

**TRANSPHOBIA IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EXPLORING THE
EXPERIENCES AND RESILIENCE OF TRANSGENDER
STUDENTS IN KERALA
A STUDY CONDUCTED IN THIRUVANANTHAPURAM DISTRICT**

*A Dissertation Submitted to the University of Kerala in the Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master of Arts Degree
Examination in Sociology*

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DECLARATION

I, **VAISHNAVI ANILKUMAR** do hereby declare that the Dissertation Titled **TRANSPHOBIA IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES AND RESILIENCE OF TRANSGENDER STUDENTS IN KERALA: A STUDY CONDUCTED IN THIRUVANANTHAPURAM DISTRICT** is based on the original work carried out by me and submitted to the University of Kerala during the year 2022-2024 towards partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree Examination in Sociology. It has not been submitted for the award of any degree, diploma, fellowship or other similar title of recognition before any University or anywhere else.

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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled **TRANSPHOBIA IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES AND RESILIENCE OF TRANSGENDER STUDENTS IN KERALA A STUDY CONDUCTED IN THIRUVANANTHAPURAM DISTRICT** is a record of genuine work done by **MS. VAISHNAVI ANILKUMAR** Fourth semester Master of Sociology student of this college under my supervision and guidance and that it is hereby approved for submission.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the experiences of transgender students within educational settings, with a focus on understanding the challenges they face, the coping mechanisms they employ, and the effectiveness of institutional policies designed to support them. Despite increased awareness and efforts toward inclusivity, transgender students continue to encounter significant obstacles, including transphobia, misgendering, and exclusion from both peers and faculty.

The research is grounded in a qualitative approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews with transgender students from various educational institutions in Kerala. Through these interviews, the study gets into the lived experiences of the students, capturing the complexities of their daily lives within academic environments. Key areas of exploration include the social dynamics of student interactions, the role of faculty and administration in either supporting or hindering inclusivity, and the availability of gender-neutral facilities and other supportive resources.

Findings reveal that while some institutions have made steps in creating transgender-friendly environments, many students still experience significant barriers to full participation in academic and social life. These barriers include intentional misgendering, lack of adequate facilities, and insufficient support from both peers and faculty. The study highlights the resilience and agency of transgender students who, regardless of these challenges, continue to advocate for their rights and well-being within educational spaces.

The insights gathered from this research contribute to a deeper understanding of the ongoing struggles and successes of transgender students in Kerala. The study also offers recommendations for educational institutions to better support transgender students, ensuring a more inclusive and equitable learning environment for all.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions are viewed as spaces of knowledge, inclusivity, and progressive thought. Sometimes these ideas often clash with the realities experienced by marginalized communities. Among these communities' transgender individuals face unique challenges that go beyond academic performance. The experience of transphobia within educational settings can be affecting not only just the academic success but also the overall well-being and sense of belonging of transgender students. Transphobia, which includes a range of negative attitudes, behaviors, and systemic barriers against transgender individuals, is a major issue that influences the educational journey of these students. Countries as progressing recognize this as something that hinders the overall growth and well-being of its people comes up with various legal measures, in India where the landmark NALSA judgement of 2014 affirmed the rights of transgender persons but still the social acceptance of transgender individuals remain a question. This gap between legal progress and social acceptance becomes particularly evident in educational settings, where transgender students often help themselves from an environment that is not fully inclusive or supportive.

The experiences of transphobia in educational institutions are not just an issue of individual prejudices but is often rooted in institutional practices, policies, and cultures that failed to accommodate or accept or to respect transgender identities. It is embedded in the institution itself. It includes the lack of gender-neutral washrooms, fill out forms that only offers the male and female option or policies that don't recognize the needs of transgender students. These might seem minuet but they can create an environment where the transgender students may feel excluded or invisible.

In recent years, the visibility of transgender individuals has increased significantly, due to the social movements advocating for equal rights and recognition. But still, this increased visibility has also been met with resistance, exhibiting in various forms of discrimination and exclusion, particularly within educational settings. The resilience of transgender students in the face of transphobia is a crucial area of study, as it sheds light on the strategies they employ to cope with discrimination and the factors that enable them to continue their education. By examining these aspects, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the experiences of

transgender students in higher education and to inform the development of more effective policies and practices that support their success and well-being.

The unique socio-cultural context of Kerala, a state known for its high literacy rates and progressive social policies, this study provides an opportunity to explore how transgender students deals the challenges of transphobia within a supposedly inclusive environment. The focus on ongoing college students of Kerala University colleges in the Thiruvananthapuram District allows for an in-depth examination of the experiences of transgender students within a specific institutional context, providing insights that can inform broader discussions on transphobia and resilience in higher education.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The struggle for transgender rights has seen a notable milestone in recent years, but the journey toward full inclusion remains filled with challenges, notably in the field of education. Transgender students often encounter institutional barriers and social stigma that hinder their educational experiences. The impact of these barriers is well-documented in academic literature, highlighting the need for focused research on the resilience strategies employed by transgender students to overcome these challenges.

In the Indian context, the educational experiences of transgender students are shaped by a complex interplay of social, cultural, and institutional factors. According to a report by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) titled "Making India Transgender Inclusive: An In-Depth Analysis of the Education Sector in India", transgender students face significant hurdles, including "discrimination from peers and faculty, lack of access to gender-neutral facilities, and a general lack of understanding and sensitivity towards transgender issues within educational institutions" (NHRC, 2018, p. 45). These issues contribute to high dropout rates and lower academic performance among transgender students compared to their cisgender peers.

A piece of research in (2017) underscores the systemic nature of these challenges, noting that the absence of inclusive policies and practices within educational institutions often forces transgender students to either conform to gender norms or face isolation and harassment. This environment not only affects their academic achievements but also their mental health and social integration, leading to a cycle of marginalization and exclusion.

There is also a growing body of research that highlights the resilience of transgender students. For example, Singh, Hays, and Watson (2011) in their seminal work "Resilience among Transgender Youth: Voices of Strength and Struggle" emphasize that "transgender youth develop unique coping mechanisms, often relying on peer networks and advocacy groups to navigate hostile environments" (p. 231). This resilience, however, is often born out of necessity rather than institutional support, raising questions about the adequacy of current policies and practices.

In Kerala, known for its progressive stance on social issues, the situation of transgender students presents an interesting paradox. While the state has implemented policies aimed at supporting transgender individuals, such as the Kerala Transgender Policy of 2015, the practical implementation of these policies in educational institutions remains inconsistent. As noted by Bhaskaran (2019) in "Transgender Rights in Kerala: Policy versus Reality," "there is a significant gap between the progressive policies on paper and the lived experiences of transgender students, who continue to face discrimination and lack access to adequate support systems" (p. 82).

This study aims to explore this gap by focusing on the resilience strategies employed by transgender students within the higher education institutions of Kerala. By examining how these students navigate the challenges posed by transphobia, this research seeks to contribute to the broader understanding of the effectiveness of existing policies and the areas where further intervention is needed. The findings will not only add to the academic discourse on transgender issues but also provide practical insights for those who striving to create more inclusive educational environments.

1.3 GENDER IDENTITY AS TRANSGENDER – UNDERSTANDING CONCEPT

Gender identity is a fundamental aspect of human life, shaping how individuals perceive themselves and are perceived by others within society. It refers to a person's deeply felt internal experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth. Understanding gender identity requires an exploration of both its psychological and social dimensions, recognizing that it is not a fixed attribute but rather a dynamic and personal experience.

1.3.1 Defining Gender Identity

Gender identity is distinct from biological sex, which is typically assigned at birth based on physical characteristics. As Butler (1990) argues in "Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity," gender is performative, meaning it is constituted through repeated actions, behaviors, and social interactions (p. 25). This perspective challenges the binary notion of gender, which traditionally categorizes individuals strictly as male or female. Instead, gender identity encompasses a broad spectrum, including identities such as transgender, non-binary, genderqueer, and more.

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), gender identity is "a component of a person's identity that describes their experience of being male, female, a blend of both, or neither, and can correspond with or differ from the sex they were assigned at birth" (APA, 2015, p. 14). This definition underscores the variability of gender identity and the importance of respecting each individual's self-identification.

1.3.2 The Development of Gender Identity

The development of gender identity begins early in life and is influenced by a complex interplay of biological, psychological, and social factors. According to Bem's (1993) "The Lenses of Gender," children begin to form an understanding of gender roles and expectations through socialization processes within their families, schools, and media (p. 78). These social expectations often reinforce traditional gender norms, which can be restrictive for those whose gender identity does not align with these norms.

For transgender individuals, the realization of their gender identity often involves navigating a world that is not always accepting or understanding. Lev's (2004) work "Transgender Emergence: Therapeutic Guidelines for Working with Gender-Variant People and Their Families" emphasizes the challenges transgender people face during this process, particularly the internal conflict and external pressures to conform to societal expectations (p. 112). Lev also highlights the importance of supportive environments in the healthy development of a transgender person's gender identity.

1.3.3 Social and Cultural Conceptions of Gender Identity

Cultural perceptions of gender identity vary widely across different societies. In many Western contexts, the dominant narrative has traditionally centered around a binary understanding of gender. Somehow non-Western cultures often recognize a more fluid and diverse range of gender identities. For example, the Hijra community in South Asia has long been recognized as a third gender, distinct from male and female. Nanda (1999), in her book "Neither Man Nor Woman: The Hijras of India," explores the social and religious roles of Hijras, highlighting how gender identity is culturally constructed and varies significantly across societies (p. 58).

In India, the legal recognition of the third gender, following the 2014 NALSA judgment, marked a significant step towards acknowledging the diversity of gender identities. As Agrawal (2020) notes in "Transgender Rights and Recognition in India," legal recognition alone does not necessarily translate into social acceptance or equal rights (p. 104). The ongoing struggle for transgender rights in India reflects the broader challenges of reconciling traditional cultural norms with evolving understandings of gender identity.

1.3.4 Gender Identity and Educational Settings

Educational settings play a critical role in shaping and affirming students' gender identities. However, these environments can also be sites of exclusion and marginalization for transgender students. As Spade (2011) points out in "Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law," the structures within educational institutions often reflect and reinforce cisnormative standards, making it difficult for transgender students to fully express their gender identity (p. 89). This can express in various ways, including the lack of gender-neutral facilities, the enforcement of dress codes that align with binary gender norms, and the absence of inclusive curricula that reflect the experiences of transgender individuals.

The importance of supportive educational environments is echoed in studies such as that by Singh, Meng, and Hansen (2014) in "It's Already Hard Enough: Transgender Students Speak Out About the Harsh Realities of Their Educational Experiences." They found that transgender students often feel isolated and unsupported, which can have a detrimental impact on their mental health and academic performance (p. 273). Conversely, when educational institutions actively work to create inclusive spaces, transgender students are more likely to succeed academically and socially.

Understanding gender identity is crucial for recognizing the challenges faced by transgender students in educational settings. By acknowledging the complexity and fluidity of gender identity, educators and policymakers can better address the needs of transgender students, creating environments where all students can thrive. This section provides the foundation for exploring how transphobia impacts the educational experiences of transgender students and the resilience strategies they employ to navigate these challenges.

1.4 TRANSPHOBIA

Transphobia, broadly defined as the irrational fear, hatred, or aversion toward transgender people, is a pervasive social issue that manifests in various forms, from individual prejudice to systemic discrimination. Understanding transphobia is essential for addressing the challenges faced by transgender individuals, particularly in institutional settings such as education, where the impacts of transphobia can be deeply detrimental.

