

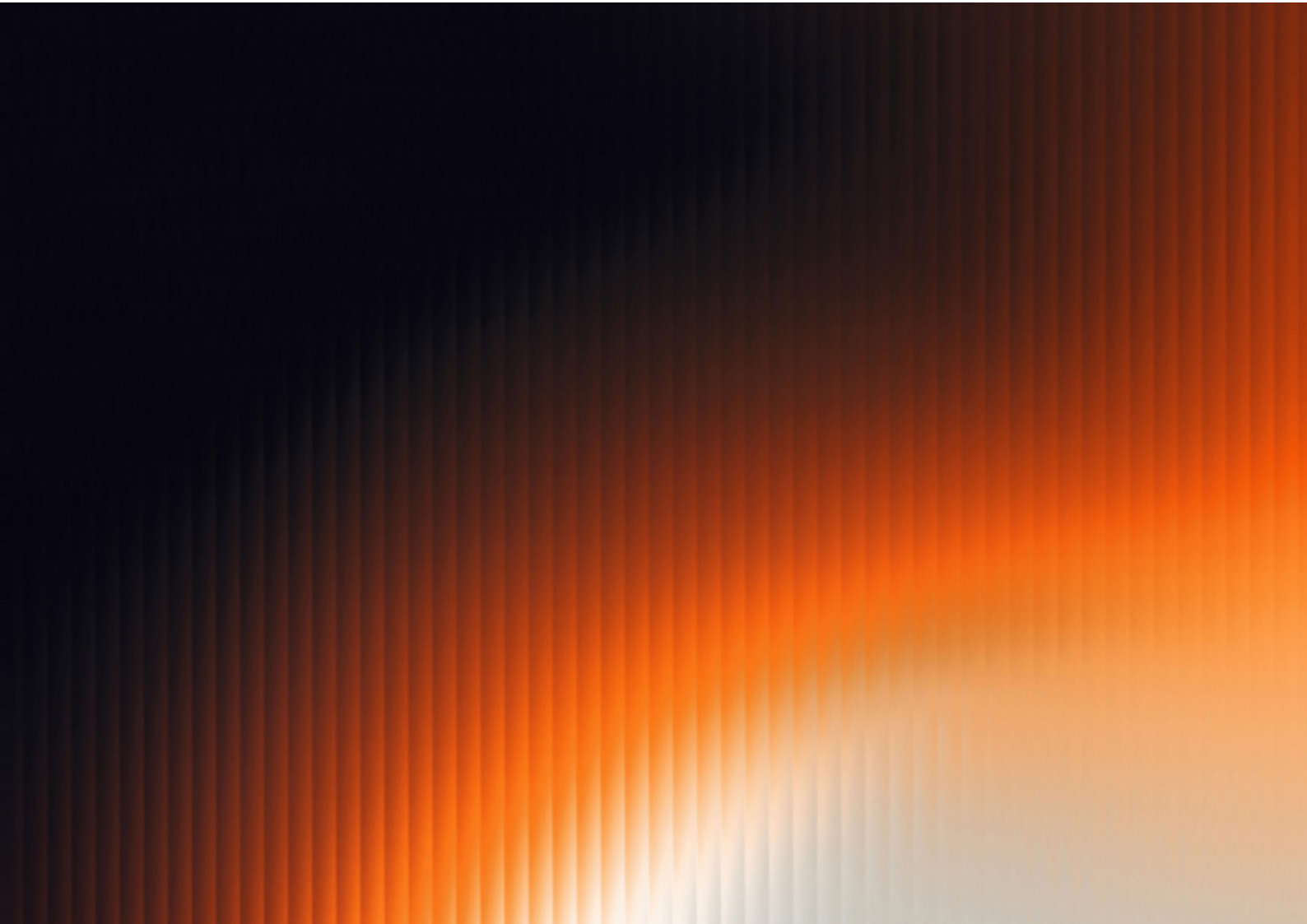
AVIAN **We.**



DIVERSITY EQUITY  
AND INCLUSION

# EQUITY ECHO

OUR JOURNEY IN INCLUSION



# Foreword



Identity must not become a barrier to opportunity and participation. At its core, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) is about recognising the equal worth of every individual. However, DEI doesn't function in isolation. Overarching structural and systemic norms tend to trickle into homes and communities—workplaces are no exception.

