

An Ecumenical Document on Human Sexuality

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Executive Committee of the NCCI on the 16th September 2010)*



Developed by

**The Commission on Justice, Peace and Creation
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN INDIA**

An Ecumenical Document on Human Sexuality
Published by Dr. Roger Gaikwad, General Secretary,
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Message from the President

Dear Ecumenical Colleagues,

Greetings!

I write this introduction to the Asia's first initiative of developing an ecumenical document on Human Sexuality. The Commission on Justice, Peace and Creation was mandated in September 2009 to study the issues related to Human Sexuality in the light of Delhi High Court's verdict to repeal the IPC Sec 377, which caused great commotion and restlessness among the faith communities all over the country. But by considering the importance, I have proposed the NCCI CJPC to undertake this Study in the 2009 General Body. The study was systematically, sensitively and successfully carried out in India, through interface between Church Leaders and Sexual Minorities, Interfaith Leaders' meet, Theological Round Table, Workshops and symposiums. The Executive Secretary of the NCCI - CJPC put his hard work and identified able and committed people, groups and organizations who work among the Sexual Minorities, and the Christian Sexual Minorities in bringing this historically important, timely, relevant and appropriate document. The development of this policy inscripts a landmark feat for NCCI in its centenary expedition cranium for linking its constituent cohorts in addressing the issues to Sexuality and Sexual Minorities and Ministering the Sexual Minorities in India and around the globe.

NCCI's initiatives during the years have been in the form of creating awareness, Advocacy, Campaigns Trainings, Workshops and Capacity building through Churches, Regional Councils, Theological Colleges and Seminaries, Sunday Schools, Youth and Women's Fellowships and National Ecumenical Organisations, assuring synergy of wherewithal in Church and other sectors to take up the challenges to minister the Sexual Minorities, Cross-Learnings and Cross Fertilization for better cooperation from Love, Justice and Peace perspective, developing resources, Bible Study Materials and Text books and other related publications and networking with other stakeholders which includes engaging with another faiths.

I personally appeal to all the NCCI member Churches and other constituent members to consider the importance of the concerns and implement and mainstream the policy through all your ministries. My vision is that, this effort is to reach beyond Churches and Christianity towards the establishment of 'Reign of God'.

As a Chairperson I personally congratulate, appreciate and thank Rev. R. Christopher Rajkumar, Executive Secretary, Commission on Justice, Peace and Creation and the Team which put all its efforts for articulating this policy and to the Honorable Members of the General Body of the NCCI for their approval and adoption for implementation.

Yours in God's Service,
Bishop Taranath S. Sagar,
President -NCCI

FOREWORD

We live in a world of pluralities, and therefore of multiple options. In the words of Christian social commentator Os Guinness, "Life is now a smorgasbord with an endless array of options. Whether it a hobby, holiday, lifestyle, world view of religion, there's something for everybody and every taste, age, sex, class and interest." The result of this multiplication of choice is a vast diversity of life-styles. Quite often on TV and Internet we get the message, "Define your own universe!" and people are increasingly attempting to do just that. The multiplication of choices that has emerged from technological and social changes has, in our 21st century society, inevitably spilled over into the area of human sexuality and sexual relationships.

Some researchers assert that sexual behavior is determined by genetics, while some others argue that it is molded by the environment. This is the 'nature versus nurture' debate, in which one can define nature as those behavioral traits that are due to innate characteristics, such as instincts and drives. The concept of nurture can be defined as the environmental factors or external stimuli that influence behavior, emotions, and thinking. Human Sexuality could best be understood as the total expression of who you are as a human being, your femaleness or your maleness. Everyone is a sexual being. Your sexuality is the interplay between body image, gender, identity, gender roles, sexual orientation, relationships, etc. It includes attitudes, values, knowledge and behaviours. Families, culture, society, values and beliefs influence how people express their sexuality.

Churches in general have not addressed the issue of 'Sexuality'. The very mention of the term 'sexuality' leads Christians to think about the word 'sex'. Most teaching and

discussion of sex in churches (when it is present at all) tends to be 'sex-negative'. In other words it focuses on encouraging Christians not to sin sexually and to keep themselves sexually pure. For instance during the Victorian era, it was asserted that all sexual acts were sinful, unless they were specifically done for the purpose of procreation. Others have claimed that the original sin of Adam and Eve was a sexual act, represented by the eating of the forbidden fruit. So also there have been differing views among the churches about the place of the human body in our relationship with God. Likewise there have differing views about the place of sexual abstinence in Christian discipleship.

The purpose of this document is to invite and encourage churches to articulate mature responsible views on human sexuality and to enable Christians to live by such perspectives in their inter-personal relationships. We need to begin to teach the subject of sexuality with more positive and affirming messages about the biblical basis of sexuality, its compatibility with our spirituality and God's desire for us to bring our sexuality and all its accompanying aspects into God's presence. Rather than avoid and ignore difficult issues associated with human sexuality, churches need to begin to engage in meaningful dialogue concerning biblical theology and ethics. In other words, it is important to recognise that human sexuality is a wonderful gift from our Creator; it is an integral part of our personalities. At the same time, since all human beings are created in the image of God, we need to discern this image in all, relate to all in justice and love, and thus include all of us in God's family.

Roger Gaikwad
General Secretary,
National Council of Churches

Acknowledgment:

From the depth of my heart I would like to record my gratitude to the Rt. Rev. Dr. Taranath S. Sagar, President, NCCI, the Office Bearers and the Honorable Executive Committee of the NCCI for their confidence in me and for their encouraging support for taking on this invaluable two-year study project on "Indian Churches' Response to Issues related to Human Sexuality". So, I sincerely thank all the Members of the J.P.C. Commission, the Members of the Executive Committee and General Body, and the constituent members of the NCCI, for enabling all of us to responsibly address this very important issue of Human Sexuality in our times, and for adopting this document as a historical step towards facilitating Indian Christianity to be responsibly inclusive.

I specifically would like to mention the hard work rendered by the working group members (kindly refer the list annexured at the end of this document) and the advisors for making themselves available and extending their full cooperation in completing this study in time. Their knowledge and wisdom, their dialogical interactions, and their mature openness in understanding perspectives different from their own, contributed immensely to the drafting of the document.

I would like to record in particular my grateful appreciation of Rev. Dr. Joseph Prabhakar Dayam, Dr. George Zachariah and Ms. Edwina Pereira for their untiring commitment to compiling the document, and to Ms. Florence David for helping us in making the document presentable.

