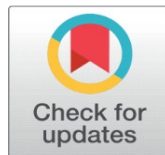


MARGINS WITHIN MARGINS: DUAL STRUGGLES OF HIJRA IDENTITY IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF LAXMI AND REVATHI

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the dual struggles of hijra individuals in India and deals with the marginalization they experience both within mainstream society and within their community. Through a critical analysis of two autobiographies titled *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* by Laxmi Narayan Tripathi and *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* by A. Revathi, this study investigates how language is used to construct, resist, and negotiate power. Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theory of subalternity have been employed in this study to explore how autobiographical narratives can be used to investigate the ideology and power structures that are involved in their dual marginalization.

Keywords: Hijra Identity, Narrative Resistance, Gendered Subalternity, Language and Power, Hijra Autobiography

1. INTRODUCTION

Transgenders have been a part of India's mythology, especially in major epics such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, which have recorded the existence of the "third-sex" (Boruah, 2020). It is also mentioned in the Ramayana that Lord Ram gave a boon to those who identified as neither man nor woman. During his exile, he had requested all men and women to return to the kingdom of Ayodhya. Upon his return, he discovered that there were still people waiting for him for fourteen years. Upon enquiring, he learned that these people were neither man nor woman. He was so touched that he blessed them with a boon that whatever they say will come true (Laxmi, 2015). This belief is prevalent to this day, especially in North India, where hijras are invited on auspicious occasions such as birth and marriage to impart their blessings or 'badhai'.

Before the arrival of the British in India, the transgenders in India enjoyed a position of privilege in the royal courts of the Mughals (Boruah, 2020). Systematic oppression by the British and laws imposed against them led to their marginalization. The imperialist ideology that was imposed against them is still being reproduced by the Indian masses to this day. As the British rule began taking over India, the hijras and the whole transgender community in general were outlawed and criminalized “due to their bodies, gender performances, sexual practices and occupations” (Hazarika, 2021). This created a negative image of them and attached stigma to their identity as well as their existence in society. Boruah adds, “People began to treat them differently and started receiving constant ridiculing of their physique and habits. Society started passing various abusive remarks towards them and even the family began to criticize them” (2020).

This was a big blow to their status in society, and they faced many hardships that have continued to this day. The social exclusion that resulted from this has made it difficult for them to find employment or housing. They mostly resorted to begging or sex work to earn their daily bread. Subramanian writes, “Hijras traditionally perform the labour of begging, blessing newborns and newlyweds, and practising the profession of sex work. These are highly stigmatised professions and also precarious sectors of work; thus, hijra communities often find themselves struggling financially and are simultaneously socio-culturally ostracised” (2022).

The hijra community is a cultural subsect (Laxmi, 2015) within the broader category of transgender in India that follows a familial structure of kinship (Kalra, 2012). According to Subramanian, “Through the lens of recent legal reforms and related discourse in India, the term hijra has been interchangeably used with transgender whilst Hijra itself does not connote a gender identity and has more to do with ‘a specific group of people (which could include transfeminine individuals, kothis and women) with specific religious and linguistic practices’” (2022).

The hijra community follows a certain set of norms based on the ideology of the culture that they have established. The reproduction of these ideologies of those in power within the communities prevents hijra individuals, especially those at the bottom of the hierarchy, from exercising complete autonomy of their lives, in terms of finances, relationships, activism, etc.

Therefore, this paper aims to examine the dual struggles of hijra individuals, who face oppression not only outside their community but also within their community through a critical analysis of selected hijra autobiographies titled *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* (2014) by Laxmi, and *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* (2010) by A. Revathi. The analysis of the text incorporates Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine the language of the text to understand how ideology and power structures, both outside and within the community, shape the experience of a Hijra individual in negotiating and challenging such power dynamics. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s theory of subalternity has been employed to explore how this concept of power and ideology influences such gendered marginalization.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Transgenders have been believed to have had positions of power and status before the advent of the British in India. Compared to the current scenario, the Hijras were more welcomed in the social structure of the country before the colonisers set foot in India, bearing positions of power and prestige in the Sultanate (Shanka et al., 2022).

