

Existential Crisis: A Transgender's Journey

Reva Ramesh¹, Dr. Sreelakshmi N²

¹M.Phil. Scholar, Department of English Language and literature

Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Kochi Campus, India

Email Id: reva.ramesh24@gmail.com

²Assistant professor (Sr.Gr) and Research Guide, Department of English Language and

Literature, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham

Kochi campus, India

Abstract

Intolerance, the dictionary defines it as the unwillingness or refusal to see or accept another person or their opinion. Transgenders as a third gender exists in the world since its inception. But even today they are recognized as people having mental instability or as substandard. The patriarchal/ chauvinist society places them as an outcaste alongside or nether to other socially and economically backward people. The paper deals with how such standards have affected their identity and existence and the struggle they have been through in finding a decent venture.

Key words: Gender dysphoria, existentialism, identity crisis, transphobia

Introduction

The term outcasts define those people who are eschewed from the society, and deliberately kept away from the human settlement or the fellowship in which they live in. Since time unknown, a transgender/transsexual is treated as an outcast as they are considered unfit for the notions of "normality" formulated by the social conventions. As a consequence, many societies evacuate themselves from the idea of considering a transgender/transsexual as their own. If one could hark back to the time when they were stopped in a traffic signal and forfended from a Hijra or any transgender person begging and instantly padding with hatred or loathe, it is worse than seeing a beggar with a child. The queer community in India is generally uneducated. Because, carrying the sting of hatred and bullying all throughout school days to college is not easy. Even a transgender from quite a well-off family would not be okay to attend colleges or higher education dreading for being tyrannized by the society. As the school education provides knowledge regarding the two major sexes only, anyone who lives outside might be considered wide of the mark. Also, learning what they actually like can also become back breaking due to the inadequate hostel facilities and restroom facility. Due to such circumstances, even after getting educated, finding a remuneratively standard venture is almost not worth considering. Even if it is practical, the probability that they will be bullied and hunted down is excessive in degree.

Since they are uneducated, most of the transgender in India tends to exhibit their femininity or maleness quite openly. Instead of giving proper education for all to make people feel okay to exhibit their innateness, what education actually provides is techniques as to hide their innate nature. Thus, the transgender is regarded by the society as outcast among the outcasts. Mainly due to the fact that they deviate from the 'normal,' they are subjected to constant tormentation, harassment, degrading remarks as sex slaves and often subjected to much other violence. It also due to the fact that our 'normal' society is chauvinist hence has to bear a man with no maleness or a woman with maleness is considered a shame. They live in the fringes of society far away from the other human settlements. They are in every way haunted, humiliated and even expected to hide their identity for the fear of scrutiny. Thus, people who are young among the transgender/transsexual community

might be timid towards the queer community for being uneducated, for teasing each other in public, for revealing each other.

The Crisis

Gender groups thus makes up a society which in turn provides a benchmark for people who can identify themselves within such groups. But the identity of a person must not limit hardly within the boundaries of gender. It must go beyond that thereby helping many to conquer their dreams, and to attain desirable gain. In her autobiography, *I am Vidya, A Transgender's Journey* Living Smile Vidyawrote, "I was in search of myself, going beyond my confusion over my gender." (49) This transgender woman had a suffrage of her own in the journey in doing what she really wants. She had three girls as friends in school, which made her more comfortable. Nobody during her school days questioned her identity as she was still a boy then and probably thought she was avoiding empty chatter for fear of losing focus on her studies. But when they were older, they started commenting on her friendship with other women. She is a woman at heart and felt ashamed and uncomfortable when mocked alongside another woman. The difference between mocking and recognizing is enormous as no people might feel bad with recognizing their gender. But will definitely hate it when they are made fun of. Vidya was keenly interested in dramatics and wanted to become an actress from a very early age. In her juvenility, she would dress up in her sister's skirts and dance to film songs. After completing an MA, pursuing doctoral studies in dramatics was her ambition but as her feminine traits were growing intense day by day and she was always asked to hide herself from the outer world, she couldn't go after the calling. There were more important deeds she had to accomplish, to break free of her maleness she was born with and to be a completewoman. Almost all the transgenders/transsexuals could narrate a long account of struggle due to the lack of social acceptance, oppression and violence of many kinds. Since they left their families at a very young age, there are high chances that they might get indulged in drugs and unsafe sex, the after effect of which are depression and many other mental and physical issues. Eventhough their entire efforts concentrateson altering their body, and to seek an identity to that of the desired gender, taking unhealthy surgeries and hormones might further take them away from the identity they longed for. Their existential crisis is more evident after the Covid-19 pandemic, hitting hardly on them than ever before. They are forbidden from doing sex work and since there are no marriages conducted, they couldn't earn a penny by showering blessings on the newlyweds.

