

The Subaltern Saga: A Critical Perspective of Transgenders in Lucknow

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The alternative paradigm in Communication Studies is concerned with the youth, alternative subcultures, gender and ethnicity. Taking a cue from here, the researchers have attempted to showcase the distorted public perception on sexual orientation and gender identity of transgenders. Although the Supreme Court's landmark judgement has provided legal sanctity to the third sex, the study using qualitative approach highlights the stigma and prejudice faced by the community. Further, the researchers seek to understand the tools used by community organisations working with transgenders to engage and raise awareness about high risk sexual behaviour. The spirit of the Constitution of India is to provide equal opportunity to every citizen to grow and attain their potential, irrespective of caste, religion or gender. Although the Election Commission of India took the first stride in allowing Transgenders to choose their gender as 'Other' as early as 2009, there is still a long way to go. The study also attempts to identify the steps being taken to rehabilitate the community by using focussed group discussions and in depth interviews. The study is significant as it highlights the fact that it is important for community organisations to create partnerships and understanding with all levels of media to improve the coverage and representation of key issues facing the third sex.

Key Words: alternative paradigm, third sex, social inclusion, community organisations

INTRODUCTION

Defining "Subaltern"

The Oxford English dictionary defines the term subaltern as inferior status or rank; subordinate; hence, of rank, power, authority, action. Subaltern studies emerged in 1982 as a series of journal articles published by Oxford University Press in India. A group of Indian scholars trained in the west wanted to reclaim their history. The primary leader was Ranajit Guha who had written works on peasant uprisings in India. Another leading scholar is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. What she and other historians (including Ranajit Guha) wanted was to reclaim their history, to give voice to subjected peoples.

The notion of the subaltern was first referred by Italian Marxist political activist Antonio Gramsci. The subaltern classes in Gramsci's words refers fundamentally to any "low rank" person or group of people in a particular society suffering under the hegemonic domination of a ruling elite class that denies them basic rights of participation in making of local history and culture as active individuals of the same nation.

We cannot deny Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak her due when we mention the term, subaltern. Although Spivak acknowledges the "epistemic violence" done upon Indian subalterns, she suggests that any attempt from the outside to ameliorate their condition by granting the collective speech invariably will encounter the following problems:

- 1) A logo centric assumption of cultural solidarity among a heterogeneous people.
- 2) A dependence on western intellectuals to 'speak for' the subaltern condition rather than allowing them to speak for themselves.

She argues that by speaking out and reclaiming a collective cultural identity, subalterns will in fact re-inscribe their subordinate position in the society (Graves, 1998).¹

The Alternative Paradigm

The alternative paradigm does not accept the prevailing liberal-capitalist order as just or the best one. It rejected the transmission model of communication. It came into being during the 1960s and 1970s, combining anti-war, liberation movements and neo-Marxism. The critical paradigm is not only concerned with working class domination but also youth, alternative subcultures, gender and ethnicity. It also focuses more on qualitative research when it comes to media research. The critical paradigm is based on a more complete view of communication as sharing and ritual rather than just transmission. (McQuail, 2010)².

EVOLUTION OF TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY IN INDIA

Transgender people have been part of Indian society for centuries. There was historical evidence of recognition of "third sex" or persons not confirm to male or

¹Graves, Benjamin.(1998) Can the Subaltern Speak? Retrieved from <http://www.postcolonialweb.org//>

²McQuail, Dennis (2010). Mass Communication Theory.67-68.Retrieved from <http://books.google.co.in//>

female gender in near the beginning writings of ancient India. The concept of “tritiyaprakriti” or “napumsaka” had been an integral part of the Hindu mythology, folklore, epic and early Vedic and Puranic literatures. Lord Rama, in the epic Ramayana, was living in the forest upon being banished from the kingdom for 14 years, turns around to his followers and asks all the ‘men and women’ to return to the city. Among his followers, the transgenders alone did feel bound by this direction and decide to stay with him. Impressed with their loyalty, Rama sanctioned them the power to confer blessings on people on auspicious occasions like child birth and marriage(Michelraj, 2015)³. So we see that the community is seeped in the rich cultural milieu of Indian history.

Defining Transgender

Transgender people are individuals of any age or sex whose appearance, personal characteristics, or behaviors differ from stereotypes about how men and women are “supposed” to be. Transgender people have existed in every culture, race, and class since the story of human life has been recorded. Only the term “transgender” and the medical technology available to transsexual people are new. In its broadest sense, transgender encompasses anyone whose identity or behaviour falls outside of stereotypical gender norms.

