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Unveiling the Utterance of a Subaltern Class: Analysis of Selected Transgender Autobiographies from India

HARIPRIYA R J NAIR ¹ AND DR MANJULA KT²

ABSTRACT

Transgender or people whose gender identity or gender differs from the sex that they were assigned at birth are generally a class of subalterns. They are deprived of even basic and most fundamental rights by different societies. Indian society is also not different. In India people are forced to behave according to the gender constructs which is too narrow and closed. Thus transgender who falls outside the binary classification of gender as male and female are crushed by the cogs of Indian gender norms for years. They are forced to hide their actual gender notions and behave according to the sex they were assigned at birth. This will leads to a traumatic life for the third genders. Gender othering is unbearable when it turns out to be a weapon capable of even taking the lives of transgender. Though many raised their voice against the injustice shown in different realms, the utterance is never fully heard by the society. Thus the research entitled Unveiling the Utterance of a Subaltern Class: Analysis of Selected Transgender Autobiographies from India tries to analyse through the support of selected transgender autobiographies various forms of oppression faced transgender as a subaltern class even today.

Design/ Methodology/ Approach: *The research takes the support of qualitative methods for study. It will be a qualitative analysis including textual analysis, in depth study, close reading as well as interpreting, comparing and contrasting the primary sources chosen for the study. Data for the research will be collected with the help of library resources and online sources. Different articles and books relating to transgender autobiographies from India are carefully read and analysed for the research. Subaltern theory which stands for understanding the society through conditions of subordination of people belonging to the different caste, class, age, gender, race and so on is taken as a effective tool or instrument for analysing the selected autobiographies.*

Findings/Results: *Even now transgender continues to be a subaltern group in India and this is a serious blow on the face of democratic India. Thus a research aiming at addressing the long unheard and silenced voices of transgender and trying to uplift them from their*

¹ Author is a Research scholar at College of Social Science and Humanities, Srinivas University, Mangalore and Assistant Professor at PG Department of English, Christ Nagar College, Maranalloor, India.

² Author is a Research Professor at Srinivas University, Mangalore, India.

marginal positions to the mainstream is highly essential for India. The research entitled Unveiling the Utterance of a Subaltern Class: Analysis of Selected Transgender Autobiographies from India therefore aims at bringing about a change in subaltern status of transgender in the Indian society. For this, various issues faced by transgender community in India will be addressed with the help of selected autobiographies by transgender themselves and solutions will be offered to wipe out their agonies.

Originality/Value: *Possible solutions for safeguarding the life and dignity of transgender community like institutionalising the category called third gender along with the traditional binary divisions of gender, realising the legal support for trans community, authorising transgender rights, punishing heteronormative assumptions and violence against transgender will be suitably suggested. Changes which can be brought about in socio-economic, political and legal levels within India will be suggested to raise the transgender from their present subordinate positions.*

Paper Type: *Qualitative research paper.*

Keywords: *Gender identity, Gender othering, Indian society, Third gender, Transgender.*

I. INTRODUCTION

India is always hailed for its unity in diversity and secularism but in reality, many groups are given a marginal or subaltern position by the Indian society. A few among them are Scheduled Castes (Dalits), Scheduled Tribes, women and so on. [1] But rarely did anyone addresses transgender as a subaltern group and give space for their expressions in different domains. The utterance of transgender is often unheard or not properly attended by the society. Literature is not different in this aspect. Though many writers tried to express the agonies of transgender community and tried to bring about changes in their marginalized positions, even now something notable is unreached. There are many biographies and other writings about transgender but a search for unveiling the true and most authentic utterance of transgender group will ultimately lead us to transgender autobiographies. They are written from actual experiences and hence are most reliable to recover the grievances of a subaltern class. Thus the research entitled Unveiling the Utterance of a Subaltern Class: Analysis of Selected Transgender Autobiographies from India attempts to address the subaltern sentiments expressed by Indian trans community through their own self-writings. The Truth about Me: A Hijra Life story and A Life in Trans Activism by A Revathi, Me Hijra, Me Laxmi and Red Lipstick: The Men in My Life by Laxminarayan Tripathi, A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi [2] by ManobibBandyopadhyay and I Am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey by Living Smile Vidya are the selected autobiographies for the study. In the course of discussion many sub and related

topics like position of transgender in Indian literature [3], potentiality of transgender self-writings, long-term battle of transgender for recognition and acceptance, transgender rights in India will be carefully considered. [4-8]

(A) Objectives

The research basically aims at a study of selected transgender autobiographies from India using subaltern theory. The chief objectives of research are to:

1. Analyze the position of transgender and their autobiographies in Indian literature.
2. Appreciate the literary potential and reformatory power of transgender self writings from India.
3. Create awareness among public about the problems faced by transgender and call for a fair and equal treatment of such a community using a subaltern study of selected autobiographies.
4. Discuss the protection offered by Indian government for such a community and how far it is realized.
5. Identify the physical, biological, psychological and sexual difference of transgender from other communities which marks them as a separate class.
6. Discuss whether there is a need for separate category called transgender or third-gender.
7. Provide a subaltern analysis of selected transgender autobiographies and study whether transgender are able to express themselves and their issues without outside agents.
8. Offer some suitable suggestions and solutions for their problems.

II. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS BY SEVERAL WRITERS

Table 1 summarises the contributions of various authors in the discussion of issues and concerns of transgender community in India.

Table 1: Related Works

SN	Author	Date	Findings
1	Raja, Gopika A., &Indu, B. [9]	(2020)	Attempted to study on the traumatic lives of the hijra community and how they encounter the stigma in society with particular reference to LaxminarayanTripathi's Me Laxmi

			Me Hijra.
2	Cholakkal, Sajeera [10]	(2019)	Focuses on day to day issues and challenges the ‘transformed’ Vidya came across in her strenuous journey to self-identity, and the predicaments transgender community face when they do not conform to the prevailing expectations about gender in society.
3	Chowdhury, Payel Dutta., & Bhattacharjee, Shreoshi [11]	(2018)	Attempts to throw light on the prejudices and preconceived notions that the society has about the non heterosexuals, particularly the transgender.
4	Lakshmi, Suba P., Mangaiyarkarasi [12]	(2019)	Attempts to show how Manobi faces the struggles and comes out of the crisis to achieve greatness in the society
5	Das, Rajorshi [13]	(2015)	Explores at Laxmi Narayan Tripathi’s autobiography Me Hijra Me Laxmi as an important intervention in the debates about what constitutes Indian transgender identity.
6	Subapriya, K. [14]	(2016)	Focuses on the pathetic state of transgenders in India through the autobiography of an individual Vidya who had a transition from being a man to woman.
7	Baruah, Pallabi [15]	(2016)	Studies how the transgendered identity has been significant to queer theory since the figure of the transgender

			made possible the merging between the gay and the lesbian, giving rise to a different type of homosexuality and thereby broadening its horizon.
8	Dwivedi, Vachaspati [16]	(2016)	Attempts to study the life, culture, desires, trauma and pain of transgender exclusion at the hands of dominant culture.
9	DeBoxi, Chanchal [17]	(2018)	Shows how the transgender people as a distinct category suffer marginalization, oppression as well as colonization in every sphere of their lives at the hand of hetero normative society.
10	T.A, Kavitha [18]	(2019).	Focuses on the identity crisis faced by Indian Hijras.

III. RELATED WORKS

Raja, Gopika A., &Indu, B. (2020) [9] have attempted to study on the traumatic lives of the hijra community and how they encounter the stigma in society with particular reference to LaxminarayanTripathi`s Me Laxmi Me Hijra. A striking feature of Laxmi`s narration is the inherent struggle for making the hijra community visible and audible from the obscurity of vulnerable silence.

Cholakkal, Sajeera.(2019) [10]focuses on day to day issues and challenges the ‘transformed’ Vidya came across in her strenuous journey to self-identity, and the predicaments transgender community face when they do not conform to the prevailing expectations about gender in society.

Chowdhury,Payel Dutta., &Bhattacharjee, Shreoshi. (2018)[11] attempts to throw light on the prejudices and preconceived notions that the society has about the non heterosexuals,

particularly the transgender. The transgender or hijra are in a constant battle against the world for their social acceptance and also for their identity crisis. This paper deals with Revathi's autobiography *The Truth about Me: A Hijra Life Story* from the similar perspective where Revathi struggles to establish her real identity in the society.

Lakshmi, Suba P., Mangaiyarkarasi, (2019) [12] discuss education shapes one's life and gives upliftment. Many transgender persons try to come out of their restricted cage to spread out their wings in flight. Only few transgender people like ManobiBandyopadhyay have come out successfully breaking the shackles of the society. Education and family support alone have helped her to assert her identity and she has become a representative and voice of her community. The paper entitled *Voice of a Trans Woman in ManobiBandyopadhyay's A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi* is an attempt to show how Manobi faces the struggles and comes out of the crisis to achieve greatness in the society.

Das, Rajorshi.(2015) [13] explores at Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's autobiography *Me Hijra Me Laxmi* as an important intervention in the debates about what constitutes Indian transgender identity. Using literary and cinematic works by contemporaries of Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, the writer argues that while the categorisation of the 'third gender' may be necessary to facilitate governmental policies for the community, one has to look beyond law as a legitimizing tool as evident from the uniqueness of Laxmi's 'celebrification' and its impact within Queer activism.