I also acknowledge the pivotal role played by my

predecessors, Rev. Dr. George Mathew Nallunakkal (presently HG Geevarghese Mor Coorilos) and Rev. Dr. Chandran Paul Martin (who started addressing this issue in the early 90s) for their constant advice and for providing us with study materials to make the study successful. A special word of thanks to Dr. Aruna Gnanadason, who when she was on the Staff of the World Council of Churches, shared study documents with us to strengthen our work.

Grateful mention must also be made of Rev. Dr. Roger Gaikwad, General Secretary for his encouragement, advice and help in finalizing and logically organizing the document, as well as to my former colleagues Rev. Raj Bharath Patta, Rev. Dr. Mar Atsongchanger, Adv. Anjana Masih and Bishop Dr. D. K. Sahu (former General Secretary) for their contribution to this study.

I am grateful to all the resource persons and participants for their inputs during different sessions, especially the friends from the LGBTQ communities and PDSOs for their confidence in all of us while sharing their stories and challenging all Indian Christian Faith Based Communities to be justly, lovingly and practically inclusive by accepting all God-created humans as they are. It is their challenging inputs which have contributed significantly towards giving a clearer perspective on various issues in this study.

I also thank the following Churches and organizations for their passion for and commitment to the cause, and their helpful support in organizing the interfaces, dialogues, consultations, discussions, round tables and conferences at different places in Chennai, Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi and Bangalore: the Arcot Lutheran Church (ALC), Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College (BTESSC), Christian Institute for Study of Religion and Society (CISRS), Church of North India Programme

Department (CNI), Church of South India Synod (CSI) and CSI Diocese of Madras, India Peace Centre (IPC), Inter Church Service Association (ICSA), International Services Association India (INSA-INDIA), Maharashtra Christian Council (MCC), SANGAMA (Bengaluru based LGBTQ Rights Advocacy Organization), South Asia Theological Research Institute (SATHRI), Senate Centre for Extension and Pastoral Theological Research (SCEPTRE), Student Christian Movement of India (SCMI), Tamil Nadu Christian Council (TNCC), United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India (UELCI) and Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) of Mumbai.

Indeed I am grateful to God for providing me supporting churches and organizations, committed resource persons and participants, and a dedicated team of colleagues who have helped in making this document possible.

I am indebted to the Inclusive God of all creation for challenging me in my faith journey during this study as I listened to the stories and cries of the stigmatized and discriminated, who questioned exclusive faith expressions. I sincerely pray that this document would inspire all of us to go beyond our traditional faith perspectives to evolve a mature understanding of the issues related to sex, and to help us embrace neglected and discriminated persons, as God has exemplified in Jesus. Let us continually trust in God as we seek to fulfill the divine will and be partners in God's all-inclusive Mission.

In Christ,
Rev. R. Christopher Rajkumar,
Executive Secretary,
Commission on Justice, Peace and Creation, NCCI

Background and History

The honorable Executive Committee mandated the Commission on Justice, Peace and Creation to undertake a study on the mixed reaction of Indian faith communities to the Delhi High Court's verdict directing the Government of India to process the repealing of Sec 377 in IPC which criminalizes homo sexuality since, it was misused by the police. In accordance with the mandate, the CJPC engaged itself in a two year study, aiming at:

- Reviewing the situation arising out of aggressive expressions of both sides relating to the review of Sec. 377 of IPC.
- Listening to the Churches' Engagement Experiences on the issue of PDSOs and Human Sexuality.
- Appraising the Churches' Mission in Today's India within the framework of dignity and inclusiveness.
- Reading together sensibly the Biblical passages which refer to Human Sexuality.
- Recommending Involvement Avenues and Strategies to the Churches.

Programatization of the Study:

The Commission on Justice, Peace and Creation (CJPC) devoted a lot of time in programatizing the study professionally and efficiently by having several sittings and sessions with the Commission Members, Church Leaders, Theologians, Lay women and men, Christian Transgender(s), Christian PDSOs, Activists, and NCCI Executive Secretaries and General Secretary. It organized several meaningful and fruitful interventions and interactive sessions such as interfaces, Church and interfaith leaders meetings, theological roundtables and workshops. These were organized jointly with UELCI, SCMI, CISRS, BTE-SSC, SATHRI, SCEPTRE, YMCA, ICOSA, Tamil Nadu Christian Council, Maharashtra Christian Council, CSI Chennai Diocese, Arcot Lutheran Church and several other Churches and Organizations in the course of two years. These meetings were held in Delhi, Chennai, Mumbai, and Kolkata. The Mumbai Church Leaders Meet and The Theological Round Table in Kolkata were the turning points in the study process.

These initiatives paved the way for several Theologians and Church Leaders to engage in interaction with friends from the LGBT communities on several occasions. These interactions were dialogical in nature. There were also times of heated arguments which made the sessions vibrant with cross-learning exercises. Indeed there were several learning experiences in this study process.

The Mumbai meeting analyzed the context in which Churches and their Ministers are targeted and blamed for sex scandals. This analysis led to the question whether churches were sensitized and capable enough to address issues related to PDSOs, Sex and Sexuality. So, it was suggested to hold a theological roundtable on the subject as well as to emphasize the importance of these particular concerns while training candidates for pastoral ministry in Seminaries. The Kolkata Round Table was initiated as an academic exercise but after listening to friends from the PDSO Communities and the theological questions they raised, there was a drastic change in the thinking of the participants. Instead of adopting and circulating a statement on the issue, the participants sent a Message to the Indian Churches on Human Sexuality, articulating their beliefs and convictions. They also proposed to organize a 'Bible Study' workshop on Human Sexuality in order to facilitate Christian Faith Based Communities to develop a mature understanding on Human Sexuality. Accordingly a Bible Study workshop was conducted and 12 Bible Studies were developed. These Bible Studies will soon be published.

The above-mentioned study process culminated with the drafting of this Ecumenical Document on Human Sexuality. In preparing the draft, the outcomes of each segment of the study process were considered. So also the Ecumenical Documents adopted by the World Council of Churches and Lutheran World Federation were studied. As mentioned earlier, this draft was presented to the Executive Committee of the NCCI. It was accepted by the

Executive Committee with the recommendation that the document be edited before it is circulated to the constituent members. Accordingly the document was edited and made available for circulation and implementation. Now this booklet has been published and is being made available so that individual readers, churches and church-related bodies would be able to look at issues of human sexuality from a mature theological perspective.

Acknowledgement:

I am grateful to all the participants of the study and drafting process, my colleagues, the Chair and Members of the Commission, the Honorable Executive Committee, the General Body and the Constituent Members of the NCCI for enabling all of us to responsibly address this very important issue of Human Sexuality in our times.

