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## **THE POWER STRUCTURE AND IDENTITY: A STUDY OF TRANSGENDER FROM BOURDIEU'S PERSPECTIVE**

### ***Abstract***

*The transgender community experience difficulties in society where heterosexuality is a norm and homosexuality is regarded as deviant. The transgender in India have their distinct power structure which is culturally defined. Foucault perceives power as 'ubiquitous' and outside agency and structure, while Bourdieu considers power as culturally and symbolically crafted, which may be re-legitimised in the course of the interplay of agency and structure. The resultant may be through what he calls 'habitus' or socialised norms that guides behaviour and thinking. The political and cultural power is usually centrally concentrated among transgender in India. The Gurus enjoy the culturally and symbolically created power among transgender. This paper tries to relate the Bourdieu's theoretical implication of cultural habitus and field and the concept of Gurus among transgender, a cultural and political connotation, and their identity in India. The objectives of this paper are: (a) to understand the problems faced by the transgender community, (b) to analyze the socio-cultural identity of transgender, and (c) to relate the Bourdieu's theoretical implication of cultural habitus and field and power structure of transgender community.*

**Keywords:** *transgender, cultural identity, power structure, sexual violence, bullying.*

### **Introduction**

The transgender face lots of difficulties growing up in a society where heterosexuality is frequently presented as the only acceptable orientation and homosexuality is regarded as deviant. The People around the world face violence and inequality and sometimes torture, even execution. Sexual orientation and gender identity are integral aspects of our selves and should never lead to discrimination or abuse. It is well documented in exposing abuses based on sexual orientation and gender identity worldwide, including torture, killing and executions, arrests under unjust laws, unequal treatment, censorship, medical abuses, discrimination in health and jobs and housing, domestic violence, abuses against children, and denial of family rights and recognition. There is need to advocate for laws and policies that will protect everyone's

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dignity.

Transgender term coined in the U.S. is used to include people whose lifestyles appear to conflict with the gender norms of society. In the use of the broad term, a gender person crosses the conventional boundaries of gender; in clothing; in presenting themselves; even as far as multiple surgical procedures to be fully bodily designed in their preferred gender role. Transgender is a term used to describe individuals who exhibit gender-nonconforming identities and behavior, or in other words, those who transcend typical gender paradigms (Ryan and Futterman 1997). This broad category of people includes transsexual, cross dressers and gender benders/blenders. According to World Health Organization (WHO), Transgender is a term use for people whose identity and expression does not conform to the norms and expectations traditionally associated with the sex assigned to them at birth; it includes people who are transsexual, transgender, or otherwise considered gender non-conforming. Transgender people may self-identified as transgender, female, male, transwomen or trans-men, transsexual, or, by a variety of indigenous term used in specific culture, such as *Hijra* (India), *Kathoey* (Thailand), *Waria* (Indonesia), or one of many other transgender identities. They may express their gender in a variety of masculine, feminine and or androgynous ways. In India there is wide range of transgender related identities which include the *Hijra*, *Kothi*, *Arvaniand*, *Thirunangai*, *Jogtas/Jogappas* and *Shiva Shakti* etc.

*The Queer* is a political and theoretical term and a reclamation of the word used as an insult. Politically it was associated with groups such as Queer Nation and is used as umbrella term to apply to individuals often associated with the categories lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT). It generally indicates opposition to identity-based categories and signals a strong antipathy for “heteronormativity” (roughly: the taken-for-granted social and sexual arrangements in a heterosexual-centered world-view). *Queer Theory* roughly applies to theoretical work, typically informed by Foucault and Derrida that aims to study and “deconstruct” heteronormative ideology. The term *genderqueer* draws on the political force of *queer*. It is used as a term of self-identification by individuals who do not subscribe to the traditional binary division between male/female, man/woman, and masculine/feminine. An individual who self-identifies may claim both sexes and genders, neither, or a complex blend of them (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-trans/>).

The transgender in India have their distinct power structure which is culturally defined. Foucault perceives power as ‘ubiquitous’ and outside agency and structure, while Bourdieu considers power as culturally and symbolically crafted, which may be re-legitimised in the course of the interplay of agency and structure. The resultant may be through what he calls ‘habitus’ or socialised norms that guides behaviour and thinking. The political and cultural power is usually centrally concentrated among transgender in India. The *Gurus* enjoy the culturally and symbolically created power among transgender. This paper

tries to relate the Bourdieu's theoretical implication of cultural habitus and field and the concept of *Gurus* among transgender, a cultural and political connotation, and their identity in India.