In India there are a host of socio – cultural groups of transgender people like hijras/ kinnars, and other transgender identities like – shiv-shaktis, jogtas, jogappas, Aradhis, Sakhi, etc. However, these socio-cultural groups are not the only transgender people, but there may be those who do not belong to any of the groups but are transgender persons individually. Though an accurate and reliable estimate of transgender people is not available, it cannot be denied that their number is miniscule compared with the total population of the country. (Sathasivam, 2011)⁴

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

³Michelraj, M.(2015). Historical Evolution of Transgender Community in India, Asian Review of Social Sciences,17-19

⁴Sathasivam,P.(2011) Rights of Transgender people-Sensitizing officers to provide access to justice,1-10. Retrieved from <http://www.tnsja.tn.nic.in//>

In “Issues faced by Transgender persons in Odisha”, July 2015, the Human Rights Law Network finds out that no transgender specific HIV services have been established in Odisha. However, free ART is available and accessible in public hospitals. Moreover, the access to SRS and counselling is very difficult due to cost. They have no access to government housing schemes. Their primary occupation is begging and there are transgenders who engage in sex work. (Soren&Barpanda, 2015)

In another report entitled, “Hijras/Transgender women in India: HIV, Human rights and Social Exclusion (Chakrapani, 2010)⁵, it has been pointed out that most transgender people, especially the youth, face great challenges in coming to terms with one’s own gender identity and/or gender expression which are opposite to that of gender identity and gender role imposed on them on the basis of their biological sex. They face several issues such as shame, fear and internalized transphobia, disclosure and coming out, adjusting, adapting or not adapting to social pressure to conform, fear of relationships or loss of relationships; and self-imposed limitations on expression or aspirations.

Nevatia& Shah (2012)⁶ understand that stigmatization of gender non-conforming and transgender children and youth is amplified in the education system, which mirrors the rest of the society in reinforcing strictly binary and patriarchal gender norms.

Chakrapani&Dhall (2011)⁷ point out that classmates and teachers alike bully, taunt and harass gender non-conforming children. Extensive evidence suggests that gender non-conforming children are at a higher risk of sexual abuse.

OBJECTIVES

- 1) To highlight the stigma and prejudice faced by the community.
- 2) To study the tools used by community organisations working with the third sex to engage and raise awareness about high risk sexual behaviour and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- 3) To find out the steps been taken for the social inclusion of the community by the organisation.

⁵Chakrapani, V.(2010). Hijras/Transgender women in India: HIV, Human Rights & Social Exclusion,4-5.Retrieved from <http://www.undp.org//>

⁶Nevatia, S., Raj Mahajan, S., Shah.C. (2012) Bound by norms and out of bounds: Experience of PAGFB within the formal education system, Contemporary Education Dialogue, 9(2), 173-96

⁷Chakrapani, V. &Dhall, P. (2011) Family acceptance among self-identified men who have sex with men (MSM) & TG people in India, Family Planning Association of India (FPAI): Mumbai

- 4) To find out steps been taken to create partnerships and understanding with media to improve coverage and representation of key issues facing the community

METHODOLOGY

The researchers have used the qualitative approach as far as data collection is concerned. In-depth interviews and focussed group discussion along with secondary data have been used to elaborate on the topic.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Focus Group Discussion involving 11 transgenders from Lucknow. The discussion was held on three parameters.

Figure 1. Matrix for assessing level of consensus in focus group

<u>Focus Group Question</u>	<u>Mem ber 1</u>	<u>Mem ber 2</u>	<u>Mem ber 3</u>	<u>Mem ber 4</u>	<u>Mem ber 5</u>	<u>Mem ber 6</u>	<u>Mem ber 7</u>	<u>Mem ber 8</u>	<u>Mem ber 9</u>	<u>Mem ber 10</u>	<u>Mem ber 11</u>
1) There is stigma and prejudice against the community	<u>A</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>
2)Steps have been taken	<u>D</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>D</u>

for social inclusion of the community											
3) There is less awareness about high risk sexual behaviour	<u>SE</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>

A = Indicated agreement (i.e., verbal or nonverbal)

D = Indicated dissent (i.e., verbal or nonverbal)

SE = Provided significant statement or example suggesting agreement

SD = Provided significant statement or example suggesting dissent

NR = Did not indicate agreement or dissent (i.e., nonresponse)

Question 1

There is stigma and prejudice against the community.

