

KÖN

Gender Studies Cell

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FOREWORD

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JOINT COORDINATORS

The Academic year opened on a note of innumerable uncertainties owing to the COVID-19 pandemic and the political climate, and thus navigating as a society through a tumultuous range of diverse social realities and culminating the same into an annual journal under a single theme made less sense. In its earlier days, Kon was taken out as an annual journal at the end of every academic year. However, we acknowledge that it's challenging to accumulate all that goes on in the country under one umbrella. At the same time realising that our readers would much rather prefer to engage with a shorter format on a monthly basis, so the executive council decided to formulate a monthly newsletter under the same name "Kon".

What we aim to do as a collective is to bring forward different narratives that exist and are suppressed across communities and to also build solidarities that can help while traversing through the many political predicaments. The idea behind our journal, KON has always been to acknowledge and celebrate the intersectionality between caste, class, gender and sexuality and to also confront the taboos that exist within the socio-political-cultural realms. We firmly

believe that to engage is to create safe platforms for individuals, especially for those who share marginalised social locations. Therefore, we sincerely hope to report and share experiences and ideas through means of artwork, stories, poetry and other forms of expression.

May this season of fall aid us in renewing our sense of hope during times of duress and may we continue to work for a space that is safe, worth preserving and imagines ideas of radical change as well as processes of healing, just like those who came before us. We congratulate the editors for their dedication throughout the making of this first edition of the Kon Newsletter for 2020-21, the theme for which is 'Queer Lives In Quarantine'.

Love, Rage and Hope!

we're

here

we're

queer



CONTENTS

**01 MIDNIGHT HOPE
(POEM)**

By Anna Alexander

**02 QUEER HISTORY:
HOW DID QUEER
WOMEN NETWORK
BEFORE THE AGE OF
INTERNET?**

By Umara Zainab

**03 TENDERNESS
(ARTWORK)**

*By Srishti
Vaideeswaran*

**04 THE CHAOS OF
COMING
OUT(POEM)**

By Priyanshi Prasad

**04 DIY PRIDE FLAG
(ARTWORK)**

By Khushi

**05 PRONOUNS, AND HOW
TO USE THEM RIGHT**

By minipapyrus.in

**06 PHOTOS FROM
PRIDE**

By Ananta Jain

MIDNIGHT HOPE

BY ANNA ALEXANDRA

The clock struck twelve
And shouts about another year echoed
The sound of a new beginning
New day, a new year
Air filled with thousands of resolutions,
And promises of being a 'new you'.
The clock struck twelve
A sad mellow tune filled the room
It was the same song, a familiar beat
Same old lyrics, same old tune
"I'll be just fine" echoed, it filled my soul
And I smiled, finally decided to be anew.

The clock struck twelve
And I started to search
Found some help from Haley Kiyoko, Love, Simon
And all the words I could find and mutter.
One day took a deep breath, blurted out about my true self
Cried my heart out and finally embraced the pink, purple and blue.

The clock struck twelve
And I start to type
Few words of hope, a hope to bring a smile
We are not the same, we ain't different either
We all want love, warmth, peace
A safe place to protect someone and be protected, it still remains the same
for me and you.

The clock struck twelve
And I still type
Extending a rope, a rope of life
I want you grab it
Grab it and climb
Till you find the skies filled with stars, dreams, different shapes, colours,
tones and hues.

QUEER HISTORY: HOW DID QUEER WOMEN NETWORK BEFORE THE AGE INTERNET?

BY UMARA ZAINAB

The anonymity of the internet has provided a safe comfort for queer people to explore their identity and form communities. The question is what used to happen before the advent of internet. How did queer women communicate, find comfort, seek relationships, forge solidarities, and confront tensions among their own group and the wider queer community?

This article is not a simple listing of places where queer women used to meet, but a glimpse into what went into these initial efforts to come together, and the fight against the dominant narratives around same-sex love that prevented queer women from talking about their lives, politics and desires.

Arati Rege notes how, at the start of the 1980s, there was almost a complete absence of lesbian women and their lives in movies, discussions and writings. The dearth of sexual awareness and information in conjunction with pressures of compulsory heterosexuality created a situation where “we (queer women) did not even know ourselves.”

The formation and popularity of women’s autonomous groups in the eighties provided the physical space for queer women to meet each other. The possibility of networking granted to them was due to the women’s movement. Many of these groups even forged relations with international organisations – in 1985, Indians attended a workshop for lesbians at the Nairobi Women’s Conference. In the

mid-1980’s, many same-sex desiring women met each other through local activist groups.

