

Pakistani Transgender Women Oral History Project

Interview with: Faizi Ji

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Date of interview: 25 July, 2021

Interview Setting: Pakistan and Vestal NY

(Start of Interview)

0:03

MN: Welcome. The date today is July 25 and the day is Sunday and I am interviewing Faizi Ji today via Whatsapp. I am sitting in America and she is in Pakistan and this interview is for my Capstone Project for the Master's program of Human Rights. Let us start, Faizi Ji. Can you introduce yourself a little bit?

0:38

FJ: First of all, I would like to thank you for choosing me for an interview. I belong to the Punjab province in Pakistan. My name is Faizi but my name on the ID card is Fiazullah. I go by the name Faizi. In Pakistan, I have a degree of M.PHIL Urdu and I am teaching in the private sector and academies here...Hello?

1:23

MN: Yes yes. Your voice was cutting a bit but I understood what you were trying to convey.

1:35

FJ: Okay that all was covered in the introduction so it is alright.

1: 38

MN: Yes. So just to clarify you said that you teach at a university?

1: 48

FJ: No no. I don't teach at a university but I teach at academies in a private sense. Meaning there are no government jobs for the transgender people here in Pakistan.

2:05

MN: Yes. Fine fine. Would you tell a little bit about where your childhood was spent and how your childhood has shaped who you are today?

2:23

FJ: Yes. My childhood was spent in my house meaning within my family but it was a very troubling childhood, meaning there were a lot of problems. I was a victim of a gender identity crisis and the behavior people or my family had with me was a different one, like I was not treated like a child of a family, whether being a daughter or a son. Therefore, my childhood was spent within my house but it was a very strange one. Like other people have normal childhoods and they associate good memories with them but for me, this is not the case as I have very bad memories associated with my childhood.

3:19

MN: Yes. Yes I can understand it all. And what time in your life or at what age did you recognize or got awareness of your transgender identity?

3:37

FJ: This became prevalent even before I opened the eyes of my consciousness. I was regarded as different, meaning I was neither like men nor like women and I kept noticing this as I was climbing the ladder of consciousness and as I was growing up. At 11-12 years old I learned about what gender is, meaning I understood what a male is, what a female is and these are the classification of a gender, then I realized that I did not fit in the two categories and I was neither a male nor a female, but rather I was something else.

4:28

MN: Yes. So is your family aware about your transgender identity and what was their reaction to it?

4:43

FJ: Yes definitely definitely. Everyone in my family knows about my transgender identity and their attitude towards me was really bad, meaning they refused to talk to me and refused to meet with me and called me derogatory things. I was a victim of the typical insults and I dealt with various abuse, like beatings, getting kicked out of the house, not being provided with financial support nor shelter, and not getting support for education attainment. I was dealing with all of these situations at home and my family absolutely knew about my transgender identity because they are the ones who gave birth to me.

5:25

MN: Okay. So sorry to hear about all this. This I think is a very common behavior of families in regards to the transgender community in Pakistan.

5:37

FJ: Yes absolutely. Almost all the transgender community in Pakistan is treated in such a horrible manner by their families. Their behavior is very strange, meaning they are beaten up, their hair is cut, they are tied, they are even killed. Few days back actually there was a murder of a transgender woman who was killed by her brother just because of her transgender identity. There is discrimination on the basis of gender here, whether in the form of family, society, educational or governmental institutions, or any other societal structures, wherever you go outside, there is discrimination prevalent. For example, if you get kicked out of the house by your parents, you cannot find a place to rent because of your transgender identity. All the discrimination happening here is based on gender, even the smallest of things. These are social matters and there is zero social support provided.

6:51

MN: In regards to this, in your opinion, why do you think there is so much discomfort and stigma related to the transgender identity especially in Pakistan?

7:24

FJ: Hello?

7:26:

MN: Yes. Did you hear my question? Hello?

7:38

FJ: Yes I understood that you were asking about the people's perception.

7:47

MN: Yes, meaning....hello?

7:54

FJ: Yes, can you hear me now?

7:56

MN: Yes yes I can repeat my question. According to your understanding, why is there so much discomfort and stigma associated with transgender identity among Pakistanis?

