

Understanding the Transgender Community

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Understanding the Transgender Community

By : Prof. Anita Rani Rathore

Editorial

In a world increasingly attuned to diversity, the transgender community stands as a living testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the evolving understanding of identity. *Understanding the Transgender Community* is not merely a book—it is a bridge. A bridge between ignorance and empathy, between silence and dialogue, between marginalization and dignity. It is a conscious effort to replace stereotypes with knowledge, prejudice with compassion, and invisibility with recognition.

This volume arrives at a crucial moment in history. Across cultures and continents, transgender individuals continue to face systemic discrimination, social exclusion, and violence—often simply for daring to live their truth. Their struggles are not isolated; they are woven into the broader narrative of human rights and social justice. Yet, alongside these challenges, their stories shine with courage, creativity, and a profound yearning for authenticity. This book seeks to illuminate those stories, not as curiosities or exceptions, but as essential threads in the fabric of humanity—threads that enrich the tapestry of our collective existence.

The chapters within draw from lived experiences, academic insights, and cultural narratives, offering readers a multidimensional lens through which to view

gender. They challenge the rigidity of binary thinking and invite us to explore gender as a spectrum—fluid, personal, and deeply human. By doing so, the book dismantles long-held assumptions and opens pathways to empathy, understanding, and respect.

For educators, policymakers, families, and allies, this work is both a guide and a call to action. It urges us to listen more deeply, act more justly, and love more expansively. It reminds us that inclusion is not a favor granted but a right recognized. It emphasizes that education must go beyond textbooks to embrace lived realities, that policy must extend beyond laws to ensure dignity, and that family must transcend tradition to nurture authenticity.

To understand the transgender community is not simply to learn new terminology or adopt progressive policies. It is to confront our own biases, to unlearn inherited prejudices, and to open ourselves to the richness of identities that defy convention. It is to recognize that every individual, regardless of gender identity, deserves the freedom to live authentically and the opportunity to flourish without fear.

This book is an invitation—an invitation to dialogue, to reflection, and to transformation. Let it be more than a reading experience. Let it be the beginning of a journey toward a more compassionate society, where diversity is celebrated, dignity is upheld, and humanity is embraced in all its forms.

At its heart, *Understanding the Transgender Community* is a celebration of authenticity. It teaches us that when individuals are free to live as they truly are, society itself becomes richer, more compassionate, and more resilient. The courage of transgender individuals to embrace their truth is a lesson for all of us: that dignity is not negotiable, and humanity is most beautiful when it is diverse.

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1.

Social Status of the Transgender Community Challenges and Possibilities

Dr. Kishor Kumar*

The history of the world has always been a history of struggle, and this struggle is not limited to human beings alone; it appears in varied and even rudimentary forms across all living organisms. Diversity is a fundamental law of nature, and therefore it is reflected among all species, including humans. Within human society, diversity of identities is acknowledged, and differences based on gender structures, race, mental condition, caste, and class have long been present. Biological, psychological, sociocultural, and reproductive distinctions often become grounds for discrimination.

Humans experience such discrimination more intensely than other living beings, and evidence of this struggle is visible from ancient periods to the present. Each era carries its own set of problems, and addressing them becomes a defining challenge of that time. Increasing complexities related to behaviour, physical traits, birth,

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and caste have shaped social interactions. Within this context, numerous studies have examined transgender lives, revealing persistent negative and exclusionary behaviours in both historical and modern settings.

Although legal reforms in recent times have recognised new rights for transgenders, the community continues to face significant challenges. This study seeks to analyse these challenges and identify possible avenues for improving the social position of the transgender community.

The term “transgenderism” was first used by John F. Oliven in his book *Sexual Hygiene and Pathology* (1965). He argued that the term “transsexualism” was inappropriate because it focused solely on physical or medical intervention, whereas the actual subject concerns gender identity.¹ In 1969, American sexologist Harry Benjamin explained the terms transgender and transsexual. He defined transgender to the individuals who changed their gender identity without undergoing surgical procedures. In this way, the distinction between “transsexual” and “transgender” was made clear. In 1974, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary recorded the term “transgender” for the first time.² This was the time when the word began entering mainstream language.³ By the 1980s, the term “transgender” gradually became an umbrella term that included the transgender community and gender diversities.

By the 1990s, the term had become part of social movements, LGBT+ debate, and academic writing. The term “transgender” was no longer limited to medical transition alone; instead, it came to signify an identity that moves beyond the traditional male–female binary. Today, the term “transgender” is not merely a part of language but symbolizes the recognition of socio-political rights and gender diversity. It also includes the Non-

binary, Genderqueer, and South Asian transgender communities.

According to the World Health Organization, the definition of transgender in the context of gender incongruence is as follows: “Gender diversity refers to a clear and persistent incongruence between an individual’s experienced gender and the gender assigned at birth.”⁴

This definition represents transgender identity, wherein a person’s gender identity differs from the sex assigned at birth. In ICD-11 (International Classification of Diseases, 11th Revision), it has been classified under sexual health conditions rather than mental disorders, which is a more appropriate and logical approach. In India, the definition of transgender is provided under the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, which states: “A transgender person is one whose gender identity does not align with the sex assigned at birth,” and this includes:

Transmen – individuals assigned female at birth but identifying as male.

Transwomen – individuals assigned male at birth but identifying as female.

Intersex persons – individuals whose bodies may exhibit both male and female biological characteristics.

Genderqueer persons – those whose gender identity is neither fully male nor fully female, and who is identified outside these traditional categories.⁵

Historical Background

Transgender people have existed in Indian society for centuries. Their presence has been recorded in our ancient religions, scriptures, and folk traditions. According to a legend, when Lord Rama left for exile, he asked the men and women who had accompanied him to

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return, but this community or group, being different from both genders, stood there. Pleased with their devotion, Lord Rama blessed them that they would have the power to bless them on every auspicious occasion in the times to come. This belief is visible even today in Indian society.

In the epic Mahabharata, the presence of the kinnars is evident through characters such as Shikhandi. Alongside this, the union of Arjuna and the Naga princess Ulupi led to the birth of a valiant son named Iravan.

According to Sutra 7 of 90th chapter (Navātītāmaadhyāya) Volume 3 of the six volumes of the Mahabharata published by Gita Press, Gorakhpur (Samvat 2078, 2021-2022AD), Sanjaya introduces Iravan to Dhritarashtra, explaining that Iravan was born to Ulupi, the daughter of the Naga king, through Arjuna.

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Many south Indian oral tradition and folklore mentioned about the sacrifice of Iravan to goddess Kali to ensure Pandavas's victory and Iravan's dying wish to be married and Krishna's compassionate act of taking the form of Mohini to fulfil that wish. Koothandavar festival (also known as the Kuthandavar-Aravan Mela) In remembrance of this event, thousands of members of the Kinnar community gather even today in the village of Koovagam in Tamil Nadu, where they participate annually in the significant ritual of Iravan's symbolic wedding, marking one of the most meaningful days of their lives.⁶

In medieval Islamic societies, transgender individuals were also appointed as guardians of the royal harem. Kings sought to ensure the security of their harems so that no man could establish any physical relationship with the women. As a result, transgender individuals

held a significant place within the power structure and administrative authority of the harem.⁷

In particular, their presence in the Mughal court left a deep impact on different layers of political power. During that period, this community was regarded as a symbol of trustworthiness, confidentiality, and loyalty. They had access to the private domestic life of royalty as well as to political decision-making. Thus, their role was not limited merely to the security of the harem; on many occasions, they served as political advisers and even handled financial management.⁸

The Mughal rulers used them as a bridge between the court and the harem. Another aspect of their position was that they could enter almost all social classes and locations without restriction. This unrestricted mobility allowed them to play an important role in the exchange of information, secrecy, and administrative surveillance. According to historians, their position in Mughal society and politics elevated them to a level of influence where major decisions were shaped not only by the court but also through the intimacy and trust they shared with the royal family. For this reason, Mughal literature and historical accounts portray transgender individuals as a respected and influential class of that era.

The arrival of British rule profoundly affected the status of the Indian transgender community. While in medieval India the kinnars were part of royal courts, administration, and religious-cultural life, the colonial period pushed them to the margins. One major example of this is the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871. Under Sections 26–28 of this Act, “Eunuchs” were declared hereditary criminals, and special registers were maintained to monitor their activities.⁹

The human consequences of these policies were severe. The traditional livelihoods of the transgender

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community—such as blessings given at births and weddings and other ceremonial roles—were gravely disrupted. Their respected cultural identity was replaced with an image of being “criminal” and “cursed.” Police surveillance, social exclusion, and limited employment opportunities pushed them into poverty and humiliation. Colonial rule stripped the transgender community of their identity, dignity, and social position. This period turned out to be one of the most oppressive phases in their history.

Provisions for Transgender Communities in India

The Constitution of India and the judiciary together have taken significant steps to ensure the dignity and recognition of transgender and third-gender communities. Through judicial intervention, India’s constitutional framework has provided important safeguards for their rights. Article 14 guarantees equality before the law and ensures that no person can be denied equal protection.

The landmark judgment in *NALSA (National Legal Services Authority) vs. Union of India (2014)* clarified that fundamental rights cannot be restricted only to men and women; transgender persons must also be included.¹⁰ Article 15 prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. The judiciary interpreted the term “sex” to include gender identity and gender expression. Similarly, Article 19(1)(a), which guarantees the right to freedom of expression, extends its protection not only to the expression of ideas and emotions but also to the expression of gender identity. Most importantly, the court affirmed that the identity and self-respect of transgender persons lie at the core of their right to live with freedom and dignity.

Through numerous landmark decisions, the Indian judiciary has provided constitutional recognition and strengthened the rights of the transgender and LGBTQ+

communities, safeguarding both their lives and dignity. In the *NALSA vs. Union of India* (2014) judgment, the Supreme Court for the first time recognized transgender persons as the “third gender,” making it clear that their existence is integral to the meaning of fundamental rights. This decision also placed responsibility on state governments to ensure reservations, welfare schemes, and access to education, healthcare, and employment for transgender individuals.

In *Navtej Singh Johar vs. Union of India* (2018), the court declared Section 377 partially unconstitutional and granted legal recognition to consensual same-sex relationships. This was not merely a legal reform; it was a decisive step toward ensuring real protection for the privacy, equality, and dignity rights of the entire LGBTQ+ community, including transgender persons. In this sequence, the judgment in *Arjun Malhotra vs. Union of India* (2020, Delhi High Court) further advanced these principles. The court held that transgender individuals have the right to equal and safe access to toilets and other public facilities according to their gender identity. This decision delivered a clear message that constitutional rights are not confined to the pages of legal texts; they are deeply connected to the everyday life and dignity of every individual.

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 marked a major step toward safeguarding the rights of the transgender community and integrating them into the mainstream of society. The Act legally recognized transgender persons and ensured them equal opportunities in education, health, employment, and access to public spaces. In addition, the Act provided specific safeguards against discrimination, harassment, exploitation, and violence. However, it also received criticism because it limited the right to self-identification by requiring a certificate of transgender identity through

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a District Screening Committee—an approach considered contrary to the spirit of the NALSA judgment (2014).

Challenges Faced by the Transgender Community

Discrimination in employment and economic marginalization continue to affect transgender individuals despite equal competencies and educational qualifications. During recruitment and selection processes, they frequently encounter systemic bias. As a result, they face numerous hardships such as unstable income, lack of educational opportunities, and unsafe or limited livelihood options. The absence of secure and stable economic support remains one of their greatest challenges.

In the field of education, resistance and discrimination have been widely documented. A parliamentary report presented in June 2019 stated that except for IGNOU, no central university had provided enrollment data for transgender students (Government of India, 2019). Recent AISHE cycles have begun acknowledging transgender students in enrolment data, a significant shift from earlier reports that offered no separate enumeration. Ministry of Education disclosures indicate that transgender enrolment in higher education increased from 302 in 2020–21 to 1,448 (provisional) in 2022–23, signalling an emerging—though still marginal—visibility. This limited quantitative presence demonstrates that institutional policy frameworks remain in an early stage of recognising and addressing transgender educational inclusion. Despite institutional provisions and government schemes, problems of implementation, administrative ambiguity, and systemic shortcomings persist. The absence of dedicated scholarships, lack of transparent admission processes, and weak monitoring systems pose major barriers to securing educational and social opportunities for them.¹¹ In terms of educational

access, the 2011 Census reveals that the literacy rate among transgender persons is only 56.1%, compared with the national average of 74.04%.¹²

Educational Environment and Social Exclusion

In many colleges and universities, the lack of inclusive environments, gender-neutral toilets, safe hostels, and sensitized teaching policies forces many transgender students to discontinue their education. Social prejudices and widespread non-acceptance often label them as “undesirable,” pushing them to the margins of society. This social exclusion profoundly affects their self-esteem, mental health, and overall aspirations within society.

Health-Related Challenges

Transgender persons commonly face significant obstacles even in accessing basic healthcare. Barriers in reaching existing health services, irregular check-ups, and discrimination prevent them from receiving essential medical care such as mental health services, NCD screening, and immunization.

They also experience a heightened mental health crisis: depression, anxiety, and suicidal tendencies occur at rates far higher than the general population. The shortage of gender-affirming services—such as hormone therapy, surgeries, and crucial counseling—worsens their situation. Discrimination within health institutions, restricted treatment access, and the absence of respectful medical interactions further intensify their vulnerability.¹³

Additionally, mainstream social values, religious norms, and cultural beliefs often deem them “socially unacceptable.” Moreover, despite the legal foundation provided by the NALSA judgment (2014) and the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019, the essence of “self-identification” has been weakened

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through screening processes and restrictive eligibility criteria.

Documentation of identity remains a longstanding issue for transgender persons in India. According to the 2011 Census, there were 4,87,803 transgender persons recorded in the country. However, due to stigma and discrimination, many avoid publicly disclosing their identity, leading to underreporting. This hesitation to identify themselves publicly becomes a major barrier, preventing many transgender individuals from asserting their rights.

They face the absence of official documents that reflect their true gender identity, limited access to social and economic opportunities, and systemic marginalization—all of which place them in positions of deep social insecurity. Many transgender individuals spend years attempting to legally change their names and gender markers (assigned at birth), struggling to obtain justice and recognition of their lived identity.

As a result, their old identity documents become invalid, and obtaining new documents brings numerous difficulties. This situation creates several new challenges. To access government welfare schemes, valid identification is required; however, most transgender individuals do not possess such documents. The absence of a permanent residence becomes a major barrier to procuring proof of residence. In addition, from renting a house to accessing healthcare services, they face severe constraints. As one transgender individual shared—“I have been a transgender person since birth. People treated me harshly, I applied for several jobs, but I received only two.”¹⁴

The symbolic marriage of the kinnar community to their deity Iravan is a deeply emotional and religious tradition. It is a central element of their faith. Many

kinnars look toward this sacred wedding with hope. However, the very same day of the ceremony is followed by the symbolic reenactment of Iravan's death, causing immediate emotional devastation. For them, this experience is not merely a ritual; it forms an intense emotional foundation that reflects the depth and poignancy of their lives.

The grieving community observes a week of fasting and charity. They offer earnest prayers to God, asking that such a fate never befall them again.¹⁵ For them, this funeral ritual is not simply a religious requirement but a symbol of the deepest and most heart-wrenching sorrow of their lives. It stands as a cultural testimony that repeatedly raises the question of their existence: "Why must a life be so cursed and filled with suffering?"

Opportunities for the Transgender Community in India

Although the transgender community in India has long faced social and economic marginalization, recent legal and policy reforms have opened new pathways for progress. This research explores the emerging opportunities in education, employment, politics, health, socio-cultural participation, and international engagement. The National Education Policy (NEP 2020), the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019, and the Supreme Court's NALSA (2014) ruling have together provided a strong foundation for these possibilities.

Education forms the foundation of empowerment for the transgender community. The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 includes transgender students within the socially and economically disadvantaged groups, introducing the Gender Inclusion Fund (GIF) and scholarships. Digital learning has improved their access to educational resources. With future policy reforms and

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inclusive state-level initiatives, national dropout rates are expected to decline significantly.

Employment and Economic Opportunities

The NALSA (2014) judgment granting recognition as the “third gender” expanded employment prospects in both government and private sectors. Initiatives such as MSME and Skill India have encouraged entrepreneurship. Their presence in fashion, arts, digital content creation, and social work is rising.

However, challenges remain, though employment opportunities are expected to grow by 2025 through schemes like SMILE. This scheme is an umbrella initiative launched by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment on 12 February 2022 that offers comprehensive support for transgender persons and individuals engaged in begging. It includes interventions in education, skill-development, shelter, medical care, and livelihood to facilitate their rehabilitation and integration.

Political and Policy Participation

Transgender individuals have begun receiving representation from local bodies to legislative assemblies. States such as Karnataka and Kerala have established transgender welfare boards, increasing their participation in policy-making. Political manifestos and ministries may increasingly include transgender issues in the future.

Health Services

Under the Transgender Persons Act 2019, the Government of India has expanded gender-affirming surgery support, mental health services, and HIV prevention initiatives. Ayushman Bharat and the National Transgender Health Scheme offer free treatment and insurance. Telemedicine represents the future of accessible care, but lack of awareness—especially in

rural regions—remains a concern.

NACO's efforts to control HIV are part of the National AIDS Control Programme, which aims to achieve the United Nations's Sustainable Development Goal 3.3 of ending the HIV-AIDS epidemic as a public health threat by 2030.

Cultural and Social Prospects

The historical traditions of Hijra and Iravan communities remain culturally significant. Cinema, theatre, and social media have increasingly presented positive narratives. Digital platforms are amplifying their voices in the mainstream. With growing awareness through cultural campaigns, societal acceptance and recognition are expected to strengthen.

International Opportunities

At the global level, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals—especially SDG-5 (Gender Equality) and SDG-10 (Reduced Inequalities)—provide a progressive framework for India. International scholarships, global advocacy campaigns such as Trans Advocacy Week, and partnerships with NGOs are opening new avenues. As India adopts global best practices, it can create stronger and more inclusive national models.

Government Initiatives

The Transgender Persons Act 2019 provided legal recognition and equal opportunity. Ayushman Bharat (2021) ensured insurance coverage up to 5 lakh rupees. The SMILE Scheme (2022) allocated 365 crore rupees. The National Transgender Portal has enhanced transparency. Collectively, these measures significantly increased inclusion.

At state-level, Kerala (2015) has provided free surgeries and housing assistance, Tamil Nadu (2008)

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has created welfare board and self-identification policy. Karnataka & Odisha started pension scheme and inclusion in PDS, Delhi govt started welfare schemes and skill-development programs, these efforts created a better environment of inclusive governance.

The transgender community's social, cultural, and developmental contributions in India are deeply significant. Historically, Hijra and Kinnar communities played essential roles in rituals, blessings, births, and marriages, symbolizing auspiciousness. They represent not only a gender identity but also India's profound cultural diversity and traditions of inclusion. Modern constitutional provisions and judicial rulings have affirmed their rights to education, employment, and political participation. Empowering this community strengthens society as a whole. Their lived experiences, resilience, talents, and cultural wisdom form a unique foundation of strength. When transgender individuals are integrated into the mainstream with equal opportunities, their skills and perspectives enrich national development and strengthen the vision of a "Developed India."

Conclusion

The history of the transgender community is not merely the story of a marginalized group; rather, it forms an integral part of India's social, cultural, and political fabric. Their presence and contributions are evident from ancient scriptures, epics, and folklore to medieval power structures. However, colonial rule inflicted deep wounds upon their social dignity and respect, leading to widespread discrimination and socio-economic exclusion. After independence, the Indian Constitution and judiciary undertook significant measures to secure their rights and recognition. The landmark NALSA (2014) judgment, the Navtej Singh Johar (2018) decision, and the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 together laid a

strong foundation for the recognition of the third gender, the right to self-identification, and the assurance of equal opportunities.

Additionally, the National Education Policy 2020 and various welfare initiatives of state governments have opened new avenues for transgender persons in education, healthcare, and employment. Yet, practical challenges remain substantial. Social stigma and family rejection, discrimination in education and employment, inadequate healthcare facilities, and limited political representation continue to impede their progress. The lack of effective implementation of humanistic values and insufficient social awareness also create significant obstacles.

Despite these difficulties, the future holds substantial promise. Areas such as education, skill development, equal employment opportunities, accessible healthcare, and social acceptance present strong and meaningful pathways for integrating transgender persons into the mainstream. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), combined with the policies of the Government of India and coordinated efforts by state governments, can accelerate this process in the coming years.

Therefore, it can be stated that the empowerment of the transgender community is not merely the restoration of their rights; it is also a moral responsibility of Indian society and an essential expression of true social justice.

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2.

Depiction of Transgender Identities in Indian Cinema from Ridicule to Respect

Dr. Deepti Bajpai*

Introduction

The Hijra community occupies a distinct socio-religious position in South Asia, recognized in India as a “third gender.” Historically, Hijras were revered for their spiritual power and found mention in epics like the Mahabharata, where Arjuna takes on the form of Brihannala during exile. Over centuries, however, colonial laws such as the Criminal Tribes Act (1871) reduced their status, criminalized their existence, and forced them to the margins of society. Today, despite constitutional protections, the community continues to face stigma, exclusion, and violence. The modern term “transgender,” popularized in the 1990s, encompasses a wide spectrum of identities including transsexuals, cross-dressers, intersex people, and those with gender-

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nonconforming expressions. Yet, Indian cinema has often failed to reflect this diversity authentically. Instead, films have portrayed Hijras either as comic figures, villains, or voiceless side characters, rarely giving them dignified representation.

Indian Cinema and the Shaping of Public Imagination

Cinema is India's most influential cultural medium, producing over 1,500 films annually in multiple languages. From its beginnings in 1896, Indian cinema has reflected societal values while also shaping public attitudes. The portrayal of transgender people is particularly significant because cinema reaches millions of viewers, embedding stereotypes deeply into collective consciousness. Bollywood and regional industries like Kollywood (Tamil cinema) have typically cast transgender characters in minor roles—often for comic relief or shock value. For instance, cross-dressing scenes in films such as 'Rafoo Chakkar' and 'Apna Sapna Money Money' are treated as humorous spectacles rather than explorations of gender diversity. Such portrayals trivialize transgender lives and reinforce misconceptions. In contrast, recent films like 'Tamanna' (1997), 'Daayra' (1996), and 'Naanu Avanalla...Avalu' (2015) have challenged stereotypes by exploring the struggles, resilience, and humanity of transgender people. These works signal a gradual shift from ridicule toward respect, though mainstream cinema still lags behind.

Representation and Stereotyping in Society

Gender norms in India are deeply entrenched, reinforced through family, religion, education, and media. Cinema both reflects and sustains these norms. Hijras are frequently represented as objects of ridicule—obsessed with men, overly flamboyant, or aggressive—creating one-dimensional caricatures rather than multifaceted

individuals. In 'Pyaar Kiya To Darna Kya', for example, Hijras are mocked in a comic sequence. In 'Dil Ne Jise Apna Kaha', Bobby Darling's character exists purely for comic relief, perpetuating the idea that Hijras are not to be taken seriously. Another recurring stereotype is the portrayal of Hijras as criminals or villains. In 'Sangharsh' (1999), Ashutosh Rana's terrifying character kidnaps children in the guise of a Hijra. Similarly, 'Murder 2' (2011) features a transgender villain engaged in grotesque violence. Such portrayals fuel public fear and prejudice, linking transgender identity with criminality and danger.

The Voiceless Transgender

In many films, Hijras appear voiceless or marginal, with no agency over their narratives. They are reduced to symbols or side characters without depth. This cinematic silencing reflects broader social exclusion, where even legal recognition has not translated into dignity and equality. Playwright Mahesh Dattani's work highlights this silencing, portraying Hijra characters who yearn for dignity but are constantly denied space to speak.

Legal and Social Developments

Indian law has gradually recognized transgender rights. The Supreme Court's 'NALSA' Union of India' (2014) judgment affirmed the right of individuals to self-identify as male, female, or third gender, extending constitutional protections under Articles 14, 15, 16, and 21. Article 14 guarantees equality before the law, Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of sex, and Article 21 ensures the right to life and personal liberty, now interpreted to include dignity and gender identity. States like Tamil Nadu and Kerala pioneered welfare schemes offering free gender-affirming surgeries, housing, and education for transgender people. The decriminalization of Section 377 in 'Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India'

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(2018) further advanced rights for sexual and gender minorities. Yet, despite these legal victories, social attitudes remain slow to change, and cinema often mirrors these contradictions.

Toward Respectful Representation

Cinema has long been guilty of perpetuating stereotypes when it comes to portraying transgender people. For decades, Hijras and trans characters were shown either as comic relief, criminals, or eerie side characters who served no narrative purpose other than to trigger fear or laughter. Such portrayals reinforced prejudice, leading audiences to associate transgender identity with ridicule or deviance. However, in recent years, there has been a noticeable shift in both mainstream and independent cinema that seeks to portray transgender lives with empathy, dignity, and complexity.

One landmark moment in this journey was the release of ‘Super Deluxe’ (2019), a Tamil film featuring Vijay Sethupathi as a transgender woman named Shilpa. The film avoided caricature and instead portrayed her as a complex human being—a parent, a victim of discrimination, and a person deserving love and respect. This representation helped spark conversations about the nuanced struggles and resilience of transgender people.

Another important work is ‘Naanu Avanalla...Avalu’ (2015), a Kannada film that tells the real-life story of Living Smile Vidya, a transgender woman. The film moves beyond stereotypes and presents her struggles for identity and acceptance, winning a National Award for its portrayal.

Most recently, ‘Taali’ (2023), a Hindi web series starring Sushmita Sen as Shreegauri Sawant, has redefined the narrative of transgender representation in India. Unlike earlier films that depicted trans characters

only in marginal or exaggerated ways, Taali centers the story entirely on a transgender activist's journey. It chronicles Sawant's early struggles with identity, rejection from family, and eventual emergence as a pioneering voice in the fight for transgender rights in India. The series highlights her role in the *NALSA v. Union of India* (2014) case, where the Supreme Court recognized transgender people as a "third gender" and affirmed their constitutional rights.

What makes Taali especially significant is that it does not present the transgender experience as tragedy alone. Instead, it showcases resilience, leadership, and empowerment. By focusing on an actual activist's life, the series bridges the gap between representation and reality, offering audiences a chance to empathize with the lived experiences of transgender people while also educating them about the legal and social milestones achieved through activism.

The casting of Sushmita Sen, a mainstream Bollywood star and former Miss Universe, also carries symbolic weight. While the decision to cast a cisgender actor in a transgender role has generated debate, Sen's portrayal brought mainstream visibility to transgender issues in India in a way few earlier projects managed. Ideally, such roles should be played by transgender actors themselves to ensure authenticity and create opportunities for trans performers. Yet, the widespread popularity of Taali has contributed to an important cultural shift—audiences are now engaging with transgender narratives not as comedic subplots but as central, serious, and inspirational stories. For Indian cinema to move fully "from ridicule to respect," it must continue this trajectory. Respectful representation requires three essential steps:

1. **Authentic Storytelling** – Narratives must be rooted in the lived experiences of transgender

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people, avoiding caricature and sensationalism.

2. Inclusion of Trans Voices – Transgender individuals should be part of the creative process—not only as actors but also as writers, directors, and consultants.

3. Focus on Empowerment – Representation should highlight not only the struggles of transgender people but also their achievements, agency, and contributions to society.

Films and series like *Taali* demonstrate how cinema can challenge prejudices, inspire empathy, and promote inclusivity. By shifting from mockery to respect, Indian cinema has the potential to become a powerful ally in the transgender community's ongoing struggle for equality and dignity.

