Chapter 1
Introduction. Transgender to Transperson: An Overview of Indian Histories of Self, Sex, and Society

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Transgender India: Understanding Third Gender Identities and Experiences underlines an essential conversation surrounding transpeople in India. Often, the spectacular, the spectacle, the erotic, and the exotic are all that remain in the eye of the public, and the lived realities of being transgender are often ignored. Who are the transpeople and what spaces do they occupy in the civil and civic life of a country like India? In the changing vocabulary of this nation, how do they fit? How do their lives, the legislations they have caused to bring about, and their visibility affect Indian mindscapes? How does all this translate into relevant public discourse? How does it influence art or its contemporary readings? How does the transperson figure as an entrant into the workplace, all the while maintaining their identity and not hiding anymore? These and similar questions find an answer, or at any rate, a direction in this book.

The very contemporariness of this book is its strength as it connects the monumental research done in the past and newer directions of research in transpeople studies has turned in newer directions, especially post-Article 377 and the enforcement of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) 2020. After the repeal of Article 377 and the Bill being passed, the prevalent question was, what next? Where does the trans community go from here? The chapters of this book identify possible directions, as reflected in the way the chapters have been divided into sections of the book. The first section looks at the way literature has interpreted the transperson, while the second section on history forms a bridge between creativity and the elements that make up civil society. This sense of historical awareness is essential to understand the ways that modernity and its (dis)contents worked upon the Indian mind and enabled the readings of laws, ideas of personal liberty, life-choices, and social interpretations of sexualities, causing deleterious effects to this day. The third section reads contemporary amendments in legislation regulating sexualities and

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ponders the concept of citizenship. This naturally leads to the fourth section on health and employment, where the immediate and real time effects of citizenship in subsidized healthcare and the health hazards caused by disenfranchisement can be felt. The meaningful and sustainable employment of transpeople as viable citizens can add valuable numbers to the workforce that is already suffering from a lack of skilled labor. The final section on transmen looks at a doubly marginalized group of people who seek an alternate community. In my introduction, I will address these concerns as well, setting the tone for the deliberations to follow.

Human societies are very interesting subjects of study. It is believed that the more complicated the laws that govern a society are, the more thought that has gone into its making, propagation, and maintenance. These include the laws of kinship, marriage, or its need; the rules that prevail after death; regulations about the sharing of property; all the paraphernalia that come to define the morality of a society; and its governing codes that indicate its fundamental belief system and the sort of stability it aspires to have. Stability is rather important for most modern societies, in that they aspire for a normalcy—a constantly replicating and recurring pattern is preconfigured and that can be recognized based on the constants that are involved. For example, a marriage in India is usually defined by society as a contract, a covenant, or an agreement between a man and a woman in the presence of parents, relatives, friends, and members of society who subscribe to the same set of beliefs and customs as the people getting married. Any deviation from this is covered under special provisions of the law and demand a separate set of norms and requirements.

When events occur that do not conform to this formula, a sense of moral and social panic sets in (Cohen 1972; Drislane and Parkinson 2016). When people violate expectations about how they should behave, speak, and be seen, the pattern breaks and the carefully calibrated systems of norms do not work anymore. This panic is what generally defines the first reaction to transpeople in India and the rest of the world.

It is not as though this panic is a permanent state of affairs or that it is insurmountable. There are very specific situations when the transperson is welcome and very visible as well. These occasions invariably coincide with a festival or ritual that requires their presence as auspicious. The state of visibility is therefore very conditional and conforms to pre-agreed days and very particular moments. During my work on transgender festivals in South India, I have travelled to a number of spots sacred to the trans community in India and found that most of the narratives that regulate the presence of transpeople in these places occur at times when certain rituals demand their presence, like the Bonnalu that is celebrated in the Yellamma temples in Andhra Pradesh. A ritual during the Bonnalu has transpeople come into the temple beating drums and singing hymns, circumambulating the sanctum, and then going out and helping families sacrifice animals brought to propitiate the Goddess.

This is a sanctioned, sanctified presence—one that is present through decree of the deity. It is a requirement for the rituals to be complete. But once the Bonnalu is done, these transpresences become an aberration, or at any rate they are expected to go back to their everyday existences. Their role in the rituals, and hence in the public memory, is fulfilled. This is one of the major reasons why transpeople in India

have sought legal redress through claiming citizenship in the cultural (read pre-colonial) and mythological matrix of India.

The transperson is a direct victim of the social stratification that came about in British India due to the interventions of the British reformist zeal and the Indian elite's response to the same that expressed itself in the form of an enthusiasm for modernity. Modernity became an aspiration as a means of setting up the "enlightened" Indians for the promise of self-rule. This itself is evident in the way the European styles of dressing, learning, and social conduct became an essential commodity of cultural consumption among the well-heeled in India. The poor, the marginalized, and the vagrant thus became a project for the "British Indians" to prove their European worthiness, and in the process brought far-ranging changes into Indian society as direct or indirect consequences—the effects of which can be felt today as well.

