

**Born in the Wrong Body:  
A Study of Select Contemporary Transgender  
Life Writings**

*Thesis  
submitted to the University of Calicut  
for the award of the Degree of*

**Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
English Language and Literature**

**V. S. ANITA**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT  
2020**

## **DECLARATION**

I, **V. S. Anita**, hereby declare that the dissertation titled **Born in the Wrong Body: A Study of Select Contemporary Transgender Life Writings** submitted to the University of Calicut for the Degree of **Doctor of Philosophy in English Language and Literature**, is an original bonafide work of research carried out by me under the supervision of **Dr.V. Prathiba**, Reader, Department of English, University of Calicut and that it has not formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, or similar title.

University of Calicut

Date:

**V. S. Anita**

Dept. of English

University of Calicut

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

*Virginia Woolf famously stated that women need financial independence and a room of their own to write fiction. My research experience showed me that I required immeasurable determination coupled with unending and tons of patience along with much support and cooperation from my family and friends. It has been a very long journey from the day I registered for research seven years back.*

*At the very outset, I express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Prathiba, without whose encouragement, my study would never have seen the light of day. Madam, you have been away physically (first abroad and later at Bengaluru) during most of my research work, yet I could always depend on you to listen to my wit's-end ravings (when I felt I had reached my lowest point); immediately you would hold my hand and very gently nudge me to get up and going. You have always been very understanding and very, very sweet to me. From the bottom of my heart, a very big "thank you Mam!!". As far as the HOD Dr. Sherrif is concerned, he has been extremely helpful and proffered great support, especially during the online Pre - Submission seminar. I also wish to extend my immense gratitude to other faculty members at the Department - Dr. M. V. Narayanan, Dr. Janaky Sreedharan and Dr. Umer Thasneem whose valuable suggestions and observations aided me in my work. The Department Library and the Calicut University C. H. Muhammad Koya Library with its vast online resources have greatly benefited me. The office staff in the English department are also remembered with love and gratitude. I also travelled to the Central University at Hyderabad and the English and Foreign*

*Languages University, which proved highly rewarding experiences. I place on record my thankfulness to the library staff at these two institutions.*

*I have been very lazy and stinting with cooking and other house work during my “work hours”. I respect, love and value my family for putting up with me on such occasions. I hereby wish to voice my immense gratitude and love to my husband Anoop and my lovely daughters, Arpitha and Ashitha for having been very patient and understanding whenever I have lost my cool. A very sincere and huge thanks to my dear brother Ashok and sister-in-law Sangeeta whose constant goading to “complete” my work, has often pushed me forward. Very often I have found it difficult to stick to my writing as I was juggling my teaching job, caring for my sick and nearly bed-ridden father (who passed away two years back) and attending to innumerable jobs in and around the house. However, words of encouragement from my family members kept me focused.*

*Last but not the least, the care and concern of my colleagues - Dr. V. G. Prasanth. A. Vinodkumar and Vidhya Viswanathan is greatly treasured and appreciated. They have often motivated me apart from helping me with official responsibilities.*

*I also wish to articulate my appreciation and thanks to Revathi Madam, Laxmi Madam and Dr. Manobi for their gracious assent to my request for personal interaction-cum- interview.*

*My parents have been the driving force in my life; they always exhorted me to put in the best I could in whatever I undertook. I dedicate my thesis to my late parents - Maj. (Retd.) C.V.Soman and Valsala Soman.*

*I wish to salute and pay humble tributes to the transgender persons for their fortitude and courage as well as their resilience which helps them to grow from strength to strength.*

*Date*

*V S Anita*

# CONTENTS

	<i>Page No.</i>
<b>Introduction</b>	1-43
Chapter 1	44-95
<b>Crisis of Misalignment: The Body/Gender Dichotomy</b>	
Chapter 2	96-138
<b>Metamorphosis: A Transition towards Self Actualization</b>	
Chapter 3	139-177
<b>The Post-Transition Scenario: Empowering the Community</b>	
<b>Conclusion</b>	178-206
<b>Appendices</b>	207-233
<b>Work Cited</b>	234-243

## **Introduction**

Contemporary findings in astronomy and physics are exploding all of the myths we have lived with for thousands of years. From the discovery of black holes, the expansion of chaos theory, and the recent discovery inspired by the Hubble telescope that there are at least 50 billion galaxies, our traditional ways of seeing and existing are being challenged .... Fixed ideas of gender bipolarism are wavering, forging a revolution on bodies and consciousness that embraces their complexity. From this new vantage the emergence of at least 50 billion galaxies of gender becomes a distinct possibility.

(Gordene O Mackenzie –“50 Billion Galaxies of Gender:  
Transgendering the Millenium”)

The observation that scientific and technological discoveries and developments fail to correct many misconceptions and remove societal prejudices, demands appropriate deliberation. Both the macrocosm and the microcosm have been exploited to satisfy innumerable needs of humankind. Other planets are being probed for habitable conditions which guarantee the possibility of human life there in future: many developed and some developing nations are executing space voyages for the same at tremendous expenditure. Simultaneously, increasing demand for energy compels scientists and researchers to search for alternative sources; the production of nuclear energy is being increased to meet the power requirements of many countries. The depths of the ocean have been investigated and

different new species are being discovered from various places; the precincts of volcanic eruptions have been photographed; the life cycle of wild life and birds have been researched and analyzed; different medical and surgical procedures help mankind to treat innumerable diseases which killed many in the past; the threat of diminishing petroleum resources has galvanized researchers to look towards alternate sources to fuel vehicles; laser and robotic surgeries are being performed to treat various ailments; different communication and satellite facilities enable persons to bridge vast geographical separation and numerous other developments enable people to lead better and longer lives. Mankind has almost, learnt to combat bacterial and viral epidemics through state-of-the-art research and medical science development. The Corona virus outbreak which originated from Wuhan in China towards the end of 2019 is still wrecking lives all over the world, even towards the end of 2020, with over fifty five millions afflicted and around 1.34 million dead. In spite of such enviable achievements, it is distressing to note that people make no attempts to make life on earth meaningful for all inhabitants. Political conflicts, greed for resources and religious-fundamentalism-funded terrorism make life for some people challenging. Likewise, certain social wrongs are taken for granted. No efforts are made to view and tackle larger social issues with understanding or compassion. A look at the social structure reveals that there is inequity not only between the higher strata and the impoverished class but also a cross section of most towns or cities all over the world will highlight how some categories of people are sidelined and denied human rights. Society comprises the homogeneous mass of people on one hand and the relatively devalued marginalized categories on the other.



The term “marginalization” connotes the basic central position of the dominant majority that sidelines certain minorities to the fringes of society. Those in the majority fail to acknowledge the presence as well as diverse characteristics of all others who are *dissimilar* from them. The social rejection and consequent exclusion of such groups, results in their peripheralisation: the fact that some people are subjected to blatant violation of human rights on the basis of their *differences* or challenges appears reprehensible and unjustifiable. Mainstream society, constituted mostly of *normative* persons, values the so-called *physically* or *intellectually useful* citizens; while others, including racial and ethnic minorities, physically as well as mentally challenged persons, the old and infirm and the diverse sexual and gender categories, are sidelined and pushed to the edges of society where they are neither able to sustain themselves, participate in social life nor find their potential, or hone their talents and capabilities to lead meaningful lives. Social exclusion of these groups often results in their political, economic and cultural exclusion as well. The unchallengeable reality is that society is anathema to anyone who is *different*: any person belonging to any of the aforementioned groups is peripheralised and subsequently subjected to exclusion. Such stigmatised groups are *different* from the privileged group and it is their *difference* which often influences their treatment by the latter.

This study attempts to analyze life writings by some contemporary transgender personalities and examine how these individuals are felt as *different* from other social beings. These gender minorities subvert societal gender norms in an attempt to assert their true gender identity, thereby also successfully establishing

themselves as an indispensable part of society. In order to understand the various alternately-sexed and diverse gendered groups, a basic knowledge of terms like *sex*, *gender*, *gender identity*, *sexuality* and *sexual orientation* is pertinent to investigate how certain *differences* often expose the sexual and gender minorities to discrimination, exploitation and violence from the *gender binary* groups which form mainstream society. The term *gender binary* is a reference to the male and the female sexed individuals as also the conviction that only these two sexes exist; these two are the *norm* and anything which is diverse is branded *deviant* or *abnormal*. *The Cambridge Dictionary* gives the following meanings of *sex*: “the state of being either male or female”, “all males considered as a group, or females considered as a group”, “physical activity between people involving the sexual organs” and so on ([dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/English/sex](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/English/sex)). According to the same dictionary, *gender* refers to: “the physical and/or social condition of being male or female”, “all males or all females, considered as one group” and so on. Put in other words, sex is the anatomical state while gender is a cultural construct since sex refers to one’s genital form while gender alludes to the social roles expected from one’s sex. *The Oxford Dictionary* designates “the feelings and activities connected with a person’s sexual desires” as *sexuality* ([oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/English/sexuality](http://oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/English/sexuality)). The *Web MD* defines *sexual orientation* as “a term used to refer to a person’s emotional, romantic and sexual attraction to individuals of a particular gender”, either male or female ([webmd.com/sex-relationships/guide/sexualorientation](http://webmd.com/sex-relationships/guide/sexualorientation)). Basically sexual orientation is of three types- heterosexuality, which designates attraction towards members of the opposite sex and which has become the norm as it is more common; homosexuality, which

signifies attraction towards members of one's own sex, and bisexuality, which alludes to feeling attracted to members of both the sexes. Probably because homosexuality and bisexuality are practised by, comparatively, lesser numbers, these two sexual practices are scorned and labelled *abnormal* while heterosexuality is designated as normative and thereby, accepted and indoctrinated.

Sexual minorities are generally clustered under the umbrella term *transgender*. The various categories under the comprehensive term *transgender* need elucidation. The *transgender* category comprises a spectrum more varied than the colours of the VIBGYOR: *gay* persons are men (however, nowadays *gay* is also being used for women) who are romantically and/or sexually attracted to people of the same sex and not the opposite sex, as experienced by heterosexual men; likewise, *lesbians* or homosexual women enjoy romantic and/or physical relationships with women; the *bisexual* group which forms sexual alliances with men as well as women and the last comprehensive group of *transgender* individuals comprising the cross-dressers, the transgender clan and the transsexual people.

The cross-dresser, formerly referred as transvestite, alludes to one who cross-dresses as a member of the opposite sex usually for sexual satisfaction while the transsexual individual is one who believes he/she is born with the wrong genital organs and gets SRS (Sexual Reassignment Surgery, also known as Sexual Alignment Surgery, Gender Confirmation Surgery or even Gender Affirmation Surgery) done along with hormonal treatment in an attempt to live as one of the opposite sex and gender. After surgery, the person is called a trans man (if a woman has undergone surgery to become a man) or a trans woman (if the male has got

operated to become a woman). To become a trans man, a woman undergoes mastectomy (surgical removal of breasts) and/or hysterectomy (surgical removal of uterus) and gets phalloplasty (surgical construction of a penis) in the place of vagina. Phalloplasty is done with grafted skin from the arm, thigh, back or abdomen and later a penile implant may be done. In order to become a trans woman, a man can get castrated, but normal feminine physiological conditions like menstruation or child bearing may not be possible in the present situation. With the help of hormones, breast development is possible; some also resort to silicon breast implant to appear like women. Vaginoplasty, construction of vagina is also resorted to by trans women to experience the genitals of a normal woman. Hormonal treatment may help in the development of masculine and feminine characteristics to some extent in those desirous of transcending their natal gender. In future, scientists probably may be able to recreate the desired bodily and physiological features of “normal” males and females in trans men and trans women. The *transgender* persons also believe they are born with a mismatch in their body and gender and either reconstruct their bodies to match their gender identity or prefer to avoid surgery by merely living as members of the opposite gender. In India, the term “transgender” is commonly used for all the three categories, the transsexual, the transgender and the cross-dresser, that constitute the wide group of *transgender*. Living Smile Vidya, A. Revathi, Manobi Bandopadhyay and Laxminarayan Tripathi use both the terms *transgender* and *woman* intermittently to refer to themselves. Most of the transgender individuals experience *gender dysphoria*, which was earlier known as *gender identity disorder*. The *American Psychiatric Association* defines gender dysphoria as “a conflict between a person’s physical or assigned gender and

the gender with which he/she/they identify” ([www.psychiatry.org/what-is-gender-dysphoria](http://www.psychiatry.org/what-is-gender-dysphoria)). The fact that the term has lost its negative connotative element of *disorder* points to the earlier prejudice in medical and psychiatry academia. Those experiencing gender dysphoria are uncomfortable with the incongruity of their natal sex and the gender they think they are. They may also feel discomfort with expected social roles of their natal gender. The “LGBTQQ2IPA community” (consisting of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, trans, queer, questioning, two-spirit, intersex, pansexual and allies) as stated by Michelle Walks believes it is extensively varied in its composition (““We’re Here and We’re Queer”: An Introduction to Studies in Queer Anthropology”, 56 ). The colourful rainbow pride flag, also called the equality flag, is used during pride marches to represent the various sexual and gender personalities which combine to form the transgender family. As per Michelle Walks, apart from lesbians, gays, trans persons, there are: the *queers*, who claim non-conformity to the gender binary norm; the *questioning*, who are unclear about their gender identity; the *two-spirit*, which refers to the indigenous American tribes who have two spirits (the male and the female) within them and perform rituals due to their third gender status, and finally, the *pansexuals* who are attracted to others, irrespective of their gender (15). All other varieties of non-conforming individuals are referred as *allies*. GBTQIA is the commonly used comprehensive acronym that includes: *queer*, those whose gender, gender expression and/or sexuality do not conform to the normal and thereby dominant gender expectations; the *intersex*, which is composed of persons who possess both male and female sexual characteristics, that is, they may be placed in an intermediate position between the sexes, and the *asexual*, which as the name suggests, points to one who does not have any sexual feeling. It is pertinent to note

that an asexual person differs from a celibate; while the former has no inclination for sex, the latter deliberately chooses to abstain from sex. Thus the wide spectrum of LGBTQIA is a social reality and the mainstream society needs to overcome its denial and accept each group with its particular characteristics. The concept of *gender identity*, defined as “a person’s internal sense of being male, female, some combination of male and female, or neither male nor female” by *Merriam Webster Dictionary* is a very significant term as far as gender minorities are concerned ([merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gender%20 identity](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gender%20identity)). The transgender persons are born with incongruous body and mind; a transgender *female* feels she is a girl *trapped* in a male body while a transgender *male* is convinced that s/he is actually a man in a female body. It is this conviction of the transgender persons which has been incorporated in the title of this study. The transgendered person thinks that he/she has been born with mismatching genitals and it becomes imperative that the incongruity be corrected: since one cannot transform the psyche, he/she strives to correct the anatomy to match the gender.

In India the transgender persons are generally referred as hijras, though terms like aravani, jogta, jogappa may also be used in different parts of the country. Before the coming of the British, the hijra community was socially accepted and looked upon with respect as it believed that their blessings and curses were powerful. The harsh and prudish legal system of the British that was followed in India resulted in the social exclusion of the hijras: in the pre British society, the hijras participated in weddings, collected badhai from shops and sex work was also practiced by a few. *The Criminal Tribes Act of 1871* penalized and stigmatized the transgender

communities, along with other caste individuals. Shubha Chacko and Arvind Narrain explain the *Criminal Tribes Act of 1871* as a bizarre legislation which deviated from the spirit of the *IPC* or the *Indian Penal Code* ( “Transcending the Binaries: Transgender Exclusions in Law and Policy”, 4). The *IPC* demanded an accusation against a guilty person to be proved beyond doubt in the court; the British authorities, however, disregarded this salient feature while dealing with some tribes and communities, especially those “addicted to the systematic commission of non-bailable offences” (5). The members of these communities were branded criminals by birth. Men, women and even children were liable to be prosecuted for being born into these groups. Narrain explains, “The idea of criminal tribes was based on the notion that ‘crime’ as a profession passed on from one generation of criminal caste to another: like a carpenter would pass on his trade to the next generation, hereditary criminals would pass on their profession to their offspring” (5). The movement of these people was restricted; the police proved to be an omnipresent threat to such communities. Acrobats, singers, dancers, tight rope walkers, fortune tellers and such individuals were considered “a threat to the order of sedentary societies” (5). The criminal aspect of sexual non-conformity was included in the 1897 amendment to the *Criminal Tribes Act of 1871* and it was renamed as *An Act for the Registration of Criminal Tribes and Eunuchs* (5). Consequently, the transgendered people, who had a fairly decent life till then, became targets of the legal authorities. Many restrictions were imposed on them and they were imprisoned on trivial issues. Gradually the transgendered group became a stigmatized group; they lived apart from the mainstream society and took up begging and sex work for their livelihood since their performances at weddings and childbirths could not procure sufficient income.

However, in contemporary Indian society many transgender individuals have struggled hard and reached various enviable positions through hard work and consistent persistence. Some of the very prominent among the transgender individuals in India are: Kalki Subramaniam, Shabnam Mausi, Padmini Prakash, Prithika Yashini, Anjali Ameer, Joyita Mondal, Zara Sheikh, Gauri Sawant, and Kajal, to name a few. Kalki, from Tamil Nadu, is not only a journalist but also a writer, an actor, an activist and a painter. Even though her family was supportive about her decision to change her gender, she experienced ridicule and bullying at the hands of schoolmates and teachers. Through her persistent hard work she acquired two masters' degrees, one in *Journalism* and the other in *Communication and International Relations*: later she founded the *Sahodari Foundation* for the empowerment of her community members. Kalki has published many poems in Tamil as well as articles and essays in online and print media, apart from being a painter. Shabnam Mausi could not attend school since her family did not support her but her hard work enabled her to become the first elected transgender Member of Legislative Assembly from Sohagpur in Shahdol, Madhya Pradesh in 1998. Padmini Prakash was the first transgender television anchor to appear on television on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2015, India's sixty-eighth Independence Day, some months after the historic Supreme Court ruling which recognized the "transgendered" person as a legal third gender. Padmini is also an actor and transgender activist. Prithika was born Pradeep; she completed her graduation and left home when her parents were unable to comprehend her condition. In Chennai, she was accepted by the transgender family and later got sex surgery done to become a female. She applied for the post of a police officer but was rejected since there was no vacancy for a *transgender*. She



went to court and managed to get a decision in her favour and finally became a police officer, as she had desired all along. The transgender personality Anjali Ameer ran away from home as her family disapproved of her wish to transition. She stayed in Coimbatore and Bengaluru before transitioning. She was a model before she landed a role in the film *Peranbu* co starring the Malayalam film actor Mammooty. She is now studying Malayalam literature at a college in Calicut. Joyita Mondal, a transgender activist, joined the official post of a judge at Uttar Dinajpur's Islampur Court in West Bengal after a long period of struggle. Earlier she had been the founder secretary of DNAS (Dinajpur Notun Aalo Society) which works for the LGBT community. Similarly, Zara Sheikha had always wanted to live as a woman but was bullied and harassed for her gender assertion. She joined *UTS Global*, an MNC in Technopark near Thiruvananthapuram and is the first among the transgender community to do so. Gauri Sawant, born as a male named Ganesh, transitioned to a woman named Gauri and founded *Sakshi Char Chowghi*, a trust which provides counselling and assists trans persons apart from helping HIV infected people. Kajal experienced gender dysphoria as a child. She was scolded by her teachers for sitting among girls and playing with them. She reached Mumbai and transitioned at the young age of thirteen. Later she became the first transgender radio jockey in the coastal town of Mangaluru in Karnataka.

In contemporary society, as from the traditional times, the hijras stay together in a parallel social set up with its own rules, regulations and rituals. There are several families of hijras, called "gharanas" and each gharana has a "nayak" (also spelt naik) who is the topmost leader, followed by many "gurus" who form the

second tier in the community. The “guru” has “chelas” or disciples and most chelas stay and work for their guru. The guru’s guru is called “nani” while the chelas under a guru consider each other as “gurubai”. The hierarchical set up of the hijra community is strict but if a chela is unwilling to continue under her guru, she can pay an amount as fine and accept another guru from another gharana. Their customs and rituals are strange and often kept secretive and people from the mainstream are unaware of hijra traditions. In order to become a hijra, one undergoes a ritual named “reet”. Traditionally, the hijras earned money by “badhai” or seeking alms by clapping hands in a distinctive manner. The distinctive hijra clap is intentionally loud to attract attention. In childhood itself the transgender persons are often forced to flee their homes since parents fail to realize the predicament of their children. Such individuals are then compelled to join the *hijra* community. The internationally acclaimed transgender activist, Laxminarayan Tripathi writes,

The word ‘hij’ refers to the soul. The body in which the holy soul resides is called ‘hijra’. The individual is not important here. What is (sic) important is the soul and the hijra community that possesses it. God loves the hijra community and has created a special place for it outside the man-woman frame. A hijra is neither a man nor a woman. She is feminine, but not a woman. He is masculine, a male by birth, but not a man either. (*Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*, 39-40).

In order to enrich our understanding of the nomenclatures of the diverse gender categories and the issues therein, let us take a look into the critical theories which deal with these notions. These theories or methodologies of analysis have

posed an incipient and significant challenge to essentialist models of sexuality and gender. Arguing for a fluid and performative understanding of gender and sexuality, queer theories and practices have been and are still interrogating the normalizing logics of heteronormativity and hetero/gendered assumptions about identities. Therefore a short overview of some of the theories is attempted here.

Michel Foucault's most popular study in queer theory is *The History of Sexuality* in three volumes. While the first volume is subtitled *The Will to Knowledge*, the second and third are named *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self* respectively. In his *History of Sexuality Volume 1* (1980), Foucault analyses the concept of sex as a circuitous edifice, through deconstructing the normative categories of sex. Foucault critiques the hypothesis of oppression which was a discovery of the Victorian society (15). According to Foucault, Victorian society was suspected to be one where sex was taboo while silence and censorship was forced. He contests this view and claims that sexuality was a popular discourse in that society. In fact, he mentions, the profuse discourse of sexuality created the category of the "homosexual". The main focus of Foucault's text is that it refutes the stability or constancy of one's gender identity. Likewise, it also contests the idea that one's identity is influenced by gender and/or sexual orientation. The "repressive hypothesis" of the nineteenth century scorned sexual activities, especially, if not between married couples. Any sexual activity outside marriage was forbidden, or rather, repressed.

Foucault proposes that the expression of wrong sexual actions was, however, often observed in prostitution and psychiatry. In the twenty first century, this

repression is still prevalent. Discourses on sex are only observed in academic field or in psychiatric clinics. According to Foucault, sexual discourses are a form of political liberation. He avers that language and knowledge have a political aspect since the person who decides what is to be talked about, also resolves what must be known. Foucault states that power is exerted to repress discourses on sex or sexuality. Only marriage is given the monopoly of discourses on sexuality: sexuality outside marital relationships is banned. He hypothesizes that the emergence of the middle class caused repression of sex. When the middle class expended their energy in work and started earning money, they looked down upon sex for pleasure and other activities.

Foucault argues that power, knowledge and discourse seem to be linked in the “repressive hypothesis”. The ones with power exert their authority over sexual discourse. How sex can be discussed, who can involve in its discussion; all these aspects are controlled by the powerful. Non-reproductive sexual relationships have not reduced in modern times; in fact many sexual “deviances” have been observed. Foucault acknowledges that knowledge about sex has taught us about the following categories- transsexual, transvestite and the transgender.

With her seminal work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1980) Judith Butler presented a pioneering text of queer theory. It proved to be an influential work in feminism, philosophy and criticism as well. The notion of feminism is contested by her as it categorizes men and women as distinctly different from each other; she states about women that “the very subject of women is no longer understood in stable or abiding terms” (*Gender Trouble: Feminism and the*

*Subversion of Identity*, 1). Butler adds that women are not a unified “homogeneous” group: differences of race and class distinguish one from the other. She quotes Freud who advances the view that one identifies with one’s sex and desires the opposite. Butler proposes that women are expected to behave in a feminine manner while men, in a masculine way. Problems arise when a man behaves like a woman and a woman like a man. Butler suggests that a man does not feel “masculine” all the time and a woman “feminine” all the time. She observes that gender is not the core aspect of one’s identity; rather it is a performance or achievement and not a biological factor. Butler’s identification of “performativity” as being the core of one’s identity was a novel way of defining gender.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *The Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) proved to be a bold intervention in the field of queer studies. This work may be considered as a development of her earlier work *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire* (1985). Sedgwick’s deconstructivist approach clarifies that all kinds of binaries, especially heterosexual/homosexual, is so constituted that one (heterosexual) subordinates the other (homosexual). She contests the binary notion of gender and sexual orientation and argues that there is no single definition of sexuality. “Coming out” is also seen to be harmful for homosexuals since while being closeted, one has the fear of being found out; simultaneously when one comes out, one is exposed to homophobia all around. It is a contradiction that while one expresses one’s gender openly, one is mocked and/or prone to violence; being closeted and then being discovered, however, makes one a cheat and a fraud.

Nancy Chodorow maintains that “gender difference is not absolute, abstract, or irreducible; it does not involve an essence of gender” (“Gender, Relation, and Difference in Psychoanalytic Perspective”, 9). She holds that “gender differences” are “socially and psychologically created and situated” (9). Chodorow, further adds, that “difference and gender difference” are “created relationally, that is, in relationship” (9). She professes that “difference” cannot be understood “apart from the relational construction”. According to Chodorow, “core gender identity”, the sense of one being male or female is “established in the first two years concomitantly with the development of the sense of *self*” (italics added, 15).

Annamarie Jagose in *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (1997) gives a lucid and precise picture of her perspective of queer theory. Jagose considers queer theory to be a part of the same-sex love in the nineteenth century which paved the way for gay studies, women’s movement and lesbian feminism. She avers that the validity of queer theory rests in its contesting ideas of sexual identities. According to her, queer theory aims to create novel ways of studying sexual identities and concepts like sexuality, gender, man and woman.

Since hijras are a unique Indian category among the transgender group, a look at some of the Indian theorists will also be highly beneficial. Zia Jaffrey’s *The Invisibles: A Tale of the Eunuchs of India*, 1996, is a narrative of her travels through the country to research the lives of the hijras. She builds up the narrative with accounts from various quarters; accounts of travellers, policemen, journalists and hijras themselves.

Serena Nanda's seminal work *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India*, 1999, is perhaps the first anthropological book about the hijra community. In this book Nanda presents the personal accounts of various hijras she met, thereby introducing the cultural and religious traditions of the community to the reader.

Arvind Narrain's book *Queer: Despised Sexuality, Law and Social Change*, 2004, contests the intolerance, the prejudices and disbeliefs regarding the hijras. He argues that the colonial legal structure resulted in the marginalization of the community. Along with a paradigm shift in the legal aspect, pertinent and immediate positive changes in religion, family, school and media, can help ameliorate the condition of the hijras.

Gayatri Reddy's serious intervention in hijras' lives helped in the publication of *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India*, 2006. She mentions the intersectionality of religion, gender and class with hijra identity and the significant place given to the concept of honour in a hijra's life. She argues that the hijras subvert the normative notions of gender, family and religion.

*Same-Sex Love in India: A Literary History*, 2008, edited by Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai, analyses the myths and literature written in the country to investigate the hijra community. The book charts the literary history of queer writing beginning from the Sanskrit epics to cover contemporary fiction.

Amara Das Wilhelm's *Tritiya Prakriti: People of the Third Sex*, 2010, studies the notion of the third sex and related aspects of the third gender behaviour

prevalent in ancient Indian society. He calls for the inclusion of the sexual and gender minorities within mainstream society.

*Nothing to Fix: Medicalisation of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*, 2016, edited by Arvind Narrain and Vinay Chandran elaborates on the complicity of the legal structure and the medical fraternity in the marginalization and oppression of the sexual minorities. He blames the medical fraternity for playing a significant role in its attempts to “normalize” queer identities. He exhorts for the sensitization of healthcare workers who are equally biased and homophobic towards the gender and sexual minorities.

The life writings analyzed in this study are by Indian transgender writers-activists: A. Revathi, Living Smile Vidya, Laxminarayan Tripathi and Manobi Bandyopadhyay. While Revathi, Laxmi and Vidya have penned autobiographies, Manobi’s is a biography. Philippe Lejeune, the theorist in autobiographical studies, defines an autobiography as a “retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality” (*On Autobiography*, 4). Hermione Lee, on the other hand asserts that the term “life writing” is used when the fine line between autobiography and biography is unclear: “The term ‘life writing’ is sometimes used when the distinction between biography and autobiography is being deliberately blurred, or when different ways of telling a life story- memoir, autobiography, biography, diary, letters, autobiographical fiction- are being discussed together” (*Body Parts: Essays on Life Writing*, 100). Thus three autobiographies, a biography and a book each by two writers have been included in this study. These works have been investigated



from the queer theory perspective. Queer Theory, which developed in 1990s, is an offshoot of gay, lesbian and feminist studies; its thrust is on sexual identities that act as representations and simultaneously it contests the traditional gender binary norm as well as heterosexuality. The word “queer” is probably derived from the modern Irish *cuair* which means “crookedness, state of being bent or hollow” like the adjective *cuar* with a similar meaning of “curved, bent, crooked”. In the beginning it was used for weapons and implements and conveyed a sense of “something twisted” ([www.tandfonline.com](http://www.tandfonline.com)>pdf). In English the word “queer” suggests “strange”, “unnatural”, “unconventional” and so on. When used for persons, it attributes socially improper deportment. The gay liberation movement propelled the gays and lesbians to study themselves and their representation in literature and culture which further led to the analysis of the construction of gender and sexual orientations. Gayle Rubin’s seminal essays “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex” in 1975 and “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality” (1984) postulated a theory fundamental to gay and lesbian studies: there is a relationship between gender difference and sexual difference but they are not the same. While gender difference points to the meaning of the binary term “man/woman”, sexual difference deals with the dualistic terms “heterosexual/homosexual”. Gay and lesbian studies examine the social systems which define notions of sexuality being expressive acts and also as identity. It also analyses how homosexuality and heterosexuality were explained in social history. These studies also explain that some cultures and some periods in history have considered homosexuality as “normal” and even “moral”. Henry Abelove’s 1985 essay “Freud, Male Homosexuality and the Americans” clarifies Freud’s view of

male sexuality to be much less morbid and more complicated than generally accepted.

Albertson M Fineman suggests that as far as feminism and queer theory are concerned, they may be envisioned to be connected since both complicate the relationship between gender identity, genital sex and sexual orientation (“Introduction: Feminist and Queer Legal Theory”, 4). According to Fineman, feminism “is linked to a conception of gender identity centered on the idea of a female sex (biologically, culturally, legally and socially determined), the degree to which sex and sexuality are considered necessarily central or an all-encompassing component of the feminist analytic remains in dispute, with competing feminist approaches apparent” (4). Fineman goes on to claim that for the feminist theorists, sexuality was not an important aspect. This was discovered much later when feminism attempted to challenge discrimination and usher equality between men and women on the basis of sex; women’s alternative sexuality was also grounds of their oppression. Consequently, there has been inequality and injustice even based on women’s same-sex preferences.

Monique Wittig’s essay, “One is Not Born a Woman” (1981) tries to study gender oppression due to one’s sexuality. “Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation” (1988) by Teresa de Lauretis probes issues of lesbian visibility and feminist definition. Queer Studies have also been immensely influenced by Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* as well as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire* (1985). Foucault investigates social constructionist norms of sexuality by applying religion, politics and

economics. He avows that no model of sexuality is natural or pervasive universally. Sedgwick in *Between Men* proposes the notion of “homosociality” which refers to asexual bonds between and among men that developed in the nineteenth century Britain due to more interaction among them in the workplace. She goes on to maintain that though *homosociality* is antithetical to homosexuality, the two often end up negating each other. Queer theory also borrows from feminism’s concept of gender being an indispensable element of one’s self and also owes to gay/ lesbian theories with their observation of the culturally constructed sexual acts and identities. One major difference of queer theory from gay/lesbian studies is that the latter looks into normal and abnormal sexual behaviour, while the former has a larger horizon and includes all the sexual activities and identities which are labelled “deviant” in society. Peter Barry questions whether “the underlying question in queer theory is whether it is gender or sexuality which is more fundamental in personal identity...It tends to endorse ‘experimental’ forms of sexuality” (*Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, 143). Donald Hall, however, describes queer theories as “positioned abrasively toward notions of the normal” while queer texts are expressed as “explicitly or implicitly denaturalized notions of sexual normality and that provide evidence of the mutability and variability of human sexual desire and performance in excess of the hetero/homobinary” (*Queer Theories* 149).

A look at history reveals that the term “queer theory” was coined by the academic and critical theorist Teresa de Lauretis. It was the title of a conference organized by her in 1990 at the University of California. A 1991 article by Teresa de

Lauretis was named “Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities” in which she contests the norm of heterosexuality, apart from claiming that lesbian and gay studies are not to be considered as a single “entity” and the idea that race plays a significant role in the formation of “sexual bias”. In short Queer theory may be said to critique all that is included in non-normative and/or deviant categories, especially sexual acts and identities. It includes in its scope of analysis, all types of deviant sexual and gender behaviour as well as non-normative sexualities.

According to Queer theory, sexual behaviour, ideas linking sexual behaviour with sexual identities and all kinds of normative as well as deviant sexualities are socially constructed. It rejects the concept of sexuality being an essentialist category, which is seen in feminism and gay and lesbian studies. It also affirms that sexuality is not biologically determined and cannot be judged by traditionally established standards of morality. This theory challenges the prevalent beliefs about gender and sexual identity. Apart from contesting the existing theories and beliefs, it attempts to inculcate novel ideas, promote new ways of observing, analyzing and elaborating human experience. However, according to Judith Butler, queer theory is pitted against major core issues of gay and lesbian studies. Butler postulates her unease with “lesbian theories, gay theories for ... identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression” (*Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, 13-14). Butler further asserts that heterosexuality is a compulsory performance that may end in failure. In *Gender Trouble* she supplements

Heterosexuality is always in the process of imitating and approximating its own phantasmatic idealization of itself- and failing .... Indeed in its efforts to naturalize itself as the original, heterosexuality must be understood as a compulsive and compulsory representation that can only produce the effects of its own originality; in other words, compulsory heterosexual identities, those ontologically consolidated phantasms of 'man' and 'woman', are theatrically produced effects that posture as grounds, origins, the normative measure of the real". (*Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 21)

About queer theory, Annamarie Jagose says that it,

has come to be used differently sometimes as an umbrella term for a coalition of culturally marginal sexual self-identifications and at other times to describe a nascent theoretical model which has developed out of more traditional lesbian and gay studies. What is clear even from this brief and partial account of its contemporary deployment is that queer is very much a category in the process of formation. It is not simply that queer has yet to solidify and take on a more consistent profile, but rather that its decisional indeterminacy, its elasticity is one of its constituent characteristics. (*Queer Theory: An Introduction* 1)

Later Jagose adds

Queer describes those gestures or analytical models which dramatize incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex,

gender and sexual desire. Resisting that model of stability-which claims heterosexuality as its origin, when it is more properly its effect- queer focuses on mismatches between sex, gender and desire ... queer locates and exploits the incoherencies in those three terms which stabilize heterosexuality. Demonstrating the impossibility of any 'natural' sexuality, it calls into question even such apparent unproblematic terms as 'man' and 'woman'. (*Queer Theory: An Introduction*, 3)

J Tilsen and D Nylund state "Queer theory does not merely complicate the hegemonic assumptions with regard to the connection between gender identity, anatomical sex and sexual orientation, but it totally rejects biological theory of identities" ("Homonormativity and Queer Youth Resistance: Reversing the Reverse Discourse", 8).

Since queer alludes to someone whose difference is never innately experienced by the cisgendered, the transgendered face bigotry and violence from the latter who constitute the majority of the social structure. The term "cisgender" refers to the person whose gender corresponds to his/her natal sex. *Transphobic* attitudes and violence unleashed by the dominant group is targeted towards the sexual minority groups just as the predominant social majority marginalizes ethnic and other minorities and often subjects them to cruel and barbaric ways of violence and torture. *Transphobia* denotes the emotional feelings of anger, disgust, fear and revulsion against those who do not conform to societal expectations of a typical male or female. The dominantly heterosexual society tends to stigmatise those who are alternately sexed; so while the stigmatized persons lack social acceptance and

support, the dominant majority considers itself justified in transphobic reactions against the former.

William Turner mentions the peculiar feature of the concept of *identity*. He writes of how, on one hand, “identity” connotes certain uniqueness; how each individual supposedly possesses an identity entirely particular to him/her, one that no other human shares (*A Genealogy of Queer Theory*, 31). On the other hand, such unique identity depends necessarily on certain basic similarities or commonalities in order to become recognizable as human. As Turner elaborates,

Identity in the sense of uniqueness implies that each human is a category unto himself or herself. Yet the peculiar requirements of identity politics in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century increasingly point up the ways in which categories of identity fragment those supposedly unique individual and significantly determine the options open to any given one of them. (31-32)

T. Garner explains

Becoming is a highly productive concept in transgender studies and in theoretical perspectives on the body in general because of its capacity to provide a way of reconsidering the nature of the body and body modification. In particular, it has the potential to undermine the accusation that trans bodies are unnatural or constructed”. (*Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 30)

He refers to Nikki Sullivan who talks of “explicit, visible and transformational procedures” associated with transgender bodily changes

(*Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 31). She mentions the trans body as being “marked, that which is becoming (strange or other), always situated in opposition to the original body, which is uncritically associated with being (natural)” (31). Garner mentions that for Sullivan “being is becoming; the nature of the body is always already constructed” (31).

In *The Psychology of Prejudice and Discrimination*, Bernard E. Whitley and Mary E. Kite cite Crocker et al. who use the term “marked” to refer to the marginalized while the privileged group are labelled “marker” (420). The marked persons are “devalued, spoiled or flawed in the eyes of the others” (Crocker et al, 1998, 504). Such a type of dehumanization results in adverse situations for the humiliated individuals. The advantaged dominant group denigrates the stigmatized persons because of cultural and historical reasons. In the same work, Whitley Jr. and Kite cite Edward Jones et al. who mention the five aspects of *course*, *concealability*, *aesthetic qualities*, *origin* and *peril* which fashion stigmas (421).

1. Course-Benign stigmas are often temporary; that is the course of the stigma is short... An individual’s ethnicity is typically part of his or her lifelong identity. Another term that is sometimes used is *stability*; some stigmas are perceived to be stable, or permanent, whereas others are perceived to be unstable and so can change over time. In general, people believe that physically based stigmas, such as blindness or cancer, are stable and that mental-behavioural stigma, such as drug abuse or obesity, are unstable (Weiner, Perry and Magnusson, 1998).



2. Concealability- Some stigmas are concealable, which means they can be hidden or controlled by the stigmatized person....Many gay men and lesbians, for example, are not open about their relationships out of fear of social rejection, loss of employment, or the threat of physical violence; as a result they often find themselves lying about or hiding an important part of their life and they feel guilt and shame because they must do so (Meyer, 2003).
3. Aesthetic qualities-Aesthetics refers to what is beautiful or appealing...many stereotypes are triggered by physical appearance cues (Friske and Taylor, 1991) and many stigmas are based on this dimension as well...One reliable indicator of physical attractiveness is facial symmetry, or the degree to which the left and right sides of the face are mirror images of each other. (Langlois and Roggman,1990). Individuals with facial disfigurement typically do not meet the standard and are likely to be stigmatized.
4. Origin –This term refers to how the stigma came to be and whether its onset was under the control of the stigmatized individual. Stigmas perceived to be controllable include drug addiction, acquisition of HIV, and obesity; those perceived to be uncontrollable include cancer and heart disease (Weiner et al.) .... When people believe that a stigma is uncontrollable, they feel more pity and less anger towards the stigmatized individual compared with when the stigma is perceived as controllable (Dijker and Koomen, 2003; Weiner et al. 1988). This

viewpoint is evident in this excerpt from a letter to the editor that appeared in the *Chronicle Review*: “Race is something that a person has no control over; hence racism is wrong. Homosexuality is a choice a person makes, and therefore it is not wrong to disagree with it” (Colvin, 2003). . . . Bernard Whitley (1990) found that people who believed that sexual orientation was controllable had more negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men than did people who believed sexual orientation was not controllable.

5. Peril-Members of some stigmatized groups are perceived, correctly or incorrectly, to be dangerous. Persons with a mental illness, for example, are stereotypically perceived to be dangerous, even though statistically they are no more likely to commit violent crime than people not so diagnosed (Corrigan and Penn, 1999). In general, groups assumed to be more dangerous are more stigmatized than groups perceived as less dangerous (Jones et al., 1984).(421-423).

