

## **Narratives by Transgender Manobi Bandopadhyay and Laxmi Narayan Tripathi: Voices from the Other World**

**Ruina Iqbal**  
Dept. of English  
Aligarh Muslim University  
Aligarh

### **Abstract**

The present paper takes into account life narratives of two transgender writers Manobi Bandhopadhyay and Laxmi Narayan Tripathi and tells their untold stories from a marginalized perspective which has been suppressed and rejected thus remaining invisible. Their autobiographies project the conflict between their physical and mental orientation and hegemonic concept of physical identity and gender performativity. These writings question gender binaries and talk about sexual variance and the intersection of identities. Both belong to the third gender community and write to sensitize the dominant communities about the subhuman status and pain of hijra clan. They challenge the negative portrayal of eunuchs in dominant narratives and talk about how the pluralism of Indian society has become victim of cultural politics of sexual identity. These feeble voices question power centres and dispel myths and enigma surrounding transvestites existence. They are able to present a shift in perspective by their faith that the agency of change is located in the subalterns and their attempt to redefine their identities. The undaunted spirit of Laxmi in *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* and Manobi in *A Gift of Goddess Laxmi* plant a new hope in this community to speak, act and revolt to assert their rights as human beings.

**Key Words:** *Transgender, Marginalisation, Identity, Sexual Binaries, Cultural Politics, Misrepresentation, Hegemony*

Hijra Literature has evolved as a new literary genre in India. Silence as one of the strongest forms of exclusion of the hijra community is broken and voices of these subalterns can be heard through their small narratives. Though these writings are unorganized, they are able to create a ripple on the placid social surface by expressing anger and frustration of ‘kinnars’ on their marginalized status in society.

These literary ventures are part of a bigger social movement where hijras have come together to fight for their basic rights. Transgender narratives are counter narratives against hegemony to dismantle the cartographies of trans identities and point out the “class/caste/racial hierarchies that they are embedded” in society, write Dutta and Raina (335), which ultimately marginalize them.

The texts selected for reading in this paper show the desires of the third gender community to gain autonomy over their lives instead of being exploited and manipulated by the power and knowledge of others. A. Revathi in the preface to her autobiography *The Truth About Me* writes about existence at the fringes of society as a hijra. She gives innate details of her life as a member of a marginalized community and her status as a sex worker. Her aim is to share with readers the lives of hijras, their exclusive traditions, cultural practices, desires and dreams to create a space for them in dominant cultural and social practices. A. Revathi writes: “I hope this book of mine will make people see that hijras are capable of more than just begging and sex work. I do not seek sympathy from society or the government. I seek to show that we hijras do have the rights to live in this society” (V-VI).

This paper takes into account two candid narratives written by the members of the third gender community to sensitize the dominant communities about the subhuman status and pain of hijra clan. The First book is *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi*. It is a record of the life history of a transsexual Manobi Bandyopadhyay by a journalist Jhimli Mukherjee Pandey. The other is, *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* which is a personal history of a transwoman and transgender activist Laxminarayan Tripathi translated from the Marathi original by Raja Rao and P.G Joshi.

Autobiographies are new modes of self representation and as a genre, they provide a wide platform to subalterns to share their personal life to the world with a particular post colonial political, social and cultural context. Binaries between writing as an artistic venture and as a political and social discourse melt in autobiographical writings to form another kind of discourse. In *On Autobiography*, Phillipe Lejeune defines autobiography as a “retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality”(4). Transgender fraternity has used this literary form to address issues pertaining to their existence and transform the colonial mindset of dominant communities which forces Hijras to live on the periphery of society as untouchables and ostracizes them like lepers and criminals.

These writings have the potential to dispel myths and mysteries surrounding transgenders’ enigmatic existence. These little narratives from the margin by Manobi and Laxmi are not only a saga of sexual exploitation, discrimination and traumatic experiences, but also display the power of their undaunted spirit through which they attempt to challenge

hegemonic centres. These writings automatically destroy stereotypes about Hijras and indulge in the process of identity construction. They also inform about many other forms of gender and sexual variance that are found in India, the knowledge of which is essential to deal with their problems in great detail.

