

Contested Spaces: Gender, Community Networks, and the Absence of Civil Society Support for Transgender Communities in Jammu

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Abstract

With an emphasis on the lack of civil society involvement and the structural, social, and cultural obstacles they encounter, this study investigates the lived realities of transgender populations living in Deras in Jammu, India. Through qualitative techniques such as focus groups and semi-structured interviews, the study draws attention to the conflict between structural marginalization and community resilience. The findings suggest that traditional Dera networks, hierarchical communal households operating under a guru-chela (master-disciple) structure continue to provide essential social and economic support. However, transgender issues remain unaddressed due to insufficient civil society infrastructure, fragmented demographics, persistent stigma, and limited governmental interest. The study recommends a number of strategies to improve the visibility, inclusion, and empowerment of transgender persons in the area which include partnerships with Dera communities, gender sensitization, legislative protections, and the capacity-building of civil society organizations.

Keywords: Transgender communities, Dera culture, civil society, social marginalization, community resilience, policy advocacy.

Introduction

Over the past few decades, the idea of gender identity has drawn more scholarly, political, and cultural attention, underscoring the presence of various identities outside of heteronormative frameworks and challenging the conventional male-female binary, with transgender referring to people whose gender identity or expression does not correspond with the sex given to them at birth (American Psychological Association [APA], 2020), encompassing a broad spectrum of identities including gender non-binary people, trans men, trans women, and culturally specialized

groups like South Asian Hijras, the latter being a historically ingrained community in India with centuries-old roots in cultural and spiritual traditions (Nanda, 1999; Reddy, 2010).

Despite growing acceptance in international human rights discourses, transgender people still face systematic violence, discrimination, and marginalization globally, experiencing disproportionately high rates of homelessness, unemployment, poor health outcomes, and targeted violence (WHO, 2015) while cultural contexts vary in recognizing gender diversity, from stigmatization and criminalization to institutionalized third-gender categories like Two-Spirit identities (Winter et al., 2016), making transgender rights central to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals related to equality, health, and human rights.

In India, transgender individuals occupy a contradictory position of cultural conspicuousness and social marginalization; Hijras historically held ritual significance in Hindu and Islamic traditions, particularly in marriage and birth ceremonies (Nanda, 1999), and in Jammu were accorded respect during Maharaja Hari Singh's rule through ritual roles rather than begging (Sharma, 2016), but were later stigmatized under colonial legislation such as the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 (Hinchy, 2014), with Partition further disrupting their social networks and post-independence systemic neglect intensifying vulnerabilities.

The Supreme Court of India's ruling in 2014 *NALSA v. Union of India* recognized transgender persons as a "third gender" and affirmed rights under Articles 14, 15, 19, and 21, followed by the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, yet significant gaps remain between legal recognition and implementation at the grassroots level (Jabareen & Vilkomerson, 2013), compounded by the limited presence of civil society organizations in Jammu underscores a serious deficiency in regional support ecosystems.

Jammu and Kashmir, now a union territory, provides a distinctive socio-political and cultural setting for examining transgender life. Its geopolitical location, characterized by protracted hostilities and bloodshed, has eclipsed social concerns, such as those that transgender populations face. Unlike Kashmir, which has garnered greater attention from donors and civil society, Jammu has been largely overlooked in both research and advocacy (Gupta, 2024). The region's strongly ingrained gender norms shaped by conservative religious and cultural values, have historically marginalized gender-diverse voices, largely excluding transgender discourse from public and policy conversations (Gandotra, 2021).

In Jammu, Hijras and other transgender people are referred to as Khusra/Khusre, and many of them live in communal areas known as Deras. A single Dera is a home that is usually owned (or

rented) by the community and is run by a senior transgender person called the Guru. As Chelas (disciples), newcomers enter a relationship with the Guru that involves social protection, economic dependence, and cultural apprenticeship. This guru-chela relationship serves as the fundamental social framework for the generational transmission of skills, customs, and livelihood strategies, including badhai (ritual blessings at life-cycle ceremonies like births and weddings). In this study, “community networks” are specifically conceptualized as Dera networks - the interconnected structures of Dera-based social organizations. These “Dera networks” encompass the inter-Dera connections between multiple households across Jammu, and in some cases, across regions. These connections facilitate mutual recognition, resource-sharing, dispute arbitration, and ceremonial coordination, often through senior Guru figures and informal councils. In the almost complete lack of formal institutional support, these networks serve as surrogate kinship structures and constitute the main social infrastructure accessible to transgender people in Jammu (Sharma, 2016; Reddy, 2010; Nanda, 1999). Understanding the distinction between a Dera as a household unit and Dera networks as a broader inter-community web is essential to analyze both the resilience and the structural limitations documented in this study.

