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QUALITATIVE STUDY ON CULTURAL PRACTICES OF MALE TO FEMALE TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY IN SOUTH INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This study finds the socio-cultural customs of male-to-female transgender persons in Tamil Nadu, India, through their unique traditions, customs, rituals, and lifestyles. The paper provides insight into the significant role these persons play during ceremonies, fraught with social discrimination and economic deprivation. We conducted qualitative research to find out how Transgender cultural practices given security and insecurity. Focus group discussion and case study has been used. Transgenders from Tamil Nadu face intense socio-economic and cultural issues. In many religious rituals, irrespective of the roles granted with honour, they are indeed placed outside the societal domains, thus affecting a larger section into beggary and sex work. The Jamaat community system provides support but tends to force economic dependence on the leaders. Key subjects include kinship within Transgender, language, food, and ritual practices, including the Koovagam festival and complexities regarding sex reassignment surgery.

Keywords: Cultural practices, Transgender, Marginalized community, Gender Security

1 INTRODUCTION

Gender construct is nothing but the differences that exist between men and women just because of gender disparity. This is found in almost every stage and globe at different stages of life ranging from prenatal to old age. Gender constructs have a robust platform called "bias" which leads to discrimination with multi-dimensional effects such as oppression, suppression, marginalization, and subjugation from the mainstream of the society leading to inequality amongst genders (Nagoshi et al., 2012). Observably, the gender construct is in purely religious and cultural aspects with step-by-step historical patriarchal system in both spiritual and social arenas (Chakrapani et al., 2011). The marginalized gender which has long been sidelined, is not considered as a person with an identity or rights of her/his dignity (Babu, 2016; Connell, 2020; Vianello et al., 1990). Hijras (Male to Female Transgender) belongs to South India. This makes them one of the oldest known transgender groups in the region. They share a history that is also integrated with spiritual reverence and social ostracization (Das & Das, 2019; Hughto et al., 2015). Traditionally, Transgender are believed to possess spiritual powers and are therefore integrated into most religious and cultural ceremonies. Despite holding a prestigious role in specific contexts, Transgender oftentimes face great socio-economic challenges and societal discrimination (Nanda, 1999; Rani & Srivastava, 2015).

Historical meaning of Aravani/Transgenders

In the Indian epic Mahabharatha, Lord Aravan, son of Lord Arjuna has married Lord Krishna, who was in the transgender form. Later Lord Aravan used human sacrifice in the war and thus Lord Krishna lost her husband, Lord Aravan. By connecting this incident, the present-day transgenders are called by the name of Aravani, meaning wife of Aravan (Vanitha, 2017).

Language of Transgender

The transgender community uses a unique language among their community members, which is called "Kavudi Bhasha". This language does not have a written form and it is a mixture of Tamil, Hindi, Urdu, and Sanskrit. Since the Muslim kings were very close to this community in ancient India, many words are from Urdu and Hindi (Babu, 2007; Vanitha, 2017).

Food and Diet of Transgenders

In general, transgenders' diet patterns are like mainstream society but some differences are found in

their food habits. After the sexual reassignment surgery or SRS (Removing male sex organs), the transgender who has undergone the surgery is advised to drink more black tea and bread. This community never eats pork, it may be because of the relationship between transgenders and the Muslim Kings, in the past. In many things, Transgenders are similar to the Muslim community. They are also strongly against eating male chicken or roosters. They describe the rooster as a male symbol of male, so they are not taking it in their diet (Vanitha, 2017).

Community Structure of Transgenders in India

Jamaat is the community system that mostly exists in the west and the northern Indian states and Nayak is the head and the primary decision maker and policy maker of the Transgender community. This kinship pattern goes as chelas, and naticheles (granddaughters) under the same house. Jamaat is an Islamic term. Jamaat has its own strict rules. Within the hijra Jamaat system, the guru is a guardian of her Chela. Chelas earn and give full or partial amounts of their earnings to their respective gurus. The guru is entitled to collect all the money, and in return, the guru gives food, apparel, and accommodation to the Chelas (Babu, 2007; Sathasivam, 2011). Adolescent transgender people receive moral and emotional support from the community. Due to their feminine identity, they practice matrilineal relationships like sister, aunt, niece, grandmother, granddaughter, etc among themselves ((Babu, 2007; Mahalakshmi et al., 2021; Vanitha, 2017).

