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Literature Review

The Government of India imposed a nationwide lockdown on 24th March, 2020 for 21 days. This lockdown restricted the movement of 1.38 billion residents. Furthermore, offices, schools and colleges shut down and students were sent back home which resulted in online classes, work from home and almost everything became virtual.

There was also a temporary suspension of flights from and to India which led to situations where a lot of us could not go back home due to the travel restrictions related to COVID-19 which, for a lot of us, meant staying with our relatives and other friends for almost 4 months. During the pandemic, there was also shortage of groceries, more challenges to the already overstretched public health system of India, new COVID protocols which included wearing masks, maintaining physical distance of at least 2metres, using sanitizers along with numerous others. With all these challenges, came some realizations. All of us realized the importance of touch, affection, communication and most importantly, family and friends. Lucky are the ones who have someone to call family, family that supports them in tough times like the pandemic. But the pandemic also made us realize that injustice does not affect everybody equally, the pandemic did not affect everyone equally (Roy, 2020).

Pandemic witnessed a change in our norms, a reconstruction of our norms. Norms around work discipline, educational institutions, healthcare systems and a number of other institutions had changed but unfortunately, the understanding of gender and sexuality still remained the same. When it comes to gender identities, all basic rights in India have been easily accessible to only two genders namely, 'men' and 'women'. Our traditional understanding of gender and sexuality made pandemic a whole lot difficult for communities who do not identify as either 'man' or a 'woman'(Shah et al., 2015). This traditional understanding of gender identities and sexualities excludes a section of our society and as a consequence makes them invisible. Therefore, there is an urgent need to shift from the traditional ideas to a more inclusive definition of gender and sexuality (Shah et al., 2015, p. 13).

One community that does not conform to the norms around gender binary in particular is of great interest to me, thus this study's primary subjects belong to that community, that is, to the transgender community. Before we look into the research done on this particular group, I will first clarify the reason for my interest in this community.

'Transgender' refers to people who "transgress the rigid gender dichotomy" (Ganguly & Singh, 2021). The community is not as simple to understand as this definition, their community comes with their own complexities and cultural diversities just like any other community (Ganguly & Singh, 2021). Trans people are more likely to be unemployed since they have low chances of being accepted in a traditional job. According to a report by the National Human Rights

Commission, there are 92% of transgender communities who are deprived of the right to participate in economic activities and 96% are forced to take up jobs that are low paying which includes sex work, begging and other acitivities which are exploitative in nature. 23% of transgender communties participate in sex work itself. Moreover, 29% transgenders have never attended school while only around 30% have graduated with a degree (Ganguly & Singh, 2021).

The transgender community only truly got *freedom of expression* after the Supreme Court verdict in April 2014. The verdict states that "Transgender will be included as a third gender under the various scholarship/fellowships schemes of UGC" (Shah et al., 2015). This judgement gave recognition to the marginalized communities and acknowledged individuals who self-identified as neither a 'man' or a 'woman' but the verdict was vague in itself and had a number of unanswered questions, questions like, who exactly is transgender? This verdict was also incapable of supporting communities marginalized on the basis of their gender expression (Shah et al., 2015, p. 12). Even though the April 2014 verdict gave a means to protect the basic rights of the marginalized communities, the general public still does not accept everyone who does not place themselves in the gender binary.

The above mentioned statistics are from the pre-pandemic period. It is necessary to figure out how the pandemic became a significant factor in changing these statistics and whether the pandemic made things worse or better.

The pandemic changed everyone's lives, some for better and some for worse. We all have stories from the pandemic but it is also important to be aware of others' experiences. While some of us were home fighting loneliness from not meeting our friends for a long time, there were many others who were fighting to get one meal a day. Millions in our country lost their jobs ergo a stable livelihood, but the LGBTQ+ community or any other marginalized community for that matter who face discrimination even in a "normal" setting, the pandemic only worsened their state of living.

