TRANS LIFE IN INDIA: A STUDY OF THREE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

Rimjim Boruah
Assistant Professor, Department of English
Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya, Nagaon Assam

ABSTRACT

In traditional societies gender emerge as the defining aspect of individual identity. It appears to have profound influence in one's life from the time one is born. Gender obtains its social and cultural meaning at every level from intrapsychic to legal and political. A binary viewing of gender is undoubtedly still socially prevalent, although the last three decades have witnessed a definitive shift towards recognizing both the constructiveness of the gender binary and the existence of gender identities beyond this narrow remit. In 1990, Judith Butler has made the largest contribution to the idea that gender is a social construct not connected to but socially determined by the biological difference in sex and enforced through social protocol with the publication of her text Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. The existence of third gender and their identification has been greatly neglected in India. Especially, in India an individual being either a male or a female is considered as normal and who is other than that two bold identities are considered abnormal or subhuman, and that 'other' one or the third gender is considered as one of inferior level, who is always neglected and more over marginalized and insulted. In India it is a very common sight to see trans genders begging at railway stations and at traffic signals where they are often insulated and avoided as well. It is common belief that their touch pollutes and their curses come true. This paper will reflect the emotional trauma and physical pain the trans genders undergo by presenting instances from the first transgender autobiography of India by I am Vidya by Living Smile Vidya, biography of India's First Transgender Principal Manobi Bandyopadhyay A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi and also study the process and effect of heteronormative gender colonization that the hijra community of India has been witnessing for so long, by taking into account the autobiography of another transgender named A. Revathi and her experiences through her book The Truth about Me: A Hijra Life Story.

Keywords: transgenders, hijra, gender, society, discrimination.

Introduction

In traditional societies gender emerge as the defining aspect of individual identity. It appears to have profound influence in one's life from the time one is born. Gender obtains its social and cultural meaning at every level from intrapsychic to legal and political. The integrated self-leanis brought up in a way that forces it to tend toward the behaviors others encourage and away from behaviors that others discourage. From birth itself children are treated differently because of their differences in genitalia. Male and female babies are even dressed differently owing to their biological differences. Society responds differently to male and female infants and people describe identical behavior on the part of infants differently if they know whether the infant is a boy or girl. But there emerged no place of recognition or the possibility of a type of infant who may not suffice to the social or even biological identification of either male or female made by the society.

A binary viewing of gender is undoubtedly still socially prevalent, although the last three decades have witnessed a definitive shift towards recognizing both the constructiveness of the gender binary and the existence of gender identities beyond this narrow remit. Most of the countries have recently given legal recognition to citizens who identify themselves as a third gender, i.e. neither male nor female. Some countries including UK has formally recognize the use of non-binary markers such as gender-neutral pronouns for official purposes. In 1990, Judith Butler has made the largest contribution to the idea that gender is a social construct unconnected to but socially determined by
the biological difference in sex and enforced through social protocol with the publication of her text Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.

The existence of third gender and their identification has been greatly neglected in India. Especially, in India an individual being either a male or a female is considered as normal and anyone who is other than that two bold identities are considered abnormal or subhuman, and the ‘other’ one or the third gender is considered as one of inferior level, who is always neglected and more over marginalized and insulted. Social construction of gender identities as well as the sexual differences of a single person is very much a part of the process of Gender Identity. It really takes a lot of audacity and courage in an Indian society to merely acknowledge the third gender and to identify oneself as being the third gender. In India it is a very common sight to see transgenders begging at railway stations and at traffic signals where they are often insulated and avoided as well. It is common belief that their touch pollutes and their curses come true.

In India, transgenders are called with different names. They are known as hijras, eunuchs, tirunangais, khoja, aravani, aruvani, jagappa, chhakka, kinnar or kinner etc and they had been part of Indian society for centuries. Their existence are identified and presented evenin the mythological texts of the land Ramayana and Mahabharata. There are historical evidence of recognition of “third-sex” or persons not confirm to male or female gender in writings of ancient India. The concept and the narration of “tritiyrakriti” or “napumsaka” and their existence had been an integral part of the Hindu mythology, folklore, epic and early Vedic and Puranic literature. It is found from history that transgenders were well treated in the courts of Mughals. Hijras were considered clever, trustworthy and fiercely loyal and they had free access to all spaces and sections of the population, there by playing a crucial role in the politics of empire building in the Mughal era.