1.4.1 Defining Transphobia

Transphobia is a complex phenomenon that includes a range of negative attitudes, behaviors, and policies directed toward transgender individuals. These attitudes often stem from rigid, binary understandings of gender, which do not accommodate identities that fall outside of the traditional male-female dichotomy. Stryker (2008), in her influential work "Transgender History," defines transphobia as "the various ways in which people are marginalized, discriminated against, or subjected to violence because their gender identity or expression does not align with societal norms" (p. 91). This definition underscores the multifaceted nature of transphobia, encompassing both overt acts of discrimination and more subtle forms of bias and exclusion.

According to Serano (2007) in "Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity," transphobia is deeply intertwined with societal gender norms, particularly the rigid enforcement of gender binaries and the devaluation of femininity. Serano argues that "transphobia is not just a matter of individual prejudice, but a systemic issue rooted in the broader cultural devaluation of transgender identities and non-conforming gender expressions" (p. 42). This perspective highlights the importance of addressing both individual and institutional forms of transphobia in efforts to create more inclusive environments.

Transphobia can be expressed in various ways, ranging from interpersonal interactions to institutional policies and practices. On an interpersonal level, transgender individuals may experience verbal harassment, physical violence, or social ostracism. These experiences are often compounded by the lack of legal protections and social support systems, leaving transgender individuals vulnerable to ongoing discrimination and abuse.

Institutional transphobia refers to the ways in which policies, practices, and structures within organizations and society at large perpetuate discrimination against transgender people. As Namaste (2000) discusses in "Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgender People," institutional transphobia can be seen in the exclusion of transgender people from gender-specific services, the lack of recognition of their gender identities in legal documents, and the absence of transgender-inclusive policies in workplaces and educational institutions (p. 33). Namaste emphasizes that this form of transphobia is often more insidious because it is embedded within the very systems that are supposed to provide protection and support.

In educational settings, transphobia can take many forms, from the refusal to use a student's correct pronouns to the lack of gender-neutral facilities. McBride (2017), in "The Missing Majority: Transgender Students and the Systemic Neglect in Education," highlights how "transgender students are frequently subjected to hostile environments in schools and universities, where transphobic attitudes among peers and staff are often tolerated or ignored" (p. 57). This neglect not only affects the educational experiences of transgender students but also contributes to a broader culture of exclusion and marginalization.

1.4.2 Impact of Transphobia on Transgender Students

The impact of transphobia on transgender students is profound, affecting their academic performance, mental health, and overall well-being. Research has shown that transgender students who experience transphobia are more likely to suffer from anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. For instance, a study by Kosciw et al. (2015) in the "National School Climate Survey" found that "over 70% of transgender students reported feeling unsafe at school due to their gender identity, leading to higher absenteeism rates and lower academic outcomes" (p. 38). This highlights the direct correlation between transphobia and the academic challenges faced by transgender students.

Transgender students often face barriers to social integration within educational institutions. As Singh, Meng, and Hansen (2014) noted in their research on transgender students' experiences, "the pervasive presence of transphobia in educational settings creates an environment where transgender students are less likely to participate in extracurricular activities, form peer relationships, or seek out support from faculty" (p. 275). This isolation further exacerbates the difficulties faced by transgender students, making it harder for them to succeed both academically and socially.

1.4.3 Addressing Transphobia in Educational Institutions

Efforts to address transphobia in educational institutions must be multifaceted, involving changes at both the policy level and within the school culture. The introduction of anti-discrimination policies that explicitly include gender identity is a crucial step in combating transphobia. Moreover, training for educators and staff on transgender issues can help create a more inclusive environment where transphobia is actively challenged rather than passively tolerated.

Graham (2019), in "Educating Against Transphobia: Best Practices for Schools," advocates for the integration of transgender-inclusive curricula, which not only educates students about gender diversity but also affirms the identities of transgender students (p. 102). Graham argues that "education is a powerful tool in dismantling transphobic attitudes, as it challenges the stereotypes and misinformation that often underlie prejudice" (p. 103).

However, policy changes alone are not enough. Creating a supportive and inclusive environment for transgender students requires a commitment to cultural change within educational institutions. This includes fostering a climate of respect and acceptance, where diversity is celebrated, and all students feel valued and supported.

Transphobia remains a significant barrier to the full inclusion of transgender students in educational settings. Understanding its applications and impacts is essential for developing effective strategies to support transgender students and create truly inclusive educational environments. By addressing both the individual and institutional dimensions of transphobia, educators and policymakers can work towards an education system that is not only free of discrimination but also affirming of all students' identities.

1.5 ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN PROMOTING GENDER INCLUSIVITY

Educational institutions hold a significant responsibility in shaping the social and cultural attitudes of future generations. In the context of transgender rights and inclusivity, these institutions are uniquely positioned to create environments where all students, regardless of their gender identity, can thrive.

One of the key roles educational institutions can play is in raising awareness and educating the campus community about gender diversity. This includes implementing sensitization programs that help students, faculty, and staff understand the challenges faced by transgender individuals and the importance of respecting and supporting their identities. For example, initiatives like gender-neutral restrooms, inclusive language in communication, and addressing individuals by their chosen names and pronouns are simple yet powerful steps that can make a difference in creating a more inclusive environment.

Furthermore, educational institutions should actively work to ensure that their policies and practices are inclusive of transgender students. This includes reviewing existing policies related to admission, accommodation, and campus activities to remove any discriminatory barriers. Faculty and staff training is also essential, as it equips educators with the knowledge and tools to support transgender students effectively. Studies have shown that when teachers and administrators are educated about transgender issues, it leads to a more supportive and understanding environment for transgender students (Clark, 2020).

Student-led initiatives and support groups can also play a crucial role in promoting gender inclusivity on campus. These groups often provide safe spaces for transgender students to share their experiences, find solidarity, and advocate for their rights. The involvement of students in promoting inclusivity helps to foster a campus culture where diversity is celebrated rather than merely tolerated.

the effectiveness of these efforts largely depends on the commitment of educational institutions to not only implement policies but to actively enforce and support them. The lack of consistent enforcement can undermine the impact of these policies, leaving transgender students vulnerable to discrimination and exclusion. Therefore, it is imperative that educational institutions take a

proactive stance in promoting gender inclusivity, going beyond mere policy implementation to foster a truly inclusive and supportive environment for all students.

1.6 INTERSECTIONALITY IN TRANSGENDER EXPERIENCES

The concept of intersectionality is crucial in understanding the diverse experiences of transgender individuals. Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality refers to how different aspects of a person's identity—such as gender, race, class, caste, and sexuality—interact to create unique modes of discrimination and privilege. In the context of transgender individuals, their experiences of transphobia can be compounded by other forms of social marginalization.

For example, a transgender person who belongs to a lower caste or is from a marginalized ethnic group may face additional layers of discrimination that someone from a more privileged background might not encounter. These intersecting identities can significantly impact how transgender individuals experience and cope with transphobia. Studies have shown that transgender individuals from marginalized communities often face greater barriers in accessing education, healthcare, and employment, which in turn affects their ability to thrive in educational settings

In educational institutions, the lack of consideration for intersectionality can lead to policies and practices that fail to address the needs of all transgender students. For instance, while some policies might focus on gender inclusivity, they may not take into account how issues like caste discrimination or socioeconomic status intersect with gender identity. This can result in an incomplete understanding of the challenges faced by transgender students and the development of solutions that do not fully address their needs.

Understanding intersectionality allows for a more nuanced approach to supporting transgender students. It encourages educational institutions to consider the multiple identities that students hold and how these identities influence their experiences of inclusion or exclusion. By acknowledging and addressing intersectionality, educational institutions can develop more comprehensive and effective policies that support the diverse needs of all transgender students. It is understandable that recognizing and addressing intersectionality is essential for creating truly inclusive educational environments. It ensures that the unique experiences of all transgender students are considered, and that support systems are designed to meet the diverse needs of this community

1.7 STATE POLICY ON TRANSGENDER RIGHTS

The recognition and protection of transgender rights have gained significant attention in recent years, as governments around the world strive to address the historical marginalization and discrimination faced by transgender individuals. In India, the legal and policy framework for transgender rights has evolved considerably, reflecting both progress and ongoing challenges in the quest for equality.

1.7.1 Evolution of Transgender Rights in India

The journey toward recognizing transgender rights in India has been marked by a series of legal and policy developments. The landmark judgment by the Supreme Court of India in 2014, known as the NALSA (National Legal Services Authority) v. Union of India case, was a pivotal moment in the history of transgender rights in the country. The Supreme Court, in this judgment, recognized transgender people as a "third gender" and affirmed their fundamental rights under the Indian Constitution. The judgment also directed the central and state governments to take steps to ensure the full inclusion and participation of transgender individuals in society.

The NALSA judgment laid the foundation for the development of state policies aimed at protecting the rights of transgender individuals. It emphasized the need for affirmative action, including reservations in education and employment, and the provision of social welfare schemes to uplift the transgender community. The court also called for the establishment of transgender welfare boards at the state level to oversee the implementation of these measures.

1.7.2 The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019

Following the NALSA judgment, the Indian government enacted the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, as a legislative measure to safeguard the rights of transgender individuals. The Act aims to provide a legal framework for the protection of transgender persons from discrimination in various spheres of life, including education, employment, healthcare, and housing.

The Act prohibits discrimination against transgender individuals in employment, education, and access to public services. It also mandates the creation of welfare schemes and programs to support the community. However, the Act has been met with criticism from transgender activists and

scholars, who argue that certain provisions of the law are inadequate and fail to fully address the needs of the transgender community.

One of the major criticisms of the Act is the requirement for a transgender person to undergo a medical examination to obtain a certificate of identity. This provision has been seen as a violation of the right to self-identification, which was affirmed by the Supreme Court in the NALSA judgment. Critics argue that this requirement reinforces harmful stereotypes and undermines the dignity of transgender individuals.

1.7.3 State-Level Initiatives and Policies

In addition to the national legislation, several Indian states have taken proactive measures to support transgender rights. For example, the state of Kerala has been at the forefront of transgender rights advocacy, becoming the first state in India to introduce a Transgender Policy in 2015. Kerala's policy focuses on ensuring the social, economic, and educational empowerment of transgender individuals. It includes provisions for free sex reassignment surgery (SRS) in government hospitals, housing schemes, and the establishment of transgender justice boards.

Other states, such as Tamil Nadu, have also implemented welfare programs specifically targeting the transgender community. Tamil Nadu's Transgender Welfare Board, established in 2008, was one of the first of its kind in India and has been instrumental in providing social security, employment opportunities, and healthcare services to transgender individuals.

Despite these efforts, the implementation of state policies on transgender rights remains uneven across the country. Challenges such as lack of awareness, societal stigma, and bureaucratic hurdles continue to hinder the effective realization of transgender rights. Moreover, the absence of comprehensive anti-discrimination laws at the state level further exacerbates the vulnerability of transgender individuals to violence and exclusion.

1.7.4 The Role of Civil Society and Advocacy Groups

Civil society organizations and advocacy groups have played a crucial role in advancing transgender rights in India. These groups have been instrumental in raising awareness about the issues faced by the transgender community, challenging discriminatory laws and practices, and advocating for the inclusion of transgender voices in policy-making processes.

