

# THE SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND INCLUSION OF THIRD GENDER IN INDIA

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**Abstract:** The third gender community has been a marginalized community to a large extent throughout the world. They face multiple forms of oppression. The main Reason behind their marginalization in the society is that people do not have proper knowledge about them. The people have little knowledge about their lives and their existence. Only through writings stories, songs and autobiographies they express themselves. The purpose of this research paper is to propose an introduction of third gender's self narrativization and their personal experiences of pains and traumas and to summarize the various issues faced by them by using their socio-cultural aspects, their exclusion and inclusion in Indian Society through third gender auto-biographies I Am Vidya (2013) by Living Smile Vidya and The Truth About Me (2010) by A. Revathi.

**Keywords:** Third Gender, Hijra, Discrimination, Rights, exclusion, Inclusion.

In Indian context the third gender is an umbrella term used for a community of people known as the Hijras. They are also referred as people who are transgendered, castrated and effeminate. The word Hijra comes out from the Urdu word 'Hijra' that denoted to those persons who walked out from the community. In Urdu, they are also called 'Khwaja Sara'; in Hindi we called them 'Kinner'. Physically they are born as male children but psychologically they feel as female. The transgender felt so isolated in the society because society digests only the fact that is binary system i.e. male and female.

Some mythological and dramatic roles of Hijra encouraged the lives of the Hijra community. As in Mahabharata, there is an incident in which Arjuna, the very strong king among Pandvas was sent into an Exile. There he adopted an identity like Hijras-wearing bangles, long hair, wearing sarees and teaching the women of the king's court to sing and dance.

In Ramayana when Rama leaves Ayodhya for his 14 years of exile a crowd of his disciples follows him to the forest and show their true devotion to him and told all men and women not to mourn and should return to the kingdom, then he leaves his native place for 14 years but when he came back he finds, some disciples waiting for him who are neither men nor women. By being impressed from their true devotion, Rama gives power to Hijras to give blessing in the auspicious occasion like wedding, in childbirth and in house warming. (*Me Hijra Me Laxmi* 49)

These mythological texts give long-widened space to the Hijras, so that through religious text they could get more respect and their social life can identify as 'Third Gender.' The third gender people criminalized by the British Government in colonial period. The History and the social life of the third gender somehow give us a view that their position has been changing with the time. In the contemporary period, the status of the third Gender is remarked by abused, marginalized and neglected community. They face various types of discrimination on the basis of class, gender and religion which makes their community as one of the most stigmatized and marginalized community in Indian Society. With the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Hijras were targeted by the Britishers who sought to eradicate them, criminalized under section 377 and considered as a criminal Tribe in 1871. According to 2011 census report there are about 4, 90,000 (Nagarajan May 30, 2014) third gender men in India. Their everyday life is filled with discrimination, shame and rejection of their identity. Their Educational enrolment is near zero. Ethnographic research has not yet done on the life and culture of Third Gender community. There are some videos on Facebook and YouTube related to their dancing, singing and dressing but the people never thinks deep about their psychological sufferings which they faced. As Laxmi Nrayan Tripathi writes in her autobiography:

People are curious to know about Hijras, How do we live? Behave? What do we do? Do we kidnap children? What funeral rites are performed for a Hijra after her death? Is she cremated or buried? Such questions do not have answers... because we Hijras are so secretive about our lives, hearsay rules the Roost. (*Me Hijra Me Laxmi* 155)

The social exclusion of Third Gender community begins from their families by birth or by their recognition of being 'different' because Indian families do not accept if their boy child starts behaving differently in a feminine way. Further it leads to separation from the family or disinherited from property. That's why the third Gender people could never claim their share of the property. Due to this their life becomes challenging and they face problems. There is no employment for them; they also face lack of health facilities. Thus it is clear that they have no breathing spell for them

and ultimately their illiteracy makes their situation worse. We found that several Hijras living in parks, train stations, and other public places. Since fleeing from their homes they lived in slums or train stations. It is critical to understand the concept of their 'Social Exclusion' how they are treated in the society.