Kinship system among the Transgender

Husband-wife relationship: The marriages of Transgender with males are still not legally valid in India. There is no provision for registering marriages. Same-sex marriage and sexual activity are considered illegal activity under section 377 of the Indian Penal Code and this section enforces lifetime imprisonment for this activity (Hughto et al., 2015). Hence, many men are marrying Transgender and running away with the hard-earned money of Transgender. However, some of the Transgender are living their life happily with their life partners such as Chennai Priya Babu, Coimbatore Padmini, Pollachi Kalki, Subramaniyan, etc., with some of the transgenders adopting and rearing children (Mahalakshmi et al., 2021; Vanitha, 2017).

God & Worship Pattern of Transgenders

Transgender are worship the goddess Bahuchara Mata. The temple of Bahuchara Mata is situated near Ahmedabad in Gujarat state. Apart from their deity,

Transgender are also devotees of Lord Aravan who is believed to be the husband of Transgender. Lord Aravan temple (also called Koothandavar temple) is situated in Koovagam village, Villupuram district of Tamilnadu, and is very famous for its "Chitra Poornima" festival. Transgenders from other states and even other countries in Asia take part in this festival. The Central theme of this festival is Lord Aravan's marriage and his death ((Babu, 2007; Mahalakshmi et al., 2021; Vanitha, 2017).

Koovagam Festival

The Koovagam festival is held every year around the time of the Chitra Poornima festival in Tamil Nadu. The festival venerates the figure of Lord Aravan, who is sacrificed at a battle between the Pandavas and Kauravas in the Mahabharata texts. Having desired to be married before his death, Aravan's wish comes true when Lord Krishna, in the form of a woman, marries him. After this, Aravan is sacrificed. Transgender and their subgroups attend the festival to symbolize their marriage to Lord Aravan so that they can stand as a distinct cultural and religious identity. The festival attracts participants from across Tamil Nadu and neighboring places, even though the term Aravani belongs specifically to the Tamil Nadu cultural milieu (John & Marak, 2013; Tom & Menon, 2021).

NIRVANA- The Castration

Traditional Method: Transgenders willingly undergo castration either by traditional method or institutional method, called SRS (Sexual Reassignment Surgery) for changing gender after joining the transgender community. Once the community decides to perform Nirvana to male to female Transgenders, they announce the occasion and select a date. On the day of the evening, they perform elaborate Puja to "Betharasi Metha". Efficient "Dayamma", a senior transgender, who usually performs Nirvana, in the traditional method, comes with hot water and warm milk after sharpening a knife. After reading the name of the transgender, the hair is caught between the teeth, is brought before the idol of "Betharaasi Matha" and with swift action with the knife, the Dayamma does two cuts to separate the penis and pair of testicles, from the body. The blood is left to flow incessantly; the belief is that the "Maatha" will protect them from the bleeding (Zavlin et al., 2018).

Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS): Sex reassignment surgery denotes any one of the several surgical techniques therein involved in the process of transitioning from one gender to another (Lawrence,

2005). Most transgender people do not prefer surgery for various reasons ranging from medical or financial problems to lack of necessity (Selvaggi & Bellringer, 2011).

Sex Reassignment Surgery Procedure for Male-to-Female: Sex reassignment surgery for male-to-female conversion involves the reshaping of male genitals to give them the appearance and function of female genitalia. Before surgery, the person normally undergoes hormone replacement therapy, and depending on the time Hormone Replacement Therapy begins, facial hair removal is also done. There are associated surgeries, transgenders may choose to undergo, including facial feminization surgery, breast augmentation, and various other procedures (Selvaggi & Bellringer, 2011; Vidal-Ortiz, 2005). An incision is made on the scrotum to remove male genitalia, The flap of skin is drawn back, and the testes are removed. The skin covering the penis is removed but left attached, and a shorter urethra is cut. Leaving a small stump of the penis, all else is removed. And excess skin creates the labia (external genitalia) and vaginae (Maharasan, 2007).

