

EMPIRICAL OBSERVATIONS ON LIFE EXPERIENCES OF TRIBAL TRANSGENDERS IN ODISHA

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Abstract

The present study is an exploration of day-to-day life experiences of tribal transgenders in Odisha. A new innovative research is carried out to explicitly show the issues of peculiar tribal transgenders. Many research work on tribal studies are being done. But study on tribal transgenders are neglected in research domain. In order to understand tribal issues a holistic approach lens is required which include the study of tribal transgenders. This study includes very few respondents(4) but the data can give impetus to new areas to explore. This is a first raw step of research done where the life history of tribal transgenders staying in Bhubaneswar but belonging to tribal districts is being explored. A series of personal interview sessions has been organised between 05 July to 05 Sept 2020 for collecting facts, during these sessions. Respondents has discussed various life experiences and incidents of their life which reflects the problems faced by tribal transgender in their day today life. The study is an effort to highlight the issues related to tribal transgender who are struggling for their identity in this global-techno world. The discrimination they face, the occupation they work and the violence they face shows how the caste, colour and creed create disparity for tribal transgenders as compared to non-tribal transgenders. Life style varies, struggle varies, life chances and life opportunities vary for tribal transgenders. Snowball sampling is used in this study. Case study analysis is being done to collect in-depth data from the respondents using interview schedule. The present study will definitely help future researcher and policy makers to work on this area of interest.

Keywords: Tribal, Transgender, Discrimination, Livelihood

Introduction:

Odisha occupies a unique position among all the States and Union Territories in India for having a rich heritage and colourful tribal scenario. Majority of tribal communities' lives in hilly and forest areas. Their economy is largely subsistence, non-stratified and non-specialized in nature. Their social system is very simple and needs are limited. Though the Scheduled Tribes of Odisha always suffered from social, educational and economic

backwardness due to geo-historical reasons but they have their own unique distinctiveness and social-cultural characteristics. There are around 62 Scheduled Tribes in Odisha and they speak around 74 dialects. Their ethos, values and ideologies have global level appreciations. Tribal communities are diverse from each other as some belong to nomadic food gatherers and hunters and some are skilled settled agriculturists and horticulturists. Odisha has the privilege of having highest number (13) of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). As per the 2011 census there 22.85% of tribal population in the state (SCST Department, 2017-18). The statistical data base explores the data of tribal in general. But data on tribal transgenders lack in every discourse of life. No work and research on tribal transgenders are done till now widely. The Supreme court of India in its NALSA judgement 15 APRIL, 2014 gave them legal recognition as "Third Gender" (Dutta). But unfortunate on our part that their viability and recognition for 6 years is neglected and hidden under tribal research and development perspective in Odisha (Dutta).

Who Are Transgenders?

Transgender communities historically exist (Khan et al 2009) in almost all the types of societies under different cultural contexts. The hijra, also called 'third gender' or eunuch-transvestites, has existed for centuries in the Indian sub-continent (Nanda, 1999; Reddy, 2003). Kama Sutra provides wide description of sexual life of people with 'third nature' which is referred to as Tiritiya Prakriti (Chakrapani, 2010). According to Peoples' Union for Civil Liberty (PUCL) report (2001), hijras are social cultural construct in which a transgender person, who is biologically male but takes on the gender roles of the female. In India, Transgenders have their own form of social organization and form a parallel society. A transgender is defined as being born with one physical sex, but their actual sex is different. It does not account for cross-dressers, gender benders, people who are blends, inter-sexed, duo-genders or others also called as gender queer. They pose both the male and female characteristics together. Their vulnerabilities, oppression Chakrapani (2010), frustrations and insecurities have been historically ignored by conventional society. The focus of this research is to study the various issues faced by hijras and transgender women using the social exclusion framework, and highlight the relation between this exclusion and their quality of life. Gilbert et.al. (1998:80) defines "A cross-dresser is a person who has an apparent gender identification with one sex, and who has and certainly has been birth designated as belonging to one sex, but who wears the clothing of the opposite sex because it is the clothing of the opposite sex. This excludes people who wear opposite sex clothing for other reasons. Also, the group does not

include those female impersonators who look upon dressing as solely connected to their livelihood, actors undertaking roles, individual males and females enjoying a masquerade, and so on. These individuals are cross dressing but are not cross dressers. Cross-dressers may not identify with, or want to be the opposite gender, nor adopt the behaviours or practices of the opposite gender, and generally do not want to change their bodies medically. The majority of cross-dressers identify as heterosexual”.

