

Reclaiming Transgender Bodily Autonomy and Sexuality: A Comprehensive Analysis of *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi* by Manobi Bandyopadhyay and Jhimli Mukherjee Pandey

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Abstract—The queer community encompasses a broad spectrum of gender and sexual identities, with transgender individuals forming an integral part of this community. This article analyzes *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi* by Manobi Bandyopadhyay and Jhimli Mukherjee Pandey, a candid biography that provides valuable insights into sexuality and transgender identity in contemporary society. The protagonist, Manobi, born into a disproportionately vulnerable and marginalized community, later emerges as India's first transgender principal. This was not merely a milestone; it symbolized a powerful act of liberation and protest, marking a significant step toward creating her identity. We situate the study within transfeminist literary discourse. The mapping of transfeminism and theoretical discussions on deepened binary divisions contributes to transgender scholarship and English literary discourse. This study employs close textual analysis to illustrate the diverse contours of sexuality, transphobic discrimination, hegemonic masculinity, and the confines of heteronormativity. A constellation of factors contributed to Manobi's psychological distress, particularly the burden of heteronormative standards within her family. She also recounts episodes of trauma and grief in which she was shamed for her sexual orientation and feminine characteristics. The authors engage with artistic expression and motifs as a means of self-reflection on her lived experience, demonstrating a brilliant use of language that ultimately unfolds intimate accounts of gender violence she endured throughout her life. The narrative locates subaltern subjectivities within the broader context of bodily autonomy and gender identity. This study underscores the intricacies of identity formation and offers a nuanced reading of transgender life narratives.

Index Terms—narratives, gender identity, sexuality, heteronormativity, transfeminist discourse

I. INTRODUCTION

India has witnessed the unprecedented struggles of transgender, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and queer communities. At present, the transgender community is culturally recognized. They continue to fiercely defend their simultaneity in gender and sexual identities. At the same time, structural heteropatriarchy has predefined parameters that prescribe normative gender roles for women, transgender, intersex, and queer people. To delve deeper, it is important to understand that transgender is an all-encompassing term. Transfeminine, transmasculine, and intersex are collectively referred to as transgender. As Davidson (2016) states, “‘Transgender’ is an umbrella term that refers to people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth at least some of the time, and the term ‘cisgender’ refers to people whose gender identity corresponds to the sex they were assigned at birth” (p. 2). This statement highlights that the anatomical structure of transgender and intersex individuals differs from cisgender males and females. Sometimes transgender and intersex individuals are also bracketed together; however, they have distinctive functional characteristics. Hazarika (2020) notes, “The traumatic experiences undergone by the hijra community in society necessitate the production of literature from the margins that represent their lived realities. Such form of writing becomes political due to the quest for agency, equality, and empowerment, initiated by the authors who represent the marginalized community” (p. 232).

We situate our work within transfeminist literary discourse in English. This study is anchored in trans-inclusive feminism, which brings to the forefront the traumatic narrative of a transgender individual existing beyond the gender binaries. Koyama (2003), in “The Transfeminist Manifesto”, describes transfeminism as “primarily a movement by and for trans women who view their liberation to be intrinsically linked to the liberation of all women and beyond” (p. 245). This statement locates transfeminism within the broader context of feminist literary discourse. Moreover, applying this

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approach is imperative to challenge the dominant heteropatriarchal power structures that continue to exclude transgender individuals from mainstream discourse. This framework deepens the analysis of Manobi Bandyopadhyay's progressive transformation in the biographical narrative, which engages with themes of sexual violence, transphobic discrimination, and trans-inclusive reproductive justice.

This article analyzes *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi* by Manobi Bandyopadhyay and Jhimli Mukherjee Pandey, a candid biography that provides an effective understanding of transgender sexuality. Manobi Bandyopadhyay's journey exemplifies the quest for acknowledgment and respect within society at large. The narrative of Somnath's (his) metamorphosis into Manobi Bandyopadhyay (her), India's first transgender principal, emphasizes the importance of cultural reforms in creating an inclusive environment for all queer communities.

The story *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi* revolves around Manobi's life, spotlighting the role of the heteropatriarchal system. This narrative goes on to point out how gendered behavior is normalized in heteronormative society, and the transgender community is assumed to behave according to societal expectations. Furthermore, gender stereotyping and gendered violence might also lead to maladaptive behavior in transgender children. The prolonged grief they have within themselves since childhood could be caused by hate violence and withdrawal of monetary expenses by families. "Mainstream society has long viewed trans bodies through the lens of deviance and shame. Denied access to homes, families, and medical care, many are driven into sex work or forced begging as a means of survival" (Baruah, 2025, p. 41). Over time, this discrimination occurs and calcifies due to the social construction of gender. Because of this, the stigmatized group is suffering prejudice; thus, it is important to question the normative definitions and position of dominance to end the normalization of abuse. Seen largely through the Manobi's perspective, the trajectory of pain, inevitable compromises, suppressed sexuality, and resistance illustrates the extent of her traumatic experiences. Her perpetual psychological trauma is represented by unsettling experiences of systemic dehumanization influenced by heterosexual norms.