For instance, organizations like the Humsafar Trust and Sangama have been at the forefront of transgender rights activism, providing legal aid, healthcare services, and support to transgender individuals. These organizations have also been involved in capacity-building initiatives, helping transgender individuals to access education, employment, and social welfare schemes.

Advocacy efforts have also led to the inclusion of transgender persons in government advisory bodies and the drafting of policies that are more inclusive and representative of the transgender community's needs. However, the road ahead remains challenging, with the need for sustained advocacy to ensure that the rights of transgender individuals are fully recognized and protected.

While significant progress has been made in recognizing and protecting the rights of transgender individuals in India, several challenges remain. The legal and policy framework, although a step in the right direction, is still marred by gaps and inconsistencies that hinder its effectiveness. The lack of comprehensive anti-discrimination laws, the requirement for medical certification, and the uneven implementation of state policies are some of the key issues that need to be addressed. Going forward, there is a need for a more holistic approach to transgender rights, one that takes into account the intersectional nature of the discrimination faced by transgender individuals. This includes addressing the unique challenges faced by transgender individuals who belong to marginalized caste, religious, or economic groups. Moreover, there is a need for greater sensitization and training of government officials, healthcare providers, and educators to ensure that transgender individuals can access their rights without facing discrimination or stigma.

In conclusion, the state policy on transgender rights in India represents a significant step towards the recognition and protection of transgender individuals. However, the journey is far from complete. Continued advocacy, legal reform, and social change are necessary to ensure that transgender individuals can live with dignity, free from discrimination and violence.

1.8 STATEMENT OF THE STUDY

The study titled "Transphobia in Higher Education - Resilience of Transgender Students: A Study Conducted in Thiruvananthapuram District" seeks to explore the experiences of transgender students within the higher education system, focusing on the pervasive issue of transphobia and the strategies these students employ to navigate and resist such hostility. Despite significant legal advancements and growing societal awareness regarding transgender rights in India, transgender

individuals, particularly students, continue to face substantial barriers within educational institutions. These barriers manifest as both overt discrimination and subtle, insidious forms of exclusion that severely impact the academic performance, mental health, and overall well-being of transgender students. In a state like Kerala, which is often lauded for its progressive stance on education and social development, the persistence of transphobia in universities and colleges raises critical questions about the inclusivity of these institutions.

This study aims to address the gap in the existing literature by focusing specifically on the resilience of transgender students in Kerala University colleges, located within the Thiruvananthapuram district. It will examine the strategies these students use to cope with and resist transphobia, as well as evaluate the effectiveness of the policies and support systems implemented by educational institutions to foster a more inclusive environment.

The central problem this study addresses is the impact of transphobia on transgender students in higher education and the resilience strategies they adopt in response. The study is guided by the following key research questions:

1. How do daily experiences of transphobia impact the academic performance and social integration of transgender students?
2. How effective are the existing facilities and support systems at educational institutions in creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for transgender students?
3. What strategies do transgender students employ to cope with transphobia in educational settings?

By addressing these questions, the study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on transgender rights and inclusivity in higher education, offering insights that could inform policy reforms and institutional practices. The findings of this research are expected to not only illuminate the challenges faced by transgender students but also highlight their resilience and agency in the face of adversity. Study underscores the urgent need to address transphobia in educational institutions, particularly within the higher education system. It seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the experiences of transgender students in Kerala, thereby contributing to the ongoing efforts to create a more just and equitable society for all.

1.9 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is important because it sheds light on the experiences of transgender students in higher education, particularly in Kerala University colleges. While there have been efforts to support transgender individuals through policies and laws, many transgender students still face discrimination, prejudice, and isolation in educational settings. This study aims to understand these challenges and the ways in which transgender students deal with them.

The significance of this study lies in its focus on resilience—the ability of transgender students to overcome the obstacles they face in their daily lives at college. By exploring how these students cope with transphobia, the study provides valuable insights into their strengths, struggles, and strategies for survival. Understanding these aspects is crucial for developing better support systems and policies that can truly make educational institutions inclusive and welcoming for everyone, regardless of their gender identity.

This study is significant because it takes place in Kerala, a state known for its high literacy rate and progressive social policies. Examining transphobia in this context challenges the assumption that education alone can eliminate prejudice and discrimination. It highlights the need for more targeted interventions and education programs that address the specific issues faced by transgender individuals.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The concerns regarding the experiences and wellbeing of transgender students in higher education catch more attention and central to the discussions in literature and policy. In a country like India which guarantee its people with fundamental rights—the right to education in article 21A, expecting higher education system to be place where students irrespective of any other parameters can learn and grow equally. As transgenders being the minority community it is crucial to check on them. This chapter will cover the topics of inclusive education, lived experiences of transgender students and legal frameworks that supports Transgender Rights in India from the existing available literatures

2.2 EXPERIENCES OF TRANSGENDER STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN KERALA

2.2.1 The 2013 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth in our nation's school.

The study conducted by the GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network) provides a detailed understanding of the experiences of the student representatives of LGBTQ+ community across the United States. The survey monitors the educational environment for the LGBTQ+ students and focuses on several aspects including the existence of hostile school climates, and the impact of such climate on LGBTQ+ students. Also, the effectiveness of certain intervention and policies in shaping safer school environment.

The survey finds out that most students' including the transgender students are facing hostile environment in their schools. A percentage of 74 students of LQBTQ+ community are reported being verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation and 55% were harassed because of their gender expression. The study also put forward that a large number of students experienced physical violence such as pushing or shoving ad even physical assault were also reported which more severe violence just because of their sexual orientation and gender expression. All these have direct

negative impact on the academic performance and And mental health of these students. Most of the students try to escape from these by missing school day. The feeling of unsafe, and those who experienced higher levels of victimization were more likely to report lower grades, higher level depression and low self-esteem. And the survey also finds out negative school climate can lead to higher dropout rates among LGBTQ+ students.

The survey also finds a space to evaluate the role of school policies and the support provided by the school staffs in reducing the negative experiences of LGBTQ+ students. Schools providing rooms that are inclusive for transgender students with anti-bullying policies were found to have more positive outcomes. Of course, the presence of supportive and LGBTQ+ students club (such as Gay- Straight Alliance) have a great contribution to a safer and more welcoming school environment. Apart from this the survey also finds that less than half of the students attended school with comprehensive anti- bullying policies and even fewer had access to gender neutral bathroom or lock rooms.

This study identifies variations in school climate depending on geographic regions, school type, and demographics. The students in rural areas and those who are attending the religiously affiliated school reported higher levels of victimization compared to that of the students in urban or sexual school. This report also indicate that transgender students faced unique challenges such as misgendering and lack of access to facilities that aligns with their gender identity. The report concludes with a series of recommendations aimed at improving the school climate for LGBTQ+ students, including the implementation of comprehensive anti-bullying policies, the establishment of LGBTQ+ inclusive curricula, the provision for professional development for school staff to better support LGBTQ+ students, expansion of support networks etc.

2.2.2 Transgender Adults' Access to College Bathrooms and Housing and the Relationship to Suicidality.

This study also focuses on the challenges that transgender students are facing in college setting, particularly concerning access to bathrooms and housing facilities. The study also understands the troubling relationship between these challenges and suicidality among transgender students by providing a critical analysis of how institutional policies or the lack of gender segregated spaces like bathrooms and housing can affect on mental health and wellbeing of transgender individuals. Study reveals that transgender students frequently encounter certain barrier when attempting to

access gender segregated spaces such as bathrooms, rest rooms, dormitories in colleges. These barriers make the transgender students to use facilities corresponding to their sex assigned at birth which can make the situation worse, it can contribute to the feelings of exclusion and marginalization among transgender students.

A central focus of the study is the connection between lack of access to appropriate facilities and the mental health of transgender individuals. The authors found that that transgender students who experienced difficulty in accessing bathroom housing that aligns with their gender identity were more likely to report mental health issues, including depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts which can impact their overall well-being. A large number of students are more likely to have considered or attempted suicide. Study highlights the urgent need for policies that address these issues to prevent such severe mental health outcomes.

2.2.3 Strength in the Face of Adversity: Resilience Strategies of Transgender Individuals

The study by Singh, Hays, and Watson try to shift the focus from the vulnerabilities of transgender individuals to their strengths and resilience. It highlights the adaptive strategies that the transgender individuals used to cope with the obstacles they face particularly in relation to social stigma, discrimination, and marginalization. The study also underscores the vital role of supportive social environments and the need for systemic change to accelerate or help resilience among transgender individuals.

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2.2.4 Supporting Transgender and Gender Diverse Youth: Protection Against Emotional Distress and Substance Use.

The study examined the relationship between supportive environment with mental health and substance use behavior of transgender youth. Study explores how factors like family support, school connectedness, and access to gender affirming resources can be able to protect the emotional well-being and substance usage among these youth, who are open to face significant challenges due the existing social inequality and stigma. The research found that transgender youth are at a higher risk of experiencing emotional distress such as depression, anxiety etc. while compared to cisgender youth. This was mainly due to the discrimination, victimization and social exclusion they face. It's also conveyed that transgender youth are more likely to engage in substance use, which can be a coping mechanism for dealing with all the negative experiences.

One of the critical findings of this study is the protective role of the supportive environment plays in the lives of transgender youth. School connectedness - feeling safe, accepted, and supported in the school environment was identified as a particular important protective factor. It also stresses the role of family support. When families are accepting and supportive of their child's gender identity, it greatly reduces the child's risk of depression, anxiety, and substance usage. And the access to gender affirming resources such as the ability to use preferred name and pronouns, access to gender neutral bathrooms, supportive counseling services was also shown to be crucial in protecting transgender youth. These resources can help them to feel validate and respected.

2.2.5 Trans in College: Transgender Students' Strategies for Navigating Campus Life and the Institutional Politics of Inclusion.

The focus of the book is on transgender students' real-life experiences as they balance their academic and social life. It looks how the students deal with the potentially non supportive college environment while maintaining their gender identities. This focus on their day-to-day life helps to understand the difficulties transgender students have on a deeper level. Study reveals how campus polices and cultures fails to accommodate their needs. The work criticizes that institutional flaws and suggest that many so-called inclusive policies do not address the root causes of marginalization.

One of the key themes in this book is how transgender students negotiate their gender identity in a variety of campus spaces. It describes the challenges involved in being visibly transgender in college, where students often have to make careful decisions about when and where to disclose their identities. Finding a safe spaces, connecting with supportive peers, and building networks of allies among faculty members and staff. These strategies are important for managing environments that may not always be welcoming and affirming.

This book also clarifies various institutional obstacles that transgender students must overcome. These include the poor health care services, policies that do not adequately recognize transgender identities. And explains how these barriers contribute to the ongoing marginalization of transgender students and create additional stress in everyday lives. The author's argument is that such challenges are not isolated incidents but are rooted in systemic issues that must be addressed to create truly inclusive educational environments.

The work also highlighted the resilience and resourcefulness of transgender students. It describes how these students create their own communities and support groups or networks, both inside and outside of campus. These networks provide much-needed emotional support, practical resources, and a sense of belonging, which are essential for their overall well-being and success in college. A part of work conveyed that the concept of inclusion is often practiced in higher education. Many institutions provide a version of inclusion that is largely performative and does not address the deeper, systematic issues that can marginalize transgender students. Instead of offering a genuine support. These efforts often result in token gestures that fails to bring meaningful change. The author calls for rethinking of inclusion polices and advocating for a more transformative approach that address the root cause of exclusion and inequality. And the notable thing is the author

portrayed not as a mere victim of exclusion but as active agents who resist marginalization and advocate for change.

