

OCTOBER 2022 VOL\_42\_No.12

# KERALA CALLING

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A black and white photograph of two transgender women in white dresses celebrating. The woman on the left is holding a trophy high in the air, and the woman on the right is holding a trophy and looking up. They are both smiling and appear to be in a celebratory mood.

**the  
transgender  
people of Kerala  
have already  
carved their  
niche in various  
fields with the  
overwhelming  
support from  
the government**

# PROUD & CONFIDENT

## A MATTER OF PRIDE FOR THE STATE

*In a society where stereotyped binary gender norms are ingrained in its blood, the niche for a hidden yet age-old identity is difficult to be carved out. But when the winds of change are gathering momentum, every outworn idea is destined to be blown away. The nature of Truth is that it shall manifest one day and under the power of its light, all the misconceptions will fade away. Such a transformation is happening in our society. The human race is not only masculine/feminine, but it goes beyond that.*

*In a sweeping judgment in 2014, the Supreme Court expanded the scope of 'sex' in Articles 15 and 16 and said the rights of the transgender community to equality be safeguarded. The judgment also directed the Centre and State governments to give the transgender community full recognition of their gender identity. The Kerala Government has understood the dynamics of integrating the transgender community into the mainstream. It takes not just a sense of social justice but political and administrative will.*

*Transgender Welfare Board and Transgender Cell were formed under the Department of Social Justice to create awareness among the public, and to provide counseling and support to every member of the transgender community.*

*The Transgender Cell, which is the first of its kind in the country, provides assistance and support to the functioning of the State Transgender Justice Board and District Transgender Justice Committees. The cell also formulates and coordinates the Transgender welfare initiatives of the Department. The government has also rolled out many welfare schemes and initiatives, including scholarships for students at various levels of their education.*

*Due to a lack of social support transgender persons are often subjected to atrocities that may require immediate medical assistance, treatment, food, shelter, clothing, and legal aid. The 'Karuthal' scheme assists needy transgender persons who require immediate support during crises or emergency situations.*

*Let's not turn a blind eye to the fact that transgender people are the most vulnerable community in our society now. But with all the pioneering efforts by the government, they are getting ingrained in social strata. Many of them have already marked their own space in life. That's why the groundbreaking initiatives by the Government of Kerala to make sure the transgender community is protected, provided for, and loved to deserve a pat on the back.*

**H. DINESHAN IAS**

EDITOR



# OF HOPE

Kerala is the first state to formulate and implement a state policy for the transgender community. The policy supports the attainment of a just society where transgender persons have as much right to access developmental opportunities, resources and benefits as cisgender men and women.

**T**ransgender persons often face several forms of discrimination in society. Often, they are even disowned by their own family members once they reveal their gender identity. A survey conducted in 2015 revealed that almost 51% of the transgender population in the State were estranged from their families.

Due to social discrimination, financial constraints and lack of family support, the rate of school and college dropouts among transgender persons was alarmingly high. In fact, up to 58% of transgender students dropped out before completing 10th grade (24% dropped out even before completion of 9th grade). Gender-related negative experiences at school and severe harassment made education impossible for them. Subsequently, they were denied jobs and struggled to earn a sustainable livelihood. The lack of support from family members added to their misery. This distressing scenario often forced them to take up socially unacceptable jobs. Lack of proper awareness and realisation of transgender issues at the ground level also caused several issues.

However, Kerala society has evolved a lot in the past few years. A conscious, yet subtle sensitisation regarding the



aspirations and pains of transgender persons has occurred. Society has now come to acknowledge that transgender persons share the same hopes and dreams as any other individual in our society, and that they have an equal right to a dignified life as every other citizen.

Earlier, the term 'sex' in Articles 15 and 16 of the Constitution of India referred only to binary genders of male and female. The Supreme Court of India, however, has now expanded the scope of the term to include 'transgender'. The Honourable Supreme Court of India, in its judgment dated April 15, 2014, had asserted that the right to equality and equal protection for transgender persons will be safeguarded. The judgment also explained how Article 19 (1) of the Constitution states that all citizens shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression of their self-identified gender, besides directing the Union and State governments to grant transgender persons full recognition of their gender identity.

Taking into account the Supreme Court judgment, the Government of Kerala had formulated the Transgender Policy. Kerala is the first state to formulate and implement a state policy for the transgender community. The policy supports the attainment of a just society where transgender persons have as much right to access developmental opportunities, resources and benefits as cisgender men and women. It ensures their right to live with dignity, enjoy a life free from all forms of violence, and also their right to freedom of expression in all matters that affect them.