Very often, societal ignorance about the sexual and gender minorities makes them vulnerable to stigmatization. Whitley and Kite claim that prejudice and discrimination not only affect academic and economic progress of a stigmatized person, it also influences one’s health, both physical as well as mental (443). Prolonged exposure to invidious behaviour can induce nervous tension in stigmatized persons. Most adolescents undergo conflict during their sexual identity development but gay, lesbians and other alternate sexualities cannot easily express their sexual preferences; they may face “personal rejection or physical and verbal

abuse”, according to Pilkington and D’Augelli, (1995). Heterosexuals can easily mention and discuss their attraction to members of the opposite sex but when a queer person, especially a gay or a lesbian attempts to “come out” (frankly articulate in public their attraction for a member of their own sex) they may either be “rejected” or subjected to “physical and verbal abuse” (Whitley and Kite, 443). In fact, Rotheram-Borus and Fernandez, (1995), assert that lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) persons who express their true sexual preferences to family and friends face a greater risk for a suicide attempt than LGBs who have not dared to leave the “closet”. It is hardly surprising that transgendered individuals also face similar forms of discrimination or transphobia, which leads to their marginalization.

The marginalization of the sexual minorities’ calls for immediate reparation, and the simultaneous implementation of appropriate and meaningful measures for their inclusion in the social domain to enable them to lead fruitful lives, will revolutionalise their insecure existence. Through their subversion of the gender binary, the concomitantly invisible as well as hyper visible trans persons not only become positively visible but also succeed in celebrating their gender identity. Through their gender assertion, they also empower others in their community to challenge societal norms and claim their rightful place in society. Mainstream society is predominantly gender binary and variations in the case of one’s sexuality or sexual orientation is looked upon with suspicion and ridicule. The question of difference needs to be addressed and tackled in order to acknowledge and recognize that those who are dissimilar have every right to be so and attempts to homogenize them are futile. All attempts to impose *normal* attitudes and opinions of gender

binary norm on the alternately sexed and, the insistence that conventional sexual identities must be accepted and followed since they conform to the orthodox and appropriate expectations of what an individual ought to be, may be considered unreasonable and unrealistic. Political correctness makes the majority impose itself on the minorities, compelling them to act as the former does. The problematization of adhering to the politically correct does not permit any allowances to those who are loyal to their individual preferences. Who decides what is politically correct is a majority in society but simply being the majority in numbers cannot and should not entitle anyone to dictate terms to others. Political correctness cannot be so merely by reason that the majority is of that view. The autobiographical narratives of many transgender and transsexual writers inform the reader of the gross and inhumane atrocities faced by them. Their travails begin from home itself; many parents, unaware of *transgenderism* or *transsexualism*, cannot fathom why their children are *different* from other *normal* children. Parents are at a loss to know that their children are not like others; these children feel they are trapped within their bodies and only through appropriate measures they are able to realize their actual identity and thereby find and create their rightful place in the world.

In this context, it becomes pertinent to take a look at the different countries where homosexuality is legally sanctioned and same-sex marriage is allowed. Neha Kumari in her doctoral thesis presents a detailed analysis of the countries which support homosexuality and transgender sex/gender change. A chronological list of these countries is as follows-

1. France was the first country to decriminalize homosexual relations as early as 1791. Same-sex marriage was legalized in France in 2013, while gender change in transgender persons was legally allowed in 2009.
2. In 1811, Netherlands became the first country to sanction same-sex marriage in 2001; since 1985 gender change for the transgender individuals has been possible.
3. Brazil revoked its anti-sodomy laws in 1831 and same-sex marriage was legally permitted in 2013. Transgender people can opt for gender change since 2009.
4. In 1887 Argentina legalized homosexual activity, while homosexual marriage got legal sanction only in 2010. In 2012 transgender persons were allowed to choose gender change surgery and modify their documents.
5. Legal homosexual activity came into effect in Italy in 1890 while same-sex couples could enter wedlock in 2016. In 1982, legal gender change for transgender individuals came into effect.
6. Taiwan gave lawful permission for homosexual activity in 1895 and in 2017 the Constitutional Court of Taiwan passed the judgement that homosexual couples could get married. Gender change for transgender persons became legally possible in 2015.
7. In 1993 Denmark repealed sodomy laws while legalizing same-sex marriages occurred only in 2012. Transgender person started gender change legally from 2104.

8. In 1934 Uruguay permitted same-sex sexual behaviour; homosexual marriage became possible since 2013. Transgender gender change came into effect in 2009.
9. Thailand put an end to criminalization of homosexuality in 1956, but it has not legally permitted same-sex marriages. From 2007, transgender persons have the legal right to change their gender.
10. England revoked its sodomy laws in 1967; homosexual marriages have become legal from 2014 and transgender individuals have been allowed to change their gender since 2005.
11. East Germany and West Germany annulled their sodomy laws in 1968 and 1969 respectively. Same-sex marriage has become legal since 2017 while gender change for transgender persons came into effect in 1980.
12. In 1979, Spain cancelled its laws regarding homosexuality and later became the third nation in the world to legally recognize homosexual marriage in 2005. Since 2011, transgender persons can opt for the sex/gender of their preference in official records.
13. Anti-sodomy laws were repealed in 1981 in Columbia while homosexual marriage received legal sanction in 2016. Transgender people could choose the gender of their preference since 2016. Transgender individuals got the legal right for gender change in 1993.
14. New Zealand revoked its anti-sodomy law in 1986 and same-sex marriage has been legalized since 2013. Transgender individuals got the legal right of gender change in 1993.

15. In 1993 Russia decriminalized anti-sodomy laws but same-sex marriages have not been recognized so far. The legal right for gender change of transgender people became applicable in 1997.
16. Ireland corrected its anti-sodomy laws in 1993 while permitting marriages between the same-sex became a reality only in 2015. Gender change for the transgender community became legal in 2015.
17. China's anti-sodomy laws were annulled in 1997; however, same-sex marriage is still not legally sanctioned. Gender change for transgender people became legalized in 2009.
18. In 1998 South Africa's anti-sodomy laws were declared outdated; later it became the fifth country in the world and the first in the African continent to legally permit same-sex marriage in 2006. Legal sanction for conducting gender change for transgender persons was realized in 2003.
19. Kazakhstan legally recognized homosexual activity in 1998 while marriage between same-sex individuals is still not permissible. In 2003 transgender community got the legal sanction for gender change.
20. The United States of America annulled sodomy laws in 2003 and 2015 onwards same-sex marriage is legally permissible. Transgender rights vary from state to state in the US. (Kumari. *Bed for a Hundred Flowers: Interrogating the Norm of Sexual and Gender Identities*. Ph. D Thesis. 2018, 5-8)

Among the neighbouring countries of India, Nepal is the most progressive: in 2007, with the abolishment of monarchy, the first elected government sanctioned

same-sex marriage and since 2007, gender change has become legally acceptable. Pakistan still follows the colonial laws established in 1860; the Pakistan Penal Code punishes homosexuality with incarceration. In 2009 the Supreme Court of Pakistan allotted third gender status to transgender persons while gender change could become a reality only in 2010. Bangladesh government officially legalized the third gender in 2013, though homosexual activity is a criminal offence which may even result in life imprisonment. In 2016, Sri Lanka allowed transgender individuals to change their gender, but concomitantly, same-sex relations are not permitted. India legalised consensual homosexual sex in September 2018, yet social attitudes remain regressive.

This study attempts to claim that if a person is born with mismatched body/gender, then he/she will either celebrate the body and /or refashion it to challenge and overcome the social marker of natal sex to reclaim one's true identity. The autobiographical life narratives by A. Revathi, Laxminarayan Tripathi, Living Smile Vidya and the biography of Manobi Bandyopadhyay are the texts taken for investigation. Living Smile Vidya's biography titled *I Am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey* was published in 2007. Revathi's works originally written in Tamil have been translated into numerous languages including English. The works that are included in this project are her autobiography *The Truth about Me: A Hijra Life Story* (2010) and *A Life in Trans Activism* (2016) in which Revathi expresses her support for trans men. Laxminarayan Tripathi, a celebrity and crusader for transgender rights has written the autobiography *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* (2015) as well as *Red Lipstick: The Men in my Life* (2016) in which she mentions all the important



men who have influenced her. Living Smile Vidya's autobiography *I am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey* is a bold affirmation, while the title of Dr. Manobi Bandyopadhyay's biography is *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi: A Candid Biography of India's First Transgender Principal*. All the accounts are similar as far as adverse experiences are concerned; the only difference is individual experiences faced by each person.

An attempt to comprehend the reason why some are born with a body-mind mismatch is pertinent. In the chapter "Gender Roles and Sexuality" in *Fundamentals of Human Sexuality*, Anuly and Burnette assert that nature is predisposed towards the development of females; it is clarified by the statement that as opposed "to male development, female development requires no added hormones" (236). The internal and external female sex organs develop even without the presence of the male hormone androgen or the female hormone estrogen. Conversely, the development of a male requires vast quantities of testosterone between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> week of conception (236). The testosterone produced triggers the development of the male ducts and the simultaneous degeneration of female ducts. Testosterone activates the development of internal and external male sex organs (236). In most individuals sex differentiation is a faultless phenomenon; in some persons, abnormalities crop up which results in sex defects. These abnormalities may either be chromosomal or hormonal (236). The former type of defect could be the result of the presence of an extra chromosome or the absence of a sex chromosome. Numerous types of disorders related to sex chromosome problems can be observed.

Klinefelter's syndrome, Turner's syndrome, hermaphroditism are some of the disorders which are commonly seen. Klinefelter's syndrome refers to a condition in which males are born with XXY chromosome instead of XY. The presence of the extra X chromosome results in "incomplete masculinization" along with female physical characteristics. Consequently underdeveloped penis, testes, low testosterone yield as well as abnormal puberty issues may occur. Infertility is a common complaint in some persons with this syndrome while some may also exhibit mental retardation. This abnormality occurs in one out of five hundred to one thousand live births ("Gender Roles and Sexuality", 238).

Another of the disorders is Turner's syndrome seen in women; instead of XX, such women have XO, which is manifested as female physical structure yet lack of ovaries or deficient ovaries. Lack of female hormones in such women prevents physical maturity during puberty. Artificial hormones may be used to induce physical changes in these individuals. Turner's syndrome affects one in two thousand five hundred to one in five thousand individuals ("Gender Roles and Sexuality", 238). The impaired production of sex hormones also affects sexual development in the foetus. Congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH) and Androgen insensitivity syndrome (AIS) are the main defects caused by hormonal imbalances. Congenital adrenal hyperplasia or adrenogenital syndrome is produced by a genetic problem that stimulates the adrenal glands in the foetus to produce large amounts of male hormone testosterone, leading to premature puberty. Boys as young as five have been seen to be affected by CAH and in girls, excess amount of testosterone results in masculinization of genitalia (238-239). Androgen insensitivity syndrome or AIS

is seen in men in whom normal amount of androgen is present but the cells which react to androgen are insusceptible, that is the androgen receptor gene is lacking. The male baby is born without an internal reproductive system but externally has female genitals. At puberty breast development is seen; however such persons are incapable of reproductive ability due to lack of internal reproductive organs (239).

Anuly and Burnette also mention the harmful effects of gender stereotyping; gender stereotyping refers to the assigning of certain social roles and activities as being the monopoly of one sex which cannot be attempted by the other sex. Most gender related stereotypes are incorrect and consequently result in oppression of the stereotyped and consequently stigmatized group. Another term used by the two is “gender polarization” which is responsible for the terms -“unnatural”, “abnormal” and “immoral” - being applied to those who deviate from the gender norm. Culture demands the conformity of gender to sex and androgynous individuals, those with both masculine and feminine characteristics, along with the “undifferentiated” (those who do not have either the masculine or feminine characteristics) are consequently labelled as “sexually deviant”. Individuals who flout gender norms are adversely evaluated and judged harshly. The common misconception of a person’s notion of oneself as male or female being congruent with one’s biological sex is clarified by Anuly and Burnette: individuals experiencing gender dysphoria (when the notion of oneself as male or female is conversely opposite to one’s natural born sex and one experiences doubts about one’s gender) resolve it through cross dressing or Sex Reassignment Surgery.

Sigmund Freud's theory of psychosexual development argues that infants are polymorphously perverse, which may be understood as infants being capable of sexual attraction to anyone. He also claimed that young children have to resolve their Oedipal or Electra complex and thereafter they develop either male or female sexual identity. While Freud did not consider homosexuality as a disease or bisexuality as innate in each individual, he asserted that natural psychosexual development resulted in heterosexuality ("Gender Roles and Sexuality", 267).

Vivienne Cass, as mentioned by Anuly, suggests a six-stage model of development in one's sexual identity. The first stage, she asserts, is "gender confusion" when the individual tries to find answer to "who am I?" When same-sex feelings and distinctiveness from others is realized, "identity comparison" (I may be gay/lesbian) happens. Cass' third stage, "identity tolerance" (I probably am gay) occurs when the person acknowledges his/her same-sex desires. This stage may manifest in late adolescence or adulthood. The discernment of one being a "stigmatized group member" is mentally and psychologically taxing. The stage of "identity acceptance" (I am gay/lesbian) creates conflicts between self-acceptance and interpersonal relationships. The issue of revealing one's true sexual identity (coming out) is also resolved simplistically. An individual may "come out" to friends or colleagues but not parents or relatives. Some choose to be "out" to select individuals and the process of "coming out" may be a lifelong process. Cass names the fifth stage as "identity pride", freshly out persons may feel comfortable in their group and consider the heterosexual group as unsympathetic and antagonistic. "Identity synthesis" is the final stage when the individual feels "being gay/lesbian is

a part of who I am” and there are attempts on one’s part to reconcile his/her personal and private identities into a single concept. Consequent to this stage, most individuals become politically active members of their community (“Gender Roles and Sexuality”, 268-269). I would like to argue that similar stages may be observed in the lives of transgender individuals and transsexual persons too.

Julian C H Lee quotes E Douglas Lewis’ striking words about gender:

First, in those languages in which gender is counted as one among many grammatical *categories* (others being case, number, tense, voice, mood, etc.), we find languages that establish more than two categories of gender. Second, there are no systematic, logical or necessary semantic correspondences between nouns and the gender classes to which they are assigned. Thus, the French classify ‘meat’ as feminine, *la viande*, while the Germans find it neuter, *das Fleisch*. (Lewis, 1982) (Policing Sexuality: Sex, Society and the State, 8)

Lewis points out that while the French use two gender varieties for nouns, the Germans utilize three and Swahili has six classifiers. These observations clarify that gender distinctions vary from culture to culture and there is no absolute monopoly of gender binarism. Lee also cites Serena Nanda who talks of “Euro-American” cultures which claim of there being only the male and the female genders and that one’s genitals are related to one’s sexual orientation. From this it is concluded that male babies grow into adult men who feel attracted to women and vice versa. This, Nanda claims, may be termed as heteronormativity (*Neither Man nor Woman*, 8).

Serena Nanda cites Unni Wikan who mentions the category of the *xanith*, found in Oman. The term “xanith” means “impotent, effeminate and soft” (130). Omanis look upon this group as not belonging to the male/female category but rather exhibiting characteristics of both genders. Like the hijras, the xanith are male at birth, with male genitalia but unlike the hijras, the xanith do not castrate themselves. The xanith enjoy all the privileges of males in the community: the right of deposing in court, mosque worship and taking up employment, all of which are prohibited for women. Within the house, the xanith behave like women; cooking, housekeeping and other chores are their preferred occupations. In social gatherings, the xanith are allowed to sit in the company of women. Sexually, the Omani men are considered active in the role of penetrators, while a woman is passive due to her receptive role. The xanith act as male homosexual prostitutes due to the passive role in sexual activity (*Neither Man nor Woman*, 130). However, if the xanith can publicly prove that he can penetrate a woman successfully, he is allowed to marry and thereby he becomes a *man*. However, the xanith are forbidden to wear feminine attire (131). Nanda adds that though the “facial expressions, voice, laugh, movements, and swaying walk of the xanith imitate those of women, they wear clothing that is a mixture of men’s and women’s styles” (131). She also mentions that “the xanith demonstrate their intermediate gender role in many aspects of their public presentation of self, and in Wikan’s view they constitute a true gender alternative to men and women” (131).

Julian C.H. Lee quotes Shelly Errington who says about sex,

as something to include the whole complex of beliefs about genitals as signs of deeper substances and fluids and about the functions and *appropriate use of genitals*; (italics added) the assignment of the body into the category of the 'natural' (itself a culturally constructed category); and the cultural division of all human bodies into two mutually exclusive and exhaustive Sex categories" (*Policing Sexuality: Sex, Society and the State*, 8-9).

Lee mentions that babies born with "ambiguous" genitals are operated upon to "align" the body to either of the sexes. He further quotes from Errington,

among those who wish to cross gender categories, genital surgery is frequently sought to align that person's gender with their sexual organs. The desire to cross over from the gender category correlated to one's sex is often regarded generally as abnormal and often 'perverse'. This is to a large extent because gender identities are felt to flow directly on from one's sex" (*Policing Sexuality: Sex, Society and the State*, 23, 8-9).

Julian Lee mentions societies which have more than two genders- "The Chukchi of Siberia, for example, had seven genders beyond men and women...in Native American societies there were up to two gender categories beyond men and women" (*Policing Sexuality: Sex, Society and the State*, 13). Lee mentions Sabine Lang who talks of "woman-man" to refer to "males who partially or completely adopt the woman's role as defined by their respective culture" while "man-woman" is used for "females who adopt the roles of men more or less completely" (13). Somewhat similarly, Nanda talks of the two-spirit *berdache* who exhibit "gender-divergent dress, occupation, linguistic expression, ritual position and sexuality"

(*Neither Man nor Woman*, 132). She also mentions that in many societies, these two-spirit individuals get married to spouses of the same sex from the community of men/women. Lang also observes that while Western cultures concentrate on one's sexual desire, the "women-men" and the "men-women" are differentiated through their "marked interest in work activities belonging to the role of the 'other' sex" and not their "interest in sexual relationships"(13).

The present study comprises four additional chapters including the conclusion. There is an appendix at the end which includes the interviews given by Revathi, Laxmi and Manobi. The first chapter is titled "Crisis of Misalignment: The Body/Gender Dichotomy", which talks of the pre-transition life of the transgendered writers. The struggles experienced by each transgender person, be it the difficulties they experienced at home or at school, the transphobic hatred and ridicule, all point to the immense hardships they faced due to the assertion of their gender and societal reaction to that. The true representation of a person's life and his/her experiences can best be analysed from his/her testimony. For the sake of propriety and, convenience, all the transgendered have been addressed as masculine in this chapter and masculine pronouns have been used; after all they were *masculine* before their transition. The second chapter bears the title "Metamorphosis: A Transition towards Self Actualization" and it deals with the post-transition life of the transgendered. Post-transition, each trans person not only manages to refashion her body to match her innate gender, but also experiences a sense of completeness. After changing into the gender of their choice, each individual seems to undergo great transformation; they seem to express themselves fully and find a meaning and purpose in their life. It



is equivalent and comparable to the metamorphosis of the larva into a beautiful butterfly. Since their transition to the female gender has been achieved, the feminine pronouns have been used for the transgender persons under focus. The third chapter is “The Post-Transition Scenario: Empowering the Community” which is concerned with each writer’s initiatives towards empowering the trans community. In spite of various personal trials, each of the transgender persons showed immense fortitude in dealing with their struggles and challenges. Apart from their personal victories, they also strove and succeeded in fighting for the welfare of their community members. A series of personal interviews were held with Revathi, Laxmi and Manobi. Despite many attempts to contact Living Smile Vidya for an interview, it could not materialize; hence her present occupation and work could only be understood through the social media. The interview with Revathi was held at her hotel room at Thiruvananthapuram on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2020; the interaction lasted an hour. Laxmi agreed to my request for an interview and we met at her house in Thane, near Mumbai on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2019. As far as Manobi is concerned, the question-answer sessions happened digitally, over Whatsapp. The conclusion summarises the findings of the study of the life writings of the transgendered personalities: Living Smile Vidya, Revathi, Laxmi and Manobi. Most of Vidya’s activism details are available in the cyber media, which helped me to analyse her personality and activism. The three interviews have been included as appendices after the conclusion.

## Chapter 1

### **Crisis of Misalignment: The Body/Gender Dichotomy**

Susan Stryker defines the transgender community as

People who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth, people who cross over (trans-) the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain that gender...it is the movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place-rather than any particular destination or mode of transition-that best characterizes the concept of transgender. (*Transgender Studies*, 4)

The most fundamental question which rises is why one *strives* to *cross* the *gender* boundaries. The answer to this query lies in one's mismatching body and gender. The gender identity of such individuals does not conform to that of their anatomical sex, the reason being some genetic, chromosomal or developmental mishaps. The fact that most individuals do not face any incongruities in their body and mind vis-à-vis gender identity should actually be ample reason for celebration. Simultaneously, one must empathise with the unfortunate whose body and psyche are not compatible, yet who attempt to accept their existence. All the transgendered individuals this study focuses on, are Indian writers, who have taken up activism to empower their community.

The first chapter of Vidya's book, *I am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey* is titled "Nirvana". As per *The Cambridge Dictionary*, "nirvana" means "a state of freedom from all suffering that Buddhists believe can be achieved by removing all

personal wishes". It also alludes to the state of enlightenment which Sree Buddha is said to have attained after intense meditation. Indian transgender person, referred commonly as Hijras, use the term "Nirvan" or "Nirvaan" to refer to castration. Vidya's use of term "nirvana" for "nirvan" probably alludes to her great wish fulfillment; since as a boy and later as a man Saravanan only wanted to become a *woman*.

Serena Nanda describes "nirvan" as the condition of an emasculated hijra. The whole process of castration and the mandatory healing period of forty days transform a normal "hijra" into a "nirvan" (*Neither Man nor Woman*, 624). According to Nanda, "nirvan" may be referred as "rebirth", "calm and absence of desire" and/or "the dawn of a higher consciousness" ( 624). In earlier pre-British Indian society, the hijras underwent castration through the services of a *Dai* (midwife). This process of emasculation was conducted without the aid of any anaesthesia by an elderly and experienced hijra (dai amma). The Dai Amma would examine the physical condition of the hijra and if satisfied fix a date for the castration process. On the day of the emasculation procedure, the moorath would be dressed in bridal finery. Then worship is performed before the image of the goddess Bahuchara Mata. After flowers and sweets are offered to the deity, the moorath is given a ritual bath. A few hijras hold the moorath's arms and legs and in one single slash of the knife, the penis and testicles are cut by the Dai Amma. The wound is allowed to bleed normally and nothing is done to stem the bleeding. It is believed that the "male" blood has to flow from the body and no medicines would be given (624).

The ceremony called “jalsa” is celebrated after forty days when many hijras assemble: saris and other gifts are given to the castrated person (625). During the daylong celebration, haldi (turmeric paste) is applied on the individual’s *new female body* and her palms are decorated with mehendi (henna paste). After the ritual singing and dancing, a hot water bath is given to the person. The *nirvana* is dressed in green coloured attire and green bangles and jewellery are put on her. After midnight, a pot of milk is placed on the nirvan’s head; she and others from her household reach the seashore where the milk is poured into the sea. The nirvan reveals her genitals to the sea, a black dog and a green tree; all these are traditions strictly followed by the hijra community even in contemporary times.

Saravanan was born with mismatched body/ gender dichotomy; deep in his mind, however, he felt he was a girl. His obsessive desire for womanhood points to his deep rooted determination to reject the male body and refashion it into a female body. Rebecca Callahan says “The more comfortable a person is with himself or herself, the more active that person will be in not only helping other transgender individuals, but also educating the community about transgender individuals and gender oppression” (“Bending Gender, Ending Gender: Theoretical Foundations for Social Work Practice with the Transgender Community”, 88-89).

Saravanan was a privileged child: he was spared from work at home and enjoyed many concessions. His father only wanted him to study; when he stood first in the first grade, he carried him on his shoulders and went about announcing the glad news in the locality (*I am Vidya*, 12). The day Saravanan came second in the sixth standard, he was beaten black and blue since the father felt the latter had failed

him and dashed his hopes. Constant pressure to study and inability to play with friends compelled him to spend his leisure time in dressing up in his elder sister's dress and dancing as he came to realize that this was the only pastime which truly comforted him. In fact Saravanan felt "he" was a "girl". Vidya recollects that she loved to wear her sister's clothes and dance to film songs playing on the transistor.

Jeffrey Weeks argues thus,

'sexuality' is a historical construction, which brings together a host of different biological and mental possibilities, and cultural forms- *gender identity*, bodily differences, reproductive capacities, *needs, desires, fantasies*, erotic practices, institutions and values - which need not be linked together, and in other cultures have not been. (italics added, *Sexuality*, 7-8)

Weeks adds that "sexuality" is a highly complicated notion and one cannot find "easy answers to the challenges it poses" (10). The way out of the predicament lies in articulating the "correct questions" (10-11). Similarly, the concept of gender identity also has to be dealt by raising the apt queries. The term "transgender", according to Weeks, "embraces both a move towards the essentializing of traditional gender, and a profound unsettling of gendered beliefs" (93). Weeks cites Morgan's idea of the "transsexual dilemma", which translates as the transgender persons' desire for human rights that compels them to express a unified identity sans appearing ambiguous (93). Yet it has to be pointed out that society has always divided people into "men" and "women", so a transgender appears to be a "misfit" for most cisgendered persons; it is hardly surprising that the transgendered persons are ridiculed and called obnoxious names.

Vidya recalls that when people made fun of Saravanan with terms like “girly” or “sissy”, *he* was actually pleased. She remembers, “Actually I didn’t mind being called ‘girly’ -- it gave me a secret thrill” (*I am Vidya*, 23). Saravanan revelled in this leisure activity of dressing up and dancing. Even after the death of Saravanan’s mother, the father’s tyrannical methods continued and gradually Saravanan’s childhood became unnatural and abnormal. While his father dreamed of his son becoming a *District Collector*, Saravanan simply wanted to become a *girl*.

At school Saravanan was often mocked for his feminine ways and ridiculed by terms like “ombadhu” (nine in Tamil, a derogatory word for transgender persons). Usually, most of the trans persons discontinue their education at this point. Joelle Ruby Ryan alludes to disheartening experiences faced by transgender persons. She mentions the difficulties for trans scholars to ascend the higher rungs of academia due to various barriers they face (“Death by Transphobia: Increasing Gender Awareness through Teaching the Day of Remembrance”, 85). The very low numbers of college educated transgender individuals may be attributed to this fact.

For many years, Saravanan had to put up with his father’s dictatorial and oppressive ways which often bordered on physical violence. One day however, he retaliated; Saravanan pushed his father when he was thrashing him. On realizing what he had done, Saravanan prepared to hang himself from the ceiling fan. Chithi (his step-mother) rushed in and stopped him from proceeding any further. Relations between father and son were strained after this incident and his father even ceased speaking to him. In spite of his good marks which would have easily allowed him to study engineering, he decided to go for Computer Science: since Information

Technology was a promising branch, his father agreed to his choice and took a loan at a high interest to pay his tuition fees.

Meanwhile, Saravanan would often go to his sister Radha's house; what mainly attracted Saravanan to his sister's house were her saris. When he was all alone, he would wear a sari from the laundry lot and watch song and dance sequences on television.

At college, literature and loneliness were his sole companions. During a cultural meet, Immanuel, a friend of one of the participants, put a lighted cigarette on Saravanan's foot (35). Saravanan often had to face similar pranks by boys who enjoyed harassing him. This is another instance of transphobia faced in educational institutions. Shubha Chacko and Arvind Narrain talk of school years being "terrifying" for trans persons ("Transcending the Binaries: Transgender Exclusions in Law and Policy", 26). Chacko adds that such students are "segregated, harassed, bullied and even sexually abused by both the teachers and students" (26). Such incidents lead to "self-loathing" and "low self-esteem", which consequently result in their dropping out of school (26). The life of a hijra, according to Sujata Moorti in "A Queer Romance with the Hijra" is one of "absolute human rightlessness" as there is "violence, discrimination and disenfranchisement" (25). The marginalization starts from school itself and as the individual grows; it changes its form to be violence in some cases, discrimination in other instances and other ways of cruelty and transphobia.

Even when he scored very low marks in his degree examination, Saravanan's father wanted him to join for M. Sc. or MCA but he was keen on doing post-

graduation in Linguistics since he wanted to pursue theatre, drama and music, and only a humanities course could allow him to cultivate these interests.

Saravanan met Gunasekharan, an actor and professor of drama at *Pondicherry University* and wondered if he should join for post-graduation there but decided against it when he realized that he would have to stay in a hostel. This incident reveals how a transgender is unable to study, if study at all, because of a seemingly insignificant issue like suitable hostel accommodation. He could not imagine staying at a boys' hostel, so he started searching for colleges offering masters in Drama but since there was none, he zeroed in on a post-graduation in Linguistics in order to be a day scholar. Initially his father opposed his choice but Saravanan's insistence paid off.

*A Time for Farewells*, the sixth chapter, commences with a narration of Saravanan's active participation in dramatics: he joined Mu Ramaswami, a professor in the drama department, and his group. When they staged a play *Agitator Comrade Periyar* at Yadava College in Madurai, Saravanan also helped in rehearsals as a prompter, in the lighting section and other related areas. Around forty performances of the play took place in various cities of the state. Saravanan also got acquainted with Murugabhupati, the much acclaimed Tamil theatre personality. Some striking incidents from these days show the real identity of Saravanan being perceived by others. Vidya recalls, "Once, Murugabhupati stared at me for a while and said, 'Your face has a certain art about it that is a mixture of male and female'.... I felt a strong urge to kneel before him and pour my heart out, weep wordlessly, cathartically" (*I am Vidya*, 52). Vidya recollects,



Another instance, I had put lipstick on when Senthil came into the green room. The mirror may reflect your outer appearance to you and others like you, but in the case of tirunangais it portrays their innermost feelings and turbulence, their essential femininity, displaying all .... In that instant, he must have received confirmation of what he had already suspected. He stood quite stunned, but quickly recovered. ‘Ennadee, Saravani’, he teased me, without malice. (*I am Vidya*, 53)

Yet another incident, “On one occasion, I acted like a girl for the benefit of Maharasan and a couple of other University students. Actually, I was pretending to imitate a girl for fun and they liked my ‘acting’- but deep inside I was not really acting; I was subtly expressing my inner urges” (*I am Vidya*, 53). With each day, Saravanan found that it was becoming more and more difficult for him to suppress his real identity and behave like a man. When he stood first in the University in masters in Linguistics, he had the following choices before him-become a theatre artist, look for employment or express his true identity and be the woman s/he was. To resolve this crisis, Saravanan confided in a kothi named Sri, who was highly educated, well employed and from a rich family. Sri advised him to study further, get a doctorate and for “her” gender expression attend the Koovagam festival (a festival for transgender persons) and become a good son for the family by earning a decent job. He also warned him that he would end up a beggar in the bus stand if he underwent sex-change. Saravanan knew that Sri was speaking the truth but he “could not lead a double life any longer” (56).

Saravanan worked in a firm doing surveys for business houses and would go to the NGO to spend time with the tirunangais there. He came in contact with Aruna, who advised him to collect money for the surgery: Aruna resolved to send him to her guru at Pune. Saravanan was taken to Kalyan for the *reet* ceremony after which he became the guru's chela and renamed as Vidya. Vidya was only halfway in the journey towards becoming a woman.

S. Ramya mentions that Queer Studies and LGBT literature is known to all but very few fail to “acclaim those who fall under the category with an open heart” (“Living Smile Vidya’s Traumatic Experiences- An Overview”, 32). She lists that the issues faced by the transgender community are aplenty-“shame, fear, and internalized transphobia; disclosure and coming out; adjusting, adapting, or not adapting to social pressure to conform; fear of relationships or loss of relationships; and self-imposed limitations on expression or aspirations” (33). More than one of these issues is experienced by all transgender individuals.

At Pune, Saravanan was compelled to start begging to earn his livelihood: his first reluctance to supplicate was gradually overcome. He walked long distances and used different techniques to wheedle money from shopkeepers.

Susan Stryker avers that many persons “have great difficulty recognizing the humanity of another person if they cannot recognize that person’s gender” and adds that “the gender-changing person can evoke in others a primordial fear of monstrosity, or loss of humanness” (*Transgender History*, 6). This observation is validated when Saravanan mentions the unpleasant experiences that occurred when he went begging in trains. Once a woman questioned why an “able-bodied” person

like him went begging and on another occasion, he was beaten up by a group of men as he had asked one of them to give him some more money (*I Am Vidya*, 94).

Saravanan talks of the violence he faced when he went begging. Vidya remembers,

Violent incidents took place predominantly when I was begging alone....  
Nonetheless, I was obsessively collecting and saving money... not to buy fancy stuff but to redeem my identity, to fulfill my dream, to achieve what I set out for in Pune: nirvana .... Sure enough about wanting to discard my identity, I was willing to die in the process. (*I am Vidya*, 97-99)

Such a determined stand by Saravanan throws light on his resolve to undergo the surgery at any cost. This perseverance seems to echo Stephen Whittle when he affirms

Gender as it is perceived by others is called gender role. Gender identity is the total perception of an individual about his or her own gender. It includes a basic personal identity as a boy or girl, man or woman, as well as personal judgments about the individual's level of conformity to the societal norms of masculinity and femininity. ("The Becoming Man: The Law's Ass Brays", 22)

Whittle points to how almost all persons express their gender through "dress, manners and activities" (22). The significance of markers like "mannerisms" and "occupational choice" are also considered to be equally important. Whittle, further claims,

For most people their gender role along with their gender identity and all the symbolic manifestations of gender will be congruent. But trans people do not

necessarily feel that they fit neatly into either the male or female role or that their behaviour is totally congruent with the rules and expectations of the society they live in. (*Reclaiming Genders*, 22)

Stephen Whittle mentions Katherine O' Donovan who alludes to the two ways of sex determination in judicial system while dealing with legal cases related to such issues - the "essentialist approach and the cluster approach" (*Reclaiming Genders*, 23). In the first, the court considers only one important aspect, and brands all individuals biologically to belong to either the female sex or the male sex. This is done by examining only three characteristics, the genital, the gonadal and chromosomal sex at birth. In this case the psychological or behavioural sex is not considered as significant. Even though the approach may appear thorough, it is fundamentally flawed. At birth, Whittle continues, only the genital sex is regarded while determining a baby's sex. He cites the case of a woman without a vagina, yet deemed a woman. He also raises questions about those women who are later discovered to be XY in their chromosome structure and remained women due to androgen insensitivity which hampered the development of descended testes and a penis (23-24). These cases clarify the weaknesses of the essentialist approach: the chromosomal sex is not determined at birth and only a basic examination of a baby's genitals is done and it is not known if the baby has ovaries or not. In fact medical science claims the existence of seventy different intersex categories. It is also accepted that one in every two hundred children is born with intersex characteristics. The fact is that many are unaware of their chromosomal structure and only some

may realize it when they undertake fertility treatment later on once they are unable to conceive.

Whittle further refers to the work at Netherlands Brain Bank which has discovered that brains of men and women are different and transsexual persons have been found to have the brain structure of the sex they claim to be. The complicated aspects involved in sex determination has compelled some courts to consider the “cluster approach” which takes into account a group of related features which helps distinguish the category into which an individual fits in. This approach examines psychological or behavioural sex and allows one’s personal choice to determine one’s sex. However this is a recent development and has not yet been applied all over the world.

The next transgender writer under analysis is Revathi; Revathi’s autobiographical narrative, *The Truth about Me*, originally written in Tamil was translated into English by V. Geetha. Geetha, an active voice in the Indian Women’s movement, is a writer, translator and social historian. She has written in English apart from her mother tongue Tamil; she writes on topics like popular culture, gender, caste and politics. Revathi’s narrative presents an authentic picture of her long struggle to reclaim her true identity as a hijra despite lack of support from her family. In the preface she acknowledges the fact that her first book in Tamil, *Unarvum Uruvamum*, wrought a positive change in the state of Tamil Nadu; the government came up with many welfare measures for the transgender community. This fact is validated in the article “The Third Sex: Transgender persons in India want to be treated as Citizens. Is that too much to ask for?” where it states

that as early as 2008 “Tamil Nadu set up the Aravani/Transgender Women Welfare Board to provide social support for the transgenders” (9). Revathi asserts that the hijra community needs to be educated and employed which will ensure that they do not resort to begging or prostitution. The writer points to the undeniable fact that hijras need fundamental human rights to lead meaningful lives. Revathi hopes her autobiography will usher in changes in the life of transgender community and make mainstream society realize how their community can contribute to the country’s development. She states clearly that “I do not seek sympathy from society or the government” (*The Truth about Me*, v-vi).

Revathi’s narrative talks of the family of three brothers and a sister, joined by Doraisamy, the name given to Revathi on her birth. She recollects how as the youngest child, Doraisamy was bestowed a lot of affection and care. Being the youngest, Doraisamy was encouraged to study well and succeed in life, more so as his brothers did not study beyond school. His father had a milk transportation business: Dorai’s father and brothers collected milk from the nearby villages in huge cans and delivered it to the milk factory in their lorry; the work started early in the morning and at evening the work had to be resumed.

Revathi recalls that as a school student, “I would go to the village school along with the girls from the neighbourhood and return with them. I played only girls’ games. I loved to sweep the front yard clean and draw the kolam every morning. I even helped my mother in the kitchen, sweeping and swabbing, washing vessels” (*The Truth about Me*, 3).

These memories clearly exhibit Doraisamy's feminine behaviour and fondness for the company of girls while going to school. Unlike other young boys, Doraisamy enjoyed doing "kolams" (geometric or floral designs drawn with rice flour on the ground) at the entrance to the house along with other household work. Back from school, Doraisamy would wear his sister's ankle length skirt and blouse and wrap and twist a towel on his head, "I would then walk as if I was a shy bride, my eyes to the ground and everyone would laugh" (*The Truth about Me*, 4). These incidents throw light on the realization in the young Doraisamy of his being a girl. When his schoolmates and others on the street addressed him as "number nine", "female thing", "female boy" and so on, he felt that he was indeed a girl, "In fact, I wanted to be so" (4). The fact that he did not feel ashamed or insulted by ribald terms reveals his firm conviction of being a girl.

It would be pertinent here to quote Judith Butler who contests the notion of gender corresponding to sex. She avows

If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way. Taken to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders. Assuming for the moment the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of "men" will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or that "women" will interpret only female bodies. Further, even if the sexes appear to be unproblematically binary in their morphology and constitution (which will become a question),

there is no reason to assume that genders ought also to remain as two.

(*Gender Trouble*, 9)

Revathi recollects that at school older boys addressed her as “girl-boy” (*The Truth about Me*, 6). The first instance of Doraisamy’s dressing as a woman was during a temple festival in which he dressed as a “kurathi” (tribal woman) in a skirt with anklets, artificial hair and makeup. Doraisamy knew that he looked like a beautiful woman and admired his reflection in the mirror. “The boy who had to play my partner muttered ‘Hey Doraisamy, you look like a real woman. If you were one, I’d fall in love with you.’ My face flushed with pride and I felt warm and bashful. The other boys sniggered and yet it all felt very good” (12). Revathi reminisces, “A few people even told me that I ought to have been born a woman and that it was unfortunate that I had been born a man. I felt elated from all this praise” (14). However, he was upset by the response men produced in him and wondered if it was abnormal to feel desire for men. At school Doraisamy would not sit near boys in his class since he felt “coy and shy” (9). At the same time, he was attracted to boys who did not ridicule him and even “imagined I was in love with them. This confused me— I was a boy and yet I felt I could love other boys. Was this right or wrong?” (9).

When Doraisamy reached tenth standard, he underwent many changes in body and in being. Revathi writes of that time,

I experienced a growing sense of irrepressible femaleness, which haunted me, day in and day out. *A woman trapped in a man’s body* was how I thought of myself. But how could that be? .... I longed to be with men, but felt shamed by this feeling. I wondered why God had chosen to inflict this



peculiar torture on me, and why He could not have created me wholly male or wholly female. (*italics added, The Truth about Me, 14-15*)

S. Ramya mentions that Doraisamy was unable to understand his bodily transformations with innumerable questions about his mind because of “social stigma” attached to his condition (“Revathi’s Estrangement”, 60). While “normal” men and women walk freely in society, this right is hardly allowed given to transgender individuals since gender binary norm is socially accepted as normal and natural. Doraisamy could not study beyond tenth standard. Due to the dilemma about his identity and sexuality, Doraisamy lost interest in academics; he had done well in all subjects but failed in English in the tenth standard and decided to reappear for examination the next year. It was decided that he would attend tuition for English; he joined a class from six to eight at night and would go for the class on his bicycle.

