



Tali To ‘Pechan’ *Me Hijra Me Laxmi*: ‘Everyday Resistance’ And Negotiating Gender(Ed) Identity

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Abstract:

The present paper examines Everyday Resistance and Gender(ed) struggle of renown transgender person of India Laxami Tripathi as accounted in her autobiography *Me Laxami Me Hijra* originally written in Marathi and Translated into English by R Raj Rao. The paper underscores the critical significance of Everyday livelihood and struggles of Transgenders combining insights from Transgender theoretical framework. Standing upon the recent research that re-evaluate transgender discourses through an encounter with Gender theory, this paper argues Everyday challenges and elision of sexual and gender non-normative character. This paper extends the projection of transgender across the trans-national / trans-disciplinary academic framework, it addresses the everyday negotiation with the heteronormative society. The paper has used Gende Performativity and Intersectionality as theoretical framework and delineates the everyday struggle of Transgender represented through autobiographical account. The paper will ruminate the social space, and habitus theory propounded by Bourdieu within the light of the select primary source.

Key Words: Gender Performance, Queer, Transgender, Autobiography, Everyday Culture

Introduction:

The present research paper delineates the process of coming out to attune with one's own gender identity forms fulcrum of transgender's autobiography *Me Hijra Me Laxami*. This process of coming out involves a profound sense of dislocation as they struggle to reconcile with their internal sense of self. This process involves great deal of experimentation in 'Everyday' as individual try on different identity and try to explore different aspects of themselves to find a sense of wholeness and completeness. In that regarding

the existing culture plays a pivotal role in establishing their self-identity. For over millennium transgenders, Hijras, and other sexual minorities have been suppressed. The transgender identities have been rendered invisible and pushed in to periphery of the society. Decentring these identities has been heteronormative structure of societal hegemony.

According to the, Revathi as she brings out the definition of Transgenders, in *A Life in a Trans Activism*,

“Transgender is an umbrella term that includes a range of people with diverse gender identities and experience. It includes kothis or pre-operated trans people at the feminine end of the spectrum, post-operative transgender women, and non-operated transgender people (both of whom identify with the gender that is diametrically the opposite of their biological sex), and other gender non-conforming individuals. A male to female transgender person is referred to as a trans woman, and a female to male transgender as a trans man.”

Despite these observations, I suggest that much everyday life theory and recent studies that map a cultural and intellectual history of the everyday continue to reflect this gender bias. I suggest that one possible reason for this is women’s historical exclusion from the realm of theoretical discourse broadly conceived and propose that to trace alternative critiques and histories of the everyday feminist scholars need to look to alternative modes of cultural and discursive production—for example, literature, the essay and art—through which to trace implicit and explicit analyses of the everyday by women. (“Theorising the Everyday”)

Georg Simmel too emphasizes on gendered experience of realms of sociability, the serving of meal and Walter Benjamin’s work on interiors can be read in the context of the gendering of the everyday. Our thoughts and behaviour are the product of everyday life that live through social environment in which we live: it is a product of both its position in the social space and of the practices of the social beings who inhabit it. As Fiske claims through the eyes of Bourdieu,

“The position in social space, the practices and the identities are not separate categories in a hierarchical or deterministic relation to each other, but mutually inform each other to the extent that their significance lies in their transgression of the categorical boundaries that produced the words I must use to explain them, and which are therefore perpetuated by that explanation.” (Fiske)

Research Gap:

Previous research that has been conducted in the realm of Transgender Autobiographies have reflected the perspective of Identity and Transgender community. There is still a scope to delineates the lives of Transgenders as represented through their autobiographical narratives. Thus, the focus of the present research is to examines Everyday life challenges and Negotiating Gender Identity as portrayed through the narrative voices in the *Me Laxami Me Hijra*. Since various studies have been conducted so far regarding gender identity and resistance to the transgender peoples, there is hardly any study availed on theorizing every day in the area.

Research Questions:

The present paper seeks to address the given questions through the everyday theorizing method.

1. Whether everyday treatment given by the surroundings form any sort of feeling of suppression in the transgender people?
2. How the unique pattern of Everyday life form's identity of gender(ed) in the psyche of transgenders?
3. How does Laxami Tripathi through her autobiographical accounts represents politics of gender which established socio-political cultures in the heteronormative society?