The dearth of sexual awareness and the pressures of compulsory heterosexuality created a situation where “we (queer women) did not even know ourselves”

However, the precondition for allowing queer women to enter and stay in these spaces was that they had to be quiet about their identity. They weren’t allowed to assert their love for other women in a brazen, unapologetic manner. Behind this hesitation was the pressure to appease to the mainstream nationalist imagination which saw ‘lesbianism’ as a Western import, trying to infiltrate an essentially Indian culture

Moreover, these were groups restricted to women involved in activism. Implicit in this was the understanding that the activist circles could not include 'ordinary' queer women who didn't want to engage with the political side of their desire, or be out in public, and instead simply wanted to meet and know others like them.

In an effort of negotiation with ideas of Western imposition of 'lesbianism', the term 'single women' was adopted instead which provided a community framework for queer women. Hence, from 1987-1993, several women met informally in one another's homes under the backing of single women's nights.

The Delhi Group, formed in 1989, was composed of feminist activists who also eschewed the Western label 'lesbian' in favour of 'single women.'

One of the most important efforts to collectivise queer women was taken up by **Sappho**, established on 20 June 1999, whose initial aim was to provide emotional help and support to queer women and female-to-male trans persons. It eventually grew its activities to fight homophobia and discrimination through a rights-based framework.

LABIA (formerly known as Stree Sangam) was also a queer women collective that was founded in 1995. The initial impetus behind it was the need for women to simply meet each other, as noted by Shahls Mahajan, one of the earliest members of the group. One of their first attempts to come together was at a meeting at Gorai in a rented cottage, which acted as a safe space where women shared their stories'.

with each other. LABIA was and has always been intersectional in their approach, having previously opposed death penalty and 'ghar wapsi'.

There were even attempts to involve lesbian and bisexual women in initiatives carried out by gay men. Established in 1990, Bombay Dost gave a writing platform to the former. Women across the spectrum, from married women to teenage girls, wrote in, seeking a support system. But after three or four rounds of letters, the move was disbanded due to the lack of an infrastructural system.

Counsel Club, started in 1993 in Kolkata, was meant to be a safe shelter for gay men and women to discuss both overt and covert forms of discrimination faced by them. A regular activity of the group was the Sunday monthly meeting conducted in the apartment of one of the members. The issues discussed in these meetings revealed the anxieties shared by queer women and the ways in which their issues were perceived.

The ethics of the question of married women who sought same-sex relationships was debated during these gatherings. It was reasoned that women hardly had any space to exercise agency and say no to marriage and were hence trapped in relationships with men they didn't choose. Most importantly, the peculiar position that lesbian women occupied, because of the ways in which the intersections of gender and sexuality affected their experiences, was reflected upon. These meetings and involvement of women were seen primarily as an opportunity for men to learn about the problems faced by queer women.

It was only in 1991 that Giti Thadani started the first explicitly lesbian organisation called Sakhi. The organisation created a system of communication for queer women in 1994. All the letters written to them were replied to and once it was ensured that the writer was a woman, a list of postal addresses of women who'd written to them earlier was included and sent to them. Through this, a channel of efficient networking was created by women of Delhi Group from Giti's flat, was created.

This had a much more profound and meaningful impact than just creating an infrastructure for communication. Indian women from a range of social classes, educational backgrounds, religions found an avenue to not only talk to other queer women but also enter into a world of belonging. Smita, a queer feminist activist notes how, "This kind of a system would have been very very important, simply because these women are not alone anymore. They don't have to feel like they are the only ones with these desires, or like this is not an Indian thing etc. More importantly, they could keep themselves safe when exploring this alternative side of themselves."

Whilst women in urban India had resisted the adoption of the term 'lesbian' due to fear of being accused of bringing in decadent Western ideas, many of the women who wrote to Sakhi identified as 'lesbian' and even 'bisexual'. This was mainly because their primary concern was to find a place where they could belong, and hence they accepted titles which granted them an entry into such places and also a sense of self.

A community was hence formed despite the fact that there was no physical interaction amongst members. It was based on the knowledge of each other's existence and a sense of empathy for each other after the recognition of similar struggles and hopes. A common theme which ran across these letters was the helplessness and frustration over lack of resources and spaces for lesbian women. Anuja, from Ahmedabad in 1991, wrote, "We are very few lesbians [in Allahabad] and also we are not sure of each other, except a few."

This system marked a change from earlier local activist groups. It was lot more democratic in nature – mainly due to the anonymity afforded to the women. Hence, women who were silenced by hetero-patriarchal norms of their families and communities and shunned by women's groups found solace in this system of anonymous writing.

