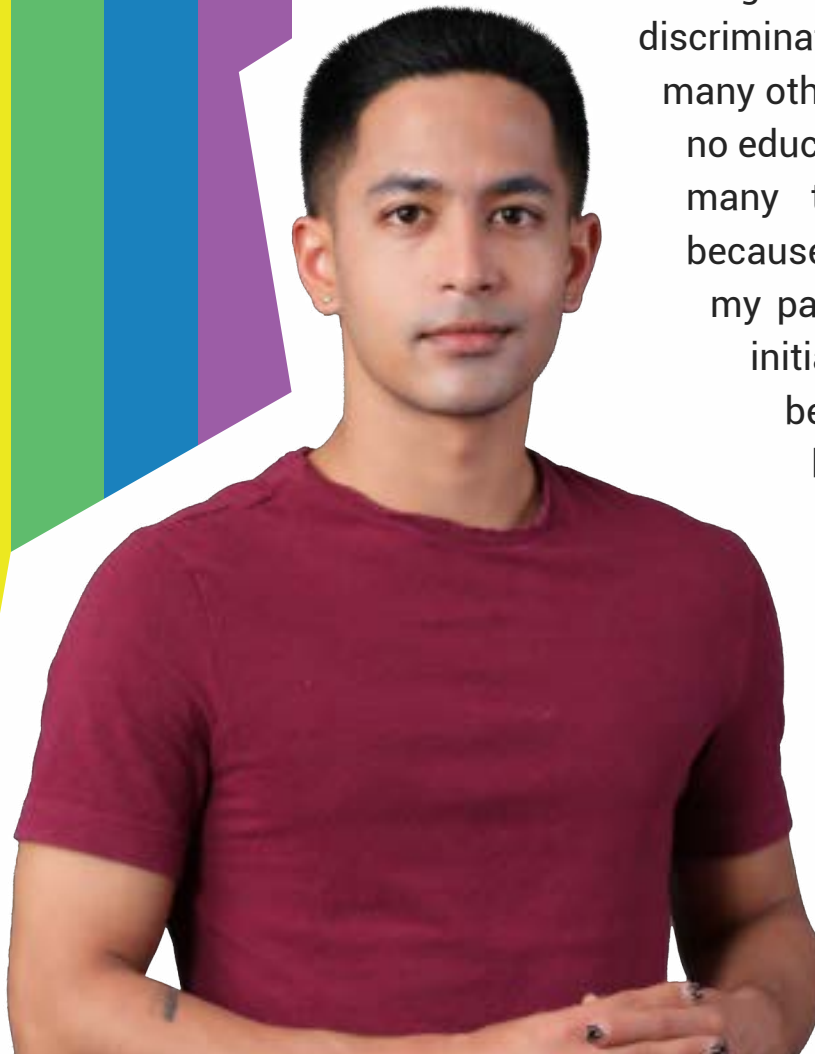




Photo Credits: Sourav Karmakar, India

FINDING A VOICE: NAVIGATING QUEER IDENTITY AND SOCIAL MEDIA

As a queer person, I am grateful to grow up in a liberal family who accepted me even though I am slightly different from other boys. I studied in an all-boys boarding school in Mumbai, where I faced discrimination, bullying and name-calling like many other community members. As there was no education about the LGBTIQ+ community, many taboos exist in schools. However, because of the liberal environment of our home, my parents accepted my coming out. They initially thought I developed such feelings because of growing up with boys in a boarding school.



**Parakram
Rana**



Nepal

During COVID times, new social media apps like TikTok helped me to connect with my friends and supporters. I also revealed my sexuality in Tik Tok. As I went viral and my supporters increased, I thought that social media was my way to influence people and gather support for the community. Like everybody else, I found a mixture of reactions in social media.



Understanding acceptance and rejection of queer people, such as me, lies at the heart of understanding violence, discrimination, and the multitude of negative consequences arising from exclusion and unfair treatment. Sexual and gender minorities all over the world are heavily impacted by the attitudes and beliefs of

those around them. Low levels of acceptance are tied to bullying and violence, physical and mental health problems, discrimination in employment, and underrepresentation in positions of civic leadership.




The global push for queer acceptance around the world has been a long, slow struggle – in some Middle Eastern and African countries, for example, same-sex acts today can bring the death penalty. But public acceptance is increasing, even in culturally conservative countries. Today, generally, people hear me out and support it. Even though stereotypes are still prevalent all over, things are improving. The young generation is more supportive and accepting. I see the bright side. For the new generation, I want them to love themselves, accept themselves and tell people they trust. It is totally ok not to come out in public. Love yourself and love what you do.







Photo Credits: Samapika Gautam, Nepal



MY JOURNEY AS A QUEER ADVOCATE, FROM FAMILY REJECTION TO FRIEND'S ACCEPTANCE



During my **early adolescent years**, it was around Grade 6 or 7, I began to question my sexual orientation, realizing I might not be heterosexual. I struggled to come to terms with these feelings, unsure of how to comprehend and handle them. Self-discovery is a continual process, and as we age, we often gain a deeper understanding of ourselves and this can include our identities. This is particularly true for sexuality, which can be a complex and lifelong journey. This process can be especially challenging for women who identify as non-heterosexual later in life, it can be difficult to question one's sexuality as an adult and wonder if something significant has been missed.

**Shailee
Chaudhary**



Nepal



In my case, the confusion persisted throughout high school until I came to terms with my Queer identity.

Unfortunately, my mother passed away over two decades ago, and I confided in my sister about my feelings. I mustered up the courage to share my feelings with her and my brother-in-law, but their initial reaction was shocking and hurtful. They asked if I needed medical intervention and suggested my "condition" could be "cured". Their response left me feeling disillusioned and hesitant to confide in them again. While I have not discussed my sexual orientation with my father and brother, I suspect that they are aware of it. Despite their expectation that I will marry a straight man, I do not envision such a future for myself.

I am doubtful that my family will ever fully accept me for who I am, but coming out to my friends has been a positive experience. I was overwhelmed by their unwavering support. For the first time in my life, I felt accepted and able to be myself around others. Their acceptance has boosted my confidence to embrace my identity and I no longer feel compelled to hide my true self. For many years now, I have been




passionately advocating for Queer rights. I met my partner on a dating app, Bumble, and we have been together for a couple of years.

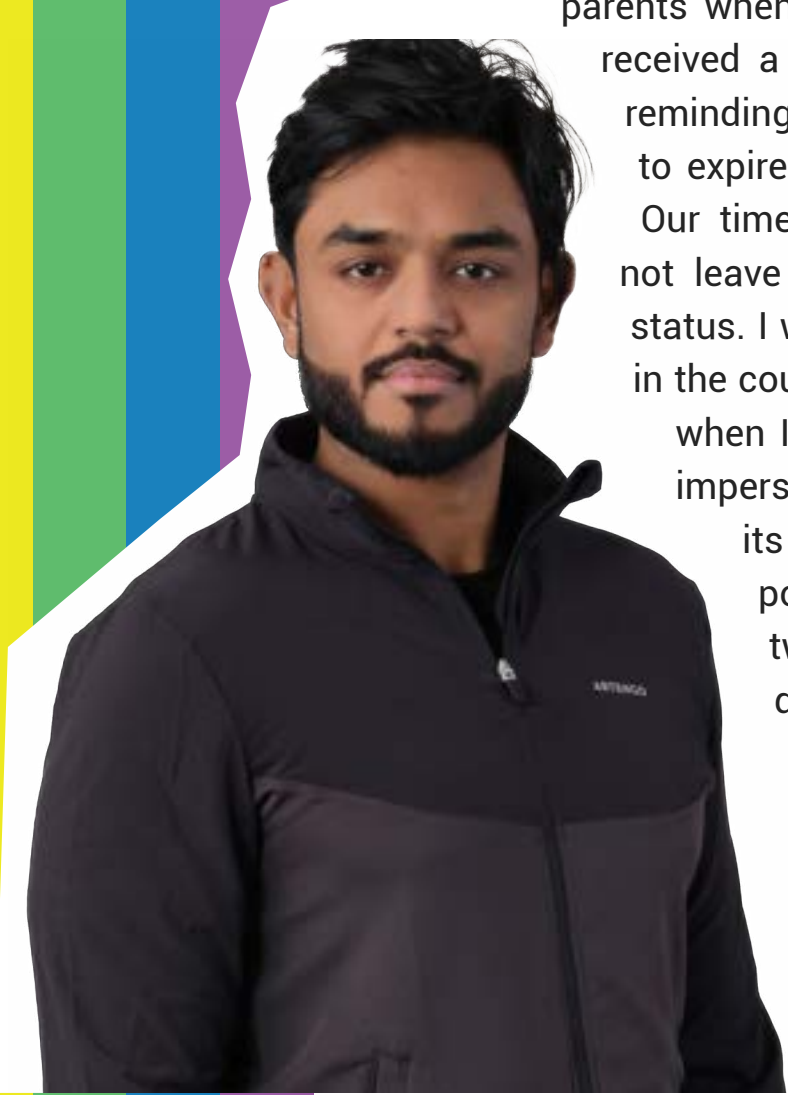

To my fellow community members, I want to emphasize that you are wonderful, valuable, and worthwhile individuals just the way you are, regardless of whether you identify with a particular label or not. However, it's important to note that some people may misuse the name of our community for their own benefit. I implore everyone not to exploit the community for personal gain and to respect the diverse individuals within it.







