Ritu weds Chandni

The visibility & representation of

LGBTQ

in Indian society

LGBTQ themed children's book

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Guided by **Prof. Sudesh Balan**

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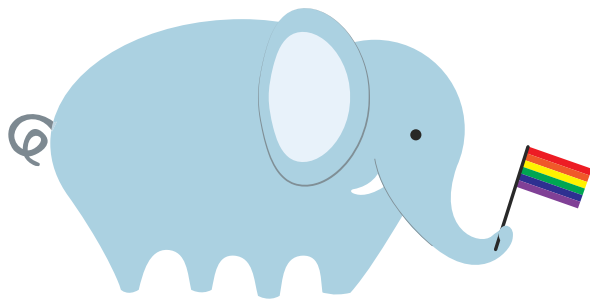Visual Communication
P2: **Final Stage Presentation**

If I get to see myself on screen, then I know that I exist.

-Gabourey Sidibe, star of *Precious*

The situation in India

- **The elephant in the room:** Homosexuality in India
- Sec 377 in times of democracy

- Religion & Mythology
- *Log kya kahenge?*

The need for visibility

- **Validation of self-identity**

- **Educate on reality of gay lives**

- **Change perceptions**

- **Role-models**

- **New perspective**

- **Combats heteronormativity**

Representation in media

- **In media**,
  Only covered when there is an **update on the verdict**,
  someone from the community is harrassed or
  a politician is making absurd statements on gay rights

- **Films** - minimal vs positive representation

I am petrified of lesbians.

-Bipasha Basu

My role as a Visual Communicator

- **How do I contribute?**
- Would it have a **meaningful impact** on society? on an individual?

- Even if judiciary process decriminalises homosexuality, would it end homophobia?

- Coming to the realisation that **my solution might not help everyone concerned, cannot cover all aspects of the LGBT community in India**

The direction of the project

- **Are we born homophobic?**

- 'Breaking the cycle'

- Medium of **storytelling**

- Society - Media & resources - **Literature for children**

To create & design a fictional
storybook for children and families;
with a central LGBT theme,
in an Indian context.

Why children?

- Conditioned since childhood to behave in a certain way

- Representation can foster **understanding and acceptance of LGBT amongst children**

- **Scattered sources of information**

- **Indoctrination vs education**
  Not teaching them what to think but how to think

- **Why has it not been explored as much?**

Views of parents & teachers

- Need of diversity for their **social development**
- The presence of diverse role models in terms of gender and sexuality in popular media for children, shall help **sensitise them towards the community**

- The information to be conveyed to the child on the subject
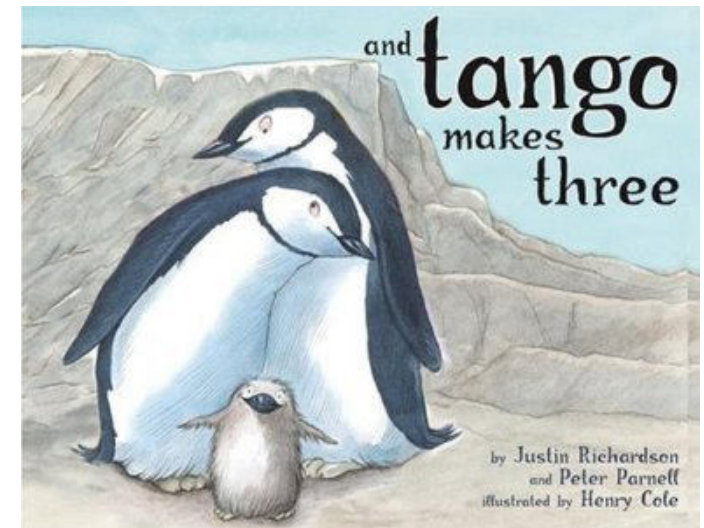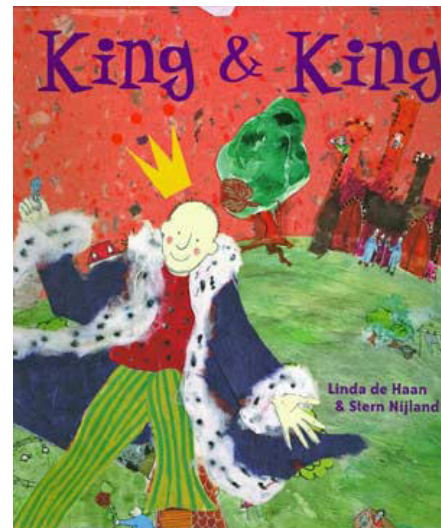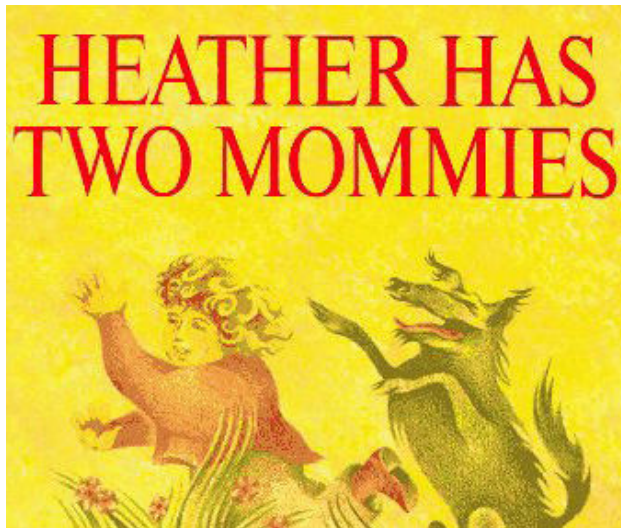- The type & method of information conveyed