Research Objectives:

The present paper investigates the mentioned objectives:

- To Investigate how Autobiographical accounts have been tool or Everyday Identity Construction
- To Understand how everyday struggle of the transgender has form various cultural practices which results in to marginalizing their Identity.
- To get understanding of Various struggles like Physical, Sexual and Financial faced by transgenders in Everyday life through trans autobiographical account.
- To use intersectionality as a theoretical approach to understand the everyday challenge of the transgender person to reclaim their sexual identity.

Methodology:

The method employed by the researcher in the present paper is Qualitative Research method. The qualitative and conceptual analysis of the mentioned primary source has been done employing Theory of Everyday as a tool of Research. A mixture of several other approaches such as everyday theory, historical, biographical, comparative has also been taken into consideration for the development of arguments in the paper.

Everyday Resistance and Conflicts:

“As a realm of experience, the everyday is familiar to everyone. As a conceptual tool and a set of theories, it has its origin in certain strains of twentieth century thought. In the past two decades, moreover, the quotidian has become a metaconceptual category that allows the retrospective grasp and subsequent redeployment within literary criticism for earlier discourses and intellectual tradition.”

(“Thinking the Everyday on JSTOR”)

Transgenders have been oppressed and resisted over a century, at the sight of heteropatriarchal hegemonic culture. Although several milestones have been achieved by transgenders in recent years. Thus, they are catering their voice to represent progress. Transgenders have been writing about their body and desires where they can be accepted and heard, to interact with the heteronormative society, and therefore it becomes a concept of Body Politics.

As Butler states, Laxmi understood the reality that gender could neither be true or false, neither natural nor superficial. Yet we are forced to live in a culturally constructed perspective of gender. She was able to break the stereotypical binaries of gender and could transgress both mind and body from a male-born Raju to a female- Laxmi. Her body performed in becoming a transgender in a heterosexual society where the stereotypical binaries exist to remain as male or female only. Laxmi was a victim of harassment and abuses by the society because she did not perform the correct gender which was assigned at her birth.

Alludes Laxmi Narayan Tripathi In her autobiography. The given lines refer to the kind of ambition Laxmi used to have like all human being.

“Yet I wanted a Lifestyle. I wanted to live rich and the famous”, (37).

Laxmi was well educated and well behaved yet everyday she was not accepted as fellow being. Everyday practice has formed heteronormative ideologies in the society. So, when Laxmi breaks the truth about her identity in front of her parents, she was not accepted by them. She thought she would be accepted for the reason for what she is but on the contrary she faced a lot of challenges to convince her own parents she says:

“My father did not speak to me. As for my mother, she cried non- stop for three whole days. Things came to a head when, in a fit of anger, she sheared off some of my hair. I could take it no longer. I drowned my sorrow by starting to work for the hijra community.”

(Tripathi 49-50)

The culture of everyday life works only when it is practiced by our social values, saying this it can be claimed that the kind of culture of the normative society that we live in has some preconceived notion towards sexual identity. It always works in binaries and polarization. As Fiske argues in *Cultural Studies and the Culture of Everyday Life*,

“The culture of Everyday life works only to the extent that it is imbricated into its immediate historical and social setting. This materiality of popular culture is directly related to economic materiality of the condition of oppression. Under these circumstances, social experience and therefore, culture is inescapably material; dinstantiation is an unattainable luxury. The culture of everyday life is some concrete, contextualized, and lived just as deprivation is concrete, contextualized, and lived. It is, therefore, a particularly difficult object of academic investigation”. (Fiske)

Over the last seventy-five years transgender's have used the medium of literature, especially life writing as a genre not only to speak about their deeper self but also to clarify and educate others about their lives. This is a great effort taken on their behalf to gain greater acceptance in society. The word “Hijra” for Laxmi is much more dignified term. Laxmi explains the origins of the word to us- “The word Hijra is derived from ‘Hijra,’ which means a journey to find one’s true self and I went through this whole process of self –discovery to self -recognition and fighting for my gender identity” (30).

