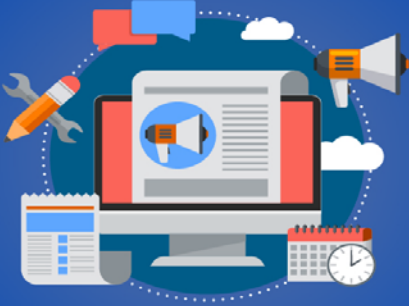


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***Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* by Laxmi Narayan Tripathi. (English, Paperback, Rao R. Raj) Publisher: OUP India, 2015. ISBN: 9780199458264, 019945826X**
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Me Hijra, Me Laxmi is the most evocative and moving autobiography about the hijra activist Laxmi Narayan Tripathi popularly known as Laxmi. The title of Laxmi's autobiography foregrounds her hijra identity using 'Me' which is associated with the public self rather than 'I' which is more private. By doing so it strategically places the work under the militant genre of 'testimonio' that claims to record the collective trauma of the community. *Me Hijra Me Laxmi* is a revelation of the hijra identity.

Laxmi is a conspicuous dancer, an actor, writer, and distinguished transgender rights activist of India. Laxmi has become the first transgender of India to represent Asia Pacific in the UN in 2008. Born as the eldest son to parents from Uttar Pradesh, with a conservative Brahmin background, Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, alias Raju lived in a shanty on the banks of Siddheshwar Lake in Thane, Mumbai with his parents, sister Rukmini and younger brother Shashi Narayan. Laxmi Narayan Tripathi was the first transgender person to represent Asia Pacific at UN and has represented her community and India on several international platforms including the world AIDS conference in Toronto. She has even written a book named "Me Hijra, Me Laxmi". She is mostly known as a social activist and has secured an important place in society here the author means mainstream society.

Laxmi also played a lead role in a movie called "Queens of Destiny" based on the lives of hijras. She won the approbation of celebrity like Hema Malini and various prominent stars of Bollywood. She was also interviewed by a renowned writer Salman Rushdie. Laxmi, today has become an international celebrity and prominent social activist. She has become an icon of transgender; tripling around the world, posing for selfies and signing autographs for her countless fans.

She is worthy of the great esteem, which she has got after a great struggle, and *Me Hijra Me Laxmi* is the perfect picture of her journey from a feeble boy to a dignified transgender of

India. It can be considered as a traumatic but a success story of a member of hijra community. She is the one who is in news for all the good reasons for her courage to speak to fight for the rights of transgender people. Laxmi proudly asserts that she is fortunate in the sense that unlike other hijras who are driven out of their house by their parents, she received a lot of support from her family, especially her sister Rukmini who taught her the Bollywood style of dancing. After leading an anguished life for years, today Laxmi stands tall and has become a loud voice and undisputed spokesperson of transgender community; striving hard to fight for their rights in India and representing hijras on global platforms.

Hijra Community in India is the most backward community which is rejected and socially excluded from participation in any social activity. Her battle for attaining the dignity of the transgender and other members of LGBT community is an unstoppable process. In *Me Hijra Me Laxmi* Laxmi speaks how she was born a male child in an orthodox Brahmin family, felt trapped and decided to become hijra. This is one of the rare biographies of LGBT community that intends to dispel many myths about their world. It gives a peep into their world that is surrounded in secrecy leading to many myths and speculations.

In *Me Hijra Me Laxmi*, Laxminarayan Tripathi has portrayed a veridical picture of the plight of the third gender in Indian society. Through the narrative, Laxmi Narayan Tripathi introduced the readers to the plight of the transgender people; her journey from a male to third gender activist is filled with hardships and struggle. Laxmi in the autobiography narrates incidents to show how passionately Raju, alias Laxmi wanted to dress like a woman and how he/she enjoyed playing the role of female characters.

Me Hijra Me Laxmi seeks to make readers aware of who the hijras really are, and what goes into the shaping of their personalities. Laxmi expresses her heartfelt gratitude towards her parents, who wholeheartedly accepted her the way she was, despite suffering continual derisions and contempt from their family and social circle.

Laxmi opines that if the transgender are treated equally, respectfully and given employment like other citizens of India, then their lives will also blossom and they will also lead their lives happily. But it is only through proper education and free information that this gulf of knowledge could be bridged.

