

### **III. BORN OF MOTHERS ... NOT DESCENDED FROM THE SKY...**

(TTAM 247)

Where do human rights begin after all? The question of human rights begins in places that are much closed and small that can't be located in any map. The abrogation of human right begins from such places. Violence is perpetrated; assault, intimidation and harassment are largely prevalent in these places, where the people are still ignorant of their rights. It is time to put an end to the perpetuation of hate crimes, especially to those who are harassed. Strengthening the protection of human rights is the need of the hour. Transgenders worldwide are subjected to atrocities the most. Transgenders in most places are found to be anonymous victims of oppression, as well as victims of over blatant human rights abuses. Unless we amplify and legitimate subjugated knowledge to challenge oppressive constructions and throw light on the true reasons behind their existence, the society will continue to perpetuate the evils of blatant abuses. Every individual in the society should be educated about the causes behind the birth of transgenders and their psychological trauma to understand about their plight.

It is possible to spin different theories about why transgender people exist. The mythical aspects of their existence are dealt in the subsequent chapter whereas this chapter concentrates on the scientific theories behind their existence. Though the transgender issues touch on basic factors related with human life, people simply are blind to these facts. People do not have the good sense to ask what makes transgenders what they are. Society, in fact does not intend to see the difference between the terms sex and gender. Sex is not the same as gender though it is used interchangeably most of the times. Sex is purely a biological factor where as gender is a social construct. The words male and female are related to sex which indicate reproductive ability.

Sperm producers are usually classified male and ovum producers are termed female. The sex pattern of any individual is determined genetically, exclusively by the fragments of the genes in the chromosomes. The genetic or chromosomal sex cannot be changed.

The key to unravel human sexualities lies basically in understanding evolutionary biology. All fields of science - anatomy, physiology and biochemistry reason out that every species adapts life styles according to environmental conditions. In her article *Endocrine Disrupting chemicals and Transsexualism*, author Christine Johnson posits a causal link between the "reproductive, behavioral and anatomical effects of exposure to chemicals commonly found in pesticides and food additives". Rising numbers in transgenders is linked to falling sperm counts and other anomalies purportedly related to endocrine disrupting chemicals in the environment. Dismissing castration, whether done voluntarily or involuntarily, attention may be paid to how sexual disorders result primarily from abnormalities in the chromosomes. Fritz and Speroff explain in their book *Clinical Gynecologic Endocrinology and Infertility*:

The gender identity of a person is determined by their genetic gonadal and Phenotypic sex and is also influenced by their environment. Genetic sex is defined by the sex chromosomes typically XX or XY. Gonadal sex is defined by the gonadal differentiation into ovaries and testes. Phenotypic sex is concerned with the external genitalia and the secondary characteristics that develop later. By gender identity all behavior having any sexual connotations such as body gestures and mechanisms, habits of speech and content of dream are meant. Sexual expression... reflects the sum of all sexual influences on the individuals both prenatal and postnatal, the latter referring to the role assigned by the society in accordance with the individual's phenotype and behavior. (332)

Sex is ultimately laid down by genes which are present in each body cell in twenty three pairs of microscopic packages called chromosomes. One member of each of the twenty three pairs is acquired from the mother and the other member from the father. The twenty three human chromosome pairs can be numbered and distinguished from each other by consistent differences in appearance. In chromosome pairs one to twenty two the two members of each pair appear identical when viewed through a microscope. Only in the case of chromosome pair twenty three, the so called sex chromosome, do the two representatives differ and even that is only in men who have a big chromosome X paired with a small one Y. Women have instead two paired X chromosomes. Many X chromosome genes specify traits unrelated to sex. But Y chromosome contains sex specifying traits.

Sexual dimorphism is the result of development that begins with conception and ends at puberty. Sexual dimorphism is achieved in five different stages (1) Genetic (2) Gonadal (3) Hormonal (4) Internal genitalia (5) External genitalia. The first stage is the inheritance of the chromosomes related to sex. The second stage augurs the development of the gonads. The hormonal stage begins prenatally with the selection of androgen and estrogen. Hormonal development occurs at puberty producing mature functional gonads. Internal genitalia develop prenatally too and affect not only the ovaries and testes but also other internal structures relating to reproductive functioning. The external genitalia results in differences that is apparent at birth.

In the development of sex characteristics, prenatal development is critically important. A great many prenatal events occur in a coordinated sequence to result in a boy or girl. But at times things go wrong and then a baby with developmental abnormalities of a combination of female and male patterns results. Though these mistakes are rare they do exist. These cases on the other hand reveal a means of understanding elements of normal development.

The genetic sex of an individual is determined at fertilization. The ovaries do not participate in sexual differentiation. In the ovum the sex chromosome is always X but in sperm it is either X or Y. In the fertilized egg the 'Y' chromosome directs the development of the undifferentiated gonads into testes whereas XX develop along the female line and turns the undifferentiated gonads into ovaries. According to Jared Diamond,

In the fifth week after fertilization human embryos of either sex develop a 'bipotential' gonad that can either become a testis or an ovary. If a 'Y' chromosome is present... that gonad begins to command itself in the seventh week to becoming a testis. But if there is no 'Y' chromosome the gonad waits till the thirteenth week to develop into an ovary. The natural tendency of the primordial gonad is to develop as an ovary if nothing intervenes; something extra, a Y chromosome, is required to change it into a testis. (57)

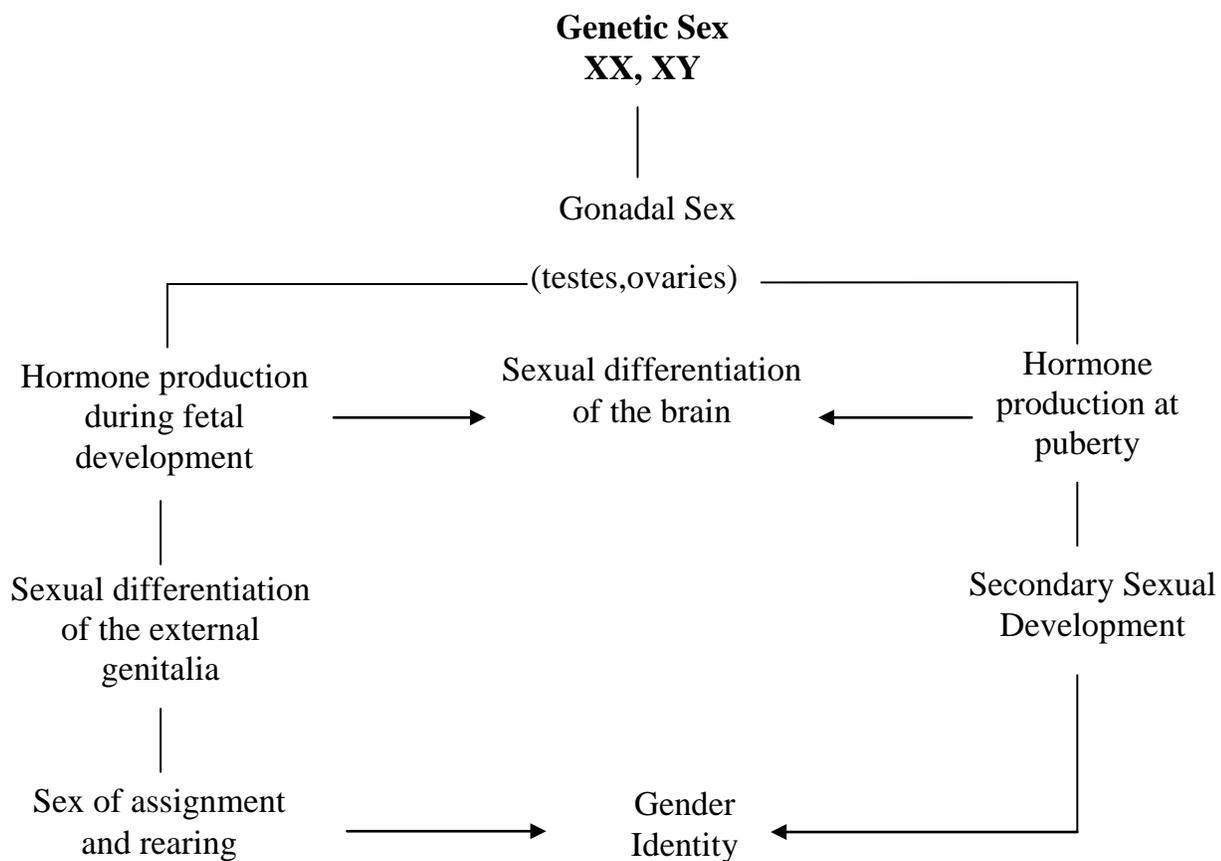
Alfred Jost says that "becoming a male is a prolonged, uneasy and risky venture" and the endocrinologist continues, "It is a kind of struggle against inherent trends towards femaleness" (57). Chauvinists may claim that becoming a man is heroic and becoming a woman as easy. But Diamond declares, "Conversely it could be concluded that women hood as the natural state of humanity with men just a pathological aberration that regrettably must be tolerated as the price for making more women"(57). The overall genetic difference between men and women is very modest but the consequences of these modest differences very vast and tragic.

