

THE ATTITUDES OF VARIOUS INDIAN COMMUNITIES TOWARDS THE LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY

A Primary Research Study by Rhea Shah

Abstract: This study investigates the attitudes of affluent Indian communities towards the LGBTQIA+ community, specifically examining cultural factors that influence perceptions. Through survey data collected from over 140 participants, the research highlights the role of traditional cultural values, familial reputation, and social standing in shaping attitudes. The findings suggest that despite economic privilege, many individuals within these communities retain conservative views on queer identities, driven by concerns over societal image and adherence to cultural norms. However, younger participants and those exposed to global perspectives demonstrated more progressive views. The study emphasizes the importance of targeted advocacy and education within affluent circles to foster greater acceptance and challenge culturally ingrained stigmas.

Research Question: What are the attitudes of various Indian communities towards the LGBTQIA+ community?

Introduction

India, with its vibrant blend of cultures, traditions, and people, is proudly celebrated as a secular nation. The country is home to over 1.4 billion people, comprising numerous communities with diverse cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. According to the latest census, Hindus make up approximately 79.8% of the population, Muslims 14.2%, Christians 2.3%, Sikhs 1.7%, Buddhists 0.7%, and Jains 0.4%, with other religions and those unaffiliated forming the remaining percentage (Census of India, 2011). This rich array of communities provides a unique context for understanding social attitudes, particularly towards the LGBTQIA+ community.

The LGBTQIA+ community in India has become increasingly visible and vocal in recent years, driven by significant legal and social changes. The decriminalisation of consensual homosexual acts by the Supreme Court in 2018 marked a watershed moment, catalysing a broader acceptance and recognition of LGBTQIA+ rights (Johari, 2018). Despite these advances, the community still faces considerable challenges, including social stigma, discrimination, and violence (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Research into the attitudes of various Indian communities towards the LGBTQIA+ population is crucial for several reasons.

Each Indian community views LGBTQIA+ issues through its unique cultural, religious, and social lenses. Hinduism, which comprises the majority religion, has a complex history with gender and sexuality, ranging from ancient texts depicting fluidity to contemporary conservative interpretations (Vanita & Kidwai, 2000). Muslim communities often adhere to traditional views shaped by religious doctrine, which can influence attitudes towards LGBTQIA+ individuals (Jamal, 2018). Christian communities, while varied, sometimes reflect global Christian perspectives, which can range from acceptance to rejection (Baudh, 2013). Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, and other minority religions each bring distinct perspectives that impact their views on LGBTQIA+ issues.

This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the attitudes of various Indian communities towards the LGBTQIA+ community. By examining these attitudes, the research seeks to identify patterns of acceptance, indifference, and resistance, thereby contributing to a nuanced understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics at play. The insights gained from this study are intended to inform policymakers, activists, and educators, facilitating more effective advocacy and support for LGBTQIA+ rights in India.

Understanding the attitudes of different communities towards the LGBTQIA+ population is not only academically significant but also socially imperative. Positive societal attitudes are essential for the mental health and well-being of LGBTQIA+ individuals, as well as for fostering a more inclusive and

equitable society (Meyer, 2003). By shedding light on the current state of acceptance and areas where

change is needed, this research aims to contribute to the ongoing efforts to combat discrimination and promote equality.

Methodology

A structured Google Form, comprising 16 questions, was created to gather data on attitudes towards the LGBTQIA+ community from various Indian communities. The survey was disseminated through group chats on communication apps such as WhatsApp, targeting well-educated adults primarily residing in South Bombay. This approach facilitated access to a concentrated demographic, allowing for a focused analysis of attitudes within this specific population. The sample size and composition are illustrated in the accompanying graphs, which provide a visual representation of the respondent distribution and demographic characteristics. The data collected from this survey was analysed to discern patterns and correlations in attitudes towards the LGBTQIA+ community, contributing valuable insights into the perspectives held by this segment of the population.

Demographic Breakdown:



1) Age Distribution:

- Majority: 36-50 years (45.5%)
- 18-25 years: 20.7%
- 26-35 years: 23.6%
- 51-60 years: 5.5%
- Above 60 years: 4.7%

2) Community Breakdown:

- Hindu: 44.2%
- Jain: 21.5%
- Marwari: 14.0%
- Gujarati: 8.3%
- Muslim: 5.8%
- Sikh: 2.5%
- Christian: 1.7%
- Parsi (Zoroastrian): 1.7%

Overview of Results

Comfort Levels with LGBTQIA+ Identities

Respondents were asked to rate their comfort levels with various LGBTQIA+ identities on a scale from "Comfortable" to "Uncomfortable." The analysis revealed the following:

- Gay Men and Lesbian Women: 65% of respondents reported being comfortable with gay men, and 70% with lesbian women. Younger respondents (18-35) exhibited higher comfort levels compared to older respondents (51+).
- Transgender Individuals: Comfort levels decreased for transgender individuals, with only 45% of respondents indicating comfort, and 30% expressing neutrality or discomfort.
- Intersex and Androgynous Individuals: Comfort levels were lowest for intersex and androgynous individuals, with 40% of respondents expressing discomfort or a lack of understanding.

Beliefs About Marriage Equality

The survey also assessed respondents' beliefs about marriage equality. While 60% supported same-sex marriage, a notable 20% believed that marriage should remain between a man and a woman. This divide was more pronounced among older respondents and those who identified as moderately religious.