Indian cinema's portrayal of transgender identities has been historically fraught with ridicule, stereotyping, and exclusion. Yet, the gradual emergence of more nuanced narratives signals a positive shift. Cinema can play a transformative role in reshaping public attitudes—moving from mockery to understanding, from marginalization to inclusion. For this to happen, filmmakers must commit to authentic storytelling that upholds the dignity and humanity of transgender lives. The journey from ridicule to respect in Indian cinema mirrors the larger societal struggle for transgender rights. As laws evolve and activism grows stronger, cinema too must rise to the responsibility of portraying transgender identities not as objects of laughter or fear, but as citizens deserving equality, respect, and justice.

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3.

Inclusion of Transgenders in Social Structure with the Help of Constitutional and Legal Rights in India

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Introduction

The transgender community encompasses Hijras, Eunuchs, Kothis, Aravanis, Jogappas, and Shiv-Shakthis, all of whom have been integral to Indian society for centuries. Vedic and Puranic texts reference “tritiyaprakriti,” denoting the third gender, and “napunsaka,” referring to individuals with diminished reproductive capabilities. The term hijra in Indian vernacular is believed to originate from the Persian word hiz, which signifies someone who is effeminate or ineffectual. Another frequently used term is kinnar, while chhakka is often employed in a pejorative manner.

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Although many contemporary eunuchs are seen soliciting alms at traffic intersections or during weddings, they were once held in high esteem during the Mughal era in Medieval India. The term “eunuch” itself is derived from the Greek Euneukhos, meaning “bed chamber attendant,” as they were entrusted with the management of harems due to their emasculated status. Under British colonial rule, they were stripped of civil rights and categorized as a distinct caste or tribe, often associated with criminal activities such as kidnapping and castration of children, as well as performing in women’s attire.

In April 2014, the Supreme Court of India delivered a landmark ruling affirming that an individual’s sexual orientation is a fundamental aspect of their identity, dignity, and freedom, and recognized transgender individuals as a third gender. In the case of National Legal Services Authority (NLSA) versus Union of India, the court granted legal recognition to transgender individuals (including Hijras and Eunuchs) and issued seven additional directives. Following the NLSA ruling, numerous courts have issued favorable judgments for the transgender community.

Transgender Community is Related to our Ancient History

Transgenders have been an integral part of Indian history. Transgenders have been mentioned in Indian mythology, myths, Ramayana, Mahabharata etc. Even about Arjun, it is well known that he had to lose his manhood for some time due to the curse of an Apsara. Transgenders are mentioned repeatedly in medieval history. Especially in Mughal history, it is mentioned that transgenders were used to serve the Begums of Mughal emperors at that time.

But, as far as equal rights for transgenders are concerned, there is no such mention in history.

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Even after gaining independence, there has been no significant improvement in the condition and direction of transgenders. It is a matter of the recent last few decades that if a transgender child was born in a family, then the family members could not keep him in their house even if they wanted to.

Who are Transgender People

According to the law, a transgender person is a person whose gender does not match the gender assigned at birth. The following persons are referred to as transgender persons:

- ❖ Trans-men
- ❖ Trans-women
- ❖ Persons with inter-sex variations
- ❖ Queer persons
- ❖ Persons with socio-cultural identities such as Kinnar, Hijra, Arwani and Jogta

What is the Legal Status of Transgender Persons in India?

In India, transgender persons are legally recognised as 'third gender' or 'other'. Transgender persons enjoy the same rights as everyone else in India. Along with this, they also have the right to exercise their fundamental rights under the Constitution of India. In 2014, the Supreme Court in a landmark judgment recognised transgender persons as 'third gender' in India.

- ❖ There are some important provisions in the Constitution that protect the interests of transgender persons:
- ❖ **Right to Equality (Article 14):** All persons are equal in the eyes of the law and have equal legal rights. The word "person" here indicates that there can be no discrimination on the basis of sex or

gender identity legally.

- ❖ **Prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sex, caste, religion, place of birth and descent (Article 15):** There cannot be any discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, race or sex. Discrimination or mistreatment of transgender persons is a violation of their basic fundamental right.
- ❖ **Freedom of speech and expression (Article 19):** This right gives every Indian citizen the freedom of speech and expression. It also includes the freedom to express one's gender identity in public.
- ❖ **Right to life and personal liberty (Article 21):** No person can be deprived of his or her life and personal liberty. According to this right, every person including a transgender person has the right to life and personal liberty. Being a citizen of India, a transgender person has the full right to protect his or her life and personal liberty.

Is there any Reservation for Transgender Persons?

Under the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules, 2020, the Central and State governments can place them in the 'Other Backward Classes' for vertical reservation.

What are the Laws in India to Protect the Rights of Transgender Persons?

- ❖ **The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 and Rules:** This Act passed in 2020 gives several rights to transgender people.
- ❖ **The Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989:** If a person belongs to the Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe community, this law protects that person from any kind of caste/tribe-related discrimination.

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- ❖ **NALSA Judgement:** In the landmark judgement of National Legal Services Authority vs Union of India and others 2014 case, the Supreme Court recognised the transgender community as a “third gender”. This case gave transgender persons the freedom to choose their gender identity and live a life with dignity.
- ❖ **Puttuswamy v Union of India (2017):** In this case, the Supreme Court held that privacy is a constitutional right inherent in the right to life, equality and fundamental liberty. This right to privacy includes the right to have a relationship of one’s choice, sexual orientation and gender identity.
- ❖ **Navtej Singh Johar v Union of India (Decriminalisation of Section 377 of IPC):** The Supreme Court held in this case that LGBTQ+ people in India are entitled to all constitutional rights including freedom protected in the Constitution of India.
- ❖ **Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860:** Any offence committed by a transgender person shall be punished as per the provisions of the IPC. The case of Mrs. X vs State of Uttarakhand (2019) affirmed the NALSA judgment and held that denial of the right to self-identify one’s gender is tantamount to denial of the right to life and liberty. This judgment was significant because it was the first case that upheld the right to self-determination based on a person’s “mindset” even in criminal law.
- ❖ **Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973:** A transgender person is subject to the same criminal procedural law in matters of arrest, bail, summons, investigation, etc.

Why were Such Laws Made?

Transgender persons are not considered a part of society

due to lack of social acceptance. Transgender persons are usually left on their own and have limited means of survival and earning. Parents feel that having a transgender person is humiliating as it will bring shame to the family. Transgender persons face such problems in terms of marriage as well. This Act aims to address these issues along with all other problems faced by transgender persons.

What can be done if Transgender Rights are Violated?

- ❖ Under the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, a National Council has been set up to hear complaints against transgender persons. The Act came into effect on **10th January 2020**, which is the first concrete step towards ensuring welfare of transgender persons. The rules seek to recognise the identity of transgenders and prohibit discrimination in the fields of education, employment, healthcare, holding or disposing of property, holding public or private office and access to and use of public services and benefits.
- ❖ Apart from this, cases like violation of Part III rights of transgender persons can be heard in the Supreme or High Courts under Article 32 or 226. Apart from this, other rights under many laws are protected under Article 226.
- ❖ Apart from this, violation of the rights of ‘third gender’ is also a violation of human rights. Victims can complain about such violation to the State and National Human Rights Commissions.
- ❖ Authorities under Transgender Law

What is the National Council for Transgender Persons (NCTP)?

The National Council for Transgender Persons (NCTP) is a statutory body. The NCTP was set up by

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the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment on August 21, 2020. It advises the government on all policy matters relating to transgender, intersex persons and people with multiple gender identity orientations and sex characteristics. The Council comprises:

- ❖ Union Minister-in-charge of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Chairperson
- ❖ Minister of State, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (Co-Chairperson)
- ❖ Representatives from different sectors

What are the Functions of the National Council for Transgender Persons (NCTP)?

The following are the functions of the National Council for Transgender Persons:

- ❖ Redressal of grievances of transgender persons.
- ❖ To advise, monitor and evaluate the impact of policies made by the Central Government relating to transgender persons.
- ❖ To monitor the work of government and non-government organizations related to transgender persons.

Does the law Protect Pransgender Persons from Abuse in their Family?

Section 18 of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act: This law protects transgender persons against all forms of abuse (physical, verbal, emotional, sexual, mental and economic). The guilty can be punished with imprisonment of at least six months to two years along with fine. But there is no separate mechanism for filing any of the above complaints.

Domestic Violence Act, 2005: This Act protects all women including transgender women (without identity

certificate) against any form of abuse by any member of the family

What can a Transgender Person do if their Family Evicts them from their Home because of their Gender identity?

According to the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, it is illegal for any family to discriminate against or evict a transgender child from their home. All transgender persons have the right to:

- ❖ They can live in their family home.
- ❖ They can use all the facilities of their family home without discrimination.

If parents or family members cannot take care of the transgender person, the court can order that such person be placed in a rehabilitation centre. (As per Section 12(3) of the Act) According to the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, it is illegal to isolate a transgender person from the family or expel them from their home, village or community. If someone tries to do this, they can be jailed for 6 months to 2 years. Transgender people have the full right to live in their homes, the government has also created 'Garima Grihas' to help homeless people.

Marriage and Divorce of Transgender Persons

Transgender persons can marry in India under personal religious laws (Hindu Marriage Act or Indian Christian Marriage Act) or the Special Marriage Act, 1954.

Protection Against Sexual Harassment

- ❖ **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act-** Under Section 18 of this Act, it is illegal for any person to sexually abuse any transgender.

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- ❖ **Indian Penal Code (IPC)**- Transgender women can seek protection under all sections of the IPC to avoid sexual abuse. This was stated by the Delhi High Court in the case of Anamika vs Union of India (2020).
- ❖ **Prevention of Sexual Harassment at Workplace (POSH)**- If a transgender is sexually harassed in his/her school/college, it will be considered sexual harassment at workplace. Transgender students can lodge a complaint of this harassment with the internal complaints committee of that school/university.

POSH Act Protection of Rights of Transgender Person against Sexual Harassment at Workplaces

Under the POSH Act, (Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013), the organization has to create adequate grievance redressal mechanism to deal with complaints of harassment of transgender persons while keeping the identity of the complainant anonymous.

The Essential Duties of Workplaces for the Welfare of Transgender Persons;

Employers cannot discriminate against transgender persons on any issue related to their employment. All establishments have to abide by the provisions of the Transgender Act. It is the duty of the employer to appoint a person as a Grievance Officer to deal with complaints of violation of the Transgender Act.

Can Transgender Persons Vote?

Like other genders, a transgender person aged 18 years or above can vote in India. The voter registration form also has an option of 'other' in the gender category. Under the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights)

Act, any transgender person can hold public office, which means transgender persons in India can also contest elections.

Conclusion

The Government of India has today adopted a position and launched various welfare policies and initiatives aimed at the transgender community, marking a significant advancement. These measures encompass a census, documentation, the issuance of citizenship ID cards, the provision of passports, as well as social, economic, and political reforms, housing initiatives, legal actions, police reforms, and legal and constitutional protections to safeguard against human rights abuses faced by transgender individuals, along with institutional frameworks to tackle the specific issues concerning transgender people.

The legal landscape for transgender rights and protections in India has made great progress, especially with the enactment of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019. However, challenges remain in fully implementing the rights and protections provided by the law. Continued advocacy, education, and systemic changes are necessary to ensure that transgender persons can live with dignity, free from discrimination and violence.

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4.

Indian Literature of Transgenders in Postcolonial Period in the Light of Some Specific Writings

Bind Kumar*

Introduction

Postcolonialism as a discipline emerged during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Its popularity as an influential discipline rests on the works such as Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* published in 1961, Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978 and *Culture and Imperialism* in 1993, Gayatri Spivak's 1987 *In Other Worlds*, Homi Baba's 1980 work *Nation and Narration*, Helen Tiffin and Bill Aschroft's *the Empire Writes Back* published in 1989. Nagarajan asserts that "the nomenclature 'postcolonialism' is used to refer 'to all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day.'" Postcolonialism examines and analyses the literature that was produced in response to colonialism i.e. postcolonial literature.

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Transgenders of India

Transgenders in India were well treated if not as equals to the heteronormative society until the advent of colonization. There are references to three genders in various mythological texts of Hindus. According to Devdutt Pattanaik contrary to the western world, queerness and gender diversity are very natural in Hindu world. “. . . in the Hindu World, culture (*sanskriti*, in Sanskrit) remains an artificial imposition on nature (*prakriti*), enabling humans to discover their humanity by offering a chance to make room for, or reject, diversity.” In his seminal book *Shikhandi and other Queer Tales, they don't tell you*, Devdutt narrates thirty queer stories from Hindu Mythology of different states of India. All these stories show gender in smooth elegance where gender boundaries of male and female are completely erased and merged. They celebrate queerness in all its grandeur. Devdutt shares three stories about transgenders which are very popular amongst the hijra community of India.

The Aravan story depicts the descent of the term ‘Aravani’ the most revered term to address transgenders in Tamil Nadu. Bahucārā Mātā narrative from Orissa traces the story behind the hijras of India worshipping Bahucārā Mātā as their mother goddess. Bahucārā Mātā is known as goddess of feretanity mainly related from Gujarat temple named as Bechārji. He also shares oral tradition of hijras from Ramayana, where Ram promises the hijras, who stayed on the banks of the river that separates the forest from Kingdom of Ayodhya, for fourteen years awaiting the return of Ram from exile, great political power in the Kali Yuga and also moksha, freedom from rebirth.

Transgenders were well treated and adorned with respectful positions during Mughal rule. Though the transgenders in India explicitly date their origin to the

pre-Mughal period in India they claim that the Muslim rulers brought them closer rather than pushing them away. The hijra communities were given lands and property to have an insured living.

Eunuchs that are called as a man whose testicles have been removed and appointed as guard in Haram in some Asian countries in old age. They also appointed in India were often accorded respect in the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal courts, holding positions of eminence especially under the Khiljis of Delhi in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and under the Mughals from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Although many eunuchs were initially brought as slaves into the houses of Muslim nobility in principalities such as Awadh and Hyderabad, they were accorded respect and trusted with sensitive positions, including guarding the *harim*, or inner/female spaces within the palace.

India has more than 200 years of Colonial past history. Colonialization has left paralyzing effects on the psyche of Indians. The advent of colonization made the transgenders of India – as ‘others. The British occluded them from the Mughal courts then established. They are marginalized and criminalized by the Britishers. The agricultural lands and property were taken back by the British as they were not inherited by the transgenders through blood relation. In addition to that the mere sight of transgenders and the importance they were given in Mughal courts was so infuriating for the Britishers.

Accounts of early European travelers showed that they were repulsed by the sight of Hijras and could not comprehend why they were given so much respect in the royal courts and other institutions.

In the second half of the 19th century, the British colonial administration vigorously sought to criminalize the hijra community and to deny them the civil rights.

Hijras were considered to be separate caste or tribe in different parts of India by the colonial administration.

Later British criminalized hijras of India and introduced the Criminal Tribes Act, 1871. According to the act the hijras are the section of people who don sarees and dance on streets and are involved in kidnapping and castrating children. This wrong notion about hijras was so strongly etched on the minds of Indians that even after the repeal of the Criminal Tribes Act in 1952; the prejudicial attitudes prevail against hijras in India till date. They are seen as criminals and their presence is scared by many.

Post Independence, begging and sex work has become the only livelihood for transgenders. As Laxmi shares: - *“Hijras were an integral part of the courtly traditions of Muslim kings. But when they were overthrown by the British, the hijras landed on the street. Today, hijras beg in shops and other public places, and do sex work, not out of choice, but out of necessity. How, otherwise, can we keep body and soul together.”*

However, in North India they do ‘*Badhāī*’ i.e., singing and dancing at newlywed couples’ homes and at homes of new born babies as their blessings are believed to come true. “For many Indians—both upper- and middle-class—hijras exist (and to some extents have always existed) at the periphery of their imaginaries, making themselves visible only on certain circumscribed ritual occasions.”

As Revathi mentions in her autobiography, when she asked one of the senior *nānis* (grandmother in transgender community) “Why do they go like this to collect money? Can’t they work?” to which her *nāni* replied:

“In this Hindi country, we hijras are meant to do this and no other things. We ask money from shops, collect *badhāī*. In the old days, hijras waited upon queens and

princesses. But today there are no queens; the rule of kings and queens has given away to the rule of ministers. But this government has not given us other work to do. In Indira Gandhi's time – God bless her memory – they built houses for hijras and other poor people.”

Characteristics of Post Colonial Literature

Post-colonial literature is the literature of those colonized countries, those who have been marginalized, trying to break the typical “Orientalization” and misinterpretation of their culture and heritage by the colonizers – British. Colonialism has always been a powerful mode of exploitation. Colonialism completely affected the difference in race, culture, ethnicity, forms of knowledge, advancement in technology and political system. Postcolonial writing reflected upon cultural colonialism, native identity and anti-colonial resistance. Post-colonial literature was primarily considered to be the literature of Third World countries that were once colonized by the British.

Third world countries included Africa, Asia, the Caribbean Island etc. However, the canon of Postcolonial Literature also sometimes includes the literature of Second World countries such as New Zealand, Australia and Canada who achieved their independence long before the third world nations.

However, it is generally criticized that the division of world countries into first-world, second-world, and third-world itself is Eurocentric and they put themselves in the main position or center and then compare and position other countries in parameter to them. Edward Said introduced the term ‘Orientalism’ to define the Eurocentric universalism practiced in England, Europe and the USA, which “takes for granted both the superiority of what is European or Western, and the inferiority of what is not.’ According to Said Orientalism

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is the “discourse of the west about the East is a particular and long-standing way of identifying the East as ‘Other’ and inferior to the west.” This is considered as a result of the “overbearing attitude of the nineteenth and early twentieth century European imperialism. Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between the orient and the occident.”

According to Nagarajan postcolonial literature is the literature that was affected by the imperial process, the literature that grew in response to colonial domination, right from the time of contact between the colonizer and the colonized down to the contemporary situation.

Transgender Literature as Post-colonial Literature

Thus, the contemporary literature that shows the effects of Colonization and its aftermath falls under the category of postcolonial literature. Hence, it can be drawn out that the transgenders whose life was affected by the colonization and hence been the same till date, their literature seeking for just in the society is the postcolonial literature. Peter Barry owes the ancestry of postcolonial criticism back to Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) published in French. In this book Fanon the French psychiatrist proposed the idea of ‘cultural resistance’ which constitutes of two steps. “If the first step towards a postcolonial perspective is to reclaim one’s own past, then the second is to begin to erode the colonialist ideology by which that past had been devalued.” (Barry 186) According to Fanon for centuries together the Europeans spread their colonizing power by devaluing the past of the nations they colonized. They always portrayed the pre-colonial era of those nations as that of the pre-civilized and sometimes barbaric. Similarly, in India transgenders during the pre- colonized era were

not treated as badly as they were and are treated post colonization. It was the portrayal of the colonizers that the transgender lot of India was criminals and was to be kept at safe distance from the mainstream society for the benefit and safety of the mainstream society. They treated transgenders of India as a separate caste and expelled them from the mainstream society. As Bill Ashcroft says in *The Empire Writes Back*- “We use the term ‘post-colonial’, however, to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because we have continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression.”

Thus, the process of marginalizing the transgenders which was initiated by European imperial aggression is still continued in India till date. The upcoming generations of post colonized India were taught to see the history, culture and progress from the perspective of the colonizers and were forced to practice them blindly. It can be said that transgenders of India are appallingly affected and destroyed by ‘cultural denigration’ meaning “the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model.”

Thus, the discrimination against the transgenders still exists at a substantial level in India. As Nagarajan points out in his book. There is an inherent clash between the native, indigenous precolonial cultures, and the culture imposed on the natives by the imperial forces. Cultural colonization still exists, and there has been no complete decolonization.

As said thus almost all nations that were once the victims of colonization are not yet completely decolonized but still carry on the traits and traces of colonization. Transgender Literature just like any other postcolonial

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writing reflects upon cultural colonialism, loss of their identity and being marginalized. Taking Spivak's 'subaltern', transgenders in India are the Subaltern subjects – the non-elite people who are denied access to power and who have distorted representation or self-expressed voice. M. H. Abrams states that “The **subaltern** has become a standard way to designate the colonial subject that has been constructed by the European discourse and internalized by colonial peoples who employ this discourse;” Thus, the transgenders of the India are constructed by the European discourse as criminals and untouchables that pose a great threat to the smooth functioning of the ‘normal society’ and hence were to be marginalized from the mainstream society. They are the “gender subalterns” who are always defined via their differences from the bipolar genders – male and female. As Nagarajan claims Postcolonialism refers to “all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” transgenders of India do fit rightly into the quiver of Postcolonialism, as transgenders and their culture were affected from the moment of colonization to the present day.

Transgender literature of India can be considered as the ‘indigenous’ response of the transgender community of India where they question and challenge the colonial representation of their community and its repercussion that exists till date in contemporary India.

The alienating process which initially served to relegate the post-colonial world to the ‘margin’ turned upon itself and acted to push that world through a kind of mental barrier into a position from which all experience could be viewed as uncentred, pluralistic, and multifarious. Marginality thus became an unprecedented source of creative energy.

Similarly, the marginalization towards the

transgenders of India has turned into a creative energy aiming at the abolition of the marginalization itself. These autobiographies can be considered as writing back to the center, where the center is occupied by both Eurocentricism as well as the mainstream Indian Society which still marginalizes and discriminates transgenders. The Themes advanced by the postcolonial critics like that of “cultural identity, double consciousness, unhomeliness and alienation” (Nagarajan 190) can be observed in these autobiographies but in relation to their gender. These autobiographies are crammed with the themes of gender identity, double consciousness or crisis in relation to their gender, unhomeliness and alienation because of their gender choice. Hence, transgender literature of India can be studied as Post-Colonial Literature. As the literature of transgenders portrays the fight of transgenders for their just position and place in society it is also the Literature of Empowerment.

Conclusion

Transgender Literature of India not only portrays the imitation of human action but also pleads for a change in their attitude towards the transgenders of the nation. It clearly displays the characteristics of Postcolonial Literature and would definitely add to the existing body of Postcolonial literature produced by the nation. It can play as a tool in order to sensitize and spread awareness in the society. Hence, the present paper claims transgender literature to be considered as a part of Postcolonial literature produced by the nation in resistance to the colonial imperialism.

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5.

Neurobiology of Gender Identity Insights from Human Studies

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Introduction

Gender identity represents an individual's deeply held sense of being male, female, a combination of both, neither, or another gender altogether. It is a core element of personal identity and typically emerges early in life, remaining stable in the majority of individuals across time. While historically examined through psychological and cultural frameworks, recent scientific developments have sparked increasing interest in the biological dimensions of gender identity. The evolving discipline of gender identity neurobiology aims to uncover the brain-based mechanisms that underlie the development and experience of gender identity, with a

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strong emphasis on evidence from human-based research.

This shift toward a biological perspective has been driven by clinical insights from individuals experiencing gender incongruence—where one’s gender identity does not align with their assigned sex at birth—as well as by findings from studies on intersex conditions, neurodevelopment, and prenatal hormonal effects. With the advent of advanced neuroimaging techniques, such as MRI, fMRI, and DTI, researchers have been able to examine the human brain in greater detail, revealing patterns that may help explain the biological underpinnings of gender identity.

Studies involving transgender individuals have reported that specific brain structures—such as regions within the hypothalamus or cortical areas—often resemble those typically observed in individuals who share their identified gender, rather than those who share their natal sex (Burke et al. 2017). These discoveries imply that gender identity may be linked to distinct neurological features, potentially influenced by genetics, prenatal hormone exposure, and epigenetic factors during key stages of brain development. There are interactions between sexual orientation and gender in specific brain regions—including the left inferior frontal gyrus, both temporal lobes, and the right rostral anterior cingulate cortex—which are believed to play a crucial role in the sexual differentiation of the human brain (Wang et al. 2020). Although these findings are compelling, the field of gender identity neurobiology remains in a formative stage, characterized by complexity and the need for further exploration. Challenges such as small sample sizes, ethical concerns, and the necessity for inclusive research populations highlight the importance of careful study design. Integrating biological data with psychological, social, and cultural insights is essential for a holistic understanding of gender identity.

This article aims to present an overview of current findings from human neuroimaging and neurodevelopmental studies, explore the possible neurobiological correlates of gender identity, and discuss their broader implications for medical care, public policy, and social attitudes toward gender diversity.

Brain Structures and Gender Identity

The human brain displays several sexually dimorphic traits—structural and functional characteristics that typically differ between males and females. These variations are believed to arise due to the influence of sex hormones during sensitive stages of both prenatal and postnatal brain development. Interestingly, many of the brain regions known to be sexually dimorphic also appear to be involved in the formation and expression of gender identity.

1. Sexually Dimorphic Brain Areas

One of the most studied areas in this regard is the bed nucleus of the stria terminalis (BNST), particularly its central subdivision (BSTc). This brain region plays a significant role in modulating stress responses, reproductive behavior, and social interaction. Research has shown that the BNST is typically larger and more neuron-rich in cisgender men compared to cisgender women. However, in transgender women (those assigned male at birth but who identify as female), the BNST often mirrors the structure observed in cisgender women, even before the initiation of hormone therapy. This observation suggests that the BNST may align more closely with a person's gender identity than with their biological sex (Frigerio *et al.* 2021). Brain functional organization of GD AFAB was generally more similar to that of cisgender girls than cisgender boys (Skorska *et al.* 2022).

Other regions of interest include the interstitial nuclei

of the anterior hypothalamus (INAH), which also display sex-related differences and have been found to vary in transgender individuals in a manner that corresponds with their identified gender (LeVay, 1991). These nuclei are known to influence sexual behaviors and hormone-related functions, making them relevant to gender identity development.

2. Cortical Structure and White Matter Connectivity

In addition to subcortical regions, cortical areas and white matter pathways have shown variation that may be linked to gender identity. Brain imaging studies using MRI and diffusion tensor imaging (DTI) reveal that transgender individuals often exhibit cortical and white matter features that are either intermediate between cisgender males and females or closely match those of their identified gender (Burke et al. 2017). For example, transgender men (assigned female at birth) have shown white matter microstructure patterns that are more consistent with cisgender men, particularly in brain areas associated with body perception and spatial orientation. Findings indicate that the cortical structure of adolescents with gender dysphoria who were assigned female at birth (GD AFAB) aligns with their experienced gender, particularly in relation to age-related changes in sexual attraction during adolescence—changes that are primarily reflected in brain tissue microstructure (Skorska, 2021).

Notable findings also include differences in cortical thickness within regions such as the prefrontal cortex, insula, and occipital-parietal lobes—areas involved in self-perception, emotional processing, and social awareness. These regions are considered central to the internal experience of gender and may reflect the neurological basis of gender identity.

3. Brain Structure Consistent with Gender Identity

Across various studies, a consistent observation is that transgender individuals often possess neuroanatomical characteristics that align more closely with their experienced gender rather than with their assigned sex at birth (Zhou *et al.* 1994). Importantly, these traits have been identified in some cases prior to hormone therapy, suggesting that they may arise from early neurodevelopmental processes. Factors such as prenatal hormone exposure, genetic predispositions, and epigenetic regulation are likely contributors to these differences, pointing toward a biological foundation for gender identity.

Hormonal Influences on the Development of Gender Identity

Hormones play a pivotal role in the biological processes that contribute to gender identity formation, especially during critical stages of brain maturation. The impact of sex hormones during prenatal and pubertal periods has become a central area of investigation in neuroendocrinology and gender research. These hormonal inputs are thought to influence how neural circuits are organized—circuits that govern sex-related behaviors, cognitive patterns, and potentially, gender identity itself.

