



Reclaiming the Self: The Struggles and Resilience of Trans-individuals in Living Smile Vidya's "I Am Vidya" and A. Revathi's "The Truth About Me"

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Abstract

As the social scenario has shifted in modern India to create a more inclusive society, it is essential to amplify suffering, pain and hardships of the non-binary individuals. Trans-individuals in India encountered numerous adversities such as ancestral disownment, exclusion from academic setting, elimination from the mainstream profession, marginalization and institutional discrimination. They endured animosity from an early age. Though the legal system has provided them some relief, the social stigma and stereotypes revolving around them continue to hinder their growth and prosperity. Family structure failed to accommodate them, further schools and colleges became the site of oppression and exerted control on them. Indian society disregarded gender nonconforming and non-binary identities. Society often rebuked them and mocked them with certain derogatory remarks such as Number 9, Ali, female boy etc. Since childhood they experienced lack of acceptance, and isolation, yet they couldn't express their feelings to anyone, not even their loved ones. Now trans-individuals overcome traditional binary and challenge the mainstream definition of heterosexuality. Their desire for cross dressing comes from within. They didn't borrow or purchase these emotions though it seems natural to them. This proposed study delves into their hardships; they endured in the quest for identity amidst intense societal pressure. It examines the role played by family, educational institutions, societal sphere and legal framework in suppressing their voices and furthering their disempowerment. Additionally it examines the influence of fear on them, yet shaping their visibility in the mainstream heteronormative society.

This research engages qualitative research, incorporating textual evaluation of these two autobiographies — *I Am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey* (2007) by Living Smile Vidya and *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* by A Revathi (2010). These texts offer an intimate account of their journey embarked with immense pain and endless sufferings. In this article the researcher aims to encourage a fair, equitable, and unbiased social sphere for the transgender community by bringing their plight and hardships to the forefront.

Key Words: Non-binary, Trans-individuals, Institutional discrimination, Societal alienation, Heteronormative norms, Mainstream discourses, Systematic marginalization.

Introduction

The term transgender encompasses someone whose gender identity doesn't match with the sex assigned to them at the time of birth. It's an inclusive term that encompasses numerous other identities such as trans-men and trans-women and people who are non-binary or genderqueer. Due to the dominance of western culture, there exists a sharp dichotomy between heterosexual and homosexual. This research paper incorporates transgender studies. This separate field of research particularly engages trans-studies. Their identity, expression and other issues have been explored under this separate field. It was in the 1990s, when this field emerged along with queer studies. Initially queer studies focused on the gay and lesbian studies, but with time it evolved to encompass other variants. Sandy Stone essay, *The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto* is seen as the foundational work in this field. She wrote this text in response to *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*, a book that featured them in a negative lens. The word Transgender is a combination of prefix trans and the term gender, in which trans comes from the Latin refers to span, crossover or traverse. It had its beginning in 1965, when the American Psychiatrist John F. Oliven used the term transgenderism in his seminal work, *Sexual Hygiene and Pathology*, as an alternative expression for transsexualism. As stated by Oliven, transgenderism refers to those who prefer social transition, unlike transsexualism encouraging surgical treatment. During the same period, two transgender activists, Christine Jorgensen and Virginia Prince were the first to employ the term 'transgenderal' in their magazine titled *Transvestia*. Its first publication came out in 1960, however in 1963 it expanded to address issues related to cross dressing. It sheds light on their experiences and challenges. Advancing into the era of 1992, when an American Transgender activist Leslie Feinberg published a pamphlet titled "Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come" in which he integrated all forms of gender variance under the single term Transgender. Then in 1994, gender theorist Susan Stryker intervened, he traversed traditional definitions and simply incorporated all those who don't find themselves in the stereotypical roles of men and women. However, the Indian notion of Transgender doesn't align with the western definitions. In case of India, the concept of third gender exists in our mythologies and scriptures; terms like *tritiya prakriti* straightly defines third gender and another word *napunsaka* signifies someone who cannot procreate. Its existence can be traced in great mythologies like Ramayan and Mahabharat. Historically they held dignified positions in the society. During the medieval era they were assigned roles such as advisors, guards, and performers. Then in the Mughal times, they were destined to take care of royal harems. But their condition worsened under British regimes, they proposed Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, labelled them as criminals. This led to their ostracization, and discrimination, which continued even after Independence though their experiences undergo substantial decline. In the Post independent era, numerous attempts have been made to explore the term transgender, reclaim their rights and dignity. In the year 2014, National Legal Services Authority of India (NALSA) defined the term transgender which encompasses someone whose gender doesn't align with the sex assigned to them at the time of birth, someone who doesn't fit neatly into the binary of man and woman, furthermore includes several other socio-cultural identities like hijras, kothis, aravanis, jogtas, and others. Following this, another definition arrived in the year 2016 (Protection of Rights) Bill which includes, person not wholly male or female, neither female nor male, and the combination of two. Scholars and Activists were profoundly dissatisfied with this definition. Another pursuits have been taken on 5 August 2019 (Protection of Rights) Bill, in which they include someone whose gender doesn't align with the gender assigned to them at the time of birth, trans-men and trans-women, gender queer and several other socio-cultural identities such as kinnars, hijras, aravanis, jogtas etc. This research paper is based upon two Indian autobiographical texts, *I Am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey* (2007) by Living Smile Vidya and *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* (2010). These texts challenge conventional boundaries and advocate for their rights and inclusion.

