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Convergence Of Discrimination, Stereotypes, And Self-Sustainment In Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's *Me Hijra Me Laxmi*.

Ms. N. Shajitha Parveen

Research Scholar,

PG & Research Centre of English,

Mannar Thirumalai Naicker College, Pasumalai, Madurai.

Abstract: Transgender individuals may experience discrimination and sexual assaults in society, commonly because of gender stereotypes. To overcome this crisis, they have to break down the false notion of the stereotypical society. For this research analysis Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's autobiography, *Me Hijra Me Laxmi* was taken as a significant effort to challenge and overcome prevailing misconceptions about transgender individuals. The topic describes about the optimistic attitude and self-sustaining ability of the multi-talented and well-known social activist Laxmi. The main objective of the paper is to describe the various stereotypes and false mythologies about the Hijras (transgender) and to motivate them to have a positive approach towards their transformation. The paper includes stereotypes of the mainstream society, where the common people and the policemen do not even treat the Hijras as mere human beings. They were humiliated and their rights were exploited. Even in the hijra community, Laxmi was dominated by her guru, Lata Guru. Just because she does not undergo Castration (sex assignment surgery). she is criticized by other hijras, and as a result of this Laxmi walks out of her hijra community. At first, Laxmi was entrapped between her family and the hijra community. But at last, she breaks the stereotypical notion of society through self-sustainment. Being a hijra, she does not force herself to remain shackled within the bounds of an imposed stereotype. Rather she was able to maintain herself by independent effort to break down the stereotypes. Despite the struggle she can create her own identity and recognition in society, and sets a very good example for leading a proud life of being a hijra. Her family and friends play a major role in her transformation. Therefore, during her testimony, *Me Hijra Me Laxmi* challenges numerous misconceptions and preconceived notions that the general public holds about hijras.

Keywords: Transgender discrimination, self-sustainment, Hijras, Laxmi, Myths, Stereotypes.

Stereotyping refers to the process of forming assumptions about an individual based on their affiliation with a particular class or group. To comprehend the definition of stereotyping, one must grasp the functioning of conventional gender norms and stereotypes. Perpetuating the most attractive ideas about transgender individuals leads to the formation of stereotypes, such as the belief that they are unattractive, predominantly engaging in begging or working as bar dancers, and resorting to sex work as a means of survival. These prejudices serve as significant obstacles to achieving social equality for transgender individuals. Discrimination is commonly seen as the act of displaying biased behavior towards and perpetuating preconceptions about, a specific group (transgender). Research has investigated prejudice towards transgender people; including transphobia (i.e., an irrational fear or hatred of, or emotional disgust toward, individuals who do not conform to society's gender expectation; Hill & Willoughby, 2005)

and trans prejudice (i.e., negative beliefs about the character and value of individuals who, in appearance and/or identity, do not conform to society's current conceptualization of gender, King Winter, & Webster, 2009). Stereotype content is believed to influence the nature of prejudice and discrimination (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Tajfel, 1981); Hence, conducting an inquiry into the stereotypes attributed to transgender individuals could be a significant contribution to the existing body of work on attitudes of transgender people. The topic of Gender Identity has assumed a significant position in conversations, organizations, and actions championed by the Transgender community. Many people who lack a complete understanding of their worries have extensively misunderstood it.

Laxmi's autobiography elucidates the issues and facilitates readers' involvement in more constructive dialogues concerning Gender Identity, devoid of perpetuating stereotypes or disregarding the legal significance of biological sex. "Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, actor, activist, and dancer, whose familiar florid face epitomizes the rise and rise of the transgender. While her debut book *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* may have caused a mini tsunami in the past" says Kankana Basu (in the new Indian Express, published on 8th October). Writing has proven to be the most potent medium for sensitively and compassionately portraying the life of the hijras. Any impact on the hijra community has a direct and significant influence on me as an individual. I found it utterly infeasible to avert my gaze or remain silent. Writing proved to be the most efficacious means of addressing and combating tyranny. When an individual's biological, psychological, and sexual identities are incongruent, they are perceived as aberrant by society. He is socially excluded by society. Consumed by a sense of seclusion, an individual in this state fervently pursues others who share similar experiences and forms alliances with them. He may choose to have sex reassignment surgery or have another hijra perform a procedure to remove his male sexual organs, without the use of anesthesia. Hijra communities are formed when individuals undergo hormone therapy to develop breasts.

