

Rupkatha Journal

On Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities

ISSN 0975-2935

www.rupkatha.com

Volume VII, Number 3, 2015

General Issue

Indexing and abstracting

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SNIP, IPP and SJR Factors

Nr.	Source ID	Title	SNIP 2012	IPP 2012	SJR 2012	SNIP 2013	IPP 2013	SJR 2013	SNIP 2014	IPP 2014	SJR 2014
1	21100201709	Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities	0.313	0.034	0.1	0.271	0.038	0.116	0.061	0.007	0.101

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Representation and Categorization: Understanding the Hijra¹ and Transgender Identities through Personal Narratives

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Abstract

Following the April 2014 Supreme Court judgment, several attempts have been made to define and specify what constitute the Indian transgender identity. My paper looks at Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's autobiography *Me Hijra Me Laxmi* as an important intervention in this debate. Using literary and cinematic works by her contemporaries, I shall argue that while the categorisation of the 'third gender' may be necessary to facilitate governmental policies for the community, one has to look beyond law as a legitimizing tool as evident from the uniqueness of Laxmi's 'celebrification' and its impact within Queer activism.

Keywords: Third Gender, Hijra, Laxmi, Transgender, Queer, Supreme Court, Celebrity, Testimony

Introduction:

In December 2013, the Supreme Court reversed the 2009 Delhi High Court judgment, reinstating the constitutional validity of Section 377 originally introduced in the Indian Penal Code by the British government in 1869 to criminalise all non-procreative sexual acts. The major grounds cited for the decision include the lack of prosecution under this law and the insignificance of a "minuscule fraction of the country's population" ("Supreme Court Sets", 2013) that gets affected by it. Consequently it came as a surprise when few months later the apex court in response to a writ petition filed by NALSA and supported by activists like Laxminarayan Tripathi (Dutta, 2014, p. 225) not only recognised the transgender community as the 'third gender'² but also instructed the states to make reservation for them in employment and education sectors³. While activists have questioned the inherent contradiction between these two judgements, I argue that it makes a significant (though unintelligent) distinction between gender performativity and sexual orientation. As Jasbir Puar (1998) writes – "one must interrogate not only how the nation disallows certain queers but perhaps more urgently, how nations produce and may in fact sanction certain queer subjectivities over others" (p. 414). Any definition of the Indian transgender is bound to be flawed and limiting unless understood from its cultural context. Aniruddha Dutta points out that the two judges in the latter case failed to come to any definite understanding of the transgender: while Justice Radhakrishnan relies on gender self-determination, Justice Sikri identifies surgical evidence as primary criteria and restricts the label to the hijra community (p. 231). This

¹ In her autobiography Laxmi (she is usually identified by her first name) does not italicise terms like hijra, koti and panti. In this paper, I shall go by her example.

² Historically the term 'third gender' would come closest to '*trittiya prakriti*'. However as indicated by Ruth Vanita (2002), it was usually used to refer to those manifesting same-sex desires in ancient and medieval India rather than shaping any gender identity.

³ It must be noted that the state of Tamil Nadu had already legally recognized the community and formed a welfare board in 2008.

recognition of the hijra as a gender endemic to India is at the cost of excluding those who identify themselves only by their sexual orientations- gays, bisexuals and lesbians⁴.

As someone not belonging to the transgender community, I cannot claim to authenticate any of the experiences testified in Laxmi's book. However, as a researcher, I can try and understand the various strands of the identity politics by looking at the representations of transgender bodies. My choice of texts like Laxminarayan Tripathi's *Me Hijra Me Laxmi* (2015) and Rituparno Ghosh's Bengali film *Chitrangada: A Crowning Wish* (2012) is guided their primary focus on the hijra and transgender subjectivities respectively and problematization of these identities due to the celebrity status of the artists/subjects. I will also consider A Revathi's *Our Lives, Our Worlds* (2011)⁵—a collection of testimonies based on the theme of *izzat*⁶--since being written by a fellow hijra, it not only authenticates Laxmi's narrative but also probes into the specificities while contesting any attempt to homogenize them under umbrella terms like 'LGBT'. In this process I shall also explore the relationship between gender and genre as evident from Laxmi's work that heralds a new form of life-writing.