Sincerely,
Rev. R. Christopher Rajkumar
Executive Secretary,
Commission on Justice, Peace and Creation

An Ecumenical Document on Human Sexuality

[Adopted by the Honorable General Body of the National Council of Churches in India, on 24th Sept. 2011 for implementation (vide Res. No.21/GB/2011)]

Preamble:

At the heart of Christian faith is the core spirituality which each Christian is called to follow: Love God and love your neighbour as yourself. Based on the foundational theological understanding that every human being is made in the image of God, we urge the Churches to review and affirm sexuality as a gift from God. While we celebrate this divine gift, we lament the loss of its sacred character in the way in which we perceive and practice sexuality, resulting in acts of sexual violence. Therefore we affirm:

1. *Love in all its forms, 'agape', 'philea' and 'eros', is central to the Christian understanding of the divine and the consequent ordering of human communities.*

In essence, God is love. The Bible bears witness to this self-revealing God of love. It bears witness to a God who out of love reaches out to liberate creation. The New Testament suggests that the summary of God's Law is love. Accordingly, the Christian vocation is to love God and to love the neighbor as one's own self. The Christian faith tradition has understood love in three forms: 'Agape', 'Philea' and 'Eros'. All these three forms of love are integrated and interrelated. In 'agapeic' love God

gives God-self away for creation. In 'phileal' love God comes to dwell with us and befriends us. At the heart of this self-giving and befriending love of God is a desire within the life of God to know and to be known. This 'erotic' desire of God to know and be known makes 'agape' and 'philea' possible. As God reaches out to us to know us, we are invited to enter into the triune life of God by "knowing" God. This "knowing" in the New Testament tradition is an 'erotic' knowing. It arises out of our "restless" quest for our life with and in God. At the heart of all our human relationships is the desire to know and to be known. This desire which is a gift from God as a consequence of being created in the image of God makes all human relationships possible.

2. *Sexuality is characteristic of our being created in the image of God and has the potential to facilitate our becoming in God.*

At the foundational core of Christian theological anthropology is the belief that we are all created in the image of God. As being counterparts of God, we reflect God's longing and capacity to love. To be in the image of God, therefore, is to be in love as relational beings. Our desire to know and to be known by the other is characteristic of the love that binds human communities, a manifestation of which we see in the making of love in a covenantal relationship. This form of love expressed in mutual respect, consensus and tender care enables us to grow in the bond of love thus facilitating the sanctifying process of our becoming into the likeness of Christ which is love.

3. *Sexuality is essentially relational and has pluriform expressions.*

Sexuality as an indispensable dimension of all human development and life is as complex and diverse as the human population, because each human experiences and expresses sexuality in different ways. Sexuality is pluriform, ambiguous and fluid. Sexuality is essentially relational and involves human relations with the self, the other and the divine.

4. *Sexuality can however be distorted.*

Though human sexuality is an indispensable dimension of life, it is also experienced and expressed in a distorted way. The beauty, sacredness and transcendence of materiality of human sexuality is distorted by unequal power relations, violence, objectification and commodification of the body and sexual reductionism instead of a liberative sexuality. This distorted concept of sexuality is underpinned by culture, theology and the judgmental moralizing of the church.

5. *We need to Re-read Sexuality in Scripture, Tradition and Liturgy*

Readings of scripture, tradition and liturgy, with openness to sensuality, affirm sexuality. Scripture provides us with instances of deep love, sensuality and sexuality being expressed by biblical characters. The biblical vision of the future of the world is couched in a sensuous language of the union of the bride and the bridegroom.

Christian tradition in its mystic spirituality and the consequent aesthetic expressions have embraced sexuality as a form of Christian love. Such awareness calls us to re-read the scripture and tradition to retrieve the sacred character of sexuality and its centrality in our spiritual pursuits.

6. *The dichotomy between spirituality and physicality is blurred when sexuality is embraced within a horizon of human flourishing and covenantal love.*

Our popular imagination of reality and the consequent spiritual practice is conceived in dualistic terms of dichotomy between the “spiritual” and the “material.” Such dichotomy often results in trivializing sexuality or relegating sexuality as being something profane. Such dichotomy and the consequent distortion of sexuality can be overcome by embracing sexuality as a gift from God and practiced with recognition that it facilitates human flourishing and deepens covenantal love.

7. *The Church has to be an inclusive just community*

A theological conversation on sexuality will further enable the church's self-understanding and witness as a welcoming and affirming community, making space within which the human rights and dignity of all will be upheld.

Working Group Members:

Representatives from LGBTQ Communities:

Miss. Shakthi Devi (CSI Madras Diocese, Chennai)
Miss. Noory (CSI Madras Diocese, Chennai)
Mr. Reginald Rex (C/o INSA, Bengaluru)
Mr. Anto James (Chennai)

Activist Representative:

Ms. Edwina Pereira (INSA)

Youth Representatives:

Ms. Belinda Prais (Church of South India)
Rev. Georvin Joseph (Marthoma Syrian Church)
Ms. Sweety Helen (Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church)
Mr. Vinod Wesley (Church of South India)

Church Leaders and Theologians:

Rev. Dr. Prabhakar Dayam (Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church)
Dr. George Zachariah (Marthoma Syrian Church)
Rev. Dr. Peniel Rajkumar (Church of South India)
Rev. Dr. Jeyachitra (Tamilnadu Theological Seminary)
Ms. Anungla Lemtur (Baptist Church)
Rev. Fr. Dr. Jerry Kurian (Jacobite Orthodox Church)
Rev. Philip Peacock (Church of North India)
Rev. Logan Samuel (United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India)
Rev. Raj Bharath Patta (Student Christian Movement of India)
Rev. Pramod Frazer (Methodist Church of India)

Advisors / Consultants

HG Geevarghese Mor Coorilos (Jacobite)
Rev. Dr. PBM Basaiawmoit (Vice-president - NCCI & Presbyterian)
Dr. Aruna Gnanadasan (Ecumenist (CSI))
Ms. Magdalene Jeyarathinam (Christian Counsellor)
Rev. Dr. Wati Longchar (Baptist)
Rev. Richard Rodericks (Methodist)
Rev. Dr. Roger Gaikwad (General Secretary NCCI)

Convener and Secretary:

Rev. R. Christopher Rajkumar, Executive Secretary,
Commission on Justice, Peace and Creation - NCCI

**Theological Roundtable On Churches'
Response To Human Sexuality**

5th - 6th Dec. 2009, Kolkata

Message To The Indian Christian Communities

We, the participants of the Theological Roundtable on Churches' Response to Human Sexuality jointly organized by NCCI, SCEPTRE, CISRS, and SCMI, who are engaged in different ministries in Church and Society as Bishops, Church Leaders, Theological Educators, Research Scholars, Professional Counselors, Lawyers, and Activists with different sexual orientations, after several brainstorming discussions and sessions on Biblical, Theological, Ministerial, Ecclesiastical and Legal perspectives, resolve to send the following message on Human Sexuality to all Christian communities in India in general, and to the NCCI member churches, regional councils, theological institutions, Christian organizations, and our ecumenical partners in particular.

