



Transcending Victimization: A Critical Study on A. Revathi's *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*

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Abstract

Transgender, or trans, is an umbrella term for individuals whose gender identity differs from their socially determined gender by birth, although the term “transgender” and its contemporary definition have only been in use since the late 20th century. Depending on the transgender’s culture and social background, their challenges vary. Transgender people face discrimination not only in public spaces but also in private spheres. For the most part, people have a hard time in accepting them, since they have no idea what they are going through. Is there something special about them that makes them stand out? Can we call them sinners? are not only the questions of the society, but transgender also have many questions within them. This mental trauma is compounded by the shame they experience within their families and the broader community. Discrimination exists on many levels in our society, including those based on one’s social status, physical appearance, level of education, religious beliefs, economic status, and so on. Despite having the right to freedom that every citizen deserves; this study highlights the various forms of persecution transgender people endure both before and after the change.

Keywords: Citizen, Facets of life, Rights, Transgender, Victimization.

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The literary treatise makes a big deal about identity crises. The crucial component of any person's life cycle is their place in the

society. The struggle for identity is the primary issue in the society. Developing one’s own identity in a given community is not all that



simple. Many people in society will use the term "man-woman identity dilemma" because it is believed to be a gender fabrication. There are a few other identities outside the feminine and the masculine. The phrase "cis-gender" or "third-gender" or "transgender" refers to people who are neither men nor women and are also known as "sexual minorities". We missed this transsexual identity since it did not fit the mainstream pattern. There are more social norms and social orders for the third-gender individuals. Being a transgender, they have to suffer and struggle a lot for their self-identity and existence.

The concept of an individual's right to life and liberty encompasses much more than just the right to stay alive. The right to personal liberty, guaranteed by the law is not limited to the absence of physical restraint or the absence of incarceration, but rather, it is utilized in a broad meaning to encompass all forms of protection. When someone breaks into someone else's house and causes harm, it is an invasion of their privacy and a violation of their right to personal autonomy. The word "personal liberty" is used as a succinct term for the many different types of rights that come together to make up the concept of "personal freedom". Article 21's expansive list of guaranteed liberties includes the "right to work", "right to a fair trial", "right to privacy", "right to travel", "right to the environment", "right to free legal aid", "right to education", "right to live with human dignity", and "right to travel", among many more. Article 21, which has been justly called the "heart" of the Constitution, protects a wide range of individual liberties and guarantees equal treatment under the law. Article 21 works relentlessly to safeguard the rights of all the people, broadening the scope of justice in the process. Even though transgender people have the same legal rights to life and freedom as everyone else, they have been denied those rights for an excessively long time. This is made crystal clear in Revathi's autobiography *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*.

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The writer and activist A. Revathi, initially born as Doraisamy, the fourth son and the youngest of five children in a small village in Namakkal Taluk, Salem district represents the interests of sexual minorities as a member of the Hijra community. Being a transwoman, she worked with Sangama, a Bangalore-based NGO that supports sexual minorities who are subjected to oppression. In her debut book, *Unarvum Uruvamum*, which is loosely translated as "Feelings and the Whole Body", she describes her fieldwork with hijras in Tamil Nadu. Her second book, an autobiography called *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*, was published and translated by V. Geetha from the original Tamil.

One of A. Revathi's work *A Life in Trans Activism* was a memoir of her time spent in trans activism which was translated into English by Nandini Murali. Here she tells the incredible story of how she rose from obscurity to become a transgender rights icon in India and an inspiration to many. Revathi recounts her life and career at the non-governmental organization (NGO) Sangama, which serves people across a range of gender identities and sexual orientations, and how she progressed from the position of office assistant to that of a director. Today, she is a transgender rights activist, theatre artist, actor, and author.

