

LGBT RIGHTS IN BHUTAN- A CRITICAL STUDY

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Abstract

Around the worlds, LGBT rights are a matter of discussion and some of the rights have been arranged for the community. But, the rural areas in Bhutan, hardly any discussion of LGBT issues is noted. Although, the community found speaking up for their rights with the help of media and social media. The provisions of section 213 and 214 of the Bhutanese Penal Code which criminalized “unnatural sex” or “homosexuality” omitted on 10th of December 2020, by the joint sitting of both houses of Bhutan’s parliament after prolonged intensive campaigns by activists, advocates and by the individuals belonging to the LGBT community themselves. Despite the amendments, homosexuality still considered a taboo subject in conservative religious Bhutanese society, this has made the lives of the members of LGBT community hard and unworthy of living. There is hardly any discussion of LGBT issues in the rural areas in Bhutan as they think that sexual orientations of that kind is against the order of nature. This paper for displaying a true picture about the lives and rights of the members of LGBT community prior to and after decriminalizing homosexuality and suggest suitable changes in the existing system to ensure rights to the community in Bhutan with the help of doctrinal and non-doctrinal methodology.

Keywords: LGBT rights, social media, Bhutanese Penal Code.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Day 10 December 2020, recorded as historic moment in the history of Bhutan for removing section 213 and 214 of the Penal Code of Bhutan. Section 213 stated that a “defendant shall be guilty of the offence of unnatural sex, if the defendant engages in sodomy or any other sexual conduct that is against the order of nature” (Penal Code of Bhutan, 2004). While section 214 stated that, “offence of unnatural sex shall be a petty misdemeanour”(Penal Code of Bhutan, 2004). Bhutan Penal Code (Amendment) Act 2021 decriminalised same-sex relationship. With this Bhutan became the most recent country to decriminalise homosexuality, joining the rest of the countries that supports the rainbow community.

However, still not change have been recorded about the LGBT situation, their rights have not been reorganised and not accepted in Bhutan even after removal of section 213 and 214 from Penal Code of Bhutan. Despite the fact that there are too many people supporting and empathising with them and their situation, including social media influencers, activists, politicians and lay people, the members of the Bhutanese LGBT community continue to face societal judgments and discriminations(LGBT Community Still Faces Stigma, Stereotypes, n.d.).According to the records of the LGBT community there 218 registered LGBT, among them only 53 of them are publicly open about their sexual orientation. While some of them have opened up to their closed ones, while the rest of them have never talked about their gender identity to anyone(n.d.). Though the

educated population of the country is open and accepting towards the members of the LGBT community, the rest of the population of the country misunderstands the sexual orientation of these people and perceives the idea of LGBT totally against the order of nature and considers it as a sin.

In 2013, some of the member from LGBT community came forward to open their sexual orientation. Karma Dupchen, Dechen Seldon and Pema Dorji come forward for brighter future of all the members of Bhutanese LGBT community (ABOUT US | Pride Bhutan, n.d.).

Most of the member of the community found difficult to disclose their identity due to societal judgments, reputation of their family, fear of being mocked and bullied by people. For example, Pema Dorji shared about an incident where he was severely bullied and abused which caused him to suffer a nervous breakdown (ABOUT US | Pride Bhutan, n.d.). This paper for displaying a true picture about the lives and rights of the members of LGBT community prior to and after decriminalizing homosexuality and suggest suitable changes in the existing system to ensure rights to the community in Bhutan.

METHODOLOGY:

The nature of this research is a type of quantitative research, the reason behind this research is the grave shortage of literature and research work done on the LGBT community and their rights in Bhutan. Since the topic of LGBT and their rights in Bhutan is sensitive and less talked about, it was a difficult task to find enough number of participants who were willing to carry out the survey. The sampling in this survey was done using snowball sampling method. The respondent of this survey consists of a small group of transgender man and transgender woman, gays, lesbians and bisexuals. There are 25 respondents in total who are of different age groups. Some of them are school, college or university students, some work in government sectors while some are unemployed.

A set of structured questionnaires was prepared for the respondents. The purpose of the

research survey was well explained to the respondents before they took the survey. The identities of the respondents were kept confidential since the topic of the study was sensitive and also to make the respondents feel comfortable sharing their answers and ideas.

