

'Transwomen's Odysseys In Indian Autobiographies: A Critical Exegesis Of 'I Am Vidya' And 'The Truth About Me'

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a comprehensive exegesis of the autobiographies 'I Am Vidya' and 'The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story', delving into the experiences of transgender individuals in India as depicted in the texts. The study aims to clarify the intricacies of transwomen's experiences, obstacles, and metamorphoses while also illuminating the social and cultural environments that influence their identities in Indian society through a critical and comparative analysis. The study makes an effort to highlight the complexity of the issues transwomen confront, noting that cultural norms as well as legal, social, and medical shortcomings exacerbate their difficulties. In order to support transgender rights and inclusion in Indian society, the paper emphasizes the urgent need for strong policies, sufficient funding, legal recognition, and public awareness.

Keywords: Autobiography, Gender reassignment, , Gender Inclusivity, self-Identity, transwomen.

I. Introduction

'Autobiography' is a powerful literary method that allows individuals to express their personal experiences and perspectives. It serves as a tool for self-reflection, self-empowerment, and storytelling. The study of autobiographies written by transwomen helps us comprehend, thread by thread, the ups and downs of their life with a superficial glance is not possible. The autobiographies 'I Am Vidya' by living Smile Vidya and "The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story' by A. Revthi offer invaluable insights into the lived experiences of transwomen in India and provide a platform for their stories and identities to be heard and understood and provide a space for introspection.

Identity crisis is one of the most prominent topics in literary treatises. Every individual and their position in society are an essential part of the life cycle. In the following days, the utmost argument in contemporary novels is the quest for identity. But it is not that easy to establish one's own identity in a particular community. If a man and a woman attempt to carve out an individual slot in society, it comes under common disputes. Many people in society will put a word only for men and women, but it should be considered as gender construction beyond the feminine and masculine identities, there are a few other social norms and social orders for third-gender people. Due to the mainstream pattern, we often fail to notice the transgender identity as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, intersex (LGBTQI+) community.

The terms third-gender or cis-gender refer to people who belong to neither a man nor a woman and are also called sexual minorities. They are intersex people born in another gender's body. From LGBTQI community 'transgender' or 'intersex 'individual are born naturally like that and later they go for sex change surgery to acquire either male or female gender, but some doesn't go for it and stay as they are. They just cross-dress or acquire behavioral traits like those of the other gender.

These autobiographies shed light on the transgender experience in India, showcasing counter-hegemonic narratives that dismantle the cartographies of trans identities. They also point out the "class/caste/racial hierarchies that they are embedded in," which marginalize them. These narratives describe the many forms of gender and sexual variance found in Indian society, challenging the normative understanding of gender and highlighting the struggles faced by transgender individuals in their quest for acceptance and recognition. Autobiographies provide a platform for individuals to powerfully communicate their stories, highlighting the struggles, triumphs, and personal growth they have experienced. These autobiographies not only serve as a

means of self-expression but also carry a broader social significance, giving voice to the voiceless and raising awareness about the lived experiences of marginalized communities.

Historical and cultural context of the transwomen community in India. Transwomen, also known as hijras, have a long history dating back centuries. They have traditionally occupied a distinct and unique social role, often considered to possess spiritual powers and blessings. In many Indian cultures, hijras were revered and sought after for their blessings during important ceremonies such as childbirth and weddings. However, with the impact of colonialism and modernization, hijras, or transwomen, have faced increasing discrimination and marginalisation. During the British era, when the Indian Penal Code of 1861 criminalised hijras and categorised them as a "criminal tribe," this categorization further entrenched their marginalisation and reinforced societal stigmatisation of transwomen. This law penalised their natural instinct of becoming someone else; this cruel law had a deplorable impact on their position, which they enjoyed earlier in Mughal's court and palaces.

Legal and societal perspectives on transgender rights and recognition in recent years have been significant towards recognizing transgender rights in India. The landmark Supreme Court judgment in 2014, which recognized transgender individuals as a third gender and affirmed their constitutional rights, marked a turning point in the struggle for transgender recognition and rights in India. Additionally, there have been efforts to pass comprehensive transgender rights legislation, such as the Transgender Persons Bill, 2019. The Bill aims to protect transgender individuals from discrimination and ensure their access to healthcare, education, employment, and other basic rights. The bill has been met with mixed reactions, with some praising it as a significant step towards equality and inclusion, while others criticize its limitations and failure to address all the concerns and needs of transgender individuals in India.