In her memoir, Laxmi recounts her formative years as a frail male child plagued by persistent uncertainty regarding her sexual identity, finding great joy in dressing in feminine garments. After meeting Ashok Row Kavi who works for the Gay community comforted her by saying, "What is abnormal is the world around us. They simply don't understand us." (Tripathi 11). Laxmi felt happy and relieved by discovering her gender (third gender). "I felt relieved. The thought that I was not the only one like this, but there were others too was elating." (Tripathi 11), "On the contrary, I had become brazen, ready to declare to the world that I was gay." (Tripathi 14). It was her first positive approach towards her identity. The experience of meeting people who were like her transformed her feeling of bewilderment at her plight and was replaced by solace. It molded her to become a transgender social activist in the future. "Social service can be a bitter pill with adverse side effects. But I was determined to dedicate my life to social work" (Tripathi 61). Then she shifts her house to Khopat, she has positive thoughts in that new atmosphere. She took part in various activities like playing basketball, dancing, enacting, and elocution, and also won many prizes. She never hesitated to do what she liked to do which helped her to attain her present status. People appreciated Laxmi for her talents. "I loved winning prizes, for they gave my self-esteem a boost. Thus, I enrolled my name for whatever dance competitions I got to know of." (Tripathi 26).

Dancing played a major part in Laxmi's career. Her proficiency in dancing gave her many opportunities to prove the mainstream society that trans genders are not lesser than any other gender (including male and female gender). Through her achievements, she proved that they too have talents and can lead a successful life. Even though she suffers from Asthma, she does not give up dancing. Dancing was the therapy that she had not given up. "Dancing transported me to another world where I could be my true self." (Tripathi 23). She joined dance class during her eighth standard. Later, along with her friend Sachin Kharat she ran a dance school called Lucky Chap Dance Academy (also known as Vidya Nritya Niketan). Laxmi not only defies the conventional perception of classical dancing as being for women but also employs it as a means of expressing opposition. Later, she becomes a Model-coordinator. Then, she conducted the Indian Super Queen Contest (beauty contest) for the transgender. By conducting such events will avert the gaze of others because of a deep and abiding inferiority complex, who would now get a chance to walk on the ramp. "The hijras were exhilarated. Everywhere, we were the talk of the town. The contest boosted their confidence and they were able to carry themselves about with an air of dignity." (Tripathi 133). This emphasizes the idea of equality for the transgender and society's need to accept them as common human beings.

Transgender people are systematically silenced daily. "The world would only be too happy to silence us." (Tripathi 56). They lack sufficient representation in the realms of politics, governance, and media. In a culture that harbors dread towards them, individuals are discouraged from expressing themselves openly. They frequently lack safety even within their neighborhoods. Laxmi tries her best to get the fundamental rights of hijras and she states that "I have been swimming against two currents- one society and the other community. Both need to change their attitude" (Tripathi 160) and "Change is only possible when the laws change. And for that the authorities need to be

approached” (Tripathi 161). The public ‘often think of us as troublemakers and would avoid engaging with us’ (Tripathi 53). Even policemen who must safeguard every individual, often arrest them for no reason and are brutal in their dealing with hijras: The phrase 'hijra' is derogatory. Colloquially, it is referred to as "number six," "number nine," or "chakka." The term 'hijra' is derived from the Urdu word 'hijra'. A hijra is an individual who has voluntarily distanced themselves from their tribe or group. A hijra is an individual who has chosen to depart from conventional society, which includes both males and females and has instead become a member of a hijra community. “They looked at us with suspicion and bias, subjecting us to questions and cross-questions.” (Tripathi 54). “The cops would arrive at the most unearthly hour and randomly pick anyone of us up for questioning at the police station. If we asked for details, we were given evasive answers, like ‘someone told us...’ or ‘our sources have revealed...’ But such responses did not satisfy us” (Tripathi 56).

