

Chapter V

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Writing as Therapy

A few years ago, Yale University School of Public Health conducted a study and found a link between reading and life span longevity. They claimed that reading could reduce cognitive decline, encourage empathy, reduce stress levels, boost happiness, and even preclude dementia. The effects persisted even after ruling out factors like gender, education, and health. Experimentations have also proved the benefits of writing too. Writing helps an individual to work through the thoughts and emotions, regulates the feelings and provides a healthy outlet to express the sensations through words. Dr. James Pennebaker from University of Texas conducted a study among his students. He randomly selected some undergraduates and classified them into four groups. Each one of them was asked to write for fifteen minutes for four consecutive nights. Three of the groups were asked to write about the traumatic events occurred in their lives and the fourth group wrote about some other trifling topic. All the four groups were then monitored for the next six months and researchers found that the students who wrote about their traumatic past exhibited a change of behavior and even reported that the writings helped them to recover from their psychological issues. Those who practiced it regularly then had fewer visits to the counselling centers. Writing has the power to create self- awareness about the emotions the individual is going through. It reflects the person's traits, feelings, behaviours, values, and motivations.

The articulation of gender, a socially constructed one, through language, and literature is one of the familiar debates in existence. However, it is pertinent to recall that such debates call for its renewal and relocation in the contemporary society.

Considering the line of reasoning that gender does not allude to a pre-set phenomenon, in contrast, it is constructed through the recurrence of many actions solidified into an innermost self that makes one's gender, it could be maintained that the formalized repetitions of such actions could be overturned in order to challenge the socially anticipated functions from a gendered identity. Therefore, the dictated social functions on persons owing to their gendered identities could not have control anymore over the socio-cultural definitions. This exposes the fabricated nature of the patriarchal master- narratives of the fixed compartmentalization of gender identities and sexual orientation, hence revealing that such compartmentalization is a fallacy that acts as an ideological apparatus for the perpetration of the ingrained socio-cultural standards. These discussions are still legitimate and unmistakable even in the scholarly circles as well as in the non-scholastic circles of our society.

Additionally, these conventionalities and their deconstructions get best depicted in autobiographical forms particularly in memoirs and blogs written by the queer people. As queer self-narrative practitioners aim at deconstructing the exclusionary practices of patriarchy, as it attempts to subvert the structures of gender. It also proves that gender as appearance, a study based on autobiographers, memoirists, and bloggers associated with queer self-narratives could be the best device to comprehend these deconstructions to clarify the fluidity of gender. Biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, diaries, and personal blogs have the potentiality to be the voice of the dispossessed and the culturally uprooted, vindicating their voice to articulate both for and beyond the individual.

Autobiography is one of the most important and popular forms of literature. It is assertively a truthful record of an individual which is used as a means of self-expression. *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* by A. Revathi is a magnificently

portrayed firsthand account of an Indian trans woman. The autobiography is not solely about her gender realization, struggles, discriminations faced in the society, and social work rather Revathi stands as a representative of a subjugated community. Through *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*, the readers can comprehend the life of transgender people in India. Revathi was forced to undergo several struggles in life due to her gender identity as trans.

Life accounts of the sexual minorities do not glorify the uniqueness of their identity, they rather reveal how self-consciousness of the narrators manifests their being transgender first and an individual later. Akin to other marginalized communities, gender and sexual minorities have to invent fresh ways of creative resistance that sparks out of their existing realities, existential encounters, setbacks and triumphs as they settle their slot in the society. These unique tools of creativity are generated by the collective effort of the victims to guard themselves against malicious forces and their life accounts reveal that they are against establishing unified subjects and viewpoints. For several years readers have missed out the testimonial literatures of sexual and gender minorities and dismissed them as unfaithful sources to believe consequently putting an over dependence on sources unsympathetic to queerness. These sources often provided a stereotyped idea of non-normative sexual orientations and highly judgmental of the character of transgender persons.

