

The Plight of Third Gender and Quest for Identity in the Narrative ‘Me Hijra Me Laxmi’

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Abstract:

Since the dawn of time, the callous and inhuman tradition of discriminating against the third gender has been prevalent in almost every society and every part of the world, thus plunging these poor souls into a vast ocean of unspeakable agony and miseries. In spite of many sensitive authors, poets and activists striving to raise their voice for them, this queer community's predicament remains pretty much the same, courtesy a disheartening lack of probing and insightful literature delineating their horrifying woes. The present paper is a small attempt to highlight the predicament of the third gender by studying, analysing and diving deep into their tormenting grievances. This paper also aims to employ the queer lens in order to fathom as well as provide a probing insight into the hijra community's genuinely unsettling dilemma regarding their social standing. Finally, this paper outlines the origin of the queer theory, while also presenting a comparative analysis of the queer in the Indian context. And then, using its explained queer theoretical approach, this paper studies the woeful narrative of Laxminarayan Tripathi, thus highlighting the plight of the third gender and giving a screeching wake up call to a sleeping society to act before it's too late.

Keywords — hijra, queer, identity, third gender, plight, guru, chela

INTRODUCTION

There has been a surge in recent years in the popularity of writing about transgender people and their lives. Their (transgenders') autobiographies offer readers an empathetic perspective. The Hijras' lives and issues have been discussed in writing even by non-hetrosexual people. The identity of a hijra or transgender person, or one who is gay, lesbian or bisexual, is typically referred to as 'third gender' at present. As a result, having the identity of "Hijra" becomes a problem in our society. The objective of this paper is to examine Laxmi from the standpoint of identity. How she dealt with issues of identity in society. People forget that modernity is not to

blame for the existence of transgender people. It was left to human subsistence. We can even trace the history of Hijra in the two great epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata. Shikhandi was an important character in the epic Mahabharata. Transgender people, like everyone else, are part of society. Transgender studies, for the same reason, raise reader awareness of transgenders, gay and lesbians, and biosexuals, as well as their rights. Many transgender people now work as social workers and campaigners.

Our understanding of Hijras as individuals and how they shape their personalities as Hijras is enriched through Laxmi's autobiography. In addition to

dispelling myths about the Hijras, her autobiography also helps us throw away our prejudices. Like us, Hijras are also ordinary people. Society treats them unfairly, humiliates them, and assaults them continuously throughout their lives. Usually Hijras, who are third-gendered, spend their lives in a state of dilemma and questioning who they are. As a result, sometimes they do not consider themselves part of society because of the way people perceive them.

Laxminarayan Tripathi's autobiography, *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* is about a transgender activist. Despite being a transgender person, Laxminarayan Tripathi lives a better and more graceful life than the ordinary man or woman. No other transgender person has the courage and determination to live such a respectable life. It became possible because of her education, free will, and the support of her biological parents to do whatever she wanted. That is why she has dedicated her autobiography to her parents. Her dedication reads:

*“To my beloved parents
who have been my guiding light through the
highs and lows of my existence.
For standing by and making Laxmi who she is
today.”*

Almost all parents want to get rid of their child as soon as they learn about the child's gender defect. In most cases, the child is beaten so severely that he runs away from home or is handed over to any Hijra community. Sometimes the child is beaten brutally and even murdered, or poisoned and cremated out of sight of the public. Running away from home or being caught in the hands of any Hijra community marks the beginning of this hapless child's painful struggle and exposure to a series of tortures in this virulent and unrelenting world. His life becomes hellish and perilous.

Concerning transgender issues, there is a long list of them that the government should address as soon as possible. Some of these issues may be considered discrimination based on gender orientation. Many unjust features exist, such as a lack of legal protection, poverty, harassment and stigma, anti-

transgender violence, aversion to health care, identity documents, housing and homelessness, unemployment, economic injustice, police persecution, unjust prisons, and negligence.

Laxmi's visit to the United Nations for the UNGASS (United Nations General Assembly Special Session) on a G4 visa was an eye-opening experience for her. She saw transgender people in America as more settled than those in India. They have a wide range of applications in a variety of areas of life. She correctly stated-

“Here (in America) trans-men and trans-women are not obliged to live in ghettos and gated communities, as they possibly are everywhere else in the world. Transgender people are to be found in virtually every profession in New York, be it medicine, law, or IT. Contrast that with 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 finger 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.”

Changes in social opinion and people's mindsets are critical in providing transgender people with a life and a status of dignity. The marginalisation of transgender people is a slur on humanity. Every creature and living being has the right to exist in this universe. Because human development is anthropocentric, it is absurd to say that a transgender person is left behind to lag despite having the same features as a man and a woman, with the exception of a deformed venereal.