It is unjust to see people giving up their ambition, for sake of sustaining in a society which can no longer adjust to the fact that differences exist. Talking about Vidya again, she was educated by her father, who did a sweepers job and belonged to the lowermost strata of the caste system. From the time Saravanan (Vidya's name when she was still pretending to be a man) was born, his father was so keen in educating his son, making him go through the homework's and conducting the same test papers again and again. He wanted to give better education for his son and make him a collector. Thus, educating the male heir of the family was in a way a move to attain salvation for his father. He had borrowed money at a high interest to educate his son. Whenever Saravanan felt the need to break free of his maleness and to be a "Vidya," he felt like destroying his father's dreams one by one. He could not tell his family, friends, or the society that he is not Saravanan but a girl. The disclosure might be a shock to all of them, she thought. Thus, a whole family is pushed into void upon revelation of one's gender. Wouldn't it be so much easier for them to live if the populace is a lot more accepting and less selfish?

Vidya had a friend Sri, a transgender man who had a master's degree in computer science and was working ina private sector IT Company. He held a good job and came from a well-off family in Madurai, now settled in Chennai. He was the youngest son and faced the same kind of social and family problems a she did. He worked hardat studies and did not care about the criticism of masses. He does his duty towards his family and enjoys his freedom and time while visiting an NGO where many transgenders lived. He enjoyed his life secretly without revealing himself to the society. Sri advisedVidya to continue her studies complete the PhD, earn a good salary and be a good son to the

family meanwhile visiting the transgender festivals and celebrations annually and spending some quality time with the NGOs. The consequences of revealing and sex changing can make her end up being a beggar. This is how a majority of transgenders/transsexuals live, leading a double life. Some will take suicide as an option; some will want to live fighting the odds. Thus, as members of the third gender, they face many issues concerning education, employment and so on. In this society, concealing their identity, keep on with the education and to earn a better economic independence is more important as far as the transgenders are concerned. Education plays a major role here. It is mainly observed among the educated transgenders/transsexuals an urge to deviate from their communal norms and live freely like all others. The fact that they are bullied from schools to colleges prevents them from being an active student. Thus, education must be provided for all gender groups, to help them get a better understanding of nature's creation.

Most of the transgender from south India migrate to the north, to cities like Mumbai, Pune, Kolkata and Delhi. An important reason for this being that, in these areas, people see them as avatars of Lord Krishna. But this doesn't mean that they could earn a dignified life there. Either people think it is good to receive their blessing, or fear that their curse could come true. Whether such beliefs are true or not, they have encouraged Tirunangais to seek shelter in those cities. In TamilNadu, there are certain myths and legends about transgender that in Hindu mythology Lord Krishna took the form of Mohini, to fulfill Arjuna's son Aaravan's last wishes before he had to sacrifice himself to Kali to win the war. Aaravan's last wish was granted when Krishna took Mohini's form and married him a day before his beheading. Even though there are no direct discourses on homosexuality, there are many accounts of sex change, or a third sex characters in Ramayana, Mahabharata and Vedas. It could be either of deities getting incarnated or non-deities getting blessed or cursed to be one. Even with all these, the crimes against transgender are superabundant in all south Indian states. Despite of having such major atrocities, these issues are not been discussed or talked about not before a decade. Till then, there were no traces of information regarding the extent, the depth and the different forms of violence happening across the country. It is simply because people never cared about it and felt it unimportant. Most Indians, especially south Indians are God-fearing people. But when the matter comes to transgender and their rights, these epic stories and mythologies seems to have a very little impact on them. What people never understand is that, the queer community too are a bunch of human beings who eat, sleep, do hard work and live just like anyone else.