We affirm that sexuality is a divine gift, and hence God intends us to celebrate this divine gift in committed, consensual, and monogamous relationships. It is in such celebrations of our sexuality that we grow into the fullness of our humanity, and experience God in a special way.

We believe that our negative attitudes towards sexuality and our body-denying spirituality stem from our distorted understanding of God's purpose for us. The embodied God who embraced flesh in Jesus Christ is the

ground for us to love our bodies and to celebrate life and sexuality without abuse and misuse. So God invites us to experience sexual fulfillment in our committed relationships of justice-love with the commitment to be vulnerable, compassionate, and responsible.

We recognize that there are people with different sexual orientations. The very faith affirmation that the whole human community is created in the image of God irrespective of our sexual orientations makes it imperative on us to reject systemic and personal attitudes of homophobia and discrimination against sexual minorities. We consider the Delhi High Court verdict to “decriminalize consensual sexual acts of adults in private” upholding the fundamental constitutional and human rights to privacy and the life of dignity and non-discrimination of all citizens as a positive step.

We believe that the Church as 'Just and Inclusive Community' is called to become a community without walls to reach out to people who are stigmatized and demonized, and be a listening community to understand their pains, desires, and hopes.

We envision Church as a sanctuary to the ostracized who thirst for understanding, friendship, love, compassion and solidarity, and to join in their struggles to live out their God-given lives. So we appeal to the Christian communities to sojourn with sexual minorities and their families without prejudice and discrimination, to provide them ministries of love, compassionate care, and justice.

We request the National Council of Churches in India and its members to initiate an in-depth theological study on Human Sexuality for better discernment of God's purpose for us. This involves a deeper engagement with Bible, traditions, and other disciplines such as social theories, psychology, and medical science. This process should be an inclusive one where people with different sexual orientations can learn from each other and contribute to this process without prejudice and fear.

We also request the Theological Fraternities in India to further help this process through integrating issues related to Human Sexuality into the process of theological and ministerial formation.

We hope and pray that the embodied God will bless our endeavors to grow into the fullness of life, and to transform our faith communities into rainbow communities of the beloved and equals.

The Participants
Theological Roundtable on 'Human Sexuality'
06th Dec. 2009

Indian Faith Based Organizations' Response to Human Sexuality

A Report

The Commission on Justice, Peace and Creation and Policy, Governance and Public Witness, NCCI jointly organised a Discussion on *Indian Faith Based Organisations' Response to Human Sexuality* on 18th July 2009 at India International Centre Annexe, Lodhi Road, New Delhi.

Why there was a need to organize an Open Debate?

The Delhi High Court vide judgment dated 2nd July 2009 decided a Public Interest Litigation filed by Naz Foundation India Trust in 2001 wherein they challenged section 377 Indian Penal Code 1860 and asked for legalization of homosexual intercourse between consenting adults. The bench comprising of Chief Justice A.P.Shah and Justice S.Murlidhar in their 105 page judgment changed section 377 IPC by decriminalizing consensual homosexual activities between two adults. The bench hold that section 377 IPC which criminalizes consensual sexual acts of adult in private, is violating Articles 14, 15 and 21 of the Constitution of India which guarantees equal opportunity of life and equality to all its citizen before the law.

Aim of organizing a Discussion:

The aim of organizing an open debate on the issue of Homosexuality and Section 377 IPC was to initiate a debate and discussion on the recent judgment of the Delhi High Court. This was an attempt to deliberate and

take a holistic view on this issue by bringing various aspects of society across the table. The reaction to the judgement after it was made public were quench and extreme. In the light of the recent judgment passed by the Delhi High Court on the issue of holding that homosexuality is not a crime, the Commission on Policy, Governance and Public Witness organized debate/discussion on the aforementioned issue.

Objectives

- To discuss the effect of judgment from social, legal and religious point of view.
- To understand the effect on society at large, after bringing homosexuality out of purview of section 377 IPC

Programme

- A discussion and study of judgment passed by Delhi High Court on Section 377 of IPC from Legal, Social and Religious Perspectives.

The Panelists comprised of:

Ms. Anuradha Mukherji,
Programme Manager, Naz India.

The Very Rev. Dr. M.S.Sakariah Ramban,
Delhi Orthodox Church centre.

Sh. Mujtaba Farooq,
Secretary Jammat-e-Islami Hind.

Sardar Bhupinder Singh,
Delhi Sikh Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee.

Ms Anuradha Mukherji, Naz India, while appreciating the initiative of National Council of Churches in India said that Naz Foundation India Trust is a Delhi based NGO working on HIV/AIDS. It aims to sensitize the community to the prevalence of HIV as well as highlight issues related to Sexuality and Sexual health.

And then she explained Why Naz foundation had filed Public Interest Litigation on the issue in 2001. While working with the Gay or MSM community it was realized that section 377 IPC was being used to harass people from the said community and extort money from them. It was difficult to access the community from health perspective as they were unable to come out of them closet, fearing imprisonment. While homosexuals are of no less value than any other people, section 377 IPC demeans them and infringes their right to live with dignity. While welcoming the judgment of Delhi High Court dated 2nd July 2009 she laid stress upon the quoted text of the judgment; If there is one constitutional tenet that can be said to be underlying theme of the Indian Constitution, it is that of 'inclusiveness'.

The Court believes that the Indian Constitution reflects this value deeply ingrained in Indian society, nurtured over several generations. The inclusiveness that Indian society traditionally displayed, literally in every aspect of life, is manifest in recognizing a role in society for everyone. Those perceived by the majority as "deviants" or 'different' are not on that score excluded or ostracized. Where society can display inclusiveness and understanding, such persons can be assured of a life of

dignity and non-discrimination. This was the 'spirit behind the Resolution' of which Nehru spoke so passionately. In our view, Indian Constitutional law does not permit the statutory criminal law to be held captive by the popular misconceptions of who the LGBTs are. It cannot be forgotten that discrimination is antithesis of equality and that it is the recognition of equality which will foster the dignity of every individual".

