



The Key transsexual characters and their significance in Hindu Mythology and Lisa Williamson's the Art of being Normal – A Comparative Study

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Abstract

Transgenders are the most under privileged and sidelined group of people, mostly failed to secure position in the society. They are deprived of education, jobs, health care and proper sanitation and shelter. The biological changes have brought them under third sex category among the mortals. Transgenders were thought to be good omen in Hindu myths and considered as heavenly beings. Transgenders are under privileged group of people and the society has least bothered for them nor sought any attention for their plight. The welfare programmes for the emancipation of the forbidden group by the government. A handful of transgenders are evolved over the years by the provision of education. But, their empowerment is too little and too late. The innumerable sufferings are unmentionable and their hardships communicated. The article makes a valiant attempt to consolidate the sufferings, enhancement of their life in reference with Hindu Mythologies. The study aims to make a threadbare analysis of their ancient and present roles with reference to myth and Lisa Williamson's *The Art of Being Normal*.

Keywords: Transgender, mythology, deprivation.

Introduction

Hindu mythology holds transgender as an unique individual. There are very few writers and activists who work for the transgenders. In India transgenders are commonly known as Hijras. We find some people of men dressed like women by themselves in shops, bus stands, railway station and traffic signals. They beg by shouting and clapping their hands for getting more money. They bless the people if they give money or else they curse. Hence they destined to be abused and involved in sex work. The treatment that the transgenders receive very brutal and barbarious.

The modern advancement and education didn't educate people in marginalising fellow men even though we live in the modern world. But myth recongises the equality of all men. Especially Mahabharata portrays transgenders in high esteem. Similarly Lisa Williamson's *The art of Being Normal* pictured the plight of transgender in the current scenario. Being an activist she elaborately analyse the gender inequalities and third sex rights. This study makes an emphatic study on the upbringing of transgenders compared with the myth and a modern day novel.

In *Mahabharata* S.Rajagopalachari has focused on the female character named Amba, who has a boon to revenge Bhishma given by Lord Shiva. He portrayed Amba was a kind, lovable and emotional girl. She had an oscillatory mind when Salva rejected her. This incident paved a way for the transformation. Her vengeance towards Bhishma turned into a vigorous form. During *Mahabharata* period men and women gained equal importance from every place. Likewise, Ambha gained Shiva's boon as Sikhandi. C.Rajagoplachari describes Ambha in *Mahabharata*,

The lotus-eyed Amba spent six bitter years in sorrow
and baffled hope, and her heart was seared with suffering and
all the sweetness in her turned to gall and fierce hatred towards
Bhishma as the cause of her blighted life. She sought in vain
for a champion among the princess to fight and kill Bhishma
and thus avenge her wrongs but even the foremost warriors
were afraid of Bhishma and paid no heed to her appeal.(M 15).

The Epics welcomed transgenders by giving equal status. Krishna came to know that Sikhandi was Amba. On seeing Sikhandi in chariot Arjuna and others mocked in the Gurushethra. Ambha, Krishna narrated Sikhandi's transformation in the words of C.Rajagoplachari in *Mahabharata*,

She practised austerities in the
forest and in time was transformed into a male and became

known as Sikhandin...

Bhishma knew that

Sikhandin was born as female, and true to his code of chivalry

he would not fight him under any circumstance.(16-17).

In *Mahabharata* Sikhandi's transformation was supported, but in Lisa Williamson's *The art of being normal* one of the protagonist who was similar qualities to Amba named Kate has no recognition in the society. She was neglected by her family and friends. She was trembling to confirm her gender. She was born as David Piper at beginning of the story. Lisa Williamson expressed David's sorrow,

I can feel water building up under my eyelids,
threatening to spill. But, i can't cry in front of them. I won't...
at first I think maybe I've
had some kind of out body experience and I'm the one
responsible.(68).

Sikhandi didn't have such problem to expose her gender in front of the society. Amba doesn't have faith on hearing Lord Shiva's words regarding rebirth. She died by creating a flame and born as Sikhandi, a daughter of King Draupada. C.Rajagoplachari defines Sikhandi's emotion as transgender, "Sikhandin supported Bhima by pouring a shower of arrows on Bhishma" (194). Bhishma agreed and supported her words. And Lisa added the emotion of present transgender feeling in *The art of being normal* through David as Kate, "I hadn't written about wanting to be a footballer or an actor or a doctor, like everyone else. I hadn't written down anything like that... I wrote I wanted to be a girl,' I say, my voice cracking on girl.'"(196-197). They couldn't express their real face.

Like Kate many transpeople have affected mentally and physically. At present nobody is ready to take care of their child who is transgender by birth or in other ways. Such people are voluntarily expelled out by family and relations. Added to that, society is also discriminating them. Sikhandi's true identity was shown to Arjuna before entering into the battlefield. Likewise, David's true identity was shown by Leo and Lisa describe, " 'What I mean is, it's hard because I know you as a boy. But I reckon if I was a stranger and saw you on the street, I would assume you were a girl.'"(271).

