



## Voices from the Field

### Identity Politics, Educational Participation and Transgender in India (Featured Profile: Dhananjay Chauhan, Chandigarh)

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Date Received: 25th April 2019

Date Accepted: 28th June 2019

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#### Who am I?

My name is Dhananjay Chauhan Mangalamukhi. I am a transgender person and am the first transgender student of Punjab University, Chandigarh! I hail from a lower middle-class family, where talking about sex is kept far from regular interactions in daily life! I was born in 1970, in the Pauri district of Uttarakhand. As I was a Male child, so there was an atmosphere of happiness in my family. My father had a small Government job! I was well received, and several religious rituals were performed. It included the centuries-old practice of 'Kinnar' community visiting homes to purify the courtyard of our house! They all went singing and danced, cheerfully! Alas, none could recognise me and my true nature, and the beauty of my Soul!

I consider myself a secret work of nature, which works silently in the world! People used to call me a

Man! Only a few months after my birth, my parents brought me to Chandigarh, where I was raised and have continued to live since then. According to my mother and daughter-in-law, I had a lot of excitement in our house with the ease of my feet! My behaviour was different from other children in the sense I had a bewildered tremor and a strange attraction in the face. My eyes were like a 'mriganayani', who used to attract a man towards him! Gradually as I grew with age, the woman inside me started establishing her identity, and at the age of 3-4, I used to do the same thing which my mother or other women used to do! I did not do these things because I used to live in their company, but I consider it as an instinctive trait that a woman is endowed with since their birth!

I was five years old and were enrolled in a Government school! My school education was conducted in a public school in



Chandigarh! I was an overall good student, and almost always ahead of all the students; whether studies or music, always on the top of my game! Teachers were always happy with me! My parents never complained about me. Many a time, we used to make small mischiefs in school, and then the teacher would forgive me because I was a bright student at my school! Everything was going normal. I still remember when I was five years old, according to religious rituals, I had to be shaved because everybody thought I was a Boy, so it was necessary to cut the hair of my head, so many guests came into the house. Clothes were brought for me! However, when they were shown to me, I refused to wear them at first sight! I wanted a frock like other girls. My parents explained to me that you are a boy and Boys do not wear frocks. But, I did not listen to any of them! I was obstinate! Those people also got tired and brought a frock for me! I was happy and sad too! Happy,

because there was so much fanfare at home; and, unhappy that my beautiful hair had to be shaved off! I refused a lot, but I failed.

I used to be very eager to perform some household chores since my childhood. I still love it. I have the courage to fight the society, and I aspired to do something different and unique in the society. Since childhood, I always used to play girl's games with my companions, as it suited to my feminine nature. I used to spend most of my time with womenfolk and play with them. I did occasionally play with male companions as well, but used to play a woman's character! Because of which men started to feel attracted towards me! Boys always wanted to call me; some people treated as if I am their female friend, and I enjoyed it! Some men used to make friends with them because I used to live with women friends. I was used as a messenger to communicate a message to girls. That was a time when phones were rare, and no internet was available. Therefore, the messages were delivered only with hand-written letters. In this pretext, I got closer to many boys, and formed friendships with them, and didn't have many girls as friends.

I never deliberately avoided girls, but I was drawn naturally to Boys and Men.

However, I feel the girls understood my feelings well, and their choice was similar to my choice! The girls who play games liked me too! Boys would often play hockey or football, which I did not like much!

Occasionally, I used to play hockey. Boys would often tease me, and tell me to play with girls instead! I was made fun of, mostly because my delicate body would not fit to play boys' games! I used to feel shy to play with boys anyway! My family raised and cared for me, just like my siblings! I was never treated like a girl! But still, I used to help my mother in most household chores! The people from my house and neighbours were also thrilled with this because their boys used to spend time outside the home all day; they never used to study as much as I did. I was doing well both in studies and household chores.

