

Myths and Realities of Lesbianism

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Abstract

Indian society refuses to accept and acknowledge anything other than heterosexual man-women relationship. So lesbian invisibility today has become a deep seated feature of society and has had a deterring effect on lesbian community. Discrimination huts lesbians both economically and socially but it has even greater and a dangerous impact on them, because they are harassed, coerced and condemned in several fields and their rights are infringed. The topic highlights how social stigma attached of being a lesbian leads to suppress their sexual and emotional preferences and making them subservient to family wishes and societal norms.

Key Words: Lesbian, Gay, Sexual orientation, Heterosexual, patriarchal, Gynocentric and Hypothalamus

Introduction:

Among the wonders of Omnipotent Creator woman stand apart for her charm at attraction, but this apparent boon has become a curse for her being a Lesbian. Lesbianism is a concept used to differentiate women with a shared sexual orientation and basically it is a twentieth century phenomenon. A large number of studies that delve into ancient Hindu Scriptures to look for acceptability or at least instances of Lesbian behavior often came up with priceless observation but things haven't changed much for same-sex relation for women. Throughout history women have not had freedom to pursue homosexual relationship like Gays. The term Lesbian itself does not seem to exist in ancient India. Even though, it is western in origin, but still it existed and even flourished in ancient India. In the beginning of the first millennium Indian society was more or less patriarchal and the acceptance of female sexuality also diminished steadily till tenth century due to Islamic Invasions.

There are many evidences for this and even punishments charted out. The Kamasutra, Manusmriti the oldest text of Indian philosophy Vedas are very clear on acceptance of Lesbianism. Even the Khajuraho sculpture depicts erotic Lesbian depiction. It is no secret that the Vedic culture in most ancient form was gynocentric placing female power on high pedestal worshipping and consecrating the female form as another culture but even then accepting their sexuality was not done, Indian Lesbian are accepting their sexuality and a nascent Lesbian movement has sprouted in Indian subcontinent during the last decade and its awareness is spreading thick and fast. Indian society today could be regarded as one of the diverse societies on earth created by centuries of internal faultiness along the Lines of class, religion, gender, thus created divisions and affected Lesbian women adversely. The confluence of this division with highly patriarchal form of state and social order results in the creation of complex webs of dependencies and

oppression within which women are caught bound and selected.

Origin of the term Lesbian and what does it mean:

Literally the word Lesbian is a term widely used in English language to describe sexual and romantic desires between females. The word Lesbian is derived from the name of the Greek Island Lesbos. In 1890 the term was used in medical dictionary as an adjective to describe tribalism (as Lesbian love) or sexual gratification of two women by stimulating intercourse.

It is an erotic attraction between two women, or in a simplified version it is homosexuality of a woman. It is a trait which is like one's liking for a particular food item. Since it is foreign to Indian culture it is regarded filthy and flawed. A female person is called a Lesbian when she expresses her sexual and romantic desires towards another female by the law of nature. Many say it is a non procreative sexual behaviour.

All living creatures are born with inborn instinct to mate with opposite sex but Lesbians are exceptions to this law of nature and generate no feelings of romance towards opposite sex; and show sexual feelings for same sex being. So a woman who is attracted to another woman is called Lesbian and it is such a type of behavior which is possible in a sexist society characterized by rigid sex roles. Lesbians in India are conspicuous by their lack of visibility in the main stream society and their networking has taken shape on peripheries of society's consciousness.

Causes and Models of Lesbianism:

Lesbianism is caused by both physical and mental reasons, many a times a person

develops Lesbian traits at the early childhood. But today it is considered a mental disorder. It is proved that Lesbianism is more a mental orientation than a physical orientation. Gender expression is a stumbling block, an accident, an aberration or a deviation. The major factors responsible for this are biological factors, genetic factors and environmental factors. Other factors being differential hormonal balance, in their brain and there is a sexual dimorphism in the pre-optic area of hypothalamus, greater steroid exposure. So it is a structural problem born out of inherent gender inequalities within the global system purely based on genetic predisposition, individual choice of life style. So basing on this there are two models for lesbianism.

Lesbianism - Model – 1:

If a girl experiences the company of another girl more than with a boy she may primarily become a Lesbian.

Lesbianism - Model – 2:

If a girl for whatever reasons happen to hate boys she may become a Lesbian. In fact Lesbianism can be derived from uncommon attachment to a girl or from hatred to boys. The physical measures include sexual disabilities of different kind. They never enjoy their life to the fullest rather live a life of anonymity and isolation because society frowns at alternate sexuality. India is a male dominated country deeply conservative about sexual matters and lesbians face a life of double discrimination.

1. First because of their gender
2. Second for their sexuality

Social issues related to Lesbianism:

Unfortunately the current era of Indian

History is not one of tolerance for homosexuality especially Indian Lesbians. Lesbianism is a much debated topic now-a-days. Orthodox minded people and religions get furious on the thought of Lesbians as they believe it is an attempt to rewrite all the conventional attitudes of people regarding sexual life. Lesbians in India could still be described as little more than shadows largely silenced and marginalized and are not considered to be legitimate part of mainstream society.