2. SECTION 213 AND 214, THE PENAL CODE OF BHUTAN:

Lyonpo Namgyal Tshering, the then Finance Minister suggested for removal of section 213 of the Penal Code that laid down provisions for unnatural sex. In the original draft the provision was not there. (National Assembly Takes a Big Step towards Decriminalizing Homosexuality, n.d.). Even though, this suggestion was considered as a random comment at first, the committee took this suggestion seriously and added this suggestion when the Bill was sent to the Legislative Committee. Prior to that, the Bill only included the amending of 8 provisions of the Penal Code and adding 2 new sections to the Penal Code.

Legislative Committee member supported suggestion. Thereafter, committee members asked the finance minister to put his suggestion of doing away with the two sections into writing so that the committee members could take an action on it and put it up as an amendment to the National Assembly that was supposed to take place on 11th of June 2019. The request of the legislative committee members was made official after the finance minister agreed to give his suggestion in writing which in turn enabled the committee to propose it as an amendment. While in conversation with the national media outlet the minister said that the primary reason behind his suggestion to remove the sections was because these sections were there in the Penal Code since 2004 but it has been enforced in the past 18 years and has become invalid and inapplicable. He said “that it has also become an eyesore for international human rights bodies” He also pointed out the fact that “Bhutan is reputed as one of the happiest Country in the world and also as one of the Country that teaches values like compassion

and tolerance and having such stringent laws against the members of LGBT community doesn't do any justice to the country's reputation.". He has also made reference to the international developments and stated that LGBT rights are a major international movement. He pointed out that India gained widespread recognition when the Supreme Court of India decriminalized homosexuality; he states that the countries are often judged on the basis of how they treat peoples belonging to LGBT communities.

Once the amendment bill was passed to the National Council, the Legislative Committee of the National Council was divided. Half of the members supported the removal of the two sections while the other half of the Legislative Committee was of the view that there is a need for more deliberations to decide if it can be kept as it is or to if it needs specific details and definition of unnatural sex in its provision(NC Legislative Committee to Better Define Section 213 to Avoid Criminalization of LGBTIQ Community, n.d.). The deliberation was filled with a lot of debates on the term "unnatural sex" and with efforts to find out the actual definition of the term "unnatural sex". Dorji Khandu, member of parliament, Gasa, was one of the members that supported the move and said that the provisions laid in section 213 and 214 was discriminatory and that it did not guarantee any legal protection for those who engage in same sex relationships. He also stated that Lesbians, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender deserves freedom and right of marriage of their choice. Likewise, Phuntsho Rabten a member of National Council said that Bhutan should keep up with the international trends, as many nations across the world was doing away with provisions that criminalised same sex relationships.

On the other hand, some members of parliament felt that repealing these sections would also mean that all sorts of unnatural sexual activities will be legalised. Unnatural sexual activities here meant sex with animals and with dead bodies. They felt that there is a need of a proper definition for the term unnatural sex as repealing the sections directly would cause problems in the future. To settle

this confusion the members of the National Council came up with three solutions which are: to either do away with the sections as suggested, or keep it as it is in the Penal Code or to repeal the sections but also define the term unnatural sex. Where by the members of the National Council decided to go by for the third option. On 10th of February 2020, the Council approved of the amendments with 19 votes in support and 6 abstentions and sent it back to the National Assembly which on 27th February 2019 adopted it by a vote of 34-1 with 7 abstentions, but they refused 32 of the 56 amendments proposed by the National Assembly. The legislation was then sent for a joint committee review and voted by the joint sitting of both the houses of parliament. The bill was passed with 63 votes in favour of the move with 6 abstentions in joint sitting, thereby decriminalizing homosexuality or unnatural sex. The bill turned into a law following the Royal assent by king Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck, and it came into force on 17th of February 2021 (LGBT Rights in Bhutan, 2022).

3. LGBT COMMUNITY IN BHUTAN:

3.1. Pre-Decriminalizing Same sex relationships

As per the statistics shared by Pride Bhutan there are 218 registered members who identify themselves as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transmen and Transwomen. The LGBT community Bhutan has members from all age groups, the highest number of LGBT members falls in the age group of 20 to 30 years (ABOUT US | Pride Bhutan, n.d.).

