

Tactics of Survival: Social Media, Alternative Discourses, and the Rise of Trans Narratives

Khushboo Sharma¹ and Arun Dev Pareek²

¹Research Scholar, Department of Languages, Manipal University Jaipur, Jaipur-303007, Rajasthan, India.

²Assistant Professor, Department of Languages, Manipal University Jaipur, Jaipur-303007, Rajasthan, India. ORCID: 0000-0001-5427-9906. Email: arundevpareek@gmail.com

Abstract

In 2018, when Nandini Krishnan decided to write a book on trans men of India titled 'Invisible Men', perhaps she expected great accolades. After all, she was raising a topic that was relegated to the periphery of peripheries, an identity that often went astray in translation. But was the intent enough to write something impactful and honest? At the same time in Indian Cinema, Akshay Kumar geared up for a stereotyped role as a trans woman. What's the connecting dot between these two? They ended up being nothing but highly skewed queer representations by cis-folks. Meanwhile, an alternative movement was brewing on social media as Alok Menon narrated poems of subversion, dressed as a challenge to everything heteronormative. The current paper aims to examine these voices of subversion, of trans narratives, as formed and catalyzed on social media and across various mediums of general discourses. The paper would also explore the rise of trans narratives in literature with special reference to 'Me Hijra, Me Laxmi' by Laxminarayan Tripathi and 'A Life in Trans Activism' by A. Revathi. Both exploratory and descriptive research methods are used for deriving the theoretical analysis from the primary and secondary sources.

Keywords: trans narratives, literature, voices, subversion, challenge

Introduction

If history is any proof, the tragedy of the year 2020 is sure to haunt the human psyche for decades and centuries to come. While the said tragedy has manifested in varying ways, senses, and forms for everyone across the world, for literary enthusiasts, it has been marked by the death of an author, both in the metaphorical and Barthian sense of the term.

It all started on June 4th 2020, when J.K. Rowling, in a moment of extreme transphobia decided to write a highly problematic tweet. The tweet was meant to be a commentary on a "Devex" article, titled *Opinion: Creating a more equal post-COVID-19 world for people who menstruate*. Hard to comment on the entirety of the world population and their views on it, given the conceit exhibited by Rowling herself in the case (that'd be soon divulged), the title appeared perfectly normal. To put it simply, Judith Butler would have approved the sense of gender fluidity invoked by the educated title and by relation its author who refrained from giving a fixed gender identity to "people who menstruate." Sadly, the same person who managed to create a potpourri of an inclusive

world in her fantastic vision of the *Harry Potter* franchise, failed to grasp the concept of gender inclusivity in real life.

“People who menstruate.’ I’m sure there used to be a word for those people. Someone help me out. Wumben? Wimpund? Woomud?” read her extremely transphobic tweet as a reply to the title that certainly triggered something sinister in the author. Of course, it has to be attributed to a certain myopia on the author’s part that she failed to size up the power of the popular media discourses that today are seeing a new impetus with social media. Academician Clay Shirky (2011) has talked about the very same while dwelling upon how social media has enabled people and communities to respond to problematic ideologies and opinions. He talks about how “social media have become coordinating tools for nearly all of the world’s political movements, just as most of the world’s authoritarian governments [...] are trying to limit access to it” (30). Now, given that it was on social media that the #BlackLivesMatter movement found its impetus> How hard could it have been for the queer community to call out Rowling for her blatant transphobia?

Moments after Rowling shot her first tweet, obviously gloating in her own conceit, she was bombarded with a slurry of tweets and social media open letters. Ah! open letters and the folly of assuming that you claim a certain literary superiority over those letting it all out on social media. Of course, to examine the validity of fantastical discourses and fiction in comparison to real life narratives especially during a historical movement when the world arrived at the kind of impasse that the #BlackLivesMatter movement had to be carried out during a world pandemic remains a pressing matter here. However, it is Rowling’s folly that concerns this research paper just a tad more. Inundated by the slew of criticism and social media attacks, Rowling decided to retaliate (if only she had stopped) through another series of tweets and then a highly skewed and ill-founded blogpost that only made the situation worse. And just like that a legacy was lost, one of the biggest authors of the millennium duly dead, and the *Harry Potter* franchise officially orphaned in a moment of poetic irony one might say.

