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‘Living on the Edge’: Examining the Socio-economic Issues of India’s Transsexuals

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Abstract

Transsexuals, the subset of transgenders, constitute one of the most discriminated and marginalised communities in India. Given the deeply entrenched heteronormative values in Indian society, which essentializes binary beliefs about sex and gender, any transgressions of these values and beliefs invariably evoke societal backlash. This study examines how heteronormativity, which fuels transphobia, impinges upon the lives of the transsexuals – both male-to-female (MtF) and female-to-male (FtM) transsexuals. Through narrative inquiry, the study sheds light on how transsexuals, despite the burgeoning legal provisions for protection of their rights and entitlements, continue to endure various social and economic infirmities. Ensuring equality for transsexuals, or for that matter the trans peoples, calls for, *inter alia*, confronting gender essentialism and mending the gap between law and implementation.

Keywords: Discrimination, Gender, Identity, Transsexuals, Transgenders, Socio-Economic

1. Introduction

Sexual minorities or more commonly known as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community – whose sexual identity or characteristics are different from the majority population – face a myriad of problems and issues. They have been largely kept out of the broader socio-economic and political life of a society. Discriminations against them range from denial of rights as citizens, right to self-identification, basic dignity, and body autonomy to deprivation of equal economic opportunities, education and access to healthcare (Cruz, 2014; White Hughto et al., 2015). As such, sexual practices, orientations and gender identity become an important determinant of a person’s identity, life chances and access to socio-economic and political privileges. The situation of sexual minorities or the LGBTQ community in India is also no exception to this universal trend. They continue to remain a subject of relentless discrimination – both within and outside their homes. In the light of this, this study seeks to examine the socio-economic conditions of transsexuals in the context of India.

The study becomes important in the backdrop of the renewed efforts towards legal reforms and institutional measures initiated for ameliorating the plight of the sexual minorities, including the transsexuals. These legal

reforms and institutional measures, elaborated in the proceeding section, reflect the increasing recognition of the problems faced by various groups of sexual minorities in the country. As such, it becomes incumbent to examine if these legal and institutional measures have really made a difference in the lives of the sexual minorities. A transsexual is a person who does not identify with the birth sex and assigned gender. It can also be referred to as a condition marked by the incongruence between the birth sex and the gender identity. This condition is generally accompanied by a strong desire to bring into congruence the physiological sex and the preferred psychological gender through surgical or hormonal interventions (Gooren et al., 2007).

The study is qualitative in nature. In-depth interviews with transsexuals were conducted during the period of March to November 2021 – involving both telephonic and physical interviews. Purposive and snowball sampling procedures were used to recruit respondents (thirty six of them) for the study. The study is mainly done in the cities of Bengaluru and Ahmedabad. The interviews were conducted only after due consent of the respondents was obtained. The interviews were conducted with the aid of an interview guide, which contains a grouping of topics, issues and questions to be covered during the interviews. This ensured the flow of the interview, maintained control over the pace and direction of the interview.

The article is structured into five main sections, including this introduction. The second section deals with transsexuals and its cognate concepts. The third section critically examines the legal frameworks concerning the transsexuals or sexual minorities – the past and the contemporary legal developments in India. The fourth section examines the socio-economic conditions of the transsexuals. These are examined in relation to the problems confronted within the family setting, migration and its concomitant problems and the educational problems, focusing on its implications for economic and job conditions. The fifth section provides the summary and conclusion of the study.

2. Transsexualism: Conceptual Terrain

The general tendency for people is to identify identity with sex. Sex connotes a biological and physiological attribute of males and females; gender connotes the non-physiological or socially constructed attributes of men and women. The former is centred primarily on the reproductive organs while the latter is centred on the cultural expectations and roles for man and woman. Embedded in the notion of gender are the cultural expectations of masculinity or femininity. This conceptual distinction between sex and gender is instructive as differences in the behaviour of man or woman do not necessarily stem from physiological attributes of sex (Lips, 2020, p. 7). The misalignment of gender identity and the sex-based body is transsexuality (Bettcher, 2014). Transsexualism implies that gender is not pre-determined by sex or at the time of birth. A person may resist or disown male identity or female identity. This connotes a desire to exercise a sense of agency to define one's own gender identities.

