

HIDDEN VOICES AND HIDDEN REALITIES

Exploitation of the rights of LGBT communities at Tourism sites

Organised by EQUATIONS, Jeeva, Karnataka Sexuality Minorities Forum, Karnataka Sex Workers Union, Ondede, Raksha, Sangama, and Samara
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There is significant lack of understanding of transgender people as human being whose lives include a difficulty which goes beyond the normative connection between biological sex, gender identity and sexual orientation. The heterosexual norms of the society is institutionalised through the process of socialisation by various social institutions. This binary concept of gender leaves no space for people to understand that the linkage between sex and gender is socially constructed and not the natural one. In turn, it creates a lack of social acceptance of identities of LGBT. This has resulted in intolerant attitudes towards LGBT communities being dismissed as a western phenomenon, an upper class phenomenon or stigmatised as a mental illness, a disease or a crime. Perceptions such as these enforce invisibility of the LGBT communities pushing them to the margin and making it a challenge to 'come out'. All these forms of non-recognition, lack of social acceptance and enforced invisibility expose them to various overt and covert forms of discrimination and violation of their rights.

In recent years, India has witnessed a growing activism of various NGOs and civil society institutions toward mainstreaming LGBT rights groups . Such efforts toward mainstreaming consist of advocating the rights of LGBT groups, campaigning against laws that discriminate their rights, seeking public petition for withdrawal of such laws, and efforts to normalize the recognition and acceptance of LGBT identity in India. In 2014 the Supreme Court recognised the "third gender" status for hijras or transgenders community and also asked the Centre to treat transgenders as socially and economically backward. After the judgement, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment sent recommendations to the states to set up mechanisms to ensure that trans persons live a life of dignity. Taking a cue from the recommendations, Karnataka's draft policy on what? also came up with schemes for their development. Suggestions included establishment of a transgender cell, distribution of ration cards under the Public Distribution System, a monthly pension scheme for destitute trans persons, job opportunities, self-employment grant worth Rs 1.5 lakh for individuals and groups for formation of Self help groups, granting scholarships to trans children and also ranging from the specific directions to operate separate HIV centres, to providing medical care in hospitals.

A study was undertaken by EQUATIONS in collaboration with Sangama, Samara, Karnataka Sexuality Minority Forum on LGBT and Tourism to understand the realities, relationships and challenges faced by LGBT communities at tourism sites. It was found that sex work and begging are the common source of livelihood for most of them. Tourism season brings opportunity for LGBT communities not only to earn money and benefit from donations of food and clothing, but also provide space to meet members from their own community. However, while accessing these opportunities they face many challenges in society like non acceptances, discrimination, lack of opportunity and cut throat competition in getting clients in a threatening and insecure working environment. To share the analysis of the study; how tourism creates conducive environment for sexual interaction / activities like performing dance, begging, sex work and also as guides at tourism sites . However the activities are seen on moralistic ground and the role of tourism in recognizing the facts and realities faced by the LGBT has been failed. The moralistic approach leads to violation of rights of the communities involved in such interaction, especially people from LGBT communities.

The Fundamental Rights are defined as the basic human rights of all citizens irrespective of race, place of birth, religion, caste, creed or sex. But in reality the right to work has been denied as their identity as a person who has specific gender and sexual preference is not acknowledged. Denial of their identity puts them on the margins of society, encourages violence in different forms and denies their access to justice. LGBT communities are forced to engage with sex work, begging or dancing due to lack of options to choose from as there are limited occupational opportunities offered to them by tourism.

There is a lack of awareness about skill development programmes, schemes launched by the Ministry of Tourism and Department of Tourism. Next is the criterion to participate in such programme which needs to be relaxed. For example, Hunar se Rozgar scheme includes English as one of the criteria which can be relaxed by including it as a

skill to be taught to the target group. This will help LGBT to access the scheme. Under the same scheme, there is the Tourist Facilitators Programme for Pilgrimage Tourism. Building skills as Tourist Facilitator will not only provide employment opportunities to LGBT communities but would also offer opportunity for interactive learning to the tourist about significance of the particular tourist site.

Looking ahead to address the issues of reality and the relation of LGBT and tourism in the context above, a one day consultation is planned in collaboration with EQUATIONS, Jeeva, KSMF, KSWU, Ondeade, Raksha Sangama, and Samara

Objectives:

- Experience sharing and discussion on the specific challenges and impacts of tourism faced by the LGBT communities
- Identify the gaps, realities, relationship and opportunities in the context of social, cultural, economic and political scenario.
- Building common understanding on issues related to LGBT in tourism.
- To formulate recommendations on LGBT and Tourism to pressurize the state to incorporate recommendations in draft policy

Expected Outcomes

- Recommendations to influence the National police and state polices on LGBT and Tourism.
- Findings of the of study as a major contribution to the deliberations on advocacy on rights of LGBT communities in tourism.
- Building tourism perceptive among the groups to mainstream the issues of LGBT in tourism.

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