The nationwide Behavioural and Serological Surveillance in India discussed the vulnerability of transgenders to social discrimination in terms of lack of legal recognition and ambiguity related to their gender identity; little access to public and private health services; use of social welfare and health insurance schemes (Verma, 2011) and employment opportunities (Chakrapani, 2010). They also have no access to theatres, shopping malls, public toilets, and such other public places. This kind of discrimination has pushed them to begging, dancing or become sex workers.

Statement of The Problem

Many issues are there with transgenders that they face due to their gender identity disorder (GID). But there are peculiar problems strictly applied to tribal transgenders in the study area. The major problems faced by the tribal transgender are as follows:

1. Tribal transgenders are neglected in transgender community.
2. Tribal transgenders voices are not taken as important and ignored.
3. Status of tribal transgenders are low in transgender community.
4. They are restricted to beg in rural and under developed area which lead to lower income for them.
5. Violence and discrimination rate is more against tribal transgenders as compared to non-tribal transgenders.
6. Due to black colour tribal transgenders are less appreciated to participate in any dance festival organised locally and to go for baddhai ceremony. Beauty and colour counts a lots for transgender community.

Objectives

Keeping the above facts in mind, the focus has been given to know:

1. The find out the socio- economic conditions of tribal transgenders in the study area.
2. To examine the lifestyle and sources of livelihood of the transgenders in Odisha by conducting case studies.

3. To examine the nature of discriminations that tribal transgenders face in their day to day life experiences.

Methodology:

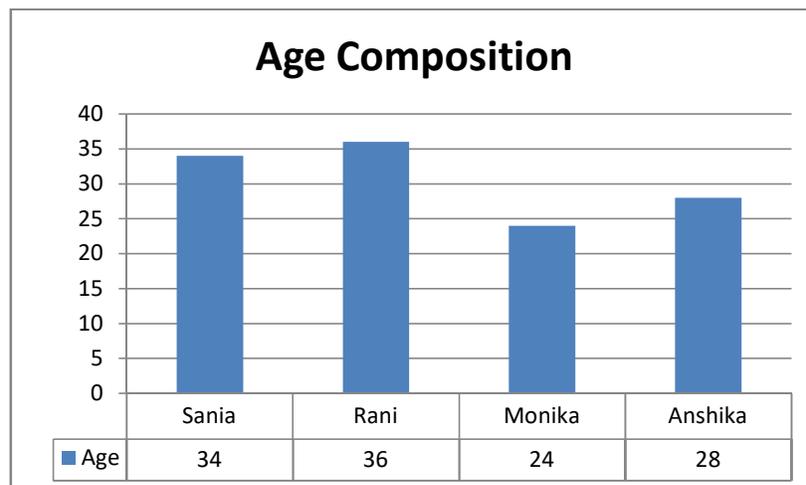
The study is based on primary and secondary sources of data collection. Descriptive cum exploratory research design is used in this study. The study included both qualitative and quantitative data analysis method. Study area includes Khordha district of Odisha. Semi structured Interview schedule is used to collect data. In case of secondary sources of data collection various books and articles are reviewed. Snowball sampling is used as sampling method. Total 4 tribal transgenders are included in this study.

Limitations of the Study:

The study includes some limitations such as very few respondents are included in this study. Due to COVID – 19 personal interaction and rapport building with respondents of the researcher is less and hence sample size is also low. The study is limited to Bhubaneswar area only.

