



India's Approach towards its Transgender Community

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Abstract

Transgender community is one of the most controversial and socially marginalised sections of the society. The term transgender carries a stigma with it. Transgender have suffered over the years on all fronts because of non acceptant attitude of society. They face social exclusion as well as family exclusion. This paper is an attempt to make readers aware about their life, their struggle to attain identity in the society. “The Truth About Me” is the

courageous and moving autobiography of Revathi who fought against all odds to prove her existence. This book tells us about traumatic life of Revathi born as a male but behaved and felt like a female. "A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi" is the courageous and moving biography of Manobi. Her story tells us that merit is the only equalising factor in search for identity in this callous world. These two narratives are two eye opening narratives for the society.

Keywords: Transgender, Alignment, Sanctity, Recognition, Harassment.

A country where Yaksha, Gandharva, Kinnars were treated like Gods, a country where history worships Mohini, an avatar of Lord Vishnu, a country where the divine form of Lord Shiva, the Ardhanareshwar, is worshiped, sadly suffers from a trans-phobia in its recent times. The term 'transgender' comes with a pre-attached stigma, of being the 'other' of the social structure. But if one looks to the tradition of Ancient India, and even in the times of Mughals, transgender people were given much-deserved respect in society. It is only after colonialism, and the patriarchal shift in the mindset of people, that they are not even considered humans.

The picture of a transgender person, when comes to mind, is of a beggar, begging for a livelihood, dancing in the streets or, functions to fulfill their basic human needs. But, they are a lot more than just 'bodies'. The soul, which is different from alignment to its body, a heart, that longs for acceptance, and the basic human rights to live a life of dignity.

The term 'hijra' or 'kinar', is used as a derogatory term in our society because we can't accept the ones who are different from us. As they are more clearly 'visible' than their LGBT counterparts, so more prone to harassment and sufferings. In April 2014, the Supreme Court of India, decided to take the initiative of having the responsibility of the 4,90,000 lives across the country and ruled that transgender people should be recognized as a third gender and enjoy all fundamental rights, while also being entitled to specific benefits

in education and employment. But, that too, never gave the full security and sanctity, which they deserved. Though it was a ray of hope that gave these lives a motive to live, to sustain in this harsh world.

A two-judge bench of the Supreme Court took this decision, on April 15, 2014. April 15, was specially chosen as, it was the day, in 2008, when the country's first Aravani Welfare Board was constituted by the Tamil Nadu state government marking, April 15, as the Transgender Day. Justice K.S. Radhakrishnan told during the ongoing ruling of the top-court, "Recognition of the transgender as a third gender is not a social or medical issue, but a human rights issue." But, behind this big victory are the sacrifices and sufferings of uncountable transgender people, who suffered harassment for being different and not getting fit into the norms of the so-called social structure. The lives of many such people are an inspiration for mankind.

A Revathi, the author, "The Truth About Me", a transgender activist, who herself suffered a lot due to her gender-identity, is an inspiration for all. Revathi, was born a boy, but was never satisfied with the alignment of her body and soul and so, she chose to change her body into that of a female, with a sex change operation, but that didn't come to her served in a platter, she had to suffer and face abuse and harassment as an ordinary thing.

She had mentioned in her book, "The truth about me", that how she felt during this period of her life and how everything is going to change for her after the operation. "The very core of my life was to be removed and who knows if I would survive it. ... I felt fear. Of only God had created me a woman, I wouldn't have to suffer through all this."¹ The ones who are denied the basic human rights, for them getting property rights was an impossible thing, and faced these harsh abuses from her own family, "You pottai motherfucker! Be glad that we've allowed you to be in a sari! Think you can hung around with those number nines... and still demand your share of property?"²

Even after facing all this, her spirits stood firm and how she kept motivating others of her clan to be aware of their rights can be seen in her words, "...I also explained that it was important they know of their rights, that they come together to fight for what was due to them. Alone, I could achieve nothing, we had to somehow pull together."³

