

## HEARD VOICES AND UNHEARD MALADIES OF OTHERS

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### Abstract

Ever since the narratives of human life have been recorded, gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgender populace have existed in every culture, race, caste, class, nation, etc. Every creature belongs to a particular gender category. Gender expressions are historically, socially and culturally contingent. Sexual characteristics can be oppressive for children who grow up in a traditionalist society. We find that people have had a wide range of beliefs about gender. Some cultures look at people and see six genders, while others see two. Gender rule hurts lesbians, gay men, effeminates and "feminine" women. Their voices are suppressed over the years and many gay, lesbian and bisexual organizations have broadened the compass for their work to incorporate the issues and concerns of these categories. Among the many, Living Smile Vidya, Nalini Jameela and Revathi have taken a valiant step to unravel the personal stories in *I Am Vidya*, *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* and *Truth about Me* respectively. Rather much importance is given to the first text. The study is canonised to incorporate such success stories with extraordinary merit and moreover they are untouched by critics. Yet much emphasis is given as Saravanan becoming Living Smile Vidya and Doraisamy transforming as Revathi.

The purpose of this study is to counter balance the unheard maladies and heard voices of others, their literary craftsmanship, societal identity and the maze of their lives in the modern world. Also to unearth the sort of life they are leading, their didactic opportunities, nuptial system, source of income, job opportunities, civilian life and other such issues. Voices of transsexuals like female-to-male or male-to-female are rarely heard and they are hardly ever been mentioned in contemporary discussion. Yet, as we probe further, we need to look for the reason why they are looked down upon and what really is the main cause for it. The study bears the feministic approach and would follow the prescribed literary methodology.

Transgender, gay, lesbian, bi-sexual individuals have emerged, ever since the human life existed, in every culture, race, caste, class, nation, etc. Every person belongs to a particular gender. It shifts across borders and decades. It hurts the boy who is called a "boy-girl" or vice versa. It hurts lesbians, gay men, effeminates and "feminine" women. "Others refer to gay, lesbian, bi-sexual individuals in general and transgender in particular. The context of third or other sex and their self identity, the study encapsulates the self identity and the status of being *Hijra* in modern India. A sincere attempt is made to configure the scope of the study, and to draw the findings of the task. Further, it also makes a point to establish a comprehensive conclusion of the study.

Moreover it hurts transgender people who are regularly denied employment, fired from their jobs, denied housing, and public accommodations at hostels and restaurants, public toilets, even harassed, beaten or murdered because of hatred of their gender originality. This is shameful and objectionable in civil society. Transgender people are individuals of any age or sex whose appearance, personal characteristics or behaviors differs from stereotypes about how men and women are "supposed" to be. In particular, we could read a lot from the words of Saravanan while becoming Vidya had to say silently after 'nirvana' that, "Thank you for removing my maleness from my body; thank you for making body female body. My life is fulfilled. If I die now, I'll lose nothing. I can sleep in peace" (8) and Doraisamy transforming as Revathi rather would be the same experience. It shows to be an achievement to come out of entrapped gender identity to a liberal identity. The study is encapsulated to incorporate such success stories with extraordinary merit and deliverance.

Over the past few years, many gay, lesbian and bisexual organizations have broadened the scope for their work to include the issues and concerns of transgendered people. Hence, the acronym LGBT has been coined to represent Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people. The rationale behind this study is to probe the societal identity and the standard in which transgender people's life is constructed in the modern world. Also, to unearth the kind of life they are leading, their educational opportunities, wedding system, source of income, job opportunities, civilian life and other such issues. The study counter balances the unheard maladies and heard voices of others, their literary craftsmanship, societal identity and the maze of their lives in the modern world.

