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# Challenges LGBTQIA+ Authors faced & Notable Achievements and Awards in LGBTQIA+ Literature

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## ABSTRACT

*This research paper examines the challenges and triumphs experienced by LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) authors within the literary landscape. It analyzes how institutional prejudices and personal hardships affect LGBTQ authors and their experiences, as well as the effects these obstacles have on the LGBTQ community and the larger literary community. LGBTQ writers have overcome these challenges with incredible fortitude and inventiveness, elevating LGBTQ voices and fostering an inclusive literary landscape. Their success stems from their stories' capacity to uplift, cultivate empathy, and promote social change. This study highlights the importance of LGBTQ literature in promoting diversity, inclusiveness, and understanding in our multicultural and dynamic society and celebrates the literature's transforming power.*

**Keywords:** *LGBTQ Authors, Literary Landscape, Institutional Prejudices, Inclusiveness in Literature, LGBTQ Literature Impact.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The literary world is a potent medium for individual expression and a window into the variety of human experiences. LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) writers have made significant contributions to this artistic area by providing distinctive perspectives on the LGBTQ experience. Her writings are victorious and transformational, frequently questioning the current quo and broadening society's perceptions of gender and sexuality.

The intriguing examination of the difficulties LGBTQ writers encounter and their successes in the literary world is the basis of this piece. examines the intricate relationship that exists between creativity, identity, and the publishing industry. This study aims to comprehend the challenges and dilemmas LGBTQ writers have when navigating a mostly heteronormative literary landscape.

LGBTQ writers encounter a wide range of difficulties, from personal hardships to institutional

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prejudices, and these obstacles have a significant impact on the LGBTQ community as a whole. Among the challenges they face are discrimination, censorship, and invisibility. Nevertheless, these obstacles haven't stopped LGBTQ writers—in fact, they've frequently stoked their artistic passion. Their successes are rooted in their tenacity, the elevating of LGBTQ perspectives, and the life-changing power of their narratives, which speak to readers of all backgrounds.

The goal of this study is to celebrate the successes LGBTQ authors have had in their fight to be acknowledged, heard, and seen in the literary community while also shedding light on their complex path. It highlights the transformational ability of narrative to develop understanding, empathy, and acceptance in a society striving for diversity and inclusion, underscoring the value of LGBTQ literature as a strong vehicle for social change.

### **(A) Materials and methods**

#### **a. Methods**

The research methodology entailed a thorough review of the literature in order to assess the obstacles and achievements faced by LGBTQ authors in the literary community. In order to shed light on the effects of institutional prejudices and personal hardships on LGBTQ writers and their contributions to literature, this retrospective study reviewed previous scholarly works and evaluated their conclusions critically.

## **II. CHALLENGES**

### **(A) Censorship**

Globally, according to the data I found, 25 countries prevent the depiction of LGBTQ people in media or literature or any mass communication through legislatures. 6 countries make the depiction a criminal offence. 22 have a ban on these depictions. You can face legal challenges in 8 of them for the depiction of LGBTQ characters. These are just the legal and outright provisions that directly censor the LGBTQ media and literature. The thorough overlook will fare much darker, no doubt.

In India, Ancient Indian literature had references to the queer world, reflecting diverse opinions on various aspects of life. Homophobia is more common in the Judeo-Christian environment. It was less pronounced in Hindu traditions, where homosexuality was viewed as impure but not unnatural. In the early 20th century, as India redefined its national identity, literature faced censorship by nationalist supporters who deemed certain content decadent. During this period, there was no organized support for the LGBTQIA community or sexual liberation movements in India. Two distinct perspectives emerged: one opposing any discussion of homosexuality or

erotic topics, and the other advocating for literature to address LGBTQIA themes but to eradicate such practices from society.

It is time to take a look at the United States and the United Kingdom. In the early 20th Century, Lesbian fiction, including works like "Orlando" and "The Well of Loneliness," faced censorship and legal challenges. 1928 was a pivotal year for the exploration of gender roles and sexuality in British fiction, with books like "Lady Chatterley's Lover," "The Well of Loneliness," and "Orlando" published. Changing attitudes towards sexuality were reflected in legal cases like the prosecution of "Lady Chatterley's Lover" and the defense of "The Well of Loneliness." The mid to late 20th century saw ongoing challenges related to the censorship of LGBTQ literature. Early works with homosexual themes faced censorship, and many pre-1900 homosexual literary works remained inaccessible. Scholars and editors historically censored or omitted parts of queer literature, and translations often involved suppression. Censorship trials of LGBTQ work like "Howl," "Another Country," and "Annie on My Mind" played a role in establishing First Amendment rights. Changing legal definitions of obscenity disproportionately affected LGBTQ books, and recent examples of censorship underscored ongoing challenges. LGBTQ authors and activists like Allen Ginsberg, James Baldwin, and Nancy Garden fought against censorship and promoted LGBTQ rights. Censorship of LGBTQ literature often had roots in homophobia and transphobia, negatively impacting LGBTQ youth. The First Amendment played a crucial role in safeguarding the freedom to create and read LGBTQ literature.

