




against all odds.

 advancing equity for india's **LGBTQIA+** communities

February 2025

The report is written in homage to the resilience and perseverance of the various movements led by LGBTQIA+ communities. It has been supported by a grant from **Radhika Piramal, Parmesh Shahani and Keshav Suri.**



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foreword.

by: Radhika Piramal, Parmesh Shahani & Keshav Suri

We commissioned this report as a call to action for leaders, allies, and changemakers to come together, pooling resources and expertise to foster a future where equality and inclusivity are not just ideals but realities. We are immensely moved by the findings you will read about in the report.

India stands on the brink of a powerful transformation – a moment where bold collaborations can reshape the future for LGBTQIA+ communities. The findings in this report may, at first glance, contradict this reality. After all, as researchers have found, India receives less than 1% of global funding for LGBTQIA+ issues; and only two of India's top 50 philanthropic givers identify these issues as a priority. The broader reality of systemic exclusion, invisibility, and marginality is one that each of us have encountered in our work over the years.

Yet there is a liberatory and revolutionary spirit in our history and our reality that will not allow the future of India's queer communities to languish. Our civil society organizations have been torchbearers of this spirit. They have struggled for equity, dignity, and justice for India's LGBTQIA+ communities for decades. Starting from the watershed years of HIV+ awareness and public health activism, they have, quite literally, fought for our lives, and those of millions of Indians. They continue to struggle for social and economic justice for our communities. In doing so, they struggle for our collective queer future.

As individuals who have been deeply involved in movements for LGBTQIA+ equity and inclusion for most of our lives, we choose to see this report not only as an accounting of reality, but an announcement of opportunity. It is an invitation to hope, and a call to renew our lifelong commitment to the prosperity and progress of our beloved community, our country, and our world. We firmly believe that when diverse voices unite with a common purpose, the sum of their

efforts creates outcomes far greater than any individual endeavor could achieve.

The report is the catalyst for the Pride Fund, an initiative aimed at empowering grassroots LGBTQIA+ organizations across the country. This fund goes beyond financial support; it will amplify voices, strengthen movements, and create lasting change through collective effort. In the next few years, we envision tangible progress – impactful changes that will influence policies, reshape societal perceptions, and improve the lived realities of queer communities. We are building a foundation for a future where LGBTQIA+ individuals are not just included but celebrated, where our rights are recognised, and our potential fully realised.

We hope this report will encourage you, our reader, to join us in forging a future where LGBTQIA+ individuals can live with dignity, freedom, and pride. If you're queer: we see you and we hear you. We hope this report helps clarify the outstanding, history-making work that our civil society organisations have done, often in desperately adverse circumstances, to build the infrastructure of our liberation. We hope you will see how crucial your donations, your volunteering, and your advocacy continues to be.

And if you're an ally: we see and hear you, too. You have told us, repeatedly, that you care for us. This is your chance to walk the talk. Join us by converting that care to action and give India's grassroots queer organisations your economic support. On behalf of everyone who dares to dream of a more just future, we welcome you to co-create it with us.

We hope this report will encourage you, our reader, to join us in forging a future where LGBTQIA+ individuals can live with dignity, freedom, and pride.



executive summary.

- **The LGBTQIA+ communities in India are anything but monolithic.**

Lived experiences of the LGBTQIA+ communities span across backgrounds including class, gender, ethnicity, caste, tribe affiliation, religion, and other identities. Despite such diverse trajectories – a shared truth unites us: the weight of what we must endure. The remnants of colonial conservatism and prejudiced socio-cultural narratives force queer communities to the margins.

- **Across this continuum, the journey toward equity has been long, tumultuous, and often fraught with setbacks.**

Watershed moments like the NALSA judgment of 2014 and the reading down of Section 377 of the IPC have brought renewed momentum to struggles to strengthen LGBTQIA+ rights in the last decade. We continue facing challenges linked to economic precarity, social exclusion, institutional discrimination, risk of violence, and other forms of systemic harm. We find little mention in the mainstream vocabulary of development. Against this backdrop of erasure and hardship, an extraordinary force has persisted.

- **Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have been at the forefront of action, for LGBTQIA+ communities' needs, amplifying grassroots perspectives and creating spaces of solidarity.**

The unyielding efforts of CSOs to represent and respond to queer lived experiences — as practitioners, petitioners, policy experts, and storytellers — have been key to struggles for legal and formal equality, which continue to see long-term civil society engagement with the judiciary and legislatures. Their work has addressed gaps in service delivery and institutional redressal, highlighting the unique struggles faced by intersectionally marginalized LGBTQIA+ communities.

- **Our report pays homage to the resilience of LGBTQIA+ civil society movements in India.**

Recognizing the transformative role they have played and continue to play in the larger struggle for equity – this report provides a comprehensive view of the action landscape. These organizations stand as catalysts for change, proving that even in the face of entrenched adversity, the pursuit of dignity, love, and belonging, cannot be silenced.

1.

key findings



a. policy

- **The legislative landscape is largely shaped by the judiciary. Action by the executive is in the nascent stages, presenting a window of opportunities.** Courts have upheld and recognized the right to self-identity, equality, dignity, and privacy for the community. They have also recognized queer relationships and associated rights. In 2018, the Supreme Court decriminalized homosexuality. Though, it deferred the decision on the right to marry for same-sex couples as a fundamental right. Moreover, the Parliament has passed a law to protect the rights of transgender persons and ensure certain welfare schemes. Currently (on the direction of the Court), the government has constituted a committee to investigate queer issues. Thus, in India, homosexuality is no longer considered a criminal offence, but legal recognitions sanctioned by Parliament remain absent.
- **Lack of legislation and policy can be explained by little/no political representation. The lack**

of official data remains a concern, rendering queer communities invisible. While these communities have begun to find mentions in election manifestos, openly queer political leaders are glaringly missing from the Indian political landscape. Due to the very nature of queerness, the community is spread out geographically, making it difficult for them to be seen as an electoral constituency. Further, there are no official estimates of the queer population. Therefore, queer issues do not feature in political agendas.



b. civil society organizations^a

- 57% nonprofits working with queer communities are service providers and field-builders, engaged in delivering basic services. 53% are hyperlocal, working in grassroots settings.** These organizations expand access to essential services for marginalized queer communities across healthcare, education, livelihoods, and access to justice. Additionally, they play a vital role by aligning multiple stakeholders to develop resources and services that address the specific needs of queer individuals.
- More than half of the nonprofits working with LGBTQIA+ communities in India are queer led. Queer leadership is driving change.** Investing in such organizations is crucial to reap long-term socioeconomic dividends for the communities and empower young LGBTQIA+ leaders. This shift reflects how Indian nonprofits are fostering community-centered models of change, grounded in authentic queer perspectives and lived experiences.
- Only 43% of the nonprofits were eligible for international funding. A mere 27% of nonprofits have a national presence, while**

20% are regionally focused. There is a need to support collaboration and scale in the landscape of organizations working for queer communities. Since most of nonprofits working closely with queer people are only eligible to receive domestic funding – organizations require greater access to domestic funding sources to thrive.



c. funding^b

- Funding gaps are stark with a heavy reliance on international funders. Yet India receives less than 1% of global funding for LGBTQIA+ issues.¹** India holds a minor share in total queer funding. This is in stark contrast with India's ~18% share in the overarching global population, highlighting a gap between resources and on-ground needs. Almost 86% of the funding to the Asia-Pacific region came from North American (46%) and European (40%) funders. This highlights the reliance on external funding for queer issues in the region.
- Domestic momentum is low with 59% funders being international. This has implications for the way resources flow to organizations working with queer communities.** Domestic funding isn't keeping pace. Only two among India's top 50 philanthropic givers identify LGBTQIA+ issues as an explicit priority. This impedes long-term resourcing strategies. In our analysis, we have also found that a significant proportion of organizations are not eligible to receive foreign contributions.
- Intentional giving is skewed. Nearly half the funders are intentional in their funding commitments, supporting two or more organizations working with LGBTQIA+ communities.** However, a majority (76%) of such support can also be traced back to international funders.

^a Findings for this section are based on an analysis of publicly available information on 81 registered nonprofits working with LGBTQIA+ communities in India, based on publicly available information.

^b Findings from this section are based on insights from secondary sources, expert interviews, and an analysis of 78 funders based on self-reported publicly available data gathered from nonprofits.

2.

cornerstones

Cornerstones are key starting points for making real change happen. To illustrate how these cornerstones can translate into meaningful takeaways on the ground – we have identified nudges for the government, funders, and other catalytic actors, to use for supporting LGBTQIA+ civil society efforts.



Universalize LGBTQIA+-affirming documentation for improving quality and access to services

- **Governments:** Expand legal gender-affirming documents for trans communities and recognize institutions such as family and marriage across communities
- **Funders:** Promote pilot grants to incorporate an inclusion lens in sectors such as health, education, and livelihoods for communities
- **Legal Actors:** Help with case work and documentation at subsidized rates and on pro-bono basis to help marginalized communities



Invest in community-led crisis response systems for strengthening shelter and legal aid

- **Governments:** Plug gaps in schemes like Garima Greh shelters and train queer-affirming first responders at the grassroots
- **Funders:** Provide flexible and long-term funding for community-led crisis infrastructure and human resources
- **CSOs:** Build and train a pool of legal and mental health practitioners, who are sensitized and can help with support services



Enable visibility in mainstream culture and public life to strengthen narrative change

- **Governments:** Strengthen queer representation and inclusion lens in policymaking through consultations
- **Funders:** Shift from outcome-driven funding to patient capital for storytelling and behaviour change initiatives
- **Media:** Undertake thorough and intentional representation of queer characters on mainstream platforms, that is not caricature-like



Generate rigorous data and evidence for improving program delivery on ground, with sensitivity

- **Governments:** Focus on collecting culturally sensitive and gender-disaggregated data through national exercises (such as the Census)
- **Funders:** Fund community-centric evidence-building, strengthen documentation, and enable collaborative research among nonprofits
- **Think Tanks:** Leverage research and data collection to develop protocols and set precedents which are scalable, with use cases for implementors

3.

call to action

Our research highlights the critical role of CSOs in bridging divides within India's LGBTQIA+ movements. Despite facing challenges of competing priorities and unequal power dynamics, CSOs remain resilient, driven by leaders with lived experiences of exclusion. However, their efforts require urgent reinforcement through resources, recognition, and support to sustain progress and preserve the movement's diversity.

Empowerment for queer communities demands more than legal reforms or fragmented initiatives. It requires amplifying marginalized voices, addressing

intersectional inequities, and committing to long-term priorities like health, education, livelihoods, and representation. Current funding remains insufficient and narrowly focused, sidelining critical needs.

The movement's strength lies in its ability to hold a mirror to societal fears and contradictions. Real progress requires dismantling entrenched power structures and fostering environments. Schools, workplaces, and homes – where queer identities are celebrated and nurtured.

**LGBTQIA+ communities deserve a future built
on collective societal resolve, not the
isolated resilience of individuals battling
against all odds.**

chapter 1.

introduction.

The reading down of Section 377 of the IPC, which decriminalized homosexuality in 2018, was a watershed moment for the LGBTQIA+ communities in India. It was a moment when queerness, in its refusal to be categorized or erased, demanded recognition – not as something abnormal or deviant, but as a fundamental aspect of the human experience. As Justice Indu Malhotra poignantly wrote in her ruling, *“History owes an apology to the members of this community and their families for the ignominy and ostracism they have suffered through the centuries.”*^c The judgment was a declaration of dignity and recognition, an acknowledgment that we have always existed, albeit often at the margins of society.

Yet, as monumental as this legal victory was, it did not signal the end of the struggle. Beyond decriminalization, we are yet to enable the necessary social, political, and economic acceptance and basic human rights for queer people across India. This fight for belonging – for a place in the national imagination – remains an ongoing challenge for queer communities in India, where colonial moral codes have long shaped attitudes towards sexuality and gender.

To be queer in India is not just to navigate one’s relationship with sexuality and gender, but to engage in a broader, often precarious, negotiation with state power, cultural histories, and social norms. Most of us must navigate a landscape that demands conformity, and the treacherous balance between asserting our identities and managing the social repercussions of doing so. Indeed, even in urban spaces where queer visibility is growing, the pressure to conform and fit into a palatable, sanitized version of queerness that aligns with globalized ideals is increasing.² Many of us continue to live in fear of ostracization, rejection, and violence, particularly in conservative, patriarchal environments where heteronormative notions of gender and expression remain deeply entrenched.³

The history of LGBTQIA+ rights in India, much like queerness itself, resists simplification. It is a mosaic of alliances and ruptures, moments of profound progress juxtaposed against stubborn barriers. Understanding this history necessitates viewing the broader landscape – not just the headlines or isolated narratives but the systemic gaps and silences that underpin the movement.

Criminalization and Moral Impositions in Pre-Independence India

Pockets within India’s cultural ethos exhibit a fluid understanding of gender and sexuality. Texts like the Kama Sutra openly discussed same-sex relationships and temples like those in Khajuraho and Konark celebrated diverse expressions of love through art.⁴ Yet this acceptance coexisted with punitive interpretations in scriptures. Pre-Independence India, much like its ancient past, was a deeply stratified society where heteronormative and patriarchal control over familial structures and rigid caste hierarchies dictated much of life. The exaltation of queerness in art, myth, and ritual did not extend to the everyday lives of queer individuals, who faced intense scrutiny, invisibilization, and stigmatization. The coexistence of celebration and censure in ancient India laid the groundwork for the complex interplay of acceptance and stigma that continues today.

During the period of British colonial rule, the cultural ambiguities were legitimized, codifying homophobia into law with Section 377 of the IPC in 1861.⁵ For over 150 years, Section 377 legitimized police brutality, blackmail, and ostracism. Queer individuals were forced into the shadows, navigating their identities in a society increasingly intolerant of diversity. The law framed consensual queer relationships as “unnatural offenses”.⁶

c Justice Malhotra observed this in her own judgment, during the Supreme Court hearing the fight against Section 377 of the IPC. <https://www.scobserver.in/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/377IPC-Judgement-Malhotra.pdf>



Hijra Indian entertainers
(c.1865)



Vinayak Das, Bangalore,
India - Bengaluru Pride 2009

Silence and Stigma in Post-Independence India

After Independence in 1947, India retained Section 377 of the IPC, perpetuating colonial morality in its legal framework. The early decades of independence saw little progress for LGBTQIA+ rights, as queer lives remained shrouded in silence. Public acknowledgment often came at a steep cost – with queer expressions, in literature and the arts subjected to protest and prohibition. During this period, queer individuals endured societal invisibility, economic marginalization, and personal isolation.⁷ This systemic erasure meant that many queer people were cut off from family support, access to healthcare, and avenues for legal redress against discrimination and violence.

Then came the 1980s and 1990s- these years marked a turning point with the HIV/AIDS crisis, disproportionately affecting queer communities.⁸ Over the years to follow, this public health tragedy catalyzed grassroots movements, creating solidarities with other struggling groups, and demanding major public health interventions.⁹

India in the New Millennium and The Rise of Movements

The civil society ecosystem emerged to address both the medical and social dimensions of the crisis. Finally in 2001, Naz Foundation and others were able to file a legal challenge to Section 377 of the IPC, deeming it as a violation of constitutional rights to equality, privacy, and dignity.¹⁰ This challenge marked the beginning of a protracted legal battle that would span nearly two decades. The movement for LGBTQIA+ rights in India has made significant strides in the past two decades, from creating virtual and physical spaces for community building to organizing pride marches, film festivals, and literary events that draw both queer and non-queer audiences alike.¹¹

From indigenous communities that have survived for generations like the kothis and hijras to the more urban, emerging upper-class populations who have access to the language and resources of global LGBTQIA+ culture, there is no one



The Hindu, News paper article



Khajurao Temples, Madhya Pradesh

way to be queer in India. The movement thrives on the alliances that form across lines of caste, class, and region, and it is in these coalitions that the queer communities find their power. Like its counterparts worldwide, this movement is both a site of contestation and a space of possibility. As the Indian LGBTQIA+ movement continues to evolve, it must embrace a spectrum of roles as the critic and participant within systems of power. This means reckoning with its own exclusions and fostering solidarities that are not merely performative but deeply transformative.

As queer people continue to carve out spaces for themselves, they invite everyone to consider this: what does queerness really mean to you? The answer, if we look closely, may be simpler than we think: queerness isn't an "other." It is humanity in its infinite variety – a spectrum of identities, desires, and dreams. And it is a reminder that in embracing the queer, we embrace the full complexity of being human.

To embrace queerness is to embrace complexity. It is to acknowledge that identities are fluid, that binaries are insufficient, that humanity itself is a spectrum. In every generation, queer people have pushed society to confront its own discomforts and prejudices, revealing both the fragility and the strength of our collective understanding of identity.

chapter 2.

historical context.



How to Map a Movement?

Mapping a movement is an inherently complex endeavor – less a linear history than a constellation of moments, alliances, and ruptures. Movements are dynamic by nature: their boundaries shift, voices within them sometimes harmonize and at other times clash, and their priorities evolve as they contend with both external pressures and internal contradictions. In mapping such a history, we confront a paradox: queerness resists fixity. And like queerness itself, the movement too resists singularity.

The history of LGBTQIA+ rights in India is a fragmented, nonlinear history, full of investments and divestments – offering fleeting markers that help trace the evolution of identities, alliances, and aspirations within India’s queer landscape. It thrives at intersections, defies easy categorizations, and embraces multiplicity.

