

## A Snapshot of Transgender Community in India

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### Abstract

Gender is a human social structure of differentiation by sex for roles, behaviours, traits, appearances, and identities. The third gender is a broad term adopted to depict those whose gender, gender identity, or gender expression is in some sense, varied from, their allotted birth sex (Choudhury, 2016). In India, the life of the transgender community is under peril of bigotry, barbarity, and above all, it is an identity crisis. In the recent 2011 census, the government took an unusual step of enumerating the third gender as a portion of the mainstream population. The existing research intends for at depicting their demographic characteristics like total population, caste, literacy, 0-6 transgender children population, and workforce participation rate established on the 2011 Census. Also, the study has assessed reports from various transgender based organisations and NGOs to formulate it further explorative and descriptive. The outcomes reveal that around 4.87 lakh people reported themselves as transgender. The distribution of the transgender population is high in one of the primary states of India, i.e. Uttar Pradesh 28.18 per cent. It surmises that there should be robust and flawlessly operating strategies to civilise their lives and exempt them from societal humiliations and discrimination.

**Key words:** Census; India; Transgender Population; Demographic profile; Literacy; Employment.

### Introduction

Transgenderism is a widely stigmatised concept around the globe besides few developed countries (Ortiz-Martínez et al. 2017). Those individuals not comfortable or incongruent with their biological body or anatomic sex assigned to them at birth are recognised as transgender people. It is an umbrella term encompassing a male-to-female transgender individual alluded as to 'transgender woman', a female-to-male transgender individual, as 'transgender man', crossdressers are individuals who take pleasure in dressing up as the opposite sex for a desirable period, drag kings and drag queens are the ones who also cross-dress which is performance or occasion-specific, genderqueers are those who identify themselves either utterly different from what

has been assigned at birth or somewhere between male and female, bigender are those who identify themselves or prefer both male and female identity.

There are androgynes who represent a combination of masculine and feminine characteristics (Beemyn and Rankin 2011). In the Indian context, a transgender person has been referred to by various names such as *Hijras*, *Kothis*, *Aravanis*, *Jogappas* and *Shiv-Shaktis* (Agoramoorthy and Hsu 2015). The local name *hijra* used in the Indian context originates from the Persian word 'hiz' that is someone who is effeminate or ineffective or incompetent. Other local names are 'kinnar', whereas 'chhakka' is used in a derogatory context (Michelraj 2015).

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## Status of the Transgender Community in India

A group known as 'hijras' or eunuchs are often found begging at traffic signals or entertaining us at weddings, besides the fact that they were once treated with the utmost respect and performing imperative roles during the Mughal rule in medieval India (Abbas and Pir 2016). During the British government, they were denied civil rights and considered a separate caste or tribe often indulged into abduction, castration of children and danced and dressed like women. Therefore, this led to a downfall of the transgender community, and since then, they lived taboo lives for generations. A growing body of literature has demonstrated that third genders are often presented with widespread social shame, separation, provocation, parental isolation, physical and sexual manhandle (Stotzer 2009; Chakrapani 2010; Hughto et al. 2015; Field and Mattson 2016). A study estimated the transgender population to be around 1 million in the US as of 2016 (Meerwijk 2017). Transgender people comprise 0.3% of the total adult populace in Asia and the Pacific (Winter 2012). Upon evaluating population information from the UN (2010), he ascertained that there might be around 9.0 and 9.5 million trans individuals in this region. Another high school-based study conducted in New Zealand in 2012 found that 1.2% of the population is transgender, and 2.5% is not sure about their sexual orientation (Clark et al. 2014). In 2014, the Supreme Court of India ordained that transgender people be recognised as a third gender and enjoy all fundamental rights. The Supreme Court stated: "Transgender persons' right to decide their self-identified gender is also upheld and the Central and State Governments are directed to grant legal recognition of their gender identity

such as male, female or as third gender (Goswami 2018). The Union Cabinet approved the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill 2016 for introduction in Parliament, and this Bill is expected to bring social, educational and economic empowerment to the transgender community which lives on the societal edge. To a community that has been ostracised and discriminated against for so long, this Bill could mean a chance to live a life of dignity and equality (Michelraj 2015).

