

## ENGAYGING LIVES

### Documentary on Homosexuality in Urban Mumbai.

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Mumbai.

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Language of Documentary- English and Hindi

In the past two decades homosexuality has been getting increasing governmental, medical and media attention and from being a taboo word, homosexuality has become a topic taken up often in public discourse. With all the recent debates and discussions on homosexuality after the decriminalization of section 377, it is impossible for India to ignore the topic.

There are homosexuals secretly all around us, fearing to reveal a part of their being, but they are there nonetheless. They are our celebrities, our professionals, our acquaintances, our friends and co-workers among others..

Our documentary has four homosexuals, Mr. Nitin Karani, Dr. Krishna Kumar (KK), Lenin Christiane and Dyaneshwar Raut, who have been through the various aspects of being a homosexual. Nitin, KK, Lenin and Dyaneshwar represent the perspectives, the struggles, the conflict, the realization, the confession, the trauma, the rejection, the acceptance of many queer people in our country. Krishna Kumar Venkitachalam is a 29 year old orthopaedic surgeon from Kerala who now lives in Mumbai. He is not practising medicine right now so as to pursue a career in music. Lenin Christiane is a fashion analyst whose parents are unaware of his sexual preferences. He is married to Yeshua who is based in Muscat. Nitin Karani is a trustee of the Humsafar Trust and one of the editors for Bombay Dost, India's first gay magazine. Dyaneshwar Raut is 31 years old and HIV positive. He works at the Humsafar Trust as an advocacy officer. He lives with his parents in Virar. Coming from that section of society where even the word "homosexuality" is alien, Dyaneshwar has had a tough life.

*Nitin Karani realised that he nurtured homosexual feelings when he was only 13. At that time he obviously didn't realize what it meant exactly, and it was mostly about expressing or controlling sexual desires. It took him almost 8 years to realize and accept to himself that he is gay. Krishna Kumar, too, dates back his homosexual arousals to when he was just six years old. He had this particular neighbour, a friend's father who was widowed, and he remembers getting aroused by him. He claims though that the man never made any sexual advances at him. Also, throughout his childhood and teenage, KK has had crushes on friends' fathers, teachers and so on, but never someone of his age. As he puts it, he's always been into older men. Lenin however feels that something needs to trigger off a person's sexuality and his was when he was molested by his older cousins in his early teens. Though at that time he didn't realize what it was, gradually he found himself getting attracted to men.*

It is indeed a question, as to why someone, as a preferential matter would want to adapt a life of hatred and rejection within his/her own society. In fact it is the other way round. Due to the

set norms and tremendous societal expectations, many homosexuals pretend to be straight and lead double lives. This is one of the biggest conflicts that any queer person goes through, especially at an early age.

Speaking out can be intensely painful, and yet at the same time, it is liberating. Coming out with his/her homosexual orientation is probably the most confronting difficult challenge a young adult may face. And then, with the tiny phrase “I’m gay” the world is turned around. It often brings untold tears, secrecy, frustration, confusion and annoyance with the society and its attitudes.

Homosexual orientation of one’s son/daughter doesn’t go down easily with any parent. How parents react is perhaps the truest test of love they profess to have for their children.

*Although Lenin is extremely close to his family, especially his sister, Lenin fears his parents’ anxiety to his orientation so much that he still has not been able to come out to them. Nitin Karani, on the other hand, did not take long to come out to his parents once he was sure of his orientation. His parents obviously didn’t accept it initially, and his father even thought that sending him abroad would “cure” him. Today, things are better, and Nitin though he lives with his boyfriend, visits his parents every day. KK, too came out to his parents last year, and it was a conscious decision on his part to tell them himself, putting things in the right perspective.. Today, KK’s mother has reached the level of comfort where she can joke with her son about the fact that when all other boys must have been drooling over Pamela Anderson, KK has been gawking at the hunky David Hasselhoff.*

*On the other hand, coming out to friends could also have adverse consequence. Although Lenin has not told his parents yet about his orientation, most of his friends know about it. Whereas when Nitin Karani came out to his college friends, most of his friends found it hard to believe, especially his best friend, from whom he slowly drifted apart after the confession. For KK it was a little different. When he told his friends about his sexuality, they, instead of being repulsive, actually asked him what KK would think of them as a guy. For Dyaneshwar it has been a rough journey all through. Coming from that section of the society where the very word “homosexuality” is alien, it has been a tremendous effort on his part to survive the pain and rejection.*

While many homosexuals are members of gay clubs and societies, within their professional lives they prefer keeping their identity hidden for obvious reasons. While in most professions, homosexuality is totally unacceptable, in some, funnily and ironically it is synonymous as in the case of the fashion industry. Most fashion designers are commonly perceived as being gay, even if they are not, and if they are, it is well accepted; whereas in a profession like medicine or any other professional job, having a homosexual orientation is almost unfathomable.

*Being a fashion designer somehow it is much easier for Lenin to be open about his orientation in his workplace, at the same time, it had been impossible for KK, who’s a doctor, to come out with his orientation in his workplace. Now that KK is on a break from medicine and is concentrating on his music career, he can still be open about his sexuality. On the*

*other hand, for Nitin Karani, it varies from person to person and of course the policy of the company he works for. Nitin is open about his orientation to his co-workers and bosses, but as far as work is concerned he has to maintain a certain level of confidentiality. Dyaneshwar has so much to deal with otherwise, that for his professional life, he has chosen to work for his cause. At least, his workplace is a space where he can find himself at ease.*

The personal stories of these people bring in the depth, the emotion and the feeling, as they pour their heart out.

***Engaging Lives was screened at the First Kashish Mumbai International Queer Film Festival***