1. Influence of Prenatal and Pubertal Hormones on Brain Differentiation

During fetal development, the brain undergoes sexual differentiation under the influence of steroid hormones—primarily testosterone and estrogen. In typical male development, a testosterone surge during the second trimester leads to masculinization of the brain, affecting areas such as the hypothalamus, amygdala, and certain cortical structures. Conversely, in the absence of elevated testosterone, brain development follows a more typically

female pathway.

Although ethical constraints limit direct experimentation in humans, animal studies and indirect human research provide strong evidence that variations in prenatal hormone exposure can shape gender-typical behaviors and possibly influence gender identity. A second hormonal milestone occurs during puberty, when the brain and body are further shaped by gonadal hormones. While puberty brings about changes in physical appearance and emotional regulation, many scientists suggest that the foundational aspects of gender identity are primarily established during prenatal development, with puberty serving as a reinforcing phase rather than a determining one.

2. Insights from Intersex Variations: CAH and AIS

Additional understanding of hormonal effects comes from individuals with intersex conditions, where sex hormone production or response pathways diverge from typical patterns. Two widely studied conditions in this context are:

- ❖ **Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH):** A condition in which genetic females (46, XX) are exposed to excess androgens in utero. Research shows that females with CAH are more likely to show masculine-typical interests and behaviors. While most still identify as female, a minority report experiencing gender dysphoria or identify outside the binary, indicating that prenatal androgen exposure may have a lasting impact on gender identity in certain cases (Seneviratne and Sumudu, 2021).
- ❖ **Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (AIS):** In this condition, individuals with an XY chromosome pattern have a genetic variation that makes their cells partially or fully unresponsive to androgens.

Those with complete AIS (CAIS) typically develop female-typical anatomy and are raised as girls. Despite having internal testes and an XY karyotype, the majority identify as female, which supports the view that brain exposure to androgens—not chromosomal sex—is more influential in shaping gender identity (Gottlieb and Trifiro, 1999).

These case studies underline the role of early hormonal influences in the shaping of gender identity. However, they also emphasize that this is not a deterministic process—factors such as genetics, individual brain sensitivity to hormones, and social environments interact in complex ways to influence the trajectory of gender identity development.

Functional Brain Imaging and Cognitive Correlates of Gender Identity

Advancements in functional brain imaging, especially functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI), have deepened our understanding of how the brain processes gender identity. While structural imaging provides a static snapshot of brain anatomy, functional imaging allows researchers to observe dynamic brain activity during various cognitive and emotional tasks. However, brain function in transgender individuals often reflects their experienced gender, rather than the sex they were assigned at birth.

1. Functional Imaging in Gender Perception, Voice Processing, and Emotional Interpretation

Functional imaging techniques have been applied to investigate how individuals process gender-specific stimuli, such as faces, voices, and emotional expressions. These experiments typically engage brain systems responsible for social recognition, self-awareness, and emotional evaluation, all of which are integral to how one

experiences and expresses gender.

- ❖ **Gender Perception Tasks:** Studies utilizing gendered visual or auditory stimuli—such as photographs of faces or gender-typed body images—have shown that transgender individuals tend to activate brain regions in a pattern that matches their identified gender. For example, in categorization tasks using gendered faces, transgender women often show activation in areas associated with cisgender female processing patterns (Fisher *et al.* 2020).
- ❖ **Voice Recognition Studies:** Tasks involving gender-specific voices highlight how the brain decodes and categorizes vocal cues. In such studies, transgender individuals frequently exhibit neural responses in regions like the superior temporal gyrus and auditory cortex that are characteristic of their experienced gender, suggesting that auditory gender processing is closely linked to identity (Smith *et al.* 2018).
- ❖ **Emotional Processing Tasks:** When exposed to emotional facial expressions or emotionally charged scenarios, transgender individuals show activity in regions like the amygdala, insula, and anterior cingulate cortex that aligns more closely with their gender identity. These brain areas are crucial for affect regulation and empathic engagement, and their activation supports the emotional congruence with one's gender experience (Mansueto *et al.* 2024).

2. How the Brain Supports Our Sense of Gender

Our sense of who we are—whether we feel male, female, both, or neither—is deeply connected to how our brains work, not just how they look. Even before any kind of medical treatment, many people already show patterns in their brain activity that match the gender they feel

on the inside. This suggests that gender identity comes from within and isn't just shaped by outside influences. When people are simply resting and not doing anything specific, their brains still show certain patterns. These patterns, in many transgender individuals, seem to reflect the gender they identify with, not the one they were assigned at birth. This gives even more reason to understand gender identity as something real, natural, and deeply personal.

Rather than being about appearances or changes someone makes later in life, these brain patterns remind us that gender identity is often part of a person's inner world from early on. It's another way of showing that who we are inside is just as important—and real—as what others might see on the outside.

Neuropsychological and Behavioral Dimensions of Gender Identity

Gender identity influences more than how a person sees themselves—it can also shape how they think, feel, and interact with the world. Instead of being strictly tied to the sex assigned at birth, the way people process information, express emotions, and behave often aligns more closely with their deeply felt sense of gender. For example, individuals who identify as women may show strengths in communication or emotional expression, while those who identify as men might display skills in tasks like spatial navigation. These patterns can often be observed in transgender individuals as well, whose thinking and behavior may reflect the characteristics traditionally associated with their identified gender.

Emotional traits such as empathy, sensitivity to others' feelings, and emotional awareness also tend to match one's gender identity. These tendencies are often visible from an early age—whether in the way children play, form friendships, or respond to social situations.

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Overall, these patterns remind us that gender identity is not just about the body or external appearance. It is a deeply rooted part of who someone is—reflected in their thoughts, emotions, and everyday interactions. This perspective helps us appreciate the richness and complexity of human identity, encouraging greater understanding and respect for each person's unique experience of themselves.

Understanding Gender Identity: What It Means for Health and Society

As we learn more about how gender identity is deeply rooted in who we are, it's becoming clear that this is not just a matter of personal choice or external appearance. For many people, their sense of being male, female, both, or neither is something that comes from deep within—and this understanding is changing the way we approach both healthcare and social attitudes. In everyday healthcare, recognizing that gender identity is a natural part of a person's makeup helps guide more thoughtful, respectful, and supportive care. When someone seeks support for things like counseling, hormone therapy, or surgery, they deserve to be treated with kindness and understanding—not judgment. Knowing that a person's identity comes from within can help doctors, nurses, and therapists offer the right care without making assumptions.

Outside of medical settings, this awareness also helps in shaping a fairer society. It can influence laws that protect people from discrimination, inspire schools to be more inclusive, and encourage workplaces to support everyone, no matter how they identify. When we understand that gender identity is part of human diversity, it becomes easier to move away from old stereotypes and toward acceptance.

In the end, seeing gender identity as something natural and real helps create a world where everyone can

live openly and authentically. It's about showing respect, offering support, and making space for every individual to be themselves.

Being Respectful and Responsible When Studying Gender and the Brain

When exploring how the brain relates to gender identity, it's important that we do so with care, respect, and a strong sense of responsibility. For a long time, people who identify outside traditional gender norms—like transgender or non-binary individuals—have faced unfair treatment and misunderstanding. That's why it's essential to approach this topic in a way that values and respects everyone's experiences. Researchers and those talking about these issues should use thoughtful and inclusive language. It's also important to listen to and include people from gender-diverse communities in these conversations, instead of making assumptions based on old or limited ideas about gender. One big concern is that some people might misuse brain-related information to try to “prove” or “disprove” someone's gender identity. But gender identity isn't something that needs to be proven with brain scans. It's a personal truth—and science should help us better understand and support that, not box people in.

In the end, the goal of studying gender and the brain should be to build a kinder, more understanding world. It should help create better healthcare, more respectful policies, and greater acceptance. What matters most is that everyone feels seen, heard, and valued—just as they are.

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6.

Problems of Transgender in India From Social Exclusion to Social Inclusion

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Transgenders were first time enumerated in Census 2011. Census 2011 have covered this category as ‘others’ and estimated that there were 4, 87,803 persons under this category. Out of the total enumerated gender under ‘others’, 28 percent of these persons were enumerated in Uttar Pradesh followed by 8 percent in Maharashtra. This number may be much more than the estimates because due to their extreme social exclusion many of them would not have disclosed their identity as gender. Transgender have been defined in *“The transgender persons (protection of rights) Act, 2019, “transgender person means a person whose gender does not match with the gender assigned to that person at birth and includes trans-man or trans-woman (whether or not such person has undergone Sex Reassignment Surgery or hormone therapy or laser therapy or such other therapy), person with intersex variations, genderqueer and person*

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having such socio-cultural identities as kinner, hijra, aravani and jogta.” Hence, the transgender are not covered only under binary definition of the sex. They are mainly categorized as per social norms and gender behavior defined by the society. Because transgenders are different from the “normal” and socially accepted gender, they are subject to social oppression and physical violence. Due to prevalent social taboos they are discriminated at every level starting from family towards society. Whenever, a child is found to be in other sexual category than ‘male’ or ‘female’, he is generally abandoned by the family and forced to leave the family consequently facing various types of discrimination and violence such as physical violence, social violence leading to his mental distress. The transgenders were present in all civilization from ancient to the present word. They have always been discriminated in every civilization. During the British rule, Criminal Tribes Act, 1871, which deemed the entire community of Hijras persons as innately ‘criminal’ and ‘addicted to the systematic commission of non-bailable offences’ had passed. After Independence, even though the law was repealed in 1949, but mistrust of the transgender community has continued.

Although there is safeguard provision given in the Article 14 and 15 of the constitution that there would be equality before law and state would not discriminate any person only on the basis of religion, race, caste, **sex** and place of birth. Moreover, Article 21 provides right to live which encompasses right to live with dignity. Further, the government has enacted **‘the transgender persons (protection of rights) Act, 2019.’** Even though the legal safeguard are there but the ground situation is very much deplorable. The word ‘Hijra’ considered to be an abuse in India reflecting degradable condition of a human being. Although, these civil and political rights have been enshrined in the constitution, these ‘Hijra’

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communities face worst form of discrimination. As per the study by an NGO “Humsafar Trust” more than 80 percent of them have no bank linkages. Moreover, most of them do not have identity cards, separate toilets, employment etc. and having no medical facilities. These marginalized and vulnerable groups under ‘other-gender community’ faces significant challenges in various aspects of human development, particularly in education (**Rajesh & Naved: 2013**). As per Census 2011, only 56 percent of the transgenders were found to be literate meaning thereby that approximately half them were illiterate. Their situation in employment is very much precarious. Many of them find themselves teetering on the brink of helplessness and despair, resorting to risky behaviour such as alcoholism, drug addiction and prostitution (**Winter & King: 2011**). Hence, they are prominently indulged in begging or prostitution. They can be seen begging at every crossing or red light stop. In many instances they are compelled to return for begging and prostitution because they faces challenges in getting a respectable employment. However, some of them got elected in nagar panchayat election, municipal elections and state election for example **Shabnam Mausi** became the first eunuch to be elected as MLA from Madhya Pradesh showing some political gains. However, these instances are very scarce and even no political parties give tickets to them in election. Hence, transgenders are marginalised group and facing the extreme form of vulnerabilities. These communities are forced to leave together so that they can have some cohesion and can help each other at the time of distress. But the geographical locations where they stay are pathetic and have less or no facilities of basic amenities. Their concentrations are mostly found near railway station, Bus Stand or in area known for prostitution.

The situation became very grim when the Government

policies have not included these communities for their welfare. It is pertinent to mention that most of the schemes of the government only include the binary form of sex and not the transgenders resulting the deplorable condition of these communities. It is a bitter truth that every scheme of central government is running in silos without having and holistic approach. The Transgenders did not get the expected benefits of these schemes due to lack of coordination between the central and the state government and also due to various social taboos. However, presently some efforts are being made to make a focused approach targeting transgenders by some ministries, however, these schemes and policy must include **‘The Whole of the Government Approach’** to counter the socio-economic and residential vulnerabilities of transgenders in India.

It is pertinent to mention that over the past few years, legal reforms pertaining to the transgender community have demonstrated a gradual but consistent progress towards its acceptance and equal treatment as citizens (**Vahishth :2017**). In recent years some of the State Governments like Tamilnadu and Kerala have given special focus to the transgenders by implementing transgender welfare policies, encompassing services such as counselling, pensions for destitute individuals, free sex reassignment surgeries, ration cards, self-employment grants, and the establishment of free homes and transit homes etc.

Recently, The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has formulated a scheme namely **“SMILE - Support for Marginalized Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise”**, which focuses on two dimensions viz; ‘Comprehensive Rehabilitation for Welfare of Transgender Persons’ and ‘Comprehensive Rehabilitation of persons engaged in the act of Begging’. This scheme provides comprehensive measures including

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welfare measures for transgender persons as well as for persons who are engaged in the act of begging with focus on rehabilitation, medical facilities, counselling, education, skill development, financial inclusion etc. with the support of various stakeholders inter alia State Governments/UTs/Local Urban Bodies, Voluntary Organizations, Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and institutions and others. This type of scheme is required for welfare of the transgender persons. The implementation of this scheme must be monitored through a robust MIS Portal.

Conclusions

The transgenders in India are facing the worst form of discrimination through economic, residential and social exclusion. Now the Government is focusing on inclusive growth without any exclusion. The transgenders in India are predominantly poor. They need to be covered under various schemes of financial inclusion and social welfare. The Government should promote entrepreneurship among them through entrepreneur development programs and through specific skills tailored made courses. The Government should also provide them loan on low interest subvention for their self-employment. For addressing their residential vulnerabilities, they should be given priority in '**Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna**' by providing all of them houses under 'Housing for all' schemes. If the two forms of vulnerabilities are addressed effectively, the third form of vulnerabilities i.e. social vulnerabilities which is the most complex form, can be dealt with. The rising economic condition of these transgenders would help them to change the public view and orientation against these communities. The Government schemes for them needs proper advocacy and planning. Unless these communities are not brought in to the main streams, the concept of equality and right to live with dignity has no meanings.

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7.

Prospects and Challenges in Education for Transgender Persons in India

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Introduction

Education is a fundamental right enshrined in the Indian Constitution, Yet for transgender individuals, accessing quality education remains a significant challenge. Despite legal advancements and policy initiatives aimed at inclusion, transgender persons continue to face systemic barriers that hinder their educational aspirations. This article delves into the prospects and challenges of education for transgender individuals in India, examining the socio-cultural, institutional, and policy-related factors that influence their educational experiences

Rights of Transgender

Usually, transgender persons are deprived of social and cultural participation in India and therefore they have restricted access to education, health care and public

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places. It has also been noticed that the community also faces discrimination as they are not given the right to contest election, right to vote (Article 326), employment, to get licenses, etc. And in effect, they are treated as outcast and untouchable (Agarwal, Oct. 24, 2015).

Further Agarwal (Oct. 24, 2015) discussed in her article about the rights of transgender persons entitled as What are the Rights of Transgender in India. She expressed that the right of equality before law and equal protection of law is guaranteed under Article 14 and 21 and the right to choose one's gender identity is an essential part to lead a life with dignity covered under Article 21. They also have the right to personal freedom and self-determination that is the gender to which a person belongs is to be determined by the person concerned only. The Court has given the people of India the right to gender identity so as transgender cannot be discriminated against, on the ground of gender.

Legal Framework and Policy Initiatives

National Legal Services Authority vs. Union of India (2014) In 2014, the Supreme Court of India delivered a landmark judgment in the case of National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India, recognizing transgender individuals as the "third gender." This ruling affirmed their fundamental rights under the Constitution, including the right to education. The Court directed the government to take steps to ensure the welfare of transgender persons, including access to education and employment opportunities.

Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019

Building upon the 2014 judgment, the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, was enacted to safeguard the rights of transgender individuals. The Act mandates the establishment of welfare measures,

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including provisions for education, healthcare, and employment. It also directs educational institutions to provide inclusive education to transgender students and ensure their safety and dignity.

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

The NEP 2020 acknowledges the challenges faced by transgender students and emphasizes the need for inclusive education. It proposes the creation of gender-neutral facilities, the inclusion of transgender persons in educational curricula, and the establishment of support systems to address their unique needs. The policy also envisions the formation of a Gender-Inclusion Fund to promote equitable quality education for transgender students.

Socio-Cultural Challenges

Stigma and Discrimination

Transgender individuals often encounter stigma and discrimination within educational settings. This marginalization can manifest as bullying, exclusion from activities, and derogatory remarks from peers and educators. Such experiences not only affect their academic performance but also their mental health and self-esteem.

Family Rejection and Economic Constraints

Many transgender students face rejection from their families, leading to economic hardships. Without familial support, they struggle to afford educational materials, transportation, and other necessities. This financial instability often forces them to discontinue their education or engage in informal employment to make ends meet.

Lack of Awareness and Sensitization

Educators and administrators often lack awareness about transgender issues, leading to insensitivity and unintentional harm. The absence of training programs

on gender diversity results in an environment that is not conducive to the well-being of transgender students.

Institutional Barriers

Binary Gender Norms

The traditional binary gender framework prevalent in educational institutions poses a significant barrier for transgender students. Uniforms, restrooms, and seating arrangements are typically designed for male and female students, leaving transgender individuals without appropriate options. This lack of accommodation can lead to discomfort and alienation.

Documentation Issues

Transgender students often face challenges related to documentation. Educational records that do not reflect their gender identity can lead to confusion and discrimination. The reluctance of educational boards to update records further exacerbates this issue, hindering their academic and professional prospects.

Inadequate Support Systems

The absence of dedicated support systems, such as counseling services and peer groups, makes it difficult for transgender students to navigate their educational journey. Without these resources, they may feel isolated and unsupported, impacting their academic success and mental health.

Economic and Employment Challenges

Limited Employment Opportunities

Transgender individuals face significant barriers in the job market, including discrimination during hiring processes and lack of workplace inclusivity. These challenges often result in high unemployment rates among transgender persons, despite possessing the

necessary qualifications.

Economic Exclusion

Economic exclusion is prevalent among transgender individuals, with many relying on informal and stigmatized occupations for livelihood. This economic marginalization limits their access to quality education and perpetuates the cycle of poverty and discrimination.

Prospects for Inclusive Education

Community-Based Initiatives

Organizations like the Sahodari Foundation and Kinnar Vidyalaya are making significant strides in providing education and support to transgender individuals. These community-based initiatives offer scholarships, vocational training, and safe spaces for learning, empowering transgender persons to pursue their educational and professional goals.

Awareness and Advocacy

Increased awareness and advocacy efforts are crucial in challenging societal norms and promoting acceptance of transgender individuals. Educational campaigns, sensitization programs, and media representation play a vital role in changing public perceptions and fostering an inclusive environment.

Policy Implementation and Monitoring

Effective implementation and monitoring of existing policies are essential to ensure that transgender students benefit from the provisions made for their welfare. Regular assessments, feedback mechanisms, and accountability measures can help in identifying gaps and improving the educational experience for transgender individuals.

Conclusion

While significant progress has been made in

recognizing the rights of transgender individuals in India, substantial challenges remain in ensuring their access to quality education. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from all sectors of society, including government, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and the community at large. By fostering an inclusive and supportive educational environment, we can empower transgender individuals to realize their full potential and contribute meaningfully to society.

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8.

Representation of Trans Identities in Contemporary Literature

Sanjay Kumar*

Introduction

In recent decades, literature has become a powerful platform for exploring transgender identities, moving away from historical invisibility and misrepresentation. Contemporary authors have increasingly embraced the responsibility of portraying transgender characters with depth and authenticity, moving beyond simplistic or pathologized depictions. This shift has been influenced by broader social and political changes, including legal advancements in transgender rights and increased visibility of trans voices in media and activism. This paper examines the ways in which modern literature navigates transgender identity, challenges traditional gender norms, and presents trans experiences in a manner that affirms their complexity and humanity.

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Literary representation plays a critical role in shaping public perception and discourse around transgender identities. Historically, trans characters have often been relegated to tragic or villainous roles, reinforcing societal prejudices. However, contemporary literature is reclaiming these narratives by centering trans voices, presenting their joys and struggles with authenticity and nuance. This paper explores key texts that contribute to this evolving discourse and examines how they address themes such as self-discovery, societal acceptance, and personal agency. The representation of transgender identities in literature has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past few decades. Early literary portrayals often depicted transgender individuals through a lens of deviance or pathology, reinforcing negative stereotypes. However, contemporary authors have challenged these narratives, offering stories that celebrate trans identity and humanize their experiences.

“To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment.”—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity provides a critical lens through which to analyze trans representation, highlighting how literature constructs and reinforces notions of gender. Susan Stryker’s scholarship on transgender history and representation further contextualizes the progress made in trans-inclusive storytelling. By drawing from these theoretical frameworks, this section reviews critical perspectives on the importance of literary inclusivity and the evolving landscape of trans narratives.

“Gender is not something that one is, it is something one does, an act...a doing rather than a being.”—Judith Butler

Modern literature has embraced transgender

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narratives in various ways, from memoirs and autobiographical fiction to speculative and experimental storytelling. One of the most notable shifts in contemporary literature is the move toward narratives that center transgender characters without reducing them to their struggles alone. Instead, these stories explore a full range of human experiences, from love and ambition to resilience and self-acceptance. Torrey Peters' *Detransition, Baby* (2021) is a groundbreaking novel that delves into the complexities of trans identity, relationships, and the intersections of gender and parenthood. By portraying trans characters in multifaceted roles, Peters challenges traditional narratives and offers a nuanced exploration of identity beyond transition itself. Similarly, Akwaeke Emezi's *Freshwater* (2018) disrupts Western notions of gender and selfhood by drawing from Igbo cosmology to depict a protagonist with multiple selves, highlighting the fluidity of gender beyond binary constructs.

“Transgender people are not a burden, We are a blessing.” – Imara Jones

In addition to mainstream literary fiction, speculative fiction has become a powerful medium for exploring trans identities in imaginative and boundary-pushing ways. Charlie Jane Anders' *All the Birds in the Sky* (2016) and Ryka Aoki's *Light from Uncommon Stars* (2021) integrate themes of transformation and self-acceptance within fantastical settings, offering metaphors for the transgender experience that resonate deeply with readers. Trans representation in literature also extends to young adult fiction, where visibility is crucial for affirming young trans readers. Books like Meredith Russo's *If I Was Your Girl* (2016) and Kacen Callender's *Felix Ever After* (2020) provide accessible and empowering narratives for transgender youth, challenging the notion that trans stories must be tragic or solely defined by hardship. Despite significant progress, challenges remain in

ensuring accurate and respectful representation. Issues of authorship and authenticity continue to be debated, with discussions on whether cisgender authors can or should write trans narratives. The role of publishing gatekeepers in determining which stories reach mainstream audiences also affects the breadth of trans representation. As literature continues to evolve, the emphasis on own-voices narratives—works written by transgender authors about trans experiences—remains vital in fostering genuine and meaningful representation.

Conclusion

The evolving representation of transgender identities in contemporary literature reflects broader social advancements in gender inclusivity and awareness. While historical narratives often marginalized or misrepresented trans individuals, contemporary authors have reclaimed literary spaces to offer complex, empowering, and authentic portrayals. Literature serves as both a mirror and a catalyst for social change, and as more transgender authors and stories emerge, the future of trans representation in fiction looks increasingly promising. By continuing to push the boundaries of storytelling and representation, literature can play a crucial role in affirming transgender identities and fostering a more inclusive cultural landscape.

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9.

Role of Transgender Community in the Mughal Era (1526–1857) An Analytical Study

Prof. Anita Singh*

The Mughal era (1526–1857) in India was marked by a rich confluence of cultures, administrative sophistication, and evolving social structures. Within this complex socio-political tapestry, transgender individuals—commonly referred to as *hijras*—played a notable and often respected role. Unlike the marginalization faced by the transgender community in modern times, the Mughal period witnessed a comparatively visible and influential position of hijras in courtly life, administrative systems, and cultural spaces.

Historical records indicate that hijras, or transgender individuals, held significant and trusted positions within the royal courts, particularly during the Mughal era. They were often appointed as custodians of the zenana,

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or women's quarters, due to the perception that they posed no threat and could be trusted in female-exclusive spaces. Some hijras were deployed as spies, informants, or secret messengers, leveraging their unique access to both male and female quarters. Their role as silent observers within the palace and courtly circles gave them an edge in intelligence gathering, which was critical in times of dynastic tensions or external threats.

Emperors like Akbar and Aurangzeb relied on them not only for their discretion but also for managing sensitive state affairs. Their lack of familial ties and heirs made them less susceptible to corruption or forming political alliances, enhancing their reputation for loyalty and confidentiality. The high regard in which they were held was also observed by foreign visitors; for instance, the Dutch traveler Francisco Pelsaert, during his seventeenth-century visit to the Mughal court, expressed astonishment at the luxury and respect enjoyed by eunuchs. He noted that they had access to fine horses, servants, and richly adorned clothing, rivaling that of nobles. Such testimonies from foreign sources reinforce the view that hijras occupied a position of considerable prestige and power within the Mughal imperial household.

Land and Economic Power

The Mughal administration acknowledged the importance of hijras not only in ceremonial and courtly contexts but also by integrating them into the empire's economic framework. As a mark of royal favor and trust, Hijras were also commonly exempted from *jizya*, the tax imposed on non-Muslims, highlighting both their distinct identity and the critical services they provided to the court. Their loyalty was often rewarded with promotions and further were awarded *jagirs*—land grants that provided them with a stable source of income and a place within the administrative structure. These grants empowered

hijras to collect revenue, manage agricultural operations, and supervise local governance, giving them substantial economic authority. Over time, some hijras accumulated considerable wealth and influence, which they often channeled into acts of public welfare. Their patronage included funding the construction of mosques, inns, wells, and other community resources, as well as contributing to religious institutions. Such philanthropic activities not only enhanced their standing at the imperial court but also earned them respect and recognition among the broader population, cementing their social and political legitimacy.

Cultural and Religious Roles

During the Mughal period, hijras were deeply embedded in the spiritual and ritual life of the empire, revered for their perceived sacred powers, particularly in matters related to fertility, childbirth, and other significant life events. Their presence at births, marriages, and royal ceremonies was believed to bring blessings and ensure auspicious outcomes. This role drew upon longstanding indigenous traditions, which the Mughal court adopted and upheld, thus reinforcing the hijras' ritual significance. Their blessings were eagerly sought, while their curses were feared, granting them a unique moral and symbolic authority that extended across both elite and popular cultural domains.

Beyond their spiritual functions, hijras played an important role in the artistic and cultural expression of the Mughal court. Trained in music, dance, poetry, and storytelling, they regularly performed at major events such as Eid, Nowruz, and literary gatherings like *mushairas*. These contributions reflected the rich Indo-Persian cultural synthesis that defined Mughal aesthetics.

Hijras also had deep connections to Sufi traditions,

where their nonconforming gender identities were often interpreted through a mystical lens. They were active participants in *urs* celebrations, served at Sufi shrines, and were affiliated with spiritual brotherhoods, which provided them with a recognized place within the religious and social fabric of the time. In the broader cultural milieu, especially in rural North India, hijras functioned as ritual specialists in folk religious practices. Their performances and blessings, known as *badhai*, were considered essential for household harmony and community well-being, symbolizing both ritual transformation and cultural continuity.

Legal Protection and Administrative Legitimacy

The Mughal state's Islamic framework did not necessarily marginalize them; instead, Islamic jurisprudence recognized the category of *mukhannathun* (effeminate men or those not fitting the binary) and provided them certain legal considerations. Thus, hijras under the Mughal regime often experienced a unique blend of socio-legal recognition, spiritual status, and economic patronage.

