

Liberating Discourse: Unleashing the Power of Language in Transgender Advocacy and Empowerment

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Abstract

Autobiographies of transgender individuals offer profound insights into their experiences, traumas, and the challenging journey of transitioning. The narratives, exemplified by Revathi and Manobi Bandopadhyay, highlight the bravery required to define their identities amid societal and personal adversities. Revathi's story illustrates the psychological and physical abuse faced by transgender individuals, depicting her severance from family and subsequent life as a hijra, begging on the streets. Similarly, Manobi Bandopadhyay's *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi* recounts her path to becoming India's first transgender college principal, tackling themes of gender identity, societal expectations, and discrimination. Bandopadhyay's narrative combines straightforward language with sentimental tones, reflecting her struggles and resilience. Her use of defensive language and symbolic accessories underscores her fight against societal exploitation and discrimination. Her early life, marked by an identity crisis and abuse, shaped her defensive stance and advocacy.

The paper attempts to read how the autobiographies of Revathi and Manobi Bandopadhyay demonstrate the power of language in transgender advocacy. Through defensive language and candid discussions of their experiences, they challenge stereotypes and advocate for a deeper understanding of transgender lives, serving as vital tools for empowerment and resilience within the transgender community.

Keywords: Transgender, identity, resilience, autobiography, trauma

The transgender community in India represents a marginalized social segment, facing deprivation of fundamental human rights and privileges accorded to cisgender and heterosexual individuals within society. Terms such as "Hijra" and "transgender" connote distinct yet

occasionally intersecting notions of gender identity and expression. It is imperative to acknowledge that these terms can carry diverse meanings and cultural implications contingent upon context and geographic location.

Within India, transgender individuals are referred to using various labels, varying based on regional distinctions. These designations include ali, aravani, chhakka, hijra, jogappa, khusra, kinnar, kojja, maada, mukhannathun, napunsak, nau number, pavaiyaa, Thirunangai, and others. Certain terms are elucidated with illustrative examples. For instance, "Ali" denotes a man exhibiting feminine behaviors and characteristics, lacking masculinity. An individual identifying as female despite having a male physique is termed as aravani. Notably, the term "Hijra," as posited by Tripathi, is often regarded as derogatory and is associated with colloquial epithets like "number six," "number nine," and "chakka." Originating from Urdu, "hijra" denotes an individual who has distanced themselves from their original tribe or community. Consequently, a hijra is someone who has joined a specific hijra group subsequent to departing from mainstream societal norms, encompassing both males and females. However, it is essential to recognize that the hijra community is not monolithic, with variations in history and culture across different states.

Primarily utilized within the South Asian context, particularly in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, the term "hijra" most commonly signifies a distinctive social and cultural category. Hijras, born male but identifying and expressing themselves outside the conventional male-female binary, predate contemporary conceptions of transgender identities. They boast a rich historical and cultural legacy in the region, often organizing into cohesive groups with unique social structures and partaking in rituals such as castration or genital modifications.

Hijras (also called as "kinnar," "tirunangai," "kothi," "aravani," etc.) have been in India since the Vedic era, when they were regarded as holy figures by the populace. The terms "tritiya prakriti" (meaning, "third nature") and "napumsaka" (meaning, "impotent"), which are mentioned in the Hindu epics, mythical writings, folklore, and the old Vedic and Puranic scriptures, are indicative of this. Hijras had respectable positions in the royal court even throughout the Mughal era, acting as confidantes, counsellors, and harem guards (Konduru & Hanging). In addition to their honourable standing, hijras established their status as lucky people by performing the "badhai" ritual (meaning, blessings) during marriages and childbirths. Hijras were therefore seen as an essential component of the sociocultural landscape in pre-colonial India.

