

THIRD GENDER IN MAHABHARATA; THROUGH THE LENS OF QUEER THEORY

Akhila Valsen

**Former Assistant Professor at the Department of English, Christ College, Mysuru,
Karnataka**

Mysore University

CHAPTER I

Introduction

India is and has been a land of diverse ethnicity, culture and spirituality. India has gifted the world its life and culture through the great epics such as *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. The culture and life of the people is deeply interlinked with the Vedic texts and scriptures. The whole world has recognised and accepted Indian texts for its universality and essence. According to the traditional accounts, *Mahabharata* is written by the great ancient sage Veda Vyasa. The title can be translated as “The great tale of *Bharata* dynasty.” *Mahabharata* is the longest epic poem written in verse in which the core part ‘*Bharata*’ consists of 24000 lines. It is narrated as ‘story within a story’ and the central theme is the ‘war of justice’ or “*dharmayudha*.” Different layers of stories and sub stories then got intertwined with the main plot of ‘Kuruksheetra War’ in which *Bhagavad Gita* stands out as the moral teaching and lessons from Krishna to Arjuna at the time of War. *Mahabharata* is larger than the combination of the two Greek epics which is *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

The various approaches *Mahabharata* in the form of religious, spiritual, mythical and philosophical aspects provided new dimensions and meanings to the central theme. Many religions across the world follow *Mahabharata* as their sacred text or manifesto which includes Hinduism, Jainism, Indonesian philosophy etc. It is written in Sanskrit. The text has been translated into different versions and the main text consists of 18 *parvas*

or sections. It is a great philosophical text which has got adopted into different national and regional art forms.

The sub-narratives have also influenced people to create great artworks.

According to the scholar and translator, K.M Munshi's, 'Introduction' to Kamala Subramanyam's version of *Mahabharata*:

The *Mahabharata* is not a mere epic; it is a romance, telling the tale of heroic men and women and of some who were divine; it is a whole literature in itself, containing a code of life, a philosophy of social and ethical relations, and speculative thought on human problems that is hard to rival; but above all, it has for its core the Gita, which is, as the world is beginning to find out, the noblest of scriptures and the grandest of sages the climax of which is reached in the wondrous apocalypse in the eleventh canto. Through such books alone, the harmonious underlying true culture, I am convinced, will one day reconcile the disorders of modern life. (Foreword to *Mahabharata* 5)

So, the importance of *Mahabharata* and its significance in Indian culture and tradition as well as in the whole world is evident from the above quoted lines. The great Vedic scriptures, along with *Bhagavad Gita* and *Mahabharata* are a gift from India to the whole world. It teaches the way of life and to attain a high state of thinking and living a highly moral and ethical life. Even though when it is approached in contextual level, many of these notions are debatable which includes the core theme of *dharmayuddha* and the various levels of injustice shown to various characters such as Karna, Ekalavya, and Duryodhan etc.

However, the universality of this text is unquestionable which is showcased through the popular saying about *Mahabharata* that is 'what is not there is nowhere to be found'. *Mahabharata* can be perceived as the story of human life by negating all the attributed divinity and spiritual, mythical elements. The characters of *Mahabharata* can be perceived as normal human beings with flesh and blood and without the attributions of divinity, which helps the reader to sympathise with the characters. When the characters possess all the feelings and emotions of normal human beings devoid of the divine, supernatural powers, it makes the story more authentic, lively and acceptable by readers.

It is believed that *Mahabharata* is written by sage Veda Vyasa who is also playing a major role in the text. There is a story regarding the birth of Veda Vyasa and how he is related to both Pandava's and Kaurava's, the two different families of the same clan. It is believed that he is the son of the great sage Parashara and the adopted son of great sage Vashistha. His mother was Satyavati who later became the wife of king Shantanu and the great grandmother of Pandava's and Kaurava's. Vyasa is one of the seven *chiranjeevis* who is blessed with immortality. His other name is Krishna Dvaipayana which means 'black' and 'island borne'. He categorised the *Vedas* and hence, the name Veda Vyasa.

There are different narrators narrating the stories in different parts of the text. In the initial part, it is Ganesha who writes the text under Vyasa's dictation in another part it is Vaisampayana who is a disciple of Veda Vyasa narrates the story to king Janamejaya who was a later member of Kuru clan at a *yagna* named *sarpasatra* or snake sacrifice and the early life of Kuru princes. This *parva* includes 19 sub *parvas*. The other *parvas* are *subha parva*, *vana parva* or *aranyaka parva*, *virata parva*, *udyoga parva*, *bhishma parva*, *drona parva*, *karna parva*, *shalya parva*, *saaptika parva*, *stri parva*, *shanti parva*, *anushasana parva*, *ashvamedhika parva*, *ashramavasika parva*, *mausala parva*, *mahaprasthanika parva*, *svargarohana parva* and finally *harivamsa parva*. The histories of the events are attributed to Iron Age of India which is a part of the Harappan civilization. This leads to the formation of *janapadas* or tribal kingdoms of the Vedic period and later transformed to *mahajanapadas*. Then it witnessed the establishment of the Gupta and the Maurya empires.

Even though there are so many versions of *Mahabharata*, for the purpose of my research I have referred to Kamala Subramanyam's version of the *Mahabharata*. Srimati Kamala Subramaniam was born on October 4, 1916 in Bengaluru, Karnataka. Her father was an eminent Kannada poet and dramatist named, Shri T.P Kailasam. She had a profound knowledge in English literature especially of Shakespeare. She loved philosophy and had a deep knowledge in Bible as well as Gita. She wrote a series of imaginary conversations on the model of Landor for Triveni under the pen name 'Ketaki'. She had a keen interest and fascination towards the epics, *itihasa* (history) and *puranas* (myths) of India. After her operation for cancer, Kamala took her life as a challenge and this period turned out to be the most productive literary period of her life. Interpretation of *Mahabharata* was her first attempt. This dissertation is based upon the 20th edition of Kamala Subramaniam's *Mahabharata*. The

reason why this version is taken as the primary resource is the main focus is given on the various and complex characters and usage of simple language. In her own words:

I want my book to be a narration of the stupendous drama which was enacted years ago. To me the *Mahabharata* is like a Greek tragedy. I am fascinated by the many characters who appears in it, as sympathetically as I could. Having studied Shakespeare, one cannot help studying the *Mahabharata* with the eyes of a dramatic critic. Viewed from this angle the epic presents immense possibilities. (7)

About the language which she adopted for the work, she says: “At times, crisp clear English does no work. I find the blending of the old and new to be the perfect medium for the narration. So, I have deliberately adopted the style, which to my thinking is absolutely perfect” (8). She follow’s the *parva* orders till *salya parva* and the rest of the *parva*’s are included under the title after the war.

According to Peter Barry’s *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* the LGBTQ critics “Identify and establish a canon of ‘classic’ lesbian/gay writers whose work constitutes a distinct tradition. These are, in the main, twentieth century writers, such as (for lesbian writers in Britain) Virginia Woolf, Vita Sackville- West, Dorothy Richardson, Rosamund Lehman and Radcliff Hall” (143).

The rigid social construction and forced imposing of gender identity suppresses the growth and development of natural gender identity and this leads to serious complications in future. Such people often convert to the opposite sex. In short, transgender identities include transsexual, transvestite or cross dressers, gender queer, androgyne and bigender. Queer literature is a response to the mainstream literature which tries to assert heterosexuality as a compulsory accepted norm and homosexuality or homophobia as evil or rather sinful.

Human beings have a tendency to go beyond the restricted or prohibited level of understanding as well as to reject anything that deviates from the socially constructed pattern. Society and its systems are basically patriarchal and artificial. Queer movements initiated with the 1969 Stone Wall riot in New York and Gay Liberalisation Movements in the 1970s. The famous queer theorists were Eve Kosofsky Sedwick, Judith Butler, Adrienne Rich etc. The women who question or challenge patriarchal norms are often silenced and suppressed

by force, violence and power. The moment they try to deviate and emerge as independent human beings, they are dragged back to the societal rules of patriarchy. But in the case of queer people, when they are forced to confine themselves within the socially constructed gender roles, it turns out to be detrimental to their personality as well their identity development. Devdutt Pattanaik is one among India's leading mythologist, he examines the meaning behind the metaphors of the classic myths in symbolic art and in a multifaceted tradition of ritual practices in his works.

The portrayal of transgender characters in *Mahabharata* is questionable as well as pitiful in some respects. For example, Shikhandi was born as a woman named Amba in her previous birth and then later becomes a man just for the fulfilment of her revenge. Her transformation from being a woman to a transgender, Shikhandi makes her more powerful and chivalric warrior who fought with Arjuna and helped him to win over Bhishma. Transgenders in modern India are often regarded as Shikhandis because they believe that they are the followers of Shikhandi and they worship this warrior hero as their God. There are many other queer characters in *Mahabharata* such as Mandhata the ancestor of Lord Shri Ram, Bhangashvana, Skanda, Aravan, Bahuchara, Brihannalla (Arjuna), Bhima, Vijaya, Krishna, Samba etc.

Sanchita Chowdhary in her article, "The Tragic Story of Aravan: Origin of the Third Gender" tells the story of Aravan, whose life was sacrificed for the victory of Pandavas in the great war of Kurukshetra. The transgenders in the contemporary India especially in south is regarded as the wives of Aravan and the myth behind the famous Tamil festival Koovagam where the story of Aravan or Kuttandavar is re-enacted and worshipped.

