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Socio-Economic Position of Transgenders in India

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Abstract : *Hijra, a Hindi and Urdu term traditionally translated into English as Transgenders actually refers to what modern westerner would call male to female transgender people or third sex. The very first image that comes to our mind when we think of Transgenders is that of a man's body clad in a shabby sari clapping clamorously in a busy market hustling for 5 or 10 rupees. An estimate of 5-6 million Transgenders live in India but it is thrice the actual data because many of them are not ready to reveal their identity as Transgenders. Their condition was far better in ancient and medieval times but it started deteriorating after the Criminal Tribal Act, 1871 of British India. Transgenders face a lot of problem in their social life, starting*

from their home, they face brutal violence in public places, police stations, prisons and everywhere. They hardly have any employment opportunities to uplift their economic status and are forced to lead a life of deprivation. They carry on their livelihood by begging, prostitution and performing at ceremonies.

On April 15, 2014 India's Supreme Court recognized Transgenders as the third gender, ending an age old social dilemma (Theodore Rajiv, 2014). Supreme Court directed the Centre and the State governments to take steps to treat them as socially and educationally backward classes and also to provide medical, sanitation and educational facilities. But even after recognition as third gender, people are not ready to assimilate them in their society and stigma is still attached to their lives. The anomalies are there within the society and mere formulation of laws cannot help the situation. What is needed is a clear and loud expression of implementation of decision taken by the Supreme Court. Thus the only ray of hope is increasing awareness and mobilizing people whose potential can be utilized to improve the management of the entire society.

Key words – *Transgenders, Identity, Livelihood, Anomalies, Awareness.*

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Introduction :

According to Oxford dictionary a eunuch is a impotent man or a masculine looking woman. There are three categories of Transgenders :-

1. Hermaphrodite- a hermaphrodite is a person possessing both male and female organs.
2. Transvestite- It is a person who chooses a sex other than the one he/she is born with.
3. Castrated Transgenders – They are those person who have gone through forced castration for becoming a Transgender.

Harsh reality about their life is that only 1% of *hijra* are naturally born and about 99% of them are forcibly castrated. As estimated 5-6 million Transgenders live in India but it is thrice the actual data because they are not ready to reveal their identity. In modern day India Transgenders often live in ghettos. They make a living by dancing and celebrating births and marriages but often have to resort to other means to make both ends meet and they have a social stigma attached to their lives. Even after being recognized as third gender, they are still facing the same problems because people are not ready to accept them as an integral part of the society. Moreover, they are pushed into prostitution and are compelled to lead a secluded life.

In India almost nineteen lakhs eunuchs live as outcastes. They are a caste unto themselves living a marginalized life, abused and despised by one and all (Piyush Saxena, 2011).

Our attitude to the transgender is often misconstrued and stereotyped. We blame them for what they are without understanding how they reach that stage. We need to educate ourselves on the issue before finding fault with them.

Human sexuality is not a matter of choice but mostly a matter of chance. Who we are and what we think we are is a biological legacy. We are what we are because of hormones (Indian Currents, 2014).

Methodology :

The study was based on data collected by:-

1. Research based on primary data.
2. The information collected by personal interaction with Transgenders.
3. A study of selected number of secondary sources such as publications, books, official reports, media clipping, seminars, newspapers, information from internet concerning the issues.

Objectives :

1. To bring forth the hitherto facts unknown to the public about Transgenders.
2. To highlight the present socioeconomic status of Transgenders.
3. To make aware people about the small initiative taken by the government for the welfare of Transgenders.

Hypotheses :

1. The Transgenders are satisfied with the decision of the Supreme Court.
2. The general society is ready to accept and assimilate them.

Tools and Techniques :

1. Information from internet
2. Magazines.
3. Survey research.
4. Print media.
5. Interview schedule with Transgenders

Social position of Transgenders in India :

Transgenders in India have virtually no safe place, not even in their families, where they can be protected from prejudice and abuse. The discrimination based on their class and gender makes the *hijra* community one of the most disempowered groups in the Indian society. The systematic violence that Transgenders face is

reinforced by the institution such as the family and medical professionals. The hijras face many sorts of state and societal harassment. They have been recognized as the third gender by the Supreme court on 15 April 2014, but still their social position has not seen any change.

Indian mythology abounds with numerous instances pertaining to eunuchs (Piyush Saxena, 2011).

In Shaiva mythology, we know of Lord Shiva's form as Ardhanarishvara in which the left half of his body is female (Piyush Saxena, 2011).

Lord Vishnu's incarnation as Mohini a beautiful woman is a unique example of the same.

Shiva Ardhanarishvara represents the divine hermaphrodite and Vishnu Mohini he divine transsexual (Piyush Saxena, 2011).