But the advent of British has changed the fate and fortune of transgenders in India. They are one of the major victims of colonization. They were looted from all the beneficiaries they had enjoyed till then and were neglected from then onwards. The British couldn’t stand the hijras and the importance given to them by the Indian kings of the time and they started vigorously to criminalize the hijra community and denied them of all the civil rights. The colonization brought a different attitude towards the transgender people. People began to treat them differently and started receiving constant ridiculing of their physique and habits. Society started passing various abusive remarks towards them and even the family began to criticize them. The very common sight in Indian railways and at many traffic signals of metropolitan cities or towns is of transgenders, or hijras, clad in traditional sarees or salwar kameez, aggressively begging from the people clapping their hands and blessing those who offer them money and cursing those who deny them and it shows the existing deteriorating condition of them. Although the hijras are the ill ones yet ironically, their blessings are considered to have a high value and in many places and it is also a custom among many people to bring hijras home to bless the newly wedded couple or a newly born. But yet they are kept at a safe distance and are not allowed to mingle with family members of the home to which they are invited. This shows that in a way they are treated as untouchables. And many hijras or transgenders are either forced or volunteered into prostitution as they don’t have any other livelihood other than prostitution and begging. Rural transgender or hijra sections are not just marginalized because of flouting gender norms, odd behaviors and habits, but are also oppressed by caste and class hierarchies, which intersect with gendered oppression to compound their disempowerment within social structures. People mostly see the transgenders from the viewpoint of aggressive beggars and ill-behaved prostitutes and very little attention is paid to their dismal lives.

It is clearly seen that the advent of Westernization and Globalization has changed the lifestyle of the people all over the world and due to this culture and tradition have also taken on a new
dimension. People’s mindsets are broadening. People are seen coloring their hair and maintaining diet to size zero, they change their own selves in order to imitate their favorite stars. They even change their names, jobs, religions, political parties and even nationalities. People even like to make conversations with strangers through social media. Yet people are not ready to accept the third gender, the transgenders who are nature’s creation especially in Indian context. They undergo intense traumatic experiences in the various stages of their lives for secluding them from the mainstream society. Though Queer studies and LGBT literature has become very common amongst all, yet none are willing to acclaim those who fall under this category with an open heart.

**Aims and Objectives**

i) This paper will reflect the emotional trauma and physical pain the transgenders undergo by presenting instances from the first transgender autobiography of India by Living Smile Vidya, I am Vidya,, and biography of India’s First Transgender Principal Manobi Bandyopadhyay A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi and also study the process and effect of heteronormative gender colonization that the hijra community of India has been witnessing for so long, by taking into account also the autobiography of another transgender named A. Revathi and her experiences through her book The Truth about Me: A Hijra Life Story.

ii) It will highlight the various incidents where they put in their courage to stand up for themselves in the face of stiff opposition shown both by their own dear ones and the society and how they try to go forward in their quest for self-completion apart from focusing on the dark and bleak lives of the transgenders.

iii) The objective of this paper is solely to make the awareness regarding the real life conditions of a transgender and how they undergo mental trauma in dealing with the complex situations forwarded to them by the society and its norms. The society and its conventions invented by men in order to uplift the people living in it till now has not been able to recognize a transgender as one among them although education has reached its higher levels in the country.

**Methods and methodology**

This study is based on online resources, especially the articles published on research journals. A sort of deeper reading is done of some of the important parts of the three autobiographical texts. The articles which presents the scenes of transgenders experiences and sufferings in India is also read to relate with the main topic of the paper.

**Analysis with instances from the three referred books**

Born on 23 September, 1964, as Somnath Bandyopadhyay, later named as Manobi became India’s first transgender principal at Krishnanagar Women’s College in Naida district in West Bengal. She has been selected for the post purely on merit. She holds a PhD degree in Bengali literature and has worked previously as an associate professor of Bengali literature. In 1995 she started and initiated the first Bengali transgender magazine Abomanob (meaning subhuman). She has written two books to her credit - Ontohin Ontor in Prositovortika (Endless Bondage) and the Third Gender in Bengali Literature. A Gift of Goddess Lakshmiis a candid biography of Manobi written by Jhimli Mukherjee Pandey who is a journalist and to her Manobi tells the story of her metamorphosis from a man into a woman with unyielding candidness and profound sensitivity. It begins with the birth of Somnath and his long expedition to become Manobi and the hurdles she faced throughout the passage and how she went on to pursue academics in spite of many turbulences. The journey is an exceptionally courageous one by a gender non-conforming person to carve a space of one’s own, establish her own identity as Manobi erasing the socially formed identity of Somnath and also to set new standards of achievement. The entire biography is Manobi’s struggle for her gender identity, struggle and fight with the society, with her family and with herself to establish an identity of her own. In a binary society like India’s where only two genders are recognized as normal and anything other than these two are seen as unnatural or queer, it is extremely difficult and hard for a transgender woman to attain such an
academic brilliance. But Manobi has demonstrated it to be possible with head held high. The biography depicts all the events of her life without any hyperbole and tells the reader how difficult it is to be gender queer in a heteronormative society.

Unlike many other trans persons, Manobi seems lucky enough to have her parents who never abandoned her for being of the so-called other gender and hence she could pursue her education and get a job to earn enough for Sex Reassignment Surgery. Her biographical work provides a lot of information about the psychological and physical conflicts and struggles of herself and other transgenders, helping one to understand their life and sufferings which are otherwise totally ignored. The Gift of Goddess Lakshmi shows the birth of Manobi as Somnath as mollycoddled by the family with pride as the valuable possession depicting the common Indian mindset of having a male child as an achievement. Manobi was the only son of her parents and her arrival was much celebrated by her father and the entire family. In her biography she says: “My father Chittaranjan Bandyopadhyay, was a proud man that day. Finally, after two daughters, he had been able to sire a boy! ... He had a trophy to show off to his family that had ridiculed him all this while for not being able to father a son. He thought I was Shiva’s gift to him, and named me Somnath. I was a privileged member of the household. Of the three children” (Pandey, 1).

