

Resilience - Experiences of LGBTIQ Community in Bhutan



(A collection of prose and poems)

QUEER VOICES OF BHUTAN



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An ode to the rainbow people -Anonymous



Lesbians, a marvelous creature
Attracted to the same beautiful gender
With an awesome mind
Love by the faith
Not by gender.
Gay- the cutest beast in this world
Love and attracted to the same cute
creature
Wow! How magnificent.
Bisexual, an extraordinary creature
With both blue and pink
Who is astonishing
Love with a concoction of blue and pink.
Transgender, a fascinating soul
With a beautiful smile
Born in the wrong body
But proud of being who they are.
Let's break the silence
Light the beam of colours
The smile on the face
the beautiful rainbow.



Journey of a young boy - Phurpa Dorji



“Hi! I’m Phurpa Dorji, a high-school boy and I’m gay.

I found out that I was attracted to boys when I was in primary school. I faced a lot of difficulties trying to cope with my new found sexual identity. People around me made fun of me and called me names which made me feel sad and depressed at times. I was bullied, discriminated against and insulted for the way I expressed myself. But I didn’t lose hope. I grew stronger from those challenges and revealed my sexual orientation when I was in middle school. Even though some friends made fun of me, most of them accepted me and gave me their full support. Some people also said “It’s just a matter of time. You will get beautiful girls in the future.”

I tried to change myself but failed. I even tried dating a girl but I couldn’t give her any love and affection. I didn’t feel a connection at all. I tried to change but couldn’t so I looked up ‘homosexual’ and found out that it is normal.

I was born this way. I want to be happy just as you all are. I want to live freely without any judgments. I am not an object that can change shape as I want. God has created me this way. God wants their people to be happy and loved by everyone. So I now ignore every bad comment about my sexuality and stand up for myself. I just want to say to those people who judge others to please allow everyone to be happy. Let’s stop discrimination against the LGBT community.”



Source:
[@stories_from_everywhere](#) (Instagram)

So Gay - Tenzin Yoezer



You ran your hands over my soft cheeks
Like the wind and sea, you blew my
worries away
And I never had someone play my
heartstrings
And turn my howling pain into a beautiful
song
Was it confusion or mystery? The way
your smile,
Formed into an upside-down rainbow on
my lips
We did something, no two boys
Would even dare to do
But I never saw you again,
And your remains on my lips
Changed me forevermore
And I was right where you left me
All alone in the world, that was out to
hate me
At first, I tried everything to be invisible
It seemed much safer in a dark closet,
Without the light showing everyone who I
was
Living in a world where boys are supposed
to like girls

I tried to cut this part of me out, but it
was an organ to my soul
And without it, I seemed to be dying
Even though we have our preferences
Can anyone be sure of who we will fall for,
When it comes to love?
With every breath, it got harder to
breathe
I couldn't take it anymore
So I broke through the doors and
Everyone saw me in disgust
But the breath of fresh air brought life
into my lungs
And the light that I thought would kill
me,
Didn't
In the fear of ending up alone in life,
Rode on my train of thoughts away from
home
Long was I in search of happiness
Wondering if it's in the sparkly ocean
eyes of a man
Had convinced me that I would be only
happy
With a loving man beside me
21 heartbreaks I had after I came out
gay

Being rejected for my excessive weight
 Ignored for my less attractive face
 Masked me in tight dresses and starved
 me to get skinny
 Cursed the way I walked and talked as
 people glared at me
 Then again It's me at the end
 Drowning in their sexual intentions
 I had lost everything and even myself
 Even though I was gay, being happy was
 far away
 But smiles and chuckles did blossom my
 mood
 As I danced like a gorilla to my favorite
 song
 I went to the mirror and saw my
 mother's smile blend with mine
 Despite all my flaws, I did look better
 just because I was happy
 I wasn't an architectural building
 That I could plan, cut, shape and color

I was a living person and I had hurt
 myself for too long,
 I accepted all of me with a warm hug
 Treating myself with the things I loved
 Letting myself grow into a happy me,
 Brought me happiness and made me gay
 Maybe someday I may fall in love
 And lord knows it would mean so much to
 me
 But today it wasn't about being loved by
 everyone
 Or a romantic man holding my hand in the
 dying sunset
 It was looking in the mirror with content
 Having this person who I can relate to
 Who doesn't ask me to be something
 more
 Who doesn't make me feel any less
 Who wishes everyone happiness and love
 And it's me, I Love Me
 And God!!, I am so gay



Image source:
 Humans of Thimphu
 (Facebook and Instagram)

A beautiful poem - Rinzeen Penjore



Is he a she?
Together we grew as the brothers we
seem
Those years that you and I have seen
I pick a ball to kick around
You picked a doll you thought was
profound
With knife and rope I helped our father
With pots and pans you replaced our
mother
In school I picked to play with boys
With girls you found your times of joy
I hit my teen and puberty
I had the fun and liberty
You read and found your sexuality
You had disputes with your mentality
The laughs and pranks you took all in
As blind and mute I remain therein
The night I heard you sob and sleep
The night I knew I'll help you keep
The books we checked and read
The books those helped me fade
The differences that I have had
The dissimilarity you thought that you
have made
In girls I found my urge and lust
For boys you knew your heart will rust
I fell in love and found my maid

I felt your need to find your lad
In all these years that came and went
There transpired a man that's meant
Decades of secret I kept of yours
In love I know your heart so roars
The lips you plant your kiss upon
The man you had your fate redrawn
So now they ask me what you are?
A he or she or that is a scar?
With smile and pride and all my sense
Roaring and yelling;
Shouting and screaming;
I pronounce you a brother of now and
thence.



