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Transgender World: A Reading of *Me Laxmi, Me Hijra* and the *Truth About Me*

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Abstract

This paper explores the lived experiences, struggles, and triumphs of the Hijra community in India through the autobiographical narratives of A. Revathi and Laxmi Narayan Tripathi. These memoirs—*The Truth About Me* and *Me Laxmi, Me Hijra*—offer firsthand insights into the lives of individuals who identify outside the binary gender framework. Through their personal journeys, both authors address themes of gender identity, social exclusion, trauma, and empowerment. The study emphasizes the intersectionality of caste, gender, and socioeconomic status in shaping the marginalization experienced by Hijras and highlights their resistance through activism and self-representation in literature and public life.

Keywords

Hijra community, gender identity, social exclusion, autobiography, marginalization, activism, intersectionality, transgender rights, Indian society

I. Introduction

In South Asia, particularly India, the Hijra community occupies a complex socio-cultural space. Often categorized as a "third gender," Hijras include individuals who may be intersex, transgender, or identify outside the male-female binary. Their existence is documented both in ancient scriptures and in modern sociopolitical discourses. Despite their historical presence, Hijras have been marginalized, stigmatized, and subjected to systemic discrimination in all areas of life, including employment, education, healthcare, and public space access.

Two landmark autobiographies, *The Truth About Me* by A. Revathi and *Me Laxmi, Me Hijra* by Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, bring forward authentic voices from within the community. These works provide an in-depth exploration of the personal and collective challenges Hijras face, their internal journeys of identity and self-acceptance, and their external struggles against societal prejudice.

II. Discussion

Gender, Identity, and Self-Discovery

Both Revathi and Laxmi trace their awareness of being "different" from an early age, marked by a mismatch between their inner identity and their assigned gender roles. Revathi's story is steeped in pain, rejection, and a longing for recognition, while Laxmi's journey, though fraught with struggles, exudes a tone of pride and self-celebration.

Revathi's discomfort with her male identity leads her to seek refuge in the Hijra community, where she begins her journey of self-affirmation. Laxmi, although not entirely rejected by her family, finds deeper identity validation through her affiliation with the Hijra gharanas and her rise as a public figure. Both memoirs stress that gender identity is not merely about physical transition but involves emotional resilience, societal confrontation, and spiritual affirmation.

Rejection, Acceptance, and Family Dynamics

The relationship with their biological families represents a microcosm of societal attitudes toward gender nonconformity. Revathi faces severe rejection and violence, forcing her to leave home. Laxmi, in contrast, maintains a complicated yet enduring relationship with her family, marked by initial resistance and eventual partial acceptance.

Chosen families within the Hijra community offer an alternative support system through guru-chela dynamics, providing a structure for belonging and survival. Yet, these relationships are not devoid of exploitation, highlighting internal community hierarchies and economic dependencies.

Social Stigma and Marginalization

Hijras continue to face social exclusion rooted in religious taboos, legal neglect, and cultural stereotypes. Revathi recounts frequent abuse and denial of access to basic rights, while Laxmi exposes societal hypocrisy that reveres Hijras in rituals but shuns them otherwise. Public spaces become arenas of humiliation, while economic opportunities are restricted to informal and stigmatized sectors like begging and sex work.

Despite the Supreme Court's 2014 NALSA judgment recognizing the third gender, societal acceptance remains elusive. The autobiographies stress the gap between legal recognition and lived reality.

Violence and Exploitation

Systemic and interpersonal violence is a recurring theme. Revathi's life story includes graphic accounts of sexual and physical abuse, police brutality, and societal scorn. Laxmi too describes episodes of public harassment and victimization. Both authors underline how poverty and social ostracization push many Hijras into precarious livelihoods, where vulnerability to exploitation is heightened.

Advocacy and Resistance

Laxmi's narrative shines in its depiction of activism. Her participation in national and international forums, media appearances, and legal advocacy have been pivotal in reshaping the image of Hijras in contemporary discourse. Revathi, through her literary and organizational work, champions transgender rights and brings visibility to the community's struggles.

Both memoirs highlight how reclaiming narratives through literature can be a form of resistance. Their stories move beyond personal pain to communal empowerment.

Intersectionality of Oppression

Revathi's identity as a Dalit Hijra exposes multiple layers of oppression based on caste, gender, class, and geography. Her experiences underscore Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, showing how overlapping identities compound discrimination. Laxmi's privileged background allows for different opportunities but does not insulate her from gender-based stigma.

Together, these stories show how the hijra identity cannot be understood in isolation but must be examined through the lens of intersecting social categories.

Challenging Stereotypes and Representation

Both authors actively challenge the narrow perceptions of Hijras as mere objects of superstition or sexualized beings. Laxmi redefines femininity and empowerment through her bold public presence, while Revathi disrupts hegemonic narratives by offering an unfiltered account of marginalization.

Their literary contributions form part of a broader corpus of queer and Dalit literature that destabilizes normative assumptions about gender, identity, and societal roles.

Comparison with Dalit Marginalization

Both Hijras and Dalits share histories of systemic exclusion and oppression. Though rooted in different axes—gender versus caste—their struggles for dignity and justice overlap significantly. The literature argues that both communities represent "minor literature," challenging mainstream social discourses. However, while Dalits benefit from more extensive structural protections (like reservations), Hijras still battle for fundamental recognition.

III. Conclusion

Hijras in India continue to face formidable barriers to equality and dignity. Despite legal recognition as a third gender, the community remains socially ostracized and economically marginalized. Autobiographical narratives by A. Revathi and Laxmi Narayan Tripathi are vital in documenting the lived realities of Hijras and serve as powerful tools for advocacy and reform.

These stories illuminate how individual resilience, community kinship, and public activism can converge to challenge dominant narratives and advocate for systemic change. They call upon policymakers, educators, media, and society at large to dismantle prejudice and create inclusive environments where all gender identities are respected.

Recognizing Hijras as full citizens requires more than symbolic inclusion—it necessitates a transformation in public attitudes, institutional practices, and cultural understandings of gender. Their voices, once silenced or misrepresented, now resonate powerfully in India's evolving socio-political landscape.

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