The autobiographies of transgender persons serve as a testament and a true expression of their opinion, experience, and trauma. Considering that "autobiography is an art of self-expression" (Revathi 76) Their transition from a man to a lady is difficult and painful. The endeavour to define their identity and establish new performance benchmarks for the entire community is exceptional and brave. In addition to having bipolar disease, they see firsthand how identities can both define and constrain a person. Their narratives deal with reclaiming one's identity and asserting one's consciousness after experiencing the misery of being imprisoned in a physical form that does not correspond to their psyche. Revathi and Manobi have experienced physical and psychological abuse because of social persecution. These individuals still bear profound psychological scars from the verbal and physical abuse they received from their own transgender community as well as from their family, school, peers, and the street. Revathi describes the experience by leaving her family to join the home of hijras, which involves being cut off from her family and society and having to beg on the streets. Similar to this, Manobi experienced a variety of psychic tensions when she changed from a man to a woman.

Manobi Bandopadhyay's autobiographical novel *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi* is a candid and powerful portrayal of her journey as India's first transgender college principal. The book addresses a range of themes, including gender identity, societal expectations, and discrimination, and provides insights into the experiences of transgender individuals in India. One of the notable aspects of Bandopadhyay's writing is her use of defensive language. Throughout the book, she employs a defensive tone in response to the discrimination and violence she has faced as a transgender person. This is particularly evident in her interactions with colleagues and students at the college, who often question her authority and legitimacy as a principal. By using defensive language, Bandopadhyay asserts her position and challenges the notion that she is somehow less qualified or capable because of her gender identity.

Another key aspect of Bandopadhyay's writing is her candid discussion of sexual articulation. She describes her experiences of navigating her sexuality and gender identity in a society that is often hostile to non-normative expressions of sexuality. She also discusses her romantic relationships and sexual experiences in a way that challenges stereotypes and misconceptions about transgender individuals. Through her writing, she also discusses her romantic relationships and sexual experiences in a way that challenges stereotypes and misconceptions about transgender individuals. Through her writing, Bandopadhyay presents a

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Bandopadhyay presents a nuanced and complex picture of transgender sexuality that is rarely depicted in mainstream media. The author uses straightforward and frequently harsh language, yet she is honest about her fixation with love and romance, writing with both self-assurance and self-pity. She acknowledges that a lot of the affection she encountered was 'animal' love, which she did not necessarily detest. However, her prose soon turns sentimental and is dripping with tears, goosebumps, and heartbeats. It lacks irony and humor and makes the reader restless and impatient. Defense language was a main weapon that was used by Manobi for her existence in the society where exploitation and cruel eyes are waiting for her as, people looked at her like a ripe fruit ready to be plucked. She started to wear accessories like scarves and women's sunglasses to show off her sexuality. She also realized that she would have to overcome her shyness and not make herself available for exploitation. She used such a defensive tone of language to fight against her discriminations and exploitations from the society. Manobi's early years were filled with signs of her ongoing identity crisis. At her birth, well-wishers remarked on the family's growing riches and quipped, "This is a boy Lakshmi!" (Bandopadhyay 6). Her youth was everything but simple -- from being sexually harassed by her cousin in class V to being physically attacked by boys at school. In 2015, Manobi made headlines when she was named the "first transgender principal" of an Indian institution. Over the following two years, she re-entered the public eye as a result of the publication of her autobiography and widespread claims of workplace harassment. Manobi has endured her fair share of hardships to become resilient, like most trans people. She also possesses impressive credentials, including a author of numerous more books, periodicals, and hundreds of newspaper pieces, as well as a PhD in Bengali literature. She established the first transgender publication in Bengali, *Abomanob (Subhuman)* in 1995.

Manobi recalls her harrowing experience as a minor victim of sexual assault, when she was raped by an older cousin. "He was like a tiger who had tasted human blood, and lurked here and there, trying to corner me every now and then," (Bandopadhyay 56). It eventually turned into a routine for both him and me. At school, Manobi became an object of ridicule and abuse, for deviating from the gender specific norms associated with clothes, the use of makeup and accessories. She mentions, "They would pinch me, pull my hair, box my ears and punch my face at the slightest provocation...No one took pity on me. This left a deep scar on my mind" (56). When she moved to the college also her situation got worsened. But finally, she claimed

her goal as a woman, as a human being in the society, she tired a lot for having her dreams in her hands and she struggled hardly for her soul and identity. This was the only result of her hard work and sacrifices using her weapons of her defense language that is used to kill those vicious creatures in the society.

