INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED LEGAL RESEARCH

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF VULNERABILITY ACROSS DIFFERENT STAGES OF LIFE

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ABSTRACT

Through the lenses of gender, labour, and vulnerability, this paper looks at India's growth by looking at how legal frameworks, social structures, and economic realities affect each other. This study looks at differences in access to resources and rights, taking into account how caste, class, and culture interact. It looks at how well regulatory systems protect vulnerable groups from exploitation and precarious work by focusing on labour dynamics in both official and informal sectors. It is looked at how the law changes social and economic processes and how reforms affect social justice and empowerment. This paper adds to scholarly discussions by showing how socio-legal factors affect each other. It also supports whole-person approaches and big changes to improve human rights and equality in India's growth.

Keywords: India, Gender, Labour, Vulnerability, Legal frameworks, Social-structures, Economic realities, Access to resource

INTRODUCTION

Vulnerability varies for children, women, and the elderly throughout their lifecycles, showing distinct problems and requirements at different life stages. Children are at risk because they rely on carers, are easily exploited, and have limited capacity to speak out for themselves. They face dangers like child labour, maltreatment, and insufficient access to education and healthcare. Women are vulnerable because of gender-based discrimination, economic inequities, and social norms that limit their independence and opportunity. This results in problems like gender-based violence, unequal resource access, and restricted decision-making

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authority. Elderly individuals are vulnerable because of health issues connected to ageing, financial instability, and social isolation, which can lead to neglect, abuse, and insufficient support networks. Comprehensive strategies that take into account age, gender, socioeconomic situation, and social dynamics are necessary to address vulnerability at all stages of life and safeguard the well-being of individuals.[3]

I.   ISSUES RELATING TO CHILDREN

The youngster of today will become the future of tomorrow. For a child to experience growth, mental development, and social development, they must be raised in a healthy atmosphere. A significant concern arises for the vulnerable segments of society. Society's stakeholders must be fully informed about the vulnerability of children who are at risk of abuse and neglect and in need of protection. Prior to addressing their concerns, it is essential to acquire an awareness of the definition of a vulnerable child, the various types of vulnerability present in society, and the specific difficulties that affect vulnerable children.

Vulnerability, as described by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, refers to a state of weakness or poor defence, especially in young individuals who are more susceptible to dangers than their counterparts. The hazards include deprivation, exploitation, abuse, neglect, violence, and health issues like HIV infection. Indian children are vulnerable due to extreme poverty, with a substantial number of people living below international and national poverty thresholds. Youthful females are notably susceptible to issues such as anaemia, malnutrition, and domestic abuse, which is cause for concern. The World Bank's "Orphan and Vulnerable Children (OVE)" toolkit identifies vulnerable children as those who are facing adverse outcomes more frequently than their peers, such as street children, child labourers, individuals impacted by armed conflict or HIV/AIDS, children with disabilities, and local orphan and vulnerable children. Comprehending vulnerability is essential for stakeholders in society to tackle the unique demands and difficulties experienced by vulnerable children and to strive for their protection and well-being.

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[3] Ghosh M. Regional Disparities in Education, Health and Human Development in India. Indian Journal of Human Development [Internet]. 2011 Jan [cited 2022 Sep 6];5. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/302964390_Regional_Disparities_in_Education_Health_and_Human_Development_in_India

a. Types of Vulnerability

Vulnerability appears in different ways, bringing distinct difficulties and outcomes for individuals, groups, and civilizations. Social vulnerability is a crucial aspect that considers the effects of various stresses like abuse, social exclusion, and natural disasters on individuals. This dimension is closely connected to societal structures such as literacy levels, education, access to basic human rights, governance systems, social equality, and traditional values. Social vulnerability results from the interplay of social factors and stressors, indicating larger problems of systemic inequity and injustice. During natural disasters like flooding, specific groups in society, such as children, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities, may experience increased dangers and need specialised assistance. Enhancing social vulnerability requires engaging the community and enhancing resilience and social cohesiveness.[4]

- Physical vulnerability is the likelihood of being affected by hazards in the constructed environment and the adverse consequences on infrastructure and possessions. This dimension covers physical harm to structures, infrastructure, and non-structural harm to contents. It also include secondary losses caused by the gradual decay of impaired buildings. Being close to disaster-prone areas increases physical vulnerability, making some places more likely to be affected by disasters such as earthquakes, floods, and landslides. Lack of access to vital services like water, healthcare, and transportation worsens the difficulties caused by physical vulnerability. To address physical vulnerability, it is necessary to plan comprehensively, construct sustainable infrastructure, and implement strategies to reduce risk factors and strengthen resilience at both individual and community levels.

- Economic vulnerability arises from inequalities in income, job prospects, and resource availability, influencing the capacity of individuals and communities to endure economic crises and disturbances. Economic vulnerability indices evaluate communities' economic resilience by taking into account criteria including population size, distance, export concentration, and agricultural productivity.

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[4]Joseph, J., Sankar, H., Benny, G. et al. Who are the vulnerable, and how do we reach them? Perspectives of health system actors and community leaders in Kerala, India. BMC Public Health **23**, 748 (2023). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-15632-9

Marginalised populations, such as those in poverty and experiencing employment instability, are disproportionately impacted by economic recessions and natural calamities, worsening pre-existing disparities.[5] To enhance economic resilience, it is important to diversify income sources, promote sustainable livelihoods, and ensure fair access to resources and opportunities. It is crucial to implement focused strategies to assist economically disadvantaged groups in order to create communities that are both inclusive and sustainable.

- Environmental vulnerability is the sensitivity of ecosystems and communities to changes in environmental conditions, such as human-induced changes and the repercussions of climate change. This component covers risks related to pollution, habitat degradation, and extreme weather events, which present considerable health and livelihood concerns for vulnerable communities, especially women and children. To reduce environmental vulnerability, it is necessary to implement methods that support sustainable resource management, strengthen ecosystem resilience, and tackle the effects of climate change. Education and awareness initiatives are essential for encouraging environmental stewardship and advocating for sustainable lifestyles to protect natural resources for future generations.

