



## TRANSFORMING SOCIETY THROUGH LITERATURE MANOBI BANDOUPADYAY'S *A GIFT OF GODDESS LAKSHMI*: A BIG CHANGE IN TRANSGENDER STREAM

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### ABSTRACT

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) social movements are social movements that advocate for LGBT people in society. Social movements may focus on equal rights, such as the 2000s movement for marriage equality, or they may focus on liberation, as in the gay liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Earlier movements focused on self-help and self-acceptance, such as the homophile movement of the 1950s. Although there is not a primary or an over-arching central organization that represents all LGBT people and their interests, numerous LGBT rights organizations are active worldwide. The earliest organizations to support LGBT rights were formed in the 19th century.

A commonly stated goal among these movements is social equality for LGBT people, but there is still denial of full LGBT rights. Some have also focused on building LGBT communities or worked towards liberation for the broader society from Bi-phobia, Homophobia, and Trans phobia. There is a struggle for LGBT rights today. LGBT movements organized today are made up of a wide range of political activism and cultural activity, including lobbying, street marches, social groups, media, art, and research.

Manobi Bandyopadhyay became India's first third-gender PRINCIPAL at Krishnagar Women's college in Nadia district in West Bengal on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2015. Selected for the post purely on merit, her message to her community is: **'Education: if we learn, all our problems will be solved.'**

She holds a PhD in Bengali Literature and was previously an associate professor of Bengali at the Vivekanand Satavarsiki Mahavidyalaya in Jhargram. In 1995, she started the first Bengali transgender magazine, ABOMANOB (subhuman). Through her work *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi* this paper would present how literature can bring spectacular changes in the society.

People in the sleepy government college she had worked in for eight years prior to her sex-change were worried about which washroom she should be allowed to use. People who before threw words like 'woman', 'girl' at her as if they were insults suddenly seemed to be convinced that she was a man. And that she should behave and dress likewise.

But acceptance came from the unlikeliest quarters. Call it disinterest or broad mindedness; her students seemed more comfortable in her saree-and-salwar-kameez avatar. Perhaps, too, the Kohl looked better on her, she says.

Bandopadhyay also discovered **the paradoxes of social conditioning after her sex**

change. All her life, she used to relate to the world like David Copperfield used to with Edward Murdstone (his cruel stepfather). In my imagination, very few people could break out of the prototype, and struggle seemed to come only her way, she says.

The purpose of this paper is to bring forefront the socio conditioning of the people around us i.e. society, also highlight the prototype society. Through Hijra community and her work I would like to draw our attention towards their life, their struggle and our prototype vision towards them and I took this work *A gift of Goddess Lakshmi* just to show how reading and understanding literature can bring stunning modifications in the society which is now mandatory. This is a voice

To all those people who humiliated me and called me

Subhuman, pushing me to the brink of my life.

It is because of them that I discovered my strength and fought my way back to life.

I hope my book inspire those

Who are like me and helps them win.

People around the world face violence and inequality—and sometimes torture, even execution—because of who they love, how they look, or who they are. Sexual orientation and gender identity are integral aspects of our selves and should never lead to discrimination or abuse. We document and expose abuses based on sexual orientation and gender identity worldwide, including torture, killing and executions, arrests under unjust laws, unequal treatment, censorship, medical abuses, discrimination in health and jobs and housing, domestic violence, abuses against children, and denial of family rights and recognition.

Manabi Bandyopadhyay is the professor and first transgender person in India who has completed Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). Bandyopadhyay was associate professor in Bengali at Vivekananda Satobarshiki Mahavidyalaya and took charge as principal of Krishnagar Women's College on 7 June 2015. She is India's first openly transgender college principal, and began work as such in 2015 at the

Krishnagar Women's College in Nadia district. Manabi is a devotee of Sarada Devi and she was initiated in spiritual life by Swami Atmasthananda. "There was a time when I used to ask myself, what is wrong with me? Why is it that every bone in my body cries out to be a woman?" she asks. Decades later, Bandopadhyay gathered the courage to construct a body that her spirit agreed with." (A Gift of Goddess Laxmi)

#### GIFT OF GODDESS LAXMI

Manobi Bandhopadhyay's life history as recounted to Jhimli Mukherjee Pandey charts her transformation from a man to a woman and of her path breaking appointment to a college as its principal. Along the way Manobi describes the very conservative family she was born into and how very difficult it was to survive. In fact many people in her family and the village recognised her for being gender fluid and would taunt her as well as sexually abuse her. It was horrific. *The Mint's* assessment of the biography in its own way documenting the queer Indian history particularly from the mid-1990s is a fair one. Sometimes it is biographies such as this that give insights into the rapid socio-historical transformations taking place in society but being still too near in recent past to accord any objectivity.