Within the broader society, including medical and scholarly community, transsexualism has long been deemed as a mental disorder. The 5th edition of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) has however removed transsexuality as a mental disorder (APA, 2013). By and large, there is an increasing emphasis on, to borrow Atienza-Macia's (2015, p. 575) words, "depathologization of transsexuality as a mental illness." Writing way back in 1966, Harry Benjamin took issue with psychoanalysis and instead advocated hormonal or surgical treatment to achieve congruence between body and the mind (Benjamin, 1966). Contrary to the tendency to assume transsexualism as a product of socialization, many transsexuals contend that they "have a fixed, inborn gender and that they were simply born into biological bodies that do not match their true being" (Lenning and Buist, 2013, p. 46). As such, transsexualism is now increasingly seen or understood as gender identity disorders (GID), marked by a persistent desire to undergo sex reassignment surgery (SRS). In this sense, transsexualism is deemed as a condition that requires medical treatment (hormonal or surgical treatment) to attain the desired gender (Sutter, 2001). However, there are also cases wherein transsexuals do not wish to alter their biological sex and are content with living as the third sex. But an overwhelming majority of them wish to undergo SRS. After undergoing SRS, many of the transsexuals do not wish to identify as trans man or trans woman; they simply wish to identify themselves as a man or a woman (Bettcher, 2014).

While the question of whether gender is immanent or rather a constructed one may be a matter of enduring debate, transgender community, including transsexuals, nevertheless share one thing in common. They all hold the view that the entire process of realizing that one's own gender is not congruent with one's biological sex, and the quest for achieving congruence between the two, is a traumatic one. However, several studies have noted that transsexuals who have undergone successful SRS experience more happiness and a sense of satisfaction than those who have not undergone SRS (Fallahtafti et al., 2019; Kailey, 2005), with some thanking, and giving credits to, medical science that makes such transitions possible (Lenning and Buist, 2013).

3. Legal Frameworks governing Sexual Minorities

Sexual identities that go beyond two gender options, male and female, have had a long historical presence in Indian society. Transgenders, for instance, have been known historically by various names – Hijra, Aravani, Kothi, Jogappas, and Shiv-Shakthis, among others (UNDP, 2010). As per the 2011 Census, India has about half a million transgender peoples. The actual population may be on the higher side as many transgender would be hesitant to come out of the closet and reveal their true identity for the obvious reason of its associated social prejudice and stigmatization. A common feature of the transgender community is that they are among the most discriminated and neglected communities in the country. They are overwhelmingly working in informal sector, predominantly in stigmatised jobs such as, *inter alia*, prostitution, begging, mendicancy, and singing and dancing in bars (HRLN, 2015). Many also face the problems of homelessness, landlessness, exclusion from formal employment sector, and poor health conditions, among others.

The colonial British administration passed the *Criminal Tribes Act*, 1871, which identified or listed many tribes in India as criminal tribes. It was meant to regulate and control the pastoral people. Soon after, the transgender community, the *Hijras*, were deemed as deviant and criminal groups. As per the Section 377 of the *Indian Penal Code*, 1869, eunuchs were criminalized. Post-colonial India continued to retain this law, which criminalizes any sexual acts between same sex people by terming it as “unnatural” or “against the order of nature.” In fact, decriminalization of same-sex sexual relations, which in practice means removing Section 377 of the IPC, has been the rallying cry for the LGBTQ movements in India. In tune with the times, several legal reforms and institutional measures have been introduced in India to ameliorate the plight of the transgender communities.

In 2014, in its significant ruling in *National Legal Services Authority v Union of India and Others* (2014), the Supreme Court of India (SCI) upheld the rights of transgender people to their self-identified gender, enjoined the Government of India (GoI) and the state governments to initiate the required steps to legally recognise their choice of gender identity (Jose & Vinod, 2014). The ruling drives home the point that a person's sexual orientation is intrinsic to an individual's personality, dignity and freedom. Further, the SCI's ruling in 2018 struck down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) in the *Navtej Johar vs Union of India*, 2018. The ruling, which places a premium on the individual dignity and choice, stipulated that criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual relations between adults is unconstitutional (Gupta, 2006). It was well-received among the LGBTQ community and the civil society and human rights circles. Section 377 has been widely censured as the main villain that violated the rights of transgender communities; the law is known for its rampant misuse to blackmail, extort and harass the LGBTQ people (Baset, 2018).