Estimates of the transgender population at a large-scale can be traced only through a Census count of 2011. Precise information related to transgender community is available through Census 2011, one among which is the number of transgender children in the age group of 0 to 6 years and literacy among the transgender population of India. Transgender people often face non-acceptance at a familial and societal level and are despised at a very young age. This exclusion and prejudice against transgender people are driven by various factors which subsequently impinge their identity, well-being, literacy and employment. The study intends to capture the count of transgender people in India along with basic demographics. It also portrays the distribution of transgender across every Indian state, caste and literacy status. This study through relevant literature explores the familial and employment exclusion among the transgender community and unravels instances of change in this sphere.

## Methods

The study adopts a mixed-method approach through descriptive as well as an exploratory analysis. Multiple reports have been utilised to conduct this study, such as the UNDP Report (2014), NACP Phase-III Report (2007-12) and the Annual Labour Bureau Report

(2015-16). Published articles in international journals, news reports, articles by various NGOs working for transgender have been utilised to fulfil the targeted objectives. India had no proper count on transgender population and was accounted with the general population until its 2011. However, for the first time in the history of Census of India, as directed by the Registrar General of India (RGI), during enumeration of Census 2011 and upon the recommendations of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), transgenders had been covered as 'Others', thus assigning a code '3' in the name of others along with '1' and '2' assigned for male and female respectively, for more details refer <https://pib.gov.in/PressRelease/framePage.aspx?PRID=1575534>. To accomplish the goals of the study, we employ data on the transgender community from the 2011 census. Hence, it remains the only source for figures on the prevalence and essential background characteristics at state-level. Data has been retrieved from <https://www.census2011.co.in/transgender.php>. Information had been procured as to details exhibiting their *caste* and *literacy status*. The 2011 census recorded information incorporating transgender count by *caste*, *literacy*, *workforce participation* and *number of transgender children in the age group of 0 to 6 years*.

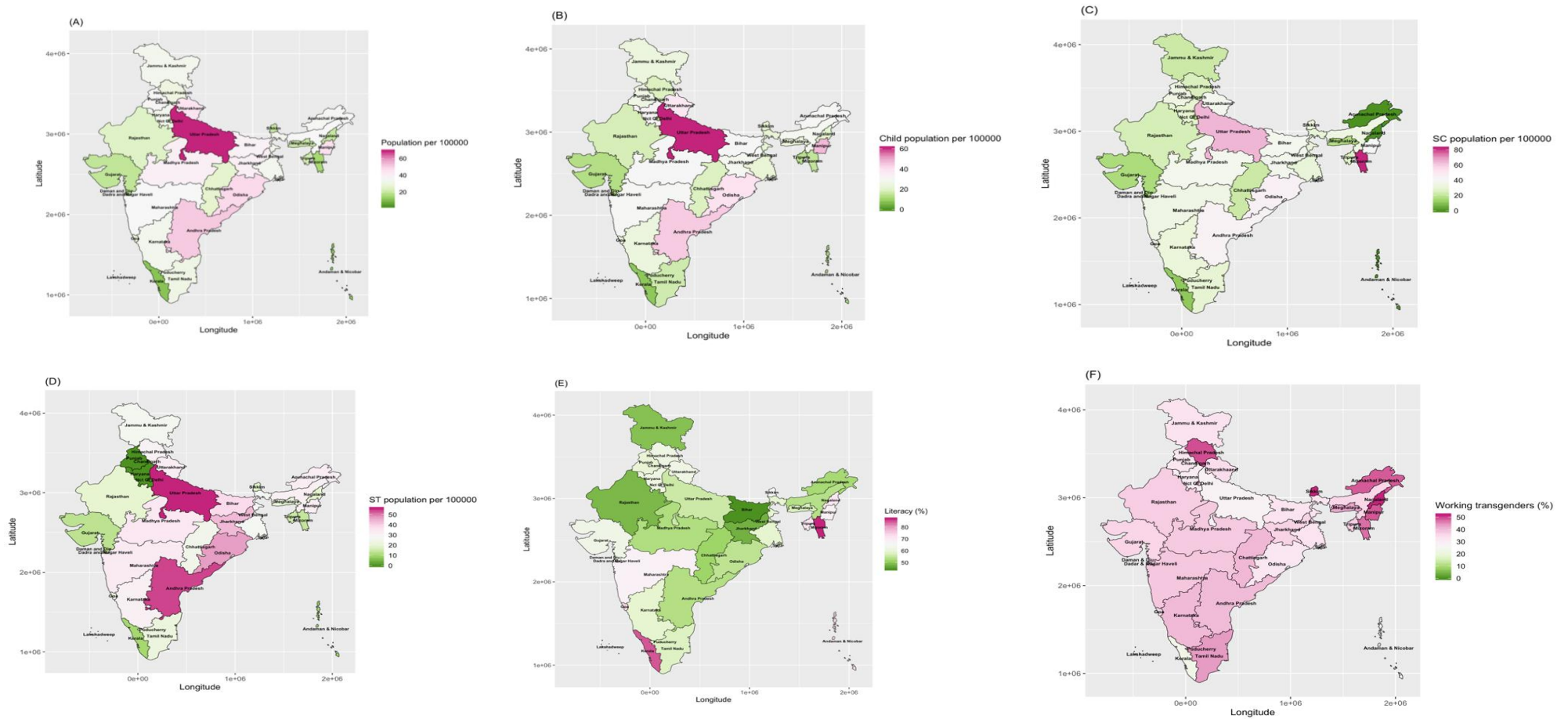
Information had been procured as to details exhibiting their *caste* and *literacy status*. Census 2011 also reported *third gender children in the age group of 0 to 6 years* who identified as transgender children by their parents. Due to the absence of information on various background characteristics of transgender people in India, our analysis was limited to specific estimates only. Since it is challenging to obtain a clear picture over the population of transgender only through

