



Sustainable Perspective of Homosexuality: A Novel Paradigm under the Realm of Gender Equality?

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Abstract. The suggested research delves into the kinship between Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) concerning gender identity and erroneous beliefs on homosexuality. The focus of this study was to examine the attitude of individuals towards homosexuals and to traverse across its possible provenance. The study sought qualitative methodology using thematic analysis, and the data was collected through semi-structured interviews under purposive sampling. Results showed there was a trend of positive attitude towards homosexuality from the younger generation who exhibited unequivocal signs of compliance. However, homo-negative behaviour was observed in the middle-aged and elderly with more conservative ideologies. Findings revealed that the ubiquity of such attitudes was owing to distinct factors which may directly jolt one's social identity pertaining to religion and the environment. Furthermore, the study upholds the admittance of homosexuality within the purview of gender equality and propagates sustainability with an extensive concern.

Keywords: Homosexuality, Sustainability, Social identity, Attitude, acceptance.

I. INTRODUCTION

Having awareness about oneself is vital in the development of an individual which would embody their existence across the lifespan. Gender and sexuality have invariably been a zone of conflict and subtlety to communities which has brought to endless arguments surrounding it. In developing societies like India, gender consciousness is discounted. There have been shreds of evidence pointing towards hatred of homosexuals throughout history, which extends in the more conventional parts of the society. Studies have also shown that there are gender differences in the presence of homo-negative behaviour, where women show a less negative attitude towards homosexuals than men (Herek, 2002). The binary outlook on gender has been a major hindrance for the growth of tolerance levels towards people belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. However, there has also been a gradual change in the younger generation of individuals today as cohort replacement was noticed in developing countries, where more conservative older ideologies are replaced with liberal perceptions of the youth (Abramowitz et al., 1965). There is an increase in the acceptance of various sexualities and a broader understanding of sexuality as a spectrum is clear. Changes were also noticed in the medical and psychological fields as time passed, homosexuality was no longer considered a mental disorder and was normalized.

Historical and Religious Ideologies of Homosexuality

Historical evidence proposes that homosexuality was staged and pigeonholed as early as 1500 BC, in Vedic scriptures. Vedic literature has been a considerable influence in shaping the culture in India. The Vedas examined every facet of nature, hence homosexuals were likewise considered as equal to heterosexuals. This meant that they had equal laws, an equal measure of social restraints, and were not singled out. As there were obvious discrepancies turned up in the sexual categorizations between the present day and back in time, one could speculate that people who do not fall under the normative binary structure of sexuality were acknowledged as Tritiya-Prakriti (Wilhelm, 2004), the modern term for third-sex. Inimical to current scenarios, they were not barred from societal settings and were treated a fundamental part of the ecosystem to preserve homeostasis.

Mahabharata and Ramayana, the two distinguished epics of India's vibrant folklore, still reveal people belong to the "third sex" who condoned in sexual activities with the same gender (Vanita, 2005). Some well-known illustrations are the Rakshasa women in the kingdom of Lanka and personalities such as Shikhandi, Brihannala and Aravan in the Mahabharata. In other manuscripts such as the Puranas, all gods are found to have a female counterpart, known as Shakti. In the Shiva Purana, Lord Shiva is celebrated in many forms corresponding to various cultures. He is seen as ardhnanarishwara, where he is envisioned as

half woman. Ancient temples around the country show graphic portrayals of scenes involving same-sex affairs. The most famous of them all is the Khajuraho temple in Madhya Pradesh, which has sculptures involving both men and women in voluminous intimacy (Rian et al., 2007). Perhaps how most of these matters can be penned off as fiction and might be whimsical, but these mythological scriptures form the basic belief system of Indians and have been kept through traditionally, which has impressed in modern-day ideologies (Vanita, 2002).

Although India was known for its rich heritage referring to sexuality and its approval. There has been a drift over a few hundred years, which was beleaguered with numerous invasions, which influenced Indian creeds. First arrived the Mughals, who brought in Islamic customs and doctrines (Abraham & Abraham, 1998), subsequently pursued by the British who admired Christianity. Both these practices regarded homosexuality as a sin and showed an abundance of bitterness towards homosexuals (Han & O'Mahoney, 2018). Introducing article 377 in the Indian Penal Code during the British era legally crippled homosexuals as it set forth, "Unnatural offence: whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to ten years and shall be liable to fine" (Sanders, 2009). However, this clause was withdrawn in 2018, but the harm was done, as it stigmatized homosexuality in the ethos of Indians. This was viable because of years of revolts and liberation movements since the immediate 1980s with organizations such as AIDS BhedbhavVirodhiAndolan spearheading the movement.

