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**SUBSTANTIATION OF SELFHOOD: A JOURNEY THROUGH  
TRANS-LIFE IN INDIA**



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**ABSTRACT**

*Sexual minorities across the world have long been marginalized. Their painfully harrowing tales are yet to be narrated to the heterosexual majority at the centre of power in every nation. Lesbians, gays, bisexuals and trans genders continue to be pushed to the periphery where they are victims of prejudice, public scorn and persecution. The last decade of the twentieth century and particularly the beginning of this century have emboldened them to challenge conventional norms and resist their marginalization. Very little about trans genders has been known, read or researched in the Indian academia. The research done so far on these people has been from the medical point of view and very little research findings are available in psychosocial terms.*

**KEYWORDS**

*Sexual Minorities, Transgender, Marginalization*

## **RESEARCH PAPER**

The term, “transgender”, as *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, defines it, is “a general word for people who feel that they belong to the other sex, and not the sex they were born with, and who express this in their sexual behaviour.” These people used to be categorized as eunuchs, which accounts for Jesus Christ referring to them in the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Matthew in the Bible as “eunuchs “because they are “born that way”. In India, transgenders have long been subjected to indignities of different kinds solely on account of their gender identity. The isolation they experience coupled with their guilt that generally accompanies their cross-gender propensity in many cases leads them to abuse of alcohol. What these gender-distressed people need for their emotional stability is social affirmation and acceptance of their transgender identity.

The creation of an inclusive social environment is crucial to negate many of the issues that result in their angst and anxiety which make their plight unbearably painful. Medical imposition of male or female identity on these people has only deepened their despair. Research on transgender literature, it is now assumed, will go a long way in removing the stigma attached to one born with the third gender. It is likely to turn the focus back onto the transgender person as an individual rather than as a medical patient or a sexual pervert. The literary output of the articulate segment of this community validates what they feel in their heart of hearts.

Transgender studies which make up a subdivision of LGBT studies provides a trans feminist approach to gender studies. Transgender studies are beginning to gain currency as a discipline in its own right. Fed up with the mainstream literary patterns and practices that provide little space for people with different sexual orientations, transgender people in Tamil Nadu, as in other parts of the world, seek to create an alternative literary movement that will portray their lives, agonies and aspirations in a realistic fashion. They increasingly feel the necessity for a separate literary channel as the majoritarian literary tradition continues to cast them in poor light, very often occluding an objective analysis of their traumatic experiences in the midst of people with traditionally defined and globally accepted sexual identities.

Priya Babu, a vociferous literary voice in Tamil Nadu, asserts that, “unless we are classified as a gender and the government on this basis legislates for reservation for the transgender community at all levels, we cannot win the battle against marginalization and discrimination”. The book authored by this writer is titled, *I am Not Saravanan*. In her autobiography *The Truth about Me: A Hijra Life Story*, Revathi a transgender activist narrates the horrors of growing up as a transgender in vivid detail. She charts here the painful process that Doraisami undergoes during the journey towards turning into Revathi. Revathi in an interview given to Sindhuja Parthasarathy published by *The Hindu* (01-03-2015) asks:

The Supreme Court judgement is about 150 pages long. Who will explain to me or to the many uneducated transgenders what this means? As long as we don't have specific laws addressing our right to education, jobs, marriage, divorce, adoption or the right to own property, do you think we have made any real progress?

Vidya, a prominent transgender actress, activist and author of the book, *I am Vidya*, tells her interviewer, Monika (2-03-2014) about her autobiography:

I can say that it was all due to my lovely brother Mr. S. Bala Bharathi. He was the one who asked me to write a blog and continuously encouraged me, and the blog was a huge success then. One day Kilakku publishers came up asking me to write my autobiography and I just accepted it with half a mind. When I started writing ohhhh, trust me it's worse than my life to recollect all the memories ahh . . . .

This first transwoman to hold a mainstream job in a rural bank in India has this to say on the present situation of transgender women in the Indian scenario:

Just before a couple of years people wanted to have sex work and NGO work. However, this generation of transwomen is looking for more. There are new thoughts emerging from youngsters that they want to work in government sector, in media, in politics and want to get rid of begging and sex work.

The present study seeks to show that stereotypes about the transgender community are often unfair, untrue and absolutely unjustifiable in the postmodernist context. Uniformity and

Universalism are on their way out as there is increasing acceptance of what is national, local or sectional not only in this politically pluralized world but also in this multicultural ambience that accepts people of different political persuasions and sexual orientations. Expansion of societal awareness in the light of the apex court's verdict on the status of the transgender and the favourable response of the government of Tamil Nadu to reduce the severity of the distress of this ostracised community form part of the main thrust here.

The present study sheds light on the predicaments that transgenders are confronting, which reveals that the dearth of proper skills has forced the transgenders to prostitution and indigence. To improve their employability, practical literacy programs can be administered for transgenders. Implementing more training programs that will benefit them to be self-employed is the necessity of the hour since the study reveals that gaining employment is one of their significant quandaries. Transgenders face a horrendous task to gain social recognition by overcoming the inimical tenets maintained by society. Future awareness campaigns should focus on eliminating these restrictions. A better understanding of the challenges and trials that transgenders have endured can help in inducing about the shifts in strategies and proffer them with their due benefits.

More awareness programmes must be designed for society especially for students since it will stimulate them to the dilemmas of the marginalized communities like transgenders. Both quantitative and qualitative technique of the study imparts proper guidance for counselling the trans people. More denudation should be given to counsellors to negotiate with sex variant groups particularly the transgenders. The study also explicates how awareness programmes can compose a transformation in approaches towards transgenders.

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