The fable of hijras as child-kidnappers, criminals, evil doers, disease bearers, vagabonds, sex workers etc. were the product of typical literary conception of queer sexuality held by the public for years together. The ultimate sources for the study of gender queerness in India are the transgender testimonies written or dictated to others by a specific community of Indian male to female transgender persons known as the hijras. Recent literature on hijras returns to the issue of gender ambiguity, questions

binary polarity and also advocates cross cultural understanding of gender fluidity. The Western versus non-Western tolerance for non-normative sexual and gender categories has been the subject of discourse during recent times. The different categories of gender and sexual orientation from various parts of the world who represent an alternative to the rigid duality of the Anglo European gender system, the reasons for their existence, their struggle for survival, their multiplicity of social differences and their attempt to express themselves in order to bring about a change in the general public thereby gaining acceptance and respect in the society have become central motifs of discussion.

In telling their story they marvelously evoke an intense apprehension of being in the wrong body that afflicted them from their infancy. To be genuine to themselves and to get away with the violence inflicted upon them within their homes and in the community, they ran away to the community of hijras to find refuge. Their life became a series of ridiculous episodes and dangerous emotional and physical adventures to become women and to find acceptance and love. These are moving accounts of hijras who resisted humiliation, mistreatment, and brutality both within their respective homes and in society to find a life of dignity. Every individual has equal rights in the society to lead a life which is convenient for them but the marginalized sectors are not given equal rights and opportunities. They are denied their rights in the name of gender, sex, caste, religion etc. To live in the society people either have to oblige or oppose those double standard ideas. Revathi was physically and psychologically torn out by the oppositions she faced as a trans woman. She encountered various of difficulties to be a woman and to live a life of her dream but soon she found out that the society she lives in does not welcome people like her. And thus she decided to fight her way through. Through her autobiography, Revathi tries to make people aware of the

struggles transgender individuals face in their families, educational institutions, work place, and neighbourhood.

I am one such individual who has been marginalized because I was born a male and wanted to live my life as a woman. *The Truth about Me* is about my everyday experience of discrimination, ridicule and pain; it is also about my endurance and my joys.

As a hijra I get pushed to the fringes of society. Yet I have dared to share my innermost life with you—about being a hijra and also about doing sex work.

(Revathi v)

In the Indian society, the dimension of marginalization of the third gender manifests itself in various cultural and social norms. The bigotry towards the trans community is not a current occurrence; it has developed before centuries. They were treated inferior, in the hegemonic system of binaries of being masculine and feminine because of the perception of sexual orientation and gender identity. Gender identity refers to the personal view of oneself as male or female: how a person identifies his/her gender regardless of the sex assigned at the time of birth. It is the inner sense of being of an individual; that of being a male or female or somewhere in between those identities. When Revathi came out as a trans woman, her parents, and other family members ridiculed and harassed her instead of lending a supporting hand. She was ostracized by her siblings and friends. Also she was physically abused and tortured by the police and goons. The verbal and physical torment affected her psychologically. Revathi was emotionally torn apart and began to have suicidal tendencies. The trauma was unbearable for her which resulted in consuming of alcohol. She used to go to a bar and bemoaned her worries to strangers. She picked up fights with fellow hijras and even self-harmed by breaking a glass bottle on her head.

Revathi thought she could find a temporary solace in alcohol but that led to various other problems.

Famila, one of Revathi's daughters introduced her to Sangama, an NGO for the underprivileged. There she learned about the legal rights of trans people. The encounters with various other transgender individuals made her to realize that her community should be empowered. She strongly believed that hijras are not only meant to do begging and sex work, they too can achieve greater heights if opportunities were given. She decided to be a spokesperson for her the trans community. Through Sangama, Revathi met many trans men and trans women, learned about their needs and sufferings. She was moved to tears every time a trans person narrated his/her life story. Trans people, whose experience of gender is different from what has been imposed on them at birth face widespread stigma and discrimination. They were called 'ali', 'ombadu' and 'pottai', all derogatory terms used to refer trans women. Like Revathi, every other hijras goes through immense pain, anguish, sexual violence, and human rights violation. They are isolated and shunned by society. Revathi decided voice out her experiences and the oppressions she faced in life through an autobiography. She believed that she can create a change in the world by sharing her story. Furthermore autobiographical writings can have a cathartic effect on the writers; it helps to channelize the innermost fear and agony in a much productive way.