Her chela Subhadra’s death becomes an eye opener for Laxmi to protect her community from the stereotypical society. She taught her chelas ‘how to face the cops when to abuse, and when to be gentle’ (Tripathi 56). Laxmi’s encounter with the police gave an idea about the kind of life she would be leading in the years to come. She says, “It would be a life of social and political activism.” (Tripathi 53). She even shifts her house to Kalwa, to be with the other hijras in their hour of crisis. As a responsible and affectionate Guru for her chelas, she sacrifices her luxurious life and serves as a role model for her chelas. She aimed at empowering the hijra community and educating society. “To us, the hijras were the ultimate subaltern, deprived of fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution. We were slaves, non-persons. We had been suffering injustice for centuries.” (Tripathi 91).

Transgender individuals are frequently depicted in the media as hypersexualized, unmanageable anomalies, or erroneously characterized as drug-addicted sex workers or flashy drag performers. Laxmi opposes the stereotypical portrayal of transgender characters in the media. “Bollywood films, by continually stereotyping hijras, as indeed they do every marginalized section of society, only add to our jaundiced view of them. Rarely has Bollywood come up with a sensitive portrayal of a hijra, a notable exception being Pooja Bhatt’s film Tamanna.” (Tripathi 182). Laxmi explains that those portrayals alter public attitudes. She rejects certain chances to act in movies because of this false image. She even participated in many TV programs like Big Boss, Boogie Woogie, The Big Fight, Dilkhulas, the album Lavani on Fire, and Zee News channel. She acted in a short film called Slut for the Kala Ghoda Festival. “It is a story of a highly strung but rebellious hijra who rips off the masks of morality worn by the middle class.” (Tripathi 119). When Kanchan Adhikari, a TV anchor for the channel Mi Marathi, wanted Laxmi to be a guest on the show Dilkhulas. She arrived at the studio in a one-piece suit that she picked up at Toronko. When her friend Sandeep Malvi asks her ‘What have you worn?’ she protests his question by saying, ‘What does it matter if I wear these clothes?’. ‘After all, my body isn’t exposed.’ She lapsed into a little lecture about the need to destroy stereotypes. “Just because I was a social worker, I didn’t have to wear a sari.” (Tripathi 89). Later, she appeared in the documentary Bambaiya, made by Kartikeya Narayan Singh. She feels about her role in that film, she says “I play myself in the film- I am Laxmi, the hijra and the transgender activist.” (Tripathi 120).

While she was working as a chairman of the DWS; Laxmi was invited and asked to present a paper. She seized the opportunity and delivered a paper in impeccable English at the Proposal Development workshop held by the Avert Society in Vashi, earning much applause. “Everyone was amazed. Their stereotypes about hijras were dismantled.” (Tripathi 63). Education plays a crucial role in her life and comes to her rescue in her time of need. Because of her educational qualification, Laxmi was able to battle the system when it refused to give her a passport on account of her being a hijra. Her success at the workshop made her to leave her disrespectful past behind and assume her as a respectable person. “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.” (Tripathi 63). “I started having differences with the DWS hijras.... ‘What does it matter if you are a man, woman, or hijra when something’s got to be done?’ I asked. ‘Why segregate yourselves from mainstream society to such an extent?’” (Tripathi 67).

