

Nandini Ray: Hello everyone. You are on the Maitri podcast between friends conversations with Maitri. This is your host Nandini Ray with my production team member Daman Tiwana welcoming you all. We are presenting today's episode to celebrate trans-queer marginalized lives. In this episode, we will discuss oppression and discrimination faced by this marginalized group and shine a light on their contributions to society.

Today we have invited Anjali Rimi, the co-founder and president of Parivar Bay area. Parivar focuses on driving TGNC economic Justice and LGBT inclusion within the South Asian diaspora. Anjali has committed all her efforts in uplifting trans queer marginalized lives and changing their narrative to be lovable respectable and competent individuals who can hold jobs, be in relationships, belong to their families and contribute greatly to society.

Welcome Anjali, Welcome to our show.

Anjali Rimi : Thank you so much Nandini, thank you for having me on the show. It's a great pleasure to be here. And to have this, much needed conversation and also to share our experiences in this community. I am Anjali Rimi, pronouns used are She/Her/They/Them.

Nandini Ray: Anjali, let's Start our conversation introducing Parivar. I Know Parivar is an amazing South Asian queer trans family as we co-hosted a community panel discussion with Parivar recently and all the speakers from Parivar did a fantastic job but it is possible that many of our listeners may not know about this great organization. So introduce Parivar to our listeners.

Anjali Rimi: My pleasure. Thank you for that question Nandini. Parivar Bay Area is a movement. It is a collection of parts of love and togetherness. Parivar is the South Asian trans- gender, gender non-conforming intersectionality centered queer organization that powerfully centers trans lives beyond cisnes and beyond the element within the South Asian diaspora. And we also powerfully welcome all LGBT cis folks and their allies. Parivar came to exist because the community needed to find each other to be able to uplift the voices of those that need to be heard. It is a very interesting journey. We were asked by one of the organizations based in the San Francisco Bay Area to do a three part series that focused on South Asian queer trans lives. By our second night we were over capacity and we started getting very touching messages and emails and phone calls really showcasing that there was a great need in the community for such an organization to exist. A space, a collective, a platform where folks could be ethnically themselves and also be able to celebrate their sexual diversity and gender identities. So Parivar was created in November of 2018, and was founded in January of 2019. And our focus is primarily to ensure that we are working too on the Intersectionality of being south Asian and also being at the crossroads of our gender identity. It's about uplifting the entire South Asian diaspora. You know, we kind of talk about South Asians being synonymous with Indians, but

South Asian identity is much more than Indic identity. It's beyond that. So we promote an inclusive definition of the South Asian diaspora including individuals from the Caribbean , West Indies, Africa , The Middle East Asia, and anywhere else in the world. We also are really focused on making sure we do our part in building racial equity and cultural humility to fight casteism and xenophobia. Islamophobia, gender binary constraints, anti-blackness and really try to achieve immigration equality and you touched on the Partnerships that we do go into to be able to drive all of this mission and vision we have, to build awareness through such conversations. Ultimately I'll say that Parivar has really had to work further on what we were good at, which was to build its ability to cope and provide relief efforts. So we do work with organizations in India, where our core organizations, are focused on building trans entrepreneurship and capabilities. So trans folks have an opportunity to get a salary and build their skill sets and in the Bay Area and greater part of the U.S, we have been leading a coalition to raise funds, and bridge connections, to be able to support folks with Essentials and Foods and food needs and a lot of others other situations as they were going thru the pandemic.

Nandini Ray : It's a wonderful mission and vision. I am requesting all our listeners to visit your website, that is Parivarbayarea.org so that they can learn about your organization. I also know that you have a Facebook, right?

Anjali Rimi: Yes, we do. Parivar bay area on Facebook,

Nandini Ray: okay. So I hope that people will visit that and know about your work, and other countries also will be able to know that. Anjali to create a center space, for the most marginalized members of our communities and in order to deconstruct the impact of gender oppression against transgender people, we need to understand specific terms within gender identity and oppressive system. A common misconception which some people have is that the term sex has the same meaning as gender and they use it interchangeably. So they may not understand that sex and gender have two distinct definitions and there is so much more beyond gender binary as non-binary people show us every day that knowing one's authentic self and identity is a powerful thing. But the problem is, if anyone has a misunderstanding or misconception about gender non-conforming people, then their wrong assumption can create a dangerous and oppressive environment so please educate us, educate our listeners on What does TGNC mean? What does trans gender non-conforming mean?