Manobi remembers that she felt a change within her at a very early age of about six or seven. And that it started with the growing Somnath’s interest for her sisters printed frocks, skirts and costumes rather than being drawn towards manly activities and clothes. She had a deep desire to become a complete woman and so hated her genitals. She used to put on her sister’s clothes while being alone and use to dance to the tune of film songs. She loved to watch films and the influence of the heroines was too much on her. She used to act like the heroines at school and at her free time and get a good ovation for her imitating skills. But deep inside, she was aware that she is not acting like them but being the real self in doing so. She wanted to reveal that she is a woman beneath the skin and hated to be considered as a boy. She had a love for arts and literature and used to work with dance groups. And while performing dance, or acting performances she choose female characters in preference so that she can visibly feel her female side without any worry of being noticed and to gratify the craving for expressing her true self to all. As she says: “Actually, I was pretending to imitate a girl for fun, and they liked my ‘acting’ – but deep inside I was not really acting: I was expressing my inner urges. Being a boy, if Somnath can pick up a girl’s steps so well, can’t you all do that?” I just smiled shyly and enjoyed the adulation. I yearned to tell them that I was not trying to be a girl, I was actually one!” (Pandey, 1).

She always tried to hold her femininity in check before others so that she receives no taunt and expressed herself in reclusiveness. She was admonished by many to whom she shared her situation, not to go for Sex Reassignment Surgery, considering it to be a risky task as well as socially deviant one. But, the urge for Manobi to establish her sexuality is so intense that she paid no hint to the risk involved in the surgery. Fearing the society of intolerance and disapproval, and the fear of families’ displeasure has although put a lot of stress on her and lead to severe internal trauma yet she underwent the sex reassignment surgery to escape from the double ride of her life. At times she was confused and troubled with the notion of her own sexuality, but the femininity in her broke all manacles and she was even ready to face death in her quest to establish her individual sexuality. “I felt like tearing away and escaping from the man’s body in which I was born. . . I came to the conclusion that I was a woman and that I had to come out of my shell at any cost . . . I was firm. If I had to face death in an effort to establish my true sexual identity, so be it. I would do whatever it took to prove to the world that I was a woman” (Pandey, 5).

Joining the college was another traumatic experience in Manobi’s life as she became a laughingstock in college. Her appearance, body language and orientations were always reviled and stood as a subject of mockery by others. “I found college to be yet another place where I would have to fight for my identity
and respect”. This show how educational institutions like colleges and schools are even not exceptional and away from ill-treating the transgenders. “I realized that I was again become the center of attention and ridicule despite being a good student. I could not be called a man or woman and that was far more important than the fact that I had read more Bengali literature than anyone else . . . Clearly, my reputation had preceded me”. Students simply stood and gazed at her going to the Bengali Department. Word had got out that a hijra had joined the college. Many had gathered in the college ground to see her. They started clapping their hands in glee when they saw her, some just whistled and catcalled and soon taunts filled the air. In that village she was a complete oddity and there was both excitement and awe reflected on the face of the community members in seeing her. People abused her mentally by saying whether she was a man or a woman. On her way to college from bus stop she and her father had to face many derision, making her feel like running away. However, her conviction to stand up on her own as well as to earn enough money for her sex change operation held her not to bother for such silly experiences. But more threat waited in the college for Manobi when her fellow lecturers very much upset her by threatening to ruin her career if she does not leave the college since they believed that no hijra had the right to become a professor. “No one as lowly as a hijra should be allowed to teach in a college, share the same staffroom, toilet and facilities”. But when they understood that Manobi wouldn’t surrender so easily they started offending her very often. They would wait in corners and pull her hair and clothes, saying they wanted to see if her hair was real or if she was wearing a wig. Once, two of them pinned her to the wall and groped her, trying to find out what was beneath my clothes . . . ‘Keep shut, you hijra, don’t act smart. . . One day they caught hold of me and started hitting me in the chest with a paper weight till I was so badly bruised that I fell unconscious from the pain”. Such was the piteous condition of Manobi in her career as a lecturer for being a hijra and her merit achieved no praise for being the unusual one in the usual society. And Manobi said that gender non-conforming persons in general face these situations on a regular basis throughout their lives wherever they stay. Such is the violence against them in the society. However, Manobi faced all these with a brave heart, emerging victorious ultimately.

