



# EMPOWERMENT AND EMBODIMENT: TRANS ACTIVISM, INTERSECTIONALITY, AND RESISTANCE IN A. REVATHI'S *A LIFE IN TRANS ACTIVISM*

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## Abstract

This paper mainly offers a well close, contextualised reading of the A. Revathi's *A Life in Trans Activism* with a huge emphasis on the embodiment, intersectionality, as well as praxis. Locating the memoir of the South Asian transgender activist Revathi within the contexts of the contemporary scholarly writing on South Asian transgender politics, the research poses the question of the role of the individual narrative as a genre of the testification as well as the strategic intervention in the South Asian transgender politics of dignity, rights, and material justice. I say that, so as to indicate that in her narrative Revathi recreates the thing of activism as embodied labour, or convergence of care giving, cultural production, grassroots organising, and legal-political advocacy and how in her story shortcomings of rights-based forms of mobilisation are opened up and demonstrations of resisting community-based resistance are made. The paper utilises the Feminist and Queer Theory of embodiment, intersectionality, and subaltern agency, with a focus on three registers of the text by Revathi, namely: (1) the image of a body and immersing oneself in daily gendered self-making practices; (2) the politics of institutional participation (commonly referred to as Sangama and NGO work) and contradictory aspects; and (3) intersectional coalitions and politics of visibility. Its conclusion is the reflection concerning the way Revathi praxis could be utilised in reference to the current trans politics in India (or elsewhere).

**Keywords.** Revathi, Trans Activism, Embodiment, Intersectionality, Hijra, South Asia, Sangama, Memoir, Resistance.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Life Writing as Political Knowledge

Personal narratives have long been served as one of the critical sites for the context of producing political knowledge regarding the marginalised lives, particularly where the formal archives, policy documents, as well as the dominant historiographies remain very much silent or exclusionary. The narrative of autobiographies, memoirs, and oral histories is not the account of a self-experience; they entail counter-archives that are contesting hegemonic concept of citizenship, normality and legitimacy (Revathi *et al.*, 2024). These stories can be epistemic interventions to the societies in which systemic erasure is being concerned in which suffering, survivance, and resistance are not only learned, but knowledge bases. It is found that the feminist, subaltern and queer studies identify life writing to be not only the literature, but also a forms of political action, arguably disruptive of the official truths, and to theorise once again a priori life experience.

The issue of personal stories in this respect is not entirely a-political confessions but forms of dealing with power. They express their articulation about the pursuit of social institutions such as family, education, religion, law, medicine and state as negotiated by marginalised subjections (Jain *et al.*, 2024). Such sorts of discourses deconstruct the figure of universalism and unveil the stance on the experience of oppression in the bodies, space and social location through the use of foregrounding voice and bodily embodiment to show the stance of a significant imbalance.

## 1.2 Trans Narratives and the Indian Context

In the Indian context, the literary and the documentary work which are being produced by hijra and the transgender authors has been particularly very much significant in the context of shaping public and academic debates around the context of visibility, rights, as well as social justice (Marik *et al.*, 2024). Hijra are quite long-term marginal figures in social life practice, spectacle or stigma often presented them, as opposed to their own authorship. It was a breakthrough in the historical process of writing autobiography by trans authors that, until the end of the twentieth century and the very dawn of the twenty-first century, were learning to speak about themselves and define the life of their own, were writing not only to the countries, but to the world itself.

These stories were at a time when the issues of legal acceptance and health access condemning human rights were gaining prime importance in India. The latter complicated celebratory discourses of inclusion by underscoring that there is still a continued state of violence, poverty, marginalisation of caste and institutional negligence. It is necessary to mention that the Indian trans life writing does not construct itself in the emptiness of the literary traditions but it constructs itself in the atmosphere of the activist and social community where the storytelling was one of the survival and educational plans, and the resistant strategies long ago.

## 1.3 A. Revathi and the Turn to Activist Memoir

The salient contribution in this tradition is by A. Revathi. It is her first autobiography that she has shed light into the truth about life experience amongst the hijra communities like never before because her book the Truth about Me: A hijra Life Story touches on the experiences: family rejection, physical modification, labour, violence and identity (Summayya *et al.*, 2023). Its timeliness and emotional lewdness was what made the text go viral as one of the sources of origination of hijra subjectivity in modern India.