CSOs as Chroniclers, as Catalysts

Traditional methodologies suggest a straightforward route: combing through archives, reviewing literature, and tracing trends to identify gaps and opportunities. Such an evidence-based approach thrives when information is systematically recorded, expansively available, and widely acknowledged as representative. But, historically, queerness in India has not received this kind of care towards documentation. As political theorist Jasbir Puar has argued, queerness can operate both within and against power structures. *“Queerness irreverently challenges a linear mode of conduction and transmission: there is no exact recipe for a queer endeavor, no a priori system that taxonomizes the linkages, disruptions, and contradictions into a tidy vessel.”*¹² The archive of queer experiences is often incomplete, shaped by silences and omissions imposed by a society that has marginalized its queer communities for centuries.¹³

An alternative lens has emerged: observing how communities mobilize around contemporary issues, how narrative change takes form, and how specific struggles visibilize marginalized identities. Resistance is central to queerness – not always at an individual level, but unmistakably as a collective force.¹⁴ LGBTQIA+ activists in India have long resisted social, cultural, and

While both methodologies – the archival and the observational – offer valuable insights, they fall short when employed in isolation. Each risks creating fragmented narratives that overlook the broader systemic landscape. The silences, absences, and omissions, missing data, unacknowledged histories, and unspoken struggles tell a deeper, more poignant story. These gaps reveal a society shaped by exclusion, institutional neglect, and the indifference of mainstream systems.

institutional norms to carve out space within an exclusionary society. This approach emphasizes the “now,” centering on the lived realities of queer individuals navigating intricate webs of societal expectations, legal hurdles, and cultural tensions.

To address these challenges, our study adopts a different lens: mapping the action landscape through the evolution of CSOs and their engagement with LGBTQIA+ communities. It seeks to understand how alliances are built, how voices find resonance, and how priorities evolve in response to shifting landscapes. We have focused on the role of civil society, and aim to capture the intersection of narrative change, action, and aspiration – an intersection where the queer movement is continually evolving.

Civil society’s role in advancing equity for the LGBTQIA+ causes and communities in India is manifold. They have been among the first responders to violence, discrimination, and marginalization, and championed the causes of visibility and representation in spaces which typically exclude queer voices. From the early days of programs to address HIV/AIDS to contemporary battles for marriage equality and anti-discrimination laws, CSOs have been at the forefront of the LGBTQIA+ movement’s most transformative achievements.

Ways of Seeing, Ways of Learning from CSOs

Understanding the civil society landscape for queer identities in India requires more than a surface-level view of its successes and challenges. It examines the mechanisms through which support and empowerment take shape. In our framing, we focus on civil society's engagement through four interlinked lenses: Safe and Affirming Environments, Autonomy and Wellbeing, Visibility and Representation, and Social and Economic Inclusion.

Each lens brings into focus the dynamic, collaborative, and iterative processes that civil society must navigate to meet the diverse and complex challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals in India. Together, these lenses illuminate the ways in which LGBTQIA+ movements and communities in India operate – balancing urgency with intentionality, and resistance with resilience.

- **Safety and Community** crucial vantage points for identifying the violence and unsafety — both visible and invisible — that queer people are forced to endure in everyday spaces. For many LGBTQIA+ people, the structures of natal families or workplaces are fraught with rejection, hostility, or outright violence. In these circumstances, the role of CSOs becomes not just supportive but essential—a bridge to sanctuaries of solidarity and safe spaces where identity is not a liability. Community is the bedrock of queer movements, where solidarity is both a strategy and a source of strength. Observing the landscape through this lens enables us to understand how the absence of institutional and familial acceptance makes mental trauma, violence, and self-harm alarmingly common, these CSOs hold the transformative potential to dismantle barriers and cultivate hope.
- **Physical and Mental Health** captures the ways in which queer individuals and communities assert control over their lives and destinies, maneuvering through cascading crises of discrimination in spheres such as education, health, and other forms of affirming care. It foregrounds the role of civil society in nurturing leadership, building capacities, and enabling self-determination. Through this lens, we see how queer movements seek to reclaim mobility and agency that have historically been denied to them due to exclusion and invisibility. It links

to the livelihoods and financial security which is often affected due to the discrimination faced by the communities. From grassroots protests to strategic legal battles, queer agency is a testament to courage and ingenuity.

- **Visibility and Representation** is both a tool and a terrain of struggle. It encompasses the power to be seen and to shape how one is seen, while simultaneously grappling with the risks of exposure in a society that can be hostile to LGBTQIA+ identities. CSOs have often been at the forefront of advancing visibility by organizing pride marches and broader rallies for justice, crafting inclusive media campaigns, and enabling representation in policy dialogues. This lens, when rooted in the lived realities of marginalized voices, can transform societal perceptions and challenge entrenched stereotypes.
- **Social and Legal Inclusion** is the most poignant aspect of queer existence in India, and its pursuit the most prevalent challenge among LGBTQIA+ communities. For generations, queer people have long formed chosen families, safe circles, and hyperlocal networks to compensate for institutional protections they are often denied. This lens highlights the collaborative and iterative nature of civil society engagement, where efforts are informed by dialogue, shared learning, and mutual support to drive systemic solutions.

Looking at the civil society landscape through these lenses helps map the trajectories of queer struggles and courage while illuminating how responses must adapt to the evolving realities of LGBTQIA+ lives. Civil society's efforts are rarely linear. Change in this landscape demands constant recalibration — learning from community feedback, adapting to shifting socio-political contexts, and balancing immediate needs with long-term goals. Individually and collectively, these lenses serve as guides to understanding not just the challenges but the possibilities for transformative change.



methodology.

This report represents a deliberate attempt to address the gaps in understanding and documentation, particularly those that obscure the voices of marginalized queer communities in India.

1.

secondary research

To chart the historical and contemporary trajectories of queer movements in India, we reviewed academic and other grey literature, archival materials, and anecdotal accounts from both domestic and international publications. We examined the shifting policy landscape, drawing insights from court rulings, government reports, manifestos, and other legal frameworks to trace the codification of progress and persistent gaps in the system.

Crucially, we engaged with the wealth of documentation produced by CSOs and drew on participatory research and studies conducted by independent agencies and collectives etc. Additionally, we delved into interviews, documentaries, films, and other multimedia narratives, seeking a richer, multidimensional understanding of queer identities, expressions, and the struggles that underpin them.

Disclaimer:

The samples used for analysis of the CSO and funding landscapes, covered in Tear-Outs 2 and 3 are limited (70-80 in absolute numbers). The insights are meant to be non-exhaustive and indicative. We acknowledge the limitations of our approach due to data paucity. However, we have used a mix of primary and secondary sources to corroborate the data.

2.

primary research

Throughout the primary research process – we gathered knowledge from the communities and practitioners, through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). These processes have helped us identify patterns in knowledge and experiences.

- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** We conducted over 25 semi-structured interviews with a diverse cohort of stakeholders. These included CSO leaders, legal and policy advocates, researchers, educators, entrepreneurs, artists, and storytellers engaged with LGBTQIA+ communities. Our conversations prioritized queer individuals working within the ecosystem, while also incorporating perspectives from non-queer contributors whose roles support queer rights and well-being.
- **FGDs:** We complemented our interviews with two FGDs, engaging CSO partners across thematic and regional dimensions. The candid and urgent inputs shared during these sessions were instrumental in mapping the nuanced problem landscape that LGBTQIA+ communities and their allies continue to navigate.

Our blended approach merges academic rigor with insights from lived experiences, offering a nuanced, actionable understanding of the role of CSOs in supporting queer communities in India.

The Forest Through the Trees in Uncovering the LGBTQIA+ Action Landscape

We acknowledge the limitations in our framing and research processes. Our intentional focus on CSOs aims to inspire action from a broader audience, but this may inadvertently limit the full scope of the issue. We acknowledge that the perspectives presented may not fully capture the intersectional nuances from the communities. Furthermore, conducting and presenting the research primarily in English, inevitably limits our understanding of varied perspectives.

This report is not an all-encompassing chronicle of LGBTQIA+ realities in India. It does not serve up exhaustive timelines, nationwide records, or intricate policy analyses. In some ways – that absence isn't accidental – it reflects decades of neglect and erasure in a country where taboos and indifference have stifled queer narratives. Rather than stitching together an impossible



Pride Parade,
Mumbai, India

whole, this report attempts to map fragmented terrain.

Too often, isolated stories or headline-grabbing moments dominate the mainstream understanding of LGBTQIA+ politics. The deeper, more challenging work lies in examining the broader landscape – the systemic voids, the persistent silences, and the patterns we overlook. In India, LGBTQIA+ discourse is frequently shaped by urban, upper-caste, and elite narratives. This focus sidelines critical voices speaking from the intersections of caste, class, religion, and geography. For many, the struggle is not just for visibility or legal recognition but for justice—against the structural inequities of poverty, caste-based exclusion, and geographic marginalization.

These gaps, the missing data, tell a deeper story. It's not just about the statistics that aren't there – it's about the communities left behind, the policies that remain inadequate, and the institutions that continue to fall short. In envisioning the queer landscape, we have attempted to uncover not only what is seen but also what remains obscured. It is here, in the layered, intersecting realities of queer existence that this report seeks to locate its purpose.

This report is not a conclusion; it is a beginning. An invitation to look closer, dig deeper, and engage with the contradictions, silences, and possibilities that define the ongoing fight for LGBTQIA+ rights in India.

Civil society's role in advancing equity for the LGBTQIA+ causes and communities in India is manifold. They have been among the first responders to violence, discrimination, and marginalization, and championed the causes of visibility and representation in spaces which typically exclude queer voices. From the early days of programs to address HIV/AIDS to contemporary battles for marriage equality and anti-discrimination laws, CSOs have been at the forefront of the LGBTQIA+ movement's most transformative achievements.

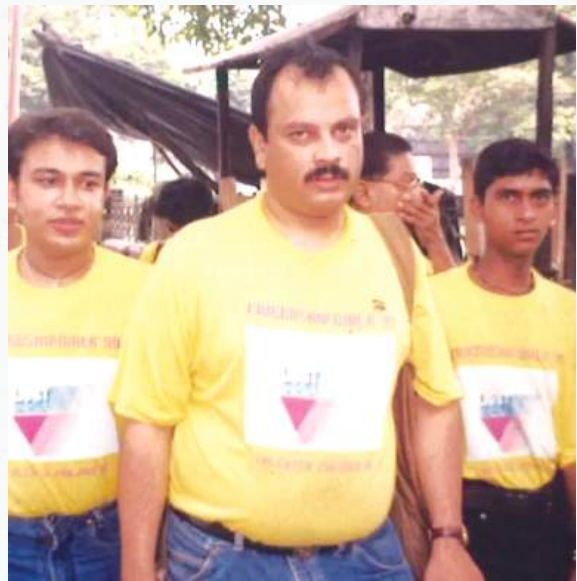
ht 1. spotlight

pride movements: something to be proud of

→ in the spotlight 1

On a quiet day in 1999, fifteen friends took a bold step through the streets of Kolkata, their bright yellow t-shirts emblazoned with pink triangles glinting in the sunlight. The modest parade, dubbed The Friendship Walk, marked India's first pride parade. It was a walk that demanded to be seen, heard, and remembered.

The next day's newspapers immortalized the moment, featuring photos alongside headlines like "15 friends walk with gay abandon." For those who participated, and even for those who read about it in the news, it felt like something monumental had begun.



The Asian Age,
July 3rd, 1999



The Asian Age,
July 3rd, 1999¹⁵

"It showed us literally, and not just abstractly, that queer alternatives are possible in our country. For a young queer person like me, the march showed that we could struggle for a better and more queer-friendly India visibly, proudly and publicly."

- Parmesh Shahani¹⁶,
Godrej DEI Lab

The History of Stonewall

The history of pride begins in the United States with the Stonewall Uprising of June 28, 1969. This landmark event—spurred by LGBTQIA+ individuals resisting police harassment in New York City—ignited the modern queer rights movement. A year later, the first pride march was held to commemorate the uprising, establishing a tradition of resilience and celebration that spread across the globe.

At The Friendship Walk, the marchers' distributed brochures to NGOs and the state's Human Rights Commission and met with reporters to share their stories. Though humble, their efforts inspired the Kolkata Rainbow Pride Walk later that year—the first formalized pride parade in South Asia.

Today, pride marches have blossomed into a nationwide phenomenon, reaching nearly two dozen Indian cities. From the community-funded Delhi Queer Pride to Bengaluru's corporate-supported Namma Pride, which features a month-long celebration called Queer Habba, each march reflects the local flavor of queer assertion. For some, it's a celebration; for others, it's a loud, defiant act of existence in a society that often chooses to look away.



"Our backs ache, our hearts are broken, wallets empty. Yet, we're here on the streets, marching to emphasise that queer."

- Siddharth Santosh, Delhi Pride Parade participant

The only known photograph taken during the first night of the Stonewall riots, by freelance photographer Joseph Ambrosini, shows LGBTQ youth scuffling with police

tear out 1.

policy landscape and key milestones

Why is it important to study the policy context?

Many aspects of personal life in a society are determined by law. For example, aspects like marriage, divorce, adoption, and succession are all governed by personal laws in India.¹⁸ It is through the structure of law that individuals are accorded with benefits and guarantees of certain rights. Bills and policies that are debated in our legislative systems finally trickle down and inform how people lead their daily lives. In this context, while researching any community and mapping their challenges, it becomes important to analyze the policy framework within which they function. This section aims to contextualize the overarching policy frameworks within which queer communities exist

Section 377, Indian Penal Code, 1860, the only legal framework for 157 years

“The native way of life gradually changed with the entry of the British, who brought with them their own sense of morality. It was not their morality alone that they brought with them but also their laws.”¹⁹

In the landmark judgement of Navtej Singh Johar and ORS vs. Union of India (2018), the Supreme Court recognized queerness as a natural phenomenon that has existed in India for centuries. In pre-colonial India – it was not a phenomenon to be ‘accepted’ and considered a part of normal existence in society. A study of historical texts over different periods ranging from ancient India to Sufism provide evidence of visible queerness in various (and often unique indigenous) forms.²⁰

In recent history, the first ‘policy’ for queer communities was enacted by the British in pre-independent India. Under section 377 of the IPC, 1860, homosexuality was deemed a criminal

offence punishable with life imprisonment, or imprisonment up to ten years, with a fine.²¹ This formed the basis of widespread homophobia, forced the communities to go into the closet over the years, devoid queer people fundamental rights. As noted in Navtej Singh Johar and ORS vs. Union of India judgement, the effects of this provision went far beyond criminalizing the sexual act. It “reinforced stereotypes about sexual orientation” “[it] has reinforced societal disdain” (sic). The only legislation surrounding queer people (and that too one that criminalized them) remained in force between 1861 and 2018 (for 157 years).

In 2018, Criminalizing consenting queer relationships under Section 377 of the IPC was finally read as unconstitutional by the Supreme Court after a two-decade long legal battle. This allowed consenting queer adults to enter same sex relationships without fear and they were accorded with certain protections.



Pride Parade,
Mumbai, India

Note, the IPC was replaced by the **Bhartiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS), 2023 in June 2024.**²² It does not retain Section 377 of the IPC in any form. While the Supreme Court read down 377 with respect to consenting same sex relationships, the rape of an adult man or sex with an animal was still a criminal offence. Under the BNS regime, rape of an adult man or sex with an animal is not an offence.

A policy landscape shaped by the judiciary, with legislative frameworks being nascent

If one closely looks at the legal structure that provides the framework for queer communities, one can find legislation and policy glaringly absent. In the absence of legislation, the judiciary have had to step in to provide the communities with certain legal protections and rights. While the Parliament passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 (after the 2018 Supreme Court judgement), and the government has acted on some Supreme Court directives – an overarching legal/policy framework including all queer communities remains missing.

Given several publicly available resources have analyzed queer-rights related judgements – this section only highlights key judgements, as well as legislation and policies that impact queer communities directly.

Key Judgements

Over the years, the courts have passed judgements with respect to queer communities in many aspects including fundamental rights, marriage and relationships, right to identity, employment, and other social protections.

- **National Legal Ser.Auth vs Union of India (2014)23:**²³ The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA), constituted to provide free legal services to the marginalized, filed a writ petition to fight for the cause of transgenders. The Supreme Court noted the historical context and role of the communities in Hindu mythology and ancient texts. It recognized the injustice meted out to the communities over

the years, especially after colonization. In this landmark judgement, the court recognized the ‘third gender’ and the right to self-identify one’s gender. Furthermore, it directed the government to take measures ensuring that as backward classes they receive appropriate reservations. It also asked the government to formulate welfare schemes for the communities.

The judgement is considered landmark as not only did it pave the way for a better life for the transgender communities, but also served as a basis for other progressive judgements to follow for queer communities.

The government set up an Expert Committee to look into issues related to Transgender communities in 2013 which identified the lack of access to healthcare, education, employment and government services in the communities. In 2014, a Private Member Bill to accord transgender rights was introduced in Rajya Sabha and passed in 2015. The government then introduced the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2016 which was examined by a Standing Committee. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2019 was finally passed by Parliament in the 17th Lok Sabha in 2019.

- **Justice KS Puttaswamy (RETD.), and ANR. vs. Union of India and ORS:** In 2017, a nine-judge bench unanimously recognized the right to privacy as a fundamental right accorded by the Constitution.²⁴ The Supreme Court also included sexual orientation under the ambit of the right to privacy. It recognized that the right to privacy is at the very core of human dignity and is derived from Article 21 (the right to life and personal liberty) of the Constitution.

The judgement is considered landmark as by including sexual orientation within the fundamental right to privacy – it paved the way for decriminalization of homosexuality in Navtej Singh Johar and ORS vs. Union of India.



- **Navtej Singh Johar and ORS vs. Union of India:** A series of events in the Courts starting in 2009 finally led to the decriminalization of homosexuality in 2018 through the Navtej Singh Johar and ORs vs. Union of India judgement. It critiqued the reasoning in Suresh Koushal, which upheld Section 377 IPC on the basis of LGBT individuals being a “minuscule” population, deeming it inconsistent with constitutional principles that protect even the rights of a single individual. The Court referring to prior judgements emphasized that the right to identity, dignity, privacy, and self-determination are constitutional rights. It recognized sexual orientation as natural and inherent, with autonomy and privacy central to dignity and identity.

