

From Social Exclusion to Self-Assertion: Queer Identity and Performance in *I Am Vidya* and *The Gift of Goddess Lakshmi*

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ABSTRACT:

This research paper studies *I am vidya a transgender's journey* by Living Smile Vidya and *The Gift of Goddess Lakshmi: A Candid Biography of the First Transgender Principal* by Jhimli Mukherjee Pandey and Manobi Bandopadhyay. The themes of works is queer identity, social exclusion, gender performance, and self-assertion. The paper examines how transgender individuals suffer because of rigid social rules and traditional beliefs about gender in Indian society. Both autobiographies describe the emotional pain, rejection, discrimination, humiliation, and loneliness faced by transgender people in their everyday lives. The study also explores how the writers struggle to express their true identities while facing social pressure and marginalization. Using Queer Theory and Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity, the paper analyses how gender is socially constructed through behaviour, appearance, and repeated actions. The autobiographies not only present suffering and exclusion but also show courage, resistance, and self-confidence. Through autobiographical writing, both writers challenge social stereotypes and strongly assert their identities and dignity in society.

KEYWORDS: *Queer Identity, Gender Performativity, Social Exclusion, Self-Assertion, Transgender Autobiography, Marginalization, Resistance.*

Introduction

Indian society has traditionally been shaped by fixed ideas related to gender and sexuality. People are generally expected to follow social roles connected with masculinity and femininity. Society accepts only two genders, male and female, and expects individuals to behave according to these categories. People who do not fit within these social expectations often face rejection, discrimination, and exclusion. Among the most marginalized groups in society are transgender individuals because their identities challenge traditional ideas of gender. Transgender people frequently experience emotional suffering, social isolation, violence, humiliation, and denial of equal rights. They are often rejected by family members, educational institutions, workplaces, and society. Because of social stigma and prejudice, many transgender individuals struggle to live with dignity and acceptance. Transgender literature has become an important part of contemporary literary studies because it gives voice to people who were ignored and silenced for a long time. Transgender autobiographies especially play a significant role because they present real-life experiences of pain, struggle, discrimination, identity crisis, and resistance. These autobiographies not only describe personal suffering but also expose the rigid social structures that marginalize transgender

individuals. Through autobiographical writing, transgender writers challenge traditional social norms and demand recognition, equality, and dignity. Such narratives help readers understand the emotional and psychological realities of transgender lives. Two important autobiographical works in Indian transgender literature are *I am vidya a transgender's journey* by Living Smile Vidya and *The Gift of Goddess Lakshmi: A Candid Biography of the First Transgender Principal* by Jhimli Mukherjee Pandey and Manobi Bandopadhyay. Both autobiographies present the difficult journey of transgender individuals in Indian society. They describe the struggle for identity, self-expression, social acceptance, and dignity. The writers narrate their experiences of rejection, discrimination, emotional pain, and loneliness while also showing courage and determination to assert their identities.

I Am Vidya narrates the life of Living Smile Vidya, who struggles from childhood because her inner identity does not match the masculine role imposed upon her by society. From an early age, she feels different from other boys and faces criticism, ridicule, and violence because of her feminine behaviour. Her family and society fail to understand her identity, which creates emotional pain and psychological suffering. The autobiography describes her struggles for education, employment, shelter, and survival. Vidya experiences discrimination in almost every stage of life because society refuses to accept transgender identities. She also faces poverty, exploitation, and humiliation. However, despite these hardships, Vidya refuses to remain silent. She continues her struggle for self-respect and recognition. Through writing and activism, she challenges social stereotypes and openly asserts her identity as a transgender woman. *The Gift of Goddess Lakshmi* presents the life story of Manobi Bandopadhyay, who also experiences conflict between personal identity and social expectations. From childhood, Manobi struggles to express her feminine identity within a society that strictly follows gender norms. She experiences emotional isolation, rejection, and humiliation because people consider her identity abnormal. The autobiography describes her inner conflicts, loneliness, and social suffering. It also highlights the importance of education and intellectual growth in her life. Through education and professional success, Manobi gradually gains confidence and social recognition. Her autobiography presents the emotional and social struggles of transgender individuals while also emphasizing resilience, self-belief, and determination.