Against the backdrop of 1960s India, Manobi's story is a riveting illustration of a transgender individual navigating her identity and sexuality in a heteronormative society. From a young age, she grappled with her desires and societal demands. Growing up in an environment that valued education helped her achieve academic success despite the mental strain brought on by her identity. However, family restrictions aggravated her issues, as rather than honoring her academic success, they battled societal shame related to her non-homogeneous behavior. It was due to ideological differences between her and family that she was consistently projected as a failure. Soon, the family members realized that her actions were contrary to conventional heterosexual norms. As a result, she was trapped between identity and the confines of the patriarchal structure. She struggled with these emotions and eventually experienced discomfort as she expressed her inclination towards feminine characteristics. Later, we see her experiencing a deep dichotomy as a result of the societal perspective on masculinity and femininity. This underscores her internal struggles as she negotiates the intricacy of identity exploration, significantly influenced by societal criticisms.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

"Life narratives differ from a mere collection of event-specific stories by requiring the stories to cohere so that they communicate individuals' personal development and therefore reflect their identities" (Altunнар & Habermas, 2018, p. 2). For instance, Manobi's life narrative focuses on her journey toward embracing her identity. The review of the literature looks at research from 2010 to the present to get contemporary perspectives and examine related research that highlights similar issues. The biography of Manobi Bandyopadhyay necessitates scholarly discussion, particularly in the context of gender identity.

In relation to Manobi's lived experience, examining other seminal life narratives further highlights the social marginalization of transgender individuals. Revathi, the protagonist of *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*, is a transgender rights activist. As Chowdhury and Bhattacharjee (2018) state, "What earned her respect in the society is activism and protests, the NGO Sangama exposed her positive traits and today Revathi is an active writer and activist who attends seminars and conferences about LGBT issues and also gender related issues. Thus, Revathi is a perfect example of that transgender that is able to bring about the change and is still witnessing and contributing to it" (p. 4). Drawing on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, Bose and Pandey (2022), in their article "Forced Gender Performance Traced in the Novel *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*," highlight how Revathi is compelled to conform to the male gender role.

Similarly, Laxmi Narayan Tripathi is the author of *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*. In her article, Anita (2018) emphasizes Laxmi's efforts to destigmatize prejudice against the community: "Laxmi's acceptance of her hijra identity brought out the activist in her; she worked for the welfare of the prostitutes in Mumbai. She also became an active spokesperson for the hijra community" (p. 56). Further, Abinaya and Chanthiramathi (2022) in their article highlight how Laxmi Narayan Tripathi challenges systemic discrimination and preconceived notions based on gender.

Through these narratives, the literature review acknowledges the significance of the lived experiences of these transgender individuals. Through a postcolonial and feminist lens, Hazarika (2020) examines how heteronormative ideologies and systemic oppression exclude transgender individuals from "narratives of the nation" (p. 232). Her research article on Living Smile Vidya's autobiography, *I Am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey*, highlights socially imposed gender roles. In addition, the study by Pandya and Redcay (2020) highlights the social exclusion and gender

discrimination faced by transgender individuals in India. Baruah (2025) rightly notes, “Transgender autobiographies thus serve a dual function: they humanize lives long denied their humanity and simultaneously dismantle the ideological foundations of gender-based oppression” (p. 41).

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This article has primarily adopted a qualitative research methodology for the current study. It thoroughly analyzes the biographical narrative of Manobi Bandyopadhyay. The primary text that has been undertaken for this study is: *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi* (2017) by Manobi Bandyopadhyay and Jhimli Mukherjee Pandey. This study, therefore, employs close textual analysis of the biography to illustrate diverse contours of sexuality, gender-based violence, and the confines of heteronormativity. To support this textual analysis, the following three books have been selected: *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* (2010), *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* (2015), and *I Am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey* (2013). In addition to primary text, secondary sources include academic papers, research articles, reports, and internet sources. The overarching theme of this study includes gender identity, sexuality, gender-affirming surgery, heteronormativity, mental health, and transphobic discrimination faced by the protagonist and the author of this book, Manobi. The study provides a comprehensive overview of the underlying mechanisms of the binary gender categorizations and heterosexual privilege in society, which is hugely problematic.