The judgment declared Section 377 of the IPC unconstitutional insofar as it criminalizes consensual adult relationships, as it violates Article 14 (Right to Equality), 19 (Right to Freedom) and 21 (Right to Life and Liberty) of the Constitution by enabling discrimination, infringing freedom of expression, and denying dignity and privacy.

Supriyo @ Supriya Chakraborty & Anr. Vs Union of India²⁵ (2023)

The petitioners made certain prayers including that LGBTQ persons have a right to marry a person of their choice regardless of religion, gender and sexual orientation. Further, they prayed that the Special Marriage Act (SMA) be read gender neutral. The judges (although differing in their opinions) unanimously decided to not read the right to marry as a fundamental right for all persons. The court concluded that the right to enter into union cannot be restricted on the grounds of sexual orientation. The court acknowledged that queer couples have certain rights, and have the rights to form emotional, mental and sexual relationships. The court also directed the government to ensure that the queer community is not discriminated against because of their sexual orientation. The court also noted the government's assurance of constituting a Committee to define the scope of the entitlements of queer couples who are in unions. However, the Court found it beyond its purview to read into the provisions of the SMA, as it would overstep the boundary of separation of powers and it would amount to judicial legislation.

Key Legislations

The legislative framework surrounding queer communities in India is sparse. Based on the Court's directions, the government introduced a bill to protect the rights of transgender persons, which was passed by Parliament in 2019. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 recognizes the right to self-perceived gender identity.²⁶ It establishes a process for obtaining a transgender certificate and mandates the central and state governments to set up welfare schemes and a national council for their support.

The Parliament also passed the HIV and AIDS (Prevention & Control) Act, 2017 to prohibit discrimination against people infected with HIV and AIDS, preventing and curtailing the spread of the disease, while safeguarding confidentiality and certain rights.²⁷ While the Act concerns any individual affected by the virus, in the Bill, the government recognizes that the ‘concentrated’ epidemic is more prevalent in certain vulnerable groups, including men who have sex with men (MSM).^d Thus, this legislation can be considered a policy to provide welfare measures to vulnerable members within the queer communities.

It is noteworthy, that few recent legislations mention certain queer communities or explicitly prohibit discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation (for example, the Mental Health Act, 2017). However, other comprehensive legislation directed towards the communities does not exist.

Key Schemes

This section provides a brief description of key welfare schemes launched by the central government targeted specifically towards queer communities. Due to our limitations – we have not been able to cover schemes at the state level.

- **SMILE - Support for Marginalized Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise- Comprehensive Rehabilitation for Welfare of Transgender Persons and Comprehensive Rehabilitation of persons engaged in the act of Begging..²⁸**

The initiative includes scholarships, skill development, healthcare (including insurance under Ayushman Bharat covering gender affirmation surgeries), housing through ‘Garima Greh’ shelters, and a helpline for support. It also establishes Transgender Protection Cells to address discrimination and violence.

^d The term ‘men who have sex with men’ originated during the HIV pandemic to focus on behavior rather than identity.

The program ensures access to education, employment, and dignity for marginalized communities while promoting inclusivity and empowerment through convergence with other government schemes and partnerships.

- **National AIDS and STD Control Programme (NACP) Phase-V:** The National AIDS and STD Control Programme Phase-V (2021-2026) is a strategic initiative by the government to reduce annual new HIV infections and AIDS-related mortalities by 80% from 2010 levels. The program explicitly includes LGBTQIA+ individuals, especially transgender people, hijras, and men who have sex with men (MSM), as high-priority groups. Tailored interventions aim to provide comprehensive prevention, testing, and treatment services to these populations, acknowledging their higher vulnerability to HIV infections, compared to the general population.

Committee to consider queer issues and immediate policy reliefs

The National Transgender Portal allows transgender persons to apply online for a transgender ID and certificate as per the provisions of the Act and Rules. This ID is needed to avail all benefits provided under the law and welfare schemes. As of December 06, 2024, the Ministry has received 28,543 applications for transgender certificates/IDs. Of these, 23,803 certificates had been issued.²⁹

On the direction of the Supreme Court, the central government constituted a committee in April 2024 to look into issues faced by queer communities and submit recommendations for safeguarding their interests.³⁰ The committee is chaired by the Cabinet Secretary. Its convener is the Secretary, Department of Social Justice and Empowerment, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Its members include the Secretaries of (i) Department of Home, Ministry of Home Affairs, (ii) Ministry of Women and Child Development, (iii) Department of Health and Family Welfare, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and (iv) Legislative Department, Ministry of Law and Justice. The Committee may also co-opt if experts if deemed necessary.

So far, the Committee has met in May 2024 to discuss issues related to ration cards, holding joint bank accounts with partners as nominees, and harassment faced by the communities, and in August 2024 to review progress made by Ministries.³¹

A sub committee was formed which met in May 2024 to discuss measures to address discrimination faced by queer communities, especially with respect to access to welfare, public goods, and police violence. The Department of Social Justice and Empowerment also held a consultation, inviting representatives from LGBTQIA+ communities and other central and state ministries.

As the various sub-committees continue their deliberations and consultations with stakeholders – certain interim actions to safeguard the interests of the communities have been announced. These include:³²

- Queer partners are to be treated as part of the same household for the purpose of ration cards. Further, states are directed to ensure that queer partners do not face any discrimination in issuance of ration cards.
- There will be no restrictions on queer partners to open a joint bank account and to nominate each other as a nominee, in the event of death of the account holder.
- All states/UTs are directed to ensure rights of queer couples with respect to healthcare. These include, (i) prohibiting conversion therapy,^e (ii) making sex reassignment surgery available, (iii) sensitizing staff, and (iv) allowing queer partners to claim the body when near relative/next of kin/family is not available.
- All state health departments are directed to ensure health care access and reduce discrimination towards LGBTQIA+ communities.
- Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has framed guidelines in respect of medical intervention required in infants/ children with disorders of sexual differentiation (intersex).

^e The pseudoscientific practice of attempting to change an individual's sexual or romantic orientation and gender identity or expression, to better align with the cis hetero-patriarchal norms. This includes various forms of violence and intrusion, including and not limited to, forms of brain surgery, surgical or chemical (hormonal) castration, aversion therapy treatments such as electric shocks, nausea-inducing drugs, and more.



Why is legislation and policy glaringly absent?

"The ghost of Section 377 lives on in spite of the decriminalization of the sexual offence and the recognition of the rights of queer persons in Navtej"³³

- **Almost no political representation:** As pointed out by the Supreme Court, criminalizing queer communities had the effect of pushing the communities to the margins of society in all spheres, including politics. Despite decriminalization, the communities continue to face political oppression. This could be due to fear of public disapproval and fear of ostracization. While queer communities have found a mention in election manifestos, openly queer political leaders are glaringly missing from the Indian political landscape. In 2015, Raigarh, Chhattisgarh elected India's first trans mayor, who has chosen not to re-enter electoral politics due to polarization.³⁴ "Queer people have been left out of conversations, told politics is not an avenue for them for so long"³⁵ - India got its first openly gay national spokesperson of a political party only in 2024.³⁶ According to the analysis done by the Pinklist India, only 151 (28%) of Members of Parliament have been vocal about queer issues in the 16th Lok Sabha.^{37, f} The lack of political representation and visible political leaders from the communities is correlated with the barriers to queer issues featuring in the political agenda.
- **An invisible constituency:** Evidence from our conversations with community leaders shows that queer communities are left out of political agendas because they don't form a geographic concentration of a constituency. In a first-past-the-post or Parliamentary electoral system – the geographic concentration of an electorate becomes very important. In India, communities may vote based on affiliations to class, caste, and religion among other factors. Research has shown that communities tend

to vote in a unified way.³⁸ The complexities of queer communities make it harder for them to be seen as an electoral constituency by political parties. The very nature of queerness makes it spread throughout the population. This means the communities cannot form an electorally important bloc. Society induced closet-ization of queers makes the communities further invisible. In addition, a qualitative study found that many queer people do not vote based on queer issues.³⁹ A candidate's stance on queer issues is not a main consideration for them. These complexities link to political parties not being incentivized to take up queer issues in a system where votes are a driving incentive for political parties.

- **How many queers are out there? No one knows:** The only official figures that exist around the communities as pointed out earlier in the report are 2011 census data on the transgender population. There are various other estimates on the size of queer communities in India. In 2012, in its submission to the Supreme Court, the government estimated the LGBTQIA+ population to be 2.5 million.⁴⁰ Another estimate using the Kinsey scale places the LGBTQIA+ population to be approximately 10% (135 million) of the population. A study by IPSOS, a market research firm, estimates 17% of the population identifies themselves somewhere on the spectrum of LGBTQIA+ communities.⁴¹ The different sources greatly vary in their methodologies and estimates. In the absence of official data of the LGBTQIA+ population of the country, it is hard to create a policy and legislative framework. Data is fundamental to begin officially documenting issues faced by the communities for the state to form policies. The upcoming census in 2026 (the first since decriminalization of homosexuality) presents an opportunity for the government to be inclusive and consider gathering data on the queer communities.

f Note, these mostly include trans related issues. Also, while reporting, Pinklist does not distinguish between the nature or content of intervention made by the Member of Parliament.

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भारत का राजपत्र
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सं० ६४] नई दिल्ली, बृहस्पतिवार, दिसम्बर ०५, २०१९/ अग्रहायण १४, १९४१ (शक)
 No. 64] NEW DELHI, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 05, 2019/AGRAHAYANA 14, 1941 (SAKA)

इस भाग में भिन्न पृष्ठ संख्या दी जाती है जिससे कि यह अलग संकलन के रूप में रखा जा सके।
 Separate paging is given to this Part in order that it may be filed as a separate compilation.

MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE
 (Legislative Department)

New Delhi, the 5th December, 2019/Agrahayana 14, 1941 (Saka)

The following Act of Parliament received the assent of the President on the 5th December, 2019, and is hereby published for general information:—

THE TRANSGENDER PERSONS (PROTECTION OF RIGHTS)
ACT, 2019

No. 40 of 2019

[5th December, 2019.]

An Act to provide for protection of rights of transgender persons and their welfare and for matters connected therewith and incidental thereto.

Be it enacted by Parliament in the Seventieth Year of the Republic of India as follows:—

CHAPTER I

PRELIMINARY

1. (1) This Act may be called the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019.

(2) It extends to the whole of India.

(3) It shall come into force on such date as the Central Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, appoint.

Transgender Persons
 (Protection of Rights) Act,
 2019 on Gazette of India.

● **Window of Opportunities**

Over the years, communities have been fighting to get legal protections for queer citizens of India. It has been a long battle that has yielded some results with respect to protection of fundamental rights, but the journey is far from over. While the courts have recognized sexual orientation as core to an individual’s identity and protected by the right to dignity, life and privacy – the society has a long way to go to integrate queer communities in the mainstream. The government can play an important role in shaping the attitudes of society through policy and legislation. While the government did not fight decriminalization of homosexuality, it did argue against the right to marry for same sex couples. This precedent may reinforce existing stigmas. We acknowledge that not being able to marry is only one of the issues faced by queer communities

As declared by the Courts, the Constitution already guarantees the right to equality, dignity, and privacy to queer communities. However, the executive must play a role in ensuring that these rights are upheld. The Supriyo & Anr. vs Union of India judgement has left much to the wisdom of the government, including safeguarding rights beyond marriage. As a first step, the government has acted on the Supreme Court directive and is working to address various issues faced by the communities. As mentioned earlier, certain interim steps have already been taken to ensure that queer couples have access to social welfare, and do not face any discrimination. As these deliberations continue, the government should see this as a chance not to be missed to finally do right by communities that have been wronged and pushed to the margins of society systemically for over a century. With the courts paving the way for the government, there is now a window of opportunity for the government to build on this momentum.



NACO involved people who had been living with HIV, many of whom had already worked as activists, to target High-Risk Groups

(Vijayanand Gupta, HT photo)

feminist movements: feminist articulations of gender and sexuality in india

→ in the spotlight 2

From the 1970s onwards, the emergence of autonomous women's movements in different parts of the country brought newfound attention to issues linked to gender-based discrimination and violence.

These movements comprised of educated, working-class women from different folds of life — students, youth, workers, peasants, Dalit and tribal communities — who were united in their struggles to strengthen women's agency. Characterized by a progressive understanding of sexuality, these movements often welcomed queer women. However, deeper engagement with their distinct lived experiences remained conspicuously absent.

"Though there was an acceptance of being lesbian, there was no foregrounding of issues. So one felt that there was space within these groups to be who you are to a certain extent, but there were no campaigns that were being taken up."

- Chayanika Shah, women's & queer rights campaigner

Fashioning spaces for the distinct lived experiences of LBT communities

Feminist organizing in India has long shared a camaraderie with struggles to expand LGBTQIA+ rights. By the 1990s, lesbian and queer-identifying women had begun to collectivize on their own, from within and beyond the folds of women's movements. This decade laid the foundations for the vibrant ecosystem of informal networks working with lesbian women, bisexual women and transmen (LBT) and persons assigned gender female (PAFGB) communities in India today.

1991

Sakhi, widely considered one of India's first explicitly lesbian networks, opens up its mailbox in South Delhi to letters from lesbian women and collectives across India

1995

LABIA – a Queer Feminist LBT Collective (formerly Stree Sangam) emerges in Mumbai to offer lesbian and bisexual women a space for community mobilization

1996

Vikalp Women's Group is founded in Vadodara, Gujarat, to address violence and discrimination against marginalized women and LBT communities

1998

CALERI (Campaign for Lesbian Rights) is formed in Delhi to advocate for the rights of lesbian women, in response to political censorship of Deepa Mehta's film Fire, which explores lesbian romance

1999

Sappho, Eastern India's first community support group for LBT communities, is established in Kolkata

On the one hand, the last 25 years have witnessed the emergence of pioneering models of care and support for LBT communities. Nonprofit organizations and autonomous collectives have been instrumental in illustrating the unique challenges they face — including heightened vulnerability to some forms of gender-based violence, and additional socioeconomic barriers that impede autonomy and agency. On the other hand, the lived experiences of LBT communities remain obscure in the mainstream, in politics as in culture, and the vision of an India where they can thrive with equity remains to be fulfilled.

Forging solidarities through shared articulations of gender and sexuality

Feminist articulations of gender and sexuality have evolved, and continue to evolve, through a centering of people's lived experiences. The patriarchal, binary articulation asserts that 'man' and 'woman' are universal categories that apply to everyone and ascribes them normative behaviors that align with cisgendered and heterosexual identities. Ongoing, reflexive dialogue between diverse movements, cultures, and identities has helped challenge this idea, pointing out how the experiences of queer, transgender, nonbinary, intersex, and other communities that fall outside of this binary can help broaden how gender, sexuality, and even biological sex are understood.

Progressive feminist movements today widely acknowledge a de-binarized approach to gender and sexuality, which prioritizes how people self-identify and experience their identities, as a priority. For some feminist civil society organizations in India whose work focuses on gender and sexuality rights, employing such an approach has been endemic to their mission. As frequent collaborators for grassroots organizations that work with LGBTQIA+ communities, their contributions to areas such as research, capacity-building, and narrative change have been transformative.

Spotlighting stories of impact



1.

CREA, an international feminist human rights organization founded in Delhi in 2001, works with structurally excluded women and girls, disabled people, sex workers, and people with diverse sexualities, genders, and sex characteristics. The organization's work focuses on feminist leadership, sexual and reproductive health rights, responding to gender-based violence, and fostering collective resilience through narrative change.



2.

Point of View empowers women, girls, and queer gender and sexual minorities to inhabit and shape digital spaces, through digital literacy and capacity-building, digital storytelling, and research. The organization incorporates a strong queer-affirming lens across its programs, and partners with LGBTQIA+ communities for its initiatives in strengthening digital rights and facilitating narrative change.



3.

TARSHI (Talking About Reproductive and Sexual Health Issues) uses an intersectional feminist lens and a rights-based approach to advance people's wellbeing and agency over their sexuality through research and capacity-building. The organization's current thematic areas of work include sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), safe, inclusive, and self-affirming spaces (SISA).

chapter 3.

thresholds.



LGBTQIA+ communities experience intersecting realities, emerging from diverse socioeconomic and cultural contexts. The challenges faced by the communities are rooted in the stigma and structural inequity stemming from their othering in society. These issues are multilayered and must be understood in conjunction with other intersectional identities. At the heart of each complex dimension of LGBTQIA+ struggles, there is a need to be seen, understood, and accepted for one’s queerness, and the identities and aspirations that stem from it. It is important to fundamentally recognize LGBTQIA+ needs as human needs, cutting across sectors of development such as education, livelihoods, and healthcare, and calling out societal structures to be more responsive to non-normative identities. The marginalization of queer lived experiences in mainstream development discourse is reinforced by a societal reluctance to engage with these communities. Empirical and ethnographic narratives from within the folds of civil society challenge how we view these needs, pushing us to reconsider how we understand various forms of inclusion.

The lives of LGBTQIA+ individuals are often marked by challenges in navigating societal structures that may be unsupportive of their needs or even actively discriminatory towards their identities. These negotiations can be contextualized across three sites:

- **Communities:** Social agents such as families, peers, and kinship networks based on geography, language, caste, and communal identity
- **Institutions:** Government authorities, justice systems, service providers, and other agents responsible for safeguarding rights and guaranteeing access to basic services
- **Systems:** Mindsets, norms, structures, customs, and attitudes that lie at the root of power dynamics in society

Thresholds signify a point for the beginning of change, denoting a level at which something must start to have an effect. In the table below, we provide an overview of communities’ threshold needs, through the interplay among the four lenses and the three sites highlighted earlier.

