
REVATHI AND VIDYA'S ORDEALS FOR INCLUSION
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Abstract: Most modern men, in spite of the plethora of the environmental resources available to them, and in spite of the great strides made in science and technology, live by the law of the jungle. In a life of 'survival of the fittest' they want to make themselves the fittest, at times, even at the expense of other lives. They look with suspicion and keep at a distance people who are different from them. One such group they treat with contempt and prejudice are the gender deviant.

This paper refers to the hostile social environment – family, neighbors, friends, academic scenario and the world of employment – in which the transgender live. The paper makes an attempt to juxtapose the status of the TGs in India with that in the Western countries. India as a country and Tamil Nadu as a state still have not completely shed their conservatism. Hence this paper will trace the place accorded to the TGs in the major Indian religions. The ultimate aim of the paper is to bring out the various stigma associated with the Transgender and their struggle for 'identity' in Tamil Nadu through a study of the autobiographies of Revathi (*Truth About Me*) and Living Smile Vidya, (*I am Vidya*), transgender themselves, who in their works have represented their community as a whole.

Keywords: Transgender, Indian religion, Tamil Nadu, Ecology, stigma

Introduction: The advent of Westernisation and Globalisation has changed the lifestyle of the people all over the world. Culture and tradition have taken on a new dimension. We see the youngsters amidst us colour their hair and diet to size zero. We see people who change their own selves in order to imitate their favourite stars. We even have people who change their names, jobs, religions, political parties . . . and even nationalities. We not only see them but we also accept them.

Apart from all the above we do find quite a large number of men who dress themselves as women and seek alms or at times we do find them in shops screaming and quarrelling, asking for money. Who are these people? Do we consider them as human beings? How do they eke out their living in a society which shuns them? What stops us from accepting them as they are?

Is our hostility towards them is it due to the "transphobia" or is it that we are not able to accommodate a new community who are of course "gender deviant".

As long as a person's perceived physiological sex is consistent with that person's gender identity, the gender role of a person is rarely even thought of. Only in cases where there is a deviation, if an individual has a gender role that is inconsistent with his or her sex this might draw attention. People who have a gender identity or expression that differs from the sex at their birth were called as the "eunuchs" or

"ali". Of late they are identified as "Transgenders". Transgenders are of two categories MtoF, male to female and FtoM, female to male. This digression is a natural process which they identify on their own. From our study on "transgenders" we come to know that they develop a desire for cross dressing at an early age and also have an urge to change their sex through Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS).

The thought "to be identified" among the mainstream is the constant urge of the transgenders. They are a "double bind" (i.e.) by their own self and by their surroundings. The livelihood for this category is marginal. They resort in taking alms or a sizeable portion is forced to engage in prostitution. The transsexuals also take part in auspicious functions like marriage and birth. Many of them are also good cooks. Many of them are talented in arts and take part in many cultural activities, recitation of folklore and staging of street plays. Some of them spend part of their income on SRS. A male-to-female transgender person is referred to as 'transgender woman' and a female-to-male transgender person, as 'transgender man'.

In Indian set up we believe and follow our life according to religious beliefs. We willingly follow the religious code of conduct. The concept of Ardhanarishvara, in Hindu mythology, symbolizes the inseparability of the male and female principles. Ardhanarishvara signifies the "totality that lies beyond duality", the "bi-unity of male and female in God" and "the bisexuality and therefore the non-

duality" of the Supreme Being who unifies all other dichotomies of the universe.

In our religion we have Aravan the patron saint of the transsexuals of Tamilnadu. Aravan (Literally the son of snake) is the son of Arjuna by the Serpent Princess Ulupi. The Pandavas sacrifice "Aravan" to victory in Kurukshetra war. So he makes a last request that he should be married and should enjoy the connubial bliss before his sacrifice. Krishna transforms himself into a beautiful virgin (Mohini) and offers herself to Aravan. The next day Aravan is sacrificed. Mohini adopts the widowhood.

