

Epistemic Self-reclamation of Gender: A Study of Systemic Interventions in Indian Schools

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Abstract

This paper explores the challenges to understanding gender issues in schools in India with the specific focus on the discourse around gender variance (GV) that has been shaped by the historical and psychological experience of colonization in the region. It further discusses the impact of colonization in creating sociocultural and academic discourses that criminalized and delegitimized gender variance in South Asia resulting in 'cultural injustice' wherein local knowledge systems, social practices and cultural frameworks to understand and support gender variance were discredited and systematically eroded. The resultant epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007) has percolated through the postcolonial reality to impact social, cultural and psychological responses to this phenomenon. In this context, using content analysis and critical reflexivity that draws on author's interactions with school teachers and subsequent reflections, the paper further examines the continuing discrimination against gender variant people, especially gender variant youngsters in educational institutions that is the result of lack of awareness and sensitivity among the teachers, and also due to absence of any institutional mechanism to address the concerns of such children. The results and findings provide evidence towards lack of affirmative psychological interventions for depathologizing gender variance in schools, and also the curricular omission of non-western traditions, festivals and rituals around gender variance for achieving epistemic self-reclamation. Consequently, decolonizing educational frameworks and training the teachers to address concerns of transgender children are recommended.

Keywords: Epistemic Injustice, gender, colonialism, psychological barriers, postcolonialism.

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Introduction

Gender variant identity, in South Asia, is a complex socio-economic phenomenon. GV people in the Indian subcontinent have had a turbulent historical experience beginning with ancient reverence to colonial condemnation and postcolonial stigmatization (Tiwari, 2020). The people of 'third nature' (*tritiya-prakriti*) have been part of the Indian worldview for more than five thousand years with Hinduism defining the sex or gender of an individual according to its *prakriti* (nature): *pums-prakriti* (male), *stri-prakriti* (female) and *tritiya prakriti* (the third sex) (Reddy, 2005; Wilhelm, 2008). People of the third sex have been mentioned in epics and treatises like *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Arthashastra* as fulfilling important social roles, and cultivating the finer arts, skills, sciences and spirituality. There were multiple terms used to refer to the third sex such as *napumsaka* (neuter), *kliba* (gay), *Svairini* (lesbian), *Kami* (bisexual) and *shandha* (transgender) in Vedic texts (Reddy, 2005; Wilhelm, 2008) which when loosely translated by early British and English scholars collectively meant only *eunuch* or neuter. Draconian laws were passed criminalizing them, exterminating and disconnecting their entire existence from the strictly constructed binaries of sex/gender frame of reference (Tiwari, 2020).

Colonization of South Asia created and legitimized systems of political and economic injustice that were sustained by the widespread belief in the cultural superiority of the colonizers (Bhargava, 2013). This cultural superiority was established through control over systems of governance, education and epistemic resources. The onset of Eurocentric epistemologies systematically replaced the vibrant indigenous traditions of knowledge, philosophy, culture and practices. In this context, there are many intersecting complexities in the living experience of GV people in postcolonial India especially for the such children who are most vulnerable to continual episodes of psychological disruption, discrimination and violence. This scenario results from hermeneutic injustice (Fricker, 2007), arising partly from testimonial injustice, wherein such youngsters do not have access to socially acceptable knowledge resources and frameworks for validating and making sense of their identity (Dubgen, 2016). It is in schools that children acquire knowledge about gender as part of their early childhood development. For most children, their gender identity aligns with the sex assigned to them at birth; however, some children experience discordance between their assigned gender and expressed gender from an early age (Olson et al., 2015). In this background, the paper aims to explore the

concerns of gender variant children in schools in India that are the result of lack of awareness among teachers and peer group, absence of affirmative psychological interventions, absence of counselling mechanism, policies and mechanisms that have been shaped by the historical and psychological experience of colonization in the region. The paper further examines the continuing discrimination against GV people, especially children in educational institutions that results in psychological distress for such children. The paper also validates the key factors employed in the present research through a content analysis of the existing literature for alignment of key findings with global research output in the concerned area. In the end, the paper recommends decolonizing educational frameworks to address mental and psychological concerns of GV children.

