



## SOCIAL EXCLUSION BASED ON GENDER: A STUDY WITH REFERENCE TO TRANSGENDERS IN THE CITIES OF ERNAKULAM AND TRIVANDRUM

Elizabeth Johnson\* \*Corresponding Author

### ABSTRACT

The paper analyses the socio-economic conditions of transgender people in Kerala. It attempts to study the depth of social exclusion being faced by these people from the mainstream society. Social exclusion in its extreme form involves the denial/ non-recognition of gender identity. Gender identity can be defined as a personal conception of oneself which is intimately related to the concept of gender role (outward manifestations of personality that reflect gender identity). The difference lies in the fact that gender identity is self-identified whereas gender role is manifested within society. Transgender people constitute a class which is denied of such an identity and is borne with social exclusion in its highest form. They are people who have a gender identity which is different from their birth assigned sex. The transgenders of Kerala, especially, prefer to hide their gender identity due to social stigma and fear of social negligence. This necessitates a deep study into the living conditions of this people and here lies the scope of the study. The study would provide insights to evolve effective policies to improve the plights of the transgenders in Kerala.

**KEYWORDS :** Social Exclusion, Gender identity, Transgender, Discrimination, Sexual orientation, Human Rights.

### INTRODUCTION

Social exclusion, defined as the discrimination on the basis of a number dimensions such as gender, ethnicity, age etc. constitutes the most visible type of exclusion in any society. Social exclusion is a rupturing of the social bond. It is a process of declining participation, access, and solidarity. It can be viewed as the systematic denial of entitlements to resources and services, and the denial of the right to participate on equal terms in social relationships in economic, social, cultural or political arenas.

Social exclusion in its extreme form involves the denial/ non-recognition of gender identity. Gender identity can be defined as a personal conception of oneself which is intimately related to the concept of gender role (outward manifestations of personality that reflect gender identity). The difference lies in the fact that gender identity is self-identified whereas gender role is manifested within society.

Transgenders constitutes a class which is denied of such an identity and is borne with social exclusion in its highest form. Conventionally speaking, there are mainly two gender identities; masculine and feminine and it is often connected with the birth assigned sex (i.e. masculine for persons who are male by birth and feminine for the persons who are female by birth). Like the women lived without any identity and individuality for centuries, there is a group of people who are "neither male nor female" living in our society. They live in social negligence and alienation in many countries.

The term 'transgender' was first coined by John F. Oliven of Columbia University in his work, 'Sexual Hygiene and Pathology' (1965). The term transgender was then popularised by various transgender, transsexual and transvestite people. Now, people who wish to live without Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) are generally known as transgenders and those who undergo surgery are called transsexuals.

Mainly there are two divisions in transgender; Male to Female (MtF) and Female to Male (FtM). MtF are those persons who are male by birth but possesses a female gender identity while FtM are those who are female by birth but have a male gender identity. This clearly shows that transgender is a concept related to gender expressions rather than biological sex and being a transgender is independent of sexual orientation.

Medical science offers a scientific reason for the origin of gender that is a diffusion of both masculine and feminine. A foetus when formed is in a feminine state. Its sex can be determined as male or female only after six weeks. If the foetus receives the male hormone androgen, it develops the sexual

organs of a male. In the second stage too, if it receives male hormone the feminine state of the foetus' brain is changed to masculine state. The unavailability of male hormone in second stage leads to the birth of a child who may be a male in physical appearance and female in gender expressions. The child may fall into the category of gay or transgender. The same is the case of a female child also. If the foetus receive male hormone in the second stage, it will lead to the birth of a child with female sexual organs and male gender identity. (Moonnam Lingam:Linganeethikkayulla Muravikkal). Being raised in the wrong gender causes them profound gender dysphoria and mental anguish as they grow up.

### SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Kerala's development experience, characterised with high human and social development, without matching economic growth is well acclaimed nationally and internationally. The better social development that Kerala is credited with, however, seems something to be less proud of when it is taken into consideration of the plight of the highly marginalised and much vulnerable groups. One such vulnerable and marginalised group is the transgenders in the state.

In the historical judgment on 15th April 2014, the Supreme Court of India observed that 'transgender community is treated by the society as "unnatural" and generally as objects of ridicule and even fear on account of superstition.' The judgment directed the Centre as well as State governments to ensure fundamental rights of the transgender communities all over the country. This was on account of the Constitutional guarantee of equality irrespective of gender. Transgenders were granted third gender status as well.

As followed by the above development, the then State Government of Kerala formulated a Transgender policy for the welfare of the transgender community of the state. The policy allows for the self-identification of a person as a Transgender. The problems faced by the transgenders came to the mainstream Kerala by this development. The transgenders of Kerala, however, prefer to hide their gender identity due to social stigma and fear of social negligence. This necessitates a deep study into the living conditions of this people and here lies the scope of the study. The study would provide insights to evolve effective policies to improve the plights of the transgenders.

