



## The Evolution of Social Harmony: A Historical Analysis of Transgender Experiences with Special Reference to the Mughal Era

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### Abstract

This paper explores the complex and often fraught history of transgender individuals, highlighting moments of social harmony and acceptance. Through a critical analysis of historical texts, personal narratives, and cultural artifacts, this research reveals the ways in which transgender people have consistently sought to find their place within societal norms, often in the face of overwhelming adversity. By examining the intersections of identity, community, and social acceptance, this paper demonstrates the resilience and determination of transgender individuals in their pursuit of social harmony.

### Introduction

Transgender individuals have long been a part of human society, yet their experiences have often been marginalized, erased, or distorted. Despite these challenges, transgender people have consistently sought to find acceptance and understanding within their communities. This paper will explore the history of transgender experiences, highlighting moments of social harmony and acceptance. Gender fluidity is a well-known idea in ancient India, both among humans and yakshas. Queerness has a long history in Indian culture, spanning from ancient epics and scriptures to medieval prose, poetry, art, and architecture. Historians typically use pre-colonial examples to discuss same-sex love and its prevalence in religious texts, mythology, and popular literature. However, many people are opposed to homosexuality because they believe it conforms to Western values.

Pre-colonial India validates the presence of sexual orientation and transgender individuals. Historical evidence and religious writings suggested that pre-colonial India was far more permissive of sexuality. One of the primary arguments against homosexuality is that it is unnatural and contradicts Indian traditional values and morals. As a result, understanding the history of homosexuality in India and its impact on Indian culture and values is critical. This article will hence concentrate on different examples from ancient and medieval India to show that India was not a morally rigid culture prior to invasion. Transgender individuals are defined as those whose gender identity contradicts their biological sex. Hijras are accepted as normal by society, some even viewing them as sacred.

However, they have faced humiliation mentally and emotionally, but are often welcomed on holy occasions like Hindu marriages and the birth of a new baby. The dual standing of Indian society has led to discrimination against transgender individuals, both by the state and society. The constitution of India prohibits discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, and place of birth, making it accessible to every citizen. However, this discrimination extends to transgender individuals, who are not covered under specific gender categories but are considered part of Indian society.

In the 21st century, the importance of identity and selfhood for transgender individuals is not universally recognized. However, recent changes have been made, such as the World Health Organization declassifying being Trans as a psychological instability and homosexuality being decriminalized under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. These measures have helped the transsexual local area, but there is still a long way to go.

### The history of other genders and its Reference Points

Biological evolution can't be stress down at one point. It takes decades to evolve. Throughout the medieval period there were some incident, but the problem is its ether written in the poems or in Urdu so it's hard to translate. During the Mughal period in India, the Hijra community, which were a group of transgender people, had an important position in society. In Hinduism, they are recognized as a third gender, with their presence mentioned in ancient literature such as the Mahabharata and the Kama Sutra. The Mughal Empire tolerated non-Muslim cultures, but LGBTQ persons were treated more harshly. The Hijra community was admired for its clothing, language, and culture, but they endured prejudice and marginalization, especially during the British colonial period.

### Incidents of Presence of Homosexuality.

The transgender are the have been recognised and respected in various ancient cultures. For example, the Native American Two-Spirit tradition acknowledged individuals who identified as both male and



female, or as neither. Also in Kathoey in Thailand a term used to describe transgender women, have been an integral part of Thai culture for centuries. Sarmad, a Jewish rabbi associated with Dara Shukoh, whose fluid sexuality challenges modern perceptions of sexual norms. The absence of homosexuality as a reason for his execution underscores a broader acceptance of variant sexualities during the Mughal era, contrasting sharply with contemporary taboos.

Babur openly expressed affection for a boy and Jahanara Begum's intimate relationship with her slave girl, revealing a pattern of emotional and physical attachment between individuals of the same sex. This suggests that while patriarchal norms suppressed women's sexuality, there was a relative openness towards same-sex relationships among men within certain social circles.

Additionally, the discussion of *khwajasaras*, a marginalized group with diverse gender identities, challenges conventional notions of gender binaries and highlights the fluidity of sexual orientations in pre-modern Mughal society. Furthermore, religious beliefs, artistic representations, and comparative perspectives with other contemporary cultures enrich our understanding of the broader socio-cultural context in which attitudes towards sexuality evolved. Medieval period shows relative acceptance of diverse sexual orientations during the Mughal era, despite some opposition from orthodox historians like Badauni. The prevalence of same-sex relationships, illustrated by examples like Jahanara Begum's affection for her slave girl and the liberal attitudes of some princesses towards *khwajasaras*, challenges modern assumptions about historical attitudes towards homosexuality. This acceptance extends beyond gender binaries, encompassing individuals with fluid sexualities and non-normative relationships. Overall, this multifaceted exploration underscores the need for a nuanced and interdisciplinary approach to studying sexuality in historical contexts.

