



# HeartBeat

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays



Olympia, Washington

Issue 82 July-August 2007

## COLORS IN THE RAINBOW:

### RACE, CULTURE, AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

#### PART 5 OF A 6 PART SERIES:

## PART V: ASIAN INDIANS

BY STEPHEN M. WHITE, PSY.D.

Like the other groups described in this series, many people of Indian heritage are uncomfortable with homosexuality. Unlike most of the others, female homosexuality is often more stigmatized than male homosexuality. The relatively powerless position women hold in the culture and the complications that arise when women seek to opt out of arranged marriages make this a much more difficult issue for women.

Discussions of homosexuality are largely absent from daily Indian life. Large cities such as Mumbai (Bombay) have a gay subculture, though its members still face harassment from hostile individuals and even the police. Parents are often at a loss for where to get helpful information when a child comes out as gay.

Despite the modern bias against homosexuality, historically Hindu tradition has been accepting of same-sex love. Ancient Sanskrit texts, sculptures on Hindu temples at Khajuraho and Konarak, and even descriptions in the fourth-century Kama Sutra indicate that homosexuality was known and accepted in India from very early times. This acceptance continued until Britain colonized India in the early seventeenth century, at which point the Western bias against homosexuality, along with other cultural taboos, was imposed on Indians. This prejudice gradually became part of the culture, to the point that many modern Indians are unaware of the surprisingly open attitude of their ancestors. Ironically, those who regard homosexuality to be an alien influence introduced by Europeans have it exactly backward: it is the Western fear of homosexuality that is the alien influence.

In addition to gay and lesbian

Indians, India has transgendered individuals known as hijras. A hijra is a biological male who is considered a member of a "third sex." They typically present themselves as female, and belong to a specific caste devoted to the goddess Bahuchara Mata.

Historically hijras were accorded a place of honor in society, but harsh laws instituted by the British discriminated against hijras and led to social disapproval. Today some Indians still regard the hijra as semi-sacred, but they also face frequent discrimination.

Despite the lack of resources that parents experience, there are some sources of information available. GayBombay, a website for gay men in India, offers a section of their website with answers for parents who have recently learned that their child is gay ([www.gaybombay.org/support/parents.html](http://www.gaybombay.org/support/parents.html)).

Additional resources include several helpful documentaries, such as Khush (1991), a series of interviews with Indians in the U.S., U.K., and India about their experiences, and Geja Poeto: Mother Hoshang (2004), a film about Hoshang Merchant, a gay Indian poet and teacher.

Documentaries about hijra include Jareena, Portrait of a Hijda (1990), The Hijras: India's Third Gender (2001), India's Ladyboys (2003), and Between the Lines: India's Third Gender (2005).

Books that may be of help to parents include Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History (2001) edited by Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai, Love's Rite: Same-Sex Marriage in India and the West (2005) by Ruth Vanita, and The World of Homosexuals (1977) by Shakuntala Devi. Books have also been written on hijra, including Trito-Prakriti: People of the Third Sex (2004) by Amara

*(Continued on page 2)*



#### ▼ SUNDAY, JULY 8, 2-4:30 PM

**Super Support** — This is when we come together as a group for mutual support and to talk about what's going on in our lives, in PFLAG, and in the world. Our usual routine is to break into smaller groups for support, with parents, friends and family in one group and glbtq people in another. But years ago we found that on occasion it is beneficial to stay together in a larger group — thus Super Support.

#### ▼ SUNDAY, 12, 1-5 PM

**Picnic in Priest Point Park** — Our annual potluck picnic will be at Kitchen #3 in Priest Point Park. Invite your family, friends and folks from ally organizations. Everyone welcome. Please note that we meet earlier than normal. See our website for a map and more details closer to the day.

Volunteers are not paid .....  
not because they are worthless,  
but because they are priceless.  
~ anonymous



#### **PFLAG-Olympia meeting format**

2:00-2:30 p.m. Introductions  
2:30-2:40 p.m. Announcements  
2:40-3:15 p.m. Support  
3:15-3:30 p.m. Social time/snacks  
3:30-4:30 p.m. Program

August meeting 1-5 p.m. for annual picnic (see above)

## COLORS IN THE RAINBOW

(Continued from page 1)

Das Wilhelm, and Neither Man Nor Woman: The Hijras of India (1990) by Serena Nanda.