The paper is organized in six sections including introduction and conclusion. The second section offers theoretical foregrounding of the existing educational systems, policies and mechanisms, which have been shaped by epistemic injustice resulting from the colonial experience. The third section outlines the research framework and contextual analysis followed by documenting snippets of conversations and responses of teachers in the fourth section which highlights the damage that colonial erasure of Indian epistemologies has brought about. The next section charts out understandings and implications of the theoretical argument and the critically reflexive narrative strategies that facilitate alternative ways of knowing in this research context. The conclusion summarizes the insights attained from the interactions, and the theoretical grounding with a focus on recommendations for bringing about epistemic justice.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The Indian subcontinent must be approached as a hub of overlapping cultures with numerous commonalities in terms of linguistic structures, beliefs, practices, kinship and gender patterns that have shaped lives in the region for many millennia. One of the more interesting features of Indian culture (South Asia in general), which the colonizers found both shocking and intriguing, was the deeply entrenched and socially acceptable traditions around gender variance that still resonate throughout the region in local ritual contexts.

The third gender of India and Southeast Asia: Gender variance phenomena, in South Asia

(and Southeast Asia), is characterized by the fluidity of gender, since ancient times, to include ritual transvestism, transcendent male-female duality and worshipping androgynous deities that epitomize wholeness, purity, gender totality and perpetuality of the universe (Peletz, 2006). Ancient Indian epistemology both acknowledged and accommodated nonprocreative conduct by the people of third sex. (Wilhelm, 2008). The puritanical concept of total prohibition and moral policing of the people of *tritiya prakriti* was non-existent in the subcontinent rather gender variance is aptly recorded and celebrated in myths, epics and treatises for its fluid, spontaneous and expansive nature. The story of Shikhandi, in *Mahabharata*, enumerates upon the such an identity as taken on by a woman in her next birth to take revenge upon the man who kidnapped her on her wedding day. The tale of Mohini wherein Vishnu becomes a woman to enchant demons as well as gods, delves into the power of the feminine that saves the world from demons. There are narrative variations of the tale showcasing the union of Shiva and Mohini (Vishnu) serving to acknowledge the oneness of being as an integral trope in the South Asian metaphysics nurturing the spiritual schema of the subcontinent “until the Western gaze points out its queer nature” (Patnaik, 2014, p. 62). Then, there is Brihannala’s story where Arjuna temporarily becomes a eunuch, and singlehandedly defeats the whole Kaurava army. At the same time, the cult of ‘Ardhanarishwara’, the most widely known hermaphrodite deity in Hinduism, is a confluence of masculine and feminine energies advocating the principal of balance between mind and soul/nature. It is a composite androgynous deity representing the synthesis of conflicting energies and generative powers. The figure signifies the power of creation that comes both from Shiva and Shakti (Nanda, 1999; Reddy, 2005; Wilhelm, 2008; Patnaik, 2014; Vakoch, 2022; Mishra, 2023).

These cosmologies are one of the main features of gender variance phenomena in South Asia as emulated in the auspicious presence of the GV person/ritualists in ceremonies and rituals of various regions with local variations: the cult of Goddess Bahuchara in western and northern India, the festival of Goddess Yellamma in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, the aravanis of Koovagam (Tamil Nadu), the Chamayavilakku festival in Kerala, the worship

