

Transgender Identity As Hidden in Vedic Literature And Society

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Abstract: *Vedic literature in India is the source of immense knowledge and a valuable treasure for the world knowledge. It deals each and every thing in the world such as nature, human being, animals etc. Vedic literature is the oldest records in the world and generally regarded as the period of BC 1500 to 500 BC. This article is an endeavour to interrogate the transgender identity in Vedic literature and Vedic society. This paper found that Vedic literature and society thought of and accommodated transgender persons in a realistic manner and within the modern Indian society transgender community faces a heap of issues like discrimination, exploitation, social exclusion etc. Nowadays our central and state governments are taking urgent and productive steps to uplift the transgender community from the tyrannized state.*

Keywords: *Marginalisation, Social exclusion, Transgender identity, Tritiyaprakriti, Vedic literature*

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I. Introduction

Indian culture is rich, unique, diverse and attracted by many people all over the world. It is deep-rooted, most valuable, rich informative, present and future oriented and a great advantage to the innovative ideas and thoughts to the world. Indian culture is extremely influenced by Vedic literature. It is religious and spiritual in nature and reflects the world as a whole at that period. Vedic literature is the basic root of Indian culture. It is said to be the treasure of immense knowledge and influenced by Indian culture and tradition. A unique feature of the Vedic literature is its adoption of humanistic approach to abstract, unique, confused and difficult subjects like third gender. The ethical, esthetical, social, political and economic aspects of life have been taken into account by the Vedas. Vedic literature is the backbone of Indian culture and society. It discussed each and everything under human life. It served as a great unifying force in the Indian sub-continent and all continents and still continues to hold immense authority in the sphere of spiritual, religious, social, economic and political relevant literature. In the entire Vedic literature names of a lane number of Gods and Goddesses are mentioned. Broadly speaking the Vedic literature (Aparavidya) can be categorised as the Vedas and the Vedangas. The Vedas are considered to be the oldest literary records of the world and is generally regarded as the period 1500 BC to 500 BC. The four types of Vedas are (i) Rigveda (ii) Yajurveda (iii) Samaveda (iv) Atharvaveda. These four types consist of four different classes of literary works. Each of these classes belong a greater or a smaller number of separate works, of which some have been preserved in their true form but many lost in time. These four classes are: Samhitas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads (Jha, 2016). Sometimes, the Aranyakas and Upanishads are treated as part of Samhitas/Brahmanas. The Vedangas consists of the six knowledge streams required for understanding of the Vedas. They are: Shiksha, Kalpa, Vyakarana, Nirukta, Chada and Jyotisha. In addition to this each of the Veda consists of a secondary knowledge source called Upveda. Vedic literature is more transparent to deal human biology. In the Vedic literature the gender of the human being is precisely divided into three categories according to prakriti or nature. They are pums-prakriti or male, stri-prakriti or female, and tritiya-prakriti or the third sex (Svetasvatara Upanisad, Galva 108). Third sex people are also classified under a larger social category known as the “neutral gender.” Its members are called napumsaka (not engage in procreation). Napumsaka people divided into five different categories, they are: children, the elderly, the impotent, the celibate, and the third sex. They were all considered to be sexually neutral by Vedic definition and were protected and believed to bring good luck and prosperity. This non reproductive category played an integral role in the balance of human society and nature. Vedic literature underlined that everything in nature in corporate and has a purpose, role, value and reason for existence. In Vedic literature human categories considered and assessed the entire being that includes the gross (physical) body, the subtle (psychological) body, and a unique consideration based upon social interaction (procreative status) (Wilhelm, 2004). These assessment and categories of the tritiyaprakriti is centuries before. But in the modern world the concept of third gender/transgender is first identified ‘Transvestite’ in 1910 from the German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld. ‘Transsexual’ was not identified until 1949, ‘transgender’ not until 1971, and ‘trans’ (a very British term) not until 1996 (Stryker & Whittle, 2006). The fact is that the third gender is a very common term in the ancient Indian

