

Awareness of Transgender Issues among M.Ed. Students of Regional Institute of Education, Bhubaneswar

Srimoyee Poddar

Research Scholar

Department of Education; Regional Institute of Education (NCERT), Bhubaneswar, India

Abstract

Transgender persons are those who have a gender identity, or gender expression, that differs from their assigned sex (Altilio and Green, 2011). The term 'Transgender' comes from the key abbreviation LGBTQIA. This abbreviation stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual individual identities. The present study aims at investigating the awareness of transgender issues among M.Ed. students of Regional Institute of Education, Bhubaneswar. To achieve the objective of the study, the researchers adopted exploratory method. 20, 3rd semester M.Ed. students were taken as sample. Semi-structured interview was conducted by the researchers. The findings indicated that there is lack of awareness about transgender issues and education of transgender among these participants. The study recommended that teacher education institutes should seek to consciously promote the transgender issues and the education of this marginalized community among the students specially these future teacher educator or prospective teachers by making the study of subjects which contains the elements of the gender inclusiveness as core, and exposing them to the various aspects of transgender issues from time to time.

Keywords: *Transgender Issues, Teacher Educator, Prospective Teacher, M.Ed. students*

Introduction

The world is beautiful because of the admiration and positive perception of human beings. People also have differences in color, language and gender. Understanding the differences and accepting the reality and motivating each other will make the life more beautiful. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (December 10, 1948): Article 26 says everyone has the right to education; Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all. It has also mentioned in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child, 1989 (UNCRC) article 29 that "The education of the child shall be directed to the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential". Therefore it is the responsibility of the system to provide quality education to all people irrespective of the differences exists among individuals.

Transgender persons are those who have a gender identity, or gender expression, that differs from their assigned sex (Altilio and Green, 2011). An individual's gender expression is external and socially perceived. Whereas gender identity is one of the most fundamental aspects of life which refers to a person's intrinsic sense of being male, female, transgender or transsexual person (NALSA Judgment, 2014). The term 'Transgender' comes from the key abbreviation LGBTQ which was originated in 1990s and was formerly known as the 'Gay Community'. The abbreviation was created to be more inclusive of diverse groups. LGBTQ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer individual identities. Presently two letters I and A include with LGBTQ i.e. LGBTQIA. This abbreviation stands for

lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual individual identities. As per census 2011, there are around 4.9 lakhs trans-gender in the country and 4% of this population is present in Odisha (Times of India, 2014). In India the literacy percentage is 56.07% compared to 74% in the general population.

In India there are laws and norms for the transgender to pursue education and participate in social, cultural, economic issues. In the contemporary period the transgender in India is possibly the most well-known and popular third type of sex in the modern world. The Supreme Court declared transgender as third gender. On 15th April 2014, the landmark judgment in National Legal Services Authority v Union of India and others (Writ Petition No 400 of 2012 with Writ Petition No. 604 of 2013) was passed. The Hon'ble Supreme Court found transgender to be a socially and educationally backward class under Article 15(4). The Hon'ble Supreme Court opined that transgender should be entitled to reservation in matters of appointment in Article 16(4). The court also held that gender identity is protected under Article 19(1) (a) as a means of expression protected under the constitution. The court held that the right to choose one's gender identity is integral to the right to lead a life with dignity and hence protected under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. Even transgender were legally granted voting rights as third sex in 1994. Including all this judgment and reservations the Government of India introduced so many welfare policy and schemes such as census, documentation, issuing of the citizenship ID Cards, issuing passports, social-economic development and constitutional safeguards for the transgender people.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is a major initiative of the 11th Five Year Plan period which brought employment opportunities for transgender people. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation is the National Urban Livelihood Mission and Healthcare facilities. The social, economic, political transformation, Housing legal measures, Police Reforms, Legal and constitutional safeguards to prevent human rights violations of the transgender community and institutional mechanisms to address specific concerns of transgender people.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has written to all universities to include a column for the transgender category in all application forms. From the source- 'Times of India'-(February 15, 2015), In a letter to all vice-chancellors, UGC secretary Jaspal Sandhu has said they should ensure human rights of transgender students are safeguarded and their mainstreaming is fast-tracked within the university and society.

