

Transgender Deities And Festivals In India – A Study

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Abstract

This article deals with cult, deities, festival and cultural attributes of Transgender in India. The most neglected culture of India, indeed the transgender people have own deities, festival and tradition in India. Once they have the great recognition in the ancient period, through the religious aspect. The Sultante, Mughals, Vijayanagara and Marathas have given the great benefit to the people to live their life independently, also enjoyed their religious space. However, the British has to eliminate the transgender people in the society. However, their tradition and culture does not vanish on until date. After NALSA judgment, they lived like a human as same as other gender getting privilege in India. Throughout India, transgender celebrated in Hindu, Islamic and other culture. Transgender religious space and cultural attributes completed neglected by the modern people. However, some of the festivals and minor deities also celebrated by the people general people through the years. Transgender having the religious identity with religion aspect like veneration of Ardhnareeshwara. In addition they have the own deities like Angalamman, Arvan, Bahucharya Mata, Yellamma and Drupadiyamman. In addition, they conducted the festivals, also participated in the festivals, which conducted by the general people.

Keywords: Religious space, cultural attributes, Festivals, own deities, Social identity, Transgender people.

Introduction

India is a multi-cultural state for having numerous religions born and existed here, called as land of religions. The majority of the population has possessed the Hindu religion, glorified the god and goddesses through festivals. People attribute the culture and tradition that reflects the religious space of the same. Every holy place, including the temples has exhibited the religious ideas of the people in this country. Both men and women considered as the equal citizens also participated the cultural events without any discrimination. Nevertheless, the people from other gender officially called as Third gender completely ignored in the social and religious space in India. However, Transgender have the religious identity from the ancient period from modern period, both traditionally and mythological. After the British entered India, Transgender lost their pride and prosperity through the acts. Under this act they curtailed in the social space, neglected the identity in India, indeed move out from the general people. Finally, they received their rights through judiciary, like Tribal and women. NALSA judgment revealed by the Supreme Court by the year 2014 A.D., blossom the rights of transgender high esteem.¹ Transgender religious space and cultural attributes completed neglected by the modern people. However, some of the festivals and minor deities also celebrated by the people general people through the years. Transgender have the religious identity through religion, like veneration of Ardhnareeshwara, and they have the own deities like Angalamman, Arvan, Bahucharya Mata, Yellamma and Drupadiyamman. In addition, they conducted the festivals, also participated in the festivals, which conducted by the general people. This article deals with cult, deities, festival and cultural attributes of Transgender in India.

Transgender people

Transgender, a word is used to definite lot of communities like intersex people, cross-dressers, trans-woman, transsexuals, drag queens and trans-man. These people are under the brand of LGBTQ+, which included more than hundred varieties. Leslie Feinberg becomes the first person to utilize the name as umbrella term, connecting to the field of politics.² The term 'transgender' is coined by John F Oliven has worked at Columbia University in 1965. In India, the transgender has been renowned numerous names, because each region and language

given the different name to the people like Hijra, Kinner, Enoch, Kojra, Aravanis, Mangalamukhi, Kusra, Jogappas, Shishaktis, Pavaiyaa and Napunsakudu.³ In 1997, Tamil medias are mentioned the transgender people as 'Ali'. In 1990, the writer Noorullah about the transgender as 'Aligal Vazhkai' (life of transgender). In 1994, the famous novel writer named Su.Samuthiram titled his book as 'Vadamalli'. In 1997, Police officer R.N. Ravi had changed the name of transgender as 'Aravanigal'. In 2008, the welfare board for transgender founded in the name of Arvanigal nala varyiam. Late Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Dr.Kalaignar Karunanidhi has coined the word Thriugnagnai instead of aravanigal or aravani. In 2009, the name of transgender changed as 'Thirunangai' means 'sir-lady'.⁴ In 2014, the honorable supreme court declared transgender as 'third gender'.⁵

