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1. *Asst. Prof. of English,
Noida Institute of
Engineering &
Technology, Greater
Noida Uttar Pradesh,
India*

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Emergence of Transfeminism

Dr. Shormita Bose¹

Abstract

The transgender community is considered a marginalized sect of people in the society. They are out of the box of gender binary. Therefore, gender equality is necessary to establish a peaceful, sustainable, and prosperous world. This paper aims to study the inclusion of transgenders in society by giving special reference to the novel *Me Hijra Me Laxmi*. This novel will trace the plight of a transwoman, Laxmi, and how her parents and family have accepted her sexual identity. This prejudice towards transgender people is shared by both men and women of the society. This paper will study the difference between the sex and gender of an individual. The problems faced by the transgender community in society for their feminine mannerisms are also aptly discussed in this paper. To construct a trans-inclusive society, we shall also examine the views and opinions of some transfeminists. Transfeminists such as Susan Stryker, Krista-Scott Dixon, and Emi Koyama have discussed the rise of transfeminism in society and stressed the connection between transfeminism and feminism. We have examined primary and secondary sources, journal articles, and the life narrative of Laxmi with the aim to carry out this study.

Keywords: Sex, Gender, Feminism, Transfeminist, and Transfeminism.

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Emergence of Transfeminism

Introduction

Transgender is an umbrella term used for transwomen, transmen, transsexuals, drag queens, cross-dressers, eunuchs, etc. They are the people who do not belong in the gender binary box. They find it challenging to integrate into mainstream society at large. The transgender community in India was stigmatized for decades, living on the periphery of society with limited access to work, healthcare, and education. Due to a lack of options and social acceptance, many have been compelled to engage in sex work or begging. Many transgender people frequently encounter assault, harassment, and discrimination in both public and private settings.

In India, they have different names in several regions, such as Hijra, Aravani, Kinnar, Pothai, Kothi, Jagappa, Khawaja Sira, Shiv-Shaktis, etc. While transgender people have historically been regarded with reverence in some cultural and religious contexts, such as blessing babies and newlyweds. Also, they have also experienced extensive societal stigma, marginalization, and discrimination in India. As rightly pointed out by in his research study,

Some of these problems can be considered as discrimination in the name of gender orientation. Many unjust features like lack of legal protection, poverty, harassment and stigma, anti-transgender violence, reluctance to health care, identity documents, housing and homelessness, unemployment, economic injustice, police persecution uncalled-for prisons. (Gupta, 2018) Therefore, transgender individuals face complex challenges that stem from societal prejudice, lack of legal protection, and limited access to healthcare and employment opportunities. Despite growing awareness and activism, many transgender people continue to struggle for basic rights and recognition in their daily lives.

Me Hijra, Me Laxmi

Me Hijra, Me Laxmi is a personal memoir of Laxmi Narayan Tripathi. This novel portrays the sufferings of Laxmi, who must fight for her gender identity and rights. The novel has autobiographical elements as the narrative revolves around the life story of Laxmi, who is biologically born as male but identifies as a trans woman over the period. In the novel *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*, the writer talks about the pain, agony, and suffering of transgenders in mainstream society. Laxmi is widely recognized for her fearless advocacy for the transgender community in India, as well as their rights and dignity. She has been a strong voice in media and legal reform, and she was the first transgender person to represent Asia Pacific at the UN. Laxmi's story discusses her dual life, accepting her identity as a hijra but upholding her duty as a son in her family. An honest portrayal of this contradiction emphasizes the emotional upheaval as well as the fortitude needed to deal with social expectations. Moreover, she emerged as a vocal advocate for transgender rights, representing the Asia-Pacific region at the United Nations in 2008 and working tirelessly for HIV/AIDS awareness. Her efforts were instrumental in the 2014 Supreme Court ruling that recognized transgender individuals as a third gender in India.