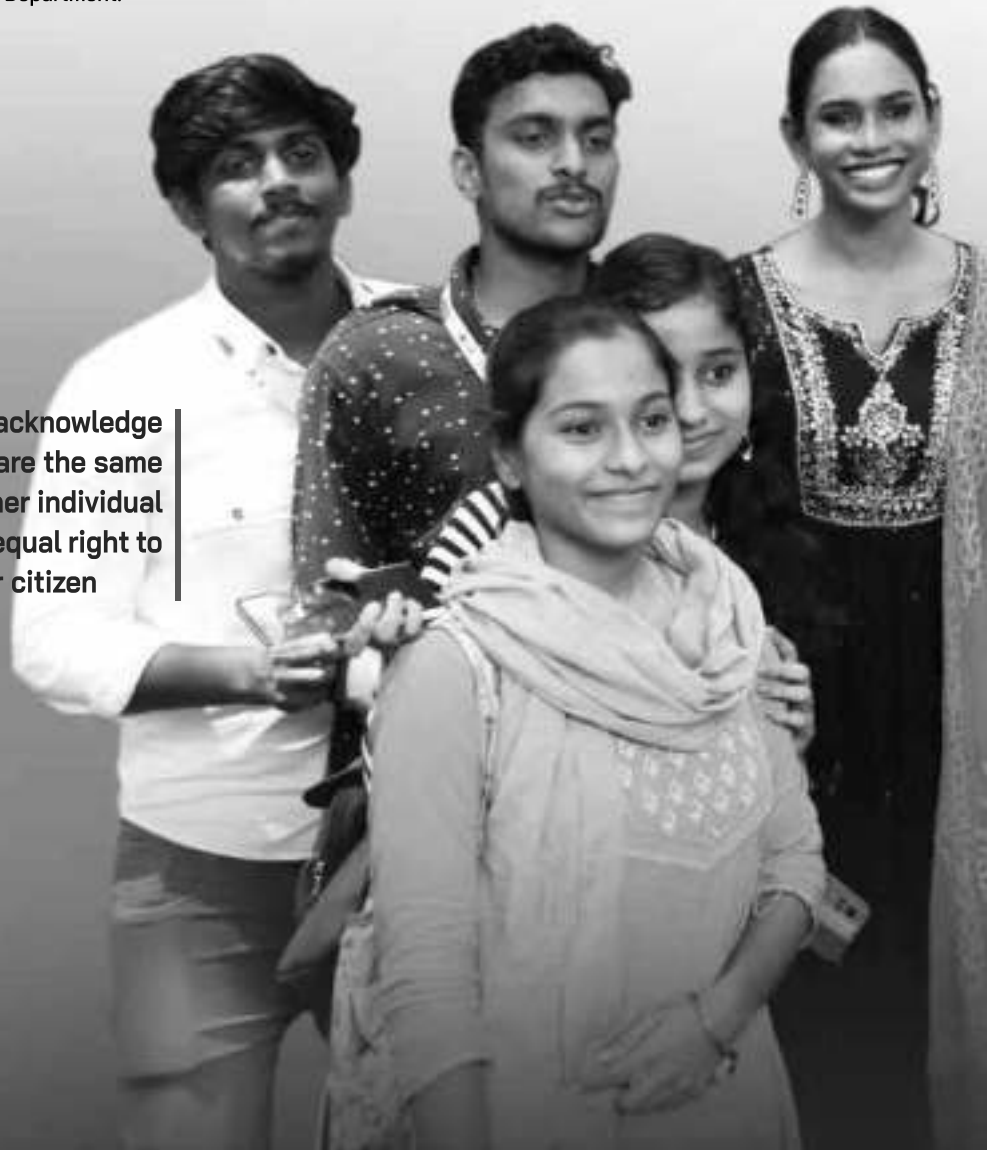
The Department of Social Justice under the Government of Kerala is the frontrunner in implementing various welfare programmes for the upliftment of transgender persons. The department is committed to taking measures to ensure the participation of transgender individuals in various walks of life. It is striving to take forward the vision of a people's government to handhold and bring forward a community that was hitherto marginalised and ostracised. Kerala is the first state in the country to form a transgender cell. The main objective of the cell is to provide assistance and support the functioning of the State Transgender Justice Board and the District Transgender Justice Committees. The cell also formulates and coordinates the transgender welfare initiatives of the Social Justice Department.