As an organisation, we organise blood donation drives and encourage everyone to participate. Yet, India's current blood donation guidelines starkly remind us how exclusion continues to be written into our systems. Gay men and transgender persons remain barred from donating blood, simply because of their gender and sexual identities. Blood donation, an act that symbolises solidarity and care, is rendered a site of discrimination. An entire community is branded 'unsafe' and stereotypes that have no place in society are reinforced.

This edition of Equity Echo places this issue at the centre of our dialogue on inclusion. Inside, you will find reflections on the ban, context from best practices, and an interview with Sharif Rangnekar, who has been at the forefront of this fight for equality.

Alongside these wider societal conversations, we have also been deepening our own commitment to inclusion. In July, we welcomed our first neurodiverse intern, and in the coming months, we are welcoming another. This phased approach has allowed us to focus on each individual's strengths and provide the attention they deserve. It is a small but meaningful step in translating our DEI values into practice.

As always, our purpose is not only to inform but to provoke reflection. Equity is not achieved in silence—it requires us to question, to challenge, and to act. We invite you to engage with these perspectives and to add your voice to the call for change.

Warm regards,  
Sharmistha Ghosh Solomon

# Voices that Matter



Sharif Rangnekar

Sharif Rangnekar is a communications and workplace culture consultant, author, and musician with over 30 years of experience. He founded the Dwijen Dinanath Arts Foundation, which runs the Rainbow Lit Fest and Awards. A petitioner challenging India's ban on blood donation by gay and transgender persons, and sex workers, Sharif continues to advocate for dignity and inclusion of LGBTQ+ and other marginalised communities.

## #01

What prompted you to file the petition against the blood donation ban?

The law currently denies homosexual and transgender persons, as well as sex workers, the right to donate blood. It assumes everyone within these groups shares the same lifestyle and health risks, which is simply untrue. This approach is based on suspicion and stigma, not science. In reality, many within the queer community are more aware of sexual health and testing practices than the general population. The blanket ban reflects bias, not evidence.

## #02

What motivated you personally to take legal action?

It started with something very personal — a fear that one day, if a loved one needed blood, I wouldn't be allowed to help. I live with my mother and at the same time, my uncle and aunt treat me like their son, and I remember thinking: what if they ever needed me, and I was turned away simply because I'm an out gay man? The idea that I could be stopped from doing something as basic and human as giving blood to family — that I could be seen as “unfit” to save a life — stayed with me. I realised that if this could happen to me, someone with privilege and access, it would be far worse for others without support systems. The ban tells us that our lives, our care, and our contributions are somehow less worthy, that we are impure and untouchable. That's what I want to change.

## #03

How do you see the current policy in the context of changing laws around LGBTQIA+ rights?

While India has made legal progress, such as the reading down of Section 377 and recognition of transgender rights, these policy gaps show that social attitudes and administrative systems haven't caught up. If we can aspire to be a global leader in health and technology, we must also update our public health practices to match scientific advances.

