

## Iran's transsexuals: religiously acknowledged, but rejected

Transsexuals have a tough life in Iran. Although they are acknowledged in religious terms, there is very little tolerance shown towards them by the society, not even by their own families.

Young Iranian woman filmmaker Sharareh Attari made the highly controversial issue the main theme of her new documentary, 'It Sometimes Happens', which deals with the life of a young man, Amir, who undergoes the process of turning into a woman, Rima.

Even during his childhood, Amir felt that he was not like other boys. In his teenage years, the religious boy wrestled with his conscience as he thought he was a gay due to his sexual preference for boys.

Eventually he realised that he was a woman, physically and psychologically, and decided to undergo surgery to become Rima.

As soon as Rima went public with her decision, her father abandoned her. Even her mother stopped seeing her regularly and eventually discarded her. Her sister, although tolerating her decision, preferred to avoid her so that she would not get into trouble with her husband.

Although Rima finally realised her dream of becoming a woman, her humble wish to have a husband and children and lead a normal life did not come true. Twice she fell in love, but both relationships came to an abrupt and bitter end after she told her partners about her background.

At the end of the 42-minute film, we see her sitting in a café crying because she doesn't have a partner or children in her new life.

'I wanted to show that trans-sexuality is no sexual perversion but an anatomic necessity,' Attari said after a private showing of her film here.

However, the message of the film could not be conveyed to the public. Despite the permission of the ministry of Islamic culture and guidance to make the film, a public screening has so far been prevented.

'Society is very prejudiced and is not ready yet for such a film. This would be too much provocation,' a ministry official said.

Attari has fought hard for a public screening, but has faced hurdles from various quarters.

'But I have been trying for the screening as these people are part of our society and deserve to get public attention and lead better lives,' she said.

Despite societal prejudice, religious leaders in Iran have a rather liberal approach towards transsexuals.

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who led the Islamic revolution in 1979, decreed that being a transsexual was permissible for those at odds with their gender.

Most transsexuals believe that a life in the West would be much easier for them due to the open mindedness in those societies.

'Once I was crying loudly at home, my father came and watched me, then just ignored me and left,' said Shida, another transsexual.

'After all, regardless of whether I am a boy or girl, I am his child. But ignoring his own flesh and blood shows that if you are not understood by your parents how can you expect the same from strangers,' Shida maintained.

There are no precise statistics on the number of transsexuals in Iran as many of them do not dare to go public with their problem.

'Just changing gender cannot be the ultimate aim because as long as you are not accepted by your own family - let alone society - how can you expect even a minimum of happiness,' said a woman, who is currently going through the same experience as Rima.

'I feel that God does not love us and sometimes I feel that an unidentified flying object came and took away all the strange creatures to another planet but left us behind,' she added.

*Farshid Motahari ( © IANS / India eNews)*