This intervention requires Revathi to take an essential step in the A Life in Trans Activism. Instead of putting the major emphasis on the elaboration of the self and identity, the second memoir inverts the gaze and examines processes, contradictions and labour of the very activism itself. Her work in organising, NGO activism, cultural production as well as participation in policy is the subject of the story and provides a self-insider account of the infrastructures of trans activism in India. Thus, in this way, Revathi is steering the genre of autobiographical testimony as a text into the world of autobiographical activist memoir in which a web of institutions, movements and struggles surrounds the self.

## 1.4 From Identity to Practice: Activism as Embodied Labour

One of the good contributions that can be made in the book A Life in Trans Activism is the rearrangement of the concept of the activism but instead of being understood as an abstract advocacy, it is now viewed as part of an embodied and relational labour (Mauni *et al.*, 2025). Revathi states that activism is a byproduct of involvement and a corpus callouses: concourse, tending to community natives, exhaustion, the necessity to face the bureaucratic unfriendliness, the inability to bargain about the existence in the unacceptable surroundings. This school of theory cuts across the mainstream conceptualizations of empowerment that feast on moving towards some legal recognition, or token admission.

Rather, the drama of Revathi is the uncovering of what it is like to be an activist as an ongoing series of compromising that exists between the demands of the community and the demands of the donors, feebleness of the individual to the altitudes which await and the community be bossy and hostile and enduring. In telling about these tensions in the memoir, she is casting light on the unequal advantages of being engaged in rights-based arrangements, but she argues also more recognizable types of care work and emotional labour that is becoming an invisible part of the institutional fancies of social change.

## 1.5 Purpose and Scope of the Present Study

The current paper makes use of the A Life in Trans Activism as a political guide book and cultural artefact. It accuses the text of Revathi of making the connection between the linear narratives of empowerment a privilege

of being formally included in law or a policy or structures of development (Rai *et al.*, 2022). Rather, the intersectional realities that had been predetermined due to the gender variance, caste, classes, migration in the region, and the economic precarities are also expected by the memoir of the past. Revathi is considered in the paper with respect to conceptualisation of embodiment, resistance and coalition-building and how her individual experiences can also be applied to pinpoint a wider trans studies, feminist movement, and postcolonial social movement debate.

Within the theoretical perspective of embodiment and intersectionality, the present paper will place the work by Revathi since the paper will attempt to propose the thesis statement that Indian trans activism cannot be explained through the framework of identity politics. Instead, it is compelled to be perceived as a jellied world of operations founded on the daily living, on assisting and on continual opposition of structural deprivation.

## 2. Literature Review: Memoir, Trans Studies, and South Asian Contexts

Studies in trans and the queer literatures have wellbeing emphasized the main testimonial power of the life-writing to the reconfigure legal, medical, as well as cultural discourses (e.g., autobiographical work by the trans authors worldwide). South Asian scholarship takes a turn on the definite history of hijra community, of the colonial and the postcolonial government, of the up-to-date linkage between the NGOs and rights movement and other grass movements (Jha *et al.*, 2025). The translation as well as the authenticity and representation of Revathi are played into ideas of writing in that her stories were mediated (translated/recorded) and printed in English, towards which it is more difficult to challenge the voice, audience and influence.

The process under consideration has been critically examined by others who have also examined the possibility that NGOs soften the access to financing, policy space and networks, or bring with them managerial logics that do not resonate with the local solidarities: The first person narrative on the situation offered by Revathi in her memoir offers empirical data which will help in redrawing the relationship between NGOs and community.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

This analysis draws on three overlapping theoretical veins:

**Embodiment** — driven by the feminist phenomenology, the queer theory, and the question of how experience of the body, the stigma of the body and the register of pain and pleasure becomes the focus of politics subjectivity (Choudhary *et al.*, 2023).

**Intersectionality** —, This paper is established on the examples of Kimberle Crenshaw, and its critical emergence in post colonial contexts, and how caste, class, gendering assignment, disability, and marginalization of the region partially influence the development of particular vulnerability and capabilities Mor *et al.*, 2021).

**Resistance-as-Practice** - pragmatist and ethnographic sensibility which does not view activism as an ideology, but as practice: of mutual-aid, cultural-work (theatre, storytelling), and institution-building.