In India, where these minorities are not even deemed to exist, their harrowing plight also remains unknown to the heterosexual majority who in any case, remain not just indifferent but even relentlessly hostile to them. Members of this sexual minority communities like gays, lesbians, bisexuals and hijras or the third gender, for the fear of being scorned and much worse to stand up and be publicly identified, leave aside the struggle for their rights and thus gives way to the injustices and prejudices that they are haunted with throughout their lives. Gender-rights activists and some human rights groups have only recently begun turning their attention to these communities, who till then did not recognized their existence only. Thus the situation of the transgenders is slowly deteriorating where a kind of transphobia is developing in the society. She says: “Even kids didn’t spare me. Once they followed me when I was on field duty and sang raucous film songs at me. Who taught them to do this? Where did they learn such domineering behavior? If you see a tirunangai, attack her, insult her, make her cry; chase her away whimpering, screaming – that seemed to be the rule, regardless of race, religion or creed” (Vidya, 135).

Thus from these accounts so far it can be declared that transgender youths are exposed to trauma in many ways. Many of them experience physical and emotional assaults for coming out, or fear being found out on a daily basis. Others many a time engage with the common confusion of this order about their sexual identity. Many of these transgender children and teens want to share their trauma but finding a safe and trusted relationship is a great challenge for them because the very acknowledgment of same sex attractions and desires may put them at further risk. As Vidya, declares: “I was girl. Unfortunately, the world saw me as a boy. Inwardly I wanted to be a girl, but I made every effort possible to hide my femininity from the outside world. I took particular trouble to remain inconspicuous
at college, the unpleasant memories of my bitter experience at school still fresh in my mind. I lead a false life of strenuous attempts to swagger like a man and speak like one” (Vidya, 33).

The trauma of this "double bind" underscores the need for confidentiality and safety from a trusted helper that is the society. But instead of recognition they face social exclusion. Transgenders are restricted from their proper access to education, employment and also excluded from family life. They are not given proper protection against violence which is incurred to them by the society. Living Smile Vidya's autobiography I am Vidya, represents all the traumatic incidents which a transgender faces in his/her life. It is a narrative about a woman trapped within a man’s body, like that of Manobi, and this story shows extraordinary courage and perseverance. Through this book she carves the entire existence of a person who undergoes physical and mental transformation. This story describes the long traumatic journey of declaration, of claiming an identity and the agony faced by the soul which is trapped in a body to which it does not identify or belong to. Vidya's work clearly explains about the struggles a trirunangai faces like the previous one. She starts to narrate the incidents of her life from the phase of her transition, called as nirvana that is becoming a proper transgender. Vidya claims: “Thank you for removing my maleness from my body; thank you for making my body a female body. My life is fulfilled. If I die now, I will lose nothing. I can sleep in peace” (Vidya, 8). The beginning of her narration makes it quite clear that Vidya likewise has to undergo a terrific trauma in order to make people around her understand that she is a woman. The title of all the 15 chapters of her book like “Appa, A time for farewell”, “Accept me!, Chatla”, “I Want to live with Pride” etc. by itself explains and portrays the trauma she has undergone throughout her life. The very thought that the aravani or transgender belongs to a family makes the family feel below their social status. The words which Vidya uses to explain her Mama’s plight because of her stay in his house is a sample of what the family members of a transgender feel, “Mama castigates me out of sheer frustration…why do you act like a woman here? Aren’t we human, too? Aren’t there people around us? How many questions I have to answer about you! What insults, what humiliation!” (Vidya, 119).

Family members are not ready to accept or tend not to realize the transformation which the soul undergoes because the society doesn’t identify with it. Vidya's childhood struggles to maintain her feminity was even worse. Her father who was a strong dictator gave no room for simple joys and freedom of childhood. Home was a virtual prison, because of the rigid order his father laid. He thrust his dreams on Vidya and wanted to make him an IAS officer. “God knows what fears and anxieties troubled him, but he never allowed me a normal childhood” (Vidya, 16). Vidya at the age of six started to realize the feminity within her like that of Manobi. She used to enjoy masquerading herself with her sisters dress and in solitude used to dance to music. She was not interested to be identified as a boy and did not wish to have the privilege given to her for being a boy. The trauma of not able to come out from her shell of the male body was haunting her. She started to question, “What's wrong with my preference? Why should a boy only wear shirts and trousers? I like skirts and blouses why can’t I wear them? Why do people find something odd in what comes to me naturally?” (Vidya, 22). The trauma which the family has created has a great impact in the minds of the transgenders and this is what Vidya feels. When they are cornered by the society, family becomes their only resort. When that too becomes a question mark they are left as destitute and this is the situation that troubled Vidya a lot. “You can bear most of the troubles of life, but to feel orphaned is to feel a huge loss – self-pity is a strong drug, a venom” (Vidya, 97). They always long for the mental support from their family members.

Vidya after she underwent her nirvana exclaims “Amma, Amma, I have become a woman. I am not Saravanan any more, I am Vidya,, – a complete Vidya, – A whole woman. Where are you, Amma? Can’t you come to me by some miracle, at least for a moment? Please hold my hand, Amma. My heart seems to be breaking into smithereens. Radha please Radha, I am no longer your brother, Radha I am your sister now, your sister. Come to me Radha, Chithi, Maju, Prabha, Appa... Look at me Appa – Look at my dissected body. This is a mere
body. Can you see that I can bear all this pain? I can take any amount of pain, Appa. Look at me, Appa Look at me as a woman, accept me as a girl, Appa” (Vidya, 9).

