

## Some Day

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by Ho Kwon Ping

The words “some day” resonate with many people of my generation. They were the final words of the refrain from the song “We Shall Overcome” which marked the civil rights movement of America in the 1960’s and ‘70s. As a wide-eyed freshman in the US I attended student rallies and demonstrations, and I still recall the poignant, hopeful idealism of many young people, black and white, as they sang, arms linked and waiting for that “some day”.

For my parents’ generation, “some day” was a longing for a future when they would control their own destinies free from colonial masters; for freedom from poverty, hunger, illiteracy. The PAP when it came to power delivered on all its promises – and more – and “some day” became today. Basic civil rights – equality of gender, race, and religion – became such a reality that for most of our younger generation, “some day” as an expression of hope, has little meaning since they have not had need to hope. Not having to yearn for a distant and perhaps unreachable future is a blessing our prosperity and security has given to younger people today.

But there is still a group of ordinary Singaporeans, of different races, religion, and gender, for whom “some day” remains elusive, distant, and yet fervently yearned for.

These are the people whose identities have become marginalized at worst and unclear at best, because of their sexual orientation. Once labeled pejoratively “homosexual”, then “gay”, and now for the politically correct — LGBT ( lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender ) – men and women who happen to love and desire others of their same gender, have yet to become just ordinary people in the eyes of society as they pursue their love lives. Worse, sex between males remains a criminal activity – though the government has declared that it will not enforce the law.

The rationale for not simply decriminalizing Section 377A is presumably the social conservatism of the very religious Singaporeans – whether Christian, Muslim, or Hindu. Whether there will indeed be a groundswell of anger if Section 377A is repealed or not, I do not know. We still do not have polls which can accurately survey public opinion. As to whether public opinion should even be the basis for discrimination against people is another matter altogether.

In some other societies, not being of the majority race or religion was reason enough to be an outcast – itself the start of the slippery slope to legal and institutionalized discrimination. Thankfully, in Singapore we have embraced diversity as the foundation of our social cohesion, so it is unimaginable to us that people of a different race or religion can be legally discriminated against. How then do we justify the discrimination of people with a different sexual orientation?

I still recall when as a child, I was scolded and discriminated against in school because I was left-handed. My teacher thankfully, made a cursory attempt to make me right-handed, then gave up and accepted my deviancy. Today, being left-handed is so normal that no one even gives it a second thought.

The point is, as societies mature and progress, what was previously considered deviant behavior generally becomes part of a larger “normal”. This is after all, the vision behind an inclusive society. Inclusive across different religions and races, and yes, even between people of different sexual orientation.

The Government has recently created the vision of an inclusive society as the basis of its programs. This is a very timely and relevant vision: during decades of impressive economic growth, segments of Singapore society have not enjoyed the fruits of development as others. But diversity and inclusiveness is not just about income levels.

Nor is it just about tolerance. Instead, it is recognizing that not only should we be tolerant of those who are different from us, but indeed, that having a high level of diversity is a more positive assurance of creative continuation than unrelenting homogeneity.

It is about celebrating, as we do in the culture of Singapore Management University and Banyan Tree group, the very differences in our colleagues and stakeholders, which makes us stronger.

Long ago, my left-handedness made me a deviant in school. Today, our society accepts LGBT people as part of our social fabric. Perhaps gay love will even be decriminalized. Some day ....

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