Data Analysis and Discussions

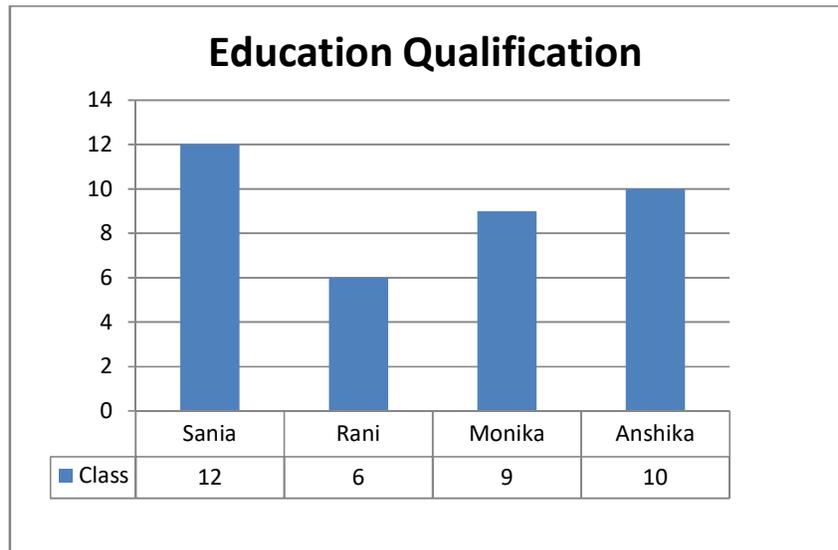
Age Composition



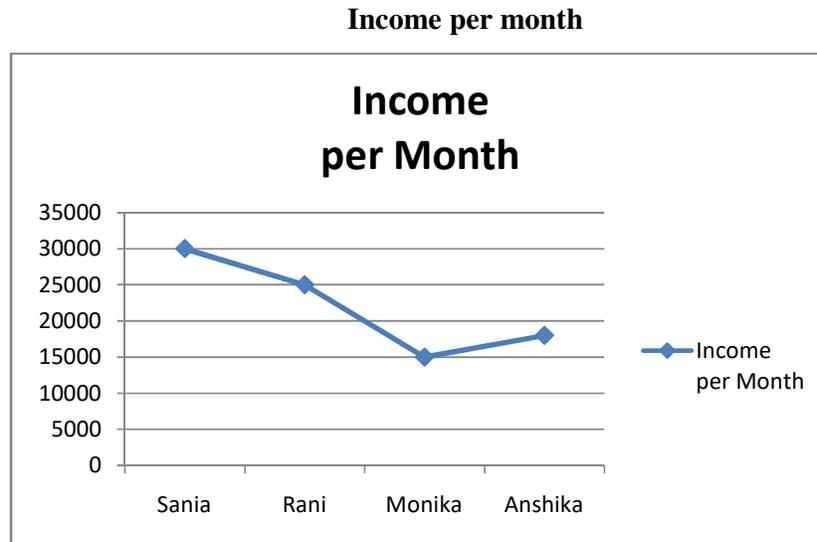
The age composition of the respondents also matters in relation to the position they occupy in their life course. Sania (34) and Rani (36) are now in the position of guru. Once upon a time they were chela but in due course of time they adopted some transgenders as their chela and now avail the position of guru to many transgenders. Besides Monika (24) and

Anshika(28) are not guru but are chelas to their guru. The age distribution shows that according to the age profession also changes as discussed below.