Very Rev. Dr. M.S.Sakariah Ramban, Delhi Orthodox Diocese, appreciated the open debate on the issue by the Church Council. He said that Orthodox Church believes that homosexuality is unethical and ungodly as it is against Biblical teachings and hurts moral consciousness of the nation. He also cited the incident of Sodom to Gomorrah from the Bible and said the incident is an eye opener to know how God punished homosexuals. He stressed that religion is custodian of morality. He stated that legislation made provision to consider homosexuality as crime on the basis of the then prevalent customs and traditions. It was further argued by him that Homosexuality with consensus of mind of adults is not a matter of right as homosexual think. In support of his view he asked whether a thief, who steals because he is not rich enough to sustain his family, can be allowed to steal on the basis of his right to live? He said if homosexuality is being held as part of human rights, then there will be no crime which humanity can oppose. He said homosexuality is a disease which needs proper counseling and treatment. Homosexuals need sympathy as it disdains, deride and ridicule the basic concept of family.

Sh. Mujtaba Farooq, Secretary Jammata-e-Islami Hind welcomed the debate on the issue of decriminalizing of homosexuality. He said that as far as Islam is concerned, homosexuality is *haram* means illegitimate and punishable act. While citing the story of Sodom from Quran (same is also found in the Holy Bible) he stressed that this perversion namely homosexuality was unknown to world till then and it is deadly sin. He further stated that homosexuality should be criminalized as it is unnatural; homos destroy the family system as it terminates institution of marriage; it is injurious to health both mentally and psychologically; it is an escape from social duties and obligations and enhances selfish tendency; it legitimizes obscenity; it discontinues family because no offspring's can come out of gay marriages. He reiterated that homosexuals should be treated on health grounds as they are mentally and psychologically troubled. He laid emphasis that they do not support allowing homosexuals to keep continuing their wrong practices which are dangerous to not only to their own health but to society as well.

Sardar Bhupinder Singh, Delhi Sikh Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee said that Sikhism does not approve of homosexuality, however, many Sikhs consider that homosexual thoughts and behavior are natural. He said the way of living is clearly defined in Sikhism and what character of man and woman should be. Homosexuality is a psychological disorder and deficiency of spirituality which can be overcome by medication and meditation.

Legal Perspective:

Section 377 Indian Penal Code 1860 defines unnatural offence as under:

Unnatural offences: Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine.

Explanation: Penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse necessary to the offense described in this section. The section 377 IPC criminalized and made homosexuality and gay relationship an offence. The legislation had incorporated section 377 with the aim of preventing homosexuality.

The main ingredients for committing the offence are:

- accused has carnal intercourse
- such intercourse is with any man, woman or animal
- it is against the order of nature

The judgment in question has dealt with section 377 IPC in the light of rights guaranteed to citizens of India under Article 14, 15 and 21 of its Constitution. The Constitution of India guarantees fundamental rights to its citizens.

Article 14 of Constitution: “**Equality before law**”
“The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.”

Article 15 of Constitution: **“Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth”**

1. The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.
2. No citizen shall, on ground only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them, be subject to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to
 - a. access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and places of public entertainment; or
 - b. the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort maintained whole or partly out of State funds or dedicated to the use of general public.
3. Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for women and children.
4. Nothing in this article or in clause (2) or article 29 shall prevent the State from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.

Article 21 of Constitution:
“Protection of life and personal liberty”

“No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.”

It is worth mentioning here that fundamental rights were made so that all citizens were to be equally free from coercion or restriction by the state or by the society privately. Liberty is not a privilege of the few.

It was also clarified that homosexuality is a different kind of relationship and should not be judged from heterosexual perspectives. Furthermore the section 377 IPC has not been repealed by the aforesaid judgment nor legalized.

Participants Views:

The participants enthusiastically participated in the discussion on the issue raised and also put forward their views in agreement and disagreement. The religious heads as expected clearly adhered to their view that homosexuality is sin. However, the participants from the floor disagreed and agreed that that sexual orientation is one's personal choice and it cannot be condemned in the name of religious beliefs.

On the issue of it being a disease or normal behavior again spokespersons of religious organizations reiterated that it is not a normal act and needs proper counseling and treatment. While others say it's one's own choice and cannot be termed as disease.

The LGBT community person raised the issue of unjust why to differentiation between hetero and homosexuals. How can we define what is natural? Admittedly a person is borne out of heterosexual relationship and no one force him/her to be homosexual. Its one's personnel choice.

It was further clarified that the judgment does not promote homosexuality. The judgment however provides a space for the PDSOs to affirm their identity.

The were several question which arises out of aforesaid discussion /debate were :

1. Wether homosexuality is a crime or sin?
2. Is it natural, normal or disease?
3. Whether criminalizing homosexuals solely on the basis of their sexual orientation would be against the spirit of constitution which guarantees equal rights to all its citizens?
4. Why differentiate between heterosexual and homosexual?
5. Does decriminalizing homosexuality communicate that it is going to be promoted?
6. Does the faith based organization failed in their call and feel insecure with decriminalization of homosexuality among adults of consensual mind?
7. Why hesitation in accepting sexual orientation of a person when it is personnel decision of an adult individual?

Conclusion:

The debate gave Awareness about homosexuality and LGBT community to the participants as many do not have very clear understanding about the LGBT Community and the Spirit of judgment passed by the Delhi High Court in the light of Article 14, 15 and 21 of the Constitution of India, though, same was condemned out rightly.

No condition however bad or good is seen as a singularity. Admittedly, homosexuals are tiny minority community and possibly cause no threat to heterosexual community. The choice before us boils down to just two. Firstly, we treat homosexuality as illegal and drive homosexuals underground by condemning a section of fellow human beings into lifetimes of misery and hopelessness. Secondly, acknowledge the reality of their existence and simply leave them alone to be what they are and allow them to pursue dignified lives of their own.

While submitting my report, we take this opportunity to thank Bishop Dr. D. K. Sahu who has readily permitted to organize this debate. Though, due to his pre occupied schedule, he could not attend the same. I also thank the Presidium from whom I received suggestion and ideas which were incorporated in the debate.

Adv. Anjna Mashi, Executive Secretary
Commission on Policy, Governance and Public Witness

R. Christopher Rajkumar, Executive Secretary
Commission on Justice, Peace and Creation

Indian Express:
<http://www.indianexpress.com/news/church-panel-organises-discussion-on-sec-377/491313/1>
Christian Today:
<http://in.christiantoday.com/articles/naz-foundation-and-faith-based-organisations-debate-homosexuality/4238.htm>

A Study and Public Debate: Indian Church and Repealing of the Section 377 of IPC

ICSA, Chennai 28, July 2009

Report:

Recognizing and accepting the People with Different Sexual Orientation (PDSOs) has been hotly debated in India for several years now. In the recent past attempts have been made to review the controversial Sec. 377 of the Indian penal code which is allegedly used to harass people with different sexual orientations. The Delhi High Court has directed the release of all those arrested under the section. Despite assurance from the Federal Law Minister of the Government of India, that people from all walks of lives, and particularly the Faith Based Organisations will be consulted before taking action on the controversial section of IPC, the issue is snowballing into a major national debate. Amidst arguments from both sides, representatives from various organisations and religions have started airing their views.