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## Transgender Cell

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Intending to bring the transgender community into the mainstream and uphold their rights, the department has implemented several transgender-friendly welfare schemes in the State. With a view to coordinate the welfare activities of transgender persons, the department has prepared a detailed guideline. It has also developed several action plans and personalised benefit schemes in this regard.



## 24x7 Helpline for Transgender Community

As a novel initiative, the Social Justice Department under the Government of Kerala has launched a 24x7 transgender helpline - 1800 425 2147. The objective is to provide necessary assistance to transgender persons who are in distress, enlighten them with an idea of their fundamental rights, and also provide counselling and legal assistance. This one-of-a-kind helpline also acts as a crisis management centre that ensures the service of community counsellors and legal advisers.

## Karuthal scheme

Due to a lack of social support, transgender persons are often subjected to atrocities which may require immediate medical assistance, treatment, food, shelter, clothing and legal aid. The 'Karuthal' scheme assists transgender persons who require immediate support during crisis or emergency situations.

## Scholarship for Transgender Students

As part of its efforts to bring the marginalised transgender community to the mainstream of society, the Social Justice Department has initiated a scheme for providing scholarships to transgender students studying in government, government aided, or self-financing schools from 7th standard onwards.



*Students taking selfie with Participants of 'Varnapakittu'*

Financial assistance is being provided to Transgender students on the following basis:

1. For transgender students from 7th std to 10th std – Rs. 1,000/- per month for 10 months
2. For transgender students studying in Plus one & Plus two – Rs. 1,500/- per month for 10 months
3. For transgender students pursuing a Diploma, Degree, Post-Graduation, or Professional courses – Rs. 2,000/- per month for 10 months

## Varnam

'Varnam' scheme provides financial assistance to transgender students pursuing Degree/Diploma/ PG courses through distance education. A maximum amount of Rs. 24,000/- will be provided annually. For students pursuing PG courses, assistance will be provided for two years, and for Under-Graduate students assistance will be given for 3 years.

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## Saphalam

'Saphalam' scheme provides financial assistance to transgender students pursuing Degree or Diploma-level professional courses. This scheme provides an opening to transgender students who possess high technical/professional competence.

### Samanwaya Continuing Education Programme

The Kerala State Literacy Mission Authority (KSLMA), along with the Social Justice Department, has rolled out a continuing education programme called 'Samanwaya' for school/college dropouts.

## Financial aid for the hostel facility

Transgender persons who are pursuing scholarship schemes are often forced to discontinue their studies for reasons such as lack of accommodation facilities. To address this issue, the Department of Social Justice has introduced a scheme that provides Rs 4,000/- as financial assistance to transgender persons as rent for finding hostel facility/accommodation.

## Sakalyam

The Department of Social Justice has also formulated a new comprehensive scheme called 'Sakalyam' for imparting vocational training to transgender persons. The scheme aims to create employment opportunities for the deprived community through skill development. The scheme aims to create transgender inclusive work environments and support transgender persons to be self-reliant.

## Self Employment Assistance Scheme

The Social Justice Department along with Kerala State Women's Development Corporation (KSWDC) provides financial assistance for transgender persons to help them launch self-employment ventures. KSWDC provides loans of up to Rs. 3 lakh to transgender persons for starting the self-employment initiatives.

## Marriage Assistance for Legally Married Transgender Couples

The Special Marriage Act does not cover transgender individuals who are legally married after sex change surgery. Hence, the Social Justice Department has introduced a new scheme that provides marriage assistance for legally married transgender couples who have undergone Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS). The amount for marriage assistance has been fixed at Rs. 30,000/-.

## Financial Aid for Gender Affirmation Surgery

Social Justice Department has formulated a scheme which provides financial assistance to transgender persons undergoing gender affirmation (aka sex reassignment or SRS) surgery. The maximum amount of financial assistance is up to Rs. 2 lakh.

## Financial Aid for further treatment

Transgender persons who have undergone the aforementioned surgery have to continue proper medication throughout the recovery period. An amount of Rs. 3,000/- is provided as financial assistance by Social Justice Department for 12 months from the date of the surgery.

The government has taken several measures to uplift the dignity of transgender persons and make sure they are provided with their rightful space in society. The application forms used for various purposes in all departments of the state government have been revised to include transgender as a gender identity option. Now, all the government application forms include woman, man, transgender, transwoman, transman options.

The transgender policy of the Government of Kerala has been hailed for providing support to trans persons in employment, education, housing, health etc. Let's bequeath a society that sets aside all differences to oblivion and honours every individual for their true self.



