

# Haze of Spring

Student Name: Prateeti Rai

Student ID: 202014002

Guides: Prof. Madhumita Mazumdar  
Prof. Vishvajit Pandya



Dhirubhai Ambani  
Institute of Information and Communication Technology

# Feedback

# Acknowledgement

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# Introduction

Due to the legal discourse following the LGBTQ+ community since 2009 & the verdict of the Supreme Court in 2018 concerning section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, the last decade has been crucial for the community in India. However, even though the justice system requires the need for mental health assistance and advocacy for the members of the community, it continues to face neglect on a national and individual level. Homophobia and transphobia continue to persist in Indian social circles. It's a mindset passed on or created due to the beliefs that homosexuality is unnatural, abnormal and a sin.

Though there are organisations like Nazariya, Humsafar Trust, Naz Foundation to name a few, they are obligated to work with people over the age of 18 years. It is already difficult for teens to get comfortable with the changes in their mindset and body. Combining this with bullying or abuse within peer groups due to their 'non-gender normative' attributes, a Queer teen becomes more susceptible to skipping school, have mental health issues or self harm.

Haze of Spring is a short documentary that tries to shine light upon the early consciousness, bullying, stories of compassion and face of self acceptance experienced by the members of the LGBTQIA+ community. It does so using the life stories of three members from the community.

Though there were a lot of ideas that were explored before embarking on this project, the central theme of most of them were related to the impact of a problem on kids. However, under the guidance of Prof. Madhumita Mazumdar and Prof. Vishvajit Pandya, I was able to refine the project further. This was especially crucial in shaping the final narrative and deciding the appropriate medium for presenting the information in an effective manner.

# Project Brief

## Problem Statement

To generate awareness about the struggles of LGBTQIA+ individuals in order to start a conversation about the importance of Queer inclusivity and acceptability.

## Need for Design

LGBTQ+ is a community of persons who identify as non-heterosexual or non-cisgender i.e. someone who doesn't identify with the sex they were born with. Though social media has provided a voice to many members of the community, in real life, people still struggle to accept themselves.

Lack of resources & support from friends & family contributes to the fear, especially in those below the age of 18 years. There's hardly any form of communication about the LGBTQIA+ community at schools, in textbooks, by counsellors or among peer groups. Any attempt made to initiate such a discussion among adolescents is protested against.

This puts LGBTQ+ individuals below the age of consent at a higher risk because, if their guide/parents are unsupportive of their orientation, the teen has nobody to seek help from. Upon this, if act of bullying, discrimination or abuse is added, navigating one's sexuality becomes even more isolating.

The minds of those between the ages of 11-17 years are very fragile. When an adolescent struggling with identity is not provided with enough support, they're more likely to run away, quit schooling and/or self-harm. This calls for a medium to at least start a conversation about the LGBTQ+ community so that those who are members feel recognised, have some voice & those who aren't can act as a support for the former.

While there has been a lot of work published to shed light upon this issue, there is also a need to bring out the true agony and eventual victory of those who accepted themselves. The film is an attempt to showcase the ways in which some members of the community worked around problems caused due to bullying and discrimination. It touches upon the impact of stigma surrounding the community, on a person.

This narrative connects different aspects of people's experiences like early consciousness, bullying, coming out and reconciling with self to Expose the difficult reality of lives of Queer individuals and how they cope up with it.

## **Choice of Medium**

The initial choice of medium was audio. This was to preserve the identity of those being interviewed as one may not want their family to find out about their sexuality/gender. However, after a lot of back and forth, it was concluded that in order to communicate this idea to a larger audience, in terms of age, the project needed to utilise multimedia as that would call for complete engagement.

Thus a documentary film was best suited as the form of communication for this project. One can put forth complex ideas with utmost flexibility through the mode of a film. And although the interviews guide the entire film, visuals still allow the viewer to derive their own meanings from the observations.

## **Target Audience**

Though the documentary film focuses largely on the impact of childhood bullying, the act of abuse, discrimination and bullying isn't limited to schools. However, the impact of childhood bullying is irreparable due to the nature of their minds. So even though initially, adolescents were the specific target group, this project is intended to reach the general public, including adolescents, policy makers, and NGOs.

# Pre-Production

## Ideation and Preliminary Research

The process of ideation started with research on understanding whether what seemed like a problem i.e. issues with bullying and accepting one's sexuality was truly a problem or not. This was to get an idea about the perception of community within teenagers, the problems they were truly facing and how they are being affected. The direction of the project was further streamlined with the help of feedback from the guiding professors and preliminary research.

### a) Literature Review

i. Articles: Through the means of several online articles, a basic idea about Queer teens and their problems was obtained. Following are some of the points gathered from the articles-

1. Bullying in the name of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) starts as early as primary classes. It, thereby, affects the students' mental health and ability to focus on studies.
2. According to a study conducted by UNESCO, "60% of those identifying outside mainstream sexual identities were physically harassed in middle/high school, and 50% in higher secondary. Sexual harassment was high among the participants from primary schools at 43%.
3. There are several queer-affirmative & LGBTQIA+ support groups/organisation but most are inaccessible to minors because of their minor status. Because the teen is under the care of parents or guardians, in case they aren't supportive, the teenager may never receive help until they reach the age of consent.
4. Education related to gender sensitization & sexuality aren't always available to teenagers due to them being taboo topics. How nuanced they are is also often left to the discretion of the school's management
5. Bullying and/or abuse within peers/social circles makes the process of navigating gender and/or sexuality an isolating process for a teenager. This also makes them the most vulnerable group for quitting school, running away and suicide.
6. There are hardly any options for teenagers to seek help, in case they don't get any at home or school. Schools usually don't have counsellors (especially government schools) and at home, they can't ask such questions (internalised social values around gender and sexuality, moral, or religious reasons).



7. Resources are available online but the information could be overwhelming, inauthentic or child unfriendly. There are also dangers of being exposed to predators, groomers of age-inappropriate material.
8. Social media has created an increasing awareness about the LGBTQIA+ community and their rights. However, the voices and their struggles that are heard through these platforms are only a small part of the challenges faced by the community.
9. Major reason behind stigmatization of LGBTQIA+ community is parental reaction towards homosexuality. They pass on this ideology to their kids who, in turn, apply them in their real life by bullying or mocking or name-calling those who don't conform to gender-normativity and/or heteronormativity.
10. These issues may affect them psychologically, restricting them to perform to their fullest capacity as an adult. Nearly 70% of the bullied LGBTQ students in India face anxiety and depression and suffer from loss in studies.

ii. Podcasts/Documentaries: Due to uncertainty in the medium of presentation, a mix of podcasts and documentaries were observed.

Podcasts: Following are the three podcasts that are currently leading the conversation related to LGBTQ+ community.

1. 377- It's a scripted narrative podcast with episodes that examine the long journey behind the 377 case & about the rights of the LGBTQ+ community along with the Indian legal system. It delves into the complex history of 377— how it came about, how it became closely intertwined with another crisis (the HIV/AIDS public health crisis), & how, in 2001, an NGO decided to contest the law's constitutionality in the Delhi High Court.
2. Queering Desi- Long term activist & member of LGBTQ+ community, Priya Arora chats with guests about their lives, & journey to self acceptance.
3. Keeping it Queer- Covers law & pop-culture representation of LGBTQ+ along with debunking myths surrounding the community.

Out of the three, the last two podcasts seemed much closer to what I was thinking of. Thus, I gave each of them a listen. Some observations are-

1. Queering Desi especially focuses on the lives of well known but creative members of the community. The podcast focuses more on the journey of the artist to master their art than their relationship to LGBT community.

2. In some episodes, Priya does touch upon the struggles & pressures of the stereotypes of LGBT community.
3. The podcast focuses on both the Indian & Pakistani LGBT community.
4. Keeping it Queer, on the other hand, dives deeper into the lives of the common queer. It does so through the medium of activists, authors, artists as well as common people like students, professors, office goers.
5. S2E14 is especially relevant as Navin, the host, talks to Sridhar & Shibu who are members of the KASHISH Mumbai International Queer Film Festival. Throughout the conversation, the two hosts discuss how regional cinema is doing better at explaining Queer than the mainstream bollywood movies. Using examples like Kejdi (Rajasthan) & My son is gay (Tamil Nadu), the guests explain how regional cinema is challenging the stereotypes set by the LGBT community.

Documentaries: Following are a few documentaries that acted as a reference point in terms of gathering and presenting information, as well as explaining the kind of progress that has been made thus far-

1. Desire? - Desire, a film by Garima Kaul, touches upon asexuality- low or absent sexual attraction to another person. It tries to bring the perspective of asexuals, who are constantly belittled for not having sex or coerced into indulging in sexual activities. <sup>11</sup>

2. Main Mona Ahmad- By Ayesha Khatoon, Mai Mona Ahmad is a documentary on a eunuch named 'Mona Ahmed ', a 75 year old who left her community and has been living in a graveyard for the last 15-20 years. Her ways of living a dignified life makes her inspirational and a mentor to many others who show up at her place from time to time. It shows the hidden realities and unknown truths, the disliking, and awakening of the eunuch community. <sup>12</sup>
3. Purple Skies- Purple Skies convers the heartrending stories of LBT people victimised and subjugated by the law, the family and society, as well as hopeful stories of youngsters who have come out of the closet bravely.

iii. Readings: In Doubleness of Sexuality by Akhil Katyal <sup>10</sup>, he highlights how in the Indian context, even though homosexuality is an unacceptable term, there are other ways in which the culture communicates sexuality & 'tolerates it.. in private' <sup>13</sup>. Points of significance are-

1. 'Homosexuality' is just a term from a large dictionary of intersecting idioms of same-sex desires in India whose breadth extend beyond the term. He discusses how sexuality is marked by a doubleness i.e. how it's conceptualised & how it's lived out.
2. Concept of 'gay' & 'lesbian' remain open ended. He does so by studying early to mid-20th century Hindi/Urdu literature & recent Indian 'gay/lesbian' writing, stating that, "in modern India, numerous idioms of same-sex desire, such as that of baazi (habit, addiction) are simultaneous to or related with idioms of sexuality."