2.3 LEGAL FRAMEWORKS SUPPORTING TRANSGENDER RIGHTS IN INDIA

2.3.1 The NALSA Judgement, 2014

The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) vs. Union of India judgement delivered by the Supreme Court of India on April 15 2014, is a landmark ruling that recognized the rights of transgender persons and provided them with a legal status distinct from male or female categories. This judgement is considered a pivotal moment in the struggle for transgender rights in India, laying the foundation for future legal reforms and policies aimed at ensuring equality and dignity for transgender persons.

The Supreme Court recognized transgender persons as a third gender separate from the binary categories of male and female. This legal recognition was significant because it marked the first time that transgender persons were acknowledged as a distinct gender category by the Indian judiciary. The Court held that self-identification of gender is a fundamental right under the Indian Constitution. It allowed transgender persons to identify as male, female, or third gender, based on their self - perception.

The judgement affirmed that transgender persons are entitled to fundamental rights guaranteed by the Indian Constitution, including the right to equality (article14), the right to non- discrimination (article15), and the right to personal liberty(article21). The Court held that discrimination based on gender identity violates the right to equality and equal protection under the law. Therefore, it mandated that transgender persons should not be subjected to any form of discrimination in education, employment, healthcare and other spheres of life.

The Supreme Court directed the central and state government to take affirmative action to ensure the socio-economic and educational upliftment's of transgender persons. This includes providing reservation in education and public employment, similar to those given to socially and educationally backward classes. This judgement also called for the creation of social welfare schemes specifically aimed at addressing the unique needs of transgender persons, including healthcare, housing and public facilities like toilets.

The NALSA Judgement emphasized that gender identity is an integral part of one's personality and is protected under the right to dignity. It ruled that transgender persons have the right to decide their self-identified gender and that this should be respected by the state. This Court directed that transgender persons must be issued documents such as voters IDs, passports and driving licenses reflecting their self-identified gender.

The judgement called for legal recognition and protection against any form of violence, abuse, or harassment faced by transgender persons. It stressed the importance of sensitization programs for police, government officials, and the public to combat societal stigma and discrimination against transgender persons.

The Supreme Court directed the government to frame comprehensive legislation to address the right and needs of transgender persons. This directive eventually led to the formulation of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 which was enacted to protect the rights of transgender individuals and provide a mechanism for their social, economic, and educational inclusion. Also, the court stressed the importance of creating public awareness to remove the stigma associated with the transgender community. It recommended that the government and civil society conduct sensitization programs in schools, workplaces and public spaces to promote acceptance and Inclusivity.

The true essence of NALSA judgement empowered the Transgender community by providing them with a legal identity and access to fundamental rights. The judgement challenged societal norms and promoted a shift towards inclusivity and equality. Also laid the groundwork for subsequent policy reforms, including the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019, various state- Level policies, and welfare schemes aimed at uplifting transgender persons.

2.3.2 Census of India 2011 and Kerala Transgender Data (2014-15)

It was the census of 2011 which includes the category of other for the first time in India's census history that captured the data of transgender persons. This inclusion marked a significant step towards recognizing transgender people in official statistics.

National level data: 2011 census estimated around 4lakh 90thousand transgender people in India. After that many activists came forward with the argument that this number is under reported due to stigma and fear of disclosure.

Kerala transgender data (2014-15) following the census Kerala conducted its own survey on transgender population in the year, providing more detailed insights into the socio-economic conditions of the community in the state. This survey finds out that majority of transgender persons in Kerala lack access to educational and employment also faced widespread discrimination.

The data included in 2011 census was crucial for policymakers to understand the demographic realities and social needs of transgender peoples. The data serves as a foundation for creating targeted interventions such as the Kerala transgender policy 2015.

2.3.3 Kerala transgender policy 2015

Kerala became the first state India to introduce a comprehensive transgender policy in 2015. Following the supreme court NALSA judgement in 2014 which recognized transgender individuals as a third gender.

The policy of 2015 aims to end the stigma, discrimination and violence faced by transgender persons in the state. Their right to self-identify, access education, healthcare and employment and to live a life of dignity. The policy also includes setting up of shelter homes, providing skill development training, offering scholarships and creating transgender cells in every district to address and to provide support. It mandates the inclusion of gender-neutral bathrooms in public buildings and the sensitization of law enforcement agencies.

Specific provision made to ensure educational institutions are inclusive and supportive for transgender students. This includes guidelines for anti-discrimination policies, financial support and training for educators to handle transgender issues sensitively.

2.3.4 Kerala state literacy mission 2017

The state literacy mission survey conducted by Kerala government was a notable initiative that focuses on understanding the educational, social and economic status of transgenders in Kerala. The survey was one of the first comprehensive efforts in India to gather data specifically about the transgender's community. Reveals that a significant percentage of transgender people in Kerala face severe social exclusion and had dropped out of formal education due to bullying and discrimination. About 50 percentage of the respondents reported discontinuing their education because of an unwelcoming school environment. Many transgender individuals were found to be

unemployed due to discrimination and lack of skills. The survey indicates the need for vocational training and skill development programs to enhance their employability.

Based on the findings that the state government implemented more inclusive policies, provides scholarship and conduct sensation programs and conduct programs in educational institutions to create a more supportive environment for transgender students. This survey played a critical role in shaping Kerala subsequent transgender policy initiatives and informed broader debates about transgender right in India.

2.3.5 The transgenders person (protection of rights) act 2019

The transgender persons (protection of rights) act of 2019 is a landmark legislation in India. Which aims at protecting the rights of transgender persons. The act gives a comprehensive legal framework for ensuring equality, nondiscrimination and social inclusion for transgenders. The act recognized the right to transgender persons to self-identify their gender and it allows them to obtain a certificate to identify which they can seek from the district magistrate, which serves as proof to their gender identity.

The Act prohibits discrimination against transgender persons in the streams of education, employment, healthcare and access to public services. Educational institutions funded or recognized by the government are liable to provide inclusive environment and to prevent discrimination in any forms against transgender students.

The act mandates that the government and private healthcare providers offer medical facilities to transgender individuals including sex reassignment surgery and hormone therapy. It also called for the welfare measures to support transgender persons in terms of employment, education and social security. The act proposed an establishment of a national council for transgenders to monitor and evaluate the impact the policies and programs on transgender community to ensure their effectiveness after the implementation.

2.3.6 UGC guidelines in favor of transgender students

The University Grants Commission (UGC) of India, a body under the ministry of education has issued several guidelines to ensure nondiscrimination against transgender students in higher education institutions. Recognizing the challenges faced by the transgender individuals in

accessing education the UGC are part of broad efforts to make campuses more inclusive. The UGC mandates that higher education institutions to create an inclusive environment free from harassment and provide equal opportunities in all aspects of academic life. The institution is encouraged to create gender neutral facilities and hostel, provide gender sensitive counseling and use inclusive language in official document, these measures ensure a positive change.

The UGC also recommended to providing scholarship and financial aid for the transgenders students to reduce the financial burden and encourage them to pursue higher education. This underscores the importance of inclusive education as a source of social empowerment.

2.3.7. Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules, 2020

Following the enactment of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019 the Indian Government notified the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) to clarify and streamline the implementation of the act. The Rules provide detailed guidelines on the process for transgender persons to apply for a gender identity certificate, which is critical for accessing legal recognition and various rights under the Act. This includes procedures for issuing certificates and identity cards, as well as measures to protect transgender individuals from discrimination in educational institutions, healthcare settings, workplaces and public places.

The Rules have faced criticism from the Transgender community for being overly bureaucratic and not fully respecting the principle of self- identification. The rules originally required a medical examination for gender change certification, which was contested and led to further clarifications emphasizing the self- identification process without medical intervention.

2.3.8 National Council for Transgender Persons 2020.

In August 2020, the Indian Government constituted the National Council for Transgender Persons to advise on and monitor policies concerning transgender rights. The Council is tasked with advising the central government on the formulation and monitoring of policies, legislation and projects with respect to transgender persons. It also reviews the impact of existing policies and ensures that grievances are addressed promptly. The Council includes representatives from various from various ministries, State governments and five members from the Transgender community, ensuring that transgender voices are included in policy making processes.

2.3.9 State- Level Policy Updates

Some Indian states have introduced or updated policies to provide targeted support to transgender communities:

Kerala Transgender Policy Updates, 2023

Kerala which was the first state to adopt a transgender policy in 2015, has continued to build on its commitment to transgender rights. In 2023 the state government announced new measures to expand healthcare access, provide housing schemes, and increases scholarships for transgender students. The Kerala government has also mandated that all state- run universities and colleges must have a transgender cell to address grievances and promote inclusion.

Tamil Nadu Transgender Welfare Policy, 2023

Tamil Nadu has also revised its policies to strengthen welfare measures. The State announced a comprehensive scheme that includes pension scheme for elderly transgender persons, free sex reassignment surgeries in government hospitals, and increased representation in government jobs. Tamil Nadu measures are recognized for their inclusivity and effectiveness.

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 Implementation

While the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 itself is not specially a transgender policy, its implementation includes significant focus on inclusive education for marginalized groups, including transgender students.

Inclusivity in Education

The NEP 2020 promotes inclusive practices in schools and higher education institutions, advocating for gender - neutral bathrooms, transgender sensitization programs for teachers, and the inclusion of gender studies in the curriculum. The policy focus on creating an inclusive environment for all genders aligns with broader legal and social reforms for transgender rights in India.

Recent Court Ruling and Directions

Indian courts have been proactive in recent years in interpreting and expanding the rights of transgender persons:

The Madras High Court issued several progressive guidelines for guidelines for protecting the rights of the LGBTQ+ community, particularly Transgender individuals. These guidelines include mandatory sensitization of law enforcement agencies and the judiciary, ensuring that educational institutions and workplaces are inclusive, and prohibiting any form of medical "conversion therapy".

The Kerala High Court directed educational institutions in the state to take proactive steps to provide an inclusive environment for transgender students, including setting up gender neutral hostels and sensitizing staff and students about transgender rights.

Healthcare Policies for Transgender Persons

In addition to legal and educational reforms there have been significant updates in healthcare policies. The Central Government expanded the Ayushman Bharat Health insurance scheme to include transgender persons, providing free health coverage for specific medical procedures, including sex reassignment surgeries.

Kerala 'Mazhavillu' Project 2023, which was initially launched to provide free healthcare to transgender persons, has been expanded in 2023 to cover more districts and include mental health services, recognizing the unique psychological challenges faced by transgender individuals.

2.4. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND TRANSGENDER STUDENTS

The concept of inclusive education to its core ensuring that all the students irrespective of their identity or sexuality or background have equitable access to learning opportunities, feel valued, supported, and are able to ensure their participation in social and academic activities. The experience of transgender students representing marginalized sections highlights the importance of inclusive education. Opinion on inclusive education for transgender students put forwarded highlights several key areas including the role of educational policies in contributing social inclusion. The inclusive policies are formulated in a way to ensure that transgender students have the same rights and opportunities as their cisgender peers. It not only covers the access to education but also protection from discrimination, availability and access to facilities that match their gender identity and the recognition of their chosen pronouns and names. Studies have shown that where educational institutions implement and provide welcoming and supportive rooms for transgender students, it can significantly improve their sense of security and belonging also reduce the

incidence of bullying and harassment (Smith and Jones, 2020) These policies also help to create awareness among the campus community and promote and celebrate respect, understanding and diversity.

