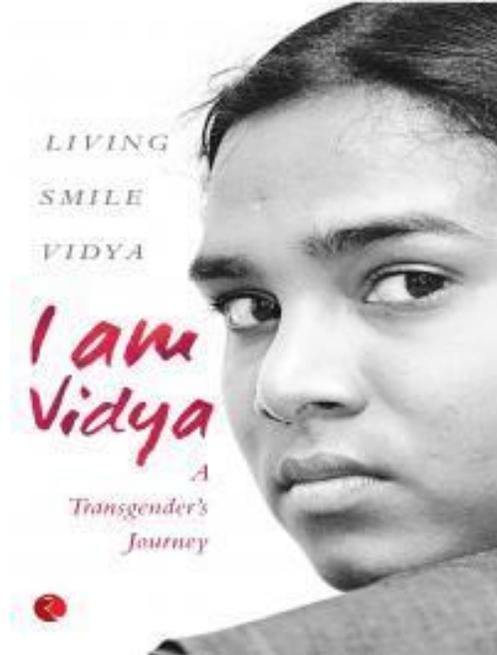


## Transforming the Tradition towards Transgender – Understanding *I am Vidya*

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Subaltern literature always lay bare the covered face of humans who are all presumed to be untouchable or unacceptable and it attempts a kind of inclusion of these people who deserve rights and respect in the society which is totally numb and dumb to their cries. Transgender studies in the recent past paved a way for both research and exploration of identity disorder which creates a threat to the accepted gender norms of the society and pose questions about the social assemblage. The auto-biographical account by Living Smile Vidya in her *I am Vidya* narrates her journey as a boy Saravanan to her identified inner self Vidya.

### Addressing the Problems of Gender

The novel addresses the problems of the transgender in simple language. The critical analysis of the literary production by one of its members provides a mean to redefine the existing concepts and practices of the contemporary society. It also expresses the difference between sex and the gender chosen by a small section of people who can be categorized into various groups under gender identity disorder.

### Sex and Gender

Sex is a term that describes people born with physical characteristics which fit the notions regarding male and female bodies, chromosomes, hormones and both internal and external sex

organs. Gender is what the society delineates as masculine and feminine characteristics. Every society conditions its men and women to identify themselves with their self as man or woman and relate that with gender role or responsibility assigned to them without any choice. When this association creates a sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of their biological sex and when this discomfort persists it results in cross-gender identification.

Anatomically male and female sex organs and the hormones like estrogen, progesterone and testosterone differentiate the sex of a human. The biological differences based on genitals are called primary sex characteristics and hormonal differences make the secondary sex characteristics. Here the hormones play a crucial role to fit any individual into the gender spectrum. Genetically women have chromosomes of X and men have chromosomes of XY. But sometimes men are born with two or three X chromosomes and women with Y chromosomes. Secondly a child may be born with a mix between male and female genitalia. Here the predominant biological sex is assigned. Similarly, when the production of estrogen and progesterone predominates in a human body, feminine characteristics predominate.

In gender differences, each society has its own norms and roles adhered to its individuals. It varies from society to society and can be changed accordingly. For instance, Saudi women are not allowed to drive which is allowed in all other societies. So, gender stereotypes are highly fluid and can change over time. In every society an individual's view about his or her gender depends on their personal sense of being a woman or man. When the internal gender identity does not match with the external manifestations of gender assigned to them biologically, gender disorder arises.

### **Transgender Studies**

Transgender studies pave a way for innovative research in cultural analysis which explores gender diversity, gender identity, sex and sexuality. In this vital ground we can discuss how a transgender find it difficult to view sex in traditional terms as they feel different from their physiological sex. It also creates an arena to show the society how the transgender society can be categorized into the existing society as they have become an undeniable threat to the gender norms of the conservative society.

### ***I am Vidya***

In this novel *I am Vidya* written by one of the members of transgender community, a critical portrait has been shown about transgender biopolitics, economy crisis and difficulties in changing the view of the gender biased society. Saravanan was born to middle class parents in Trichy. He was best education by his father out of all his difficulties. Petted and pampered by his two sisters and mother he had a life of a cozy child in the settings of poor background.

