Who Put the 'e' in Trannie? :

Indian Transgender Writings Online

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by

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Certificate

This dissertation titled "Who Put the 'e' in Trannie?: Indian Transgender Writings Online" submitted by Arshad Said Khan, Centre for English Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree, diploma of any university or institution.

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To Vinita Mathew for Gender 101 and more

Acknowledgements

Contents

INTRODUCTION

I have a dream of becoming a bird

flying happily.

I also have a dream of being a beautiful bride

blushing all the time...

Have a,

Dream of being a Tamil teacher, walking with an umbrella;

Dream of searching a pencil as a student (female);

Dream of playing in the rain as a little kid (female)...

-From the poem, 'Dreams' by Living Smile Vidya, 2012

To be transgender is to dream. To write as one is to make dreams. This is a study of not only those dreams but the dreamer too. To, take stock of the dream catchers and other devices and to see how these reveries become bright promises for the dreamer. The only problem is that the dreams caught and recorded are far too few. It becomes easy indeed, to pick each special one and hold it to regard. The scant figures allow one to dwell in luxurious detail over those but one somehow wishes, that wouldn't always be the case.

Much dreaming exists online in the form of weblogs or blogs by Indian MTF[1] transgender subjects. Fin de siècle onwards, these blogs seem to have become one of the prominent sites for the creation of a body of writing circulated actively within the transgender community. Intrinsically personal and emotionally motivated, the largely autobiographical stories, poetry, erotica, novellas, shorter narratives in new forms such as pictorials like captioned stories, self-clicked images, videos et al. also continually cross pathways with other traditional narrative formats to merge as genres and types. All put together these are eclectic and multi-dimensional grounds for the construction of the self that more than qualifies for a discourse analysis. Although, one is excruciatingly mindful of the still nascent character of the study in the primary as well as secondary readings (largely, transgender theory). The research presupposes the validity of the texts and its "authors" found online as a point of departure only to be eventually challenged. Much before that postulation comes the issue of

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[1] Male to Female.

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the lacuna in Indian scholarship as far as transgender is concerned. The sheer lack of literary commentary owes in part to the lack of literature. While anthropological studies on Indian transgenders are easily found, one has not been able to locate a similarly significant polemic on transgender writings. Blogs take the first step towards filling the gap with a modest numbers of texts. Conversely, the scantiness makes one wonder if one should move past statistical data and into the qualitative for the moment. The privileging of the literary thus, in this case functions in the paradigm of and looks to American (and British) transgender theory; Indian queer scholarship; cyberculture theory; besides, the anthropological-ethnographical studies on transgenders. I employ all these as best applicable and available methodological tools to excavate agency in the concerned subject.

The major cue is to be discovered in Rahul Mitra and Radhika Gajjala's essay, "Queer Blogging in Indian Digital Diasporas: A Dialogic Encounter" published in 2008. As a quick macro glance into South Asian LGBT blogging, the study whets one's appetite for a detailed account of blogs. The critic duo play bloggers themselves to interact rather than simply study queer blogs to come up with as many hues of the varied community as the format of the peer review journal essay would allow. Consequently, during the course they intersperse critical opinions as part of the blogging discourse. In my much larger canvas, the scope is naturally liberating but I turn specifically to transgender and not other sexual/gender minorities. Also, unlike Mitra and Gajjala, the motive is not to be part of the loosely structured group to eke out interpretations from within. The reason against such creativity is not simply to maintain academic objectivity but a personal one. My cissexual/gender privilege would limit my participation and therefore, affinity over identification is the more suitable characteristic if rigour in understanding is to be achieved.

There are 14 found blogs which constitute the axis of this study. The incorporation has not been a result of selection. Rather, the abrupt if not diverse collection lays bare the paucity of written material but in analysis, the more detailed readings may be focused on even fewer blog narratives. Some names will be summoned more than the others but an effort has been made to articulate as many kinds of accounts as possible and any concentration on a particular blog need not establish it as more demonstrative of Indian transgender life than any other. The idea has been not to look for exemplary ideations but varied points of view.

