



# THE STRUGGLES FOR SPACE AMONG THE TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY IN INDIA: FEMINIST AND MARXIST APPROACH

*Sentsuthung Odyuo*

Research Scholar,

Department of Sociology & Social Work, Bengaluru.

**Abstract:** This paper explores the complex relationship between transgendered people and the spatial identity in the city, in reference to various works of literature, secondary data, and some primary data collected. The studies have undergone various exposures in the context of transgender in their quest for survival in the day to day life. This paper explores the complex relationship between transgendered people and cities specifically in the Indian context, and in particular, their relationship with spaces within those places. The paper highlights this often neglected group and considers the nature of their perceptions of a variety of urban spaces. Using a combination of face-to-face interviews for data, few interviews were conducted with male-identified transgender individuals aged 20-50 from Mumbai- In a railway station, and streets/market place. Subsequently, literature from an array of disciplines such as the feminist perspective and Marxist perspective was presented to interpret and discuss different implications. Additionally, secondary data input was also added for broader studies, and in determining transgenders in different location and space.

**Keywords:** *Transgender, Space, Identity, Feminist, Marxist*

## I. INTRODUCTION

For a general understanding 'Transgendered public space' refers to urban areas known for their transsexuals and transvestites. Dietert & Dentice(2013) on Growing up Trans: Socialization and the Gender Binary states that, "the constructions of gender tend to demand conformity by adhering to only two choices of gender identity, male and female, transgender individuals transgress this binary conception of gender by deviating from the societal gender norms associated with the sex assigned at birth". Beginning of the 1870s, to erase hijras (transgender in the Indian context), Jessica Hinchy(2014) it was seen as a visible social category and gender identity in public space through the prohibition of performance and transvestism, and till date not much has been changed, amidst the supreme court allowing special legal aid for this section of people. Looking at the present scenario of the transgender community, the situation seems to have gotten worst. Violence best describes the life and affairs of the transgenders, be it private space or public space, there is not enough room created for them to endeavour their identity in the already shaped society. Some have argued that Tran's spaces occur at the margins of society and constitute a safe haven for the LGBT oppressed by the hetero-normative nature of urban areas.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A secondary data from a survey of 149 transgendered individuals in major cities in India, indicates that although queer spaces provide a measure of protection for gender-variant people, the gendered nature of these spaces results in continued high levels of harassment and violence for this population, the strongly gendered dimensions of these spaces suggest that a discursive revisioning of gender is needed to create more transgender-friendly urban spaces. Identifying their spatial structure in the society; In the Indian context, The Transgender (commonly known as Hijras) often experience gender-based social rejection like discrimination, violence, and exclusion in public spaces. According to anthropologist (Srivastava, 2012) Spaces have a dual identity. Public spaces such as streets, parks, marketplaces, offices, shopping malls, schools, or universities often represent male space. In contrast, the home as private space is represented by females. While males have the privilege to enter and form public spaces as domains of action, women are often excluded by taking care of the domestic sphere (Srivastava 2012: 21-31). The division of public and private spaces into male and female leads to the fact, that public spaces are (besides inherently classed) inherently gendered...in particular transgender identities with female public appearance – become victims of public discrimination. On the one hand, hijras lack acceptance and recognition of what is considered by society as “normal”. Their promiscuity in public, as well as their frequent involvement in sex work, makes them targets of violence (Butalia 2012: 4-5).

In India, public spaces are being constructed with gender-segregated facilities, which serve to determine who is to be allowed and not, to obtain a particular space. Herman (2014) Gender segregation is commonly found in public restrooms, locker rooms, dressing rooms, homeless shelters, jails, and prisons and is intended to provide safety, order, modesty, and security in these facilities. Apart from that, those transgendered people who are rejected by their families may have fewer education opportunities and be forced to work in unskilled labour positions. Koch, in her essay, states that in extreme cases transgendered teens may flee punishing home environments and seek work on the street, they may be joined by newly unemployed trans people who find it difficult to obtain another job. This practice becomes one identification to relocate their spatial structure in society.

