

Philip Dallmann: Hello, inclusion believers, and welcome to the Access Champions podcast. I'm your host, Phil Dallmann, for this week's journey into the galaxies of accessibility, diversity, and inclusion.

Philip Dallmann: Uh, we got a great episode for you this week. Uh, Miss Brinda Guha, uh, joins us. Uh, Brinda is a, an Indian American woman, uh, and a choreographer, a dancer, advocate, a billion other hats here in New York City. Um, and she joins us to, to talk about the repeal of Section 37- or overturned of Section 377, um, in Indian law, what that means, uh, as a member of the LGBTQ community, and, uh, what it means, uh, in the realms of, uh, the, the ongoing decolonization of India. And she's bringing some great thoughts, and, and, and I don't want to give too much away, but, um, i- it's a really exciting conversation.

Philip Dallmann: I want to take a moment before we dive into that interview. Uh, last week we had, uh, Marc Molinaro on, uh, to speak about his initiative, THINKDifferently, out in Dutchess County. Um, Marc is also, uh, the Republican candidate for governor. Um, and I'm going to say I was incredibly disappointed over the last couple of days, uh, on social media, um, with some of the language used, um, in response to the episode, um, from both those who identify as, uh, liberal or Democrat and those who identify as conservative, uh, and/or Republican.

Philip Dallmann: Um, I, uh, we did not endorse Marc has a candidate. What we endorsed was, uh, Think Differently, uh, an inclusion program. Um, and I don't think anything constitutes hate speech. Uh, a- and the hate speech that was sent our way, um, frankly, is unacceptable. Now, do I think most of the folks, uh, who sent that actually listened to the episode? Absolutely not, uh, but I, I, I feel the need to put this out there, um, that, uh, hate speech will not be tolerated. Um, and uh, your actions with that, uh, will be unsuccessful because, frankly, I am quick with that block button.

Philip Dallmann: Uh, and, uh, don't think anymore about it. Um, but, you know, it's something that we hadn't encountered before, and I feel the need to just kind of put it out there, um, in ca- in case it had to be said, uh, uh, any type of derogatory or hate speech, um, used on social media will get you a quick block, and I won't think anymore about it.

Philip Dallmann: Uh, so moving on, uh, I do want to just put out there, um, please do follow us on social media. Uh, there is m- majority 98%, which is really incredibly positive things, uh, coming your way from, uh, specifically, our, our champion intern, Ms. Kelsey Rose Brown, uh, who is just constantly, uh, pulling content from our episodes, highlighting different things, but also, uh, finding great articles to retweet and share on Twitter. Um, we are @accesschampion on Instagram. We occasionally go live. We have our, inst- Insta stories going on, um, and on Facebook, uh, you know, obviously we have the ep- weekly episode, but it's also another way for us to communicate with you, our viewers.



Philip Dallmann: So, please give us a follow, uh, and, and please continue to subscribe, uh, on all platforms. Uh, we're working on Spotify, trying to make that happen. Still, it is a slow process with them, uh, but iTunes, Stitcher, Google Play, tune in all of the above. Uh, we are there currently. Um, if there is a way that you listen to podcasts, and you're, or a preferred way and you're listening in a way that you don't want to, uh, sh- shoot us a message. We, you know, it's likely we don't know about that platform, um, and we would love to be on it.

Philip Dallmann: Um, and, and, uh, that's that. So, uh, without further ado, Access Champion, Brinda Guha.

Philip Dallmann: All right, and we are here with Ms. Brinda Guha, who is a queer Indian American woman, here in, uh, New York City, um, a working dancer, choreographer, philanthropist, activist, all of the above. Um, thank you for taking the time to join us, Brinda.

Brinda Guha: Yes. I'm so happy to be here.

Philip Dallmann: Uh, so, uh, we were just chatting briefly before I hit record, as I was saying, um, this ruling, uh, an overturning of Section 377, um, I, I realized as it happened that it was a big deal, uh, obviously in that I wanted to cover on the podcast. Um, and, but it wasn't until, uh, you re-posted something, uh, an image that, uh, reminded me, an actual- well, not reminded me, actually made me aware, um, that it wasn't an Indian law, that it was in fact a British law, and this was not only a huge deal for the LGBTQ community, but also a huge deal in the realm of decolonization.