Both autobiographies show that gender is not only biological but also social and cultural. Society teaches individuals how to behave according to gender expectations. Men are expected to behave in masculine ways, while women are expected to follow feminine roles. Individuals who do not follow these expectations are often punished or excluded. This idea can be understood through Queer Theory and Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity. Butler argues that gender is not natural or fixed but is created through repeated social actions, language, dress, behaviour, and performance. According to this theory, masculinity and femininity are socially constructed identities rather than biological truths. This theory is useful for understanding transgender experiences because transgender individuals challenge traditional gender categories and social expectations. The concept of performance is very important in both autobiographies. The protagonists are forced to perform gender roles according to social expectations even when these roles do not match their inner identities. This creates emotional conflict, suffering, and psychological pressure. Both Vidya and Manobi experience difficulty in expressing their true selves because society forces them to follow traditional masculine roles. Their autobiographies reveal how gender becomes a performance controlled by society. However, the narratives also show resistance against these social pressures. Both writers gradually reject imposed identities and publicly assert their true selves. Their autobiographical writing becomes an act of courage and resistance against social oppression.

Another important theme in both autobiographies is social exclusion. Transgender individuals are often excluded from family relationships, educational institutions, workplaces, and public spaces. They are denied equal opportunities and treated as outsiders. Society frequently views transgender individuals with suspicion, ridicule, and hatred. This social exclusion creates emotional trauma and feelings of alienation. Both autobiographies describe experiences of loneliness, fear, shame, and humiliation. The writers present the harsh reality of living in a society that refuses to accept gender diversity. At the same time, both texts also present resistance and survival. The writers refuse to remain victims of oppression and instead fight for dignity, recognition, and equality. Self-assertion is another central theme in both autobiographies. Despite suffering and discrimination, both writers continue their struggle for identity and respect. Their journeys represent movement from silence to voice and from invisibility to visibility. Through education, writing, activism, and public identity, they challenge social stereotypes connected with transgender individuals. Their autobiographies become powerful tools of self-expression and empowerment. They inspire marginalized individuals to accept their identities and resist social oppression. These narratives also encourage society to question rigid gender norms and become more accepting of diversity.

The study of transgender autobiographies is important because such texts expand understanding of gender, identity, and social justice in literature. They expose inequalities present within society and question dominant social structures. Transgender autobiographies also contribute to queer literature in India by representing voices that remained absent from mainstream literary discussions for many years. These narratives create awareness about the emotional, psychological, and social struggles of transgender individuals. This research paper focuses on the themes of queer identity, social exclusion, gender performance, suffering, and self-assertion in *I Am Vidya* and *The Gift of Goddess Lakshmi*. Using Queer Theory and Judith Butler's idea of gender performativity, the study examines how transgender individuals struggle to express and construct their identities within a rigid social system. The research also analyses how autobiographical writing becomes a form of resistance and empowerment. Through comparative analysis, the study highlights the similarities and differences in the experiences of Living Smile Vidya and Manobi Bandopadhyay while exploring their journey from social exclusion to self-assertion.

Literature Review

A literature review on *I Am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey* examines how scholars and critics have interpreted the autobiography through themes of gender identity, marginalization, caste oppression, trauma, resistance, and self-representation. Written by Living Smile Vidya, the autobiography is considered one of the significant texts in Indian transgender life writing. The work narrates Vidya's journey from being assigned male at birth to recognizing and asserting her identity as a transgender woman in a deeply conservative and discriminatory society. Critics have approached the text from multiple perspectives such as queer theory, gender studies, Dalit studies, trauma studies, and autobiographical studies. *The Gift of Goddess Lakshmi* by Manobi Bandopadhyay is one of the most important transgender autobiographies in contemporary Indian literature. The text narrates the struggles, identity crisis, discrimination, and eventual success of India's first transgender college principal. Scholars and critics have examined the autobiography through the lenses of queer theory, trauma studies, gender performativity, subaltern studies, and identity politics. The autobiography is considered a powerful narrative of resistance against heteronormative social structures and patriarchal oppression.

Several researchers focus on the theme of suffering and social exclusion in the autobiography. Dinesh K. and N. Moses Sunderaj, in their article "Sufferings and Challenges

of a Transgender in Living Smile Vidya's: I am Vidya – A Transgender's Journey," argue that the autobiography exposes the emotional pain, humiliation, and violence faced by transgender individuals in Indian society. According to them, Vidya's life reflects the harsh realities of rejection by family, ridicule in educational institutions, economic insecurity, and social alienation. The scholars emphasize that the autobiography presents transgender identity not merely as a personal issue but as a social and political struggle for dignity and recognition.