Debasmita Chatterjee's "Shikhandi and lord Krishna in Mahabharata: The Other Tale No One Tells You", analyses the relationship between Krishna and Shikhandi from a different perspective. Krishna is the mentor, rescuer and instructor of Shikhandi who insists him to shoot thousand arrows at Bhishma, who represents celibacy, strict and disciplinary rules and regulations of ancient Indian society. So, this act can be seen as symbol of the beginning of change mainly, the destruction of stereotype by the prototype. The age-old stubbornness of celibate sages of approving only the heterosexual as natural and everything else as sinful is questioned through this act of Shikhandi. Krishna supports and rescues Shikhandi to establish his identity. Lord Krishna realizes the power of

both manhood and womanhood residing in Shikhandi which makes him unstoppable and invincible. Shikhandi is the manifestation of *Ardhanareeswara* concept where both the power of man and woman unites in a single body.

Veejay Sai's article, "*Mahabharata* Character Come Alive at This Festival Celebrating Gender Fluid Aravanis" deals with the significance of Koovagam festival and how it is significant for the transgender communities of India. The whole village becomes a gathering of people with different sexual orientations. The Tamil Nadu government promotes this festival. In fact, the visit of people from all over the world makes it a cultural tourism and arranges facilities for the visitors. Transgender people in Tamil Nadu are regarded as Aravanis with respect to their culture and customs as well as the wives of Aravan, and this festival contributes a great amount to the state revenue.

"Brihannala, the Transgender" by Vaidyanathan Pushpagiri explains the story of Brihannala who was in reality Arjuna, the Pandava warrior hero who was cursed by an *apsara* named Urvashi, for rejecting her love. She cursed him to be a eunuch but then later by Indra's power, the curse turned out to be a blessing for Arjuna during the *vanavasa*.

"The *Mahabharata* and Reproductive Endocrinology" by Bharti Kalra and et al explains various events and characters in *Mahabharata* through the lens of reproductive endocrinology. After providing a glimpse of Amba's life or Shikhandi's life, the author attributes the aspect of intersex to this character and addresses it as a condition which requires empathy. Another case is the *Yadava* prince Samba's pregnancy and delivering of iron mace and mortar. This explains that male pregnancies were theoretically possible. This is supported by the advancement of womb transplants and hormone supplementation. The deliverance of iron mace can be a misinterpreted as faecoliths or stones delivered through rectum or urethra. Mythology is the study of people's subjective truth expressed in stories, rituals and symbols. Indian mythology is vast and complicated which includes a variety of characters with complex personalities and identities. The multiple interpretations of the text in the form of oral, written and regional are thought provoking as well as debatable. The universality of *Mahabharata* makes it flexible and subject to deep contemplation and interpretation from different angles and multiple perspectives.

The alternative sexual orientations or queerness gained comparatively lesser attention than feminism and theories related to gender. This may be because of many reasons, which includes the social stigma associated with the minority sexual community of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender). They are being accepted and recognised now, as a result of the awareness and protests to gain their rights along with the new judgement on section 377 Act of Indian Penal Code. Many of them used literature as a powerful tool to express their plight in life. Transgenders constitute a major part of the queer people who have been striving hard to establish their position in society and to be regarded as the third gender.

In order to analyse the current situation and life of transgenders in modern India, an autobiography of a transgender person has been taken up for this research. *A Life in Trans Activism* is an autobiographical account of a transgender, A. Revathi who is also known as Doraiswamy. A. Revathi is a writer, actor and activist based in Bengaluru. The preface of this book is written by Nandini Murali. She is a gender and diversity professional with special interest in sexuality, identity and masculinities and a great friend of Revathi. When Revathi's powerful memoir, *The Truth about Me*, first published in 2011, it caused a sensation. Readers came to know about Revathi's childhood unease with her male body. Her escape from her family to a house of *hijras* (the South Asian generic term for transgender people) and her eventual transition into being a woman she always knew she was in her heart. Revathi describes her life, her work in the NGO Sangama, which works with people across a spectrum of gender identities and sexual orientations, and how she rose from being merely an office assistant to the director's position of the organisation. Her life offers the reader an insight into one of the least talked about experiences of gender trajectory which is transmen. *The Life in Trans Activism* is an unforgettable book which leaves the reader questioning the 'safe' and 'comfortable' boundaries of male/female identity that so many of us take for granted.

This dissertation is to analyse the transgenders in *Mahabharata* in terms of their life, self-realisation, identity formation, identity crisis, social struggles, survival and self-assertion in comparison to the contemporary life of transgenders in modern India. Transgenders are on their process of coming out to light through a series of protest which began with the Gay Liberation Movement in America. In India, it started with the homophobia that spread as part of the HIV AIDS scare in the west. They were ostracised from the main stream society, accused of

being unnatural and morally corrupt creatures born as a mistake of God. They are often ill-treated, isolated and humiliated in their comfort zones. Their dignity and individuality are diminished, crushed and scattered due to the constant suffering and humiliation that they receive from home and society. They feel suffocated as if they are trapped inside a wrong body. Escapism or the public exhibition of gender is way for them to overcome these insecurities and fears and to express their desired gender identity. The approach towards analysing the characters in *Mahabharata* is more of a humane level by negating all the attributed divinity and spiritual elements which elevates them to a superior position.

CHAPTER II

Great Indian Myth through the Lens of Queer Theory

The foundation of Hindu mythology is based on the idea of recurring life cycles of birth and death. It is structured on the four *yogis* or life cycles. They are *Satya yuga*, *Treta yuga*, *Dvapara yuga* and *Kali yuga*. *Satya yuga* is remarked for its clear distinction of categories and rules. Slowly these boundaries fade away when the time moves onto *Treta* and *Dvapara yuga*. Finally, the structure gets collapsed at *Kali yuga*. Everything gets contaminated in *Kali yuga*. According to the Hindu mythology, the apocalypse comes in the form of a great flood or *pralaya*. It cleanses everything, the four cycle's repeats and the world starts afresh. Devadutt Pattanaik, who is currently India's most leading mythologist covered almost all the aspects of queer characters and the elements of queer theory in Indian mythology. Every time, when the structure collapses, when there is imbalance between the so called good and evil, Lord Vishnu takes different incarnations to rescue the earth and purges it by eradicating the evil forces. According to Pattanaik:

The shift of *yuga* marks a mind that is increasingly losing faith, hence getting increasingly insecure, hence grabbing more and more power. Due to this the categories are forced to locate in a hierarchy. Domination and oppression follows, resulting in calls for revolutions. (12)

About liberation of the soul or salvation, he remarks that:

Duties are enforced and rights demanded in order to shift power. Battle lines are drawn and despite the intervention of Vishnu as Parashurama, Ram and Krishna, few accept that the problem is inside and not outside. As long as we let the mind be controlled by fear and transformed into *aham* (ego), the march of *yuga* will continue; this is *samsara*, the wheel of rebirth. As soon as we unknot the mind with wisdom, then *atma* (soul) reveals itself and the march of *yuga* stops; this is *moksha* or liberation. (24)

In *Shikhandi and Other Tales They Didn't Tell You* Pattanaik traces the evolution of queerness in various Hindu myths, which includes the written text along with the folk, oral, regional versions of different Hindu myths. According to his opinion, Hinduism was a strategically implementing British colonial power for the convenience of administration. The term was originated from the root word 'Indos' which is used to refer to the people who lived at the valley of 'Indus' and the civilization which is established because of the Aryan invasion. Pattanaik opines 'What we discover is deemed natural. What we invent is deemed unnatural. (13) He further states "In the

Christian world, God's commandments constitute the natural, while in the Hindu world, cultural remains an artificial imposition on nature." (18) In the Preface to *The Discovery of Invention of Queerness*, Pattanaik states that, queerness is natural because it has existed for a long time before even culture got established. So, queerness is something that is discovered, not invented; it is natural, unlike the forceful and strict implementation of heterosexuality in order to maintain social order and to prevent anarchy.

He more says that it's evident from the Hindu mythology that social organization is solely associate fancied construct and thence unnatural, to assert possession upon, to along with the concept of marriage. He says wedding in an exceedingly construct fancied to established fatherhood or arise out of a requirement to assert possession or authority over folks.

In order to substantiate this idea, he says that "Mahabharata refers to a time when there was no concept of marriage" (19). Later on, those ages emphasized or demanded the fidelity and loyalty of a woman to her man for the purpose of inheritance. The soul is more important than the flesh and this thought arise out of the enlightenment. So the soul is a multi-dimensional, enlightened entity which has no gender or physical appearance which related to the flesh.

"The unenlightened being values the flesh or gender over the soul" (21). But all the ideas got changed with the establishment of monastic orders and it demanded celibacy from men. So, Hinduism basically accepts and openly supports gender fluidity and queerness. Pattanaik, retells the stories of Shikhandi, who became a man to satisfy his wife; Mandhata, whose mothers were not all women; Aravan, whose wife was the complete man; Bahuchara, whose husband was an incomplete man; Arjuna, who was temporarily castrated for showing restraint Bhima, who wore women's clothes to punish Kichaka; Vijaya, who wore women's clothes conquer; Krishna, who wore women's clothes in love; Samba, who wore women's clothes as a prank; Alli, the queen who did not want a man in her bed; Ram, who included all in his kingdom. Majority of these stories are taken from different versions of Mahabharata as well as the different versions of Mahabharata and the rest are from the oral folk tales of *Hijra's*.