- Attitudinal vulnerability refers to having unfavourable attitudes towards change, innovation, and self-reliance, which leads to relying on external help and having a decreased ability to deal with challenges. This component includes psychological obstacles like dread, hopelessness, and pessimism that impede individuals' capacity to adjust to changing situations and participate in proactive risk management. To address attitudinal vulnerability, one must promote attitudes that develop resilience, encourage a sense of agency and empowerment, and support community-led initiatives for disaster planning and response. In order to overcome deep-seated ideas and develop strong communities that can effectively handle difficult challenges, it is crucial to use innovative methods that encourage positive coping skills and challenge existing attitudes.[6]

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[5] Agarwal M. Vulnerable Groups in India: Status, Schemes, Constitution of India [Internet]. 2022 [cited 2022 May 30]. Available from: http://www.legalservicesindia.com/article/1079/Vulnerable-Groups-in-IndiaStatus,-Schemes,-Constitution-of-India.html

[6] Aayog N. Role of Social Justice & Empowerment Division [Internet]. NITI Aayog; 2019 [cited 2022 Jul 9]. Available from: https://www.niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2019-08/Role-of-SJE-Division-in-NITI.pdf

b. Factors associated with the Vulnerable Child

The vulnerability of a child is influenced by a myriad of factors,

- Physical aspects are essential in shaping a child's general well-being and development. A child's health is crucial for their development and performance, and ongoing health problems can make them more prone to vulnerabilities. This encompasses a range of physical abilities or personal situations, such as age, handicap, cognitive challenges, or mental health issues. Children with physical disabilities have distinct obstacles such as restricted mobility and sensory impairments, which can impede their access to crucial services and opportunities for development. Specially-abled children, despite breakthroughs in services, nevertheless frequently experience neglect and need increased attention and care. Children from impoverished socio-economic circumstances are more prone to mental health concerns compared to their wealthier peers. Physical factors play a crucial role in shaping the vulnerability of children, highlighting the significance of treating their health needs completely.

- Economic variables significantly impact a child's susceptibility, as their family's economic situation greatly affects their access to resources and possibilities for growth. Children from families with poor educational achievement and less financial means may encounter obstacles to success in different areas of life, particularly in education. Proper housing, healthy food, clothing, and other essentials are crucial for a child's holistic well-being and growth. The economic stability of a household significantly influences a child's health, education, and opportunities for economic advancement. Therefore, it is crucial to provide economic assistance and stability within the family to enhance resilience and decrease vulnerability in children. Environmental influences exacerbate children's vulnerability by directly influencing their health and well-being. Human health is significantly threatened by environmental pollution, land degradation, and climate change, especially among vulnerable groups. Climate-related disasters like heatwaves, floods, and storms worsen health risks and interrupt crucial services like as agriculture and access to clean water, resulting in higher poverty rates and

socio-economic vulnerability. Children are more exposed to environmental dangers due to their developing bodies and immune systems, which increase their vulnerability to illnesses and other negative health effects. Addressing environmental degradation and climate change is crucial for protecting the health and well-being of vulnerable children and communities.

- Social variables play a crucial role in influencing the vulnerability of children by shaping the social environment in which they mature and progress. Children, due to their innate innocence and reliance, are vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, violence, and neglect, especially when they do not have sufficient social support and safety. Factors including lack of identification, education, orphans, and physical disabilities exacerbate their vulnerability, leading to notable discrepancies between children from affluent families and those in poverty. Children from low-income households or those in unstable situations, like street children or orphans, are especially prone to health issues and encounter many challenges in pursuing their goals. Addressing social variables and creating inclusive and supportive environments are essential for safeguarding vulnerable children and promoting their overall development and well-being.[7]

c. Major Issues

Nutrition significantly influences the health and well-being of children, beginning during the prenatal stage. A child's proper growth and development depend on receiving sufficient nourishment, starting with the mother's diet throughout pregnancy. Inadequate nutrition during pregnancy can result in a range of health problems and developmental irregularities in the child. Ensuring a balanced diet is crucial for optimal brain development, physical growth, and general health. Malnutrition can occur due to inadequate critical nutrients, emphasising the significant connection between health and nutrition. An in-depth knowledge of health includes physical, mental, and social well-being, highlighting the significance of diet in sustaining optimal health. A balanced and nutrient-rich diet is essential for enhancing physical fitness, muscular strength, and

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[7] Karunya Arogya Suraksha Padahathi, State Health Agency Kerala. Schedules for Service Contract of AB-PMJAY-KASP [Internet]. Department of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Kerala; 2020 [cited 2022 Jun 9]. Available from: https://arogyakeralam.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Schedules.pdf

overall well-being, while also lowering the chances of diseases linked to unhealthy eating habits.

Evaluating a child's nutritional status includes assessing indicators like height, weight, strength, functional capacity, and blood volume. Poor nutrition can hinder typical growth and development, resulting in malnutrition and associated health problems. Imbalances in food can lead to deficiencies, undernutrition, or overnutrition, all of which can pose major health hazards for children. Nutritional deficiency can result in malnutrition, undernutrition, or overnutrition, leading to various health issues such stunted physical and mental growth, compromised immune systems, and increased vulnerability to infections. To tackle these nutritional issues, it is essential to ensure children have access to sufficient, nutrient-dense food and encourage the development of healthy eating habits starting at a young age.

Child labour is a major threat to children, robbing them of their rights, education, and childhood. Child labour, as defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), refers to employment that disrupts a child's education and impedes their physical and mental growth. It includes several types of exploitative work, such as dangerous activities. Children involved in dangerous labour are exposed to increased dangers to their health, security, and general welfare, which can prolong patterns of poverty and inequity. Despite worldwide attempts to address child labour, millions of youngsters, especially those from disadvantaged homes, are still being exploited in many sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and domestic service. To eliminate child labour, it is essential for governments, businesses, civil society, and communities to work together to enforce laws, offer education and support services, and tackle the underlying factors including poverty, lack of education, and social injustice.

Child abuse is a serious danger to children's welfare, involving several damaging actions targeted at them. Child abuse, whether physical, mental, or sexual, can result in significant psychological and physical damage, leading to enduring scars on victims. Indicators of abuse include injuries without explanation, alterations in behaviour, and physical signs suggestive of mistreatment. Neglect is a type of maltreatment where there is a lack of proper care and support, which can harm a child's health and growth. To effectively deal with child abuse, a collaborative effort is needed from authorities,

healthcare experts, educators, and communities to safeguard the safety and welfare of children. Efforts to prevent and address child abuse should encompass education, awareness campaigns, and support services for victims and their families, together with strong legal frameworks to ensure perpetrators are held responsible for their acts.

d. Legal Aspects of Vulnerable Children

Children have the right to be protected from all exploitative and vulnerable situations. The United Nations Organisation in its General Assembly on 20th November 1989 adopted the Convention on the Rights of Child. This is a landmark convention. Accordingly, Rights of Child includes freedom from all forms of exploitation, abuse and inhuman or degrading treatment. This includes right to special protection in situations of emergency and armed conflict.