3. Discusses the usage of '*laundebaazi*', '*baazi*', & '*chaklet-pathi*' in the early-twentieth-century Hindi & Urdu literature. He does so by means of a 50-page essay written by Ramath Lal 'Suman'.
4. Suman makes some point to differentiate masculine behaviour from non-masculine behaviour (non-gender normativity or gender transgression), in order to identify a *laundebaaz*.

How natural is Normal? by Nivedita Menon <sup>16</sup> emphasises how the structure of normality is fragile & a person's will to accept themselves is enough to shake its base. Point of significance are-

1. It begins by highlighting how Section 377 penalises sexual activity against the order of nature, thereby assuming that normal sexual behaviour springs from nature & has nothing to do with culture or history. But at the same time, arguing that sexuality is located in culture points in the direction that it is in fact a human construct & not naturally occurring.
2. This coupled with the definition of *normal family* (which is a heterosexual, patriarchal system, where the fundamental rights of equality & freedom have no place, meant for transfer of power, property & lineage through men) that is maintained & policed by the state, law & social institutions make '*normal*' far from natural.

## b) Discussions

Before field work, a few telephonic interviews and discussions were scheduled. First three interviews were with three teenagers from different schools. This was done in order to navigate whether a problem really existed or not. The change in technology may have created solutions that have eradicated the problem I was working with.

Conclusions made from the interviews were-

1. Irrespective of online support & representation, kids still feel unsafe to talk/indulge in conversation about the Queer community.
2. Two out of three of them gave the interviews in a hushed tone due to a fear of being heard & scolded. Parents hardly want to involve themselves in this.
3. There seems to be an actual problem of unacceptability & lack of inclusivity among adolescents. These interviews also point out that there is a need for well framed conversations about LGBTQ+ community for them to accept others & come out of the closet, if need be.

Later, a discussion was scheduled with Dr. Dhiren Borisa. The discussion commenced with the explanation of the idea of 'coming out' and how it was a western concept or church based concept. It can be perceived as coming clean because one was guilt stricken due to their identity.

The political rhetoric of confession & "coming out" may not have the same effect & acceptance in transitional societies as India<sup>131</sup>. It may, in fact, push that person in further isolation because their 'lifestyle' isn't heteronormative.

Instead, he pointed out that coming out for the LGBT community in India, especially for the underprivileged, is self acceptance & celebration of their identity. Instead of focusing on one's victimisation, they use it as their strength to keep moving forward.

Other noteworthy points from that conversation were-

1. Though they are victims, portraying them as one might not work. Instead, the narrative could be used to create a bigger network that may help and give hope to someone, and show how the system of binary is weak and fragile and a mere facade.
2. Bullying isn't limited to school. It happens everywhere & takes different forms. Telling stories of resilience in various environments could be a good move.
3. Diversity is of the essence because anybody listening to it should be able to relate.

## c) Field Visits

### i. Ramkali - Basera Samajik Sansthan (Founder)

Age- 28 yrs.

Birthplace- Bijnor, U.P.

Field visits played a crucial role in getting to know people, their opinion of the problem, location and identifying characters. The first visit was to a NGO called Basera Samajik Sansthan, located in sector 62, Noida. During this visit, an interview was conducted with Ramkali- a trans woman- who talked about her life. She emphasised on accepting herself, which was comparable to the point Dr. Dhiren made i.e. coming out for the LGBT community in India, especially for the underprivileged, is self acceptance & celebration of their identity.

From a young age, she felt uncomfortable in the body she was born in i.e. of a boy. People identified her as ‘different’ before she could do so. They would make fun of her & her family for not raising her right. “Mai toh hamesha se aise hi thi, par mujhe nahi pata tha. Par vo hota haina, humse pehle padosio ko sab kuch pata lag jata hai.”

Today she is content with her identity & believes that the best way to win such a battle is to *slowly accept yourself*.



However, due to the concerns related to working with an NGO, contact with Queer Collectives at different universities was established. Social media platforms like Reddit and Twitter were also used to find the right voices.

## **ii. Utkarsh Kaushik- Business Operations Associate**

Age- 24 yrs.

Birthplace- Delhi

Meanwhile, I decided to conduct an informal interview with one of my friends who is gay and has been open about his sexuality for about 6 years

Being a long time theatre artist, Utkarsh is full of energy and enthusiasm. But he wasn't always like that because when didn't follow in his father's footsteps i.e. joining the Army, he was bullied. He pointed out that he was not bullied for being gay but for looking/behaving less manly.

Acceptance, for Utkarsh, was also very much internal because he fought his own homosexuality for many years during schooling.

Due to a discrimination from friends & teachers at school, he felt as if something was wrong with him. This made him question his sexuality & interest to a point where he pretended to like girls. When he moved to Ghaziabad, he believes he got lucky with classmates at Kendriya Vidyalaya. That's when he decided to give up the act & accept that he is, infact, gay.

Upon accepting his sexuality, the problems became very similar to those of heterosexuals- finding partners & whether to be with someone or not. Things became easier because he didn't have to sort the right from wrong because there was nothing wrong at all. The conversation was recorded.

## **iii. Abineet- Student (Delhi University)**

Age- 17 yrs.

Birthplace- Jaipur, Rajasthan

Along with contacting collectives in and around the area of Delhi-NCR, I was trying to find voices online. That's when I came across Abineet on Reddit. He is also gay. Because he's still a teenager, his official name has been retracted.

Born and brought up in a conservative area, Abhineet was in denial about his sexuality throughout his early teens. He calls himself the 'closeted gay' who would take quizzes about whether or not he is gay, only to deny it further.

It was when 377 was abolished that he started giving his sexuality a thought. However, during pandemic, he decided to break up with his girlfriend, someone he was seeing due to peer pressure. Films like Love, Simon really helped him in doing so.

This is when he gave dating a guy a chance and decided to come out to his mother. His mother is now in denial and hopes that her son will ‘recover’ and become normal. Abineet, on the other hand, was looking forward to joining his friends at campus so he can explore himself further.

#### iv. Aditya Kumar- Credit Portfolio Analyst

Age- 28 yrs.

Birthplace- Delhi

Around the same time, Aditya, a fellow Redditor, contacted me. We scheduled a call and it was worth every penny. Apart from having an charming personality, Aditya had a story I was sure needed to be captured.

Till now, everyone I spoke with was an outgoing extrovert. Through him, I got the perspective of a “nerdy introvert” and how his introversion worked in his favour for once. “It goes without saying that no single personality type can ‘protect’ someone. I got lucky here.”, he said while laughing.

He shared stories about different places he spent his childhood at, and how constant travel hardly allowed him to make close friends. Somewhere he knew he liked guys. It was mostly due to a crush he developed for Robert Pattinson but he didn’t pay much heed to it as there were better things to do.

However, towards the end of schooling and into university was when he started looking further into it. He realised that he had a liking for certain types of films, Aditya was sure that he was sexually and emotionally attracted to both men and women.



The journey from here on was to let people know about his sexuality instead of trying to get them onboard. His acceptance of self allowed him to joke about his sexuality- something he couldn't do before that.

After emailing, and calling about 35 Delhi-NCR based Queer Collectives, I was able to talk to the founder of Revival Disability Collective and All India Queer Association.

#### **v. Meghna Mehra- Political Analyst & All India Queer Association (AIQA - Founder)**

Age- 2 yrs.  
Birthplace- Delhi

Meghna Mehra is a renowned face in student politics. Having said that, she's also known for being the first Asexual Student Leader. I first spoke with her in a telephonic conversation during Punjab Elections. She was out of town and wanted me to meet her first, before going forward with any interview.

We then met at Lodhi Garden at a potluck hosted by AIQA. This is where she shared a brief life story. Due to lack of knowledge about Asexuality, she kept jumping from one relationship to another in hopes of feeling sexual attraction. This caused more damage than anything else.

Further, she was made fun of for being more masculine- another case of bullying due to gender-transgression. However, in DU, she found out about Asexuality and after researching online, realised that she is infact sex-repulsed bi-romantic asexual i.e. she is romantically attracted to males and females but is repulsed by sex.

Currently she runs AIQA along with completing her PhD and is an advocate for Queer rights.





## vi. Akash (Sky)- Event Manager & Member of AIQA

Age- 2 yrs.

Birthplace- Delhi

Through Meghna, I got in contact with Akash. He has been a member of AIQA for last three years and gives the organisation maximum credit for properly discovering himself.

Born and brought up in a family of five, Akash is a middle child and rarely gets what he wants. “It’s the middle child curse”, he says. Much like Akash, he was aware of his attraction to men. However, irrespective of being blessed with supportive peers in school, university became a big problem in their life.

After experiencing bullying, torture and physical and sexual abuse, he was at the verge of quitting. This is when, through support of a senior, he decided to give himself another chance.



During university freshers, he decided to do what he loved the most no matter what others thought of it- dance. He danced till his heart was content and decided to never go back in the hell-hole again.

Though initially there were four voices, due to circumstances, I had to reduce it to three namely Meghna Mehra, Akash and Aditya Kumar. Upon finding the voices listed above, the next step was to get to know them better which involved understanding their work, daily routine, family structure, social groups to name a few.

Apart from specific insights about each interviewee, following were some common observations that were made-

1. The common point of bullying (of any form) was one’s non-gender-normativity.
2. They either questioned their sexuality or decided to change the way they behaved to escape the bullying.
3. Bullying wasn’t simply limited to school but instead played in some form in their adult lives.
4. There’s a defined process of accepting oneself in each case. However, the steps of this process differ from person to person. Some approach friends while some like to go through this by themselves.