Thomas Page McBee's *Man Alive* is equally disturbing. He writes mostly in first person not only about the transformation **from being a woman to a man but also the regular sexual abuse he suffered in childhood from his mother's husband**. As an adult he experiences happiness in love and ultimately marriage too but it's deeply painful as it seems to be getting to the core of the writer. It's almost as if this process of writing these chapters were part of some cathartic process. For some years he has a column in the Rumpus called Self-Made Man.

Born on September 23, 1964 as Somnath Bandyopadhyay, Manobi's childhood was loaded with premonitions of her lifelong struggle with identity. Well-wishers referring to the family's increasing prosperity and commenting, at her birth, that "This is a boy Lakshmi!" were an early instance. From being raped by her cousin in class V to being physically assaulted by boys at school, her adolescence was anything but easy.

After she moved from her hometown Naihati's Rishi Bankim Chandra College to Jadavpur University to study Bengali literature, Manobi's worldview expanded under the instruction of Shankha Ghosh and Pabitra Sarkar and in the company of her equally intellectually stimulating fellow students. Theatre, dance and writing provided a creative outlet to her constant state of physical and mental unrest. The book is a raw account of her personal relationships and her family's longstanding denial of her Tran's identity. The many trials of her romantic engagements and her consistent longing for a deeper connection make the reader marvel at her hopeful character.

During her Jadavpur days, Manobi became closely acquainted with another transgender Jagadish (Juhi), a public performer. Despite their intimate friendship, the contrast in their lives and understanding highlighted the difference that education and socialisation make in an individual's life. Jagadish succumbed to AIDS due to a reckless sexual lifestyle.

After her first stint at lecturing at Jhargram and her subsequent enrolment in a PhD programme, she started Abomanob (meaning subhuman) – India's first transgender magazine – which served as a gateway of dialogue between the community and the rest of society. The magazine touched on topics like health, hygiene, living conditions, language, sex, interviews, castration, conventions, stigma and of course, the way forward. This created a space for transgendered people in the public sphere. "Till then, hijras belonged to a community that clapped and begged at traffic signals or extorted money when new-borns were brought from the hospital. The fact that there could be a whole magazine dedicated to their cause so they could fight for their rights were unthinkable."

From an early age, Manobi was clear that she wanted a sex-change operation and that she did not want to be bracketed as homosexual. Her wishes began to take shape in 1999 when she began hormone treatment. She went under the scalpel in 2003. The years in between were just as tumultuous as any other.



Manobi Bandyopadhyay is India's first transgender principal. (HT Photo)

Her appointment in 2015 as the principal of the Krishnagar Women's College helped vindicate her stand against all those who thought she didn't deserve social standing. Her ability to extend a compassionate understanding to even those who are inconsiderate is profoundly touching. No amount of sneers, giggles, taunts or lack of empathy discouraged her from making her place in the world. It seems like she never grew tired of making the first move and offering warmth and respect to people, of being civil to the most uncouth, of having to prove her as capable.

India's first transgender principal, Manobi's tale asserts that merit is the only equalising factor in an unequal fight. Now well known for her achievements, she often wonders at how education has created a marked difference between the trajectory of her own life and that of other transgender.

Conversations about gender fluidity even today continue to be challenging to have; this despite so many conversations, publicity campaigns, changes to laws worldwide etc. So personal journeys like these memoirs are a crucial contribution to the public discourse. There are commonalities in the two Trans genders experiences of sexual abuse, violence and opting to make the decision to undergo a physical transformation from the gender assigned at birth to the one of their choice. These are not easy.

Apart from the obvious physical transformation there are many psychological and emotional consequences that too need to be

addressed for the individual and their immediate family. But the stark differences lie in the narrative style of the two memoirs. Manobi Bandhopadhyay's *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi* though a remarkable biography for its subject matter including the legal cases she is battling is worth reading about but it is cautious in tone. Whereas Thomas Page McBee's *Man Alive* is far more absorbing though at times terrifying to read for its direct approach; at times it is impossible to read and the book has to be put down before resuming it once more.

