

Visibility and challenges of Transgender in Puducherry: A Sociological Analysis

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Abstract

Transgender are those who transgress social gender norms, living in a society which considers being male or female is normative and only acceptable one. The condition of the third gender across the world varies as different parts of the world practise different cultures and to follow different norms and traditions. The debates and discussions over the rejection or acceptance of the article 377 for over sometime has brought to public space the rethinking of ideas associated with normal or abnormal body and also the kind of sexual orientations of individuals with supposedly an unnatural body. Transgender community is a marginalized group due to numerous reasons; primarily because fewer steps or no steps at all have been taken for the welfare and only recently have they been recognized by Indian Union although they were present before. In this context we will find the relevance of Community Based organizations like Sahodaran Community Oriented Health Development, which is the first community based organization in Southern India and one of the first in all India run by LGBT for LGBT. This study endeavours to contribute in the practical well-being of the needy and to help the government machineries in identifying the target group under the label of transgender.

Key words: Transgender, visibility, Community Based Organisation, Empowerment, LGBT

Introduction

“Girls can be athletic. Guys can have feelings. Girls can be smart. Guys can be creative and vice versa. Gender is specific only to your reproductive organs (and sometimes not even to those) not your interests, dislikes, goals and ambitions” (Franta Connor, A work in progress, 2015). We are living in such a society where there are only two genders – masculine and feminine in that too we can see hierarchy where male is considered as first gender. Being male or

female is normative and only acceptable one. Being transgender, Lesbian or gay is like being tall, short, white, black, male or female is another part of human condition that makes each individual unique and something over which we have no control. But it is profoundly absurd that we think of ourselves as inhabiting a “modern” world, and yet there exists a large amount of community people who are structurally ostracised and denied the fundamental right to a livelihood. Often, they have to either resort to—or are forced into—begging or sex work since they remain socially circumscribed from other forms of employment. According to 2011 census, which is the first attempt to count the third gender it is said that there are around 4, 90,000 Transgender in India. Transgender are considered as third genders and in India the present understanding of Transgender consists of an overlapping of identities. It includes people but not limited to: pre-operative, post-operative and non-operative transsexual people; male and female cross-dressers (sometimes referred to as “transvestites”, “drag queens”, or “drag kings”); intersexes; and men and women, regardless of sexual orientation, whose appearance or characteristics are perceived to be gender atypical. The most accepted definition currently for the term transgender seems to be “People who were assigned a gender, usually at birth and based on their genitals, but who feel that this is a false or incomplete description of themselves” which is adopted from USI LGBT Campaign, 2007.

In the month of June 2018, WHO announced that being transgender is no longer classified as mental illness which is actually a sign of progress. WHO is effectively saying to everyone and to the world that this is not a mental disorder and we support people who are transgender. This is a meaningful step because it promotes inclusivity as well as acceptance. But the irony in this is that WHO took this many years to understand that transgender are not mentally

ill. In countries like America and all we can see the visibility of transgender and they are accepted in American Society but this has been however met with resistance. When we look at India, the transgender are social groups who are recognized roughly 4000 years ago and they are the accepted ones. It is evident from our great history as inscribed in the religious books, caves and walls in the ancient temples. The seminal concept of 'Ardhanareeswaran' in Hindu religion offered ample respect for the transgender community. The eunuchs and other trans-people were highly valued for their strength and loyalty and were part of the royal governance during the Muslim rule. With the colonization everything has changed. Hijadas, who once enjoyed a respectable position was socially alienated. Homosexuality became a deviant act. The changing perspectives have been reflected in the laws produced by the judicial institutions. The 377 Act of criminalizing homosexuality which was introduced in 1864 during the British rule was questioned from the 1990's. In July 2009 while decriminalizing the Act, the Delhi High court gave a verdict pointing that section 377 of Indian Penal Code is against the fundamental rights ensured through the articles 21, 14 and 15. But after five years in 2013 the Supreme Court overturned the Delhi court's judgement. Making a triumphant end to the lengthy struggle of justice, in September 2018 the Supreme Court outscraped the section 377 describing it "irrational, indefensible and manifestly arbitrary". For attaining the equal rights to transgender as promised by Indian Constitution, National Legal Services Authority along with human rights activists submitted a petition in 2014. It resulted in receiving the status of "third gender". Supreme Court also directed the central and state government to treat transgender as socially and economically backward.

