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The Unseen Curriculum: Narratives of Transgender Resistance in India's Educational Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Educational institutions in India, often regarded as instruments of empowerment and social mobility, simultaneously function as powerful mechanisms of regulation and exclusion for transgender and gender-diverse individuals. The everyday operations of schooling—from gender-segregated facilities and binary documentation to normative curricula and faculty apathy—are governed by an insidious hidden curriculum that reinforces cisnormativity, upholds patriarchal norms, and renders non-conforming identities invisible. The review critically examines how these institutional logics manifest within schools and universities and explores how transgender students confront, navigate, and resist them through diverse strategies of survival and subversion. Drawing on interdisciplinary frameworks from queer theory, intersectionality, and critical pedagogy, the review explores the layered nature of marginalization where caste, region, language, and class intersect with gender identity. It highlights the stark underrepresentation of vernacular, Dalit, Adivasi, rural, and non-binary experiences in dominant academic discourse, which continues to center urban, English-speaking, dominant-caste narratives. At the same time, it foregrounds the creative and political forms of resistance enacted by transgender students—through bodily autonomy, campus organizing, digital counter publics, autobiographical writing, and grassroots activism—which contest institutional erasure and assert transgender lives as sites of legitimate knowledge production. The review identifies key gaps in the existing literature, including limited empirical focus on educators, curricular content, and the absence of trans-authored scholarship. It argues for a paradigm shift from inclusion-as-access to inclusion-as-transformation—advocating for trans-affirmative educational frameworks rooted in justice, plurality, and epistemic dignity.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the diverse cultural mosaic of India, where traditions and progressive values often coexist uneasily, transgender individuals occupy a unique yet marginalized position. Although religious and cultural texts acknowledge the community, Indian transgender individuals often do not receive legal rights, are excluded by society and are often not accepted by various institutions (Hossain, 2017). Transgender people in India are still mostly excluded, especially in education, although this area is supposed to remove barriers to empowerment and advancement. In regional mythologies, Indian society has traditionally noted the importance of transgender persons—known as Hijra, Aravani or Jogappa. But this celebration of culture has mostly failed to lead to true inclusion in US institutions. It wasn't until 2014 when the landmark

National Legal Services Authority vs. In Union of India (NALSA), the Supreme Court of India promised that transgender individuals could legally identify themselves and be treated the same way as everyone else (Misra, 2014). If a judicial affirmation is accepted, it is generally only expressed in words, because transgender students in educational places still face hostile attitudes, barriers and direct discrimination. Educational institutions represent society, helping form each person's values, direction and self-image. Yet, these organizations tend to spread dominant gender rules and straightness which are usually hidden in the day-to-day lessons given at school (Jackson, 1968; Apple, 1979). For students who are transgender, this curriculum tends to silence, erase, mistreat and in some cases lead to violence. There are unwelcoming facilities, non–inclusive books and hurtful policies, making the education system remain deeply unfair to some students (Mishra & Sengupta, 2021). There is also a lack of representation in academic literature of the ways transgender individuals face, work against or change these unfriendly environments. Many authors examine the structures or policies at play, but fewer write about what students and teachers go through, how they stay strong and how they fight back in Indian schools (Rao, 2020). Studying these stories gives us valuable understanding of the ways gender and power relate to education.

Even with constitutional protection, transgender individuals in schools face regular discrimination. Most of the time, whether it is formal education or not, the curriculum plays a part in making transgender identities seem invisible or wrong (Srivastava & Chopra, 2022). This kind of bias is not only found in studies; it is also real and comes out as bullying, getting ignored in discussions, being ignored by administration and having little or no support systems (Puri, 2018). More research should come directly from transgender people's experiences. Usually, studies assess laws or make suggestions for change without considering how transgender students really live on a daily basis (Nambissan, 2021). Because of this, the conversations on including transgender people in schools do not fully recognize how they exercise their rights, resist stereotypes and present themselves as themselves. The difference between policy formation and its actual use by schools is concerning. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 requires all schools to accept transgender students, but the practice is unreliable and sometimes follows only the letter of the law (Jain, 2020). If educators don't grasp the ways transgender students experience and reject stigma in the classroom, moves for inclusion will be shallow. By discussing gender and resistance, the focus of the study is on how transgender students in India encounter and react to challenges in schools, colleges and universities. It uses personal accounts, interviews and case examples to look at how transgender individuals interact with and respond to rules, policies and expectations of society and institutions.

