
Indian Gay activists want apology from Britain

Posted by Brenna1508 - 2008/08/16 10:12

See: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/gay-activists-in-india-want-british-apology-for-sex-law-898979.html>
<http://tinyurl.com/68y6kd>

Am I missing something here or are these demands reaching ridiculous proportions? Britain is being asked for an apology regarding a law that was enacted in India in the 19th century. India has had self rule for over 60 years so why have they not repealed this law themselves during that time?

If I went across to Ireland and demanded an apology from somebody named Murpy, "because your great great great grandfather smacked my great great great grandfather in the eye one Saturday night" I'd be laughed all the way back to Scotland!

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Re:Indian Gay activists want apology from Britain

Posted by LYDIA REID - 2008/08/16 11:46

Well I tried to find a word that surpassed ridiculous and the only word that I could find is preposterous.

I was sorely criticised when I stated I would not apologise for slavery in the past. I know many Scots were just as guilty as any other nation but not me, it may well have been an ancestor of mine but not me. I did not do or condone this atrocity. I cannot apologise for something my ancestors did. We can say we condemn this or we can say we wish our forebears had not acted this way but we cannot apologise.

The pain suffered by enslaved people probably cannot be comprehended by any person living such a free life in Scotland today. To be thought of as a possession, a chattel, an acquisition, which will increase a person's business holdings, a part of breeding stock, we will never understand how that felt.

I can also say that Britain, which in those days included Scotland, had no right to enter these countries as they did to build an empire.

We have so much slavery particularly sexual slavery in the modern world that we should concentrate on abolishing that. India should concentrate on changing the system if this is what the majority of people want. Maybe the problem lies in the fact that not enough people want the law changed.

When a country such as India gained their independence so long ago, I cannot see why they have not repealed this law after all this time.

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Re:Indian Gay activists want apology from Britain

Posted by InfrequentAllele - 2008/08/16 14:13

It should be pointed out that the call for an apology comes from a small fringe organisation and is not the official policy of the Naz Foundation, the largest South Asian organisation which campaigns for lesbian and gay rights. The move by some Indian activists has attracted criticism in the lesbian and gay media.

It's a sheer nonsense to claim that the British introduced homophobia to the Indian subcontinent and that before colonisation the country was a paradise of sexual freedom. Homophobia runs deep in South Asian culture as it does in all cultures which are strongly patriarchal and sexist. Blaming it all on the "British" is a way in which Indian society can avoid taking responsibility for its own homophobia and sexism. But even though it was the British who introduced homophobic legislation into India, India has had 60 years of independence in order to address the situation. The reason India hasn't done so is because of its own deeply ingrained and indigenous homophobia.

If anyone is interested in the history of homosexuality in India, I suggest the book 'Neither Man Nor Woman: Hijras of India' by Serena Nandra (ISBN-10: 0534509037). The Hijra are a caste of transsexuals who live on the margins of Indian society, they face rampant discrimination. Many Hijra are not in fact transsexual, but rather are effeminate gay men. The traditional values of Indian society demanded that effeminate gay men were castrated and cast to the margins of society. If that's not oppression I don't know what is.

The Indian activists want the law criminalising homosexuality between consenting adults to be abolished. They're framing their campaign in the way they are in an attempt to gain the support of Indian left-wing political organisations who are

likely to be more receptive to an anti-colonialist argument. Those left-wing Indian organisations are the real target audience of this campaign, not the British government. One of the reasons the activists are making the demand for an apology from Britain is because it gives them a chance of publicising the issue of homophobia in a country where lesbian and gay issues are rarely if ever discussed openly.

Demands for apologies for slavery or apologies for the genocide of native Americans or native Australians arise from the fact that it can be argued that Western society still enjoys benefits which arose from slavery or the dispossession of indigenous peoples. But I don't see how anyone could argue that the British government and Western society still benefit from the oppression of South Asian lesbian and gay people.

I don't agree with the strategy of Indian lesbian and gay activists here, but I do agree with their aim of getting Indian law changed.

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Re:Indian Gay activists want apology from Britain

Posted by LYDIA REID - 2008/08/16 20:11

(The traditional values of Indian society demanded that effeminate gay men were castrated and cast to the margins of society. If that's not oppression I don't know what is.)

Hi IA are you saying this still happens in India, that is barbaric.

I have read a little about the Caste system but assumed from what I read that most of the Caste's were generations old. Are you saying that when a man in India discovers they are not heterosexual they join this caste.