IV. DISCUSSION

A. Childhood Trauma and Familial Support

The narrative provides insight into Manobi's life by addressing heteropatriarchal structures and incorporating sexuality beyond heterosexual norms. It also highlights the oppression she faced as a non-cisgender individual, revealing the scars of discrimination, sexual exploitation, and gender stereotyping. The authors brilliantly explore the intricate concepts of transgender sexuality, hegemonic masculinity, and patriarchal value systems. The narrative locates subaltern subjectivities within the broader context of bodily autonomy and gender identity. Also, it is important to note that we use the name ‘Somnath’ before her surgery and later refer to her as ‘Manobi’ to indicate her transformation.

The diverse spectrums of gender and identities have distinct physiological and sexual characteristics. It was due to these variations in the biological and physical features that Somnath experienced heightened vulnerabilities in accessing education and critical care. His attempts to express his femininity through clothing and makeup only deepened his feelings of confusion about his identity. During his childhood, he often faced harassment and taunts from his classmates, particularly one named Shyam. Shyam was the boy whom Somnath loved deeply, yet he deliberately targeted and shamed him for his sexual orientation. For instance, Manobi mentions, “They would pinch me, pull my hair, box my ears and punch my face at the slightest provocation” (Bandyopadhyay & Pandey, 2017, p. 8). These instances of harassment by men in his area, under the pretense of ‘fixing’ him, left him traumatized.

Trauma and mental health are intertwined. Ogarrio et al. (2025) argue, “Transgender people commonly experience health disparities. Research posits that transphobia is a leading attributable cause of negative health outcomes for transgender, nonbinary, and gender diverse (henceforth, trans) individuals” (p. 1). For instance, transgender adolescents are emotionally vulnerable and deal with complexities throughout their lives. The psychological trauma from humiliation, mistreatment, and socially imposed sexuality negatively impacted his mental health. This possibly heightened his awareness of societal ostracism faced by those who do not conform to traditional norms. He also tried to articulate his struggle by questioning his increasing aversion to his genitals and his feminine identity. He described the emotional turmoil he was experiencing: “Who was I? Why was my body different from my soul or was I mistaking my identity? Why was I born this way?” (Bandyopadhyay & Pandey, 2017, p. 31). From this point, it is evident that societal constructions and norms have conditioned people to maintain a distance from transgender individuals. This explains why Somnath's attraction to men was never acknowledged. These rigid constructs of gender impose social expectations on queer individuals to adhere to conventional notions of masculinity and femininity. Somnath also expresses the pain of social exclusion, emphasizing the harassment he faced in society, stating: “The hypocrisy around me hurt me. People took every opportunity to call me hijra, to ridicule my sexual identity and yet when they found me alone, they never missed an opportunity to take me to a dark corner and gave a go at me” (Bandyopadhyay & Pandey, 2017, p. 35).

Heteronormative ideologies play a significant role in the social polarization of sexual minorities, pushing them to the margins. It is crucial to understand that to bring sustainable change, depatriarchalization of heteronormative ideology is necessary for a functioning society. “Transgender individuals or those who display cross-gender behaviors are mostly rejected by the families” (Pandya & Redcay, 2020, p. 3). As Coleman et al. (2012) argue, “In addition to prejudice and discrimination in society at large, stigma can contribute to abuse and neglect in one's relationships with peers and family members, which in turn can lead to psychological distress” (p. 168). The majority of families, being conventionally committed to societal norms, find it difficult to embrace their child's unique identity. Raj and Juned (2022) also mention that “Due to patriarchal structures, for many trans men, the family becomes the first space for mental and physical violence, abuse, and outright rejection of their identity” (p. 8). It is worth noting that chronically manipulative families consistently pressure their transgender children to conform to gender norms while making plausible excuses for psychological abuse and other wrongdoings. In some cases, transgender children are taken for

conversion therapy and involuntary hospitalization by family members who believe they are mentally ill. This intentional application of coercion on transgender children is mentally traumatizing and could potentially jeopardize their future. They employ these methods to prevent them from expressing their sexual orientation and gender identity.

Somnath's reflection on his relationship with his father highlights the critical role of familial support for a transgender child suffering from body dysphoria. Somnath's question: "Does he still believe that I would have been more responsible towards him had I been a 'son'?" As a daughter, am I not fulfilling my duties equally well?" (Bandyopadhyay & Pandey, 2017, p. 58) encapsulates his desire for validation and acceptance from his father. Within his household, he overwhelmingly carried the burden of heteronormative standards. Despite the emotional distress and transphobic discrimination, Somnath remained determined in his journey of gender transition. His desire for validation from his father reflects a universal yearning for acceptance, but also opens up a dialogue about the need for recognition in all forms, transcending rigid gender binaries.