In the 19th century, the Hijras were outlawed by the British through the imposition of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) of 1861 and the Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) of 1871 (Hazarika, 2021) and “required the registration, surveillance and control of Hijras” (Jain & Rhoten, 2020). The transgender people were registered as ‘eunuchs’ by the government. They were targeted as suspects of potential crimes such as castration of children, kidnapping or violating any part of the Indian Penal Code’s Section 377. The law had also deprived them of simple pleasures of life, such as “playing music, willing away property, participating in any public or private show or adopting sons” (Jain & Rhoten, 2020). Such a step taken during the British rule had caused severe damage to the status of Hijra in the country, which was done to a great degree. They lost their credibility in society and were pushed out of its very structure.

Although the Criminal Tribes Act was revoked post-independence in the year of 1952, the Habitual Offenders Act of 1952 soon took its place. The omission of the term ‘eunuch’ from the Act, however, did not prevent the criminalization of those who were targets of the previous Act. The focus was now on the individual rather than groups, which was the case previously, with the revival of several provisions from the previous Act (Jain & Rhoten, 2020). This was soon followed by the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act of 1956 passed by the Indian government with the sole objective to persecute the gender deviant persons of the country, which also included the Hijras. This act criminalized sex work,

making it impossible for those involved in the profession to earn their livelihood. Again in the year of 1959, several states of the country banned the act of begging, the first one being the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act of 1959 (Jain & Rhoten, 2020).

The transgenders witnessed a breakthrough in their case after the country's highest court passed the famous NALSA verdict in 2014, "...which upheld the right of Indian citizens to self-identify their gender, regardless of gender affirmation surgery in the National Legal Services Authority (henceforth NALSA) v. Union of India case" (Bhattacharya, 2019). This discussion on the rights of transgender individuals was carried forward by Rajya Sabha's passage of The Rights of Transgender Persons Bill of 2014 and The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill of 2016 in the Lok Sabha (Loh, 2018).

The hijras of India fall under the category of the umbrella term "transgender" or the "third gender". Their gender identity deviates from the heteronormative idea of the gender binary. Hazarika defines hijras as "an individual born biologically male but exhibiting feminine gender traits that situates them in a liminal space, termed as the "third gender" in society" (2021). They have been also called with various other names in the country, such as tirunangais, aravani, kinnar and more.

Hijras embrace femininity and incorporate "feminine gender roles" and "feminine attire" (Anuar & Asl, 2021). In India, the word "hijra" has come to define only transgender women and does not include transgender men. The concept of hijras is exclusive to the Indian culture and "does not have an equivalent in the Western context, where the term transgender is employed" (Anuar & Asl, 2021).

In this study, the marginal position of Hijras within Indian society is examined through Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theory of subalternity, as articulated in her seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", which interrogates the structural conditions that silence marginalized voices. In the essay, Spivak criticizes Western theorists such as Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari for speaking for the marginalized without removing themselves from the position of the West. She notes that these theorists overlook how ideology influences individuals to conform to the system of their oppressors and prevent them from speaking for themselves. She quotes Althusser, who highlights how the reproduction of the ideology of the ruling class plays a key role in exercising power over the oppressed class. The continuous reproduction of these ideologies has shaped how the oppressed view the system, and as a result, submit to such systems of inequality (1993).

Spivak states that modern theories, such as that of Deleuze, tend to ignore how power and ideology play a significant role in shaping people and the systems that surround them. Drawing this insight from Althusser, she writes, "The critique of ideological subject-constitution within state formations and systems of political economy can now be effaced, as can the active theoretical practice of the 'transformation of consciousness'" (1993).

Spivak criticizes the claims of these theorists who have emphasized that the oppressed groups do not need representation as they have a voice of their own and can speak for themselves. She examines how these oppressed classes lack the autonomy to speak for themselves due to complex ideological structures and systems of power. She uses Marx's argument that some oppressed classes "cannot represent themselves; they must be represented" (1993).