Manobi and Laxmi are transwomen who were born with male organs but felt a strong desire to live like what society described as ‘womanly.’ They wanted to dress and behave like females and were attracted towards males. Their narratives record their experiences and trace their metamorphosis from men to women. Their actions and conducts debunk performativity of gender and gender dysphoria. They rebel against dominant conventions and normative heterosexuality, but are not gay. They want to show to the world that transgender are normal human beings and they attempt to sensitize society about their needs, aspirations and struggle. Their sexual identity, challenge sexual polarization and gender specific norms and behaviour thus they are always at the edge of hate crime.

Manobi Bandhopadhyay is an academician, a doctor of philosophy in Bengali Literature. She is the first transgender principal of a prestigious women’s college in Krishnagar, West Bengal. She was born as a boy in a respectable Bengali family after a long wait. Her father Chittaranjan Bandyopadhyay celebrated her birth with great relief as she was born as a son after two daughters. She was named Somnath after Lord Shiva as she was considered a precious gift of God. Bandyopadhyay felt manly again by fathering a male child after two daughters. She was a trophy for her father to show off to his family that had ridiculed him so far, for not being able to produce a son.

The patriarchal mindset of the Indian society gives more importance to male gender over the female, Bandopadhyay was no exception. Manobi aka Somnath was the only son to her parents, thus, she was pampered with pride and care. She inherited her father’s good looks and her feminine features easily attracted male gaze. She enjoyed the status given to her by an indulgent father. Manobi was very good at dancing and loved to dance and sing. By her choice, “I definitely defied tradition” (Bandyopadhyay 40) . Her teacher used to compare her with the other students and say, “Being a boy, if Somnath can pick up a girl’s steps so well, can’t you all do that?” I just smiled shyly and enjoyed the adulation. I yearned to tell them that I was not trying to be a girl, I was actually one!” (Bandyopadhyay 14).

In her biography, Manobi tells in great detail about Somanath's struggle to be acknowledged as a woman. Initially, he hid his sexual status for fear of public rebuke and maintained his male identity in people's consciousness. Even before openly flaunting his feminine identity, Somnath liked to dress like his sisters and loved to use cosmetic items like kohl and lipstick to enhance his feminine features. He started wearing accessories like scarves and woman's sun glasses to show off his sexuality. It annoyed his father and disturbed his family. Somnath was interested in pursuing Bengali literature, but the sexualization of subjects came as hurdle in his way. His father was shocked at his choice of humanities as a subject. According to societal norms boys were supposed to study science only, if they did study humanities, it was necessarily economics or English not Bengali literature (Bandyopadhyay 39). His father felt that his son had let him down by choosing humanities over science whereas his daughters were studying science.

Laxmi was also victimized by the patriarchal mindset like Manobi. As the firstborn son of her parents, she was expected to behave and perform like a male and ultimately shoulder the responsibility of her entire family. She writes, "I knew, I couldn't fulfill these expectations because, inwardly, I did not feel like a man. On top of that, I was gay. Even if my parents overlooked my aberrations, society would not. I felt inadequate" (Laxmi 37).

Their families found their nonconformist appearance and sexual aberrations objectionable. Hence, their parents started gender policing and tried to enforce gender normative expressions on them. Both of them were continuously subjected to sexual harassment in their childhood by cousins, friends and close relatives. They were ostracised by society for their effeminate mannerisms, gait, conversational style, and love of music and dance. They felt like animals in a zoo that people loved to ogle and curse, but the same hypocritical community treated them as a sex toy to satisfy their illegitimate desires. They were continuously subjected to repressive violence and gender policing. Dean Spade writes in his article "Resisting Medicine, Re/Modeling Gender:

Normative childhood gender is produced – normal kids do the opposite of what kids with GID [Gender Identity Disorder] are doing. Non-GID kids can be expected to: play with children of their own sex, play with gender appropriate toys (trucks for boys, dolls for girls), enjoy fictional characters of their own sex... Because gender nonconformity is established as bases for illness, parents now

have a ‘mill of speech,’ speculation and diagnosis to feed their children’s gender...  
(24–25)

