

# Exploring the Intersectionality of Gender Identity and Violence: A Critical Analysis of A. Revathi's the Truth about Me

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## **Abstract:**

In the twenty-first century, every individual's identity is determined by nationality, race, and gender. This gender identity plays a crucial role in the successful growth and development of a person in society. The present research paper explores the concept of gender identity and violence concerning studies of transgender in India. From a social constructivist point of view, gender identity is not something people are born with; instead, it is shaped by social rules, expectations, and power relationships. This view understands that gender is not just male or female, but a complicated idea that can be shown and felt in many different ways. As we know transgendered people are excluded from society which often mistreats and abuses them at every place. They are marginalized and treated like outcasts forgetting the fact that the moral failure of our society is its unwillingness to accept a variety of gender identities and expressions, a mindset that needs to be changed.

The objective of this paper is to examine the perspective on gender identity and how Revathi as a transgender uplifted her life by embracing diversity and challenging traditional norms. The realm of transgender identities in India involves a bigger picture that extends beyond just gender identity or sexuality and delves into the realm of disputed cultures and forgotten histories. In recent years, some developments have changed the perspectives of Indian society towards the LGBT community. Here, the aim of this paper is to deal with the insights shared by A. Revathi in her autobiography *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* concerning the struggle for transgender inclusion and appreciation.

**Keywords:** Transgender, Gender Identity, LGBT, Queer theory, Gender Studies, Traditional norms, Marginalization, Third gender.

Transgender individuals worldwide face significant challenges, including social stigma, discrimination, violence, and limited access to healthcare and education. Many are forced to live on the margins of society, struggling to access basic rights and services. The conversation on transgender rights has developed with the passing of The Rights of Transgender Persons Bill, 2014 (2014) by the Rajya Sabha and The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2016 (2016) in the Lok Sabha.

In some countries, transgender people are recognized and protected by law, while in others, they face severe persecution and violence.

This research paper explores A. Revathi's autobiography "The Truth about Me" as a powerful narrative of self-discovery and resilience in the face of societal marginalization. Through a critical analysis of Revathi's life story, this paper examines the intersectionality of gender identity, social exclusion, and violence

experienced by transgenders in India. The study highlights the complexities of transgenders' identity and the struggles of navigating a society that stigmatizes and discriminates against them. Revathi is a transgender activist and author from India, who is a part of an NGO Sangama, fights for the civil rights of the transgendered people. She writes on the unspoken stories of transwomen and how, from a mainstream perspective, they are socially ostracized. Her autobiography talks on how the transgender community is mistreated and oppressed by mainstream society despite the constitution and laws that guarantee everyone the right to exist regardless of sex, caste, gender, and other factors. "Police harassment has also burdened the hijra community as they imprison them over offences such as begging and prostitution. They are attacked even more for trying desperately to survive in a society that was practised institutionalised, pursued and encouraged harmful policies towards this community" (Steven 349).

By employing a qualitative approach, this research sheds light on the ways in which Revathi's narrative challenges dominant narratives around gender identity and violence, offering a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of transgender in India. Additionally, the paper seeks to increase awareness of how transgendered people are marginalized by social location, patriarchy, and gender identity, which impacts their self-discovery and, ultimately, the course of their lives.

A transgender is a person who was assigned male at birth but identifies as a woman. She may undergo medical treatments such as hormone therapy or surgery to align her physical appearance with her gender identity. Not all transgenders choose to undergo medical interventions, and their identity is based on their self-identification as women, not their physical characteristics. As an 'umbrella' term, 'transgender' references a gender identity that defies 'rigid, binary gender constructions', where people live in the 'opposite' gender role (Chakrapani 3). Aniruddha Dutta p. 228, argues that the consolidation of gender nonconforming people under a 'stable and bounded' identity 'constitutes them as biopolitical subjects for care and management by the state', an argument extending to recent developments relating to transgender citizenship rights. Transgender identity as a 'gender' identity is conceptually separated from 'sexual' identities, such as MSM ('males who have sex with males', a category with origins in sexual health discourses). This separation prohibits flexible identification and establishes a bounded 'transgender' category into which certain identities appear to fit, namely hijra identity. Hijras were presented as a subsection of transgender identity, or as a group linked to this identity (UNDP 17, 24).

Nearly her whole childhood, spent in a village in Salem district of Tamil Nadu, was plagued by this deep and nagging unease of being trapped in the wrong body and by 'a growing sense of irrepressible femaleness'. But when she behaved like one of her girl-playmates, it only meant repeated humiliation and violence by her family and community. This affected her academic performance, and she had to drop out of school after failing the tenth grade. In a quest to be true to herself, Revathi, still in her teens, ran away from home and travelled to Delhi to join a house of transgenders.