Chapter 1 is to be an examination of the very term 'transgender' and its limitations. Such a primary move must follow navigation through the overvaluation of the taxonomy in transgender theory. Appositely, I will move to consider the status of 'transgender' as an absorbed category in Indian queer politics that disappears even in the moments of glorified liberation. The most important aspect of this commencement is to question the price one pays in assuming affiliation to a particular group at the level of classification. Chapter 2 will continue the project of names in detail but taking a different route, will question the authorial authority of the blogger taking a hint from the popular joke, "nobody knows you're a dog online". How then, are we to ground subjects who are looking to construct themselves through blogs? Connected issues like the nature of the 'hypertext' and the role it plays on many different planes including problematizing the blogger-author figure besides the general privilege English language enjoys online will be dwelled on amongst other concerns blogging subjectivities entail. Chapter 3 will take one in the direction of the narratives themselves, the different kinds of stories found therein and what they signify at micro and macro level of transgender identity politics. The critical insight will spring from the fact that many stories go directly against the transsexual canon of the west and even Indian queer reasoning we have come to accept without undertaking studies of more liminal tales. Ultimately, if these marginal perspectives exist, they must have found the ideal location to speak from. If yes, what are the implications? The body of primary texts claims centre stage at this juncture as it becomes the part of the virtual mise en scene of self creation. Hence, the trannie with the 'e' of electronic? Chapter 4 as the concluding chapter will challenge this deductive reasoning and explore the precise process of the virtualisation of Indian transgenders as they appear inundated in cyberspace in not only the creation of the self but the fragments of the embodied self which need not be taken for itinerated parts of a certain abstract whole. If trannie is indeed electronic enabled, does cyberspace imply a finality to the political project in the creation of a true transgender identity?

The dreamscape of Living Smile Vidya and her contemporaries is one found between their transgender identity and the miscarriage of surrounding reality in pushing that identity to the margins. If her wish is to simply be a female in all minor aspects of life it is one fraught with difficulties. Tasks we take for granted as neutral and un-gendered mean something altogether different to a transgender person. If a moment as unimportant and mundane as looking for a pencil to write with must carry a consciously noted sense of gendered desire then one enters a universe full of profusions. These cornucopias of meaning attachments one

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may miss otherwise are replete with such verse and prose. Not only do they speak of a gendered being but the struggles that person undergoes to arrive every moment at those meanings. It is in the service of the intricacies and preciosity of those margins and meanings, this research is dedicated.

CHAPTER ONE

TAG AND THE TAXONOMY

Shopping for labels,
shopping for love.
Manolo and Louis
is all I'm thinking of.

-From the song. "Labels or Love" by Fergie. OST *Sex and the City 2*, 2010

It's 2012 and countable years become a very long time ago when you move at the speed of pop. It's been a while indeed since, Fergie went shopping[1] with other consumerist feminists of SATC2 but the event has been well recorded and will perhaps be forever retrievable in the ever growing archives of metrolyrics.com or some such system. Maybe a few decades down the line, Fergie will receive a life time achievement award and the audio-video montage that will be played before she gingerly approaches the stage would include the hit song. That of course is not the concern of this study. An anticipated nostalgia is a simple minded ruse to bring to attention the value of the lyrics that is at once ephemeral yet retrievable, relevant and irrelevant.

Conversely, the honour of contradiction her words enjoy lies in the fact that those were produced by a celebrity-singer and published institutionally. That however, is not the objective either. It's about the very poetic contents that in a newly regained moment signal to places other than their conspicuous intentions of empowering the feminine-feminist subject through commodity fetishism. The credit-card purgings of a woman disappointed with men is called an essentially "female approach" which lies in the availability of choices of (brand) names or more appropriately, (designer) labels of "Gucci, Fendi, Prada" et al. All summoned by Fergie, represent the amazing variety of identity building fragments at her easy disposal unlike relationships "which are often so hard to tame". They are all labels and are up for grab. For anyone who can pay the price is an implicitly obeyed fact.

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[1] The single was first released in 2008.

As Roland Barthes might have explained from *The Fashion System*, Fergie would include a variety of labels to signify herself not as an organic whole but a visible assemblage of "tiny, separate essences" (254). She will not say, "I am a Fendi today and would be a Gucci tomorrow". The requirements of the fashion system make her necessarily be a patchwork of many different labels at the same time but refuse her in this "accumulation" any "synthesis"[2], even one of a mega label since personality in Fashion is "quantitative" and "compound but it is not complex"(Barthes 255). Pessimism aside, when the very Cartesian idea of the self has been repeatedly questioned, it becomes not a matter of value judgement but one of the trajectories that multiple naming leads to. Perhaps, there can never be a successful single label as seems to be alternatively suggested by the consumerist-feminist.

