



Exploring the Treatment of Violence in A. Revathi's Autobiography, *The Truth About Me: A Hijras Life Story*

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Abstract:

The writer, A.Revathi, a trans woman, is a Bangalore-based activist who is giving her voice for sex-workers or sexual minorities in south India. The Truth About Me: A Hijras Life Story is her second book which was published in 2010. Actually, she belongs to hijra community which was considered to be a set aside community. In this book, she narrates her personal life events. In this story the author reveals her personal experiences which she faced, being a third gender. This novel reflects the mental agony and sufferings of every transgender. And she is also the first transgender writer who explores and informs the tragic and untold issues of heteronormative people in the society through this autobiographical story. Hence this paper highlights how the third-genders are marginalised in the colonial setup and what are the hurdles they faced including harassments during the establishment of their identity.

Key words: Sex-workers, transgender, Colonization, Marginalization, Gender identity

Introduction:

The contemporary writers want to picturise the characters who struggle for identity. Hence, many literary writers concentrate on "Identity Crisis" as it is one of the most prominent areas in the literary writings. Because every individual wants to get recognition in the society where he or she lives. That is why, in the contemporary novel, most of the writers focus on the theme of the quest for identity. But the existing problem is that to show once own identity in the particular community is a difficult one. Therefore, those who want recognition have to constantly strive to get a specific status in the society. Normally, man and woman identity crisis were discussed so far. But the need of the hour is that the so called third gender also to be considered for it. So, apart from feminine and masculine identity, there are other few social norms or orders for the third -genders. Because of the significance of the mainstream people or gender, the third transgender identity issues are ignored knowingly or unknowingly. Therefore, the term third-gender or cis-gender refers to the people those who belong to neither a man nor a woman and also called as sexual minorities. They have their own set of social law and order in the heteronormative norms. Though they are born and brought up like other common individuals, a slight change in their body or in the functioning of their biological system including some specified attitude has given them a new name as TRANSGENDER. Being transgender, they could not find the proper identity in their society. This name is used or differ based on their attitude, behaviour and culture to which they belonged. Therefore, the word hijras are taken from the Urdu hiji, it means "leaving one tribe" in the Hindi language.

Generally, in Indian society both male and female are to be considered as hijras. Because they were almost neglected from every social order. And they were also called in different names in the other part of the state. For instance, in Tamil Nadu many case studies were conducted the transgender people by the Indian health care system. The study showed that they did not have any testimony about them. Therefore, they were named as Aravani, Pottai, Ali, and number 9 and also with some offensive words. However, for the first time in Indian population, the third gender people were also considered in the enumeration process. But later, they came to a conclusion that it is not possible to count the hijras in the whole in India. Because in the large-scale cities like Mumbai and Delhi, the hijras are living in more than 5000 different localities. Anyhow the world-wide the censusing process was held in 2011. They have divided them into three categories based on their biological sexual system. Unlike other countries, Indian had collected a data, including the sexual minorities. Because Indian government assured that all transgenders have equal rights to led a dignified life like other normal human beings.

So, this paper mainly focuses on the issues and challenges faced by third gender and their identity which dealt in the novel *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*. Actually, this is her autobiography (originally written by her in Tamil as *Unarvum Uruvumum* and translated into English as *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* by V. Geetha) in which she discusses the hidden issues of transgender and how much difficulty they faced to survive in Indian community. In fact, the author has genuinely examined every aspect of transgender association and what are the hurdles faced and overthrown by hijras. The writer Revathi describes not only her social background in her hometown but also her dreams and desires in her writing. In the preface to the novel, the author began writing with a question. "In our society, we speak the language of rights loudly and often, but do the marginalized really have access to these rights?". So, in this way, she was side-lined as she belongs to sexual minorities. Therefore, the story begins with a wide range description of author's homeland Nammakal town, Salem district, Tamil Nadu.

In that small town, Revathi was born and brought up by her parents in the name of Doraiswamy with the feminine qualities. As he is the youngest son in the family, he was so affectionate towards his parents. In his early school days, Doraiswamy showed more interest to play games which are only girls' oriented games and events. But surprisingly, one day, after returning from the school, he disguised himself as a girl by wearing his sister's skirt around his hip. At the age of ten, Doraiswamy started to face the gender troubles. However, his family approached and treated him in a different way. But his changed-attitude was sensed by his neighbours. Later, majority of the village people started to talk about the informal things about Doraiswamy. In addition, some of the friends and neighbours started using the foul language to represent Doraiswamy like Number Nine and all other female things. However, he ignored all such comments and could not make any change in his natural behaviours of feminine.

