

Voices from the Margins: Understanding the Educational Journey of Transgender Students in India

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ABSTRACT

Transgender students in India face various challenges in the education system due to social bias, exclusion, and neglect of their rights. Even with the NALSA judgment of 2014 and the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, of 2019, the actual situation is rife with prejudice, invisibility, and poor enforcement of non-discriminatory policies. Following are some of the barriers that are exacerbated by intersectionality factors including; caste, class, and region, which affect transgender learners particularly those in marginalized groups. This review aims to understand the nature of the education of the transgender population in India and to synthesize qualitative data and analyses of policies and practices to illustrate how they navigate identity, inclusion, and opportunity in educational contexts. The study reveals the structural factors that hinder them including lack of gender-inclusive facilities, harassment, and lack of support structures. At the same time, it points out specific opportunities for educational institutions, policymakers, and communities to help make a change. The article also looks at the global trends in implementing inclusive education. It provides practical suggestions for the Indian context like curriculum changes to include gender equity, provision of gender-neutral facilities, anti-discriminatory measures, partnerships with NGOs, and other Advocacy Organizations. Through focusing on these concerns, this review calls for immediate action that will enable transgender students to have equal access and success in a non-discriminatory education system.

1. Introduction

The Indian transgender community, including Hijras, Kinnars, and other gender-variant individuals, possesses a rich history. Historically, they have been integral to cultural ceremonies such as childbirth and marriage. However, they have also faced significant oppression, particularly due to the colonial legacy of Britain. The Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 criminalized Hijras, formalizing their ostracization and perpetuating prejudice, which persists to the present day (Reddy, 2005). These structural inequalities inherent in Indian society also permeate educational systems, posing numerous barriers for transgender individuals. The Indian census of 2011 was the first to include the transgender population, recording over 480,000 individuals. Nevertheless, these figures are relatively low, as many individuals fear disclosing their status due to stigma. Education, a cornerstone of empowerment, remains inaccessible to many transgender individuals. Transgender youth frequently experience marginalization, bullying, and harassment from peers and educators, leading to high dropout rates. For example, Revathi's autobiographical work, *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*, illustrates her isolation in the school, highlighting how society deprives children like her of a supportive learning environment (Revathi, 2010).

India enacted the NALSA judgment in 2014, which recognized the rights of transgender individuals as the "third gender." However, there has been minimal progress in the educational sphere. Despite the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act of 2019, the protection and rights of transgender individuals remain inadequately safeguarded. This paper establishes that many educational institutions fail to provide gender-neutral washrooms, gender-sensitive course content, and trained gender-sensitive teachers, thereby creating a hostile environment for transgender students. As highlighted by Ghai in *Education and the 'Third Gender'*, these institutional failures perpetuate a vicious cycle of marginalization, leaving transgender individuals underrepresented in both education and employment (Ghai, 2018). Furthermore, transgender individuals face various socio-economic

barriers, including poverty, family rejection, and lack of access to healthcare and legal services, which significantly impact their educational opportunities.

Sandeep Yadav's *Transgender India: The Construction of the 'Third Gender'* illustrates how multiple forms of exclusion further marginalize transgender students (Yadav, 2015). These challenges are not merely social justice issues but critical steps toward improving the education system. Education is a developmental process that enables individuals to become responsible citizens, economically stable and well-integrated into society. For the transgender community, education serves as a crucial tool for emancipation and social inclusion, providing a pathway toward societal change. However, Indian schools and colleges have yet to fully welcome transgender students, leaving them excluded and marginalized. Suraj Yengde's *Transgender and Education: The Indian Experience* documents that transgender students face harassment in educational institutions, ranging from name-calling to physical assault, making the learning environment unfavorable and impeding academic success (Yengde, 2020).

The lack of inclusive infrastructure, such as gender-neutral bathrooms, and the absence of curricula addressing transgender issues exacerbate this exclusion. Caste, class, and gender intersections further compound these challenges, especially for Dalit and Adivasi transgender individuals, who experience multiple layers of exclusion that hinder even primary education. Ananya Mishra, in *Transgender Education and the Politics of Identity*, explains that these intersectional identities are particularly marginalized (Mishra, 2019). Fostering inclusive educational environments is imperative not only for the rights of transgender individuals but also for promoting social change. Schools and colleges play a pivotal role in shaping societal attitudes and beliefs. According to Mishra, promoting classroom diversity impacts society as a whole, fostering greater acceptance (Mishra, 2019). Additionally, empowering transgender voices in educational policy-making can lead to more effective interventions, as emphasized by Jaffrey in *I Am What I Am: The Life of a Hijra* (Jaffrey, 1996).

This review aims to:

1. Examine the systemic barriers faced by transgender students in Indian education.
2. Highlight the personal narratives of transgender individuals to provide deeper insights into their lived experiences.
3. Propose actionable strategies for creating inclusive and supportive educational environments.

Transgender people's exclusion from the education system in India also points to the larger issue of society's prejudice. This problem can only be solved through a combination of policy change, institutional change, and social change. In this review, the authors aim to add to the current discussions on educational equity by raising the voices of transgender individuals and discussing systemic obstacles. Transgender students should not be deprived of this basic right; education has the potential to break the barriers and promote inclusion.