A SEPARATION BEYOND LOVE: FIGHTING FOR QUEER RIGHTS IN THE FACE OF STATE POWER



In the early 2000s, I was living in the US with my partner of five years at the time. He was an undocumented Latino immigrant who was brought to the US by his parents when he was only two years old. One day, I received a letter from the US Immigration Bureau reminding me that my temporary visa was about to expire, and I would have to leave the country. Our time together was about to end. He could not leave the US because of his undocumented status. I would not be permitted to continue living in the country without a permanent visa. This was when I saw the full magnitude of the faceless, impersonal, nonchalant power of the State and its power to intervene in private lives; its power to separate two private individuals – two consenting adult lovers – without any qualms.

**Jerry
Johnson**



India

Politics became truly personal. That moment on, our clock started ticking. Our lives marched relentlessly towards the day of our separation – an involuntary, unwanted, harsh separation. From that moment on, I vowed to be and always remain an open advocate of human rights – of minority rights, in particular. I was compelled to move back to India in 2006. Homosexual expressions of desire were still a crime in India then. Yet, I openly advocated for queer rights on public platforms, national TV, newspapers, and magazines. I was out at work.





I was out in public. Recently, India decriminalized homosexuality. It is still dangerous for queer minorities in various parts of India; but what has changed now is that there is at least some recourse to law and our legal status as Indian citizens. This is a significant win along a long road of full citizenship rights for queer people.





Photo Credits: Ajay Mahato, India

ART AS RESISTANCE: THE QUEER STORYTELLING OF A SMALL TOWN PAINTER FROM ASSAM

I was born in a small town in Assam.

My childhood was not very happy nor memorable as early on in my life I realised that I am not like the others. I was a little different from everyone. My sexuality and my identity were not what the society expected of me.

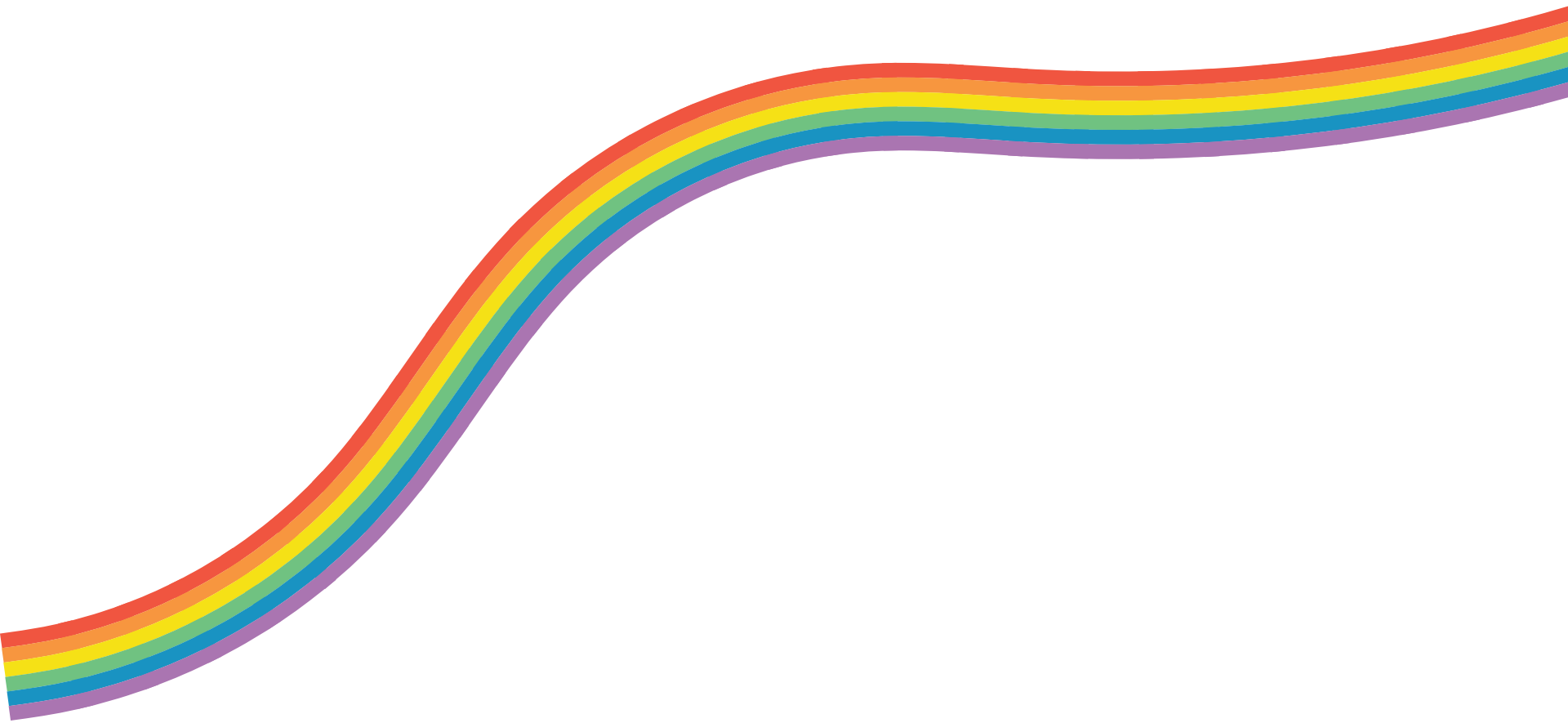
As may be expected it was not a bed of roses that I had. The society is not only harsh towards those who don't fall within the norms but also it has several social taboos. Not only did the social taboos toward sexual minorities affect me emotionally, but these also manifested themselves as I also faced many financial hardships after losing my father.



**Ajay
Mahato**
 **India**



I didn't find much interest in my studies. Instead, I found a passion for art. My love for painting became my medium of expression. It was a window into my soul. Suddenly there was a way to show how I feel and express my anger, my pain, my joy and longing for acceptance. My paintings gave me the courage to tell others about my sexuality and the struggles that people like me face. This is my way of making people understand my struggles and that of many others like me.



I soon discovered that classical Hindu epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata have many hidden, unknown queer stories. Unearthing such stories was the research that I conducted. As I read through these stories, characters leaped out and became the main subject of my paintings. Many people were attracted to my work and art and appreciated what I do through my paintings and medium. However, when they got to know about my sexuality, there was always a sudden silence, the environment would suddenly change. But slowly, people have started accepting me and my art is now also become a point where I am exploring my sexuality along with others. The art now acts a bridge, which is a good feeling.

I think self-awakening, self-exploration and self-acceptance is necessary before we try to awaken society.





NIRVANA
BHANDARY
NEPAL
F
She/Her

JOURNEY TO FIGHT FOR SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE AND BODY POLITICS

I am a **transgender woman** and have been an activist for 25 years, determined to fight the battle for expression of identity, social acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community, and body politics. All of us have stories and battles that we have fought. Of all the battles, the bitterest is that of the social construct and traditions. The most significant challenge in this battle is how you are judged based on your gender. These are the challenges to understanding the concept of gender and sex, sex and psychology.