Discussion

Now, here are a few questions to ponder: What made Rowling so callously look out on the simple fact that that not all people who identity with the tag “women” menstruate and more importantly, there exist many girls, trans men, and non-binary people who do? Perhaps it was one of those vitriolic movements that led feminists like Camille dismiss queer theorists as “flimflaming freeloaders.” (Barker, 138) Clearly, what’s more shocking in the fact that it was the same author who very triumphantly declared it to the world that Albus Dumbledore was, in fact, gay or in her own words had a different “sexual dimension.” Was it a moment of pink washing then? Or was it an instance of what Susan Stryker terms as “homoromantic went beyond what appeared like his cis portraiture in all the *Harry Potter* books. Was it a movity” that made her so comfortable in embracing the idea of “gay” people but turn with aversion at the idea of “trans” folks?

Closer home in India, Chetan Bhagat, while rightly sizing himself up, clearly assumed that he would not have to face the kind of scrutiny that Rowling did for transphobia? Or the entire idea of it being a transphobic act escaped him, when he tried marketing his book with the help of trans negative imagery. Surprisingly, the queer folks across what’s being referred to as *desi* social media, were quick to call him out. And while the pulp author still owes an apology to the trans community, he was made to take down the imagery within hours. Something similar was observed in the case of Akshay Kumar’s film titled *Laxmii*, in which the actor plays a trans woman. All across social media, a plethora of questions were raised: questions based on the stereotypical image of trans

people in the Indian cinema where the entire umbrella is easily sidelined to talk just about trans women who again are portrayed in the most stereotypical manner. Questions were also raised about the problematic tropes, dialogues, cultural misappropriation, and the entire idea of how *hijras* are generally portrayed in popular media in the Indian cinematic and entertainment space. But most importantly, questions were asked around the entire exercise of casting Akshay Kumar, a man playing a trans woman when no trans person has ever been given the opportunity to play a cis person in any of the films in Indian cinema.

A similar reaction was observed in the case of a recently released trailer of an Adah Sharma starrer 'web show' titled *Pati Patni aur Panga*. In the trailer, the actress is seen playing a trans man and standing while peeing, an act that is categorically attached to the idea of being a man. Ironically, from Ashutosh Rana in *Sangharsh* to Akshay Kumar in *Laxmii*, nothing has changed about the trans portraiture in Indian cinema, television, as well as majority of cis narratives. There exists something that has indeed changed: the burgeoning queer communities that have found a voice via social media.

This has been the decade of transformations, especially in case of literature. Not that there ever was a decade or year or a day in literature that wasn't rife with the flux of life of the ever changing human condition. That established, this sounds like the perfect moment to recollect two groundbreaking literary quotes. It is generally with a reference to French philosopher De Bonald's famous quote that states that "literature is an expression of society", that much discourse exploring the relationship between literature and society is built on. Society at large, can be referred to as a continuum of human nature which brings us to the next quote which happens to be equally important. "On or about December 1910 human nature changed," declared Virginia Woolf in her essay *Mr Bennett and Mrs. Brown* in 1924. Now, to put all of this together: literature is a reflection of society and by extension that of human nature and if we can put a certain finger on when (if not how) the human nature changes, we'd take the liberty of inferring that we can do the same with literature especially in the case of the past decade. It was in the year 2016 that Bob Dylan, a musician won the Nobel prize in literature "for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition." Thus, this research paper takes the liberty of signposting October 2016 as the time in contemporary literature when it underwent a definite flux. It was after all the year that challenged the distinction between "high" and "low", in what's considered as literature and what's not. If music can be regarded as literature, then why not honest-impassioned-personal accounts of gender on social media be approached with the same regard. For these annals of gender and of queer individuals' lived experiences of it are what possess the power of unlocking a world of gender positivity.

