

Gender Performativity in (un)Safe Space: The Narratives of Male to Female Indian Trans* Revathi and Vidya

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Introduction

'Transgender' people include a broad range of 'gender-variant individuals,' such as transsexuals, cross-dressers, and drag queens.^[1] The term transgender also pertains to individuals who live in a gender that is 'opposite' to their biological sex. 'Gayle Rubin refers to the 'sex/gender system' to elucidate 'a sequence of arrangements through which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is sculpted by human social actions.'^[2] However, sex, like gender, is a culturally manufactured normative construct, challenging the boundary between sex as natural and gender as cultural. Vera Mackie asserts 'gender identity is about the narrative of shared experiences. A person who is unable to share it in the exchange of stories will not be interpellated as belonging to that group and will not recognize him or herself in these narrative exchanges.'^[3] According to Anne Fausto-Sterling, who discusses intersex in *Sexing the Body*,^[4] the binary paradigm is inadequate for describing the heterogeneity of human sexuality. Dimorphism diminishes at the level of basic biology when it can be discerned that some women have facial hair, while men have none; some females have deep voices, while some males squeal.

Transsexuals, whose gender mismatches their biological sex, claim to be grouped into dimorphic absolutes—men 'trapped in women's bodies' or women 'trapped in men's bodies.' Talia Mae Bettcher posits a 'multiple-meaning model' that permits non-pathologised trans to affix into 'man' and 'woman' binaries. She suggests that Trans culture is rife with distinct gender narratives.^[5] She contends that when a trans individual announces, 'I am a woman' or 'I am a man,' their gender expression conflicts with their intention to escape from the non-normative to the normative, that ensues violence, leading them to be stigmatised as 'fake women.' Gender theorists may use Judith Butler's idea of performativity to formulate a comprehensive theoretical framework for studying gender.^[6] 'Doing gender theory describes how gendered subjects form via a process of repeated discursive imitation and repetition—or recitation—of gender norms.'^[7] Adopting the perspectives of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche and Reginald John Hollingdale, 'there is no "being" behind doing, acting, or becoming; "the doer" is merely a fabrication imposed on the doing—the doing itself is everything.'^[8] The (illusion of the) 'doer'/subject is created and maintained through a series of performed actions. Hence transgender is 'outside' the binary category whose gender mismatches their assigned sex. For MtF, despite possessing male genitals, they embrace their gender by performing as females repetitively through attire, language, beautification and mannerisms.^[9]

Gender variant individuals are under suspicion due to their identity, hence confronting various challenges to own a safe 'space' in society. A significant relationship between gender and space suggests that gender identity is unfixed, ephemeral, and frail, rather than representing a constant and unified nature. Hence gender in both personal performative actions and the external environment, demonstrates that reiterated public 'performances' of gender perpetuate gender identity.^[10] 'Space' becomes the venue of cultural

imprint when the body explicitly vocalises the social ties of a particular time and place. A critical emphasis on the intersection of gendered space and spatially generated gender identities might be a potential strategy for new gender configurations. Comprehending space as multifaceted, dynamic, heterogeneous, conditional and contentious may assist us to deconstruct the oppressor-oppressed dichotomy, which challenges those in positions having authority over knowledge and spatial praxis against those who suffer from it.[11] Indian transgender suffer the agony of not being in safe spaces either at home or outside due to their unacceptable gender identity. In this paper, through the narratives of A. Revathi and Vidya, the traumatic relationship of transgender with their 'own' spaces will be highlighted. Revathi and Vidya in their autobiographical narratives *Truth About Me* and *I am Vidya* respectively, confirmed their desire and identified themselves as transgender, enabling other individuals to cope with and establish their identity as trans.[12]

Vidya's autobiography, *I Am Vidya*, published in 2007, is India's first hijra autobiography in which she shares her experiences of 'being hijra' and 'belonging to the hijra community.' The book garnered tremendous recognition. She demonstrates battles with her sexuality, societal and gender subjects, and coming to grips with her womanhood. Vidya established *panmai* theatre and became the first trans in 2013 to be awarded the Charles Wallace Award. Her autobiography established a literary tradition by representing her experience of socio-cultural and somatic metamorphosis. Byalakere Shivananjappa (B. S.) Lingadevaru directed *Nannu Avanalla Avalu* (2015), a Kannada film modelled on Vidya's autobiography. Hence hijra autobiography as a literary genre earned traction, persuading other hijras to pen their experiences and performative roles. Revathi's Tamil book *Unarvum Uruvum* (Feelings of the entire body) is a compilation of true-life experiences of hijra people. An English version of A. Revathi's *The Truth About Me*, translated by V. Geetha and published in 2010, describes her daily interactions with prejudice, scorn and misery in a socially constructed environment. She illustrates her experiences of 'being a hijra' and working in the sex industry. Hence, we find these two autobiographies appropriate for the study of trans in the performance of 'self' and 'space' that it acquires in a hegemonic society.