Time is therefore ripe for us to study and review the issue with a Christian commitment. We need to initiate a study and public debate within the Churches. With this Christian commitment in mind, the NCCI Commission on Justice Peace and Creation called her constituent members Churches, Organizations and the members from the (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Community for a one day study and reflection in Chennai on 28th July 2009.

There were 110 participants from the Church of South India, Marthoma, Andhra Evangelical Lutheran

Churches, Arcot Lutheran Church, Methodist Churches in India, Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church, Salvation Army, Orthodox Church and Evangelical Churches in India, Tamilnadu Theological Seminary, Gurukul, Madras Theological College, CSI BDM, UELCI, CASA, NMSI, CLS, World Vision, FMPB, SCMI and AICUF including 50 from LGBT community. This debate was jointly hosted by the Christian Service Agency, Church of South India, Tamilnadu Christian Council, Ministry Among the Transgenders and the Student Christian Movement of India.

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Dharendra Kumar Sahu, General Secretary NCCI inaugurated the study. While speaking Bishop Sahu said this deliberation is to engage the Church and Civil Society to address the issue by considering and using the Christian values as tools such as, love of God, non-discriminative and just and inclusiveness. Also he said, NCCI does not want to be hasty in making any statements but will facilitate the platforms to listen to both the groups and place it before the NCCI constituent members among them to come out with a position. He also welcomed the move to decriminalize adult homosexual relations even though he disapproves of homosexuality. Homosexuals should not be branded as criminals, but they should be nurtured and helped out by Churches as part of God's creation.

Rt. Rev. Dr. V. Devasahayam, the Chairperson of the Tamilnadu Christian Council and the CSI Bishop in Chennai delivered the keynote address. At the outset Bishop Devasahayam welcomed the Delhi High Court

Judgment by saying it has helped the Church and Civil Society to understand the issue of 'human sexuality'. He appreciated the NCCI-CJPC's initiative to bring out a study document for wider ecumenical discussion. Bishop Devasahayam explained about the Sec 377 of IPC and its implications and how it is misused by the law enforcement personnel. He also called the Church and Civil Society to have a proper knowledge on 'LGBT' communities and 'PDSOs'. Condemning and rejecting them is easy but the Church is not called to behave so he said. He also referred to the Luther's theology of salvation by grace alone. Since the God of the Bible is so gracious towards all humankind why do we have to have confrontational attitude and combative approach he asked.

Also, Bishop Devasahayam called the Churches to re-read the scriptures which refer to homosexuality and unnatural sex from the present context. Along with the Judeo-Christian tradition the Indian and other societies are also been facing this issue for long years; it is not a new phenomenon for the Indian Church and Society and so let us look at the issue missiologically. He also mentioned that some scientific studies have proved that homosexuality is 'genetical', if so, according to our faith, we all are created in God's image and the PDSOs are also created in God's image. Therefore ignoring them and discriminating them is nothing but we are insulting our creator God. So, let the Indian Church accompany the PDSOs towards holistic wellbeing of them and execute

the mission of God towards a just and inclusive society. Rev. Dr. George Zachariah presented a paper on 'Church: A Rainbow Community of the Beloved and Equals: Reflection on Christian responses to the repealing of the Sec 377 of IPC'. Dr. George dealt with the issue of "Morality and Missiology". There he finds out that homosexuality is not a new phenomenon which has been imported from the Western world to India. It is very part and parcel of the society, because the '*kamasutra*' and '*Khajuraho*' traditions openly depict homosexual acts. He also observes that how the Christian mission to heathens targeted to address such issues in the eastern world when it was exiting in their lands. Dr. George goes further and surveys different models in ethical and theological responses such as, 'RejectivePunitive Positions', 'RejectiveNon-Punitive Positions', 'Qualified Acceptance of Homosexuality' and 'Full Acceptance Positions'. And he also tried to interpret the related passages in the present context. According to Dr. Zachariah Sec 377 in IPC is a mission strategy of the imperialistic project of British. He proposed a new Queer perspective in Indian Christian hermeneutical exercise. His vision for the Indian Church to prioritize its mission and ministry 'towards the Rainbow Community and Beloveds and Equals.

Rev. Dr. Daniel Premkumar presented a paper from Pastoral approach, in which he interpreted, selected passages contextually. He suggested that, unless we deploy the pastoral method of accepting and visiting the PDSOs the Church will loose its integrity.

Advocate Anjna Masih, presented an overview on the judgment. There she mentioned that the proposal of repealing Sec. 377 of IPC is just a suggestion but its importance should be seen with considering of Articles 14 (Human Dignity) Article 15 (Human Rights), Article 19 (Discrimination) and Article 21 (Inclusion). She raised the question that why can not Church consider those components and accept the PDSOs just as the law accepts?

A panel discussion was planned with representatives from the PDSO communities, a Sexologist, Psychiatrist, Social Worker, Christian Youth Worker and Counsellor. The discussions were found meaningful and helped the participants to understand the pain and cry of the PDSOs.

Mr. Anto James from LGBT Community said that, PDSOs are barred in on the closet: “We cannot go and share our problems and no one is there to hear also. Though we live in the Society we are discriminated and treated as untouchables”. He also pleaded, “Please accept us human beings”. I did not opt for this sexual orientation but if I am born with it, whose fault is? Our life is similar to the born visually disabled person who was brought to Jesus by the people and asked 'On account of whose sin is he born blind?' I as a PDSO on also asking the same question, By whose sin or fault was I born as a PDSO?

Miss. Dahanam, a Transgender, explaining how the LGBT Communities are harassed by the Police by booking them u/s 377 of IPC, said that even the Police use them for oral sex when they are booked u/s 377 of IPC and when in police custody. She also raised the same

question “Who would be held responsible for their birth? Are our parents or God?”. She also pleaded the Churches play the role as Human Rights Defenders in different cases. Please include us also in your list and help us, when there is a Human Right Violation against the PDSOs”.

Dr. V. Jeyaraman informed the participants that castration is just a psychological treatment nothing medical in it. Since the society does not accept the Transgenders and bi-sexual they would go for surgery. So that they can have recognized identity, if the societies accept them as third sex as the Government of Tamilandu accepts legally, the thing would be different. He asserted that, social acceptance is more important than making them different by surgery. The medical science helps an individual to change their sexual appearance by a surgery but I believe that the institutions like Churches can bring changes the mindset of people to accept the PDSOs as they are which is very important.

