



Review Article

Homosexuality among Females: Evolution to Revolution

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Abstract

Females were not given the liberty to express their sexuality in historically male dominated world until education was accessible to them and women were educated to socialize their thinking. Homosexuality refers to same sex attraction. Although much was written about male homosexuality, female homosexuality is less studied and still reasons for female homosexuality are not that evident. A huge gap could be identified between early recognition of symptoms of homosexuality to self-acceptance and disclosure to other's about own -sexual-orientation. Although family is usually the first place for disclosure of own sexual orientation, fear sustains regarding acceptance. Homosexual women face multiple problems in all walks of life and may be abused or denied basic rights for a dignified living. An empathetic and non-judgemental attitude from the clinicians might help in easily approaching the mental and physical health issues faced by female homosexuals.

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Introduction

Homosexuality is characterized by having sexual contact with same sex, either as a genital act or maintaining a long-term sexual /erotic status. A homosexual person dwells bonding of love for an individual having similar physical structure and sexual orientation and chooses them for being a sexual partner (Gooren, 2011). Homosexuality in females indicate to a sense of identity

based on those attractions, related behaviours and membership to other females (APA, 2008) This article tries to give an overview regarding the origin of homosexuality among females. Viewpoint of various historians regarding female homosexuality otherwise called lesbianism is described in a chronological approach. Current legal status around the globe and hurdles faced by the lesbians are also described.

Origin of the term

The derivation of the word 'lesbian' lies with name of the Greek island of Lesbos, right from the 6th-century associated with the name of BC poet Sappho, who herself was a lady. In early 19th century the word lesbian was regarded as related to Lesbos (Oxford referencen.d). The remnants of her writings in poetry suggests her female influenced ideas regarding everyday life of females, their bonding, relationship and the customs females followed during that era. Her words further highlighted elegance of feminine beauty and declaration of her love towards females (Weick 2010).

Development of the term 'lesbian'

- ♦ 1870 - Lesbianism documented to be sexually stimulating correlation between females.
- ♦ 1890- A medical dictionary used lesbianism as a descriptive term for addressing love towards same sex among females.
- ♦ 20th century–Term lesbian, invert and homosexual frequently used as per the earlier concept given by Sappho in her poetry.
- ♦ 1925- Medical literature became friendly with use of term lesbian and became a pronoun for female homo sexual act (Marcus,2016; Zimmerman, 2000).

In the early 19th century sexologists described lesbian women as those not sticking on to female personality and gender roles and even misinterpreted as insane individuals.

Women homosexual did not have freedom at par with male counterpart to openly pursue their relationship although it was considered to be harmless if not asked for acceptance as homosexual relationship. Things started changing by world-war II as government actively supported homosexual women to expand their social circle by reaching out to women having similar ideas by means of education and better earning opportunities which gave them economic freedom (Timeline of LGBT, 2019).

Very less literature focused on female homosexuality comparative to male homosexual behaviour as it was not considered as a significant problem by health care personnel, even its existence was not admitted to exist. However, few researchers like Richard von, Krafft Ebing, German sexologist, and Britain's Havelock Ellis had listed earliest and more adoring sequence of female same-sex attraction, approaching it as a form of insanity (Ellis' categorization of 'lesbianism' is currently disapproved as being a medical disorder. However, Ellis conceded that there were 'true inverts' who would spend their lives pursuing erotic relationships with women. Inverts were regarded as third sex or the opposite gender role follower. Women in Victorian time were forbidden or were prohibited to initiate sexual events rather had an image of feminist to be followed and the so called inverts were opposing this concept and were thought of having masculine features for showing sexual interest in women(Hull, 1983).

Kraft-Ebing and Ellis were pioneer sexologist in shedding light on the female homosexuality and creating awareness among masses. They claimed that homosexuality was a congenital anomaly and it should not be considered as criminal offence. Lack of societal acceptance of homosexuals prevented lesbians from describing their emotions openly and lead them to form closed subculture group which gave them the acceptance of being different and form their own social circles in Paris and Berlin (Aldrich,2006).