The presence of 'XY' chromosomes is only the first factor that produces male physiology and its presence is not sufficient to produce a normal male. Within the first six weeks of prenatal development, no difference exists between male and female embryo even in the gonads. All embryos have a Wolfian and Mullerian system during the ambi sexual period of development of

up to eight weeks. Both male and female have a Wolfian system which has the capacity to develop into a male reproductive system and a Mullerian system which has the capacity to develop into the female reproductive system. There after one duct system persists enabling the growth of the glands and the other regresses leaving behind only nonfunctional vestiges. The wolfian system develops first whereas the Mullerian system later after the beginning of sex determination. During the 3rd month of prenatal development two processes begin to occur to fetuses with the 'XY' chromosome pattern to further the developing into male. The first involves the production of testosterone by the foetal testis. This stimulates the Wolfian system. The growth of this system is further stimulated by the increased production of testosterone which augments the development of the male pattern. The second process that prompts male development is the production of the Mullerian inhibiting system which degenerates the Mullerian system. One action increases masculinisation and the other defeminisation of the developing foetus. The foetal ovaries do not require any surge of female foetal hormones. Even after six weeks of conception the external genitalia of the male and female foetus are identical. The hormones then take over resulting in the formation of external genitals.

Sex differentiation is a complex process comprising a series of activities which begin in the womb during the sixth week of pregnancy. The potential bisexual gonad gradually ends up with the development into a specific gonad with its corresponding internal and external genital organs later. Genetic and hormonal influences play a stellar role in the development of sex, though other extraneous influences too have a hand in modifying its development. Padubidri observes that “the teratogenic and environmental factors” like “ionizing, radiation, viral infection, chemical agents, immunological disturbances, hormone and nutritional deficiencies” cause considerable changes (96).

According to Dewhurst, "Three factors determine an individual's sexual development. These are: the effect of the sex chromosomes on the differentiation of the gonad; the proper functioning of the differentiated testes (ovaries are not important here) and the response of the end organs to testicular activity (25). The mechanisms that govern sex differentiations are not entirely known despite so much scientific advancement. Our understanding of the molecular processes involved has advanced significantly in recent years. Beginning with the genetics of sex determination, followed by germ cell sex differentiation, gonadal differentiation and development of the internal and external genitalia the current concepts are summarized as follows:



It has been found that the probable mechanism by which the 'Y' chromosome promotes testicular differentiation is by the production of a substance known as HY antigen. This is thought to be the testis determining product in the 'Y' chromosome. The circumstance in which this differentiation happens is not clearly known as of now. Moreover testing for HY antigen is quite difficult and investigation is available only in advanced research centers which make it really costly. When testes develop and function normally in an early embryo that embryo develops into a male. If the testes are absent if they do not function normally, the embryo becomes female, whether ovaries are present or not. Testes carry out their functions with testosterone and anti Mullerian hormone which give rise to the external genitalia. The external genital organs and the end organs must convert testosterone effectively to abet normal sexual differentiation. Abnormal sexual development will be evident if this function is not performed normally. This abnormality, in most cases is the cause for the existence of transgenders and intersexed persons. The following situations can be summarized as the reasons for these types of anomalies as suggested by Dewhurst

1. Sex chromosome abnormality interfering with testicular differentiation resulting in gonadal dysgenesis.
2. Testes' inability to produce testosterone due to anatomic testicular failure or a biosynthetic defect.
3. The end organs may be incapable of utilizing testosterone because of androgen insensitivity.

4. Rarely in a genetic female, testicular differentiating genes may be capable of producing HY Antigen. (57)

Abnormalities in prenatal hormones not only affect the development but also the sex of the foetus. Exposure to androgens can occur through the action of the tumors in the adrenal gland or through the pregnant women's inadvertent or intentional exposure to androgens. Individual's androgen insensitivity can be completely unknown till they reach near the age of puberty. These suggest the complexity of sexual development and suggest that many components contribute to gender identity and functioning. It should be understood that the role of hormones is not subject to cultural variation but cultures dealing with the treatment of sexes vary enormously.

Nature does not allow any one species to propagate beyond a certain limit. Survival of the fittest is nature's law that does not allow the weak to sustain. That is why many species are extinct now. But living things try to retaliate against nature and reproductive instinct tops their priority. Nature has installed an in-built mechanism by which reproduction can be limited. That is why defective beings are born both in the animal and plant kingdom for example the worker bees in a beehive. This irrevocable feature of nature cannot be ignored when we study about the transgenders. It is the predominance of the characteristics that makes persons male or female "because every human being is the result of the union of a female egg and male sperm" (TTG158).

Sex and gender are two terms used inter changeably even in specialized discourses. It should be understood that there is difference between them as between black and white and chalk and charcoal. It should be impressed upon the society that sex is a biological construct unlike gender. Historically and culturally there have been different systems of organizing people into

genders. The ancient Samoan and Polynesian had three social genders including Faa'fine and the Mogul castrated males or eunuchs. Some cultures allowed people to change their gender on visions and dreams and others using a scalpel. This then raises the important question that the social type the body wants to live should not be determined by the sex of the body. This shakes the basic assumption that it is the sex of the body which decides the social sense as a man or woman. It should make people that a wide range of livable bodies are divided only into two categories on their genital signs. Those who do not conform to this prevalent and dominant pattern oppressed and traumatized.

