

Social Acceptance of Homosexuality in India.

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Guided by Prof. Sudesh Balan



176450004

IDC IIT Bombay,

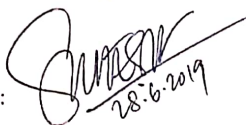
Communication Design'19

Approval Sheet

The project titled “Social Acceptance of Homosexuality in India” by Nandini Dhananjay Bhosale of M.Des Communication Design Batch of 2017-2019 is approved as partial fulfillment of requirements of post graduate degree in communication design at IDC School of Design, IIT Bombay.

External Examiner : 

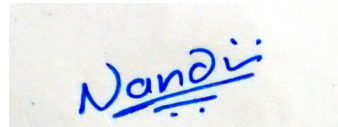
Internal Examiner : 

Project Guide : 
28.6.2019

Chairman : 

Declaration

I hereby declare that this written submission submitted to IDC School of Design, IIT Bombay, is a record of an original work done by me. This written submission represents my idea in my words, I have adequately cited and referenced the original source. I also declare that I have adhered to all principles of academic honesty and integrity and have not misprinted or falsified any idea/fact/source in my submission. I understand that any violation of the above will be cause for disciplinary action by the institute and can also evoke penal action from the sources which have thus not been properly cited or from whom proper permission has not been taken when needed.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Nandini". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

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No one can escape from their individuality

I was inspired to take up this topic after I had a deep discussion with two of my close batchmates, Meera (who is a lesbian) and another guy friend (who is gay and doesn't want to be named). Even post decriminalization of Homosexuality, her parents were not ready to accept her and her girlfriend's relationship and on top of it, they were forcing her to marry a guy as a solution to avoid the social pressure. It was drastically affecting her personal as well as academic life here and it left me disturbed with a question: Which is a bigger weapon? The law? or the Social prejudice that still exists in varied extents throughout the country.

Decriminalizing section 377 is surely a progressive step that has brought about a huge positive wave of change in our country. But still, there exist many who are yet to be a part of the change and are still holding on to their preconceived myths about homosexuality instead of actually knowing more about it. Many blogs written post decriminalization state that it's still a 'Battle half won' until the social prejudices vanish. The struggle to win the other half still continues and I genuinely wish to contribute to it through my work.

We usually like to follow the natural rhythm that has been already set by the society for us. Going against it or choosing to differ takes courage especially if one has already spent most of their life abiding by all the set rules, which is the case with most Indian parents.

Parents proudly accepting their homosexual child plays a huge role in building up the self-confidence of the child as well as the way Society looks at them. So, I wanted to present the story of mother, who, while holding on to our traditions chooses to embrace the new, once the prejudices in her mind about her daughter's homosexuality are dissolved. 'Acceptance' is still kept open ended but a positive end pointing 'towards acceptance' is clearly shown and I think is much needed to be displayed in as many mediums as possible.

Excerpts from the Supreme Court Judgement scrapping section 377 | 6 Sept 2019 |

I firmly believe that every person is unique with her/his own special purpose in this world and has every right to lead a respectable social life. After reading the ~500pg long judgement released by the Hon' Supreme Court of India on the scrapping of Section 377, these are few of the many many fabulous points that I resonated with:

“Social exclusion, identity seclusion and isolation from the social mainstream are still the stark realities faced by individuals today and it is only when each and every individual is liberated from the shackles of such bondage and is able to work towards full development of his/her personality that we can call ourselves a truly free society. The first step on the long path to acceptance of the diversity and variegated hues that nature has created has to be taken now by vanquishing the enemies of prejudice and injustice and undoing the wrongs done so as to make way for a progressive and inclusive realisation of social and economic rights embracing all and to begin a dialogue for ensuring equal rights and opportunities for the —less than equal sections of the society. We have to bid adieu to the perceptions, stereotypes and prejudiced deeply ingrained in the societal mindset so as to usher in inclusivity in all spheres and empower all citizens alike without any kind of alienation and discrimination.”

