



MOSAIC had the pleasure to speak with activist Gopi Shankar Madurai moments after the announcement on India's Supreme Court decriminalizing Section 377 of the Penal Code. This is what he had to say:

MOSAIC: Tell us how you're feeling right now.

Gopi Shankar Madurai: It's such an emotional moment. I'm happy we're on the right side of "Herstory" of India. This is dedicated to people who lost their lives. People who were victimized by this law. 377 was a colonialist law. We are not Britain. We are India now. Colonialist laws are still part of Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and other Commonwealth countries. I hope they follow and work to change them. This is a baby step. I hope it paves the way for other civil rights. Activists can now ask for same-sex marriage. That's our next step as activists. The transgender community in India has experienced more inclusivity due to their representation in our temples, culture, and transgender Gods. We want the same for the LGB community and full and equal rights for the LBGTIQ+ community.

M: You've had threats in the past, are you fearing any backlash after this victory?

GSM: The media, politicians giving interviews have all been positive. I meet people, activists - India is rejoicing. We are a diverse country of many languages, many religions. This is our diversity. Our supreme court has revised Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. We've stopped applying this law to consensual sex. Also, Men who are rape victims can now come forward to file their cases without fear like they had before. India was tolerant and people lived harmoniously, 377 was a colonialist law.

M: What pushed you towards activism? Is it something you acquired, something that came to you naturally?

GSM: That's a tough question. I happen to be. I happen to stand for justice and equality. When you see someone suffering, you can't be quiet. People in my community and friends committing suicide, you need to stand for them.

M: Can you speak a little bit about your activism?

GSM: I belong to a lower middle-class family. I'm not from a big city or funded by anyone. I'm from Madurai, in Tamil Nadu. It takes me longer to get to my country's capital than it is to arrive in Sri Lanka. Unlike LBGTIQ+ communities in big cities, our community gets very little media attention. We founded Srishti Madurai [first genderqueer & LBGTIQ+ student volunteer group to work on the issues the community faces in small areas like Tamil Nadu]. We were able to introduce LBGTIQ+ studies into the curriculum of a few schools and universities to influence the students. I also wrote my first book, *Maraikkappatta Pakkangal* [on gender-varients in Tamil] in the Tamil language. The book is now part of the American College in Madurai University's curriculum. Anjali Gopalan of NAZ foundation was our guiding light and one of the original petitioners of this case.

M: What is your advice for other activists who live in oppressive societies/countries? What is your most important and useful tool in your activism?

GSM: Patience, education. Hate cannot be conquered by hate. If someone is discriminating, we need to educate them. We need diverse materials to read. Diverse communities often forget their diversity. Educate the community and then the lawmakers. Sensitize medical practitioners, educators, students, and make allies. Don't forget that governments don't have any business to look into your bedroom or know what reproductive organs you have. God won't look between your legs or inside your bedroom to love you. All you need is a good heart and compassion. Each citizen has integrity. Bodily integrity. Uphold your integrity.

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