of the Goddess by the jogappas and the jogtis in Karnataka (Reddy, 2005; Wilhelm, 2008; Vakoch, 2022; Mishra, 2023). Here it is pertinent to be attuned to multiple terms used in South Asia to refer to people of the third sex like *Maichia*, *kwajasara*, *jogappas*, *Tawai*, *napumsak*, *kojja*, *kinnars*, *aravanis*, *akwa*, *kushra*, *thirunangis*, *kothis*, *hijra*, *shiva-shakthis* (Reddy, 2005; Patnaik, 2014; Sutradhar, 2022; Tanupriya, 2022; Vakoch, 2022) and many more. All the festivals and rituals surrounding these figures have gained legitimacy over centuries and are still an integral part of local cultures: be it the annual festival of Chavara Sree Devi Temple in Kollam, Kerala where thousands of men dress up as women in gratefulness to Vana Durga (Goddess of the forest) for everything they received during that year or the Koovagam festival in Tamil Nadu in which aravanis assemble and play out Aravan's life story from *Mahabharata*¹. These rituals and cultures can make a valuable contribution to the larger domain of Transgender Studies, as put forth by Stryker and Whittle (2006), and contribute towards recognizing the "body" not as an object of knowledge but "as the contingent ground of all our knowledge...of embodies human consciousness" (p. 12). The historical continuity of these cultural traditions was impacted first by the Islamic interventions in South Asia and Southeast Asia, and later by the European colonization of the region.

The GV ritual specialists in Southeast Asia, known as *Bissu* in Indonesia, *sida-sida* in Malaysia, *Ngaju Dayak* in Borneo, are embedded in the ceremonies, mythologies and overall cosmologies of the region (Peletz, 2006, p. 312). The historical dynamics around these cultural phenomena radically changed in Southeast Asia when Islam was adopted, in 17th century. *Bissu* had same-sex spouses and were bestowed with the status of divinity in the community. Such practices were considered major heresy in Islam because of which there were sustained efforts by subsequent Islamic rulers to discredit and eradicate such ritual practices from the land as they were considered pagan (Ismoyo, 2020; Peletz, 2006, 2011). Subsequently, the advent of colonial rule further added to the challenges faced by GV people in the region. Early Europeans, who explored the nonwestern world with political and economic motives, were both fascinated and scandalized by the 'immoral' gender

practices in Asian societies. In pre-colonial Sri Lanka, neither Buddhism nor Hinduism regulated, measured, classified or codified gender identities as was done by early western travelers and colonizers to the island country from 17th century onwards. European anthropologists and moralists portrayed Sri Lankan men as effeminate due to their traditional attire and grooming (Aldrich, 2014). This led the British to put into action the mission to civilize the natives and implement Article 365 of the Ceylonese Penal Code, in 1883, aimed to prohibit perverse practices and bestiality among the native population.

The Colonial Construct: Colonial power, in South Asia and elsewhere, created widespread systems of economic, political and social injustice endorsed by innate belief in the civilizational supremacy of the colonizers leading to gradual disintegration of the local epistemic frameworks by which the people of the subcontinent understood their past in relation to the present. These aspects of colonial rule created, what Fricker (2007) calls, prejudicial stereotypes arising out of testimonial injustice as a form of epistemic injustice which occurs when an individual is "wronged specifically in her capacity as a knower" (p. 20). The other form of epistemic injustice – hermeneutical injustice, as Fricker argues, is inextricably linked with testimonial injustice in that the individuals can neither validate nor make sense of their identity due to "structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource" (p. 162). The *credibility deficit* in testimonial injustice is acutely visible in the colonial overriding of the South Asian epistemologies of gender variance thereby preventing any nuanced postcolonial understanding of social knowledge and practices of the historical and cultural traditions around the GV phenomenon. With the advent of British colonizers in the Indian subcontinent, people of the third sex became direct victims of social stratification resulting from their reformist agenda driven by political and economic ambition. All gender variant people were clubbed together in the category of castrated men termed as eunuch or *hijra* in the colonial administrative records and were criminalized as "cross-dressers, 'beggars' and 'unnatural prostitutes'...'habitual sodomites', an obscene presence in public space and the kidnapers and castrators of children" (Hinchey, 2019, p. 1-2). The British considered

homosexuality, 'sodomy' and 'transvestism' as moral deviations plaguing the Asian cultures at large (Peletz, 2006; Aldrich, 2014; Gannon 2022) and framed laws to regulate them. Indian Contagious Diseases Act (1868), The Criminal Tribes Act (1871), Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (1860) were all framed to assert colonial political authority and to monitor, in general, "gender expression, sexual behaviours, domestic arrangements and intimate relationships" (Hinchy, 2019, p. 3) that were central to colonial governance. It is to be noted that it was the Macaulay Code, derived from codification of English criminal law and enacted as Indian Penal Code that was the manifestation of a colonial experiment of rationalizing and civilizing South Asia.