Land marks for Human Rights [8]

1. The United General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child which is a landmark of human rights.

2. The first international treaty that recognizes the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of children.

3. The convention on the rights of the child has 54 articles and these articles list different rights that children have and the responsibilities that governments and others including parents have.

List of Rights for Children

1. Right to equality (Article 2),

2. Children's interests (Article 3),

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[8] On November 20, 1989, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a landmark for human rights. It is the first international treaty that recognizes the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of children. In December 1991, Canada ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and thus committed itself under international law to respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights of children in Canada. India ratified the Convention in 1992. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most widely accepted human rights treaty – of all the United Nations member states, only the United States and Somalia have not ratified it. The Convention on the Rights of the Child has 54 articles (sections), and most of these articles list different rights that children have, and different responsibilities that Governments and others, including parents, have to make sure that children have these rights.

3. Having your opinions heard (Article 12),

4. Freedom of expression and getting information (Article 17),

5. Freedom of thought and religion (Article14),

6. Freedom to gather together and join organisations (Article 15),

7. Right to privacy (Article 16),

8. Protection from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and maltreatment (Article 19),

9. Protection of child who is deprived (Article 20),

10. Adoption (Article 21),

11. Children with disabilities (Article 23),

12. Health (Article 24),

13. Children not living with their parents or have had to be removed from their parents (Article 25),

14. Right to get benefit (Article 26),

15. Standard of living (Article 27),

16. Right to education (Article 28),

17. Children from minority groups (Article 30),

18. Rest and leisure (Article 31),

19. Right to work (Article 32),

20. Protect from using drugs (Article 33),

21. Protection from sexual abuse (Article 34),

22. Abduction (Article 35),

23. Protection from harm (Article 36),

24. Protection against torture and detention (Article 37),

25. Joining the army (Article 38),

26. Recovery from abuse (Article 39),

27. Children who have broken the law (Article 40).

II.   ISSUES RELATING TO ELDERLY PERSONS

Maturing and ageing are inherent processes that all individuals undergo. Currently, there are 727 million individuals worldwide who are 65 years old or older (World Population Ageing Report, 2020). They are referred to as the aged population or the ageing population. Another term used to refer to them is senior citizens. It is widely understood that as people age, there is a gradual decrease in their physical and cognitive functions. As a result, older persons become feeble, leading to a decline in their ability to manage everyday activities and an increased reliance on others. The decline in skill and agility, along with the dependence on others, causes those around them to neglect, ignore, isolate, and exploit them.[9] This results in numerous disadvantages such as insufficient nourishment, shelter, healthcare, and both physical and economic security. Collectively, these factors render them a susceptible demographic within society. These individuals significantly contributed to creating our family, community, and nation during their lives. However, in old age, they are generally left alone.

Senior citizen or old often refers to those who have attained a specific age commonly linked with retirement. In India, the typical retirement age is 60 years. However, there are talks about raising this age because of reasons like the increasing elderly population, their possible societal contributions, and advancements in healthcare that allow people to stay active and productive for longer. An "ageing nation" is defined by the United Nations as a country where the population over 60 years old makes up 7% of the overall population. This threshold is projected to be reached worldwide by 2050, with 2 billion people over 60 years old, accounting for 22% of the global population. In low and middle-income

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[9] Marginalisation. and Deprivation Studies in Multiple Vulnerabilities.pdf [Internet]. [cited 2022 Jun 1]. Available from: http://dspace.kila.ac.in:8080/jspui/bitstream/123456789/276/1/Marginalisation%20and%20Deprivation%20Studies%20in%20Multiple%20Vulnerabilities.pdf

nations, 80% of the old population is projected to live, indicating a significant demographic change.

The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act 2007 in India categorises a senior citizen as an individual aged 60 years or older, a standard used in several policies and programmes designed to cater to this age group. The rise in the senior demographic is linked to variables such as enhanced healthcare, economic prosperity, and decreasing birth rates. Life expectancy has increased dramatically in both rural and urban settings. According to the 2011 census, India had around 104 million senior people. This number is projected to increase to 138 million by 2021 and 173 million by 2026. The sex ratio trend among the older population shows a greater percentage of women living alone, highlighting the necessity for customised care and support to meet their individual requirements. [10]

The demographic change towards an older population brings forth both advantages and difficulties. Advancements in healthcare have increased life expectancy but have also led to challenges including disability and chronic health concerns in older individuals. Societal attitudes and policies must change to guarantee the well-being and integration of senior people, focusing on financial stability, healthcare access, and social support. Age-specific interventions and support systems are required to address the unique requirements of different age groups among the old population, including the "Young Olds," "Old Olds," and "Oldest Olds," who face distinct problems. It is essential to comprehend demographic changes and meet the complex demands of the elderly to ensure their dignity, well-being, and engagement in society.

a. Issues and Needs of Elderly in India

Historically, India has predominantly been an agrarian economy. In these communities, the joint family system was dominant, with the oldest members of the family having authority over financial transactions, social contacts, and daily activities. They were the most revered in the family. In Indian culture and tradition, showing care and respect for

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[10] Chatterjee CB, Sheoran G. Centre for Enquiry into Health & Allied Themes (Mumbai I. vulnerable groups in India. Mumbai: Centre for Enquiry into Health and Allied Themes; 2007.

elders in the family was a fundamental aspect of the social value system. The family's eldest member, sometimes known as 'the head of the family', possessed the authority to make decisions.

In the village community, elders held the role of the head of the village, known as 'panch,' which was the decision-making and dispute-resolution body of the village. They were involved in various social and political decision-making processes inside the local community. The joint family system in most regions of India is diminishing due to urbanisation, globalisation, and technological advancements. The agriculture-dependent economy is transitioning rapidly towards a technology and industry-driven one.

Parents are increasingly inclined to provide their children with education to enhance their financial and social standing. Children are choosing to pursue further education and employment possibilities in distant locations, both domestically and internationally. Urban migration for education and employment opportunities is increasing, but there are also instances of distress migration driven by the need to support destitute families, leading people to move far away from their home. The older family members are often left behind, experiencing a prevalent "empty nest" feeling in current society. The remaining senior citizen population in rural and urban areas has several obstacles, with feelings of loneliness, isolation, and abandonment being the most common. Elderly individuals who reside with their children and other family members may nevertheless experience feelings of 'loneliness' and various other challenges in their day-to-day existence. In this section, we will explore the challenges and needs of older individuals who are often overlooked and unheard despite being present in our midst. The demography of senior folks in India indicates that the aged population is increasing rapidly and represents the fastest-growing component of India's population as well as globally.