The members of LGBT community have been subject to harassment of all kinds either at work place or others although it is not as severe as the harassments that takes place abroad. The members of the LGBT community in Bhutan have long been fighting for their rights, they have actively taken part in the movement to repeal section 213 of the Penal Code of Bhutan along with all the other human rights activist, advocates and supporters. Despite these efforts on the part of the LGBT members, they said

that they knew the fact that removing these two sections and their provisions would not protect them from the discrimination and stigma they face in their day to day lives. The members of LGBT stated that it is only through advocacy and awareness programs that people will become more accepting of them and their sexuality orientation orientations (LGBT Community Still Faces Stigma, Stereotypes, n.d.).

There are a lot of incidences that the members of LGBT recalls when asked about the discrimination and harassment they have faced. Incidences when the members of LGBT community were harassed by the officials at hospital when they went to seek health services where they questioned their gender and sexual orientation. There also incidences where two members of the LGBT community were sexually abused but they couldn't report this incident to the police and the concerned authorities and the reason behind this is even more daunting, the perpetrators scared them that they will charge them sue them under section 213 and 214 of the Penal Code of Bhutan which criminalised same sex relationships. Thirty-one-year-old Pema Dorji who identifies as gay man said that when he was in school, he was a victim of verbal abuse and was called demeaning names by his mates. Gyeltshen, another gay man said that his friends labelled him as a boy with both the female and the male biological reproductive organs. He said that he had to isolate himself as an effort to protect himself from being harassed, teased and abused (National Assembly Takes a Big Step towards Decriminalizing Homosexuality, n.d.).

The members of the LGBT community said that a foreigner conducted a survey to study the impacts of section 213 and 214 on the members and it turned out that 69% of the members were negatively impacted by these two sections. Tenzin Gyeltshen one of the joint directors of Rainbow Bhutan stated that although no one has been penalized for homosexuality under section 213 of the Code till date it still caused fear in the minds of the members of LGBT. He said that if this section was eradicated from the Penal Code the members will feel at ease with

no laws criminalising their sexual orientation and preferences. The members of the LGBT community also stated that removing these provisions from the Penal Code would not only empower them to come out openly without fear but also help them avail services for their mental and sexual health without any hesitations (Amid Widespread Stigma and Harassment, Bhutan's LGBT Community Seeks Acceptance, n.d.).

Apart from the harassment, stigma and ostracization that the member of the LGBT community faces, there are a lot more risks associated with LGBT member that makes them vulnerable. Due to the traumas caused by innumerable incidences the members of LGBT community suffer from mental health problems. According to Integrated Biological and Behavioural Surveillance survey (IBBS) from among the key populations that are vulnerable and at higher risks in the country, 2016, more than 23% percent of gay and bisexual men and more than 42% of transgender women have attempted to commit suicide multiple times which has caused them their health and their self-esteem. The study also showed that about 24% of the members of LGBT community resorted to use drugs and majority of the LGBT community members resorted to drinking alcohol to cope with their emotions and the pressure. The study also found out that gay, bisexual men and transgender women are the victims of severe physical and sexual violence (Review of Integrated Biological and Behavioural Surveillance, 2016).

3.2. Post Decriminalizing Same sex relationships

The National Assembly of Bhutan recognised the rights of the members of LGBT community in Bhutan and decriminalised unnatural sex by reading down section 213 and 214 of the Penal Code of Bhutan without the members of the LGBT community having to demand and fight for their rights (National Assembly Takes a Big Step towards Decriminalizing Homosexuality, n.d.). In an interview with Bhutan Echoes joined by the representatives of Pride Bhutan, Tenzin Gyeltshen and representatives of

QUEER voices of Bhutan, they mentioned that the decriminalisation of homosexuality and unnatural sex by the parliament of Bhutan was a historic moment and a landmark decision that assured inclusivity in the Bhutanese community. The members of the LGBT community stated that decriminalising homosexuality for them was like they were introduced to a room full of opportunities and possibilities(Newspaper, n.d.).