2. Historical and Cultural Context of Transgender Identity in India

2.1 Traditional Recognition: Historical Roles of Hijras in Indian Culture

The transgender community, particularly the hijras, has a long and significant history within Indian culture. They have been recognized since ancient times as an integral part of society and culture. Hijras were acknowledged as distinct from the binary genders and were afforded both spiritual and social status. Hindu mythology has traditionally depicted gender-fluid and non-binary individuals, as seen in the epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. For instance, Shikhandi in the *Mahabharata* is portrayed as a gender-neutral character, reflecting the acceptance of gender diversity in ancient Indian society. Similarly, in the *Ramayana*, Lord Rama recognizes and blesses the hijras for their devotion, underscoring their societal importance (Reddy, 2005). In her seminal work *Hijras: Beyond the Third Gender*, Gayatri Reddy highlights that hijras were not merely tolerated but were respected

for their perceived supernatural abilities. They were often invoked during auspicious events, such as childbirth and marriages, to confer fertility and prosperity. These traditions granted hijras symbolic power, allowing them to serve as intermediaries between the divine and human realms (Reddy, 2005).

During the Mughal period, hijras were actively involved in society and were part of royal courts, serving as advisers and guardians of the harems. This integration ensured their role in governance and leadership, affirming their significance in pre-colonial India. According to Reddy, the limited perspectives on the hijras' societal role indicate their involvement in political systems. Despite their respected positions in religious and cultural rituals, hijras never achieved full societal acceptance. While they wielded symbolic power and had influence in certain societal aspects, they simultaneously faced social exclusion, which was exacerbated during the colonial period.

2.2 Colonial and Post-Colonial Marginalization

The arrival of the British colonialists in India marked a significant shift in the status and societal attitudes toward hijras and other transgender individuals. Colonial administrators, unfamiliar with the cultural significance and value system of hijras, perceived them through a moralistic colonial lens. This perception led to the dismantling of their traditional roles and the enactment of laws that marginalized their presence. The Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, for example, classified hijras as criminal tribes, viewing them as threats to societal order. This legislation not only prohibited their public appearance but also legitimized discrimination and persecution against them. The colonial regime, driven by a mission to 'civilize' Indian society, imposed rigid divisions, particularly regarding gender and sexuality, which were previously more fluid. In her book, *The Other Side of Silence*, Urvashi Butalia (1998) discusses how the colonial project transformed the social perception of hijras from revered figures to objects of ridicule and fear.

The colonial period also marked the beginning of systematic oppression aimed at stripping hijras of their leadership and authoritative roles. Their participation in royal courts and religious rituals was curtailed, and their visibility in public spaces was restricted. This exclusion extended to education, employment, and healthcare, where systemic injustices continued to marginalize transgender individuals in post-colonial India. After independence, the socio-legal framework did not effectively address the colonial erasure of transgender identities. Consequently, hijras, socially stigmatized and economically disadvantaged, were often confined to stereotypical roles such as begging and performing blessings. The absence of state interventions and public awareness further entrenched their marginalization, perpetuating their status as societal outcasts.

2.3 Contemporary Social Status

The current situation of the transgender community in India is a story of progress as well as the struggle for acceptance and rights. On the one hand, the legal environment has been expanded to include the rights of transgender individuals. The 2014 NALSA judgment of the Supreme Court of India opened up the way for the recognition of the third gender in India, allowing transgenders to enjoy equal rights and, inter alia, education according to the Indian Constitution. The second act that was promulgated was the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, which seeks to prevent and penalize discrimination against transgender persons. Nevertheless, the legal progress has been made, the real-life experiences of transgender people are still full of prejudice and discrimination. A. Revathi's autobiography, *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*, gives a real-life experience of the challenges that the Hijras go through in India. According to Revathi, she was expelled from her house by her family, teased on the streets, and made a laughingstock in schools and colleges. It captures the gap between the provision of laws and the practice of society and thus points to the fact that policy change is not enough to change the minds of people (Revathi, 2010).

Zia Jaffrey's *I Am What I Am: The Life of a Hijra* also extends the analysis of the paradoxes of hijra's social position. On the one hand, they are still welcomed in some rites and ceremonies, on the other hand, they are excluded from the general society. Jaffrey also describes how hijras are often denied education, medical care, employment, and a host of other rights they are eligible for as citizens. This is a narrative of two people living a dual existence and being symbolically included in society but not afforded the rights and chances that come with being included (Jaffrey, 1996).

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3. Transgender Students in the Indian Education System

3.1 Barriers to Access

The Indian Constitution guarantees equality and non-discrimination based on gender identity. However, the education system in India remains largely inaccessible to transgender students. Their educational experiences are impeded by structural barriers rooted in persistent discrimination, infrastructural deficiencies, and the absence of appropriate structural interventions tailored to their needs. These challenges not only impede their academic progress but also their broader social acceptance. Discrimination is the most prevalent issue transgender students encounter in Indian educational institutions. Suraj Yengde, in *Transgender and Education: The Indian Experience*, illustrates how this discrimination manifests in various forms, including name-calling, harassment, and exclusion from class activities. Transgender students are often bullied by peers for not conforming to traditional gender norms in appearance and behavior. Such harassment can escalate, rendering educational environments hostile and potentially leading to school dropout. Yengde provides instances where students were publicly ridiculed for their appearance, conduct, or dress, resulting in education systems that are both traumatic and isolating for transgender individuals (Yengde, 2020).

The individuals to whom learners typically turn for support and guidance are often those who not only fail to intervene but may even participate in perpetuating discriminatory behaviors. Yengde asserts that such ignorance and insensitivity on the part of educators result in institutional oblivion. Many teachers harbor prejudices that lead them to mistreat, neglect, or treat transgender students differently. For instance, it remains common for teachers to refuse to address students by their

preferred names and pronouns, which further marginalizes transgender students (Yengde, 2020). These are not isolated incidents but rather indicative of a broader pattern of exclusion faced by transgender students in Indian schools and colleges. Another critical challenge is the lack of accessible infrastructure and policies. As R.L. Ghai highlights in his article *Education and the 'Third Gender'*, most schools and colleges in India are built upon a gendered divide, failing to accommodate the needs of third-gender students. The absence of gender-neutral restrooms and dormitories presents a significant problem for transgender students, who face harassment or assault when using either male or female facilities. As Ghai explains, when gender-neutral restrooms are unavailable, many transgender students choose not to use restrooms at all, leading to discomfort, health complications, and heightened anxiety (Ghai, 2018). The lack of institutional policies to support transgender students exacerbates these infrastructural deficiencies. Although laws such as the Supreme Court's judgment in *National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) v. Union of India* (2014) and the *Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act* (2019) provide for the inclusion of transgender individuals, the practical implementation of these laws remains inadequate. According to Ghai, many schools and colleges are either unaware of these mandates or, if they are, fail to enforce them properly. Consequently, transgender students are excluded from admissions, scholarships, and other academic opportunities due to administrative loopholes and prejudices (Ghai, 2018). Thus, without systemic reforms, the educational aspirations of transgender individuals will remain unattainable, perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalization.

3.2 Intersectionality

These barriers are not uniform and are compounded by factors such as caste, class, and geographical location. In their analysis of the article *The Intersection of Gender and Education in India*, published in the *Gender and Education Journal*, the authors argue that the intersection of gender with other identities intensifies the marginalization of the transgender population. For transgender students from marginalized caste backgrounds, such as Dalit or Adivasi communities, the exclusion is a complex process. These students experience both caste-based prejudice and gender-based discrimination, which contributes to a negative learning environment that is ill-suited to the provision of quality education. According to the *Gender and Education Journal*, in some cases, these students are ridiculed for their caste status and gender identity, making it exceedingly difficult for them to integrate into the school system (Gender and Education Journal, 2019). Such students frequently encounter discrimination and stigmatization from both teachers and peers, which fosters feelings of inferiority and undesirability, ultimately impacting their academic performance.

The economic status of transgender students also plays a significant role in shaping their educational experiences. Many transgender individuals come from low-income backgrounds, which limits their ability to cover the costs associated with education, including fees, books, uniforms, and transportation. Furthermore, there is a lack of targeted financial assistance or scholarships for transgender students, reducing their opportunities to pursue higher education. This economic marginalization often leads transgender students to drop out of school in search of employment in the informal sector, contributing to the perpetuation of poverty (Gender and Education Journal, 2019). Regional disparities further exacerbate these challenges. Transgender students in rural areas face additional obstacles due to limited awareness and inadequate facilities within their communities. Schools and colleges in rural India often lack even basic infrastructure, such as gender-neutral restrooms and anti-discrimination policies. The *Gender and Education Journal* highlights that cultural norms and practices in rural areas tend to be more conservative than in urban settings, with rigid cultural beliefs making these students more vulnerable to social exclusion and less likely to have access to support networks compared to their urban counterparts (Gender and Education Journal, 2019). While urban areas tend to exhibit greater awareness and advocacy, transgender students in cities still attend underfunded schools and colleges due to their financial

constraints. Consequently, the quality of education they receive differs significantly from that of their cisgender peers, further exacerbating the disparities between transgender and cisgender students. These intersecting challenges of caste, class, and region underscore the need for a holistic approach to addressing the issues that affect the learning and well-being of transgender students.

Transgender students face several barriers in the Indian education system that stem from social bias, structural failings, and various forms of oppression. The problem of discrimination in schools and colleges, along with the lack of inclusive physical environments and policies, prevents the full and equal participation of transgender students in education. However, caste, class, and regional differences compound these challenges, making the educational pathways of transgender students even more difficult. These barriers must be overcome, and this can only be achieved by the government, schools, and society as a whole. Sensitization of teachers and students, provision of gender-neutral facilities, and implementation of gender-inclusive policies are some of the ways to ensure that the teaching and learning environment is gender-friendly. It is crucial, therefore, to identify and respond to the multiple forms of oppression that transgender students experience to create educational environments that are both equitable and inclusive.

4. Educational Narratives of Transgender Individuals

The educational journeys of transgender individuals in India are deeply intertwined with personal struggles, societal discrimination, and systemic inadequacies. These narratives, often explored through autobiographies, case studies, and research, highlight the profound challenges transgender students face within an education system that is largely unprepared to accommodate their needs. Despite these barriers, many transgender individuals exhibit remarkable resilience, using their personal and collective experiences to advocate for inclusivity and equity in education.

4.1 Personal Experiences

Self-account narratives provide an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of transgender individuals within the Indian education system. These personal accounts illuminate the systemic deficiencies, societal prejudices, and psychological challenges that transgender students face in an environment dominated by binary gender norms. A. Revathi's autobiography, *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*, offers a poignant and highly personal portrayal of her journey towards self-acceptance and identity. Revathi recalls her early school years as a time of profound frustration and isolation. Aware that she did not conform to the gender expectations placed upon her, she found the school environment unhelpful and unaccepting. Her peers mocked her for what they perceived as "too feminine" behavior, while teachers failed to intervene and, instead, reinforced gender stereotyping. Revathi further recounts being reprimanded for not behaving like a boy, which only deepened her sense of difference and led her to dread attending school. The lack of a safe and accepting environment eventually prompted her to abandon her education (Revathi, 2010). This narrative reflects the experiences of many transgender students in India, whose educational aspirations are thwarted by an environment that undermines their very existence. Rigid gender norms in schools exacerbate the difficulties faced by transgender students, as they are often compelled to wear gender-specific uniforms, participate in gendered activities, and use non-neutral facilities. Additionally, Revathi's story underscores the absence of supportive figures within the school system to whom transgender students can turn for help.

Similarly, *Redefining India: The Hijra* by Sumathi Ramaswamy documents the lives of hijra individuals, many of whom undergo similar challenges in their pursuit of education. Ramaswamy highlights how the dual stigma of gender and economic disadvantage often prevents hijra students from accessing education. Those from low-income households are particularly hindered, as their families are unable to afford educational expenses. Even when hijra students manage to enroll, they

often face victimization and isolation from both peers and educators, which severely limits their academic potential (Ramaswamy, 2012). The theme of identity struggles is also explored in *Transgender India: The Construction of the 'Third Gender'* by Sandeep Yadav. Yadav's study reveals the psychological toll of identity crises on transgender students, particularly during adolescence when societal pressures are heightened. Many transgender students experience alienation, stigmatization, and a lack of self-confidence, exacerbated by the absence of positive role models within their educational institutions. Yadav asserts that even small acts of inclusion, such as a teacher respecting a student's name and pronouns, can have a significant positive impact on the mental health of transgender students. However, such inclusive actions are rare, as most educators are unprepared and unaware of the specific needs of transgender learners (Yadav, 2015).

4.2 Struggles with Identity and Acceptance

Transgender individuals often confront struggles related to their identity even before they enter the school environment. However, educational institutions exacerbate these challenges by reinforcing and perpetuating polarized gender norms, which restrict individuals' ability to express themselves authentically. Rather than providing support and opportunities for personal development, schools, and colleges become sources of oppression and harm for transgender students. A clear manifestation of this struggle is the imposition of rigid dress codes and the segregation of activities based on gender, which limit the opportunities available to students who do not conform to binary gender categories. In her memoir *The Truth About Me*, Revathi recounts how being forced to wear the boys' uniform exacerbated her dysphoria, deepening her sense of alienation from both her classmates and her own body. Similarly, students are divided into male and female categories for sports and cultural activities, thereby creating an environment that marginalizes those who do not fit into these binary divisions. These practices not only erase the existence of transgender students but also isolate them from their peers (Revathi, 2010).

In *Transgender India*, Yadav elaborates on the challenges transgender students face due to the absence of gender-neutral facilities in schools and colleges. Educational institutions rarely provide restrooms, dormitories, or changing rooms that accommodate the needs of transgender individuals, forcing them to use facilities that do not align with their gender identity. In *The Truth About Me*, Revathi describes how being required to wear the boys' uniform and participate in activities reserved for boys intensified her dysphoria and sense of alienation. Consequently, many transgender students refrain from using restrooms altogether, which has detrimental effects on their health and further isolates them from academic activities (Yadav, 2015). Another significant issue is the absence of transgender narratives within the educational curriculum. Textbooks and classroom discussions often omit the presence and roles of transgender individuals, contributing to their marginalization and oppression. In *Redefining India: The Hijra*, Sumathi Ramaswamy argues that this erasure not only denies transgender students the recognition they deserve but also fails to educate cisgender students about gender diversity. The lack of an inclusive curriculum perpetuates ignorance and prejudice, making it exceedingly difficult for transgender students to be accepted by their peers (Ramaswamy, 2012).

4.3 Case Studies: Systemic Failures and Personal Resilience

Case studies provide valuable insights into how systemic failures shape the educational experiences of transgender students and how they navigate these challenges. These narratives highlight the significant obstacles faced by the transgender community and underscore their resilience in the face of adversity.

Zia Jaffrey's *I Am What I Am: The Life of a Hijra* offers a compelling example of a hijra individual whose pursuit of education was hindered by institutional neglect and social exclusion. The

protagonist, a school student, faced both verbal and physical bullying, with little to no intervention from teachers. The absence of institutional support led to the students' disillusionment and eventual dropout. However, this was not the conclusion of the story. The protagonist continued to pursue education through informal networks and community programs, eventually becoming an advocate for transgender rights. This journey illustrates the critical role that supports networks play in helping gender non-conforming individuals reclaim their educational and personal aspirations (Jaffrey, 1996).

Transgender India further highlights the educational challenges faced by transgender individuals, focusing on a student from a rural village who was expelled after revealing her transgender identity. Subjected to daily bullying by both peers and teachers, the student's expulsion was justified by the school administration as necessary to maintain order. Nevertheless, the student persisted, receiving assistance from an NGO that facilitated her enrolment in a new school. She later became an activist, advocating for the rights of transgender students and sharing her experiences of systemic oppression. This case supports Yadav's (2015) assertion that grassroots organizations are essential in addressing the gaps left by formal institutions.

In *Redefining India*, Ramaswamy also presents the stories of hijra individuals who overcame significant obstacles to access education. One such story details the journey of a hijra activist who defied societal norms to pursue higher education. By applying her education, she fought for the rights of her community and sought to alter societal perceptions, demonstrating the transformative power of education. While these success stories are inspiring, Ramaswamy (2012) emphasizes that they are not representative of the majority, as many transgender individuals still lack access to educational opportunities.

The educational experiences of transgender individuals in India reveal a grim reality of social marginalization, cultural stigma, and institutional discrimination. Life narratives from transgender students highlight the deep issues related to identity and acceptance that they face. These case studies also reveal the systemic barriers within the education system and how transgender individuals resist and overcome these obstacles. Addressing these challenges requires more than policy changes or ensuring institutional accountability. To create truly inclusive and safe learning environments, educational institutions must adopt anti-discrimination policies, provide gender-neutral facilities, and incorporate the experiences of transgender individuals into their curricula. Additionally, non-state and civil society organizations, including NGOs and advocacy groups, are crucial in bridging the gaps left by formal institutions. By amplifying the voices of transgender individuals and dismantling the barriers that exclude them from the educational system, India can take meaningful steps toward achieving equality for all.

5. Policy Analysis and Legal Framework

India's legal and policy framework for transgender individuals has seen significant advancements in recent years, particularly in recognizing their rights and protecting them from discrimination. However, despite these strides, the implementation of these policies remains inconsistent, leaving many transgender students vulnerable to systemic challenges within the education system.

5.1 Current Policies

The Supreme Court's decision to allow transgender rights in India is an undeniably positive step towards eradicating inequality and ensuring equal opportunities for the education system. In the last decade, the Supreme Court judgments and legislation have tried to give transgender persons a legal identity and protect their rights. However, there is still much work to be done when it comes to the actual implementation of these policies that will benefit transgender students in educational facilities. This paper cannot discuss the struggle for transgender rights in India without focusing on

the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) v. The Union of India judgment in 2014. This judgment given by the Supreme Court of India held that Transgender persons are the third gender and are entitled to avail the fundamental rights of equality, education, and dignity under Articles 14, 15, and 21 of the Constitution. The court ordered the central and state governments to take affirmative measures to ensure that transgender persons are admitted to schools, hospitals, and workplaces. Specific directives of the judgment included:

- Providing transgender individuals access to public welfare schemes, including those related to education.
- Including transgender individuals in the "socially and educationally backward classes" to facilitate their access to reservations in education and employment.
- Creating gender-neutral facilities, such as restrooms, in educational institutions to ensure a safe and inclusive environment.
- Initiating awareness campaigns to combat stigma and discrimination against transgender individuals and promote their acceptance in society (NALSA Judgment, 2014).

The NALSA judgment provided a necessary basis for expanding the scope of this policy approach. It was the first time the Supreme Court of Appeals recognized the structural erasure of transgender people and demanded change from institutions to end the erasure of this community. The judgment was hailed for its liberating approach as well as a clear understanding of education as a tool that can help transgenders.

Continuing from the NALSA judgment, the Indian Parliament passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act in the year 2019. This legislation aimed at giving practical effect to the court's orders by putting in place a broad legal regime for the enforcement of the rights of transgender persons. The act outlaws discrimination against transgender persons in education, health care, employment, and access to public facilities. It also mandates that educational institutions adopt measures to create inclusive environments, including:

- Enforcing anti-discrimination policies to protect transgender students from harassment and exclusion.
- Ensuring equal access to academic and extracurricular resources for transgender students.
- Providing gender-neutral facilities, including restrooms and dormitories, in schools and colleges.
- Implementing counseling and mental health support programs tailored to the needs of transgender students.

The Act represents a proactive measure aimed at addressing the challenges faced by transgender students and seeks to provide a legal solution to these obstacles. As such, the legislation on non-discrimination in education aligns with global trends and reinforces India's commitment to safeguarding the rights of vulnerable groups. At the state level, several governments have introduced additional policies to support transgender students. Kerala, for instance, became the first state in India to implement a transgender policy in 2015, which includes provisions for free education, skill development training, and scholarships for transgender individuals. Moreover, the policy emphasizes raising awareness among teachers and students to promote acceptance and eliminate prejudice. Similarly, Tamil Nadu has established welfare boards that provide financial assistance for education and vocational training to the transgender community. These state-level initiatives suggest that there is potential for targeted interventions that could complement national-level legislation and address the specific needs of transgender populations in different states.

In 2021, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment launched the National Portal for Transgender Persons to facilitate the issuance of identity certificates to transgender individuals. This portal enables transgender persons to approach their respective institutions and assert their rights under the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act. This digital initiative is particularly significant for transgender students as it streamlines the process of legal gender recognition.

Additionally, in response to the increasing enrolment of transgender students, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has issued policy recommendations for higher education institutions. These guidelines advocate for the establishment of offices to combat discrimination, the provision of scholarships for transgender students, and the inclusion of the third gender category on university admission forms. The UGC has also recommended the integration of transgender issues into curricula to raise awareness among both students and staff. While these policies are commendable, their implementation has been inadequate, resulting in many transgender students being unable to access the necessary resources and support for their education. For example, the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act mandates that schools and colleges provide gender-neutral restrooms and changing facilities, yet few have complied. Similarly, the lack of awareness of the NALSA judgment and subsequent policies among educators and administrators has hindered their implementation. Nevertheless, the existing policies form a solid foundation for addressing the educational needs of transgender students. These policies aim to foster the social and legal acceptance of transgender individuals and ensure equal opportunities within the education system, contributing to the positive societal change that is needed. However, the full potential of these policies can only be realized through sustained efforts to bridge the gap between legislation and its practical application.

5.2 Gaps in Implementation

The NALSA judgment and the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, provide a strong legal foundation, yet the practical implementation of these measures for transgender students remains a significant challenge. In her article, *Transgender Education and the Politics of Identity*, Ananya Mishra identifies several key obstacles surrounding the policies in question. The most evident challenge is the low level of awareness and sensitivity among educators, administrators, and policymakers. Mishra asserts that many schools and colleges are unaware of the provisions outlined in the NALSA judgment and the 2019 Act, rendering recommendations aimed at fostering tolerance, creating gender-friendly facilities, and preventing discrimination largely ineffective. For example, while the law mandates the provision of gender-neutral restrooms in educational institutions, few schools and colleges have complied, and those that have done so often face opposition. This situation forces transgender students to use restrooms that do not align with their gender identity (Mishra, 2019).

These challenges are further exacerbated by a lack of accountability from the institutions involved. According to Mishra, the absence of enforcement mechanisms to compel adherence to the law allows schools and colleges to neglect their responsibilities. Many institutions fail to address instances of bullying and harassment of transgender students, even though the law mandates such action. Transgender students have reported experiencing verbal and physical assault, as well as social exclusion, in schools where they receive no protection or justice (Mishra, 2019). Another major issue is the inadequate management of resources. Although the law provides scholarships and financial aid for transgender students, these provisions are poorly enforced. Mishra notes that many transgender students come from disadvantaged backgrounds and face additional financial hardships, such as being disowned by their families or ostracized by society. Despite this, few specific scholarship programs are available, and existing bureaucratic procedures often hinder access to necessary support.

The issue of identification documents is also a critical concern. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act requires transgender individuals to obtain a certificate of identity from the district magistrate to access the rights and benefits outlined in the law. However, this process is frequently bureaucratic, invasive, and stigmatizing, which discourages many transgender individuals from even attempting to navigate it. Mishra discusses how this requirement disproportionately

affects transgender students, who are often dependent on their parents or guardians, many of whom may not support their gender identity (Mishra, 2019). Furthermore, the policies are silent on the intersectional challenges faced by transgender students. Mishra highlights how caste, class, and regional factors exacerbate the already dire situation for transgender individuals, particularly in terms of their access to education. For instance, transgender students from lower castes or rural areas face compounded vulnerabilities, limiting their ability to access the scarce resources and opportunities available. These multifaceted concerns are not addressed in the current policies, which are uniform and fail to meet the specific needs of transgender students (Mishra, 2019).

The legal and policy shifts regarding transgender individuals in India represent a positive development in the protection of human rights and the fight against social injustice. The NALSA judgment and the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, establish a robust legal framework for ensuring gender-inclusive education for transgender students. However, as Mishra's analysis demonstrates, the enforcement of these policies remains inconsistent and inadequate. To address these gaps, it is crucial to implement strategies such as public awareness campaigns, teacher training, and stronger enforcement mechanisms. Financial assistance programs should be streamlined, and the processes for acquiring identification documents should be simplified. Moreover, policies supporting transgender students must be intersectional, addressing the diverse needs of marginalized transgender groups. Ultimately, real change can only occur through the genuine commitment of educational institutions, educators, and the broader community. In light of this, the present study suggests that by addressing the gaps in policy implementation, India can move closer to achieving its constitutional and legal goals of equality and inclusion.

6. Strategies for Inclusive Education

The inclusion of transgender students in education is a cornerstone for fostering equality and empowering marginalized communities. While India has made strides in recognizing transgender rights through legal frameworks, the practical implementation of these measures in educational institutions remains a challenge. Addressing the systemic barriers faced by transgender students requires a multifaceted approach that involves educational institutions, community support, and inspiration from global best practices.

6.1 Role of Institutions

Educational institutions are at the forefront of creating inclusive spaces for transgender students. They serve as critical environments where societal prejudices can be challenged, and acceptance can be nurtured. However, achieving this requires intentional changes to policies, infrastructure, and pedagogical practices.