The needs, difficulties, and day-to-day experiences of transgender people residing in Deras, however, are still underreported in scholarly, civil society, and policy discourses despite their historical existence and cultural contributions. This research aims to address that gap.

Literature Review

Numerous works of literature examine transgender lives worldwide, with varying points of emphasis ranging from sociological, anthropological, and legal viewpoints to medical and psychiatric frameworks. This section summarizes previous research that is pertinent to the current study, arranging it on four levels: (1) Global discussion of NGOs and transgender lives, (2) South Asian and Indian contexts, (3) Indian legal and policy frameworks, and (4) research specifically related to Jammu & Kashmir. A theoretical framework subsection follows, which explicitly positions the present study within the analytical traditions of queer theory, citizenship theory, and Gramscian civil society analysis.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on three intersecting theoretical traditions to analyze the lived experiences of transgender populations in Jammu’s Deras and the absence of civil society ecosystem support structures.

Queer Theory and Gender Performativity

Butler's queer theory posits that gender is a performative act constituted through repeated enactment of social norms (Butler, 1988). Thus, the Hijra identity in Jammu is a sustained challenge to the heteronormative gender binary structuring Indian social life. Butler argues that stigma, exclusion, and pathologization of transgender individuals are disciplinary measures preserving the binary system. This paradigm guides the investigation of how everyday activities in Dera function as gender-normative transgression and communal connection. Furthermore, queer theory's critique of identity-based politics (Warner, 1993) helps to understand why civil society organizations may find it difficult to engage with the diverse identities within Dera communities.

Citizenship Theory and the Rights Gap

The tripartite model of citizenship by T. H Marshall provides an instructive lens for understanding the gap between formal legal recognition and substantive inclusion; comprising civil, political, and social rights (Marshall, 1950). The Supreme Court of India's *NALSA v. Union of India* judgment, 2014 and the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 represent significant advances in civil and political rights for transgender individuals. However, the presence of formal rights does not imply social citizenship, or the right to a standard of living compatible with full involvement in society. Scholars like Richardson have extended this framework to "sexual citizenship," addressing the conditions under which sexually and gender-diverse individuals are accorded full membership in the political community (Richardson, 2017). Despite formal legal safeguards, transgender people in Jammu continue to be excluded from healthcare, work, education, and civic involvement, highlighting the gap between nominal and substantive citizenship that this study aims to document and investigate.

Gramscian Civil Society and Counter-Hegemony

Antonio Gramsci defined civil society as the cultural and ideological space between the state and the economy, where hegemonic norms are reproduced through consent rather than coercion (Gramsci, 1971; Bates, 1975). Civil society is a potential arena for counter-hegemonic struggle, where subaltern groups can challenge dominant ideas and articulate alternative visions of social justice. In India, NGOs and advocacy organizations have long performed a counter-hegemonic role for marginalized communities, opposing discriminatory practices in health, law, and public discourse (Nelson & Dorsey, 2007; Thara & Patel, 2010). The absence of such organizations in Jammu for transgender communities represents the loss of a critical institutional space through

which transgender people could challenge hegemonic gender norms and bureaucratic indifference.

Global Discussion of NGOs and Transgender Lives

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are key civil society actors in global transgender advocacy. NGOs worldwide have addressed systemic gaps and facilitated inclusive conversations on gender, sexuality, and human rights (Francis, 2024). In India, organizations have expanded mental health services, combatted stigma, and advanced systemic changes (Thara & Patel, 2010). The Humsafar Trust in Mumbai, for example, combined HIV prevention programming with rights-based advocacy among transgender and men-who-have-sex-with-men (MSM) populations (The Humsafar Trust, 2000). NGOs internationally have shifted from relief-oriented approaches toward advocacy-driven strategies focused on structural transformation (Nelson & Dorsey, 2007).