Overall, *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi* is a compelling and insightful read that sheds light on the experiences of transgender individuals in India. Bandopadhyay's use of defense language and candid discussion of sexuality and gender identity make this book a valuable contribution to the literature on transgender experiences.

The memoir *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* was written by Revathi, a transgender person from Tamil Nadu, India. The book chronicles Revathi's life and her difficulties as a transgender woman known as a hijra in South Asia who is frequently shunned by society. The connection between language and power is one of the topics Revathi delves in her book. She points out that the hijra population speaks a unique form of Tamil that is different from that spoken language of others. Hijras converse in this language to build a sense of identity and community among themselves. Hijras frequently experience discrimination and marginalization, though, because their language is not acknowledged by the public. Another subject Revathi addresses is sexual articulation in her book. She discusses the distinctive sexual rites and practices of the hijra group, which are sometimes misinterpreted by outsiders. Revathi emphasizes that sexual expression should not be stigmatized or restricted because it is an essential component of hijra culture and identity. According to Revathi, she feared rowdies at night and police officers during the day. Due to her need to assist her elderly parents, Revathi was compelled to engage in the sex industry. Due to their circumstances, most transsexual people are compelled to work as sex workers.

She was first gender-unknown to the cops and the rowdies. They assumed she was a female. However, her medical predicament became apparent quickly, and they began to mistreat her. Policemen stole her money during the day under the pretence of a fine or bribe, and at night, thugs broke into her hut, searched her pocketbook, and stole all of the cash. They would rape her if her purse was empty and severely beat her. Many times, they have caught her in this manner, beaten her in plain view of the road, taken money from as a bribe, and then sent away. Revathi claims that police officers never view transgender people as living beings.

Revathi was once jailed when a police officer booked her in a prostitution-related nuisance case. She pleaded with each police officer individually while clasping her hands

together. But instead of sending her out, they utilized her as a trap to make further arrests. A two-star police officer entered the station after midnight. She begged him to set her free. "He then demanded that I remove my clothing in front of the prisoner observed" (112). The protection of the public is one of the police officers' key responsibilities, but they were behaving worse than a ruffian. After that, he started abusing her:

Despite my tears and pleas, he forcibly stripped me. He forced me to stand with my legs spread like a woman would when I was completely naked, sticking his lathi where I had my surgery. He asked, "So can it go in there?" after repeatedly striking the section with his lathi. Or is it a field that is off limits? Then, how do you have sex? (114)

She was subjected to barbaric treatment and handled like a dog by the police enforcers. A person ought to have regard for another person. The Bible commands, "us to love one another As I had loved you" (123). The policeman was supposed to protect Revathi within the police station as a protector of the populace, but Revathi found the very same police station to be a terrifying place where people flee for protection and justice. The very men who were supposed to protect her, abuse her sexually. Even a terrorist might have mercy before killing someone, but these police officers tortured her like the devil. He examined her breasts and enquired as to how it occurred.

She was unable to speak out of sorrow. He demanded an explanation about her breast. This incident was the most horrible she had ever experienced in her life. She rates the rowdies better than the policeman. They raped her harshly without her consent but never tortured her like what she was undergoing then. Her reply to that was "I took hormone tablets to grow them." After a while, he ordered her to bend and show her back. Still, she was naked and showing her boobs for his inspection. She turned back and bend - "When I did, he thrust his lathi in there and asked, 'So you get it there?'" I straightened up, yelling with the pain of it (117).