Closer home, maybe what is called the 'umbrella' of the term, Transgender (nota bene- capital 'T') or its 'spectrum' is doomed from the beginning. At the same time, one may ask, what sort of politics would seek the fragmented; multi-label clad; and more post-modern and therefore, queer inclined trans self? Through this much labouring metonymic device, rather, inspiration of Fergie's label(s) I hope to explicate the promises and shortcomings of the overarching transgender label as it appears, in capital letters or otherwise to be incorporative of different modes of identifications relevant to the context of the Indian bloggers and the inclusive Indian queer politics. American transgender theorists, as a matter of fact, have spent a staggering amount of scholarship discussing its usage, character, applicability and the costs incurred.

Before such an attempt, another consideration rests on the choice of 'Trannie'[3] in the title. It was to be a tongue-in-cheek rendering of a light hearted yet all-encompassing form of address which can be offensive being subject to contingently acceptable conventions.[4] Much like, 'nigger' which when used by those within the community is an act of re-appropriation and thus, subversion but still holds the possibility of joviality as an insiders' tag.[5] 'Queer' on the other hand is more explicit in its politicized academic usage as in queer theory as well as

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[2] The citation of Barthes has been used by Marjorie Garber to explain the externalization of personality in transgender theatrical representations. See Garber 250.

[3] In certain New York locales, "trannie" would include cross-dressers who may not identify articulately as transgender but simply, gay. See Valentine 131. A transgender theorist's use of "trannie" is that of an insider and therefore more tongue-in-cheek than any other cisgender/sexual critic's. See More 242.

[4] For similar discussions, see Glaad's Transgender Resources page. Also, see Snyder.

[5] See, BBC article, "The 'N' word - anything but black and white" on rapper Ice T's conviction, "if you are it, you can use it" in rap music.

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a reclaimed term in community culture blanketing many identities (Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz 1). A term whose power as a slur has begun to die and is now more open to unproblematic usage by outsiders unlike 'nigger' or 'trannie'. The application of 'trannie' by the researcher who is a person of cissexual and cisgender[6] privilege remains unchartered territory. More noticeable is the fact that hardly anyone in the studied blogs call themselves, 'trannie'. Colloquially, it appears more imported than transgender[7].

Who Put the 'e' in Transgender? may not hold the same rhetorical weight owing to the presence of two 'e's and could disappear without gaining any political currency. To go by the bloggers' claims in profile bios is an applicable possibility. Adding the same 'e' of 'electronic' to kothi[8] appears to be one possibility but the blogging subjects are a multifaceted group. Kothi(e) who may or may not embrace all the technologies[9] of the transgender self is but one of the few select modes of transgendered to semi to borderline transgendered being. Other such sub Indian taxonomies[10] like zenana are closer to kothi representing a proto-drag performance based relationship with other ritual based factions like hijras (Reddy). Cross-dresser (CD); or Lady Male are options other than Transvestite (TV); Transgender (TG); Transsexual (TS); T(h)irunangai;[11] and also, Eunuch in the self-descriptions of the bloggers.[12] However, some tend to claim more than one label like Fergie. To subsume all those dynamics within trannie, electronic sensibilities notwithstanding, is as much an act of violence as using transgender because both would remain similarly alien, assuming and consequently, artificial. The other side of this textual aggression could be subversion when it hints at the fact that any tag works to be similarly unstable as the chosen one keeping self-assertions, aside. The story does not end here. Transgender as a more or less open site of meaning attachments is vulnerable to misappropriation. Lesbian activist and writer, Ashwini Sukthankar, quoting two

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[6] My use of cisgender and cissexual follows a strict opposition to transgender and transsexual and no other categories. For a comprehensive distinction, see Serano 12.

[7] For a discussion on how the Indian 'queer' identities exceed western frameworks, see Narrain and Bhan 16.

[8] Spellings of kothi/koti end with an 'i' as the term appears in the blogs as well as studies on the group. For a concise definition of the category, see Bhaskaran; Reddy; Rao.

[9] I use technologies in the Foucauldean sense to include all the gender presentation labours available to transgender subjects as in "technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and ways of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality". See Martin L.H., H. Gutman, and P.H. Hutton.

[10] In a small yet political move, I have chosen not to italicize the Indian taxonomies assuming a familiarity of the terms in Indian queer scholarship that will hopefully inspire a move away from categorical objectification.

