



Struggle of a Newcomer for Survival in the Hijra Community: A Study of A. Revathi's *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*

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Abstract: *A transgender woman or trans woman born a male changes gender at a given age. They are women, but their acceptance in Indian society is substantially lesser than in other nations. A man who is viewed indifferently alters his gender and also becomes a woman as a result of this patriarchal society. Despite the fact that transwomen wish to be recognized as women, society seems unconcerned about their mental processes and mindsets. They are abused and labeled as a separate group. This situation is still unacceptable, but it is disheartening to see people from the same community not tolerate each other and fighting among themselves. This paper approaches to study the conflicts between the hijras among the hijra community through A. Revathi's autobiography *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*. The paper aims to throw light on the real-life struggles and the problems a hijra goes through after joining the hijra community. It describes how difficult it is for a hijra to absorb herself in the hijra community.*

Keywords: *Hijra community, survival, absorption, hijra, society*

INTRODUCTION

The Hijra community has always lived in abject poverty on the outskirts of society. They face extreme forms of violence and are denied basic human rights such as food, shelter, and the right to live a dignified life. Hatred, rape, harassment, and physical abuse are among the frequent crimes committed against Hijras. The perpetrators are frequently those who are supposed to be in charge of upholding the law. As a result of numerous forms of cultural discrimination and intolerance, the Hijra community exists in terror and solitude in clandestine, ghettoised locales. The concealed character of the community is also one of the explanations for why the issues impacting these groups of individuals have not been thoroughly explored. The hijras must also endure a great deal of sorrow and anguish within the hijra community. They always have an ongoing race among themselves due to caste, color, looks, etc. Truth



About Me: A Hijra Life Story, A. Revathi's autobiographical work, comes to light the trauma, suffering, and misery that these people face. This study focuses on how hijras live their lives, the struggles they face within the Hijra group, and how they interact with others in society.

A. Revathi, a transgender woman, is a Bangalore-based author who advocates for the rights of the Hijra community. There are roughly 5 lakh hijras in India. Considering the Supreme Court's acceptance of 'Hijras' as a 'Third Gender,' they face difficulties exercising their fundamental rights. Traumatic incidents at school as well as work have a bad impact on the way they feel and think. They find it difficult to progress in life since they have been mistreated physically, emotionally, sexually, and cognitively. Because they are forbidden to speak out opposing oppression and injustice, establishing an identity is a mammoth endeavour. They are denied certain rights that other people have. Revathi shares the difficulties she faced and the pains of being marginalized in a gender-oriented society in her autobiography, *The Truth About Me*. She tells us about the pain she went through in the hijra community itself. She brings to light the agony, trauma, and pain of being forced to live on the outskirts of society. She even felt it was better to be dead than to lead such a painful life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A.Bercina Fernando in his scholarly paper "Real Life Instances of the Gender Dysphoria Community in A. Revathi's *Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*" tells us how Revathi fights against all odds, overcomes all obstacles, and the way she boldly raises her voice for the Hijra Community in the face of cruelty, ridicule, and shame. She looks to be effective in her fight for the liberation of the Hijra community. Kalyan Das in his research paper "Gender Identity and Violence in Revathi's *Truth About Me*" presents an example of how society seeks to reject, deny, and annihilate the transgender self's identity that does not adhere to its patriarchal perspective. This paper seeks to highlight a deeper societal sickness and colonial discrimination in the pursuit of patriarchal and colonial norms of homogeneity. Dr.I.P.

Remya in her research article "Voice of the Voiceless: A Perlustration of A. Revathi's *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*" ventures to voice the suffering that is an integral part of a hijra's life by describing the violence, isolation, and discrimination that they face today in the context of the racial hippie's sociocultural context. Zeba Naaz in her article "Conflicting Identities: Traversing Through The Subdued Voices of Transgender in India with Special Reference to A. Revathi's *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*" seeks to study the problems and predicament of the transgender community in India with special reference to the autobiography. Ragitha Rajendran in her research article "Identity Search as Women among Trans Women in India: A Study on A. Revathi's *Truth About me: A Hijra Life Story*" educates us about transwomen who receive education and live in Indian culture with a muddled identity. Mousim Mondal in her scholarly paper "Gender Geometry: A Study of A. Revathi's Autobiography *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*" examines the processes and consequences of heteronormative gender colonization that the hijra community of India



witnessed. Julia M Abraham, Dr. Rajasekaran V and Dr. Kalai Selvan Arumugham in their article “Gender Performance In Hijras: Paradoxical Identity of Indian Transgenders in the book by A. Revathi, *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* aimed to shed light on Hijra sexuality and gender identity by analyzing how appearance and sexual characteristics are important for hijras to establish their identity.