An examination of some of the most important legislation that the British passed in India gives a telling picture of the ways that Indian sexualities were perceived and sought to be regulated directly or indirectly through the Indian Contagious Diseases Act (1868), The Criminal Tribes Act, 1871, The Ilbert Bill (1883), and the Age of Consent Act (1891). The Ilbert Bill, while not directly impacting the perception of sexualities in India, did however influence the passage of the Age of Consent Act. The Ilbert Bill sought to grant senior Indian magistrates the right to preside over cases involving British subjects. While this was primarily intended to avoid British magistrates needing to travel long distances to satellite areas, the Bill came under considerable criticism for placing Indians in a position of punitive power over British subjects. For the Indians, the defeat of the Bill was an indication of the fact that they were not considered capable enough for self-rule and that their place in the colonial hierarchy would always remain that of subjects. The Age of Consent Act that followed the Ilbert Bill a few years later was controversial, as it was perceived as an interference in the religious life of Indians. The challenge to patriarchy that the Act presented and the underlying implications of the need to realign social order was considered a direct assault on the cultural autonomy of Indians. The questions of cognizance of marital rape and whether consummation could even be considered rape brought questions of sexuality, sexual practices, and the intertwining of culture and religion into the minds of Indians (Kosambi 1991). The Age of Consent Act had immense fallout in terms of the counter questions raised about the cultural command of the British over the Indians and the retaliatory loss of political support by Indians. Judith Whitehead (1996, 31) points out, "Both the British and the Indian middle classes fantasized their national 'body' by idealizing their mother figures as the bearers of national traditions. The Age of Consent controversy which occurred 8 years after the Ilbert Bill agitation, reveals the metaphoric connections that exist between social bodies and gender identities."

The equations of political command and participation were thus linked to autonomy over cultural practices, the preservation of which was perceived as a way of retaining the personhood of the colonial subject. These exchanges by the colonizers and the "reformers" point to the transactional nature of colonial power and the ways that any power is maintained through civil consent and public participation. The

readings of colonial sexualities and their real time significance in the lifespan of the colonial regime in India have been well documented by Jessica Hinchy, Anjali Arondekar, Zia Jaffrey, Sanjay Srivastava, and Arvind Narrain. What one repeatedly comes back to through these readings are the ways that the colonizer tries to prevent a rent in their own moral fabric either by keeping the erotic and the exotic away from their line of sight or by keeping them exclusively for themselves. The second often happened through enactments such as the Cantonment Act, which sanctioned pleasure-seeking activities within the prescribed boundaries allowed to soldiers, with women sanctioned by the Raj. This led to the decline of the courtesan culture of places such as Lucknow and Awadh, where the Baiji then became the Madame of the brothel visited by British soldiers, and the tawaif culture was decimated by gradual decline in their social stature and the lack of patronage.

These sexual contracts—be they spoken or unspoken—were crucial in fixing the Indian perception of the British as people of rather loose morals, with the result of seriously denting the moral authority with which the British ruled India. The Empire was sexing its way onto the saddle of Home Rule by questioning the cultural antecedents of the colonizer. The post-colonial memory retains these perceptions and also seeks to build a hybrid modernity that is aspirational yet abrasive of Western ideas of enlightenment and progress. While the fear toward anything not "normal" is retained, one of the ways to dispel it is through invoking the colonial attitude toward it. For example, while hijra are among the most marginalized people in modern India, many of the arguments in favor of repealing Article 377 originated in the memory of the place of honor occupied by hijra in the pre-British times. In contrast, the matrilineal system of governance among the Nair community of Kerala, which gave autonomy to women over their bodies and their lives (in theory at least), was replaced by patriliny and not restored. This could also be in adherence to the prevalent legal system in the country, which has strong patriarchal tendencies as evidenced by laws governing marriage and divorce systems.

The inherited memory of colonial times is significant in helping rewrite history. Entire histories of people, castes, communities, and leaders of national significance are rewritten by using or misusing archival evidence or by playing fast and loose with timelines. Rewriting histories brings to the fore lesser-known people, narratives, and systems of lives. Bose and Bhattacharya (2007, xvii) point out that

> …it would be imperative, of course, to look at the ways in which colonial discourse has shaped contemporary attitudes to sex and sexuality in India and to examine the role of the post-colonial nation-state in the othering of gendered and sexual minorities. The alternatively sexualized citizen—just like the 'second sex', perhaps—is instrumental, through the very performance of his/her sexuality, in rendering unstable all universalized notions of citizenship (modelled on the male heterosexual). The nation-state then becomes a site of anxiety as well as of negotiation, where the dissident sexual subject threatens the socio, cultural and economic boundaries of the national imagination and challenges the ideological apparatus employed by the state for vigilance and containment.

