

RECOGNIZE ME: NORMALIZING QUEERNESS IN MANOBI'S A GIFT OF GODDESS LAKSHMI

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ABSTRACT

Literature plays a crucial role in shaping the ideologies of a society as it has the power to influence the psyche of the people unconsciously. Queer is one such literature that is gaining prominence today. Queer is a strange as well as a fashionable term used to refer to particular group who are called non-heterosexuals categories like gay, lesbians, bisexuals and transgenders. It was only after colonization that the transgenders were relegated as others. Once we had a system of worshipping the 'Ardhanareeswara' role of Lord Shiva. Another instance can be also traced back to the epic *Mahabharata* in depicting Srigandi in the war of Dharma. But as soon as we began to adopt European culture our myths and ideologies began to get eroded this was how marginalization acquired new shape in the form of biological constitution apart from casteism that already pervaded in India. It is believed that queer theory has acquired the notion of gender solidarity from Feminism specially from the works of Simone de Beauvoir. This sort of discrimination is clearly employed in her work *Second Sex*. Queer resists homogeneous definition of multiple identities and opposes all totalising discourse of gender. Such totalising discourse is rooted in the static

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sexual identity of an individual. The understanding of self is concrete , but the identity of the Other is stereotypic and edges towards caricature. Queer theory challenges the powerful forces that attempt to render sexual minorities invisible. It questions the predetermined gender notions. And argues that as per the existence of male and female the existence of the transgender is also a fact and we have no right to deny their rights or hinder them from exploring their opportunities. But the heteronormative people hinders their right to live in world which forces them to create a new space and time which can be addressed as Queer Space and Queer Time which exist outside the so called normal world. Manobi raises a claim for her identity through her memoir *A Gift Of Goddess Lakshmi* and tries to gather our attention towards trans-sexuality in India. This thesis shows how she builds a queer space and queer time outside the normal temporality. The objective of this dissertation is to make aware the society that this sort of marginalization can lead to severe psychie disorders in people who are referred to as Hijras in the Indian context. So the paper entitled **Recognize Me: Normalizing Queerness in Manobi's A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi** describes the traumatic experience which Manobi was forced to face in search of her identity. This thesis argues that they too are an independent entity. They too have opinions so instead of blurring their identity try to accept them as they are.

Keywords: Transgender, Identity, Marginalization, Queer Space, Queer Time.

INTRODUCTION

Queer is an Umbrella term that includes a wide range of non-heterogeneous categories like Gay, Lesbians, Bisexuals, Transgenders and Intersex. Presently Queer theory is gaining prominence in literature. The term has a wide and divergent meaning. It simply means something strange. Queer theory critically examines and reexamines the way power works to institutionalize some peculiar forms and expressions of sexuality probably the so called "normal" by stigmatizing the other. Queer theory problematizes and questions the rigid gender rules out forwarded by the heteronormative society and the hegemonic norms they justify. These lead to a deconstruction of gender roles which they are asked to play and enables them to reclaim and then to reconstruct an identity of their own, they are asked to deconstruct the existing gender norms and then to reconstruct it because they occupy a paradoxical space in the boundary continuum of male and female. Transgender people are those individuals whose gender identity do not pertain to their biological sex thus differ from the stereotype of men and women normally are. Sex is a biological constitution where gender is a social construction.

It is often believed that Queer shares its idea of gender solidarity from Feminism and the urge to create an identity of their own from Subaltern studies. Both theories aim to create a history of their own through the medium of literature as it is the most powerful tool that can be used to bring changes in the post modern era.

Gender Performativity was a term coined by Judith Butler, in his book *Gender Trouble*. He clearly depicts how performativity is connected with precarity. Precarity is directly linked with gender norms. Gender norms is a part and parcel of performativity. Therefore, Precarity is linked with Performativity. In a nutshell it

simply means that those who fail to perform the predetermined gender roles are in danger. They will be punished or criminalized. Thus they are thrown out from the fluid of protection offered by the government to his citizens. This is what that happens with transgender or the so called people who comes under the term Queer directly linked with gender norms. Gender norms is a part and parcel of performativity. Therefore, Precarity is linked with Performativity. In a nutshell it simply means that those who fail to perform the predetermined gender roles are in danger. They will be punished or criminalized. Thus they are thrown out from the fluid of protection offered by the government to his citizens. This is what that happens with transgender or the so called people who comes under the term Queer.

Marginalization of the transgenders is a intercontinental affair that has gained a universal attention from both orient and occident, developed and the undeveloped, North and South. The Supreme Court of India was raised the homogenous groups into "third gender" by the Special act of 2014 but still the heteronormative world considers the third gender as Other. We hinder them from coming to the mainstream of the society. The dimension of third gender or the so called "Others" manifest in various social and cultural forms. The third gender persons are marginalized and their identity is often blurred or sidelined in the hegemonic system of binaries of being masculine and feminine because of their perception of sexual orientation and identity. For humans our concept of gender is predetermined as masculine and female as we belong to a heteronormative world. But for us "Hijra" (a synonym for transgender used in India) The emergence of this word can be traced back to the Arabic word "Hjr" which literally means leaving one's tribe.

In our country, India Hijra is an awkward term used to refer to people who is biologically male and psychologically a female as they do not belong to the predetermined notion of the generally accepted ones they are referred to as third

gender. It is a very pathetic situation that we who are living in this postmodern era, where we believe that there is no absolute truth, has reluctance to accept these people who are called "Others". So it is the absolute failure of our education system and the domination of Essentialism over Existentialism where essence precedes existence. "Gender is a social organization of different kinds of bodies into different categories of people" (Stryker 11).