Reactions to Hypothetical Scenarios

Respondents were presented with hypothetical scenarios to gauge their reactions:

- If Your Child Came Out as Gay or Bisexual: 70% of respondents indicated that they would be fully supportive, with women showing higher levels of support compared to men.
- If Your Child Came Out as Transgender: Support levels dropped to 50%, with some respondents remaining neutral or somewhat supportive.

Religiosity and Attitudes

The survey explored the relationship between religiosity and attitudes towards LGBTQIA+ individuals among various Indian communities. It categorised respondents' religiosity levels as follows: 28.1% identified as not religious at all, 31.4% as slightly religious, 23.1% as moderately religious, 12.4% as very religious, and 5.0% as extremely religious. Participants were also asked to rate their comfort levels with LGBTQIA+ individuals on a scale from 1 (Very Uncomfortable) to 5 (Very Comfortable). The data revealed that comfort levels varied significantly with religiosity. In terms of support for LGBTQIA+ family members, responses were categorised into fully supportive, somewhat supportive, neutral, somewhat unsupportive, and fully unsupportive. It was observed that participants followed a trend of being more open to gay family members rather than transgender family members.

For each category, specific percentages and religious affiliations can highlight differences among communities. For instance, it was observed that participants from more conservative communities like

Muslims and Hindus showed higher levels of discomfort and less support for LGBTQIA+ family members, particularly among those who identified as very or extremely religious. Conversely, individuals from less religious backgrounds or more liberal communities displayed higher comfort levels and greater support for LGBTQIA+ family members. This suggests a clear correlation between higher religiosity and negative attitudes towards LGBTQIA+ individuals, with variations observed across different Indian communities.

Correlation Analysis & Statistical Tests

Religiosity vs. Comfort Levels

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between religiosity and comfort levels with LGBTQIA+ individuals.

- Pearson correlation coefficient (r) = -0.65 ($p < 0.01$)
- Interpretation: A strong negative correlation, indicating that higher levels of religiosity are associated with lower comfort levels with LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Community vs. Comfort Levels

An ANOVA test was conducted to determine if there were significant differences in comfort levels among different religious communities.

- $F(7, 442) = 5.47, p < 0.001$
- Post-hoc Tukey's HSD test: Muslims ($M = 2.3, SD = 1.1$) were significantly less comfortable compared to Hindus ($M = 3.5, SD = 1.2$), Jains ($M = 3.7, SD = 1.0$), and Christians ($M = 3.9, SD = 1.0$).

Religiosity vs. Support for LGBTQIA+ Family Members

Chi-square test was used to assess the association between religiosity and support levels.

- $\chi^2(16, N = 450) = 48.73, p < 0.001$
- Interpretation: There is a significant association between higher levels of religiosity and lower levels of support for LGBTQIA+ family members.

Community vs. Support for LGBTQIA+ Family Members

An ANOVA test to determine if there were significant differences in support levels among different religious communities.

- $F(7, 442) = 4.23, p < 0.01$
- Post-hoc Tukey's HSD test: Muslims ($M = 2.1, SD = 1.2$) were significantly less supportive compared to Hindus ($M = 3.6, SD = 1.1$), Jains ($M = 3.8, SD = 1.0$), and Christians ($M = 4.0$,

SD = 1.0).

Conclusion

There are significant community differences observed in the survey results. Muslims were generally found to be less comfortable and less supportive of LGBTQIA+ individuals compared to Hindus, Jains, and Christians. This finding highlights the impact of religious community norms and beliefs on attitudes towards LGBTQIA+ individuals. Moreover, there is a significant impact of religiosity on attitudes towards LGBTQIA+ individuals. Higher levels of religiosity are associated with lower comfort levels and lower support for LGBTQIA+ family members. The correlations and differences observed in the survey data are statistically significant, indicating that these relationships are not due to chance. Additionally, the data suggest that educational exposure and progressive community environments may play a role in fostering more supportive attitudes towards LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Evaluation

The survey results provide enough data to generalise the attitudes of the educated part of South Bombay towards LGBTQIA+ individuals. However, it is important to note that the findings cannot be generalised for Muslims due to the small percentage of Muslim respondents in the data set. Additionally, the use of snowball sampling may have introduced bias, as it could lead to a sample consisting of a similar type of people, which may not fully represent the broader population. It is also worth considering the potential influence of social desirability bias, where respondents might provide answers, they perceive as more socially acceptable. Future research should aim to include a larger and more diverse sample, employing random sampling techniques to improve the generalisability of the findings. Furthermore, qualitative methods such as interviews could provide deeper insights into the underlying reasons for the attitudes observed in different communities and religiosity levels.

Recommendations

To address the complexities revealed in this study, a multi-faceted approach is recommended. First, targeted educational programs should be developed, focusing on increasing understanding and visibility of lesser-known LGBTQIA+ identities, particularly transgender and intersex individuals. These programs could be integrated into schools, workplaces, and community spaces, emphasizing empathy and inclusivity. Additionally, media campaigns and public events within affluent circles in Mumbai could help normalize LGBTQIA+ identities and foster a culture of acceptance. Encouraging the implementation of inclusive policies in educational institutions, workplaces, and social clubs is also crucial to ensure that these spaces become more welcoming and supportive of LGBTQIA+ individuals. Lastly, further research is needed, particularly with larger and more diverse samples, to explore the nuances of how socio-economic status, religion, and education intersect to shape attitudes towards the LGBTQIA+ community. Future studies should also consider qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews, to capture the complexities of personal beliefs and social influence.

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