The transperson in India even till recent times was a very paradoxical citizen. They were not sexual, social, political, or legal citizens. Yet they existed, rented homes, met and talked to people, went about their everyday activities, and were very

visible. No one could account for the millions of identity cards of supposed males and females being rendered useless through the changed appearance or the complete identity dysphoria of the card holder. No one could account either for the millions of people who appeared over a period of time, who had no certificate of birth to prove their name of choice or their gender of choice or a valid address or antecedents. These paradoxes were resolved to a certain extent in various ways: through the gharana system of colonies or residence complexes of transpeople in metropolitan cities where there was a community-based way of life, through the guru-chela system, and through the existence of other members of the family such as nayak, guru-bhai, nati, and nati-chela. The community too follows the social and familial hierarchy within the residential and intercommunity spaces. This act of replication often leads to straitjacketing independent thinkers within the community, in a way doing the exact same thing that each member of the community had battled against, and which led to the institution of this community in the first place. In any case, the gharana was a very pre-colonial way of life, one that encouraged the community to go out as tolis (troupes) and collect money in the form of badhais through celebratory life cycle events such as births or weddings, or through public performances.

If British discomfort with non-heteronormative sexualities and gender expressions led to the displacement and disenfranchisement of transpeople, post-independence India had no time for them either, as the country marched toward the obvious and masculinized perceptions of progress in the form of dams, machinery, and modernization. It was only in 1952 that the CTA was abolished but then replaced by the Habitual Offenders Act in many states of India. The euphoria of freedom was supplemented by the desire to seem as progressive as possible, leading to a distinct distaste for all that could not be identified, classified, traced, and tracked down. In short, the suspicions that the British had regarding the travelling, performing, or semi-nomadic people was passed down to the legal systems of India as well. The emphasis placed on settling down or having an address that took one out of their indigenous or local identity went against an elemental facet of the dignity of these peoples. Even up to today, the legislative systems of India have not been able to get out of their inherent prejudice toward the seemingly homeless, the vagrant, and the wanderer.

These are some of the fundamental factors that have caused the trans community to end up in abysmal circumstances and have made society link their identities to sex work and begging. The rise of gated communities, shopping malls, and similar gated existences have caused a sharp deterioration of the life chances of the transpeople in India. Most of the births are now hospital births, and celebrations are held in halls and hotels. The upward aspirations and the shrinking living spaces of the middle and upper middle-class Indians have limited the possibility of the trans community being able to eke out a living by performing at these occasions. Many transpeople leave home in their formative years as they find their situation untenable, thus limiting their education and subsequent job prospects. Also, the names, photographs, and genders in their certificates, if any, do not match their gender expressions, thus again leading to very slim chances of earning a living. This automatically opens them up to dangerous and unsafe career paths, stigma, violence, and infection.

This is why the few days of the year when they are sought after by society become so important. Transpeople in India, who as I mentioned earlier are paradoxical citizens, are examples of how legal citizenship in India is obtained through cultural citizenship and inherited memory of a pre-colonial Indian society. The claims of social and political consideration on account of being descendants or legacy heirs of a certain historical figure are not unheard of in India. Transpeople of this country claim their spiritual origin from Goddess worship or from the Aravan myth, or they subscribe to a hybrid form of intersectional faith that incorporates the tenets of Islam and Hinduism. It does not matter what religion they were born into. What matters after is the faith they follow after they become part of the community.

The subscription to some form or faith is important for most among the trans community simply because it gives them and others an idea of their allegiance—the gharana they belong to and who their nayak or guru is. So important is the idea of the transperson and their invisible visibility in social performances that the first Pride Walk in India was held in Calcutta in 1999 by a group of transpeople. The LGBTQIA+ agitation to repeal Article 377 and decriminalize same-sex intercourse saw multiple sexualities come together to agitate. The trans community too was a part of the struggle and the protests. They were an integral part of the celebrations as well when the Act was finally, once and for all, repealed. Indeed, the social and legal developments in the area of transgender jurisprudence is progressing more rapidly than for the people of other sexualities and genders.

There have been Transgender Justice Boards established in the states, shelter homes and care homes have been set up, medical aid and governmental financial assistance has been offered for those who wish to perform gender affirmation surgeries, welfare schemes have been developed for enhanced food security, and options are now available for individuals to change their names and genders on the various government-issued identity cards and educational certificates as well to declare their gender of choice on application forms and other forms where said declaration is required. There are seats reserved in colleges for transgender students wanting to pursue higher education. There are provisions for getting married, with a spate of weddings among transpeople in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. In Tamil Nadu, when the marriage between a cisgender man and a transwoman was denied registration, the court intervened to define marriage as a contract between two persons, helping transpeople get their personhood after decades of India's independence.

One must understand that this is not overnight progress. It is the culmination of decades of struggle and determination. The struggle for civil rights of sexual and gender minorities in India has been an ongoing one. Decades of vocal protest against the state-abetted violence and social ignorance regarding the anomaly of not applying the tenets of human rights to these human beings as well and a modernity-inspired ethos of sexual prudery began to bear fruits through acts of visuality. Activists such as Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, A. Revathi, Living Smile Vidya, Shabnam Mausi, Kalki Subramaniam, and others began using performance avenues such as stages and podia, venues of conferences, television talk shows, and Pride Walks.