A rapid perception survey (Ahmed & Sifat, 2021) conducted in 2021 found that 18% of the urban participants and 10% of the rural participants had no food stored at home. The lockdowns being extended along with the stress of pandemic only added to their hopelessness. It was also found that 61% of the respondents needed food, 59% needed money, 9% needed secure work, 9% needed medicine and 8% needed protective equipment. They also experienced financial difficulties due to the lack in social protection, this lack in social protection can be attributed to the fact that the transgender people are not publicly identified (Ahmed & Sifat, 2021).

Scholars agree that gender dysphoria generally ends up putting the transgender community at a higher risk of anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicidal tendencies (Roy, 2020). They often face physical abuse and find support in NGOs or other community- based organizations aimed to provide such marginalized communities shelter and other help (Roy, 2020). The lived reality of the transgender community is facing social stigma on the basis of their identity and being denied

fundamental human rights and basic priviledges. Furthermore, the transgender people are exploited by the property owners, they face financial insecurity thus there is a never ending struggle for finding a safe home and at least two meals a day. Due to the widespread transphobia and lack of support they are forced to take up jobs where they get exploited. They take up jobs like sex work, begging and seeking alms in functions. That being the case, the transgender community always faces twice the discrimination due to their gender and their socio-economic status (Ganguly & Singh, 2021).

One of the main concerns during the pandemic was health care services for the transgender community. The healthcare services had to be expanded to accommodate the ever increasing number of covid positive patients. But for transgender people, even seeking medical help during the pandemic was a task. Healthcare practitioners would not know which ward ('male' or 'female') to place the trans person in. Placing them in either wards would make the other patients uncomfortable. Sometimes, the healthcare practitioners themselves were transphobic and did nothing to help the trans person. In addition to this, many trans people were undergoing the sex reassignment surgeries (SRS) but with the pandemic, all such surgeries had to be postponed indefinitely since there were no doctors available in the outpatient departments (Ganguly & Singh, 2021 ; Roy, 2020). This resulted in more frustration, confusion and depression in transgender communities.

To tackle this issue of discrimination faced in healthcare institutions, there have been various discussions about the necessity to make the Indian healthcare system more inclusive for trans people (Pandya & Redcay, 2021). Both the public and the private sectors of the healthcare system need to be trans-friendly and have to be trained to understand the healthcare needs of trans people. In a survey to obtain transgender community response (Ahmed & Sifat, 2021), it was found that while all transgender communities knew about coronovirus, only 8.8% shield themselves while coughing and sneezing to prevent the spread, 47.5% wore masks and only 21.3% used sanitizers. The statistics prove the need for more awareness in such communities regarding healthcare. But healthcare systems are not the only institutions where trans people faced discrimination during the pandemic crisis.

Scholars have done a lot of research on the life of the transgender communities to understand the lived realities of trans people during the pandemic. A few studies have tried to categorize the results they obtained into themes (Pandya & Redcay, 2021 ; Bhalla & Agarwal, 2021). These themes captured and categorized the lived experiences of the participants. One of the papers (Bhalla & Agarwal, 2021) which used themes to describe the lived experiences selected participants through snowball sampling. The study was qualitative in nature and applied transcendental phenomenology as a mode of enquiry whereas another paper (Pandya & Redcay, 2021) which used themes categorized the questions for their telephonic interviews into five categories. They used a qualitative descriptive method which helped them develop descriptions

of their participants' experiences during the lockdown. The participants in this study as well were selected through snowball sampling.

We notice an overlap in the methods used by these papers. Both the above mentioned papers used snowball sampling to select their participants and then proceeded to hold telephonic interviews. One reason I can think of for both the studies using snowball sampling even though snowball sampling usually leads to biased results is that communities marginalized on the basis of gender identities and sexualities usually exist in groups and communities. Others who are not a part of such groups and communities either are hard to get in touch with or are not ready to participate in such studies. These studies also had an approach which was qualitative in nature. Almost all papers that I have come across have used a qualitative methodology in addition to some other approach. These other approaches ranged from interpretive approaches, content analysis (Ahmed & Sifat, 2021) to using an intersectionality lens that provides a new perspective on the interconnectedness between various social categorisations and through this lens understanding how power and inequality operates and impacts traditionally oppressed groups (Bhalla & Agarwal, 2021).