The Hijra Body and Transgender Subjectivity:

Judith Butler (1999) writes: "Assuming for the moment the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of 'men' will accrue exclusively to the bodies of men or that 'women' will interpret only female bodies" (p. 10). This is best explicated in the performativity of the hijra identity which paradoxically both subverts gender binaries and demands inclusion and recognition within the heteronormative traditions of family and marriage. While the modern transgender became the subject of sexological discourses in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe⁷, the category of the hijra is endemic to South Asia with stories of their origin being part of Hindu epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*⁸. In her testimony *Me Hijra Me Laxmi*, Laxmi breaks several myths and stereotypes governing the average onlooker's perception of hijras. Citing the etymology of the term, she says- "The word 'hij' refers to the soul, a holy soul. The body in which the holy soul resides is called 'hijra'" (p. 39). The hijra's body is referred to as a "trap not just to the hijra itself who suffocates within it but to the world in general that wrongly assumes a hijra to be man" (p. 40). Then what is the hijra's relationship with the material body? Is this "felt sense" of the body contiguous with the visible body? (Salamon, 2010, p. 18). While sex and gender are contested terms, the body is believed to be material. Hence the hijra arrives at his or her⁹ subjectivity through a complex process of self-determination irrespective of whether she or he chooses to undergo castration. Laxmi distinguishes between a hijra and a hermaphrodite: "a hermaphrodite has both male and female sex organs at birth, whereas a hijra is always born as a male" (2015, p. 173). The performativity of the hijra identity is best manifested in sartorial terms as evident from Laxmi's pictures before and after being inculcated into the community. Emphasizing her love for dressing up as a woman, she comments in an interview-"I never thought I would do

⁴ In the Afterword to Laxmi's book, R.Raj Rao suggests that the ambiguity of the judgment may lead to its manipulation by opportunist men posing as hijras.

⁵ Revathi's *A Truth About Me* (2010) is arguably the first in the "genre of hijra literature" (Rao, 2015, p. 187)

⁶ which is also central to Gayatri Reddy's well researched work *With Respect to Sex* (2005)

⁷ In the medical model of the 'sexual invert', studied by Havelock Ellis (1927) the categories of the homosexual and the transgender tend to overlap.

⁸ It is beyond the scope of this paper to delve into the myths of their origin.

⁹ I am a bit wary of gender neutral pronouns like 'hir'. For Laxmi, I will use only female pronouns since she identifies herself as a 'woman'.

make-up but now make-up is Laxmi.” (“Laxmi’s Sole Mission”, 2015) While Laxmi identifies herself as a “woman” (2015, p. 40), she has not undergone the customary *nirvana* or any sex reassignment surgery¹⁰. Gayatri Reddy (2005) argues that in the Hyderabad hijra community a “real” hijra is like an “ascetic or sannyasi completely free of sexual desire” and the *nirvana* operation is essential to attain that status (p. 56). This castration of the male genital is also important to become a “*badhai*” hijra who occupies a higher status in the hierarchy than the “*Kandra*” hijra who earns money through sex work (Ibid). Therefore within the community, homosexuality is not a marker of hijra identity but those of ‘kotis’- effeminate men who engage in sex work (p. 62). The need or desire for *nirvana* is often characterised by the expectation of womanhood as evident in Revathi’s collection where Radha chooses to undergo circumcision in the hands of *Thayamma*: “I prefer *Thayamma* since there was a belief that *Thayamma*’s *nirvanam* would make one look exactly like a woman!” (2010, p. 64). Not being castrated herself, Laxmi contradicts Reddy’s research finding that circumcision is an essential requirement of a pure hijra identity by stating that this belief is held by a “minority” section (2015, p. 175). However when Laxmi needs a passport to attend the Sixteenth World AIDS Conference in Toronto, she realizes that not being castrated she cannot get the required certificate. Gayle Salamon (2010) writes that “in psychoanalysis the body is available to the subject through a complex set of mental representations of psychic images designated alternately as the bodily ego and body schema” (p. 18). It is only when she manages to get a statement from a doctor who relies on her psychological self-determination to attest her womanhood, that Laxmi is able to attend the event. In an article written immediately after the NALSA judgment, Vikramaditya Sahai remarks that “bodies are bodies only as much as they are intelligible to the norms of recognition, i.e., the body must conform to the norm of the body else it is not recognized as a body” (“Bodies Beyond Rights”, 2014). With the law yet to construct the category of the ‘third gender’, Laxmi therefore chooses to be listed as a ‘woman’ –one of the two legitimate genders. This also suggests the inefficacy of surgical proof as a means to recognize the transgender body. Else those like Laxmi cannot be considered a hijra and subsequently becomes unfit for any reservation¹¹. If ‘sex’ is a designation to be given and governed by the state, the latter needs to be more equipped in its understanding of the ‘third gender’.