## #04

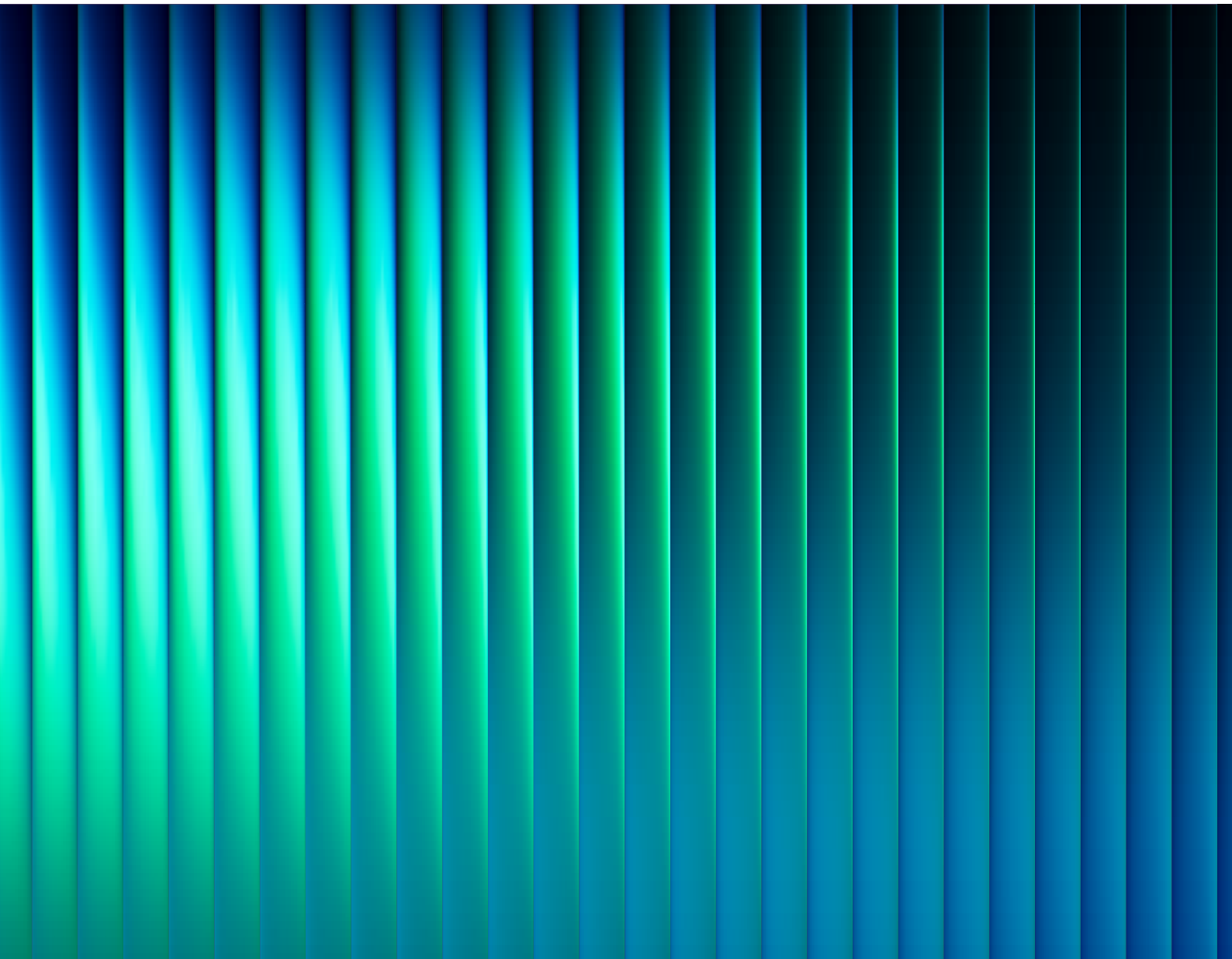
What does this ban mean for organisations striving to build inclusive workplaces?

It exposes the limits of inclusion when laws themselves are exclusionary. Many organisations hold blood donation drives as part of their social responsibility efforts, yet these drives automatically exclude employees who are gay or transgender, or compel them to come out when they are not ready. That contradiction can make people feel othered, even in workplaces that are otherwise progressive. The point is not to bypass the law, but to recognise how systems built on identity-based bans affect real people. True inclusion means creating environments where participation is possible for everyone, safely and without fear.

