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# THE LABYRINTH OF GENDER TRAJECTORY TO SELF-ACTUALISATION: A STUDY ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA OF TRANS WOMEN IN SELECT INDIAN MEMOIRS - A DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH

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#### **ABSTRACT**

"We are all assigned a gender at birth. Sometimes that assignment doesn't match our inner truth, and there needs to be a new place-a place for self-identification." (Geena Rocero). Despite the growing exposure to intellectual advancements, society is hierarchically constructed based on caste, creed, religion gender and class. Amidst all, gender issues have remained unresolved for many years in the heteronormative set-up. And the sexual minorities in India exceed the established gender frameworks of the society. Being socially and spatially marginalized, the predicament of gender nonbinarism is still a problematic issue and the concept of gender binomial prevails in mainstream society which leads the TGNC (Transgender and Gender Non-conforming People) into stigmatization, the act of trans-bashing. Since the morbidity is high in MF (Male to Female) trans individuals, transwomen have been chosen for the study who possess the male anatomy and female behavioural traits and feminine sense of identity. This makes society tag them as social deviants or as abhorrent people. The consecutive events of stigma encountered by the transwoman reciprocate the psychological trauma in every stage of their life. The coming out of the transgender can be compared to a moth which struggles to pop out of its cocoon. The labyrinth of the trajectory of transwomen from the state of self-discovery to self-identification is crucial and can be formatively categorized into different stages as self-discovery, disclosure, socialization, selfidentification and Self-acceptance. With all these stages, they go through different psychological trauma like gender dysphoria or incongruence, internalized transphobia and suppression of identity till the coming out. This study critically investigates the stages of coming out of trans women and the psychological trauma they face in different stages of their life and has been reflected through trauma narrative in the select narratives of transgender writers like A. Revathi, Living Smile Vidya and Kalki Subramaniam and also reiterates the fact that trauma narrative can be an avenue to attain selfactualization.

## INTRODUCTION

The Universe is a vast space where human race exists with diverse creed, race, nationality and culture. Amongst all, gender which has two distinct complementary entities and are rooted deeply in binarism neglecting the TGNC (Transgender or Gender Non-Conforming) people. Since the morbidity and stigmatization is more in trans women, they tend to internalize the gender attitudes that the society reflects on them and makes them live in fear, exclusion and invisibility.

# **SIGNIFICANCE**

TGNC (Transgender or Gender Non-Conforming) people exited almost in every part of the world since the record of human saga. Transgender studies, as a major discipline of Gender Studies emerged only after 1990s and it has been established as an academic discipline tracing them as 'sexual minorities'. In order to have a broad understanding of the gender non-conforming people and to administer the adversities happening

to them in terms of their looks and behavior, researches were made based on their mind body misalignment and their physical and biological working. In contrast to transvestites or hermaphrodites, gender identity disorder (GID) is an outcome of societal gender norms. The Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 was an attempt by the colonial rulers to eradicate "hijras" and promote binarism which made them to Sexual minorities are more likely than other minority groups to experience oppression and stigma because of their appearance, behavior, and development. One in 30,000 males and one in 150,000 women are estimated to have GID (APA, 1994).

# **OBJECTIVES**

- To know about transgender life, their conflicts, challenges, issues they have faced, and societal acceptance
- To investigate the intricate experience of transgender community people, focusing on how

- they deal with their feelings and ways to cope up with the challenges of the world
- To understand the complex experiences associated with gender identity and post trauma most importantly, psychological estrangement with a profound study of the chosen discipline
- To investigate the embodiment of the trauma endured by them and its effects on their psychological health
- To find out the ways that gets them out of their trauma they face from the suppression of their gender identity and to derive the solution for their psychological well-being attaining Self-actualisation

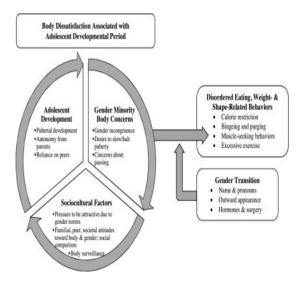
#### **METHOD EMPLOYED**

This paper employs an armchair qualitative research to gather and analyze descriptive data with the aim of understanding the social reality of trans individuals, specifically focusing on trans women who undergo internalized cissexism crucially in their adolescence stage. Though being a literary research, considering the social, cultural and psychological aspects of the trans individuals, it employs an applied research with implications of various disciplines and its purely trans disciplinary in design.