Women who were silenced by hetero-patriarchal norms and shunned by women's groups found solace in this system of anonymous writing.

Another reason why there was an increase in the number of letters they received was due to the language of self-assurance and respect adopted by Sakhi which resonated with queer women across India. In an interview with Sunday Statesman Review, one of the Sakhi's volunteers, Aparna said – "My advice to young lesbians is not to crumble under pressure...Believe in yourself."

The increased communication among these women led to a desire to meet in real life and create a face-to-face community. The community Women to Women, created in Bombay in 1995, was the result of this desire to come together.

However, several tensions and rifts came up with the constitution of such communities. There were two points of contention. Firstly, not all women had the freedom of mobility to participate in meetings regularly. Secondly, many felt alienated since they did not have access to the vocabulary of politics used in the discussions in these spaces.

As a result they came to be dominated by "urban, middle class, upper middle class group of well educated, independent women" who were also at the forefront of local activist groups of earlier times, as noted by Shals Mahajan, a member of Women to Women.

While the activist groupings have sought to fight for rights and visibility, informal networks of communication have served a different but equally important purpose. "A network and community like the one developed by Sakhi, or like the ones

created by queers online are more personal, on ground, and community based. Real people are involved, influenced, and affected (positively and negatively) by these networks and communities," argues Smita

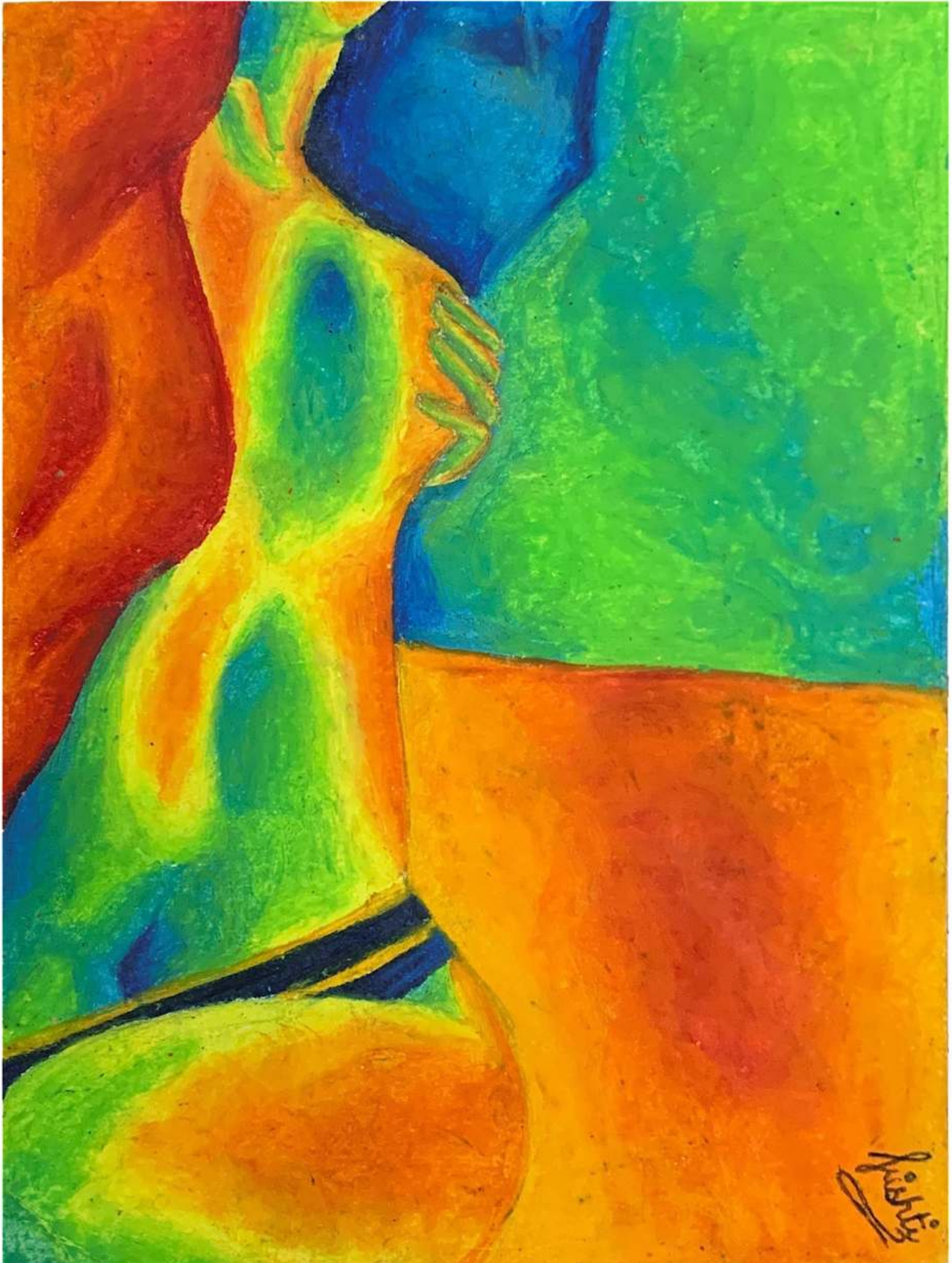
Many felt alienated since they did not have access to the vocabulary of politics used in the discussions in these spaces.