The winds of change that we are witnessing in Kerala can be attributed to the fact that there is a paradigm shift in the perspective of society towards the transgender community. Though there are miles to go, for ensuring complete equality and justice for the transgender community, a sense of hope and optimism is on the horizon.

**K**erala has been at the forefront when it comes to implementing policies and ensuring equal rights for the LGBTQIA+ community. These policies have ultimately helped the marginalized, to overcome the odds and come forward with their heads held high. It is quite an impressive feat to bring out new strategies to elevate the status of Transgender people in the state. Being the first state to implement the first-ever Transgender policy in 2015, Free sex-reassignment surgery, the first-ever beauty pageant for Trans-women, A pension plan for transgender people, a Justice board for the welfare of transgender people, etc were few of the many revolutionary achievements brought forward by the state.

It has been almost 7 years since the policy was implemented and a lot has changed and been achieved. Though there are miles to go, for ensuring complete equality and justice for the transgender community, a sense of hope and optimism is on the horizon. Kerala can further narrow the discrimination by continuing its implementation of inclusive policies which ultimately aim for equal opportunity for this Transgender people. The Social justice Department's "Mazhavillu" Umbrella scheme has implemented many schemes to support the community and has been actively promoting their growth and welfare. All these policies, schemes, and initiatives have helped many transgender persons from the state become the face of various inspiring success stories within the country.

## Prides of Kerala

### 'Lead'ing the way

Indian cinema isn't much inclusive when it comes to Transgender actors. They are marginalized in the industry and are often portrayed stereotypically with little or no prominence. However, it all changed, and history was made, when Anjali Ameer, a transgender played the lead role in the movie "Peranbu". The movie brought her national recognition and many awards for her titular protagonist role. She was a household name when selected as a reality show contestant, which further catapulted her into fame. She was proud to represent the transgender community in the mainstream media and dedicated her success to the community.

Albeit, among all the fame and glory that Anjali has achieved, there was always a period of hardships and struggles in the past. Anjali wanted to transform herself into the woman she always was, but her family and the society that she lived in were against it. So, she left her home when she wanted to fully embrace the femininity in her. She went to Coimbatore and Bangalore in pursuit of her passion for becoming a model and in turn an actor. She was



featured on the cover of several popular magazines before finally getting noticed by Mammootty who suggested her for the role. Anjali's life is an inspiration to those who are in search of the silver lining, that glimmer of hope against all the hardships of life.

## Touch of Elegance

A talent with a mix of beauty and determination, this is what we strike in our mind at the glance of Seema Vineeth. An Actor, model, make-up artist, and transgender activist are a few of the many titles under her name. She is an aspiring talent who has made her mark in various fields. Without a doubt, she is a pride of, not only the Transgender community but the entire of Kerala. She made her mini-screen debut with the hit comedy show on a Channel. The journey from Vineeth, a man, to Seema the woman she's now become, was taxing. Nonetheless, she overcame all the odds and is now living proudly as a working woman and an inspiration to many.



*Seema Vineeth*

## Conquering the Corporate Sphere

Finding one's footing in the corporate world is a hard nut to crack, especially for women. This is even more demanding when it comes to trans persons. However, in a revolutionary turn, the world came to know about Zara Sheikha, the first transgender to work in a Multi-National Company (MNC) which is based outside Kerala. Zara works as an HR Consultant at UST Global and has many other achievements and recognitions under her belt. She is also a trained classical dancer and runner-up in several beauty pageants. Zara's story wasn't any different from others in her community. She too had to overcome immense struggles and hardships from her family and society as well. She had to hide her identity in front of the world to follow her passion and thereby conquer her fears. She did several jobs in Chennai and Abu Dhabi at the HR department and worked as a Quality Analyst before being hired at UST Global.



*Anjali Ameer*

All these policies, schemes, and initiatives have helped many transgender persons from the state become the face of various inspiring success stories within the country.



*Zara Sheikha*

## To Learn and To Serve

Nadira Mehrin may seem like an ordinary student but in fact, she created history by being the first trans person to be elected as the vice president of the All India Students Federation (AISF). She was also the first trans-woman student at Kerala University. She is pursuing her second Post Graduation at Kalady University in M.A Theatre after completing her PG in Political Science at University College, Thiruvananthapuram, where her native place is. This also marked the first trans person in Kerala to have two master's degrees. She is also an activist, model, and actress, who recently starred in Jeo Baby's movie, Freedom Fight, in which she played the role of a transgender person. Nadira feels that nobody should go through the struggles and hardships that she had faced. She fought her way through the marginalized and ostracized views of society. She wishes for trans students to be given reservations in professional colleges and PSC which would help those who are struggling with various personal battles. Nadira wants to get a Ph.D. in a respective field and wishes to be active in politics, and dreams to become an MP (Member of Parliament), working for the betterment of the Trans community.



