

'If you can't love, there's no need to live'

Protesters In Black Call SC Order Shameful And Regressive, Demand Right To Life Of Dignity

Maria Akram &
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New Delhi: After Supreme Court set aside the 2009 Delhi high court verdict decriminalizing homosexuality, hundreds of people belonging to the LGBT community and supporters gathered at Jantar Mantar on Wednesday evening to protest. Most of them were clad in black to show their resentment and were holding placards with messages clearly indicating the mood. They were demanding their right to live a life of dignity.

"If we can't go to the apex court, where will we go? Supreme Court has said that they will guard the Constitution from themselves if they have to. The time has come for them to guard the Constitution from themselves," said gay rights activist Gautam Bhan.

Protestors carried rain-



Sanjay Sekhri

FORBIDDEN EMBRACE: Protesters console each other after the SC verdict criminalizing gay sex

bow-coloured flags and wore black wristbands. Some were even blindfolded. Even those not part of the community came out in support. "It's a fight for a fundamental right. Being gay or lesbian is not

a crime. If today they can criminalize being gay, then maybe wearing a skirt will, too, become a crime," said Suhana Mazumdar, a Delhi University student.

Apart from anger, there

was anxiety. Adhish Mehrotra, a PR consultant, said that now their very existence is a crime. "Since morning we are all upset and scared as well. It took us so long to come out of the closet but with a verdict

like this, people will go back into their shells. It took years for my parents to accept but now there's no point. It's not a sin to be gay and I'm very proud to be one," said the 35-year-old.

He said there should be "such a regressive and shameful judgment in the world's largest democracy" was regrettable. His company is already receiving "concern emails" from those who've booked tours and paid. "Where are we to go? If you don't have a right to love, there's no need to live."

Groups that had led protests against gender inequality after the December 16, 2012 gang rape, joined this one too. Student groups from Jawaharlal Nehru University - All India Students' Association and Students' Federation of India - were present. Foreign nationals and NRIs too poured in. "In other parts of the world,

same-sex marriages are legalized but here their existence is criminal," said Emily from Newcastle, England. She's a tourist but joined the protest on hearing of the verdict.

Geeta Misra, 50, and founder-director of feminist human rights group CREA, has been a part of 'Voices Against 377' since its inception. One of the co-petitioners, she woke up on Wednesday "all ready to celebrate." She said: "This took away from an amazing high court judgment. It's not just about LGBT; it's about the rights of all the minorities. This is a step back."

Also at the protest was Sanjay Malhotra, who'd started IndjapInk, a gay tourism company six years ago. "What an irony!" he said. "Six years ago we were still living under the shadow of section 377 and now we are back to where we started, may be worse."

Community fears harassment by cops, moral police

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The Supreme Court order criminalizing gay sex will not result in a "massive crackdown" by the police as feared. At least that's what senior officers told TOI when asked how the judgment would impact police action against this 'crime'. They said they acted only on a complaint, perhaps indicating that they won't be proactive.

Delhi Police registered 92 cases under section 377 (unnatural sex) of the Indian Penal Code in 2012. This year, the po-

lice had registered 119 cases under this section till November 30, an officer said. "We booked people under this section only after receiving a written complaint regarding any "assault" by a man or a woman. If a person approaches us complaining of sexual misbehaviour, we are bound to take action," the officer said.

Members of LGBT community, however, fear harassment by both the cops and moral police. "Five years ago, the police had come to our Malviya Nagar flat and stopped our party. Two of my friends were talking in



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LOUD AND CLEAR: Activists at Jantar Mantar on Wednesday

the balcony. One cop just held them by the collar and took them along. They were let off af-

ter we apologized, compromised and paid Rs 2000. We fear return of those dark days,"

said an activist who refused to be named.

Another member of the LGBT community said they weren't sure that they would be able to move around freely anymore. "Attending parties at some places - which the cops refer to as gay joints - will be a problem as we could be picked up on suspicion during a raid and booked as well for the offence," said another.

However, the members of the community are gearing up to combat these ugly situations. Manish, an LGBT activist, said: "I don't fear moral policing as

we are doing nothing now. If we are targeted, we will take the legal route. Our revolution will continue."

Officers who have earlier dealt with cases lodged under this section said misuse of this law was a concern but that was true for any law. Even in this case it had been argued that Section 377 had been used to "perpetrate harassment, blackmail and torture" against certain people, especially those belonging to this community. But the court opined that this treatment was neither mandated by the section nor condoned by it.