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**Discerning the Identity and Ostracization: The Phase of Subservience in A. Revathi's *The***

***Truth About Me***

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**Abstract**

This research article explores the complex relationship between marginalization and gender identity. The novel amplifies the voices of the transgender community in India. It raises questions about the institutional, societal, and cultural practices that perpetuate their marginalization and examines how Revathi's novel highlights the connection between gender identity and the subservient experience of transgender individuals. Drawing on Trauma Theory, this article, through its lens, examines the struggles endured by transgender people, which lead to particular forms of discrimination and social exclusion. Through Revathi's narration, this article addresses the existential crisis that accompanies identity formation in the context of marginalization, shaped by social class, caste, and gender. This study aims to provide a crucial framework for exploring how the voices of marginalized people navigate a society that often attempts to silence them. It also offers insight into how Revathi's life experiences deepen the understanding of the complexity of gender identity.

**Keywords:** marginalization, identity, subaltern, trauma



## Introduction

An Indian author, A. Revathi is well known for her significant contributions to the rights of the transgender community, as a member of *hijra* community. Her memoir *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* provides a deep and clear projection of her life experiences, successes, and obstacles as a trans woman. This novel was first written in Tamil and then translated into English. It emphasizes discrimination, physical and mental traumas, and the quest for identity that *hijras* endure in this society. Revathi has gained respect as a result of her social activity by providing a great conversation about the rights of transgender individuals. The convergence of marginalization, trauma, identity, and subservience is a vast area of inquiry in the field of postcolonial discourse. *The Truth About Me* is an emotional story that highlights these issues, especially when viewed under the lens of trauma and subalternity. Revathi's experiences, as a *hijra* in India, are clearly explored which in turn gives voice to the transgender group that has been hushed and marginalized. In multicultural and diversity perspective in art theory article, Stella A. Stephny states "the process in which individuals or entire cultural groups are systemically blocked from or denied full access to various rights, opportunities and resources that are normally available to members of the dominant cultural groups is referred to as marginalization" (90). Revathi shares her own life story to illuminate the obstacles faced by the transgender community, and also shows the intricate webs of social and cultural oppression that enabled to shape her identity and experiences. This analysis highlights the necessity for compassionate approaches to understand identity formation and marginalization by scanning it under the lens of intersectionality, which provides a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of the transgender community.



## Literature Review

According to Shubhangi Vaidya, Revathi's story brings to limelight over the trans community by breaking stereotypes, providing them with real-life struggles and making it an example of resistance. In her efforts to make her autobiography available among her own community members, she decides to write her work in Tamil, which is her mother tongue, and then translates it into English for a wider audience. Her decision to write her work in both languages is appreciable because it connects the people globally and makes them aware of the gender identity and the trans community in a particular cultural framework. Revathi herself states that she wants society to learn the truth about their lives beyond superstitions. This highlights her dedication to providing a platform to her trans community. Revathi's work grasps her way of self-realization and acceptance as a transwoman, providing a great exploration of gender identity. According to Devika and Menon, the novel is a political statement that questions gender binary division. The novel illustrates Revathi's self-examination to match her assigned male identity.

*The Truth About Me*, with marginalization as Revathi's narrative, focuses on the structural dominance of the society over the *hijra* community which includes institutional, societal and family exclusion. According to Aniruddha Dutta, Revathi's novel expresses marginalization based on gender, caste, and class. She demonstrates difficulties in living a life with difficulties, mockery, and overcoming preconceptions. According to R. Raj Rao, Revathi's novel covers the problems of caste, class and identity in addition to the gender.

In NIH article Nemoto et.al. state that "Transgender persons are frequently exposed to violence, sexual assaults and violence, and verbal and nonphysical harassment, derive from various perpetrators. Transgender persons suffer from assaults and these experiences persist



throughout life”. Through trauma theory, it is clear that her identity as a transgender woman is influenced by her personal desires and external factors of oppression and violence.

Trauma theory provides a framework for comprehending the mental trauma of the prevailing marginalization and violence. According to Cathy Caruth, trauma is not just an injury made psychologically but is also caused when society fails to understand them. Revathi’s account of her own life, where she experiences prejudice, violence, and alienation from her family, is a major example of how trauma affects her self-worth. Revathi’s autobiography is an act of protest as well as the narration of horrific events. She regains power and control over her suffering which she has undergone and demonstrates that sharing a story can be a therapeutic tool.