Technological advancements and advancements in medicine have extended human life expectancy in the 20th century. However, this has also led to challenges for the elderly, who are sometimes viewed as unproductive and a financial burden. This concept encompasses several levels of society, from individuals and families to nation-states, ultimately hindering older individuals from living a dignified life. Let's analyse the 7

insecurities and obstacles experienced by the elderly in our country. These concerns are interconnected and create a vicious cycle.

Elder abuse and neglect involve different types of harm inflicted on older individuals, including physical abuse and financial exploitation. It is essential to comprehend the complex nature of these challenges in order to tackle the root problems and offer sufficient assistance to the aged population.

1. Elderly adults may encounter physical obstacles such as abuse, neglect, and issues in accessing vital services, leading to physical insecurity. This can lead to feelings of vulnerability and worry, particularly for individuals who live alone or without adequate support systems. To address physical insecurity, it is essential to implement comprehensive programmes that guarantee the safety and well-being of senior adults.

2. Abandonment and Neglect: A major issue is when elderly folks are deserted by their families or carers. This might happen owing to a range of factors such as geographical distance, family disputes, or financial limitations. Neglecting the elderly can lead to serious effects on their physical and emotional well-being, underscoring the significance of family support and community engagement.

Financial insecurity exacerbates the difficulties experienced by senior citizens due to economic reliance and insufficient financial means. Elderly adults often depend on meagre pensions or assets, leaving them vulnerable to financial exploitation and abuse. Financial stability for the elderly necessitates a blend of social support systems, economic empowerment, and awareness programmes.

Loneliness and social isolation are common among older individuals, especially as they become older and have physical restrictions. Urbanisation, migration, and evolving family patterns are factors that lead to feelings of loneliness and alienation. Establishing robust social networks and promoting ties between different generations are crucial for addressing social instability in the elderly.[11]

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[11] Lynch SM, Brown SJ, Taylor MG. The demography of disability. In: Uhlenberg Peter., editor. International Handbook of Population Aging. London: Springer-Verlag; 2009.

Ageing brings about health-related concerns such as chronic diseases, mental health issues, and access to healthcare services. Inadequate healthcare facilities and assistance worsen these concerns, making senior citizens more vulnerable. Emphasising geriatric healthcare and advocating for preventive measures are crucial for meeting the healthcare requirements of the aged.

Ageism and sociocultural attitudes towards old age lead to the marginalisation and neglect of elderly people. Age-based discriminatory attitudes limit opportunities for active involvement and engagement in society. Combatting ageist attitudes and advocating for diversity are essential in establishing age-friendly environments.

7. Establishing supportive communities that prioritise the well-being of elderly individuals is crucial for resolving elder abuse and neglect. Creating community-based programmes, support groups, and recreational activities can improve social inclusion and offer essential support systems for older individuals.

Government policies and institutional initiatives are crucial in protecting the rights and dignity of senior citizens. This encompasses laws related to elder abuse, financial safeguards, healthcare benefits, and social welfare initiatives designed for the senior demographic.

9. Promoting education and awareness is crucial for cultivating a culture of respect and care for the old by addressing elder abuse, neglect, and age-related difficulties. Educational programmes aimed at both the general public and healthcare professionals can assist in recognising symptoms of abuse, encouraging good ageing behaviours, and supporting the rights of elderly individuals.[12]

10. To effectively address the difficulties experienced by the aged, a comprehensive approach is necessary, considering the physical, mental, social, and economic aspects of ageing. Society can ensure that elderly citizens age with dignity, respect, and enjoyment by supporting active ageing, offering comprehensive support services, and creating age-friendly environments.

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[12]Mutharayappa R, Bhat TN. Is lifestyle influencing morbidity among elderly? Journal of Health Management. 2008;10(2):203–217. [CrossRef]

LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

Efforts to address the rights and wellbeing of older individuals at the international level have been continuous since the adoption of the 1st International Plan of Action on Ageing in 1982. Following events include the implementation of the UN Principles for Older Persons in 1991, the designation of 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons, and the creation of the International Day of Older Persons on October 1st every year. The projects prioritise ideals like independence, involvement, care, self-fulfillment, and dignity for older adults. The United Nations has been instrumental in promoting the incorporation of these concepts into national programmes globally.

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment at the national level in India supervises programmes aimed at meeting the requirements of elderly individuals. The National Policy on Older Persons (NPOP) was established in 1999 with the aim of safeguarding the welfare of elderly individuals by providing governmental assistance in areas such as financial stability, healthcare, and safeguarding against mistreatment. The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act was established in 2007 to provide the care and support of senior citizens, covering mandatory support, property entitlements, and the creation of elderly care facilities.

National initiatives like the National Action Plan for the Welfare of Senior Citizens (NAPSrC) strive to offer extensive assistance to elderly folks. The plan has sub-schemes for integrated programmes, state action plans, coordination with other ministries, and media advocacy. These efforts include several facets of older citizen well-being, such as healthcare, housing, and social integration. The government is aggressively enhancing and broadening these programmes to better address the changing requirements of senior folks in India.[13]

The Indian government has launched many plans and initiatives at the national level to acknowledge and assist senior folks. The Vayoshreshtha Samman is a programme that recognises individuals and organisations for their exceptional contributions to aged welfare. The awards encompass a range of categories such as research institutions, district

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[13] National Sample Survey Organization. National Sample Survey 52nd Round Report. New Delhi: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India; 1996. The Aged in India: A Socio-economic Profile, 1995–96.

panchayats, urban local authorities, and commercial and public sector organisations. Furthermore, there are specific categories like Centenarian, Iconic Mother, Lifetime Achievement, and Creative Art, among others.[14]

The RashtriyaVayoshri Yojana is a notable programme that offers complimentary assistive living gadgets to elderly individuals with age-related difficulties. The programme now encompasses those living below the poverty level as well as elders earning less than Rs 15,000 per month. The plan is managed by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, which utilises funding from the Senior Citizens Welfare Fund.

The National Council of Senior Citizens provides guidance to the government on policies and programmes concerning senior citizen welfare to improve their quality of life. The council comprises representatives from different ministries, senior citizen associations, and NGOs.