But there is a specific, individual importance attached to both advocacy groups and informal groupings or communities. "I don't think we can prioritise one over the other. Both kinds of spaces and communities need to exist and be worked upon for overall development," notes Smita.

The actual importance of documenting the work done by activist circles, of noting the porous boundaries between them being safe spaces to discuss personal issues and political concerns and the creation of alternative systems of communication lies in the need for queer history. History, when written from the perspective of the marginalized, disturbs the stories we so simply accept as important and normal.

TENDERNESS

BY SRISHTI



DIY PRIDE FLAG

BY KHUSHI V



**IT'S JUNE, I AM SUPPOSED TO BE OUT AND ABOUT,
I AM SUPPOSED TO BE ALL THE COLOURS IN THE RAINBOW,
I AM SUPPOSED TO BE LOVED, SUPPORTED AND MADE FEEL THAT MY IDENTITY IS VALID.**

**BUT I AM AT HOME, WHERE IT'S A HUSHED AFFAIR.
I AM BLUE AND THE EDGES OF MY EYES CRIMSON.**

SO I PAINT A LITTLE, WALLOW A LOT, PAINT MYSELF MY OWN FLAG, DISGUISED, BUT BRIGHT ENOUGH FOR ME TO FEEL OKAY.

THE CHAOS OF COMING OUT

BY PRIYANSHI PRASAD

The Chaos of Coming Out

Coming out are two words that cannot possibly convey the heaviness of what they represent.

All the emotions, the sweating, the questions.

Confusion, fear, and if you're lucky, relief.

Nervous glances, heart thumping

What played out in my head was miles apart from what happened.

The beginning of this year. A friend of four years. In the lane behind my house.

With a lump in my throat,

I declared a discovery about myself which was ten years old.

Expecting anger, disgust and worse,

I was met with love, acceptance and reassurance.

It has been eight months since that encounter.

Holed up in a house with people

Who hate people like me.

If only they knew.

Without those who truly know me,

I've had to learn to hide with great difficulty.

It is not pretty, sometimes.

Salacious conversations about 'girl on girl' action online

That only ever caters to men.

Evergrowing anxiety about being exposed.

Feeling like an outsider in my own home.

Someday- very soon

I hope to go out into the world again

With a newfound appreciation for my community

Where acceptance exists in abundance

And there is no fear.

queer
pride
queer
pride

PRONOUNS, AND HOW TO USE THEM RIGHT.

Originally published in www.minipapyrus.in

A pronoun is a word used to substitute a noun or a noun phrase. The Third Wednesday of October is International Pronoun Day. Why should you add your pronouns in your social media bio and e-mail signatures? What is the need to specify your pronouns? What are the different pronouns? Why is it important to use a person's correct pronoun? How to make sure that you use a person's correct pronoun? Read on to find out. **SEX, SEXUALITY AND GENDER:** What are the differences? Sex is a person's physical body. It is something that is assigned to a person at birth by observing their external genitalia. Sexuality refers to a person's sexual orientation. This defines who a person is attracted to.

The spectrum is very wide and includes heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, pansexuality, asexuality, demisexuality and so on. Gender is how one identifies oneself as a person; socially, emotionally and psychologically. What are the different genders? The gender spectrum is very wide and a specific number is difficult to ascertain. Each person identifies themselves according to how they wish to be identified. Remember, gender is what a person identifies themselves to be. Here are some (not all) of them. **CIS Gender:** A person whose gender identity is same as the sex assigned at birth. Most cis genders prefer the pronouns she/her/ hers and he/him/his. **Transgender:** A person whose gender identity is not same as to what is assigned at birth. **Non-Binary:** A person who does not sit comfortably with the binary identities of 'male' and 'female'.

