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Understanding the formation of Chosen Families for Dalit and Bahujan Queer and Trans People in India

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ABSTRACT

Forming chosen families is a common phenomenon that is evident all across the world. This term coined by Kath Weston in 1991, describes people who are related to each other not by biology but by choice. It is a safety net that provides support, care, and love to the people in it. However, the formation of chosen families is more evident among marginalised communities. One such community is that of queer and trans people, who in the absence of natal family acceptance form a chosen family and build a system of support. In India, queerness and transness is not the only thing that has a long history. Caste is also very much embedded in its culture. Being a casteist society people in India are also discriminated against based on their caste location. Hence, forming a chosen family becomes even more complex when one's marginalised caste identity intersects with their queerness or transness or both. Many people can form these chosen families by accessing queer spaces that are safe and affirmative. However, the question is what do Dalit and Bahujan (marginalised castes in India) queer and trans people have in mind while forming a chosen family for themselves? How are their experiences shaped whilst navigating queer spaces that are a gateway to forming these chosen families? This paper aims to delve deep into these questions by taking an interpretive approach and interviewing six Dalit and Bahujan queer and trans people living across metropolitan cities in India. It explores intersectionalities with queer religious minorities as well.

Keywords: caste; gender; intersectionality; queer spaces; sexuality