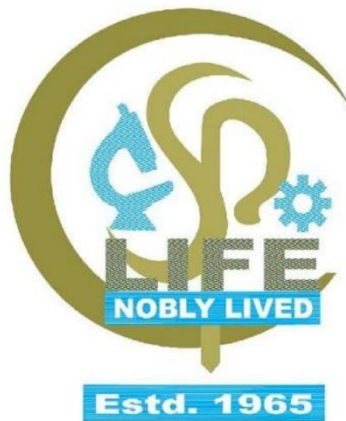


Caught in a Gender Conflict: A Critical Reading of *Me Hijra Me Laxmi*

Project submitted to the Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam in
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DECLARATION

I do hereby declare that the project “Caught in a Gender Conflict: A Critical Reading of *Me Hijra Me Laxmi*” is the record of genuine research work done by me under the guidance of Mr. Binil Kumar, Assistant Professor, Department of English, St. Paul’s College, Kalamassery.

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Certificate

This is to certify that the project work “Caught in a Gender Conflict: A Critical Reading of *Me Hijra Me Laxmi*” is a record of the original work carried out by Anamika K. S. under the supervision and guidance of Mr. Binil Kumar, Assistant Professor, Department of English, St. Paul’s College, Kalamassery.

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Anamika K. S.

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Introduction

In the Indian subcontinent, hijra are eunuchs, intersex people, and transgender people. Also known as Aravani, Aruvani, Jagappa or Chhakka, the hijra community in India prefer to call themselves Kinnar or Kinner, referring to the mythological beings that excel at song and dance. In Pakistan, they are called Khawaja Sira-equivalent for the transgender in Urdu language. Hijras are officially recognized as third gender in countries in the Indian subcontinent, being considered neither completely male nor female. Hijras have a recorded history in the Indian subcontinent from antiquity onwards as suggested by the karma Sutra period. Many hijras live in well defined and as organized all hijra communities, led by a guru. These communities have consisted over generations of those who are in abject poverty, rejected by, or flee, their family of origin. Many work as sex workers for survival

The word 'hijra' is a Hindustani word it has traditionally been translated into English as 'eunuch' or 'hermaphrodite', where the irregularity of the male genitalia is central to the definition. However, in general hijras are born male, only a few having been born with intersex variations. Some hijras undergo an initiation rite into the hijra community called nirvaan, which involves the removal of the penis, scrotum and testicles. Since the late 20th century, some hijra activists and non-government organizations have lobbied for official recognition of the hijra as kind of 'third gender' or 'third sex', as neither man nor women. Hijras have successfully gained these recognition in Bangladesh and are eligible for priority in education. In India, Supreme Court in April 2014 recognized hijras, transgender people, eunuchs and intersex people as a 'third gender' in law. Nepal, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh have all legally accepted the existence of third gender, with India and Nepal including an option for them an passports and certain official documents.

Down the ages, our society has condemned and alienated people who do not conform to its norms. The term transgender is generally used to describe those who transgress social gender norms. Transgender is often used as an umbrella term to signify individuals who defy rigid, binary gender constructions and who express or present a breaking and blurring of culturally prevalent stereotypically gender roles. It includes pre-operative and post-operative transsexual people who strongly identify with gender opposite to their biological sex.

Transgender are known locally 'laanch' in Kashmir. The problems and issues pertaining to transgenders vary from culture to culture, environment to environment and country to country. As in other parts of the country, the third gender in Kashmir exists but their existence is hardly recognized by the society and they are pushed to the boundaries.

Moreover, various welfare programs have been devised and implemented for the uplift of the socially and economically excluded, deprived and marginalized sections of society. These measures have not dispersed significant reimbursement for the transgenders due to lack of political will, social activism, community participation, media intervention and research support. There has been little research aimed at understanding the difficulties faced by these people, who are very much a part of the society that still does not consider them normal human beings to be at par with other members of society.