### **Marginalization**

Understanding the concept of marginalization has a long-term effect on the psychology and identity of the marginalized community and requires the comprehension of trauma theory. Social groups that are classified as subalterns are those who are kept out by the superior power system and have minimal or no access to the political and cultural areas where power plays a major role. John Beverly states about subaltern in Duke university press article that “Subalternity refers to a condition of subordination brought about by colonization or other forms of economic, social, racial, linguistic, and/or cultural dominance” (1999). This idea has been established in postcolonial studies by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Ranajit Guha, a member of the Subaltern Studies Group, used to highlight real-life incidents of marginalized people in tracking the historiography. Here, Revathi plays a pivotal role as a subaltern in *The Truth About Me* in numerous ways. In this world, she is not only excluded by gender norms, but also by caste, class, and sexuality. Her narration gives a clear account of how the superior power holds to oppress and marginalize transgender individuals who do not conform to the dominant class structures.



### **Voice of Subaltern**

All the traumatic experiences that Revathi has faced, align with Spivak's question "Can the subaltern speak?". Revathi's life was filled with a sense of emptiness and voicelessness before receiving a good recognition of her writing as an author, which is a common experience endured by the marginalized community. In addition, she was shunned by her own family members because of her gender transformation and social standing. Revathi decides to write her own life story as a novel to give a clear response and break all stereotypes. By doing this, she attempts to respond to Spivak's question that the subaltern can also speak, but only through numerous struggles and resistance against the superior power that silence them.

### **Trauma Theory**

Trauma theory was developed by Cathy Caruth, a literary theorist. NIH article states, "Trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being." The trauma theory concerns how people perceive, recount, and interpret all traumatic experiences. Trauma theory also highlights the psychological impacts of marginalization on Revathi and the transgender community. Through the writings of Revathi, one can understand trauma rooted in society. It is not only intolerant of differences but also aggressive in its exclusion. Throughout her life, Revathi has endured constant struggles as a result of trauma, ranging from physical abuse to discrimination by society, such as public places and the work area. In one instance, Revathi has suffered in the hands of a police officer after being taken into custody. She has endured considerable suffering from her own family members. She lives in a society where she is often portrayed as "other" which completely damages her mental peace. As



the transgender community navigates in a society that often devalues and dehumanizes them, trauma is not only considered an individual experience in society but also a collective experience.

Revathi's reflective narration shows a deep connection between the changes in identity and trauma. In addition to her quest for identity, her fight to achieve gender identity is the result of the social pain of not being allowed to be herself. Thus, trauma shapes Revathi's perception of herself and the society around her, and both things play a damaging and formative role in her life. In order to live a normal life, transgender people often face violence and continue throughout their lifetime.

### **Intersecting Identities**

*The Truth About Me* provides a unique and unvarnished portrayal in the life of a *hijra* in India by illuminating the paths of gender, class, and caste that intertwine to create marginalization. Revathi conveys the voice of the subaltern and how her overlapping identities impact her self-identity and society. She exemplifies the subaltern persona in the postcolonial concept by sharing her life story, in which a person's voice is stifled by hegemonic power institutions. Her experience as a *hijra* is a prime example of the exacerbated marginalization faced by the transgender community in India. In India, transwomen are considered to be *hijras*. Many *hijras* live dual lives to avoid violence and marginalization. In IJSP journal Mal and Sibsankar say that "Many *Hijras* play double-life in the dichotomous gendered society to avoid discriminations. They wear female clothes and adopt feminine names while visiting general society and they wear male clothes and adopt male gestures while living with o relatives". Many transgenders suppress their real identities to survive in society.



Being a *hijra* and a person with fewer financial resources, are the intersecting identities that contribute to Revathi's marginalization. Every element of her identity provides a unique contribution to her societal standing, strengthening her subaltern rank. Revathi lives outside the traditional gender binary maintained by Indian society. In India, *hijras* hold a marginal and liminal space, where they are frequently stigmatized and despised as "other", but sometimes they are occasionally honored and even worshipped for their claimed connection with divine powers. However, *hijras* are greatly excluded and denied fundamental rights, and have been treated as outcasts in modern society. Owing to the class structure of Indian society, Revathi's caste status worsens her sense of alienation and prejudice by aggravating marginalization. Owing to the limitations imposed by her working-class background, she is economically dependent and frequently exploited.

Revathi's life story demonstrates how Spivak's understanding of subalternity underlines the intersection of social identities and the resulting sense of helplessness. According to her, people who are constantly silenced by the dominant discourses and are subalterns. As a person who represents a group and is consistently excluded from involvement in social, economic, and political life, Revathi's story explains how the intersection of gender, caste, and class positions her at the margins of society. Through her autobiography, Revathi challenges Spivak's claim that the subaltern cannot genuinely speak in their own voice and confront societal alienation.