Another important area of research is gender dysphoria and identity crisis. Misbah Arif Keng, Kum Kum Ray, and Siddhartha Singh analyze the text through the lens of gender dysphoria in their article "Gender Dysphoria: A Study of Living Smile Vidya's Autobiography I am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey." The researchers explain that Vidya experiences deep psychological conflict because her inner gender identity does not match the biological identity imposed upon her. They further note that the autobiography highlights how rigid social norms and binary gender structures intensify the suffering of transgender people. Their study also discusses the emotional effects of discrimination, exclusion, and societal prejudice on mental health and identity formation.

Scholars have also examined the autobiography as a narrative of resistance. Twinkle Dasari, in "Struggle for Existence and Marginalization of the Third Gender in I am Vidya," argues that the autobiography is a testimony of survival against social oppression. The study explains that Vidya's decision to openly embrace her transgender identity becomes an act of resistance against patriarchal and heteronormative social systems. Dasari observes that the autobiography challenges dominant assumptions regarding gender and questions the exclusionary practices of society. The work is therefore viewed as both a personal narrative and a political text demanding social justice and human rights for transgender communities.

Recent critics have expanded the discussion by connecting transgender identity with caste oppression. Ghanshyam Raidas, in "Embodied Inequalities: Caste Hierarchies in Transgender Autobiographies of Tripathi and Vidya," compares Vidya's autobiography with *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* by Laxmi Narayan Tripathi. The study argues that Vidya's experiences are shaped not only by gender discrimination but also by caste-based marginalization. Raidas points out that Vidya's Dalit identity intensifies her social exclusion within both mainstream society and transgender communities. The article highlights how caste operates as a hidden but powerful force within queer spaces, limiting access to visibility, leadership, and opportunities. This intersectional analysis makes Vidya's autobiography important within both queer and Dalit literary studies.

Some scholars discuss the autobiography in relation to social inclusion and the search for belonging. In "Longing for Belonging: Transgender Identity and Social Inclusion in Living Smile Vidya's Autobiography," R. Prathisha and S. Ayyappa Raja argue that the autobiography reflects a continuous struggle for acceptance in family and society. The researchers explain that Vidya's narrative demonstrates the emotional pain caused by rejection, while also emphasizing the human desire for dignity, love, and recognition. They further note that the autobiography criticizes social systems that deny transgender individuals equal rights and opportunities.

Comparative studies have also become important in recent scholarship. Juveriya Firoz and Anita Yadav compare *I Am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey* with *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* in their study of Indian transgender autobiographies. They argue that such autobiographical narratives reveal the complexities of gender transformation, identity formation, and social discrimination in India. Their study highlights how these narratives

function as counter-discourses that challenge silence and invisibility imposed upon transgender communities.

Researchers have explored the role of language, silence, and voice in transgender autobiographies. Nimisha P. Jayakumar and X. Disalva, in their study on Indian trans life writing, argue that autobiographies like Vidya's transform personal trauma into political testimony. According to them, language becomes a tool of resistance through which transgender individuals reclaim agency and identity. The scholars note that the autobiography gives voice to marginalized experiences that are often ignored in mainstream literature and society. Existing scholarship on *I Am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey* establishes the text as a major contribution to Indian queer and autobiographical literature. Researchers commonly interpret the autobiography as a narrative of pain, survival, identity, and resistance. The text is valued for its honest portrayal of transgender experiences and its critique of social discrimination based on gender and caste. At the same time, many scholars emphasize that the autobiography creates awareness about the need for equality, dignity, and inclusion for transgender individuals in Indian society. Through its personal and political dimensions, the work continues to inspire critical discussions in gender studies, Dalit studies, queer theory, and trauma studies.

Some researchers focus on the pain and social exclusion experienced by Manobi throughout her life. Sugapriya S. and Dr. M. Geetha, in their article "Agonies of Manobi in Manobi Bandyopadhyay's *A Gift of Goddesses Lakshmi*," discuss the emotional and psychological suffering faced by Manobi from childhood onward. The scholars argue that the autobiography reveals the harsh realities of social humiliation, gender discrimination, and rejection within family and society. According to them, Manobi's life becomes a representation of the larger struggles faced by transgender individuals in India. The study highlights how the autobiography portrays both pain and determination, showing the author's strength in overcoming oppression.