While studying seventh standard, Doraiswamy got a chance to enact like a girl character called Chandramathi. Actually, he enjoyed for doing this female role. After a few months i.e., in his tenth standard, he himself sensed certain biological changes in his body and mind. And then, Doraiswamy was surprised and fascinated for his gender identity. During his young age, he was visiting a temple at every Saturday. At the temple area, one day, he got chance to meet a group of hijras people and later he came to know about the people that they were like him who dress up with a female costume. After meeting such people, he developed a kind of friendship with them and spent some quality hours with the hijras. After a week, Doraiswamy was so glad that he was affectionately recognised by those people. Later, those people explained him about the importance of meeting their so called Amma [who lives in Dindugal where she does operation]. After getting complete information about the transformational operation, Doraiswamy showed interest without any hesitation to become a woman. Therefore, he and his friend planned to meet that lady called Amma. And this is the occasion for Doraiswamy to assume a female name as Revathi.

However, Doraiswamy secretly maintains his gender issue from his parents for some time. [sari clad feminine men]. In Tamil they used to call Hijras as a Pottais. Now Doraiswamy has transmuted into Revathi by performing some stereotypical practice. Finally, during the temple festival time, Doraiswamy declared himself as Revathi, a female. After a month, Revathi went back to her hometown to visit her parents. Actually, in the Indian social set up, the transgender people are always treated as an oppressive race. But the author was reflexive to the charges. Meanwhile, Revathi came to know that her sister is getting married. She was really

happy to hear the news of her sister's marriage and she also wanted to take part in the marriage ceremony. But she realised that her new identity as Revathi would become a massive pitfall in the patriarchal world. When she was there, she was brutally attacked by her family members. So, she decided to meet her guru. Unfortunately, her guru went to Delhi. It was very challenging situation for her.

At last, with the help of her friends she reached his guru's place in Delhi. One of the most important things in the identical issue is accepting the things. Wearing the woman costumes for disguising himself as a woman cannot be considered as transgender. But the society has to accept as a woman. There are some writers who have discussed the transgender issues very lightly. Whereas this is Revathi's autobiography novel which was totally different from other such novels. Because it depicts every issues of transgender particularly their pains and sorrows. As India is also considered as a spiritual country, here Lord Shiva takes the shape and appearance of Arthanarishwara (human body parted as half Shiva and half Parvathi).

Therefore, some people in India have a strong belief that getting blessings from the transgenders is bliss and have an auspicious power of changing things. That is why, those people are invited to take part in the new born ceremonies and in the marriage ceremonies to bless them. But it is not a supernatural power to enhance the societal range. So, this novel is actually about how the trans people were constantly facing problems in order to make daily wage. However, the author vividly explains the main source of money-making is to plead or pull them for sex work. Even Revathi elaborated the cultural norms followed by hijras and how the guru chela relationship was prevailing all over India. In India, almost every state they are specified with their own traditional rules. Here, Revathi felt so complicated to attain south Indian hijras' phrase and diction. Like jamaat [the group of elder guru and chela], Ghorimoorthan [the person who became first chela], Pamapaduthi [inviting], Reeth [deity]. The hijras were tormented by their guru even during the household times. Revathi detailed her friends and how they were traumatically treated. Her friend Shakuntala was belonging to chachan house where she was brutally attacked by her guru for money.

Therefore, she leaves her guru's house and she, in turn, fell in love with a man thinking that she would get solace. But, unfortunately, he also started ill-treated her and disturbed her for cash. This is not the routine story of Revathi but for every transgender is facing some challenges daily. As a result, they were protesting and longing for the recognition of their identity. In this way, they were constantly being victimized in every stage of life in the called civilized world. Hence, they were not only disdained by their society but also by their family and friends. For instance, when Revathi returned to her parents, she was insulted as well as neglected by her kith and kins. At this situation, Revathi was helpless and miserably failed to defend herself in the family. Worse still, she could not bear the torture and mental agony exercised by her brothers. So, there is no other go and determined herself strongly to get back to her guru's place. More than that, she mentally prepared to join with hijras community through the protocol of nirvana.

At last she reached the status of a woman which she longed for long time. Therefore, her earnest thirst has paved way to be a woman through transaction. Though she mingles with transgender community, she was not accepted and she could not find her identity. Being a transgender, she was forced to follow basis of the hijra's federation. But the norms of transgender did not permit Revathi to be a woman. Because of this, she returned to her native home. In the meantime, she was not interested to be become a flesh trader or a prostitute. Because her consciousness did not permit her to be in this status. During this period, the family members and her neighbours including her friends treated her with the feminine respect calling her as Revathi! Sister! Daughter! Revathi felt so surprised for the way she was invited. However, Revathi involved in a dispute with her family members. As a result, she was not able to be with them and detached herself from the community. She planned to live a dignified life.