Figure 1: Thresholds across lenses and sites

	Sites>>>	Communities	Institutions	Systems
LENSES	Safety and Community	Limited access to safety and shelters amidst exclusion	Backlash from justice institutions and authorities	Absence of queer-affirming redressal against violence
	Physical and Mental Health	Vulnerability to mental health issues and injustice	Lack of queer-affirming services and providers	Denial from long-term economic resilience
	Visibility and Representation	Underrepresentation of intersectional identities	Patriarchal and heteronormative contexts	Limited avenues for political engagement
	Social and Legal Inclusion	Need for community support structures	Limited safeguards for workforce inclusion	Lack of socio-legal sanction to chosen + found families

safety and community

physical and mental health

visibility and representation

social and legal inclusion

1. safety and community

Threshold | Communities: Limited access to safety and shelters amidst exclusion

LGBTQIA+ people in India may face neglect, abuse, and ill-treatment from their assigned families (by birth or adoption), with consequences linked to restrictions on mobility, expression, and resource-access. Leaving their assigned homes is often necessary for them to lead openly queer lives, and in more extreme circumstances, escape imminent violence. The limited evidence available points to the widespread nature of the familial abuse, violence, and subsequent estrangement faced by queer communities.

A 2018 study supported by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of India revealed that only around 2% of India's transgender people live with their parents.⁴³ Findings from a closed-door Jan Sunwai (public hearing) organized in 2023 highlighted how grievous violence from assigned families can be, encompassing threats such as physical and sexual violence, forced marriage, and wrongful confinement at the hands of their assigned families.⁴⁴ In the face of these challenges, access to safe shelter remains elusive for many young queer people in the country. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, directed the government to establish shelter homes aimed at the rescue and protection of transgender people. In the last three years, the government has set up 18 Garima Grehs which have rehabilitated 990 individuals.⁴⁵ However, much work remains to be done to build shelter spaces that address a wider breadth of LGBTQIA+ identities, affirm queer autonomy, and enable communities to live dignified lives free of stigma.

Threshold | Institutions: Backlash from justice institutions and authorities

LGBTQIA+ communities' vulnerability to violence is compounded by the tendency of justice institutions to collude with acts of repression against them. From the late 1990s onwards, the need for legal protection against violence by these institutions became a rallying cry for queer activists around India. Section 377 of the IPC, which was often used by police authorities in the country to stigmatize, detain, and harass queer people on grounds of 'suspected' homosexuality, was increasingly understood as a symbol for these excesses of force.⁴⁶ The judgment reading down Section 377 sought to address these entrenched forms of violence, spelling out that it is important for police forces to be sensitized on how to engage with LGBTQIA+ communities. However, police violence against queer people continues to be a challenge, with authorities often harassing individuals at the behest of their families.⁴⁷ This indicates that as they exist, legal deterrents have been insufficient in preventing violence from justice institutions. Specific mechanisms are required to address these entrenched forms of harm, prioritizing deeper engagement with how societal norms and attitudes influence institutional behavior.

Threshold | Systems: Absence of queer-affirming redressal against violence

A lack of norms and vocabularies to address specific forms of violence against LGBTQIA+ communities creates legal lacunae. A growing body of evidence indicates that some queer communities in India are disproportionately vulnerable to verbal, physical, and sexual violence. In 2016, a study by National Aids Control Organization (NACO) revealed that more than one-third of the transwomen surveyed had experienced sexual violence at the hands of men.⁴⁸ A 2024 survey of gay and bisexual

safety and community

physical and mental health

visibility and representation

social and legal inclusion

men across six Indian cities found that those who were openly queer were up to five times likelier to face violence of some nature than those who were not.⁴⁹ Interlocking marginalization linked to regressive gender norms make violence faced by lesbian women, transmen, and other queer PAFGB more obscure and difficult to trace. Accounts from these communities note the prevalence of physical and sexual violence, particularly in coercive familial and marital settings.^{50, 51}

Nascent legal frameworks that lend some acknowledgement to LGBTQIA+ communities' rights fall far short of accounting for such violence. Ambiguities in India's sexual violence laws further impede legal recognition of sexual offences where perpetrators and victims do not fit rigidly defined gender categories. While the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (2023) omits any laws that can address physical and sexual violence against LGBTQIA+ people in non-heteronormative contexts, Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, (2019) caps punishment for violence against transgender people at a mere two years' imprisonment.⁵² When compared to other laws against sexual and physical violence, the disparities become stark and the gaps apparent. In addition to addressing these ambiguities within existing laws, queer-affirming redressal frameworks call for a deeper engagement with specific forms of violence against LGBTQIA+ people — such as stigma-fueled acts of curative violence in familial settings, or intimate partner violence within queer relationships.

The National Transgender Portal allows transgender persons to apply online for a transgender ID and certificate as per the provisions of the Act and Rules. This ID is needed to avail all benefits provided under the law and welfare schemes. As of December 06, 2024, the Ministry has received 28,543 applications for transgender certificates/IDs. Of these, 23,803 certificates had been issued.

- Department of Social Justice & Empowerment, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Government of India, "SMILE".

2. physical and mental health

Threshold | Communities: Vulnerability to mental health issues and injustice

Exclusion from spaces of care and community creates unique mental health stressors for LGBTQIA+ communities. Increased vulnerability to violence, stigma by social agents at home and beyond, and proximity to precarious socioeconomic conditions all play a role in alienating queer people from care and acceptance. A systematic review of research on LGBTQIA+ mental health in India revealed that queer groups across the spectrum have a high propensity towards experiencing mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and substance use.⁵³ The grave implications of leaving this crisis unaddressed are apparent in the disproportionately high rates of suicide documented among transgender people — at almost 31%.⁵⁴

Far from providing affirming pathways to wellbeing, mental healthcare systems often replicate and exacerbate stigma against queer people, demarcating queer orientations and identities as deviant and less-than-normal. Accounts of curative violence and 'conversion therapy' illustrate how medical professionals further impede LGBTQIA+ communities' access to lives of autonomy and dignity under the guise of providing psychological and psychiatric support.⁵⁵ Considering the paucity of spaces where queer people can access affirming mental health support, it remains a point of crisis that must be addressed with urgency.

safety and community

physical and mental health

visibility and representation

social and legal inclusion

Threshold | Institutions: Lack of queer-affirming services and providers

LGBTQIA+ communities face structural barriers due to discrimination while accessing basic services in education and healthcare. A policy paper by UNESCO highlights the nature of barriers faced by LGBTQIA+ students in schools across the world — including bullying and discrimination by peers, the absence of queer-affirming curricula, and shortfalls in awareness and capacity among teachers.⁵⁶ Challenges linked to education for queer communities remain somewhat underexplored in the Indian context, despite strong evidence to indicate structural exclusion. A 2019 study by LGBTQIA+ community-based organization Sahodaran in Chennai found that physical, verbal, sexual, and cyber/social bullying are frequent experiences for LGBTQIA+ school students in Tamil Nadu.⁵⁷ The 2011 census estimates a literacy rate of around 56% for transgender people.⁵⁸ However, the absence of robust and well-defined data protocols makes it worth considering that this number might be much lower at a population level.⁹

Healthcare is another key area where LGBTQIA+ communities face challenges. Historically, efforts to expand healthcare access for queer groups have focused on the alleviation of HIV-AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). The challenges that emerge from this are twofold. First, despite some recognition of these needs by legal and political systems, little progress has been made on improving queer-specific medical services such as hormonal therapy and sexual reassignment surgery for transgender people.⁵⁹ Second, the rampant use of unscientific, regressive medical practices that pathologize queerness makes it difficult for LGBTQIA+ people to access medical care at large while interacting with India's healthcare systems.⁶⁰ A paucity of longitudinal data makes it even more challenging to map the impact of discrimination in health and education on the lives of queer communities in the long run.

Threshold | Systems: Denial from long-term economic resilience

A combination of factors makes LGBTQIA+ communities more vulnerable to unemployment and underemployment throughout the course of their lives. A 2013 study highlights how this operates in the Indian context — the intersection of multiple marginalizations linked to gender, caste, class, and other social identities traps LGBTQIA+ people in cycles of economic deprivation.⁶¹ This is exacerbated by economic and social displacement due to violence in families, schools, and other social spaces. On the other end, stigma and regressive ideals often place an artificial ceiling on the kinds of employment that queer individuals can access. In 2018, a study by the NHRC revealed that up to 96% transgender people are forced into low-income employment in precarious settings, taking up jobs such as sex work and begging — despite 80% of them meeting eligibility requirements for better employment opportunities.

In recent years, there has been more recognition around the need to increase economic participation among LGBTQIA+ people. Reframing this challenge to focus on enabling and empowering queer communities highlights the need for a greater focus on forms of employment which enhance economic agency. It also reinforces the need for nuanced, responsive approaches to livelihoods that can account for various identities and intersections.

⁹ Data collected under the 'other' category, leading to ambiguities in reporting

safety and community

physical and mental health

visibility and representation

social and legal inclusion

3. visibility and representation

Threshold | Communities: Underrepresentation of intersectional identities

Like their counterparts in other countries, LGBTQIA+ communities in India have been forced to make difficult negotiations with respect to public visibility. For a people whose very existence is only beginning to be legitimized in the eyes of the state and society, being identifiably queer could come with contingent risks and threats. As a result, it is LGBTQIA+ communities with socioeconomic privileges who have been at the forefront of queer visibility in the mainstream. A 2019 study on intersectionality and caste in South India highlights how transgender people who are Dalit experience heightened vulnerability to structural discrimination and violence.⁶² However, inquiry into how intersectional identities exacerbate LGBTQIA+ experiences of inequity is nascent. Firsthand narratives from LGBTQIA+ individuals from marginalized castes and communal contexts illustrate how their political assertions are sidelined and their identities alienated in LGBTQIA+ community spaces such as pride marches.^{63, 64, 65}

Caught in the crossfire, the voices of queer people who are intersectionally marginalized are often sidelined. The absence of inclusive, culturally responsive vocabulary echoes these constraints. The experiences and expressions of indigenous queer groups such as the hijras, jogappas, aravanis, kothis, and shiv-shakthis, for instance, are often invisibilized when placed under Global North-influenced categories like 'transgender' and 'intersex'. Addressing the systematic underrepresentation of intersectionally marginalized queer groups in the mainstream calls for sustained, long-term engagement with their perspectives and needs.

Threshold | Institutions: Patriarchal and heteronormative contexts

Cis-heteropatriarchy refers to systems of power and control that position cisgendered, heterosexual men as the normative ideal subject in expressions of gender and sexuality.⁶⁶ LGBTQIA+ communities challenge these dominant expressions and often bear the brunt of social backlash for 'deviating' from them. Some queer groups face additional constraints in this paradigm, due to disproportionate vulnerability towards patriarchal repression. A 2013 study by LABIA – A Queer Feminist LBT Collective charts out how grassroots movements led by lesbian and bisexual women in the 1990s gradually came to encompass a more pluralistic view of queerness.⁶⁷ It describes how this shift was informed by a deeper engagement with alternate articulations of gender and sex among groups such as transmen, intersex people, and some indigenous queer communities. The study highlighted the distinct nature of struggles faced by PAFGB, an umbrella term used to refer to queer people who were assigned social identities linked to womanhood at birth. The similarities in their struggles, it argued, do not necessarily emanate from shared identities such as being or loving women, but instead in how their experiences are invisibilized in patriarchal contexts. This invisibilization is apparent in the glaring omission of these groups in laws, policies, and development agenda focused on LGBTQIA+ communities, which have tended to focus more on the needs of cisgendered gay people and, more recently, transwomen. The need to solve for such patriarchal and heteronormative inequity in representation coexists with, and within. The wider struggle is to find convergences between the needs of LGBTQIA+ communities amid a heterogenous spectrum of lived experiences.

safety and community

physical and mental health

visibility and representation

social and legal inclusion

Threshold | Systems: Limited avenues for political engagement

LGBTQIA+ communities have found it difficult to secure meaningful representation in electoral politics in India. This can be attributed to several reasons, including the geographically dispersed nature of queer populations, the plurality of queer needs and struggles, and the structural neglect of queer experiences in the mainstream. LGBTQIA+ concerns found limited room in the manifestos of prominent political parties in the run-up to the 2024 general election.⁶⁸ Further, no major political party fielded a single openly queer candidate as an electoral prospect.⁶⁹ At the heels of a decade where LGBTQIA+ concerns have made significant legal strides in the country, the dissonance between the growing momentum behind queer rights at the grassroots and the lack of representation within political systems is apparent. Transgender politicians who have been active within Indian electoral politics have historically endured backlash, discrimination, and a lack of support from their own parties for their candidature.⁷⁰ Instances of sexual minority individuals who are out to the public contesting elections remain far more elusive. Amid limited avenues for direct engagement with political systems, the standpoints and lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ communities are confined to the fringes of larger political discourse.

4. social and legal inclusion

Threshold | Communities: Need for community support structures

Community support structures are deeply interwoven into the histories of LGBTQIA+ communities around the world — as spaces of solidarity and refuge in the face of societal stigma and indifference alike. Accounts from the 1990s onwards speak to two distinct, if overlapping, trajectories of queer community support in India. On the one hand, the emergence of an ‘underground party scene’ in cities like Mumbai, Delhi, and Kolkata facilitated convening and community among affluent urban queer populations.⁷¹ On the other hand, the intensification of community mobilization efforts by civil society movements began to seed spaces for marginalized queer communities to come together and seek support.⁷² Efforts to make queer communities of care more widespread and accessible have carried forth into the digital age, with online support networks, social media forums, and even dating apps offering room for LGBTQIA+ people to interact with one another. Regardless, seeking social support remains an uphill battle for many queer communities in the country, and is compounded by other forms of marginalization at every stage.

For those who migrate to new geographies in search of mobility and respite from persecution — cascading challenges linked to linguistic assimilation, class and caste performance, and other cultural barriers often limit the sense of belongingness that they find in such spaces.⁷³ Communities of care play a crucial role in enabling queer people to articulate and express their own identities and receive social support that has been denied to them by others in society. Expanding these communities and making them more ubiquitously available to queer people across lines of geography, language, identity, and culture is necessary.

safety and community

physical and mental health

visibility and representation

social and legal inclusion

Threshold | Institutions: Limited safeguards for workplace inclusion

Examining how LGBTQIA+ communities are excluded in workplaces adds another dimension to how their economic struggles can be understood. While anti-discrimination policies and sensitization programs have become more common in the corporate sector, queer individuals report persistent experiences of harassment and discrimination. Invisibility within other workplace policies and safeguards also remains a persistent challenge. Building infrastructure such as gender-neutral washrooms and providing relevant benefits such as health coverage for same-sex partners and sexual reassignment surgery, are among the steps that some workplaces are taking to bridge this gap.⁷⁴

In recent years, grassroots queer movements and activists have shifted their focus from the need for responsive policies to how enabling workplace environments are required to facilitate meaningful inclusion. A study on LGBTQIA+ workplace inclusion by Humsafar Trust points towards the need for more employees to publicly endorse their support for queer communities.⁷⁵ It also points to the need for leadership buy-in and engagement with queer diversity at the workplace, and the catalytic role that LGBTQIA+ leaders could play in making intentional commitments. Moving beyond tokenistic workplace inclusion requires deep engagement with framing affirming policies that respond to their needs in real-time, and an institutional overhaul, ensuring such measures are encapsulated as clear safeguards.

Threshold | Systems: Lack of socio-legal sanction to chosen + found families

Queer modes of community and belonging at once represent a radical reimagining of norms linked to family, kinship, and gender, and an ever-evolving response to the crisis of care in other social ecosystems. The absence of legal sanction for LGBTQIA+ marriages and partnerships in India disempowers communities from building familial ties based on their identities. In 2023, the Supreme Court of India ruled against granting legal recognition to same-sex marriages and suggested

that legislative reform was required to achieve this, despite reaffirming that discrimination against LGBTQIA+ couples must end.⁷⁶ In the absence of equitable recognition for queer marriages – the communities are not guaranteed the same legal rights and protections as married heterosexual couples, placing arbitrary constraints on how they can share resources, access domesticity, and even raise children. Strong community and support spaces prevent cycles of loneliness, persecution, and exclusion. For those who leave their homes to escape persecution and regressive social expectations from their assigned families, the ‘chosen’ and ‘found’ families that emerge from within these spaces can offer refuge, socially as well as economically.⁷⁷ Beyond granting sanction to queer marriages, there is a need to legitimize non-normative structures of family where LGBTQIA+ people are empowered to autonomously decide who should legally and socially be considered their kin.

Examining the ecosystem for support:

Addressing LGBTQIA+ communities’ needs requires paradigmatic shifts in societal attitudes among a wide range of stakeholders, across the sites of communities, institutions, and systems. The struggles to achieve equity for queer communities in India has largely been decentralized and people led. These movements and coalitions, forged through organic solidarities, have enabled belongingness and wins for queer communities.

These vibrant, heterogenous efforts fall under the broader umbrella of civil society, accounting for individuals and groups of different kinds, noted below.

- Influential LGBTQIA+ citizens and allies
- Advocates and activists
- Artists and media voices
- Voluntary community groups and support networks
- Rights-based movements
- Nonprofit organizations

Spotlight 3.

sustaining hope:

a legacy of community-based support and resilience

→ in the spotlight 3



"I am who I am today because of the support I found 30 years ago."

Vivek Raj Anand, The Humsafar Trust

"I am who I am today because of the support I found 30 years ago." Vivek Raj Anand reflects on the three decades since he joined The Humsafar Trust, shortly after its inception. "We came together as an alternate family. I knew that my friends and siblings would one day marry and create their own families. For those of us who are queer, criminalization cast an unyielding shadow, making such dreams seem unattainable. In this moment, Humsafar became our sanctuary, our chosen family."

The 1990s were a time of political ferment for India's urban queer movements — a period where hope and struggle were deeply intertwined. Public discourse on HIV-AIDS brought nascent attention to queer needs within policy, yet pervasive stigma and systemic violence against LGBTQIA+ people remained the norm. Section 377 of

the IPC loomed large, and it was often used to harass and persecute those involved in grassroots civil society campaigns. Humsafar Trust emerged in response to these challenges, envisioning a support ecosystem that could foster greater acceptance of LGBTQIA+ identities.