Transgender people have a gender identity or gender expression that differs from their sex assigned at birth. Some transgender people who desire medical assistance to transition from one sex to another identify as transsexual. Transgender, often shortened as trans, is also an umbrella term. In addition to including people whose gender identity is the opposite of their assigned sex, it may include people who are not exclusively masculine or feminine. Other definitions of transgender also include people who belong to a third gender, or else

conceptualize transgender people has a third gender. The term transgender may be defined very broadly to include cross-dressers. Being transgender is independent of sexual orientation. Transgender people may identify as be, homosexual, bisexual, asexual, or may decline to label their sexual orientation. The term transgender is also distinguished from intersex, a term that describes people born with physical sex characteristics that do not fit typical binary notions of male or female bodies. The opposite of transgender is cisgender, which describes persons whose gender identity or expression matches their assigned sex.

The degree to which individuals feel genuine, authentic, and comfortable within their external appearance and accept their genuine identity has been called transgender congruence. Many transgender people experience gender dysphoria, and some seek medical treatments such as hormone replacement therapy, sex reassignment surgery, or psychotherapy. Not all transgender people desire these treatments, and some cannot undergo them for financial or medical reasons. Many transgender people face discrimination in their work place and in accessing public accommodations and health care. In many places, they are not legally protected from discrimination. Many foster homes will not accept openly transgender youth because of homophobia and fear of predation on other children in home. The transgender people they themselves didn't disclose their inner personality. Over the law, also recognize only heterosexual marriages, the right to marriage and family is denied to same sex couples and transgenders. These misconception or misunderstanding, prejudice and social on their gender role should not accept them to continue or maintain a normal and healthy relationship with the family as well as society. The hijras, known to be the third gender has stated by the Constitution of India, are the people who do not follow the conventional roles of males or females as they have attributes of both genders. They are the people who born as

a different gender child but usually behave and feel a belonging to the other gender. For example: a boy child is born but he feels more established as the bigotries of a women like cooking, dancing, wearing makeup etc.

The status of hijras is supposed to be quite high in Indian society as these people mark their presence since the mythical ages and have been a part and parcel of Indian tradition. Be it Ramayana or Mahabharatha, the instances of God's praying hijras or becoming hijras are very much a part of their tradition and hence their recognition is as old as the scriptures of India. Lord Rama granted the hijras that they can curse and bless the men and women and that wish would always come true. Similarly, Krishna turning into Mohini to satiate the desire of Aravan for a night before his death another example of hijras in Indian mythology. The hijras were an essential part of Mughal empire and other empires because they were the most reliable and trustworthy patrons of the kings and were the great friends to the queens. Kings deliberately let the hijras reside in the queens palaces to help them in situations pertaining to danger or help. So, evidently they were good care takers and trusted folks who would directly report to the kings. It was only the Britishers came in India that the status of hijras being snatched from them and that they were put in jails for being too different. Hijras, being neither males nor females, lead a very confused life which is due to many reasons. First of all, they cannot associate with the gender they are born into. Hijras are not accepted well by the followers of conventional genders and thus live their life in stress, harassment and particularly shame. Hijras are usually harassed by their family members and at school or college are often treated with ridicule and are bullied. They are forced to leave their families and homes as they cannot become a part of the society and thus live at the peripheries of the city with others like them.

In this project I am saying about what the transgenders are and what were the problems they were facing in the society. In these times the society were making fun at them because they are the third genders of the society. Through this project I am conveying how the transgenders are also important to this world. I'm applying marginalisation theory in this project. The reason why I took this topic to do this project is, because in our country many transgender wear facing problems like insult. Through this project I want to give our society that transgenders are also humans they also have the right as we do. We have to give respect them like anyone else.

Chapter 1

Marginalized

Transgender persons who are one such group of people who have been marginalized, abused, disdained and callously neglected community in almost every known society. They face discrimination in every aspect of life be it employment, legal recognition, access to social resources including decent life standard and education. As in other parts of the country, the third gender in Kashmir exists, but their existence is hardly recognized by the society and they are pushed to the boundaries.