Aside from aforesaid significant Court rulings, there have also been legislative efforts and institutional measures – notably the *Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act*, 2019. The key takeaways of the Act are: (i) prohibition of any discrimination against the sexual minorities with regard to, *inter alia*, access to education, healthcare, socio-economic opportunities, and employment; (ii) recognition of the right to self-perceived identity; and (iii) recognition of the right of movement, own property and the right to hold and stand for public or private office. Further, the Act requires a transgender person to apply to the district administration a certificate of identity as a transgender person. If a transgender is desirous of getting legal recognition as a trans man or trans woman, the person is obliged to submit documentary evidence of having undergone SRS (Sawant, 2017).

The *Transgender Persons (Protection and Rights) Act*, 2019 has been criticized by scholars and the transgender community. The aforementioned provisions of the Act, such as obligating one to submit proof of SRS, among

others, are seen as violating the body integrity, autonomy, placing huge financial burden, and exposing them to the mercies of the corrupt bureaucratic system (Singh & Singh, 2019). Several provisions of the Act are considered detrimental to the fundamental rights of transgender community. Since the time the bill was first tabled in the Parliament in the form of *The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2016*, it evoked widespread censure and criticisms. First, the bill is seen as denying the right of people to self-determine their gender identity (Jos, 2017). Second, the requirement of a “certificate of identity” or “transgender certificate” to be issued by the administrative authority, renders “the process of gender identification and reassignment cumbersome and intrusive” (Jain, 2020). The lacuna with this is that it does not take into account the possibility of the bureaucracy lacking the requisite expertise to evaluate the application for transgender certificate. Third, the Act is also seen as creating a hierarchy between the trans community and the cisgender by prescribing a more lenient punishment for abusing transgender persons. For instance, abusing trans community would invite a jail term ranging from six months to two years; the quantum of punishment for the same crime against cisgender can be life sentence or even capital punishment. Finally the Act refrains from providing any affirmative action measures concerning education, healthcare and other related rights.

To be sure, the extant legal framework meant to address the plight of sexual minorities suffers from various shortcomings. However, the passing of laws itself is evident of the significant gains, if not satisfactory, that have been made with regard to the protection of the sexual minorities. This is also borne out by the proactive efforts of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in line with the *Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019*. On January 10, 2022, the MHA, for instance, had issued an advisory to all state governments to undertake all the necessary efforts to prevent any acts of discriminations against the sexual minorities in prisons and other correctional institutions (GoI, 2022). The Advisory includes, *inter alia*, the right of the individual to self-perceived identity, provision for suitable accommodation and facilities in accordance with self-identification, maintenance of registry to include transgender as a category apart from male and females, adequate healthcare, and sensitization of the prison personnel.

4. Socio-economic Conditions of Transsexuals

Most, if not all, societies expect their members to conform to societal norms and regulations. As structural functionalists would argue, such conformity to norms and regulations would facilitate social cohesion, stability and order. Any deviations from such societal norms are deemed as posing threats to the society. Similar is the case with the social structures that determine gender identities and roles. As alluded to previously, in most societies, dominant gender identities and their associated roles and expectations are expected to conform to the two exclusive gender categories – male and female. This binary thinking about gender identities is quite entrenched in the society – be it in the primary institutions (say, family) or secondary institutions (say, schools). The obvious corollary of this is that transsexual identity or any other transgressive identities comes into confrontation with the dominant binary identities – male or female. This provides the overarching context as to why the transsexuals or for that matter any other categories of sexual minorities had to endure various hardships and challenges in their quotidian lives – be it in their social, economic and political life (Bhattacharya & Ghosh, 2020). These hardships and challenges began right from the family to workplace. This study specifically focuses on the issues and problems of transsexuals within the context of the family, their migration and its concomitant problems and problems of education.

