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TRANSGENDER LITERACY AND EMPOWERMENT: A CASE STUDY OF EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTIONS IN INDIA

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Abstract: This analytical study investigates the transgender literacy rate across various states and Union Territories (UTs) of India using secondary data collected from Census India (2022). The findings reveal significant disparities in transgender populations, child populations aged 0–6 years, Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) populations across different regions. Uttar Pradesh records the highest transgender population (1,37,465), followed by Andhra Pradesh (43,769) and Maharashtra (40,891). However, underreporting and social stigma are likely to affect the accuracy of these figures. Uttar Pradesh also records the highest number of transgender children (18,734). Bihar exhibits a relatively high SC population among transgender individuals (6,295), suggesting the presence of intersecting forms of discrimination. Notably, Mizoram records the highest transgender literacy rate at 87.14%, closely followed by Kerala at 84.61% and Goa at 73.90%. These findings underscore the varying levels of access to education and literacy among transgender populations across India, highlighting the urgent need for targeted interventions to address regional disparities and promote inclusive educational systems.

Keywords: Transgender literacy, India, Census data, Educational disparities, Marginalized communities, Inclusive education, Empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

Transgender individuals in India face multifaceted challenges deeply rooted in societal discrimination,

inadequate legal recognition and limited access to education and employment opportunities. Despite

being an integral part of India's cultural and historical fabric through roles such as hijras, aravanis, kothis and jogappas, the transgender community has historically occupied a marginalized social position. The contemporary context, however, has witnessed a gradual yet significant shift, propelled by landmark judicial decisions, progressive legislative interventions and sustained activism by transgender rights advocates.

The Supreme Court of India's landmark judgment in *National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India* (NALSA, 2014) recognised transgender persons as a 'third gender' and affirmed their fundamental rights under Articles 14, 15, 19 and 21 of the Constitution. Subsequent legislative action in the form of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, further codified protections against discrimination in education, employment and healthcare. Nevertheless, the translation of these legal provisions into tangible improvements in the lived realities of transgender individuals remains incomplete and uneven across states.

Education serves as a cornerstone for social mobility and empowerment. For transgender individuals, who face higher rates of school dropout, familial rejection and institutional harassment, access to quality education is not merely a developmental goal but a prerequisite for survival and dignity. Transgender students often encounter discrimination from peers and educators, absence of gender-neutral facilities and curricula that render their identities invisible. These structural barriers compound into significantly higher rates of illiteracy within transgender communities compared to the general population.

In response to these challenges, several state governments and civil society organisations have undertaken educational interventions specifically designed to address the needs of transgender individuals. Kerala's pioneering Transgender Policy (2015), the establishment of the Social Justice Department's welfare schemes and the integration of transgender individuals into mainstream employment as seen with the Kochi Metro project represent models of inclusive governance. Similarly, non-governmental organisations such as the Humsafar Trust, Naz Foundation, Sangama and the Sahodari Foundation have contributed substantially to advancing transgender literacy, health awareness and vocational training across different states.

Against this backdrop, the present study undertakes a systematic analysis of transgender literacy rates across all states and Union Territories of India using secondary data from Census India (2022). The study also contextualises literacy data within broader socio-demographic variables, including SC and ST populations, child populations and total transgender

enumeration, to understand the multidimensional nature of educational disadvantage within this community. The paper is organised as follows: Section 2 reviews the relevant literature; Section 3 outlines the research objective; Section 4 describes the methodology; Section 5 presents the analysis and interpretation; Section 6 discusses findings and conclusions; and Section 7 provides references.

2. Review of Literature

The academic literature on transgender education and empowerment in India has grown substantially over the past decade, reflecting increasing scholarly and policy interest in this long-neglected domain. Early contributions by Mal (2012) provided one of the first census-based spatial analyses of the Indian transgender population, revealing significant regional disparities in distribution that would later inform targeted policy interventions. Mal's work drew attention to the limitations of census enumeration and the challenges of accurately capturing marginalised gender identities within a binary administrative framework.

Vats and Purohit (2017) examined the intersection of education and employment rights for transgender individuals, arguing that access to education is constitutionally guaranteed and that the State bears an obligation to create enabling environments for transgender persons in both schools and workplaces. Their analysis of the NALSA judgment emphasised that the right to education under Article 21-A must be read expansively to include transgender children and youth. They called for affirmative measures including reservation in educational institutions, scholarship programmes and sensitisation training for educators.