B. Gender Identity Struggle of Manobi

Some children experience discordance between their gender and identity from early childhood, and if this is not acknowledged, they may compartmentalize themselves as a coping mechanism for childhood trauma. For instance, Somnath talks about how he encountered gender-based discrimination and violence in childhood and was unable to process the emotional baggage. He became doubtful of his true gender identity: "Am I really a woman trapped in a male body or are these just delirious thoughts? Why is it that the whole world thinks of me as a man who is nothing more than a sissy?" (Bandyopadhyay & Pandey, 2017, p. 109). This statement effectively critiques patriarchal conditioning that views transgender individuals through a dismissive lens and coerces them to conform to binary notions of gender.

Given this, education is necessary to combat homophobic behavior and dismantle social hierarchies. It provides the stage for questioning the facultative prescriptions manifested through societal norms. Dasgupta (2022) asserts that "Traditionally considered deviants and ostracized as social outcasts, hijras are often victims of structural oppression that systematically deny them opportunities for education, employment, and social welfare programs" (p. 494). However, with regard to access to education, Somnath had the privilege of learning throughout his life. Even though Somnath came from a disadvantaged community, he feels he is blessed to have a proper education that changed his life for the better. Somnath got admission into Naihati's Rishi Bankim Chandra College in the Bengali section, where he reflects: "I definitely defied definition. Word had got out that a hijra had entered the college in the garb of a student!" (Bandyopadhyay & Pandey, 2017, p. 40). He knew this would impact his mental health; nevertheless, he enthusiastically embraced the opportunity to pave the way for academic growth.

Following his academic excellence, Somnath's literary career commenced in Kolkata when feminist Maya Siddhanta offered to contribute to *Malini*, the first Bengali women's magazine. This opportunity to work with progressively minded people inspired him to pursue journalism and express his sexual orientation. He recalls how this gradual transition was instrumental in solidifying his expression of being transgender: "Empowered with this new-found confidence, I decided to take bolder steps to come out as a transgender person" (Bandyopadhyay & Pandey, 2017, p. 47). However, Somnath questions the homogeneous society in which transgender individuals are labeled for their sexual orientation and queerness. His statement: "I have always had very strong instincts about who I am and what I am. However, a large part of how we feel about ourselves is also linked to what people say or feel about us" (Bandyopadhyay & Pandey, 2017, p. 51), encapsulates the concerns about external perceptions and societal validation of his identity.

Somnath's experience while pursuing MPhil at Jadavpur University (JU) exemplifies the value of education, where the university's scholarship transcends preconceived notions of the standard gender norms. He writes: "It was time to develop intellectually. And that made me who I am today" (Bandyopadhyay & Pandey, 2017, p. 64). Moreover, at the age of 23, he secured a part-time teaching post at Sri Krishna College, Bagula, despite facing societal scrutiny throughout his academic journey. Another significant milestone in his professional life was when he was offered a professorship at Vivekananda Satavarshiki Mahavidyalaya in Jhargram by the West Bengal Service Commission. Although he was emotionally vulnerable in the educational institution, he made efforts to remain productive and determined. Interestingly, his narratives indicate that it was this commitment to his education and involvement in theatrical activities that shaped his identity.

While he was growing professionally, he had potentially problematic relationships with colleagues. The ways in which he was attacked and shamed for his sexual preference and feminine characteristics were horrible. The physical threats intensified even more when two male students physically harassed him. He recounts a terrifying experience of being molested by these so-called masculine men: "Once, two of them pinned me to the wall and groped me, trying to find out what was beneath my clothes" (Bandyopadhyay & Pandey, 2017, p. 94). As those around him threatened to potentially sabotage his professional journey because of his transgender identity, the campus environment grew more antagonistic. This perpetuating cycle of discrimination he experienced there is indicative of systemic prejudices against queer people. The biography draws attention to the hypocrisy that often exists in modern educational settings regarding gender inequality. Somnath recalls memories of his transgender friend Jagdish, who, despite being born male, blatantly expressed his sexual identity. He was known as Juhi; however, he tragically passed away from AIDS, as a consequence of multiple sexual encounters and risky practices. While comparing himself to Juhi, who was caught in a cycle of exploitation, Somnath considers himself fortunate that, despite his family's adherence to heterosexual norms, their

support for pursuing further studies played a critical role in his development. In spite of these difficulties, Somnath created Ardhhanarishwar Natya Sanstha, a theater troupe portraying his own "in-between" life by depicting the balance between masculine and feminine power.