That year for the Mariamman festival, Doraisamy participated in a dance with clothes borrowed from his neighbour; the performance was well appreciated. Revathi’s words express the reaction of the crowd and the subsequent feelings in Doraisamy show his true identity:

I was unwilling to shed my female clothes and stood for several minutes in front of the mirror. My neighbour rushed in and whispered, “Dorai! Take it all off! I don’t want your brothers scolding me!” Reluctantly, I changed into my regular clothes. As I re-emerged in my man’s garb, I felt that I was in disguise, and that I had left my real self behind. (*The Truth about Me, 16*)

Doraisamy's articulation reveals the untrue life of each pre-transitioned transgender person and their sense of completion in the attire of a woman, the gender they feel, think and know they are. Patricia Gagne believes that the individual whose gender is at variance with his/her genital sex is very often penalized as he/she is unable to perform gender in "socially prescribed ways" and this subverts the "cultural and structural social order" ("Coming Out and Crossing Over: Identity Formation and Proclamation in a Transgender Community", 479).

While going for tuition, Doraisamy came across others like him on the hill fort. He saw men dressed in lungis and one of these men had long hair. They addressed each other as girls would and danced like women. When they started talking, Doraisamy realized that they were also like him and he was not abnormal and unique. He learnt for the first time that there were other persons like him, who wore saris, had undergone surgery and lived in Erode, Dindigul, in the state of Tamil Nadu and also far off places like Mumbai and Delhi. Soon Doraisamy went for tuition only three days a week and on the other days would meet his new friends on the hill fort. From these friends Doraisamy learnt about a woman, "an 'amma', in Dindigul, who wore saris and had had an 'operation' and that she received other women like him from Mumbai and Delhi during the time of the Goddess festival" (*The Truth about Me*, 20). One day, Dorai left for Dindigul with these friends. Revathi reminisces that his friends acted coyly like women and applied make up during the journey. Dorai was agitated by his friends' behaviour and scolded them, but their response throws light on the true identity of a hijra/transgender. One of them responded

Keep quiet! We can't be ourselves at home or do what we want to. There isn't anyone on this bus who knows us. It's only like this, without anyone at home knowing, that can we do what we wish to do-express our desire to be women. We can't ever live if we fear being teased. Or dare express our feelings. We must then reconcile ourselves to a life that is neither here nor there. Come on! Let's be happy at least for the time we're away. (*The Truth about Me*, 20-21)

These words express a transgender person's ardent desire to live as a member of the opposite gender. While harbouring such secret desires, many are unable to act assertively and declare their true gender identity. Whenever they attempt to express themselves openly or share their predicament with others, they are brushed away as acting "weird" or "silly" and none tries to discover the reasons for their strange behaviour. The gender binary norm is widely accepted and expected; and anyone going against this is met with disapproval and contempt.

At Dindigul, Dorai and friends went to Amma's place. He realized that all the persons there "looked like real women. Only their voices gave them away" (*The Truth about Me*, 21). Dorai and friends were asked to pay respect to the elders by doing "paampaduthi" (touching the feet of the elderly), which is an indispensable courtesy among the hijras. Later all of them got dressed in saris, wore wigs and jewellery. One of them stood before Doraisamy and said, "You look like the actress Revathi .... I looked at myself in the mirror and felt a glow of pride. I did look like a woman. It was at this moment that I was convinced I was indeed one" (22). It is words like these which ascertain and help a transgender person assert his/her true

gender identity. Doraisamy was in his mid-teens, tall, slim and without any facial hair and had not undergone castration. One of the elders said, “If this one were to undergo *nirvaanam* (sic), she’d look like a real woman .... I felt even more gratified on hearing this” (22). Dorai learnt that in order to become a woman, he would have to get his ears and nose pierced, grow his hair long, learn their ways and become a “child” to a guru. The guru would be like a mother, provide sustenance and also get the castration surgery done after the disciple worked and earned for the guru. The next day the “jamaat” assembled (25). Jamaat alludes to the meeting of the hijra community in which they take important decisions like the acceptance of a new chela (disciple) by a guru and so on. After a temple visit, the ritual of chela-adoption commenced. Through this ritual Dorai became a “chela” (disciple) and would have to address his guru as “amma” (mother) (25). The guru asked her to stay with her parents, study well and get employed but Dorai’s crestfallen face and tears made her offer that he could come to her in case of unfavourable circumstances at home. She also advised Dorai to go to his “nani” (guru’s guru or his grandmother in hijra system) at Erode in case he needed an urgent shelter. Dorai was also reminded to grow his hair long. Esha Tiwari affirms that when Dorai is asked to grow his hair long, it is an act of gender. She argues that a person who lacks long hair is a “man” and thereby brings opprobrium to the hijra community (“Distortion of Tritya Prakriti (Third Nature) by Colonial Ideology in India”, 20).

Dorai accompanied the group to Erode instead of going home. His nani managed a dance troupe consisting of transgender persons of various age groups. This group danced at temples during the season of festivals and at other times would

go to Mumbai or Delhi. Dorai was advised to wear his lungi and shirt and forbidden to wear a sari to avoid being mistaken for a man in a sari. If someone saw a boy in a sari, it would be a disgrace to the transgender community. Dorai stayed at home, washed the clothes of the elders, fetched water, shopped for grocery and also did the cooking. Being the youngest, Dorai was entrusted with much hard work but he did it all without any complaint.

Dorai's nani, (guru's guru) kaalaguru (nani's sister) and others were expert dancers and they would practise on the terrace of their house. He also learnt some dance steps from them and once accompanied them for a temple festival, wearing a half skirt and a blouse, long false hair in two braids decorated with paper flowers. Make-up was applied on his face by the others in the group. Dorai's love to look feminine and dance at festivals echoes Butler's idea that "gender is always a doing" and "gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence" (*Gender Trouble*, 34). Revathi recalls, "We got stared at a lot, and I heard people ask rather loudly whether we were men or women or Number 9s or devadasis" (*The Truth about Me*, 29). She recalls "some men made bold to touch us on our waists or our shoulders. Some others pointed to our breasts and asked, 'Original or duplicate?'" (29); this upset him and Revathi remembers

At such moments, I felt despair and wondered that people could be this way. How we could ever hope to make a living? God had 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. I tried hard to ignore all that was happening around me. (*The Truth about Me*, 30)

After a month at Erode, Dorai decided to return home to participate in his sister's wedding. When his mother saw "him", she burst into tears and wanted to know where "he" had been. Dorai's brothers were very angry and one of them hit him with a cricket bat. Dorai lied and said that he had accompanied a friend from tuition class to visit the Madurai temple. He explained that he thought that if he told them that he wanted to go to Madurai they would not allow it so he left without informing them. As his sister's wedding was imminent, he was let off without much thrashing. His brothers questioned "him" about "his" long hair to which Dorai replied that he wanted to offer his hair at the Tirupati shrine; he purposely mentioned a faraway temple to gain time. His life as a cleaner was extremely strenuous. Getting up at five, he would clean the lorry's wind screen, fill the radiator with water, dust the driver's seat and light the incense stick. His brother would drive the lorry; they would go from village to village picking up cans of milk to deliver at the milk factory. Meanwhile Dorai's hair had grown and he was getting restless to meet his guru but he could not confide in anyone.

One day when Dorai's father humiliated "him" in the presence of his workers, the former was crestfallen. He decided that he would no longer live with his parents. On the third day, he left home, taking one of her mother's gold earrings and two saris. Instead of walking on the road, he walked through fields and on reaching the hill fort, waited for his friends. One of them came and Dorai ran to him: he requested him to sell the ring, bring the cash and put him in the train to Delhi.

Revathi writes, “My heart stopped beating wildly. I’d done it! I had escaped!” (*The Truth about Me*, 38). These words reveal how the transgender person seems to be leading a dual life, an individual of a sex physically and of the opposite gender psychically. It is akin to being in a prison: a prisoner feels restricted and claustrophobic in a jail, while a transgender individual leads a life rife with identity issues. The issue is neither fully comprehensible to the person nor can he/she articulate it clearly to others. Others cannot comprehend the dilemma faced by a transgender person; consequently the latter is compelled to seek similar individuals who can support and simply be there for them. It is the fierce longing to make one self “complete” and comprehensible to others that drives one to his/her kind, even though they are complete strangers to oneself.

At Delhi, Dorai boarded an auto rickshaw and reached Wazirpur. After some asking around, he was able to reach his guru’s house. His guru was surprised to see him and also expressed her concern “At this young age, you dared to leave Tamil Nadu and come this far? What if something had happened to you on the way?...You could have lost your way, what would I have done then? It is God that has brought my daughter to me! I owe Him a hundred prayers” (*The Truth about Me*, 42).

Dorai was sent to his nani’s place in Rafiq Nagar. The guru did not want anyone to think that she had caught a young boy and forcibly made him like them. Her guru asked an elder to take him to Rafiq Nagar. “I, of course, did not know anyone apart from my guru. But I had always felt close to pottais, even if I didn’t know them. So I agreed to go to my nani’s and together we left in an auto rickshaw” (*The Truth about Me*, 43). The identity crisis of a transgender person which makes

him/her alienated from the others in society and simultaneously feel a kinship with other transgender individuals is very obvious from the words of the adolescent Dorai.

Dorai's innumerable doubts about hijras were clarified by nani. She also enlightened him that in north India, the people consider that hijras have been given a special boon by Lord Rama; as per that, the words spoken by a hijra always come true. She also counselled him that since the people believe that offering money to hijras brings blessings to the giver, the hijras ought to behave "in a manner that is worthy of that respect" (*The Truth about Me*, 45).

Dorai realized that the hijras in that house engaged in collecting badaai (the hijras collect money from shops and it is considered auspicious to offer money to hijras) from shopkeepers and doli-badaai (hijras play the drum called dholak, sing and dance during weddings and at childbirth) and thereby earned money. After some days, Dorai also joined the other hijras in visiting shops and collecting badaai from shopkeepers. He befriended a shopkeeper from Kerala and wrote a letter home saying he was fine, working in a shop and not to worry about him. One day during badaai, a driver from Namakkal saw "Dorai" dressed in a sari and called out to "him" but the latter ran away.

Shortly after that Dorai received a telegram about his mother being sick: when he informed his nani, she bought him a ticket and sent him home. He removed his earrings, nose ring and bangle and covered his shoulder length hair with a cap. On reaching home, Dorai found his mother in perfect health; his second brother shut the door and started hitting him with a cricket bat. Dorai was beaten on his legs,



back and finally a blow to the head cracked his skull and he was drenched in blood. He stopped only when he was tired and his arms ached. His mother also joined in scolding him,

What've we not done for you? What comforts were you denied? You tell us that! We bought you clothes, we fed you. Why, we have men working for us and you had to go and wear a sari, join a gang of pottais and beg! How can someone from a good family do that? Do you know who we are and what caste we belong to? How could you forget all that and do what you did? How did you have the heart to do all this? (*The Truth about Me*, 56)

The reaction from Doraisamy's brother may be due to *abjection*: abjection according to Robert Phillippe is a "vague sense of horror that permeates the boundary between the self and the other" (*Transgender*, 19). Phillippe gives the meaning of abjection as "to cast out" and he quotes Julia Kristeva, for whom abjection "disturbs identity, system, order" (20). He refers to Susan Stryker's essay "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage" that is mentioned by Kristeva thus "Stryker acknowledges and welcomes her abjection when she declares, 'I am a transsexual and therefore I am a monster'" (21, 244).

His mother decided that "Dorai's" long hair would be offered to the goddess at Samayapuram temple. In "The Voice of an Indian Trans Woman: A Hijra Autobiography", Regiane Correa de Oliveira Ramos states that violence is a part of a trans person's life (Indi@logs.<https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/indialogs.11086>). She explains how violence may be inflicted by "strangers, boyfriends and partners" (86).

Regiane mentions that when Dorai's hair is forcibly cut, it is a form of deep psychological savagery since for a trans person, the gender he/she claims is theirs, is an intensely personal identity expression (81). One day Doraisamy's brothers and mother took him to the temple where his hair was shorn off. Revathi writes,

I felt more pain than I did when my brother thrashed me. I prayed fervently: 'Amma! Why must I suffer like this? Why must you put me through this ordeal? ... What have I done wrong? It was you who made me male in form, but with female feelings. And now, for your crime, I am being punished and in your own shrine! .... Don't you have any pity? By this day next year, you must make a woman of me, just like you. If you can't, at least make me into a man completely.' (*The Truth about Me*, 57)

After some days, Dorai had to resume the work of loading and unloading milk cans once again. He felt that the entire village people spoke about him; at the milk cooperative store, the employees would ask him details from his Delhi life and at times even pinch him on his chest, caress him with their hands and touch his buttocks. He could not reveal these insulting incidents to his brothers, for fear of being accused of having brought it on himself. In three months his hair had grown: he finally left home and at Salem railway station changed into women's clothes. At Delhi, his guru and nani decided that it would be safer for him to leave for Mumbai. The person at Mumbai was Dorai's "nani" (grandmother).

In Mumbai, Dorai stayed with hijras in his guru's natal home at Ghatkopar, which was a large family of more than five hundred people consisting of chelas, naathis and sadak – naathis (daughters, granddaughters and great- granddaughters as

per hijra terminology). All these persons lived in faraway places like Delhi, Tamil Nadu and even abroad. After some days, Dorai started going to shops; each day of the week, he went to a different locality. While some hijras did sex work, others went to shops and collected money. Revathi describes the parallel structured hijra society which expected all hijras to follow the tacit rules of the jamaat. The society is described thus-

While there are no castes among hijras, there are houses or clans. There are seven clans or houses, and each has its own name. Hijras can choose their guru from any house and sometimes shift their allegiance to another house. This is allowed. Each of the seven houses has its own elected or chosen head, known as a *naik*. A *naik's parivar* comprises sister, younger sister, daughter, granddaughter and so on. But they don't necessarily live together, and meet occasionally at festivals or when the jamaats hold their meetings...I also came to understand that hijras had evolved a culture of their own to enable them to exercise order and restraint and also to exercise their rights. (*The Truth about Me*, 62)

After two months in Mumbai, his nani's chela asked Dorai if he would consent to be her chela. When Dorai said that he already had a guru in Delhi, his nani informed him that among chelas, they follow different traditions in each different city. To become a chela, Dorai had to go to Byculla where all the naiks of the seven different families live. The naiks were seated on a mat and asked him if he had become a chela to someone; since he had not, he was declared as a "ghori-moorathan" or one becoming a chela for the first time (63). After the jamaat

declared that Dorai was the chela of her chosen guru, she performed “paampaduthi” (touching the feet of the elders in the hijra community by the chela). The custom through which one gets initiated into the hijra family is called “reeth”.

Dorai continued to stay with his nani and gave his entire earnings to her. He served her well; he massaged her feet, helped in household work and listened to her advice. After six months, two of the chelas were getting ready for their castration surgery. One day nani told Dorai not to go the shops that day and keep two saris and inner skirts aside. Dorai was greatly thrilled to learn that he also was to have the surgery with the others.

Moving on to Laxminarayan Tripathi, her memoir titled *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* was published in 2015 in which she narrates her life experiences that compelled her to become a hijra in her quest to assert her true identity. The book originated from Laxmi’s talks to Vaishali Rode and the Marathi book with the title *Mi Hijra, Mi Laxmi* got published. Later R. Raj Rao translated the Marathi work into English; the Marathi “mi” means the same as “me” in English, hence the translator did not face great difficulty in finding an apt title for the book. Among the transgender writers chosen for this study, Laxminarayan Tripathi is unique as she chose to become a hijra without undergoing castration, though she later went in for the surgery. In 2019 she got the SRS (sexual reassignment surgery) done, many years after her autobiography was published. She commences her autobiography with a mention of her sickly childhood: born a male named Laxminarayan, by the age of seven, he had already suffered from typhoid, pneumonia and malaria while asthma was a constant illness and each bout of sickness left him weak. These

reasons led to his being compelled to lead a life of loneliness and unable to play with other boys. His ill health, however, hardly curbed his passion for dance. Laxmi claims, “Dancing saved me. It was the therapy I hadn’t given up, in spite of going through turbulent times” (*Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*, 23). At school, Laxmi was always chosen to participate in dances. She recollects “The stage had a hypnotic effect on me. Once on it, I would forget who I was and danced to a frenzy. Nothing, not even my chronic breathlessness and cough, acted as a deterrent. I thus came to regard the stage as an oasis in the desert of ill health” (4). However, people would tease him with names like “homo” and “chakka”; this was mainly due to his mannerisms and feminine style of deportment. Yet he never understood why this was so, “I did not know. I wasn’t of the age to answer this question” (4).

Laxmi recollects her sexual harassment at a young age: the young Laxmi was subjected to sexual exploitation possibly due to his feminine characteristics. At a family wedding, an older relative sexually abused him. The relative repeatedly raped the child at family gatherings and also brought his friends to molest him. The abuse continued at all family gatherings and consequently, Laxmi was completely transformed; she confides “These sexual assaults transformed me. I became secretive and incommunicative, hiding my feelings from my family and friends. Suddenly, it felt as if my childhood was over and I had grown up before my time” (*Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*, 7). After these incidents, Laxmi also faced sexual exploitation at the hands of his younger brother Shashi’s friends. His abuse continued unabated; Laxmi finally put an end to his exploitation by becoming bold and assertive.

When Laxmi found himself attracted to boys, he confided in Sangita, an older friend who helped him to prepare for English elocution competitions at school. Sangita told him about Ashok Row Kavi, the gay activist, which prompted Laxmi to go and meet him. This meeting was a relief to Laxmi: Ashok advised the schoolboy to contact him after the completion of his education. Laxmi felt comforted and went back home realizing that he was not unique and there were others like him. Meanwhile, Laxmi was having affairs with older boys, yet unable to fathom why he felt attracted to boys and not girls.

Dance was the only “therapy” that sustained him through the turbulent adolescence (*Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*, 23). When he danced he could express his true self and “everything paled into insignificance when I was on stage” as Laxmi recalls (23). Laxmi had learnt dancing from his sister Rukmini, who taught him “to dance to the tune of Bollywood songs” (23). At Singhania School, Mrs. Menon taught him to bring more expertise to his movements and later at Beam’s Paradise School, Baby Johnny teacher helped Laxmi to present his first dance performance. Baby Johnny inspired Laxmi to start his own dance school while the latter was in the eighth standard. It was named Vidya Nritya Niketan after the name of his mother, Vidyawati. He also taught dance at other schools. Laxmi also learnt Bharatnatyam (a classical dance form that originated in South India) from Mahalingam and Vasant Kumar Pillay. Laxmi’s students got opportunity to participate in TV dance reality shows like *Boogie Woogie*.

After his SSC Examination, Laxmi joined Mithibai College where he found the atmosphere suitable for his cross dressing ways. At times Laxmi would go

dressed as a male and on other occasions, he would go in female attire. Laxmi also started model coordination work, providing girls from his dance class to act in small parts in Bollywood films: it was his friendship with Anabel, a model that helped Laxmi to start model coordination. Along with his dancers Laxmi also started participating in dance shows. All this helped Laxmi to unleash his potential for dance and become popular. Soon Laxmi got the role of a dancer in an album by Vaishali Sawant that was named *Lavani on Fire* which catapulted him to the status of a celebrity. People started approaching him for autographs. Through a bar dancer, Sweetie, Laxmi learnt about bar dancing which was very lucrative and took it up. His high earnings from bar dancing were spent on fashionable clothes and expensive make up items.

Laxmi saw the life of bar dancers from close quarters: they belonged mostly to royal *tawaif* families which had declined after the establishment of democracy in the country, and the pains they took to feed their families were immense. As these women belonged to good families, they did not involve in sex work but struggled to keep their customers happy: they had to be very careful and act as if they were interested in each customer, without ever being so. This stress of acting flirtatious along with the burden of family liabilities forced many of them to take to drinking. These incidents throw light on the immense strain and pressures on bar dancers. Laxmi also started drinking as she could not express her gender identity openly; she expresses it thus, "I knew I couldn't fulfil these expectations because, inwardly, I did not feel like a man. On top of that, I was gay. Even if my parents overlooked my aberrations, society would not. I felt inadequate. I wanted to be addressed as a

woman, not a man, I was in turmoil” (*Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*, 37). Laxmi was looked upon as the eldest son in the family; apart from him there was an elder sister and a younger brother. Yet deep inside he felt he was a woman. When Laxmi was introduced to Shabina, a hijra who walked and talked exactly like a woman, he realized that he too wanted to be like her. Shabina told Laxmi about the history of the hijras, their customs and lifestyle as also their means of livelihood. Laxmi realized, “I had suffocated all along. I had been a victim of the wrongful assumptions of the world. Till I met Shabina and got the answers to all my questions....Yes, that was the answer. I was a woman and the world must see me as such” (40).

Laxmi went to Byculla, where the heads of the hijra gharanas stayed, to officially become a hijra. After the ceremony known as *reet*, Laxmi was accepted into the hijra community and given a gift of two green saris. “When I became a hijra, a great burden was lifted off my head. I felt relaxed. I was now neither a man nor a woman. I was a hijra. I had my own identity. No longer did I feel like an alien” (*Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*, 43). Laxmi was sent to Shabina’s guru, Lataguru, who was surprised that a child from a good family had opted to become a hijra. Laxmi informed her that he was staying at home with his parents and wore shirts and trousers at home. Her guru advised him to continue staying with his parents.

Although Laxmi had become a hijra, he could not bring himself to reveal this to his parents. He only mentioned it to a few close friends. Their reaction is conveyed thus,



So I shared it with a couple of intimate friends who were shocked beyond belief. When they recovered, each one of them reacted differently. Some said ‘Why have you brought this hell down upon yourself?’ Others were so pissed off that they stopped talking to me. But to Pravin, my boyhood buddy, it made no difference. He said, ‘You were, you are and you will always remain Laxmi for me. (*Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*, 45)

After his transformation to a hijra, Laxmi observed the general characteristics and behaviour of hijra community members to adopt their ways of carriage and gait. In pre-hijra days, Laxmi wore saris only for performing shows or for rehearsals; when he started wearing saris all the time, his acquaintances became suspicious. When protests against Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (which criminalizes homosexuality) were held throughout India towards the end of the twentieth century, Laxmi also participated enthusiastically. At a Press Club meeting to discuss 377, attended by Ashok Row Kavi and members of the hijra community, Laxmi was surrounded by television channel reporters who wanted to know his opinion on the issue. Laxmi jumped at this opportunity to become famous and spoke his mind. His parents learnt of his having become a hijra and were terribly shocked. His mother said, “No one in fourteen generations has done such a thing in our family. We are a noble, high-caste Brahmin family. Didn’t you think of our self-respect? Your sister is married. What will her husband’s family think of us?” (*Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*, 47-48).

Initially his parents tried to get Raju (the nickname his parents called him) married off to cure him of his hijra identity but when he tried to convince them that the decision would lead him to commit suicide, they accepted him as he was.

Nivedita Menon's words throw light on the typical reaction of parents when they learn of their son/daughter being of another gender:

The question of gender-appropriate behaviour is thus inextricably linked to legitimate procreative sexuality. That is, sexuality strictly policed to ensure the purity and continuation of crucial identities, such as, caste, race and religion. Non-heterosexual desire threatens the continuation of those identities since it is not biologically directly procreative; and if non-heterosexual people have children by other means, such as technological interventions or adoption, then the purity of these identities is under threat.

*(Seeing like a Feminist, 4)*

After some time Laxmi's parents accepted him as he chose to be and only insisted that he dress as a male in the house. In due course of time Laxmi had chelas of his own and of these Subhadra was the senior most. When Subhadra, a sex-worker, was murdered, Laxmi and the other hijras filed a police complaint. In spite of their sincere and sustained fight for justice, lack of evidence led to her killers going unpunished. It was a shattering blow to Laxmi and the others. This incident galvanized Laxmi to fight more determinedly for the rights of the hijras.

Later Laxmi started social work by associating with DWS, Dai Welfare Society; she catered to the welfare of the hijras, especially those who had got their

castration done. Shabina and Priya, both experienced social workers, had left DWS due to differences of opinion with some members: the responsibility of heading the organization fell on Laxmi's shoulders. Thus he became the first chairman of DWS. Laxmi writes about this new role, "As chairman of the DWS, I now had to look after the welfare of the entire hijra community in Mumbai. I felt empowered, and empowerment is not a word that normally exists in the vocabulary of a hijra. It is true that as a person, I, Laxminarayan Tripathi, liked taking on new challenges, but as a hijra I was never allowed to" (*Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*, 62-63).

On behalf of DWS, Laxmi was invited to a workshop on proposal development. Many well-known organization chiefs attended the meeting and many were highly impressed by Laxmi's presentation. One of his clients at the dance bar was also present; at first he looked uncomfortable, but at the end of Laxmi's talk, he was stupefied beyond words. He could not reconcile to the fact that a bar dancer could be so articulate and express himself so clearly and forcefully. The success of the workshop made Laxmi realize the importance of having a respectable standing in society; since he wanted to work for the welfare of hijras he stopped bar dancing. Laxmi next made a presentation at the Mumbai District AIDS Control Society (MDACS). A visit to Kamatipura, Mumbai's notorious red-light area, showed Laxmi the unhygienic and ugly surroundings in which the prostitutes worked and lived. She knew that in order to improve the conditions of the prostitutes, he had to become one of them, since otherwise they would not open up to anyone. Thereafter he frequently visited the place to understand their issues and contributed to their medical welfare through various measures.

Laxmi's meeting with Atharva Nair, a student of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences brought the latter's services to DWS and soon their work won international reputation. A German named Dorothy visited DWS and mentioned about a film she wanted to do based on the life of hijras. The film *Between the Lines*, written by Dorothy and directed by Thomas Wartman premiered at the Lokarno Film Festival in Switzerland in 2005. Anita Khemka, a photographer in real life and Laxmi were the main protagonists in the film.

Meanwhile, Laxmi's stay with his family was the bone of contention between him and his guru. His guru would often say, "Live with us hijras and not with your birth family....Your birth family may make you do things that are forbidden to us. We are neither male nor female. Why, then, must you cling on to the male-female society?" (*Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*, 72). Laxmi had a genuine reason for staying with his parents. To them Laxmi was their eldest son "Raju" and they loved and accepted him as he was. For their acceptance of him, he felt duty bound to care for them. A little later, Lataguru also came to live in another flat on the same building. However when she found that Laxmi could not be completely compelled to leave his family and stay with her, she left the flat and returned to her former house.

Laxmi was invited to participate in a high level conference in which the United Nations General Secretary Mr. Kofi Anan was to be present. The conference went off well and Laxmi's sense of achievement grew. Shortly later Laxmi had a quarrel with Lataguru: his frustration was vented on his siblings and in a fit of anger he packed her bags and left the house. He went to stay at his friend Rahul Kale's

house, whose attempts to cheer him failed, so they went to a resort in Daman. When Laxmi saw the sea, his suicidal tendency surfaced and he jumped into the sea with the intention of killing himself. Some fishermen came to his rescue and brought him back to safety. There he met Sylvester Merchant, a trustee of the Lakshya Charitable Trust that worked for AIDS patients, who counselled him and he returned with an improved state of mind.

The rate of suicide among the differently sexed is reported to be very high. As per the *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine*, both suicide rate and suicidal tendency are comparatively greater among the transgender community members. It states that the reasons for such high numbers are, “gender-based victimization, discrimination, bullying, violence, being rejected by the family, friends and community; harassment by intimate partner, family members, police and public, discrimination and ill-treatment at health-care system” (2016; Nov-Dec). Suicide attempts are also mentioned by Vidya, Revathi and Manobi in their narratives.

The *World Aids Conference at Toronto* in 2006 was the first international event to which Laxmi was invited: a hijra’s presence was being solicited for the first time in an international arena but Lataguru dissuaded him from going, as the visibility of hijras was anathema to her. Laxmi, however, was compelled by all others not to ignore this chance. Laxmi decided to go but needed a passport for his journey. The difficulties he experienced in applying for a passport are unimaginable. The passport officer, Mr. Mistri told him that his case was without precedent so he contacted the Delhi office and promised him that he could get a passport if he produced a ration card and a medical certificate that validated his identity. Laxmi

had not got castration surgery done and they had not renewed their ration card when they shifted their house. Ms. Shaila Khandge, an employee at the ration card office, took Laxmi to the District Superintendent of Police who issued a certificate which hastened the issuance of the ration card. However the ration card officer clerk was flustered with the sexual identity of Laxmi and the latter had to relate all the details of his conversion to a hijra. When he still seemed unwilling to help Laxmi, she thought of getting a medical certificate. Dr. Hema Jayrajani issued him a certificate to the effect that though Laxmi was born biologically male, his social and psychological identity was of a female. This certificate helped him to get the ration card and with his new documents Laxmi went to the passport office. Laxmi did not have the entire amount for the fees and Mr. Mistri lent him the extra amount. When Laxmi promised to repay the loan, he declined it and requested him to bless him instead since a hijra's blessings are supposed to be very powerful.

Laxmi's Toronto experience was exciting and novel. He spoke extempore when he had to substitute for an absent speaker and was greeted with thunderous applause. At the main speech, while others had written speeches with them, Laxmi had not made any written notes so he was nervous. Yasmeen, a transgender activist of Indian origin from Canada, infused him with confidence and once again Laxmi spoke to a resounding applause. After the conference, Yasmeen took Laxmi sightseeing. During his walk, Laxmi learnt that transsexual individuals in Canada underwent a long process of counselling, surgery and hormone therapy to reclaim their actual gender whereas in India joining the transgender or hijra community is almost a spiritual process. She also realized that most transsexuals there worked in

professions like medicine, law and other fields while in India they could not do anything except begging, singing and sex-work.

Laxmi resigned from DWS due to disagreements and shortly later, she, Kiran and Atharva formed *Astitva*, an organization for the welfare of the hijra community. When funds to their organization got stalled, they resolved to work independently. They started a hijra census to determine their actual number, socio-economical background as well as their means of livelihood. Laxmi understood that the condition of hijras was like that of the untouchables in the earlier days: consequently, they met some doctors and counsellors and requested them to act more humanely towards hijras. In fact through her conversations, she could convince many of the issues faced by the transgender group.

The *Netherlands Transgender Film Festival, 2007* organizers had invited Anita Khemka for the screening of *Between the Lines*; she requested that Laxmi also be allowed to accompany her. The film was screened there: the audience thoroughly enjoyed it and later Laxmi interacted with them. Laxmi met famous transsexual individuals like Kate Bornstein, Stephen Whittle, Josephine Hu, Susan Oxnor and so on. He met Kris who was attracted to him; Laxmi saw the T mark on his chest, he knew that it was the result of a mastectomy surgery and felt repulsed by the thought of sex with someone who had been a woman. It is ironical that he was disenchanted by a trans man while in his later life, he himself transformed to a trans woman. Kris saw him off at the airport and everyday he would call him; very soon he landed at Mumbai. When Laxmi did not treat him kindly, he left the place in anger. On

Laxmi's next visit to Amsterdam, he apologized for his rude behaviour and the two reunited.

Susan Oxnor, the curator of the *Amsterdam India Festival* took Laxmi to the festival director and introduced him thus, "For us, India means Laxmi" as she wanted to involve him in the upcoming programmes of the festival (*Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*, 100). For this event, Laxmi planned to take a troupe of hijras for the dance performance: apart from four hijras, there would be musicians, male and female singers and a male dancer. Rehearsals were started and passports were prepared for all the hijras. He had to teach the hijras about the cultural differences and also variations in weather, diet, sanitary habits and so on. In the month-long festival, Laxmi and his group presented dance forms from different parts of India. Along with their troupe, there was also a fashion show by the celebrity fashion designer Manish Arora; later, the BBC also produced a documentary based on the festival.

Laxmi was requested to become a member of the Asia-Pacific Network for Sex- Workers, which he accepted and consequently had to participate in many meetings. The United Nations General Assembly Special Session invited Laxmi for a high-level meeting at New York and he was sent an application for a G4 visa. He had heard that getting an US visa was a difficult process but at the consulate office he was called soon and his visa was ready in a few days. At the JFK airport, Laxmi was taken to a special queue where he got his passport stamped and could leave early. At the United Nations building the flags of all the member countries were flying and it was a very proud moment for Laxmi as he represented his country. He noticed that in New York, trans men and trans women did not live ghettoed lives;



they were employed in professions like medicine, law and so on. He contrasts the situation with that in India,

We abuse hijras when they ‘harass’ us on the streets, without realizing that the things they can do in order to survive can be counted on the fingers of one hand- begging, singing, dancing and sex work. Can a hijra in India ever aspire to be a doctor, engineer, teacher, journalist, or business manager? The answer is a resounding NO” . (*Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*, 110)

Laxmi’s civil society task force work also took him to Bangkok, “often regarded as the sex capital of the world” (*Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*, 112). There he learnt that the “kathos”, referred as lady boys

are transgenders (sic) who cross dress from childhood and have the body language and mannerisms of women. Some think of them as *different* type of men, others as *different* type of women. Still others call them the ‘third gender’, a term that the *Kamasutra* (sic) frequently uses.... They go to school and colleges, and work in shops, restaurants, beauty parlours and even factories. And then a large number of them are employed by the sex industry that is an offshoot, in a way, of Thailand’s tourism industry. The Thais love their kathos and treat them without bias or prejudice. (114-115)

With his growing celebrity status, Laxmi was invited for television shows like *Dus ka Dum* hosted by Bollywood film star Salman Khan. He also participated in the American show *Moment of Truth* inspired *Sach ka Saamna* which asked twenty one questions of each participant. In his case, he answered the first fifteen

correctly but the sixteenth answer went wrong. The answers were being verified from his parents, brother, sister-in-law, chelas and friends who sat in the audience. Later Laxmi also participated in *Big Boss* which demanded the players to stay together under a roof for three months. He was determined to stay there as a hijra activist, and not Laxmi the person, as he wanted to show the world that hijras are just as human and normal like other people.

Laxmi had become a celebrity, yet he had to face discrimination. He was invited to a conference after which a dinner party had been arranged. Laxmi found the crowd to be snobbish, so decided to leave. Sreela Mathai, the owner of the restaurant brought him a plate of food and told him he could go after he had eaten. A little later the CEO of the *Bombay Gymkhana*, Brigadier Bose called one of the organizers and asked him to make Laxmi leave the party. The reason given was that the club rules did not allow the presence of hijras. Laxmi was forced to leave without even finishing his food. He decided to expose the club's discriminatory practice and spoke to the *Mumbai Mirror* reporter. The next day newspaper headlines splashed the news and even Laxmi was embarrassed by the sensationalized news report. Laxmi sent a legal notice to the *Bombay Gymkhana* through the *Lawyers' Collective* advocate Anand Grover, who was his friend. He demanded a public apology from the club and its CEO. After some time however, Laxmi lost interest and decided not to proceed with the case. This incident, however, inspired him to fight more determinedly for the rights of the transgender people. Laxmi mentions,

One of the issues we raised was that in all government application forms, one had to state one's gender as either male or female. But hijras are neither male nor female. That meant that we couldn't fill out application forms! Which, in turn, implied that a hijra couldn't get a passport or a ration card as a hijra.

The clerks in the government offices were confounded. If hijras were neither M nor F, what were they? We suggested that we were O, or other, and that, henceforth, all application forms should have an option for 'O'. (*Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*, 130-131)

Laxmi's narrative then devotes two chapters to his father's struggle with cancer, his death and the rituals that followed. Chapter nineteen talks of how he was pressurized by Lataguru to pay her two lakh rupees: Laxmi said he did not have that amount, but Lataguru complained against him to Latanayak (the supreme authority in the hijra clan) so finally Laxmi had to give her the amount. Thenceforth Laxmi decided to break off all relations with her. When he met Laxmiguru, nicknamed *doctrani guru* by friends, he became her chela. She also reveals a few things about the hijras, namely their ghettoed communities and its structure, the occupations they do: badhai at weddings, begging at streets, dancing in bars and night clubs and sex work. The myths circulated about hijras; that they kidnap children and force them to become hijras and that they indulge in crimes, are busted by Laxmi. He asserts

It is tiresome to swim against the current. I have been swimming against two currents-one society and the other community. Both need to change their attitude. Whereas society needs to confront its biases towards the hijras, the hijras themselves must be forthright. We have paid a hefty price for living an

estranged and secluded life. The black sheep in the community, no more than ten per cent of our population, defame the entire community. (*Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*, 160)

Nivedita Menon talks of the hijras being ostracised and not supported by women's support organizations. She writes

The identity of the hijras is not in question here. Nor is the fact that hijra today are among the most marginalized of communities in India, often reduced to the borders of criminal extortion (in the guise of demanding traditional gifts at weddings and childbirth) in order to make a living. They are routinely harassed by police and physically threatened and/or assaulted under the umbrella of Section 377. Their specific needs for a dignified existence are not addressed by any political grouping, and certainly not by the women's movement. (*Seeing like a Feminist*, 105)

Even though Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code which criminalized homosexual relations, is no longer in force, the hijras are still questioned if seen at late hours, presumably soliciting customers for sex work. It is to be noted that neither *badhai* nor begging is as lucrative as sex work and in the case of hijras who are uneducated, nothing other than prostitution will help them earn a livelihood. So apart from educating the transgender individuals, necessary reservations in the employment sector is also required.

Laxmi established the Maharashtra Trutiya Panthi Sanghatana (MTPS) to fight transgender rights and try to procure housing and employment for hijras. The

attempts by the MTPS resulted in a meeting with the members of the Women's Commission, which helped in the formation of subcommittees to deal with hijra issues. Sensitization drives to create awareness about hijras were raised and the urgent need to issue documents like ration cards, passport or identification certificate like Aadhaar card to these persons was highlighted.

In the twenty first chapter, Laxmi dwells at length on the following: the meaning of the word "hijra", the parallel structure of the hijra family, the various gharanas or families of the hijras, the rituals and customs the hijras follow, the stories about hijras in the Indian epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, the hijras who have won laurels and recognition through their determination and hard work and how the term transgender refers to gender while terms like lesbian, gay and bisexual, all refer to sexuality.

The last work to be analysed is Jhimli Mukherjee Pandey's *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi: A Candid Biography of India's First Transgender Principal* about Manobi Bandyopadhyay, which is an account of formidable courage and honesty. The birth of a male child after two daughters produced pride and excitement in the father Chittaranjan Bandyopadhyay and before long he took his family to his ancestral home. His father-in-law reasoned with him to wait for the customary three months but the latter wanted to exhibit his son to his family; after an altercation, he finally took his new-born son and family home. Soon the baby fell ill, was diagnosed with pneumonia and on the point of death: the doctor who brought the baby back to life was "proclaimed" as "Dhanwantari" (god of Ayurveda stream of medicine) (*A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi*, 3). The son was

named Somnath (a synonym for God Shiva) since the father thought he was a gift from God Shiva. Somnath's birth proved lucky for the father; he got a job soon after. People complimented him and exclaimed, "Chitta, this is a boy Lakshmi"; in India it is believed that daughters bring luck to fathers (4). However, Manobi says, "It could have been pure coincidence that I, a boy, was being referred to as Lakshmi, but it was quite a meaningful one. Was this some kind of a premonition of things to come? A forecast that the boy was just outwardly male? Perhaps it was. At least, I like to think of it that way" (4).

Manobi remembers how as a young boy he loved to wear his sister's frocks and walk around the large house. His aunts and cousins mocked him but he did not care; soon he started applying his mother's makeup and it was then that his mother and sisters realized that it was an abnormality. Somnath was teased, called a girl by the bigger bullies in class on the first day of school and later pinched and punched by other boys due to his weak physical frame. Meanwhile, he had developed attraction for good looking older men and also developed "distaste for my genitals. I just couldn't accept my balls and my penis. I wanted to have my sisters' genitals. It was not that I did not like the male organ. I actually loved it, but in others" (*A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi*, 8).

Manobi talks of her sexual abuse by an older cousin around the age of ten. The young Somnath was taken to an abandoned room in the large house and subjected to anal sex, "Till he pierced me from behind, I had no idea what was going to happen. I think I did not mind the foreplay and the way he caressed me all over. But then he entered my anus and kept thrusting till I screamed in excruciating pain;

he put his hand on my mouth to suppress my cries” (*A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi*, 9). Even at school, Somnath’s delicate feminine features attracted boys to him; these same boys had harassed him during his initial days at school. As Manobi states, “From a time when the stronger boys enjoyed physically abusing me, now was a time when they tried to shield and protect me. I was too young to realize that this was just a passing phase and I enjoyed myself thoroughly. I thought that my femininity was finally being accepted by all” (9).

Somnath loved to participate in family weddings and festivals: girls and women dressed up in fine clothes and jewellery, dancing took place, and he was a “born dancer” (*A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi*,13). When his sisters went for dance class, Somnath accompanied them and even though he was not learning dance, he often danced much better than the other girls in the class. Seeing his penchant for dance, the teacher included him in a dance programme in feminine attire. The dance teacher’s words, “Being a boy, if Somnath can pick up a girl’s steps so well, why can’t you all do that?” made him smile and he “enjoyed the adulation. I yearned to tell them that I was not trying to be a girl, I was actually one!” (14).