[11] T(h)irunangai, the Tamil equivalent for hijra is spelled without the 'h' in Living Smile Vidya's English translation of her novella, *I am Vidya*.

[12] Mostly, the self descriptions or bios of the bloggers composed under "About Me" on Blogger.com.

differently identified trans persons in "Complicating Gender: Rights of Transsexuals in India" deliberates over "defining (the) community".[13] Her two ontic subjectivities include the located, rooted and historicised hijras in comparison with the more nascent trangender/sexuals (165). However, other queer Indian writers' motives in discussing transgender are one of political mobilisation that indicates disappearance within homosexual rhetorics which will be explored in detail as the chapter unfolds.

Trans Transer Transest

A remarkable number of works in transgender theory and studies open with the history of the term, transgender and it's coinage by a certain Virginia Prince, except for David Valentine who challenges that claim in *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (32). Instead of charting the evolution of the taxonomy as has already been done many times, I will focus instead on a select few speculations, especially those by Susan Stryker, supplemented by other noted transgender theorists; its inevitable queering, only to eventually challenge the tag; to at the end, consider the very taxonomies currently in rotation by the bloggers to define their gendered selves. The use of queer, queering and queered would take for granted the presumptions of post-modern piecemeal sensibilities.

In her 1998 introduction to what is now considered a landmark in the history of the journal, *GLQ*, "The Transgender Issue", Susan Stryker writes comprehensively,

> In this introduction, I use transgender not to refer to one particular identity or way of being embodied but rather as an **umbrella term** for a wide variety of bodily effects that disrupt or denaturalize heteronormatively constructed linkages between an individual's anatomy at birth, a nonconsensually assigned gender category, psychical identifications with sexed body images and/or gendered subject positions, and the performance of specifically gendered social, sexual, or kinship functions (149). Emphasis, added.

Ideally, then the label will subsume all the identities mentioned earlier with an ever growing room for more. By 2006, in the introduction to *The Transgender Studies Reader* she speaks of Transgender to have become an "overdetermined construct like "cyborg" through which

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[13] Brackets, added.

contemporary culture imagined a future filled with new possibilities for being human, or becoming posthuman" (8). In her book *Transgender History* (2008) she recognises the state of flux a few decades old term happens to find itself in but intends to use it throughout the book as such. She proposes rendering riven, the spectrum/umbrella. The independent prefix with a hyphen "(trans-)"[14] may be cut off but transgender as a political tag is still useful even if under construction and applicable widely (1-29). It is in the introduction to *WSQ*'s issue titled "Trans-" of the same year that Stryker along with other editors of the journal elaborates further. While trans-gender is one possibility, the suffixes can obviously be made to go beyond the matters at hand. They add:

> It's common, (for example), to think of the "trans-" in "transgender" as moving horizontally between two established gendered spaces, "man" and "woman", or as a spectrum, or archipelago, that occupies the space between the two...But what if we think instead of "trans-" along a vertical axis, one that moves between the concrete biomateriality of individual living bodies and the biopolitical realm of aggregate populations that serve as a resource for sovereign power?" (Currah, Moore and Stryker 13-14)

Following this logic, "Transing" is seen to be a practise. It is also clear that we can use this hegemonizing "trans-" as a fixed marker to attach to it the free floating suffixes beyond gender (for instance, race) in order to resist powers-that-be who want us, preferably, floundering in a more or less stable identity billabong for easy regulation. The splitting of the spectrum that is enveloping or the umbrella which is overarching might threaten a debilitating disintegration but identities and their utilisation happens at many different political levels and the academia is but one arena.

Marxist-Transgenderist activist, orator and writer, Leslie Fienberg in keeping up with the spirit of 'umbrellaness', 'spectrumivity', and a transing ethic had already in the nineties in a published speech, spoken to the effect on what is "Trans liberation":

> We are a movement of masculine females and feminine males, cross-dressers, transsexual men and women, intersexuals born on the anatomical sweep between female and male, gender-blenders, many other sex and gender-variant people, and our significant others. All told, we expand understanding of how many ways there are to be human being (5).

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[14] Bracket. author's.