There are limited studies which support the study of well-being of transwomen's community. This area requires robust research to enhance social and human rights standards of community in India and abroad. Apart from healthcare laws and infra they require proper channelisation for indiscriminate employment environment and mental and psychological well-being. The major challenges faced by transgender individuals in Indian society include widespread discrimination, violence, lack of access to education and employment opportunities, limited healthcare services, and societal stigma. Despite the progress in recognizing transgender rights, transgender individuals in Indian society still face numerous challenges. These challenges include limited legal protections, lack of awareness and understanding among the general public, prejudice and discrimination in various spheres of life, and limited access to healthcare. Furthermore, the transgender community in India often faces economic instability and struggles to find sustainable employment opportunities due to the stigma associated with their gender identity. Sometimes they acquire suicidal behaviour due to lack of basic needs. In order to address these challenges and ensure equal rights and opportunities for transgender individuals in India, it is crucial for society to continue raising awareness, promoting inclusion, and advocating for inclusion of firsthand literature by this community in academia. This comparative study sheds light on the diversity of transgender experiences within the community highlighting the significance of personal narratives in understanding the complexities of identities and its impact on living standards and overall life. We may find differences in experience and opportunities present for them in different environments. At the end new perspectives can bring new visions for future research and areas of interests.

1.1 Aim and objective of the paper

The purpose of this research paper is to analyze the representation of transgender experiences in Indian autobiographies. The significance of studying 'I Am Vidya' and 'The Truth About Me' in the context of transgender experiences in India is twofold. First, these autobiographies provide a firsthand account of the challenges faced by transgender individuals in Indian society, shedding light on the discrimination, prejudice, and violence they endure on a daily basis. Second, these autobiographies challenge the dominant narratives and stereotypes surrounding transgender identities in India, offering a nuanced and multifaceted perspective that promotes understanding and empathy. Apart from this literature is a mirror of society so studying perspectives gives new horizons to ponder on. For more inclusivity in our society, it's extremely crucial to introduce and study more trans centered literature.

'I am not diseased. I consider myself a woman. But I possessed the form of a man, I wanted to rid myself of that form and live as a complete woman. How can that be wrong? (262, A. Revathi)

1.2 Proposed work of the paper

This paper dives deep into the multifaceted journeys of transgender individuals in India, unveiling the intricate interplay of societal, cultural, and personal factors shaping transwomen's narratives. Through this exploration, this research aims to illuminate the diverse experiences, challenges, and resilience of transgender individuals while highlighting the pivotal role these autobiographies play in advocating for understanding, empathizing, and societal acceptance of transgender communities in the Indian context.

By analysing the autobiographies 'I Am Vidya' and 'The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story'- we may gain insight into the socio-cultural context in which these transgender journeys unfold and the various intersecting factors of caste, class, and gender that shape their experiences. By examining the personal stories and reflections of Vidya and the hijra narrator, we may explore the complexities of transgender identities in India

1.3 Organization of paper:

Organization of paper - The paper will begin with an introduction discussing the importance and significance of studying an autobiography written by a transgender sharing experiences in India. The introduction will also provide a brief overview of the two autobiographies, 'I Am Vidya' and 'The Truth About Me,' highlighting their relevance to the research topic. The paper will then delve into a comprehensive analysis of both autobiographies, examining the themes, narratives, and cultural contexts depicted in each. Then literature review to find the previous study on the topic and identify the gaps that this research aims to fill. The paper will also discuss the methodology, analysing other sources used for this research, such as interviews, textual analysis, and comparative study of other autobiographies. Result and discussion the paper will present the findings of the analysis, discussing the representation of transgender experiences in both autobiographies and highlighting key themes and insights. Finally, the conclusion will summarize the main findings of the research and discuss their implications feasible for transgenders living in different parts India. The conclusion will also reflect on the overall significance of studying transgender autobiographies and suggest avenues for further research. Finally, there is a bibliography that includes all the sources cited in the research paper to give proper credit to all researchers.

This comparative study sheds light on the diversity of transgender experiences within the community. Stressing upon the significance of personal narratives in understanding the complexities of identities and societal norms. We may find differences in experience and opportunities present for them in different environments. At the end new perspectives can bring new visions for future research and areas of interests.