Educational Qualification

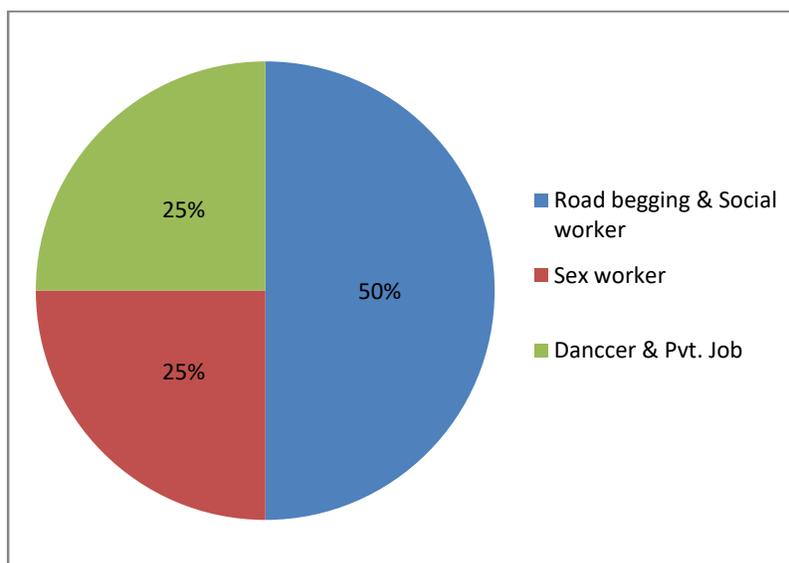


The second analysis describes about the educational qualification of respondents. Sania has completed + 2 (Arts) whereas Rani has just completed 6th class. Monika has gone up to 9th class and Anshika has completed 10th class. This shows that all of them have not done higher education and their gender ambiguity or trans behaviour is responsible for that. In tribal society also the education is given least importance. Family, school and neighbours has not supported to them to educate themselves freely with dignity but discriminated them always in all sphere of life. Due to stigma and discrimination higher education is denied to tribal transgenders. Still in the study it is found that some tribal communities have no stigma against a transgender child. Rather they equally love and support them. This is a unique finding which is not seen in our mainstream society.



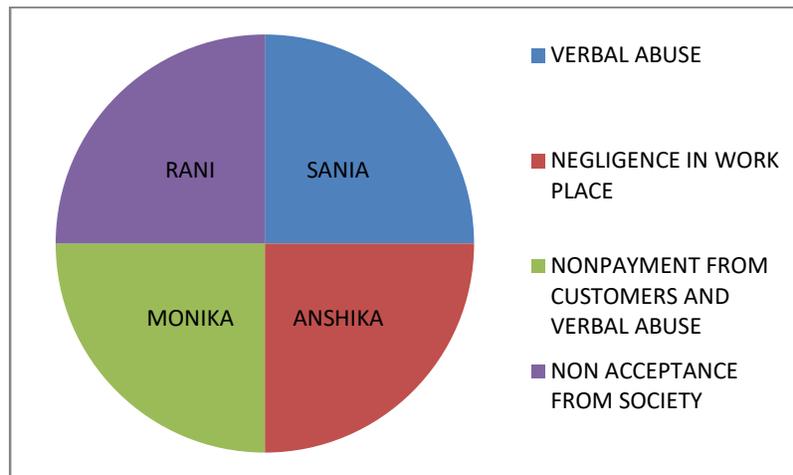
The income of the respondents in this study also depicts some unique findings. Although the said income is told to the researcher by respondents is secret and varies from one month to another. Basically they don't tell the actual amount and it is not fixed in nature. But by developing good rapport by researcher with the respondents the data is being explored by conducting the research. But the income of these tribal transgenders guru are less as compared to other non-tribal transgenders guru revealed by researcher in many conversations. The group is done separately for all tribal transgenders where they can do road begging, sex work, go for baddhai and do social work. The areas procure less income as the areas are semi-urban or rural in nature. Discrimination is also there in transgender community related to caste, class, colour and creed. Mainly the high caste transgender guru occupy high status and power including high income for them. Sania earns Rs.30,000 per month approximately, Rani also earns around Rs.25,000 per month approximately. Majority of their income come from their chelas. As chelas contribute some part of their income to their gurus every month. Monika's income is around Rs. 15,000 per month and Anshika,s income is around Rs.18,000 per month.

Sources of Livelihood



The sources of livelihood are highly linked with age and education of tribal transgenders in the study area. The data reveals that road begging, sex work, dancing and job in private office is their main source of income. The data depicts that tribal transgenders are discriminated and neglected in work place. Availability and accessibility to normal job as done by general people is restricted to them. Coming to Rani, her age is 36 and her source of income is social activist and road begging. In her initial days she was doing sex work but with the passage of time she becomes a guru and now she has changed her livelihood. Similarly, Sania aged 34 do same work as Rani. She is guru to many transgenders too now. Monika aged (24) earn her livelihood through road begging and sex work. Anshika aged(28) do dancing and private job in an office.

Forms of Discrimination



The forms of discriminations that tribal transgender faces are included in this study. The discriminations are in the form of verbal abuse Sania faces in her work place as she used to beg in road. Rani being a transgender guru receives respect and love from her chelas but the society never accepts her as a normal human being and thus she is discriminated from the society as in her back all use to laugh when she visit to a public place. Anshika said that in her office she is always used for entertainment purpose and all use to make slang comedies on her and also sometimes she faces physical abuse too. Monika faces discriminations from her customers as she is a sex worker. Sometimes she get less payment and sometimes faces physical violence. Most of them receive discrimination related to their tribal identity and black colour. A verbal communication shows the rate of discrimination is more among tribal transgenders as compared to non – tribal transgenders.