Note that Fienberg's "Trans" is already independent of any hyphen and yet attaches freely to the notions of humanist progression. Through partaking in this politics, the question of adopting the label becomes a contained issue unconcerned with questions of embodiment otherwise crucial to transsexual as well as transgender subjects since "significant others" are also invited. The move is similar to LGBTIQQA[15], where the "A" represents "allied" or PFLAG[16] which relies on support from outside the immediate community. The difference rests solely in the label with which Fienberg speaks. PFLAG's name explains the relationship more than the sexual orientation of those parents and friends which becomes a moot point. A trans liberation, however, makes no such discrimination. If that inclusion is universal, then being transgender is no longer necessary to be a part of it. Nevertheless, the translation has not resulted in the dissolution of the movement and cissexual/gender persons are least likely to abandon their gender investments anytime soon even if at the level of naming.

Fienberg and Stryker are worlds apart as radical agents given the different locations from which they postulate but the rhetoric remains faithful to the same aim, that of achieving some sort of a built continuum. Taking a more micro approach, we observe that there may be random moving around within the spectrum and unacknowledged border sharing when it comes to gender presentation. Richard Ekins and Dave King in their British sociological study, speak of "oscillating"[17] as one of the essentially trans techniques in the evolution of a person's narrativised gender subjectivity (*The Transgender Phenomenon* 35, 97-137). The movement suggests the very conundrum transgender presents to the questions of categorisation. A trans person may go back and forth between largely unambiguous masculine and feminine identities before deciding (or not) on the desired one or like, one must add, certain transsexual writers may even choose in favour of incomplete surgical transformations (Fienberg; Serano). This seemingly ubiquitous playfulness of gender (and even sex) thus, appears suspiciously to be a fundamentally queer truth of trans existence which merits a closer look. Especially, into the ideological functionality of an open ended queerness that transgender as a label may pre-empt. Any promise of categorical fertility must be investigated in the latter when it begins to reflect a similarly open site which is queer.

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[15] Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Questioning and Allied.
[16] Parents, Families and, Friends of Lesbians and Gays.
[17] "'Oscillating' entails a mode of transgendering that involves moving backward and forward across the gender border, only temporarily resting on one side or the other".

The Queer Transgender

Crucial to the agenda of "Trans-" in Stryker with Currah and Moore is movement along any provided split nouns or compound nouns. The prefix as an evolving afterthought in their argument is left open to be unstable and in flux. Her view now seems to come full circle with her more queer perception in a 1993 performance piece at a conference on "Rage". Stryker, then spoke what would later be reproduced in print as "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage" to be a seminal work in transgender theory. She writes of the rage of the surgically produced transsexual whose nearest kin is Dr. Frankenstein's vengeful monster who has come for a tête-à-tête with the creator. The text echoes Hélène Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa" in its identification with a maligned monster but the vehemence takes shape overtly as a "queer fury" to rupture boundaries (252-253). She emphatically tells transgenders to reclaim new labels of "creature...monster...unnatural" following feminist and queer examples of appropriation (246). Stryker had performed in "genderfuck" drag with other poly-gender and lesbian symbolism. Her use of labels like "a shredded Transgender Nation T-shirt"; "DYKE"; and "SEXCHANGE" signify in Fergie-esque multimode (244-245).[18] Stryker's metaphor at large that speaks of surgical intervention would have one believe that she is talking of transsexuals but the sub-title reads, "Transgender Rage" and she confuses the reader/ audience by using both transgender and transsexual interchangeably and simultaneously throughout the text. Besides, the point of view is one from a lived transsexual experience. Such layered taxonomic boundary blurring and assuming a trouble-free relationship with those belie easy deductions except for a conceivably active hint at queering.

Furthermore and presumptuously, if queer in queer cultures is dominated primarily by gays and secondly by lesbians owing to the sheer strength of numbers,[19] it is also taken for granted that both transgender and transsexual as categories have little to do with sexuality per se. The conviction must be the same that Judith Butler takes up when she questions the fixations of

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[18] It is interesting to wonder at this juncture that transgender in transgender theory must have been the transcendental label of choice as opposed to transsexual because the former is assumed to be an already open site of multiple signification than the latter who is supposed to be over-focused on surgeries.