They also began to write their own stories, not only to reach out to other members of the community, but also to make their narratives resound and strike a chord

with those who refused to consider themselves a part of this social struggle—namely, cisgender individuals who preferred to pretend that these people and these events were happening elsewhere. Autobiographies by transpeople such as *The Truth About Me* are vital in understanding the socio-cultural processes that lead to treating transpeople differently. The role that family plays in the social perception of a transperson comes through in vivid detail. That the family is the first place where rejection often happens has been reiterated in a number of accounts of transpeople. The times acceptance has been extended often coincide with economic dependency of the family on the income earned by the transitioning child.

Today, India is at a critical juncture as far as the civil rights of its non-male, non-upper caste, non-heteronormative, non-cisnormative population is concerned. Sweeping reforms are demanded in terms of legislation in marriage, sexual rights, and dignity of life and livelihood. The legal system is looked upon with hope as reformative justice can ensure political and social justice—however grudgingly it is given. For example, it is not enough to decriminalize consensual sex between two adults of the same sex. They must be given the right to marry, to have a say in the disposal of property, and to have access to their spouse's health insurance. The Government of India who is the respondent in this case argues that it is impossible to have two people of the same sex marrying each other, as a marriage is the union of a biological man and a biological woman and that any reinterpretation of the same could cause havoc in the delicate balance of personal and social laws. In contrast, the union of transgender couples, as well as the marriage between cisgender people and transpeople, is socially and legally sanctioned and has all the privileges accorded to cisgender couples in India.

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules 2020, which followed the rulings of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, has invited considerable criticism in its notion of self-determination. The very wording of the rules and the format of the annexes that need to be filled out are problematic, as they show little or no sensitivity to the delicate differences in identity and the use of names and terms.

Consider the following provisions from the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules 2020, that are to be followed for the purpose of establishing a person's identity as transgender:

3. Application for issue of identity of certificate under section 6 or 7:

1. Any transgender person desirous of obtaining a certificate of identity shall make an application, in *form – 1* of this rule.
2. The application shall be submitted to the District Magistrate in person or by post till online facilities are developed by the State Government concerned, and thereafter application may also be made online.

4. Procedure for issue of certificate of identity (section 6):

1. The District Magistrate shall, based on the application, the affidavit attached therewith and the report of psychologist, without any medical examination, issue the certificate of identity.

It is obvious that there is a contradiction between the intention and the legal interpretation of the idea of self-determination. For the self-identification to be given credibility, it is imperative that there should be a confirmation from a psychologist. The psychologist in question may or may not understand the intricate thoughts and rationale of the person they are talking to. To entrust one's process of identity affirmation to a stranger puts an individual under stress and also results in giving undue power to the assessor, which may not be ideal for an activity such as mental assessment—an assessment that is private and subjective, and which the person being assessed is submitting on account of to meet a legal requirement and not because of a genuine identity crisis.

In the past decade, rapid strides have been made to vocalize the cause of sexual and gender minorities in India. Interestingly, in the earlier decades, while the LGB segments of the movements were visible and vocal, the T were seen as disruptive to the cause. With the passage of time, transpeople became the face of the movement to repeal Article 377. Soon enough, the Transgender Rights (Protection) Bill, introduced by the member of parliament (MP) Tiruchi Siva, became the point of departure, from which the legal parlance of the trans movement took on an entirely different emphasis, with the questions of gender performativity, self-identification, life chances, and precarities becoming crucial. The historical and mythological examples given in the court judgment, in the bill introduced by MP Tiruchi Siva, and later in the private bill introduced by MP Shashi Tharoor, all drew heavily on the glorious past of transpeople and the roles they played in the sociological narrative of this country.

This focus makes the idea of transpeople more acceptable. To make one a cultural citizen is a certain way of gaining political and social citizenship. But the question remains whether these advances have entered the consciousness of the ordinary Indian and whether the legal system is completely aware of the nuances of identity, selfhood, and the need for placing power in the hands individuals regarding their own identity. If so, then processes and forms such as the following are counterproductive (Fig. 1.1).

The highlighted portions of the form to be completed to obtain a certificate of identity are problematic. To use words such as Birth Name and Transgender Name and to pre-fill the category Gender as Transgender, rather than have the transperson do it themselves, with the gender of their choice is extremely entitled and presumptuous to say the least. To assume that until one undergoes gender affirmation surgery, the person has to identify as transgender rather than, say, male or female, goes against the fundamental principles of self-determination and makes the process interminably long and covered with red tape. It involves too many players who have no right to encroach on an autonomous entity. Also, the idea of a Birth name and a Transgender name is plain offensive as most transpeople refer to their given name as Dead name and the name they selected as their choice as their Name. To ignore this most basic courtesy is one of the ways that governments and civil societies create impediments in the life processes of citizens.

Arvind Narrain and Alok Gupta (2011, 3) raise the crucial question of civil and political accountability.

