

Unheard Endeavour of Third Gender for Identity in *Me Hijra Me Laxmi* & *The Truth about Me: A Hijra Life Story*

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ABSTRACT

The Hijra literature is gaining a space for readers, although small, challenging the heteronormative world. Both these autobiographies, *Me Hijra Me Laxmi* by Laxmi Narayan Tripathi and *Truth about Me: a Hijra Life Story* by A. Revathi, stand before us like a mirror towards the society and it clearly presents the difficulties faced by hijras in the present society for identity and their basic rights. The paper attempts to study about the life of these two hijras and their problems, traumas and denial for identity throughout life. This paper will also try to explore and understand how through their struggle they tried to create an equal space for transgender community in our society.

Keywords: identity crisis, heteronormative, third gender, human rights

INTRODUCTION

Apart from men and women, another gender exists in modern period, which is called '*transgender*'. The identity of being a hijra, transgender, lesbian or gay is considered as 'third gender'. Hijra is "a physiological male who adopts feminine gender identity, clothing and other feminine roles". In India, Hijra community is abhorred more than other communities such as Dalits and minorities. Hijras in India face multiple forms of oppression and are constantly abused, insulted and denied even basic human rights. Hijras, who can be trans, intersex, or eunuchs, were historically respected in ancient India, but over past centuries, have become most misunderstood and marginalized communities. The hijra community act and dress like women. A hijra seems to always be noticed when a child is being born or marriage taking place. Otherwise, can be seen waiting and begging for money and livelihood. People often won't speak to them, but will instead pass on a string of unsupported myths relating to the group, provoking prejudice generation after generation.

Identity crisis is one of the significant issues of man's life. Our society is made of paradoxes. It is a challenging task to build up one's own identity and is even more challenging when it is for someone who does not fit into the mainstream world. When we think of identity construction, the only thing which comes in mind is of masculine and feminine identity, but apart from these two identities there is a *third gender*, who needs to have their own identity and their own space. Both the autobiographical works, *Me Hijra Me Laxmi* by Laxmi Narayan Tripathi as well as *The Truth about Me: A Hijra Life Story* by A. Revathi presents the struggle of the hijra community for identity and equal positioning in society. These works portray in depth scenarios of how hijra community is treated as trash and are humiliated, tortured, abused at every step of life. Even though both these autobiographies have something in contrast but are connected to each other with emotions. Every aspect of hijra culture is narrated in a way to make people cognizant of the fact that the hijras are normal beings; they desire to live their life just like the other human leads in the society.

Me Hijra Me Laxmi

The autobiography is a narrative of Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's tribulation of becoming a hijra by choice, and her ensuing journey of fighting against colossal odds for the rights of her community. About her autobiography she says "The book is about my life. It's everything from the many relationships I've got to finding solace in Mumbai's bars. From mental and physical abuse to finding a lifetime of grace, dignity and fame, it's about Laxmi, someone who recognizes herself as a hijra at this time proudly".

Laxmi Narayan Tripathi was born in an orthodox Brahmin family as a male child. As the narrative begins, within the first picture it talks about Laxmi's childhood. Since childhood she was favorite of all and got much appreciation due to her nature. From very early age she was keen on dancing and infrequently got the possibility to perform on stage, but in Indian patriarchal society, dancing is expounded with feminine identity. Due to this interest, people used to tease her and refer her by the names of homo and *chakka*. When she was young, she recognized different gender identity, as she herself says "Yes, it's true that I used to be sort of a woman. My mannerisms, my walking and talking style were all feminine. But why was it so? I didn't know. I wasn't of an age to answer this question..." (Me Hijra Me Laxmi 43). Laxmi was physically assaulted at the age of seven by her cousin and his friends over and over. She was a little boy at the time of molestation, that's why she remained silent. Sexual assaults had a deleterious effect on her personality. It transformed her behavior as she became secretive and incommunicative, started hiding her feelings from her friends and family. She felt as if her childhood was ruined and was grown up way before time.

