



Writing the Abjected Body: Hijra Subjectivity and Performativity in A. Revathi's *"The Truth about Me"*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how A. Revathi's autobiographical text "*The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*" is a site of hijra identity formation through abjection and gender performativity. Through the theoretical lens of abjection developed by Julia Kristeva and gender performativity cultivated by Judith Butler, this paper illustrates that Revathi's text is a document of power through marginalization, but at the same time, it produces a resistant self that subverts binary codes of gender. The hijra body, which is subjected to marginalization through power dynamics of society, families, and institutions, is constructed as both abjected and executor. Close textual reading shows how autobiographical writing serves as a form of resistance, transforming experiences of shame and trauma into visibility and agency. Through an indigenous approach towards hijra identities, this paper seeks to make a contribution towards South Asian queer study that is a critique of Western transgender paradigms.

Introduction

In South Asia, hijras have always been both culturally acknowledged and socially marginalized. It is paradoxical that hijras have always been present in society and are socially invisible and marginalized. Literary representations have always been structured by outsiders and have always tended towards exotic



or pathological representations. “*The Truth About Me*,” by A. Revathi, provides a first-person narrative that foregrounds hijra self-expression and challenges external interpretations.

This study will focus on the theoretical importance of the autobiography of Revathi. Through the text, there is abjection of the hijra body and at the same time the performative construction of a gender identity. This study will make use of the concepts of feminism, queer theory, and poststructuralism to explore the importance of autobiography as a resistant strategy towards normative constructions of gender.

Review of Literature

Previous research on hijras has mostly been anthropological or sociological, emphasizing ritual, kinship, and economic status (Nanda). While insightful, such approaches often overlook the literary and self-representational aspects of hijra life. Recent studies have considered hijra narratives as literary texts that articulate selfhood and agency.

Transgender life writing emphasizes the autobiographical genre as a space for constructing identity and asserting political presence (Stryker). Such texts challenge clinical and legal frameworks of gender. However, there has been limited theoretical exploration of abjection and performativity in Indian hijra autobiographies. This study fills that gap by applying Kristeva and Butler to Revathi’s narrative.

Theoretical Framework: Abjection and Performativity

Kristeva defines abjection as a process where subjects expel what threatens identity and order, creating boundaries of the socially acceptable (Kristeva 4–5). Hijra bodies, which disrupt binary gender classifications, are often socially abjected.

Butler’s theory of gender performativity argues that gender is constituted through repeated social acts rather than inherent traits (Butler 179). Applying this to hijra identity shows that performative acts produce gender in ways that resist normative expectations.

Together, abjection and performativity offer a framework to examine how Revathi represents bodily exclusion and constructs an agentive gendered self.

Writing the Abjected Hijra Body

Revathi chronicles rejection experienced in the realms of family, school, office, and social environments. Her body is now identified as the hub for social disgust and moral judgment. She recounts,



“My movements, my walk, my way of speaking—everything about me was considered wrong” (Revathi 23). This illustrates how the hijra body is socially problematized.

Abjection can well be seen as existing in the work of Kristeva: “People looked at us as though we were neither human nor worthy of dignity” (Revathi 64). Such experiences position the hijra’s body at a liminal stage.

Revathi’s narrative exposes these mechanisms and converts experiences of abuse and humiliation into a space of voice and agency. The act of autobiography asserts control over the representation of the hijra body.

Gender Performativity and Hijra Subjectivity

Revathi outlines the learning and performances of femininity within the hijra community: “I learned how to walk like a woman, talk like a woman, and dress like one—not because I was pretending, but because that was who I was” (Revathi 87). These performances of gender are highly misconstrued and represent conscious acts of gender performance.

Through Butlerian analysis, the acts reveal the performativity of gender. Hijra femininity is culturally specific and rebels against binary constructions of gender. Revathi affirms further: “My body did not decide who I was—my feelings and my sense of self did” (Revathi 91), to insist that gender roles are performed socially and not determined by biology.

Autobiography as Resistance

Autobiography allows people in marginalized communities to challenge various dominant narratives. Indeed, Revathi points out: “If I did not tell my story, no one would know what we go through” (Revathi 102). In articulating her life, she resists her invisibility and countering reductive representations of hijras.

The text transforms personal experiences of exclusion into a broad critique of common social norms. Writing becomes a method through which politics can allow identification and contest structures of marginalization.

Conclusion



“*The Truth About Me*” serves as a critical text where hijra life writing becomes both theoretical and political. The lens of abjection and performativity helps decode the ways in which Revathi performs resistance against exclusion on the basis of gender.

Hijra autobiographies like Revathi’s are best understood as literary texts that challenge dominant gender frameworks. By emphasizing an indigenous perspective, this work contributes to inclusive understandings of gender and critiques Western-centric transgender narratives.

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