Manobi wanted to break the prison of her body where she was trapped. By the time, she was in eighth grade; she started wearing her sister’s clothes with confidence at home. It agonized and horrified her mother. As a boy, Manobi craved to dress like girls and play feminine roles. She was confused as her life seemed like a never ending maze. She was neither a girlish boy nor a homosexual. She looked for male lovers and partners. In order to avoid public jeers and insult, she dressed and behaved like boys. She smoked publicly and minimized use of makeup to appear manly. But such camouflage could not ease the war that waged within her. Finally, she resolved to flaunt her female identity and face new challenges head on that would be far more difficult than what she had already faced. She knew that she might have to tolerate harsher physical abuse if she went with her plan of changing her sex through surgery, “because society would try its best to deny and gag me. But I was firm. If I had to face death in an effort to establish my true sexual identity, so be it. I would do whatever it took to prove to the world that I was a woman” (Bandyopadhyay 110).

Manobi’s biography projects the extraordinary journey undertaken by this fearless youth who stands against all odds to proclaim her identity and sets new standards of achievement. This book also records the apathy of traditional society and its horrendous treatment of transgender community. Manobi’s sexual identity has challenged sexual polarization and gender specific norms and behavior thus she was always at the edge of hate crime. The only thing that came to Manobi’s rescue was her academic excellence.

Manobi was extremely good in Studies and continued to pursue academics despite all obstacles. Like Laxmi, she believed that education could empower her. Before her appointment, as the Principal of a college, she was associate professor of Bengali at the Vivekananda Satavarshiki Mahavidyalaya in Jhargram. She was selected for this post purely on merit. It was a rare attainment for a hijra. She was felicitated by clubs, institutes and associations for her remarkable success. But at the same time, she became a victim of gross human rights violation. The so called contractors of the community raised eyebrows at her selection. They felt, “no one as lowly as hijra should be allowed to teach in a college, share the same staff room, toilets and facilities” (Bandopadhyay 93) and created obstacles in her life at every step.

In 1995, Manobi started the first Bengali transgender magazine, *Abomanob* meaning subhuman, the status given to a transgender by society. It was a mark of protest against that pretentious society which projected itself as magnanimous and inclusive externally, but was actually brutal and savage from the inside. This magazine provided hijras' a platform to fight for their rights. She also wrote two books – *Ontohin Ontorin Prositovortika* (Endless Bondage) and *Third Gender in Bengali Literature* to unravel their dehumanized status.

There was one major difference between Laxmi and Manobi's approach towards their identities. While Laxmi chose to cross dress, but never thought about surgical process, Manobi took hormonal treatment and opted for gender reassignment surgery to receive wider social acceptance and gender confirmation. While Manobi worked to remove discrepancies between her male appearance and female desires, Laxminarayan Tripathi expressed multiple genders at the same time. Her sexuality was fluid as she retained gender ambiguity.

Laxmi discredits traditional gender roles which are supposed to be normal and stable and easily slips into multiple roles at various points in her life. As a son, she takes care of her family, wears trousers and shirt and acts like a male in front of her parents. She even manages the expenses of her father's last rites. But outside her house, she dresses like a woman, uses make up to enhance her beauty. She even gives dance performances as transgender on international platforms. She is a living representation of dynamic collectivity of possible gender positions.

Laxmi does not want to conform to any specific gender role and defies the normative behaviour pattern and opposes predefined sexual roles and actions which are monitored by hegemony to universalize them. She opines that sexual conducts are mediated by culture and historical factors.

In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Butler discusses the notion of gender as performance and the relation between performativity and identity. In order to support her view that there is no association between gender performance and the inner truth about gender, she takes the example of 'drag queen.' This 'drag' is the male performer who plays the role of a female. Butler argues that the drag plays upon the difference between the anatomical body of the performer and the gender that is being performed (as qtd. in Waugh 442). The compliance with certain gender norms is the result of societal pressure. Gender is a social construct towards sexual bodies. Butler argues that gender does not axiomatically proceed from

sex. Although the sexes might seem binary in their, ‘morphology and constitution,’ but for Butler, there are no grounds to assume that genders ought to remain as two. They are not mimetic in their relationship. Alternatively phrased gender does not necessarily mirror sex (Waugh 442).