The patriarchal culture in India forbids the individual to deviate from gender conformity. They supposed to behave in a certain gender role and deviation may lead to punishment. The transgender often take refuge under the *Gurus* of transgender. The power of *Gurus* is not negotiable and questionable. The absolute power of *Gurus* may be relate to the cultural capital and field.

The study is aimed to define and describe the socio-political structure of transgender. They represent a community which needs to be framed together for their social and cultural activities. The role of *Gurus* of transgender is important in defining the social solidarity among transgender community. The social solidarity among them is politically designed to achieve social and cultural goals. The social power of *Gurus* among transgender community is authoritative to take decision on behalf of them. The study aims to analyse the concept of social power of *Gurus* of transgender from Bourdieu's Perspective. While Foucault sees power as 'ubiquitous' and beyond agency or structure, Bourdieu sees power as culturally and symbolically created, and constantly re-legitimised through an interplay of agency and structure. The main way this happens is through what he calls 'habitus' or socialised norms or tendencies that guide behaviour and thinking. Habitus is 'the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them' (Wacquant 2005: 316)

Habitus is created through a social, rather than individual processes leading to patterns that are enduring and transferrable from one context to another, but that also shift in relation to specific contexts and over time. Habitus 'is not fixed or permanent, and can be changed under unexpected situations or over a long historical period' (Navarro 2006).

Habitus is neither a result of free will, nor determined by structures, but created by a kind of interplay between the two over time: dispositions that are both shaped by past events and structures, and that shape current practices and structures and also, importantly, that condition our very perceptions of these (Bourdieu 1984: 170). In this sense habitus is created and reproduced unconsciously, 'without any deliberate pursuit of coherence and without any conscious concentration'.

Bourdieu's theory of 'fields', includes various social and institutional arenas in which people express and reproduce their dispositions, and where they compete for the distribution of different kinds of capital (Gaventa 2003: 6). A field is a network, structure or set of relationships which may be intellectual, religious, educational, cultural, etc. (Navarro 2006). People often

experience power differently depending which field they are in at a given moment (Gaventa 2003: 6), so context and environment are key influences on habitus.

‘Bourdieu (1980) accounts for the tensions and contradictions that arise when people encounter and are challenged by different contexts. His theory can be used to explain how people can resist power and domination in one field and express complicity in another’ (Moncrieffe 2006).

### **Methods and Objectives of the Study**

The study revolves around the problem and issues of transgender. The study aims an attempt to investigate the socio-economic condition and problem of socio-cultural identity of transgender. The study is guided by three objectives as follows. (a) to study the problems faced by the transgender community, (b) to analyze the socio-cultural identity of transgender, and (c) to relate the Bourdieu’s theoretical implication of cultural habitus and field and power structure of transgender community.

It is an ethnographic study. The analysis of empirical research is based on the designing of case study. The data is collected from both primary and secondary sources.

### **Analysis and Interpretation**

The participant name is Chavanni Mai QadriKinnar (Pseudo name). She is 35 year of age. She is a Muslim by religion. She lives along with other transgender. She schooled up to VII standard in nearby school. She belongs to a family living in a nearby village in Aligarh. Her father was a skilled labour and works in a lock factory. Her mother is a home maker. She has two younger brothers and three elder sisters. Her grandfather was a renowned skilled labour in lock factory in Aligarh. She has three uncles and eight cousins. They all live together in a joint family in Aligarh.

She was born as a male child at home. She was happily living in the family. Everyone loved her till the age of 10 years.

The problem unfolds when she felt comfortable to be with girls than boys. Her body did not sense to be a boy. She started loving girlish stuffs. She was behaving like a girl. She wanted to groom and dress up like girl. She felt to be a girl inside. She wrongly dwelt in boy’s physical body. Apparently, she looked like a boy and inside felt and behaved like a girl.

She started behaving according to her sexual orientation which was not acceptable to her family. She has been beaten and threatened by the family members to behave boyishly.

She was bullied at home and neighbourhood. She was not allowed to

visit any of her relatives. The family members felt shame to accompany her in any of the family ceremonies. She was not allowed going outside. She was having bruised all over her neck and back. Her fellow students at school started bullying and make fun of her. She was mocked and thrashed many times at school. She has been physically and psychologically traumatised at school, neighbourhood and family. Once she felt to commit suicide but didn't dare to do so. Then people started taunted her to accommodate in her own grouping of transgender. She felt to be different and difficult to adjust in cis-gender category. She has been harassed at home, among peers, neighbourhood and in kinship. She has psychological dilemma to behave like boy or girl.