As a transwoman, Revathi experiences assault, objectification, and marginalization. Her identity subverts the strict gender roles that are deeply ingrained in the Indian culture, in which the people who do not fit in are given less chance due to the binary conception of gender. In NIH article Diwan, Cortez, Smelyanskaya and Keatley state that "Like all other human beings, trans people have rights- to life, liberty, equality, health, privacy, speech, and expression, but



constantly face denial of these rights because of the rejection of the trans person's right to their gender identity." Being a transwoman, Revathi becomes a social situation where she always faces open violence, mockery, and contempt. Her life experience serves as a metaphor for the transgender community's battle for acceptance among people who continue to treat them as abnormal.

Revathi explains how her psychological trauma and marginalization are exacerbated by being thrown out of her house, being mistreated by her own family members, and experiencing violence in public places. In NIH article Koken, Bimbi and Parson state that "Because of the stigma associated with transgenderism, many transwomen experience rejection or abuse at the hands of their parents and primary caregivers as children and adolescents". Structural exclusion prevents them from having rights in housing, jobs, healthcare, and education. She describes that, through the lens of society, she is always objectified and hated. Transwomen often lose their unique quality due to objectification and as a result they become ignorant and prejudiced. Through this, the author tries to demonstrate how the view of society over the trans community creates a strict barrier which causes them so many obstacles to obtain their self-respect and humanity.

Revathi often finds herself in vulnerable circumstances where her words are silenced, and her rights are limited due to the interplay of caste, class and gender identity. She also describes her encounters with the prejudice in the workplace, where her gender identity plays a major role in marginalizing her from the workplace. Gradually, she depends on the exploitative and dehumanizing way of making money. Due to the limitation in her financial independence, she is identified with her subaltern status.





## Voice of the Subaltern

According to Spivak, the subaltern cannot speak around the dominant power as their voices are either neglected or twisted by the dominant discourses. In Research Gate article, Verlo states that “Subaltern as a concept related to issues of dominance and power, democracy and citizenship, resistance and transformation. Subalternity is a position without identity, a position “where social lines of mobility, being elsewhere, do not permit the formation of a recognizable basis of action”. And such ideas are contradicted by the choice which is made by Revathi to share her life story as an autobiography, in which she explains her own experience to show the life lead by the trans people. She breaks the idea which circulates that the subaltern has no voice or strength through sharing her experience in her autobiography. Through sharing her viewpoints, she guarantees that story is expressed on behalf of herself and acts as an opposition against the rules and regulations which makes her hidden. In addition to that Revathi’s work strengthens the trans community by turning the spotlight towards the hardships they face. She portrays her experience like a mirror to the society by describing the abuse, marginalization and the fortitude she has endured in her life. Through her work she challenges the obstacles which silence them and leads to the path of subalternity. She defends her rights to define herself rather than making others to define her life by sharing her experiences and defying the dehumanization and ostracization of the society. Her works are a strong act of identity redefinition. She alters herself from the society’s limited classifications by running out of the societal limitations that portrays *hijras* as “other”. Her life lesson challenges the structures which determines the people to speak. She challenges the historical seclusions around the trans people by mirroring her life and adding a clear conversation on the formation of identity and the rights of the transgender people. In addition to that, her experience gives the trans community a platform to make their life



recognized and accepted. She redefines the word *hijra* by spilling about the hardships they face. This shows her transgender community as a strong group who fight against the oppression daily rather than portraying themselves as victims. By confronting her ostracization, her works turns into an image of empowerment.

### **Role of Trauma in Identity Formation**

Revathi's novel explores how the trauma and identity formation connect in the life of *hijras* in India. It also comprehends how her experience of violence and marginalization gives a huge impact on her mental growth by using the trauma theory. According to Cathy Caruth who has coined the trauma theory, it can be the result of a broken sense of self, when a person's self-identity is continuously impacted by the memories of the trauma from the past and also the fears of the upcoming injury. The author's experience plays as an example of how trauma gets ingrained in a human's identity and affects their resilience. Systemic prejudice, mental abuse and violence had a significant impact over the psychological health of Revathi throughout her life. She has experienced physical abuse and a sense of rejection from her family since her childhood days as they have failed to recognize her true gender. In her work, she clearly pictures about how her family has disowned her by considering her as a piece of shame. The rejection which she has faced in her own family is the main source of trauma as it perpetuates the idea that her real identity has felt undeserved in love and acceptance. Due to this rejection, she takes up the step to enter into the world of *hijras* in the search of acceptance by leaving her home behind. Even after entering into her community, she experiences layers of trauma, as she faces conflict in her life.

A recurring subject in the novel is the physical abuse, which Revathi faces, underscores the harsh consequences of being looked as "other" in a particular group which maintains a rigid gender stereotype. She even faces harassment and physical violence even in the public places.