The gender fluidity of Hindu scriptures is visible even from their characters, where most of them cannot be termed as proper transgenders who underwent sex change. As in the case of Bhima, Vijaya and Krishna they

were cross dressers and not transgenders. Their activity of cross dressing was also to fulfil different purposes. So, Hinduism essentially accepts gender fluidity which is discernible from the above characters. Pattanaik in *Indian Mythology: Tales, Symbols and Rituals from the Heart of the Subcontinent* says:

Just as man and woman are complementary, so are spiritual and material realities. Hence when God is represented, Hindu choose not male or female but both male and female. In Hindu temples, there for, God is always associated with the Goddess. In Vishnu temples, one finds Lakshmi, In Krishna temples one finds Radha. Without either there is neither. (27)

The above statement actually shows the inseparable pairing of male and female. The proper and ideal example of a perfect transgender character is Shikhandi in *Mahabharata*. Shikhandi is the most dynamic and powerful character whose presence is not limited to one *parva* but extends to other *parvas* of *Mahabharata*. In one aspect, the entire conflict of *Mahabharata* is initiated from Bhishma's vow of celibacy and his rejection of Amba. The story of Shikhandi or Amba starts from *Adi parva* and extends to *Bhisma parva*, *Salya parva* and *Vanaprastha*. Pattanik closely also follows Kamala Subramanyam's version of *Mahabharata* where she explains the story or the transformation of Amba to Shikhandi.

Amba was the eldest daughter of Kashi king and she along with her two sisters Ambika and Ambalika got abducted by Bhishma on the day of their *Swayamvara*. He abducted them not for himself but for his step- brother Vichitravirya. But Amba was already in love with king Shalva and hearing this, Bhishma freed her. When she approached Shalva, he rejected her saying that she is gift won by Bhishma in fighting with Shalva. It might affect his dignity if he accepts the 'left overs' of his enemy who defeated him in war. Shalva insulted her and send her back to Bhishma. Amba pleaded Bhishma with tears to accept her and not to spoil her womanhood. But he was helpless because of his vow of celibacy this continuous rejections and humiliations enraged Amba. She leaves Bhishma's palace and goes to the forest. She prays to Kartikeya, the God of war he appears before her and gifts a garland of ever-fresh lotuses. Anyone who wears the garland would kill Bhishma. Unfortunately, nobody accepted it fearing the power of Hasthinapur and Bhishma's rage. Amba becomes frustrated when her last hope, king Drupada, the powerful king of Panchala refused her request. She flunked the garland which landed up a pillar in Drupada's palace. She committed suicide after that and when reborn as Drupada's daughter Shikhandini. She was

raised just like a son and she learned all the martial arts required for a fine prince. Eventually she got married to king Hiranyavarna of Dasarna.

On the day of their marriage consummation, the bride realises that her husband was actually a woman and not a man. Then she felt so desperate and went to the forest. There she happened to meet a *Yaksha* named Sthuna. He agrees to lend his manhood in exchange of her womanhood. Thus, Shikhandini returns to his palace as Shikhandi and his married life becomes normal and one day he accidentally wears the garland and thus it was proven that he was borne to kill Bhisma. But Drupada wanted a son to kill Dronachariya instead of Bhisma. So, he did a *yagna* and from that fire a man and woman emerged.

They were Draupadi and Dhristadyumna. Draupadi becomes the wife of the Pandava brothers and Dhristadyumna kills Dronachriya, the enemy of king Drupada and the teacher of both Pandava's and Kaurava's. Bhisma is invincible when he holds his bow. No one can kill him as he had born to choose the time of his death. Pandavas made a plan to defeat. Bhīma by lowering his arrow in front of Shikhandi as Bhisma still believed that Shikhandi was a woman. On the tenth day of the war, Bhisma was pierced with Arjuna's thousand arrows when Bhisma refused to raise his bow in front of Shikhandi. But later Shikhandi was killed by a sudden unexpected attack by Aswathama, the son of Dronachariya.

At the end of the chapters Pattanaik raises some questions. Shikhandini, who became Shikhandi is what modern queer vocabulary would call a female to male transsexual, as her body goes through a very specific change genitally. But various interpretation avoid details and tend to portray him/her either as a eunuch (castrated male), a male to female transsexual (a man who rejects his male biology), a male to female transgender (a man who wears women's cloths as he feels like a woman) as the hermaphrodite, or simply a man who was a woman (Amba) in his past life. It reveals the patriarchal bias even in the queer space.

Mahabharata, the greatest epic of India reached its final written form 300CE. This was the Post-Buddhist phase of Hinduism, also known as puranic Hinduism countered the rather monastic Buddhist doctrines by celebrating family life. Shikhandi plays a key role in *Mahabharata* become his arrival the turning point of the war Bhisma dies right in the midpoint of 18th day of *Kurukshetara* war on the 10th day making the queerness here not accidental but quite deliberate. The word Shikhandi means 'one who tufted hair like a peacock'. It

sometimes also refers to a peacock or specifically its crest. It is one of the names of God and so part of the thousand names of Shiva and Vishnu. Modern retellings shy away from the conflict created by Vyasa between the sexual Amba/Shikhandi and the asexual Bhishma, who has taken the vow of celibacy. Bhishma's celibacy grant him long life; his contact with the sexual being leads to his death. This reinforces the traditional association of sex with mortality, materiality and the mundane and celibacy with immortality and the transcendental. In the Jainism *Mahabharata* so that no one doubts his vow of celibacy, Bhishma castrates himself.

The idea of a forest spirit magically enabling sexual transformation is found in many folk tales. Vijayadan Detha, who documented Rajasthan's oral tradition, refers to such a change in his story *Teeja Beeja*. When Teeja turns into a man however, he stops being romantic and considerate and so Beeja asks him to become a woman once more. In the *Mahabharata*, however, the sexual transformation happens because a *Yaksha* sacrifices his manhood. This is like an organ transplant from an organ donor.

Shikhandi and his wife were happy with this sex change. No author has yet explored the relationship of Draupadi, the complete woman and Drishtadhyumna, the complete man with Shikhandi, who is neither a complete woman nor a complete man. Who will inherit Drupada's throne? The elder Shikhandi or the younger Drishtadhyumna? What about Shikhandi's relationship with his wife? How does it feel to know that one's husband was a woman on the wedding night and then is a man in the following night, sporting someone else's genital? Devavrata was renamed Bhīma, but he chose to remain celibate. So that his aged father could remarry. This meant he could never father a son (*putra*) or daughter (*putri*) and so faced eternal entrapment in a hell like realm known as *Put* unable to reform for having failed to repay his debt to his ancestors (*pitr*). Today childless couples and single people are advised to offer prayers in places such as Gaya Bihar to placate their ancestors to ensure their own rebirth.

The next transgender character that comes in the great Indian epic is Mandhata. King Yuvanashava of the *Ikshvaku* clan had several wives but no children. Feeling sorry for him, sages prepared a pitcher of magic water that had the power to impregnate wives. When the king visits the sages, he was so overcome by thirst that he accidentally drank the magic water and ended up being pregnant. Nine months later he experienced labour pain. There was no orifice through which the child could come out. Yuvanashva invoked Ashwini, the divine

physicians, who cut his side and pulled out the baby. How do I nurse him? Yuvanashva asked. In response, Indra, king of devas, cut his thumb. Out flowed milk, for milk runs in the veins of the gods as blood runs in the veins of humans. Indra let the newborn suckle his thumb. That is why children suck on their thumb when seeking comfort. The child whose mother was a man, whose midwives were gods and whose wet-nurse were another god grew up to be Mandhata, a great king.

The story of Mandhata's birth is retold not once but twice in the *Mahabharata*. First by Lomasha during the exile of the Pandavas and the next time by Vyasa during the Great War. It is then repeated in the *puranas*. The 'age of Mandhata' refers to an ancient time, a golden age in many languages of India. In the genealogical lists found in the *Puranas*, Mandhata is an ancestor of Ram and belongs to the Surya- Vamsa or the solar dynasty. The idea of king unable father children and so approaching a hermit who will conduct a *yagna* to create a potion that will enable his wives to bear his children is common in Indian epics. Here the potion is said to make the womb capable of germinating even the weak seed of men. Traditionally great value is placed on Mandhata's birth as he is born without association of a woman. He is *a-yoni-ja*, not born of a womb. This makes him special. He bypasses the passage of death and rebirth.

This mythical story raises queer questions; is Yuvanashva the father of Mandhata or his mother? If mother, can he inherit his father's throne? As mother, can Yuvanashva sit on the throne since traditionally women, hence mothers, have not been allowed to be race? If a man uses medical sciences to bear a child and lactate, how would 'modern' society treat him? When the magic potion prepared by Yaja and Upajaya for king Drupada is cast into the fire altar, because the queen is unavailable to drink it, two children are created in the flames: a son called Dhrishtadyumna and a daughter called Draupadi. Thus, the womb is not necessary to procreate. Such is the power of the magic potion produced by a *Yagna*.

The next queer character is Bhangashvana, who was a mother and a man. Yudhishtira asked the dying Bhisma who gets greater pleasure in the world: a man or a woman. For that he replied, only one like Bhangashvana who experienced life as a man and as a woman can answer this question. King Bhangashvana performed a *yagna* that he may be blessed with hundred sons. The sacrifice pleased *devas* and in due course, he fathered hundred sons. Unfortunately, during the ceremony, he did not make an offering to Indri, king of Gods.

Furious Indri cursed Bhangashvana and turned him into a woman. In due course, the female Bhangashvana bore a hundred sons. Thus, Bhangashvana ended up with two sets of children: those who called him 'father' and those who called him 'mother'. When Indra found Bhangashvana happy in the company of two hundred children, he was further infuriated. He hissed out a curse that the two sets of children would fight and kill each other.

When this came to pass, Bhangashvana was inconsolable in grief. On learning of his lapse and the wrath of Indra, Bhangashvana made offerings of appeasement and begged that the children be revived. Indra responded that he shall only raise only one set of children. Bhangashvana replies that he wants the children who calls him mother to be brought back from dead. He reasons it by saying that children love their mothers more than they love their fathers. Then Indra asked what he would like to be: a man or a woman. For which, Bhangashavana replies that he wants to be a woman explaining that woman experience greater sexual pleasure than men during sex. Pleased with his honesty, Indra revived both sets of children.