Gender is the fundamental aspect of human aspect. It is deeply rooted element of how we see ourselves and how others see us. Transgender is a term used to describe whose identity or appearance differs from stereotypical of how men and women should look or act. It also includes much larger group of people who don't necessarily undergo medical treatment, but who don't confirm to the idea men have to be stereotypically 'masculine' and women have to be stereotypically 'feminine'. In other words, a transgender is a person whose gender identity or gender expression defers from that associated with his or her birth sex. Most parents feel confused, angry, self-doubting, and deeply worried.

The transgender are not recognized as a distinct and equal subset of humanity and hence they face a lot of human rights issues too. At family level as well as society level the practice of discrimination has been taken place, the majority of the parents are not willing to reveal about their transgender kids in the public, not only the parents but also siblings and relatives. Many transgender youth leave their home because of the stress in the family environment or because they are thrown out by homophobic parents. Marginalization and

discrimination refers to the overt and covert trends within societies to avoid the minority group from the mainstream society. At the time when young people develop their identity to learn to express themselves socially, discrimination and marginalization can damage their self esteem and confidence. The discrimination leads to bullying, exclusion and stigmatization and has a negative impact on LGBT's mental health that it increase the risk of inferiority complex, depression, self harm and suicide.

Bullying can socially exclude young people, and leave them in fear of being hurt or ridiculed. Anxiety related to fear of discrimination or bullying can also lead young people to hide their true self to consider coming out process as a luxury with potentially dangerous consequences. Historically, the field of Human Resource Development has undervalued dialogue about Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender people remains in Human Resource Development. Most of HRDs LGBT related research as focused on sexual orientation, giving little attention to what differentiates transgender people-gender identity and or expression that differs from assigned sex at birth. Transgender issues are particularly important to HRD practice, as practitioners increasingly aim to create diverse and inclusive organizations, but there is a lack of understanding about what it means or is like to be transgender.

Transgender persons have been recognized in many cultures and societies from ancient times until the present day. However, the meaning of gender variance may vary from culture to culture. Every society comprises individuals who do not fit into the cultures dominant sex/gender categories-persons born intersexed, those exhibit behavior or desires deemed appropriate for the opposite sex/gender, or those who, while confirming outwardly to culturally normative gender roles, experience themselves in conflict with these roles in some fundamental ways.

In the Mughal period the transgender were in high position and they were political advisor and administered in empire. In British era the transgender were benefited by the provision of land and rights of food. After the periods, they were facing so many inequalities, marginalization. In contemporary period the government of India implemented new policy for the social protection and welfare schemes of transgender community. In India, people include hijras/kinnars, shiv shaktis, jogappas, sakhi, jogtas, Aradhis etc. In fact, there are many who do not belong to any of the groups but are transgender persons individually. Transgender fall under the LGBT group they constitute the marginalized section of the society in India, and thus face legal, social as well as economic difficulties.

Over the last few years, there have been important developments for eliminating the historic discrimination and exclusion of transgender persons, and for ensuring that they are accepted in society and given equal opportunities and access to resources. In April 2014, the Supreme Court of India gave a major boost to transgender rights in India by its decision in the case of National Legal Services Authority Union of India. It recognized the right of transgender persons to adopt their self identified gender as male, female or third gender. Often, it leaves them with no option but to depend on others for their livelihood or engage in sex work, exposing them to further violence at the hands of law enforcement authorities.

Chapter 2

Hijra the Laxmi

Hijras are disliked a lot in India. The word 'hijra' is a term of abuse. In few languages such expressions Chhakka Kinnar have been used of hijras. The word 'hijra' has been derived from the Urdu word 'hijra' which means a person who has walked out from his tribe or community and joined a community of hijras. In Urdu, hijra is called Khawaja Sara and Kinnar in Hindi.

