

Transgender Identity and Equality : A path to development

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Introduction

Indian culture is rich, unique, diverse and attracted by many people all over the world. It is deep rooted, most, valuable, rich informative, present and future oriented and a great advantage to the innovative ideas and thoughts to the world. Indian culture is extremely influenced by Vedic literature.

India is multicultural country which hosts different cultures and ideologies. In India transgenders have a very ancient history. They used to enjoy a good position and adorned different official posts in pre-colonial India. A lot of change has been brought in the lives of transgenders in India by Colonization. They were treated and named as criminals and different laws were brought against them. This resulted in the marginalization of transgenders in society. However, the recent developments in India are a ray of hope for transgenders. The 2014 verdict of the Supreme Court recognizing transgenders as third gender and providing reservations to them seems promising.

Gender and Sex

To understand third gender individuals peculiar characteristics, physiological and psychological uniqueness, the ancient Vedic literature in India must help us, which have thoroughly analyzed and recorded all aspects of human life. People of the third sex are mentioned throughout the Vedic literature in different ways due to their physiological and psychological appearances and uniqueness. Vedic literature concerning everything about third gender like the causes of their birth, various characteristics, types, practices, problem, occupations etc. In Vedic society third gender citizens were neither persecuted nor denied their basic rights like modern Indian society. They were allowed to keep their own societies or town quarters, live together within marriage and engage in all means of livelihood never treated as out caste and untouchable like today.

In Vedic society they were not perceived to be a threat and ridicule in any way and were considered to be aloof from the ordinary attachments of procreation and family life. In this way they were awarded their own particular status, dignity and welcomed as a part of civilized Vedic society.

Gender and sex are generally used as interchangeable terms. However, these terms differ from each other. Gender and sexuality are socially constructed, whereas sex of a person's biological. The society decides the roles for each gender and expects them to act accordingly and those who act differently to their gender are considered as queer. Gender identity differs for each person. Gender identity is generally considered as the sense of people as male or female and is related to people's existence as male or female. Transgenders are those whose gender identity does not match with their biological sex. "Transgender is the state of one's "gender identity" not matching one's "assigned sex". (Golden Kisha 2013)

Nevertheless, the existence of third gender and its identity is greatly neglected in our societies. Especially, in Indian society either male or female is considered as normal and anything or anyone that is other than male or female is considered abnormal or subhuman, which means they are not complete humans but are on an inferior level.

At present it is a very common sight in Indian railways and at many traffic signals of metropolitan cities or towns that a group of transgenders, or hijras, clad in traditional sarees or chudidars, aggressively begging from the people clapping their hands and blessing those who offer them money and cursing those who deny. It is believed that their touch pollutes and their curses come true. Ironically, their blessings are considered to have a high value and in many places it is a custom to bring hijras home to bless the

newly wedded couple or a new born. But they are kept at a safe distance and are not allowed to mingle with others. In a way, they are treated as untouchables. On the other hand, many hijras or transgenders are either forced or volunteered into prostitution as they don't have any other livelihood other than prostitution or begging. Rural transgenders or hijra sections are not just marginalized because of flouting gender norms, but are also oppressed by caste and class hierarchies, which intersect with gendered oppression to compound their disempowerment within social structures. Most people see transgenders from this viewpoint of aggressive beggars and prostitutes, but very little attention is paid to their dismal lives. In India, transgenders are called with different names in different parts of the country. They are known as Hijras, eunuchs, tirunangais, khoja, aravanis etc and they had been part of Indian society for centuries. Their existence can be seen in the mythological texts of the land 'Ramayana' and 'Mahabharata'.

Work place- related research on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans (LGBT) individuals reveals that trans workers are the most marginalized and are excluded from gainful employment, with discrimination occurring at all phases of the employment process, including recruitment, training opportunities, employee benefits, and access to job advancement. This environment inculcates pessimism and internalized trans phobia in trans people, discouraging them from applying for jobs. These extreme limitations in employment can push trans people towards jobs that have limited potential for growth and development, such as beauticians, entertainers or sex workers. Unemployment and low-paying or high risk and unstable jobs feed into the cycle of poverty and homelessness. When homeless trans people seek shelter, they are housed as per their sex at birth sex at birth and not their experienced gender, and are subject to abuse and humiliation by staff and residents. In these environments, many trans people choose not to take shelter.

Legal systems often entrench this marginalization, feed inequality, and perpetuate violence against trans people. All people are entitled to their basic human rights, and nations are obligated to provide for these under international law, including guarantees of non-discrimination and the right to health; however, trans people are rarely assured of such protection under these State obligations.

Systematic strategies to reduce the violence against trans people need to occur at multiple levels, including making perpetrators accountable, facilitating legal and policy reform that removes criminality, and general advocacy to sensitize the ill-informed about trans issues and concerns. Strengthening the capacity of trans collectives and organizations to claim their rights can also act as a counter to the impunity of violence. When trans people are provided legal aid and access to judicial processers, accountability can be enforced against perpetrators.

Providing equal access to housing, education, public facilities and employment opportunities, and developing and implementing anti-discrimination laws and policies that protect trans people in these contexts, including guaranteeing their safety and security, are essential to ensure that trans individuals are treated as equal human beings

For all the challenges faced by trans people in the context of their human rights and health, promising interventions and policy progress have shown that positive change is possible, although this must be implemented at scale to have significant impact. Change has occurred due to the efforts of trans advocates and human rights champions, often in critical alliances with civil society supporters as well as sensitized judiciaries, legislatures, bureaucrats, and health sector functionaries.

Conclusion

Vedic literature has explored each and every aspects of human life in a very wider perspective. The revelation, recognition and consideration of the identity of third gender are the most effective example.

Nobody ought to be denied the opportunities of an individual to live with dignified human being within the name of gender, sex caste etc. Through the initiatives of our Governments transgender people are affirming our inherent values and dignity as human beings and our right to equality and justice in the public sphere.

Specially in regard to trans people, the SDGs are a call to immediate action on several fronts; governments need to engage with trans people to understand their concerns, unequivocally support the right of trans people to legal gender recognition, support the documentation of human rights violations against them, provide efficient and accountable processes whereby violations can be safely reported and action taken, guarantee the prevention of such violations, and ensure that the whole gamut of robust health and HIV services are made available to trans people. Only then can trans people begin to imagine a world that respects their core personhood, and a world in which dignity, equality, and wellbeing become realities in their lives.

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