M1: This respondent indicated agreement with the statement.

M2: This respondent provided significant statement suggesting agreement. He opined that transgender persons are forced to leave the house resulting in expulsion from property rights and other family entitlements. .

M3: This respondent provided significant statement suggesting agreement. According to him skilled transgenders are denied employment opportunities because

of their transgender status. However there are examples of few transgender persons who have had created an impact through media activism.

M4: This respondent indicated agreement with the statement.

M5: This respondent provided significant statement suggesting agreement. He highlights that transgenders are booked under Section 268 IPC (causing public nuisance) or under Section 294 (Obscene Acts and songs).

M6: This respondent indicated agreement with the statement.

M7: This respondent provided significant statement suggesting agreement. Not only socio-economic problems, they also face problems in exercising their citizenship rights. Though transgender persons have contested and have had won local, state and national elections and were Mayors and MLAs, in the absence of a national policy, they do not enjoy basic fundamental rights.

M8: This respondent provided significant statement suggesting agreement. Moreover those who contested in elections in the woman category were turned down on the basis that they were not biological females. KamlaJaan was elected as the first eunuch mayor of Katni, Madhya Pradesh. She resumed her position in the year 2000 but gave up in the year 2003. The reason was that the political opposition filed a petition at a lower court, and then later at the Jabalpur High Court stating that KamlaJaan had lied about her gender. The opposition won the case stating that the election had been illegal.

M9: This respondent provided significant statement suggesting agreement. Some basic rights denied to transgender persons include ration (family) card, Right to vote, right to marriage, child adoption, opening a bank account and many other fundamental (transgender) rights.

M10: This respondent indicated agreement with the statement. Transgender persons also face physical and sexual violence from police and local hoodlums/ extortionists due to the nature of their work.

M11: This respondent indicated agreement with the statement.

Question 2

Steps have been taken for social inclusion of the community.

M1: This respondent indicated dissent.

M2: This respondent provided significant statement suggesting agreement.

Transgender activism has a very strong history in the states of Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal. One of the reasons for this is because transgender community is more organized and mobilizes community members for rights and services in these states.

M3: This respondent provided significant statement suggesting dissent.

The governments have been unresponsive to a large extent. She further said that transgenders remain politically isolated in Uttar Pradesh. We have problem in getting an identity for ourselves and it is a Herculean task to get a PAN card, aAadhar card or even a ration card because there is no column for third gender in government forms. Schools and colleges in Uttar Pradesh do not offer third gender options.

M4: This respondent indicated agreement.

M5: This respondent provided significant statement suggesting dissent. The steps taken by the governments have been insufficient to a great extent. In July 2015, the state of Odisha took a major step for the transgender community by creating the Department of Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities. The SSEPD has drafted a proposal for recognition of transgender community in Odisha and for providing them with certificates that identify them as third gender. Other states also need to do something to do away with stigma and discrimination.

M6: This respondent indicated agreement.

M7: This respondent provided significant statement suggesting agreement. As part of the scheme by the Odisha government, transgender students will get pre-matric and post-matric scholarships. Transgender persons will be provided assistance with skill development training.

M8: This respondent provided significant statement suggesting agreement. Transgenders are politically isolated in Uttar Pradesh.

M9: This respondent provided significant statement suggesting agreement. In September 2015, the Odisha government took steps to extend the benefits of the National Food Security Act, 2013 to transgender persons. Further, it announced that

transgender persons would be provided with the same social welfare benefits as people below the poverty line under various schemes..

M10: This respondent provided significant statement suggesting agreement.

There are people from our community like Shabnammausi and Laxmi Narayan Tripathi who have been successful and hold a position of respect in the society but these examples are very few.

M11: This respondent indicated dissent.

Question 3:

There is less awareness about high risk sexual behaviour.

M1: This respondent provided significant statement suggesting agreement. Apart from these socio-economic and political issues, transgenders also face health problems such as STI/ HIV/ AIDS, sexual health, mental health, alcohol, and substance abuse. (This was also highlighted in UNDP report(2010)).

M2: This respondent provided significant statement suggesting agreement.

Transgender persons do not visit government hospitals fearing stigma and discrimination, harassment and lack of sensitivity among health care staff and counsellors (Pisal 2006; Ranade unpublished). Lot of money is spent in private hospitals and clinics.

M3: This respondent provided significant statement suggesting agreement.

There is a changing trend in castration pattern and many transgender community and MtF now opt to go for sex change operation.

M4: This respondent provided significant statement suggesting agreement.

