

# Evolution of Transgender Movement in Hyderabad

Manjir Das

IIT Hyderabad

## **Introduction**

Most metropolitan cities have become spaces for queer activism ever since homosexuality has been decriminalised. As social media grew as the platform for dialogue and dissent, Queer activism went on to occupy the digital space as well. In fact, queer aspiration has grown over the past years owing to social media.

Hyderabad, being of a corporate nature and a growing cosmopolitan city, witnessed a growing Queer inclusive culture over the past few years. This movement has, in fact, radically grown in Hyderabad since 2014 due to the entry of strong trans-leadership (Kumar, 2017). In this article I look at the various Queer organisations headed by people from the community, which have played an influential role in shaping the Queer space within the city.

Hyderabad, the capital of Telangana and the de jure capital of Andhra Pradesh, experienced massive technological progress, especially in Information Technology, post 1990. The Princely state of Nizams thus went through a rapid economic boom leading to various cultural changes. Kumar (2017) recounts Reddy's account in her book "With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India" where she identifies the existence of the hijra community in Hyderabad since the beginning of the formation of the city- back when it was ruled by the Nizams. However, unlike other metropolitan cities such as Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata, Hyderabad took relatively more time to accommodate the Queer culture within the growing modern space.

### **Evolution of Transgender movement in Hyderabad**

"Transgender movement is little bit different from the rest of the gay movement. Trans people been a part of HIV work- almost a decade before any other Queer rights movement started anywhere in the country. Same is the case with Hyderabad. There were trans people

working in different communities, there were organisations which were doing HIV intervention working, and awareness work.” said Tashi Choedup, from Telangana Hijra Intersex Transgender Samiti (THITS). When Hyderabad had its first Pride March in 2013, the movement picked up as more people came together and more marginal communities got together. More than two thousand people had joined in, including various organisations such as Anveshi, Suraksha and Hero’s project and also corporations like Google. As the Transgender and Queer communities started building narratives with other marginal communities such as Dalit groups, the movement started taking on a broader theme of civil rights. Hyderabad Queer Pride, in 2015, was renamed ‘Queer Swabhiman Yatra’ as it gained a more political angle and looked into issues of intersectionality. It was an initiative by the Hijra, Transgender, Lesbian, Kothi, Gay, Bisexual, Pansexual, Inter-sex, Inter-gender, Asexual, Queer and Allies of Telangana.

In this article, I look at some of the major organisations which have been involved with the Transgender movement in Hyderabad.

### **Organisations working for LGBT+ rights in Hyderabad**

**Queer Campus Hyderabad.** Queer Campus (QC) is run by a group of independent Queer students since 2010. It is a virtual organisation and operates through Facebook. They aim to create a safe space for the Queer community where they can discuss anything and everything and also build a close community of Queer students among themselves. The basic problems such as bullying, coming out, acceptance, awareness, career guidance etc are also dealt with by them. They conduct meetings every week where they discuss various such issues and anyone is free to join these meetings. In 2014, the first Queer Carnival in Hyderabad was organised by QC Hyderabad.

**Telangana Hijra Intersex Transgender Samiti.** Telangana Hijra Intersex Transgender Samiti (THITS) is an unfunded collective of transgender, hijra, non-hijra intersex, transwomen, transmen & genderqueer people. According to Tashi Choedup, as the Queer and Transgender rights movement had started picking up pace in Hyderabad, a lot of people felt like doing it in a more organised manner and working towards a larger collective space which led to the formation of this collective. THITS have been raising strong voices against various issues faced by their community. In 2017 they expressed their outrage when a transgender woman was attacked by the Jawans in Hyderabad. Way back in 2015, they also expressed their discontentment for the Trans Rights Bill. They have also been fighting against the Trans Bill. They have also raised their voices against any discrimination faced by the transgender community.

**Mobbera foundation.** When Anil had come out to their family, they had to eventually run away from home. However, they knew no one who could help them and could not find any such organisation which was inclusive of all identities and not a particular few. This experience made them realise the importance of one platform for everyone.

Following a flash mob performed in Osmania University, Hyderabad, the “mobbers” came to be called Mobbera. Mobbera was founded in 2015 and works towards raising awareness about the Queer community and addressing the discrimination faced by them. It also focuses on human rights activism, women and child empowerment, racism, body-shaming, and other forms of discrimination. They organise various events such as cultural programs entailing dance, drama, music and various other forms of art, that are aimed at making the community more visible and raise an understanding of it in society. They also conduct sessions that are aimed at raising awareness about issues faced by Queer people- such as issues of mental health and discrimination. Other than that, they also engage in fieldwork where they distribute food, water,

clothes, etc to people who need them. In the last 6 years, Mobbera has conducted 400+ events. Mobbera has volunteers and members who are from all over India and identify with all sexualities and gender identities. Mobbera has also built a community of netizens on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#), who also engage in creating awareness and busting myths. Irrespective of any differences, the volunteers support each other like family, while leveraging different art forms to bring about awareness and change. As Anil puts it, “Art doesn’t require any language. People will love it and at the same time learn from it”.

**Trans Vision.** It is a Hyderabad based [Youtube channel](#). It has been started by Rachana Mudraboyina, a trans woman and is aimed at disseminating the various myths and misconceptions around the trans community. While most of us might know the meaning of the word ‘transgender’, there still remains huge gaps in our knowledge. This lack of awareness and knowledge results in discriminatory behaviour against transgender people. The initial few videos covered basic topics explaining who transgenders are, sex affirmation surgery, and so on. Post that, the videos familiarised us with festivals celebrated by Transgender people in Hyderabad, transgender celebrities, policies and laws relevant to the community, all the while, throwing ample light on the historical and cultural background of the community. Not only was Rachana the brain behind the idea of the channel but also the script writer and director of the few videos. Other than Rachana, the team also includes other community members- Anjali Kalyanapu, Jhanavi Rai, and Soniya Shaik.