According to filmmaker Paromita Vohra and founder of the Agents of Ishq 17 **May is International Day against Homophobia Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT)**. To commemorate it she published an article worth reading about Trans genders dating where five people talked about love and dating.

Despite all the violence directed towards them and denial by conservatives that trans genders exist in society the fact these memoirs have been published is a step in the positive direction — it is opening room for conversations and hopefully, change.

She was born on 23 Sept. 1964 at her maternal grandparents' magnificent house in Hooghly' Chandernagore. My father, Chittaranjan Bandyopadhyay, was a proud man that day. Finally, two daughters he was able to sire a boy! Her father was so excited that he even did not let her wife stay at her parents' house; and when she was twenty-one-day-old baby, he brought us back to his Naihati home. Naihati is an old town on the outskirts of Kolkata, in the North 24 parganas district.

The baby would have been better cared for in the Chakraborty household of Chander nagore because they were more educated and cultured than his lot did not matter to him in that fit of euphoria. He had a trophy to show off to his family that had ridiculed him all **this while for not being able to father a son. He thought I was Shiva's gift to him, and named me Somnath.**

Her mother was not willing to move just as yet. She knew that she would have to leave the

comforts of her parents' home for a household that was culturally far less evolved. There was no household help in Naihati, and she would have to slog it out alone with her older children and now a new born.

Bholanath Chakraborty, my maternal grandfather, was an educated man and quite a personality in those days. My maternal grandmother too was quite accomplished, though she did not have formal schooling. She could read and write and even helped her children with the alphabet and simple sentences.

'But my maternal grandparents entreated my father to leave me and my mother in their care till I was three months old.' That was the tradition.

"So the inevitable happened. The boy he was so keen to show off to his people at Naihati, soon contracted pneumonia. Doctors said that there was no hope."

It could have been pure coincidence that I, a boy, was being referred to as Lakshmi, but it was quite a meaningful one.

My father would have to hear similarly unkind things from his people. 'Since your wife does not live with you, why don't you become a ghar jamai?'

"My sisters were years older and their frocks would almost be like gowns for me, but I would still wear them and stands for hours in front of the mirror admiring my looks. First, I would do this in the privacy of my room. Then gradually, I started wearing their frocks and roaming about in the whole house. I was six or seven years old then. My aunts and other cousins initially thought that this was just childish and laughed me off but gradually, when I started putting Kohl and lipstick from my mother' make up kit. My mother and sisters realized that this was definitely an aberration; something was not okay here."

She joined a school and it was winters so her mother tied a scarf on her neck and when she entered the classroom everybody made fun of her because she was slim, delicate and had curly hair.

"The boys kept saying that though I wore pants, I must be a girl because I had a veil on my head."

My mother was her greatest confidence and she was trying to make her understand that this behaviour of hers is bringing shame to the family.

'But Ma, I am a woman.... Don't you believe that?

Even my father was not spared. The whole locality started shunning us for my wayward behaviour.

"How can you let your son turn into a Hijra right in front of your eyes?"

"Somehow, I did not let my awakening sexuality affect my intellect; I would work hard to stay at the top of my class. I realized that this was the only way by which I could win this unequal fight."

"Dancing as a regular hobby, though, came to me much later. Before that I had my first affair. He was a classmate, and his cousin was my best friend. Actually both of them were wooing me at the same time and I enjoyed teasing them both. I loved to see how jealous they were of each other over me.

But it was not before my lover left the school after class X that I realized that I was actually in love with my best friend instead of him. Though both the relationships did not work out, I am still in touch with my best lover. He is still a good friend. But it would be unfair if I did not spill the beans."

'Despite the fact that I had no breasts or vagina, Shyam never made me feel incomplete. It was a heady feeling that aroused me and made me feel sensual.'

She was deeply in love with Shyam she says "my love for shyam has reached a higher plane, yes our bodies met, but that was not the goal. It was just a manifestation of the deep love that we felt for each other. I was not looking for physical gratifications at all, but for a relationship that would lead to a future, a family. Like any other girl who is about to step into her youth, **I would dream of a happy family with a loving and protective husband.**"

Her father overlooked her love for lipstick, kohl, skirts and other female traits that were quite pronounced at that time. He believed that she is just bit wayward and needed strict parenting, which he did not have time for; so he happily shifted blame to her mother for her erratic behaviour.