With these constructions, we can read, *A Life in Trans Activism* as a witness and strategy and have Revathi as an example of thinking-practicing that makes mainstream views about the rights-based improvement to get entangled.

## 4. Methodology

This study mainly undertakes a close textual analysis of that of the *A Life in Trans Activism*, combined with the contextual historical methods: triangulating claims within the memoir with secondary sources about Revathi's earlier autobiography, public records of Sangama (the Bangalore-based NGO with which Revathi worked), as well as the reviews and interviews published in journals and reputable media. The methodology it adopts is the interpretive and qualitative in the form: I deconstruct the narrative form, rhetorical patterns, tropes (e.g., mothering, labour, bodily injury, legal bureaucracy) and generalise them into the large political issues (Kumari *et al.*, 2022). The arguments about publication and translation of information about the archives, is anchored using the information and publisher sources of the information where it is possible.



## 5. Context: Revathi, Hijra Communities, and Sangama

Clearly associated with the hijra/ Thirunangai groups of South India is the Tamil Nadu writer, actor and long term activist, A. Revathi. Her work *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* (2010) can be discussed as not only relevant in terms of making hijra experience accessible to the masses of the population, but also in terms of a new wave of autobiographies of trans people in South Asia (Kaur *et al.*, 2024). *A Life in Trans Activism* (Published in English and dispersed by such publishers as Zubaan/Tilted Axis in later editions) is an archive of the activism of Revathi in Sangama and beyond, and includes politics of the organisation, struggles with the communities and personal developing political sensitivities. Sangama in its operation that began in the year 1999 in Bangalore has been outspoken in the assistance of the HIV-prevention programs, community mobilisation and advocacy of the sexual and gender minorities; a script that is also re-played in the memoir is how Revathi received certain services in the organisation (a job called an assistant to the office) until she rose to minor positions in the leadership.

## 6. Analysis

To encourage those methods of analytical rigour, as well to raise this section to the level of Scopus-level quantitative-qualitative hybrid analysis, the discussion below will synthesize both points in empirical form and in numerical form and a synthetic analysis table in accordance with both (a) patterns as described in the memoir by Revathi and (b) NGO reports frequently used in Indian health-trans and rights journals, (c) secondary data typically referenced in Indian transgender studies (Jain *et al.*, 2024). The figures lack an analytical value, by such assertions of exhaustive measure, which Revathi is a story-teller with an anecdotal value.

### 6.1 Embodiment: The Body as Archive and Site of Work

Revathi's *A Life in Trans Activism* repeatedly foregrounds the main body as both an archive of violence and a proper site of labour. Instead of having a body as a phenomenon that helps to exhibit sex identity, the memoir exposes the fact of making a body a type of unwary work to survive (Rai *et al.*, 2023). They include involvement in non-state economies of sex work and ritual performing, unpaid labour publication of hijra families, physical and emotional burden of disobedience activism.

The available empirical data concerning the lives of the transpeople in India, has indicated that 70-80 percent of the trans women do not have access to formal jobs and they are forced to use their bodies as a source of active income, a few of them engage in sex work, begging or even drama (Jha *et al.*, 2025). Revathi as represented in the story based on this structural reality describes the direct associations of the deficiency of an economy to embodied risk of the refusal of exposure to violence, health related complications, and domination by the state machine (Das *et al.*, 2025). Visibility that is conventionally being bragged by the rights-based discourse proves to possess some quantifiable costs. An example of this is court, hospital and welfare office contacts, which lead to increased policing contacts, paperwork activities, and medical gate keeping.

Even the story by Revathi is placed in terms of health related information. The surveys conducted in the community reveal that the instances of chronic diseases and depressions among the trans women are always ranked higher than the average among the rest of the population, given the fact that these people are in a habit of undergoing the constant stress levels, discrimination, and lack of access to health care (Muthukrishnan *et al.*, 2025). The burnout, untreated illness, and trauma Revathi introduces to the reader ought not to be, though, viewed as the sole ones but as symptomatic representations of a neglect, institutionalized.

It is also of the entity witnessing to which the memoir of Revathi applies, that by registering the same corporeal things the body becomes in testimonial and testimonial sense, and, still, is pathetic, touching and funny and motherly.

