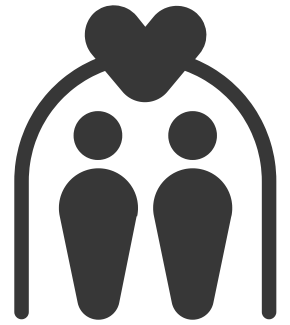


SELAH - PAUSE AND REFLECT

Therapist's view on ongoing hearing regarding SSM in Supreme Court



It's a beautiful thing when two people fall in love. When they wish to celebrate that love with the people closest to them, have a lifelong commitment, share their lives and maybe build a family together. Deep down, we all crave love and connection. We long for someone who will be there for us through thick and thin, holding our hands and cheering us on. It's a basic human need—to love and be loved. Marriage is an institution that is deeply embedded in the human experience. A significant body of psychological research and theories supports the notion of humans' need for love and relationships. The Interdependence Theory, developed by social psychologists Harold Kelley and John Thibaut, explores the dynamics of relationships and emphasises the concept of interdependence. It suggests that individuals rely on others to fulfil their needs, and long-term relationships provide opportunities for mutual support, satisfaction, and the sharing of resources, both emotional and material.

However, it is disappointing to realise that some of us are not permitted to express this beautiful emotion of love for another person. Living in India, the idea of a committed long-term relationship is only socially acknowledged in the context of marriage. With same-sex marriages not being recognized, it leaves no room for the LGBTQ+ community to provide a name to their equally valid romantic relationship. For the LGBTQ+ community, this dream of getting married to their partner remains elusive due to societal barriers and discriminatory laws. The ongoing debate on same-sex marriage in India sheds light on the poignant reality that not everyone is granted the fundamental right to marry the person they love.

The constant struggles for equality and acceptance make it more and more clear that cultural restrictions on personal happiness have an effect that goes far beyond the boundaries of the law; they have a negative influence on the mental health and resilience of countless people.



As therapists, working in the mental health field we constantly emphasise the importance of psychological well-being. Psychological well-being refers to a person's overall state of mental and emotional health. It is not merely the absence of mental illness or distress but rather it involves the presence of positive emotions, a sense of purpose, engagement in meaningful activities, and the ability to cope with life's challenges effectively. The fact that same-sex marriage is not legally recognised might lead to greater psychological distress for many members of the LGBTQ+ community who are already more prone to experiencing mental health concerns. Research consistently indicates that social rejection and a lack of legal protections have a detrimental effect on the mental health of sexual minorities. The negative repercussions of this discrimination can be observed in the form of higher rates of anxiety, despair, and low self-esteem. This is exactly what the Minority Stress Theory also emphasises. It explains that the denial of marriage rights exacerbates minority stress, as it reinforces the perception of inequality, exclusion, and discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals thus leading to a negative impact on the mental health of members of the community.

The Special Marriage Act was enacted in 1954 which did not include same-sex marriages or consider them valid. Therefore, same-sex couples are unable to register their marriages and get the privileges and protections that come with marriage under the Special Marriage Act. The act stipulates that the parties must be male and female, and it doesn't offer a way for same-sex couples to officially get married or have their relationships recognised by the law. The current arguments presented to the Supreme Court include a plea seeking recognition of same-sex marriage under the Special Marriage Act, of 1954. The petitioners argue that the act discriminates between same-sex couples and opposite-sex couples, denies them the legal rights, social acceptance, and status that come with marriage and that any marriage between two people should be subject to the Special Marriage Act of 1954, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Along with equal recognition, the petitioners demand laws that allow them to avail insurance, buy or rent homes, open bank accounts and consider other more practical aspects of daily life.

However, the Centre opposed same-sex marriages in the Supreme Court stating that marriage is a holy union that occurs between a biological man and woman, who can have children and live as a family. Some concerns allowing same-sex marriage will create legal problems, such as issues with inheritance, tax, and property rights.

