

The Transgender can Speak - A. Revathi's *The Truth about Me*

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Abstract

Of lately, a lot of interest has been generated by the literature of marginalized. There have come many streams like the feminist literature, Dalit literature and the literature of the subaltern. A. Revathi's novel, *The Truth about Me*, A Hijra life Story, is a new perspective on the already existing and perceived notions of the word, Hijra. It is the heart rending story of a boy who feels trapped in the body of a female. In spite of numberless odds he wants to live life in his own terms. The present paper is an attempt to unearth the truth as seen from the perspective of a Hijra, that lies under our social structures based on hierarchy as depicted in this heart rending novel. A very interesting question is posed in the novel regarding the place and position of a eunuch in Indian Society. The protagonist of the novel, Doraisamy/ Revathi, a Hijra by choice in his own way tries to come to terms with the realities of life which are very much different from the gender oriented concerns of society. Tormented by family, society at large, he neither has work to do nor a place to live. Like a driftwood he floats from one corner to the other, tossed by the hard waves of family and society. It is the fight of brave soul to come to terms with the reality of his life in its own way and add a substance to it. This hard hitting novel is indeed a landmark in the way that it draws reader's attention to the never revealed and ever mysterious chronicle of a Hijra life and also paves way for such iconoclastic critiques.

Key Words: Marginalized, Subaltern, Hierarchy, Driftwood, Substance, Landmark, Pave.

An iconoclastic work, A.Revathi's *The Truth about Me* (2010)

is an unflinchingly courageous and moving autobiography of a hijra who fought ridicule, persecution and violence both within her home and outside to find a life of dignity. Written in Tamil, *Unarvum, Uruvamum* is translated in English by V. Geetha, who is a writer, translator, social historian and activist.

Revathi's autobiography *The Truth about Myself, A Hijra life Story*, is a new perspective on the already existing and perceived notions of the word, Hijra. She is a writer, actor and activist based in Bangalore. She works with Sangama, a sexuality minorities human rights organized for individuals oppressed due to their sexual preference. Her autobiography, *The Truth about Me*, is the first of its kind in English from a member of the Hijra community.

Mumbai Dadar, Chennai Central- the thing I saw at these places filled me with sorrow. Men and even women stared at us and laughed, and heckled us. I realized what a burden a hijra's daily life is. Do people harass those are men and women when they go out with families? If someone has experienced physical hurt, they are cared both by the family and by outsiders...but we are not considered human (83)

The protagonist of the novel, Doraisamy/ Revathi, a Hijra by choice in her own way tries to come to terms with the realities of life which are very much different for every class in our gender oriented concerns of society. As a member belonging to the marginalized section of society, she is tormented by her family members and social structures which are anti marginalized. She neither has a respectable work to do nor a place to live in. Like a drift wood she floats from one corner to the other, tossed by the hard waves of family and society. It is the fight of brave soul to come to terms with the reality of his life in its own way and add a substance to it. This hard hitting novel is indeed a landmark in the way that it draws reader's attention to the never revealed and ever mysterious chronicle of a Hijra life and also paves way for such iconoclastic critiques.

Recalling the hard hitting realities of her life Revathi avers in the preface of her novel:

I am one of such individual who has been marginalized because I was born a male and wanted

to live my life as a woman. *The Truth about Me*, is about my everyday experience of discrimination, ridicule and pain: it is about my endurance and my joys ... My aim is to introduce to the readers the lives of hijras, their distinct culture, and their dreams and desires. (v)

Revathi belongs to a small village in Namakkal Taluk, Salem district. She is born last in a family of five with three brothers and a sister. She was named Doraisamy by her parents. Being youngest in the family, she was loved and pampered by everyone in family. As a child she loved wearing girls' dresses and smear make up on face to look beautiful. She would copy her mother and sister in every way.