From the age of five he started feeling a change in his attitude towards the opposite sex and liked to wear girls attire. He slowly understands his desire to associate himself with women but not with men. Saravanan was thrashed many times by his father whenever he failed to come first in the class but was accepted as he was by his mother and sisters. There is no love or lust for any woman but only an inner urge to assert him that he is not a man but a woman. He finished his B.Sc. in computer science and joined M.A. Linguistics in Tanjore University. In his school

and college days also, he felt comfortable with women folks and received unutterable insults from his male class and playmates.

### **Community of Transgenders**

He started his journey to fulfill his inner hunger. He met many Kothis, transgenders, NGO to aid him in his journey and joined one of the parivaars of transgender in Pune. These parivaars have their own hierarchy of amma, nani, dadi, etc., and each transgender is bound to their rigid rules.

Saravanan was sent to shop begging along with other transgenders. She begged in the streets and in the trains to earn money. A transgender will not be given any job anywhere and she is looked upon as a stigma to the family and to the society. Wherever they go they have to accept the indignities and insults afflicted on them by the society without any protest. When Vidya along with her friends started selling commodities in the train, the people who are ready to give them alms are even not ready to buy anything from them. They closed their business without selling a single item. They were beaten up very cruelly by men in three occasions for having opened their mouth in retaliation. So, a transgender saves money to keep herself dignified in her old age without expecting other transgenders to provide her decent livelihood.

### **Vidya**

Vidya earned money to attain nirvana i.e to get rid of the male protuberance in Pune. It was done in a local hospital in Pune in completely unhygienic and illegal procedure. The surgery to remove his unfortunate identity was mere a castration, while she was watching and screaming under poor anaesthesia. Her struggles didn't end there. She lacked social approval even after that. But determined to fight the fate of a transgender either live as by begging or as a prostitute, she knocked the doors of so many broad-minded individuals. She got an employment in micro-credit institution in Madurai and a busy blog writer now.

Thousand years of belief has left unthinkable horrors upon the life and unutterable injuries on the psyche of the transgender. So, they subject themselves to survive on the mercy of Hindu traditions as a transgender's blessing is most desired in upper part of India. But the cruelty and tyranny perpetrated on them in the name of sex and gender perpetuate the ostracism exercised on them. We are touched with pity at the plight of them as they are segregated and discriminated against the rest of the society. Vidya is pragmatic and realistic in raising her voice her against this discrimination and there is no quixoticism in her demand.

### **Difficulties Faced**

The life of Vidya proves how difficult it is for a transgender to feel genuine about their physical appearance and enforce their psychological identity to the society. Though the sex reassignment surgery had taken place medically the individual is not assigned the protection coverage from the atrocities of the society legally. The conditions of depravity lead to possible circumstances for transexuality but not for transgender. The book asserts that gender identity is one's personal sense of being identified as male or female.

But in society the wider gap between the sexual orientation and gender identity is not properly understood and accepted and always portrays the gender-variant people as

homosexuals. Whether a Homosexual or heterosexual, bisexual or asexual does not have any role or problem in gender identity as the transgender faces.

### **Gender Dysphoria**

If the concerned transgender does not face any discomfort or distress regarding their sex it can't be considered as mental sickness. When they have depression or inability to work or have good relationship with others, then this situation is called gender dysphoria. Recent researches found out that this can be cured in children. When a person suffers any inner frustration impairment in functioning owing to the biased and negative behaviours of others also do not indicate gender disorder. The solution for this is to restore functionality and alleviate suffering through counseling, through medicine or even if it requires sex reassignment.

In reassignment laser treatment can be used to remove hairs, vocal cord surgery can be done and all the implementation required by the individual can be met. But in India these things are impossible even to think. Clinical training and mental healthcare counseling training lack adequate information and practices to help transgender clients. Believing that transition from one sex to another is the only solution available is also leads to so many social complications. But choosing a 'nirvana' or not is totally up to the individual but after proper counseling.

### **Conclusion**

*I am Vidya* is the story of a woman trapped inside the body of a man and struggled to define her identity woman. Though her identity and aspirations limit her reach and relationship with other men, her determination to assert her consciousness which suffered the agony of not having any means to express the suppressed femininity and the indignities she was forced to endure in her attempt to become a complete woman. She lost her manhood not in the excruciating surgery but when the realization dawned on her. It is a journey of perseverance to achieve her desired identity.

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### **WORK CITED**

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