Objectives of the study

- 1-To examine the various challenges the trans-community face in seeking their identity amidst intense societal pressure to conform to the heteronormative norms.
- 2-To analyze the role played by family, academic setting, societal pressure in excluding transgender from the mainstream.
- 3-To analyse the extent to which fear is infused in their lives and shapes their visibility in the mainstream heteronormative society.

Research questions

- 1-What challenges do trans-individuals encounter in their journey of seeking identity or claiming their real selves amidst societal expectations?
- 2-In what ways family, academic institutions, societal values and legal structure contribute to the marginalization of trans-individuals?
- 3-What role does fear play in constructing their visibility in the mainstream heteronormative society?

Methodology:

The proposed research paper incorporates exploratory transformative design. It involves a qualitative research methodology with a particular emphasis on textual evaluation. This research work adopts sources from both primary and secondary materials. The original text serves as primary source whereas other articles, monographs, and research papers available in this area are classified as secondary source.

Literature Review

The dominant struggle of the Trans-community revolved around their inarticulateness and disempowered state. Now the scenario has improved but the social stigma and stereotypes revolved around them continue to hinder their growth and prosperity. During the colonial era their status was challenged and attempts were made to marginalize them which continue to question their existence even in today's world. Several studies incorporate their sufferings and hardships. However, this present work is more extensive and comprehensive in dealing with their adversities, deprivations and destitutions. It sheds light on the challenges trans individual's encounter in their journey of asserting or claiming their identity amidst intense societal pressure. It examines the involvement of family dynamics, academic setting, societal values and legal framework in the inarticulateness and disempowerment of third gender individuals. It further analyse the extent to which fear is infused in their lives and shapes their visibility in the mainstream heteronormative society. This literature review has analyzed three crucial research done in the same area and uncovered its essential findings.

Dr.I.P. Remya (2019) Voice of the Voiceless: A Perlustration of A. Revathi's The Truth about Me: A Hijra Life Story amplifies the sufferings of hijras. Indian society is deeply confined to the traditional definitions of binary (male and female). Non binary individuals experience marginalization, rejection and isolation. Society compelled them to do servile jobs such as begging and prostitution. They have not been given opportunities to work in the organized sectors. Before the British invasion they were treated with respect and dignity. The British implemented certain laws that led to their deprivation and destitution. This continues even in the post-colonial era. Despite facing several apprehensions, sufferings and marginalization, Revathi recovered herself and constructed her identity in the predominant heteronormative society. Remya points out that society prioritizes social validation over individuality, as justified by the case of Revathi. Her choice of identity was not approved by her family members and friends. The researcher made it clear that Indian society needs to be more inclusive towards them. Although several changes have been made, it still needs more flexibility and comprehensiveness.

Dr. K. Thiyagarajan (2021) Exploring the Treatment of Violence in A. Revathi's Autobiography, The Truth About Me: A Hijra's Life Story highlights the complexities and hardships of hijra communities. Revathi's experience reveals the mental agony, turmoil and sufferings of trans individuals in India. According to Thiyagarajan, the significant challenge for the third gender individuals is the pursuit of identity. Since childhood, Revathi was inclined towards feminine clothing, games and expressions. She keenly observed the females around her. Her life transformed after meeting with Amma who blessed her with the name Revathi. Like other Aravanis she faces rejection and dismissal from family and friends. Her brother often beat her with a wooden bat. All these incidents completely traumatized her, leading her to opt for alternative chosen families. However Sangam transformed her journey as an individual and made her a confident being. Thiyagarajan points out that Revathi's sole purpose behind this work is to promote inclusiveness and to urge the government to incorporate third gender individuals in the mainstream.