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Re:Indian Gay activists want apology from Britain

Posted by InfrequentAllele - 2008/08/16 23:59

I'm no expert in the Indian caste system, but I understand that usually a person inherits their caste status. The Hijra count as a special caste very low down the pecking order, but uniquely their members aren't born into the caste. Becoming a Hijra in Hindu religion means losing your original caste status, and you are 'reborn' as a Hijra. The new member dresses as a woman and takes on a female name, he becomes she. Hijra are mentioned in ancient Sanskrit literature as the triyati prakriti "the third gender", so they seem to go back a very long way.

The Hijra make a living as licenced beggars, traditionally they turn up at Indian weddings and sing bawdy songs until being paid to go away. Being cursed by a Hijra on your wedding day is considered extremely bad luck. The Hijra also make a living from prostitution. Violence against them is commonplace and often brutal.

Effeminate gay men (the 'obvious' ones) were either expelled by their communities or ran away to join the Hijra. Even today many run away because relatives threaten to kill them for offending family honour. Without being a member of a community or caste they have no way of making a living, no-one to look after them when they get old or ill, and no one to protect them from the violence and abuse they face in Indian society. Traditionally, joining the Hijra meant being castrated. Castration appeased family honour since the new Hijra was considered as dead to her old caste. In theory it was choice, but in practice it meant many effeminate gay men had to choose between castration or death.

The practice of castration still goes on, but it's thankfully nowhere near as common as it once was. Many younger Hijra choose not to be castrated. I'd guess that nowadays most of those who do choose it really are transsexual. If they can afford it they go to Western trained doctors.

Not all gay men in India had to join the Hijra, only those who couldn't pass as straight and fulfil the traditional obligation in Indian society to marry a woman and have children. Others just endure the social disgrace of being "an impotent husband". Most Indian gay men just have gay sex on the quiet and are not socially regarded as gay. Unless they get found out, then they too can find themselves the victims of so called honour killings.

I'm quite fond of blaming the British for things, but even I can't blame the British for any of the above.

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Re:Indian Gay activists want apology from Britain

Posted by Brenna1508 - 2008/08/17 08:05

Lydia wrote: I was sorely criticised when I stated I would not apologise for slavery in the past. That was exactly what came to mind when I first read this article.

Whether an apology is forthcoming or not it cannot change the past. Whatever happened is gone and while an apology from the perpetrator of the offence to the victim can sometimes alleviate some of the hurt the original offence cannot be undone. Taking responsibility for your own actions means that you can apologise for them but I do not see how anybody can take responsibility for another person's action from from over a century ago - let alone apologise for them.

While it is possible to sympathise with the one (or the group) who was wronged (or who feels wronged) an apology seems a pretty meaningless gesture to me.

Re:Indian Gay activists want apology from Britain

Posted by Brenna1508 - 2008/08/17 08:20

InfrequentAllele offered: It should be pointed out that the call for an apology comes from a small fringe organisation and is not the official policy of the Naz Foundation, the largest South Asian organisation which campaigns for lesbian and gay rights. The move by some Indian activists has attracted criticism in the lesbian and gay media. Thanks for that additional information - the original article was rather economical in the detail! I wondered if it was a fringe organisation as they can sometimes cause more problems for the mainstream organisation that is working to obtain a more equitable outcome for it's members.

Re:Indian Gay activists want apology from Britain

Posted by TLJ - 2008/08/17 10:58

Brenna1508 wrote:

L I do not see how anybody can take responsibility for another person's action from from over a century ago - let alone apologise for them.

While it is possible to sympathise with the one (or the group) who was wronged (or who feels wronged) an apology seems a pretty meaningless gesture to me.

I agree. "Apology" is the wrong word. What we're doing is acknowledging that the "state" behaved badly (albeit within the social mores of that time). Recognition of the role we (the state) played in whatever wrong is appropriate; apologising is not.

Re:Indian Gay activists want apology from Britain

Posted by DoricMan - 2008/08/17 11:27

Will they have to dig-up Gladstone or some other culprit?

I suggest we start with William the Conqueror and King Canute and progress from there.

Re:Indian Gay activists want apology from Britain

Posted by LYDIA REID - 2008/08/18 00:23

Ah well but would digging them up do, we would need a trial to discover if they are really guilty

:silly: :silly: :silly: :ohmy:

