

The Interviews: Tale of Two Transgender in an Urban Milieu

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Abstract: Transgender people have an internal experience of gender identity which is different from most people of our society. They are deprived from their happiness of life and rights because of the society's lack of consciousness, lack of mental support as well as some expectation of their own family, less interested Government and their development board towards the poor or middle class people of this community. A kothi or koti, are a heterogeneous group who are biologically male in the culture of the Indian subcontinent. Kothi(s) show various degrees of being effeminate and often with a desire to be the penetrated member in sexual intercourse.

The present study is an attempt to look for the present scenario of urban transgender (kothi) people who faced many problems in their life. The problems impact on their social life as well as their mental health. It was also tried to find the involvement of Government to the development of this people. This study intend to show that, though there lots of facilities should be given to them but it is often found that, the transgender people do not get proper rights and facilities by the Government. Besides, they have to face lots of social, physical and mental problems. The study can also depict the relationship between the gender identity and development.

Keywords: Urban kothi, gender identity, narratives, government, development, society

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I. INTRODUCTION

Transgender is a term that yet to get much attention in our society. Various kinds of discrimination faced by transgender community suppressed due to lack of awareness and knowledge. Transgender is a group of people created in the same way that male or females are, but the only difference is that due to biological concerns, they develop physical features of both sexes. This genetic difference not only segregates them from societies but also leads people to treat them as an inferior creed.

The community of Transgender people is an important part of Indian society. Even, the laws of Indian Constitution can't deny their existence. It is hard to believe that we are in 21st century where human rights are assured and preserved for human beings except the third gender (Transgender) people. Though there are all kinds of constitutional guarantees, yet the Transgender people do not get their basic rights like Right to Dignity, Personal Liberty, Education, Freedom of expression etc.

In addition, aggressive behaviors and negligence towards the individuals of transgender community who do not coincide to social norms around gender manifest, frequently of extreme violence towards the transgender people.

II. METHODOLOGY

The present fieldwork is done among the Transgender of Kolkata Metropolis. Altogether 8 individuals were interviewed thoroughly and observed their lifestyle intermittently. The total length of fieldwork was about 3 months. The data was collected by administering qualitative semi structured questionnaire schedule from different age groups (15 years to 45 years). The narratives were given which are their own words. A schedule was prepared and that helps to do the interview in an organized way. Observation was used to observe their behavior during the fieldwork. This fieldwork totally focused on the dimensions of the lifestyles of transgender of Kolkata.

III. STUDY AREA

The study was conducted among the transgender of Kolkata who are the active members of the organization named 'PLUS' (People like us), which is located in Kadapara (Phoolbagan area), Kolkata. This area is located in Narkeldanga Main Road. It is near the Subhas Sarobar Lake nearer to the Kakurgachi. Kadapara is in Kolkata City in West Bengal State, India. It is belonging to Presidency Division. Narkeldanga, Bagmari, Raja Bazar, Tangra, Beliaghata are the nearby Localities to Kadapara.

IV. THE INTERVIEWS:

Respondent - I

Name of the respondent: **Bapi Roy (Rai)**

Age: 33 years.

Family background: The respondent is the only child of the family. She had a nuclear family. There are no other person is transgender in her family. Now after the death of her father, she lives with her mother in their own house. Her monthly parental income is now 3500 rupees only. The respondent work in a N.G.O named Anjali Mental Health Organization and her income is 6000 rupees per month.

The conversation between me and respondent was as follows:

Q: “Can you tell me about your childhood? I mean tell me about your likes, dislikes, preferences etc. in your childhood”.

Respondent: “In my childhood, I liked to wear the ‘tape¹’ shirt of my female family members. I liked to make chignon in my hair. During my childhood, I copied the ‘hijra²’ but don’t feel like them. At the age of 7 or 8 years, I felt that I was different from other friends of mine, i.e., feminine. I liked to play effeminate games like ‘rannabati³’ with my female friends. They were too close of mine. My father made me admitted in swimming, karate training, cricket practice etc., but I didn’t like those things. I grow up with every care of my family”.

Q: “Bapi, tell me about your friends including your school friends?”

Respondent: “All of his male school friends have the intension to do sexual relationship with him. The scenario is same for the neighbor or the local male friends. But my female friends are my so close, u can say my partner, my soul mate. In my childhood, they do not start their play until I join them. I am really happy with my female friends.”

Q: “What kind of harassment you had faced in your school life?”

Respondent: She faced various kinds of harassment in school. She was locked in the bathroom by her friends and forced her for sexual relationship to make her free. Besides, teachers used various types of negative words to scold her for her identity in front of other students. For this reason, there were nothing happened after complaining about the harassment faced in sch

Q: “What kind of behavior you received from your neighbors and relatives?”

Respondent: “My neighbors are good and supportive. But my relatives are not supportive and irritating for me. They said different types of words about me. One day my elder brother came and says negative words about me and my hair. Then I told him to burn my hair. From that day, he stays away from me.”

Q: Then I asked her that how her family reacted and behaves with her.

Respondent: His mother never accepts her as she is. Her father frequently has beaten her for his identity. But her father loved him so much. Her mother still feels ashamed for herself. Few days ago, when she make up herself, her mother came and criticize herself for this practice, but her mother always care her because she is her own son.

Q: “How did you came in contact of PLUS?”

Respondent: “We had a project of Manas Bangla running in Sealdah station. The project was named as Launda Dancer⁴ (The dancing boys). The project came from the UNDP⁵ TAHA⁶. That time my community members came to join the programme. In that programme, my community members told me that there is an organization for the people like them. After that I decided to go the organization. From then I am here.”

Q: “From which age you had joined or came in this organization?”

Respondent: “I worked here from 2007 to last year. Now I came here but I am not a paid member. I worked on a 10 years long shelter home project. Now I came here with for my own interest and love to the organization.”

¹ Tape- A type of female upper innerwear.

² Hijra- Hijra is a term given to eunuchs, intersex people, and transgender people in South Asia.

³ RannaBati- A type of effeminate outdoor game mainly played by girl children.

⁴ Launda Dance-They are a feature of traditional ceremonies in the feudal heartlands of Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Bihar: young boys who dress as women and dance at weddings and other auspicious occasions.

⁵ UNDP- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

⁶ TAHA- Trafficking and HIV/AIDS project (TAHA).

Q: “How is your life now? Was there any kind of change occurred in you after joining this organization?”

Respondent: “Yes, of course. I have changed a lot from previous. I got the empowerment. I can talk and convince other people. I am more conscious than previous. I am now a knowledgeable person and know many things about transgender which was unknown to me. Besides, I got help and support many other aspects.”

Q: “Do you ever face any kind of public harassment or not?”

Respondent: “Yes, many times. Whenever we are passing from the road in front of Gurudas College, we get teased mainly by the female students, who are regularly changing their lovers. But they don’t tease our seniors. They only tease us because we look different from others. Let me tell you a story. One day I came to this organization by auto. I sit beside the auto driver because the back seat is full. In the next stoppage a person gets down from the auto and I went to the back seat. There was a lady sitting with his child, told me to sit in front. Then I ask her why I should do like that. She can’t explain.”

Q: “Tell me about her love life.”

Respondent: “If you say about relationship then I can say I had many relationships. But among all of those I loved truly one individual. His name is Sanju. I tattoo his name in my hand. Though he betrayed me, yet I love him till now. When he left me, I cut my hand by sharp knife and became drunk the whole day. Recent days my physical condition is worst for him. We had almost 1.5 years long relation. He is the reason of the bad relation between me and one of my close friends.”

Q: “Do you ever like a woman?”

Respondent: “No, never. I am not a bisexual. I have female friends who are my soul mates. I can’t think like that. I am a human who has effeminate character in a male figure.”

Q: “Have you ever experienced sex with any one?”

Respondent: “I basically do sex for pleasure. Besides, I also do sex with my Facebook friends. Sometimes I was paid and sometime not. Depending on my mind and situation, I take money for sex.”

Q: “Tell me according to you, what are the differences lie between people like you and the people like me?”

Respondent: “Society should be more educated about us. The society is not sensitized about the people like me. Besides, people like you can wear any kind of dress you prefer. But I cannot wear any kind of dress which I want to wear. If I can hold the status like Rituparno Ghosh⁷, then nobody can criticize or harass me. Because nobody had known him before he become a famous film director. He was not accepted as he today before be a famous successful film director.”

Q: “After that I asked her to tell about her job experience and working area and does she feel there any kind of harassment or not.”

Respondent: “Now I work in Anjali⁸, a NGO. There I worked in tea and cleaning department. They are very supportive and cooperative. I never feel any kind of harassment there. Besides, I work as maidservant for monthly salary of 200 rupees. I sold sari and also worked in a beauty parlor. Before that I worked in a factory but I leaved the work.”

Q: “Why did you leave the job of the factory?”

She replied that an old male worker who was her colleague, tried to molest her and in the next day he complained against her that she tried to harass him. That’s why she leaved the work.

Q: “Can this organization provides you some kind of jobs or any other thing else for earning opportunity?”

Respondent: “I worked here 10 years long shelter home project of this organization.”

Q: “Do you heard about TG Bill and tell me about it.”

Respondent: “Yes, of course. There will be a screening committee. They will scan an individual to decide the individual is really a transgender or not. The individual has to be naked in front of the community. Who they are to decide who is a transgender or not and why should a person have to prove his/ her identity being naked in front of a scanning committee! It is a bill by which people like me can never benefit in any way.”

Q: “What are the requirements to live your life happily and comfortably?”

⁷Rituparno Ghosh- Rituparno Ghosh (31 August 1963 – 30 May 2013) was an Indian film director, actor, writer and lyricist in the Bengali cinema.

⁸Anjali- Anjali works in one of the most neglected areas of health. Mental Illness is not a priority as a health issue in any part of the world, more so in developing nations like India.

Respondent: “Frankly speaking, I need a permanent shelter to live, a job of a good salary and need social acceptance for the people like me to live happily and comfortably.”

Q: “Is there any kinds of development or developmental projects are taken by the government from the last few decades for the people like you?”

Respondent: “No, there are no developmental projects are installed for the government for us. In the phase of previous government, we were quite good in the aspect of standard of lifestyle. We have the worst situation in the phase of this government”

Q: “Tell me, why don’t you apply through TG Board⁹?”

Respondent: “The board is made to benefit few persons, not for us. There was a time when we do the work of Health Ministry but we did not get the salary of the last 7 months. The board does nothing for the community members. We are taken for granted for the boards.”

Analysis of Respondent- I:

From the beginning of the interaction, the conflict between her mind and body was come into view. She (respondent) recognize herself different from her other friends from the early of her childhood in the behavioral as well as psychological aspect. She had to face a very strong rigid mentality of her family about her gender identity, especially from her parents. She was experienced sexual and verbal abuse by her friends in childhood. This is one of the reasons which make her to feel alone and isolated. Naturally these incidences impacts upon her upbringing which is quite different than the other children.

She has the experience of work in many spheres which was her one of the struggled phase of life. She was appreciated for her work. It can say that she has to carry lots of burden from her childhood. She was fall in many loves but one of which made her mad and that madness led her to do many wrong things which create a deep impact on her physical health. All these incidents happened when her lover betrayed her. This incident changed the perception of love towards her. After this case, she perceives and believes that most of the heterosexual people are interested to do physical relationship in terms of love.

She has the same kind of emotions as many of us generally have. Her relatives say many wrong words to her which make her mentally strong. She believes that society should change their perceptions and views towards the transgender people and should be consider themselves as the normal people like us. It is frequently come in her words that she should be accepted as she is by the society. She was criticized and harassed in her childhood, adolescence as well as in adulthood, which make her mentally strong and create a distance between her and the society.

She believes that all this happen to her just because she is a transgender. She wants to hold high status and accepted in society like Rituparno Ghosh. She thinks that, her economic condition, background, academic qualification is responsible for her situation. If she holds a high status, the situation may be different from today. She came under the influence of Agniva Lahiri in 2006 which made her mentally stronger and much more conscious than before. That time she became the member of the N.G.O ‘PLUS’, where she can express her point of view on various topics. She learnt about different kinds of law here which make her more confident than before. Now she is economically independent and empowered. She is strongly against the ‘Transgender Persons Bill (2016)’.

Respondent-II

Name of the participant: **Prasenjit Manna.**

Age: 24 years.

Family background: The respondent is not the only child of her family, she has a brother. She has a family which consists of her mother and father. She has no other family member who is Transgender. She lived with her family. Monthly parental income of her family is 10000 rupees. She works in a N.G.O (Anjali Mental Health Organization) and income 10000 rupees per month. She also works as call girl and income almost 5000 rupees per month.

The conversation between me and respondent was as follows:

Q: “Prasenjit, tell about your childhood, your likes-dislikes, and preferences and so on.”

Respondent: “I studied in a co-educational school. I have some female friends. People say different words towards me. When I read in class 8, I first experienced sex. I was teased by my female friends for my nature. I really got very depressed. Then I got a friend who is exactly like me. Then I got some relief.”

Q: “Tell me about your love which may be happens in your childhood or adulthood.”

⁹TG Board- Transgender Development Board of West Bengal formed by Government of West Bengal in 2015.

Respondent: “I have a love relationship. During my school days, others became confused to identify me. But one understood me. I have a love relation with my lover from the class 9. We frequently go to Digha to travel or spent some good times.”

Q: “*When did you start to recognize yourself as a woman?*”

Respondent: “I was in class 8, when I recognize myself as a woman.”

Q: “*Tell me about your friends in school.*”

Respondent: “I had school friends of both the sexes. No one was special among them.”

Q: “*Had you faced any kind of harassment in the school for your expression?*”

Respondent: “Classmates abused me verbally by using different words. Besides they tried to lock me in bathroom and wanted to does physical harassment in exchange of make me released.”

Q: “*What kind of behavior you had received from your neighbor and relatives?*”

Respondent: “My relatives tease me most. They say ‘chakka’ and other bad other to me. One day one of my relative called me ‘chakka’ in a public place and instantly I go to her and rebuked. From that day she does not tease me.”

Q: “*How your family reacted on those incidents and behaves with you?*”

Respondent: “My family does not know about my identity before. But now they know about me. I am happy that after know about myself, they remain as they were. In my teenage, my elder brother rebuked me so much. My father rebuked me lesser than my elder brother. In that time I cannot dress well. But now, everything is normal.”

Q: “*How did you came in contact of PLUS?*”

Respondent: “Before joining this organization, I was regularly visited the nearest lake Subhash Sarobar. In that place, one of my friend whose name is Vanu, told me about this organization which is for the people like me. After few days, I joined this organization.”

Q: “*From which age you joined this organization?*”

Respondent: “I joined this organization from 2010. I joined here 8 years before.”

Q: “*Do you feel comfortable with the members of this organization?*”

Respondent: “I was not comfortable from the very beginning of my days in PLUS. But gradually I feel comfortable with the members of this organization.”

Q: “*How is your life now and was there any kind of change occurred in you after joining this organization?*”

Respondent: “Yes. Now I got my own power. I am now more conscious than before; I have a mental back up for this organization. I travelled many places after joining this organization. Besides, I can talk in any places as a transgender and so on.”

Q: “*Have you ever faced public harassment?*”

Respondent: “Quite frequently. I was abused verbally in many places, especially in public places. Besides, many people looked at me peculiarly. It feels uncomfortable for me.”

Q: “*Do you ever like a woman?*”

Respondent: “No, I have female friends but I never like a woman.”

Q: “*Have you ever experienced sex and with whom?*”

Respondent: “Yes, I have experience of sex. I occasionally perform group sex¹⁰ and I provide this service for money.”

Q: “*What are the social and mental differences between you and people like me.*”

Respondent: “Frankly speaking, though I have many desires, yet I have to accept the fact that I am or the people like me are physically incomplete. I cannot give the birth of a child. People like me are not socially

¹⁰ Group Sex- Group sex is a form of sexual behavior that involves more than two partners.

accepted. Sometimes I feel ashamed to dress what I want. Many times I get abused or teased verbally. Besides, there are many other reasons which are responsible to make us depressed gradually.”

Q: “Do you interested to do a job?”

Respondent: “I am already doing a job. Now I am a staff of Anjali, a NGO. But before this, I work as a physiotherapist in Shyambazar. Besides, I worked in a HIV project, work as a call girl and do many other works and gave few interviews for jobs.”

Q: “Do you hear about TG Bill and do you think this beneficial for you for you?”

Respondent: “Yes, I heard about it and this Bill is not beneficial for us.”

Q: “What are the requirements of you which can help you to live your life happily and comfortably?”

Respondent: “The stigma upon us should be removed. If possible, bus seat should be reserved for us. Besides, public toilet is needed, because people like me cannot use properly public toilets which are made for male and female. The fear of own mind should be removed. Section 377 should be legalized.”

Q: “Why these kinds of requirements still required and what are the reasons behind this situation?”

Respondent: “Our society is not developed. The TG Board is corrupted and do not work properly for the transgender. Our community members who have the power of administration or ability to develop, they remain silent. If they work properly, the situation of us may be quite better from now.”

Q: “What is the probable way out from the overall situation; I mean what you expect from society and Government?”

Respondent: “Government can organize various types of rally, workshops, and seminars to make conscious the society about us with the help of Ministers and other public figures. The TG Board should be active and helpful for us,”

Analysis of Respondent-II:

She realizes that her behaviour is quite different than the other friends in early her childhood. She faced many shocking events in her childhood. She experienced her first physical relationship in class VIII. She was abused sexually a number of times. Eve-teasing was a regular matter for her life. She became frustrated when she was teased by her female friends. She was in depression that time because she was teased by those, with whom she believes have same mental conditions, emotions, feelings. Her family did not know much about her gender identity. After knowing about her gender identity, they did not react too much. That was a reason of a sigh of relief of the respondent, though she was rebuked by her elder brother and also her father in few times but her family is so supportive which make her so comfortable at the end of the day.

She cannot dress according to her choice which is the reason of her dissatisfaction, which reflects the conflicts between her mind, body and society. She was abused in school as well as in public place. She do not care about what relatives are say about her because she feels happy of what she is. She believes that people like them have to accept that they are physically incomplete and they cannot fulfil the desire of the family. Her words reflect that she is so practical in her life. She also thinks that the gender binarity, stigma of transgender, fear of own should be removed.

Now she is economically independent, conscious and empowered, which helps her to lead the normal life. She is strongly against the ‘Transgender Persons Bill (2016)’ and think there is corruption in West Bengal Transgender Developmental Board. Besides, she also thinks that the present scenario of the transgender of Bengal might-be better if the community members (transgender) do their work appropriately without giving any kind of excuse. Now-a-days this kind of self-evaluation is rarely found. Undoubtedly, she is a true human being.

V. CONCLUSION

The present study tried to analyze the phenomena under study; they also help elaborating with, extending to and adding original findings to the social processes in which the studied social constructs are embedded. The study is conducted on the transgender who are also known as ‘Kothi’. They are the sexual minorities as well as gender variant people. I tried to search their problems of life in different aspects of life. In many cases they are also exploited by their community members.

This study tries to negotiate the feelings of respondents towards their memories and experiences. Their story is very much common to other Kothis or transgender of Kolkata, India. Their experiences are nonetheless very rich and valued resources for understanding the sexual and / or gender identity. The transgender people live in a society where other people have gender binarity in their mind. The transgender people and their identity exist beyond the binarity of gender. So, there is a conflict arise always in every spheres of the society.

Transgender persons have lack of social acceptance. They believed that they are cursed. The common people have less knowledge about these people and that is one of the reasons for abasement or the harassment of these people. Now-a-days the transgender people have no project works come from the N.G.O(s) due to the death of the director of this organization. So, they have no recent work in their hand. The situation is getting worst gradually. Besides, some transgender does not find job due to lack of educational qualification. Even some of them want to beg instead of study or work because if someone earns money easily, no one wants to work hard. So, it is basically expected that with the help of society, Government the thoughts, perceptions and approaches will be change as the transgender are also human beings.

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