

Falling Forward: Marginalisation and Ostracization of Transpersons And A Tipping Point in Social Inclusion and Cohesion.

Fr. Justin Prabu
PhD. Research Scholar, Loyola College
Affiliated to the University of Madras
Chennai -34
&

Dr. A. THEEBA
Associate Professor in History
Rani Anna Government College for women
Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli 8
Mail id theebajovar@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Of many things and no one thing. *Thirunangai, Ali, Aanali, Idapi, Kilibam, Alli, Annagan, Gosha, Sandagam, Pandagan, Pedi, Pedu, Pethai, Pennali, Pedar, Orinam, Vali, Kanchana, Iru Unarvugal, Iru Mugan, Aval Nangai*¹ and numerous other familiar words fall sour into our ears. These are Tamil words that are really positive and pleasant in nature. However, most of us conceive them as negative. A known Tibetan proverb ‘*a hundred male and a hundred female qualities make a perfect human being*’ challenges our perception and allows us to see beyond binaries.

Sexual binaries are male and female. Gender equality is always misconstrued by binaries of gender. It is a fact that there are over 45 gender identities that are found in human beings, among these male and female are just two. Our society has dominantly learned to look at things as binaries. It is not uncommon to see people talk, act and think in terms of sexual binaries: male and female. Interestingly, today we have come of age to see numerous colour gradients between maleness and femaleness. It is this spectrum of shade between maleness and femaleness that makes the transpersons equal and one among us. Jean Paul Sartre’s philosophy of human person states that *hell is the other*, who are my significant ‘others’? Fear, suspicion and ridicule are basic human emotions that a majority projects onto numerical minority who are ‘third gender’ or transpersons and our ‘significant others’.

The theoretical framework for this is rather straightforward. Could we, as human persons break away all barriers and move away from marginalising and ostracising transpersons and work towards social inclusion? Is it possible to fashion a brave new world? How could we do that? Added to these, this paper sets out to eliminate elements that negatively stereotype and positively construct balanced happy society.

¹Equivalent names for transpersons in Tamil and positive in meaning

The methodology employed here is just a case study. An analysis of 15-min radio podcast, which show cases their lives and livelihoods -a sample of 15 podcasts were recorded and analysed. These podcasts are about transpersons narrative, an experience of their livelihood, reality and survival stories. Our focal point is a critical observation of what really empowers their identity as transpersons. It is all about *who they are what they are* made of. Hence, this study.

II. A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CASE STUDY

Here is the case study with 15 samples. A profile of audio podcast recorded with 15 transpersons, and their success stories of livelihood are the base study. An analysis of recorded audio podcast was done. It is a brief audio podcast using just a qualitative analysis. The 15 participants were selected using purposive sampling technique. The research and research analysis are about quality of life and livelihood. All of them answered a simple question: who am I? The very first question was all about their identity as transpersons. Most of them are proud and happy to be transpersons. Eventually, it was a sharing of their lives and livelihood. By and large, most of them are interesting to listen and challenging the listener to actively involve in their struggle as transpersons. Almost every one of them was asked about numerous stereotypes. All most all of them were very negative in nature.

Transpersons who are respondents here themselves share how our Tamil society looks at them negatively. Of course there are exceptions. In a larger Indian context, only in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, transpersons are respected and treated well. This means, the awareness of respect and empathy from the part of the larger society are lacking in general. This also goes a long way to prove that transpersons in Tamil Nadu and Kerala largely fight every odd situations and struggle through life. When they responded to the question of livelihood, all of these 15 transpersons expressed how they gone through life and struggled to come up in life. These experiences of struggles clarified their identity as transpersons. Because they overcome life and struggled in life, they continue to impact society and the society interns see the positive side of transpersons. Ultimately, the purpose of this research is to investigate possibilities to alleviate discrimination and enhance social inclusion.

These podcasts reveals that how most transpersons go through life and its aspirations, desires, injustices and denial of democratic rights as human persons. There exists a strong sense of fear; suspicion and ridicule at play in various people, events and situations. The inability to see them as whole person by themselves and by those out in the society is a challenge. There is a mutual fear, suspicion and ridicule from both sides: transpersons and the society. Obviously, it looks like a mirror effect, each imitating the other. Fear is an emotion. It

is likely to be painful, harmful and dangerous. Suspicion is an emotional state. It is a feeling or thought that something is wrong or true without proof. Ridicule, on the same note, is a subjection of someone or something that is being laughed at.

III. CELEBRATION OF LIFE

Nine is auspicious. Indian cultures celebrate those as auspicious. These could be anything: be it a mother who carries the baby for nine months, nine metals, nine offertories, nine planets, nine festivals, nine lentils, nine beats, nine qualities of human person and many more. It is important to positively embrace transpersons' lives matter. Given the diversity found in India, life becomes a cause for celebration. It is all the more important to consider transpersons and their community have a lot to celebrated. In fact, they are 'good and auspiciousomen'; and in fact, the real guardians and custodians of rich Indian folk and artsforms.

a. Who am I?