%age distribution, prevalence maps have been produced using R studio, to graphically represent the prevalence of transgender per 100000 general populace to facilitate accurate and appropriate results. These rates can be compared and utilised to draw inferences over locations with a high or low prevalence. Maps have been created for *total transgender per 100000 state population*, *transgender children per 100000 state population*, *Schedule caste (SC) and scheduled tribe (ST) transgender per 100000 state population*, *literacy rate and workforce participation rate* among transgender people employing Census 2011 data.

### Results

The 2011 census recorded information incorporating transgender count by caste, literacy and number of transgender children in the age group of 0 to 6 years. These maps provide us with a graphical representation of transgender count and their available demographic characteristics.

(A) Exhibits the transgender population across all states in India. The population count of 'Third Gender' as per Census 2011 was 4,87,803. The transgender community is very high in the states of Uttar Pradesh (28 %), Andhra Pradesh (9 %), Bihar (8 %), West Bengal (6 %) and Tamil Nadu (4 %). Based on this distribution, it would be misleading to determine the most and least number of transgender people in various states. However, when estimated in terms of 100000 state population (A), states which are indicated by shades of purple such as Uttar Pradesh (69), Andhra Pradesh (51), Odisha (48), Jharkhand (41) and Madhya Pradesh (40) record high transgender persons per 100000 population whereas shades of green such as Kerala (11), Mizoram (15), Gujarat (19) and Sikkim (20) report less transgender population.



**Figure 1** Transgender people per 100000 population across all the states of India, 2011; **(A)** Transgender people per 100000 population across all states in India. **(B)** Transgender children (0-6 years) per 100000 population across all states in India. **(C)** Transgender people belonging to SC category per 100000 population across all states in India. **(D)** Transgender people belonging to ST category per 100000 population across all states in India. **(E)** Literacy rate among the transgender population in India. **(F)** Workforce participation rate among the transgender population in India.

Lakshadweep (3), Andaman and Nicobar Islands (12) and Dadra and Nagar Haveli (12) among the UTs reported minimal transgender community. The count had been provided in Table 1 of the supplemental file.