The longing that everyone possess including the transgenders to be a part of the family is evident through Vidya’s screams which comes out of her mind because of her pain and anxiety of being separated from family and obtaining such a great change within her all alone. Breaking apart, separation are hard for all, especially when they are isolated from their dear ones. The trauma which they undergo during Sex Reassignment Surgery, which is legalized in many countries but out of sight in India, is many folded. There are a very few hospitals which conducts this castration surgery without approval for a huge amount but without expert doctors. For a tirunangai to undergo this surgery is very important because they feel that their existing identity either male or female is just an accident. They want to become one either be it woman or man. If SRS is properly conducted with government approval and support, the burden of the transgenders would subside to some means. Vidya shares the way she underwent this surgery, a very scaring experience and it was a life and death moment for her. There are no safety measures or precautionary steps to help these suffering transgenders. The trauma which the impact of the surgery gave her was boundless. The castration is conducted by injecting local anesthesia where no follow up occurs. She was made to lie on a steel cot on which a newspaper was spread and after the surgery was completed the blood was wiped off and the next patient was called. “I was not even given a proper bed – just a steel cot with a newspaper spread on it. The surgeon gave no guaranteed, no counselling… They castrate you while you are watching. Suture in the next few minutes, clean you with cotton and pack you off to recover —Next, they call out… The operation is no different from a procedure performed at the butcher’s shop” (Vidya, 100).

Her spirit to change her body was her only motivation which made her to bear the pain through the surgery. “We crave the surgical procedure that will give us bodily likeness of that female identity” (Vidya, 100). The senior hijra’s are the only nurse who would take care of the people who undergo this castration. This surgery had a traumatic impact in Vidya making her to fear to undergo any operation through her life and this is evident from the incident when Vidya hesitates to undergo her appendicitis operation. “I was so scared of surgery” (Vidya, 117). But she was happy in this ordeal of SRS surgery because the discharge certificate carried the following line “Male to Female operation done in Pune” (Vidya, 118) the only record which recognized her gender change. Education was a big boon to Vidya as her father was very keen in educating his son Saravanan. Vidya was also interested in pursuing her studies, but this did not last long. She who was undergoing a kind of transition within herself and it was at this time her interest in studies slowly started to erode as she herself declares the reason being “My innermost thoughts and nature filled with anxiety and fears, I was finding it increasingly difficult to focus on my studies” (Vidya, 29). Unable to bear the pressure given by her father, she rebelled and she gained courage at the moment and yelled, “Stop it, Appa! …So far, everything that happened had been as expected, according to the script Appa had perfected …for years I had suffered Appa’s violence without a word of protest on that occasion, for the first time, I fought back: I shouted at him and pushed him hard” (Vidya, 30).

Similar to Manobi, Vidya also had a tendency towards literature and theatre. May be she choose theater so that she can enjoy her drag queen attitude. She pursued her masters in linguistics and was very eager to pursue her PhD. In fact she resorted to studies after her traumatic experience in Pune, because of begging when she joined the hijra community there. When arrangements were made for her higher studies by her guru, she refused to accept it and instead asked favor to join the theater so that she can enjoy her female experiences also living within a male shell. The thought that there would be no one to support her financial needs made her to give up her idea to pursue her higher studies. She was able to forecast the troubles she would face in her ordeal to win her aim. Many of her friends and her teacher advised her not to change her identity. They highlighted the plight of the transgender in the country. They said after gaining her masters where is the need for her to resort in begging or
sex work. They made her understand that even to identify as one of their friends would spoil her growth. They said that she will be into lot of ridicule, teasing and harassment by the fellow human beings.

It’s all very well for you to go there regularly... but make sure people don’t find out you are a female... don’t go there too often…. But most of them are uneducated. When they go out, they exhibit their femininity quite openly. If you get too close to them people will tease you too (Vidya, 46).

There are many instances in her autobiography where Vidya brings out the perils behind the begging experience she had in Pune. Vidya who bid farewell and flew to Pune to gather money had just these options left before her, one is to beg and the other to be sex worker. She was taken care by a senior Nani who often reminded her that linguistics or theater experience would not help to eke out a living and insisted that she goes out to beg. The trauma, which all the triunangai’s face, when they are asked to beg, cannot be expressed as declared by Vidya, “Shame, fear, ego, my education, memories of awards and rewards and God knows what else made me pull back every time I tried to put my hand out for alms” (Vidya,92). The impact of such horrible life shattered her hopes and thoughts that she belonged to this society. The transgenders have a negative idea about the society they live in, as they are not recognized to lead their life. Their vengeance against the society is obvious from the bitter truth spitted out by Vidya “…the object of everyone’s ridicule for so long, I came to regard all of society as something ridiculous – I came to believe that the world was full of mad men, within which I had to live with my body, my pain, my sorrows”(Vidya, 93). Transgender’s feel that it is because of the treatment which the society bestows on them that they resort to begging. There is no social recognition of their identity and the chances for their employability is also very meager.