Society drills an image of people's biological sex into our psyche. People in general tend to judge a person guided by the behavioral patterns associated with each sex. This image is nourished, perpetrated and passed down from generation to generation. This image which is embedded in our psyche is called gender. It is nurtured by socialization and by an unconscious observation of the behavior and attitudes considered appropriate for each sex. According to Sujatha Sen "Gender can best be described as a social construct referring to roles, characteristics, behavior appearances and identities that develop through cultural interpretation of genetic sex" (3). Where gender is constructed, sex is natural and inherited is the one aspect that will dispel our hatred for the traumatized transgender individuals.

Gender identity refers to the individual's identity, according to his/her perception about his/her biological sex, an awareness that starts in his/her childhood and grows along with him/her. Though the society teaches the aspects of masculine and feminine during a person's growth into an adult, it is the conception he/she has of himself/herself that decides his/her identity. Gender Identity is a device by which a society controls its members. Most societies try to impose on its members, expected patterns of behavior associated with each sex and these

expectations are linked to the gender identities of every individual. "The formation of a gender identity is a complex procedure which has a great influence on the psychology of the individual. If the sex of the individual coincides with his gender identity there is no complexity" (Sen 3). The lack of this identification results in the great struggle experienced by transgenders.

In each and every society of the world, there are individuals who feel that their gender does not correspond to their biological sex. They are at odds with their physical identity, which is incompatible with their psychological identity; those of them who suffer this discordance are the intersexes or transgender people. The disharmony might be the result of hormonal or other abnormal conditions during periods of gestation. It ultimately turns out to be a medical, psychological and sociological phenomena rolled into one and results in excruciating experience for the victims of the disorders.

Sexuality plays a very dominant role in a person's life. Reproduction is not the sole end at least as far as humanity is concerned. A civilized society, where human rights are promised to all the individuals, who are its members, should respect and understand the views, needs and beliefs of all the people as long as it does not disturb the harmony prevailing in the society. But it is the way of the world to treat the people who have views and behavioral patterns that do not conform to societal rules, as abnormal or emotionally ill. The society fails or refuses to understand the condition referred by the medical term DSD (Disorders of Sexual Development) and treats the people suffering from it as outcasts. The transsexuals in most cases suffer from this. But even amongst them there are some who reject it abjectly as unduly pathologising. All these factors should make the society broad minded and remove the despicable prejudice with which it denigrates those who do not follow the set standards.

Society and family can make these people mental wrecks. It is not that their problems are sorted out immediately after the genital surgery because it is not a panacea for all their emotional imbalances. It is more like a placebo which offers them comfort of living in specific gender roles. When they shift their gender identity they need mental stamina, firmness, single mindedness, perseverance and ability to cope with stress that is far more complex than what general public can understand.

Many transgenders grow up feeling alienated from their peers. Since they do not conform to the gender roles, they are teased and bullied by schoolmates and kids within neighborhood. Some tend virtually to eliminate social interaction from their lives. Many transgenders are the targets of hate crimes. They are also the victims of subtle discrimination, which includes everything from glance or glares of disapproval to invasive question about their body parts. They live a lonely life as children; they feel they are the only ones who experience the feelings they have and they are afraid to reveal it to anybody out of fear of rejection or humiliation. They dress in secret and develop deep seated feelings of guilt about their behavior. Their efforts to purge these feelings and to live a life without cross dressing and giving up their desire to be the opposite gender have always been 'spectacularly unsuccessful'.

When these people change their gender roles, they are attracted to opposite gender. The feelings they experience can create fear, panic, anger, confusion, self loathing and guilt which are very harmful to mental and psychological wellbeing. The rejection they face from family when they come out with their feelings is the most harrowing experience one can undergo. All too often people are under the belief that they want their surgery done for sexual reasons. They fail to realize that this is a long standing problem and that the transgenders cannot get a solution through mere psychotherapy. There are practically no physical or psychological tests to diagnose

transgenderism that is probably why the practical cross dressing experience is helpful to prevent people from making irreversible mistakes.

After gaining an understanding about the factors that decide the sexuality of an individual and the reasons for aberrations, recent studies have analyzed the brain structure of these individuals. In a first of its kind study Zhou et al in 1995 found that in a region called the bed nucleus of the striaterminalis, a region known for sex anxiety responses, male to female individuals have the size that is normal for females while female to male have a male normal size. This became established only as they grew up. Later in 2006, Gooren who reviewed the evidence confirmed that transsexualism is a sexual differentiation disorder of the sex dimorphic brain. In 2008, the findings of Garcia Falgueras and Swaab proved that regardless of hormone exposure, male to female transsexuals' interstitial nucleus and neurons lay within the female range and female to male within the male range.

Another scientist Ramachandran V.S in his study about transsexuals has brought out a factor that strengthens the case of the transgenders, both male to female and female to male. In his study about phantom limb syndrome in transsexuals, Ramachandran explains what phantom limb syndrome as, the vivid sensation of still having a limb that has been amputated. He explains that the same is a case of transsexuals, who have undergone sex reassignment surgery for the removal of their penis or breasts. Nearly two thirds of non transsexuals who had their penis removed surgically, for cancer related ailments, felt the phantom penis sensation, whereas only one third of male to female transsexuals felt the sensation after surgery. The phantom syndrome results because our body image is innately 'hard-wired' into our brains. Even limbless patients felt this way. Hence he hypothesizes that probably due to a disassociation during embryological development, the brains of transsexuals are 'hard-wired' in a manner which is opposite to that of

their biological sex. So it is predicted that a transsexual individual especially male to female, may not experience this syndrome. There is also another possibility that female to male will have a phantom penis although there is not one physically there. This interaction with nature and nurture should abet human understanding about the link between 'the brain based internal body image with external sexual morphology'.

An in depth analysis of the behavior of transgenders, who undergo a treacherous path causing pain and suffering, reveals the complex issues affecting their emotional and psychological state. First of all, gender dysphoria, which is a fundamental uneasiness they experience with their biological sex, which leads to anxiety, depression and restlessness culminates into a desire to transition. Even as they are children, they are not allowed to do what they like but are expected to follow the norms of their biological gender. When they get into adolescence their plight becomes all the more worse because, added to their teen worries, they learn that they are different. The taunt and tortures they face during these hard times, deny them the support they badly need. They move away from family and friends, which leaves indelible scars on their psyche. They run away from the family, thereby, spoiling their chances of getting education and learning skills, that are needed for their future. Their early adulthood is yet another problematic age, when depression from stigma, shame and isolation resulting from their inability to earn for tiding over the financial crisis of undergoing surgery, takes a toll on their mental and physical health. This age, when they should achieve laurels in life, is wasted in harboring secrets and suicidal thoughts, due to lack of support.

Only to allay the fears of isolation and secrecy the transgenders seek friends like them. What they have lost in their natal family, they try to gain from their adopted families. If most of the transgenders had not found their mentors they would have been wiped out of their existence

by their own sorrow and sufferings. They show implicit obedience to the ways of their community because they have already experienced what would happen if they 'deviate' from norms. The gregarious nature of human beings which is ingrained in their psyche makes them adhere to the group. Though they show difference in preferring to change their gender, the basic gregarious instinct of human beings is yet holding its say over them, thereby proving that they are not people bereft of humanity and that they are not mere psychos who shun human company.