Many states are making policies which are pro transgender like Kerala's transgender policy 2016 and appointment of transgender in Cochin metro was ground breaking and appreciated. But most of them resigned due to many difficulties. Even though changes are taking place they still are facing problems all over the world. The world's least progressive countries are in forefront to accommodate transgender. They are alienated socially, politically, economically, culturally etc... The first and foremost difficulty faced by the

transgender community is the denial of sexual citizenship. According to the NHRC data, 99% of the transgender community in India have faced social rejection. Transgender persons cannot inhabit public spaces and command the same respect that a heterosexual cis-man would receive from his fellow citizens because their bodies themselves are stigmatised presences. The transgender community occupies a very specific intersection among marginalised communities that makes them uniquely vulnerable to sexual violence and medical neglect. Largely, they are estranged from their families, which removes them from one of the most primary forms of social legitimacy. As per the NHRC survey, only 2% of transgender persons in India live with their families. Even though the problem does not lie with them, nobody is ready to accept them even those who have given birth to them. Now we can see a little mobility among transgender but still they are not able to use public toilets and all. They occupy a very specific intersection among marginalised communities that make them vulnerable to sexual violence, mental harassments and medical neglect. When compared to other states in Tamil Nadu transgender have somewhat good condition that is also not better but comparatively good. Especially in Pondicherry which is a small union territory its visibility is seen.

Objectives of the study

- To understand the visibility of transgender community in Puducherry.
- To find out the socio-economic-political challenges faced by the community members.
- To comprehend the role of Community based organization run by LGBTQ community for the empowering the transgender community

Methodology

The present study is qualitative in nature. It has been done on the basis of both primary and secondary sources of data. Transgender community of Puducherry constitutes area of the study. The sample area is selected purposively and the data is collected using in-depth interview schedule. 10 respondents of

the organization has been interviewed. Books, research journals, newspaper articles, reports and different websites has been used as secondary sources.

Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed qualitatively.

Visibility of the transgender

According to 2011 census, there are 252 transgender in Puducherry and at the same time about 250 members are registered in the Sahodaran, there are many non-registered members also. This itself had proven the reliability of census. Puducherry is the union territory which has largest number of transgender population than any other territory. When compared to other places the visibility of transgender community is more here and because of this visibility they are intimidated, black mailed as well as harassed. Almost all the respondents told that at first they were in a dilemma of not knowing what is happening to them. Only after seeing people like them they came to know about the organization which became a place for them to disclose their sorrows, share happiness, behave as they like etc., It is this organization which had given them strength to live as what they are. Before that they were living by cheating themselves because they are afraid of the society as well as family.

It is this visibility helped them to stay in Puducherry other than to migrate into any places. They are visible mainly in the jobs like begging and sex work because they don't have any other options. But still when compared to Kerala and all they are getting acceptance. Some of the respondents have said that in the beginning the situation was very worst but now they are getting acceptance from their neighbors as well as family members. Sahodaran which is a Community Based Organisation has played an important role for their acceptance. Because they are trying to empower community members in all aspects and tries to make their presence in all fields. Now the Community members are visible in public sphere and even in election campaign. In Puducherry they are visible in educational institutions, medical field, cultural field etc., Here we can see Thirunangai's who are riding vehicles and going which is very rare in states like Kerala. Here the visibility as more as

well as certain level of acceptance is also there but still they are not having a good life. During festivals like Christmas, Pongal and all the non-community members are presenting them with gifts and all. This attitude of public results in increasing visibility of members. But at the same time their visibility is increasing atrocities towards them like the case of Thailand which is more transgender friendly, they are more visible but still they are facing a lot of problems (Nagamake :2013).