CASE STUDIES

To make the study more in depth and fruitful case study of 4 tribal transgenders are collected. Each case study explains the trauma and struggle each tribal transgender face in their day-to-day life.

Case Study- 1 RANI (KANDHA TRIBE)

Rani (name changed), is staying in Bharatpur aged 36 belong to kandha tribe. By explaining her childhood Rani said her family's financial condition was very poor. Her house was in Balliguda block of kandhamal district. By the help of Namita Parida she came to join trans community since she was only 15 years old. She has two sister and one brother. Due to

families low income, she had worked in mills as daily wage labourer amounting Rs. 10 per day. She used to do all household works including cooking and taking care of her younger brother and sisters. Started her journey as a transgender from Jharsuguda and by struggling too hard now she is a guru to many transgenders in Jatni currently. Researcher observed, She was very tall and fair looking. Her appearance was very impressive and she was the head of the group. Without asking, Rani herself told that she was the head of trans community, and showed her identity card. She was sitting on her bed; her room was well furnished with luxury items. Being very dissatisfied from the mainstream society, she reluctantly replied, “Mein kyakarungi interview deke, humaritozhindagi hi tabaah ho gayihai.” However, after requesting repeatedly, she agreed. Rani is a political activist, who is fighting for the rights of third gender people (hijras) in Jatni, especially of the two third gender (hijra) children, who were living with her in her dera. Being disappointed from the local government she criticized the state for not supporting the rights of this community. She is the guru of the chelas (50 in number) who were residing in the dera. Besides Rani said due to COVID-19 now the source of income of all transgenders are in trouble. Train begging is denied to them by government and due to lockdown sex work in road side is prohibited. These two activities are the main source of income for transgenders. Now they are in financial problems. Besides due to a tribal transgender guru her command is low as compared to non-tribal transgender guru. Her voice and demand is considered less important.

Case Study –2 SANIA (MUNDA TRIBE)

Sania a leading tribal transgender guru belongs to Munda community of sundargarh district. Her lifestyle is very charming. She always dressed herself like a Devi (Goddesses). Have long hair and shiny eyes. Her day started with a cup of tea prepared by her chella. Then she take bath and worship to Murgimata (transgender deity) . Then she use to take her breakfast at 9 am. As she is working as social activists in different areas, then she use to visit different government offices by taking the demand and need of their community. She has her scooty which she used to go everywhere. Then again she do her lunch at her house prepared by a trans cook but menu decided by Sania. Again at 3pm she organised her group meeting with all her chelas. Besides she visited brudhashram (old age home) and orphanage frequently to help them in various matters. She socialised her chellas with tribal traditional health practices and simplicity. The unique thing that she reveals that her family accept her still knowing her gender identity disorder. Besides, she used to take the financial burden of her family. Her village people love her. If any people face any problem in her locality, she used to help them always.

By asking her about her peer trans group, she replied as she is a tribal so her chela are not allowed to go for begging in urban areas. They are being allotted in under developed areas which are semi – urban or rural in nature. So their income is also low ultimately Sania's income become less as she gets less shares from her chelas for her survival. Being a guru of many transgenders still she faces problem as a tribal. Caste hierarchy also plays an important role in transgender community.

Case Study- 3MONIKA (SANTAL TRIBE)

Monika (name changed), is the 2nd child of her parents belonging to santal tribe of Mayurbhanj. She was brought up like a boy and was named „Sonu“ by the parents. Before Monika (then Sonu) was born her parents had a daughter. They were expecting a boy. Although, doctors told the parents about the abnormality from the time she was born, but they were in a hope that they will provide best treatment to their baby and Sonu will get well like a normal boy. They used to live in Angul as father work there in an office there. Sonu (now Monika) was admitted to school like her sister and completed primary education from a convent school. Monika's (Sonu) up-bringing was done like a boy. However, her identity of being a third gender was kept secret from everybody; even her sister did not know the reality. She was made to wear clothes like a boy and always behaved in a perfect masculine way. Her parents were so conscious about her sexual identity, that they sent her to school upto 7th standard only and later on, the study was done from the home itself. At that time, she was just 12 years old and did not understand the reason for not going to the school, whereas her sister used to study in High school at that time. She always used to ask her father that why she was not made to study in school. Her father always used to avoid these kinds of questions. Later, when she grew and became conscious about her abnormality, she understood, the reason for not being allowed to go to school or play with the children in the neighbourhood.