## Script - First Run

### Introduction

EXT. CONNAUGHT PLACE - DAY

[Medium Shot]

Various heads answering questions about identity and are they sure of it?

*Response of the strangers overlapping*

Visuals fade out while the voices continue to speak.

*Voices Fade Out*

INT. BEDROOM (MEGHNA) - DAY

[Low Angle - Medium Shot]

Bed sheet being thrown and flattened out by a person (Person blurred), followed by the person leaving

*Sound of hand on the bed sheet and food getting cooked in the background*

Title fades in

### Character Introduction

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

[Medium Close Up]

Person (Meghna) holding cup of coffee

*Statement related to things people have said for them being queer*

EXT. PRIDE MARCH - DAY

[Overhead Shot]

Quick Cut to Pride march

*Faint chanting in the background: **We're here, we're queer***

EXT. ROHINI - DAY

[Over The Shoulder]

Person (Aditya) gaming with his friends online

*Statement related to 'name calling'*

EXT. LODHI GARDEN - DAY

Quick cut to people painting rainbows/pride flags on their faces

*Sound of crowd in the background, giggling, talking*

EXT. SUNDAR NURSERY - DAY

[Medium Wide Shot]

Person (Nu) doing their makeup, looking into the mirror, face not visible

*Holding back herself from exploring sexuality because of her disability and how people expected her to behave*

EXT. - DAY

Quick cut to dreamlike shot (*ref. Midsomer Dani's Dance*) of people doing Keekali

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

POV of Akash

Dissolve to Akash swiping through images of him dancing

*Akash's statement on being beaten at uni*

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

[MEDIUM CLOSE UP]

Meghna petting their adopted dogs.

Name card fades in

Sequence of images of Meghna as a child

*Talks about the dogs, their childhood - interests, studies, family type, family's expectations*

EXT. GARDEN- DAY

[MEDIUM CLOSE UP]

Meghna sitting on the grass talking about Politics

Cut to images of Meghna at a political rally, as student leader

*Politics - father's influence, why politics, most significant political moment in their life*

EXT. SUNDAR NURSERY - DAY

[MEDIUM SHOT]

Aditya showing his camera - while pointing in some direction (slow)

Name Card fades in

*Him talking about continuously moving around, as a child, how that resulted in his current personality*

*Aditya's photos of baby Yoda and Stitch*

EXT. SUNDAR NURSERY - DAY

[MEDIUM CLOSE UP]

Aditya talking while sitting in the garden

*Spain- Last place he lived at outside India and where the exploration began*

EXT. SUNDAR NURSERY - DAY

[CU]

Of his hand while he's explaining (slow), and the ring gifted by his friend

*The kind of friends he made from Spain and beyond (at uni)*

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

[MEDIUM SHOT]

*(Picking up from the intro) Nu doing their makeup, looking into the mirror - face visible*

Name card fades in

*They explain the kind of child - being raised in a privileged environment - interest (painting and writing specifically)*

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

[MEDIUM CLOSE UP]

Nu sitting on their bed talking

*Disability - 2007 - people's attitude changed - they had to act disabled like the abled wanted - without having an authority of their own*

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

LA - MS

*(Taking from introduction)*

Akash on his phone, him in focus while his trophies etc. are out of focus, in the background

*Being an average student, parents wanted to prepare him to be on his own, school life the interests he developed that made him choose HM*

## The act of being 'Different'

INT. BALCONY - MORNING

[MEDIUM SHOT]

Meghna drinking cup of coffee

*Started dating pretty early*

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

[MEDIUM CLOSE UP]

Meghna talking in the garden

*Because of discomfort in intimacy,  
would jump from one partner to another*

Leaves the frame with the cup in her hands

EXT. LOCALITY - MORNING

[MEDIUM CLOSE UP]

*(Taking from Meghna's leaving shot)*

Aditya enters the frame from a morning jog

*For being an introvert and hanging out with  
girls, would get bullied and called homophobic  
slurs*

EXT. LODHI GARDEN - DAY

[MEDIUM CLOSE UP]

Aditya in the garden, talking

*Library became my safe haven*

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

[MS - Slow Pan (L-R)]

*(Picking up from the main interviews) Nu doing  
their makeup, looking into the mirror - face  
visible (slow)*

*Their disability caused a lot of internal  
complexities - constantly being told they looked  
too young - hence they tried to look older  
Quick cut to a picture from their childhood  
smiling*

Back to them doing makeup

*Environment made them constantly work toward  
appealing men*

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

[MEDIUM CLOSE UP]

Nu sitting on their bed talking

*Dating an older guy while being at LSR where people were open about their gender and orientation - liking someone but not pursuing them because of the older guy they were dating (him faking suicide and heartattack)*

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

[MEDIUM CLOSE UP]

Akash talking

*The uncle, being called meetha for dancing and not playing sports, so isolated himself*

INT. HALL - DAY

[MEDIUM SHOT]

Them preparing for dance- choosing the right outfit

*Though they were initially open to the idea of being with a guy, university was when the problem started*

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

[MEDIUM SHOT]

Meghna scheduling meetings for activism work

*Talking about different things people said when they expressed their discomfort- 'blessing of God', 'will change after marriage' etc.*

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

[MEDIUM CLOSE UP]

Meghna talking in the garden

*Asking/telling oneself that they're just late bloomers? Are they doing okay?*

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Aditya enters the frame with cheese and slices of bread to make sandwich

*Continuing from 'safe haven', he talks about how was he thinking because of kind of things people would say*

EXT. LODHI GARDEN - DAY

[MEDIUM CLOSE UP]

Aditya in the garden, talking

Cut to images from school and uni with his friends

*Didn't really affect him much, he knew in his heart what he really was and how he truly felt*

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Walking out with a plate with sandwich and a cup of coffee

*However, it did limit the number of friends he eventually made and circles he'd hang out in*

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

[MEDIUM SHOT]

Them preparing for dance- in the outfit, preparing for a warm up routine

*Spending time with one senior, that got others to name call- beat him and started spreading rumors about him being gay - nobody would talk and he felt isolated - first year*

## **Enough is Enough**

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

MS

Meghna on call while we see her books related to politics

*This is where they start introducing having enough - Paused from being in relationships 8 years of abuse/struggle/ domestic abuse Couldn't understand why them*

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Aditya now getting ready for his meetings

*He finally spoke about his liking for men to a friend - Took him some time to 'accept' it, which included him going back and forth around the idea, reading about it - Thinking it was just a phase, maybe*

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

[MEDIUM SHOT]

Nu working on the revival disability blog

*Incidents like those put them in a shell - even  
people at LSR were against the fact that they  
may be queer*

*The break up was their way of breaking free from  
all this*

*Felt like they had enough of - lot of rage -  
went into writing - painting - putting it in the  
form of RDC*

INT. HALL - DAY

Akash starting his dance sequence - slow

*' It was a torture, contemplated suicide, wanted  
to quit' - Kept wondering what was wrong with  
him - Why was he this way, why did he like guys*

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

[MEDIUM SHOT]

Meghna sitting and talking

*Since they were always advocated for equal  
rights for all, this is how they became an ally  
However, they found out 'A' in LGBTQIA+ is  
Asexual*

Inserts:

Image of them as the first asexual student  
leader, Interactions with members of the  
community

*AVEN's website about asexuality*

*When they discovered the term, had more clarity*

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Aditya on a call with his colleagues - moving  
his hands while explaining things - from front

*Though it took 2 years to finally take a step in  
that direction, through a friend, they began  
exploring, If not for the friends, they may have  
never openly discussed it with someone*



Inserts: Images and posts from Revival  
Disability Project

*RDS was their way of getting to know themselves  
- instead of talking to people who pushed them  
to live in a gender-normative way, they created  
their own reality using RDS*

INT. HALL - DAY

Akash continuing his dance sequence - slow

*Freshers, when he took a stand for himself even  
while getting mocked, in the form of a dance*

INT. HALL - DAY

Akash's dance becoming powerful

*Senior who later became his supporter  
They knew they were bisexual but the support  
helped them explore further  
Realising they were bi-romantic ace*

## End Comments

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

[CU - LA]

Meghna laughing while talking

*Discovering they were pansexual and non-binary*

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

[MEDIUM CLOSE UP]

Meghna talking while petting the dogs

*What pushed them to take this decision and how  
does it feel - including others in journey -  
making decisions for self openly*

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

MCU

Aditya looking at a distance while the voiceover  
continues

*The liberation after opening up about sexuality,  
reading further on it - Experience with dating  
men and women and what are they looking forward  
to in future*

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

[MEDIUM CLOSE UP]

Strength to share with the family

Officially having a relationship - Still get  
picked on but self-acceptance allows them to  
answer back in need be - A strong support system  
has been created - Nu, talking (slow) and  
giggling

*While they still have a back and forth with  
themselves, they now know the process of coming  
out of it*

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

[MEDIUM SHOT]

Nu, in their space, smiling, dressed up looking  
at the camera with RDC on laptop and their work  
around them

*"I'm very much the most queer person out there"  
A community built them up instead of bringing  
them down and that's the difference b/w then and  
now*

INT. HALL - DAY

[MEDIUM SHOT]



