
Identity Crisis in "Me Laxmi Me Hijra" Autobiography by Laxmi Narayan Tripathi

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Abstract:

This paper examines the issue of identity crisis in Me Laxmi Me Hijra, the autobiography of Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, a notable transgender activist and performer in India. Through profound introspection on her journey, Tripathi offers an illuminating tale that reveals the intricacies of existence as a hijra—a designation denoting a third gender in South Asian societies. The autobiography functions as a personal narrative and a social critique, highlighting the challenges encountered by persons who reside beyond binary gender conventions. This paper analyzes how Tripathi manages her transgender identity in the face of societal rejection, emotional struggles, and the compulsion to adhere to stringent gender norms. The paper further elucidates themes of self-discovery, exclusion, and resilience, emphasizing the societal and psychological aspects of identity crises within the hijra community. It also examines the autobiographical form as a mechanism for reclaiming agency and affirming one's identity in a culture that frequently renders non-normative identities invisible or marginalized. The study highlights the interconnectedness of gender, sexuality, and cultural norms through Tripathi's narrative, illuminating the continuous pursuit of acceptance and self-realization within a multifaceted socio-cultural context.

Introduction

The examination of identity, especially with marginalized communities, has received significant attention in literature and sociology. "Me Laxmi Me Hijra" is the autobiography of Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, a prominent transgender activist and the first transgender person to represent Asia at the United Nations. The autobiography, Me Laxmi Me Hijra, provides a candid and unembellished narrative that delivers profound perspectives into the daily activities of a hijra (a member of the transgender community) in India, exploring the complexities of gender identity, social ostracism, and the pursuit of self-acceptance.

This study will analyze the identity problem in Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's autobiography. It will examine the identity crises encountered by transgender individuals, particularly concerning their relationships with their families, society, and self-perception. Tripathi's autobiography will explore the social, cultural, and psychological dimensions of identity problems in the transgender community.

The Concept of Identity Crisis

An identity crisis occurs when an individual encounters ambiguity concerning their self-concept, leading to uncertainty and distress. This often transpires during pivotal changes in life, such as puberty or a shift in gender, when societal norms diverge from one's identity. The concept was first introduced by psychologist Erik Erikson in 1974, who identified it as a common experience during adolescence and early adulthood. Erik Erikson's theory of mental growth posits that individuals progress through eight unique stages, each defined by a particular psychosocial struggle that shapes personality and identity throughout life. Erikson asserts, "If an individual has not developed a sense of identity, they will experience confusion about their role in life."

The identity crisis for transgender individuals is intensified by the lack of societal acknowledgment and acceptance of their gender identification. They must confront the internal struggle between their self-identity and external expectations. In *Me Laxmi Me Hijra*, Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's narrative elucidates the intricate character of this calamity, highlighting its effects on individual lives and the greater dynamics of community and society.

Laxmi Narayan Tripathi and the Transgender Identity

Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's autobiography offers a frank and moving portrayal of the hijra community, which has been historically neglected in Indian society. Hijras, who are perceived as neither male nor female, occupy a unique position in the cultural and historical context of India, where they are identified as a third gender. Despite their longstanding recognition in Indian society, hijras are often marginalized and perceived as outsiders. Tripathi's exploration of self-identity signifies both an individual metamorphosis and the communal endeavor of the hijra community for acknowledgment and esteem. Tripathi's narrative encompasses her challenges with exterior identification and her efforts to reconcile her internal self-perception. This internal conflict underscores a profound psychological contradiction between her biological sex and gender identity. The autobiography offers a glimpse into her inner conflict and social ostracism and attempts to affirm her identity as Laxmi, a hijra, in a culture that persistently devalued her existence.

In an interview with *Guernica*, Laxmi was asked about her childhood, to which she responded. Childhood is often characterized by significant confusion. I contemplated, "I exude femininity; why do others label me as a boy?" I have consistently aspired to don dresses. I abhorred my school uniform yet admired the females' clothing. I noted, "Women are wearing those elegant dresses." I was obligated to wear shorts. I have persistently abhorred it.

My femininity was subjected to scrutiny from a young age. Whenever given the chance, I would dance and embellish myself. I began dance instruction at our school's extracurricular class, where I was the only male member.

At the age of seven, I endured sexual exploitation inflicted by a distant relative during a family wedding. I was persistently abused by older cousins and their associates. I irrevocably lost my innocence and achieved maturity after a unique, tragic occurrence. I assert that I never had a childhood. I developed as an elderly person. That is the result of my femininity. In a patriarchal society, hijras' bodies are regarded as things.

I followed dance precisely because of my zeal for it. It mitigated the pain and eradicated everything else; I experienced elation while dancing. I garnered significant admiration while dancing; many valued my artistry over only my physique. This elucidates the identity problem they have encountered since childhood.