As nine years old, I became friends with a boy living in our neighbourhood! We both started to do studies together, and our choices were almost similar! He was 4-5 years older to me and took care of me a lot. Gradually, we got close to each other and loved each other a lot. I was not sure of the nature of charm, but, we loved each other very much! This friendship was undoubtedly different from a normal friendship, and was taking a different turn! We were unable to live without each other! Although there was no involvement of sex in our friendship, I liked to meet him often, and would spend all the time together and sleep together! I used to wait for him for hours! As I grew with age, at the age of 12, I started to experience physical changes to my body, and I experienced a huge rise in the desire to be loved and felt quite attracted toward him. This love was going to take some different colours! Gradually, a platonic love which was purely for heart and minds turned into physical.

This series continued until I was 19 years old! And then my friend got married! He got busy in his life and could not pay attention to me! The person who loved me started to explain to me for hours on how everything between us was not at all right. He would tell me, we have grown up now, and now we have to think about our lives! He told me that since he is married now, he would no longer be able to give me time. He was scared that if anyone discovers this, then his life would be endangered. He didn't hesitate to tell me that "if you need any other Man, I will also arrange for you too". He suggested that a male friend of him is keen to have a physical relationship with me! I was very sad and unhappy, and told him that "*you are crazy! You do not even care about my feelings! You were with me only for physical needs*". We both cried...

Later, he tried to fill the emptiness between us! He had spoken to two of his friends about me that he would continue to have a relationship with me! I think now that how easily he could talk to his male friends that I can be used as an object to fulfil people's sexual desires! For these Men, Love had no place in their list of things, and I was merely a means to satiate their sexual desires. They believed that the truth of life is to marry and procreate, and a relationship and love or any such feelings between two men were impossible. For them, anyone beyond Man and Woman was unimaginable. It's sad that most people treat us as objects of play; you play, and when tired, throw it away.

I think this is because social attitude, which makes them, think of us as redundant as we cannot contribute to run their lineages. There is a lot of stigmas that if they associate with us, their image will be tarnished. But I think we are more than our bodies. We don't truly belong to the bodies we are born with. Our gender identities are socially manufactured, be it a Man or Woman. Those who don't feel comfortable with either of the gender identities attributed and this challenge of socially established gender roles has given rise to the concept of the third gender, i.e. Kinnars in Indian society.

However, there is a lot of stigma and discrimination in the name of gender; if naturally born women face discrimination, kinnars face double discrimination! Women mostly live inside the household, and Kinnars are discriminated on the roads. I feel, as long as the women and Kinnars remain silent and don't confront the oppressors, human rights violations would keep on occurring in daylight. In a man's society, both women and Kinnars are unsafe. Often Men would argue how Women and Kinnars dare challenge their hegemony and talk about equality! People often believe that Transgender people have physical deformity, but it is certainly not the case!

There are many ill-formed beliefs about the nature of our bodies, and I think it applies equally to Male bodies, as Males are supposed to be able to perform everything, which is far from being true! These socially rooted misconceptions regarding our bodies are entirely absurd. In

my opinion, sexual impairment does not cause any haemorrhoids or impotence, and nor are we disabled or crippled! Our mind only decides who we are! Our brain only tells us to be a Man, Woman, or both. Our brain provides us with instructions on performing different gender-related roles, or not and thereby helps us decide our preferences. Societies make us a Man, a woman or a Transgender! However, societies often advocate for a relationship between only a Man and Woman because they can procreate, and run families.

Hindu religious texts would describe that the world was created by the trishakta: Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh! One creates a creature, and one is a destroyer! For many people, this might just appear as a story, but three powers have always existed! Therefore, a theory of Man and Woman, and denial of our existence is indeed painful. I believe, if a trans-man and trans-woman get the right to live and get married in the society, they can adopt orphans. But, social misconceptions prevent them this very right as well. But, just think for a moment, are we not a legitimate part of the society?