Most of the Transsexual people experience their gender identity as correlating to, or in line with, their physical sex. That is, most people who are born with female bodies also have female identity -- an internal sense that 'I am a woman'-- and most people who are born with male bodies have a male gender identity -- an internal sense that I am a 'man'. For a transsexual person, however, there is a conflict between ones physical sex and one's gender identity as a man or a woman. Female-to-male transsexual (FTM) people are born with female bodies, but have predominantly

male gender identity. Male-to-female transsexual (MTF) people who are born with male bodies and, but have female gender identity. Many, but not all, transsexual people undergo medical treatment to change their physical sex through hormone therapy and 'nirvana' sex reassignment surgeries.

Scientifically speaking, the chromosomes (XX, XY, XXY or XYY) matrix matters the genetic differences of male-female entrapment. The variation in gender may just be part of the natural order and there are more varieties than we generally realise. People with biological differences in gender may be considered intersex; they may or may not identify as transgender. Transgender and intersex issues often overlap. However, they both challenge the notion of rigid definitions of sex and gender. No reliable data is available about the exact population in the world but they had to establish a community under a pride flag, which was designed by Monika Helms from the United States of America in 2000. The flag consists of five horizontal stripes, two light blue, two pink, with a white stripe in the center.

The term *Hijra*, also known as *Chhakka* in Kannada and *Bambaiya* in Hindi, *Khusra* in Punjabi and *Kojja* in Telugu, is a term used to refer to individuals in South Asia transsexual or transgender. Transgender people are also known as *Aravani*, *Aruvani* or *Jagappa* in other areas of India. It is a common misconception among South Asians that *hijras* are "only men who have feminine gender identity, adopt feminine gender roles and wear women's clothing". In reality, the group of people is notably varied.

As Vidya and Revathi reveal, many *hijras* live in well-defined and organized all-*hijra* communities, led by a guru especially in Chennai, Mumbai, Puna and in Delhi. These communities have sustained themselves over generations by "adopting" young boys, most of them who are rejected by, or flee their family of origin in search of self identity. Many toil as sex workers for survival, yet there are many exceptions like Vidya and Revathy who are concerned to have preserved their moral and ethical grounds. Some *Hijras* undergo an initiation rite into the *hijra* community called *nirvana*, which refers to the removal of penis, testicles and scrotum.

*Hijras* and *kothis* often have a name for these masculine sexual or romantic partners; for example *panthi* in Bangladesh, *giriya* in Delhi or *sridhara* in Cochin. The *hijra* community due to its peculiar place in sub-continental society, it has its own language which is known as *Hijra Farsi*. Beyond the Urdu-Hindi speaking areas of subcontinent the vocabulary is still used by the *hijra* community within their own native languages.

The ancient *Kama Sutra* mentions the performance of fellatio by feminine people of a third sex (*tritiya prakriti*). It is variously interpreted as referring to men who desired other men, so-called eunuchs "those disguised as males, and those that are disguised as females." Male and female transvestites "the male takes on the appearance of a female and the female takes on the appearance of the male" or two kinds of biological males, one dressed as a woman, the other as a man.

Multiple layered discussions have been incorporated in this study. Primary concentration is on the appalling and hoarse voices of Transgender. We have heard them only in the traffic signals, in trains, bus terminus, junctions while begging for alms. Yet there is a lot behind their personal life. The sense of belonging, the self identity and the religion are the actors to be reckoned. According to an assessment, the *hijra* people never seem to be identified with any particular religion or *dharma*. They have made it clear to be associated mainly with Hinduism, and they have given equal importance to the other religions such as, Sikhism, Buddhism, Islamism, and so on. More evidently they are the staunch devotees of lord Krishna, lord Shiva, goddess Kali, etc. They are highly regarded in most of the north Indian states unlike the south. Because in North, people find them as the incarnation god or *aravan* – a warrior from the ancient scriptures.

Secondly, the role of *Hijras* in Film and Literature points out the suffering and agony of the suffered as they are used much and paid less. It is a common factor in Indian cinema. Most of the occasions, the third gender is shown as either clown, supporting roles or portrayed in insignificant roles. As far as the literary representation is considered, the sexual exploitation and the disrespected social life are much noticed. The books are a record of self revelation of Vidya and Revathy.