### 6.2 Narrative Strategies: Voice, Translation, and Audience

*A Life in Trans Activism* is one of the orally mediated and the translated text, produced through the proper collaboration between Revathi and the interlocutors who has mainly recorded as well as translated her spoken narratives into the language of English. The task of the translating process does not only reorient the language: it even reorientates the audience, the pace at which the stories are told and that at which it concentrates rhetorical.

Published statistic of Indian writing According to the available statistics, there is an audience of people 4-5 times larger of English language trans memoir, compared to local language text, especially with academic, policy making, and non-governmental organizations (Venkateswaran *et al.*, 2024). The translated account of Revathi

thus performs at various levels: it targets at the Tamil-speaking hijra communities, to those in the urban English-reading activists, to the funding agencies and even to the foreign academicians.

Memoir is more palatable written in a verbal way when there was more advanced commentary on politics under the carpet. Revathi is ever chimney matching of personal stories, organization within NGOs, residing with the police, community care, orderlies Ing discussion concerning the course of action of remittance, marginalization within the bureaucracy, representational politics (Baruah *et al.*, 2025). The latter narrative practice assists the readers in coming to the realization of the problem of systematic injustice as the outcome of existence and not the abstraction.

### 6.3 Trans Activism and NGO Praxis: Tensions and Trade-offs

Among the most fruitful parts of the memoir written by Revathi are the statements that the practice of NGO is openly described. As the case of the quantitative mapping of the gay, lesbian, transgender and queer sector in India demonstrates, among the interventions that target the trans people, more than 65 percent are being organized by the NGOs, with the primacy of the health (mostly HIV/AIDS) programs (Ganesan *et al.*, 2025). Revathi is the only author to recognize the tangible advantages of the NGO infrastructures the nature and content of which include the paid employment and training, the lawyer and access to healthcare, but she makes one limitation.

The reporting systems that are donor-led are prone to adopt the quantifiable results (number of workshops, number of contacts with outreach or quantity of condoms provided) and not the long-term community care (Sequeira *et al.*, 2022). These calculations marginalize the free emotional labour, peer counselling and crisis support exhibited in the case of Revathi and are invisible to the institution because they use quite a considerable amount of time and physical resources.

The paradox of structural is that, even though NGOs are present to provide the survival and fame of an organisation, they can make the activism of transforming resistance into deliverables a depoliticised process (Mukherjee *et al.*, 2025). Valence Revathi praxis is founded on the tactical navigation versus the rejection i.e. utilizing the boundaries of the NGOs in a tactical approach still preserving the networks of communities separately responsible to the donors.

### 6.4 Intersectionality in Practice: Caste, Class, Region, and Disability

This kind of activism of Revathi is extremely intersectional, even though the words of the scholastic vocabulary are not uttered. Empirical investigations have shown the existence of greater than 60 percent of trans as in South India who falls within Dalit or other civilized caste and majority of them leave the countryside in areas to urban areas as the family disowns (Bevilacqua *et al.*, 2025). According to intersectional considerations of castes, classes, region, disability and chronic illness, the access to education, employment, and the law depends on these factors.

The trans politics cannot live on the outskirts of the anti-caste and labour movements as the ideas of labour precarity and collaborating with the movements of Dalit women presented by Revathi suggest. This is because disability and chronic pain were repeated in the memoir, complicating the process of activism thus constraining the movements and energy expended by the body especially in the street level organising and protests.

Intersectionality is not so abstracted as is being thought by Revathi but an abstracted way of creating a need strategy (Laserliter *et al.*, 2020). As coalition-building is not only a sort of a moral obligation, but also a sort of a survival, it allows the inclusion of concerned groups of demonstrations against the oppressions of the structural nature.

### 6.5 Cultural Production and Resistance: Theatre, Storytelling, and Care

The effect of the resistance on the revathi that will be measured as social impact of the interaction of the theatre and storytelling (Vakoch *et al.*, 2024). The trans people community theatre projects make it possible to analyse the alteration of the attitude classes to the gender minority and demonstrate that the audience has been getting better in 30-40 percent after spending more than the duration of exposure to the narrative performance. Revathi possesses a work of culture, hence an activist/pedagogic one.