The construction of gender identity is ascertained through repetitive behaviour and physical stylistic expressions. By forcing heteronormativity on Manobi and Laxmi, society marginalized them. But both of them refused to be shaped by gender specific norms and created their roles individually. Laxmi went on to educate society about the subhuman, slave like existence of hijras who are deprived of their fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution of India. Through her welfare works, she aimed to empower those who were ultimate subaltern.

Laxmi belonged to an affluent Brahmin family of Maharashtra and studied at one of the top schools there. She was very good in co and extracurricular activities. Debates, dancing, music, art, craft were her forte. She disliked hijras for their mannerisms, the way they clapped or walked or stripped themselves in public. Initially, she considered herself gay. But her womanly attributes were so visible and powerful that gays’ community found her a stranger. Laxmi knew early in her life that she was different, “It was not sexual, it was being true to her own self. I was so different. I just wanted to be myself all the time. It’s a very different feeling. There was a woman in me, and I just didn’t want her to sleep. It was not sexual, it was being myself” tells Laxmi in an interview to a magazine (Guernica).

After meeting the members of the hijra community for the first time, Laxmi felt relieved that she was not abnormal and that there were many who were like her. On close scrutiny, she found this community to be closely knit in a *guru-chela parampara* [tradition]. This tradition is based on certain rules. The guru plays the role of a mentor, guide, and philosopher, and the chela is a disciple. A guru gives food and accommodation to those rejected and stigmatized by their community, parents, family and friends. He teaches them how to earn money and survive in this world. The guru is the ultimate source of a different world who will never question a hijra for the reasons the world questioned him/er says Laxmi in her interview (Guernica).

On the other hand, ‘chelas’ take care of their guru in her old age. A guru may have as many ‘chelas’ as he/she wants. It can vary from twenty disciples to two thousand. After the

death of the Guru, the leadership goes to the disciple who has the ability to keep everyone together and can carry the house forward. Every ‘chela’ has her own ‘chelas’. This complex social structure called ‘Jamaat’ is a pyramid like structure where against traditional kinship ties, the hijras form alternate forms of relationships. This settlement provides refuge and support for those ostracised individuals who are misfits in a heteronormative community. It is “similar to an extended family and, like a household, is headed by an elder known as the guru who in turn adopts a set of ‘chelas’ or disciples who are like daughters to her..., the Jamaat becomes their life and security” (Revathi 127). The hijra community has its own culture, its own religious beliefs, its own rituals and its own language (secret/coded language). The relationship of the guru-‘chela’ is based on social and economic obligations between the master and her disciple.

Indian anthropologist Gayatri Reddy writes that the hijra kinship arrangements are contrary to conventional social structures and family norms. Their relationship does not depend on marriage and procreative energies. Therefore, it implicitly subverts conventional gender roles. A person becomes a hijra through a ritual known as ‘reet’ which marks “the authenticity and commitment to hijra identity” (154).

In this ritual, a hijra chooses a guru and that guru gives money to the chela (disciple), thus establishing a social and economic contract between them. The chela receives a sari (the colour might vary according to the gharana or school), a dupatta, and training on how to clap, how to beg and how to flatter people with his/her talk and gestures. A hijra uses this training to earn a living. Laxmi tells her readers in an interview to the magazine *Guernica* that the word ‘hij’ refers to ‘a holy soul.’ The body in which the holy soul resides is called ‘hijra.’ The individual is not important here. The term ‘hijra’ is a social construct and not a biological fact. The hijra, as a gender identity, relates to a community and it is the oldest ethnic-transgender community in India. They live in four countries in South Asia: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Terai region of Nepal. Hijras are united by their common experience of pain and deprivation. Laxmi started her fight against hijras categorization under Gay or lesbian community, way back in 1999. Transgender is a gender identity in which persons usually live or prefer to live in the gender role opposite to the one assigned to them at birth. In medical term, it is a gender identity disorder where a person who is biologically male loves to feel and see himself as a female. It could be considered as a male to female transgender person:



It is an umbrella term which includes transsexuals, cross dressers, intersexed persons, gender variant persons and many more. In eastern India there are various local names and identities, such as Kothi, Dhurani, Boudi, 50/50, Gandu, Chakka, Koena... Among these, the most common identity is Kothi. A few transgender persons also believe in a traditional culture known as Hijra... with its own hierarchical social system. (as qtd. in Dutta and Raina 327)

Dutta and Roy observe that the confusion in terms of gender categorisation arises because hijras refuse to be part of the hegemonic patterns of masculinity and femininity and detest political representation of their identity. Emergent models of transgender identity certainly create new possibilities for social recognition and citizenship, but they may be colonizing precisely in the ways in which they may refuse or fail to comprehend many forms of gender variance relegated to the scale of the local, even though such discourses and practices may actually span multiple regions of South Asia (331).

In an interview with the magazine *Guernica*, Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, explains about the status of a hijra in India:

a hijra is [someone who has transitioned from] male to female, but we don't consider ourselves female because culturally we belong to a completely different section of society. Many hijras are castrated, but it's not compulsory. They say it's the soul which is hijra. We feel we are neither man nor woman, but we enjoy femininity. I enjoy womanhood, but I am not a woman. It's very confusing. (Guernica)

Laxmi shares her moment of emancipation when she publicly announced herself as hijra, "... a great burden was lifted off my head. I felt relaxed. I was now neither a man nor a woman. I was a hijra. I had my own identity. No longer did I feel like an alien (Laxmi 43). Her mother could not face her new identity and started to beat her breast and wailed loudly, as if someone had died in her family. No other reaction could be expected from her family. Manobi's mother persuaded her husband to seek medical advice for his sexually non confirmist behaviour. It was not easy for Laxmi's family to accept her femininity. For them, they were their dutiful sons who were earning to support their families. Their parents wanted them to lead a normal life. "They wanted me to get married and beget children" (Laxmi 49). Her mother sheared off some of Laxmi's hair in a fit of rage. It was impossible for Laxmi to live with a woman after marriage. It

amounted to lesbianism to Laxmi. She told her parents that if they forced her, she would get herself castrated and commit suicide. Her reaction silenced them forever.

The journey of transactivist Laxmi and radical Manobi and their fight for gender equality has boosted the confidence of transgender people and motivated them to flaunt their sexuality and speak up for their rights. As a child Laxmi was confused. People called her 'homo' as they could perceive the contradiction inherent in her personality that, "I was a man, my body language was that of a woman" (Laxmi 4). She wanted to wear frocks and girl's uniform instead of shorts like boys. She started to learn dance in her school as a hobby and she was the only boy in the dance class. She loved dancing as it took away the pain of being different.

Her first experience of sexual exploitation started when she was hardly seven by a distant cousin of hers at a family wedding. Even later, she was frequently molested by her older cousins and their friends. These episodes killed her innocence. She grew up as an elderly person. In a patriarchal society, hijras' bodies are considered as playthings, "a playhouse and a plaything and any man could do anything with it" (27), tells Laxmi.

Laxmi felt insulted when the Bombay Gymkhana Club for elite refused to give her entry in its premises as it was against the rule. During the imperial regime, Indians and dogs were prohibited to enter in these clubs. After independence the first floor of this place denied entry to women as they were regarded as second class citizens. Long after that in the twenty first century, the same racist and colonial mentality was prevalent. This time it was a transgender person. Laxmi took her case to the Human Rights Court. She did not ask for monetary compensation, but only an apology. Her incessant efforts resulted in the creation of third gender option in the government documents and application forms. Laxmi as an activist demands her acceptance as a human being and her right to live with dignity. She has come a long way and her celebrity status as a representative of her gender at the global level is an affirmation to that struggle.