In this book, Laxmi spoke about every sphere of her life, whether it was the matter of sexuality or personal life. Initial chapters are fully dropped in the incidents of sexual harassment. She is a popular transgender activist, actor-dancer and a television celebrity. According to her, she was born as a normal male child but always had confusion to choose between her sexuality or personality. Laxmi was the eldest son of a Brahmin family, settled in Mumbai, Thane. She has one brother and one sister. Fortunately, her family accepted her as hijra. She hadn't face any difficulty to live with her family after acceptance of hijra. It seems much trickery when she had used to wear pants-shirts to live like elder son in the family and used to wear sari only outside of house, especially in hijra community.

She also talked about the bitter truth of her life. She was sexually abused in her early childhood due to feminine feeling and gesture. Not only by her relatives, but outsiders also. From her early childhood, she was enable to find her identity as women or man. When she is in the fourth standard, she joined a gay group of Ashok Row Kavi. She had several love affairs with boys, forcibly or due to self interest since her childhood. Unfortunately, she was used by boys sexually such as object and abandoned by them later.

After living a confused life, she joined a hijra community and became a chela of Lataguru, a leader of hijras. It held a small ceremony with rituals in 1998. In chapter six, Laxmi expressed her joy for being called as hijra. She said, “when I became a hijra, a great burden was lifted off my head. I felt relaxed. I was now neither a man nor a women. I was hijra. I had my own identity. No longer did I feel like an alien”(43). In 2006, she gave a lecture on 'Transgender issues' in Toronto at 6th world AIDS conference. She has been a participate of Das Ka Dum and Bigg Boss hosted by Salman Khan, an actor. By these shows, she got immense popularity. She organized many programmes to make an awareness among the peoples towards transgender issues and society.

The word hijra is a social construct not a biological construct. Laxmi also spoke about historical significance of hijras. How hijras characters such as Aravan and Shikhandi had played an important role in Ramayana and Mahabharatha. Hijras are born as male children biologically. There is a conflict between psychological and biological which effects on a person. The gestures, manners, expressions and movements are the result of this conflict. In this case, a person has attraction with same gender like lesbian and gay. Laxmi has never had to live the life of a typical hijra who sings, dances, begs. She never did sex work for a living. Although, she has worked in Bombay's bar in her initial days.

The life of Laxmi Narayan Tripathi has not been easy either. Laxmi Narayan Tripathi is a transgender rights activist, Hindi film actress and Bharatanatyam dancer in Mumbai, India. Transgender rights activist Laxmi Narayan Tripathi is proud of her sexuality and claims to be “a women who can pull all other women to shame”(55). Though she considers herself as a blessed hijra as her family accepted her as she was and stood by her through all her life altering decisions. “I am a hijra and have been accepted by my family. This is rare in

a culture where deviant sexuality is enough for parents to disown their offspring”, (79) she writes. “They never stopped me from expressing myself”,(79) she says. She was a sick child with feminine longings. She was sexually abused by one of her own family member and then was raped again some weeks later. These sexual assaults transformed her and made her secretive and incommunicative. Later on she met Sangitha auntie who thought that she understood the 'different' nature of Laxmi. Sangitha auntie felt that Laxmi was a gay thus has feelings of men.

“As the eldest son of my parents, they expected me to be a man. They expressed me to be manly, and eventually be the man of the house. I knew I couldn’t fulfill these expectations because, inwardly, I did not feel like a man. On top of that, I was a gay. Even if my aberrations, society would not. I felt inadequate. I wanted to be addressed as a women, not a man. I was turmoil”. She helped Laxmi and told her about the man who was fighting for the rights of gays and lesbians in India, Mr Ashok Row Kavi who was a leader of gay men group. Laxmi opened up to him her problem, “I am effeminate and people tease me. I am also sexual attracted to men. Why I am like not everyone else? Am I abnormal?”. Laxmi was in fourth standard, even at that tender age Laxmi could realize that there is something wrong with her, and that every issue bugged her. She couldn’t share this with her family because of the fact that there has always been a distance between parents and their child in India and the notion that what will the society think that their child is ubnormal is always going to be a factor.