According to the Executive Director of Pride Bhutan Tenzin Gyeltshen, the situation on LGBT was completely different from when it was introduced for the first time in the country. It was very hard for the individuals who identified themselves as one of the LGBT to come out and talk about their sexuality openly because if they did so they were for sure going to be subject to people's prejudices, harassment and abuse. Members of the LGBT community were hesitant to even avail services like counselling services and health services because of the stigmatisation. However, after the parliament of Bhutan decriminalised homosexuality individuals belonging to the LGBT community has started to open up more about their gender and their sexual orientation(A Quiet LGBTIQ Revolution in Bhutan and the International Situation, n.d.).

Ever since the decriminalization of homosexuality there has been a lot of awareness and advocacy programs organized to make the heterosexual members of the community more aware about the difference between sex and gender and also to teach them about different kind of genders that exists like gay, bisexual, transgender men, transgender women, lesbians and their sexual orientation. Subjects of LGBT and its members are also being taught to the children in school so that they are aware and accepting of their LGBT friends. Decriminalising homosexuality has helped the members of the LGBT community in various ways, it has helped them open up about their sexual orientation without the fear of judgment, it has made it easier for them to avail health services and mental health services. And what is considered most important than all of the other benefits it has also made parents

approve of and accept their child's sexual orientation and their same sex relationships.

According to the members of the LGBT community since the decriminalisation of homosexuality there has been an increase in the number of individuals who identifies themselves as LGBT, there has also been an increase in the number of individuals of LGBT community coming out publicly and speaking about their sexual orientation. Majority of the general public has been very supportive of the members of the LGBT community. Not only has the individuals belonging to LGBT community coming out publicly but they have also been actively advocating people about themselves and their gender identity online. Having the members of the LGBT community themselves sharing such information's about them has helped educate people about different types of gender identities(Amid Widespread Stigma and Harassment, Bhutan's LGBT Community Seeks Acceptance, n.d.).

4. LGBT RIGHTS vs RELIGIOUS BELIEFS:

In Buddhism, according to the early Buddhist scriptures there are no texts that states same sex relationships or opposite sex relationships have anything to do with sexual misconduct. According to the Theravada (Buddhism's oldest existing school)same sex relationships does not violate Buddhist beliefs. According to it having sex with a minor, involving in adulterous relationships and having sex with a person who have vowed to religious celibacy are considered as sexual misconduct. Throughout the history many Buddhist leaders have supported and continues to support people of LGBT community. According to the renowned Vietnamese Buddhist master Thich Nhat Hanh, the spirit of Buddhism is its inclusivity, he stated that "when you look at the ocean, you see different kinds of waves, many sizes and shapes, but all the waves have water as their foundation and substance. If you are born gay or lesbian, your ground of being in the same as mine. We are different, but we share the same ground of being". Similarly, His

Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama also supports the human rights of all people regardless their sexual orientation (Religion and LGBT People, 2022).

In Bhutan, religion and the religious beliefs of the people has played a huge role in the lives of the members of the LGBT community. From time immemorial the Bhutanese people has believed and still continue to believe that same sex relationships are against the order of nature and that the idea of man having sex with man and woman having sex with woman is against God and his religion. Despite the fact that these beliefs are baseless and has no grounds to prove its claims, it has had immense negative impacts on the lives of the members of LGBT community. It has caused the LGBT members to be subject to the judgment and prejudices of people. Also, these religious beliefs that having same sex relationships are against the Buddhist beliefs has contributed greatly to the stigma that surrounds the topic of LGBT in Bhutan. There are incidences where the members of LGBT community are told that their sexual orientation is against buddha dharma, they are made to feel guilty for being who they truly are and that makes them feel like they are committing a sin when all they are trying to do is to be true to themselves by embracing their sexual orientation.