The colonial policies of governance and control required documenting and translating the local epistemes and scholarship for administrative records, and for establishing "indigenous precedents (however farfetched) to the new concepts, laws and procedures which were being created by the British state" (Dharampal, 1983, p. 16). The British, in India, achieved this purpose by "making the people conform to what was chosen for them from such texts and their new interpretations" (Dharampal, 1983, p. 16). Colonization of intellectual cultures of South Asia, in many cases, wiped out or distorted entire ethnography of concepts and representations that defined non-western societies and replaced them with concepts and categories of the colonizers (Bhargava, 2013). The eunuch 'problem' created administrative anxiety which was systematically dealt with in the censuses conducted in South Asia by the colonizers from 19th century onwards. From the 1st census conducted by the British in India in 1801 to 1901 census, there were several attempts to categorize or decategorize; assimilate or expunge the GV people of India. In these censuses, such people were counted as men and were increasingly linked with criminality and caste thereby privileging the colonial worldview to justify colonial governance in the region (Gannon, 2022). These critical changes in the legal, social and educational framework disrupted the flow of cognitive resources and cultural knowledges in the Indian subcontinent. These regulatory and cognitive colonial mechanisms erased the local understanding of the GV people and constructed them as a single caste of men with criminal qualities. Such structural identity

prejudices (Fricker, 2007) were further consolidated through anti-transgender Acts and Statutes, brought in by the British, creating the idea of a social type which was humanly lesser, criminal and ungovernable.

This colonial domination over knowledge production in the colonies continues to shape global research cooperation till date with expert research originating from the Global North being presumed to be superior to local experiences and knowledge systems of the Global South. The neo-colonial control over epistemic resources is manifest in the extraction of epistemes in the Global South by a research mechanism grounded in the Global North, whereby the subjects of research from the Global South serve the interests and careers of researchers abroad (Bhargava, 2013; Dubgen, 2016). Thus, decolonizing epistemic frameworks and knowledge production in the Global South, in general, and India, in particular, requires critical engagement with the western discourses and intellectual practices while accentuating cultural concepts and representations of Indian traditions.

Educational institutions play a pioneer role in shaping epistemologies, curbing/facilitating prejudices and social stereotypes around select local socio-cultural practices and traditions, GV phenomenon in this case, thereby giving rise to hermeneutical injustice that disadvantages GV people not only due to "collective hermeneutical lacuna, but also in terms of the very construction of selfhood" (Fricker, 2007, p. 168). The colonial legacy is not only reflective in the prejudices, discrimination and violence against GV people in postcolonial South Asian settings, it is also visible in the complete erasure of non-western epistemologies of gender variance in favour of expansive categories like transgender to denote all gender variant identities (Valentine, 2007; Stryker and Aizura, 2013).

With the subjugation of epistemic frameworks to understand the cultural, social and political contributions of the GV people in the South Asian context, there is a dearth of educational tools and nationally informed social structures, in postcolonial times, to understand and respond to this population. At the same time, it is to be noted that though transgender is being used as an umbrella term in most part of the world, countries like India and Nepal have recognized more local expressions like the third gender to denote gender variance and to counter

hegemonic anglophone discourse of such identities (Dutta and Roy, 2014). India has also reframed the regulatory structures to cover legal rights of this population and to decriminalize them (UNDP & APCOM Report, 2010).

The postcolonial reality: In India, GV people's rights were ignored in the first 50 years of independence, it is only in the last two decades that the debate around their rights gained momentum with the apex court abolishing section 377 of the Indian Penal Code in 2018 among other legislative victories. In 2014, the NALSA judgment of the Supreme Court in India legalized the 'third gender' in terms of voting rights, employment opportunities etc. This judgment laid down the foundations for the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019. Such constitutional amendments and legal interventions are operationalized only when they are embodied in inclusive epistemic discourses. GV children are shunned by family and society when they show signs of gender variance, and subsequently go through psychological distress in accessing education, employment, health services and political spaces (Wijewardene, 2007; Nepal Country Report, 2014; Chandimal, 2014, 2015).