“History owes an apology to the members of this community and their families, for the delay in providing redressal for the ignominy and ostracism that they have suffered through the centuries. The members of this community were compelled to live a life full of fear of reprisal and persecution. This was on account of the ignorance of the majority to recognise that homosexuality is a completely natural condition, part of a range of human sexuality.”

“The natural identity of an individual should be treated to be absolutely essential to his being. What nature gives is natural. That is called nature within. Thus, that part of the personality of a person has to be respected and not despised or looked down upon.”

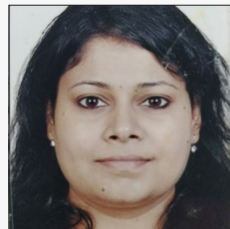
Visits to the Humsafar Trust



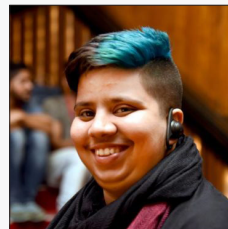
The Humsafar Trust (HST) was founded in April 1994 by reputed journalist Ashok Row Kavi, to reach out to LGBTQ communities.



Ms. Koninika Roy
Advocacy Manager



Ms. Megha Seth
Clinical Psychologist



Ms. Pearl Daruwalla
Advocacy Officer

It was very important for me to know deeply about the topic from people who had been working in the area. I decided to visit THE HUMSAFAR TRUST. Once before starting the project and next after completing the story.

At the humsafar trust, I had a detailed conversation about my project with Ms. Koninika Roy and Ms. Megha Seth, Advocacy Manager and Clinical Psychologist respectively who regularly deal with counselling the LGBTQ individuals and their parents.

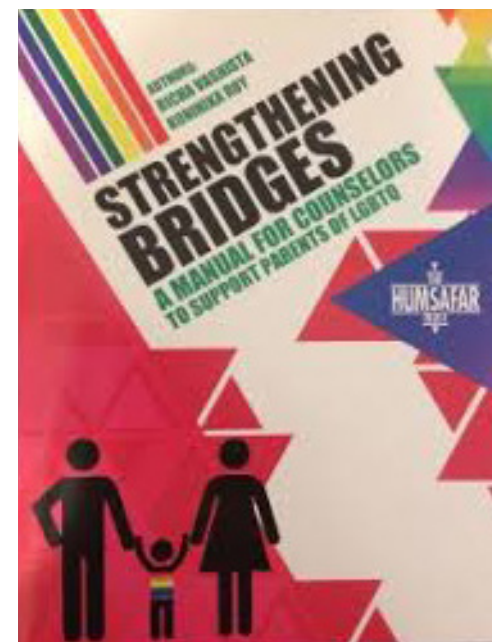
Ms. Koninika Roy openly and proudly identifies herself as a homosexual and was kind enough to share her personal experience, growing up as a homosexual girl. The important points of a discussion are mentioned as follows:

1. Growing up, when you don't completely understand things, whatever others tell you, you accepts that as the truth.
2. Difficult to come to terms with "This is do gay" "You are doing something wrong if you are attracted towards a girl"
3. Around you, you don't see examples of gay or lesbian people living a happy life
4. A long phase of self hatred..forcing oneself to think "I should not be like this" "I should be attracted to men only"
5. We tell ourselves the negative things that people say
6. This also affects the other actions in life. You second guess yourself in every decision.
7. Want to just please the family and hence might not come out.
8. Parent's/Family's support plays a TREMENDOUS role."You are my family, I want to be true to myself. I trust you to be there for me. Those who matter are by my side".

Megha Seth, the clinical psychologist at Humsafar let me into her experience of dealing with parents coming to terms with their child's sexuality and accepting them in the family first and then in front of the society. The points of discussion that directly concerned my film were:

- 1) Parents are worried about what wrong did they do in their upbringing of the child over the years.
- 2) It's either a curse
- 3) Tend to go to show to a psychiatrist or a baba
- 4) Might want to marry off the child sooner to an opposite sex partner in the hope of child 'realising' his/ her sexuality.
- 5) Consider it as a city life influence
- 6) Consider it unnatural and 'Log kya kahenge' pressure
- 7) Have a lot of plans and expectations already chalked out for their ~25 yr old child(marriage, home, grandchildren, etc) So they get highly shocked one they are subject to this truth about their child.
- 8) Parents deserve to take their time to accept their child. When the LGBT individual himself takes so much time to accept himself. but it's important for them to know the right details about homosexuality.
- 9) Marriage is just a legal document. If two individuals are comfortable sharing the rest of their lives together, it's better they do. Also, today there are some priests who have adapted the 'mantra's chanted during marriage ceremony to facilitate same-sex marriages. Just the legal confirmation is missing now.

