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Exploring Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Resilience in Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's Me Hijra, Me Laxmi

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Abstract

India's diverse cultural landscape has historically accommodated gender identities beyond the male–female binary, with hijras occupying a distinctive social, cultural, and ritual position. However, colonial interventions, legal regulation, and subsequent social structures contributed to the marginalisation and stigmatisation of transgender communities. Although the recognition of transgender persons as a third gender by the Supreme Court of India in NALSA v. Union of India (2014) marked a significant legal development, social discrimination and exclusion continue to shape transgender experiences. Against this context, the present study examines Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's autobiographical narrative Me Hijra, Me Laxmi as a representation of transgender identity, marginalisation, resilience, and self-assertion. The study adopts a qualitative and interpretive methodology based on close textual analysis, focusing on the intersections of gender identity, social exclusion, sexuality, family, performance, and activism. The analysis demonstrates how Tripathi transforms personal experiences of stigma, humiliation, violence, and social rejection into a narrative of self-recognition, dignity, and resistance. Dance emerges as an important medium of self-expression and empowerment, while the autobiographical act itself becomes a form of resistance to dominant genderder norms and stereotypical representations of hijras. The study argues that Me Hijra, Me Laxmi challenges conventional understandings of gender and reclaims agency for a historically marginalised community. Tripathi's narrative therefore contributes to broader discussions of transgender rights, identity politics, social inclusion, and the representation of subaltern voices in contemporary Indian literature.

Keywords: *Gender Division, Cultural Identities, Personal Identity, Marginalization, Suffering.*

1. Introduction

People who identify as hijra have lived in India for generations, contributing to mainstream culture as transgender people. Outside of the binary of male and female, they constitute a third gender. Hijras are recognised for their alternate gender identification and for participating in certain cultural and religious

rituals. The presence of hijras in Indian culture has never changed, although their acceptability and position have evolved with time. Hijras have always been held in high esteem for the spiritual abilities they attribute to their gender identity. It was thought auspicious to ask them to bless new babies, marriages, or inaugurations.

However, hijras nowadays are subject to prejudice and exclusion. They often face bigotry, aggression, marginalisation, and unemployment. There is a long history of prejudice and discrimination against transgender people in Indian society. In addition to experiencing prejudice in the workplace and classroom, transgender people often endure social exclusion and stigmatisation within their own families and communities. Not only do transgender people encounter harassment and abuse on the job, but many firms outright refuse to hire them. There may be fewer economic prospects and more financial instability as a result of this. The media and political spheres in India do not adequately portray transgender people, which may lead to the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes and the further marginalisation of transgender people in society. Because transgender people are not legally acknowledged as having a distinct gender identity in India, they are denied certain fundamental liberties and protections.

According to what this text says, Although Laxmi Narayan Tripathi always identified as a girl, he was born a guy. His identity changed. To boys, he felt an attraction. How did this affect him? Dancing was his passion. How come other people teased him? Born into a high-caste Brahman home, Laxminarayan Tripathi battled such mental upheaval from an early age, experiencing feelings of confusion, confinement, and loneliness. Ghosh and Dwivedi (2020) observe that Tripathi's autobiography reveals the "mismatches between biological sex, social gender roles, and behavioral attitudes"(Ghosh & Dwivedi, 2020, p. 77-85) associated with third-gender identity. He started donning women's clothing gradually. As time went on, he grew more outspoken about his true sexual orientation. She was Laxmi, a hijra, and he had finally discovered his own self. This autobiography chronicles the remarkable journey of a hijra who battled for the recognition of hijras and their rights, overcoming numerous challenges along the way. Antony (2019) notes that Tripathi faced abuse from childhood because of her effeminate mannerisms and love for dance, while dance became a means of developing "courage, power and superiority". The author finds solace in dancing in Mumbai bars, finds herself taunted as a homo, and becomes the first Indian hijra to attend the World AIDS Conference in Toronto. She also finds grace, dignity, and fame in the face of mental and physical abuse.