[19] One may cite numerous statistical examples here, such as the exclusion of transgenders from a lesbian feminist music festival in Michigan, USA but the most immediate concern in the Indian context is visibility via a touching upon the concern over Section 377 bringing only homosexuality to the light. See Wilchins; Chakravorty 369.

study in gender for feminists and sexuality for queers in "Against Proper Objects". Both transgender and transsexual have as their objects, gender alone and the sort of queering to bring sexuality to the table would be of slight significance to the trans- label/s because any language to express a 'trans-sexuality' (pun intended) will require the already given tropes of hetero-homo-bi-queer vocabulary (Whittle, "The Becoming Man..." 23). Gazal Dhaliwal who writes as simply Gazal, in a post, "Who am I?" on her blog *A Little Hope...A Little Happiness* says,

> Unlike L, G and B, T does not stand for one's sexual orientation. It stands for one's Gender Identity.

I rush to add, 'specifically so'. In a Foucauldean scheme, if homosexuality started its journey as Oscar Wilde called it, "the Love that dare not speak its name" then trans-sexuality does not even exist and awaits a big bang event to separate from this chaos and be launched into subsequent discursivising to begin to not dare[20] (Summers 744). Such a void that inhabits 'queer' must point towards grave consequences. Before jumping off that theoretical cliff, if one is to return for a moment to queered transgender appellation, it is Kate Bornstein who complicates transgender in her *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us*. As one of the founding texts of transgender theory, the book introduces transsexual as anyone who will admit to it and transgender as anyone, "transgressively gendered" (121, 135). Although, she admits to a hierarchy and resulting prejudices within the loosely structured and varied community, the fact of being an "outlaw" is claimed as the ground for commonality (68). Later, she incorporates other elements of identity and says, "I write from the point of view of an S/M transsexual lesbian, ex-cult member, femme top and sometimes bottom shaman" (143). Sexuality is one ingredient along with spirituality and operative status since the defining components are hinted to be only the tip of the iceberg that is the gender outlaw. Also, from the very start, she takes us right back to where we started, in making of the self through many different constituents. Bornstein in Fergie's *mode d'emploi,* thus, takes fashion to begin her venture:

> I see fashion as a proclamation or manifestation of identity, so, as long as identities are important,
> fashion will continue to be important. The link between fashion and identity begins to get real

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[20] The not daring may beget the daring, since the oppressive discourse, "...also made possible the formation of a "reverse" discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or "naturality" be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified." See Foucault 101.

interesting, however, in the case of people who don't fall clearly into a culturally-recognized identity-people like me (3).

This fashion-ing is a proto pariah's becoming as she adds that her identity is a "cut-and-paste thing", a "collage" which is also the style of the book. "It's a transgender style, I suppose", she quips (3). Her stance is begging to be called a post-modern-esque queer pastiche practise codified as situational transgender but one is hesitant to give into that temptation. If Bornstein's ideation of gender as a "plaything", especially, in her subsequent works seen to be a range of practises within unstable representations, what post-modern principles are possible that can benefit transgenders?[21]

To begin with, representation is denied existence and therefore, innocence of categorisation by Jean Baudrillard in the nostalgic era of simulation and simulacra when representation of an original sacred image is no longer possible after making its journey from being the reflection of a "profound reality" to losing complete touch with it. What may be best achieved are simulacra through the process of simulation. A profusion of genders or gender voluntarism in terms of demonstration of representation may fall in the last fourth step and trap of Baudrillard's image in becoming simulacra. The gradual corruption of the image and the inevitable loss of the real do not work to favour the transgender/sexual because someone like Bornstein is intrinsically anti wholeness along any sacramental "profound reality" (*Simulacra and Simulation* 6). More explicitly, Baudrillard's later dissolution of transsexuality exacerbates the devaluation of not only simulacra but the former as well. If "we are all transsexuals", at least "symbolically" given the pervasive devilish pact with artificiality as practiced by everyone but to the hilt by the transsexual, the project and politics of Bornstein's light hearted approach and any development of gender playfulness to favour the trans subject is bound to reveal less politics and more superficial romp. More so, when a pop star's gender ambiguity is cited as an empty assurance of erotica to be a concealment of lack of specificity (*The Transparency of Evil* 21).

Unfazed, Bornstein in the later publication, *My Gender Workbook: How to Become a Real Man, a Real Woman, the Real You, or Something Else Entirely* promotes more gender play and pluralism. The commissioned anthology, *Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation* extends

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[21] A critique of Bornstein's *My Gender Workbook* is a skeptical account over how gender playfulness cannot benefit trans persons or anyone else. See Hausman "Review..." 473.