But they are always looked down with hatred, approached with domineering eyes, with dislike, detachment, resentment, as if coming in the vicinity of them could be polluting. They are blamed for being one of nature's creations. It is not fair that society still thinks homosexuality as a sin. It is this fear of the society and their negative frame of mind that steers away the queer community to the northern states. Whether it is due to the fear of Lord Krishna's incarnation or the fear of being cursed, they face fewer challenges there. Thus, if any man in the southern states wanted to live like a woman, they have no choice other than going to north.

But the life in northern states of India too will not be a good piece of cake. What is in store for them is either begging, or prostitution. All of them have to leave behind the dreams of doing a regular job and returning back to family every evening as they prepare to embark on the harsh journey. They will be asking for money from shop to shop, begging in the train, traffic signal etc. They will have to follow every rule and regulations set forward by their community in order to prevent themselves from causing any trouble. They would also have to keep their heads bowed while walking through the streets. They couldn't own a house at any cost. On one such occasion where she was begging, Vidya says, "of course, I had waited for this moment. It was something I was expected to do, something I now had to. And yet, even as my brain told my hand to reach out, the hand refused to obey! Tears were welling up in my eyes. At that very instant I remembered my M.A in linguistics, of all things, I stood there, nervous, hesitant." (I am Vidya, 85). Soon she realized that her M.A means nothing in the real world.

The fact that, holding an M.A never indicates that, government jobs are waiting for them. Even the sympathizers working in private sectors too will hesitate to employ a transgender. Even if they

wanted to become an established entrepreneur, there will be no agency to finance them, or no company to give them business. Thus the social security is a vague dream as far as transgender are concerned.

The insults stacked upon them alongside all those weary desires repeatedly fortify the fact that they were not considered a member of this society. Since the whole society has looked upon them so far with contempt, they too started scorning society as one big system of mockery. The world just turns out to be an oyster of madmen, in which many had to live in pain, shunned in their bodies. The people are still corrupted, greedy, obscene, treacherous and cruel. Thus, their constant effort in making themselves feel superior is just superfluous. Even if they cannot work, there is no wrong in begging for a rupee or two if we consider it as a compensation for throwing into them barbs and stings battering them into numbness. There are no standard jobs waiting for them to venture on and begging is not as easy as one says. Henceforth, living as a transgender in a society like ours only means putting our heart and life at stake.

From many of the success stories surfaced to limelight with the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2016, the life story of the first ever transgender principal in India is a breakthrough. Introduced by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and enacted by the parliament of India, the act provides protection of rights of transgender people, their welfare and other related matters. Education must be something which is the most vital and most protected rights for them as in the case of Vidya, a clear boundary can be observed in the mannerisms in which she and other transgender act. Considering ManobiBandyopadhyay's life, she succeeded in becoming the principal of Krishnagar Women's College in 2015 after having years of experience and qualifications. She refused to accept and surrendered to the bitter truth prevailing so far that if they have to live, either as a sex worker or a beggar. In her biography, *A Gift of Goddess Laxmi*, she has penned down her lifelong struggles with identity, getting physically assaulted by people at home, school and work and her family's established denial of her innateness. Of many things, theater, dance and writing has provided a creative outlet to her constant state of unrest. It is same as in the case of Vidya, who tried to stay away from the uneducated transgender at first, Manobi became closely connected to another transgender, Jagadish who was uneducated and finally succumbed to AIDS due to his careless sexual lifestyle. From his life, she realized that education has in a way helped in overcoming the boundaries and to voice against what they see as pure injustice. Her life story is not easy to read and comprehend; she studied Bengali literature, expanding her worldview with the acquaintance of her similar and intellectually stimulating fellow students. She got enrolled into a PhD course and started a magazine which is India's first transgender magazine that managed to create a platform for verbal exchange between the community and the rest of the society. Till then, the problems of transgender were described largely by the revolutionist but it largely remained within the reach of lips only. In her famous work, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has elaborated the concept of oppressing the outcast by not letting them speak. Defying all the popular notions, the magazine openly talked about the issue related to healthcare, stigma, language and the way forward.