Objectives of the Review

1. To explore how transgender students resist, negotiate, and survive within educational spaces.

2. To critically review existing literature on gender nonconformity and hidden curriculum in India.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND THEORETICAL LENS

2.1 The Hidden/Unseen Curriculum

Sometimes referred to as the "unseen" curriculum, this describes the cultural, social and power lessons found in schools that don't appear in the written lessons. In 1968, Jackson stated that the hidden curriculum includes the invisible mechanisms which schools and universities apply to create obedient students. Critical pedagogy scholars Apple (2004) and Giroux (1983) later added to this concept. They consist of gender being separated into two groups, people being expected to behave as expected by society's view of heterosexual relationships and supporting systems based on caste and class. India has so-called hidden curriculum elements in its uniforms, toilets, school dorms and syllabi which mostly ignore important issues for LGBTQ+ people (Kumar & Patil, 2020). Schools and colleges give importance to some identities while seeing others as problems or things to ignore. Not giving transgender experiences any space in academia and related discussions means these groups do not receive both recognition and knowledge in the production of knowledge (Spivak, 1988). The hidden curriculum thus plays a key role in shaping attitudes towards marginalized identities, particularly transgender and non-binary individuals. It operates through everyday interactions—teachers' reluctance to address gender variance, administrative ignorance of pronouns, and peer ridicule—which cumulatively reinforce the status quo. As Kumashiro (2002) asserts, education often teaches "normative oppression" by failing to trouble the very systems of meaning that exclude non-normative identities.

2.2 Queer Theory and Trans Epistemologies

To interrogate the effects of the hidden curriculum on transgender students, this review draws on queer theory and trans epistemologies. Queer theory, as developed by theorists like Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick, and Michael Warner, critiques the naturalization of gender and sexuality and emphasizes the fluid, performative nature of identity (Butler, 1990). In *Gender Trouble*, Butler conceptualizes gender as a repetitive performance regulated by social norms, which opens up possibilities for subversion and reconfiguration. Being transgender means challenging the basic categories of gender, so drag can be a way to stand up against gender pronouncements, rules and ideas.

These criticisms are further developed in trans studies by putting the lived experiences and political problems of transgender people in focus. For Susan Stryker (2006), trans studies stands on its own and challenges the fundamental principles behind many existing disciplines. In Jack Halberstam's In a Queer Time and Place (2005), the author shows how queer and trans bodies respond to time and location in unique ways and suggest ways to handle and protest against institutions. In the South Asian context, existing theories from the West are more complex. Hijra, Kinnar and Aravani communities in India break the rigid pattern common in American trans rights (Reddy, 2005; Hossain, 2017). Such identities are linked to specific caste, religious and ritual customs and are often both honored in some places and banned elsewhere. Therefore, Indian queer theory should take account of various points of intersection, address inequalities based on caste and focus on decolonizing knowledge, keeping in mind that trans lives in India have different histories than those in Europe or America (Dutta & Roy, 2014).

2.3 Resistance and Agency

To dominant portrayals of transgender students as passive victims, recent scholarship highlights their acts of resistance, resilience, and agency. These acts are often subtle, embodied, and performative, including choices around dress, speech, naming, and spatial occupation. Michel de Certeau's (1984) notion of "tactics" and James Scott's (1990) "everyday forms of resistance" help conceptualize how marginalized groups resist dominant structures through micro-political acts that may not be overtly confrontational but are nonetheless deeply subversive.

The classroom and the campus can thus be seen as contested terrains, where transgender students exercise agency by forming collectives, participating in student politics, and asserting their identities despite structural constraints. Such resistance may also be digital—manifesting through social media platforms where students create trans-affirmative communities, circulate counter-narratives, and challenge administrative apathy (Banerjee, 2022). A key analytical framework here is intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to describe how systems of oppression—such as race, gender, caste, and class—intersect to shape unique experiences of marginalization. In the Indian context, the intersection of gender identity with caste, religion, and region significantly influences how transgender students experience and resist exclusion. As an example, being part of a transgender community and of the lowest caste brings distinct troubles to Dalit students, as opposed to existing difficulties for upper-caste queer students (Manoj, 2020).

Being aware of these different layers of discrimination keeps us from grouping transgender people together. It shifts the emphasis from including transgender individuals to remaking education so that transgender agency makes a real change.

3. EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND THE POLITICS OF (NON-)INCLUSION

3.1 Legal Frameworks and Institutional Mandates

The decade before us has seen changes in the way India thinks about transgender rights, due to courts and official policies. The key NALSA v. The Union of India judgment issued in 2014 by the Supreme Court called transgender persons the "third gender" and allowed people to express their gender identity without having to go through medical or surgical treatment (Choudhury, 2016). It led the central and state governments to act to ensure transgender individuals can go to school, see a doctor and find jobs, no matter what their gender identity is. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 was brought into effect to clearly record these protections. The Act legally bans discrimination in schools, guarantees systems for handling complaints and asks for changes to the curriculum to include transgender people (Government of India, 2019). Along with these recommendations, the UGC issued a policy in 2015 asking universities to create policies for everyone's admission, establish supportive surroundings and run awareness training for both students and teachers. The country's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 advances the goal of providing equity and including every group, including those based on gender. Importantly, the policy does not give enough attention to transgender identities and it has no enforceable steps to hold the actions of its recommendations accountable (Sharma & Mehta, 2021). Because of this, we don't see many changes happening in schools despite legal reforms.

3.2 Critical Gaps and Bureaucratic Tokenism

Even with these rules in place, the way they have been followed is mainly just tokenistic, according to what scholars call "bureaucratic tokenism" (Narrain, 2020). When institutions include third-gender fields in forms or add gender-neutral facilities such actions are usually short-lived and there is little or no cooperation with the transgender community. One of the most persistent issues is the enforcement of binary gender norms in institutional documentation and everyday practices. Transgender students frequently report difficulties in changing their name or gender in academic records, which are typically governed by rigid bureaucratic procedures and requirements for medical documentation—contravening the right to self-identification upheld in *NALSA* (Misra, 2018). The continued enforcement of gender-segregated uniforms, hostels, sports categories, and restrooms reinforces binary conceptions of gender and excludes those whose identities do not fit neatly into 'male' or 'female' categories.
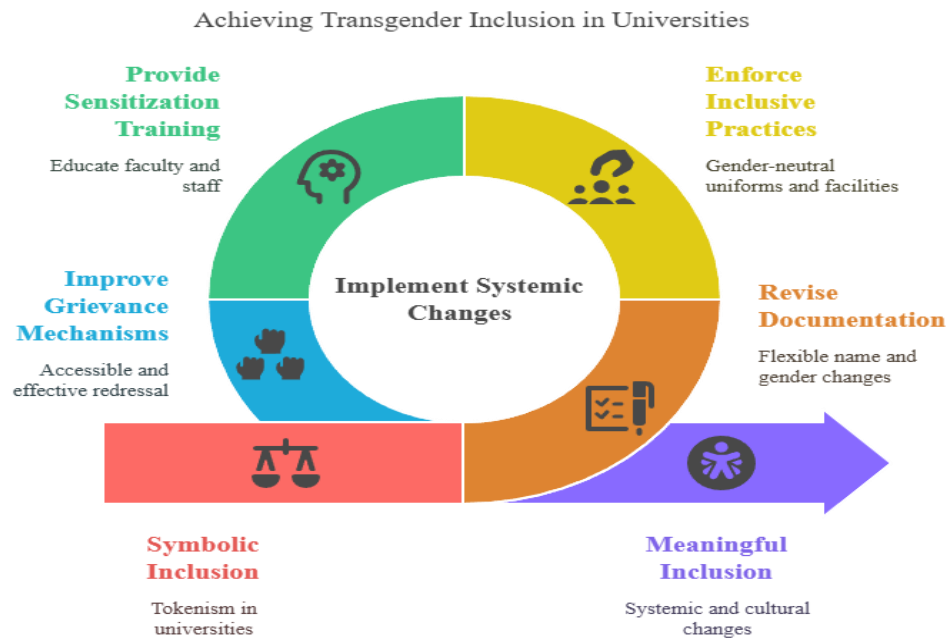
Figure 1. From Symbolic to Meaningful Inclusion: A Framework for Systemic Transgender Inclusion in Indian Universities

(Generated by the author)

In many universities, trans-inclusive policies exist only on paper. Faculty members, administrative staff, and even student leaders often lack basic sensitization, resulting in misgendering, social ostracization, and exclusion from peer networks (Banerjee, 2022). Such tokenistic approaches do not address the systemic and cultural changes necessary to ensure meaningful inclusion. Most grievance redressal mechanisms remain inaccessible, ineffective, or unresponsive to trans-specific concerns, leaving students with little recourse.