As soon as I got home from school, I would wear my sister's long skirt and blouse...I would then walk as if I was a shy bride. (4)

Gradually, people around her begin to notice change her excessive interest in the girl thing and they call her "number nine", "female thing". At school she feels like playing games of girls and is least interested in the boy's games, thus becoming a butt of jokes for everyone. In her classroom she stares at her class mates, noticing their hair styles. During her adolescent years she begins to understand her cravings more clearly:

I somehow got to class 10. I experienced changes in my body and in my being. I experienced a growing sense of irrepressible femaleness, which haunted me day in and day out. A woman trapped in man's body was how I thought of myself.(15)

In order to live her life on its terms she runs away from her home taking her mother's jewellery and manages to live with a Hijra family in Delhi, where she is adopted lovingly, as their own daughter. Being a very smart and attractive Hijra the menial jobs are not offered to him. She has to collect money from shops where the shopkeepers readily give her money. She learns the ways and customs of Hijras. She is told by her nani that they go the houses where marriage has taken place or a child is born. She learns many things like she has to make way for a man, if she sees one crossing her path. She must lower her head bashfully and make sure that

her chest is covered. Many times she is attracted towards a handsome shopkeeper and wants to be with him. But she realizes soon that:

We can't possibly get what we want, nor do we have right to desire them (48).

She is treated with love and affection by her Delhi nani but she is sent to Mumbai by his Delhi nani for further course of action that is to become a woman. As she has not been operated, she has to protect herself from pimps and police officers who are always on look out for vulnerable people like her. In Mumbai she finds things different from Delhi. She realizes that Hijras have their own rules, culture and rituals. The Jamat is their forum for meditating and pronouncing what is good or bad.

Marginalized by mainstream society, denied a legal existence and dispossessed of their right, hijras turn to their community and its culture for comfort and for nurture. In the hijra community there are no high or low- hijras do not observe caste or religion differences... there are no castes among hijras, there are houses or clans. (62)

She feels very lonely after she has taken her final decision to get operated. A very touching description is given about her proceeding for the operation as she feels that she has a deep craving to bade good bye to someone, and wished to hear some consoling words but there is no one except the doctor and the nurse who are ready for their job. She gets scared as she has never been operated upon.

After the operation and its nuances she feels that at last she has got what she always wanted to that is to be a woman. The desire of her life is fulfilled now, she feels, unaware about the price she has to pay for being a woman.

Like my mother and sister wished, I wanted to marry and settle down. But how does it matter what I want? Who would want to marry a hijra? (94)

As a woman she is exploited by the police man who always eyes her viciously. Many times horrifying incidents happen in her life like their house is burnt. She is forced into sexual activity without her choice. There comes a time when she rejects one hijra clan

for the other. But ultimately she is not at ease there also. She falls in love with a man who reciprocates her love. But with time she realizes that these things are not meant for her. Her parents too gradually accept her. She also becomes guru of many chelas. It is one of her chelas who introduces her to Sangama. There she is given as an office assistant with a pay of two thousand five hundred rupees. She works very meticulously, thus becoming a favourite of her superiors. She begins to find solace in her work :

Sangama began a campaign for the rights of sexual minorities through seminars, workshops, film screening and public meeting. Our aim to challenge stereotypical and incorrect perceptions of sexual minorities. I participated in these events and spoke about hijra culture, hijra way of living, and the violence and discrimination that we faced. (244)

In her journey from a man to woman where she is rejected by her family members but accepted by loving hijras everywhere is a poignant example of selfless love given by hijras. But there are many instances of fight among the groups and their desire to assert their superiority over the other. In the later years of her life she is accepted by her family members. She takes care of her parents specially her sick mother. With so many ups and downs in her life. She sticks to her work in Sangama, as she feels that it is the only way to live a life of dignity. Unlike many people of her clan her choice is revolutionary because she wishes to bring about a change in the way society thinks about these people. In a way through her book, she has been able to do so. Her novel has given voice to the voiceless.

Works Cited

Revathi, A. *Truth about Me*. Penguin: Random House, 2010.