



TRANSGENDERS IN KERALA- THE ISSUES SURROUNDED IN GENDER VARIATION

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ABSTRACT

When we look across cultures, we will find that people have had a wide range of beliefs about gender. Some cultures have created specific ways for people to live in roles that are different from that assigned to them at birth. In addition, different cultures also vary in their definitions of masculine and feminine. Whether we view someone as transgender depends on the cultural lenses we are looking through as well as how people identify themselves. Our society is, however, very harsh on gender-variant people. The term transgender encompasses a wide range of identities, appearances, and behaviors that blur or cross gender lines. These gender variations often lead to a divergent aspect of their culture. Some transgender people have lost their families, their jobs, their homes and their support. Transgender children may be subject to abuse at home, at school or in their communities. A lifetime of this can be very challenging and can sometimes cause anxiety disorders, depression and other psychological illnesses. These are not the root of their transgender identity; rather, they are the side effects of society's intolerance of transgender people.

Key words: transgender. Hijra, gender Variation, Alienation

Kerala has the lowest positive population growth rate in India, 3.44%; highest Human Development Index (HDI), 0.712 in 2015; the highest literacy rate, 93.91% in the 2011 census; the highest life expectancy, 77 years; and the highest sex ratio, 1,084 women per 1,000 men. Kerala the land of diversities and God's own country decorated by high growth in the

matter of Education, socio-economic Development and the related development criteria's. Development indicators such as HDI, PQLI, and GDI etc are very high in Kerala. In Kerala as like in other states in India we have a community known as Transgenders. The existance eof stigma nsolation make this sect as one of the most marginalized sect in the economy. Their population is around 25,000; located in almost all the districts in the state. In the category of LGBTQ transgenders occupies an important place. Transgender have a recorded history of more than 4,000 years. Asian countries have centuries-old histories of existence of gender-variant males who in the moderns times are labelled as 'transgender women'. India has a history of people with a wide range of transgender related identities, cultures, and experiences. People with such identities include Hijras, Aravanis, Kothis, Jogtas/Jogappas, and Shiv-Shakthis. Ancient myths bestow them with special powers to bring luck and fertility. Kama Sutra provides vivid description of sexual life of people with 'third nature' (Tritiya Prakriti). These identities have always been part of the broader culture and were treated with great respect in the past though only some are accorded such respect in the present. Our society is, however, very harsh on gender-variant people. Some transgender people have lost their families, their jobs, their homes and their support. Transgender children may be subject to abuse at home, at school or in their communities. A lifetime of this can be very challenging and can sometimes cause anxiety disorders, depression and other psychological illnesses. These are not the root of their transgender identity; rather, they are the side effects of society's intolerance of transgender people.

Hijara Culture

The *hijra* is considered to be apart of a 'third gender' which identifies with feminine roles, characteristics, and the use of the pronoun 'she', yet at the same time being neither male nor female (Patel 2010:863). Transgenders in India are commonly known as 'hijras' and they live in small groups of similar community. They induct new members, i.e. young boys, who are either victim of sexual abuse or have run away from home because of shame. The community often lives in seclusion and follows their own customs. They are devoid from actively participating in political, social, economic and financial sectors, which leaves them with limited options to earn a livelihood. Thus, on account of this, they earn their living by performing in the streets, at ceremonies, begging and even prostitution.

This third gender is the equivalent of the West's transgender definition, yet *hijras* are not expected to go through a formal sex change operation (i.e., Do not receive a vagina in exchange for a penis, in this case its lose-lose sex organ situation – no room for indecision here!). This process of transitioning into the third gender is reserved only for males to females not female to male.

Once the hijra has completed all of the ritual processes she then enters the hijra community or the *gaharana* (Patel 2010:840). These members of the community live together for protection purposes and also because they do not interact directly with general society. Many of the hijra women are excluded from outside work, finding much of their income and livelihood stemming from prostitution and sex work (Patel 2010:841). Aside from sex work, hijras also perform *badhai* – A tradition that uses hijras to bless babies and weddings (births – literally, and birth of new life together), yet this is more of a supplemental income to their work in prostitution (Patel 2010:837).

