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REIMAGINING LGBTQ+ ACTIVISM THROUGH INTERSECTIONALITY: ADDRESSING RACE, GENDER, AND CLASS INEQUALITIES

~ *Priyanka Pillay*

Intersectionality is a strong framework that helps one understand how different axes of identity, such as race, caste, class, disability, and religion, intersect in the lives of LGBTQ+ persons. Indeed, it is only by recognizing these intersections within global and Indian contexts that one can enable truly inclusive movements and policies that address the layered realities of discrimination faced by marginalized communities. Not all members of the LGBTQ+ community are equally discriminated against.¹ A transgender person from a lower caste or a queer person with disability would have to go through increased barriers, primarily social exclusion, lack of healthcare access, and economic marginalization. Within the Indian context, caste, religion, and sexual orientation frequently intersect to aggravate the vulnerabilities of LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly those from rural or minority backgrounds. Overlapping forms of marginalization require that legal or social reforms take an intersectional approach to ensure no person is left behind. But an intersectional framing also means amplifying the voices within the LGBTQ+ movement. Centring the experiences of queer people of colour, disabled members of the LGBTQ+, and those coming from low-income families can ensure advocacy that is responsive and fair. This enriches the movement and fosters solidarity across communities, leading to more effective, sustainable change. In all, intersectionality is not an abstract theory but a concrete necessity for whoever works in the direction of LGBTQ+ equality.² In understanding and addressing those specific areas of challenge that come with

¹ JENNIFER C. NASH, Re-Thinking Intersectionality, 89 FEMINIST REV. 1, 1–15 (2008), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40663957>

² Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics. University of Chicago Legal Forum.

intersecting identities, a society that values and uplifts all members of the LGBTQ+ community can be built. The intersectional theory, proposed by one of the profound legal scholars Kimberlé Crenshaw, explains how different kinds of oppression impact people based on their multiple group identities. Queer people of colour, trans individuals, and those with limited resources face complex problems that mainstream LGBTQ+ activism often overlooks.

UNDERSTANDING INTERSECTIONALITY IN LGBTQ+ ACTIVISM

Intersectionality, as developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, recognizes how different types of discrimination intersect. While LGBTQ+ activism has been framed around broad civil rights concerns like marriage rights and discrimination in the workplace, it hardly accounts for how race, gender expression, and class affect access to these rights. Queer people of colour, for instance, experience racial and sexual discrimination, limiting access to services, healthcare, and economic security. In the LGBTQ+ context, this means understanding how race, gender, and class contribute to a person's experiences. For many, being part of the LGBTQ+ community doesn't erase other identities. Instead, these overlapping identities often lead to compounded challenges.³

Historically, LGBTQ+ movements have been led by white, cisgender, and middle-class activists. The 1969 Stonewall Riots, which most historians recognize as the beginning of the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement, were organized by queer people of colour like Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera. While crucial, their involvement often lowered their secondary status in mainstream gay rights movement discourse. Likewise, groups like *the Combahee River Collective* of the 1970s brought up the necessity of analysing racism, sexism, and classism within feminism and LGBTQ+ politics. LGBTQ+ individuals come from diverse backgrounds. Some may identify as people of colour, while others may belong to different socioeconomic classes.⁴ These identities can amplify experiences of marginalization. For instance, *Racial Discrimination*, where LGBTQ+ people of colour often endure racism within the LGBTQ+ community and outside of it. *Economic Inequality* is also one of the significant sectors in which those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may face financial strain that affects their access to vital resources.⁵

³ LESLIE MCCALL, The Complexity of Intersectionality, 30 SIGNS 1771, 1771–1800 (2005), <https://doi.org/10.1086/426800>.

⁴ Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. The Crossing Press.

⁵ LOLA OKOLOSIE, Beyond “Talking” and “Owning” Intersectionality, 108 FEMINIST REV. 90, 90–96 (2014), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24571923>

Statistics reveal the harsh realities faced by marginalized members of the LGBTQ+ community. LGBTQ+ people of colour are 2.5 times more likely than white LGBTQ+ individuals to experience discrimination in housing. Transgender individuals, particularly those of colour, face a 50% unemployment rate, compared to the national average of 3.7%. These numbers show that intersectional issues must be addressed in advocacy efforts.⁶

Many navigate discrimination in both their gender identity and their race, leading to compounded struggles. *The Sylvia Rivera Law Project (SRLP)* is a project that works towards advocating for low-income people and people of colour who are transgender, intersex, or gender non-conforming, fighting against legal obstacles that prevent them from working, accessing healthcare, and being housed.

CONCLUSION

LGBTQ+ activism must be intersectional if it is to be successful. By understanding and working to address the intersectional challenges of race, gender, and class, the movement can better represent all queer people. Court victories such as *Bostock v. Clayton County*⁷ are important, but they must be followed up with more comprehensive reforms that account for economic and social inequalities. Grassroots groups, policy reform, and accessible advocacy campaigns are needed to ensure that the LGBTQ+ movement places in the foreground the most marginalized among us. Real LGBTQ+ liberation is impossible unless it is intersectional because justice for one is justice for all. Understanding intersectionality is crucial in LGBTQ+ activism. By recognizing how race, gender, and class intersect, advocates can address the unique challenges various community members face.⁸ The key takeaways urge us to amplify marginalized voices, collaborate across movements, and engage in proactive allyship. Together, we can create a more inclusive future for everyone in the LGBTQ+ community. Engage in further learning and activism today to ensure that all voices are heard and valued.

⁶ National LGBTQ Task Force. (2021). *LGBTQ+ Economic Disparities Report*.

⁷ U.S. Supreme Court Decisions: *Bostock v. Clayton County*, *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*, *Doe v. Trump*.

⁸ JOAN A. BELKHIR & BERNICE M. BARNETT, Race, Gender and Class Intersectionality, 8 RACE, GENDER & CLASS 157, 157–174 (2001), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41674988>