It is about time that these laws are revised considering how exclusionary and restricted they are. It is clearly understood that denying the right to marry to same-sex couples takes away the legal rights that normally a heterosexual couple would enjoy.



This includes the right to legal protection and benefits such as inheritance rights, property rights, and the ability to make decisions on behalf of a spouse in case of any incapacity. Since same-sex marriages are not considered legal, couples also lack adoption and parenting rights limiting their ability to form a legal family unit. The repercussions of rejection of legal rights can again be seen in the form of compromised well-being of individuals. It increases the hurdles in the everyday life of same-sex couples where they may encounter obstacles while trying to receive services from the government, rent a home together, or gain spousal benefits from their employers. These difficulties may lead to further anxiety, tension, frustration, feelings of injustice, and overall low life satisfaction.

The non-recognition of same-sex marriages not only represents the absence of basic human decency and the needs of LGBTQ+ couples but also deeply impacts their mental and emotional health. It hampers their resilience and takes them farther away from their rights and ability to navigate everyday life. It serves as a wake-up call, a reminder that real development depends on accepting love in all of its forms. It is based on granting each person the freedom to embrace their reality, uplifting them to exercise their basic right of choosing who they are and grow alongside the person they wish to marry. It's time that we practise democracy in its fullest form and aim for a future where the human spirit is nurtured and love is not discriminated against.

Reflections:

- What does queer mean to you?
- When do you feel your most authentic self?
- How do you envision a future that is LGBTQIA+ inclusive? How does that vision feel?
- In times of need, who do you fall back to for support?/ Complete this sentence, In times of need..."
- Describe your safe space/haven
- Which emotions are surfacing when you consider the ongoing argument over same-sex marriage?



Reading Recommendations:

For or about Queer Community:

- Queeristan - LGBT Inclusion in the Indian Workplace by Parmesh Sahani
- I Am Onir & I Am Gay by Onir & Irene Dhar Malik
- Queersapien by Sharif D. Rangnekar
- Get out by Aniruddha Mahale
- Queer Activism in India - A story in the Anthropology of Ethics by Naisargi N. Dave

Fiction:

- Cobalt Blue by Sachin Kundalkar
- Mohanswamy by Vasudhendra
- No Outlaws in the Gender Galaxy - Zubaan Books
- So Now You Know: Growing Up Gay in India by Vivek Tejuja
- The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story by A. Revathi



Monthly Takeaway

“Equality means more than passing laws. The struggle is really won in the hearts and minds of the community, where it really counts.”

– Barbara Gittings





Things Happening at Room



Internship programs

- Bachelor's students: Open to bachelor's students, our internship program aims to build a foundation on what counselling and psychotherapy in an Indian context can look like. It's a 1-month program where interns get a chance to connect with themselves and, as a result, connect better with others around them. The internship program is also open for all enrolled in the bachelor's degree and graduates.
- Master's students: Training and internship program in the Humanistic approach to psychotherapy, with real-life clients and personal and peer supervision, offers a strong foundation course for novices and professionals alike, who want to brush up on their skills. It is a 3-month intensive program with an opportunity to build professional connections.
- **Basic Counselling skills:** A one-month program on developing and upskilling the basic counselling skills required for assisting clients in their journey of healing. The program is open for students who are enrolled in Masters's program for psychology and related fields and also for those who have completed their post-graduation.

Workshops

- **Crisis Intervention:** workshop is open for students who are currently pursuing Master's in Psychology, Counselling Psychology, or Clinical Psychology, and to individuals who have completed their Master's Degree and are practising professionals. This workshop is designed to assist you in crisis counselling skills necessary for dealing/ managing clients experiencing crises or self-harm.
- **Bachelor's career-workshop:** This workshop is designed for undergraduate students, providing an incredible opportunity to gain clarity and knowledge about the many career opportunities in the field of Psychology.

For more info - careers@roomthespace or www.roomthespace.com

