National Medical Commission Advisory on LGBTQIA+

Why in news?

The National Medical Commission (NMC) in its recent advisory has emphasised the need to avoid derogatory references to the LGBTQIA+ community in medical textbooks and teaching methods.

What are the instructions given?

> LGBTQIA+ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and Asexual people

- Medical institutions should not teach students in a way that is derogatory or insulting to the LGBTQIA+ people.
- Authors of medical textbooks should amend all unscientific and discriminatory information about the community.
- Medical universities, colleges, institutions should not approve books with such derogatory references.
- Government and authorities are to strictly apply the guidelines.

What was the Madras HC role in this?

- The NMC circular represents the fruition of efforts by Justice N. Anand Venkatesh, who framed guidelines in an order in June 2021, to protect the LGBTQIA+ community's rights.
- In the course of the hearing, Justice Venkatesh subjected himself to counselling to overcome his own mindset, limitations in understanding issues of gender non-conformity.

Case

- A writ petition was filed by a lesbian couple for protection against harassment.
- The case went on to introspect the status of those who did not conform to gender identity assigned at birth or to hetero-normative sexual orientation.

Textbooks

- The court's attention was then drawn to psychiatry, forensic medicine and toxicology textbooks that had unscientific and derogatory remarks against LGBTQIA+ people.
- E.g. curriculum of undergraduate forensic medicine described "sodomy", "lesbianism" and "oral sex" as sexual offences, and "transvestism" (cross-dressing) as a "sexual perversion".
- Some books listed homosexuality as a disorder and even mentioned conversion therapy.
- Conversion therapy is, notably, banned in several countries and was harshly criticised by the Madras high court.
- The HC also observed that "queerphobia" was rampant in medical education.

"Queerphobia" refers to prejudicial and abusive attitudes and behaviour towards the community.

HC Directions

- The NMC and the Indian Psychiatric Society should bring in necessary changes in the curriculum.
- Police are advised not to harass sexual minorities.
- Changes to the police conduct rules to provide for punishing erring police personnel in this regard.

What lies ahead?

- The NMC advisory underscores the value of institutional awareness on issues concerning queer and transgender people.
- However, in complex issues with that of LGBTQIA+ people, there is need for greater effort by the authorities at various levels.
- Moreover, changes in law on same-sex relations must be along with an attitudinal change in society.

Source: The Hindu, Hindustan Times

