

**SOCIAL IDENTITY AND EMPOWERMENT OF TRANSGENDER PERSONS IN
COIMBATORE DISTRICT**

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Transgender persons (TG) are the third sex considered as vulnerable, not only in India but also world over without proper identity. They face extreme discrimination in education, economic status, health, housing and law. They also face discrimination in public places like ration shop, vegetable shops, temple, cinema theatre, commuting place etc. In general, the society identifies them as sex workers and beggars by occupation. They are being feared by the public for their arrogance and quarrelsome nature which is expressed by them due to the discrimination they face in the society. Today slowly there seem to be changes in the traditional Indian mindset. The quality of life of the TG is improved by engaging themselves in various alternative job assignments and thereby stepping into empowerment scale. Hence, in this paper an attempt is made to study the social identity and empowerment of transgender persons in Coimbatore District.

Key words: Transgender, Social Identity, empowerment

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I. Introduction

The term transgender has been derived from the Latin word 'trans' and the English word 'gender'. No particular form of sexual orientation is meant through the term transgender. The way they behave and act differs from the 'normative' gender role of men and women. Leading a life as a transgender is far from easy because such people can be neither categorized as male nor female and this deviation is "unacceptable" to society's vast majority. Trying to eke out a dignified living is even worse (Sathasivam, 2011). The term is used broadly "to describe people who transcend the conventional boundaries of gender, irrespective of physical status or sexual orientation" (Feldman & Bockting, 2003). The term is used to refer to groups such as transsexuals, cross-dressers, drag queens, drag kings, and gender queers, as well as myriad other members of the "gender community" (Kidd and Witten, 2007; Sims, 2007; Witten and Eyler, 1999; Witten and Eyler, 2007; Witten, 2003). However, it is important to understand that these terms are dynamic in location, cultural interpretation and context, in time, and in personal/political meaning, and needs a careful application. UNDP, 2010, generalized that Transgender is an umbrella term for persons whose gender identity, gender expression, or behavior does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth (Sheela, 2017).

Transgender Identities that Exist in India are 1. Hijras - biological males who reject their 'masculine' identity in due course of time to identify either as women, or "not-men", or "in-between man and woman", or "neither man nor woman 2. Aravanis/ 'Thirunangi' 3. 'Kothis' can be described as biological males who show varying degrees of 'femininity' - which may be situational, 4. Jogtas or Jopgappas are those persons who are dedicated to and serve as a servant of Goddess Renukha Devi (Yellamma) whose temples are present in Maharashtra and Karnataka 5. Shiv-Shakthis are considered as males considered close to goddess and have feminine gender expression.

Transgender People are identified as a separate sex in India. The Office of the Registrar General of India (RGI), said based on the recommendations by the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) that transgender would be given separate code i.e. '3' in the Census 2011. The TAC had proposed that during census, males would be given code one, females two and for transgendered it would be 'code three' which has been accepted by the Government. But this could be reported only when the respondent wishes other than the code-1 and code-2 and thus, left at the choice of respondents to opt for code-3.

Society has specified certain roles defining their identity on the basis of gender. Social identity is a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership(s). Tajfel (1979) proposed that the groups which people belonged to were an important source of pride and self-esteem. Social identity allows people to be part of groups and gain a sense of belonging in their social world. These identities play a major role in molding personal image. Social identification is important because it influences how people see themselves and how they interact with others. Social identity theory argues that in many social situations people think of themselves and others as group members, rather than as unique individuals. The theory argues that social identity underpins intergroup behavior and sees this as qualitatively distinct from interpersonal behavior.

Women empowerment as a concept was introduced at the International women Conference in 1985 at Nairobi, which defined it as redistribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women. Empowerment of women is empowerment of family/household and in turn development of a nation. Empowerment of women leads to benefit not only to the individual woman or to women groups, but also to the families and community as a whole through collective action for development. Women can never achieve empowered till they attained the literacy and education. Women education in India plays a very important role in the overall development of the country. It not only helps in the development of half of the human resources, but in improving the quality of life at home and outside (Khatri, 2016). Women must believe their skills and values and create their own identity by building networks and come out of fear, inhibition and self pity. Women empowerment is to make the women independent in all

aspects of life be it in mind, thoughts and making the right decisions without the societal and family restrictions.