India is certainly inching towards modernity but our attitude towards LGBT rights reflect how our country is still enveloped in Victorian-era morality. Needless to say, Section 377 needs to go. There is no place for a draconian, colonial-era law which targets the LGBT community in our society. Doing away with it could be tremendous step in rooting out transphobia and homophobia

Lack of access to education coupled with discrimination, stigmatisation and subsequent lack of formal employment, pushes them toward sex work and begging. Negligence from the society and lack of acceptance from the family are the starting issue of transgender community. Unprotected sex has made them all the more susceptible to sexually transmitted diseases. In an annual report, the National AIDS Control Organization's said that India's transgender population was “emerging as a risk group with high vulnerability and high levels of HIV.” The sexual health of this community has been neglected for years. The situation worsens as they fail to get tested due to fear of further isolation and lack of nutrition

Sexuality and Gender

Sexuality is complex and there are additional terms for sexualities beyond just these. Our attractions are based on much more than the gender of the people we're attracted to. Some important terms from the understanding of Transgender. While we can use the term "**sex**" to refer to the physical attributes of one's body, "**gender**" typically refers to the social roles that people engage in. Gender manifests a few sub-concepts:

Gender identity is a person's internal sense of what their gender is

Gender expression refers to the ways in which a person outwardly expresses their gender identity

Gender roles are the expected behaviors set out for which it is socially acceptable/encouraged for people of each gender to engage in.

Gay men are men who are sexually attracted to men.

Lesbians are women who are sexually attracted to women. The difference there is pretty straightforward; gay men are men and lesbians are women

Bisexual people are sexually attracted to both men and women (and if you're open to the existence of the entire gender spectrum, typically everything in between, though the definition gets a little vague there). The difference there is pretty straightforward as well. A lesbian and a bisexual woman are both attracted to women, but bisexual women are also attracted to men, wherein lesbians are not

Transgender people are people who identify as a gender other than the one typically associated with the sex they're assigned at birth. Someone assigned female at birth might identify as a man, for example; he would be a trans man. When it comes to transgender people, we have to take a step back from the sexuality angle, because gender is sort of a different issue entirely.

Asexual people are those who are attracted to neither men nor women. They may still pursue relationships (heteroromantic, homoromantic, biromantic) or not (aromantic), and lack of attraction to people does not imply a lack of sex drive.

Hijra comes under the transgender community but is regarded as third gender i.e. a subset of transgenders who follow a distinct constitution eg. The signature clap, The Guru-Chela hierarchy etc.

Transvestite is a term used to describe persons who enjoy cross-dressing e.g. a male wearing saree. However, Transvestites are not necessarily Transgenders

Eunuchs are males with their genitals removed.

Queer: It can be used as an umbrella term for all the categories of LGBT community but literally means anything which doesn't fit the social construct or gender norms etc.

Jogtas/Jogappas: Jogtas or Jopgappas are those persons who are dedicated to and serve as servants of Goddess Renukha Devi (Yellamma) – whose temples are present in Maharashtra and Karnataka.

Shiv-Shakthis

Typically referring to a community of transgenders in Andhra Pradesh, Shiv-shakthis are males who are considered “possessed by” or “married to” the gods, particularly Lord Shiva. They have a feminine gender expression and cross-dress as women during religious rituals and festivals.

Kinnar: The term for hijras in north India. In other parts of India, such as Maharashtra, the term kinnar is being used more recently by the better-educated hijras to refer to themselves.

Aravani: The term for hijras in Tamil Nadu. They identify themselves as women trapped in male bodies, although many aravanis would prefer to be called ‘Thirunangi’.

Kothi: The judgement describes kothis as a heterogeneous group, because it refers to biological males who show varying degrees of being effeminate.

Panthis: The term 'Panthis' is used by Kothis/Hijras to refer to those persons who are 'real men' - in the sense those who only penetrate.

LGBTQ terms mean and include the following criterias

1. **Sexual orientation:** who you're attracted to. Gay, lesbian, bisexual, straight, pansexual, asexual, etc.
2. **Gender:** who *you* are. Man, woman, gender fluid, non-binary, etc.
3. **Cisgender:** someone whose gender matches with what they were assigned at birth.
Ex: a baby was born and the doctor said "it's a girl!" And that was true. She's never doubted that or had issues with it.
4. **Transgender:** someone who isn't cisgender. Trans men, trans women, gender fluid people, etc.

5. **How you look:** the way you dress and act. Completely unrelated to any of the above terms. This is why gay men don't usually feel attracted to "butch women". Why would a man who is attracted to men be attracted to a woman?

Understanding Gender: Some basic concepts

1. For the clear understanding of transgenders, it is necessary to establish a basic understanding of what gender is and how and who it is determined by. Since gender is one of the most pervading and given social category, one may not be aware of it on a daily basis and yet while going about the business of daily living, gender is present at every step. It determines every aspect of our life including our name, clothes, hair length, appearance, behaviours, occupation, and mobility and so on. It is present in every document of identity, including birth certificate, ration card, voter ID, passport, mark sheets/grade cards and so on.