Dr. Shanthi Davidar academically explained the whole issue of, 'homosexuality' and helped the participants to understand the differences between 'Transgender' and 'Homosexual'. She informed that homosexuality is not decease. She had brought out of several success stories of homosexuals having become normal persons. Also, she said if a PDSO is willing, counselling techniques would help them to become normal. So, she urged the Church to play a crucial role in making the PDSOs to understand that change is possible by the grace of God and that would lead them to the fuller salvation.

Rev. Solomon Raj disproved by using data as a myth that the HIV/AIDS spreads faster through the PDSOs. He says that, HIV/AIDS spreads through any kind of sexual intercourse: not only because of PDSOs. Also, he clarified that most of the PDSOs are living as couple so, the rate of spreading of HIV/AIDS through PDSOs is comparatively low. Further he said that Church has to come out and work with PDSOs instead the just contemplating the word of God in a four-walled hall.

Dr. Esther Kathiroli, as a social worker cited several stories and referred to some scientific studies to inform the participants that the PDSOs are also normal people. "Condemnation and Justification of PDSOs are against the will of God, so let us all jointly help the PDSOs to live in dignity as a plan of God". Also she raised a question "Who decides the 'natural and un-natural? Or in other words what is natural and how?"

Rev. Fr. Henry Jerome posed a searching question Is Church insecure on this issue? Since he is working among the youth he voiced the views of the youth folk. He said he was upset with the uproar of the Churches on the issue. The Church has to study the issue in depth with scientific knowledge because the society especially the younger generation is well informed about the issue. So, he called the Churches to first acquire proper scientific knowledge on the issue instead reacting pre-maturely. Judgment brought to light those LGBT communities and PDSOs have become reality in India so this issue has to be addressed by the Churches from the 'Reign of God' values. Condemnation and exclusion will make the Church 'un-contextual' but the Church is to be 'in-contextual'. He emphasized that, the Churches are to be the Human Rights Defenders of the PDSOs and LGBT Communities.

A meaningful interactive session followed, in which reciprocally, the Church representatives and LGBT community members clarified their doubts and expressed their views on the discussions and deliberations. This dialogical sessions in which even the heated arguments made the session vibrant and proved to be a learning experience. The patient explanation by the LGBT communities made the floor well informed about the issue. This sessions have helped the Church to listen to the LGBT communities and their Groans and tears.

Major. Johan William (Salvation Army), Mr. Inbaraj Jeyakumar (SCMI), Rev. Paul Francis (CSI), Ms. Noori (LGBT Community), Rev. Dr. Daniel Premkumar, Ms. Susan Jacob (Orthodox Church), Rev. Christopher Ratnasamy (Mission among the TGs CSI Madras), Rev. Dr. George Zachariah (Theologian), Dr. Mar Atsongchanger (NCCI), R. Christopher Rajkumar (NCCI) jointly prepared the study document for wider ecumenical discussion on the questions raised by the participants, Church leaders, resource people and the panelists. Rt. Rev. Dr. Dharendra Kumar Sahu, General Secretary NCCI presided over the meeting, Ms. Rachel Pradhan, Executive Secretary AICCW welcome the gathering, R. Christopher Rajkumar, Secretary, NCCI CJPC introduced the study process, Dr. Mar Atsongchanger proposed the vote of thanks and Bishop. Sahu concluded the meeting with a word of prayer and benediction.

Reported by:

R. Christopher Rajkumar,
Executive Secretary, NCCI CJPC

National Council of Churches in India

Press Release on Repealing of the Section 377 of Indian Penal Code Discussion and Dialogue

The current debate in India on the ethics of homosexuality was triggered by the verdict of the Delhi High Court on 2nd July 2009. The National Council of Churches in India initiated an open discussion on 'Decriminalization of Homosexuality in Private' following the repeal of the section 377 of IPC by the High Court on 2nd July 2009. One discussion in New Delhi on 18th July 2009 was organized by the Commission on Policy, Governance and Public Witness and the second one in Chennai on 28th July 2009 by the Commission on Justice Peace and Creation.

The Delhi Consultation was focused on listening views of leaders from Islam, Sikhism and Christianity including the Naz foundation. The Chennai Consultation on 28th July 2009 was 'a listening inclusive community' as the participants represented a wide spectrum of the church and society including Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender community. Some of the Churches and Regional Councils already have responded on this issue. May we request all to address the issue at the local level and share information with us taking into consideration the mission of the Church:

- The High Court Judgment decided a Public Interest Litigation challenging the constitutional validity of section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 filed by the Naz Foundation Trust in 2001. The bench comprising of Hon'ble Chief Justice A.P. Shah and Justice S. Murlidhar declared that section 377 IPC in so far as it criminalizes consensual sexual act of adults in private is violative of Article 14, 15 and 21 of

the Constitution of India. The provision of section 377 IPC will continue to govern non-consensual involving minors.

- The stated object of section 377 IPC according to the Union of India was to protect women and children, prevent the spread of HIV/AIDs and enforce social morality against homosexuality and was based on a conception of sexual morality specific to Victorian era drawing on notions of carnality and sinfulness.
- The High Court was of the opinion that if there is one constitutional tenet that can be said to be the underlying theme of the Indian constitution, it is that of 'inclusiveness'. The court believed that Indian Constitution reflects this value deeply ingrained in Indian society, nurtured over several generations.
- The fear is that decriminalization of homosexuality would open a potential Pandora's box leading to same sex marriages and the right of same-sex couples to adopt children. Such developments would become a threat to the definition and sanctity of marriage and related social institutions.
- The vision of an inclusive community is based on an affirmation that reference to Sodom's wickedness was not of homosexuality but the unwillingness of the people to show hospitality to the visiting strangers and their cruelty of raping.

Bishop. D. K. Sahu, General Secretary

R. Christopher Rajkumar, Executive Secretary
Commission on Justice, Peace and Creation

Visit: http://www.nccindia.in/news/pressrelease/n_123.htm

National Council Of Churches In India

Commission On Justice, Peace And Creation

Daring To Study Scriptures Publicly And Sensually: A Bible Study Workshop

February 04-06, 2011 Church Women Centre (CWC), Chennai

REPORT

National Council of Churches in India's Commission on Justice, Peace and Creation hosted a Bible study workshop on the Theme: **Daring to study scriptures publicly and sensually**, from February 4th to 6th, 2011 at Church Women's Centre, Gurukul Campus Chennai. 30 persons participated in the workshop representing various Theological Institutions, Churches and other Organizations including clergy, friends from PDSO and TG Communities.