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the lack of recognition for queer authors in various regions, including India and Canada, was highlighted. These authors often struggled to secure space in mainstream publishing and resorted to self-publishing. Lack of representation in literary awards and curricula was discussed as a persistent issue. LGBTQ young adult literature became more widely available after 2015, and landmark legal cases like *Obergefell v. Hodges* impacted LGBTQ rights. LGBTQ authors started addressing the lack of representation by creating inclusive books for children and young adults. Book bans and censorship efforts increased, with LGBTQ authors facing backlash and threats. Advocacy groups like GLAAD and PEN America played a role in addressing censorship issues. The fight against censorship of LGBTQ literature remained important, especially in school and library settings. From the early 21st Century, soft censorship emerged as a subtle form of exclusion affecting LGBTQIA+ authors and their works. Some LGBTQIA+ authors experienced revoked invitations and rumors of parental objections, potentially due to their identities and themes. The authors questioned whether their LGBTQIA+ identities led to exclusion from school bookshelves and events with limited public discussion. Instances of soft censorship often went unreported, leaving authors

uncertain about the reasons for their works not being promoted. Being open about LGBTQ+ advocacy could result in decreased interest from educators and administrators, affecting author interactions.

Let us take a look at China. Fans actively participate in internet censorship, driven by a decentralized form called participatory censorship. Platform design influences this censorship, with reporting mechanisms affecting discussions and limiting queer expressions. BL writers in China face criminalization due to internet censorship policies. The complex interplay between participatory culture, corporate interests, and censorship is explored. Fans' collaboration challenges traditional notions of masculinity and gender identity, impacting broader society.

The niche BL market allows unique interpretations and reintroduces queer themes into censored works. Fans self-regulate communities, both empowering and limiting progressive aspects of fandom. Decentralized censorship and content moderation on platforms like Weibo involve Super Topics and topic managers in rule enforcement. BL fandom censorship in mainland China, including government and platform practices, is concerning. BL novel adaptations often downplay homosexual themes, leading to fan interpretations. Content removal raises censorship concerns, and participatory censorship through reporting functions shapes discourse boundaries. BL fans adapt to censorship challenges through alternative platforms, overseas fanfiction sites, and campaigns against content restrictions, including creating explicit stories.

### **(B) Lack of Recognition**

On the global scale, the Diversity Baseline Survey (DBS) by Lee & Low Books highlighted a lack of diversity in the publishing industry globally, encompassing race, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. The DBS 1.0 (2015) revealed underrepresentation, with a significant majority of respondents identifying as White, cisgender women, straight, and non-disabled. Despite increasing awareness of diversity issues, DBS 2.0 (2019) indicated limited progress in diversifying the industry, with similar demographics among respondents. Marketing and publicity departments in publishing had the lowest percentage of White employees, suggesting disparities among departments. The publishing industry is urged to reflect the diverse world it serves and promote equity, inclusion, and systemic change.

Queer individuals in India historically lacked representation in literature, but recent works like 'Ritu Weds Chandni' and 'Mohanaswamy' have provided access to LGBTQIA+ stories. LGBTQIA+ literature in India unofficially began with Shakuntala Devi's 'The World Of The Homosexuals' in 1977, followed by other works. Despite the presence of queer literature, queer authors in India struggle to secure space in mainstream publishing and often resort to self-

publishing. Queer writers from marginalized communities face additional challenges due to factors like casteism and transphobia. Traditional publishing houses in India hesitate to engage with diverse or rights-based queer narratives. Queer literature thrives in regional languages, and translating these works into English can showcase diverse queer experiences. Recognition for queer writing in India is limited, with many awards and anthologies overlooking queer and trans authors. Initiatives like the Rainbow Awards aim to bring recognition to the work of queer authors and create more opportunities for aspiring writers.

The absence of recognition for the history of queer literature in Canadian publishing is a concern, with past incidents of censorship highlighting issues. Prominent journals like *Canadian Literature* have limited articles on censorship and queer theory in Canada. The industry appears hesitant to examine its role in marginalizing queer writers despite theoretical discussions on intersectional queer Canadian identity. The lack of acknowledgement of queer books by Canadian institutions raises suspicion.

Queer literature often faces underrepresentation in major literary awards and educational curricula, hindering recognition. Tokenism can occur when queer authors are published, where their work is seen as a "diversity checkbox" rather than valued for its artistic merit. Biases in reader reviews on platforms like Goodreads and Amazon can unfairly affect the recognition and ratings of queer-themed books. Achieving full equity and representation for queer authors in the literary world remains an ongoing challenge, requiring reader support and industry changes.