Parents proudly accepting their homosexual child plays a HUGE role in the way society looks at them.



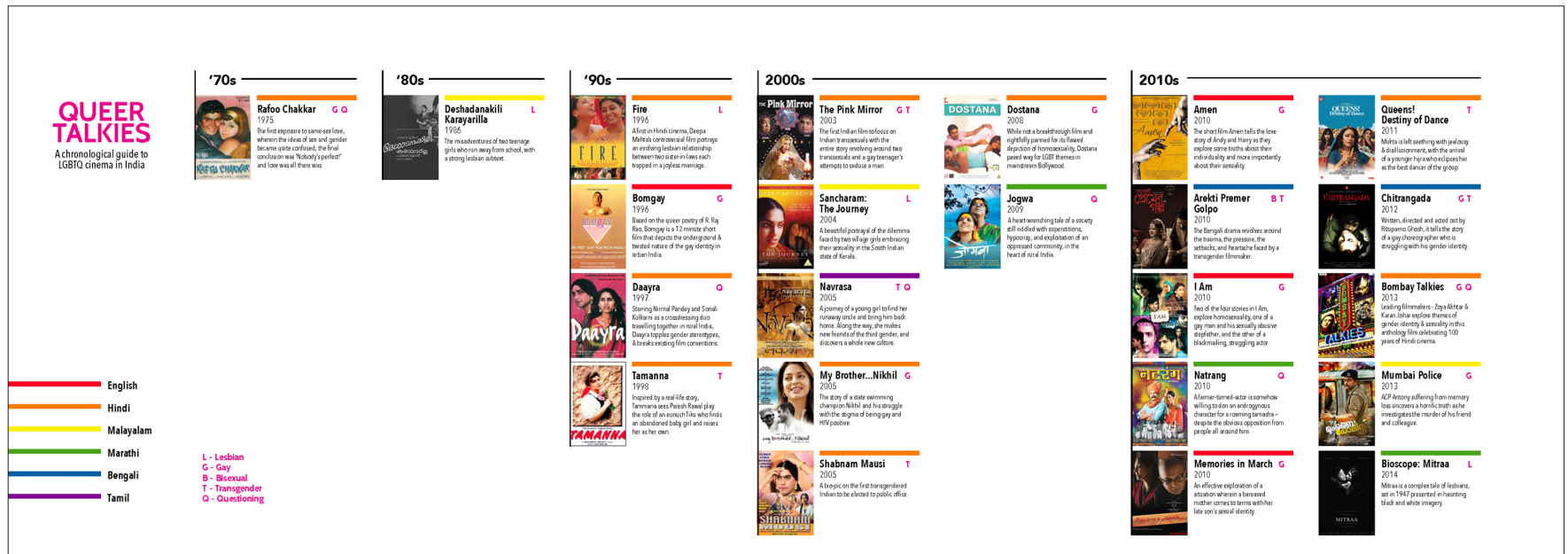
STRENGTHENING BRIDGES

A manual for counsellors to support parents of LGBTQ

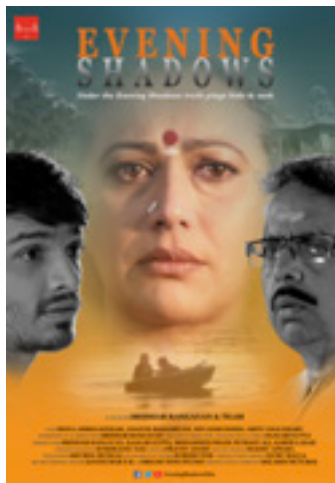
I was handed over this manual for my further reference which was of tremendous help for the project. It has neatly articulated the following:

- 1) Stages of Coming Out
- 2) 4 Possible stages of Acceptance
- 3) Conflicts in accepting along with FAQs
- 4) Taboos around talking about sex to LGBTQ child.