Rule ____ Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules, 2020
*** Strike out whichever is not applicable**

State Emblem
State Government of (name of the State)
Department of (name of the issuing department)

Application – cum – enumeration form for issue of transgender certificate of identity under Section 6* / 7* of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 under Rule ____ Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules, 2020

*** Strike out whichever is not applicable**

Note:
1. **Furnishing false information would result in cancellation of the identity card as stipulated under Rule __ of ____ Rules, apart from making you liable for penal action under the relevant Act(s) or/ and Code(s).**
2. **Information provided by you in this application will be treated as confidential and shall not to be shared with any person or organisation save the Central and / or State security agencies**

1	**Name**	
(i)	**Birth name (in capital letters)**	
(ii)	**Transgender name (in capital letters)**	
2	**Mother's name**	
3	**Father's name**	
4	**Guardian's name**	
5	**Gender**	Transgender
6	**Date of birth or Age as on the date of application**	dd/mm/yyyy __ years
7	**Educational qualification**	

Fig. 1.1 Form completed to obtain transgender certificate of identity

> Is the task of queer politics to press for the inclusion of citizens who are being discriminated against on the basis of their gender and sexuality within the existing democratic framework? Or can one take it a step further and argue that there are implications of the queer perspective for the question of a democratic practice? Is the imagination of a queer politics merely about access to rights for queer citizens or also about questioning structures which limit the very potential of human freedom?

In Kerala, where significant work has been done toward an equitable condition for transpeople, the situation is marginally better. Despite having a working Transgender Justice Cell and succeeding in integrating welfare schemes with discussions on precarities, it is regretful to note that there are not many concrete measures to ensure strong support at the governmental level. The TG Board can at best issue directives or make recommendations.

As mentioned earlier, transpeople of the country are generally associated with various myths that ascribe powers of bestowing blessings or curses upon people. It is this cultural currency that has been instrumental in carrying out transactions with society at various instances and venues. There are many examples history being written to include transpeople by recounting the ritualistic nature of their initiation: the conduct of the nirvan ceremony, the offerings to Bahuchara Mata, the worship of the Goddess by the jogappas and the jogtis in Karnataka, the aravanis mourning at Koovagam, the Chamayavilakku festival in Kerala, and the festival of Goddess Yellamma in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. A new history of modernity celebrates these diversities as these bodies that present themselves at these rituals and festivals are devoid of sexuality and instead are a stand-in for the Goddess. The

divinity that these bodies attain through the absence of desire is what makes them desirable as ideal bodies in the larger quest of nation building.

Some try to script a vocabulary by invoking the inherited memories of pre-colonial times, when the nation was conceived as a masculine entity. This entity was devoid of sexuality and bodies were warrior-like. The cult of the warrior sanyasis and the pehelwans of the akhadas present a virile masculinity that tries to shake off the anxieties of English-speaking modernity that seeks to establish a very different ethos of progress—one that is vertical and not vernacular. These vernacular masculinities see the transperson's body as a site of purity—one that has been sanctified through castration or through impotence. This cleanly erases the hijra body from any such conversation and instead welcomes the kinnar identity. What was before a syncretic identity is now one that reflects the deep schisms that are symptomatic or replicative of those that we find in Indian society today.

The community system where resources were earlier pooled together to sponsor crudely done surgeries is now increasingly replaced by transpeople who do not join any gharana or who even when they do, do not stay with their community members. There are individual access points for transpeople to approach authorities for surgeries or apply for assistance. What was the toli system, is now NGOs that are run by community leaders who wield considerable influence over policy matters and allocation of funds. The transgender welfare system has become highly organized and systematized, and it has a definite toolkit that helps transpeople gain the essential identity card. However, the holding of the card is a critical part of transgender economy. There is a process of gatekeeping that does not allow passing transpeople to participate or benefit from the schemes meant for transpeople. The limitedness of these resources is a major factor, but at the same time, it is rather disheartening to see transpeople themselves determining identity based on external markers when they have often suffered as a consequence of the same.

A broader view of the issue will make us understand that in a welfare economy, it is difficult to expect an honest disbursement of resources and hence considerable vigilance is required in the process of handing out concessions and assistance on the part of the states and the community. A more proactive system of resource distribution in society such that no one slips through the cracks would be extremely helpful.

The unfolding of the historical, political, and social narrative of the trans community in India is one that throws the spotlight on the pathways by which cultural discourses are formed in the country and the implications they can have down the line. While transpeople are followers of the Goddesses Bahuchara Mata and Yellamma, or they claim lineage from the Mohini avatar of Lord Krishna, or they claim to be blessed by Lord Ram for their unswerving obedience, we must read into these epistemes the ways that cultural legacies are established as a means of gaining social validity. The route to social citizenship lies within these kernels of meaning that are generated implicitly and explicitly. The body is then a site devoid of desire, and there is only divinity that is fearsome and that demands sacrifice of the ability to procreate. This renunciation of the vital organ of procreation as demanded by the Goddesses in lieu of a better life in the next birth is also a warning to those who wish to preserve their procreative ability, or plainly, their masculinity. The renounced

body is a site of sacrifice and thus attains ritual purity. It commands respect at places of worship and on festival days when the public spectacle reminds people of the sacrifice committed by the body at that point in time.