2. Hijras as Cultural Identities of India

According to Nanda Serena (1990), the role of Hijras associated with goddess. Folklore and stories associated with the hijra community attest to the hijras' long history of cultural significance in India. Many depictions of hijra figures in Hindu and Islamic mythology (e.g., the puranas) and well-known Indian epics (e.g., the Mahabharata and the Ramayana) have contributed to the hijra community's power legacy. It is important to recognise that hijras are gendered identities deeply ingrained in India's cultural heritage, despite the common perception that they are similar to transsexual identities in the West. Queerness, which challenges binary gender roles, is mentioned in Hindu mythology. The purported history of third sex in India is discussed in the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, and the Puranas, as well as in the oldest works of Indian literature (Brahminical, Buddhist, and Jain) that include transgender or eunuch characters. Hindu mythology has stories about transgender people who identify as either feminine or male. It also makes reference to vague-sounding monsters, such as makara. Makara has characteristics of both fish and elephants. Another nebulous beast, Yali, is an elephant-lion hybrid. It is a representation of a legendary beast that may be found on the pillars of Hindu temples. South Indian sculptures have made extensive use

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of it. In *Shikhandi: And Other Tales They Don't Tell You,* Devdatt Pattnaik notes that "there are also many words in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Tamil (Indian languages) such as kliba, napunsaka, mukhabhaga, sanda, panda, pandaka, pedi that suggest a long familiarity with queer thought and behaviour." (Pattnaik 2014, p. 8) In sharp contrast to the naiveté and inflexibility prevalent in Indian culture, Hindu mythology, symbolism, and rituals joyfully embrace queer concepts.

The hijras' narratives, which take the form of autobiographies and feature a trans woman as the protagonist, shed light on the transgender community's social lives within a patriarchal society, the challenges of surgical transformation, and the social and performative construction of one's "body." The first hijra autobiography published in India, by Vidya, *I am Vidya (2007)*, gained momentum. When Vidya wrote her autobiography, she became the first hijra to ever publish an account of her life as a hijra and her experiences within the hijra community. Vidya (2014) describes her internal battles about gender and sexuality as well as her acceptance of herself as a woman. English, Malayalam, Kannada, Marathi, and Assamese are some of the translations of the autobiography, which was originally written in Tamil. Vidya, who is often called "Living Smile Vidya," is the one who started and runs Panmai Theatre. For her outstanding work in theatre, Vidya became the first transgender woman in India to win the 2013 Charles Wallace Award from the British Council. Theatre has been a part of her life since 2004. She paved the way for other writers by chronicling her own social and physiological metamorphosis in her autobiography, which she called hijra autobiography. The 2015 Kannada film Nannu Avanalla Avalu, directed by B. S. Lingadevaru, is adapted on Vidya's autobiography.

Hijra autobiography was given a platform once Vidya's book came out, and it inspired other hijras to write about their experiences and how they acted as performers. *The Truth About Me* (2010), an autobiography by A. Revathi, was first written in Tamil and translated into English by V. Geetha. Unarvum Uruvamum (Feelings of the Entire Body) is a Tamil book by Revathi that compiles true experiences from members of the hijra community. She lists Bama, a famous Dalit writer from Tamil Nadu, as an influence. Her daily encounters with heteronormative society's prejudice, scorn, and anguish are chronicled in The Truth about Me. Being a hijra and engaging in sex work as a profession were topics she discussed in detail. A Life in Trans Activism, her other notable 2016 book, recounts her life, the lives of hijras, and the tales of transmen, among other topics. According to Gayatri Reddy (2010), all people support Hijras for better society and further development in the country.

Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, a Mumbai-based activist, Hindi cinema actor, and dancer, is another author whose works are part of this new generation of autobiographies. Tripathi published two volumes of her memoirs in 2015 and 2016. In 2015, R. Raj Rao and P.G. Joshi translated her memoirs *Me Hijra Me Laxmi* from Marathi to English. In her autobiography, Laxmi recounts her life from childhood, through her years as a drag queen, hijra, and gay man. 'Hijras are regular individuals, just like others.' (*Me Hijra Me Laxmi)*, which is her second autobiography. We don't hail from another planet.The purpose of this research is to use the theoretical frameworks of "performativity," "materialisation," and "corporeal significations" to better comprehend the hijra's process of identity creation within the context of these autobiographies.

3. Transcending Gender Division in *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*

Me Hijra Me Laxmi, shows how the third gender want to be independent of others' power and knowledge and to conduct their life according to their own terms. This study takes into account an open narrative written by members of the third gender group, *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*, which is translated from Marathi by Raja Rao and P.G., and details the life experience of transgender activist Laxmi Narayan Tripathi. The goal of this narrative is to educate the cisgender community about the subhuman conditions and suffering of

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the hijra clan. My name is Joshi. Transgender people's incomprehensible existence, along as the myths and ambiguities surrounding it, might be explained by these self-narrative writings. The ambitious Laxmi Narayan Tripathi is a member of the learnt caste. An individual's life is forever changed by the trauma they endured as a youngster, regardless of their gender variation. According to Laxmi Narayan, she did not have enough chances to enjoy her childhood since society exploited her because of her sexuality. According to Laxmi, "These sexual assaults transformed me. I became secretive and incommunicative, hiding my feelings from my family and friends. Suddenly, it felt as if my childhood was over and I had grown up before my time. " (Laxmi et al., p. 7) The struggles that a person who does not identify with any gender has are never acknowledged or accepted by the heteronomous society that operates on the binary gender paradigm. After becoming a hijra, a person has little choice except to engage in sex work or beg for a living.

Transgender people's biggest problem is that they can't find work. The bulk of people are forced to engage in begging because they are unable to obtain a reasonable means of subsistence: Anger at an anonymous, faceless society was building up inside of me. You had to be prepared to go kilometres every day, stopping at shop after shop, just to beg at the bazaar. Security guards at large stores wouldn't let you in unless you made a lot of noise and yelled at them; you had to clap until your hands hurt, even after you'd stopped; and finally, they gave you some charity, but only reluctantly, because they wanted you out of their lives and weren't very sympathetic. A common misconception is that one's success determines their gender and identity. Our traditional culture draws the divide between the cisgender and transgender groups. Transgender persons face oppression and violence because to the prevalence of heterosexual normativity. 'Gender' denotes the roles that men and women are expected to play within various social and cultural contexts. It all comes down to the societal expectations of what men and women should be doing in terms of specific tasks and responsibilities. From the time they are very young, people are shaped by gender and gender norms. Dr. Toyeba Mushtaq's, *The Social Construction of Third Genders in India*, the author correctly notes that "the term third gender is generally used to describe those people who transgress social gender norms and challenge the dichotomous gender binary construction." (Mushtaq 2019, p. 1574). This claim may therefore be backed up by Gender Schema Theory. Thus, the focus of gender schema theories is on the process by which a youngster learns about and makes sense of gender. The content of schemas evolves as a result of social interactions and other individual and cultural variables; this is because schemas are seen as dynamic knowledge systems. Additionally, as a result of age-related changes in perception, people react differently to various circumstances.