During the Mughal period, hijras were not merely acknowledged but were formally incorporated into the administrative and social framework of the empire. They held official positions, particularly within the royal harem (*zenana*), as well as in various state functions. Some historical accounts identify individuals like Ikhtar Khan, a legal officer under Emperor Jahangir, and Firoz Khan, the founder of Firozabad during Akbar's reign, as eunuchs who rose to prominence within the nobility. Prominent hijras such as Khawjasaras (chief eunuchs) were assigned crucial administrative responsibilities, including managing palace staff, arranging court ceremonies, and even participating in diplomatic functions. Their influence extended into political advisory

roles, where they could shape succession decisions or state appointments due to their proximity to royal confidences. The *Ain-i-Akbari*, compiled by Abul Fazl, provides detailed references to eunuch officers who were entrusted with critical administrative responsibilities, including overseeing the state's finances. These individuals were often elevated to high-ranking positions within the court and were generously rewarded with wealth, luxurious accommodations, fine garments, and jewelry. The Mughals also viewed this as economically beneficial, since the absence of heirs meant that their wealth would eventually revert to the royal treasury. This strategic use of hijras underlines their integral role in the administrative and social fabric of the Mughal court.

The high regard in which they were held was also observed by foreign visitors; for instance, the Dutch traveller Francisco Pelsaert, during his seventeenth-century visit to the Mughal court, expressed astonishment at the luxury and respect enjoyed by eunuchs. He noted that they had access to fine horses, servants, and richly adorned clothing, rivaling that of nobles. These individuals were afforded significant legal protections, including access to imperial justice systems—privileges that were often denied to other marginalized communities. Such testimonies from foreign sources reinforce the view that hijras occupied a position of considerable prestige and power within the Mughal imperial household.

Economic Stability Through State Patronage

The Mughal administration played a crucial role in integrating hijras into the economic and bureaucratic framework of the empire, thereby solidifying their social standing. Under emperors like Akbar and Shah Jahan, institutional mechanisms were established to support hijras, including regular stipends, official residences,

and most significantly, *jagirs* or land grants. These provisions offered them not just financial stability but also avenues for prosperity. In addition to receiving land, hijras were often appointed to oversee tax collection and manage estates, granting them authority at the local level and embedding them in the administrative fabric of the empire. This economic empowerment enabled many hijras to engage in philanthropic activities, using their wealth to construct wells, rest houses (*sarais*), and religious institutions. Such contributions elevated their social status and reinforced their legitimacy in both courtly and community settings. However, this inclusive approach sharply contrasts with the policies enforced during British colonial rule. The colonial administration systematically marginalized hijras, stripping them of their rights and institutional roles. The enactment of the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 marked a turning point, criminalizing hijras and portraying them as deviant, thus dismantling the structures of support they once enjoyed. This transition from Mughal patronage to colonial repression highlights a dramatic shift in the socio-legal treatment of hijras in Indian history.

Challenges and Limitations

While hijras played influential roles in the political, cultural, and economic life of the Mughal Empire, their position was inherently unstable, resting heavily on the favor of individual rulers and elite patrons. Although some attained notable ceremonial and administrative status, their authority was contingent upon personal relationships with emperors or powerful courtiers. Their proximity to the royal harem—a highly sensitive and politically charged domain—made them particularly vulnerable to court intrigues and factional rivalries. The constantly shifting alliances and succession struggles within the Mughal court meant that hijras could experience sudden changes in fortune, gaining prominence under

one ruler only to be sidelined or purged under another. Benefits such as land grants, tax exemptions and formal titles were not secured through institutional guarantees but were awarded at the discretion of the emperor, leaving them exposed during times of political instability or regime change.

As the Mughal Empire began to decline in the 18th century—undermined by foreign invasions, dynastic conflicts and the increasing power of regional authorities—the support systems that had sustained hijras began to deteriorate. With the collapse of centralized imperial authority, many hijras lost access to the privileges and protections they had previously enjoyed. The arrival of British colonial rule intensified this decline. Shaped by Victorian ideals and a limited understanding of South Asia’s diverse gender traditions, the British systematically dismantled the social roles hijras had historically occupied. The Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 marked a particularly damaging moment, as it designated hijras as a “criminal caste,” effectively outlawing their public performances and nonconforming gender expressions. This shift from Mughal recognition to colonial repression marked a dramatic and painful transformation in the lives of hijras, turning once-respected members of the royal establishment into marginalized and stigmatized figures under colonial rule.

Conclusion

The Mughal period stands out in South Asian history as a time when transgender individuals, particularly hijras, were not only visible but actively involved in the social, cultural and administrative spheres of imperial life. Rather than facing exclusion, hijras were institutionally embedded within the Mughal court system, taking on important roles such as guardians of the royal harem, estate managers and even spiritual participants in

the empire's cultural and religious life. Their status was legitimized through formal court practices and reinforced by legal, economic, and religious institutions. This recognition was shaped by a unique blend of Islamic principles, Indo-Persian bureaucratic traditions and indigenous cultural views, which collectively allowed hijras to occupy positions that symbolized both sacred authority and administrative responsibility.

They frequently took part in court ceremonies, were associated with Sufi practices and engaged in acts of public patronage, reflecting their multifaceted identity that often defied modern notions of fixed gender roles. The Mughal state's support—offering legal rights, protection, and social privileges—indicates a deeper historical awareness and accommodation of gender diversity. However, this integration came with its vulnerabilities. Hijras' reliance on imperial patronage meant their fortunes were closely tied to the stability of the court. As the Mughal Empire began to fragment in the 18th century, and with the subsequent rise of British colonial power, hijras experienced a sharp decline in status. Colonial ideologies, grounded in rigid moral and legal codes, pathologized gender nonconformity and criminalized communities that had once been respected.

This historical shift marks a stark departure from the Mughal approach, which recognized and included hijras within the political and social order. Revisiting this era offers critical insights that challenge the modern perception of gender binaries and marginalization as timeless. Instead, it reveals that there were periods in Indian history when transgender individuals held institutional roles and were treated with dignity. As historian Ruby Lal notes in her discussion of Mughal authority, hijras today still retain traces of the symbolic power once attributed to their predecessors and often view themselves as inheritors of the legacy of Mughal-era

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eunuchs. Such reflections invite a reexamination of how gender, governance and law have been shaped historically and encourage a more inclusive understanding of India's past.

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10.

The Biological Foundations of Gender Identity The Role of Genetics and Hormones

Dr. Nidhi Shubhanand*

Introduction

Sexual differentiation refers to the biological process through which males and females develop distinct anatomical and physiological characteristics (Collazzoni et al., 2017). This process, which is widely observed across species, also plays a fundamental role in human development. Gender identity is a dimorphic trait (Hines, 2005) and defined as an individual's internal sense of self as male, female, or as an alternative gender that differs from the traditional binary of male and female. Gender identity is governed by many factors including genetics and hormones.

The Role of Genetics in Gender Identity

The formation of gender identity is a complex and multifaceted process, influenced by a diverse range of

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biological, psychological, and social factors. The wide variability in gender expression challenges reductionist or unified explanatory models. Consequently, the relative contributions of biological determinants versus environmental influences remain a subject of ongoing debate. Research shows an intricate interplay of hormonal, neuroanatomical, neurofunctional and genetic factors in the development of core gender identity. Human sexual development is primarily regulated by genetic factors and is executed by endocrine mediators including steroid hormones and peptide hormones (Ristori et al., 2020). The initial stage of sexual development is determined by chromosomal sex, which is established at the time of fertilization through the inheritance of either an X or Y sex chromosome. The specific chromosomal complement subsequently directs the differentiation of the bipotential gonads into either testes or ovaries, a process referred to as gonadal sex determination (Lucas-Herald and Bashamboo, 2014). Typically, human beings possess 46 chromosomes, including one pair of sex chromosomes—XX for females and XY for males. However, variations in chromosomal patterns, such as Turner syndrome (XO) or Klinefelter syndrome (XXY), demonstrate that biological sex itself is not strictly binary (Bao and Swaab 2011). These genetic differences can influence physical, hormonal, and possibly neurological factors that are associated with gender identity.

Recent genetic studies have sought to identify specific genes associated with transgender identities. One of the key investigations in this area is the study by Hare et al., (2019) which focused on the androgen receptor (AR) gene located on the X chromosome. The researchers hypothesized that variations in this gene might influence how individuals respond to androgens, or male sex hormones, during prenatal development. Their 2009 study found a significant association between a longer

AR gene repeat length and male-to-female transgender identity, suggesting that genetic differences may partly contribute to the biological underpinnings of gender identity (Hare et al., 2019).

Although research in this field is still evolving, these findings indicate that genetic components likely interact with hormonal and environmental factors to shape gender identity. No single “gender gene” has been discovered, but rather a combination of genetic variations may influence the neural structures and brain chemistry associated with gendered behavior and identity.

Hormonal Influences on Gender Identity

Hormones are chemical messengers that play a crucial role in sexual differentiation, brain development, and gender identity. The primary sex hormones, testosterone and estrogen, regulate the development of primary and secondary sexual characteristics and influence neurological structures in both prenatal and postnatal stages.

During fetal development, the presence or absence of testosterone determines the physical differentiation of male or female genitalia. Simultaneously, hormones influence the development of brain regions associated with gender identity. Research by Bao and Swaab highlights that certain brain structures exhibit sex-specific characteristics and that differences in these structures have been observed in transgender individuals. For example, the bed nucleus of the stria terminalis (BSTc) in the hypothalamus—a region believed to be related to gender identity—has been found to resemble the typical size and neuron number of the affirmed gender in transgender people (Bao and Swaab, 2011). This finding suggests that hormonal influences during prenatal development can lead to variations in brain structures associated with gender identity.

Additionally, hormonal exposure and sensitivity can vary significantly among individuals. Factors such as androgen insensitivity syndrome (AIS) demonstrate how individuals with XY chromosomes can develop a typically female phenotype due to the body's inability to respond to androgens. Cases like AIS further underscore the importance of hormonal influences in shaping both physical characteristics and potentially gender identity.

Adolescence and Hormonal Changes

Adolescence is another critical period when hormonal surges play a significant role in physical and psychological development. Increased levels of sex hormones during puberty reinforce secondary sexual characteristics such as breast development in females and voice deepening in males. For transgender individuals, the changes that occur during puberty can cause significant distress if these physical transformations conflict with their gender identity.

To alleviate this distress, gender-affirming hormone therapies are increasingly used in medical practices. These therapies involve the administration of estrogen or testosterone to promote the development of physical traits aligned with an individual's gender identity. According to the American Psychological Association, hormone therapy has been shown to improve the mental health and overall quality of life of transgender individuals by reducing gender dysphoria and helping them align their physical appearance with their experienced gender (American Psychological Association, 2015). This therapeutic approach provides strong evidence of the powerful influence hormones have on both the body and the psychological experience of gender.

The Interplay of Genetics, Hormones, and Environment

While genetics and hormones contribute significantly

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to the formation of gender identity, it is essential to recognize that these biological factors interact with a complex network of environmental, psychological, and social influences. The American Psychological Association emphasizes that gender identity is not determined by biology alone but is a product of a dynamic relationship between biological predispositions and lived experiences (American Psychological Association, 2015).

Cultural expectations, family values, peer relationships, and personal experiences play vital roles in how individuals understand and express their gender identity. While genetic and hormonal factors may predispose certain traits or inclinations, the environment can affirm, challenge, or shape these tendencies in various ways.

The complexity of this interplay is also reflected in the wide diversity of gender identities across different cultures and societies. Some cultures, such as those recognizing hijras in South Asia or Two-Spirit individuals in many Indigenous North American communities, acknowledge more than two gender categories, demonstrating the importance of social context in shaping gender identity (Bao and Swaab, 2011).

Conclusion

Gender identity is a deeply personal, multi-layered experience that arises from a complex interaction of genetic, hormonal, psychological, and social factors. Scientific research indicates that genetics and hormones contribute significantly to the biological foundations of gender identity, influencing brain development, physical characteristics, and gendered behavior. Studies provide valuable insights into the roles of androgen receptor gene variations and prenatal hormonal exposure in shaping gender identity.

However, it is crucial to approach this topic with an understanding that no single factor operates in isolation. Environmental, cultural, and personal experiences interact with biological predispositions to form the diverse spectrum of gender identities observed in human societies. As research in this field continues to advance, a more comprehensive understanding of the biological and social aspects of gender identity will promote greater inclusivity, acceptance, and support for all individuals, regardless of their gender identity.

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11.

The Impact of Social Media on Transgender Visibility and Acceptance

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The rise of social media has revolutionized the way we communicate, interact, and present ourselves to the world. For transgender individuals, social media has provided a unique platform for self-expression, community building, and activism. By sharing their stories, experiences, and perspectives, transgender individuals have been able to increase their visibility, challenge stigma and stereotypes, and promote greater understanding and acceptance. Social media has also enabled transgender individuals to connect with others who share similar experiences, providing a sense of community and support that is often lacking in offline spaces. However, social media has also posed significant challenges for transgender individuals, including online harassment, bullying, and marginalization. This complex and multifaceted impact of social media on transgender

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visibility and acceptance is the focus of this exploration.

Positive Impacts of Social Media

Social media has had a profoundly positive impact on transgender visibility and acceptance. By providing a platform for self-expression and connection, social media has enabled transgender individuals to share their stories, experiences, and perspectives with a global audience.

A. Increased Visibility and Representation:

Social media has played a crucial role in increasing the visibility and representation of transgender individuals. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter have provided a space for transgender people to share their lives, challenges, and achievements, helping to humanize and demystify their experiences. Social media has significantly increased visibility and representation for marginalized communities, including transgender individuals. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have provided a space for transgender people to share their stories, experiences, and perspectives, amplifying their voices and promoting understanding and empathy. The increased visibility and representation have helped to challenge stereotypes and misconceptions, humanize transgender individuals, and foster a sense of community and belonging. Moreover, social media has enabled transgender individuals to connect with others who share similar experiences, providing a sense of validation, support, and solidarity. By increasing visibility and representation, social media has played a crucial role in promoting transgender awareness, acceptance, and inclusivity.

B. Community Building and Support: Social media has also enabled the creation of online communities and support networks for transgender individuals. These communities provide a safe space for people to connect,

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share their experiences, and find support and solidarity. Social media has played a vital role in community building and support for transgender individuals. Online platforms have provided a safe space for transgender people to connect with others who share similar experiences, creating a sense of community and belonging. Social media groups, forums, and online support networks have enabled transgender individuals to share their stories, seek advice, and offer support to one another. This online support system has been particularly important for those who may be isolated or marginalized in their offline lives. By facilitating connections and fostering a sense of community, social media has helped to mitigate the feelings of loneliness and isolation that many transgender individuals face.

C. Challenging Stereotypes and Promoting Education: Social media has been instrumental in challenging harmful stereotypes and promoting education and awareness about transgender issues. By sharing their stories and experiences, transgender individuals have helped to dispel myths and misconceptions, promoting greater understanding and empathy. Misrepresentation and stereotypes pose significant concerns for transgender individuals on social media. Despite growing visibility, many platforms perpetuate harmful stereotypes and misconceptions about transgender identities. Transgender people are often portrayed as “other,” “exotic,” or “tragic figures,” reinforcing damaging narratives about their lives. Social media algorithms prioritize sensationalized or exploitative content over accurate representations of transgender experiences, leading to distorted views, stigma, marginalization, and exclusion. By perpetuating misrepresentation and stereotypes, social media platforms exacerbate existing social and economic inequalities faced by transgender individuals. Social media has provided a powerful platform for transgender

individuals to challenge stereotypes and misconceptions that have long been perpetuated by traditional media. By sharing their stories, experiences, and perspectives, transgender people have been able to humanize themselves and showcase the diversity and complexity of their lives. Social media has also enabled transgender individuals to reclaim their narratives and challenge dominant discourses that have historically marginalized and excluded them. Through hashtags, campaigns, and online activism, transgender individuals have been able to raise awareness about the issues that affect them, challenge stereotypes and misconceptions, and promote greater understanding and acceptance.

D. Amplifying Marginalized Voices: Social media has provided a platform for transgender individuals to amplify their voices and advocate for their rights. Hashtags like #TransRightsAreHumanRights and #Trans Visibility have helped to raise awareness and mobilize support for transgender issues. Social media has amplified the voices of marginalized transgender individuals, providing a platform for them to express themselves, share their experiences, and advocate for their rights. By leveraging social media, transgender individuals from diverse backgrounds and experiences have been able to reach wider audiences, challenge dominant narratives, and assert their presence in the digital landscape. Social media has also enabled marginalized transgender voices to be amplified through hashtag campaigns, online petitions, and digital activism, allowing them to mobilize support, raise awareness, and push for social change. Ultimately, social media has helped to create a more inclusive and equitable digital space, where marginalized transgender voices can be heard, valued, and respected.

Overall, social media has been a game-changer for transgender visibility and acceptance. By providing a

platform for self-expression, community building, and education, social media has helped to promote greater understanding, empathy, and acceptance of transgender individuals.

Negative Impacts of Social Media

Despite its many benefits, social media has also had a profoundly negative impact on transgender individuals. Online harassment and bullying are pervasive, with many transgender people facing vicious attacks, hate speech, and even death threats. Social media platforms have also been criticized for their role in perpetuating stigma and stereotypes, with many algorithms and content moderation policies perpetuating harm and marginalization. Furthermore, social media has created new avenues for the exploitation and commodification of transgender identities, with many individuals facing pressure to present a curated and marketable version of themselves online. The constant barrage of negative messages, harassment, and marginalization can have serious consequences for transgender individuals' mental health, well-being, and sense of self-worth.

1. Online Harassment and Bullying:

Misrepresentation and stereotypes are also significant concerns for transgender individuals on social media. Despite the growing visibility of transgender people, many social media platforms perpetuate harmful stereotypes and misconceptions about transgender identities. For example, transgender people are often portrayed as "other," "exotic," or "tragic figures," reinforcing damaging and inaccurate narratives about their lives. Furthermore, social media algorithms often prioritize sensationalized or exploitative content over accurate and nuanced representations of transgender experiences. This can lead to a

distorted view of transgender people and their lives, perpetuating stigma, marginalization, and exclusion. By perpetuating misrepresentation and stereotypes, social media platforms can exacerbate the existing social and economic inequalities faced by transgender individuals. social media has been used to harass and bully transgender individuals, including the impact on mental health and well-being.

- 2. Erasure and Exclusion:** Erasure and exclusion are also pervasive issues for transgender individuals on social media. Despite their growing presence online, transgender people are often erased or excluded from digital spaces, conversations, and communities. This can take many forms, including the use of binary language, the exclusion of non-binary and genderqueer identities, and the erasure of transgender people's contributions and experiences. Social media platforms often perpetuate these forms of erasure and exclusion through their policies, algorithms, and design. For example, platforms may fail to provide adequate options for transgender people to identify themselves, or may remove content that is deemed "inappropriate" or "offensive," without considering the impact on transgender individuals. This erasure and exclusion can have serious consequences for transgender people, including feelings of invisibility, marginalization, and exclusion. social media platforms have erased or excluded transgender individuals, particularly those who are marginalized or non-binary.
- 3. Commodification of Transgender Identities:** The commodification of transgender identities is another significant concern on social media. As transgender people gain more visibility and recognition, their identities and experiences are

increasingly being exploited for entertainment, profit, and social capital. Social media platforms, influencers and brands often capitalize on transgender identities, using them as a marketing tool or a way to appear progressive and inclusive. This commodification can lead to the exploitation and tokenization of transgender individuals, reducing their complex experiences and identities to simplistic and marketable representations. Furthermore, the commodification of transgender identities can also perpetuate harmful stereotypes and reinforce existing power dynamics, where cisgender people profit from transgender identities without reciprocating with meaningful support or solidarity. social media has been used to commodify transgender identities, reducing complex experiences to simplistic or stereotypical representations.

Social Media Impact on Society

- 1. More Accurate Reflection of Society:** Media and institutions that reflect the diversity of society help to break down stereotypes and promote understanding.
- 2. Increased Empathy and Understanding:** Seeing themselves and their experiences represented in media and society can increase empathy and understanding among different groups.
- 3. Improved Self-Esteem and Confidence:** Representation and diversity can improve self-esteem and confidence among underrepresented groups, particularly children and young adults.
- 4. Enhanced Creativity and Innovation:** Diversity of thought, experience, and perspective can lead to more innovative and creative solutions.
- 5. Better Decision-Making:** Diverse representation

can lead to more informed decision-making, as different perspectives and experiences are considered.

- 6. Breaking Stereotypes:** Media representation can help break down stereotypes and promote more nuanced understandings of different groups.
- 7. Providing Role Models:** Representation in media can provide role models and inspiration for underrepresented groups.
- 8. Increasing Visibility:** Media representation can increase visibility and awareness of different groups and their experiences
- 9. Active Recruitment and Hiring Practices:** Implementing active recruitment and hiring practices that seek out diverse candidates.
- 10. Mentorship and Training Programs:** Establishing mentorship and training programs to support underrepresented groups.
- 11. Inclusive Policies and Practices:** Implementing inclusive policies and practices that promote diversity and representation.
- 12. Community Engagement and Outreach:** Engaging with and outreach to diverse communities to increase representation and participation.
- 13. Clear Community Guidelines:** Establishing clear community guidelines that outline expected behaviour and consequences for violating those guidelines.
- 14. Trained Moderators:** Training moderators to recognize and address hate speech, harassment, and other forms of harmful behaviour.
- 15. Proactive Moderation:** Proactively monitoring online spaces for harmful behaviour, rather than relying solely on user reports.

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16. **Transparent Moderation Processes:** Providing transparent moderation processes, including clear explanations for moderation decisions.
17. **Easy-to-Use Reporting Tools:** Providing easy-to-use reporting tools that allow users to quickly and easily report harmful behaviour.
18. **Clear Reporting Guidelines:** Establishing clear reporting guidelines that outline what types of behaviour should be reported.
19. **Timely Response to Reports:** Responding promptly to reports of harmful behaviours, and taking swift action to address the issue.
20. **Feedback Mechanisms:** Providing feedback mechanisms that allow users to track the progress of their reports and receive updates on moderation decisions.
21. **Reduced Harmful Behaviour:** Improved moderation and reporting can lead to a reduction in harmful behavior, creating a safer online environment.
22. **Increased User Trust:** Transparent and effective moderation and reporting processes can increase user trust and confidence in online platforms.
23. **Improved Community Engagement:** Improved moderation and reporting can lead to improved community engagement, as users feel safer and more supported.
24. **Better Compliance with Regulations:** Improved moderation and reporting can help online platforms comply with regulations and laws related to online content.

Recommendations

Needed more detailed explanations of the positive and negative impacts of social media on transgender

visibility and acceptance, including more specific examples and case studies to illustrate key points. Emphasizing the importance of responsible social media use and the need for inclusive and respectful online communities, providing more concrete recommendations for social media platforms to improve their treatment of transgender.

1. Increased Representation and Diversity:

Recommend that social media platforms prioritize increasing representation and diversity, including hiring more transgender individuals and featuring diverse transgender voices.

2. Improved Moderation and Reporting:

Recommend that social media platforms improve moderation and reporting mechanisms to address online harassment and bullying.

3. Education and Awareness Campaigns:

Recommend that social media platforms launch education and awareness campaigns to promote understanding and acceptance of transgender individuals.

4. Inclusive and Respectful Online Communities:

Recommend that social media platforms strive to create inclusive and respectful online communities, where transgender individuals feel safe and valued.

Conclusion

Social media has had a profound impact on transgender visibility and acceptance, yielding both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, social media has provided a platform for transgender individuals to share their stories, experiences, and perspectives, increasing visibility and representation. It has also enabled community building and support, educated the public about transgender issues, and

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amplified marginalized voices. However, social media has also perpetuated online harassment and bullying, misrepresentation and stereotypes, erasure and exclusion, and the commodification of transgender identities. As a result, social media has both empowered and endangered transgender individuals, highlighting the need for responsible social media use, inclusive online communities, and ongoing education and awareness efforts.

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12.

The Role of Self-Employment in Empowering Transgender Community

Bhavna Yadav*

Introduction

The census of India in 2011 was the first census in the history to incorporate transgender population of the country and estimated that amongst the population officially recorded transgender population was 487,803, accounting for approximately 0.04% of the total population at that time. According to the Census they are the individuals who were identified under the “other” gender category, introduced for the first time in that census. Although it is predicted that due to inhibitions and stigma attached to the term “transgender” many people do not reveal their gender and the number might be more. The highest proportion of transgenders are in Uttar Pradesh with about 28% followed by Bihar and West Bengal. While Over 66% of the Transgenders lived in rural areas. This community has a low literacy rate

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of 56.07 % as compared to the national literacy. On the occupational front 41% of all employed are Transgenders that is “Other,” which denotes the informal occupations of their income, and unemployment rates for Transgenders are greater than the national average. Workforce participation among the transgender community was only 34%, which is substantially lower, that showing the gravity of the problem. The transgender community in a country like India with deep-rooted social stigmas, face discrimination in all walks of life especially education, employment, healthcare etc. Traditional employment opportunities are often limited due to prejudice they face in the community. As a result, many transgender individuals seek alternative income sources, including self-employment in order to escape discrimination at the workplace and attain financial independence since they are not accepted readily in traditional workplace.

Significance of Self-Employment for Transgender Individuals

- ❖ **Social Empowerment:** Successful transgender entrepreneurs serve as an inspiration and role models for others especially for other transgenders, inspiring community members to face challenges and act as a motivational factor for their counterparts and carve a niche for themselves in the society.
- ❖ **Economic Independence:** Self-employment enables transgender individuals to attain financial independence, reducing dependence on family and society, since traditionally they earn their livelihood by begging or by visiting homes on special occasions for blessings. Self-employment prevents them from being dependent on charity that serves as sustaining factor for them.
- ❖ **Freedom from discrimination:** By working for themselves, transgender can attain freedom from

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discrimination that they face in the society especially at workplace and also create safe and accepting work environments free from discrimination since now they are working for themselves.

- ❖ **Diverse Business Opportunities:** Many transgender individuals engage in professions such as beauty services, handicrafts, arts, tailoring, modelling, digital businesses and entrepreneurship that open diverse opportunities for them instead of pursuing traditional occupations that is difficult to find.

Challenges Faced by Transgender Entrepreneurs

Transgender in India often encounter obstacles such as limited access to financial resources, societal discrimination, and transphobia. Various studies have identified key challenges including financial constraints, competition, human resource issues, marketing difficulties, natural calamities, and transphobia present in the society as major challenges.

- ❖ **Social Stigma and Discrimination:** Due to social stigma Customers and suppliers may refuse to transact with transgender-owned businesses, affecting their identity, profitability and making it difficult to face competition and sustain in the market.
- ❖ **Lack of Access to Capital:** Since this community is a neglected lot with no clear rules of inheritance and social stigma, and since they usually live in a society of their own usually away from family, they do not have any collateral for loans that they require for setting up their own business and Financial institutions including Banks often discriminate against transgender individuals, making it difficult for them to secure loans required for investments.
- ❖ **Legal and Bureaucratic Barriers:** Most of the

countries including India lack legal recognition and rules for transgender identities, leading to issues related to official documentation necessary for business registration and bank loans.

- ❖ **Limited Business Training:** Being a neglected lot, many transgenders do not have access to formal training and business education due to which they face competition from trained and expert professionals hindering their business and growth.
- ❖ **Lack of information and unawareness regarding government policies:** Due to the fact that Transgenders are a neglected lot they lack access to information especially on government programmes and policies, which significantly affect the number of beneficiaries and expenditure.