4.1. Family Rejections and Its Associated Problems

Family constitutes the most important social institution for nurturing community values and norms. It offers the primary context for socialization and adolescent well-being. It offers its members social, emotional, and financial stability – and also acts as a social and economic unit. Given the entrenched social norms and values, families expect their members or children to conform to the dominant conceptions of gender identities. Any transgression of such gender norms and roles are reviled. The relationship between sexual minorities – such as transsexuals – and their parents come under severe strain or tensions when their sexual identity or orientations come out of the closet (Patterson, 2000; Tharinger & Wells, 2000). A study by Riggs et al. (2018) indicated that non-binary people are more likely to face family violence than other individuals. Studies have also demonstrated the association

between parental rejection and health and mental problems of adolescents, including recourse to drug abuse. Family members may even resort to intimidation or physical harm for failing to conform to dominant gender norms. Few studies have however demonstrated how sensitization of parents regarding the needs of the child (who transgress dominant gender identities) help in improving the relations with their children (Ryan et al., 2010). This underscores how family can get reduced to a space for discrimination and abuse (Sethi & Barwa, 2018).

This study has also affirmed the persistent discriminations against transsexuals within the context of family. Out of the 36 respondents in our study, 26 of them reported having been expelled from their family after revealing their gender identities or sexual orientations. And most of them indicated having faced physical violence from their immediate family members. A respondent says,

The disclosure of my gender identity which does not conform to my biological sex made my life within the family quite difficult. Since I was a kid, I love to get dressed up in female attires – putting lipsticks, adorning the sarees of my mom, and enjoying doing domestic chores like sweeping and cooking – which invited resistances and anger of my parents. In my family, I had been given a step-motherly treatment, at times involving physical violence, while my other siblings were treated with love and affection. The rejection of my sexual identity deprived me of happiness and sense of belonging to my family. All I wish is for my family to accept me as I am (Transwoman, Personal Communication, 8 March, 2021).

Within the family, the harassment of transsexuals takes various forms. The common form of harassment reported by my respondents includes, *inter alia*, being coerced to dress as per their sex assigned at birth. Any deviation from this invites verbal harassment and disapproval.

This underscores the vexed relationship between transsexuals and their family members. This is in tune with several studies that reported that sexual minorities face lower level of support from the family (Factor and Rothblum, 2008; Klein & Golub 2016). The fear of inviting the wrath of family members always weighs heavily in the minds of the transsexuals when taking a decision whether to disclose or not to disclose their sexual identities. Indeed, fearing rejection by kith and kin, most of our respondents reported about delaying their disclosure of their sexual identity. However, once that disclosure is made, they have a sense of emancipation. Despite getting a backlash from family, the disclosure enables them to live in their truth or true self. Underscoring the importance of coming out of the closet, a respondent argues:

The truth is that I had for long period lived a life of pretension out of fear of upsetting or angering my family members, especially my aging parents. More than my own, I cared for my family image in the society and had long suppressed my own identity. But nothing good came out of that pretentious life. How long can we hide our true identity and live our life for the sake of pleasing others, even if that includes your family? We can afford to please others only if we are happy and true to ourselves. Though my parents were really hurt and resentful of my sexual identity, I felt a sense of liberation once I disclosed my true identity and began to live my life as such. It is of course never easy to come out of the closet; but living a false life was even more torturous. As such, it is always better and more meaningful if we live our own true lives. I have never once regretted coming out in the open; the same feeling applies to all members of my ilk (Transman, Personal Communication, 9 March, 2021).

Family's refusal to accept the claimed gender identity of transsexuals has implications on their health. Our respondents indicated various mental health issues such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and suicidal tendencies. They also confront on a daily basis the problems that include, *inter alia*, shame, fear of being rejected by friends and kith and kin, adaptation issues, access to public spaces, and difficulties of coming to terms with their own gender identity which stands in opposition to the identity foisted upon them based on their biological sex. This is in tune with studies that found that sexual minorities or LGBTQ community have poorer physical and mental health conditions than their heterosexual counterparts (Lick et al., 2013; Meads, 2020).