8:18

FJ: Yes. Look, let me inform you that this issue is not only prevalent in Pakistan but on an international level. There are many transgenders abroad who are victims of ridicule everyday. Like for example if there is a transgender in America who is standing in a railway station, he is being called out and people will make fun of him too. In Pakistan there are more extreme cases such as transgenders being raped and killed as compared to other countries, meaning they are excluded entirely from the society. And what are the reasons behind this? The reason behind this is when...can you hear me well?

9:15

MN: Yes yes, I can hear you well.

9:23

FJ: Okay...when in 19...sorry 1857 the British government came, they passed a law in 1870 called the 373 act. According to this act, many people were criminalized, including the transgender people. Transgenders had to visit the police station mornings and evenings for attendance, meaning criminalizing transgenders in such a way excluded them from the rest of the society. Ever since then and currently, transgenders are suffering. They have become victims of problems...hello?

10:58

MN: Hello, yes.

11:03

FJ: Did you understand it?

11:04

MN: Just the last part of what you were saying got cut off because of the connection. If you could repeat it again.

11:14

FJ: From where? The 373 act I was talking about?

11:17

MN: Afterwards, yes.

11:20

FJ: Yes. So I was saying that after the 377 act, transgenders were criminalized. Lord Macaulay brought this act. In Britain, this act was in place since the 16th century but then it was ended. Even in India this act was ended back in 2015. The supreme court of India has ended this 377 act and has legalized homosexuality and the transgender identity. But in Pakistan, not much work has been done on this. Ever since 1857 and even before, because this was a mughal empire and the transgenders were very loyal to the empire and had even sacrificed their lives for their king in order to save his life, the English thought that the transgenders were against them and that they were very loyal people. Loyalty was the way of the transgender people, therefore, the older transgenders gave many sacrifices to save

the king and their government. In order to distance the transgender community from the society, the 377 act was passed. Hence, once excluded from the society, transgenders had to beg, were also hung in public and fell victim to many cruelties during the time. As a result, the transgenders hid away and they hid in such a manner that they were never able to come out again in the society, and once they did, the behavior of the people towards them was cruel.

13:01

MN: Yes definitely. So specifically do you have any of your own experience or experiences of other transgender women of Pakistan that collectively you would like to share and want others to know and raise awareness about?

13:32

FJ: First of all the main thing is that a family should accept a transgender identity. Families do not accept transgender children, do not provide shelter nor social support. Afterwards, there are problems with education attainment as there is no space for transgenders to gain an education, nor are there any specific schools for transgenders. There is no work being done for us to achieve an education and move forward. Then there are many problems related to our health. We have many health problems. Many doctors do not know how to treat transgender patient. Like there are doctors for men and women, there are doctors specifically for transgenders as well. Therefore, we suffer from health problems frequently. And afterwards, our transgenders are constantly living a life in fear and they live under this shadow because they do not have a shelter, nor do they have protection provided by their family. So anyone can abduct them at take them away anytime, can rape them, kill them because there will be nobody asking around for them. Nobody will ask the culprit "why did you do it?" Hence, these are some of the society's norms and matters which make a transgender's life very difficult. They are like an open bag sitting at a crossing, anybody can come and steal it away.

15:15

MN: Yes of course. In relation to this, like in Pakistan and even India there is a prominence of close-knit communities and family structures, and oftentimes there are maternal uncle and aunts, as well as paternal uncle and aunts living in the same

house, and many people living under the same roof which is normal in Pakistan. In your opinion, how can such a close knit family structure benefit or harm a transgender individual?

15:54

FJ: Look, whether a transgender lives within a family or lives alone, both situations are fine. Meaning, is his honor, life and security secured? If he is safe by living alone then that is fine and if he is safe by living with family then that is fine too. However he is living, he should have a sense of security. His basic human rights should be protected, like education, health, finding a place to rent, going to a market without having anyone calling you names, or drinking water from a glass and not having that thrown away because a transgender drank from that glass. These kinds of things should not happen. There should be no discrimination. Everyone has the right to basic human rights. He is also a human being. A transgender is also a human being. He also feels pain, he also gets sad, has emotions, feelings, and all of the things. He also cries, gets happy, gets upset, gets angry, minds things, feels things, so taking into consideration all of these things, considering transgenders as human beings, human rights should be granted to them. For example, if jobs are opening in Pakistan then they should be opened to transgenders too with their separate quota. They should be given jobs separately as well as seats in the parliament. All of these things should be available to transgenders.

