



Transgender Community in India: Historical Perspective

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Abstract

This paper explores the historical growth of the transgender community in India and emergence of the transgender community during the Mughal, British, post-Independence, and modern periods. During the Mughal era, transgender people held important positions, served as political advisors, and controlled the empire. The introduction of land and food rights during the British era was advantageous to transsexual people.¹In the modern era, the Indian government implemented new policies and programmes for the social protection and welfare of the transgender community.

Keywords: Transgender, Hijra, India, Community

Transgender people are people whose gender expression differs from the gender into which they were born. Trans males and trans women are referred to collectively as transgendered. Transgender people have existed since antiquity, according to historical records. The first mentions of transgender identities in India can be found in our ancient religious texts and other great publications. As a result, our society is not unfamiliar with the idea of transgender identity. The homophobic mind-set of the general public causes a lot of challenges for the transgender population in India, despite the fact that they have a rich religious and cultural tradition of their own.

History of Transgender in India

In India, gender diversity has origins that date back to ancient times, possibly even prehistory. The transgender community is made up of Hijras, eunuchs, Kothis, Aravanis, Jogappas, Shiv-Shakthis, etc. The Hijra communities in India have a documented history spanning more than 4000 years. Hijras belonged to the 'Eunuch' culture that was common across the Middle East and India, where Eunuchs worked as guards, advisers, and entertainers.² Various Shastras, and other Vedic texts mention about the third gender communities. Kama Sutra³, Manusmriti⁴(although it provides sanctions only) are the prominent texts which mention about these communities. They can also be found in numerous Hindu scriptures from antiquity, including the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Mugal period. In the epic Ramayana, Lord Rama urged all the "men and women" to return to the city as he was leaving the forest after being exiled from the kingdom for 14 years. The hijras were the only members of his group that felt compelled to follow him because of this directive. Rama was moved by their loyalty and granted them the authority to bless people during inaugural ceremonies as well as on significant occasions like marriage and childbirth. In the Mahabharata, Aravan, the son of Arjuna and Nagakanya, offered to be sacrificed to Goddess Kali in order to guarantee the Pandavas' victory in the Battle of Kurukshetra.⁵ His only request was that he spends his final night married. No woman wanted to wed a man who was destined to die, but Krishna took the form of Mohini, a stunning woman, and wed him. The Hijras of Tamil Nadu refer to themselves as Aravanis and view Aravan as their ancestor. The hero of Mahabharata the Arjuna seems to take a vow of third gender, as follows: 'Arjuna replied,



'O lord of the Earth, I will declare myself as one of the neuter sex. O monarch, it is, indeed difficult to hide the marks of the bowstring on my arms. I will, however, cover both my cicatrized arms with bangles. Wearing brilliant rings on my ears and conch-bangles on my wrists and causing a braid to hang down from my head, I shall, O king, appear as one of the third sex, Vrihannala by name. And living as a female I shall (always) entertain the king and the inmates of the inner apartments by reciting stories.'⁶

Mughal Period

In the royal courts of the Islamic world, particularly during the Ottoman and Mughal eras in medieval India, hijras played a prominent role. They progressed to become well-known generals, administrators, political consultants, and harem guardians, among other responsibilities. Hijras had unrestricted access to all areas and populations and were regarded as intelligent, trustworthy, and fiercely loyal. The Hijras held prominent positions within the Islamic religious establishments as well, particularly in the capacity of person of trust for the guardianship of Mecca and Medina's holy sites. These individuals had the power to shape national policy and were compensated handsomely for their proximity to kings and queens.

British Period

The circumstances, status, and overall state of transgender people dramatically shift with the advent of colonialism in the 18th century. When it comes to Europeans, they were horrified to observe the level of respect accorded to transsexual people in the royal courts. The HIJRA community was further criminalised by British colonial authorities in the second half of the 19th century; they were now to be treated as a distinct caste.

After Independence

The law was overturned in 1949 after India gained independence, but prejudice towards the transgender population has persisted. As a result, transgender persons have been marginalised and no real effort has been made to mainstream them. The transgender population, also referred to as "Hijras" in this country, is a segment of Indian people who are considered by society as "unnatural and generally as objects of ridicule and even fear due to superstition," the Supreme Court stated in a landmark judgement in 2014. The right to personal liberty, dignity, freedom of expression, education and empowerment, protection from violence, discrimination, and exploitation, and the right to work are among the fundamental rights that the transgender community is entitled to under the Supreme Court's ruling. Every person must also have the freedom to select their gender expression and identity, as well as the right to be treated as a third gender⁷. This includes transsexuals, transgender individuals, and hijras. As a result, transgender people are now seen as belonging to a third gender in India. Hijras exist all over India. Despite collecting data for years, the Indian Census has never acknowledged a third gender, i.e., transgender. However, information on transgender people's occupation, literacy levels, and caste were gathered in 2011. The total number of transgender people in India is estimated to be 4.88 lakh as of the 2011 census.⁸