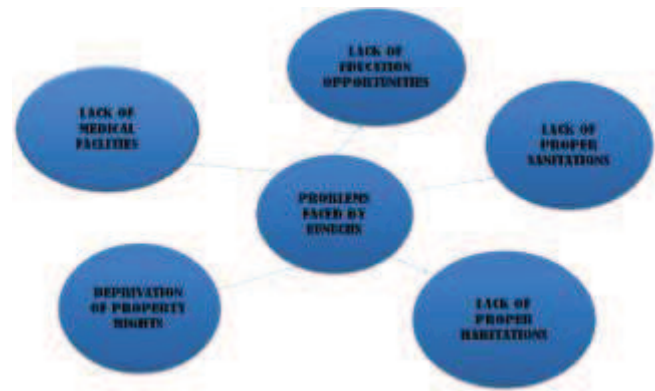
Mahabharata is also replete with several instances involving eunuchs. During the epic war, Bhishma acted as the 'Senapati' of the Kauravas. The Pandavas could not win the war until, the mighty warrior was defeated. This was achieved through Shikhandi a transgendered man (Piyush Saxena, 2011).

In *Ramayana* the Lord Rama while addressing the assembled crowd at the border of the Kingdom, who were eager to accompany him to *vanvas* said "all men and women of Ayodhya may return to their homes" everyone left but for eunuchs who stayed on because they were neither 'men' or 'women'. They stayed there for the entire period, 14 years, waiting for the Lord Rama's return. On his return he rewarded their loyalty with a boon that their blessing will be sought on every auspicious occasion (Piyush Saxena, 2011).

"That the transgender community is marginalised in our society is not news anymore. We have no identification and, therefore, no rights. Whether it is for Colleges or hospitals, voter IDs or PAN cards, forms don't recognise transgenders as entities. If not the male category, we are reluctantly clubbed into the female category. We have no recognition and that gives rise to issues like

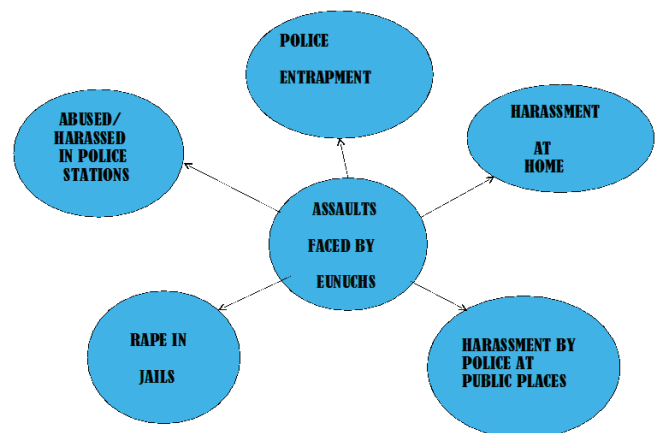
unemployment. Besides, there is always this stigma associated with transgenders because of which we are treated with complete disregard. Says Gauri Sawant a member of the transgender community and social activist (Femina, 2013).

Figure 1. Problems faced by Transgenders



Transgenders face a lot of problems in their social life. They are not provided with proper medical care. They do not have employment opportunities to lead a dignified life. Moreover, they are not provided with the right to inherit ancestral property. There are no facilities for their sanitation. No separate toilets are there for them. They do not have proper place to reside. Thus in every sphere of life they face discrimination. Moreover, there is no provision for their education and most of them are uneducated.

Figure 2. Assault faced by Transgenders



Even police which is defined as the protector of the citizens harass the Transgenders. They use obscene words and bad remarks for Transgenders. Sometimes the cruelty reaches its zenith when they beat them in public places and insult them with derogatory remarks such as “*Mauga*” and “*Chakka*”. They also refuse to take their complaints to the police stations because they are thrown out from there. Not only this if Transgenders are put into jail some policemen rape them and degrade their dignity.

Economic condition of Transgenders :

Hijras are primarily associated with a few traditional occupations, foremost among them being ritualized performance at childbirth and the marriage ceremony. *Hijras* also resort to begging in the street for alms from passerby and from shops. These activities are regulated on a daily rotational basis by the elders of the *hijra* community. Although prostitution is considered deviant within the *hijra* community, in India generally, many *hijras* earn a living from it.

Most *hijras* live on the margins of society, with very low status. The word *hijra* is sometimes used in a derogatory manner. Few employment opportunities are available to *hijras*. Usually many get their income from begging; performing at ceremony or sex work. Violence against *hijra*, especially against *hijra* sex workers is often brutal, and occurs in public places.

Decision of the Supreme Court :

On 15th april 2014, the Supreme Court gave some decision regarding welfare of Transgenders which are as following :

- Hijra, Transgenders, apart from binary gender be treated as “third gender” for the purpose of safeguarding their rights under part III of our Constitution and the

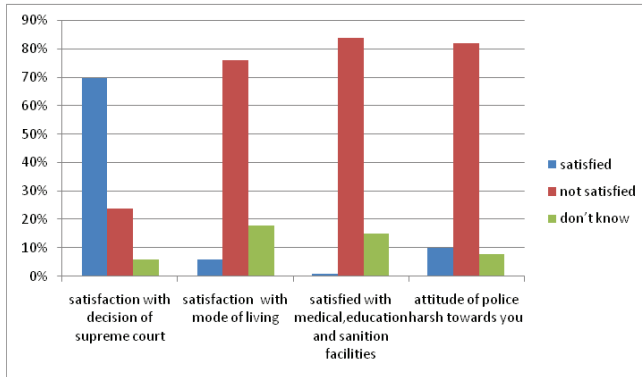
laws made by the Parliament and the State Legislature.

