

**Tour de Queer India**  
**- A German's fascination with strong women –**  
by Urmila Goel, Germany

I came to India, looking for lesbians there, thinking they must be terribly suppressed and totally unheard of. I wanted to learn more about them, and thought I could help them getting a wider public abroad. I was fortunate enough to have a friend in Delhi, who introduced me to many others. I met all these lesbians, bisexuals, dykes, women attracted to women, and whatever else they may call themselves. I learned to say queer women, and I was impressed. I learned much more. The women I met were so much more at home in queer discourses, so much further in developing concepts, so much more active than me. It was fascinating. The women were fascinating. It was the best trip through India I had so far. India became so much more diverse, vibrant, exciting than I thought before, knowing only my conservative family.

I did not tell my family about my real field of research. I just said I was working on women's issues, which sparked some stupid remarks from the husband of my niece. To another niece I had actually come out earlier, and she had been surprisingly comfortable with it. But I did not want to tell the rest of the family, they only would be irritated and cause problems for my father. There is no point in creating trouble in my family. I am not living in India, I do not have to deal with my family there. My father has to, even if he is in Germany. To him I am out. That is enough.

So I was travelling from Delhi to Mumbai to Chennai to Kerala and back to Delhi. Everywhere I met these fascinating, strong women. I felt very good in their company, I liked this India. Moving from one self-confident queer space to another I almost forgot that India is not a paradise for queer people, that all these strong women were fighting because they need to. Being with them, talking with them seemed so easy that what they told me about seemed so far away.

My reason to learn more about lesbians in India actually has its basis in Germany. I have some queer friends of South Asian origin, and they had lots of problems coming out of the closet. They thought they are the only ones, they thought their families could not handle it, the community would never accept it. And I wanted to show them, that they are not alone. That there are queer people in India - no reason to stay in the closet in Germany.

What I had not expected was that my tour through Queer India and the many interviews I conducted would actually also link to my major research project. - I am working on how Indians of the second generation in Germany use the internet to negotiate their "Indian" identity. - But I soon learned that in the context of queerness like in that of ethnic minorities one major issue is identity construction and the lack of suitable, understandable terms. When do we consider one of our identities as so important that we define ourselves through it? As an Indian in Germany? As a lesbian in India? Or dyke? Or German? Or ...? What social processes, marginalisations, prejudices, power imbalances lead us into identity politics? What do we gain and what do we lose through this? How can we struggle for the rights of the marginalised without essentialising?

I learned a lot in Queer India, I had a lot of fun and I want to come again. Thanks a lot!

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