

THE INNER WORLD OF KINNARS

RUCHIR KUMAR busts some myths, as he rocks with a hip crowd of Kinnars descended on Patna to talk rights

Friday was different. In a small corner of the town, sixty different people gathered for a really momentous meet. They talked about how the world hated them, even though they loved in return and how people dispossessed them of everything, and kept them off!

Unwelcome they may be to the world, but in the few beautiful hours that they gathered, they let their hair down to be caught in a swirl and let the world know, they had arrived. And arrived they did!

It was the day of the Kinnar's in Patna and as one jelled with them, their worries, their pain, their love for life and zest seemed unbelievable.

There they were—a hip crowd—dancing, swaying, sashaying in their very best-seemingly ordinary-till they spoke of their world. Unwanted, shoed off, with no access to means to a normal life—the trauma showed. But the fun loving, damn care attitude was there for all to see.

Some work as professionals in banking and business and in big towns. Some have adopted children and been do-gooders all their life, while others still, have joined NGO's to empower others like themselves. But the abrasive society does not go away and denial of their rights, leave them out cold, and in the dark

MYTHOLOGICAL CONNECT

It has been a huge climb down for members of the transgender community from the ancient days. The community finds a mention in the epic Mahabharata in the form of Shikhandi, who was used to defeat the invincible 'Bhishma Pitamah'. As the epic goes, Arjuna had used Shikhandi, a Hijra, to rain arrows at 'Bhishma', his grand uncle, who sided with the 'Kauravas', to defeat their unholy design.

Besides, Arjuna had remained incognito as a Kinnar at the time of 'Agyatvaas' (to hide identity and escape recognition that would have otherwise led to another 13 years of exile). In hiding at Matsyapradesh (Viratnagar), he was a dance teacher of princess Uttara, who later married his son Abhimanyu.

The one good aspect in the transgender community is that it is free of caste or creed divide. The only distinction here is of 'guru' (master) and 'chela' (disciple). Right from the way they clap, to enticing clients, the 'guru' teaches them at a young age.

But why do they behave in a belligerent manner in daytime?

Simran explains, "There are two primary reasons. First, it is the frustra-



■ A Patna event gave Kinnars an occasion to forget pain and display their zest for life.

AP DUBE/HT PHOTO

tion of cruelty inflicted on us at night. Secondly, our (sexual) temperament increases during day time. Besides, if you don't behave the way most of us do, the civil society will not part with a farthing."

TOUGH BUSINESS

So, is that a business tactics? "Of course," replies Simran candidly.

If transgender members are to be believed, their average daily earning is anything between Rs 500 and Rs 2,000 here. "The earning depends on their ability to attract and extract most out of customers. Why you think they wear skimpy clothes, revealing their cleavage?" asks Simran.

Isn't the income enough for a decent living?

"No. The cost of living of a transgender, as compared to a normal person,

is much more even if they live in the same city. Members of TG community do not easily get house to live. Even if they do, they are charged extra. Add to it the expenses on feminisation, taking hormonal pills for breast development, muscle weakening to look feminine, buying beauty accessories, et al," she says.

Even as we talk, Simran is called out by the manager of the hotel where the state level consultation with Hijra and Kinnar community members was held. After sometime, the burly Simran walks in with a frown on her face. She then makes an announcement. "You are not supposed to venture out of the hotel intermittently and do 'tafri' (merry-making). As it is, very few hotels allow us. You should respect the hotel's business concern as well," she says in a stern voice — the warning coming loud and clear.

True, most hotels reserve the rights of admission. And, members of the transgender community are not wel-

come everywhere.

On the contrary, their life does not move beyond sex — either by choice or force — and begging. Unfortunately, these vocations do not come with pension benefit. Naturally, the worry of growing old and being 'unemployed' haunts them, always.

We see what they do in daylight. What happens to them after dusk is invisible to the world. For, their nights are darker than ours.