According to Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche, Bhutanese lama, filmmaker and writer the Buddhist attitudes towards LGBT is a reflection of culture and not actual Buddhist teachings. His Holiness said in an interview with the writer of The Bhutanese that as a Bhutanese citizen he takes pride in Bhutan for taking great step of decriminalising homosexuality. He also stated that Buddhism doesn't allow sexual misconduct of any nature, and that there are no teachings of Buddha that has ruled out sex as dirty and sinful. In the interview he also states that sexual orientations of the LGBT members should never have been a concern for Buddhists in the first place. He states that instead Bhutanese should respect and oppose any type of prejudices and cherish differences in lifestyles and thinking and look for unity in diversity(The Buddhist View on LGBTQ and Smoking, n.d.).

5. MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT LGBT COMMUNITY:

There are a lot of misunderstandings surrounding the topic of LGBT in Bhutan; these misunderstandings have worsened the already existing social stigma about the LGBT community. The misunderstandings are so much so that it has forced the members of the LGBT community to isolate themselves and not speak up about their sexual orientations.

The first misunderstanding that the people have about LGBT members is that they view the members of LGBT community as being sexually more active than the cisgender people and they believe that it's okay to call LGBT members demeaning and disheartening names. The second misconception that people have about members of LGBT community is that people think that transgenderism, bisexuality and homosexuality are influences of modern western culture. People are also of the view that a person decides to become LGBT member as a way to seek attention and that individuals claiming to be LGBT members are mentally sick and abnormal. The cisgender population of the community is also of the view that gender identity and sexual orientation is a choice and that it can be changed as per the preferences of an individual which is not true. People tend to think that when people identify themselves as LGBTs it is just a phase and they think that he or she can outgrow that phase. According to Pema Dorji, who identifies himself as a transgender woman state that the most disheartening misconception that people have about LGBT members like herself is that people think that they bring bad luck(Misconceptions Plague LGBT Community, n.d.).

Such misunderstandings negatively impact the members of LGBT community and forces them to stay in a closet and compels them to shy away from opening up about themselves to others and also makes them hesitant to seek and avail help and services provided by the government. These problems and social stigmas have also caused members of LGBT community to leave school, resort to taking drugs to cope with the traumas and pressures

and also in unfortunate situations compels them to commit suicide. The members of the LGBT community urge each and every one to accept them as they are, and states that being an LGBT member is not a choice and neither is it a disease which can spread (A Quiet LGBTIQ Revolution in Bhutan and the International Situation, n.d.).

6. FINDINGS:

In order to study the lives and the rights of the members of the LGBT community in Bhutan an online survey was conducted. The target population for this survey were the members of the LGBT community of Bhutan. According to the convenience of the respondents and the researcher the survey questionnaires were sent to one of the representatives of the LGBT community and with the representatives help it was then floated in a social media group chats of LGBT community of Bhutan. And as requested by the members of LGBT community no identifying information's about the survey respondents, like their names and email addresses are mentioned in the survey.

Age Group:

Among the 25 members of LGBT community that took the Survey the youngest was aged 19 and the oldest was aged 33.

As per the survey report over 62% of the active members of LGBT community falls under the ages of 20 to 30. This figure suggests that there are increasing number of youths identifying themselves as a member of the LGBT community in Bhutan.

The graph given below shows the ages of the respondents.

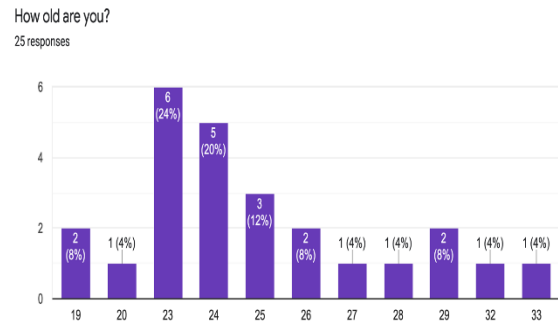


figure no.1

Sex Assigned at Birth and What They Consider Themselves to Be:

According to the pie chart shown below, out of the 25 respondents that took the survey 72% that is 18 out of 25 were 'Male' as per the sex assigned to them at birth and the rest 28% that is 7 out of 25 were 'Female' as per the sex assigned to them at birth.