One of the deficits that makes a child coming out such a confusing and difficult event is the relative absence of openly gay Indians in the media. One of the few out gay actors is Aneesh Sheth, who has performed in Bombay Dreams, the Andrew Lloyd Webber musical. In the summer of 2005 the rock band Cactus released "Pokkhiraaj (The Pegasus)," the first Indian music video to touch on gay issues.

Gurinder Chadha, the director of Bend It Like Beckham, is heterosexual, but has examined lesbian issues in her earlier films Bhaji on the Beach (1993), and What's Cooking? (2000), as well as including a gay character in Beckham.

One of the most visible events in gay Indian cinema was Deepa Mehta's 1996 film Fire, which portrays the relationship that develops between two sisters-in-law. Violent protests broke out when the film was first screened, with conservative critics vandalizing theaters where the film was being shown. Following soon after Fire, Nisha Ganatra's 1999 film Chutney Popcorn portrays an Indian lesbian in New York who seeks to navigate relationship issues with her partner and her family.

In addition to actors, role models may be found in the political arena. Urvashi Vaid has served as the director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) Policy Institute in Washington, DC, and wrote the book Virtual Equality. She stands as a powerful example of an articulate, independent, lesbian Indian.

As with parents, there are relatively few resources for

gay men and women in India. Telephone helplines exist, such as Sangini in New Delhi, and the Aanchal helpline for women in Mumbai. Organizations in the U.S. include Sangat in Chicago, SALGA (salganyc.org) in New York, Satrang in Los Angeles (www.satrang.org), and Khush DC (www.khushdc.org).

It will take many years for the situation of the fledgling gay community in India to change for the better, but there are already signs that things are changing. The first gay pride parade was held in Calcutta in 2003. Helplines now exist to answer questions for gay Indians and their families. And groups are forming in the U.S. and India to help improve the situation of LGBT community.

### Resources

**The Gay & Lesbian Vaishnava Association** (GALVA-108):

www.galva108.org/hinduism.html

**Hindu section of Out People of Color:**

www.temenos.net/faith/hindu.shtml

**Sangama** (Sexual Minorities Rights organization):

www.sangama.org

**GayBombay** (organization for gay men in India):

www.gaybombay.org

**Sangini Helpline in Delhi:**

info@naz.unv.ernet.in, Sangini97@hotmail.com

**Aanchal Helpline for lesbians** (based in Mumbai):

www.aanchal.org

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### NEW or RENEWAL MEMBERSHIP

Please check the membership types you prefer:

- Individual \$35
- Household \$50
- Senior/Student/Low Income \$15

New  Renewal

Membership \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Add this amount as my tax-exempt gift (thank you!) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL MEMBERSHIP AND GIFT \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

- I want Olympia's bi-monthly newsletter *HeartBeat* (which is mailed in an envelope with no identified return address.)
- I want the national quarterly newsletter *PFLAGpole* (which is not mailed in an envelope).
- I want to be added to the PFLAG-Olympia email alert/announcement list (include your email address.)

DATE: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ PHONE: (\_\_\_\_)\_\_\_\_-\_\_\_\_

SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_

PRINT NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail with your check to: PFLAG Olympia, P O Box 12732; Olympia, WA 98508-2732

PFLAG is a tax-exempt non-profit 501(c)(3) organization not affiliated with any political or religious institution.

### PFLAG-Olympia Alert

**PFLAG-Olympia Alert** is an email service of PFLAG-Olympia designed to inform members of upcoming events, programs, and more. Email updates are sent out prior to each of our the regular second Sunday meetings and whenever something comes up that we think our members and friends might like to know about. You can subscribe to the alert by sending an email to our newsletter editor at newsletter@pflag-olympia.org — put "Subscribe PLAG-Olympia Alert" in the subject line.