The aim of this bible study workshop was to study scriptures "sensually" in honour of matters and issues that blur the public and private, seeking to complement "intellectual" and "organic" ways of studying scriptures. The turn to sensuality will encourage the reconstruction of how we theologize the issue of sexuality with scriptural interpretations in the context of different sexual orientations. With this aim the workshop began with the inaugural worship led by the Gurukul team on February 4, 2011 at 10.30 am. The reflection on the theme "Human Sexuality as a garden of celebrations" was led by Mr. Georvin Joseph of Gurukul

This was followed by the introductory remarks offered by Mr. Christopher Rajkumar (Executive Secretary, CPJC-NCCI) who shared the need to organize such a workshop to address the issue of Human Sexuality, a neglected topic which is often considered as taboo in the Indian Churches. Being the first workshop of its kind to be organised by NCCI it would create an impact among the churches in India in the future days to come, he concluded.

This was followed by the inaugural addresses delivered by Dr. Esther Kathiroli (General Secretary, Tamilnadu Christian Council), Rev. Dr. Ponniah Manahoran (Director, Gurukul Lutheran Theological College), Rev. Christopher Retnasamy (Director, Ministry Among Transgenders, CSI, Diocese of Madras) and Rev. Dr. Jione Havea (United Theological College, Australia). All of them shared the need for an open space to make private debates into public discourse with regard to human sexuality, and appreciated the NCCI-CJPC for the courage to address this issue which would help to eradicate the taboo that exists in the church and society.

Dr. Aruna Gnanadason delivered the keynote address on the topic "Making Issues of Sexuality a Public Discourse." Raising critical questions on the dominant notions of the authority of the Bible, she invited the Churches to engage in developing Christian interpretations of human sexuality so the Churches can speak issues of sexuality in a healthy and transparent way as a matter of public discourse and ridding it of the secrecy and intrigue that surrounds it.

Rev. Dr. Jione Havea in his address introduced the theme: Daring to Study Scriptures Publicly and Sensually. In his address, he emphasized the need to repeal the taboo about sex in our context. He challenged the churches to address the issue of sexuality publicly and proposed to explore the space for sexuality in public theology by initiating new conversations between the Bible and human sexuality in the family, the church and the public floor.

A panel discussion on different themes addressing the issue of sexuality in the Indian context was the highlight of the afternoon. The session was moderated by Mr. John Lalnuntluanga (Lecturer, LTC, Jabalpur). In his presentation on "Sexuality in Indian History," Mr. M. Aravind Jeyakumar (Lecturer, LTC, Jabalpur) explained the liberal nature of ancient Indian society which never stigmatized or condemned the celebration of human sexuality in the public sphere drawing from ancient temple sculptures, arts and literature such as *Kamasutra*. The second presentation was on "Sexuality in the Bible" presented by Rev. Jayachitra (Professor, TTS, Madurai). She presented various texts from the Bible to emphasize that sexual liberty existed in the Israelite community and in the New Testament world.

Ms. Bharati a transgender person doing her B.Th. studies at the Madras Theological Seminary and College shared her own experience and the agony that she continues to face in her family and the society because of her attitudinal change toward transgender identity. The final panelist was Mr. Vinod Wesley (an M.Th student from

Gurukul, Chennai) In his presentation on "Sex and Sexuality in the Indian Context Today" he brought out the situation of the LGBT people who are marginalised as sexual minorities and criminalized under IPC section 377. He challenged the Indian community to come out of their comfort zones and be disturbed by the unpleasant situations faced by the LGBT people and to fight for their rights to consider them as our own brothers and sisters.

On the second day (Saturday, February 5, 2011) the session started with a short worship led by the Gurukul worship team and reflection by Fr. Jerry Kurien of Malankara Jacobite Syrian Church. This was followed by an interactive session on Bible and human sexuality facilitated by Rev. Dr. Jione Havea, introducing different interpretive tools which can be used to read the Bible from a Human Sexuality perspective. He challenged the participants to dare to open the public space to invite people to engage with the biblical texts to break the taboo of sexuality in our context.

Dr. George Zachariah (Professor of Christian Ethics, Gurukul), in his address presented a theological and ethical response to the issue of sexuality on the theme "The Church: A Rainbow Community of the Beloved Equals: Reflections on Christian Responses to the Repealing of Section 377 of the IPC." He invited the Indian Church to affirm the plurality and diversity ordained by God and to engage in the mission of reconciliation with sexual minorities in the Church and society. Dr. Havea then presented the following topics and outline for group work to develop new Bible studies"

Topics

1. Celebrate body and sexuality
2. Sex, pleasure and humor
3. Sexual Orientation
4. Sexual violence, pain and cruelty
5. Masculinity and Femininity
6. Sensitivity and Relationships
7. Pollution, purity and touch
8. Promiscuity and Hypocrisy
9. Sex, prostitution and exploitation
10. Sex, Colour and Caste

The participants were divided into 10 teams to work on these themes. The groups met several times and developed the outline of their biblical reflection on the assigned themes.

On the final day (Sunday, February 6, 2011) the final session of the workshop began with a short mediation offered by Ms. Belinda Praisay and a contextual Eucharist service was conducted by the Gurukul worship team. Everyone was moved by the Eucharist service because of the opportunity they had to receive the Holy Communion from the hands of Ms. Shakthi who is a transgender.

The worship was followed by group presentations; each group presented their tentative outline for the Bible Study based on the theme selected. The session was moderated by Dr. Joine Havea. The group presentations were well appreciated with contributions made by other participants through their comments and suggestion for making the Bible Study more contextual with clarity.

In his closing remarks Dr. Havea reminded the team to make the Bible Study more creative and participatory by inviting the public to participate in the process. Rev. Christopher Rajkumar (Executive Secretary, CJPC-NCCI) in his concluding remarks expressed his gratitude to all the participants and especially to the resource persons of the workshop for their valuable contributions.

The workshop was a great inspiration to the participants to think daringly, sensually and publicly on human sexuality.

The following are the future plans that were proposed during the workshop.

- To initiate biblical and theological engagement with human sexuality at the grass root levels.
- To strive towards transforming the Church in India as an inclusive community which welcomes sexual minorities without prejudice and stigma.
- To organize similar intensive workshops in other regions with local resources.
- To revise, edit, and publish the bible studies as a booklet.
- To develop theological and biblical literature on human sexuality in vernacular languages.

To encourage the Senate of Serampore College and the theological institutions to develop courses on Human Sexuality and to offer them as required subjects.

Rev. R. Christopher Rajkumar, Executive Secretary,
Commission on Justice, Peace and Creation, NCCI