Despite these hurdles, many have shown resilience and innovation, and were able to carve out spaces for themselves in various industries and besides all odds and overcoming various obstacles and challenges they were able to establish successful ventures and advocate for the rights of their community. Some notable figures are:

Kalki Subramaniam

Kalki Subramaniam was India's first transgender entrepreneur who started the journey and paved the way for her counterparts. She was the founder of Sahodari Foundation, which is an organization for the welfare of transgender individuals. Kalki Subramaniam is also an accomplished author, poet, activist, artist and actress. She was the first transgender woman in India to play a lead role in a movie *Narthaki*, which addresses issues faced by the transgender community.

Amritha Joseph Mathew

Amritha Joseph Mathew Based in Kochi, Kerala, is

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also another transgender entrepreneur, who established a juice shop inside the Kakkannad civil station. With the support from Kudumbashree, a state government initiative, the venture started by her offers a variety of fresh juices, including her special creation by her in the name of, 'Kakkannad Neeli'. Amritha's journey reflects her willpower, desperation and determination to achieve economic independence and challenge the existing societal norms.

Rudrani Chettri

Rudrani Chettri is a trans model and activist and founder of India's first transgender modelling agency. She aimed to provide professional opportunities for trans individuals in the fashion industry, this field which was previously lacking representation of the third gender and faced challenging exclusionary practices. Her efforts were also documented in Ila Malohtra's documentary "India's 1st Best Trans Model Agency", that depicts the challenges and journey of establishing the agency.

Gudiya

Gudiya, from Varanasi, established a power loom at her home to produce thread, a profession that was usually run by men. Born in a low-income Muslim family, she faced various hardships, including harassment at various fronts, which led her to leave home at an early age of sixteen. Despite the challenges, Gudiya's entrepreneurial spirit enabled her to create a decent livelihood and also to contribute to her community.

Some Initiatives for Transgenders

SMILE that is a scheme "Assistance to Marginalized People for Livelihood and Enterprise" is an initiative from the government for the Welfare of Transgender People. The scheme deals with various components like skill development for transgender people, holistic medical

health, safe shelter through the scheme Garima Greh, a national portal for transgenders is also started to provide identity and identity cards and certificate are issued to eligible transgender people, transgender protection cells and other welfare measure were also undertaken by the Government for the upliftment of Transgenders. For overall review, A National Council for Transgender Persons was also established in order to monitor as well as evaluate the impact of policies that are made for, transgender, so that they the targeted may be benefited.

Besides the initiatives by the government policies, the Initiatives by NGO's like PeriFerry emerged as a support the transgender community by providing them training and employment opportunities, thereby enabling them for economic independence and social inclusion. PeriFerry has trained trans persons, prepared them for interviews, get assistance on building resume, improve their English communication and grow their confidence. According to the information more than 810 Trans Persons were Upskilled and n more than **170** were Corporate Journey enabled by PeriFerry.

The entrepreneurial endeavours of transgender individuals in India not only contribute to economic growth but also play a crucial role in challenging societal norms and promoting inclusivity.

Policy Recommendations and Support

- ❖ **Inclusive Financial Policies:** Government and financial institutions should introduce loan schemes and microfinance opportunities specially dedicated to transgender entrepreneurs in order to address their issues and provide them with financial support since this community face bottlenecks due to
- ❖ **Legal Reforms:** Simplifying the legal recognition process for transgender individuals can facilitate business registration and access to services and

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help them in attaining self-employment. Ensuring gender-inclusive policies and easing the business registration process for transgender individuals can improve their access to formal markets.

- ❖ **Awareness Campaigns:** Creating awareness in society and Promoting transgender-owned businesses through media and corporate partnerships can help increase social acceptance and customer engagement thereby, helping them to promote their enterprise and occupation.
- ❖ **Financial Assistance Programs:** Governments should provide tax holidays for newly set up enterprises and provide grants, subsidies, and loans at a low-interest rate to support transgender entrepreneurs.
- ❖ **Skill Development and Training:** Vocational training centres and entrepreneurship workshops by the government are required, in order to equip transgender individuals with business skills and financial literacy.
- ❖ **Entrepreneurial Training Programs:** NGOs, universities, and government agencies should offer business education and programs specifically tailored for the needs of transgender individuals so that they may get training to set up their own business and face the competition with other trained entrepreneurs.
- ❖ **Public Procurement Policies:** Since transgenders find it difficult to interact in the market Governments can create special provisions to include transgender-led enterprises in public procurement, increasing their market opportunities.

Conclusion

Self-employment and entrepreneurship, being a powerful tool for transgender individuals in order to

overcome economic hurdles and discrimination should be promoted. By fostering inclusive policies and providing support to the community, governments and societies can help to empower transgender entrepreneurs, promoting social equity and economic development. Addressing the challenges faced by transgender collaborative efforts from policymakers, financial institutions, and civil society is required to create a conducive environment where transgender entrepreneurship can thrive. Joint efforts are required on the part of government non-government sectors and society in order to bring the community into the mainstream. should work to ensure a supportive and congenial environment where transgender persons in India can live fulfilling lives by upholding their human, gender, and citizenship rights.

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13.

Transgender Empowerment through Media A Study of TAALI and its Protagonist

Nisha Saifi*

“Taali Bajaungi Nahi! Bajvaungi.”

I Won't Clap! Will Make Others Clap

Introduction

Why are those humans who do not fall under the typical categories of male or female, and are known by various names such as hijra, kinnar, etc., considered so different? For hundreds of years, these individuals have faced injustice and have been exploited in many ways as: Social Exclusion and Stigmatization, Lack of Access to Education and Employment, Sexual Exploitation and Abuse etc. Transgender in India have faced a long history of marginalization, discrimination, and exploitation across various aspects of life. They have never been placed in the category of respected citizens. They have always been viewed with contempt. Films and social media are reflections of reality, and

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thus, transgenders have also been viewed and portrayed with a sense of inferiority in these media. No one wanted to talk about their rights, but over the past few decades, there has been an improvement in their living conditions and way of life. Through social media, many films, documentaries, and series are now being created in which they are being portrayed in a positive light. Their rights are being brought to the forefront, and they themselves are being encouraged to become more aware. TAALI, the topic of this research paper, is a Web Series penned by Kshitij Patwardhan. It is a story of a boy Ganesh Sawant and how he later became Shreegauri Sawant. It is the depiction of this boy's accomplishment of his real identity, survival and equality in his family and later in society. Basically TAALI is an attempt to highlight the real life story of Ganesh cum Gauri, his struggles in life. TAALI has a protagonist named Ganesh or Gauri through which we encounter different incidents and sufferings during the depiction of the whole life journey of the protagonist. This series is based on three main ideas or purposes we can say and those are to get Identity, Survival and Equality.

The portrayal of transgender individuals in the media has evolved significantly over the past few decades, playing a vital role in shaping public perception, social acceptance, and policy changes related to the transgender community. Initially, transgender characters were either invisible or depicted through harmful stereotypes, often portrayed as comic relief, victims, or criminals. However, with time, the narrative around transgender people has shifted to reflect their humanity, complexity, and resilience, largely due to the efforts of transgender activists, filmmakers, and advocates. The representation of transgender individuals in media serves multiple purposes — from fostering understanding to driving social change — and has had a significant impact on their

lives.

What Taali is all about?

The series *Taali* (2023), streaming on **JioCinema**, is a powerful biographical drama based on the life of **Shreegauri Sawant**, a transgender activist and mother from Mumbai. The title *Taali* (which means *clap* in Hindi) is a reference to the iconic clap used by hijra and transgender communities in India—a symbol of their visibility and resilience. The purpose of *Taali* is to spotlight the life and journey of a pioneering Indian trans activist, to challenge societal stereotypes around transgender people, to humanize and mainstream trans narratives in Indian media and to educate viewers on trans rights, especially the legal and social challenges they face.

Mainstream Impact: A popular actress like Sushmita Sen taking on a trans role brought attention to trans narratives in households that may otherwise not engage with these issues.

Educational Value: The show subtly introduces viewers to real-life issues like name/gender change in documents, workplace discrimination, and societal exclusion.

Empowerment: Gauri is not shown as tragic or comic relief (common in Indian media), but as a hero — proud, political, and powerful.

A General Study of Transgender Empowerment over Decades

Breaking Stereotypes and Creating Awareness

Historically, media portrayed transgender individuals in one-dimensional roles: as side characters or figures of ridicule, which reinforced harmful stereotypes. These negative portrayals led to a lack of

empathy and understanding, contributing to stigma and discrimination. For instance, in earlier Bollywood films, transgender characters were often seen as mere symbols of oddity or used for comedic effect.

However, over the last two decades, there has been a conscious effort to provide more nuanced portrayals of transgender people. Films like *Tamanna (1997)* and *Shabnam Mausi (2005)* presented transgender characters in a more empathetic light, showing their struggles for recognition, dignity, and equality. *Taali (2023)*, a web series about Shreegauri Sawant, focuses on a real-life transgender activist and mother, offering a representation that is both empowering and humanizing. These portrayals help break the cycle of negative stereotypes and provide transgender people with role models they can relate to, thereby fostering a sense of dignity and hope.

Challenging Social Norms and Influencing Policy

The representation of transgender people in media is also a key factor in challenging societal norms and influencing policy. As more films, documentaries, and series began to centre on the lives and issues of transgender individuals, there was greater public awareness of their struggles — from legal recognition to healthcare access. For instance, the portrayal of Shabnam Mausi in the film *Shabnam Mausi* brought attention to the struggles of transgender people in politics and governance, helping break the taboo surrounding their involvement in political and social spheres.

This kind of representation has a direct impact on policy. In India, the **2014 NALSA judgment** by the Supreme Court, which recognized the third gender, was a significant legal victory for the transgender community. Media, through its storytelling, played a key role in informing and educating the public and policymakers

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about the legal and social challenges faced by transgender individuals, thereby helping shape a legal framework that recognized their rights.

Amplifying Transgender Voices

For a long time, transgender people were either absent or had very little control over how their lives were portrayed in the media. The voices and stories of transgender individuals were often told by those outside their community, which resulted in misrepresentation and a lack of authenticity. This changed significantly with the rise of transgender activists and filmmakers who took it upon themselves to tell their own stories.

Films like *Naanu Avanalla...Avalu (2015)*, based on the life of trans activist and actor **Living Smile Vidya**, gave the transgender community a voice. By presenting transgender individuals as complex, multi-dimensional characters, the media allowed transgender people to share their experiences, struggles, and triumphs in their own terms, fostering greater acceptance.

Impact on Transgender Individuals and Communities

The role of media in shaping the lives of transgender individuals goes beyond just social acceptance. Positive and empowering portrayals help transgender people feel seen and validated. For transgender youth, seeing characters who are confident and proud of their gender identity can significantly boost self-esteem and provide a sense of belonging.

Moreover, media representation also helps create a support network for transgender individuals. Movies, TV shows, and documentaries can connect transgender people with like-minded communities, providing emotional support and solidarity. For example, the international success of the TV series *Pose (2018-2021)*, which highlighted the lives of transgender people in the

ballroom culture of the 1980s and 90s, had a significant impact on the transgender community globally, showcasing resilience, creativity, and unity in the face of adversity.

Empowerment Through Visibility

Transgender visibility in media empowers not just individuals but entire communities. It enables the transgender community to take ownership of their narratives, leading to greater acceptance and understanding. Visibility in mainstream media also provides transgender people with the opportunity to be viewed as more than just their gender identity. As transgender people are seen as diverse individuals with varied talents, interests, and capabilities, they are increasingly accepted as part of society's broader fabric.

Moreover, the rise of transgender actors and activists, such as **Laverne Cox** (from *Orange Is the New Black*) and **Georgina Beyer** (the first openly transgender politician in New Zealand), has led to increased representation in areas like entertainment, politics, and activism. This visibility challenges the binary gender norms of traditional media and promotes a more inclusive society.

Transgender empowerment in India has undergone a remarkable transformation, evolving from cultural reverence to social marginalization and, in recent years, towards legal recognition and inclusion. Historically, transgender and third-gender communities, particularly **Hijras**, were regarded with respect and spiritual significance, often seen as powerful figures in rituals, fertility, and blessings. In ancient India, they were not only acknowledged but also integrated into various aspects of religious and cultural life. However, the arrival of British colonialism introduced harsh gender binaries, leading to the criminalization of Hijras through laws like the **Criminal Tribes Act of 1871**, which marked the

beginning of systemic oppression. Post-independence India continued to marginalize transgender individuals, with limited access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. It wasn't until the **NALSA judgment of 2014** that the Supreme Court of India legally recognized **transgender people as the “third gender”**, which opened avenues for transgender individuals to access rights, including legal identification, affirmative action in education and jobs, and social welfare. Pioneers like **Shabnam Mausi**, **Laxmi Narayan Tripathi**, and **Gauri Sawant** played critical roles in advocating for the rights and visibility of the transgender community in India. Despite the passage of the **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019**, which sought to protect the rights of transgender individuals, the law has faced criticism for its shortcomings and lack of community involvement in its creation. While recent years have seen progress in terms of transgender representation in mainstream media, politics, and social services, challenges like discrimination, violence, and a lack of economic opportunities persist. The ongoing movement for transgender empowerment in India reflects the resilience and determination of the community to reclaim dignity, identity, and a rightful place in Indian society.

Shabnam Mausi (2005)

Shabnam Mausi is based on the true story of **Shabnam Mausi**, India's first transgender person to be elected as a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) in Madhya Pradesh.

“Main ek aurat hoon, lekin mujhe woh haq nahi mila jo doosri auraton ko milta hai.” This dialogue expresses the central theme of *Shabnam Mausi*—the struggle for identity and equal rights for transgender individuals. Despite being a woman in her heart and spirit, Shabnam

faces exclusion from basic rights, such as the recognition and respect that cisgender women receive.

“Mujhe apne jeene ka hak chahiye.” This line is a powerful assertion of Shabnam’s desire for dignity and acceptance in a world that denies her humanity based on her gender identity. It speaks to the core struggle of transgender individuals, who often have to fight for the simplest recognition as human beings.

Tamanna (1997)

Tamanna is about a transgender individual named **Tikku** (played by Paresh Rawal) who adopts an abandoned girl named Tamanna, showcasing themes of love, identity, and societal rejection.

“Main hijra hoon, lekin insaan bhi hoon.” This line is fundamental in the movie, emphasizing the human dignity of transgender individuals despite societal stereotypes. It highlights the need for empathy, urging others to see the person beyond the gender label.

“Zindagi ek imtihaan hai, aur main har din usse jeetne ki koshish karta hoon.” This dialogue speaks to the perseverance and resilience of transgender individuals in the face of societal challenges. Tikku’s struggle is not just for survival but for the dignity and recognition that everyone deserves in life.

Impact of TAALI and its influence over society

“Main taali bajaati nahi, bajwaati hoon.”

This powerful line asserts Gauri’s leadership and her role in empowering others. It signifies her transition from seeking validation to commanding respect and recognition. The phrase plays on the dual meaning of “taali” (clap), symbolizing both applause and the traditional clap associated with the transgender community in India.

The release of *Taali* (2023), a biographical series based on the life of **Shreegauri Sawant**, a prominent transgender activist and mother, marks a significant milestone in Indian cinema's evolving portrayal of transgender individuals. By focusing on the real-life struggles and triumphs of a transgender person who fought for recognition and rights, *Taali* not only redefines how transgender characters are portrayed but also highlights the societal challenges they face. The series has had a profound impact on both Indian cinema and the transgender community, contributing to the visibility, empowerment, and acceptance of transgender people.

Taali is a departure from traditional depictions of transgender individuals in Indian cinema, where they have often been portrayed as mere side characters or the subject of ridicule. In films like *Kanchana* (2011) or *Baahubali* (2015), transgender characters are often reduced to comic relief or serve a secondary role. However, *Taali* presents **Shreegauri Sawant** as a fully realized character with depth, struggles, and victories. Her life as a mother, an activist, and a public figure challenges stereotypes, illustrating that transgender individuals are capable of leading fulfilling, meaningful lives.

"Maa banna koi gender nahi, feeling hai."

This line challenges traditional gender roles, emphasizing that motherhood is defined by love and care, not biological factors. It reflects Gauri's nurturing nature and her role as a mother to adopted children.

The portrayal of Gauri's journey in *Taali* is not just about suffering but also about **resilience, empowerment, and activism**. By showing her as a mother who raises a child and fights for transgender rights, the series provides a more nuanced and humanized image of transgender people, which helps shift public perception toward acceptance and respect.

Episode 1: Teesri Ladai ("The Third Battle")

The series opens with Shreegauri Sawant preparing for her third major battle—legal recognition of the third gender. Flashbacks introduce us to Ganesh, a 10-year-old boy in Pune who identifies as female and dreams of motherhood. His father, a police officer, struggles to accept Ganesh's identity, leading to familial tension and emotional turmoil. This episode sets the foundation for Gauri's lifelong fight for identity and acceptance.

Episode 2: Two in One

Ganesh's adolescence is marked by increasing internal conflict and societal pressure. He grapples with his gender identity, facing bullying and isolation. The episode delves into his decision to leave home and move to Mumbai, seeking a place where he can live authentically. It highlights the challenges faced by transgender individuals in a society that often lacks understanding and acceptance.

Episode 3: Rahi Chal Raha

In Mumbai, Ganesh embraces his identity as Gauri and finds solace within the transgender community. She begins her journey as an activist, advocating for the rights of her community. The episode showcases her initial struggles, including discrimination and lack of resources, but also her resilience and determination to make a difference.

Episode 4: Gauri Aa Gayi

Gauri emerges as a leader within the transgender community, organizing events and raising awareness about transgender rights. She confronts societal norms and challenges legal barriers, striving to create a more inclusive environment. The episode also touches upon her personal growth and the strengthening of her support

network.

Episode 5: Gharaunda

Gauri's desire for motherhood leads her to adopt a child, breaking stereotypes and showcasing the nurturing aspect of transgender individuals. She faces legal and societal hurdles in her quest to provide a loving home. This episode emphasizes the importance of family, love, and the right to parenthood, regardless of gender identity.

Episode 6: Taali ki Goonj

The series culminates in Gauri's legal battle, leading to the Supreme Court's historic decision to recognize the third gender in India. This victory marks a significant milestone in the fight for transgender rights. The episode reflects on Gauri's journey, her unwavering spirit, and the impact of her activism on society.

The initiative commonly referred to as TAALI – which stands for Transgender Awareness and Legal Initiatives – has emerged as a significant force in the socio-political landscape of India, especially in relation to the empowerment of the transgender community. While the term “TAALI” became more widely recognized through media representations, such as the biographical series “Taali” based on the life of Shreegauri Sawant, its relevance goes beyond popular culture. It symbolizes a broader movement aimed at addressing the systemic challenges faced by transgender individuals in India. Historically marginalized and subjected to discrimination, transgender have often been excluded from mainstream education, employment, and healthcare. TAALI represents a multi-faceted approach that combines awareness, legal support, education, and advocacy to transform this narrative and create a more inclusive society.

One of the core areas where TAALI plays a critical role

is in legal empowerment. India took a progressive step with the enactment of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, which legally recognized the rights of transgender individuals. However, the implementation of this act requires awareness and access – two areas where TAALI acts as a bridge. Through workshops, legal aid camps, and community outreach programs, TAALI helps transgender individuals understand and assert their rights. These include the right to self-identify, the right to protection from discrimination, and access to welfare schemes. Moreover, TAALI offers crucial assistance in legal processes such as changing gender identity on official documents like Aadhar cards, voter IDs, and educational certificates, which are vital for leading a dignified and autonomous life.

Education and skill development are also essential pillars of TAALI's mission. Due to persistent stigma and lack of support, many transgender individuals drop out of school early and are pushed into unsafe or informal employment sectors. TAALI works to break this cycle by collaborating with educational institutions to make them more inclusive and sensitive to the needs of transgender students. It also facilitates vocational training programs that equip transgender persons with skills in fields such as beauty, healthcare, IT, and handicrafts. By enhancing their employability and confidence, TAALI not only helps trans individuals secure stable income but also challenges the traditional stereotypes that restrict their roles in society.

In terms of health and social welfare, TAALI plays a proactive role in ensuring transgender persons have access to basic and specialized healthcare services. Trans people often face discrimination in hospitals and clinics, leading many to avoid seeking medical help. TAALI engages with healthcare providers to promote sensitization and inclusivity, ensuring respectful treatment. It also raises

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awareness about specific health needs such as gender-affirming surgeries, mental health support, and HIV prevention. Furthermore, TAALI campaigns for the inclusion of transgender individuals in social security programs such as housing schemes, pensions, and public distribution systems, thereby addressing their economic vulnerabilities and enhancing their quality of life.

Perhaps one of the most transformative aspects of TAALI is its role in awareness and public sensitization. By organizing community events, pride marches, media campaigns, and storytelling platforms, TAALI brings transgender experiences to the forefront of public consciousness. This representation is crucial in challenging the deeply rooted prejudices and misconceptions held by the general public. The portrayal of transgender lives through shows like “Taali” has sparked important conversations and increased empathy, especially among younger audiences. It redefines trans identities not as marginal or deviant, but as powerful, dignified, and deserving of respect. These cultural shifts are essential for long-term social change, as they pave the way for acceptance, integration, and equal opportunities.

The overall impact of TAALI on Indian society is profound. For the transgender community, it provides a renewed sense of identity, purpose, and community support. More individuals are now visible in public life, participating in education, employment, and civic engagement. For the wider society, TAALI acts as a mirror – compelling people to confront their biases, challenge existing norms, and move toward a more inclusive understanding of gender. Employers, educators, and policymakers are increasingly acknowledging the need for inclusive practices, and the influence of initiatives like TAALI has been instrumental in this shift. While challenges remain, especially in rural and conservative areas, the progress catalyzed by TAALI marks a

significant step in India's journey toward social justice and equality for all genders.

Conclusion

The ongoing evolution of transgender representation in media is a crucial factor in shaping a more inclusive society. The media's role in empowering transgender individuals is multifaceted — from breaking stereotypes to influencing legal changes, providing role models, amplifying voices, and fostering visibility. While challenges remain, the strides made in recent years represent a significant shift in how transgender people are perceived and treated in society. As the representation of transgender people in media continues to grow, it holds the potential to shape a future where transgender individuals are fully accepted and integrated into the fabric of social, cultural, and political life.

The conclusion and overarching message of *Taali* resonate deeply with the themes of identity, dignity, and equal rights. The series not only tells the personal journey of Shreegauri Sawant but also symbolizes the collective struggle and resilience of the transgender community in India. By chronicling Gauri's transformation—from a young boy named Ganesh to a fierce activist and mother figure—it powerfully illustrates that one's gender identity should never be a barrier to living a dignified and fulfilling life. *Taali* is a clarion call for acceptance and respect, emphasizing that trans individuals are not just to be tolerated, but celebrated for their courage and humanity. The series challenges deep-rooted stereotypes and breaks the silence around issues faced by the transgender community, including social exclusion, legal invisibility, and emotional abandonment. Ultimately, *Taali* sends a strong, inspiring message: that empowerment begins with self-acceptance, but true change requires societal transformation—and that transformation starts with

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visibility, voice, and relentless advocacy. Through Gauri's journey, the series inspires viewers to question biases, embrace inclusivity, and actively support the rights and dignity of all, regardless of gender.

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14.

Transgender Identity A Divine Gift or a Scientific Phenomenon

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Introduction

Society views transgender identity in two broad paradigms: as a divine or spiritual manifestation and as a result of biological or scientific processes. These perspectives, often seen in conflict, can actually complement one another in building a comprehensive understanding of transgender identity. It is vital to clarify distinctions between sex and gender, recognize the lived experiences of transgender individuals, and understand how a scientific approach can dismantle stigma and foster inclusivity.

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The Divine Perspective

Across cultures and belief systems, gender diversity has often been viewed as sacred. In India, the Hijra community has long held social and ritual roles, recognized in ancient texts and traditions. Similarly, the “Two-Spirit” identity in Native American cultures illustrates reverence for individuals who embody both masculine and feminine spirits. Such historical acknowledgements indicate that transgender identity is not a modern deviation, but rather part of the natural human spectrum embraced by spiritual worldviews.

This divine framing can serve as a powerful cultural tool to foster respect and dignity for transgender persons, framing their identity not as an anomaly, but as a gift embedded in creation.

Genetic Foundations of Gender Identity

Scientific inquiry into transgender identity often begins with the genetic foundation of sex differentiation. Typically, biological sex is determined by XX (female) or XY (male) chromosomes. The SRY gene on the Y chromosome initiates testis development. However, this binary framework does not account for the entire picture.

Numerous genes have been implicated in influencing gender identity:

SRY: While responsible for male sex differentiation, alterations can impact development.

FOXL2, SOX9, WNT4: Involved in ovarian and testicular development.

Androgen receptor (AR): Variants may alter testosterone sensitivity, potentially influencing gender identity in transgender women (Bao & Swaab, 2011).

Estrogen receptor genes (ESR1 and ESR2): Influence

brain sexual differentiation (Henningsson et al., 2005).

CYP17 and CYP19A1: Enzymes involved in sex hormone synthesis that might affect fetal brain development.

These findings support a complex interplay between gene expression and gender identity development.

Neurodevelopment and Epigenetic Factors

Genes alone do not fully account for gender dysphoria. Neurodevelopmental and epigenetic mechanisms also play a crucial role. Epigenetic regulation, such as DNA methylation and histone modification, can influence gene expression without altering DNA sequences. Hormonal exposures during key fetal development windows can interact with these mechanisms to shape gender identity (McCarthy & Arnold, 2011).

The sexually dimorphic nucleus in the hypothalamus, for instance, differs in size among cisgender men, women, and transgender individuals, suggesting structural and functional neurobiological underpinnings of gender identity (Zhou et al., 1995).

Twin and Family Studies

Studies of twins provide compelling evidence of heritability in gender dysphoria. Identical twins show a higher concordance rate than fraternal twins, indicating genetic influence. However, environmental and psychosocial factors also significantly contribute, pointing to a multifactorial model (Heylens et al., 2012).

Genome-Wide Association Studies (GWAS)

Although still emerging, GWAS has identified certain single-nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) potentially associated with transgender identity. These studies are limited by sample size and complexity in phenotype

definition. Further research is essential, with larger, more diverse cohorts and refined methodologies (Tordjman et al., 2022).

Scientific Caution and Ethical Considerations

Despite advancements, no singular genetic or biological cause for transgender identity has been definitively identified. The scientific community agrees that gender identity results from a dynamic interplay of biological, psychological, and social factors. Ethical considerations are paramount to avoid pathologizing or stigmatizing transgender individuals. Research must be conducted with cultural sensitivity and an affirming approach (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).

Beyond Biology: A Holistic Understanding

Transgender identity cannot be confined to genetics or spirituality alone. Psychological well-being, societal acceptance, and cultural context are equally vital. An inclusive scientific approach fosters respect, affirms identities, and promotes mental health. Supporting transgender individuals requires acknowledging the full spectrum of human diversity.

Renowned Transgender Individuals in India

India has seen several transgender leaders emerge across sectors. From Gauri Sawant, a transgender activist, to Joyita Mondal, India's first transgender judge, these individuals have shattered stereotypes and made substantial contributions to society. Their stories affirm that transgender identity is neither a limitation nor a burden but a powerful testament to human resilience and potential.

Conclusion

The dichotomy between divine gift and scientific phenomenon is not mutually exclusive. Acknowledging

transgender identity as part of nature's diversity, supported by both cultural reverence and scientific inquiry, can foster a compassionate and inclusive society. Continued research, ethical discourse, and cultural affirmation are crucial to honour the identities and experiences of transgender individuals.

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15.

Transgender Inclusion in the Society Economic Participation, and Corporate Responsibility

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Introduction

The transgender community comprises individuals whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. “Transgender” is an umbrella term that encompasses a wide range of identities, including trans men, trans women, non-binary individuals, and others whose experiences of gender do not conform to traditional binary norms. Gender identity refers to a person’s deeply held sense of their own gender, which may or may not align with societal expectations based on physical or biological attributes.