Societal Rejection and Its Impact on Identity

A major subject in Me Laxmi Me Hijra denotes the societal ostracism encountered by the transsexual population. Laxmi's autobiography accounts her experiences with discrimination from family, friends, and society at large. The outward rejection she experienced, both as an outcast within her family and as a pariah among her peers, exacerbated her identity dilemma. This subject is especially salient in a traditional nation such as India, where stringent gender standards and binary gender classifications prevail.

Laxmi Narayan Tripathi articulates that social rejection compels individuals such as herself to find solace within the hijra society, where they can safely express their gender identification. This group, although fostering a sense of belonging, is also beset by challenges such as violence, exploitation, and insufficient legal rights. The ongoing negotiation between acceptance inside the hijra community and the pursuit of acceptance in the broader society intensifies the identity dilemma. Throughout history, hijras have consistently been denigrated as a societal threat. Their family and society frequently undervalue them. Laxmi's autobiography challenges and discredits various beliefs and preconceptions that shape public perception. Laxmi's family's willingness to embrace her challenges the established norms and motivates other families with such children. Laxmi's memoirs detail her experience of the show "Sach ka Samna," in which she appeared and which was avidly followed by her family, plainly demonstrating the acceptance of her queerness. This favorable change in the family's attitude is illustrated. Laxmi's father endorses her decision, inquiring, "Why should I disown Laxmi from the family?" He is my offspring, and I am his parent. Any family can generate a Hijra. They will be forced to beg if we expel them. Laxmi was unable to be forced to vacate the premises. Laxmi asserts on her parents, "My parents were never ashamed of me." Upon the conversion to Islam, I was not required to depart the residence. What proportion of hijras in India may assert that their parents exhibited genuine affection? In contrast to prevalent belief, the families of the majority of hijras constituted the principal opposition to the narrative. I was somewhat fortunate.

Laxmi's metamorphosis represents an endeavor to reconcile her contradictory identities—her biological sex, her gender identity, and societal expectations to adhere to the binary classification of male and female. Laxmi seeks to liberate herself from cultural restraints by embracing her status as a hijra. Her narrative serves as a reminder that the journey to self-acceptance is seldom uncomplicated, particularly when the surrounding society fails to acknowledge one's authentic identity.

Psychological and Emotional Struggles

The emotional and psychological burden of experiencing an identity crisis is a significant element of Tripathi's narrative. In her memoirs, she discloses the profound confusion, sorrow, and isolation that accompany the quest for identity. The compulsion to adhere to social standards of masculinity and femininity compels numerous transgender individuals to conceal their own identities.

Laxmi articulates her experience of feeling a dissonance between her intrinsic identity and the societal gender role imposed upon her from an early age. The internal conflict, along with societal rejection, engendered significant psychological distress. She articulates the emotional anguish of familial rejection and the anxiety associated with concealing her identity to safeguard herself from potential harm or discrimination.

As Laxmi matures and starts to embrace her identity as a hijra, she encounters instances of self-empowerment. Her recognition of the hijra identity delineates the transition from confusion to clarity, providing a pathway to self-liberation. Nonetheless, her mental turmoil persists beyond this acceptance, as the negotiation of her dual identity remains throughout her life.

Laxmi endured sexual assault at the impressionable age of eight. She participated at a relative's wedding when she was abused and harassed by a cousin. Moreover, she was once again subjected to molestation by him and his colleagues. As a little child during the abuse, she remained silent and did not reveal the assault to anybody. She endured physical abuse as her cousin and his accomplices assaulted her repeatedly during family gatherings. This rendered her both physically and mentally incapacitated and weakened for a lengthy duration.

Laxmi silently endures her agony till she decides to join the hijra community. Laxmi recognized her gender identity and joined the hijra society. She identified as feminine rather than masculine. Laxmi expresses her feelings by stating, "When I transitioned to a hijra, a significant weight was removed from my shoulders." I had a state of relaxation. I was neither a man nor a lady. I was a hijra. I possessed my own identity; I no longer felt like an outsider. Laxmi became a disciple of Guru Lata as a member of the hijra community. Her path subsequently leads us into the struggles of the transgender community. Social ostracism emerges as the primary source of psychological pain for the third gender. Laxmi recounts the struggles of hijras throughout their existence. She elucidates that their methods of subsistence were either sex work or begging. The majority perished in a lamentable manner, either as a result of destitution or hazardous sexual practices. The entire society, including law

enforcement, exhibited an attitude of indifference towards them. The cops not only failed to assist them but exploited them. Indeed, Laxmi's interaction with the police motivated her to pursue a life of activism. The memoir contains multiple instances depicting the mistreatment of transgender individuals by law enforcement. An example of assault is exemplified by the incident involving Subhadra. She engaged in sex work and subsequently disappeared, ultimately being reported deceased.