While the gender dysphoria of the hijra subverts essentialist binaries and negates the society, the community conforms to its own hierarchies. Laxmi writes- “We hijras virtually have a parallel social structure. There are seven hijra gharanasA person who decides to become a hijra must find a guru to perform her initiation rite and ‘reet’. The guru then becomes the hijra’s mother and she, the chela....It is a vast extended family” (p. 174). As evident from Reddy’s study, the ‘reet’ ceremony is matter of *izzat* in the *gharana* since without a guru a hijra is considered an “*andoli*” or illegitimate (p. 162). As the hallmark of an ascetic is the renunciation of family ties, “hijras are expected to cut off all ties with their natal families” (2005, p. 154). However since Laxmi’s family embraces her new identity, she is reluctant to stay with her guru, *Lataguru* who is reasonably miffed: “why must you cling on to the male-female society?” (2015, p. 72). As an example of her family support, Laxmi cites how in the show *Sach Ka Saamna*, her father had remarked, “Why should I expel Laxmi from the family? I am his father, he is my responsibility” (p. 123). This is almost utopic for the hijras in Revathi’s collection, who have to battle with their male family members over property rights.

¹⁰ However as a child, Laxmi struggles to accept her body: “...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?” (p. 22)

¹¹ It is a different question whether she needs one. Also it is ironical that being born a Brahmin, she can only claim this reservation under OBC category

Gayatri Reddy claims that the guru-chela symbiotic relationship is central to the community's conception of family with the koti-panti¹² relationships being largely unstable (p. 152). However in Revathi's book, Rajam is happily married to a man and undergoes castration surgery only after her marriage to 'normalise'¹³ the union. The need to seek refuge in heteronormativity is also prominent in the desire for *chhati* or breasts for which the hijras resort to drugs (2005, p. 133). While hand-clapping is the ubiquitous symbol of a hijra, breasts become the most visible marker of a woman. However as seen in Ghosh's film *Chitrangada*, Partho's rejection of his transgender lover Rudra's breast implants suggests the inability of science to contest the biological category of 'women'¹⁴. This is also highlighted by the hijra legend of Tarabai whose desire to conceive leads to her death (Ibid). Urvashi Butalia (1998) suggests that for both the researcher and the subject, the task of "exploring memory can never be separated from the ethics of such an exploration" (p. 366). Consequently Revathi, the hijra-researcher is conscious enough to problematize her collection by including accounts of Aruna and Rati whose stories refuse to exoticise hijra marriages by highlighting their complexities. This also gives us a different perspective from that of Laxmi's autobiography which has very little of the protagonist's sexual life.