The attitude of the society behind the treatment meted out to transgenders should also be understood, to find the way out of discrimination, harassment and violence. The society is under the mistaken belief that the transgenders want the surgery for merely sexual reasons. They fail to realize that no amount of psychotherapy and counseling could rid them of this desire. That is why they are thrown out of homes, ridiculed abused, harassed, insulted and stoned where ever they go. A vicious section of the society, misguided by the phenomena called 'corrective rape' assaults them sexually, to bring them back to heterosexuality. They blindly argue that by their action, transgenders would realize their mistakes. This misconstrued assumption can be cured only if they understand that the deviance of the transgenders is not a passing fleet of fancy, but a deeply embedded yearning.

Another facet of this problem is that the believers in hetero normativity want to exploit these much maligned creatures to fulfill their lust. They satisfy their desires of enjoying alternate forms of sexual intercourse out of these people who become victims silently, because if they valorize their sufferings, their means of livelihood would be denied and more oppression would follow. They bear the pain inflicted by these people stoically. Many male to female transgender people, who have transitioned or in the cross-dressing stage are subjected into this ordeal of forced sex tortures and rape. Many transgenders who appear masculine look to be strong enough

to ward off such nasty encounters; but they do not. The only psychological explanation that could be given is probably because they want to be feminine in every aspect. They put up with this monstrosity as a part of satisfying a feeling of woman in them. They probably derive a secret satisfaction that rape had been committed on them because; 'she' is a woman.

The solace given by the adopted family of the transgenders is because everybody in the group, has also undergone similar experiences and they understand them better. The life in a family lends many advantages. A custom of the 'parivar' is to subject the new entrant into the order to cross-dressing. The experience of the transgender in his desired role is enacted even before the operation. The person is trained, prepared practically to the problems that he/she is going to face after the surgery. This also psychologically tests the preparedness of the transgenders to undergo surgery. It also readies them to face the challenges they will encounter after transitioning.

There is more number of people who want to transition from male to female, although quite a few move from female to male also. One of the chief reasons for the invisibility of the female to male transgender is because, enough attention is not paid to women and their preferences. The society doesn't bother or show concern to women's likes whereas if a man does something uncommon, the society considers it much more interesting. Another glaring reason is that the men cannot that easily pass off as women whereas a woman can always be thought of as an effeminate man easily. A sari clad male to female transgender is easily identifiable but a girl who is in pants and kurtha still can pass off as a man. Not much is known about female to male transsexuals in India, though they too find life difficult, which is proved by the suicide stories that are circulated. An autobiography from New Zealand *F2M* by Hazel Edwards and Ryan

Kennedy is available to narrate the experiences of female to male converts but not many books are to be found in India either in English or in regional languages.

The process of transitioning has its traumatic accompaniments which have terrible bearing on the psychology of the individuals. When the individual decides to transition the first prospect that one has to face is about the reaction of his immediate family, friends, relatives and neighbors. The rift the individual causes and the thought about its repercussions is a bitter psychological experience that the individual has to undergo. Apart from that, even after the surgery the hormones that have to be taken affect a toll of the mental and physical health of the individual. Surgery which the individual thinks, the be all and end all of his life is not so. The individual still has to cope with the removal of facial hair and mellowing his baritone voice after the surgery. Post transitioning fails to solve the problems of some individuals, who are not satisfied with their appearance after surgery.

The need to prove themselves as women to the society probably is the basic psychology behind the choice of transgenders to become prostitutes. From time immemorial prostitution has been recognized as the business of women though there are male prostitutes too, this has been the women's field. The male to female transgenders have this etched in their cultural memory and that is why they inadvertently resort to prostitution. But of late this trend has been changing as we see in the case of many transgender who do not resort to sex trade. Even Vidya contemplates suicide before taking to begging. Hijras tend to direct their aggression more towards men than women to whom they direct their attention only to extract money, "We are like women and we do everything like women... It is not possible" (Reddy 52) is the reply hijras give when they are asked their views about women.

There are some positive psychological changes as a result of surgery. It stands the individual to great advantage. The surgery which involves a great deal of tolerance, perseverance, emotional strength, stability and introspection help to make the individual to grow into a well meaning human being. The excruciating experience during and after surgery, makes them empathetic kind and understanding. And so they help the operated ones whole heartedly as seen in the experiences of all the three characters.

Though 'coming out' of their hidden and so called shameful lives and exposing themselves to the public gives them psychological relief, they do not do this to cause sensation but only to bring about the welfare of others like them. This coming out satisfies them on two counts. One, it acts as a purgative for their pent up feelings and second, it serves as an eye opener to the state administration and society. The operation stigmatizes them in the views of the mainstream society. They undergo this for the satisfaction of their inner urge and for gaining legitimacy for their inner feelings of a desired sexuality. When the reason for this is analyzed psychologically, the obvious answer is the association of 'nirvana' with creative power of (Hindu) sexual renunciation. According to them, this operation elevates them beyond the stigmatization and transports them into a state of a sexual sacredness.

The depression that the transgenders face, due to stigma, shame and isolation that is vented out through their writing does give 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.

There are not many studies about depression in the transgender community in India. Whatever little is there, say that the possible causes of depression are the lack of acceptance by the family and society. Another major cause is the fear of persecution under laws such as section 377. The perception that queerness is a disease that has to be cured also contributes to depression. There have been the rare cases that got parental support but the bullying and violence they encounter have a demoralizing effect on them. When there is pressure from families about marriage, their inability to refuse, result in break ups and trauma leading to suicidal attempts. Most often lack of peer support and inability to share grief and seek solace result in ailments. Prevalence of mental illness is higher due to these factors .The life of constant anxiety pushes them into stress thereby debilitating their productivity.

The psychology of the society has also to be studied with care and the reasons behind the treatment meted out to those unfortunate beings should be enumerated. Any society respects the ways of the majority. This preference most of the time leads to ignorance and misconception about those who resist its edicts. The society which has its own conceptions about the binary existence has its reservations about recognizing people who do not fit into this binary division. It develops a primordial fear of monstrosity or loss of humanness. This fear manifests itself as resentment, revulsion and hatred. These change into physical, mental and emotional violence directed at those, whom they feel do not conform to their standards. The society cannot understand or sympathize with what it cannot feel. The burly physique and deep, baritone voices should not hamper the efforts to understand them.

This thesis aims at analyzing these factors. It adds another perspective to the already existing body of literature. It is an attempt to broaden the pivotal points and as far as possible to demystify the myths concerning the lives of transgenders. A genuine attempt has been made to

eliminate sensationalism and to create an understanding of reality. Media, both visual and print, have already served as eye openers to bring transequalism into focus and into mainstream factuality. An effort has been made to interpret transgenderism as an ‘Uninvited dilemma, and a condition, rather than a sensational, sexual aberration only to be whispered or snickered about’ (Stuart 2).

The subsequent part of this chapter traces the expression given by the three chosen writers in this regard. The books examine human rights issues and the struggle of the marginalized to find physical and mental peace and wholeness. The readers are motivated to reconsider their own biases and are pushed into engaging in the work of securing human rights for these people. They question the social politics, that the social type the body prefers to live, should not be determined by the sex of the body. This shakes the foundation of the accepted norm that it is the sex of the body, which decides the social sense as a man or a woman. They try to question the myth of gender roles and conformity to those myths. They question the society which sits in judgment about the 'rightness' or 'wrongness' of their very existence on which they have no control. It is not their volition to suffer this predicament but they are pushed into this hell by aberrations in nature.