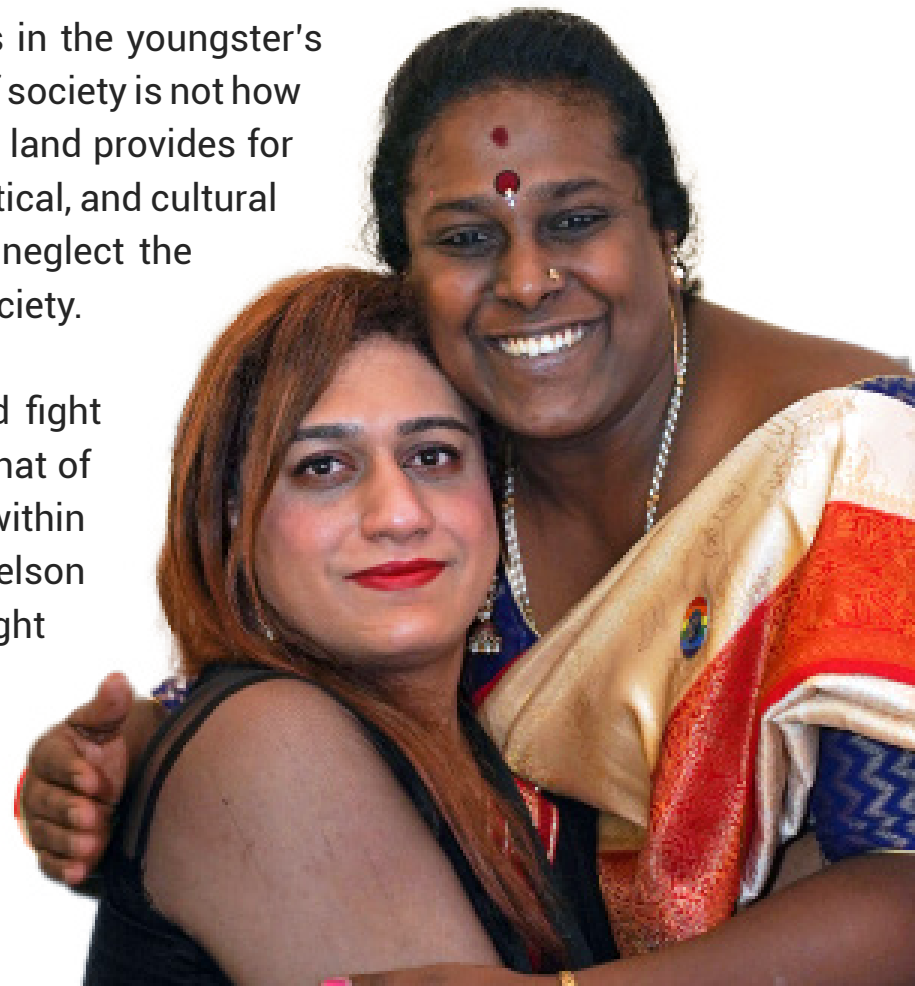
**Akkai
Padmashali**





People from the community are universally pushed into a corner, ignored and excluded socially, economically, and traditionally. The pertinent question is – how do we challenge this exclusion? What is the role of youngsters in nurturing social acceptance? It is not just the society or the family but the state and the political leaders whose exclusionary behaviour is problematic and challenging. This comes from the colonial mindset, which we inherited through draconian Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which criminalises same-sex conduct. After the landmark judgement, we are no more criminals! Now the ball is in the youngster's court to take forward. Ignoring the issues of a section of society is not how the society can uphold societal justice. The law of the land provides for the protection and respect of the social, economic, political, and cultural rights of every member of society. The state cannot neglect the violation of the human rights of a certain section of society.

The way forward in this battle is to be in 'unity' and fight discrimination. In addition, this fight needs to be like that of Gandhi and Ambedkar, on the values of non-violence, within the legitimacy of law. I want to see the world as Nelson Mandela fought for black rights, as Ambedkar fought for the rights of Dalits, like Gandhi fought against the British. To fight this battle, youngsters need to come together as one and be unified in their action, process, mindset, and views. Teenage, youngsters





and people in their 20s share an additional burden and need to think critically. It is through their coming forward as leaders that we will make the foundation and bring common people's perspective by going to the grassroots. No one wants a discriminatory society's perspective. Researching, going to the grassroots, and interacting with people to understand their identity is the process youngsters will have to take to go beyond in this fight.

Converging together the voices of minorities and marginalised struggles is the way forward. This fight is beyond caste, religion, all social constructs and binary boxes.



Photo Credits: Payana, India

CHALLENGING GENDER NORMS: FROM CLASSROOM TO FACEBOOK COMMUNITY


In 2008, when we, at the Department of English, University of Kalyani, were asked to design new Optional Courses for the Semester System that we were changing to, I decided to suggest a course called New Gender Studies. My objective was to challenge the simplistic way in which Feminism tends to be taught in many institutions, which I sum up as “Men bad, women sad”.

I designed the course in such a way that it would have space for an intersectional Gender Studies that would include Queer Theory, Masculinity Studies and Disability Studies. Mine is not an urban university and many were sceptical about the number of students that may opt for the course. At least 10 students had to sign up for the course to be taught.



**Niladri
Ranjan Chatterjee**





When I entered the class on 21 July 2009, I was amazed to find the huge class almost full! 53 students had opted for the course. Next year, on 26 June, I started the group New Gender Studies on Facebook. As of today, it has over 15000 members.

My articles and books continue to explore the unexplored. My co-edited book on Androgyny is an engaging subject of discussion and research in the present times. The book makes an effort to understand concepts of androgyny and 'nari bhav' or sensibility of the feminine beyond the anatomy-directed definitions circumscribed within the dubious realm of the 'third sex', or 'third gender'. As expressed through various literary and performative traditions in India that emphasize interrelatedness of art and society, the concept of 'nari bhav' is a deeply rooted cultural belief in the fluid interplay of the female and the male symbolized, for example, as Ardhanariswara.





The concept of intersectionality identifies a mode of analysis integral to gender, sexuality studies. Within intersectional frameworks, race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ability, and other aspects of identity are considered mutually constitutive; that is, people experience these multiple aspects of identity simultaneously and the meanings of different aspects of identity are shaped by one another. The work continues!





Photo Credits: Rumi Harish, India



EMBRACING MY NON-BINARY IDENTITY AND FINDING CONFIDENCE IN MY TALENTS



I grew up in a **non metro city in India**

in the 80s and 90s and have lived in various parts of the country since then. I did not have a particular moment when I realized my queer identity; but, I always had a sense of being different from my peers. Until the late 90s, the internet wasn't as easily accessible as it is today, so there was a lack of information and resources to understand and share what I was experiencing. I often felt confused and guilty about my sexual orientation back then and couldn't discuss my thoughts and feelings at home. For some years in my early 20s, there was chaos in my head. There were several instances of bullying, catcalling and rejection for being different- both amongst friends and on college/campus.