After school when Somnath joined a dance troupe, he found many like him there. “There were so many like me ...they were such wonderful dancers! They were all men, physically, but had feminine souls....Unlike me, they have chosen to remain trapped in their male bodies and to the world they are male dancers, albeit a tad feminine or delicate” (*A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi*, 14-15).

After tenth standard, Somnath’s father compelled him to study science for secondary level, even though he was keen on taking humanities. His mother also felt

that since his sisters had studied science, it was preferable that he also study science especially since he was a “boy”. At school many boys were attracted to him but he felt close to Shyam, and chose him over his cousin Shwet who was very loud and boisterous in his proclamations of love for Somnath. Shyam and Somnath were like lovers and enjoyed each other’s company and the latter completely avoided Shwet. Shyam, however, ignored Somnath when both of them joined the same school for secondary education. For a long time he felt heartbroken and depressed. Somnath had some more heartbreak in his adolescence and coupled with his personal gender crisis, he sought the help of a medical student who directed him to a psychiatrist, who however, advised him to forget about sex surgery. Somnath then decided to earn money before going for surgery.

As he had scored well in the examination, his father again insisted that he study science, but Somnath preferred Bengali literature. After much persuasion, his father agreed to his studying Bengali literature. The first day at college Somnath was welcomed with taunts and catcalls as he was dressed in kurta and salwar and walked in a feminine way. When some students asked him if he were a cross-dresser, “I vehemently denied it and said that I was a woman trapped inside a man’s body, not knowing the term ‘transgender’ (*A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi*, 41). Not only senior boys, even Somnath’s classmates ragged him. Even though many boys sought him for a physical relationship, Somnath always yearned for a sincere emotional relationship. Somnath did not find college stimulating and looked for other avenues to excel in. He started writing articles in local magazines and soon won respect in his college.



After graduation while other classmates opted *Calcutta University* for post graduation, Somnath wrote the admission test of *Jadavpur University*, which was supposedly difficult to clear but he managed to clear it. Even though his parents feared that a very free atmosphere would seriously affect their somewhat strange son, Somnath persisted in his demand and they had to accept his wish. His post-graduation at the university proved to be an invigorating experience: not only were the teachers and students intellectually higher, they were also very progressive and none considered his feminine aspect as an oddity. Somnath's admiration for his teacher Shankha Ghosh encouraged him to confide in him about his gender identity through letters. The teacher was understanding and read his letters without being judgmental. When the results were published, Somnath did not get first class marks; he guessed that his sexual status may have upset some teacher. After his M. Phil, Somnath got a part time job at a boys' school, where he enjoyed interacting with the students and set up a dance and theatre group. Many boys approached him with their gender identity issues which they hesitated to express "for fear of parental and societal backlash" (*A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi*, 67).

In 1995 when Somnath got appointed as a lecturer at Vivekananda Satavarshiki College in Jhargram, he was happy as he had recently broken off with a lover and thought the change would do him good. His entry to the college, however, sent giggles and comments among teachers and students. Even his father, who had accompanied him was humiliated and jeered at. A lady staff member who had insulted him was the librarian, who along with a teacher from the English and History department each, often harassed Somnath as they could not reconcile to the

idea of a hijra in the college. While the teachers were mostly hostile, the students were very eager for Somnath's class; Somnath's hard work paid off when his student, whom he had personally coached, stood first in the University. Along with the issue of uncooperative colleagues, Somnath also faced accommodation problems, which made him shift houses often. When a suitable house was found, Somnath moved there and visited his home on weekends. Even though he had to start at four in the morning on Monday to catch a train and then take a bus to reach college, he enjoyed the train journey.

Somnath's plan of doing research had to be put aside, as one of the two guides refused to cooperate with the topic of transgender people that he had in mind. Consequently, he started the country's first transgender magazine *Abomanab* (Bengali for subhuman). It was a very successful magazine and enabled its readers to understand the transgender community. When he went to the hijra community near his hometown, he saw firsthand the life of the hijras. He took *diksha* to enter the community and the experiences were published serially as a novel in *Abomanab*.

His search for the apt doctor for his sex surgery led him to consult many psychoanalysts but all of them discouraged him. Finally, he met Dr. Anirban Majumdar, an endocrinologist who promised to help him and he started with hormone treatment. The doctor suggested the best plastic surgeon in the city, Dr. Manoj Khanna, for the surgery that would follow the hormone treatment. The treatment involved the suppression of the male hormone testosterone and the simultaneous augmentation of the female hormone estrogen. The therapy commenced in 1999 and continued till 2003.

The effects of the hormone treatment wrought a great change in Somnath; he looked more glamorous. Manobi describes the change thus,

My body hair started to thin, my facial hair being the first to go. Though my bone structure remained more or less the same, I started looking more rounded at first and then, to my great surprise, curves appeared-around my waist, near my tummy and on my chest. Gradually, the image in the mirror showed that I was developing what I had waited for all my life-breasts! (*A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi*, 119-120)

Most trans individuals express the feeling of “a woman being trapped in a man’s body”. The same experience is articulated by Vidya when she asserts, “It was all so complicated: I was a woman trapped in a male body. Physically, I was no woman, but my thought processes when considering my future, my professional career, were those of a woman” (*I am Vidya*, 37). Revathi mentions “A woman trapped in a man’s body was how I thought of myself .... and all the time I was obsessed, confused and anxious” (*The Truth about Me*, 15). Laxmi recollects that people “couldn’t see ... that though I was a man, my body language was that of a woman. Yes, it is true that I was like a woman. My mannerisms, my walking and talking style were all feminine. But why was it so? I did not know” (*Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*, 4). Laxmi also mentions that others called her a “chakka” or “homo” since she “was a man, my body language was that of a woman” (4). As far as Manobi is considered, she thinks that her mother may have known that something was very wrong with her third child Somnath. She regrets, “Ma perhaps tried her best to ignore the problem for as long as possible. She perhaps knew that she could not

correct what God had willed; she perhaps knew that she had borne a girl the third time, bottled in a man's body" (*A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi*, 26). As a college student when other students asked him if he were a cross-dresser, Manobi recollects, "I vehemently denied it and said that I was a woman trapped inside a man's body, not knowing the term 'transgender' (41).

The frank and explicit narration by each trans person reveals how, knowingly or unknowingly, each cisgender individual in mainstream society is directly or otherwise complicit in the pathetic condition of the trans community. A sizeable majority of the trans members are disowned by their immediate family. Those who stay with their birth family are exposed to harsh and transphobic treatment from relatives as well as other social beings. However, despite such adversities, some trans individuals are daring and courageous enough to carve their way forward and find their rightful place in mainstream society. To achieve this, stereotypes are challenged and contested, and they prove their merit; they exhibit their potential and reveal that like others, they are also capable of attaining success. They show their true worth to be considered as deserving as any other successful person.

Society needs to be made aware about the transphobia that is exhibited against certain marginalized individuals, which is often normalized and trivialized by the cisgendered majority. The hyper visibility of the transgender persons, as opposed to the others of the LGBT group, often makes them the brunt of societal ridicule and harassment, and at times even subjected to violence including rape.

There ought to be social recognition, equality and dignity for all marginalized individuals, including the trans community. *The Transgender Bill of*

2014 and later social developments exposed the hypocritical politicians, who only support the community as potential vote bank. Their apprehensions about the community became explicit when they failed to bring any significant positive change. Even in a so-called inclusive country like India, the fate of these hapless minorities is left in the hands of the majority, creating more hurdles for the growth and success of the former group. Consequently, large scale violence and harassment of the trans persons goes on. They are not provided any legal protection, and at times, the police personnel themselves exploit them, financially and/or sexually. Manobi's resignation from the Principal post and numerous other incidents, especially in Revathi's narrative exposes the transphobic reactions from society.

It is an optimistic hope that the *Transgender Bill*, which is still under process might prove to be a silver lining for the marginalized categories who are looking for succour in the cloud of darkness. In the past decade, many trans persons have adorned various high level posts and broken stereotypes, like trans individuals being suitable only for begging and/or sex-work. Yet, it is to be agreed that the inclusion of these minorities can be possible only through support and acceptance from mainstream society.

## Chapter 2

### **Metamorphosis: A Transition towards Self Actualization**

#### **Unidentified Transvestite Male**

Shot execution style.

Multiple stab wounds.

Strangled.

Gang raped.

Sodomized.

Beaten. Slapped. Kicked.

Left to die.

Buried in a shallow grave.

We know some of your names:

Brandon, Amanda, Gwen, Stephanie, Ukea, Rita, Debra, Frederika.

But others remain.

Nameless

Faceless

Voiceless.

Unidentified transvestite male.

Man found dead wearing wig.

I think of you, my unknown sister,

lying motionless

blood rivulets flowing from slashed-open skin

decaying in a puddle of crimson  
the twilight sidewalk  
glistening with fresh rain droplets  
the luminance of the moon  
casting eerie shadows  
on your battered anonymous  
Body.

Your wig  
so a part of your identity,  
tipped off your head,  
lying sodden in a  
cigarette-butt laden puddle.  
mixing with traces of your blood.

How do I resurrect you?

These lines by Joelle Ruby Ryan are an excerpt from her poem, with which she begins her article “Death by Transphobia: Increasing Gender Awareness through Teaching the Day of Remembrance”. The T D o R or the Transgender Day of Remembrance is held every year on 20<sup>th</sup> November to commemorate all the transgendered persons killed due to transphobia. The first Transgender Day of Remembrance was held in 1999 by transgender advocate Gwendolyn Ann Smith to pay tributes to Rita Hester, who was murdered in 1998. The *GLAAD*, the *Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation*, was formed in 1985 to fight all forms of discrimination faced by the gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender and queer

communities; the organization wants to usher in acceptance, dignity and equality for these marginalized categories. On the Transgender Day of Remembrance, a list of the trans persons killed during the past year is read out first. Later candlelight vigils, church services, marches and other activities are organized to create awareness about the transgender category. The previous week itself awareness programmes are held to sensitize the general public. The poem by Ryan is highly touching yet factually accurate since most transgender persons are vulnerable to transphobic hatred and violence, which finally leads to their murder. It may be argued that the number of such deaths is very less, yet statistics state the opposite view. In 2019, the Transgender Day of Remembrance listed the names of thirty trans persons killed in the United States of America; the actual number might be much more since most deaths either go unreported or misrepresented. Gwendolyn Ann Smith asserts,

Transgender Day of Remembrance seeks to highlight the losses we face due to anti-transgender bigotry and violence. I am no stranger to the need to fight for our rights and the right to simply exist is first and foremost...With so many seeking to erase transgender people-sometimes in the most brutal ways possible- it is vitally important that those we lose are remembered, and that we continue to fight for justice. ([www.glaad.org/tdor](http://www.glaad.org/tdor))

Smith's words throw light on the very insecure existence of the transgender community in the USA. Transphobia is not a Western phenomenon, it is a universal threat faced by sexual and gender minorities. It has to be noted that transgender people are being attacked and killed for simply expressing their true identity. Even in India many individuals belonging to such categories are viciously treated and



mercilessly hounded out by goons and the police. There have been innumerable cases of sexual assaults and/or murder of transgender people in various parts of the country. Transphobic incidents exhibit the lack of knowledge about gender and sexual categories and deep rooted belief in the gender binary norm.

Patricia Gagne et al declare that since an individual with mismatched body/gender happens to be in an intermediate position between the gender binary, there is often a mistaken belief about their being homosexuals (*Gender and Society*, 479). They assert that this is more so in the case of the “feminine man or the masculine woman” (479). As such persons fail to conform to societal expectations, they are often “stigmatized, ostracized and socially delegitimized to the extent that they may fail to be socially recognized” (479-480). The authors add, “For those whose transgender feelings and behaviour began in early childhood, pressures to ‘fit’ into the masculine stereotype and ‘act’ like boys created confusion about identity, an internalized sense of deviance, and frequently strong self-loathing” (488). They insist that such children are initially confused about their mismatched sex and gender: these children also realize that cross-dressing and other feminine mannerisms are often considered *deviant*, so they indulge in it only secretly. When these children start to comprehend the gender binary system, they experience shame and try to conceal their behaviour. However, “Despite the stigma attached to transgenderism ... the need to be themselves” is too strong to resist and “Even as they tried to stop and as their feminine attributes were criticized and sanctioned, they found it impossible to stop and learned to become more and more secretive” (488). Gagne and others admit that usually such individuals experience “guilt, anxiety” and

being “different” from others. Societal pressures to conform to their natal gender often leads to an “internal struggle” which finally compels them to come “out to one’s self” (489). At first, these persons presume themselves to be “sick or deviant” and it is only when they find others like themselves, that they realize they are “normal” (490). Such individuals often experience “periods of confusion and turmoil” and at such times cross-dressing provides them relaxation and comfort (491). According to Gagne,

Throughout childhood, adolescence, and early to mid-adulthood most transgendered experience shame and confusion for not being “right”. They lived in a social region for which there was no idiom. Because they were sanctioned for feminine attribute and behaviour, they learned that there was no place for feminine boys or men in society. Feeling more comfortable with girls, they began to understand gender and sex within the social options presented to them. The socially constructed aspects of reality were so strong that believing they were *born with the wrong genitals* seemed more plausible than violating the gender binary. (italics added, *Gender and Society*, 490)

By asserting their gender identity, the simultaneously invisible yet hyper-visible transgender individuals challenge and subvert their natal markers of sex while the expression of their hitherto muted personality endows them positive visibility. Once they assert their actual gender through surgical intervention, they endeavour to challenge social prejudices and claim their basic human rights; thereby empowering the members of their community. This study investigates why transgender people live as members of the opposite gender at the cost of risking the

loss of their family and friends: it is an undeniable fact that most transgendered individuals in India are completely shunned by their families when they attempt to assert their gender.

The term *transgender*, an adjective, refers to one who feels trapped in his/her physical body since there is no correspondence between their born sex and the gender they believe they are. In India the transgender persons are usually referred by the term *hijras* which points to those males who spurn their masculine identity and identify as women: however, Indian society is yet to acknowledge the presence of (wo) men who undergo mastectomy or surgical removal of breasts to assert their male gender and transition to a man. The hijras, on the other hand, dress in feminine attire, wear jewellery, apply make-up, adopt feminine names and wish to be addressed as women. Hijras are simultaneously invisible and hyper-visible and can be “seen” in traffic signals or begging at shops: but their residence, lifestyle, rituals and other details are hardly known to others in society. However some hijras have managed to challenge the dichotomy of their body/gender and assert their “true” gender through surgery and hormonal treatment. Once they reclaim their actual gender identity, they become empowered to strengthen their community. “Hijra” is the common term for transgender persons, but other names are also frequently employed; in northern parts of India like Delhi and Maharashtra, “kinnar” or “kinner” is another word for hijra. In Tamil Nadu, a feminine man is called a “pottai” while the emasculated person is known as “thirunangai” or “aravani”. Biological males showing shades of femininity are termed “koti” or “kothi”; some hijras may identify as kothis but not all kothis identify as transgender persons or

hijras. In Andhra Pradesh males “possessed” or “close to a goddess” are considered as “shiv-shakthis” while “jogtas” or “jogappas” in Maharashtra and Karnataka are the devotees of Goddess Renuka Devi or Yellamma. G. Kalra holds that the hijras prefer being referred as “trithiya panthi” or “trithiya prakriti” meaning the third gender and third nature respectively (“Hijras: The Unique Transgender Culture of India”, 122-126). Hijras are documented to have had a very old tradition and they follow age-old rituals. Sibsankar Mal and Mundu claim that the hijras owe their “cultural heritage” to the “khwajasara” of the Muslim period (“Hidden Truths about Ethnic Lifestyle of Indian Hijras”, 622). The “khwajasaras” were either eunuchs or hermaphrodites employed as guards at the “harems” of the Mughals; unlike other men, they had free access to the women there as their being emasculated did not prove a risk to the womenfolk. The term ‘harem’, derived from the Arabic word ‘harem’ originally referred to a sanctuary, but later alluded to the female apartments and the inmates there which included all the female relatives of the king: mother, sisters, wives, daughters and concubines. These secure and well-guarded lodgings for the women were arranged within the palace. The eunuchs were placed outside the harem and they were controlled by khwajasara or the chief Eunuch. Gayatri Reddy mentions, “The *khwajasara* or “chief eunuch” held a prominent position in royal household and the political hierarchy of the court” (*With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identities in South India*, 116).

In her popular work *Neither Man nor Woman*, Serena Nanda mentions the hijras as “a religious community of men who dress and act like women and whose culture centres on the worship of Bahuchara Mata” (ix). Bahuchara Mata is probably

the most important among the goddesses worshipped in India; she is a version of the Indian Mother Goddess. Bedhmata is another name of Bahuchara Mata and a temple dedicated to her is located in Varakhdiwala in Mehsana district of Gujarat.

According to Nanda,

Bahuchara was a pretty, young maiden in a party of travelers (sic) passing through the forest in Gujarat. The party was attacked by thieves and, fearing that they would outrage her modesty, Bahuchara drew her dagger and cut off her breasts, offering it to the outlaws in place of her virtue. This act, and her ensuing death, led to Bahuchara's deification and the practice of self-mutilation and sexual abstinence by her devotees to secure her favour.

*(Neither Man nor Woman, 25)*

Another story of Bahuchara Mata goes thus: there was a king who prayed to the Goddess for a son and when his wish was fulfilled, the son, Jetho, turned to be impotent. At night, the Goddess appeared to Jetho in a dream and asked him to be emasculated. Serena mentions the belief prevalent in Gujarat which says that impotent men are ordered by the Goddess to get their castration done. If someone disobeys the Goddess' call, he will be cursed and born impotent in the following seven births (27).

There is another version of a prince who did not want to get married. However, he relented to his parents' wishes and married a girl, none other the Goddess. On the nuptial night, the prince left his wife and went away. The wife waited and became angry as he did not return even at dawn. Every night the prince would leave home; one day the wife decided to follow him. She saw her husband

acting like a hijra in the forest. She returned home and later asked him if he did not need her presence. The prince pleaded with her, “Mother, if I had the urge for a wife and children, I wouldn’t have left you and gone away. I am neither a man nor a woman, and that is the truth” (*Neither Man nor Woman*, 25-26). The Goddess was overcome by rage and slit off his genitals saying “They have spoiled my life by hiding the facts, and therefore your life will also be spoiled. Hereafter, people like you should be nirvana” [undergo emasculation in order to be reborn] (26).

Nanda mentions Mehta who states that Bahuchara Mata was ritually worshipped by childless women for the birth of a son. She explains that traditionally the hijras had ritual roles at wedding functions and birth of children. She states that the hijras presented performances at such gatherings and the prerequisite for the performers was that they be “real hijras” that is “they must be emasculated or intersexed, and the hijra dancers must be dressed in women’s clothing” (*Neither Man nor Woman*, 5). At such celebrations, songs are sung, dances are performed by hijras and finally blessings are bestowed on the new-born baby. The performance by hijras at marriages is also an important tradition. A few days after the wedding, a group of hijras assemble at the groom’s house. In the presence of relatives, the hijras bless the new couple with fertility (4). The hijras bless babies as representatives of the Mother Goddess and it is a ritual which involves checking the baby’s genitals. If the baby is an intersex, they lay their claim on the child. The examination of a baby’s genitals strengthens the “belief that hijras have claim on infants whom they observe to be intersexed”; they say that “these children belong to us because they are like us, neither man nor woman” (5). The family is expected to gift them money,

clothes and other items as per their means. However, the hijras' ability to bless the newly-born can also be subverted to curse persons with infertility and misfortune, when they are dissatisfied with the amount of money and/or the gifts they receive (6). Serena points to the paradox that the hijras, "impotent and emasculated men, have this traditional role of conferring blessings of fertility on new-born males and newlyweds" (5). It is indeed riveting that the impotent hijras bless the baby to grow up and create new life, "of having many sons, and of carrying on the family line" (3).

Nanda mentions various stories about hijras prevalent in different parts of the country, which point to their revered position in pre-British times. As per the *Ramayana*, Ram was ordered to leave the kingdom and exiled to the forest for fourteen years. As he reached the edge of the forest, he addressed the people who had accompanied him thus, "Ladies and gents, please wipe your tears and go away" (*Neither Man nor Woman*, 13). It is reported that those who did not belong to the male/female category, lingered at that place, since they had not been given any instructions. For the fourteen years that Ram stayed in the forest, this group stayed there. When Ram returned, he was impressed by their obedience and blessed them (13). It is reported that he said they would have the gift of prophecy; both their blessings as well as their curses are believed to come true. This is the reason that the hijras are treated with respect yet simultaneously, their sight fills people with fear. Some hijras identify with the Hindu deity Shiva, "who incorporates both male and female characteristics. Shiva is an ascetic, someone who relinquishes sex, yet he is found in certain erotic and procreative forms. The phallus is Shiva's most potent

symbol of worship, yet this phallus is mostly represented in the *yoni*, the female genitalia. The *Ardhanarisvara*, one of the most striking forms of Shiva, which is half-man and half-woman, signifies Shiva united with Shakti, the female creative power” (20). The story of Vishnu also exhibits his “dual gender manifestations” (20). A myth is prevalent which claims that Vishnu transformed into Mohini, a very beautiful woman to retrieve the sacred nectar from the demons who had taken it unjustly. A myth about Krishna (an incarnation of Vishnu) says that he disguised himself as a beautiful woman to kill a demon called Araka whose chastity was the source of his unconquerable power. Araka had never seen a woman; Krishna, it is said, took the form of a beautiful woman, married him and then killed him. Another legend about Shiva goes thus; he performed the most severe form of tapasya, self-mutilation. Brahma and Vishnu wanted Shiva to create the world. Shiva acceded to their request and stayed underwater for a thousand years. In his absence, Brahma created the gods and the world. Shiva’s reemergence from water showed him that the world had already been formed. Shiva cut off his linga (phallus) and scattered it on the earth. It is believed that this act bestows fertility in the world. Nanda cites O’ Flaherty who mentions “the linga becomes a source of universal fertility as soon as it has ceased to be a source of individual fertility” (30). In the *Mahabharata*, there is a story related to the hijras. After the game of dice in which the Kauravas defeated the Pandavas, the latter had to spend twelve years in exile and the last year they had been incognito. Arjun disguised himself as a eunuch, named Brihannala, dressed in feminine attire and taught music, singing and dancing to princess Uttara, daughter of King Virata (30).



Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai mention the interesting legend of two Hindu gods creating a child. Lord Ayyappa, also known as Hariharaputhra, is supposed to have been formed from the union of Shiva and Vishnu. Vishnu had taken the form of a woman, Mohini and a baby was born from their union. Vishnu was embarrassed of the child and abandoned it, which was later discovered by King Rajasekhara of Pandalam, who brought up the child, who grew up to be Lord Ayyappa. Later a temple dedicated to Lord Ayyappa was built at Sabarimala (*Same Sex Love in India: A Literary History*, 110).

The prevalence of such mythological stories points to ancient societies that were tolerant and accommodating towards hijras, since even Hindu gods were believed to have taken the form of transgendered persons. Serena Nanda avows

Hijras are men who are impotent for one reason or another and only become by having their genitals cut off. Emasculation is the *dharm* (religious obligation) of the hijras, and it is this renunciation of male sexuality through the surgical removal of the organ of male sexuality that is at the heart of the definition of the hijra social identity. (*Neither Man nor Woman*, 15)

The hijra's identity as "not men" due to their faulty anatomy (either the dysfunctional penis or absence of one) and through the choice of a hijra life, seem to proclaim the negation of "sexual desire and sexual activity" (*Neither Man nor Woman*, 15). The pre-British Indian society revered the hijras and it was believed that their words were prophetic; they would bless those who treated them kindly and curse those who ignored them or refused to offer them money. In contemporary north Indian towns and cities where hijras collect money from shops, most believe in

the power of their words; hence most shopkeepers pay them money. Those who treat them harshly are sure to experience their sharp tongue or even be exposed to their genitalia, which seems to be a threat to the former being reborn as a hijra.

Nanda mentions an engrossing fact about the hijras: the celebration of an important festival at Koovagam in Tamil Nadu in which hijras, transgender persons and homosexual men from all over India participate. The festival celebrated in April/May, is held over eighteen days. All the hijras who participate in the celebration, identify with Krishna, get “married” to the deity “Koothandavar” and later become “widows” (21). The story associated with this festival is about two warring kingdoms. In order to become victorious, one of the kings decided to sacrifice his eldest son to the gods, soon after his wedding. Since no woman was willing to get married only to become widowed later, Krishna took the form of a woman to marry the prince. Everything went as per plan; the wedding occurred, the prince was sacrificed and the king became a victor. To commemorate this event, every year, devotees assemble near the temple and undergo the marriage ceremony. The next day, the deity is taken to the burial ground. The “women” who have married the deity remove all traces of their marriage, from the wedding chain to the flowers and wail like widows. Women, however, are not allowed to witness the festival rituals.

According to Amara Das Wilhelm, in Kottankulangara temple in Kerala, a festival “Chamaya Vilakku” is held every year in which “thousands of men dress up as women and offer themselves to Sri Bhagvati - devi, an expansion of the goddess Durga. In a special ceremony called *Chamaya - Vilakku*, the cross-dressers grasp

tall, lighted lamps and wait for the procession of the goddess in form of a *sila* or stone to pass by” (*Tritiya Prakriti: People of the Third Sex-Understanding Homosexuality, Transgender Identity and Intersex Conditions Through Hinduism*, 59). In the festival, the goddess blesses the devotees. The story associated with this cross-dressing festival is narrated by Wilhelm thus, “Long ago, a group of cowherd boys worshipped a stone in the mood of shy, young girls. After some time, the goddess Bhagvati personally appeared before them to accept their worship and become the stone” (60). It is reported that a temple was constructed there in honour of the goddess and the men who participate in this cross-dressing ceremony do it as an obeisance. Another temple ritual narrated by Wilhelm is related to the Navaratri festival. Wilhelm writes, in “Tiruvanaikal Siva temple on the banks of Kaveri, a priest will wear a sari and headdress of the goddess while offering *puja* to Lord Siva on her behalf” (61). Wilhelm writes of the days before Dussehra when men in Tamil Nadu dress up as women and visit houses asking for donations for the temple festival. On Dussehra day, these men cross-dress and offer prayers to Mutharamma Goddess. The Renuka-Yellamma festival to worship Goddess Yellamma, another form of Goddess Durga, is held in Karnataka. As per a legend, Goddess Yellamma had saved the life of Goddess Renuka and thereafter they became close companions. The largest temple for these goddesses has been built in Saudati and Badami in Karnataka. Wilhelm says, “They are associated with the *devadasi* cult as well as the *jogappa*-cross dressing men and homosexuals who, like the *devadasi* serve the temple goddess as dancers and prostitutes” (62).

As far as transgender individuals are concerned, they spend their childhood trying to fathom the incongruity of their sex and gender and when they reach adolescence, they strive to transform to the gender of their psyche. The writers analyzed in the project underwent castration at different ages: Vidya in her early twenties, Revathi in her teenage, Laxmi in her forties and Manobi in her thirties. While castration and other gender-related surgeries in the west are done after much counselling and other formalities, in India it is a spiritual experience within the hijra community.

Kristen Rudisill mentions Pritham Chakravarthy, a one-woman theatre artist, who performs *Nirvanam* (Transcendence), a play based on the life of transgendered persons or aravanis. The play, first enacted in 2001, has later been performed around thirty times at different venues like international drama festivals, aravani functions, human rights conferences in India as well as the U S and UK (*Performing*, 537). Chakravarthy, a faculty at *Ramanaidu Film Society* at Hyderabad, dons many hats- playwright, performer, researcher, director, activist and film critic. Pritham Chakravarthy has co-authored *Ethanai Kaalam Thaan*, a critical analysis about the growth of Tamil cinema, with Venkatesh Chakravarthy. *Akira Kurosawa*, is another book which she has co-authored and several essays and articles are her other literary contributions. Chakravarthy performs what she terms “applied theatre” in which it is, “all solo, all conversational and all telling women’s stories in an autobiographical fashion” (539). She expands the play *Nirvanam*, Rudisill claims, and evolves the narrative from stories recounted by the aravanis at each performance. Each aravani’s experience, which is shared after her presentation, is incorporated in the next one

(537). Experiences, feelings, emotions; anything which brings out a feature of an aravani is judiciously utilized by Chakravathy. Her narration during the play is conversational and she has very skillfully portrayed the incidents in aravanis' life which she identifies with during her performance.

Aravanis had seen and appreciated Chakravathy's play "Vellavi", the story of a Dalit washer woman. They then approached her with a request to "tell our story" (*Performing*, 540). Chakravathy researched for almost six months, spent time with some aravanis, recorded their experiences and wrote the first draft of the play. It was very difficult to make it a "cohesive" structure and she struggled to select the apt incidents for the first draft of *Nirvanam*; however when she showed it to the Tamil Nadu Aravani Association, it was rejected since it highlighted the "abuse and exploitation" of their community members (541-542). "This was not what they *desired*: they wanted a *strong story*" (italics added, 542). The aravanis did not want their victimization to be the crux of the story. This demand points to the strong and undefeatable spirit of the aravanis, whose life is uncertain and often filled with transphobic violence. Most are thrown out of their houses and miss the emotional support and love of their kith and kin. However the buoyant zest for life encourages them to move forward in the face of adversities and challenges. Chakravathy admits "The promise to retain their dignity, portray not just their pain, but their determination and sturdiness in withstanding it, their pleasure in coming into their womanhood, finding solidarity with fellow travellers, and daring to exist against all odds, molded (sic) both the form and content of my performance"(543). When Aasha, the president of the *Tamil Nadu Aravani Association* saw a performance of

*Nirvanam* her response was given thus, “When I first saw the show, I couldn’t bear it and tears came to my eyes. I didn’t see Pritham there, but a fellow *aravani*. A fellow being’s suffering that stayed in my mind” (539). The transgender community’s ability to rejoice in their innate gender identity, especially at the cost of ridicule and social stigmatization deserves respect. Most members of the community run away from home when they fail to find empathy or understanding from their loved ones. Such persons get acceptance, friendship and love from the transgender community while society, on the other hand, only marginalizes, violates and hurts them. Chakravarthy skillfully represents the traumatic narratives of the aravanis which transforms them into formidable individuals. Simultaneously, without evoking sympathy, she excels in impressing and instilling a semblance of “tolerance” for the transgender members, in the audience (543). In order to sensitise the mainstream society and create awareness about the trans community among social beings, a few initiatives have to be implemented. First of all widespread gender sensitization needs to be promoted to introduce the different categories of sexual and gender minorities-lesbians, gays, intersex, transgender, transsexual ,transvestite and others. Simultaneously, legal reforms must take into consideration the existence of these marginalized sections and ensure the protection of their basic human rights. Along with discrimination and violence from the mainstream society, some trans persons also face various forms of harassment within the community. Such intra-community problems must be identified and addressed to ensure secure lives for the community inmates. The *2019 Transgender Bill* has not yet been fully operational since many anomalies still need redressal and certain clauses are unacceptable to the community members. A long way lies ahead for the trans

community and it will take many more years for a semblance of gender justice to prevail in the Indian subcontinent.

Judith Butler concedes that “if there is something right in Beauvoir’s claim that one is not born, but *becomes* a woman, it follows that woman itself is a term in progress, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully, be said to originate or to end”( *Gender Trouble*, 45). In this way of “becoming” some transgender persons may and some may not opt for surgery; however those who undergo castration experience a transformation in their personality as they have always been convinced of being a “woman” in a male body and post-surgery when the penis is discarded and a vagina takes form, a “he” transforms into a “she” both in mind as well as body. The transgender individual attempts to subvert the binary gender norm prevalent in society to assert his/her true gender and thereby accept his/her new “genitals”. The incongruence between body and mind is resolved through surgery and the transgender character finally exults in his/her actual gender identity.

The transgender life narratives in this study mention each transgender person becoming a “complete woman” after castration; the transfiguration may be comparable to the metamorphosis of an inelegant pupa into a lovely butterfly. The pupal stage of a butterfly, apart from being an incomplete form, is also the stage of transition. Similarly, all the transgender individuals who achieve “completeness” through surgery and/ or hormones become like the butterfly; they are able to experience life in all its beauty and variety. The pre-transition stage is one in which a female psyche is trapped in a male physique; the castration gradually paves way for the “birth” of a “woman” from the male body. When there is absolute

compatibility between body and mind; when the physical form corresponds to the psyche, the individual is vindicated in his/her gender identity assertion.

Stephen Whittle in the seminal essay “The Becoming Man: The Law’s Ass Brays” cites Money who claims that gender identity is the product of a complicated interplay of three components, namely

1. “The sex –derivative grade” which is correlated with hereditary aspects and hormones. He cites the muscular strength variations between the males and females to clarify this part.
2. “Sex adjunctive differences” are those which do not have an immediate relation with hormones but their “sex-derived” outcome. One example of this can be considered to be the compulsion of women to be housebound to rear children that further resulted in “division of labour” that segregated women from certain work areas.
3. “Sex arbitrary differences” that are unrelated to the hormonal characteristics but show how power and societal position affect gender variations. The use of cosmetics by women highlights how society expects women to always appear beautiful and thereby their attempts to do so and the difference in access to some activities clarifies how power play often demarcates the positions to be taken by men and women in society. (*Reclaiming Genders*, 22)

The castration surgery, for both Vidya and Revathi was undertaken in unauthorized hospitals and no prior elaborate laboratory tests were done; it may be



considered a very savage and brutal form of butchery. Vidya's narrative *I am Vidya : A Transgender's Journey* describes Saravanan's journey to Cudappah with Satya and Sugandhi Ayah for the castration surgery. Vidya comments thus about the hospital, "Unfortunately, these operations are carried out in primitive, unsafe, unhygienic conditions in India. A kothi-undergoing castration is not administered any tests. No questions are asked either. The kothi only learns the fee payable-ranging from three to ten thousand rupees, depending on the place where it is done" (*I am Vidya*, 100). Saravanan's surgery took place in a hospital which did not even have a name board. The situation has changed now because public sector hospitals in some states of India perform the Sex Reassignment Surgery legally, unlike in the past when these were done clandestinely. Anyway, the castration surgery, involving the removal of the penis and testicles is very painful and irreversible. Hence, one who decides to proceed with the procedure needs to be firmly determined and sincerely earnest in his/her decision.

Butler avers, "It is, for Beauvoir, never possible finally to become a woman, as if there were a *telos* that governs the process of acculturation and construction. Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being (*Gender Trouble*, 45). If so, can a person undergoing sex-surgery ever "become" a "woman" as per Butler's claim?

In Vidya's attempt to "construct" the body of a woman, the first step is castration. Vidya recalls that the surgeon neither did any counselling nor did he give any guarantees. The first surgery was done for her companion Satya, whose whole

process took less than half an hour. Vidya noticed that the “attendant” and the “nurse”, who brought Satya to the room, looked like “they belonged to some completely unrelated profession” (*I am Vidya*, 6). They “dropped” Satya on some newspapers laid on a bare “steel cot” (6). When Vidya was taken for the surgery, she observed, “it was a slaughterhouse.” (7). It was a very small room (Vidya calls it “miniscule”) and apart from her and the “doctor”, there were only a man and a woman. When she got the spinal injection, Vidya expected she would not feel any sensation, but when the first incision was made, she screamed that she “hadn’t quite lost sensation altogether.” (7). Another injection was given but she distinctly remembers that “the pain subsided but did not disappear” (7). Even though she screamed out in pain and shouted that she be allowed to go, the surgery progressed. Vidya recalls, “As the operation reached its climax, the pain rose to unbearable heights - as if someone was digging deep into my innards with a long rod and removing my intestines” (7). In spite of suffering this ordeal, she rejoices in her new “body” which now corresponds to her mind. After the sutures were put and medicine had been applied, she felt, “Ah! Nirvana! The ultimate peace!” (8). Despite the immense post-operative pain, Vidya says, “Inside I was at peace. It was a huge relief. I was now a *woman*: mine was a *woman’s body*. Its shape would be what my heart wanted, had yearned for. This pain would obliterate all earlier pains” (italics added, 8). This incident throws light on the immense will power of the transgender persons who face even death-like situations in order to fulfill their deep desire to assert their identity. Simultaneously, the utter callousness of the illegal, unauthorized health care establishments is highly shocking to the reader. Vidya suffered much pain, both during and post-surgery. She mentions that many among the transgender

community often die due to post-operative complications, especially since most surgeries are performed without government approval. Vidya's words are about the situation then, more than thirteen years ago, when sex surgeries were only performed in shady medical establishments. At present some states offer medical care to transgender persons and perform surgeries there. She adds that in countries where the Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) is legal, numerous tests are done prior to the actual surgery. She mentions "medical, investigative, environmental and RLT (real life testing)", which are carried out between six to eighteen months (99). Vidya claims that a psychiatrist and a gynaecologist then confirm and recommend that the person may undergo surgery and it is only after this that the actual surgery is carried out. SRS, in such countries is supplemented with "facial feminization, speech therapy, breast augmentation and the insertion of a plastic vagina" (99).

After the surgery, they went to Cudappah railway station, from where they went to Chennai. It is to be noted that the train journey was on the third day after surgery, when the wound was still raw. Since the transgender persons belong to economically weak background, they cannot afford the luxury and ease of either cars or ambulance. The post-operative stay at hospital is very brief and one can well imagine the intense pain a castrated person may experience on the third or fourth day of surgery. Vidya recollects, "The journey was a forgettable struggle" (101).

Post-surgery, Saravanan had transformed into a true and complete woman-Vidya. For the haldi (ritual of applying turmeric) and mehendi (custom of applying henna on the palms) ceremony she wore a long skirt and blouse while the tirunangais applied turmeric paste on her body and henna was applied to her palms.

This was followed by singing, dancing and merry making. Around two in the morning, a ritual bath took place after which Vidya wore a green sari, a green blouse and green coloured jewellery. Later at the seashore, a jug of milk was handed over to Vidya; she had to pour it into the sea and facing the sea and exhibit her genitals to the ocean. The same process was repeated in front of a black dog and a green tree. This ceremony known as “chatla”, completes the transformation of a kothi to a tirunangai. The traditions followed by the hijra or transgender community in India have much significance; the rituals of haldi/mehendi as well as chatla are similar to rites of passage in other caste and ethnic groups and signify an important landmark in the life of the transgender person. The mandatory rest of forty days with restrictions regarding food and travel aids in the healing of the surgical wound.

Through the castration surgery Vidya could finally assert her gender identity but society was unwilling to accept her “new form”. After the surgery, Vidya was not keen on begging and when her income began to decline, she started a business of selling mobile pouches. Even though she attempted to embark on this venture with enthusiasm, people seemed unwilling to buy goods from her due to her gender. First she started with pouches and other items, but when no sales were made, she attempted to sell key chains and flashlights. When sales did not go as expected, Vidya understood: “The problem was obviously our gender, not the goods we sold. We couldn’t understand the prejudice” (*I am Vidya*, 110). Patricia Gagne and Richard Tewksbury vouch that when individuals “internalize” a gender identity contradictory to the social norm, they are “often sanctioned because they fail to enact gender in socially prescribed ways, thereby challenging the cultural and

structural social order” (“Coming Out and Crossing Over”, 479). Most transgendered individuals are not educated beyond school level and it seems ironical that the educated among them are not preferred for employment; they are humiliated for begging and sex work, but when they venture towards business, even that is discouraged. It is no wonder that even seventy three years after Indian independence, a sizeable majority of the transgender group still earn their living by begging, visiting shops and/or prostitution.

However, perseverance happens to be the forte of transgender persons. Vidya decided to contact her friends Vijai and Murugabhupati for chances of employment. Even though Murugabhupati brought a sponsor for Vidya’s Ph. D. studies, she decided to take up employment instead. Through the efforts of her friends, Vidya got a job at a private bank as an EDP assistant at Madurai. She found her colleagues to be warm and loving. Soon she started writing of her Pune encounters in a magazine and also began a blog in which she wrote some verses and her experiences.

In India the governmental support for transgender individuals happens to be very limited when compared to developed countries. Only a few states in India, like Tamil Nadu, W. Bengal, Maharashtra and some others have initiated steps for the welfare of the sexual minorities. The main problems faced by these minorities are illiteracy, lack of employment opportunities and inadequate medical care apart from lack of residential facilities. Another issue is, even after surgery, most transgendered persons find it problematic to get alterations done in their identification documents. Vidya took great efforts and considerable time to get her name changed in the official records for which she sought the help of an advocate. After a year and half

of waiting, Vidya could finally change her name officially from “Saravanan” to “Vidya”. She recollects that she had to seek the help of numerous government departments and the inordinate delay is expressed thus,

It took me a year and a half to change my name - to exercise my legal, moral right. How hard I had to fight-how many rounds to various hospitals, advocates, taluk office, collectorate and Stationery and Printing Department I had to undertake to accomplish my purpose-when politicians, people who believe in numerology, people who convert from religion to religion, can change their names in a month! (*I Am Vidya*, 135)

Vidya claims that in countries where SRS is legally carried out, “identity documents you will ever need, including your degree certificates”, are simultaneously corrected to include one’s new name and sex change which enables the person “to seek proper employment or return to an earlier job” (*I am Vidya*, 99). When SRS is done illegally, without government approval, “denial of jobs and opportunities for higher education” is often faced by the transgendered individual (99). Vidya hopes such laxity on the part of government machinery would be resolved at the earliest.

