

Domestic Issues Faced by the LGBTQ+ Community in India: A Game -Theoretical Approach

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ABSTRACT

The LGBTQ+ community in India faces numerous domestic issues, primarily rooted in societal attitudes, legal challenges, and social discrimination. These issues significantly impact the lives of LGBTQ+ individuals and hinder their ability to live authentically and with equal rights. Efforts are being made by LGBTQ+ activists, organizations, and allies to address these issues and advocate for equal rights and social acceptance. In 2017, the Supreme Court gave the country's LGBTQ+ community the freedom to safely express their sexual orientation. However, even after providing the community with necessary rights, many LGBTQ+ individuals in India face familial rejection upon coming out, resulting in strained relationships, emotional distress, and in some cases, violence and disownment. This lack of acceptance often leads to homelessness and vulnerability among queer youth. This particular aspect has been looked upon in this paper through the lens of game theory.

KEYWORDS: LGBTQ+, game theory, queer, family, coming out, closeted

JEL Classification: C73, Z13

INTRODUCTION

The LGBTQ+ community in India often faces significant domestic issues due to the prevailing social norms, cultural values, and lack of understanding surrounding non-heteronormative identities. These familial issues can have a profound impact on the lives of LGBTQ+ individuals. Here are some of the key familial issues faced by the LGBTQ+ community in India:

Family Rejection: Coming out as LGBTQ+ can lead to family rejection and estrangement. Families may struggle to accept and understand their LGBTQ+ members due to societal stigma, cultural expectations, and conservative beliefs. This rejection can result in strained relationships, emotional distress, and feelings of isolation for LGBTQ+ individuals.

Forced Heterosexuality and Marriages: Many LGBTQ+ individuals in India face pressure to conform to heterosexual norms and enter into opposite-sex marriages. Families may arrange marriages to hide

their LGBTQ+ family members' identities or to fulfil societal expectations. These forced marriages often lead to emotional turmoil, unhappiness, and difficulties for LGBTQ+ individuals and their spouses.

Lack of Emotional Support: LGBTQ+ individuals often lack emotional support from their families, which can significantly impact their mental health and well-being. Without familial acceptance and understanding, LGBTQ+ individuals may experience feelings of loneliness, depression, and anxiety.

Physical and Verbal Abuse: In some cases, family members may resort to physical or verbal abuse upon learning about an individual's LGBTQ+ identity. This abuse can range from verbal insults, emotional manipulation, to physical violence, posing serious threats to the safety and well-being of LGBTQ+ individuals.

Homelessness and Disownment: Family rejection can leave LGBTQ+ individuals without a support system,

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leading to homelessness and disownment. LGBTQ+ youth are particularly vulnerable as they may be forced to leave their homes and face challenges in finding shelter and basic necessities.

Lack of Financial Support: Family rejection can also result in the denial of financial support, such as education funds or inheritance rights, to LGBTQ+ individuals. This lack of financial support further exacerbates their difficulties in pursuing education, career opportunities, and financial independence.

Strained Relationships and Loss of Community: Family rejection often leads to strained relationships with extended family members and a loss of community support. LGBTQ+ individuals may experience isolation and a sense of disconnection from their familial and cultural networks.

It is essential to recognize that not all families respond negatively, and some families do offer support and acceptance to their LGBTQ+ members. However, addressing these familial issues requires increased awareness, education, and dialogue to foster understanding, empathy, and acceptance within Indian families and society as a whole.

Application of Game theory

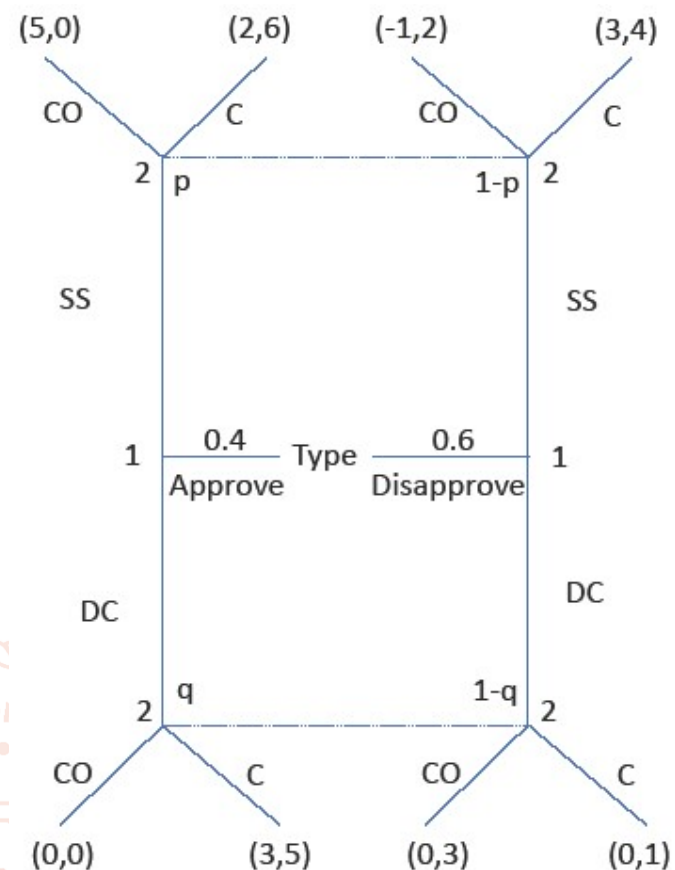
Game theory is not typically applied to the study of social justice issues, there are some ways in which it could be used to understand the domestic issues faced by the LGBTQ+ community in India. It provides a useful framework for understanding the behaviour of different actors and the dynamics of social interactions. By combining game theory with other approaches from social justice and human rights, a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community in India can be developed. This paper highlights the struggle faced by the LGBTQ+ community in India to reveal their orientation in the fear of not being supported and accepted by their families.