Her mother taunts her all the time. She felt like worthless. She developed acute psychological problems. She couldn't concentrate on any work. She was having hallucination. She screamed, cried out loud to ease her physical and psychological agony. She didn't find console. Many times she tried to run away from her home. She accepted her destiny and realise that she is a transgender.

She often hesitant to use male toilets in public, as toilets in India are limited to male and female and has no provision for third gender. She faces the problem of cultural identity and existence to accommodate in binary gender grouping.

She responded that there are many social, cultural, political, physical and psychological problems of transgender. The transgender face many problems like homelessness, harassment of transgender Students in Schools, psychological distress, dropping out of school earlier, leaving home and family, unable to find regular jobs, have fewer options than others, being ignored in the community and isolated, lack of family and social support, and migrate to other countries for seeking safer livelihood and acceptance, attempt suicide.

The transgender is being considered as the third gender. They have many social-cultural, economic, political problems in their life.

Once she met the *Guru* of transgender at the wedding ceremony in her neighbourhood. Everyone was talking about her in front of the transgender community. The *Guru* realised the pain she was going through. Since Gender isn't defined biologically but culturally.

On the next day, the *Guru* with other transgender persons came at her home to meet the family. They had discussion about her gender identity and finally her family decided not to give away her daughter to them.

She said, "I was a bit nervous and frightened to come in front of the *Guru* and other transgender persons. The *Guru* came close to me and put her hands on my head. When I saw the *Guru* and other fellows close to me I started getting shiver. However they started lovingly talking to me. They showed care and pamper. I felt melt down and pacified with their behaviour. I

was feeling so comfortable and relaxed. Once at that moment I wanted to be a part of their community. However my family rejected their proposal. The behaviour of my family remains same. They wanted me to behave like a boy. I was unable to express my sexual orientation to them. I was very comfortable to be a girl. Since I used to have the feeling of girl and wanted to remain same. I was unable to settle down with my family. Finally, I decided to flee away from my family and settle down with transgender community. The Guru and transgender community welcome me at their place. They were so cordial to me. They offer me some community work at their place. Everyone has their defined duties. They all care and concern about everyone. I felt like liberate and emancipated from the clutches of dual-gender identity. Here with them I can explore my sexual orientation and behave accordingly”.

She was compelled to take refuge under the *Guru* of transgender, where she was welcomed and charmed. She gradually started accommodating herself in transgender grouping. Finally she felt console and pacified with transgender community.

It is there in the minds of the people to define Gender. There is a typical stereotype and mind-set of the people to treat anyone based on their gender identity. People don't culturally accept anyone beyond the male-female notion of gender.

She spent more than 30 years with them. She was managed to develop her own identity among them. She was the favourite of *Guru* and senior among them. Soon after the death of the *Guru*, she has been nominated by the council of the elders of transgender community as their *Guru*. She has become the *Guru* of transgender community.

The *Guru* is the highest elected and nominated representative of transgender persons in the community. *Guru* enjoys political, social and cultural power. She regulates the lives of transgender and gives them the protection and refuge. She looks after the issues and problems of transgender under his control living in definite locality. The highest authority of all transgender in Aligarh is the *Guru* named Haji Shamshad. She lives in Shahjamal, Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh.

The social structure of transgender community may be conceived from the authority of *Gurus*. Chavanni Mai, the *Guru*, enjoys the socio-cultural, political and economic privileges among the transgender community in general and society in particular. Chavanni Mai, the *Guru* of transgender, holds the political and social power among transgender persons. She started living in *Dargah*, to control and regulate the lives of transgender persons. In addition to it she also enjoys the position at *Dargah*.

She enjoys the social power and privileges due to her control over the *Dargah*. People from different faiths get the blessing from her. The people

across the faith have this belief that transgender blessings and curse have divine power and it affects the lives of the people. Chavanni Mai being herself as the regulator of *Dargah* has cumulative impact on people's belief that her blessings matters a lot for them. In seeking the blessings for their children, people offer some money to her. She feels proud to take refuge in *Dargah* and enjoys the authority. She responded that transgender s don't have economic problem as they have the blessing from God to bless or curse the people on some social and cultural events. She said that in weddings, births and other functions important for them to bless people and earn money from them, their presence on such social and cultural events belief to be auspicious. She replied that we are blessed one and don't have any economic problems.