"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" (Revathi).

II. Literature Review

A review of existing literature reveals that there is a growing body of research exploring the experiences and challenges faced by transwomen individuals in India. These studies highlight the systemic discrimination, social exclusion, and health disparities that transwomen individuals face. It also emphasizes the need for more comprehensive legal protections, access to healthcare services, and education and employment opportunities for transgender individuals in India. The requirement of robust research in areas of mental health care apart from just AIDS awareness, proper tests for personality assessment and post gender surgery care.

It is clear that the impact of colonial regulation continues to shape the live experiences of hijras and transwomen individuals in India. Additionally, studies have also examined the socio-economic problems faced by transgender individuals in the workplace in India, revealing socioeconomic discrimination and limited opportunities for advancement. while progress has been made in recognizing the rights of transgender individuals in Indian society, there are still significant challenges that need to be addressed, likewise the profession of prostitution is linked with them as they don't find employment opportunities elsewhere so either they become suicidal or else get into nasty profession of prostitution.

'I am not diseased. I consider myself a woman.

But I possessed the form of a man, I wanted to rid myself of that form and live as a complete woman. How can that be wrong?' (262, Revathi)

Previous research on transgender autobiographies in India offered insight on the lives and hardships of transgender people in a culture that frequently marginalizes them. These autobiographies offer vital insights into transgender people's personal stories, showing the discrimination, assault, and social marginalization that they frequently face. These experiences demonstrate that transgender people in India confront not just societal stigma, but also legal and institutional impediments that prevent them from accessing basic rights and opportunities. These impediments include insufficient access to school, healthcare, job, and housing, all of which contribute to their marginalisation and isolation from mainstream society.

NGOs and government organisations are implementing strategies and activities to address the issues that transgender people confront in India. Cultural and religious beliefs have an impact on how transgender people are treated in Indian society, adding another layer of complexity to their difficulties Traditional gender stereotypes and conservative beliefs frequently contribute to the prejudice and violence experienced by the transgender community, further marginalising it. However, NGOs and government organizations have implemented proactive strategies and activities to solve these difficulties. These include awareness campaigns, legal activism, and the development of inclusive legislation aimed at protecting transgender people's rights and well-being while also promoting their social inclusion.

A research endeavor that compares the experiences of transgender people living in urban and rural settings, emphasizing the differences between these places as well as the unique difficulties they encounter. To enhance the transgender community's general well-being and attend to its special needs. The issues that transgender people in rural areas confront, such as restricted access to support networks, healthcare, and education, are brought to light by drawing attention to geographical discrepancies. Embracing variety and inclusivity, this all-encompassing strategy aims to empower transgender people.

The impact of societal stigmas on the mental health and well-being of transgender individuals in India is an important area of research that warrants further exploration. Understanding the psychological impact of societal stigmas on transgender individuals in India is crucial for developing effective support systems and

interventions. Research should investigate the relationship between discrimination, depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation among this population. By addressing these issues, policymakers and healthcare providers can work towards creating a more inclusive society that values the well-being and rights of all individuals, regardless of their gender identity. Furthermore, it is necessary to examine the potential protective factors and resilience strategies that transgender individuals in India may employ in the face of societal stigmas.

The role of education and awareness campaigns in challenging gender norms and promoting inclusivity could be explored as a potential solution to combating discrimination against transgender individuals in Indian society. Additionally, fostering collaboration between government agencies, civil society organizations, and transgender advocacy groups is crucial to ensuring a comprehensive and coordinated approach towards inclusivity. Moreover, the provision of legal protections and access to healthcare services tailored to the specific needs of transgender individuals is essential to dismantling systemic barriers and promoting their overall well-being. The government must allocate adequate resources and funding towards the implementation of these policies and initiatives to ensure their long-term sustainability and effectiveness. Ultimately, creating a society where transgender individuals can live without fear of discrimination requires a collective effort from all stakeholders, including individuals, communities, and institutions.

III. Analysis of the Autobiographies

Analysis of existing scholarly work on Indian transwomen Vidya and Revathi, which is originally written in their mother tongue and later translated for the world to relive their experience. 'I Am Vidya' and 'The Truth About Me' talk about protagonists both born into normal families with strict binaries adherence, but with time both of them realise that there is something that they don't want to live like this. Both found their femineity in their souls, seeded deep inside their bodies, which started struggling to come out with the growing age.