Intersex people are not transgender, but they can choose to be one. They have to make some tough decisions! The progress in science has given us opportunities to fix physical deformities. However, any effort to cure people and trying to fix them psychologically is unscientific, as they are as natural as any other. People, apart from Men and Women are considered natural in Psychology!

Usually, by the age of twelve, most people begin to feel attracted to the opposite sex. I was also attracted to boys, which I consider fully natural phenomena now. But, when I was 12, I started worrying about my sexual identity, I did not understand what I am. I am a woman completely from inside, but the body I inhabited was of a Man! My soul and body were incompatible, and I did not understand that I am different.

### **Education matters! It is a medium to form an Identity.**

Although, I was a meritorious student, a constant tension related to my Gender, and Identity, affected my study outcomes. And I got abysmal results in my matriculation exams. I somehow passed with many difficulties. Thoughts of committing suicide came frequently, and I tried twice as well but was always saved. Although I had already had a love for a male friend, then I did not understand why. As I grew older, I got more confused. I could not understand why this is happening to me. I feel, Sex Education in India was a taboo and still is. In addition, there exists a significant stigma in Indian society. People often judge one's character based on one's engagement with concepts of sex and sexuality. No one cares to teach and educate you on concepts of Gender and Sexual Identity. I feel most people are afraid, hesitant and shy to talk and ask about sex, although rapes are rampant in Indian society. In the absence of scientific information about Gender and Sexualities, the lives of millions of people like us are being ruined. Since then, this has

remained an important concern in my mind.

After many difficulties, I explained myself and started paying attention to my studies after the matriculation. I tried to change my behaviour to fit the college and had to conceal my true identity. I spent three years in government college sector 46 and stood first in all the fields. I received the first prize in every field. I completed my BA and got admission in the University of Punjab's History Department in 1993. I started doing private work and enrolled in a law program in the evenings. But, I was ragged by a few students at the University, and they made me run down to different classroom in the naked body. They were bullies and made me do unspeakable things. So, I had to leave the program. Then, I took admission in the Diploma in the French language. In 1998, I also pursued a Diploma in Computer Science and continued to work alongside! Discrimination continued everywhere, whether it is college or a university, workplace, and hospital. At times, I suffered considerable violence! The police officers were showing sympathy for the lie and would show off their fake sympathies. I started thinking that people like me do not exist, and it made me more scared. I was very intimidated to even go out at night.

I had started thinking that such incidents would continue to happen to me! Nevertheless, gradually, I decided to stand for myself and to change this mind set in the society. I said to myself; I have to fight! However, for this to happen and to

raise my voice in the community, I must feel pride when I describe myself as a Transgender, and there is no harm in it! It's my personal preference how I live, what I wear, who I like and choose to live with. Society cannot decide what will be my gender.

I had started thinking that before leaving this world; I would make such an environment for the newly coming out Trans-folks so that they do not suffer the discrimination as I did. I wanted to create a society where everyone has equal rights. First, I started sensitising my own family [yes, I was married to a woman]. Because I thought that before sharing it to society, my family's mind set must be changed so that they know about these issues before it goes public. They should accept me so that they are prepared to face society, and give them a positive answer! I first started to explain to my family members and started to advise them connecting to religion, and then sensitised to the need for identifying one's gender identity. We used to have at-length discussions on alternate days on gender and sexualities, connecting it to Vedas and Upanishads. This process lasted for many years! In the meantime, I started working for society too!

I started to know about similar people like me, the LGBT community. Moreover, I was then able to differentiate between one's 'sex' and 'gender' and could understand their pain on the social fixedness! We started educating people about HIV/AIDS and other

sexually transmitted diseases! I would take patients with sexual dysfunctions to government hospitals and helped them be treated. In this process, we faced a lot of maltreatment and discrimination.

