

The SPL Journal of Literary Hermeneutics

A Biannual International Journal of Independent Critical Thinking
Double-blind Peer-reviewed and Open Access Journal in English



Vol. 4 Issue 2 Monsoon Edition 2024 e-ISSN 2583-1674 Page no. 55-64

www.literaryhrm.org
www.cavemarkpublications.com



Quest for Identity: Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's Me Hijra Me Laxmi

Naveen Kumar Vishwakarma

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-3287-6857>

Corresponding Author: Naveen Kumar Vishwakarma, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Baiswara Degree College, Lalganj, Raebareli, nkv1977@gmail.com

Research Article

Keywords:

Alienation, humiliation, symbol of change, creation of identity, personal narrative

Article History

Received:

July 11, 2024

Revised:

July 25, 2024

Accepted:

July 30, 2024



ISSN 2583-1674 (SPL-JLH)



Abstract

Aim: The present research paper aims to examine the quest for identity and creation of identity through individual effort in the lives of the transgender people. Role of people in society in the plight of marginalized transgender community is critically evaluated through the autobiographical literary texture Me Hijra Me Laxmi. The paper also seeks to critically study the psychological trauma of the transgender when they are denied of fundamental opportunities like other human beings.

Methodology and Approaches: Critical and analytical methods have been applied in the present research paper examining the reasons and effects of biased attitude regarding transgender. Expectations and attitudes have been kept in mind in analyzing socially and psychologically with a view to find out the ways for betterment in the lives of transgender people.

Outcome: Exclusion from the society is the root cause of suffering of transgender people in the society is the outcome of the present research paper. It is education that is of great significance to resolve the problem and bring a change in the existing situation in the society.

Conclusion and Suggestion: In conclusion it is found that individual is also responsible for happiness and sorrow. As suggestion it can be pointed out that education, inclusion, positive attitude, personal effort, opportunities in every walk of life among others will be successful pillars in making the life as human beings for transgender people.

*Correspondence: Naveen Kumar Vishwakarma, nkv1977@gmail.com © (2024) All rights are reserved with the author (s) published by CaveMark Publications. This is an Open Access Article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any form or medium, provided that the original work is properly cited or acknowledged. This paper is available online on www.literaryhrm.org and it was published by CaveMark Publications, India.

As Hijra, we live ordinary lives, like everyone else. Like underdog, we are respected by nobody. Except for the newly introduced Aadhar card we have no aadhar card or official recognition or support from any quarter whatsoever. We are thus destute estraned from family and ostracized by society, people couldn't care how we earn our livelihood or where our next meal comes. (Tripathi 155)

Following the steps of Art for Life's sake, daring and challenging steps have been taken by writers like Laxmi Narayan Tripathi in depiction of their life stories pregnant with alienation and humiliation like thematic texture in the form of autobiographies. She has made a place for herself along with her community, that is at margin, defined as others not in the mainstream, by virtue of her own endeavours and daring steps although she has to face a number of difficulties that she mentions in her autobiography entitled *Me Hijra Me Laxmi*, which is not only a memoir but also a book to ignite the fire to work for survival as well as identity. She fights, she wins, she accepts the truth and she creates identity, dignity and space for herself. Like other works of art, transgender autobiography is a work expressing the transgender personal narrative. To tell their stories and show the wound given to them only because of their birth in this community and nothing else, they write in the form of autobiography that is full of firsthand experience arousing our sympathy for them and a need to bring change. With the help of their writing they wish to attract our attention to their marginal and excluded life so that society can know their trauma and change the attitude towards them and extend helping hands in the name of humanity.

Moreover, it is the purpose of their writing to overcome crisis of identity as well. They are frank, bold, expressive, in the treatment of subject matter, although in their own metaphors and style, like Kamala Das, the feminist poet of Indian English Poetry, known for her candid and bold expression of taboo themes in fighting for the better lives of women. It is the aspiration of Laxmi to live as a lady as other ladies live their lives with their dreams and desires with dignity. Equality for all is the idea that she pleads through her writings. Inequality in the social structure has been lashed out by her just as Mulk Raj Anand is the advocate

of equality for suppressed and downtrodden people in his novels and stories. Her plead is that transgender individuals are normal human beings with emotions and dreams of living like other people in society. She has successfully presented the realistic image of predicament of transgender with her artistic competence that is not only remarkable but also commendable as it is concerned with marginalizing and exploiting culture of so called cultured. She has the position of transgender rights campaigner, deserves high regard for her social work and beautiful representation of her community in art.

