

BEAUTY PARLOUR AS A SCOPE FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS AMONG TRANSGENDER NUPI MAANBIS OF MANIPUR

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ABSTRACT

Nupi maanbis are the men to women transgender subjects of Manipur, in Northeast India. The nupi maanbi community is usually marked as socio- economically marginalised. Lack of education and professional qualifications are major factors for such marginalisation. The paper attempts to explore how the nupi maanbi community of contemporary Manipur organizes beauty parlours as a 'capital' for gaining economic niche and social acceptance needed for overcoming stigma, and negative stereotype tenaciously attached to their unconventional gender identity. However, parlour as a site for social and economic empowerment has major limitations. In this sense, the socio-economic success attained by nupi maanbis through parlour and its allied field, namely fashion, is not to be construed as liberalization of societal attitude towards gender and sexual identities of nupi maanbis. On the contrary, the mode of parlour economy and its association with nupi maanbi players reinforces stereotypes about nupi maanbis, such as the subjects' constant association with fashion and lack of education. Eventually, we are left with a bigger contention – Is parlour economy an adequate scope for social mobility among nupi maanbis who still exist within a narrow universe be it sexuality, gender or social success in the Manipuri society?

KEYWORDS: Nupi Maanbi, Manipur, Education, Gender, Parlour, Fashion