Deities reflected third gender

In India, Hinduism has followed by the majority of the people attribute the culture over the years. One part of religion, Saivism are glorified the Lord Shiva is the primary deity. Shiva has the lot of symbols, like Shiv-lings and Shiv-shakthi. In addition, the Ardhnareeshwara is renowned by the identification of transgender, because both Shiva and Parvati conjoined together. This cult has believed to celebrate from Indus valley civilization, some of the terracotta symbol shown like shivlingas.⁶ In addition, the Ardhnareeshwar deity may venerated from ancient to modern period, also from North India to South India. The sculptural evidence authenticated this celebration. Moreover, the Ardhanareeshwar cult existed from 1st century to modern period. The earliest Ardhnareeswar sculpture identified in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh and safeguarded in the Mathrua museum,⁷ which belongs to Kushan period, dated around first century A.D., The second important sculpture from sixth century identified in Elephanta belongs to Rashtrakuda period. Another ancient sculpture is existed in Mahbhalipuram⁸ from seventh century belongs to Pallva period. Another one held at Gangaikonda Cholapuram in beautiful nature.⁹ In addition, the Bronze sculpture of Ardhnareeshwara protected in the Madras museum from Chola period belongs to eleventh century. Also the modern temples held in Tiruchengodu, Uyyankondan Tirumalai, Kodumabahr, Tirukarukavur, Tiruvarur, Anakur, Uraiur alone

Own deities

Transgender have the unique traditional history regarding some deities, which glorified the people through the years.

Bahuchara Mata

Bahuchara Mata is the important deity of transgender, which temple held from Gujarat, Tripura and Assam. This temple has visited by the devotees from all genders, especially third genders. The folklore version says that the connection with the Bahuchara Mata with transgender. Bahuchara mata was travelling with her sisters by caravan, while the local pandit named Babiya robbed them. At once, Bahuchara has to cut off the breast of her sisters and her own, for saving the dignity to save them from the robbers. She cursed the pandit as impotent. For cure is curse, the goddesses appeared his dream to said that he could wear women clothes and worshipped mata. This veneration system is still prevailed, while male also wear women clothes to visit the temple. ¹⁰Once in a year, all transgender people visited the temple during the festival. In 2023, the Government have spent around 70 crore for the renovation of the temple, revealed the significance of the temple. ¹¹The same version believed in Assam, where the temple existed in the name of Mahamayaji. ¹²This goddesses are venerate in Tripura in the name Murgavati Mata. ¹³

Yellamma Devi temple

Yellamma devi (also known as Jogamma) is venerated by the transgender community, held at Soundatti in Belgaum. This worship also followed in the regions like Northern Karnataka, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. The prominent festival celebrated in full moon day named 'Yallamma Yatra', worshipped with all the rituals. The folk culture related to the transgenders and worshipped by them. Yellamma, birth name was Renuka Devi, wife of Sage Jamadagni. Her husband needs some water, while Renuka devi delayed and watched gandharvas playing in water. He got angry to his wife, and ordered his five sons to kill her. First four sons refused to do it. However, the fifth son also got angered like his father and killed his mother. Her head was cut off, and then the head multiplied into thousand heads. Their four sons lost their manhood, become devotees of Renuka devi. This story existed until date, and transgender who have worshipped the goddess as Yellamma

devi. ¹⁴The same Renuka devi temple existed in Devanampattinam in Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu. Transgender from Tami Nadu very much glorified the goddesses of Angalamman. In ethical format, the Angalamman related to the transgender.

Aravan

Aravan is the god of transgender; this temple is located in Koovagam in Tamil Nadu. Aravan related to the epic of Mahabharata, who glorified for his bravery. Aravan is a child of Prince Arjuna and Princess Ulupi, his father was the main character in the epic of Mahabharata. Aravan is otherwise known as Koothandavar in this region. The folk culture says that Aravan sacrifice his life to won the Battle of Kurushetra. Before the battle Kauravas, sacrificed a white elephant to won the war to get blessing of God. The Pandavas tried to sacrifice uncommon object. Arjuna wanted to sacrifice his son Aravan. Aravan also agreed the same. But Aravan wish to marry before his death. While Krishna made female boon as Mohini, to satisfy the Aravan. ¹⁵During the 18th day of the war, he scarified his life; also the Pandavas won the battle. This story related to the transgender until date. The same cult held at Indonesia named as Irawan. After cut off his head thrown to the river, while chandirigiri king found as a child. Then the child crying like “kuvakuva’ related to Koovagam village. In Tamil Nadu, there are 32 temples existed to have the primary deity as Aravan, reflected the glorification of God Koothandavar. ¹⁶

