

LGBTs find a voice at IIT-Gandhinagar

Following gender sensitisation and session with an expert, students are veered towards accepting LGBTs amongst them and also have a more positive approach towards them

Kuldeep.Tiwari
@timesgroup.com
TWEETS @kuldeep_2105

The Indian Institute of Technology – Gandhinagar (IIT-Gn) is set to form an LGBT group (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) to create a better environment for students who identify themselves with this group. The institute has a ‘care centre’ for gender equality. Now, following gender sensitisation and sessions with students by concerned experts, the institute is on way to form an LGBT group.

Following a long and interesting discussion on the subject, ‘Queer Movement in India: Rights, Struggles and Activism’ by Pallav Patankar of The Humsafar Trust in Mumbai and IIT-Gn students, their orientation towards LGBT group has turned positive.

Meanwhile, a few gay, lesbian and bisexual girls also came forward to talk about their sexual orientation. Raagi Sharma (name changed), 24, a masters degree student of Society and Culture at IIT-Gn, told *Mirror* that she is a bi-



Pallav Patankar of the Humsafar Trust talks to students at IIT-Gn

sexual and wishes for an LGBT group at the institution.

“I am a bisexual and some of my friends on campus know about it and have accepted me. Likewise, my school friends also know about it and they support me in my sexual orientation,” said Raagi who believes “there is some discrimination happening at the institute, maybe because people don’t understand as they are less in-

formed about it.”

Talking about the students and others, she said, “It’s fear of the unknown that students unknowingly become offensive while talking to LGBT students. I am sure the efforts of forming such a group within the institution will be helpful for such students.”

Supporting the rights of LGBT and their freedom to express themselves

the way they are, Gagriti Ganguli, a 26-year-old PhD student said, “Though I am straight I would support the formation of such a group. But my concern is like Raagi how many students will be bold enough to come forward?”

Mihika Shah, a fifth semester engineering student said, “It was an informative session and I wish there is a session on sensitisation too.”

Student Counsellor at the institute Jasbir Kaur Thadhani said, “We deal with all issues under our ‘care centre’ for gender equality, which also includes LGBT. We are planning to have more such sessions and discussions with the help of experts on third gender and LGBT issues. Gradually, we can also form a formal group based on these discussions.”

IIT-BOMBAY TOO HAS ONE

IIT-Bombay has an LGBT group called Saathi that was formed by the students themselves. Likewise, IIT-Gn students can also come up with a similar group as they have the rights/power to form groups on their own.

Pallav Patankar, director of HIV programmes and founder of The

Humsafar Trust made a presentation on ‘Queer Movement in India: Rights, Struggles and Activism’ wherein he also exposed students and others to what LGBT is all about. He also answered students queries and explained in detail about Gender, Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sexual Orientation.

Talking on why this event, Patankar told *Mirror*, “These (IIT-Gn students) are the bright minds of our country. They will be working in diverse fields. It will help them get along and be positive about someone’s gender orientation and they need to be good team members along with being competitive individuals.” He added, “A lot of students weren’t able to see in my eyes that I am a gay or probably because I was talking on the subject. I wanted to break the ice which happened to some extent.”

Patankar also said that there were lots of misconceptions about LGBT but no one wants to talk about it. They also avoid going to the doctor and avoid public health messages. “By such means, we can make them informed on the subject,” he said.