On 24th April 2015, the Rajya Sabha passed The 'Rights of Transgender Person Bill' 2014 is to provide for the formulation and implementation of a comprehensive national policy for ensuring overall development of the transgender persons and for their welfare to be undertaken by the State and for matters connected therewith and incidental thereto. The bill guaranteeing rights and entitlements, reservations in education and jobs (2% reservation in government jobs), legal aid, pensions, unemployment allowances and skill development for transgender people. It also contains provisions to prohibit discrimination in employment, prevent abuse, violence and exploitation of transgender people. The bill also provides for the establishment of welfare boards at the Centre and State level, and for Transgender Rights Courts. It is enacted by Parliament in the Sixty-sixth Year of the Republic of India. The bill includes six chapters. These areas includes Preliminary, Transgender Identity, Rights and Entitlements, Education, Skill Development and Employment, Social Security, Health, Rehabilitation and Recreation.

In the chapter IV of the education clearly mentioned about the following facts-

- Institutes should admit transgender students without discrimination and provide them education as also opportunities for sports, recreation and leisure activities on an equal basis with other.
- Institute should provide reasonable accommodation of the individual's requirement.
- Institute must provide necessary support in environment that maximizes academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion.
- Institute must monitor participation, progress in terms of attainment levels and completion of education, in respect of every transgender student.
- Government shall provide scholarship/ entitlements, fee- waiver, free- text books, free hostel accommodation and other facilities at subsidized rates for students belonging to this group.
- All the educational institutions/universities should establish an anti-discrimination cell to monitor any form of discrimination against the transgender community.
- The appropriate Government and local authorities shall ensure participation of transgender persons in adult education and continuing education programmes on an equal basis with others

Presently the Chandigarh administration has decided to provide transgender with an option to prefix Mx with their names while filling application /admission forms. From the source- 'India Today'-(October 24, 2017).

But we Indians fortunately have reached a stage where we think of children with disabilities only. Still we talk less of including children whose identity does not fit into stereotypical gender norms. Transgender people have existed since time immemorial and have been recorded in mythology and history. Still they are treated as outcasts in the society because they are neither like men or women. Seldom, our society realizes or cares to realize the trauma, agony and pain which the members of transgender community undergo, nor appreciates the innate feelings of the members of the transgender community. The society, even their parents are not providing any kind of support to them due to the stigma attached. They are being ridiculed and abused in the public places like railway station, bus stands, schools, workplaces, malls, theatres, hospitals etc. They are forced to do begging, clap their hands to get attention from people, do sex work to earn their living etc.

Besides these problems also many transgender are working in a reputed place like Manabi Bandyopadhyay working as the first transgender principal to a government college in West Bengal, Amruta Alpesh Soni as the advocacy officer for the states of Punjab, Haryana and Chhattisgarh for the National AIDS Control Project (Rajkumar 2016), Anwasha and Rituparna posted in a sells- tax office at Paradeep, Odisha, Prithika Yashini was appointed as India's first transgender police officer in Dharampuri, Tamil Nadu. So education of transgender and their better performance in different field makes the other people think positively towards that particular community (Tabassum & Jamil, 2014).

We can conclude that now a days transgender person are becoming increasingly visible in the educational institutions and even in work places as to across the country and expecting institutions to meet their needs. Inclusions in education, social, cultural, economy and citizen participation thus can no longer ignore this population. Educational institute they must quickly learn the appropriate language to describe trans people, educate themselves on transgender histories, and seek to understand their lives and experiences. Even the sensitization of the transgender issues should be started from the school level so that the attitude towards the transgender should be positive.