Das (2019) focused specifically on higher education, mapping the opportunities and structural barriers confronting transgender individuals seeking access to colleges and universities. The study identified key obstacles including discriminatory admission processes, absence of gender-neutral hostels and washrooms, unsupportive administrative frameworks and social exclusion within campus environments. Das emphasised that higher education institutions must not only reform their policies but also undergo a broader cultural transformation to become genuinely inclusive spaces.

More (2021) provided a sociological investigation of the problems confronting the transgender community in India, situating educational exclusion within a broader matrix of economic marginalisation, family rejection, social stigma and inadequate legal protection. The study highlighted the role of technology particularly distance learning platforms and online certificate programmes as a promising mechanism for expanding educational access to transgender individuals who face barriers in attending

conventional institutions. More also underscored the importance of community-based peer support networks in sustaining educational engagement.

Biswas and Soora (2021) offered a comprehensive review of the status and challenges of transgender education in India, analysing both governmental and non-governmental initiatives. They identified deep-rooted institutional inertia, insufficient funding for transgender-specific programmes and bureaucratic resistance as primary obstacles to meaningful educational reform. The authors advocated for inter-sectoral collaboration among government departments, NGOs and civil society organisations as a prerequisite for developing holistic and sustainable educational strategies.

Naik, Gharge and Unisa (2023) presented a demographic snapshot of the transgender community in India drawing on Census 2011 and other administrative data, highlighting the youthfulness of the transgender population and the concentration of transgender individuals in certain states. Their work reinforced the urgency of addressing educational needs early in the life course, noting that interventions targeting transgender children and adolescents are likely to yield higher long-term returns than those focused exclusively on adults.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study adopts an analytical research design. Secondary data were sourced from the Census India (2022) database, which provides detailed demographic and socio-economic information disaggregated by gender identity, including data on the transgender population. The variables selected for analysis include: (i) total transgender population; (ii) transgender child population aged 0–6 years; (iii) SC population among transgenders; (iv) ST population among transgenders; and (v) literacy rate among the transgender population.

Data were compiled for all 28 states and 8 Union Territories of India, enabling a comprehensive national picture. The data were subjected to comparative analysis and interpretation, focusing on identifying regional patterns, disparities and outliers. Percentages and absolute figures were both considered in the interpretation to avoid the distortion that can arise from examining only proportional data in the context of widely varying population sizes across states.

It is important to acknowledge certain methodological limitations. The Census data on transgender populations are susceptible to under enumeration owing to persistent social stigma and the reluctance of many individuals to self-identify as transgender in official surveys. Additionally, the categories used in the census may not fully capture the diversity of gender identities within the transgender community. These limitations should be borne in mind when interpreting the findings.

5. Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1 presents a comprehensive state-wise breakdown of the transgender population, child population (aged 0–6 years), Scheduled Caste (SC) population, Scheduled Tribe (ST) population and literacy rates across all states and UTs of India. The data are sourced from Census India (2022) and are analysed under the following thematic heads.

At the other end of the spectrum, smaller states and UTs such as Lakshadweep (2), Andaman & Nicobar Islands (47), Dadra & Nagar Haveli (43) and Sikkim (126) record minimal transgender populations. These figures may reflect genuinely smaller populations or, more likely, severe underreporting due to the geographic and social isolation of these regions. It is essential to treat all census figures for transgender populations with caution, as systemic underreporting driven by stigma, family pressure and inadequate enumerator training is well documented in the literature.

Collectively, the literature underscores that transgender literacy and empowerment are not merely educational concerns but profoundly intersectional issues involving caste, class, geography and gender identity. The present study contributes to this body of knowledge by providing a state-wise comparative analysis of transgender literacy rates, situating them within the broader context of population demographics and social vulnerability.

3. Objective of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the transgender literacy rate in the context of various states and Union Territories of India, using Census India data. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the distribution of transgender populations across Indian states and UTs.
2. Analyse the child population (0–6 years) within transgender communities to identify states with high concentrations of transgender youth.
3. Assess the representation of Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) individuals within transgender populations to explore intersecting forms of marginalisation.

Compare state-wise transgender literacy rates to identify high-performing states and regions requiring urgent educational intervention.