Authenticity and 'Celebrification':

The title of Laxmi's autobiography foregrounds her hijra identity¹⁵ using 'Me' which is associated with the public self rather than 'I' which is more private. By doing so it strategically places the work under the militant genre of 'testimonio' that claims to record the collective trauma of the community. It can also be identified as what Pamele Caughie (2013) describes as a "transgenre" that "disrupts conventions of narrative logic by defying pronominal stability, temporal continuity, and natural progression. It thereby demands a new genre, a transnarrative" (p. 503). Since Laxmi's narrative mostly relies on individual memory and witnessing, it is open to contestation. In a scathing review Ashok Raw Kavi, a gay activist who is part of Laxmi's "pilgrimage"¹⁶ criticises the book for sounding like an exotic fairy tale: "what gets tiresome is Laxmi's huge 'I'. The book is full of 'I's..." ("Fables and Half-Truths", 2015). However such prioritization of personal narrative is important to celebrate the hijra identity – "Hijras are considered ugly. But when I see Laxmi- tall, sturdy, beautiful and confident- my stereotypes are automatically destroyed" (Rao, 2015, p. 225). R Raj Rao cites the complexity of translating a piece that is ghost-written: "what complicates the work is that it was not authored by Laxmi herself...but was written by Vashali Rode, a Marathi journalist to whom Laxmi spoke. The disadvantage of this kind of reportage is that it relies too heavily on the spoken word and thus risks being rambling and sloppy in structure" (p. 212, 213). Despite Rao's "cleaning up" (p. 213) the text is beset with several repetitive instances, making it more of a memoir. On more than one occasion Laxmi emphasizes her family lineage stating that she was born in a Brahmin household with a strong sense of heritage (p. 37, 137). While this may be a strategy to package her as a 'different' hijra and dismiss the notion that most hijras hail from

¹² A 'panti' is the Koti's 'masculine' male partner who passes off as the latter's husband.

¹³ As evident from the brouhaha over the recent US Supreme Court judgment, same-sex marriages rather than being subversive, betray a streak of homonormativity.

¹⁴ The context will be discussed later when I shall focus on the film in its entirety.

¹⁵ In popular usage the term 'hijra' may refer to any 'effeminate' male. Laxmi's identification with the term in the title seeks to reclaim its status as a cultural construct.

¹⁶ As sarcastically described by Kavi.

the lower class and caste, it tends to overdo her exclusivity, betraying a streak of narcissism and condescension.

Though Laxmi's narrative is similar to Revathi's collection in terms of the specific tropes of sexual abuse, attempted suicide and use of aggression as a means of survival; my primary focus on the former's text is influenced by the author's unique status –that of a celebrity. Citing the French word *célèbre* which means “well known in public”, Chris Rojek (2001) states that “mass media representation is the key principle in the formation of celebrity culture” (p. 15). While an English educated hijra is bound to find some favour with mass media, Laxmi's ‘celebrification’ is not merely a creation of popular interest. Unlike Jairaj in Mahesh Dattani's *Dance Like a Man* (1989), Laxmi not only manages to overcome the stereotypical image of classical dance as being a female domain, but also uses it as a tool of dissent. Soon from being a dance teacher, she becomes a model-coordinator, getting her first stint with fame and glamour when she performs in an album, *Lavani on Fire*. Since this event is preceded by her decision to join the hijra *gharana* in 1998 (p. 42), one can conclude that it is Laxmi, the dancer rather than Laxmi, the hijra who takes the initial step towards ‘celebrification’. Laxmi's education helps her to be the chairman of DWS even as she later starts her own group MTPS (Maharashtra Trutiya Panthi Sanghatana) and empowers the hijra sex workers. However her purism is apparent when she clarifies that she herself has never used sex as a profession (p. 35). Ostensibly privileging morality and responsibility over stardom, she takes pride in an instance when she rejected the Bollywood star Salman Khan's offer to participate in a show because she had to attend a meeting in New York (p. 121). Laxmi however is critical of her desire “to be famous” when she recollects how she had signed up for the television show *Big Boss* despite her father's illness (p. 125). Though she succumbs to what Rojek calls an “abstract desire for commodification” (p. 191), unlike the fellow celebrities whom she meets at the show, Laxmi's ‘celebrification’ is fuelled by her social activism, using the platform to “make the viewers aware that hijras are normal people, just like them” (p. 125).