Namita Rani (2023) Metamorphosis and Triumph: A Transgender's Journey in I Am Vidya Penned by Living Smile Vidya examined the challenges trans individuals have endured in their pursuit of equality. They deserve equal

treatment, dignity and acceptance from society. Namita points out that Indian society is deeply rooted in heteronormativity and the strict codes of gender roles. Those who identify themselves as gender variance or gender queer, they often experience marginalization, discrimination and prejudices. In Vidya's case her gender identity doesn't align with the sex she was assigned at the time of birth. Her deep down desire always aligns with feminine attire. But this patriarchal heteronormative society failed to comprehend her desire and pushed her to the margins. The similar circumstances are faced by other trans individuals. Namita points out that the legal system in India is not supportive enough for them. Perhaps this is the major reason for their deprived state.

Significance of the study:

This present work sheds light on the challenges trans individual's encounter in their journey of asserting or claiming their identity amidst intense societal pressure. It examines the involvement of family dynamics, academic settings, societal values and legal framework in the inarticulateness and disempowerment of third gender individuals. It further analyzes the extent to which fear is infused in their lives that shapes their visibility in the mainstream heteronormative society. In this article the researcher aims to encourage a fair, equitable, and unbiased social sphere for the transgender community by bringing their plight and hardships to the forefront.

Analyses

I Am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey (2007) by Living Smile Vidya offers an intimate account of Vidya's journey, her life experiences as a trans woman. This book captures Saravana's transformation into Vidya, filled with several ups and downs. For many years of her life she chooses to hide her identity. But after consequent suffering she finally embraces her real identity.

Vidya was born into a conservative, poor family as Saravana. Her father wanted her to complete her education and secure government positions. She was seen as the last hope for their better days. Despite securing good marks, he often beats her for not securing 1st position.

Vidya navigating through turmoil, abuse and mockery, as well as the early demise of her mother, contributed to her isolation and loneliness.

"I preferred to join the girls at their games— generally board games like dayakattam (the Indian version of Chinese checkers) and pallanguzhi. I loved playing girls' games and being one of them." (Vidya 23)

Like other transgender she prefers the company of girls and enjoys playing girls' games such as dayakattam and pallanguzhi. Sports are typically dominated by males and are also subject to gender demarcation. A child from a third gender identity often spends their childhood phase in utter confusion, uncertainty, and mockery which ultimately pushes them into isolation. She clearly remembers an incident from ninth grade when one of her classmates mocked her ninth position in a line with derogatory remarks Number nine. Afterwards she became vigilant about her position in line.

"...we stood in a definite order for the prayer assembly, and my usual place was between seventh and tenth in my class. One day I happened to be in the ninth place, and a classmate immediately pounced on the coincidence (the number nine is the offensive epithet in Tamil for eunuchs or transgenders). 'Saravana, You are Nine, isn't that why you are standing ninth?' he jeered." (Vidya 25)

She often endured several derogatory remarks and labels, which shattered her confidence in the long run. Furthermore it infused her with low self-esteem and internal turmoil. Though Vidya was a bright student but was often left isolated. She puts immense effort to bury her identity deep down within herself, but all her efforts seem futile. This demonstrates the pressure to submit to the heteronormative structure.

Furthermore she recalls that it was always hard for her to merge into the mainstream in the manner they expected her to. So she diverted herself in her imaginary world where she expressed herself the way she wanted to. She transported herself to a realm where she could dance wholeheartedly and embrace femininity without objection and hesitation. She loved spending time near the riverside. Third gender individuals often indulge themselves in such experiences due to their lack of acceptance in the heteronormative structure. Her early signs of inclination towards feminine

dressing and expression were ignored by her family, though she felt her true self when expressing her that way. Many trans individuals go through the same scenario so they choose to express themselves in secret often behind doors and within four walls. Similar things happened with Vidya. Although her cross dressing challenges the mainstream discourses on binary, yet her joy in singing and dancing in feminine attire indicates gender euphoria. She felt immense joy in expressing herself in feminine clothing, as it aligned with her inner desire. However things didn't remain the same. She recalls that her father thrashed her for expressing herself in feminine clothing, and they were unable to comprehend her natural behavior. There was a strange silence between Vidya and her father. Her father refused to meet her when she chose to express herself for the very first time. This inculcates confusion in her regarding her preferences.