Social, Economic and Political Challenges Faced by Community People

Social Challenges

“The worst cruelty that can be inflicted on an individual is isolation” says Sukarno but its common among transgender community. Even though all the individual are unique but in case of transgender most of the challenges they faced are similar. As Aristotle pointed out that “Man is a Social animal” but so called normative society is forgetting the fact that transgender are also human beings who become like this not because of their own fault but due to some biological factors like difference in chromosomal division and all. They are isolated from society, family and all public spheres.

All the respondents pointed out that they have gone through sexual exploitation in one way or another. They are teased or sexually abused by the classmates, neighbors, relatives, teachers, police and others.

Stigma is another challenge faced by them, Herek (2007) has described sexual stigma, or stigma against sexual minorities (i.e., gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, or GLBT individuals), as a cultural phenomenon that manifests on three intrapersonal and interpersonal levels: internalized stigma, enacted stigma, and felt stigma. *Internalized stigma* occurs when stigmatized cultural attitudes and beliefs are adopted by an individual. Stigma can also manifest behaviorally in the form of discriminatory actions, including harassment and violence, known as *enacted stigma*. The actual experience of (or even the anticipation of) enacted stigma by its recipient refers to *felt stigma*. All these can be seen in this society. They are stigmatized as well as rejected from the

society even from their home. A study conducted by Nagamake (2013) in Thailand shows that men are more concerned with conservative gender role beliefs and threatened by transgenderism because they have put substantial investment in maintaining social status. The condition is not distinct in India or Pondicherry which is propagating patriarchy and they themselves are considering them as first gender.

Lack of social acceptance is another challenge faced by them but now it's changing slowly. Almost all the respondents have been eloped from their home for living a life they want and after surgery they went to home or members came to know about that, nobody accepted them. But now the respondents are saying that they are talking with parents, some time they will go and meet them it's only because of the Project Director of Sahodaran. The respondents says that when they are doing household chores and all it was encouraged by their parents. Because they are helping mothers for doing their works who do not have nobody to help they became very happy. But when the community people began to dress and behave like female they threatened, beaten and most of them respondents have tried to end their life because of the stress, stigma, rejection and all. Many of the respondents said that they don't know what is happening to them when they came to know that there are many people like them and they got relieved. There are also community people who are not even now accepted by the family.

Discrimination from public sphere is another challenge faced by them. While travelling in bus the people will stare at them or murmur something which is really make them feel so bad. Some of the respondents have faced difficulty while using public toilets but majority of the respondents told me that they don't have such difficulties. The sexual exploitation from police other than locals in which the community people are forced to do sex with police, they will say them that they are doing so much help to them in return for that they should do sex with them. Film is one of the medium which will influence the society but negative portrayal of transgender is seen in film where the current example is a new movie called 'Super Deluxe' which is portraying the story of transgender. As a layman we may feel that the movie is a realistic one but when we

talk with them we came to know how the movie is negatively depicting or labelling the life of transgender. In that school children are calling transgender as 9 and all but according to them the children usually do not discriminate them but by seeing this it will influence children and in one part they are negatively labelled as kidnappers which they are strictly defending and saying that we do not do like that. There are many incidents like that in that movie.

Even though discrimination in public sphere is reducing but still there is but now they are not bothered about what others are saying they are busy with their own lives. When the researcher asked them whether they want to be known as woman or transgender, some of them told that they need to be known as woman but then they said that we are proud to be known as transgender or woman like transgender.

Due to the teasing from public sphere and all many have stopped their education. When I asked whether they are satisfied with their present condition many of the respondents told that they are ok with the situation not fully satisfied. Identity crisis is another problem faced by them. All the respondents had gender dysphoria which is a situation in which the condition of feeling one's emotional and psychological identity as male or female to be opposite to one's biological sex. Hence identity is to be 'socially bestowed, socially sustained and socially transformed (Goffman and Berger). But in case of transgender the situation is just opposite in which their identity is teased and in some stage they still have doubt in their own identity as well as someone will be questioning their own identity these all will mentally torture them.

