

AFFLICTION OF TRANS-PREJUDICE IN REVATHI'S TRUTH ABOUT ME: A HIJRA LIFE STORY

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Abstract

The transgender community is one of India's most vulnerable groups, marginalised from mainstream society. Transgender people face social, cultural, economic, and political discrimination and are denied their rights because of their gender identity. Such discriminatory behaviours and prejudiced attitudes toward the transgender community cause significant affliction, pain, and suffering, preventing them from contributing to the growth of society. This paper examines the trans-prejudice against Hijras in Revathi's autobiography *Truth about me: A Hijra Life Story*, attempting to uncover the reasons for the attitudes of trans-prejudice imposed on them. This paper also looks at the life of a trans woman, trans prejudice, and negative stereotypical views of the transgender community in heteronormative society. This paper concludes that for a society to be healthy, it must be filled with equality, respect, and love.

Key Words: Transgender, Tran-prejudice, Affliction, Discrimination, Stereotypical

Introduction

The term “transgender” is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “Designating a person whose sense of personal identity and gender does not correspond to that person's sex at birth, or which does not otherwise conform to conventional notions of sex and gender”. Transgender people are generally identified as trans-women and trans-men, and they are widely recognised as the third gender, as the term is often shortened as trans. Transgender people in India are referred to as *thirunangai*, *kinnar*, *hijra*, *eunuchs*, *aravani*, *mangalamuh*, *jogappas*, *shiv shaktis*, *thirunambi*, *bhaiyya*, and *khoja*. The Indian Constitution guarantees equal rights to all citizens; however, transgender people are denied access to rights such as education, housing, and employment by mainstream society due to trans-prejudiced attitudes. The denial of their rights pushed them to the margins of society, and trans-prejudice attitudes toward transgenders cause severe distress, forcing them to fight against negative behaviours imposed on them. It becomes difficult to remove prejudiced attitudes from mainstream society's minds, as noted scientist Albert Einstein stated, “What a sad era when it is easier to smash an atom than a prejudice.”

A. Revathi, a social activist and writer from the Tamil Nadu district of Namakkal, is a trans woman who belongs to the *Hijra* community. She has been advocating for the rights of sexual minorities through Sangama, a Bangalore-based NGO. *Unarvum Uruvamum* (Our Lives, Our Words), her first book in Tamil, was published in 2004. It depicts the real-life stories of the *Hijra* community in Southern India. She wrote her second book as an autobiography, *Vellaimozhi* (Tamil), which was translated into English by V.Geetha as Truth about me: A Hijra life storey (2010), in order to give voice to the voiceless transgender community of modern India. This paper discusses the problem of trans-prejudice, a negative stereotypical view of the transgender community, and the reasons for this attitude.

Men and women are socially or culturally classified as masculine and feminine. This is known as a gender binary, which assigns distinct identities, roles, and attributes based on gender. The gender binary system creates power, which affects people who are outside the binary system, such as LGBT people, who may face humiliation, discrimination, and harassment. Gender identities can include dress expectations, behaviour, sexual orientation, names or pronouns, preferred restroom, and other characteristics. These expectations can reinforce negative attitudes, bias, and discrimination against LGBT people who exhibit gender variance or nonconformity, or whose gender identity is incongruent with their birth sex.

Transgender people are not permitted to use the restrooms designated for men and women in both private and public settings. It becomes a painful situation when they are in a hurry to use the restrooms because they do not have separate restrooms. Revathi describes her experience, saying “I return to the bus stand and decided to go to the women’s toilet there. But the man who stood there to receive money for the pay and use toilets dismissed me as a *pottai* and would not let me in. when I was tried to get into the men’s toilet section, I was shooed away from there as well” (54).

