
Not A Disorder: A Deep Insight Into Vidya's Narrative *I Am Vidya*

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ABSTRACT

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Gender and sex are two terms that are often used synonymously but they differ from each other in a wide variety of ways. The difference does not only lie in their meanings but also the context in which they are used. The very fact that Sex is a biological entity declares it different from gender which is a social construction. The medical institution in the words of Michael Foucault labels the gender of a child as male and female. The society decides the roles that these genders ought to play and expects them to behave accordingly. In this construction of gender as male and female, what is left behind are those who do not identify as either and they are termed as 'QUEER', or 'THIRD GENDER'. The identity of a person is identified by which gender it relates to. Third gender people are those who do not relate to either male or female. Their biological identity does not match with their gender identity. The third gender has been into existence since ancient times. Nevertheless, their existence is highly neglected by our society. Back in the ancient times they enjoyed a reputed status just like the other members of the society. The ancient texts witness the three categories of sex, male, female and the third gender. In the Indian society which is highly patriarchal in its approach towards gender, where the third gender do not find a place. Our society in general considers only male and female as normal and debars those who fall for any other category. The society disregards those who do not identify as male and female and grants them an inferior status. They are known by names like Hijra, Kothi, Eunuchs, tirunangais, Aravanis, Khoja and many more.

Transgender literature as a branch of LGBTQ studies emerged when few transgenders managed to come forward and talk about their life experiences to the world. They dare to face discrimination and rejection of the society and managed to come forward and express their feelings and desires. The ideas of these writers that they expressed through various mediums clearly state their identity as an existence not a curse which they need to be ashamed of. These writers have tried to talk about and reveal their real identity through various fields. They have tried to posit this fact that third gender/sex is as normal as male and female sex and has been into existence since human existence. Literature has served as a major medium through which transgenders have tried to express themselves and their lives. These writers have stood firm despite facing discrimination and neglect in every phase of their life and have made a use of literature as a medium to convey their inner desires.

Living Smile Vidya or simply Vidya is a renowned Indian trans woman actor who is involved in Dalit rights activism. She is a well known Tamil based writer who is widely known for her Trans autobiography *I AM VIDYA*. Her autobiography has been translated into many languages including English. The present paper discusses her autobiography *I AM VIDYA: A TRANSGENDERS JOURNEY* which was originally written in Tamil and later translated into English. Her narrative is regarded as a masterpiece amongst other transgender writings. *I AM VIDYA* is one of India's first transgender autobiography which explores the struggles of Saravanan, a transgender to become Vidya, a woman of her dreams. Her autobiography reveals the intricacies that transgenders go through in their life to achieve real self and the physical as well as the mental torture that the society gives them for being third gender. Vidya through her narrative has tried to give a lens to the society through which they can look into the life of

Transgenders in India and the struggles they face everywhere in all the four corners of the world.

Her narrative starts with the birth of Vidya as Saravanan, a boy who is born after his father's offerings to lord Murugan. Her father contracted with the lord to name the boy child after his name, hence named Saravanan in fulfillment of his promises. The autobiography gives us a description of the lives of transgenders since their childhood to their death. The text reveals the typical mentality of Indian people and how our society is patriarchally bound that the birth of a son is considered to be an achievement, whereas the birth of a girl to bring a defame to the parents. Vidya clearly writes about her fathers's typical Indian patriarchal mentality, she writes,

For many years he had practiced his own vague brand of atheism, but he suddenly made an about-face and visited temple after temple. Landing finally at the Valayur Murugan temple in Tiruchi, he vowed to name his next child after Murugan (the presiding deity) if it was a boy.., Saravanan is one of Murugan's many names. (11-12)

She shares how her parents treated her as the most privileged member of the family for being a boy and how she used to get a special treatment from her father since she was the most desired child of the household. Her other sisters had to look after her and report everything to their father. Since she was considered by her father as the most precious child therefore her childhood was confined to studies only and her father avoided her doing any household chores. All she was expected was to study and score good grades in her class.