Rationale of the Study

Education is the most important aspect for the social development of individual as well as the development of the society. In the present scenario it has been found that real education and proper work among the transgender community is very negligible. It is essential to bring out the potentialities of transgender community for the development of our nation. In the present days, it is found that they are being forced to bear their livelihood through begging or sex work since their acceptability and social recognition is still an issue in the world of work. Many reports on transgender community such as NALSA (2014) also expressed the concern that they have the identity crisis and suffering from the social stigma. Thus it is very important to mainstream them for the development of their community as well as the development of the nation. Mainstreaming should start from the educational institutes and continues in the work place also. Teachers and administrators need to work hard to make their class rooms welcoming places where each student feels included. The teachers must trained in such a way so that they can accept gender inclusiveness in their class room. Teacher education curriculum must include such kind of issues. We should keep in mind that only preparing the different policies are not an important matter but awareness towards it and following it in a real situation is the most important. Studies conducted on the awareness of transgender issues among prospective teacher educator or teachers are very few especially in India. The acceptance of this group of people in society was depend on demographic characteristics of people, thus to include transgender population into the mainstream society in a country like India, court verdict was definitely not enough (Roy Choudhury et al., 2016). Rajkumar (2016) in the study on education of transgender in India: status and challenges where the researcher clearly mentioned that no formal education for transgender is popular in Indian context. Researcher clearly said that the biggest lacuna in the system is that nobody knows the real definition of transgender. Sensitization will not help until people are ready to accept change and acceptance can come only through education. Jayaseelan (2015) showed in his study, Transgender have knowledge about the fundamental rights for education and not aware of the state government policies regarding education and majority of them are not aware that they come under backward classes. Hence they are not exposed to higher studies. Layton (2012) in the research, explores the attitudes of a group of Postgraduate Certificate in Education Citizenship student teachers in London towards lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues in education, their own perceptions of their abilities to deal with LGBT education within schools, the training they have received from their teacher training institutions in this area, and how this training may be improved in the future. Guasp (2008) in the teacher's report: homophobic bullying in Britain's schools of London: Stonewall, revealed that 91 percent of secondary school teachers said that pupils within their schools are bullied, harassed or called names for either being LGBT or perceived as being LGBT. The same research reported that homophobic bullying was the second most common type of bullying after weight, and three times more common than religion or ethnicity. This particular research also indicated a positive correlation between LGBT young people becoming more open about their sexuality and rates of bullying. If no one is 'out' as gay, then there may be no target for homophobic abuse, and heterosexism dominates with little challenge. Watkins (2008) a research was conducted on problems and priorities when tackling homophobia in secondary schools advocated that the training of teachers in LGBT issues should occur within teacher training colleges, arguing that newly qualified teachers who have entered the profession were better placed to deliver LGBT education awareness. However, researcher said these recommendations could be more difficult in practice because they rely on government support and senior management support, and resources such as time and money.

Educational bills, policies, judgment and rights are present exclusively for the transgender community in India then also why they remain isolated in the society. They do not have proper education, rather we can say they are not getting conducive environment in schools and home for continuing their education. So the present study intends to focus on the awareness of transgender issues specially their education among prospective teacher educators or teachers. Therefore, the present study is planned and designed to understand about the area not much explored.

Objectives of the Study

To study the awareness of transgender issues among M.Ed. students of Regional Institute of Education, Bhubaneswar.

Research Question

Are the M.Ed. students of Regional Institute of Education, Bhubaneswar aware about transgender issues?

Delimitation of the Study

The present study is delimited to-

20 M. Ed. students from Regional Institute of Education, Bhubaneswar (NCERT).

Methodology

The present research adopted an exploratory research method. The details of research methodology are presented as follows:

Sample

20 M.Ed. students from Regional Institute of Education, Bhubaneswar were selected as sample for the study. Due to the data saturation researchers took small sample. Purposive sampling technique was used for collecting relevance informants.

Tool

Data were gathered by semi-structured interview.

Analysis of Data

The collected data were analyzed qualitatively and critical analysis has been made from that data.

Major Findings

A semi-structured interview was conducted to understand awareness of transgender issues among M.Ed. students of Regional Institute of Education, Bhubaneswar. Except 2 participants all of them have a clear idea about the difference of gender and sex. While interacting with the participants it is found that they do not have the clear idea about gender identity and gender expression. Though they have studied child psychology in their B.Ed. and M.Ed. previous semester they are not able to express that as a teacher in the classroom which one, gender identity or gender expression they have give priority.

Next, the participants have very poor idea about who are transgender. Many of them have said that they are belong to the *hijra* community, doing all those activities which are not accepted in the society like clapping their hand and begging, taking money after the birth of child and during marriage ceremony, doing sex works, staying in *basti* etc etc. Some have misconception with trans-sex. Only 2 participants have positively said that it is natural and they are also

human being like other male and female. Even they have mentioned that these people belong to 'Third- Gender' and they do not fit in the typical binary notions of male or female bodies.

While the researcher asked about the meaning of gender inclusive classroom all the participants have said that there must be no discrimination in terms of gender i.e. boys and girls in the classroom. While researcher said that where the transgender students will go. Majority of the participants have said transgender students are not found in the school premises. In their B.Ed. curriculum they have studied about 'Gender, School and Society'. In this paper maximum focus has been given to the women community, their problems, challenges etc. No content is there in the teacher education course related to transgender issues.

Most of the participants are from different states and they have completed their B.Ed. from different institutes. While the researchers have asked that whether they got any ideas about transgender community from their teachers' or faculty members during their teacher education courses or at any level of their education, the answer from all the participants is 'No'. They are all the future teacher educator or teacher but they have not read any resources related to the transgender issues or specially how to handle transgender students in the class room. They have also mentioned that the library also do not have such kind of material.