Julia Swindells asserts that autobiography has 'the potential to be the text of the oppressed and the culturally displaced, forging a right to speak both for and beyond the individual ... via the assertion of a "personal" voice, which speaks beyond itself.' [13] The argument that autobiography might be 'the text of the oppressed,' demonstrates an individual experience that represents the experiences of a specific disadvantaged group. Through cultural inscription and acknowledgement, autobiography becomes a means of testifying oppression and strengthening the individual. Judith Halberstam claims that writing autobiographically may provide 'intellectual sponsorship' and a feeling of belonging 'in the absence of flesh and blood models.' [14] It is not a naïve personal connection between writer and reader, but 'is calculated, is in fact a performance.' [15]

The autobiography is a fundamental aid in the creation of 'self' and the establishment of an 'identity,' especially pertinent to the transgender/transsexual community. [16] For members of the trans community 'self' is attained through a prolonged and traumatic process of physical change as well as the embrace of a new desired identity in traumatic space. The autobiographies of Revathi and Vidya represent a strategy to vanquish the traumas of self-knowledge and societal awareness, sex transition, and identity loss, as well as the acclimatisation to their newfound identities and abilities. Under the influence of various socio-cultural structures, the self and space in autobiography are perpetually constructed and reconstructed. Therefore, trans through their autobiographies convey their experiences and join in building their gender identity and confronting violence in the process. The autobiographies share a profound knowledge about their community and the way they languished from their 'home' and society. The trans community in India is a unique group, who were long neglected and were subject to discrimination, persecution and torment. [17] Hence Revathi and Vidya are the transgender members, who performed 'self' through 'the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts.' [18]

While executing narrative analysis in qualitative investigations, John Creswell recommends four components to describe, classify and evaluate the text: codes, categories, patterns and themes.[19] Codes are used to indicate ideas in the text; categories are used to connect codes to form a unit or category; themes are used to reflect comparable patterns, and patterns are used to detect repetitive units from categories. Therefore, narrative analysis allows us to analyse and interpret the text. Although autobiography emerges as a self-complacent narrative that appears personal and unique, it holds the narratives of collective self-arising from the trans community. In this paper we exemplify the two-fold dimensions of the narratives; first through the 'repeated performance' of the self as a female who is imprisoned in the erroneous body of a male. This highlights the incongruity between the body and mind, hence ensuing 'passing as women' and 'the wrong body concept' that accords a transpicuous picture of Revathi's and Vidya's performative 'self.' Second, we analyse 'space' as an imperative tool in ensuing trauma and violence against transgender in the life experiences of Revathi and Vidya. Their narratives suggest a pivotal question, Is there a safe 'space' for the transgender community? They are subject to excessive violence, physical abuse, and mental trauma at home and outside. Hence, the autobiography and life experience are used as units of analysis in narrative inquiry to study and understand how individuals construct meaning in their lives.

Performing 'self' in A. Revathi and Vidya

An individual's internal sense of self as male, female, or an identity between or beyond these binaries has been characterised as gender identity.[20] Gender explains the physical traits and behaviours that we assign to bodies, assuming that a man should possess masculine traits that are consistent with the assigned biological sex. In contrast, a woman should possess feminine features.[21] The biological gender of a person and the physical act of sexual intercourse are the two most frequent ways in which sex is defined. Jamison Green defines sex as 'a system of categorization that separates body types based on assumed reproductive capability as assessed by visual inspection of the external genitalia.'[22] Kate Bornstein, in her book *Gender Outlaw*, discusses the idea of a biological gender rather than the word 'sex,' which encompasses body type, chromosomes, hormones, genitals, reproductive organs, and chemical essences/pheromones.[23]