The statistics presented in studies such as "Education Statistics at a Glance", GOI (2018) and Census in India, do not have any dataset on such children enrolled in or dropped out of schools. The Gender Parity Index, in India, on the level of education mentions only male and female category with no scope for GV children. Absence of relevant institutional arrangements, affirmative psychological interventions, pedagogical and curricular interventions further complicate matters.

This scan of literature helps theorize the impact of colonization in suppressing and subverting non-western epistemologies resulting in cultural imperialism in postcolonial times. In this context, the paper has focused on retrieving and intellectually engaging with Indian history and anthropologies to understand the mythic, cultural and historical significance of gender variance. The paper has further contextualized this historical phenomenon in the present context to redress epistemic injustice reflected in the continuing postcolonial neglect of religious and cultural centrality of gender variance in India that further percolate through the institutional setups to create situations giving rise to psychological distress in such

children. In this context, the paper seeks to fulfill the following objectives:

- This paper explores the concerns of GV children in schools in India through lack of affirmative psychological interventions, policies and mechanisms that have been shaped by the historical and psychological experience of colonization in the region.
- This paper also examines the continuing discrimination against GV people, especially children in educational institutions that results in psychological distress for such children.
- This paper further explores the possibility of retrieving and integrating the neglected epistemic traditions of South Asia around gender variance, into the curricular framework for achieving inclusivity.

Research Methodology and Context

The methodological framework followed in this paper combines a critical reflexivity and social-dialogic strand of qualitative research method. Critical reflexivity is a, continuous, and analytical research tool where researchers actively examine how their own (built up from content analysis), and societal positions shape the research process. Social dialogic method is often employed for interactions where multiple perspectives come up, and knowledge is co-created through collaborative discussion. This combined method is particularly suitable for addressing real-world problems through a cyclical process of planning, acting, describing and evaluating, often within specific social systems like educational institutions and healthcare organizations emphasizing a collaborative approach, involving stakeholders in the research process to facilitate change and improve practice (Tripp, 2005). The goal is to understand and improve the social contexts through practical transformation, mostly utilizing qualitative data compilation methods like focus group interactions, observations, and document analysis to gain insights into participants' experiences and incentives.

In the first place, a content analysis has been carried out from a large body of literature that has helped the author to prepare a questionnaire for interaction in the focus group to unearth the factors encompassing GV children. The survey of literature and subsequent content analysis has helped the researcher in understanding how decolonizing knowledge and introducing gender expansive education can play a pivotal

role in decriminalizing the socially constructed gender phenomena. In order to create a focus group to study the research context, the researcher approached higher secondary schools in the national capital region (NCR) of Delhi. Upon reaching out, some of the teachers were skeptical of the motives for doing research on 'such' a topic, some did not want to participate in the research on a taboo subject and some excused themselves saying that there are no 'such issues' in their class or school. After much persuasion, a focus group of 35 teachers from different schools agreed for dialogue and conversation but out of these, only five teachers could share, in detail, their experiences of dealing with the psychological distress and trauma that GV children face in schools, and they, also, highlighted how equipped or ill-equipped educational spaces are to deal with such issues. The conversations spanning over days have been summarized here to reflect upon the kind of knowledge that this research is producing and the process involved (Yip, 2023). These interactions are based upon critical reflexivity used as a tool of enquiry to explore the issues and concerns of these children in schools by dwelling into personal experiences shared by teachers on gender variance in the very first place. Subsequently, the social-dialogic (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000) framework has been employed for the analysis using dialogue and conversations to explore meaning and understanding of the contexts as has been often used in areas like social work and education. All these methods and tools work to highlight how decolonizing knowledge, introducing gender expansive education and curriculum restructuring can play a pivotal role in decolonizing and decriminalizing gender issues in India.