### Feminist Approach

Within feminism, there has been much debate about how to move beyond the gender dichotomy, but little consensus on how to achieve this objective. The feminist view on transgender has been both of an up's and down's, it highlights to intervene the construction of spaces created for transgender people in the society, by understanding its underlying proximity through different arguments. Bem (1993) clarifies that it is the polarization of gender into a rigid dichotomy that must be removed... Gender de-polarization would undermine the social reproduction of male power that thrives on the separation and segregation of the sexes and thereby would provide transgendered individuals greater freedom to express the range of their gender identity positions. The gendered dimension of the 'public' has been examined by many feminist scholars (for example, Ardener, 1978; Garmonikow et al, 1983; Sydnie, 1987; Walkowitz, 1980). Shirley Ardener (1978) remarks that the presence of men is used to define a particular space as 'public', this means that women are relegated to the private sphere.

A public-private, masculine-feminine opposition has deep historical roots. Walkowitz (1980) noted that society sanctioned men in the streets and public establishment. Benner (2016), along with the women's movements of the 1960s and 70s many academic disciplines began to consider for the first time the unique perspectives and concerns of women and trans people. Feminist critiques and takes on geography, sociology, and city planning and urban studies contribute much to our understanding of gender in urban public spaces. In the pioneering Transgender Studies Reader (Stryker & Whittle 2006), have analyzed extensively how patriarchy has shaped the city and metropolitan regions and discuss how urban material and spatial reifications of patriarchy contribute to oppression. In other words, the city is inherently sexist. (Benner, Ibid) Theorists like Nancy Duncan, Clara Greed, and Susan Gal have highlighted the gendered nature of the public/private divide and explain how the assumption of who should be in what space and when have served to subjugate and constrain women... suggests that cities hoping to address their sexist nature would implement gender equity planning.

### Marxist Approach

In recent decades, much of social science theorizing has seen an influence and shift, both substantively and methodologically toward the spatial aspects of society. These attempts to reconcile space and society to reconceptualize human life and social organization as not only temporal, as conventionally held, but also spatial (Lefebvre, 1991). Highlighting the limitations of merely recognising queer of colour subjects and emphasizing the need to “approach these subjects as sites of knowledge” (Floyd, 2009).

A queer theory grounded in Marxism must critique the contradictions of such experience. In the manner that queer theory has “consistently maintained that any representation of sexuality in isolation from ... other dimensions of the social... as always already localized, particularized, or privatized, is a misrepresentation of the social as well as the sexual” (Floyd, *ibid*), a queer Marxism must make the fundamental claim that the isolation of capital and the

economic sphere from contemporary epistemologies of the social and the sexualize is also a misrepresentation of their existence.

The Marx approach has dealt with scientifically to manage capitalism. Bennett(2014) in an unprecedented and indeed total fashion, properties, and relations that are always ultimately social, historical, and human. Under the influence of an increasingly complex division of labour, including an intensified division between intellectual and manual labour, social knowledge itself assumes what we might call, in a more disciplinary, normalizing character of the capitalist labour process itself. Wolf(2009) writes, mustering historical evidence, it was capitalism that “created the conditions for people to have intimate lives based on personal desire.” She cites John D’Emilio’s key essay “Capitalism and Gay Identity” to explain how this played out in the 19th- and 20th-century development of lesbian/gay communities and identities of the transgenders have embarked a change in the revolution. Essentially she credits Marxists with understanding that the ruling class divides to rule. This is a useful idea, up to a point. But it is not enough to understand the power of the heterosexual norm or the persistence of anti-transgenders prejudice even in the absence of direct or visible ruling class influence.

### **Conjecture of Marxist and Feminist approach**

Like masculinity, manhood was a social construction, but it emphasized the kind of rigid personality structure that was required for male participation in the production process and the reproduction of the working class. This does not directly implicate the trans, but the structure shows that it may or may not have space that can be explored (Wolf,2009). The statement propounded by Wolf in his writing credibility accounted for the interface of transgender in the lens of Marxism, though his writings portray a complex understanding in a way a concrete space is defined. Not much can be further substantiated but Marx’s perspective on space gender has an open way for more analysis or studies.