3.3 Curricular and Pedagogical Silences

Beyond infrastructure and policy lies an equally damaging issue: the absence of transgender narratives in the curriculum itself. Educational content in schools and universities continues to propagate cisnormative and heteronormative perspectives. Textbooks rarely mention LGBTQIA+ issues, and when they do, the treatment is often pathologizing or couched in outdated psychological frameworks (Rao & Tiwari, 2019). A lack of information in the subject maintain a sense of ignorance and disrespect. It excludes students—from all genders—from exploring gender diversity, making it seem like non-binary identities are only unusual and strange. Values taught in schools which play an important role in India, tend to strengthen the belief that the "normal" way to be and express gender is by being young and unmarried, heterosexual and living with a family (Kumar & Patil, 2020). Similarly important is the fact that teachers receive little instruction on how to teach about gender diversity in the classroom. Since teachers mostly gained their education in a cisnormative system, they are not always sure how to handle teaching about transgender issues (Sivakumar, 2021). Without compliance with such modules, teachers may continue to use discriminatory actions, from mildly disregarding facts to ridiculing people. Because of so many pedagogical silences, transgender students find themselves unwelcomed, with their existence and part in learning not being accepted. It challenges the purpose of schools as forums for important discussion and engaging in democracy.

4. NARRATIVES OF RESISTANCE IN SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES

4.1 Erasure, Stigma, and Institutional Violence

Transgender students in India often deal with violence, both from other students and because of the careless system in place. Many times, they include bullying, being misgendered, being left out and discriminatory regulations, so students must often overcome adversity just to remain safe. In 2017, a study by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) showed that practically all transgender students in India are subject to frequent harassment and discrimination which makes it hard for them to continue learning and go to college (NHRC, 2019). Many classrooms are places where transgender students become the laughing stock for both their peers and teachers, making them feel isolated. Making mistakes about someone's gender—whether you try or not—is a continuous way language can hurt people and support cisgender dominance (Kumashiro, 2002). Many times, institutions use policies as a way to control entry to education and define attendance rules. In many cases, transgender students cannot enter school unless they identify as male or female. Even when admitted, the process of correcting one's name or gender in official records remains bureaucratically taxing

and emotionally exhausting (Misra, 2018). In many cases, transgender applicants must submit proof of gender reassignment surgery or psychological assessments, in direct contradiction to the NALSA ruling which emphasized the right to self-identification (Choudhury, 2016).

In hostels, sports teams, and restrooms, students are expected to conform to male or female categories, with no infrastructure for gender-nonconforming individuals. These spatial exclusions reinforce a sense of not belonging and further institutionalize structural transphobia. Such conditions contribute to chronic mental health issues among transgender students, including depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation (Sivakumar, 2021).

4.2 Forms of Everyday and Organized Resistance

Despite these structural constraints, transgender students engage in various forms of resistance, ranging from everyday acts of subversion to more organized, collective movements. These acts challenge the hegemonic "unseen curriculum" that enforces binary norms and seeks to erase queer and trans presence in educational spaces. Dress and naming practices are frequently politicized tools of assertion. The choice to wear clothing aligned with one's gender identity, despite institutional dress codes, becomes a visible act of defiance. Similarly, using chosen names and pronouns, even when not legally recognized, asserts self-definition against imposed identities (Banerjee, 2022). Language, too, becomes a site of struggle and creativity—trans students often coin alternative terms of identity in vernaculars or reclaim pejorative labels as emblems of pride and solidarity (Reddy, 2005). Artistic expression—through poetry, performance, and visual arts—has emerged as a powerful medium of critique and reclamation. Events like pride parades, queer film festivals, and cultural collectives within campuses provide platforms for transgender students to express dissent, build community, and reimagine inclusion.