Therefore, Laxmi prefers “Hijra” over “Trans” and there is a reason for it. Laxmi claims:

“The word ‘trans’ is inadequate in every sense and especially in the Indian context. Here the Kinnars and Hijras have been part of our history and ancient text like ‘Ramayana’ ‘Mahabharata’, and others. The Hijra or the Kinnara community follow the ‘Guru-Chela’ Parampara and have certain rules, rituals and customs. And none of this can be described by the western equivalent ‘transes.” (31)

Judith Butler, in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, writes:

“Gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free- floating attributes . . . the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. . . . Gender proves to be performative- that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In these 4 senses, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed”. (33)

Likewise, gender performativity is related to the idea of gender identity in society, whereby certain codes of behaviour are according to gender. Which is learnt both consciously and ingrained unconsciously on the psyche of the individual, who is aware that they are performing a gender role but accept the gender identity assigned to them by their own behaviour or performance. This autobiography exemplifies the journey of a transgender who underwent innumerable sufferings but ultimately decided to live life with her head high. However, in this autobiographical text, Laxmi constructs her own identity as third sex and leads the movement of voice to voiceless and space for dislocated community. Her struggles construct the separate identified group in the society where one’s identity is not obtained by sex but by one’s act of

socialization and attributes. By documenting oral narratives as of cultural artifacts, Laxmi has created transgendered identity by means of consistent revolt against mainstream hegemony.

According to the rules of the hijra community,

“one must break all ties from their family or at least stay away from their biological family, with their guru or chelas. Laxmi did not accept this and continued to stay with her family which caused Lataguru to be miffed with her. Even Laxmi’s activism and her growing celebrity status alarmed her guru and she tried to create obstacles in her path. In contrast to Laxmi’s relationship with Lataguru is Laxmi’s relationship with her own chelas. Both the relationships are quite contrasting as Laxmi empowers her chelas as well as all others hijras. ...Here the condition is even worse than that of Dalits or various tribal groups. The life of discrimination and deprivation that the hijras live in India is unimaginable. Laxmi as a hijra is very different from the general hijra community”.
(Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal)

Number of theorists have tried to theorise the everyday from a gendered perspectives thereby highlighting the politics of representation in everyday status where sexually minor people occupy the status of Object. Gendered experiences of everyday life explain the unique characteristics of everyday life to generate unique socio-cultural as well as political forms.

“Although the notion of everyday life as multiform, multidimensional has always been an integral part of our cultural experience, the essence of everyday life, i.e. the “everydayness of everyday life”
(Highmore, 1Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction)

The last section of the autobiography is titled as Manthan: The Churning of the Laxami. It refers to the Hindu Mythology of the churning of the ocean, in which the gods and the demons churn the ocean to obtain the nectar of the immortality. Laxami sees her own struggle as a kind of churning process through and empowering. She concludes the book with the realisation that in the life ahead continue, and new Laxami will emerge. Again re-reading this whole event from the autobiography of Laxami it can be examined that how , in everyday life ‘Myth’ also stands for its relevance in the life of the transgenders be it the myth of Shikhandi, Mohini or any other transgender character stands for the significance of identity construction.

Delimitation of The Study

The primary limitation of the paper appears to be the primary source that paper aims at. Objectification of all the transgenders in India through only one autobiographical account can be consider as limitation in sample selection of the paper. Although the researcher has here reviewed other autobiographical account of the transgenders exist in India, therefore some of the findings that are visible through the paper can be further help to the future researchers working in the area.

Scope for Future Investigations

Though there have been enough studies available on the subject still several scope remains to investigate that how narratives can work as a catalyst to project a good example of everyday struggle and challenges faced by transgender and help to establish a healthy inclusive environment. Moreover, the theorizing Everydayness in the gender(ed) consciousness of cultural practices further research can be extended.

Conclusion:

Highlighting the Importance of support system such as family, friends, and education in everyday life for the upliftment of transgenders towards the journey of self-discovery. Summing up the whole discussion it can be drawn that everyday resistance in the life of transgender as presented through the autobiographical account assert her identity that results the anger, due to various psycho, physiological, social crisis and ultimately lead up to showing anger through several kind of 'unaccepted' (in terms of normative everyday culture) actions. Thus, the research study conducted through the given paper finds the relevance of Everyday culture in establishing the various identity in the heteronormative society. Moreover theorizing Everyday provides multidimensional insights into the lives of transgenders.

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