Only in the 1970s did socialist-feminists begin to forge a new synthesis of Marxism and feminism, which gradually won over many Marxist currents. Wolf, in his studies, argued that the lack of a critical Marxism that theoretically integrates feminism has political consequences. Based on their understanding of male domination and class domination as distinct though interlocking, socialist-feminists argue for an independent women’s movement that chooses its leadership and charts its course alongside an independent labour movement.

Floyd(2009)Marxist also fails to address at the heterosexual norm that pervades society or the creativity of Trans’ challenge to it, even rejects the concept of “straight society” outright, arguing that it’s wrong to apply the same concept to working-class and middle-class straights, many of the earliest non-trans feminist perspectives on transsexuals were marked by hostility.

Rubin(2009)states that “I want to challenge the assumption that feminism is or should be the privileged site of a theory of sexuality. Feminism is the theory of gender oppression. To automatically assume that this makes it the theory of sexual oppression is to fail to distinguish between gender, on the one hand, and erotic desire, on the other”, the safety secured through an opposite-sex partner seems to hold regardless of the public space which one occupies. The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy on Feminist Perspectives on Trans Issues states that sometimes sexism and transphobia can be blended together inseparably, for example, some trans women may sometimes find that they are stereotypically represented as prostitutes simply because they are seen as transgender women, with such considerations in mind, a trans feminist stance might involve taking the oppression of trans women as its starting point. Several writers have outlined distinctive “trans feminist” positions.

Raymond(1994)The definition of public space is intimately linked to culturally sanctioned gender identities...This has profound implications for people who live outside normative sex-gender relations: 'ordinary' public space as well as regions demarcated as transgender sites where the potential of being verbally abused, and/or physically assaulted, is remarkably high. Because available data indicate an astounding rate of violence against transgenders, and because the regulation of public space depends on a man-woman, public-private split (Valentine, 1993), it is absolutely crucial that theoretical and political work on violence attend to the function of gender in such acts of aggression. What implications does this seizure of public space hold in terms of violence? This question still remains a question.

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

A primary data has been collected in several places in Mumbai city- In railways stations and markets using a combination of face-to-face interviews (semi-structured interview) for data, few interviews were conducted with male-identified transgender individuals aged 20-50 from Mumbai- In the railway station, and in streets/market place, those participants were born male-bodied but eventually expressed gender traits that align with female identity rather than male identity. All together five identified transgender individuals were interviewed.

#### IV. CASE NARRATION

Because of the social stigma attached to transgendered populations, they are extremely difficult to identify however certain questions were prepared pre hands, such as their understanding on gender and space in their day-to-day problems- both private and public space - A race to achieve identity and in coping up with the rest and building a relationship with family and friends etc. Some of the major answers that were received during the interview:

*"I have a good life inside my office,"* says 40-year-old trans woman, who has been working in a private firm for the past two years. She states, here, people know that I am a transgender, something she will never be able to tell anyone outside;

*"Outside of the office, people won't even want to shake my hand or take a glass of water from me when they discover that I'm a transgender. But here, I'm just another employee".*

When asked about her relationship in which she grew up, she replied

*"I felt like I don't belong among them and didn't see a future for myself, I have created my own space now".*

A transgender in her early 30's responded that- Accessing public toilets, has to a large amount diminished the freedom of trans people to use a toilet, be it at work or public spaces, another trans revealed that, *"I cannot use a urinal, and it makes me very uncomfortable and sometimes embarrassing when my male co-workers watch me go to a closed-door bathroom,"*.

She was further prompted by asking whether she prefers to work in companies? She replied that

*"Most of my transgender friends have set up their business, working in companies is not sustainable in the long run,"*.

