

Transgender on Loyola College campus raises voice for equality

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CHENNAI: For transgender students on educational campuses, it is no cakewalk. While some colleges have opened their doors to them, it is still a huge struggle at the school level, says Naleena Prasheetha, the only transgender student in Loyola College in the current batch. The Viscom student, who had to drop out of school after she underwent the operation, says she studied her plus two years of schooling at home and wrote the exams.

"The issue at the school level requires a lot more attention as gender identity and sexuality is understood during teenage. Even though I wanted to go back to school, I couldn't. If the authorities set a tone that everyone needs to be treated equally, students too will become aware," she said

speaking on the sidelines of a conference on 'mainstreaming transgenders' at Loyola College on Friday.

While her keen interest in academics made her pursue higher education, she says many others are not confident of enrolling in various institutions. This depends on how approachable educational institutions are to attract more such students.

Naleena said a separate category for transgenders in admission forms is one step of being approachable but it shouldn't be for the sake of it. "I had applied to four colleges when I completed schooling. While Loyola gave me admission immediately, the others were hesitant. So, the attitude of acceptance matters more than just having a 'T' option sign in forms," she said.

Naleena who is now the secretary of women welfare in the student union of the college, recalled how frightening it was when she first entered the college campus. "Initially, there were whispers and taunts by a few but the teachers were extremely encouraging which helped me make it through my first semester. As I participated in extra-curricular events, I got to know other students who made me feel comfortable," she said.

Founder of Sahodaran, Sunil Menon said, "One of the biggest challenges is bullying which forces many to drop out from schools. When authorities keep quiet and don't take action, they are equally culpable," he said.

Students of other colleges like Madras University and MOP Vaishnav who attended the seminar said peers can help in the inclusiveness by not segregating on campus. Vice principal of Loyola College Joseph Antony Jacob said institutions could help by providing employment opportunities to transgenders on campus.