Later, Somnath enrolled in the PhD program at Kalyani University in the Bengali Department with the goal of making a significant contribution to academia. He wanted to advocate for a more compassionate approach towards transgender individuals and stand in solidarity with marginalized identities with an unwavering pursuit of increasing awareness within the transgender community. In addition to this, Somnath started India's first transgender magazine, *Abomanob (subhuman)*, to raise public consciousness about the rights, importance of queer discourses, and social acceptance of transgender individuals. He described this as advocating for marginalized identities: "It was my protest against our society which pretends to be magnanimous and inclusive while being nakedly brutal beneath its mask" (Bandyopadhyay & Pandey, 2017, p. 112). He invariably addressed the issues surrounding important subjects such as improved access to psychological support and recognition of sexuality.

Paradoxically, as a tradition, many Indian households seek blessings from transgender individuals on special occasions and continue to avoid them daily, showing a change in our attitude towards them. This could be because of conformity to defunct social norms, which influence people's perspectives and attitudes. These notions have conditioned individuals to maintain distance from transgender individuals. Anita (2018) asserts, "Laxmi recognized her identity crisis, boldly reclaimed her distinct unique hijra personality and through her narrative tries to dispel some of the myths society harbours against the transgender. She elucidates that if a person's biological, psychological and sexual identities are incongruous, that individual is ostracized by society" (p. 58). Rathee (2019) further argues that "Revathi's autobiography, through her expression of the pain of being neither 'wholly male' nor 'wholly female' and through the endless agony faced by her where one cannot afford to be what one really feels from the core of one's heart, throws open some of the most basic questions related to one's sex at birth" (p. 20). Thus, through the interconnected narratives of these transgender individuals, we understand that literature and academia have become platforms for addressing critical issues within the community. To navigate the complexities of heteronormative culture and challenge the dehumanizing roles assigned to transgender individuals, Somnath decided to delve deeper into the lives of the hijra community. With this aim, he sought diksha under Shyamoli Di, a prominent leader of the transgender commune in Ranaghat. Over time, he gained insight into the complex social dynamics that influence hijra life, including the close relationships between gurus and their chelas. He also aimed to work with progressive responsibility and greater accountability to initiate a discourse on the psychological well-being, gender dysphoria, and sexual health of transgender individuals.

C. Reclaiming Bodily Autonomy

Transgender individuals deserve bodily autonomy to unequivocally accept their identity in society. Gender-affirming surgery is a boon to the transgender community and has also garnered attention in recent years. Hence, it is a therapeutic choice for transgender individuals. The narrative sheds light on how Somnath suffered from gender incongruence between his assigned sex and gender identity, which led to resentment of his existence. The possibility of gender-affirming surgery was a path to liberation for him. Following the transition, he could gain the confidence to overcome challenges and fully embrace his identity as a woman. Therefore, he chose to undergo this transformative process, aiming to align his genitalia with his identity and obtain legal recognition.

"The stigma arising from societal norms and preconceived notions serves as a core element of inequality. As a result, stigmatized populations face heightened risks of marginalization due to the multifaceted violence directed towards them" (Rathore & K, 2025, p. 245). It needs to be charted out how the heteronormative standards and transphobic discrimination marginalize transgender individuals. It is quite evident that physical and emotional harassment toward Somnath in his college years led to the development of severe psychiatric symptoms and chronic depression. He also mentions how often he faced victimization in his professional space: "The catcalls continued and they harassed me every now and then, but my new-found liberation sometimes got the better of them; at times I tried hard not to let depression set in" (Bandyopadhyay & Pandey, 2017, p. 119). The college staff and students were part of the structural heteropatriarchy that instilled fear in Somnath, potentially increasing the risk of suicidality.

The narrative highlights not only the discrimination but also the social ostracization faced by transgender individuals, both of which often curtail their access to primary resources. A myriad of factors, such as sexual exploitation, suppression of sexuality, and feelings of invalidation, contributed to Somnath's deteriorating mental health. Therefore, it became imperative for Somnath to get psychological support for his depression. But soon he reflects: "I realized that these therapists treated transgendered people as just 'cases' without delving too deep into their minds. I yearned for sex change operation but not a single psychoanalyst encouraged me" (Bandyopadhyay & Pandey, 2017, p. 117). This preferential treatment given to cisnormative people underscores the challenges faced by transgender individuals like Somnath in accessing services. These instances led Somnath to establish a connection with endocrinologist Anirban Majumdar, who contacted him to provide access to proper hormonal treatment to make his physical male characteristics less pronounced. During counseling, Dr. Khanna and Anirban informed him that his body might undergo a monumental shift. Unfortunately, he was alone at this crucial stage of his life: "I prayed for strength. But I was scared. I cried and cried till there were no tears left in me. I asked God why he created me like this?" (Bandyopadhyay & Pandey, 2017, p. 122). This introspection further highlights the existential crisis faced by Somnath. With the help of Anirban, the therapy

of Somnath began in 1999, and following years of preparation and counseling, he underwent surgery in 2003 to align with his preferred gender identity.