**(B)** Portrays the 0-6 aged transgender population at the state-level as per Census 2011. A high %age of children belonging to the transgender community were recorded in the states of Uttar Pradesh (345), Bihar (11%), Maharashtra (7%), Andhra Pradesh (7%) and Madhya Pradesh (6%).

The total prevalence of India's child transgender per 100000 population is highest in Uttar Pradesh (61) followed by 47 per 100000 in Manipur, 40 per 100000 in Orissa and 44 per 100000 in Andhra Pradesh. In comparison, the least transgender people per 100000 population could be located in Kerala (8), Gujarat (13), Tripura (14) and Rajasthan (18). In case of UTs, Lakshadweep (0), Dadra and Nagar Haveli (10), Andaman and Nicobar (12), Puducherry (12) and Chandigarh (13) comprise low records of child transgender per 100000 population.

**Table1** Transgender population in different states of India, 2011

States/UTs	Transgender population	Transgender population per 100000	Child (0-6) transgender population	Child (0-6) population per 100000
India	487803	40	54854	33
Jammu and Kashmir	4137	33	487	24
Himachal Pradesh	2051	30	154	19
Punjab	10243	37	813	26
Chandigarh	142	13	16	13
Uttarakhand	4555	45	512	37
Haryana	8422	33	1107	32
Delhi	4213	25	311	15
Rajasthan	16517	24	2012	18
Uttar Pradesh	137465	69	18734	61
Bihar	40827	39	5971	31
Sikkim	126	20	14	21
Arunachal Pradesh	495	35	64	30
Nagaland	398	20	63	21
Manipur	1343	47	177	47
Mizoram	166	15	26	15
Tripura	833	22	66	14
Meghalaya	627	21	134	23
Assam	11374	36	1348	29
West Bengal	30349	33	2376	22
Jharkhand	13463	40	1593	29
Odisha	20332	48	2125	40
Chhattisgarh	6591	25	706	19
Madhya Pradesh	29597	40	3409	31
Gujarat	11544	19	1028	13
Daman and Diu	59	24	10	37
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	43	12	5	10
Maharashtra	40891	36	4101	30
Andhra Pradesh	43769	51	4082	44
Karnataka	20266	33	1771	24
Goa	398	27	34	23
Lakshadweep	2	3	0	0
Kerala	3902	11	295	8
Tamil Nadu	22364	31	1289	17
Puducherry	252	20	16	12
Andaman & Nicobar	47	12	5	12

Source: Census of India, 2011

(C) Shows that majority of the transgender people in India belong to two social groups, i.e. scheduled caste (SC) and scheduled tribes (ST). The total SC transgender population is 78811, and the overall prevalence of SC transgender per 100000 state population is the highest in the following states: 64 in Uttar Pradesh, 45 in Odisha and 44 in Andhra Pradesh.

(D) shows the total count for scheduled tribes (ST) transgender in India is 33293. Majority prevalence of ST Transgender person per 100000 state population is 56 in Uttar Pradesh, 54 in Andhra Pradesh, 47

Orissa, 43 Jharkhand and 37 in Bihar. Table 2 from the supplemental file shows the count for SC/ST population in India as per Census 2011.

This could be well highlighted in (E), which maps out the state-wise literacy rate among transgender people in India. According to the 2011 census, the total literacy rate of transgender at the national level is 56%. Mizoram (87%), Kerala (85%), Goa (74%), Tripura (71%) and Nagaland (71%) have the highest literacy rate among the transgender population ranging from 87% to 71%,