In *The Truth about Me* Doraisamy, the protagonist even in the very first chapter makes it explicit that he began to feel the 'difference' when he was "around ten, studying in class 5". (3) When he could understand what is expected of a boy, he could not think in the expected lines. He confides that he "would go to the village school along with the girls" and "played only girl's games"(3). He loved to sweep the front yard clean and draw the kolam every morning - the last being a very typical women's chore. What more, he did all these household chores “with confidence”. Moreover his attraction to womanly ways did not stop in doing their work with

élan. He began to dress himself in his "sisters' long skirt and blouse, twist a long towel around his head and let it trail down his lock like a braid"(4). These made people around him call him "Hey, Number 9", 'female thing' and 'female boy'. A boy in whom androgen hormone is in adequate amount would not like himself to be called so. But he, in whom there is a very early symptom of what is going to happen in future "understood that I was indeed like that. In fact I wanted to be so" (4).When all the boys worked in the fields during holidays along with men of their families he "stood along with the women and helped with the planting" (5).

Doraisamy was a 'regular source of amusement and curiosity" (6) as he enjoyed playing only the girls games like fivestones and hide and seek. He would hurl obscenities on his tormentors as women do. Doraisamy's behavior is a result of his basic psychological need. He elucidates his inner feeling:

I did not know that I behaved like a girl; it felt natural for me to do so. I did not know how to be like a boy. It was like eating for me - just as I would not stop eating because someone asked me not to eat, I felt I could not stop being a girl, because others told me I ought not to be so". (7)

Doraisamy felt elated when he was recognized as a girl during the village festival in his kurathi's garb because he could express all "those female feelings that I usually have to suppress and so felt happy for days afterwards" (14). Very early in life Doraisamy was troubled by the feelings that men incited in him. He was shy when he saw young men; he was drawn to men and wondered even then, why he should not be drawn to women instead since he was a man. He thought of himself as "a woman trapped in man's body" and he "longed to be known as a woman

and felt pain at being considered a man" (15). He was confused and anxious because of this peculiar torture and wondered often why he was 'a flawed being'.

When Doraisamy went to Dindigul with his friends he was allowed to fulfill his desire of wearing a sari. When he was complimented for his looks and his resemblance to actress Revathi he decided to be called by the same name. When he saw his sari clad figure he felt a glow of pride. He not only looked like a woman but was convinced that he "was indeed one" (22). When he went to fetch water taking the pot in his hip he tucked his sari like women do as he was thrilled to do all womanly chores in women's clothes. Even when he slept during the night he tucked his hands into the folds of the sari when his feet were shown and felt "all the way more womanly" (24). When he took clothes to the river for washing he wore his lungi over his chest, and rubbed the soap and turmeric. His friends teased him, "Look at this boy-girl, such desire to be female" (28).

Doraisamy's fear and anguish increased as days proceeded on. When he had to work with his brothers with his 'lungi folded above' his knees which made him squirm like a worm. Though his friends who appeared more feminine than him could hold back their desires, Doraisamy could not. He decided to run away to Delhi where he was initiated into hijra culture. But the telegram from his father when he was spotted by a driver from Namakkal made his life miserable. When he had to enter his home town he did not want to worsen his mother's condition by presenting himself in a sari before her. But the sartorial changes he had to resort to was complicated as he could enter neither a woman's nor a man's toilet.

By fair or foul means his family, tried to make him a man. They decided to offer his hair to goddess Mariamman at Samayapuram. The physical assault by his brothers caused him less pain than this suggestion. His ardent prayer could have moved even a stone:

Amma! Why must I suffer like this? Why must you put me through this ordeal? ...What have I done wrong? It was you who made me male in form but with female feelings. And now, for your crime, I am being punished and in your own shrine! Aren't you a woman too? Can't you understand another woman's feelings? Don't you have any pity". (57)

He prayed that he should be made a woman just like her or "at least to make him" into a man completely. His ordeal at home and workplace only instigated his insatiable desire to return to the likes of him, have the operation done and become a woman. But he had to bide his time as his hair had to grow before he could go over to them.

Back in Delhi, Doraisamy spent the next six months attending to his nani's needs. His dedication earned him his right to undergo the 'operation'. He "was eager to become a woman and that was all that mattered" (66) to him. Back then he had thought that to get rid of this 'male object' was enough to become like other women. He was ready to undergo any amount of trouble to face this ordeal. The crude surgery was done without proper medical procedures. When he was shown the organ he was in fact ecstatic as his pain had not started then. But when the real pain started he screamed and howled only to be chided by the ayah who was there. Till the stitches were removed on the seventh day they had to go through hell every time they went to pee. He put up with all these painful procedure 'to become a woman' (76).

Apart from putting up with all these physical pain he had to suffer more from the stares of people in the railway halls during his journey back to Delhi. They looked at him as if he were an oddity. The police woman scorned him for not being like other men. "Why can't you be normal"? (89) was her query. Now the transformed Doraisamy (Revathi) had no energy to explain her troubles. She remarks that the police woman "made it seem easy, this business of being a normal man" (80). These lines express the amount of torture that they undergo to escape from being 'abnormal' but that abnormality appears normal to others. She returned silently to the nearest bathroom to clean the cotton wad soaked in blood. Applying boric powder she put fresh cotton on the still raw and fleshy red wound. Her pain was accentuated as she did not have enough money to buy a return ticket or food. The sight and sounds of people in all the stations filled her with exhaustion and she vents her disappointment. Her inner anguish that disturbs her and upsets her for which she has no answer, makes her almost a neurotic, causing her to exclaim: "Why, a crippled person a blind person-even they attract pity and people help them. If someone has experienced physical hurt, they are cared for both by the family and by outsiders who come to know of it but we-we are not considered human" (83).

Revathi's dream comes to fruition only after the forty day's ritual when she sees her face in a mirror. She "felt like a flower that had just blossomed" (88). It seemed the earlier "male form had disappeared and in its place was a woman" (88). She was exuberant and exultant. After a coaching class by her guru about how to conduct herself in the future, she was trained to toe the line of her community so that she can attain the status and freedom of her guru and nani when she was their age. But not for long could she suppress her desire for sex. She became the chela of a guru at Mumbai. As a pimp for some time, she also had to undergo all the tortures that women prostitutes undergo. This life of horror and violence drove her back to her native place this time

with a determination to counter any attack. When her brothers taunted her she replied, "I felt like a woman-I wanted to stay true to my feelings, so I changed into a woman" (114).

Though Revathi was subjected to ill treatments and injustices done to women in India, she definitely nurtured no illusions about marriage or child birth. She blatantly voices the pin pricks inside her. She says, "one can joke about marriage but I know deep down that none of this would come to pass in real life" (121). Instincts, feelings and desires that are not acceptable to the conscious mind are repressed into the unconscious. Revathi's desires about marriage and leading the normal life of a woman which she felt would not materialize remain embedded in her unconscious mind. Psychologists suggest that there is always a struggle of the banished feelings striving to express them. Revathi's speech in the contest at Villupuram is only an expression of these pent up desires, "The feelings I have are natural and they should be recognized as such. All I ask is that you accept as worthy of respect what you have all along considered unnatural and illegal". (261). When she went back to Ghatkopar she underwent what women who are beautiful and weak experience everywhere. She was worried about how she was going "to survive as a woman in this world" (157). Revathi's total disillusionment with life is expressed thus "when I was dressed like a man they said I spoke like a woman and now after I've changed into a woman, they say my voice is like a man's (173). Even after so many trials and tribulations she did not get the response she wanted and a pitiable outpour caps all her suffering, "could not God have created me as a man or woman? Why did he make me this way? Why is He savoring this spectacle that He created?" (186)

Deprived of social documents, denied of the means of supporting herself, it was only natural that the prospects of suicide crossed her mind. "I wondered if I should end my life"(57). She is torn between two worlds one of social activism and the other of prostitution – the world of

aravani's means of livelihood. Revathi contemplated suicide but the trials and tribulations that she had suffered so far gave her the mental strength to give up the lesser world and choose the better one that of social activism.