Somnath legally changed his name to Manobi. Manobi explains the choice of her name in an interesting way: "It means the quintessential female-prakriti-as nature made her" (Bandyopadhyay & Pandey, 2017, p. 159). She acknowledges her transition to womanhood with a sense of fulfillment. "Finally, my soul had found its body, and I had a sense of completeness that had been denied to me at birth" (Bandyopadhyay & Pandey, 2017, p. 136). This 'completeness' was felt by her because Anirban acknowledged her sexuality. However, she still encountered discrimination after her transition. She recounts episodes of mental trauma she suffered in college after identifying as a transgender woman: "My colleagues still treated me like I was subhuman, like I had no right to sit with them in the same staffroom and enjoy the same facilities as they did as college professors" (Bandyopadhyay & Pandey, 2017, p. 163).

The question that arises is: What precipitates these actions? It is important to acknowledge that transphobia and transmisogyny permeate every level of society, placing transgender individuals in a disadvantaged position. "The impacts of transphobia can have numerous deleterious effects" (Ogarrío et al., 2025). Transphobic remarks, propaganda against marginalized communities, and deliberately misgendering transgender people symbolize societal prejudices. The preferential treatment of other faculty members over Manobi and the discriminatory attitudes toward her were deeply institutionalized forms of inequality that prevailed within the institution. Both academically and personally, she worked tirelessly for the empowerment of marginalized communities, asserting the need to recognize the importance of accepting transgender identities. This change in perspective is readily apparent by Manobi's appointment as the principal of Krishnagar Women's College in March 2015, as she emphatically states: "And yes, I became the country's first transgender college principal. The impossible had happened!" (Bandyopadhyay & Pandey, 2017, p. 182). Manobi's unprecedented accomplishment was not only a personal triumph but also an enormous step forward for marginalized communities in India. She believed that this outright discrimination within her academic institution was deeply rooted in men's authoritarian existence and heterosexual dominance, questioning how a transgender person could hold such a high position.

As we know, Manobi has shared her lived experiences in the form of a biography. Throughout her life, she advocated for the social inclusion of disproportionately vulnerable marginalized identities. While pursuing her PhD, she attended seminars, conferences, and workshops to engage in constructive discussion. Subsequently, she started writing a book titled "*Antaheen Antareen Prositobhortika – The Elusive Horizon* – which was published serial in Abomanob to a lot of critical acclaim" (Bandyopadhyay & Pandey, 2017, p. 115). Through her novel, she conducted prospective research and gained insight into the subjective experiences of transgender individuals. During her tenure as principal, she committed to addressing systemic barriers. Through her art, magazines, and literature, she played a pivotal role in raising awareness about sexual health and addressing persistent disparities in transgender well-being.

D. English and Gender Studies

(a). Analyzing Literary Features of English in the Biographical Narrative

The authors engage with artistic expression and motifs as a means of self-reflection on her lived experience, demonstrating a brilliant use of language that resonates deeply with transgender individuals. The recurring motifs in the narrative are sexuality and gender identity. For instance, Manobi expresses her longing for her desired gender identity when she writes: "I was born to be a woman and all my life I had waited to own a woman's body" (Bandyopadhyay & Pandey, 2017, p. 121). Her narrative is a boundary-shattering representation of sexuality that delves into the emotional complexities of transgender lives. In this context, literature offers an academic space for a transgender woman like Manobi to address the pervasive discrimination faced by transgender individuals, fostering literary engagement. This differential treatment is reflected in her narrative, which highlights the multilayered experiences of being a transgender woman.

The authors symbolically introduce *Goddess Lakshmi* in the title, drawing from the cultural traditions of Bengal, where the goddess is symbolic of femininity, transformation, and social acceptance. Being born and brought up in Bengal, her transformation holds powerful resonance within the city's rich tradition of goddess worship and devotion. The authors have artistically employed literary devices, using precise language purposefully directed toward the literary representation of a transgender narrative. This is further demonstrated through the use of metaphor when Manobi writes: "It visits me in my loneliest hours, when I come face to face with the question of my existential reality. Who am I and why was I born a woman trapped in a man's body?" (Bandyopadhyay & Pandey, 2017, p. 7). This metaphor illustrates her feelings of being isolated from the outside and empty from the inside. She points to the alarmist narratives surrounding her physical characteristics and the unambiguous discrimination to which transgender individuals are subjected. The voice in her biographical narrative is candid, assertive, and bold. It addresses the stigmatization of transgender sexuality, systematized gendered violence, and the objectification of transgender bodies.