However, since late 20<sup>th</sup> century the government has worked for their validation and acceptance in that case government plays very important role. Since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, some Hijra activists have promoted for official recognition as a kind of 'Third Sex' or 'Third Gender' as neither man nor woman. In India the Supreme Court on 15 April 2014 recognized Hijras as 'Third Gender' in law. Before 15 April 2014 the Hijras had no right of their own. In 2016 a transgender bill was introduced which has not yet been passed by the upper house of the parliament. Improving their social status and empowering their community in the workplace has to be a collective effort. It will take a long time in reducing social stigmas and also improving their economic position. Before introducing any change in the system it will be necessary for organizations to educate society about gender entirety and prepare their mind for the acceptance of third gender individuals. Undergoing SRS (Sex Reassignment Surgery) transition is not only a difficult process but also very painful both physically and psychologically as seen from the autobiographies of living smile Vidya and A. Revathi.

The effeminacy in a Third Gender person begins from childhood while he born with male sex. Since their childhood they urge to wear feminine attire, long hair, and makeup and take interest in dancing as seen from the autobiography of Living smile Vidya. She was born as a male and psychologically a female, later she identifies herself as female, by undergoing a sex reassignment surgery. When Vidya was born her parents name her Saravanan. Saravanan was the sixth child of the family. In fact family got a boy after many years of prayers. Appa Vidya's father ran his own business of milk supply, which had an incomplete dream to get government job but circumstances don't allow him. After Sarvanan's birth Appa start dreaming about his son growing up as a district collector. Appa always thinks that district collector is the top job in India. He started seeing his left future in his son. But no one was aware about Vidya inside Sarvanan:

Vidya Mentions in her autobiography: My womanhood was raging to destroy my manhood, incinerating all the advice I was receiving. (*I Am Vidya 19*)

The femininity starts in her character from early childhood. She explains, "I usually locked myself inside once all of them had gone out, put on girls' clothes and Sang and danced." (*I Am Vidya 19*) when Saravanan sees himself in the mirror and acts like a girl it gives him pleasure but he always hides his inner desire from family. Gradually people start noticing the femininity in his personality and they start insulting him. Then it became very difficult to Saravanan to find social space. The feeling of non- acceptance and torture had started in family and in the society. Vidya shares her inner feelings of torture:

I was a 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 Am Vidya 33*)

The crucial phase of Sarvanan's life had started with the reveal of his femininity in front of society. He dreamed to become "an actor, Journalist or Researcher." (*I Am Vidya 33*) rather than to fulfil his father's dream to become an I.A.S. He felt that humanities course would best suit his involvement in theatre, music and dance. He joined Pondicherry University for M.A. and faced many problems there; he spent very bad two days in Boys' Hostel while nobody knows about his femininity. He Joined Tamil University for his masters in linguistics where he met to Revati and became best friend but the other students made cheap comments about his friendship with Revati this affected him emotionally. As Vidya explains that:

I had no problem with people recognizing my femininity, but hated it when they made fun of me on that account. Worse was when they imagined I was a man sexually or romantically interested in a woman. (*I Am Vidya 50*)

A new journey of Saravanan's life starts with his fled to Channai where he met to professor MU Ramaswami.

Professor Ramaswami asked his name and the reason of his moved to Channai. Initially, he felt much hesitation and then said,

I must tell you something' Go ahead 'Sir'. 'Go ahead'  
'Don't hesitate, Saravanan. (*I am Vidya 64*)

That was the turning point of Sarvanan's life. He felt that he can't live a lie anymore; he decided to change his sex while it was very difficult time for him to left everything behind and to choose a life of begging or becoming a sex worker. This forced performativity of feminine appearance is a difficult process for a transgender who was earlier a male. They have to undergo for surgery called Niravan which is much too painful as Vidya mentioned- "Afterward, you are left with a hole to pass urine through a task that remains painful and messy until the wound heals. You can't move your legs for a few days, so you cry and scream all day long from your bed, to no avail." (*I Am Vidya 100*) These operations are unsafe, unhygienic because the hospitals where they take operation do not provide them proper treatment. The Surgeons don't give guarantee for their successful operation.

In India there is no SRS facility available.