Mahabharata is not so much a tale of war as it is believed to be. More than that, it is a collection of wisdom literature. Almost a third of the epic is composed of the conversation between the Pandavas and Bhishma. They make up the chapters called the *Shanti parva* (Book of Peace) and *Anushasana parva* (Book of Discipline). It is here that the story of Bhangashvana is narrated. It is significant that the celibate Bhishma discusses sexuality with his granted nephews on his death bed. This speaks of a very different Indian value system from what we have today. A similar story is found in Greek mythology related to the seer Tiresias. He accidentally kills the female of a pair of copulating serpents and so turned into a woman. Years later, having lived as a woman, he kills the male of a pair of copulating serpents and turns into a man. He is asked to answer a question that led to a furious debate between Zeus and Hera, king and queen of the Olympian gods. They ask him, who gets greater pleasure in sexual act: the male or the female. Tiresias answers female. Zeus laughs and Hera is so embarrassed and angry that she curses the seer to become blind.

A queer person may see Bhangashvana as a bisexual man who has had known both the roles of man and woman. They would see him as a married gay man who considers both his children and his lover's children as his own, relating to the former as a father and the later as a mother. They would see the tale as a metaphor, as most people views the mythological tales. Those uncomfortable with queer sexuality would prefer seeing the

tale literally, rejecting all attempts to rationalise it. Between the lawbooks *Manu-smriti* and the *Narada-smriti* and the medical treatise of *Shusruta-samhita*, all dated between second and fifth centuries CE we find many words to indicate queer people, men who were not quite men such as *Panda*, *Sanda*, *Kliba* and *Napumsaka*.

The birth of Skanda, whose mothers were not all women is a repeated story in *Mahabharata* as well as in several other *puranas*. Skanda is also called Kartikeya in the North and Murugan in South. There are many stories with many variations of the origin of Skanda found in the scriptures dated from 200 BCE to 1500 CE. In most of them he has many mothers. Two of them are male God: Agni, the fire God and Vayu the wind God. In the story of Skanda's birth found in *Mahabharata*, there is no mention of Shiva. Agni wishes to seduce the wives of the seven sages. Agni's wife instead takes the form of these women and make love to Agni protecting him from the wrath of sages. From these multiple love-makings is born a great warrior who leads the *devas* into the battle against the *asuras*.

The next character is Aravan or Iravan, whose wife was the complete man. This story is taken from the oral retelling of the Tamil *Mahabharata*. The Kauravas and Pandavas fought a great battle on the plains of Kurukshetra. Both were evenly matched. The oracles on the pandava side divined that human sacrifice was the only way to please the goddess of war and ensure victory. Three men in the Pandava camp were found worthy of sacrifice: Krishna, the divine guide, Arjuna, the commander and Aravan or Irawan who is Arjuna's son from the serpent princess Uloopi.

As Krishna and Arjuna were indispensable, the Pandavas decided to sacrifice Aravan. But Aravan wanted a wife before he was sacrificed; marriage entitled him to a cremation and proper funerary offerings. He thought that life is of no use when no woman pines for him when he dies. But a single woman on earth was willing to marry a man doomed to die the day after his wedding. Desperate, the Pandavas turned to Krishna who turned into a beautiful woman called Mohini. He married Aravan, spent the night with him, and at dawn, after he had been sacrificed, mourned him as a widow. No widow ever wept for her husband as Krishna did.

Traditionally, Krishna is known as '*Purana-Purusha*' or the 'complete man'. Though conventionally translated as man, the *Purusha* refers to consciousness that is gender-neutral. That is why Krishna is comfortable with his feminine side as indicated by his sporting thins generally associated with woman especially his *tri-*

bhanga posture where the body is bent at the neck, waist and knee. This story is part of the Tamil *Mahabharata* that has many unique stories. These stories are ritually enacted in many parts of Tamil Nadu much like the Ramleela tradition of the Gangetic plains. In the Sanskrit *Mahabharata* of Vyasa, there is no mention of Irawan being sacrificed. Every year, near Pondicherry, in the villages of Koovagam the story of Aravan is enacted. Aravan is linked with the village deity, Koothandavar, he is also associated with Shiva.

A giant image of Koothandavar is taken into procession before it's taken apart which indicates his sacrifice for the victory of *Pandavas* in the war and the top of Koothandavar image is given special prominence because it sees the complete 18-day war at Kurukshetra from a vantage and discovers the war is that the outcome of Krishna's manipulation in order that the blood of the wicked king falls on the bottom and is consumed by the world god, World Health Organization takes the shape of Kali and detached her tongue as she is bored with their wickedness. The Aravanis or the wives of Aravan are transgendered but are not obliged to castrate themselves. The word *Thiru-nangai* meaning sir-lady, is being increasingly used for them. The idea of Krishna, or Vishnu, becoming a woman is a common one. In the images of Krishna, he is often shown sporting a nose ring and a braided plait like a woman. To establish *Dharma*, Vishnu takes many forms: animal, human, priest, king, servant, male and female.

The story of Arjuna, who was temporarily being castrated for showing restraint is another instant from *Mahabharata*. When bored, Urvashi would leave Indra's realm and come to the realm of men to seek pleasure for herself. One of the men who fell in love with her was Pururava of the *Kuru* clan. When she left him as *apsaras* often do when bored of earthly life, he went mad. Hundreds of years later, Urvashi saw a handsome young man in Amaravati. He reminded her of Pururava and so, dressed in finery, she approached him with the desire to make love. But the young man turns away from her. This had never happened to her before.

A furious Urvashi asked for the explanation and the man said he is Arjuna, the Pandava, descendent of Pururava. As she was his wife, she is like a mother to Arjuna. He cannot be her lover besides she is the beloved of Indra, his father, so such a relation will turn out to be incest. Furious for being rejected, Urvashi curses him to be a eunuch. When Indra heard about this curse, he modifies it to any one year of Arjuna's life, by his choice. This worked out well when Arjuna and his brothers when in after being driven out of palace. They had gambled

it away and could reclaim it only after spending twelve years in the forest and the thirteenth year incognito. There was also a clause that should their true identities be discovered during the final year of the exile, they would return to the forest for another twelve years.

Arjuna realised that he could live out his curse as a Eunuch in his final year of exile. After enduring the harsh wilderness stoically for twelve years, the five Pandavas hid their weapons, disguised themselves as servants and sought refuge in the court of King Virata. Arjuna disguised himself as Brihannala, or Brihanada, the dance teacher, and gained employment in the royal women's quarters where he taught dance to the princess Utthara.

As the years drew to a close, the Kauravas- whose spies had informed them of the Pandavas whereabouts- invaded Virata kingdom to smoke out their cousins, while the king and his soldiers were away chasing cattle thieves. Petrified the women turned to Virata's young son Uttar who boasted he would drive the invaders away single-handed. As there were no Charioteers around, Brihannala offered to take up the reins of the war- chariot.

This caused great mirth until the prince realised he had no other option. As the two rode towards enemy lines, Uttar caught sight of the formidable formations of the invading army- the shining spears, the array of trumpeting elephants- and panicked. He leapt out of the chariot and ran towards the city. Brihannala ran after him, caught him by the scruff of his neck and dragged him back. Those who witnessed this scene roared in laughter. Unable to bear this public humiliation, Uttar decided to end his life but was stopped by Brihannala. She says that she could drive the enemy away provided Uttar served as her Charioteer. The prince did not like the idea of serving a eunuch until Brihannala, after much difficulty convinces him to have faith on her.

Brihannala then took the prince to the forest, collected a massive bow from a secret place, strung it and ordered Uttar to take the chariot straight towards enemy. There, to Uttar's astonishment, the effeminate eunuch- now transformed into a fierce warrior – shot lethal arrows and in no time drove invaders away. When the duo returned to the city, Brihannala resumed his position as charioteer and the palace women- who had not witnessed the scenes in the battlefield- hailed the prince as their saviour. When Brihannala's true identity was revealed later, King Virata overcome with gratitude offered Arjuna the hand of his daughter Uttara in marriage. Arjuna politely refused since in his role as dance- teacher he looked upon Uttara as his daughter. Instead, the princess was given

in marriage to Arjuna's son Abhimanyu. The story of Arjuna's transformation is not part of the critical edition of the Sanskrit *Mahabharata* and is treated as a later interpolation. The idea of castrated men serving in the women's quarters is believed to have come into India after the arrival of Muslim warlords from central Asia. But historians have different opinions. Any culture that castrates bulls and turns them into Ox for pulling ploughs and carts knew about gelding and eunuchs.

In many Indian texts, there is disapproval of men who turn down a woman who sexually approaches them. Urvashi punishes Arjuna for rejecting her. But in later texts, such women were considered vile. In the *Ramayana*, Surpanakha is violently punished for being sexually aggressive and not respecting rules of marital fidelity. The name Brihannala means 'big stick' perhaps indicates that this was an invention of theatre designed to make people smile. It gave the audience a chance to see the great warrior behave like a woman. It is common to use cross-dressing to evoke humour. We often laugh at things that make us feel superior. Queerness has been at the receiving end of this very human desire. Krishna runs away from the battle field when Mathura is attacked by Jarasandha. He is, therefore, called Rana-chor-rai, he who withdrew from battle. This is seen as a tactical withdrawal and is celebrated. But Uttara's running away from battle is seen as injury to his masculine pride, especially since he is brought back by a cross-dressing eunuch. In fact, even King Virataslaps Yudhishtira for suggesting that it was not his son, but the eunuch- dancer who defeated the Kaurava army.