**Table 2** SC/ST transgender population in India, 2011

States/UTs	SC Transgender population	SC TG population per 100000	Total ST Transgender population	ST TG population per 100000
India	78811	39	33293	32
Jammu and Kashmir	207	22	385	26
Himachal Pradesh	433	25	118	30
Punjab	3055	34	0	0
Chandigarh	22	11	0	0
Uttarakhand	731	38	95	32
Haryana	1456	28	0	0
Delhi	490	17	0	0
Rajasthan	2961	24	1805	19
Uttar Pradesh	26404	64	639	56
Bihar	6295	38	506	38
Sikkim	9	32	37	18
Arunachal Pradesh	0	0	311	32
Nagaland	0	0	335	19
Manipur	40	41	378	32
Mizoram	1	82	146	14
Tripura	172	26	181	15
Meghalaya	3	17	540	21
Assam	774	34	1223	31
West Bengal	6474	30	1474	27
Jharkhand	1499	37	3735	43
Odisha	3236	45	4553	47
Chhattisgarh	742	22	1963	25
Madhya Pradesh	4361	38	5260	34
Gujarat	664	16	1238	13
Daman and Diu	1	16	2	13
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	0	0	22	12
Maharashtra	4691	35	3529	33
Andhra Pradesh	6226	44	3225	54
Karnataka	3275	31	1324	31
Goa	9	35	33	22
Lakshadweep	0	0	2	3
Kerala	337	11	51	10
Tamil Nadu	4203	29	180	22
Puducherry	40	20	0	0
Andaman and Nicobar	0	0	3	10

Source: Census of India, 2011

whereas Bihar (44%), Jharkhand (47%), Rajasthan (48%) and Jammu & Kashmir (49%) recorded the lowest literacy rate among the transgender community. Daman and Diu (75%), Andaman and Nicobar Islands (74%), Dadra and Nagar Haveli (74%) among the UTs exhibited the highest literacy rate among transgender people.

While observing workforce participation status (**F**), we found that workforce

participation among the transgender community was only 34%, which is substantially lower than the literacy rate among the population. However, states like Nagaland (52%), Himachal Pradesh (49%), Manipur (48%) and Arunachal Pradesh (48%) manifest higher workforce participation among transgender people whereas Kerala (23%), Uttar Pradesh (28%) and Haryana (30%) have low workforce participation rates.

**Table 3** Literacy rate and workforce participation rate of transgender population across different states in India, 2011

India/State/UTs	Transgender (%)	
	Literacy*	Workforce**
Andaman and Nicobar Islands	73.81	23.4
Andhra Pradesh	53.33	39.7
Arunachal Pradesh	52.2	48.5
Assam	53.69	35.8
Bihar	44.35	32.5
Chandigarh	72.22	37.3
Chhattisgarh	51.35	40.1
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	73.68	32.6
Daman and Diu	75.51	35.6
Goa	73.9	34.2
Gujarat	62.82	36
Haryana	62.11	29.9
Himachal Pradesh	62.1	49.3
Jammu and Kashmir	49.29	33.3
Jharkhand	47.58	36.3
Karnataka	58.82	39.8
Kerala	84.61	22.7
Lakshadweep	50.0	0
Madhya Pradesh	53.01	37.6
Maharashtra	67.57	37.9
Manipur	67.5	48.7
Meghalaya	57.4	42.7
Mizoram	87.14	47
Nagaland	70.75	51.8
NCT of Delhi	62.99	40.1
Odisha	54.35	31.8
Puducherry	60.59	30.2
Punjab	59.75	32.1
Rajasthan	48.34	37.1
Sikkim	65.18	51.6
Tamil Nadu	57.78	43.7
Tripura	71.19	36.9
Uttar Pradesh	55.8	27.7
Uttarakhand	62.65	34.9
West Bengal	58.83	32.5
<b>India</b>	<b>56.07</b>	<b>34</b>

Source: \*Census of India, 2011; \*\* (Mandal 2020).

### **Marginalisation from family and society**

Most families disapprove of their male child reflecting feminine characteristics and consider it contradictory to that of expected gender roles. This paves the way to the social exclusion of the vulnerable group by enforcing socio-cultural pressure upon them. Due to fear of embarrassment, disgrace and exclusion from society, transgender children are abused, discriminated and avenged by their own families in the urge of altering them as per social norms (Kisha, 2017). Several families either reject their Transgender children or these children themselves flee such homes. All these dynamics leave numerous Transgender children, adolescents and youth without families and peer support and also several times with no privileges on the parental property. Gender nonconforming adult may find it difficult to claim their share of the property or inherit what would be rightful theirs (Chakrapani, 2010). As a transgender person, they are often eliminated from family events, weddings, and funeral. One might observe stark disparities in the social life of a transgender person, mostly due to lack of self-esteem and unhealthy straight-gay alliances. Family rejection also triggers substance abuse and suicide among transgender people. Many transgender people could be located in slums with a history of banishment.