The Model

A signalling game that is a dynamic game of incomplete information is considered, involving 2 players, player 1 being “Family” and player 2 being “Queer”. The action of Family is (Supportive (SS), Discouraging (DC)) and the action of Queer is (Coming Out (CO), Closeted (C)).

The probability of the type of family is $P(\text{approve}) = 0.4$ and $P(\text{Disapprove}) = 0.6$, that is, 40 percent of the families will approve and 60 percent of the families will disapprove. This piece of information is obviously known to the families, and it is their discretion whether to hide or reveal their type to player 2 i.e., the queers. Queer people can distinguish

between Approve and Disapprove but cannot determine the type of their families.



How can a parent signal their type?

Say, a parent is of the “Supportive” type. The following signals can be given by them-

- 1. Encouraging self-expression:** Parents can support their queer child's self-expression by allowing them to explore and express their identity in various ways, such as through clothing, hairstyles, or hobbies. Encouraging their child to be authentic and true to themselves sends an indirect message of approval.²
- 2. Including queer representation in media and conversations:** Parents can make an effort to include queer representation in the media they consume as a family, such as movies, TV shows, books, and music. Engaging in conversations about LGBTQ+ characters or issues can show their interest and acceptance.
- 3. Discussions about LGBTQ+ issues:** Parents can engage in conversations about LGBTQ+ issues,

² Based on multiple surveys, it has been observed that homophobia is prevalent in majority of the Indian households. Also, most respondents prefer not to reveal their type. Hence, the probabilities of the families' type have been taken accordingly.

news, or events in a positive and accepting manner. This demonstrates awareness and understanding of LGBTQ+ experiences and shows support for the community.

- 4. Expressing empathy and understanding:** Parents can express empathy and understanding when discussing LGBTQ+ issues or experiences, emphasizing the importance of accepting others for who they are. This indirectly signals to their children that they approve of diverse identities.

Case 1

Family that “Approves” will be supportive, family that “Disapproves” will discourage.

Queer’s complete plan of action is to play Closeted (C) when the family reveals, and to play Coming Out (CO) when the family hides.

Then the family that approves gets a payoff of 2, and the family that disapproves gets a payoff of 0.

Now, given the belief and strategies of queer (Coming Out, Closeted) will be played by them on the equilibrium path, we need to check whether it is optimal to signal Case I.

If the family that approves deviates from supportive to discourage, then queers will choose to remain Closeted and the family that approves will hence get a payoff of $3 > 2$. Therefore, there are intentions to deviate.

If the family that disapproves deviates from discouraging to supportive, then queers will choose to remain Closeted and the family that disapproves will now get a payoff of $3 > 0$. Therefore, there are intentions to deviate.

Therefore, Separating Equilibrium for the family that approves will reveal and the family that disapproves will hide does not exist.

Case 2

When queer observes discouragement, the family is of “Approve” type, and when queer observes support, family is of “Disapprove” type.

The Queer plays “Closeted” when the family discourages, and they play “Closeted” when the family supports.

If the family that Approves deviates from discouragement to being supportive, then there is no incentive to deviate. (Since, payoff of the family decreases from 3 to 2)

If the family that disapproves deviates from supportive to discouragement, then there is no incentive to deviate. (Since, the payoff of the family decreases from 3 to 0)

Therefore, the Perfect Bayesian Equilibria is $\{(Discouraging, support), (Closeted, Closeted), p=0, q=1\}$

Here, anyway, the queer chooses to remain closeted because even if they get a supportive family they get a lot of criticism from society, and relatives. Even if the family wants to accept them personally, they might not want to accept them in front of society that their children are queer or homosexual. They find a lot of criticism from the workplace, and educational institutions and are thus deprived of a lot of opportunities and thus they might choose to stay closeted even if there is the slightest chance that they might get a supportive family.

