

Quest For Identity In “The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story” By A. Revathi And “Me Laxmi, Me Hijra” By Laxmi Narayan Tripathi

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Abstract : The Indian society is closely tied by a variety of rigorous standards and beliefs based on class, caste, and gender. Society fails to recognise that sexuality and gender are two distinct ideas and frequently conflates the two. The marginalised are excluded from society's mainstream. They are bound to feel like an ostracized class, and often live alone, or on the societal edge. This diminishes their position, resulting in a loss of esteem, a lack of personal identity and, on rare occasions, public humiliation. The 'Hijras' are one of the most downtrodden marginalised communities. Transgender people commonly known as hijras, are always battling the world for social acceptance as well as an identity crisis. This paper examines A. Revathi's autobiography “The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story” and Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's “Me Hijra, Me Laxmi” from a similar standpoint, in which both the authors try to establish their identity in society.

IndexTerms - Transgender, Hijra, Autobiography, Feminine, Identity.

INTRODUCTION

In India, Hijra Literature has emerged as a new literary form. The hijra community's silence, which has been one of the most powerful kinds of exclusion, has been broken, and the voices of these downtrodden can now be heard via their tiny narratives. Despite their disorganised nature, these works can cause a ripple on the otherwise calm social face by expressing the wrath and dissatisfaction of kinnars about their marginalised standing in society. These literary projects are part of a larger social movement in which hijras have banded together to struggle for basic human rights. According to Dutta and Roy, transgender discourses are counter-narratives against hegemony that undermine trans identities' cartographies and bring out the class/caste/racial hierarchies that they are embedded in society, which marginalise them (Dutta, et al., 2022). Laxmi Narayan Tripathi and A. Revathi are two examples of transgender people who have written about their lives. "The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story" by Revathi and "Me Hijra, Me Laxmi" by Tripathi are outstanding works on the quest for identification by both authors.

To inform dominant groups about the hijra group's subhuman position and suffering, this study uses two candid stories written by persons of the third gender group. The first book is Revathi's “The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story” by Revathi is the first book. The other is Laxminarayan Tripathi's "Me Hijra, Me Laxmi," a personal story of a transgender and transwoman campaigner (Iqbal).

LAXMI NARAYAN TRIPATHI'S “ME LAXMI, ME HIJRA”

Laxmi, who was raised as a boy in a Brahmin household, realised when she was at the age of five that her attitude and demeanor were feminine, but she could not explain why. She possessed feminine traits and dressed in a manner that her friends, family, and society did not accept. Every day of her life, she wished to be a woman. She was challenged with huge hurdles at every phase of her life. Notwithstanding this, she never gave up the fight. She stood up for her family and herself, proving to the world that she is only another human being, despite how strange the public thinks her to be. Therefore, Laxmi's childhood was unusual, as she was compelled to adjust to gender-appropriate behaviour.

The laid-back attitude toward transgender people in Indian society is a product of the country's lengthy socio-cultural norms. In the novel "Me Hijra, Me Laxmi," one transgender woman's life is presented from the perspective of another (2015). Laxmi seeks to show in her memoirs that, notwithstanding her hijra background, she is not a guilty person. She is self-sufficient and supportive of her family, and she also speaks out at international conferences in support of transgender equality.

Laxmi, who had been sexually exploited since she was seven fought back when she realised, she was being threatened and coerced. She decided to be boisterous and confrontational, and she confronted anyone who attempted to molest her. She was fourteen years old when she first opened up against sexual advances, and she has not looked back since. It is a narrative that tries to analyse and confront prejudices that contribute to legitimise gender identification's traditional discourse. She quickly realised she was of a distinct sexual orientation, which baffled her. Regardless of the truth that she was teased by boys, she remained attracted to them. She was bewildered because she was born with a natural preference for girls. Was it due to her attraction to boys that she was gay? On the other side, the LGBT community did not entice her. She did not see herself as being like gay males. Her attraction to men made her question whether she was odd (Tripathi, 2015).

When Laxmi was a kid, she thought there was something strange about her. Then, to allay her anxieties, LGBT activist Ashok Rao Kavi grinned and assured her that she was not odd, she was entirely normal, but the world around her was abnormal because they did not understand her (Tripathi, 2015).