Her book presents the throbbing traumatic experiences she had to go for being a woman in a man's body. Her work reveals the wounds that her body had to bear for being transgender and how the heteronormative society discarded her existence and made her a mark of sin and disgust for the society and its people.

This clearly states trauma as relational- since it does not only affect the subject who experiences it directly but also the ones associated with it- either actively or passively. "Gender identity is a category of social identity and refers to an individual's identification as male, female or, occasionally, some category other than male or female. It is one's deeply held core sense of being male, female, some of both or neither and does not always correspond to biological sex" (Sawant 59-61). We witness in the quest of her identity Revathi had to face a trauma that caused her a desire to almost join the majority- not only affecting her

psychological health but her related ones as well. From being mocked at school, to facing harassment by her neighbors and family members all these incidents reveal how our society at large excludes those who do not conform to its established notions. Revathi who faced copious confusion in her childhood could not even get her family support, her parents and siblings could never think of her as a Trans child who was in her ways manifesting her inner desires of drawing a kolam and doing household chores which vividly express her inner self showing womanly traits and clearly uncovers the cultural aspect of our society where certain acts are predetermined as per gender notions. Revathi throughout her life had to go through abuse and violence which not having an immediate response later on in her life becomes a mark of guilt and sufferings for her. This gender violence she faces not only by the society but also at her personal space and the agony of a woman trapped in a cage is seen evidently when she comes back to her family after becoming a chela to her guru. The violence that she faces at the hands of her brothers reveals the stereotypical thoughts of our society which lead to violation of their rights:

“As soon as I stepped in, he shut the door, grabbed a cricket bat, and began hitting me, all the while screaming, ‘that’ll teach you to go with those Number 9s. He beat me hard mindlessly, yelling that he wanted to kill me, I who had dared to run away. I tried to protect my face and head with my hands to keep the blows from falling....that’s right. Beat him and break his bones. Only then will he stay at home and not run away’, I heard my mother say...” (55)

Alongside physical violence the intricacies of the psychological trauma is witnessed throughout the narrative. Revathi is not even an exception. She found it difficult to manage her school days as she was regularly criticized for her feminine behavior and for being with other girls in the class. The atmosphere was undesirable. Her sports teacher once punished her for her girlish behaviour. He was also caned for not being ‘brave like a boy’ and for not playing boys’ game, “I got punished by the PT teacher too. He would box my ears and yell, ‘Are you a girl or what? Pull your trousers down, let me check.’ He would make as if he was going to strip me and I would start crying. The other boys laughed at this”. (Revathi 7). For Revathi, police is not different from the cruel rowdies. They are the two sides of a same coin, “The police took bribes from us all the time” (Revathi 210). Revathi also adds:

“I screamed that I did not want to go into the cell. I fell at policeman’s feet. He kicked me with his boots. He then asked me to take my clothes off- right there, while the prisoner was watching. I pleaded with him and wept, but he forcibly stripped me. When I was standing naked, ...”(Revathi 206).

Society's perception of transgendered people is often marked by stigma, prejudice, and misunderstanding. Many transgender face discrimination, harassment, and violence, which can lead to social isolation, mental health issues, and limited access to education, employment, and healthcare. Some people view these people as "unnatural" or "deviant," failing to recognize their right to live authentically and express their gender identity. However, there are also many individuals and organizations working to promote acceptance, understanding, and inclusivity, advocating for the rights and dignity of transgenders and challenging societal norms and biases.

In India, transgendered people experience physical, emotional, and psychological violence that is closely related to their gender identification. Social stigma, prejudice, and a lack of legal protection all contribute to this violence, which causes serious mental health problems, restricted access to healthcare, and social marginalization. According to studies, the combined effects of prejudice and violence cause these people in India to suffer from high rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts.

According to research, transgenders in India have major obstacles when trying to obtain healthcare services, such as care that is gender affirming, which makes health disparities worse. Furthermore, the

lack of awareness and understanding about trans issues among healthcare providers contributes to the marginalization of transgenders.

### Conclusion

To conclude, the exploration of intersectionality of gender identity and violence against transgenders in India highlights the need for a comprehensive approach that tackles the various types of discrimination and violence that faced by this population. By understanding the complex interplay of factors contributing to this violence, policymakers, healthcare providers, and social organizations can work together to create more inclusive and supportive environment for them in India.

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