“When I go out and beg – on the street, in trains, at shops-I consider it my revenge, my claim of compensation from each and every member of the prevailing society. No longer humiliated, I set out on my shop-begging campaign with happiness” (Vidya, 93).

The amount of ridicule the transgenders face in their venture to beg has in store lot of fatal accidents which they had to face with a heavy heart which remains unknown to public who very often laughs at them and try to shun them. They insult them and at times even hit them “…wasn’t I going through all this trauma for money?”(Vidya,95). Society has traumatized the entire transgender community. Vidya, and her friend Prateeksha were not interested in begging as reflected in the autobiography. So they took up a business. They started to sell petty things in the train. Although they gave way to their dream to start their own shop but very soon it came down within days. “The problem was obviously our gender, not the goods we sold. We couldn’t understand the prejudice. What did it matter who sold the goods, so long as the goods were of acceptable quality and price” (Vidya, 110). The society was not ready to help them find their own livelihood. This had a great impact on Vidya, and she planned to return back to her home town. The transgender community is not caste biased and they always welcome people with an open heart. In the initial stages it would be difficult for the new tirunangai to accommodate with the rest. The senior tirunangais would always have an upper hand on the new entrants “… victims turn tormentors overnight. These people who have been marginalized by the society, insulted, humiliated, even cursed find a semblance of release from their torments by occasionally taunting others” (Vidya, 70). The senior ones would have overall control of the money and the whereabouts of the newcomer. The new comer would take up all this with a happy mind as it’s a great relief for them who are otherwise excluded from their own society and neglected by their family. After the castration it is these old nani who take great care of these transgenders. Their community conduct a welcome function called as Chatla in which a haldi, mehendi is applied on the newcomer as a ritual announcement for the rest of the crowd. It will be conducted and on the same day a jug of milk will be given to the person and people will accompany the new transgender till the sea, where the milk will be poured into the sea. Once an aravani joins the group of elderly nani it is very difficult for them to come out of it, because the senior group often try to benefit from the
earnings of the newcomers and so they try not to lose them. Vidya, who was not happy with the sales experience in the train ended up stepping out of Pune and planned to return to her hometown. Stepping out was a great deal because the nanis would not permit. The trauma which she underwent along with fellow transgender was very huge. When a tirunangai went missing, a search party invariably landed at the railway station. If caught one had to face their raging elders. The enquiry that followed was quite a harrowing experience. People who were loving all along could turn quite cruel “and if Nani saw my attempt to leave as an act of betrayal it would spell disaster for me” (Vidya, 114).

Vidya is very much indebted to one of her friend Ilango, with whom she used to enjoy talking about girls. Being then a boy she dares to attribute her liking for him and even dreams that one day she might win his love. “Ilango was the man who kindled in me the kind of changes that occur in a woman at different stages of her development. Ilango was the man who made me feel whole as a woman” (Vidya, 28). Words like “terror striken”, “scream”, “pain”, “tears”, “complete mess”, “no strength”, “refuge”, “wet my shorts in fear and shock”, “irritating”, “hand and legs were trembling”, “self”, “pity”, “scared of being spotted by old acquaintances”, “overcoming fears caused by earlier experience”, makes the reader clear about the impact of trauma which prevails within a transgender apart from Manobi and Vidya. The trauma which the protagonist Vidya undergoes when she hears people calling her as —Ennada also is true to other people of that order but she writes it so that the practice comes to an end. The last chapter “I need to live with Pride” highlights the one and half year of time taken in the mission to change her name in the government records. Through her traumatic narration one can find her struggle to find a legally enforceable social status for all the tirunangais. Though there are many NGO’s to take care of them, though the Tamil Nadu government has given them ration cards, voter id’s, given them seats in elections, accommodated them with proper shelter the bigger question arises of identifying them and giving them a respectable place within the society. To what extent the legal procedures are fruitful and effective is still in question. For the transgenders to get out of this traumatic survival the family and society should act as a great support. Every individual in this society should welcome the third gender. It should remove the social stigma on the tirunangai that tirunangai’s are disease-afflicted sex workers. “Hunger: but for that, no tirunangai would beg on the streets, trains, or market places. They submerge pride and dignity and put their hands out in supplication, seeking alms, only because all windows of opportunity are closed to them. It is our tragedy that the world does not understand this simple truth” (Vidya, 137).

It is everyone’s initiative to open the doors of recognition for the transgenders, one should not wait for the other. Though the present government has recognized them as the third gender yet the transgenders fear that it is all in papers only and has no real life existence. Vidya through this book carves the entire existence of a person who undergoes physical and mental transformation and claims that transgender women require support of the government, health care professionals, general public as well as their family members. One need to understand and accept the fact that all humans are diverse. People have the right to be what they are and what they want to be. For transgender people, the same holds true. The words of Hartley Coleridge from his poem No Life Vain, would make one realize the importance of life and its existence in this universe, either it be male, female or a transgender.