Empowerment of transgender person refers to increase and improve the social, economic, political and legal strength, to ensure equal rights to transgender persons (TG) and to make them confident enough to claim their rights and helps them to take their own decision by breaking all personal limitations of society and family. Empowerment of transgender person would mean encouraging them to be self-reliant, independent, have positive self-esteem, generate confidence to face any difficult situation and invite active participation in various socio-political development endeavours. TG persons are being repressed by their own family natives or members and the society for many reasons. They have been preyed for myriad types of brutality and prejudicial practices by all their own native family and society. In order to gain back the respect, independence and their rights, TG persons must understand their strengths to grow and flourish in life.

Transgender persons (TG) are the third sex considered as vulnerable, not only in India but also world over without proper identity. They face extreme discrimination in education, economic status, health, housing and law. They also face discrimination in public places like ration shop, vegetable shops, temple, cinema theatre, commuting place etc. In general, the society identifies them as sex workers and beggars by occupation. They are being feared by the public for their arrogance and quarrelsome nature which is expressed by them due to the discrimination they face in the society. Today slowly there seem to be changes in the traditional Indian mindset. The quality of life of the TG is improved by engaging themselves in various alternative job assignments and thereby stepping into empowerment scale. Hence, in this paper an attempt is made to study the social identity and empowerment of transgender persons in Coimbatore District.

According to The Hindu (2011) and Indian Express (2007) report there are about 60,000 estimated transgender people living in and around Tamil Nadu. Report from 2011 census of India about 1307 transgender persons are residing in Coimbatore district. Hence, Coimbatore district has been purposively selected for the study and data for the current research paper were

collected from 201 TG persons living in Coimbatore during 2013 using non non-probability sampling technique.

II. Results and Discussion

A. Social Identity

Social Identity towards Transgender Persons

Traditionally, in India, Transgender persons are given importance and treated as the first person to perform the rituals in the family during the auspicious days. But later their presence is unwelcomed by the members of the society and they are neglected. Their perception and social identity towards TGs is in a negative way. Table 1 highlighted that the percentage distribution of the TG by social identity. The rural-urban differences revealed that in rural area TG people are more prone to adverse effect as compared to their counterparts in urban area. Of all the statements regarding social identity, 40.6 per cent of the TG persons stated that the public make fun, comment at time having fear of convert to TG closely followed by 24 per cent of them stated that people are walk away from them due to fear and 20.8 per cent of them highlighted that people try to hide their purse and money when they saw the TG persons. More or less the similar pattern was observed in urban area. The chi-sqaure test also support this fact at higher level of significance ($p < 0.002$).

Type of Discrimination Faced in the Hospitals

The results from Table 2 indicated that 18.4 per cent of the TGs are faced discrimination by delay in treatment when they approach hospitals for their ill health. Interestingly, doctors hesitated to touch the respondents were stated by 16.9 per cent of the TGs. To the extreme, the doctors humiliating the TGs by covered their nose and use mask while giving treatment (12.4%). Heavy fees (10.4%) and using abusive words (9.5%) were experienced by the TG respondents when they approach hospitals during sickness.

B. Economic Empowerment of Transgender Person

Occupational Status of the Transgender Persons

Transgender persons are achieving empowered status by generating income through engaging themselves in one or the other economic activities. Thereby they are not depending on their

biological family for their livelihood. Instead they are in a position to help their native family and society. Occupational status of the TGs are given in Table 3 and the results revealed that TG person are engaged either in collecting commission from the shop or doing sex trade (77.4%) in rural area as compared to urban area. Most of the urban TG women (32.6%) are doing catering job than in rural areas (18.9%). Begging and dancing are the occupation stated by minimum per cent of the TG women in both the areas. The rural-urban differences among the occupational status do support this fact at higher level of significance (.001 level).

Decision Maker during Purchase of Assets

Homeless after leaving the biological home and abundant by the relatives, the transgender persons are in need of identifying the TG family associates and hence forced to live in the achieved family which consists of TG mother and TG sisters. After the TGs are economically independent, they started buying things for their comfortable living condition and they became the prime decision maker of the family. Decision maker of the TG family during the purchase of assets across the current age indicated that among the age cohort 47 per cent of them are in the age group of 26-53 years stated that they are the prime decision maker in their family during the purchase of assets. When the TG persons are in the young age group below 25 years of age, their biological mother was the decision maker during the purchase of assets (Table 4) in one of the respondents. The chi square result also support the fact at 0.046 level of significance.