In the Foreward to Revathi's *Our Lives, Our Words* Gautam Bhan (2011) suggests that the stories should not be considered only as testimonies but also recognized as “tales of rights and citizenship” (p. viii). Laxmi's recognition allows her to merge her transgender self with the geopolitical nation-space that until April 15, 2014 did not recognize her gender identity. During a conference she realizes: “I was no longer just Laxmi, the hijra; I was India” (p. 109). In the nationalist movement, the country has mostly been imagined as a mother (*Bharat Mata*) who needs to be protected by her sons. Consequently all non-reproductive sexualities have been denied legitimacy within the heteronorm. As Leela Gandhi (2006) argues –“after Darwin, the colluding discourses of evolutionary anthropology and psychology hermetically sealed the frontiers of ‘civilized’ community...only admitting certain forms of human alliance” (p. 36). Laxmi's association of the nation's geopolitical body with the physical body of the transgender is a potential counter-discourse where the nation-state is re-imagined as being androgynous. It claims acceptance and rights to be included in the list of legitimate bodies under the Indian law. This is part of a homonationalist strategy to locate the hijra identity within the nationalist discourse as also evident from their rendition of the national anthem on the occasion of India's Independence Day 2015.

Visibility and ‘celebrification’ come with their own sense of vulnerability. In his *Introduction to Visual Culture* Mirzoeff (1999) refers to Foucault's argument about the panopticon where “visibility is a trap” (p. 50). Reddy points out that visibility makes the average hijra “wary of scholars and journalists alike, and this attention has also heightened scrutiny by local disciplinary regimes, including the police” (p. 3). In most cases they are used as ‘native informants’ (to use

Spivak's term) for the mainstream media who exoticise their experiences. This may explain Lataguru's disapproval of Laxmi's self-fashioning as a voice of the community in popular media. The latter ends up paying penalties for these transgressions while emphasizing the need for the hijra community to embrace change –

“I was all but ostracized.... But my chelas stood by me. They were proud of me because I was educated and had a mind of my own” (p. 160).

Perhaps to publicize this dissidence, Laxmi not only composes her autobiography but authenticates it with photographs of the most significant moments of her life including meetings with celebrities, appearances at international conferences and dance performances. This is a significant attempt at completing her ‘celebrification’ (or as in this case self-celebrification) and dismantling any charges whatsoever of name-dropping. In fact Laxmi's references to fellow well known hijras like Shabnam Mausi and Revathi, popular medieval text *Kamasutra*, Stonewall riots and Bangkok ‘ladyboys’ ; all establish her awareness of Queer history and politics, thereby attesting her identity as a ‘different’ hijra.

Despite this ‘celebrification’, Laxmi is helpless when her *chela* Subhadra goes missing and is later found dead. Even as she is advised not to claim the body, Laxmi confronts the police who “would arrive at the most unearthly hour and randomly pick anyone of us up for questioning” (p. 57). The case is finally closed for lack of evidence- “A hijra's death, nay murder, didn't seem to matter to anyone” (Ibid). This is akin to Mahesh Dattani's account in *Seven Steps Around the Fire* (1998) where Kamla, a hijra gets murdered after marrying a Minister's son Subho and her friend Anarkali is accused of the crime. The violence against the hijra and her construction as an outlaw is a part of our colonial legacy that can be traced to the British imperialism's need to regulate sexuality¹⁷. In his article *Being a Eunuch*, Siddharth Narrain provides a detailed account of the laws used to victimise the community:

“The violence that the hijra community faces from the police can be traced to the 1897 amendment to the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, which was subtitled ‘An Act for Registration of Criminal Tribes and Eunuchs’. Under this law, the local government was required to keep a register of the names and residences of all eunuchs who were ‘reasonably suspected of kidnapping or castrating children or committing offences under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code’” (2003, para. 14)

