

LGBTQ+ Rights and Legal Recognition in India: The Path Forward

 kautilyasocietynewsurl.in/2025/09/19/lgbtq-rights-and-legal-recognition-in-india-the-path-forward

September 18, 2025



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“As a gay man, I’ve felt the effects of inequality, particularly in the last 10 years, so I feel very deeply committed to the cause of equality. Facing one kind of discrimination makes you more attuned to other forms of discrimination. Anyone who lives in this country can see how unequal we are,” said [Saurabh Kirpal](#).

Saurabh Kirpal, an Indian senior advocate, author, and LGBTQ+ rights activist, was born on April 18, 1972, the son of B. N. Kirpal, a former Chief Justice of India. Saurabh completed a bachelor's degree in physics at St. Stephen's College, Delhi, followed by law degrees from the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge. After a short tenure with the UN in Geneva, he returned to India and has been practising law in the Supreme Court of India for over 20 years, specialising in civil, commercial, and constitutional law. Kirpal was also counsel for the landmark case decided in 2018 that decriminalised consensual same-sex relations in India. Kirpal has also been serving on the board of the Naz Foundation Trust, an NGO that advocates for LGBTQ+ rights. Kirpal was designated a senior advocate by the Delhi High Court in March 2021. Kirpal is in a long-term relationship with Nicolas Germain Bachmann, a Swiss human rights activist.

Beginning

With acceptance in history giving way to colonial impositions and present-day legal battles, the trajectory of LGBTQ+ rights in India has followed a long and complex journey. The landmark decriminalisation of homosexuality in 2018 represented a glorious victory; however, the LGBTQ+ community continues to face an array of complications ranging from legal recognition and social acceptance to economic equity. A complete analysis of the LGBTQ+ rights scenario in India against the background of the global experience can offer pathways toward a more inclusive society. The discourse stresses the importance of building affirming communities and education aimed at increasing LGBTQ+ awareness, dismantling entrenched prejudices, and securing the community's rightful place.

History

Over the ages, India's ideology regarding diverse sexual orientations and identities has undergone blows and radical transitions. In ancient Indian cultures, gender matters were understood much more fluidly than in contemporary times. Sacred texts and mythological tales from the religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism refer to non-binary and same-sex relationships, providing proof against the existence of cultural premises in which such diversity was sometimes recognised or even revered.

British colonialism in the nineteenth century spread over their Victorian moralistic practices and cast a deep shadow on the possible freedoms of the LGBTQ+, criminalising same-sex relations in Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code enacted in 1861. Such a draconian law categorised "carnal intercourse against the order of nature" as criminal and secluded gay people cloaked in darkness. Post-independently, despite India's attempts toward liberal democracy, Section 377 seemed to continue systematic discrimination and social ostracism of the LGBTQ+ community.

Towards the latter part of the 20th century, gay activism began to get organised in India. A few of these early organisations included the Naz Foundation, which took up challenges to bad laws and paved the way for major litigation battles. A major victory came in July 2009 with the Delhi High Court ruling to set aside the decriminalisation of consensual sex acts between adults, a ruling later regrettably overruled by the Supreme Court in 2013. The rise and flow of laws [illustrated the precarious state](#) of LGBTQ rights in India.

Supreme Court verdict of 2018

An important day marked in history was September 6, 2018, when the Supreme Court of India, in the case of [Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India](#), unequivocally stated that portions of Section 377 would stand annulled, thereby decriminalising consensual same-sex relations among adults. The unanimous verdict became history in the legality of India when, in terms of ethos, sexual orientation became part of unalienable identity, as otherwise suppression thereof would violate fundamental rights. Justice Indu Malhotra noted in her concurring opinion, the historical injustices that the LGBTQ community had undergone and also apologised to her through a long historical time of denial of rights.

