

Q. Analyse in detail, how cruelty casted on the Hijra community with reference to the story 'The Truth About Me' - A Hijra Life Story by A. Revathi

Ans:

The Truth About Me' is the unflinchingly courageous and moving autobiography of Revathi, a Hijra who fought ridicule, persecution and violence both within her home and outside to find a life of dignity.

The story opens in small village in Tamil Nadu. Doraisamy was the youngest of five children - the fourth boy. He grew up shy, culturally effeminate, with an inclination to dress as a girl and do traditionally female activities around the house - the domestic chores, the games, the singing and dancing. As an indulged youngest child, this behaviour must at first have seemed merely precious. It was harder to ignore as he grew older; Doraisamy spends his childhood years with a growing unease as he tries to negotiate his body's incongruity with his inner desires and natural talents. In a family where every flaw is punished by physical violence one of Doraisamy's brothers has a penchant for beating him with cricket bats Doraisamy's dangers are not just about acceptance but also for his safety.

In his mid-teens he met a group of like-spirited men, who introduced him to visiting hijras. Doraisamy stole some money and an earring from his mother, and ran away from home. He went to Delhi, where his chosen "guru" ("teacher", here treated as mentor/mother) lived, and asked her to take him - her - under her wing.

As Revathi, she could dress, walk, talk as a woman. But she is, of course, a hijra, that liminal third-sex, and so she was constrained to live and earn in specific places, in specific manners. The story follows Revathi's life as she moved from city to city, from Hijra House to House. Revathi yearned to live freely, to love, to be a woman - for me it was a bit odd to place myself in the mindset of someone who defined womanhood in terms of the loving, dignified service which seems so old-fashioned, today, even oppressive if viewed as the only option. The hijra elders forbade her from taking a husband, or a steady man. Proscribed from marriage, unable to work, unrecognised by the state bureaucracy, Revathi had only three options to make money - she could beg, she could bless, or she could do sex work. Initially, she begged, in the flamboyant, utterly recognisable hijra style; but she felt restricted and constrained by the rules and demands of her hijra House, with her guru and her sisters. One of the underlying themes of Revathi's life is that for each step she took to attaining her desires. She recognised new avenues of desire, of freedom, she now incoherently yearned for.

A large part of the novel is taken up with her steps into sex work - it's hard to understand, to remember how limited her choices within the hijra Houses were, but in essence, at the age of twenty Revathi decided to take up sex work in order to fulfill her sexual desires. This was the only way, at the time, that she could come close to sexual satisfaction. But being a sex worker, and sexual minority, means that you get the wrong kind of attention. Revathi does mention that she had moments of happiness in her life, but details in dry terms the brutal facts of life as a hijra - the dangers, the assaults, the rapes. Her tone while she describes the violence committed on her body - by clients, by random rowdies, by policemen - is one of matter-of-fact reportage. Revathi wants us to feel her pains and her sorrows, but her sufferings are not sensationalised; her dramatic moments are for her spiritual, emotional traumas.

Aside from the problems she has outside the hijra Houses and within - oppressive gurus, infighting with other hijras, battles with other Houses - Revathi maintains a fragile relationship with her family, whose acceptance of her new state is grudging at best. Aside from the tensions surrounding her gender identity, her family is involved in long-standing conflict over the parental property. To split it between three sons and one "daughter" is no laughing matter, especially when the daughter has so few avenues of income and is sensitive to rejection; let's not talk about the sons, one of whom is basically a terrible brother.

In fine, we can say that Revathi was born a boy, but felt and behaved like a girl. In telling her life story, Revathi evokes marvellously the deep unease of being in the wrong body that plagued her from childhood. To be true to herself, to escape the constant violence visited upon her by her family and community, the village-born Revathi ran away to Delhi to join a house of hijras. Her life became an incredible series of dangerous physical and emotional journeys to become a woman and to find love. The Truth about Me is the unflinchingly courageous and moving autobiography of a hijra who fought ridicule, persecution and violence both within her home and outside to find a life of dignity.