Akash, towards the end of the dance sequence -  
slow

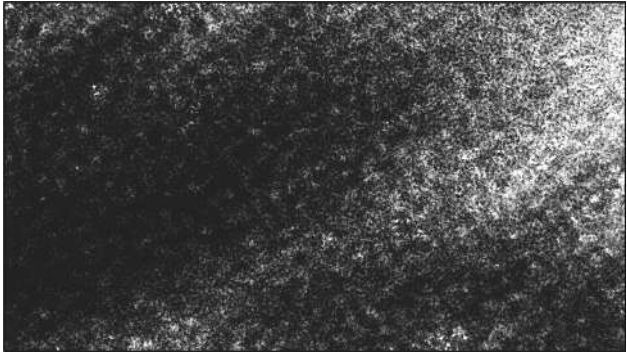
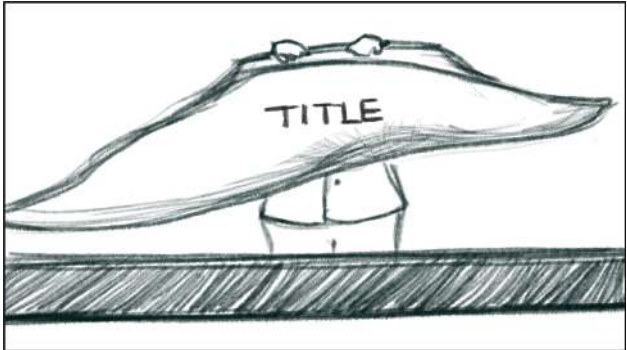
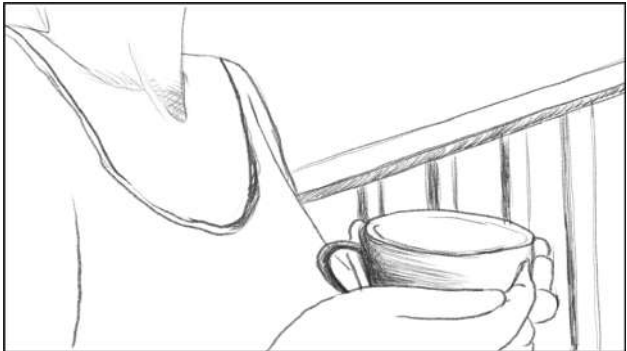
*Strength to share with the family -  
self-acceptance allows them to answer back if  
need be - A strong support system has been  
created*


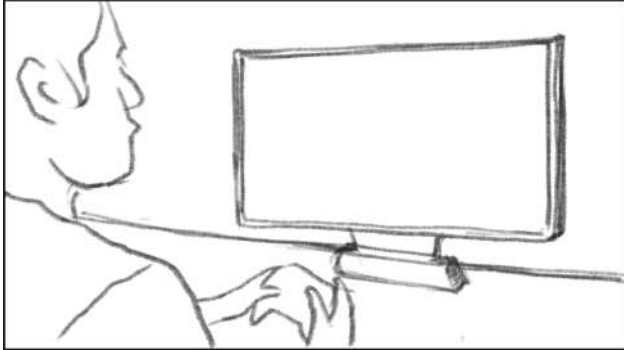
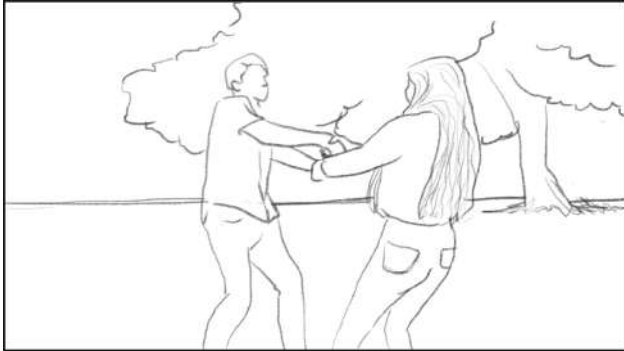
Akash stops and the screen fades out


**End Credits**




## Storyboard


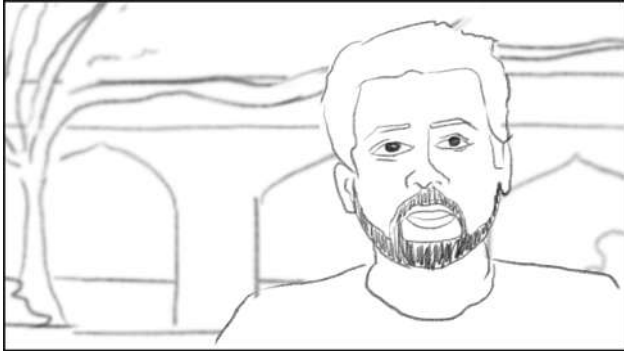

Frame	Shot Description	Audio Description
<b>Introduction</b>		
	<p>EXT. CONNAUGHT PLACE - DAY</p> <p>(MS) of Strangers answering questions about the LGBT community namely, if they know about the community and what do they think about it?</p>	<p>Response of the strangers overlapping</p>
	<p>EXT. CONNAUGHT PLACE - DAY</p> <p>(MS) of Strangers answering questions about the LGBT community namely, if they know about the community and what do they think about it?</p>	<p>Response of the strangers overlapping</p>

	<p>Visuals fade out while the voices continue to speak.</p>	<p>Voices Fade Out</p>
	<p>INT. BEDROOM (MEGHNA) - DAY</p> <p>(LA) Bed sheet being thrown on bed as if someone is making bed</p>	<p>Sound of cloth unraveling</p> <p>Sound of hand on the bed sheet and food getting cooked in the background</p>
	<p>INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY</p> <p>MCU Person (Meghna) holding cup of coffee</p>	<p>Statement related to things people have said for them being queer</p>




	<p>EXT. PRIDE MARCH - DAY</p> <p>Quick Cut to Overhead shot of Pride march</p>	<p>Faint chanting in the background: <b><i>We're here, we're queer</i></b></p>
	<p>EXT. ROHINI - DAY</p> <p>(OTS)</p> <p>Person (Aditya) gaming with his friends online</p>	<p>Statement related to 'name calling'</p>
	<p>EXT. - DAY</p> <p>Quick cut to dreamlike shot (ref. <i>Midsomer Dani's Dance</i>) of people doing Keekali</p>	<p>Akash's statement on being beaten at uni</p>

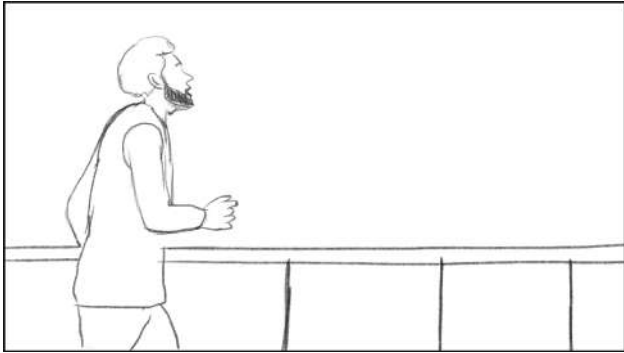
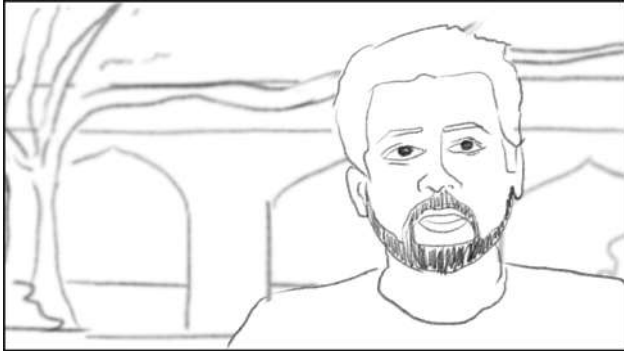

	<p>INT. BEDROOM - DAY</p> <p>POV of Akash  Dissolve to Akash swiping  through images of him dancing</p>	
<p><b>Main Interviews</b></p>		
	<p>EXT. GARDEN - DAY</p> <p>MCU  Meghna petting their adopted  dogs</p> <p>Name card fades in</p>	<p>Talks about the dogs, their  childhood - interests, studies,  family type, family's  expectations</p>
	<p>Sequence of images of Meghna as  a child</p>	

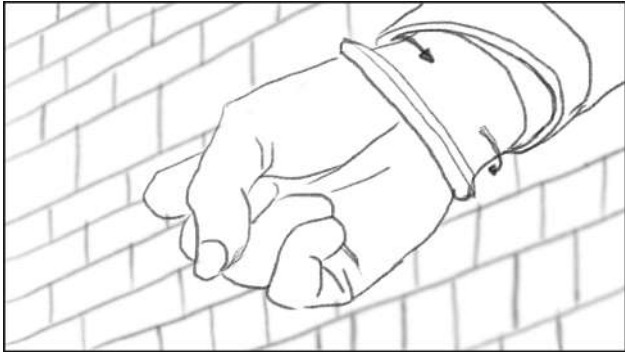


	<p>EXT. GARDEN- DAY</p> <p>MCU</p> <p>Meghna sitting on the grass talking about their childhood</p>	<p>Politics - father's influence, why politics, most significant political moment in their life</p>
	<p>Cut to images of Meghna at a political rally, as student leader</p>	
	<p>EXT. SUNDAR NURSERY - DAY</p> <p>MS</p> <p>Aditya showing his camera - while pointing in some direction</p> <p>Name Card fades in</p>	<p>Him talking about continuously moving around, as a child</p>


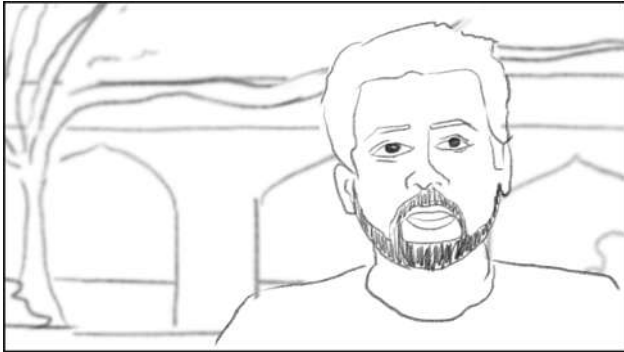

	<p>Aditya's photos of baby Yoda and Stitch</p>	<p>How that resulted in his current personality</p>
	<p>EXT. SUNDAR NURSERY - DAY</p> <p>MCU Aditya talking while sitting in the garden</p>	<p>Spain- Last place he lived at outside India and where the exploration began. The kind of friends he made from Spain and beyond (at uni)</p>
	<p>INT. BEDROOM - DAY</p> <p>LA - MS <i>(Taking from introduction)</i> Akash on his phone, him in focus while his trophies etc. are out of focus, in the bg</p>	<p>Being an average student, parents wanted to prepare him to be on his own</p>