Economic challenges

Social challenges will obviously leads to economic challenges. Since they are ostracized and stigmatized from the society as well as many had to discontinue their education due to discrimination, abuse and all they do not have any option other than doing sex work or begging. All the respondents have done sex work as well as begging only did not do sex work for their livelihood. Many have done this for making

money for doing Sex re assignment Surgery which costs a lot. They don't have any other option other than doing this. For Sex reassignment Surgery as well as for hormone treatment, fixing silicon breasts everything they want money for which nobody is there for helping them. In case of begging they will tease them and even some shop keepers will give them 100 rupees and at the same time some also give one rupee. In case of Sex work as an occupation they will be given less amount than a prostitute as well as they will use them without any humanity. Some time when they caught in the hands of police they need to do sex freely which prevents them from earning one days income, is great loss to them. Since they are earning very less which is actually not sufficient for living.

Majority of the respondents are living alone and those who are studying also will go for begging for their survival. Those who are doing job as outreach worker will get 8000 in which they need to pay 6000 as rent and they have only balance 3000 with that they need to fill petrol for their vehicle, they will have daughters they need to look after them etc., Many need to continue their studies but due to lack of money they are not going to study.

Government is not providing anything other than transgender pension of 3000 rupees. As most of the people are left from home and they do not have any certificates as well as identity proofs with them, so they cannot apply for any job. If they went to do job they need to resign that due to alienation, torture, they are forced to resign that.

Some of them will go for dancing there also they will be given low money compared to other dancers. One of the great criticism for transgender bill was begging and sex work will be considered as crime, for that they are saying that nobody is interested to do begging or sex work it's their situation that is compelling them to do this. Without providing any alternative how can they consider this as crime is their question. It's very difficult for them to take loans and all. For depositing money banks do not have any problem but at the same time they have lot of legal issues while giving loans. So there is no source for them to earn livelihood. Only few have

good jobs they are struggling to meet their needs then we can imagine the situation of others.

Political challenges

They are a group of people who are denied everything, all the rights even the right to live. When the researcher asked them which is primary right you want? Then almost all of them said that they want house to live so the house rent can be reduced they have better income. All the respondents opined that the transgender bill which is amended several times is an utter flop and they have protested against that. According to them in order to know about their needs or condition it should be possible if there is an inclusion of any one respondent from their community, but for drafting that bill nobody is from their community. They are not providing any alternative job for livelihood and they are saying that begging and sex work will be criminalized as well as in order to formalize their gender they need to get certified from a District Screening Committee. Self-identification is not possible. All this created resistance among them. The government is doing nothing according to the NALSA judgement. There is no reservation for transgender people either in job or in education.

Another important need of them was to provide reservation in all this so they can study since due to lack of money they have discontinued as well as reservation in job may help them to get good jobs since many had studied and not getting any job still going for begging and sex work. The non-recognition of non-biological kinship is another issue. Since they don't have any proof in their hands it was very difficult for them to attain necessary proofs or even proving them as citizen of India. They are saying that the project Director of Sahodaran Organisation have struggled a lot for getting some of their rights. Even though the organisation has been working for past 20 years the government is not giving any aid or support. No government has done anything for them except congress, they have done a little aid compared to other party. They are this time campaigned for congress because one of their community Apsara Reddy is contesting in election so they are in a great hope that at least she will do something for them. In India, there are approximately one million

transgender who are structurally ostracised and denied the fundamental rights to livelihood. Even though there are certain legislations are coming their condition is still pathetic. Only if they enjoy basic human rights, social and political, their self-esteem will grow. Proper implementation of law is essential. They are saying that they are also human beings who need to have better, dignified life as rest of the society or try to consider them as human beings. One of the recent article that came in social media says that the transgender in Hyderabad is saying that why we go and face lot of difficulties and taking id card and go for voting since they are not providing anything for us. The condition is similar in all place. Right to lead a dignified life with rights enjoyed like ordinary citizen is most important from them as well as try to include representatives from the community itself for planning or making policy because they only know what they want were their main demands.

