



Happy
Replublic
Day

THE URBAN POST

KNOW YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

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WORK IS WORSHIP.

In a society that still does not have a place for the third-gender, Kumari has created a niche for herself with tremendous amount of hard work. Sitting next to the entrance of one of the most prominent places of worship in our neighborhood, behind a cart full of fresh and beautiful flowers, she is shy but willing to share her story. Her trademark red round spot of kumkum on her forehead, hair tied up into a bun, colorful bangles and an ornate nose stud, adds to her persona. Greeting me with a smile that is hard to resist, she proudly tells me that she had also been invited to give a similar talk at a college near Ulsoor. Slowly but surely, with nimble fingers constantly weaving flowers into garlands even as we talk, we get a glimpse into the life of Kumari.

Starting her business...

I came to Bangalore 15 years ago and worked as a construction worker in Kammanahalli for 5 years. One day as I was carrying cement bags at a construction site, I accidentally fell down and critically hurt myself. There was no one to help or look after me, not even my co-workers. I nursed myself back to good health, but I realized that I had to look out for another job. Acting upon a well-wisher's suggestion, I decided to start selling flowers near this temple.

Her daily routine...

I start my day at 3:30 am by going to the market to buy fresh flowers. I get back at 6 am and then start weaving the flowers into garlands. As long as this temple is open, I am here to sell flowers. I have good days and bad days but manage to earn around Rs.250-300/day on an average and I am content with it.



Her customers and her work ethics...

There is dignity of labor in what I do. My customers respect me and appreciate the hard work that I put in for my living. They encourage me by buying flowers from me regularly and invite me for special occasions for my blessings. In return, they give me some gifts and clothes as well. I came to this profession with a lot of difficulty and I do not like asking anyone for money. I will work hard for my living by selling flowers.

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Socialism is... not only a way of life,
but a certain scientific approach to
social and economic problems.

- Jawaharlal Nehru



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WORK IS WORSHIP. *Cont...*

Her relationship with her family...

When I was 10 years old, I realized that I truly felt like a woman but in a man's body. Since then, my life has taken a lot of twists and turns. My parents mean everything to me and they live in Tiruppattur in Tamil Nadu. I visit them occasionally. I have brothers, but I am not in talking terms with them since they look at me differently. My relatives do not understand that I am born this way and they do not want to accept me into their society. I consider my customers, a few friends and my neighbors as my family. They take care of me very well.

Her difficulties...

At times I feel lonely as I live alone and have to take care of myself especially when I fall ill. Even now, I have people including my siblings and relatives, who refuse to treat me with respect. It hurts but I have stopped taking it seriously. However, with the Almighty's blessing I am happy with my life.

Her advice to other transgenders...

I do not have any advice for them. Each person can choose to live their life the way they want to. I am not part of any transgender community or society. I do not have time for that. I am who I am and I like earning an honest living rather than roaming the streets begging. One must not force their opinions or preconceived notions on others. It is heartening when people accept me for who I am and motivate me to lead a positive and blessed life.

India has over two million transgenders. Though many people like Kumari have always been a part of Indian culture, they are shunned by common folk including their own families. In ancient India they played pivotal roles in administration as well as in the royal household. But as India progressed they were sidelined to the dregs of the society. With the help of several human rights activists and NGO's,



they are now spreading awareness through their own personal stories. Recently, Madhu Bai Kinnar from Raigarh, Chattisgarh was elected as the first openly transgender mayor with a landslide victory of 4500 votes against her opponent. In April 2014, the Supreme Court recognized transgenders as a third gender. While granting rights to those who identify themselves as neither male nor female, the Supreme Court said- "It is the right of every human being to choose their gender". This landmark ruling ordered the government to provide transgenders with quotas in job and education, in line with other minorities.

...And remember when you judge another, you do not define them, you define yourself!

Sonali.K