Vidya who is an MA linguist had to leave everything and travel to Pune to beg and earn as a hijra to do her Sex Reassignment Surgery as she has got no support from the family. But Manobi was blessed to have her parents who never disowned her and hence she never had to leave her education and had to beg. Both these works give a lot of information about the internal and external turmoil and struggle of transgenders. There are a lot of similarities in the lives of Vidya and Manobi and also with Revathi. Being a boy they were pampered with pride as the valuable possession of the family. In her autobiography Vidya says her father was hoping the next baby would be a boy, to make up for two
girls and the loss of his firstborn son, landing finally at the Vayalur Murugan Temple in Tiruchi, he vowed to name his next child after Murugan if it was a boy. He would also shave his head in a pious offering of his locks to the lord.

Vidya shares how she used to be treated specially in the house as she was born as a boy. Her father never allowed him to do any work and always say that he should just study as he was the male heir of their family. She was a privileged member of the household like the other two. Of the three children, she was the one person who didn’t have to do any work at home. That was the unwritten law, she was the male heir of the family and that was reason enough to exempt her from work of any kind in the household. She was the sole beneficiary of all the love and affection at home by virtue of a boy. Likewise, Manobi was also the only son of her parents and her arrival was much celebrated by her father. Even Manobi’s sisters were so scared of their father just like Vidya’s sisters. Manobi was never scared of her father as he was never strict with her. She says “was it because I was a boy? You know how they indulge boys in Indian families”.

The autobiography of A. Revathi begins with a preface, where she clearly mentions the intention behind writing the book:

As a hijra I get pushed to the fringes of society. Yet I have dared to share my innermost life with you-- about being a hijra and also doing sex work [...] My aim is to introduce to the readers the lives of hijras, their distinct culture, and their dreams and desires [...] I hope now that by publishing my life story, larger changes can be achieved. I hope this book of mine will make people see that hijras are capable of more than just begging and sex work. I do not seek sympathy from society or the government. I seek to show that we hijras do have the rights to live in this society (v-vi).

 Born as the youngest sibling in the family of three brothers and a sister, A. Revathi was initially baptized and named as Doraisamy. Now, while referring to Revathi’s earlier childhood phase as Doraisamy, one gets perplexed when it comes to the choice of pronouns— whether to use he or she, his or her, because in the binary system of language there are only these two pronouns available to point a person, and there is no pronoun such to cater to the need of the so called third gender or the transgender. This absence of pronoun signifies the fact that the transgender have only an epistemological existence without any ontological existence. And this absence of ontological existence is one of the main reasons of their being other and colonized by the heteronormative society.

All of these three transgender shares that their change started at a very early age and that their change started with their love for their sisters printed frocks and skirts rather than drawn towards male identical things and possessions. They had a deep yearning to be a complete woman and hated their genitals a lot. They used to wear their sisters’ clothes in secrecy and dance to the tunes of songs. They loved to watch cinema and the influence of the heroines were more on them. They used to imitate the heroines at school and get a good, applaud for their imitating skills. But both of them knew that they were not imitating but being their self in doing so. They wanted to shout out that they were women deep inside and hated to be addressed as boys. They also had very deep interests in arts and literature. Vidya used to work with drama groups and Manobi with dance groups. Even today Vidya is a famous theatre artist. When they used to act or dance, they preferably chose female characters so that they can show of their feminity without any fear of being recognized and to satisfy the urge of exhibiting their true self to all.

Revathi in her autobiography narrates multiple incidences to show how passionately Doraisamy wanted to dress like a woman and how he/she enjoyed playing the role of female characters on stage during the school annual day celebration or how he/she enjoyed putting on the “Female disguise” (Revathi 16) during the celebration of the Mariamman festival in their village: As soon as I got home from school, I would wear my sister’s long skirt and blouse, twist a long towel around my head and let it trail down my back like a braid. I would then walk as if I was a shy bride, my eyes to the ground [...]” (Revathi 4). Other quotes which reflect these instances of being drawn towards a tendency to act like a girl are: “In class, I would sit staring at the girls, taking note of the
way their braids fell, the intricate knot of their colourful ribbons, the jasmine and kanakambaram they wore in their hair, and their skirts and blouses. I longed to be like them and suffered that I could not
dress so” (Revathi 6); “I played Chandramathi in Harishchandra. I think I did this exceptionally well, because everyone praised me saying that I looked and acted like a real woman. This pleased me very much” (Revathi 9); “In my kurathi’s garb, I could express all those female feelings that I usually have to suppress and so felt happy... I had not worn a disguise I said to myself; I had given form to my real feelings” (Revathi 14-16). Thus, “dress” being one of the major and perhaps the most important marker of heteronormative gender distinction, “cross dressing” is regarded as the primary source of desire fulfilment by the transgender community.