LGBTQ representation in Indian Cinema



A chronological guide to LGBTQ cinema in India by Ameya Narvankar.



This Timeline prepared by our senior years back really helped me gauge quickly how the LGBTQ have been represented in Indian films. I had already seen some and for the rest, I read about the films online.

Evening Shadows is one film that I found most appropriate to study. It clearly shows what a typical middle class Indian family goes through once their child comes out to them. The emotions and dialogues portrayed in the film were par excellence. It is directed by Shridhar Rangayan, an IDC alumni.

Watching these relevant films not only broadened my knowledge about the topic but also made me realise, to handle such a subject through a film, the role of Actors was very important. That's when I decided to prioritize 'Actors' over 'Camera/Equipments' due to constrained budget for the film.

Ground Research

Quite a lot of content is already available on the internet too about views of Indians on homosexuals (both pre and post decriminalization). It is clear from them that those talking totally against the LGBTQ had very little 'knowledge' about who they actually are and what homosexuality actually is.

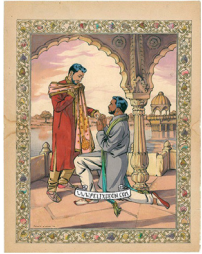
When it came to cities, what I naturally noticed was that the younger population was much much more accepting towards Homosexuality. I wanted to know more about what people of older ages thought and people from towns/ villages thought about homosexuality.

My film's shoot was in Mahabaleshwar. So I thought of conversing with the locals there, (particularly 35+ yr olds) regarding homosexuality, the recent decriminalization, etc. Initially, they were playing very safe and directly saying they 'agree with' or 'support' homosexuality but it seemed like that was coming out of the pressure to look good in the interview.



An elderly couple in Mahabaleshwar in discussion.

Since people were feeling awkward about openly talking about what they really felt was right or wrong , I made metaphor-match sheets and asked them to anonymously fill and submit in a box. This really helped them freely express and let me get an insight about what they still think about the issue. Participants were not told anything about the topic this time. They were simply asked to fill the sheets. 20 participants in the age of 35-75 anonymously participated.



From talking with them I realized that they hadn't paid much attention to the recent Section 377 Decriminalization news as many were unaware of it, didn't know much about homosexuality and didn't take the news much seriously thinking that this is something that won't happen in their village/town atleast . None of them talked/wrote ill about them. Atleast not in the interview.

Concerns mentioned by them at the end :

What can girl-girl do (in bedroom)?

How will child be born in the family?

If it was natural, it would have been seen all around in India.

Doesn't look good in our culture.

They go to cities and foreign and get influenced because of that

Child needs both mother's and father's care.

Well functioning family is important, child should know who the father and mother is.

Our past generations must have thought deeply and set up this institution of man-woman getting married only and not for woman-woman or man-man getting married.

Illustrations directly picked from the internet and not made by me

Misconceptions about LGBTQ and Parent's Concerns

Collectively from the visits to Humsafar Trust's counsellors, available information on the internet and the research, I made a list of misconceptions and concerns that in general still exist in many minds..

Gays 'Choose' to be homosexual..it's their choice

Homosexuality is Unnatural

Homosexuality is Immoral

Homosexuality is a Mental Illness/ Disorder

One can spot or identify gay men and women by the way they dress or talk or look.