Brinda Guha: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip Dallmann: Um, and, uh, because you posted it, I was like, you know what, I'm want to chat with Brinda about it. (laughing) So, I, I'd love to hear from you, I guess at least initially, this has been, uh, a law in effect since the 1860s, um, the, the criminalization, uh, of queerness, a- and of the LGBTQ community in India. How, how has that influenced you, um, a- as someone growing up, uh, as an Indian American woman, w- with those laws, uh, existing from where you're from?

Brinda Guha: Um-

Philip Dallmann: Where your family's from?

Brinda Guha: Where my family's from would be more accurate. Uh, granted I'm very proud of my, um, roots, but I, uh, to be completely fair and honest, I grew up here. I have very little ... um, and I think it's important to say that, because I have very little connection to the gravity of how important this is, 'cause I'm not an Indian citizen.

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: But, um, because of, I'm 100% by blood, Bengali, for me, it's, it's important to see this as the product of first generation immigrants, because I already grew up with the, with the immigrant narrative, right?

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: Whether it was conscious or, or subconscious, I grew up with this notion that we're going to recreate something to better ourselves and to better our future. And, and it was already pretty telling when, when that need was in place, for my parents to move here. It was already pretty telling, because that's kind of, um, you know, quote unquote where more opportunities were, where more, um, ability to create sustainable life.

Brinda Guha: It existed outside of their homeland, you know. And so it was, it, that already was, uh, playing into mine and my brother's upbringing, because whether, whether they talked about it or not, because-

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: ... it was, um, it was a need for discovery of something more, you know, freer, you know, to be able to like prove yourself. And so that all to say, um, experiencing this, um, ruling has been really fun for me, uh, to, to, to see people's responses to it and to see people's writing to it, because as happy as people are, the macro-scale kind of perspective of this whole ruling is that, uh, yeah, this is just one more, this is just one more notch, uh, of decolonization. This isn't like a progression of any kind.

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: You know? And so it really just depends on your lens.

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: You can see a notch down from regression as being progression, or you can see, uh, or you can see it as mutually exclusive.

Brinda Guha: And so, um, I kind of feel both ways. I think it's a great step in the right direction, if we're going to be, uh, real about, you know, the reality of, of, of the ruling, and, and what it means for so many communities today in India.

Brinda Guha: That being said, I mean we're talking about the land that made the Kama Sutra.

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).



Brinda Guha: Like ever- like get real everyone.

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Brinda Guha: Like, you know what I mean? Like, we're talking about the land that, that idolizes, you know, gay and lesbian statues. We're talking about ... I do Indian dance, we, w- we replicate those positions, those postures, those tableaux, like in our work.

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: You know, and so for us to really think there's this, there's this huge perspective that Indians are really backwards and really patriarchal and really this and that. And that's not untrue, you know, I just don't think it's black or white.

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: I don't think that those things were put into place, uh, naturally. (laughs) You know, I think, though--

Philip Dallmann: Yeah.

Brinda Guha: I think a lot of those things were put onto people. Back in the ancient days, India had so many matriarchal societies, had so much, uh, worship and, and, uh, commonality and, and connection to the female energy and to female gods and goddesses. So there was, there, homosexuality, uh, womanhood, um, female empowerment, all these things are in India's DNA, you know?

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: Uh, and it's important to really look at India through that lens of, when we're looking at it today with our privilege, to look back from 2018 and to go, "Yes." And then there's this bandage of time where India didn't get to be India. (laughs)

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: You know, they were completely taken over with ideals that ... That's what colonization is, right? Colonization isn't just infiltrating the land, it's infiltrating thought, and it's infiltrating process, and it's infiltrating, uh, the weight of people's, um, entire existence and their, and their labeling and their workforce and they're, again, their, just their thought that-

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).