An *aravani* is someone who is feminine but not a woman, masculine but not a man, a person beyond the boxes of man and woman. The person follows the rules and regulations of the community, has a guru, lives in feminine attire, may or may not be castrated². What does an aravani desire and how does an aravani imitate? Exactly like the rest of humanity.

By virtue of this biological and gender gradation, their gestures, articulations, needs, habits through words, deeds and thought patters are imitative. Sex is what one is born with, gender is what one recognizes and sexuality is what one discovers³. A transpersons person desires the same that we all need. They fall short of adequate expressions in an attempt to bring their act to completion.

b. Quality of Life

René Girard states that human being is a creature who does not know what to desire. Ironically, we turn to others in order to make up our minds in every given moment or situation. We desire what others desire because we imitate their desires - that is *imitatio*. There is nothing spontaneous, original and natural about human desires. This imitation is a fundamental mechanism of human behaviour. Hence desire is imitative. *Oh happy fault*, the fault-line for René Girard is that we do not fight over our differences but we fight because we are the same, and we want the same things (material, physical and socio-psychological needs).

² S. Mohan, "More than a woman no less than a man", Aids Buzz, New Delhi: Resource Centre for Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS, June 2007, p. 2.

³ A. Chettiar, "The status of hijras in civil society: a study of the hijras in greater Mumbai," Ph.D. Dissertation, College of Social Work NirmalaNiketan, Mumbai, 2009.

This is 'mimetic desire' for Girard that represents: desire, jealousy, rivalry, deceit, scapegoating and violence. Scapegoating includes a strong sense of fear, suspicion and ridicule. Transpersons are no different from us that we need to ostracize but celebrate. This is a certainty that we can conclude that we are one.

IV. MARGINALISATION AND OSTRACIZATION

The reality today, transpersons are faced with prejudice and discrimination, such as unequal treatment when it comes to jobs, housing and employment. More than these, they are subjected to verbal, physical and sexual violence. The struggle related to this treatment is inhuman beyond telling. Just for no reason people become suspicious of transpersons.

They no longer dare to step outside, out of fear to be treated irrationally. In most rural homes in Tamil Nadu, children when they realize that they are being marginalized and ostracized, that is when they run away from home. At home, it is marginalization and in society it is always ostracization. It effectively pushes transpersons to the margins of society economically, politically, culturally and socially. It is exclusion.

V. POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS

In Genesis, the first book of the Bible, God created man and woman in his own image and likeness⁴. It makes transpersons vulnerable and broken at a first glimpse. But rereading the same will tell us how profound it is. Hence, the brokenness is in our mental make up. God has intended and ordained that we, common humanity move beyond our brokenness and vulnerability. These vulnerable transpersons are not deviant but normal -the very image and likeness of God. Walt Whitman comprehends that, '*I contain multitudes*' -a fluidity of identity and divine in totality.

Paradoxically, it is true that men are from Mars women are from Venus. Men with their own innate domination, shameless are profiteering, insecure and fearful as opposed to women whose portrayal of lamentable victims, juggling power and beauty with strong will leaves the humanity vulnerable of blurred boundaries between maleness and femaleness. It pushes us to think beyond the prescribed binary and integration of body, mind and sense of self. What exactly is that thin layer of aspiration, untold emotion and unexpressed sentiment of biological bigotry to gender non-confirmatory?

a. Scapegoating to Good Oman.

⁴Genesis 1:27

In fact, there are many negative stereotypes exist in the minds of people. However, it is always possible to replace them with positive ones. This is how people realise and remove unwanted negative stereotypes from their minds and become aware of the existence of others. It is appalling to know even educated persons hold views such as transpersons have a biological and mental disorder. They are deviant. They are sex workers, criminals and beggars. As human person, we need to respect and embrace the brokenness of others and ourselves.

Year after year, there is a ritual scapegoating of Aravan at *Koovagam*⁵. An 18-day *aravanigal*⁶ festival reminds *Kurukshetra war* that ends with a ritual of scapegoating. Lord Krishna takes the form of Mohini and marries Aravan and gives him an opportunity to experience love by marrying before his self-sacrifice. Celebrating this nuptial bliss of Krishna and Mohini, every *aravani* ritually marries the Koothandavar namely Aravan according to the epic *Mahabharata*. Mohini, the widow who mourns after her husband Aravan's death. Sacrifice is scapegoating for René Girard. This ritual includes beating of breasts, breaking of bangles, crying and venting of emotional loss, in addition wearing white saris and cutting off 'thali' forms the part of a ritual closure for every *aravani*.