It talks about the heartrending tale of a transgender Laxmi who always felt comfortable in the garb of a woman, though born as the eldest son of her father. The autobiography exemplifies the journey of a transgender who underwent innumerable sufferings but ultimately

decided to live life with his head held high. He bravely declared himself as hijra and fought for the community ceaselessly abused, insulted and denied basic rights. His/ Her quest is to bring about a positive change in the society to enable the transgender acquire dignity and respect by their inclusion in jobs in public and private sectors. Her bold representation as a transgender on the international platforms determines her adeptness in voicing the issues related to LGBT. Talking about her own self, she said, “I was just as normal as any other boy or girl. Society made me feel different.”

The autobiography by Laxmi is not a mere record of the agony of a transgender but actually it delineates the dilemma of the whole community. At one point of time, he realized that he is a hijra, though at home, he was treated as the eldest son and expected to wear men’s apparel. As a child, he was sickly and mostly fraught with illness. But he was well looked after by his parents. Though there was no dearth of friends around him, yet he started to live the life of a loner. He had asthma from an early age and till date he has been suffering from the disease. But his frail and weak body was no hindrance to his love for dancing. In childhood, he would dance to the tune of Bollywood songs and participated at various functions organized by school. He danced to such a frenzy that his chronic breathlessness and cough did not come his way. Though dancing had a therapeutic effect on him, people could observe that in spite of being a man, his body language was that of a woman. He was being teased by others as chakka. It was true that his mannerisms, his walking style and his way of talking were all feminine. But he was unable to understand the mystery of his body which drew him more and more into a cocoon. The cruelest part of his life was that he was sexually exploited from a very young age of seven.

It was the year 1998 when Laxmi finally decided to become a hijra. She made up her mind to represent hijras and fight for the rights of her community. Laxmi went on to join Mithibai College and finished his graduation. He wore female attire on campus, became a model coordinator for Bollywood, staged dance shows, became a bar dancer.... and all this without the knowledge of his family! Laxmi took to drinking, struggling with the dual identity and the deception of playing "the man of the house" when all he wanted to was to be acknowledged as a woman.

Laxmi also disrupts the codification of the profession in terms of gender. In order to dispel her anxiety regarding her identity, Laxmi met Ashok Row Kavi at Maheswari Udyaan in Mumbai. Ashok Row Kavi was a gay activist and he welcomed Laxmi in the gay community.

Laxmi also felt relaxed to a great extent thinking that she was 'gay', not 'abnormal' at least. But, this feeling of 'gay' identity did not sustain long in Laxmi. What made her feel alienated from the 'gay' community was that the gays of Maheswari Udyaan were homosexual men. Even when they got engaged in sexual act, they enjoyed the pleasure of sex as men with men. So, unlike Laxmi the gays are men both physically and psychologically. She boldly declared her gender identity and worked for the upliftment of the sexual minorities.

The text offers insight into the life of the third gender people of India who have been alienated because they don't belong to the world of masculine or feminine as they are considered neither male nor female. Laxmi Narayan Tripathi took the daring step to reveal the plight of the hijra community in the Indian society.

Laxmi's recognition of her gender identity influenced her to join the hijra community. While talking about the avenues of job opportunities for the transgender, she cited an example of the frequent rape cases in the compartments of the moving trains, which could be avoided by employing a hijra as a security guard.

She became a sex worker also. She established intimate relationships with some of her male friends. In the narrative, Laxmi boldly reveals the incidents of her intimate relationships. Laxmi is proud of her sexual identity and had many love affairs but ended up hurting her. The memoir is the tale of the pathetic as well as fortunate experiences of a member of the hijra community, categorized as the sexual minorities.

Me Hijra Me Laxmi is a journey of a hijra, who takes her gender identity transformation as the major aspect of her life and represents it in a picturesque description. The memoir is an evocative story which reveals the hidden aspects of a flamboyant transgender, Laxmi. The autobiography illuminates the voyage of a hijra, from a meek, feeble young boy to one of the distinguished personalities of India. Laxmi joined hijra community and learnt everything from Shabina. Being a hijra, Laxmi realized the hardships and torments the hijras suffer are unacceptable for her. *Me Hijra Me Laxmi* is a thrilling saga of Laxmi, who didn't give up against the odds of her life and reached towards her destination. There was no word called defeat in her life till now.