The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story is a Revathi's struggle to express and experience womanhood. An autobiography will cover the entire life of the writer from birth till the time of writing through a flash back. Revathi begins her story from childhood. The setting is a small village in Namakkal Taluk, Salem district in the state of Tamil Nadu. The readers can get a glimpse of her village, the life of people in that area,

temple festivals, the rituals, and their beliefs. Revathi has used a chronological way to narrate her story. She emphasizes on each incident during childhood so that the readers can fully comprehend the emotional turmoil of Revathi as a child. It is evident through her writing that the people of her village were highly superstitious and not fully aware of the gender spectrum.

The effeminate behaviour of Revathi was mocked and admonished by the elders of her household. When she came out as a trans woman, they thought she was possessed by some evil spirit and taking her to a temple and performing some rituals can ward off the evil from contaminating further.

Revathi has managed to maintain the balance of incidents and characters in her autobiography. From realizing her identity, she takes the readers to her coming out as a trans and living the life as a trans woman. In an autobiography it is important to maintain the authenticity by delivering true events and emotions without any fabrications to please the readers. In *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*, Revathi boldly revealed her decisions and experiences in life whether it might be judgmental in some people's eyes. After her sex reassignment surgery, Revathi was sent to begging by her nani, but she wanted to experience the physical pleasures as a woman. She was afraid to tell this to her guru so one night she eloped from her guru's house and joined another hijra parivar and did sex work, but sooner she realized that getting out of her former hijra house was a mistake. With careful attention Revathi has captured the nuances of characters and incidents in her book.

Writing an autobiography is equivalent to reliving the experiences- whether it is good or bad. The trauma and agony will once again create a tremor in the writer. What Revathi went through in her life was horrendous and inhumane. A night at the police station in Bangalore, she was stripped naked in front all the police men and

criminals and was mercilessly abused. Reading those lines can give chills to the readers. One can only imagine the pain Revathi would have undergone while writing those incidents. The perspective of Revathi in writing this autobiography was clear from the beginning; to share her experiences to the world and by sharing to create a change about the outlook of transgender community. “I hope this book of mine will make people see that hijras are capable of more than just begging and sex work. I do not seek sympathy from society or the government. I seek to show that we hijras do have the right to live in this society” (Revathi v- vi).

The word ‘trauma’ is derived from the Greek, which originally represents the wound or an injury inflicted upon the body. But later in psychiatric literature and most centrally in Freud’s text, the word is stated as a wound inflicted not upon the body but on the mind. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud suggests that the wound of mind is much deeper and harder than the wound of the body which is usually a healable one. Trauma is not locatable completely in the violent or real event which happened in the past, but rather in the way that it is unassimilated nature, the way that it is not known in the first instance but returns to haunt the survivor later on. It has negative effects on an individual’s overall health and wellbeing. Traumatic exposure has been linked to higher rates of psychological and physical health problems. Parental pressure, death, divorce, gender issues, and sexual or physical harassments are some of the reason that people become traumatic which poses a great risk of physical and psychological dysfunction.

Writing about trauma or stress has been proved to be effective in helping individuals recover from the tragic past. Reliving a traumatic experience in a supportive environment helps a person to integrate and come out the agony preventing further development of psychological disorganization and chronic psychological

issues. Researchers has proved this using a plethora of experiments which proves that writing about a current or past trauma has specific positive psychological and health benefits.

Living Smile Vidya in her autobiography *I Am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey* shares her experiences from being a boy called Saravanan till the hardships she encountered to live the life of her dream. Vidya elaborates the adversities faced for being born in a male body with a female soul. People around her lacked the empathy to comprehend her emotions and burden instead they scolded and beat her for being effeminate. Friends and neighbours called obscenities which wounded her further. The price Vidya paid to become a woman was higher; she lost the love of her father and dropped the dream to be an IAS officer. The humiliations and insecurities she faced each day made her heart bleed.