In Indian police stations, transgender people were given this level of safety and protection. Where would the average man go for protection if the police fail to protect him? This incident is unequivocal proof that the protectors abuse the weaker sex. The entire night, Revathi was used as a sex toy by police. Revathi had to agree with the policeman to get out of that misery and survive when she was brought before the judge "They told me that I must not speak of how I was beaten and humiliated" (137). She then made a payment and departed the courtroom. She finally used her defense language in the book to overcome such brutal

situations in her life. She strongly stated that hijras have a language that is strong as a knife to kill these devilish creatures. Revathi also highlights the unique cultural practices and traditions associated with hijra communities, such as the role of hijras in religious ceremonies and their participation in begging and sex work for survival.

The book offers a courageous narrative depicting the struggles of a hijra individual in pursuit of freedom and recognition of their humanity within society. Through perseverance and sacrifice, she ultimately secures her liberty and amplifies her voice, harnessing the power of language to combat societal oppression. Revathi's autobiographical account not only chronicles the adversities she faces but also endeavors to assert her own narrative, encompassing both the sorrows and joys of her life.

The Truth About Me emerges as a poignant and insightful memoir, shedding light on the challenges encountered by transgender women in India. Revathi endeavors to foster greater empathy and comprehension by dispelling prevalent misconceptions about the hijra community. The prose of the novel is characterized by simplicity and clarity, yet imbued with a tone of pathos and anguish, accentuating Revathi's tribulations. Moreover, the author employs a rhetorical stance, critiquing the gender binary framework of heteronormative society.

Manobi Bandyopadhyay shattered barriers by becoming India's inaugural transgender institution principal, exemplifying resilience amidst societal norms. Her formative years serve as a paradigm for Indian youths navigating gender nonconformity. Despite enjoying familial privileges, Manobi faces rejection for asserting her identity, enduring instances of sexual assault within her family. In her autobiography, *The Gift of Goddess Lakshmi*, Manobi recounts the harrowing experience of being preyed upon by her older cousin, employing vivid imagery to illustrate her victimization. Furthermore, she reflects on the exploitation she suffered at the hands of schoolmates and family members.

A pioneer in transgender activism and a transwoman writer, Revathi has experienced trauma in her life since she was a little child. Revathi has discussed her experience as a youngster who was not gender-confirmed. She claims to have been physically tormented by the family and when her identity is discovered by her actions, she says, "I tried to protect my face and head with my hands to stop the punches from landing...I was severely battered on my back and legs before my brother used the bat to finish me off" (78).

Both autobiographical works depict the inner and extreme plight of exploitation and brutality faced by Manobi and Revathi through their journey to become a woman. Both books

offer a candid and often emotional portrayal of the difficulties and joys of living as a transgender person in India. They also shed light on the broader social and cultural issues surrounding gender and sexuality in India, including the discrimination and violence faced by LGBTQ+ individuals and the need for greater acceptance and understanding of diverse gender identities and expressions. Sexual articulation refers to the ways in which individuals express their sexuality and desires. In both works, the protagonists explore their sexuality and desires in the context of their gender identity. They describe their experiences of attraction and intimacy, as well as the challenges they faced in expressing their sexuality in a society that is hostile to transgender individuals.

Manobi Bandopadhyay uses phrases like "I am not a man in a woman's body" to assert her gender identity, while Revathi uses the phrase "I am a woman with a male body" to express her identity. Through these phrases they indulged in to their strong identity through their defense language. In fact, the author has genuinely examined every aspect of transgender association and what are the hurdles faced and overthrown by hijras. The writer Revathi describes not only her social background in her hometown but also her dreams and desires in her writing. In the preface to the novel, the author began writing with a question: "In our society, we speak the language of rights loudly and often, but do the marginalized really have access to these rights?". These lines depict that how marginalized these people are in the society, but they use their strong language to overcome these discriminations, exploitations and they also come to the forefront of the societies where they get their language and they also got their dreams and achievements in their hands of sorrows. Manobi also portrays her as the most courageous and unflinchingly brave transgender who fought for her dreams and achievements in the society to stand straight with her own power against the society where transgenders are considered sexless.

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