Ashok’s answer comforted the lost soul of Laxmi, “No, child, you are not abnormal. You are absolutely normal. What is abnormal is the world around us”(85). He advised him that Laxmi is too young to be thinking about all these things and that she should come back

after her class tenth exams and then he could explain everything to him. As Laxmi started to get older she had many affairs with different men who end up hurting her eventually. By that time Laxmi learnt the fact that although she loved men and she could be gay but she wasn't ready to accept her masculine body. Her trauma was so be that she wanted to end her life.

“Slowly gradually, I came to the conclusion that I wasn't a boy. I was a girl. But then I had a penis and testicles, not breasts. So how could I call myself a girl? I was bewildered. I didn't have answers to these difficult questions. I wanted to end my life”(123).

Identity is not only a status of a person but is the very essence of one's being. It is a part of our soul, which gives us comfort and strength to establish ourselves. If one is unsure of his identity then the person may live a life with undue trauma and stress. He would be depressed and even feel suicidal as was the case with Laxmi. Meanwhile, amidst all the chaos and confusion, she decided to take charge of herself and she started to learn dancing and very soon opened her own dancing class. In those days, dancing was her only refuge, “dancing transported me to another world where I could be my true self” (65). Her teacher Baby Johnny taught her to accept her femininity first during the dancing lesson and then even after the dancing lesson. She taught her “how to be myself, without compromising on my dignity and self respect”.(76). This helped Laxmi to stand up but her sexuality was still a problem. Still the mental turmoil was a major part of her life from time to time as she had questions about her sexuality and her desires. She became a regular part of Ashok's gay group. The gays provided her with some solace but they all considers themselves as men. “This brought me to the question of sexuality. I had learnt from Ashok Row Kavi that I wasn't abnormal. But then, what was going on with my body? Though I was born as a boy,

how come I fell in love with boys and not with girls? Slowly, gradually, I came to a conclusion that I wasn't a boy. I was a girl" (72).

After her school got over, Laxmi picked up courage to dress up in a female attire. She started wearing lipstick, grew her nails, and wore rings. This is the time when she got free from her own shackles of sexuality and accepted who she wanted to be by becoming a drag queen. She started going at pubs and dancing. After making some contacts, she became a model coordinator. Being into this industry she wanted to bring out her sexuality and assert her sexual difference with utmost confidence. She liked being a drag queen and dressing up in female attire. But no for long, this also started to bother her as she wanted to drape a saree every day.

Though Ashok's circle of people, Laxmi met a couple of hijras. One of them was Sweetie who introduced Laxmi to the life of bar girls and bar dancing. Laxmi was fan of dancing and bar dancing gave her a lot of money but it wasn't good enough because she wasn't interested to having sex with random men. The other bar girls were doing this because they have to support their families.

That was the point when Laxmi's life fell into place. From being not accepted by her own family to being sexually abused to being raped twice, and to being ridiculed by the society and friends. Laxmi Narayan Tripathi had faced so much so that a girl only can have nightmares of. Yet she never lost hoped. She took matters in her own hands and tried to fight each battle of her life with utmost power and confidence. She is a transgender activist today and has been representing Indian transgenders throughout the world. She was the first transgender person to represent Asia Pacific at the United Nations and has represent her

community and India on several international platforms including the world AIDS conference in Toronto.

Chapter 3

Every Transgender is a Human

Several recent Trans Equality surveys have shown that transgender individuals face discrimination within their own family units and schools, in employment and housing, within government settings, through hate crimes, and under the justice and legal system. From a young age, children are often brought up in heteronormative settings within their own homes and in school. Parents often times respond quite negatively when their children cross gender barriers, prompting transgender youth to run away. As a result homeless transgender youth are more likely to turn to drug dealing, car theft, and sexual exploitation. According to the human rights campaign, less than 43% of transgender expansive youth said they could turn to an adult in their family if they were worried or sad. In education, transgender individuals also describe discrimination from peers. Transgender youths are three times more likely to be excluded by peers because they are different. A survey of national center of transgender states, “who expressed a transgender identity or gender non conformity reported alarming rates of harassment, physical assault and sexual violence. Harassment was so severe that it lead almost one ninth to leave a school settings or in higher education”.