While reading Tripathi's *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*, readers will come across a number of uncertainties and queries. Throughout the story, Laxmi Narayan Tripathi challenges the conventional gender roles. She starts to doubt her own sexuality in response to this ambiguity: "So, I landed on the subject of sexuality. Ashok Row Kavi had taught me that my situation was normal. However, I had no idea what was happening within. Why did I develop romantic feelings for other males and not girls, despite the fact that I was born a boy? For some reason, I finally realised that I wasn't a male. In my past life, I was a female. I used to have breasts, but now I only have a penis and testicles. To what extent, therefore, am I a girl? Astounded, I froze. The solutions to these challenging issues eluded me. I was contemplating suicide" (Laxmi et al., p. 22)

In defiance of heteronormative society's long-held beliefs, Laxmi Narayan dances, an activity traditionally linked with femininity. As a result, this further highlights the curative power of art for transgender people: "I was rescued by dancing. Despite facing difficult circumstances, I persisted with this treatment. Part of the reason people believed I was effeminate was because of the way I danced, which included some very feminine waist motions. That was irrelevant to me, however. When I was younger, I didn't give a hoot, and

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today I still don't. I started working with a professional dance instructor for my dancing classes. I was corrected by my Singhania School teacher, Miss Menon. Dancing took me to another dimension, one where I could express myself completely. When I was performing, everything else seemed trivial in comparison" (Laxmi et al., p. 23)

As part of her mission to challenge and eradicate stereotypes, Laxmi urges readers to see transgender individuals with an impartial eye. Among many other things, she describes experiences with persistent harassment, disapproving stares, dread of public situations, and fears of not making it home alive. But this marginalised group is rising above its fears and stepping out into the spotlight, fighting back against the obscurity that has befallen it. Their stance is that transgender identity is more of a social construct than a medical condition. Her mental instability stems from the dislocation she experiences between her masculine body and feminine emotions. Her words are: "What role did I play in this? I didn't understand my place in that situation. A family wasn't dependent on me, that's true. But I, too, was a nomad who dabbled in various realms. I was brought up to be a man since I was the firstborn of my parents' children. They looked to me to be the alpha male and take charge of the household. I felt like a man on the inside, therefore I realised I couldn't live up to these standards. Plus, I identified as homosexual. The rest of society would not tolerate my eccentricities, even if my parents did. Somehow, I felt unworthy. Instead of calling myself a guy, I preferred to be called a lady. All was chaos for me." (Laxmi et al., p. 36–37)

A 'hijra' is rethought and reinterpreted in the novel. Hijra is more of a societal than a biological term. Laxmi Narayan Tripathi says, "There is the ghetto and there's the mainstream. My dominant identity was that of a hijra. I wanted to live with the hijras, but I also wanted to live in society. Luckily, for me, I was both a dancer and an activist. So, while activism enabled me to live in the ghetto, my dancing ensured that I was also a part of mainstream society" (Laxmi et al.). Laxmi is fortunate to have family support, unlike other transgender, and she is grateful for it. "I am a hijra and have been accepted by my family. This is rare in a culture where deviant sexuality is enough for parents to disown their offspring. Some hijras are initially kicked out by their families, and later welcomed when they start earning ad sending them money. The money is often earned through sex work, but the parents have no qualms in accepting it. Doesn't this amount to pimping one's daughters?" (Laxmi et al., p. 169).

During her early hijra days, when she was afraid to embrace her sexuality, Laxmi highlights the influence of society. She liberates herself from the constraints of conventional norms by empowering herself with knowledge and activity. Her words are: "Society was the root cause of my inferiority mentality when I was a kid. I used to be confident, but now I feel superior. I have been to every continent. The great and powerful have been my hobnobs. My life has been filmed. My superstar status is undeniable, isn't it? Everyone used to make fun of me, but now I'm the one getting the final laugh. All of this, however, is due to the fact that I chose to become a hijra. It was a daring move that paid off. I might have been just another gay man if I hadn't been a hijra. I became both attractive and fierce as a hijra. I felt like an alien to myself at first. However, as time passed, the old Laxmi Narayan—who was shy and reticent—dwindled away, and the Laxmi who is standing before you—an aggressive and fearless warrior—took his place." (Laxmi et al., p. 169)