The hostility and homo-negative attitude impact the social identity of homosexuals. This further gives rise to in-group and out-group formation within their social circles. They feel deviant and cut off with the world, leading to closeting of individuals within their safe spaces. The resentment could still stem from unreliable social identities, wherein people show homo-negative to belong with their respective social groups. Either way, we find that social identity plays a huge role in dictating attitudes towards homosexuals (Tajfel et al., 1979).

There has been an increasing trend in the awareness about gender identity and there has been a broader approach towards sexuality from the present generation, which seems to show more acceptances towards people belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. However, homo-negative behaviour is also noticed, which has been a persisting issue for people belonging to the community. There has not been enough existing literature which studies homosexuality within India, thus, this study would allow us to further understand and help us characterize attitudes and facilitate us to provide a more congenial atmosphere for homosexuals.

II. METHODS

Participants

Participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling from 3 different cities within India. The sample consisted of 13 young adults, four of them identified their gender as males, and the nine of them reported being identified as females. The age range of the participants is between 19 to 23. one of the participants was employed, while the rest of them identified as students.

Procedure

A semi-structured interview was conducted that covered a wide range of topics: understanding of homosexuality, historical interpretation, discrimination against homosexuals, practical scenarios, family and peer relationships. The questionnaire was reviewed by the subject experts before data collection. The data was collected in the form of interviews on the dates specified by the participants, which was collected along with the demographic details. Participation was completely voluntary and consent was taken before administration of the interviews. The interviews were conducted over a telephonic medium, which was recorded and brought to the notice of the participants.

Data Analysis

A multi-stage inductive thematic analysis was used under the recommendations of Braun and Clarke (2006). The study was not based on any predetermined theory; instead, the data obtained during the interviews was used to derive the structure of analysis. Furthermore, to enhance the analytic process, Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) was employed through software called QDA Miner.

The data were examined repeatedly to discern the theme in participants' responses. Coding was done at three different stages, open coding, axial coding and selective coding summarised as shown in table 1.

III. RESULTS

Two selective codes, 'societal perceptions and comprehension of homosexuality' and 'self-perceptions of homosexuality' were observed after a careful analysis of data. Both the codes can be considered as themes of the study and contain numerous sub-codes under them. The theme 'societal perceptions and comprehension of homosexuality' reflect how an individual views homosexuality in a broader perspective, considering its variability in the lens of society or a family. Four axial codes were identified under the first theme: Meaning, Historical perception, Current familial perception, and Current social perception.

The second theme in the study 'self-perceptions of homosexuality' opines subjective narrations about homosexuality and reflects how an individual perceives homosexuality under four dimensions: Behaviour towards unknown homosexuals, Behaviour towards known homosexuals, Bystander reaction towards oppression on homosexuals and Possible ways suggested to overcome the oppression. The coding frequency and case similarities are further discussed in table 2 and table 3.

Table 1. *Three stages of coding on the attitude of young adults towards homosexuality*

Stages of Coding	Codes					
Selective Coding	SOCIETAL PERCEPTIONS AND COMPREHENSION OF HOMOSEXUALITY					
Axial Coding	Meaning	Current Perception	Familial	Historical Perception	Current Perception	Social
	Mere attraction	Rejection		Sin		Social rejection
	A physical relationship	Acceptance		Taboo/ Stigmatic		Implicit hatred
Open coding	A way of life			Rejections at the religious level		Partial acceptance
	A sexual disorder			Satanic		Taboo/Stigmatic
				Acceptance		
Selective Coding	SELF-PERCEPTIONS OF HOMOSEXUALITY					
Axial Coding	Behaviour towards unknown homosexuals	Behaviour towards known homosexuals		Bystander reaction towards oppression on homosexuals	Possible ways suggested overcoming the oppression	
	Complete avoidance	Support		Bystander behavioural support		Self-acceptance
	Cues of rejection	Unacceptance		Bystander emotional support		Spreading awareness
Open Coding	Similar behaviour that is shown with the opposite gender	Acceptance on a course of time	a	Inert		Education
	Undisclosed unacceptance	Ignorance				Social support
	Undisclosed acceptance					Not possible to change
	Complete rejection					
	Feeling of shock					
	No-reaction					

Table 2.*Metrics of the theme 'societal perceptions and comprehension of homosexuality'*