Laxmi articulates her sorrow, stating, "Subhadra's death had illuminated the perils of being a hijra" (55).

She was slain, and the police were unable to uncover any evidence of the crime. The investigation into Subhadra's murder was ultimately concluded due to insufficient evidence. Laxmi discusses the misery of being a hijra, while Subhadra's death remains a mystery for the other hijras. Laxmi recounts another instance illustrating the struggles of the third gender as follows:

"A hijra was raped in Virar. Not only did the police refuse to lodge an FIR, but they also refused to listen to what the hijra had to say. The hijra was in pain, but the doctors were unwilling to treat her till the police did their job. It was a vicious circle... When I reached the police station, the havalgars were in splits. They couldn't fathom how a hijra could be raped (couldn't they)? They were using the incident to lubricate their filthiest fantasies when all they should have done was file the FIR and send the hijra to hospital." (92)

By the conclusion of the book, Laxmi evolves from a timid, frail youth into one of India's prominent figures. She not only joins the nonprofit DWS to raise awareness about sexual epidemics such as AIDS but also becomes its inaugural chairperson. Activism serves as a fundamental principle in the life of Laxmi consistently.

Readers face numerous misunderstandings and inquiries while engaging with *Me Hijra and Me Laxmi* by Tripathi. Laxmi Narayan Tripathi interrogates the ostensibly established constructs of gender performativity within the story. This led me to contemplate the subject of sexuality. Despite being born male, why did I develop romantic feelings for males rather than females? Gradually, I arrived to the realization that I was not a boy. I was female. However, I possessed a penis and testicles rather than breasts. How can I identify as a girl? I was perplexed. I lacked the solutions to these challenging issues. I contemplated ending my life.

Laxmi Narayan engages in dancing, an activity traditionally associated with femininity, so contesting the established norms of a society that is heteronormative. This underscores the healing effects of art on a gender-variant human.

"Dancing saved me. It was the therapy I hadn't given up despite going through turbulent times. In a way, it was my dancing, complete with my feminine movements of the waist, that contributed to my being thought of as effeminate. But I didn't care. I couldn't care less when I was younger, and I couldn't care less now. I began to take lessons in dancing from a

professional dance teacher. Miss Menon, my teacher at Singhania School, was right. Dancing transported me to another world where I could be my true self. Everything else paled into insignificance when I was on stage". (Laxmi 23)

Laxmi implores the reader to impartially evaluate transgender folks to confront and deconstruct traditional perceptions. She recounts instances of continual harassment, judgmental stares, and apprehension around exposure in public settings.

Apprehensions on the potential inability to return home safely, among other issues. This oppressed community is currently overcoming its fears and beginning to articulate its concerns on a worldwide scale, repudiating the enforced invisibility of its existence. They contend that a transgender identity represents an identity rather than a condition. Her confusion over her male physical and feminine emotions leads to psychological distress. She inquires, "And where was I in all this?" What was my role in this scenario? Indeed, I was not obligated to provide for a family. However, I also traversed multiple realms without being affiliated with any. As the firstborn son of my parents, they anticipated that I would embody masculinity. They anticipated that I would embody masculinity and ultimately assume the role of the head of the household. I recognized my inability to meet these requirements, as I internally did not perceive myself as a man. Additionally, I identified as homosexual. Although my parents may have disregarded my deviations, society would not. I experienced a sense of inadequacy. I like to be identified as a lady rather than a man. I was in distress.

The book reinterprets the concept of 'hijra' and transforms public perception of this group. The notion of hijra is inherently societal rather than biological. Laxmi argues, "There exists the ghetto and the mainstream." My primary identity was that of a hijra. I desired to exist with the hijras, but I also aspired to integrate with civilization. Fortunately, I was both a dancer and an activist.

"Thus, while activism allowed me to reside in the ghetto, my dancing guaranteed my inclusion in mainstream society" (Laxmi 118).

Laxmi underscores the influence of society on her during the early stages of her hijrahood when she was apprehensive about embracing her sexuality. Empowered by her education and activity, she liberates herself from the constraints of societal expectations. She states:

When I was young, I had an inferiority complex, and society was responsible for it. But now I have a superiority complex. I have traveled all over the world. I have hobnobbed with the high and mighty. Films have been made in my life. Who can deny that I am a celebrity? People laughed at me once, but today, I have the last laugh. But then, I owe all this to my decision to become a hijra. It was a bold decision, and it yielded rewards. Had I not become a hijra, I might have been any ordinary effeminate homosexual guy. Being a hijra made me glamorous and militant. At first, I seemed a stranger to myself. But over time, the timid, shy Laxminarayan of old faded out of existence, and the Laxmi you see before you, aggressive, ready to fight the world, stood in his place.