One paper in particular that interested me the most conducted a cross-sectional online survey of LGBTQ+ people to collect data on their experiences in the pandemic and conduct regression analyses for a range of sociodemographic variables (Kneale & Bécares, 2021). This was one of the few papers that I had come across and had used a quantitative methodology to form conclusions.

The work done by Kneale and Bécares tried to assess the mental health and experiences of dicrimination among the LGBTQ+ people at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. They collected data from a cross-sectional online survey conducted in April-July of 2020 where they asked questions related to mental health, experiences of discrimination and other pandemic-related experiences. They used regression analysis on a range of sociodemographic variables to understand the relationship between sexual orientation and gender and mental health and experiences of discrimination. This study found that the majority of their participants had high levels of depressive symptoms. In addition to that, the LGBTQ+ community experienced high levels of stress, depression and discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through this extensive reading on the pandemic experiences of the transgender community, it is clear that there has been a lot of studies and papers written on the pandemic experiences of the communities marginalized on the basis of gender identities and sexualities in India. Most of them have used a qualitative method to form conclusions with some interviewing and learning about the different stories and experiences in-depth while others reading articles, papers and journals published on PubMed, PsycINFO, Medline and Google Scholar to write an extensive and elaborate literature review (Philip, 2021). These qualitative studies have given us enough

evidence that prove that pre-existing stigma, inequalities and violence against these communities had intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the quantitative studies we came across also used data collected through a qualitative approach and made inferences on the basis of that. But one very important means of communication that was significant during the pandemic is never mentioned by any of the studies described above, that is, communication through social media.

Social media platforms reveal information that might not be available in data obtained from other sources. These platforms have their own norms, their own way of expressing things and the data obtained from such platforms provide insights which cannot be found elsewhere. In addition to this, they are a great medium through which people stay in touch with their loved ones, form new connections by meeting new people, share their life stories, find people with common interests, in short, these spaces bring the world a little closer and makes it easier for people to express themselves and share their stories with everyone else.

Just like everyone else, communities marginalized on the basis of their gender identity or expression also took their issues online and more so during the pandemic. Social media platforms like Twitter, Reddit, Instagram and Facebook have been the major platforms where experiences of everyone during the pandemic can be found. Consequently, crucial debates and discussions from the pandemic crisis have been developed on these platforms making them a great primary source for data collection.

All the above mentioned studies used semi-structured interviews, structured interviews or surveys to collect their date during the lockdown or post-lockdown. As mentioned, social media was a means through which everyone stayed connected and a place where they asked for help due to its great reach. By using data available on social media, it becomes easier to understand the experiences of a number of people not situated in one particular geographical location. It helps us capture the experiences of trans people differently than what has been done till now. Using this social media data as my primary data source, I would then proceed to conduct regression analysis where my variables would be the time period and other socio-demographic variables. By using a computational tool like regression analyses, the experiences of the trans community can be captured in a better and a more organized way and can add to the existing knowledge collection on the trans people pandemic experiences.

Thus, in this project, I will be reviewing "No outlaws in the gender galaxy" (Shah et al., 2015) along with around 10 articles on the pandemic experiences of the transgender communities in India. The purpose of this review is to understand the key questions that have been posed and addressed in the scholarship on transgender people in the context of the pandemic.

In short , this project will aim to do the following :

- To understand what are the most widely shared pandemic experiences of transgender people in India on social media
- To assess and analyse what the realities of transgender people have been during the pandemic, and what that reveals about their place in the Indian polity
- To gauge how effective the use of computational tools is in the study of gender, particularly in the context of marginalized communities

Through computational analysis of social media data about transgender pandemic experiences, we will recieve insights which are unique and different from what has been observed so far. I will also relate and interpret my findings and results from the computational analysis thus doing a solid analysis and reaching legit conclusions.

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