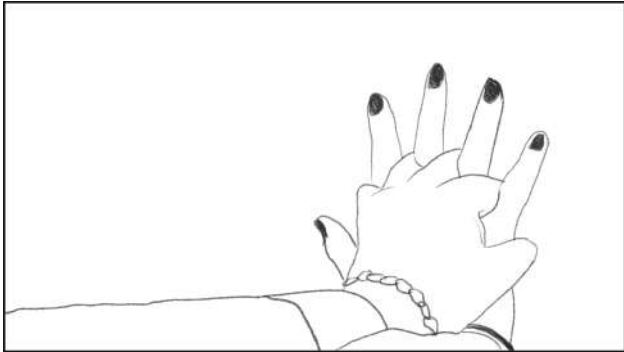




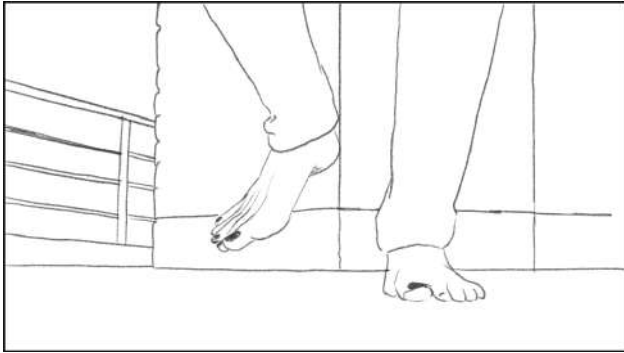


	<p>INT. BEDROOM - DAY</p>	<p>School life the interests he developed that made him choose HM</p>
<p><b>The act of being 'Different'</b></p>		
	<p>EXT. GARDEN - DAY</p> <p>MCU Meghna talking in the garden</p>	<p>Started dating pretty early and because of discomfotable in intimacy, would jump from one partner to another</p>
	<p>INT. BALCONY - MORNING</p> <p>MS Meghna leaving the frame to keep the cup in the kitchen</p>	


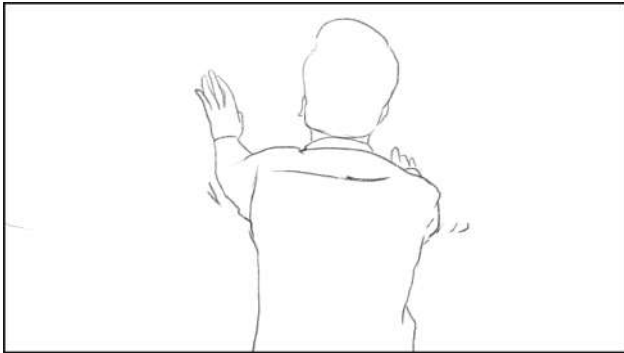

	<p>EXT. LOCALITY - MORNING</p> <p>MCU  <i>(Taking from Meghna's leaving shot)</i></p> <p>Aditya enters the frame from a morning jog</p>	<p>For being an introvert and hanging out with girls, would get bullied and called homophobic slurs</p>
	<p>EXT. LODHI GARDEN - DAY</p> <p>MCU  Aditya in the garden, talking</p>	<p>library became their safe haven</p>
	<p>INT. BEDROOM - DAY</p> <p>MCU  Akash talking</p>	<p>The uncle, being called meetha for dancing and not playing sports, so isolated himself</p>

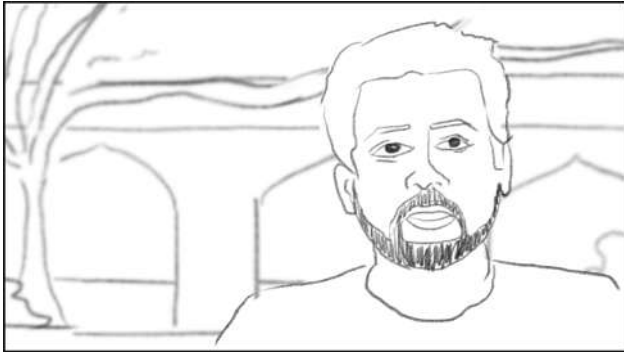
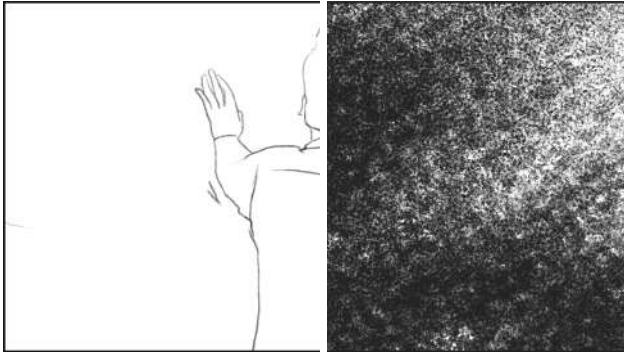
	<p>INT. HALL - DAY</p> <p>MS Them preparing for dance- choosing the right outfit</p>	<p>Though they were initially open to the idea of being with a guy, university was when the problem started</p>
<p><b>Enough is Enough</b></p>		
	<p>INT. BEDROOM - MORNING</p> <p>MS Meghna scheduling meetings for activism work</p>	<p>Talking about different things people said when they expressed their discomfort- 'blessing of God', 'will change after marriage' etc.</p>
	<p>EXT. GARDEN - DAY</p> <p>MCU Meghna talking in the garden</p>	<p>Asking/telling oneself that they're just late bloomer</p> <p>Are they doing okay?</p>

	<p>INT. KITCHEN - MORNING</p> <p>Aditya enters the frame with cheese and slices of bread to make sandwich</p>	<p>Continuing from 'safe haven', he talks about how was he thinking because of kind of things people would say - didn't really affect him much, he knew in his heart what he really was and how he truly felt</p>
	<p>EXT. LODHI GARDEN - DAY</p> <p>MCU</p> <p>Aditya in the garden, talking</p>	<p>However, it did limit the number of friends he eventually made and circles he'd hang out in</p>
	<p>Cut to images from school and uni with his friends</p>	<p>However, it did limit the number of friends he eventually made and circles he'd hang out in</p>

	<p>INT. BEDROOM - DAY</p> <p>MS Them preparing for dance- in the outfit, preparing for a warm up routine</p>	<p>Spending time with one senior, that got others to name call- beat him and started spreading rumors about him being gay - nobody would talk and he felt isolated - first year</p>
<p><b>Enough is Enough</b></p>		
	<p>INT. BEDROOM - MORNING</p> <p>MS Meghna on call while we see her books related to politics</p>	<p>This is where they start introducing having enough / Paused from being in relationships / 8 years of abuse/struggle/ domestic abuse Couldn't understand why them</p>
	<p>INT. BEDROOM - DAY</p> <p>Aditya now getting ready for his meetings</p>	<p>He finally spoke about his liking for men to a friend / Took him some time to 'accept' it, which included him going back and forth around the idea, reading about it / Thinking it was just a phase, maybe</p>

	<p>INT. HALL - DAY</p> <p>Akash starting his dance sequence - slow</p>	<p>' It was a torture, contemplated suicide, wanted to quit'</p> <p>Kept wondering what was wrong with him</p> <p>Why was he this way, why did he like guys</p>
	<p>EXT. GARDEN - DAY</p> <p>MS</p> <p>Meghna sitting and talking</p>	<p>Since they were always advocated for equal rights for all, this is how they became an ally</p> <p>'A' in LGBTQIA+ is Asexual</p>
	<p>Inserts:</p> <p>Image of them as the first asexual student leader</p> <p>Interactions with members of the community</p>	<p>AVEN's website about asexuality</p> <p>When they discovered the term, had more clarity</p>

	<p>INT. BEDROOM - DAY</p> <p>Aditya on a call with his colleagues - moving his hands while explaining things - from front</p>	<p>Though it took 2 years to finally take a step in that direction, through a friend, they began exploring If not for the friends, they may have never openly discussed it with someone</p>
	<p>INT. HALL - DAY</p> <p>Akash continuing his dance sequence - slow</p>	<p>Freshers, when he took a stand for himself even while getting mocked, in the form of a dance / Senior who later became his supporter / They knew they were bisexual but the support helped them explore further</p>
<p><b>End Comments</b></p>		
	<p>EXT. GARDEN - DAY</p> <p>CU - LA</p> <p>Meghna laughing while talking</p>	<p>Discovering they were pansexual and non-binary / What pushed them to take this decision and how does it feel - including others in journey - making decisions for self openly</p>

	<p>EXT. GARDEN - DAY</p> <p>MCU Aditya looking at a distance while the voiceover continues</p>	<p>The liberation after opening up about sexuality, reading further on it</p> <p>Experience with dating men and women and what are they looking forward to in future</p>
	<p>INT. HALL - DAY</p> <p>MS Akash, towards the end of the dance sequence - fades</p>	<p>Strength to share with the family</p> <p>Officially having a relationship</p> <p>Still get picked on but self-acceptance allows them to answer back in need be</p> <p>A strong support system has been created</p>



# Production

## Equipments

During the field visit, I had acquired a Canon 50mm lense, a lapel microphone and a trip from a friend. The camera used was Canon 1500D, 18-55mm lens and my laptop during the field visits. Most of the shooting was handheld, while interviews were recorded with a camera mounted on a tripod. Lapel microphone was used during the interviews and while recording background sounds. I had backup batteries for the camera, and kept transferring shots to the laptop post shoot, everyday.