"Around 140 TG community members are raped every night in India. All these incidents go unreported," says Simran Shaikh, who belongs to the same ilk. As a programme officer with India HIV/AIDS Alliance, a New Delhi based NGO, Simran is working on 'Pehchan', a project for TG empowerment.

"How do you complain of rape when you are yourself engaged in sexual activities? And, who do you complain to?" she asks. Simran then hastens to

add, "The police are our worst perpetrators of sexual exploitation."

Has anyone thought why they need to sell their bodies or beg?

Santosh Kumar of Patna has an answer. "That's because MSMs (men having sex with men) like me do not get jobs either in government or private sector. Even if we open a small shop, no one will come because of the social stigma attached."

PROBLEMS APLENTY

Ironically, there is no end to their litany of woes.

"We do not get social services for lack of IDs (identity cards). We want reservation in education and job as well," says Monika, who works in a public sector undertaking in Bihar. Like Simran, she is lucky to have fought her way into getting a formal education and land up with a respectable job.



Sonia (Patna), too, talks of identity proof. "We do not have IDs. Aadhar (Unique Identity Cards) is the only government document, which allows transgenders to register. We need proper IDs so that we can avail of social services," she says.

Aarti, from Hajipur, wants a discrimination-free society and equal rights for kinnars. "It pinches when the civil society sees you disrespectfully and as a sex object." Shivani (Patna) echoes Aarti's thoughts, as she says, "If you cannot treat us at par, at least do not make fun of us."

Michael Rosie, also from Patna, talks about bigger issues. "The government should legalise marriage between members of transgender community and give us child adoption rights. We also need property rights," she says.

On an emotional note, Manoj Kumar (Danapur) says, "Why do people we love ditch us? We are human beings. We need love and have the right to love. We also have feelings. Our partners should not use and leave us. We, too, have a heart."

Anupam Singh from Aurangabad wants easy accessibility to feminisation process (sexual reassignment surgery). "We should be made aware about the process and the same be made easily accessible. In metros like Delhi, options are available. Not so in Bihar," laments Anupam.

Suraiya Naik (Gaya) alias Shanti Devi, says the government should open an ashram for her brethren where they can be taught sewing, embroidery, tailoring, cooking and other vocational courses. Suraiya has tried her luck at the hustings from Gaya. The defeat has, however, not deterred her from contesting again. She thinks she still has the spark in her that can kindle her political career.

Mansi (Patna) has done her intermediate from the Bankipore Girls High School. She wants to do something in life. Unfortunately, other than dancing, she finds all avenues closed. "Why is the thought of the civil society negative towards us? We do not get jobs, can't live freely, or go to religious places and don't get respect anywhere. Can we not change public perception?" she asks, knowing well she will never get an answer from the civil society.

Today, they find themselves fighting for marriage and child adoption rights among many other issues. But is anyone listening?

Monk's decree appointed VC in ancient Nalanda

RARE FINDS The KPJRI team also discovers exquisite historical sculptures, remains of a Buddhist monastery at Ghosrawan

Mammen Matthew

Exploratory excavations at the Nalanda Mahavihara site in Bihar's Patna district of Bihar, some 130 km south-east of Patna, has laid bare exquisite statuettes, which for the first time reveal how appointments were made to the Kulapati or vice chancellor's post at the ancient university.

The statuettes and murals found at Ghosrawan on the periphery of the ruins of the Nalanda University, now establishes, the VCs were appointed by a decree passed by a monk's assembly, which had to be ratified by a council of elder monks to govern Nalanda.

The explorations carried out by the K.P. Jayaswal Research Institute, Patna, has claimed to have discovered the 'vital missing link' in the history of the ancient university while attempting to document archaeological sites state wide since July 2007, which have unearthed over 600 rare evidences to Bihar society.

Director of KPJRI, Dr Bijoy Kumar Choudhary, said the team also discovered exquisite historical sculptures, remains of a Buddhist monastery and other antiquities from Ghosrawan while perusing evidence from the village.