Humsafar's commitment to long-term systemic engagement has enabled it to cultivate enduring partnerships with state and central governments and public health institutions. It has sought to make redressal mechanisms against HIV and AIDS more accessible to vulnerable LGBTQIA+ communities and built comprehensive well-being programs in mental health, nutrition, and other key areas linked to well-being. Peer support networks and safe community spaces have been the lifeblood of the organization's efforts, which have empowered queer individuals through legal aid, crisis intervention, and support groups tailored to diverse intersections — LBT individuals, youth, and those living with HIV, among others.

As a first mover in this landscape, Humsafar has been at the forefront of legal action and narrative change efforts linked to the reading down of Section 377. Beyond legal victories, the organization has amplified its impact through research and capacity-building initiatives, strengthening sectoral intelligence and cultivating queer-affirming approaches to evidence-informed action. Humsafar Trust's story is not merely one of survival; it is a tale of thriving in the face of challenges. As it steps into its fourth decade, Humsafar remains a luminous force, a story of individuals and communities daring to dream, heal, and build together.

queering mental health: transformative care for lgbtqia+ communities



→ in the spotlight 4

“Historically, the discipline of mental health has been violent towards queer and transgender folks from its very genesis,” says Raj Mariwala. Indeed, homosexuality was classified as a disorder in psychiatric manuals until as late as 1990, leading to the use of stigmatizing practices like conversion therapy and institutionalization against queer individuals. Yet, overwhelming evidence exists to demonstrate how queer communities face disproportionately high mental health burdens in the face of stigmatization, isolation, and violence because of their gender and sexuality. Mariwala Health Initiative (MHI), founded by Harsh Mariwala in 2015, has been at the forefront of nudging the mental health ecosystem to become more responsive to the needs of historically marginalized communities.

In 2019, MHI launched its flagship program, the Queer Affirmative Counseling Practice (QACP) course — a first-of-its-kind initiative in India. Designed by queer and transgender mental health practitioners, the six-day program equips therapists to embrace a queer-affirmative approach. The distinction is profound: being “queer-friendly” is neutral, even passive; being “queer-affirmative” is active, a commitment to acknowledging and addressing systemic inequalities that LGBTQIA+ individuals endure.

“Much before formal mental health entered the picture, queer communities have always been supporting each other, and that is invaluable.” MHI has been queering mental health itself — by recognizing the value of collectives and community led-support and tapping into the possibilities of approaches that are not top-down to engage with distress.

MHI’s commitment goes beyond immediate

care, addressing the broader systemic oppression — caste, class, ability, age, gender, sexuality, religion — that intersect with mental health. This has meant partnering with organizations and working towards community leaders driving mental health work in their own communities. They have now extended their reach beyond individual practitioners, engaging in collaborations with government and educational institutions, their latest initiative being a QACP specially designed for campus counsellors/mental health practitioners and faculty members to support LGBTQIA+ students.

Mariwala Health Initiative’s work illuminates a future where care is liberating, transcendental, and led by LGBTQIA+ communities, proving that mental health is not a neutral discipline but a deeply political one, and that healing cannot exist without justice.

tear out 2.

state of civil society organizations

Nonprofit organizations constitute a key stakeholder group within the civil society umbrella. Historically, nonprofits working with queer communities in India have received government and international funding for targeted interventions against HIV-AIDS. This has led to greater mainstream visibility for nonprofit programs concentrated on the theme. However, nonprofits within the landscape have continued to represent and serve a breadth of LGBTQIA+ communities. Nonprofit programs and interventions may encompass the following:

- **Engaging with legal systems:** Petitioning courts, consulting policymakers and government bodies, advocating for queer-affirming legal and policy shifts, enabling access to legal aid and justice
 - **Improving access to basic services:** Last-mile services delivery to enable outcomes in education, healthcare, and livelihoods, particularly among intersectionally marginalized groups
 - **Reaching special interest groups:** Tailored programs to engage with special interest groups whose needs are often deprioritized in mainstream queer narratives, including LBT groups, indigenous queer-trans communities, and Dalit, Bahujan and Adivasi groups, etc.
- Extending emergency support:** Offering shelter, mental health support, and other crisis intervention services to LGBTQIA+ people facing homelessness, isolation, and other threats
- **Facilitating behavior and narrative change:** Interventions aimed at sensitization, awareness-building, evidence-building, and disseminating queer perspectives in the mainstream

Action Landscape

We studied 81 registered nonprofits, based on publicly available information, to analyze trends in the nonprofit action landscape. The findings and analysis presented below identify actionable opportunities to strengthen their impact.

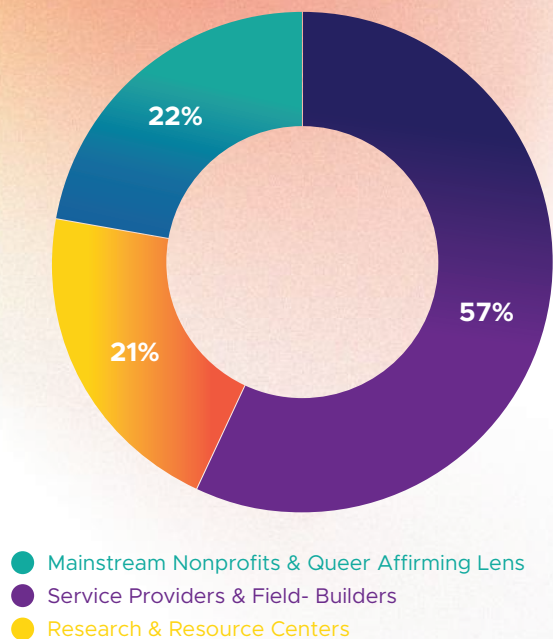
Programs

Nonprofits in this landscape tend to work on multiple program areas, creatively utilizing their resources to address a breadth of queer needs.

At 57%, service providers & field-builders constitute more than half of the nonprofits in this landscape.

To understand where nonprofit programs and priorities are concentrated, we mapped their primary focus areas across three archetypes.*

Figure 2: Primary Focus Areas of Nonprofits



*Most organizations engaging with queer communities directly worked across both the 'service-providers and field-builders' and 'research, and resource centers' archetypes. We have highlighted only their primary focus area, to illustrate the nature of nonprofit interventions in this landscape.

- Service Providers and Field Builders (57%):** Nearly 57% of nonprofits working with queer communities function as service providers and field builders. These organizations expand access to essential services for marginalized queer communities across healthcare, education, livelihoods, and access to justice. Additionally, they play a vital role in field-building by aligning multiple stakeholders to develop resources and services that address the specific needs of queer individuals on the ground.
- Research & Resource Centers (21%):** Almost 21% nonprofits working with queer communities focus on increasing visibility and building evidence around queer lived experiences through research, capacity-building, public awareness campaigns, and narrative change initiatives. These organizations help co-create the narrative with community members. The evidence built by these organizations is critical to confront the biases, stigma, and discrimination communities may face.
- Mainstream Nonprofits with a Queer-Affirming Lens (22%):** Approximately 22% of nonprofits in this landscape are mainstream organizations integrating a queer-affirming lens. Through programs in broad sectors such as education, health, and climate, these nonprofits aim to normalize and promote a non-normative, de-binarized, and inclusive understanding of gender and sexuality within their respective fields.

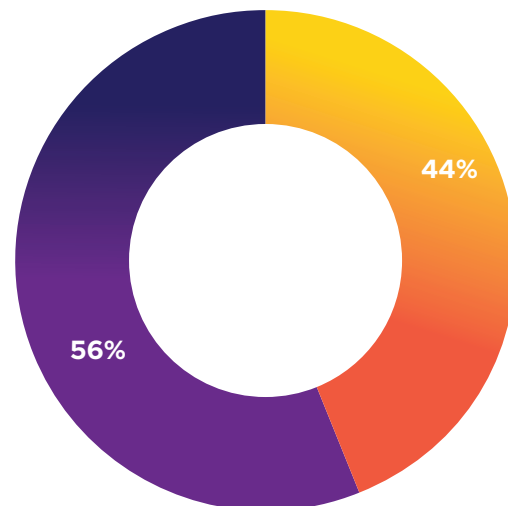
In addition to their core programs, many nonprofits are also involved in providing crisis support to queer communities, seeding support networks and community spaces, and running narrative change and public awareness campaigns. This speaks to the multifaceted nature of the challenges faced by queer communities in India, and the quantum of efforts required to solve them.

Representation

Nonprofit leaders in this landscape often come from a legacy of involvement in queer movements and are informed by lived experiences in their work.

More than half of the nonprofits in this landscape have queer representation within their leadership.

Figure 3: Queer Representation in Nonprofit Leadership



● No/Cannot Say
● Yes

Queer representation in nonprofit leadership within this landscape highlights encouraging progress.

- 56% nonprofits are queer-led:** These organizations now exceed ally-led counterparts in number, despite the inclusion of mainstream organizations in this mapping. This shift reflects how Indian nonprofits are fostering community-centered models of change, grounded in authentic queer perspectives and lived experiences.



There is growing evidence to demonstrate that proximate leaders, who hold lived experiences and belong to the communities that they serve, have the potential to drive more transformative social impact.^{78,79} Queer-led nonprofits are also creating new capacity-building infrastructure and fostering next-generation leadership among the communities they work with.

A recent survey of India's nonprofit ecosystem revealed that it contributes more than 2.5 million jobs and an estimated 2% to the country's GDP.⁸⁰ Supporting the burgeoning queer workforce in this landscape can generate positive socioeconomic outcomes for these communities.

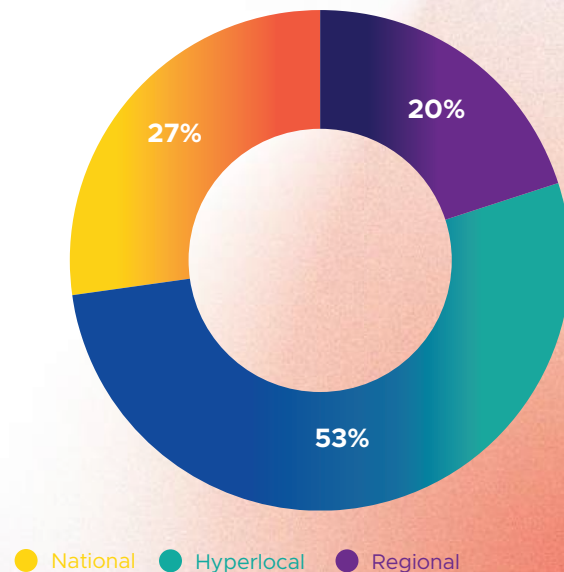
Further bolstering the LGBTQIA+ leadership in nonprofits can yield catalytic impact for queer communities. In addition to encouraging authentic leadership and holistic solutions, it can generate positive socioeconomic outcomes for queer livelihoods and pave the way for new queer futures.

Spread

Irrespective of their geographical footprint, most nonprofits in this landscape engage closely with local queer communities through their programs. However, addressing the challenges faced by queer communities in India calls for multiple solutions at different scales.

Nonprofits vary in their geographical footprint, catering to national, regional, and hyperlocal needs.

Figure 4: Geographical Footprint of Nonprofits



- **Hyperlocal Nonprofits (53%):** A notable 53% of nonprofits in this landscape operate at the grassroots level, engaging in community settings with queer stakeholders who represent distinct sociocultural contexts and identities.
- **National Nonprofits (27%):** Almost 27% of nonprofits function at a national level, with either on-ground programs across multiple regions or initiatives that reach audiences nationwide through public dissemination efforts.
- **Regional Nonprofits (20%):** Approximately 20% of nonprofits are regionally focused, maintaining a strong presence within a single state in India. These organizations often collaborate closely with state government departments to advance welfare goals.

Nonprofits working at the hyperlocal level are doing critical work by expanding last-mile services and protections for underserved queer communities. The high proportion of hyperlocal organizations in this landscape indicates that queer mobilization is thriving in grassroots contexts.

In contrast, nonprofits with a strong national or regional presence are well-positioned to engage with policy levers, institutions, and systems change outcomes through their work. The relatively low density of national and regional organizations signals the need and opportunity to support field-building through greater scale and collaboration.

Other observations from our analysis:

- Only 43% of nonprofits held FCRA registrations at the time of data collection (30th November 2024). When mainstream nonprofits were removed from this consideration set to focus on organizations that are engaging more directly with LGBTQIA+ communities, this percentage dwindled further to 35%. This indicates that around two-thirds of nonprofits working closely with queer people are only eligible to receive domestic funding.
- Almost 64% of nonprofits surveyed were headquartered in four states – Maharashtra, Karnataka, Delhi, and West Bengal. Within these states, most nonprofits operated out of Mumbai, Bangalore, New Delhi, and Kolkata, respectively. This highlights the disproportionate concentration of nonprofit action to empower LGBTQIA+ communities in urban metropolitan geographies.

Challenges

Based on the review of literature and conversations with civil society leaders and practitioners, we have mapped the challenges and barriers faced by nonprofits in this landscape.

- **Lack of sustained funding for crisis support mechanisms:** Specific struggles faced by LGBTQIA+ people, including greater vulnerability to violence at the hands of family, society, and government institutions, are not well-represented in the mainstream. This makes it difficult to generate long-term resources for crisis support, through shelter homes and other emergency services.
- **Emphasis on short-term outcomes:** Interventions in traditional areas such as healthcare have historically focused on short-term outcomes such as treating symptoms and cures. This has led to a deprioritization of long-term outcomes that can enable systems change, such as social and behavior change, evidence-building for policy, and institutional capacity-building.
- **Limited avenues for engaging with systems:** Corridors of power where influential queer stakeholders can contribute to shaping the narrative on LGBTQIA+ rights in India are more readily accessible to those who are privileged. There is limited representation of the voices of queer communities with intersectional identities in these spaces.
- **Siloed communities of practice:** While there is a strong ethos of mutual support and collaboration within this landscape – greater funding commitments and concerted efforts are required to facilitate tangible solutions linked to cross-learning, resource-sharing, and multistakeholder collaboration.



from the ground-up:

a trailblazing vision for transgender leadership



→ in the spotlight 5



Inter and intra-community divergences, often exacerbated by intersectional power differentials, have been a persistent challenge for queer movements. Since its inception in 2015, TWEET has been dedicated to creating spaces where the diverse voices within the transgender umbrella are heard and empowered. Through its community-responsive leadership structures, TWEET prioritizes meaningful representation from among transmen, transwomen, nonbinary people, and other transgender identities. The organization is among the first in the Asia-Pacific region to have representation from diverse transgender communities on their board.

At its core, TWEET's mission is to tackle systemic inequities head-on — such as the glaring underrepresentation of transmen in policy discourses and the exclusion of nonbinary and gender-nonconforming identities from mainstream narratives. Working with young transgender people to

build their leadership capabilities is central to this mission.

Evidence-driven and grounded in lived experiences, TWEET's initiatives are designed to fill the white spaces in existing support mechanisms for transgender communities. Recognizing the profound role of economic empowerment, TWEET pioneered efforts in skilling and livelihood development for transgender individuals at a time when such initiatives were yet to gain more mainstream traction. Its healthcare programs strengthen access to public health services and extend vital mental health support, emphasizing the need for a more expansive understanding of wellbeing.

The organization's programs are as bold as they are necessary. In 2019, TWEET made history by establishing India's first shelter home for transmen in Delhi. This trailblazing initiative was soon followed by another shelter home for transgender individuals in Mumbai, operated under the government's Garima Greh scheme. Through these efforts, TWEET has demonstrated the sustainability, feasibility, and transformative impact of shelter homes tailored to LGBTQIA+ communities. TWEET's journey is a testament to what can be achieved when queer communities are empowered to become architects of their own resilient futures.

breaking the silence: vikalp's quiet revolution for rural queer rights

→ in the spotlight 6



“We were strange, stigmatized creatures,” Maya Sharma recalls, reflecting on the early days when coming out to the media was a radical, almost defiant act. In the 1990s, Maya Sharma had been conducting research to understand the lives of working-class lesbian women and transmen from rural Gujarat — people who loved differently, and in doing so, faced a world shaped by silence and isolation. It was this silence that led her to Vikalp, a women’s organization focused on combating domestic violence and other forms of gender marginalization through grassroots mobilization.

From its humble beginnings, Vikalp evolved into a force that went beyond conventional activism. “We wanted to work with people who love women and who are queer,” Maya says, with the kind of conviction that makes you sit up a little straighter. Over the years, Vikalp has provided everything from shelter and crisis intervention to a lifeline of community support, making sure that no one had to face the harsh realities of being queer in rural India alone.

Yet, the road to narrative change was fraught with challenges. In an era where funding was often tied to public health interventions against HIV-AIDS, Vikalp’s focus on LBT communities had little support. Over time, Indira and Maya identified and undertook the responsibility for capacity-building programs that brought government departments and institutions into the fold, helping them see the humanity behind the crises of queer communities in the region.

The people she’s met along the way, the lives changed, the families painstakingly negotiated with — all of this continues to fuel her fire. What began as a modest effort to support rural women now stands as a cornerstone of queer rights in India’s heartlands, a movement that refuses to be silenced.



tear out **3.**

state of funding

Resourcing has been a challenge for civil society organizations that are supporting the queer communities across the globe. At present, intersectional queer approaches do not appear to feature prominently in funders' grant-making priorities. Evidence on funding flows within this action landscape is sparse and scattered, particularly in the Indian context. Examining where queer causes sit within funders' grant-making priorities can inform actionable strategies on how to unlock more resources.

The Global Picture⁸¹

In the year 2021-22, India received USD two million as foreign funding for the well-being of queer communities, amounting to less than 1% of the total funding across the world.⁸²

India holds a minor share in total queer funding. It received only 5% of the total funding allocated to the Asia-Pacific region. Given India's population size, which is ~18% of the global demographics, and the significant challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ communities here – the funding gap must be addressed.⁸³ Key observations and insights on the funding landscape are presented below. The data in this section is based on the 2021–2022 Global Resources Report: Government & Philanthropic Support for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex Communities.