Anjali Rimi: Great question and I'll start with the basics. It's important to understand that as human beings we have various components of who we are. Two of those primary ones that you touched on are sex and gender. Sex is essentially what your born with your genitalia your physical anatomy is what determines sex. Gender is far from it. Gender is a psychological state of the mind as to what we identify as. So it's important to recognize that they are very vastly

different. But also beyond that within gender, most people wouldn't know this. But beyond man and woman there are hundred and ten known genders in the human Species. There's a lot more in nature but what has come to become is that the gender binary of a man and a woman is how we identify and recognize and it's heightened with the colonization which has only further compounded this as problematic aspect. Gender is a lot of things beyond male and female and transgender the word trans is to be in transit, in trans, in flux, in progress, in movement. So all of those things, they seem to basically say that transgender person is somebody who does not identify with the sex that they were born in. It doesn't take away from who we are, but it also doesn't correspond with our birth sex. And I think that is where we kind of get othered and move out of the valid gender identities. Transgender is anything to do with many aspects, it's an umbrella term for many expressions within the trans community. Like you mentioned, you know, there's trans male and trans female and as the name suggests trans female, which is how I identify myself or a female of trans experience is one who was born as male birth sex and they have attested to the gender binary of a female, or a female identifying person and that's how they exist in the world in an authentic way. Trans men is the opposite of that somebody who was assigned at birth sex as a female and who have transcended to live as an authentic male in the community. So it doesn't take away from who we are but it's also the challenge we have and in the South Asian Community, there is another aspect for us to kind of also double-click on, that is the aspect of transgender identities and Hijra identities Hijra is social psychological state of expressing feminine energy. That has more of a cultural connotation than to do with an individual's gender identification of self. And it is indoctrination of getting into a rut. Some folks call a cult you know like a guru chela system and be able to adapt to the responsibilities of being in that group. So there is a tight-knit community and some folks within the Hijra community can be trans, but in great majority they do not identify as trans. And I'm not generalizing, I don't want to generalize by any means but the trans community as such is different and you know most times in the Western Hemisphere we say, you know, folks think that Hindi translation or the Hindi word for trans is Hijra. So we need to really change that connotation and also recognize that the Hijra community is one that was considered to be demi gods and really respected before colonization happened and they got dethroned and dismantled from their status.

Coming back to Trans. Transgender also means many folks who are within that umbrella that widespread umbrella that includes gender queer, third gender, crossdresser, drag, male to female, female to male, Amber, Ambi gender, bi- gender, but one aspect that I want to recognize and that is definitely being seen and being identified more is the gender non-binary or gender non-conforming. These are individuals who do not attest to either one of the gender binary and live in a state of euphoria based on their sexual freedom and fluidity. It's important to recognize that gender non-binary folks, or gender non-conforming folks typically go with pronouns they/them. So you know, that's important to mention because when we want to use inclusive language we must make sure that we start using the right pronouns. So my pronouns are she/her. But I also recognize as gender non-binary so I go with they/them as well. And so, that is the short and the long of transgender you know, basically saying that it's varied identities, they have something in common, but there's some element of crossing over or challenging traditional gender roles as well.

Nandini Ray : You described such a rich subject so beautifully in such easy language that anybody can understand. I'm so glad that I invited you so that you can educate all of us in every heteronormative identity since in a misogynistic patriarchal society, transgender and gender non-conforming communities always face oppression and no doubt about it. We all know that. An oppression is perpetuated in multiple aspects of a society like, at an individual level, interpersonal, institutional and systemic level. And it is the synergy of these levels that produces transphobic results, both intentionally and unintentionally. And people who value misogynistic patriarchal culture show their biases openly against this marginalized groups of our community and some may not show their biases openly but they may feel that oh this group does not belong to our community. It's us and them and they are outsiders and that is also a covert discrimination and it hurts. So I'm sure in your work at Parivar you are seeing closely that people are facing oppression and discrimination on a daily basis because of their gender identity. So tell us some facts, incidents of this kind of discrimination that are bothersome for you.

Anjali Rimi : You brought up a very much needed discussion, which also kind of can be triggering because I as a trans woman have had to in a sense, escape the South Asian community and come to the U.S. and be able to exist and survive. I can say that it is difficult for anybody to exist as a trans person in this world that is very gender binary, that is so male-dominated but it's also compounded when you layer upon my South Asian identity which is my intersectionality. Intersectionality, the big word but it essentially means that whatever identities I have, that allows somebody to discriminate or oppress me all come together at the intersection, like, literally it can be divided into sections and when that happens, you know, we are further relegated within the marginalized community. So, trans people of color. Black, brown, are further marginalized in the community in any Community for that matter. The status of trans people anywhere in the world is far from being healthy.