Role of CBO in empowering Transgender

“With organization comes empowerment”- Lynda Paterson

Sahodaran Community Oriented Health Development is the first Community Based Organization in Southern India and one of the first in all India run by the LGBTQ community for the LGBTQ community. It is a CBO (Community Based Organization) Network in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry where a group of community members took initiative to address the problems related to the sexual health and human rights of sexual minorities i.e., Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender populations. It is a registered Non-Profit State Level Community based organization established in the year 1998, managed by and for people with different sexuality. Their objective is to bring these communities together and provide them with skills and services to empower them to protect their sexual health and human rights. It is the only immediate space in which members of society can freely gather, benefit for health and education and also gain the empowerment necessary to fundamentally change societal views.

The organization runs the project by funding agencies such, Pehchan Project funded by Alliance India and Target Intervention (TI) Project aided by Tamilnadu

State AIDS Control Society (TANSACS) as well as NAACO. This project aims to work systematically towards lessening the incidents of infection of STD/HIV/AIDS in MSM/TG population through the inception of the four components of Targeted Intervention Programme (Condom Promotion, STD care, Enabling environment, and Behavior change communication) through a creative and a holistic approach. This Sahodaran has two branches one in Pondicherry and the other in Cuddalore. The Sahodaran which I took that is in Pondicherry consists of 1600 members which includes LGBTQ people whereas 250 are transgender with in these 250, five are trans men. Currently, the organization runs under the Project Director Sheethal with Project Manager, Monetary Evaluation Officer cum accountant , Counsellor, four Out Reach Workers (under each ORW four Peer Educators are assigned). In this only project manager and monetary evaluation officer cum accountant are non-community members the rest of them are community members itself.

The mission of this organisation is to lessen the level of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), with special emphasis on HIV/AIDS, for men who have sex with men (MSMs) and transgender people in Pondicherry. As a compliment to this, they want to provide safe and high quality sexual health treatment for their community. Finally, they want to promote their rights and be an active part in decreasing discrimination for their minority group.

Activities of Sahodaran for Transgender Community

When we focus on the empowerment or their major achievements we can see that they have organized Voter registration special camp for transgender at their complex. As a result of that now the transgender have the right to vote and all of them are casting their vote. It is not an easy process for them. They have struggled a lot to get this right. The authorities have been saying many reasons as obstacles for giving election identity card and the political parties does not show much interest because they are minor sections. It took 3 years to get their voting right and it is in 2014 they achieved that. Now a transgender who is recommended by the project Director of Sahodaran along with the letter from organisation and a photo

can easily get Voter ID. Because most of the transgender are thrown out from the family and they don't have any proofs for applying. But this organisation is helping them to achieve one of the basic rights.

Next one is by making tie up with Mahatma Gandhi Medical College they have established separate special Transgender /MSM Clinic and Sexual Re-Surgery and follow-up were done at free of cost. Not only that in the year 2014, 5 Transgender were recruited at Mahatma Gandhi Medical College as permanent University employees & act as role model to other universities & medical Colleges. They are working in high positions like library in charge, executive manager, billing section, counselling section etc. It is also through constant advocacies and all they have established this transgender clinic which is very much helpful to the community. They had started the advocacy from 2007 and in 2010 clinic has started. At first they provided everything free of cost. The transgender have been given music therapy, physiotherapy etc., free of cost.

In 2015 they started the Sex Reassignment Surgery in which patients need to pay only medicinal charges. The transgender can approach the clinic whenever they wanted and they did not face any problems or discrimination. Three MSM/TG Self help Groups were formed at Pudhuvai Bharathiyar Grama Bank at Ariyankuppam in 2006, it functioned couple of years and they ended the programme. The irony in this is that the bank have no problem in accepting deposits whereas while asking the loans they are saying many illogical reasons.