Jack Halberstam, who has done a considerable amount of work in popular culture with the attempts of "queering" it, is one of the theorists who does not discriminate against discourses. In *The Queer Art of Failure*, he thoroughly examines the low culture as a site pregnant with possibilities, of creating the sort or voices, discourses, and resistances that wouldn't have been otherwise feasible. Thus, it would be a common site if you come across a comparison of Lady Gaga nonchalantly compounded with a paragraph on, say, Foucault. (Barker, 105)

This is to say that when it comes to queer discourses, the "low" is where the magic happens and infamous as social media might be, it has proved to be an effective tool of expression in the given context. In fact, a lot of theorists and researchers vouch by it. For instance, Summer Harlow (2012) has talked in favour of social media as a tool to trigger masses. She has talked about how social media is a very potent tool to draw expansive movements that, once triggered, can easily be taken from online to offline. She refers to the phenomenon as 'Activism 2.0'. (3)

Also, if you look into the lives of trans individuals like A. Revathi and Living Smile Vidya, it would become quite apparent that a major reason behind the trans marginalization happens to be the educational and economic burden that constantly weighs them down. In her book, *A Life in Trans Activism*, Revathi shares about the economic pressures that she had to endure throughout life and how she had to endure the tolls of being a sex worker against all her wishes because there were no other ways for her to make money besides begging.

“I got into sex work because I desired men. I was able to have sexual relations with men but it was not satisfying. With Clients, you have to do what they want, especially, if you need to get paid. I was forced to have sex even when I didn’t feel like it because I needed the money. But sadly, I never got to keep even a little money from my clients on my behalf. I was terrified of asking my clients for money because I feared that they would tell my guru.” (Revathi, 22)

She further posits, “Had my family and teacher been supportive of my gender and identity when I was a child, my life would have been radically different.” (Revathi, 103) Now, how exactly do we intend to address this issue and more importantly to familiarize the cis population with them through academic theories with their many complexities? More importantly, by design, the queer theory happens to be rather treacherous as it constantly goes on dismantling its own premises. Would that approach help the marginalized communities in the queer umbrella? Wouldn’t we need to accept an identity before we go on dismantling it? To say that “gender” and “sexuality” are both societal constructs is one thing, but to experience gender in a country like India where heteronormativity is the reigning practice, it happens to be an entirely different ball game altogether.

Now, this is to be understood that from De Lauretis to Butler to Lisa Duggan, queer theorists have long resisted the idea of essentialism so much so that many of them don’t even seem categorically drawn to the idea of attaching the term “queer” to their gender theory. As we talk about trans folks, we need to first accept that it is an identity, that trans people exist, that gender dysphoria exists. While the trans identity might be an umbrella term that encompasses a number of other identities, perhaps to give the community a voice, we really need to adopt an approach that has been termed as “strategic essentialism” by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The approach can be best summed as “a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (The Spivak Reader, 214). To put it simply, while talking about the concept, Spivak delves on the idea of going beyond the differences between individuals that belong to a particular group so as to fight a common goal. For instance, members from the gay, lesbian, intersex, trans, bisexual, etc. communities come together to create discourse in queer identity while engaging in debate based on their differences within the community, or to say, trans men, trans women, intersex people, and non-binary trans people come together to talk about the struggles of the trans identity while relegating their internal differences aside.