### Women "coming out" after 30 a peer-facilitated support group

for women over the age of 30 who are "coming out" or have previously come out as queer, lesbian or bisexual, or who are questioning their orientation.

**Meets 1st and 3rd Tuesday of every month  
from 5:30 pm – 7:00 pm**

**Unity Church of Olympia; 1335 Fern Street SW**

For more information, please contact Victoria Nuesca  
970-3517 vnuesca@msn.com.

# A Journey with Pride

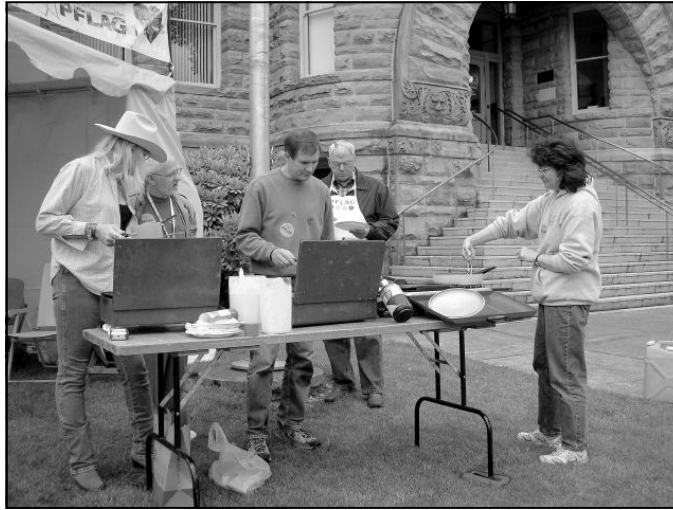
by Jeff Loyer

“Gay Pride” day used to make me shudder, for several reasons. First was the name. I’m not “proud” that my daughter is gay — I reserve “pride” for wise choices or putting in extra energy to get something worthwhile done. Then there were the folks marching and performing — many a bit “over the top”, to say the least. I felt the predominant message folks took away was the spectacle of “those people” and their weird dressing/behavior.

My outlook has changed — a lot. While I’m still not sure about the “Pride” title, I wouldn’t change it either. It serves as a clear call for GLBTQ folks to not feel ashamed, and takes power away from those who try to label different folks as immoral or shameful.

As far as the “spectacle” of Pride is concerned, I’m convinced that it’s a necessary part of social change. I think about the “bizarre” things done for equality in our past: women refusing to wear bras or dresses; calling God “Her”; a black woman refusing to give up her seat to a white man, black students sitting at a lunch counter. Martin Luther King Jr. was convinced that his movement had to exert a tension on society to break them out of their complacency, to challenge the status quo. I now think the non-conformist folks at Pride are doing the same.

I know I really had to examine my thoughts about cross-dressers, for instance. At first they seemed disgusting, to tell the truth. When confronted with them for hours,



**Serving PFLAG Pancakes in the Park for Pride.**  
*Pictured left to right: Richelle Lanning, Alec Clayton, Jeff Loyer, Paul Pearson and Betsey Loyer.*

though, I was forced to reflect on my own feelings. They weren’t hurting anyone, merely expressing themselves differently than most. What was the harm? I eventually decided that there was a remarkable (and scary) similarity between my distaste for them and whites’ attitudes about blacks sharing a lunch counter! Now I continue to challenge my “morals” — what do I judge wrong because it causes harm to someone, and what is merely a remnant of my status quo upbringing? It wouldn’t have happened without the tension from Pride.

And finally, I’ve realized how proud I am, and should be, to participate in Pride. I’m

convinced that Pride Day is a key component to bringing about another facet in our evolving society — equal rights for GLBTQs. Just as I think the people who fought so hard to bring about equality for women and African-Americans are entitled to feel proud, so should today’s advocates.

I’m especially proud of the young people who so publicly join in the celebration. It’s one thing for me to be in a public GLBTQ celebration, with the relative safety of being there for my daughter, working for a GLBTQ-friendly company, etc. It’s quite another for many of the folks I meet, who know they might suffer from the exposure. But, they do it anyway. Talk about guts! It’s bravery to be proud of.

