



My Brother Won't Speak Up

Shivani Kumari

What does it stand for an Indian society? I personally do not think it over so much, but people do. The fundamental foundation of a society is an individual. Since school times, we have learned “you and I create a society,” especially during social science lectures. This assumption is not entirely true because I have heard people saying to me, “You do not fit into this society”; “you will end up being alone.” Therefore, I as an individual, see myself standing alone who observes people building this society. They are the people who have accused me of not silently mingling with the social conventions. Society turns out to be the result of their effort, which starts at the base of the concept of family.

The image of a family reflects a father and a mother who together reproduce children. I too, grew up in that family and was raised by two parents of the opposite sex. Society is comprised of multiple families with innumerable couples always a man and a woman marrying together. Who does think about people of same-sex making a couple in this society? Under section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), homosexuality was criminalized. However, in September 2018 it was declared legal, but my society always thinks that same-sex marriages happen on cursed land.

I grew up watching movies like *Dostana* starring Abhishek Bachchan and John Abraham. It was on my TV screen in 2009 where two male actors were faking as a gay couple. My family and I laughed a lot, seeing how a stereotyped image of gay walks and flirts with other guys. It was a comedy but not for all of us. No one noticed my brother, who was trying his best to keep himself with us in this laughter uncomfortably.

My immaturity arrived at its edge when I came for my higher education at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, the capital of India. In the corner of this city, JNU had its world and of course, it had several things to teach me. Public debates and discussions were the heart of its learning process. I too slid into the progressive thoughts. Everyone was found guilty of homophobia and now had to prove how one was not.

I was scared because I had laughed at movies dealing with LGBTQ. That day when I laughed watching *Dostana* still haunted me. I was compelled to initiate the discussion over LGBTQ again and again. My friends gave references to movies like *Margarita with a Straw* and *My Brother Nikhil* during such conversations. These new names turned my curiosity on. I watched both the very day on one of the computers in the library and wondered how many of us would have watched these movies, which had tried hard to represent gays and bisexuals as one of us with desires to explore and to live a life. The exact moment I unlearned the learned.

Always looking for events to attend on LGBTQ, I read once a leaflet about a talk on them organized by Dhanak, a queer group of JNU. The talk was on section 377 of the IPC. The year was 2013 when each and every word of the section was inscribed on people's

tongues. I went to the Godavari Dhaba, the venue. At first, I was stunned by what I saw. The organizers and participants were not only the activists but they were stylish too. I noticed a guy in a burgundy-colored skirt and a black *kurta*. He had long hair left open and free reaching his shoulder. A dark-colored *bindi* between his thick eyebrows was making him visible in the crowd. My eyes were not getting tired of trying to have his glimpses. He was the most beautiful guy I ever see.

Next to him, there was another guy. He was really handsome. Generally, we think “he must be the crush of several girls,” but that night I could see, he was the crush of several guys. This feeling enlightened me and now I was freed from the self-accusation of being homophobic.

I started figuring my brother happily with his friend. They were friends since their childhood. They first met when they joined a government school together in 7th standard in 2002. Since then, they were inseparable. Their childhood love brought them more together in bachelors which they completed from the same university of Banaras, Banaras Hindu University and later ended up moving together in the same city for jobs.

My family felt extreme happiness whenever my brother visited us for several days. But the feeling of separation penetrated him. I had heard those loving conversations between them on the terrace over their calls. The love was revealing itself as his friend used to post about him on Facebook, as they used to travel in south India, as they used to take care of each other in illness. It was not a secret love story. My sisters knew that well.

Last time when I was with my sister in her kitchen, our gossip started from my lovers to hers. Then we came to the brother. “We should talk to him”, I said. “If he is not telling then it must be his choice”, she said. I added, “His silence is the imposition not his choice”. She replied, “We cannot ask him to speak”. I added nothing.

Then I met my brother. I was scared to confront him. So, I always tried to put myself as the subject of our conversations. We were just

talking about marriages. I told him, “I might not get married. It seems an obligation”. In irritation, he said, “you will have many troubles later. It would be appreciated if you settle yourself at a certain age.” The discussion ended.

One day I was so angry how can people with dubious characters expect from others. I discussed that too with my brother. He told me in a warning tone “that’s the rule of society. You have to talk to everyone. You cannot deny talking to someone because that person sounds hypocrite to you”. I said, “Whatever!” in frustration and added, “I am never going to impress someone and fuel his or her jealousy and ego by demeaning myself”. An outburst of anger warned me, “You will end up being alone.” After an uncomfortable pause he said life is about compromises.

I consoled myself saying, “My brother won’t speak up”. It has been 3 years and he still pretends to be a straight and heterosexual. For him, gays and lesbians exist like clowns only on the screens.

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