Some stay in parks or stations. And most transgender people are confirmed as homeless (Mal, 2018). Furthermore, some of them prefer staying in around the Hijra communities. Their culture, rule and regulations, behaviour, religious practices are much different and unique. They live together in a household which, according to their culture, is referred to as "*Gharans*" (Mal, 2018). In an exploration of social and emotional support, many transgender

people formally join *Gharanas* or groups (e.g. transgender community) that draw together people of similar orientation and identity and where behaviours deemed inappropriate by mainstream society are ratified, admired and groomed (Kalra, 2012). India's transgender community is being acknowledged as legal residents. However, they are still unable to utilise their democratic rights with regards to marriage, adopting/raising children and employing financial support system such as free and subsidised healthcare, surgeries and medical treatment until the society at large makes some significant efforts (Agoramoorthy, 2015).

### **Marginalisation from economic partaking**

Most employers prohibit employment for even qualified and skilled transgender people. Although there are quite several third gender people who have consistently put in efforts, employed themselves and other of their kind. There have been isolated enterprises that offer mainstream jobs to qualified transgender women, such as agents for Life Insurance Corporation of India (Chakrapani 2010). Nevertheless, those are anomalies. Scarcity of occupation choices is a vital motive for a substantial amount of transgender people to prefer or proceed with the sex work with its associated HIV and health-related risks. Unemployment and low-paying or high risk and hazardous situations feed into the cycle of poverty and homelessness (Divan 2016). Most of the transgender people reported that due to lack of education and employment opportunities, they are forced into sex work and begging. While some sail to the other side and manage to endure their job despite social obstacles in the workplace, most of them resign from their roles without tolerating stigma and discrimination (Mal, 2018). Workplace-related research on lesbian, gay, bisexual,



and trans (LGBT) individuals reveals that trans workers are the most marginalised and are excluded from gainful employment, with discrimination occurring at all phases of the employment process, including recruitment, training opportunities, employee benefits, and access to job advancement. This environment teaches pessimism and internalised transphobia in transgender people, discouraging them from applying for jobs. These extreme constraints in employment can push transgender people towards jobs that have restricted potential for growth and improvement, such as beauticians, entertainers or sex workers.

Transgender population in India is an economically backward community. They are withheld from exploiting their potential and securing government or private sector job. They reap by begging, dancing in bars, weddings, etc., and they are highly indulged into sex work. They are avoided and discriminated by the general population that is one of the justifications they are not found on any high-profile jobs. Their percentage of Labour force rate is meagre in India as correlated to the general population. Devoid of any mastery or education, consequently they do not get job opportunities. Furthermore, as many government forms comprehend only the two genders, male and female, has staved off them from profiting from many schemes, which are otherwise accessible to other marginalised communities (Seil, 2004). However, India is on the path of the desired change in terms of normalising and inclusiveness of the transgender community. Yet, a great example has been set by Leo Varadkar, a leader of the Fine Gael party and Ireland's first openly gay and youngest prime minister. He is the son of Ashok Varadkar, a man from Mumbai, India (McDonald 2017).

## Discussion

India has been collecting census data for decades but never acknowledged "Third Gender" until now. For the first time in 2011, Census of India clubbed transgender population into the mainstream society of India. This was a proud moment for the transgender community around the country. Census enumerated around 4.87 lakh transgender population, and the states of Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu recorded a high proportion of the transgender population. The transgender community in India is about 40 per 100000 population ranging from 11 in Kerala to 69 per 100000 in Uttar Pradesh among the bigger Indian states. However, in a document published by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment on Welfare of Transgender, stated that the category 'other' is not just confined to transgender people but anyone who recognises oneself neither male nor female. The document further states that the odds could be that transgender person might have returned themselves either male or female as per their thought over self-recognition.