This study aims to examine the socio-cultural practices of male-to-female transgenders in Tamil Nadu and their impact on social standing, identity construction, and experiences of marginalization. The assessment would elucidate these different roles that Hijras play in religious ceremonies and also everyday life, hence clarifying the complexities of their cultural identity with consequences in terms of gender diversity and social inclusion.

2 MATERIAL AND METHOD

A qualitative research design is required to give a clear understanding of issues concerning cultural practices and socio-cultural issues concerning the Transgender community, which affords detailed inquiry into personal issues and beliefs as well as interpersonal relationships. So that the qualitative research approach has been used for this study.

Data Collection and Analysis

The Transgender community from Chennai Corporation, Tamil Nadu was taken as the participants, with an age range of 18-60 years. Recruitment of the participants was made through local transgender organizations, community leaders, and snowball sampling techniques to provide diversity in representation within the community. The researcher has selected the areas wherever transgender is found in abundance as per the NGOs' documents within the Chennai corporation area on Tondiarpet, Kasimattu, Rayapuram, Gunidy,

Mylapore, Saidapet, Nungambakkam, Kodambakkam, Guindy park, Triplicane, Anna Nagar, Vadapalani.

The primary tool on Focus group discussion and case study has been used. Ten focus group discussions and five case studies were conducted. Among transgender, mixed group members like different age groups, different religious groups, and those who had different occupations, participated in all ten FGDs. In each FGD, an average of 8 to 12 respondents participated and open-ended questions were used to extract responses from them. Based on their responses, further questions were asked to probe. Each FGD lasted from one hour to one and a half hours, based on the active participation of the respondents. The inclusion criteria has the male individuals, who are self-identified as female or third gender, male to female transgender (MTF) who chose to undergo sexual reassignment surgery or not, were included in the present study. They may be migrant transgender or permanent residents of the Chennai Corporation area.

After the data analysis, thematic analysis disclosed recurring themes or patterns representative of the data. To facilitate the organization and coding of qualitative data, NVivo software was used for systematic theme development.

3 RESULT

A community system (Jamaat): The Transgender community has a structured body that controls the total members of the community. The community leader is called "Naayak" and the head of each household or group is termed as "Guru". Newly joined Transgender or who are being controlled by a Guru are called "chellas". This pattern extends till the "grand chelas" (Babu, 2007; Mahalakshmi et al., 2021; Subramanian & Sugirtha, 2015; Vanitha, 2017).

The Leader (Nayak): Nayak is a transgender, who wields absolute power over all other transgenders in a specific geographical area. A Nayak is selected by the community taking into consideration the person's ability to plead the issues of the Transgender, shoulder responsibility, and be accepted by the community. The elderly transgenders take the consent of the would-be Nayak and will approach seven Nayaks from different places and invite them to the ceremony (Reddy, 2010).

Adoption in the Jammath system by Nayak: Men with feminine feelings, have come to Transgender community, without the knowledge of their family. Each state follows different types of ceremonies to celebrate the acceptance of a new member. In

Chennai, they conduct parties. They celebrate the "lap-tying" (Madikattuthal) function. Firstly, they inform everyone about the matter. Then elders inquire about the new Transgender as well as the mother Transgender's willingness to adopt the new Transgender. Then the elders advise both of them, to bear all the good and bad things happening in their lives, together. This Jammath will not easily accept a new Transgender, first, they inquire about their family background and the circumstances in which they are leaving their house. During the function, they give a big plate called a Jammath plate, containing fruits, betel nuts, betel leaf flowers, fruit, sweets, Rs.101 or Rs.11, and a lighted Kamatchi lamp, then they accept the person as a daughter in the community. The Elder Transgender announces "From today, this Transgender is my daughter" Then the TG will declare "From today, she is my mother". There are two Gurus for every Transgender. Chela means daughter-in-law, when a Chela is adopted, she becomes a daughter to one guru and daughter-in-law to another.