“What’s wrong with my preferences? Why should a boy only wear shirts and trousers? I like skirts and blouses. Why can’t I wear them? Why do people find something odd in what comes to me naturally?”(Vidya 22)

Her neighbours also teased her with names like sissy, girly and female thing. With time she learns to negotiate with her identity, dressing and expression. She chose the middle path. She realised that obvious feminine clothing could be more problematic so she preferred combination clothing such as kurtas and jeans. Despite having an excellent educational background, she was forced to beg so that she could live the life of her choice. Her main goal was to collect money for her nirvana. Once she succeeded in that she put her blood and sweat into finding a job. She recalls that it was not easy for her to beg because that journey was filled with humiliation and taunts. She mentioned an incident while begging on a train, where she was slapped hard by a man and on another occasion she was thrashed by five men so intensely that blood oozed out from her nose and almost shook her cheekbones.

“...A foursome was sitting there: three of the men were tall and well built; the fourth one seemed to be a kindly person. I avoided the toughies and approached the softie. He gave me two rupees. ‘Can’t you make it five, Tamil sir?’ I said. Hardly had I spoken when a hard slap landed on my cheek. It was delivered by the buffalo sitting in the opposite seat. ‘Hasn’t he given you two rupees? How dare you ask for more?’ (Vidya 95)

From there onwards she chose to roam around in a group. Her act of begging highlights the inability of government or authority to provide jobs for the third gender individuals. Prior to her surgery one of the kothi named Sri advised her not to undergo surgery because it deprived her status as a beggar. Although it is strange that one kothi prevented another from undergoing surgery, he was spitting facts to her. He was sketching the true position of the Trans community of India before her. On another occasion, the director of an NGO also advised her not to undergo surgery as it will bring humiliation and social disapproval. Adding to that, she also asked her professor Mu Ramaswami, about her surgery. His suggestion remained the same. She reveals that in India there is no proper sex reassignment surgery but it is merely castration, often performed under unhygienic conditions. In other countries, an individual has to undergo several tests before surgery, only then is the operation performed under the supervision of specialised doctors. But in India the scenario is different, trans individuals undergo surgery with only a dose of local anesthesia and the only test carried out is HIV and that also with the intention of extracting money from them as revealed by Vidya. Vidya recalls that in her case anaesthesia was not properly administered, and after the procedure she was left lying on bed covered with paper sheets. She was not given any ointment. All she had to survive on was hot water. For her this surgery was no different from what butchers do in their shops.

Furthermore, undergoing surgery doesn't signify the end of their struggle. In fact it invites the most significant challenge of their lives and i.e., their struggle for identity. Society continues to identify them with their earlier identity as evident in the case of Vidya. Her sister continues to call her Sarvana. The second important struggle they endure is lack of acceptance in the society. They experience extreme adversities in achieving mainstream professions. In foreign countries after surgery trans individuals continue their life with their preferred identity. But here they face difficulties with documentation and have to choose between him and her. Despite navigating intense societal pressure she embraced herself as Vidya and enjoyed her life the way she wanted.

Revathi's, autobiographical text *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*(2010) intricately weaves the transformation of Doraisamy into Revathi. It contains detailed experience of Revathi as a part of the hijra community, emphasizing

on the issues of discrimination, and prejudices that she and her people endured on a regular basis. Revathi's main aim in composing this text is to bring to light her people's potential and capability before the mainstream.

Revathi, a trans woman, was born as Doraisamy in Namakkal taluk, Salem District, Tamil Nadu, India. Revathi's journey reflects early signs of an inclination towards femininity. She loves spending time with girls, accompanies them to school. She keenly observes women around her. Furthermore, she was also interested in playing girl's games (five stones, hopscotch and hide-and-seek). She preferred assisting her mother with household chores like sweeping, cleaning utensils and drawing kolam.

