Panel: Opening up Spaces for Transgender Community in a Digital Era

In a documentary entitled True Stories: Transgenders: Pakistan’s Open Secret, a cleric, speaking for the dominant conservative stream, declared:

Transgenders have themselves to blame. They deform their gender and change their identity. They behave immorally and enjoy the reactions they provoke. They are not born women; they only destroy their manhood. By doing this, they cut themselves off from society.

Paradoxically, in the region now very much in the digital age, transgender people are often seen as a biological anomaly and yet, at the same time, somehow to blame for being the way they are. Nevertheless, we have such exemplary transgender people who, despite all the challenges, have not lost hope and sought to achieve a more respectable and “socially acceptable” way of living.

This panel would like to invite transgender people to share their stories with the community about their struggles, challenges and achievements. Human rights activists and political representatives would look at political and social aspects of the ‘imagined community’ of transgender in the region, noting that how political classes show great reluctance to grant full citizenship to transgender people. Moreover, religious representation would also be invited for throwing some light on how religion (which is ingrained in social construct) responds to the problem. This panel will first examine issues of the body and sexuality which provoke strong and divergent emotions in conservative societies. Divine precepts, as taught to this day, insist on a rigid morality that condemns those who transgress them as objects of shame and humiliation (Scheff 1997).

The panel may also reflect on how the patriarchal foundations of society weigh on transgender issues. Moreover, where the patriarchal system oppresses women, even those oppressed women are hand-in-hand with men and become oppressors in case of transgender communities, and deny accepting them as part of society.

The digital age offers opportunities to allay long-standing fears about transgender people, who may themselves take advantage of digital opportunities to organise themselves, and in the long-term find a more dignified place in the region.

References


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