Transfeminism

Transfeminism is a branch of feminism that focuses on the intersection of transgender rights and feminist theory, emphasizing the ways in which sexism and transphobia overlap and affect transgender and gender non-conforming individuals, especially trans women. It promotes the feminist movement's inclusion of trans women and other gender diversity. In the similar approach that traditional feminism challenges patriarchy, it challenges the notion that being cisgender is the standard or norm. According to Emi Koyama, Transfeminism is a movement primarily driven by and for transgender women, who believe their liberation is intertwined with the liberation of all women and beyond. It is open to a broad range of individuals, including other queer people, intersex individuals, trans men, non-trans

women and men, and those who see their alliance with trans women as crucial for their own liberation. (Koyama, 2001)

Therefore, it is primarily led by and for transgender women, who see their own freedom as interconnected with the freedom of all women and beyond. Transfeminism is open to a wide spectrum of people, including other queer people, intersex people, trans men, non-trans women and men, and those who see their alliance with trans women as essential to their own freedom. Julia Serano, Susan Stryker, and Sandy Stone are key thinkers who have contributed to transfeminist theory.

Traces of Transfeminism in *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*

In India, transfeminism is a dynamic emerging field that combines feminist theory with the rights and everyday lives of transgender people. It includes academic study, cultural expressions, changes in law, and grassroots activism. Transfeminist theory is slowly gaining recognition in Indian academia, particularly within gender studies, sociology, and queer theory. However, trans voices are still underrepresented in mainstream academic feminism, with most work emerging from a few progressive and independent scholars. For example, novels like *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi, I Am Vidya, The Truth About Me, Guthli Has Wings, No Outlaws in the Gender Galaxy*, etc. have been written about transgender experiences and their struggle.

In the novel *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*, we can trace several instances that reflect the transfeminist aspect. Laxmi's narrative offers a powerful lens to examine these intersections, especially in the Indian socio-cultural context. Laxmi's assertion of her gender identity and her right to live as a woman challenges cisnormative definitions of womanhood. She resists societal, familial, and institutional pressures that try to define her identity for her. Laxmi asserts, "I liked being a drag queen. But then drag queens cross-dressed only sporadically, for show, whereas I wanted to drape myself in a sari and wear skirts every single day (Rode, 29)." It underscores the transfeminist emphasis on bodily autonomy and the right to self-identify. Additionally, Laxmi's advocacy for the legal rights of hijras and transgender people, including recognition of a third gender and access to education, jobs, and healthcare, represents a form of feminist activism that centers trans lives. She writes, "I discovered that passivity did not pay. It might endear me to society, but it came with a price. I decided at that moment to raise my voice against the things I did not like. Henceforth, I would not do anything against my will (Rode, 8)." It reflects the transfeminist principle of challenging societal norms and advocating for one's rights.

Laxmi's bold assertion of her right to speak reflects the transfeminist principle that trans voices must lead in the fight for gender justice. Moreover, Susan Stryker is one of the most influential voices in transgender theory and transfeminism. Her work deeply aligns with the themes presented in *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*. Stryker views transgender identity not just as a personal reality but as a political stance that challenges hegemonic gender norms. In her essay 'My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix,' she famously writes, "I am a transsexual, and therefore I am a monster (Stryker, 238)." Like the way Laxmi proclaims her hijra status in contrast to strict binary categories, she reclaims the concept of 'monstrosity' as a metaphor for defying mandatory gender standards. Stryker emphasizes that the trans body is not unnatural but instead reveals how gender is socially constructed and policed. She challenges the assumption that biology determines gender.

Stryker's work insists that transfeminism must incorporate race, class, nationality, and colonial history. In her co-edited volume *The Transgender Studies Reader*, she promotes a global and decolonial perspective. Likewise, Stryker, Laxmi offers an indigenous, decolonial interpretation of transfeminism through her story, which is deeply rooted in Indian cultural, religious, and social dynamics. Transfeminism embraces intersectionality, recognizing how multiple oppressions affect trans people—especially trans women of color or from

marginalized communities. Laxmi broadens and perplexes the concept of womanhood. She makes room in feminist theory for non-binary and culturally unique gender identities as a trans woman and hijra. This is essential to transfeminism, which incorporates a range of gender experiences and questions binary gender roles.