Vidya's narration in the auto biography *I am Vidya* begins with her nirvana and her earlier life is told to us in 'flash back' mode. Saravanan was born in a family which prayed for the birth of boys and his father had always nurtured hopes of seeing his son as a district collector. He was a 'privileged member of the household' (20). He enjoyed every kind of concession but when it came to performance in the academics his father did not agree with anything other than the first rank. Life was running like well oiled machinery till his eleventh year when Saravanan began to show a fancy for wearing his sister Manju's Indian skirt. He began to lock himself inside, when everybody went out and put on girls clothes and sang and danced like a girl. When his grandma chided him during one of his pirouettes assuming the act to be a playful imitation did not she realize the true story behind. He liked to dance at a rapid pace and sat down at a fast force wearing his sister's skirt. The skirt spread out like a lotus and he felt happy as if he was sitting on the lotus as the goddess in the Hindu temples is portrayed. When his grandmother discovered him doing this, she could not fathom his inner longings but only blurted out, "Look at this madness...come and see what this boy is up to"(26).

Saravanan liked to watch 'Oliyum Oliyum' (Audio,video) programme in Television to admire the beauty and gait of the heroines. He watched the show only to put himself in the heroine's role and "blushed as they did, danced and wooed their heroes as they did" (26). After coming back to reality he masqueraded as the heroines, dressing and walking around like them. His sister Manju's dress and cosmetics abetted his transformation. He used a towel to cover his forehead and twirled the long rear portion into a pigtail. Even when his mother's corpse was

lying in the hall for his relatives to pay their homage, Saravanan could not dissuade himself from dancing. When his father was told about this, he slapped him and asked "what are you doing, dancing like a girl at such an unhappy time" (29).

Saravanan's habits did not change in a year but people began to view his pranks was looked with disfavor. Even his sister, who till then thought it was after all a childish prank began to scold him. That was when he knew that it was unsafe to wear a skirt and dance. He decided to enjoy these pleasures in locked up rooms. His voice was still soft and effeminate, but his neighbors did not dismiss his activities as naïve ways. They began to make fun of him. Even those who sympathized with him for being a motherless child, began to call him names. When he walked in the streets, youngsters began to parody his gait saying that "he walks like a girlie" (30).

Even when he was at school Saravanan did not compete with the boys. He envied only the girls, especially a fellow student, a girl, Amirthavalli for her feminine looks. The long thick double plaits and her smile made him feel that she was his rival. During one of the dance sessions, when they both danced, he was appreciated as a better dancer. His feelings of rivalry were assuaged a bit. He was perversely satisfied that he could score over her. The marriage of his sister was a shattering blow, as she was his great means of comfort. The news of his effeminate ways spread to his school, where he was ridiculed and teased, which made him shun company and he became a loner. This began to tell upon his studies.

As he entered his teens, he began to be dismissed by his classmates as number nine. Crude puns were invented by the boys using the suffix 'ali' a name for eunuchs. As he grew up, his desire to cross dress was intensified. No amount of taunting or teasing could make him mend

his ways and his need became very clear to him that he “felt like woman inside and wanted to be a woman (33). He indulged his feminine sensibilities all alone on the river bank when he bathed and washed his clothes, "visualizing a hero grabbing me on the water" (34).

Saravanan avoided men for two reasons, one for his innate shyness and second due to the fear that they "would soon notice... and tease and torment" (34). But when he met Ilango, he started wishing that he feast on him the way he enjoyed watching other girls. (35). Ilango was the man who kindled in him the kind of changes that occur from time to time in a woman's different stages of development. Ilango was the man who made him “feel whole as a woman” (35). With increasing urges inside him, he could not concentrate on his studies. His brother-in-law too could not understand or appreciate his feelings. He repeatedly coaxed him “Sit straight like a man” (39). His father had given him up when he was pushed away by Saravanan during one of the ‘bouts of flagellation’. He could not fathom, why none of them was ready to accept his real feelings. They wanted to treat him as a boy, when he felt himself to be a girl.

Saravanan's troubles increased when he went to college, as he had to share his room with men. Fear and worry decimated his happiness. He had fully realized that “I was a woman trapped in a male body. Physically I was no woman, but my thought process when considering my future, my professional career was that of a woman” (43). His association with Senthil instilled more courage in him and he voice began to his need boldly “Please get me a ladies” bicycle (44). The friendship with Revathi a fellow traveler in train came in like a draught of fresh air but nobody could understand that the woman in him yearned for the friendship of another woman. Unable to bear the rumors doing the rounds, he moved away from Revathi to avoid causing her embarrassment.

When he was working with the drama troupe, he was very happy that his femininity came out without his knowledge during rehearsals. He was lost in self admiration, whenever he was alone. His inner turmoil and feelings are vented out when Vidya narrates this incident demonstrating the plight of transgenders!

The mirror may reflect your outer appearance to you and other people like you, but in the case of thirunangais it portrays their innermost feelings and turbulence, their essential femininity, showcasing it all. Other people cannot understand this phenomenon. Your face may be mirrored when you sit before a dressing table, but in the case of people like me it is our heart that is so mirrored (59)

Saravanan's age, education, experience and maturity were directing him closer to realizing his inner urges. He was no longer afraid but was ready to flaunt his desires to the world. "What I had feared would be exposed all those years, I was now dying to express" (60). His most virulent desire, his "strong urge to be a woman following my natural inclination, breaking free of the maleness I had been born with" (61) loomed large before him, when he finished his post graduation. Not even the advice of Sri a kothi like him to continue his studies and to find expression to his desires in privacy did not hold good to him because "he could not lead a double life any longer. No I could not live any longer as a man. If I could not become a woman I'd rather die... I hated being a man. I was going to try and live as a woman. If I failed, I was ready to die" (62).

Neurosis as a result of the conflict between his desires and feigned appearances began to take its toll. It was accentuated by his inability to convince his family about his plight. That he was shattering the hopes of his family traumatized him:

How could I tell him I was not Saravanan, but a girl? How would my loving chithi, my older sisters whom I loved more than my life, my younger sister who it seems had been born to shower me with her love, how could they bear the shock of my disclosure? (61)

He had almost reached the stage of contemplating self destruction, if his inner urge was not satisfied. So he decided to move over to Chennai.

At Chennai Saravanan could not pay heed to the well meaning advice of the director of NGO, Ashabharathi who wrote the Foreword to Su. Samuthram's *The Third Gender* and he was exasperated:

“Wasn't she a woman like me? Why then was she advising me to continue to be a man? This was no causal interest like my foray into theatre. This was my need. It was a want. It was my existence, my very survival. I was a woman, not a man. Why couldn't they understand that?” (69)

He explained to Kumaran, who tried to change his mind. “In my heart the decision to become a woman had taken firm root. I felt the transformation in my mind and body complete. It was impossible to continue as a man”. (72)

The last ditch efforts by his friends Kumaran, Sri and Neelamma could not change his attitude. He knew very well that each of them had his welfare at heart. His education warned him of the repercussions but nothing deterred his decision because he hated to be a man in public and a woman in private. He found wearing men's clothes disgusting:

Nobody's advice could shake my resolve. I was a woman and I was nothing without my passion to be a woman. It was more than a passion, it was an obsession. My womanhood was raging to destroy my manhood, incinerating all the advice I was receiving. (74)

Vidya justified her separation from her family and the disappointment she had given to her relatives. "If, to be born male and feel female is a sin, it is nature's creation. What can we do about it" (88).