Deb was another lad who came into her life and she has feelings for him also. Deb and shweta were two different people with different perspectives of life despite their physical similarities. Deb just felt intense erotic desire for her and would try to initiate the 'act' every time they were together. She will not be a hypocrite and she did not get pleasure from sex but that was the only thing that she wanted from her lover. She wanted romance, security, the promise of a family in future and, above all, love; all of which were missing in her relationship with Deb. 'he did not realize that I was forced to offer my anus because I did not have Vagina.'

**She realized there is no point telling Deb that she is a female trapped in male body and she yearns for breasts and Vagina. She yearns to be a woman physically. He could never understand this.**

She knows Deb's love is not love and that is just a sexual experiment with her and but she had no choice but to hold on to a relationship. Because she felt close to shweta, close to an illusion of love.

*As she got into for higher secondary exams, it was norm in her family to choose science and she was interested in science. But her father was not agreeing with her this decision.*

"College usually comes as a relief in the lives of most students. They find freedom after fourteen years of regimented school life. But this did not happen to me."

Some of her fellow students thought that she was a cross-dresser or a transvestite and asked her if she was one.

"I vehemently denied and said it was a woman trapped inside a man' body, not knowing the term 'transgender'. I still believe that there is nothing as a 'transvestite'. People who seriously

cross-dress probably have the urge to change their sex; hence they are all transgendered people”.

She got close to Abhi; one of her friend in the physics dept.

“Throughout college, I was sought by many boys who would take me to secluded spots along the Ganges just for sex and fun. I did let my hair down and have fun with them but, as I have said before, I was getting tired of such escapades and yearned for something permanent, something that would uplift my soul”.

“I also realized that I would have to overcome my shyness and not make myself available for exploitation any more. People looked at me like a riped fruit, ready to be plucked. I was at risk equally at home and outside in this context”.

**“The term ‘transgender was unknown to most that time, my status had changed to ‘samakami’ or ‘homosexual’. I had an objection to this. I was definitely not a homosexual, I was a woman trapped inside a man’ body looking for a suitable partner like any other woman of my age. I have so many questions in my mind for this world. Why are be put into brackets as transgendered people?”**

“I have always had very strong instinct about who I am and what I am. However a large part of how we feel about ourselves is also linked to what people say or feel about us.” (Chapter 4, p 51)

She was in a state of shock and disbelief and, just as she had done in shyam’ case, she kept looking for Biman everywhere and made wild attempts to win him back. She doesn’t get over relationship easily. One day she spotted him talking to a girl from the locality. The girl was stunned as she got hold of his collar. She screamed at him in mad rage. In an attempt to calm her down, lest things went out of control, Biman pulled her away and took her to a secluded spot from where he fled, leaving her alone. She realized she has loved a weak person and he was not worthy of her attention. But this is easier said than done.

She was enveloped in depression and life seemed to her as ended all over again. But she could

see new beginning have always held her hand when endings seemed permanent.

“Around the same time, as a bright light of hope, I received a letter from the West Bengal College service Commission offering me a lecturer’s position at the Vivekananda Satavarshiki Mahavidyalaya in Jhargram”.(Chapter.5, p 70)

*“In order to earn for her family, Jagadish danced on the streets- raunchy, sexually explicit moves that attracted attention. Naturally the pimps’ could not miss her!”*

She also felt into trap. They told her that as a launda or hijra she would earn well if she relocated to Bihar result of it she shifted to Bihar where she became famous at weddings and during chat and other festivals. It was her fluency in Hindi and Bhojpuri that made her popular even among non-Bengalis in our area. She had to undergo at the hands of her clients there because she enjoyed experimenting with positions and the number of partners that she could handle at a time.

She was teaching in a school where Jagadish and she become close friends. They deeply admired each other. She was impressed by her educational background and she was by her spirited ness and immense talent. She felt herself far more fortunate than transgendered people like Jagadish. She says “if my family had not supported me despite my’ oddity’ and forced me to excel in studies, god knows where I would have ended.”

Despite our closeness jagadish developed negative feelings towards her. She felt this was because of the different lives they led. She could not term to the terms with the fact that she had a world of her own where she interacted freely with the people of both the sexes. Physical pleasure and sexual desires demarcated her existential boundaries and she made fun of the fact that she was not solely driven by sex.

She had attained financial independence by this time and was quite happy. Naturally she was looking for steady relationship and a home of her own. She says Jagadish said to her that she is novice in transgender parlance, and that all she could become was a Chhibri, a professional Hijra. But she

was dreaming of a man so that she could become his wife.