#### Evidences of presence of Gender Fluidity

Homosexuality in India has been heated, with right-wing parties claiming it is a corrupt "Western import that is incompatible with Indian culture. This argument has been used to defend the criminalization of homosexuality in India, which was upheld by the Supreme Court in 2013 and later overturned in 2018. However, activists and researchers say that same-sex intimacy has existed in Indian society for thousands of years, with examples found in ancient Hindu mythology and writings. The Kamasutra, a Sanskrit sex textbook, has explicit instructions on penetrative intercourse between women using sexual implements, sex between men, and *tritiya prakriti*, or persons of the third gender. Ancient Hindu literary and sculptural studies also reveal dual feminine deities and inter-feminine interactions.

In medieval and early modern South Asian court culture, same-sex love between rich men and slave-boys was romanticized, despite male intercourse being illegal under Islamic law. In the late 18th century, a new form of Urdu ghazal poetry called *rekhti* emerged in Lucknow, produced and recited by male poets dressed as women, conveying female sexual desires for a feminine lover.

We tried to explore the Mughal visual legacy of female intimacy, focusing on Mughal-style paintings from the provincial Awadh, Rajput, and Deccan courts. due to declining court support and British colonial legislation criminalizing homosexuality and transvestism in the 19th century. The study highlights the underutilized Mughal visual legacy of female intimacy.

Mughal-style paintings depicting female homoeroticism and cross-dressing in pre-colonial India, highlighting the non-heteronormative sexuality and gender flexibility. The use of labour to examine these feminine intimacies challenges the positive view of precolonial homoeroticism and highlights the inegalitarian nature of some queer intimacies. The article uses homoerotic, cross-dressed, and same-sex identities to describe precolonial South Asian female intimacies, which typically coexisted with heterosexual polygamous marriages. The term "queer" has several interpretation possibilities and is used in this article as an amorphous phrase to refer to diverse types of South Asian gender and sexuality that are not binary or heteronormative.

Similarly in the various countries different situation but he similar instances accrued like 1950s and 1960s the emergence of transgender pioneers like Christine Jorgensen and Reed Erickson, who helped raise awareness and promote acceptance. The gay liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s also played a crucial role in promoting transgender rights. 1960s-70s Gay Liberation Movement: The gay liberation movement, led by activists like Marsha P. Johnson, a transgender woman of colour, fought for the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals. 1990s-2000s Transgender Rights Movement: The transgender rights movement gained momentum, with activists like Sylvia Rivera and Miss Major Griffin-Gracy

advocating for transgender rights. These people uplift themselves from the societal norms and become influential figures; Fought for the rights of the Minorities like transgender, gays, lesbians.

#### Paintings

The Mughal and Rajput paintings from Bikaner, Jaipur, and other Indian courts depict homoerotic female couples in various settings, showcasing a blend of power dynamics, romance, and labour. Maidservants and slave-women play a crucial role in creating a romantic atmosphere, with dominant partners in cross-dressed attire engaging in intimate gestures with their lovers. The scenes are rich in symbolism, with elements like wine, music, gardens, and luxurious settings enhancing the romantic mood.

Mughal painter *Ruknuddin's* paintings in the Rajput courts exemplify a fusion of Islamic Persian-Mughal and Deccan styles with Hindu mythology, portraying homoerotic female couples in a secular Islamic domestic setting. The power dynamics within the couples are less pronounced, with partners dressed in feminine fashion and positioned in an egalitarian manner. Maids play a supportive role, serving and entertaining the mistresses, contributing to the romantic narrative.

Rajput paintings from Jaipur, Udaipur, and other courts in the 18th century depict intense moments of passion between female lovers, with maidservants attending to the couples. The paintings also feature elements of elite status, luxurious settings, and symbolic gestures that enhance the narrative of love and desire between the female partners.

#### Legal Rights and their Status

During the medieval period other genders like Gay, lesbian, asexual, etc. were not widely accepted but the transgender had some kind of rights and position at councils. With reorganization as third gender. During the Mughal reign, transgender individuals were referred to as *Khawjasaras*, a term indicating respect and dignity. They were employed as security officers in female quarters, akin to their historical role in holy towns, where they served as intermediaries for prayers and pilgrimage. Transgender individuals were revered and considered holy in Muslim regions. That eunuch or *Khawjasaras* was not merely confined to the harem but were active participants in various aspects of Mughal life. They served as slaves, servants, administrative officers, and even brokers within the empire. Despite their divergent sexuality, they occupied a crucial position bridging the gap between the private world of the harem and the public sphere.

One of the most significant services provided by eunuchs was their role in facilitating the exchange of information between the harem and the outside world. They acted as conduits for gossip, intrigues, and official communications, thereby influencing the political, social, and cultural dynamics of the Mughal Empire. Additionally, eunuchs were entrusted with administrative and managerial duties, often performing tasks similar to those undertaken by important nobles. Within the harem, eunuchs played a crucial role in maintaining security and order. They guarded against unwanted intruders and controlled access to the harem, ensuring the safety of the women within. Despite their authority, eunuchs faced challenges such as breaches of security, which could result in severe consequences for them.

