

Metamorphosis and Triumph: A Transgender's Journey in I Am Vidya Penned By Living Smile Vidya

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Abstract

Transgender people require understanding and support from every individual in the society, from the government, doctors, from their own family members. *I am Vidya* is an undeniable narrative about a women trapped within a man's body. *I Am Vidya* is the story of one such journey that of a declaration, of the claiming of an identity. It is an assertion of a consciousness that has suffered the agony of being trapped in a mould it does not belong to, a body it does not identify with. This paper has analysed the issues faced by transgender in terms of equality. The novel emphasizes social Reformation through which transgender community could have equal rights in the society.

Keywords: Transgender, Struggles, identity, consciousness, society

I. Introduction

India is a land famous for giving the world the concept of 'you are not the body but the immortal soul' in the holy Bhagavad Gita. However, with a close look, it would reveal that the wisdom stays on the pages of the books to be quoted but not to be applied. Living Smile Vidya's story is no different from any other transgender in India. However, the story is not only about revisiting her abuses and her insecurities against the world but her rise to become an actress, assistant director and writer in India. This research will thus focus on the novel '*I am Vidya*' by *Living Smile Vidya*, which is her autobiography. The books address the situation in India while she was growing up. She describes the different perspectives and hypocrisy that people have of the situation related to LGBT community in India. It is a story of her experience and the story that needs to be heard by the people in the society.

Struggle of Gender Identity

Gender is a biological phenomenon that separates a typical man from a typical woman. The concept of Gender Identity has always been under the stereotype of identifiable features of the human baby at birth. However, in the words of Polderman, it is the inner experience or an in-body feeling that a person feels in the psychological sphere, which shapes the Gender Identity of any person (95). The author clarifies that the inner experiences of any individual describe their gender identity. This is a concept and the actual process that should be followed by people worldwide. Similarly, the same type of image is seen in the verse of Castro-Peraza, who states that Sex is determined at birth, but the application of gender identity comes from the inner experiences of the person; both are not the same (1). Thus, it is important to learn the differences that arise while defining sex and gender identity. Lack of proper sex education is the biggest issue of the country.

The same problem with gender identity is seen in the life of Vidya from her childhood. She was born Saravanan, and her father was extremely pleased that a boy was born into their family where there were already two elder sisters. However, after reaching a certain age, Vidya could understand that the role she was supposed to play in society was of no interest to her. She started going deep into her thoughts and started evaluating her feelings, "*what's wrong with my preference? Why should a boy only wear shirts and trousers? I like skirts and blouses why can't I wear them? Why do people find something odd in what comes to me naturally?*" (Vidya 29). These kinds of thoughts arise when the person is confused about the desired role and their feelings, which are completely opposite. Vidya felt the need to understand the feelings that were brewing in her mind as she recognised that she had no interest in her male persona as her parents decided. She was much more comfortable with the roles of women like her mother and sisters. She clearly states, "*I was a girl. Unfortunately, the world saw me as a boy. Inwardly I wanted to be a girl, but I made every effort possible to hide my femininity from the outside world*" (Vidya 33). It is common in places like India, where it is a stigma, which lowers the credibility of a transgender. They are reduced to some entertaining eunuchs who are supposed to earn their living by literally begging the world.

Patriarchal Influence over the Third Gender

Patriarchy is an issue that needs attention from the whole society as this concept is so deep-rooted in socio-cultural values that it becomes inseparable from the context. The third genders are the most ridiculed and most discriminated against in developing countries. The main problem is when the legal system does not support the third gender due to the patriarchal values that form the basic framework of the laws in general (Nisar 59). The author states the importance of the laws in protection of the society, whereas it is the one thing that becomes the tool for oppression. In India, there was no provision for the acceptance of the third gender of LGBT until recently, and they were actually punishable under the *Sec 377 of The Indian Penal Code, 1860* for unnatural sexual activities, which was amended recently. The patriarchal values set out that the men and women propagate on the earth, and any other gender is not identified.

Right from the beginning, it is clear that the family of Vidya wanted a boy after having two girls. Their obsession with boy children is a problem not with India but with every third world country. The child was looked after till the time Vidya was intelligent enough to realise that she was not a boy. At the age of six or seven, she was already getting into the idea of being a woman, singing, dancing and wearing her sisters' clothes. "*Grandma probably thought that I was doing some playful imitation. Hardly did she know the true story, did she?*" (Vidya 18). She used to dance freely and sing her favourite songs while her family dismissed them as childhood pranks. Her sisters Chitti and Radha were freer than Vidya, and it bugged Vidya as she wanted to be like them. After the passing away of her mother, it was tougher for Vidya, as the more she grew, the more she was drawn to the feminine indulgences. Vidya's father was unable to cope with these changes in her. The family, including her sister and father, scolded and thrashed her for dancing and singing. "*My old ways – the same habits which had been dismissed lightly as childish pranks – were now viewed with disfavour. Chitti and Radha scolded me for my acts and Appa thrashed me regularly.*" (Vidya 22). This is the main problem with stigma coupled with patriarchy as the lack of knowledge about the genders is actually accepted in society. Science acknowledges these changes, but men cannot as they think that to be in order, the world has to be run in a particular way that was devised thousand years ago. "Even kids from lower class teased me at school. Look at him lady, they shouted after me" (Vidya, 21). From this section, it has been evident that Vidya realised the harsh truth through her experience, and she understood the concept of being hated for who she was. The loving father who once welcomed his child actually did it because he wanted a boy and not a child. That same father had no issues while thrashing his own child because she identified herself as a woman. Patriarchy still dictates most of the norms and rules in the society and has a subtle influence over all the sectors that are even feminine in nature.