Odisha has implemented a strong administrative structure at the state level to support the welfare of senior citizens. This involves district and block-level officials in charge of senior citizen matters, along with committees overseen by district collectors to cater to their requirements. The state has implemented the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act and established specific laws and policies, including the Odisha State Policy for Senior Citizens.

Odisha offers social security pensions to senior persons through programmes like the Madhubabu Pension Yojana, showcasing its dedication to their financial welfare. The state regularly grants awards to organisations and people for their outstanding contributions in senior care.

At both the national and state levels, there is a focused effort to protect the rights and benefits of elderly residents by legal, administrative, and welfare measures. The efforts attempt to guarantee that elderly folks are provided with the assistance and acknowledgment they deserve in Indian society.

The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), emphasising "Leaving No One Behind," underscore the significance of inclusive development, particularly for vulnerable

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[14] Milika Mehrotra, "A Resource Book On Disability Studies In India", www.jnu.ac.in

groups such as the elderly. In India, with over 10% of the population being elderly, it is crucial for both the government and society to prioritise their well-being to accomplish development goals. This involves prioritising the well-being and respect of the ageing population amidst efforts for advancement.[15]

The 2021 topic for the International Day of Older Persons (IDOP), "Digital Equity for All Ages," highlights the need of involving elderly individuals in the digital realm. It focuses on providing opportunities and executing programmes to guarantee that older folks may use and benefit from digital technologies. This issue requires collaboration between individuals and communities to help the elderly adapt to the digital world, allowing them to fully engage in the digital lifestyle.

The state is essential in tackling the issues brought about by an ageing population by creating and executing suitable social and economic policies. The policies should aim to adjust society to accommodate the requirements of older folks and assist the aged in adapting to societal changes. Key areas for policy action involve establishing geriatric healthcare infrastructure and guaranteeing aged individuals access to preventive and curative healthcare services.

Promoting academic research and study on geriatric topics to enhance comprehension and satisfy the requirements of older populations.

3. Creating a strong social security system for the elderly to ensure financial stability and assistance.

Providing programmes and job opportunities tailored to the age group to help older persons stay involved and active in society.

5. Offering customised leisure and recreational opportunities for the ageing population.

Strong legal processes are crucial for protecting the rights and well-being of older adults, in addition to policy frameworks. This encompasses safeguarding against abuse and neglect, maintaining the safety of their life and possessions, and ensuring access to vital services including healthcare and social security. India can improve the well-being and

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[15] Schemes and services for the PwD, Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities department.

inclusion of its senior population by implementing comprehensive policies and legal frameworks that meet these concerns.[16]

III. ISSUES RELATING TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITY

Disability is a significant and enduring concern. It is an inherent aspect of human existence. At some point in their lives, every individual will encounter handicap, whether temporarily or permanently. Some individuals are born with disabilities, while others may develop disabilities later in life due to societal factors. They are described as differently-abled or specially-abled, possessing distinct abilities and views. Individuals with disabilities are part of our community. In order to provide individuals with access to basic necessities and possibilities in society, they must be educated, motivated, supported, and cared for.

Individuals with disabilities must be given sufficient opportunities to develop skills. Disabilities manifest in various forms. It might manifest as intellectual disability, learning disability, or physical disability resulting from the dysfunction, non-functioning, or malfunctioning of specific bodily features. Disabilities restrict a person's movement. Disability impacts an individual's mobility, sensory functions, and restricts their participation in activities. Disabled individuals have numerous limitations and obstacles in life. Individuals with disabilities are recognised as one of the most marginalised and vulnerable groups in society. They encounter societal discrimination and stigmas in addition to their physical and mental limitations. They lack access to several life options.

Research indicates that individuals with disabilities frequently achieve lower levels of education, experience worse health conditions, face higher poverty rates, and engage less in economic activities compared to individuals without disabilities. It is important to transform the current disability culture by altering the common perception and fostering a mindset for attitude changes towards individuals with disabilities, to enlighten society that people with disabilities are equally capable. They must be able to fully experience their rights as children and as humans. They are highly proficient at performing productive tasks. Issues faced by disabled individuals can be prevented from the outset by raising society awareness and fostering confidence and a positive attitude among people. In the

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[16] Compendium of schemes for the Welfare of Persons with Disabilities, 2018, government of India, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, www.disabilityaffairsgov.in.

upcoming sections of this unit, we will explore the definition of disability, its various types, factors that lead to disability, challenges encountered by individuals with disabilities, existing support systems, ethical considerations, and our role in fostering an environment that is accommodating to people with disabilities.[17]

Disability is a term that describes a physical or mental condition that restricts a person's movement, senses, or activities. Disability is a condition that affects both the physical and mental capabilities of an individual. The individual is incapable of performing specific activities. There is a restriction on the activities of the impaired person. They are not conventional. Individuals experiencing physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory disabilities may encounter challenges in doing tasks. These limitations or deformities may be congenital. They are also identified as PWD (person with disability). The acronym PWD, which stands for 'person with disability', is utilised for all official matters. The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, a division of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in the Government of Odisha, is providing a distinctive Disability Identity card to individuals with disabilities. Individuals with disabilities can acquire a PWD certificate or be classified under PWD categories for official use when accessing government-provided schemes or facilities. Another phrase used as an alternative is differently-abled. The word differently-abled denotes a lack of typical functioning in physical, mental, or psychological functions. It is also known as cognitive challenges or social adjustment difficulties that impede a person's typical growth and development. Terms such as crippled and handicapped are also utilised to refer to those with disabilities.

The term disability is now considered outdated. It is increasingly being linked with positive terms to enhance the self-efficacy of this group and alter the attitudes of those around them. The fundamental principle is to focus on individuals' abilities rather than their disabilities. Positive phrases that can be used to identify individuals with disabilities are:

• Specially-abled — This term is used in a broad meaning. It signifies that an individual possesses abilities that exceed those of the average person. All individuals possess unique features and strengths as well as weaknesses, including individuals with disabilities. It is

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[17] Ruchi Ramesh and Sudhir Kumar Singh, "Disability Towards Inclusive India", published by Pentagon Press.

our duty in our environment to concentrate on individuals' talents rather than weaknesses so they can experience life fully. We must recognise them as equals rather than objects of pity. [18]

• Para ability - Before the 2016 Paralympics, those with disabilities requested that the term "disability" be substituted with "para-ability," signifying an additional capacity rather than a complete one. Jan Cocks, who was permanently paralysed on her right side, coined the name.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged to refer to individuals with disabilities as "divyang," suggesting they possess divine qualities. The term's literal meaning is "divine organ."