**Ruhaan
Joshi**

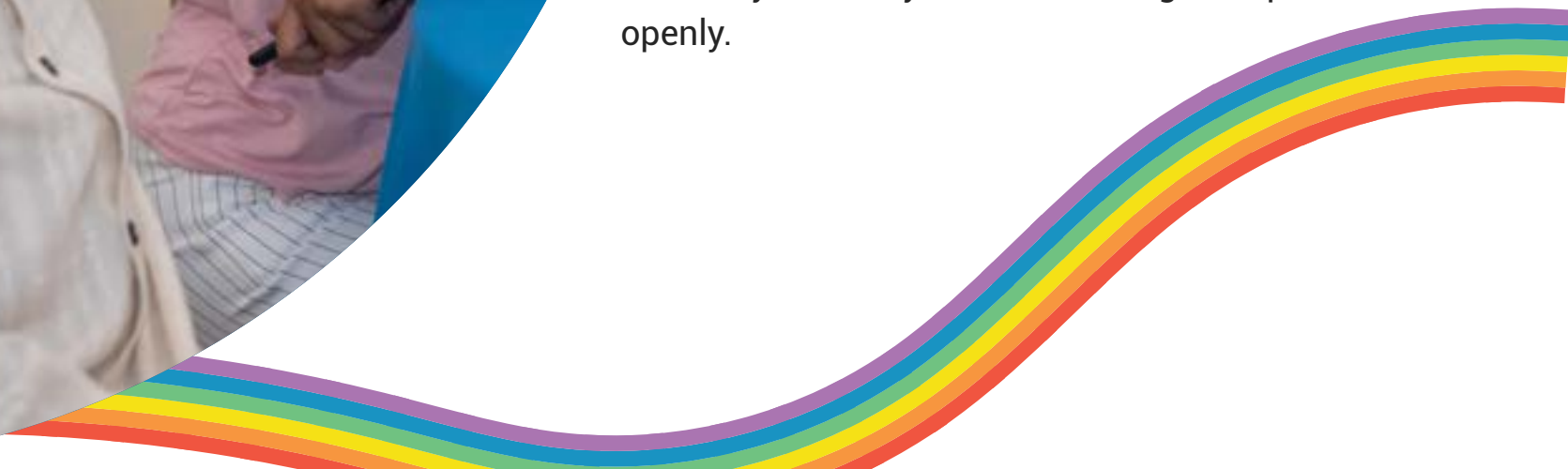


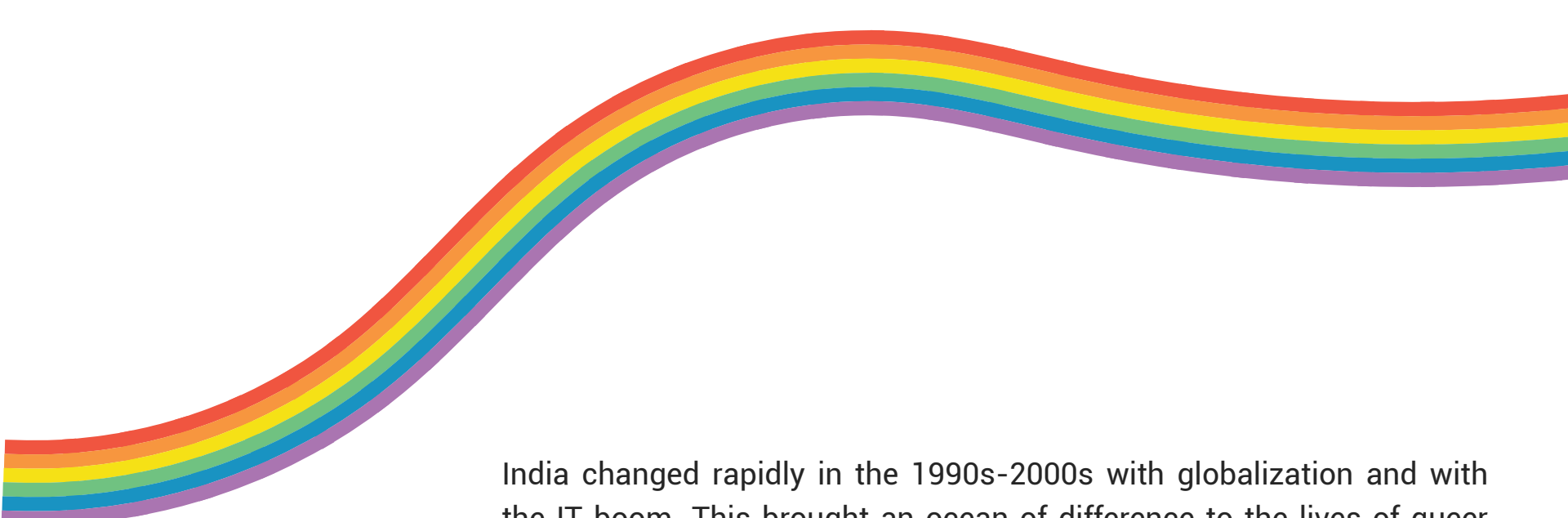
India



I was worried about this 'differentness' which led to missing some important academic and professional opportunities. Looking back I sometimes regret the admissions in universities in India and abroad that I let go fearing being different from others and being 'found out about' by others. My story of initial struggle is similar to that of many urban queer people of my generation.

The Internet did eventually play a big role in helping me understand my sexual orientation, the vocabulary to express it and to connect with similar people from all around the world. I self-learned Spanish around this time on the internet and as a part of it, also interacted with a lot of people in Europe. Their experiences, their stories of acceptance and celebration of queer identity sparked a sense of dignity in me. I was in my mid-twenties at that time, when I started coming to terms with my sexuality and was willing to express it more openly.





India changed rapidly in the 1990s-2000s with globalization and with the IT boom. This brought an ocean of difference to the lives of queer community in India. While the experiences of non-acceptance are still common for many queer persons in India, we have indeed covered a long distance in terms of social acceptance and dignity of queer persons. My idea of an ideal world is where we don't see people either as victims or as perpetrators of hate. We acknowledge our complexities as humans yet believe in dignity and acceptance for all. My firm belief in being able to stand up for myself and for the dignity of others, helps me to engage confidently with the world around me.



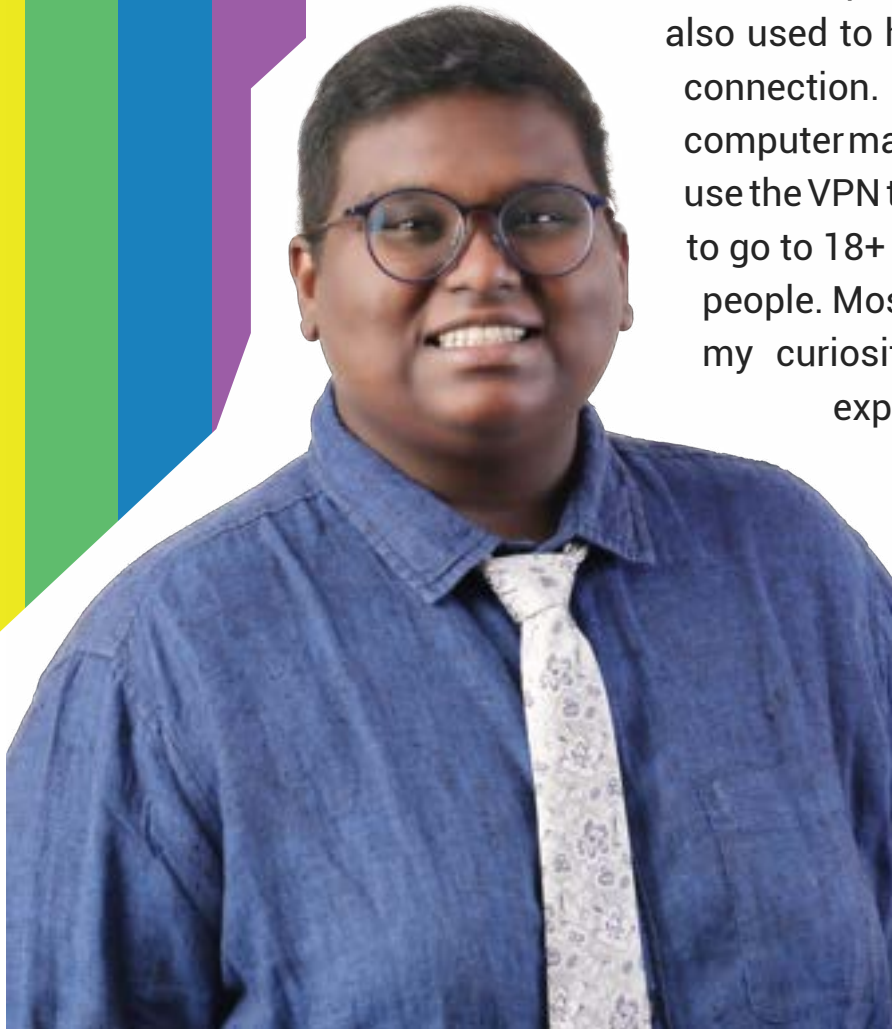
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Photo Credits: Nila Nandi, India

EXPLORING MY SEXUALITY IN A BANNED COUNTRY: A JOURNEY OF SELF-DISCOVERY

I was born in Dubai, UAE with a very strict policy regarding the LGBTQIA+ community. It was seriously banned in UAE. As my father is an electrical engineer, I am raised up in an environment of technology. I also used to have my computer with an internet connection. Growing up with the internet and computer made me explore my sexuality. I used to use the VPN to explore the unknown world. I used to go to 18+ chat rooms and communicate with people. Most of them are helpful and answered my curiosity and questions. This is how I explore my sexuality and learn about it.



Smita

V



India

Kathmandu




SANKU FOUNDATION

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September 2022





Despite my education and exposure to the world, I am not out to my parent as a non-binary person. As there are videos of me online, I hope my parents know about me. I don't even feel the need to talk about it to my parents. I don't want to take this struggle. But I don't know. It's normal to wonder about coming out (telling people that you are a member of the LGBTQIA+ communities). You might feel relief that you finally get to be your true, authentic self. But you probably also think about how your world could change if you do share: How will people react? Will the people you tell spread the word to someone you'd prefer didn't know? Is it safe to come out? My younger brother who knows about me is very supportive.

Parents, caregivers and families can be supportive and affirming when your child comes out to you or discloses their identity. I believe that we should not rush. We need to give the family time to understand. We also need to give time to people to understand us. It's like climbing mountains, taking one step at a time. One message that I would like to give to fellow new-generation queer persons is that- be the queer person that younger you would love to see.



Photo Credits: Aditya S.L. , India

PERFORMING IDENTITIES: MY JOURNEY OF EXPLORATION AND ADVOCACY

My journey of life has been about discovering, exploring, accepting and also ignoring my several identities, some of which are the ones I was born into i.e. being a child of inter-religious marriage, caste, and class, others, have resulted from conscious exposure and inquiry. My first encounter with gender identity was when I was in college. At first, I was afraid to acknowledge my identity because of the society and culture I come from. Later, when I went to Germany for studies, I came across a friend who was not only not afraid of his gender identity but also planned a wedding.

This exposure to the fact that gays can be equally respected in society gave me the courage to accept my gender identity, and I after coming to India, came out to my mother who gave me unconditional support.

**Zameer
Kamble**





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CONFERENCE
2021

I identified myself as gay. But that was just the beginning of my exploration of gender and my sexuality. Two things that have helped and broadened my exploration of gender identity and sexuality are the readings of eminent scholars and philosophers in the field like Judith Butler, Dr. Ambedkar, and Alian Badiou, as well as my experience of working with the theatre. After I came back to India, I met Bindu, an LGBT activist and through that contact, I found various platforms which gave me the opportunity to become an activist myself. It also bought me a life-changing opportunity to work in theatre.

I wrote my first play called 'off beat' in Marathi, which was about three major issues pertaining to LGBT and end of the play was a dream of a utopia of a society void of religion, caste, class, gender, and sexuality.



This play also gave me an opportunity to work with the community, which opened my understanding and meaning of gender further. I wrote and worked with many more plays exploring the themes of gender and its issues and challenges. Theatre became a medium through which I expressed, explored and transformed. It was my experience with the theatre coupled with the readings that gave a horizon to my realization of various identities and made me think that each is its own performance just like on stage motivated by our social construct.