Transgender Living Smile Vidya and Revathi, who represent their community, share their plight in the process of even being recognised as human being. They have taken this leap by penning their lives struggle in the form of an autobiography. They claim that Transgender suffer a lot from within because of the fear of being identified by the people as this might cause a lot of problems for their family members. The family members also consider it a curse on their family. Eventually, these 'betwixt' people have to run away from their homes. They are torn between of their love for their family and their incapability to make their family understand what their real nature is. "Why don't you try and understand my feelings? ... I am here only because of the love I bear for all of you!" [3].

The environment which should succor one's moral, mental and physical courage should by no means suppress or become a mechanism that marginalizes a particular group. 'Transphobia', the term itself makes it obvious as to how the society views the transgenders. Had they been included or treated equally in the mainstream this term would not have come into existence. The transphobia does not merely stop with unleashing our fear against the transgender community. It goes a step further: it curtails and disrupts the routine life of the transgender. "I could neither talk about my condition, nor entirely hide it. Every day, my feelings die only to be reborn and to die again" [3]. These lines testify to their longing to live like any other in this society. But under the duress of social prejudice and bias the transgender take to begging and sex work, those jobs that are looked down upon by the 'normal' people. It is the society which hard presses them to take up such odd jobs. "Society and law not only think we are doing wrong, but are violent towards us" [3]. The stress and depression which she suffered within because of the environment (family, friends, neighbours and teachers) compelled her to question the Creator. "Amma! Why must I suffer like this?

Why must you put me through this ordeal? ... What wrong have I done? It was you who made me male in form, but with female feelings. And now, for your crime, I am being punished..."[3]. Why he was determined to test me?" [3]. The people around her make her feel alienated. They do not even consider these gender deviant people as human beings. "Why did God give me these feelings? Why must we be tortured by people's looks?" [3].

Family members are not ready to accept the transformation which the soul undergoes. Vidya's childhood struggles to maintain her femininity was even more 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" [2]. Vidya at the age of 6 started to realize the femininity within her. 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.

The trauma which the family has created has a great impact in the minds of the transgender. When they are cornered by the society, family becomes their only resort. When that too becomes a question mark they are left as destitutes. "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" [2]. 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 whole woman. ...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... Look at me as a woman. Accept me as a girl, Appa [2].

The longing to be a part of the family is evident through her screams which comes out of her mind because of her pain and anxiety. Family bonding is what the transgender long for.

The impact of such horrible life shattered her hopes and thoughts that she belonged to this society. The transgender have a negative idea about the society they live in, as they are not recognised 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” [2]. Transgender’s feel that it is because of the treatment which the society bestows on them, they resort to begging. There is no recognition of their identity and the chance 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. [2].

For the transgender to get out of this ordeal the family should act as a great support. Every individual in this society should welcome the third gender. The government should take necessary initiatives to identify them as a human being. It should remove the social stigma on the “tirunangai” according to GO No. 377 that “tirunangai” are disease-afflicted sex workers.

Transgender women require understanding and support of the government, health care professionals,

general public as well as their family members. We need to understand and accept that 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 transgenders in their search for ‘identity’ and in their struggle to become one among the main stream society face innumerable hardships. They feel they are still in the fringes of the society.

“God has made us this way. I thought, and we have no work of our own, our parents do not understand us and this world looks upon us with distaste. Yet we too go hungry. Above all we wanted to live as human beings do, with dignity” [3].

A society cannot claim itself to be ‘progressive’ if it leaves behind a portion (however negligible) of the society to darkness and suffering. It should change this bleak environment to a better and safe place for such people to live in. It is not only imperative for us to take the concepts of ‘inclusion’ and ‘identity’ seriously, but it is also imperative on our part to find the means and implement them sincerely. The initial step for that can be by consciously expunging the term ‘transphobia’ from use and by empowering our fellow beings to lead their life as others do, in this Universe.

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