- **Underrepresentation of South Asia in queer funding:** South Asia received only 23% of the total amount, which represents a 29% decline from the previous period. This suggests an underrepresentation in financial support for queer issues despite the population density.
- **In contrast, queer funding in the Asia-Pacific region is growing:** The Asia-Pacific region saw an increase in queer funding, with a 63% rise compared to the previous period. This indicates international attention and financial commitment.

- **North American and European dominance in funding sources:** Almost 86% of the funding to the Asia-Pacific region came from North American (46%) and European (40%) funders. This highlights the reliance on external funding for queer issues in the region.
- **Localized funding in Asia-Pacific is limited:** Regional funders contributed only 14%, indicating a lack of local financial investment. Local philanthropists and foundations may not be sufficiently supporting LGBTQIA+ issues, possibly due to social, cultural, or political reasons.

The Domestic Landscape

Data on philanthropy in India remains fragmented and is ever evolving. This section analyzes self-reported, publicly available information on funders supporting organizations serving LGBTQIA+ communities, examining the potential implications for resource allocation. Our analysis covers details for 78 funders; key insights are presented below

- **Majority (59%) of the funders are international funders:** Our analysis shows that majority of the funders are foreign, corroborating what we heard from CSO's themselves. This has implications for the way resources flow to organizations working with queer communities. In our analysis, we have also found that a significant proportion of organizations are not eligible to receive foreign contributions. Given that majority of the funding flows from international sources, the funding is not absorbable by most queer organizations.

"Domestic support has been relatively weak overall. For instance, while certain organizations are effective in funding specific causes, many others still rely heavily on foreign donors, when they have an FCRA clearance. Overall, I would say the domestic response has been weak, with limited effort from major actors."

- Raj Mariwala, Mariwala Health Initiative

- Intentional support to queer organizations is stagnant:** More than half of the funders (54%) are intentional in giving to queer causes, which implies they are supporting over two organizations working with the communities. Of these, most (76%) are international funders.^h Organizations reported that funding is usually sporadic, leading to uncertainty in long-term planning and shortfalls in resources. Thus, it is critical to examine intentional funding. It can alleviate some of the above stressors. It allows organizations to allocate resources directly for the welfare of the communities.

Only two among the top 50 philanthropic givers in India identify giving to LGBTQIA+ issues as an explicit priority.

We also studied funding trends among India's top 50 philanthropic givers. This group donated INR 79 billion to philanthropy in 2023.⁸⁴ Health and education remained the top issues in focus. Despite a broad range of funders contributing to LGBTQIA+ causes, only two funders specifically focus on queer issues. Other funders provide support sporadically, typically when queer issues align with their broader priority areas or outcomes.

Challenges

Lack of domestic funding remains a significant challenge for organizations working with queer communities. This hinders nonprofits access to resources, especially for organizations without an FCRA registration. Dependency on foreign contributions might explain the lack of sustainable long-term support.

It is noted that often domestic funders do not have awareness or understanding of LGBTQIA+ issues or organizations working with queer communities. Perhaps the socio-political context surrounding queer communities might instill personal prejudice or discomfort with these issues. This may lead funders to view these issues as non-important.

The dispersed nature of the community, along with limited visibility may also pose a challenge for organizations to attract funding. It is reported that funders, especially CSR funders, prefer projects with large number of beneficiaries and visible, immediate results, which can be difficult for organizations working with scattered,

marginalized communities. Funders also often hesitate to fund projects that may not have direct, immediate, tangible deliverables. Funders need to be sensitized about these context specific issues as they embark on their giving journey. Organizations also noted the hesitancy of funders to fund important issues like policy and narrative change.

Opportunities

Every giving journey evolves over time. It is promising to see sporadic one time giving to queer causes (especially by domestic funders) as this presents an opportunity to unlock funding. The domestic funder landscape may not be evolved enough to understand queer needs. The positive momentum towards queer rights created by court decisions, the Committee (formed at the direction of the Supreme Court to look into queer issues) may serve as an opportunity for civil society including intermediaries to sensitize domestic funders on queer issues.

A greater proportion of domestic funding may imply better ability to absorb funding for organizations, and thus a more reliable, steady stream of resources. It will also allow organizations to drive (already scarce) resources away from FCRA compliances. Further, it may allow organizations to build capacity, and park resources for unforeseen crisis expenditure that is often a need for organizations.

Domestic funders might also have the ability to better understand certain localized queer issues in the Indian context. Queerness looks different in India, especially regarding certain indigenous queer identities which might not feature in an international perspective. Certain behaviors within the Indian queer communities (for example the MSM community) are very context specific. Domestic funders might be better poised to identify and understand these issues that are rooted in the larger context of the ethos of Indian society.

There is a need to envision what it will take to make funders move from sporadic giving to intentional giving. Larger organizations, thought leaders, and intermediaries will have to sensitize funders to view issues with a queer lens. Often this could imply showing funders that while they continue to fund their existing preferred causes, they account for impact on queer communities.

^h For the purpose of this report, funders giving to more than two organizations working with queer communities have been considered more intentional in their giving focus.



Spotlight 7.

small farms, big futures: an approach to queer empowerment

→ in the spotlight 7



Karna Subarna Welfare Society (KSWS) is no stranger to adversity. Headquartered in the historic district of Murshidabad, West Bengal – this NGO has, since its inception in 2006, consistently risen to the challenge of addressing the needs of surrounding transgender and queer communities. At first glance, KSWS’s model might seem deceptively simple: help people help themselves. But scratch the surface, and the uniqueness of their approach becomes apparent. The solutions and interventions are rooted in empathy, that build from experiences of discrimination, exclusion, and systemic oppression which cut across caste, class, and gender lines in India’s deeply stratified society.

Recently, they have launched a Zero-Waste Farm, run primarily by trans-fem individuals from working-class Muslim backgrounds. It exemplifies Karna Subarna’s model of empowerment through skill-building — leveraging what people already know and elevating it to a sustainable source of income.

“We believe there is a lot of creativity within us [the trans/queer community], we just need a space to express it. That is one of the reasons why we chose the farm – it utilizes the farming experience and skill, as well as the creativity within” says Sudeb/Suvana, part of KSWS leadership.

Beyond livelihood programs, they also run sensitization workshops targeting both public and private sector organizations. These sessions, designed to foster greater understanding of queer and transgender issues, serve a dual purpose: dismantling the socio-cultural stigma while also pushing for policy change at the local level.

However, Karna Subarna’s leadership, spearheaded by Avi and Sudeb/Suvana, has been vocal about the need for deeper investments in queer leadership. They’re excited about interventions such as an Action Research Lab and fellowship programs for trans and queer leaders. These possibilities can help leverage the strengths, skills, and dreams of the people they work with to create a future where queer individuals have the power, agency, and resources to craft solutions on their own terms. And in doing so, they’re providing a roadmap for how to build queer-friendly spaces in places where stigma and prejudice still run deep. It’s a roadmap that deserves more attention, more support, and above all, more belief that small, hyperlocal interventions can lead to big, systemic transformations.

8. spotlight

building safe havens: on a mission to empower lbt communities



→ in the spotlight 8

The 1990s in India marked the emergence of LGBTQIA+ CSO's and support groups, many of which initially focused on addressing the HIV/AIDS epidemic. This public health crisis brought much-needed attention to marginalized communities, particularly men who have sex with men (MSM). Yet, during this time, a quieter revolution was brewing within the feminist movement — a push to create spaces where queer women and transmasculine individuals could organize, support one another, and fight for visibility.

Feminist queer organizations like Sangini and LABIA (now dissolved, formerly Stree Sangam), were born from this wave, nurtured by broader feminist collectives that offered safe havens for dialogue and resistance. Among these trailblazers was Sappho for Equality, founded in the eastern region of India as the first self-support group for lesbian, bisexual women, and transmasculine individuals.

“We didn’t even know the word [lesbian],” recalls Malabika, one of the founders of Sappho for Equality (SFE), recounting its modest beginnings. “We didn’t know anyone, we didn’t know each other.” Yet, in those early years, Sappho became a beacon for individuals navigating their identities in isolation, providing a vital safe space and emotional support for sexually marginalized women and female-to-male transpersons. Over time, the group evolved from a support network into an organization identifying and addressing the unique, intersectional challenges faced by lesbian, bisexual, and transmasculine individuals.

Their feminist ethos underscores its approach to address these complexities. Their interventions include Chetana, a resource

center which houses an archive of material on sexuality. Additionally, they offer counselling services, a helpline, and drop-in facilities. SFE also identified the glaring absence of empathetic and community-inclusive knowledge production surrounding queer issues, motivating the breadth of research produced and housed by them on key issues such as queerphobic violence.

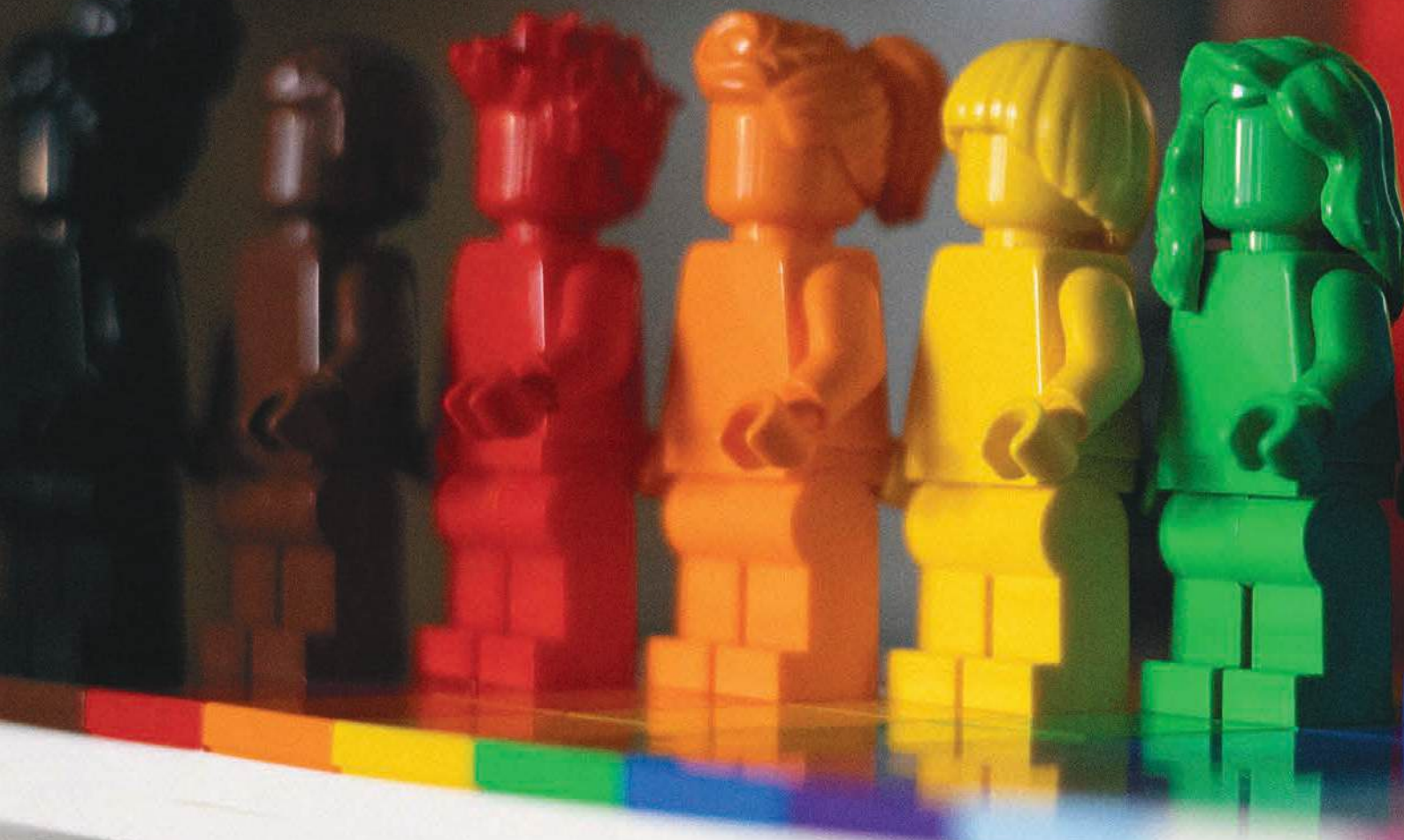
Post-pandemic, they have also expanded their focus to include livelihoods, recognizing that economic independence is fundamental to empowering queer and trans communities. Through initiatives like Porshi, a training center that includes a welcoming canteen aptly named “Qanteen”.


SFE exemplifies the transformative potential of queer feminist organizing in India. They continue to champion intersectional narrative change, building safe and inclusive spaces to challenge deeply ingrained social norms while offering hope and a sense of belonging to those who need it most.



chapter 4.

cornerstones.





"Social change is a process that requires flexibility and adaptability. I think that those who support causes linked to social change need to have a lot of patience and courage. For instance, queer communities and collectives are often loosely organized, so you cannot go in with the idea that you will reach 'x' number of queer people through a program. It takes patience and courage to design, redesign, collaborate, and really be open to learning what might be required."

- Shubha Chacko, Solidarity Foundation

Manifestos for change must contend with the reality that mainstream perspectives on increasing LGBTQIA+ equity in India represent a mere tip of the iceberg when it comes to communities' lived experiences. This is reinforced by entrenched societal narratives that demarcate queer communities as cultural 'others' whose experiences are difficult to demystify. The vibrant ecosystem of civil society action that sustains the needs of LGBTQIA+ people at the grassroots is a poignant reminder that pathways to meaningful progress must be co-created with communities.

Cornerstones are key starting points for making real change happen. They can bring together different groups of people to work together and create a big positive impact for the LGBTQIA+ communities. To illustrate how these cornerstones can translate into meaningful change on the ground, we have identified nudges for the government and funders to act upon while supporting LGBTQIA+ civil society efforts.

universalize LGBTQIA+-affirming documentation for improving quality and access to services

cornerstone 1



Basic resources and services encompass a broad range of essential conditions that are required for individuals to live dignified lives. Unfettered access to education and healthcare forms the bedrock of these services. The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes the need for universalizing access to basic services as a step towards eradicating extreme poverty.⁸⁵ While India's legal framework offers protection against discrimination faced by LGBTQIA+ communities from government institutions and service providers in sectors

like education and healthcare, the reality on the ground is far more complex. The Supreme Court of India, in the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) v. Union of India and Others and the judgment reading down Section 377 of the IPC (2018), reaffirmed that LGBTQIA+ communities have the right to live their lives free of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.⁸⁶ However, policies that capture the full breadth of LGBTQIA+ aspirations remain elusive while queer people continue to encounter alienation from institutions and systems alike.

Perspectives from civil society practitioners:

"Systemic engagement with what structural discrimination against queer people can look like in schools and colleges is still nascent. Greater sensitization of these institutions is essential to ensuring that we can start building the capacities of the next generation."

- Shaman Gupta, Misfyt Trans Youth Foundation

"Our work is to take narrative change materials to institutions such as universities, so that we can make things which are now part of the law more visible. If universities, schools, and even government offices embrace non-discriminatory practices, queer people will have a more comfortable life."

- Maya Sharma, Vikalp Women's Group

Nudges

Stakeholder	Nudges
Government	Strengthen access to gender-affirming social security documents for transgender communities
	Recognize institutions such as family and marriage for the communities through legislative action and judicial processes
	Institutionalize sensitization and awareness programs across public authorities and workforces in healthcare and education
Funder	Invest in pilot grants to empower service delivery organizations to build and scale new approaches to providing LGBTQIA+-affirming basic services
	Incorporate an LGBTQIA+-inclusion lens while grantmaking in critical sectors like education and health
Legal Actors	Support community-based organizations working to expand connectivity at the last mile through grassroots narrative change
	Help with case work and documentation at subsidized rates and on pro-bono basis to help marginalized communities

invest in community-led crisis response systems for strengthening as shelter and legal aid

cornerstone 2



Exclusion from social spaces makes LGBTQIA+ communities vulnerable to resource-deprivation, violence, and a lack of care and community. As responders to various forms of distress, civil society actors often take on a multitude of roles, substituting for families, peer networks, communities, and even institutions in times of dire need. Creating parallel infrastructure and capacities that can complement these efforts is a time-consuming and resource intensive exercise. For decades, LGBTQIA+ activists and organizations have sustained these efforts ‘on their own time’, relying on personal networks and stopgap funding to offer crisis support at

the hyperlocal level. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the cracks in this infrastructure, impacting LGBTQIA+ communities’ ability to converge, mobilize, and exchange critical forms of care and support.⁸⁷ In a stunning display of solidarity, actors in this landscape — funders, civil society, voluntary networks, and activists alike — came together in this period of unprecedented challenges to prioritize crisis response services.^{88, 89} Today, there is a need to build on this momentum and enable more investment into resilient community-led support infrastructure for queer people.

Perspectives from civil society practitioners:

“At one point, even the biggest LGBTQIA+ organizations that were running millions of programs were not willing to work on shelter. Shelter work requires a lot of resources. It is something you can start doing, but you cannot end. Where will you send all the people who are already relying on you? You have to constantly raise resources that allow you to continue this work.”

- Abhina Aher, TWEET Foundation

“An elderly gay man approached us recently. A family member took control of his property and forced him to leave his own home. At his age, we had to find him shelter, we had to look for opportunities to get him back into work. Outside of community-based organizations, who is really thinking about how we can support elderly LGBTQIA+ people who have no family, no support, and no economic stability?”