It became emotional for Monika to recall the day when she entered into the third gender (hijra) community. She was forced by her father's brother and her wife, as they were the ones who brought the news to the local third gender people (hijras). Monika argued that a group of third gender people (hijras) came to their home when her father and her sister were not present. Mother on seeing the hijras asked her (Monika) to hide herself in the kitchen. The hijras asked Monika's Mother to handover Monika to them. Monika memorizes that her mother cried and begged before them to let her father reach and then they will discuss the matter. On her father's arrival also, the community didn't listen and forcibly took her (Monika) with them. Her parents

cried helplessly but all their efforts were of waste. The people in the neighbourhood stood watching the whole scenario but none came for the help. Monika was then taken to the hijra community which seemed to be a new world to her. Monika recalls the day when the initiation ceremony took place wherein, she was given a female attire to wear and was told not to cut the hair in future. It took time for her to adjust in the new settings and identify with the third gender community.

There is a traditional ritual role of third gender people (hijras) of conferring blessings on newly born as well as on newly married. However, people in Angul and in the surrounding areas believe that Monika has power to bless those people who want to become parents or are facing complication, or who want a son or who want to marry. There were cases of people getting married and blessed with the children when they were given blessings by Sonia. Monika is quite famous in her area and everybody in the neighbourhood and in area respects her. Till today she used to cook the typical tribal food which her mother used to cook for her. She uses natural herbs for her hair as her mother taught her sister which Monika practice today also.

Case Study- 4 ANSHIKA (MUNDA TRIBE)

Anshika (name changed), 24 years old is a dancer by profession belong to Munda tribe of Rourkela. She attended, Government high school, in Rourkela, till the tenth standard. She speaks fluent Hindi, and sometimes English. She is from a small village in Rourkela and her father is a farmer. She is 24 years old and had been a third gender (hijra) since her teens. Anshika dances and sings whenever She gets an opportunity, besides this She also earns his living as a housekeeping supervisor in a Honda showroom in Bhubaneswar. At the first sight, Anshika is found wearing jeans, shirt, and earrings along with other accessories and eye makeup on her face completing his attire with a high heel sandal. He loves wearing female dresses but it was not allowed by his boss in the office hours. Besides she is called as “Adivasi chakka” in her office frequently by colleagues. Anshika is called as “Billo Rani”, whenever he goes out for dancing and singing in marriage parties.

On being asked about her life, she narrated a long story and recalled her childhood and adolescence period. She said, “I will tell you about us (middleman/hijras). Hijras dress like girl because of the sexual desire for men. We are born like human beings, from the womb of our mother. However, at 5, or 8 or 10 years of age, one comes to know that one is different”. Anshika further argued that, after she passed her matriculation, she always thought about what

she would become in his life, and then argues that she wanted to become a girl. In her words “meinesoocha, meinkyabanoonapni life mein, tohmeineekladkibannapasandkiya.”

Results and Conclusion:

The study findout that the socio - economic condition of tribal transgenders. They earn a standard amount but compared to non-tribal transgenders their income and lifestyle varies. Discrimination is there in transgender community too. As restrictions is there for them where to work and how to work. Underdeveloped area is assigned to them for road begging, sex work and for baddhai collection. In private office where some respondents faces restriction for wearing clothes (saree & salwar). The desire to wear women's clothes are not allowed to them. Long hair is highly prohibited in office. Coming to lifestyle the life pattern depends on income level of respondents in the study area. Higher the income higher the standard of living, good food habits and good wearing of clothes etc. But the lifestyle of non-tribal transgenders are more good and prominent. Besides, coming to forms of discrimination verbal abuse, non-payment from customers (sex work), physical violence from customers (sex work and road begging) while doing sex work and non-acceptance from general society and family. But some peculiar things came to limelight that in tribal communities' acceptance is more for a transgender child in their families. The stigma is very less for them as compared to mainstream society. Being a tribal the respondents donot follow tribal way of life as they are tuned with transgender way of life. But in food habits and natural health care still they practice there traditional families methods. So, more research is required on those issues to get more new dimensions to explore among tribal transgenders.

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