Some other responses that were gathered in the process of the interview,

*"In a crowded city like Mumbai, there should be a separate berth in a train, for even the womenfolk failed to recognize their distress".*

*"Public places in cities have become a space of violence for transgenders".*

*"People ask me inappropriate questions like when will I get married or as a matter of fact who will marry me".*

*"I get mocked and ridiculed every now and then"*

*"There wasn't a time I was not starved"*

These instances are a mere speck in the spectrum of discrimination that more than 488,000 transgender people (census 2011) experience in India.

#### V. ANALYSIS

Despite the lack of empirical research on this phenomenon, we can stipulate that transgenders are at risk in areas known to be lesbian or gay, as well as in 'ordinary' public spaces. The presence of women in public who are not identified with men is a threat to the implicit masculine dimension of public space. It is for this reason that Trans, and other women perceived to be a threat to normative heterosexuality, are assaulted in the streets. Benner(2016) Trans users of public transit expressed safety concerns, pointing to the restraining nature of public transit, as well as the potential to expose users to unique forms of harassment. Other spatial themes regarding other male passengers' attempts to dominate trans riders spaces, the often difficult attempts at trans spatial resistance, and the role of gender nonconformity in transit spaces fall under the Gender and Space side of participants' responses to experiences of transit spaces.

Namaste(1995), highlights the division of public and private spaces, which relies upon and reinforces a binary gender system, has profound implications for people who live outside normative sex-gender relations. The article also stressed that transgenders are in jeopardy in ordinary public spaces and in those designated to be lesbian/gay. Though one must account for the workings of gender in these sites, an investigation of violence against transgenders would also account for the emergence of transgendered public space. Rubin(2003) it is not surprising that most cities have separate geographic areas known for transgenders, and although certain sections of the city are known for their transsexuals and transvestites, these people are usually only visible at night.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Transgender population remain one of the most vulnerable inhabitants of urban spaces. According to Doan, in her studies on Safety and Urban Environments: Transgendered Experiences of the City, There is a twofold element to their vulnerability, first is the fear of exposure or “outing” to the wider community in which they live and work, the other part of the fear is due to the potential trans-phobic violence and abuse they may face in the daily life. For both components of fear, the nature of gender embodiment matters and can be significantly different for trans men and trans women. In an urban area, those people who transgress gender norms risk public ridicule and approbation. Individuals who can pass easily as their preferred gender are likely to have fewer confrontations, but are still aware that they would be subject to harsh disapproval if they are discovered to be transgendered. Once discovered any transgendered person could be the victim of discrimination or overt violence., in 2014 the Supreme Court recognized transgender as a legal third gender which sets a landmark for India and called on the government to ensure their equal treatment, which has made India one of the few countries to do so. But the stigma and other challenges in the wider society are a reminder of the hard work that lies ahead, and the conceivable spaces that the society has in store to them.

India’s first transgender school was established in Kochi, highlights a positive narration for the transgender community, the school Sahaj International, the first of its kind in the country, is expected to go a long way in ensuring equal opportunities for transgenders who have dropped out of school. A space created for the younger generation to enhance their day to day expression and a movement that can keep sight in the long run. One straightforward and direct strategy is to show an association planned to give safe space to transgender individuals and to be unequivocal about that cause and by providing them with different jobs with an approach of an inclusive model.

The utilization of signs that explicitly incorporate the words transgender can be a pointer that trans individuals are genuinely welcome and not simply a letter in the alphabet of the political consideration that is either recalled or overlooked but provide them with the space needed in an hour with lesser or no prejudice, after all, they are all human being and have equal rights to perform whatever they like/prefer. Over the years there has been an uproar majorly in mainstream spaces to revolutionise movement for equal treatment towards the transgender community, it forays a tribute for a need to recognise identified transgender people in a society that identify transgender individuals as an outcast, the movement for justice has set a benchmark for many that are confined in social norm to be accepted and acknowledge by the society.

It is evident that the debates encompassing transgender in the Indian society still need adherence because of the varied conventional social construction and belief system yet there is a strong desire that our society will one day acknowledge transgender individuals as another human being by providing them with the space they deserve.

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**Video:** A visual essay by Milena Koch-<http://www.hera-single.de/hijras/>