In the Gita, Krishna tells Arjuna, 'Don't behave in an unmanly way' (43) when he hesitates to fight in the battle. The word used is *Kliba*. This Sanskrit word is commonly translated as eunuch. But it is a non-specific pejorative term for referring to all things that are not manly, similar to the Hindi/Urdu word '*namard*'. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna tells Arjuna not to behave as a *Kliba* when he is unable to raise his bow and fight the battle at Kurukshetra. It is reflection of the masculine cult that celebrates valour. It is significant that Arjuna is able to singlehandedly defeat the Kauravas when he disguises himself as a eunuch-dancer. During the Kurukshetra war, by when he has regained his manhood, he becomes nervous wreck because he was in a dilemma whether to fight with his own relative or to not fight at all and is chastised for his unmanly behaviour by Krishna. Arjuna and Krishna are great friends. But while Krishna is comfortable with his feminine side, Arjuna is not. After he shares his first wife Draupadi, with his brothers, Arjuna marries many more women including Uloopi, Chitrangada and

even Krishna's sister, Subhadra, perhaps an attempt to erase any question about his inability to satisfy Draupadi completely. One can read this story as an attempt by to help Arjuna discover his feminine side.

When Virata gives Arjuna his daughter as a bride, Arjuna refuses. Perhaps he no longer has the yearning to prove his masculinity. He gives her in marriage to his son, Abhimanyu, instead. He is content being seen as the dance- teacher, and parent, or may be a mother. There is another story in *Mahabharata* of Bhima punishing Kichaka for harassing Draupadi through cross dressing. The idea of a hero dressing up as a woman to save another woman is popular in folk lore around the world. Here cross-dressing is valorous, even noble. In another story, popular in Andhra Pradesh, Bhima's son known as Ghatotkacha also pretends to be a woman called Vatsala, Balarama's daughter, and marries Duryodhana's son, Lakshmana while the real Vatsala elopes with Arjuna's son, Abhimanyu. Ghatotkcha squeezes Lakshmana's hand so tightly that he faints.

The story of Vijaya comes from the oral tales based on the Tamil *Mahabharata*. A sorcerer possessed five sacred objects that the Pandavas needed to defeat their enemies. The sorcerer lived in an impregnable fort and could be killed by no one but his son. Krishna and Arjun, who were also called Jaya and Vijaya, came up with a plan to kill the sorcerer, destroy his fort and acquire the sacred objects. Krishna disguised himself as an old woman and while Arjuna bedecked himself as a ravishing young maiden named Vijayampal. They approached the sorcerer's son, Pormannan sought her hand in marriage with one condition that he should behead his father, destroy his fort and should bring the five sacred objects that he possesses. Pormannan, smitten by uncontrollable desire, killed his father, destroyed his fort, stole the sacred objects and ran after Krishna and Arjuna. When he discovered they were not women, he got angry and sad. Feeling sorry for the youth, the Pandavas let him marry their sister and made him a senior officer in their army.

These stories that are popular in Tamil folklore are relatively unknown in other parts of India. In the many adventures of Arjuna and Krishna they often dress as women. Here Arjuna is the younger, attractive one. At other times, Krishna is so. The idea here is to enchant a man and get him to do their bidding. Thus, Arjuna is acting like an *apsara*. The celestial damsel of Indra sent to enchant *tapasvins* or hermits. Since the cause is noble, the cross dressing is not frowned upon. Both Krishna and his son, Pradyumna, dress as a woman to infiltrate in to the kingdom of Bana to rescue Krishna's grandson, Aniruddha, who has been abducted by Bana's daughter, Usha

in folktales based on the Bhagavata tradition. Thus, cross dressing is a common trick used by heroes to defeat villains.

Unlike the story of Aravan, here the female attire is just a masquerade. Sexual desire is not satisfied. In fact, Pormannan feels cheated when he discovers the woman, he loves is a man. Arjuna is called Vijaya, or the one who always wins, in Tamil literature. In stone sculptures of Orissa, Krishna is shown sporting a braid like a woman. He also wears a nose ring at Jagannath temple in Puri, Orissa. These characteristics are also seen in the images of Krishna at Nathdvara, Rajasthan. Krishna is often shown standing in a *tri-bhangi* (thrice bent) position, the body bent at the neck, waist and leg, generally considered a feminine posture.

In describing the sexual exploits of Hindu gods, one has to be careful of the 'gaze'. When Europeans first studied Indian scriptures in the eighteenth century, they saw the excessive sexuality of Hinduism as indicative that it was a false religion like the religions of the debauched Roman Empire. This view made many Hindus defensive and apologetic. Many American and European academics of the twentieth century continue to see these stories from vicarious, liberal, hippie perspective. The Hindus are not amused. In temples, Krishna is often visualised as a woman. This is called *stri-vesha* at Nathdvara temple of Srinathji where this choice of costume is an indicator his love for his beloved milkmaids and for his mothers.

The last story is of Samba, who wore a woman's clothes as a prank. Krishna, lord of the Yadava clan, had a son called Samba who loved to play pranks. Once, he and his friends decided to have fun at the expense of a few sages who were visiting their city. Samba disguised himself as a pregnant woman and approached them coyly. His friends asked, 'wise sirs, will she bear a son or a daughter?' The sages realized the mischief and were not amused. 'Neither,' they replied, 'he will bear an iron mace that will destroy the Yadava clan.' To their horror, a few months later, Samba experienced excruciating pain and delivered an iron mace.

When the Yadava elders learnt what had happened, they advised the youths to pound the mace and throw the iron powder into the sea. Unfortunately, the powder deposited itself on the beach at Prabhasa and turned into sharp blades of grass. A fish swallowed one sharp scrap of iron that could not be pulverized. The fish was caught by a hunter named Jara who turned the fragment into an arrowhead. Sometime later, the Yadavas went to the beach at Prabhasa for picnic. They consumed alcohol and began discussing the war at Kurukshetra. Those who

sided with the Pandavas began arguing with those who had sided with the Kauravas. Soon the Yadavas were divided into two groups, each one determined to assert their point of view. When words failed, the argument became violent. The men pulled out the blades of grass and began striking each other with them. Unfortunately, these were not ordinary blades of grass. They were as sharp as razors and they struck people dead. Ever before the situation could be brought under control, the Yadava men were killing each other. Realizing the futility of trying to stop this civil war, Krishna went to the forest where he was accidentally struck dead by Jara's arrow.

Samba cross-dresses like his father, but the results are rather disastrous. Samba wants to make fun of the sages, test them, and ends up earning a curse for himself and his clan. Samba destroys all that Krishna spends his life protecting. Here, cross-dressing is seen in a negative light. It destroys rather than protects. Even though he is Krishna's son, Samba creates a lot of problems. According to the *Padma purana*, he pretends to be Krishna and tries to fool Krishna's junior wives. For this crime, he is cursed to suffer from skin disease on his face and to enable all to distinguish between the father and the son. Samba then prays to the sun-god and is cured of this skin condition. Samba is therefore associated with sun-temple across India. In the *Bhagavata Purana*, Samba tries unsuccessfully to abduct Duryodhana's daughter leading to war like situation between the Kauravas and the Yadavas. Peace is restored when Krishna's elder brother, Balarama, threatens to drag Hastinapur to the sea with his mighty plough. The stories of Samba are perhaps a warning: don't imagine the son of God will also be like God. Every living creature is unique, carrying his or her own burden of *Karma*.

All these characters have something peculiar relating to queerness that makes them stand out among other characters. These characters with their strong, deep and coloured gender identities make the epic more interesting and deeper. So, while the analysing the Indian myths especially the great Indian myths, one cannot neglect the wide arena or spectrum of queerness that these texts offers. It enables one to approach the idea of queerness in a broader, deeper and sensible way rather than being narrow minded and contempt. Indian myths celebrate queerness and embrace it as natural and not something that should be avoided or regarded as sinful. Among the queer characters, transgender Amba or Shikhandi holds a special place in the mind of the reader with her strong and unshakable determination and her vengeance for Bhisma that she preserved and ignited over different incarnations. The character of Shikhandi is not something that evokes pity but rather something that creates great

admiration and respect for that soul which desires to seek justice for all the humiliation that she suffered over the different births. All those sufferings made her to be the most chivalric warrior of the Great War.

CHAPTER III

Life of Transgenders in Modern India: *A Life in Trans Activism*

“Trans-people deserve something vital. They deserve your respect. And from that respect comes a more compassionate community, a more empathetic society and a better world for all of us.”

- Caitlyn Jenner

An autobiography is a self- written account of the life of one self. The word ‘autobiography’ was first used deprecatingly by William Tayler in 1797. Autobiography takes stocks of the auto biographer’s life from the moment of composition. While biographers generally rely on wide variety of documents and viewpoints, autobiography may be based entirely on the writer’s memory.

“Queer” marks each a continuity and a chance with the notion of sex rising from gay liberationist and lesbian feminist models, like Adrienne Rich's mandatory sex activity and Lesbian Existence. “Gay” vs. “queer” oil-fired debates (both at intervals and out of doors of academia) regarding LGBT identity. The independence of “queer” from “gay” came from the alignment of gay ideals with assimilationist and political orientation, whereas queer coincided with a radical approach. Assimilationists saw nothing wrong with society; queer political orientation aspires to realize nothing in relevancy the establishment as a result of social group acceptance isn't essential because society is unacceptable.