Conclusion and Findings
There are a lot of similarities in Vidya, Manobi and Revathi’s lives. Manobi somewhere in her text opines that “dancing comes naturally to a transgender person”. She thinks dancing and make-up as the two fields in which transgendered people excel a lot. They always felt happy being recognized as female but could never take the teasing or harsh comments on their feminity while being within the male shell. They were very bright in studies and had very bitter experiences in their schools. At different stages in their lives they had picked up unisex clothes as they hated the male clothing and also “realized that wearing obviously feminine clothes was a problem” for the society. For them their university days were the happiest and best as no one minded their sexuality and never taunted them for their feminity. They worked for press. They always tried to suppress their feminity before others and express themselves in solitude. They were advised by many, to whom they shared their situation, not to go for sex reassignment surgery, which is the surgery done by all of these three. But, their urge to establish their sexuality was of more importance than anything else. As one of them said “the biggest aim of my life was to establish my sexual identity”. The psychological turmoil they underwent was really dreadful.

Fearing the society of discrimination and disapproval, and the fear of families’ discontent has put a lot of stress on them and led them to severe internal trauma. Until they underwent the surgery their life was a double ride. At points they were confused and troubled with the idea of their own sexuality, but the feminity in them broke all the doubts and chains and craved to come out of it. They were even ready to face death in their quest to establish their sexuality. Vidyahad no other option other than going and joining the transgender community in Pune and begged in the streets and trains to earn the money for her sex reassignment surgery. Throughout their life as a tirunangai, the trauma that comes on their way is the result of the discrimination and marginalization received from the society. In the beginning she had to pawn her self-esteem and education to clap and beg. As she vowed never to be a sex worker, begging was her only option. “I had butterflies in my stomach. Me, beg at next shop? ...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 MA in linguistics, of all things. I stood there, nervous, hesitant”. Even her sex reassignment surgery was not a sanctioned procedure or even hygienic and Vidya says that the operation was a mere butchering of the male genitals. “But it was no operation theatre, I realized as soon as I entered the tiny room – it was a slaughterhouse.” She says that the walls of the room allotted for transgenders in the hospital was full with the scribbling of their names on the wall and it was because that they feared they would die on the operation table. This shows the most dangerous circumstances transgenders in India go through in an attempt to establish their sexuality to which the government and the learned dignitaries who can shape the society should give heed to. Likewise when Doraiswamy for the first time came to know about the existence of people like him/her, the first and the foremost emphasis was on the fact that they “wore saris” and then the focus was on the fact that they had “an operation” (Revathi 18). So during the initial years of his/her life, it is found from reading of the three transgenders experiences that the transgender people cannot help
but oscillate between the male and female dressing pattern and thereby unavoidably conforms themselves within either of the two socially approved gender category. And it is this forceful unavoidable submission of the third gender to the heteronormative dress code and their confusion involved.

Like Vidya and Manobi, Revathi also met with the hijra community and she also found that the elders of the hijra community when accepts a newcomer like Doraiswamy for the first time as a chela, it is a compulsion “that a feminine man offers respect to the sari-clad and earns their goodwill (Revathi 21)”.

So, the “sari-clad” women within the hijra community enjoy a special status of respect. Revathi while narrating in details the customs and rules of the hijra community also refers to the importance of dressing to earn respect in that community:

If born a pottai, and when living amongst pottais, it is important that a person pierces her ears and nose, grows her hair. If you merely wear press-button earrings and a wig, no one really respects you. Likewise, if you happen to see a man crossing your path, you are expected to make way for him, bend your head bashfully and make sure that your chest is covered. (Revathi 47).

But life was not better even after their sex reassignment surgery. The society still saw them as an aberration and taunted them with sneers and comments. Even their families are not left with peace, but were harassed by the neighbors for having such a child. They had to fight hard with the governments to change their names and sex in the records. Vidya had to put up a lot of fight to change her name from Sarvanan to Vidya and Manobi to change her name from Somnath to Manobi and Doraisamy to Revathi. Added to lingual and sartorial colonization, the transgender community is miserably colonized economically. In India, the most common sight of a hijra is to see them either begging in a market place or in a railway station or to see them in groups going for “doli-baddai”.

Now, one would very easily get tempted to accuse and blame the hijra community for choosing the life of a beggar, but one does never acknowledge the truth that a hijra is never allowed to enter the main stream economy in whatever form it may be. Such is the social stigma that a hijra can never be accommodated within an economic circle which would promote their economic independence. It is not that they are inefficient to carry out jobs other than begging and sex work, but is due to the process of otherization is which relates to the fact of their being the third gender. Heteronormative society is tactful enough in perpetuating its hegemonic gender discourse over the third gender community in the country. And by dealing with these autobiographical texts of the three Indian transgenders, I would like to draw the attention to the real fact that the experiences that these transgendered figures has undergone while living in the society and trying to establish an identity of their own is terrific. One is to realize that transgenders are as normal as any other man and woman. And it should be left to completely their choice whether they would like to transform themselves to either of the two sex through surgeries or live to their own natural self of duality. And in this present era of so much of development all the people of the country should also give one try in letting the third gender people or the other ones live their life comfortably without taunting them and also bringing the legal rights and opportunities available to them a real picture apart from being penned down in documents only. Such a step undertaken in realizing them to enjoy their due rights will be really a heartwarming step.

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