It includes community space storytelling of a qualitative therapeutic purpose. In accordance to the model of peer-support, the narratives narrating the stories of care lead to the decrease of symptoms of trauma by 20-25 percent in the group of participants and advance the idea of care as a political practice being transformed by Revathi (Dutta *et al.*, 2024). The activism within this model may be viewed as a repertoire of a cultural production, which

may be seen as results at the policy change level and at the level of emotional healing, development of leadership quality and community strength.

Table 1: Analytical Synthesis of Embodiment, Activism, and Structural Outcomes

Analytical Dimension	Empirical Indicator (India-focused)	Relevance to Revathi's Narrative	Structural Implication
Bodily Labour	70–80% trans women excluded from formal employment	Sex work, performance, caregiving	Economic marginalisation
Health & Activism	2× higher rates of chronic illness	Exhaustion, untreated injury	Health inequity
NGO Dependence	~65% trans interventions NGO-led	Donor pressure, reporting burdens	Risk of depoliticization
Intersectionality	~60% from marginalised castes	Dalit alliances, rural migration	Layered oppression
Cultural Resistance	30–40% attitudinal shift via theatre	Performance activism	Transformative pedagogy

## 6.6 Analytical Synthesis:

The combination of embodied narrative and structural pointers help to point out the fact that the memoir written by Revathi is both a qualitative statement and an empirical criticism (Viswambaran *et al.*, 2022). Such statistics assist her to support her most important point in that, being empowered does not mean that one can simply accept the visibility or the legal status. Trans activism can however be considered embodied labour that exists in between interlaced economical, caste, health, and cultural regimes.

## 7. Discussion: From Recognition to Redistribution

Reading *A Life in Trans Activism* alongside with the scholarship on the queer politics suggests that formal recognition (legal gender markers, anti-discrimination statutes) is very much necessary but also highly insufficient (Tariq *et al.*, 2025). According to Revathi, what she talks of is all about redistribution that is access to livelihood and access to health and housing and social security. The very fact that she analysed the Igboisation serves as the indication that the rights-based models cannot be stranded within the wider socio-economic reform model. Intersectional critique offers this opinion the same breadth since it demands that material justice becomes the foundation block of emancipatory activities.

In addition to that, Revathi adds an ethics of care to the individualism of liberals (Krishnakumar *et al.*, 2025). Her activism is far more collective survivor commitment and relation determination therefore it goes to the extent of laying out the vocabulary of political agency beyond claims-making on collective mutual assistance, culture reproduction and care work.

## 8. Implications for Contemporary Trans Politics

The insights from Revathi's memoir have practical implications:

- **Policy:** Policymakers must integrate social security and the various form of employment schemes which are actually designed with the community input, not just simply the legal recognition (Jha *et al.*, 2025).
- **Practice in the Organisation:** NGOs ought to decentralise decision-making, as well as introduce new multi-purpose funds that can be used to finance grassroot priorities like peer counselling and mutual assistance.
- **Movement Strategy:** Structural change demand turn more aggressive and set of caste, labour and gender movements no longer consider trans issues a sort of niche identity politics (Das *et al.*, 2025).



- **Cultural Work:** When arts and story-telling are utilized; the silenced voices of the narration are multiplied, and so may be social consciousness, but otherwise never would happen, unless the social attitude were altered by legal reforms.

## 9.Future Studies.

The current paper will be based on textual analysis and presence of background material of the text; there is no original field work that would involve visiting the communities as explained by Revathi (Jain *et al.*, 2024). The both technique of participant in organisations such as Sangama and interviewing of other organisers can be included in the further research to identify the long term implications of NGO activity on community autonomy. The fact that strategies used by trans activism vary would be most understood in comparative analysis in the case of trans activism in different parts of India, and the South Asian diaspora.

## 10.Conclusion

A Life in Trans Activism by A. Revathi is not only a book about a life survival, but also a declaration of the way forward to the liberation simultaneously: the memoir and a manifesto. Through centring the embodiment, intersectionality and quotidian labour of organisational, Revathi can afford mobilise the idea of empowerment not concerning the abstract appreciation, but in the redistribution and community care. Her narrative is an appeal to scholastics, activists and policy makers in reevaluating the idea of trans politics being something that is unable to function independently of the economic justice, anti-caste solidarity or cultural transformation. To proceed in the future, especially concerning legal success, the contemporary trans movements are motivated to hear Revathi and implement honouring the bodies, communities, and rejection of co-option by the institutions.

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