GAP

Many research works have been already done on the struggles of hijras and gender identity relating to A. Revathi’s autobiography *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*. But no researcher focused on the issues which the hijras face in the hijra community. This paper focuses on the survival and absorption of a new hijra in the hijra community and all the issues they face in their life staying in the hijra community taking the reference of A. Revathi’s autobiography.

METHODOLOGY

This paper uses the method of textual and autobiographical analysis.

DISCUSSION

Hijras have been facing a lot of harassment by people around them, their families, and even the police for a long time. Despite all these societal and family issues, they try to remain strong thinking that they have a strong community of themselves and they have other hijras for them. But this is not the case. Like every other human being, hijras are also human being who have feelings and emotions. Like other human beings who live in a family and have various problems ongoing within the family, hijras also have various issues among themselves. Revathi in her autobiography describes many of her life incidents that relate to this issue.

Revathi was born Doraisamy in Namakkal taluk, Salem district, Tamil Nadu as Revathi. He was the youngest one among his siblings. He was born as a boy but he felt like a girl since the very beginning of his life. He loved doing all the girlish activities and even helped her mother with the household chores. He even liked wearing the girl’s clothes and acting as if he is a girl himself. “As soon as I got home from school, I would wear my sister’s long skirt and blouse, twist a long towel around my head, and let it trail down my back like a braid. I would then walk as if I was a shy bride, my eyes to the ground” (Revathi 4) Regardless of all these things, having a male body and dressing up like a female haunted his heart. As he started growing up he found it more difficult to handle all these things like hiding his own personality and dressing as a boy although feeling like a girl inside because he wanted to live with his real identity.

Doraisamy had faced a lot of complications staying in his village and even in his own house too. He got teased in school, bus, and almost everywhere in the public. His brothers made him leave school and work with them and tortured him a lot if he did any mistakes in his assigned tasks. After facing a lot, he finally decided to run away from his house and joined the Hijra Community. But this was not it, the major issues of her life began when he took this big



step. First, he went to Dindigul along with his friends to meet the sari-clad women. He was named Revathi there by an elder due to her similarity in looks with the actress Revathi. He stayed there for two days and then left for Erode. In Erode he stayed for about a month and then he decided to go back to his village although he was very scared that what will be his brother's reaction and that they would not allow him to keep his hair long. A few days after he came back to his house he again started feeling trapped. "I could not bear it anymore, this pain and hurt that wracked my body and mind- which I could not even mention to anybody. I decided that it would not do for me to continue to live in my parent's home." (Revathi 33) This time he decided to go to Delhi where his elders used to stay. His way to Delhi was indeed very difficult but somehow he managed to reach his elders.

On reaching Delhi he started living with his guru's family and declared himself as a woman "I am not a man now. I am a woman and I have a family with a mother, a

grandmother, sister-in-law." (Revathi 43) In the initial days, she learned about the manner the hijras live their life and the various rules and regulations which they had to follow in the house itself. She did not complain about these things incipiently as she thought things might get better with time and that every hijra has to go through this phase of life. She was even shocked to know that hijras, like other people, do not get to work like others. They only earn by collecting money from shops, 'doli badaai', sex work, and so on. Even in this work, they are not allowed to express their feelings "If the 'seth' at the shop looked fair and handsome, I found myself drawn to him. But I knew I could not ever display desire, I consoled myself with the thought that we are like beggars, asking for money from the shops. We can't possibly get what we want, nor do we have the right to desire them." (Revathi 48)

Revathi knew that her life is not going to be easy but she never knew that with each passing day she will have to face the worst of problems. She hoped that life within the hijra community would be at least peaceful among the hijras but it was never like this. The hijras themselves never lived with each other peacefully. Everyone had their own complaints and issues. Most of them were jealous of each other due to reasons like color, looks, etc but all of the above was about who can earn more. They were bound to give some portion of their money to their guru at least once a month and therefore sometimes they never saved money to buy things other than the necessities. They were not even allowed to be friends with other hijras who do not belong to their own house as their gurus thought that the other house hijras are disrespectful to their own gurus and would poison other hijra's minds too and will somehow convince them to join their household. "You should mind your business. Go to the shops, finish your work and return home. If you feel like chatting, talk to hijras in your own house. Why go and talk to that Chauhan-house woman? She does not know how to respect her guru." (Revathi 98)