It has clearly mentioned in 'Transgender Person Bill'2015 that separate toilet facilities must be present in all the educational institutes for transgender students. Participants clearly mentioned that their present institute as well as the institutes they come across so far do not have separate toilet facilities for this particular community students. Even no participants are aware about the concept of the separate toilet facilities.

Further researchers have asked about separate school system for transgender students, except 4 participants all other have said that transgender students need separate school system to continue their education. Only these four participants have said that there is no need for separate school system because it's the time to mainstream this marginalized group of society. We should allow them in the general school and make them seat with other students. They must not feel that they are socially isolated.

Researchers have asked that how the participants will make a safe classroom for the transgender students. As the participants are the future teacher educator or teacher it is very important for them to know or to train student teacher about how to make a safe classroom for this community of students. They have mentioned that these issues must be introduce as the content in the teacher education course, so that they get enough knowledge about this kind of students and come to know about their needs. Side by side they have said it is very difficult to mainstream this group of students. They have also mentioned that it is very difficult to make aware about this transgender issues to other students of the class. They have said that if this kind of students will be in the class, parents of other students will object. But four participants they have mentioned that as a teacher it is the duty to accept them as they are. In the classroom it is very necessary to discuss about transgender issue positively with other students. It must be said that like male and female they are transgender and it is natural. They are also part and parcel of the society and also human resources. If the transgender students face any problem teachers should try to solve that problem and bullying by other students should not be entertained. School counselor must regularly talk with these students as well as their parents. Many transgender persons are there who are in their own respectable position; school authority must invite this kind of person and share

their stories which help transgender students to become optimist. One participant has included that it is the duty of media also to show transgender persons in the positive manner. It is also mentioned clearly by this participant that it is the time we must change our pre-conceived notion and negative thoughts about transgender people.

While it has been asked by the researcher that only education of transgender can improve their self-concept, participants said that transgender persons they are always engage in begging, sex works etc and they do not want to continue their education. So if they will continue their education it will help them to develop their self concept and also reduce prejudice that is present in their community. Four participants have clearly mentioned that only education of transgender will not help them to develop self concept or give them respect and proper job. It is the time where society must have proper education and have enough knowledge about this transgender community and accept them as human being.

Researcher also asked that what are the factors that make this marginalized community isolate them from the society? The response come from majority of participants that it is the behavior of the transgender persons that make them isolate and even they do not want to be the part of the society. But five of them have said that due to lack of sensitive parents, proper effort from the side of government, proper educational institution and societal prejudice force them to isolate from the society.

Though Transgender community have strong history from the period of Ramayana, Mahabharata, Mughal period etc but participants have no idea about the rich history of this community.

Participants have no idea about NALSA judgment and 'Transgender Person Bill' 2015. These two contains about the basic rights and the judgment for this marginalized group of the society.

Lastly it has been asked by the researchers that weather only Supreme Court's judgment is enough for the transgender persons' in getting their rights? The answer from all the participants is No. They have said that proper education and understanding among the transgender community and society is very important. Awareness is most important. Otherwise all the bills and judgment become futile.

Conclusion

From the interaction it has come out that majority of the participants have no clear idea about transgender persons. Though they can able to differentiate between gender and sex but have no clear concept about gender identity and gender sex. They have no idea about NALSA judgment and 'Transgender Person Bill' 2015 and even the rich history of transgender community. They have no idea about separate toilet system and even institute do not have such kind of facilities. In their teacher training course also the curriculum do not contain such kind of issues and teachers' and faculty members also not discuss about this matter. They even do not come across with the material which helps this prospective teacher educator or teacher to handle this marginalized community. The library also does not have such material. Majority of participants have said about separate school system for transgender students. But four participants they have said no need for separate school system. It is very essential to mainstream them. From the discussions it also comes out that it is very difficult to give them education. Because their behavior makes them isolate from the society. On the other hand few participants said that sensitive teachers make transgender students optimist and can give safe

classroom. Lastly it can be said that participants have very less awareness about transgender issues among themselves and they blame the marginalized community for the present situation. But handful of participants have said that proper education of the society is very important for the development of self-concept among transgender community, reducing prejudice and leading a healthy life. Only education among transgender will not change anything. All the participants have accepted that only Supreme Court's judgment will not bring any change. Proper education, awareness and understanding among transgender community and society can bring any change. It is a mutual task.

Suggestions

- Teacher education institutes should seek to consciously promote the transgender issues by making the study of subjects which contains the elements of the gender inclusiveness as core.
- Educational institutions must conduct periodical programmes- if possible by the transgender –to make the students and the teachers to understand about the third gender.
- Media both electronic and print must highlight the educational status of the transgender persons and bring them in the forefront rather than portraying them in poor light.

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