Sixty eight transgender had received Ration cards and 20 had newly applied, which was labelled under Transgender identity is another achievement made by the organization. Now the transgender need to fill the form, along with that they have to attach a letter from Sahodaran for applying for ration card. They are saying that at first the authorities are not bothered about them they actually don't know what to do but through organisations constant approach have helped them to get this. All the members who registered in the community have Aadhar card. Actually this is the one which they got without struggles. Hence Pondicherry is a small Union territory the

governmental itself first experimented it among the community. Now some of the transgender are getting transgender pension of worth rupees 3000 per month. In their community there are many talented people for nurturing that and also for exposing their talent, cultural troop have been formed. From 2003 onwards the cultural troop have started their programmes by street plays and all saying that here are people like us also. They will be doing programmes in low charge when compared to others. For the first time in Pondicherry state, Transgender Film Festival had been organized for two days which gained many social activists to lift a hand to the community. But due to lack of fund they need to stop that anyway they are not getting any aid from the state. Pondicherry Government deputed 10 Transgender for the All India Third Gender Sports Meet held at Raipur, Chhattisgarh on 8 – 9th September 2012.

For the First time in India, State Social Welfare Board funded to conduct an Awareness Camp for MSM/TG at Pondicherry district. This is only happened once and they did not made any follow ups or anything. For the First time in Pondicherry, they had organized Transgender Day 2017 with the Honourable Chief Minister as the Chief Guest. In 2018 in collaboration with government Sahodaran conducted transgender day, it is for the first time in India it had happened. They conducted a special camp for the Permanent Account Number and 130 had accessed.

Advocacy with the Police and Judiciaries for the welfare of Transgender and with their tie-up had conducted a campus interview for them. Every 6 month there will be meeting with police and regarding the cases of transgender the police will approach Sahodaran. They are now sending 10 community members for beautician courses which is funded by government and one member is doing nursing course.

Now this Organisation have connection with all over India and common plans too. This organisation through their outreach workers and peer educators are working for those who are not yet registered. It is with the help of this organization especially with the help of the project Director whom they call as Nayak many have come back to life from suicide and all as

well as many families accepted the transgender back to their family. This organization have played a significant role in the life of transgender community in Puducherry.

Demands of the Organisation

The first and foremost demand raised by the organisation is to conduct census of transgender. This should be done with the help of community people otherwise the data may not be accurate. Because according to census of India there are only 38 transgender in Pondicherry region but in Organisation there are 200 registered and there are many non-registered too. The same thing can be seen on Census of India too.

The community people also need the basic facilities such as housing, education, providing loans for starting any small entrepreneurs etc., Housing facility is the one of most important problem faced by them. Because they are “abnormal” personality, residential associations are not ready to accommodate them. Even though, if somebody ready to occupy them, they have to pay huge amount for house rent.

The organization is giving vocational and skill training to the community people as part of their community development of programme. The main problem they are facing to reach the market is lack of market space for selling their products and skills.

Even though state is promising that they will take all the action for community development, many of community members are school/college dropouts. Many of them discontinued their education due to discrimination faced by them in educational institution and society. The ostracising attitude of society also frighten them to continue their studies. The government is saying that Pondicherry is a small one and they cannot make separate welfare board for them. But what Community is asking that they need only a separate wing so there will be somebody to question or address their needs. When we look at all this we can see that a minimal aid from the government may create drastic changes.

Conclusion

Even though there are conditions which are against transgender community among them some have achieved good position after a lot of struggle. We have judge, college principle, police officer, lawyer etc., from this community. Even though we can see all this, they still don't have good position especially the non creamy section. Since society is constructed by individuals so if the mind of that individuals is broadened everything will be solved. But what we see is very pathetic recent death of transgender in Kerala as well as police proclamation of making Ernakulam district of Kerala as a non-transgender district is the condition of state which is highly literate and first implemented transgender policy then we can imagine the condition of the rest of the country. The change is apparent, from an age where people who indulged in impermissible behaviour (including the sexual orientation which was deviant in nature) would be persecuted to an age where transgender are coming out by openly expressing their identity.

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