They are doing acts of devil

They are sex freaks

It's not a part of our Indian Culture and is a western concept

Homosexuality can be cured back to Heterosexuality

It's a temporary phase while growing up and might go later on

Homosexuals can 'Influence' other people to become Homosexual

Influence of wrong company turned my child into homosexual

It runs in the family and it would tarnish the family's image too if the child is declared to be Homosexual in the society

It's due to faults in bringing up the child by the parents. They didn't raise the kids properly and hence the kids turned out to be Homosexual

They can do it in private, the whole world need not know it

Being gay is all about sex

They are the carriers of HIV

Story, Essentials and Main Characters

Essentials that I wanted to be included in my story:

- 1) Common questions, myths and prejudices about Homosexuality to be discussed as a part of conversation between two people. It was best to have the fallacies discarded by a renowned doctor/ expert in the film.
- 2) For both the lesbian couple characters, I wanted their look and dress up as normal as any other individual. The notion that gays or lesbians 'look' different is totally not right and I didn't want to encourage that.
- 3) Establish a connection between Nature, Traditions and Ceremonies and portray homosexuality as something completely natural, something that our powerful mother nature has bestowed upon some special ones amongst us and is nothing to be ashamed of.
- 4) A positive end. The concept of 'Acceptance' is too uncertain to allow me to show it in the film as the time taken for it varies from parent to parent. But yes, I wanted to show an end pointing towards acceptance, after the misconceptions are washed away, as it is much needed to be shown.



The Homosexual Girls as a couple: **Manushi** (meaning Human) and **Sneha** (meaning Love).



Manushi's mother, **Savita** (meaning the Sun) who is desperate to get Manushi married to an apt groom as soon as possible.



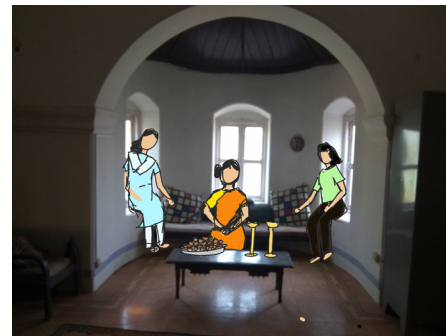
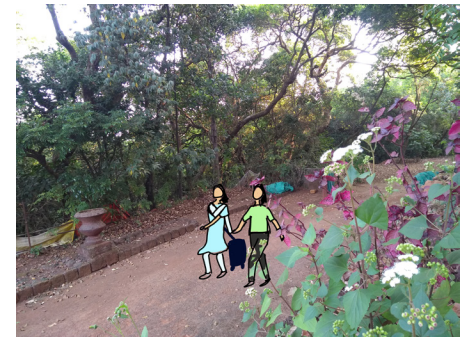
Ram, who is the man Manushi's mother looks up to a lot and wants Manushi to get married to and settle down.

Storyline: On the occasion of Makar Sankranti, Savita urges her daughter Manushi to come home after many years in order to meet other relatives and Ram, who has now become an esteemed Doctor and has returned to their town to practise (and whom Savita knows and looks up to as person since many years and wishes Manushi to marry). Manushi's partner Sneha

accompanies her and the mother comes to know her daughter is a Lesbian. Now, Savita who thought her daughter was mentally unstable and marrying a man could save her daughter, calls Ram for talking about their marriage. Dr. Ram is actually a Consultant Psychiatrist and the meeting between Dr. Ram and the mom Savita changes her perspective.

Storyboarding

Storyboarding was extremely essential to give the cameraman as well as the cast of the film an exact idea of how the film was supposed to be shot. Everyone having the exact idea of what's expected out of the scene helped in wrapping up the shoot in two days, thus saving production cost as well.



Quick Overview of Scenes



Manushi and Sneha entering their home where Manushi's mom lives



Manushi meets mom after a long time of 5 years and introduces Sneha as her friend/ roommate in Mumbai



Mom is all praises for a Ram, whom she knows since childhood, thinks of him as a wonderful human and perfect husband for Manushi



Mom likes Sneha a lot by the end of their conversation



Mom has some other work..so Sneha and Manushi complete preparing all the tilgul laddus for the next day's Sankranti function at their house



Mom explains Sneha what Makar Sankranti is and why they make the laddus in Maharashtra



After Sneha goes, Mom again starts pestering Manushi for marrying Ram, this time much seriously



Manushi gets very angry after a point as mom is just not ready to back off and shouts out that “she can’t marry a man”



They finally reveal to mom that they are a homosexual couple and want to spend life together. Mom loses all respect and love for Sneha and there is a drastic change in her behaviour.