(b). Representation of Transgender Identity

A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi, published in English, is a compelling personal narrative of Manobi that critiques the condescending perspectives on masculinity and femininity. The trajectory of Manobi's traumatic experiences, which

potentially impacted her mental health, is intrinsically linked with transphobic discrimination and transmisogynistic ideologies. Baruah (2025) observes that “marginalization is a product of systemic exclusion not intrinsic identity. Through these works, trans authors reclaim the authority to name themselves, define their desires, and locate themselves within the cultural and historical continuum of India” (p. 41). This book contributes to existing English literature on transgender narratives, necessitating awareness of transgender representation in society. The narrative acts as a resistance to the oppression experienced due to deep-seated transphobia and conventions established by the heteronormative structure. Manobi explored reams of literature, and this research thus consolidated her understanding of the considerable differences between transgender and cisgender identities. In her PhD thesis on transgender issues, she documented the representation of transgender identity through her narrative: “After all, who knew the subject better than me? Their lives were shrouded in much mystery and darkness and only an insider could reveal facts and dispel myths” (Bandyopadhyay & Pandey, 2017, p. 111).

(c). *Contemporary Life Writings of Transgender Individuals*

Manobi’s *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi* aligns with transgender autobiographies written and published in English, such as Laxmi Narayan Tripathi’s *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*, A. Revathi’s *The Truth About Me*, and Living Smile Vidya’s *I Am Vidya: A Transgender’s Journey*. These narratives have thematic similarities that depict experiences of neglect, transphobic discrimination, and identity-based oppression. These life narratives share common themes of sexual orientation, gender-affirming surgery, trauma, and hegemonic masculinity. English literature has become an important medium for international and intercultural readership. Its wider reception and reach have contributed to the empowerment and cultural representation of transgender individuals across boundaries. For instance, when Manobi writes: “My success lay in the fact that I was able to create a space for transgendered people in the public mind” (Bandyopadhyay & Pandey, 2017, p. 112), she challenges the stereotypical representation of transgender women, particularly focused on bodily agency and sexuality. “These autobiographies offer vital insights into transgender people’s personal stories, showing the discrimination, assault, and social marginalization that they frequently face” (Firoz & Yadav, 2024, p. 1201).

Vidya, a Dalit transgender writer from Tamil Nadu, India, belongs to a marginalized section of society. Her autobiography, *I Am Vidya: A Transgender’s Journey*, captures her subjective experiences as a minority in contemporary society, emphasizing the intersectionality of gender identity and caste. She was physically and mentally abused, particularly by her father, who burdened her with the expectations of a traditional masculine role. Moreover, she was subjected to harassment due to differences in her anatomical characteristics, which exacerbated her gender dysphoria and heightened her desire to undergo Nirvana. “In Vidya’s autobiography, the writer narrates her personal experience of undergoing the surgery, conducted in dangerous circumstances, in the absence of trained medical professionals and hospitals” (Hazarika, 2020, p. 233). Similarly, Manobi’s narrative foregrounds the role of gender-affirming surgery in the lives of transgender individuals, highlighting the complexities in accessing reproductive care. Thus, these instances in Vidya’s narrative illustrate the concept of hegemonic masculinity and the assertion of dominance within the heteropatriarchal society.

In a similar vein, there is another book by a transgender woman named Revathi. Bose and Pandey (2022) state, “The novel *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* is an autobiographical novel written by a transgender A. Revathi on her plight of being transgender” (p. 1382). Revathi, the protagonist of *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*, is a transgender rights activist. “Revathi is a character who has suffered from a crisis of gender identity in her early childhood days. She has always suppressed her femaleness in a male body and tolerated all the fingers pointed towards her for her feminine mannerisms” (Bose & Pandey, 2022, p. 1383). Much like Manobi’s narrative, this book also serves as a powerful example of a transgender individual grappling with an identity crisis, the burden of patriarchal conditioning, and a hostile environment that aggravated her suffering. She faced discrimination due to the lack of familial assistance and limited access to healthcare and educational opportunities. With no source of income, she resorted to begging on the streets, where she was harassed, raped, and eventually “forced into prostitution” (Rathee, 2019, p. 30). Despite these challenges, she expressed her identity through cross-dressing and underwent gender-affirming surgery. She later joined the non-governmental organization Sangama, where she engaged in social work and advocated for the marginalized community.