In the hijra community, one is fully embraced and taken into consideration. Laxmi offers her thoughts on the significance and motivation for the establishment of hijra communities: Society views a person as a freak when his biological, psychological, and sexual identities clash. He is shunned by society. Because he can't stand being alone, he searches out other people who share his sentiments and forms a group with them. They may even encourage him to get sex reassignment surgery

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or have another hijra cut off his privates without anaesthesia so that he may remove himself of his male reproductive organs. They could go to extrengths to grow breasts for each other, including hormone treatment or just wearing false ones. Communities of hijras are established in this way. For a better understanding, Laxmi gives a detailed note on what the term "hijra" means. In her statement, she claims: 'Hijra' is a derogatory nomenclature. "Number six," "number nine," and "chakka" are some of its variations in informal speech. What we now call "hijra" is really a loanword from the Urdu language. An individual who has abandoned his or her group or clan is called a hijar. So, a hijra is a person who has abandoned the majority-gender society and become a part of the hijra group. However, the hijra community is diverse. From one state to another, its history and culture differ.

According to Konduru Delliswararao and Chongneikim Hagsing (2018), Transgender people have been persecuted by heteronormative society from ancient times. Notwithstanding this, transgender persons have made great strides. Transgender persons express themselves physically and via writing in an effort to be heard and understood. Through this process, individuals have the ability to express themselves and engage with traditional, heteronormative social norms; hence, body politics is born. *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*'s afterword discusses the importance of hijra literature and transgender authors: One of the first pieces of hijra writing is Laxmi's autobiography. The story's goal is to shed light on the hijras' true identities and the factors that shape their personalities (yes, they do have them). The book aims to help us overcome our biases and misconceptions regarding the hijras. The idea that hijras are just regular people—not special in any way—is central to Laxmi's narrative. However, Laxmi's autobiography is not meant to be read in a vacuum. It is more accurate to say that it belongs to the larger canon of LGBT literature in India.

4. Laxmi, A Person's Identity and Object of Custody

In Laxmi's life, activism is very important. She would have disappeared into the many unknown realms of untold history had she been disgraced as an activistic craftswoman. Her genuine and heartfelt efforts have made her a fantastic activist, bringing her name, fame, glamour, a positive public image, and an incredibly desirable platform. As a result, many transgenders and sex-work people have benefited from her work. She goes to a red-light district with some delegates who wanted to assess DWS's efforts during her activist days. Anyone may feel compassion for the sex workers and transsexual people in her portrayal of their terrible situation.

In her writing: "The brothels' living and working quarters were squalid, airless pigeonholes. To make room for more than one customer, however, each slot was further divided. From the rooms came a putrid stench. The girl sold sex under these terms. This perplexed me since I had the impression that having sex could only be enjoyable in aesthetically pleasing environments. Ugliness has taken human form here. Not even a sideways movement was possible! The females, however, had become used to it, much as how office workers do. However, clerks have the option to go on strike. Was the right to protest ever conferred to these girls? This was the height of slave work. Sixty-five, she goes on to identify the clients. What does she say? My attention shifted to the shoppers. Among them, one had a beard, another a huge forehead cut, and a third a turban. They were young and old, and they belonged to every major faith. To avoid detection, a few of them covered their faces. Others seemed to have completely shed any feeling of guilt and were much more forthright. They were all hypocrites, however. After fucking prostitutes, they returned to their legitimate social roles as husbands, parents, and children." (Laxmi et al., p. 65)

Upon seeing the direst circumstances, her mind spun and her activist spirit swelled, and she resolved to bring about systemic change all by herself. Between Lataguru and Laxmi's parents, Laxmi was a subject of custody. As the leader of the hijra community, Lataguru urged Laxmi to abandon her conventional family