Social discrimination against transgender persons continues even after one’s surgery. Vidya had very few “expectations” (*I am Vidya*, 130). She simply wanted to live a “normal” life, like all ordinary people. She mentions, “My being a tirunangai was natural, just as men are men, women are women, and cats are cats. Trouble starts when people do not understand this simple truth” (130). However, when Vidya

moved outside, she faced taunts and ridicule as men, women and even small children passed hurtful comments. Roz Kaveney in "Talking Transgender Politics" writes,

It is less important to pass than to be accepted. If being transgendered is valued as a human variation, then many problems disappear. And it is more likely to be valued if we value it ourselves-being out and proud and prepared to defend ourselves is probably rather less risky than being in the closet, ashamed of our pasts and relying on a piece of paper. (*Reclaiming Genders*, 149)

Stigma attached to gender nonconformity shapes psychological identity development and many clinical researches have focused on the role of transition in alleviating gender dysphoria. Tom Sanger observes that gender has been posited on the axis of "maleness" and "femaleness" and sexuality has always been analysed in the "heteronormative framework" (*Transgender Identities :Towards a Social Analysis of Gender Diversity*, 260). Since a large majority of social beings are either "male" or "female", the notion of existence of other sexual and gender variations is not easily conceded.

It is an indisputable fact that most transgender individuals are unable to complete their education, so the question of an employment does not even arise. However, when persons like Vidya, a post- graduate, fail to be employed, then society's stigmatization is to be blamed.

Vidya did get employed but it was only because she had a large network of friends from mainstream society to help her. Vidya claims that transgender persons

beg and do sex work as no other job is open to them since they are illiterate. She reveals that nobody would beg but to satisfy one's hunger. She adds that when the transgender individuals beg, "they submerge pride and dignity" and they are forced to do so as all other "windows of opportunity are closed" (*I am Vidya*, 137). Her disapproval of NGOs is evident when she states that the latter have not attempted to save the transgender persons from begging or sex-work. In fact most NGOs work for HIV and AIDS awareness in the community. Vidya asks, "What kind of rehabilitation was it to tell them then, 'Go on being sex workers, but do it safely?'" (123). Vidya's words reveal her disapproval of the NGOs which merely cater to providing protection against contracting AIDS; she opines that these agencies must strive to move beyond this and ensure that the trans people are enabled to acquire education and earn respectable livelihoods. She considers that such organizations should work for "the general welfare of transgenders, the redressal of their grievances, providing them job opportunities and economic freedom overall." (123). Vidya observes that "Society marginalizes us constantly. Tirunangais have no family, no jobs, no security, nothing" (137). Vidya contends that Dalits and feminists "hold rallies, demand their rights. But transgenders are the Dalits of Dalits" (136). Her closing words are very touching "I do not ask for heaven-I am begging to be spared from living hell. I plead for myself and fellow tirunangais." (138).

Even though Vidya was educated, qualified to work, and had become the "woman" she wanted to be, she felt powerless about the plight of other transgender individuals. She mentions her "inner voice" which reminded her that "social



acceptance of tirunangais did not end with my rehabilitation” (*I am Vidya*, 132). It is her intense wish to work for members of her community which motivated her to move to theatre. Vidya was also very active and vociferous in anti-caste discrimination and transgender empowerment but was forced to emigrate to Canada when she faced death threats. At present she is involved in theatre through which her activism for the sexually marginalized and anti-caste struggle continues.

Moving on to Revathi, the castration surgery removed the male appendage on her body and she could finally claim that she was a woman. Revathi and a gurubai chela were sent to Dindigul for the castration surgery. After the chela’s surgery, the doctor took Revathi to take a look at her; she lay without much pain. However, on being brought to the room, she started screaming in pain. Revathi was also operated in a similar fashion. As soon as the effect of the anaesthesia wore off, Revathi experienced burning pain and screamed loudly. They could not eat or drink anything except black tea. Revathi realized that the surgery was conducted stealthily since the nurse lied about her castration surgery to an enquirer. These experiences reveal the unsafe conditions in which the transgender persons underwent highly risky and painful surgical procedures some years back. Revathi mentions that traditionally transgender persons were castrated by a “thayamma” (dai amma in Hindi) who would cut the penis and testicles with a single slash of a knife.

Since they did not have much money, Revathi and her gurubai decided to return to Mumbai at the earliest. During their journey they met a group of pottais who helped the two by sharing their food and took them to their nani’s house on reaching Mumbai. This incident reveals the strong bonds among the members of the

hijra community who help others of their clan even though they are not acquainted to them. The two chelas, now “women”, were received warmly and after a ceremonial welcome by burning camphor on a coconut, were given a warm bath. As per hijra custom, for the next forty days, they were to avoid drinking milk or eating fruit. They bathed in warm water, had to clean their wounds, ensure the area was kept dry and apply boric powder to prevent infection. When they slept, their legs were to be kept apart. Certain restrictions had to be followed: they could not look into a mirror, look at men or comb their hair. As part of the hijra custom on the twelfth and twentieth day, some neighbourhood hijras came and poured water on their heads, then turmeric was applied on their bodies and sugar was placed on their tongues. The hijras follow all traditional rituals as demanded by their community in order to fulfill their ardent desire of becoming women.

It was the fortieth day ceremony that proclaimed to the hijra community of their having become “complete women”. Other hijras had been invited: there was dance, music and food and the merrymaking got over at two in the morning. Both of them wore green skirts, haldi (turmeric) and mehndi (henna) were applied. Each was given a gift of a green sari, green blouse and jewellery comprising a nose ring, toe rings and anklets. A jug of milk was placed on their heads; they were taken to a well into which the milk was poured. One difference between this ceremony and Vidya’s was that Revathi poured the milk into a well while Vidya did it in the sea. Revathi recalls the ceremony,

Back in front of Mata’s image, we were asked to uncover our faces and look at her glorious image...She looked gorgeous and her face glowed, as if it

were made of gold. As I whispered softly, ‘Take my form and bless me with yours’, I felt tears sting my eyes...The mirror was of such a size that I could view my face and Mata’s face. Beguiled by her rich beauty, I could not recognize myself. My face had changed! I felt like a flower that had just blossomed. It seemed to me that my earlier male form had disappeared and in its place was a woman. I felt exultant. (*The Truth about Me*, 87-88)

After Revathi had become a woman, she started developing sexual desire for men; however she could not express it to her nani as their house did not do sex-work and without nani’s knowledge, it was impossible for her to experience it.

Heterosexuality is the norm and nobody interrogates whether the heterosexual couple indulges in “sexual practices” other than penile-vaginal penetration; when the transgendered mention their sexual life, however, it becomes an issue of paramount importance to investigate how they might indulge in sex. It seems irrelevant to analyze the sexual actions of either the heterosexuals or other sexualities. The sexual activity between partners is strictly personal and a private affair and outsiders have no legitimate grounds to interrogate it or comment on that. After all, nobody tries to speculate on the sexual activities between heterosexual couples.

Sexual behaviours and gender roles vary from culture to culture, and this, invariably has an effect on the place and position of the gender variant persons in that culture. In most cultures, transgender people are stigmatized while sexual activity involving the trans individuals is branded shameful. This is more

pronounced in cultures with rigid sex roles or strictures against non-heterosexual sex.

To satisfy her sexual desire, Revathi left the house and approached another guru whose family practised sex work. The new guru had two jopdis (temporary hut-like structures) near the railway track. Even though Revathi started sex work to appease her sexual desire yet she considered it work. She was treated well, by her guru and gurubais (other chelas under her guru or her sisters) as she was “fair and pretty and spoke nicely” (*The Truth about Me*, 106). Most of her customers were drunks who could only afford around fifty rupees. Opposite their jopdi lived a drunk from a rich family, who always tried to solicit her for sex work, but they always fended him off saying his family would drive them out from there. To overcome the fear and stress of such occupational hazards, Revathi started drinking liquor.

Venkatesan Chakrapani and others mention the violence unleashed on the transgender persons by goons, police, family and the general public (“Structural Violence against Kothi-identified Men who have Sex with Men in Chennai, India”, 350). They state that transgender persons are often beaten up by the police personnel and even subjected to sexual assault and rape. At times the police also resort to blackmail and extortion. It is ironical that the guardians of legal system themselves inflict savage violence on the marginalized individuals. Since the police itself harass the transgendered, the latter hesitate to approach the police station when they face violence from goons. Revathi mentions an incident when she was out for sex-work and the police abused her physically and sexually. The policemen took her in their van to the police station. She pleaded with them to let her go but they made her

sweep and mop the station. Then she was asked to undress in the presence of a prisoner. Revathi recollects,

Picking up a sheet of paper, the policeman scribbled something on it, and asked me, ‘Where did those breasts come from? They grew on their own?’ ‘No, not on their own. I took hormone tablets to grow them.’ ‘Open your mouth wide.’ I obliged him. ‘Bend down. I’ve got to inspect your back.’ I bent down and showed him my back. He then asked me to hold my buttocks apart so that he could see my anal passage. When I did, he thrust his lathi in there and asked, ‘So you get it there?’ I straightened up, yelling with the pain of it. (*The Truth about Me*, 207)

Such violence, which amounts to gross disregard and infringement of one’s basic human rights, happens regularly in a transgender person’s life. Another incident happened when she was soliciting customers and five men caught hold of her and told her to help them catch some people approaching her. At first they appeared to be rowdies; it was only later that she realized that they were police personnel. She was asked to talk to anyone who approached her and they immediately pounced on the person and took him away. Revathi is sure that some may have stopped to ask her the way or some other reason; anyway she helped them to apprehend fifteen men. Chakrapani also talks of “violence by rowdies” ( “Structural Violence against Kothi-identified Men who have Sex with Men in Chennai, India”, 352). In Revathi’s case, local rowdies would come and threaten the hijras involved in sex work. Once a rowdy came and compelled her for sex. She could not escape and had to comply with his violent sexual lust. The physically

bruised and bleeding Revathi required medical treatment. A few days later, the same man accused her of taking his gold watch. He demanded it back along with five hundred rupees, which he claimed was lost in that jopdi. Revathi realized that though she could earn more money through sex work, there were dangers also.

All these instances show how members of the transgender community are vulnerable to harassment by goons and the police, even after Supreme Court read down *Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code* to decriminalize consensual homosexual acts. Also in its landmark *National Legal Services Authority* judgement of 2014, the Supreme Court recognized the identity of the transgender community for the first time. The trans community was formally and legally accepted as the *Third Gender* category. In that judgement, the Court invoked the spirit of the Indian constitution to make a passionate case for the rights of transgender people. It recognized them as a socially and economically weak category, subjected to harassment and violence and demanded their right to access justice. The scrapping down of *Article 377* is indeed a remarkable step in progress and a dent in the structure of homophobia. Yet police apathy and harassment is an undeniable fact. An absolute overhauling of the legal and judicial machinery is the need of the hour.

When Revathi went home for the first time after her castration, she was welcomed with angry words from her mother. Her brother came out, armed with a stick, ready to hit her. When she showed her castrated state, he changed his decision while her mother lamented that she had lost a son. When her father came home, he appeared hurt at her change and told the others, “Look, we tried our best. We beat him, cut his hair, shaved his head. He would not be deterred. .. It seems this is his

destiny....Things will happen as they must. Let him be and eat of our food “ (*The Truth about Me*, 116-117).

Her mother’s enquiries about how she would live after the death of her parents set her thinking; she decided to return to her guru who had helped her get the castration done. Her kaalaguru (guru’s sister) and gurubais welcomed her but her guru reprimanded her for running away and joining another house. She scolded her for feeling “man-love” and after she had once again become her chela (by undergoing all the rituals again), Revathi was sent to Crane Road for sex work (*The Truth about Me*, 130). During this period she learnt of many hijras who were cheated by men after being trapped in bogus love affairs. Many had lost a vast amount of money and been left with “scarred faces, bruised by knives”(133). There were some who had been duped by their mistresses after having earned a very huge amount by their work. She also came across those who had been afflicted with venereal diseases and died without getting medical care. The fact that the transgendered lack the love of their family members; are manipulated and exploited financially and sexually by their partners; and at times, by their own gurus, is reprehensible. Such revelations by transgender sex workers make it all the more pertinent for the establishment of organizations that cater to the needs of this marginalized lot. The government also must plan welfare schemes for the transgendered, apart from the sensitization of society in general and police force in particular.

In many studies conducted on transgender inequality, it was seen that these people are not protected by the state or law in schools, places of work or social

gatherings. Ultimately one of the largest reasons for transphobic harassment is the lack of public understanding of transgender people. The notion of transgenderism as a mental disorder is widely rampant. Such individuals are discriminated against not just by their own family but within government settings through hate crimes under the very eyes of justice and the legal structure. Harassment, physical and verbal assault and sexual violence are their daily challenges. Although they are at more risk health wise, they are denied adequate health care. Most of the transphobic violence incidents are not reported because of their distrust and fear of the police.

After some time Revathi went to her village but the cold reception and bitter experiences again drove her away, this time to Bangalore. Initially she joined a hamam (bath house) where she helped with collecting water, heating it and other work. Later she started sex work: she had to endure hardships, both from the police and from some rogues. The money she earned through sex work was sent home regularly. Her parents thought that she earned money by dancing and other work. After some time Revathi got three chelas who introduced her to *Sangama*, an organization that worked for the sexual minorities. Her work there did not pay much but she understood the welfare work being and gradually learnt how data on gender minorities was collected and welfare schemes were coordinated with other agencies.

Revathi then mentions her marriage to and subsequent separation from a staff member of *Sangama*: initially, she was happy in her married life but within a year her husband seemed to have lost all love and desire for her. Not only Revathi, most transgender persons who have cisgender partners, seem to have an incompatible life; soon after they start their life together, internalized transphobia



seems to be manifested. Tom Sanger mentions how the partners of trans individuals experience being “shaken” in their notions of gender and sexuality post-marriage (*Transgender Identities: Towards a Social Analysis of Gender Diversity*, 266).

Revathi’s post-separated life was one of sadness and great suffering; her colleagues often found her tearful and gloomy. Her office colleagues suggested that she write a book after interviewing hijras, which she readily agreed to. However, the news of her chela, Famila’s suicide was a huge shock; inspite of her great personal loss, Revathi resolved to start her work. Her project took her to different parts of Tamil Nadu and also helped her to overcome her distressed condition. During her work at Theni, she heard of her guru’s murder, which was initially distressing to reconcile to. She went to Bangalore and fulfilled all the duties a chela has to perform for her guru, especially the funeral and other rituals and also accompanied her gurubais to the police station to file case against the murder.

Meanwhile her book based on the interviews of the aravanis (the term used for hijras in Tamil Nadu) was completed; it was titled *Unarvum Uruvamum*. She left her work at *Sangama* to live with her parents but was unable to find employment due to her hijra identity. The same predicament was faced by Vidya also; when people saw her, they would lie about the vacancy being filled and so on. When Revathi’s mother fell ill and had to be admitted to a hospital, she accompanied her. Revathi tended to her for three months and when she was offered work at Bangalore, she asked her elder brother and wife to care for her. The new work involved training workshops for the prevention of AIDS, but even after all the sessions, she was unable to earn much. Revathi, once again had to go for sex work, even though now

she disliked it. Finally, when no other job was forthcoming, she went back to *Sangama*. The autobiographical narrative concludes at this point.

Laxmi's book, *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*, published in 2015 does not mention her surgical castration as it was done later, in 2019. However, throughout the book, Laxmi is seen to enjoy herself and live her life to the full after she joined the hijra community, revel in her gender identity and simultaneously gain fame as a dancer, an actress, an activist, a television reality show participant and so on. Laxmi's *metamorphosis* may be said to have happened when she joined the hijra community. Her activism also made her known internationally as a celebrity.

Vidya, Revathi, and Manobi appear to have transformed after their castration since the disparity between the body and their gender is erased and with a "new" female body, they are more at peace. Finally the body corresponds to their innate gender and they are able to experience their life as normal people. All the transgender individuals have expressed the transformation that they underwent post-surgery. A remarkable point is that each of these transgender individuals underwent a crisis in their post-transition life, yet overcame that successfully. Vidya found that when she walked on the street; men as well as women humiliated her. She mentions, "On the way home, there was always the jibe or two flung at me- 'Hey, is this a boy or a girl?' While all around laughed at me, I tried to hide my tears" (*I am Vidya*, 135). She adds, "Even kids didn't spare me (135). Often children would sing raucous songs when they spotted her on their way. Vidya admits that she never "applied make-up for attracting attention", yet their reaction tormented her. Even though she had finally become the same gender both in her body and mind, she

realized that a lot still had to be done for the transgender community. Social awareness regarding alternate sexualities is to be highlighted and simultaneously, the protection of their human rights needs to be safeguarded.

Revathi had personal issues after her transition. Her marriage and subsequent separation from her husband caused her great anguish; she was in a state of depression. However, when her office asked her to take up a project to interview transgender individuals for a book, she readily agreed. She met and interviewed around thirty trans people in six months. Revathi says, “My difficulties were nothing compared to some of the things I heard” (*The Truth about Me*, 295).

Moving on, Somnath’s transformation into a “woman” started with hormone treatment. Through this therapy, Somnath observed changes in his body; facial hair started disappearing, bodily hair began to thin and though the overall physical structure remained the same, the waist, tummy and chest developed curves. Somnath cross-dressed more confidently and people’s positive comments made him happy. Meanwhile psychological counselling also continued.

Somnath contacted Dr. Khanna in 2002 and the sex surgery was scheduled. In the meanwhile Somnath had a relationship with a young man named Arindam Parbat, which later turned out to be a conspiracy planned and executed by Samarjit, who had been spurned by Somnath. Arindam also seemed to be in love with Somnath and the latter felt it would lead to their marriage. Somnath wanted to have a woman’s body before the wedding and the surgery date was fixed. Through the surgery Somnath got a vagina and the hormones had already bestowed breasts; Somnath now became Manobi, a perfect “woman”.

Manobi's experiences may be compared with Tom Sanger's observations. Tom Sanger mentions his research about trans persons and their partners in Ireland and UK in "Beyond Gender and Sexuality Binaries in Sociological Theory: The Case for Transgender Inclusion". Sanger cites Sam, a genderqueer aged 24, "I'd really like everyone to just be able to, if someone doesn't feel male, female, feels both, feels something else, it would be nice if there was some representation of that. Or alternatively there was no representation of gender and everyone was just a person. That would be nice" (265). Sam's words express his deep yearning to either be accepted as he is or at least the non-existence of "gender". Sanger quotes Lorber's concept of "degendering" being an echo of Sam's request for there to be "no representation of gender" (266). This opinion is significant as gender binary is the accepted norm in society and any alternate gender identity or sexuality is ridiculed and shamed.

Somnath wanted to see Arindam's reaction at her new female body. When Arindam saw Manobi his response is expressed thus, "It was a mix of admiration, love, adoration and complete devotion" (*A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi*, 137). The relationship was blossoming but whenever she hinted at marriage, Arindam showed lack of interest. Manobi started enquiring for an auspicious date for the wedding; while Samarjit, Arindam's relative who had hatched the plan of trapping Manobi in a love affair with Arindam, convinced her landlord that she was a transgender, who had used her home as a brothel and trapped Arindam, his brother-in-law. Arindam was sent away and Samarjit spread stories about Manobi having sexually abused the former and her attempts to trap him in an illegal marriage. Samarjit had cleverly

trapped Manobi in having relations with Arindam when she refused to entertain the former's advances.

Manobi approached the *West Bengal Commission for Women* and narrated the entire incident. Arindam contacted her on the previous day of the enquiry and demanded four lakh rupees to stop the malicious stories against her and requested that she withdraw the case. Even though she reported before each hearing of the commission, he never came and finally an arrest warrant was issued against him. Arindam was arrested and produced before the commission, where he argued that Manobi had lied about her sex-change and he could not marry a "man". He claimed that she was a homosexual and had forced himself on him every night. When his love letters to Manobi were produced, he admitted that he was mistaken about her and he was unwilling to have relations with another "man". A date for the final hearing was fixed. When Samarjit and Arindam realized that the judgment would be against them, they filed a defamation case against her for an interview in which she had explicitly detailed her relation with the latter. Her lawyer advised her to file a counter case against him "for rape, cheating and criminal conspiracy" (153). The state had taken up her case and directed the police to get a "capability test" done to prove that she had a vagina (153). When the medical team gynecologist saw her genital area, he was shocked; it was as if he were looking at a normal woman's vagina. The doctor, an old man, probably was unaware of government approved sex change surgery. The case was transferred from Contai to Jhargram court: Arindam was arrested in 2006 and imprisoned for fourteen days. The case had not been settled even after eleven years, as per Manobi's biography.

The only saving grace in this period was her research which was registered in the name of Somnath but was later changed to Manobi.

Manobi, being a transgender person could not conceive a child but became a “mother” when she met Debashish. She accepted him as her son and started teaching him for his examination as he was weak in academics. At weekends she would teach him at Naihati, later she asked him to stay with her at Jhargram. Her coaching helped him score fifty five per cent marks in his degree and for post-graduation, he studied under the distance education mode, finally passing with similar marks.

When the Trinamool party came to power in Bengal in 2011 after thirty four years of communist rule, Manobi’s academic achievements, which had been ignored so long, were regularized and she was finally eligible for all due privileges. She wanted a change in her career and as her mother had passed away, she wanted to be near her father. Her mother had been bedridden for two years and her father had become too old to be left on his own.

Manobi applied for the post of principal and got the post purely on merit as she had more than ten years of service, was an associate professor and also had a doctoral degree. Her appointment as the Principal of Krishnagar Women’s College was a record; she was the first transgender person in the country to adorn the post. The book ends on a happy note; she is happy with her adopted son Debashish in the principal’s quarters near the college.

The transgender writers through their narratives prove that they faced innumerable challenges to succeed in life. First of all they accepted that their body

did not correspond to their gender and even though they were ridiculed for their feminine ways, they were absolutely certain of their gender identity. Once they realized that their body could be transformed into a woman's, they were determined to do it even if it involved many personal risks and intensely painful surgeries. Their problems did not end there; they had to face transphobic reactions and discrimination from several segments of society. However their perseverance and strength in the face of adversities enabled them to turn challenges to achievements. After their surgery, they contributed to their community in different ways.

Vidya had an oppressive childhood as her father pressurized her in academics, yet her love for dressing up in her sisters' clothes and dance along with a firm belief in her gender being inconsistent with her natal sex, made her determined to go to extremes to affirm herself. Revathi, on the other hand, ran away from home to fulfill her ardent desire to become a woman. For this she had to do sex work, be at the receiving end of violence by police and rowdies; yet her insistence to overcome all odds, helped her in her endeavour. Laxmi suffered sexual abuse in her childhood, yet overcame its trauma; she managed to convince her parents about asserting her gender identity. And lastly, Manobi faced a transphobic academic circle, yet persevered to achieve her womanly body to correspond to her female mind. While Laxmi and Manobi were educated and also enjoyed their parents' support, Revathi and Vidya did not experience their parents' unconditional love or protection. Vidya received education due to her father's wish to make her an IAS officer whereas Revathi spent much money for her parents but was shunned by other members of the family. Education and her personal charisma helped Laxmi acquire

international fame. Vidya turned to theatre to express herself and take up the cause of her community. In spite of barely a school education, Revathi was able to write a few books and work for her community. Manobi scaled academic heights and proved that if transgender persons are provided with education and enjoy their family's love and support, their merit will ensure that they get due position and respect in society.

The life narratives of the transgender persons mentioned, reveal that they were initially affected by stigma and prejudice, which added to their stress. Most transgender individuals experience internalized transphobia which results in their perceived rejection from society coupled with discrimination. To overcome such negativity and assert themselves, the trans persons need to forge resilience, accept and emphasize their true identity and also be aware of the oppression which may come their way. Through dedication to their profession and/or activism, most trans persons are successful in their lives. Their determination in combating social transphobia and creating awareness about their issues, goes a long way in helping others like them.



### **Chapter 3**

#### **The Post-Transition Scenario: Empowering the Community**

I am not just my body or my attire  
there is something more precious, if one could notice  
a complete heart within a body which is tagged 'imperfect'  
that carries various emotions and a million dreams.

(Valli's blog, Jan 27, 2013)

The above lines reflect the numerous dreams in a transgender person's mind. The society in which even one's existence is compromised, most transgendered persons can only strive to express their aspirations through verses. Vidya and Revathi have penned verses in Tamil; while the former has shared these poems in her blog, Revathi has often expressed her poetic self at theatrical performances and other events. Like any cisgendered person, a trans person also wishes to lead a meaningful and successful life. Yet the prevalent societal conditions deter his/her existence, solely because the person is determined to assert his/her identity which subverts gender binarism. The society consisting of a cisgendered majority and minorities from various gender and sexual minorities, sticks to the norm of heteronormativity and gender binarism. Susan Stryker believes,

Each person has a subjective sense of fit with a particular gender category; this is one's gender identity. For most people, there is a sense of congruence between the category one has been assigned to and trained in, and what one considers oneself to be. Transgender people demonstrate that this is not

always the case-that it is possible to form a sense of oneself as *not like* other members of the gender one has been assigned to or to think of oneself as properly belonging to another gender category. Many people who have never experienced a sense of gender incongruence doubt that transgender people can really experience this, and transgender people who experience it often have a hard time explaining to others what this feels like. (italics in original, *Transgender History*, 13)

Stryker adds that “gender is historical” and it manifests itself based on one’s geographical location and “culture” (*Transgender History*, 11). Stryker thinks that one’s gender identity is influenced by “a lot of unrelated things coming together” (11). She expresses herself vociferously when she says, “the sex of the body does not bear any necessary or deterministic relationship to the social category in which that body lives” (11). The structuring of gender by society is revealed in its political classification of members into the gender binary. She claims that “the categories based on their unchosen physical differences are never politically neutral....One of the main points of feminism is that societies tend to be organised in ways that are more exploitative of female bodies than of male bodies” (11). This makes the trans people vulnerable to sexual violence both pre and post-transition. Stryker’s words throw light on the precarious lives of the trans persons in the United States; one can well imagine the horrendous state of affairs in India. No wonder that not many cases of violence against transgender individuals are reported in the Indian media. In many cases, illiterate and hapless members of the trans community refrain from

seeking police aid due to physical and sexual attacks from the so-called protectors of law itself.

Since transgenderism questions the conventionally practised and accepted gender binary, any challenge to its monopoly is hardly entertained let alone addressed. Consequently, the trans persons resort to firm determination to assert their gender identity. Stryker attests,

Non transgender people, after all, think of themselves as being women or men, and nobody asks them to defend the political correctness of their “choice” or thinks that their having a sense of being gendered somehow compromises or invalidates their other values and commitments. *Being trans is like being gay: some people are just “that way”, though most people aren’t.* (italics added, *Transgender History*, 4)

In their attempt to subvert gender binarism, the trans people are often in opposition to a formidable and resisting social set up which either negates their existence or simply humiliates them. Yet, the mental strength to transform their body to match their innate gender is too strong to become powerless before society. The trans persons collect money to transition to their gender and along with hormonal treatment, they are able to live in their innate gender. Their struggle for gender affirmation is extremely strenuous and marked with violence and transphobia from society. As Stryker admits, “I’m one of those people who, from earliest memory, always felt I was a girl even though I had a male body at birth and everybody considered me to be a boy. I didn’t have an explanation for these feelings when I was younger, and after a lifetime of reflection and study, I’m still open-

mindful about how best to explain them” (*Transgender History*, vii). Stryker mentions that finally she felt “right” in her self expression before others as well as the manner the latter experienced her to be. Yet she feels that “making the transition from living as a man to living as a woman had some huge negative effects on my life. Like many transgender people, I have spent years being marginally employed because of other people’s discomfort, ignorance, and prejudice” (vii-viii). Stryker adds, “Transitioning made relationships with many friends and relatives more difficult. It made me more vulnerable to certain kinds of legal discrimination, and it sometimes made me feel unsafe in public” (viii).

Coming to the Indian context, a significant fact about sex surgeries is that they are highly expensive. Since trans persons earn very little through begging and/or badhai, most are compelled to resort to sex-work, since the latter is more lucrative compared to other means. This is not to claim that all trans persons resort to prostitution to collect money for their surgery; a significant number indulges in it as they enjoy doing it. Another significant fact is that the transgender individuals lack well-paying job. Consequently, most trans individuals resort to sex-work as it is lucrative and they can easily fund their transition. While Vidya never indulged in it, Revathi started sex-work after her transition. Revathi felt sexual desire and started sex-work but soon realised that it had certain occupational hazards; namely, drunk and rough customers who often resorted to violence and/or extortion. Both Laxmi and Manobi had support from their family, so did not have to regard sex-work to earn money. While Laxmi got the surgery done only in 2019, the Manobi concealed it from her family. Manobi approached the endocrinologist and the surgeon all by

herself and prepared for the surgery. It was only when she developed a post-surgery medical complication that she decided to confide in her elder sister.

Post-transition, most trans persons experience deep personal satisfaction, and attempt to contribute their services to their community. Stryker states,

Some members of the minority group make art or write literature that changes the way others think of them and the issues they face....Others direct their attention toward promoting self-worth among members of the minority community who have internalised disempowering attitudes or beliefs about their difference from the dominant majority. (*Transgender History*, 6-7)

Society fails to accept the transitioned individuals for having subverted the normative gender binary and often resorts to ridicule and/or violence. However, mustering all their resources, most trans persons fight the negative reactions from society and try to find their legitimate place in society. It is a fact that facing transphobic behaviour every single day, does take a toll on the trans persons. This idea is expressed by Stryker thus “Because members of minority groups, are by definition less common than members of majority groups, minorities often experience misunderstanding, prejudices, and discrimination” (5).

Judith Lorber’s words are also pertinent when she talks of

dilemmas and paradoxes in crossing borders and erasing boundaries. *The first paradox* is that to erase boundaries one must first recognize them, which confirms them... We want to erase the boundaries between categories of race, gender and sexuality, but to do so, we have to use them, for without clear

categories, you can have neither a politics of identity nor a politics of transgression. Categories are needed for group power and boundaries are needed to transgress against... The second paradox is that confirming boundaries indicates that they are natural, they do not have to be confirmed. If categories are socially constructed, they can be melded or regrouped. (italics in original, "Crossing Borders and Erasing Boundaries: Paradox of Identity Politics" 363)

In a diversely pluralistic country like India, it would appear that the hijras or the trans persons may be an accepted part of the variegated mosaic of various ethnicities, languages, cultures and so on. But the fact is far from the truth. Till the coming of the British, the hijras, called khwajasaras in the Mughal courts, were highly respected under the kings. With the implementation of the *Criminal Tribes Act of 1871*, the transgender individuals were targeted and systematically marginalised from society. Gradually, the trans people, who once had property and land were compelled to seek shelter in the fringes of towns. Prior to the 1871 Act, the transgendered depended on badhai or seeking alms from shops and participation in weddings and blessing newly born babies. With harsh legal cases being imposed on them, often they lived low profile lives and started sex-work for their sustenance. In contemporary situations, most trans persons have proved that through education and training, they can scale great heights in different arenas of society. Adam Harry, the first trans man in India to get a pilot's license, could achieve his goal through persistent hard work in the face of stiff opposition from society. Similarly, the Keralite celebrity makeup artist Renju Renjimar had to surmount various hurdles to

transition to her gender and become a celebrity beautician. In various social media platforms Renjimar has mentioned that she was sexually abused and often endured poverty before she took up makeup as a profession. Many trans persons have proved their mettle in various fields. They are ample proof of the fact that true merit does not depend on one's sexual or gender identity. One's potential cannot remain hidden; all that society has to do is encourage the talented trans people to work in convivial surroundings.

Lorber adds another interesting aspect of gender thus, "Multiple genders and sexualities show that the conventional categories are not universal or essential nor are the social processes that produce dominance and subordination. Multiple gender and sexual categories disturb the neat polarity of familiar opposites—woman and man, homosexual and heterosexual" ("Crossing Borders and Erasing Boundaries: Paradox of Identity Politics" , 364). The fact that "men can turn into women and women can become men, that people can have same-gender and different –gender lovers sequentially (and in the case of transvestites and hermaphrodites simultaneously)" is indeed very intriguing (364). Lorber states that people often create and recreate themselves and asserts that "even anatomy is hardly destiny" (364). This is an absolute truth as far trans persons are concerned: in spite of being born with gender/body dichotomy, they transform into completely new individuals through which they try to bridge the body and gender gap.

When the transgender person realizes that without altering his/her body, he/she cannot achieve any meaning in life, then the next immediate step lies in going for an anatomical change to correspond to one's gender. When this is achieved, the

person experiences a sense of completeness or wholeness. As far as *normal cisgendered* persons are concerned, they never experience the existential dilemma of the trans individual; therefore, they can never gauge the mental and emotional anguish of the latter. The trans persons and other sexual minorities challenge the age old monopolies that society imposes on them. They question the normalisation of generally accepted heterosexuality and gender binarism. Apart from resisting the conformist strategies of society, they simultaneously assert their gender identity very boldly and vehemently. In their liminal position, they undergo various forms of ostracism and discrimination. Yet their fierce determination in the face of stiff opposition from society only strengthens their resolve to live in their true gender. Apart from the highly expensive surgeries and medical care their transition demands, they are, very often clueless about their future life and livelihood issues. Yet they persevere to erase the anomalies of body and gender and finally reach their goal. All this calls for perseverance, great mental strength and an ability to resist and oppose transphobic reactions from society. Through sex surgery, hormonal treatment, feminine ways of dressing, make up and wigs, trans persons are finally able to step out in society in their true gender identity.

Their next action lies in activism through which they can contribute to their community as well as expand their personality. It is true that most among those who face negative and cruel behaviour from others, are more likely to be empathetic compared to others who have not had bitter experiences. Susan Stryker's words sum it up very well,



Although I can't claim that being transgendered gives me any special insight into other kinds of discrimination (based on race or national origin, for example), I have experienced the injustice of being the target of *irrational hatred*, and this has sensitized me to situations where I see other people being treated unjustly. (italics added, *Transgender History*, viii)

Stryker attempts to express the idea that experiencing transphobia enabled her to become empathetic to all forms of discrimination. All the transgender persons under focus, have made contributions through various ways. Vidya joined theatre before she migrated to Canada; she also entertained sick children in various Chennai hospitals. She won the prestigious Charles Wallace award in 2013 from the British Council for her accomplishments in theatre which enabled her to study theatre in the UK. Vidya named herself Living Smile Vidya and wanted to bring smiles on the faces of small children who were in great pain. In an interview given to Monica, a trans woman blogger, more details about Vidya's post-transition life could be understood. Monica started a blog in December 2013, exclusively to showcase trans women from various social spheres. Vidya admitted to the interviewer that theatre is her "first love"([theheroines.blogspot.com/2014/03/interview-with-living-smile-vidya.html](http://theheroines.blogspot.com/2014/03/interview-with-living-smile-vidya.html)). She also revealed that she had to quit the Tamil film field when she learnt that women directors were not encouraged there. Vidya added that in most films transgender people are shown as "criminals, kidnapers (sic), sexual perverts.... In films they were all about men in awkward women dresses with awkward voices and longing for sex. So annoying!" ([theheroines.blogspot.com/2014/03/interview-living-smile-vidya.html](http://theheroines.blogspot.com/2014/03/interview-living-smile-vidya.html)). This frank revelation from Vidya helps one understand her

bold and unapologetic stand against films which portray trans persons in ridiculous and cringeworthy situations. Vidya argued that “it reached the audience and prejudiced people against trans women, though we did not deserve to be treated like shit”(sic).

According to Vidya, transwomen, earlier would be interested in either sex work or NGOs; the contemporary transpeople, however, are keen to work in “government sector, in media and want to get rid of begging and sex work”. Simultaneously, Vidya believes that “Dalits, religious minorities, transwomen and transmen” must be considered at par with all others. Vidya frankly mentions that she tried to “keep my femininity within me and cheat the whole world that I am a boy but it didn’t work”. When asked what was the most difficult part of her “coming out”, she confessed that it was “begging”. She is sure that had she continued in the academic field, she “would have been a well settled professor or something if I were a boy or as an actor I would’ve been in cinema as a well paid actor”. Vidya thinks that transgender persons ought to involve in “mainstream politics” to ensure “job and education opportunities and that’s how we can change heteronormative policies”. On the other hand, as far as Manobi is concerned, she scaled academic heights and published two books, *Ontohin Ontorin Prositovortika (Endless Bondage)* and *Third Gender in Bengali Literature*. Apart from starting the first transgender magazine *Abomanab*, which is still being published, Manobi also helped college students in their theatrical pursuits. Revathi acted in plays and films, wrote a book *A Life in Trans Activism* with help from Nandini Murali and is at present actively engaged in working for trans men. Laxmi wrote the book *Red Lipstick: The*

*Men in my Life* and launched herself as the Mahamandaleshwar of the Kinnar Akhada. There are thirteen religious sects called Akhadas, which congregate for the “holy bath” or “Shahi Snan” on the banks of river Ganges during the holy Kumbh Mela each year. Laxmi’s ascension to the position of a religious leader, is likely to usher in major improvements in the life of the trans community members.

Revathi’s post-*Sangama* life was devoted to the welfare of trans men. This is evident from her book *A Life in Trans Activism*, 2016, which deals with her life after she left *Sangama* and started to act for the empowerment of trans men. *A Life in Trans Activism* took shape from conversations in Tamil between Revathi and Nandini Murali, which the latter translated into English. This book was published six years after Revathi’s autobiography was published and therefore narrates her activism after that period. She recounts the *Sangama* experience, particularly how she became aware of terms like *sex*, *gender* and *sexuality*. She also gained knowledge of sexual minorities like gays and lesbians. This exposure opened up the existence of sexual and gender minorities to Revathi, who until then was only aware of hijras. Earlier she was scared of admitting that she was a hijra and that she had done sex work; gradually she learnt to overcome her shyness and hesitation and also stopped feeling apologetic about her condition or situation. It was a revelation to her that transgender people could not get their names altered in mandatory documents like school certificates and birth certificates. Police atrocities against the transgender community taught her that legal awareness and a basic knowledge of the legal system was indispensable for the community members. After she became aware of basic legalities, she often encouraged those who had legal problems to approach

police authorities. She mentions that many trans individuals were often hauled up to the police station under flimsy complaints. Due to their inexperience and fear of the police, many often were reluctant and expressed helplessness in approaching the police station. Through imparting basic knowledge of the legal system and creating awareness about their fundamental legal rights, Revathi showed them that they could stand up for their rights.

Revathi and Famila worked patiently for the transgender community and their efforts paid off: the hijras approached *Sangama* unhesitatingly and consequently another community based organization named *Vividha* was established. In 2002 a *Hijra Habba* event was convened by *Vividha* with help from *Sangama* and YMCA where music, dance and similar items by transgender members were presented. Such initiatives in which transgender participation was involved, greatly empowered the community by instilling pride and confidence in them.

In 2003 Revathi was invited to attend the *South Asian Court of Women on Violence and Trafficking in HIV/AIDS* at Dhaka. Again in 2007 she was invited for *Asia Pacific Court of Women on HIV, Disinheritance and Property Rights* in Colombo. In a span of four years, Revathi had grown “personally and professionally”: her first book got published, she wrote many poems and as an activist her work had progressed. It is to be noted that Revathi was able to achieve an international presence due to her activism (*A Life in Trans Activism*, 74). She was honoured when her name, along with that of Toni Morrison and Maya Angelou was

displayed at the Butler Library in Columbia in 2019. It was a result of demands by student groups to give public appreciation of women writers.

When the English translation of *Unarvum Uruvamum* appeared in *Tehelka* magazine in 2009, *Penguin Publishers* signed a contract for the English translation of her memoir and *The Truth about Me : A Hijra Life Story* was published. Since Revathi wanted V. Geetha, the famous author, activist, feminist and historian to do the translation, she obliged. Her memoir transformed Revathi into an international celebrity. Even though the Tamil autobiography was written earlier, Revathi thought publishing it first in English would be better.