society which mention to the highest Hindu population in the world. Unfortunately, transgender are not widely recognized and accepted in modern India, except in the Indian State of Tamil Nadu. In contemporary Indian society there has been much controversy and confusion concerning the physiology, psychology and position of transgender persons within the society. But in the Vedic society there were no any confusion related to the concept of third gender/transgender. In Vedic society each individual was seen as an integral part of the greater whole. To understand third gender individuals' peculiar characteristics, physiological and psychological uniqueness, the ancient Vedic literature in India must help us, which have thoroughly analyzed and recorded all aspects of human life. People of the third sex are mentioned throughout the Vedic literature in different ways due to their physiological and psychological appearances and uniqueness. Vedic literature concerning everything about third gender like the causes of their birth, various characteristics, types, practices, problem, occupations etc. In Vedic society third gender citizens were neither persecuted nor denied their basic rights like modern Indian society. They were allowed to keep their own societies or town quarters, live together within marriage and engage in all means of livelihood never treated as out caste and untouchable like today. Gay men could either blend into society as ordinary males or they could dress and behave as females, living as transvestites (Galva 108). They are especially mentioned as being expert in dancing, singing and acting, as barbers or hairstylists, masseurs, and house servants. Vedic society was accepted their skills and capabilities with full support. And transvestites were invited to attend all birth, marriage, and religious ceremonies as their presence was a symbol of good luck and considered to be auspicious. In Vedic society they were not perceived to be a threat and ridicule in any way and were considered to be aloof from the ordinary attachments of procreation and family life. In this way they were awarded their own particular status, dignity and welcomed as a part of civilized Vedic society.

II. Biology Of Tritiyaprakriti

Vedic literature earnestly concerned the birth of the human categories. Explained that all three sexes (male, female and third sex) are biologically determined at the time of conception (*Sushruta Samhita*, Galva 108) and mention how third-sex conditions (homosexuality, transgender identity and intersex) are caused at the time of conception. It had been medically evidenced by the modern world. Long years ago the scholars of Vedic literature identified the fact without any confusion. It proved that they were having immense knowledge in all areas related to human physiology. Vedic astrological texts (the *Jyotir Shastra*) analyze the sex of any child, whether male, female or third sex, through the adhana or conception chart. Another text said that the sex of the fetus—whether male, female or third sex—becomes clear during the second month of pregnancy and cannot be changed after that (*Sushruta Samhita*). Various planetary configurations indicate the conception of third-gender. The *Jyotir Shastra* furthermore mentions hundreds of signs in the janma or birth chart indicating third-gender characteristics such as male and female, homosexuality, transgender identity, bisexuality, impotence, sterility and so on. The modern science proved the truth with experiment that the living conditions of mother (internal and external environmental) must influence the birth of a child. Vedic literature stressed that the living entities take birth as male, female and third sex for many different reasons that include the state of the mother and father, the living entity's desire (*kama*), environment and nutrition, the psyche, past deeds (*karma*), previous life impressions (*samskaras*), astrological influences, divine ordinance (*daiva*) and so on.

Vedic literature especially *Narada-smriti*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Caraka Samhita*, *Smriti-ratnavali*, *Sabda-kalpa-druma etc* (Galva 108) gave definitions of third gender people is that they do not beget offspring, being either physically impotent or devoid of any desire for the opposite sex. Vedic literature states that men with inborn impotence such as homosexuals (*irshyaka*, *sevyaka* and *mukhebhaga*) and those without semen (*vataretas*) are incurable and unfit for marriage to the opposite sex. Ayurvedic aphrodisiacs (*vajikarana*, which cure impotence in males) are useless on third-gender men who are impotent with women by nature. Bisexuals (*paksha*) are possibly fit for opposite-sex marriage if confirmed as potent after a period of one month (*SushrutaSamhita*, *CarakaSamhita*), commentary by Gangadhara; *Narada-smriti*, Galva 108) The Vedic literature emphasised the most important truth related to the nature that third sex exists throughout the natural and supernatural worlds. Third-gender animals, humans, demigods and deities with mixed male/female qualities are existed in the two worlds (*Sushruta Samhita*).

III. Vedic Law For Tritiyaprakriti

In Vedic society each individual was considered to be an integral part of the whole society. In Vedic period third-gender citizens were not denied their basic rights. They had permission to keep their own societies and live together within marriage and engage in all means of livelihood with dignity. They were mostly invited to attend special occasions such as birth, marriage, and other religious ceremonies as their presence considered to be auspicious and good luck. Citizens of the third sex were given their own particular status in Vedic society. The Vedic literature indicates that there were no specific Vedic law which penalizes third gender men or women (*napumsa*, *kliba*, *svairini*, etc.) for their characteristic behaviour (homosexuality, cross-dressing, etc.).