In India, The system has relegated most trans people along with the Hijra to a third gender and I applaud that you know they're protected at reservations they can get passports and such. But it does not allow them to assimilate into the community and society, they're still very much ostracized by the society and they are relegated to begging and sex work.

Let me give you an example, Covid hit. India went into lockdown. We have organizations that we're working with. They can't even go to the bank and get the money out. Yes, The government is giving us rights and all that, but they were starving because nobody gives us a place to rent. So when we find a place, we are living with seven or eight people in one place. And I'm talking about the status in India, there is a shelter we work with, which is one of the few shelters that takes in trans folks. So, here's a community that has starved many nights, but yet they still took part in distributing rations when they became available. Why did the trans community get left behind because we are already relegated to not being treated as human beings and not being considered to be those that need all the support and are just like any other

human being. That's one part of it, the other extreme and the more triggering and sad part is that there are countless murders and violence meted out to trans people that don't even get recorded all over the world. In America we've been keeping track since 2015 and unfortunately we've lost folks every single year, the most being last year when we lost 44 trans people, mostly black trans folks. You know we have to really watch our back. We have to have a strategy to walk from here to the store so that nobody gets us and it's pretty hard to know that all of those compound into the statistics and the figures that say that the average life of a trans person of color, mostly black trans folks is 35 years, Now, can you imagine if you were born and your parents have already decided that your child is not going to live past 35 because they are trans.

I think parents are going to be worried but that's the fact of life. So when I celebrated my birthday going over the tail at being over 40, I felt jubilant that I got past that average life. 72% of the trans community lives under the poverty line in a first nation like America and almost all of them live below the poverty line in India and many other south Asian places. 45% of trans people have contemplated committing suicide, or have attempted suicide. Here's where I think I'll draw the comparison of me trying to be myself in a world that said I didn't belong. I've met all the expectations of my parents, studied to have an education, but as soon as my trans identity were out in the open, I was quickly relegated to being incompetent and being somebody who cannot handle conversation or cannot sit alongside other women and disqualified me as being a woman. So it's important to recognize that there is a huge aspect of discrimination around many many things from documents to medical care , to legal protections, to immigration and to be able to go to school and make something out of ourselves,

Nandini Ray: Oh Anjali, this is 2021 and we claim that we are members of civilized society. I'm sitting here and hearing all this discrimination and abuse that people are having. A human being is against another human being. I'm so sorry. I'm sure our discussion will help our listeners to reflect on their own actions and identify if they have any biases. If they are doing any such wrong things. And I truly hope that all our listeners will become our ally and each of them will try their best to prevent all forms of gender oppression and violence.

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- Add for Maitri in Hindi -

अगर आप या कोई जिसे आप जानते हैं जो घरेलु और domestic violence से गुजर रहे हैं , कृपया मैत्री से संपर्क करें

मैत्री कि सेवाएं बिलकुल मुफ्त और विश्वासनीय हैं. हमारी सेवाएं हिंदी, पंजाबी, मराठी, गुजराती और अन्य दक्षिण एशियाई भाषाओं में उपलब्ध हैं

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Nandini Ray:Do you want to discuss any myth about transgender lives and relationships?

Anjali Rim: One myth is that, you know we are not human. I'm a successful trans woman. I'm an exception that has been able to get out of India and make something out of myself and somehow navigate the system. So the first aspect is that we are not human and that's why trans youth suicide rate is the highest anywhere in the world. The second myth is, you know, something very drastic: that we are social elements that are unhealthy for communities. We are quickly put in a bucket and segregated and pushed away we're not allowed to rent homes. We're not allowed to date. We're not allowed to have marriages and live our lives that way. Because we are considered to be invalidated and considered to be deviant which is the farthest thing. Another myth about us trans folks is everybody who is trans is going to go to physical transition or gender transition. In reality, some folks are comfortable on this journey with being able to take hormones and be complete with that. The other aspect is, folks that do want to go through the entire procedure of gender-confirmation surgery are able to live their life more authentically . And it is not one surgery that's going to fix. It's not like an on and off button . The other myth is that children aren't old enough to know their transgender identity. Gender identity is known to a child when they are three or four years old and that is proven. I knew who I was by the age of seven. Of course I didn't know the word. I started recognizing and realizing who I was at 11. And was hoping that I would become this beautiful girl, when I woke up one fine day, Trans gender people are not mentally ill, this is not a mental disease. And that's how auntys and uncles and pinnis and attas and chachas. and chachis kind of tell, our parents who are trans that "tumhare bache ko kuch pagal hai" but that is far from the truth. In reality,trans people are some of the smartest people in this world.