'It was all so complicated: I was a woman trapped in a male body. Physically, I was no woman, but my thoughts processes when considering my future, my professional Carrier, were those of a woman'. (486, Vidya)

Upon close examination, it becomes evident just how crucial it is to amplify the voices and experiences of transgender individuals. Both autobiographical works provide unique perspectives on the challenges and successes that transgender people encounter, shining a light on the systemic obstacles they face in accessing healthcare. In "Truth about Me," Revathi exposes the dire conditions of the hospitals where the transgender community seeks 'NIRVANA' gender reassignment surgery. She vividly describes how they were left on steel cots after surgery with no post-operative care.

'When I finally had the opportunity to undergo hormone therapy and gender-affirming surgeries, it was a transformative experience. Not only did it align my physical appearance with my true self, but it also improved my mental health and overall quality of life. It is essential that these treatments are recognized as essential healthcare services.' (Revathi)

Through careful examination of these narratives, researchers can pinpoint areas where the healthcare system needs improvement and develop targeted interventions to address these shortcomings. This analysis is a crucial step in creating a more inclusive and fair healthcare system for transgender individuals. These narratives highlight the importance of advocating for transgender rights and the need for comprehensive healthcare coverage, including hormone therapy and gender-affirming surgeries. Both stories emphasize the significance of amplifying transgender voices and experiences to foster understanding, empathy, and positive change within the healthcare system and society. The truth about me and becoming whole:

"I have faced discrimination and stigma throughout my life simply for being transgender.

It has been a constant battle to access the healthcare I need and deserve.' (Revathi)

The lack of understanding and acceptance within the healthcare system only exacerbates the mental health challenges I face. It is crucial that we work towards creating a healthcare system that is inclusive and supportive of transgender individuals, providing them with the care and resources necessary for their well-being.

The impact of the autobiographies "I Am Vidya" and "The Truth About Me" transcends academic boundaries. These narratives have the potential to raise awareness and cultivate empathy among readers, leading to a shift in societal attitudes towards transgender individuals. By humanising the transgender experience and challenging stereotypes perpetuated by society, these autobiographies can serve as powerful tools for advocacy and activism, inspiring change in policies and social structures that marginalise transgender individuals. Through sharing their stories, Vidya and Revathi exemplify the resilience and strength of transgender individuals, challenging societal norms and expectations. Vidya and Revathi exemplify the resilience and strength of transgender individuals, challenging societal norms and expectations.

"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" (Revathi, 9).

The comparative study of these autobiographies has illuminated the complexities of transgender identities in India, emphasizing the significance of personal narratives in understanding the multifaceted nature of identity and societal norms. It is clear that transgender individuals navigate and resist societal norms and expectations in unique ways, shaping their experiences through a complex interplay of societal, cultural, and personal factors.

'It was like eating for me-just as I would not stop eating because someone asked me not to eat, I felt I could not stop being a girl, because others told me I ought not to be so.' (7).

IV. Methodology

In this study, a qualitative research approach is utilised to examine the narratives of Vidya from the autobiography 'I Am Vidya' and the hijra narrator of 'Truth about Me', in order to identify common themes and divergences in their experiences. The analysis delves into the intricate and multifaceted journeys of transgender individuals in India, recognising the influence of societal, cultural, and personal factors. The autobiographies provide a compelling perspective for understanding the socio-cultural context of these transgender journeys. Through the examination we aim to explore the realities encountered by transgender individuals, their strategies for navigating societal norms, and their methods of resistance and transcendence of societal expectations. Additionally, secondary sources such as YouTube documentaries, vlogs by the transgender community, and interviews are being reviewed.

Selection criteria for choosing 'I Am Vidya' and 'The Truth About Me' included relevance to the research question, availability of primary source material, and cultural significance within the context of transgender experiences. The approach to reviewing and analysing the autobiographies involved a close reading of the texts to identify key themes, narratives, and personal reflections. The review and analysis of the autobiographies involved a careful reading of the text, identifying key themes, experiences, and challenges faced by the transgender individuals in each narrative. The comparative study aims to shed light on the diversity of transgender experiences and challenges in India, highlighting the significance of personal narratives in understanding the complexities of identity and societal norms.