Saravanan took the decision to undergo surgery because "a person of my kind never feels male. Our male identity is an unfortunate accident. We are, we want to be women. We feel like women" (16). That made him declare to his professor, "I want to be a woman. I can't be a man anymore. My whole life is a lie...I can't wait Sir. I want to live as a woman. Nothing else seems important now" (71). She questions and explains:

If you are a man would you like to wear women's clothes? If you are a woman, would you like hirsute facial hair growth? That is the essence of our problem, my problem. We are women at heart and desperately delete or erase our male identity. That is why we crave the surgical procedure that will give us the female identity. (105)

During and immediately after the surgery she had experienced near death. But her reaction suggested her relief from her trauma. She gasped after the excision of his penis and testicles. "Ah! Nirvana the ultimate peace! (16). Though she could not bear her pain, she felt:

Inside I was at peace. It was a huge relief. I was now a woman. Mine was a woman's body. Its shape would be what my heart wanted, yearned for. This pain would

obliterate all my earlier pains...Thank you for removing my maleness from my body, thank you for making my body a female body. My life is fulfilled. If I die now, I'll lose nothing. I can sleep in peace. (16)

The words delivered from the depth of heart can never be mistaken for a flight of fancy or a fleeting desire. These words surmise Vidya's psychological trauma and its ultimate catharsis. No one can fail to understand the genuineness of her suffering and cannot help sympathizing with her. But what she needs is not the sympathy of the society but the understanding of the plight of people like her.

*The Truth about Me* and *I am Vidya* being autobiographies trace the inner feelings of the protagonists' from a very early age unlike '*The Third Gender*' where the protagonist is introduced as a teenager, as an adult. The author does not relate his earlier experience and plunges the reader right into the center of action. Suyambu the protagonist was caught in a turmoil of emotions. Everything was wrong with him. He was on a highway on a dark night with his suit case. Unable to stay at the hostel, he had come out and was standing rooted midway, as if he were 'trying to liberate something imprisoned within his body' (1). There appeared to be no "connection between his body and self" (2). The strangeness within him had brought him to the road side and the lorries passing by did not deter him. An occasional bus stopped by and even it threw him out for sitting next to a girl. Suyambu fell down on the road and his scream reverberated in the darkness. He was on his way home only "to see his mother and shower a couple of abuses on her. If his father intervened he wanted to take him to task too. He was fuming with rage"(11).

The turmoil in Suyambu's mind was the result of his external appearance not correlating with his inner body. He sat near the girl in the bus just because he felt, he was himself a girl. In the lorry also he was attracted towards the cleaner just as any girl would be by a male whose hand appeared manly. But that happiness did not last long. The 'woman' inside him woke up suddenly and he began to feel a strange fear as any Indian girl would in the company of men. He had been brought up in a culture where women of his family who were not married were not allowed to sit next to strangers especially men. This made him scream and so he was thrown out of the lorry. His inner feelings were not known to the cleaner who saw him only as a man. Suyambu reached home. He appreciated his nephew's words that he was right because "You said is true. As an uncle I am dead" (16).

Unlike the protagonists of the other two books, Suyambu blamed his parents for begetting him like 'that'. Doraisamy and Saravanan being the narrators don't blame their parents for their condition but Suyambu's angst is directed towards his parents and his contention is that "They deserve to be punished for having got one like this" (28). Moreover a change in the physical appearance is more explicitly described in this novel, "Suyambu who was broad chested, angular-faced and had proportionate arms and legs, was gradually undergoing a change" (2).

The disparity between his outer appearance and inner feelings landed him in trouble, be it with his friends in the hostel or classmates in college. When Muthu and Murthy patted him he was piqued. "Next time you touch me, mind you, you'll lose your respect... Here don't touch me... If you do I don't know what I'll do next" (35). Suyambu's infatuation for the volley ball player made him forget completely that he was a boy and in his eagerness to share his crush with a girl who was standing nearby he touched her shoulders. All hell broke loose and he was beaten

to pulp by everyone present here. His perception of himself as a girl is best expressed during his visit to his brother-in-law's place and yet another facet of his womanliness is exposed. To his surprise he found the girl who was the reason behind the chaos in the bus. The girl had travelled along with her lover who posed as if he was her brother. Suyambu who immediately grasped the situation did not betray her to the family as he felt that a girl should protect another in distress. At college he never wanted to be called 'thambi' as the term made him squirm. His utter confusion over his sexuality became the cause of his dismissal from college. He asked for a lift to the voting booth to a girl called Parimala which was misconstrued as a dastardly act by vulgar political patrons and cunning ruffians. As he still appeared a male to others, they could not understand his passion.

Suyambu, after coming from college did not regret his act. He became keenly aware of the woman in him. He openly pleaded with Malarkodi whom he was supposed to marry to teach him to wear a sari. He was not embarrassed to ask the girl who was to be his future wife about the "parting right across at the base of the hanging locks"(84) because he envied the fashion as a girl did . A letter from her did not enthuse him but only reminded him to write one to David his presumed lover. The desire to be addressed by David as a 'lover' and not a 'sister' was so intense that he felt he would 'commit suicide' if David called him a sister. When he saw his sister's sari on the cloth line, he could not control himself anymore He Dressed himself like a girl using his sister's clothing and he bejeweled himself with his sister's finery. Maddened by the jingle of the anklets and bangles he began to dance as if to punish the femininity imprisoned in his male body. Soon it became a dance of bliss. He behaved like a person possessed. When his mother tried to snatch the sari he even slapped her. His sister Maragatham's comforting grace did not appease him.

Magnetized by the femininity in him, Suyambu decided to wear the sari that was given as an offering to appease the soul of the dead Seethalakshmi. But Chandra her sister-in-law picked up a fight for insulting her family. Chandra decided to avenge the insult by teaching him to wear a sari. She did not stop with that but complimented Suyambu. “Sabaash! This becomes a lady... You look very much like one” (105). Unable to recognize the trap Suyambu’s inner feelings answer her, “Not just look, my dear, I am a lady” (105). Even when his parents threatened him, he refused to remove the sari because he was sure “I am a lady, I shall not take it off” (112).

Suyambu could not control his urges to behave like a girl despite being beaten senseless by his brother and father. All the coaxing and cajoling stories from the epics told to him by his loving sister only beget the response, “I understand it akka, but I can’t control myself” (117). On the fateful evening before his sister’s marriage “what had been imprisoned within him, sought to reveal his true self... The ‘Shakthi’ in him overpowered the dormant Siva” (130) and he decked himself with all the jewels. But this became his ruin and also that of his sister’s marriage. The father son duo vented their ire till his flesh appeared to have been plough up. “This urge to become one with the ladies, to be one among them” (135) cost him the love of his sister whom he adored and that of his family. From that moment he lost his family.