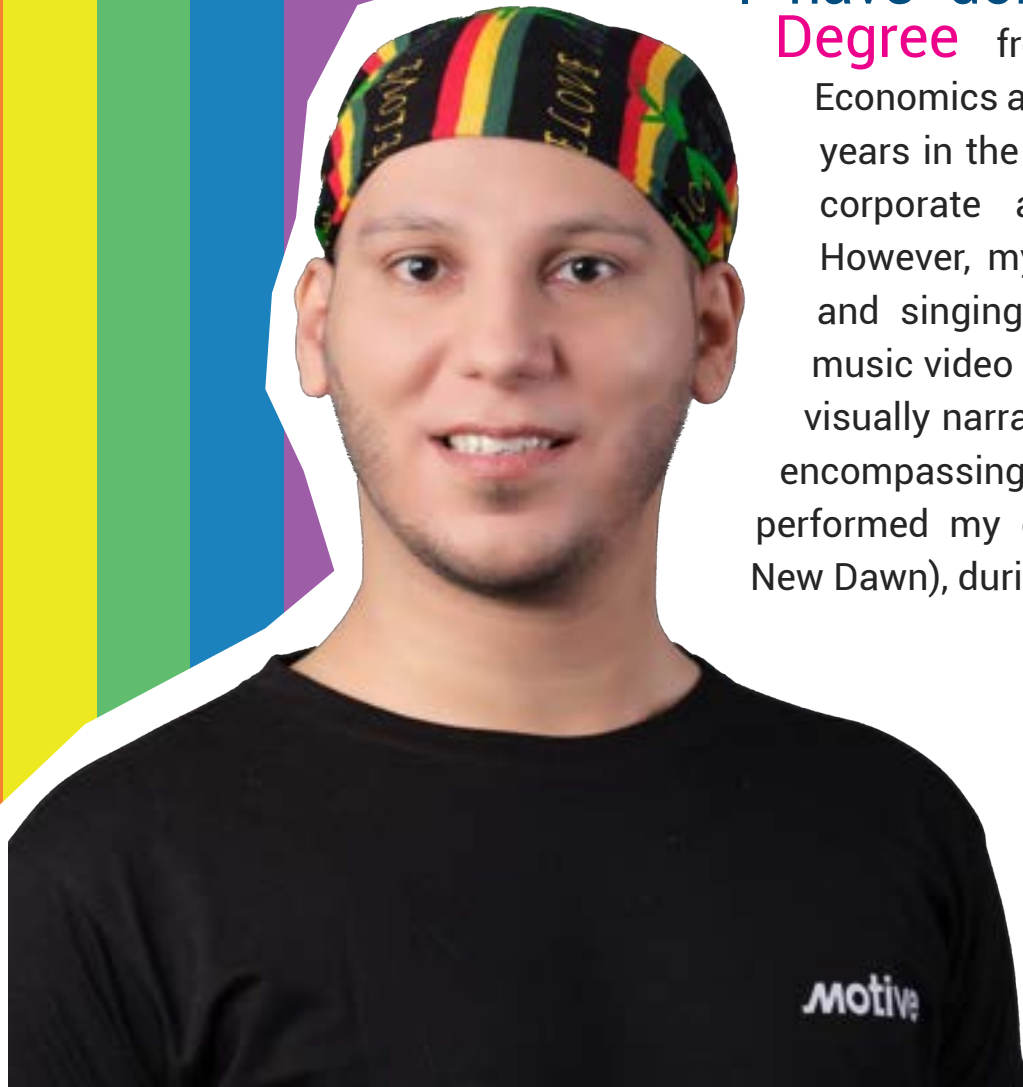
My education, theatre experience, working as an activist and my own enquiry and research has led me to become self-critical, and critical of the issues pertaining to the LGBT, whether it is about the need to give a definition or adding more letters and + to LGBT, or calling it a community at all, all have pushed to further my boundaries of understanding and realizations. Being a spoilsport to the celebration of identities I am trying to make a point of a different kind of politics where difference must not be let co-opted into fluidity but with its inherent void and contradiction be made into an event that will lead us to find ways of constructing newer and better communes.



Photo Credits: Aditya S.L. , India

BREAKING BARRIERS THROUGH MUSIC AND ADVOCACY: A NON- BINARY SONGWRITER'S JOURNEY

I have done my **BBA (Hons) Degree** from the Lahore School of Economics and have been working for many years in the media as a video producer for corporate and small-scale businesses. However, my passion lies in song writing and singing. In 2017 I released my first music video titled "Whiskey Shiksey", which visually narrated a story of personal growth encompassing queer characters. In 2018 I performed my original song- "Nae Suba" (A New Dawn), during Pakistan's first trans pride.



**Raphay
Shahzad**



Pakistan



This event marked the Transgender Law passed in Pakistan garnering positive media attention. In 2022 I performed a concert in collaboration with Shakir Ali Museum with their own original English and Urdu songs, which were well received.

Being non-binary/androgynous, I believe in an approach to song writing which uses non-gendered linguistics so that not just cisgender and transgender people can enjoy the songs but is also inclusive to non-binary/androgynous individuals. Currently, I am working on recording more upcoming songs exploring complex concepts from a non-binary (genderless) perspective.



However, I don't limit myself to song writing and performance. Being mental health survivor and taking therapy because of strong intolerance during my education years, I became a strong advocate of mental health for queer people.

Even though we might call ourselves advance and modern generation but it is disheartening to see the atrocities faced by people belonging to Community at different places. It is here that the media's role is multi-dimensional: on one hand, queer talent is increasingly accepted by the media and public and encouraged; on the other, the same media shapes a narrative about the queer community and relevant laws, which in most cases are at odds with the queer cause. They recommended an increase in genderless storytelling, character and expression in the media.

Photo Credits: Monon Muntaka, Bangladesh



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Why label? special act -> way you are, so be proud of yourself

Manisha Lama #tions #Indigenous

Queer AF

By You! Be Authentically Be for - by!

#Pride #Nepal

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It's fun to live out your authentic life!

#Love is love ♡

Success is always an act of "Rebellion"

#Fight for what's Right

#Transition efforts for LGBTIQ

See you tomorrow for #

यसो कसैकाय बरै पायकाय

Be Proud!!!

AR!!!

Disability LGBTIQ Inclusive

Love Wins

Queer AF

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See you tomorrow for #

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Queer culture = revolution

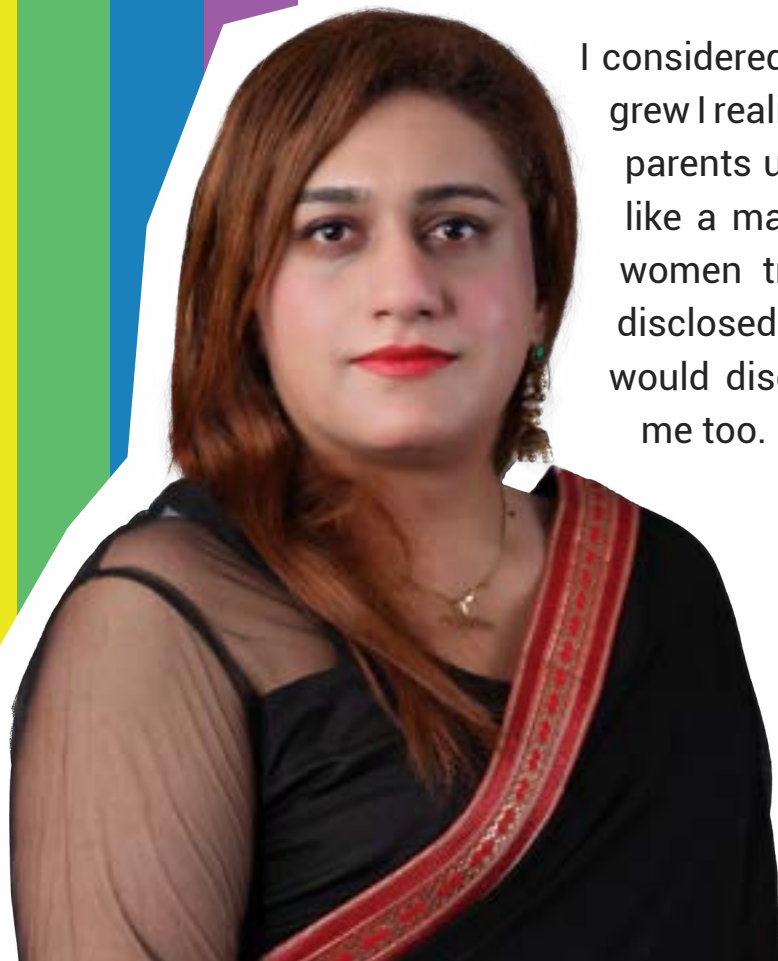
I wasn't supposed to be here!!!



BREAKING STEREOTYPES: A TRANSGENDER ACTIVIST'S JOURNEY FOR EQUAL RIGHTS IN PAKISTAN



I am a **transgender woman** an activist, qualified researcher and trainer from Pakistan.



I considered myself a girl in my childhood, but as I grew I realized that I was a transgender woman. My parents used to ask me to be a man and behave like a man. I also have seen many transgender women trying to be like men because if they disclosed their gender identity, their families would disown them. It has been challenging for me too.