Subapriya,K. (2016) [14] focuses on the pathetic state of transgenders in India through the autobiography of an individual Vidya who had a transition from being a man to woman. The study of autobiography *I am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey* raises key issues about the status of transgender in India, their identity and the struggle for the survival. The reading of this autobiography expands the role of autobiography. It is not a mere record of the memories and the experience but it is a record of the common plight of several transgender who suffer severe forms of marginalization in the society. The future of autobiographies lies in this sort of text that has a cause and effect. The autobiography of Transgender Vidya is the voice of the voiceless of every transgender in India who constantly faces harassment and atrocities in current scenario despite the awareness and good will spread about them. The very existence in this earth becomes a question mark without the strong support of the family, society and government.

Baruah, Pallabi.(2016) [15] studies the autobiography of a transgender writer from India and attempts to analyse how trans narratives tend to be body narratives, wherein the somatic

transitions which hold great significance in trans lives also becomes the central focus in their autobiographies and also how it involves a will to compose a self, literally, a self which they intend to express in the autobiography, out of the many selves and eventually how it becomes political, the will to be heard and accepted, rather than merely being treated as site markers of non-binary gender systems. The paper also studies how the transgendered identity has been significant to queer theory since the figure of the transgender made possible the merging between the gay and the lesbian, giving rise to a different type of homosexuality and thereby broadening its horizon.

IV. NEW RELATED ISSUES

- i) Transgender in Public domains: inclusion and exclusion.
- ii) Pandemic and the troubles faced by Indian trans community.
- iii) Legal status of transgender in India.
- iv) Media and gender issues.
- v) Relevance and irrelevance of the categorization called ‘third gender’.

V. RESEARCH GAP

It has been identified that though much research is done on identity crisis, trauma, discrimination, social exclusion and otherness faced by transgender with the help of their self-writings, limited study is available on addressing the subaltern sentiments of transgender community in India. Thus the research paper *Unveiling the Utterance of a Subaltern Class: Analysis of Selected Transgender Autobiographies from India* tries to fulfill this gap by discussing about the transgender as a subaltern class in Indian society even today and voicing their utterance silenced and suppressed by our gender norms and rules. [19-35]

VI. RESEARCH AGENDAS

The agenda of the research entitled *Unveiling the Utterance of a Subaltern Class: Analysis of Selected Transgender Autobiographies from India* aims at a qualitative study of selected transgender autobiographies from India for understanding their position as a subaltern class within the society even in these days. Subaltern theory will be used for the dissertation as an efficient tool in unveiling the utterance of transgender who are denied to speak out their agonies even today or are considered as figures to be mocked at in front of the gender ideologies of our society. Thus through such a research, voicing the trauma of a voiceless class, creating awareness among public about the depressed lives of trans people, calling for a revolution in

gender ideologies and insistence on the inclusion of third gender along with the existing binary divisions of gender will be the major research agendas.

VII. RESEARCH PROPOSAL

The research entitled *Unveiling the Utterance of a Subaltern Class: Analysis of Selected Transgender Autobiographies from India* addresses the issues of transgender community as a subaltern class in Indian society. The invisibility of transgender in many public domains will be seriously considered for the study. Though many studies have been conducted in the past about transgender, a very few research is available on revealing the subaltern voice of transgender whose journey from margins to centre of Indian society is still unachieved. Thus the main concern of this research is to reveal the true subaltern voice of transgender community as expressed through the autobiographies. The research is hoped to benefit the transgender community by making public aware about their trauma within the gender constructs of Indian society.

VIII. SUGGESTIONS

Transgender will be able to live a peaceful life only when society builds a space for them within the gender constructs which assigns to each individual basic codes of behaviour and if anyone goes against this they are termed outcast. Change in such a prejudiced gender notion will only ensure a secured life for the trans people within India.[36-51]

IX. LIMITATIONS

The limitations of present study include:

- i)Reliance on translated autobiographies other than on actual writings in regional language of trans writers for the research.
- ii)Lack of reliable sources discussing historical and political struggle of transgender in India.
- iii)Invisibility of transgender in Indian elite literature of the past.
- iv)Unavailability of trustworthy studies on biological, physical, psychological, sexual and mental aspects of transgender.

X. CONCLUSION

Every institution of Indian society be it family, marriage, religion, caste, schools, or colleges need to realize that gender is a socially constructed notion about how each sex should behave in the society and such notion may falls against the actual gender feelings of some class. Transgender are such a category of people whose gender identity or gender expression differs

from the sex that they were assigned at birth and thus are considered to be outcast in front of the established gender norms proposed by the society. But we must realize transgender as people with their own whims and fancies which need to be respected and accepted like that of other's in a society. Transgender autobiographies vehemently oppose myriad forms of discrimination in the name of gender. A reading of them will make us realize the level of oppression they faces from different realms of Indian society which curtail their freedom to fly. Thus a research about them is truly necessary for people to realize the suppressed lives of trans community and call for a revolution to up bring them from their subaltern or subordinate levels.

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