Rejection by his natal family made Suyambu seek solace in the newly found mother, a member of the transgender community. He felt that she was not just a mother but “Aadi Parasakthi, Lokamatha – a mother, even if she did not beget him” (137). Pachaiaamma’s gain was Velliamma’s loss. When he could not bear to live in the slum and wished death would come to him, a twenty year old who comforted him revealed the reality of his choice. He realized that everyone there had been numbed by similar agony and they laughed at his woes. The author

states the condition of the people there “It was laughter born out of a chemical reaction in which the brain had transformed sorrow into joy” (TTG149).

*The Third Gender* is a third person narrative, in which the author sheds light on the reasons behind this behavior. David the doctor, clarifies, “it is clear that he cannot resist wearing a sari; nor can he marry anyone. He does not do it voluntarily. His physical condition forces him to do so” (154). The lecture that David gives is not only for Suyambu’s family but to all readers; “Nature destroys individual creatures as well as species that are unfit to live... Hence nature has installed an inbuilt mechanism by which reproduction can be limited. Eunuchs are born for this purpose” (157). Citing examples from the insect world he clarified that people like Suyambu cannot be changed and ultimately gave the advice “It is we who have to change our attitude” (157). David also gives a homily on the differences between eunuchs and people who merely change their sex. He says that “Eunuchs can never bear children. They are like grain which can never be used as seeds...eggs that could not be fertilized and therefore can’t be hatched into chicks” (157). He explains that there are male and female elements in each of the human beings and so the predominant element governs the characteristics. At times some become eunuchs who “are the third kind of human beings” (158).

Another feature of the third person narrative is the reader’s ability to get an insight into the other character’s point of view. The traumas caused by Suyambu’s activities on the psyche of the others in the household are narrated by the author. His brother who had been, “so well-built and robust, is now merely a shadow of his former self. His limbs which had been solid logs were now drumsticks’ (257) within a short span of time. Arumugapandi who had understood Suyambu’s plight expresses his sincere apology: “How agonized you must have been to suffer from an aberration that could not be explained in a thousand words?” (257). His sister had been

liberated from all sorrows as she “rests in peace” (258) as she hanged herself within a year. His father “the once majestic face now wasted. The mouth had shrunk to the size of the eye. The eyes had sunk and become like pot holes... His hands which had been like wooden beams, now needed a support to rise (258). His mother who, “had been strong and healthy now looked emaciated” (258). The author had painted a moving picture of the household which was ravished by his decision. The stigma, strain and anxiety had taken its toll on each of the members.

Komalam his sister-in-law was the one who had changed radically. “Her round face had become elongated. Her cheeks had become so hollow that the jaws stuck out, giving her at once a pathetic and sinister look” (259). Mohana, his sister whose face was “dotted with warts” appeared “like a creeper bearing withered flowers” (259). Komalam’s sarcastic jibes about queerness running in the family had ruined her marital happiness. Nobody knew what transpired between the couple. His brother, who was smitten by the ‘lash of her tongue’, which left an ‘unhealing wound’ which still smarted, was not willing to talk about it.

From a reading of the experiences and expressions of the three characters it can be delineated beyond doubt that their suffering is the result of some physiological disorders the exact cause of which is yet unpredictable. Their longing to change their sexuality is not ephemeral or transient. It does not alter with duress. It is built in their system and perpetually bides its time to reveal itself, shattering all the other relationships in their life in the process of breaking out. This mental ailment is called Gender Identity Syndrome/Disorder GID in medical parlance, which is a condition in which a person with apparently normal sexual differentiation is convinced that he or she is actually a member of the opposite sex. This conviction is accompanied by the unchangeable and irrepressible urge to live in other sex, both physically and

socially and by the wish to acquire the physical characteristics of the desired sex to the fullest extent possible.

The gender identity syndrome doesn't imply that all transsexual persons should suffer from this. This has been a cause of much confusion. If a transgender person feels comfortable with his/her gender and if it doesn't cause inner frustration or impair his functioning he/she is not suffering from GID. Another fallacy about GID is that it is not curable. It is a curable disease which should not imply an opinion of immorality. It doesn't mean that people who are oppressed by negative attitudes are suffering from GID. Doctors and psychiatrists opine that any kind of mental or emotional problem should not receive a stigma. This positive attitude has led several countries to remove the transgender identity from the list of mental illness. France has led the world in 2010 by doing so.

The psychology of people who have been deprived of love and affection is to cling to those who extend them. This is what happens in case of most transgenders who establish bondage of family with people of their predicament. The people who have been stigmatized and pushed to the margin, who are denied basic human rights and who lose the composite portrait of a 'citizen' lose respect for the society that has made them so. They engage in hateful and risky activities thus worsening and jeopardizing their relationship with the society. There are others of the same predicament, who unite together to oppose or change these unlawful practices and prejudicial attitudes. They advance medical support to vent their grievances in public, they group together to raise money to better their life and probably to draw the attention of public about their unmet needs. These sentiments find expression in the experiences of Saravanan aka Vidya during her train begging, when Priya, Prateeksha and Vidya unite together to stall the menace of the passengers in the train. They touch the raw nerve by elucidating their ordeal and try to

promote self worth among their own kind thereby striving for acceptance by the society.

When they change their gender roles, transgenders are attracted to opposite gender. The feelings they experience can create fear, panic, anger, confusion, self loathing and guilt which are very harmful to mental and psychological wellbeing. Rejection they face from family when they come out with their feelings, is the most ruining experience one can undergo.

The transgender people are trained well in advance by their community to face the consequences of their surgery. They are trained to live in the role of women as cross dressers. This experience and the treatment meted out to them are expected to dissuade the weak minded from undergoing the surgery. The mentors also advise them of all the repercussions that they may encounter. Despite all these, most of them prefer surgery there by making explicit their inner urge. The lamentation of the transgender in their annual festival sums up their angst:

Did you forsake me 'cos I was a paper flower?

Or did you leave me 'cos I had no fragrance?

To my father I was a neem fruit...

To my brother, a poison seed... (TTG 253)

Whatever little has been done for the welfare of these people would only be in vain unless people realize their plight and embrace them into their fold. Till then they would have to wail like Mekalai in *The Third Gender*:

Had I been a plant, I would have flowered...

Had I been a creeper, I'd have clutched a tree...

Had I been a river, I'd have flowed into the ocean...

Had I been a crab, I'd been in my burrow...

'Cos I'm neither man nor woman, I stand here, an orphan (253).

Revathi blames the world for its attitude towards people like her:

“The world looks askance at me. It holds me wrong for having turned into a woman after being born a man. God has given me these feelings, and I have to live in a world that does not respect my feelings...

If someone beats me, pinches me, scolds me, I hurt. I feel hungry, I have to eat, I have to cover my shame with clothes, I too need to be with my loved ones. I want their affection. I want to experience pleasure. I long for respect. I want to live a life of dignity. I want to go to work as many women do.

But who gives people like me love? Or respect? Who offers us clothes to hide our shame? When I am hungry who feeds me? If I want all of this, what am I to do? Did I come with a mission at birth, wanting to be a pottai? Did my parents imagine I would be one, when I was born? I did not imagine that I would walk endlessly on several roads, begging, doing sex work. Who is responsible for what has happened to me? (219-220)

If these thoughts appeal to the society's introspection, there is no need to say, that an attitudinal change will result. The treatment meted out to these people will be for the better.