# #05

What change do you hope the Supreme Court will bring?

The court should recognise the realities of the social system we live in — where declaring one's sexuality, gender, or profession, especially for sex workers, still carries stigma and risk. Even men who claim to be heterosexual and are in legalised 'straight' marriages are known to indulge in sex outside of these marriages with other women and men as well as sex workers. But since there are many layers of fear and violence attached to being honest in a society that often rewards silence, we need a scientific process where every donor is tested, regardless of identity, to ensure safety for all. Such an approach would protect recipients, minimise risk, and expand the donor pool at a time when India faces a constant shortage of blood. It's a chance for the courts to combine compassion with evidence and create a system that values both safety and dignity.



# DEI Deep Dive

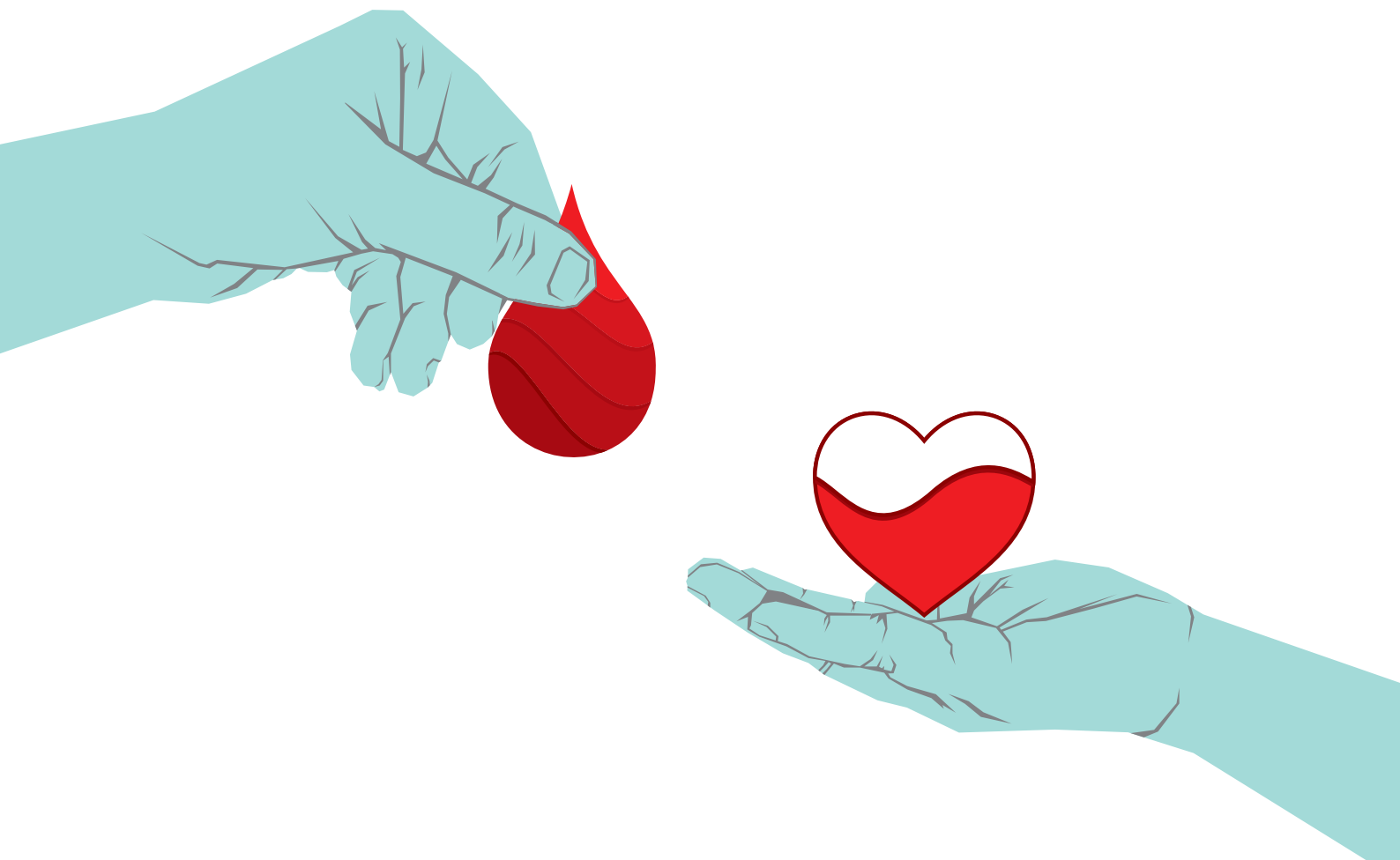
## Blood Screening Lends Safety and Dignity to Blood Donation