So, to all who put in the incredible hours to plan Pride, to the wonderful performers, and to all who attend, my hat’s off to you. Thanks for your energy, courage, and talents that make for an incredible experience. See you next year!

## Please join us for a wonderful PFLAG picnic

By Alec Clayton

It’s time for our annual potluck, picnic! Sunday, August 12 beginning at 1 p.m. Bring food and non-alcoholic drinks to share. The board will provide burgers and hot dogs (including veggie burgers). Bring lawn chairs also if you have them.

We hope you will invite friends, relatives and allies from our community of local and regional organizations.

The picnic is always one of our most enjoyable events of the year, providing opportunities for our members and their friends and families to get to know one another better and socialize in a more relaxed atmosphere than at our regular meetings. No business conducted at this meeting. Just fun and food.

This year’s picnic will be held in Priest Point Park at Kitchen Number Three. The entrance to the park is off East Bay Drive. If you’re heading south on East Bay, the entrance is to the

right. Keep to your right and follow the loop around to the overlook. Look for our signs and banners (it may be oldest cliché in the book, but you can’t miss us). Coming from downtown Olympia, you’ll be heading north on East Bay. Turn right into the park and follow the road to your left, through the parking lot and across the overpass. Once you cross the overpass, follow the above directions. Better yet, go to the PFLAG-Olympia Web site and click on the link to a map.

<http://www.pflag-olympia.org>

Remember, the meeting time is pushed ahead an hour for the picnic. We fire up the grill at 1 p.m. and have the kitchen reserved until 5 p.m., although in the past we’ve tended to break up around 4 to 4:30. Don’t expect there to be any food left if you’re late.

Please join us!

## The PFLAG Mission

To promote the health and well-being of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons, their families and friends through:

- ▼ **support**, to cope with an adverse society;
- ▼ **education**, to enlighten an ill-informed public; and
- ▼ **advocacy**, to end discrimination and to secure equal civil rights.



The Pearson family leads the PFLAG contingent in the 2007 Capital City Pride Parade.

PFLAG Olympia welcomes all allies - straight and GLBTQ.

Our chapter's monthly attendance typically has an equal number of both.



# PFLAG

Olympia, Washington

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays

**MEETS** at 2PM on the second Sunday of each month at First United Methodist Church, 1224 Legion Way SE, Olympia (except in August when we have our annual picnic at a local park.) It is handicap-accessible.

**DIRECTIONS:** from Sylvester Park on Capitol Way and Legion Way, go 12 blocks east on Legion Way to Boundary Street. Turn left around the church. Park in the lot at 5th Avenue and Boundary and enter through the glass doors.

*Letters, articles and requests for literature are welcome.*

Mailing address:

**PO Box 12732; Olympia, WA 98508-2732**

*For information or to discuss personal matters with an understanding parent and experienced PFLAG member,*

**CALL the PFLAG-Olympia HELPLINE:  
(360) 866-0511**

Email: [info@pflag-olympia.org](mailto:info@pflag-olympia.org)  
Website: <http://www.pflag-olympia.org>

## BUY PFLAG-OLYMPIA GEAR

t-shirts ~ sweat shirts  
 coffee mugs ~ mouse pads  
 BBQ aprons ~ tile coasters  
 canvas tote bags ~ boxer shorts



Buy yours now on the web at  
[http://www.cafeshops.com/pflag\\_oly](http://www.cafeshops.com/pflag_oly)

## HeartBeat

is a free publication of the PFLAG chapter in Olympia, Washington, published six times a year. The editors are Alec & Gabi Clayton.

Unsolicited articles are welcome and are due by the 10th of even-numbered months. The editors reserve the right to reject or edit material.

**The deadline for the next issue is 8/15/2007**

Mail submissions to:

HeartBeat

P.O. Box 12732

Olympia, WA 98508-2732

Or email to: [newsletter@pflag-olympia.org](mailto:newsletter@pflag-olympia.org)