Insults heaped on me and all my shattered hopes repeatedly reinforced the fact that I was not considered a member of this society. The object of everyone's ridicule for so long, I came to regard all of society as something ridiculous- I came to believe that the world was full of mad men, within which I had to live with my body, my pain, my sorrows. (Vidya 93)

At the core of these words, there is a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a 'crisis of life' and 'crisis of death'. The readers can witness her struggle to survive in this prejudiced world. Vidya decided to pen down the struggles forced upon her in a hope that by reading her autobiography people might change their attitude towards the transgender community.

I Am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey narrates the life story of Vidya, a trans woman from Tiruchi district, Tamil Nadu. The autobiography is divided into fifteen chapters with an appropriate title for each chapter. It is the dream of most trans woman to

undergo the sex change surgery and lead the life of a woman. After realizing their gender identity they strive hard to make money for the surgery. In India, the nirvana or the sex reassignment surgery is considered as a crucial part in a trans woman's life. Vidya begged on the streets, markets and railway stations and saved the money for her surgery. As a gesture to imply the significance of her dream to be a woman she started her autobiography on recollecting the memories of the day of operation. She has changed the chronology of recording life events which usually starts right from childhood. She incorporated a future event in the beginning itself as a dramatic irony so that readers can get a glimpse of the trajectory of events which are about to unveil. The first chapter titled *Nirvana* details the turbulence of emotions she felt on that day. Vidya could not help thinking about her past, the days her father beat her for being effeminate, friends who avoided when they got to know about her identity as trans and above all begging in the streets though she was a postgraduate. Like Revathi, Vidya's surgery was also done in a private clinic without following any clinical observations or health precautions.

Vidya after narrating her experiences about sex reassignment surgery employs a further flashback which unveils her early days and life she lead as a child with gender incongruity. The story goes on with a first person narration. Vidya's way of storytelling creates empathy in the readers. In the second chapter that titled *Appa*, she expresses the deep love for her father. After the death of her mother Vidya was devastated and longed for the affectionate presence of her father unfortunately he was concerned more on her studies and failed to notice her emotional needs. Though he beat Vidya for her behaviour, the lines reflect an emotional bonding she have for her father. Her words help the readers to understand the fact that a child born with gender incongruity needs more attention and care compared to other children. Vidya has

intensely portrayed the innocence of her child self which makes the narration about the early period remarkable.

Writing involves the employment of techniques to change or modify behaviour, to alleviate emotional distress through the development of understanding, the provision of support, and re- assurance. It involves promotion of growth, insight, and maturity in the person. Writing autobiography improves self- understanding and creates a change in personality. It allows the writer to seek a narrative framework for his/her life and in the process of finding this background the person gets to identify and constructs a coherent view of self that allows self- understanding and change.

Vidya had a profound interest in theatre arts. Since childhood she enjoyed listening to music and dancing to the rhythm. She felt peace and solace whenever she heard her favourite songs in the radio. Her love for dance later created a passion for stage plays. She has performed various plays before and after transition.

Expressing her repressed emotions through art was one kind of resistive strategy she devised to keep herself composed during emotional turmoils. The depression transgenders face, due to stigma, shame, and isolation that is vented out through their writing gives psychological comfort, recognition, and satisfaction. Art is a great pacifier, especially to those who are subjected to anxiety and stress in many forms, when one is made to run from pillar to post to get basic social documents like driving license, passport, or even a ration card.

In the fourteenth chapter *A New Journey of I Am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey*, Vidya narrates the incidents that lead her to begin her writing career. When she was working in a micro- credit bank in Madurai, Bala her friend insisted her to start writing blogs. Vidya was hesitant at the beginning and thought no one would want to read articles or stories written by a trans woman. But Bala kept on

encouraging her and at one point Vidya felt that someone from her community must voice out their needs and sufferings to the public. And then she created a blog <http://livingsmile.blogspot.com>. Her earlier posts were introductory pieces about her life but later on she wrote some verses. Vidya was burdened by the ill treatments of the society; writing paved a way to rejuvenate her soul. People started reading her blogs and commented on it. Some even expressed their remorse for treating trans people inferior. The editor of *Aval Vikatan*, a famous women's magazine in Tamil, contacted Vidya to do an article based on her life.

