

EDUCATION OF TRANSGENDERS IN HIMACHAL PRADESH: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract - Fair and beyond the world of social justice and global upliftment lays the hidden mysterious world of transgenders, commonly known as hijras or kinnars. Though they constitute a marginalised part of society, the reality of their existence and omnipresence is unavoidable. Being a part of third gender community, they are simply considered as a source of entertainment or a kind of prowler by so called social beings. Transgender community is always suspected and mostly neglected. Their birth is taken as a curse, their presence scornful. They have a challenged life, full of hardships and sufferings.

Keywords - Transgenders, Hijras, Kinnars, Problems, Gender issues, Education.

I. INTRODUCTION

"I was a normal child but it is the world that made me feel different" – painful words by Lakshmi Narayan Tripathi, the first transgender to represent Asia Pacific at U.N. and a transgender rights activist in India.

The moment a child is born, an immediate enquiry starts whether it's a male or female. Our society is orthodox and traditionally accepts only two genders i.e. girl or boy as normal. But a newborn may have defected genitals at birth. There is an equal chance that as a normal child matures, he/she feels transcending between male and female characteristics, showing no signs of genital defects at birth. Such situations give rise to the third category of gender that is, a transgender or a third gender. In Indian context, transgenders are known by different names such as *hijras*, *kinnars*, *eunuchs*, *kothis*, *aravanis*, *jogappas*, and *shivshaktis*. Transgender is an umbrella term, coined in U.S. to include people whose lifestyles appeared to conflict with gender norms of the society and is used to describe individuals who exhibit gender non-conforming behaviours or those who transcend typical gender paradigms. Transgenders are deemed as individuals who do not fall into conventional definitions of male or female. Physiologically, they could be born with ambiguous genitals, male genitals or female genitals; biologically, imbalance in the level of sex hormones during the foetal development leads to the birth of a transgender. Thus, transgender people may self identify as transgender, females, males, transwoman or transman, transsexuals or by a variety of indigenous terms used in specific cultures such as *hijra* (India), *kathoe* (Thailand) and *waria* (Indonesia).

Life of a Transgender

Birth of a transgender is taken as a curse. Rejection is the first gift they receive from their parents. Their biological family discards them. They are either taken by transgender community or they manage their lives by begging. In their case, education is not important because jobs are meant for men and women only. Every single living being has some basic rights to enjoy life but transgender community is stuck in a dilemma which rights to enjoy- of males or of females. Every citizen is equal before the law, but what is their fault if they are different. They are always taken as a source of entertainment or kind of prowler in the society. Asking for money in weddings and birth ceremonies is not their duty, but it is the only source of income for them. Right to property is not meant for them. Even the *kinner deras* they live in are either rented or not in their own name. What they are getting from us is only discrimination, stigma and rejection. Even the constitution keeps everyone equal before the law, but transgenders stand nowhere. Not even a single effort is made by the government to uplift their status practically. This behaviour stems from the ignorance of people and authorities to understand them as they are, to realise how they feel, what problems they face and then co-operate them in lifting their status up. Life of a transgender lacks basic living ethics and we, the social people are responsible for this.

Transgenders can be of two types – female-to-male (FTM) and male-to-female (MTF). FTM transgenders are born with female bodies but have a predominantly male gender identity. MTF transgenders are born with male bodies but have female gender identity.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Xavier (2000) found that 29% of the transgenders reported no source of income and 31% have incomes under \$10,000 per year. Their unemployment rate is 42% and 15% reported losing a job due to discrimination. 40% have not finished high school; 47% lack health insurance; and 43% report being victims of violence or crime. 34% felt they have a drug problem, but only 53% sought treatment. 39% did not have a doctor whom they see for routine health care. Only 26% of the participants are satisfied with their current living situation with employment, hostility and insensitivity of housing staff and other residents as the most common barriers to housing. Chakrapani (2010) reported that most hijras/ transgenders in India belong to low socio-economic status and have a low literacy level which is a barrier to seek healthcare. They also face mental health issues like depression and suicidal tendencies, societal stigma, lack of social support and HIV and violence related stress. They face challenges like gender identity and gender expression, shame, fear and adjustment problems. To come out of this stress, significant proportion of hijra/ transgender community was found to consume alcohol. They face social and cultural exclusion such as family non-acceptance; discrimination in healthcare settings etc., were found to be excluded from economic participation. They lack social security in terms of livelihood options, social welfare schemes, life and healthcare insurance schemes and face problems related to registration and legal procedures. Suguna (2013) found that the transgenders in Tamilnadu are leading a highly deplorable life and experiencing all sorts of inhuman treatments meted out by the society. They are disowned by their families and even society doesn't accept them as humans. Their social status is low and economic condition is poor. There is nobody to take care of them so they get involved in illegal activities and prostitution. Asmy and Nagaraj (2015) found that there is zero acceptance level in family and society, forced illiteracy prevailing in the schools, lack of empathetic attitude towards transgenders in India so they suggested a need for progressive environment