Models of Homosexuality in Females

Although the scientific basis for the exact reason behind one's sexual orientation to be felt as heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual still is a evolving controversy but still some possible biological, psychological or social effects of parent's sexual orientation involvement has been seen. Psychological and physical environment experienced by children brought up by homosexual parent's shows greater inclination towards choosing homosexuality in own future (APA, 2008).The girls exposed earlier to androgen are predisposed to show homosexuality or being lesbian (Gooren, 2006).

Numerous researchers have proposed and worked on various models of sexual identity development for more than three decades. Cass (1979) developed a model, on a six-stage linear psychological path of sexual identity development. Troiden (1989) evolved Cass's model and

categorized it in four stages: (a) sensitization-initial same sex attraction and first self-questioning regarding heterosexual relationship (b) identity confusion-internal conflict duration during mid-adolescent time and initiation of same-sex sexual activity(c) identity assumption-young adults start identifying them as LGB and shares the new self-identity with near ones people and seeks community among other LGBs (d) commitment- indulging in same-sex romantic relationship and revelation to a society consisting of heterosexual people (Floyd & Stein, 2002). Take home message suggested by these research models was that healthy and stable sexual identity development forces imbibition of sexual identity in individual's life(Aldrich, 2006).

Sexuality and Lesbian identity

Culture followed in western countries tag Lesbians as characteristics that describes their individual sexuality in combination to resemblance to a group that shares common traits(Rust, 1992). History reflects that women in many culture and society have had sexual relationship with other women, but they were never acclaimed to be in a relationship with whom they have sexual relationship. Lesbian identity was side-lined from society by giving a subcultural identity and was reduced to a bare political minority in western culture (Aldrich, 2006).

Whether sexual activity need to be there to define a relationship between two females as lesbianism,

still remains a debated issue. According to feminist writer Naomi McCormick, men community gives the judgement pertaining to women's sexuality, who primarily points lesbian sexual orientation as sexual closeness with other women. However same criterion is not necessary for declaration of heterosexual behaviour of women. McCormick emphasized that rather than genital contact, emotional, psychological and ideological connections between women are more crucial (McCormick et al, 1994).

A study conducted in 2011, on ascertaining the difference related to lesbians for health related matter suggested segregating lesbians using the following criteria-identity, sexual behaviour or both. Sexual desire or attraction would not qualify as a criterion for sexual identity as it rarely accounted in measurable health or psychosocial issues (Brogan, 2001).

The evolving debate on homosexual behaviour and identity over year's further weekend the previous belief of every culture that heterosexuality is the most usual pattern of sexual identity individual follows. When a female is attracted toward another woman it leads to negative speculation about life goals. Those who undergo this, they use to adopt the identity breaking the stereotype of what society considering normal (Schlager,1998). This identity is different from gay men, hetero sexual women and bisexual women, which sometimes cause conflict among them (Oxford referencen.d).

Legal status across the globe

As per the Gallops survey the proportion of LGBT Americans has reached 4.5% of the US population (over 11 million) by the year 2017 (Moore, 2013).“The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (IGLA) reported in March 2019, that 70 States still continue to criminalise same-sex consensual activity. Regardless of the gender in 44 of these States individual is pronounced a criminal in such issues. The criminalization of homosexual behaviour in 2017 by legal system in India was a major setback to rights of LGBT community (ILGA, 2016). Advances to change legal aspect have occurred in last two years in states like: India, Trinidad and Tobago, and Angola. Majority of the countries against homosexuality lies in Africa, Middle East and other parts of south Asia. Homosexuality could result in death sentence also in eight countries across the globe (Carrol, 2016).