Being the family's eldest child, Laxmi was expected to be the chief of the family in the house. Her family wished for her to grow up to be a strong woman. She had a sneaking suspicion she wouldn't be able to meet their expectations. She was a woman on the inside. Despite her parents' enthusiastic greeting, she questioned whether the culture would accept her flaws. She used to experience insecurity and preferred to be recognised as a woman rather than a male. She had been in a tumultuous situation (Tripathi, 2015).

When one has been unable to fit into society's gender stereotypes, one frequently doubts oneself. The reality that she had to live her life as a man suffocated her. She did not realise she was a hijra till she was much older. She did not feel truly free until she joined the hijra community. Her position as a hijra affected her identity. She explains:

"When I become a hijra, a great burden was lifted off my head. I felt relaxed. I was now neither a man nor a woman. I was hijra. I had my own identity. No longer did I feel like an alien."

Her femininity yearned for a true companion, someone who would embrace her for who she was, as a person and as a hijra. Her immense patience, strength, and willingness to maintain her dignity as a hijra allowed her to put an end to society's hijra taboo. Laxmi is self-assured about her sexuality, claiming that she can be a woman better than any other woman. The Indian Hijras indicate that gender's psychological and behavioural characteristics are a result of socialisation rather than biology (Tripathi, 2015).

Rather than being a biological truth, the term hijra relates to social phenomena. According to Laxmi Tripathi, the word 'hijra' comes from the Urdu term 'hijar.' As a result, a hijra is a person who has abandoned the mainstream society and joined a hijra community (Tripathi, 2015). In addition, Laxmi stated that the term 'hij' alludes to the soul, namely a holy soul. Hijra is the name given to the body wherein the holy soul lives (Tripathi, 2015).

Hijra, she said, is neither a woman nor a man. She has a feminine appearance, yet she is not a lady. He is manly - born as a male, but not a man either. The body of a hijra is a trap, not only for the hijra who is stuck within it but also for the world at large, which incorrectly considers a hijra to be a man (Tripathi, 2015).

- A. Revathi compares the community to an extended family, and it is led by an elder person known as the guru, who adopts a group of Chelas or students who are treated like daughters by her, and they find their home and security in the jamaat (Revathi, 2010). A human does not incarnate a hijra when she is born, but by reet, a difficult and intricate rite of passage (Chand, 2019).

However, many of these notions and misconceptions that influence the public's perception are challenged and dispelled in Laxmi's autobiography. The acceptance of Laxmi by her family defies the status quo and establishes an example for other families that has special needs children. When Laxmi recalls a television serial called 'Sach Ka Samna,' in which she appeared and was joined by her family, her family's acceptance of her queerness is obvious. Laxmi's father, who backs her decision, says:

"Why should I expel Laxmi from the family? I am his father; he is my responsibility. A Hijra can be born to any family. If we spurn them and show them the door, we leave them with no alternative but to become beggars, driving Laxmi out of the house was out of the question" (Tripathi, 2015).

For the author, the purpose is not to get sympathy from society or the government, but to educate this sexist culture about the fact that the third sex is just like any other human being. A hijra like Laxmi is not used to taking control of her destiny as she did here. She did not indulge into a sexual activity in exchange for money. She had always thought of herself as the owner of her body (Tripathi, 2015).

The concept of a self-governing hijra still baffles many. Her presence on a Mumbai panel discussing the state of HIV and AIDS in India was notable because she was the first hijra to be invited. Empowerment is a phrase that does not often appear in the vocabulary of a hijra, and she claimed that she felt empowered (Tripathi, 2015).

She was also a Bigg Boss contestant, appearing in all nineteen episodes. She hoped the performance would serve as a platform for raising awareness of the problem. Hijras are regular humans, just like the rest of humanity. They are not aliens. They may even be more sensitive than the average human being (Tripathi, 2015).