However, such representation often results in dominance. Spivak warns against the belief that the oppressed classes can speak for themselves as it ignores complex systems of ideology and power that shape these classes. She argues that the blurred lines between two kinds of representation – one that politically represents them and speak on their behalf (vertretung) and the other that philosophically portrays them (darstellung) – "leads to an essentialist, utopian politics" (1993).

Spivak challenges the notion that class is formed naturally and argues that "the formation of class is artificial and economic...systematic and heterogeneous" (1993), where politics, ideology, shared struggle and economic systems play a role. Using Marx's statement that people sharing similar conditions do not automatically form a class unless there is a shared feeling of community, she points out that class consciousness can only exist through "national links" and "political organizations" (1993).

Spivak examines Foucault's concept of "epistemic violence" in Europe in the eighteenth century. Knowledge systems were altered and shaped to fit imperialist ideals, while the "palimpsestic narrative" was dismissed as "subjugated knowledge" (1993). In this regard, Spivak cites the example of the "British codification of the Hindu Law" (1993) to show how the British made an attempt to exert their authority and control over India's cultural complexity. More importantly, she points out how Macaulay, in his 'Minute on Indian education' (1835), talked about reforming the Indian education system in such a manner that a new distinct class is formed that will act as the intermediary between the British authority

and the Indian citizens – those who had adopted the intellect, morals and taste of the English but were Indians by blood (1993). Spivak also sheds light on how the history of the Brahmins in India were altered through the “increasing ‘feudalization’ of the performative use of Sanskrit in the everyday life of Brahmanic-hegemonic India” to show that the Brahmins and the codifying British were aligned on their perspectives (1993).

Spivak points out that the general, non-academic population does not realize how the system “operates its silent programming function” (p.78), which shapes and controls their actions and thoughts. This leads Spivak to raise the critical question “Can the subaltern speak?” (1993).

Hijras live within a tightly knit community structure that follows a distinct set of social, cultural and behavioural norms, often governed by ritual hierarchy, gender performance, and guru-chela relationships. Gupta added a cultural context to the definition of Hijras and said, “Hijra identity does not exist in the ‘body’, but in the ‘performance culture’, which is a coming together of rituals, community structures, traditions and performative markers of the Hijra identity” (2019).

This study employs Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis to examine the underlying ideologies and power dynamics that shape the dual struggles faced by Hijra individuals, both within their community and in broader society. In *Language and Power* (1989), Fairclough argues that power is both exercised within discourse and exists behind it. Discourse is not neutral; it is a space where power is won, maintained, and contested. Power within discourse refers to how individuals and groups use language to assert dominance, while power behind discourse refers to the broader social structures and conventions that shape who can speak, what can be said, and how it can be interpreted. Discourse, therefore, is a key mechanism through which power operates in society (Fairclough, 1989).

To explore the long-term consequences of these power struggles, Fairclough introduces a framework based on three types of constraints that powerful participants in discourse can impose on less powerful ones: constraints on contents (what can be said), relations (how people interact in discourse), and subjects (who is allowed to participate) (1989). These constraints can be immediate or structural, with the latter having enduring effects on social practices. When seen structurally, they shape the knowledge and beliefs, social relationships, and social identities within a society (Fairclough, 1989).

Fairclough also talks about three ways in which society achieves coordination and shared understanding: practice, inculcation, and communication. Practice is about the commonly accepted ways of speaking and behaving; inculcation is when norms are subtly imposed to maintain power; and communication is where open discussion and debate take place (1989). The real tension today lies between inculcation and communication. While inculcation works in favour of those in power by making their views seem natural and unquestionable, communication offers space for resistance and change. So, the key question in critical language studies is whether the limits on what can be said and who can speak are being enforced through control or shaped through dialogue (Fairclough, 1989).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Norman Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has been employed in this study as its central theoretical lens. According to him, discourse functions beyond language and employs social practice embedded in broader ideological structures. His three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis includes (a) textual analysis, (b) interpretation, and (c) explanation.