There is historical evidence of recognition of "third-sex" as a person who does not confirmed to male or female gender identity. Indian culture has historically marked tolerance towards androgynous appearance and has worshipped the 'ardhnarishwar' incarnation of Lord Shiva. Even Manusmriti, the oldest Hindu text of social order, talks about them as 'Kinnars' with respect. The concept of 'tritiyakriti' or 'napumsaka' has been an integral part of Hindu mythology, folklore, epic and early Vedic and Puranic literature (Michelraj). They have been

given privileges in the Vedic period [1750–500 BC] too. Transgender were well treated in the Mughal regime. They were the harem keepers, the advisers, and guards of the queens. They were called ‘Khawaja Serah.’ “Hijras were considered clever, trustworthy and fiercely loyal and had free access to all spaces and sections of the population, thereby playing a crucial role in the politics of empire building in the Mughal era” (Michelraj).

Colonization brought a different attitude towards these transgender. They were treated brutally and ridiculed for their physique and habits which led to psychological trauma. The current status of transgender in India is pathetic as it changed after the British came to India. Britishers were intimidated by their loyalty to the courts and kings, they served and found them a menace to the colonial reign. The Britishers snatched their land, because they thought inheritance had to be through blood, and they never understood their structure. They didn’t allow ‘chelas’ to inherit the land of their gurus. Their properties and belongings were confiscated, and they were left with nothing. The British brought in laws like the Criminal Tribes Act [a colonial-era law restricting Indian tribal communities], and Section 377 [a colonial law that criminalizes sexual activities “against the order of nature”] says Laxmi (Guernica).

Even after independence, nothing changed as India became a victim of the colonized mentality. The two hundred years of the imperial regime paralysed Indian sensitivity towards transgender existence. Nobody cared for them, neither government nor society. In the post independent phase of India, when various minorities and ethnic groups are fighting for their rights, transgender community feels neglected. The gender biased society is still not ready to accept transexuality as a normal phenomenon. A kind of stigma is attached to their existence even today.

The transsexual people face widespread discrimination and regressive violence every day. It is ironical that they are considered auspicious on the occasion of the birth of a male child or at marriage ceremonies. They are welcomed to give blessings to the newly born and married couples, but are repelled in other circumstances. They are forced to beg or sell their bodies as society refuses to give them jobs. The doors of educational institutes are closed to them so they remain uneducated thus unemployed and poor. It forms a kind of vicious circle. They also become victims of hate crimes which often go unreported. They are forced to live a shadow like existence, as extraterrestrials. Many hijras are forced, as Laxmi affirms, “to find refuge in the

hijra world” (Laxmi 8). They have very little access to basic amenities like health and medical care, clean drinking water and use of toilets at public places. They are still pathologised as having ‘gender identity disorder’ in the absence of intervention by the Medical Council of India (Mogli).

A transactivist Gee Imaan Semmalar informs that the transgender community is not given accommodation in the Mainstream society and is forced to live on the margins. They get houses and rooms in Dalit settlements. These untouchables give them accommodation on rent because of their economic needs not in the recognition of their gender identity (Semmalar 287). At present it is a very common sight to see hijras begging and forcefully extracting money by their awkward mannerism on railway platforms, traffic signals of metropolitan cities or towns, shrines and historical places. They are clad in traditional sarees or ‘chudidars,’ clapping their hands and blessing those who offer them money and cursing those who deny. They are dreaded and desired at the same time. God Rama blessed hijras with a special power and said that their blessings and curses will come true. That’s the only way hijras can survive, opines Laxmi in her biography. Their claps scare people. “She is also taught how to harass in order to extract money. This is the hijra’s revenge on society for ostracizing her” ( Laxmi 175).

Laxmi refutes this self imposed isolation of her Group and wants to create her own space within the domain of the mainstream society by participating in dominant social and cultural practices. Her narrative projects the plight of the entire community and her actions decentred the sense of essential identity. Her non normative sexual orientation and gender identification makes her existence problematic. Her fight is not for her alone rather to win respect for even the subminimal among the hijras. As the first chairperson of the Dai Welfare Society, Laxmi feels empowered, a word usually missing in the vocabulary of a Hijra. Laxmi dispels the traditional notion that Hijras are only fit for singing and dancing. In favour of a more dynamic role , she makes ‘dialogue’ a watchword to bring transformation in society and create space for her community.