In the eighth chapter of *A Life in Trans Activism*, Revathi is at her articulate best. She narrates how *Article 377 of the Indian Penal Code* criminalizes same-sex relationships and the historical origins of the act. According to *Article 377*, oral and anal sex is “unnatural” while only penetrative penile-vaginal sex is considered “natural” (*A Life in Trans Activism*, 101). Revathi thinks that consensual sex between any two adults is a personal decision as well as a private choice and none should object or consider it a criminal offence. She argues that if oral and anal sex between heterosexual partners is alright, then how does it qualify as “unnatural” in the case of same-sex partners. The sensitization of the medical community and the police force is urgent since through proper awareness, the great discrimination faced by the trans community can be reduced. She dwells on the importance of sex education in schools as she feels, “Unless and until we are open about gender, sex and sexuality, we will be shrouding them in shame, secrecy and silence” (106). The

chapter ends on this note, “For us to be liberated from gender oppression, we must also be liberated from caste, race and religious oppression” (107).

In 2004 the popular Tamil film director Santosh Sivan approached Revathi with a cameo role in a film, *Navarasa*, dealing with the transgender community; it bagged the national award for the best film next year. Next, V. V. Kathir offered her a role in a Tamil film *Thenavattu* in 2007, which proved to be a learning experience for her, as she learnt the various aspects of filmmaking like screenplay, lighting, camera angles, costume, make up, dialogues and so on. The Kannada activist Dr. M. Ganesh of *Ninasam Theatre Institute* in Shimoga along with his theatre group *Janamanadatta*, attempts social change through the medium of theatre and has performed extensively in Karnataka. They staged a theatre adaptation of Revathi’s memoir *Baduku Bayulu*, the Kannada translation of her autobiography in different parts of the state. The audience at each place seemed to be touched by the performances and confessed that their prejudices regarding the transgender persons were proved false and unreasonable. Revathi claims that transgender individuals perform folk art forms and wonders why the government does not extend financial support to the community to engage in cultural performances.

Revathi’s theatre experience shows how the acting skill hidden in her, was recognised and polished by Santosh Sivan and Nagesh. She has also narrated at length how she danced in temple celebrations, in spite of not having basic training in dance. Even Vidya, Laxmi and Manobi, excelled in dance without any formal training. This proves that most trans people are innately talented in acting and dancing. In fact Laxmi is a renowned dancer who started her own dance class when

she was in her eighth standard. Her dance classes have benefited many aspiring dancers. Vidya, on the other hand, was attracted towards theatre in her university days and often helped Murugabhupati in staging plays in different venues.

Revathi got a one year fellowship from *Samvada* for research involving the least invisible among the transgender community, namely the female-to male (FTM) group, which set her towards activism for this group. While trans women or the castrated hijras are visible in society, the trans men are hardly in sight. The former have the support system of their “jamaat” and even if they face stigma and discrimination from the mainstream, they can rely on their hijra family but the trans men are unable to either “come out” or enjoy any community support. Revathi fails to comprehend why the hijra community cannot support trans men. Once when the elders of the hijra community threw a challenge to the trans men, “Can you produce a baby? Show us your penis and then we will talk about whether you are real men!” Revathi’s chela, Famila responded “Do you have a uterus? That doesn’t prevent you from thinking that you are women!” (*A Life in Trans Activism*, 93). Revathi was very impressed by Famila’s unconditional acceptance of all sexual and gender minorities and she credits her own support for the trans men to have been inspired by her. This incident clarifies Revathi’s impartial and unprejudiced acceptance of the trans men.

Revathi’s activism for the “invisible” trans men is laudable, especially since she is a trans woman. In her experience she noticed that most NGOs follow “tokenism” and are not genuinely interested in the basic fundamental issues of the marginalized groups. In her scathing attack, she recollects thus

I also worked in an NGO once. I thought then that I was working to improve the lives of people in my community....In fact they are so scared of critical voices, they will silence you before you can talk. The first *Hijra Habba* was organized by Famila along with her sisters. They raised funds for the programme by begging on the street...many funded NGO projects ... do not remember or acknowledge Famila and the fact that it was started by her. If people who claim to work for trans people behave like this, what is to be expected of others? If they get funding for another 10 years, they will continue to do the same thing. From Delhi to Tamil Nadu, most NGOs prepare reports even before they hold the meetings for which they are supposed to do them, and they ensure just a token presence-if at all-of trans people. Everything is done according to their needs and their funders' needs. They book big rooms in hotels and talk about street-based hijras without their presence. They waste so much food at their buffets but talk about poverty and starvation. (*A Life in Trans Activism*, 216)

Revathi's ruthless attack of the pseudo-NGOs and their hypocritical standards speaks much about the unprofessional and insincere activities of some organisations. These establishments exist simply due to donations and grants from well wishers; they do not have any genuine interest in the upliftment and empowerment of the marginalised categories. In this context, Stryker's observation may be noted,

Because members of minority groups, are by definition less common than members of majority groups, minorities often experience misunderstanding,



prejudice and discrimination. Society tends to be organised in ways that (either deliberately or unintentionally) favor (sic) the majority, and ignorance or misinformation about a less common way of being in the world can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and mischaracterizations. (*Transgender History*, 5)

Revathi mentions the 2014 Supreme Court judgment that gave legal status to the third gender and raises a very relevant question when she asks if the term “third gender” will unintentionally heighten the prejudice and intolerance towards that community. She wonders, “Even if such gender segregated toilets are a reality, trans people will become highly visible and singled out for being ‘different’. Thus the likelihood of increased stigma and discrimination is a serious threat that would make the transgender community even more vulnerable.” (*A Life in Trans Activism*, 232-233). Revathi’s genuine apprehensions about the gender minorities are based on her own negative experiences from various quarters. The only way out is creating an amiable social condition which will not differentiate among men, women and the trans persons. This is why Revathi ends the narrative on this note

Like Babasaheb Ambedkar said, legal change without social freedom is meaningless. Even the best legislation in the world is of no use if persons’ mindsets and attitudes remain closed. True equality emerges only when women are treated with respect, as equals in the true sense of the term. Only when this happens, will trans people also be truly respected as humans. (*A Life in Trans Activism*, 237)

After the interview with Revathi on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2020, I could have a clearer vision about her present life and activism. She spoke simply, without any prejudices or harshness towards those who had oppressed her. I present here a brief observation about the various topics discussed during the interview. At first she mentioned very frankly of her childhood attraction towards a man, which produced puzzling reactions in her mind about her gender identity. She came to realize her incongruous body/ gender situation. Around that age, her intense desire to dress in feminine attire, that was fulfilled during temple performances, proved to be a kind of wish-fulfillment. On undressing and going back to the usual boyish garb, she writes, “When I went back home and wore my boy’s clothes, that was the costume that was unreal”. These words reveal her leading a false “male” life while being a female in psyche. Revathi confessed that she left home to join the hijra community since she did not want to lead a life of falsehood, but rather wished to “lead a true life”.

Revathi revealed that her unpleasant experiences in Mumbai and Bangalore helped her to fight for the transgender rights. While she was at *Sangama* in Bangalore, her close interaction with trans men showed her that the latter group did not have either social support nor did they enjoy the jamaat facilities which were enjoyed by the hijra members. In her personal life, her marriage to a senior *Sangama* staff and later separation, had caused much bitterness. Yet she spoke with fond memories of her *Sangama* days and the immense personal growth she achieved there. The stark realities of the trans men prompted her to crusade for them and help them become positively visible in society. It is highly encouraging and appreciable to observe that while other hijra activists only fight for their rights, Revathi is among

the very few champions of trans men. She recollected that her *Sangama* experiences aided her in imparting certain social skills to trans men; within six months of their coming to *Sangama*, they were taught Kannada and also realize their potential. These persons often became drivers, writers or started acting in plays.

Revathi mentioned that her family members are staunchly against her due to her gender status. Yet she has always strived to support them financially. She cared for her parents selflessly, but they did not regard her with love or any consideration. They only considered her as a servant, who had to attend to their needs. Even the house which she had helped rebuild, was registered in her name on the condition that she would not sell it. Revathi had sent huge amounts of money to her father, yet he did not treat her with any special affection. Revathi's brother and his wife had died of AIDS, leaving behind two children. Revathi brought them up and helped them in the absence of their parents. It is nothing short of selfless service that she fulfills her familial obligations despite their total disapproval of her personality. Her brothers have not accepted her, yet she treats them with love and consideration.

Revathi's marriage to a staff member from *Sangama* ended in divorce within a year. During the interview she expressed her wish to have a life partner, but ridicule from society and strict restriction from her family, prevent her from venturing again into matrimony. Simultaneously, she expressed her apprehensions about marriage in which most women are subjected to physical, mental and emotional abuse. Nevertheless, she also mentions that marriage between a trans person and a cisgender can be successful and happy. As she claims, "I know I can sexually satisfy my husband and even I will be happy" while she frowns upon

mainstream society's misgivings regarding the sex life of a trans person. It is true that while society does not venture to analyse whether heterosexual couples engage in oral sex or other sexual practices, the speculative way society tries to transgress into the sexual practices of a trans person is condemnable. Sexual activity between two consenting adults, either heterosexual, homosexual or any other category, must never be openly speculated or frowned upon. It is entirely their personal matter and choice.

Next, Revathi reminded me of her close ties with her guru: her first guru, originally based in Delhi, is now settled down in Tamil Nadu; her guru at Bangalore was killed by some goons. She still maintains close ties with her first guru and often visits her. While supporting the significance of the guru-chela tradition and its contemporary relevance, Revathi prefers it would be freed from certain discrepancies. She hopes that the relationship between a guru and a chela should be of mutual understanding and support. Monetary and exploitative nature of gurus towards chelas must not be allowed unchecked; there needs to be a healthy change yet the tradition must be retained as it is a source of great support to chelas, especially since most are thrown out of homes by parents. Her close ties with her guru reveals her deep gratitude to the latter who helped her to enter the hijra community. Simultaneously, she warns of several gurus who exploit their chelas monetarily and merely treat them as money-vending machines.

In order to create societal awareness about the sexual and gender minorities, Revathi suggests that the government must play a proactive role. The government has to legalise same-sex marriage, provide employment reservation for these

minority groups and allow same-sex parents to adopt children. The Fundamental Rights of a citizen as per the *Indian Constitution* must be fully enjoyed by the gender and sexual divergent categories. Likewise, Revathi argues that an individual has the right to choose his/her gender and society must not interfere in such personal inclinations.

In order to facilitate educational and employment opportunities for the trans community members, the first basic prerequisite is sex-education at school level, which along with sensitization of the general population will aid in the speedy implementation of welfare schemes for the transgender community. She adds that mere legal acceptance, without social interaction and discourses, is meaningless. Revathi abhors the sympathy prevalent in society against marginalized classes as she neither expected nor approves sympathy where the legitimate need is acceptance. She is confident that all marginalized sections will benefit from governmental welfare schemes in course of time and gradually all forms of discrimination will also end. Revathi insists on the urgency of social sensitization in this regard.

Revathi complains that mainstream society attacks the trans community for begging and sex-work: in the case of uneducated trans people, they have hardly any other means of earning money. The government pension paid to these helpless and unfortunate persons is a pittance. She expresses her confidence that when the transgender individuals find inclusion within mainstream society and get access to decent employment opportunities, the traditional occupation of sex work and begging among the hijra community will cease.

Revathi feels immensely proud of the fact that the popularity of her autobiography paved the way for much needed reforms vis-à-vis the transgender community in Tamil Nadu. In fact the *Transgender Welfare Board* in the state of Tamil Nadu was established as a result of the publication of her autobiography. Apart from this positive impact for the transgender community, many trans individuals were inspired to write of their experiences. She articulates the great power of an autobiography to become instrumental in transforming society.

Coming to Laxminarayan Tripathi, her book *Red Lipstick: The Men in my Life*, written with help from Pooja Pande was published in 2016, a year after her autobiography *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* was brought out. Laxmi's second work discusses the birth of the activist Laxmi from her unanswered questions in her young days regarding why a biological male was feminine and wanted only to be recognized so. A look at the important persons in Laxmi's life is significant as it unfolds various aspects of her personality. She talks of the persona of *Laxmi* which enabled her to travel the whole country, attend international conferences in many cities in the world, attend queer marches, give inspirational *TED Talks* and have the fortune to be interviewed by the world famous writer Salman Rushdie. She is convinced that if she were a mere transgendered person, she could not have achieved so much. All her achievements are attributed to "an image of absolute self-assurance" (*Red Lipstick: The Men in my Life*, 05). At the same time, Laxmi articulates her immense gratitude to her parents for their unconditional love and support.

Laxmi's immense love for her father is revealed when she recounts the struggles he faced in providing for his extended family. Laxmi's father Chandradev Chandinath Tripathi, from a Brahmin family in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, reached Bombay at sixteen and joined *JK File Company*. In spite of her father's love and hardships for his relatives, he was not comforted by their presence on his sick bed. Laxmi ruefully claims that none of his relatives visited him when he was suffering from cancer or later on his deathbed. She recalls that he took a lot of effort to bring up his children. He would work for eighteen hours on some days to provide for his family. When people taunted him about having a hijra for a son, he calmly said he did not mind "his" (Laxmi's) joining the hijra community. Laxmi is convinced that without her father's support, she would never have achieved so much but would only have ended up as a prostitute. This fact is significant since most transgendered persons are disowned by their family when they fail to conform to expected gender norms. Laxmi's father showed immense courage in keeping a "hijra" in the house and his unconditional love for Laxmi helped her to assert herself and make her life meaningful.

If social acceptance of transgendered persons were a reality, there would be no hijra communities in most cities of the country. It has been observed that many transgender persons undergo psychological issues when they are alienated from their families and the absence of a solid emotional support system drives many towards alcohol and drugs. Lisa R Miller and Eric Anthony Grollman mention that transgendered persons who are exposed to frequent discrimination tend to attempt suicide and depend on smoking or drugs or alcohol ("The Social Costs of Gender

Nonconformity in Transgender Adults: Implications for Discrimination and Health”. 826). According to the 2008 findings of the *NTDS (National Transgender Discrimination Survey)* it was also noticed that more trans women than trans men are victims of discrimination.

In *Red Lipstick: The Men in My Life* Laxmi recollects with gratitude the immense help of Atharv Nair in the setting up of *Astitva*, an organization for sexual minorities. Their hard work paid off when they became a part of the petitioners in the Supreme Court verdict on the transgender persons. They could influence the Maharashtra government to include a chapter on transgender people and sex workers in their policy proposal. Laxmi had gained much wealth, fame and respect from mainstream society but the duty towards her hijra community was foremost in her mind. The chances of Laxmi's status of a celebrity overshadowing her formidable contribution to the hijra community are great but her actual contribution can never be underestimated.

Andrew Hunter, the president and founding member of *Global Network of Sex Work Projects* is a person whom she respects immensely. She credits her social activism to his concrete support as he taught her “the politics, the work, how to really be an activist” (*Red Lipstick*, 39). He was her “true godfather. He polished Laxmi and turned the rough stone into a glittering diamond” (40).

Another person close to her heart is her cousin Vijay Pratap Dubey. He took the children in the family to school, brought them their lunch and when Laxmi was in her sickbed, he would sit near, give her medicines as prescribed and talk to her. His death due to jaundice was a great loss to the family and Laxmi in particular.



Other persons whom Laxmi recollects with gratitude and love are: Raju Iyer and his wife; Rishi Ajaydas, author of *Tratiya Prakriti: Kinnar*, who helped initiate the Kinnar Akhada; Godabai who performed Laxmi's haldi-kumkum (which signifies one's entry into the queer community), and is looked upon as Laxmi's mother; Varsha Gaikwad, Maharashtra Minister of Women and Child Welfare who included transgender welfare in government policy; Anjali Gopalan, director of *Naz Foundation Trust*, whose Public Interest Litigation against *Article 377 of the Indian Penal Code* resulted in its scrapping by the Supreme Court; Meena Saraswathi Seshu, an activist from Tata Institute of Social Sciences; Gauri (Ganesh) Sawant, her college –day friend; Kamini, Muskaan and Jumman, her loyal friends from the hijra community; Pawan, whom Laxmi helped to set up Samarpan Trust and the advocate Anand Grover of the Lawyers' Collective who was part of *NALSA* (the *National Legal Services Authority*) that fought the case against *Article 377* and won in the Supreme Court. Numerous friends, lovers and her first husband are also mentioned in the book.

Prince Manvendra Singh Gohil of Rajpipla in the state of Gujarat, the first openly gay member among the royals of the country, is Laxmi's "brother", not by relation but because of their love and friendship. His childhood as an heir apparent of the Rajpipla royalty was stifling and confused. When the prince had a nervous breakdown in 2002, the counsellor identified his predicament but when his parents were informed of his being a homosexual, they chose to keep it a secret. In 2004 he finally spoke to a Gujarati newspaper that he was a homosexual: the king and the queen were hurt and shocked and the very next day through a declaration in the

newspapers they disowned him. He started the *Lakshya Trust* for the gay community and keeps himself engaged with that.

Some pages in the *Red Lipstick* are by Prince Manvendra in which he narrates his identity issues, meeting Laxmi for the first time and their bond of a “brother” and “sister”. This chapter titled “Prince Manvendra’s Monologue: Laxmi, my Sister”, narrates the immense love and respect for his “sister”. He writes thus

Lakshmi is a natural leader- all her amazing qualities contribute to her personality as a leader... I remember when my guruji, from whom I learnt music, met Laxmi at one of my birthday dos. He must have been around eighty-five then - he died at ninety-one - and had nursed a bad opinion of hijras all his life. But the moment I introduced Laxmi, I could see his entire impression of hijras change. In a matter of a few hours, they were both chatting like old buddies and it was obvious that he had shed all his preconceived notions about hijras. And this has happened time and again-I have been witness to it. (*Red Lipstick*, 128-129)

This testimony reveals Laxmi’s personality and overpowering presence which has enabled her to become the brand ambassador of hijras in India and abroad. A person’s total contribution to his/her community or society at large may be estimated by the words of others who are aware of the field in which the former has been involved.

In the chapter named “Raju’s Monologue”, Laxmi talks of “Raju” who “will always live and breathe inside me” (*Red Lipstick*, 148). Laxmi asserts that the male in her comes forth when the situation demands. She recollects the time when her

father was in intense pain and she sat beside him acting brave and strong. When he neared his end, “Raju was by his side, he had to be...I took papa’s hands in mine and nodded, tears in my eyes. Papa closed his eyes and drifted off, I am sure he found some peace in my acquiescence, some assurance that even though he was going away, everyone would be looked after” (148-149).

Laxmi’s narrative is frank and outspoken; she does not try to hide or euphemistically express the unpleasant experiences she has faced in her life. She has a larger than life persona, which she maintains for its effectiveness to get things done. Her close association with various people and her free interaction with them reveals that she treasures her loved ones. Her active role in the *National Legal Services Authority versus Union of India and Others* case and the subsequent Supreme Court verdict has immensely helped in giving legal rights to the hitherto invisible and silenced transgender community. Her equations with different people have helped her to become a strong presence in the transgender community. Further details about Laxmi’s present life were revealed through an interview held at her home at Thane near Mumbai on 12th September 2019 , which has been attached as an appendix after the conclusion.

The interview with Laxmi revealed interesting facets of her personality. She spoke of her supportive parents, how her education helped her to articulate herself boldly at national and international events. Her deep gratitude towards her parents is clearly expressed and she spoke of the respect, wealth and fame she could achieve only through her gender identity. Laxmi is certain that her immense self-confidence not only empowered her, but it also strengthened her struggles to fight for her

community. She recollects that her weak physical frame and feminine attributes may have attracted young boys towards her to abuse her sexually. Laxmi recalls that her sexual abuse continued unabated for a long time, and it was her great boldness and assertiveness which finally enabled her to put an end to her degradation. Her experiences prove that transgendered children are equally, if not more vulnerable to sexual violence as compared to cisgendered ones. However, her own sexual victimization and her consequent resistance of it make it evident that strong assertiveness helps curb such violence.

Throughout her interview Laxmi used many teachings from the Mahabharata and other holy scriptures. Simultaneously, she also appeared quite progressive in her thinking. Her words exhibit her educated status and advanced world-view. Laxmi argues that her celebrity status as a transgender at the *United Nations* and other international forums was possible only due to her education and merit. Her establishment as the Mahamandaleshwar of the Kinnar Akhada has added a religious charm to her vivid personality.

Laxmi affirms that gender sensitization sessions, awareness campaigns and talks by successful transgender persons will vastly empower the community as well as facilitate inclusion of these minorities in mainstream society. Societal reform calls for sustained efforts, both by the government and the marginalized communities. The transgender individuals have all the Fundamental Rights that are enjoyed by the gender normative categories, yet in order to lead normal and dignified lives, each transgender person will have to become educated and qualified for professions that suit them. Persistent efforts will surely benefit each marginalized member of the

transgender community. Laxmi wishes that the community would progress while concomitantly upholding their traditional culture. She urges each trans individual to usher in positive transformations in the community, which will subsequently be beneficial to all the members. At the same time, positive and affirmative changes will gradually transform the societal mindset and negative attitude and discriminatory behaviour towards the persons will lessen. She demands sustained struggle to ensure that human rights are accessible to each person in the community.

Laxmi gives her own example when she talks about the great influence that education brought in her life. It was her academic background which helped her become articulate while expressing the legitimate demands of her people. However, she asserts that she lives for herself and does not conform to social norms if she is not convinced about them. Through her forceful expression of herself, she throws light on her independent spirit and genuine personality. She has no pretensions about herself being the ideal spokesperson of her community, as she herself admits that she is a non-conformer. At the same time, she does not impose herself on the community.

Laxmi articulates her deep sense of gratitude towards her mother for accepting her despite her gender identity. She suggests that she would not have reached the pinnacle of success had she been forced to leave her home due to parental displeasure at her mismatched body/ gender. As far as her identity is concerned, she claims that she is a *kinnar*: as she says she is “not both genders. I am a totally different gender. For me I believe I am better than both the genders.” Yet in her book *Red Lipstick* she mentions the presence of both the genders within her and

how the male becomes dominant at certain crucial situations. When her father, stricken with cancer, was on his deathbed, she recalls that Raju (the male nickname used by her parents for her) stood strong and unwavering. During the interview she said, “Yes, I have always said that my gender is like the Ganges, my sexuality is like the Ganges” and later she contradicts herself when she answers another question thus- “Fluidity may be there in some persons. That’s not me.”

By being elevated to the post of the Mahamandaleshwar of the Kinnar Akhada, Laxmi wishes to reclaim the lost glory of the hijra community. She asserts that the Kinnar Akhada was established amidst much resistance from several quarters. Laxmi believes that through this position, she can do much more for the upliftment of the hijra community. The indisputable fact to be noted is that Laxmi's efforts to mitigate her community's sufferings and ensuring that each trans person deserves social justice, cannot be refuted. As far as Laxmi is concerned, she would even accept political or religious support for the lawful needs of the community. In spite of her claims to the contrary, Laxmi seems to be playing a political card in advocating the construction of the Ram temple at Ayodhya. The support of the marginalized hijra community for the Central government's Ram temple construction may boost the governmental efforts, and simultaneously, also ensure that the government takes note of the community and its legitimate demands. She also would be willing to adorn a seat in the Rajya Sabha, if nominated by the government. The trouble of working at grassroots level politics is beyond her imagination. As far as her personal life is concerned, Laxmi had married a much younger man, which finally resulted in separation. She fears that her wealth and

celebrity status may have attracted him to her; she was only a source of wealth to him. Laxmi is now married to a trans man named Aryan Pasha, who is fourteen years younger than her. He is a bodybuilder as well as a lawyer based in Delhi.

It was only after her ascension to the post of Mahamandaleshwar that Laxmi got her castration carried out. She mentions that she had no personal dislike for her penis and when she felt like doing so, she got the emasculation surgery performed. The fact that she had to stay home for over a month post-surgery was a very difficult decision for her, but when the time was suitable and when she had the money for it, she got it done. The surgery was done in July 2019 and the interview was held shortly later.

The government has a very prominent role to play vis-à-vis transgender empowerment. Apart from reservation in educational institutions for the sexual/gender minorities, providing suitable career opportunities and training would be highly beneficial to the hijra community. Laxmi rues the fact that very few Indian states have established *Transgender Welfare Boards* or taken any proactive steps for the community. The implementation of pro-trans initiatives would surely highlight the gross injustice faced by them and also help them to empower themselves.

Moving on to Manobi, her courageous stand has aided her in reaching academic heights and through her activism, mainly through publishing *Abomanab*, she has helped transform public opinion about transgender individuals. She also believes that she needs to live life on her terms and attempts to find companionship and love in her husband.

All the transgendered writers analysed in the study have not only faced innumerable challenges to assert their identity, they have also striven to work for their community in their own individual ways. While Vidya uses the medium of theatre, Revathi goes to different educational institutions to spread awareness about the marginalized sexual and gender minorities. Laxmi has been established as the head (Acharya Mahamandaleshwar) of the Kinnar Akhada and attempts to wrought changes through religion, while Manobi thinks creating societal awareness will definitely help the transgender community. All have not only asserted their true gender but also managed to empower their community in their own way.

The interview with Manobi Bandyopadhyay manifested how her honesty about her gender identity and her immense patience in the face of innumerable challenges, helped her to achieve success. Simultaneously, she expresses her gratitude to her parents for their support and acceptance of her gender, although, initially they thought it was an eccentricity and they overlooked it, as scholastically she performed well. She feels grateful for the fact that she was not thrown out of the house when her mismatched body/gender was discovered. At the same time, people in society always treated her with contempt and ridicule. Once she joined the higher education profession, she faced academic transphobia from her colleagues. These experiences and bigotry from society towards transgender individuals makes Manobi unsure and hesitant of transgender inclusion in mainstream society. In her scathing attack on the academic community, Manobi calls for the *medical treatment* of such individuals. She makes it very clear that transphobia must be removed from



the so-called progressive group first. When that is materialized, societal reform will consequently follow.

Manobi prefers to call herself as a woman: while Revathi refers to herself both as a woman and a transgender and Laxmi refers to herself as a kinnar. Among the three, Manobi very strongly insists that she is a *woman* and nothing else.

While Revathi and Laxmi argue that the hijras need to be accepted and integrated in mainstream society, Manobi avers that the trans community is much better, away from the mainstream society since there are more transphobics in society compared to those who accept transgender individuals. She mentions her particular case; in spite of high academic achievements, she failed to find any compassion or understanding among the teaching fraternity. Manobi witnessed much mental and emotional stress due to her colleagues' transphobic behaviour and consequently was compelled to resign from the post of college Principal. She recalls that the mentality of some teaching and administrative staff coupled with their rude behaviour was highly unbearable. Her experience tells her that there may be many closeted sexual and gender minorities within the student community. She maintains that an empathetic understanding of the issues of the transgender group combined with support from teachers can greatly help such students. While Revathi and Laxmi insist that education must be accessible to the marginalized categories, Manobi asserts that highly educated individuals are not accommodated within certain professions. Her unpleasant experiences as a student and later as an academic have embittered her. On reading her biography, one is shocked at the humiliating and lowly behaviour of her so-called academic colleagues. They groped her chest,

hit and punched her; so much so, in one encounter she needed medical treatment. Bengal is reputed to be one among the few Indian states with a well educated population; however, her experience at college may have embittered her endlessly. However, she strongly feels that the stigma and discrimination faced by the transgender people must be erased and their human rights assured and implemented for a dignified life.

As far as her own identity is concerned, she refutes the existence of gender fluidity in her. She supplements that some may use such “theories” to take advantage of mainstream society. From her personal experience, she states that marriage between a transgender and a cis male cannot be successful. For a marriage to be successful, unconditional love and total understanding is essential. Manobi argues that if a trans person gets attracted to a cis male/female, it is merely a form of infatuation. In her personal life, Manobi has found love and companionship in a much younger man. Many months after the interview, Manobi claimed that she had married the person.

Sex- education is a pertinent part of school education, according to Manobi. She blames the traditional attitude of social beings which prevents a free and open discussion of rape and other sexual atrocities against women and children. If sex education is made compulsory and if it is imparted in a suitable environment, children would evolve into mature individuals, who will learn to respect women. Consequently, the cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence against women would diminish.

Manobi thinks the West is pro-transgender and they provide a variety of facilities to the community members. In India, she finds that tokenism is practiced in the name of transgender development. Manobi rues the fact that most educational institutions and universities organize seminars and conferences on transgender issues but are not genuinely interested in their issues and not much concrete work has been initiated by anyone in this regard. Even researches about transgender persons or their problems are purely academic exercises and nobody takes any positive steps to mitigate their hardships. Manobi also shares her concern about numerous NGOs which only function to cater to HIV cases but do not venture any further.

According to Manobi, the country's economy needs to flourish for a simultaneous improvement in the life of the transgender persons. The development of the transgender community must be at par with that of the mainstream society.

Manobi vehemently denies being interested in full-time activism. She very stoutly denies having social duties to perform. Her occupation as a college Principal materialized because of her educational background, so she is satisfied doing her present work. She adds that her achievements in life are because of her academic education. She added that she also imbibed much knowledge from her family and her life experiences have helped to shape her life.

Regarding children who are unsure of their identity, Manobi is of the opinion that all children are very sure of themselves and their gender identity. It is parents and other persons who confuse the child and expect conformity between the body

and psyche. She cites herself as one who defied parental authority and dressed in feminine attire to fulfill her gender expression.

*Abomanab*, the transgender magazine started by Manobi in 1998 is still being published and she is proud of the fact that it has managed to sensitize many in her state. She claims there are many transgender individuals who now work in different professions like teaching, social work and other occupations.

The interview concluded with Manobi's expression of happiness and contentment regarding her life. She feels proud that she could express herself completely. The credit for her achievement and contentment goes entirely to her honesty to herself, coupled with the teachings from Guru Ramakrishna Paramhans, Swami Vivekananda and Rabindranath Tagore.

It is heartening to observe that most of the transgender writers have also taken up activism. While Vidya stays in Canada and through theatre tries to sensitize society about the sexual and gender minorities, others are involved in their own way. Revathi, in spite of being a trans woman, strives to work for the socially invisible, yet suffering trans men. She states that while the hijra community provides emotional, social and financial support to the transgender women, there is no similar social set up for trans men. In her book *A Life in Trans Activism*, Revathi mentions various trans men she has interacted with. Through these personal conversations, she has learnt about the great suffering and ridicule faced by such individuals.

Susan Stryker writes

Within modern bureaucratic society, many kinds of routine administrative procedures make life very difficult for people who cross the social boundaries of their birth-assigned genders. Birth certificates, school and medical records, professional credentials, passports, driver's licenses, and other such documents provide a composite portrait of each of us as a person with a particular gender and when these records have noticeable discrepancies and omissions, all kinds of problems can result: inability to marry, for example or to cross national borders, qualify for jobs, gain access to needed social services, and secure legal custody of one's children. Because transgender people typically lack the same kind of support that fully accepted members of society automatically expect, they may be more vulnerable to risky or self-harming behaviours and consequently may wind up having more health problems or trouble with the law- which only compounds their already considerable difficulties. (*Transgender History*, 6)

Stryker's words express very pointedly how the gender binary dominated society discriminates against the trans people. Vidya, Revathi and Laxmi have narrated at length the bureaucratic hurdles they encountered while getting documents in their new gender. Manobi had much problem in her service records as the male name Somnath had to be corrected to her new female name; consequently apart from the delay, she also encountered various other issues. Laxmi describes the various problems she faced in getting a passport: she had to rush from the passport office to the ration shop, and from there to the hospital and get a certificate documenting her gender status. Revathi also experienced delay in getting her two-

wheeler license as her name was Doraisamy in the government issued ration card, which had to be furnished for identity purpose. The matter of accommodation was also a juggernaut for Manobi. In spite of having a degree in Computer Science and a Master's degree in Linguistics, Vidya failed to get a suitable job. It was due to her acquaintance with friends in Chennai that she finally got a job in a bank.

All the transgender persons under focus, through their life as well life narratives are bringing in tectonic shifts in the way people look at transgender individuals in our country. They are concerned about how social conditioning has led to the marginalization of trans people. Cultural empowerment, probably, is the only way to counter that. The success stories of several trans personalities have had a great impact on society and a little tangible difference can be seen in society. Yet much more needs to be done and many more trans people need to be empowered and brought out into society.

Against all odds, these writers have been working hard towards building a platform for transgender community. Through their work, they exhort the public to treat the trans persons with respect on humanitarian grounds. When these trans persons started their post-transition life, they did not have societal agencies to help and support them. In fact, even now there are no models for provision of appropriate tailored services and social support for the transgender population. These writers-cum-activists are putting their foot down on providing a platform as well as visibility of peer groups of trans individuals. They put in their share of strengthening of health, social and community systems to better respond to the unique needs of the trans category.

At the same time, the trans persons need to develop resilience, fight for their identity affirmation rights along with self-acceptance. They have to look out for innovative ways to deal with pervasive discrimination, challenge and fight micro-aggressions and various forms of victimization. Improving social connectedness among the various sexual and gender minorities will also benefit them. Within the community, the transgender members perceive a profound sense of security and safety. Close connections among members will lead to decreased levels of fearfulness, less suicidal tendencies and heightened comfort and meaningful lives. Simultaneously, these minority groups must have access to resources they need to live as their innate, authentic selves.

All said and done, all trans persons have to be provided sound education and/or training in different skills needed to earn a livelihood. Along with this, the provision of reservation in higher educational institutions and government services will surely benefit the marginalised sections to come at par with other cisgendered individuals.

As far as A, Revathi, Laxmi and Manobi are concerned, all metamorphosed into absolutely lovely women. To assert their gender identity, they had to undergo much transphobia and humiliation from society. At times, they were even subjected to physical and emotional abuse; yet their perseverance paid off and now they are outstanding personalities who not only inspire others through their achievements but also motivate trans people to face the challenges in their life.

## Conclusion

If you prick us, do we not bleed?  
If you tickle us, do we not laugh?  
If you poison us, do we not die?  
(*The Merchant of Venice*, Act 3, Scene 1)

The lines quoted above are Shylock's rant against Antonio for the latter's ill treatment and humiliation of the former on numerous occasions. Shylock feels justified in being unflinching about exacting his pound of flesh from Antonio; after all, the latter has "disgraced" and "hindered" him apart from "mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains" according to Shylock (*Merchant*, Act 3, Scene 1). Somewhat similarly, the transgender individuals who have been struggling against discrimination and transphobia from society cannot be ignored as inconsequential if they demand justice and reparation for their loss and suffering. Most transgendered persons experience trauma which leaves them completely transformed and it keeps returning to haunt them. Pritham Chakravarthy, the famous one-woman theatre personality, quotes Maria Root's observation about trauma as being "usually associated with the social status of an individual being devalued because a character intrinsic to their identity is different from what is valued by those in power, for example, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability. As a result it is often present throughout a lifetime" (*Performing*, 542).

The transgender community in India has faced societal exclusion since the British introduced discriminatory laws against the sexual minorities in 1871. On November 26, 2019, the Indian government passed the *Transgender Persons*



*(Protection of Rights) Bill*. This *Bill* defines a trans person as someone whose gender does not match the one assigned at birth and it prohibits any form of discrimination against them in employment, education, housing, healthcare and allied services. The *Bill* also forbids forced labour by the trans community members. Yet, discrimination against the trans persons is rampant in all spheres of public life and even Fundamental Rights are denied to such individuals. The transgender community is perplexed about the *Bill* as it does not differentiate among its various sub-categories –the transgender group, the transsexual individuals and the intersex persons. While the *Bill* permits self -perception of gender identity, it requires such a person to be so recognised on the basis of a certificate of identity issued by a District Magistrate. The trans community has many points of difference with certain clauses in the bill. They affirm that the change of identity cannot be done with certification by the District Magistrate. According to the transgender community, the issuance of identity certificate from the District Magistrate impinges on an individual’s right to self-determination. Along with that, delay and bureaucratic discrimination may also be experienced by the community members. While the *Bill* imposes a trans person below the age of eighteen to stay with his/her birth family, transgender activists claim that many families themselves inflict violence on the said individual. Consequently, it cannot be assumed that a trans individual would be free from discrimination and violence in his/her natal home. Begging is criminalised by the *Bill*; yet it does not extend any reservations for education or employment of these marginalised sections. It is a well-known fact that most transgender persons depend on begging for their livelihood, hence the clause which criminalizes begging can hardly be beneficial to these gender minorities. The *Bill* focuses only on trans men

and hijras while the intersex, gender queer and other gender minorities are ignored. All the diverse sexual and gender categories must be included and the issues of each section must be addressed in order to provide social justice to all concerned. While the Bill envisages adequate health facilities for the trans community including HIV surveillance and sex surgeries, the community is sceptical about the health care providers who are ignorant about the transgender community or their issues. While the Bill assures that a trans person can change his/her first name only, many of the trans persons have been abandoned by their birth family and would like to take on the name of their guru; this becomes a problem for such individuals. The *Bill* proposes the setting up of a *National Council for Transgender Persons*, comprising many ministers and five trans persons. The community demands greater representation from their community. The anomalies and contentious points in the *Bill* need to be corrected and suggestions from the community ought to be considered to ensure that a truly beneficial and empowering tool helps the trans community.

However it needs to be acknowledged that mere implementation of laws cannot curb either discrimination and/or transphobic reactions against the community. In “Trajectories of the Transgender: Need to Move from Sex to Sexuality” Ina Goel and K R Nayar state,

We feel that mainstreaming the so-called ‘sexual minorities’ by creating a separate category will lead to stigma and discrimination and labelling them as ‘backward class’ would be misleading ... The correct problematization of the issue would command the recognition of pluralistic expression in gender that

would encompass those who identify themselves as cisgenders, cissexuals, transvestite, transgenders, hijras, homosexuals, genderqueers and genderless among the many others who find space beyond the established binaries of gender. (“Trajectories of the Transgender: Need to Move from Sex to Sexuality”, 22)

First and foremost, there has to be ample general awareness about the various sexual and gender identities; especially because among the cisgendered majority in society, some are even unaware of their existence. The basic priority entails providing sex education at school, apart from enabling these marginalised categories to procure education in government and private educational institutions. Currently, most people are ignorant or in denial of the marginalised sexual and gender groups. Through gender sensitization campaigns, mainstream society can realise the existence of such individuals as well as their problems and issues. Adequate reservation quota for the transgender community in higher education sector will certainly pave the way for their becoming qualified for employment in public and private sector. *The Kochi Metro Rail Limited* in the state of Kerala in India provided employment to twenty three transgendered persons and this initiative gained much media attention. However, many of the transgender persons were unable to acquire suitable residential facilities or hostels due to transphobic reaction from the general public. Therefore, gradual yet sustained measures aimed at their inclusion in mainstream society, can smoothen and facilitate their acceptance by the cisgendered majority.

In this regard, the importance of sex-education in schools, which detail not only the anatomy of “normal” male and female body but also the biological variations of intersex as well as other sexual and gender minorities, must form the syllabus of this venture. At present, a very fundamental form of sex education, which is limited to the biology syllabus, is imparted to schoolchildren. Apart from transacting academic knowledge, vast scale of awareness programmes throughout the country, will certainly ameliorate the wretched condition of these marginalised individuals. Secondly, education must be provided to all marginalized categories, and trained and sensitised teaching and administrative staff must be employed to enable the trans people to study in congenial atmosphere. It is often observed that such persons drop out of school due to the transphobic behaviour of students and staff. At present some physically challenged and moderately mentally challenged students study in regular schools, which teaches empathetic interaction among children. A similar “normal” school life for the sexual and gender categories, will be highly appreciable and beneficial to them. At college level and university level also, reservation for such persons, will surely improve their academic qualifications. With education, they will be exposed to various professional openings and will be placed in deserving positions. The unfortunate and dismal life of the transgender people will be greatly transformed. Most of the individuals suffer from low self-confidence as well as stunted self-esteem. Proper education in a college campus will certainly pave way for heightened self- awareness coupled with greater self- esteem. Therefore, the urgency of education of the sexual and gender minorities can hardly be ignored.

Very few states in India have started *Transgender Welfare Boards*, which have yet to initiate concrete training programmes for the transgender categories. After the registration of these individuals in these organisations, steps may be commenced to begin different training programmes based on each person's individual preference and aptitude. Such ventures will surely aid the transgender person to equip oneself with much needed work skills.

Nancy Chodorow proposes that “gender difference is not absolute, abstract or irreducible; it does not involve an essence of gender” (*Feminist*, 9). She further claims that “gender differences” are “socially and psychologically created and situated” and also adds that “difference and gender difference are created relationally, that is, in relationship” (9). The transgender persons on whom this study focuses, prove that cultural differentiation of gender roles has become deeply embedded in social consciousness and that leads to confusion about them and the roles they adopt. Yet reflection about Chodorow's observation on “core gender identity” will clarify why the transgendered refute their socially assigned gender, based on their natal sex and strive to transition to the opposite one (15). She avers that one's “core gender identity”, the sense of one being male or female is “established in the first two years concomitantly with the development of *the sense of self*” (italics mine, 15).