Table 1: Transgender Population, Child Population, SC/ST Population and Literacy Rate across Indian States and UTs (Census India, 2022)

#	State / UT	Transgenders	Child (0–6)	SC	ST	Literacy (%)
	India (Total)	4,87,803	54,854	78,811	33,293	56.07
1	Uttar Pradesh	1,37,465	18,734	26,404	639	55.80
2	Andhra Pradesh	43,769	4,082	6,226	3,225	53.33
3	Maharashtra	40,891	4,101	4,691	3,529	67.57
4	Bihar	40,827	5,971	6,295	506	44.35
5	West Bengal	30,349	2,376	6,474	1,474	58.83
6	Madhya Pradesh	29,597	3,409	4,361	5,260	53.01
7	Tamil Nadu	22,364	1,289	4,203	180	57.78
8	Odisha	20,332	2,125	3,236	4,553	54.35
9	Karnataka	20,266	1,771	3,275	1,324	58.82
10	Rajasthan	16,517	2,012	2,961	1,805	48.34
11	Jharkhand	13,463	1,593	1,499	3,735	47.58
12	Gujarat	11,544	1,028	664	1,238	62.82
13	Assam	11,374	1,348	774	1,223	53.69
14	Punjab	10,243	813	3,055	0	59.75
15	Haryana	8,422	1,107	1,456	0	62.11
16	Chhattisgarh	6,591	706	742	1,963	51.35
17	Uttarakhand	4,555	512	731	95	62.65
18	Delhi	4,213	311	490	0	62.99
19	Jammu & Kashmir	4,137	487	207	385	49.29
20	Kerala	3,902	295	337	51	84.61
21	Himachal Pradesh	2,051	154	433	118	62.10
22	Manipur	1,343	177	40	378	67.50
23	Tripura	833	66	172	181	71.19
24	Meghalaya	627	134	3	540	57.40
25	Arunachal Pradesh	495	64	0	311	52.20
26	Goa	398	34	9	33	73.90
27	Nagaland	398	63	0	335	70.75
28	Puducherry	252	16	40	0	60.59
29	Mizoram	166	26	1	146	87.14
30	Chandigarh	142	16	22	0	72.22
31	Sikkim	126	14	9	37	65.18
32	Daman and Diu	59	10	1	2	75.51
33	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	47	5	0	3	73.81
34	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	43	5	0	22	73.68
35	Lakshadweep	2	0	0	2	50.00

Source: Census India (2022)

5.1 Transgender Population Distribution

Uttar Pradesh has the highest transgender population in the country, with 1,37,465 individuals, accounting for approximately 28.2 per cent of the national total of 4,87,803. This is followed by Andhra Pradesh (43,769) and Maharashtra (40,891). These three states together account for nearly 45 per cent of India's entire transgender population. The high figures for Uttar Pradesh may partly reflect the state's general demographic size as India's most populous state, but they also indicate the concentrated presence of established transgender communities particularly hijra gharanas in cities such as Lucknow, Varanasi and Kanpur.

5.2 Child Population (0–6 Years)

The child population data (ages 0–6) within transgender households is a significant indicator of intergenerational transmission of marginalisation. Uttar Pradesh records the highest number of transgender children at 18,734, followed by Bihar (5,971) and Maharashtra (4,101). High child populations within transgender communities in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh two states that also record relatively low overall transgender literacy rates suggest that the educational exclusion of transgender adults is likely to replicate itself in the next generation without targeted early-childhood and school-level interventions.

The relatively low child populations in states such as Mizoram (26), Nagaland (63), Goa (34) and Kerala (295) align with smaller overall transgender populations in these states, but they also signal that interventions in these states need to ensure continuity of educational access for transgender youth before they reach adulthood.

5.3 Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Populations

The presence of SC and ST individuals within transgender populations provides a lens through which to examine the intersectionality of caste-based and gender-based discrimination. West Bengal records the highest SC population among transgenders (6,474), followed closely by Uttar Pradesh (26,404) and Bihar (6,295). The particularly large SC population in Uttar Pradesh among transgenders is consistent with the state's overall demographic composition and its historical patterns of caste-based stratification.

For ST populations, Madhya Pradesh (5,260) and Jharkhand (3,735) record the highest figures, reflecting the significant tribal populations in these states and the likelihood that transgender individuals from these communities face compounded forms of discrimination based on both caste/tribe and gender identity. States such as Punjab, Delhi, Chandigarh and Puducherry record zero ST populations among transgenders, which is consistent with their near-absence of ST populations in general.

The intersection of caste and transgender identity amplifies educational disadvantage. Transgender individuals from SC and ST communities face discrimination not only on account of their gender identity but also due to their caste background, which may limit access to affirmative measures, scholarships and institutional support systems. This double marginalisation necessitates policies that address both dimensions simultaneously.