The sole environment where a hijra is fully embraced and acknowledged is within the hijra community. Laxmi discusses the significance and rationale behind the establishment of hijra communities.

"When a person's biological and psychological and sexual identities are at odds with each other, he becomes a freak in the eyes of society. Society ostracises him. Overcome by feelings of isolation, such a person desperately seeks out others like him and bands with them. Together with them, he may decide to get rid of his male sexual organs, either through sex reassignment surgery or by having another hijra sever his private parts from the rest of his body without anesthesia. Together, they may acquire breasts, either through hormone therapy or simply by sporting falsies. That is how hijra communities are formed". (Laxmi 172) Laxmi provides readers with a specific note of the definition of the word 'hijra' for deeper comprehension. She states:

"The word 'hijra' is a term of abuse. Its variants in colloquial language include expressions like number six, number nine, and chakka. The word 'hijra' derives from the Urdu word 'hijar'. A hijab is a person who has walked out of his tribe or community. Thus, a hijra has left mainstream society, comprising men and women, and joined a community of hijras. But the hijra community isn't a monolith. Its history and culture varies from state to state". (R.R and Joshi)

Since antiquity, heteronormative culture has marginalized transgender individuals. Transgender individuals have, nevertheless, achieved notable advancements. To be acknowledged and accepted, transgender individuals articulate and convey their experiences. Their respective physiques. By doing so, individuals cultivate a voice to engage with the usual heteronormative societal framework, thereby establishing body politics. The importance of transgender authors and hijra literature is discussed in the afterword of Me Hijra and Me Laxmi.

"Laxmi's autobiography is one of the earliest works to belong to the genre of hijra literature. It seeks to make readers aware of who the hijras are and what goes into shaping their personalities- yes, they do have personalities. It seeks to dispel myths about the hijras and help us shed our prejudices. One of Laxmi's primary endeavors is to show us that hijras are ordinary people, no different from us: they do not exist in a rarefied realm. And yet, Laxmi's autobiography must not be read in isolation as a one-off text. Instead, it must be placed within the wider tradition of Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgender (LGBT) writing in India." (Laxmi 183)

Laxmi's life and activities provide significant insights into the interrelation of gender, culture, and social justice. The book details the personal journey of the individual and poignantly illustrates the common struggles and goals faced by transgender individuals. Within India and outside its borders.

The Role of Religion and Cultural Practices

Religion and culture profoundly impact human identity development in Indian civilization, and Tripathi's narrative illustrates the intersection of religion and gender identity. The hijra community is often perceived as a knowledgeable category, undertaking unique roles in ceremonies such as childbirth and marriage. Historically, hijras in India were perceived as auspicious entities in rituals, but their spiritual importance did not protect them from the profound public humiliation they faced.

Laxmi's effort to reconcile her religious and spiritual beliefs with being recognized as a hijra illustrates the complex relationship between faith and gender in India. While she recognizes the spiritual significance of being a hijra, she concurrently confronts the reality that religious conventions and cultural traditions may intensify the exclusion of transgender individuals. The duality of her identity—spiritual and gendered—complicates her quest for self-understanding.

The Path to Self-Acceptance and Activism

Despite the widespread cultural impacts, Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's autobiography offers an uplifting narrative of self-empowerment and agency. As a transgender rights advocate, she strives to attain acceptance for herself while simultaneously enhancing the recognition and voice of others in the hijra community. Her autobiography functions as both a personal tale and a call for societal reform, advocating for equal protection and acceptance for the transgender community.

Laxmi's campaigning represents the conclusion of her identity crisis. By taking the role of a spokesperson for the hijra community, she affirms her identity and leverages her platform to challenge traditional norms. Her activism functions as a conduit for expressing oneself, healing, and social change, as well as facilitating the dismantling of misconceptions and biases related to the hijra community.

Conclusion

This autobiography is a profound examination of the identity problem encountered by transgender individuals in India. The book offers a candid depiction of the challenges associated with navigating gender identity in a predominantly intolerant society towards non-binary people. Tripathi's narrative illustrates the convergence of internal and external struggles related to self-acceptance, societal rejection, and emotional distress, frequently resulting in severe perplexity and insecurity for transgender individuals.

Nonetheless, the narrative embodies empowerment, perseverance, and optimism. Laxmi's pursuit of self-acceptance, along with her advocacy, confronts conventional standards and advocates for respect for transgender identities. Her autobiography is both a personal testament and a plea for social reform, motivating individuals within the transgender community to accept their identities and advocate for their rights.

Ultimately, *Me Laxmi Me Hijra* transcends the narrative of a singular individual's battle with identity, serving as a comprehensive commentary on the universal pursuit of self-

actualization in a society that frequently compels individuals to conceal or repudiate their authentic identities.

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