Recent studies explore trauma and survival in the autobiography. Jyoti Meena and Dr. Shweta Meena, in "Voicing Gender Fluidity: Trauma and Survival in Manobi Bandyopadhyay's *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi*," analyze the text from the perspectives of trauma theory and gender fluidity. They argue that the autobiography presents gender as a continuum rather than a fixed identity. The scholars discuss how Manobi experiences violence, rejection, and institutional discrimination, yet continues to survive and resist social oppression. Their research also emphasizes that survival itself becomes a political act for transgender individuals living within marginalizing social systems.

Scholars have also focused on social prejudice and institutional discrimination in the text. V. Priyadharshini and Reddi Sekhar Reddy Gudisa, in "Social Prejudice and Transgender Identity in Manobi Bandyopadhyay's *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi: A Critical Study*," explain how society often reduces transgender individuals to their gender identity rather than recognizing their talents and achievements. The researchers note that Manobi faces humiliation even within educational institutions despite her academic excellence. The autobiography therefore exposes the deep-rooted prejudice present in Indian social and professional spaces.

Recent researchers have explored queer perspectives and intersectionality in the autobiography. Sai Parvathy I. R. and Dr. Preeti Kumar, in "Reclaiming Identities: Queer Perspectives on Gender and Sexuality in *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi*," examine the autobiography through queer theory and discard studies. The scholars argue that transgender individuals are often treated as socially "discarded" bodies within mainstream society. The study highlights how Manobi resists this marginalization through self-expression, education,

and public visibility. According to the researchers, the autobiography becomes a space for reclaiming dignity, identity, and agency.

Another important contribution comes from studies that discuss bodily autonomy and sexuality. Anvesha Singh Rathore and K. Jayalakshmi, in "Reclaiming Transgender Bodily Autonomy and Sexuality," analyze the autobiography as a transfeminist narrative. The scholars explain that the text portrays the emotional trauma caused by transphobia, heteronormativity, and hegemonic masculinity. They argue that Manobi's autobiography is not merely a personal life story but also a political text that demands recognition and equal rights for transgender communities. Their study highlights how the autobiography gives voice to marginalized experiences that are usually ignored in mainstream literary discourse. The existing scholarship on *The Gift of Goddess Lakshmi* establishes the autobiography as a major contribution to Indian queer and transgender literature. Researchers commonly interpret the text as a narrative of suffering, identity formation, resilience, and social resistance. Through its personal and political dimensions, the work continues to inspire discussions in gender studies, queer theory, trauma studies, and subaltern literature.

Research Gap

Many researchers have studied transgender autobiographies mainly through the themes of trauma, discrimination, and marginalization. However, no comparative studies focus on both *I Am Vidya* and *The Gift of Goddess Lakshmi* from the perspective of queer identity and gender performance. Existing studies often discuss social suffering but do not deeply examine how transgender individuals perform and negotiate identity within rigid social structures. There is also limited research on how autobiographical writing becomes a form of self-assertion and resistance against social exclusion. This study attempts to fill this gap by comparatively analysing identity, gender performance, suffering, and self-assertion in the selected autobiographies through Queer Theory and gender performativity.

Research Questions

1. How do *I Am Vidya* and *The Gift of Goddess Lakshmi* represent queer identity in Indian society?
2. How do social exclusion and discrimination affect the emotional and psychological lives of the protagonists in the selected autobiographies?
3. How is Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity reflected in the experiences of Living Smile Vidya and Manobi Bandopadhyay?
4. How does autobiographical writing become a medium of resistance, empowerment, and self-expression in the selected texts?