In A. Revathi's autobiographical work named *A Life in Trans Activism*, she explicates all the hardships and torments that a transperson undergoes in her whole life during the process of self-realisation and identity assertion. This autobiographical account leaves the reader questioning the 'safe' and 'comfortable' binaries of male/female that so many of us take for granted. This work is a saga of a fighter who survived a series of obstructions and struggles to achieve her rights to lead a life she desires. This can be viewed as a bildungsroman. This work was translated from Tamil to English by Nandini Murali. In the Introduction titled 'A Shared Sisterhood', Nandini explains her undefinable relationship with A. Revathi. About Revathi's life Nandini states that:

Revathi's life, both letter and spirit, is all about transcending barriers and boundaries; narrow either-or definitions such as male/female, man/ woman. Revathi is a trans-woman. As a child, when Revathi, then known as Doraiswamy, tried to live her 'growing sense of irrepressible femaleness, she was disowned by her family and excluded by society. But that is just one facet of this remarkable woman, who is also an author, poet, performer and independent activist for the rights of differently gendered people, sexual minorities and an ally of other marginalised communities such as Dalits and Adivasis. (23)

Revathi from her childhood, experiences the agony, torments, suffocation and entrapment for being born in a wrong body, not only physically but also mentally. Society including her family, relatives and friends forced, insulted and humiliated her to confine herself to her biological sex which she resisted with great deal of physical

and mental pain. In her own words, she says “Yet over time I realise that being a woman meant independence and assertion (24).

Nandini recollects the conversation they had in the serene ambience of *Ardhanareeshwara* temple and says in the Introduction:

The truth about me is Revathis’ coming-of-age memoir, chronicles her struggles and agony as she negotiates the painful transition from Doraiswamy to her trans-woman avatar as Revathi through surgery and hormone therapy. Joining Sangama, a Bengaluru-based organisation for the rights of sexual minorities and differently gendered people, Revathi tells me, was a turning point in her life. It led to her avatar as an activist and her passionate activism informs who she is and why she does what she does today (26).

A. Ravathi’s works depicts almost all three psychological traumas and mental conflicts that a queer person undergoes. Her attempts to tackle and define her sexual identity and struggles for acceptance by the society and isolation is common feature exhibited, by almost all the queer persons, especially transgenders. So this autobiography is an apt example to analyse the transgender issues in modern India. Thus we can associate some of the elements in comparison with Shikhandi such as isolation, struggle, survival and acceptance. So, there we can establish a commonness or universality. First book was *Unarvum Uruvamum* or *The Feelings and the Body*. In her Introduction of her autobiographical work ‘A life in Trans-Activism’, she gives an account of even the small issues that a third gender undergoes in society on a daily basis including using public toilets, reserved seats and rights even in a public transport. They were rather treated as forgotten or neglected category of people by the mainstream society. Trans-people inhibit or rather hide themselves away from the crowd and retreats to the darkest slums and alleys of cities just for being born in a wrong body which is not at all their fault. Revathi represents the transgender community of modern India who were subject to the contempt, humiliation and suppression of the patriarchal society. No matter how much they try to resist or voice out, the law and judiciary turned deaf to their cries. All these situations put them in a state of dilemma in terms of their identity. They began to question even the purpose of their existence.

Is there a God at all, one who created us with male bodies but gave us female feelings? Are my parents responsible for this? Am I simply impudent to put on this garb? Who am I? Which gender do I belong to? Is it right or wrong to be like this? In India, Ardhanareeswara, the half-male and half-female form of Siva is worshiped. Why then such a country abuse hijras. (10)

These questions are not only from Revati but also from the whole transgender community towards the mainstream society, government and judiciary. Each and every citizen of India should ask these questions themselves. Indians have the tradition of worshipping hijras as *ardhanareeswara* and the incarnation of Shikhandi. She further asks in her work that:

Are basic human rights only meant for males and females? Aren't hijras human enough to enjoy these rights? Aren't we citizens of this country? Don't we deserve to get voting rights, passports, driving license, ration cards and property rights? How justified it is to say that since I was born a male, I can get access to all this only if I remain a male? Don't I have the right to reassign my gender identity? Why do you refuse to understand me and my emotion? (10).

Her ideas are reflected in her plea for equality and human rights for transgender people have been the pivotal point of her transgender activism. She explains how transgenders are treated in Tamil Nadu where she was born. They were called as 'Aravani' or 'Thirunanga'. She never regrets for undergoing sex change and hormonal therapy even though the society refused to accept her female identity. She says that even today, her greatest challenge is to live as a woman with respect and dignity. She recollects the bitter memories of her childhood and how much she struggled and was humiliated for being different from other children. The forcible confining of gender identity had wounded her so badly that her childhood was almost filled up with these traumatic incidents. She recollects the memories of her family and society attempts to suppress her identity as:

My family thought that this was just a passing phase. However, to their horror, when they realised that it was not, they began to punish me severely to make me behave like a 'normal' boy. At school, teachers and students made fun of me. I was called 'ombudu', 'ali' and 'pottai', all derogatory terms used to describe transwoman and 'kothis. (11)

She continues that, like her, every other Hijra irrespective of caste goes through immense pain, sorrow, anguish, sexual violence and human rights violation. They are isolated and shunned by society. For the past seventeen years, she has been spearheading a campaign to address such issues through her role as researcher and independent activist for the rights of gender minorities in India. In her work, *The Truth about Me*, which has been translated to seven Indian languages, she gives an account of the circumstances which prevent them from emerging. She states that;

Today people ask us why the transgender community is involved in street-based sexual work and begging. They ask us why we cannot do other work. Who will give us work? Most of the transgender community have low levels of education as we are thrown out of our homes and forced to discontinue schooling. Then how can you tell us not to do sex work? What choice do we have?

(13)

Revathy says the reason for which people lack awareness regarding the problems and struggles of transgenders issue are mainly the stigma associated with this particular topic. Along with lack of resources mainly books and autobiographies of transgender writer. The first autobiography to be written by a transgender person in India is, 'living smile' Vidya's, *I Am Vidyawhich* was originally written in Tamil. Revathi's life was a turmoil of struggles to assert her identity as part of her existence. In her own words,

My life has been one long struggle to express and experience my identity as a woman. In my quest as a person born physiologically male, but who always desired to live as a woman, I experienced multiple oppressions from many sides. Family, society, education, law, culture and caste. Although it has been uphill all the way, I emerged triumphant as a trans woman. Today I speak fearlessly about the human right violations, stigma, discrimination and the rights of transwoman to live like any other person. (14)

She is advocating for the rights of not only of transwomen but also of other gender and sexual minorities such as transmen, queers, gays, lesbians, bisexual and intersexual individuals. Besides being an activist, she supports other marginalised communities such as Dalits and Adivasis. In this particular work, *A Life in Transculturalism*, she explores or rather captures the narratives of transmen (female to male trans individuals), a

highly invisibilized and marginalised gender minority. Apart from that, she gives incidents from her life as an activist and how she became an activist. She had to come across individuals who struggled hard in life, especially during her days in Sangama, which is a Bengaluru based organization for the rights of sexual and gender minorities. She was actually a mother figure for many of these transmen whom she had met.

She desires that the stories of these people should create awareness among parents, policy maker, professionals and the general public so that they will be sensitive to their needs and concerns. Basically, she is a humanist at her heart. In her own words: “I question the rigid categories such as male/female and feel that they are meaningless. Instead, I strongly believe that we need to go beyond male-female distinctions and learn to look at people as human beings” (16).

Another instance that proves Revathy’s feminine identity is her maternal affection and care for the other transgenders especially those transmen whom she adopts as her children. She loves them and nurtures them which shows her strong maternal instincts inherent in her like any other woman. She says in her work:

I cannot have biological children. But I have several children who are transmen. All of them calls me mummy. When they do so, I experience the joy of actually having given birth to daughters and sons. In my 17 years of activism, I have also journeyed with my sons, have experience theirs joys and sorrows. I have accepted them, the same way they have accepted me. Why can’t then society accept them as my sons and brothers. (17)

She regards that there is an inseparable past of her journey, toward a world without borders and boundaries. The main stream society always tries to stereotype the transgender community in a negative lime light. The rigid demanding for the conventional stereotyping becomes detrimental for the development and empowerment of transgender minorities. All their efforts and services are taken for granted by the main stream society and its institutions. Revathi had undergone many such incidents in her day to day life where the narrow mindedness of the society deprives her efforts even her dignity as person or a worker who got denied her deserved rights. She recollects one such incident from her life was when she was invited to Mumbai for the release of a short film based on her autobiography, *The Truth About Me* . The treatment that she received from the film maker

was nothing less than a servant. She felt as an outcast during her stay and above all, she got no credit or payment for the film. She says that;

In such a society, bound by numerous rules and regulations characteristic of a heteronormative, caste based society, a child who is changes from male to female or vice versa is never accepted. There is no better teacher that lived experience. One should also have empathy and put one self in the place of another person; see the world from that person's point of view. Unless that happens, we will only be looking at the world through a blinkered vision that sees the world either black or white. And in doing so, we miss the many shades of Grey which is what life is all about. (18)

Budhiswatya Shankar Das in his article, "Reimagining Gender; Reading Transgender Biographies from Psychosocial Perspectives" conducts a research on the basis of the two autobiographies, *The Truth About Me* by A. Revathy as well as, *A Gift Of Goddess Lakshmi* by Manobi Bandyopathay. He analyses almost all the levels of oppression that a transgender person undergoes in his or her life- the psychosocial issues, gender identity, abuse and violence, education, discrimination, families, migration, the guru-chela system, minority stress, transphobia, marriage and so on. Transgender and other non-hetero normative gender non-conformists still resist and contest the gender binary and their life stories are vivid explications of gender diversities

In another article named "Hijras and Toranzus; Comapartive Study of Transgenders In India and Japan" by Sonali Roy, she traces the evolution of the word *Hijra*. She traces the historical reference of transgenders and *Hijras*. Along with briefing their customers in both India and Japan. She narrates how *Hijras* are represented in Indian cinema. As one refers the biographies of transgender people, most of them faced similar dilemmas regarding their identity role. From the childhood onwards they exhibit an interest in appearing as the desired gender. She further substantiated by stating that:

Often when I got back from school, I'd play a little game. I'd put on my sister's long skirt and blouse, twist my hair into a towel and let it trail down my back like a bride. I would then pretend I was a shy bride, my eyes down cast, and my family would laugh. I knew deep down that I am indeed a girl. In fact, that is what I wanted to be. (4)

Transphobia is a term used to refer a fear, dislike, hate and suspicion towards transgenders and it may have substantial impact on the transgenders during adolescence and adulthood phases. It actually deteriorates the growth and formation of self-respect and identity of a transgender person as well as diminishes his or her self-confidence which further leads to enfeebled personality, traumatic incidents and above all, a depressed mental state. Their selfhood construction will be affected by constant formation of negative feelings such as; guilt, shame, familial and peer pressure and the need for secrecy.