such as sensitisation of society for transgender identity, legal implementation of land and property rights, creation of separate toilets, hospital wards, support of media, extension of financial support and community based organisations and refraining from using verbal abuses against transgender community. Rajkumar (2016) realised that despite of the equality laws in the constitution of India the 'other gender' that is, transgender continues to be ostracised. Transgenders face discrimination and harassment, family, school and community forces them to move to other places. The nature of the harassment includes verbal, sexual and physical abuse which has serious impact on the social and political rights. They are not considered as a part of any welfare scheme.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

With the keen interest in transgender community of Himachal Pradesh, researchers conducted a pilot study with following objectives:

- To find out the transgender people in Himachal Pradesh.
- To establish rapport with transgender in order to understand them.
- To find out the major problems faced by transgenders in Himachal Pradesh.

IV. DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The study was delimited to the transgenders of Himachal Pradesh.
- The study was confined to the male-to-female transgenders only.
- The study was confined with respect to variables as only social, economic and educational status of transgenders was studied.

V. METHODOLOGY USED

According to the need of the pilot study, the *descriptive survey* method was used by investigators. A total of 2051 transgenders have been recorded in Himachal Pradesh, as per census 2011 but no residential records were found. Sample included 30 transgenders living in the community on their own or as members of *kinnar deras* or *gharanas* in Shimla, Kangra, Mandi and Chamba districts of Himachal Pradesh. Since the population under study was usually hidden and difficult to access, sample was drawn using *snowball non-probability sampling* technique.

VI. FINDINGS

In the present study, the researchers intended to trace the transgenders living in Himachal Pradesh and practically found great difficulty in doing so as the community was not registered anywhere and keeps on moving from one place to other. Those who were traced, the researchers established rapport with them so as to know about the major issues they are facing. In total 30 male-to-female transgenders or *hijras* were interviewed personally, out of which six transgenders were from district Shimla, seventeen from Kangra, four from Mandi and three from Chamba. Major findings were:

- Only one out of 30 transgenders was living with their true family, rest 29 were either living in *kinnar deras* or in rented houses with adopted families.
- Only 4 of them were educated with X as highest qualification.
- Only one was working as a social worker, believed to possess great blessing power for curing ailments. For others, the only means of income was traditional dancing and singing in weddings and birth ceremonies.
- None of them had *ration card* or own registered property.
- None of them were HIV positive.
- They have divided areas under one head. No transgender is allowed to ask for money in others' area so that everyone can earn.
- They said that they neither have any health security nor financial security.
- Those who went to school reported that they were treated normally like other girls there.
- All of them reported early withdrawal from school due to lack of financial support. Moreover in *deras*, they believed that even after being getting educated, there will be no jobs for them in future and ultimately they have to get involved in traditional dancing and singing in weddings and birth ceremonies, so there was no need to become highly qualified. They really wanted to study further and get some job but circumstances didn't allow them.
- The common problems they reported were rejection by family, discrimination by society, lack of adequate educational, employment, health facilities and no living support. Major challenges were questioned self-identity ('females' in school, 'males' as per Census Department of India and 'others' according to Supreme Court of India), social exclusion, meeting healthful living, getting property registered in their name, public abuse and poor civil status.

VII. CONCLUSION

Transgender people in Himachal Pradesh are facing many challenges in meeting their livelihood. Most prominent reasons for this are family rejection, lack of education and social discrimination. To be a transgender is not their choice; it is a natural phenomenon and can happen to anyone. What if they are neither males nor females, they are human beings at least. Every section of our society has right to equality and equity before the law, then why not hijras? The mainstream society fails to understand that the culture, gender and sexuality of transgender community and their social deprivation and harassment have never received attention by policy makers. Better understanding of socio-cultural and humanistic aspects of the discrimination against the transgender community would help in bringing about an attitudinal shift. Such an attempt at assimilation would require a review and reform of structural constraints, legal procedures and policies that impede access to mainstream education. Affirmative actions are needed to wipe out stigma and discrimination associated with the community and to improve the access to educational opportunities at all level. Schools and colleges need to play a supportive role in such instances as sensitisation through education helps in stepping-in to ensure skill development/vocational training, awareness about their rights and duties and making employment opportunities available to these individuals.

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