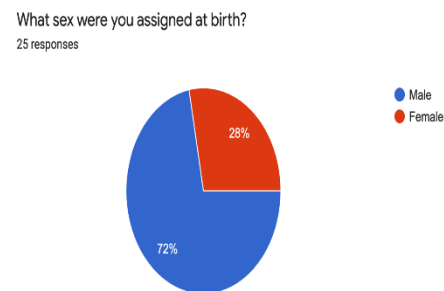


figure no.2

However, as per the pie chart shown below out of 18 'male' respondents and 7 'female' respondents, 36% that is 9 of them identified themselves as Bisexuals, another 36% of them identified themselves as Gay, 16% that is 4 of them identified themselves as Transgenders, and rest 12% of the total respondents identified themselves as Lesbians.

What do you consider yourself to be?
25 responses

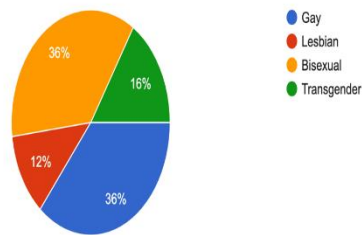


figure no.3

Have they talked about their sexuality to others and if so at what age

Out of all the respondents that took the survey only 8% that is 2 of them have never opened up about their sexuality to others, on the other hand majority of them have opened up about their sexual orientation to others which is a positive indicator.

Have you opened up to anyone regarding your sexual orientation?
25 responses

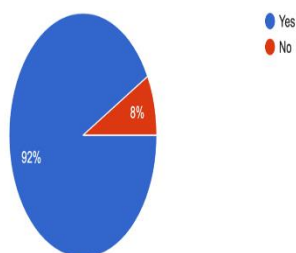


figure no.4

According to the following Pie chart maximum number of the respondents opened up and shared about their sexual orientation to others between the ages of 18 to 24 which amounts to 62.5% of respondents followed by 29.3% who opened up to others before they turned 18 and the 8.3% of the respondents didn't open up about their sexuality until they were grown adults.

If yes, how old were you when you opened up about your sexuality?
24 responses

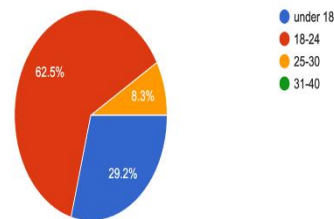


figure no.5

The persons they first opened up to and if they are open about their sexuality publicly

According to the pie chart shown below the survey has found out that the members of the LGBT community feel the most comfortable to share about their sexuality and gender identity to their close friends, 68% of the respondents answered that they first opened up about their sexuality to their close friends, followed by 12% of the respondents that share it to their parents, another 12% of the respondents answered that they first talked about their sexuality to their teachers or counsellors then followed by 8% who shared it with their relatives.

Who did you first open up to?
25 responses

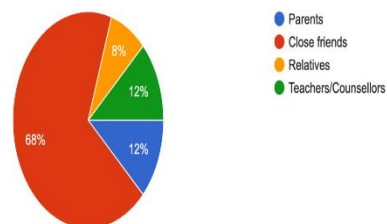


figure no.6

The survey also found out that out of 25 respondents who did the survey, 20 of them are open about their homosexuality publicly while rest of the 5 respondents are yet to come out of their closet. To know that more than half of the total number of respondents are open about their homosexuality is an important outcome of the survey as now we know that our LGBT friends are now opening up and talking about their issues and fighting for their rights.

Severity of discrimination faced by LGBT members

As per the findings of the survey 80% of the members of the LGBT community has faced discrimination because of their sexuality and gender identity. And according to the pie chart shown below 52% of the respondents stated that the discrimination they faced were very severe and 40% of them answered that the discrimination they face were moderately severe.

How severe is the discrimination faced by LGBT members?
25 responses

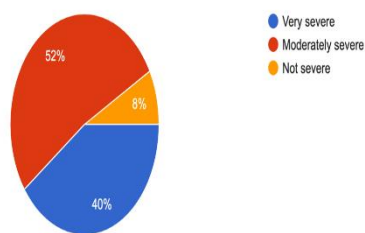


figure no.7

Social stigma, religion and taboo

Do you think LGBT issues are still a taboo subject in Bhutan?
25 responses

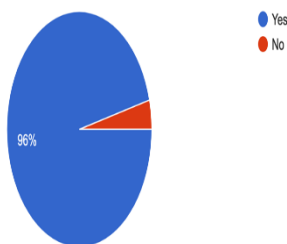


figure no.8

Do you think that the stigma surrounding the topic of LGBT is because of the religious beliefs?
25 responses