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and adopt their way of life. Despite the fact that Laxmi's parents were unwilling to forbid her. They preferred to raise Laxmi at home. The parents of Laxmi and Lataguru got into a tussle. They were all reluctant to abandon her. All of Lataguru's efforts to imprison Laxmi and her dazzling entourage and clip her wings to prevent her from soaring and following the path of the hijra community were fruitless. "Do not stay with your birth family; instead, live with us hijras," Lataguru admonished her. Things that are taboo with our family could be expected of you by your biological relatives. We don't identify with any gender. There is much significance in Laxmi's statement on Lataguru and her birth parents' adherence to the male-female culture. I did not want to live in a hijra ghetto," (Laxmi et al., p. 73) she says. To my parents, I aspired to be the oldest son, Raju. Unlike the families of other hijras, my own did not become monsters because of my decision to become a hijra. Lataguru was a woman who used feline methods. Regardless, she was not in the mood to say goodbye. After meeting Laxmi, she decided to move in with her. Laxmi was always under her watchful scrutiny. Her notoriety, modus vivendi, and mode of operation were all things she never approved of.

A traditionalist and protective woman, she thought a hijra had no business remaining with her family. "You know nothing of hijra behaviour," she admonished Laxmi, sounding like a strict guru. How often do you check in with your followers? They discredit us by acting arbitrarily. As if Laxmi were a little kid, Lataguru and Laxmi's parents fought and fought for custody of her. If Laxmi lived with Lataguru, she would be initiated into hijra culture. According to her memoirs, she described the event as follows: "My parents were deeply pained by the thought that I would leave home again." (Laxmi et al., p. 85) The emotional aspect of a transgender person is consistently ignored, much as when they are a little kid, when they are the centre of a custody fight between their parents and Lataguru. They want to have children of their own. They start to feel the need to parent and begin to identify as feminine. In her book, Laxmi talks about a picture show that had the title "What Are You?" Also, we asked several hijras what they would like to do with their lives if they weren't hijras. A motherhood dream came true for Malini, a hijra. Laxmi is a captivating individual with unforgettable traits and a bold, outspoken, and gay attitude.

Laxmi says when asked what she wants to be when she grows up. "I would love to be Cleopatra," she said. My interest in Cleopatra has never waned. I loved Cleopatra's vivacity; she was the quintessential Egyptian queen—beautiful and intelligent—and she wooed even Julius Caesar. It was she who served as my inspiration." (Laxmi et al., p. 84–85) She is a pioneering, fearless campaigner. On a national level, she launched a hijra beauty contest in India. "The Indian Super Queen Contest" was the moniker she gave to the event. The pageant was on par with the Miss India or Miss Universe pageants. Transgender persons were the only ones invited. How did Laxmi get the idea for it? She said that hijras are unattractive. Let's look at her statements. That was a mentality I wanted to change. As for how I would go about it, I considered holding a beauty contest for the locals. It occurred to me that hijras should have their own pageant if there are Miss India and Miss Universe pageants for women. For once, we would make the world cheer for the hijras instead of the other way around. Walking the ramp would be Hijra, who avoided looking at others due to a profound and persistent inferiority problem! For many, it was their very first time performing on stage. From a lack of funds to her father's sickness, there were numerous obstacles on the path of event planning, but she refused to give up. She stayed resolute in the face of bad circumstances, much like an uncompromising and stubborn mentality. "To withdraw from the competition would be to concede loss," she said herself. And I was never meant to take a loss lying down. Trying to back out of a situation I had deliberately set out to create was completely out of character for me. I was reluctant to drop out of the competition. How are police, physicians, bus drivers, bank tellers, merchants, and other service providers handled when dealing with hijras? Somebody raped a hijra in Virar, according to Laxmi. In addition to ignoring the hijra's statements, the police also declined to file a FIR. There was agony for the

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hijra. However, until the police had finished their work, the physicians would not treat her. It felt like being caught in a never-ending cycle.