Laxmi, the author of *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*, is another prominent figure in the transgender community. The autobiographical work of Laxminarayan Tripathi demonstrates the challenges encountered by transgender and sexual minorities. Abinaya and Chanthiramathi (2022) state, “Throughout her memoir, Laxmi dispelled myths and illogical beliefs about transgender people and demonstrated what it means to be a successful person, a hijra, a social activist, a devoted son to her family, and the ideal Guru to her chelas” (p. 5). She articulately addresses the limiting labels imposed on transgender individuals. “Another important issue in breaking the stereotypes through self-sustainment includes Laxmi’s disapproval of the process of castration (sex assignment surgery, also called Nirvana)” (Parveen, 2024, p. 431). Biswas and Riggs (2025) also assert that “While cultural mandates for Hijra are longstanding and should be respected, it is also vital that Hijra who may be considering or who may feel compelled to undertake Nirvanam are provided with impartial information about the process (i.e., information that does not privilege Nirvanam as the only proper way to be Hijra) and their potential options” (p. 7). Laxmi emphasizes that such procedures should never be

forced upon individuals, thereby challenging the normative mindset. This perspective thus aligns closely with Manobi's story, highlighting the importance of self-worth in the process of reclaiming one's gender identity.

(d). *Literary Contribution and Pedagogical Implications of Life Narratives in English and Gender Studies Curricula*

"The English language definitely cuts across national boundaries more than any other language and is an icon of the contemporary age" (Guilherme, 2007, p. 74). These life narratives in English literature can be used in academic settings to foster inclusive spaces for transfeminist experiences across frontiers. Literature holds the power to shed light on social invisibility and gender-based oppression experienced by both women and transgender individuals. It contributes to intellectual development in academia by delineating the unique lived experiences of transgender women globally. Through an intersectional lens of sex, sexuality, and gender identity, life writings by marginalized subjects can critically examine the long-term implications of discrimination. These include trauma, the impact of post-traumatic stress disorder, and grief associated with transgender experiences. The integration of a trans-inclusive educational environment requires effective pedagogical strategies that promote understanding of gender identity and sexuality in ways that are comprehensible to scholars with diverse cultural backgrounds. As Case et al. (2009) observe, "By infusing relevant transgender content into lectures and reading materials, instructors contribute to normalizing transgender issues for an inclusive curriculum" (p. 120). From a literary perspective, extending discourse on language and cultural competence helps effectively address deliberate mispronunciation and misgendering of oppressed identities. This necessitates the incorporation of transfeminist discourse, gender sensitization, and intercultural communication into gender studies curricula in academic institutions.

"The articulation of transgender identity through autobiographical narratives is emerging as a compelling form of resistance and self-definition in Indian literature and thought" (Baruah, 2025, p. 42). The topics of sexuality, identity, gender-affirming surgery, and transgender healthcare are increasingly relevant in literary discourse, flagging their importance for future scholarship. The mapping of transfeminism and theoretical discussions on deepened binary divisions contributes to transgender scholarship and literary research. These frameworks foreground the importance of transgender studies, which challenge the conventional understanding of the gender binary system. Thus, an appropriate interpretation of the transfeminist perspective provides a framework for resistance to social oppression.

V. CONCLUSION

In the cultural context within India, cohorts of marginalized communities and sexual subalterns are present and deserve the right to live with dignity. Therefore, this biographical narrative reinvigorates gender discourse by highlighting the intimate experiences of a transgender woman. This study has attempted to analyze Manobi's lived experiences as a transgender woman, particularly in the context of sexuality, social exclusion, and heteronormativity. This book narrates Manobi's journey of perseverance and the aggravating circumstances that coerced her into living with a restrictive identity. Through her biography, she highlighted the issues surrounding same-sex desire and sexual expression. Her transition from assigned biological sex helped her overcome challenges and fully embrace her identity as a woman. This study analyzes *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi* through the lens of transfeminist literary discourse. A transfeminist approach recognizes the constraints imposed on transgender individuals by the patriarchal structure due to their non-normative behavior. Interestingly, the narrative strategy adopted by Manobi highlights a seemingly contrasting relationship between the title and the narrative. We could focus on the term "candid biography," which stands in juxtaposition to the traumatic experiences she had in her life. She integrated her life experiences into this narrative, offering a fresh perspective on transgender women in literary discourse. At the end of her candid biography, she writes: "When I sit with the ledger of my life on quiet evenings and look at the tally, the red marks and green marks stare at me. I study them till I doze off and let another consciousness take over" (Bandyopadhyay & Pandey, 2017, p. 184). Thus, Manobi's achievement stands as a testament to her resilience and critical understanding of her vulnerability as a transgender individual.

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