The international human rights framework has increasingly centred transgender exclusion as a priority concern. The Yogyakarta Principles established a framework of rights related to sexual orientation and gender identity, emphasizing state obligations to protect individuals of all gender identities (Thoreson, 2009). Empirical research documents disproportionately high rates of violence, barriers to healthcare, and workplace discrimination faced by transgender populations globally (White Hughto et al., 2015; Reisner et al., 2016).

South Asian and Indian Contexts

South Asian societies have long recognized gender variation through institutionalized social roles, such as the Hijra in India, the Khwaja Sira in Pakistan, and the Meti in Nepal (Reddy, 2010; Hossain, 2012). Anthropological studies characterize Hijras as occupying ambivalent social positions where they are simultaneously stigmatized and ritually significant (Nanda, 1999). Due to their systematic exclusion from formal education and employment, many depend on sex work, begging, and ritual performance for their livelihood (Reddy, 2010).

Postcolonial scholarship highlights how colonial legal legacies continue to shape societal attitudes toward transgender individuals in India (Hinchy, 2014), noting that the prosecution of same-sex relationships under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code until 2018 was part of broader exclusionary legal processes (Narain & Bhan, 2005). Sociological and ethnographic research documents the daily negotiations with identity, survival, and stigma that characterize Hijra lives (Sharma, 1989; Puri, 2016). Deras play a critical role in fostering community, transmitting survival skills, and preserving Hijra cultural practices (Reddy, 2010).

Indian Legal and Policy Frameworks

In 2014, the Supreme Court ruling in *NALSA v. Union of India* 2014 marked a landmark moment in the recognition of transgender rights in India, affirming the right of transgender individuals to self-identify their gender (K.S. Radhakrishnan, 2014). The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 sought to operationalize this recognition; however, it has been criticized for requiring medical certification and for failing to adequately address housing, education, and employment concerns (Gupta, 2024; Spicer, 2010). This study aims to shed light on the gap between official legal recognition and the practical exclusions faced by transgender people, particularly in locations such as Jammu.

Research on Jammu and Kashmir

There is still a dearth of academic research on transgender issues in Jammu & Kashmir. The limited scholarship produced over the past decade documents the near-complete invisibility of transgender populations in local policy frameworks, a situation exacerbated by deeply conservative social norms (Majid et al., 2024). Existing studies underscore the importance of Deras as the primary social and cultural institutions sustaining Hijra life in Jammu. In addition to shelter, these communal spaces provide kinship-like bonds, shared identity, and a platform for ceremonial economic activity (Sharma, 2016). Despite this, communities face nearly complete exclusion from formal employment, persistent social discrimination, and severely restricted access to healthcare (Gupta, 2024). Research also highlights the compounded vulnerability of transgender people in conflict-affected regions, where displacement and conservative political environments exacerbate existing marginalizations (Rizvi, 2020).

Significance of the Study

This study connects national policy in India, the cultural-historical context of Jammu & Kashmir, and international discussions on transgender rights. Highlighting the lived experiences of Hijra and transgender populations in Jammu's Deras, it contributes to conversations on gender, marginality, and rights while bridging a regional gap. While organizations such as The Humsafar Trust and the Naz Foundation have demonstrably shifted public discourse and policy in other regions, there are no similar programs interacting with transgender populations in Jammu. This absence produces a deficit of advocacy, welfare provision, and public visibility, and raises questions about the political, cultural, and structural elements that contribute to the disengagement of NGOs in this region. This study identifies the consequences of this absence and investigates potential frameworks for meaningful civil society engagement.

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Objectives

1. To understand the challenges that hinder NGO engagement with transgender communities in Jammu.
2. To explore the impact of the absence of NGO support on the social, economic, and cultural lives of transgender individuals in Jammu.

Methodology

The current study uses a qualitative research design to investigate the challenges faced by transgender communities in Jammu, with particular attention to the absence of civil society support. The study was carried out in the Jammu district, where the majority of transgender people live in Deras, guru-run communal spaces that offer social, cultural, and financial support. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who had firsthand of the phenomena under study. Transgender participants were chosen based on their active involvement in Dera community life and willingness to discuss sensitive topics, including livelihood, social stigma, and access to support. Civil society representatives were selected for their familiarity with operational challenges in Jammu and their background in grassroots development work. Data were collected through focus group discussions (FGDs) and semi-structured interviews. A focus group discussion involving 20 transgender individuals facilitated the collective sharing of experiences, while individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with civil society representatives. The semi-structured format ensured thematic continuity while allowing participants to freely express their opinions. All interview and FGD transcriptions were anonymised to preserve participant confidentiality.