Collectives led by students have greatly influenced how institutions approach LGBTQIA+ matters. Gender-neutral hostels, easy access to bathrooms and adding queer literature to the curriculum have become priorities for queer groups at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) and English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU). Groups provide assistance to their members and make efforts to get university administrations to fix issues by setting new guidelines. In a few institutions, they have achieved the adoption of spaces and systems that treat all genders equally and allow for fair complaints. Even so, these gains can easily be lost or changed back. As a result of pressure from the right-wing and the slow actions of government institutions, groups of queer people commonly experience supervision, booking restrictions and being ignored by the government (Narrain, 2020). Even so, the fact that they keep going despite strong opposition highlights how clever and persistent transgender people are.

Table 1. Forms of Transgender Student Resistance in Indian Educational Institutions

Type of Resistance	Illustrative Example	Function/Impact	Sources
Embodied Assertion	Trans students wearing gender-affirming clothing despite institutional dress codes	Challenges institutional enforcement of binary norms; affirms self-identity	Banerjee (2022)
Linguistic Reclamation	Use of self-chosen names and pronouns in social and academic interactions, even if not legally recognized	Asserts agency over identity; subverts imposed misrecognition and bureaucratic erasure	Kumashiro (2002); Reddy (2005)
Digital Counterpublics	Online activism via hashtags like *#QueerCampusVoices*, *#TransLivesMatterIndia*, and platforms like Instagram	Creates visibility, builds virtual communities, documents discrimination, and mobilizes digital activism	Banerjee (2022); Fraser (1990)
Artistic and Cultural Expression	Poetry slams, queer theatre, campus pride parades, and zine creation	Serves as symbolic resistance; reclaims narrative agency; fosters emotional solidarity	Vidya (2007); Kole (2020)
Collective Organizing	Student-led LGBTQIA+ groups in JNU, TISS, and EFLU lobbying for gender-neutral facilities	Negotiates institutional reforms; provides peer support and initiates policy change	Kole (2020); Narrain (2020)
Epistemic Interventions	Sharing lived experiences through memoirs, blogs, and research contributions by trans individuals	Challenges curricular silencing; asserts transgender	Stryker (2006); Padmashali (2021)

		lives as valid knowledge sources	

As shown in Table 1, transgender student resistance happens in different and intertwined ways in Indian schools. Bodily expression, modifying pronouns, using social media and making art all protect trans individuals and also protest against the ideas and rules of cisnormativity. Blocks of students and open social space on the web help people challenge authority and create communities. In the same period, the use of memoirs and research helps replace the idea of transgender individuals simply being included, by also making them producers of knowledge. In all, these different techniques change the conversation from simple inclusion to disruptive change, making clear the political and educational importance of including transgender people in education.

4.3 Autobiographies, Memoirs, and Ethnographies

Resistance stories are found both in reports about the activities of institutions and through memoirs, autobiographies and ethnographic accounts about how transgender students manage their schools. Living Smile Vidya wrote I Am Vidya, one of first memoirs by a Dalit trans woman, describing how she managed stigma, gender struggles and the difficulties of receiving education (Vidya, 2007). The author reveals that her strong qualifications could not prevent her from being let go from the teaching profession because of transphobic harassment. Maggie adapted her resistance in theatre and writing, to make her story heard where no one listened to her. In the same way, A Small Step in a Long Journey (2021) by Akkai Padmashali lists her activism and the path from being roundly rejected from school to speaking out for trans rights in official policies. She demonstrated the way personal narratives can teach about and challenge current political narratives.

The work of sociologists Gayatri Reddy in 2005 and Shrinivas Arkatkar in 2019 has added to our knowledge of how transgender and queer people fit into educational and social settings. The studies point out that peer interactions near a transgender student, classroom interactions and the attitudes of faculty members all influence transgender identity. Through ethnographies, it becomes clear that students living in hostile circumstances try to develop new educational methods to help themselves thrive. Literature like this keeps transgender records alive and also rejects the way knowledge can be discarded, recognizing lived learning as credible.

4.4 Digital Counterpublics and Online Resistance

Over recent years, digital platforms have become major places where transgender students show up, challenge injustices and connect with each other. Such websites become forums for people on the edges of society to speak out against common beliefs (Fraser, 1990). Thanks to Instagram, YouTube and Twitter, transgender students can share their stories, start public awareness efforts and point out inequities faced in institutions. Pages created such as "@transvisionindia" and hashtags including #TransLivesMatterIndia and #QueerCampusVoices have gotten many people to support one another and pay attention to matters like difficulty in changing names and medical neglect (Banerjee, 2022).