Social Activities Involved

Once transgender women are economically independent, they involved voluntarily in social activities. Social activities they involved here are: work for common people, taking free tuition, lending money for disabled person, give money to poor and children, help to TG community, donate money for oldage home and donates money for children education. From the Table 5, it is evidenced that lending money for disabled person (25.5%), working for common people, taking free tuition (15.1%) were the major social activities involved by the TGs in rural area. Whereas in urban area donates money for education of the children (20%) and work for common and taking free tuition (18.9%) are the main social activity stated by the TG women. Hence the result indicated that donating money for education of the children and taking free tuition are high among the respondents in rural area and lending money for the disabled evidenced high

percentage in rural area with significant difference. The differentials across rural-urban by social activities are significant at .000 level.

Conclusions

In India, the numbers of transgender person are high and they live mostly in groups in urban area. They earn mostly through doing sex trade and begging, in Coimbatore they do catering services too. In the study it is overwhelming to note that, more than half of the respondents are involved in social activities like taking free tuition, lending money for disabled, giving money for poor and children for their education and donate money for old age homes. It is always been a great challenge for the government to improve the quality of their life since they are socially stigmatized. Now the scenario found to be changing after they are recognized as third gender with supporting health, education and occupation policies for them. Today though majority of them are treated as social vulnerable their profession and social status found to be improved and this has to be fairly distributed to all transgender in the society. It is necessary to ensure equal right to TG person and to make them confident to claim their rights, such as free live their life with a sense of self-worth, respect and dignity. They should be given complete control of their life, both within and outside their home and work place. It may be expected that with a strong determination, commitment and involvement of people and organizations with philanthropic motive and a rational outlook, the problem that TG person faced, can be solved and hurled be overcome for promoting national rejuvenation and development.

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Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Transgender Persons by Social Identity

Public Reaction	Rural		Urban		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Problem not Faced	--	--	4	4.2	4	2.0
Make Fun, Comment, fear of convert to TG	43	40.6	36	37.9	79	39.3
Scared, Felt Dirty	15	14.1	11	11.6	26	13.0
Try to Hide Purse and money	22	20.8	28	29.5	50	24.9
Fear, People Walk Away from Place	26	24.5	16	16.8	42	20.9
χ^2 – Value: 20.880; Significant Level: .002						
Total	106	100.0	95	100.0	201	100.0

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Transgender Persons by Type of Discrimination Faced in Hospitals

Type of Discrimination	Have Discrimination	
	No.	%
1. Poor Treatment	24	11.9
2. Misbehaving /Violent Behaviour	14	7.0
3. Covers Mask, Close their Nose	25	12.4
4. Abusive Words	19	9.5
5. Heavy Fees	21	10.4
6. Delay in Treatments	37	18.4
7. Hesitant to Touch	34	16.9
8. Stand in Male Queue, Hesitate to Touch, not Using Medical Kit	33	16.4

Table 3: Occupational Status of the Transgender Persons

Occupational Status	Rural		Urban		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Catering	20	18.9	31	32.6	51	25.4
Commission from Shop/Sex Trade	82	77.4	51	53.7	133	66.2
Begging, Dance	4	3.8	13	13.7	17	8.5
χ^2 – Value: 13.802; Significant Level: .001						

Table 4: Decision Maker during the Purchase of Assets

Decision Makers	Current Age							
	≤ 25 Years		26 – 35 Years		36+ Years		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Purchase of Assets								
TG Mother, TG Sister	9	30.0	12	40.0	9	30.0	30	100.0
TG Women	55	36.4	71	47.0	25	16.6	151	100.0
Biological Mother	1	100.0	--	--	--	--	1	100.0
Others	2	10.5	15	78.9	2	10.5	19	100.0
χ^2 – Value: 12.796; Significant Level: .046								

Table 5: Percentage Distribution of Transgender Respondents by Social Activities involved across Current Place of Residence

Social Activities Involved	Rural		Urban		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Not Involved	39	36.8	35	36.8	74	36.8
Work for Common People, Free Tuition	16	15.1	18	18.9	34	16.9
Lending Money for Disabled Person	27	25.5	7	7.4	34	16.9
Give Money to Poor & Children	10	9.4	4	4.2	14	7.0
Help TG Community	7	6.6	8	8.4	15	7.5
Donates Money to Old Age Home	3	2.8	4	4.2	7	3.5
Donates Money for Education of Children	4	3.8	19	20.0	23	11.4
	χ^2 – Value: 24.132; Significant Level: .000					
Total	106	100.0	95	100.0	201	100.0