

Real Life Instances of the Gender Dysphoria

Community in A. Revathi's

Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story

A.Bercina Fernando

M. Phil. English,

St. Mary's College (Autonomous), Thoothukudi,

Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli

bercina97@gmail.com

Abstract

India with its rich population has more than five lakh hijras living in it. People belonging to the Hijra Community undergo triple marginalization. They are geographically marginalized having no place to call home where they feel loved, accepted and secured. They are also economically marginalized. They are forced to earn their livelihood by singing 'badhai' songs on ceremonial occasions and are occasionally engaged in sex. They are also marginalized in socio-political context, and are forced to live in the fringes of the society. The trauma, pain and agony that these people undergo are brought to light by A.Revathi in her autobiographical novel, *Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*. This paper focuses on how Revathi fights against all odds, how she stands against all obstacles and boldly raises her voice for the Hijra Community admits cruelty, ridicule and shame. She fights for the rights of the Hijra Community and this seems to be a revolutionary step to break all the social and cultural politics of gender and introducing the 'third sex'.

Keywords - Discrimination, exclusion, heteronormative society, hijra, identity construction

A. Revathi, a transgendered woman, is a Bangalore based writer who boldly raises her voice for the rights of the Hijra Community. The term '*hijra*' refers to "a transgendered person, a physiological male who adopts a feminine gender identity, women's clothing and other feminine gender roles" (Samanta 220). There are nearly five lakh hijras in India. Although the Supreme Court accepted 'Hijras' as 'Third Gender', they find it hard to exercise their basic rights. The traumatic events they undergo in academic institution and workplace leave a negative impact in their hearts and minds. They find it hard to move forward in life as they are abused emotionally, physically, sexually and mentally. Constructing an identity is a herculean task as they are not allowed to raise their voice against the oppression and injustice done to them. They are denied certain privileges that a normal human can enjoy. In this specific autobiography, *The Truth about Me*, Revathi shares with us the troubles she faced and the pains of being marginalized in the gender oriented society. She brings to light the pain, trauma and agony of being forced to live in the fringes of the society.

A. Revathi, initially named as Doraisamy, was born as the youngest in the family. Although he was a boy he grew up timid and bashful. He longed to dress up like girls and perform activities assigned for them. The thought of being a girl haunted him. "In class, I would sit staring at the girls ... I longed to be like them and suffered that I could not do so" (4). As soon as he returned home from school, he would wear his sister's dress to satisfy his inner urge. Having a body of a male and dressing up like female baffled his heart. He found it harder to ignore these activities. It made him confused and anxious.

Doraisamy was on a quest to find a solution to his problem so that he could construct his own identity. He was in search of someone who could understand his feelings. "Why did I love men? Was I the only one who felt this way? Or were there others like me ... if indeed they were there?" (14). He was expected to exhibit masculine traits and behaviour as he was born with the body of a 'male'. But his male body nurtured the passion of a 'female'. He ponders, "A woman trapped in a man's body was how I thought of myself... I longed to be known as a woman and felt shamed by this feeling. I wondered why God has chosen to inflict this peculiar torture on me, and why he could not have created me wholly male or wholly female" (15).

Doraisamy, in his thirteen's, encountered a group of people and felt comfortable in their company as they shared similar feelings with him. These people introduced to him the Hijra community. Doraisamy was eager to join this group. So he stole some money from his house and left to Delhi to join the Hijra community. The guru accepted him as her daughter. She christened Doraisamy as 'Revathi'. She was accepted as a woman and this filled her with the feeling of being loved, accepted and secured. She happily did the job of a woman that was assigned to her. Her duty was to help the elderly people to wash their clothes at home, fetch water for them, and help them in doing household work and cooking. She also earned some money by dancing in the temple festivals.

In India, the hijra community is colonized economically. They beg in market places or in a railway stations and go in groups for 'doli-baddai.' The society blames the Hijra for choosing the life of a beggar, but no one understands the truth that a Hijra is never allowed to carry out a job of his/her own interest so that they can enter into the mainstream economy. It does not mean that they are inefficient to carry out their jobs assigned to them. Being the 'Third Gender' they are denied employment of their own interest. So they are engaged in begging and sex work to earn their daily bread. "Heteronormative society is tactful enough in perpetuating its hegemonic gender discourse" (Samanta 222).

Revathi faces humiliation and brutality in all walks of her life to gain employment. She has to fight against the social and economic injustice done to her. She is engaged in sex work to satisfy her physical hunger. Hijras are not allowed to marry a normal man, so Revathi finds sexual satisfaction by engaging in sex work. But the violence done on her body by the rowdies and the inhumanness of the police shake her from within. Lack of education and family support, hatred of common people in the society and the injustice done to her by the police authorities left her with no choice other than begging.

Revathi realized that she can lead a life of dignity after having association with the NGO Sangama. She realized that they were not only meant for begging and sex work but for something far more than that. This Sangama made her conscious about the fact that they too are citizens of India and they also have the same rights as other citizens. It also made her aware that being a citizen of India she also can exercise the right to equality. This altogether changed the perceptions that she had about her life. Now she has become

strong enough to fight for her rights and for her community. She wanted to live a life as other women do. Their parents also begot them as they did other children. They are also humans born of mothers. They are not descendents from the sky. They have the rights just as others. They are also citizens of this nation.

Finding hijra as an owner or at least an attendant of any shop is a rare sight in India. They are not allowed to enter into the mainstream productive economy. Their gender is totally neglected,

In India the application form for any government jobs maintain a column specifying the gender of the applicant, but this specification is clearly stated to be either a 'male' or a 'female.' This ... makes them all the more an object of rejection and derision. The tragic part of the story is that it is society who denies them entry into the main stream productive economy, and it is society itself who curse them for living a parasitic life. (Samanta 222)

Revathi fights against all odds and boldly raises her voice for the Hijra Community. She fights for the rights of the Hijra Community and this seems to be a revolutionary step to break all the social and cultural politics of gender and introducing the 'third sex'. Many hijras have started breaking out their traditional roles. Though some progress has been made, there are still miles to go, and they need our support to go there. Let's support them and respect them.

Works Cited

Revathi, A. *The Truth about Me: A Hijra Life Story*. Penguin Books, 2010.

Samanta, Atanu. "Gender Discrimination in A.Revathi's Autobiography *The Truth about Me: A Hijra Life Story*." *IJELR*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2017, pp.222. *Adobe Reader*, <http://www.ijelr.in>.