He further argues that The Immoral Traffic Prevention Act of 1956 (amended in 1986), “whose stated objective is to criminalise brothel-keeping, trafficking, pimping and soliciting, in reality targets the visible figure of the sex worker and enables the police to arrest and intimidate the transgender sex-worker population” (para. 16). According to Mirzoeff, those “who could be observed could be controlled” (p. 51). Hence the hijra's hypervisible androgynous body becomes an easy target to legitimize one's masculinity: violence often being “the single most marker of manhood” (Kimmel, 1994, p. 150). Thus while Laxmi's celebrity status has enhanced the visibility of her community across popular media, it has foregrounded her vulnerability as a homosexual who can be penalised under Section 377. This further justifies Laxmi's repeated attempts to distinguish between the persecutions faced by the hijra and those by the mainstream gay or MSM (Men having Sex with Men) because the latter identify themselves as “men” and can easily melt into the “everyday world” (p. 33).

¹⁷ As evident from Gandhi's argument (cited earlier).

Art and Gender Fluidity in Ghosh's *Chitrangada*:

While dance acts as a “therapy” for Laxmi and is significant to her “true self” (p. 25), it is equally central to Rituparno Ghosh’s film whose protagonist Rudra is also an artist and a celebrity. The film is a contemporization of Tagore’s 1935 dance drama, *Chitrangada* which was itself a modern rendering of the legend in *Mahabharata*. As a critique of the monolithic understanding of nationalism, Tagore’s works often tend to celebrate gender dysphoria and transgressive sexual desires. Unlike Vyasa’s version, in Tagore, Lord Shiva’s boon to the Manipuri king is for a single son (rather than a single child) in each successive generation so that when Chitrangada is born she is brought up as a son (Satpathy, 2015, p. 176). In the frame narrative within the film, Rudra played by Ghosh himself is acutely conscious of Chitrangada’s construction as a manly princess warrior. Thus he chastises the dancer Kasturi for her feminine body language- “What is this? Do you think you are Radha playing Holi... It does not matter if you are wearing a sari or a pant...Chitrangada is conditioned to be a man!”¹⁸ Unlike Laxmi, the hijra; Rudra, the transgender artist does not recognize sartorial factors as being significant markers of one’s gender. While explaining to the doctor why he wants to undergo the sex reassignment surgery, he makes it very clear that it is only a means to be certified a ‘woman’- “I will not wear a sari or salwar. For me it is nothing more than a cosmetic surgery”¹⁹ Calling the play “a story of wishes”, Ghosh emphasizes that gender is a matter of choice. Like Laxmi’s narrative, Ghosh foregrounds the performative qualities of dance as a mode that is genderless and also beyond gender –“My dance is not limited by my gender. Neither is my identity.”

If *Me Hijra Me Laxmi* is a revelation of the hijra identity, Ghosh’s film is a celebration of androgyny. The name ‘Rudra’ is popularly associated with Lord Shiva and hence alludes to the androgynous figure of *ardhanareshwara*²⁰, symbolising the union of the masculine and feminine energies of the universe. The director-cum-actor Ghosh internalizes the myth of Chitrangada by using Partho, another name for Arjuna, as the primary reason for whom Rudra decides to undergo sex change so that they can adopt children. The role of Indian legal system as a regulatory body is once again underlined when Rudra remarks that a gay couple does not have adoption rights²¹. While Chitrangada’s transformation by Madan, the Lord of Love is more in terms of her gender performance, Rudra’s sex change which is in realist mode leaves him traumatized as he requests the nurse not to address him as “sir”. However, following his breast implantation, he finds support from his parents including his father who initially had asked him to consult a psychiatrist. In a conversation with her husband, Rudra’s mother questions the essentialist beliefs: “One’s nature decides what is natural to him. Nature too has its own desires.” When Rudra’s father intends to change the will so that his son (who would now be a woman), need not face any legal complexities while inheriting the property, Ghosh resists it by questing the very permanence of bodily reality or any relationships. While Rudra is empowered by his class and profession to be unconcerned about paternal property, Revathi’s hijra friends who are exploited by their families cannot afford such a luxury.