Online communities are important because they provide resources about gender identity, what the law says and mental health. The absence of traditional education is filled by these spaces, where teens learn from each other, feel supported and form community. Many students who come from small towns or traditional families rely on digital spaces to freely learn about themselves without constant criticism. Digital activism can be a risky thing to do. Getting harassed online, doxxed or blocked by platforms is still a serious problem. Nevertheless, the internet gives marginalized people a way to fight their isolation and find safety with others who have shared experiences across caste, class and place.

5. INTERSECTIONALITY, STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE, AND DIVERSE POSITIONALITIES

5.1 Caste, Region, and Language-Based Marginalizations

Gaining an understanding of transgender resistance in Indian schools means using an intersectional, rather than single-category approach. First introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, intersectionality explains that multiple types of oppression—caste, class, gender and region—can affect those who are marginalized. India's transgender and gender non-conforming students are shaped differently by caste, region, religion and language in their experiences of violence and rebellion. While urban, English-speaking, transgender members of dominant castes may suffer gender-based discrimination, their social advantages put them ahead of Dalit, Bahujan and Adivasi trans people who are further marginalized by caste barriers (2020). As a result, Dalit queer students commonly face strict restrictions in getting help from psychology teams, receiving social programs and connecting with activist networks because casteist discrimination and transphobia are typical in these places (Guru, 2009).

Because caste is not mentioned in much of LGBTQIA+ dialogue, high-caste people's stories and actions come to represent the main symbols of queer struggle and acceptance. The way regions differ can further position some social groups aside from others. Transgender identities are being recognized better in educational settings across Tamil Nadu and Kerala in South India, as is shown by the introduction of third-gender laureates for state-funded scholarships (Hossain, 2017). Many institutions in North India, especially in rural and semi-urban regions, continue to operate within deeply conservative gender and caste norms, making it almost impossible for transgender students to assert their identity openly. Language-

based marginalizations further complicate access to resources and representation. Most queer theory, trans scholarship, and activist discourse is produced in English or translated into it, which often alienates non-English-speaking trans students. While some community-based organizations produce vernacular materials, these remain unevenly distributed and inaccessible to many. Consequently, trans narratives in regional languages remain underrepresented in academic discourse and policy formulation, erasing the epistemologies rooted in local experiences (Dutta & Roy, 2014).

5.2 Mental Health, Economic Precarity, and Academic Access

Transgender students across caste and regional locations also face significant mental health challenges as a result of prolonged exposure to institutional neglect and social alienation. Yet, the Indian education system has largely failed to respond to these needs. Schools and universities rarely provide trans-affirmative counseling services, and most campus mental health professionals lack training in gender and sexuality-affirming practices (Sivakumar, 2021). This creates what can be termed as "therapy deserts"—spaces where psychological support is either absent or actively harmful. Emotional distress among transgender students is often dismissed as individual pathology rather than a response to structural violence, leading to further stigmatization. The Indian Journal of Psychiatry (2019) survey discovered that transgender individuals commonly suffer from anxiety, depression and dreams of suicide, made more severe by both being rejected by their family and facing social exclusion. Schools do not often implement trauma support for students or recognize how much effort transgender students need to make to survive in unfriendly places (Narrain, 2020). Having problems with money is also a big obstacle for students who want to get an education.

Transgender students often face familial estrangement, forcing them to become financially independent at a young age, usually without formal employment opportunities. Although some institutions have initiated merit- or need-based scholarships, they seldom include provisions for transgender students explicitly. The bureaucratic processes for availing financial aid are also exclusionary—requiring parental consent, fixed gender documentation, or permanent residential proof, which many transgender youth cannot provide (Misra, 2018). These systemic hurdles make higher education an unattainable goal for many. Within this matrix of exclusion, non-binary and genderfluid students face unique challenges. While trans men and trans women may navigate the institutional binary with relative difficulty, non-binary individuals often remain entirely unrecognized within the administrative and cultural frameworks of schools and universities. From application forms that force binary gender selection to dress codes and housing policies that require conformity, non-binary students are rendered "unintelligible" to the system (Butler, 2004).

Additionally, the lack of terminologies, social awareness, and policy language to describe non-binary experiences perpetuates their erasure. Their identities are often delegitimized as "confused" or "Western," reinforcing epistemic violence and undermining their right to self-identification (Banerjee, 2022). Such students must constantly navigate an educational space that denies the validity of their existence while offering no institutional mechanism to accommodate their needs.