Impact of stories on children

- Celebrating & acknowledging diversity
  shows children that it is **okay to be different**

- In turn, **builds self-esteem and boosts confidence**

- **Relatable characters,** walk in their shoes

- Stronger parent-child bond
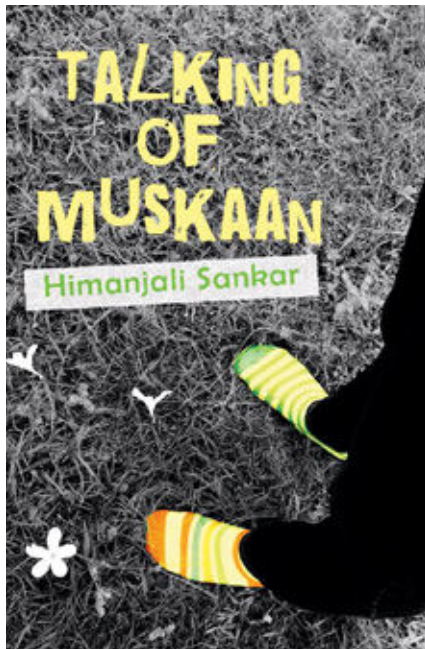
- Shape their moral reasoning

Available media & resources

Available media & resources

WHAT IF YOU DON'T KNOW THE ROLE YOU'RE PLAYING
OR YOUR STORY ISN'T IN THE TALES YOU'VE HEARD
WELL IT MEANS YOUR CHARACTER IS STILL UNWRITTEN
AND IT'S UP TO YOU TO FILL THE PAGE WITH WORDS.

Dallas Clayton
Children's book author & illustrator

Approach

- Identifying **inherently Indian ideas** and concepts that are heteronormative in nature, which children are exposed to, from an early age For eg. **popular Bollywood films, an Indian wedding**

- **Inserting the LGBT aspect in that situation** and offering a new perspective

Story Development

"The Big Fat Indian Wedding"

Why a wedding scenario?

- **Weddings are a huge affair in India**, grand celebration, guests come from near and far

- Relevant and **relatable**

- A recurring theme in **Bollywood**

- **Alternate family approach** in western children's books not applicable

Plot A

A wedding household is in a state of chaos with preparations underway .

A key object say, a ring or mangalsutra is lost, hampering the celebratory mood.

Plot B

A bride/groom is off to marry their same-sex partner. They take to the streets with a traditional Indian wedding procession - baraat.

Along the way, they are harassed by the self-proclaimed protectors of Indian culture and society.

Will they safely make it to the venue and get married?