"We successfully linked a stone inscription discovered at the site in 1848, and now kept at the Indian Museum, Kolkata,

■ The rare statue of Maya giving birth to Buddha, found at Ghosrawan.



■ The 10th-11th century idols of Buddha and Ganesha.

which was re-read with the newer murals and statuettes discovered to confirm Ghosrawan as the site of the Buddhist monastery known as Yashovarmapura vihara.

Archaeologists here say, the Ghosrawan stone inscription informs that a monk called Veeradeva originally hailing from Nagarahara (Near Jalalabad in west Pakistan) visited Yashovarmapura vihara, and stayed here for a long time. He gradually won the esteem of the Pala emperor, Devapala who ruled over Bihar and

Bengal during the first half of the 9th century. Veeradeva also won the respect of the holy monk, Satyabodhi, probably the senior monk of the Nalanda Mahavihara during the same period and was subsequently appointed by a decree of the monks' assembly to govern Nalanda (Nalanda paripalanaya niyata sangha-sthiteriya sthita).

Said an elated Choudhary: "This evidence clearly tells us that the head of Nalanda was formally appointed by an assembly of monks. It also suggests that to bag such an important appointment,

the trust of the royalty and the elderly monks was an important precondition. It is crucial evidence because so far we had no idea how the head of the Nalanda Mahavihara was appointed."

At Ghosrawan-Tetrawan, potsherds of black-slipped ware and the red ware associated with the northern-black-polished ware have also been found in explorations and the antiquity of these shards go back to the 6th century BC.

Choudhary said, the sculptures at Ghosrawan-Tetrawan can stylistically be assigned to a period between 800-1200 AD. The burnt bricks found at the mound are akin in size and shape to those used in the early medieval structures of the region. The coins of Vignrahapala found at the site can be assigned to a period between 700-900 AD.

It has also been established, that the stone inscription at Ghosrawan was engraved during Devapala's reign, i.e. the first half of the 9th century AD. Moreover, the monastery seems to have been established after Chinese traveller, Xuanzang's visit to Nalanda and its surroundings, as his travelogue does not mention it. Given the proximity of Ghosrawan-Tetrawan complex to Nalanda, and the profuse Buddhist features at these two sites, it is unlikely that he would have missed them. Therefore, the beginning of monastic establishment at Ghosrawan can be placed around the turn of the 8th century AD, though the settlement originated here around 6th century BC.

The extant sculptures found at the village have been stylistically placed between 700-1200 AD. Significantly, the images belonging to more than one religion

occupy the same chronological context. Thus the Buddhist and Shaiva images, now kept at a modern temple called Asa Devi at Ghosrawan, seem to belong to the 8th and 9th centuries. These images have plain rounded stele, a little ornamentation and some jewellery, and the Buddhist images, in particular, reflect the influence of the Sarnath school. The Shaiva sculptures include a few Uma-Maheshvara images.

Buddhist sculptures predominate the assemblage of this period and include such images as Maya giving birth to Buddha, Buddha taming Nalagiri, the descent of Buddha from the Trayastrinsa heaven and the ashta-maha-pratiharya scene of Buddha's life.

Historians say, the images assignable to the 10th and 11th century AD at Ghosrawan belong to the Shakta, Shaiva, Vaishnava and Bauddha sects and are marked by an increasing ornamentation and detailing of the back-slabs, a growing stiffness and angularity of bodily features and a high polish. The Buddhist images predominate even during the late Pala period. The 10th century repertoire includes an image of Buddha in bhumisparsha mudra, flanked by Avalokiteshvara and Maitreya, an image of Manjushree.

"What it details also, is that several religious streams flourished, and together at the site, a rare feature of a secular environment even at those times," Choudhary said, speaking of the rare discoveries, which is bound to kick up further interest in Nalanda.

The Bihar government has already established the global Nalanda University with economist Amartya Sen as mentor, with funding from all south-east Asian countries.

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