Secondary data were collected from academic journals, government documents, newspaper publications, and international human rights instruments to situate local findings within broader national and international discussions on transgender rights and civil society engagement.

Findings and Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Transcripts were reviewed repeatedly to identify recurring patterns, concepts, and categories, which were then grouped into overarching themes. Analysis focused on two broad domains: structural challenges (e.g., the absence of NGO support and governmental funding deficits) and community dynamics (e.g., Dera culture and internal divisions). The study also compared local realities with lessons from

successful initiatives in other states, such as Mumbai and Delhi, highlighting strategies applicable to Jammu. Following themes have been emerged from the data which are discussed as below-

1. Institutional and Structural Barriers

1.1 Limited NGO Infrastructure and Government Support

The absence of a structured NGO ecosystem in Jammu emerged as the major barrier to transgender support in the region. Jammu lacks both the government facilitation and civil society traditions.

One NGO representative noted;

“Jammu lacks the ecosystem for NGO work; there’s neither government facilitation nor civil society traditions that encourage grassroots organizing on gender and sexuality.”

Similarly, transgender participants expressed feelings of neglect due to the absence of NGO engagement;

“In Delhi or Chandigarh, NGOs visit hijras regularly. They help with ID cards, Aadhar cards, health checkups, or just listen. But here in Jammu, no one ever comes. We feel like we’re left behind.”

The narratives indicate an institutional vacuum marked by the absence of both NGO engagement and state support (Putnam et al., 1993).

1.2 Funding Challenges and Prioritization

Limited funding and skewed donor prioritization restrict potential NGO engagement in Jammu. Kashmir receives a disproportionate share of civil society attention and resources, leaving Jammu’s transgender community underserved.

As one NGO reported;

“National and international donors tend to prioritize areas seen as more volatile or high-profile, like Kashmir.”

Another representative reported that;

“Funding decisions are often tied to numbers. By limiting scope only to transgenders, it doesn’t encourage funders to give us donations/funds.”

Population size and perceived visibility influence resource allocation (Banks et al., 2015), reflecting a structural inequity in humanitarian and development funding. Smaller populations in politically peripheral areas are rendered doubly invisible - to the state and to civil society.

1.3 Legal Invisibility and Absence of Grievance Mechanisms

Participants consistently highlighted that, despite the existence of national legal frameworks like the NALSA judgment and the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, enforcement is limited in Jammu (PTI, 2022).

Transgender individuals often remain without formal avenues to address discrimination, contributing to structural vulnerability as narrated by one participant;

“No one sees us. The people visit us during elections or for votes and make fake promises of helping and understanding our issues. After winning we are invisible, our problems don’t exist for them. We are nobody.”

2. Visibility, Awareness, and Social Stigma

2.1 Social Invisibility and Neglect

Social stigma against transgender individuals in Jammu is pervasive and multidimensional. Participants described harassment, public mockery, and social avoidance. Transgender individuals in Jammu reported a profound lack of visibility, which contributes to social neglect and exclusion (UNDP, 2012).

One participant reflected;

“People here don’t understand us. They stare, mock, or avoid. People come to us on Wednesdays, offer charity to gain merit, hoping it will calm their Mercury... we take their troubles onto ourselves... we too are someone’s children... yet society still doesn’t accept us.”

Another participant described;

“People here in Jammu don’t work for us like in other neighbouring states like Delhi or Chandigarh. We don’t get the same attention or help.”

2.2 Stigma, Misunderstanding, and Fear

Social stigma against transgender individuals is widespread, with participants noting harassment, mockery, and avoidance in public spaces.

NGO representatives confirmed that such attitudes limit the effectiveness of interventions;

“Without sensitization workshops or awareness campaigns, all the efforts would remain unproductive.”

These lived narratives align with international research demonstrating that stigma and low public awareness impede transgender individuals’ access to health and social services (Winter et al., 2016; White Hughto et al., 2015).

2.3 Distrust and Prior Experiences of Disappointment

The community's deep-seated mistrust of external actors poses a significant barrier to NGO engagement and reflects a rational response to historical exploitation and tokenism. Participants voiced concerns about outsiders who had engaged with the community for research or documentation without providing tangible benefits.

A participant explained;

“We cannot trust outsiders. Some promise help, then disappear. We are fed up of all these fake promises.”