As a result, Revathi obtained Mayuri, Famila, and Revathi as a chela. She gave them rights and freedom according to their wish. She set aside for them to live in the same place. Revathi felt blessed to be as a mother for these three. And she exposed them to the world that they as a gentleman. Actually, people those who belong to hijra's community are not at all qualified. But these three chelae are well educated. She had a good number of educated friends. They only introduced Revathi to these Sangma [sexual minority's organization]. After joining in the Sangma, leaves the gurus position and started to live in an apartment. Revathi shares openly about her cherishing love life in her writings. The fondness of the companion makes her life so accomplished.

Revathi felt so happy for seeing her fantasy to come true. So she was married to the man who was working as a senior assistant in the Sangam.

With the great blessing of the gurus, the marriage ceremony was conducted. However, Revathi's happy marriage life did not long last. It came to an end. It was tough time for Revathi when her husband leaves and her daughter Famila committed suicide. Unfortunately, another tragic incident occurred in which her guru was stabbed by the street rowdies. Though Revathi faced these awful incidents, she did not give back even though she was bundled up with anguish, discomfort, difficulties. She never failed to finish her book *Unarvum Uruvumam*. Revathi wanted to go back to stay with her parents for a while but she was messed up with the trouble, tribulation, failures. Meanwhile her mother fell sick and she was admitted in the hospital. Revathi wanted to take care of her mother at any cost. Though she was in need of money, she didn't like sex work. So, she felt so hopeless and was pushed towards to the edges of the life. At last, she came back to work in Sangama.

Revathi's novel *The Truth About Me. A hijras life story* is not only about single character. But it was an untold miserable story of every transgender in the social order. The status of respective soul determines is decided by the public. But the notion of the people may differ. So, the transgender had to handle the pivotal pressure. Having feminine qualities in the masculine body is a rare creation. The author is the best example for it. Worse still, she leads a hostile life in her own community. Because she failed to receive respect from the chela and was alienated.

The prime concept of the identical crisis is to prove and figure out the gender and sexual norms. "The question of the identical crisis plays an important role in queer studies since indemnity is bound with mutually dependent and undefined social construction,". That is why, many questions raise in Doraiswamy's mind like why do I love men? Do I am mad? Why should I have felt like this? Is there any person in the world with the same feeling? and so on. Actually, Doraiswamy wanted to be a woman as he felt women inside. Queer theory specifying that the people belong to sexual minorities are not able to fit into the social norms. Those humankinds are felt so distressing in the cultural perception. Here, Revathi also senses the same belief. Her family members expect that Revathi should lead a normal life like other men. But she could not fit into the socio-cultural rules. So, she went for gender transaction and she gave the detailed account in her autobiography. Revathi yearned to be a woman that made her different from the society. Doraiswamy wanted to be [sarie-clad] a masculine member in the town. His own desire strengthens his mind and body to be a woman.

In the hijras community they would like to follow some stereotypical traditional. Revathi Nani grandmother reveals the guideline which was followed in the hijras community. And she asks Revathi to follow the same norms and regulations. Revathi was forced to purse the cultural practice like others. But Revathi decided to make a move as she felt discomfort with hijras norms. Queer theory analysis the gender issues and sexual minorities. Revathi was born boy but as a day past his gender doesn't fit into the gesture. He could not assign himself to be a masculine. Being a male with feminine habitual is a recreation of sin in the Indian society. Revathi decided and found to be a woman. So, she modulated himself to be transgender with a general dissimilarity. Revathi loved to do house hold work for his mother like cleaning the front yard, helping in the kitchen etc. even in the school she used to play only girls games like hide and seek, five stones. During the school time she was badly forwards her to became to transgender.