¹⁸ Most of the quoted lines from the film have been translated by me.

¹⁹ In fact in real life, Ghosh celebrates his androgyny not by wearing clothes traditionally ascribed to Indian women but by seeking unisex sartorial accessories as also evident from the interview cited in Satpathy’s essay.

²⁰ The deity is often worshipped by the hijra community.

²¹ Despite the legal ambiguity on this issue, Rudra could have adopted (though only a male child) as a single father. Hence his decision seems abrupt even though necessary for the progression of the plot.

Rudra's initial acceptance of Partho, a drug addict in his dance troupe is guided by a "capacity of radical kinship" (Gandhi, 2006, p. 36) since the latter too faces societal marginalisation. Though Ghosh (unlike Laxmi) does not shy away from the sexual aspect of this relationship, the movie escapes any censorship since in contrast to *Fire* (1996) and *Girlfriend* (2004) it focuses more on gender performance than sexuality²². The protagonist's decision alienates his lover to such an extent that he rejects the artificial "half thing" in favour of a "full woman" –Kasturi. This, along with his intimate conversations with Subho, an extension of his traumatised psyche during the liminal stage of sex change, enables Rudra to recognize the futility of his "martyrdom"²³. His final decision not to undergo vaginal reconstruction and do away with the breast implants is also influenced by his parental support as now he need not seek an alternate Queer Home. Thus both Rudra and Laxmi reject artificial bodily changes, privileging only gender performativity.

Conclusion:

The commonalities between Ghosh and Laxmi's texts notwithstanding, one should be wary of constructing a homogenous Indian transgender identity. This was particularly apparent when recently India's "first transgender principal"²⁴, Manobi Bandopadhyay was made the Vice-Chairman of West Bengal Transgender Board much to the disapproval of the hijra community who sees her as being elitist²⁵. This further underlines the need to broaden the definition of the 'third gender' and in fact go beyond such homogenous labels. However one should not simply rely on law as the primary mode of recognition²⁶, since the current judgment largely caters to the male-to-female transgender and clubs the community with OBC (Other Backward Classes) for reservation purposes. Moreover as evident from Laxmi's autobiography and Revathi's collection both the castrated and non-castrated hijras may choose to identify themselves as 'women' rather than as 'third gender'. Laxmi is also a Brahmin and claims (if any) by the like of her to be included in OBC quota are likely to be contested.

In her essay, 'The Empire Writes Back', Sandy Stone (1992) suggests that transsexuals be considered as a genre rather than a 'third gender'—"a set of embodied texts whose potential for productive disruption of structured sexualities and spectra of desire has yet to be explored" (p.165). This is also relevant for Laxmi, the transgender, irrespective of whether her archiving of individual memory makes it a reliable source of subaltern history. Her 'celebrification' has further enabled the "recognition and celebration of lifestyles, beliefs and forms of life previously unrecognized and repressed" (Rojek, 2001, p. 191). Perhaps Laxmi's biggest achievement lies in restoring the cultural exclusivity of the term hijra, reclaiming it from its derogatory usage within

²² Also these films were themed upon lesbianism, an identity not even recognized by Section 377 but whose representation comes under the purview of The Indecent Representation of Women Act 1986.

²³ The theme of martyrdom is best enacted in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* where Stephen's upbringing has an uncanny similarity with that of Tagore's Chitragada.

²⁴ Dr Bandopadhyay is a transsexual. The connotations of these identities indicate the use of 'transgender' as a homogenous umbrella term.

²⁵ As reported by a Bengali newspaper.

²⁶ In Sri Lanka instead of decriminalizing Section 365 (similar to Section 377), the legal reform expanded its scope to include women offenders (Puri, 2012, p. 102).

the heteronorm²⁷. Though the ethics of writing this testimony can be further analysed, one can not dismiss its significance as a celebration of hijra identity.

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²⁷ This is not unlike the reclaiming of the term 'Queer' as problematized by Butler in *Bodies That Matter* (1993).

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