This cultural capital thus lays claim to an inherited memory of a time before the British and their unitary religion and culture that saw these people as freaks. Thus, recognizing the cultural and social citizenship of the transperson is also a reclamation of the hoary history of India. It is also a means of negating the Western idea that India had no history before the arrival of the Europeans. The recognition of transpeople as valid citizens runs counter to the modernity that India has been grappling with so far and so the subcultural value the community represents is immense; the focus on an ethnic, vernacular sexual economy that insists upon bodies with sexualities is a way of differentiating between the "pure" Indian and the "immoral" Other.

Myths form a vital part of these conversations and serve as the markers that guide the discourses around transpeople and their sexuality (or in this case, the lack of it). Take the myth that surrounds the Chavara Sree Devi Temple in Kollam, Kerala, India. It is believed that long ago some young cowherds found a coconut that they tried to crack open on a stone. The stone began to bleed under the impact of the blows and the scared boys ran away. The oracle of the village declared that the stone carried the presence of Vana Durga, the Goddess of the forest, and that a temple must come up in the very spot. And since it was the boys who discovered the Goddess, they should dress up as girls and stand holding ceremonial lamps to light her path on the day the temple was ready. It is one of the few temples that has no roof over the sanctum as Vana Durga is a free spirit who must not be enclosed.

Year after year, in the month of March, thousands of men dress up as women and hold the ceremonial lamp for the Goddess as a form of thanksgiving for the favors they received during that year. Also, men who are currently passing or transpeople who are devotees of the Goddess come to this annual festival. This means that there is no direct claim to the Goddess by transpeople; she is not their Goddess alone. But the festival has gained traction today due to the burgeoning presence of transpeople at the festival. The performative acts of gendering are always on full display, and one keeps trying to look beyond the make-up and the hair to discern how closely the performance resembles the social visualization of women. North Kerala also has a festival where the young men of the village cross dress and go from door to door to dance and perform in the name of the Goddess. There are within the walls of these sanctioned performances, desires that dare not speak their name. While it is not imperative that those that attend the Chamayavilakku festival are transpeople, there are hardly any transpeople who have not visited the festival before they revealed their true identity.

The Koovagam festival at Villupuram in Tamil Nadu is a festival that sees massive participation by the transgender community. The aravanis—as they are known—assemble for the festival and play out the story of the *Mahabharata* featuring the fate of Aravan, the tribal prince who was the son of the Pandava hero Arjuna. Aravan or Iravan hears of the war and comes to help his father. The Pandavas and the Kauravas are told that victory is assured for the side who sacrifices a warrior of perfect proportions and who carries all the auspicious and desirable features. The

Kauravas found their warriors to be indispensable while the Pandavas also found their perfect warriors—Arjuna and Krishna—to be indispensable. The third suitable warrior was Aravan, who was ready to be sacrificed, provided he did not die unmarried. However, no woman was ready to marry this doomed young man and then later be consigned to a life of widowhood. To solve this dilemma, Krishna assumed the avatar of Mohini and married Aravan. He was subsequently sacrificed, but as he was such a noble man, he did not meet with immediate death. His head remained conscious through the entire battle, and he passed away after knowing the outcome of the war. Mohini was said to mourn for forty days, breaking her bangles, wearing white, and keening—wailing in grief. The aravanis believe themselves to follow the footsteps of Mohini. They have a priest tie a yellow thread around their necks, symbolizing the sign of matrimony. There is plenty of singing and dancing throughout the night, and the next morning the priest comes round cutting the thread from the necks of the aravanis, who then mourn and keen.

The revelries of the night give way to a dawn of mourning, the morning air rent with the wails of the aravanis, their bodies sanctified for replicating Mohini. The Mohini of the previous night was an object of desire, a persona of power and sacrifice. The Mohini of the morning is an aggrieved widow, fulfilling her Dharma. The Mohini who leaves Villupuram later in the day is spectacle, a nameless face among many others like her. That is the transformative power of cultural replication.

Transgender India: Understanding Third Gender Identities and Experiences could not have come at a better time as India stands on the cusp of a crisis of identity. Words such as secular, liberal, democratic, and socialist, which formed the foundational basis of Indian political and diplomatic policies, are gradually being replaced by polarized standpoints. There is a greater need to understand human and environmental rights and the politics of vocabulary. The language we speak, the mode of dress we adopt, the food we eat, and the methodologies of our social consciousness are constantly being challenged by an array of socially motivated agencies. Sanskruti or culture is of a major concern in these discussions. There seems to be an imperative push toward creating binaries for any sort of identity or ideology. The "With" and "Against" camps seem the easiest way to frame public debate in India in the current socio-political scenario. There is a deepening dread of the Other. In the midst of this Otheredness, the transperson forms an interesting intersection.