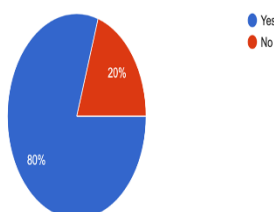


figure no.9

The aforementioned pie charts states that 96% of the LGBT members thinks that LGBT issues are still a taboo subject in Bhutan despite the fact that a lot of efforts are being made to do away with the taboo that surrounds LGBT Community members. Moreover, the charts also shows that 80% of the respondents believe that the stigma surrounding LGBT and their community is because of the orthodox religious beliefs of the people.

Societal judgment and religious beliefs

The survey report in the following pie charts show that 84% of the respondents have been subject to societal judgment and prejudices because of their sexual orientation and in what seems disheartening the survey reports also shows that 84% of the respondents have been told that their sexuality and sexual orientation is against the order of nature and against God himself.

Have you ever been told that your sexual orientation is against the religious beliefs?
25 responses

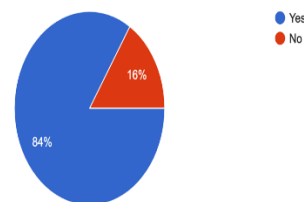


figure no.10

Have you ever been a subject to societal judgement because of your sexual orientation?
25 responses

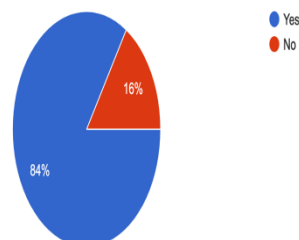


figure no. 11

Knowledge of decriminalization of Homosexuality

Homosexuality is criminalised in Bhutan?
25 responses

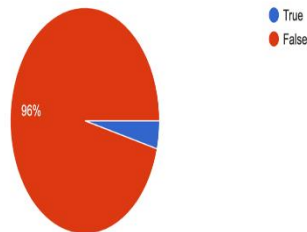


figure no. 12

According to the above shown pie chart 96% of the respondents knew that the provisions criminalising homosexuality has been taken down. And while they were asked if they notice any changes in the way how people treat the LGBT members in the past five years, majority of the respondents that is 88% of the total have seen positive changes in the way how people treat them after homosexuality was decriminalised as shown in the pie chart provided below.

Have you noticed any changes in the way how people treat the LGBT members in the past five years?
25 responses

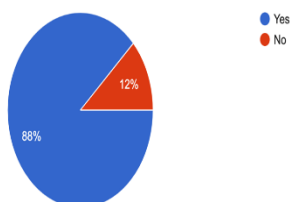


figure no. 13

Need for new laws to protect the rights of LGBT

As per pie chart given below 84% of the respondents answered that there is a need for new laws to protect the rights of LGBT community and to put them on an equal footing with the heterosexual members of the society.

Do you think there is a need for new laws to protect the rights of LGBT community and to put them on an equal footing with the heterosexual members of the society?
25 responses

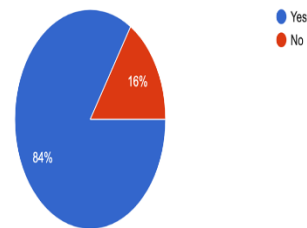


figure no.14

For the respondents that answered yes, they were asked to specify what kind of new laws they wanted to be put in place. As an answer to that the respondents came up with various new laws they wanted which could protect their rights and empower them and their community members more. To mention a few answers they provided for this question:

- One of the respondents said that there is a need for new laws to protect their privacy and laws that can protect them from discriminations.
- Another respondent stated that he/she /they want laws that will give him/her/they the right to take part in politics and right to vote using their desired gender.
- While some of the responses read, “we are also human and we need equal treatment”.
- A respondent wrote that there is a need of new laws that will protect them from online harassment and cyberbullying.
- There were also quite a few responses that stated that there is a need of laws for same sex marriages and adoptions.
- A response stated that he/she/ or they wanted the freedom to wear any dresscode they prefer.

