

LITERATURE OF THE TRANSGENDER: SENSITIZING ISSUES OF TRANS VIOLENCE AND VICTIMIZATION

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Abstract

Transgender literature as a genre has emerged significantly in recent years and has paved the way for trans activism. Literature of the transgender has moved a long way in sensitizing issues and the problems of transgender identity and discrimination. Transgender writers have started to represent transsexuality, trans violence and victimization of the transgender community. Literature of the transgender portrays the life of transgender people who undergo an identity crisis in identifying themselves as bigender, pangender, gender queer, non-binary, agender, androgynous or other gender. Transgender writers across the world have been physically, verbally or sexually assaulted, abandoned and discriminated by the mainstream, and to reveal the social stigma that is existing the transgender writers have chosen writing as a media to expose their vulnerability. The aim of this article is to sensitize the issues of victimization and the prevailing trans violence towards transgender community. It also tries to break the stereotypical barriers associated with the transgender community. The books of various transgender writers across the globe is analyzed to explore the history of transgender such as transphobic harassment, lack of legal protection and problems regarding identity documents, health issues and transgender violence across the globe.

Key words: Transgender literature, Trans violence, Trans experience, Gender Identity, Trans sexuality.

Transgender studies originated as a subfield of LGBT studies which includes gender studies, gay and lesbian studies, and sexology. Sandy Stone is a transgender woman whose essay, titled “The Empire Strikes Back: A Post transsexual Manifesto,” published in 1987 is the origin of transgender studies. Susan Stryker and Paisley Currah's *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, published in 2014, deals about transgender problems and challenges. Transgender people have a different gender identity that varies from their assigned biological sex. “Transgender” is a term that commonly refers to people who differ from exclusively being “masculine” or “feminine” instead they are represented as “third gender” and are considered as heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, asexual. “Cisgender” refers to normal persons whose gender identity goes along with their assigned sex. Susan Stryker's article reveals the fact that arguments existing on transgender rights and identities have proven to be false .

John F. Oliven a Psychiatrist of Columbia University ,coined the term transgender in his work *Sexual Hygiene and Pathology* published in 1965. Leslie Feinberg's “Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time has Come”, (1992), identified transgender as a term that represents all forms of gender nonconformity. In the late 1990's and early 2000s, the terms used were “female to male” (FtM) for men who transitioned from female to male, and “male to female” (MtF) for women who transitioned from male to female. At present the terms such as “trans man” and “trans woman,” and the terms “trans-

masculine” or “trans feminine” are used to denote the transformation of transgender community. “Transsexual” a term coined in 1949 by David Oliver Cauldwell, is used to describe the transgender people who desire to undergo transition permanently to the gender identity which they desire for and in turn seek medical assistance for such transition. They seek assistance from medical experts like gynecologists, psychiatrists, sexologists, endocrinologists, urologists and plastic surgeons for such a process of transformation. At present, the terms such as androphilic, gynophilic, bisexual or asexual, are used to denote a person's sexual orientation without in particular confirming their normal gender identity.

Transgender community are prone to suffer from gender identity disorder (GID). It manifests itself as depression or inability to work which is commonly called gender dysphoria and they fail to maintain relationships with people. Trans people who are able to cope with their gender do not suffer from gender identity disorder (GID). Transgender persons are extremely vulnerable to harassment, violence and sexual assault including molestation, rape, forced anal and oral sex, gang rape and being stripped in public spaces, in prison and even at home. Discrimination of transgender people in society results in lack of employment, education and proper health care. These people are denied rights in public places like restaurants and malls and their rights to access public toilets are even denied. Such discrimination leads either to begging or being pushed into sex-work for their survival. A 2011 study carried out by the Williams Institute found that 41% of transgender people had attempted suicide, with the rate being higher among people who experienced discrimination in access to housing or healthcare, harassment, physical or sexual assault, or rejection by family.