A literature review related to autobiographies will be conducted to provide a broader understanding of the role of personal narratives in transgender studies and the impact of autobiographies on social and cultural perceptions. Then we will do the exegesis to come to terms with ground zero.

The legal and societal viewpoints regarding transgender rights and recognition in India have significantly influenced the experiences of transgender individuals. Despite legal changes and the establishment of welfare agencies to enhance medical, healthcare services, employment opportunities, social dignity, and trans identity, transgender individuals still encounter mistreatment and exploitation when seeking space. This is largely due to societal stigma and the medical community's lack of expertise in dealing with transgender patients.

V Result and Discussion:

V.1 Impact contribution and implementation

The function of education and awareness campaigns in lessening prejudice against transgender people in India. Programmes for education and awareness are essential in lowering discrimination against transgender people in India. These programmes seek to dispel prejudice by challenging cultural norms and perceptions that support discrimination. These projects aim to educate the general public on transgender identities, experiences, and rights through workshops, seminars, and educational materials. Their aim is to establish a more tolerant society where transgender people can live without fear of violence or marginalisation by promoting an atmosphere of tolerance and acceptance. Furthermore, in order to guarantee that transgender people receive support, these programmes also concentrate on raising awareness among educators, medical professionals, and law enforcement officers.

V.2 Implications for future research and advocacy

One possible way to counteract discrimination against transgender people in Indian society is to investigate the role that education and awareness initiatives play in questioning gender norms and fostering inclusivity. Furthermore, building cooperation across civil society organisations, government agencies, and transgender advocacy groups is essential to guaranteeing a thorough and well-coordinated approach to inclusivity. Furthermore, removing structural obstacles and advancing the general wellbeing of transgender people depend on the availability of legal safeguards and healthcare services catered to their unique needs.

The legal and societal viewpoints regarding transgender rights and recognition in India have significantly influenced the experiences of transgender individuals. Despite legal changes and the establishment of welfare agencies to enhance medical, healthcare services, employment opportunities, social dignity, and trans identity, transgender individuals still encounter mistreatment and exploitation when seeking space. This is largely due to societal stigma and the medical community's lack of expertise in dealing with transgender patients.

In the end we can draw an inference that qualitative research approach employed in this study has offered valuable insight into the complexities of transgender identities in India, promoting a deeper understanding of identity, acceptance, and resilience within their narratives. It is hoped that this study will contribute to increased awareness, empathy, and support for transgender individuals, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and equitable society

Furthermore, the historical and cultural context of transgender communities in India has profoundly influenced the narratives of transgender individuals, shedding light on the impact of colonialism and modernization on their experiences. Notably, legal and societal perspectives on transgender rights and recognition have played a pivotal role in shaping the lived experiences of transgender individuals in India.

Despite legal reforms, transgender individuals continue to face exploitation and discrimination in various aspects of their lives, particularly when seeking healthcare.

'It was like eating for me-just as I would not stop eating because someone asked me not to eat, I felt I could not stop being a girl, because others told me I ought not to be so.' (7).

In light of these findings, it is crucial to recognise the significance of personal narratives in transgender studies, particularly in the Indian context. These narratives not only provide an avenue for understanding the intricacies of transgender experiences but also serve as a platform for transgender voices to be heard and understood.

VI Conclusion

In conclusion, the qualitative research approach utilized in this study has provided significant insight into the intricacies of transgender identities in India, leading to a deeper comprehension of identity, acceptance, and resilience within their stories. It is anticipated that this study will aid in raising awareness, empathy, and support for transgender individuals, ultimately cultivating a more inclusive and fair society.

The autobiographies of Vidya and Revathi emphasize the need for more research and advocacy to address the challenges faced by transgender individuals in India. It is crucial to prioritize the emotional and physical well-being of this community and explore unheard voices to contribute to their holistic well-being. Additionally, policy changes are necessary to ensure the rights and recognition of transgender individuals in various spheres of life.

The results of this study can inform targeted interventions and support programs aimed at enhancing resilience and improving the mental well-being of marginalized communities. Furthermore, a comprehensive understanding of the distinct challenges faced by transgender individuals in India can guide the implementation of inclusive policies and practices that address various forms of discrimination and promote social justice.

VII. Reference

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