It is worth mentioning that queer individuals have been living on the peripherals of the society every now and then realizing their existential cut off and meaninglessness for their identity assigned by society on the basis of their being transgender for which they themselves cannot be accused. Their life is metaphor of struggle from existence to identity. They are not accepted nor included in the society. It is observed that they are of the perception that if society neglects, they don't bother about societal neglect. Nor they try to associate them with the people of society. Very minute and appealing details about the anguish of transgender like Laxmi have been presented realistically by Laxmi who is pained to observe their pitiable condition. Though Laxmi urges the people to become more resilient towards the third gender, yet they need to be included in society. Because they are also human beings like other people, they also deserve to be treated as human beings.

Through the work of Autobiography Laxmi seems to inspire the transgender people not to be humiliated, insulted or submit them to their lot. Here we can find a will to fight with destiny or destined role like that of Michael Henchard of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Though she was born like other transgender, yet she created her own identity as social activist among others by negating the assigned role and life of margin to the transgender people. Her life story individually inspires them to realize their identity and potentials. In our country this fact cannot be denied that Hijras are condemned, on a regular basis, people experience rampant prejudice and have their fundamental rights infringed. A Revati states in this connection in her autobiography entitled *The Truth About*

Me: A Hijra Life Story, “we are harassed by parents, teachers, peers, and the police. The media and law only highlight our involvement in street based sex work and begging. Why don’t you highlight some of our pressing needs and concerns and multiple violations and oppressions we experience?” (A. Revathi 62) They go through the fear of anything and everything throughout their lives. They have no support from family, friends and the society; they suffer from gender identity disorder. Suffering, hooting, ridiculing, exclusion along with marginalization are identified with this third gender against which they cannot ‘say no’ also in heterosexual society. Harassment, sham, rejection, sexual assault, rape and molestation are done to them by so called civilized people in the society and to their dismay they rarely get justice and protection either by police or by law only because they are transgender people. And moreover, they cannot expose it as well if it is done in the family if they are there like Laxmi who also was victimized by friends and others. Tripathi talks about her own exploitation and molestation:

I did not tell anyone about the ugly incident. Perhaps the guy’s threats scared me again. But a few days later, he molested me again and then again. He was accompanied by his friends and all of them took turns to violate me. The physical and mental torture I went through in indescribable. But I did not say any word to anyone, either then or later. I kept my feelings battled. (Tripathi 6)

In *A Life in Trans Activism*, A Revathi points out very frankly that by writing such autobiographical works, they wish to deal with oppression done to them because of their gender. In fact, they find it unbearable to survive in such situation when they are marginalized and oppressed. Through their presentation in the form of writing, they seem to compel us to think of them and their betterment, whatever affects the hijra community also affects me personally. It was impossible for me to look the other way or keep quite. Writing was the most effective tool to deal with the oppression. (Revathi 79)

In *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, the playwright Mahesh Dattani has portrayed the same situation of injustice and treatment of police to the third

gender people very minutely and critically with realistic touch. We come across some situations in the play that indicate the inhumanistic behavior of the police towards the transgender. They claim that these people deserve beating and torture. In murder there is no role of Anarkali but she has been jailed and when she was about to be approached by the social activist Uma who is having a research over the condition of the eunuchs. She goes to the prison to note and know their response. The following is very appealing and revealing the condition of transgender in the society and among authorities when the policeman says that he will beat her if she is not going to answer the question of Uma or doesn't take interest in talking with Uma:

Uma: Will she talk to me?

Munuswamy: (Chuckling). She! Of course it will talk to you.