Brinda Guha: ... the way that they organize the population has been changed, not only physically and not only in a governmental sense, but in their mind. (laughs) That's what colonization is.

Brinda Guha: Today, when you see a racist Indian person, who prefers light-skinned over dark skin, like, that's because they associate light skin with, uh, the betterment of people, of the higher, the, the most elite, you know?

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: Because they were taught that elite is, uh, you know, a certain thing that, that it wasn't, um, I'm trying to find the words. It wasn't primal.

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: Because they were, they were first taught that they were primal people, and then they were taught that there's ways to be elevated, should you accomplish X, Y, and Z. And so, uh, but then the people who were allowed to accomplish X, Y, and Z were placed in different castes and had different responsibilities on them, in order to go do that. So the whole thing is really backwards.

Brinda Guha: And so what I think that this, this beautiful ruling, yes in the micro-scale, is like, rah rah, let's go man.

Philip Dallmann: Right.

Brinda Guha: Especially as, as a, as a queer woman of color living here, I'm all for it, don't get me wrong. In the micro-scale, what we're seeing is, we're seeing a step in the right direction, especially as a queer woman of color.

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Brinda Guha: In the macro-scale, what we're seeing is just, uh, the Indian people disinfecting themselves from this long period of time, where they were told what was right and wrong, and they were told whose lives are worth more than others, you know?

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: And so, um, it's really important to go into this and not think, yes, you know, progressive India or this, that, or we don't have anywhere to go from here. It's like, no, you have some more work to do. And, and it sucks that it's on our shoulders because we were the people who got, you know, who suffered from colonialism, you know?

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Brinda Guha: But um, it is our responsibility, now that we have gained independence, to also independently recreate our idea of thought and go back to the, to the roots of, of what made us a progressive nation in the first place, you know?

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: Um, and so there's a lot of work to do and I, I'm, I'm really happy about it, and I'm also really like, okay, don't rest on your laurels. You know, we have, we have stuff to do that, that the, the, the gay and trans and lesbian community of India is thriving. They do amazing, amazing work. And it's so much of the country falls under the LGBTQ label, you know?

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: And the only people who have stopped, you know, them from really truly expressing themselves outwardly, in the public, um, are the people who believe the things that the British have conditioned them to believe, which is that certain things are meant for certain people, and then other people are primal, and other people are not as advanced. And other people, you know, are not as elevated, and so those people are suffering from kind of this, uh, you know, postcolonial, you know, traumatic syndrome. (laughs)

Philip Dallmann: Yeah.

Brinda Guha: You know, and, um, those people are the ones imposing these really conservative views. But I do not believe that that's the spirit of India.

Philip Dallmann: What do you think, um, because obviously, um, one of tho-, the, one of the things you referenced is, is, is obviously Kama Sutra, but also, uh, the statues and what do you, what do you think art plays, uh, how art plays a role in sort of, uh, recapturing, uh, the essence of India, pre-colonization?

Brinda Guha: I think that art is the reason why India has gotten as far as it's gotten in the world.

Philip Dallmann: Okay.

Brinda Guha: So I think that, because, if it wasn't for art that has gone through all these kind of, um, eras, uh, before and after colonialism, whether it was depressed, whether it was celebrated, whether it was documented, whether it was passed along and wherever the, uh, wherever the emphasis was for art to be moved forward, and for whatever reason, I think, if it wasn't for art, India would not be considered such a profound, uh, uh, culture, you know. Um, and I, I think do think statues that are, you see in Ajanta, Ellora, there's these temples in so, in India, that are like known for their sculptures and their, um, and, uh, and their



clay work, and all the women and the men that they show, they show on the walls like etched, you know?

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: Um, uh, gay and lesbian relationships. They show all of these incredible, incredible things, and then full, and then there's full classical dances that are based on the stories of the, of the gods and the goddesses in the sculptures of these temples, and then on top of that to say, to have any kind of anti-LGBTQ, like rhetoric, doesn't make any sense, if we're really, really, if we're really, really looking at, um, where things came from, you know?