Types of Transgender

We can perceive a wide range of transgender related identities, cultures or experiences which are generally as follows⁹:

Hijras:

Biological men who identify as hijras later reject their masculine identity to identify as either women, not men, in-between men and women, or neither man nor woman. Hijras are sometimes compared to transgender or transsexual (male-to-female) people in the west. However, Hijras have a rich heritage and culture, and their close-knit communities are formalised through the reet ceremony (becoming a member of the Hijra community).

The terminology used to refer to Hijras varies depending on the locale. Kinnars (Delhi) and Aravanis, for instance (Tamil Nadu).Hijras can make money by performing their customary work, such as badhai (clapping their hands and soliciting alms), blessing newborns, or dancing at ceremonies. Due to a lack of other employment options, some Hijras engage in sex work. Others may be self-employed or work for non-governmental organisations. (To learn more, visit the UNDP India Report) (December 2010).

Eunuch:

An emasculated male is referred to as a eunuch, and a person who is intersexed has genitalia that are unclearly male-like at birth; nevertheless, when this is revealed, the infant who had previously been classed as a male is reclassified as intersexed as a Hijra.

Aravanis and Thirunangi:

In Tamil Nadu, Hijras identify as Aravani. Aravanis are biological males who identify as women imprisoned in male bodies, according to the Tamil Nadu Aravanigal Welfare Board, an effort of the state government under the Department of Social Welfare. Some Aravani activists want the term "Thirunangi" to be used in the public and media to describe Aravanis.

Kothi:

The Kothis are a diverse group. Kothis are biological men who exhibit various levels of femininity, some of which may be situational. Some Kothis act in a bisexual manner and wed females. Kothis typically have lower socioeconomic position, and some turn to sex work to make ends meet. Some Hijra-identified individuals may also self-identify as Kothis. However, not all Kothi-identified people also identify as Hijras or transsexual.

Jogtas/Jogappas:

People who devote their lives to Renukha Devi (Yellamma), a Hindu goddess with temples in Maharashtra and Karnataka, are known as Jogtas or Jogappas. The male servant of that goddess is referred to as Jogta, and the female servant is referred to as Jogti (who is also sometimes referred to as Devadasi). If it is part of one's family tradition or if one finds a Guru (or Pujari) who accepts them as a Chela or Shishya, one can become a Jogta (or Jogti) (disciple). Male-to-female



transgender people who are followers or slaves of the goddess Renukha Devi and who are also members of the Hijra community are sometimes referred to as "JogtiHijras."

They are distinguished from Jogtas—heterosexual people who may or may not wear women's clothing while they worship the goddess—by this name. This word also distinguishes them from the biological female devotees of the goddess known as Jogtis. But JogtiHijras might also call themselves Jogti (feminine pronoun), Hijras, or even Jogtas on occasion.

Shiv-Shakthis:

Shiv-Shakthis are said to be males with feminine gender presentation who are possessed by or particularly near a goddess. Senior gurus usually initiate new Shiv-Shakthis into the Shiv-Shakti society and teach them the rules, practises, and rituals they must adhere to. Shiv-Shakthis are married in a ritual to a sword that symbolises Shiva or male power (the deity). Shiv-Shakthis then evolves into the sword's bride.

On occasion, Shiv-Shakthis dress inappropriately and accessorise with items considered more appropriate for ladies. The majority of the residents of this town are from lower socioeconomic strata and make a living as spiritual healers, soothsayers, and astrologers; some also ask for alms.

Conclusion

The transgender community was placed in a prominent position during the Mugal era but was subject to many restrictions due to British colonial laws. However, the government has now put in place a number of rules and programmes to protect the transgender community. The transgender community's social and economic status will be improved as a result. For the benefit of the transgender population, the government should eliminate the stigma, discrimination, and abuses of human rights. The transgender community in India will expand if they take all of this into account in their daily lives.



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2. Chapter IX Part 2 states about Auparishtaka or Mouth Congress “There are two kinds of eunuchs, those that are disguised as males, and those that are disguised as females. Eunuchs disguised as females imitate their dress, speech, gestures, tenderness, timidity, simplicity, softness and bashfulness.”
3. Chapter 8, Verse 367,369,370.
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