When donating blood, it is essential to ensure that it is free from infections that could harm the recipient. Blood screening protects patients from transfusion-transmitted infections (TTIs) such as HIV, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C. In India, these safety goals have historically been pursued by excluding gay men, transgender persons, and sex workers rather than focusing on individual risk behaviours.

Nucleic Acid Testing (NAT) is one of the most reliable methods for testing blood for safety. Unlike traditional antibody-based tests that can take weeks to detect an infection, NAT identifies the virus's genetic material within just a few days of exposure. For people who need frequent transfusions, such as those with thalassaemia, NAT significantly lowers the risk of receiving infected blood.

However, NAT is not a perfect solution. It cannot detect infections acquired just hours before donation, so behaviour-based deferrals, such as asking about recent high-risk activities and delaying donation for a short period, remain vital. NAT is also unavailable in smaller towns and rural areas, where there is a lack of equipment and trained staff. Where this test isn't available, safety depends heavily on donor questionnaires and older testing methods.

Even with infrastructure issues, evidence shows that a combination of NAT, conventional tests, and behaviour-based screening can keep blood safe without stigmatising entire communities. As India re-examines its policies, the goal should be to employ evidence-based practices, rather than stereotypes, to ensure safety and dignity for both donors and recipients.



# DEI IN THE NEWS



## **Blood donation ban under scrutiny (Newslaundry, SC proceedings) –**

The Supreme Court has questioned India's decades-old guidelines that bar gay men and transgender persons from donating blood, asking the government to review them with medical experts. Activists such as Sharif Rangnekar have called the identity-based ban "a form of untouchability", stressing the need for scientific screening instead. [Read More](#)



## **Corporate diversity drives profits (TOI) –**

A Marching Sheep study of 840 listed firms finds companies with stronger gender diversity post nearly 50% higher PAT, yet 63% lack women in top management, revealing that true inclusion needs power redistribution, not just numbers. [Read more](#)



## **Why Western DEI playbooks stumble in India (People Matters) –**

Experts warn that copy-pasted global DEI templates often miss caste, language, and informal-sector realities; Indian organisations need context-specific data and grassroots-led approaches. [Read more](#)



## **Opinion: Hold the line on DEI (Telegraph India) –**

The piece urges firms to treat diversity as a core business principle rather than a branding exercise, noting that only a few Indian companies have embedded it meaningfully in leadership pipelines. [Read more](#)



## **Best workplaces for women & inclusion (Commercial Design India) –**

The latest Great Place to Work® India list shows organisations that design flexible policies, safe spaces, and equitable growth paths see higher retention of women and persons with disabilities and better innovation outcomes. [Read more](#)



## **Corporate India 2025: LGBTQ+ inclusion (Q Plus) –**

As more firms extend gender-neutral benefits, inclusive healthcare, and sensitisation programmes, leaders call for dismantling stereotypes of what "professional" looks like to unlock LGBTQ+ talent. [Read more](#)

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Contact us: For any questions or feedback, please write to [DEI@avianwe.com](mailto:DEI@avianwe.com)