Loss of Innocence - Anonymous



I am a woman born in the wrong body. I tried for a long while to compromise on how I felt on the inside. But during adolescence I realised that my urge to dress in a woman's clothing and act like one could no longer be suppressed. In order to get away from my family and have the freedom to do what I wanted, I chose to work in a drayang. I always loved dancing and for someone as misunderstood as me, the only place to be who I was without hesitation was at a Drayang.

My elder brother has always been strongly against it. But he is more repulsed by me wearing a kira and living the life of a woman than dancing in a drayang. On the day he found the drayang I was working at, he climbed onto the stage while I was performing and slapped me in front of everyone. Humiliated and hurt, I ran away and sought refuge in a friend's house. I thought time would heal and change things. I worked at different drayangs, against my family's wishes. It was the only place where I found acceptance and was able to be free of ostracization. I never wanted to hurt my family. But trying to please everyone is the toughest thing to do. You cannot make everyone like you no matter what you do so you have to do whatever makes you happy. My brother, despite being family, treated me very roughly and although it might have been tough love, I didn't deserve it. I just needed a little acceptance and compassion.

Unfortunately, it only got worse. I had run away from home before I had an accident and was hospitalised. People who knew me informed my family so my brother came to me and he forcefully took me back home. My parents wanted me to leave my obsession with the drayangs and the stage so they sent me away to become a monk. My mother told me if I don't become a monk, they will disown me. My hair was shaved and I had to live in a dratsang with several others.

However, the monks and the teachers there also come from the same society as my family so I continued to find myself in tough situations. Punishment was a regular thing for young monks but in my case it was severe. The head monk told me at a few instances to act like a man. I was not accepted there at all, and I knew I could not go on like this. I needed to live a life beyond the sphere of family and society. Even as a monk, I was not given the simplest dignity of being a human being. So I left. I ran away and now I am seeking shelter at the houses of people I know from my drayang days.

Once the drayang open up after the pandemic, I am going to look for a spot and work there again. Pleasing society is when most of us destroy our mental health. Family is supposed to be a place where you find acceptance, love, and a sense of community. Without that, a family is just another group of people.

Source: Humans of Thimphu





The other half - From Tshering Dendup



I think most of us have read or heard about the Greek legend which suggests that humans were originally created with four arms, four legs and a head with two faces. Fearing their power, Zeus split them into two separate parts, condemning them to spend their lives in search of their other halves. Thus, people wander around searching for their other half, and when they find him or her, they are finally whole and perfect.

In “The Symposium” Plato had Aristophanes tell the story of the Soulmates. Before starting the story, Aristophanes warns the group that his eulogy to love might be more absurd than funny. He begins by explaining why people in love say they feel “whole” when they find their love partner. This is, he says, because human beings were originally created with four arms, four legs and a head with two faces. There were three genders: all male, all female, and the “androgynous,” half male, half female. At that time, people were so powerful, fearless, and strong, that they even dared to threaten the gods. Fearing their power, Zeus thought of blasting them with thunderbolts, but did not want to deprive himself of their devotions and offerings, so he decided to cripple them by chopping them in half, in effect separating the two bodies.

Since then, people have been running around saying they’re looking for their other half, because they’re really trying to restore their primal nature. Women who have been separated from men run after their own kind, thus creating lesbians. Men split from other men, too, run after their own kind, and love to be embraced by other men. Those who come from the original androgynous beings are the men and women who are engaged in heterosexual love. Aristophane says that some people think that homosexuals are shameless, but he thinks that they are the bravest, the bravest of all.

These days, the whole world is going on and on about love. Poets are spending their lives writing about it. Everyone feels it's the most amazing thing to do. But when you mention two guys in love, they forget all that, and start freaking out. My point today is simple. Whether it's men, women - it doesn't matter. The human race is full of love. And to coin terms like heterosexuality, homosexuality or even bisexuality does not do justice to the meaning of love. You are a human being. You love the one you love and that is enough - No tag, No Gender, No taboos, no nothing . Just Love. That's enough.



A lesbian's experience - Anonymous



I am a lesbian but I am not ready to come out yet. My family doesn't accept it. I am 20 years old and a college student.

I recognised my sexuality when I was in class seven. I was too young and wondered why I was different. I started acting masculine, and kept distance from people. People teased me but I wasn't bullied. I sheltered myself from everyone. Depression built inside me, and my performance in school suffered. I found my first love when I was in class eleven. She accepted me but not in public. She was bisexual but no one knew about it. As time went by, she left me because she said two women couldn't be together in the long run. To overcome that pain I started dating my junior. Both her and her family accepted me but my friends and family couldn't believe it. She was very supportive but distance broke us apart eventually.