Transvision is the first Youtube channel in India to be run by Transgenders. In an interview with Rachana, they pointed out that it is only the community that can speak for themselves and narrate their true story without being tainted by voices of other agencies. They emphasised on the importance of having independent media platforms where marginal

communities can voice themselves. While further discussing the motivation behind starting this channel, they clarified, “it was the need of the hour”. This channel with 4.5k subscribers, continues to address more topics as it creates change, one video at a time.

**Women and Transgender Organisations Joint Action Committee.** The Telangana State Movement saw the various communities across social classes coming together in the hope that the formation of a new state would lead to the end of their suppression and sufferings. This movement eventually resulted in the formation of the Telangana State. The women of the state expected that the infrastructure set up by the state would enable the women to fulfill their aspirations, goals and constitutional rights. However, even in 2018, that is, 4 years after the formation of the state of Telangana, the expectations remained unfulfilled. This led to the Dalit, Adivasi, Transgender and other minority women to come together to demand their rights and space in politics and decision making. They made demands regarding political representation, access to quality education, better access to healthcare facilities, ensuring women’s safety from violence, protection of women, girls and Transgender people, regulation of alcohol consumption to reduce violence against women, and recognition of the role of women in agriculture and in the handloom industry. They also demanded that shelter homes with minimum facilities should be built for all the women who migrate to the city for livelihood without a place to live or without a family along with access to social security schemes, and also social security for the children, single women, people with disabilities, and transgender people.

During the pandemic and the consequent country-wide lockdown, Women and Transgender Organisations Joint Action Committee identified around 200 transgender women who are especially vulnerable. with limited access to government welfare schemes and a lack of

support systems, and is making sure that they can survive the lockdown. In an earlier event, they had also raised voice against UAPA. The Facebook Page run by them create awareness about their upcoming events and also shares other details about the organisation.

**Queer Nilayam.** Queer Nilayam is a support group for the Queer Community and is based in Hyderabad. It was started by a group of young Queer folks. Before Jayant Iyer moved to Bangalore, he was a part of a LGBTQIA+ support group in Bangalore, named Good as You. However, he realised that most Queer NGOs and Support Groups focused on specific issues instead of providing all round services and support. This made him get in touch with other fellow Queer folks and form an organisation which fills that gap. “At the end of the fourth of five hours, we decided that let's go ahead and have a support group of ourselves. Our main goal is to go ahead and create a physical space in Hyderabad so that at any point of time anyone from the LGBTQI community can walk in just to even say hi or a hug or anything”, he added.

They organise weekly online/offline meetings which entail discussions on emotional, social, health-related issues faced by the Queer community. They also try to raise awareness about the community. In just a span of 4 months, they have been able to garner a community of more than 500 people through the use of digital and social media such as [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and Clubhouse, publish their own magazine ([Queernama](#)), showcasing art and writing by Queer people, have rescued queer people who were either seeking a safe shelter after having run away from home or facing violence. Through all this, they help the community develop a feeling of belonging. Even the pandemic could not dampen their spirit. “Nothing has stopped, as we will not stop, we will move forward”, he added confidently.

## **Conclusion**

Telangana has seen progress in issues related to the Queer community even recently. Telegu Akademi published the textbook 'Towards a World of Equals: A Bilingual Textbook on Gender'. It was a first of its kind book aimed at bringing about more gender sensitization at all levels of education. With this, Telangana became the first state to implement a mandatory undergraduate course on Gender. Apart from this, a Transgender Community Desk was started at the Gachibowli Police Station. This first-of-its-kind initiative is aimed at looking into cases of violence and discrimination against any transgender person.

However, needless to say these representations do not do any justice to the diversity within the Trans community. In fact, Transgender people still lack access to quality healthcare and education. While a lot of new policies and legal amendments (for example, the NALSAR judgement of 2014, Transgender Protection Act) are to celebrated, we have to remember policy changes have very limited effect on the mainstream population. To sum it up, in Tashi's words "they [policy changes] do a bit of it, no doubt about it. Especially for people who inhabit the spaces where the role of laws, policies acts and sections and legalities has a bigger play. But any other spaces where law does not have a bigger role to play- I don't think it does really much. Because one thing to recognise no matter how much of an independent, democratic, and republic and constitutional run country we are for the last seven decades, we are still a country that is not driven by laws alone, we are a country that is run by culture, tradition, beliefs, religion and so many other complex factors. In that scenario I do not see law playing a bigger role, not yet at least."

While there has been a lot of change happening, we need to create more change in terms of spreading awareness and building an inclusive society. These organisations, and many such similar ones, aid society to take not steps but leaps towards a brighter future.





## References

- Kumar, P. (2017). Radicalizing community development: the changing face of the queer movement in Hyderabad City. *Community Development Journal*, 52(3), 470-487.
- Ravi, S. (2017). Transgender awareness and Youtube. *The Hindu*. Retrieved from <https://www.thehindu.com/society/transgender-awareness-and-youtube/article19960435.ece>
- Reddy, G. (2005). Geographies of contagion: Hijras, Kothis, and the politics of sexual marginality in Hyderabad. *Anthropology & Medicine*, 12(3), 255-270.