"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, and everyone would laugh. No one thought much of it then, for I was little." (Revathi 9)

Since childhood, Revathi finds delight in wearing feminine attire, and assuming herself as a new bride. This indicates natural inclination came from within her. Her early deviation was ignored and tolerated within her house because childhood was considered as a period of innocence. Her parents assume that soon Doraisamy learns to fit into the strict codes. However in the public sphere, she became the subject of ridicule and mockery. On the other hand, she experienced complete liberation in a natural setting. In places such as open fields, tall grasses and huge trees, Revathi embraces her real identity. This place symbolises an unguarded and unregulated domain, unlike her personal and public spheres. Furthermore Revathi's acts of imagining herself as a girl, dancing, and singing challenge gender essentialism. It sheds light on the narrator's attempt to negotiate her behaviour in different places. For Revathi, imagination brings comfort and relief, a space where she can embrace her real self without any hesitation and hindrance. A child's self-expression seems to be curbed and can only be expressed in limited space. The constant rebuke from her neighbour, friends and school teacher assert the idea of correcting her from deviation. She recalls people questioning her for playing with girls and engaging in household chores. At school, she was bullied with terms like Girl-boy, Ali, and Number 9. Her sports teacher never missed a chance to insult her and in one instance, he even threatened to strip her.

"I remember having knelt down on the floor too. I think I was punished not just for being distracted, but also because I spoke like a girl, holding my body coyly like one. I remember being caned for 'not being brave like a boy'. And since I did not play boys' games, I got punished by the PT teacher too. He would box my ears and yell, 'Are you a girl or what? Pull your trousers down, let me check.' He would make as if he was going to strip me and I would start crying. The other boys laughed at this." (Revathi 11)

As a male child Revathi was expected to conform to certain behaviour, clothing and games but Revathi defied all those norms. During the school's annual day Revathi preferred to play the female part. As a male child, she performed the role of Chandramathi and received immense appreciation. Spectators find her acting fully aligned with the feminine role and expressions. At another instance during the Mariamman festival she performed the role of kurathi. She loved feminine dressing but that remained limited to the role and upon completing the role, she had to return to the identity of Doraisamy, which she hated. Acting serves as a midway point she chose to express her true identity.

"I felt horribly shy, and whenever I saw young men, I automatically lowered my head. I felt drawn to them, but wondered if I should not be drawn to women instead, since I was a man. Why did I love men? Was I mad? Was I the only one who felt this way? Or were there others like me, elsewhere in the world?" (Revathi 16)

As a child, she went through immense internal turmoil and confusion regarding her inclination but was unable to converse with her own family and siblings. The mainstream discourses have historically excluded and overlooked them in every possible manner. They were never given the opportunity to converse or present themselves before the mainstream. Consequently they enveloped those feelings under their skin and learned to veil their emotions. She considered herself a flawed being, ashamed of her feelings which ultimately infused low self-esteem in Revathi. Due to constant mockery and rebuke, she lost interest in studies and was asked to work as a cleaner for the family's lorry. Perhaps the first step of marginalization, ultimately opens the door to further marginalization in different areas of her life. Such people endure immense suffering and hatred from their families and society in general. In Revathi's case, she experienced extreme atrocity at the hands of her family. On one occasion her middle brother beat her and

fractured her skull with a wooden bat. Several times they verbally abused her. Therefore, non-binary individuals choose to abandon their biological relations and seek alternative chosen families where they receive love, care and solace. Revathi asserts that it doesn't mean they didn't want to live with their family but constant rebuke and insults made them flee. If an individual experiences humiliation from society then they turn to their family. However in case of hijras their humiliation, insult and dishonor begin at homes and are initiated by their own family members. She felt immense joy after meeting her Amma. She felt an instant connection with her. Trans individuals' families desert them due to their inability to provide an heir. Furthermore their presence has systematically visualised as a source of shame and disgrace to their family. The dominant reason behind their exclusion and exile stems from their non-heterosexuality. Similarly Revathi's brother felt that she didn't deserve father's inheritance because she had no children and family. Her elder brother thinks of him as diseased. It suggests that those who deviate from the heteronormative norms are often labelled as lunatic and deranged.

Howard Becker rightly says;

"...social groups create deviance by making rules whose infraction creates deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders. ... The deviant is one to whom that label has been successfully applied." (Becker 9)