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Transgender individuals exist across all cultures, ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds. While gender diversity has been recognized in many Indigenous and non-Western cultures for centuries—such as the hijra in South Asia, the fa’afafine in Samoa, and Two-Spirit identities among Indigenous North American tribes—the term “transgender” gained broader recognition in the late 20th century as global awareness of LGBTQ+ rights increased.

Despite growing visibility, transgender people frequently face social stigma, discrimination, and systemic barriers in various aspects of life, including healthcare, education, legal recognition, and economic participation. Access to employment and fair treatment in commercial settings remains a particular challenge, with many individuals reporting high rates of workplace bias, limited career opportunities, and underrepresentation in media and marketing.

Understanding the transgender community and its diverse experiences is essential for promoting inclusion, equality, and human rights. In the context of commerce, recognizing the needs and potential contributions of transgender individuals is not only a matter of social justice but also a key factor in creating inclusive economies and ethical business practices.

Transgender Inclusion in Workplace

Transgender inclusion in the workplace refers to the active efforts made by employers to create an environment where transgender employees are respected, valued, and given equal opportunities for professional development. This includes recognizing and affirming gender identity and expression, ensuring access to appropriate facilities, implementing inclusive policies, and fostering a culture of diversity and equity.

Challenges Faced by Transgender Employees

Despite increasing awareness of LGBTQ+ rights, many transgender individuals continue to face discrimination and marginalization in professional settings. According to a 2022 report by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), **over 46% of transgender workers in the United States reported experiencing unfair treatment at work**, including being denied a promotion, being misgendered, or facing harassment. In some cases, transgender individuals may be fired or pushed out of their jobs simply for expressing their gender identity.

Common challenges include:

- ❖ Workplace harassment and bullying,
- ❖ Lack of inclusive health benefits,
- ❖ Inadequate policies regarding name and gender marker changes,
- ❖ Barriers to hiring and promotion,
- ❖ Fear of coming out due to job insecurity,

These challenges often lead to higher rates of unemployment, underemployment, and poverty among transgender populations.

Best Practices for Inclusion

Companies that actively support transgender employees often implement the following measures:

- ❖ **Non-discrimination policies** that explicitly include gender identity and expression.
- ❖ **Gender-inclusive facilities**, such as all-gender restrooms.
- ❖ **Training and education** for all staff on transgender issues and inclusive language.
- ❖ **Supportive HR processes**, including ease of updating names and pronouns in company records.

- ❖ **Inclusive health care benefits**, including coverage for gender-affirming care.

Organizations like IBM, Accenture, and Salesforce have been recognized for leading transgender-inclusive practices, including mentorship programs, employee resource groups, and public support of LGBTQ+ rights.

Business Case for Inclusion

Transgender inclusion is not only a moral imperative—it also makes good business sense. A diverse and inclusive workplace is linked to:

- ❖ Increased employee satisfaction and retention,
- ❖ Greater innovation and creativity,
- ❖ Improved company reputation and brand loyalty,
- ❖ Better financial performance,

Studies show that companies with strong diversity and inclusion practices outperform their peers in productivity and profitability. In today's global economy, consumers and investors increasingly favour businesses that uphold ethical and inclusive values.

Legal Frameworks and Global Trends

In many countries, laws protecting transgender employees are expanding. In the U.S., the Supreme Court ruling in **Bostock v. Clayton County (2020)** confirmed that discrimination based on gender identity is prohibited under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. Similar protections exist in countries like Canada, the UK, and parts of the EU. However, legal protections vary widely around the world, and in some regions, transgender workers still lack basic rights and legal recourse.

Understanding CSR in the Context of Diversity and Inclusion

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) refers to

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a company's commitment to operate in an ethical, sustainable, and socially conscious manner. In recent years, CSR has evolved to encompass not just environmental concerns and philanthropy, but also **diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)**—with particular focus on historically marginalized groups, including the transgender community.

Transgender inclusion under CSR initiatives reflects a company's willingness to address inequalities, support human rights, and promote social equity beyond profit-driven motives. These efforts can significantly influence public perception, employee morale, and long-term business sustainability.

Why Supporting the Transgender Community Matters

Transgender individuals often face systemic discrimination, not only in employment but also in healthcare access, education, and public life. Companies that ignore these issues risk alienating a growing demographic of employees and consumers who prioritize ethical business practices.

CSR that supports transgender rights demonstrates:

- ❖ A **commitment to human rights and social justice,**
- ❖ An investment in a **diverse and innovative workforce,**
- ❖ Alignment with **consumer expectations,** especially among younger generations,
- ❖ Support for **sustainable development goals (SDGs)** related to gender equality and reduced inequalities,

CSR Initiatives That Promote Transgender Inclusion

Corporations can engage in various CSR initiatives to support transgender individuals both within and outside the workplace:

a. Internal Initiatives

- ❖ Inclusive **HR policies and benefits**, including gender-affirming healthcare;
- ❖ Transgender **employee resource groups (ERGs)**;
- ❖ **Education and training** on gender identity and unconscious bias;
- ❖ **Leadership development programs** for LGBTQ+ employees;

b. External Initiatives

- ❖ **Sponsoring LGBTQ+ events**, Pride campaigns, and transgender rights organizations;
- ❖ **Funding scholarships or vocational training** for transgender youth;
- ❖ Partnering with **non-profits and advocacy groups** focused on trans issues;
- ❖ Using **inclusive advertising and branding** that represents transgender individuals respectfully;

c. Advocacy and Public Policy

- ❖ Supporting **anti-discrimination legislation**;
- ❖ Signing onto global standards such as the **UN Standards of Conduct for Business on Tackling Discrimination against LGBTI people**;
- ❖ Taking a stand against anti-trans policies and laws;

Examples of Corporate Leadership in Transgender-Inclusive CSR

Some leading companies have gained recognition

for their proactive CSR efforts regarding transgender inclusion:

- ❖ **Google** has consistently ranked high in the Human Rights Campaign's Corporate Equality Index, offering gender transition guidelines and employee support systems.
- ❖ **Accenture** offers transgender-inclusive healthcare, runs global awareness campaigns, and engages in public policy advocacy.
- ❖ **Ben & Jerry's** has publicly supported trans rights through campaigns and partnerships with trans-led organizations.

These examples illustrate that CSR isn't just a tool for brand-building—it's a strategic and ethical choice to foster societal progress.

Challenges and Criticisms

While many companies embrace transgender-inclusive CSR, some face criticism for “**rainbow-washing**” or “**performative allyship**”—where support for LGBTQ+ communities is superficial and not backed by meaningful action. Authentic CSR must be:

- ❖ **Long-term and measurable**
- ❖ Backed by **internal policy change**
- ❖ **Community-informed** and driven by genuine consultation with transgender voices

Conclusion

Transgender inclusion is not only a matter of social justice but also an essential factor for economic progress and corporate sustainability. Ensuring transgender individuals have equal access to employment, fair wages, and safe work environments leads to stronger, more diverse workforces and stimulates innovation. Companies have both a moral and economic responsibility to foster

inclusive practices—through policies, representation, and education—that dismantle systemic barriers and support the full participation of transgender people. By embracing diversity and committing to genuine equity, society and businesses alike stand to benefit from the unique perspectives, talents, and resilience of the transgender community. Corporate Social Responsibility offers a powerful platform for advancing transgender rights and inclusion. When executed authentically, CSR efforts can help dismantle systemic inequalities, improve lives, and create a more equitable business landscape. As public awareness grows and stakeholder expectations shift, companies that embrace transgender-inclusive CSR are likely to lead the way in both social impact and sustainable business success.

Inclusion of transgender individuals in economic and corporate spheres is vital for fostering equitable development and sustainable growth. Research consistently demonstrates that diverse workplaces are more innovative and productive. As such, corporate responsibility must extend beyond non-discrimination policies to proactive inclusion efforts. Societal progress depends on dismantling systemic inequalities and creating environments where all individuals, regardless of gender identity, can contribute meaningfully and thrive.

Transgender people deserve more than visibility—they deserve full participation, respect, and equity in every corner of society. Economic justice and workplace inclusion are key battlegrounds in the fight for transgender rights. It's time for corporations and communities to step up, not just in words but in action, by implementing real policies, uplifting trans voices, and challenging discrimination at every level. A just society is one where every identity is valued—not merely included, but empowered.

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16.

Stereotypes vs. Reality

Analyzing the Shift from Comic Relief to Complex Protagonists in Bollywood's Transgender Representation

Mr. Avneesh Kumar Nim*

The cinematic portrayal of transgender individuals within Bollywood has historically been shaped by reductive stereotypes and societal prejudices. For much of its history, Hindi cinema relegated transgender characters to the peripheries of narrative significance, often employing them as sources of comic relief, horror, or social deviance. Films such as *Sadak* (1991) and *Sangharsh* (1999) are emblematic of a broader cultural tendency to depict transgender identities through sensationalized and villainous tropes, thereby reinforcing existing societal stigmas. These portrayals not only marginalized transgender lives but also contributed to their symbolic othering within

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the public imagination. In the wake of important legal interventions such as the NALSA judgment of 2014, which recognized transgender persons as a “third gender” entitled to fundamental rights, Bollywood has gradually begun to reconfigure its narrative approach. Contemporary films such as *Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui* (2021) and biographical series like *Taali* (2023) suggest an emerging trend toward the complex, empathetic portrayal of transgender individuals as protagonists rather than peripheral caricatures. However, these developments warrant critical interrogation: are these portrayals authentically inclusive, or do they reflect a commodified version of inclusivity aimed at capitalizing on progressive discourses? This paper seeks to explore the shifting cinematic gaze toward transgender identities in Bollywood, tracing the transition from stereotypical depictions to more layered representations. By examining key films across different periods, this study aims to evaluate the role of cinema in either sustaining or challenging social prejudices. Furthermore, it questions whether recent portrayals mark a genuine paradigm shift or remain constrained by the commercial imperatives and normative biases of mainstream Hindi cinema.

Early Representations: Stereotypes and Misrepresentation

In the early decades of Bollywood, transgender characters were rarely afforded dignity or complexity. Instead, their appearances served specific narrative functions: to elicit fear, ridicule, or a sense of exotic otherness. These portrayals not only mirrored but also perpetuated societal prejudices, reinforcing the marginalization of transgender communities in India.

One of the most infamous examples is the character of Maharani, played by Sadashiv Amrapurkar in *Sadak* (1991). Maharani, a transgender brothel owner, is

depicted as sadistic, manipulative, and grotesque. Critics have observed that Maharani's portrayal "cements the association of transgender identity with deviance and violence" (Ghosh, 2018). Instead of offering a nuanced view of gender diversity, *Sadak* sensationalized it, framing the transgender body as something to be feared. The character was powerful but monstrous, reinforcing public anxiety about gender non-conformity.

Similarly, in *Sangharsh* (1999), Ashutosh Rana's character—a villain with gender-fluid attributes—terrorizes the film's protagonists, further entrenching the stereotype of transgender individuals as dangerous and predatory. As film critic Anupama Chopra noted, "In Bollywood's moral imagination, the non-normative gendered body became a site of horror, a deviation that must be punished or eradicated" (Chopra, 2000). These cinematic choices dehumanized transgender lives, stripping them of everyday humanity and complexity.

Apart from villainous portrayals, transgender identities were also frequently employed as vehicles for humour. Cross-dressing, often conflated with transgender identity, was a recurring comedic trope in films such as *Bol Radha Bol* (1992) and the *Masti* series (2004, 2013). Here, gender nonconformity was presented as absurd and laughable. Scholar Shohini Ghosh argues that "Bollywood turned the trans body into an object of slapstick, ensuring that audiences laughed *at* transgender characters, not *with* them" (Ghosh, 2014). Such humour not only trivialized the lived experiences of transgender individuals but also validated public mockery.

This persistent pattern of stereotyping had deep social consequences. As author Arvind Narrain points out, "Popular cinema did not merely reflect transphobia; it actively taught generations to fear, mock, and marginalize trans people" (Narrain, 2015). In a country

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where popular cinema heavily influences social norms and values, these misrepresentations played a critical role in upholding the cultural invisibility and social ostracization of transgender communities.

Thus, early Bollywood films largely positioned transgender identities either as monstrous aberrations or sources of ridicule—both strategies that contributed to systemic dehumanization. There was little to no attempt to engage with transgender individuals as full human beings with desires, struggles, and agency. This cinematic treatment not only denied transgender people visibility as protagonists but also made their realities virtually invisible to mainstream audiences.

Transition Towards Nuanced Representation

The late 1990s and early 2000s witnessed the beginnings of a slow but noticeable shift in the portrayal of transgender characters in Bollywood. While early representations largely confined transgender individuals to the margins of monstrosity or mockery, some filmmakers began experimenting with narratives that afforded trans characters a degree of dignity, complexity, and emotional depth previously denied to them. Though still imperfect and often trapped within tragic frameworks, these portrayals marked an important step toward humanizing the transgender experience on the Indian screen.

Mahesh Bhatt's *Tamanna* (1998) serves as an early, significant attempt at engaging with the realities of a transgender individual beyond caricature. In this film, Paresh Rawal plays Tikku, a transgender woman who raises an abandoned infant girl against the odds of societal prejudice. Tikku is portrayed not as a figure of fear or humour but as a deeply compassionate human being, struggling for acceptance and love in a hostile world. Though *Tamanna* occasionally falls into melodrama, it was one of the first mainstream Hindi films

to acknowledge the existence of transgender individuals as active, nurturing members of society. As critic Rachel Dwyer observed, “*Tamanna* allowed audiences to see trans characters as capable of love and sacrifice, challenging the easy moral binaries of earlier Bollywood” (Dwyer, 2002).

Another notable film from this transitional period is *Darmiyaan: In Between* (1997), directed by Kalpana Lajmi. The film centers around a celebrated actress who discovers that her son is intersex. Though it engages more with intersex identity than strictly transgender identity, *Darmiyaan* nonetheless contributed to expanding cinematic discussions about non-normative genders. The film’s nuanced portrayal of emotional alienation, shame, and identity struggles offered audiences a rare glimpse into the inner lives of gender-diverse individuals, even if broader societal empathy remained limited.

Importantly, this era also saw the rise of regional and independent cinema offering bolder, more grounded representations. Films like the Kannada movie *Naanu Avanalla...Avalu* (2015), which chronicles the life of a trans woman based on real events, pushed beyond the narrow frames of victimhood and villainy. These films, though less commercially successful, laid crucial groundwork for changing the narrative ecosystem around transgender lives. As film scholar Lata Murti notes, “Independent cinema carved out spaces where transgender characters could finally exist with emotional depth, far from the gaze of mainstream sensationalism” (Murti, 2017).

The slow transition in Bollywood was also accompanied by broader cultural conversations around gender and identity. Increased media attention to LGBTQ+ rights movements, the visibility of transgender activists like Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, and gradual shifts in public discourse all began to influence filmmakers’ sensibilities.

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Characters who were once depicted only in isolation or exaggeration were now portrayed as part of families, communities, and romantic relationships. Even when flaws persisted—such as cisgender actors still being cast in trans roles—the fact that transgender characters were moving into narrative centers marked a critical departure from earlier eras.

Thus, the late 1990s to mid-2010s period represents a significant transition in Bollywood: a movement from the periphery toward tentative but meaningful representation. While complete authenticity was still elusive, and many films fell back on tragic tropes, a crack had appeared in the wall of cinematic invisibility. This transition set the stage for more assertive, mainstream explorations of transgender identities in contemporary Bollywood.

Factors Behind the Shift in Representation

The evolving representation of transgender individuals in Bollywood is not an isolated phenomenon; rather, it is the result of multiple, overlapping cultural, social, legal, and political developments. Understanding these factors is crucial to recognizing why and how the cinematic gaze toward the transgender community has shifted from ridicule and fear toward complexity and empathy.

One of the most significant catalysts for change has been the legal recognition of transgender rights in India. The 2014 Supreme Court verdict in *National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) vs. Union of India* recognized transgender persons as a “third gender” and directed the government to ensure their social and economic inclusion. This landmark ruling did not merely affirm the dignity of transgender individuals but also sparked broader conversations about gender diversity in public discourse. Filmmakers, often responsive to

shifts in societal norms and legal frameworks, began to reflect this new consciousness in their work. As legal scholar Arvind Narrain notes, “Judicial acknowledgment of gender diversity created a new moral vocabulary that cultural producers could draw upon” (Narrain, 2015).

Grassroots activism and the growing visibility of transgender leaders like Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, Gauri Sawant, and Kalki Subramaniam have played a crucial role in reshaping public perceptions. Their relentless advocacy efforts have humanized transgender lives in the media and challenged entrenched stereotypes. Documentaries, TED talks, public campaigns, and participation in pride parades have brought transgender issues into mainstream conversations. Bollywood, often reflective of larger social currents, could no longer ignore these voices without appearing regressive.

The global expansion of media and the rise of streaming platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime Video have exposed Indian audiences to a broader array of LGBTQ+ stories from around the world. Films and series from Hollywood, such as *Pose*, *Transparent*, and *The Danish Girl*, showcased nuanced transgender narratives and set new standards for representation. In an increasingly globalized entertainment economy, Bollywood faced pressure to modernize its storytelling to appeal to younger, more socially aware audiences. As scholar Parmesh Shahani asserts, “Cultural capital now lies in inclusivity; for Bollywood, telling trans stories is not only ethical but commercially savvy” (Shahani, 2020).

Indian audiences themselves have evolved. Urbanization, access to global media, education, and social media platforms have contributed to a younger generation that is more open to diverse narratives. Issues of gender identity and LGBTQ+ rights, once taboo, are increasingly discussed in schools, workplaces,

and families. Filmmakers are acutely aware that their success now depends on resonating with audiences that demand greater authenticity and social sensitivity.

Independent filmmakers and regional cinema industries have often led the way in exploring marginalized identities with greater honesty. Films like *Naanu Avanalla...Avalu* (Kannada, 2015) and *Super Deluxe* (Tamil, 2019) portrayed transgender characters with unprecedented sensitivity. The critical acclaim and cult followings of such films demonstrated that there is an audience for complex transgender narratives, encouraging Bollywood producers to take similar risks within mainstream frameworks.

Although still limited, there has been a slow rise in LGBTQ+ individuals participating behind the scenes—as writers, consultants, directors, and producers. Their involvement brings authenticity to scripts and ensures that transgender stories are not reduced to voyeuristic spectacles. Moreover, public advocacy for trans actors to play trans roles—although still an ongoing struggle—has added another layer of critical pressure on Bollywood to rethink its casting and storytelling practices.

Challenges and the Road Ahead

Despite significant strides in the representation of transgender individuals in Bollywood, substantial challenges remain that threaten to undermine the gains made in recent years. True progress demands more than visibility; it requires systemic changes both on-screen and behind the scenes. As transgender narratives become more common, it is essential to examine where Bollywood continues to fall short and what steps are needed to ensure more authentic, empowering storytelling.

Authentic Representation and Casting

One of the most persistent criticisms is the continued

casting of cisgender actors in transgender roles. While films like *Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui* and series like *Taali* have brought trans narratives into mainstream cinema, the choice to cast cisgender celebrities over transgender actors perpetuates a form of erasure. It denies trans actors the opportunity to tell their own stories and reinforces the idea that trans identity is merely a costume that can be worn for dramatic effect. As activist Kalki Subramaniam has emphasized, “Authenticity matters. Our stories must be told by us, not performed by those who have never lived our realities” (Subramaniam, 2022).

Oversimplification and Stereotyping

Even in films attempting positive portrayals, transgender characters are often trapped within narrow narrative frameworks—frequently centered around tragedy, rejection, or the need for acceptance by cisgender society. While these stories are important, they risk reinforcing the idea that trans lives are defined solely by struggle and victimhood. More diverse portrayals are needed, showcasing transgender individuals thriving in professional, romantic, and everyday contexts without their gender identity being their only defining feature.

Lack of Trans Creators Behind the Scenes

Representation is not just about who appears on-screen but also about who writes, directs, produces, and shapes the narratives. Currently, Bollywood still lacks a significant presence of transgender writers, directors, and producers. Without their voices shaping the storytelling process, trans characters risk being filtered through a cisgender lens, however well-intentioned. Structural changes within the industry—such as mentorship programs, inclusive hiring practices, and platforms for marginalized creators—are necessary to create truly representative cinema.

Risk of Tokenism

As conversations around diversity gain popularity, there is a risk that transgender characters will be included superficially, without meaningful engagement. Films may showcase a transgender character simply to appear progressive without genuinely exploring their interior lives or struggles. Tokenistic inclusion can be just as damaging as outright erasure because it reduces transgender individuals to political symbols rather than fully realized human beings.

Audience Resistance and Backlash

While urban and younger audiences are increasingly receptive to transgender narratives, resistance remains strong in more conservative sectors. Films tackling transgender themes often face social media trolling, boycott calls, and political opposition. Filmmakers must navigate this complex terrain, balancing commercial viability with social responsibility. Overcoming deep-seated societal prejudices remains a long-term challenge that cinema alone cannot solve but can certainly help address.

Intersectionality is Often Ignored

Most transgender narratives in Bollywood have so far focused on urban, middle-class experiences, overlooking the intersections of caste, class, religion, and regional identity. Transgender people from marginalized communities face layered forms of discrimination, and their stories remain largely untold. Future representations must embrace a more intersectional approach to truly capture the diversity of transgender experiences in India.

Moving forward, Bollywood has the opportunity to lead cultural change by embracing more inclusive practices both in storytelling and in the industry's

power structures. Greater efforts must be made to cast transgender actors in major roles, involve transgender consultants and writers, and support films that portray transgender lives with joy, complexity, and authenticity. Cinema has the unique power to shape public imagination. When transgender characters are depicted with the same depth, flaws, humour, and dignity as any other character, it challenges audiences to rethink their biases and expand their empathy. As Indian society continues to grapple with issues of gender, identity, and equality, Bollywood's choices will play a critical role in either reinforcing old stereotypes or building new possibilities. The road ahead is undoubtedly challenging, but it also holds transformative potential. A truly inclusive Bollywood can not only reflect social change—it can inspire it.

Conclusion

The journey of transgender representation in Bollywood, from caricatured stereotypes to nuanced protagonists, mirrors broader societal shifts in India's understanding of gender diversity. Early portrayals often relegated transgender individuals to the margins—depicting them as comic relief, villains, or tragic figures—reinforcing societal prejudices and misunderstandings. However, in recent years, with the influence of legal advancements, LGBTQ+ activism, global media trends, and evolving audience sensibilities, Bollywood has begun to reimagine transgender narratives with greater empathy, depth, and authenticity.

Yet, this progress is uneven and incomplete. Authentic representation remains a challenge, with cisgender actors often playing transgender roles, and storytelling frequently limited to narratives of struggle rather than celebrating the full complexity of trans lives. The absence of transgender voices behind the camera, the risk of tokenism, and societal resistance continue

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to pose significant obstacles. True inclusivity demands not just visibility but structural changes within the film industry—providing opportunities for transgender actors, writers, and directors to tell their own stories. Nevertheless, the current trajectory offers hope. Bollywood’s evolving portrayal of transgender characters has the power to challenge stereotypes, foster empathy, and catalyze social change. Cinema, as a powerful cultural force, can either reinforce old prejudices or open new pathways toward acceptance and understanding. As Bollywood continues to grapple with its responsibility in shaping public imagination, the authentic representation of transgender individuals will remain both a creative and a moral imperative. The road ahead is long, but with continued effort, the screen can become a space where all identities are not just seen but celebrated.

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17.

Transgender Representation In Indian Art

Shalini Tiwari*

Introduction

God has created different types of people in this world. In which apart from male and female there is also a third gender, which is also known as transgender. Transgender term refers to people whose gender identity differs from that typically associated with sex they were assigned at birth. In India transgender people are also known as kinnar, Hijra, Kothi, khoja and Third gender. Transgender is a combination of two words Trans+Gender, in which the meaning of Trans is opposite and Gender means the state of being male or female. But actually in medical department unnatural gender change is called transgender. One who is a boy or a girl by birth but after gender change surgery boy becomes girl and girl becomes boy called transgender. But transgender is also vogue for eunuchs. If we look closely transgender are also an integral part of our society but they are ostracized by society due to narrow and conservative thinking of the

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society.

These are people who claim to be neither men nor women. Examples of these are found in mythological stories, tales and art. Evidence of this has been found in civilizations like Harappa and Mohenjodaro. We live in a society where there is no respect for them. They are often pushed to the periphery as social outcasts. They have to face harassment, abuse and discrimination in society.

The depiction of transgender people in art has been going on since ancient times. The origin of art is social. Artist is the part of the society and his social environment influenced his art. Art is not only the reflection of society and nature but it is a means to eliminate the separation and isolation of life among people.

Indian art has a vast and diverse history and it has evolved to reflect the changing cultural and social norms of different periods. In the context of transgender representation in Indian art, Transgender people have a unique and important place in Indian mythology. They had a recognition and acceptance in Hindu culture and played a very important role in Indian culture and rituals. They were considered a goddess and associated them with spiritual power.

Ancient Literature and religious texts have evidence of transgender identities. In the art based on these religious texts we find the depiction and representation of Transgender. Transgender people have been portrayed in various art forms across different styles and mediums.

Representation of Transgender People in Indian Art

In Indian art, transgender representation can be seen in various art forms and styles, the examples of which are as follows:

Transgender portrayals in Ancient Art

Mohini: The first reference of transgender is the female avatar of Vishnu - Mohini. According to 'Matsya Puran' lord Vishnu transformed himself into a beautiful woman 'Mohini' during the churning of the ocean. Mohini deceives the demons so that the God could drink the nectar.

Ardhanarishwar- Transgender representation can be seen in Indian art in the form of Ardhanarishwar the unisexual form of Shiva and Shakti represents the perfect balance of masculine and feminine qualities in one form. Shiva is known as the god of destruction and on the other hand Parvati is considered the goddess of love and fertility. The characteristic of both shows the harmonious balance of this universe and challenges traditional general stereotype.

Mahabharata: In Mahabharata transgender depiction is seen at many places. Mahabharata's character 'Aravan', son of Arjun and Nag Kanya, wanted to get married for one night before sacrificing himself to goddess Kali, but no woman was ready to marry him, so Krishna adopts the form of beautiful woman Mohini and weds Aravan. Inspired by this story Hijras in Tamilnadu identify Aravan as their forefather and call themselves Aravanis.

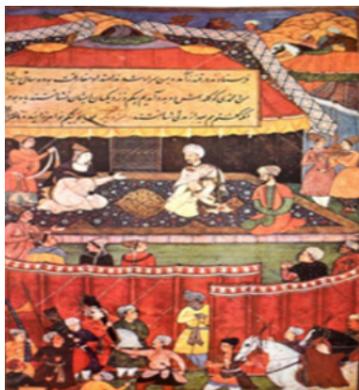
Another character of Mahabharata Shikhandi with mixed gender was the reincarnation of Amba, the daughter of the king of Kashi. Shikhandi fought against Kauravas and was responsible for the death of Bheeshma. At the wedding of Abhimanyu shikhandi blessed him. These incidents of Mahabharata have been depicted in various art forms.

