



Subjugated Sexuality V/S Emancipated Self In A. Revathi's The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story

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ABSTRACT

This paper gives a brief analysis of the effects of sexual inequality and the miserable state of the hijra community in India. This autobiography demonstrates how hijras are denied access to all the amenities that a typical citizen of a nation should have. The author's goal in writing this autobiography was to demonstrate that people exist and that people have opinions, thoughts, sentiments, and emotions on every facet of society. A person's gender and sexual orientation are frequently intertwined, and it is common to take these two distinct identities for granted. One is expected to act and behave like a 'man' according to whatever socially constructed definition of a man exists, if they are born with a male reproductive organ. If a person is born with a female reproductive organ, they must aspire to the feminine ideals that society and culture have established. Any departure from the dichotomy of male/female is met with scepticism on the one hand and derision or contempt on the other. To recognise and respect such lives, it is vital to create identities that lie outside of the man/woman spectrum. Since their sexuality and gender performances do not fit the pre-existing sex-gender binary, hijras continue to be a mystery to the majority of people. This paper seeks to illuminate the paradoxical identity of the hijra community and examines how gendered behaviours and outward appearances are important to hijras in forging their identities in order to shed insight on their sexuality and gender identifications.

Keywords: Hijras, Gender, Identities, Sex, Heteronormative society, Transgender.

INTRODUCTION

Sexuality refers to a person's sexual desire. Sex refers to the act of being male, female, or transgender. Gender refers to the state of being male or female in relation to social and cultural distinctions. Consequently, it encompasses all sexual variation that is deemed unnatural by the mainstream system of sexual classification, including gays, lesbians, cross-dressers, transgender, bisexuality, sadomasochism, butch/femme, and other forms of sexual nonconformity. It challenges the notions of sexuality, gender, sex, identity or difference, and sameness that appear to be prevalent. Hence, it positions itself against everyone who is 'normal' not just heterosexuals. The many areas of our lives where gender inequity exists reinforce one another. For instance, health inequality may have an effect on schooling, which may then have an effect on career opportunities, and so forth. Gender inequality is a serious problem that needs to be addressed because attitudes do not change even when laws are implemented. Understanding the differences between concepts like gender, sex, gender identity, binary, and non-binary is a prerequisite for understanding gender inequality. Understanding the connection between sex and gender as well as how they differ could assist to simplify the complex debate over issues like gender identity. Sexist views still exist worldwide because changes in attitudes, particularly regarding the roles women may perform, have been sluggish, even in countries that have passed legislation to promote gender equality. The intricacy of gender inequality and related issues including sexism, gender, binary identities, and non-binary identities will be discussed in this article.

Modern authors aspire to visualise characters who fight with identity. As one of the most famous themes in literary literature, 'Identity Crisis' is a topic on which many literary writers focus due to the fact that everyone wants to be acknowledged in the society in which they live. Due to this, the majority of modern novelists concentrate on the issue of the search for identity. The difficulty in expressing one's own identity in a given community, however, is the current issue. As a result, anyone seeking recognition must work tirelessly to attain a particular status in society. In the past, identity crises for men and women have been considered. Yet it is vital that the so-called third gender be taken into consideration. Hence, in addition to feminine and masculine identities, there are a few different third-gender social norms or orders. Third-party transgender identity difficulties are disregarded, consciously or unwittingly, due to the importance of mainstream individuals or gender. In light of this, the term 'third-gender' or 'cis-gender' refers to those who identify neither as male nor female and are also known as sexual minorities. The heteronormative norms have their own unique set of social law and order. Despite the fact that they are born and raised like other people, they have been given the moniker 'transgendered' due to a small change in their physical characteristics or the way their biological systems function, as well as a particular mentality. They struggled to fit in because of their transgender status. Depending on their attitudes, behaviours, and the culture they belonged to, different people may use this name. As a result, 'hijras' is derived from the Urdu term 'hiji' which in Hindi means 'leaving one tribe' in the Hindi language.

The Hijra's identity is one that is constantly changing, and how they define and situate themselves in India's modern social and cultural environment might at times be different from how they are traditionally portrayed. The traditional nature of autobiography is challenged in the postmodern society, which gives the socially and culturally outcast people a voice. In order to challenge the mainstream narratives, the non-dominant communities have established an alternative discourse to tell their stories of racial, gender, and sexual inequality.