SRS can incorporate facial feminization, speech therapy, breast argumentation and the insertion of a plastic vagina. You can acquire the sweet voice of a normal woman. (*I Am Vidya* 99)

In India the Third Gender people undergo only for local anaesthesia that is illegal procedure, without government approval. In India Trans genders have no option for earning their live except begging or doing sex work. They face many challenges in determining their gender identity as Third Gender/Transgender. As in her Ethnography with Respect to Sex: - Negotiating Hijra Identity in south India Gayatri Reddy mentions that:

Hijras also engage in several less harmful practices to erase vestiges of masculinity and enhance their femininity. One of the most common of these is the use - of tweezers (cimte) to pluck out their facial hair. All Hijas are required to tweeze their facial here. The leaders impose a fine on those who disregard the rule. The reason for this painful practice is that facial hair does not grow back as quickly and coarsely as it would if shaved. (*With Respect to Sex* 124)

After Nirvana Saravanan felt as an independent spirit, he was accepted by Hijra community, his new self-journey started when he met to Satya another Hijra who gave him new name Vidya. Satya Said 'My name is Satya, Let's call you Vidya.' (*I Am Vidya* 73) Vidya felt that she was not only the sufferer in this society there were many others like her who had a similar life as her. They too had faced a number of obstacles, challenges, pain and trouble. In our Indian society these people are considered as Hijras, Transgender, third gender, marginalised community and forced to begging, singing, dancing and to do sex work. There are significant gender differences, in case of transgender. To portray their inside femininity which is hidden in a male body they adopt feminine behaviours, body language and clothing style of women. In the last chapter of her autobiography Vidya urged for the legalization of sex change operation and their acceptance in the society. Vidya urged that, "I do not ask for heaven-I am begging to be spared from living Hell." (*I Am Vidya* 138)

A. Revathi became the first transgender activist to write about transgender issues and gender politics in Tamil Nadu. In her autobiography, *The Truth About Me* she works with a sexual minorities human organization for individuals. She is a writer, Actor and activist, working for the gender minorities in India. In '*The Truth about Me*' A Hijra life story', she shares her own experiences of having a female psychology with male physique. Her narrative is translated by V. Geetha from Tamil to English.

In her autobiography she narrates every aspect of Hijra Community to aware the society about the fact that the Third Gender people are also human beings, they have desires to live their life as the other people have in this society. She begins the preface of the autobiography with a question,

In our society, and we speak the language of rights loud and often, but do the marginalized really have access to these rights? (*The Truth About Me* 05)

Her life story starts in a small village in Namakkal Taluk, Salem District in Tamil Nadu. She was the youngest son of the family after three brothers and a sister. Her parents named her Doraiswamy. Doriaswamy grew up effeminate and shy. He always went school along with his neighbourhood girls. He grew up with a desire to dress up as girls. When he studied in class V, he started living as a girl child. Doraiswamy's Gender trouble started with his attraction towards girls' game because the society does not digest that a male lives like a female. Revathi Shares her experience:

As soon as I get 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, and everyone would laugh. No one thought much of it then, for I was little. They reasoned, he'll outgrow all this when he grows older', and did not say much else. (*The Truth About Me* 04)

Soon Doriaswamy became the source of laughing for his neighbours. At school, the boys started teasing him by saying 'Hey Number 9!', 'Female Thing', and 'Female Boy'. Some of them asked him, "Aren't you a boy? Why do you walk like a girl? Why do you wear girls' Clothes?" (*The Truth About Me* 04) But it was natural for Doraiswamy to behave like a girl. When Doraiswamy studied in 10<sup>th</sup> class he experienced a growing sense of "Irrepressible femaleness." (*The Truth About Me* 14) As Revathi Mentioned:

A woman trapped in a man's body was how I thought of myself. But how could that be? Would the world accept me thus? Longed to be known as a woman and felt pain at being considered a man. I longed to be with men, but felt shamed by this feeling. I wondered why God had chosen to inflict this peculiar torture on me, and why he could not have created me wholly male or wholly female. (*The Truth About Me* 15)

His gender conformity was not clear to him that was the problematic situation for him. He desired to be a woman. He met a group of four men who dressed in lungis and had growing long hair and they start dancing like a woman. After meeting them he noticed that the three were other people like him who dressed in saris and behaving as a woman. Doriaswamy was fifteen years old when he met them and it was the time when he got his real identity, he was called Revathi by an elder Hijra, "you look like 'Revathi'." (*The Truth About Me* 22) On hearing his new name as girls' he felt much happiness:

And in my heart, I imagined that was name-Revathi. I looked at myself into the mirror and felt a glow of pride. (*The Truth About Me* 22)

After that Doraiswamy became Revathi joined Hijra Community and performed every ritual of temple festival. She became the Chela of Hijra Guru but suggested by her Guru to go back home. She returned after living for months with

Hijra community. When she returned back to family in her sister's marriage function, her family teased her brutally. She didn't tell anyone her new identity as Revathi because in Indian Society a boy's transformation into girl is unacceptable. In Indian Society these people are called third gender, Hijras and marginalised community. The gender prejudice starts from family as we seen through transgender autobiographies. In their families no one wants to know the reason behind their behaving differently, what they really feel inside. Revathi explains:

This confused me-I was a boy and yet I felt I Could love other boys. Was this right or wrong? I could not talk to anyone about my confusions. Not to my brother or my parents. (*The Truth About Me* 09)

This gender non conformity suppresses them to find their own real identity. They have to leave their home to live like a woman, joined Hijra community. Revathi also took decision to go back to third gender community when she doesn't get space in her own family. She decided to become a Hijra through operation which is called 'Nirvana'. When she was sent for operation she felt, "Finally the female in me would be free from her male body." (*The Truth About Me* 67)

Serena Nanda in her work neither 'Neither Man nor Woman': The Hijras of India explains the ritual of Nirvana, The Hijras call the emasculation operation Nirvana. Nirvana is a condition of calm and absence of desire; it is liberation from the finite human consciousness and the dawn of higher consciousness. The Hindu scriptures call the beginning of this experience the second birth, or the opening of the eye of wisdom. The Hijras too translate nirvana as rebirth. Emasculation is explicitly is a passage, moving the Nirvan (the one who is operated on) from the status of an ordinary, impotent male to that of a Hijra. (Neither Man nor Woman 26)

The Nirvana was not the end of Revathi's identity crisis. According to Hijra norms she had to engage herself in the sex work. She disagreed to live a life as a sex worker so her identity crisis remained the same. The Third gender people have follow their Guru if anyone denies to obey Guru she brought new problems to herself. Revathi explains, My guru said, 'Beta', if we are to live here and make a living in this place, you'll have to listen to what people like him say. Do as he wants you to do and make him happy. (*The Truth About Me* 109)

Revathi was forced to do sex work, except doing sex work they had no source of income. Revathi explains how a new self is constructed and the older self is demolished and how society accepts such changes. She explores the difficulties of moving away from home and finding a community. Throughout her autobiography she explores the invisibilisation of Trans-woman's pain and the sexual violence against them. The violence started from family, Society and ultimately the law. When Revathi returned home after her operation, she felt so much emotional pain expressed by a mother who lost her son and her mother's inability to understand her. Revathi mentioned "Seeing me lift my sari, My Mother hit her mouth with her hands and bowled out, He's cut it all off, the two and the third! Oh, how did he have the heart to?" (*The Truth About Me* 113) Her mother was unable to accept her gender change. Revathi felt that why Hijras are treated with no respect, if the time would come when we can also live freely like a woman. In the last chapter of her autobiography Revathi explains her aloofness and seclusion form her own community.

In regard with conclusion this paper presents the pathetic conditions of Third Gender people who are excluded from family and society due to their gender non conformity. They are included in their community that is unfit to live, involved in begging and sex work for earning their bread and butter. Society itself is responsible for their marginalization, to rejecting them neither male nor female. A Revathi is the first Indian transgender activist told the stories of her psychological trauma, how the Hijras are facing the difficulties in every sphere of life. Hence, they are recognised as 'Third Gender' in law but not completely accommodated as either male or female.

They are abused, humiliated and discriminated in male dominated society. Excluding these, they are the victims of exploitation not only by the society but also by their own family members. Living Smile Vidya represents all the miserable incidents in her autobiography that a third gender person faces in his /her life. She urges to government to give equal rights to transgender and for their acceptance in the society. Positive actions are needed to eliminate stigma and prejudice against the transgender community; it would help in bringing a positive change in their life. To explore educational and employment opportunities this community needs a facilitating environment. To give great strength and a sense of identity to this community the efforts should be made by the Government. With the endeavour of some transgender rights activists, Hijras of India are on their way to get the right to equality yet their destination is still far away.

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