Transgender portrayals in Medieval Period

Transgender people played important roles in Mughal period such as political advisor, administrator, general

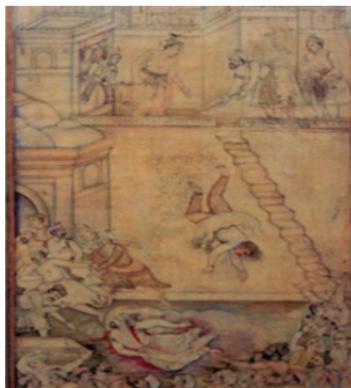
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and guardian of the harems etc. Mughal miniature paintings depicted the prominent place of transgender people in Mughal court and society. In Mughal period eunuchs were called Khwajasaras, which is the Persian term for a range of men with removed or non functional sexual organs. Abul Fazl, the author of 'Akbarname' is a major source of information of Mughal period, mentions that these eunuchs were the major source of information of the harem to the outside world.



*Babar meeting a princess, Mansoor (Baburnama) 1598 AD,
National Museum, New Delhi*

In this painting there is a meeting going on in the tent. Two men are sitting with Princess and eunuchs can be seen in the service of the princess.



Adam Khan's punishment, (Akbarname), wordpress.com

In this miniature painting in the upper left portion of the painting eunuchs can be seen peeping from the door.

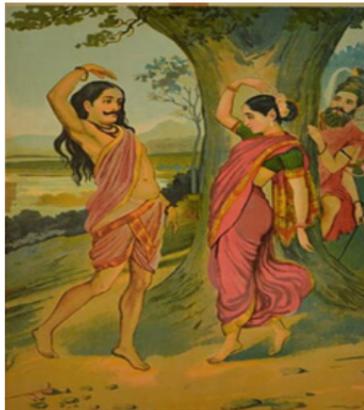
Transgender portrayals in Modern Art

In Modern Period there are various artists who depicted the transgender people in their art. Raja Ravi Verma, considered the father of the Indian Modern art, showcased the various Mohini forms of Vishnu in his religious paintings.



Mohini on swing, Raja Ravi Verma, memeraki.com

In this painting Raja Ravi Verma depicted the female form of Vishnu as Mohini singing on the swing.



Bhashmasura- Mohini, Raja Ravi Verma, en.m.wikipedia.org

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Raja Ravi Verma depicted the story of Bhashmasura and Mohini. In this painting Vishnu in the Mohini form convinces Bhashmasura to place his hand on his head because he had a power to incinerate anyone with a touch. And in the background Shiva can be seen watching them from behind the tree.



Narayani-Mohini, M. V. Dhurandhar, en.m.wikipedia.org

This painting depicts the Mohini, female form of Vishnu but with the representational male features of Vishnu.

Transgender Portrayals in Indian Contemporary Art

In contemporary art world artists have more liberty to express their thoughts and emotions through different mediums such as visual arts, literature, music and performing arts. These artists challenge societal norms, advocating for acceptance, visibility and equality for the LGBTQ community. Their works contribute to the broader discourse on gender and sexuality in India. In contemporary art world there are so many artists who are showcasing the LGBTQ people in their art-

Bhupen khakar

Bhupen khakar raised his voice for LGBTQ community's right through his paintings. His luminous paintings address issues of class, gender and sexuality with sensitive often tragic comic nuance. 'Two men' in Banaras painting is his iconic work. In this painting he divided the canvas into two parts, in one part he has showcased the various scenes of Banaras and in another part he has showed two naked male lovers embracing each other. Bhupen painted 'You can't please all' painting depicting a naked figure standing in balcony and watching characters from ancient Aesop fable.

Kalki Subramaniam

Kalki is the first transgender artist of India. She is the freelance artist and the founder of 'Sahodari foundation'. This organisation works on social environment of the transgender community. She also promotes the transgender community's painting through travelling exhibitions. Her figurative art is the combination of POP art and cubism. She paints mostly with fluorescent paints and palette knife. Under the Thoorikai project she gives art training to transgender people and motivates them to pursue art as their career. Kalki says "Gender is not just binary it is multiple and real".



Shee, Kalki Subramaniam, kalkisubramaniam.com

Uttam Chitrakar

Uttam chitrakar from Medinipur, West Bengal has brought a modern thematic twist to the age old art of Kalighat pat. He has reflected a transgender theme in his art. According to him “Some people think my figures are males some feel they are women. But I wish to highlight the rights of the third gender, who should enjoy equal rights like all”.

His painting style is very unique and getting place in well known art galleries and exhibitions. There are variety of subject matters in his paintings such as depiction of God to daily life and transgenders all elements of life can be found in his art. According to him “I have tried to turn Pat Chitra into contemporary success. I have transformed the ‘Babu-Bibi’ concept to ‘Babu-Babu’ or ‘Bibi-Bibi’ concept. It is all about love, not just about sexual inclination”.

Anwesh Sahoo

Anvesh is the winner of the Mr. Gay World India, 2016 but he is also an artist, writer and blogger. His sketches are the satire on the gender norms of society. His art series ‘Mermen of colour’ has been creating a buzz.

T Praveen Kumar

TPraveenKumar is representing LGBTQ community’s struggle through his art. He believes that his art will help normalise non- binary identities. According to him “As a child I found art as my mode of expressing the struggle of accepting my sexuality. These sketches helped people around me understand what I was going through. Giving queer artists equal representation not only helps in normalizing same sex relationships in society but also instils a sense of acceptance and confidence in the artist”.



Untitled, T Praveen Kumar, thehindu.com

Priya Dali

Priya Dali is the queer Indian artist and has been searching and exploring the sexual identity through the mechanism of a comic book.

Veer Misra

Veer Misra uses gouache and ink to create painting and explores the realms of love and intimacy through queer story telling with sombre tone and mood.

Opashona Ghosh

Opashona's work is revolutionary and evokes a sense of freedom from the chains of normative gender and other issues. Her work is the combination of modern pop culture and surrealism.

Aravani Art Project

The primary goal of Aravani art project is to embrace the people from the transgender community and create consciousness, well being through art. This project is a Trans-women and Cis-women led art collective which bring about change in the way the society views the LGBTQIA+ community. With the help of this project,

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community found their strength in art and alternative source of income also.



Aravani art Project, facebook

Conclusion

Indian art has a very rich and diverse history and in different periods it reflects the changing artistic and cultural norms of that period. If we talk about the representation of transgender people in Indian art there are various examples in every period. From ancient period to contemporary period, Indian art has a representation of transgender people. Transgender people have been described a lot in mythologies and paintings and sculptures have been created on the basis of those same mythologies. In present time contemporary artists have become more liberated to express their feelings, desires and identity. Indian art and society are changing with time and exploring diverse identity, experiences and narratives within the LGBTQ+ community. Artists are highlighting the struggles of transgender people for the acceptance and equality through their art.

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18.

Transgender Representation in Literature Evolution, Challenges, and Impact on Cultural Narratives

Diksha*

Introduction

The representation of transgender individuals in literature has undergone significant transformation, paralleling broader socio-cultural shifts in the understanding of gender identity. Historically, transgender characters were marginalized, their narratives often constrained by stereotypes, moral judgements, or medicalized frameworks. However, over the past several decades, literature has increasingly served as a platform for nuanced and self-reflective portrayals of trans experiences. This paper examines the historical development of transgender representation in literature, analyzes the persistent structural and thematic challenges faced by trans narratives, and evaluates the cultural significance of these representations in shaping

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public discourse on gender diversity.

Historical Context and Early Representations

The origins of transgender representation in literature can be traced to antiquity, where themes of gender fluidity were explored through mythological and allegorical narratives. In classical texts such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, stories of transformation blur the boundaries of sex and gender. The tale of Iphis, for instance, narrates the divine transformation of a female-assigned individual into a male in order to fulfill heterosexual norms. While these early depictions reflect an awareness of gender nonconformity, they are largely symbolic, lacking the conceptual framework of modern transgender identity.

During the medieval and Renaissance periods, cross-dressing and gender disguise became recurring motifs in drama and prose, often employed for comedic or subversive purposes. Shakespearean characters like Viola in *Twelfth Night* embody this tradition, though their disguises are temporary and rarely challenge the gender binary in substantive ways. These portrayals hint at the performative nature of gender but fall short of articulating a transgender perspective.

The 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed a growing interest in gender and sexuality, influenced by emerging psychological and medical discourses. Literary figures such as Radclyffe Hall's Stephen Gordon in *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) engaged with themes of gender nonconformity and identity crisis. Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928) introduced a protagonist who lives across centuries and changes sex mid-narrative, presenting a philosophical exploration of gender fluidity. Though not explicitly transgender, *Orlando* represents a significant departure from rigid gender norms, foreshadowing later queer and trans narratives.

Mid-to-Late 20th Century Developments

The post-war era and the rise of LGBTQ+ activism in the 1960s and 70s catalyzed the emergence of more explicit transgender narratives. Autobiographical works such as Jan Morris's *Conundrum* (1974) and Renée Richards's *Second Serve* (1983) provided first-person insights into the complexities of gender transition. These memoirs, while groundbreaking, often adhered to medicalized narratives of trans identity, emphasizing transition as a linear, transformative journey anchored in physical change.

A pivotal moment in transgender literature occurred with the publication of Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* (1993), a semi-autobiographical novel that chronicles the life of a gender-nonconforming individual navigating working-class queer communities. Feinberg's work introduced a politicized and intersectional perspective, challenging binary frameworks and highlighting the socio-economic dimensions of trans life. This period also saw the rise of small presses and zine culture, which provided alternative platforms for trans voices outside the mainstream publishing industry.

Contemporary Representation: Diversity and Complexity

In the 21st century, transgender representation in literature has become increasingly diverse, reflecting a broad spectrum of identities and experiences. Trans authors are now writing across genres—from literary fiction and memoir to young adult literature and speculative fiction—creating multifaceted portrayals of trans life. This shift has been facilitated by greater visibility of trans issues in public discourse and by the efforts of independent publishers committed to inclusive storytelling.

Notable works include Imogen Binnie's *Nevada* (2013), which deconstructs traditional narrative arcs around transition and centers the internal complexities of gender identity. Torrey Peters's *Detransition, Baby* (2021) explores themes of gender, parenthood, and relational ethics through the intersecting lives of trans and cis characters. Similarly, Kai Cheng Thom's *Fierce Femmes and Notorious Liars* (2016) employs magical realism to depict a trans coming-of-age story that resists realism in favor of imaginative liberation.

Young adult (YA) literature has emerged as a particularly important site for trans representation. Books like Meredith Russo's *If I Was Your Girl* (2016) and Kacen Callender's *Felix Ever After* (2020) feature trans protagonists navigating adolescence, identity, and social relationships. These narratives play a crucial role in normalizing trans identities for young readers, offering both mirrors for trans youth and windows for cisgender audiences.

Persistent Challenges in Representation

Despite the growing body of transgender literature, several challenges persist. One major concern is the continued underrepresentation of trans authors in mainstream publishing. Trans writers often face systemic barriers, including limited access to literary agents, lack of institutional support, and editorial gatekeeping. While diversity initiatives have improved visibility, they sometimes result in performative inclusion rather than substantive change.

Another issue is the misrepresentation of trans characters by cisgender authors, who may lack the lived experience or cultural competence to portray trans lives accurately. Such depictions risk perpetuating stereotyped as the "deceptive trans person" trope—or reducing trans identity to a narrative device centred

on trauma or transition. Ethical representation requires both sensitivity and accountability, underscoring the importance of elevating trans voices in authorship.

Intersectionality is another area requiring greater attention. The experiences of trans people of colour, disabled trans individuals, nonbinary persons, and those from varied cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds are often marginalized or excluded. Addressing these gaps necessitates a more inclusive and intersectional approach to both writing and publishing practices.

Cultural Impact of Transgender Literature

Literature holds the potential to influence public perceptions and shape cultural narratives. Transgender representation, when executed with care and authenticity, can challenge dominant gender ideologies and expand the boundaries of identity discourse. By offering readers access to the interior lives of trans characters, literature fosters empathy, disrupts prejudicial assumptions, and cultivates a more nuanced understanding of gender diversity.

For transgender readers, literary representation affirms identity and provides a space for reflection, healing, and connection. Seeing one's experiences articulated in literature can mitigate feelings of isolation and contribute to a sense of belonging. For cisgender readers, engaging with trans literature can serve as an educational tool, prompting critical self-reflection and allyship.

Moreover, transgender literature intersects with broader cultural and political movements for gender equity and social justice. By highlighting systemic inequalities and celebrating trans resilience, these narratives contribute to a collective reimagining of community, identity, and liberation. Literature, in this

context, becomes a vehicle not only for artistic expression but also for social transformation.

Conclusion

The evolution of transgender representation in literature reflects the ongoing struggle for visibility, authenticity, and inclusion within both literary and societal frameworks. From mythological allusions and early queer-coded characters to the emergence of trans-authored narratives, literature has played a critical role in articulating and validating transgender experiences. While challenges remain—particularly regarding representation, authorship, and intersectionality—the proliferation of diverse and affirming trans narratives signals a shift toward a more inclusive literary canon.

As literature continues to adapt to evolving understandings of gender, it holds the promise of fostering empathy, advancing equity, and enriching cultural dialogue. Transgender representation in literature, therefore, is not merely a reflection of identity but a dynamic force in shaping the stories we tell about ourselves and others.

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19.

Transgender Rights in India A Constitutional and Legal Analysis Post NALSA and The 2019 Act

Shashank A. Anand*

Introduction

In India, the transgender community has historically faced systemic marginalization, often being denied basic rights and recognition. The Supreme Court's landmark judgment in *National Legal Services Authority vs. Union of India* (2014) marked a significant shift by recognizing transgender individuals as a 'third gender' and affirming their fundamental rights under the Constitution. This judgment emphasized the right to self-identification and called for measures to ensure their social and economic inclusion. Following this, the government enacted the *Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019*, aiming to protect the rights of transgender individuals. However, "the Act has faced criticism for several reasons. Notably, it requires

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transgender persons to obtain a certificate of identity from a District Magistrate, a process that some argue undermines the principle of self-identification upheld by the Supreme Court.” Additionally, the Act lacks provisions for reservations in education and employment, and it prescribes lighter penalties for offenses against transgender individuals compared to those against cisgender individuals.” According to the 2011 Census, “there are approximately 4.88 lakh transgender individuals in India.” Despite legal recognition, many continue to face discrimination in various aspects of life, including employment, education, and healthcare. “Reports indicate that a significant percentage of transgender persons are denied employment opportunities, forcing many into marginalized professions. According to the NHRC 2018 report, over 90% face employment exclusion, and many are denied basic healthcare and education. ” This paper aims to critically analyze the constitutional and legal developments concerning transgender rights in India post the NALSA judgment and the enactment of the 2019 Act. It seeks to explore the gaps between legal recognition and the lived realities of transgender individuals, highlighting the need for more inclusive policies and societal acceptance to ensure true equality and dignity for all.

Legal and Constitutional Recognition of Transgender Rights in India

Since India’s independence in 1947, transgender individuals have largely been excluded from the legal and social frameworks of the country. The absence of legal recognition meant that transgender persons were often denied access to essential services and opportunities. Historically, the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 had classified certain transgender groups, particularly hijras, as criminal tribes. Although repealed in 1952, this criminalization left transgender persons without formal

legal recognition. The NALSA judgment(2014) marked a significant shift by legally recognizing transgender individuals as the ‘third gender’ and affirming their fundamental rights under the Indian Constitution. The NALSA judgment was a landmark decision by the Supreme Court of India that recognized transgender individuals as a ‘third gender.’ “The Court held that gender identity is integral to an individual’s dignity and is protected under the right to life and personal liberty guaranteed by Article 21 of the Constitution.” “It directed the government to take affirmative action to ensure the social, economic, and political inclusion of transgender individuals, including the provision of legal recognition of their gender identity, affirmative action in education and employment, and protection from discrimination and violence.” In response to the NALSA judgment, the Government of India passed the *Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019*, which aimed to provide a comprehensive legal framework for the protection and promotion of the rights of transgender persons. The Act defines a transgender person as one whose gender does not align with the gender assigned at birth. “The Act establishes a process through which transgender persons can apply for a certificate of identity, which legally acknowledges their gender identity. However, the process includes the formation of a district-level screening committee, a provision that has been critiqued as undermining self-identification. The Act establishes penalties for offenses such as physical abuse, sexual violence, and discrimination against transgender persons.” However, “The Act’s requirement for transgender persons to undergo a district-level screening process to obtain a certificate of identity has been deemed a violation of the right to self-identify. Activists argue that this process is invasive and stigmatizing, contradicting the NALSA decision that upheld self-identification.” Moreover, the lack of concrete legal provisions for addressing

harassment, bullying, and discrimination, particularly in rural areas, has led to concerns about the practical impact of the Act.

Case Study Example: The Experience of Transgender Persons in Education and Employment

Analysis Post NALSA and the 2019 Act

A study by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on the status of transgender persons in India highlights the challenges faced by transgender individuals in accessing education and employment. The lack of legal recognition and societal acceptance has led to high rates of school dropouts and unemployment among transgender persons. One example is “the case of *Madhuri*, a transgender woman from Delhi, who faced discrimination in her educational institution and was unable to pursue a career due to societal and institutional barriers. After the enactment of the 2019 Act, Madhuri applied for a transgender certificate, which was essential for accessing government schemes.” Despite the legal framework, Madhuri reported that she faced further discrimination during the process, including intrusive questioning about her gender identity, highlighting the ongoing challenges of implementing the Act effectively.

Analysis Post NALSA and the 2019 Act

Post-NALSA and the 2019 Act: Societal, Governmental, and People’s Changes in India

Following the NALSA verdict, transgender persons gained legal recognition as a third gender, marking a monumental shift in societal perspectives toward them. According to a research article by *Chakrapani*, “the NALSA ruling allowed transgender individuals to access legal identification and government schemes that were previously inaccessible.” However, societal acceptance of transgender persons has been a slow and complex

process. The presence of transgender individuals in the media has increased post-NALSA. “Transgender actors like *Shree Ghatak*, who appeared in the *Kahaani* (2012) film, and *Laxmi Narayan Tripathi*, a well-known activist, have contributed to changing public perception.” Despite this, transgender persons continue to face social ostracism, especially in rural areas where deeply rooted stereotypes persist. The *Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019* further nudged social changes by prohibiting discrimination in education, employment, and healthcare. However, news reports such as one from “*The Hindu*” have highlighted that transgender persons still face violence, harassment, and discrimination in educational institutions and workplaces despite legal protections.” Furthermore, the enactment of the 2019 Act has prompted social organizations and NGOs to establish programs that focus on the economic and social empowerment of transgender individuals.” Initiatives such as *Anjali Gopalan’s Naz Foundation* (an NGO) continue to work on policy advocacy and support systems for the community.”

Changes in Government Policies

The Indian government’s approach toward transgender rights has evolved significantly since the NALSA judgment. As per the report from the *Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment* (2020), the 2019 Act has led to increased recognition of the transgender community in government databases, with specific provisions made for the issuance of identity certificates, essential for accessing welfare schemes. In the *Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019*, the government explicitly prohibited discrimination in employment, healthcare, education, and public spaces. A 2019 article from *The Times of India* pointed out that several state governments had begun implementing state-level welfare programs aimed at providing financial assistance, educational scholarships,

and healthcare benefits to transgender individuals.

Conclusion

India's legal journey toward affirming transgender rights has witnessed landmark developments, particularly with the Supreme Court's progressive stance in the *NALSA vs. Union of India* (2014) judgment and the subsequent enactment of the *Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019*. While these legal instruments represent significant progress in constitutionally recognizing the identity and rights of transgender individuals, the implementation has been inconsistent and often fails to bridge the gap between legal promises and lived experiences. The *NALSA* judgment boldly upheld the right to self-identification and underscored the constitutional guarantees of equality, freedom, and dignity. It laid the foundation for inclusive policy reforms and societal transformation. However, the 2019 Act, though intended as a legislative response to *NALSA*, introduced procedural hurdles—such as the requirement for a certification process—that effectively diluted the right to self-identify. Additionally, the Act remains silent on critical issues such as marriage, adoption, inheritance, and affirmative action, thereby excluding transgender persons from full citizenship and civil rights. Societal acceptance continues to lag behind legal recognition. Transgender individuals still face systemic discrimination in education, employment, and healthcare, as reflected in national reports and case studies. Despite efforts by activists, NGOs, and some progressive government policies, stigma and exclusion persist, especially in rural and conservative areas. Therefore, while the constitutional and legal framework has laid a foundation for recognizing transgender rights, India must now focus on meaningful reforms. This includes amending the 2019 Act to align with the principle of self-identification, ensuring comprehensive

rights and protections, and fostering widespread societal awareness and inclusion. True equality will only be achieved when legal recognition is accompanied by social acceptance, institutional accountability, and empathetic governance that prioritizes the dignity and humanity of every transgender person.

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20.

Problems of Transgender in India From Social Exclusion to Social Inclusion

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Introduction

The transgender community in India, historically known by various cultural identities such as Hijras, Kinnars, Aravanis, Jogtas, and Shiv-Shaktis, has existed within Indian society for centuries, often occupying a paradoxical position of religious reverence and social ostracism (Michelraj, 2015). Despite their rich historical presence and cultural significance, transgender individuals in contemporary India face pervasive discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion from mainstream society (Chakrapani et al., 2017). While recent legal developments have acknowledged their rights and identities, the lived experiences of transgender persons remain characterized by significant hardships and barriers to full social participation.

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The term 'transgender' encompasses individuals whose gender identity differs from the sex assigned at birth, including those who identify as transmen, transwomen, gender non-conforming, and other non-binary identities (Singh et al., 2014). In the Indian context, the diversity within the transgender community reflects complex intersections of gender identity, socioeconomic status, caste, religion, and regional cultural practices (Dutta, 2014).

Social exclusion of transgender individuals in India manifests across multiple dimensions, including limited access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities, housing, and legal recognition (UNDP, 2017). This exclusion often begins early in life with family rejection and school dropout, creating a cycle of vulnerability that persists into adulthood (Kalra, 2012). The consequences of such exclusion are reflected in alarming statistics regarding the community's health outcomes, economic status, and experiences of violence and discrimination.

While significant strides have been made in the legal recognition of transgender rights, particularly through the Supreme Court's landmark NALSA judgment in 2014 and the subsequent enactment of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act in 2019, substantial gaps remain between legislative promises and ground realities (Bajoria, 2019). The journey from legal recognition to meaningful social inclusion requires addressing deep-seated stigma, institutional barriers, and societal attitudes that perpetuate exclusion.

This research paper aims to comprehensively analyze the problems faced by transgender individuals in India, tracing their experiences of social exclusion while identifying pathways toward inclusion. Through a systematic review of secondary data from various sources,

including government reports, NGO studies, academic research, and demographic surveys, this paper seeks to:

1. Examine the historical and contemporary factors contributing to the social exclusion of transgender individuals in India
2. Assess the impact of recent legislative and policy developments on the lived experiences of the transgender community
3. Identify persistent barriers to inclusion across key domains such as education, healthcare, employment, and social security

Historical Context and Legal Framework

Historical Position of Transgender Persons in Indian Society

1. **Ancient and Medieval Recognition:** References to gender non-conforming individuals can be found in ancient texts like the Kama Sutra, Mahabharata, and Ramayana, where “tritiya-prakriti” (third nature) individuals were acknowledged (Nanda, 1999). During the Mughal era, transgender individuals often held respected positions as guardians of harems and sometimes served as political advisors (Reddy, 2005).
2. **Colonial Impact:** The status of transgender individuals deteriorated significantly during British colonial rule, particularly with the implementation of the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, which categorized Hijras as “habitual criminals” (Hinchy, 2019). This criminalization represented a substantial shift from pre-colonial approaches and deeply impacted societal attitudes.

Contemporary Legal Developments

1. **NALSA Judgment (2014):** The Supreme Court’s landmark judgment in National Legal Services

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Authority vs. Union of India recognized transgender individuals as a “third gender,” affirming their fundamental rights under the Constitution. The Court directed central and state governments to recognize transgender identities, develop social welfare schemes, and address discrimination in healthcare, education, and employment (Supreme Court of India, 2014).

2. Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act (2019): This legislation aimed to protect transgender rights by prohibiting discrimination, recognizing identity, and providing for welfare measures. However, it has been criticized for several problematic provisions:

- ✓ Requiring medical certification for identity recognition
- ✓ Inadequate penalties for crimes against transgender persons
- ✓ Lack of provisions for reservations in education and employment
- ✓ Absence of measures addressing family violence (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2019)

3. Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules (2020): These rules provided guidelines for implementing the 2019 Act, including procedures for identity certification, welfare schemes, and anti-discrimination measures (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2020).

Implementation Challenges

Despite progressive judicial pronouncements and legislative efforts, significant gaps exist between legal promises and implementation:

- 1. Identity Recognition:** While the NALSA judgment affirmed the right to self-identify

gender, many transgender individuals continue to face bureaucratic hurdles in obtaining identity documents. A survey by the National Human Rights Commission (2018) found that only 2% of transgender respondents had been able to obtain identity documents reflecting their preferred gender.

- 2. Judicial Activism vs. Administrative Inertia:** While courts have been proactive in recognizing transgender rights, administrative bodies have shown reluctance or inability to implement court directives effectively. Many states have yet to constitute transgender welfare boards or allocate budget for transgender-specific schemes as directed by the Supreme Court (Lawyers Collective, 2020).

Methodology

This study employs a comprehensive secondary research methodology to analyze the problems faced by transgender individuals in India and explore pathways from social exclusion to inclusion. The choice of secondary research is appropriate given the extensive existing literature on transgender issues in India, which spans governmental reports, NGO studies, academic research, and demographic surveys.

Data Sources

The research draws on multiple secondary data sources to ensure comprehensive coverage and triangulation of findings:

- 1. Government Reports and Statistics:**

- ✓ Census data (though limited in transgender enumeration)
- ✓ National Human Rights Commission studies
- ✓ Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment reports

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- ✓ Legal documents including court judgments and legislative texts

2. Academic Research:

- ✓ Peer-reviewed journal articles from disciplines including sociology, public health, gender studies, and law
- ✓ Published books and monographs on transgender issues in India
- ✓ Conference proceedings and academic dissertations

3. NGO and International Organization Reports:

- ✓ Studies conducted by organizations working with transgender communities
- ✓ UNDP, WHO, and UNAIDS reports on transgender health and rights
- ✓ Documentation by community-based organizations and advocacy groups

4. Media Reports and Testimonials:

- ✓ News articles documenting issues affecting transgender individuals
- ✓ Published testimonials and narratives of transgender persons

Data Analysis Approach

The analysis follows a thematic approach, identifying patterns and trends across the literature while paying attention to:

1. **Historical Context:** Evolution of transgender identities and their position in Indian society
2. **Contemporary Challenges:** Current manifestations of exclusion across various domains
3. **Policy Analysis:** Evaluation of legislative measures and their implementation

Dimensions of Social Exclusion

Family and Social Relationships

The exclusion of transgender individuals often begins within the family unit, creating foundational challenges that impact all other aspects of life:

1. **Family Rejection:** Research indicates that 79% of transgender individuals face varying degrees of rejection from their families upon gender disclosure (NHRC, 2018). This rejection frequently manifests as:
 - ✓ Forced psychiatric consultations and “conversion” attempts
 - ✓ Restrictions on expression and movement
 - ✓ Physical and emotional abuse
 - ✓ Expulsion from the family home
2. **Early Life Disruption:** Family rejection often leads to premature departure from homes and disruption of education, with data indicating that 58% of transgender individuals leave home before the age of 18 (UNDP, 2017). This early displacement creates cascading vulnerabilities including homelessness, economic insecurity, and susceptibility to exploitation.