This journey of a teenage trans-gender, of running away from the home, finding the same people of her kind in a new place, facing the hatred of society as well as family, sexual abuse, selling body to earn the bread and butter, and still becoming an activist, and fighting for the others, requires a spirit which can't be shaken easily and a lot of courage and positivity of the heart and soul to be what A. Revathi has become. Another such braveheart, India's first transgender principal, Manobi Bandhyopadhyay born as Somnath in a town named Naihati in Kolkata. She was the third child of her parents and that too a 'son', after two daughters, a big deal in a typical Indian family. This could be felt with the words that she shared in the book, "A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi", "I was born on 23rd September, 1964 at my maternal grandparents' magnificent house in Hooghly's Chnadernagore, My father Chittaranjan Bandhyopadhyay was a proud man that day, finally after two daughters, he had been able to sire a boy!"⁴ And think of the plight of that little boy, who had no idea, that how the dynamics of life will change for him.

Destiny decided something different for Manobi. As she was growing young, she realized that hers was a female soul locked up inside a male's body. Like all other transgender people, Manobi, also experienced the weird eye of society, and the abuse, the daily dose of harassment, and the shame to the family which they thought came to them due to her. But one thing that kept her spirits high, despite never getting love in life, or care and concern which she deserved, was the support of her family, though not directly but indirectly and, her education. Education plays a key role in a person's life. With her education, she was able to overpower all the hardships that came to her, more precisely than an uneducated trans-gender would do. An M.Phil and a Ph.d, degree for a trans-gender was a big deal at that

time, and she achieved this milestone with the will to survive and fight the hurdles and becoming India's first transgender principal. As she mentions in the book, "One morning, in March 2015, as I was travelling by car from Kharagpur to Jhargram to attend class, my mobile rang. It was a staff member from the college; she had called to say that the panel of new principals had been declared and I had been selected! ... Imagine my joy! I felt like screaming out loud, telling the whole world about my success, but of course I didn't! ... And yes, I became the country's first transgender college principal. The impossible had happened!"⁵

Imagine the pain and suffering she had gone through to achieve this milestone. Despite having a bad experience in love, facing all the inhumane treatment she was able to make through all this. When the man she loved with all her heart, cheated her and tried everything to make her life hell, even in that situation, her spirits were always high, as she says "I am a believer of destiny and sometimes I wonder if I will die without getting justice... Will Arindam have the last laugh after wronging me? Sometimes I tell myself that I should stop thinking about it and let God be the best judge of my agony. But in every lonely waking moment, those insults chase me and make me feel restless. Something inside me tells me to arise, awaken."⁶ And may be that spirit, that attitude of never giving up made her what she is now.

Currently living with her adopted son, Debashish, she is living a pleasant life, enjoying the motherhood, for the ones who can give birth to a child, it a feeling of care and concern that can make anyone a loving and caring mother, and this satisfaction which she feels with what she has now can be seen in her remarks towards the end of the book, when she says, "I live with Deba at the Krishnagar campus now. It is a modest principal's quarters but I am very happy. ... The stress that had build up inside me for years has started ebbing away as clean, fresh air sweeps my lungs. I think the wheels of fortune have finally changed and I thank Lord Shiva for this. He has finally answered my prayers."⁷ The positivity and the zeal to live, which she possessed during the journey is an inspiration for every

human being and a lesson that love and faith can change every hurdle into an opportunity.

Many more examples are before us, like Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, the trans-gender to represent India in the United Nations also, India's first trans-woman IPS officer, K Prithika Yashini, Joyita Mondal who became a Lok Adalat (Civil Court) judge, Anjali Ameer became the first transgender actress to play a lead role and Nitasha Biswas, who was crowned as trans-queen, India. These people and more like them have set an example for the others to come forward and demand their rights for living a humane life.

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2016, which first lapsed when it didn't appear in the Lok Sabha, but later on passed and became the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019, gave hope to society. As things are changing, with these people getting educated and aware about their rights but there is a long way to go, to reach a point where society will develop a mindset of acceptance, and love for the people. There will be a time when society will get rid of hatred, disgust or, disapproval of someone based on their sexual orientation or gender differences.

With a change coming in the overall structure of viewing everyone as a part of the society, it can be hoped that India will once again become more open and accept the differences with their beauty and flaws and embrace humanity over any other categorization of class, sex, gender, race or religion and be a place filled with love and compassion and a welcoming heart for every soul.

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