Lesbian couple feel socially neglected and looked down upon. Society always takes its own time to change the deep rooted mentalities. Their number today is increasing people have all the freedom to identify their sexual orientation and select their life style independently.

The bulging issues associated with Lesbianism in the increasing number of fatherless babies. Lesbian if they prefer to have babies has either to adopt or to approach a sperm donor to mother a baby. Since Lesbian Union is based on sexual aspect only a baby who grows between Lesbian parents has all the possibilities of lagging behind other kind of mental growth and maturity unlike heterosexual marriages which accomplish social needs.

In a patriarchal society like India Lesbian sexual practices and activities involving women having sex with women is looked down by society. Today Lesbian is a rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion it is a category of behavior possible only in a society socially characterized by rigid sex roles and dominated by male supremacy.

Interestingly a man in Manu's opinion indulging in homosexuality has to bear the punishment of bathing with all his cloths

on while a woman if found guilty of same act has a much higher price to pay. If it is between two virgins the seducer virgin has to pay monetary fine as well as bride price for the girl she seduced and receive a lashing. A mature woman caught seducing a virgin shall have her head shaved finger cut off and is made to ride through the down on a donkey.

The movie Fire directed by Deepa Mehta was released in 1996 where the explicit portrayal of a Lesbian relationship between two protagonist caused outrage among public and everyone protested against and said Lesbianism is alien to Indian Culture. Even Shiv Sena Mahila Aghadi Kashi Sanskriti Raksha Sangharsh Samiti barged into Cinemax theatre in Mumbai during the show and smashed glass burnt posters and shouted slogans.

India is one of the worst countries in the world in terms of compulsory heterosexuality, the whole social culture is so much embedded in getting married, begetting children, and if one rejects this there is a whole policy of insidious exclusion. To quote:

In Chhindwada a conservative town of Madhya Pradesh two young girls Jyoti and Sabita assessed their rights to live as Lesbian couple after five years into a relationship. A fortnight before leaving home, Jyoti was told by her parent that they had arranged her marriage to a boy from Jhansi when she protested and told that she wanted to live with Savita for the rest of her life. She was locked in a room for days. In 1998 there was a flare-up against Lesbianism in India and explosion of obscenity degeneration of womanhood and an attack on Bharatiya Sanskriti.

Discrimination, Taboos and Stigmas:

Discrimination hurts many women economically and socially but it has even greater and sometimes dangerous impact on Lesbians. Most Lesbians discussed their experiences at “Economic Justice for Lesbian women” setting an agenda on 12th International Forum of the Association for women’s Rights in Development (AWID) – In a world where women earn less than men Lesbians may face greater difficulty even landing a job if their appearance is perceived as masculine.

The discriminations the Lesbians face and the human rights violation they experience is sky high. They are harassed, coerced, and condemned in fields of marriage, adoption, profession, education, inheritance right to equality, and personal liberty. Acts like Insurance Act – 1938 Employment Provident Fund Act, 1952 Payment of Gratuity Act - 1972, Workmen Compensation Act 1923 Employment State Insurance Public Liability Insurance Act, Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act 1956, Hindu Succession Act 1956, Hindu Marriage Act 1955 recognize blood relationship and marital relationship and do not favour Lesbians. In contemporary India there are many surprising facts that owe their surprise to the effect of various agencies and families brushing these discriminations under the Carpet. Lesbians have fewer opportunities for public action freedom of movement and freedom of expression of opinion. They have been always targeted and experience abuses in private and family life, Even they are beaten, raped, forcibly impregnated or married or otherwise attacked by family members and fired from jobs for their

sexual orientation. Discriminations on the basis of sexual orientation may increase vulnerability to depression, anxiety and abuse in adolescents and adults exacerbates violence, hampers access to health services due to stigma and increases the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections HIV. But after Supreme Court’s verdict in *Suresh Kumar Kaushal and another Vrs Naz Foundation and others Cr. J.L. (S.C) 2014 784* – activists have long argued that this would leave lesbians more vulnerable to discrimination and police harassment.

Conclusion:

In conclusion Crusaders of Indian Lesbian movement say that Lesbians are bracing themselves for a long uphill battle. Indian society today refuses to acknowledge anything other than heterosexual man-woman relationship. Today it is human tendency to highlight exceptions rather rules and that it is the reason why today God’s diversity in creation instead of being glorified is shunned, feared and despised. Hostile environment against Lesbians is a crude form of displaying heterosexual suppression over Lesbians. Since it is neither a mental illness nor is it any sort of mental depravity rather it is just the way a few of them who wish to express their love sexually. So the taboos and stigmas for Lesbianism as a deviant behavior and abnormal trait should die down. Now it is up to Indian society to accept this trait in an effort to become more open, tolerant and inclusive, certainly it will take time and what is required most for them is a positive outlook.

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