**“She could stand and urinate like a man which is big taboo for a transgender”.**

There were households that accepted transgendered people within their fold during festivities and they would deck up much like the womenfolk to participate in the celebration. Such was very surprising for her. Such acceptance was unthinkable for conservative society where Hijras are considered beggars, sex workers and irritants, who come home to dance and extort money when babies are born.

“I don’t support everything that transgendered people do to earn their living, but I also do not support the hypocrisy of our so-called Bhadra society”.

Much later in 2001, when she was teaching in Vivekananda Satavarshiki College, an international meet was arranged for sex workers of transgendered people by then she already started magazine *ABOMANOB, 'subhuman'* which focused on third gender activism and rights. She found the international meet quite a novel concept.

The beautiful part was that people appreciated her stance and called it a unique approach to freedom of expression that transgender people and sex workers sought! The year was 1995 and she has break up with Biman and she has a ray of hope. She started working in the **Vivekananda Satavarshiki College in Jhargram on 8 Marche- the world international women’ day**. She was very scared to go to college so her father accompany her

A woman psychologist whom she visited on and off for her identity and emotional issues, knew about her break up and warned her to stay away from relationships in Jhargram. People, teachers all stood around gaping at me as she made her way with her father to the principal’s office to formally sign in. **“A few people, ignoring the decorum expected within the college, started catcalling. ‘Arrey dekho, dekho ! beta na beti. E ke go bote?( LOOK, LOOK! WHOS IS THIS, A MAN OR A WOMAN?)**

“I saw teachers and students peeping from all corners and heard their gleeful laughter. Suddenly I wanted to turn back and run away.”

“Finally my father had no choice but to leave me to my fate. Unnerved, I found myself walking into the room of the principal, Ajoy De.”

“No one as lowly as a Hijra should be allowed to teach in a college, share the same staffroom, toilet and facilities”.

Initially they thought if they made her feel miserable, she would leave of her own volition. But when they realized that she won’t give in so easily, they got together to assault her every now and then. Chandresh and Surya treated her so bad- constantly threatening her to rape- was nothing sort of a hate crime. One day they caught hold of her and started hitting her in the chest with a paperweight till she was so badly bruised that she felt unconscious from the pain.

**“In their society, Men were born to bear the brunt of men’ fancies. And why only blame rural society? I think even our so called urban intellectual spaces are no different. It is fashionable to say that men and women are equal, but how many actually believe and practise it?”**

Her aunt, a cousin of her mother’s, lived in Kharagpur and she decided to live with her family as a temporary arrangement. She started staying out late with my friends and used to come home late. This irritates my aunt because her neighbours started taunting her for giving shelter to a Hijra.

The matter went up to the west Bengal College University teachers’ Association, but God was with her. The false charges pressed against her did not hold. She was very depressed that she left the campus and returned to Naihati.

“I was debating whether to give up career and quite my job because I did not have the mental strength to go on any further. Two things kept me from sending in my resignation.”

“First was the helpless look on my parents’ face that still lived in the hope that their child, despite her transgender existence, would continue earning to sustain them. The principal asked me to

return to work immediately. I had written to say that I felt threatened but he insisted that such fear was only a figment of my imagination. So with much trepidation I went back to college not knowing what the future held for me.”

‘Sometimes I doubted myself and my decisions’. Am I really a woman trapped in a male body or are these just delirious thoughts? Why is it that the whole world thinks of me as a man who is nothing more than a sissy?”

She was standing naked in front of the mirrors trying to inspect the image that stared back at her. “I hated him and I could not relate one bit to this body that was absolutely linear with no curves in sight.”

“My soul and sexuality did not match the image I saw in the mirror. I would look at that otherwise perfect reflection and weep for hours. I felt like tearing away and escaping from the man’ body in which I was born. I knew if I dressed and behaved more masculine in public I would be spared the insults and jeers that had now become a part of every waking minute of my life.”

Sometime she decided to put on manly act and started smoking. In Jadavpur University smoking was quite genderless act and women puffed away just as nonchalantly as men. But she decided she will come out of this shell at any cost and it was her resolution, so she fixed to face the challenge face on. She knew that her life ahead would be far more difficult than what she had already faced. So if she had to face difficulty in order to prove her transsexual identity, so she will do it. She says

“I will do whatever it took to prove the world that I was a woman. Once I was able to come to an understanding with myself, I became a calmer person.”