Similarly, NGOs reported reciprocal challenges;

“Our well-intentioned efforts are often met with suspicion. The community has been disappointed before, and there's fear on both sides. They don't trust any outsider and won't want our intervention in their Deras.”

Such mutual distrust present on both sides of the community-NGO relationship is well documented in studies of community-based interventions among socially marginalized groups (Kabeer, 2000).

3. Community Networks and Dera Culture

3.1 Reliance on Traditional Dera Structures

Deras provide social, economic, and cultural security to transgender individuals in Jammu, functioning as surrogate families, economic units, and repositories of cultural identity in the absence of formal institutional support.

One participant stated;

“Our guru is our guide. The Dera gives us shelter, food, and a name. We don't need others.”

Another added a distinction in occupational identity;

“We are the real transgenders. The others are fake, who beg on streets and signals. They are defaming us. We have only one occupation of taking badhai as per our traditional occupations. We are not the ones who beg.”

NGO representatives highlighted the challenges of navigating these closed networks;

“Internal rivalries between deras and conflicting power hierarchies complicate external interventions. It is hard to navigate within.”

“The traditional dera system is a closed space. Intervening can be perceived as a threat to community autonomy.”

These networks offer resilience and protection to marginalized individuals but may limit access to external resources by creating inward-looking social dynamics (Langlois, 2022; Reddy, 2005).

4. Population Size, Fragmentation, and Access to Civil Society

4.1 Small Population and Fragmentation

The dispersed and small size of the transgender population in Jammu limits collective visibility and organized action. Civil society representatives noted difficulties in programmatic planning due to the absence of reliable demographic data.

As one of the NGOs representatives stated that;

“Without proper data or visibility in census data, health surveys, or schemes, it’s challenging to justify funding or programmatic focus.”

Internal rivalries and fragmented leadership within Dera communities impede collective advocacy, hindering the ability to influence policy and demand rights or access resources.

4.2 Educational Constraints

Limited literacy among transgender participants restricts engagement with NGO programming, civil society resources, and awareness of available support structures.

As one representative stated that;

“Many in the transgender community lack basic literacy, making participatory programming difficult and it’s not easy to make them understand or trust us.”

Many participants had received no formal schooling due to family rejection and social exclusion. This educational deficit correlates with reduced participation in social programs and limited access to rights-based information in South Asia (Francis, 2024).

5. Socio-Political Context and Marginalization

The broader political environment in Jammu and Kashmir significantly shapes the marginalization of transgender populations. NGOs noted that social work on gender and sexuality is often perceived as provocative in a socially conservative context.

“In such a socially conservative region, working on transgender rights is seen as provocative. Most NGOs avoid it to maintain legitimacy. As some of the transgenders are involved in prostitution or sex work for their survival.”

This finding aligns with research on conflict-affected regions more broadly, which documents how political instability and entrenched conservative norms consistently overshadow social justice concerns, rendering gender-diverse populations doubly invisible (Bacchetta, 2002). The political climate thus constrains both civil society actors and transgender individuals.

Discussion

Transgender individuals in Jammu's Deras experience a compounded institutional abandonment, wherein the state, civil society, and formal economic structures have, in overlapping ways, withdrawn or failed to extend their protective functions to this community. This discussion situates that diagnosis within the three theoretical frameworks introduced earlier: queer theory, citizenship theory, and Gramscian civil society analysis, while also drawing comparisons with successful civil society interventions in other Indian cities to identify transferable lessons. Gender performativity theory explains the paradox of transgender and Hijra individuals in Jammu as hyper-visible in public yet invisible within institutions, a condition structurally produced through stigma as a disciplinary mechanism. Drawing on Butler's queer theory posits that stigma functions as a regulatory force enforcing the gender binary by publicly humiliating those whose gender expressions deviate from normative performances, thereby reinforcing conformity by signaling the social costs of gender transgression. As evident in theme 2, this disciplinary dynamic produces two consequences: at the individual level, stigma harms transgender individuals and deters them from accessing support systems, obstructing their engagement with civil society; at the institutional level, the social coding of Hijra visibility as shameful discourages service providers and officials from openly engaging with the community, resulting in an exclusionary loop where those with the greatest need remain least accessible to institutional support. Theme 1's findings further highlight Marshall's citizenship gap, where the acquisition of formal civil and political rights through *NALSA v. Union of India* in 2014 and the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 has not translated into substantive social citizenship, leaving a persistent divide between law and practice in the absence of civil society actors providing legal literacy, documentation assistance, and advocacy. Systemic exclusion from education and other social rights continues to hinder meaningful access to healthcare, employment, and protection from violence, reflecting recognition without realization. The contrast with metropolitan contexts such as Delhi and Mumbai underscores this structural deficit, where organizations actively bridge this gap, whereas their absence in Jammu leaves it unaddressed. From a Gramscian perspective, civil society in Jammu operates within conservative hegemonic norms that perpetuate stigma and exclusion evidenced in the findings of Theme 1,3 and Theme 5; making it a non-neutral space where engagement with transgender issues carries reputational risk for NGOs. The absence of transgender-inclusive civil society actors forecloses counter-hegemonic space, leaving dominant norms institutionally unchallenged and reinforcing