This, in fact, is currently happening with a lot of queer groups currently on social media who have taken upon themselves to raise the LGBTQIA+ discourse. Research has further shown that these communities are using social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram to raise awareness, and create support groups. (Cerni & Talmud, 2015). The current research paper with a specific focus on the trans umbrella identifies:

Transgender India (https://www.instagram.com/transgender_india/),

Transgender Health India (<https://www.instagram.com/transhealth.india/>),

Transmen Collective (<https://www.instagram.com/transmencollective/>),

Bringing The Change (https://www.instagram.com/lgbt_india/),

Yes, We Exist (<https://www.instagram.com/yesweexistindia/>),

Queer Desi Mag (<https://www.instagram.com/queerdesimag/>),

Nazariya LGBT (<https://www.instagram.com/nazariyalgbt/>)

as some of the communities on Instagram.

Transgender India (<https://www.facebook.com/Transgender-India-224912497891952/>),

Srishti Madurai Foundation (<https://www.facebook.com/srishti.madurai.5>),

Orinem.net (<https://www.facebook.com/Orinam.net>),

Queer Ink (<https://www.facebook.com/Queer.Ink.India>),

Gaylaxy Magazine (<https://www.facebook.com/gaylaxymagazine>),

LGBTQ India News (<https://www.facebook.com/IndiaLgbtq>)

as some of the communities on Facebook.

From raising awareness about queer identities and normalizing related conversations to promoting queer individuals who are doing well and doing exceptional work in promoting this discourse, these communities are doing it all. Most important of all, these communities are working together to fight queerphobia as and when it's observed in popular media, conversations, and everyday lives. They have also been raising awareness against all the name calling, humiliation, violence, bullying, and trolling that queer individuals have to face on an everyday level in the country. That said, trans folks, on an individual level are also creating impactful discourse in the direction. Now here's an interesting proposition: queer theory is anti-binary and anti-essentialist. Instead of the "either/or" narrative, it relies on "both/and" narrative. Now given that we just kept its anti-essentialist premise aside so as to explore the trans identity, how about we play with the binary in a fashion that truly challenges essentialism especially when it concerns literature?

A. Revathi and Laxminarayan Tripathi happen to be two of the most prolific trans writers in India currently. In fact, Revathi's *'The Truth About Me'* was one of the first biographies of trans woman ever published in India. The book ended up being an eye opener and led the way to other books including *'A Life in Trans Activism.'* In this book, Revathi, at length, discusses all the issues faced by trans women and *hijra* community in India, the unique *jamaat* system followed by *hijras* in India, the quasi families that are made as part of this system, the need for a community, education, and economic independence, and also, the trans men and their hidden narratives. Revathi also throws light at the hypocrisies of a system that marginalizes trans people, renders them useless, and then judges them for trying to make ends meet by begging or doing sex work. The work owes its intensity and honesty to the fact that Revathi has lived it all. The story of Laxminarayan Tripathi or Laxmi is however different. She is a *hijra* but an educated one who embraces her true identity after finding her place in the society and the world. Laxmi's story throws light on how one can choose to be a part of the *jamaat* and yet continue to have a life of their own. Laxmi's narrative is also important because of the fact that she does not undergo *Nirvanam* unlike Revathi. These two accounts show us different sides of the same narrative and also illustrate the difference that education, financial independence, and family support can make. But more importantly, they are vital because they tell us all about what it is like to be a *hijra* or a trans woman in modern day India. Time and again, queer individuals have talked about the need of leaving queer discourses to them, to let them tell their stories for them to make sense and that indeed is the need of the hour. It was

only recently that Nandini Krishnan undertook the ambitious task of covering the narratives of trans men through her book *Invisible Men: Inside India's Transmasculine Network*. Perhaps she took a certain pride in writing a book on an identity that was left to the peripheries of the peripheries. However, was that enough to write an honest and more importantly responsible account here? The writer was duly called out right after the publication of the book as a number of trans men who had interviewed of the book were shocked by the lack of empathy and understanding exhibited by the writer. She was also called out by Gee Imaan Semmalar, a trans man who feared that the book is sure to cause more damage to the community than good. This is why he wrote in a column for *The News Minute* while drawing a parallel between her and A Revathi's book:

“*Invisible Men* by Nandini Krishnan is a poorly written book on trans men in India that would just about pass as a racy, voyeuristic thriller the privileged pick up in airports during long transits. In comparison, *A Life in Trans Activism* by A Revathi, published by Zubaan in 2016, has poignant narratives of five trans men, some of who are also part of *Invisible Men*. The treatment and portrayal of trans men in these two books is markedly different. While A Revathi has spent years with the men she accepts as her sons, and transcribes their life stories in their own words, Nandini Krishnan in her book *Invisible Men*, dissects and lays bare, in transphobic ways, the lives and bodies of the men with her voice-of-god narrative throughout.”

Now here's something more to think about. When we seek to employ literary theories on texts, the purposes can be manifold: examination, comparison, proving a hypothesis, pedagogic etc. However, when it comes to queer theory, hardly anything has been done in the Indian discourse that can be affiliated as trans specific. How about we challenge the literary theory-literary text binary here and try examining the social media discourses by drawing comparisons with A Revathi and Laxmi's books?

Take for instance, Mx. Kris Chudawala (https://www.instagram.com/sorta_kris/) who identifies as trans non-binary. They have been organizing Instagram live sessions so as to throw light on those marginalized within the trans umbrella in a series titled “Shit Queer People Say.” In a recent session (<https://www.instagram.com/p/ClS8zVn2MX/>) they discussed “Erasure within the trans community”, where they discussed the hierarchies within the trans communities and how trans men always fall at a disadvantage in comparison to trans femme individuals. Revathi's book actually gives us a very good insight here. She discusses how more often than not, trans men are not accepted within the community that is as hegemonic as any other system of gender identification. As ironic as it sounds, within the community a lot of trans women don't accept them and their identities. She writes,

“Even in the transgender community, trans men are not accepted. That's because of gender stereotypes that are so prevalent in our society. We commonly believe that a woman is defined by breasts and a vagina; a man by his penis, beard and moustache. The hijra community says, ‘We have removed our moustaches, beard and penis. We are complete women. Even if they (trans men) wear men's clothes, can they be called men?’” (Revathi, 130)

She further adds “Trans women are more visible. But this does not mean that we can erase or deny the existence of trans men.” (Revathi, 129) This is when pages like ‘Transmen Collective’ and ‘Individuals like Kris’ play an important role. Despite the rampant violence, harassment, and online trolling, they are risking it all to create a discourse on trans men, to tell the world that trans men exist. For instance, visit the ‘Transmen Collective’ on Instagram and you'd be surprised to realise how expansive is the research material that is available on this page. In a recent live session,

they held a discussion on the experience of being a trans man in North-East India while incorporating the cast, religion, and other social dynamics in the conversation. These conversations are research gold, this intersectionality is where the real discourse is created and while these trans folks might currently find themselves unable to publish books and share their stories, these social media communities are where the true archives are being created.

Alok Menon (<https://www.instagram.com/alokvmenon/>) is yet another (and very important) of these non-binary individuals who through their hard-hitting poems talk about the trans experience as a diasporic Indian. In a poem titled ‘Trans/Generation,’ he writes, ‘I understand, in my culture transgender, is not just an identity, it is a tactic of survival’ (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLPwZZjMqyI&t=171s>) in a line that should be propagated and popularized to haunt a cis normative world that somehow finds it alright to negative everything that is not binary. Alok again is a very important queer presence online sheerly for the being all that they are: the entire concept of subversion personified. For them, the human experience goes beyond gender identities and they always ensure that the message is loud and clear. For them, the societal stereotypes are props to play with, to send an important message. For them, the identity occurs and is claimed at the other side of shame, in a space when all bodies are beautiful and all gender are sacred. This might escape ci-folks but this is a very important message for someone suffering from body dysphoria. Laxmi, in her autobiography, makes sure to touch on the subject and it is all the more important because she isn’t one of those hijras who has undergone *nirvanam*. Refer to this extract from her book:

“It is believed that all *hijras* are castrated. We call it ‘Nirvana’. In the eyes of the public, we are castrated males. But that is not always the case. Castration is strictly optional and every hijra decides for herself whether or not to undergo it. Castration cannot be forced upon a hijra. Though the world believes that a castrated hijra alone is a real hijra, we do not endorse this. I am not castrated.” (156)

Now, it is important to understand that what falls beyond binary is marginalized because it is looked at as the “other” and until and unless the mystery of this “other” is revealed, it is always looked at with a suspicious glance. This is exactly why it is important to talk about trans bodies to normalize the conversation. Dr. Trinetra Haldar Gummaraju is one such individual who has long been creating discourse on the trans community and the kind of violence that they have to face on an everyday basis throughout their lives. She has effectively proven the kind of change that just a little bit of support and education can bring to the trans community. Trinetra recently finished her education, is a qualified doctor now, and took to social media to shut down each and everyone who has ever called her by a derogatory name recently. “Ch*kka, tr*nny, f*ggot, m*ttha, k*jja, and countless other titles were awarded to me. This day forward, it’s “Doctor,” she wrote in a rather powerful moment on social media. (https://www.instagram.com/p/CG-c_ODj5CU/?utm_source=ig_embed)

In fact, she is quite an “influencer”, has a verified account on Instagram, and often talks about how the trans body becomes the receiving site of both hatred and lecherous advances, the double bind of casteism and heterosexism, sexual harassment, and every single issue that bothers a trans woman today. Here’s an extract from an Instagram caption where she talks about dysphoria and internalized transphobia that even trans individuals themselves struggle with:

“Everybody has days when they’re not feeling too great about their bodies, and I have them too. Even today. Dysphoria doesn’t magically vanish with xyz intervention. It’s a dull ache with acute exacerbations thanks to the occasional transmisogynistic medical lecture, a random troll on the internet, a painful coming-out-gone-wrong on a dating app. However,

on most days, I can defocus. That's what transitioning allowed me to do. It made life manageable, it gave me more control. Dysphoria aside, you can't magically undo internalised transphobia and misogyny - you can't suddenly stop feeling the shame you were taught to feel around your body and existence, as a woman, as a trans person. We spent decades directing all that anger and hate within because it had nowhere to go. Don't assume a scalpel takes all that away - in doing so, you're placing the onus on surgical steel and not on yourself to do better." (<https://www.instagram.com/p/CGU9kSHjfW4/>)

While there might be a lot of debate over trans conversations and HRT, the trans folk do need the right sort of information and medical assistance that they require during the process. In a chapter written by Gee Imaan Semmalar in 'A Life in Tran Activism,' he talks about the harrowing experience of falling prey to a greedy doctor, Dr. Neeta Patel, who didn't think twice before performing a surgery on him that she clearly had no expertise in. He writes:

"In a week, I saw my chest disintegrating again to form the same craters of flesh and blood. I lost all desire to live. All my life I had waited for that moment. Even before I knew it was possible to transition medically, I had waited for it. Years of self-hatred and bodily shame led me to this place. Years of binding so tight I could hardly breathe. I had finally convinced myself, a psychiatrist, taken hormones, looked for doctors, got my mother this far with me on my journey and I looked down at the body I had always wanted to see and saw nothing but broken dreams. Broken dreams inside a broken chest." (Revathi, 200-201)

Revathi, in her book, talks about the lack of facilities and how most of these procedures in India are done under a shroud of secrecy and with no adherence to medical protocol whatsoever. In fact, in her book '*Our Lives Our Words Telling Aravani Lifestories*,' she puts across a vivid description of how more often than not, Nirvana operations are generally conducted by a member of the hijra community called Thayamma without any anesthesia. But that's just the beginning because what follows in a painful cycle of healing and recovery, a challenge that not everyone survives. "They put strands of hair into my mouth and asked me to keep uttering the name of the *Mata*. Since there was hair in my mouth, I uttered *Mata's* name within myself. As I was doing it, Thayamma pulled my penis and cut it in one blow with a knife. It was not painful when she cut it. After she made me sit. It was burning like hell. It was like sitting on burning fire. I could not do anything. I fainted." (Revathi, 65)