Nandini Ray : I also want to touch upon that many people who are in a traditional patriarchal set-up and who believe in traditional patriarchal norms and conditions, for them it is very, very easy to say that oh something wrong with your child, your child has mental health problem without understanding anything without even trying to understand anything. They just put that label on somebody. They don't know that it can be detrimental for that child and as well as for that family but they just put that label.

Anjali Rimi: That's a good point to make and we should really break that down Nandini when we have such misogyny in our South Asian community, where women are gagged to be able to express themselves, education and having a whole lot of degrees does not give anybody the basics of how to be excellent human beings. So we have to recognize that there are a lot of marginalized voices in our South Asian Community but we don't talk about it. We just keep it within closed doors and I'm a living example that I can flourish and do all that, but I can never go back to my extended family in India. The other aspect that I wanted to bring up was the fact that our sexual orientation has nothing to do with my trans identity. Sexual orientation is who you go to bed with, gender identity is who you go to bed as. And that's a big myth that needs to be dispelled out there. Yes, there is a Hijra cultural aspect and considered as third gender but we are not third gender and we don't want to be that way. We want to be able to live our life as any other male or female cis person out there and finally I'll say we're not molesters. We are not out to kidnap your children. We are human beings just going to the bathroom to just pee.

One of the most important things that we need to see happen in the trans Community is to build capability and have opportunity. And so Parivar Bay Area strongly partners with a great organization called Aravani art project, you can learn more about them on our website. It is a collective which involves collaborative public and wall art projects to raise awareness of the friendship between Trans women and other people, women, men, everybody in public spaces.

It's a beautiful journey of allowing trans folks, to have an other option besides having to go into sex work or begging and be able to come to a studio in Bangalore every single day. get paid a stipend and be able to stay in a safe space while expressing their alternate voices through ART, Most of their work is done in public spaces, it is bodies of transgender identifying people that are telling the world that the violence, harassment, social negligence and pressure meted out to us despite all that, we are going to beautifully paint to make this a beautiful world. You can find their murals in almost every city in India. In the Bay Area, you can find their murals at the Facebook offices in Menlo Park and also at the office of transgender initiatives in downtown San Francisco. I can keep going on about the myths and the violence that is meted out at the results of believing those but I'll stop here.

Nandini Ray: No, I'm glad that we are having this conversation today. And it is evident that there's a lot of work to be done in debunking those needs and in securing full protection and rights for our non-binary siblings. So I would like to acknowledge some members. of our community at least they are trying their best to raise awareness, talk about these issues that matter to our community and we want to bring change. And that's the reason we had this panel discussion with Parivar and not only that we have had a couple of other panel discussions focusing those social injustice gender injustice, and we are seeing that people are some people are trying their best to learn about the issue and trying their best to take part but long way to go a long way to go. And there are a lot of incidents where trans and gender non binary kids are rejected by their parents, families and we all know that acceptance begins at home and it's

parents, family members ,friends, neighbors, co-workers, teachers. When they all become welcoming, then we can surely create an inclusive community. Can you share some tips on How our community can be more inclusive and welcoming for all genders. What can be done to prevent abuse and discrimination against this marginalized group of our community?

Anjali Rimi : I will continue to believe that despite everything I've gone through in life. So I think it's important to recognize that it's not just the trans community that needs to be uplifted and taken care of in the South Asian Community. We are very quick in giving labels. You know, she's divorced , she's a rape victim, She is the housemaid we give labels and when you start doing that your brain and your mind is going to continue to be so constricted and live in those compartmentalized ways and that you pass on to generations and the your children see that kind of behavior. So it's important to dispel those labels and actually recognize that one has to treat everybody equally. Attached to that is the fact that the qualifiers in the South Asian Community are not accessible to everybody just because somebody doesn't have education doesn't disqualify their thoughts or their comments or their opinions. And 95% of trans people have never been able to get access to education. Being able to open the fundamental aspect of learning to everybody is a basic right. Trans people are not asking for special rights or any marginalized community ever wants equal rights. We want Justice, equity, and equal rights an individual has to recognize their privilege. And a lot of folks are privileged. I have privilege. I'm sitting here, being able to talk to you without somebody chasing me with a knife. So I think it's important to build that awareness and education and reach out to our community of south Asians and brown folks. As long as it doesn't happen to you or your family it doesn't become important to address`