CASE 3

If in the case of pooling equilibrium, we consider the case if both the families discourage their queer children.

Then the expected payoff of the queer is –

$$EU_C = 5(0.4) + 1(0.6) = 2.6$$

$$EU_{CO} = 0(0.4) + 3(0.6) = 1.8$$

$$EU_C > EU_{CO}$$

Here thus again the queer chooses to stay closeted and this is the optimal path of the queer.

Now given the queer will stay closeted is it optimal for both families to approve and disapprove?

If they approve –

If the families are discouraging, then the payoff for the family is 3 but if they reveal it’s 2 which is less. So, they do not have a tendency to deviate.

If they disapprove –

Then if they discourage then their payoff is 0 which is 3 if they support, which is better, so here in this case they tend to deviate.

And if any one family deviates from the equilibrium path, then the pooling breaks.

In off the equilibrium path we get, if family choose to support then the expected payoffs are –

$$EU_{CO} = 0.p + 2(1-p) = 2(1-p)$$

$$EU_C = 6.p + 4(1-p) = 2p+4$$

chooses C if $EU_{CO} < EU_C$

$$\text{i.e. } 2p+4 > 2-2p$$

$$\Rightarrow 2p+2p > -2$$

$$\Rightarrow P > -1/2 \text{ (not feasible)}$$

This is why pooling is not possible because we can't derive a possibility from this case.

CASE 4

If in the case of pooling equilibrium, we consider the case if both the families support their queer children.

Then also the queer chooses to stay closeted as given the societal hindrances they face (so staying closeted gives them a better payoff). And thus, the queer information set according to supportive family is on the equilibrium path and their belief is updated by Bayes rule –

BAYE'S RULE –

$$\mu(A|SS) = \frac{P(A) P(SS|A)}{P(A) P(SS|A) + P(DA) P(SS|DA)} = 0.4$$

$$P(A) = 0.4 \text{ and } P(DA) = 0.6$$

$$P(SS|A) = P(SS|DA) = 1$$

Now the queer expected payoff is given by –

$$EU_C = 6(0.4) + 4(0.6) = 4.8$$

$$EU_{CO} = 0(0.4) + 2(0.6) = 1.2$$

$$EU_C > EU_{CO}$$

Thus, here too the optimal path is to stay closeted.

Given belief queer will stay closeted is it optimal for both the approve and disapprove type family?

If the family type is to approve –

Then if they support, they receive a payoff of 2 which is lesser than the payoff 3 which they receive if they discourage. Thus, they have a tendency to deviate to disapprove type.

If the family type is to disapprove-

Then if they support, they receive a payoff of 3 which is greater than the payoff 0 which they get if they discourage. Thus, they have a tendency to not deviate.

Now in off the equilibrium path let us check what happens if both the families choose to discourage.

Then the queer expected payoff is

$$EU_C = 5 \cdot q + (1+q) = 4q+1$$

$$EU_{CO} = 3(1-q) \text{ thus the queer chooses C}$$

if $EU_C > EU_{CO}$ for $q > 2/7$ Queer chooses C if

$$\Rightarrow 4q+1 > 3(1+q)$$

$$\Rightarrow 7q > 2$$

$$\Rightarrow q > 2/7$$

And choose CO if $q < 2/7$

Thus, the perfect Bayesian Nash equilibrium for pooling is [supportive, supportive] for families, [closeted, closeted] for queer, if $q > 2/7$ and [closeted, coming out] if $q < 2/7$.

Though here we find a little probability that the queer might come out given the probability $q < 2/7$ but still mostly they choose to stay closeted because of the same backward societal norms and thus they get a higher payoff being closeted.

Conclusion

This reason why efforts to make LGBTQ+ rights legal is crucial is to ensure that the queers are not deprived in the Indian Households. The struggle dates to the British colonial period to till date. In present days, even if they have got recognition to some extent, they still have a long way to go to get accepted socially and legally. In most of the cases, it has been observed that equilibrium lies when queers choose to remain closeted despite families being supportive. This means that they themselves rethink before revealing their identity to their families as they believe it's still a social taboo and they might face further consequences. This paper shows that even if the queer gets a supportive family, the fear of facing humiliation, exclusion and disapproval from their families hinders them to come out as a queer, thereby reducing their social payoffs which results in them choosing the equilibrium path of staying closeted.

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