However so far in India there is no provision for any life or health insurance schemes for transgender community. The reason ranges from lack of knowledge, inability to pay premiums or not able to enroll in insurance schemes because of their ambiguous sex/ gender status (UNDP 2010)

M5: This respondent provided significant statement suggesting agreement.

The Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) agent training given to transgender persons in Tamil Nadu is a good initiative for transgender employment.

M6: This respondent indicated agreement with the statement.

M7: This respondent provided significant statement suggesting agreement.

Project Pehchan was launched in October 2010 in order to tackle the HIV epidemic among MSM, transgender people and hijras (MTH) in India. Pehchan advocates for policy to create an enabling environment where MTH can easily access HIV and other sexual and reproductive health services.

M8: This respondent provided significant statement suggesting agreement.The Avahan project works to reduce HIV transmission among sex workers, MSM and transgender people through the provision of education as well as condom promotion, sexually transmitted infection (STI) management, behaviour change communication, community mobilisation and advocacy.

M9: This respondent indicated agreement with the statement.

M10: This respondent indicated agreement with the statement.

M11: This respondent indicated agreement with the statement.

When we analyse the results of Question1, all the 11 respondents have expressed agreement with the statement or have provided a significant statement indicating agreement. Similarly, the analysis of Question2 proves that 8 out of 11 respondents believe that steps have been taken for the social inclusion of the community. When we analyse the results of Question 3, all the 11 respondents have have expressed agreement with the statement or have provided a significant statement indicating agreement. This means respondents feel that there is less awareness about high risk sexual behaviour among transgender communities.

In- Depth interviews

Making a Living for Eunuchs - Payal Singh (Payal Guru)

Researcher: **Tell me something about yourself?**

Interviewee: Born to a Thakur Family on April 26, 1980, I (*Jugni*) was fourth among five children in my father, Ram Bahadur's family in Unnao district of Uttar Pradesh but was cursed on my birth specially by father Ram Bahadur Singh who longed for a baby boy. "My mother Shanti Devi had to face wrath of everyone around. Yes, I was born a *Eunuch* (Transgender)".

Researcher: **What happened next? How did you come to the world of transgenders?**

"Suicide seemed only option to me. I ran away from my village and boarded a train. The journey was more horrifying as an elderly person in the train sexually assaulted me and when I got down at a nearby railway station, I met the same fate from a Police Constable. I asked myself "Is the male world like this everywhere"?

Having realized that it's difficult to survive in the male dominated society, *Jugni* had to convert herself as *Jugunu* when she finally landed up in Industrial city Kanpur.

"Everyone is not bad in this world", says Payal recalling her association with some decent people who helped her like Anwar, Santosh Singh, KatiyarSaheb and Ashok Sonkar. They not only provided shelter to her but helped her in whatever way they could. She worked as Projector Assistant with KatiyarSaheb in the talkies. Payal did not disclose her identity and kept wearing male dresses. One day when it was disclosed she had to shift her base to Lucknow. A gang of Eunuchs however kept a watch on her and she got trapped by two Eunuchs – Riya and Tabbasum and was taken to their Chief Guru Mai. Initially reluctant but when beaten up mercilessly, Jugunu alias Jugini introduced herself as Payal Singh. She had to succumb to the pressure of Guru Mai and join the Dera/Gang. She however never liked the life style, the regular use of liquor, and the way fellow Eunuchs were involved in sex work and vowed to take revenge one day. Circumstances once again brought Payal back to Kanpur but not before deciding to take revenge from Guru Mai by reigning the Guru Mai's Dera one day but with a different cause.

Researcher: **What has been the impact of SC judgement?**

Interviewee: She does not find any significant impact after Apex Court's decision to refer a batch of curative petitions against Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. "Be it Police or public at large, Transgender do not get a dignified place in the society". The option of "Others" so far has not brought entitlement of Loans, housing & Employment to them. "The authorities want us to file Income Tax Return. Can you put us in the category of fixed income

to file a return; she asked and said there is a long way to go if you talk of giving a dignified life and a status in the society to the eunuchs”.

Researcher: Tell me about your debut in serials. Has it helped change the attitude of people?

Interviewee: I have worked for TV Serials “ Savdhan India”, appeared on TV shows in Life OK , Zee besides playing an important character of Mother in a powerful theatre performance “ AkhiMaanHoon” She is today part of many TV serials, her story being filmed by Bollywood including famous Vishal Bhardwaj and has travelled to USA, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, London and UAE to participate in international conferences. “It’s only in India where you are looked down upon and hated” she said and referred to other countries where she was treated as a normal human being and became part of all the activities.