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, disability is a persistent limitation, whether physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory, that, along with societal obstacles, can restrict complete involvement in society. Disability includes impairment, limitations in activities, and constraints in participation, characterised by difficulties in tasks, inefficient time management, and obstacles in accessing physical settings. It is a common part of human life, impacting around 15% of people worldwide, necessitating comprehension, acknowledgment, and assistance.

Disabilities range from physical impairments like mobility issues, visual and hearing impairments, to sensory conditions including autism spectrum disorder, blindness, and sensory processing disorder. Somato-sensory dysfunction impacts sensory information processing, whereas balance disorders disturb body movement control. Intellectual disabilities restrict learning capabilities, whereas invisible and numerous disabilities impact the neurological system. Mental and emotional problems affect the ability to express and recognise emotions, while developmental disabilities encompass cognitive, emotional, and physical limitations. These illnesses stem from variables such as infectious and non-infectious diseases, injuries, mental health disorders, and nutritional deficits.

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[18] Trimarchi M. THE DISCRIMINATIONS FACED BY THE HIJRA COMMUNITY IN BANGLADESH. 2022. https://ghrd.org/the-discriminations-faced-by-the-hijra-community-in-bangladesh/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=the-discriminations-faced-by-the-hijra-community-in-bangladesh&fbclid=IwAR1d9IHu272J2ccDN5kvFfboRKJgGSfKa4UXE8SjFBv0Xlxb63RV7IasSgY

The rights of individuals with disabilities in India are protected by constitutional provisions such as Article 15(1), 15(2), 17, 21, 23, 24, and 25, along with the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act of 2016. Actions like preferred land allotment, non-discriminatory procedures, and equitable opportunities in services can promote social justice for those with disabilities. Furthermore, government initiatives like Samarth, Gharaunda, Niramaya, and Sahyogi are designed to empower individuals with disabilities through the provision of practical assistance, such as assistive devices, healthcare, education, and marriage incentives. Programmes such as Vikash, Gyanprabha, and Prerna cater to specialised requirements, while initiatives like Sambhav and Baditeekadam advocate for inclusivity and accessibility. Providing PwD identity cards and laptops for visually impaired individuals improves support and inclusion initiatives, promoting a more inclusive society for people with disabilities.

IV.   ISSUES RELATING TO THIRD GENDER

Gender is a sociological concept that determines the roles and behaviours linked to being female, male, girl, or boy, influenced by cultural norms and expectations. Gender has generally been seen as binary, with individuals categorised as either male or female. However, some people question these standards by identifying with non-stereotypical gender identities. Transgender individuals challenge the binary classification by identifying with a gender that goes beyond the usual male and female boundaries. This comprehensive view of gender includes a wide array of identities and experiences, such as transsexuals, cross-dressers, intersex individuals, and people whose gender expression differs from traditional norms.

The idea of a "third gender" or "third sex" acknowledges that certain persons do not conform strictly to the traditional male and female categories. This category encompasses individuals who may identify as intersex or transgender, whose gender identification differs from their biological sex assigned at birth. Members of the third gender frequently encounter prejudice, marginalisation, and social exclusion. They can face rejection from

their families, communities, and society, resulting in financial difficulties and restricted job prospects.[19]

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2016, aims to defend the rights of transgender individuals by acknowledging their distinct gender identity and offering legal protection against discrimination. The law recognises transgender individuals as those whose gender identity differs from the gender assigned to them at birth, encompassing a range of identities such as trans-men, trans-women, individuals with intersex variants, and genderqueer individuals.

Comprehending and embracing various gender identities are essential for fostering inclusiveness and fighting against prejudice. Transgender individuals, along with all individuals, are entitled to respect, dignity, and equal rights as per the law. Efforts to increase awareness, educate the public, and support the rights of transgender individuals are crucial for creating a more inclusive and fair society where everyone may live freely and authentically, regardless of gender identification.

The transgender community in India is known by distinct regional labels, which represent the variety of gender identities in different regions of the country. Examples include Kothi, Hijras, Kinnaras, Aravani, Jog tas/Jogappas, and Shiv-shaktis, Sakhis, and Aradhis. These words symbolise different communities in specific regions: Hijras and Kinnars in North India, Aravanis or Thirunangai in Tamil Nadu, Yellamma in Karnataka, Shiv-Shakthi in Andhra Pradesh, and Jogappa in Maharashtra. The geographical differences in India showcase the cultural and linguistic diversity and the distinct ways gender identities are perceived and articulated within various communities.

Indian mythology and religious literature recognise the presence of several gender groups, such as the Hijras. Examples of gender fluidity and non-binary gender expressions in ancient Indian literature include figures such as Ardhanarishvara, a composite male-female deity, and people like Shikhandi and Arjuna from the Mahabharata, who adopted transgender identities. The mythical references help foster cultural acceptance and acknowledgment of transgender individuals in Indian society.

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[19] Sifat R.I. The effect of COVID-19 on hijra (third gender) people in Bangladesh. Lancet Psychiatr. 2020;7(12):1015–1016. [PubMed] [Google Scholar

Individuals who identify outside of the usual binary classifications of male and female are referred to as the "third gender" or "alternative gender." The LGBTQIA+ group includes a variety of sexual orientations and gender identities. The term "third gender" is used to describe individuals who do not identify as male or female. In India, the predominant third-gender categories are Hijras/Kinnars and Kothis, each distinguished by certain traits and societal functions.

Hijras are among the oldest ethnic groupings of transgender individuals globally, known for their unique roles and behaviours linked to femininity. They might participate in activities such as begging or performing at weddings and festivities. Kothis are individuals who were designated male at birth but identify as women and may not be part of the Hijra community. The varied identities enhance the intricate fabric of gender diversity in India.

Approximately two percent of the world's population identifies as transgender, gender-fluid, or non-binary, according to demographic estimates. The Census 2011 in India documented a transgender population of approximately 0.49 million, while campaigners believe the true figures could be greater. In Odisha, the transgender population was projected to be 20,332 according to the 2011 Census. The statistics highlight the significance of acknowledging and dealing with the requirements of the transgender population in India, such as healthcare, education, employment, and social acceptance.