The societal and familial pressure includes forcing and contemplating transgender child as sinned and vicious. So, instead of embracing their gender identity with confidence as natural, they tend to hate themselves and the people around them. For most of the transgenders, there is a mismatch between the anatomical sex and gender identity. This is termed as gender incongruence or transgenderism. This mismatch and the resulting feelings of confusion, loneliness, anxiety, guilt and shame collectively regarded as gender dysphoria. Sex change operation is very complicated and dangerous processes were a person biologically changes his or her sex. The chance of risk in this operation is very high if it is not done by a good surgeon under extreme care. Revathi recollects the memories of her sex transforming operation in her autobiographical work. She says that:

Deep inside my heart, I was afraid of the Thayamma operation. The pain after the effect of an anesthesia had worn of was unbearable. I wonder how I survived that agony. On the sixth day, the doctor removed my stitches. Peeing and shitting were terribly painful. We held our sarees high away from the area that had been operated on, and walked with our legs apart. If pee did not flow freely, we had to be careful not to force it out, for it would hurt unbearably and bleed. As for shitting, I had to take a deep breath to force it out as I felt my nerves would snap. Oh! The things I had to put up with in order to be a woman. (20)

Most of the transgenders ends up as sex workers which are not because of their will but because of their fate and misfortune. They have to face people who lacks humanity and ill treat them brutally. They were often silenced by threat and physical abuse. These make their life a living hell. They often had to bear with all these atrocities and to retreat themselves to the darkest allies and corners of cities. This might instigate and eventually cultivate criminal mind set in some of them which turns out to be a threat to the society.

CHAPTER IV

Transgenders in India: An Overview

This chapter includes the analysis of ten articles related to the issues faced by transgenders in modern India. The first article is titled as, “Transgenders with reference to sexuality, psychosocial, legal, economic and curricular aspects and policies” by Satish Chandra. Through this article, he conducted an interdisciplinary study regarding the various fields concerning transgenders along with his ideas and suggestions to re-engage and to include them in the mainstream society like other minority communities. He brings in the concept of chromosomal sex determination mechanism in humans in order to explain the sexual orientations. Many a times, the chromosomal traits do not align (all male or all female) within same person as intersex and many others like transgenders. Also, for the reason behind the sexuality traits, some people’s anatomy will fall “in between” or “outside” what most people considers to be standard for female or male. The term ‘sex’ is neither very simple nor very straight forward, it refers to a collection of sexually dimorphic traits that are variable both across traits and within each trait. All of us exist across several spectrums of sexual identity. Many transgenders live with ambiguous feelings with reference to his or her sexual category. Satish Chandra states in his article that “Sometimes such persons reflect behaviors which are not considered in the frame of society norms, this may happen due to additional chromosomes or ambiguous genitals may cause deviated behavior of any person or socially the particular behaviors or actions can vary in relation to social norms” (5).

One’s sexual orientation may be explained further as emotional, mental and physical attraction to others. This may be same sex orientation, male-female orientation or bisexual orientation. Gender identity refers to one’s perception of having a particular gender which may or may not align with his or her inherent sexuality. During the colonial rule in India from 18th century onwards *Hijras* or third genders were criminalised under The Criminal Tribes Act, 1871 (repealed in August 1949). But in independent India, transgenders failed to attract the focus of Indian governments. Though, preamble of Indian constitution is guiding force showing the path a better and inclusive Indian society. Preamble is the soul of Indian constitution which explains that constitution will secure social, economic and political justice, liberty of thoughts, expressions, beliefs, faith and worship, equality of status and opportunities and will promote among them fraternity assuring the dignity of all citizens. Constitutionally every citizen is equal before law and the expression ‘person’ under the Article 14 includes male, female and transgenders. Goals of equality and liberty described in Article 14, 15, 16 and 21 etc. They can be categorized for benefits of positive action for empowering this socially and educationally backward class that had been neglected

or marginalised weaker section. Long after on 1st April 2014 supreme court of India gave 'third gender' identity to *hijras* in a historic judgment established *hijras* as a new gender and they came in focus with reference to their rights, status of life, harassment and life challenges.

The psychosocial aspects of transgender individuals begin from childhood traumas to the lifelong stigma associated with them for being a transgender. The aspect of inclusive education is further explained in detail in the next article named *The Role of Teachers in Gender Inclusive classrooms* by Dr. Anil Kumar Panda and Neha Mishra. In this article, they explain the educational deprivation of transgenders in India. They state that:

No formal education for transgender population in Indian context. They are deprived from family and school environment. Transgenders discontinue their education and risk their future career opportunities. A close analysis of various reports and discussions with community and stakeholders suggest that transgenders are most uneducated or under educated, becomes reluctant to continue schooling. The average qualification is secondary (matric) or senior secondary level. The enrolment is significantly low and drop out and dropout rate at the primary and secondary level is still very high. They are hardly educated as they are not accepted by the society and therefore do not receive proper schooling. Even if they are enrolled in an educational institute, they face harassment and we bullied every day and are asked to leave school. (61)

The above statement explains the reason behind the lack of opportunities and productive outcome from the transgender community. The scholars suggesting some methods rather specific teaching strategies to promote gender inclusive classrooms on a fundamental level. The first step for teachers is to develop gender neutral language. All the learning materials has to be scrutinized in a way that supports gender neutral language. In the classroom an effort must be made to integrate students and not to separate them in the seating arrangements based on gender differences. As the children grow into pubescent age, teachers must make conscious effort to impart sex education to every student. It is always useful to treat human body clinically while teaching anatomy and biology, which helps to remove embarrassment and awkwardness for either sex by using relevant and humorous illustrations.

The children must be taught to be good partners and parents in future. The most influential role models are teachers and it is imperative for teachers to give examples of role models that are not gender stereotypes. The institutionalisation of patriarchy in various agencies of socialisation such as family, schools and media, religious, legal and political institutions allow individuals to become transmitters of gender biases. This institutionalisation is largely takes place in schools in a very subtle way. The teachers have the responsibility in confronting patriarchy by consciously helping children to identify the gender discriminations and to change this by creating a world inside the class room where all the genders are treated and perceived in equal status.

“Hijra and Torenzus: a comparative study of Transgenders In India and Japan” is an article by Sonali Roy and in this article she explores the evolution of the two terms *hijra* as well as transgenders. She traces out the historical references of transgenders. She brings in different mythical references related to *hijras*. When lord Ram had to live 14 long years of exile, a huge crowd of his subjects refused to go back and hence Ram, being concerned about the wellbeing of his subjects, told them not to mourn. He requested “all men and women return to their homes in Ayodhya. But the hijras waited for Ram’s return after exile. Deeply, touched by their devotion, lord Ram granted them a boon that hijras would be able to give blessings to people during auspicious and inaugural occasions such as child birth and marriage.

As part of the historical significance of queer people in India, she brings in the example of Malik Kafur, who conquered the entire Deccan for Delhi Sultan Alaudin Khilji. Apart from that, she explains how *hijras* were used to work as servants in women’s quarters and were kept as trusted life guards in female armies. Then she explains how British government during their ruling in India, tried to eradicate *hijras* whom they saw as a breach of public decency. The repealing of Anti *hijra* laws along with placing them under the Criminal Tribal Act 1871 stigmatised them for a long time. Even through, after the independence, they were de notified, the centuries old stigma continues. Then she explains the history of the Transgenders in Japan. They used the term *Futanari* to refer transgenders especially hermaphrodites. Japanese folk religion created diverse fantasies related to sexual characteristics. She quotes:

Although criticised, homosexuality was practiced for centuries among have assumed literal performance of gender. Cross dressing was wide spread in Kabuki which makes it difficult to

differentiate between men and women in prints. Adult male actors would take on female roles but would also appear as *wakashu*: *Wakashu* is a historic term. *Wakashu* would cross-dress as woman, who may owners of their works, who were primarily adult men. (48)

She further states that – “The Japanese government has missed an opportunity to introduce information about sexual and gender minorities to class rooms during once in a decade review of its national education curriculum. Instead the government said in March that including information about LGBT. Lives is difficult because the public and guardians have not accepted” (49).

Roy continues to explain it further on how transgenders are portrayed in Indian cinema. She remarks that *Hijras* have been portrayed on screen in Indian cinema since its inception, historically as a comic relief. She continues to explain it further on how transgenders are portrayed in Indian cinema. She remarks that *Hijras* have been portrayed on screen in Indian cinema from its inception, historically as a comic relief. She brings in examples of movies in which *Hijras* also took part. Such as *Amar Akbar Anthony* (1977). She says the first movie which took a sympathetic stance to transgender is Mani Ratnam’s, *Bombay* (1995). The 1997 Hindi film *Darmiyan*: In between directed & co-written by Kalpana Lajmi is based on the subject of *Hijra*, were in a fictitious story of an actress bearing a son that turns out to be neuter gender.