However, gender, according to Butler is performative, indicating that 'it is real only to the extent that it is performed.'[24] This implies that gender is not a fixed and unchangeable characteristic; rather, gender norms and the gendered subject are formed by the very acts of performing gender in daily life, as we see in the cases of Revathi and Vidya. Revathi desires to act and do feminine work, stating, 'I loved to sweep the front yard clean and draw the kolam every morning. I even helped my mother in the kitchen sweeping and swabbing, washing vessels.'[25] This performative production of gender is illustrated through Vidya's ebullience as she demonstrates in her autobiography 'in walking swaying my hips like a woman, sat with my legs crossed stylishly, or rearrange my hair in a feminine way whenever the wind blew it across my forehead.'[26] In a similar vein, Gayle Salamon's contemplation on gender is significant since she describes it as 'a question of the interaction between in and out, between self and observer, between the, seen and the unseen.'[27] Salamon's discourse of gender is essential for trans identities because they undermine the normative paradigm via the repetitive simulacra of bodies. External physical change, in this perspective, becomes a symbol of interior continuance and permanence.

'One becomes a woman, but always under a cultural compulsion to become one,' asserted Simone de Beauvoir.[28] This assertion emphasises that the sexed body may or may not adhere to the gender role ascribed to it. Thus, the body is a platform on which numerous performative actions may be conducted to validate the individual's gender identity. However, Butler in her *Gender Trouble*, asserts that 'performativity must be understood not as a singular act, but rather as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names.'[29] Thus, gender identity is the product of repeated acts,

and transsexuals assert their control over their chosen gender identity via performative traits. Femininity is performed in a male body through a connection of 'performativity,' 'representation' and 'transition,' not only through surgery and hormones. It is a process of 'becoming a female,' or establishing a female identity and feminine self-presentation. It encompasses predominantly feminine behaviour, such as emulating the female sartorial style, 'passing' as a woman, using cosmetics to appear feminine and relating oneself to female experiences and desires as demonstrated in the autobiographies of Revathi and Vidya. Vidya as well as Revathi in their early childhood, loved to apply make-up, wear female clothes, bangles and the jewellery of their sisters to perform their gender in secret. For instance, Vidya states, 'I usually locked myself inside once all of them had gone out, put on girls' clothes ... I loved it.'^[30] Hence through the autobiographies of both trans (MtF), it is noted that cross-dressing was the prime step in performing and embracing femininity. Revathi affirms, 'As soon as I got home from school, I would wear my sister's long skirt and blouse, twist a long towel around my head and let it trail down my back like a braid,' to express the suppressed female desires.^[31]

From reading Butler's work, theorist Jay Prosser concludes that transsexualism is both productive and non-essentialist.^[32] Prosser claimed that, although Butler's *Gender Trouble* addresses performativity in the last chapter, 'Bodily Inscriptions and Performative Subversions,' *Gender Trouble* is most recognised for gender 'performativity.' While Butler claims that all gender is 'performative,' that man and woman are not manifestations of prior intrinsic essences but are formed 'through the repetition of culturally intelligible stylized acts,' *Gender Trouble* portrays the transgender subject as a tangible paradigm through which to illustrate gender's 'performativity.'^[33] Butler defines performativity in *Bodies that Matter* as: 'not a singular act, for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition.'^[34]

Manifestations of an intrinsic identity or 'self' are regarded as 'constative performances' that actively build the identity and are considered representations of individual acts. For instance, we see Revathi, who performed a female character in the village drama, proclaim 'to the world, it appeared that I was dressing up and playing a woman, but inside, I felt a woman.'^[35] '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.'^[36] Cross-dressing on the stage brings into question her real 'self' where she, in female disguise, got rid of her male body for a short duration and performed 'self,' claiming, 'I had to make chest big, and wore a blouse stuffed with cloth balls, with the skirt, anklets, long false braid decorated with paper flowers, kohl-lined eyes and painted lips, I knew I looked beautiful.'^[37] Here we find the deconstruction of the inherent foundation of one's gender identity and acknowledgement that gender is 'performative.' It may be expressed via the repetition of actions, utterances, habit, and gestures. Vidya, in her autobiography, claims that she repeatedly asserts her innate desire to dress as a female in order to feel a complete woman. 'I put on Manju's skirts, shut the door and started to dance to the tune: "I am the princess, / A fresh new rose. / Will my dreams come true?"'^[38]