Material and Methodology

This research is qualitative, analytical, and comparative in nature. The study mainly focuses on the close textual analysis of two selected autobiographies; *I am vidya a transgender's journey* by Living Smile Vidya and *The Gift of Goddess Lakshmi: A Candid Biography of the First Transgender Principal* by Jhimli Mukherjee Pandey and Manobi Bandopadhyay. These autobiographies have been selected because both texts present the lived experiences of transgender individuals and discuss important issues such as identity crisis, social exclusion, discrimination, emotional suffering, resistance, and self-assertion in Indian society. The study uses both primary and secondary sources for analysis. The primary sources are the selected autobiographies themselves, which provide detailed personal narratives related to queer identity and gender performance. Secondary sources include books, journal articles, research papers, online scholarly materials, and critical essays related to Queer Theory, transgender

studies, gender studies, autobiography, identity politics, and Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. These scholarly materials help in developing the theoretical and critical framework of the research.

The research applies Queer Theory as the main theoretical approach to understand how transgender identities challenge traditional social ideas related to gender and sexuality. Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity is used as an important framework to analyse how gender is socially constructed through repeated actions, behaviour, language, dress, and performance. The theory helps in examining how the protagonists negotiate their identities within a society dominated by rigid gender norms and expectations. The study adopts a comparative textual analysis method to examine similarities and differences between the two autobiographies. Through detailed textual analysis, the research explores themes such as queer identity, gender performance, social exclusion, emotional suffering, marginalization, resistance, and self-assertion. Special attention is given to the emotional and psychological struggles faced by the protagonists and the ways in which they resist social oppression and assert their identities. The research also investigates how autobiographical writing becomes a powerful medium of self-expression, empowerment, and resistance. Both autobiographies are studied not only as personal life stories but also as social and political narratives that challenge discrimination and demand recognition, dignity, and equality for transgender individuals. Through this methodology, the study attempts to understand how transgender autobiographies create awareness about marginalized identities and question dominant social structures in Indian society.

Discussion

Queer Identity and the Search for Self

Queer identity is one of the most important themes in *I Am Vidya* and *The Gift of Goddess Lakshmi*. Both autobiographies deeply explore the emotional, psychological, and social struggles faced by transgender individuals in Indian society. The writers describe how they begin to feel different from the gender identity imposed upon them from childhood. Their narratives show that gender identity is not limited to biological sex alone but is closely connected with emotions, inner feelings, self-awareness, and personal understanding of the self. From an early age, both writer experience confusion and emotional pain because society expects them to behave according to rigid masculine roles. However, their inner identities do not match these expectations. This conflict between personal identity and social norms creates continuous suffering and emotional isolation. Both autobiographies present the emotional and psychological struggles faced by transgender individuals in Indian society. The writers describe how they feel different from the gender identity imposed upon them since childhood. Their experiences reveal that gender identity is not fixed by biology alone but is connected with feelings, emotions, and personal understanding of the self.

In *I Am Vidya*, Living Smile Vidya explains her discomfort with the masculine role that society forces upon her. She feels more connected with femininity and feminine behaviour from childhood. However, society refuses to accept her identity. Vidya describes how people insult and humiliate her because of her feminine gestures and appearance. She states, "I was trapped in a male body" (Vidya 27). This statement shows her emotional suffering and identity conflict. The quotation reflects the pain of living with an identity that society refuses to recognize. Manobi Bandopadhyay in *The Gift of Goddess Lakshmi* describes her inner struggle with gender identity. She feels disconnected from the masculine identity expected by society. She explains how her behaviour and emotions did not match social expectations of masculinity. She writes, "I always wanted to live as a woman" (Bandopadhyay 41). This statement reflects her desire for self-expression and acceptance.

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity is important in understanding these autobiographies. Butler argues that gender is socially constructed through repeated behaviour and social performance. According to Butler, masculinity and femininity are not natural identities but social performances shaped by society. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler explains that gender identity is created through repeated acts and social expectations. This idea can be clearly seen in both autobiographies because the protagonists are forced to perform masculine roles even when their inner identities are feminine. The writers continuously struggle between personal identity and social expectations. Society expects them to behave according to traditional gender norms. Their inability to follow these norms results in rejection and discrimination. Susan Stryker argues that transgender identity challenges fixed ideas of gender and exposes the limitations of binary thinking. This idea is reflected in both autobiographies because the writers reject rigid social categories and assert their own identities.

Both texts also show that queer identity is closely connected with emotional suffering. The protagonists experience confusion, loneliness, fear, and shame because society considers their identities abnormal. Family members often fail to understand their emotions and identities. This rejection creates psychological trauma. However, both writers gradually gain confidence and begin to accept themselves. Their journeys reflect movement from silence and fear to confidence and self-recognition. The autobiographies also present identity as a process of resistance. The writers refuse to hide their identities despite social pressure. Through writing and self-expression, they challenge social stereotypes connected with transgender individuals. Their narratives become acts of courage and resistance against social oppression.