Further, the author has tried to describe the context of the study revealing the deep structure of social interactions with the help of content analysis that in turn consolidates the findings of the interactions to have first-hand experience and to determine the factors of analysis such as lack of sensitivity and awareness on the part of teachers and peer group, no institutional mechanism to handle GV issues, continuing psychological distress among such children due to unresolved challenges in school and grievance redressal system if any, etc. This exercise has generated quality data, from NCR of Delhi school teachers in addition to the findings from content analysis to trace the

epistemological roots of discriminatory practices to colonial delegitimization and criminalization of gender variance that has shaped the postcolonial reality in the subcontinent.

Experiential Narratives for Trans Epistemic Justice

GV children in India face structural identity prejudice, rooted in the collective hermeneutical resource that subjects them to physical abuse, psychological trauma, desolation and coercion in the family, schools and social spaces.

There is suspicion, denial, resistance to even acknowledge gender variance as a viable subject of discussion among educators which highlights the inability in the school system to overcome, and shake off the colonial legacy that still drives sociocultural and academic discourses in India. This challenge became visible during an interaction in which Teacher X¹, from a government school in Delhi, revealed that though no such child has ever approached him so far, but if any 'such' child does approach him, he would 'refer the child to the doctor'. On being asked why he thinks so, the teacher believed that 'this problem' was a hormonal disorder and could be treated with medication. Teacher X² from the same school added that she had observed one 'such' boy from the last batch that she taught of class 8 whose conduct seemed feminine, and so, was teased by the boys of the class. She did not intervene because, firstly, the concerned child never approached her and secondly, the matter never escalated beyond control. Further, when asked if she noticed any psychological distress in the child that might have affected his peer group learning and academic performance, she responded with explanations as to how

...school teachers are burdened with teaching, paper setting, evaluation, conducting co-curricular and extracurricular work throughout the day and round the year. It is impossible to focus on individual student problems, more so when student/s are not very forthcoming with disclosing issues plaguing them.

Also, both these teachers highlighted that their school does not have any student counsellor and it is teachers who remain available to sort out interpersonal and intrapersonal matters among students.

None of the responsive teachers could acknowledge using any targeted or specific

pedagogical and psychological interventions to address bullying and resultant trauma faced by GV students. This became clear in interaction with two teachers from a premier private school who gave detailed insights into the issues that plague the such children in schools. Teacher X³ revealed that GV students have approached her, over the years, with issues and problems of bullying and she has a three-step approach to dealing with such incidents:

Firstly, I counsel such children to not be afraid and fight against violence and always stand for their rights. I don't rush and allow the child to unfold on his/her own comfortable pace. And since, the school has zero tolerance for bullying, we organize sessions on addressing reasons, consequences and prevention of bullying in general. Lastly, I take out time during classes to talk with the whole class on developing sensitivity and empathy in mutual interactions.

Teacher X⁴ showed similar approach and further highlighted that, in some cases, they have also separately talked to parents (during regular parent teacher meetings) of such children for better understanding of the overall approach of the immediate family members towards their child's situation.

None of the teachers the author talked to had any student come to them during the transition period for support to cope with stress, confusion, shame, fear, emotional and physical turmoil, misinformation and more partly because teachers may seem inaccessible. However, GV students did approach these teachers with issues relating to parental

disapproval/unacceptance, peer group aggression, safety concerns, lack of equal opportunities, lack of trans-friendly facilities etc. as is visible from an anecdote shared by Teacher X⁵ who narrated a particular incident, that happened a few years ago, about a middle school student (male, aged 12-13 years) who used to be more inclined to participate in co-curricular and extracurricular activities with girls. The child also complained to her about being teased and bullied by other students of the class for which she warned them off and kept a tab on them afterwards. After the students promoted to next class, she lost touch with this child but would still see him around and observed changes in his behavior:

For a year or two afterwards, the 'boy' came across as a recluse and did not seem to have many friends. But after another year or so when I accompanied their group on an excursion trip to Chail (in Himanchal Pradesh), this child who was in class 9 at that time also joined. I saw him wearing nail polish, vibrant coloured V neck T-shirts and trimmed eyebrows. He was with the girls group all the time, emulating their mannerism and all. We, as teachers, could not allow him to be with the girls so much and used to tell him to go to the boys group. He used to be very reluctant about that.