Laxmi was praised for her efforts at the event, which went off without a hitch. Yet she was asked to show proof that she was a hijra and to produce a certificate from a licensed physician attesting to the fact that she had been transformed from a man to a woman (Tripathi, 2015). Despite not having undergone any surgical procedure nor having papers to prove her a hijra, she was compelled to go through a series of tests and run from pillar to post before she could be certified as such and receive an official passport. To the delight of the crowd, she delivered her speech in Toronto to a standing ovation. Many complimented Laxmi, including Dennis Brown, the UN AIDS head, who said, "I am proud of you" (Tripathi, 2015). When she arrived in the city's homosexual district on Church Street, she continued her journey. After spending time with transgender people in the US, Laxmi realised that their way of life was in stark contrast to that of Indian transgender people, who are denied even basic constitutional rights. "International Journal of Research (IJR)" states that Laxmi's autobiography provides a genuine view of the life of a hijra, who they are, and what processes develop their personalities as hijras. Her narrative helps to refute myths about the hijras and to eliminate prejudices regarding the hijra community. Hijras are just like the rest of us (Jahan, 2016).

Hijras are the subject of several stories that have been spun by various people over the years. Some people believe they are ordered by their society to abduct and turn young people into hijras, which is false. They also have the idea that their funerals are held late at night, and that they are battered with slippers by their mourners (Tripathi, 2015).

The cremation of Hindu hijras and the sinking of Muslim hijras are two distinct practices. As a social worker, Laxmi's status as a hijra is important to the residents of this country, but her work goes well beyond that. Laxmi was aware of her current situation and accepted it. A sex reassignment surgery may be an option, but castration is a spiritual one for her. Preparation is essential for it. Even though she could not be coerced, she decided to become a hijra and began trying to strengthen the community of hijras (Tripathi, 2015). She used to tie a large towel around her hair and let it fall on her back like a braid as soon as her mother arrived home (Tripathi, 2015). Her performance as Chandramathi in 'Harishchandra' was applauded by everyone who saw it since she looked and acted like an actual woman - this made her quite happy (Tripathi, 2015). While dressed in her kurathi's costume, she felt free to express all the female emotions she usually kept to herself, and she was filled with joy (Tripathi, 2015).

For transgender people, transgenderism serves as the major source of wish fulfilment because clothing is one of the most fundamental markers of gender heteronormative distinction. For this performance, Hijras play the dholak while singing and dancing. Among the gifts they get are rice, wheat, and a sari. Upon identifying a

birth, Hijras contact the family to inform them that they would come on a specified date to bless the kid and that the baddai must be given. They dance and sing and mock the bride and groom while being offered money at weddings (Tripathi, 2015).

As Laxmi explains in her autobiography, "Me Hijra, Me Laxmi," the public has a misconception and stereotype about people who identify as hijras. She explains that the word 'hij' alludes to the soul, a holy soul, considering its origins. It is termed hijra because it is the physical vessel in which the divine spirit resides (Tripathi, 2015).

As a result of this mistaken belief, the world views a hijra as a man, and as a result, its body is described as a trap that suffocates the hijra (Tripathi, 2015). The body is seen as a tangible object, even though sex and gender are debatable words. It does not matter if the hijra decides to be castrated or not; the process of self-determination required to develop uniqueness is arduous.

Laxmi describes the distinction between a hijra and a hermaphrodite by saying that a hermaphrodite is born with both male and female sex parts (Tripathi, 2015). As seen in Laxmi's photographs before and after becoming a member of the community, the hijra character's role in the book is best represented through sartorial statements. During her childhood, Tripathi's parents treated her as an individual. As a child, she was fascinated by the female form, and had a natural talent for dancing and portraying female characters. According to her, it is common in patriarchal, misogynistic cultures like ours to view dance as a woman's pursuit. So, she was bullied. She was referred to as a homo and a chakka by the public. All they could make out was that despite being a man, she had the body language of a woman. When she was seven, she became the victim of sexual exploitation for the first time (Tripathi, 2015).

Throughout her upbringing, Tripathi's parents have treated her as a singular individual. She has a natural flair for dancing and portraying female characters, and she does not play with boys her age. Rather than thinking of them as hijra, she prefers to think of them as human beings. Any of them could be detained and taken to the police station at any time for questioning (Tripathi, 2015).