2. The determination of gender by whom? This is a question, how and by whom this gender determined is, we first need to understand that none of us are born with a gender, but gender is assigned to each one of us based on the kind of primary sexual characteristics or external genitalia that we are born with. Thus an infant born with genitalia looking like a "vagina" is assigned gender female at birth and an infant born with genitalia looking like a "penis" is assigned gender male at birth. This basic idea of 'gender as assigned' is expressed through the two terms - person assigned gender female at birth (PAGFB) and person assigned gender male at birth (PAGMB).

3. The assigned gender at birth may or may not match the person's idea of their own gender as they grow up. As a result there would be those, who grow up with a sense of comfort and alignment between their 'felt' or own sense of gender and the gender assigned to them.

Medical support for the transgenders

Sex and gender are complex issues. A huge variety of factors are at work in making each individual the person that they are and there is no one reason that causes people to be transgender. Trans people are part of the variety that makes up the human community.

The ideology of gender confirmation is much dependent on the medical confirmation. Biologists tell us that sex is a complicated matter, much more complex than what we may have been taught in school. A person with XX chromosomes is generally considered female, while a person with

XY chromosomes is generally considered male. However, there are also people who have XXY, XYY, and other variations of chromosomes; these genetic differences may or may not be visibly apparent or known to the person. Some people are born with XY chromosomes, but are unable to respond to testosterone and therefore develop bodies with a vagina and breasts, rather than a penis and testes. A variation in gender may just be part of the natural order and there are more varieties than we generally realize. People with biological differences in gender may be considered intersex; they may or may not identify as transgender. There are medical theories about why people are transgender. Some speculate that fluctuations or imbalances in hormones or the use of certain medications during pregnancy may cause intersex or transgender conditions. Other research indicates that there are links between transgender identity and brain structure. Some people believe that psychological factors are the reason for the existence of transgender people. It is clear that there are people who are aware that they are transgender from their earliest memories. Many transgender people feel that their gender identity is an innate part of them, an integral part of who they were born to be. Then there are people who feel that everyone has a right to choose whatever gender presentation feels best to that individual. People should have the freedom to express themselves in whatever way is right for them.

Downtrodden section of the community-Transgenders

In the 25,000 population of Transgenders in Kerala, we can see that most of them are marginalized mentally, physically and emotionally. Because these people have low emotional stability. They are getting less care and support from their families, societies etc. in the growth process their mental strength is highly influenced by the inner conflicts in their thoughts.

They are facing many issues from the communities. Some of them are listed here.

1. Even though they are qualified, they will get less chances in employment opportunities.
2. At public they are far away from equality
3. They are thrown down as degraded and unworthy to live
4. Rejection of Entry directly or indirectly at some Public Places like Hospitals, Hotels, Malls, Restaurants, Dance Floors, Theaters, Shopping Complexes
5. Continuous and forced Rape & Abuse orally and physically
6. Forced to leave Parental Home if identified as a Transgender

7. Unwanted attention is given to their presence
8. People do not behave or act normal in their presence or with them
9. Calling them Names loudly
10. Associating them with child nabbing
11. Associating them with prostitution
12. Cehtaing them by the public
13. Providing them mental agony at the public

Conclusion

With specific reference to the Indian society, the transgender community lives on the periphery of even the marginalized community. They face crisis of gender identity recognition. The same snowballs into associated legal issues in terms of same sex marriages, sex change, inheritance, child adoption, etc. Because of the continuous discrimination, they do not even receive formal education and even if the parents want them to be educated, the schools remain reluctant to admit them. Devoid of any skills or education, consequently they do not get job opportunities. Furthermore, as many government forms recognize only the two genders, Male and Female, has prevented them from benefitting from many schemes, which are otherwise available to other marginalized communities. As gender variant people are also ridiculed by society, for being different, they are more vulnerable to face violence and abuse. Lack of protection from the police translates into them being easy targets for money extortions and sex work. Their issues spiral over the health sector as well since many practitioners do not have adequate knowledge about health issues of sexual minorities, which makes them face barriers while accessing public healthcare. For instance, some of the discrimination reported by the transgender community is as follows: registering them and admitting them in male wards; verbal harassment; denial of medical treatment, etc. there are many able people in the category of transgenders. But the continuous stigmatization affects them very negatively. They will lose their confidence and strengths

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