Studies suggest that effective implementation is crucial. Educational institutions not only adopt inclusive policies but need to work actively enforce them. For example, there are enough college that claims their institutes are following gender neutrality and transgender friendly but they haven't taken any efforts to ensure the seat that are reserved for the transgenders are filled. Beyond this it is crucial to provide awareness and training for the faculty members, students and non-teaching staffs on transgender issues, as well as ensuring counseling and peer group support groups, specifically tailored to the needs of transgender students (Miller, 2019)

The role of students friendly or students -led initiative is of vital importance. Peer group support groups, LGBTQIA+ clubs, advocacy organization within educational institutions can bring so many differences. These collectives can create safe spaces where transgender students can come and connect with others, find support, advocate for their rights. Studies indicate that when transgender students got access to these support networks, they are more likely to feel included and can bring positive academic success (Petel, 2018).

Ensuring inclusion is essential and literatures recommend it through addressing the remaining challenges despite the positive developments. It's a call to discuss the lack of gender-neutral facilities, insensitive attitude from peers and staff, the absence of transgender role models in academia. These challenges can lead to the feeling of isolation and alienation, which can negatively contribute to the academic performance and mental health (Reddy 2021).

In recent years, Kerala has emerged as a pioneer in implementing inclusive education, particularly with respect to gender neutrality. Kerala's initiative to revise school textbooks to be gender-neutral is a groundbreaking step in promoting inclusivity. This effort involves the removal of gender stereotypes from educational materials, which traditionally reinforced specific roles for boys and girls. The textbooks now depict men and women participating equally in all spheres of life, such as fathers cooking or mothers working outside the home. This change is not merely symbolic but a deliberate effort to instill values of equality in students from a young age. Research on gender-neutral educational materials suggests that such interventions can significantly reduce gender biases among children and promote a more egalitarian mindset

Another significant initiative in Kerala's push for inclusive education is the introduction of gender-neutral uniforms in schools. The Valayanchirangara Government Lower Primary School in Ernakulam is a notable example, where students of all genders wear the same attire—3/4th shorts and shirts. This policy is aimed at breaking down the traditional barriers associated with gendered clothing, allowing students to express themselves freely and comfortably. The move has been met with both praise and resistance, highlighting the deep-rooted nature of gender norms in society. Studies on the impact of gender-neutral uniforms indicate that such policies can contribute to a more inclusive school environment, where students are less likely to be judged based on their appearance and more likely to focus on their education. These initiatives have significant implications for transgender students, who often face discrimination and exclusion in educational settings. By adopting gender-neutral policies in textbooks and uniforms, Kerala is creating a more welcoming environment for transgender students, helping them feel accepted and valued.

The integration of queer narratives into educational curricula is a crucial step towards fostering inclusive education. A notable example is the inclusion of a poem from *Pennappan*, a book authored by Aadhi, in the syllabus of Mahatma Gandhi University, Kerala. Published on December 7, 2022, *Pennappan* is a significant contribution to gender and queer literature, offering a profound exploration of experiences within the queer community. The inclusion of this poem in the university syllabus is not just an academic gesture but also a powerful statement about the importance of queer voices in shaping social and cultural narratives. It is not only fostering a more inclusive environment but also challenging the traditional boundaries of educational content, which has historically excluded marginalized voices.

This initiative aligns with the broader goals of inclusive education, which seeks to ensure that all students, regardless of their gender identity, are represented and validated within the educational system. As scholars like Mohan and Ramesh (2023) have noted, the visibility of transgender narratives in academic settings is crucial for promoting understanding and empathy among students. Moreover, it serves as an essential tool for combating transphobia and fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 TITLE OF THE STUDY

TRANSPHOBIA IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES AND RESILIENCE OF TRANSGENDER STUDENTS IN KERALA: A STUDY CONDUCTED IN THIRUVANANTHAPURAM DISTRICT.

3.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- i) How daily experiences of transphobia impact the academic performance and social integration of transgender students?
- ii) How effective are the existing facilities and support systems at educational institutions in creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for transgender students?
- iii) what strategies do transgender students employ to cope with transphobia in educational settings?

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Bryan (2012) a research design provides a structured framework for the collection and analysis of data, guiding the researcher in addressing the research questions effectively. In this study, an explorative case study design is employed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the experiences, challenges, and coping strategies of transgender students in higher education institute in Kerala. A case study design allows for an in-depth exploration of a specific social phenomenon and here it is the lives of the transgender students which enabling a detailed examination of complexities and unique aspect that characterize their educational experiences.

The case study approach involves a deep and focus investigation of case or few selected cases, which could range from individuals and groups to specific events or social units (Yin, 2018). By concentrating on the case of ongoing transgender students in Kerala university colleges, the effectiveness of existing support systems and the strategies they use to cope within the educational environment.

As Stake (1995) suggest, case study is particularly effective for exploring phenomenon that require an understanding of context specific variables and individual experiences. This research aims to go deep to understanding of distinct qualities and circumstances that shape the educational experiences of transgender students in Kerala, including the cultural, social and institutional factors that impact their lives. One of the advantages of the case study approach is its ability to capture the depth, richness and subjectivity inherent in the experiences of the individual being studied (Creswell, 2013). Through detailed interviews and document analysis, this research seeks to understand the emotions, perceptions and coping mechanisms of transgender students, providing a complete understanding of how they deal with the discrimination and exclusion within their educational settings. Using a case study design, the researcher aims to identify the variables that influence these students' social and academic life including how they deal with transphobic environment.

3.4 RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a **qualitative research approach** with a descriptive focus to explore the lived experiences and challenges of transgender students in higher education settings in Thiruvananthapuram city Kerala. Qualitative research is particularly suited for studies that seek to understand complex social phenomena from the perspective of those who experience them (Creswell, 2013). To gather in-depth data, **semi-structured interviews** were conducted with transgender students. Semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility, enabling the researcher to probe deeper into specific topics while maintaining a general structure of the questions to ensure consistency across interviews (Kvale, 1996). This approach is ideal for capturing the personal narratives and subjective experiences of transgender students, especially in understanding how they deal transphobia within educational settings.

Purposive Sampling method was employed in this method involves selecting participants who are specifically relevant to the research questions. In this study, the initial respondents were identified by obtaining a list of all ongoing transgender students under Kerala university within the Thiruvananthapuram city. A sample of **six transgender students** were identified and studied. Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research when the goal is to focus on specific characteristics of a population that are of interest, which in this case is transgender students currently enrolled in higher education (Palinkas et al., 2015).

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

In this study, data were analyzed using **thematic analysis**, a method widely used in qualitative research to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within data. The researcher involved immersing in the data by reading and re-reading the interview transcripts to become thoroughly familiar with the content. This process allowed for a deep understanding of the experiences and perspectives shared by the transgender students. Coding was done by systematically identifying significant features of the data that were relevant to the research questions. After coding the data, related codes were grouped together to form broader themes. These themes represented major patterns in the data that captured important aspects of the participants' experiences, particularly in relation to transphobia, social integration, and the effectiveness of support systems within educational settings.

3.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While this study provides valuable insights into the experiences of transgender students in higher education, particularly in the context of transphobia and social inclusion. The study was conducted with a small number of respondents, limited to transgender students from Thiruvananthapuram district in Kerala. While this allowed for in-depth exploration, the findings may not be representative of the broader population of transgender students across different regions or educational institutions. Variations in cultural, social, and in. The study relied on self-reported data through interviews, which may be subject to biases such as social desirability bias or recall bias. Participants may have consciously or unconsciously altered their responses based on what they believed to be socially acceptable or may have had difficulty recalling certain events accurately. Situational contexts across regions could lead to different experiences of transphobia and social inclusion. While the study primarily focused on experiences of transphobia, other intersecting factors such as economic status, caste, or religion that may also influence the experiences of transgender students were not extensively explored. This could limit the understanding of how multiple identities intersect to shape the experiences of these students. The study was conducted within a limited timeframe, which may have restricted the depth of data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER IV: CASE PRESENTATION ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 NARRATIVES

4.1.1 Case 1: 1st year Undergraduate Trans Woman

The researcher engaged with a 23-year-old transgender woman who recently joined college after undergoing gender-affirming surgery. She has taken a three-year break following her school education and she entered the college environment with high expectations of acceptance and belonging. Unfortunately, her experience was completely opposite by extreme exclusion and discrimination.

From the very beginning she noticed that her classmates avoided her. Most students didn't want to sit near her, choosing to sit in groups of 5-6 on one bench while leaving her alone. Only one girl in the class was willing to sit with her, but this girl soon found herself excluded from other groups because of it. The respondent explained, *"Most of the time, I was left alone. Sometimes teachers would ask the others to sit with me, most of the teachers didn't even care about it they just take the class and left. During group discussions, the other students wouldn't even include my name or think of me as part of the group. It felt like I was invisible"*

After her surgery, maintaining a hygienic environment became crucial, yet the college lacked adequate provisions. Beside her there were other two transgender representatives studying in the college. They were clear that a gender-neutral bathroom wouldn't work since they knew no one else would use it besides them. They approached the college union about it. The union assured them that the issue would be addressed within a week, but nothing happened.

The respondent said, *"We even approached the college authorities and were told to write a letter to the principal. It was frustrating because this is something the UGC guidelines already cover. Why do we still have to fight for basic rights that are already granted?"* Upon escalating the issue to the college administration, they were directed to submit a formal letter to the principal, despite the UGC guidelines that already mandated such facilities. After persistent efforts, a bathroom was finally allocated to the transgender students. But the space provided was far from adequate it was a dark, poorly maintained room with no lighting, creating a sense of fear and insecurity due to the

potential presence of snakes or other dangers. The respondent expressed that using this bathroom felt more like a forced choice than a viable solution. The respondent also faced disrespect from the college union, particularly when discussing the exclusion they faced. The union members used dismissive language, referring to her and other transgender students as "ningal or others," which created a sense of othering and deepened her feelings of alienation. This attitude left her feeling disrespected and excluded, she explained that she eventually stopped discussing her concerns altogether because of the negative responses she received.

Her experience with the union took a different turn during the college's arts festival, where transgender students were seen as assets. She did recall a time during the college arts festival when the union seemed supportive. She believed this was because they wanted to win points for the college, as having transgender students in competitions often brought in extra points. It was really essential for the union as the college, being one of the top competitors in the Kerala University Kalolsavam, recognized that having transgender students participate could significantly boost their points. During this period, the union members treated her well, and she felt a rare sense of belonging and care. This positive treatment was short-lived. After the festival ended, the friendly nature of the union members vanished, replaced by coldness and hostility, leaving her confused and hurt by the sudden change in attitude.

She said, *"It felt like they only wanted to use us for their benefit, and once they got what they needed, they didn't care anymore."*

She also stressed the need for spreading awareness among students, as the lack of understanding only worsens the situation. She said, *"Students are indirectly being given a license to harm others by not being taught about the importance of inclusivity and respect."*

The respondent wanted the college authorities to acknowledge the challenges faced by transgender students and to treat basic facilities, such as bathrooms, as integral parts of the campus infrastructure. She also stressed the need for spreading awareness among students, as the lack of understanding only worsens the situation. She said, *"Students are indirectly being given a license to harm others by not being taught about the importance of inclusivity and respect."*

4.1.2 Case 2: Final-Year Postgraduate Trans Man

He is a final-year postgraduate student who had carefully chosen his current college after conducting extensive research. This college, known as the first transgender-friendly campus in Kerala, was particularly attractive to him because it offered gender-neutral bathrooms and a supposedly supportive environment. Though his experiences since joining have been a mixture of acceptance and disappointment.