In 2000 Tamil film *Appu* directed by Vasanth, a remake of the Hindi film *Sadak*, the antagonist is a brothel-owning *Hijra* played by Prakash Raj. In the Malayalam movie *Ardhanari*, released on 23 November 2012, director Santhosh Sowparnika tries to depict the life of a transgender person. Manoj K Jayan, Thilakan, Sukumari as the leading roles. *Vaadamalli* is a novel by Tamil writer Samuthiran, is the first Tamil novel about the Aravani community in Tamilnadu. ‘Mainstreaming transgenders through inclusive open and distance learning’ by Dr. G. Anbalagan deals about the contemporary scenes of transgender persons of India with the statistical data of the exploitations faced by transgenders in India.

No formal education for transgenders is popular in Indian content. They are deprived from family and school environment. He then analyses Article 21 of Indian Constitution which states the fact that, education is a fundamental right to every Indian. To substantiate this idea, he further states that:

Despite, such laws in the constitution of Indian, the other sex continues to be ostracised.

Transgendered peoples faced discrimination and harassment at family, school and community forces them to other places. The nature of the harassment includes Verbal, physical and sexual abuse which has serious impact on the mental as well. (66)

Then he goes onto explaining about transgenders and higher education system in India. According to that, the higher education system in India promotes inclusiveness, innovation and integration of ICT in teaching and learning process due to the fact that the digital education becomes reality in the globalised world. Transgendered normally after entering into their teen age shows physical difference and speech variations which can be identified their families and societies through behavioral change of the individuals. In case of school education, the problems of discrimination on the transgender are very low compared to their entry into the higher school secondary and college level of education. Most of the families neglect their wards once they are identified as transgender during their teenage.

The transgenders due to the gender-based conflicts in the society, are willing to be associated with the transgender groups so as to earn for their livelihoods. The physiological amendment, mental depression on the identity and lack of education are the key forces among the transgender naturally opt to express their physical look as ladies instead of men because of the neglect of family anonymous and community, several transgenders are forced to measure with their teams and even solicitation are a lot of common which ends in human trafficking conjointly.

The transgender also faces such lacunae of financial issues for their educational attainment due to the lack of support from family and society. The welfare boards established for the transgender needs at state level has to think of promoting individuals' talents and higher educational goals of the transgender by taking rigorous steps. Establishing open colleges in the higher educational programs and nurturing training for the future needs in several industrial and corporate sectors.

“Educational Status of Transgender persons in India” by Monica Chahar and Jaita Mandal deals about gender equating in the class rooms, also suggests ways in which inclusive education can be implemented. Career counseling begins in schools, and teachers often do not realize that the confidence they in still in children shaper

future leader. Girls are often taught to excel along with boys but ultimately, they are told that they must become good wives and mothers, but boys are almost never told to be good husbands and fathers. All children must be told to be good husbands and father. All children must be told to be good partners and parents in the future. It is the responsibility of teacher to show how achieving success in one's career, important as taking care of the family for both boys and girls. The nomenclature "third gender" is a problem in itself. It treats sexuality as a ladder like structuring in which the lowest rung is occupied by the queer community.

In "The Role of Social Media to Support Transgender in higher education," Dr. C. Thanavathi opines many students face discrimination at home. If a teacher wants to reach out to a student's identification as genders non-binary, he or she should only do so in consultation with the student. Supporting parents may choose to help the students through the transitioning process at school by penning letter to other parents or school staff fielding question or helping with lesson plan topics surrounding with lesson plan topics surrounding transgender identities until colleges, due to the lack support at home and/ or at school.

In "The transgender child, Sexuality and transgender children's Literature: Classroom teaching and acceptance" Dr. Rizia Begum Laskar analyses the issue in both national and international scenario. In India, the problem is even more acute in many countries in the west. In a country where sex and sexuality are considered a taboo topic and is often shunned from discussions, sex education in schools has faced many challenges. Intricately connected to the issue of sex education is concept of gender identity or rather gender biases. It is therefore no wonder that a country which struggles with providing equal opportunity for the girl child, the transgender child is a non-entity in itself. She talks about the difference between a child and a transgender child. In this article, they say:

The child forms a potent agency through which the society be upended in its attitude, towards transgender people can bring about a major shift in society's understanding. Therefore, the child can be conceptualised and visualised as means of changes and the school is an important arena to bring about the change. It is believed that a child's malleable mind can be formed through literature. While the child is still in a formative stage, literature can be used as a tool to mould the mind and still the desired values. It has been universally acknowledged that literature plays a vital role in

introducing children to societal values and norms and in also preparing them for their roles in society (142)

While reading literature which explores the issues of queerness, there are two ways to approach it one is of the direct approach which includes literature which portrays queer characters or has queer themes. The other indirect approach is a more open ended one where any literature can be read and analyzed from the queer perspectives thrust will be on how such approaches can open up scopes for understanding and what role can the teacher play in such process.

Status and representations of transgender persons in Indian Society by Dr. Bimal Charan Swain and Dr. Raja Lakshmi Das talks about, the present status of transgender people in India constitutional rights of transgender people, international conventions transgender people supreme court judgment of transgender rights, problems forced by transgender people welfare process of transgender people in India, representations of transgender people in Indian society. John F Oliven, a psychiatrist of Columbia University coined the term 'transgender' in his work, 'Sexual Hygiene and Pathology 1965'. The term 'queer' best describes their sexual orientation. Eighteen percentage a foresaid "Pansexual", transgender day of remembrance ascertained on twentieth Nov in honor of Rita Hester. Transgender individuals can feel that they're additionally half and parcel of the social life and to not be treated as marginalized.

Significance of teacher training programs for a better world by Dr. Hayat Köksal discusses about teachers and gender diversity at class rooms, conflict with homosexuality, hate crimes, murdering of homosexual people as well as LGBT. Homosexuality is romantic or sexual attraction or behavior between members of the same sex or gender. Heterosexuality is romantic or sexual attraction or behavior between persons of opposite sex or gender in the gender binary. Bisexuality is romantic or sexual attraction or behavior towards male and females.

Role of teachers, family and media on gender inequality by Dr. J Maria Prema discusses about gender equality in school, college and at work. Causes for gender inequality in India are economic, occupational, political, educational, health and survival inequalities. Gender has many components both as a social institution and as an individual perception. Though the religious belief makes woman a goddess, we fail to recognise her as a human

being first. The society shows double standard attitude towards woman is concerned: our thought and preaching different than our actions.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

The previous chapters discussed the various aspects of transgender issues in India and this chapter includes a sum up of all the previous chapters along with some suggestions and solutions on how to solve this issue in various levels. The ideas of gender instigated in a person from his childhood onwards. So in order to make a change in the perception, first it should begin from the foundation which is an individual's childhood. The change must begin from within, the restructuring of gender framework as well as the notions of gender distinctions are some of the areas which should be focused. The societal institutions such as family and school play a major role in constructing one's gender identity and gender perceptions. In Satish Chandra's article he states that:

Inclusion of transgender children in the disadvantaged group comes on the heels of Delhi university's decision to acknowledge transgender students by introducing a third gender category in its application form. With this inclusion, transgender children will now be eligible for 25 percent reservation under the economically weaker section (EWS) and disadvantaged students for admission into city schools. The efforts are taking shape in educational context but these are not much enough and government should frame comprehensive policy for transgenders educational, social and economic re engagement as well as protection of their rights and providing adequate health care facilities. (21)

He further explains the need of providing awareness among transgenders regarding their rights and the responsibility of governments and NGO's in making them aware of their rights as well as including them in

education system and providing employment opportunities etc. He suggests there should be a frame work of the comprehensive policy for transgenders. Awareness should be provided to community people about transgender people as well as their family members; the immediate family should be encouraged to inhabit the transgender person with family, so that they could be nurtured like normal child. Community people as well as new generation children should be made aware about the sexuality, sexual orientation and different gender identities; and they must learn how to respect one's gender identity instead of hating, humiliating and isolating them for what they are or because of their different gender identity. Everybody is unique in different ways. He further explains in the same work:

Regulations, norms and standards (NCTE) 2014 included a new course on gender, school and society in two years B Ed curriculum and gender inclusive education in two years M Ed curriculum. But most of the universities did not include the content on transgenders/ *Hijras*. Future teachers must understand about transgenders/*Hijras* and can be trained to gender diverse class including transgender children. (23)

Higher authorities or agencies in teaching sector as well as in educational fields should review this course and reframe the content of the same course. Future teachers should be given exposure to this as well scholars should focus on comprehensive research plans and findings or recommendations will make a positive move in this area of concern.

The reason for using Kamala Subramanyam's version of Mahabharata for this study as well as a general introduction about Mahabharata is explained in the introduction. Along with a glimpse of the characters, theoretical introduction, introduction about the author and finally literature review is also given. Second chapter analyses the queer characters, mainly the transgender characters in Great in different versions of Mahabharata. Some prominent characters such as Shikhandi, Brihannala and Aravan are studied in detail. Third chapter analyses an autobiography called *A Life in Trans Activism* of a transgender named A. Revathi to get a clear idea about the contemporary situation of transgenders in modern India with the help of queer theory. Fourth chapter is the analysis of some scholarly articles about the different aspects of transgender issues in general as well as the solutions to face these issues. The conclusion comprises of the summation of all the chapters with a few general

ideas or suggestions and a few fundamental ways in which transgenders can be included in the mainstream society as normal human beings with dignity and respect.

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