Festivals celebrated by the Transgender

Transgender have not getting complete recognition in the social space, but traditional, folklore and mythological version given great benefactions to the people on some areas. In India there are some festivals celebrated such as Pola, Dussera, Diwali, Akhaji , Tij Rakshabandhan, Gadaba puja, and Bhujariya.

Bhujaraia Festival

Bhujaraia Festival celebrated by the transgender people in the capital of Madhya Pradesh. This festival also conducted in Maharashtra state. Bhujaria festival has celebrated from the folk culture. Once Raja of bhoj ruled in this state, there was, a feminine happened due to drought. The king called the astrologers to solve this issue. The astrologer told that the puja conducted by the kinnars in the water bodies. Kinnars agreed

to pay their homage to the god and held the puja on the same. Suddenly the rain has flown in this land. This story has given the highest dignity to the transgender community. The Bhujararia festival has been celebrated after the Rakshabandan festival, while the people the Bhujaria(wheat) to the water bodies. This customs has followed in Tamil Nadu, known as Mulaippari.¹⁷

Koovagam Festival

In Tamil Nadu, the third genders are called as 'Aravanis'(now changed into 'Muntaram palinathavar', Thirunagani and Thirunambi) which interconnected the mythological culture of Arvan sacrifice. In the Tamil month of Chithirai, English month of April and May, the festival celebrated in grand manner. This festival was conducted 18-day festival while there was lot of transgender come to attend from all over India. During the festival, an Aravan head created and painted, perhaps it looks huge. There were some rituals executed in this festival. The transgender dress themselves as same as brides (or Mohinis), wearing bright coloured sarees, lot of bangles, gajaras (garland), jewellery with bridal makeup¹⁸ on 17th day festival. All transgender ties a mangalsutra around the neck in front of Aravan idol, while priest made special rituals. This ritual is connected with the myth of Mahbharata, when Aravan asked Lord Krishna for three boons. For neglecting to marry aravan from any women, Krishna took avatar as Mohini and became the bride of Aravan. The next days, transgenders observed mourn for the death of Aravan. Hence, the next morning is the Chariot procession conducted could be the important festival in this occasion, while idol of Aravan took to around the village. Finally, the transgender cut off their sacred thread (thali), break their bangles (Valaiyal), and finally wear the white saree to symbolize as widow¹⁹. Moreover, this festival has dances, songs, merrymaking beauty contest between the transgender. Thousand of transgender people from various parts of India congregate at Koovagam.

Yellamma Devi Festival

Sri Yellamma devi otherwise known as Renuka, temple existed all over India. Among them, the temple held at Saudati and Badami in Karnataka are the important one. They are associated with the devadasi cult as well as the jogappas, cross-dressing men and homosexuals. The importance festival are

conducted on the full-moon day of Chithirai(English month of March and April).²⁰

Bonalu festival

Bonalu festival is celebrated from Hyderabad, the capital of Telagana grand manner. In this region, there are around 3020 temples existed, most of the temples conducted the Bonalu festival.²¹Bonalu festival, a festival literally known as 'festival of pots'.²² The Bonalu festival is primarily observed in Ashda's mongh, according to the Hindu caller. The word "Bonalu" comes from the word "Bhojanalu," which refers to food dedicated to the god. This century-old tradition observed with the greatest joy and ardour. The devotional and ritualistic worship of the village goddesses "Yallamma," "Mahankali," "Maisamma," "Pochamma," and "Gundamma" characterizes this one-month celebration. The "Bonam," or adorned pots filled with neem leaves, which carried on the heads of the women in a procession, are a characteristic feature of the Bonalu celebration. The males accompany the women by carrying lambs or hens, and the women carry the cooked rice and jiggery in polished metal containers or in clay pots adorned with neem leaves to the local goddess, Women wearing vibrant clothes. A group of women and Hijra, referred to as "Shivsakti," do a pot-balancing dance alongside Pochamma, the local deity and guardian of the community, to the beats and melodies of the rhythm.²³The presence of trans women in the Bonalu culture has been on the rise because of this folk culture traditional does not restrain them.²⁴