### **(C) Discrimination:**

The Diversity Baseline Survey (DBS) identified a lack of diversity in the publishing industry, including underrepresentation based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. Queer authors in India struggle to secure space in mainstream publishing and often resort to self-publishing due to challenges. Queer writers from marginalized communities in India, such as Dalit-queer individuals, face additional hurdles due to casteism and transphobia. The Canadian publishing industry's lack of recognition for queer literature and historical censorship incidents highlights direct discrimination.

Initiatives like #ownvoices and #DisruptTexts aim to promote diverse voices and challenge problematic books, addressing indirect discrimination by advocating for representation. DBS 2.0 noted increased diversity in executive positions but highlighted predominantly White editorial departments, reflecting indirect discrimination. The research titled *Gender, Sexuality, and (Be)longing in Hindi Cinema* accurately emphasizes the need for understanding and acceptance of LGBT individuals to combat indirect discrimination.

DBS 2.0 indicates insufficient progress in diversifying the publishing industry, suggesting a form of soft censorship that limits diversity and inclusion. The Canadian publishing industry's reluctance to examine its role in marginalizing queer writers hints at a form of soft censorship that stifles discussion and change. The lack of public complaints about issues in the Canadian publishing industry raises questions about potential soft censorship through silence. The study *Gender, Sexuality, and (Be)longing in Hindi Cinema* critiques the portrayal of queer identities in cinema, highlighting soft censorship through negative portrayals and misconceptions.

#### **(D) Other challenges**

##### **a. Self-Censorship in Diversity and Recognition:**

The Diversity Baseline Survey (DBS) revealed a lack of representation in publishing, prompting self-censorship by some authors who may fear their work won't be widely accepted due to its diversity. Initiatives like #ownvoices and #DisruptTexts challenge self-censorship by promoting diverse voices and encouraging authors to share their unique perspectives. Queer authors in India, despite their presence in literature, may resort to self-publishing due to challenges in mainstream publishing, reflecting a form of self-censorship. Traditional publishing houses' hesitancy to engage with diverse or rights-based queer narratives can lead to self-censorship among queer authors. The lack of recognition for queer books in Canadian institutions may deter authors from openly discussing or publishing their queer-themed works.

##### **b. Fear of violence**

Heterosexist censorship and swift removal of LGBTQ books by school administrators can contribute to a hostile environment and raise concerns about the fear of violence or discrimination among LGBTQ students. Queer authors in India, especially those from marginalized communities, may face additional hurdles such as casteism and transphobia, which can contribute to their fear of violence or discrimination. *LGBTQ Authors At The Center of Book Bannings Speak Out*: Some LGBTQ authors have encountered backlash and threats due to their inclusive works, indicating that they face a fear of violence and harassment. LGBTQIA+ authors have experienced soft censorship through revoked invitations and rumours of parental objections, which may be linked to the fear of backlash or violence.

##### **c. Isolation and other challenges**

Queer authors often face soft censorship, where their works are quietly sidelined or omitted from school bookshelves and events due to concerns about parental objections or audience disinterest. Authors who openly discuss LGBTQIA+ advocacy may experience decreased interest from educators and administrators during events. Some audiences openly express

disinterest in LGBTQIA+ themes, possibly due to homophobia. Recognition for queer writing is often lacking, with awards and anthologies frequently overlooking queer and trans authors. This lack of recognition isolates these authors from mainstream literary recognition. Queer authors may struggle to secure traditional publishing opportunities due to concerns about broad appeal or backlash from conservative readers, limiting their visibility.

Queer authors from marginalized backgrounds, such as Dalit-queer individuals, face additional hurdles due to intersecting discrimination based on factors like casteism and transphobia. In some cases, queer authors may feel like their work is tokenized, seen as a "diversity checkbox" rather than valued for its artistic merit, which can lead to feelings of isolation and frustration. Biases in reader reviews on platforms like Goodreads and Amazon can unfairly impact the recognition and ratings of queer-themed books, contributing to the isolation of queer authors. Some queer authors use pseudonyms or remain closeted to protect their privacy, fearing discrimination or backlash, which can limit their recognition and isolate them from openly sharing their identity.

### **III. FINANCIAL CHALLENGES**

LGBTQ authors often encounter financial challenges due to heterosexist censorship, which assumes that LGBTQ content promotes homosexuality and raises suspicion.