In the construction of law in sexual minorities the person can have genitive attraction towards either with the same sex or with a opposite sex or both – homosexual, heterosexual and bisexual. So, this theory has carefully scrutinized the Revathi novel in depth with the gender perception. She was so conscious of getting that she felt love with same gender. Though she fascinated to be a woman, her guru never allowed her to live like feminine. So, she planned to make a move and joined as chela to another guru called Matunga. There she was allowed to do sex work happily. And she was inclination to become a sex worker. But, she was so disappointed with that work. That is why, she left sex work and joined in the Sangama. There she met a senior officer. Both of them fell in love and love each other. Finally, she was married to the officer and started to lead a normal life. Again, the dream is not a compatible, the relationship came to an end. This theory analyses about the people who belong to sexual minorities and they are called heteronormative. However, the Queer theory explores how the individuals are facing some difficulties in the society. Actually, the Bisexual concept played a major role

in the story of the Revathi. The author is trying to explain about the hardship of transgender's life. At the same time, some hijras' are not interested in doing sex work. The people those who exist in the transgender federation are called as sexual minorities. Many of the hijras made of choice of transmutation for the societal acceptances. So, a transgender means people those who was born male and later change into the feminine through operating. A hijras are also called eunuchs etc. A transgender is totally different from hermaphrodite who are generally born with the male and female organs. But here, Revathi deseed herself as a woman because Revathi urges to be a woman. For that reason only, Revathi's diary is the first stepping stone in the hijras community and her chronicle of life is the best raising spirit for every transgender. And then, she is the one who came forward to write about her truth in her book. In her autobiography, she unfolded the truth of every sparkle of her life. And then, she raised her voice through her writing for the upliftment of transgender community in the society. She started her first speech with the people in koovagam, is a village in Ulunthurpet taluk, where transgenders meet in the month of Chithirai for their annual festival of every year. The main aim of the Revathi's speech in koovagam's festival is to grab the attention of the society towards transgender.

It was very that the ultimate aim of her speech was to get equal rights for hijras and on par with general public. On that occasion, Revathi's courageous voice was so stunning and another official who was present in the congregation was shocked to hear it. Again, some of them raised their oppressiveness against the people who represent trans as an Ali and number 9. So, Revathi's talk highlighted some of her prime issues and advocated for changing of the prejudice which was prevailing against transgender people in their socio-cultural atmosphere. Revathi admitted that from the age of twenty she started doing her sex work. Doing sex work is the only way to satisfying her sexual thirst. Yet as a sexual minority, she got a wrong impact from the general public.

During her narration of the story, her voice was so tough and the words are struck in her throat. actually, she wanted every reader should experience the same pain, sorrow and brutal attack which she faced for long time in her life. She also narrated the bitterness and every traumatic incident which was hitting back in her life and how the area rowdies, co-worker, policemen, and other public in the road treated them in the public place. However, she emerged from all these issues, problems and sufferings. Later, she came out of the oppressive clutches of her guru and immediately joined in another hijras house where she was accepted with the feminine qualities. In the Indian society, the hijras, the eunuchs, the transgender community were allowed to enjoy their share and rights. That is why, Revathi was valorously leading towards her autobiography to break the stereotypical law against the transgender community and heteronormative people.

So, narrating the transgender story is not so smooth and simple as others. Because every bit of their life is wrapped with untold pains and sorrows. Finally, she is able to overcome those hurdles and hindrances only after the publication of her first novel. Generally transgender people are not even considered to be a human being in the Indian social norms. That is why Revathi is not so praised for her remarkable book. Though it is easy for the readers to read and understand, the whole novel narrates only about Revathi and her life journey. Truly speaking, Revathi's life story confesses the traumatic piece of every transgender. Actually, she used writing as a weapon not to kill the people but to defend her own race. Later she reached a suitable platform, World Social Forum, where she justified herself as women got a chance to convince the society to determine as a feminine. As a result, she started to write her autobiography thinking that she would be recognised by the audience directly. Unfortunately, she was pushed to face extreme poverty which pushed back to the prostitution. Anyhow, she did not give up and she did not back from her writing. Again, she went back to Sangama.

To sum up, the main objective which the author aims to insist through this novel is very clear. She doesn't have any selfish motive for personal benefits. That is why, instead of securing a separate recognition for transgender, Revathi wants everyone including the government to treat them as other mainstream people. Actually, she wants to remove the border line between sexual minorities and mainstream society. She also exhorted now and then even directly or indirectly the society that at the back of every painful struggle, there will be a success. Because Revathi's incessant fighting spirit and will power changed others life drastically. For instance, the Indian government agreed to add the third gender or cis-gender(M/F/T) in the gender list like Male, Female and Transgender. Therefore, this remarkable change done by the government is considered to be the first success for the transgender people. Now a days, the third gender people involve or take part in all

the events not only to familiarise themselves but also to retain their identity. At present, throughout the world, every individual struggle for identity in their own area, place and country as every place has its own social norms and culture. But Revathi's soul aim is to make the society and the government must come forward to recognise every sexual minority as equal as to other mainstream people and pave way to lead a dignified life.

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