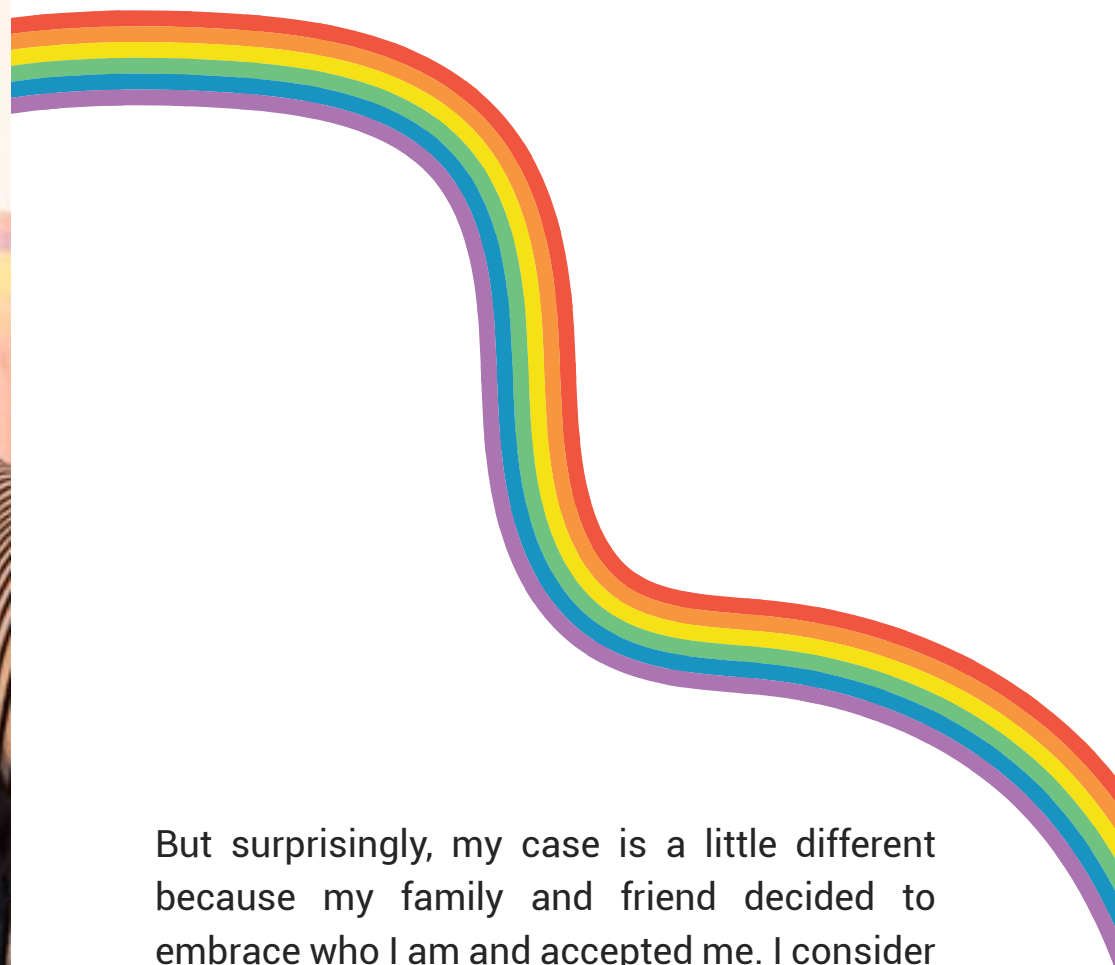
**Aisha
Mughal**



Pakistan

022

Nepal



But surprisingly, my case is a little different because my family and friend decided to embrace who I am and accepted me. I consider myself lucky and loved because even the government of Pakistan has given me not only acceptance but also recognition and respect.

Pakistan is a traditional society with many taboos and stereotypes that manifest themselves in a negative way for the transgender community. I have been working with the Ministry of Human Rights, Pakistan as a transgender rights expert and focal person. In such a context, I aim to create a safe environment for transgender persons in the country and to ensure the implementation of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019. In 2020, I represented Pakistan in a National Delegation at the UN CEDAW and became the World's first Transgender Woman to represent her government at the UN in Geneva. With all these exposures, I know that the fight will be long and the battle tiring but I am determined and willing to fight for equal rights and respect for the transgender community across Pakistan.





Photo Credits: Payana, India

BREAKING STEREOTYPES: MY JOURNEY AS A TRANSGENDER ACTIVIST

As a child, I have seen many transgender people begging on roads and people making fun of them in everyday life and on TV shows. Since my journey of self-identification began with no proper guidance and sensitisation, I, too, faced many social obstacles. My parents tried to mould me as expected by society and school forced me to sit in the boys' section and did nothing when I experienced verbal and sexual harassment. Such misbehaviour caused me to question why these things were happening to me and not my siblings.



Jannat
Ali



Pakistan



Growing-up I realised that I am no longer just a crossdresser, but a transgender person. Even though society calls me a derogatory name, I wanted to live with my gender identity. I consider education very important to break this stereotype and search for my space. This made me compromise my gender expression to complete my education. Eventually, I became the gold medalist with a degree of MBA. But even after getting a management degree, I experienced marginalization and even situations where I was simply looked over when I was looking a job. It seemed as if people who were interviewing me were more bothered about my gender than my educational qualifications.

Later with different initial training and my determination to claim my space, I got a job of a Project Manager in an NGO working in the area of HIV and AIDS. Considering the activism and doing a job not enough, I believed legal change was needed to bring about long-lasting change. I have successfully run a literacy program as an educator regarding basic education of transgender people by mobilizing and motivating the community members. As a professional Kathak dancer with more than 4 years experience I am proud to be one of the six transgender women who worked as an actress in a theater play "The Third Tune" based on real stories of transgender persons' lives which has been performed in Lahore, Islamabad and the United States. I have conducted lectures and workshops in Denmark and has sensitized hundreds of students and teachers on Gender diversity, norms and Performing Arts. I am the first Muslim transgender person to have conducted a Khutba during Friday prayers. I started working on the Law and was on the Steering Committee of the legal bill- Protection on Transgender Act 2018. We also organised 1st ever Trans-Pride program in 2018, and doing it every year since then. As also a dancer, I performed in 40 countries. Dance helps me relieve my stress and challenges. Recently I have been working on my own TV program, Journey with Jannat.





SCARS OF RESILIENCE

The turning point of my life as a transgender activist is when I suffered violence just because of my activism for the protection of LGBTQIA rights. I was dancing at a festival in Toba Tek Singh, I got an acid attack on my chin, neck, and body. However, this did not prevent me from working for the community. This is the price I paid to work for the community. My scars are the biggest award that I get.



Nayyab
Ali



Pakistan



Photo Credits: Md Masbah U. Ahmed (Bangladesh)



Later on the journey of change began after I started working in the CBO in my hometown and we worked for a Transgender Protection Rights Bill. With the help of my fellow transgender friends, we became successful to pass that bill and now the situation of transgender is far better than what we faced. That's not all, I also manage a 'Community Centre' in Okara, which offers a basic literacy and numeracy programme, vocational training, life skills education and driving classes for the transgender community.

A trans woman from Pakistan, an acid attack survivor, trans activist and the founder and chairperson of the All Pakistan Transgender Election Network. This is what we achieved in less than 10 years. This is my story of resilience and living with pride. We were living with pride and we are living with pride and will live in pride in future.

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Texts from medieval and ancient India, are documented proof that the “third gender” were not only in existence in society back as early as the 2nd Century but were also widely accepted then. We believe in our indigenous supremacy; we need to protect it. We used to live in diversity before the colonial era. This colonial effect is what we are suffering till now. We need to work towards going to the pre-colonial era when we were living proudly in a diverse society.



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A JOURNEY OF SRI LANKA'S FIRST TRANS-IDENTIFIED ACTRESS AND ACTIVIST




I am a known voice in Sri Lanka's human rights movement calling for the rights of the LGBTIQ community. Throughout the decade since my breakthrough as a young advocate for HIV prevention. I have been an activist, a media spokesperson, a role model and a subcommittee member of the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka speaking out for the rights of communities who are marginalised due to their sexual orientation and gender identity and/ or expression.

**Bhoomi
Harendran**



Sri Lanka





As many of us, I too faced lots of negative comments and stereotypical slurs. However, I do not think about the hardness of life. As an actor, I am performing in movies in Sri Lanka. The most significant achievement I received is the SAARC film festival award in 2017. I became the first trans-identified actress who got a film award, making me the second person in the world. The name of the movie was "Franzi Panni". It was at this moment I realized that I am the biggest achievement I have in my life.

I am proud to say that I am blessed by the community that drives me to keep going on.

Another aspect of my life is about activism and advocacy. The trans-protection bill is in the drafting process in Sri Lanka and I am leading the process. We are taking the example of Pakistan's trans protection bill as an example. I am also a host on a political show, and in 2020 I am among the 20 women who won the iconic achievement award. All these experiences made me interested in politics. I hope one day I could contribute to my society through my politics. I also love children and I want to contribute to child rights through my political career in future.