Access to public health and other opportunities are also contingent upon having certain documents. However, as resistance runs deep in the family against transsexuals altering their gender identity as per their choice, they have

difficulties in getting the required documents. This hampers their access to education, healthcare, and mobility. At times, they are even portrayed as sinful people, bringing religion or religious belief systems into context. The common refrain among family members is that it is a sin not to conform to gender binary of male and female which is explained as the only two gender identities sanctioned by God. In ideal sense, family is supposed to be a space that nurtures love, empathy and emotional support. In the absence of supportive family, transsexuals develop negative or low self-perceptions, struggle to value themselves or care about their health. Our respondents have also overwhelmingly indicated internalized transphobia in the sense of having discomfort with one's transsexual identity. Internalized transphobia can be attributed to the internalization (via socialization) of the society's dominant gender norms.

4.2. Migration and Its Associated Problems

Transsexuals are mostly discriminated within the family space. Various studies have also indicated how disclosure of one's transsexual identity can lead to being expelled from the family home (Porter & Haslam, 2005). As such, migration of people who deviate from dominant gender binary (male and female) may occur largely to escape discrimination and ill-treatments within the family and societal backlash. The term "sexual migration" is commonly used to connote this phenomenon. It refers to the migration prompted by "repression, oppression, persecution" due to one's sexual orientation (Toro-Alfonso et al., 2012, p. 59). In a further elaboration, Carrillo (2004, p. 59) sees sexual migration as

motivated, fully or partially, by the sexuality of those who migrate, including motivations connected to sexual desires and pleasures, the pursuit of romantic relations with foreign partners, the exploration of new self-definitions of sexual identity, the need to distance oneself from experiences of discrimination or oppression caused by sexual difference, or the search for greater sexual equality and rights.

Other factors of migration, such as economic and educational, are not totally absent, but sexuality is the prime factor for the migrations of sexual minorities, including transsexuals. Our study also mirrors the migrations of transsexuals under similar circumstances – coerced to migrate due to discrimination based on sexuality. Most of the respondents indicated having left their parental homes to live their own independent lives and to escape discrimination and even violence within the family setting. An account of a respondent goes:

My family regarded me as a misfit in the society. Societal values are so internalized that my family always come under the pressure of the society. They always tend to agree with the broader societal norms and regulations. Even if I am death, my family would have deemed it as better as I have always been deemed as bringing shame and dishonor to the family. For this reason, for my own desire to live a more autonomous life and to escape daily torture, and discrimination and prejudice, I left my parental home (Transwoman, Personal Communication, 23 June, 2021).

Sexual migration (be it intra-national or international) is usually aimed at achieving gender affirmation, i.e. the iterative process whereby a trans people attains social affirmation of their gender identity, expression and practices (Reisner et al., 2016). Gender affirmation, as Sevelius (2013) says, is of utmost importance for the trans people in order to obtain acknowledgement, recognition and bolstering their gender identities. Sexual migration to attain gender affirmation is usually towards urban spaces. Urban spaces are often portrayed as offering anonymity, more inclusive environment, tolerance, and acceptance. However, these sexual migrations may not necessarily have positive outcomes. Several studies have indicated that sexual migration for gender affirmation has its own challenges, such as, *inter alia*, resettlement issues, structural violence based on transphobia, poverty, and low-income (Enchautegui, 2012).

Our study has also mirrored these challenges associated with sexual migration for gender affirmation. Respondents have indicated encountering diverse problems and challenges – homelessness, difficulties in finding accommodations, economic hardships and access to public welfare services, among others. In urban spaces, they struggle to find suitable accommodation given the broader societal prejudice and discrimination against them. Landlords show disdain for transsexuals and refuse to rent out their properties to them. Landlords' refusal is mainly influenced by the fear of inviting censure and criticisms from the society. Families may also be wary of their kids

coming under the influence of the transsexuals. The problem of finding accommodation or its related problems is captured by the observation of a respondent:

It is pretty difficult for us to have a settled life. I have changed my rented accommodation three times in a year. In all three cases, I was evicted and did not leave out of my own free will. During my stay in any of my previous rented accommodation, neighbors were always wary of interacting with me. It was not difficult to read their disdainful attitudes towards me and my ilk (Transman, Personal Communication, 27 July 2021).