Curriculum Changes to Include Gender Diversity

A crucial strategy for fostering societal acceptance of inclusivity involves revising school and college curricula to include discussions on gender diversity and the transgender community. Currently, educational materials in India fail to highlight the experiences and achievements of the transgender population, effectively erasing their presence. Incorporating textbooks that feature transgender narratives may reduce prejudice and alter stereotypical perceptions of gender. For example, discussing the lives of transgender individuals, whether as role models or through the exploration of the history and culture of gender diversity—such as the recognition of hijras in Indian society—can enable students to appreciate the significant contributions of transgender individuals to society. Furthermore, universities should consider offering specialized gender studies courses or integrating gender perspectives into existing subjects. Such courses could equip students to challenge gender ideologies, understand the complexities of oppression, and advocate for equity. Research, such as that presented in *The Intersection of Gender and Education in India*, has shown

that such educational reforms can shift social norms by improving students' perceptions of others (Gender and Education Journal, 2019). Teachers play a pivotal role in driving these changes. The study also recommended providing training for educators in the form of workshops and programs aimed at helping them understand the challenges faced by transgender students. These initiatives would enable educators to address prejudice, avoid biased language, and cultivate a positive classroom environment. Additionally, school and college admission forms should include gender options beyond male and female, allowing students to self-identify. These seemingly small, yet significant actions, can result in substantial societal change by signaling institutional recognition of transgenders.

Creation of Safe and Inclusive Learning Environments

Transgender students often experience schools and colleges as environments of rejection rather than acceptance. Significant efforts are required to ensure that these institutions provide safe and supportive teaching and learning spaces, both physically and psychologically. One of the primary steps is to establish gender-neutral infrastructure. The absence of facilities such as restrooms and dormitories that are not segregated by gender forces transgender students to use facilities that do not align with their gender identity, which increases their vulnerability to harassment and violence. Consequently, educational institutions must prioritize the construction of such inclusive features to safeguard the rights of transgender students.

Furthermore, it is essential to revise school uniforms and dress codes to allow transgender students to wear attire that reflects their gender identity. There should be a zero-tolerance policy for bullying and harassment within educational settings. Bullying must be explicitly prohibited, and clear procedures should be in place for reporting and addressing such incidents. The establishment of anti-discrimination cells—comprising teachers, counselors, and students—can provide a platform for transgender individuals to report cases and access justice. Peer support networks, formed within educational environments, can foster a sense of community and solidarity among transgender students.

Another critical consideration is the mental health of transgender students, which institutions must actively support. Providing access to counselors who are knowledgeable about the specific challenges faced by transgender individuals can significantly enhance their well-being. Counseling services should be confidential to encourage students to openly discuss their issues without fear of disclosure. Educational institutions can also work to reduce prejudice and increase acceptance by organizing awareness campaigns and workshops. Moreover, transgender individuals should be actively included in decision-making processes within educational institutions. Participation in student councils, faculty committees, and other administrative roles allows transgender individuals to contribute their perspectives, ensuring their voices are heard. This inclusion can also serve as a powerful example for younger transgender students, demonstrating that they, too, have the potential to make meaningful changes within their communities.

6.2 Community Support

The role of communities, particularly NGOs and transgender advocacy groups, is indispensable in creating inclusive education systems. These organizations can complement institutional efforts by providing resources, expertise, and outreach.

Collaborations with NGOs and Advocacy Groups

Self-help groups and NGOs that focus on gender identity and education are particularly well-placed to help transgender students. Such organizations help schools and colleges to get specialized training programs for the teachers and the administrative staff. These programs could also have the

potential to undo prejudice and develop an understanding of the rights and requirements of transgender students. It should also be noted that advocacy groups can also contribute to the formulation of policy and infrastructure that is inclusive. For example, NGOs can help with the technical aspect of coming up with gender-friendly washrooms or writing policies against discrimination that meet international standards. Educational institutions can be prepared for the needs of transgender students when such partnerships exist. It also includes financial support for transgender students in the community. Some of the many NGOs provide scholarships, mentorship, and career guidance to transgender people in a bid to eliminate dropout rates. These measures are especially helpful for students who suffer from economic problems as a result of family disownment or social isolation.

Grassroots and International Collaboration

Grassroots organizations can help in tackling issues to do with the region or culture that transgender students may face especially in rural areas where there is little understanding of gender orientation. They can act as agents that assist gay and lesbian students in overcoming barriers and fighting for the rights of transgender students in schools and colleges. International cooperation might provide useful information and assets for India to enhance its efforts on inclusive education. Other international efforts, for instance, Education for All by UNESCO or the Human Rights Watch advocating for the rights of LGBTQ+ people also provide guidance that can be applicable in the Indian context. These partnerships can also help in sharing experiences and successful practices, thus, Indian institutions can copy other effective models from other countries.

6.3 Recommendations

Drawing inspiration from global best practices, India can implement a range of strategies to create an inclusive education system for transgender students. As outlined in *The Intersection of Gender and Education in India*, these recommendations emphasize the need for localized solutions that address India's unique socio-cultural dynamics (Gender and Education Journal, 2019).

