

Identity Crisis: A Transgender Experience in Gift of Goddess Lakshmi by Manobi Bandyopadhyay

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Abstract

Indian literature refers to literature produced on the Indian subcontinent until 1947 and in the republic of India thereafter. Indian writing in English has a very recent history that has passed through several phases such as Indo-Anglian, Indo-English etc... In spite of this diverse culture, races and religions Indian writing in English has successfully recaptured and reflected the multi-cultural, multilingual society. A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi is a biography of Manobi Bandyopadhyay, as told to journalist Jhimli Mukerjee Pandey. It is a candid biography of India's first transgender principal. Bandyopadhyay's biography offers a complicated story on many levels. Here she trace the identity crisis she faces as a transgendered individual. Here in the first chapter I gave an introduction on the glimpse of Indian literature and an introduction to the author. Next chapter deals with the identity crisis that the writer has to face due to non-confirmation to the accepted gender binaries. And the last chapter is a brief summing up of the findings.

Keywords: Indian literature, culture, race, religious, multilingual.

The biography deals with how she overcomes all the oppression she faced when she worked in college. Her co-workers abused her; they harassed her mentally and physically. But she overcame all those experiences. This incident is included in this biography because transgenders face these kinds of problems in the society they live in. She says in her life people have called her derogatory terms 'hijra', 'brihannala', 'napunsak', 'khoja', 'launda' etc... she lived those years knowing that she was an outcast. Manobi Bandyopadhyay transformed her gender from Male to female through surgery and by choosing to wear feminine clothes. She wants freedom to live her own life and freedom to do what she wants. Acceptance is what she sought for. In her life she learnt to suppress and let go. When she became the principal a rare post for transgender person, the media proclaimed that she is a woman who inspired the whole community.

Identity is simultaneously private and particular as well as social and duplicitous. It is impossible because of the multiple ways in which individuals identify. Identity crisis is a problem of great magnitude among individuals in a transgendered society. Transgender people seek professional help in understanding their gender identities and patterns of gender expression. Transgender people

should not only seek medical services to Make their bodies more congruent but also that of mental health professionals, as it is necessary and desirable. any transgender people experience gender crisis and discrimination as a result of living in a gendered culture. They experience discrimination, harassment and denial of basic human rights. Our cultural values have impacted the way that many view gender. The term gender identity refers to the ways in which individuals internally identify as Male or female or somewhere along the gender continuum (Bolin453). The symbolic representation of gender is reproductive differences of men and women and the primary basis on which biological sex is assigned. Further, as Kessler and McKenna stated, "Gender attribution is, for the most part, genital attribution".

Manobi Bandyopadhyay faces gender crisis from her childhood. She lived as a boy in her childhood, but she knew something was wrong about it. We live in a hegemonic binary system, wherein there are two genders, two sex organs, two sexualities, etc...The transgender person makes a choice to have a biological sex change or an "alignment" in order to align with social constructions. Manobi Bandyopadhyay decides to undergo the surgical procedure to 'become 'a woman'. She says that she grew

up feeling like a girl trapped in a boy's body. She openly speaks about her change. But she does not exactly remember when she finds change in her body. That makes her think that she is different. She is not clear about who finds out first that 'she is different', may be her neighbors or the people around her, but when she wakes up early in the morning one day, she finds that she is different from most people in the world. Her childhood memories are those of a boy, no different from other boys at her age. She realizes that her soul is trapped in a man's body. She tries to come out from that. She wants to live like a woman, dress like a woman. This makes her to think that she is different from others. This is the first step that led to her decision to change her gender from male to female. She wanted to live like a woman and undergo woman's experience.

Transgender communities face gender crisis in many areas of public life, for example, as we can see in voting. Election cards identify them as the third gender. Voter slips place them as male or female. There is an article written by Anuradha Mascarenhas about a transgender who faces voting dilemmas during an election. Payal, a transgender from parvati, was elated when she got her voter identity card that places her in the 'other' category. In the morning the voter slips issued by various political parties identify payal either as male or female. The Supreme Court had expressed concern over transgenders being harassed and discriminated in the society and in a landmark judgement had created a third gender status for transgender or hijras in 2014.

Analysing the narrative of Bandyopadhyay, a transgender individual it can be concluded that preferred identity structures for transgenders are not easily socially constructed and reconstructed through discourse. It also depicts the multiple ways in which identity, identification and gender are intertwined, because the elements on which identification are formed are constantly changing. The transgender person does not have choice to be an identity of their own because there are no alternative social gender constructs with which to identify. Interpreting the life experience of the transgender person, scholars, educators and other transgender people might understand

better the concept of 'identity' for those whose identity does not meet social expectations.

Conclusion

Gender, for the transgender individual, is simultaneously both male and female and neither male or female. Identity and gender are connected but not synonymous. Identity is plural, fragmented and dynamic. It is the construct that do not change. The gender constructs are so constricting and symbolic meaning are so mismatched with their biology, that complicates their lives and make them miss fits in the society.

This is a study about the transgender experience which adds a significant and perspective on gender, identity, identification and the relationship between gender and identity. The most important conclusion is that the society is gendered in binaries that are male and female, and that support social constructs, reinforcing the immense strength of social construction of gender.

A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi portrays the life of Manobi Bandyopadhyay a transgender person and tells about the transgender community and their problem in society due to their unexplained identity. She confronted identity issues from her childhood and even after she was employed, from her colleagues. They harassed her physically and mentally. In society, people considered her and transgender community as the 'other's' category. Through out her life, she struggles to invent an identity of her own. The book records the pain, trauma and conflicts she faced before she achieved the current position in her life. Such narratives should prompt the society to rethink it's attitude to those who are different from the norm for no fault of theirs. Our culture, religion, language and social practices should be modified so that such minorities become a part of the whole and not relegated as the 'others'.

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