The first stage takes place at the micro-level, which involves the analysis of the vocabulary, grammar, modality, and cohesion of the selected autobiographies. In the second stage, the analysis of the processes by which the selected autobiographies are produced, distributed and interpreted is done. This stage of analysis aims to interpret the text in relation to its context by considering the perspective of the producer, using “cues” embedded in the text along with the background knowledge of the interpreter, what Fairclough refers to as “members’ resources” (MR). In the third and final stage, the ideological and institutional conditions in the selected autobiographies that shape or are shaped by discourse is analyzed.

This model of discourse analysis by Fairclough examines the linguistic strategies employed in the texts to understand the power structures and dynamics through their choice of language, structure, and intertextual references. In addition, the internal community discourses are also analyzed with the help of this model to examine how they are, too, shaped by power structures, often meant to discipline the hijra individuals into conformity, and how these power structures are reflected in the way Laxmi and Revathi resist such practices.

This study also draws on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theory of subalternity, particularly as articulated in the essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1993). Spivak defines the subaltern as a subject who exists outside the structures of hegemonic representation and remains structurally unspeakable within dominant systems of knowledge. Spivak's theory is especially relevant in analyzing the gendered dimensions of subalternity. Hijras, as gender-nonconforming individuals in South Asia, occupy a space of epistemic and symbolic marginality.

Thus, while Fairclough's CDA allows the researcher to analyze the language of the selected autobiographies, Spivak's subaltern theory demands attention to who is allowed to speak and under what terms. It shifts the focus from speech acts to the conditions of speech itself, and from representation to the politics of re-presentation.

The combined use of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis and Spivak's theory of subalternity enables a nuanced exploration of Hijra autobiographies as both acts of self-expression and products of discursive struggle. Through this dual framework, the study interrogates how language serves not only as a tool of resistance but also as a terrain marked by inequality, hierarchy, and constraint — both outside and within the community. In doing so, it positions the Hijra subject not merely as a symbol of otherness, but as an agent navigating complex regimes of power, across multiple, and often conflicting, discursive spaces.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative methodology to investigate its research questions, which is primarily descriptive. Selected Indian transgender autobiographies titled *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* (2014) by Laxmi, and *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* (2010) by A. Revathi have been theoretically analyzed to investigate the dual oppression faced by hijra individuals, both within and outside their communities. These texts are first-hand accounts of the subjects and have, therefore, been treated as primary data.

This analysis is limited to the study of hijras, narrowed down from the broader umbrella of the term "transgender", and is confined to its textual representation only. The pronouns "she/her" have been used to address them, as mentioned in the texts.

The study employs Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze the language used in the text, aiming to understand how ideology, culture, and socio-political conditions have established power structures that have placed hijra individuals at the receiving end, ultimately leading to their systematic oppression. To achieve this, the interactions between hijra individuals and the general public, as well as within their community, have been investigated and critically analyzed.

This paper also draws on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theory of subalternity to highlight the issue of marginality in terms of gender in the selected autobiographies. The hijras are often pushed to the margins of society due to their gender identity, which does not conform to its established norms. The stigma attached to their gender identity subjected them to misrepresentations or the kind of representation that served the people who spoke for them rather than the hijras themselves. Therefore, when Spivak raises the question, "Can the subalterns speak?", she brings our attention to the power structures that systematically position the hijras on the periphery of social structures.

By combining these two frameworks, this study examines the dual struggle that defines Hijra life in India — the external battle against societal exclusion, and the internal negotiation of communal norms and hierarchies. Laxmi's autobiography illustrates how power can be reclaimed and rearticulated through discourse, particularly by someone with access to institutional legitimacy. Revathi's text, by contrast, reveals the fragility and precarity of the subaltern voice.

5. ANALYSIS

In the autobiographies of Laxmi and Revathi, they narrate how they have been marginalized and oppressed not only in mainstream society but within their community as well. They often expressed feeling suffocated due to first being socially excluded and then having their autonomy stripped out by their community. Both Laxmi and Revathi initially faced criticism from their biological families after they became hijras.