## Planning

Irrespective of doing extensive research, fieldwork and storyboarding, chances are that things will rarely go as planned once one starts shooting. Therefore, preparation for the shoot was done at least a day prior to the shoot. This involved mapping the time of journey in order to avoid wasting daytime, checking and readying equipment, carrying ample amounts of water and electrolytes, taking a printed checklist of shots to take and questionnaire, both general and specific and prepping for a stay, if need be.

## Questionnaire

Depending upon the interviewee, unplanned questions were asked to them. Following is the list of general and specific questions-

### General Questions

- What is your name? What is your age?
- What do you do? Where were you born?
- How many members are there in your family? What is the level of closeness with your family?
- What kind of a child would you call yourself? How different is it from how you are now?
- What were/are your hobbies?
- What kind of friend circle do you have?
- What was the environment at the school?
- What kind of student were you?
- When did you realise you were part of the LGBTQIA+ community?
- Was it ever a reason people picked on you?
- How did it make you feel?
- What was your mechanism of coping with it?

## Shooting

I live in Noida, in the Delhi-NCR region. Considering all of my interviewees live in Delhi, I got to do a lot of small trips to field locations. Shooting was a blend of a lot of different emotions including excitement and anxiety. Since most of the travelling happened via Delhi Metro, it gave me the opportunity to observe moments that would earlier go unnoticed. That is where some of the b-rolls came from. A lot of interviews were conducted but most of them didn't make it to the final cut. However, each of those individuals made an intellectual contribution which I'm thankful for.

Though the first field visit was conducted in September 2021, before the onset of the 4th semester, the shoot took place in March, 2022. To begin with, two weeks in the middle of March were booked for shoots and the days were divided for the interview of main characters and taking other important shots. I was fortunate enough to not come across weather or health related challenges, but the fear of it persisted.

During those two weeks, some of the locations covered were Chandni Chowk, Connaught Place, Karol Bagh, Karkardooma, Rohini, Vaishali, Noida to name a few.

While the main interviews took place at Karkardooma, Rohini and Noida, other locations were useful in getting background sound, interviews of strangers and b-roll footage. My process of shooting was to capture the journey along with the main location and individuals. Apart from capturing the list of shots, I made an effort to capture anything that seemed interesting, a lot of which made it to the final cut. To avoid missing out on footage due to clarity issues, I would take multiple shots of things, especially if they were moving.

Since rainbow and colours is something that is heavily associated with the LGBTQIA+ community, I tried choosing backgrounds that would bring some colour to the frame. Since I had chatted with each interviewee prior to the shoot and had got an opportunity to mingle with them in some capacity, they were pretty open in front of the camera. Even then, I made sure to never start recording right away and instead let them calm down and get comfortable. The interviewee were made aware of the kind of questions that will be asked and even though a lot of them were triggering, I am happy that they were willing to share their stories.

# Post-Production

## Organising Footage

A large amount of data was captured and collected during and after the shoot. This data was in the form of video, audio and photographs. As mentioned earlier, all the footage would be transferred to my laptop immediately after the shoot. Upon reaching home, I would sort the footage out depending upon who the footage belonged to (interviewee), its format and check for what would work and what wouldn't. Once the production process was over, it was time to look for photographs and archival footage.

After collection of footage, all the footage was moved to Premiere Pro, an editing software. Separate Premiere Pro files were created for each interviewee as well as for intro and outro. In each file, bins were created for footage, audio, and photographs to avoid mixup. Everything was properly labelled, and tracks were used to create a distinction of different types of footage i.e. background sound, music, or dialogue.

## Syncing and Assembly

Since the audio was recorded on a different device, editing began with first assembling all the audio and footage on the timeline and syncing them. Once all the footage was synced, it was assembled on the timeline, based on the script.

To build an effective narrative using the footage I had collected, everything had to be rewatched and transcribed to a certain extent. This was mainly to find points of commonality in each interview. Along with transcribing, I marked the important sections within the software using labels and noting the meaning of that label as shown in the table below.

Label Colour	Act	Meaning
Pink	1	Character Intro
Teal	1	Sexuality Intro
Brown	2	Conflict (Internal)
Iris	2	Discovery
Yellow	3	Conflict (External)
Rose	3	Resolution (External)
Green	3	Current Reality
Magenta	Conclusion	Closing Remarks

This helped in creating the new narrative as well as assembling footage from different interviews together.

## **Narrative**

During the shooting, I was able to come up with some themes of the narrative structure I had previously designed. However, things don't really go as planned once you start shooting. Due to this, the narrative had to be altered according to the kind of data I was able to procure. Of Course the pre-production narrative, storyboard and discussions came in handy at this point.

Since the pre-production narrative was based on three act structure, i.e. first act introduces the subjects, second act shows the conflict and issues and third act provides a resolution. Thus, the first act needed to introduce the main character of the interview while also hinting a little bit towards the conflict at hand. This is presented by the means of voice of people as well as adverts to create an emphasis. It goes on to introduce the three main characters namely Meghna Mehra, Akash and Aditya Kumar but doesn't give away too much about the conflict.

The second act is where individuals start discussing why the discovery was an internal issue. Here, they touch upon not just internal dilemmas but really discovering who they are and then facing external backlash as well. It keeps on building up till they reach a point where they can't have enough and that's where act three comes in.

It starts with them introducing someone/something they reach out to in order to finally get some relief. Each interviewee expresses what they're doing about the problem, what kind of solutions they came across, what happened when they finally accepted themselves and most importantly, how is it playing out now. The narrative then concludes with each individual's closing remark. remark.

## **Editing**

By far the most time consuming and challenging part of this journey was editing as this could either make it or break it. Because of the extraordinary circumstances that we have been dealing with for the last two year, none of the post-production work was done from the studio. This meant that the editing was to be done on my ancient laptop, therefore making it time consuming and challenging. Delivering any progress took ten times more effort and I really appreciate the patience my guides showed in this moment. The editing process included the following steps-

### **a) Assembling**

Once individual interviews were synced and assembled, it was time to clip and label them. The footage that fit in the narrative was clipped, and labelled according to the table shown above. Once labelled, they were then moved to a new file where assembly of each clip from all the interviews took place. Then the b-rolls, and photographs were put in place. The process of cutting, replacing, and removing clips took place throughout the post production process..

### **b) Voice over**

Since the interviews were enough to carry the narrative forward without any intervention, a voiceover was recorded only for the introduction. This was done to bridge the gap between the introduction and the rest of the documentary- a big problem seen in the rough cut. It was recorded using Audacity, a software used for mixing audio and then moved to Premiere Pro.

### **c) Graphics**

- i. Lower Thirds: All the characters are introduced using animated lower thirds in the form of their names and occupation. An unobtrusive, translucent, gradient rectangle serves as a backdrop to the text that smoothly appears over it in Open Sans font.
- ii. Credits roll: The text in the credit roll uses Open Sans font. The credit roll runs along an acoustic guitar track.
- iii. Film Title: For the film title, Open Sans font was used with a slight shadow. The title slowly appears and starts expanding after the word 'normal' is said in the voice over. It then very quickly disappears into fog in the background of the intro.
- iv. Animated Floating Comments: To highlight certain comments, or remarks from articles/posts, Floating Comments encapsulated in white rectangular were used. These comments, initially blurry, slowly enter the frame, becoming clear. After about a second they exit the frame.

## **d) Sound**

Other than the audio captured on the field, a number of background scores, sfx, and ambient sounds were used. Due credits were given to the sources. The ambient sounds ranged from rustling of leaves, winds, kids playing in the park, cars passing by and background wind.

The introduction opens with the song 'Ek Ladki ko Dekha' from the movie A Love story. The song is used to convey the excessive 'visibility' of a certain type of relationship over the other. It is also used because in year 2019, a film trying to portray a homosexual relationship used the same name- Ek Ladki ko Dekha toh aisa laga.

Music has been used within the documentary to further enhance an emotion in a scene. When characters talk about discrimination against LGBTQIA+ community, the music "Cellar Door" by Finval plays in the background. All the sounds, music and sfx used are under fair use law.

## **e) Final Cut**

The length of the documentary, in the initial stage of post-production, was close to 50 minutes. However, it was cut short to 20 mins and later to 17 minutes.

The inessential parts were cut out with each stage, and audio was further refined and denoised. Next, graphics and photographs were added which was followed by adding sound effects, ambient sounds and music.

The tough part was to choose between necessary and unnecessary but interesting footage. Each interviewee has a distinct personality and a lot of times, I had to replace personality defining footage with more informative ones. The problem statement, in such situations, kept me going.

The documentary was very close to home as it dealt with certain aspects that were triggering. Since post-production meant listening to the same thing over and over again, I couldn't help but take breaks to both think of better approaches and declutter emotions. Once all of the above were done, it was time to colour correct and add some life to the footage as well as refine archival footage and photos to sync it with the rest of the film.

## **Title of the Film**

When the final script was finished, it was officially time to give this baby a name. Ever since I heard the song Moon River by Frank Sinatra, I wanted to make a part of the song, specifically “we’re after the same rainbow’s end”, the title.

However, while interviewing Meghna, one of the comments she made struck a chord and I couldn’t let go of it. It was the line, “If there’s autumn, there’s spring.. So maybe we are the Spring”. This gave birth to the title of the documentary- Haze of Spring.

Haze is a slight obstruction of the lower atmosphere. But it also means a state of mental confusion. The self-doubt about one's sexuality due to external bullying causes a state of confusion where the person spends time questioning themselves and their behaviour. Because Meghna calls people like her ‘Spring’ it felt appropriate to title the documentary *Haze of Spring*.