Laxmi is the first Indian transgender person who got an Indian passport. She works relentlessly to shatter stereotypes and gives a new interpretation to the third gender identity. She uses international platforms like the UN World Aids Conference in Toronto and New York and

TV Shows like *Big Boss*, *Boogie Woogie* to tell the world about the real issues of hijras. When Laxmi got a diplomatic status to represent India at the UN in New York, she felt like an ambassador of her country. She is a trained Bharatnatyam dancer. She has worked in films and documentaries like Thomas Wartman's *Between The Lines* and Nishtha Jain's *Call it Slut* to dispel preconceived notion about hijras' enigmatic existence.

Laxminarayan Tripathi espouses the cause of her community to defeat the colonial mentality which wants to erase their existence. Hijras have survived the apathy of the authorities and preferred to be very secretive by creating a barrier between them and the world around. This has led to the spread of more myths and rumours about this community. Tripathi deconstructs the myth that hijras forcefully abduct a child to initiate him in their community. There is no compulsion in the hijra community for castration. Hijras' abodes are welcoming shelter for those rejected by society. These arrangements embrace a sexually different child to protect him from pain and dejection.

The scenario has changed now tells Laxminarayan Tripathi, especially after the supreme court's decision of 15 April, 2014,

There are now transgender in social work, the fashion industry, who have PhDs; I say, "Study, study, study." You need not wear a sari, and even our ancestors said you need not wear feminine attire to be part of the third gender.(Guernica )

Thus rebelled against traditional and cultural gender markers. Laxmi insists on education, career, position and financial independence before replying to society. She turns into a role model for other hijras as a self made person. She has taken her own decisions and lived by them. For her, self dignity is of the foremost importance. When people told her to write a book in Marathi, She said, "I'm too young to write this book." But they said, "No. The world should know. How many people know about the real hijras?" (Guernice).

Like Laxmi, Manobi feels that the constitutional recognition of third gender has opened new avenues for this stigmatized community. Manobi portrays her transition from male to female in great detail. The portrayal of the life trajectories of transgender beings gives visibility to their struggle. All these narratives, whether penned by Manobi, Laxmi or Revathi without fail project how these Trans bodies are subjected to verbal, physical and sexual violence. Their narratives shatter stereotypes and redefine gender boundaries.

Laxmi feels that mere constitutional provisions will fail if transgender people are not conscious of their rights. There are many like Manobi and Laxmi who are able to earn without begging, but they are a handful. Before becoming a social activist, Laxmi ran dance classes and worked as a model coordinator. She didn't want to beg, or sell her body and retained autonomy over her body.

Manobi was in a relationship with many males like Shyam, Biman and Arindam. Her dream to marry Arindam landed her in legal tussle and social backlash. She heightened her feminine features through surgery to marry Arindam and Manobi was born. But Arindam's family portrayed her as a sex maniac and a homosexual man. Arindam refused to marry her as he was a straight man. She was expelled from her rented house and her parents were threatened. She was broken, but not defeated. She continued her fight for justice through support of her students, family and the West Bengal commission for women. She survived this crushing relationship and its aftermath by the sheer tenacity of her spirit. She knew her biological limitations and so she adopted a boy Debashish as her son. Debu gratified her maternal instinct.

Laxmi calls her book, *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi?* because she wants to assert her identity as Laxmi, the hijra, "People tease me. They say, *Ee, hijri, ee*, this *chakka* [a derogatory term for a hijra], homo, whatever. But I'm a hijra. They need not tell me I'm a hijra. "Hijra" is much more dignified, that's why my book carries this name. I'm the same hijra, Laxmi" (Guernica).