When Laxmi's family first found that she had become a hijra after she was featured on television, her mother said, "No one in fourteen generations has done such a thing in our family. We are a noble, high-caste Brahman family. Didn't

you think of our self-respect?" She further added, "What you have done is so damaging that we will have to hang our heads in shame. But it is not good for you too. Please get it out of your system" (Laxmi, 2015)

Revathi, too, had a similar experience when she appeared before her family for the first time as a hijra in a sari. Her mother says:

... You've all but destroyed your life and yet you say this is real and true. You've buried our honour deep and clothed us in shame...Many in this world long for and are willing to no penance for a son! And here you are, born a man, who has decided to become a woman halfway through his life! What'll the world say? Do you think we can walk with our heads held high in the village anymore? (Revathi, 2010)

She further adds

Why, we have men working for us and you had to go and wear a sari, join a gang of pottais and beg! How can someone from a good family do that? Do you know who we are and what caste we belong to? How can you forget all that and do what you did? How did you have the heart to do all this? (Revathi, 2010)

In both experiences, their mothers link their gender identity to shame. The act of becoming a hijra has been viewed as a rejection of their caste. Laxmi's mother reminds her that she was born into a "noble, high-class Brahman family", and so does Revathi's mother. Therefore, becoming a hijra was automatically perceived as bringing dishonour to the family. In addition, Revathi's mother's statement reflects the prevalence of patriarchy, where a male child is given more preference than a female child.

Laxmi and Revathi also mention several incidents where they face discrimination on the grounds of their gender identity. When Laxmi's senior-most chela, Subhadra, had disappeared and was later discovered dead, she described how the police harassed them during the investigation. She writes, "The cops would come at the most unearthly hour and randomly pick us up for questioning at the police station" (Laxmi, 2015). "Murgi ran in after me and cried, 'Guru, the police have picked up Shaheen and Kekda' ...My pleas to the police to behave themselves had fallen on deaf ears", she further added (Laxmi, 2015).

This shows how the discrimination occurred not only at a personal level but also at a social level, where they were targeted by police officials. Laxmi reveals how hijras faced similar discrimination while availing medical services:

The hijras told us that they were no different from the untouchables of the past. When they went to the District Civil Hospital in Thane (or to any other hospital for that matter), no one touched them – neither the doctors, nor the nurses, nor even the ward boys and ayahs. They were pariah. (Laxmi, 2015)

The use of the phrase "untouchables of the past" takes us back to the period in Indian history where untouchability was practised among the higher castes. This statement uncovers the degree of social exclusion that the hijras are subjected to, where they are pushed away from a position to avail basic public services from the police or a hospital.

Laxmi recalls how she was kicked out of a sexuality conference in which she was invited as a speaker. She writes, "He told me that I would have to leave the party, for the club rules did not allow people like me to enter the Bombay Gymkhana...I was not even allowed to eat my food..." (Laxmi, 2015). Here, we can observe how Laxmi, a hijra, has been alienated from the social fabric when they categorize her as "people like you", removing the hijras from the very narrative of what or who makes a society. The inhuman treatment of her, where she was thrown out of the conference in which she was invited as a speaker, before giving her a chance to finish her food, speaks volumes about the atrocities they faced because they did not conform to the gender norms.

This incident shows where the hijras stand in terms of their position in mainstream society. Due to the consistent discrimination and transphobia they experience, they find it almost impossible to find employment or even have the luxury to choose a career for themselves. They end up either begging or indulging in sex work. This is evident in the case of Laxmigurur, a hijra who lived in Delhi. Laxmi writes, "Nicknamed 'doctrani guru' by her friends, she was once a brilliant medical student. But tormented by the ragging she experienced in her final year at college, she gave up her education and became a hijra" (2010).