## Final Script

[BLACK SCREEN]

Voiceover opens the documentary

Play "Ek Ladki ko Dekha toh Aisa Laga"

Cut to visual of heterosexual couples sitting, in a wedding outfit in an ad, walking hand-in-hand in the corridors of Connaught Place, on a heart shaped pillow with 'Happily Married' written on it

SONG

Ek ladki ko dekha toh aisa laga jaise

[MEDIUM CLOSE UP]

A woman in saree appears on screen saying

WOMAN

Bete ke liye wife hoti hai

SONG

Jaise

WOMAN

Aur ladki ke liye husband hota hai

Distortion of visual and sound followed by narrator talking while bunch of ads and snippets of movies show up on screen

NARRATOR

People often talk about what's normal and what's abnormal

STRANGERS RESPONDING

Shaadi to sirf ladke ladki mei hoti hai; Yahi Sankskriti hai India ki; Aise hi hota aaya hai hamesha se; Ladke Ladke mei Nahi ho Sakti; Nahi hai normal; Society ke hisaab se ye galat hai; Bolne mei itna ajeeb lagg raha hai, sochne mei toh aur lagg raha hai

Pace of ads increases

NARRATOR

But is something truly normal or simply immensely visible. And if so, what happens when something is not considered..



[FADE IN]

Smoke on the screen appears, title fades in

NARRATOR

..Normal?

[CUT]

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

[CLOSE UP]

Meghna playing with the grass

MEGHNA

People abused me a lot.  
They called me a monkey

EXT. BALCONY - DAY

[CLOSE UP]

Aditya fidgeting with his ring

ADITYA

I could see a disgust in their eyes regarding  
that

EXT. CAMPUS - DAY

[OVER THE SHOULDER]

Akash going through his phone

AKASH

Bohot kuch bolte they, tu ye hai tu vo hai, tu  
sirf ladkio ke saath rehta hai

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Meghna is blowdrying her hair

MEGHNA

I was always an outgoing person. I loved talking  
to people, going out, meeting new people. I live  
in a family of four.

[CUT]

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Meghna sitting in the garden talking

MEGHNA

I am an author and activist and founder of AIQA  
and a political analyst. I was born in Delhi and  
raised in Delhi. In my family there are total 4  
members.

[FADE IN]

Photograph of Meghna's family slowly zooming in  
on her sister

MEGHNA

I'm extremely close to my sister. She's like a  
this parent to me.

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Meghna petting one of her dogs in the garden

MEGHNA

I have two dogs, I call them fur babies. Their names are Babu and Shone

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Meghna sitting in the garden talking

MEGHNA

Since the beginning I was interested in SST.

[CUT]

Footage of Meghna's NSS Shield

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Meghna sitting in the garden talking

MEGHNA

I wanted to become an artist or politician, so I thought what's the use. I could do basic calculation. Activism, I think was always in me.

[CUT]

Photograph of Meghna at a DU protest

MEGHNA

So by the time I was in University, I was sure. I knew I wanted to do something different for the society and that's how I joined activism.

[CUT]

Footage of Aditya's collection of Figurines

ADITYA

I was a very nerdy kid, I was someone who was very curious. I was love learning things and love asking question.

EXT. BALCONY - DAY

Aditya sitting in a chair talking

ADITYA

And I would always be me

[CUT]

Footage of kids playing in the background

ADITYA

I remember even when the other kids would play, I was the one heaving imaginary light saber fights with my plants.

[CUT]

EXT. BALCONY - DAY

Aditya is clicking photo using his phone

ADITYA

Photography was something that I picked up pretty late but it was because of my late uncle.

[FADE IN]

Slideshow of some of Aditya's photographs he has clicked in the past

ADITYA

Looking at his pictures was the reason why I picked up a camera in the first place.

[CUT]

Photograph of baby Aditya

ADITYA

I grew up mostly outside India

EXT. BALCONY - DAY

Aditya sitting in a chair talking

ADITYA

Vietnam, I would say, was one of the best schooling experience that I had.

[CUT]

Aditya working on his laptop

ADITYA

That was the first place that I saw a library.

[CUT]

Aditya stack of books

ADITYA

There were moments where I would sit in the library during lunch breaks because it was heaven for me.

EXT. BALCONY - DAY

Aditya sitting in a chair talking

ADITYA

It was hard for me to make friends, to start conversations.

[CUT]

Slideshow of photographs with friends from Vietnam

ADITYA

But there were people who opened my eyes and there were people who introduced me to Linkin Park for the first time. Imagine a kid in first class listening to Punk Rock. I went crazy.

[FADE IN]

Slow vertical pan of a photo of Akash from childhood

AKASH

I was that kind of a person who was like "Khelo, Kudo, Mazze Karo".

EXT. CAMPUS - DAY

Akash talking

AKASH

Studies par bilkul bhi focus nahi the bachpan se. I was like study school aur tuition mei hoti rahegi.

AKASH

Meri hobbies rahi hain sabse zyada khelna, fir dance karna. Mera friend circle bhi almost mere jaisa hi raha hai

[CUT]

Slow zoom into a photograph of Akash with his friends from university.

AKASH

Mere se zyada naught, mere jaise shaitaan type. So I could easily connect with people

[CUT]

Slow pan of a photograph with his friends from university

AKASH

I could easily understand people. That's why I chose hotel management

[FADE IN]

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Meghna sitting in the garden talking

MEGHNA

I don't remember the year but at that time I used to watch a show hosted by VJ Anday

[CUT]

Footage of VJ Andy from the show Dare to Date and his YouTube channel

MEGHNA

And I loved VJ Andy. I loved his styling. That's when I asked myself if this person was gay

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Meghna sitting in the garden talking

MEGHNA

And I started reading more aboutgays and then I got to know about the term lesbians.

[CUT]

Photograph of Meghna at a Queer event

MEGHNA

In my school, if two girls were really close, students would call them lesbians, but that isn't a derogatory term.

[CUT]

Photograph of Meghna holding the pride flag

MEGHNA

I talked about homophobia because I noticed there was a friend of mine who wasn't gay.

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Meghna sitting in the garden talking

MEGHNA

But he couldn't follow the notions of hegemonic masculinity, he was bullied for looking gay or behaving gay.

[CUT]

Person hiding their face in between their legs

Meghna

It was really toxic because the poor guy got bullied for no reason.

[CUT]

Footage on television of a protest in Spain against homophobia

NEWS ANCHOR

Thousands of protestors took to the streets in several cities across Spain, angry over the death of a man in what was suspected to be a homophobic attack.

EXT. BALCONY - DAY

[CLOSE UP]

Aditya looking in some direction

ADITYA

It was in Spain when I first came across homophobia. Spain was a very catholic country, though people weren't persecuted as it was happening in India a couple of years ago.

[CUT]

Slow zoom on a photograph of protest in India against homosexuality.

ADITYA

But there were people who believed that homosexuality was a sin. Man being with another man was a sin. The first time I saw this in India was when a friend came out as gay

EXT. CAMPUS - DAY

Akash talking

AKASH

I had more female friends, boys aur male friends  
kaafi kam rahe hain. Isliye log mujhe kehte they  
ki tu ye hai tu vo hai

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Meghna sitting in the garden talking

MEGHNA

Often times I was bullied for looking very  
masculine because I was angry.

[CUT]

Meghna doing her hair and putting on face cream

MEGHNA

I was with guys for most of my life, I was  
raised with them. I was more into sports. I  
would do heavy lifting. And one time there was  
this person who said I was not woman enough.

EXT. BALCONY - DAY

Aditya sitting in a chair talking

ADITYA

No one said I looked feminine, it was just not  
the 'macho man'.

[CUT]

Aditya's images with his friends

ADITYA

I was someone who was shy, I wasn't athletic, I  
would disappear in the crowd and I was caring.

EXT. BALCONY - DAY

Aditya sitting in a chair talking

ADITYA

I gave off motherly vibe

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Meghna sitting in the garden talking

MEGHNA

I started dating at a very young age as I was  
groomed by these old men. I always felt I was  
different. I felt like I was a lte bloomer and  
though I would feel sexual attraction later,  
because I was a child, a teenager.

[CUT]

Close up of a book of quotes by Meghna

MEGHNA

And that affected me badly

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Meghna sitting in the garden talking

MEGHNA

Because I was abused a lot, just for not having  
sex.

EXT. BALCONY - DAY

Aditya sitting in a chair talking

ADITYA

So me exploring myself happened more towards the  
last few years of school and majorly university.

[CUT]

Silhouette of two individuals over a rainbow

MEGHNA

I think 11th and 12 was when I was first  
attracted to a man. And at that time I didn't  
know that was wrong

EXT. BALCONY - DAY

Aditya sitting in a chair talking

ADITYA

When people kind of found out that I was maybe  
attracted to men, people asked me if I was gay,  
which I didn't really understand. But I could  
see a disgust in their eyes.

EXT. CAMPUS - DAY

Akash talking

AKASH

When I guess I was 17, I realised, I was  
interested in boys as well. When I was in 11th  
standard, I had a crush on a guy.

EXT. CAMPUS - DAY

Akash talking

AKASH

And vo alag hi feelind rahi, ek alag zone raha  
maine khudko different hi paya ki haan shayad  
mei different hu.

[CUT]

Akash looking in a different direction

AKASH

Mujhe nahi pata tha ki kisse share karu, kiske pass jaau, kaha jaau, kisse baat karu, kisse share karu. I was at a stage jahaan mujjhe bhi answers nahi mill rahe they.

[CUT]

Pride flag, focus moves from the red band to purple which is one of the colours of the Asexuality flag

MEGHNA

At that time, there was no awareness of asexuality. I had no idea that a term like asexuality existed in the first place. So I would feel confused, totally confused.

