

# A Study on the Role of Media in Changing Society's Perception of LGBT Community

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**ABSTRACT**--LGBT Community belongs to one of the most vulnerable and marginalized populations in India, specifically in Kerala. But recently there is a notable shift in the inclusion of LGBT in Kerala. In India, Kerala is the first state to set up a welfare agreement for the transgender community in 2015. The state department of social justice had issued the policy to uphold the constitutional rights of transgender, taking into account the Supreme Court judgment (2014). On 2018 September 6, a five-member bench of the Indian penal code (IPC), decriminalized the British-era Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. It is an extremely significant victory for the LGBT community. The Queer political activism in Kerala developed much before this and has gained critical grounds. This paper locates how the media has contributed to this major change. This study uses a mixed-method approach by analyzing both the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data. It shows that the media can play a transitional role in shaping political attitudes towards sexuality and minorities in general.

**Key words**-- Media, Representation, LGBT, Section 377

## I. INTRODUCTION

LGBT is a short form for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. The "LGB" in this term alludes to sexual orientation. The sexual orientation is characterized as a regularly persevering design of passionate, sentimental, and sexual attractions of men to ladies or ladies to men (hetero), of ladies to ladies or men to men (gay person), or by men or ladies to both genders (indiscriminate). It also alludes to an individual's sense of personality based on the attractions, related practices, and participation in a community of others who share those attractions and practices. The T in LGBT stands for transgender having a non-conforming sexual orientation. It is an umbrella term for individuals having a different sexual orientation unconnected to the sex in which they are born.

LGBTQ community had been protesting for a very long time to overturn this dehumanizing law. One of their initial victories was the inclusion of L in LGBT. L stands for lesbian, G for to Gay, B for to bisexual, and T refers to transgender. The term gay relates to both men and women who are attracted to persons of the same sex. Lesbian is the term referred to intend the same sex attraction among the female folk.

The history of the LGBT community is complex, and the social acceptance of the sexual minorities in India is still a big question. The euphoric upheaval judgment of Section 377 seemed to be a moment of the coming out of queer sexuality to the open space in India. Remarkably, some positive developments towards social acceptance have been taken place after this.

From the primeval time itself, the queer people have been facing numerous issues of segregation in each portion of the world. In spite of the fact that the world has been making astounding strides in every sphere of life, what is

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astonishing is the truth that the world appears to have remained stagnant in its viewpoint, considering, conducting, and acknowledging the cases of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) people.

Media has always played a significant role in documenting time and society through ages. In past days, LGBT peoples are virtually absent in the media, and on the rare event they are displayed, they are distorted. It is observed, that at present, the LGBT community is more visible and acknowledged by society. This study will provide a broader perspective on how media help the community to come out and the shifting trends of representing the LGBT community in media (Newspaper and Cyberspace).

India is one of the most religiously and traditionally diverse nations in the entire world. It has a very long history of its own, which reflects the customs and usages that prevailed during that time, and the exciting part is that those customs and traditions are still prevalent in this new century. LGBT people in India are not a new concept; they have been recognized in our ancient history as well. They have got a strong historical presence in our country especially in the Hindu mythology and other historical texts. It could be a common fact that ancient India was one of the first sexually liberated social orders in history.

Ironically, today, India is one of the foremost sexually oppressive nations within the world. Society tends to see the sexual acts and talks as wrongdoings, a grimy act, and it is unthinkable to converse on the topic in public. The LGBT have confronted different types of abuses from their birth and also succumbed to poverty and other economic disadvantages.

Homosexuality and queer are accepted in India recently. Still, inside the boundaries of family acknowledgment of their sexuality and the opportunity to transparently express their sex choices always stay a consistent battle. Instances of pride parades, meet-ups, and heated discussions on social media, provided a platform for LGBT. Recognition of the third gender happened in India in 2016 when the Transgender Person's Bill was passed. In a society where citizens tend to turn a blind eye to even the existence of the LGBTQ community, various protests, which have garnered a lot of media attention, have certainly increased the awareness about the problems faced by LGBTQ members.

Kerala is the primary State in India, set up a justice board for transgenders pointed at guaranteeing justice and balance for the individuals of the nation, and it is also the essential State in India to set up a welfare programme for the transgender community in 2015. A paradigm move on transgender visibility happened within the social situation of Kerala with the 2014 Supreme Court Verdict, recognizing the rights of transgender. This verdict confirms their choice to be defined as third gender.

Kerala conducted a transgender survey in 2014-2015, which covered the social and individual perspective of their life. Based on the findings within the study, the State embraced a Transgender policy in 2015, which was disclosed at the Universal Conference on Gender Uniformity held in the same year in Kerala. Kerala introduces many schemes to put the community in forefront of the society.