6. GAPS IN LITERATURE AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

6.1 Need for Regional and Linguistically Diverse Scholarship

One of the most pressing gaps in the existing literature on transgender experiences in Indian educational institutions is the lack of regional and linguistic diversity in scholarship. Academic and policy discourses have largely been dominated by narratives from urban, English-speaking, and elite institutions, often based in metropolitan centres like Delhi, Mumbai, or Bengaluru. This narrow representational base creates a distorted picture of transgender realities and systematically marginalizes experiences rooted in vernacular cultures and rural geographies. For instance, while Tamil Nadu has historically recognized and institutionalized the category of "Aravani" and implemented state-level welfare schemes for transgender persons, there is a significant dearth of academic research in Tamil or by Tamil-speaking scholars that explores the educational implications of these initiatives. Similarly, transgender experiences articulated in Hindi, Bengali, Kannada, or Urdu—languages spoken by a majority of India's population—remain largely undocumented in mainstream academic discourse. What exists is either translated post-hoc or published in less accessible formats such as community zines, blogs, or grey literature (Dutta & Roy, 2014).

The dominance of English as the language of academic legitimacy limits participation from scholars and activists working at grassroots levels, and obscures the knowledge systems embedded in non-English, non-elite spaces. This linguistic hegemony reinforces epistemic hierarchies wherein transgender subjectivities articulated in local idioms—such as *koti*, *panthi*, *hijra*, *kinnar*, or *shiv-shakti*—are either erased or reframed to fit westernized or biomedical frameworks of gender identity (Hossain, 2017). As a result, the vernacular life worlds of trans individuals are misrecognized or invisible within educational reform discourses. Future research must therefore foreground linguistic and cultural specificity as central to understanding how transgender individuals navigate and resist educational spaces. Regional case studies, vernacular oral histories, and non-elite institutional ethnographies would greatly enrich the field and provide a more equitable and comprehensive knowledge base.

6.2 Empirical Work on Educator Perspectives and Curricular Reform

Another underexplored dimension of transgender inclusion in Indian education pertains to the perspectives, practices, and pedagogies of educators. Existing scholarship often focuses on student narratives, institutional policies, or activist interventions, but pays relatively little attention to how teachers and faculty members engage with gender diversity in the classroom. This gap is significant because educators act as gatekeepers of the hidden curriculum, shaping the discursive and emotional environment in which transgender students operate. Yet, little is known about how teachers conceptualize transgender identities, their level of preparedness to address LGBTQIA+ issues, or the institutional training and support they receive. In most cases, gender sensitization workshops are either absent, perfunctory, or implemented in response to controversy rather than as proactive educational policy (Sivakumar, 2021). Curricular content across disciplines—from science and literature to history and moral education—remains cisnormative. Few efforts have been made to embed transgender lives and histories in mainstream syllabi, particularly in primary and secondary education. When transgender topics are included, they are often treated as isolated chapters rather than woven into the core epistemological structure of knowledge transmission.

There is also a lack of quantitative data on faculty attitudes and behaviors, as well as qualitative studies that explore how teachers experience dilemmas around gender identity, deal with administrative constraints, or engage with parent communities in conservative regions. Without this empirical grounding, reforms in pedagogy and curriculum will remain ad hoc and inconsistent. Moving forward, interdisciplinary research that integrates educational psychology, curriculum studies, gender theory, and teacher education is essential. Training modules should be co-designed with trans and queer scholars and integrated into teacher education programs, rather than remaining as elective or extra-curricular interventions.

To support this vision, the following matrix contrasts current symbolic gestures in Indian educational institutions with transformative reforms needed to institutionalize trans-affirmative education, especially in curriculum development and teacher engagement.