Social Exclusion and Emotional Suffering

Social exclusion is another major theme in both autobiographies. The narratives present a detailed picture of how society isolates and marginalizes people who do not conform to traditional gender expectations. Both writers experience rejection not only from strangers but also from family members, educational institutions, workplaces, and public spaces. This exclusion affects every aspect of their lives and creates deep emotional and psychological suffering. The autobiographies show that transgender individuals are often denied acceptance, respect, equal opportunities, and emotional support simply because their identities challenge social norms. Transgender individuals are often excluded from family, education, employment, and social life because society considers them different from accepted gender norms. Both Vidya and Manobi experience discrimination and rejection in almost every stage of life.

In *I Am Vidya*, the protagonist experiences rejection from family members because of her feminine behaviour. Instead of receiving love and understanding, she faces punishment and humiliation. She explains that people constantly mocked her voice, body language, and appearance. She writes, "People laughed at the way I walked" (Vidya 39). This quotation reflects the cruelty faced by transgender individuals in everyday life. Vidya's autobiography also presents the difficulties faced by transgender people in education and employment. She struggles to continue her studies because of social discrimination and financial problems. Even educated transgender individuals face unemployment and exploitation because society refuses to accept them. Vidya's experiences show that social exclusion affects not only emotional well-being but also economic survival. Manobi Bandopadhyay experiences loneliness and exclusion in school and society. People insult and reject her because of her feminine personality. She often feels isolated and emotionally disturbed. She writes, "I felt lonely among people" (Bandopadhyay 56). This statement reflects her emotional alienation and social isolation.

Michel Foucault's ideas about power and social control help explain the experiences described in these autobiographies. Foucault argues that society controls individuals through social norms and discipline. People who do not follow accepted social rules are marginalized and punished. In the case of transgender individuals, society punishes those who challenge traditional gender norms. The emotional suffering caused by exclusion is clearly visible in both narratives. The writers describe feelings of fear, shame, rejection, and loneliness. They struggle to build relationships because society refuses to accept their identities. Family rejection becomes one of the most painful experiences in their lives.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of the subaltern is also relevant here. Spivak explains that marginalized communities are often silenced and denied representation. Transgender individuals have historically remained invisible in mainstream literature and society. Through autobiographical writing, Vidya and Manobi give voice to experiences that were previously ignored. The autobiographies also show that social exclusion is connected with violence and humiliation. Transgender individuals often face verbal abuse, physical violence, and emotional exploitation. Society treats them as outsiders and denies them equal respect and opportunities. However, despite this suffering, both writers continue their struggle for dignity and recognition. Their narratives reveal that social exclusion creates deep emotional scars, but it also encourages resistance and self-awareness. The writers refuse to remain silent victims. They transform suffering into strength and continue their struggle for identity and acceptance.

Gender Performance and Judith Butler's Theory

The concept of gender performance is central to both autobiographies. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity explains that gender is not natural but socially constructed through repeated actions, gestures, clothing, language, and behaviour. According to Butler, society creates ideas about masculinity and femininity and forces individuals to follow these roles.

In both autobiographies, the protagonists experience pressure to perform masculinity even though their inner identities are feminine. Society expects them to behave according to traditional masculine norms. When they fail to perform these roles, they face rejection and punishment. In *I Am Vidya*, Vidya describes how people criticize her feminine gestures and expressions. She is repeatedly told to behave like a "proper man." She explains that her natural behaviour creates discomfort among family members and society. She writes, "I could not act like the boys around me" (Vidya 44). This quotation reflects her inability to perform socially accepted masculinity. Similarly, Manobi Bandopadhyay describes how she feels uncomfortable performing masculine behaviour. She struggles to hide her feminine identity because society expects her to behave like a man. She writes, "My body and mind were in conflict" (Bandopadhyay 62). This statement highlights the emotional pressure created by gender expectations.