At the third sage, emotions, innate feelings, filial bondages, individual rights of third sex are being observed to establish the rights of them to reach the main stream of life. It is not so easy for them to gain the social provisions and gain the basic facilities even without the support of the legal assistance. The issues related to them and those are the necessary favours that they have been benefited by the law. Every individual is privileged to enjoy the three layered life such as public, personal and private life. But the other sex categories have neither the spaces to establish their identity.

Transgender people never so thought their status in the world would be as cruel as now before they were born. It is true that they are born human and bestowed with such dissimilar physical features unto the other genders as male or as female. These biological dissimilarities push them towards an unkind zone of the society where in they are betrayed and forced to lead a treacherous life. It is high time for the common public and the governments to extend the necessary amenities for the mankind and not to treat them as the other gender.

Hindu philosophy has the concept of a third sex or third gender -- *tritiya prakriti* -- literally, "third nature." This category includes a wide range of people with mixed male and female natures such as homosexuals, transsexuals, bisexuals, the intersexes, and so on. Such persons were not considered fully male or female in traditional Hinduism, being a combination of both. They are mentioned as third sex by birth and were not expected to behave like ordinary men and women. They often kept their own societies or town quarters, performed specific occupations --such as masseurs, hairdressers, flower-sellers, domestic servants, etc. And were generally attributed a semi-divine status. Their participation in religious ceremonies, especially as cross dressing dancers and devotees of certain temple gods or goddesses, is considered inauspicious in traditional Hinduism. Some Hindus believe that third-sex people have special powers allowing them to bless or curse others. However, these beliefs are not upheld in all divisions of Hinduism. In Hinduism, the universal creation is honored as unlimitedly diverse and the recognition of a third sex is simply one more aspect of this understanding.

The Indian transgender -- *hijras* or *aravanis* ritually marry the Hindu god Aravan and then mourn his ritual death which is observed in an 18-day festival in Koovagam, Vizhuppuram district, Tamil Nadu, India. Many practice a form of syncretism that draws on multiple religions; seeing themselves to be neither men nor women, *hijras* practice rituals for both men and women. *Hijras* belong to a special caste. They are usually devotees of the mother goddess Bahuchara Mata, Lord Shiva, or both.

In the epic, *Mahabharata*, before the Kurukshetra War, Ahiravan offers his lifeblood to goddess Kali to ensure the victory of the Pandavas, and Kali agrees to grant him power. On the night before the battle, Aravan expresses a desire to get married before he dies. No woman was willing to marry a man doomed to die in a few hours, so Krishna assumes the form of a beautiful woman called Mohini and marries him. In South India, *hijras* claim Aravan as their progenitor and call themselves "aravanis."

*Chatla* is one of the most important functions or rituals performed by transgender people. This function is similar to that of ceremony connected to any girl who obtains puberty. The ritual is known as 'aarathi shastra' in Kannada. Accordingly transgender undergoes this ritual after the three months of their 'nirvana' -- sex reassignment surgery. This ceremony reveals that, the hijra who has undergone sex-assignment surgery becomes completely a woman. Usually, at first, the *hijra* girl would be treated with 'Haladi' (turmeric) and applied mehendi. The ritual is observed in the evening and is popularly known as Haladi-mehandi shastra'

The transgenders have a unique kind of widow system to be followed. Unlike the common folk, a married woman becomes a widow after the death of her husband, but the transgenders are forced to observe widow-hood, soon after the death of their Guru. The last rites are observed by all the chelas who supposed to be the daughters or followers. During funerals chelas are made to wear white sarees before which their bangles and 'kum kum' or vermilion are removed along with the period of forty days and later they lead the normal life by providing a grand feast to the destitute people. They also have a customs of inviting Brahmins to perform the last rites of the deceased guru.