Nadira Mehrin

## Winning hearts across the globe

Sruthy Sithara etched her name in the history books when she represented India and won the title of Miss Trans Global 2021. She is the first Indian to win the title in the history of the pageant, which was started to raise awareness of LGBTQIA+ issues around the world. Sruthi had a humble beginning just like everyone. She came across her effeminate traits when she was an adult and had a revelation about the transgender community through her interactions with them at Kochi, which prompted her transition to a Trans-woman. She worked as a project assistant in the transgender cell of the Social Justice department of the Kerala government and was involved with various activities and initiatives of the state, of which she was very much appreciative and proud.



Sruthy Sithara

The winds of change that we are witnessing in Kerala can be attributed to the fact that there is a paradigm shift in the perspective of society towards a transgender and his/her community. This is a prerequisite for embracing the liberal and Avant-garde advance towards the once ostracized and downtrodden transgender community in India. The plethora of initiatives and programmes being implemented by the government of Kerala should be a framework for national change. Gender is comprehended as a spectrum in the new paradigm. There should be a solution to the many problems of Transgender persons which includes fear, trauma, pain, etc. These problems can be eliminated by treating Transgender persons as part of society and having an inclusive attitude in all aspects of the public sphere.

## Judgment of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India on 15 April 2014

**"Seldom, our society realizes or cares to realize the trauma, agony and pain which the members of Transgender community undergo, nor appreciates the innate feelings of the members of the Transgender community, especially of those whose mind and body disown their biological sex. Our society often ridicules and abuses the Transgender community and in public places like railway stations, bus stands, schools, workplaces, malls, theatres, hospitals, they are side-lined and treated as untouchables, forgetting the fact that the moral failure lies in the society's unwillingness to contain or embrace different gender identities and expressions, a mindset which we have to change."**



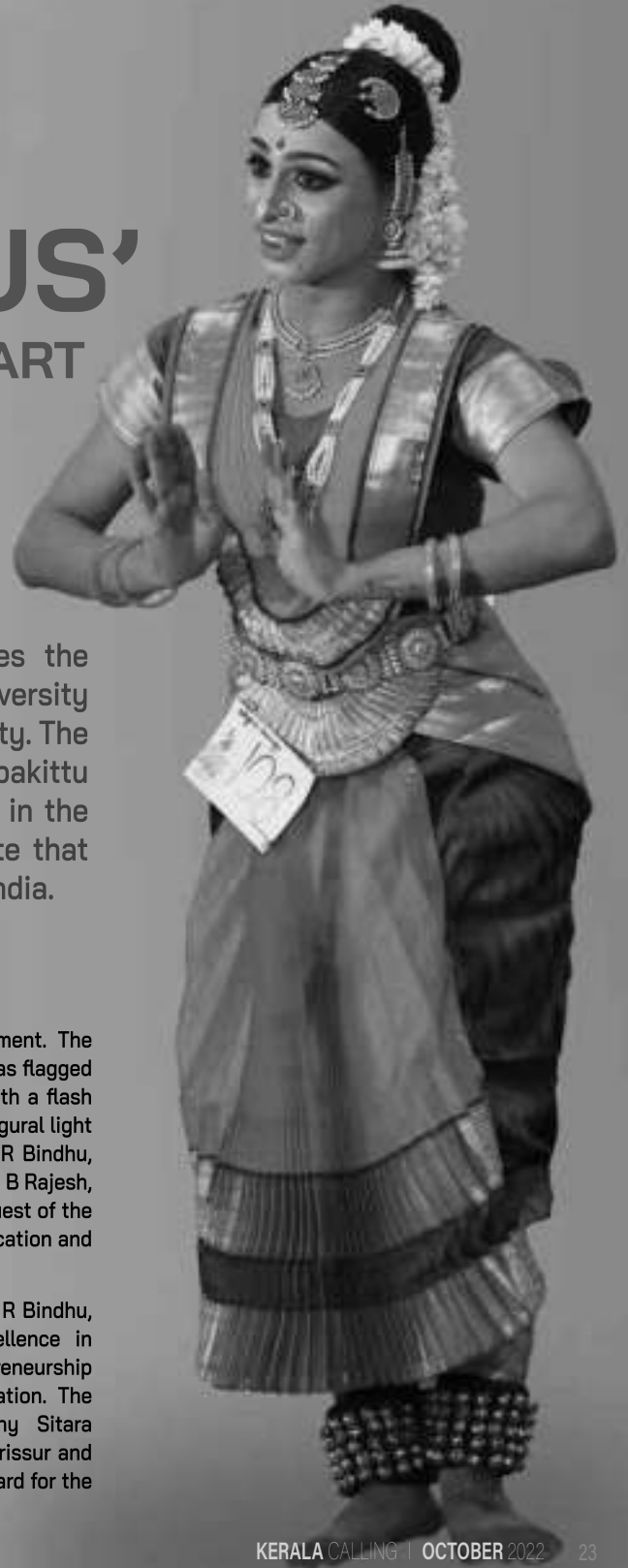
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# 'WE ARE AMONG US' REVIVAL THROUGH ART