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: Because where things came from, that was never the key in India. So I think if it wasn't for art, these ideas of ... It's not even progressiveness, it's just. I mean it's just humans.

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: (laughs) You know.

Philip Dallmann: Oh, uh, we, we talk about that all the time on this podcast is, uh, looking, when it comes and it breaks down like the world of, uh, accessibility, diversity, inclusion, it, it just comes down to, to treating humans like humans.

Brinda Guha: Exactly.

Philip Dallmann: And, uh, i- it seems so simple, but so hard for so many people to grasp.

Brinda Guha: Right.

Philip Dallmann: Uh, it's such a complex, simple idea.

Brinda Guha: Yeah.

Philip Dallmann: Uh, and uh, yeah, no, I, uh, 1,000% a- agree with that.

Brinda Guha: Yeah. And I feel like if we can get, if we can look at, if we can look at colonization [inaudible 00:16:51] as a period of time where people's character, um, and people's thought process about human nature and how to treat one another ...

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: ... you know, as, as, a, as just that period of time, however long that was, as a challenging of everything that they once knew, right? So they're being retaught things, it's a type of trauma, right? And so they're being retaught things about themselves and therefore about each other. Um, if we completely eradicate that period of time, I don't think that a ruling, like section, uh, what is it, sorry, section, uh-

Philip Dallmann: Section 377.

Brinda Guha: 377. I don't think a ruling like Section 377 would be as like, wow, look at what we're doing here, you know?

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: I think it would just be. I think it would just be like, yeah, I mean, that should have been how it is the whole time. I think the response should have, would have been a lot more like, yeah, cool, now we're on task, you know, it wouldn't be so-

Philip Dallmann: Right.

Brinda Guha: It feels so celebratory because, again, you're undoing this period of time where you were told so many things about yourselves and your family, you know?

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: And so, and then to answer your second question, art is, I believe art is the reason why India's culture is as profound as it is, because I think art, whether it's music, whether it's dance, theater, um, or visual arts, the most progressive minds, quote unquote progressive minds of India are artists, you know?

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: Um, and granted we're known for our scientists and our mathematicians as well, and they're incredible people. Um, but I think it's the artists that have really placed our ideals of ancient India on the map. You know, I, I don't think it was government officials. I don't think it was politicians. I think it was always artists who did that, um, and helped the people get closer to their roots and like remember how things actually were, you know?

Philip Dallmann: Yeah.

Brinda Guha: Which does not perfect, but definitely close to human nature.

Philip Dallmann: Right.





Brinda Guha: I think the patriarchy came from colonization. I think elite Islam, Hindu fundamentalists came from colonization. I think the oppression of LGBTQ came from colonization, personally.

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: But um, I can definitely debate with other people with that.

Philip Dallmann: (laughing) Fair enough. Uh, so, uh, and, and, and I'll get you out of here on this. Um, I always like to look forward, um, as this is whether, you know, we're looking at as a, a, a huge step of progression or just again repealing, uh, and peeling away at, at the, the colonization that exists. Wh- what would you like to see next i- in the movement towards India, uh, regaining what they had pre 1860?

Brinda Guha: What I would love to see, and I think that this is kind of happening.

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: But what I would love to see and put concentration and effort and focus towards is, um, young people getting involved.

Philip Dallmann: Okay.

Brinda Guha: Uh, and I, and I think that it's a parallel to America, as well.

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: Because, you know, the young people getting involved is going to be the only chance we can to reverse this horrendous time we live in. But, um, but I think if young people continue to get themselves involved in India, whether that be in politics, in government, honestly to say the difference is that, in India getting involved in politics, you have to, again, undo a lot of, uh, terrible practice. (laughs)

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: ... i- i- i- you know, in India, the way government was built was even quite slanted. So, um, it's important that I think young people really get involved in the ideological connections to their old selves, through art and through leadership positions and through NGOs.

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).