The referential for transpersons is growing increasingly specific. But interestingly, that is not the case with the transpersons in Kerala, who prefer the term transgender—possibly on account of the easy identifiability that the term evokes. Given the context of the times, the growing academic interest, the increasing social visibility, the political and cultural presence of transpeople in initiatives of great importance to the nation, and the sociological understanding needed to find equitable, sustainable economic measures to address some of the most vulnerable people of Indian society, this book is especially timely and through its creation of a different set of paradigms and matrices to frame the discourse. The ideas discussed in this Introduction find a deeper investigation in the chapters that follow. The chapters are interconnected, and readers will often find cross-references between chapters, because research cannot and must not exist in a vacuum.

In the following chapter, Shalini Jayaprakash looks at the contemporary life writings by prominent transpeople such as A. Revathi and Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, who in their own ways discuss prejudice and the ways they overcame the same by sheer determination and grit. Having met Revathi and interacted closely with her, I can add that she demonstrates through her life that the processes of activism and articulation are interconnected and therapeutic. The ability to inspire through theater as Revathi does, or in the case of Laxmi, through dance and public lectures, is true leadership and makes for compelling narratives. These narratives carry the kernels of immense courage and resilience and bring out the testimonials of these individuals who had to struggle to be heard. These life writings are essential to understand the ways that the unprotected citizen is a victim of the law. The politics of negotiation that these activists had to carry out with a system that rendered them invisible are narratives of contested citizenship in the world's largest democracy.

Anna Guttman decodes the current Indian social pulse through the lens of Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* in Chap. 3. Roy's much-anticipated book is a compendium of all of Roy's concerns for the nation, and Guttman has articulated a purpose-filled narrative of gendered multiplicities without the frequent use of the word queer. She looks at the ways that Roy has closely followed the hijra protagonist and woven a discourse of mercy from this persona. The hijra is a national icon in the sense of being what the nation needs at this point—neither a hypermasculine militant stand nor a cisgender Mother figure as an icon of the country. If any human should represent India, it must be the non-confirming body of the hijra, who nourishes, cares for, and protects the most vulnerable of her land. Guttman thus points out that there can be a very vibrant political existence outside of terminologies, if the intentions are present.

In Chap. 4, Peter I-min Huang looks at the classic text *Journey to the West* (西遊記) in terms of the transitions that took place in many societies that pushed for an erasure of transbodies and identities through a creative process of naming. The patriarchal systems that replaced the inclusive or affirmative social processes tended to have far-reaching consequences on the lives of the generations to come. Huang's reading of the text in terms of Foucault's subjugated knowledges shows the percolation of ossified ideology in our midst. His chapter is an important reading of the sort of archival enquiry one must conduct to reveal the place occupied by transpeople in literature of pre-colonial times, as well to create a canon of works that fight erasure.

Ruman Sutradhar's field work in South Assam leads to very interesting findings in Chap. 5 about the ways that infertility and castration myths converge in the rituals surrounding worship. This chapter examines the myths surrounding transpeople and their ability to bless and curse. Sutradhar pays special attention to the ways that these myths enable transpeople to earn a living and also points to how these narratives present the anxieties of the state and civil society, which cannot comprehend the space that must be created for transpersons as they seek to rise above their "normal" condition of precarity. The obsession around fertility and the male child have hobbled women's reproductive health for a long time and have warped social roles that women can and must play in society. This chapter reads the transperson at the

center of the fertility question and locates the transperson at an interesting juncture of being able to bestow fertility all the while remaining infertile themselves.

In Chap. 6, Shane Gannon takes forward the discovery of the ways that non-heteronormative and non-cisnormative identities have been erased by the British through the deployment of official machinery. The Census, which was a mammoth task undertaken to account for the populace of British India, became a complicated system of identity erasure and formation, sometimes at the same time. Gannon discusses the ways that transpeople were "slotted" into compartments considered convenient by the British during the Census, as they did not have and adequate comprehension of the social, sexual, and gender spectrum of the land. Such erasures point to the imposition of a knowledge system that is unrelentingly binary and that works to put down roots at the expense of multiplicities. Classifying people according to their occupations, castes, or possible criminality due to their caste was not only arbitrary, it also had deep ramifications for the country that was to become and now is.

Vaibhav Saria re-thinks notions of dignity and shame as situations that seek to galvanize society into a "savior" mode in Chap. 7. The prevalent idea is to "pull" transpeople out of the life of abjection that they lead by giving them jobs and moving them away from the life that they know. Saria raises critical issues about the perception of what constitutes shameful and dignified. He takes the reader along the streets of New Delhi, the capital of India, to read public attitudes as he theorizes the concepts of shame, privacy, the body, and the role that the law—as punitive authority and as abettor—plays in all of this. He draws attention to the sexual clowning in some parts of Odisha by the hijras who thus create a carnivalesque. The reforming zeal that tries to convert hijras into "respectable," "dignified" people smacks of the homogenizing zeal that seeks the comfort of classification.

