

TRANSGENDER AS A THIRD GENDER: TRANSGENDER IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Transgender studies have long been highlighted by social, political, moral, theoretical, and methodological constraints, yielding a multitude of transgender representations in the field. Emerging from feminist and gender theory, trans theory asks us to challenge essentialist and heteronormative understandings of gender, sex, and sexuality. The goal of transgender studies is to provide knowledge that will benefit transgender people and communities. Gender diversity has been prevalent in most global societies, “transgender” is a recent social category and phenomenon. Transgender are being deprived of many rights and privileges which other persons enjoy being the citizen of the country. Transgender people are facing serious problems of human rights, violation in the field of education, employment, healthcare, voting and contesting election and regarding their personal freedom, legal protection, family, and marriage etc. They face harassment at workplace, marketplace, and other public places. The contemporary term “transgender” arose in the mid-1990’s from the grassroot community of gender-different people. Transgender encompasses anyone whose identity or behaviour falls outside of stereotypical gender norms. Transgender has become an umbrella term that is used to describe a wide range of identities and experiments, including but not limited to transsexual people, male and female cross-dressers. A transgender as per the generic definition is a person who chooses to identify himself/herself with a gender different from one assigned at birth. Various institutions and individuals have given definitions globally. Transgenders of India who have been marginalized and decentered for decades have taken to writing to let their unheard voices echo in the ears of society. Their writings are impregnated with their ordeals to be recognized as mere human beings let alone to be treated equal. Colonizers with their tool of cultural imperialism seized the psyche of Indians and metamorphosed their attitudes towards transgender. For this purpose, the present paper will highlight the transgender identity development through the autobiographies of Indian transgenders Manobi Bandopadhyaya’s – *A Gift of Goddess Laxmi* and Vidya’s *I am Vidya*.

Keywords: Transgender Identity, Transgender Identity Development, Cultural Imperialism, Traditional Notions, Cisgender Standard, Resilience, Transgender Language and Experiences.

Gender commonly refers to the differences between men and women. In literature, it is referred as how individuals define themselves. The individuals are evaluated by others based on the gender. It is important to know how gender works. It is difficult to face people when they look down on sexuality. The lives of the transgender persons are terrible and are filled with barriers. They are left as orphans and tend to live an excluded life. Because of unemployment and lack of education, they are unable to lead a peaceful life. They even beg to balance their economic and daily needs. Most of them struggle throughout their life. They must move in the path of thorns. The society marginalises them because of their gender. The word “transgender” denotes the partial of two. They are voiceless people, if they raise their voice, society does not accept them. Laxmi Narayan Tripathi also known as Laxmi is the first person to represent Asia Pacific in the UN in 2008. She is the transgender rights activist, film actor in Hindi and a Bharatnatyam dancer. She represented her community and India internationally. She is the author of *Me Laxmi*. Her autobiography is the tale of her struggle she has faced to become who she is now. Her family supports her education and not for her sexual choice. Because of education and the timely help from kind-hearted people. Manobi identifies herself in the society. Being Somnath she longs to be a woman and wants to have the womanly life. She feels like woman trapped in a male body.

A Gift of Goddess Laxmi is the biography of Manobi Bandhopadhyay written by Jhimli Mukherjee. Manobi was born under the name Somnath Bandhopadhyay, the youngest son in the middle-class family on September 23, 1964. Believing that the birth of a boy will bring all wealth and prosperity, their relations and neighbours consider him as Goddess Laxmi born as a boy. Somnath was a kind of a boy who is very industrious and topper at school. Manobi describes her journey towards self –identification, transformation from man to woman and the struggles she faces every day. As a teenager, she faces verbal insults and physical assaults from others. Right from the childhood Somnath identifies the girl in him. She excels in her academics. It silences the comments that are passed on her at the sexuality. As a transgender she faces the problem of sexual identity. She becomes a sex toy for people around her. Among all the struggles. She moves forward to pursue her graduation where she gets funny comments. She says,