- Transgender persons' right to decide their self-identified gender is also upheld and the Centre and State Governments are directed to grant legal recognition to their gender identity such as male, female or as third gender.
- We direct the Centre and the State governments to take steps to treat them as socially and educationally backward class of citizens and extend all kinds of reservation in cases of admission in educational institutions and for public appointments.
- Centre and State governments are directed to operate separate HIV Sero-surveillance centre since hijra / transgender face several sexual health issues.
- Centre and State governments should also take steps for framing various social welfare schemes for their betterment.
- Centre and State governments should take steps to create public awareness so that TGs will feel that they are also part and parcel of the social life and not treated as untouchable.
- Centre and the state governments should also take measures to regain their respect and place in the society which once they enjoyed in our culture and social life.

Interaction with Transgenders

We interacted with 50 Transgenders to ascertain how far they were satisfied with the decision of the Supreme Court, Mode of earning and living, Medical and Education facilities and Police attitude.

Figure 3. Total no of samples-50



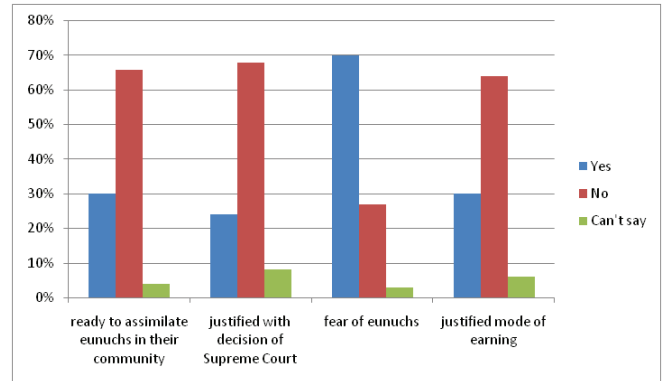
Personal interaction was done with 50 Transgenders and the above data shows that 70% Transgenders are satisfied with the decision taken by the Supreme Court regarding them whereas 24% are not satisfied with that and 6% were not aware of it. 6% Transgenders are satisfied with their mode of earning while a huge bulk of population was not satisfied with their economic status whereby they informed us that no or very few Transgenders are provided with medical, education and sanitation facilities. Apart from this the attitude of the society and police also bothers them as 82% of them are not satisfied with the treatment they receive from the police and the society.

From the above data it is clear that Transgenders are not satisfied with their mode of earning and are dissatisfied with the decision of the Supreme Court that has categorized them under OBC and want gender reservation in place of caste reservation. Apart from this it is also the responsibility of society to give them an equal status.

Interaction with local people

We interacted with 70 local people to ascertain how far they are ready to assimilate the Transgenders into their society.

Figure 4. No of samples -70



After interacting with the local people we came to conclusion that 30% people are ready to assimilate Transgenders in their community, 66% are not ready to assimilate and 4% did not respond. 24% are satisfied with the decision of Supreme Court regarding Transgenders, 68% are not satisfied and 8% did not respond. 70% people have fear of Transgenders, 27% don't have and 3% did not respond. 30% are not satisfied with the mode of earning of Transgenders, 64% are not satisfied and 6% did not respond. From the above data we found that people are not ready to cooperate with them in bringing them in the mainstream of development.

Findings :

1. Transgenders are not happy with the decisions of the Supreme Court, as it has categorized them under OBC.
2. There is lack of employment opportunities.
3. There is lack of medical facilities.
4. In spite of decisions taken by the Supreme Court for the Transgenders there is no change in their socio-economic status.
5. There is lack of proper habitation.
6. They are deprived of legal identity even after their recognition as third gender.
7. Reservation in jobs has still not been given even after the decisions of the Supreme Court.

8. Circumstances compel them to step into prostitution.

Suggestions :

1. Law should be made to punish those who discriminate on the basis of gender identity.
2. A law must be made regarding the marriages of Transgenders.
3. The Press Council of India, the watchdog Institution of various popular media, should issue guidelines to ensure sensitive and respectful treatment of issues relating to Transgenders.
4. People must realize that law alone cannot reverse the centuries old history and tradition of ruthless discrimination against Transgenders. We must accept them as “one of us”.

Conclusion :

Transgenders have no grudge against normal human beings because they accept their sexual identity as destiny. In this 21st century we are busy making machines and new technologies but are we really developed as human beings if we treat a part of our society in an inhuman way.

The systematic violence that *hijras* face is reinforced by institution such as, the family, media, medical establishment etc. The discrimination and violence that *hijras* face show that it is high time that along with the government and human right movements in the country we take this issue with seriousness. We could really emancipate them, from the social stigma attached to them because they do have the right to love, hate, construct and destroy like normal mortals.

“Social acceptance of Transgenders is necessary for a tolerant society”

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