Non binary/Non-conforming individuals experience marginalization from society, law, and are deprived of their rights. Revathi questions the biased enforcement of nature and law. Trans individuals often find themselves outside the underlying framework. Society regards their natural behaviour, (dressing and expressions) as a disease and lunatic. They transcend conventional gender binaries. Their bodies remain trapped in and in-between space (male and female), yet their affinity remain inclined towards feminine expressions. This inclination comes from within. She embraced her identity as a woman and expects society to recognize Doraisamy as a woman named Revathi. Wherever she goes in her village, she grabs immense attention. People usually discuss her transitioned identity, clothing and behaviour all of which draw attention. Not only her, it is the case about all hijras that people laugh at them. On other occasions, she went through indirect comments. Once, while travelling on public transport, some young men mocked her by discussing among themselves: what's the timing? Nine o'clock? or will the bus reach at 9 o'clock. At the vegetable market, people threw rotten tomatoes at them. This act agrees with the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theory of Symbolic violence. He points out that due to differences in power between two social groups, one group engages in non physical violence against the other. It's an unconscious way of imposing dominant narratives and values on those in submissive positions. Here, heterosexual individuals hold a dominant position and impose their norms and ideals on non-binary (subordinate) individuals.

She also provides an account of the eve teasing and objectification that her community endures on a daily basis. Staring seemed common, and some even dared to touch them. And several others bombarded them with weird questions, such as whether they were men or women, or if their breasts were real. Revathi further reinforces the fact that their existence cannot be denied or erased as they find themselves within the narratives of great Hindu scriptures. She offers a detailed description of the Koovagam festival, which historically holds great relevance for Hijras and Aravanis. This festival is held once a year during the Tamil month of Chitrai (April/ May) at Koothandavar temple. It not only offers participation and involvement of the third gender but validates their existence within the larger spectrum of the Hindu tradition. Further she challenged her people's access to public places. Public places are designed in accordance with the heteronormative structure, enforcing a rigid gender structure. Those who don't neatly fit into male and female categories experience rejection and dismissal. Revathi, being non binary, faced denial and was unwelcomed in both sections of public toilets. Although her journey transformed after joining an NGO named Sangam. Unlike most Aravanis, she got an opportunity to hold office as an assistant. Her decision of subsiding sex work reflects that this community doesn't want to work in the same field. If given an opportunity to leave, they would easily give up. She sets an ideal for the younger generation of hijras. Sangam established a great impact on Revathi's journey, transforming her into a confident being. While working there, she learns to openly reclaim her original identity. She sheds fear and stops blaming herself. She learns that fault lies not with them but with the way society treats them. Revathi points out that the significant issue trans individuals have endured is the systematic denial of opportunities to express themselves in this heteronormative society. Finally yet importantly, the institution of marriage is typically associated with heterosexuality. In the context of India it upholds profound socio-cultural relevance. It is more about the union of two families rather than a couple. However, people of the third gender fail to

accommodate themselves within this framework, predominant by men and women. Revathi's experiences amplify the same scenario. Her involvement in marriage remains concealed within the four walls. Her husband didn't disclose their relationship to his family members. Although she entered this institution, she felt extremely suffocating in carrying on this relationship. Their bond is largely engulfed by fear, secrecy, societal pressure and restricted love. Speaker contributed equally in all possible terms like financially, emotionally and physically but their relationship dynamic reflected one sided or partial giving not being able to receive love and solace back from him. Her husband holds the upper hand in the relationship that ultimately pushed her to the margins. All aspects are governed, controlled and directed by him as per his needs and desires. Soon a year after their marriage all his promises faded away and the speaker left behind with deep anguish and emotional distress.

Conclusions

On the basis of analysis done above the researcher reached on the following conclusions:

Firstly, the term identity includes a person's physical traits, learned roles as given by the society and most importantly how an individual thinks about himself or herself. But delving deep into gender identity, it is more of an individual's choice though it is largely shaped by societal codes and norms. Judith Butler, in her seminal text *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) criticizes the typical definition of gender. She challenged the rigid male/female binary and emphasized gender fluidity. According to them, gender is not something an individual feels from inside but it is more about practicing and performing a set of acts and behaviour in accordance with the social norms. This performance doesn't coincide with innate behaviour.

“There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results.” (Judith Butler 33)

A child must embrace this performance, as it provides him or her with a better position in the society. This clearly indicates that the term gender is socially constructed. However, both cases exhibit a rejection of these norms from their initial years. Revathi and Vidya reflect early inclination towards feminine dressing and expression. Since childhood both Revathi and Vidya endured confusion, uncertainty, and mockery which ultimately pushes them into isolation. They often endured several derogatory remarks and labels, which shattered their confidence and fostered low self-esteem and internal turmoil. But they prefer embracing and manifesting their identity rather than staying in the closet. Apart from this they also went through ancestral disownment, social marginalisation and financial hardship which further aggravated their struggles. Even after undergoing surgery, people like Revathi and Vidya experience difficulties with documentation. Revathi was denied a licence. Despite facing several adversities, they chose to assert their real-selves and spent their lives in a way they desired.