Codes	Count	% of codes	Cases	% of Cases
Meaning				
Mere attraction	8	53%	8	61.5%
A physical relationship	2	13%	2	15.4%
A way of life	2	13%	2	15.4%
A sexual disorder	1	6%	1	7.7%
Historical Perception				
Sin	4	26%	4	30.8%
Taboo/ Stigmatic	5	33%	5	38.5%
Rejections at the religious level	4	26%	4	30.8%
Satanic	1	6%	1	7.7%
Acceptance	2	13%	2	15.4%
Current Social Perception				
Social rejection	8	53%	7	54%
Implicit hatred	1	13%	1	7.7%
Partial acceptance	6	40%	5	38.5%
Taboo/Stigmatic	2	13%	2	15.4%

Table 3.*Metrics of the theme 'self-perceptions of homosexuality'*

Codes	Count	% of codes	Cases	% of Cases
Behaviour towards unknown homosexuals				
Complete avoidance	1	5%	1	7.7%
Cues of rejection	2	10%	2	15.4%
Similar behaviour that is shown with the opposite gender	6	30%	6	46%
Undisclosed unacceptance	2	10%	2	15.4%
Undisclosed acceptance	3	15%	3	23%

Complete rejection	2	10%	2	15.4%
Feeling of shock	3	15%	3	23%
No-reaction	1	5%	1	7.7%
Behaviour towards known homosexuals				
Support	10	5%	8	61.5%
Unacceptance	3	15%	3	23%
Acceptance on a course of time	1	5%	1	7.7%
Ignorance	1	5%	1	7.7%
Bystander reaction towards oppression on homosexuals				
Bystander behavioural support	9	45%	8	61.5%
Bystander emotional support	7	35%	6	46%
Inert	2	10%	1	7.7%
Possible ways suggested overcoming the oppression				
Self-acceptance	3	15%	3	23%
Spreading awareness	7	35%	5	38.5%
Education	3	15%	3	23%
Social support	2	10%	2	15.4%
Not possible to change	1	5%	1	7.7%

Theme 1: Societal Perceptions and Comprehension of Homosexuality

Code 1: Meaning. The Participants described homosexuality as an attraction and a physical relationship where people are attracted to the same gender. Although, most participants responded similarly, one participant (PKN, male) described it as a way of life, and how it cannot be changed.

"Well see homosexuality is a way of life. For some people, you really can't be attracted to the opposite gender sometimes."

Another participant (SG, female) described it as a sexual deviation.

"Homosexuality is feeling like having a feeling of having someone else's body, a boy's body and feeling like a girl or not feeling your gender according to your body or having likes of another gender and your wants to live like the opposite sex."

In the same line of meaning, when it asked about the manifestation of homosexuality, most of the participants agreed it is a natural concept and assumed it to be a biological process. One participant (VH, female) claimed it to be natural because it is unexplainable and cannot be diagnosed. Another participant (R.R, male) provided an interesting response where he claimed it to be unknown rather than unnatural.

"When I say natural, I don't mean, to me, it seems a little unnatural because of my religious upbringing. Firstly, and even if you mean to put aside my religious upbringing as well, I am a straight person. I the concept is something that is, you know, unknown to me. So I would rather call it unknown than unnatural."

Code 2: Historical Perceptions. Participants described homosexuality to exist back in ancient times, but people were unaware or not informed enough about it. Although it existed, participants described that historically it was considered a sin and was treated as an unacceptable taboo. This was mainly due to it facing rejection in different religions and cultures. One participant (PKN, male) made a notable comment stating homosexuality was considered satanic.

"They call people faggots. Homosexuality was satanic, it was a satanic ritual, it was like, a way of disobeying God back in the 1800s, but now it has become a way of life, you know, just as I told."

One participant (KM, female) however claimed it to be accepted earlier but was later affected due to external influences.

"It was completely acceptable. I remember looking at this picture from these ancient texts, and I saw that you know, it was a picture of two statues portraying homosexual relationships. And I mean, from what I've heard and read, I'm not sure of the source it was very normal in Indian culture to accept homosexuality, it's just that when the British came in, we knew that the thought of this is something that is not acceptable, and that is not cultured enough. And so they started, you know, forcing people to just have heterosexual relationships."

Code 3: Current Perceptions. Participants opined, there is still a sense of complete social rejection at present. They identified the society is not ready to accept the homosexuals, and this is due to the stigma surrounding the topic which ushers more of discrimination. Some participants felt homosexuals are partially accepted in society. One such participant (RR, male) appreciated the role of social media for acting as a potential platform to voice against all the odds against homosexuality.