Educational Exclusion

Limited access to education represents a critical dimension of transgender exclusion in India:

1. **School Dropout Rates:** Studies consistently show alarmingly high dropout rates among transgender students, with data indicating that approximately 60% leave school before completing secondary education (UNDP, 2017). Primary factors contributing to this include:
 - ✓ Bullying and harassment by peers and

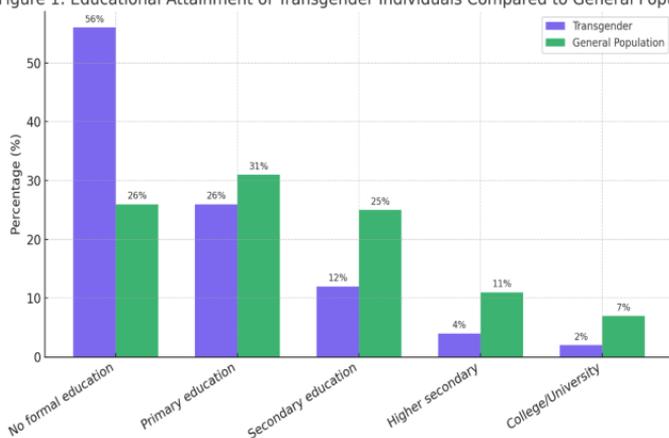
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sometimes teachers

- ✓ Lack of recognition of gender identity
- ✓ Inappropriate infrastructure (e.g., lack of gender-neutral toilets)
- ✓ Discriminatory treatment in classrooms and activities

2. Educational Attainment: The educational profile of transgender individuals reflects systematic exclusion, as illustrated in Figure 1

Figure 1: Educational Attainment of Transgender Individuals Compared to General Population



Educational Attainment of Transgender Individuals Compared to General Population *Source: Census 2011 and NHRC Study (2018)*

The graph shows that transgender individuals have much lower educational attainment compared to the general population.

- ❖ 56% of transgender people have no formal education, while it's only 26% in the general population.
- ❖ Only 2% of transgender individuals reach college or university, compared to 7% of the general population. This highlights the lack of equal educational opportunities for the transgender community.

3. Institutional Barriers: Even when transgender individuals pursue education, they face institutional

barriers including:

- ✓ Difficulties in updating academic records after gender transition
- ✓ Limited access to scholarships and educational support schemes
- ✓ Absence of transgender-inclusive curricula and teaching methods
- ✓ Lack of sensitized faculty and administration (National Council of Educational Research and Training, 2019)

Economic Exclusion and Employment Challenges

Economic marginalization represents one of the most significant dimensions of transgender exclusion:

1. Labor Market Exclusion: The formal labor market remains largely inaccessible to transgender individuals, with studies indicating that less than 6% have access to formal employment (UNDP, 2017). This exclusion stems from:

- ✓ Educational disadvantages
- ✓ Discrimination in hiring processes
- ✓ Lack of trans-inclusive workplace policies
- ✓ Absence of gender-affirming infrastructure in workplaces

2. Occupational Segregation: Due to systematic exclusion from formal employment, many transgender individuals are forced into a narrow range of traditional and often precarious livelihood options:

Occupation	Percentage Engaged	Average Monthly Income (INR)
Begging	53%	3,000-5,000
Sex Work	31%	5,000-10,000
Ritual Performance (Badhai)	18%	2,000-4,000

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Entertainment/ Performance	10%	3,000-8,000
Small Business/Self- employed	7%	5,000-12,000
Formal Employment	6%	15,000-25,000

Source: Compiled from UNDP (2017) and NHRC (2018) data

- 3. Economic Vulnerability:** The concentration in informal and stigmatized occupations results in significant economic vulnerability, with 87% of transgender individuals living below the poverty line (NHRC, 2018). This economic marginalization intersects with other forms of exclusion to create cycles of deprivation.

Healthcare Barriers

Access to quality healthcare remains a significant challenge for transgender individuals in India:

- 1. Discriminatory Healthcare Services:** Studies indicate that 52% of transgender individuals report experiencing discrimination in healthcare settings, including:
- ✓ Outright denial of service
 - ✓ Derogatory treatment by healthcare providers
 - ✓ Inappropriate questioning or exoticization
 - ✓ Lack of privacy and confidentiality (Chakrapani et al., 2019)
- 2. Gender-Affirming Healthcare:** Access to gender-affirming procedures and treatments is severely limited, with challenges including:
- ✓ Prohibitive costs and minimal insurance coverage
 - ✓ Limited availability of trained healthcare providers
 - ✓ Lack of standardized protocols for gender-

affirming procedures

- ✓ Pathologization of transgender identities in medical contexts

3. Mental Health Burden: The cumulative impact of discrimination, violence, and exclusion creates significant mental health challenges, with studies indicating that 62% of transgender individuals report symptoms of depression and 53% have contemplated suicide (NHRC, 2018).

Housing and Public Space Exclusion

Secure housing and access to public spaces represent additional dimensions of exclusion:

1. Housing Discrimination: Studies indicate that 43% of transgender individuals face discrimination in housing markets, leading to:

- ✓ Difficulty in renting accommodation
- ✓ Exploitative rental arrangements
- ✓ Confinement to specific marginalized neighbourhoods
- ✓ Housing insecurity and periods of homelessness (UNDP, 2017)

2. Limited Access to Public Spaces: Many transgender individuals face restrictions in accessing and navigating public spaces, with 68% reporting experiences of harassment in public transportation and 73% expressing discomfort in using public toilets (NHRC, 2018).

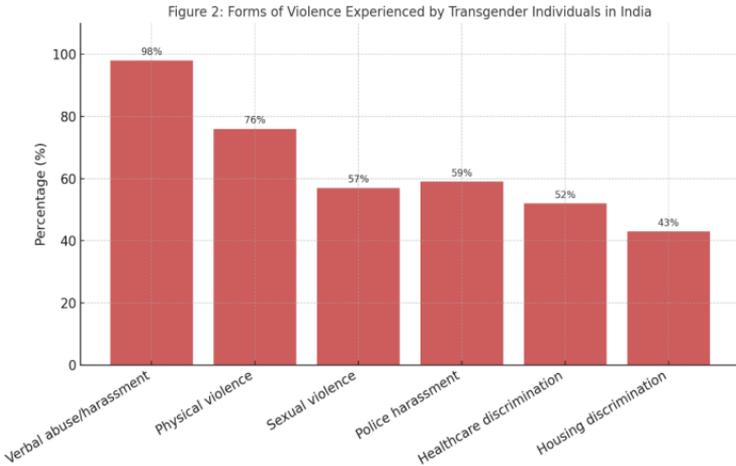
Violence and Human Rights Violations

Patterns of Violence

Transgender individuals in India face alarming levels of violence, often with impunity for perpetrators:

- 1. Physical Violence:** Studies document widespread experiences of physical violence, with 76% of transgender respondents reporting experiences of physical assault (NHRC, 2018). This violence includes:
 - ✓ Assault by family members
 - ✓ Violence by police and law enforcement
 - ✓ Attacks by the general public
 - ✓ Targeted violence by organized groups
- 2. Sexual Violence:** Sexual violence against transgender individuals remains significantly underreported, yet studies suggest approximately 57% have experienced sexual assault or rape (UNDP, 2017). Factors contributing to vulnerability include:
 - ✓ Engagement in survival sex work
 - ✓ Homelessness and lack of safe spaces
 - ✓ Police harassment and impunity for perpetrators
 - ✓ Social stigma preventing reporting
- 3. Psychological Violence:** Beyond physical and sexual violence, transgender individuals experience pervasive psychological violence through:
 - ✓ Verbal abuse and harassment (reported by 98% of respondents)
 - ✓ Deliberate misgendering and deadnaming
 - ✓ Public humiliation and ridicule
 - ✓ Social exclusion and ostracism (NHRC, 2018)

Figure 2 illustrates the prevalence of different forms of violence experienced by transgender individuals in India:



Forms of Violence Experienced by Transgender Individuals in India Source: NHRC Study (2018)

The chart shows the different types of violence faced by transgender individuals in India.

- ❖ **Verbal abuse** is the most common, experienced by 98%.
- ❖ **Physical violence (76%)**, **sexual violence (57%)**, and **police harassment (59%)** are also widely reported.
- ❖ Many also face **discrimination in healthcare (52%)** and **housing (43%)**. This highlights the severe and widespread mistreatment of the transgender community in multiple areas of life.

Institutional Violence

Particularly concerning is the prevalence of violence perpetrated by institutions meant to provide protection:

1. **Police Harassment:** Law enforcement agencies frequently emerge as primary perpetrators of violence, with 59% of transgender individuals reporting experiences of police harassment, including:

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- ✓ Arbitrary detention
- ✓ Physical and sexual assault in custody
- ✓ Extortion and bribery
- ✓ False charges under various pretexts (NHRC, 2018)

2. Healthcare Violence: Violations within healthcare settings represent another form of institutional violence, including:

- ✓ Forced psychiatric treatments
- ✓ Unethical physical examinations
- ✓ Denial of emergency care
- ✓ Violations of confidentiality (Chakrapani et al., 2019)

3. Educational Institutions: Violence within educational settings contributes significantly to school dropout rates, with 84% of transgender individuals reporting experiences of bullying and harassment in schools (UNDP, 2017).

Case Studies of Successful Inclusion Models

India presents several pioneering models of transgender inclusion that illustrate diverse strategies across policy, education, corporate, and community domains. The Tamil Nadu Model stands out as one of the country's most comprehensive state-led initiatives. Through the establishment of the Transgender Welfare Board in 2008, the state institutionalised inclusion measures such as simplified identity card issuance, educational reservations, housing schemes, skill development programs, and free gender-affirming surgeries in public hospitals. The initiative has significantly improved access to education and healthcare, with progressive outcomes in enrollment and service utilisation. However, disparities persist across districts, and the benefits remain concentrated among urban transgender women,

with limited outreach to transgender men and non-binary individuals.

The Sahaj Inclusive School Model in Kerala represents an innovative approach to educational reintegration. Established in 2016, it provides residential academic and vocational education for transgender individuals who had dropped out of formal schooling. The model emphasizes transgender participation in administration, integrates psychosocial support, and ensures pathways to employment or higher education upon completion. With high completion and employment rates, as well as improved mental health outcomes, this model has been replicated in other regions, demonstrating its sustainability and adaptability.

The Kochi Metro Inclusion Initiative exemplifies successful corporate participation in advancing transgender inclusion. Launched in 2017, the program provided formal employment opportunities to transgender individuals, combined with workplace sensitisation and community engagement through NGO partnerships. Despite initial hurdles such as housing discrimination and workplace adjustment challenges, the inclusion of housing support, mentoring systems, and flexible adaptation measures contributed to sustainable employment and enhanced public perception. The initiative has since served as a reference model for other employers.

Together, these case studies demonstrate that effective transgender inclusion is achieved through participatory planning, institutional backing, and integrative approaches that address education, employment, health, and identity. They highlight the transformative impact of combining government commitment, corporate collaboration, and community leadership in advancing social equity for transgender populations in India.

Discussion

Policy–Practice Gaps

Despite progressive policies, major gaps persist due to unclear implementation guidelines, limited training of officials, poor inter-departmental coordination, and weak grievance systems. Many programs face inadequate budgets, insufficient human resources, and lack long-term planning. Weak monitoring systems without transgender-specific data further hinder evaluation.

Intersectionality and Diversity

Most interventions focus on transgender women (especially hijra communities), while transgender men, non-binary, and intersex people remain underrepresented. Discrimination intensifies with overlapping identities such as caste, religion, rural location, or disability. State-level disparities in legal enforcement, political will, and community infrastructure further widen inequality.

Scaling and Sustainability

Successful pilot projects often fail to scale up due to limited documentation, resource constraints, and dependence on individual champions. Long-term sustainability is threatened by donor dependency, weak institutionalisation, and political shifts. Balancing transgender-specific services with mainstream inclusion remains a central challenge.

Emerging Opportunities

Digital platforms can enhance access to identity documentation, education, tele-health, and networks. Expanding corporate diversity initiatives create new employment and CSR opportunities. Global advocacy networks strengthen knowledge sharing and funding access, while youth leadership offers innovative, intersectional, and digitally informed approaches.

Conclusion

This research has examined the multifaceted challenges facing transgender individuals in India, tracing their journey from historical marginalization and contemporary exclusion toward potential pathways for meaningful inclusion. The analysis reveals both persistent barriers and emerging opportunities across key domains including legal recognition, education, healthcare, economic participation, and social acceptance.

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Transgender Visibility in the Digital Age A New Era of Empowerment and Expression

Dr. Shilpi*

Introduction

The digital age has transformed many marginalized communities, including the transgender population to express themselves, build identities, and engage in advocacy. Historically, transgender individuals have faced widespread invisibility or harmful misrepresentation in mainstream media. Mainstream sequence of events often portrayed them in stereotypical or exaggerated ways, limiting the depth and diversity of their experiences. However, with the rise of social media and digital platforms, this dynamic is shifting. Social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter have become vital spaces for transgender people to share their personal

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stories, engage with supportive communities, and challenge societal norms around gender. These creators have not only increased visibility for transgender people but have also developed inclusive spaces where followers can connect with and learn from their experiences. Through their work, trans creators are humanizing what it means to be transgender, offering diverse perspectives and contributing to a broader understanding of gender beyond binary norms.

These platforms offer transgender individuals the opportunity to define themselves on their own terms, avoiding traditional media filters. Social media has empowered transgender people to showcase their narratives, whether it's documenting their transition, discussing mental health struggles, advocating for rights, or simply sharing everyday experiences. This visibility has not only allowed transgender people to feel seen and heard, but it has also ignited a wider conversation about gender diversity, challenging long-held misconceptions and stereotypes.

Despite the significant benefits, the digital space is not without its challenges. The visibility of transgender individuals online also exposes them to risks such as harassment, trolling, and transphobia. However, social media remains an essential tool for empowerment, education, and connection, fostering a sense of community that is often absent in offline spaces. The progressing role of digital platforms in shaping transgender visibility marks a significant turning point in how society understands and relates to gender identity.

Movements like **#TransIsBeautiful** have played a crucial role in acknowledging transgender people's self-worth and challenging societal beauty standards. By using the hashtag, individuals from all over the world have participated in celebrating their authenticated

identities, promoting body positivity, and resisting the pressure to conform to conventional ideals of beauty. These empowering campaigns extend beyond self-expression to advocate for broader societal change, demanding more inclusivity and respect for transgender people's rights and dignity. In addition, hashtags like **#TransRightsAreHumanRights** have rallied communities online, bringing attention to legal and social challenges faced by transgender individuals globally. Social media, therefore, is not only a platform for visibility but a space for active advocacy, creating harmony and demanding the inclusion of transgender voices in public and political conversations. Through these movements, social media has become an essential catalyst in the fight for transgender rights and representation.

The Historical Absence of Transgender Voices in Media

For much of the 20th century, transgender individuals were either completely absent from mass media or depicted through the lens of pathology, unconventionality, or moral panic. This silence was not coincidental, it reduced from deeply embedded transphobia in both societal norms and media institutions. The lack of visible transgender figures in newspapers, television, or film reflected the exclusion of trans people from legal protections, healthcare systems, and public life. Before the emergence of independent social media platform, their images were Stereotyped and Sensational. When trans people were featured in mainstream media, it was rarely in a respectful or authentic light. Early television programs and films often cast transgender characters in roles that emphasized fraud, criminality, or instability. In *Psycho* (1960) and *Dressed to Kill* (1980), transgender individuals were linked to violence and mental illness. Talk shows in the 1980s and 1990s, such as *The Jerry Springer Show*, frequently used trans

guests for shock value and entertainment rather than education or empathy. These representations reinforced public mistrust and fear, contributing to widespread misunderstanding and stigma. The transgender person was not depicted as a complex human being but rather as a curiosity or threat. Beyond on-screen representation, transgender individuals were also denied roles behind the camera, in writers' rooms, and in editorial positions. The control of narrative was almost exclusively in the hands of cisgender creators who lacked lived experience or understanding. Capuzza and Spencer (2017), for example, examined how journalism contributed to the dehumanization of trans people by misgendering them and focusing solely on their transition. Julia Serano, in her seminal work *Whipping Girl* (2007), critiqued how trans women are objectified or criticized in popular culture, often viewed through the lens of the "deceptive transsexual" stereotype.

Emergence of visibility of Transgender in New independent digital era

The late 1990s and early 2000s marked a shift with the emergence of independent unconventional media. Publications like *Transgender Tapestry*, *Out*, and *The Advocate* began to feature more distinction and acknowledging representations. Yet these platforms often had limited reach compared to mainstream outlets. The explosion of digital media radically changed this dynamic. With platforms like YouTube, Tumblr, and Twitter, transgender individuals began to bypass traditional gatekeepers and tell their stories on their own terms. Creators like Jazz Jennings, Gigi Gorgeous, and Kat Blaque brought trans perspectives to millions of followers, contributing to visibility and cultural change. This grassroots media presence allowed for the discussion of real issues such as healthcare access, violence, and intersectionality and for celebration of joy, strength, and

community.

With the increase in the visibility of transgender in media and social media platform, transgender characters started to appear in more authentic and complex portrayals in film and television. Prior to the rise of the internet, transgender people were largely excluded from mainstream media and public communication, often facing systemic invisibility or harmful stereotyping. However, the digital era, especially from the late 1990- 2000, initiated new pathways for self-expression, community-building, and activism. Shows like *Pose*, *Transparent*, and *Euphoria* have featured trans actors in leading roles and involved trans consultants or writers in production, an important alteration toward representation with integrity. Blogging platforms like LiveJournal, Blogspot, and later WordPress became central to the rise of the “trans blogosphere.” Trans people began documenting their transition journeys, discussing societal issues, and challenging dominant narratives. These blogs were crucial in humanizing trans lives and offering personal insights beyond clinical or sensationalist portrayals in traditional media.

The hashtag **#TransIsBeautiful**, platform like **TikTok and Reddit**, trans creators share information on gender dysphoria, transitioning, legal rights, and mental health. These platforms also allow for identity exploration, especially among youth, through low-risk engagement with pronouns, names, and gender expression. Campaigns and mass movements such as **#ProtectTransKids**, **#TransRightsAreHumanRights**, and petitions against anti-trans legislation have accelerated through the power of online mobilization. These platforms also foster alliances with LGBTQIA+ and cisgender identity, broadening support for policy and cultural change.

The Role of Online Forums in Fostering Community and Support for Transgender Youth

Online platforms have become crucial lifelines for transgender youth, offering them safe spaces to explore their identity, find community, and receive support in ways that may not be available in their offline environments. For many young transgender individuals, the anonymity and reach of platforms like Reddit, TikTok, and Instagram provide an opportunity to connect with others who share similar experiences, challenges, and triumphs. These spaces have become vital for young people seeking to navigate their gender identity, especially in regions or communities where resources and acceptance are limited.

Reddit, for example, hosts numerous subreddits dedicated to trans issues, such as r/Transgender and r/asktransgender, where users can ask questions, share personal stories, and receive advice from peers. These forums often serve as emotional support networks where individuals can discuss their gender journey without fear of judgment. Similarly, **TikTok** has emerged as a platform where young trans creators share their experiences through short videos, providing a sense of camaraderie and solidarity. The viral nature of TikTok also amplifies these voices, allowing users to reach broader audiences, educate others, and foster acceptance within wider society. **Instagram**, with its visual and creative focus, has also become a space where transgender youth can express their gender identity through photos, captions, and artwork creating a sense of pride and declaration. By following trans creators and influencers, youth can learn about different aspects of gender expression and self-care, while gaining exposure to positive role models who advocate for self-acceptance.

Peer support is a central feature of these online communities, offering transgender youth a sense

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of belonging that may be missing in their immediate physical surroundings. These digital spaces not only facilitate identity exploration but also provide emotional support, validation, and the opportunity to learn from others' experiences, all of which contribute to their overall well-being and self-confidence.

The Power of Hashtags: Online Campaigns and the Evolution of Transgender Advocacy

The digital age has revolutionized how trans rights movements organize and advocate for change. Social media platforms have become powerful tools for raising awareness, mobilizing supporters, and amplifying the voices of transgender individuals. Activists now use platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok to rally support, challenge discriminatory policies, and engage with a global audience. This online mobilization has been especially vital in times of crisis or legislative attacks on transgender rights, providing a fast and far-reaching response mechanism.

Viral campaigns such as **#ProtectTransKids** have demonstrated the impact of digital activism. Launched in response to anti-trans legislation targeting youth, this hashtag became a rallying cry for thousands advocating for the safety, dignity, and inclusion of transgender children in schools and healthcare. These campaigns raise public awareness, pressure lawmakers, and serve as a powerful form of resistance against political and social marginalization. By using hashtags and storytelling, transgender individuals and their allies personalize complex policy issues and make them relevant to wider audiences.

Some popular campaigns in India such as **#377QuitIndia**, **#FreeTheRoads** **#TransThriveVoices** etc campaigns addressed discrimination against the transgender community, urging for inclusivity and

equal rights. **Trinetra Haldar Gummaraju**, as one of India's first transgender doctors, has utilized platforms like YouTube and Instagram to document and advocate her journey for medical education, legal and social transitions and combat conversion therapy. Her efforts have influenced legal reforms and increased visibility for transgender issues. Similarly, another renowned figure, **Patruni Sastry** has addressed transphobia in media, organized events like Hyderabad's first BI/PAN fest, and used performances to educate the public on LGBTQIA+ issues. Their digital presence has been instrumental in challenging stereotypes and promoting inclusivity. Some famous Indian transgenders breaking social barrier and building their position in society are **Laxmi Narayan Tripathi** (well-known gender right activist and has represented Asia Pacific in the UN), **Naaz Joshi** (the first Indian transgender to win an international beauty pageant, Miss World Diversity), **Kalki Subramaniam** (social worker, artist, actress, writer, and motivational speaker and founder of Sahodari Foundation), **Sathyasri Sharmila** (India's first transgender lawyer), **Aishwarya Rutuparna Pradhan** (India's first openly transgender civil servant and IAS officer), **Manabi Bandopadhyay** (first transgender college principal of Krishnagar Women's College) and many more empowered the transgender community by advocating their stories.

Role of allies in advocacy of transgender community

Allies are the people who are cisgender or heterosexual and stand up for transgender rights and inclusion without being trans themselves. Allies play a pivotal role in supporting transgender advocacy within India's digital landscape. By manipulating their platforms, allies can expand transgender voices, challenge misinformation, and promote inclusive stories. Such collaborative efforts not only enhance the visibility of transgender issues but also foster a

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broader partnership for systemic change. For instance, campaigns like #377QuitIndia were helpful in mobilizing public support against Section 377, leading to acceptance of demand for equal rights and the decriminalization of same-sex relationships. Organizations such as Orinam and Good have long championed LGBTQ+ rights, providing resources and platforms for both community members and allies. Furthermore, individuals like Kalki Subramaniam and others have utilized digital media to advocate for transgender rights, inspiring many allies to join the cause.

Together, allies and transgender advocates show that strength comes from unity in diversity. When they stand side by side against transphobia and lift each other's voices, online spaces turn into places of support and empowerment. This teamwork helps spread the movement farther and gives the fight for transgender rights more credibility. By working together, they make sure everyone's story is heard and respected, paving the way for a fairer society for all.

Risks and Challenges of Online Visibility: Harassment and Safety Concerns for Transgender Individuals

Transphobia and Hate Speech on social media: While social media has opened doors for visibility and support, it has also exposed transgender individuals to significant risks, including widespread transphobia and hate speech. Online platforms often showcase societal prejudices, and transgender users are frequently subjected to derogatory comments, misgendering, and dehumanizing language. Public posts, especially those that gain visibility, tend to attract trolls and hate groups intent on spreading misinformation and hostility. These attacks can escalate quickly and become relentless, particularly during discussions around gender rights or

when trans creators gain attention.

Impact of Online Trolling on Trans Mental Health: The psychological toll of consistent harassment online can be severe. Transgender individuals already face elevated risks of depression, anxiety, and suicide, and the additional burden of online trolling further exacerbates these challenges. For many, social media is a space for connection and self-expression, but the presence of hostility can turn these platforms into sources of stress and trauma. Constant exposure to withdrawal, threats, or hate speech can erode self-esteem, increase feelings of isolation, and prevent users from participating in online communities that once felt safe and acknowledging.

Platform Accountability and Moderation Challenges: Despite these dangers, many social media platforms struggle to provide adequate protection for transgender users. Content moderation policies often lag, allowing harmful content to remain visible while sometimes censoring or removing trans-positive posts due to algorithmic bias or poor contextual understanding. Reports of harassment may go unanswered, and harmful users frequently avoid consequences. This lack of accountability fosters an unsafe digital environment and highlights the urgent need for more vigorous, inclusive moderation systems. Platforms must invest in training, clearer policies, and improved reporting tools to protect marginalized voices and ensure that transgender individuals can participate in digital spaces without fear of abuse.

Apart from facing these challenges, transgender community needs policies and strategies to mitigate the risk of digital platform and protecting them from harassment and trolling. Beyond the challenges of online harassment and safety risks, the transgender community requires comprehensive support within digital spaces

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to foster well-being, resilience, and empowerment. Addressing these needs is crucial for creating inclusive and affirming online environments. **Some strategies to mitigate the risk are:**

- ❖ **Enhanced Platform Policies:** Advocating for stricter content moderation and reporting mechanisms to swiftly address harassment.
- ❖ **Digital Literacy and Safety Education:** Providing resources to help transgender individuals protect their online presence, including the use of pseudonyms and secure communication channels.
- ❖ **Community Support Networks:** Establishing online and offline spaces where transgender individuals can share experiences and offer mutual support.
- ❖ **Legal Protections:** Advocating for laws that penalize online harassment and protect individuals from digital abuse.
- ❖ **Establishing Peer Support Networks:** Creating and promoting online platforms where transgender individuals can connect with peers offers emotional support and shared experiences. These networks can serve as safe spaces for individuals to discuss challenges, share resources, and build a sense of community.
- ❖ **Implementing Robust Digital Literacy Programs:** Educational initiatives focused on digital literacy can empower transgender individuals to navigate online spaces safely. Programs should cover topics such as recognizing and reporting online harassment, understanding privacy settings, and identifying trustworthy sources of information.

By implementing these strategies, digital platforms can become more inclusive and supportive spaces for transgender individuals, promoting their safety,

empowerment, and well-being.

Conclusion

In today's digital world, the internet offers transgender individuals' valuable opportunities to connect, express themselves, and find support. However, these benefits come with challenges like online harassment, privacy concerns, and misrepresentation. To create safer and more supportive online spaces, it's essential to implement strategies that address these issues. This includes improving platform policies to protect against discrimination, providing digital safety education, promoting positive representation, and supporting online communities that offer affirming spaces. Platforms, communities, and allies working together that can help to ensure internet as a place where transgender individuals can thrive, feel safe, and be themselves.

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In a world that celebrates diversity, the transgender community stands as a powerful symbol of resilience and authenticity. Understanding the Transgender Community is more than a book—it is a bridge between ignorance and empathy, silence and dialogue, marginalization and dignity. At a time when transgender individuals continue to face discrimination and exclusion—from workplace barriers and healthcare disparities to violence and legal hurdles—this volume highlights their courage, creativity, and humanity. It weaves together intimate lived experiences of transition and self-discovery, rigorous academic insights into gender theory and sociology, and vibrant cultural narratives from art, literature, and activism across global contexts. These stories challenge rigid binaries imposed by society, inviting readers to envision gender as a spectrum—fluid, personal, deeply human, and enriched by non-binary, genderqueer, and agender perspectives that defy traditional norms. By amplifying voices long silenced, the book fosters profound understanding and solidarity.

This book is not only a guide but a call to action. It urges educators, policymakers, families, and allies to listen with compassion, act with justice, and embrace authenticity. Above all, it reminds us that dignity is not negotiable, and humanity is most beautiful when it is diverse.



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