1. Affirmative Action Policies: Countries like Brazil and the United States have implemented affirmative action policies to promote the inclusion of transgender individuals in education. India can introduce similar measures, such as reserved seats in schools and colleges, to ensure equal opportunities for transgender students, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds.

2. Gender-Neutral Facilities: Nations such as Canada and Norway mandate gender-neutral restrooms and changing rooms in schools and colleges. Indian institutions must prioritize the development of such facilities to create safe spaces for transgender students.

3. Mandatory Sensitization Programs: Training programs for teachers, staff, and students are critical for fostering inclusivity. Finland's education system, for instance, integrates gender sensitivity into teacher training curricula, equipping educators to address the challenges faced by transgender students effectively. Indian institutions can replicate this model to build awareness and reduce biases.

4. Inclusion in Extracurricular Activities: Policies that encourage transgender participation in sports and cultural events are essential. Germany and Australia have adopted inclusive guidelines that allow transgender students to compete in gender categories that align with their identities. Similar practices can be implemented in Indian schools and colleges.

5. Mental Health Support: Establishing dedicated mental health resources for transgender students can significantly improve their well-being. This includes hiring counselors trained in gender issues and providing confidential support services.

6. Technology-Driven Solutions: Leveraging digital platforms can expand access to inclusive education. For example, online learning modules tailored to transgender students or mobile apps offering mentorship and mental health resources can complement existing frameworks.

7. Data Collection and Research: Conducting national surveys on the experiences of transgender students can provide valuable insights for policymakers. Countries like New Zealand and South Africa regularly collect such data to inform evidence-based interventions. India must invest in similar research to address regional, caste, and class disparities.

A systemic approach is needed for the development of inclusive education systems for transgender students in India while learning from global examples. This is why educational institutions have to step up and assist in these endeavors with the help of curriculum changes, safe spaces, and representation. Cooperation with NGOs and advocacy organizations can also improve institutional abilities, whereas international standards can serve as useful references for practical actions. Thus implementing these measures India could guarantee that transgender students are not only admitted but enabled to succeed. Education as a social determiner of change thus needs to focus more on the issue of equity and inclusion to ensure that every survivor of the social system enjoys their rights and diversity.

7. Conclusion

The review highlights the primary challenges faced by transgender students in India, which can be categorized as structural erasure, indifference, and cultural marginalization. Despite the presence of progressive legal frameworks and policies, such as the recognition of transgender rights and the promotion of inclusivity in education, the reality remains bleak. Transgender students continue to experience marginalization and rejection, with limited resources tailored to their specific needs. The findings of the analysis indicate that individual experiences and social structures significantly shape the learning journeys of the study's participants. There is a marked scarcity of gender-neutral restrooms, and a lack of counselors to support students in addressing their day-to-day challenges. Moreover, caste, class, and regional barriers exacerbate the difficulties faced by marginalized transgender students. While there have been promising developments in institutional and community responses, gaps in policy enforcement and the processes necessary for changing societal attitudes suggest that substantial work remains. The courage and perseverance exhibited by many transgender individuals underscore the urgent need for transformative change within the educational system.

Improving India's education system to accommodate the needs of transgender students necessitates the intervention of educational policymakers, teachers, and society as a whole. Policymakers must not only develop effective policies but also prioritize their implementation. This includes establishing mechanisms for monitoring compliance, determining the allocation of resources, and supporting economically disadvantaged transgender students. Institutional accountability is crucial to ensuring that schools and universities adhere to anti-discrimination laws and foster an environment that guarantees the safety of all students. Educational institutions must take decisive steps to revise policies and strategies to foster inclusivity, which should include offering a gender-sensitive curriculum, gender-friendly facilities, and zero tolerance for bullying. The current research offers several recommendations for teacher and administrator training to better understand and address the needs of transgender youth. Additionally, institutions should ensure the availability of mental health services and peer support groups specifically designed to meet the needs of transgender individuals.

The role of the community is also crucial in fostering change. Collaborations with NGOs, advocacy groups, and local organizations can bridge resource gaps and enhance institutional capacities. These collaborations can provide platforms for raising awareness, offering counseling and guidance, and facilitating scholarships that empower transgender students to achieve their goals. Community-based interventions should also support transgender individuals' families to combat prejudice and discrimination. Moving forward, the education system should adopt an intersectional approach to understanding the challenges faced by transgender students, considering the specific difficulties encountered by those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, rural areas, and marginalized

castes. The involvement of transgender individuals in decision-making processes at all levels of education is essential.

Inclusion in education is an ongoing process that demands commitment and flexibility. Future research should focus on exploring the effects of educational policies on transgender students and identifying areas where interventions can be strengthened. Data collection and research represent the most effective means of identifying issues and recommending solutions tailored to the diverse needs of transgender individuals across different regions and economic backgrounds. Additionally, technology can play a crucial role in empowering transgender students within educational settings. Online platforms can provide access to learning materials, counseling, and peer support, thereby extending opportunities for students who face challenges in traditional academic environments. Mobile applications that connect transgender students with mentors or therapists can further address gaps in school-based support. Furthermore, international cooperation presents valuable opportunities for learning and development. Drawing from global experiences in inclusive education, India can adopt best practices and collaborate with international organizations and NGOs to share resources, ideas, and strategies for building an equitable and inclusive education system.

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