Revathi, too, had her share of experiences when it came to social exclusion. She speaks about the time she travelled after getting her nirvana done and discovered in the middle of her journey that she was bleeding. She writes:

I reached the ladies' bathroom. The woman police officer stationed outside looked at me scornfully and said, 'I can see that you have had an operation. Why can't you be like other men? Why can't you be normal? Find a woman, get married, and be a good householder, who works for a living?' (Revathi, 2010)

This reveals how "other men" were considered "normal", while Revathi and hijras in general were perceived as abnormal, deviated from the norms to become something ridiculous that the society did not approve of. The police woman suggested that she do everything that a cisgender man would do as per societal constructs – get married to a woman, earn a living and provide for his family. However, the reality that belonged to Revathi offered her nothing of that sort. She identified as a woman, but her biological sex pushed her to perform the role of a hijra, which in turn, stripped her of any opportunities to find employment apart from begging and sex work.

Revathi's brothers, too, refused to make her a part of the family business when she returned to her village after becoming a hijra. They told her, "We can't employ people like you. What do you know, anyway? Get lost, go to Mumbai or Delhi and be with those like you. You're all fit only for dancing on the roads, and having cheap, riotous fun" (Revathi, 2010).

The brothers' use of the phrase "people like you" places Revathi in a category which alienates her not just from the society in general but also removes her from having a respectful position in her biological family as well. Her brothers go to the extent of sabotaging her relationship with a man she indulges with romantically. They barge into her house and tell her:

Seems there is a man who visits you here. In the village they claim he is your husband. You're a man, so is he. Why do you need a husband? ... If we hear that he's visiting you again, be sure that we'll tear his guts out and make a garland out of them! We'll finish you off as well...(Revathi, 2010)

Laxmi and Revathi not only faced hardship due to their gender identity subjected to them by mainstream society. As soon as they joined the hijra community, they had agreed to abide by its rigid conditions which would deprive them of autonomy to do simple tasks such as dressing up as per their wishes, keeping in touch with their family or indulging in romantic relationships.

As a hijra, Laxmi did not express any hindrance in indulging in romantic relationships. However, Revathi reveals how she was told from the beginning of her journey as a hijra to refrain from finding a husband. As soon as she joins the hijra community, her nani tells her:

"Beta, I don't want you ganging up with some pottais and take to drinking and seeking a husband. If you do that, you can be sure I'll break your head! You be a good girl and listen to me, and I'll arrange for you to have nirvaanam, that is, have an operation" (Revathi, 2010)

Right from the start, Revathi is conditioned to think that going against the elders of the community would bring her punishment, while obedience would help her reap rewards. In addition, she was taught to view a "romantic relationship" as going against the community. This is further revealed in the following statement by Revathi:

I wanted to marry and settle down ...Even if I were to find a husband, my nani and guru would never approve of such an arrangement. There are hijras who do not mind alienating their gurus. And there are hijras who are on their own and could live as they pleased. But I was not like them – I was part of their household; a household with not even a trace of man. (Revathi, 2010)

Here, Revathi expresses her desire to marry and settle down. However, she associates this act with going against the elders, which would require her to abandon her guru. She refers to other hijras who have left their gurus and live life in their own terms as disobedience and points out she was not like them. She adds:

A hijra can become a chela to anyone, but must ultimately live with her nani or guru and abide by what they say. A hijra must necessarily follow the rules of the community: if she fails she is bound to suffer. (Revathi, 2010)

The hijras also did not have autonomy in choosing the way they dressed and had to comply to the wishes of their gurus and other elders. Revathi points out how she was not even allowed to choose a blouse or a tailor for herself. She says, "Nani decided everything. She would buy blouses that did not match and which were baggy and made me look old" (Revathi, 2010). In the case of Laxmi, her guru uses the act of dressing up as a form of power play and control. Laxmi writes:

The sari had become an embarrassing issue once I started living upstairs with Lataguru. I have pointed out how I wore boy's clothes at home and changed into a sari only elsewhere ... Now, at Lataguru's, I had to be in a sari at all times.

The result was that my parents, who knew I wore a saree outside, but had never actually seen me in one, had to put up with my feminine attire quite against their will. I felt trapped. I felt I lived in a golden cage. (Laxmi, 2015)

This suggests how Lataguru asserted her dominance over Laxmi by simply asking her to wear a sari at all times. Laxmi had lost her autonomy and free will to be unable to dress up as per her wishes. Laxmi's frustration is revealed when she says she felt "trapped" like she lived in a "golden cage".