Conclusion

Transgender people have always existed in every sphere of human settlement since the time unknown. After the enactment of transgender rights protection Bill, certain employment opportunities opened up for the community. The Bill banned any unjust treatment against their employment opportunities, the denial of occupation and any biased payoff about the same, prohibits any kind of discrimination in terms of recruitment, promotion and any related matter. Based on a survey conducted by the Human Rights Commission of India, about 93% of the community is denied participation in any economic activity in the country. Even the ones, who are qualified, are denied of any jobs. Only few managed to get employed. Thus, the importance of employing people from the Transgender community is the compelling necessity. Talking about the employment of transgender communities in south India, Tamil Nadu seems to have taken considerable efforts to take a step forward. In the year 2017, a Chennai based Startup Company hired around 50

transgender. Even the first transgender sub inspector of police is from Tamil Nadu. While in Kerala, around the same year, around 25 transgender people were hired by the employment department of Kochi Metro Rail Limited. But half of them had to quit their jobs within a month as no landlord was willing to give them a place to accommodate nor their employers are generous enough to protect them. An explicit episode that exhibits discrimination and ignorance.

Giving an equal opportunity certainly creates a platform for the community to prove their potentiality. In Kerala, for instance, the entire cosmetic and makeup industry is now occupied with transgender makeup artists, startling every one with their enchanting brushes. Creating magic on brides to celebrities and models, they clearly moved a huge step forward comparing to the past decades. Finding them a place in the society and coming out of their closeted life and to find a respectable job in mainstream business is truly an inspiration for all others like them. Kerala was also known for introducing a skill development course for the community with the aim to help them improve their abilities to lead a better life.

Thus, even after the Bill of 2016, the protection of their interest by preventing discrimination in educational and employment opportunity is a big challenge. One way of implementing the bill is through imposing heavy penalties on the violators. Also, equality must be more than just a revolutionary thought and it must be employed from home and schools to colleges and workplaces. A society can change only through strong familial values. Education must begin from home itself to accept to the fact that they too are people with dreams and yearnings as you do. They should be more comforted with equal opportunities in recruitments, the restroom facilities, and protection of their rights, health and lives.

Bibliography

1. Vidya, Living Smile. I am Vidya, A Transgender's Journey. Rupa Publications, 2013.
2. Bandyopadhyay, Manobi and Jhilmil Mukherjee Pandey. A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi. Penguin Books, 2017.
3. Gupta, Ankur and Ananth Govind Rajan. "The socioeconomic status of transgender people in India: A call to treat the cause and effects of discrimination." The Tech, <https://thetech.com>. Accessed 30 May 2021.
4. Self-Made Man: Autobiography of a Black Transgender Man. 1st ed. Kindel ed., Amazon, 2019.
5. Royal, Abhishek and Deepak Kulshrest. "The existential crisis of Indian transgender community." BerandaNews, https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&url=https://graduate.fk.ugm.ac.id/2020/05/28/the-existential-crisis-of-indian-transgendercommunity/&ved=2ahUKEwi95rrK_fDwAhWgyjgGHRjNB3IQFjAAegQIAxAC&usq=AOvVaw0oXpa17TZZwy5VtdtNe11W&cshid=1622364625977. Accessed 25 May 2021.
6. Chaatterjee, Subharajith. Problems Faced by Transgender Community in India: Some Recommendations. 2018. Kashipur Madhusudan Mahavidyalaya. Dissertation. IJCRT, <https://ijcrt.org/papers/IJCRT1705102.pdf>. Accessed 21 Apr. 2021.
6. Bisht, Anjali. "Transgender Community- Transgender Community – The outcaste in Indian Chauvinist Society." Indian National Bar Association, 2017. <https://www.indianbarassociation.org/transgender-community-the-outcasts-in-indian-chauvinist-society/>. Accessed 10 Mar. 2021.