7:35

MN: Yes definitely.

7:36

FJ: Hello?

7:38

MN: Yes yes. So according to what I understood, I think in Pakistan people refuse to give rights to transgenders, nor do they want any awareness raised for them. For example, my childhood was spent in Pakistan. I was 13 when I moved to America. The 13 years I spent in Pakistan, I was never exposed to any transgender or the transgender community, nor was there anything shown in the media or the tv for

the people to understand and raise awareness that transgenders are also human beings, they are also a community and they are also a part of the country. Therefore, I think education and raising awareness is very important because if since childhood the transgender identity is not being spoken about within households, then the same kids who grow up and have exposure to transgender people do not know how to react, or they might even be uncomfortable.

19:02

FJ: Yes yes. There are some social values of a society, and our social values are not even good enough to provide acceptance for transgender people. Meaning forget basic human rights and everything, you come down to acceptance and the lack of it. There should be acceptance and the society accepting them rather than questioning the existence of transgenders. Like in Pakistan there is still a case going on which I am a part of. There are 14 of us transgenders from all over Pakistan who are part of the panel and we are having a discourse of whether or not transgenders exist or not. Meaning we have to go to court to prove ourselves that we exist as transgenders in Pakistan still. This shows you how dire the situation is.

20:29

MN: Definitely. Has Pakistan done anything for the betterment of the transgender community yet?

20:46

FJ: Yes. Things are getting better slowly. There are no specific laws passed but things are starting to improve slowly. For example, now they know that there is a case pending in the court and the awareness of the issue is being spread. Then a few days back I applied for a lecturer position and the Punjab Public Service Commission informed me that I was ineligible so I took the case to the High Court asking why am I ineligible, simply because of the gender requirement and only men and women can take the test. The court decided in my favor and told me that I can also take the test. So change is coming and things are getting better but for us to go after our rights, we have to go to the High Court and for that we have to hire a lawyer, get pushed around in order to get our rights. This is difficult.

21:49

MN: Absolutely. I can understand. And basically like you said that you went to High Court and there is still awareness which needs to be spread and debates taking place...

22:05

FJ: This is a contemporary matter. This took place 2-3 months ago when the High Court announced the position of a lecturer and I applied for the position. The chairman said to me that you are rejected because you are a transgender and only a male or a female can apply for this job and you cannot in competition, nor can you sit in the exam. Therefore, I challenged this at the High Court and the High Court decided in my favor. But understand this that I am an M.PHIL and there they have two boxes for a man and a woman, a third box they forgot to make but on our identity cards we have transgender written. Therefore, since the Pakistani government has given us our identity on our ID card, then you tell us that we are Pakistani citizens and we have identity cards of Pakistani nationality, then why can't we apply for a simple position? Meaning if there are basic human rights present and if there is some work being done, then just even getting to that level is so difficult for us transgenders that we have to go to court. What use is that for us? But at least it is something.

23:27

MN: Yes of course. That too you were able to do this. If it were someone else in your position who was not as educated nor had access to resources, then perhaps that person would not have taken a step.

23:40

FJ: Then that person would stay quiet and sit idly, sit quiet and sit idly. What else could he do?

23:47

MN: Absolutely. Do you have something else you would like to talk about? I asked all of my questions.

24:04

FJ: All these questions pertaining to human rights you have asked already. If I have any other questions that come to my mind later then we can talk again.

24:13

MN: Okay alright. These were all the questions I had. Thank you so much for taking the time out to talk to me and doing this interview today. You take care of yourself and then we'll talk again InshAllah (God willing).

24:36

FJ: Yes thank you so much. You take care of yourself too. We will keep in touch (InshAllah) and let me know if you need any help. I will be available.

24:46

MN: Alright. Again, thank you so very much. Allah Hafiz (Good Bye).
(End of Interview)