They could be beaten for certain crimes or killed for grave offenses (like other citizens) but were never fined (*Narada-smriti, Galva 108*). No Vedic law prescribes castration for third-gender men. Rather, it is mentioned only as a punishment for males committing sexual offenses against women (*Narada-smriti and Gautama Dharmasutra Galva 108*). Vedic law considered female homosexuality as an offense only when it involves the violation of young, unmarried girls (traditionally aged 8 through 12). Parents must provide basic necessities (food, clothing and shelter) to their third gender offspring, according to their means. The Vedic literature gave evidence that people were familiar with that third gender community and could recognise their uniqueness. Under Vedic system every third gender had a chance to develop their own personality with the support of their family and society. Today in India transgender community face a lot of problems when comparing to Vedic period regarding their education, occupation, economic status, conditions of life, position in society, social status, social recognition etc. A detailed study conducted by United National Development Programme (UNDP, 2010) –India and submitted a report in Dec 2010 on Hijra/ Transgender in India, discovered that transgender folks, as a whole, face multiple forms of oppression and marginalisation in the society. Discrimination is so large and pronounced, particularly within the field of health care, employment, education and leave aside social exclusion. In the modern times transgender community mistreated under the banner of so-called morality. The people are looking them as suspicious, confusion and fear due to the ignorance of the peculiar nature of third gender. Most of the Indian societies without consider third gender as human being therefore their human rights are violated everywhere. The Supreme court of India in its important judgement by the division bench of (Justice K.S Radhakrishnan, 2014) stated that the recognition of a third gender is not a social or medical but a human right issue. To protect and consider third gender as a human being, India having a rich ancient cultural tradition, compelled to pass the Rights of Transgender Persons Bill (No. XLIX of 2014). The Parliamentary Committee's Report revealed that transgender community is a sidelined, ill treated and face a plethora of problems and the Bill again observed that the denial of social justice leads to the denial of economic and political justice. They suffer poor access to education, healthcare, legal aid, employment and lack of social acceptance and discriminated everywhere. The Bill suggested that the State should seriously address the problems being faced by them such as fear, shame, gender dysphoria, social pressure, depression, suicidal tendencies, social stigma, etc. and should be given any assistance for Sex Reassignment Surgery for declaring one's gender. This report draws a real picture of transgender community in Indian society. Today central and state Governments in India recognised the real problems of transgender community and are taking more initiatives to improve their social, educational, economical and political conditions. We can hope that like Vedic society, modern Indian society will recognise the physical and psychological uniqueness of transgender community. It is interesting to note that the new moral enigma of the Indian society, it motivated to go back to Vedic literature and its importance in terms of transgender identity in India. In 2014, April, Supreme Court's landmark decision to recognize the transgender as the third gender was celebrated among the specific community where they must be treated equally and getting the opportunity in the main stream and ultimately considering transgender as a human being in the society. This was the inspiring fact to obtain a clear understanding of human sexuality, manners and practice in ancient tradition where transgender were treated with full of respects, and given so much important in the society. The rich tradition and culture that India has, in which it talks about Arthanriswara (half male-half female) concept which is the genderless form of Lord Shiva and his companion goddess Parvathi and it observes that the homosexuality is visible in Indian sculptures and art. It also refers in Indian mythology where transgender are generally identified with worship the various Hindu deities such as Lord Shiva and lord Vishnu. Even the Vedas define this eternal spiritual world can go beyond our imagination where material world as a reflection of an extremely stunning, impeccable and more diversities are observable. Human beings are part of this nature and each and every individual in this world has their own role to act in the world.

IV. Conclusion

Vedic literature has explored each and every aspects of human life in a very wider perspective. The revelation, recognition and consideration of the identity of third gender are the most effective example. Vedic society in India had already self-addressed and resolved this issue several thousands of years before. Indeed, we must look back to our own ancient culture for the recognition and accommodation of '*tritiya-prakriti*' in an acceptable and respectful approach. Through this paper we have tried to reveal that gender equality, recognition and accommodation are most serious and relevant issue not today but even centuries before. This paper can facilitate to us to rethink our attitude and approach towards transgender community even in the 21st century. This text may be extended to take each and every Vedic literature and analyse exactly the social, economic, cultural, political and ethical aspects of transgender community. It can be concluded that in Vedic society transgender community lived with dignity, pride, confidence and power and considered as an integral part of the society. Nobody ought to be denied the opportunities of an individual to live with dignified human being within the name of gender, sex caste etc. Through the initiatives of our Governments transgender people are affirming our inherent values and dignity as human beings and our right to equality and justice in the public sphere.

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