Current Legal Hurdles

The verdict delivered in 2018 was considered a landmark and valid, but it has not settled several significant issues. Indian law does not recognise same-sex marriages, thus denying any legal rights to LGBTQ+ couples as to marriage, inheritance, taxation, and spouse benefits. In 2022, the petition seeking legal recognition of same-sex marriages came before the Supreme Court, but before February 2025, its verdict was still awaited. Finally, the central government hesitated and wanted to suggest that discussing such an extensive social issue was better in the legislature and not resolved exclusively judicially.

Having done so, the [Transgender Persons \(Protection of Rights\) Act, 2019](#), conferred rights for the transgender population, criticised for advocating medical certification for recognition of gender identity, which many reproached against the right to self-identify. Besides, it remained silent on affirmative action measures like reservations in education and employment, which were key towards addressing historical and structural legacies.

The second big void is the absence of such comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation in very specific terms for covering LGBTQ individuals. But, without these legal protections, such important discriminations continue to happen in income-generating sectors or further areas like health, housing, or education. Such legislative voids continue to bring about a stigma, which in turn produces economic disenfranchisement for such communities.

International Views on LGBTQ+ Rights

International paradigms provide an analytic residual that aids in the appraisal of the LGBTQ+ rights status. [Canada has outdone other nations](#) in this regard by legalising same-sex marriages as far back as 2005. In addition, the country is home to very strict anti-discrimination policies. [Such policies ensure](#) that access to healthcare services accounts for transgender individuals, including gender-affirming procedures and other aspects of inclusive workplace policies.

The [United Kingdom](#) equally scores high with the passing of the Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Act, alongside other comprehensive anti-discriminatory protections in virtually all sectors. As young learners, they integrate issues concerning LGBTQ+ in their school programs.

In the Global South, South Africa has also emerged as a forerunner in this regard. After apartheid, the country incorporated LGBTQ+ rights in the very constitution that made it a democracy and then legalised same-sex marriage in 2006. Even though there are other societal issues, the [existence of such laws](#) provides a solid platform for the fight and social reform.

On the other hand, however, there are countries like Russia that could warn anyone of the impending consequences. The enactment of bans on “gay propaganda” proved severely hindering to LGBTQ+ expression and advocacy; such measures purposely stigmatised the people and further promoted human rights abuses within the mentioned country. This makes it necessary to have [protective legal structures and a true culture of proactive initiatives](#).

Employment and Workplace Suggestions

Such preferences notwithstanding, the 2018 decriminalisation of consensual same-sex relationships has not prevented discrimination against LGBTQ+ employees in India. The general absence of any laws on anti-discrimination keeps the community at bay by hiring, promoting, and addressing entirely workplace-related issues. Most importantly, though the people of India enjoy fundamental rights as enshrined in the Constitution, usage of these rights is confined mainly to governmental entities and, therefore, does not provide adequate legal protection to private sector employees [facing discrimination](#) on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Their call to action is for public and private organisations to develop and implement inclusive policies and practices to counter all of this:

1. *Equal Recruitment Procedures*: Organisations should adopt recruitment processes free from dimensions of sexual orientation and gender identity. This includes job postings and ensures equality of opportunity for all candidates.
2. *Sensitivity Training*: Regular workshops and training sessions can sensitise employees regarding the LGBTQ+ community, thus developing a culture of respect for diversity. Furthermore, these programs can ensure a reduction in stereotypes while preventing harassment from occurring in the workplace.
3. *Facilitated Environment*: Forming resource and support group networks within workplaces is one practical way of giving a voice to the concerns of LGBTQ+ employees. A clear anti-discrimination policy, with understood redress mechanisms, will also be useful.

Legal reforms are also necessary to offer the framework for inclusion in workplaces. The consolidation of relevant anti-discrimination legislation could thereby include specific mention of sexual orientation and gender identity in the coverage of discrimination to allow legal recourse for individuals experiencing bias at the workplace. Moreover, consistency among national laws with international stipulations (as specified by the International Labour Organisation) could [strengthen protections given to LGBTQ+ workers](#).