"Like, if you're a gay person in India, you get whiplash from the level of openness you can exhibit in an online platform versus in your real life. I think in that way, the internet has created a safe space, to a very large extent, for many people with queer identities to be themselves."

Theme 2: Self-Perceptions on Homosexuality

Code 1: Behaviour towards Unknown Homosexuals. Participants described that there was a moderate level of acceptance for unknown homosexuals. However, the majority of them opined that they would behave in a similar way as to how they would have behaved with the opposite gender. At the same time, the participants insisted that they would be supportive and help people around them who are homosexuals. They described incidents involving situations where people have "come out" to them to further substantiate their acceptance. Unsurprisingly, few participants also reported a feeling of shock while encountering a homosexual for the first time. Participant PKN (male) explained how it will be his first reaction on interacting with a gay.

"My reaction like, I'm not going to lie. It's going to be like. At first and I will be shocked. Okay, I will be shocked. I'm like, Dude, are you joking? No, if they are like, I'm serious. I will be like, I'm happy for those or I'll be more than happy to find you a partner."

Code 2: Behaviour towards Known Homosexuals. While a moderate favorable reaction was expected from the participants when asked about their behaviour with unknown homosexuals, interestingly they exhibited a kind of compassionate and supportive stance towards known homosexuals. They took an example from the family or a peer circle and poured empathy towards them. A very strange reaction was given by the participant TCK (female) on his supportive stance over a course of time if not sudden.

"I think over time, I think that would definitely take a lot of time and a lot of convincing. But yeah. Acceptance over time. As much as I seen a lot of anger towards it. That the action is, extremely, it's an extreme hate, I probably don't understand the place they come from with so much hate and so much resentment towards the whole community. But I think being like a mediator would help. Like, say, probably trying to get to be with some family to understand like, the closest people of the person we're talking about. Yeah, just getting them to understand in, in their own language, and in the way they probably want to be explained. Then trying to explain somebody's perspective, probably giving them examples. And yeah, just getting them to understand"

that somebody's comfort is happiness. Somebody's choice is their happiness. Yeah, trying to get them to understand but if they don't understand by I don't know how to go on from there. But yeah, definitely try and get them to understand."

Code 3: Bystander Reaction towards Oppression on Homosexuals. The reaction of participants shows they would take action when presented with any situation which might be hostile towards homosexuals. They presented examples to substantiate their claims, which involved both hypothetical and real-life scenarios which they might have experienced. A majority of them would voice-out if the witness any odds against homosexuals. A Participant SG (female) described how she would react while witnessing oppression and her bystander stance is narrated as below.

"If I have the right to talk to the person who was harassing them. I'd stop them and I'd say just let them be. See, there's no good you're doing anybody being harassed. Okay, there are so many people being harassed, or so many people going through bad things, you're not able to stop it. So why stop this small thing from which he or she is? Is, is happy with living like that Why harassment person because she's, she, he or she is happy with that kind of decision. So it's say just let it be, you're doing good? Or you're not contributing any good by stopping them or like be stopping them?"

The participants described they would also help homosexuals to cope up with the stressful situations and provide much needed emotional support in such scenarios. They provided examples where they helped/would help to console the person involved.

Code 4: Possible Ways Suggested to Overcome the Oppression. Participants described various ways and methods which could be implemented to provide a safer and hospitable environment for homosexuals. The suggested methods were mostly focussed on spreading awareness about homosexuality and educate the mass on it. The responses are more similar to the statement given by the participant IM (female).

"So yeah, first of all, like educate them will be say, the education and knowledge and all of that when someone is educated, they're more broad minded. That's the concept that we work with. So um, I see this recently in our UP, in UP there, like there's a celebration on May transgender celebrated that, okay, there's a whole university for us, there's one new college coming up for us, I feel that has to end, there should not come up with a college separately for them, that they should be wholeheartedly welcomed to every college. every college, every school and every institution are otherwise what happens is these people because they're not studying with such people, you're not interacting on a daily basis."

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The objective of the research was to investigate the attitude of individuals towards homosexuality and rationally analyze the factors which influence in condoning such attitudes. The data from the results bring us a plethora of meaningful insights into the creeds and beliefs of participants and depicts a coarse picture regarding the society's outlook towards the same.

It can be noticed that most of the participants developed concepts and ideas referring to homosexuality based on the facts presented to them. This included historical evidence such as religious compliance and understanding, scientific prospects and the information which is passed on to them generationally. We identify that there is a comprehensive dilution, which manifests as time progresses, and takes shape of the vessel that consisted of it. Therefore, we identify individuals being amazed what homosexuality is and their interpretations of the concept which are unreliable and interchangeably used with transgender. It was done in ancient times as well, where people who wouldn't fall under the normative binary views of gender were clubbed collectively as the third gender.