Nandini Ray: . Yes, exactly partly and understanding is a really important thing in all our lives. Like, for example, In Maitri also unless someone is going through domestic violence, people don't understand the seriousness of this issue and how can we change the patriarchal culture that is instigating domestic violence or partner violence. So, all of us need to understand that it is not happening probably in our life today but it is happening in our community. It is happening with our friends and allies. So how can we be allies? How can we be supportive and respectful to all community members as a very basic simple thing for human beings? But I don't know why you have so much trouble respecting other people . Respecting other people the way they want to be respected. It's so unfortunate that people around the world are still facing violence and abuse because of who they are, how they look and who they love. So, it is necessary for all of us to address and identify these inequalities in human relationships. I think we all can take part individually and collectively in preventing abuse and violence in human relationships. This is not about any specific community. We can be respectful to each other. We can be supportive to each other and hopefully one day will see that. So thank you for sharing your thoughts Anjali I know International transgender day of visibility is coming up, so would you like to share

something about that?

Anjali Rimi : Absolutely. And I want to touch on what you brought up so beautifully. It is about being human, being able to apologize when you make a mistake, being able to stay authentic. And at Parivar we strive to build that allyship because, you know, when you're addressing racism, you need white people there in the same way when we are trying to uplift trans communities, we need the cis allies to be there. Everything we do at Parivar from holding events to collaborations to being able to address the disparity is to be able to achieve that transgender. And it is just unseen and blind of an aspect within the South Asian diaspora and you have to address it. It is pretty pronounced with parents not understanding their children and I think it's important to recognize and look around and see that trans people have been very successful when they have been given access. Transgender day of visibility emerges from that. You know, we've been celebrating transgender visibility since 2010. And it's about uplifting and celebrating trans lives. Our achievements. Our competency, our existence and what we have contributed to the community and to actually say that we should be saving trans lives and trans-gender non-binary, intersects, gender-fluid and genderqueer all those folks because the violence is not what we want to be associated or known about, we want more than that, we want folks to be able to see the visibility of trans folks, being able to not just survive, but thrive . So, that day is commemorated by making sure that you're building allyship within the communities and making sure that we are uplifting and celebrating those that are our allies recognizing their privilege, and are able to show up for us and it's about education. Anytime you get an opportunity to be able to share our stories like I'm doing here today, It's a way of education. And in a way of driving awareness, all of those happen at transgender day of visibility across the world, every year it is celebrated on March 31st.

Nandini Ray: Visibility is important for all of us and it should be a liberating and healing experience for all of us. For some, it can be risky. We need to watch their back and it's so shameful here in 2021 but because of these harmful social conditions we still see this kind of incident, hopefully we will see change in our society and at least some of us are trying. Thank you so much Anjali for educating us. We are almost out of time. So, ending this discussion with, with a heavy heart and enormous hope for a better future for all of us. Anjali, thank you so much for coming to our show and sharing your wealth of knowledge. Experience and vulnerability with such grace. I'm sure we will do more shows on this topic to keep the conversation alive. I hope today's discussion will help many of us to recognize our own biases. And also, it will motivate us to take part in creating a welcoming and inclusive environment around us where all genders can feel safe respected and happy

Anjali Rimi: I just wanted to say in closing that easiest way to empower trans lives is by showing up and listening and recognizing, we are taking the time to understand what gender generally looks like, I really appreciate you giving me this opportunity and letting me connect with the

South Asian Community, my home Community to be able to at least educate one person who listens to this. If not more and be able to show up for us, stand behind that, stand next To us or stand in front of us to protect our lives. Thank you very much for having me

Nandini Ray: . Wonderful, Anjali, wonderful. I also hope for the same, thank you. This is your host, Nandini Ray, thanking you all for listening to our show today. We are ending this show with a lot of hope that you can be our ally in the true sense. Support Parivar, support Maitri and know about our mission, vision and please take part in bringing a new tomorrow. Keep listening to the Maitri podcast between friends. Find all our episodes on Soundcloud, Apple, Google ,Spotify and other podcast apps please like, share and comment. Bye for now, sending you all a big virtual hug. stay safe and stay happy. Thank you.

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