Educational Suggestions

The manner in which social attitudes toward LGBTQ+ individuals are moulded by educational institutions must be said in contempt. In India, many schools and colleges do not advocate inclusive curricula and policies, thus creating environments that may leave LGBTQ+ students feeling marginalised or unsafe.

Guidelines to inculcate inclusivity in education:

1. *Inclusive Curriculum Formalisation*: From an early stage, the integration of LGBTQ+ issues within the educational curriculum can orient more towards understanding and acceptance. This [includes](#) discussing family diversity, gender identity, and the contributions made by LGBTQ+ persons throughout history.
2. *Teacher Training Programs*: Teachers should go through professional training and gain knowledge of how to avoid problems associated with LGBTQ+ issues. These programs could further the ability of the teachers to take proactive measures against LGBTQ+ pupils and incidents of bullying and discrimination.
3. *Supportive Student Organisations*: Queer collectives should be encouraged on campuses to provide safe spaces for LGBTQ+ students, like "[Parinde: The Queer Society](#)" of O.P. Jindal Global University. [These organisations can work](#) towards advocacy, peer support, and raising awareness regarding LGBTQ+ rights.

Along with these interventions, policy interventions are needed. The Madras High Court has put forth a series of recommendations to sensitise parents and teachers concerning LGBTQ+ issues for the [benefit of students](#) who do not conform to gender norms.

Healthcare Suggestions

Access to healthcare is a basic right; however, people from the LGBTQ+ community face a lot of stigma and discriminatory practices exercised in medical settings in India. This comprises typical issues faced by transgender individuals concerning access to gender-affirming treatment and health services generally.

For improving healthcare for LGBTQ+ individuals, the following are required:

1. *Sensitising healthcare providers*: Sensitisation of the medical fraternity regarding understanding requirements, expectations, and perceptions of the unique health needs of LGBTQ patients consequently contributes towards the minimisation of stigma and enhances quality healthcare.
2. *Creating inclusive and non-discriminatory policies*: Formulating guidelines that ensure no discrimination in the provision of healthcare services would make it easier for LGBTQ persons to seek health services without fear of stigma.
3. *Community-Inclusive Initiatives*: Outreach programs that include LGBTQ individuals could help narrow the gaps between them and the providers. For example, transgender sex workers have been harnessed into the mechanisms through which targeted high-risk individuals are reached for communicating HIV/AIDS prevention, showing how community-led health programs [have performed well](#).

Policy Suggestions

To earn an inclusive term for LGBTQ rights in India, a very multilateral study, such as legal reforms ranging from education to social awareness, is recommended.

1. *Legal Recognition of Same-Sex Relationships*: The recognition and legalisation of same-sex marriages, adding the right to adopt by LGBTQ couples, will bring those equal rights and the corresponding recognition for heterosexual couples. They will recognise equality in the eyes of the law.
2. *Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Law*: It is important to legislate and put in place bans on discriminatory practices, on any ground of sexual orientation or gender identity, throughout all sectors of life world of work, education, health care, and housing, to protect individuals who belong to the LGBTQ community.
3. *Public Awareness Campaigns*: National initiatives concerning public awareness of the issues of LGBTQ would lead to the removal of deep-rooted prejudices and a culture of acceptance.
4. *Support of LGBTQ organisations*: Support the community-based organisations with funds and policy-based support to help in effective advocacy and necessary services to LGBTQ persons.

Conclusion

It is incomplete for every individual to achieve ultimate acceptance within society wholly. Great effort is required from the whole society to make this journey complete. Decriminalizing homosexuality has paved the way for legal groundwork, but a lot of work remains to be done towards little discrimination and equal rights. It marked a journey toward a future in which individuals were treated with dignity, respect, and equal opportunity regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity- com-reform by introducing comprehensive legal reforms, instituting inclusive education environment practices, equitable workplace practices, and access to health care, among many others.

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