We will beat it up if it doesn't (Dattani 230)

Apart from violence done to them it is also pointed out by Dattani that 'it' is used for them neither male identity nor female identity. Here it refers as non-living, not human beings, not with emotions and passions. Their cases are either ignored or not taken seriously. In conversation with Uma, Munswamy says that there are lots of others cases like murder cases in which man killed wife, wife killed man's beloved, brother murdered brother. But she is interested only in case of hijra. A social critic Dattani has raised issues like Revati and Tripathi among others to draw the attention of people to their plight. In the play Dattani portrays the dejected dilemma of isolated hijra community. The play concerns murder mystery of a hijra named Kamla who is killed soon after marriage with Subbu. Suspense is maintained as who killed her? Who is the killer? Why did he kill? And the mystery of Kamala's murder becomes complicated with the shift of suspense from one person to another. In the end we confront a person whom we cannot suspect a killer. But to the dismay of readers it presented that even after mystery is resolved the real murdered will not be punished.

After a close examination of the historical situation of the transgender we find that for centuries transgender are deliberately marginalized, persecuted and stigmatized for their gender incongruity. Discrimination, humiliation and violence

throughout their life is their lot that never escape them and they cannot go beyond this border made for them by the society. They are not only despised by the mainstream society and are bound to undergo physical and psychological abuses but also. They are excluded from the society and are treated as outsiders though they like others have every right to live the way they want to. Their parents disown them sometimes because of society and personal reasons when they get to know about their gender identity. Laxmi narrates the reality of the Indian society as:

It was unacceptable for my parents that their own son should become a hijra. Supermen are okay as long they are born to others. No one wants supermen in their homes. My parents wanted me to lead a normal life. They wanted me to get married and beget children. My grandfather, Harisharan Tiwari was such an erudite scholar; he knew the Vedas and Upanishads by heart and I, his grandson, was a hijra! Now tongues would wag even more than before. My parents would scarcely be able to leave the house. They were torn between the demands of the society and the love of their son. (Tripathi 49)

Critical exploration reveals that oppressed groups are built ontologically as the antithesis of dominant heteronormativity i.e. the formation among both heterosexuals and homosexuals is predicated on a dualistic connection that maintains heterosexuality as that of the sole means of understanding the world. Writers are unable to explore such matters due to massive stigma against any sort of intimacy that is beyond the bounds of heteronormative attitude. Expressing about her consciousness of her gender Laxmi says "...I came to the conclusion that I wasn't a boy. I was a girl... So how could I call myself a girl?" (Tripathi 22) here it is considerable question that where could she put herself as a child to boys or to girls whereas she was trying to identify herself biologically. But to her suffering and struggle she was without the essence of a girl by birth. She could not call herself a girl and such frank and realistic acceptance and expression make this autobiography touching and demanding our attention towards transgender community compelling us to think their childhood that is full of pain, agony and

alienation when a child needs love and care. How difficult is it for Tripathi like children to cope with such critical situations? What will be their mental condition when they come to realize that they are neither male nor female and because of this they would be treated in different way in their life. It is curse to them but what was done by Laxmi Narayan Tripathi was not easy way to adopt for others also. There is very little space in the society that let them grow or develop out of their bracketed space. Speaking about opportunities in jobs and treatment of the employer, A Revati very frankly comments:

Because of the prejudices and stereotypes held by many employers within India, transgender people are often discriminated against in the formal sphere. If a man comes in for an interview, and his documentation still has an F sex marker, the employer will know that he is transgender and all prejudices and stereotypes that they hold will then apply to the man searching for a job. (A Rewati.)

Needless to say that Indian writers have taken bold measures to reveal the underlying aspects in Indian community and expose sexual practices that cross heterosexual social or metaphorical bounds. In this narrative there is portrayal of a gradual progression in Laxmi's life that ranges from Laxminarayan Tripathi to Laxmi (which is her wish to be female like others)

What strikes the readers most is Laxmi's stark, ingenuous honesty about herself, she is very clear about presenting the bitter as well as sweet experience, she doesn't bother while criticizing people and society. Rather than avoiding or escaping she is found expressing that could be kept in dark. Of her achievements also she's utmost critical and proud as this is the result of her hard work though she has to fight adverse conditions. Laxmi has achieved for the hijras in the matter of a couple decades what would otherwise have taken over a century. Her identity is one of the faces of those who are accepted as successful persons. While reading this text, one could feel overjoyed with each of her triumph and saddened by each hardship. Her expression is convincing, touching, critical and above all inspiring to those who are marginalized by society for no reason except inhuman attitudes. This seems the point that day by day autobiographies are gaining

currency among the readers. Concerning identities, they are writing their accounts of transgender masculinity and transgender femininity. Judith Butler is of the opinion “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 men or that ‘women’ will interpret only female bodies” (Butler 10). It is found that through their writing they are voicing for subverting gender binaries and demands inclusion and recognition within the heteronormative traditions of family and marriage. Laxmi intends that myths about transgender should be broken and stereotypes governing the average onlooker’s perception of hijras needs to be questioned and changed. There is another activist who is a successful writer also creating her own identity, Kalki Subramanian who says:

I have recently released a book called “We Are Not the Others”, which offers a candid and heartfelt depiction of various experiences from my own life and those of transgender individuals I have known since childhood. The book comprises a combination of poetry, monologues, essays and illustrations accompanying each piece. I am delighted to share that several poems from the book have been incorporated into the educational curriculum of numerous colleges. (Subramanian)

This change is her urge artistically. Texts like Me Hijra Me Laxmi intends and are successful also in promoting the formation of identities through hand work earned achievements. Such texts are also of great value in changing the perception about the along with presenting their critical and pathetic social and economic troubles caused by their gender and exclusion.

A close examination of the personality of Laxmi hints that she wanted to be true to self, to lead and live a life of her own, according to herself designed and assigned by herself not by others in the name of society or gender, perfect or imperfect, suitable or unsuitable to society. Here it can be said that she was corresponding to the idea of Self Reliance of R. W. Emerson the great American poet and transcendentalist. He is of the opinion what I must do is all that concerns me, not what people think. This rule, equally arduous in actual and in intellectual life, may serve for the whole distinction between greatness and meanness. It is the

harder, because you will always find those who think they know what is your duty better than you know it. It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crows keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude. This provided her an opportunity to develop as well as sooth herself as any art is full of transporting power. Referring to her dancing as therapy to her mental turmoil she writes, I began to take lessons in dancing from a professional dance teacher. Miss Menon, my teacher at Sighania school, was right. Dancing transported me to another world where I could be my true self. (Tripathi 23)

In the Autobiography *Me Laxmi, Me Hijra*, we find that Laxmi is a symbol of inspiration to others because of her dignified life that was not gifted by anyone but is the result of her confidence and saying 'no' to the inflicted identity and roles and creating of her own identity with contribution to bettering the life of others. No doubt, she is the symbol of change, creator of identity, victory for many who have quest for identity. We can feel with expression by Tripathy- 'we are respected by nobody.' (155) Kalki Subramanian says: "I firmly believe that if you choose social work as your profession, remember that you need to hone your skill consistently, you need to be very good at languages, non-violent communication, compassion, and knowledge in the field. It is a very soul satisfying profession where you can use all your skills."

Works Cited and Consulted

- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. Routledge, 1990.
- Dattani, Mahesh. *Mahesh Dattani's Collected Plays* vol. 2, Penguin books published, 2005
- Menon, Nivedita. *Seeing Like a Feminist*. Zubaan, 2012.
- Revathi, A. *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*. Penguin, 2010.6. Revathi, *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*. Penguin, 2010.
- Reid, Author Lindsey. Salvaged Pages: Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaust – UAB Institute for Human Rights Blog. 12 Oct. 2022, sites.uab.edu/humanrights/2022/10/12/the-economic-status-of-transgender-people-in-india/s.
- Stryker, Susan and Stephen Whittle. *The Transgender Studies Reader*. Routledge, 2006.
- Subramanian, Kalki. *We Are Not the Others: Reflections of a Transgender Artist*. Notion Press, 2021.
- Tripathi, Laxminarayan. *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*. Oxford University Press, 2015
- Vanita, Ruth and Saleem Kidwai (ed.) *Same-Sex Love in India – A Literary History*. Penguin Books, 2008.
- WAHStory. “Founder - Sahodari Foundation | Transgender Rights Activist | Artist and Author | Kalki Subramaniam | WAHStory.” WAHStory.com, www.wahstory.com/story/founder-sahodari-foundation-transgender-rights-activist-artist-author-kalki-subramaniam.

Naveen Kumar Vishwakarma

Dr. Naveen Kumar Vishwakarma is an Assistant Professor in the department of English Baiswara Degree College, Lalganj, Raebareli. His area of interest is Indian English Novels and culture studies. He has presented research papers in National and International seminars on different titles of contemporary contexts. His papers have been published in reputed journals.