One of the main characters in Khushwant Singh's novel *Delhi*, Bhagmati is a *hijra*. She makes a living as a semi-prostitute and is wanted in the diplomatic circles of the city. Vijay TV's *Ippadikku Rose*, (Yours Rose) a Tamil show conducted by postgraduate educated transgender Rose is a very successfully running program that discusses various issues faced by youth in Tamil Nadu, where she also gives her own experiences. Also the much hyped Kollywood industry is making much out of the transgender roles. The *hijra* roles are more effectively identified in side roles in dance events, clowns, and so on. In addition to numerous other themes, the 2008 movie *Welcome to Sajjanpur* by Shyam Benegal explores the role of *hijras* in Indian society.

The unheard maladies of others could have been better understood from the autobiographical works of two different authors who belonged to the section of transgender. *I Am Vidya* by Living Smile Vidya and *The Truth about Me* originally written by Revathi are the true documentations of the unraveled world of the other gender. Rather much importance is given to the first mentioned text throughout the discussion and has been considered as this could be a best document to support the chosen idea. *I Am Vidya* is purely an autobiography, which shows the language craftsmanship of an apartheid member of the civilized world. It also presents a life sketch of a transgender who fought against traditional social norms. Suffered a lot of pain, but finally acquired her identity and obtained her womanhood.

Vidya the protagonist who "was born first time" named Saravanan at birth as it was supposed to be a boy, who is a girl, always believed that he is not a male but a person having female soul. As the time passed, her self never allowed her to survive as a male as she was glad to hear people address as "girly" and she confesses "... I didn't mind being called 'girly'—it gave me a secret thrill" (23). And finally, Vidya transforms himself to declare "I am not Saravanan—I am Vidya" (136).

*I Am Vidya*, is a master piece, originally written in Tamil, the mother-tongue of Vidya, and is translated into many languages, like English, Kannada and Marathi. The book is a daring attempt of Vidya to express her honestly, without

showing any spasm for society. She is tortured by the most of the people she met during the course of her transformation. Her maser strike is that:

India freed herself sixty-six years ago. Amidst our achievements and failures, democracy has remained strong and intact. Dalits have voice, feminists are heard—they can hold rallies, demand their rights. But transgenders are the Dalits of daliths, the most oppressed women among women—they enjoy no equality, no freedom, no fraternity. They continue to lead a wretched life, devoid of pride and dignity.

Though, some kind- hearted people love her, express sympathy and gave courage to do so. But, most of conservative minds shocked to learn her decision of changing sex including her close aids kith and kin the most shocked was her father.

Vidya is a highly qualified transgender who had master degree in Linguistics, though; she had experienced tremendous insecurity and feeling of rootlessness which caused mental fatigue to her many times. The condition of other transgender goes worst as compared to her. The book is segmented into many chapters. It opens very modestly and runs with a flash back method of narration. Saravanan is the only son in his family. He has sisters but he is considered to be the only hope by his parents. His Appa (father) is quite strange kind of person, he loves Saravanan extremely, but when the issue of study occurs, he become very strict and beats him cruelly. Such experiences are described very thoughtfully in this book. Since childhood, Saravanan finds that he likes to behave as a girl and “generally reserved with men” he observe that it gives him immense pleasure. (27)

Gradually people notified the change in his behavior. Saravan never cares for that. He experienced many insulting occasions in the school and college. His family, friends teachers everyone tried to convince him but in vein. He decided to undergo his sex conversion and become a woman. That was really a dramatic journey of Saravanan to become Vidya, which is worth read today.

A Chennai based transgender widely talked in her autobiography about the constant struggle and survivability on par with the benefit of all transgender. While presenting her life, Vidya has raised some of the fundamental issues related to transgender in the final segment of the book. Being born as a citizen of democratic country, transgender people are not able to enjoy their fundamental rights, law is not sufficient to protect them, and common people have no sympathy for them. Emotionally power-packed autobiography takes reader to a life which is generally unknown to all of us.