I was a privileged member of the household of the three children, I was the one who didn't have to do any work at home. That was the unwritten law. I enjoyed every kind of concession. 'The only work we want you to do is study,' Appa said. (12)

Vidya's early life experiences reveal her interest in arts, drama and theatre. Growing up by the age of six or seven, she started showing the instincts of femininity inside her. She shares those moments when she enjoyed herself being dressed and danced in a feminine manner. She writes,

I usually locked myself inside once all of them had gone out, put on girls' clothes and sang and danced. I loved it. As thrilling as dancing was pirouetting at a rapid pace and sitting down with force so that the long skirt spread out like a lotus, on which I then seemed to be seated. (18)

She shares how her sisters company gave her all that pleasure she was looking from inside. Her sisters gave her that comfort that she being a girl from inside was expecting from the outer world. Her liking for her sisters' clothes seems evident when she writes about how she enjoyed the time when she wore her sister's clothes and danced and enjoyed by herself. All she could admire at that moment was the beauty that she was looking in her from inner heart. Influenced by her inner desires all she could aspire for was becoming like a woman in every way.

I am the princess, fresh new rose, will my dreams come true. (18)

Vidya talks about her inner urges to establish her sexuality as normal and significant as the other male and female sex. She talks about the psychological trauma that she went through when she wanted to go through sex reassignment surgery. She tells how she was advised by people not to go for any sex change surgery and remain a male and focus on her education. The society could not understand her inner desires and her inmates keep advising her to remain a male since the society does not acknowledge transgenders as normal.

Ashabharti gave me the same advice everyone had given so far. She stressed the importance of education and warned me about the social disapproval. You are a man remain a man', repeating what everyone had told me so far. (62-63)

The urge of becoming a woman in her was so intense that she couldn't tolerate her existence as a man and how she was dying to undergo sex change operation and becoming a woman, the

biggest dream of her life. She shares how hardly she wanted to have her nirvana that she couldn't even sleep whole night for her dream to come true.

Nirvana! How long I had waited for it! What humiliation I had suffered! Obsessed with it, I had mortgaged my pride, my anger, my honour- I had even begged on the streets to achieve that end. How could I sleep now, with my dream about to be fulfilled tomorrow? (3)

Vidya could not live her double role life any longer. She could not bear being a man anymore. It was like an everyday death for her to see herself playing a male's role outwardly. She went through a lot of phases in order to accomplish her dream. Vidya's journey tells about the hardships of a transgender person and how they are dumped at the corners of the society. Even after her sex change surgery she could not get her family support. She clearly describes how she was left alone by her family members and how she landed up in begging which proved to be the only source of living her life. Vidya's life was not a bed of roses even after her becoming a woman, the society did not stop its daily taunts and meaningless comments. Her family support and acceptance remained a dream for her to get fulfilled. She was the subject of mockery and ridicule to her neighbours. She shares the agony of being alone in every phase of her life. Since childhood she dealt with this mediocrity and unacceptance by her family and others. Every word that she speaks expresses her agonies and sufferings she went through everytime.

Look at me Appa- look at my dissected body. This is a mere body. Can you see that I can bear all this pain? I can take any amount of pain, Appa. Look at me Appa. Look at me as a woman. Accept me as a girl, Appa. Only I could hear my screams. (9)

Vidya had to fight hard to achieve her real identity. Even after her sex change operation she had to face a lot of challenges express her femininity and the idea that she is a woman. The journey of Saravanan to a woman named Vidya was not easy. After all hardships and struggle she stood for herself and asked the government and its citizens to accept her femininity and other fellow *tirunangais* as humans as normal as others.

I do not ask for heaven- I am begging to be spared from living hell. I plead for myself and fellow *tirunangais*. (138)

India is hailed world wide for its diversity and its different culture and traditions. *Hijras* have been a very important part of our culture since ancient times. They are the existing oldest community in India and our society has accepted of the third sex since ancient times but this did not remain the same in the modern times. The colonization period seems to have brought a huge change in the mindset of our society thus bringing devastation to their life. The Britishers tried to expel their community from our society by labeling them as criminals and passing strict laws against the transgenders. Our country in order to inculcate the feeling of inclusiveness world wide and to promote a spirit of equality needs to bring a change in the mindset of the people and put this into mark that third sex is an identity not a disorder.

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