Shifting of concept from punishable offence to a normal variant

In Indian scenario, a 14th century text mentions about a child born to lesbian couple breaks the mysterious silence about female sexuality. With the release of a film titled 'Fire' in 1996 the matter of lesbian relationship came into light to be discussed among public, prompting some theatres in India to be attacked by extremists. Indian social activist continually rejected the usage of word lesbian as being influenced by power or politics, and in rarest cases the discussion

centred on male homosexuality only. Women right groups in India continue to debate the legitimacy of including lesbian issues in their platforms and issues focusing on female homosexuality are considered to be sensitive and are usually less talked about (Vanita, 2007).

As per World Values Survey, a global survey that represents around 100 countries people's view, from 1990- 2014 the part of Indian respondents who viewed homo sexuality as unjustifiable fell from 89% to 24% giving a new vision to homosexual relations due to legal changes that occurred in India (Rukhmani, n.d).

In 2018 September Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in its historical judgment legalized homosexuality, partially strikes down Section 377. The section holds that whoever, voluntarily, has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, commits an unnatural offence.

The bench said that the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer) community faced discrimination and social stigma because of the criminality attached to the consensual same-sex relationship (Rajagopal, 2018).

Current stand about lesbianism

Issues constantly being faced by these women include coming out as a lesbian, experiencing rejection from family or facing harassment at work place, being a victim of sexual

or physical abuse, desire to become parent and deciding for insurance and end of life plans in advance (Rullo, 2017). Most important issue faced is hidden sexual orientation from society and even from near one (Martos et al, 2017). Nearly half of the participants preferred family as first person to disclose rather than anyone they met in their life as family support was priority and real intention was not to keep family in ignorance of self-homosexuality followed by friend from homosexual community and lastly heterosexual friends (Julian, 2016). Delay in admitting sexual orientation by lesbian females to parent has been found to be associated with significantly elevated levels of past month illicit drug use, degrading poor self-reported health status and a low mood for more than two week showing signs of clinical depression during past month (Rothman et al, 2012). Lesbian women are endangered to face more child sexual abuse and the severity is high resulting in requiring counselling or approaching a psychiatric for mental health issues and substance abuse than heterosexual women (Wilsnack, 2012; Hughes et al, 2001).

Discrimination based on sexual identity of lesbian at workplace include remarks jokes, ridicule and remarks when done by more than one co-worker, surprisingly when abused by single co-worker threats of physical and verbal abuse both in person and by telephonically are prominent (Barret et al, 2011; Caylor, 2018). Workplace presence

of senior lesbian official make them to accept their sexuality openly and makes a crucial difference in accepting their feelings. Employee following homosexuality are also termed as Social deviant workers who faces double glazed glass ceiling that is being subjected to intense scrutiny and they must excel to be deemed competent at par with fellow workers (Bowring & Brewis 2009; Miller et al 2003). Many a times over friendliness with female co-workers is misinterpreted as sexual interest, to avoid this they use camouflaging behaviour like self-monitoring speech and observable behaviour related to one's sexual orientation, or preferring to keep mute in common office conversation or sharing little information about their personal life with colleagues at workplace (Bowleg et al, 2008; Griffith & Hebl, 2002).

Self-help groups like The Naz Foundation, Nazariya, Humsafar Trust, Sangini, Humrahi, Sappho for equality in eastern India, CREA and many more across India, are primarily involved in social equality and providing counselling sessions and support group addressing issues and concerns of Lesbian Bisexual women and Trans people assigned female at birth. These groups organises a lot of events like film screenings, book launches, workshops and talks providing a platform to meet like-minded people, open about issues related to gender and sexuality and expand one's horizon(LGBT support n.d). Delhi based Naz foundation played

a major role in bringing the idea of homosexuality in public by challenging the section 377 in Delhi high court with strong support from other similar self-help groups in 2001(Tandon n.d).

Conclusion

Acceptance towards homosexual relationship over the period of time stretching from origin to current time is minimal, still there is a long way to gain equal rights. Although legal acceptance is increasing and better laws would help this group to prosper and live with all rights at par with other citizens, more and more social awareness activities are to be conducted and economic opportunities to be made available from government to hasten the process.

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