Hence the noun, 'princess,' indicates that Vidya affirms her female identity, not only by repeatedly cross-dressing but also by using 'female' pronouns for herself. Recitation is a discursive process that lays the foundation for identity construction. Thus, performativity is not about a single act but rather a series of actions and the discursive process of representing people as male or female, masculine or feminine. In this sense, femininity is not seen as an essentialist perspective for women who possess physiologies and corporeality. Femininity is seen as a free-floating construct that is inclusive to females and encompasses male experiences of being a female or a woman, for instance the transgender and transsexuals claims that they perform their gender opposite to the gender assigned to them during birth. In the case of Vidya and Revathi, they both assert that they are born male but perform feminine attributes. Male femininity has shattered the essentialist and fixed domains of femininity. It has also demonstrated that even though people are confined to societal roles of man and woman, gender identity is what distinguishes them from one another.

Therefore, Butler's concept of 'corporeal signification' views the 'body' as a surface on which actions, gestures, desires, and performative characteristics are carried out, resulting in the production of identity similar to natural being.[39] Joseph Bristow also views the 'body' as a platform to display gendered connotations to actions, constructions, and performative characteristics.[40] One constructs a transgender identity through sartorial style, 'passing' and 'performative' acts. Hence, the common themes observed after a comprehensive reading of the selected autobiographies are 'passing' as a woman and the concept of 'wrong body' in an unsafe 'space.'

'Passing' as a woman

The word 'passing' refers to how a person acquires the identity of a member of a different group based on ethnicity, gender, nationality, or sexual orientation.[41] In *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment*, Lynne Friedli used the term 'passing' in the context of African Americans, 'passing' as whites.[42] With the span of time, the idea got connected with transgender and transsexual individuals, that is 'passing' through performance as a man or woman. 'Passing' is an act of donning in the opposite gender's attire to 'induce an unaware crowd that one is inherently a member of that sex.'[43] As Emily Tamilin, Margaret Quinlan and Benjamin Bates assert, 'Those seeking to build new gender identities resort to culturally accepted ideals of masculinity and femininity, either to validate such ideals to "pass" as male or female, or to question such ideals.'[44] Transgender women, frequently from a young age, but not always, seem to be drawn to femininity; this might be seen as their subconscious sex manifesting itself.[45] As they grow older and have sexual desires and secondary sexual traits, they acknowledge that they do not want to be treated like boys. Vidya and Revathi, in their narratives, both exemplify their desire to become a woman from childhood. Vidya asserts that she 'felt like a woman inside,'[46] and Revathi performed her gender identity by accepting 'I am woman trapped in a male body.'[47] These statements clarify that they have forever desired to become women and never attained the same level of womanhood as born women. However, to be identified as a woman by others, they resort to procedures such as surgery, hormone therapy and wearing feminine clothing. Mattilda, in her book *Nobody Passes: Rejecting the Rules of Gender and Conformity*, analyses 'passing as a mechanism through which the violence of assimilation occurs.'[48] Western culture's fixation with gender 'binaries' propagates and maintains the obsession with 'passing.' Julia Serrano claims this obsession as passing-centrism, which 'favours the transsexual's allocated sex over their identified and lived sex, perpetuating the assumption that transsexual genders are fraudulent.'[49] Hence, transgender individuals may feel forced to pass their preferred gender and conceal their transgender identity to avoid prejudice or violence.

However, some claimed Revathi as a woman, asserting, 'Hey Doraisamy, you look like a real woman. If you were one, I'd fall in love with you,'[50] but many used derogatory words like 'ali' or 'no.9.' Hence she declares that 'I was thus a regular source of amusement and curiosity.'[51] Although transgender discourses and performances have the potency to induce many approaches to gender knowledge, Susan Stryker illustrates that they may also reinforce heteronormative comprehension.[52] As she emphasises, the alteration from male to female among trans often entails hormonal and clinical intervention, including the reproductive organs and the breast, as well as, in some situations, permanent hair removal.[53] Physiological characteristics change as a result of this alteration in order to imprint marks of the chosen gender identification onto the body. As a result, the body acquired after alteration satisfies cisnormative and cisgender standards.[54] Revathi's assertion that even if the surgery 'hurts to death, ... whatever happens, whether I live or die, I would do so as a woman,'[55] demonstrates her unsuppressed want to pass as a woman at any cost. Serrano intends to make it apparent that when transgender individuals go out in public, they are not deceitful or misleading others; they are just dressed and acting themselves. The concept of passing is problematic because society has yet to acknowledge transgender identity. For instance, after sex reassignment surgery, breast implantation and hormonal therapy, Revathi was unaccepted as a woman by society. She passed as a woman in her sight but not in the eyes of the public,

which lead to trauma and suffering. Applying the phrases 'misgendered' and 'appropriately gendered,' Serrano draws a distinction between those who have been 'assigned to a gender that does not match the gender they identify' and those who have been assigned a 'gender that aligns the ways they self-identify.'^[56] The autobiographical narratives reveal the struggles in passing. For instance, Revathi is confronted by police who physically and sexually abuse her in front of prisoners, making her stand naked and hit her with a cane on her operated area, examining her private parts. Revathi mentions:

I fell at the policeman's feet. He kicked me with his boots and asked me to take off my clothes—right there ... I pleaded and wept ... he forcibly stripped me ... He struck his lathi (stick) where I had my operation and demanded that I stand with my legs apart as woman [*sic*] do. He repeatedly struck at that part with his lathi and said, 'So can it get into there? Or is it a field one can't enter? How do you have sex then.'^[57]

When cisgendered women and transgender people were compared to cisgendered males, logistic regression indicated that they were more prone to have been sexually assaulted in the previous twelve months.^[58] Sexual assault victims are in jeopardy for a number of severe physical, cognitive and socioeconomic consequences.^[59] The treatment suffered by Revathi at the hands of police and the public manifests that there are no safe 'spaces' for the transgender community. In 'home' and 'outside,' they are subject to physical assault and barbarous treatment. Undeniably, 'passing' leads to violence that also act as a tool for public and private self-validation, questioning 'who you pass for and why you pass'^[60] However, passing also allows the trans to be what they desire to become. Revathi, in her narratives, divulges her intense yearning to pass as a woman, asserting, 'But more than anything, I was eager to become a woman, and that was all that mattered to me.'^[61] A member of her new home appraises her, stating: 'You look like the actor Revathi ... I looked at myself in the mirror and felt a glow of pride. I did look like a woman. It was at that moment that I was convinced I was indeed one.'^[62] Green proclaims 'passing' as a 'performance' and sees 'changing sex as just one way of changing one's body.' He also questions, 'so why change one's body? Because we reside in our body and interact with others through it.'^[63] Green explains the nature of gender roles and identity, emphasising that passing as a man or woman is imperative for transsexuals and cisgenders.

If an individual is gratified with her or his gender-body congruency or dissonance, and their gender identity is acknowledged by folks they value, they will feel welcomed and validated by others and society.^[64]

Through the narratives of Vidya and Revathi, it can be seen that they desired to transform or pass as women. To fulfil this yearning, they underwent sex reassignment surgery, hormonal therapy and other medical processes but were harshly denigrated by the society that failed to accept their femininity. 'Femininity' in trans and 'desire to be a woman' has always remained a matter of inquisitiveness and amusement for society, resulting in excessive violence endured by Revathi at the hands of police, public and family. However, Revathi and Vidya have an excessive inclination towards 'performing' and 'passing' as women despite experiencing outrageous violence. This is evident in Vidya's narrative that concentrates heavily on her efforts to pass as a woman, appear feminine enough, and the unexplained anguish she experiences when referred to by masculine pronouns. The continuous dread of being referred to as a man is evident in both their narratives. The idea of passing is relevant to trans in general, regardless of the mutation in culture or location. Passing has helped the trans individual to attain the satisfaction of dwelling in the body congruent to the assigned biological sex by establishing gender identity and social roles. As a result, mentioning, repeating, and re-enacting a performative act constructs a gender identity by its very nature.

Traumatic disassociation: Being in the 'wrong body'

The 'wrong body' concept of Talia Bettcher entails an incongruity between gender identification and the sexed body in transsexuals.^[65] The perception that one's body is not a part of oneself is acknowledged by the term 'wrong body.' The wrong body is considered to be a condition in which 'a disparity between body

and self is encapsulated, captivating polarised segregation like the body and its emotions, the body and its discernment, the body and adjacent gender rules, and sex and gender, which tacitly positions sex with reproductive organs and gender with social representation.' [66] Vidya's autobiography repeatedly illustrates her anxiety of being imprisoned in a male body, as well as her persistent queries to the doctor prior to the sex reassignment surgery operation, which demonstrates her insatiable yearning for a feminine identity. Later she thanked the surgeon. 'Thank you for removing my maleness from my body; thank you for making my body a female body. My life is fulfilled.' She is convinced that undergoing sex reassignment surgery is not abnormal as she believes that the alteration is a natural occurrence. 'Nobody's advice could shake my resolution. I was a woman and I was nothing without my passion to be a woman. It was more than a passion even: it was an obsession.' [67]