Aravanigal who gather in Koovagam garner this ritual into legitimate rights. This ritual of purification and passage brings them closer to themselves and the others. This celebration is a celebration of life that promotes life. In this *Kurukshetra war* of fear, suspicion and ridicule, their real struggle for equality, human dignity and rights get to surface of victory. The festival at Koovagam, many a blurred boundaries between sex and gender and million shades fade but humanity see limelight. He proposes scapegoating and mimetic desire. It inspires, fascinates and challenges us to read and look through prism of Girardian thought⁷. In every society or group, there emerges a need to constantly scapegoat people. In our Tamil society too, in the name of culture, tradition and democracy, we continue to scapegoat transpersons ruthlessly. The key words *fear, suspicion and ridicule* are expressions of scapegoating.

b. Intimidation to Empathy and Inclusion

Do transpersons need our sympathy? Certainly not. All they desire is empathy. All of us, the one common humanity needs to be in solidarity with the weaker sections of our society. The core issue of intimidations of transpersons could be easily handled. It is a kind of mirror effect. Each imitating the other and gets intimidated. The key proposition for change that happen through the language. Language is a tool of inclusion. Hence, a language of love and solidarity actually help the humanity. Added to this, media is also a tool for social change. It

⁵A village in Vilupuram district, a temple of Koothandavar hosts annual festival for Transpersons

⁶Transpersons in Tamil

⁷*Mimesis, Desire, and the Novel: Rene Girard and Literary Criticism*, Michigan State University Press, 2010.

brings in social inclusion and cohesion. Transpersons are part of the mainstream society - our significant others.

Over the period of time with our consistent efforts through language and media, we could sustain the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society. It is all about improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity as transpersons. It is a sustained effort on the part of both to become conscious of friendship, conversation and privileges.

We need to exchange civilities with gratitude in sharing due credits and listening attentively and listening attentively and humbly asking question acknowledging. After all, they help us construe our identity as humane and compassionate. We accommodate and make their working environment really productive, creative, happy, helpful and healthy. Let us be mindful of our presence in their vicinity. In every given moment and given minute, transpersons person is mediating identity with themselves, others and to the society at large. It is like that of a mirror, who we really are, actually gets reflected from them. Our good attitude gets reflected as profound.

VI. SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS

Berné Brown⁸ unearths the depth of meaning for vulnerability when she says ‘both women and men could benefit from allowing themselves to be vulnerable’. She thinks that vulnerability and shame are deeply human. The expectations that drive shame are organised by gender. There is this moment of grace or elation when one recognizes this vulnerable moment with utmost honesty. We have the obligation to construct many positive identities to enhance the quality of life for transpersons. Indeed, this identity becomes evocative of transpersons eliminating every attempt to pigeonhole, categorise and judge transpersons.

In fact, working towards the empowerment of transpersons should become an activism by which we continue to conscientize people on a daily basis with numerous programmes for both. There needs to be digital media to promote education, health, rights and employment of transpersons. A clearly and intelligently drawn policy for promoting this community in terms of love, respect, appreciation, recognition and encouragement to bind with mainstream education system is must. Networking with national and international movements to garner inclusive and gender awareness programmes.

⁸Author of many books on vulnerability

Good practices of working with transpersons should be made known to many NGOs and governmental organisations. International days of Trans-and-Friends, cafe 'InClusion', Transpersons Visibility Day, Transpersons Flag Day, TransPride and Pride India. Above all, we need to rope in political leaders and promote greater solidarity by diversity of speakers, performances and acts. Transpersons are the custodians of folk arts and folk forms. Hence, smaller units who work for the welfare of transpersons should enhance skills through painting, drawing, writing stories, writing poetry, singing, dance, theater, filming, photography or any other forms, which liberate and build self-confidence.

The role of media, be it traditional or digital, is very important because it tends to sensationalize any news related to transpersons' lives. Concretely, media sets agenda and media write the narrative of social inclusion and cohesion of transpersons. There needs to be an utmost sensitivity to handle the livelihood issues of transpersons. They distort exclude news and persons. On the part of individual transpersons, they need to take initiatives to get educated, get proper health care, take risks, try new things, fail and fight every odd and finally ask for support if and when needed. On both sides what is important for this journey is that we all need to be compassionate, open minded, humane and inclusive. We all need to be a future of fearless in fighting for equal rights and fight for world to curb every form of violence and injustice against transpersons.

Families of those transperson need to realise the need to stop discriminating, begin to respect their unique identity, stop humiliating and dehumanising. Hence, without excluding anyone, we can walk the talk in writing a new political discourse for transpersons asserting their inclusive rights to education, health care, housing and employment.

VII. CONCLUSION

Human dignity. Let me fall forward, in resonating with a Tibetan proverb that '*a hundred male and a hundred female qualities make a perfect human being*'. Sex and gender identities are best understood as interconnected, and sex and gender variations observed in our species, all around the world. The synergy propels this community to move from a sense longing to belonging, from distortion to connection and from fluidity to wholeness. Hence, it is not maleness or femaleness but wholeness, wellness towards a humane and compassionate world. This is why constructing identity is relational.

A tipping point in social inclusion is the actual need for an identity. How do we construct an identity within our democratic context today? How do we reorient our compassionate thinking and action in not making this 'third gender' cantankerous? How do we make gender of transpersons tenable or unflawed? How do media today enhance this

identity evocative for their human rights? Of course, media constructs reality. With technology on our side, every given moment we can mediate meaning in thoughts, words and actions. A coordinated activism along with transpersons will be a giant leap for the humanity. It is already and not yet.

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