### OBJECTIVES

1. To analyse the socio-economic conditions of transgenders in Kerala.
2. To analyse whether the State Policy for Transgenders in Kerala could address the issues & problems of transgenders

effectively.

## METHODOLOGY

The study is a qualitative research to analyse the social and economic conditions of transgenders. This made use of the primary data from transgenders residing in Thiruvananthapuram and Ernakulam districts of Kerala. It also made use of secondary data for further clarifications. Secondary data was collected from newspapers, journals, articles etc. Data from the Department of Social Justice, Kerala was also used. Primary data was collected through personal interview using a structured questionnaire and it was collected from a sample of 30 units identified using snowball sampling method.

## MAJOR FINDINGS

Orientation refers to whether a person in this community is trans man (female to male) or trans woman (male to female). More than half of the respondents are male to female persons. It was evident from the field that male to female people were the ones who were less hesitant to reveal their gender identity than female to male people.

More than half of the respondents are in the age group of 26 – 30 years. This may signify that the concept of transgender got emphasized recently in Kerala, thereby motivating transgender youth to reveal their gender identity. Years ago, they were forced to remain behind the walls of social stigma. They were not socially accepted because transgenders were considered as an "unusual creation". Therefore, it may be inferred that transgenders are present among us in large number, but they are invisible to the society.

Kerala is a state with high literacy rate. The findings of this survey also broadly conform to that. Half of the respondents have gained degree and above degree qualification. But the interesting fact is that about 3% of the respondents are illiterate. The reason for being illiterate is due to the lack of family support, social stigma, teasing and misbehaving from friends, negative attitude of others towards them. It was evident that 20 per cent of the transgenders had a distant mode of study. This is due to the lack of social acceptance for them as what they are in terms of their gender.

When enquiry is made on the approach from the educational institutions, teachers, and peer group, it is found that half of the respondents experienced a positive attitude from all these three. Nearly a 20 per cent of the respondents had a negative approach from them.

It is revealed from the survey that most of the respondents never had a chance to be a part of any co-curricular activities in their educational institutions as a transgender. Either they did not reveal their gender identity during those days or they were hesitant to be a part of those activities as they were afraid of the social negligence they might face as a transgender.

Among the respondents who are married, there are people who have not yet revealed their actual gender identity to their partners. This is a grave issue for in our society there are people who are not able to express their gender identity even to their much closer ones.

In general, majority of the respondents are satisfied from the approach of all the common spheres. From the responses received, however, it is evident that transgenders are very much dissatisfied from the approach of police officials towards them. However, only about 10 per cent of the respondents are having this opinion. Hence it may be inferred that even though the general trend is favourable there are rare incidents occurring here and there that makes the transgender people more vulnerable. According to the respondents, after the implementation of Transgender policy,

these people are getting much more dignified existence among the larger community.

Less they are vulnerable to harassments and undignified jokes at hospitals and banks. In fact, more respondents are satisfied from the services provided to them as a transgender at hospitals. This is a very favourable trend.

Out of the 30 sample units, 76 per cent of the transgenders were ready to give the information about the income source. Out of this, more than half of the transgenders had full time jobs. Majority earn an income below Rs 20,000. There were respondents who merely had Rs 3500 as income per month. This was due to the lack of education for these respondents. They could not attain the essential education due to the social stigma prevailed about their gender identity

As part of accepting transgender as a third gender, issuance of ration card to transgenders was announced as an immediate task of our government. But the reality is that only very few transgenders have a ration card now with their own gender identity. Only about 36 per cent of the samples have ration card with a transgender identity. This is a delinquency from the part of officials. Policy level changes such as issuing of ration card are yet a dream to come true.

About 96 per cent of the respondents are aware about the Transgender Policy, 2015. Out of it 48 per cent are of the view that the policy was a great help for them to show up their faces in the mainstream of the society. Seven per cent are of the view that it did not have any positive impact on them.

Respondents also were of the view that an effective policy implementation along with a favourable attitude from the society is the best needed combination of changes for better living conditions of transgenders. Changes in both the adoption and implementation alone can have only limited positive impact on the category of transgenders. Without having a favourable attitude from the part of society, policy level changes can do nothing.

## CONCLUSION

Amidst all these realities, Kerala in the last five years has indeed achieved a gradual progress in the visibility of transgender population within the state. The separate policies and discussions in the legislative assembly for the welfare of transgender persons depict an evolving situation in Kerala. The acceptance and political recognition of transgenders by the government plays a vital role in achieving the rights of these individuals. This acceptance happens through multiple factors that are evolved due to unique socio-political and cultural factors. The perspective of sexual citizenship could contribute to the transgender policy as well as other structural changes in the society for sexual minorities. The objective should be to create a space within the community, to ensure the redistribution of resources and to make a shift from looking at transgender persons only as recipients of welfare benefits.

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