Transgender people undergo great trauma to disclose their transgender status to family and close friends. The reason behind this dilemma is the discrimination and violence against transgender persons and fear of being excluded in their parental home are the reason for not disclosing their gender identity. Transgender violence has been reported in the form of murder, shooting with guns, stabbing, physical and sexual assault throughout the world. Countries like the United States, Canada, Germany, India, Europe and many more have taken legal measures to curtail such violence and protect the trans genders.

Trans literature as a genre has emerged significantly in recent years. The rise of trans literature has paved the way for trans activism. Trans literature has moved a long way in exposing the problems of gender identity and marginalization. Transgender writers have started to represent the physical and mental trauma of the transgender community, because the transgender issues of queerness, transition choices, disability and trans experience are diverse. Trans literature tries to focus on trans characters, cisgender's perception of trans sexuality and cultural influence, because transgender people come from various ethnic backgrounds. Transgender writers across the world have experienced rejection,

discrimination, abuse, gender dysphoria and maltreatment which have impeded their development and they have chosen to expose all the existing social stigma through their writings. They try to sensitize the issues of victimization and the prevailing violence towards transgender community. They analyze the various challenges faced by transgender community such as transphobic harassment, lack of legal protection and legal problems regarding identity documents, health issues and transgender violence. Trans literature across the globe explores the trans history, trans violence and their transcending experience.

Rosenberg is a Professor who teaches queer and trans cultural theory at University of Massachusetts. His *Confessions of the Fox* reveals that transgender have a long history and that, these histories are Connected to colonialism, capitalism, racism, and public health crises. *I've Got a Time Bomb* is a story of the marginalized, trans, countercultures. It is indeed Sybil Lamb's own victimization which the protagonist reflects and shares. Lamb also has experienced a violent hate crime when she was hit hard in the head with a metal rod. As a result she had some traumatic brain injury which affected her seriously inhibiting her growth as a writer and an artist . Riley Snorton's *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Transgender Identity* is a book which exposes double victimization of blackness and trans-ness. The portrayal of enslaved black women and the history of gynecological surgeries to transform the shape of their genitals exposes one of the most horrific stories in medical history.

Gill-Peterson's *Histories of the Transgender Child* grimly exposes the use of hormone blockers related to the early transitions of trans youth. The harsh reality is the victimization of innocent children and their transition to trans, who in reality are not trans. He writes about how in the early 20th century childhood genital surgeries were performed mostly on intersex kids, with the idea of their 'normalisation.' The book, *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility*, explores the trans visual cultural production. Other LGBT literary works are *Nights Like This* by Divya Sood, *Bright Lines: A Novel* by Tanwi Nandini Islam, *She of the Mountains* by Vivek Shraya, *The Paths of Marriage* by Mala Kumar, *Love Bi The Way* by Bhaavna Arora, *The Devourers* by Indra Das, *Valmiki's Daughter* by Shani Mootoo, *Kari* by Amruta Patil.

A Truth about Me: A Hijra Story by A. Revathi is one of the hijra memoirs of their struggle for survival in India . A. Revathi talks extensively about her arduous journey as a trans woman, and the traumatic relationship with her body and finally seeking refuge in a hijra house. A. Revathi has become one of India's leading trans activists. Her *A Truth about Me with A Life in Trans Activism*, tells the story of her NGO, which works with people of all genders and sexualities, and sharing her experiences within a community is full of courage and resilience. Transgender activist A. Revathi is the author of *Unarvum Uruvamum* (Feelings of the Entire Body): the first work which found expression in English from a member of the hijra community. She has acted and directed stage plays portraying gender and trans sexuality issues in Tamil and Kannada languages. *Vaadamalli* by novelist Su. Samuthiram is

the first Tamil novel about the Aravaani community in Tamil Nadu, published in 1994. *Naan Saravanan Alla* (2007) and Vidya's *I Am Vidya* (2008) became the first autobiography in Tamil to be written by a trans woman. Priya Babu has written four books and a number of essays on transgenders. *Moonram Paalin Mugam* (Face of Third Gender). In 2007, she wrote *Aravanigalin SamoogaVaraiviyal*.