Laxmi was against the stereotypical notion of the hijra community that they are not supposed to merge along with either the mainstream society or their birth family. “hijras are expected to cut off all ties with their natal families’ (Tripathi 72). However, Laxmi’s family embraces her new identity, but she is reluctant to stay with her guru, Lataguru who is reasonably muffled: “Why must you cling on to the male-female society?” (Tripathi 72). She walked out from the DWS when her ideas were not accepted by the other hijras. Lata Guru objected to Laxmi’s attempt to present herself as a representative of the community on social media. Despite facing consequences for her wrongdoing, she highlights the importance of the hijra culture adopting change. She could not stand the restrictions on her freedom. She boldly rejects Lata Guru’s rule which becomes an obstacle to her liberty. “But my chelas stood

by me. They were proud of me because I was educated and had a mind of my own. So what if I broke all the rules?" (Tripathi 160). For her family she was their elder son, they accepted her and loved her unconditionally. Unlike Lata Guru, Laxmi has a very good relationship with her chelas as well as with her own family. She maintains a balance between her two families. Even her mother cares for her chelas, they live in nearby houses and set a good example for the stereotypical society which created false myths about trans genders. "There are several myths about hijras in circulation that act to their detriment. One such myth is that hijras kidnap young male children, castrate them, and forcibly make them hijras." (Tripathi 183). Although this may appear amusing, hijras are currently making headlines for negative reasons. Prejudice should not exert control over those who identify as transgender.

Another important issue in breaking the stereotypes through self-sustainment includes Laxmi's disapproval of the process of castration (sex assignment surgery, also called Nirvana). "Laxmi is self-conscious and evasive about the issue of castration and dismisses it in a few lines in Chapter 19 of her book. She suggests that one has to be emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically ready for castration before one undertakes it." (afterword of Rao, Raj; Tripathi 192). According to her, "castration is strictly optional, and every hijra decides for herself whether or not to undergo it. Castration cannot be forced upon a hijra." (Tripathi 156). She breaks down the psychological and physical stereotypes about hijras through her own life. People feel ashamed or embarrassed when they see a transgender in a public place. They are portrayed as evil, ugly, unfortunate creatures. Laxmi aimed to challenge the prevailing perception of hijras as aesthetically unattractive individuals and change people's mindsets. Laxmi herself dismisses these stereotypes by conducting beauty contests for them and the translator says, "Hijras are considered ugly, But when I see Laxmi- tall, sturdy, beautiful and confident- my stereotypes are automatically destroyed" (afterword of Rao, Raj; Tripathi 225).

Throughout her autobiography, Laxmi was able to break the false assumptions and irrational thoughts about transgender and set a living example for a successful individual, as a hijra, as a social activist, as a responsible son for her family, and as a perfect Guru for her chelas. It all happened because of her self-sustaining ability to do what she wished to do and lead her own life as per her wishes. Her mature attitude motivated her, encouraged her, and even taught her, how to survive in a marginalized society, and get the basic right for her community. "One of Laxmi's primary endeavors is to show us that hijras are ordinary people, no different from us: they do not exist in a rarefied realm. And yet, Laxmi's autobiography must not be placed within the wider tradition of Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgender (LGBT) writing in India." (afterword of Rao, Raj; p.183). Thus, every transgender should be self-reliant and must develop their capacity through self-sustainment to break the norms of the stereotypical society. Her position as a writer adds additional depth to her work as a human rights campaigner. For her, writing serves as a potent means of establishing connections between the hijra community, her family, and society. By bridging the substantial divide between these two realms, she aims to begin a discourse that enables individuals to recognize the interconnectedness and emphasizes the imperative for both personal and collective accountability.

Individuals commonly perceive their existence within a favorable realm, devoid of bribery, violence, abandonment, deceit, obscenity, and greed. Laxmi encourages the reader to adopt an objective perspective towards them. She documents instances of persistent persecution, disapproving glances, apprehension of being subjected to public environments, concerns about personal safety, and various other anxieties. However, this marginalized community is presently overcoming its grievances and starting to assert itself in the global arena, rejecting the state of being ignored and unseen that has been imposed upon it. They also argue that possessing a transgender identity is a matter of personal identification, rather than a medical condition. The cognitive dissonance arising from her manly physique and feminine emotions precipitates significant psychological distress.

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