After few years, Laxmi got the opportunity to meet Ashok Row Kavi (India's LGBT rights activist). When she met him, she felt relieved because she realized she wasn't alone; there have been people who were unmanly like her. Laxmi recognized her identity and joined the hijra community. She expresses her feelings as, "When I become a hijra, a good burden was lifted off my head. I felt relaxed. I was now neither a man nor a woman. I used to be a hijra. I had my very own identity; nor did I desire an alien" (Me Hijra Me Laxmi 57). Laxmi's family was agitated initially by this decision but eventually they had to accept the truth. Social repudiations considered as the major reason for the psychic trauma of the third gender. People examine them with biasness and take a look at to ignore their presence. The harassment faced by the hijras, can be easily seen through the lens of Laxmi's autobiography. Laxmi reveals the predicament of the third gender by explaining the sexual assaults she encountered in her life additionally as her *chelas*. One among her *chela* Subhadra who went for sex work never returned and was reported dead later. Laxmi explains her sorrow by mentioning, "Subhadra's death had opened our eyes to the risks of being a *hijra*". (Me Hijra Me Laxmi 55). The social station of the transgender in Indian society is deplorable. As the transgenders are marginalized within the society, their life isn't secure. Their individuality often makes them the victim of stigmatization; therefore, they don't get the prospect to urge equal rights. Laxmi relates another incident of the plight of the third gender as:

"A hijra was raped in Virar. Not only did the police refuse to lodge an FIR, they refused to even hear to what the hijra had to mention. The hijra was in pain but the doctors were unwilling to treat her till the police did their job. It was a vicious circle. Once I reached the police station, the hawaldaars were in split. They couldn't fathom how a hijra can be raped (couldn't they)? They were using the incident to lubricate their filthiest fantasies when all they must have done was file FIR and send the hijra to hospital" (Me Hijra Me Laxmi 92).

The mainstream society of the India is unaware of the particular indisputable fact that how third gender people are suffering day by day of their life. Laxmi has given the picturesque description of the continual discrimination of the third gender. She, in her autobiography presents the dilemma of how they're denied an equal positioning and identity. She shares one instance when she was invited to attend Sixteenth World AIDS Conference, in Toronto, Canada in August 2006 for which she needed a passport. Laxmi explains: "How could I am going abroad? Foreign travel required a passport, and will a hijra, born as a male and now a female, ever get a passport? I failed to want my passport to sit down with my gender as 'male'. I wanted it to refer to me as hijra and a hijra alone" ... (Me Hijra Me Laxmi 78). It absolutely was not a straightforward task for a hijra to go through all the procedures and acquire the

legal documents. This shows how transgender have to confront the troubles to urge the legal recognition certificates because they belong to the third gender.

By discovering Laxmi's autobiography, the predicament of the transgender people is highlighted. Laxmi's journey is crammed with hardships and struggles from being born as a male to a third gender activist. Through her work, she has tried to present the verity picture of how third gender people are cornered and aren't allowed the life which they deserve. Her memoir is one of the preliminary works that belong to the category of hijra literature and make readers conscious of who hijras really are and what it takes to measure a life for them.

The Truth about My Life: A Hijra Life Story

As a hijra I get pushed to the fringes of society. Yet I have dared to share my innermost life with you-about being a hijra and also doing sex work. My story is not meant to offend, accuse or hurt anyone's sentiments. My aim is to make readers conscious about the lives of hijras, their culture, and their dreams and desires. I hope now that by publishing my story, larger changes will be achieved. I hope this book of mine will make people see that hijras are capable of more than just begging and sex work. I do not seek sympathy from the society or the government. I seek to indicate that hijras do have the right to live in this society. (*Revathi, v-vi*)

The intention behind A. Revathi's *The Truth About My Life: A Hijra Life Story* is clearly mentioned in the preface of the autobiography. Revathi, when born was baptized as Doraiswamy. She is a writer, actor and a social influencer in Bangalore as she works with Sangama, a sexually outnumbered civil rights organization for people who are oppressed due to their sexual preferences. Her journey from Doraiswamy to Revathi is entangled between many layers. In her autobiography, she expresses about her feelings, struggles, pain, and ordeals in seek for an identity.

