

PRESS RELEASE

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It's time we talk about LGBT rights

Alliance India's Simran Shaikh brings her passionate advocacy to Satyamev Jayate

New Delhi: In India, far too many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people live lives of secrecy and shame. Those who reveal their sexual identities or deviate from gender norms face social rejection, economic marginalization, and physical violence.

Breaking these taboos, Satyamev Jayate, India's leading public affairs programme, has highlighted the challenges that still confront LGBT communities in India. In its October 19th episode, Aamir Khan and the Satyamev Jayate team vividly shared the hopes and bitter realities of too many of LGBT Indians.

Simran Shaikh, a key member of Alliance India's Pehchan programme team, was interviewed by Mr. Khan during Sunday's programme and described her personal triumph against discrimination. She told the story of her life as a hijra, from being on the streets at the age of 14 and making a living as a bar dancer to her work today as a programme officer raising awareness of HIV/AIDS and as an advocate speaking out for LGBT rights.

In one of the programme's most memorable segments, Simran spoke movingly of her personal journey and the work that remains to achieve equality. She observed, "I am deeply troubled by the everyday injustices faced by my LGBT brothers and sisters. We need to fight the internalised homophobia and transphobia in our communities and transform our fear of our own gender and sexual identities. We must celebrate who we are."

Satyamev Jayate continues to challenge India to address the issues that undermine the country's progress. The episode will help expand our national conversation on alternate sexualities and gender identities encouraging their acceptance. As the programme's slogan attests, change is possible, and this can be a beginning of the change India needs.

James Robertson, Alliance India's Executive Director, added, "Even though sexual minorities are full citizens of this country, they are denied opportunities to earn a living, study, and access health services. Many families reject them and push them further to society's margins, increasing their vulnerability to a range of harms including HIV. We must join together to fight the insidious impact of homophobia and transphobia. India's LGBT community deserves freedom too!"

India HIV/AIDS Alliance places equal value on every human life. We work to foster wellbeing, realise equality, and affirm the dignity of communities most affected by HIV/AIDS, our partners in this journey. Through collaboration and collective action, we help amplify community voices to shape and propel the response to HIV/AIDS in India – from the grassroots to the international stage.

Our Pehchan programme strengthens and builds the capacity of 200 community-based organisations to provide effective, inclusive and sustainable HIV prevention programming in 17 states in India for more than 450,000 men who have sex with men, transgenders and hijras. Pehchan is Global Fund's largest single-country grant to date focused on the HIV response for vulnerable sexual minorities.

Pehchan has initiated the '207 against 377' campaign that brings together the 207 organizations implementing the programme on a common platform to undertake advocacy at national, state and district levels to protest against the 11th December 2013 Supreme Court judgment upholding constitutional validity of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code thereby recriminalizing same-sex sexual behaviour.

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