The chosen work, *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*, is widely studied from various perspectives in the literary arena. Gayathri Devi discusses the work as a diversified story with substantial political implications in the research paper "Truth Unmasked A Reading on A. Revathi's *The Truth About Me*". The novel is interpreted as an attempt to locate oneself inside the LGBT community through writing and regulating activities. The article by Kiruthiga seeks to analyze the third-gender identification and the difficulties faced by the novel's protagonist, A. Revathi, in her autobiography *The Truth About Me: A Hijras Life Story*. The purpose of the article "Hijra's Customs As Elucidated In A. Revathi's *The Truth About Me*" by Roshinie is to draw attention to the customs

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that the hijra community follows regularly. The research paper by Ragitha Rajendran, titled "Identity Search as Women Among Trans Women in India: A Study on A. Revathi's *Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*", deals with the existential crisis experienced by transwomen in general and Revathi in particular, with the aid of the queer theory. It tends to explore the questions of the common man's perspective such as, how a transwoman be identified under the identities as a woman, mother, or wife. This study also sheds light on transwomen who are educated and deal with a muddled sense of self in Indian society. Although there have been studies on transgender issues and practices through the book *The Truth About Me*, there is still a research gap that hasn't focused on how complex and inaccessible even the most basic rights are denied to them, which is crucial to comprehend in the current situation. Even though high-tech facilities are still rapidly growing, people like transgenders still need to organize demonstrations in their daily lives.

Readers initially encounter the protagonist in a rural town in Tamil Nadu. The protagonist A. Revathi was born and brought up by her parents in the name of Doraisamy. He had a reticent, culturally effeminate upbringing in which he often dressed as a girl and engaged in stereotypically feminine activities such as housework, play, and song and dance. Throughout his childhood, he struggles with an increasing sense of disquiet as she attempts to reconcile the discrepancy between his physical form and his true passions and talents. He had a great interest in playing girls' games and as soon as he returned from school, he dressed like a girl wearing his sister's skirt and blouse and admired himself:

As soon as I got home from school, I would wear my sister's long skirt and blouse, twist a long towel around my head and let it trail down my back like a braid. I would then walk as if I was a shy bride, my eyes to the ground, and everyone would laugh. No one thought much of it then, for I was little (4).

Since then, he was a kid, it was not much noticed by his family. But his friends and neighbours begin to use foul language mocking him as 'Number 9' or 'female thing':

Boys at school, as well as men and women who saw me outside the house, would call out 'Hey, Number 9!', 'female thing', and 'female boy'. Some even teased me, saying, 'Aren't you a boy? Why do you walk like a girl? Why do you wear girls' clothes? I understood that I was indeed like that. In fact, I wanted to be so (4).

Doraisamy faced threats not only to his self-acceptance but also to his actual safety. In his childhood, as he had the innate qualities of being feminine, he was humiliated by the neighbors and friends in the school. Revathi herself had talked about her trauma in school: 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 it as if he was going to strip me and I would start crying. The other boys laughed at this (7).

Such kinds of humiliation and fear of being discriminated against in childhood make transgender children hate going to school. Though, as citizens, everyone has the right to express themselves, transgender kids are put to suffer from expressing themselves. This is because the schools and educational institutions do not teach the students about gender identity, which is the basic fact that alienates trans kids in childhood.

The trans kids anticipate their families to be a source of solace after mentally taxing school days. But for trans people, the household is in which every weakness is punished with physical violence. One of Doraisamy's brothers has a horrible habit of striking him with cricket bats:

On seeing me, my mother wept and demanded to know where I had been for the past month. My elder brother brought a cricket bat down on my shoulders and asked, 'What

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happened to you? Did you go mad? We've been searching for you all over. Had you no thought for us?' He hit me again and tried to get an answer out of me. 'You wanted to go to tuition class and we sent you. Then you started coming home late and suddenly one day you went missing. What's going on in your head?' (30).

Revathi endures psychological abuse by having her hair cut by her brother in addition to verbal and physical abuse. The hijra must maintain her hair in a long style in accordance with community norms or face consequences. She was forced to remove her feminine sign. Revathi says, "At the temple when my hair was shorn off, I felt more pain than I did when my brother thrashed me?" (57).

The trans people are physically and psychologically tortured by the household members because they feel ashamed of their activities and consider them as something strange from the beliefs of the society. They are tortured, isolated, and neglected by their family if they do not follow their beliefs and conditions. Revathi was also neglected by her family members for being herself and she was denied all the rights of her family.