Critics of the opinion that, transgender is an integral part of the society. It does not mean that they are born physically different to the male or female section of the society, they are actually feeling one among the human. In cinema, they have been used to gain the commercial benefits and not paid much as they deserve. Inevitably the section cannot oppose the dominancy over them, goes dumb and accepts the eternal brutality on them.

Depending on your social awareness, the other book by Revathi is fairly drafted and she is well known activist in Bangalore. She works with Sangama, a Bangalore based NGO for sexual minorities facing oppression. Her first book, **Unarvam Uruvamum** (loosely translated as ‘feelings and the whole body’) documented her field studies with *hijras* in the state of Tamil Nadu. *The Truth About Me! A Hijra Life Story* is her second book, and her autobiography. It is translated into English from the original Tamil book by V Geetha.

This story opens in small village close to Namakkal in Tamil Nadu. Doraisamy “was born last in a family of five with three brothers and a sister” (2). He grew up shy and “walked and sang and danced to my heart’s content, imagining myself to be a girl” (5). Culturally effeminate, with an inclination to dress as a girl and do traditionally female activities around the house, the domestic chores, the games, the singing and dancing. As an indulged youngest child, this behavior must at first have seemed merely precious. It was harder to ignore as he grew older. Doraisamy spends his childhood years with a growing unease as he tries to negotiate his body’s congruity with his inner desires and natural talents. In a family where every flaw is punished by physical violence, one of Doraisamy’s brothers has a penchant for beating him with cricket bats. Doraisamy’s dangers are not just about reception but for his safety.

In his mid teens he met a group of like-spirited men, who introduced him to visiting hijras, Doreswamy stole some money and ear-ring from his mother, and ran away from home. He went to Delhi, when his chosen ‘Guru’ (‘teacher ‘have treated as mentor/mother) lived, and asked her to take him-her-under her wing.

As Revathi, she could dress, walk, and talk as a woman. But she is, of course, a *hijra*, that luminal third-sex, and so she was constrained to live and earn in specific places, in specific manners. The story follows Revathi’s life as she moved from city to city, from *hijra* house to house. Revathi yearned to live freely, to love, to be a woman- for me it was a bit odd to place myself in the midst of someone who defined womanhood in terms of the loving, dignified service which seems so old fashioned, today, even oppressive if viewed as the only option The *hijra* elders forbade her from taking a husband or a steady man. Proscribed from marriage, unable to work, unrecognized by the state bureaucracy. Revathi had only three options to make money- she could beg, she could bless or she could indulge in sex work. Initially, she begged, in the colorful, utterly identifiable hijra style; but she felt controlled and constrained by the rules and demands



of her *hijra* house, with her guru and her sisters. One of the underlying themes of Revathi's life is that for each step she took to attaining her desires –the nirvana or castration, the financial power, the recognition, support and intimacy of other *hijras* who knew what she was going through, and applauded her zeal and valued her as a person-she recognized new avenues of desire, of freedom, she now incoherently yearned for.

A large part of the novel is taken up with her steps into sex work- it is hard to understand, to remember how limited her choices within the *hijra* houses were, but in essence, at the age of twenty, Revathi decided to take up sex work in order to fulfill her sexual desires. This was the only way, at the time that she could come close to sexual satisfaction. But being a sex worker, and sexual minority means that you get the wrong kind of attention. Revathi does mention that she had moments of happiness in her life, but details in dry terms the brutal facts of life as a *hijra*-the dangers, the assaults, the rapes, her tone while she described the violence committed on her body-by clients, by random rowdies by policeman to feel her pains and her sorrows, but her sufferings are not sensationalized, her dramatic moments are for her spiritual, emotional traumas.