Khumbh Mela

Khumbh Mela is the largest congregation in the Hindu religion, while sacred saints and people have visited in this event. From eight century, the philosopher Shankara celebrated this festival. The term 'kumbh' comes from Sanskrit root 'Kumbha' (the sacred pitcher of the elixir of immortality. The NALSA judgment claimed the sacred space of transgender to allowing partially in the Ujjain Kumbh Mela on 2015.²⁵ They never were fully accepted into Hindu religious life, which rejected by Akhil Bharatiya Akhara Parishad, a body that claims to regulate Hindu monastic organizations in India. The Kinnar Akhada have often marginalized and ridiculed.

Kumbh Mela, 2019

In 2019, the Kumbh Mela festival was conducted in Allahabad so called Prayagraj, where the three sacred rivers are confluence namely Ganges, Yamuna and mythical Saraswathi River. More than hundreden twenty million devotes participated in this event. This festival commenced more than fifty-five days, devotees participated in the event and slogan shouted like Chalo Kumbh Chalo. In the history of India, at first a transgender ashram known as the Kinnar Akhara led by Lakshmi Narayan Tirpathi from Mumbai joined first bathing day. While the crowds enthusiastically welcomed the transgender devotes to the event. Juna Akhara, the largest congregation also approved the participation of kinnar Akhara in the celebration.¹⁵

Tirpathi claim that 'our religion has a space for everyone' that implies that Hinduism can encompass LGBT+ communities within its fold. The Kinnar Akhara has sought to establish itself as a faith based space for kinnars and hijras practicing Hinduism. ¹⁶It has discourse that has long marginalized Transgender community's access power and resources, carving out a place within existing religious spaces.

Kotangulangara Devi Temple festival (Chamayavilakku)

Kotangulangara Devi Temple is located at Savara village in Kollam city, Kerala state. It said by the people that there were exited the mangrove forest and thick tree plants in this region. Also there was a deep pond called Bhutakulam in this place which poisonous creature likes snakes lived there. During the rainy season there, water filled during by the water, also rearing the animals and the water utilized for agricultural needs. A story is behind evolution of the temple in this region. Once cowherds found a coconut there and break, it used the stone. At once, the blood break into it, alarmed by this told to the elders in this village. Both astrologers and elders told that the stone was sacred one. Hence, they made temple in this region and performed the pujas. Accordingly, the temple was erected and the cowherds performed the ceremony. In addition, cowherds gave women clothes and made decorations to the deity, worshiped to used puja lamps. There are many people come from various parts of Kerala with their families. While men of the family members used to visit the temple cutting across religions, wear neckless, bangles and wear women dress,

and carrying lamp called a five-wicked Samayavilakku to please the deity. The main deity of the temple Goddess bhagawathi has glorified by the transgender. In recent years various transgender people from Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra visited in this festival named Smayavilakku which celebrated on the 10th and 11th of Meenam month according to the Malayalam calendar (2nd or 3rd week of march according to the English calendar). This festival also celebrate in Assam in the Kamakhya temple, while thousands of devotees worshipped.²⁶

Conclusion

The most neglected culture of India, indeed the transgender people have own deities, festival and tradition in India. Once they have the great recognition in the ancient period, through the religious aspect. The Sultantate, Mughals, Vijayanagara and Marathas have given the great benefit to the people to live their life independently, also enjoyed their religious space. However, the British has to eliminate the transgender people in the society. However, their tradition and culture does not vanish on until date. After NALSA judgment, they lived like a human as same as other gender getting privilege in India. Throughout India, transgender celebrated in Hindu, Islamic and other culture.

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