Being non-binary means different things to different people. Sometimes, used as an umbrella term to refer any person who doesn't identify themselves as CIS gendered. **Gender fluid:** A person whose gender varies.

A gender fluid individual may fluctuate between genders or express multiple genders at the same time. This can vary randomly or vary in response to different circumstances. **Inter sex:** A person who is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male.

Why should you add your pronouns to your social media biographies and e-mail signatures? Adding your pronouns to your social media biographies and e-mail signatures signals to the recipient, or to other people, that you will respect their gender identity and choice of pronouns. It helps inculcate healthier, safer and inclusive work and social places. CIS gendered people, in particular, need to get used to using and owning their pronouns.

Adding your pronouns to your bio is a way to own your pronouns. This helps queer people to not feel pressurised and outed. It promotes a safe space to talk about pronouns and own them.

Do not make assumptions. Realize that, there is no way for you to tell a person's gender from their appearances or by just looking at them. to know a person's pronouns? You can't say a person's pronoun by looking at them or from their appearances. So how can you make sure that you use the right pronouns? It is easy. They might have mentioned their pronouns in the bio of their social media handles. If not, it's simple. Just ask them. A respectful way to do this is to introduce yourself and state your pronouns.

For example, I can introduce myself as, "Hey, I am Abha. I prefer the prefer the pronouns she/her. What are yours?" It is preferable do this in person or in a small group. Some people may not be comfortable sharing their pronouns in public and you have to respect that. Once, you know a person's pronouns all you have to do is respect it and use it. If you make a mistake while using a person's pronouns it's okay. We all make mistakes. But don't ignore your mistake. Apologize to the person and use their right pronouns from then on. Also understand that a person's pronouns can change. Respect that and use their right pronouns. You have to use a person's right pronoun even they are not in the room.

What is Transphobia? Transphobia is the discrimination people face when they do not identify themselves as CIS gender. This can be systematic like having to choose between male and female washrooms or having to check either male or female boxes while filling forms. Misgendering people contribute to everyday transphobia. Do not contribute to it unknowingly. What else can you do?

Start addressing people with "Hello everyone' or "Hey, y'all" instead of "Ladies and Gentlemen" or "Guys and Gals." Never address a person as 'it' or 'he-she'. These are slurs used against trans and gender non-conforming individuals. Some queer identities prefer the use of the pronoun 'it'. Only in that cases can you use them.

What are some gender-neutral pronouns?

They/them/their/theirs/themself

Ne/ nem/ nir/ nirs/ nemsself

Ve/ ver/ vis/ vis/ verself

Ey/ em/ eir/ eirs/ emself

Ze/ hir/ hir/ hirs/ hirsself

Ze/ zir/ zir/ zirs/ zirsself

Xe/ xem/ xyr/ xyrs/xemsself

These pronouns are often referred to as neo-pronouns.

Don't worry about the pronunciations. There are numerous variations of each. All you have to do is ask. If someone is comfortable enough to share their pronouns with you, you can always ask them politely for the right pronunciation. For example, you can say, "Hey, I have noticed that you use the pronoun x-e. I want to make sure I pronounce it right. Can you please help me through it?" These conversations also help to promote dialogue on the same.

How can I be prepared to use someone's right pronouns? The only way for you to be prepared to use someone's right pronouns is simple. Practice. One really good tool for you to practice is Minus 18, an online network driven by queer youth in Australia. They have a wonderful online app where you can practice with many pronouns

Members of the queer community weather violent storms on a day-to-day basis, the least you can do is respect them for who they are. Does everyone prefer a specific pronoun? Not all queer identities prefer a pronoun. Some people prefer not to label who they are. These people prefer that you use their name instead of any pronoun. There are many ways to define one self. You decide who you are and what you are to be called.

Finding out the right pronoun can be really difficult for you. It is not necessary that you identify yourself with a certain pronoun. Do not feel the need to label yourself if you are not comfortable with it. Another argument that has been raised plenty of times is that these neo pronouns is not natural to the English language. That it is butchering the English language. Using these pronouns is not butchering the English language in any way.

Language is constantly evolving and acquiring new meanings based on the context in which it is used. Pronouns such a 'ze' or 'hir' is not degrading the language.. They offer an alternative to people who do not conform to the heteronormative aspirations of society. Pronouns describe a person's lived experiences with gender and more importantly, the person's identity. Respecting a person's identity is a courtesy. Do not limit this to CIS gendered people..



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