Sharing Income: The Transgender has to hand over all the money she earns to the Guru. As long as the Transgender is with the Guru she should earn for her. When all of them go together to collect money from the shops, the Guru will divide a part of the money among themselves, while she will take a major share from it, because she is the one who takes care of all Transgender needs. If any Transgender is caught hiding the money, the Guru may forgive them if she is a good person, but some Gurus will beat up the Transgender and keep a red-hot coin on the forehead and chase her out, then the Transgender won't be admitted in any Transgender community. If a Guru helps a Transgender to undergo a Nirvana operation, then the Transgender should earn many years together and pay the amount to the Guru. The Transgender has to be paid many times more than what was spent by the Guru.

Changing Mother/ Breaking Adoption: If a transgender, does not want a particular person to be her mother or daughter should give "Thandu". "Thandu" means fine. She has to pay a fine. The Transgender, who is adopting another, spent money on her operation. And when she decides to go as a daughter to another Transgender, the whole ceremony of Jammath Plate has to be repeated. A few of them run away from their mother (Transgender), without any information or financial settlements. *One of the person from the FGD claimed that she paid more money than what was spent on her.*

Reassignment surgery: Mostly the surgery is done by a doctor. The cost ranges from 50,000 to 70,000

rupees. For plastic surgery, the expenses may vary from 2 lakhs to 5 lakhs rupees. After surgery, there are fair chances of death. Some of the participants reported that *“Those who have done Thayamma or visited a doctor have died. Sexual Reassignment Surgery consists of removing the male genital organs and realigning the spot like a female genital and developing the breasts (Vidal-Ortiz, 2005). Mostly the surgery is done by a doctor. The cost ranges from 50,000 to 70,000 rupees. For plastic surgery, the expenses may vary from 2 lakhs to 5 lakhs rupees. It could cost even up to 10 lakhs rupees. After surgery, there are fair chances of death. Some of the participants reported that “Those who have done Thayamma or visited a doctor have died. After the surgery if they fail to keep the wound clean, they may get infected”.*

Thayamma Method: While one person will catch the sex organs tightly with a waist rope (arnakair), another person will cut off the male organ with one stroke of the knife. There is no medicine or injection for pain. Still in some places like Vellore and Coimbatore, the Thayamma type operation is performed. In Chennai 2 persons practice the Thayamma method, in Villupuram one Transgender followed the same method. Some of the participants reported that *“Before the operation, Thayammawould dig a pit, and if during the operation anyone dies, they will throw the person into the pit and cover it and will not tell anyone. The operation will be performed around 2.00 AM- 4.00 AM, without anyone seeing it. If a Transgender is alive after the operation, she will be brought home. Otherwise, she will be left there in the pit.*

The function of Milk Pouring (Paloothuthal): The ablution ceremony (paloothuthal) is celebrated 40 days after a transgender woman follows a Nirvaan operation involving the removal of male genitals. In the interim, he lives in seclusion, where he sees no men, and no reflective surface, and takes certain foods. On the 41st day, however, a pompous ceremony unfolds: she is bathed, and clothed with a lustrous green sari, and she sees herself in the mirror decked as the bride. To climax, those prayers of offering to Goddess Ganga occur, accompanied by hand clapping (Sottala). Some believe that this ceremony must be accompanied by a sexual act to make the person wealthy and alluring for the next life he will be bound to.

Jammath System and Rules: The Jammath system, basically of Muslim traditions, was initially presided over by Muslim Nayaks and Gurus. With time, people from other religions also joined it, yet customs like women covering their heads were retained. Other than that, community organizations for

transgender persons demand that they participate in Jammath gatherings and greet elders respectfully, either as "Pambaduthi" or "Pampadathimma," depending on the custom. If any Transgender gets into a fight with another Transgender and beats her up, they will collect (Thandu) fine from her that could go up to 50,000 or 1 lakh. The Big and the Small houses fine each other, depending on whose fault it is. If a fine isn't paid, the offender is cauterized on the forehead with a heated coin and expelled from the community.