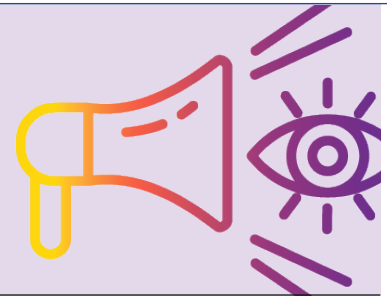
- Vivek Raj Anand, Humsafar Trust

Nudges

Stakeholder	Nudges
Government	Plug gaps in the implementation of schemes such as the Garima Greh shelter homes for transgender communities ⁹⁰
	Increase access to government aid for CSOs that are providing crisis support at the hyperlocal level
	Enact robust protections and guidelines to train first responders (police authorities, medical emergency services, etc.) to be queer affirming
Funder	Deploy capital towards resourcing community-led infrastructure, such as one-stop crisis response centers
	Increase flexible core funding to CSOs within this landscape, to enable them to provide sustained, ongoing community support
CSOs	Invest in training support to cultivate a larger pool of practitioners who can provide legal aid, mental health support, and peer support
	Build and train a pool of legal and mental health practitioners, who are sensitized and can help with support services

enable visibility for the communities in mainstream culture and public life to strengthen narrative change

cornerstone 3



Building equity for LGBTQIA+ communities necessitates sustained engagement with political institutions and social structures to challenge entrenched cis-heteropatriarchal norms. To the extent that this entails asserting queer needs before mainstream structures and institutions, it is difficult to envision LGBTQIA+ struggles as ‘non-political’ in how they operate. Contemporary research tends to draw a distinction between CSOs that are focused on delivering services and those that aim to address rights justice issues.⁹¹ This distinction fails to capture on-ground realities of civil society engagement with LGBTQIA+ communities in a context as

heterogenous as India. Against the backdrop of resource constraints, CSOs in this landscape have mastered the art of doing everything, everywhere, all at once — leveraging community mobilization, coalition-building, and storytelling to amplify grassroots perspectives. It is important to recognize the role of such programs in fostering sustained mainstream engagement with queer vocabularies, perspectives, and experiences. Ongoing and continuous support is required to sustain efforts in this direction.

Perspectives from civil society practitioners:

“Funders, governments, and other stakeholders who aren’t LGBTQIA+ need to be more intentional about educating themselves on queerness. Queer communities and organizations are doing their bit by creating training materials and conducting sensitization and awareness programs. However, we cannot be held solely responsible for bridging these gaps in understanding.”

- Omkar Shinde, Nazariya Queer Feminist Resource Group

“On the one hand, you have funders that specifically focus on art and culture work. With them, when you bring up social justice and rights, they can feel apprehensive about extending support. On the other hand, you have traditional development sector funders who don’t think art and culture are as important as other domains.”

- Rafiul Alom Rehman, The Queer Muslim Project

Nudges

Stakeholder	Nudges
Government	Strengthen participatory policymaking that prioritizes meaningful representation from diverse LGBTQIA+ communities and movements
	Foster local-level policy engagement with community-based organizations that represent the lived experiences of grassroots queer communities
	Facilitate greater participation from LGBTQIA+ people in electoral politics, and increased community representation in other government authorities
Funder	Diversify from traditional models to fund narrative change through storytelling, sensitization and awareness, and community mobilization
	Move away from target-based approaches to funding that deprioritize diffused, long-term outcomes linked to behavioral change
Media	Provide patient capital to support dynamic program design focused on innovation, learning, and feedback loops with communities
	Undertake thorough and intentional representation of queer characters on mainstream platforms, that is not caricature-like

generating community-centric evidence at scale to inspire action that responds to LGBTQIA+ lived experiences and realities

cornerstone 4



In the age of evidence-informed policy, the lack of statistically significant data on LGBTQIA+ communities' lived experiences makes it difficult to build a needs-responsive roadmap for their development. The 2011 Census was the first population-scale exercise to include people from 'other' genders, reporting that the 4.8 million individuals that fell into this category represented India's transgender population.⁹² However, the inclusion of an 'other' category neglects the need for broader sex and gender categories that can be meaningfully applied to transgender, intersex, nonbinary, and other non-conforming identities,

and does little to improve public understanding around these communities. No other official government data sources specify gender categories outside male and female. Systematic efforts to document the experiences of sexual minorities at scale have remained even more sparse. Partnerships with civil society to generate community-centric evidence can turn the tide by capturing the spread and nature of challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ communities, and enabling informed action.

Perspectives from civil society practitioners:

"Our work lies in the domain of legal and policy research that is driven by evidence. But I think we have to be very particular that we don't restrict 'evidence' only to what doctrinal law considers evidence. We think deeply about the sociological and historical aspects of queer issues, and how we can find the data to back it up."

- Namrata Mukherjee, Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy

"I think we need more programs on queer history. I'm very interested in seeing more programs that build archives and platforms, to showcase that queer people have always been a part of society, as well as the fact that queerness exists beyond the urban contexts we often mistakenly attribute to it."

- Parmesh Shahani, Godrej DEI Lab

Nudges

Stakeholder	Nudges
Government	Build gender-disaggregated repositories of evidence that account for diverse gender-non-conforming identities
	Collaborate with community-based organizations to ensure participatory and culturally sensitive approaches to data collection
	Institutionalize capacity-building measures to foster a better understanding of queer identities among public research agencies
Funder	Fund evidence-building exercises aimed at community-centric research based on LGBTQIA+ lived experiences
	Strengthen documentation and dissemination capabilities among grassroots organizations to enable them to build evidence
	Facilitate networking and cross-learning among grassroots nonprofits to encourage collaborative research efforts
Think tanks	Leverage research and data collection to develop protocols and set precedents which are scalable, with use cases for implementers

building bridges and sanctuaries:

community-focused support to LGBTQIA+ communities



→ in the spotlight 9

"Working in and with the community, one realized that many men to whom we were providing HIV services were married to women. And slowly, the impact on the lives of women and children became very clear."

- Anjali Gopalan,
Founder Naz

I realized that if we had to look at HIV prevention and really make things work, we couldn't just work with one group of people. We had to make our efforts as broad-based as possible.

Naz began by addressing issues of HIV/AIDS and sexuality, with an initial focus was on men who have sex with men (MSM), a community disproportionately affected by the epidemic. However, over several years of working in this space, the organization was able to recognize the multifaceted nature of the challenge.

In addition to direct service provision, Naz emphasized the significance of building community. Through outreach programs like distributing condoms in parks and offering on-site medical examinations, they established connections with individuals who were hesitant to seek help from traditional healthcare institutions. Recognizing the need for safe spaces where individuals could connect, share their experiences, and find support, Naz initiated the Milan project — which included a helpline, counselling services, as well as a fully functional clinic. This effort eventually manifested into the organization's LGBTQ+ center in Delhi.

One of their defining journeys began when a young man approached Naz after being subjected to shock treatment for conversion therapy by their family. This incident galvanized into a case with the NHRC, highlighting the harmful and unethical practice of conversion therapy. Though initially dismissed, this case paved the way for Naz's persistent engagement with legal systems, culminating in a long and collaborative legal battle that crescendoed into the landmark judgement in 2009. This pivotal case thrust Naz to the forefront of India's queer rights movement, placing upon them the immense responsibility of championing legal reform and advocating for the broader spectrum of queer interests across the nation.

affirming economic autonomy: a holistic approach to lgbtqia+ livelihoods

→ in the spotlight 10

Since its inception in 2018, the Keshav Suri Foundation (KSF) has made remarkable progress in empowering the LGBTQIA+ community, creating opportunities and fostering inclusivity across various sectors. Through its multifaceted initiatives, KSF has championed the rights and dignity of LGBTQIA+ individuals, driving significant change in India.

A core focus of KSF has been on skilling and employment. Over the past six years, the Foundation has trained more than 2,000 queer individuals in sectors like hospitality, retail, and finance, providing sustainable livelihoods. The Aditya Nanda Scholarship supports five queer students annually at The Lalit Suri Hospitality School and ten more at Lovely Professional University, promoting educational advancement and career growth. Additionally, KSF has partnered with various organizations to host job fairs, expanding employment opportunities for the community and ensuring economic inclusion.

In healthcare, KSF's Queering Healthcare initiative has been groundbreaking. The Foundation has sensitized over 500 health professionals to the specific needs of the queer community through workshops and seminars. The Q-Samvaad helpline has provided mental health care support to over 50,000 individuals with more than 4,000 individuals taking counselling sessions. KSF has trained 36 psychologists to be queer affirmative including training on Indian Sign Language, making mental health services accessible to deaf and mute queer individuals.

KSF has also made a significant impact in entertainment. By screening queer films and supporting content that represents

diverse identities, KSF has brought authentic LGBTQIA+ narratives to the forefront. The TRANSaction initiative, in collaboration with Faraz Arif Ansari, offers free acting workshops to LGBTQIA+ community members, with over 200 participants gaining professional opportunities in acting, contributing to the more accurate representation in media. To strengthen mental health support and advocate for the same, KSF also launched Aditya Nanda Award at Kashish Film Festival for Best Film promoting mental health care.

In sports, KSF organizes Trans Cricket Tournament and has also supported a mountain expedition by trans athletes, showcasing the community's resilience and strength. Inclusive adaptive games have further promoted diversity and inclusion, bringing together LGBTQIA+ individuals and allies. KSF's sensitization workshops have reached over 200 schools, colleges, NGOs, and corporate organizations, educating them about LGBTQIA+ community and encouraging the adoption of inclusive policies. In partnership with Pride Circle and Stonewall UK, KSF introduced the India Workplace Equality Index (IWEI), with over 150 organizations participating in 2024, marking a significant milestone in LGBTQIA+ inclusion in corporate India. Reflecting on the Foundation's journey and the path forward, Mr. Keshav Suri, the founder, states, "The way forward lies in building strong, inclusive communities where every individual can thrive. At KSF, we are committed to breaking barriers and fostering understanding, ensuring that diversity is not just celebrated but deeply woven into the fabric of society." Through its dedicated efforts, KSF continues to embrace, empower and mainstream LGBTQIA+ individuals, paving the way for a more inclusive and equitable future in India.

conclusion.

What does society fear when it denies queer individuals the dignity of opportunity?

This question lingers like an uneasy shadow over every conversation about LGBTQIA+ rights. The answer, often as incoherent as it is absurd, has perpetuated one of humanity's longest injustices. For centuries, unfounded fears – disguised as cultural values, religious doctrines, or pseudo-scientific rationales have stripped queer communities of fairness, dignity, and belonging. These fears have built systems of exclusion, not on facts, but on fables that insist difference is dangerous. Across the globe, the prejudice against queer individuals is a prism through which we can examine how societies resist difference and project their anxieties onto those who dare to live authentically.

The mirror does not lie. But it can reflect truths we struggle to confront. Social transformation cannot rest on generational change alone; it requires deliberate effort to unlearn prejudice and dismantle the structures (legal, cultural, and psychological) that perpetuate intolerance. Consider the outrage over queer representation in media, the fearmongering around inclusive bathrooms for transgender people, or the outdated medical curricula that fail to equip healthcare providers to serve queer communities. These are not isolated incidents. They are the pervasive, insidious architecture of fear that sacrifices human dignity on the altar of ignorance.

But what happens to communities pushed to the margins, such that their survival seems miraculous?

We endure with resilience. Denied open doors, we must persevere in order to prevail, transforming the meagre into the magnificent. Against all odds, queer individuals persist -

building lives, movements, and futures on the slimmest foundations of hope.

But resilience alone cannot bear the weight of systemic injustice. In India, this endurance forms the backbone of a complex queer movement shaped as much by its unity as by its differences. Amid these struggles, Indian queer politics faces an urgent challenge. Even today the LGBTQIA+ communities find themselves marginalized by a narrative built on heteronormativity, excluded from their rightful place in the national imagination. Legal victories like the decriminalization of homosexuality in 2018 and the recognition of transgender rights in 2014 have reshaped the narrative. However, these have not secured the freedom and equality the communities need and deserve. Though the tensions between cultural pluralism and sexual conservatism resonate in India, these are far from unique.

How do we overcome the fragmentation and build a unified movement that acknowledges differences?

“Political action that remains confined to corridors of power and privilege risks sidelining the most vulnerable,” warns Anish Gawande, founder of Pink List India. True progress demands more: a reimagining of platforms, spaces, and systems where marginalized voices can not only speak but lead.

Our research offers an answer. Through this report, we hope we have demonstrated that while pivotal, CSOs continue to struggle with the challenge of bridging these divides. Their efforts to build solidarity within the queer movements must navigate a delicate terrain of competing priorities and unequal power dynamics. Yet, this fragmentation also makes

one truth inescapably evident: a unified platform for LGBTQIA+ empowerment and progress in India must urgently emerge. Without reckoning with these intersectional inequities, mobilizing resources to fortify this robust ecosystem of CSOs will remain a distant dream. The resilience of CSOs was born from scarcity, from necessity. It was led by individuals who have intimately felt the cost of exclusion and who labor tirelessly to ensure that others do not bear the same burden. While extraordinary, their efforts are not infinite. Funding still remains sparse and narrowly focused, sidelining critical needs. The CSOs need resources, recognition, and reinforcements to continue bridging divides and galvanizing communities into collective action while preserving the diversity that defines the movement.

“What kind of future do we want for the queer movement?” asks Parmesh Shahani of Godrej DEI Lab. “How do we create the next generation of queer leaders who think beyond the present moment, envisioning a community as empowered as it is inclusive?” His question cuts to the heart of the challenge: supporting queer communities demands far more than legal reforms or sporadic engagement. It requires listening to our leaders, responding to our priorities, and committing resources to the issues we identify as urgent: health, education, livelihoods, and representation.

The promise and peril of India’s queer movement lie in this paradox: it is as much about claiming rights as it is about holding up a mirror to a society wrestling with its own fears and contradictions. For too long, queer people have borne the brunt of others’ insecurities, prejudices, and unwillingness to change. Our report is more than a record of these struggles; it is a testament to the resilience and commitment of queer communities as well as that of the CSOs working

tirelessly for their rights and wellbeing. We hope the report has honored the challenging work of queer individuals who, despite systemic and social obstacles, continue to fight, dream, love, and thrive in India.

No identities and experiences can exist in isolation; they must mingle, shaping who we are and how we navigate the world. Yet, acceptance and tolerance – too often offered as hollow remedies – fail to address the deeper issue: the entrenched structures of power that confine us.

Should we not, then, aspire to more than cosmetic fixes? What would it take for us to grant them the chance they have always deserved? Schools where queer children are not bullied into silence. Workplaces that recognize and nurture their potential. Homes where their identities are celebrated, not erased. The future of India’s LGBTQIA+ communities cannot remain the sole function of their resolve; it must become a measure of ours.

Because what would it say about us - our values, our aspirations, our future - if we fail to do so?



acknowledgments.

This report represents an ambitious first-of-its-kind journey. Envisioned as an exploration of CSOs working with and for the LGBTQIA+ communities in India, and into the layered complexities, quiet triumphs, and urgent needs of India's queer landscape. It stands as a testament to the power of collaboration, the courage of visionaries, and the resilience of a movement that has long thrived in the face of adversity.

We are grateful to Radhika Piramal, whose vision for galvanizing philanthropic interest into a collaborative fund for LGBTQIA+ CSOs has been the driving force behind this research study. The stories and struggles of queer communities across India are rooted in centuries of resistance and solidarity, nurtured in the margins, and carried forward by an unyielding determination to thrive. The project found its strongest partners in the trailblazers of India's queer movement: Parmesh Shahani and Godrej DEI Lab, Keshav Suri and the Keshav Suri Foundation.

This report is imbued with gratitude for the leaders, activists, and organizations who generously shared their time, perspectives, and passion. We extend our heartfelt thanks to Agents of Ishq, Gaysi, Humsafar Trust, Lakshya Trust, Pink List, Mariwala Health Initiative, Naz Foundation, Point of View, Solidarity Foundation, The Queer Muslim Project, Tweet Foundation, Vidhi Legal Policy Centre, and Vikalp. We are especially humbled by the grassroots organizations working in challenging geographies, often under the radar, yet creating ripples of transformative change. Karna Subarna

Welfare Society, Misfyt, Nazariya, Payana, and Sappho for Equality – thank you for sharing generously about your work, courage, and dedication.

This report also draws strength from the rich trove of secondary literature and documentation that chronicles the lived realities and aspirations of queer communities. Special thanks to Akshay Tyagi (KSF), Sahil Choudhary (Naz), and Supriya Nair (Godrej DEI) for lending their wisdom, perspectives, and candor to deepen the scope of our research.

At Dasra, our mission has always been rooted in advancing equity and dignity for all vulnerable communities. We are grateful to our leadership, Neera Nundy and Shailja Mehta for their invaluable advice. The researchers and writers who have led this effort include Ami Misra, Pratyaksha Jha, Sanat Kanwar, Srinjoy Ray, and Yash Thakoor. Most of us proudly identify as queer, and hope that our work represents our deep commitment to honoring the resilience and determination of our communities. We would also like to express our gratitude to Kasturi Gandhi, Latisha Shah, Rukmini Banerjee, Shachi Nelli, Stuti Gupta, and Toshali Gandhi for their support.

This narrative is, above all, an offering to the civil society organizations working tirelessly to empower LGBTQIA+ futures in India. If this report carries even a fragment of the strength they embody, then perhaps we have done justice to their extraordinary work.

organization profiles.

This landscape study was conducted in the run-up to the launch of the Pride Fund, India's first LGBTQIA+ fund. The fund aims to bridge resource gaps in the LGBTQIA+ rights ecosystem with sustained, structured, and patient philanthropy to empower meaningful, on-ground change. This section profiles 15 nonprofits making transformative impact. It is a non-exhaustive list of organizations working LGBTQIA+ communities. We will continue spotlighting non-profit action through the course of our efforts, under the Pride Fund.