Along with Stryker, Scott-Dixon's work is renowned for promoting interaction between the trans and feminist communities and questioning conventional feminist frameworks. Dixon criticizes the exclusionary practices that are occasionally present in feminist and queer spaces and stresses the significance of acknowledging the diversity among trans communities. She raises concerns about the obstacles trans people encounter in feminist environments. She quotes, "We want to create a feminism that is not just about women who were assigned female at birth. We want to create a feminism that acknowledges gender diversity, trans identities, and systemic oppression that cuts across bodies and borders. (Dixon, 112)."

Laxmi refuses to be ashamed of her choices and speaks openly about her sexuality, intimate relationships, and even sex work. She questions the view that trans women must adhere to a standardized definition of femininity in order to be accepted. Transfeminist criticisms of respectability politics and the expectation that oppressed women show themselves as 'acceptable' to society are echoed in this stance. Laxmi is critical of both patriarchy and a brand of feminism that excludes hijras and trans women. She highlights how mainstream feminism often neglects transgender experiences and fails to address the layered oppressions they face. She finds empowerment in the hijra community, describing it as a source of strength, solidarity, and identity. This community provides support absent in biological family structures. This exemplifies a fundamental transfeminist theme: community-based kinship and chosen families as means of challenging heteronormative systems.

Research Methodology

The research design used to conduct this study is a descriptive qualitative research design. This paper examines the characters, conditioning, and challenges faced by the transgender community. Both primary and secondary sources are used, such as primary texts, research articles, and web material. It helps to identify the main challenges faced by transgender individuals in society. Also, the limitation of the study is the information presented in this study is qualitative and derived from primary and secondary data; therefore, the conclusion may not be accurate for the whole transgender population in India.

Conclusion

To conclude, one of India's most well-known and outspoken advocates for transgender rights, Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, wrote the groundbreaking and impactful autobiography *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*. She was emotionally alienated from the masculine identity that was forced upon her, effeminate, and attracted to men. Laxmi first attempted to fit in by going to mainstream places, going to college, and doing classical dance, which turned into a creative outlet and a way for her to express herself. Her openness about her experiences serves to challenge the stigmatization of transgender individuals and promotes a broader understanding of gender and sexuality. Her work contributes significantly to transfeminist discourse by highlighting the intersections of gender identity, societal expectations, and personal agency. Despite societal ridicule and exclusion, Laxmi refused to remain invisible. She came out publicly and entered the world of activism, focusing on the rights of sexual minorities, particularly hijras and transgender individuals. Laxmi's activism—whether at the UN or through the Astitva Trust—is deeply aligned with transfeminism's aim to reshape laws, institutions, and public narratives that harm trans and non-binary individuals. Since it emphasizes multidimensional oppression, challenges patriarchal and exclusionary standards, and affirms trans experiences as essential to feminism, *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* is primarily transfeminist in its ideas.

The narrative relates to the fundamental ideas of transfeminism in addition to being a personal account. Through the prism of transfeminist theory, this essay seeks to critically analyse the text and investigate how Laxmi's lived experiences enhance, broaden, and challenge feminist discourse. The critique of cisnormative feminism reflects transfeminism's call for inclusivity. After embracing her hijra identity, Laxmi's Brahmin upper-caste heritage did not shield her from social rejection. This change emphasizes the ways in which different axes of identity—gender, sexual orientation, caste, and class—intersect to create distinct oppressive experiences. Transfeminist analysis, which expands upon Kimberlé Crenshaw's notion of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2019), is based on this. The narrative powerfully contributes to South Asian feminist discourse and exemplifies the inclusive, intersectional spirit of transfeminism.

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