If transgender children are accepted by their families as members with disabilities and mental retardation, the transgender issue may be simply resolved. Proper education, a welcoming atmosphere, and enough of love and care from both parents are essential for a child's development and social acceptance. It is also important for society and the general public to adjust their views about transgender people. They should be treated and behaved appropriately in accordance with their position as previously human beings, and people should stop being prejudiced against them. Despite the existence of several laws meant to safeguard and advance transgender people within mainstream society, their actual implementation has been pushed back indefinitely. Sincerely and honestly, it ought to be completed within the allotted time.

5. The Suffering of a Transwoman in *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*

Laxmi Narayan had typhoid, malaria, and pneumonia as a toddler. His long-lost cousin assaulted him during a family reunion, and he and his buddies continued to sexually abuse each other after that. One theory is that Laxmi's feminine figure drew the attention of the lads. In any case, Laxmi was unable to play with other kids because of the sexual assaults he endured as a youngster. He was ultimately able to muster the courage to reject his attackers' sexual approaches after enduring immense pain and several assaults. Because Laxmi was confused about who he was, he was unable to explain or discuss his desire to men. He worked up the nerve to confide in Sangeeta, an older lady he often sought out for assistance with school elocution competitions; eventually, he told her about his peculiar identity dilemma.

In proposing that Laxmi meet Ashok Row Kavi, the latter brought up his name. When Laxmi met Ashok, he was pleased to find that he was not alone in his homosexuality and became sure that Ashok was the same. When Laxmi's instructor saw his talent for dancing, he was quickly cast in school productions. Unfortunately, not everyone shared his enthusiasm for dancing and he was often mocked for being chakka, a pejorative word for hijra or eunuch. He began taking dance lessons from Baby Johny when he was in eighth grade, and he continued to enhance his dancing skills after that. Laxmi learnt about the hijra culture, history, and customs from her friend's brother, who was a hijra, and ultimately helped her come to terms with her own identity. Although Laxmi secretly became a hijra in 1998 via the reet ritual, she kept this truth from her parents. Lata Nayak served as guru and Laxmi was her chela. After coming to terms with her hijra status, Laxmi became an activist who looked out for Mumbai's prostitutes. On behalf of the hijra community, she also took an active role in advocating. Laxmi was able to speak about the plight of the hijras at several government meetings because to her extensive network of contacts among the Mumbai population and her status as a graduate. Laxmi, meantime, had taken up dancing at bars for financial gain; when the government outlawed such establishments, she too became an activist. The Maharashtra government still hasn't reopened the nightclubs, even after the Mumbai High Court ruled in their favour.

Laxmi received a lot of praise for her role in Between the Lines, a film about hijras made by a German journalist and indologist. Although Laxmi's guru demanded that she reside with her since it is usual within the hijra community, she was quite happy staying with her parents, who had grudgingly embraced her hijra status. Laxmi was eager to attend the round table meeting in Mumbai on the situation of HIV/AIDS in India, but her guru denied her permission. The principal visitor, the former General Secretary of U N, Kofi Anan, was a big draw for Laxmi. Despite Lata Guru's repeated attempts to discourage her from attending social events, Laxmi never wavered from her intention to attend the conference. She had to secure a passport in order to attend the 16th World AIDS Conference in Toronto, but she was the first transgender person from India to do so. The indifference and lack of understanding shown by the authorities in her

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pursuit of a passport is indicative of the homophobia and transphobia that permeate our culture. The clerks at the ration store were so obstructive and unable to understand Laxmi's hijra status that she felt she had no choice but to explain herself.