In India, "Hijras" and "Transgender" are often used interchangeably. However, "Transgender" is a broader term encompassing Hijras, Kinnars, Kothis, etc. "Hijras" specifically refer to a community that individuals join by leaving their homes and residing in gharanas or deras, specific residences for the Hijra community, where they live in groups under the guidance of their Gurus. Disciples who join the Gharanas must follow the community's own laws and restrictions. They can only engage in certain activities and socialise inside their groups. Additionally, disciples, referred to as chelas, are not allowed to attend any gatherings without their guru. We must have a precise understanding of what LGBTQIA signifies. The box below can provide clarification on the meaning of LGBTQIA. All these groups of persons can be classified as the Third gender group.

a. Issues faced by Transgender

Transgender individuals, commonly classified as the third gender, face numerous obstacles and various types of prejudice in Indian society. They are ostracised due to social stigma and discriminatory views, resulting in marginalisation and exclusion from several spheres of life. This exclusion negatively impacts their emotional and physical well-being, leading to conditions such as severe sadness and anxiety. Societal stigma and discrimination impede access to proper healthcare for transgender individuals, making them vulnerable to sexual and physical assault in hospital settings.

Transgender populations experience societal isolation, which hinders their involvement in social, cultural, economic, and political aspects. Despite being legally recognised, they nonetheless face prejudice and discrimination, which perpetuates a cycle of marginalisation. Gender-diverse and trans individuals frequently encounter violence and prejudice, such as bullying, familial and societal rejection, and lack of work possibilities. Discrimination affects different areas of life, including education, healthcare, housing, and employment.

Transgender individuals face significant stigmatisation, discrimination, and harassment in their daily lives, which can result in psychological anguish and a higher risk of self-harm and suicide behaviour. Childhood sexual abuse, verbal harassment, and rejection by loved ones worsen their difficulties, leading to a hostile atmosphere that does not acknowledge their needs and rights. Discrimination originates in families, where rejection and lack of acceptance lead to mental health problems and social isolation.

Transgender individuals still encounter discrimination in society, businesses, and educational institutions, while being legally recognised and protected. Their hardships are exacerbated by limited job prospects, social and cultural isolation, and lack of access to essential services. Systemic hurdles impede the complete integration of certain groups into society due to their under-representation in decision-making processes and limited political participation.

To tackle these issues, it is necessary to make extensive efforts to fight against stigma, encourage inclusion, and protect the fundamental rights of transgender individuals. Efforts focused on increasing knowledge, offering support services, and promoting acceptance are crucial for establishing a fair and inclusive society for all genders.

Legislative reforms and policy initiatives are necessary to guarantee equal rights and opportunities for transgender individuals in all aspects of life.

The transgender or third gender community encounters several health issues, frequently worsened by societal shame and discrimination. Transgender individuals still face challenges in obtaining healthcare treatments, despite advancements in understanding and awareness. Discrimination in medical settings, such as misgendering, verbal abuse, and refusal of care, exacerbates their health problems. Transgender individuals are frequently misgendered, placed in male facilities, and experience embarrassment when seeking medical care, highlighting institutional prejudices and healthcare providers' insensitivity.

Transgender individuals, especially those involved in sex work, are at a high risk of experiencing HIV victimisation due to economic weaknesses. Transgender individuals face a substantially elevated risk of HIV infection compared to the general population, underscoring the critical necessity for tailored HIV testing and treatment programmes. HIV-related stigma and transphobia create extra obstacles to obtaining these crucial care.

Transgender individuals experience worsened health disparities due to socio-economic marginalisation and social exclusion. Discrimination against individuals according to their sexual orientation and gender identity reinforces societal stigma and bias, marginalising transgender people. This marginalisation subjects individuals to several types of prejudice, impeding their ability to obtain school, employment, housing, and healthcare.

A holistic approach that promotes inclusivity, awareness, and sensitivity towards the needs of transgender individuals is necessary to overcome these difficulties. Education and awareness initiatives can debunk misunderstandings and biases, creating a more inclusive and encouraging atmosphere for transgender individuals. Furthermore, policies and programmes that focus on ensuring equal rights, access to healthcare, and economic opportunities are crucial for overcoming the systemic obstacles encountered by the transgender community.

Transgender individuals have taken a leading role in pushing for their rights and visibility in society, despite facing discrimination and indifference. The transgender rights movement is gaining worldwide momentum as people and organisations strive to defy

established conventions and advocate for acceptance and equality. Transgender individuals in India have overcome obstacles and accomplished notable achievements in different areas, becoming role models and champions for their community.

Eliminating prejudice and promoting inclusivity are essential measures to tackle the health disparities and socio-economic obstacles encountered by the transgender community. Society can establish a fair and inclusive environment for all persons, irrespective of gender identity or sexual orientation, by embracing diversity and honouring the rights and dignity of every person.

b. Laws in India for Justice Third Gender and Acceptance of Gender Diversity.

The Indian Constitution's Preamble aims to accomplish Justice, Liberty, and Fraternity for all citizens, ensuring equality before the law, signifying that everyone is equal in the eyes of the law. The Indian Constitution's provisions are supportive of transgender individuals, a stance that has been reaffirmed by the judiciary on multiple occasions. As per Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution, all individuals are entitled to equality before the law and equal protection of the law. Article 21 covers the freedom to freely select one's gender identification, which is essential for leading a dignified life. The Court's examination of the right to personal freedom and self-determination emphasised that an individual's gender is defined by the individual themselves. Indian individuals now have the liberty to self-identify as either male or female. Gender-based discrimination is forbidden by Articles 14, 15, 16, and 21.

• NAZARIYA is a queer feminist organisation that provides support to gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals assigned female at birth. It was founded in 2014. They see gender as a multifaceted term beyond a binary understanding and want to assist anyone facing discrimination based on their sexual orientation or assigned gender.

The Bi-Collective Delhi was established to provide a secure environment for individuals to engage in talks regarding their sexuality, attraction, and perplexity. This association advocates for bisexual individuals. The NAZ Foundation is a leading NGO dedicated to addressing issues related to HIV/AIDS and discrimination against LGBTQAI+ individuals. They conduct lectures to educate people on these matters and instruct them

on how to interact with the queer community. NGO Naz also submitted the appeal challenging the constitutionality of Section 377, which criminalises homosexual intimacy.