“Some started clapping their hands in glee when they saw me; some just whistled and catcalled and soon taunts filled the air. I had not expected this scene. In school, I had faced ridicule once in a while but my friends in general liked me. I

was shocked at such a reaction but something inside told me to brace myself to face this and not display any sign of weakness. (40)

While filling the application form in the College, Somnath marks male in the gender column as there was no option for transgender. She longs to change her sex as she does not want to be identified as a homosexual. In order to prove herself, she starts writing articles for publication in *Malini*, the first Bengali women's magazine. When she writes in *Aajkal*, people treat her with respect and it thrills her. The psychology and struggle of the transgender is evident through the life of Manobi. She pursues her post-graduation in Jhadavpur University. One of the greatest modernist poets Shankha Ghosh supports her to do her sex change operation. He advises her to aim for the highest intellectual exchange and to come out of her mental depression.

Manobi faces so many ups and downs in her life. But education helps her to shatter the barriers that society had built around her. The transgender persons suffer to get identity and reservations till they are declared as socially backward. Her career as a professor was difficult. Despite all difficulties, she pursues teaching profession. But unlike other transgendered persons, Manobi gets education through her family support. By the treatment of Dr. Khanna, she gets transformed from Somnath to Manobi, a transwoman. Bandhopadhyay states, "The April 2014 judgement of the Supreme Court, recognising transgendered people as a third gender and safeguarding their equal rights under the constitution, was, to use an understatement, a landmark decision" (115, 116). It safeguards their rights and equality under the constitution. It gives them recognition in the documents as "Other, Transgender and Third gender." Pritam Pal Singh in an article titled *Transgender Moves Delhi High Court for Name Change in Certificates* states that "The NALSA Judgement has declared transgender as a 'Third Gender' and a backward class entitled reservations". Manobi suffers in the name change. All her academic certificates bear the name change Somnath Bandhopadhyay except her doctoral degree. After losing many years of seniority, she convinces the State Higher Education that Somnath and Manobi is the name of the same person. The thirst to claim the identity forced Manobi to apply for the post of Principal. With sixteen years of experience, a doctoral degree and with the designation of Associate Professor, she faces triumph. She becomes India's first Transgender Principal. She also gets appointed as the Vice-Chairperson of the Transgender Development Board, West Bengal Government. She supports for LGBTQ community and the human rights struggle. All her hard work and struggles lead her to taste the fruit of success.

I am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey is an autobiography that talks about the plight of transgender. It is a journey through the life of Vidya who was originally named as Sarvanan by her parents. Vidya was born on 25 March, 1982. She was a precious child to her parents. They offered prayers to God for a boy child. After the birth of Sarvanan; they believed that their desire was fulfilled. They did not expect that their son would change his sex. Vidya through her book carves out the entire existence of a person who undergoes physical and mental transformation. Her experiences transformed and enabled her to resist social discrimination. There is a limited literature that addresses the challenges that trans individuals and their families face. There is a lack of literature that focuses on the resilience and resistance of the trans community. Society did not give any opportunities to them. They desire to live a decent life, but the cruel society did not accept them. Despite being an M.A. Linguistic graduate, the life Vidya from her birth to the present and her demands for the basic rights of transgender portray the plight of thousands of unknown transgenders in India. Vidya also demands the sex reassignment surgery for the medically and psychologically tested and certified transgender.

Surgery is the great achievement and memorable day for transgender like Vidya, but it is a normal working out for the hospital. After the surgery, she ultimately attains peace. She derives happiest moment through the transformation. Vidya becomes exemplary when she is proud for becoming a woman. Her happiness of being accepted as a woman is expressed in the following lines:

Amma Amma, I have become a woman I am
not Sarvanan anymore. I am Vidya- a complete
Vidya –a whole woman...I am your sister now,
you sister...Look at me as a girl, Appa. (9)

Transgenders are also part of our society. Vidya says that government would understand the difficulties and problems of transgenders one day. Vidya is one of the voiced women to raise her hand against the horrible status of Transgenders in India. Vidya was once transphobic, fearing to reveal her gender identity. But her experiences transformed 'Vidya'. She fought against the social discriminations and now survives beautifully.

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