Most tirunangais are unlettered. Thus, they cannot find avenues of expression as I have done. Even if they are prepared for hard work, they have few skills.

Who will help them to study?

We need to belong, just as the rest of humanity needs to belong. What can we do when we don't have a wall to lean on, when we can't find a place to stay?

I poured out all I knew in my blog, based on my own experience. My writing had an impact on many people, with far-reaching effects. (Vidya 131)

Vidya's autobiography throws light upon the darker side of the Indian community where transgenders are ostracized for no mistake of their own. Their lives are filled with rejection, sufferings and suppressions. There are approximately nine million transgenders in India, but they are hardly included in the mainstream society. Vidya was determined to fight for her rights and identity. Though the world mocked her for her appearance and mannerisms, she firmly fought to free the soul trapped inside the wrong body. *I Am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey* is a compelling narrative of Vidya's long traumatic journey and her extraordinary strength and perseverance. All these memoirs by hijras or trans women in India have brought the

gendered marginalized selves to the center by rewriting them in a genre which is neither masculine nor feminine in its orientation. Articulations of the collective experience of shame and disgrace challenge the hegemonic gender structure and gendered oppression and these texts are transformed to fertile literary grounds where fresh aesthetic experiences germinate. These life accounts have emerged as socio-biographies where the writing of the gendered marginalized selves result in the writing of the collective resistance and the texts emerge as the site for reclaiming lost histories and heritages.

Discrimination against trans people has been reported to be pervasive in society, including housing, healthcare, employment, and also educational sectors. Many trans people have encountered barriers in accessing gender appropriate government issued identification. The discriminations forced upon trans people is a result of transphobia, an irrational fear or hatred towards people who does not fit under the heteronormative umbrella. Cisnormativity expects all people to be binary gendered and denies the existence of trans people in cultural knowledge and institutional infrastructure. The ideologies of race, caste, creed, and colour add more suppression to trans community. Trans woman of colour are discriminated and harassed beyond human imagination. Some NGOs and welfare groups came forward to point out the inequality they face but the specific needs or expectations of trans woman of colour are not entirely fulfilled till date. They are forced to live within the intersections of discriminations based on race, being women, and being transgender.

The agonizing account of the experiences of the transgender authors and their struggles during adolescence and eventual transition as any man or woman of choice and feelings in a patriarchal, misogynistic culture is a revelation to the society. By pioneering to voice the anguish of the marginalized, the writers have spoken up

for their community's rights to survival and dignity. They have shed light on the hitherto unknown social life of hijras. They have established beyond doubt the bigoted treatment of the state has to be jolted to awakening by these accounts. The educated members of the society, through these expressions are informed about the plight of these individuals who are driven by their families and government into gutters and ghettos. The authors demand and establish beyond doubt the rights that are due from a society which has so far failed to understand, a biological condition and emotions of fellow human beings. Treated by the main stream society as outcasts, ignored by their families, denied opportunities by the State, the transgenders have forged together a society of their own. Out of the choice given to them they have carved out a unique world with its own culture. Taking moral and physical strength from their social structure and culture they have so far managed to swim against the current.

Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love and So Much More by Janet Mock is an enlightening and a much needed perspective on transgender identity. The memoir is an authentic account of a trans woman's journey to become her true self. Being poor and discriminated can be difficult, but being broke, a woman of colour and gender incongruent can be overwhelming to deal in today's world. With determination, Mock accepted her position in life and moved forward towards her goal of becoming a woman which she knew she was meant to be. With extreme honesty, Mock brings readers into the world of transgender identity, of what it meant and felt like be born and identified by others as a boy, but deep inside realizing that she was not what others presume but a different personality. From knowing her father's addiction to weed and his extra marital relationship, to the sexual abuse she encountered as a child and the distress she felt while being a sex worker to gain

enough money for the sex change surgery, Mock allows the readers into the deepest and darkest moments of her life.

Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love and So Much

More is my attempt to extend that nakedness and vulnerability to you.

It should be about those parts of ourselves that we silence every day; those parts that we all store away in boxes deep within, where they gather the dust of shame that clouds us. In this book, I aim to open those boxes, display their contents, and be accountable to my truth. This process was gradual and challenging, one in which I have to excavate answers within myself for some tough questions: Who am I, really? How does that answer contribute to the world? How do I tell my story authentically without discounting all the facets and identities that make me? Can I resolve my personal history with sexual abuse, body image, self-love and sex, as well as unpack my relationship with womanhood, beauty, objectification, and “passing”? I hope this book offers clarity and pushes you toward beginnings and conclusions of your own. (Mock xvii- xviii)

Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love and So Much

More is divided into three parts. The book opens with a scene from 2009, where Mock reveals her identity as a trans woman to her boyfriend Aaron. It is the dream of every transgender person to be accepted, to live a normal and dignified life, to be truly loved by someone and have a family, and sadly not all trans individuals are fortunate to have such a life. When Mock met Aaron, she felt a sudden emotional connect towards him. Clearly it was no lust but love. But she was not ready to disclose her identity as trans for she feared Aaron might leave her. Before going into the first part of the book, Mock takes the readers to the situation where she felt the need to tell her story. She renders a visual imagery through her words. The readers can easily

picturize Mock sitting in Aaron's room with a pillow placed between her legs to shield herself from shaking in terror. The anxiety that creeps through Mock can also be felt inside the reader. Like a cliffhanger, she makes Aaron, as well as the audience to hold their breath in suspense.

In the first part of the book Mock shares incidents from her childhood days. She grew up in her grandmother's house in Hawaii with her sisters. Her mother visited her only during weekends. When she saw her friends living with their parents, she longed to have that kind of a life. Later she was sent to live with her father who compared Mock with her brother in every small thing. Mock was utterly confused about her gender identity at that time but her father never found time to talk to her. She was also exposed to sexual abuse at that young age. The neglect and suppression lead to trauma. Social exclusion is the major trauma faced by the trans community. They are restricted from their rights as a citizen, from proper access to education and employment. Also they are not given proper protection against harassments and violence imposed upon them by the main stream society.

The second part is of *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love and So Much More* is about Mock identifying her gender and accepting herself as she is. In the third part she reveals about her decision to undergo the sex reassignment surgery. To save money for the surgery Mock involved in sex work. While narrating her experiences as a sex worker, her words reflect deep anguish and remorse. Never in her life had she thought that one day she will stand at the dark corners of the streets to solicit customers for money. Mock also provides her moments of delight as she transitioned after the long array of struggles. She found happiness in little things when some of her girl best friends accepted her and shared their

accessories and clothes. She freely discusses her thoughts on the world's view on transgender community.

As an epilogue, Mock comes back to 2009, awaiting Aaron's reply.

Ambiguous emotions can be felt by the readers at that moment. In the climax Aaron accepts Mock whole heartedly and the book ends with a happy union. By writing this memoir Mock claims that a transgender person is as normal as any other person who claims the title of normalcy and that gender or physique do not confirm a person's identity. Sharing her story helped her heal and revitalize her inner self.

The responsibility that comes with being visible is a duty. One I'm still growing comfortable with. I have been lauded as a voice, a leader, and a role model. I know intimately what it feels like to crave representation and validation, to see your life reflected in someone who speaks deeply to whom you know yourself to be, echoes your reality, and instills you with possibility. That mirror wasn't accessible to me growing up. It was an utterly lonely place to be. So when a girl with tears in her eyes embraces me and tells me "I want to be like you when I grow up" or "Reading your story has given me hope" or "You're my hero," I understand the gravity of her statements. (Mock xvi)

Gender is a natural selection, it is never a choice. Gender disparity creates hindrance in almost every aspect of a woman's life. Her likes and opinions are often tailed off by norms and taboos instilled by the patriarchal society. This patriarchal tyranny intensifies when it comes to trans men's identity formation. When compared to trans women, trans men are less visible in the society. One of the major reasons is the restriction imposed upon girl children who are under the influence and control of family members. Their voices are suppressed with yells and emotional intimidations. Encounters with violence, transphobia, and discrimination related to sexuality and

gender norms in home, neighbourhood, work place, and educational institutions further leads to suppression. Making something invisible resides in rejecting the thing any existence. The only way to make the world avoid talking about something is to invisibilize it. There has always existed a politics in the society about invisibilizing something, especially if it is deviated from the norms imposed by the society. It is made as a taboo so that the people would not dare to talk or even think about it.