Initially, the student did not disclose his transgender identity. It was only after a year that he decided to come out. He mentioned that he had a supportive group of friends, but still faced intentional misgendering from other students. These students would give him unkind looks and use his old name, even after he tried to correct them. The student expressed his frustration, saying, “I tried correcting them once, but after they started doing it more, I just gave up. He added that, sadly, even the teachers were no different. They are teaching subjects like social science and human psychology, their behavior contradicted what they taught in the classroom.

One incident that stood out was during a class group photograph. The student requested that his new name be used on the photo, a name he had legally changed and even updated on official documents like his Aadhar card. The teacher, who was in charge, said she needed to check with the principal first. The response was disappointing the principal did not grant permission to use his new name and instead suggested that his old name, as recorded in university documents, be used and put his new name in brackets next to it. The student refused, stating, *“I don’t want to live with a double identity. I’m not asking for much; this photograph is just a memory, not an official document. It hurts that something so simple was denied to me.”*

The only concession he received was that his name was changed on the attendance sheet, but this did little to ease his frustration. He shared that his dissertation topic, which focused on the need for college hostels for transgender individuals, was also less encouraged by the teachers, who advised him to choose a different topic.

The student has never participated in college arts or sports events, feeling that these spaces are primarily for binary gender identities. He explained an incident related to an NSS camp, where he approached the authorities regarding his stay arrangements. The authorities suggested him to stay

with the girls, which was not okay for that which can be discomfort for both him and other girls, leading him to opt out of the camp entirely.

One of the key reasons the student chose this college was its gender-neutral bathroom, which was a significant draw for him. However, he soon found that the facility had fallen into disrepair. For over six months, the bathroom had been in need of maintenance, but no action was taken, despite promises made during election campaigns. He expressed his disappointment and said that *“The gender-neutral bathroom was one of the main reasons I came here, but it’s been neglected for so long. The authority or the student union didn’t give any required attention to it During the election campaign they promised to look into it, but nothing happened.”*

The student also shared his frustrations with the college union. While they approached him to speak for a news media program, he refused, yet they still used his name for their own gain. He expressed his frustration, saying that the college is often highlighted as an example of a transgender-friendly campus, but in reality, there has been little progress. *“They use my name to boost their image, but when it comes to real action, there’s nothing. This place is better than others, but there’s still so much that needs to change,” he said.*

The student has hopes for improvement. He wishes for the establishment of an LGBTQ collective and counseling services specifically for transgender students. He also pointed the need for adequate facilities for transgender students, particularly in terms of accommodation. He highlighted the case of a recently joined junior, a transman who was placed in the men’s hostel but found it difficult to use the common bathroom facilities. As a result, the student had to find accommodation outside the campus, incurring additional expenses. He said, *“There are UGC guidelines in place, but they’re being ignored. It’s frustrating that the so-called first transgender-friendly campus in Kerala still falls short in so many ways.”*

4.1.3 Case 3: First-Year Undergraduate Trans Women

She had always received strong support from her family and school, which made her hopeful that her college experience would be one of acceptance and celebration. Before joining the higher education institute, she even reached out to a senior who was also part of the transgender community to learn more about the campus environment. The senior’s positive feedback made her dream of colorful college days. However, reality turned out to be quite different.

"When I joined the class, no one seemed welcoming. I arrived two weeks after the classes had started, and no one, not even the teacher, acknowledged me. The teacher simply asked me to take a seat without introducing me to the class or saying anything else. It left me with a lost impression," she shared. Despite this, she managed to find her way. Only a few students even looked at her, but one girl approached her to ask about her day. This girl, along with her other transgender classmate, became her only friends.

This girl's sister, also a student at the college, treated them with the same rare respect. She believed that healthy parenting played a big role in their kindness. The girl's parents had spoken to her over the phone a few times, and once, they even packed lunch for them.

One of the most difficult issues she faced was related to basic facilities. She, along with the other two transgender students, requested a separate bathroom not just a gender-neutral one because they knew no one else would use it. After much struggle, the college finally granted them a bathroom, but it was far from adequate. It was a dark room with no light, making it a frightening place to use, especially with fears of snakes and other creatures. The room was also dirty, sometimes have no water but they had no other option.

She approached the college union regarding many things but the only time the offer support was during the kalolsavam days. Maybe for their own benefit she added.

Another incident that left her deeply uncomfortable occurred during a campus event. While attending the program, she noticed a group of people staring at her, making her feel uneasy. When she informed the program coordinator they simply spoke to the group and then justified their actions which made the situation even worse.

Her troubles didn't end on campus. She was active on social media with many followers, but this led to her being targeted by cyber attackers. Her inbox was often filled with inappropriate messages, with people asking for sexual favors and making sexually abusive comments. Most of messages are from fake Instagram pages these messages were from her classmates or from college because they would describe seeing her on campus and comment on her hairstyle or lipstick. When she reported this to the union, they dismissed her concerns, saying there was nothing they could do since the messages came from fake accounts. She felt let down, asking, *"Don't they have the*

authority to raise awareness about this? They organize so many programs, yet they ignore something as serious as the safety and mental health of a minority student.”

She felt completely alone, with no male students willing to associate with her. If anyone tried to befriend her, others would start mocking him, calling out his name and making rude comments. They saw her only as a sexual object, rather than as a person.

Even when she was absent from college for about three months, no one from the college union or authority bothered to check on her. She only managed to attend classes for 3-4 days during that period, and yet, no one asked why.

One time, she along with her transgender representatives got invited to a government invited program with was conducted under the banner of NSS. As part of the program, they are asked about how the transformed physically even though they are not ready to answer they are supposed to answer the audience. After the program they got added to NSS WhatsApp group, after that, she was never invited to any other programs. She noticed that most messages in the group chat were in English, a language she wasn't comfortable with since she was a BA Malayalam student. One morning she noticed that she was removed from the group. When asked about it what they told her was nonsense it was because she wasn't participating in any programs. They didn't even consider that the reason she wasn't responding was because she didn't understand English. And didn't even ask about the reason.

After all these she stopped approaching college union or the authority. She always wanted to have a counselling section at college which can be a good space that help them easy their mental struggles, to help them deal with this kind of negative environment.

4.1.4 Case 4: 23-Year-Old Undergraduate Trans Women

The Sathya Sai Free Transgender Dance Academy is a pioneering institution in Kerala, created to support transgender individuals by offering training in Kerala Natanam, a classical dance form. Under the leadership of Shri K.N. Anand Kumar and Dr. Gayathri Subramanian, the academy has made history by earning recognition from the Asia Book of Records. This academy stands out for its commitment to inclusivity, offering a safe and supportive space for transgender students to learn and develop.

The researcher engaged with one of the students, a transgender woman currently pursuing her Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Bharatanatyam, represents the transformative impact of this academy. Her journey is marked by passion, resilience, and the freedom to express her true self through dance.

Unlike traditional academic settings, where transgender students often face discrimination, this academy offers a separate, dedicated learning area. Here, with only 12 transgender students enrolled, the environment is entirely free from transphobia. This student's education is centered around her love for Bharatanatyam, a classical Indian dance form known for its expressive and detailed movements.

Under the guidance of Dr. Gayathri Subramanian, a renowned expert in Bharatanatyam, the student has been able to develop her skills without fear of judgment. Dr. Gayathri Subramanian's mentorship has been crucial in helping her grow as a dancer and as an individual. The student attends classes at the academy and only visits a regular college to sit for her yearly exams, ensuring she can focus on her studies without encountering the discrimination that transgender students often face in traditional settings.

The Sathya Sai Free Transgender Dance Academy has provided this student with more than just an education. It has given her a sense of belonging and the confidence to pursue her passion. The recognition by the Asia Book of Records highlights the significance of this academy, not only as a place of learning but as a sanctuary where transgender individuals are celebrated and supported. This achievement is a source of pride for the student and her peers, symbolizing a step forward in the acceptance of transgender individuals in society. For this student, the academy has been a life-changing experience, offering her the opportunity to study Bharatanatyam in a space where she is respected and valued.

Since joining the academy, the student has grown in confidence and skill. Bharatanatyam is no longer just an academic subject for her; it has become her passion and a means of self-expression. She dreams of performing on stages across the country and internationally, showcasing her talent and representing the transgender community in the arts.

Her long-term goal is to mentor other transgender dancers, helping them overcome challenges and pursue their dreams. She hopes to inspire others to follow in her footsteps, showing them that with dedication and the right support, they too can achieve success.

This case study of a transgender student at the Sathya Sai Free Transgender Dance Academy shows the example of impact of an inclusive and supportive educational environment. The student shared her thoughts on the need for change, saying, *"I recommend increasing seats in regular colleges for transgender students. We also need to spread awareness about the LGBTQ+ community, starting with education for parents before childbirth. Family is the first place that should offer us help and security. I don't want the coming generation to struggle like I do. Educate the parents and bring a difference."*

4.1.5 Case5: 25-Year-Old Post graduate Trans Women

This case study follows a transgender student who completed her undergraduate degree at a college where she felt supported and accepted. But when she returned to the same college for further studies, she found that her experience had changed for the worse.

During her undergraduate years, the student had a good experience at the college. She said, "My graduation days were different. I don't know why things have changed now. Back then, everything was okay. Of course, there were issues like any other student would face, but I made a lot of friends. The student union was supportive, especially during cultural events like Kalolsavam and exam time. They even helped me with my attendance shortage, so I could write my exams."

In those days, she felt included and supported by her peers and teachers. The college environment allowed her to enjoy her studies and participate in various activities without fear.

When she returned to the college for further studies, the atmosphere had changed. *"Now, everything has changed," she said. "I think it's because the people have changed. The older students have graduated, and the new generation seems to be creating an atmosphere of hate. I don't get the same support I used to."*

She noticed that her new classmates avoided her, making her feel isolated. *"They don't even share food with me. I sit separately, and once, when I asked a student for help, the others told her not to*

assist me. Even when I asked for water, the teacher told me to bring my own bottle. It's clear that I'm facing discrimination, and it's very upsetting."

The student shared how she now faces discrimination regularly. *"I remember a cisgender woman wearing the same type of clothing I did, and no one cared. But when I wore it, people gave me looks, like I didn't belong."*

These experiences have made it hard for her to focus on her studies already she identifies herself as a below average student in learning. She explained, *"I don't get any support from the college now, not even from the students. In the past, I could rely on help with things like getting previous question papers or sure-shot questions and their explanations. But now, no one is willing to help me."*

This student's story shows how the college environment can change over time. What was once a supportive and inclusive place has become one where she feels isolated and discriminated against. Her request for basic support and a welcoming environment reflects her disappointment and frustration. This case study calls the need for colleges to actively fight discrimination and ensure that all students, regardless of their gender identity, feel safe and respected.

4.1.6 Case 6: A 27-Year-Old Post graduate Trans Women

The respondent is a transgender student pursuing a Master of Arts. While she was excited about her academic journey, she soon encountered numerous challenges. She had taken her UG from distance education and had no idea of the struggles she needs to face in higher education. when she moved to a larger university for her master's degree, she found herself in a less welcoming environment. The size and anonymity of the university made it difficult for her to find a community that accepted her.