Transgender individuals are considered authentic in their spirituality, just like males and women. The Prophet of Islam respected them, forbade mistreatment, and encouraged their spirituality. Some Muslim kings, believing in their divine love, designated them as intercessors in royal palaces.

The Mughals in India elevated transsexual individuals to positions of power and trust, allowing them to work as courtiers and councillors, providing advice to princes and princesses. They were domestic insiders, possessing special powers and privileges that even the most powerful ministers did not have. Their education about statecraft and religious intricacies encouraged non-Muslim transgender to embrace Islam.

The persecution faced by eunuchs, stemming from their non-man nature and threat to patriarchal norms. They were subject to ridicule, violence, and social exclusion, reflecting broader anxieties surrounding gender and sexuality in Mughal society. However, eunuchs also exhibited agency and loyalty, serving their masters faithfully despite societal discrimination.

#### Degradation of Other Genders

Transgender individuals in British India faced persecution and degradation, particularly due to the 1871 Criminal Tribes Act. This legislation stripped transgenders of their royal status and classified them as criminal tribes with perceived genetic flaws, leading to their marginalization within society.

Despite these challenges, some transgender individuals found ways to survive, such as dancing, lampooning, begging, prostitution, and criminal activities. These survival strategies reinforced societal stereotypes and perceptions of transgenders as social outcasts and deviants.

After India and Pakistan gained independence from British colonial rule, the damage inflicted upon transgenders was irreversible. Despite legal changes, transgenders continued to face social discrimination and marginalization, with deeply ingrained stereotypes persisting. The derogatory term "khusra" became prevalent in both countries, denigrating and humiliating transgender individuals. In Pakistan, the cultural and spiritual significance of transgenders within Islam has been forgotten, contributing to their continued ridicule and insult. Popular media shows, such as *Khabarnaak* and *Khabardaar*, perpetuate harmful stereotypes and make cruel jokes at the expense of transgender individuals. Even influential figures, such as lawyers, contribute to the marginalization of the transgender community through their participation in such shows.

The significant shift in societal attitudes towards transgender and intersex individuals in the Indian subcontinent due to British colonial rule. Prior to colonial influence, these communities, under the Hijra community, received protections and benefits from Indian states, including land and financial assistance for agricultural activities. However, the imposition of British culture and colonial rule led to the erosion of these protections and benefits. The introduction of eugenics theory, which promoted superior traits while excluding those deemed inferior, was central to this transformation. This theory, which upheld White cisgender heterosexual individuals as the epitome of superiority, was used by colonial powers to justify their oppressive rule and discrimination against indigenous populations, including Indians considered inferior due to their brown skin.

The conditional nature of acceptance within the Hijra community further perpetuated a cycle of marginalization and exclusion. Eugenics theory was deeply intertwined with gender norms, reinforcing patriarchal ideals and justifying racial discrimination. European colonial powers used these norms to denigrate indigenous cultures and practices, portraying gender non-conforming groups like the Hijra community as deviant and inferior. The enforcement of gender norms by colonial powers extended to the erasure of transgender and intersex identities, with efforts to outlaw nonconforming practices like effeminate men and homosexuality. This has lasting repercussions, influencing societal attitudes towards gender nonconformity in post-colonial India. Today, transgender individuals continue to face significant challenges, including discrimination, violence, and marginalization.

### Conclusion

The exploration of the history of homosexuality and other genders in India unveils a complex tapestry of societal attitudes, cultural practices, and colonial influences. From ancient times to the medieval period, evidence suggests a relative acceptance of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, with examples found in religious texts, mythology, literature, and art. However, the impact of colonialism, particularly British rule, brought significant changes to Indian society, leading to the erosion of traditional acceptance and the imposition of Western norms.

In medieval India, LGBTQ individuals likely navigated societal attitudes through various strategies such as revaluing aspects of their own group, comparing themselves to other groups, and attempting to initiate social change to improve their social status. These strategies align with social identity theory and Goffman's analysis of managing stigma. However, specific historical accounts or records detailing their experiences are limited in the provided sources.

Despite legal changes and efforts to promote inclusivity, transgender individuals continue to face discrimination and marginalization in contemporary Indian society. The derogatory term "khusra" and harmful stereotypes perpetuated by media further contribute to the stigmatization of the transgender community.

The history of homosexuality and other genders in India has highlighted the complex interplay between culture, religion, colonialism, and societal attitudes. As a society, it is crucial to acknowledge and confront ingrained prejudices and stereotypes, while striving to create a more inclusive and accepting environment for all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

To understand and maintain the harmony in the country there need to educate people that the LGBTQ+ people are like human they are not different than the human. The ancient and societal norm has made an impression that this are not human they are somehow different, this perception needs to



change. Child and youth needs to be aware of the evolution. Everyone should support and maintain social harmony within the society.

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