The life ambition of both Revathi and Vidya was to liberate themselves of the wrong and erroneous body with male genitals and be transformed into women. They underwent surgical procedures to live in their align gender and become women, however society condemned their act. Mainstream society used derogatory statements like, 'Are your breasts real ones' and called them 'fake women' that indicated transphobia and violence. [68] Their narratives often showed disdain for and dissociation from the components of their body. Trans women opted to use pejorative expressions to communicate their dissatisfaction with being associated with portions of their body that are regarded as societal identifiers of male sex. Bernice Hausman affirms that the body is a tangible signifier, hence 'a reflection of identity.' [69] She attempts to examine the connection between sex hormone synthesis, sex-change surgery, and gender identity concepts. According to John Money 'transsexuals validated the notion of being imprisoned in the wrong body.' [70] Transsexuals claim that this paradigm has been foisted on them by those who regulate and have access to clinical techniques, as well as those who govern discourses concerning transsexuals.

Vidya found it strange to dress in women's clothing while her physique was masculine. 'I hated to be a man in public and a woman in private ... My womanhood was raging to destroy my manhood.' [71] The discordance between masculine and the feminine body led Vidya and Revathi to culminate the desire to undergo sex reassignment surgery. Revathi went through all the upheaval and hardships in order to live as a woman. She transitioned as a woman after the surgery, declaring that 'I was ecstatic. I was at last a woman.' [72] Butler's reaction to sex reassignment surgery suggests that if bodily traits 'signal' sex, then sex is distinct from the manner by which it is expressed. [73] It is considered pathological to see oneself as either a woman with a penis or a man with a vagina. Sandy Stone explains that 'only one body per gendered subject is "appropriate" underneath the binary phallogocentric foundation myth through which Western bodies subjects are permitted.' [74] According to the enforced order, one can only be one or the other, not both, irrespective of preference. Alternatively, individuals are not prohibited from challenging the order and thereby undermining it. Revathi has thoroughly performed her femininity, which she repeatedly mentions in her narratives. She is traumatised by having to live in a male body and act as a woman. Her narrative often shows disdain for and dissociation from the components of her body.

Hence the 'wrong body,' now altered, becomes the gendered body of a woman. The autobiographical narratives of Revathi and Vidya illustrate and expose the painful and traumatic dissociation that they experience due to the misalignment between their bodies and gender identities.

Quest for 'Safe Space'

Butler, in *Gender Trouble*, states gender is an identity tenuously created in time, imposed in an outside space via a stylised repetition of actions, rather than a stable identity or centre of agency from which diverse acts follow. [75] This suggests a knot between gender and space as both gender and space are social constructions that not only share similar qualities but also support one another. Home and outside concentrate on patriarchal spatialisation, notably the binarisms and power hierarchies that emerge and are

reinforced via human space interactions with the environment. Butler looked at how 'home' and 'outside' space are gendered, allowing one gender to have more autonomy while restricting the others. Postmodernism and poststructuralism's investigations of the spatial dispensation of authority and wisdom in social space are significantly responsible for current geocritics' philosophical foundations.[76] They advocate that space is never independent but is always produced, culturally labelled and influenced by hegemonic systems of power and knowledge structures. To put it in another way, space is both formed and voiced via cultural discourse, which includes gender discourse, though it is an embodiment of the 'real' world.

Those credited with spearheading the spatial shift include Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, and Edward Soja.[77] Despite accentuating the discursive and ideological component of all spatial discernment and delineation, these scholars are conscious that this interpretation of space seems to provide minimal assurance for rejection of predominant cultural norms or impetus for the emancipation of counter-narratives. Nonetheless, they witness resistant propensity in a way that demarcates the spatial-social script: space's construct. Foucault demonstrates a novel and innovative understanding of space in a 1967 lecture released in French in 1984 and English in 1986 as 'Of Other Spaces'. [78] Foucault's heterotopias deconstruct spatial hierarchy and binaries, subverting the predominant power structure's forms of knowledge and connotation. Even while heterotopias are spaces separate from normal life, they are still a part of it and are characterised by their interactions with other spaces, unlike utopias. These 'other spaces' (e.g., prisons, retirement homes, cemeteries, theatres, cinemas, and even gardens) 'suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect'. [79] Transgender have separate cultural paradigms from the mainstream societal, cultural norms. They claim 'home' as well as 'society' as 'unsafe spaces' and quest for their own space, where they can perform 'self.'