From the beginning she noticed that her classmates treated her differently. In the cafeteria, she often found herself eating alone, as others avoided sitting near her. *"People would look at me, then quickly look away,"* she said. *"It was clear they were uncomfortable, and it made me feel like I didn't belong."*

Group projects were particularly difficult. Ananya was frequently excluded from discussions or given tasks that were less important. *"It was like they didn't trust me to contribute anything*

meaningful," she recalled. "I knew I was capable, but they made me feel like an outsider. "during a group presentation, a classmate deliberately misgendered her in front of the entire class. When she corrected him, he replied, "Whatever, it's just a mistake. Don't make such a big deal out of it." The professor present didn't intervene, leaving her feeling humiliated and unsupported. In another incident, the same classmate during a seminar, said a transphobic joke that was met with laughter from several classmates. When she spoke up, asking them to stop, one of them responded, It's just a joke. Don't be so sensitive. And that same professor leading the seminar did nothing to address the situation, this feeling takes me even more alienated.

The college policies that were meant to protect transgender students, she found that these policies were often ignored. *"I was constantly worried about using the bathroom," she explained. "There were supposed to be gender-neutral bathrooms, but they were one and far between, and sometimes students would block the door or make nasty comments when I tried to use them."*

She also faced issues with her university records. Even after legally changing her name, her old name continued to appear on class rosters and official documents. *"I had to explain my situation over and over to different offices," she said. "Each time, it felt like I was being outed against my will. Once, when I brought it up, the staff member rolled her eyes and said, It's not that big of a deal. But i don't want to live in double identity and they are never going to get me"*

The transphobia encountered wasn't limited to administrative oversights. She also faced direct harassment from other students. One day, while walking across campus, a group of students began shouting slurs at her. *"They called me things like 'tranny' and 'freak,'" she recounted. "I kept walking, but it was terrifying. I didn't feel safe."*

One professor, in particular, became a mentor to her. She encouraged her to apply for scholarships and research opportunities. Her support gave her the strength to keep going, even when things were tough.

she also sought help from the government counseling services offering at general hospital, though not without some initial challenges. *"At first, the counselor didn't seem to understand what I was going through," she said. "But eventually, I was connected with someone who specialized in LGBTQ+ issues, and that made a big difference."*

She found strength in her academic work and the support of a few key individuals. Her story underscores the need for universities to create more inclusive environments where transgender students are not just accepted but actively supported and protected.

4.2 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this study, thematic analysis was employed to understand the experiences of transgender students in educational settings. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a fundamental method in qualitative research that involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data. Through a close examination of the collected data, several recurring themes emerged that highlight the challenges and experiences faced by transgender students. This section will explore these themes, supported by the six case studies discussed.

4.3 THEMES

The analysis identified four main themes with corresponding sub-themes that represent the experiences of transgender students in the study.

i. Challenges in Educational Settings

- Social Exclusion
- Transphobia in the Classroom
- Lack of Institutional Support

ii. Coping Mechanisms

- Seeking Peer Support
- Self-Advocacy
- Resilience

iii. Impact on Mental Health

- Emotional Distress
- Anxiety and Depression

- Fear and Insecurity

iv. Recommendations for Improvement

- Need for Inclusive Policies
- Awareness and Sensitization Programs
- Support Systems for Transgender Students

4.3.1 CHALLENGES IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

Social Exclusion:

The case studies revealed that transgender students faced extreme social exclusion in educational settings. For example, in Case No.1 and 5, the students recalled how they were excluded from group activities and even from casual social interactions like sharing meals. One of the respondents said, "They haven't provided me a space to share my food with them. I don't even sit with them; I sit separately." This social exclusion can lead to feelings of isolation and a sense of not belonging, which can adversely affect a student's overall academic experience

Similarly, in Case No. 6, the student described how her peers refused to assist her with academic tasks, like providing previous exam questions or study materials. The exclusion was so pervasive that even asking for a simple favor, such as borrowing a pen or asking for water, was met with resistance or outright refusal.

Transphobia in the Classroom:

Transphobia within the classroom was another significant challenge identified in the analysis. For example, in Case No. 3, the student mentioned an incident where a classmate deliberately misgendered her in front of the entire class. Despite correcting the classmate, the behavior was dismissed as a "mistake," and the teacher did not intervene even though the teacher often does. This lack of response from faculty members often leaves transgender students feeling vulnerable and unsupported.

In Case No. 6, the student shared how the teacher told her to bring her own water bottle, implying that asking classmates for help was inappropriate. Such incidents of microaggressions and overt

discrimination create a hostile learning environment, contributing to the student's distress and affecting their academic performance.

Lack of Institutional Support:

The cases also highlighted a lack of institutional support for transgender students. In Case No. 2, the student had difficulty getting her name and gender marker updated in the university's records, leading to repeated instances of being deadnamed in official documents. The delay and reluctance of administrative staff to make these changes added to the student's stress and discomfort.

In Case No. 4, the student expressed disappointment with the university's response to transphobic incidents. She said, "Even when I reported these issues, nothing was done. I felt like my concerns were not taken seriously." This lack of action from the institution exacerbates the challenges faced by transgender students, making it difficult for them to feel safe and supported on campus.

4.3.2 COPING MECHANISMS

Seeking Peer Support:

Of Course there are challenges, but still some transgender students find a shoulder in peer support. In Case No. 1 and 3, the students mentioned how she formed a small group of friends who understood her situation and offered emotional support. "These friends became my family on campus," she said. Peer support can be a crucial coping mechanism, providing a sense of belonging and reducing feelings of isolation.

In Case No. 4, the student also found support from a few understanding classmates who stood by her during difficult times. This peer support helped her navigate the hostile environment and continue her studies.

Self-Advocacy:

Many transgender students in the study resorted to self-advocacy as a means of coping with their challenges. For example, in Case No. 2, the student actively pushed for her rights to have her name and gender recognized correctly in university records. Although it was a frustrating process, her persistence paid off, and she eventually achieved her goal.

In Case No. 6, the student advocated for herself by reporting incidents of discrimination, even though the university's response was inadequate. Her determination to speak up, even though she knows there lack the immediate results, reflects the resilience and strength required to overcome such a challenging environment.

Resilience:

Resilience emerged as a common theme across all the cases. Though they are facing significant obstacles, the students demonstrated remarkable resilience in pursuing their education. In Case No. 3, the student reflected on her journey, saying, "I've faced so many challenges, but I won't let them stop me from achieving my dreams." This resilience is a testament to the strength and determination of transgender students who continue to strive for success despite the difficulties they encounter.

4.3.3 IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

Emotional Distress:

The emotional toll of converting a transphobic environment was evident in the student's experiences. In Case No. 5, the student described how the constant exclusion and discrimination led to feelings of sadness and hopelessness. "I often feel like I'm not wanted here," she said. This emotional distress can have a lasting impact on mental health, making it difficult for students to focus on their studies.

In Case No. 3, the student mentioned feeling emotionally drained from the repeated microaggressions she faced. The lack of support from both peers and faculty contributed to her feelings of isolation and emotional exhaustion.

Anxiety and Depression:

The analysis also revealed that many transgender students experience anxiety and depression due to the challenges they face in educational settings. For example, in Case No. 4, the student spoke about her struggles with anxiety, particularly when entering spaces where she felt unwelcome or unsafe. "I'm always on edge, wondering if I'll be harassed or excluded," she explained.

In Case No. 6, the student mentioned that the stress of dealing with transphobia led to depressive symptoms. She said, "There are days when I don't even want to get out of bed because it feels like

nothing will change." These mental health challenges are a direct result of the hostile environment in which these students find themselves.

Fear and Insecurity:

Fear and insecurity were common emotions expressed by the transgender students in this study. In Case No. 2, the student described how she constantly worried about being targeted for her gender identity. "I'm always looking over my shoulder," she said. This fear can create a sense of insecurity that affects all aspects of a student's life, from academic performance to social interactions.

In Case No. 1, the student mentioned feeling insecure about her future, given the challenges she faced in her current environment. "If it's this hard now, I worry about what it will be like after I graduate," she said. This insecurity can undermine a student's confidence and motivation, making it difficult to achieve their full potential.

4.3.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Need for Inclusive Policies:

The analysis underscores the need for more inclusive policies that specifically address the challenges faced by transgender students. For example, in Case No. 4, the student recommended increasing the number of seats available to transgender students in regular colleges. "*There should be more opportunities for us to study alongside everyone else,*" she said. This recommendation highlights the importance of creating inclusive spaces that allow transgender students to grow academically.

In Case No. 6, the student emphasized the need for policies that protect transgender students from discrimination and ensure that their identities are respected in all aspects of university life. "*It's not just about having the right name on a document; it's about being treated with dignity and respect,*" she explained.

Awareness and Sensitization Programs:

The cases also revealed a need for awareness and sensitization programs to educate both students and staff about transgender issues. In Case No. 5, the student suggested that universities should offer classes for parents before childbirth, to educate them about gender diversity and how to

support their children. "Family is the first place that should offer us help and security. Educating parents can make a big difference," she said.

In Case No. 3, the student recommended that universities conduct regular workshops and training sessions for staff and students to raise awareness about transgender issues and promote a more inclusive environment. "People need to understand what we go through," she said. "Only then can things start to change."

Support Systems for Transgender Students:

Implementing support systems for transgender students is essential and need more attention. In Case No. 4, the student mentioned the positive impact of having a mentor who understood her struggles and offered guidance. "Having someone to talk to who really gets it made all the difference," she said. This suggests that mentorship programs and counseling services specifically tailored to transgender students could play a crucial role in supporting their well-being and academic success.

In Case No. 2, the student suggested creating a peer support group for transgender students, where they could share their experiences and offer each other encouragement. "Knowing that others are going through the same thing can be really comforting," she said. Such support groups could help reduce feelings of isolation and foster a sense of community among transgender students.

The six case studies analyzed in this research provide a detailed look at the challenges, coping mechanisms, and mental health impacts experienced by transgender students in educational settings. Despite facing significant obstacles, these students demonstrate remarkable resilience and a strong desire for change. The recommendations for improving their experiences emphasize the need for inclusive policies, awareness programs, and ensure support systems that can create a more welcoming and supportive environment for transgender students.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Findings

This chapter presents the key findings from the case studies of transgender students in different educational settings. The findings are organized around several themes that emerged during the data collection process, including the experiences of transphobia, coping mechanisms, the effectiveness of institutional support, and the unique challenges and successes within specific learning environments. These findings aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the realities faced by transgender students and the impact of inclusive policies and environments on their educational experiences.

5.1.2 Experiences of Transphobia in Educational Settings

The case studies revealed that transphobia is a reality across various educational institutions, even in those that are labeled as transgender-friendly. Many transgender students reported experiencing subtle and overt forms of discrimination from both peers and faculty members. This discrimination manifested in different ways, such as misgendering, exclusion from group activities, and negative treatment by teachers who, are teaching subjects related to social sciences and human behavior, did not practice the values they taught.

For example, one student shared an experience of being deliberately misgendered by both classmates and teachers. Even though legally changing his name and updating official documents, his request to have his new name used in a class photograph was denied, highlighting the gap between institutional policies and actual practices. This incident illustrates how even seemingly small acts of resistance to a student's identity can have profound emotional impacts.