She decided to register for her PhD because M.phil was no sufficient if she wanted to do something in academia. As a guide her choice was Nabaneeta Dev Sen also professor at JU and is the ex-wife of Nobel laureate Amartya Sen. She is extremely sympathetic towards transgendered people, their issues and realities, unlike most other authors of her time.

“She suggested me that I would be better suited for a thesis on transgender issues and trends. A new vista opened up before me”.

“Yes indeed I could work on transgendered people! After all, who knew the subject better than me?”

Their lives were shrouded in much mystery and darkness and only an insider could reveal facts and dispel myths. So she agreed with her. There was a transgender commune at Ranaghat, not far from Naihati, run by a very powerful leader of the community who calls herself Shyamoli. She had been aware of the commune existence for a long time, just as they knew about her; how I was growing up to be quite different from them. She decides to work on that commune also which can be part of her thesis as well as Magazine. She was amazed to see how Shyamoli Di works and she started taking a central character wrote a novel. She gave her name ANTAHEEN ANTAREEN PROSITOBHORTIKA- *The Elusive Horizon*. The series were later published as book by Papyrus and was soon sold out. There was demand of it.

Times are changing and so people’s sentiments. The April 2014 judgement of the Supreme Court, recognizing transgendered people as a third gender and safeguarding their equal rights under the Constitution, was to use an understatement, a landmark decision. Now she sees a definite change. Every so often a transgender film is released in mainstream cinema and people, especially the youth, are accepting of the trend.

A lot more Trans came out of their cocoons and flaunting their sexuality. She felt proud and happy looking at them. Many told her that she had opened the gates to freedom. She had decided for sex change operation. “They say if you want something desperately, the universe conspires to make it happen”. Finally hormone treatment started in 1999 and she went under scalpel in 2003.

Over next three years she underwent the hormone treatment, she saw changes in her body gradually. First things that delighted how beautiful she is. She stares at herself in the mirror and marvel

at how her outer manly roughness was melting away, giving way to shiny smoothness.

“My body hair started to thin, my facial hair being the first to go. Though my bone structure was more or less same. Slowly my curves appeared-around my waist, near my tummy and on my chest.” I now possessed delicate features that bordered on the feminine”.

It was rainy evening, the kind that makes her feel sad, and the kind that makes her thirst for a companion. It was a long summer vacation was over and the monsoon had just arrived. She walked unthinkingly to the veranda on the opposite side. She was dumbstruck when she saw a young handsome man sitting on his haunches.

He was washing utensils, a task that jarred with his looks and disposition. He looked like a picture out of a book on mythology. When he was finished with his task he looked at her and she was love struck. There was something magical in his presence and she was in love with him.

I was growing restless by the day and was losing patience. I wanted to profess my love for him and wanted him to reciprocate, but I could not risk being seen as shameless! I told myself that I was a woman and should behave accordingly. I wanted my man to make the first move”.

Their love for each other matured silently as ‘Ogo kajol nayana horini (O my doe-eyed love’) Arindam was brother-in-law of Samarjit, was an employee and looked after the Kharagpur unit. She was knowing that he is just a victim of circumstances and had been forced to accept Samarjit’ job offer.

Some of her friends and soren came one day and she was expecting Arindam too. When arindam arrived she was acting quite boldly. Her friends forced him to come straight to the point and profess his love for her.

“He was stunned at first but then he blushed; his face looked handsomer than ever. He gave me long loving stare till I looked away, embarrassed, my recent boldness giving way to the coyness of a new bride.’ Will you give me shelter? I am very, very tired. All I need is shelter for my weary soul. Promise me

that you will be mine forever!’ these were his first words for me and I found myself rushing into his arms and soon our lips were locked in a kiss. I did not even try to hide my pent- up thirst for him and I wanted my friends to stay witness of this union. I asked him straight away if he would marry me. He looked at me in wide-eyed wonder”.

Apart from losing ourselves in each other’arms and occasionally locking lips in long passionate kisses, they did not give their desire free rein. She was conscious that she was a man between her legs, though Arindam’s love for her made her strong and feels like a woman.

“I told both Arindam and Dr Khanna that I was ready for the operation and that nothing could stop me now”.

“Finally my soul had found its body, and I had a sense of completeness that had been denied to me at birth”.

When Arindam first saw her after the operation. It was a mix of admiration, love, adoration and complete devotion. She asked him how she looks?

He said, ‘Are you real or are you a devi, a goddess?’