Brinda Guha: And through, you know, I, because, and, and, and the reason I say young people, not just as a broad term, the reason I say that is because Indian people, and this is their ... I'm generalizing-

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: ... hugely. Uh, but this is their, uh, I think flaw when it comes to family, raising families is that they hold onto their kids for so, so, so long. And uh, they hold on to their kids and they, and they kind of try to plan a life for them. And so what ends up happening is, any kind of step forward that the, that the person would want to take from an early age, they wouldn't be able to take because it would directly affect their family.

Brinda Guha: And then there's this sense of guilt imposed on them for gaining any kind of independence early on. So what I do think that India- Indians can do, whether they're in India or especially, I will say, especially Indians who have immigrated here, um, and I see it with my students and their families. What I would really, really urge people to do is to give their kids the tools to make the decisions they want to make with their career early on in life, and then start to participate and give back. You know?

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: And because if they don't do that, their world is bigger. They have the Internet, they have all these things. They know that other countries are different, you know? And so they can, they can bring some of that stuff home they can bring some of that stuff or, or push their culture forward. They can, but it's really hard with Indians, because they hold onto their kids for as long as humanly possible, you know?

Philip Dallmann: Yeah.

Brinda Guha: And, and that, that there's a myriad of reasons that families, uh, overpopulation, there's a lot of reasons for that, whether it be families who have immigrated here or families that are still in India. I think one thing, to answer your original question-

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: ... that people can do differently and that could help, um, moving forward after this ruling, after rulings like this, is to empower, you know, their, their kids to be independent earlier.

Brinda Guha: Um, this is one thing, one setback of Indian families. And I, I'm prepared to face any flack for that. You know, this is one, this is one setback of Indian families. I teach a lot of Indian kids, especially kids of first generation Indians, you know?

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: And so, uh, their personal immigrant narrative has ha- is really important to them. And, but what ends up happening is, it stops the kids from, from progressing. And I believe that we live all in a time where we can contribute to our culture moving forward, should we have this space in time and support to do so.

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: And it's really, really hard to do that if you are forcing your child to le- to lead a certain life.

Philip Dallmann: Absolutely.

Brinda Guha: So, what I do think, what I do think Indians could do better and what I think we could do for- you know, do to push forward, is to give their brilliant kids some space and the support they need to pursue, whether it's art or science or math or sports, um, because that inevitably, with their brown skin and with their roots and with their language, that's going to push the culture forward, you know, they don't have to ... We have to actually push the culture forward. We can't just talk about pushing the culture forward, you know what I mean?

Philip Dallmann: Absolutely, yeah.

Brinda Guha: Um, that's, so that's one thing that I think Indians could definitely improve on, and, and it'll help, uh, with this momentum.

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: So we can see the reversal of more of these things, you know?

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brinda Guha: So young people, it's in the hands of the young people, I think.

Philip Dallmann: Fantastic. Well, thank you again, uh, for taking the time to chat, uh, Brinda, and thank you-

Brinda Guha: You're welcome.

Philip Dallmann: ... for all the work you did. Uh, I know we, we didn't, we didn't talk about it today, but I am sure we will talk about in the future, with Wise Fruit-

Brinda Guha: Yay.



Philip Dallmann: ... um, and everything you're doing for Planned Parenthood. Um, it's, it's tremendous work. Um, and uh, you are truly an Access Champion.

Brinda Guha: Aw, thank you so much. Thank you. I really appreciate your time, and I would love to talk about Wise Fruit in the future and, and anything else.

Philip Dallmann: Thanks again to Brinda Guha for taking the time to chat with us. Uh, just really, uh, invigorating, uh, conversation, um, especially when it comes to the youth of here, in America, and abroad i- in India, um, for the possibility of change and the possibility of, um, progress, progress, uh, towards where we want to be as a, as a world culture.

Philip Dallmann: Um, I want to thank Matt Kerstetter again, our, our producer for making us sound great every single week, uh, Eric Walton for that fantastic theme song, that, uh, I can't ever get enough of, uh, our champion intern, Ms. Kelsey Rose Brown, for killing the game each and every day. Uh, we'll be back again next week with another great episode and remember inclusion believers, never stopped running through that brick wall.