In Chap. 8, Sangeetha Sriraam undertakes an archival investigation and reads deep into the connect between citizenship and The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019. She critiques the ways that laws intended to protect the vulnerable end up, in contrast, perpetuating prejudice. Jurisprudence regarding the material possessions and the legalities of the same have been revelatory, showing the long route that the transpeople have to take in order to achieve complete citizenship. Or it would be more appropriate to say that the state has a long way to go to re-enfranchise transpeople and gain the benefits of their civic and political participation.

Sameena Azhar and Jason Vaudrey take a long look at the sort of psychological support that transpeople need as they manage HIV infection and related illnesses in Chap. 9. This collaborative research between Azhar and Vaudrey examines the much-needed issue of mental health among the HIV-infected transpeople of Hyderabad. The chapter reveals disturbing accounts of state intervention into the bodyscapes of transpeople through invasive questions and insensitive body examinations. This in turn translates into transpeople avoiding medical procedures or hospital visits as much as possible, leading to spiraling health crises. The attendant mental health issues are extremely distressing as transpeople deal with the trauma of stigma and insensitivity. Thus, keywords such as shame and dignity make a

comeback in this context as well. This chapter provides an informed account of these issues through first-person accounts as well as methodologically rigorous research.

In Chap. 10, Supriya Pal and Neeta Sinha present the other side of this balance by exploring the ways that employment could bring about a difference in the lives of transpeople, by helping them to break out of toxic relationships that form within their communities through kinship. This translates into the self-reliance that more and more transpersons are seeking as they strike out on their own. This chapter thus accompanies the previous two chapters in the ways that sociological presences of transpeople are impacted in their attempt to enact their own identities by joining trans communities that are supposed to be a safe haven. But the exploitative income pattern and the hierarchical, almost patriarchal systems of community life severely limit transpeople and make them uncomfortable citizens.

Tanupriya too examines literary and life narratives to read the resilient transperson in Chap. 11. The politics of such narratives is that while they serve to inspire, one must also be wary of stereotyping these narratives to form ideas of trans lives and how they must be lived. It could well lead to gatekeeping of a different kind. This chapter reads the visibility spectrum of transpeople and points out that transmen are not accorded the sort of visibility that transwomen have received. This is possibly on account of the optics of the performative aspects of gender attracting closer scrutiny. The almost habitual erasure of the female or feminine presence in literary, scriptural, and archival narratives is rather disconcerting and points to the insidious ways that power exists—covertly and without any obvious collateral damage.

In the final chapter, Agaja Puthan Purayil takes the issue further as she discusses the issues that affect transmen in large, metropolitan cities like Bangalore and the ways that the ties of family-like bonds among the community form a support system. The disenfranchisement and alienation that they experience and the sense of mutuality they employ to overcome these obstacles brings an understanding of how families and societies must exist for providing a supportive ambit rather than to drive home mind-numbing stances of conformity. The testimonials that she has collected are telling in the ways that these citizens have been systematically ignored in the spectrum of sexualities and genders that are considered "acceptable" by Indian civil society. The sense of isolation and loneliness that these subjects feel leads to deep-seated insecurities that further exacerbate their problems. The anonymity of a big city often is a blessing, as it provides respite from unrelenting scrutiny and the opportunity to start afresh. But this same anonymity can be a bane when dealing with community leaders and other transpeople. For transmen, a minority within a minority, the problems multiply.

Transgender India: Understanding Third Gender Identities and Experiences is a work that reads deeply into the personal, political, social, historical, and economic interactions that an individual, or a group of individuals, has with the state. By "state," I mean anyone and any agency who is outside the self of the transperson. This generalization may at first seem to be broad or sweeping, but on closer scrutiny, it rings true. The body of the transperson, which is the most visible marker of

their identity, is seen as the only frontier of interaction between the person and the world. However, that is not true. The real negotiation happens at the level of the sentient mind. The mind, which is the seat of our actual enfranchisement, is where truth in the spiritual sense exists. This is why most cultures foreground the mind over the body, which is often seen as transient or a mere vessel. This book reads the transperson as a mind—as millions of minds that seek to find their space under the Sun, as is their right to do so. The voices in this book are part of that revolution. This revolution, like everything else about transpeople, is one that is fought in the court, in the Legislative Assembly, in the streets, at home, and with oneself. To be a part of it, one has only to be mindful.

The need to speak correctly, to know the stories and preferred pronouns of transpeople and gender diverse people, is important and respectful. It will go a long way in changing the way people view the idea of selfhood. While the families of a bygone era welcomed blood relatives and spoke about blood being thicker than water, a quiet counterrevolution is now taking place. Transpeople are trying to look beyond traditional ideas of family and are looking to make families based on love.

This transformation will radically open the doors and minds of people to the infinite beauties of life that they have previously refused to see. The barrier of denial of selfhood is a huge debt incurred by society. It carries significant ramifications and must be solved through discourse and conversation. This book will be a vital part of that resultant polyphony.

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