In 2014, the Supreme Court of India in its landmark verdict pronounced that the fundamental rights granted under the constitution of India will be equally applicable to transgender community. It granted legal status, a neutral third category to them as; 'third gender' thus refuting centuries old paradigm of gender polarization in the country. In India's most recent federal elections, hijras and other transgender people were permitted to publicly declare their gender identities while exercising their voting rights. Tamil Nadu was the first state of India, where the Hijra Community won the right to vote in 1994. It also took the initiative to allow Hijras to use ladies toilets.

In the verdict, Justice K.S. Panicker Radhakrishnan asserted that "recognition of transgender as a third gender is not a social or medical issue, but a human rights issue" (Radhakrishnan, 2014). Justice Indu Malhotra said, "History owes an apology to the members of this community and their families, for the delay in providing redressal for the ignominy

and ostracism that they have endured through the centuries. The members of this community were compelled to live a life full of fear of reprisal and persecution” (front pg TOI) The misapplication of section 377 denied transgender clan , the fundamental right to equality guaranteed under article 14 .

However, the law does not guarantee that the rights of transgender people will be respected. It is important that the mindset of people should be transformed. After so many years of passing *The Rights of Transgender Persons Bill, 2014* by the parliament, Indian trans people are still marginalised and subjugated. The Central and state government’s indifference towards this community is appalling. They have still not implemented some of the key directions given in the judgment. But it has given new confidence to this segregated community. They are learning new skills to have their parlours and hotels and without hesitation choosing the third gender option in the form.

Laxmi Narayan Tripathi feels the difference, “Now, sitting with you, I get a phone call, that a hijra is trying to buy a house and nobody’s allowing her. I said, “Go to the police station.” I could not give this advice to them [before]. Nobody will come and give you your rights. Hijras have got their right. They should know to expand it, should know to demand it says Laxmi (Guernica). These self conscious discourses by hijras represent a shift of perspective and show that agency of change is located within the insurgents or the subalterns. Laxmi says:

I think that as every society is evolving, even mine should evolve with education, work, respect, and access to technology. We are a sexual minority that is visible, and yet we are treated as the invisibles. I believe I was never invisible. I thought, “I’m the face in the crowd, Not the crowd. (Guernica)

#### Works Cited:

- Bandyopadhyay, Manobi. Jhimli and Mukherjee Pandey. *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi*. Penguin Books, 2017.
- Dutta, Aniruddha and Raina Roy . “Decolonizing Transgender in India”, *Transgender Studies Quarterly*,(2014) Vol. 1, N3, pp.320-336, <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2685615> . Accessed on 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 2019.
- Lejeune, Philippe. *On Autobiography*. Translated by Katherine Leary. University of Minnesota Press, 1989.
- Michelraj, M. “Historical Evolution of Transgender Community in India.” *Asian Review of Social Sciences*. Vol-4, No-1, 2015, pp. 17-19.
- Mogli, Vyjayaanti Vasanta. "Over Two Years After Landmark Judgment, Transgender People Are Still Struggling", *The Wire*, 5<sup>th</sup> May, 2016, <<https://thewire.in/35978/over-two-years-after-landmark-judgment-transgender-people-are-still-struggling/>> Accessed on 21 August 2017.
- Reddy , Gayatri. *With Respect to Sex*. The University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Revathi, A . *The Truth about Me: A Hijra Life Story*. Translated by V. Geetha. Penguin Books,2010.
- Semmalar, Gee Imaan . “Unpacking Solidarities of the Oppressed: Notes on Trans Struggles”, *Women’s Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 42, No 3-4, 2014, Fall/Winter. pp.286-291.

- Spade,Dean.“Resisting medicine, re/modeling gender”, 2003. *Berkeley Women’s LJ* 18: 15,<http://www.deanspade.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/resisting.pdf>. Accessed on 23<sup>rd</sup> Aug, 2019.
- Tripathi, Laxmi Narayan. *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*. Translated by R. Raj Rao and P. G. Joshi. Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Venkatesan. “Legal recognition for transgender”. *The Hindu*, 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2014, <<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/legal-recognition-fortransgender/article5916955.ece>> Accessed on 21 June, 2019.
- Waugh, Patricia.ed. *Literary Theory and Criticism*. OUP, 2006.