Homeless transsexual migrants have resettlement issues in the new environment, particularly adjusting with new culture and language. They also have problems having access to public welfare services. Many work in the informal sector – as domestic helpers, construction workers, sex work, and street vendors. The informal sector/economy is marked by low income, irregularity of employment, and susceptibility to exploitation, among others (ILO, 2014). The unregulated nature of informal work means that transsexuals' problems and hardships hardly received the attention of the government.

But by and large, our respondents express no regret having left their family homes or places of their origin. They specifically argue that life is better in their current places because of the anonymity, better environment to earn livelihood that urban spaces offer – unlike their places of origin wherein almost everyone knows each other. Urban spaces provide them the opportunity to build new networks and solidarity among the trans people themselves. Many admitted to having received one form of help or another from their fellow trans peoples. Further, they are also able to display their own identities – be it dressing, choice of friends, and in workplaces where they do not always come under censure – more freely.

Some of our respondents have also expressed their desire to travel to other countries that have socio-cultural structures that are more tolerant towards trans peoples. Migrations to these countries are deemed as the ultimate dream where life can be lived without having to face daily societal rejections. It is noteworthy here to note that there are certain countries where trans status is a legitimate ground for granting refugee status. In his study of the social acceptance of LGBTQ people in 175 countries, Andrew R. Flores listed Iceland, Norway, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Canada as the most accepting countries (Flores, 2021). Other stream of literature however points out the complex interplay of race, ethnicity, national origin and religion, among others, in shaping acceptance or denial of refugee status (Oude Breuil, 2014). This underscores that structural discriminations against trans people, irrespective of places and societies, would remain a major challenge in the foreseeable future.

4.3. Educational Status and Challenges

In general, education constitutes one of the important determinants of life chances. That there is a general discrimination and prejudice against trans peoples or other sexual minorities is a social fact. Educational attainments have linkage with the kind of life chances and opportunities that may accrue to a person. Possessing the requisite or favorable educational qualifications and skills mitigate the challenges and problems that trans peoples face. Srikummoon et al (2022, p.10), for instance, alludes to the fact that Thai society “accepts transgender people conditionally, provided that they are beautiful, wealthy, and successful.” This implies that though the broader structural discrimination and barriers may persist, having the requisite educational attainments can contribute to improving the life chances or socio-economic opportunities of the trans peoples.

Several studies have also established that the predominant discrimination and prejudiced against trans peoples or sexual minorities adversely affect their educational attainments (Pearson & Wilkinson, 2016). A study by D'Augelli et al (2006) has indicated that more than 80 percent of students belonging to sexual minorities have faced violence and discrimination in educational institutions. Further, unfavorable institutional environments may also engender a feeling of disconnectedness to learning (Akerlof & Kranton, 2002) and may lead to disengagement altogether from further educational pursuits (Rankin et al., 2010). Given this, it is no wonder that low levels of educational attainments are reported for sexual minorities or trans peoples than cisgenders. Despite the constitutional principles and provisions that call for equal treatment of all persons, such principles and provisions

are hardly put into practice. This is attributable to the fact that whether law is put into practice or enforced is dependent upon the broader moral values that prevail in a given society. And given the dominance of moral values that place a premium on male-female categorisation, laws that are meant to emancipate the sexual minorities or trans peoples are often relegated to the periphery.

Our study has also indicated the manifold problems and challenges pointed by the extant literature as teased out above. Out of our thirty-six respondents, only 5 have educational attainments to the level of graduation and above. The rest 31 of them have only managed to complete their high school level education. A common reason for these low educational attainments is related to structural discrimination against them because of their non-conformity to the dominant gender constructions of the society. In particular, the lack of support from family, social stigma, and the unfavorable school environment are cited as the primary factors behind their low educational attainments. A respondent who has completed high school level education has this to say:

I managed to complete my high school level education simply because of my determination against all odds. More than education, my family and relatives were more interested in my conformity to the society's gender construction of male and female binary than my education. Education became secondary to my parents and relatives who only put pressure on me to conform to my male gender identity assigned at birth. Even trivial matters like buying books and school uniforms were made contingent upon my acceptance, and living accordingly, of the male identity assigned to me at birth. Not just from my family, my school friends and neighbors used to make fun at my expense. As such, even going to school was a daily suffering (Transwoman, Personal Communication, 21 June, 2021).