Transgender death ceremony: If they have undergone the operation, they would be buried according to the Muslim custom. On the demise of a transgender, either the chela (Daughter-in-law) or Atha (Mother-in-law) of the deceased would become the widow. The widow will stay in the deceased place for 9 days. On the 9th day, the Amma of the widow visits her carrying a white saree, white blouse, new chappals, garland, turmeric, and saffron and decorates her. The widow is taken to a nearby tank, half submerged in the water, then an older transgender will break her bangles, remove the flowers and she will be made to wear a white sari and blouse (Reddy, 2010).

Marriage: They tie the "Thali" among themselves. Since they are called for functions like weddings, childbirth, etc., they need to look like a married person. If people don't see the thali, they will not give their children to them for naming or blessing. So Transgender tie the thalis. Transgender is like the Devadasis, everyone wears a thali and is dedicated to a god. Those who are lesbian in Transgender are called "Nani" and "Nathithi," Nani means granddaughter, who will have 2 thalis, one is the Devadasithali, and the other is tied by the Transgender. The husband is a male sexual partner (panthi). They have sex with the Transgender whenever they want to. There are some good panthis, who live their entire life with the Transgender.

Sexual Orientation: Transgender usually engages in oral sex (through the mouth), as well as anal sex (through the anus) and hand sex (mutual masturbation) and thigh sex (in between the thighs), armpit sex (in the armpit) (Nagoshi et al., 2012; Wheldon & Wiseman, 2019). They have sex with all those who come on a day. Like 6, 10, 15, or 20, any number of people who come, they have sex with them. They receive money ranging from Rs. 200 to 2000. Minimum per person. Radhika reported *“Yes. A Guru will have sex with her granddaughter. We call this TG's Lesbian sex.*

Sexual Habits: When they were very young, the elders sexually abused male children and taught

them to do such type of sex, and they started to practice the same from then (Rafferty, 2021; Sathya & Thasian, 2016). One of the participants shared "Yes. When I was studying in a hostel at Vyasarpadi, I would dance like a lady, and the boys used to approach me for sex and I used to have sex with them, by enacting the role of the female in the sex act. All the 250 inmates of the hostel liked me, and every one of them had sex with me". Another participant reported "From a young age I have had this feeling. My uncle used to keep hugging me and also had sex with me. When I went to school, from primary grade, the boys had sex with me. From 5th to 9th, I studied in Chennai and there too I was much tortured for sex, so I left the school and joined the Don Bosco School at Vellore".

Strong and Regular Habit: Most of them have drinking habits. The majority of them use tobacco products like Jarda, Parag, Hans, etc. Some elders smoke cigarettes too. Few of them use Ganja (Lee et al., 2014; Tobin & Delaney, 2019). One participant reported that "*In Chennai 10 out of 100 use ganja, mostly elderly Transgender*". Participant 4 stated, "*In the Jamath, if I don't drink while others do, they isolate me, calling me a man.*"

Health Problems: Few of them are affected by HIV/AIDS. Before the operation, they are injected on their backbone, just like they do prior to delivery, for women, because of which they develop back pain very often. Secondly, a lot of strength is drained from them and they become very weak. As some doctors do not perform the surgery properly, they develop problems in urinating. Few of them are affected by HIV/AIDS (Chakrapani, 2010; Venkatrama Raju & Beena, 2015; Revathi, 2010). One of the participants reported that "*We get the diseases that people who use these substances generally get*". Another participant said that "*The spread of HIV/AIDS has come down much among our community*".

Occupation: Begging (KadaiKaedka) and sex work. The majority of the Transgender go to begging (KadaiKaedka) and do sex work (Thanda). Some of them do other jobs besides begging and sex work. Few of them dance to earn money (Pariseau et al., 2019; Sathya & Thasian, 2012) Some of them practice prostitution in their houses. Participant 9 reported that "*The Transgenders do begging, some do prostitution from their houses*". In the evenings they will dress up and stand at the bus stops, where they will pick up customers and bring them home for sex. They go shop-begging and engage in sex work. They also lend the money earned in these ways, for interest.

