

Book Review

***Transgender in Indian Context: Rights and Activism* by Dipak Giri**

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Transgender in Indian Context: Rights and Activism

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Transgender in Indian Context: Rights and Activism edited by Dipak Giri is an important addition to transgender studies in India. The transgender community in India has a unique and complex history, deeply intertwined with cultural, religious, and social narratives. Despite facing significant challenges, transgender individuals have made remarkable strides in fighting for their rights and recognition. This review delves into various literary works and studies that explore the multifaceted experiences, struggles, and triumphs of the transgender community in India in Giri's book *Transgender in Indian Context: Rights and Activism*.

A. Revathi's autobiographical work, *The Truth about Me: A Hijra Life Story*, in the opening chapter of this edited volume provides a poignant and deeply personal narrative of her journey as a transgender woman in India. This study examines her struggle with identity, societal acceptance, and the internal conflict of feeling trapped in a body that does not align with her true self. Revathi's story is not just about personal transformation but also about challenging societal norms and seeking acceptance in a world that often views transgender individuals as flawed or abnormal. Her narrative highlights the importance of self-acceptance and the relentless fight for dignity and rights within a predominantly conservative society.

Devdutt Pattanaik's *The Pregnant King* in the second chapter delves into the complexities of gender and identity through the lens of Indian mythology. The novel explores the conflict between dharma (duty, belief) and truth (the ultimate reality) by presenting a story where traditional gender roles and identities are questioned. This work sheds light on how ancient texts and stories can be reinterpreted to understand and validate transgender identities. The protagonist's journey reflects the struggle between societal expectations and personal truth, a theme that resonates deeply with the transgender experience in contemporary India.

The third chapter of this book on a Malayalam drama film *Njan Marykutty* is a significant contribution to understanding the psychological and emotional landscapes of transgender individuals. This work explores the inner thoughts, feelings, and challenges faced by the protagonist, Marykutty, as she navigates her identity and societal perceptions. The narrative provides a nuanced portrayal of the transgender experience, emphasizing the importance of mental health and self-acceptance. It highlights the resilience and strength required to live authentically in the face of societal prejudice and discrimination.

The fourth chapter of this book furthers study on A. Revathi and examines the hardships and stigmatization faced by transgender individuals. The chapter emphasizes the flagitiousness or moral depravity, attributed to transgender lives by mainstream society. The narrative

exposes the violence, exploitation and marginalization that hijras endure, challenging readers to confront their own prejudices and the systemic injustices perpetuated against the transgender community.

The fifth chapter of this book highlights the educational and socio-economic challenges faced by transgender individuals in India and other Asian countries. It explores various international perspectives and best practices for promoting the rights and inclusion of the transgender community. The study underscores the critical role of education and socio-economic opportunities in empowering transgender individuals and fostering a more inclusive society.

Next in the sixth chapter, a study on Kavita Sinha's *Pourush* provides a deep exploration of the concept of 'self' and 'the others' in the context of transgender identity. This reading examines how transgender individuals navigate their sense of self in relation to societal perceptions and expectations. It highlights the ongoing struggle for recognition and acceptance, as well as the resilience and agency of transgender individuals in asserting their identities.

The seventh chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the identity and rights issues faced by the transgender community in India. It examines the legal, social and cultural barriers to equality and inclusion and highlights the progress made in recent years. The study also explores the role of activism and advocacy in advancing transgender rights and challenging discriminatory practices.

The eighth chapter delves into the various contentions and conundrums surrounding the conceptualization of transgender identity in India. It explores the cultural, religious and historical factors that influence perceptions of gender and sexuality. The study also examines the evolving legal and social frameworks that impact the lives of transgender individuals, highlighting both progress and ongoing challenges.

The ninth chapter examines the representation of queer and transgender characters in Indian cinema. It analyzes how films portray transgender identities and the impact of these representations on public perceptions and attitudes. The study highlights both positive and problematic portrayals and discusses the potential of cinema as a tool for social change and awareness.

The subsequent chapter on Mahesh Dattani's play *Seven Steps Around the Fire* brings to light the existence and struggles of the hijra community in India. This study explores the themes of invisibility, marginalization and the fight for identity and acceptance. The play challenges societal norms and prejudices, offering a powerful commentary on the human rights and issues faced by the hijra community.

Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's life and activism in the eleventh chapter serve as a powerful example of the diverse experiences and identities within the transgender community in reference to her autobiography *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*. This work examines her contributions to the fight for transgender rights and her role in raising awareness and challenging stereotypes. Laxmi's story highlights the importance of visibility and advocacy in effecting social change.

Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* in the twelfth chapter explores the perceived threat of transgender individuals to traditional gender roles and societal norms. This study examines the portrayal of transgender characters and the societal reactions they provoke. It highlights the intersection of gender, politics and identity and the ways in which transgender individuals challenge and redefine societal expectations.

Next the story of Manobi Bandyopadhyay, India's first transgender principal, underscores the transformative power of education. This work explores her journey from facing discrimination and marginalization to achieving a significant educational milestone in reference to her autobiography *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi*. Manobi's story highlights the

critical role of education in challenging stereotypes and empowering transgender individuals to pursue their dreams.

The fourteenth chapter furthers study on Mahesh Dattani and explores the social prejudice faced by the hijra community, as depicted in Dattani's *Seven Steps Around the Fire*. It examines the community's fight for identity and acceptance and the societal barriers that hinder their progress. The work challenges readers to confront their own biases and consider the broader implications of discrimination and exclusion.

Devdutt Pattanaik's *The Pregnant King* in the fifteenth chapter is critically evaluated for its representation of transgender identities. This study analyzes the novel's themes and characters and its contribution to the discourse on gender and sexuality in Indian literature. It highlights the novel's role in challenging traditional narratives and offering a more inclusive perspective on gender identity.

The sixteenth chapter explores Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's personal journey from being recognized as a transgender individual to defining her own identity as "self" gender in another autobiography *Red Lipstick: The Men in My Life*. It examines the significance of self-identity and the empowerment that comes from rejecting imposed labels. Laxmi's story is a testament to the importance of self-definition and the ongoing fight for recognition and rights.

The seventeenth chapter investigates references to transgender identities in ancient Indian Hindu mythology and scriptures. It explores how these texts can be reinterpreted to validate and support contemporary understandings of gender diversity. The work highlights the cultural and historical richness of transgender identities in India, challenging modern-day prejudices and misconceptions.

Mahesh Dattani's works in the eighteenth chapter of this volume are examined for their contributions to theorizing transgender identities in Indian English literature. This study explores the themes and narratives that Dattani employs to portray transgender experiences and

challenges. It highlights the significance of literary representation in shaping public perceptions and advancing the discourse on transgender rights.

The nineteenth chapter of this book examines the portrayal of hijras again in Mahesh Dattani's *Seven Steps around the Fire*, focusing on their struggle to be heard and recognized. It explores the social realities and injustices faced by the hijra community, and the play's role in giving them a voice. The study emphasizes the importance of representation and advocacy in challenging societal norms and promoting inclusivity.

The final chapter on Living Smile Vidya's *I am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey* explores the reversal of traditional gender binaries and the journey towards self-acceptance. This work delves into Vidya's personal experiences, challenges and triumphs as a transgender woman. It highlights the fluidity of gender and the importance of embracing one's true identity, despite societal pressures and prejudices.

Dipak Giri's *Transgender in Indian Context: Rights and Activism* reveals a rich tapestry of personal narratives, literary representations and socio-cultural challenges. The works discussed above offer valuable insights into the lived experiences of transgender individuals, their struggles for acceptance and the ongoing fight for rights and recognition. Through literature, cinema and activism, the transgender community continues to challenge societal norms and advocate for a more inclusive and equitable future. The journey towards equality is fraught with challenges but the resilience and determination of transgender individuals and their allies provide hope for a brighter, more inclusive future.

About the Reviewer

Dr. K. Kavitha serves as an Assistant Professor of English at V. V. Vanniaperumal College for Women in Virudhunagar, Tamil Nadu, India, bringing nearly 15 years of pedagogical expertise to her role. She obtained her BA in English and MA from Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, and completed her Ph.D. at Bharathiar University, Coimbatore. Demonstrating her academic rigor, Dr. Kavitha has successfully cleared the State Level Test conducted by Mother Teresa University, Kodaikanal. Her scholarly contributions include over 15 publications in various esteemed journals. Dr. Kavitha's research interests are notably focused on Indian Writing in English and Diasporic Literature.