Judith Halberstam argues that gender identity should not be limited to traditional binary categories. Her ideas are reflected in these autobiographies because both writers challenge rigid definitions of masculinity and femininity. The protagonists refuse to suppress their identities despite social pressure. The autobiographies also reveal how society monitors and controls gender performance. Family members, teachers, neighbours, and strangers constantly judge the protagonists based on their behaviour and appearance. Small actions such as walking, speaking, dressing, or expressing emotions become sources of criticism and humiliation. The idea of gender performance also appears in the writers' attempts to survive within society. At different moments, they are forced to hide their true identities and behave according to social expectations. This creates emotional exhaustion and psychological

conflict. The autobiographies show that performing an imposed identity can become deeply painful.

However, both writers gradually reject social expectations and begin to express their true identities openly. Their journeys from forced performance to self-expression represent acts of resistance against social norms. Butler's theory becomes important because it helps explain how gender is socially imposed and how transgender individuals challenge these social constructions. The autobiographies therefore question the idea that gender is fixed and natural. They present gender as fluid, performative, and connected with individual identity rather than biological categories. Through their narratives, Vidya and Manobi challenge traditional gender norms and demand recognition for diverse identities.

Resistance, Self-Assertion, and Empowerment

Despite facing discrimination and suffering, both autobiographies are ultimately narratives of resistance, courage, and empowerment. The writers refuse to remain silent victims of social oppression. Instead of accepting the identities forced upon them by society, they gradually begin to challenge social norms and openly express their true selves. Their journeys from fear and silence to confidence and visibility represent important acts of personal and social resistance. The autobiographies show that self-assertion is not an easy process because both Vidya and Manobi face continuous criticism, humiliation, rejection, and emotional conflict while trying to assert their identities. However, despite these difficulties, they continue their struggle for dignity, respect, and recognition. The writers refuse to remain silent victims of oppression. Instead, they continue their struggle for dignity, identity, and recognition.

In *I Am Vidya*, resistance appears through self-expression, activism, and writing. Vidya refuses to hide her identity even though society constantly humiliates her. She decides to live openly as a transgender woman despite the difficulties she faces. She writes, "I wanted to live with dignity" (Vidya 88). This statement reflects her determination to claim respect and acceptance.

Vidya's autobiography also shows how writing becomes a form of empowerment. By narrating her experiences, she challenges stereotypes connected with transgender individuals. She transforms personal pain into political resistance. Her narrative becomes a voice for marginalized communities. Similarly, Manobi Bandopadhyay presents education and professional success as forms of resistance. Despite discrimination and social rejection, she continues her academic journey and eventually becomes an important educational figure. Her achievements challenge social assumptions about transgender individuals. She writes, "Education gave me strength" (Bandopadhyay 95). This statement reflects the empowering role of education in her life.

Riki Wilchins argues that challenging gender norms becomes a form of political resistance. This idea is reflected in both autobiographies because the writers reject the identities imposed upon them by society. They openly assert their identities and demand social recognition. The theme of self-assertion is strongly connected with visibility. Both writers move from silence and invisibility to public self-expression. They no longer accept shame or fear. Instead, they proudly express their identities. Their autobiographies become acts of self-assertion and resistance against social oppression.

Nivedita Menon explains that gender is deeply connected with social and political structures. The autobiographies reveal how transgender individuals challenge these structures through personal resistance and public identity. By openly discussing their lives, Vidya and Manobi question the rigid gender system present in Indian society. The autobiographies also show that resistance is not always dramatic or revolutionary. Sometimes resistance appears through

survival, self-acceptance, education, writing, and daily acts of courage. The writers continue to live according to their identities despite social hostility. Both narratives therefore present empowerment as a gradual process. The protagonists move from confusion and suffering toward confidence and self-recognition. Their journeys inspire other marginalized individuals to accept themselves and resist oppression.

Autobiographical Writing as a Voice of the Marginalized

Autobiographical writing plays an important role in both *I Am Vidya* and *The Gift of Goddess Lakshmi*. These texts are not only personal stories but also social and political narratives that expose discrimination and social injustice. Through autobiographical writing, the authors reclaim their voices and identities. Transgender individuals have often remained invisible in mainstream literature. Their stories were ignored, misrepresented, or silenced. Through autobiography, Vidya and Manobi create space for marginalized voices and experiences. Their narratives challenge dominant ideas about gender and humanity.