The present generation regards homosexuality as a natural process which is seen on par with heterosexuality. However, some participants still claimed that it was not a merely intuitive phenomenon, but it was something which could be exploited over time as well. Albeit its existence, it was not well received in multiple cultures, which was further consolidated into diverse cultures which were receptive towards homosexuality owing to cross-cultural influences. Therefore, it was objected to more ruthless and continuous environments. Apart from cultural influences, there was also a sense of social repudiation staged along with constant hostility towards homosexuals. This was mainly because of the presence of sundry stigmas accompanied by them, which has clouded their social image.

The earlier generations were adamant in their philosophies and opinions. Social conditioning was a key reason the rigor was insistent, as people were more concerned about their social identity. This social conditioning was seen throughout history. The social identity of people is found to be jolted by numerous religious and cultural ideologies and the social environment that the individual is subjected to. These

conservative ideologies promoted more homo-negative behaviour among the middle-aged and the greyer generation.

The homo-negative attitude voiced by society further exasperates the closeting of homosexual people, where social identity again plays a monumental role. Conforming to social identity theory, it is found there is an in-group and out-group bias which is formed when there is a negative prejudice towards one's social identity (Tajfel et al., 1979). Thus, on a social standard, people associate themselves with the social group that complements one's social identity. This explains how homo-negative behaviour brings to confinement. There was a high rate of acceptance seen among the participants and their peers, which can be substantiated to the present generation, which is due to cohort replacement between the conservational ideas of the past generations being replaced with more liberal ideas of the present. This acceptance can be seen in the form of the participants' responses when presented with various real-life and hypothetical scenarios. The act of helping the individual in distress and acting as support both during and after the stressful scenario shows that there are more openness and a greater intent to stand up for people. There is also the ideology of "live and let live" which reduces criticism of heterogeneous people to the individual and induces more acceptances. Although there was acceptance scene, there existed hesitancy and discomfort when it came to freely interact with homosexuals. Some of the participants brooded over the fact that if they interacted with homosexuals of the same gender, they might get sexually attracted to the individual, hence there were signs of alertness when in the vicinity of any homosexual.

The decriminalisation of Article 377, although seen as a move for inclusivity of people belonging to the LGBTQ+ community, has not been as effective as it was deemed to be. According to participants, there has been almost no change in the groups of people with conservative ideologies, as they are found to be ignorant of any changes concerning this. However, it has shed some light and encouraged more homosexuals to come out and provide a platform to be vocal about this topic. The participants also were vocal about this and provided valuable responses as to how to improve the present scenario. It was suggested that educating children right from the grassroots level as part of sex education could help break the negativity around the topic. Spreading awareness among the older generation is called for as it makes an effort to make the orthodox crowd empathise with the abused. Self-acceptance among homosexuals should be encouraged by providing adequate social support which would help them feel valid and reduce self-questioning. Further, Social support could be induced by not secluding them and treating them as human beings, rather than exoticise them.

Some of the participants also thought that bringing a change among the older generation was unattainable and the only scope of change would be through outliving the older generation. Although the participants provided ample ways to evoke change, similar gestures were barely noticed among them when presented with hypothetical and practical real-life scenarios involving homosexuals. Thus some participants are seen showing idealistic behaviour during the interview. It shows that albeit everything is practised in theory, it will take a profound amount of time and effort to see this implemented.

There are limitations to this study. As with most qualitative studies, the results of this study cannot be generalised across as a whole due to the sample size. Furthermore, the participants were exclusively young adults, educated and belonging to urban societies, so results might be unique to these specific demographical groups. Further studies should try to incorporate samples from different demographic backgrounds as it may yield different results.

The study presents a preliminary glimpse into the attitudes of people towards homosexuality. The findings of the study demonstrate that there nevertheless prevail homo-negative philosophies which are extensively present among the older generations. There are again ensuring trends of positive attitudes among the younger generation who evinced signs of acceptance. It was noticed that ideologies are formed early in an individual's life, hence it was proposed spreading awareness and educating the next generation would be a powerful approach to cut down homo-negativity. Social support and identification were also found as methods to persuade gender equality among society. To conclude, this study firmly voices against the despotism planted upon the gender minority and flares the constructive attitudes the younger generation has on homosexuals. Furthermore, this study enthusiastically embraces the admittance of 'gender equality' under SDG and believes that sustainability cannot be attained devoid of considering all the cornered communities of the society.

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