“Men on the streets would throw stones at me, laughing as if my pain were a spectacle for their entertainment” (Revathi 188). Such violence sets as a reminder that she is seen as an outsider, which restrict her from receiving the respect she deserves as a human being. Her interaction with the society is shaped by the recurring incidents of assaults, which adds to the generalized sense of fear. According to the trauma theory, such experiences results in alertness and a strong sense of danger which gradually gets ingrained in the mindset of Revathi as she learns to survive in an adverse setting.

Revathi has experienced mental abuse in addition to the physical violence, which has destroyed her self-worth and fed her inferiority and humiliation due to prejudice which is prevailing in the society. In NIH article, Wilson, Chen, Arayasirikul, Raymond and McFarland state that “Prejudice is enacted in numerous forms of discrimination resulting in everything from discrimination in education, employment and health care to unpunished violence and murder of transwomen, especially transwomen of color” (2016). Revathi feels more alienated from her family because of identity.

Trauma theory states that emotional abuse is highly harmful to an individual’s self-concept, mainly when it takes its origin from the family members. Revathi is often subjected to the social pressure from the society as well as her own family, in which she has been demanded to adhere to the conventional standards of masculinity. She fights with her inner self as a result of the identity constructions and societal expectations. She has a destructed identity in which she often doubts her value and fumbles between her natural self and the expectations placed on her. Her quest for the acceptance for who she is, and the fear of unaccepted reality would throw her in the world of loneliness. She wants to live her life embarrassing her true identity but fears to



show it as it may result in marginalization. Her trauma is exacerbated by the societal discrimination.

Being a *hijra* she has been denied from the opportunities of employment. The trauma theory states that the particular people who experience the systemic discrimination over a limited time may experience sense of helplessness. By that they get an idea of being lost control over particular situation. Revathi states that, survival itself is a great fight for the people like her. Furthermore, an important component of Revathi's story is the transgender community's communal experiences of trauma. Even though the trans community faces lots of marginalization and pain, it gives Revathi a sense of belonging. The transgender community has multiple connections because the members have endured numerous forms of abuses and discriminations.

Revathi states that the *hijra* community needs to balance between the survival and help as few members are forced to lead over one another so that they fit into the society, which provides them limited opportunities. This illustrates the nuanced methods in which the trauma influences interpersonal relationship within an organization.

Revathi's intention to write an autobiographic novel is an act of power recovery and also the sign that she has rejected the trauma which has influenced her life. She stands for the trans community as well as for herself. She wants people to know about the life they are living with struggles and humiliations. Revathi states in her novel that

I was afraid that if the world knew I was a hijra, I would be isolated. I was afraid that if my family or people in my neighbourhood came to know that I had done sex work, they would consider me a bad person. I felt that it was wrong to be a hijra, and to do sex work. However, working in Sangama I was beginning to realize that none of it was my fault—the way the world perceived me and refused to accept me, the manner in which it



snatched away my rights and made it difficult for me to earn a living except through begging and sex work, the violence it contemptuously inflicted on me. (244)

By using her narration as a redefining tool, she shows her capability to change her pain into the narration of resilience and victory. Through her novel, she portrays how identity and trauma are deeply connected mainly in the underprivileged groups like the trans communities. Her narration highlights the mental trauma of assault, denial, ostracization and explains how such incidents create trauma in a person's sense of identity and community. Under the lens of trauma theory, the novel helps us to understand the influence that the systemic oppression has on one's personal growth. Her autobiography takes a quick turn which creates awareness and understands the struggles of the marginalized community. Revathi defines her identity and restores her position in the society that continuously tried to exclude her by questioning the very existence.

The finding of the paper is that the novel recounts the widespread marginalisation, traumas and discrimination, which the *hijra* community experiences. Her life story expresses the repressive systems of the family as well as the society's expectations to be subservient which suppressed Revathi's true identity. But Revathi challenges all these systems with her tenacity and quest for self-acceptance and even serves as the voice to the voiceless.

## Conclusion

To conclude *The Truth About Me* by A. Revathi portrays a thorough examination of the experience of the subalternity, identity formation and marginalization by using the trauma theory. It makes us to understand how the systematic oppression has great impact over the marginalized people and how they negotiate the challenges of identity formation with these restrictions by examining her story through the lens of trauma theory. Even though the *hijra* community gives an aura of belonging it too consists of the societal trauma. The *hijras* in the



community also face conflicts among them as they have limited opportunities to survive. Their relationship can be both enhanced and also be stressed by the trauma which paves path to the rivalry among them. Revathi states that such intricate connections are just a reflection of the traumas which endured by the marginalized community. The author's story is a crucial resource to understand the complex life experience of the subaltern since it provides a clear narration and it also provides a wider perspective on the state of transgender people in the Indian society.



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