Transgender individuals also face discrimination in employment and housing and government settings. Transgender individuals face double the unemployment, and 90% of those employed face discrimination within their own jobs. The 1994 Employment Non-discrimination Act not protect transgender individuals from employment discrimination. Essentially 26% of transgender individuals had lost a job because of their transgender or non-conforming gender status. Transgender individuals are also often times discriminated within government settings through healthcare policies and government issued IDs. Healthcare

policies do not recognize transgender Identities as a physical disability. Rather it is often times characterized as a mental disability providing transgender individuals with insufficient care: Healthcare policies do not address the pre and post-operative needs of those individuals who elect to go through sex-change operations. In addition, transgender individuals are disproportionately affected by HIV-AIDS and are more likely to do drugs or alcohol. Although transgender individuals are more at risk health wise, 90% of the respondents have described being refused medical care and 50% described their medical care was postponed because of their gender status. Transgender individuals also face discrimination when it comes to government issued IDs. Only one fifth of the respondents stated that they were able to update all their identification documents. 44% of the respondents live without a driver's license that matches their gender identity.

Transgender individuals are disproportionately affected by hate crimes and some could argue the current justice and legal system are not equipped to manage such crimes. Transgender individuals are at risk for hate crime, yet transgender individuals are less likely to report transphobic violence because of their distrust for the police. Transgender people have been facing inequality and discrimination since 1800. Much inequality has stemmed from the terms used to refer to transgender people. Legal measures against known-binary people began to be implemented in the mid nineteenth century. Laws began to prohibit and make it illegal for anyone to dress in a manner opposed to their biological sex. The current legal institutions that exist today similarly act in a way that discriminates against transgender people.

There is a lack of legal possibility to persecute aggressions against transgender people or to give adequate rights to transgender people. Transgender people not fitting entirely into

the binary of 'male' or 'female', are not covered by sex Discrimination Laws. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 does not include transgender as a physical impairment, and excludes them explicitly alongside arsonists and molesters. While there are sometimes state, city or county laws that protect the transgender community, federal laws largely overlook them. Even though president Obama passed the Employment Non-discrimination Act of 2009, this does not serve to remedy the many issues of the justice system in it's just treatment transgender people. One thing that has been used by some to gain rights is the designation of transgender as a psychological disorder, known as Gender Identity Disorder.

While some in the transgender community are critical of labeling themselves as having a psychological disorder, others have used it to gain what others can't others on legal level. Some continue to say that it is harmful as it continues to other transgenderism, as well as its requirement of significant distress. The term 'transvestite' originated in 1910 from the German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld. At time, it was used in a similar fashion to 'transsexual', a word that was not coined until the late 1940s. The term 'transgender' was first used in 1971. In the past people have been arrested or forced into insane asylums for being transgender.

The first public trials for transvestite behavior involved Ernest Boulton and Fred Park. Both were arrested in 1870 for indecent behavior as a result of dressing in clothing of the opposite sex. As a result of the laws against cross-dressing, transsexual people sought out doctors who could change their gender to gender which aligned with their inner identity. The 1950s saw some of the first transgender positive organizations and publications. These helped transgender People deal with the inequality faced along with day-to-day issues they encountered.

Conclusion

Hijras despised lot in India. The average Indian thinks of hijras as menace and a nuisance, and runs away on spotting them on the streets. Men are ashamed and embarrassed when surrounded by a group of hijras who stubbornly beg for money, refusing to let go till the person concerned part with at least a few rupees. This money is not necessarily given out of a sense of sympathy or Charity, but simply to get rid of the creature that has made one its victim, often to the amusement of other present. Frequently, the person's ordeal does not end, in spite of his having given away his hard-earned money to the hijra. If the hijra thinks that the amount given is too measly, she and her friends may pester the giver for more, resorting to obscene and gestures to torment him further.