The life narratives of most well-known trans members illustrate that they have faced innumerable challenges in life which have helped them not only to realize their wish of transforming to the gender of their choice, but also awakened them to strive for legal and social rights for their community. It was during their

adolescence when each individual realized clearly that they had to assert their gender vehemently even if it involved leaving the family. Gabrielle Owen says,

Adolescence constructs and reifies adulthood as the stage of life when selfhood is final, established, known. And so the idea of adolescence contains transition, movement and change in which the perceived turbulence of puberty is loaded with meanings about *discovery of self*. Adolescence is constructed as the moment that gendered *becoming* occurs. (italics added, *Transgender*, 22-23)

Among the trans writers in this analysis, Revathi lacked education beyond high school; Vidya, Laxmi and Manobi, on the other hand, were well educated and it helped them to articulate their basic needs. Yet the lack of education did not stop Revathi from achieving her goals. In “Bending Gender, Ending Gender”, Rebecca Callahan cites the study by Stader and Graca in 2007 in schools that analysed peer victimisation on alternately sexed individuals. According to the report “ignorance is still high among youths and adults. Students reported that homophobic remarks, verbal harassment and physical abuse, were common occurrences” (Stada and Graca, 2007, 84). This study indicates that students from sexual and gender minority groups fail to perform well academically and discontinue when they feel unsafe. However, Vidya, Laxmi and Manobi survived the horrors of school and college years and persevered in their own ways.

They exhibited their assertiveness and wanted to express their actual gender identity; they took concrete and resolute steps to rectify the incongruous body/mind dichotomy. The fact that Vidya and Revathi joined the hijra community, proved

fortunate for them. It was through learning the customs and rituals of hijra community that they could earn money for their gurus, which further enabled them to be considered for phalloplasty. It was initially humiliating for Vidya, a post-graduate, to supplicate for alms: but she was determined that she would never indulge in sex-work. Initially Revathi earned money by visiting shops; then did sex-work and later joined Sangama to earn her livelihood. Laxmi used her dancing skills to become a television personality. Simultaneously, she also worked for the sex workers and this paved the way for her to attend international conferences. Manobi faced transphobic reaction from the academic circle, yet endeavoured to complete her doctoral studies and later became a college principal.

It may be recollected that these persons were biologically born males who, in early childhood experienced gender dysphoria, which made them *feel, think* and *know* that they are females in male bodies. The gender identity of being a female made them wear feminine dress as well as walk and behave like women. Judith Butler in her radical book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* talks of the notion of “women” being an “identity”, but simultaneously she states there is a “split” in that identity due to the difference between sex and gender (8). Later she adds that “gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex” (*Gender*, 8). She postulates that gender cannot be defined as “the cultural interpretation of sex, if sex itself is a gendered category” (*Gender*, 10).

These trans persons experienced their gender identity as being that of a woman. Their feminine gait, love for feminine attire and having friends among girls was tolerated for some time by their family members. At first, this was dismissed as

childish play, but when the situation continued, there was mockery, humiliation and even physical violence. At school, classmates and other students called them names like “ali” (*Vidya*, 25) and “girl-boy”, and “number nine” as Revathi recollects (*Truth*, 6). As far as Laxmi is concerned, people taunted her with terms like “homo” and “chakka” (*Hijra*, 4) while Manobi was often ridiculed as a “hijra” (*Gift*, 35). At home, parents would reason with them to mend their ways, but when there was no change, reprimands and beatings were common. Vidya was often beaten up by her father; Revathi, Laxmi and Manobi were often scolded by their parents and other family members.

Suzanne G Frayser mentions that babies are assigned genders on the basis of their genital organs; the corporal aspect is given a symbolic function, that of gender categories (“Discovering the Value of Cross-Cultural Research on Human Sexuality”, 15). The gender assigned to the baby determines whether people respond to that baby as a boy or as a girl. This action from others reinforces the belief in the child’s gender. In childhood when the child observes others, it learns the social roles of man/woman and also “gender lessons” which are elaborated by family members and others. Through symbols for men and women presented by media, notions of femininity and masculinity are further impressed on the child. Frayser talks of the four aspects of gender as

1. Biological- gender assigned on the basis of anatomical and physiological characteristics.
2. Social – gender role, how a person behaves to demonstrate that he or she is a man or a woman.



3. Cultural-beliefs about gender, masculinity and femininity.
4. Psychological-gender identity, the private experiences of gender. (34)

A similar idea is shared by Butler who analyses Simone de Beauvoir's quote "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" to assert that as per the latter's assumption; there is a "cultural compulsion" on a woman to become so (*Gender*, 11). As far as Vidya is concerned, nobody compelled her to be like a woman; she acted like one, because she *is* one. Butler insists that it cannot be presumed that the "one who becomes a woman is a 'female'", which seems to be legitimised in the case of Vidya, Revathi, Laxmi and Manobi (11). Each was a "boy" since the genitals were those of a "boy". Yet when they were young children, it dawned on them that inside, they "felt" to be "girls" ; deep in their minds, they *were girls* but female genitals were missing. The dress of a boy was hateful to them while saris, long hair and other "feminine" attributes were what they longed for. When this wish was shared with parents and siblings, the latter were perplexed; their children were "boys", had male "genitals", yet claimed they wanted to dress and be like girls. Parents and others could never understand, let alone empathize with their "strange" sons and their peculiar ways. Even schoolmates and teachers ridiculed and shamed them. It can be daunting and a great struggle to face such hostile situations in childhood: after all one's gender identity is one's own and it is hardly visible to others. It is basically psychological in nature and is experienced by the individual while only the social and cultural aspects are visible to others. It is indeed perplexing that the advocates of the gender dichotomy find it difficult to comprehend the simple fact of variations in gender and sexual orientations.

To overcome great mental tension arising out of their social discrimination, most of the transgendered indulge in singing and dancing. Dance appears to be an integral part in the life of Vidya, Revathi, Laxmi and Manobi. All the four mention experiencing great happiness when they danced. While Revathi participated in temple celebrations in female costume, Laxmi was always included in school functions which included dance. Manobi picked up steps when she accompanied her sisters for dance class and performed much better than the other female students. Vidya was scolded when caught dancing by the adults, especially in feminine attire, so she started indulging secretly in this pleasure. Revathi would completely immerse herself in dance programmes wearing female garb and while changing into her everyday clothes, she felt she was putting on a “costume”. She often participated in temple celebrations merely for the purpose of wearing female costume. Even though she was reprimanded for her dance in feminine attire, she would say that it was her offering to God and would manage to escape further approbation. Laxmi had no restriction from her parents regarding dance but she was forbidden from wearing feminine dress at home. Manobi was excused for her “eccentric” feminine behaviour as her parents thought her academic performance overshadowed this drawback. One of the sources of Laxmi’s income comes from dance lessons and Vidya also uses dance in her theatre performances. Manobi seems to have given up dancing after joining teaching profession while Revathi presents dance in her drama performances.

The fact that all the four of them experienced different forms of transphobia from society is apparent from their narratives. Vidya in her pre and post-transition

states was physically and verbally ridiculed and harassed. As she belongs to a socially and economic lower strata, she often expressed her anti-caste feelings in social media and was often ruthlessly attacked in cyber spaces. Revathi faced brutal treatment from local goons in Mumbai and insensitive policemen in Bangalore. After her sex-surgery, Revathi was often taunted by people in public places. Laxmi was once unceremoniously asked to leave a party while she was eating as she belonged to the hijra clan. Manobi was trapped in a bogus relationship and shamed in the media, apart from her bitter experiences at the hands of her colleagues. About transphobia, the transsexual feminist theorist and author, Julia Serano in *Whipping Girl* says that it is rooted in sexism and she locates the birth of transphobia and homophobia in “oppositional sexism”, the belief that male and female is “rigid, mutually exclusive categories, each possessing a unique and non-overlapping set of attributes, aptitudes, abilities and desires” (15). She contrasts “oppositional sexism” with “traditional sexism”, the belief that males and masculinity are superior to female and femininity (17). Serano asserts that transphobia is triggered by insecurities that persons harbour against gender and gender norms. She explains that the “male to female transgender incites transphobia through her implicit challenge to the binary division upon which male cultural and political hegemony depends” (19).

Anyway the fortitude and strength of the four transgendered to grapple with all forms of transphobia, shows their indomitable courage and spirit. Somewhat similar to Serano’s views, the transgender author and critic Judy Norton believes that transphobia is an extension of homophobia and misogyny. She argues that transgender people, like gays and lesbians, are hated and feared for “challenging and

undermining gender norms and gender binary” (23). The political impropriety of subverting the gender binary is highly scandalous to those who are firm supporters of the dichotomous clan.

In academics, Vidya, Laxmi and Manobi were successful: Vidya acquired a post-graduation degree in Linguistics, Laxmi was a Commerce graduate and Manobi did her masters in Bengali literature before getting employed. Revathi, however, could not go beyond high school. Vidya’s father pressurised her for studies but in her adolescent years, she challenged his authority and joined for secondary, degree and post-graduation according to her wish. Laxmi was never compelled for studies; she studied in college, not merely for academic scholarship but also because she experienced absolute freedom in her dressing style. Manobi was forced to study science at secondary level but she managed to study for graduation and post-graduation as per her choice. In spite of only high school education, Revathi is now an articulate and bold speaker at national and international venues.

As far as castration is concerned, both Vidya and Revathi had to undergo the surgery in unauthorised hospitals without any elaborate prior tests or counselling and even the post- surgery stay at hospital did not provide them comfort or expert care. Manobi had her phalloplasty from an authorised hospital after hormone treatment and the counselling prior to the surgery aided her in weighing pros and cons of the surgery. Laxmi’s sex reassignment surgery took place in 2019, a long period after her joining the hijra community.

The challenges faced by each person helped them to use their resources of strength and determination and come out successful in their endeavours. After

realising their true gender identity through surgery, they strived to fight for due and fair rights for their community members. Their struggle for their community continues through various avenues: Vidya is a theatre personality who attempts to enlighten society about gender minorities; Revathi acts in plays highlighting the experiences of the trans people, apart from addressing students in colleges and universities as part of her sensitization campaign; Laxmi has made her appearance felt at national and international levels as a representative of the transgender community and her position of Acharya Mahamandaleswar of the Kinnar Akhada has given her the persona of a religious leader; and Manobi, through her transgender magazine *Abomanab* and personal achievements inspires others to express their gender boldly.

It is a fact that most transgender people in society are not able to achieve as much success as Vidya, Revathi, Laxmi and Manobi; therefore it cannot be concluded that through writing one's autobiography, a transgendered person can bring about a great transformation in one's life. Their persistence and immense courage to face challenges emboldened them and helped them to become visible in a positive light. The transgender community is hyper-visible in north Indian cities, especially at traffic signals where they indulge in begging or go to shops for collection of badhai. The hijra community has three main sources of livelihood: the most respected one is that of "doli-badhai" in which they bless newly born babies, recently wedded couples and new business ventures. Gifts are demanded by the group of hijras, which may be given as cash or expensive things. On such occasions, apart from singing and dancing, these individuals also pray for the baby, couple or

business establishment as the case may be. This is because of the mythical supernatural status attached to their animated appearance and a belief that they have denounced sexual pleasures and thereby achieved “nirvana”. The second group of transgender community does sex-work to earn a living. This may be either home-based or street-based. The last type of earning is through begging especially from shops or traffic-signal. Among these three groups, the most *respected* group is that one which engages in blessing new born babies and recently wedded couples. However, as far as the writers whose live narratives have been analysed in this study are concerned, only Vidya and Revathi resorted to begging; while Vidya took to begging to save money for her surgery, Revathi undertook begging to earn for her hijra family. Post-surgery, Vidya never turned to begging, while Revathi engaged in begging and sex-work after her transition. Laxmi and Manobi neither indulged in begging nor resorted to sex-work. While Vidya and Revathi were compelled to leave home and seek refuge in the hijra community, the others had their family’s support, which prevented them from either begging or sex-work. This proves that one’s birth family has an immense role in carving a transgender person’s life.

The hijra community is an extremely solid support system for the transgender individuals who are forced out of their homes. However, the hijra community has its own drawbacks. The hijra family hierarchy which invests the guru with financial power often tends to be exploitative as the chelas go for badhai, begging and/or sex work and many are swindled of hugh amounts of money by manipulative gurus. However, the security they enjoy in their hijra family and the friendships they enjoy tend to make them complacent and hesitant to move out of

their comfort zone. Most cisgendered people refuse to rent out houses to trans persons and this discrimination forces the trans persons to continue their residence in hijra households. Some trans people may enjoy cordial relations with their biological family and help them financially. Among the trans persons in this study, only Laxmi and Manobi enjoyed the love and support from their family; while Vidya's father stopped talking to her altogether, Revathi's parents and siblings hardly ever acknowledged her identity or treated her kindly.

The life of a transgender, especially a hijra, is always subject to many forms of transphobic hatred and violence. Since there are many negative aspects like police brutality and rowdy violence, many trans persons become addicted to drugs or drinking and do not think of leaving their miserable background.

Cressida J. Heyes in "Feminist Solidarity after Queer Theory: The Case of Transgender" quotes Bernice Hausman, "*those of us who are not transsexuals* may wonder what it is like to feel oneself 'in the wrong body'" (italics in original [1995, 174], 1096). That is precisely what non-transgendered persons fail to realise and thereby acknowledge. Heyes mentions Raymond who asks, "Does a Black person who wants to be white suffer from the 'disease' of being a transracial?" and later states thus "there is no demand for transracial medical intervention precisely *because* most Blacks recognize that it is their society, not their skin, that needs changing" ([1979] 1994, xvi, *Signs*, 1102). Since the people of African origin prefer to live in the skin colour of their birth, as it their racial identity, similarly the transgendered individuals are content with their gender identity once they have transitioned to the gender of their choice and then refuse to change their identity for

political correctness. Their expectation that mainstream society should transform in order to acknowledge them and their gender, is hardly unreasonable; especially because the cisgendered people consider the former to be *deviants*. The demand that deviants must conform to the *norm* goes against the idea of inclusivity.

In *Transgender History*, Susan Stryker attempts to place “Transgender social change activism within an expanded feminist framework” and writes that in an effort to ascertain the relation between feminism and transgender politics, it becomes indispensable to study how each person perceives and understands his/her gender awareness (3). Stryker mentions Christine Johnson’s 2001 paper “Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals and Transsexualism” which establishes a connection between “reproductive, behavioural and anatomical effects’ theory chemical exposure to “the expression of gender identity and other disorders such as reproductive failure (*Transgender*, 5).

The realization that each writer-cum-activist had regarding their actual gender helped them to transition to their *innate* gender. The act of transition is a subversion of the gender binary norm which simultaneously helps the individual to live meaningfully. Through their life narratives, the transgendered persons have strived to share their personal and social struggles and challenges, which not only made them more determined to assert themselves but also inspired others like them to fight for their rights. The social awareness created by the frank portrayal of the various incidents not only throws light on rampant transphobia in society, but it also upholds the indispensable need for the implementation of human rights for the



marginalised social groups, who are usually stigmatised and shunned by most people in society.

This project has attempted to highlight one aspect from the life of the transgendered; of course, there is ample scope for more facets of their life and works to be investigated. It goes without saying that future research studies will surely venture into the diverse untapped facets of transgender individuals. Initially the academia has to become aware of their predicament and investigate means for their inclusion in society. Apart from these individuals, many among the transgender persons have displayed prowess in their respective fields; yet very few of the vast majority has found success in life. The various professions in which the transgender individuals have left their mark are the following: a few have become actors, some are beauticians, there are police personnels, some have become advocates and judges, radio-jockeying is the work of a few while many others are active in NGOs all over the country.

Only very few states in the country have established welfare boards for the transgendered and other sexual and gender minorities. Some of the states which have established welfare bodies for transgender persons are listed herewith. The state of Tamil Nadu was the first to form the *Tamil Nadu Transgender Welfare Board (TGWB)* in 2008. This organisation is under the leadership of The Minister of Social Welfare, who is assisted by a Special Commissioner, the Secretary of Social Welfare and Nutritious Meal Department, the Director of Social Welfare, who are the President, Vice-President, and Member Secretary of the Board respectively. Out of the eight non-official members of the Board, seven are transgender persons while

one is associated with an NGO. The main duties of the Board are to help with income generation, provide housing facilities, ensure education, employment and health care provision of these minorities. The state of Maharashtra had set up the transgender welfare board in 2018 as per the recommendations of the Supreme Court directions. Yet it had become inactive as not a single meeting of the board had been held. However, according to a report in March 2020, a fund of five crores has been sanctioned to the board. The Board was constituted to register the transgender population, ensure their social security and human rights, spread awareness on existing government schemes and integrate them with members of other communities. A special board for the transgender community was set up in the state of Gujarat: the board consists of sixteen members, including two transgender women, two male transgender individuals, two eunuchs and two NGO representatives. The other members are government officials. Uttar Pradesh has set up a *Transgender Welfare Board* with a view to register the transgender individuals, issue identity cards, ensure educational facilities and provide residential facilities under government housing schemes. The Uttar Pradesh Kinnar Akhada Parishad had claimed the establishment of the board after the 2014 Supreme Court ruling granting third gender status to the gender minorities. The state of Kerala set up the *Transgender Welfare Board* in 2016; the first 24x7 helpline to attend to the trans community, ID cards issuance to transgender individuals and ensuring hassle-free arrangements to mark their status in all records were some of the facilities promised to this community. An interaction with Ms. Shyama, the Nodal Officer of the *Transgender Cell* in Kerala showed the actual situation. The *Transgender Cell* is a four-member team; the Nodal Officer, two assistants and an office attendant, all of

whom are member of the transgender community. The *Cell* was constituted to cater to counselling and legal needs of the trans community. Shyama admitted that that the hyped 24x7 helpline is operational only during office working hours, and the government is trying to find out ways of making it operational round the clock. The calls made to this number are usually related to counselling or legal in nature. Some family issues as well as community problems are also addressed by the *Cell*. She talked of the Circular from the Police Department which has been sent to all the police stations that sensitises the police personnel about the transgender community. A training programme named *Bodhyam* has been implemented for police staff to make them aware of transgender issues. Consequently, there has been an improved approachability for the community members to seek police help. The Government Medical College at Kottayam in Kerala has a special clinic devoted to the trans community, where medical treatment and other facilities have been set up. A similar facility has also been organised at the Government Beach Hospital at Calicut in the state. Shyama mentioned that according to the 2015 Government Survey, the population of the trans individuals in the state was twenty five thousand. With more awareness and greater acceptance, the number is likely to exceed, if a survey is conducted. Shyama expressed her optimism of a much higher count if a survey is done now. She admitted that the survey would have commenced but for the Covid pandemic situation. Identity cards are issued to the trans persons after district level screening procedures through online platform. The count of trans men is quite less compared to the trans women in the state. As far as education for the trans persons are concerned, two seats have been reserved in Arts and Science colleges throughout the state. Many trans individuals are studying in various colleges. The government is

also planning to provide reservation in job vacancies through the *Government Public Service Commission* after the total population has been registered.

In West Bengal, *the Transgender Development Board* was set up in 2015 with Manobi Bandyopadhyay as the Vice Chairperson. There are fifteen members in the board, of which six are from the transgender community while the others are, an officer each from the departments of Health, Education, Social Welfare, Women and Child, a police personnel, two film personalities and the Chairperson and Vice Chairperson. Assam became the seventh state in the country to constitute an organisation for the trans people. The Board consists of six members and is entrusted with quasi-judicial powers; it proposes to end discrimination in the employment sector as well as stop sexual harassment of the community members. The issue of reservation in educational institutions, medical facilities and empowerment are also being studied seriously by the Board. The other Indian states need to realize the urgency of initiating similar welfare schemes for all sexual and gender minorities to ensure equitable social justice and stop marginalisation. There needs to be ample quota in educational and employment sectors for such minorities, which will enable them to become educated and self-sufficient without resorting to begging and/or sex work. The holistic inclusion of all sexual and gender minorities will not only result in the positive visibility of this simultaneously hyper-visible and invisible group, but it will also pave the way for a society with equitable rights and privileges.

As per “A Study on Socio-Economic Issues of Third Gender in Tamil Nadu”, the Indian Census of 2011 shows that the total population of the transgender

individuals is nearly 4.9 lakh; however, activists and transgender persons claim that the actual number is more than that. The Census figures report that of the total number, fifty five thousand were children below the age of six. The state-wise split up of the transgender population is as follows: Uttar Pradesh-28 per cent, Andhra Pradesh- over 9 per cent, Maharashtra and Bihar- 8 per cent each, 6 per cent in Bengal, 4 per cent each in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Odisha, Rajasthan- over 3 per cent and Punjab- 2 per cent. Over 66 per cent of the transgender populace lives in rural areas (*International*, 1355). These figures cannot be accepted as final since all other states and Union Territories of the country have been left out. However the mentioned numbers prove that more among the transgender individuals are able to live in rural places, doing the traditional occupation of “badhai”, begging and sex-work since they are not academically qualified to work in large towns or cities. If at all they live in cities, they usually take up sex-work as it is lucrative, though some may do “shop visiting” or begging at traffic signals. The low percentage of successful transgender persons is a reminder of the fact that a vast majority of them are still leading pathetic lives.

The large numbers of transgender individuals engaging in sex-work makes them more vulnerable to the risk of HIV and other STDs (Sexually Transmitted Diseases). According to the 2018 report of the *United Nation Development Programme*, the prevalence of HIV among the transgendered is high, “from 17.5% to 41%”. A study by a medical institute in Mumbai, has reported that the high percentage of HIV is 68% while syphilis is 57% among the transgender community. Similarly, a study at Chennai proved that 17.5% of the tested transgendered were

HIV positive and 72% had at least one Sexual Transmitted Infection. Most of the transgendered belong to low socio-economic strata; along with that lack of education and sexual hygiene makes them prone to such health hazards.

Simultaneously, the transgender community also faces other health problems like depression and suicidal tendencies. The transphobic responses from society, their bitter experiences during sex-work and begging, and alienation from natal family coupled with unpleasant guru-chela relations often drive the community members towards alcohol and allied substance-abuse. Health for any individual means physical well-being, emotional resilience and mental wellness. However, most transgender persons report various mental issues ranging from anxiety, depression to suicidal tendencies. Manobi and Revathi mention how their community members committed suicide: Manobi's friend Jagadeesh killed herself when she contracted AIDS, while Revathi speaks of the suicide of her disciple Famila. The fact that even Laxmi, Vidya and Revathi attempted suicide, proves that even persons with strong minds are swayed by thoughts of killing themselves when they become desperate.

The transgender persons are also exposed to uncooperative and insensitive health care providers; so much so that at times, there is also denial of treatment. There are various reasons for such hostile behaviour from the health workers: ignorance of their body/gender incongruity; sex-work stigma and other social prejudices. The fact that states like Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh and Kerala have established transgender development organizations is a welcome change yet much remains to be done.

In Indian context, an individual's caste plays a very important role. As far as Revathi, Laxmi and Manobi are concerned, all belong to the privileged "upper" caste and thereby, their social interactions are far smoother when compared to Vidya who belongs to the "lower" caste. The intersectionality of caste, class, religion and language cannot be trivialized since caste is still the yardstick for social behaviour. The Constitution of the country promises equality to all irrespective of gender, caste and class; yet caste consciousness is still dominant in society. Aravind Narrain's words exemplify this aspect

To speak of queer politics is, in some sense, different from just speaking of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, kothi, and hijra communities. Queer politics does not speak only of the issues of these communities as a 'minority issue', but instead it speaks of larger understandings of gender and sexuality in our society that affect all of us, regardless of our sexual orientation. It speaks of sexuality as a politics intrinsically and inevitably connected with the politics of class, gender, caste, religion and so on, thereby both acknowledging other movements and also demanding inclusion within them. (*Crystallizing*, 457)

As far as Revathi, Laxmi and Manobi are concerned, all of them are from *high caste* and caste plays a very important in the Indian scenario. It is no wonder that Vidya, who belongs to the *lower* caste, was often subjected to cyber bullying due to her anti-caste articulation. She was also involved in a road accident, which she fears, may have been orchestrated by some of her cyber haters. There were frequent death threats against Vidya, which may have compelled her to leave India and seek asylum in Canada. The aspect of caste, specially if one belongs to the

lower castes, rears its head and one is reminded on several occasions as well as social platforms, that it is politically suicidal to express negative ideas or thoughts about the *privileged castes*. *Dalit* or *lower* caste trans persons are at the intersection of caste and diverse notions of gender and are always the last people or, at times, even the ones who never make it to the annals of history. Their invisibility requires urgent attention and redressal.

Studies in history prove that trans persons are the ones driven by eroticisation, curiosity and voyeurism. To historians and writers, trans people are merely a category in documents, or much often victims in fiction. Curious objects to be observed and mostly laughed at; this is how trans members are represented in fiction and films. When the stories of trans individuals are written by their oppressors, the latter simply write to reinforce phobias and stigmas against the former. In order to know how they survive, live and love in the modern digital India, one surely has to turn to stories authored by trans persons, because only then can the world be exposed to their problems and issues. Autobiography has been and still is the preferred medium of the subaltern. It is a tool to construct one's identity/ies. It is a coping mechanism for the people who are different but still humans like the rest of the privileged group. This is the impetus which made me select four trans life writings to do my research in order to investigate their lives.

This project touches on the aspect of the duality of the transgenders' visibility; they are, concomitantly, invisible as well as hyper-visible. Yet those who have managed to assert their gender identity, in spite of harassment and discrimination, have striven to make their life worthwhile. At the same time, they



also don the garb of activists and try to empower others in their community. Through their life narratives, the cisgendered majority in society is exposed to the various vicissitudes faced by their community. No claim is made on my part that this study is comprehensive from any angle. The points for consideration which could not be included are: the interplay of casteism in diverse areas, the narrative features of trans life writings, an in-depth analysis of trans communities in historical times and so on.

The question of intersectionality of Dalit-transgender politics is a highly compelling aspect which needs to be investigated. As far the writers selected in this study, only Vidya belongs to the Dalit/lower caste; I did not want to pursue caste politics. Despite the hate campaigns and cyber bullying faced by Vidya, she managed to emigrate to Canada; rather she emigrated because of caste issues. I am well aware of caste being an integral part of an individual's life, yet I felt it would become a highly sociological analysis. It is to be considered that society is not composed of just one kind of woman. Intersectionality refer to the interplay of various factors which work together as one entity in the fight for equality. A trans woman who is also a Dalit will not only face transphobia and sexism but also casteism. In other words, intersectionality is the theory that the overlap of various social identities contributes to the specific type of systemic oppression and disorientation faced by an individual. We need to acknowledge the importance of intersectionality while fighting for equality.

It has been suggested by some that trans women renounce their male privilege to become *women*, the gender, which is considered inferior to the masculine gender. The transgender writers in their pre-transition lives were

subjected to gross violence even while they were in their *male gender*. These persons do not sacrifice their privileges to become women, the less privileged group. They are born with an anomaly; their body does not conform to their gender identity. The only way out for them lies in transitioning to the gender of their psyche, which is achieved through surgery. However the opposite idea was articulated by the famous Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche in a Channel 4 interview, “Transwomen experience the privileges that the world accords to men”. The entire trans community opposed Adiche’s assertion. To elaborate their viewpoint, they documented the violence experienced by trans groups in their pre-transition life. In fact many rejected the notion they had male privilege or were socialised males. The same Adiche has famously said that one single story cannot capture the depth of real lived experiences.

There are many shades of grey in the discussion that is too often made black and white. Whether one is trans or not, society has many ways of making sure that one knows the consequences of straying outside one’s prescribed gender.

Another point raised about trans women are that they have male energy. During the interviews conducted, it became clear that everyone acknowledges strength, but refuse to ascribe it to the presence of *maleness* in their body. Male privilege is based on the so-called superiority of men. Although male privilege is invisible to the physical eyes, yet its presence cannot be denied. After all, in spite of the surgery, the original body of the trans person was *male*; surgery and hormone treatment helps the further development of female features and female hormones, yet the physical structure of the trans person is inclined towards the masculine.

The greatest dilemma faced by each trans person would be whether she would truly live as herself or would she succumb to what is considered “normal” in the eyes of her family in order to avoid conflict and make them happy. The desire to live in one’s gender is overwhelming and compels one to struggle against one’s family and go in for surgery.

The narrative style of the writers has also not been seriously or deeply analysed in this study. In spite of being translated works, each work has successfully captured the essence of the writer. Vidya and Revathi have expressed most incidents and events in their life as if it were being spoken to the listener. Laxmi has, however, been more reclusive, even though she attempts to rewind all the significant experiences in her life. Manobi narrates the years at school and college very honestly; later she relates the details of her doomed relationship quite candidly. There is ample scope for in depth investigation in the use of language in all the writers. I have not ventured to deal with the writing stylistics since I was more interested with their concomitant hyper visibility and invisibility.

Change is an extremely slow process but it is also a continuous process. It is the large majority in society, the so-called normal/cisgender persons who can and need to decide the pace of social change. Along with that, they also have to decide the direction of change. History has proved that when people realised the drawbacks of monarchy, different forms of elected government came into existence in countries. Similarly, the modern age is developing at a rapid pace, both scientifically as well as technologically. In order to bring about positive changes in society and to ensure that future generations live in harmony and lead happy lives, it is imperative

that steps be taken and initiatives be undertaken for the inclusion of all sexual and gender minorities.

To sum up I would like to share a poem titled “To Famila” with which Arvind Narrain and Gautam Bhan commence *Because I Have a Voice*. Famila was the favourite chela of Revathi as well as a passionate trans activist. She had committed suicide and none knew the reason for this drastic step.

If you had told us,  
just one word,  
On what was killing you inside,  
When we danced that night,  
When we smoked that evening,  
When we hugged that afternoon,  
When we met that morning, just one word...  
and we would have screamed,  
some more like we always do.  
Your flesh is gone,  
but your strength remains.  
Your breath is gone,  
but your voice remains.  
We'll use it well to scream some more.  
Scream ...till our voices..  
yours, mine, and all ours,  
will be heard.

## Appendix A

When I learnt that Revathi was coming to Thiruvananthapuram for a dramatic performance, I managed to arrange a meeting with her. The interview was held at her hotel room at Thiruvananthapuram on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2020, through which her views on various aspects were collected. Since Revathi speaks only Tamil and Kannada and very little of English/ Malayalam, the questions and answers were translated with help from a Tamil speaking interpreter named Mr. Kannan Murugan, who speaks Tamil, Malayalam and English.

### Interview with A. Revathi

Q1. In your book *The Truth about Me: A Hijra Life Story*, you appear as an assertive and bold person who ran away from home to establish your actual gender. Would you ever exchange your present state of being a *hijra* for being a cisgender *male* or *female*?

Revathi - I have taken so much of pain (sic) to become a female. I am and would like to be a female only, nothing else.

Q2. You lacked education and your family was not supportive. How did you understand and decide that you had to assert your true gender?

Revathi - Biologically, I was born male, yet had female feelings. Originally, I did not realize that, it was only when I developed attraction towards a man that I realized that I felt feminine. I also desired to dress like a girl. Then it (the wish to dress and be a girl) kept intensifying. At school functions and temple festivals, I would go dressed in female attire and fulfill my desire. It was not a costume, but my real dress (a girl's garments). When I went back home and wore my boy's clothes, that was the costume that was unreal. When I wore pants and shirt, I felt I was putting on a costume or disguise. Those who watched me at temple or school functions in girl's dress, for them it was my costume, but not for me. What I wore at home was my

costume. So when I got an opportunity, I left with those people who were like me, so that I could lead a true life, without any falsehood.

- Q3. Your experiences at Mumbai and Bangalore showed you the dark side of a hijra's life. Did your personal experiences motivate you to resist and fight the discrimination of mainstream society?

Revathi - When people hear the word “transgender” they only think of a man being born with a woman's mind, since trans men are not visible in society. With the Supreme Court judgement, Male to Female and Female to Male, both categories have been recognized. In 1999, I became an office assistant at *Sangama*. Many girls with a man's mind would come there, many from Kerala would come. They would be dressed in girls' attire and their partners also would accompany them. Our organization provides temporary shelter for them. Many cases come there regularly, I attended to almost twenty cases. At home, my chelas are like daughters to me; similarly such persons (trans men) I treat as my sons. They don't have a system like the jaamat for the hijra community. The persons I have mentioned in my book (*A Life in Trans Activism*), all of them are my sons. I write about them, I fight for their rights. When a girl is born, many restrictions are passed, she can't talk to men and so on. If a girl says she wants to become a man, parents don't allow that. She is forcibly married off, forced into sexual (sic) relationship. Life becomes a big struggle for such girls. So I thought they need (sic) my attention and support. If a person is born as a male and wants to become a woman, similarly there are girls who want to live as men. If we recognize the first as transgender, we also need to accept the second group. So I go to universities and colleges and talk about such individuals. When such trans men address me as “amma”, I feel they are my sons. I don't have a uterus, can never conceive a child; but when they call me as their mother, I feel as if I have become a mother. I also have granddaughters. In Kerala, there isn't much issue in male to female transgenders; government support is also available. In fact there is a transgendered individual who is now learning to be a pilot.

Q4. Have you experienced the presence of the male and the female genders within you? Please elaborate.

Revathi - No, never, I have always felt I am a woman. I know that a woman undergoes many problems, eve teasing and so on during bus journey and so on. She also suffers sexual harassment. When a woman gets married, she is under her husband's power and at the workplace she may be discriminated against, may not get promotion and so on. As far as working class women are concerned, they do not get wages at par with men. This is prevalent in the whole country. When this happens, a woman may think it would have been better if she were a man. If you come and watch my play today evening (*Vellai Mozhi*, a Tamil solo play, acted by Revathi, based on poems by Kalki Subramaniam and directed by Mangai) there is a scene in which I show my experiences when I wore a saree for the first time, jewellery, wig and flowers. There is so much of imposition (sic), a girl should dress like this, have long hair and so on. When the saree is worn the first time, the blouse is so tight, the underskirt would be so tight on the waist. In fact there may be a tight and deep line on your waist. If this is what it is for one day, imagine what it would be for a whole life of wearing a saree.

Of course I feel sad that women experience so much of struggle, they don't have any freedom. At first I grew my hair. My mother said that you fought against us and wanted to become a woman with long hair, but now you have cut your hair like a man. I tell her that I am not a man. I find short hair comfortable, I find salwar kameez easy and comfortable, that is why I wear it. I want freedom to live the way I want to, eat the food I want to, travel to places I want to. But I have never felt there is a male part in my mind.

Q5. You are working for the welfare of the trans men. What could you achieve for them at *Sangama*?

Revathi- While I was working at *Sangama*, there is (sic) a temporary shelter for those who came to us for help. They can stay there for six months. Within that period they have to learn the language and if they want they can learn driving. I have helped them with learning the language. Some have started work as drivers, some have started writing, a few are acting in dramas. Whatever one is interested in, we help them to start that job. Since it is a temporary shelter, they have to learn the language within that period, start whatever interests them. For that we give them the background support.

Q6. Are you active in films and theatre now? What other work /activism are you involved in at present?

Revathi - At present I am not working in films or drama. I am trying to visit universities and colleges and participate in seminars. This is not limited to India only; I also go abroad and talk about the *Transgender Bill*, the Supreme Court judgment, the life of transgendered individuals, the transgender community and the transgender culture. My brother was HIV positive, he passed away; his wife is also no more. I have taken the responsibility of their children on myself. They are now grown up and married. Their children now call me their grandmother. I looked after my parents till they passed away. So I am not simply doing this for society but my family members also need me.

Q7. How is the situation at home now? Do your relatives treat you with love?

Revathi - In the beginning when I was born, my parents treated me just like any normal son would be treated. But when I became a woman, I was beaten up, kicked about, my head was shaved and I wasn't given my share of the property. Certain restrictions were placed on me, I cannot marry, I will not be given any property, I had to look after my parents. Parents always love and treat cisgendered children with great affection; I was simply like an unpaid servant. The property finally was registered in my name but I couldn't sell it or dispose it off. Even now my other brothers show their anger at this. One brother is no more, the others say 'why do you need a



house'. They may not accept me, but I feel love for them; they are my blood.

- Q8. Are you single or in a relationship? Could you tell me something about marriage between trans persons and cisgenders?

Revathi - I got married in 2002 to a staff member from Sangama and we were together for a year. Then we got separated. After that I haven't married anyone; when I was young, I had many partners, now there is no one. Now I think I am past fifty, I have the responsibility of my two children (children orphaned by the death of Revathi's brother and his wife). I brought up these children, cared for my parents. Many years have passed now: I sacrificed myself for my family, I sacrificed myself for my community. In my mind, I wish to have a partner, someone whom I can share my life with but this society will never allow it and my family will not accept it. Their attitude is, "It is okay if you want to be a transgender but you can't marry a man; it is wrong." Now I don't want a partner. Even if I have a partner, there will be violence; mentally, emotionally and physically. I have seen many such cases, I don't like that.

- Q9. Do you think a transgender person can have a happy married life with a cisgender male?

Revathi - Yes, definitely it is possible for them to get married, but society will say it is unnatural, their sex is unnatural. Questions are asked- how will you engage in sex, will a child be born to such a couple and so on. Only penile-vaginal penetrative sex is considered normal and natural. If I enjoy sex with a cisgendered person, society should not interfere in that; it is my right. About children, how many women give birth? There are many women who cannot bear children. There are women who don't menstruate, and then there are men who are unable to become fathers. Will such women and men be considered normal women and men? I know that if I marry, I can sexually satisfy my husband. Both of us can be happy together, there is no doubt about that. Marriage is not simply for having

children. One can't say that people have sex for having children. If so, why do they get the operation after children are born; they have sex even after that. If you don't want children, you needn't engage in sex. Sex is something that keeps depression away; one feels more love towards the other and romance will keep both happy. I know I can sexually satisfy my husband and even I will be happy.

Q10. Do you still maintain close contacts with your hijra family?

Revathi - First I went to Delhi and I had a guru there. Now she has settled down in Tamil Nadu and at present she is my guru. We call each other and before coming here, I visited her. When I was in Bangalore, I had a guru who was killed by some goons. In our community, relationships are very strong, not only for me, it is strong for all others. We participate in festivities on special days, we go when someone passes away. If there is some function in their family, we attend that. We don't allow all that to break. We keep all bonds strong.

Q11. What steps does the government have to take for the welfare of the sexual minorities?

Revathi - Of course the government must cater to the legitimate needs of the sexual and gender minorities. Lesbian and gay marriages should be accepted, there should be reservation for them. Gender stigma discrimination must not be there for them. Their sexuality is their issue; when their sexuality is known, they are dismissed from their workplace. Marriage rights are most important for them, they should be allowed to adopt children. Just like the transgendered have got the *Transgender Rights Bill*, there should be something similar for them too.

Q12. How can the LGBT community find their due place in mainstream society?

Revathi - Everybody has a place in our community, whether it is L or G or T. All of us are born in this country, all of us are Indians. As Indians what gender one should be, what sexuality one should follow, that is the individual's

right. Whatever law one may say about this, it is wrong. Society cannot interfere in one's personal affairs.

Q13. What is the role of education, awareness and activism in the life of sexual minorities?

Revathi - Education is very important; most among the transgender community, stop school in the ninth or tenth standard. At that age, our gender identity makes us stop school, we may leave our homes. So it is the responsibility of the government to provide education for them after that. Just like parents accept a child with a physical disability, similarly, parents should accept transgendered children. There must be parental support for transgender persons. All men and women have human rights; the same should be enjoyed by the transgender community also. If a man loves a woman, it is considered natural. If a trans woman or a trans man loves a trans person, society does not accept that. Education for trans persons can be ensured through reservation. Human rights, other small wishes that trans people have should be considered "natural"; it should not be branded unnatural. In a school, college or a university, trans persons should be allowed to have an education: trans women as well as trans men should be given reservation. Parents, the legal authority, government and society ought to support the transgender people. Merely by a change in law, nothing will happen, at first the society needs to change.

Q14. What changes do you notice in the attitude of society towards the transgender community now?

Revathi - It looks like there is some change but actually it is only a form of sympathy. We don't want any sympathy. Even today, when someone speaks in the media, they appear very positive, but we cannot be very sure it is there in their mind. A collector's son, a minister's son, nobody will accept a transgender in their family. In a meeting they may say, in the media they will say, but they will not accept in their own family. It is very sad. That must change.

. Q. 15. What plans do you have for the future?

Revathi - I want my activism to make parents aware of their transgendered children. For a building to be strong, the foundation must be very strong. Now I travel, act in plays, interact with the public. That is why I travel and do all this work. If our parents are there, we get a lot of strength. We can get our name registered in important documents. We can ensure that we are not discriminated against in school and college. I go and talk to teachers, professors and students and try to tell them all this. This is my future plan also. There must be no discrimination based on gender and we should strive for such a world. Personally, now I am fifty two; when I die, I don't want to trouble anyone. I want to die while I am attending a seminar or acting in a play.

Q16. Do you notice changes in the transgender community now? Please elaborate.