One message that I would like to convey is that we live very short life. We should make it so that people remember it by treating people with love and honesty and by helping others.



ARYTHA
WICKRAMASINGHE
SRI LANKA



Hello

WICKRAMASINGHE

CELEBRATING LOVE ACROSS BORDERS

I recently got married in June 2022. My husband is from Ireland. We married in a church in the UK, and my mother walked me down the aisle.

So what you may ask? Parents, mothers, fathers do walk their children down the aisle all the time. But this was different. The grooms were walked down the aisle by their mothers. My mother, became a heroine for many of Sri Lanka's LGBT+ community as she proudly walked her son to the altar in a beautiful, yellow Kandyan sari. Setting an example to other Sri Lankan mothers on acceptance and loving their LGBT+ child, unconditionally. My partner's mother wore a striking black and white Church dress.



**Aritha
Wickramasinghe**



Sri Lanka

It told a story of unconditional love that all mothers have for their children irrespective of who they are. Her unconditional acceptance and pride in accepting me as I am was a source of inspiration not only for myself, but for other mothers to be proud of their LGBTQIA children. It was a huge celebration in Sri Lanka. We both were thrilled to get such acceptance from the public.





Our union has brought hope on so many levels for many Sri Lankan LGBTQIA + persons who suffer discrimination and denial of their rights. The victory of our love against so many odds has only brought well wishes from everyone. Politicians congratulated us on social media, and many media reported our marriage. We also gave lots of interviews together. Our wedding and social acceptance also prove that love is natural and everyone deserves to love and be loved. I believe that shared humanity, values, family, and aspiration to be happy are the universal values that transcend the culture and heritage that separates us.



Celebrating Love with Pride

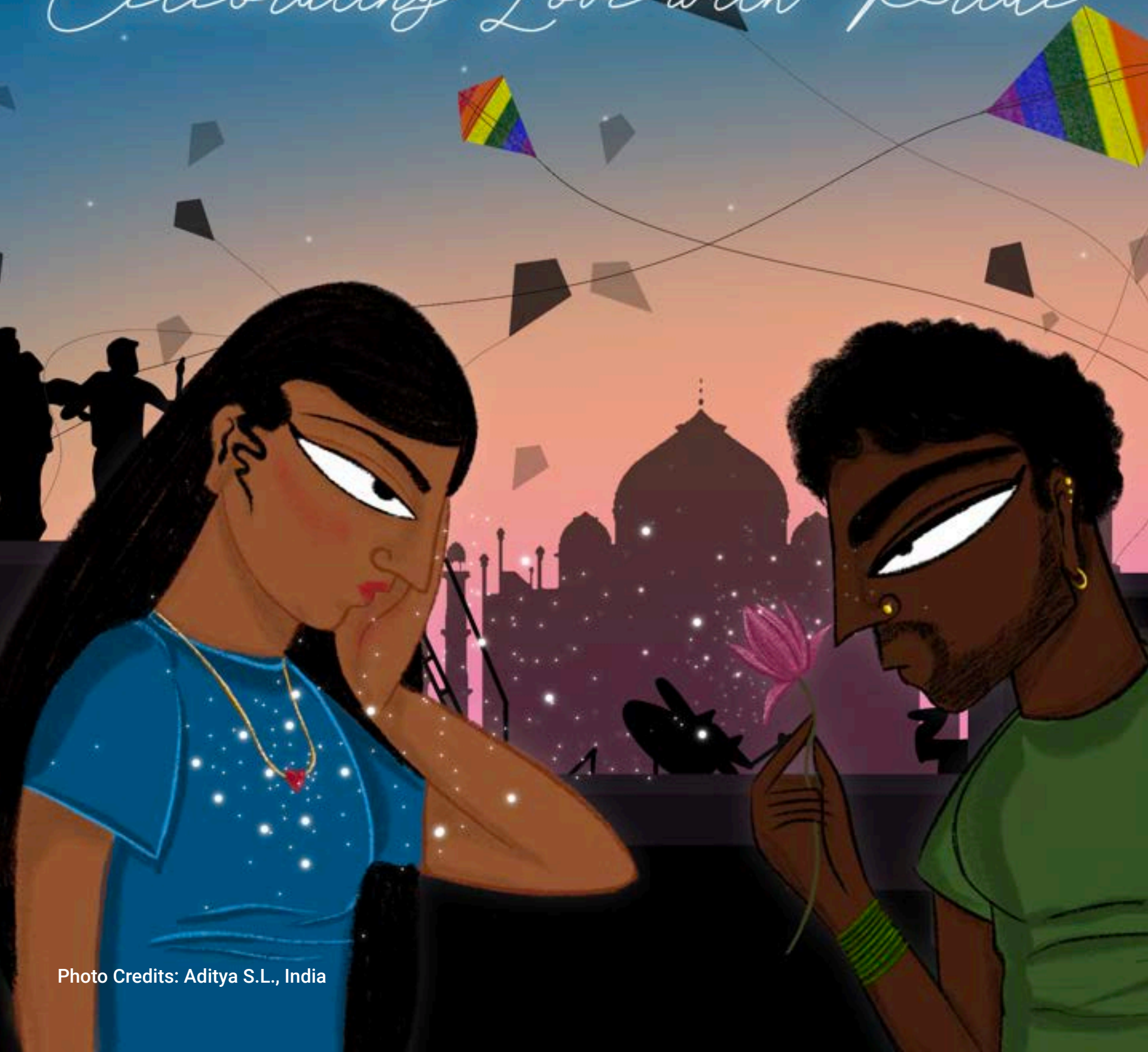


Photo Credits: Aditya S.L., India



BREAKING THE SILENCE: LIVING AS A QUEER PERSON IN BHUTAN



I am a **queer person** who leads an ordinary life. I never came out to anyone and never subscribed to the concept because coming out is a very tiring process and takes lots of effort. I think people know of me because of my work and the media coverage I have received. When I was a child, I was bullied for my feminine characteristics. This made me suppress my sexuality, which demands tremendous emotional strain.

**Tashi
Tsheten**



Bhutan



I felt attracted to both men and women in the past, perhaps because of peer pressure. However, as I uncover my sexuality, I have come to realize that I am sexually attracted to men and romantically attracted to both genders.

I live in Bhutan, which was almost isolated for an extended period. I didn't learn anything about the outside world as TV was introduced only in 1999. TV helped us connect and learn about the LGBTIQ+ community outside Bhutan.



But the same TV has propagated a lot of new stereotypes in our societies. The caricature character of gender-fluid people shown on TV did not help but rather added to the burden.


Currently, I work for an advocacy platform called Queer Voices of Bhutan. Here, we create content, write stories, host podcasts and talk shows, and are active on social media. We are making efforts to create a better place for all members of the LGBTIQ+ community.

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FROM TRAUMA TO TRIUMPH: A MODEL'S JOURNEY OF SELF- ACCEPTANCE AND ADVOCACY



I am born to a **Bhutanese mother and a Tibetan father.** My childhood memories of my father faded because he passed away when I was only four years old. I was a cheerful person in my childhood who kept dancing and making people laugh. I think these cheerful personalities impacted how I view myself today.

**Tashi
Choden**



Bhutan



I started modelling at the age of 15 and today its natural that I am very much into social media. I am an extrovert by choice. Even though my modelling career was going well, it slowly took a mental toll on me. I started comparing myself with other models, which unknowingly ate into me and increased my insecurity levels. I started bottling up the emotions. I looked for venues to vent out my insecurity and I started finding more and more solace into alcoholism. I also ended up with a toxic relationship which pushed me further into alcoholism, and as a result, I gained weight.

Later I realized that unless I cannot accept who I am, how can I convince others to do so? As per minority stress and identity development theories, these experiences can contribute to difficulties with self-acceptance of sexuality. Lower self-acceptance is considered a risk factor for adverse mental health outcomes.

So with great courage and several mental rehearsals I also came out to my family in 2021. The rehearsals didn't help at all. My family was shocked and went into a silent denial. It wasn't easy to establish communication with family for a while. However, later they accepted me.





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TASHI CHOMBAL DORJI

Miss Universe Bhutan 2022, Bhutan



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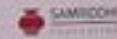
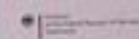


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I first described myself as bisexual on social networks at the age of 15. My sexuality, associated stereotypes, toxic relationships, and drinking habits made me a psychologically weak individual. The negative spiral was easy to get into and I even started to get suicidal thoughts. This was the time I struggled with my modelling. Luckily, I also had a few good friends. They made me seek professional help and made me take a lot of therapy sessions. Along with the therapy, my friends' support also helped me recover.

The Miss Universe Bhutan 2022 was to be held in the Pride month of June. I felt that the stars are aligned for me. I won the title. Winning the title helped me go out in public and speak out about my rights. People also slowly accepted me. When I think about my traumatic days, I felt determined to work for others suffering like I was.