Mom is tensed and worried



Mom starts to mentally hear the different comments and taunts that people would cast on them once everyone comes to know



That night Manushi tries explaining her condition to mom but mam can’t hear her voice over the voices of people’s taunts.



Next day morning too, mom again- starts hearing people's taunts



She calls Ram to immediately meet and talk about manushi's marriage with him (she thinks that would be a solution to Manushi's crazy thinking)



Its evening now, mom wasn't home all day, makar sankranti has started and Sneha and Manushi are worried where mom is



Late evening mom comes back and sees that the guests are showing an awkward behaviour towards Manushi and Sneha as they were gays



Manushi asks Mom whether she met ram and what did he say?



Morning phone call where Ram says that he can't meet today as he has an imp case on homosexuality. The patient is a Homosexual guy's Dad who is not ready to accept. This leaves mom unsettled.



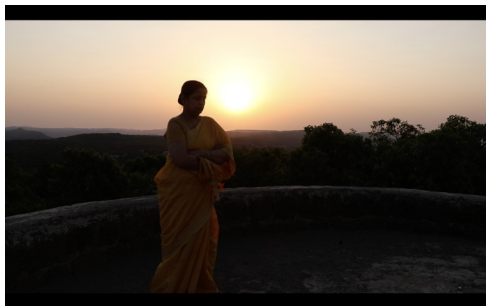
Mom goes to meet Ram where it's revealed that Ram is not just a doctor, he is actually a Psychiatrist



Mom questions Ram about Manushi and Homosexuality in general



Ram very patiently answers all her questions, misconceptions and gives her a hard-hitting dose of reality



Mom contemplates alone over the situation, the day of Sankranti and other issues



Sneha and Manushi are shown to be leaving, saying that they need to give mom her time to accept and come to terms with their identities. But they are positive because..



they remember that even though mom didn't talk to them, she said something special while giving laddus to the guests the day before..

Visual/ Verbal Metaphors Used

The House and Windows

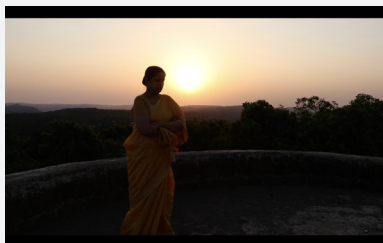


At the start of the film, the house that the mom lives in has a **British Architecture** built and all the doors, windows are closed. **Section 377** was bought in India by the British and the **House and its Closed Windows** signify the **Closed Colonial Mindset** that the Mother is still living in. Chairs to denote public's taunts.



By the end of the film, the windows are shown open, indicating that even though she has not accepted her daughter till this point of time, the Mother's mindset has "opened up" a bit after conversing with Ram and knowing more truths about Homosexuality.

Makar Sankranti, Names (Savita, Manushi and Sneha)



Sankranti (Sankraman): **Transition**
Transition in the mindset of the mother.

Festival of the **Sun: Symbol of Light and Knowledge and Equality**
Holy phase of transition: **Sun** grows, Days start getting longer, nights shorter
Mother's (**Savita name means Sun**) **delusion of darkness/misconceptions regarding Homosexuality reduces** and she grows in **Knowledge and Equality**



Till gul:
Traditional sweet given during Makar Sankranti

'Till gul ghya, god god bola' means **"Please accept our sweet and may your speech be sweet"**

Mother tries to address people talking ill about her child by asking them to accept the sweet made by Manushi (Human) and Sneha(Love) (on the previous day)
Please understand and accept this sweet Human form of Love

Production, Post production



Acknowledgements

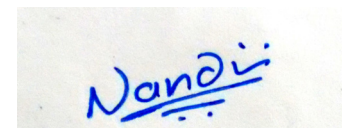
Thank you!

Prof. Mandar Rane

Prof. Sudesh Balan

Prof. Prasad Bokil

My Family and all my Friends

A small rectangular image showing the word "Nandini" written in blue ink. The word is underlined with a blue line, and there are small dots above the 'i' and below the 'n'.