After a few moments I said, ‘No, I am artificial... an artificial woman, you see.

After being real woman she was completely given herself to him and day night they used to spend together. And when he went back, she pined for him to return her again. Though they were not married but she started taking care of him as a wife and started cooking for him also and they both used to eat food together. Now officially wanted to be his wife and her friend arranged everything for their wedding but then suddenly Samarjit entered the scene and she realized it had been a big joke that they both cooked together to harass her. This was samarjit’ way of plotting revenge. They plotted to sexually exploit her and expose her in the public. All hell broke loose and she was in the worst crisis of her life, she could not manage to survive the mayhem because every day she was feeling suicidal.

"It seemed I was walking through a never ending dark tunnel with any light in sight".

They acted quickly. First they tried to kick up storm by saying that she was a transgender and was trying to entrap Arindam in a marriage that had no legal sanction. Samarjit started a vicious campaign against her in neighbourhood. He said she had sexually abused Arindam for many months in order to satisfy her carnal desires and she had been forcing herself on him knowing that he was weak. Arindam went back to his home Contoi so she will not be able to ask him for explanations. Samarjit first convinced her neighbour that she made their house a brothel and was sexually abusing other tenants.

Dr khanna played the role of a friend, a philosopher, and a guide in her life. He assured her that her sex change operation was legal and she could go ahead and fight back with her tormentors because the law supported her. Sujata bhadra, one of the best known human rights workers in Kolkata, got in touch with her and made her understand that she was victim of gross human rights violation and she should lodge a complaint with the west Bengal commission. The state women's commission heard her case with interest and in great details. She told them she wanted to face Arindam at the commission's inquiry and she was given favourable response.

She got a message from Arindam and he requested her to meet him. She asked women' commission and they agreed and took her promise that not to do sex. She finally met Arindam and what he said was big shock to her...

"He begged me to withdraw the case and said that he would stop the slander that Samarjit was propagating against me if I agreed to pay him RS 4, 00,000. He said we would live separately and there was no question of marriage but we could still be in a relationship. So Arindam too was part of the plot!"

He stood up and used her toilet first time she realized that he was not her types she said whatever happens happens for good! Samarjit and Arindam kept failing to comply with the summons sent by women'commission. Then they asked her to leave

because it was waste of time to wait around endlessly.

A date was fixed for final decision. Both were scared so they finally filed a defamation suit under section 500 IPC against her. She had given as interview to Bengali Daily in which she quoted her love life with Arindam after the sex change operation. But she was not scared. The case was filed in Contoi district home place of Arindam. Where he felt more secure.

Later on the suggestion of her Lawyer, Joymla Bagchi suggested her to not to wait rather start an offence and file a suit. So in sept 2005 she filed an FIR at the Jhargram police station against Arindam for Rape, Cheating and criminal conspiracy by more than one person under sections 376, 420 and 120B. These are non-bailable offences. Now it was difficult for Arindam to wriggle out easily and seek anticipatory bail.

But powerful people with a criminal bent of mind can find loopholes in any system. The police could not arrest Arindam for a very long time. Meanwhile the police wanted her to show her identity i. e.

"I had to undergo a test to prove whether I had a Vagina, and whether Vagina was capable of penetration and intercourse".

This was an ordeal by fire. Nothing more insulting than this.

**"I felt like a sacrificial Goat. My soul bled and I asked God why he had created someone like me at all?"**

But beside all this she had gone under tests. Superintendent of the Jhargram subdivisional hospital was sympathetic to her cause, though gynaecologist was quite disapproving to this task.

"But I was beside myself with joy when I described my victory to Dr. Khanna. The report that was drafted a few days later upheld Dr. Khanna's surgery and called me a transwoman. It was finally proven that I was capable of being raped by a man".

Finally the apex court had sent its emissary to Jhargram to transfer the case from Contoi to Jhargram. The decision of the Jhargram court on the

matter would be final. At last in 2006, Arindam was arrested and put behind bars. For fourteen days he remained there before finally being released on bail. It was small but significant victory. The case had been going on for eleven years. Since 2015 she shifted out of Jhargram. She hoped they will come to a conclusion soon.

**'A fortnight's imprisonment is nothing compared to the mental torture and public humiliation I withstood day after day. Every time I enter the court I tried to turn a deaf ear to the catcalls that followed. They called me Jhargram's famous Hijra professor who pretended to wear a saree and be a woman'.**

When she found everybody left her and no one is there to hold her hand. She took diksha at Belur Math that helped her to be peaceful and calm and the time of great stress.