BEYOND THE COUNTRYSIDE: FIGHTING FOR QUEER RIGHTS IN EUROPE

Growing up in **the countryside in Germany**

gave me the privilege to come out compared to many other societies across the world. But this is where my privilege came to a sudden halt. Even in my life, not both of my parents were always supportive. In the beginning, my father had issues with me coming out as gay, but my mother was supportive of me right from the start.

The sphere of young liberals also shaped my gay identity. It helped me to understand it's normal. Society is not as open as I thought it was. Growing up, I observed a lot of hate crimes and people getting assaulted in the streets of Europe just because they were queer. This has fueled my political activism and consequently, I joined queer politics to stop this kind of hate.



**Andre
Lehmann**



Germany

A man with a beard, wearing a dark blue blazer over a white t-shirt, is seated in a striped chair and speaking into a microphone. He has a rainbow pride pin on his lapel and a rainbow wristband. The background features a banner with the text 'CONFERENCE 2022' and a rainbow flag. A large, stylized rainbow graphic arches over the top of the image. A circular inset on the right side of the image contains the text below.

However, queer political activism in Europe was somehow lacking orientation after Europe achieved some level of equality and same-sex marriage was legalized in some countries. I think stopping or even pausing is a mistake. Despite being gay is still being a crime in 77 countries with ten of them even having capital punishment, millions of people are speaking out. The real human cost, however, is devastating and cannot be underestimated: Each day the queer community must sacrifice its safety and dignity because of their identity and their love. Even the freedom already achieved in other parts of the world might be revoked. A conference like this helps people to strengthen their activism and not to stop fighting. Sure, there will always be opponents. However, we know what we are fighting for.



By joining forces to stand for love—against those who would take our dignity, family, and freedom because of who we are—our growing movement will accomplish large-scale change in our lifetime. Those who want to come out and will fight, will also fight for those who do not have the power to fight for themselves. However, one should be aware that it is a difficult and sometimes dangerous process. My message for the new generation is: Stand by your personality and identity and if possible for you, get involved in queer politics to be a part of positive change for the queer community.



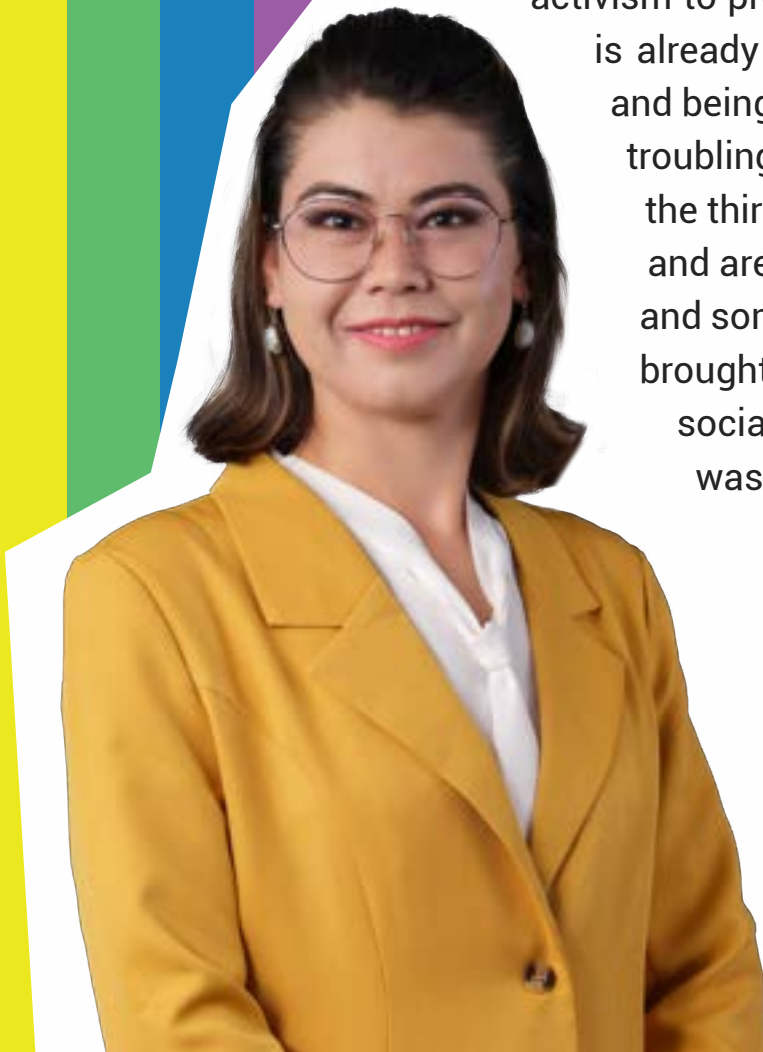
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BREAKING THE SILENCE: MY JOURNEY AS AN LGBTIQ+ ACTIVIST IN AFGHANISTAN

I am an **LGBTIQ+ community activist** from Afghanistan and have been doing activism for eight years. In 2016, I founded the first Afghanistani LGBT community. However, I am not merely limited to the LGBTIQ+ community and also do my activism to protect women from gender-based violence. It is already challenging to be a woman in Afghanistan, and being somebody of the third gender is much more troubling and challenging. In Afghanistan people of the third gender are not even considered as humans and are constantly insulted and humiliated, tortured and sometimes even killed. They are thought to have brought shame to the family. I became curious about social gender gap and later about LGBTIQ+ when I was working for children rights training in 2013.



Basira



Afghanistan

When I publicized my activism for LGBTIQ+ and BBC chose me as a top 100 inspiring women of 2021, everything changed in my life. Post this recognition, I expected more roses and celebrations. But reality had other plans for me. My friends, close relatives, even my former Afghanistan colleagues started avoiding being with me and some even started openly humiliating me. Some even tried to beat me. LGBTIQ+ people in particular face arrest, detention, torture, and gang rape. But despite all these challenges, I am committed to working for rights because I believe human rights and equality are for everyone. Activists have documented dozens of cases of harassment, beatings, burnings, and killings of young people. To bring a ray of hope, last year, we founded Afghanistan first official organization for Afghanistan LGBTIQ+ around the world.





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DANCING MONK: NAVIGATING GENDER AND IDENTITY IN THE TIBETAN COMMUNITY

I am a solo Tibetan transgender woman struggler in the Tibetan community. I was born in Himachal Pradesh near Dharamshala, India. Since I was different from many other fellow guys, my father sent me to the monastery thinking that it might help me come back like other guys. I was in the monastery in Swyambhu, Nepal for 2 years. However, nothing like thing changed my feeling. Parents often reject their children's LGBTQ gender and sexuality, sometimes leading to relationship dissolution.



**Tenzin
Mariko**




Tibet

There was one incident when I was in a wedding party in Delhi. Me, who was a monk dancing widely in that wedding party became viral in social media. Mothers are often blamed for any perceived flaws in their children. Many men feel it is a mark against their masculinity to produce a gay child. Other parents feel shame due to religious teachings. Still others are upset that their children don't fit in with socially prescribed gender roles. They seem to forget that gender roles, clothing styles, and what is perceived as masculine or feminine have changed many times throughout history. It is a misguided sense of shame, a shame so extreme at times that it can be relieved only by disconnecting and distancing from the child. People started judging me for dancing and being a monk. I was negatively treated and people started making fun of myself.



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I came out in 2015 during the Miss Tibet Pageant when I performed in a Bollywood song. It is very new to the Tibetan community. This particular incident changed my life afterwards. Even my family started ignoring me and stopped caring my feeling and my wish.

Nevertheless, because of my Buddhist teaching, I take all the hate against me and did not let this hate harm me. As I am out, I have thousands of supporters today. One message I would like to give to the young queer community is that- self-love is important but more important is to share that love with other.



SAMUNDRA
GURUNG
NEPAL



He/Him

MY JOURNEY AS A GAY FATHER IN IDAHO

I was raised in a **small religious community in Idaho**. I faced bullying and pressure to get married, as many gay people face in India and other parts of the world. Such derogatory comments made me feel guilty, unhappy, and I started to see myself as someone who is inherently evil. I developed suicidal ideations. I married a woman, and we had two kids together. We discussed my sexual attraction before we married. Like me, she asked church leaders for advice. They told her everything would be all right after we were married; marriage was the "cure." It was not, and we eventually divorced amicably. Among our two kids, one of them is queer. However, my children and many other kids of today do not have to face all the experiences that I faced. I believe society is changing in a positive direction, and people are starting to accept queer people.



Dwight

Cook



USA

My Kids were recruited to be part of a public TV documentary about children's experiences of having gay/lesbian parents. We were one of five families featured. The documentary was impactful but became controversial and became the target of a conservative backlash. In my home state of Idaho, they passed a law requiring the public TV channel to have all its programming approved by the government to keep its funding. Despite these experiences, and in some cases empowered by them, I kept going, and now I have more than two decades long corporate career.



One message I want to give the new generation is that being different can be hard and lonely but also very powerful. The evolution of the human species is a mutating process. Humans are born different to help the species adapt and survive. People who are different have a broad and unique vision that empowers them to lead the new ideas that will help humankind adapt to survive.



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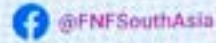
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