My brothers did not like me staying with my parents and wanted me out of the house. My parents too felt that my presence could cause trouble. They asked me to move out. Unable to counter them, I looked for a place and finally rented a room in an old woman's house for two hundred rupees a month (171).

Everything the transgenders attempted was unsuccessful, and they constantly struggled. Revathi could only beg, bless, or do sex work to make money because she was forbidden from marriage, and work, and was not recognized by the governmental bureaucracy. At first, she pleaded in the flashy, instantly recognizable hijra style; later, however, she began to feel stifled by the demands of her guru and sisters at the hijra House where she lived.

Individuals who identify themselves as transgender face discrimination in all spheres of life. Often, they face a hard time accepting

them since they don't understand what they're going through. They experience mental anguish due to many unanswered issues they have to deal with, compounded by the public and family shame they must endure. These difficulties force them to give up school and leave home. The hijras are helpless in their world of prostitution. They are assaulted and raped both by the police and the rowdies:

Once a large, dark rowdy tried to force me into having sex with him... I felt trapped and not knowing what to do, I had to accede to his demands. I held onto his legs and pleaded when he wanted me to do things that I did not like doing. (He wanted me to have anal sex with him). He spat abuse at me and forced me into the act. When I screamed in pain and yelled for my guru, he shut my mouth with one of his hands, whipped out a knife with the other, and threatened to take it to my throat. I was hurting all over and yet had to give in and do as he told me. The skin down there felt abraded and I was bleeding. Unmindful, he left, but only after he had snatched my purse away from me. Men like him will understand the terror and pain they cause only if they become hijras and are hurt by rowdy men such as themselves (108).

Each transgender person has unique challenges in their daily lives. Most importantly, the idea that transgender persons are inherently violent has persisted as a social taboo for a long time. The law does not protect them to the same extent as "hetero normative" people. Even while there are legal protections, such as the NALSA judgment and the recent verdict that decriminalized article 377, the saddest thing to note is that this bill for transgender rights is still simply paperwork and is not applied and practiced to any fair amount. These reasons and her own experiences as a transwoman made Revathi become an activist who voices for others like her she states,

The way the world perceived me and refused to accept me, the manner in which it snatched away my rights and made it difficult for me to earn a living except through begging and sex work, the violence it contemptuously inflicted

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on me. The realization increased my desire to work for the rights of those in my community who had faced as much or more violence and difficulties than me. It was not enough for me to merely challenge the violations suffered by sexual minorities- I wanted to fight against sexual violence as such (244).

They have issues before and after transition due to factors like society and parents. This highlights the fact that it is impossible to generalize about the challenges that transgender people face, as these challenges vary greatly depending on factors such as a person's family history, the degree to which their family and society accept them, and whether or not they have achieved social power.

The widespread beliefs and misunderstandings about gender identity in a country like India make it difficult for its citizens to accept those who do not conform to social expectations. In the first place, the transgender communities are not asking for a rearrangement of society or people's sympathy. They are fighting for gender equality and longing for the love and respect of people close to them like family, parents, friends, and neighbours, and to recognize them beyond the limitations of thinking about gender in terms of male and female. Whatever their legal entitlements as a citizen may be, it is essential that they first feel welcome in their household. They need the acceptance of family the most, something neither the law nor theories can give them because their stories go on forever.

A. Revathi reveals the hidden and unheard-of moments in the life of Hijra through her memoirs. Although laws are enforced on transgender rights, its implementation is still up for debate. Our society does not accept non-binary gender identities and hence they fall into the trap of gender dysphoria,

Besides, I was born a man and had become a woman—that meant more trouble, more problems. A man sometimes has to struggle to live; but for people like me, to live is to struggle and fight.... If someone beats me,

pinches me, scolds me, I hurt. I feel hungry, I have to eat, I have to cover my shame with clothes. I too need to be with my loved ones. I want their affection. I want to experience pleasure. I long for respect. I want to live a life of dignity (219).

The primary lens through which Indian culture views transgender people needs to be changed. Society needs to break free from the rigid binary structure that encourages hatred against the hijras, who have endured such hardships for so long, and support them to strive for a dignified life.

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