Nevertheless, I did not lose courage and remained focused on my work. I have always been concerned about the betterment of my community and was majorly preoccupied with thoughts of making my community free of discrimination. At that time, our identities were criminalized. There were no laws for the protection of our community. A Transgender person was not considered human enough to have the right to vote, and homosexuality was seen as a crime until last year in India, with a colonial Section 377. Our rights are still under consideration in the Supreme Court, and it remains a matter of debate all over the country! Between 2002 to 2009, there was a lot of maltreatment and discrimination! Meanwhile, in 2004, I got a job as a teacher in a private school and worked with my community members. I used to get to usually help them guide and help them by making their lives a bit easier.

By 2009, I had gained fame in my community, and people started trusting me! A relationship and a common identity was formed among all! I also got a friend and partner named Islammuddin, to establish (register) a Community-Based Organization (CBO). It took a considerable amount of effort. She was also helpless, as her brothers had disowned her because of her sexual identity!

She has no place to call it home; no food to eat, and no clothes. Therefore, I helped her in every way possible, and today, she can earn her livelihood. She has given me a lot! Together we used to make our family members explained about gender identity and gender expression. After many years of counselling, my family understood a lot, but still, they were afraid of society. And I saw the opportunity and told them about myself! They accepted me with great ease! He said that he knew it, but because of the fear of society and relatives, what others would say that a Hijra is in the house and the society would boycott us! That day was a very happy day for me because I had won a battle, and now I could work better for society! I opened up and started working! Now I was not afraid that someone would tell my family about me! Their head would not bow down with shame! I left my job as a school teacher in 2009, and now I openly started working for the human rights of my community folks alongside health! I started working for the health of the LGBT community with a social work organisation!

And along with this, I founded an LGBT organization, without much support. However, gradually, we started getting more monetary support from the public. We worked with community members from Chandigarh, Panchkula and Mohali besides Haryana and Punjab.

I had a dream that like other cities in India, 'pride marches' will also be conducted in Chandigarh so that people get to know of our existence,

and don't discriminate us. For this, I started thinking seriously. Also, with the help of a few friends, I made plans for this, and we thought of celebrating Chandigarh pride on March 15, 2013! However, there were many challenges ahead of us! First, we had no money, and no company was willing to give money, nor did any community member give money! In the end, I had to spend money out of my pocket! There was a need for permission from the administration, and that was a very difficult task! I had to run on errands of the different Government office for months. Lastly, in the end, permission was granted at the last moment. However, the sound was not permitted, and nor was the stage! I had to use my network, i.e. higher officers and the local leader, and we got permission. The pride festival was successful, and community members from Chandigarh, Punjab Haryana, Delhi and other states joined and came forward. They did provide us with much support. Each of our community members felt proud, proud that we are different, but we are human.

I told some of my common friends who did not know about me to flash mobs, I explained them all, they understood all that and agreed to a flash mob in Sector 17 and told all those friends that this festival is only for those I do not even own people because I am also a transgender. They answered that we already knew that there would be transgender and we took it simply because we knew that this is natural! There is no fault of anyone! Now I was getting full support from

all sides! I was very proud of myself! My 40 friends engaged me in a flash mob pride festival! All their friends proudly took part in it and supported me! What I am today due to my family and friends! My patience and hard work have delivered me success today!

I have never cared about money! I always had a passion for working for the betterment of society! This passion has always encouraged me to do community work! People ask me “what you get by serving people for free”, then I answer that when a transgender person thinks of committing suicide by being disturbed by his life or a person is suffering because of his gender identity, they will fight. If I do not have the capacity to do so, I encourage them by standing up with them. Let them speak to complete their studies! So that she could stand up to them so that she would not beg for living his life, would understand their human rights, and all this could be done only by studies! A person comes to me desperate, and if I can help them, it makes me very happy! I belong to the Raikee family of Kinnar society, and my teacher is a Mangalmukhi! My guru gave me a lot! Stood with me in every happiness and sorrow!

