



*India's archaic sex laws have the LGBT community more determined than ever to stake claim to their identity. But what about those who just aren't ready to be out yet?*

By NISHITA JHA

Early last year, when the world believed that India might be a tolerant place, progressive even, accessory label Fastrack released a commercial that was hailed by the hip and queer everywhere. A bright pink closet shudders at the centre of the screen. When the double doors open, an attractively tousled girl in a flouncy dress stumbles out. Another girl, wearing a leather biker, a swagger and coiffed hair, follows. The chemistry is theatrical, crackling. One smirks, the other giggles; glib text appears across the screen – “Come out of the closet. Move on.”

On December 11, 2013, when the Supreme Court decided that ‘unnatural sex’ between two consenting adults was an offence under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, it became a little harder to strut out of the closet. Of course, it was never easy. In a society unable to deal with the idea of sex for pleasure, a culture where 45-year-old film stars giggle and claim they are virgins, talking about sex continues to be a painfully awkward experience.

Before they passed what is widely being hailed as a regressive and medieval law, the Supreme Court’s judges considered some painful questions of their own: what is unnatural sex? Did they know anyone who had tried it? Were there any members of the legal fraternity who confessed to being gay?

If one were to consider retired Justice Singhvi’s description of what goes ‘against nature’ (which includes fellatio), the number that confesses to enjoying it could not be called miniscule. Yet the possibility that judges of the country’s highest legal court had never met a homosexual person made me wonder – is the LGBT community paying an unfair price for staying under the radar? Apart from the gay pride march (where activists make sure there are enough masks to go around) what if homosexuals, like most others in this country, usually find themselves in company where sexual preferences are not discussed, and any mention of specific sexual acts one finds enjoyable are met with immediate censure, or worse, harassment? ▶