Need for societal change

Do you think there is a need of social change in order for the members of the LGBT community to feel truly accepted by other people?
25 responses

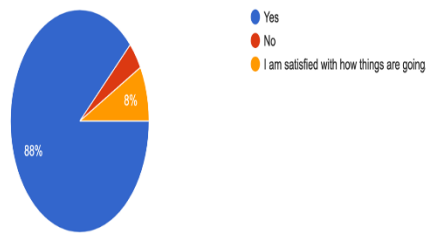


figure no. 15

It is very important for a society to be welcoming and accepting of anyone irrespective of their sexual orientation, however, it has been found out in this survey that the society we live in is not as accepting as it is to us, the cisgender members of the society. The study has shown that 88% of the respondents has answered that there is a need for societal change to make the society they live in more inclusive and accepting.

LGBT movements and supporters of LGBT

On a positive note the survey also shows that 84% of the respondents are actively involved in LGBT movements, these movements include sharing their stories of struggles and stories of difficulty they faced when they first came out to their friends and family, it also includes them carrying out advocacy and awareness programs about them and so many others like themselves. There are several social media platforms that are run by the members of LGBT community that extensively advocates about the issues related to LGBT and their community members. And when the respondents were asked if they were aware of such social media platforms that support LGBT members all of the respondents answered that they are aware of these social media platforms.

Are you involved in LGBT movements?
25 responses

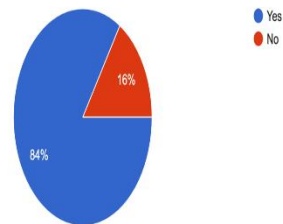


figure no.16

Are you aware of the various social media platforms that support LGBT community.
25 responses

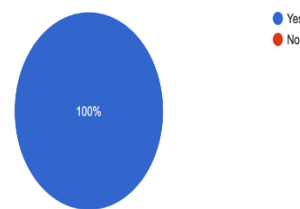


figure no.17

7. SUGGESTIONS & CONCLUSION:

1. Since it is a known fact that education and knowledge decreases prejudices, importance should be given to spreading awareness and educating people about LGBT members, their sexual preferences and their rights. Relevant awareness and advocacy programs about same sex relationships and homosexuality should be carried out with increased effectiveness.
2. More platforms should be given to the members of LGBT community to come forward and share their stories as when they do so, people tend to realize and understand their hardships and even empathize with them. This can help the Bhutanese society to become more inclusive and accepting of the LGBT members.
3. The importance of appreciating the advantages of a diverse community should be taught to children from an early age.
4. The education system of Bhutan should also consider including subjects that teaches the

student that there are different types of sexual orientations and that not everybody is born same. Educating people about this from an early age can guarantee that there will be no differentiation between homosexual and heterosexual population in Bhutan.

5. Relevant authorities should partner with and support the various social media groups like Pride Bhutan, Queer Voices of Bhutan, Rainbow Bhutan and many more. With their support and assistance these groups can do so much to advocate people about them and their rights.

CONCLUSION:

According to the Director of Rainbow Bhutan, Tashi Tsheten, Bhutan's historical decision to do away with the two clauses of Penal Code of Bhutan which criminalised homosexuality was the first step towards equality for the members of the LGBT community. He said that this decision of the government was like a commitment to the LGBT members and like a reminder to the community that they are looked after and cared for (LGBT Community Still Faces Stigma, Stereotypes, n.d.).

Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgenders and people questioning their gender in Bhutan has lived in the closet because of the fear of being subject to prejudices, societal judgments, harassments and abuse. The fear of being talked about has impacted the lives of a lot of individuals of LGBT community. However, with the government of Bhutan decriminalising homosexuality the members of the LGBT community have been receiving a lot of supports from activists, human rights advocates, politicians and from the general public at large.

Despite the unwavering supports that the LGBT community members have been receiving from the Government in the past few years, there still are a lot of people who still look down at the members of LGBT and call them degrading names. Even though Bhutan has decriminalised homosexuality it hasn't rendered any protection to the LGBT members

from the prejudices and harassment they face in their day to day lives. There are still a lot of things Bhutan and its citizens should do to make the members of the LGBT community truly feel accepted.

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