In 2009, I joined the first national level I suggested the empowerment of kinnar community. The seminar was organised by the Foundation in collaboration with UNDP in New Delhi! This seminar proved to be a milestone for me. I was meeting for the first time, a national level human rights person! From 2010 to

2015, I joined every training session on behalf of the Chandigarh State AIDS Society and got information about AIDS! In 2012, I joined Red Ribbon Train Companion, which went to the city town and gave information about AIDS to every railway station. From this, I got information about AIDS and all the incurable diseases! I was recognized as a Master Trainer from NACO and India HIV AIDS Alliance; I have been giving training to health workers about AIDS in many states of India! It has also earned fame in the health sector; now people have started to know of it at the National level! At the same time, every technique of counselling came to me, and people started coming to get more advice for me to know the diseases! Since 2010, I joined Indian Public Health, School of Public Health and Community Medicine, P.G.I Chandigarh!

Since 2012, we had started fighting for transgender rights; I have been consistently fighting for transgender rights in Chandigarh and Punjab! In 2012, we participated in the National Level Transgender Conference, in which Article 39 Institute, with the help of the Global Funds and the UNDP, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, under the Government of India, collected information about their problems and needs from people across the country. In that meeting, we recommended the NALSA decision and the Supreme Court also recognised the NALSA decision which protects and advances all the rights to Transgender in its decision on April 15, 2014! Also, it instructed all the states and central



governments to make effective policies for the transgender people and give all the facilities to the transgender by providing a different 'third gender' category! Since then, until now, all the governments have been in a vulnerable attitude towards Transgender!

We were presumptive that there would be our people on that board so that they can advise the government to issue the correct guidelines! I am working to encourage transgender to study so that transgender people can do their work by reading and do not become dependent on others! We have to beg as there is no other work for us in society! Due to lack of education, we are compelled to turn into beggars, and the policymakers don't make employment ensured to us! My fight, therefore, is with each department, from every person who thinks that nothing can be done! I demand from the government that they should introduce the gender identity in the school curriculum and put the transitor's life story in their curriculum!

For example, I went to Punjab University and made information about transgender rights available to everyone! In 2015, the University of Punjab gave the 'Third Gender' column in all its entry forms, so that transgender people could read! But, I strongly feel that until the transgender are recognized from the school level, they would not enrol into studies, and the University Education is unthinkable of!

For the Transgender Education

Rights to be realized, I am working day, night, and encouraging transgender people to come forward! In 2015, I received a Master's degree in Social Work from Indira Gandhi Open University.

I was selected for the interview of Aamir Khan's show Satyamev Jayate in 2014, which also had a short interview with me! My National level TV channel interview proved to be very good, and my image was even got better among my community members! My interviews on the PTC Chanel has also got aired twice! My interview was also shown on Doordarshan's National channel, which was a glimpse of my life, in the same way, news reporters around the world, social scientists; researchers have featured me in several documentaries! My life is printed in America! On June 2015, my photo was taken in every street square and shopping mall in a pride festival in the Norwegian capital of Oslo!

Subsequently, in July 2016, I joined the conference in Holland and France and represented India at the proud festival there. Even today, I am forced to live with a Kinnar society while being a family, even if the family is standing together and the family is supporting it, but the society does not let it live!

Recently, my regular studies started after 24-25 years intervals! Now I am not young anymore, but the passion for fighting remains. In 2016, I took admission in the Department of Human Rights as a transgender at the University of

Punjab! I passed every entrance exam with excellent marks, and I did not need any reservation because my points were excellent. My study gives me a whole deal! I also offered tuition to some children so that I could pay my fees!

I am proud of being the first transgender student at the University of Punjab. However, this reminds me of several grace responsibilities towards many transgender people in our society!

After entering university, my biggest problem for me was how I should use the toilet because there were separate toilets for women and men! The women's colleagues in my department said that you should use our toilets but how would I go to the student centre? At first, I wrote a letter to the Vice-Chancellor demanding a separate toilet which, in a few days, Syndicate Senate had spent 23 lakhs in their meeting to open Transgender-specific toilets. However, they took more than a year to be constructed as they were expected to be constructed by the end of July 2017! For the last year, I have been using women's toilets! However, I am happy that despite the lack of funds, the university has not refused to make the toilet! However, I still have to fight for a separate hostel for transgender people! I will fight for this too!