"After the disappointment of the election commission's efforts, this is fantastic news for the transgender community. We were extremely disappointed because during the voter registration process only 28,341 people registered as belonging to the third gender," said Kalki Subramaniam, a transgender and a transgender activist who is the founder of Sahodari Foundation who was thrilled to witness such a large number of people identifying themselves as a third gender. The transgender activists were unsure about so many people identifying themselves since the census counting happened well before the Supreme Court directed legal recognition

to the third gender in April 2014. But future surveys would probably estimate a higher number of transgender individuals as many could not be identified due to fear and discrimination in the current census (Subramaniam, 2014).

Remarkably, the Census of India also identified transgender children in the age group 0-6 years. There are over 54,854 transgender children. Surprisingly, parents in huge numbers have come out recognising and accepting their children belonging to the third gender. Besides, it is still a Concern about how parents could assume that a child is transgender in such tender age of a child. In contrast, it indicates that there are higher chances of intersex (whose reproductive anatomy doesn't fit defined sex) children also comprised in the third gender classification.

It came to light that many transgender people are in the category of scheduled caste and scheduled tribes. Around 78,811 are scheduled caste, and 33,293 are scheduled tribes. In India, people from scheduled caste and scheduled tribe avail reservation in every field from education to job due to their past and current socio-economic discrimination in the mainstream population. But transgender people from the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe could not avail the same because of their identity crisis.

The literacy rate of transgender is 56% that is too low. This estimate could partially be attributed to high dropout rates due to bullying, identity issues, no family support, economically backward, discrimination and all sort of social and mental problems (Gopalan, 2014). As per the Fifth Annual Report of Labour Bureau 2015-16, 44.9% transgender people are self-employed, and 31.5% are working as casual labour.

Though the number speaks a lot, transgender people are at the backend to receive any kind of services in India. During an interview with Anjali Gopalan, executive director of an NGO named the Naz Foundation (India) Trust, said "The LGBT community is living in constant fear every day because they are vulnerable to the law that does not respect their freedom of choice. The police harass them, society looks down upon them, and sometimes their own family disowns them." Moreover, when the size of the population increases, the service requirement, i.e. need of public health care centre would arise automatically. According to WHO, transgender people have low rates of access to health and HIV services due to a range of issues including violence, legal barriers, stigma and discrimination. As the NACP phase III report clearly states that transgender people fall among the high-risk group of HIV. India's transgender communities are one among the most vulnerable groups towards the deadly HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases since they rely on prostitution for livelihood (Hernandez 2006). They rarely visit any medical clinics. According to the Annual Report by NACO, 2014-15 the distributions of condoms was meagre among the transgender population. Both personal- and contextual- level factors influence sexual health condition and access to and use of sexual health services. A study published in 2016 showed that about two-thirds of transgender people who were part of the study had no access to STI treatments. It reports that of those who accessed the system, 33 % did not receive proper counselling on antiretroviral therapy adherence even though the medication was given (Shaikh, 2016).

Since transgender is an entire diverse gender spectrum; it also constitutes trans-men

(female to male) and trans-women (male to a female). This study implies that there should be a dedicated transgender survey. There is a complication among the mainstream population about transgender and intersex people, to bring about awareness, the upcoming census should modify their third gender portrayal.

### Conclusion

Accepting transgenderism and understanding the diverse nature of human sexuality would impinge transgender inclusion in the mainstream community. Our research points out to the beginning of study focus on this aspect of human sexuality. Census 2011 emerged with a gratifying idea of addressing the still marginalised population. Individuals have substantially come out to themselves and their families or friends by identifying themselves as third genders. Though the population estimate is still debatable among activists and researchers, it nevertheless provides a foundation for future research. With their undesirable literacy rates, they need to be encouraged to benefit themselves through available educational resources since being educated is their pathway to progress. However, they continue to face physical, sexual, psychological, social, and legal challenges.

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