After years of fight and struggles, the LGBT community finally found a drastic change in positive reception in Kerala. There was a time when people with differences were forced to leave Kerala because the society was hesitant to accept them. However, there is a shift at present. The "Malayali" (the peoples of Kerala) mind-set is changing positively.

Anu Kuriakose mentions that the media in Kerala began to record the events from the LGBT community and a near examination of history would differentiate the changes that happened (Kuriakose, Anu.2018). The main

events that become the explicit political acts to retort the experience of LGBT are the queer cultural festivals, queer pride parades, fashion shows, art-photo exhibitions, and transgender marriages happening in Kerala.

There is a festival in Kerala, at Kollam district in Kottankulangara temple, a unique festival where masculine dons the feminine. The Kottankulangara Celebration is an yearly Hindu celebration in Kerala, in which thousands of men dress like ladies, which is sacrosanct to the goddess, Bhagavathy. Each year this celebration is celebrated on the 10th and 11th day of Meenam in the Malayalam calendar (March in English). This festival was depicted in many Malayalam films, which clearly indicates the media involvement. The celebration is seen as the participation of an expanding number of homosexual and transgender individuals from Kerala. For them, it could be a celebration of their own identity. The festival is recorded in contemporary media as a space for the transgenders to discover themselves. The media reports this event, particularly the footage of the visuals of the light holding customs of the transgenders. The transgenders are celebrating without bothering about their personality and the modern media changes this act of cooperation into a political act of 'coming out.'

The Queer Pride March in India started after the 2009 judgment of Delhi High Court, which chosen to strike down Section 377, expressing that it damages fundamental rights to life, freedom, and equality. Over India and Kerala, that's when the pride development started. It's been a year since Section 377 got decriminalized. The LGBT people feel many things have changed in Kerala.

Every year the Pride March becomes a huge success. The number of participants and media depiction gets increased. The March improved the visibility of the LGBT community in Kerala. The Queer Pride Parades in Kerala are conducted by the support groups of the LGBT community and CBOs and Queer activists at the major cities of the state. The parades gathered attention from the society as well as the media. The media covered the event as a political move by the community to influence the public in order to make them recognize their identity, gender visibility, and rights. The associated social celebrations within the queer pride parade like seminars, art shows, film screening, beauty pageants, would appear to make the celebration a carnival.

The Kerala Government made many interventions to mainstream the LGBT community. The leading local vernaculars Mathrubhoomi, Mangalam and Madhyamam, serialized the experiences of the peoples from the community. For instance, MtF Deepthi Kalyani got to be the cover young lady of a leading women's magazine, Vanitha, the identity of the third gender in public life has been enhanced.

A significant occasion that captured the media attention in Kerala is the transgender marriages happened in 2018. It was a historic moment for the transgender community in Kerala as a transman and transwoman tied the hitch. Ishan (33), who underwent female to male surgery, married Surya (31), who has undergone male to female surgery. This is the first time a transwoman and transman marriage in Kerala. The media coverage of this transsexual couples made history, and the event was celebrated by the Media. The pride parades, exhibitions, and activities done by them were celebrated by the the mainstream media.

The visual media telecast number of programs mostly chat shows, debates that help the community to present their lives to the mass audience. Through this, the distance between the ordinary people and the LGBT community has decreased. The programs like "Moonnamlingakkarkku parayanullathu"- Sreekandan Nair Show, "Bhinnaralla Nammalarum"-Malayali Darbar, "Onnayaninneyiha Randennu Kandalavil"- Selfie, "JB Junction-Transgenders-Surya and Sheetal," "Interview with Surya," "Heart-wrenching story of a Transgender"- D4 Dance Episode 1227, "Sthree Dimension"- Life of transgenders in social Kerala," were address the community to the society.

\*Sreekandan Nair Show: Sreekandan Nair is a veteran Journalist and an anchor, Sreekandan Nair show is his signature Malayalam talk show aired on FlowersTV.

\*JB Junction: A celebrity chat show hosted by veteran Journalist John Brittas. The show is serious in nature and the celebrities are made to answer questions regarding their personal and professional life. Aired on Kairali TV.

The media made a distinction between dealing with each day's isolation and fights they experienced, which were by and large expansive related to their LGBTQ individuals (Craig, McInroy, McCreedy, & Alaggia, 2015).

Media role models serve as sources of pride, inspiration, and comfort. Our findings suggest that increasing the availability of GLB role models in the media may positively influence GLB identity (Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011).

The Transgender community faces many problems, such as fear, shame, social discrimination, depression, suicidal tendencies, and social stigma. They are unable to live a dignified life, once their gender status is revealed. Kerala is the first State to establish a Policy for Transgenders in India. As per the census conducted in Kerala during 2015-16, there are 1187 Transgenders in Kerala (C-Dit).