Even though Revathi herself went to a doctor for her *nirvana*, instead of Thayamma, the story remains more or less similar. This is why we need individuals who are going through HRT to share their stories, document them, and help their fellow trans people with a much-needed perspective on the subject. Prakriti Soni is one such individual who has been diligently documenting her transition and also answering questions on the subject. From questions pertaining to the side effects of gender affirming hormone therapy like mood swings to the kind of money it takes, she has been answering all of these questions for her fellow trans women. While this power of visibility can make a huge difference to trans lives, it is also how these narratives are penetrating through mainstream cis-discourses that is equally important. These trans folks and their personal testimonies are for everyone so as to normalize the conversation and to break the toxic cycle of heteronormativity. If you as a cis-Indian are currently reading this research, just think of the number of times in your life that you have been fed with trans-negative imagery and ideas. We as a country are so stuck to our heteronormative standards of thinking that we don't even think twice before relegating these people to periphery and absolutely denying their voices and validity of their struggles and experiences.

Conclusion

Thus, these trans narratives over social media are as much for cis-consumption as they are for that trans community. This has to be understood, if the systems of heteronormative ideologies had collapsed one day, we wouldn't have to address queer people as "queer," a world that had a past sullied by violence and erasure. It is also vital that we start looking at these trans folks beyond their bodies, as humans capable of love, emotions, and even heartbreak. This is where romantic trans discourses become important. Laxmi for instance, does not shy away from spilling the details on her romantic adventures. In her book *Red Lipstick: The Men in My Life*, she talks about the meaningful relationships that she forged with men, the men she fell head over heels in love with, and also the men who broke her hearts. "But, of course, I fell hard for him-hook, line, and sinker. And when I love, I love completely and madly. I cannot tame my love, I don't know how to temper it. I know only one way to love, it's who I am. I started living with him, it was my first live-in relationship, I didn't go back home for the night together and I would lie to my parents when they asked where I'd been." (Laxmi, 160)

Heartbreak and love are parts of life and let's take the example of Rituraaj Shukla, a trans man on Instagram to get a perspective. Rituraaj along with his ex-partner Aahana Majumdar rose to internet fame by sharing music covers, an art that both of them exhibit certain expertise at. To listen to them (<https://www.instagram.com/tv/CBk2OerAoRw/>) and listen to their complementing voices was to experience magic, a certain respite in a cruel world. Sadly, the two recently went through separation and haven't shied away from announcing it to the world. It is important to explore queer narratives that normalize non-binary identities and how they navigate life on a day-to-day basis and on how they experience emotions so as to invoke some humanity and break the cruel visage of heteronormativity.

While there is a sense of 'normalcy' in this narrative, there is also a gnawing sense of how happiness comes after many a struggle to these trans folks, the kind of struggles that cis-population would struggle to even fathom. Sara Ahmed in *The Promise of Happiness* (2010) explores this side of the narrative and talks about how happiness, as we perceive it, is more easily available to those who abide by the "norms" than those who go against them. To puncture this system, Ahmed insists that what we currently need is more of "unhappy queers" to get to a point where we stop believing that pleasure or happiness can be found through problematic "norms." We need more people who call out homophobia and transphobia. We need more people who freely express their discomfort with the problematic ideologies or a heteronormative world. From Alok Menon to Dr. Trinetra Haldar Gummaraju, a lot of these trans influencers on social media have been working in that direction. Whether you like it or not, they are here to drop some truth bombs. Including the words of Alok Menon, we can conclude, this is after all one of those 'tactics of survival' integral to a culture that is marred with both 'silence' and 'violence' that work in conjugation to suppress the queer narratives.