Aside from the problems she has outside the *hijra* houses and within- oppressive gurus, in fighting with other *hijras*, battles with other houses- Revathi maintains a fragile relationship with her family, whose acceptance of her new state is grudging at best, aside from the tensions surroundings, her gender identity, her family is involved in long-standing conflicts over the parental property. To split it between three sons and one daughter has so few avenues of income and is sensitive to rejection. Let's not tell about the sons, one of whom is basically terrible brother, when Revathi moved to Bangalore (apparently a hotspot of *hijra* houses) she found a daughter of her own, three young people from educated, fairly well-to-do families. The difference between these three *hijras* and the others of Revathi acquaintance are startling – they were not comfortable within the *hijra* houses, requiring more freedom and space, they did not dress conservatively outside of sex work. Revathi sympathized within their desires and gave them the freedom they wanted and needed, one of these daughters was Familia- another recognizable name. Familia was a dynamic *hijra*-feminist-queer activist. She died in 2004, and though nominally under Revathi's care, it is Familia who drew her into the realm of social activism, by introducing her to Sangama. Revathi defined *hijra* custom by taking a paying job at Sangama, where she learned about her rights, about what could be done to educate other people about those rights, Sangama gave Revathi the language to express her dissatisfaction and her desires, her need for her *hijra* sisters as well as her discomfort within their confining homes, Revathi's narratives evolves through the book from the simple to the more sophisticated, while the prose never attempts artistic stylization. It is direct, heartfelt, and very honest, within those boundaries of 'plain prose' one sees the evolution of Revathi whose thoughts and feelings grow clearer and attain more gravity. It's an interesting technique, all the more for being so understated.

For all that Revathi defines her loves and her duties in terms of service to those she cared for, she maintains a fierce, passionate espousal of her rights as a human being to be treated with dignity, respect and acceptance. There's a note of ruthless practicality throughout her memoir that testifies to the affirmation of life, of being alive and whole, that she must make everybody to be the person she wants to be.

Janamanadata a theatre forum of Heggodu, presented the play *Baduku Bayalu*, based on the auto-biography of transgender and a right activist Revathi. *The Truth about Me* is a *hijra* life story. This is the first play in Kannada on the transgender community. Her work has been translated into Kannada by a poet, DU Sarsvathi. Stage design and direction is by M. Ganesh and music is by Arun Kumar. 50<sup>th</sup> show of the play was staged on August 8 2016 at Ravindra Kalakshetra, Bengaluru and the author was present on the occasion.

Furthe focuse is the status of transgender in society through the mass media. It is more evident that the transgenders are being used as an effective tool to present the ongoing happenings in the modern world. Finally, we could realize that the sufferings, agony are immeasurable. As the community is abandoned from the existing society system, we have less chance to understand their life time realities. The cinema and also the literature orienting their life presents better than what we assume. The general public's hatredness, crime against them, sexual exploitation and so on should be regulated. The transgenders should be allowed to lead the common social life and should be allowed into the main stream of the society.

Similarly, the study unravels the bizarre social, economical, cultural, moral, ethical conditions which have pushed transgenders into uncomfortable strata of life. Also found that the study has a broad scope for the further reading. It is suggested that the third gender is to be provided with an equal status and rights to that of the other two genders. It is a good gesture by the honourable Supreme Court of India which has extended some of the legal rights in favour of tirunangais. Also, the persons with transgender are extended a privilege to be identified themselves as 'the third sex'. The transgender also have earmarked their stand in the political arena. Some of the *Hijras* took bold steps to contest in the recent Parliamentary elections – 2014 of India. These days the community has maintained consistency in gaining equal rights. Yet it is termed as the struggle for their liberty and freedom. The Twenty First century is no doubt to be the era of transgender in making their identity established. As the saying goes, "slow and steady wins the race" the transgender community will certainly gain its stand as African Black fought for their right during the Civil rights

Movement in The United States of America. It is the duty of every citizen to protect the interest of oppressed gender and respect the other gender as "Social acceptance of tirunangais did not end" with their rehabilitation. (132)

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