Gayathri Reddy's *With Respect to Sex* is the ethnography which deals with the sexual and social differences in India. The transgender activist Kalki Subramaniam has published two poetry collections – “KuriArutheen (Phallus I Cut)” and “Vidiyai Ezhuthinen.” in Tamil. Suparna Baskaran's *Made in India: Decolonisations, Queer Sexualities, Trans/National Projects* marks the emergence of Indian homosexual and lesbian studies. It traces the evolution of lesbian NGOs. Many films have begun to focus on the transgender and their issues. *Queens! Destiny of Dance* portrays the trans in Tamil gender community. It was acted by SeemaBiswas, the actor and the transgender LaxminarayanTripathi.

Moving Truth(s): Queer and Transgender, Desi Writings on Family, Out! Stories from the New Queer India, edited by Minal Hajratwala is 30 compelling and wide-ranging stories from all facets of the LGBTQ communities in India, *AIDS Sutra: Untold Stories from India* are stories told by well-known authors like Salman Rushdie and Kiran Desai. This anthology explores the untold tales of people living with HIV across India, the transgender community and sex workers. Other South Asian queer books are *Autostraddle*:

Babyji by Abha Dawesar, *Bodymap* by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *landing by Emma Donoghue and The Stars Change* by Mary Anne Mohanraj. Laxmi Narayan Tripathi is an Indian transgender and social activist. Tripathi in her work, *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* states, “The physical and mental torture I went through is indescribable. But I didn't say a word to anyone, either then or later. I kept my feelings bottled” (6).

Twinkle Dasari and Channa Reddy in the article “Gender Identity: Analysis of Marginalized Identity of Transgender in Manobi Bandyopadhyay's *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi*” state:

In a bipolar society like India where only two genders i.e., male and female are considered as normal genders and anything other than these two are seen as abnormal or queer, it is extremely difficult and hard for a third gender person to achieve such an academic excellence, and Manobi proves it possible with a bright smile on her lips. The biography depicts all the events of her life without any prejudice and tells the reader how difficult it is to be a third gender. (63)

In *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi*, Manobi also states, “If my family had not supported me despite my 'oddity' and forced me to excel in studies, God knows where I would have ended up” (75). Manobi faces insults and becomes a butt of ridicule. Bandyopadhyay shares, “Some started clapping their hands in glee when they saw me, some just whistled and catcalled and soon taunts filled the air “ (40). Manobi yearns, “I was a female soul trapped inside my male body and that I yearned for breasts and a vagina. I yearned to be a woman physically” (31). Laxmi shares, “My body was a playhouse and a plaything, and any man could do anything with it” (27). It is her passion and hard work that brings her to the position of India's First Transgender Principal.

G. Devika highlights, “In a major decision of including transgender community in the mainstream, University of Kerala has approved a transgender policy that transgender students can use a gender neutral prefix 'Mx' in the column of University forms” (347). Kalki Subramaniam is a renowned social activist and a journalist. She emerges as a debut actress in the film “Narthaki- Life of Transgender Woman.” He found Sohadari foundation for the welfare of the transgender community. Padmini Prakash is a popular news anchor, a vocal artist and also a Kathak dancer. She was the “Miss Transgender of India.”

Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, A. Revathi, Living Smile Vidya are the famous transgenders in India. Raj Kumar in the article “Education of Transgenders in India: Status and Challenges” highlights that the Chattisgarh government has taken efforts to empower the transgender community by drafting a welfare plan for around 3000 eunuchs in the state. The Tripura government announced an allowance of Rupees 500 per month to the transgender people in the state to ensure their financial independence. The West Bengal government on October 1st, 2015 has requested the Kolkata police to recruit transgenders in the Civil Police Volunteer Force (CPVF) to end the stigma and discrimination against the community. In the article “To Be or Not To Be: A Question of Identity: A Comparative Study of Me Laxmi, Me Hijra and The Truth About Me: a Hijra Life Story” Ishrat Jahan states, “In the case of Laxmi ... she became a social activist and also attended national and international conferences of eradication of AIDS among the people.”(211)

Manobi has been appointed as the Vice Chairperson of the transgender development board established by the West Bengal government in India for the welfare of transgender. She supports the LGBTQ community and the human rights struggle. Laxmi, the transgender rights activist, represents Asia Pacific at the United Nations. She has represented India in the World AIDS Conference in Toronto. . She has given a wide contribution to the LGBT community and their upliftment. She becomes the chairperson of DWS. She represents her community and the nation internationally. Laxmi shares, “On seeing our own tricolour, I touched it lovingly and had tears in my eyes representing my own country at the United Nations! From where to where I had come- from the bottom of the pit to the United Nations. I was proud of myself, but the empowerment came with responsibility” (109).

Trans literatures have become the voice of transgender populations in exposing their social stigma, social isolation, discrimination and victimization. It also lays bare how such social exclusion has diminished their self-esteem and has often led to psychological distress, depression, anxiety and other mental health resulting in poor sexual health. The awareness created by such trans literatures have paved a way for the empowerment of the third gender. Many trans genders have made their entry in fashion and films. Laxmi, the transgender activist started a company Twelve Noon Entertainment and has conducted Indian Super Queen Contest. The transgender people get good recognition in abroad. The government of America offers the transition expenses, provides job opportunities and lends them a helping hand to get identification documents. Saxena shares, “American society, for

the most part, is a friendly 'live and let live' and transitions are relatively free from harassment. No other country provides such wonderful opportunities for TG/TS in the work place and life in general and many post-operative TG/TS women can go on to have fine careers and lives" (34, 35).

In April 2017, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that requiring sterilization for legal gender

recognition violates human rights. In November 2017, in Germany the Federal Constitutional Court ruled that the civil status law must allow a third gender option. On June 19, 2017 in Canada Bill C-16, has

included "gender identity and gender expression" as protected grounds from discrimination. In New

York, Governor David Paterson signed into law New York's first statute to include transgender protections in September 2010. On May 14, 2016, the United States Department of Education and Department of

Justice issued guidance directing public schools to allow transgender students to use bathrooms that match their gender identities. On June 30, 2016, the United States Department of Defence removed the ban that prohibited transgender people from openly serving in the US military. In April 2014, the

Supreme Court of India declared transgender to be a 'third gender' in Indian law. In India, the Supreme Court on April 15, 2014, recognized a third gender that is neither male nor female, stating that the

recognition of trans genders as a third gender is not a human rights issue.

In 2016, NCTE released the report of the U.S. Transgender Survey (USTS), a second iteration of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey (NTDS), which clearly gives an analysis of the present

condition and the changes that have happened over the past five years. International Transgender Day of Visibility is celebrated on March 3 to create an awareness of the discrimination faced by transgender people globally. Transgender Awareness Week, which is observed on the second week of November, is a one-week celebration raising an awareness on the Transgender Day of Remembrance. Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDOR) is held every year on November 20 in memory of Rita Hester, who was killed on November 28, 1998, and of those who have been victims of hate crimes and prejudice. Transgender

Pride flag is a common symbol for the transgender community. Trans March is frequently organized by transgender communities to build community, address human rights struggles, and create visibility.

Achieving transgender equality is a challenging task, yet along with the initiatives taken by different governments throughout the world, it is the duty of each individual to promote their well-being. Though trans literatures around the world are voicing the concerns of the transgenders, huge responsibilities still remain in improving their employment opportunities, healthcare and eradicating violence against transgenders.

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