The Humsafar Trust, established in 1994, promotes the message that "your identity should be a source of pride, not something to conceal." Workshops are conducted to educate legislators, politicians, and media representatives on matters impacting the queer community. They also facilitate support groups including SANJEEVANI for HIV-positive individuals, YAARIYAN for young LGBTQ individuals, and UMANG for LBT individuals. [20]

• Sappho for Equality, a non-profit organisation located in Kolkata, was established in 2003. It seeks to connect the queer and non-queer segments of Indian society. They aim to assist transgender individuals and sexually repressed women in achieving equal rights and status in society. They increase awareness by hosting film festivals and debates. 18 Tamil Nadu was the first Indian state to officially accept "Transgender" individuals on official documents by including transgender status on ration cards in 2008. A transgender welfare board was created in Tamil Nadu to provide support in education, health, employment, and housing for aravanis. However, it is believed that the board remained inactive in Tamil Nadu for a significant period.

In the significant ruling of National Legal Services Authority of India Vs. Union of India, the Supreme Court acknowledged individuals who did not conform to the traditional male/female gender dichotomy, such as those who identified as "third gender." In the Suresh Kumar Koushal Vs. NAZ Foundation case, it was determined that the term "sex" should be interpreted more expansively than the traditional binary concept of biological sex. The Supreme Court made a groundbreaking decision by thoroughly discussing gender identity and officially acknowledging the third gender for the first time. The Supreme Court recognised that individuals identifying as "third gender" had fundamental rights protected by Indian and international law. Furthermore, state governments were directed to establish protocols for acknowledging the rights of transgender individuals. After the Supreme Court's decision, numerous policies and activities were implemented

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[20] India, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2014. Report of the Expert Committee on the Issues Relating to Transgender Community. Retrieved from http:// socialjustice.nic.in/write readdata/Upload File/Binder2.pdf

for the transgender population. The Rights of Transgender Persons Bill, 2014 was presented in 2014 as a Private Member's Bill by Dravida MunnetraKazagham. Tiruchi Siva is a Member of Parliament in the Rajya Sabha. The bill was approved by the Rajya Sabha with a unanimous vote but was not presented in the Lok Sabha. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment released the draft of The Rights of Transgender Persons Bill, 2015 in December 2015 for public review. Comments were requested to be submitted by January 2016 for consideration.[21]

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, is a crucial step in acknowledging and protecting the rights of transgender people in India. The Act, implemented on January 10th, 2020, focuses on addressing important issues impacting transgender individuals and seeks to eradicate discrimination while promoting their integration and involvement in society. The Act's key provision is the definition of a transgender person, which includes individuals whose gender identity differs from the gender assigned to them at birth, such as trans-men, trans-women, intersex persons, gender queers, and those with socio-cultural identities like kinnar and hijra.

The Act is crucial as it forbids discrimination against transgender individuals in areas such as education, work, healthcare, access to public facilities, housing, and participation in public office. The right to residency and inclusion within homes is guaranteed, ensuring that transgender individuals receive familial support and care. The Act requires actions to support inclusive education, healthcare, and employment for transgender individuals, along with providing comprehensive medical insurance plans and separate HIV monitoring facilities.[22]

The Act includes a mechanism for persons to get a certificate of identity that indicates their transgender status, enabling them to officially declare their gender identity. The Act also includes welfare measures to support the complete integration and involvement of transgender individuals in society, such as vocational training, self-employment chances, and the encouragement of cultural activities.

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[21] India, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2010. Hijras/Transgender Women in India: HIV, Human Rights and Social Exclusion. Retrieved from http:// www.undp.org/content/dam/india/docs/hijras_transgender_in_india_hiv_human_ rights_and_social_exclusion.pdf

[22] Lawyers Collective, (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.lawyerscollective.org/updates/ supreme-court-recognises-the-right-todetermine-and-express-ones-gender-grants- legal-status-to-third-gender.html

The National Council for Transgender Persons (NCT) is required to supervise the execution of the Act and handle complaints. The National Consultative Taskforce (NCT) consists of government officials, members from transgender groups, and professionals from non-governmental organisations. Its purpose is to provide advice to the central government, assess the impact of policies, and address issues concerning transgender rights.

The government has implemented affirmative actions and transgender-friendly programmes to support the transgender community, in addition to legislative efforts. Initiatives such as implementing transgender-friendly policies in railway reservation forms, providing social pensions, adjusting examination rules for central government jobs, offering financial aid during the COVID-19 pandemic, and setting up transgender-friendly vaccination centres have been introduced.

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, and government activities demonstrate a dedication to advancing equality, dignity, and inclusion for transgender individuals in India. These activities aim to create a more inclusive and equitable society for all by tackling structural prejudice and guaranteeing access to key services and opportunities.

Third gender individuals frequently encounter social isolation, economic marginalisation, and political disenfranchisement despite their importance in society. The dominant binary gender viewpoint in society has led to a hesitancy in fully recognising the concept of the third gender.

Legislative actions have been implemented to resolve these challenges and protect the rights of third gender individuals. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, is a notable achievement that aims to eradicate prejudice and promote the integration of transgender individuals in several aspects of society. The Act provides a detailed definition of a transgender person and forbids discrimination in various areas including education, employment, healthcare, and public services. The law also requires specific arrangements for housing rights, job prospects, education, and healthcare services designed for the requirements of transgender people.

Initiatives such as the SMILE project and the National Portal for Transgender Persons have been introduced to offer extensive help, encompassing financial aid, skill enhancement, healthcare, and housing services. The goal of these initiatives is to empower transgender individuals and help them integrate into mainstream society.

Odisha has become a leading state in enacting transgender-friendly policies and offering social welfare benefits, housing, education, and work possibilities. The state's efforts, such the Sweekruti scheme and the formation of transgender welfare boards, show a dedication to promoting an inclusive atmosphere and enhancing the rights of transgender people.

The unit also showcases the accomplishments of transgender individuals who have become pioneers in several industries, challenging preconceptions and promoting more acceptance and inclusivity. Salma Begum, Aishwarya Rituparna Pradhan, Meera Parida, Sadhana, and Meghana Sahoo are influential figures who defy traditional standards and make constructive contributions to their communities.[23]

The unit emphasises the significance of acknowledging and honouring the variety of gender identities, advocating for equality, and establishing a society where all persons, irrespective of their gender identity, can flourish and make valuable contributions. It requires a joint effort to turn potential provisions into concrete acts, guaranteeing the complete involvement and empowerment of the third-gender community in every area of life.

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[23] Nagarajan, R. (2014, 30 May). First count of third gender in census: 4.9 lakh, Times of India. Retrieved from http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/First-count-ofthird-gender-in-census-4-9-lakh/article show/35741613.cms