Amsterdam, Bangkok, and New York were just a few of the places Laxmi travelled to on several occasions for her work. While abroad, she met a number of transpeople, such as Stephen Whittle, Kate Borsten, and Andrew Hunter, a Thai transgender activist. Laxmi became more than just a community member once she succeeded in recovering her identity. Boogie Woogie, Dus Ka Dum, Sach ka Saamna, and Big Boss were among the television shows that catapulted her to stardom. Laxmi also pioneered an inaugural beauty pageant in India just for hijras. Despite her fame, Laxmi has been the target of racist comments and was even asked to leave a party because of her hijra heritage. Although most transgender people do not want to share details about their life, Laxmi acknowledges that the general public is interested in learning more about them. In contrast to popular belief, hijras were highly esteemed members of the royal courts of ancient Muslim nations and played an essential role in their lives. Performing badhai (songs, dances, and rituals) during marriages and the birth of a child is a traditional practice among hijras, but these days it's hard to make ends meet. Most hijras are compelled to engage in sex work or pub dancing since they are deprived of education and unable to pursue professions due to prejudice at schools. Laxmi notes that many transsexual people in their modern society are obtaining degrees and holding respectable positions; she too was able to do just that. Despite her courageous choice to come out as transgender, Laxmi defied the hijra community's strict regulations. She claims that breaking community rules was necessary for her personal growth and that her travels abroad and interactions with the press allowed her to enjoy life on her own terms. In addition to bringing attention to the transgender community's struggles, Laxmi established the Maharashtra Trutiya Panthi Sanghatana and, after much advocacy, got the government to include transgender people in its women's policy.

By analysing *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* critically, we find that Laxmi exemplifies Judith Butler's innovative views on gender identity and performance, as discussed in Gender Trouble. Laxmi often discusses her feminine traits in *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi,* including her love of dance, clothing, jewellery, and cosmetics. According to Judith Butler (1990), the core male or feminine identity is shaped by daily acts, verbal utterances, gestures, clothing rules, and conduct (apart from a few restrictions). According to her, gender is something that is always being acted, and this gender performance is completely a societal issue where one's identity is shown via performance. Laxmi bravely overcame her identity dilemma, embraced her own hijra personality, and aims to debunk societal misunderstandings about transgender people via her story. She explains that people are socially excluded if their biological, psychological, and sexual identities do not align. Due to the lack of support from loved ones, this person feels compelled to associate with people who share their situation. Surgery and hormone treatment to become one's mental gender may be required for an individual to establish their identity. Differentiating the hijra from the hermaphrodite is something Laxmi delves into extensively. In addition, she concedes that the hijras are stereotyped as being greedy and that the majority of Indians hold this view. To justify their behaviour, Laxmi says that hijras feel insulted by Nature as children and seek redress by taking it out on "ordinary" people.

At the conclusion of her story, Laxmi lays out the average hijra family's hierarchical structure, explains the gharana's laws and regulations, and lists the penalties that may be imposed for transgressions. In situations of disobedience, the hijra clan's panchayat (court) hears the evidence and makes a decision. The hijras' many rites and practices are detailed; castration is an option, albeit not required, for hijras. Laxmi was exempt from castration in her situation. Additionally, Laxmi's story includes several historical tales and traditions pertaining to transgender people, and she elaborates on some of the ceremonies connected

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with transgender people's deaths. Laxmi lists some transgender people who have recently assumed prominent positions in society, including Asha Devi, a mayor of Katni, Kamal Jan, and Shabnam Mausi, an elected legislator in Madhya Pradesh. By sharing her story, Laxmi hopes to provide a voice to the marginalised transgender community and show how important it is to reclaim one's identity in order to achieve one's goals and desires. Laxmi was able to express herself and get others to pay attention despite her marginalisation from society.

6. Summation

Laxmi stresses in her autobiography, Me Hijra Me, that being a hijra is something one chooses to do. The distinction between sex and gender must be kept in mind. The hijras' sexual binary is quite distinct from that of other groups, such as transgender people or homosexuals. Laxmi's autobiography exposes the ups and downs of a hijra's existence. Also highlighted is the fact that the 'Third Gender' has not had it easy despite the Supreme Court ruling that officially recognised them. Few hijras have managed to turn the tables on oppression and empower themselves, but Laxmi is one of them. For the most part, her group is still fighting for its very existence and a sense of self on a daily basis.

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