Marginalisation of Third Genders

The concept of marginalisation comes from the people's perception of certain groups who are taken to be distasteful according to the norms of society. This feeling has no scientific backing, but this is a segmentation done by a certain group or community to separate them from the rest and differentiate them. According to the opinion of Vorobjovas-Pinta et al. the notion of Justice and Equality are often seen for segments that bring in profit rather than a weaker section of the society; these marginalised people are discriminated against openly by the whole of society (450). Thus, marginalisation can be understood to mean the basic discrimination that is followed by society against any minority group. The third genders or transgenders and the LGBT also face these atrocities in their societies and societal frame as they are made fun of, viewed as objects and constantly abused for their identity. The literate people in society do not understand the simple fact that the third gender has no hand in choosing their gender.

Vidya saw true marginalisation when she had to go through her SRS (Sex Reassignment Surgery) as she was unable to live with the male genitalia. Her family did not support her in any way, and she had to join the Hijra Community for her survival. She recollects, "*One of them held my arms and intertwined them between the stairs of the ladder to the upper berth. Another one pulled my hair. A third thug whipped me with the buckled end of his belt, hitting my face*" (Vidya, 102). It is often confusing for a person when the internal and the external experiences are different. For example, if a person can feel that he was cut at a place and it is bleeding, but the people keep on saying that it is not blood that is coming out but just some other plasma, he would be confused. He would feel the pain, but he would doubt himself that if he is feeling the pain, there is no one acknowledging the pain. Similarly, Vidya faced her fears, but she was more confused than ever. "*University years were a time of introspection. I thought a great deal about myself and the troubles and woes of my existence. With this warning bell going off inside all the time, I was plagued by the constant fear that people were watching me.*" (Vidya, 44). It is observed that her confusion slowly became her nightmare, as she understood the position she was in. The constant mockery, the dissatisfaction of the family, everything was proving the point that she belongs to the marginalised society. It is one of the most fascinating things about humans that they will mock anything they do not understand. The mental health issue of Vidya increased with these alarming situations, and the answers were much more frightening as she kept on fighting the odds.

Childhood Trauma of Vidya

The most important theme that this thesis paper wishes to address is the mental trauma that most LGBT children face in their life. Childhood is the most important stage of development in every human being, and if any constant fear or state is indulged in this stage, it can be a disaster for the child. According to the concept given by Popovic et al., childhood stress can be stated to be a severe form of stress that can, over time, cause medical conditions like schizophrenia and other mental issues (1). Thus it is very important to indulge the child in various activities that will put less stress on their mind and make them less vulnerable to mental conditions in the future. People do not understand the importance of a good environment for any child, and this is the biggest reason that people suffer from various diseases related to their mental condition.

From the above discussions, it was clear that Vidya had faced a lot since her childhood, and she was unable to hide her true self from her family or from the world. Her whole world was filled up with. Vidya was born in India, and she was born at a time when the courts were not even taking the fact that thyroid genders were important. It could be easily determined how she was discriminated against every day by various people in society. *"Even kids from lower classes teased me at school. 'Look at this lady', they shouted after me."* (Vidya 31). All these were gradually affecting her at a young age, and she had a problem understanding why it was so. The questions were imminent, but the answers were diverse. The main problem is that Vidya was not alone in this journey; she was brave enough to fight her way out of all the abuses. However, it is not the case for every other child who has faced a similar morbid situation that often detours towards a tragedy. There are situation where suicide seems to be the only outcome for the child and they are easily taking such decisions without any hesitation.

II. Conclusion

The following novel is an eye-opener for the people in the society, as Vidya was lucky enough to have been educated so that she could pen down her experiences. It is an inspiring story full of pain coming from an individual whose only crime was to be what she felt. In a land where Lord Shiva showed perfection by the 'Ardhanarishwara' (half-male/half-female) image, it is astonishing that the place is so abusive to its transgender community, and it is a norm to discriminate against them and laugh at them. Vidya's struggle for existence can be an inspiration for the LGBT community in India and also abroad. This journey not only addresses the different issues of the society in India but the outcomes that often are not good enough. This book is for the two sides of the societies, on one side the people who do not understand the differences between identity of the gender and the other side who are constantly discriminated against. Vidya not only addresses the people who discriminates but also her words are for the people who faces the different situations like her. The LGBT community are slowly transforming and coming forward to become a part of the society and people like Vidya serves as an inspiration.

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