Punjab University is doing something on its own, but Chandigarh administration is still sleeping in a deep sleep!

Many times, I demanded attention from the government that in the line

of other states in Chandigarh, a Transgender Welfare Board should be constituted. I have written many times, and I have also met the policy makers personally, but the Government has assumed a callous attitude! Apart from this, my demand was to make separate toilets for transgender at public places in Chandigarh! Also, teach about transgender in schools so that the younger children can understand sensitive transgender care for transgender children in school so that they do not leave school due to violence and discrimination! I have been demanding from the government that fees for all transgender children at schools and universities should be waived off! I guess this will ensure studies of transgender students without fear or pressure.

I have also demanded that all teachers of the schools should be trained about gender identity and sexual orientation so that the teachers can understand that diverse gender identity is not a disorder, but this is a distinct and unprecedented creation of nature! I spend a considerable amount of time with the youth of society, almost more than 15 hours every day, whether in a meeting or an interview. Whether it is a meeting or a medium of meeting, through every medium, I being a transgender provide information about sexual orientation and gender identity, so that there is no discrimination or violence on any transgender or people of diverse sexual orientation! I joined the International level conference in Bangkok last year, and shed light on how the

transgender community discussed in the mainstream, and if there is any violence with this community, then we have to vocalise about it so that the society can tell you! The people of society should recognise our equal rights, and no one should feel scared of any form of violence on the streets or inside four walls. It has been an experience that members of the transgender community are met with unspeakable violence, and police do not help us, what will help people! This has happened many times with me; the police never give us any support.

Today, when I look back, I had to endure grief and discrimination for years! When I think of those atrocities, which were perpetrated on me for years, I pray to God that God should not show anything like that to anyone in their lives! Again, I think that the amount of gold that is heated in the fire comes in front of Nikhar. I forget that sad day of my life with a hope for the future generation and all those who expect great things from me.

There is a great deal of change happening in our society's thinking now! But, an ordinary person knows nothing about the transgender! Sex education is not provided in our country! If sex education is offered, then many details will be known only to our youth, and this will save us from many misconceptions! We can also know about sexual dysfunction and how they are treated. We can also find information about the structure and function of our body. We can also know about our sexual orientation and identity so that the

transgender of future generation does not suffer from discrimination! We should also read that our society is not limited to only male or female, in addition to this, there are people in the society whose sexual orientation and identity are different from other people so cannot discriminate in the society, and it must be ensured in every sphere. We do not need sympathy; we need acceptance! Now whatever happened to me is over, but I want that not all this should be repeated!

To protect the rights of transgender, strict laws should be made so that we can live our life peacefully in our unique ways! Now I have to do many things. It is just a starting point. The canvas is very much open and spread on the horizon! Unfortunately, People of our community do not come out! They hide the oppression, which proves to be dangerous! We must raise voice against oppression! For this, we have to come out in the open, and the governments will have to tell that we are not unnatural, we are also like you! Otherwise, many Dhananjay Chauhan will continue to suffer from sexual violence and discrimination every day, and they will be killed!

Many times, I do not have money until dinner, but I never lose heart. I know that there will be thousands of children in India who are starving hungry every day. In a way, I am still better off! Often, I go to university in the local bus! People look at me very carefully, some stare at something, some laugh, they do some things, some even cross the border and make gestures. But these do not affect my will power and determination.

I know that one day will come when we will meet the transgender in this society who can proudly live with their parents and will be the support of their parents. It is simply because the other son are separated after their marriage, and the mother leaves the father alone. However, people like us will not leave!

Today, the entire society is with me; but it does not happen to every person! I have struggled all my life, so, now I have learned a lot about the art of living amidst difficulties. I have stopped bowing now, but I have not yielded before adversities! I remember a line of Iqbal that "if you are a little, then this soil is a big problem."