Laxmi places a high value on activism. She would have vanished in the innumerable worlds of obscurity with unaccounted annals if she had been degage from activist artisan. Because of her dedication and emotional adherence to the work, she emerges as a fantastic activist who has fetched name, fame, glamour, a favourable public reputation, and an extremely coveted platform for herself, as well as numerous transgender and sex-

work people who benefit from her sincere and earnest efforts. During her activist days, she once went to a red-light district with some delegates who wanted to evaluate DWS's work. The deplorable plight and picture she has painted of sex workers and transgender people can break anyone's heart. She writes:

“The rooms in which the prostitutes lived and worked were veritable pigeonholes, devoid of air and light. But each pigeon hole was further partitioned off to accommodate multiple clients. A foul smell emanated from the rooms. In these conditions, the girl sold sex. This baffled me, for I always thought of sex could only be pleasurable when the settings were pretty.”

When she saw the worst conditions, her head gyrated and the activist in her stirred fiercely, and she resolved to change the system on her own. Laxmi seems to have been a object of custody dispute between Lataguru and her parents. Lataguru, as the head of the hijra community, wanted Laxmi to join and follow the hijra community, abandoning her mainstream family and society. While Laxmi's parents refused to keep her away. They desired to raise Laxmi in their own home. Lataguru and Laxmi's parents were in a tug of war. Nobody wanted to abandon her. Lataguru wanted to incapacitate Laxmi and her glamorous entourage and nip her flying wings to prevent her from flying and walking on the path of the hijra community, but Lataguru's efforts were futile. Lataguru chastised her and said:

“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.”

Laxmi's expression of her feelings about Lataguru and her own biological parents is significant. She asserts:

“I did not want to live in a hijra ghetto. I wanted to be Raju to my parents; Raju, their eldest son.

Though my family had reservations about my becoming hijra, they did not turn into monster like the families of some other hijras.”

Lataguru was a woman who used feline tactics. In any case, she didn't want to say goodbye. She moved into the same building where Laxmi was living. She was always keeping a close eye on Laxmi. Her publicity, as well as her 'modus vivendi' and 'modus operandi,' were never approved by her. She was possessive and traditional, believing that a hijra had no right to remain with her family. She chided Laxmi as if she were a harsh guru. “*You know nothing of hijra behaviour. Do you even keep tabs on your disciples? They do as they please and earn us a bad name. Live with me I will initiate you into hijra culture.*”

The emotional side of a transgender people is always ignored. They are desperate to become mothers. They fantasise about being female and develop maternal instincts. Laxmi describes a photo exhibition with the caption ‘What Are You?’ in her book. And some hijras were asked what they wanted to be if they weren't hijras. Malini, a hijra, expressed a desire to become a mother. Laxmi is a charismatic character with an unwavering and larger-than-life queer personality. When Laxmi is asked what she wants to be, she says (if not hijra). She replied, “*I would like to be Cleopatra. Cleopatra has always fascinated me. This iconic queen of Egypt, the epitome of beauty and brains, seduced no less a king than Julius Caesar...I adored Cleopatra's zest for life. She was my role model.*”

She is an activist and an avant-garde with a daring spirit. She organised a national-level hijra beauty pageant in India. This event was dubbed "The Indian Super Queen Contest" by her. It was on par with a Miss India or Miss World pageant. It was only open to transgender people. How did Laxmi come up with the idea? Let us go over her words.

“Hijras are considered to be ugly people. I wanted to reverse that mindset. And I thought of doing it by organizing a beauty pageant for the members of my

community. *If there are Miss India and Miss Universe contests for women, why not for hijras, I asked myself.*”

Many obstacles arose in the course of organising the event, but she refused to give up, whether it was a financial issue or her father's illness. She remained steadfast in the face of adversity, much like an unyielding and obstinate personality.

The transgender problem is easily solved if the transgender child lives with the family as a disabled and mentally retarded member of the family. The child should be given a proper education and a pleasant environment, as well as be treated with love and affection at home and outside of the home. Transgender attitudes and social perceptions should be altered as well. People will have to abandon their prejudices against them and treat and behave in accordance with their status as erstwhile human beings. There are numerous laws in place to protect and uplift transgender people in mainstream society, but their implementation has been delayed in some way. It should be done sincerely and candidly within the time frame.

CONCLUSION

Laxmi emphasises in her autobiography that being a hijra is a choice. It is critical to understand that sex and gender are distinct concepts. The hijras' sexual binaries differ significantly from those of other groups such as homosexuals and transgenders. Laxmi's autobiography reveals the twists and turns of a hijra's life. It also draws attention to the fact that, despite the Supreme Court's decision giving the 'Third Gender' an identity, life has not been easy for these people. Only a few hijras, such as Laxmi, have been able to turn the tables and push themselves towards empowerment. The majority of her community's fate is still based on daily struggles for identity and survival. In the words of Nivedita Menon, the daily struggles of a hijra can be summed up:

“The identity of the hijras is not in question here. Nor is the fact that hijras 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 childbirths) in order to make a living. They are routinely harassed by police and physically threatened and/or assaulted under the umbrella of Section 377.”

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