In *I Am Vidya*, the author openly discusses experiences of rejection, violence, exploitation, and emotional suffering. By writing about these experiences, she breaks the silence surrounding transgender lives. She writes, "I wanted the world to know my pain" (Vidya 103). This quotation reflects the importance of storytelling as a form of expression and resistance. Similarly, Manobi Bandopadhyay uses autobiography to narrate her struggles with identity, loneliness, and discrimination. Her writing becomes a way to assert her existence and dignity. She writes, "Writing helped me understand myself" (Bandopadhyay 118). This statement reflects the therapeutic and empowering role of autobiographical writing.

Arvind Narrain argues that transgender narratives are important because they challenge social invisibility and demand equal rights. This idea is strongly reflected in both autobiographies. The writers not only share personal experiences but also speak for larger transgender communities. The autobiographies also question stereotypes associated with transgender individuals. Society often represents transgender people through negative images and prejudices. Vidya and Manobi challenge these stereotypes by presenting themselves as emotional, intelligent, sensitive, and resilient individuals. The texts further show that autobiographical writing can create social awareness. Readers begin to understand the emotional and psychological struggles faced by transgender individuals. The autobiographies encourage empathy and challenge prejudice.

The narratives also contribute to queer literature in India. They expand literary discussions about gender, identity, and marginalization. By presenting real-life experiences, the autobiographies challenge traditional literary representations and create new spaces for marginalized voices. Autobiographical writing therefore becomes a powerful form of resistance, empowerment, and self-assertion. Through storytelling, the writers reclaim dignity and visibility within a society that often denies their existence.

Conclusion

The study of *I Am Vidya* and *The Gift of Goddess Lakshmi* reveals the painful realities faced by transgender individuals in Indian society. Both autobiographies present experiences of social exclusion, emotional suffering, discrimination, humiliation, loneliness, and identity conflict. The writers describe how rigid social norms and traditional beliefs about gender create difficulties for individuals who do not fit within accepted gender categories. Their narratives expose the harsh realities of living in a society that refuses to accept gender diversity. The autobiographies clearly show that queer identity is not simply connected with biology but is deeply related to emotions, self-understanding, and social experience. Both Living Smile Vidya and Manobi Bandopadhyay struggle to express their true identities

because society forces them to perform traditional masculine roles. Their experiences reflect Judith Butler's idea of gender performativity, which explains that gender is socially constructed through repeated actions and behaviour. The autobiographies reveal how society constantly monitors and controls gender expression. The study also highlights the emotional and psychological effects of social exclusion. Family rejection, social humiliation, discrimination, and loneliness create deep emotional suffering in the lives of the protagonists. Both writers experience fear, shame, confusion, and isolation because their identities are not accepted by society. Their narratives demonstrate how social oppression affects mental and emotional well-being.

However, the autobiographies are not only stories of suffering. They are also narratives of courage, resistance, empowerment, and self-assertion. Both writers refuse to remain silent victims of social oppression. Through education, writing, activism, and self-expression, they challenge social stereotypes and assert their identities publicly. Their journeys represent movement from invisibility to visibility and from silence to voice. The concept of resistance is strongly visible throughout both autobiographies. Resistance appears through survival, self-acceptance, education, public identity, and autobiographical writing. The writers challenge rigid gender norms and demand dignity, equality, and recognition. Their narratives question traditional ideas about masculinity and femininity and encourage society to accept diverse identities.

Autobiographical writing becomes an important medium of empowerment in both texts. Through storytelling, Vidya and Manobi reclaim their voices and identities. They create awareness about the struggles faced by transgender communities and expose the inequalities present in society. Their autobiographies also contribute significantly to queer literature in India because they represent voices that were ignored for a long time. The study further shows that transgender autobiographies are not only personal narratives but also political and social documents. They challenge systems of discrimination and create space for marginalized communities within literature and society. The autobiographies encourage readers to develop empathy and understanding toward transgender individuals. *I Am Vidya* and *The Gift of Goddess Lakshmi* successfully portray the journey from social exclusion to self-assertion. Both autobiographies reveal the struggles of transgender individuals while also celebrating resilience, courage, and identity. Through Queer Theory and Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity, the study explains how gender is socially constructed and how transgender individuals challenge restrictive social norms. The autobiographies ultimately become powerful voices of resistance that demand dignity, equality, visibility, and human acceptance.

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