	Organization	Head Office	Areas of work
1	Rangeen Khidki Foundation www.rangeenkhidki.in	Kolkata, West Bengal	<p>Rangeen Khidki is a youth-led feminist organization based in Kolkata, West Bengal. The organization's work focuses on mainstreaming affirming approaches to gender and SRHR among adolescents and youth from marginalized communities. The organization's gender and sexuality workshops, awareness programs, and fellowships employ a queer-affirming intersectional lens that recognizes how caste, religion, and other forms of marginalization impact LGBTQIA+ lived experiences. Through capacity-building initiatives, engagement with grassroots networks, and digital storytelling in local languages, the organization is transforming knowledge dissemination about non-normative genders and sexualities.</p>
2	Basera Samajik Sansthan www.baserasamajiksansthan.org	Noida, Uttar Pradesh	<p>Basera Samajik Sansthan is a community-based organization focused on supporting vulnerable groups including sex workers, men who have sex with men (MSMs), transgender people, and people living with HIV (PLHIV). The organization empowers LGBTQIA+ communities through education, livelihoods training, and legal support. Basera Samajik Sansthan embodies a rights-focused approach, addressing issues linked to trans rights, and discrimination and violence against LGBTQIA+ communities. It also provides crisis support and legal aid, and strengthens access to welfare and entitlements among grassroots queer groups.</p>
3	Deepshikha Samiti www.deepshikha.org.in	New Delhi	<p>Founded by Tajuddin Khan, Deepshikha Samiti is a voluntary organization working at the grassroots level for socioeconomic development among HIV-vulnerable LGBTQIA+ groups, women, and youth. Through its Targeted Intervention Program to address HIV-AIDS, the organization has provided health services, mental health support, and legal aid to vulnerable queer communities over the last two decades. Deepshikha Samiti also runs several livelihoods training programs, and has seeded community groups to address leadership, health, and violence prevention among queer communities. The organization's virtual intervention program enables queer groups to avail online health support against HIV-AIDS without revealing their identities.</p>

	Organization	Head Office	Areas of work
4	Vikalp www.vikalpwomensgroup.wordpress.com	Vadodara, Gujarat	Vikalp Women's Group was initially formed in response to domestic violence and discrimination against women in rural Gujarat. Over time, the organization grew to work with queer and trans groups, advocating for the rights of lesbian and bisexual women, and transmen in the region. Vikalp has been among the few organizations to recognize the exclusion of LBT groups and work extensively with LBT people in rural, tribal, and working-class contexts. The organization provides shelter and crisis support to these groups, and conducts narrative change and awareness programs with government authorities, educational institutions, and even families.
5	Sangama www.sangama.org	Bangalore, Karnataka	Sangama started as a documentation center, and has since grown to primarily support gender and sexual minorities — including women and LGBTQIA+ communities, sex workers, and people living with HIV in Karnataka. The organization's work spans areas such as community mobilization, awareness-building, and narrative change in the domains of health, nutrition, life skills, and financial literacy. In addition to providing legal aid and crisis support, Sangama has been pivotal in influencing legal reforms, petitioning the High Court of Karnataka to institute a 1% reservation for transgender people in government jobs. The organization partnered with the government of Kerala to build a transgender policy covering healthcare, education, and employment.
6	Sappho for Equality www.sapphokolkata.in	Kolkata, West Bengal	Sappho for Equality began as the first self-help support group for LBT groups (lesbians, bisexual women, and transmen) in Eastern India. The organization offers crisis support, mental health support, peer networking spaces, and runs a shelter for these groups. SFE also leverages research, narrative change programs, and creative expression to spark dialogue on queer lived experiences in the mainstream. The organization's awareness and sensitization programs encompass capacity-building and training programs for stakeholders such as educational institutions, medical practitioners, and private sector actors. Through networking initiatives, the organization prioritizes deep engagement with other feminist and queer collectives in grassroots contexts.
7	Karna Subarna Welfare Society www.ksws.in	Murshidabad, West Bengal	Karna Subarna Welfare Society (KSWs), founded in 2006, focuses on the upliftment of marginalized groups in West Bengal's Murshidabad district. The organization's focus areas include livelihoods, healthcare, policy research, narrative change, sensitization & awareness, and the environment. Through its work, KSWs engages with rural LGBTQIA+ populations facing homelessness, multidimensional poverty, exclusion from formal education, and vulnerability to precarious professions such as begging and sex work. The organization's recently launched Zero-Waste farm, run by transwomen from working class Muslim backgrounds, exemplifies its model of economic empowerment through capacity-building.

	Organization	Head Office	Areas of work
8	Solidarity Foundation www.solidarityfoundation.in	Bangalore, Karnataka	<p>Solidarity Foundation is a registered trust that supports sex workers, and gender and sexual minorities, founded in 2013. The organization prioritizes reaching vulnerable groups, including LGBTQIA+ communities who are indigenous, non-English-speaking, or living with HIV. Solidarity Foundation's programs focus on leadership building, institutional strengthening, improving livelihoods and health outcomes, and addressing gender-based violence and discrimination. It aims to complement the work of individual donors and large foundations by offering close support to grassroots organizations in developing their campaigns and projects. Facilitating the flow of resources, evidence, and narratives among grassroots organizations, corporate entities, professionals, and practitioners is core to the organization's model.</p>
9	Ya_All www.yaall.org	Imphal, Manipur	<p>Ya_All, which started in 2017 as a secret Whatsapp group, came into being as one of Northeast India's first LGBTQIA+ youth-led organizations in 2019. The organization's flagship programs focus on building a holistic support ecosystem for queer youth in the region, through capacity-building, narrative change, and crisis support. The organization's shelter home in the region operates as a resource hub, connecting young LGBTQIA+ people to peer support, counselling, and training in areas including mental health, SRHR, and drug use & harm reduction. Ya_All creatively leverages digital storytelling and sports as tools to mainstream awareness about queer identities.</p>
10	Chhattisgarh Mitwa Sankalp Samiti	Raipur, Chattisgarh	<p>Founded in 2009, Chhattisgarh Mitwa Sankalp Samiti is a community-based organization working to improve equity for transgender communities at the grassroots. Enabling access to basic amenities and improving linkages to government schemes entitlements are key areas of focus for the organization. Established under the aegis of the government's Garima Greh scheme, Mitwa Sankalp Samiti's shelter home provides food and shelter to transgender communities in the region. Through its sensitization and awareness programs, the organization aims to secure mainstream livelihoods opportunities for transgender people, particularly in the public sector, and shield them from precarious livelihoods such as sex work and begging.</p>
11	PeriFerry Foundation www.periferry.com	Chennai, Tamil Nadu	<p>Founded in 2017, PeriFerry is a pioneering social enterprise in India that enables employment and upskilling opportunities for transgender communities. Social stigma and prevalent discrimination make finding and sustaining gainful employment opportunities a challenge for members of LGBTQIA+ communities. PeriFerry provides access to comprehensive corporate training and enables them to pursue mainstream careers. They are committed to bridging the gap between LGBTQIA+ communities and corporate partners through tailored, impactful, and scalable solutions. Rooted in community collaboration, PeriFerry's programs are designed and co-led by LGBTQIA+ individuals to reflect their lived experiences and needs.</p>

	Organization	Head Office	Areas of work
12	Naz Foundation www.nazindia.org	New Delhi	<p>Since its inception in 1994, Naz Foundation has focused on care and support for people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) and provides counseling and referrals for LGBTQIA+ communities. Naz expanded its work to women, girls, and children with HIV, establishing one of Delhi's first homes for HIV-positive orphaned children in 2001. From 1997 onwards, the Naz Dost Helpline has offered LGBTQIA+ individuals a confidential space for emotional support, medical and legal aid, evolving from an HIV resource to a lifeline for queer individuals, particularly in rural and conservative areas. Relunched in 2023, the Naz Clinic addresses rising HIV/STI rates and healthcare barriers for queer communities and houses India's first dedicated LGBTQIA+ Centre. Naz has been a pioneer in advocacy, filing the first PIL to challenge Sec 377 in the Delhi High Court and conducting sensitization sessions across schools, police, companies, and communities to combat stigma and promote inclusion.</p>
13	QT Center at Anveshi www.anveshi.org.in/qt-center	Hyderabad, Telangana	<p>Housed within Anveshi Research Centre for Women's Studies and led by a collective of queer individuals in Hyderabad, the QT Center provides temporary housing, counseling, and a welcoming drop-in space for LGBTQIA+ people. Opening in February 2022, the center is a safe, accessible haven designed to address the lack of care and support for queer individuals across spaces, a gap that the pandemic starkly highlighted. Beyond emergency relief, the QT Center fosters rest, artistic expression, mental healthcare, and community-building, empowering LGBTQIA+ individuals to seek community and live lives on their own terms.</p>
14	Humsafar Trust www.humsafar.org	Mumbai, Maharashtra	<p>Founded in 1994, The Humsafar Trust (HST) is among India's first community-based organizations for LGBTQIA+ communities, with over 30 years of work dedicated to the health and wellbeing of queer communities. Started as a drop-in center for gay, lesbian, transgender, and Hijra persons, it quickly evolved into a pivotal institution, addressing communities' health, advocacy, and empowerment needs. Humsafar's commitment to long-term systemic engagement has enabled it to cultivate enduring partnerships with state and central governments, and public health institutions. It has sought to make redressal mechanisms against HIV and AIDS more accessible to vulnerable LGBTQIA+ communities, and built comprehensive wellbeing programs in mental health, nutrition, and other key areas linked to well-being.</p>
15	TWEET Foundation www.tweetindia.org	Mumbai, Maharashtra	<p>Established in 2015, TWEET Foundation is a transgender-led organization focused on supporting young transgender people's movements, and addressing the systematic underrepresentation of transmen, nonbinary people, and other gender-non-conforming communities. It provides crisis support, shelter, health and legal resources, skill development, and employment opportunities for transmen and women. TWEET was the first organization in India to establish a shelter home for transgender communities. Currently, it operates AASRA, the country's only shelter home built specifically for transmen. Through initiatives like a CSR-funded on-the-job training program with The Lalit and the Transgender Employment Mela in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, TWEET has enabled many community members to secure employment. The organization champions trans-led empowerment and cultivates opportunities for diverse voices within the transgender umbrella to co-create solutions.</p>

Disclaimer:

The organizations listed above were part of our research process, through the primary and secondary stages. The list is indicative and aimed at spotlighting the landscape of efforts. Therefore, please note it is non-exhaustive, and further due diligence may be needed.

annotated bibliography.

Given the significant challenge in the absence of reliable, large-scale data on LGBTQIA+ communities in India - the annotated bibliography provided below is a curated list of research sources which helped inform our perspective. We have described the sources with a summary, across critical thematic areas.

Existing research point to critical areas requiring attention — access to fundamental rights such as education, healthcare, and legal protections; protection against violence and discrimination; and recognition of non-normative family structures and relationships. The section is split into such sections: each part takes a deep dive into specific areas, through a dialogue with existing secondary literature.

Legal Landscape and Access to Justice

Access to justice is a quintessential aspect of legal agency — ensuring rights are protected, voices are heard, and discrimination can be challenged. The discrimination faced by queer persons in India encompasses a variety of exclusionary experiences, such as police violence, difficulty accessing identity documents, and judicial and legislative discrimination.

- Accessing identity documents is a major challenge for queer persons in India.⁹³ The process is often complicated, and officials may discriminate against queer individuals. The passport office, for example, requires a sex change operation certificate to change the gender marker on a passport, which prevents transgender people from exercising the right to self-identify their gender, enshrined in the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) v. Union of India and Others judgment in 2014.
- While some documents like the Aadhaar card are reportedly easier to change, updating school certificates to reflect a change in name or gender is difficult. Current guidelines don't

clearly address gender changes, which can lead to issues with job or higher education applications. Changing one's gender or name on a school leaving certificate is also complicated and may require an affidavit and notification in the Gazette.

- Systemic discrimination and violence against queer people in India are compounded by police violence and a history of criminalization against their identities. A report based on 150 interviews across nine cities in India highlights the impact of discriminatory laws and prejudicial attitudes of officials on queer individuals' access to justice.⁹⁴
- Laws like Section 377 of the IPC, which criminalized same-sex relations, and vaguely worded laws against sex work and begging are used by police to target individuals based on their real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity.⁹⁵
- Police violence, abuse, and harassment are significant barriers to justice. Trans individuals are often subjected to arbitrary arrests and detention under the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act, 1956. The Act which allows for police officers to act or initiate enquiry into situations suspected of commercial sexual activities, is often specifically weaponized against trans communities who find themselves turning towards sex work.⁹⁶
- Lesbian women who run away with their partners may face abduction charges by family members, and NGOs providing them shelter may be charged as well.⁹⁷ The lack of legal recognition for same-sex partnerships and gender identities outside the male/female binary also creates challenges in areas like personal finance, such as inheritance laws based on religious principles often do not recognize queer relationships.⁹⁸

Healthcare Access and Mental Health

The Supreme Court of India has determined that having access to sufficient healthcare is a fundamental right for all Indian citizens. However, the LGBTQIA+ communities in India still face significant obstacles in receiving healthcare.

- There is evidence of human rights violations against LGBTQIA+ individuals in healthcare settings because of gender nonconformity, HIV status, or participation in sex work.⁹⁹
- Apart from HIV/AIDS surveys, the Indian government has not conducted any comprehensive national studies on the healthcare needs and wants of LGBTQIA+ individuals.¹⁰⁰ India's focus on HIV/AIDS interventions, in line with global trends, has resulted in a lack of attention to the wider range of health issues faced by gender and sexually non-conforming communities.
- Health services frequently fail to reach those with intersectional identities, such as lesbian and bisexual women, transmen, and intersex individuals.¹⁰¹ Such as, the stigma against unmarried women in India impacts lesbian and bisexual women's access to healthcare. Without a husband's support, they face difficulties accessing even basic services, indicating potential exclusion from general healthcare due to their sexual orientation and perceived marital status.
- With respect to Indian scholars of psychiatry and psychology, there has been what Parekh (2003) describes as the preservation of "an almost complete silence on the subject of homosexuality" (as cited in Ranade, 2009).¹⁰²
- This silence contributes to the stigmatization and pathologization of homosexuality in India, as it allows harmful practices like conversion

therapy to persist unchallenged. Without open discussion and research, outdated views of homosexuality as a mental illness or a deviant behavior continue to influence clinical practices, to the detriment of LGBTQIA+ individuals.

- The medicalization of homosexuality led to violent 'curative treatments' like conversion therapy, shock therapy, and prescribing heavy drugs.¹⁰³
- The lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals, combined with the considerable mental health problems they are vulnerable to, has cascaded into a crisis of services available and tailored to LGBTQIA+ communities in India.¹⁰⁴
- In response, there has been a growing, albeit scattered, focus on queer-affirmative practices in the Indian mental healthcare system.¹⁰⁵ There is an imminent need to scale such queer-affirming approaches to mental health.

Education and Economic Exclusion

Access to education and employment in India is stratified by caste, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, and region, resulting in varying experiences across intersectional identities.

- Across the board, it is evident that LGBTQIA+ populations are materially worse off than their normative counterparts. Studies show reports of disproportionately lower wage rates, as well as higher levels of poverty among LGBTQIA+ people.¹⁰⁶
- **Exclusion from economic participation and agency is rooted in the exclusion experienced in formal educational settings.** Limited access to education significantly challenges economic participation and upward mobility for LGBTQIA+ populations, often pushing them into insecure and informal workforces.

A review of small studies across India consistently shows the hostility LGBTQIA+ people encounter in formal education, leading to denial of learning and training opportunities or increased difficulty due to negative treatment and lack of support.¹⁰⁷

- Limited economic opportunities force LGBTQIA+ individuals, particularly transgender women facing intense social stigma, into precarious forms of employment like sex work. Criminalization in these sectors increases their vulnerability to violence and abuse from individuals and law enforcement, as well as a heightened risk of HIV/AIDS.¹⁰⁸
- Even those who can access education and employment experience stigma and discrimination in their workplaces.¹⁰⁹

A 2016 survey by Mission for Indian Gay & Lesbian Empowerment (MINGLE) of 100 LGBTQIA+ corporate employees in India found that 40% reported frequent or occasional harassment at work for their gender or sexual identity. Two-thirds reported hearing homophobic comments at work, while one in five faced discriminations from their managers or human resources.

- The economic exclusion of queer people has strong implications at the macroeconomic level. A World Bank study estimated that LGBTQIA+ exclusion and barriers to employment and livelihoods cost India between 2 to 30 billion USD in GDP annually.¹¹⁰

Stigma, Violence, and the Fight for Equality

Despite constitutional guarantees of a dignified life free from discrimination, LGBTQIA+ populations in India encounter widespread stigma, discrimination, and violence from family, society, and institutions.

- A 2023 report, based on a closed-door public hearing, stresses the need to address familial violence faced by queer and trans people

during ongoing marriage equality discussions.¹¹¹ This report reveals various forms of abuse, from physical and sexual violence to threats, forced marriage, kidnappings, and wrongful confinement, and identifies the roles played by legal, social, and political institutions.

It emphasizes the lack of recognition of violence within families and advocates for specific protections to ensure safety for LGBTQIA+ individuals — particularly in the case of queer people assigned female gender at birth, who are more vulnerable to patriarchal constraints.

- Research in 2011 categorized violence against sexually marginalized women into three levels: individual, institutional, and structural-cultural.¹¹²

Individual violence includes actions like harassment, forced marriage, and even murder. Institutional violence arises when social systems hinder personal growth, such as workplace discrimination or excluding lesbian perspectives in health programs. Structural-cultural violence stems from beliefs that criminalize or stigmatize homosexuality.

- The Supreme Court, through judgements like Navtej Singh Johar and ORS vs. Union of India (2018), has upheld that discrimination based on sexual orientation violates Articles 14, 15, and 21, affirming marriage equality and constitutional morality over societal biases. It also held that sexual orientation and choice of partner (based on recent cases in the context of opposite-sex relationships such as Shakti Vahini v. Union of India ('Shakti Vahini'), Shafin Jahan v. Asokan K.M. ('Shafin Jahan'), and Shayara Bano) is a part of the right to life with dignity under Article 21.¹¹³



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