'I am grateful to the Monks of Belur Math for showing me the inward path in the search for eternal happiness'.

Perhaps the good thing that happened to her was her PhD. She was preparing to write her PhD thesis on the women in Asha Purna Devi' novels but the writers Nabaneeta Dev Sen said that she should do her research on Transgendered people because of her proximity to the subject and its path breaking nature.

'I register my thesis under the name Somnath Bandyopathyay, later it was Vice-Chancellor who suggested me to change my name in the thesis to Manabi. Because I had now bossy and spirit of woman so why should my name not uphold that?'

But this name change was barrier to her promotion because in all her certificates it was Somnath and now in PhD it is Manabi. As a result she lost several increments but she was promoted to the position of associate professor. She was somehow cling to her job that was her only sustenance. Her colleagues still treated her as she was a subhuman, as she had no right to sit in the staffroom with them or use the same facilities as they did as being college professor.

'While a majority of students were against me, instigated by the union, a few from my dept still remained by my side'.

After this all Kishalay got close to her and got possessive and becoming obsessive about her and wanted to guard her all the time. He does not like her outgoing nature and the way she makes friends. He did not like her going out on seminars or visit other colleges on Academic tours. When she refused to go as per his demands he started to beat her which was unbearable for her and was suffocating her and their relationship so she decide to leave it. She went to attend that seminar on Ashpurna Devi in Mahisha dal Raj College. There Prabhas Roy made special arrangement for her and she was feeling very happy and liberated at all around appreciation she received both from the faculty members and students. There was bunch of students who stayed with her but one student caught her attention and that were **Debashish**.

'I felt strange tugging of my heart strings again and shyly he asked me,' madam, can I help you?'

'I just blurted out, 'instead of madam, can you call me Ma?'

'He just stood there and stared at me in disbelief, after a few seconds he nodded his head in affirmation'. Tears welling in my eyes, I tried to quickly collect myself and left my Naihati add and phone no with Debashish and asked him to see me any weekend.'

'I kept thinking about that boy and the way he had called me 'Ma'. I thirsted to hear it again'.

She offered him to coach for his Pt3 examination. She was happy that she has taken Deba under her wings well. He was intelligent but was weak in studies at the time. Finally he scored 55percent marks.

Finally in 2012 the state advertised for vacant principal' position. Candidates were to apply to College service Commission. Finally she found her name on the list of professors who had been selected for the interview. In March 2015 she also got selected in the interview. She wanted to share

this news with Deba but he was out to his parents so she could not. She also remembered when old of her college staff thought she would be Principal in the same college because there was no principal. She recalled how they all made fun of her , avoided her and feared her. But she says' it was fun moment for me and I was reminded of the adage, 'Every dog has its day!'

Finally she was assigned to Krishnagar Women's College. Her other two choices were Women'college, Naihati. She was proud of becoming country's first transgender college principal. The impossible that happened!

'Suddenly I became the darling of the media and my phone has not stopped ringing since. Almost every day I am invited to speak at seminars both within the states and outside. I have toured many Universities and institutions in this one year that I have been principal. Clubs, associations and institutions have felicitated me for what they have called a 'rare' achievement. I often pinch myself to see if I am dreaming or if all that is happening to me is true'.

She lives with Deba at the Krishnagar campus now. It is modest principal's quarters but she was happy. Deba looked after her, take care of her appointments and her calls. She gave Deba –good food, clothes, and money to go shopping occasionally and to eat out.

"Memories rush back as I sit down to write my story. I write with the belief that it would help society understand people like me better. We are slightly different outwardly, but we are humans just as you are and have the same needs- physical and emotional- just as you have".

**May 17, 2004** - The first legal same-sex marriage in the United States takes place in Massachusetts.

**February 26, 2018** - The Pentagon confirms that the first transgender person has signed a contract to join the US military.

LGBT movements have often adopted a kind of identity politics that sees gay, bisexual, and transgender people as a fixed class of people; a minority group or groups, and this is very common among LGBT communities. Those using this approach aspire to liberal political goals of freedom and equal opportunity, and aim to join the political mainstream on the same level as other groups in society. In arguing that sexual orientation and gender identity are innate and cannot be consciously changed, attempts to change gay, lesbian, and bisexual people into heterosexuals ("conversion therapy") are generally opposed by the LGBT community.

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