The trans-artistic pride of Kerala enhances the beauty of the yard of the most prestigious university in the state and the elegance of the capital city. The two-day transgender art festival named Varnapakittu with the slogan We Are Among Us was held in the capital city to give pride to Kerala, the state that implemented the first transgender policy in India.

**T**he fete was organized by Social Justice Department. The cultural fest was heralded with a procession that was flagged off on the premises of the museum and started with a flash mob that proceeded to University College. The inaugural light of the transgender cultural festival was lit by Dr. R Bindhu, Minister for Social and Higher Education, at the Ayyankali Hall. M B Rajesh, Minister for Local Self-Governments and Excise, was the chief guest of the function presided over by V Sivankutty, Minister for General Education and Labour.

In the inaugural ceremony, awards were distributed by Minister R Bindhu, to eight transgender talents, who have demonstrated excellence in the fields of arts, sports, education, social work, and entrepreneurship in society. The award consisted of 10,000 rupees and a citation. The awards for contributions to Social Services were won by Sruthy Sitara from Kottayam and Suku from Trivandrum. Dr. Priya V S from Thrissur and Anand C Rajappan (Chinju Aswathy) from Ernakulam won the award for the



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endowments in the Educational sector, Praveen Nath from Palakkad and Sanjana Chandran from Kozhikode attained the award for his benefices in the field of arts and sports. Seema Vineeth from Trivandrum and Varsha Nandini from Kozhikode won the prize for entrepreneurs. The festival was held in four venues, one was in Ayyankali Hall and the other three were in University College. More than 200 contestants from different districts vied for the honours for the different competitions. Thiruvananthapuram district won the overall title again by scoring the greatest number of points.

The department of Social Justice organizes an art festival every year since 2019 to nurture the creativity and artistic flair of transgender people. It helps in bringing them into

the limelight of society. The state government envisaged a wide range of programs with making the youth and students part of the art festival. R.Bindu, Minister for Higher Education and Social Justice, during the inaugural ceremony, announced a scheme to provide an opportunity for transgender persons to showcase their creative talents and arts in the tourism sector.

History shows that art is a powerful weapon that is capable to make a revolution. Art has the power to change the general misconceptions of society and bring the marginalised to the forefront. The organization of an art fest is an ideal concept that gives wings to transgender people to fly high. Art is also a source of income which will

The cultural fest was heralded with a procession that was flagged off on the premises of the museum and started with a flash mob that proceeded to University College.



help a prestigious and harmonious livelihood. Nowadays we can see a transition in the trans community that brings them to the forefront of society from a discriminated and oppressed state.

Pablo Picasso once said; "Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life." Art is something that rejuvenates the mind that is tired of the so-called contemporary social conditions. Setting up cultural fests is really helpful in creating a new wake in their everyday life. It creates recognition among them regarding their values and rights. The aim of such schemes is to motivate them to participate more in this democratic decision-making system of our country and make aware them of their rights as citizens.

There is still a vast majority of the trans community who are keeping their identity secret and living in silence. Such art and cultural fests are giving them to build up the courage for coming forefront and live their own life happily. Unlike other states of India, Kerala put forward many efforts in finding trans people and making so many schemes for resurrecting them. A transgender festival such as Varnappakittu is one of many examples of such a fest. Education and employment are fine ways to empower a marginalized community. Kerala provides a lot of opportunities and schemes for educating and keeping their jobs secured. There is no doubt that the announcement of new job opportunities for transgender artists in the tourism sector will become a new beam of light in the life of transgender people.