All the issues highlighted through content analysis, survey, interview and interaction with teachers have been summed up in Table I and II which reflect the key factors of analysis for addressing mental and psychological concerns of transgender children.

Table I: Content analysis for aligning key findings with global research in the area

Focus of Survey	Qualitative Content Analysis	Findings
Peer group awareness about gender variance issues	Chandimal (2014, 2015), Research Brief: Experiences of Bullying in Schools (2018), Tiwari (2020) examine: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of awareness of GV issues among cisgender students, teachers, family and society at large. 	38% respondents agreed on lack of peer group awareness about such issues.
Grievance redressal and counselling facility for GV students	Chandimal (2014, 2015), Research Brief: Experiences of Bullying in Schools (2018), Tiwari (2020) highlight: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to enhance deeper understanding of gender identity and gender expression in schools. Failure to address cultural cisgenderism. 	40% respondents confirmed that there is no grievance redressal for GV students in schools.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Though schools engage counsellors but redressal of grievance is not happening. 	
Concerns and challenges of GV students	<p>Tiwari (2020), Research Brief: Experiences of Bullying in Schools (2018), Olson et.al (2015), Chandimal (2014, 2015), Nepal Country Report (2014), Stryker and Whittle (2006) address:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity erasure and invisibility of gender diversity in schools. • Exclusion of knowledge that GV people have of their own embodied experience. • Issues of bullying, transphobia, emotional challenges, drop out etc. faced by GV children in schools. 	40% respondents affirmed that GV children are victims of transphobia, bullying, abuse, discrimination etc. while 60% respondents were not aware of the challenges that such children face.
Teacher awareness and institutional arrangements for addressing concerns of GV students	<p>Tiwari (2020), National Education Policy (2020), Research Brief: Experiences of Bullying in Schools (2018), Chandimal (2014, 2015), Nepal Country Report (2014), Stryker and Whittle (2006) highlight:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to integrate gender expansive education in school curriculum and to build teacher threshold knowledges for educators. • Failure to recover subjugated knowledges in the academic research. • Schools, in South Asia, lack in policy, facilities and teacher training to address concerns of GV students. 	31% respondents agreed that there are no provisions of teacher training, awareness, inclusive curriculum and separate facilities for GV children in their school.

Table II: Interactions for understanding key factors of analysis

S.No.	Key Factors	Interaction Highlights
1	Peer Group awareness about gender variance issues	<i>All the five respondent teachers revealed that there is no peer group awareness about GV classmates.</i>
2	Grievance redressal and counselling facility for GV students	<i>X¹ & X² – no counselling arrangements, teachers sort out interpersonal and intrapersonal matters among students. X³ – teachers act as counsellors as the situation demands. X⁴ – parent counselling, mentoring and interventions. X⁵ – support to GVchild but no sustained contact with the child in later years.</i>

3	Concerns and challenges of GV students	<p><i>X¹ – non-acceptance of GV children.</i></p> <p><i>X² – GV child is teased by the fellow students.</i></p> <p><i>X³ – fear of violence and non-acceptance arising out of experiences of bullying.</i></p> <p><i>X⁴ – categorized as boy or girl with no scope for gender neutral terms and facilities.</i></p> <p><i>X⁵ – teasing, bullying and non-acceptance leading to social isolation.</i></p>
4	Teacher awareness and institutional arrangements for addressing concerns of GV students	<p><i>X¹ – GV issues are a medical problem.</i></p> <p><i>X² – complacency and indifference towards teasing and bullying of GV children.</i></p> <p><i>- teachers cannot focus on individual student problems because they are overburdened in schools</i></p> <p><i>X³ – a three-step approach to dealing with issues of GV children including sensitivity, counselling and action against bullying.</i></p> <p><i>X⁴ – sensitivity in dealing with concerns of GV children</i></p> <p><i>X⁵ – sympathetic towards the GV child but follows strict gender binary system of the school for curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular interactions among children.</i></p>

This succinct portrayal fairly sums up the challenges and hidden battles that GV children fight with respect to their right to self-determination. Societal interactions, environment and structures reflect a binary orientation that makes it all the more difficult for GV individuals to capitalize on resources and opportunities for their growth.