The researcher found that her response to this indicator is subjective to her orientation, as she enjoys socio-political power and side lined the real issues of social, economic and political problems of transgender in general.

The cultural capital of transgender *Gurus* maybe conceived in Bourdieu's theory of 'fields'. The agency and structure of power of *Gurus* reflect social and institutional arenas in which they express and reproduce their dispositions, and where they compete for the distribution of different kinds of capital among transgender. The notion of field is validated in relating the power acquired by *Gurus* of transgender through the network, structure or set of relationships reflected culturally among them. The *Gurus* often experience political power differently depending on which field they are living.

'Bourdieu (1980) accounts for the tensions and contradictions that arise when people encounter and are challenged by different contexts. His theory can be used to explain how people can resist power and domination in one field and express complicity in another' (Moncrieffe 2006).

According to her the transgender is a unique identity which possesses the divine power of blessing and cursing people. On the basis of which, they regulate their economic and political lives. Their presence on socio-cultural events like births and marriages is considered as auspicious. They bless the newlywed couples and infants at births in exchange of money. This way they regulate their socio-cultural and economic lives. She said there is no poverty among transgender community. They can earn money and enjoy life anywhere at length and breadth of this country. It was her interpretation of this social reality while responding to the questions under study. She was conditioned with the authority that he enjoys as a *Guru*. She was over-empowered regarding his thought of divine power of blessing and cursing people.

Bourdieu's advocacy of tensions and contradictions that arise when people encounter and are challenged by different contexts reflects in the retention of power of *Gurus* under study. The *Guru's* own interpretation of the social reality related to the problems of transgender is evident in his discourse. Chavanni Mai, the *Guru* of transgender, undermined their problems and

developed the narrative of divine power of transgender. This interpretation initiates a tension and contradiction in the practical life of the transgender.

### **Conclusion**

The transgender is the blurred concept in the imaginations of the people. The people have stereotype mind-set about the transgender. The transgender community more or less become the centre of amusement for the people. The people mocked and called them by different amusing words and titles like *Hijra and Chhakka*. These become the abusing words in everyday life of transgender. The children mock and insult them during many occasions. The transgender community becomes the entertainment for the people. In wedding celebrations, the transgender community is often being called for dancing and singing. They are being mocked and sexually assaulted in many occasions during their performance at different ceremonies.

The prejudice attitude of people never emotionally or rationally compels them to think about this community. They struggled a lot for their rights to have dignified life.

In a significant judgement, the Supreme Court on 06, September, 2018 ruled that consensual adult gay sex is not a crime. The gratification of instinctual sexual derive is imperative for normal functioning of humans. Human Sexual orientation is natural and people have no control over it. The judgement, by Constitution bench of Supreme Court, has scrapped the British-era Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), which deemed that gay sex is a punishable offence. Now, it is no longer an offence under section 377 to engage in consensual gay sex in private.

The decriminalization of part of Section 377 of IPC may satisfy their instinctual biological gratification but their problems and issues remain unaddressed. The research will explore the implications and social impact of decriminalization of consensual sex in their life.

It is clear that transgender individuals who basically have different sexual orientation, face discrimination, exclusion from the society, thus quite often, meet with obstacles to satisfy their needs. This exclusion and ostracism could vary from the simplest personal relations to the most general social ignorance, exclusion, ostracism, working simultaneously together, and can even violate the rights of life.

The study tried to unfold the complexities of transgender lives in their community. The centrality of the study focuses on the cultural power of Guru of transgender community. It is an attempt to delineate the construction of power of Guru among them and define them from Bourdieu's perspective.

Bourdieu's theory can be used to explain how people can resist power and domination in one field and express complicity in another. The agency and



structure of power of *Gurus* reflect social and institutional ground. This can be reflected in the discourse under study to reproduce their dispositions, and where they compete for the distribution of different kinds of capital among transgender. Transgender live their life in difficult conditions and face stigma in their day to day life. Most of the transgender are poor and illiterate. The socio-cultural acceptance of transgender is still a problem. However the *Gurus's* interpretation of their lives is a contradiction and develops a narrative of tension among them. This narrative of contradiction and tension is challenged by many practical arenas which may reflect in the retention of power of *Gurus*.

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