The existence of third gender can be traced back to the brahmanical period. It was only after colonization that the transgenders were considered as "Others". We had a rich culture of worshipping the Ardhanarishvara role of Lord Shiva. Instances can also be traced back to the epic *Mahabharata* in portraying Shikandi in the war of Dharma. These are valid proof to show that the existence of third gender is not a myth but a reality. At that time hijra was given their own social status; their identity was also accepted. But with the arrival of British to India we began to adopt Western culture; through this adoption our myth and ideologies began to get eroded. This was how marginalization assumed new shape in the form of biological constitution apart from casteism. This resulted in the change of our perspective towards transgenders; the society began to exploit them on the sexuality and their identity was blurred and sidelined.

These relegated sections of society were forced to undergo several traumatic disorders; this can either be historical or psychological and they used literature specially autobiographies as a medium to express their feelings. Through this they tried to reclaim their lost status and also to erode the ideologies by which their existence was devalued. Now these life narratives have emerged as an independent genre and politically significant due to their quest for equality. So through the life narrative *A Gift Of Goddess Lakshmi* critically analyze the marginalization of transgender community and how she developed a queer space and queer time outside the normal temporality. She argues for the dignity of transgender and stresses that they too have desires. Manobi through her memoir

exhibits the traumatic journey of a transgender who not only tries to assert her identity but tries to give a voice for her community.

Manobi's autobiography entitled *A Gift Of Goddess Lakshmi* clearly depicts the courageous journey of a transgender to assert her identity and how she explored her opportunities. The life narrative clearly pictures out the struggles that she had to face at various levels starting from the conflict with her inner self to society as a whole. This work clearly tells us how difficult it is to lead a woman's life in a man's body.

There were several instances in her life that she was confused with her identity, because she was well aware that she had no essence of a man, that a man is supposed to have. These lead her into a deep trauma that she questioned her emotions and thoughts.

I was very confused; my life seemed like a never-ending maze - each time I arrived at the same bend. Who was I? Why my body different from my soul or I was mistaking my identity? Why I was born this way? Was it some past karma for which I was being made to pay so dearly? What could I do to escape this trap? (Bandyopadhyay 31)

These lines clearly indicate her inner agony because her identity does not pertain to the generally accepted ones. She was very confused, it also stresses on the superstition that if a child is not born as male or as female it is a curse or it is the price for his or her karma.

There were times in my life when I doubted myself the path I took. In such instances, my mind would go into the state of flux and the turmoil would sear me within. Am I really a woman trapped in a man's body or are these just delirious thoughts? Why is it that the whole world thinks of me as a man who is nothing more than a sissy? My soul and sexuality does not match the image I saw in the

mirror..I felt like tearing away and escaping from the man's body in which I was born.(Bandyopadhyay109).

Though she was relegated from the main strata of the society due to the power of quality education her life became fruitful. Though she faced many obstacles she never stepped back. As she was going to pursue her graduation from Naihati's Rishi Bankim Chandra College. She was insulted by her fellow beings. She shares

Some started clapping their hands in glee when they saw me, some just whistled and catcalled and soon taunts filled the air. I hadn't expected this scene. In school, I had faced ridicule once in a while but my friends generally liked me. I was shocked at such a reaction but something inside told me to brace myself to face this and not display any sign of weakness.(40)

In her journey towards self assertion she cracks many achievements. She published the first Indian transgender magazine *Abomanob* it helped in developing a status for the transgenders in a heteronormative world. She wrote several articles in the famous magazine *Malini*. As soon as she started small scale writings she was respected by people. She was sure that education made this difference. So she decided to pursue her Post Graduation from Jaipur University it was a blissful experience as all the people who were there were open minded, they were ready to accept her as she was. She received the idea of sex reassignment surgery from Shankha Ghosh. While she was doing her M.Phil she worked as a part time teacher.

As she was appointed as teacher her affinity towards femininity was a major problem to the society. She joins Manjushri Chaki Sarkar's group. She made a dance troupe named "Ardhanarishwar Natya Sanstha" in the leadership of Jagadish who is also a transgender. Education helped her to heal his wounded wings and helped her to come up with flying colours. She proudly states

In many ways I consider myself far more fortunate than transgender people like Jagadish. If my family had not supported me despite my oddity and forced me to excel in studies, God knows where I would have ended up (75).

So her achievement was an inspiration to all members in her community and made them aware that That can do it and they should do it. So she asks each one of her sisters to make a space of their own the Queer Space and make use of the the present time the Queer Time. She states that her career as a college professor was not so easy. She was forced to face many torments and insults. She recollects the harsh experience. They press her nipples hard and pull her hair to check whether it is real or wig. She was very well aware that education was the only weapon that enabled her to fight against the heteronormative society.

Once again I realized that despite the reservations I had expressed about my parents and sisters opposing my sexuality, I could not deny their contributions to my life. Had they not kept a strict eye on me and pushed me to complete my education and focus on my career, Who knows where I would have ended up? (114)

By the sex reassignment surgery of 2003 her desire to become a woman was fulfilled by Dr Khanna in 2003. So she proudly says she has corrected the mistake that nature has made so she redefined her identity as Manobi. Her journey towards victory continued. She became India's First Transgender Principal, though she had to work hard she was able to enjoy the fruit of her labour.

Though the judiciary has accepted the role of transgenders in society, some religiously fanatic people still exploit them in the name of God. The case of Manobi is just a rare case who was able to succeed in life because she had a huge support from her family and the education she has acquired. So give everyone their chance, never deny their right to education but hindering it we are hindering their right to live. We were the one who hindered them from chasing their opportunity, and we molest them in public. We are the only one who

pushed them into begging and slave work. So never mock at them, Never deny their right to education it is the only way that they could make a means to live. So togetherly let us make a world a better place to live in. So Let us open our eyes, hear with our ears, and join our hands together for a better tomorrow.

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