She will know their matter is finished once the investigation into the police case is completed. She felt that because no one cares about the death or murder of a Hijra, battling against the world seemed useless (Tripathi, 2015). Even though she disapproves of her hijra lifestyle and the way she interacts with the public, her guru insists that hijras should not avoid contact with the public.

“We are hijras. We will not do this, and we'll not do that.” I was livid. I hated the idea of a ghetto or a gated community... (Tripathi, 2015).

Between the Lines, a video on hijras that was premiered at the World AIDS Conference in Toronto in 2006, and the establishment of astitwa, a society focused on bringing the hijra issue to the forefront, are two examples of her efforts to raise awareness of their suffering. They are considered their ultimate subordinate by her. To put it another way, Laxmi's presence in a Hijra Beauty Pageant, her participation in the television show 'Sach Ka Saamna,' and lastly, her entrance into 'Big Boss' changed her identity (Tripathi, 2015).

Although she is the oldest of her siblings, she is not given the task of performing her father's funeral rites. A serious evaluation of the current state of Indian hijras finishes her story. Laxmi's story is an attempt to demonstrate that she is not a victim since she is a hijra (Tripathi, 2015). Laxmi helps maintain her family while living with her brothers and parents. AIDS Sutra author Salman Rushdie met her in Thane, where she is a prominent character, and also a fierce advocate for the rights of hijra women. She teaches Bharatnatyam at home. However, when she leaves the house, she is known as Laxmi and everyone in Thane recognises her. Her beginnings are not out of the ordinary (Tripathi, 2015). "Me Hijra, Me Laxmi" is an autobiography of an educated and responsible hijra, who has gone from the stigma of being a victim to realising the life of a hijra and appreciating it. Laxmi is like a ray of hope for the hijras (Tripathi, 2015). Because of the style in which it is written, the memoir stands out among the other autobiographies. During the translation process, R Raj Rao discusses the difficulties he encountered. He claims that the fact that Laxmi herself was not the author complicated the work. The story was penned by Vaishali Rode, a Marathi journalist who spoke to Laxmi.

This type of reporting has the drawback of being overly reliant on verbal communication, resulting in rambling and clumsy storytelling (Tripathi, 2015).

A. REVATHI'S "THE TRUTH ABOUT ME: A HIJRA LIFE STORY"

A. Revathi is a Bangalore-based writer and activist who fights for the rights of those who identify as LGBTQ. She is a Hijra trans woman from the Namakkal area of Tamil Nadu who was born Doraiswami. For the first time, Revathi's work was translated into Tamil in 2004 with the publication of "Unarvum Uruvamum" (Our Lives, Our Words) (Chowdhury et al., 2018).

In South India, there is a Hijra community, and this book has encouraged other Hijra authors to write their books. After the success of her first book, she decided to pen her own memoir, "The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story," which was published in 2010. An Indian Tamil film called Thenavattu, which also included two other transgender performers, was Revathi's first acting role (Prabhu, 2014).

Physically, Revathi was born a man, but she was raised and behaved like a lady. When she was a child in Salem, Tamil Nadu, she felt that she was stuck in the wrong body and had a strong sense of female irresponsibility. However, when she acted like one of her girlfriends, her family and communities retaliated with humiliation and violence. As a result, her grades dropped, and she was forced to drop out after failing the tenth grade. To join a hijri's residence in Delhi, Revathi fled her family's home when she was in her teens. It is male to female in Hijras.

A. Revathi's autobiography, "The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story," is written in Tamil, the mother tongue of the transgender campaigner. The work was translated into English by V. Geetha, a renowned feminist historian. For the sake of her family, Revathi planned to publish the book as an English translation in 2010. However, Revathi decided to write the book in Tamil because her family does not know English.

For the first time, the complexities and challenges experienced by transgender people in Indian society are vividly depicted in "The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story." This book was written by Revathi to bring the lives, customs, traditions, aspirations, wishes, and experiences of Hijras to light. Revathi hopes that her book will help people realise that hijras are capable of so much more than just begging and sex labour (Revathi, 2010).