[CUT]

Timelapse of pride parade

ADITYA

Starting my master's, that was the first time I attended the pride parade in Delhi.

[CUT]

Slideshow of photographs from pride 2019

ADITYA

This was the first time where I saw colours, love, people hugging each other. Standing up with a sign saying free hugs and people going in and hugging. I wanted to do that, but a part of me was closed off, like maybe I shouldn't do it.

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Meghna sitting in the garden talking

MEGHNA

In my second year, somebody corrected me that LGBTQIA+ should be used and A isn't for ally but for Aromantic, Asexuals and Agender.

[CUT]

Animation of person typing asexuality.org and ending up at the website

I started looking up these terms and that's when I stumbled upon Asexuality.org. I realised that's it's me. It's describing me.



EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Meghna sitting in the garden talking

MEGHNA

I was like, yeah, I feel romantic attraction but I don't feel the sexual part. I feel repulsed by sex, I feel uncomfortable, I get anxious, I feel like puking.

EXT. CAMPUS - DAY

Akash talking

AKASH

When I went to college, I started exploring myself and people got to know about my sexuality. One of my roommates, poore college mei ye spread kardia ki Sky is a gay. First year that mai aur freshers aya.

[CUT]

Akash warming up before a dance routine.

AKASH

YE tha ki haan dance karke mujhe bohot khushi milti hai, toh socha sab kuch chodo, dance karte hain, acha feel hoga khudko.

[CUT]

Close up of Meghna's book, Marriage of Convenience, Chapter 1 where the protagonist's mother tells him that it's high time, she should think of marriage now.

MEGHNA

A lot of people were like why aren't you having sex, okay you are not having it now, have if after marriage atleast. How are you going to get married.

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Meghna sitting in the garden talking

MEGHNA

I felt like if I could turn heterosexual, things would get better. But that's not true. And you would think how people and family would react.

[CUT]

Footage of Hanuman and Ganesha

MEGHNA

Infact a lot of religious people said a lot of religious things to me, like phalaane bhagwaan ka awtaar, dhimkaane bhagwaan ka awtaar

[FADE OUT]

[FADE IN]

EXT. BALCONY - DAY

Aditya sitting in a chair talking

ADITYA

As I started to read more, I realised that  
bisexuals, especially male bisexuals

[CUT]

Animated floating comments about  
hate/discrimination towards male bisexuals in  
Queer community

ADITYA

Would face a lot of hate wthin the community.  
Bisexuality has always been seen as some sort of  
threat

EXT. BALCONY - DAY

Aditya sitting in a chair talking

ADITYA

There have been people who have asked me if I  
was sure I was bisexual. I was once dating a  
girl who said that maybe I'm gay and not really  
bisexual and probably more into guys

[CUT]

Akash warming up before a dance routine.

AKASH

Freshers se sirf kuch ghanto pehle hi, 2-3 guys  
came to me and they were like tera us ladke ke  
saath kuch chall raha haina

EXT. CAMPUS - DAY

Akash talking

AKASH

Us cheez ka itna bura laga ki I went back to the  
hostel and do ghante mei shower ke neeche tha.  
Aise suicidal thoughts aa rahe they ki kuch kar  
loon.

[FADE OUT]

[FADE IN]

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Meghna sitting in the garden talking

MEGHNA

Then I met Mr. Raj Saxena

EXT. BALCONY - DAY

Aditya sitting in a chair talking

ADITYA

I spoke with my bestfriend about this first

EXT. CAMPUS - DAY

Akash talking

AKASH

I was with my senior

[CUT]

Meghna sitting in Lodhi Garden with the members of the community attending one of AIQA's potlucks

MEGHNA

They had an ace meet in Delhi, and I met so many people like me who had similar experiences

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Meghna sitting in the garden talking

MEGHNA

I also went to a therapist about it, and surprise surprise, the therapist turned out to be asexual

[CUT]

Bunch of people dancing around in a circle

MEGHNA

I met a lot of people, discussed with different people, read a lot of books and did my own research. I met more asexual people and talked about their experiences

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Meghna sitting in the garden talking

MEGHNA

I met asexuals who were married and then realised they were asexual after 30 years of marriage

EXT. BALCONY - DAY

Aditya sitting in a chair talking

ADITYA

I just felt like I needed to tell someone and I don't think I was ready to share it with my family. He just said that it was evident, you could say, where he felt like..

[CUT]

Slow zoom into photograph of Aditya with his best friend

Aditya

Right, if you hadn't told this, or even if you would have told that you were gay, we would be okay with it. Since you didn't say anything, nobody thought anything

[CUT]

Slow pan n a photograph of Akash with his seniors

AKASH

She came to me and asked me what happened to you

EXT. CAMPUS - DAY

Akash talking

AKASH

Mujhemei vo courage hi nahi bacha hai ki mai logon ko face kar saku. Jo log mere saath itna kuch kar rahe hain, mai unke saamne kaise perform kar sakta hua.

[CUT]

A female and male talking

AKASH

She said, this is your day this is your time..  
You just..

EXT. CAMPUS - DAY

Akash's feet, dancing

AKASH

Dance, just close you eyes and dance  
You have to perform for yourself. Apne liye  
perform kar

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Meghna sitting in the garden talking

MEGHNA

This helped me understand asexuality from a different perspective when I met an asexual therapist. I was like yeah, I feel romantic attraction but I don't feel sexual part

EXT. BALCONY - DAY

Aditya sitting in a chair talking

ADITYA

I told my best friend about it first and that's when I was like, I want to explore this further.

And when I did, I realised

[CUT)

Image of a person with "Love is not a crime" painted on their face

ADITYA

That there are people who have some stories as me. There have been people who have faced prejudice, discrimination and hate speech against them.

EXT. CAMPUS - DAY

Akash's feet, dancing

AKASH

Senior ka support was the turning point in my life, because I was in that kind of position ke mai khudke liye stand nahi le paa raha tha

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Meghna sitting in the garden talking

MEGHNA

It was obviously very hard. It was a nightmare for me, in many cases because

[CUT]

Childhood photograph of Meghna with her father

MEGHNA

I thought I'll carry forward my family's legacy of my family

[CUT]

Animated floating comment from an article about asexuals in Delhi

MEGHNA

The hard part was making peace with the fact that you are asexual. Making peace with it meant accepting your inner demons. It took me 8 years to understand it and 2 years to come to terms with it. Sometimes I also regret coming out of the closet.

[CUT]

Slideshow of Meghna's photo with friends and one with a poster

MEGHNA

Sometimes I also regret coming out because it costed me a lot. It costed me friends, family, relationship and political relevance

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Meghna sitting in the garden talking

MEGHNA

But one day I woke up and thought, I didn't want to feel like this bechara person.. Like meri life barbaad ho gayi hai. But yes, that made me realise that there's a scope of love.. For asexual people too

[CUT]

Slideshow of Aditya's childhood photos with his brother

ADITYA

Telling my brother was a really helpful thing because I knew he was supportive but he made my parents a little bit more accepting of it too.

[CUT]

Footage of a photo of Lord Krishna

ADITYA

That's because to my parents, who are religious, it was a sin even though it's not mentioned in the Hindu religion

EXT. BALCONY - DAY

Aditya sitting in a chair talking

ADITYA

I make fun of myself, that's something I always do. But making fun of that aspect of my life was something I was stopping myself from doing

[CUT]

Aditya standing near the balcony, smiling at the camera

ADITYA

But once I came out to everyone that this is who I am, that's when I realised I could make fun of it how much ever I want.

EXT. BALCONY - DAY

Aditya sitting in a chair talking

ADITYA

Now it's laying bare. Even if someone tries to  
poke it, it's not going to burst

[CUT]

A pink flower on blue background (colours of  
bisexuality) going out of the frame

AKASH

Even tabh bhi mujhe ye lagta tha ki I don't fit  
in the bisexual term. Later on I joined  
AIQA, vahaan I started talking to people and got  
to know that I am bi-romantic grey asexual

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Meghna sitting in the garden talking

MEGHNA

I feel like maybe people like me exist to  
balance human nature

EXT. BALCONY - DAY

Aditya sitting in a chair talking

ADITYA

There are going to be people who care and those  
who don't care, and the people who are not going  
to care about my sexuality are the people I want  
to hang around with

[CUT]

Slow motion footage of Maghna laughing

AKASH

These things are normal, feeling for the same  
sex is normal

[CUT]

Slow motion footage of Akash laughing

AKASH

God made us like this

[CUT]

Slow motion footage of Aditya laughing

AKASH

Nobody chose to be who they are

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Meghna sitting in the garden talking

MEGHNA

If there is autumn, then there's also spring..

So maybe we are the spring

END CREDITS



# Conclusion

It's often said that difficulties are an important part of life. It's part of making you a complete human, for if there's no struggle, there's no learning. The lesson I've learnt by working on this project is that hardly anybody talks about the other side of the learning- the life-long damage these difficulties create. And how the damage becomes irreparable when there's no guidance or support.

I have heartfelt gratitude for Meghna, Akash, Aditya and many more from the community that I got to interact with. Their bravery lies in the fact that they acknowledged and embraced the damage, voiced it out for the world to know and continued to move forward.

Though the project taught me some valuable lessons that I shall carry forward in my life, the most important lesson I have learnt is how to communicate. Be it with the people one interacts with on a one-to-one basis or designing a solution, like a documentary, effective communication is a must so that the idea is properly propagated and accepted. I wouldn't say I have fully grasped it, I will never let go of what I have learnt so far.

The idea of the project, though came from personal experience, was still one dimensional. However, I was able to realise this idea to its fullest only through the guidance, and freedom given by the professors, who motivated me to pursue something this challenging. I am forever indebted to them and this project.

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