Table 2: Towards Trans-Affirmative Education: Comparing Symbolic Practices with Transformative Institutional Reform

Dimension	Symbolic Inclusion (Status Quo)	Transformative Inclusion (Proposed)	Supporting Sources
Policy Language	Generalized equity statements without accountability mechanisms	Binding policies co-authored with trans communities and enforced with measurable outcomes	Narrain (2020); Govt. of India (2019)
Infrastructure	Limited provision of gender-neutral restrooms in isolated spaces	Full-campus inclusive infrastructure (hostels, washrooms, signage, ID access)	Kumar & Patil (2020); Banerjee (2022)
Documentation Process	Medical/legal documentation required to update gender/name	Self-identification policy with streamlined, rights-based administrative procedures	Misra (2018); Choudhury (2016)
Curricular Representation	Sporadic LGBTQIA+ references in elective courses	Curriculum-wide integration of trans narratives, histories, and epistemologies	Rao & Tiwari (2019); Kole (2020); Padmashali (2021)
Faculty Sensitization	One-off or reactionary gender workshops	Mandatory, recurring, **trans-led training** embedded in teacher preparation programs	Sivakumar (2021); Kumar & Patil (2020)
Student Grievance Redressal	Generic, inaccessible complaint mechanisms	Dedicated, confidential grievance cells with trans-sensitive procedures	NHRC (2018); Banerjee (2022)
Knowledge Production	Trans persons treated as passive subjects or case studies	Trans persons positioned as co-researchers, theorists, and policy authors	Stryker (2006); Vidya (2007); Padmashali (2021)

The contrast outlined in Table 2 reinforces that educational reform cannot be limited to peripheral gestures or ad hoc responses. For meaningful transformation, institutions must embed trans-affirmative values at all levels—from how syllabi are written and delivered to how faculty are trained and supported. Teacher education must be reoriented to recognize transgender lives as foundational to critical pedagogy, not as ancillary topics. Similarly, structural changes such as inclusive grievance redressal mechanisms and co-authored policy frameworks are essential to move beyond the performativity of inclusion. Future empirical research should investigate how such reforms are perceived, resisted, or implemented across different educational contexts in India.

6.3 Towards Participatory and Trans-Led Research

A further structural gap in the literature is the limited involvement of transgender individuals as knowledge producers, rather than merely subjects of academic inquiry. Much of the existing research on transgender issues is conducted by cisgender scholars, which often reproduces an outsider gaze that prioritizes empirical documentation over relational accountability or transformative justice. This imbalance raises urgent questions about research ethics, authorship, and representation. Who is asking the questions? Who is interpreting the data? Who benefits from the publication? Without critical engagement with these questions, even well-intentioned research risks becoming extractive, reinforcing the same hierarchies it purports to dismantle (Stryker, 2006).

So, redressing these issues requires making use of models led by communities and trans individuals. This manner of studying empowers transgender people to see themselves as equal partners in research and allows them to theory their own lives and offer serious critiques of education, gender and power. This requires us to look past traditional accounts and aid the creation of academic texts, teaching strategies and policy criticism through voices that represent those struggles. Trans writing fellowships, as well as action research and editorial collectives, can give trans writers a way to express these views. Institutions and journals involved in academic research have a duty to be inclusive in publishing, by having transgender scholars on boards and accepting unusual perspectives during reviewing. Trans studies in education should be guided by trans communities, follow ethical relationships, support knowledge creation and focus on changing society.

7. CONCLUSION

The education system in India is used to enforce, exclude and remove students whose gender, caste or class do not fit with the accepted norms. For many transgender students, being at an institution is about being unseen, watched and only tolerated through symbols rather than acceptance. This review dealt with the ways structural, cultural and epistemic regimes in education institutions stigmatize transgender students by official policy and unseen 'hidden curriculum'. The erasure of trans students in institutional policies, silence about trans people in classrooms, segregation of students by space and untrans-friendly school curricula all allow these institutions to view transgender students as unusual or challenging. Even so, transgender students resist these challenges by thinking and acting in ways that are both stimulating and necessary for society. They do more than oppose—they help change things. After reviewing the data, the authors point out that we need to go beyond inclusion-as-access which revolves around being included in schools and instead work toward inclusion-as-transformation which requires us to transform all parts of the school system. To make this change, we must acknowledge that transgender people drive epistemic development and reshape institutions. This rethinking of Indian education includes exploring, rethinking and reinventing the school curriculum, how teachers are trained, the environments students learn in and governance structures. It requires making sure Dalit, Adivasi, rural and non-binary trans members are at the heart of trans movements, as they are usually pushed aside because of dominant caste and language systems. Therefore, education functions as a location where past rules are found and where new efforts for justice can arise. Positing transgender lives as central contributors in education helps take learning places from obeying rules to evolving and changing. The objective is to go further than including trans students and instead reform schools with a focus on affirmation, justice and epistemic dignity.

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