...autobiography is now often the mode that people turn to when they want their voices to be heard, when they speak for themselves and sometimes politically for others. Autobiography now has the potential to be the text of the oppressed and the culturally displaced, forging a right to speak both for and beyond the individual (Swindells 7).

The novel *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* deals with the problems and struggles that third gender people confront as well as their identity. This is actually her autobiography, which she originally wrote in Tamil under the title *Uruvamum* and had V. Geetha translate into English as *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*. In it, she discusses the covert problems with transgender people and the challenges they faced in trying to survive in Indian society. In reality, the author has thoroughly investigated all facets of transgender association, including the challenges faced and overcome with hijras. The author Revathi writes about her aspirations and dreams in addition to her social background in her village. The author asked a question at the start of the preface to the book. Although we frequently and loudly discuss about rights in our society, do the disadvantaged actually have access to these rights? She was therefore marginalised in this sense since she is a member of a sexual minority. As a result, the novel opens with a detailed description of Nammakal Town in the Salem District of Tamil Nadu, the author's hometown. This essay aims to examine the multifaceted process of gender invasion that the Indian 'hijra' community experiences by considering the travelogues of struggles that A. Revathi presents in her autobiography *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*, the first work of its kind in English from a member of the hijra community. In the foreword to the autobiography, author A. Revathi states her goals for publishing it in simple terms:

In our society we speak the language of rights loud and often. But do the marginalised really have access to these rights? Individuals are denied their rights in the name of sex, sexuality, caste and religion. I do not seek sympathy from society or the government. I seek to show that we hijras do have the right to live in this society (v-vi).

Transgender people in India are referred to as hijras, an ingrained 'third gender' that has been around for centuries. A specific type of transgendered individual is referred to as a 'physiological male who embraces a feminine gender identity, women's attire, and other feminine gender behaviours' (Hijra). The hijra minority in India is marginalised in terms of geography, the economy, and society. Hijras struggle to obtain work, receive official recognition for their feminine identities, or receive protection from the various legal and judicial systems. The majority of hijras labour for themselves doing sex work, begging, and religious/spiritual/superstitious blessings; they live together in rigid hierarchical family households and curses. Although there is clearly possibility for development, a hijra is not the same as a transgender male to female person.

Revathi was born and raised with her parents in that little town under the name Doraiswamy, which has feminine characteristics. Being the family's youngest child, he was very affectionate with his parents. Throughout his early years of school, Doraiswamy had a greater interest in participating in activities and games that were exclusively for girls. But strangely, one day after getting home from school, he wore his sister's skirt over his hip to pass for a girl. At the age of ten, Doraiswamy first experienced gender issues. His family, on the other hand, approached and treated him differently. But his neighbours noticed a change in his attitude. Thereafter, the vast majority of the villagers began to discuss Doraiswamy informally. Also, some of

Doraiswamy's friends and neighbours started referring to her as Number Nine and other feminine objects. He ignored all of these criticisms, though, and was unable to alter his naturally feminine behaviours.

As soon as I got home from school, I would wear my sister's long skirt and blouse, twist a long towel around my head and let it trail down my back like a braid. I would then walk as if I was shy bride, my eyes to the ground, and everyone would laugh. No one thought much of it then, for I was little (4).

Doraiswamy had various internal questions and misgivings that caused him confusion. He was so agonisingly timid that he bowed his head anytime he came across young men. He was pulled to them, but he questioned whether he shouldn't be attracted to women since he was a male. Days went along, and he continued to wonder whether he would find answers and whether anyone would truly understand how he felt. Revathi would don her sister's clothes as soon as she arrived home from school and wrap a towel around her head to simulate long hair. She previously imitated the bride's walk. Her family laughed at the incident, thinking it as a child's joke. During the Mariyamman festival, he was dressed as a *kurathi* (female gypsy), which led everyone to believe she was a real woman. She used to dance competently, attracting the attention and approval of the audience. In the attire of a woman, she sensed the awakening of her own nature. "To the world, it appeared that I was dressing up and playing a woman, but inside, I felt I was a woman" (12). Although these trans women were unaware of the presence of other trans individuals, the transsexual trope of being stuck in the wrong body could be detected in their early identity construction. According to Devor, most of the transsexuals realize this actuality only when they had undergone the stages of abiding anxiety, identity confusion and identity comparison, for many years, and it is a process which takes place at a much later stage. He states, "For many it is an "Aha!" kind of moment where everything that they have been feeling finally falls into place. Finally, they have found a mirror in which they can see themselves. Who they feel themselves to be makes sense to them for the first time. They have a name for what they feel and a possible course of action" (Devor 52).