Revathi - Yes of course, there are many changes. Earlier one had to be very careful in one's dressing, now modern dresses are worn. Now many educated transgendered have come in society. After fighting for fifty years, there is a legal right for the transgendered. Even though practically, we may not have many rights, we have legal recognition as third gender. Some stay with their families. In Kerala earlier, no one (transgendered) would wear a saree. Things are changing now. The government has done a lot. There are reservations in colleges and universities. There are many changes but everybody hasn't got these rights. Most still earn their living by begging or sex-work. People say you have government support and reservation, then why do you do these things. Our community is not the only group to do sex-work or begging. Cisgendered persons also beg and engage in sex-work. Now I am fifty years old; I can't do any work nor will anyone employ me. There are many in our community doing these jobs, as there is no other option. The pension of eight hundred or thousand rupees is hardly sufficient for a trans person to live. The coming generation should work

after proper education, the government must provide reservation for that. Gradually, the present jobs of begging and sex-work will be given up.

Q. 17. Do you think the guru-chela system should continue?

Revathi - This is a big culture in our country. The hijra community is very strongly formed and the guru-chela bond is very supportive. It is beneficial to a newcomer who is very confused and does not have any other support system. Whatever stigma or wrong is there in a community, that should go. I cannot say that system should not be there at all. I got a lot of support, after I left my home. It is like our own home, we cannot ever forget that. Nobody helped me financially; I took a lot of efforts to bring up the children (her brother's children). Mentally, physically and financially, I got a lot of support from my community. If I fall sick, my chela will take me to the hospital. There are many positive things there. At the same time, there is a hierarchy there and some gurus may ill-treat their chelas. That is wrong and must be condemned.

Q18. How did you start writing your autobiography? How much time did you take to complete it?

Revathi - I really did not know how to write my book; I am not a writer. But at the same time, I knew I had to write. Only we can write about our community. A non-community person cannot write about us, as he/she will never be permitted in our community. The book by Bama Faustina, *Karukku*, impressed me a lot and I was motivated to write my autobiography. I could not write it in one single session. I would write a little, then keep it aside and go back to it after three months. Then I would recollect that I had left out something, so rewrite it. Likewise, I wrote it four times. I took almost two to three years to write the whole of it. I have written many incidents, but simultaneously, many have been left out. I was scared to write some incidents. Society looks upon me as a criminal. You may have tortured me but I cannot write how you tortured me; you may have done so because you may have looked upon me as an aberration. So I decided not to write

about such things. If I write something unsavoury about a police officer and he reads it, it might pain him. I did not want to do that. So I have avoided names and the police station involved. At the same time, I have written quite a bit of other things. After writing it, I was scared for some time. I was a sex worker, was subjected to rape. There would be bleeding, I would have to go to a doctor, he would have to examine me. I have written about all these things very frankly. Everything about me I have written truthfully, but also wondered how my family would react to that. I also thought about how my schoolmates would respond, what they would think. All such thoughts crowded my mind. So first I got it published in English, without doing it in Tamil. But the English book got a lot of media coverage and interviews followed. My family and classmates came to know about it. I got a lot of positive responses, which encouraged me. Then it was published in Tamil. Now the children I reared have read it, they come and watch the drama based on my life. Now they are able to understand me. It is not something which has occurred to one Revathi. There are many more like me. Even today many Revathis are facing all that has been portrayed in my book. Somebody has to write openly about this; otherwise nobody will know all this is happening in society. After me many have written books; in Tamil Nadu, Kalki Subramaniam wrote (not autobiography, but poems), Priya Babu, Living Smile Vidya wrote, in Kerala Mallika has written. Many have written. I am not a role model, but this (writing) has given me a lot of strength. Some changes have happened. The book was published in 2005. In 2006 *Transgender Welfare Board* was established in Tamil Nadu. The book was one of the reasons for the board, not the only reason; many have fought for this, so this was simply just one of the reasons. After reading my book, a professor in Kerala whose daughter wanted to change her sex, came to understand the daughter's predicament and supported her. This gives me a lot of strength. In Karnataka, my book came out as a play and I acted in that. I take my book in the form of a drama to people, so change slowly takes place.

Initially I was hesitant to talk about my being a beggar and a sex worker, but now I have no qualms about it. Now I don't feel bad about it.

Q19. Who was/is your role model?

Revathi - As far as my writing is concerned, I look upon Bama as my role model. I was very much touched by her book *Karukku*. Other than that I want to remain just like this, the way I am. I don't want to be like anyone else. What I feel is right, I do that.

## Appendix B

### Interview - Laxminarayan Tripathi

The interview with Laxmi occurred at her house at Thane near Mumbai. It commenced at 5 pm and continued for an hour and a half. The interaction took place on the 12th of August in 2018.

Q. 1. In your book *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*, you appear as a person who is simultaneously happy, bold and carefree. Would you ever exchange your present identity of a hijra for a “normal” male or female (cisgendered person)?

Laxmi: I am happy; I have lived all the lives. What is the difference? See as a woman, as a trans woman is a hijra or a kinnar as they say, you see the way they are called, it's a woman, it's a different woman living a life but same as a woman but at times, it is for the patriarchy that takes much more advantages because it is considered that, it is mandatory for them to take advantage of the trans women. So the struggle becomes more harder (sic), at times it is where (the family throws you out), but I was lucky that I had a family which was there with me but for maximum of them it so happens that they are thrown out of their houses. So they are much more vulnerable. Then there is a complete traditional community where there is a completely different scenario but at times some people may take advantage. But I am happy as I am. Whatever I would have been in my life, I would have been famous because I believe only one thing- *karmanyevadhikaraste ma phaleshukadachana, ma karmphaleheturphurma, tesangostavakarmani*, which may be translated as -karma is the biggest thing in life.

I am a transgender there are thousand others, many are much more educated than me, but I had other many other arts which brought me fame. I travelled the globe. I have an elder sister and a younger brother, I have my family, you are sitting next to my mother itself, my father is no more. My elder brother's wife, my bhabhi is also here. I was not even thinking of it (becoming a hijra).



This house was given on rent. When I disclosed myself to my parents in the hall in my mother's house, that was the time my father decided. He vacated the people who were staying in this house on rent. I started staying here. So I was lucky I came with a silver spoon in my mouth, rather, to say in the community to which I belong. Many are disowned, they are not so lucky.

Q. 2. You have mentioned about your sexual abuse at a very young age. Was it your weak physical condition (as you were suffering from some ailment at that time) or your feminine appearance that may have attracted those boys to you at that age?

Laxmi: Yes, of course it was my feminine body which attracted those boys and made me a victim of their abuse. It took me some time to realize that I could put a stop to that only by being very bold and assertive.

Q. 3. You belong to the hijra community and in spite of its traditional and secretive customs and rituals; you have predominantly lived a life on your own terms. Was it your education or your family support that inspired you to fight against the injustice and discrimination faced by the hijra community?

Laxmi: What is not required in this period of time should change in every culture, every religion. I am not there to talk about other religions, I believe in what is Satya Sanatan, as a Hindu person I don't believe in the word "Hindu" but I believe in the Satya Sanatan religion or the Sanatan Dharma. And according to me, Laxminarayan Tripathi and even as Acharya Mahamandaleshwar of an Akhada, a religious Akhada, I always tell my people who follow me that truth has changed in every Yuga. What was in Satya, what was in Dwapar, what was in Tretha is not applicable now. But the teachings of those times, it is the basic principles of our religion that were taken forward, it is written that once Swayam Narayan had to come to protect Draupadi from getting insulted in the court and then it was said "The dharma has been destroyed" or that "Dharma is no more" and that is why Mahabharata happened; where you want to kill your own bloodlines to restore the dharma again. So every time the truth has changed and everyone should learn the art of accepting the

truth. What is there in this generation: you can't say that Sita gave agnipareeksha, so everyone has to do the same.

Q. 4. Your first guru, Lataguru dissuaded you from becoming visible. Do you think that it is your visibility which has enabled you to reach great heights and achieve fame, money, love and respect from the mainstream society?

Laxmi: I knew the art of presentation. One may have all the necessary qualifications but if you don't have the art of presentation, who is going to ask you. Today also if I have to leave my house at three o'clock, you will find Laxmi like this only, ready with her lipstick, with all the jewellery, because I'm no more Laxmi myself, now I'm a product for the world. People want to see me this way and I give them this way, there lies my success; there is no short cut to success, there is only hard work, isn't it? No lunch is served free, I always tell my people. You have to slog your asses (sic).

Q. 5. Is there anything substantial that can be achieved by the academic group for the transgender category? What do you suggest?

Laxmi: I think it is only through creating a proper awareness about the different categories of transgendered individuals that we and the others can slowly gain acceptance in society. Gender sensitization classes, awareness sessions and talks by sexual minorities will surely help the hijra communities and others. Present society is ignorant about us and treats hijras like untouchables; this must change. Even educated persons treat us with ridicule. So, yes, the academic group, teachers, universities, can sensitize others. Books by and about transgender persons will definitely spread awareness.

Q. 6. How many transgender persons have you been able to motivate and transform? Are your chelas merely hijras or has anyone been able to transcend oneself and reach great heights?

Laxmi: I really don't know, can't tell if there has been someone who has been able to make life from my influence, there may be some, I think. But I don't do

this for others; I'm living my life the way I want. I don't want to impress anyone. My life, so I lead it how I want to, that's all.

Q. 7. Who is your role model and why?

Laxmi: My mother is the most influential person in my life. Both of my parents supported me in all my decisions and my mother has always stood like a rock and faced all criticisms directed at me. She taught me to face life with strength and courage.

Q. 8. Do you think the rigid structure and rituals of the hijra community should change in the twenty-first century?

Laxmi: Change is a fact and change always happens for the best. I am very optimistic that way; I always tell my chelas that even while we uphold the customs and systems of our community, we should move with the times and accept the good things around us. Some people in the community are very traditional minded and do not want to change but the younger generation, those who are educated now are trying to change the very strict and oppressive things. I have always tried to move with the times and think that progressive thoughts and actions are necessary for a better society.

Q. 9 The historical judgement by the Honourable Supreme Court of India has given the transgender individual the right to an identity as the third gender, at par with the males and females in society. The transgendered persons emphasize that they have become women after castration, especially Revathi, Manobi and Vidya. Do you think or feel the same or do you sense the presence of both genders within you? Some trans persons have claimed that they experience both genders, at intervals, and at a particular time, only one may be dominant. Your comments please.

Laxmi: I am not both genders, I am a totally different gender. For me, I believe I am better than both the genders. As a man and woman at the age of forty, where people could not reach, I have reached. Why I should (sic) be like a woman

or like a man? I am both positive and negative energy, both. I believe that I am Laxmi myself, that's enough. No need to worry about anything else.

Q. 10. You have now established yourself as the head of the fourteenth order, the Kinnar Akhada. Could you please elaborate on the purpose of this order? Does it have any positive plans for the hijra community?

Laxmi: It has a positive plan; I am regaining the lost position in our dharma. See because religion plays a vital role in a country like India to get acceptance. When Sri Sankaracharya or any other dharma guru says that they are normal people, there are thousands and thousands of people who came and visited us and even in Prayag (during the Kumbh). I started the order because it is necessary and I am not asking for anybody else's position. What is written in the Vedas and Puranas, I only mention that and I took my ancestral position. We were not meant to beg or sell our bodies for fifty or hundred rupees, so I am regaining the lost position and that will bring up mass advocacy in the rural country. See for urban people, religion has become a commodity and only a few of you will find religion for what it is. But at times I really feel, for the rich, religion is a commodity, what they can afford and they want it their way. That's sad but religion in a country like India plays a very important role and in everywhere, even in US , why doesn't the Catholic base ever say that among the ten people who accepted Christ, first one was a transgender? They won't say. It's a power game and it's funny and I have created one more. Isn't it? I am fighting with the same sword.

Q. 11. Did you face any opposition when your Akhada was established?

Laxmi: All the thirteen were against me. Only Sankaracharya Vasudevanand Saraswati of Joshimath, he supported. Then afterwards, in this year of the Kumbh we had a proper agreement with the Juna Akhada saying that we are Akhada. Now the thirteen Akhada, none of them can say a word. Who will say against Juna Akhada? Who will question their Acharya Mahamandaleshwar Avdeshanandji? Does anybody have any guts in the religious world to even question them? No way. Five lakh nagas they have,

how they can be questioned. It's so much of power (sic). The time was right, the doors were open for me from all the Akhadas whichever I wanted. I only chose to be with Harigiri Maharaj in Juna Akhada.

Q. 12. Do you think that gender has fluidity and it is social conditioning which makes one "accept" one's gender being the same as one natal sex?

Laxmi: Yes I have always said that my gender is like the Ganges, my sexuality is like the Ganges. There is social conditioning that is why stigma and discrimination is so high against the transgenders. I was born so-called (sic) male and I changed to be a trans woman. (Pointing to Aryan Pasha, her fiancé) he was born a female and he changed to be a trans man. Fluidity may be there in some persons, may be. That's not me.

Q. 13. Transgender individuals are unable to have normal, happy relationships with their life partners, since the latter are usually either males/females (cisgendered) and cannot accept completely or keep up with the former. Can I have your comments on this observation please.

Laxmi: I tried my level best to make my relationship with my former partner (a cis man) to make it work out (sic). For that person I was only an ATM machine and for him my dignity was nothing. I did everything possible and people around me have seen. I have gone out of my way to keep him happy but at the end I only became a cash vending thing for him.

Q. 14. Will sex education and awareness about the LGBTIQ categories from school level help to promote social acceptance of the sexual minorities?

Laxmi: Yes, absolutely. Both education and awareness are needed for social beings to know, understand and accept the sexual minorities.

Q. 15. In the West, trans persons go through counselling, surgery and hormone treatment for the establishment of their gender identity. Do you expect the Indian government to provide such facilities for those who need it?

Laxmi: Of course, it is their responsibility to do it. At present Tamil Nadu is doing, Bengal is doing and Chattisgarh is also doing; these states are providing medical facilities to the transgender persons. The central government should form policies for the whole country for the welfare of the hijra community.

Q. 16. It is claimed that your stand on the Ram temple at Ayodhya points to your adoption of a pro-BJP stand for claiming privileges for the hijra community. Your take on this point.

Laxmi: No. my ancestors stood for fourteen years in waiting for Ram to return. My ancestors served Ram since his childhood. In the Ramayan there is an account of my ancestors. About how when he went into exile one of the hijras took jal-samadhi in Sarayu river. At tamsa they stood on one leg, they say, for fourteen years waiting for him. The amount of sacrifice the trans community since the ages of Rama has made, why shouldn't I again see the same thing? Why shouldn't I say my father is my father and my uncle is an uncle; so what is right is right. At the birthplace of Ram, my comment was - the temple should be built at any cost where Ram was born. If people can prove that Ram was not born there, he was born somewhere else; the temple should be made there. I'm not asking to make a temple at Medina Sherif or at any Muslim saint's place. I'm not taking anybody's place, I'm asking what is mine, so for that you can make me BJP or Congress. Even Congress will be in power. Ever since I have been saying the same thing. I'm Acharya Mahamandaleshwar of an Akhada, of Kinnar Akhada. We have given our so much since ages. Now if people have for whatever I say (sic), there is a new comment, so what can I do? I have become so important that whatever I say, if people follow, then what can I say?

Q. 17. Madam, do you see yourself as a political leader in future?

Laxmi: No, never. I am a dharma guru now, so I don't see myself as a politician. If someone offers me a Rajya Sabha seat, then that is okay, nothing less than a Rajya Sabha seat will do for me. My duty is not to go into the sun and slog out. Sorry, I deny (sic) that.

Q. 18 Madam , how would you like to be remembered by the future generations?

Laxmi: I shall perish, but not my name

It shall be carved in the marbles

To be remembered.

It has always been with me. (She quotes these lines which she says are from a poem she read long back)

Q. 19. Which term best describes you- transgender or hijra?

Laxmi: Kinnar, it's the Indian term for hijra. Hijra means the person who leaves, travels for his true self.

Q. 20. Most pre-hijra state persons talk of their male organ with distaste and later get castrated. They undergo surgery and also hormone treatment to express their true gender identity. Can you share your views about this?

Laxmi: I was comfortable in my body in the past. Even if I had my male organ it would not have been very uncomfortable. I only got the surgery (sex reassignment) done recently, it's only one month now and the body does not change so much. I have not used any single hormone, and you have seen me in videos also. There is no difference in Laxmi, isn't it (sic)? I did it because I did not want to do botox or go for more feminization. I only did it to be more feminine, nothing else. I was happy in my skin and I had accepted myself as I was and if you see me I stand in front of a mirror. My life is in front of the mirror so I'm chill about it. I had the money, I had the time, I did it. If I didn't have the time to do it, I wouldn't have done it. I wouldn't have wasted one month of my life sleeping at a bed. For forty days after the surgery, it is mandatory to take rest. I was worried my mother would go cuckoo but my mother was the most normal one. I was literally worried. Whatever said and done, Brahmin no?

Q. 21. Which is the best term that describes you- hijra, dancer, actress, an activist or something else?

Laxmi: Whatever I am, but to my own self I am Laxmi, that's the beauty of myself (sic). I may have thousands of feathers in my cap but I am son (sic) to my mother if my mother feels I am her son, I am wife to my husband whoever is my husband, I am guru to my chelas, I am a friend to my friend. If they feel I am their girlfriend or boyfriend, it's okay the way it is but I believe I have lived my life hundred per cent truthfully. There is no veil around it and that makes me Laxmi.

Q. 22. Do you believe in rebirth? If yes, would you like to be reborn as a hijra?

Laxmi: Yeah, with the same mother. I believe in rebirth, we are Hindus. We have a journey and everybody says this is my last birth because many things are attached to me. Top astrologers and everybody who has seen me says this.

Q. 23. There was a lot of controversy about the Kinnar Akhada engaging in the holy bath at Kumbh. Since centuries the Naga saints have monopolized the religious rituals at Kumbh How could the hijra community participate in the Kumbh Mela?

Laxmi: The Naga saints have been participating in the Kumbh Mela for centuries; there was a comment made by someone that only sadhus could take sanyas (renunciation) as they are celibate. I believe that hijras were treated like demi-gods in the earlier times and we are not celibate. In fact the hijras were of a higher position than saints and my attempts are only to bring back those days.

Q. 24. What message do you want to convey to children who are unsure of their gender identity?

Laxmi: Take your time and believe in yourself. And once you do that, live your life as you want and don't consider the opinions of others.



## Appendix C

### Interview- Manobi Bandyopadhyay

Moving on to Manobi Bandyopadhyay, her interview was conducted over mobile phone, both through recorded audio question and answer sessions and also through Whatsapp messages. Due to the Covid pandemic, a personal interview could not materialise and thereby I depended on technological means to glean her responses. The questions were typed and sent to her and she would respond likewise. Manobi is fluent in Bengali and Hindi but English is not her forte; since I can talk Hindi, I relied on English as well as Hindi to communicate with her. On a couple of occasions when her answers seemed unclear or some clarification was required, I would call her and she would elaborate her views.

Q1. Your book *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi* presents you as a strong fighter who did not shy away from fighting for her rights either at her workplace or in the Arindam case. What do you owe your strong personality to?

Manobi: I think my patience and honesty has helped me to become a very strong person. Justice will be mine if I am ready to wait a little longer. Honesty always brings positive results.

Q2. Do you prefer being referred to as a hijra, a transgender person or a trans woman?

Manobi: I know from the core of my being that I am a daughter of my parents. My epic has also proved it.

Q3. You mentioned a “diksha” to enter Shyamoli’s ashram. Can you explain how it was done? Also technically speaking you did not become a hijra since you did not have a guru or live in the hijra community. Could you please elaborate on that?

Manobi: I am sorry that I cannot talk at length about that. I have explained the method of diksha in my novel *Endless Bondage*. The tradition of guru and diksha is not entirely different from mainstream society. I did not join the hijra community because my parents did not send me away from home even though they were certain that there was something “wrong” with me; I was not like other young boys of my age. They thought that since I was a bright student, it was eccentricity and would disappear with time. A person surrenders himself or herself to a guru when one is frustrated by the outside world. Sometimes, the guru may strongly dominate his/her shishyas (disciples).

Q4. You were sexually abused at a young age. Do you think it was your feminine appearance that may have attracted the abuser to you?

Manobi: I don't know the cause of the attraction of the abuser because then I was a child. I have no experience or thinking about human sexuality.

Q5. Which is the best way to ensure the acceptance of the hijras in mainstream society -governmental intervention, activism or sensitization of society?

Manobi: I don't think it is necessary to include the hijras into mainstream society. I feel that the hijra or the transgender community is much better than the mainstream society. I have observed that some so-called members have hidden in the hijra community to escape from the “safe” mainstream people.

Q6. What can the academic community do for the welfare of the transgender persons? Please suggest steps to be taken.

Manobi: As my experience as a worker of the academic field, I have noticed that there is a high level of transphobia. The first thing needed is the academic society needs some treatment or care for their phobia. Once they are free from transphobia, others can be sensitized.

Q7. You have worked as a schoolteacher, a college lecturer and also a Principal. Which occupation did you find most satisfying and why?

Manobi: I have enjoyed working in all three different roles but I won't say I was entirely satisfied. The reason is that for transgender persons no occupation or service is suitable, I mean high level profession is not right since cisgender society does not accept even a highly qualified transgender person in that position.

Q8. Have you been able to influence any transgender individual through your struggles or your book? Please elaborate.

Manobi: I never try to influence anybody because I never think of myself as an influential person. But if someone, may be a transgender or cisgender, accepts me as his/her role model, it will depend on that person. I have never told anybody to look at me and become like me.

Q.9. Did you have any role models in your younger days? Do you think you have been able to do justice to your dreams and aspirations?

Manobi: Ramakrishna Paramhans, the gospel of Swami Vivekananda and all the followings and deeds of Vivekananda plus the songs of Rabindranath Tagore were my role models. To some extent I was influenced by Smt. Indira Gandhi in my young age. At present our Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee inspires me.

Q10. What were the circumstances under which you resigned from the Principal post of Krishna Nagar College?

Manobi: I joined as Principal for the first time in Krishnagar Women's College. But when I visited all things of official circumstances, including the mentality of college administration and of course some teaching and non-teaching staff behaviour and their attitude, it was too much. I think a highly educated true trans woman is like a Goddess and she is an embodiment of honesty.

Q11. Do you believe that gender has fluidity and it is social conditioning which compels one to "accept" one's gender corresponding to one's natal sex?

Manobi: Gender fluidity? I never believe this theory. Some people use this in their own way to disguise themselves and take advantage of mainstream society.

Q12. Transgender individuals are unable to enjoy normal, happy relationships with “normal” (cisgender) males or females. Your comments on this observation.

Manobi: It is absolutely true. The hypocrisy of the so-called “normal” society is the main reason why such relationships don’t work out. For any relationship to be successful there has to be unconditional love and total understanding. If a cisgender person cannot understand a trans person, then the question of love cannot even come up. One may feel some sort of an attraction, but you cannot call it love. Infatuation or physical attraction, only that, nothing more.

Q.13. Will sex - education and awareness about the LGBT categories from school level help in the social acceptance of sexual minorities?

Manobi: May be, sex education is helpful and very urgently needed also. Look at the rapes taking place daily now. So very shocking (sic). Sex education has to start from school itself and people should talk more openly about such things. One problem with our country is that people here are still very traditional and keep such things away from daily discussion. They will talk about politics, films and cricket but sex or sex education is taboo. Here sex and education are completely divorced from one another.

Q14. In the West, trans persons undergo surgery, hormone treatment, counselling as well as speech training sessions for the establishment of their actual gender. Do you expect the Central government to provide such facilities? What welfare measures were provided to the trans community when you were working in the *West Bengal Transgender Development Board*?

Manobi: The West is the best place for transgender people. In our country, (the facilities available to trans people there) is a dream for us. In our country, there are hardly any facilities for trans individuals. Only some researchers, colleges or universities take up the issue of the trans community. I am sorry

to say this, but I understand that none is actually genuinely interested in the cause of the trans community. Some seminar or conference on trans issues doesn't (sic) really do much for our community. Researchers only take up transgender topics as it is novel and trendy, not much thought about their real issues being addressed or tackled.

As far as individual trans persons are concerned, most of them are having (sic) a very tough time and situation. In West Bengal some NGOs rule the transgender society. They do so just for HIV schemes, which is a very shameful thing for our community.

Q15. Are you interested in a political career and do you think you can help the hijra community by joining politics?

Manobi: When the political scenario in our country is one of stability and when we develop to such an extent that we can compete with other nations, probably then (sic) I may think of joining politics. If our country's economy develops, the hijra community will also develop. When the hijra community is developed at par with mainstream society, the life of transgender persons will be highly transformed.

Q16. How would you like to be commemorated by the future generations?

Manobi: I think I should not bother about what others think of me or my life. I am living as per my educational status and working as a college principal. More than that, I don't have great social duties to perform.

Q17. Apart from your SRS (sexual reassignment surgery) and hormone treatment, have you done anything else to become more feminine?

Manobi: I don't believe in femininity and masculinity. Our Goddess Maa Durga has proved it as she has both the gentleness and softness of a woman and the courage and valour of a man. Similarly, I was born with both masculinity and femininity in me.

Q18. What is the role of education in the assertion of your gender identity?

Manobi: Education has been the most important thing in my life. At every point in my life when I struggled to establish my identity, my education helped me to present my case effectively. People would listen to me because I was educated. When I say education, I don't simply mean the institutional kind of education, but whatever came from my family and several conditions of my life situations.

Q19. Do you believe in rebirth? If yes, would you like to be reborn as a transgender person?

Manobi: I believe in rebirth. If I am reborn, I would like to be reborn as a male to female transgender. I will be established as a woman in each rebirth because I suffered a lot and I understand how cruel our patriarchal society is towards women.

Q20. What message would you like to convey to children who are unsure of their gender identity?

Manobi: Children are never confused about their gender. It is often the adults or other senior persons in the child's family or at times, the neighbours, who make the child confused about his/her gender.

Q21. Have your father and family members totally accepted you as a woman?

Manobi: My father has accepted me as his youngest daughter. Now, when my father talks to others, he often tells them that he has lived so long, (he is now 96) so that he could enjoy the love and care that I give him. My father is very proud of me now. He does not feel any guilt about my conversion. He often says that the girl child is very caring towards her parents. Now his opinion is that the girl child is far better than the boy child.

Q22. Could you share the present whereabouts of your adopted son Debashish?

Manobi: My adopted son Debashish is married now. His wife is Ahona and like me, she is also a trans woman. They registered their marriage recently. After my

new relationship, Debashish felt some sort of hesitation, as my husband is around his age. Four months back, Debashish left my home with his wife.

Q23. What about the case between you and Arindam? I hope you were able to get justice.

Manobi: Arindam is not his actual name. The publishing house didn't dare to use his real name. His actual name is Avijit Pahari. Recently, after 15 years, he sent me a message that he wants to come back to me. Now he has a pacemaker in his chest. I told him that I am in a relationship with a young man. I saw how God had created a novel of my life. Anyway I am a firm believer in God.

Q24. Are you still publishing *Abomanab*? How is it going? Has it helped in the dissemination of transgender issues in your state?

Manobi: Yes, I am still publishing the magazine. I started its publication in 1998 from my own earnings. From my earnings as a Principal, I still ensure it goes on. I think my publication has sensitized mainstream public about the transgender individuals in my state. Probably because of that in West Bengal, you can see many trans women as school teachers, social workers and many other mainstream professions, which one cannot see in any other state in the country.

Q25. Do you think you have been able to express yourself fully? Is there anything else or any potential within you that needs to be brought out or polished?

Manobi: I think that I have been able to express myself. It is not a "duty", that of expressing myself. I feel that I am able to express myself and it is only to me that I have to be true, no other person. The potential to be myself has come from my Guru Lord Ramakrishna Paramhans, Swami Vivekananda, Ma Sharada and Rabindranath Tagore.

## Works Cited

- Anuly and Burnette. *Fundamentals of Human Sexuality; Making Healthy Decisions*, Allyn and Bacon, 2003. Print.
- Bandyopadhyay, Manobi and Jhimli Mukherjee Pandey. *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi*. Penguin, 2017. Print.
- Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester University Press, 2002. Print.
- Bristow, Joseph. *Sexualities*. Routledge, 1997. Print.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 2012. Print.
- "Imitation and Gender Insubordination". *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*. Edited by Butler, Judith, Diana Fuss and Michele Aina Barale. Routledge, 1991. Print.
- Chakrapani, Venkatesh. "Structural Violence against *Kothi* -Identified Men Who Have Sex with Men in Chennai, India: A Qualitative Investigation." *AIDS Education and Prevention*, Vol. 19, No.4, pp. 346-364. Print.
- Chodorow, Nancy Julia. "Gender, Relation, and Difference in Psychoanalytic Perspective" Meyers, Diana Tierjens. Ed. *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader*. Routledge, 1997. Print.



- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*. Penguin, 1978. Print.
- Frayser, Suzanne G. "Discovering the Value of Cross-Cultural Research on Human Sexuality" *Handbook for Conducting Research on Human Sexuality* Ed. Michael W Wiederman and Bernard E Whitley, Jr. Lawrence Erlbaum Asso. Publishers. 2002. Print.
- Goel, Ina and K R Nayar. "Trajectories of the Transgender: Need to Move from Sex to Sexuality", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol 47, No 47/48 (Dec1, 2012) pp 20-22. Print.
- Jagose, Annamarie. *Queer Theory: An Introduction*. New York University Press, 1996. Print.
- Kalra, G. (2012) "Hijras: the Unique Transgender Culture of India", *International Journal of Culture and Mental Health*. 3 (2) 117-125. Print.
- Kaveney, Roz. "Talking Transgender Politics" *Reclaiming Genders: Transsexual Grammars at the Fin de Siecle*. Cassel, 1999. Print
- Kumari, Neha. *Bed for a Hundred Flowers: Interrogating the Norm of Sexual and Gender Identities*. Ph. D Thesis. 2018. Print.
- Lauretis, Teresa, de. "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities" *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, Vol 3, no2, USA. Indiana University Press, 1991. Print.

- Lee, Hermione. *Body Parts: Essays on Life Writing*. Pimlico, 2008. Print.
- Lee, Julian C H. *Policing Sexuality: Sex, Society and the State*. Malaysia. Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, 2011. Print.
- Lejeune, Philippe. *On Autobiography*. Trans. Katherine Leary. University of Minnesota Press, 1989. Print.
- Lorber, Judith. *Paradoxes of Gender*, Yale University Press. 1994. Print.
- “Crossing Borders and Erasing Boundaries”, *Sociological Focus*, Vol. 32. No 4. Oct 1999, pp 355-370. Publ Taylor and Francis. Print.
- Mackenzie, O Gordene. “50 Billion Galaxies of Gender: Transgendering the Millenium” *Reclaiming Genders: Transsexual Grammars at the Fin de Siecle*. Cassel, 1999. Print
- Menon, Nivedita. *Seeing like a Feminist*. Zubaan, 2012. Print.
- More, Kate and Stephen Whittle. *Reclaiming Genders: Transsexual Grammars at the Fin de Siecle*. Cassel, 1999. Print.
- Nanda, Serena. *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India*. Wadsworth, 1999. Print.
- (1999) “The Hijras of India: Cultural and individual dimensions of an institutionalized third gender role”, R Parker and P Aggleton (Eds) *Culture, Society and Sexuality: A Reader*. Routledge pp 226-237. Print.

- Nanda, Serena. *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India*. Wadsworth, 1999.  
Print.
- Narrain, Arvind and Gautam Bhan. *Because I Have Voice: Queer Politics in India*.  
Yoda Press, 2005. Print.
- Ramya, S and B Cauveri. "Revathi's Estrangement" *IOSR Journal of Humanities  
and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* Vol. 22, Issue 5, Ver.6 (May 2017) pp 59-  
61. Print.
- Reddy, Gayatri. *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India*.  
Yoda Press, 2006. Print.
- Revathi, A. *The Truth about Me*. Trans. V. Geetha. Penguin, 2010. Print.
- *A Life in Trans Activism*. Trans. Nandini Murali. Zubaan, 2016. Print.
- Sanger, Tom. "Beyond Gender and Sexuality Binaries in Sociological Theory: The  
Case for Transgender Inclusion" *Transgender Identities*. Routledge, 2010.  
Print.
- Serano, Julia, *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the  
Scapegoating of Femininity*. Seal Press. 2016. Print.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice*. Act 3, Scene1, lines 63-66, pp 99.  
Print.
- Shakespeare.folger.edu/downloads/pdf/the-merchant-of-  
venice\_PDF\_FolgerShakespeare.pdf

Stryker, Susan. *Transgender History*. Seal Press, 2008. Print.

----- “Transgender Studies: Queer Theory’s Evil Twin”, *GLQ Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 2004 10 (2): 212-215. Print.

Tripathi, Laxminarayan. *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*. Trans. R. Raj Rao and P.G. Joshi. Oxford, 2015. Print.

Tripathi, Laxminarayan. *Red Lipstick: The Men in my Life*. Penguin, 2016. Print.

Turner, William. *A Genealogy of Queer Theory*. Temple University Press, 2001. Print.

Vanita, Ruth and Saleem Kidwai. *Same-Sex Love in India: A Literary History*. Penguin India, 2008. Print.

Vidya, Living Smile. *I am Vidya*. Rupa, 2007. Print.

Virupaksha, H.G. et al. “Suicide among Transgender Persons”, *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine*. 38(6), 505, 2016. Print.

Weeks, Jeffrey. *Sexuality*. Routledge, 1986. Print.

Whitley, Bernard E. and Mary E Kite. *The Psychology of Prejudice and Discrimination*. II Edition, Wadsworth, 2010. Print.

Whittle Stephen. “The Becoming Man : Law’s Ass Brays” *Reclaiming Genders: Transsexual Grammars at the Fin de Siecle*. Cassel, 1999. Print.

Wilhelm, Amara Das. *Tritiya Prakriti: People of the Third Sex-Understanding Homosexuality, Transgender Identity and Intersex Conditions Through Hinduism* (Abridged Version) USA: X libris Corporation, 2010. Print.

### Net Sources

Adiche, Chimamanda Ngozi. Channel 4 interview

[Britannica.com/topic/GLAAD](http://Britannica.com/topic/GLAAD)

Callahan, Rebecca. "Bending Gender, Ending Gender: Theoretical Foundations for Social Work Practice with the Transgender Community". *Social Work*, Vol.54, No.1 (Jan, 2009) [www.jstor.org/stable/23721714](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23721714)

Chacko, Subha and Arvind Narrain. "Transcending the Binaries: Transgender Exclusions in Law and Policy" H Mander (Ed) *India Exclusion Report*, 2013-14, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed. New Delhi: BFC: An Imprint of Action Enterprise, p 184-20 [www.indianet.nl/pdf/IndiaExclusionReport 2013-2014.pdf](http://www.indianet.nl/pdf/IndiaExclusionReport%202013-2014.pdf)>[Accessed 16th July2020]

[dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/English/gender](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/English/gender) 28/092019 4pm

[dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/English/sex](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/English/sex) 29/09/2019 3.45pm

[dictionary/cambridge.org/dictionary/English/gay](http://dictionary/cambridge.org/dictionary/English/gay) 29/09/2019 4pm

[dictionary/cambridge.org/dictionary/English/nirvana](http://dictionary/cambridge.org/dictionary/English/nirvana)

Fineman, Albertson M. "Introduction : Feminist and Queer Legal Theory", *Feminist and Queer Legal Theory: Intimate Encounters, Uncomfortable*

*Conversation*, ( Fineman et al Eds). Ashgate, Emory Public Law Research Paper 09-75, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1516647>

Gagne, Patricia et al. “Coming Out and Crossing Over: Identity Formation and Proclamation in a Transgender Community” *Gender and Society* Vol.11, No.4 (Aug,1997) pp 478-508. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/190483>

Gagne, Patricia and Richard Tewksbury. “Coming Out and Crossing Over: Identity Formation and Proclamation in a Transgender Community”, *Gender and Society*, Vol. II, No 4 (Aug 1997) Sage Publications //aboutjstor.org/terms.

Garner, T. “Becoming” *Transgender Studies Quarterly*. (2014), 1 (1-2):30-32. <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2399515> [www.glaad.org/tdor](http://www.glaad.org/tdor)

Hall, Donald. *Queer Theories*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. Print. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20832051>

Heyes, Cressida J. “Feminist Solidarity after Queer Theory: The Case of Transgender”, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, University of Chicago. 2003, Vol. 28. No. 4 <https://aboutjstor.org/terms>

<https://tv.mathrubhumi.com/en/news/she-news/anjali-ameer-1.23897>

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/education/kerala-announces-reservation-for-transgender-students-in-colleges/story-qHixW6XIPTEXuXkCrrv45K.html>

<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-transgender-women-channel-4-interview-views-lgbt-raquel-willis-a7628571.html>

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24469636>, accessed on 28 May 2019 09:10

<https://www.onmanorama.com/news/kerala/2018/08/03/first-set-three-transgender-students-join-maharajas-college.html>

[lexico.com/en/definition/sexuality](https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/sexuality) 29/09/2019 4.30pm

Mal, Sibsankar and Grace Bahalen Mundu. "Hidden Truth about Ethnic Lifestyle of Indian Hijras", *Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 9 (3), July- Sept 2018 DOI : 10.5958/2321-5828.2018.00104.3

[merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gender%20 identity](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gender%20identity) 29/09/2019 6pm

Miller, Lisa R and Eric Anthony Grollman. "The Social Costs of Gender Nonconformity for Adults: Implications for Discrimination and Health", *Sociological Forum* Vol 30, No 3 (Sept 2015) pp 809-831.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43654134>

Moorti, Sujata. "A Queer Romance with the Hijra" *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ World Making*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Summer 2016, pp 18-34, Article

[oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/English/sexuality](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/English/sexuality) 19/10/2020 3.37pm

Philips, Robert. "Abjection" *TSQ Transgender Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 1-2

[poetrymyfeelings.blogspot.com/2013/01/feelings-of-hijra.html](https://poetrymyfeelings.blogspot.com/2013/01/feelings-of-hijra.html).

[psychiatry.org/patients-families/gender-dysphoria/what-is-gender-dysphoria](https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/gender-dysphoria/what-is-gender-dysphoria)  
30/09/2019 6.30pm

Raju, D Venkatarama and K S Beena. "A Study on Socio-Economic Issues of Third Gender in Tamil Nadu" IJSR International Journal of Science and Research [https://www.ijsr.net/search\\_index\\_results\\_paperid.php?id=SUB156586](https://www.ijsr.net/search_index_results_paperid.php?id=SUB156586), Vol. 4, Iss. 7, July2015, 1354-1357

Ramya, S. and B. Cauveri. "Living Smile Vidya's Traumatic Experiences- An Overview." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, vol. 19, no 10, Oct, 2014. [www.iosrjournals.org](http://www.iosrjournals.org).

Regiane Correa de Oliveira. "The Voice of an Indian Trans Woman: A Hijra Autobiography". [Indi@logs.https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/indialogs.110](https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/indialogs.110)

Rudisell, Kristen. "Performing "Aravani" Life Stories", *Asian Theatre Journal* , Vol 32, No 2 (Fall 2015) pp 536-555 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24737044>

Ryan, Joelle Ruby. "Death by Transphobia: Increasing Awareness Through Teaching the Day of Remembrance", *Transformations: The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy*, Vol 19, No 2, 2008 pp 81-91. [www.jstor.org/stable/43505852](http://www.jstor.org/stable/43505852) [www.jstor.org/stable/43505852](http://www.jstor.org/stable/43505852)

[theheroines.blogspot.com/2014/03/interview-with-living-smile-vidya.html](http://theheroines.blogspot.com/2014/03/interview-with-living-smile-vidya.html).

Tilsen, J and D Nylund. "Homonormativity and Queer Youth Resistance: Reversing the Reverse Discourse", *Counselling Ideologies: Queer Challenges to Heteronormativity*, L. Moon (Ed.). Ashgate , 2010. pp 1-19. Print.



Tiwari, Esha. "Distortion of Tritya Prakriti (Third Nation) by Colonial Ideology in India" *International Journal of Literature and Art (IJLA)* Vol. 2, 2014  
[www.scipub.org/ijla](http://www.scipub.org/ijla)

Walks, Michelle. "We're Here and We're Queer!": An Introduction to Studies in Queer Anthropology" *Anthropologica*. 56, No1 (2014) pp. Canadian Anthropology Society

[webmd.com/sex-relationships/guide/sexualorientation#1](http://webmd.com/sex-relationships/guide/sexualorientation#1) 30/09/2019 7 pm  
23/10/1979

"The Third Sex: Transgender Persons in India want to be treated a Citizens. Is that too much to ask for?", *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol. 48, Iss No 43, 26 Oct 2013. [epw.in/journal/2013/43/editorials/third-sex.html](http://epw.in/journal/2013/43/editorials/third-sex.html).