Plot Structure

- **An uncertain journey**
- **Overcoming challenges** along the way
- **The wedding**

Characters

- **Ayesha,** the protagonist
  Eager to dance in her favourite Ritu didi's baraat

- **Ritu,** Ayesha's cousin
  Off to marry **Chandni**, the love of her life

- **The Moral Brigade**
  Mean grown ups on high horses doing their best
  to stop the wedding

Ritu ki aayegi baraat

- A Baraat is an **easily recognisable** ceremony

- A pre-wedding **celebration**, with song & dance

- Parallels to a gay **pride parade**

- Highlight the **stigma & resistance - family, neighbours & society**

Words

Story-writing

Penning the narrative

- **Simple story**, not burden them with extra information

- **Light-hearted and optimistic**
- **Reflect Indian society's attitude**
  "What if?" - homosexuality was decriminalised
  Is the judiciary process alone enough for acceptance?

Setting the tone

- **Use of metaphors** with literally translated visuals

- Feedback from **Deepa Balsavar**,
  children's book author & illustrator

- **To rhyme or not to rhyme?**

  *"These words of venom they spew
  Are making didi feel sad & blue
  Chachi, I do not understand why
  On this day, they want to make her cry"*
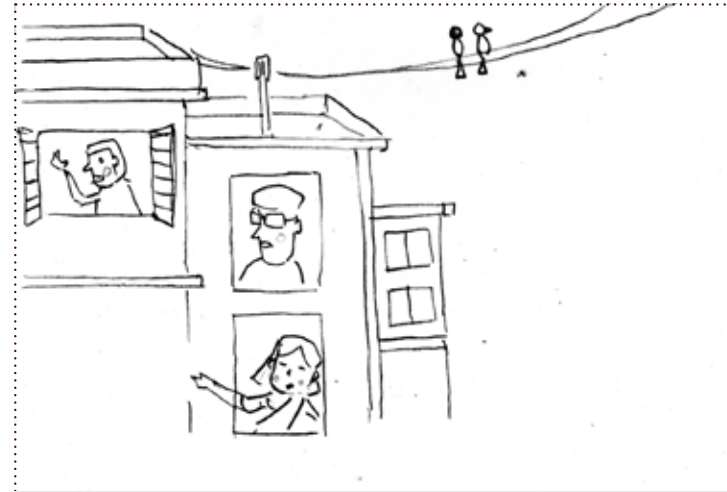
Storyboard

- Control and shape the flow of the entire story
- Sense of layout when illustrating

The baraat proceeds. The neighbours are not happy.

They express their disdain.

Visualisation

Exploration in illustration

Stylisation

- Deviation from the rainbow imagery
- Wedding card aesthetic

But most of all –
she was excited to see Chandni *didi*,
Ritu *didi's* wife to be.

Sample spreads

"Hi Chachi, where is everyone?
Why have they not yet come?"

"They are not too happy, maybe
To see Ritu marry another lady."

But what is
WRONG?
with that

"Nothing, beta.
They just don't understand."

"Bhaiya, you shouldn't have got Ayesha along.
The Moral Brigade will be there too.
You never know what could go wrong."

"Ritu & I tried to reason with them before —
We shall not let a woman
marry another woman, they swore

Riding atop their high horses
They refused to hear our voices."

Soon Ritu joined her *baraatis*,
wearing a beautiful red saree.

"Ritu didi, Ritu didi
You are looking very pretty!"

"Thank you very much, Ayesha.
And I am so glad you came!
Without your presence
it just wouldn't be the same."

"I wouldn't have missed it
for anything!"

One of the guests led in
a beautiful, decorated mare.
Ritu climbed atop
and leapt up mid-air.

And so the *baraat* began
their journey...

Wedding HALL

PARK

RitU Didi's
HOMe

CHANdNi's
HOMe

Ritu weds Chandni

- **No room for ambiguity**
- **Two-dad/two-mom family stories** from Western literature
- **Indian wedding cards**

Scope for publishing & distribution

- **Alternate channels**
- Self publishing - Ebook or Print (Amazon)
- Social Media - Instagram

- Queer-friendly publications
- Libraries

Shortcomings

- Acceptance in the form of **marriage is not the primary concern of the community**

- **Central focus is not on the LGBT characters** but on the stigma & how Ayesha responds to it

Conclusion

When there is **more visibility,**
it opens **better representation avenues**
which in turn **bring greater awareness.**

Fin.