Transgender people have always been stigmatised, leading to their marginalisation, discrimination, isolation, and exclusion from mainstream society. They experience conflict with their thoughts and bodies at a young age, and as a result, when they are trans-children, they begin to experience pain from their family members. Transgender people are naturally ignored by mainstream society, and their ignorance causes them to avoid social interaction. Revathi was neglected by her family, which pushed her into loneliness, which caused her to feel pain in her heart because no one was there to share her feelings with her. She notes that “I often wept at nights I had to do this. There was no one to share my troubles. I felt that even the street dogs were mocking me with their barks. I felt as though a sharp needle had pierced my laden heart” (152)

Generally, all families in Indian society take care of their children with love and affection, which only makes them feel more at ease, but in the case of transgender people, they are severely beaten and harshly scolded by their family members, despite the fact that they are trans-children. Revathi's family members provided her with similar experiences when she was a child. She records that “At the temple when my hair was shorn off I felt more pain than I did my brothers thrashed me”.(57). When her family members learn that she is a transgender child, they shave her head and force her to dress, speak, behave, and act like boys. That incident has a psychological and physical impact on her, and it has caused her to feel estranged from her family and to miss school as a result. Her alienation becomes a cause for her education to be halted.

Education is a powerful tool for changing one's life, thoughts, beliefs, and values. Quality education is critical for a child's mental development, but in all educational institutions, transgender students are frequently teased by members of mainstream society, forcing them to

miss out on an education. Revathi is teased by her classmates and scolded by her teacher, forcing her to miss school. She painfully notes that “And since I did not play boys’ games, I got punished by the PT teacher too. He would box my ears and yell, ‘Are you a girl or what? Pull your dousers down, let me check. He would make as if he was going to strip me and I would start crying” (7). It strikes a deep fear in Revathi’s heart, causing her to lose interest in her studies.

Transgender people are forced to do sex work and beg for their survival due to a lack of education, and mainstream society is also unwilling to provide them with other decent jobs. When Revathi left her family and education, she encountered such events. She had been denied job opportunities because she was transgender. When she tried to find other work, she was frequently ignored by the mainstream society, which never gave her the opportunity to work. Revathi painfully documents that. “And so I went into town, looking for work, in STD booths, in grocery stores, textile shops...But no one wanted to give me a work. Their responses hurt me, as if they were so many spears aimed army heart”(161). As a result of her poverty and hunger, she was forced to do sex work and beg in order to survive. She did those jobs under social pressure because she was never interested in doing them, and she tried many times to quit. However, mainstream society compelled her to perform sex work and beg. She notes that “The society only assigned two works for Trans women the one is to beg and another is sex work. “What to do? People like us have no choice but to beg or do sex work. This is how we’ve lived our lives...”(190). However Revathi worked hard to have names as a beggar, sex worker removed from her but persists to this day.

Transgender people want to live a dignified and decent life, whether they are hungry or not, but they are always treated with contempt and are not treated as fellow human beings. The society never tries to understand their problems or anything about them. Revathi quotes that “. “I thought we have no work of our own, our parents do not understand us and this world looks upon us with distaste. Yet we too go hungry. Above all, we wanted to live as human being do with dignity”(30). Transgender people are commonly referred to by pseudonyms such as *nine*, *ali*, *pedi*, *pettai*, and *ajakku*, which can be distressing and prevent them from assimilating into mainstream society. Revathi is frequently verbally abused by being referred to by derogatory nicknames. She assures that “Ay macchan! What’s the time? To be which the other replied ‘Nine, da’ ”(125). As a result, their mental health deteriorates and they lose hope in their lives.

Furthermore, transgender people are subjected to unjustified physical, psychological, and sexual harassment. The police beat and humiliated Revathi. She says “I endured physical violence and torture of mind. Had to fight every day with police and rowdies” (210). It clearly demonstrates that the police always stand with power, not with the oppressed.

Conclusion

The Indian Constitution guarantees equal rights to all citizens and guarantees that there will be no discrimination based on religion, race, caste, gender, place of birth, and so on. However, transgender people continue to face discrimination based on their gender, and they are not even treated as fellow beings, being denied all rights to live their lives. Despite the fact that the country proclaims and advocates for human equality in all aspects of life, transgender people are still treated with disdain. Education is the most important tool for empowering marginalised groups in Indian society. Ambedkar believes that “education is a movement; if it fails to uplift the status of the learners, it should be eradicated”.

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