Revathi underwent 'nirvaanam' and after that, she joined sex work to fulfill her desires and she even faced numerous problems after this. She had a fight with the other hijras on daily



basis for the customers. Other hijras blamed Revathi that she had stolen their customers. Revathi did not even know how to fight back against such things and when she sometimes gathered the strength to fight back against any of them, they gathered in mass to harm Revathi and threatened her that they would strip off her head and so on. In spite of all these issues, she got blamed by her guru for not knowing how to work properly. “You know nothing, expect to gobble a plateful of rice! My guru was exasperated.” (Revathi 151) There was a time after which Revathi was not allowed to do sex work but she was kept to look over the hijras who do sex work and had to fulfill their demands when needed. And in order to do this she faced a lot of difficulties about which she can not even complain or share with anybody. She sometimes had to sleep on the road as all the rooms were engaged by the hijras involved in sex work. She had to walk around three kilometers up and down just to bring some food for the customers and even after this she was not given a single penny in return. “My guru would pocket the remaining fifteen rupees. Could she not let me at least keep the change? Up and down I had walked a distance of three kilometers. I could have used the money to take a taxi. Why must I be made to walk? Surely I could be given a bit of money for my troubles?” (Revathi 152) Sometimes she felt as if the street dogs were living a life better than hers. Day by day her life was deteriorating more and more. “They even calculated the amount of water I used for bathing!” (Revathi 152)

Revathi later expressed how her life was worsened in every manner. She was extremely tired of the rules and regulations. She was not allowed to do any work which she wished to. She was kept there to do keep an eye on the sex workers in their house. Her image in front of the sex workers was also such that they never shared any of their problems with her thinking that she might go and tell everything to their guru. She did not even have enough money to run away from that place. It was not even like that the sex workers were leading a good life in that house, even they were extremely tortured at that house. “The women were treated more or less like prisoners. They had to do sex work for three years, earn money, and only then would they be sent home. They were also not paid much. And like I said before, even when they went to the toilet, they were watched. Going to the shops for them, keeping vigil, fighting over clients, not having enough money, not getting enough to eat in the mornings-all of this corroded my spirit. I did not know how I was going to get the money to run away from this place.” (Revathi 154) She started feeling so helpless after a point that she started doing sex work without anyone’s knowledge in order to gather some money to run away from her workplace and go back to her home until she finds any other place to work.

After experiencing humiliation and discrimination from the mainstream heteronormative society, she accepts a position with the Bangalore-based NGO Sangama, which works for sexual minorities. But she also has many ups and downs at the NGO. Revathi had always wanted to live like a woman, to be loved by a man, and to be in a marital relationship. When she returned to her village after her nirvana, she settled in for a few months. She met a man there, and they gradually became close. The man began to pay her frequent visits. However,



this caused uproar in her family, and she was forced to cut all ties with him. She fell in love with a man who worked alongside her in Sangama and married him. However, this relationship also fails, and she is left broken. She invested heavily in that relationship, hoping for a normal conjugal life filled with love, but in the end, she is left to deal with her problems on her own. This clearly depicts the lives of hijras, whose simple desires for love and acceptance are repeatedly denied and shattered. She did, however, continue to work for Sangama, conducting hijra surveys and writing a book about them. Revathi realizes and reveals that in a country like India, hijras are the most oppressed section of society, constantly struggling to become a part of mainstream society. The desire to live a normal life, similar to that of any so-called heteronormative person, is also dependent on hijras. Thus, Revathi defies the stereotypes that are associated with hijra lives by remaining independent, working and earning from a secure job, and working as an activist for her community; in every way, she differs from her usual fellow hijras.

OUTCOME

This paper analyzes the struggles of the hijras in the hijra community itself by studying A.Revathi's autobiography "*The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*." In her autobiography, A.Revathi attempts to describe her discomfiting life in the hijra community. She describes the agony which almost all the hijras face within the community and how they are envious of each other.

CONCLUSION

Hijras are still in a constant juggle for a peaceful life in society. They are not accepted by their families and society, but somehow they are trying to cope with this. They leave their families behind and join the hijra community hoping to get at least a bit of relief from their painful life. But even in the hijra community, they go through a lot of problems that always stay behind the curtain. The common man is unaware of the problems ongoing within the hijra society. We got to know about some of the issues described by A.Revathi in her autobiography "*The Truth About Me, A Hijra Life Story*". She tells us about her experience in the hijra community from the day she decided to join their community. It was a very painful experience for Revathi as she describes. Revathi lived a hard life until she found work at Sangama, an NGO working for the rights of sexual minorities. Revathi is still working in Sangama as a transgender-based activist.

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