

The Paradigm of Third Sex in Fourth World Literature with reference to Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's Autobiography "Me Hijra, Me Laxmi"

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Abstract

Fourth World Literature usher in a new horizon for literature. It is inclusive of the larger sections of the marginalized including the refugees and immigrants or transgender peoples of the world besides the native and the aborigines. In the name of race, caste, creed, religion and gender, the society marginalized its own people. Transgender community is one among those marginalized community which is left unseen and abandoned. Literature is an important tool to sensitize, establish and assert human rights in society. It also serves as a corrective mirror and brings in a constructive change as it gets disseminated and reaches the larger readers. This paper makes an attempt to unravel the tribulations and accomplishments of transgender community with reference to Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's Autobiography "Me Hijra, Me Laxmi". Her autobiography throws light on the whole transgender community and intends to dispel the many myths about them.

Keywords: *Fourth World Literature Marginalized Sensitize Transgender Autobiography*

Introduction

Despite its confrontational title, *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* is foremost the story of an exceptional human being. It is a candid and insightful version of how Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, the eldest son of an orthodox Brahmin family, became Laxmi, a hijra who made history. The memoir gives us a first-person perspective of Laxmi's experiences and struggle; good and bad, deep and frolicsome. The biography introduces the readers to the people who transformed her into the person that she is today: an activist, artist, celebrity, ambassador and phenomenal catalyst for change, for her community and country. On a more personal level, the reader is also introduced to the child, the dancer, the lover, the woman, the friend, the hijra and the dutiful son.

Reject to be a Victim

Once a sickly asthmatic boy, Laxmi, despite being subjected to sexual abuse in her childhood and being ostracised for her effeminate mannerisms and love of dancing, learnt to stand up not just for herself, but an entire community. "I discovered that passivity did not pay. It might endear me to society, but it came with a price. I decided at that moment to raise my voice against the

things I did not like. Henceforth, I would not do anything against my will."

Feminism to Activism

Laxmi is drawn to activism and takes up her new responsibilities with enthusiasm: she gives up dancing and takes up dialogue to bring about social change. The readers get a peek into patriarchal values through her story, "As the eldest son of my parents, they expected me to be a man. They expected me to be manly, and eventually be the man of the house. I knew I couldn't fulfil 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."

Our heart goes out to Laxmi, when at a vulnerable time like her father's passing, we find her feeling inadequate because of her gender, "some might say it was just as well that a son, and not a hijra, lit the funeral pyre of his father".

Empowering the Hijra Community

Laxmi is fiercely independent in thought and progressive in her understanding of the world, which sometimes alienates her from her own hijra community. Even then she remains

loyal to her purpose of fighting for their rightful place in society, alongside herself. "I alone being respected wasn't enough. I wanted that respect to percolate down to the lowest of the low among the hijras, so that we were all treated on par." While the conventional hijra mindset adheres to the belief, "We are neither male nor female. Why, then, must you cling on to the male-female society?", Laxmi thinks differently: "What does it matter if you are a man, woman or hijra when something's got to be done? Why segregate yourself from mainstream society to such an extent?" Through this narrative we are introduced to the plight of an entire community. When Laxmi becomes the first chairperson of the Dai Welfare Society, we hear her say, "I felt empowered, and empowerment is not a word that normally exists in the vocabulary of a hijra. It is true that as a person, I, Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, liked taking on new challenges, but as a hijra I was never allowed to."

Quest for Identity

The activist is searching for her identity, a sense of belonging and purpose throughout her experiences and interactions with the social circles she weaves in and out of. "A whole host of existential questions kept echoing in my head: Who was I? What was I? Why did I feel unloved and unwanted?" Ultimately, then, Laxmi shares her moment of emancipation: "when I became a 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." Her mother's reaction is completely different though. "As we entered the house, mother began to beat her breasts and wail loudly, as if there was a death in the family. Perhaps it was the most spontaneous way to react when confronted by the news that the scion of the family has become a hijra."

Me Hijra, Me Laxmi serves as an educational narrative about the lives and paradigms of the hijra community. During Laxmi's "long, introspective journey", the reader learns that the "word 'hij' refers to the soul, a holy soul. The body in which the holy soul resides is called 'hijra'. The individual is not important here". We see in Laxmi's demeanour a sense of urgency, zest for life and a desire to learn and strive for betterment. Laxmi's life in a society that practices but does not openly accept relationships of a non-heterosexual nature is not devoid of

heartbreak. "Does anybody fix the marriage of his own lover? Perhaps, it happens only in Bollywood films of the Qurbani variety. Yet that is exactly what I had done. This brought me to the question of sexuality. I had learnt from Ashok Row Kavi that I wasn't abnormal. But then what was going on inside my body? Though I was born as a boy, how come I fell in love with boys and not with girls? Slowly, gradually, I came to the conclusion that I wasn't a boy. I was a girl."

Campaigner of Transgender Community

Laxmi becomes the first transgender person to hold a passport in India. While she speaks at the UN World Aids Conference in Toronto about "Hijras and their problems", she champions "The need to destroy stereotypes' back home while appearing on a TV show". Even though every day back home is a fight for her, when Laxmi is granted diplomatic status to represent India at the UN in New York, she feels national pride: "I was no longer just Laxmi, the hijra; I was India".

Two-Fold Efforts

As part of Laxmi's two-fold efforts "aimed at empowering the hijra community and educating society", Laxmi trains her troupe of hijras and takes Amsterdam by storm by performing cultural dances at the Amsterdam India festival. A trained Bharatnatyam dancer, Laxmi has starred or appeared in films, documentaries and TV shows such as Boogie Woogie, Thomas Wartman's *Between The Lines* and Nishtha Jain's *Call it Slut*. While speaking of her experience on the acclaimed reality show *Big Boss*, featuring Indian superstars Salman Khan and Sanjay Dutt, Laxmi shares, "the two of them, Salman and Sanjay, always referred to me as 'Laxmiji'. The suffix 'ji' is reserved for people worthy of respect. It has never been used for hijras." On the other hand, when Laxmi is asked to leave the Bombay Gymkhana due to the 'no transgender persons allowed' rule, she demands an apology and doubles her efforts towards asking for a separate gender option for hijras on government application forms. She declares, "Activism runs through my blood. It is the elixir of my life."

Conclusion

The autobiography is a narrative of her ordeal of becoming a hijra by choice, and her subsequent journey of fighting against tremendous odds for the recognition of her community.

References

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