A transgender person compares their behaviour to that of other transgendered or trans sexed people as well as to those who are of their original ascribed sex during the identity comparison stage in order to determine which is more appropriate. "Why did I love men? Was I mad? Was I the only one who felt this way? Or were there others like me, elsewhere in the world? Would I find them, if indeed they were there?" (14). He saw a group of males in his mid-teens who shared his interests, and he began to question if possibly these men were similar to him in that they were both male inside and feminine outside. He learned about the hijra community and 'Danda' after meeting them (which means sex). He wanted to change into a woman, wed an intelligent man, and then have sex. But when he was informed that becoming a woman was not at all simple and that he would need to travel to Mumbai or Delhi and live with women who wear saris and have undergone 'operations' his perspective was drastically altered. He ran away from home, went to Delhi, where his chosen 'guru,' lived, and asked her to take him. He had stolen some cash and earrings from her mother.

They prefer to adhere to some conventional traditions in the hijra community. The hijras community's rules are revealed through Revathi Nani, the grandmother. She also requests that Revathi adhere to the same rules and guidelines. Like the others, Revathi was compelled to participate in the traditional custom. But Revathi made the decision to act since she didn't like the hijras customs. Queer theory examines sexual minorities and gender issues. Although Revathi was born a guy, his gender doesn't fit the gesture as of late. He was unable to categorize himself as masculine. In Hindu society, having a feminine habit as a man considered a reproduction of sin. Revathi chose to discover that she was a woman. She therefore changed oneself to have a general dissimilarity and be transgender. Revathi enjoyed helping his mother out around the house, such as cleaning the front yard and assisting in the kitchen. Even at school, she used to solely play games for girls like five stones and hide and seek. She was strongly pushed during her time in school to transition to being a transgender person.

Hijras play the dholok, sing and dance, and this is called doli-baddai. They do this at weddings and during childbirth. People give them what they can afford – rice, wheat, a sari. hijras find out where there's a been a birth and send word to the family, saying that they would arrive on such-and-such day to bless the new born and they must be given baddai. (.....) Similarly, hijras go to marriage halls and sing and dance, teasing the groom and bride, which pleases them, and they too give money (47).

Revathi made the decision to work as a sex worker when she was twenty years old in order to satiate her sexual needs. She could only get close to being sexually satisfied in this fashion at the moment. She can only attract the wrong kind of attention, though, because she is a sex worker and a sexual minority. Although Revathi acknowledges that she has experienced joy, she also describes in dry terms the harsh realities of living as a hijra, including the threats, attacks, and rapes. She speaks in a matter-of-fact reportorial style as she details the brutality perpetrated against her body from customers, random rowdies, and police officers. Revathi wants us to experience her agony, but she doesn't sensationalize it; instead, she uses dramatic moments to express her spiritual and emotional traumas. In defiance of hijra tradition, Revathi accepted a salaried position at Sangama, where she learnt about her rights and what could be done to inform others about those rights. Revathi was given the words through Sangama to communicate her displeasure, her needs, her longing for her hijra sisters, and her discomfort in their small dwellings. Through the course of the novel, Revathi's story develops from straightforward to complex. The text is straightforward, sincere, and very honest despite never attempting creative stylization.

I realized what a burden a hijra's daily life is. Do people harass those who are men and women when they go out with their families? Why, a crippled person, a blind person – even they attract pity and people help them. If someone has experienced physical hurt, they are cared for both by the family and by the outsiders who come to know of it. But we – we are not considered human (83).

The terrible aspect of living as a transgender person is revealed in Revathi's life story. Indeed, she utilized literature as a weapon to protect her own race rather than to murder the people. Later, she found an appropriate forum, the World Social Forum, where she could defend herself as a woman and persuade society to define her as feminine. She began writing her memoirs with the assumption that the audience would instantly recognize her. She was, regrettably, forced to live in abject poverty, which drove her back to prostitution. In any case, she persisted in her writing and did not give up. She returned to Sangama once more. In conclusion, it is pretty evident what it is the author wants to achieve with this novel. She is not acting out of self-interest or for her own gain. In light of this, Revathi wants everyone, including the government, to treat transgender persons the same as regular non-transgender people. She actually wants to erase the distinction between sexual minority and the majority of society. She occasionally even urged society directly or indirectly, saying that every difficult fight would end in prosperity. Because Revathi's unwavering battling spirit and tenacity dramatically altered the lives of others.

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