structural exclusion. Within this context of theme 4, the Dera network emerges as a nascent counter-hegemonic formation, embodying a structural paradox as both a primary source of survival and a potential constraint on engagement with wider civil society, thereby making it the necessary and strategic point of entry for any meaningful and sustainable intervention through its guru-chela structure.

Case Studies from Other States

The Humsafar Trust's model of integrating health service provision with rights-based advocacy carries clear potential for adaptation in Jammu. Meeting immediate practical needs through mobile health clinics, identity document assistance, and harm reduction services can function as a trust-building platform for deeper community engagement (The Humsafar Trust, 2000). This approach directly addresses community mistrust by establishing civil society credibility through the delivery of tangible benefits before moving to advocacy or awareness-building activities. The Naz Foundation's use of community health educators drawn from within the transgender community (peer educators) has proved effective in building program reach and legitimacy in contexts where engagement by outsiders is resisted (Nelson & Dorsey, 2007). Recruiting and training peer educators from within Jammu's Dera communities would address both literacy and mistrust barriers.

Reflexivity and Ethical Considerations

The researcher critically reflected on positionality, acknowledging how personal assumptions and interactions could shape interpretations. Sensitivity to participants' vulnerabilities guided the process, ensuring informed consent, anonymity through pseudonyms, and secure data storage. Participants' autonomy was respected, with the option to withdraw at any stage. Interviews were conducted in safe, private spaces to protect dignity and minimize exposure to stigma.

Framework for Potential NGO Involvement in Jammu

Drawing on lessons from established NGOs across India, a comprehensive framework for supporting transgender communities in Jammu must balance immediate, practical interventions with long-term structural reforms.

1. Well-being and Health

Healthcare is the most immediate entry point for engagement. In collaboration with nearby clinics and hospitals, NGOs can start with basic health outreach and counseling before progressively transitioning to mental health assistance and gender-affirming treatments. These fosters trust while meeting pressing demands.

2. Social Inclusion and Awareness

In addition to focused training for authorities and service providers, stigma reduction calls for ongoing sensitization in workplaces, schools, and community institutions. Humanizing transgender lives and normalizing gender variance can be achieved through concurrent initiatives to improve media visibility and storytelling.

3. Dera Cooperation and Community-Based Support Networks

The Dera culture has a significant influence on transgender groups in Jammu, offering both protection and restrictions. As mediators, NGOs can collaborate with Dera leaders to establish legitimacy while honouring local systems. Simultaneously, establishing mentorship programs and peer support groups can foster camaraderie, lessen isolation, and provide avenues for economic empowerment that supplement conventional means of subsistence.

4. Advocating for Policies and Legal Protections

Even while conservative environments may oppose policy advocacy, little changes can have a significant impact over time. Preventing prejudice in healthcare, education, and employment could be the first priority. Transgender people might report abuses through regional grievance procedures, and current national laws, such the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, would be strictly enforced

Conclusion

This study examines the lived experiences of transgender individuals within Jammu's Dera networks, highlighting a self-reliant community that is institutionally abandoned. Sustained by internal support systems, this community is systematically failed by external institutions, with the state enforcing laws without implementing them. Findings demonstrate that transgender invisibility in Jammu is a consequence of structural forces: institutional indifference, pervasive stigma, and resource allocation decisions that exclude this community from support. Despite legal recognition through NALSA (2014) and the Transgender Persons Act (2019), constitutional rights have not yielded tangible improvements in healthcare, education, employment, or protection from violence, leaving a gap between legal rights and lived realities.

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