Reasons for Transgender Engage Begging and Sex

Work: Transgender persons offer different reasons for engaging in begging and sex work based on their situation. For instance, participants state, "TGs are generally out of a job and rent is too high. If the rent for a non-TG is 2000 rupees, it ranges between 4000 to 5000 rupees for a TG. With no alternatives, we are forced to beg for sex work." On the other hand, the participant adds, "Our daily expenditure is extravagant, as for a common woman; we describe ourselves about even soap or shampoo." *Gowshalya related the experience of opening an Idli shop, and her awaiting auto drivers who come to her place every day demanding free food. When she refused to comply with their demand, they vandalized her eatery and beat her up; her only choice was to return to begging.* A Transgender told of how victimization continues; even if a Transgender is fortunate, employers exert tremendous pressure and engage in sex work.

Trafficking and Violence: Trafficking and violence have been happening among Transgender community. When young Transgender enter their community they either get support or sometimes face human trafficking and violence (Saveri, 2013). Transgender Rathika reported that "*I was educated and they took me to Mumbai promising to get me a good job, but sold me to a brothel. There they put makeup on my face and made me stand outside for sex work. Since I was educated, I refused, but they burned me with cigarette butts and forced me. I hid myself in a dirty linen sack and escaped. At the Dadar railway station, I saw some Telugu Transgender begging. I asked them if I could join their group and beg and they said ok, so I joined their group*".

Religious Practices

Most of the participants felt that in the Transgender community, there are no religious differences like Hindu, Christian, or Muslim, after joining the Transgender community everyone will go to Hindu temples, and they wear ornaments on the ear, and nose and also keep tilak on their forehead. Most of them reported that Hindu temples allowed Transgender, they accepted their offering plate (Archanai) and they gave viboothi. Most of them reported that Transgender were allowed into the Dharga, but not allowed to touch and kiss the tomb. Some of them reported that if they wear saris they won't allow Transgender, but if they wear men's clothing they will be allowed at the Dharga. Few of them felt Transgender were accepted at Hindu temples and Muslim Dharga, only in Christian churches they do not accept Transgender.

Participating in Family Function: Most of the participants reported that their family members do not call them for any family functions. Most of the participants reported that their family members do

not call them for any family function. Very few of them participate in family functions (Konduru & Hangsing, 2018). Some reasons given by the participants are that *"The people in our families are ashamed of us. They are afraid that the relatives will talk ill of them for calling us. Even if we go, they will talk badly about us. When there is a wedding, all the men will come with their wives and children, looking at that, our parents will feel that if their sons have not turned into Transgender, then their sons also would have married and have wives and children. These feelings will sadden them"*.

4 DISCUSSION

This research study reveals the socio-cultural practices of Transgender in Tamil Nadu, while the impact of community structures and cultural rituals on identity building, status location, and marginalization experiences comes to light. This study depicts the Jamaat system, wherein a hierarchy establishes the Nayaks (leaders) and Gurus (mentors) that wield vast influence, depicting a certain kinship structure all the while retaining a gendered facet of its own (Gayathri & Karthikeyan, 2016; Vanitha, 2017). While on the one hand, they create a powerful sense of common identity and moral relationships of reciprocal obligation, they also serve more effectively to consolidate economic power over the organization because they mean the sale of labor time to the Gurus on behalf of the members and also their earnings (Pariseau et al., 2019). By defining them as members they are always dependent on this choreography of episodes and include fewer and fewer of them in other labor organizations and political movements (Reddy, 2010). The functions constitute everything towards the strengthening of an internal fast set, but this also comes with certain tribulations for the family-unbalancing.

Economic Struggles and Marginalization: Transgender undergo immense rejection from society, which compels many to indulge in begging and sex work to earn a living (Sathya & Thasian, 2015). This economic marginalization is meanwhile aggravated by the social stigma attached to them. Vast numbers of their ilk have been alienated from family and local community functions and gatherings (Reddy, 2010). Such issues have further corroborated findings on the socio-economic marginalization of the transgender in India, these discriminatory practices in education, housing, and employment which severely reduce opportunities (Raghuram et al., 2024; Reisner et al., 2009; Sathya & Thasian, 2013). The Jamaat system does provide some security but reiterates financial dependence on community leaders, thereby embedding their economic issues even more deeply.