Lisa portrayed Leo and David character's who were transgender and they were afraid to reveal their identity. They were excommunicated from every activities. It clearly indicates present situation of Hijras. But, in *Mahabharata* C.Rajagoplachari described transgender allowed in battlefield and Sikhandi learned arts of warfare in forest. Due to boon Bhishma didn't fight with Shikandi by uttering,

It is not possible for me to fight Sikhandin, for I can
 never raise my hand against woman. Nor I can with my hands
 kill the Pandavas, for my mind revolt against it. I will do
 everything barring these two and fight all the warriors opposed
 to you. Nothing is gained by loosing heart. Fight as kshtriya
 should and honour will be yours whatever the events.(307).

Kate and Leo Denton couldn't expose their identity to the society. They were trembling to survive without revealing the fact. Lisa describes in the *The art of being normal*, "Instead of skin, his chest is covered by what might look to anyone else like a tight white crop top. But not to me. I know exactly what leo is wearing. And Leo knows I know." (199). David felt that, " I don't know, Because I'm different"(85) and Leo too feels , " I imagine this parallel universe where Dad is still around. In it he takes me to football games, helps me with my homework and call me 'son'"(89).

In *Padmapurana*, Arjuna transformed and participated in dance, because he wished to attend the event. But, the event has made restriction for men, not to participate. So, women were encouraged to participate. Eventually many characters were interested to exhibit their skills in the event, consequently their functions. Leo's thought was portrayed by Lisa as, "I wasn,t born Leo, ' I say my voice growing quieter and quieter, So I'm almost whispering. ...'I was born a girl'".(179).

At denoting present, Lisa portray's David's sister Livvy who was neglected to hold her brother's hand, " ' Well don't want people to know we're related,'(23). She didn't allow him to enter into her room. Since in Mythology those characters were recognised much like the battlefield and other historical events. Arjuna taught dance and music to Virata's daughter Uttara in the name of Brihannala. C.Rajagopalachari denotes, " Arjuna transformed as enuch"(191). There are two reasons for Arjuna regarding transformation. Transgender's are treated in a highly respected state.

Like Arjuna David changed his name as Kate and dressed like women. He danced with Leo when he was in London. They revealed their identity whereas their family members and society don't know their secret. Lisa reveals David's mind by

I bundle up my boy clothes and shove them into my bag.
 I inspect myself in my compact and realise I have no idea
 whether I look like a girl or not. I have started as myself
 in the mirror so hard and for many hours at a time, I
 no longer know for sure which features are masculine and

which aen't. (254).

During war in *Mahabharata* Arjuna's real character revealed because Virata suspect female couldn't rush and run the chariot as per the war rules in which C.Rajagopalachari denotes, " " I know what I am talking about. Brihannala is no ordinary person. The chariot she drives can never see defeat, and whoever is in it, is sure of success in any understanding, no matter how difficult" " (213-214). Lisa demonstrates David hid his truth and retained his original costumes before boarding to home,

David travels back with his boy clothes.

'You still gonna tell them today?' I ask.

After two days as Kate, he looks strange

back in a baggy hoodie and skinny jeans,

with his boy's haircut.(303)

Mahabharata replicates more transgender characters. Aravan who was the son of Arjuna and Ullupi, offered to kill for Pandava's victory. There was a condition, which was he need to spend time as a married man for one night. Otherwise, he couldn't sacrifice his soul. Women are not ready to marry him. Lord Krishna transformed as a woman as Mohini and married Aravan and spent a whole night with him and left morning. As per rule he killed for Kurukshetra war. This was the reason from people of Tamilnadu transgender's called themselves as Aravani. There is as festival for 18 days conducted by tramsgenders in Tamilnadu at Koovagam. There transwomen thought them as Aravan's (Koothandavar) wives and they dressed like the bride. At morning they wear white dress removing flowers, bangles and mourn for Aravan's death.

In *Ramayana* Lord Rama was banished and exiled for 14 years in the forest. During that time he ordered men and women to go back to Ayodhya. Hijra's stayed with him and they made Rama to attend all the rituals conducted by Hijra, Rama was happily participated in all the events. In present condition such acceptance is impossible which is transparently dealt in *The Art of being normal*. Even today trans people are suffering for their survival. Lisa portrays the transgender's present state, " I board the train at the back and locate the nearest toilet." (252). There are many restriction given by government. Still now they are not aware of that legal documents. In Mythology they are treated as good omen. But, in real they are mocking by the surroundings. Despite the many technical advancements and education people descriminating and neglecting them.

Conclusion

To conclude the different vision of transgender from myth to present situation by C.Rajagopalachari and Lisa Williamson advocates various points. At first there were a lack of rights for transgender. The Rights of Transgender Bill was passed in 2004 and Rights of Transgender on 2016. The bill was just passed and there was no argument or debate in Lok Sabha for wretched people. They are agitating and demonstrating for their rights. Section 377 (Decriminalization of transgender) was passed under British rule. But, Supreme Court of India rejected the application on September 2018. The main reason was unnatural offence, the consensual homosexual sex between adults was unconditional. So, the panel members rejected the application. This brought more changes towards Hijras. They were marginalised and discriminated.

Through literature many writers are fighting for the rights of transgenders. The readers are the responsible persons who must bring awareness towards each and every citizen. People have rights to be what they are and what they wish to become. There are more rights for transgenders. But, those all are in documentary form not in use for their life. At first society should support them and we should insist them about their rights. They have recognition as Third Gender in the identity cards, voter id, and the other documents. The Government and society should take certain measures to abolish discrimination among them and should give them proper rights like common men and women.

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