Gender politics plays in a way that the non- heteronormative people remain invisible.

Transgender autobiographies marks the establishment of an official discourse regulating the self-representation and provided an orientation to other individuals who identifies themselves as trans after reading autobiographies by other trans individuals. In most Western countries, to undergo sex reassignment surgery, clinicians or the medical practitioners demanded a personal history before carrying out the operation, and the success in obtaining treatment depended on their ability to convince doctors that their personal history matches the officially sanctioned regulations of gender variance. So, the published accounts became the 'guide-books' for trans people who are in transition to obtain desired medical treatment. *Both Sides Now: One Man's Journey Through Womanhood* by Dhillon Khosla is an attempt to break the stereotypical notions about trans men community. In this narrative Khosla has inextricably recorded his entire journey to manhood. The book is divided into three parts with twenty eight chapters. The two year long journey starts from June 1997 and ends by November 1999. Khosla's love for literary books is evident as he quotes C. G. Jung.

Unlike most narratives that begins from childhood, understanding the gender identity and surgery *Both Sides Now: One Man's Journey Through Womanhood* is differently drafted. Khosla breaks the usual arc of storytelling and starts the book from his decision to undergo sex change. Not everyone around him understood the

importance of using male pronouns when he insisted them to do so. Khosla lost his temper each time when somebody addressed him with female pronouns or his previous name. He decided to record the journey towards his dream so he can keep a clear track of his life. Moreover writing down the experiences of treatments and surgeries helped him to relax and gave him hope. Before each chapter he jotted down the dreams he had since childhood. Readers can find Khosla's repulsion towards his female body before transition and the unending determination to acquire a perfect male physique. Six months after his transition, he started to trust his body and appeared confidently in public. And one of those days he dreamt about his identity as male.

I am walking out my front door to my car. As I get closer, I notice that the window is smashed and realize someone has broken in. I look inside and see that all of the contents are missing, and I get angry and upset as I stand there, assessing the damage, then pull out my wallet and head to the house to make some phone calls. When I look down at my license, which has my new gender on it, I feel an immediate sense of relief. And I say to myself, "At least I still have this..." (Khosla 133)

Since the visibility of trans men is low, the knowledge towards their way of life, the medications they take and the surgeries they undergo are limited. *Both Sides Now: One Man's Journey Through Womanhood* helps the readers to have an awareness about the life threatening multiple surgeries trans men take to lead the life of their dreams. Khosla's memoir is an eye opening and unapologetic story of a brave man to achieve his identity that is much greater than a mere disclosure.

Familial support is crucial to reducing misconceptions and social stigma surrounding the transgender community. It is often the differentiation between

success and support vs. crisis and instability. Gender incongruence is still a foreign concept to many people. For the Ivester family, the news crashed into their lives when the child they thought was their daughter revealed her identity as a trans male.

Though Jo and Jon Ivester panicked at the beginning, they decided to support his son at any cost. They strongly believed that changing the sexual identity would not make him any less than their child. *Once a Girl, Always a Boy: A Family Memoir of a Transgender Journey* is the story of acceptance, love, and understanding. This beautifully written narrative does a phenomenal job of telling the story of the Ivester family's journey as their son and brother came to embrace his true self and live on that identity.

Jo Ivester has skillfully shared her insight and perspective which makes the readers understand the value of unconditional love. This particular book breaks all the stereotypical rules of recording a memoir. It is told from multiple perspectives. Jo divides the book into thirty chapters, each of which is narrated by Jeremy's parents, siblings, and Jeremy himself. In the section of preface Jo, clearly mentions about the way she is going to narrate the story, about how she will be mentioning the name Emily for the incidents that happened before transition and the name Jeremy, for what happened during and after transition. "Jeremy created a video journal to document his transition. That journal is the basis for his voice in the true story you are about to read. Beyond that, this book is based on numerous interviews of family and friends, research, and my own memories (Ivester i)."