Health and Gender Reassignment: The mental process of an individual subjected to a traditional operation, such as the Thayamma operation, is fraught with serious threats to their health, although it is still being performed in some regions despite its dangers. Transgender people have little access to safe care, which again forces them to resort to unsafe practices because they are financially incapable of accessing safe surgical practices (Reddy, 2010). This coincides with research about stigma and discrimination in the provision of health care in India for transgender people (Ghazzawi et al., 2020; Rees, 2022). The very fact that surgical conversion is considered an essential step in one's life culminates in a hydra-headed crisis (Lindqvist et al., 2017). The financial obligation to afford sexual reassignment surgery represents an acute threat for this community, especially since most within it depend on financial assistance from their Gurus for surgeries.

Religious and Cultural Participation: While being othered in nearly every aspect of social life, Transgender find a sizable presence in religious practices such as weddings and rituals related to childbirth. This dichotomy shows the sacredness as well as the profanity they are repeatedly burdened with in day-to-day activities (Reddy, 2010; Yildizhan et al., 2018). Permeating certain kinds of worship provides some degree of legitimacy (Campbell et al., 2019). But the exclusion from attending churches, especially Christian churches, and from space where anti-Aravani bigots hold the reigns, reflects the inaccessibility of full acknowledgment in the mainstream religious and cultural domains and lives (Lindqvist et al., 2017).

Suggestion

Proper Census: A complete enumeration should be put in place by delivering an identification drive in order to generate reliable data on the transgender population, which can seek the targeted intervention of policymakers and policy formulations.

Social Awareness: Social work, human rights, and gender NGOs should start integrating transgender issues into their institutional mandates to foster social acceptance and social inclusion.

Increased Family Support: Family counseling for transgender persons must be made available to overcome the problem of rejection by family and the want for emotional support.

Promotion of Human Rights: The authorities should, as a due diligence matter, investigate all mysterious deaths in the transgender community, and ensure that abusers are prosecuted based on anti-discrimination laws and acts within their jurisdiction.

Access to Health and Medical Needs: Initiatives must reflect increased access to safe and affordable healthcare coverage and sexual reassignment surgery. This should also include a reduction in health risks.

Limitations

There are quite a few limitations in this study. The other limitations of this study include the sample size of Tamil Nadu alone shouldn't generalize the findings for the transgender community across India. The self-reported data may create biases since few questions relate to exposure to sensitive topics like sexual practices and underprivileged activities. It may, thus, compromise the finding's accuracy. In addition, the study focuses only on male-to-female transgender and not on gender-diverse groups. Moreover, the intersectionality of caste, religion, socio-economic status, etc., and their impact on experiences of marginalization is not dealt with in detail. Finally, the lack of a proper examination of health and legal issues in detail would set boundaries regarding conclusions on medical and legal issues faced by the community, as there won't be comparisons made among each group.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Through the study undertaken, it is found that male-to-female transgenders termed Aravanis from Tamil Nadu face intense socio-economic and cultural issues. In many religious rituals, irrespective of the roles granted with honor, they are indeed placed outside the societal domains, thus affecting a larger section into beggary and sex work. There is some care offered through the Jamaat community system, and it also entraps them in being economically dependent. They also remain vulnerable to health dangers and unsafe gender reassignment surgeries, which add to their difficulties. Shared census data collection, social inclusion, protection of human rights, and family counseling were recommended to better the life and safety of the Transgender.

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Contributions

S.T. and J.P. designed the analysis. S.T. collected the data collected and A.R helped to transcript the data. S.T. analysed the data. S.T. and L.T. wrote the first draft of this manuscript. All authors read and provided input to the final manuscript.

Ethics declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki, ensuring respect, sensitivity, and cultural competence in research with marginalized communities. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board and Ethics Committee of the RUHSA Department (approval number PO1/2010/10/03), Christian Medical College, Vellore, Tamil Nadu, India."

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with the assurance of confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any time.

Declaration of interest statement

The authors declare no competing interests.

Consent for publication

All authors approved to submit the final version of the manuscript for publication.

Data Availability

This data is my research data. If anyone needs the data, they can write to the corresponding authors

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