## DISCUSSION

The consecutive events of stigma encountered by the trans woman reciprocate the psychological trauma in every stage of their life. The labyrinth of the trajectory of trans women from the state of self-discovery to self-identification is crucial and can be formatively categorized into different stages as self-discovery, disclosure, socialization, self-identification and Self-acceptance. Especially during the adolescence age, individuals must confront the societal expectations along with maintaining their identity development with their persona. Societal expectations necessitate the transformation of Adolescence. This is the stage where there is a physical change in appearance as well as the cognitive development of an individual takes place. As a transgender individual, since there go through gender dysphoria, there is misperception in their sense of identity.

Transwomen through a self-discovery phase in Adolescence age finds out their true identity which is hardly accepted by the society. The gender identity gets suppressed in order to match the social construction of gender dichotomy that is staunch in the society. This leads them to live a life with suppressed identity in their adolescence stage. Having been suppressing their identity until the adolescence age, they attain a stage where they could not suppress their identity anymore and "coming out" of a trans women happens. This tags them as social deviants by the society and they starts to internalize transmisia that the society reflects. They strive hard to come out of the shackles of the transmisia and they attain the stage of self-actualisation.



#### Fig. 1.1 GD (Gender Dysphoria) during Adolescence Stage

With all the stages, they go through different psychological trauma like gender dysphoria or incongruence, internalized transphobia and suppression of identity till the coming out. The gender dichotomy accepted by the society disregards relativist point of view and that has been studied through the firsthand experience of transgender writers like A. Revathi, Kalki Subramaniam and Living Smile Vidhya in their memoirs. They unveil the hidden and unprecedented trauma throughout their life.

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 who are men and women when they go outwith their families? Why, a crippled person, a blind person -- even they attract pity and people help them. If someone has experienced physical hurt, they are cared for both by the family and by outsiders who come to know of it. But we -- we are not considered human. (A. Revathi, *Truth About Me: A Hiira Life Story*)

Even after the traumatic coming out process, to symthesis their identity like any other cisgender people in the world, it happens to be a herculean task.

Maslow broadly categorizes the basic needs of the human being into two categories as the higher order needs (B-needs) and lower order needs (D-needs). The physiological needs and the safety needs basically form the lower order of needs in the hierarchy. These lower order needs are chiefly satisfied like social and environmental factors and are controlled completely by the society. The social esteem needs and self-actualization needs constituted the higher-order needs. The final higher-order need, self-actualisation is generally satisfied internally within an individual. The higher order needs are hardest to achieve because self-actualization requires the individual to be real to themselves and others and hence in most of the scenario, trans people suppresses their own self to align the society.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a concrete way to synthesis and constructs the gender identity of trans individuals. The need to be "self-actualized" is the fifth and highest need for any individual to know the worth of one self for a better future. The concept of self-actualization refers to the plea "to come to be everything that one is accomplished of becoming"and this is the need that motivates human behavior to be an ideal one. In 1943, Abraham Maslow who is a psychologist proposed five different kinds of human needs that is applicable to every human being. He also itemized that people are motivated to achieve definite needs and some needs take antecedence over others. Since this theory is applicable to all human beings, that includes transgender (Hijras) too. Maslow stated that the basic needs of human being must be fulfilled that leads to the level up and so this is what motivates one to achieve the greater self by overcoming all oddities. This is reflected in the work I am Vidya by Living Smile Vidya as,