Discussion

The real time implications of pathologizing of gender variance could be understood during the period of this study. The responses of Teacher X¹ and X² highlighted that it is essential to ensure teacher sensitivity towards, and awareness of gender issues for creating affirmative psychological interventions. Depathologizing gender variance would be the first step towards achieving the goals of gender expansiveness in schools as has also been explored by Chandimal (2014, 2015) and Olson et.al (2015). Even, National Education Policy (2020) declares that GOI is committed:

...the Government of India will constitute a 'Gender-Inclusion Fund' to build the nation's capacity to provide equitable quality education for all girls as well as transgender students. The fund will be available to States to implement priorities determined by the Central government critical for assisting female and transgender children in gaining access to education...funds will also enable States to support and scale effective community-based interventions that address local context-specific barriers to female and transgender

children's access to and participation in education. (p. 26)

These policy goals can only be achieved by introducing gender expansive education in schools which can overcome the legacy of colonial education system. The uninterrupted but obscure local traditions, festivals and rituals around gender variance such as the cult of 'Ardhanarishwara', Chamayavilakku festival, the festival of Goddess Yellamma, the cult of Goddess Bahuchara, the GV ritualists of Indonesia, Malaysia, Borneo etc. must be integrated into the mainstream academic and social discourses so as to counter the prevailing social discrimination and depersonalization of gender variance.

The responses from Teacher X³ and X⁴ exposed their inability to move beyond a binary view of gender in their everyday interaction with children in schools. Rigid dress codes, absence of gender-neutral facilities, use of binary pronouns and lack of teacher training are systemic and cultural barriers that contribute to subjugation of GV children. Also, the school curriculum does not focus on cultural and historical significance of gender variance in India; even the institutional counselling mechanism is ineffective, in most cases, in responding to the physical and emotional turmoil that a child goes through in gender identification. These responses, interactions and reflections highlight the workings of cisnormative structural identity prejudice, systemic and psychological barriers to establishing inclusive educational spaces for

these children as also found in the seminal work of Susan Stryker (2013).

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to investigate postcolonial cultural responses to GV people, in India, partly rooted in the colonial suppression and distortion of non-western epistemologies and partly driven by fractured decolonization of sociocultural and academic institutions. The paper further identified the workings of testimonial injustice and hermeneutic injustice, within the broader framework of epistemic injustice, in the prejudicial stereotypes around gender variance phenomena resulting in GV children's inability to access socially acceptable knowledge resources for validating and making sense of their identity. The paper has been able to identify significant deterrents to introducing gender expansive education in Indian schools, such as lack of teacher training to bring about affirmative psychological intervention to address gender variance, absence of gender friendly practices and facilities in schools, upholding colonial legacy of socially approved gender binary system, an unease to reclaim local epistemologies of gender variance. Subsequently, the paper explores the possibility of retrieving and integrating the neglected epistemic traditions of South Asia that revered, acknowledged and accommodated gender variance into the institutional framework through curriculum restructuring and teacher training. Official policy outlines the vision of India's new education system that would integrate cultural, intellectual and scientific knowledge traditions of the country into the curricular and co-curricular frameworks (National Education Policy, 2020). Hopefully, implementing recommendations of NEP 2020 would integrally address these concerns in schools so as to decolonize knowledge.

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ⁱ Aravan, Arjuna's son agrees to sacrifice his life so that the Pandavas can win the Mahabharata war, provided that he marries before he dies. It is Lord Krishna who, as Mohini, marries him for a day as no other woman was ready to marry a man about to die. After his death, Mohini mourned for forty days

and completed all the rituals of widowhood. The aravanis, who consider themselves to be the brides of Aravan, follow the same rituals of wedding and mourning with singing, dancing culminating in mourning.

NOTE: The authors have sole responsibility for the originality of the contents of this manuscript.