Ayoub says (Ayoub, 2017) that beneath the right conditions, interpersonal contact is one of the finest ways to decrease bias between the lion's share and minority bunches. Building on this thought, we contend that "imagined contact" indeed with characters in a TV can alter recognitions of out-groups. In their discoveries, bolster the claim that free media are essential for progressing cheerful rights and recommends that media opportunity may go before endeavours to secure bright rights enactment. In corners of the globe where gay person rights are still profoundly disagreeable, both individual and virtual contacts passing on positive pictures of lesbians and gays can lead to useful alter.

## **II. METHODOLOGY**

The Queer studies highlight the significance of creating investigations that go past character and representational, legislative issues. The paper would be examining the objectives through the questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews of the persons from the LGBT community.

## **III. OBJECTIVES**

- To analyze the impact of the Supreme Court verdict on the LGBT community
- To trace the perception change on the LGBT community among the public after the Supreme Court verdict.

## **IV. HYPOTHESIS**

H1: There is a drastic change and acceptability in the LGBT community after the verdict

H2: Exposure in media with more positive representation of LGBT community makes them acceptable in society.

In this study, the researcher utilized mixed strategy. As a method, it focuses on collecting, dissecting, and blending both quantitative and subjective information in a single think about and arrangement of studies. This method of inquiry was most suited for addressing the research aims of this proposal.

## V. THE INTERVIEW

This research adopted the method of the in-depth interview; the researcher made a selection of the participants from the LGBT community for an interview. It is one of the ways to get Primary data. The researcher met the people with arranged questions, and used the structured interview to evaluate the objective. The interview questions are prepared in the Malayalam language to ensure the proper responses from the participants and recorded their responses.

The reactions afterward transcribed and translated to English. This inquires about embracing the elemental approaches in dissecting the output from the interviewees. The data gathered from the participants summarised according to the objectives of the study.

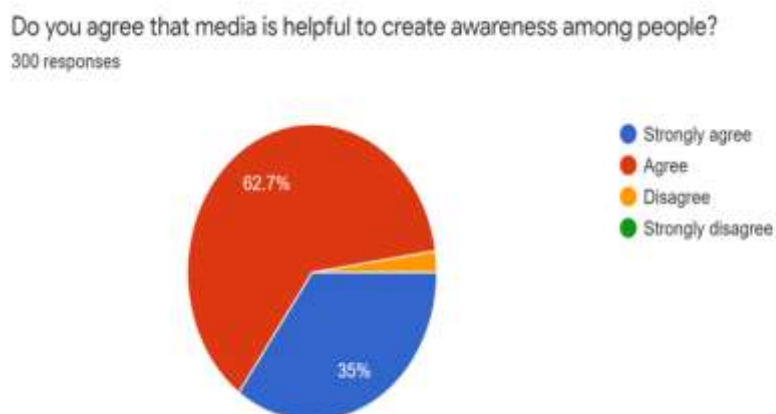
## VI. THE SURVEY

The field of study is mainly Ernakulam district. The sample size is 300. The participants are from different age groups and have different educational qualifications. They are users of mixed media like Television, radio, newspapers, and the Internet.

Adding the primary analysis in the questions, it is observed that the age dissemination of respondents that the information collected does give an all-encompassing picture. Higher respondents from the center gathered as well showed a positive note as they assumed to have a way better and essential perception or capacity to reply to the question. The subject is covering all segments of the society independent of sex separation. Subsequently, male and female attitudes have a rise to bear concerning the current consideration. Another unique characteristic that contains a bearing on recognition of the subject was the instructive status of the respondents. The respondent shifted from Fundamental instruction to College level most.

### The survey

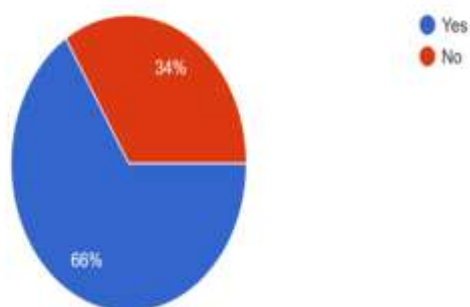
Media and awareness



Out of 300 participants the 62.7 % of people agreeing the fact and the 35% of them strongly agreed with the question.

## 2. Are LGBT people misrepresented?

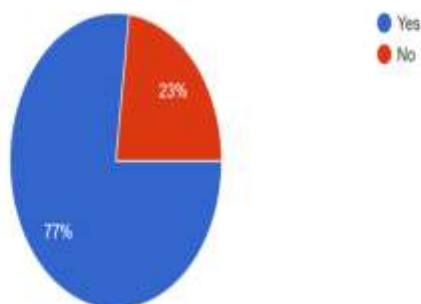
Do you think minority groups are usually ill-treated and misrepresented?  
300 responses



The survey observed that the most (66%) people agree that the situation of being an LGBT is too much difficult in our society.