Interview with Bharosa Trust (Mr. Imran Hussain - Project Director)

Researcher: How is public attitude towards you as an individual or Community? Has there been any kind of harassment / discrimination by police?

Interviewee: Though there is gradual acceptance but discrimination against transgender continues in general both from the public and police . “Stigma still exists apart from neglect, verbal abuse and even assault”, says Imran Hussain , the Project Manager of **Bharosa Trust** . The cases of assault are more common when community finds transgender individuals cross-dressed in the localities or even streets , he said.

If you visit *walled city area* you are obvious to face wrath of the people but if transgender individuals move in posh areas they are ignored.

Researcher: Do you get any kind of support in education, livelihood , education or employment?

Interviewee: Yes, under the Uttar Pradesh Skill Development Mission – there is a proposal to train Transgender in *beauty parlours, fashion courses and music (Orchestra)*. Though we are entitled for unemployment allowance but to avail the benefits of the government schemes, the key issue is our proof of residence so that Aadhar Card can be made. Bharosa is addressing

these issues but documentation will take time. We can also apply in Housing Schemes since transgender individuals now figure out in the category of *Others*.

Researcher: What are the tools used by the organisation to raise awareness about high risk sexual behaviour and to rehabilitate the community?

Interviewee: We are part of National Aids Control Organisation (NACO), UP State Aids Control Society (UPSACS) and Naaz Foundation and funds have been allocated to create awareness and constantly monitor the transgender community. There is a regular monitoring and Test of HIV to Rehabilitation and Therapy.

Researcher: Please comment on the use of media to improve coverage and key issues surrounding transgender community.

Interviewee: Media has played a very strong a powerful role and it is the media impact which resulted in the Supreme Court verdict in favour of Transgender. There has been a regular reporting on issues confronting transgender .

Bollywood has played equally powerful role with *Pink* movie being the latest hit. *GulabiAina* ,*Tamanna* , *ShabnamMausi* are other classical examples.(ad campaign with the 6 Pack Band having won the Grand Prix Glass Lion at the Cannes Lion advertising awards this year, there might be more to look forward to.)

In 2014, The Hindu, reported that the report, “A Framework for media engagement on MSM and Transgender Persons in South Asia”(Dhar, 2014)⁸, jointly prepared by Centre for Advocacy and research (CFAR) and UNDP, examined media reporting in Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Nepal. They found prejudiced, inaccurate, sensationalized news coverage.

Similarly, in the article, “(Mis) Representation of Hijras in Popular Media”, (Jain,2015)⁹ points out that instead of showing them as characters that carry a story forward, transgender persons are mere tools, a butt of all jokes.

CONCLUSION

⁸Dhar, Aarti (2014, May,2) Media Coverage on Gender Issues draws flak. Retrieved from <http://www.thehindu.com//>

⁹Jain, Tanya(2015, Dec,9) (Mis) Representation of Hijras in Popular Media. Retrieved from <http://feminismindia.com//>

From the results of the focussed group discussion, it can be inferred that there is stigma and prejudice against the transgender community (all the 11 respondents in FGD agree to the fact). The second parameter in the FGD is to find out if steps have been taken for the social inclusion of the community. Out of 11 respondents, 8 respondents believe that measures have been taken for the social inclusion of the community. Finally, the third parameter is if there is less awareness about high risk sexual behaviour, where all the 11 respondents feel the need for creating more awareness about STIs.

If we go through the in-depth interview of Payal Singh, she is of the opinion that be it police or public at large, the transgender community does not get a dignified place in the society. The option of “others” has not brought entitlement of loans, housing and entitlement. In the similar vein, Imran Hussain, Project Director, Bharosa Trust, opines that discrimination against transgender community continues in general, both from the police as well as public. There is stigma against the community along with neglect, verbal abuse and assault.

LIMITATIONS

- 1) The study is based in Lucknow only when it discusses stigma, prejudice, social inclusion and high risk sexual behaviour of the transgender community.
- 2) Due to cost and time constraint, the study has conducted only one focussed group discussion among eleven transgender people.

SUGGESTIONS

- 1) The study highlights the fact that it is important for community organisations to create partnerships and understanding with all levels of media-local, state and national-to improve the coverage and representation of key issues facing the third sex. Community organisations along with the media can impact policies and programmes and help in social inclusion of such people. This angle has to explored more.

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