Now I am dating a girl who was my classmate, roommate and confidante. She supports me and is open about our relationship. My mother was against me, which pushed me to try and change but I did not choose this, it is who I am.

-Anonymous



A poem by Samten Zangmo



Thanks for boys
Thanks for girls
Thanks for humans
Every life in this world
Boys can like pink
Girls can like blue
Your reflection
Is not a choice
When someone's proud
Let them be them
Let boys be girls
Let girls be men
Don't hate because they're different
In fact you should be proud of them
For they came out to you
He /she may be gay
Her/she may be lesbian
They/them may be pan, bisexual or trans
Why are you bothered?! She/he/ I am me
and I'm proud of that
They/them are going to let their colors
shine
Because that is who We are
Struggles will come and go
But pride is forever

Coming out and finding life -Humans of Thimphu



TW: Violence and abuse.

It was when I came to Thimphu to find work after highschool that I realised I was transgender. The first time I dressed as a woman, I was scared to face the crowd. I covered my face with a scarf and hid behind my friends. But with time, I gained confidence and learned more about myself. I made friends who were like me, trying to find a place in a heteronormative society. Once when I was in Samtse, I met my apa. When he saw me in a kira he was surprised but not mad. The first person I officially told was my ama. She said, "It was only a matter of time that you came out. I don't have the right to object to your identity." She was only worried about who'd look after me when I was old. I told her I'd never been so happy and didn't want anything more from life. Eventually everyone at home accepted me.

The world, however, was not as kind as my family. I was rejected and mocked when I applied for jobs after revealing my gender identity. I then got into a live-in relationship with a man. After the first 8 months, we started arguing daily. He was possessive, abusive and insulted me for my gender identity. He'd take drugs, making it worse. One day, after a quarrel, I left the house. He followed me to the Clock Tower, grabbed my hair and started hitting me.

There were people around but no one helped. I somehow managed to run to the police. He was arrested but I didn't press any charges and he was released. He kept showing up at my house and called me incessantly. Some days, I'd be scared for my life. After 5 months, he was jailed for a drug case. I didn't want his life ruined, but was relieved because he'd made sure my life had been hell when he was around.

I've worked many jobs now, in clubs and karaoke bars. I also worked in India for a while. Recently, I did some training in baking and tailoring. Hopefully, it will help me get a good job soon. All of us have troubles, but people like me have it a little harder. We try our best to live a normal and happy life. I hope people can start to understand this and accept us, slowly.



Source: Humans of Thimphu (Facebook and Instagram)

A makeup artist's story -Humans of Thimphu



Even as a child, I was enamored by the faces with beautiful makeup on them on the television and in magazines. This fascination would one day turn into my passion and career. After high school, at just 17, I went to study cosmetology at a training centre in Changangkha. After completing this training, I worked in the centre for the next few years. For the past two years now, I have been running a salon on lease.

I had realised from an early age that I wasn't very academically inclined. My passion always led me towards working as a beautician and this very passion drives me to work hard and pay all my bills today. Running a salon all by myself is not easy because I have to single-handedly tend to customers all day. I also try to make sure that I do not take even one day off. I am turning 22 soon and feel quite financially stable. I have been working for the past 4 years and am saving to buy my own salon in Thimphu.

When I first started trying to normalise the idea of makeup with my family, I knew that it would be hard for them to accept it. It would not have been fair on my part to give them the shock of their life by suddenly wearing full makeup. So I decided to cushion the blow by adding something every now and then. I started with a little lip gloss first, then wore lipsticks, foundation and the mascara came later on. By then, they were used to seeing me in makeup.

Contrary to popular belief, wearing makeup in public as a man does not hamper my confidence. It actually does the exact opposite. A lot of people tend to confuse my gender identity due to my profession and my love for makeup. People often ask me if I identify as a trans-woman.

However, I identify as a cisgender, gay man. In Bhutan it is still a new concept for men to wear makeup but there are many men who are beauty influencers and celebrities who wear makeup all around the world. Makeup is not only for cisgender and transgender women. I truly believe that makeup is for everyone because it can really help boost a person's confidence.

Source: Humans of Thimphu (Facebook and Instagram)



Source: Humans of Thimphu (Facebook and Instagram)

Seeking love and Acceptance -Anonymous



"I found out I was bisexual two years ago. I am the only rainbow in my family. Most of my friends are supportive but I don't know about my family. My brother knows but my parents don't exactly know. My parents joke to me saying that I might bring home a wife. It's weird. People say it's a phase. How will they know what I am and what I am not?"

LGBT is still a new concept in Bhutan. Some people might not accept it but they need to know about this. The fact that some people are disgusted by two people of the same gender kissing goes to show that they don't think about what those people must feel. It's time to think and accept each and every LGBT person out there. They are already insecure about their sexualities and the society judging doesn't help. Family and friends support is the most important thing."



Her testament - Ugyen Yangchen Lhamo



'Living your truth is the most beautiful and courageous thing an individual can do. Let us shatter the glass ceiling set by the society to redefine gender and sexuality in our own beautiful and unique terms.'



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