Jeremy was blessed to have a family who accepted him without bias unlike many transgender people who were abandoned by their parents and family members. Though *Once a Girl, Always a Boy: A Family Memoir of a Transgender Journey* cannot be labelled as a traumatic coming out story of a trans man, Jeremy talks about

the emotional anguish and insecurity he underwent before and during transition period. When he decided not to marry or have kids, Jo was worried about the loneliness that he might face during the years to come. Still she or Jon never tried to force anything upon their child. All they prayed for was their son to be happy and contented.

During the time of Jeremy's surgery Jo realized the horror of isolation people with gender incongruence face. She could not fathom that parents can stop loving their children upon sexual identity and gender norms. That moment she decided to write down the transition journey of Jeremy so that the readers will realize the significance of love and family.

When I started writing about Jeremy's journey, the entire family was apprehensive, each in their own way. Would it somehow be embarrassing to have our story out in the world for all to read? Would some of the anecdotes make us look closed-minded or unaccepting? It wasn't easy to get everyone comfortable with the idea. It required hours of conversation about all aspects of Jeremy's life and how each family member was affected, how they felt, and how their actions and comments had made Jeremy feel over the years. (Ivester 229)

This narrative is a testament that love and kindness can perform miracles. The family's learned experience has led them to be vocal advocates for everyone in the transgender community. Jo ends the memoir by adding a post titled 'Advice to Parents and Friends of Transgender Individuals', which was actually published in Huffpost, on fourth of August 2016. She adds nine useful tips to educate the readers about gender spectrum and importance of accepting the children with gender disparity.

For every summer, the Texas Transgender Non- discrimination Summit gathered to focus on the problems and confusions faced by trans community. Jo, Jon,

and Jeremy were invited to present their thoughts on 2016 gathering in Killeen, a central city in Texas. Jo felt that it would be easy for her and Jon to talk to others about their child being a trans man. But for Jeremy, it was different; he was nervous about standing before a bunch of people and say “Hi. Look at me. I’m transgender” (Ivester 201). They rehearsed their speech several times during their three hour ride to Dallas and made it perfect. That summit created a drastic change in Jeremy’s life. Two speakers who sat with him on that day were trans women who transitioned after their forties. They were awestruck at Jeremy for undergoing ‘top’ and ‘bottom’ surgery that earlier. That day went as planned. The following day, Jo and Jeremy were requested to address the delegates and audiences at the conference. For forty- five minutes, they handed the mike back and forth, sharing stories, sometimes telling the same incident from two different perspectives. Their message was one of acceptance and normalcy.

I concluded with, “It has become our passion to do everything we can to build awareness through storytelling. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to share. I hope our story has touched you. Thank you for who you are and for what you are doing here this weekend. You make a difference.”

The entire room stood up, cheering and clapping. As I gave Jeremy a congratulatory hug, I whispered to him, “That was for you, for being willing to share openly. You’re standing up for every trans person in the room, and they love you for it.” (Ivester 203)

Individuals, who were victimized by trauma, seek to find an alternative survival strategy. It can be meditation, arts, music, dance, or whatever things that can help them intentionally shut down the haunted memories of the past. Writing has the power to maneuver the repressive emotions and thoughts into a state of serenity.

Winners not sinners, these writer-activists have achieved their own space in literature, digital platforms and political activism. An egalitarian society cannot ignore a community which is in every way part of it and should embrace them into its fold.

The welcoming changes in the field of education and law serve as a beacon of hope.

Today transgender self-narratives are often utilized as a pedagogical tool for studying gender queerness. Psychoanalytic and feminist theories also have, to a certain extent, shifted the prevalent focus towards queer autobiographical studies and to the narrator's ability to define herself/ himself in a world resistant to such an endeavor.