Revathi was the youngest member of his family. Born as a son, he had confusion from his childhood regarding his sexual identity. He was an introvert, culturally effeminate, with liking to be dressed as a lady and indulged himself in activities set by society as female chores. She says "Immediately after getting home from school, I'd wear my sister's long skirt and blouse, twist an extended towel around my head and let it trail down my back sort of a braid. I might then twirl like a shy bride, my eyes to the bottom, and everybody would laugh. Nobody thought much of it then, for I used to be little. (Revathi 4)

As with time, he came to the realization that a woman was confined inside a male body:

"A woman trapped in an exceedingly man's body is how I assumed of myself. But how could that be? Would the globe accept me thus...?" (Revathi 15). He wanted to liberate herself from the trap of a male body, and this was only possible if he was ready to bear 'nirvanam', castration. This wasn't a straightforward decision to form as society doesn't gave approval to the current but he decided to go through as this was the sole choice to free herself from all the troubles and tortures. The journey from Doraiswamy to Revathi brought a ray in her life. After her castration 'he' was become 'she'. When she disclosed the reality before her family, she was severely bitten by her elder brothers as this was against the traditional family norms. She was thrown out of the house.

Revathi started begging on the street lights, was pushed towards prostitution because nobody was ready to give her job and let her live a normal life. On one hand she was neglected and tortured by the family on the opposite she indulged herself within the filth of sex work to earn a livelihood. Throughout her life she explores for a secure place, because the people of her community weren't the least bit safe, even by the police. She was even harassed and abused by the police men sexually. Revathi is the representative of her community and shows how her quest for identity made her way to be a woman through castration but it wasn't the end of her identity crisis. She was still not considered as a woman and didn't have any identity.

Revathi joined Sangama, an organization which she found was helping the people from her community and were affected by psychological state. She expresses all her trauma and tribulations faced by the hands of her family and society with the readers by saying:

“It looks as if there’s nothing for us hijras to try and do but sex work. We lack the education to do much else, and there’s nobody to supply us work. Sex work brings with it every kind of problems-we suffer at the hands of both the police and rowdies. We don’t seem to be accepted by our families. Initially my family didn’t accept me, but today I can visit them in an exceedingly sari. However, there are many whose dreams and desires buried deep within”. (Revathi, 293)

The autobiography paints a painful picture of not just Revathi but the full community. She has bravely attempted to interrupt the cyclic process of individuals taking them as not a normal human being. Its Revathi’s urge to think about people like her not from the sexually minority community but a normal creature. She, through her story asks to possess an identity just like the other genders of the society and an equal space for herself and other transgenders. She hopes that a hijra should not be gawked at or howled but should relatively be taken as a traditional soul.

“Men and women stared at us and laughed, and heckled us. I spotted what a burden a hijra’s living is. Do people harass people who are men and women after they go along with their families? Why a crippled person, a blind person- even they attract pity and people help them. If someone has experience physical hurt, they’re cared both by the family and by the outsiders who come to know of it. But we- we aren’t considered human”. (Revathi 297)

CONCLUSION

The selected literary works reflected the lives of not just Laxmi and Revathi but in common the transgender community. Both the work revealed the bruises and wounds of a body violated by a deeply hierarchical society. The transgender community in India is entangled within the slime of lingual, impeccable and economical settlement. Laxmi and Revathi both have shown great courage to speak about their lives without hiding their flaws or their virtues, with clear picture of the planet they sleep in. The autobiographies show how it’s to measure on the margins, within the luminal spaces which we in the mainstream ignore and are actively hostile towards. Through their work, they’ve demanded for a world where there’s an equal space for transgenders, where they put up their heads high and with dignity.

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