Another student faced severe social exclusion, with classmates refusing to sit with her and being excluded from group discussions. The lack of intervention by teachers in these situations further exacerbated the feeling of isolation. The transgender students' interactions with their peers and faculty often left them feeling marginalized, reinforcing the notion that educational institutions have not fully embraced the inclusion of transgender students despite claims to the contrary.

5.1.3 Coping Mechanisms Employed by Transgender Students

The transgender students interviewed employed various coping mechanisms to shift the transphobia they encountered. One common strategy was to seek comfort in the company of the few allies they had within the college environment. For example, the student who was denied the use of his new name in the class photograph found comfort in the friendship of a supportive classmate and her family, who offered emotional and social support outside the academic setting.

Some students coped by withdrawing from social interactions altogether. A student who faced relentless cyberbullying and sexual harassment from anonymous accounts, likely from her own classmates, chose to limit her engagement with the union and focus on her studies instead. This withdrawal, while protective, also limited her access to social and extracurricular opportunities, further isolating her from the broader college community.

In contrast to this, the students at the Sathya Sai Free Transgender Dance Academy, who did not face transphobia in their learning environment, did not need to employ these coping mechanisms. Instead, they were able to focus fully on their studies and artistic development. This highlights the crucial role of a supportive and inclusive environment in enabling transgender students to thrive.

5.1.4 Effectiveness of Institutional Support Systems

The effectiveness of institutional support systems varied widely across the case studies. In some cases, institutional support was minimal or entirely absent, as seen in the denial of bathroom facilities for transgender students at one college, despite clear guidelines from higher education authorities. The students had to fight for months to secure a separate bathroom, which, when finally provided, was inadequately maintained and unsafe, further underscoring the lack of genuine commitment from the institution.

On the other hand, the Sathya Sai Free Transgender Dance Academy provided a stark contrast. The academy's commitment to creating a safe and inclusive environment for transgender students was evident in its policies and practices. The institution's proactive approach to supporting transgender students, combined with the recognition it received from the Asia Book of Records, serves as a model for other educational institutions.

even within institutions that are considered progressive, gaps remain. For example, one student at a supposedly transgender-friendly campus reported that while the college had gender-neutral bathrooms, they were often poorly maintained, rendering them unusable. This student's experience illustrates that having policies on paper is not enough; their implementation and the ongoing maintenance of inclusive facilities are equally important.

5.1.5 Unique Challenges and Successes

The case studies also highlighted the unique challenges and successes experienced by transgender students. For example, one student's choice to pursue Bharatanatyam at the Sathya Sai Free Transgender Dance Academy allowed her to reconnect with her cultural roots in an environment free from discrimination. This experience was empowering and contrasted sharply with the challenges faced by her peers in more traditional educational settings.

Another significant challenge identified was the lack of understanding and awareness among faculty and administrative staff. For example, a student who wanted to stay in the college hostel found himself in a difficult situation because the institution did not have adequate facilities for transgender students. The student had to pay for off-campus housing, which imposed a financial burden on her. This case underscores the need for educational institutions to consider the specific needs of transgender students in their planning and resource allocation.

On a positive note, the support provided by individual allies, such as the supportive classmate mentioned earlier, played a crucial role in helping transgender students navigate their challenging environments. These personal connections provided the emotional support that the institutions themselves often failed to offer.

5.1.6 Broader Implications and Recommendations

The findings from these case studies have broader implications for educational policy and practice. First, they highlight the need for more comprehensive and effective training for teachers and administrative staff on transgender issues. Institutions must move beyond symbolic gestures of inclusivity and ensure that their policies are fully implemented and responsive to the needs of transgender students.

There is also a clear need for educational institutions to engage in ongoing dialogue with transgender students to understand their experiences and challenges better. This dialogue should inform the development of policies and practices that are truly inclusive and supportive.

Moreover, the success of the Sathya Sai Free Transgender Dance Academy demonstrates that when educational environments are genuinely inclusive, transgender students can develop. This example should inspire other institutions to adopt similar approaches and strive to create environments where all students, regardless of gender identity, can achieve their full potential.

Finally, it is essential to recognize the importance of peer support and allyship in the educational experiences of transgender students. Educational institutions should actively foster environments where such support networks can flourish, as they are critical to the well-being and success of transgender students.

5.2 Suggestions

Based on the findings from the case studies, several key suggestions can be made to improve the experiences of transgender students in educational settings. These suggestions focus on enhancing institutional policies, fostering inclusive environments, and ensuring the well-being of transgender students.

5.2.1. Comprehensive Training for Faculty and Staff

Educational institutions should implement mandatory training programs for all faculty and administrative staff on transgender issues. This training should cover basic awareness of transgender identities, the challenges transgender students face, and best practices for creating inclusive classroom environments. Faculty members need to understand the importance of using students' preferred names and pronouns and the impact of misgendering on students' mental health.

Administrative staff should be trained on how to handle official documentation and interactions with transgender students sensitively. This training should be regularly updated to reflect the latest research and best practices.

5.2.2. Strengthening Institutional Support Systems

Institutions should establish dedicated support systems for transgender students, including counseling services, peer support groups, and designated staff members who can advocate for transgender students' needs. These support systems should be easily accessible and well-publicized to ensure that transgender students know where to seek help.

Institutions should create clear and transparent processes for addressing incidents of transphobia. Students should feel confident that their concerns will be taken seriously and addressed promptly.

5.2. 3. Implementation and Maintenance of Inclusive Facilities

Educational institutions must ensure that gender-neutral or transgender-specific facilities, such as bathrooms and housing options, are available, safe, and well-maintained. Institutions should regularly assess the condition of these facilities and make necessary improvements to ensure they meet the needs of transgender students.

Institutions should also involve transgender students in the planning and design of these facilities to ensure they address the specific needs and concerns of the transgender community.

5.2. 4. Active Engagement with Transgender Students

Institutions should actively engage with transgender students to understand their experiences and challenges better. Regular forums, focus groups, and surveys can provide valuable insights into the needs of transgender students and help institutions develop more effective policies and practices.

This engagement should be ongoing and not limited to crisis situations. By building strong, positive relationships with transgender students, institutions can foster a more inclusive and supportive environment.

5.2. 5. Promotion of Peer Support and Allyship

Educational institutions should encourage the development of peer support networks and allyship programs that include both transgender and cisgender students. These programs can help build understanding and solidarity among students, reducing the social isolation that many transgender students experience.

Institutions should also recognize and reward students who demonstrate strong allyship and support for their transgender peers, creating a culture of inclusivity and respect.

5.2. 6. Regular Review and Update of Policies

Institutional policies related to transgender students should be regularly reviewed and updated to reflect current best practices and legal requirements. This review process should involve input from transgender students and experts in gender studies and human rights.

Policies should also be clearly communicated to all students and staff to ensure that everyone understands their rights and responsibilities.

5.2. 7. Addressing Cyberbullying and Harassment

Institutions must take a strong stance against cyberbullying and harassment targeting transgender students. This can include monitoring online platforms, providing clear reporting mechanisms, and taking swift disciplinary action against perpetrators.

Educational institutions should also run awareness campaigns to educate students about the harmful effects of cyberbullying and the importance of supporting their transgender peers.

5.2. 8. Enhancing Visibility and Representation

Institutions should work to enhance the visibility and representation of transgender individuals within the higher education institutes. This can include inviting transgender speakers to campus events, incorporating transgender topics into the curriculum, and celebrating important milestones in the transgender rights movement.

By making transgender individuals and issues more visible, institutions can help to normalize transgender identities and reduce the stigma that many transgender students face.

These suggestions are intended to guide institutions in creating more inclusive and supportive environments for transgender students. By implementing these recommendations, educational institutions can help ensure that transgender students can thrive academically and socially, free from discrimination and transphobia.

5.3 Conclusion

The exploration of transphobia in educational settings, as seen through the lived experiences of transgender students, underscores the urgent need for systemic change within academic institutions. These findings illuminate not only the static nature of discrimination but also the resilience and strength of transgender students who deal with these hostile environments daily.

The case studies presented in this research reveal that, apart from the progressive policies and guidelines, the reality for many transgender students is still marked by exclusion, misgendering, and a lack of basic amenities. Instances such as the denial of proper bathroom facilities, the refusal to acknowledge students' chosen names, and the isolation from peer groups demonstrate the gap between policy and practice.

The findings indicate that while some students manage to find pockets of support, these are often overshadowed by the broader culture of transphobia that exists within educational settings. The experience of being used as tokens for institutional gain during events, only to be discarded afterward, speaks to a deeper issue of performative allyship rather than genuine inclusivity.

The research also highlights the critical role of supportive peers, families, and faculty in reducing the negative experiences of transgender students. The inconsistency in such support across different cases suggests that institutional structures, rather than individual goodwill, must be strengthened to ensure a safe and inclusive environment for all students.

In conclusion, while there are examples of progress, such as the establishment of transgender-friendly campuses and inclusive dance academies, these remain isolated successes. For meaningful change to occur, a concerted effort is needed to bridge the gap between policy and practice, ensuring that transgender students not only survive but thrive in their educational journeys. This research calls for continued advocacy, awareness, and education to dismantle the structures of transphobia within academic institutions, paving the way for a future where every student, regardless of gender identity, is afforded the dignity and respect they deserve.

5.4 Future Research Implications

This study has highlighted several areas that require further exploration to deepen our understanding of the experiences of transgender students in educational settings. Future research could expand on these findings by considering the following aspects:

Conducting longitudinal studies to track the experiences of transgender students over time would provide valuable insights into how their interactions with peers, faculty, and institutional policies evolve. This approach could reveal patterns and long-term impacts of transphobia on their academic and personal development.

Future research could compare the experiences of transgender students in different regions, both within Kerala and across India. Such comparisons could help identify regional differences in the implementation of inclusive policies and the cultural factors that influence the experiences of transgender students.

Exploring the intersectionality of gender identity with other aspects such as caste, religion, socio-economic status, and disability could offer a more nuanced understanding of the unique challenges faced by transgender students. This would help to highlight the compounded effects of multiple forms of discrimination and exclusion.

There is a need for more research on the effectiveness of existing policies aimed at supporting transgender students. This could include evaluating the impact of specific policies, such as the provision of gender-neutral bathrooms or the establishment of LGBTQ+ support groups, on the well-being and academic success of transgender students.

While this study focused primarily on academic environments, future research could explore the experiences of transgender students in non-academic spaces within educational institutions, such as hostels, cafeterias, and extracurricular activities. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of their overall experience in educational settings.

Investigating the role of educators and administrators in shaping the experiences of transgender students could provide insights into how these key figures can either support or hinder the inclusion of transgender individuals in educational spaces. Future studies could focus on training and sensitization programs for staff and their effectiveness in reducing transphobia.

Given the increasing role of technology in education, future research could explore the impact of cyberbullying on transgender students and the effectiveness of digital platforms in supporting or harming their educational experiences. This could include examining the role of social media in both providing support networks and facilitating harassment.

Further research is needed to understand the mental health challenges faced by transgender students, particularly in response to transphobia and exclusion in educational settings. Studies could investigate the availability and effectiveness of mental health support services for transgender students within educational institutions.

By addressing these areas, future research can contribute to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the needs and experiences of transgender students. This will inform more effective policy-making and the development of practices that create genuinely inclusive educational environments.

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