

## Eco Feminism in A. Revathi's Truth about Me: A Hijra Life Story

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### Abstract

The paper focuses on the deconstructed identity of Transwomen in general and Revathi in particular. Here the identity of Doraisamy is demolished and a new construction of identity is made as Revathi. It is her story and her perspectives that are considered for this study. She is not free from the clutches of the cynical society and of course her family.

**KEYWORDS:** society, identity, transwomen, family and demolished

Literature is an expression of human life. It acts as a mirror to explore our cultural norms and psychological character of human beings and it also exhibits the integral relationship among human beings. Many English writers try to make the readers experience the life of an individual through her autobiographical character. Revathi is one of the best in English Literature. She exposes her through her literary works. Doraisamy was the youngest of five children-the fourth boy who lived small village in Tamilnadu. He grew up shy, culturally effeminate, with an inclination to dress as a girl and do traditionally female activities around the house -the domestic chores, the games, the singing and dancing. As an indulged youngest child, this behaviour must at first have seemed merely precious. It was harder to ignore as he grew older; Doraisamy spends his childhood years with a growing unease as he tries to negotiate his body's incongruity with his inner desires and natural talents. In a family where every flaw is punished by physical violence one of Doraisamy's brothers has a penchant for beating him with cricket bats Doraisamy's dangers are not just about acceptance but also for his safety.

He met a group of like-spirited men at his teenage, who introduced him to visiting hijras. Doraisamy stole some money and an earring from his mother, and ran away from home. He went to Delhi, where his chosen "guru" lived, and asked her to take him under her wing. As Revathi, she could dress, walk and talk as a woman. But she is, of course, a hijra, that liminal third-sex, and so she was constrained to live and earn in specific places, in specific manners. The story follows Revathi's life as she moved from city to city, from Hijra House to House. Revathi yearned to live freely, to love, to be a woman - for me it was a bit odd to place myself in the mindset of someone who defined womanhood in terms of the loving, dignified service which seems so old fashioned, today, even oppressive if viewed as the only option. The hijra elders forbade her (and as far as I can make out, still forbid their younger, mentored daughters) from taking a husband, or a steady man. Proscribed from marriage, unable to work, unrecognized by the state bureaucracy, she had only three options to make money – she could beg, she could bless, or she could do sex work. Initially, she begged, in the flamboyant, utterly recognizable hijra style; but she felt restricted and constrained by the rules and demands of her hijra House, with her guru and her sisters. One of the underlying themes of Revathi's life is that for each step she took to attaining her desires the nirvaanam or castration, the financial power, the recognition, support and intimacy of other hijras who

knew what she was going through, and applauded her zeal and valued her as a person, she recognised new avenues of desire, of freedom, she now incoherently yearned for. A large part of the novel is taken up with her steps into sex work and it's hard to understand, to remember how limited her choices within the hijra Houses were, but in essence, at the age of twenty Revathi decided to take up sex work in order to fulfill her sexual desires. This was the only way, at the time that she could come close to sexual satisfaction. But being a sex worker, and sexual minority, means that you get the wrong kind of attention. Revathi does mention that she had moments of happiness in her life, but details in dry terms the brutal facts of life as a hijra – the dangers, the assaults, the rapes. Her tone while she describes the violence committed on her body by clients, by random rowdies, by policemen is one of matter-of-fact reportage. Revathi wants us to feel her pains and her sorrows, but her sufferings are not sensationalized; her dramatic moments are for her spiritual, emotional traumas.

Aside from the problems she has outside the hijra Houses and within oppressive gurus, infighting with other hijras, battles with other Houses and she maintains a fragile relationship with her family, whose acceptance of her new state is grudging at best. Aside from the tensions surrounding her gender identity, her family is involved in long-standing conflict over the parental property. To split it between three sons and one “daughter” is no laughing matter, especially when the daughter has so few avenues of income and is sensitive to rejection; let's not talk about the sons, one of whom is basically a terrible brother.

When Revathi finally moved to Bangalore she found “daughters” of her own, three young people from educated, fairly well-to-do families. The difference between these three hijras and the others of Revathi's acquaintance are startling and they were not comfortable within the hijra Houses, requiring more freedom and space, they did not dress conservatively outside of sex work. Revathi sympathised with their desires, and gave them the freedom they wanted and needed. One of these daughters was Famila another recognisable name. Famila was a dynamic hijra-feminist-queer activist. She died in 2004, and so I personally only ever see her from the points of view of the people who knew her and worked with her. Though nominally under Revathi's care, it is Famila who drew her into the realm of social activism, by introducing her to Sangama. Revathi defied hijra custom by taking a paying job at Sangama, where she learned about her rights, about what could be done to educate other people about those rights. Sangama gave Revathi the language to express her dissatisfaction and her desires, her need for her hijra sisters as well as her discomfort within their confining homes. Revathi's narrative evolves through the book from the simple to the more sophisticated. While the prose never attempts artistic stylisation, it is direct, heartfelt, and very honest. Within those boundaries of “plain prose” one sees the evolution of a Revathi whose thoughts and feelings grow clearer and attain more gravity. It's an interesting technique, all the more for being so understated.

For all that Revathi defines her loves and her duties in terms of service to those she cared for, she maintains a fierce, passionate espousal of her rights as a human being: to be treated with dignity, respect and acceptance. There's a note of ruthless practicality throughout her memoir that testifies to the affirmation of life, of being alive and whole, that she must make everyday to be the person she wants to be.

The paper concludes that Revathi documents them as they affect her life, but her aim in her autobiography is to speak for herself, her life, sorrows and joys, not for the entire hijra community. At times the book is extremely uncomfortable, even distressing. But it is a direct, plainspoken narrative of the life of someone who lives on the margins, in the liminal spaces that we in the mainstream ignore, are uneducated about and are sometimes actively hostile towards. It's an engaging story of a woman who does not hide her flaws or her virtues, with clear sight and judgement of the world she lives in.

### **References**

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