5.4 Transgender Literacy Rates

The literacy rate data reveal striking regional disparities. Mizoram records the highest transgender literacy rate at 87.14%, followed by Kerala at 84.61% and Goa at 73.90%. These states are notable for their historically high general literacy rates, strong civil society engagement and inclusive social welfare frameworks. Kerala in particular has long been recognised for its commitment to social equity and its Transgender Policy (2015) institutionalised many of the literacy-enhancing interventions that are reflected in these figures.

In contrast, Bihar records the lowest transgender literacy rate at 44.35%, followed by Rajasthan (48.34%), Jharkhand (47.58%) and Lakshadweep (50.00%). These states are also characterised by lower general literacy rates and weaker social protection systems for marginalised communities. The national transgender literacy rate of 56.07% is significantly lower than the national general literacy rate of approximately 77% (Census 2011), underscoring the structural barriers that prevent transgender individuals from accessing and completing formal education.

States in the North-East, including Tripura (71.19%), Nagaland (70.75%), Chandigarh (72.22%) and Manipur (67.50%), perform considerably better than the national average despite having smaller absolute populations. These figures may reflect the relatively egalitarian social structures in some north-eastern communities as well as stronger community-based support mechanisms.

Maharashtra, which has a large transgender population (40,891), achieves a literacy rate of 67.57% significantly above the national average. This is a particularly noteworthy finding, as it demonstrates that high transgender population

size does not necessarily correspond to low literacy and that state-level policies and NGO interventions can drive improvements even in states with large and diverse transgender communities. The active presence of organisations such as Humsafar Trust in Maharashtra is likely a contributing factor.

6. Findings and Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Findings

The analysis of Census India (2022) data on transgender populations across India yields several significant findings. First, the distribution of transgender populations is highly uneven, with Uttar Pradesh alone accounting for approximately 28 per cent of the national total. This concentration reflects both demographic scale and the historical presence of established transgender communities in northern India.

Second, the child population data highlight the intergenerational nature of educational exclusion. States such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Maharashtra, which record the highest numbers of transgender children, also tend to have lower or moderate literacy rates, suggesting that the cycle of educational disadvantage is likely to persist unless targeted early intervention programmes are implemented.

Third, the SC and ST data reveal important patterns of intersectional marginalisation. States with high concentrations of SC and ST individuals within transgender populations such as Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand require policies that simultaneously address caste-based and gender-based discrimination in educational settings.

Fourth and most critically, literacy rates among transgender populations vary enormously across states from a high of 87.14% in Mizoram to a low of 44.35% in Bihar. This 42.79 percentage-point gap reflects deeply structural differences in educational access, state capacity and social attitudes toward gender diversity. States with high transgender literacy rates Mizoram, Kerala, Goa and Nagaland tend to be characterised by stronger literacy infrastructure, more progressive social policies and active civil society engagement.

CONCLUSION

Transgender literacy in India is far from uniform and reflects broader patterns of social inequality, state capacity and historical marginalisation. The findings of this study underscore that achieving educational equity for transgender individuals requires moving beyond generic anti-discrimination provisions to invest in targeted, community-responsive educational programmes. Policymakers must prioritise the states with the lowest transgender literacy rates particularly Bihar, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Jammu & Kashmir for immediate and sustained educational investment.

The success of high-performing states such as Mizoram and Kerala demonstrates that significant improvements in transgender literacy are achievable within reasonable time horizons when supported by enabling policy environments, dedicated funding and strong partnerships between government agencies and civil society. The Kochi Metro model of inclusive employment, Kerala's Transgender Policy and Maharashtra's network of NGO-led literacy programmes all provide replicable templates for other states.

Equally important is the need for curriculum reform to include transgender-inclusive content, sensitisation training for teachers and educational administrators and the provision of safe and gender-affirming learning environments. Scholarship and stipend programmes specifically targeted at transgender

students, similar to those available for SC and ST students, should be expanded and made accessible through simplified application processes.

Finally, future research should prioritise collecting more granular, disaggregated data on transgender educational outcomes, including enrolment, retention, completion and post-educational employment, to better understand the full scope of educational exclusion and the effectiveness of ongoing interventions. Qualitative research methods, including in-depth interviews and community-based participatory research, should complement quantitative census analysis to capture the lived experiences of transgender learners. Addressing the intersecting dimensions of gender, caste, class and geography will be essential to building an inclusive educational ecosystem that leaves no one behind.

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