References

- Barker, M. & Scheele, J. (2020). *Gender: A Graphic Guide*. London: Icon Books.
- Barker, M. & Scheele, J. (2016). *Queer*. London: Icon Books.
- Hall, D. (2003). *Queer Theories*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Laxmi, & Pande, P. (2017). *Red Lipstick: The Men in My Life*. Gurgaon: Penguin Books India.

- Morgan, R. (2019). It's not enough for J.K. Rowling to say her characters are queer. Show it to us. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved 6 July 2020, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2019/03/18/its-not-enough-jk-rowling-say-her-characters-are-queer-show-it-us/>
- Revathi, A. (2010). *The Truth About Me*. Gurgaon: Penguin Books India.
- Revathi, A. (2011). *Our lives, Our Words*. New Delhi: Yoda Press.
- Revathi, A. (2016). *A Life in Trans Activism* (1st ed.). New Delhi: Zubaan Publishers.
- Rowling, J. (2020). J.K. Rowling Writes about Her Reasons for Speaking out on Sex and Gender Issues. *J.K. Rowling*. Retrieved 11 June 2020, from <https://www.jkrowling.com/opinions/j-k-rowling-writes-about-her-reasons-for-speaking-out-on-sex-and-gender-issues/>
- Sharma, K. (2020). As Problematic As It Gets! 8 Reasons Why You Shouldn't Watch Akshay Kumar's 'Laxmii'. *POPxo*. Retrieved 9 November 2020, from <https://www.popxo.com/trending/laxmii-movie-review--917301/>
- Sharma, K. (2020). Call Me A Doctor Now: This Trans Woman Just Shut Down Her Trolls Like A Boss. *POPxo*. Retrieved 6 November 2020, from <https://www.popxo.com/2020/11/transgender-doctor-trinetra-haldar-gummaraju/>
- Sharma, K. (2020). Chetan Bhagat Promotes New Book With Transphobic Imagery & It's Time He's Held Accountable. *POPxo*. Retrieved 16 September 2021, from <https://www.popxo.com/trending/chetan-bhagat-transphobic-post-908605/>
- Sharma, K. (2020). OMG Stop! JK Rowling Explains Her Homophobic Tweets With Yet Another Homophobic Rant. *Popxo.com*. Retrieved 11 June 2020, from <https://www.popxo.com/trending/everything-thats-wrong-with-jk-rowlings-latest-blog-post-894046/>
- Sharma, K. (2020). *Problematic And How! Adah Sharma's New Web Show Trailer Reeks Of Transphobia*. *POPxo*. Retrieved 8 December 2020, from <https://www.popxo.com/trending/adah-sharma-web-series-transphobia--923431/>
- Tripathy, L. (2015). *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* (1st ed.). New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Social Networking Sites

- Transgender India (https://www.instagram.com/transgender_india/),
- Transgender Health India (<https://www.instagram.com/transhealth.india/>),
- Transmen Collective (<https://www.instagram.com/transmencollective/>),
- Bringing The Change (https://www.instagram.com/lgbt_india/),
- Yes, We Exist (<https://www.instagram.com/yesweexistindia/>),
- Queer Desi Mag (<https://www.instagram.com/queerdesimag/>),
- Nazariya LGBT (<https://www.instagram.com/nazariyalgbt/>)
- Transgender India (<https://www.facebook.com/Transgender-India-224912497891952/>),
- Srishti Madurai Foundation (<https://www.facebook.com/srishti.madurai.5>),
- Orinem.net (<https://www.facebook.com/Orinam.net>),
- Queer Ink (<https://www.facebook.com/Queer.Ink.India>),
- Gaylaxy Magazine (<https://www.facebook.com/gaylaxymagazine>),
- LGBTQ India News (<https://www.facebook.com/IndiaLgbtq>)