I don't anticipate any problem, sir. Even now on my way here, some people at the autorickshaw stand teased me. I went straight to them and asked for an auto to bring me here. They were respectful after that and brought me here without incident. Much depends on the way we behave. Of course, there are incorrigible elements everywhere, We must take all that in our stride. (*Vidya*, 126)

Maslow's hierarchy of self-actualization refers to the realization of a person's potential, self-fulfillment, seeking personal growth and peak experiences one does. Maslow describes this level as the desire to accomplish everything that one can realizing one's fullest potential to become the most that one can be. Individuals may perceive or focus on this need very specifically, so as trans individuals do. For instance, after transition trans individuals try to live with their true self but because of the stigmatization of the society, lack of social inclusivity prevails in the educational and employment setting. This leads them to develop low self-esteem and ends up taking derogatory works like begging or sex work.

The tussle between the innate self and the society's

tribulations to attain self-actualization is a tedious task as the trans writer Vidya exclaims in her work, *I am Vidya* that "In a happy place, secure in a friendly atmosphere, with great job satisfaction and a normal life, only my efforts to gain my identity are still unsuccessful. I am not Saravanan-I am Vidya. Is the government listening?" (*Vidya*, 136). In contrast, if one nurtures the need of self-actualisation ignoring the negative reinforcement, the desire may be expressed economically, academically or athletically and for others, it may be expressed creatively, in paintings, pictures or inventions depending upon the productivity one innately has. This makes them to overcome the barrier of trans-bashing. Like Vidya says "I realized it was all in the mind. No problem was too big-no challenge too difficult. Nothing was shameful now that I no longer had to hide my identity." (*Vidya*, 87)

**FINDINGS** 

The amount of suffering they undergo psychologically is intense; not only physically mutated but also psychologically in all possible ways, especially in adolescence age. The dejected state and aggressive nature of trans women are the outcome of society's transmisia. Accepting oneself is the key to get rid of gender dysphoria and stigmatization and can be attained through Self-actualisation in their adolescence age proposed by Erikson in the development of identity.

Maslow's psychological concept of human need portrays significance of Self Actualisation as the last stage in the hierarchy. Even the basic needs are not given to them. One can attain this through Education as Kalki extensively depicts in her work, "to use their hands to open books to build a new heaven" and not to use their hands to clap for money. Revathi as a transgender activist also feels that the reformation on the lives of transgender written on the paper is only for the sake of record and it does not happen in real life. The findings of the study states that only after fulfilling individual's primary needs, they can move to next hierarchy of needs. If the process gets sporadic in the initial stages of their lives due to external reasons, it can hinder the personal growth of the individual attaining a fulfilled self. The study also reiterates the fact that trauma narrative can be a one such an avenue to attain selfactualization as reflected by the authors through their writings. **SUMMATION** 

This study critically investigates the traumatic trajectory of coming out of trans women and the psychological trauma they face in different stages of their life especially in adolescence period and the ways to attain the self-actualisation has been reflected through trauma narrative in the select narratives of transgender writers like A. Revathi, Living Smile Vidya and Kalki Subramaniam. The social welfare schemes launched by government hardly satisfies the lower- order needs of transgender due to the prejudice which makes them to forfeit the higher-order needs.

Gender expression or gender identity is also a matter of a person's choice. Laws that criminalize gender identity and sexual orientation have no place in a democracy and must be struck down. Everyone must join hands to fight for equal rights for all of us to live in a just society. (Revathi, *A Life In Trans Activism*)

With the advance of biotechnologies, it is now possible for a transgender person to change their anatomical attributes to align with their identified gender identity and break through gender dysphoria yet the social transition is still a prerequisite for a more inclusive world.

ABBREVIATIONS

MF - Male to Female transitioned individual TGNC -Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming People GD - Gender Dysphoria

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