This suspicion can lead to reduced support and resources for their work. Soft censorship in the form of revoked invitations, rumours of parental objections, and decreased interest during events where LGBTQ themes are revealed can result in lost opportunities and financial setbacks for LGBTQ authors. Some LGBTQ authors resort to self-publishing due to challenges in traditional publishing, which can be financially taxing and may not provide the same level of financial support or exposure. Soft censorship and hesitancy from publishers to engage with diverse or rights-based queer narratives can limit the financial success and recognition of LGBTQ authors. Lack of recognition and awards for LGBTQ authors can lead to missed financial opportunities and hinder their ability to earn a living through their writing. Discriminatory practices, such as lower advance payments to "non-straight" authors in the publishing industry, can directly impact the financial stability of LGBTQ authors. Financial challenges can also arise from censorship efforts that target LGBTQ-themed books, limiting their reach and potential for sales.

#### **(A) Triumphs**

Various LGBTQ literary awards celebrate outstanding contributions to LGBTQ literature. Golden Crown Literary Society Awards include the Ann Bannon Award, Directors Award, and



Goldie Awards in various lesbian content categories. Publishing Triangle Awards cover lesbian poetry, emerging writers, lifetime achievements, and more. The American Library Association's Rainbow Round Table offers awards like the Barbara Gittings Literature Award and Stonewall Book Award. Lambda Literary Foundation's Lambda Literary Awards span multiple genres in LGBTQ literature. Gaylactic Spectrum Awards recognize positive portrayals of LGBTQ topics in sci-fi, fantasy, and horror. Bi Writers Association presents Bisexual Book Awards. Blue Metropolis awards the Blue Metropolis Violet Prize to established LGBTQ writers. Writers' Trust of Canada's Dayne Ogilvie Prize honors emerging LGBT+ Canadian writers. Green Carnation Committee's Green Carnation Prize celebrates LGBTQ fiction and memoirs. Otherwise, the Award focuses on sci-fi or fantasy that explores gender. Lesfic Bard Awards use a unique judging process for lesbian writers. Sense of Gender Awards honors gender exploration in sci-fi and fantasy. The Alice B Readers Appreciation Committee's Alice B Readers Award is for well-written lesbian fiction.

These awards promote LGBTQ visibility and diverse voices in literature.

#### **IV. POPULAR LGBTQ NOVELS**

The LGBTQ novels or novels containing queer representation are becoming popular day by day. Here are some queer novels that became bestsellers:

1. *Call Me by Your Name* by André Aciman (2007): A coming-of-age novel about a young Italian boy who falls in love with a visiting American graduate student. The novel was adapted into an Academy Award-winning film in 2017.
2. *The Secret History* by Donna Tartt (1992): A murder mystery set at an elite liberal arts college in Vermont. One of the main characters is a closeted gay man.
3. *Stone Butch Blues* by Leslie Feinberg (1993): A semi-autobiographical novel about a transgender woman's coming of age in the 1950s and 1960s.
4. *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* by Alison Bechdel (2006): A graphic novel about Bechdel's coming-of-age as a lesbian and her relationship with her closeted gay father.
5. *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* by Emily M. Danforth (2012) is a young adult novel about a teenage girl who is sent to a conversion therapy camp after being caught kissing another girl.
6. *Red, White & Royal Blue* by Casey McQuiston (2019): A romance novel about the son of the American president and the prince of Wales.
7. *The Henna Artist* by Alka Joshi (2020): A historical novel about a young Indian woman

who becomes a henna artist in 1950s America. The novel explores themes of identity, culture, and family.

8. *The Jasmine Throne* by Tasha Suri (2021): A fantasy novel about a princess who must fight to save her kingdom from a dark force. The novel features a lesbian romance.
9. *The House in the Cerulean Sea* by T.J. Klune (2021): A fantasy novel about a caseworker who is sent to investigate a magical orphanage. The novel is full of heart and humour.
10. *The Sun and the Star* by Rick Riordan and Mark Oshiro: A novel about Nico di Angelo and his boyfriend, Will Solace, on a quest to rescue their friend Bob from Tartarus. Along the way, they face old friends and foes, and learn more about themselves and their relationship.

These are just a few of the many queer novels that have become bestsellers. The genre is growing and diversifying all the time, and there are many great books out there to choose from.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the experience of LGBTQ writers in the literary world demonstrates the tenacity and inventive strength of a group of people who have continuously faced prejudice and hardship. LGBTQ authors have overcome systemic obstacles including discrimination, censorship, and lack of representation by bravely expressing their experiences and perspectives, which has helped to promote empathy and understanding.

LGBTQ literature has a profound effect on readers from a wide range of backgrounds and contributes to a society that is more empathetic and tolerant. Its influence goes well beyond the LGBTQ community itself. LGBTQ authors have shaped societal standards, disproved prejudices, and promoted more acceptance and equality via their stories.

The experiences and accomplishments of LGBTQ authors provide witness to the power of narrative in driving social change and creating understanding bridges as the world continues to change, embracing variety and advocating inclusiveness. In the future, it will be crucial to keep elevating the voices of LGBTQ writers, making platforms for their tales to be heard, and making sure that their experiences continue to influence the development of a more just and compassionate literary environment for future generations.

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