Throughout the autobiography, Laxmi uncovers several layers of power struggles that occurred between Laxmi and Lataguru after the former had begun to earn name and fame for her activism. She begins by writing:

The worst offender here was Lataguru herself. She had become a control freak. Perhaps she was jealous. But I was not going to take it. After I became an adult, even my mother did not probe me the way Lataguru did. I completely disliked her lack of trust. (Laxmi, 2010)

She later adds

But I had my detractors too. Lataguru continued to sulk. She felt I had been co-opted by the world of glamour, and she was totally opposed to this. To her way of thinking, I was a publicity-hungry sod. She also disapproved of the fact that I lived with my parents. She was possessive and orthodox, and believed that a hijra had no right to stay with her family. (Laxmi, 2010)

In both excerpts, Laxmi uses a bunch of adjectives that reveal a negative feeling towards her guru. She calls her "the worst offender", "a control freak", "jealous", "possessive" and "orthodox". She describes how Lataguru disapproved of her gaining recognition for her work. In addition, Lataguru did not like the fact that she lived with her parents to the point that she moved to the floor above Laxmi's parents' house and insisted that she live with her.

Revathi also reveals a similar experience where she was not allowed to visit her family. She writes:

I cried and confessed that I wanted to go home to my parents, that I would fall at their feet and beg to be taken back. My guru would have none of it. 'You've been here only for two months, your gurubais have been here for two years and I haven't let them visit their families. How can I let you go?' she reasoned. (Revathi, 2010)

The autobiographies of Laxmi and Revathi also reveal how they had to give away a part of their income to their gurus. Laxmi, who had become a public figure, had also started earning a large sum of money. However, her guru felt that she, too, had the right to Laxmi's income. Laxmi writes,

After Big Boss, my relations with Lataguru were completely strained. She thought I had made millions on the show and some of that lucre was rightfully hers. She asked for two lakh rupees, and when I told her that I couldn't pay her that much, she abused me. I decided to dump Lataguru. (Laxmi, 2015)

She adds

She complained about me to Lata Nayak, and I was forced to part with the two lakh rupees that she demanded. And if that wasn't enough, I was forced to gift her my chela Kiran's Thane house, which the latter had transferred in my name. The bitch was money-minded to the core. (Laxmi, 2015)

This suggests that Laxmi felt that she was being exploited by her guru to the extent that she decided to dump her. Revathi, too, narrates an episode where a hijra had met with violence when she wanted to save some money for herself. She writes:

Shakuntala's guru insisted that even if she lived on her own, she ought to give her guru a portion of what she earned, at least once a month...but Shakuntala did not want to continue that practice...She wanted to keep some money for herself...and save for her own needs...Shakuntala's guru would have none of it...After the scolding, Shakuntala's guru had also beaten her. (Revathi, 2010)

This reveals that hijras have their income taken away by the elders, and when they try to protest, they are met with punishment.

6. DISCUSSION

The autobiographies of Laxmi and Revathi serve as good examples that help us understand the dual struggle of hijras. In the mainstream society, they are met with indifference – discriminated against and socially excluded based on their gender identity. They feel alienated, with no sense of belongingness and have nowhere they can go. When they do

find people they can relate to, they have to abide by the rigid norms of the community and lose basic rights such as keeping their income, dressing up the way they wish to, and so on.

These autobiographies especially bring forward the problems of systematic power play that exists in their familial structure, where the ones at the bottom of the hierarchy are targeted by those at the top. They are first provided with shelter, food and a family. However, they have to pay the price of their freedom in exchange. This brings them to a crossroads where they feel like they don't belong anywhere – neither with the mainstream society nor with their people.

However, Laxmi and Revathi both emerged not only as survivors of marginalization but also as vocal activists challenging the systemic oppression faced by transgender individuals in India. With the help of these autobiographies, both hijras transform their narratives into tools of resistance, proving that the act of speaking, which was once denied to them, is itself a form of activism.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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