Laxmi's autobiography is one of the earliest works that belong to the genre of hijra literature. It seeks to make readers aware of who the hijras really are, and what goes into the shaping of their personalities, they do have personalities. It seeks to dispel myths about the hijras and help us shed our prejudices. One of Laxmi's endeavours 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 placed within the wider tradition Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgender (LGBT) writing in India. Non-heterosexual people have been writing testimonies about their lives and loves for hunting, if not thousands, of years.

Laxmi has supportive parents who come to terms with her status as a hijra. The backing of her parents and family members insulated her from the taunts of the world, and though she talks about the terrible things that happen to other hijras, including to some of her own chelas, none of the things ever happen to her. Laxmi's parents even appear with her on

TV and state that they are proud of their daughter, that they'd much rather accept her as a hijra than leave her on the streets to beg and trade her body.

There is another issue at stake here, and it is about her relationship with her family. If Laxmi's family, has accepted her, it is on the exclusive condition that she continues to be their son at home, though she may be a hijra outside. In such a scenario, her castration would be totally unacceptable to the family. This is proved by the fact that Laxmi's parents disliked her dressing in female attire at home, and insisted that she wear shirts and trousers like her brother. One way to read this is that Laxmi compromised on some of her principles here to enjoy homely comforts and the warmth of family life. Another reading would be that they are residues of male privilege in Laxmi that she is unwilling to let go, as it were why clinging to her genitals.

The autobiography of Laxmi reveal that she had attempted to commit suicide. As a category, hijra is a social, as opposed to a natural or biological, construct. A hijra first born as a male and becomes a hijra later. If he castrates himself, he becomes a eunuch. A hijra is different from a hermaphrodite who is naturally born with both male and female sexual organs and characteristics. A hijra may be narrowly defined as who starts out as an effeminate homosexual man from the lower strata of society who, because of a lack of money and education, believes he can only survive in a community or ghetto of like bodied and like minded people. He thus leaves home, exactly, as say, a sadhu does, to become a hijra and never to return to the family and the society on which he has turned his back. He might even from to see his life before he became a hijra as a sort of past life. The words 'effeminate' and 'homosexual' that we have used above need to be analyzed. All effeminate men do not become hijras. Hijras display a fundamental paradox. While they establish normativity on the

basis of their gender identify they also betray a desire for normativity on the basis of their sexuality.

The Hijra position seems to be that heterosexuality must be achieved at any cost; if it cannot be achieved through a reversal of gender. Thus, hijras, like transsexuals, may be said to become women in order to be able to have sex with the men of the world, in the manner of heterosexuals. The trans-woman Farrah Ruston is said to have acquired a German lover soon after her transformation, and was peeved by the fact as a trans-woman she would not be able to conceive and give birth to his child. Laxmi is so convinced that she is a woman that she feels squeamish about having sex with a trans-man whom she meets in the Netherlands, perhaps because that would make her out to be a lesbian, while her endeavour was a heterosexual.

Queer theory, that seeks to go beyond gender and sexuality binaries would make out a case for the ambivalence of gender and sexuality at the bodily level. To the extent that Laxmi is not castrated she may be sad to encompass the ambivalence principle of queer theory. However, in her case, unlike in the case of the examples cited above, this is not international, even though I have called her anti-essentialist. There is a fine distinction between wanting to be ambivalent in the ideological sense and wanting, simply, to have the best of both worlds; in Laxmi's case, it seems to be the latter.

Rushdie, a Mumbai boy himself refers to a sculpture of Ardhanarishwara at the Elephant Caves, off the coast of Mumbai, which he refers to as half woman good and a double gendered deity; on the other hand, he calls the hijras of today contemporary gender benders. Reminiscing about his childhood in Mumbai, when he often saw hijras roam the streets of Marine drive and elsewhere to beg and dance, he says they seemed aliens to him.

He does not describe their castration himself, but relies instead on a graphics, though orientalist, account of it provided by John Irvine, in his novel 'A son of the circus'. Since Rushdie's piece on Laxmi is essentially for a compilation of AIDS related Stories, it naturally pays lip service to India's AIDS politics out that she wants to be a voice in the HIV/AIDS campaign to help save what she, too, calls 'the third gender of India'.

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