Between the cognitive realm on the one hand and the physical as well as social realms on the other, real 'space' generates a chasm. As a result, a loose correlation is postulated between social space on one side and cognitive space—the (topographic) space of ideas and expressions—on another. Decoding a society's space exposes its spatial pattern from an analytical viewpoint. Revathi, in her narrative, stated that she suffered mentally and physically due to 'unsafe space' at home and outside. Gaston Bachelard in, *The Poetics of Space*, asserts that the memories of an individual are attached to 'home', which he considers as the 'spaces we love'. [80] However, the case of Revathi was different, as she was in a state of unattachment towards her home. Revathi claims in her autobiography that when she was living in her female gender identity, her brothers physically abused her. She proclaims, 'My skull cracked and there was blood all over, flowing, warm'. [81] Even her mother was against and stated, 'Beat him and break his bones.' Therefore, for Revathi, 'home' was not that 'space we love.' Furthermore, 'outside' she was repeatedly subject to sexual, verbal, or physical abuse. Revathi recalls an incident when she was publicly abused. As she explained, 'Sometimes when no one was looking, they would pinch my chest, run their hands over my bum'. [82] Vidya was attacked by the goons who mercilessly slapped her in a moving train, and hence her 'legs and hands were trembling; tears were coursing down her cheeks'. [83] Revathi and Vidya underwent medical procedures for the gender they desired, which created a hindrance to having 'safe space' at 'home' and 'outside' for them both.

Hence the question posed at the beginning of this paper, 'Is there a safe 'space' for transgender?' is answered. No, there is no space that might provide safety for transgender as portrayed in the narratives of Revathi and Vidya. Revathi was abused and left with no sympathy at the hands of police who thrashed her with a cane in her operated part, points to evidence of an unsafe 'space.' Indeed, the non-binary genders were often the source of amusement for the mainstream 'binary' society. Revathi and Vidya were both mocked by the public due to their feminine nature. Vidya, before sex reassignment surgery, was advised by Ashabharathi, director of an NGO, 'You are a man, remain a man' because she was aware that Vidya would be denied any 'space' in which to perform her gender in this patriarchal society. [84] Doreen Massey emphasises that the gendering of space aids gender constructions: 'From the symbolic significance of

spaces/places and the gendered messages which they convey to straightforward alienation by violence, spaces and places are not only themselves gendered but, in being so, both exemplify and influence how gender is formed and comprehended.'^[85]

Conclusion

People with transgender bodies, while passing as women, negotiate with the heteronormative spaces embedded with meanings culturally, socially and politically constructed. The body is viewed as a tool for constructing identity and implementing gender roles. Passing under binary compulsion trans bodies do not proportionately fit into societal gender norms. As a result, transgender people may feel compelled to 'pass' their desired gender and hide their transgender status to prevent discrimination and violence. The passing of transgender has often confused the mainstream mind leading to interrogation as to why 'male desire to mutate as female.' These interrogations and confusions lead to transphobia, as seen in the case of Revathi and Vidya. Revathi is challenged by cops who assault her physically and sexually in front of the other inmates. Revathi's treatment by police and the general public demonstrates that there are no safe 'spaces' for the transgender community. Unquestionably, 'passing' induces violence, which also serves as a tool for public and private self-validation, raising the issue of who you pass for and why you pass.

The paper has explored the two-fold dimensions of the narratives of Revathi and Vidya, first through the 'repeated performance' of self as a female who is imprisoned in the erroneous body of a male. This highlights the incongruity between the body and mind and explains the themes 'passing as women' and 'the wrong body concept' that accords a transpicuous picture of Revathi and Vidya's performative 'self.'. Second, the role of 'space' has been analysed as a tool that is used against transgender in the life and exemplified in the lived experiences of Revathi and Vidya. Their narratives elevate a pivotal question. 'Is there a safe 'space' for the transgender community? Both at home and outside, their autobiographies demonstrate that they were subjected to barbarous treatment. Therefore, the study asserts that 'space' for Revathi and Vidya both at 'home' and 'outside' is not safe.

Notes

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