Transsexuals usually face problems of adjustment and acceptance among peer groups and the broader society. Even in formal social spaces, such as educational institutions, the environment – be it physical or social environment – is not conducive for them. Infrastructure arrangements such as the provisions of toilets do not account for the needs of trans peoples. They usually got the blame for leading a solitary life, not mingling with peers and for lack of enthusiasm in participation in school functions, among others. At times, they experience mistreatment in the form of hate speech and sexual harassment from peers, fellow students, and even the school teachers and staff. A transwoman respondent narrated about the travails of being subjected to daily moral sermons from teachers:

Going to school for me was more of an occasion to listen to the moral sermons delivered by one teacher or another. Cloaking their sermons as motivated by their concern for my well-being, my teachers used to implore me to remain true to what they deemed as my true male identity, arguing that any deviation from it went against our culture, nature, and religion. A teacher even deplored me for not honoring the sensibilities and dignity of my parents. They think that my sense of gender identity is a psychological problem which can be corrected through counselling and moral sermons. The fact that I am a woman trapped in a man's body is hardly given attention (Transwoman, Personal Communication, 22 June, 2021).

Low educational attainments have profound implications on their economic status. Most of the respondents reported about how their daily life is a constant struggle to get or retain their jobs. In an indication that the educational attainments determine their job profile, a total of 5 respondents who have completed graduation and above have higher income and more satisfying jobs. They mostly work find employment in non-governmental organisations, private companies, medical profession and educational institutions as teachers. In a sign that they have better economic standing, 4 of them claimed to have done SRS. A transman respondent says:

After completing my 12th standard, I financed my own education, pursuing higher education in naturopathy. Now I work as a naturopathy doctor earning enough for my sustenance and even giving occasional financial support to my own relatives, who had earlier rejected me. Despite all the hardships that I have faced due to my own gender identity, I pursued my education with determination and carved out a space for myself (Transman, Personal Communication, 5 March, 2021).

The majority of the respondents (twenty-five of them), however, work in the more unregulated informal sectors. They work employment mostly in beauty parlors, cosmetic and garment shops, daily wage earners as labourers,

housemaids, and sex work or prostitutions, among others. None of our respondents are however jobless. But they all express their preference for government jobs. Security of jobs and better salary are cited as reasons for their preference. Further, they also point to the prevalence of discrimination, subtle or otherwise, in their workplace. Further, they all expressed their resentments against the lack of efforts on the part of the government to implement reservation for transgenders as ruled by the Supreme Court in 2014, which called for categorisation of transgender as Other Backward Class (OBC). They also resent the law that requires a transgender to produce proof of having undergone SRS to claim transgender identity. This, to them, is a major barrier for them as they put further economic burden of them.

5. Concluding Remarks

It is axiomatic that transsexuals constitute one of the most discriminated and marginalised groups in India. Given the deeply entrenched heteronormative biases in the collective psyche and practices of Indian society, which essentializes binary beliefs about sex and gender, any transgressions of these values and beliefs invariably evoke societal backlash. As explicated in the preceding discussions, this is evident in the enduring discriminations, social stigma and prejudices against the transsexuals in multiple settings – within the family and public spaces, such as educational institutions and workplaces. Fueling transphobia or gender-based discrimination, gender essentialism has profound implications on transsexuals' educational attainments, health and employment opportunities, among others. To be sure, there is no gainsaying the strident gains made by the indefatigable efforts of the trans communities, individuals and gender-justice movements towards greater recognition of the rights and entitlements of sexual minorities. The catch however is that – despite umpteen favorable SCI rulings, legal reforms and greater governmental efforts towards institutional protections – no real, visible change has occurred on the plight of the sexual minorities. This, therefore, calls for a more focused interrogation of gender essentialism and efforts towards mending the gap between law and implementation.

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