

# India's 'gay' Prince thanks Oprah for exposure

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NEW YORK: India's only openly gay prince Manvendra Singh Gohil of Rajpipla in Rajasthan has credited daytime talk show doyen Oprah Winfrey for the recent change in homosexuality laws in India which no longer deem homosexual acts as illegal.

Appearing on the Oprah Show Jan 25 for a second time - his first appearance was in 2007 - Manvendra Singh talked of how life had changed for him since appearing on the show three years ago and how the tremendous publicity and exposure had not only brought about attitude changes in India towards gays to the extent that today gay pride parades are seen in various cities across the country, but how it brought about change in law whereby homosexual acts were not longer illegal, prompting Oprah to 'high-five' him with pride.

On the show Tuesday, as in his first appearance in 2007, the scrawny Manvendra looked somewhat incongruous in a royal red sherwani worn over white churidaar pants, a gold embellished turban on the head and a red tikka on his forehead.

When Oprah expressed concern for him since his last appearance as to the reaction in India over his Oprah show appearance, Manvendra said he was in fact thankful to Oprah for the exposure. He said since the show he has been invited to inaugurate the Euro Pride gay festival in Stockholm, Sweden in 2008 and has received more support back



Prince Manvendra Singh Gohil talks about being the only openly gay royalty in India on the Oprah Winfrey Show  
-Pic Courtesy Harpo Studios

home for his social work in the area of HIV-AIDS prevention and education.

Asked by Oprah how homosexuality was viewed in India today, Manvendra said India has changed as well. Homosexual acts are no longer illegal, and gay Indians have started asserting their rights. In 2007, a gay pride parade in India would have been unthinkable; now they are regular fixtures in the country, he said. "Not only just Mumbai," Manvendra told Oprah, "We have pride [parades] happening [at] other places in India as well: in Delhi, in Calcutta, in South India."

Prince Manvendra says being a guest on The Oprah Show has opened many opportunities for

dialogue. "I'm noticing that they are now getting comfortable to the terms. The mainstreaming

**His parents attempted but failed to disinherit him after he revealed his homosexuality; it was revealed to his family by doctors in 2002 following his hospitalization for a nervous breakdown**

has started happening," he says. "A lot of guys are actually coming out to their parents, and a

few of them have even come out to the society."

Manvendra was born in Ajmer in 1965 to Maharana Raghubir Singhji Rajendrasinghji Sahib, who inherited the title of Maharana of Rajpipla in 1963. Although princes and royalty in general were derecognized by India in 1971, descendants of the royal families in Rajasthan and some parts of Gujarat are still revered locally as royalty.

His parents attempted but failed to disinherit him after he revealed his homosexuality; it was revealed to his family by doctors in 2002 following his hospitalization for a nervous breakdown. However, it was when he talked publicly about his sexual orientation in 2006 in a magazine inter-

view, that his family took action and accused him of bringing dishonor to the clan.

In 2007, Manvendra stepped out of the closet and into a firestorm of controversy when he announced to the world he is gay. His mother took out an ad in the newspaper disowning him and threatening anyone who referred to him as her son. His father was convinced he could be changed into a heterosexual.

By coming out, Prince Manvendra even risked his freedom. At the time in India, being gay was legal, but homosexual acts were punishable by up to 10 years in prison.

In his latest appearance on the Oprah Show, it was revealed that Manvendra's mother had at that time issued newspaper advertisements disowning him. When asked by Oprah how his relations with his parents were now, Manvendra said, "My father is cool about it now, but my mother still does not talk to me."

Manvendra told Oprah that his father had expressed his acceptance of his son in a recent media interview where he blamed societal pressures for initially taking a stand of publicly disowning his son. He said that he continues to live in the same royal palace as his parents, but in a section far from where his mother lives. He says he keeps "bumping" into his mother once in a while in the palace.

His father, Manvendra said, now even attends functions of the Lakshya Trust founded by Manvendra to work in the area of prevention and education of HIV/AIDS.

## IAAC Film Festival in NYC to be held in May

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NEW YORK: The Indo-American Arts Council (IAAC) kicks off its second decade of film excellence with a new name and a new set of dates for its signature event of the year. The New York Indian Film Festival: 11th Annual IAAC Film Festival will take place May 4 to 8. Formerly held every November, the oldest and most prestigious film festival for Indian cinema in North America is now moving to its new spring home on the first weekend of May.

The New York Indian Film Festival will continue its tradition of launching at the world-famous Paris Theatre in Manhattan with



Indo-American Arts Council Executive Director Aroon Shivdasani

its star-studded Opening Night red carpet premiere. Film festival screenings will take place May 5 through May 8 at Tribeca Cinemas

with the Closing Night selection to screen at Asia Society followed by the annual awards ceremony and after party. In addition, the festival

will also host an exclusive celebrity-filled celebration honoring the 150th anniversary of the birth of India's legendary Nobel Prize-winning artist and poet Rabinranath Tagore at Asia Society on May 8.

A call for submissions has been announced by the Indo-American Arts Council with a deadline date of February 20.

"We start 2011 with a whole new energy for our annual IAAC Film Festival - a new name, a new Film Festival Director and a move to Spring," says Indo-American Arts Council Executive Director Aroon Shivdasani. "I am really excited about these changes and look forward to presenting New York with a fresh and exciting selection of films this year."

Film Festival Director Aseem Chhabra adds. "I am thrilled to have been appointed as the director of the festival - now renamed as the New York Indian Film Festival. I have been a part of the IAAC family for several years and its events have been my one-stop shop as an entertainment writer and a New York-based consumer of Indian arts."

Created in 2001 in the wake of the September 11 attacks on New York City, the film festival was started to create a better understanding of the people and stories from the Indian subcontinent by bringing the most acclaimed feature films, shorts, and documentaries from that region and its Diaspora.