Using he or she is written forms can be problematic due to the lack of an English term for a transgender person. It is written by A. Revathi:

"I hope this book of mine will make people see that hijras are capable of more than just begging and sex work....I seek to show that we hijras do have the rights to live in this society" (Revathi, 2010).

While referring to Revathi as Doraisamy, the pronoun he will be used, and when addressing her as Revathi, the pronoun she will be used. Revathi was the fifth and final child to be born to her parents. Her name was Doraisamy, and like the family's newest member, she received a great deal of affection and pampering. To this day, Doraisamy still sees himself as a male, even though his body is that of a woman. He did not mind helping in the washing, kitchen, the dishes, or sweeping the floor because he was used to it. At the time, nobody in his family appeared to notice that he enjoyed dressing as a woman, and they dismissed his interest in feminine attire as a child's play. When Doraisamy was tempted by other men, he felt uneasy and bewildered. Thoughts of being the only one with such conflicting feelings ran through his mind. Because he dressed like a girl, he was subjected to harassment at school. And he had no concept that what he was doing was out of the ordinary. Dressing up like a woman for the Mariamman festival did not make him feel like he was being disguised; rather, he felt more at home in men's clothing. In his man's clothes, he felt like an imposter, having left his true self behind (Revathi, 2010).

It was not until he met certain members of the Kothi community that Doraisamy realised who he was. Because of them, he was exposed to the transgender community and became a part of it. With help from his mother-like mentor (a guru), he took over the character of her chela (follower) as a daughter. As a result of his Hijra heritage, he was given the name Revathi. For transgender people, a major concern is not only being exploited but also being socially marginalised. They cannot get a regular job or a respectable place in society. They are treated as if they are invincible by the public.

“How could we ever hope to make a living? God has made us this way, I thought, and we have no work of our own, our parents do not understand us, and this world looks upon us with distaste. Yet we too go hungry. Above all, we wanted to live as human beings do, with dignity” (Revathi, 2010).

Nirvaanam has completed thanks to the help of the Hijra group and Revathi's gurubai (sex reassignment surgery). For her breasts to expand, she took hormone replacement therapy, as well. Although she had achieved her goal of becoming a lady, she remained in a precarious situation, unable to find calm and respect in her new form. In the hopes of generating some extra cash and satisfying her sexual urges, she entered the world of prostitution.

With the birth of her own three girls, Revathi's life was forever altered (chelas). Revathi was surprised to learn that her chela friends were unlike any transgender individuals she had ever encountered. These people were well-educated, and they battled for personal freedom. Revathi was introduced to Sangama by her chelas, a secretive social club dedicated to defending the rights of the LGBT community. Despite Revathi's desire to work as an activist at Sangama's office, she was offered the job as an office assistant instead of being arrested.

It was a genuine profession that allowed her to learn about the rights of LGBTQ persons under Indian law, even though she was paid a pittance. When she was working at Sangama, she was pulled to a senior colleague who shared her sentiments. They decided on a simple garlands exchange for their nuptials. Revathi's happiness, on the other hand, was fleeting. He abandoned her when she tried to tell him how she was feeling since he was no longer interested in her. Revathi was devastated after her marriage fell apart. At Sangama, she found some respite from her daily battles.

As part of the endeavour, she set out to meet other transgender people and interview them for a book on their lives and experiences. Famila, another of her children, too took her own life because she could not afford to pay for her mother's funeral. She completed her book Uruvamum ("Feelings of the Whole Body") in 2004 despite these difficulties. The book chronicled the daily struggles of the Hijra people in southern India. It is called "The Truth About Me" by A. Revathi. It provides a glimpse into the daily life of a transgender person. The author's language is free of grammatical embellishment, making it easy to understand.

CONCLUSION

The two author's narratives often underline that feminism in them is intrinsic. A woman trapped in a man's body framework can be utilised to express this. Nevertheless, femininity needs to be created in compliance with the ideals and choices accessible in society. However, being transgender is self-expression, there also exists a performance element to it. As an activist, they aim to remove hurdles that pertain to heteronormative culture and generate a more positive perspective of the sexual minority in general.

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