Secondly, a child with a non-binary identity often suffers extreme atrocities, humiliation, and torture at the hands of their parents and closed ones. Family symbolizes safe space. It provides children with love, care and unconditional support. A positive and encouraging family helps boost children's confidence and moulds them into responsible, confident and amiable individuals. However, in the case of non-binary or third gender children, their roles are transformed into uninvolved or ignored parenting. Families exert physical assault on their children in pursuit of correction. They lay pressure on their children to conform to the standards. They refuse to accept their child's sexual orientation. Both Vidya and Revathi experienced abandonment because they were unable to produce an heir and fit into the heteronormative mainstream. Therefore they chose to seek alternative chosen families, a shared reality in the lives of non-binary individuals. Both left her family behind and step into an alternative family. Their family structure expanded beyond the horizon of biological bonds. They felt immense joy after meeting their Amma and alternative family. Their chosen family provided them with the identity of Revathi and Vidya, which they had yearned for.

Next delving into the role of academic institutions into the lives of third gender individuals, progressive academic environment advocates for inclusivity. However, they couldn't succeed in accommodating third gender individuals. These places often become sites of humiliation for them. Those individuals face extreme extortion, abuse and bullying in schools, colleges and other institutions. They have been ridiculed with several derogatory names like Number 9, Ali, female boy etc. Such taunts damaged their self-esteem. During their school years, they were punished for their effeminate behaviour. It may also happen that they lose interest in their studies. In Vidya's case, she was a bright student but was often left isolated. Although she chose to endure immense humiliation, she completed her

education. She had done a Masters in Applied linguistics. On the other hand due to constant mockery and rebuke, Revathi lost interest in her studies and was asked to work as a cleaner for the family's lorry.

Now with reference to the role of society and legal structure in the life of third gender individuals it can be said that Indian society is deeply embedded in heteronormativity and often disregards gender variance or gender queer individuals. Vidya in her work *I Am Vidya* highlights that there are two extremes in viewing trans individuals in India. One section is often surrounded by myth and legend while another section views them with hate and detest. Former section engulfed in fear of being cursed or enduring ill fortune turn to hijras for blessings while the later sections primarily defy anything outside binary and consider them outsiders, alien and push them to the periphery. She points out that trans individuals are not seen as human beings with lives, dreams and aspirations. They have been visualised as sex objects. No idea of consent could be derived from them. Revathi recalls an incident when she was sexually abused by rowdy. He forcefully coerced her into having anal sex. Such abuse seems common to them, sometimes by these local rowdies and at other times, policemen take advantage of their vulnerability. She emphasizes that public places are designed in accordance with heteronormative structure, and those who don't neatly fit into male and female categories experience rejection and dismissal. They had to resort to the traditional definitions of binary. Thus, it is clear that family, academic institutions, societal values and legal structure contribute to their marginalization.

The third conclusion is that in mainstream heteronormative society trans individuals are often engulfed in fear of being insulted, molested, harassed and mocked. It creates hindrance for them to openly express themselves and claim her identity. In the case of Revathi and Vidya, the main source of fear is external. Vidya recalls that due to the fear of being mocked and rebuked she chose not to express herself openly. She preferred closeting during her former years. She felt immense joy in expressing herself in feminine clothing, as it aligned with her inner desire, but was unable to exercise her identity. Both of them often experience bullying, mockery and taunts. Revathi denied visiting her relatives and public gatherings. She recalls that, on one occasion she hid her hijra identity out of a fear of losing her friend. Revathi mentions that non-binary individuals often fear rowdies and police officials. Wherever and whenever they saw them they chose to flee from the scene. These individuals couldn't walk freely in several areas, as dominated by police officials. Vidya mentions that due to fear of being attacked, trans individuals step out in groups. She further reveals that they adopted certain gestures such as loud clapping which facilitated instant attention among them. Revathi reveals she had a fear of losing her family's affection. Furthermore her description of non-binary individuals from Namakkal, emphasizes the fact that such individuals choose to express themselves in secluded places. The dominant reason behind this is fear of being caught and harassed. Unfortunately they carry this baggage for their entire life. Although fear exerts immense pressure for their invisibility but such individuals refuse to submit to that as exhibited in both cases.

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