## 3. The recognition of LGBT after the verdict

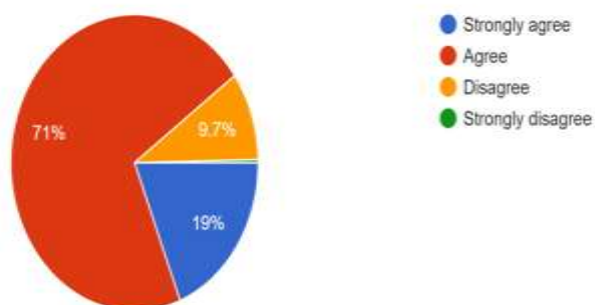
Do you think LGBT community feel more recognized in the society after the Supreme Court Verdict?  
300 responses



The results show that there is a drastic change held after the verdict of the recognition of the LGBT community in Kerala. 75% said yes.

## 4. Media as an education tool

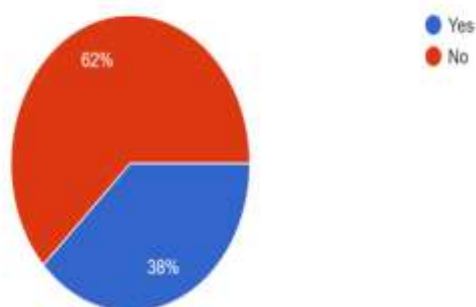
Do you agree that the media can educate the society in the right direction about the LGBT Community?  
300 responses



According to the respondents, 71% of them agree and the 19% of people strongly agree that the media can play an educating role in society. And they can educate more about the LGBT community.

#### 5. Media Coverage

In your opinion, do the LGBT people get sufficient media coverage?  
300 responses

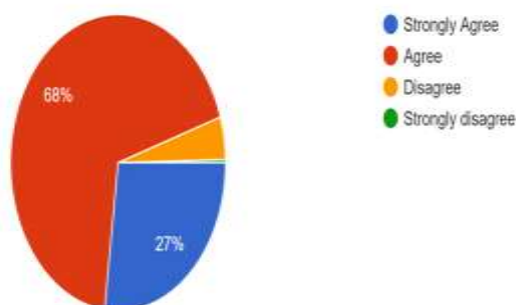


The survey clearly shows that 62%, the greater percentage of participants accepting that LGBT community get sufficient media coverage.

#### 6. Broad based media coverage

Do you believe that more broad-based media coverage of LGBT issues in the positive direction help change in people's perceptions?

300 responses

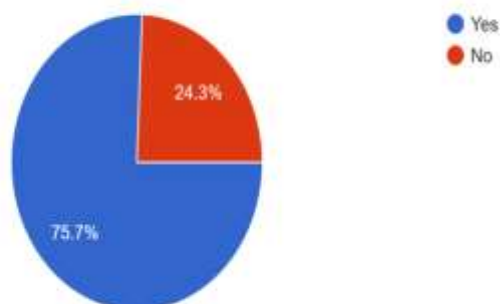


The survey brings into a conclusion that the broad based media coverage of LGBT issues in a positive direction helps in changing people's perception. 68% agreeing and 27% strongly agreeing with the fact.

#### 7. Society's Outlook

Do you believe that society's outlook towards the LGBT community will change soon?

300 responses



The survey shows the hope that the majority of 75.7% believe that the society's outlook towards LGBT community will change soon.

## VII. CONCLUSION

A representation is a depiction or a sign that stands for or takes the place of something else, and it is an essential component of our lives, which helps us make our world better and even from a different perspective. After years of fight and struggle, the LGBT community finally found a drastic change in positive reception in Kerala. In their life journey, the violence experienced by them starts right from a young age. The accessible support for the LGBT community from the Media makes a considerable success saga in history. In this new media age, the social media platform engages as a mobilizer and support system by giving space to the LGBT community.



Out of 5, the majority of 4 persons from the LGBT community accepted and agreed that there is a drastic change and acceptability that happened in Kerala society after the verdict through the interview. The survey results show that there is a radical change held after the verdict of the recognition of the LGBT community in Kerala; 77 % respondents agreed with it. The research shows the hope that the majority of 75.7% believe that society's outlook towards the LGBT community will change soon. According to the respondents, 71% of them agree, and 19% of people strongly agree that the media can play an educating role in society. And they can educate more about the LGBT community. This shows that the more exposure in media with a more positive representation of the LGBT community makes worthiness and willingness to learn more and acknowledge the identity in society. The media can cross the transactional boundaries and record the queer history in Kerala. Thus the media can play a transitional role in shaping political attitudes towards sexuality and minorities in general.

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