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the queer promise in breaking all boundaries of inclusions with a "cisgender queer woman"; an "intersex man"; a "queer goth rollergirl"; and a "very feminine boy" amongst many others (280-295). The heteroglossia of the new outlaws celebrates concurrently under blog-able tags[22] of outlaw-queer-transgender. Stryker's resonance in monster-queer-transgender is not a far cry.

Cutting lose the Baudrillardean from the queer as it relates to transgender implies simply, unrestricted additions and probabilities sans theoretical baggage. For Arvind Narrain and Gautam Bhan, any schema to stimulate trans inclusions in queer would be unnecessary since transgenders like hijras and the unclassifiables like kothis would already be queer. It is a matter of gaining currency. They write in the introduction to the anthology, *Because I Have a Voice: Queer Politics in India*,

> In India, the word queer is not as yet commonly used. However, the realities of the non-normative experiences…which contest the embodied nature of heterosexism in our society have traditionally existed and continue to exist in the contemporary context (5).

In their work, queering precedes any transing and hurries elision in the name of a common enemy which leads to textual fruition in comprising of transgender within a curious rushed queer list counting hijras that in turn includes those undergoing hormonal treatments; kothis which are "feminised male identities"; while LGBT's T is understood to be one of urban "men" and "women". The carelessness in the placing of the labels is also evident in the presumably homosexual orientation of kothis[23] (5). Such a protest must not denote that the incorporation of kothi in another straight jacket called transgender, however large, will not be similarly fallacious. Yet, faced by the limitations of the language, the "man" who identifies as transgender could have been more sensitively listed as a transwoman or an MTF transperson and separated from the cissexual/gender men and women of L, G and B. Secondly, what may seem like theoretical nit-picking at this stage is perhaps necessary as an intervention to underline the intricacies in transgender experience Indian queer writers take for granted and effect omissions over complex realities.

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[22] The 'tag' words, normally found under a blog post to make search of topics easy and enable hyperlinks.
[23] In another critic's view, married and fathering kothis are seen to be wrongfully reaping benefits of patriarchal heterosexuality. See Kavi 395.

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For R. Raj Rao in his introduction to *Whistling in the Dark: Twenty-One Queer Interviews*, edited with Dibyajyoti Sarma, the working umbrella term remains 'queer' as it spans various sub-identities. He writes,

> There are multiple queer sex identities in India: gay, bi, MSM (men who have sex with men), hijra (eunuch), koti (effeminate men, usually passive in the sex act), etc. (ix).

Skipping over another critique of the bird's eye view analogous to Narrain and Bhan, one is led back to the issue of kothis who present to both, queer and transgender or any categorisations, a befuddlement. Keeping the issue aside for the moment, Rao must be noted for his use of 'sex' as perhaps, the verb. He goes on to reflect on one of his interviewee's views in the following manner:

> To autodriver Aslam Shaikh, men cannot be commodities like women, so male prostitution by its very definition is a contradiction in terms. There are no red-light areas where men can be picked up, argues Shaikh, in whose view a man cannot be with another man without one of them thinking of himself as a woman. A passive sexual role, by this formulation, is tantamount to being a *hijra*, a much misunderstood and a much-maligned queer category (xxvi). Italics, author's.

The axis of identity appears to rest overtly in the transgressive sexual act and not innate convictions even if it's without any doubt, queer for Rao. If Shaikh wants to see every anatomically male-passive-partner seeing himself in the feminine that may be another matter of an external gaze upon a self-directed gaze. For the bloggers such refraction is not the immediate topic of discussion owing to self-controlled representations. Also, Rao in an interview as part of Ruth Vanita's *Project Bolo: A Collection of Oral Histories of LGBT Persons* elaborates on the encapsulating notion we call queer in the published extract of the transcript:

> The thing is to shun stereotypes... and if you would detect stereotype, then one should try to move away from it. Having said that, it should be left to the individual... Stereotyping is the silliest thing to do, as anybody could be a gay man or a homosexual. That's what the word 'queer' does, it includes all these people under the ambit of 'queer'.

Nevertheless, what Rao of *Whistling in the Dark* reminds one of is the larger framework of nationwide NGO led MSM categorisation with the reported immediacy of HIV-AIDS crises that push aside any LGBT or queer umbrella/ spectrum with a completely different idea of cataloguing: that of sexual activity. The boomerang of trans-sexuality returns via NGOs as predominantly deciphered in homosexual terms. According to Suparna Bhaskaran in *Made in India: Decolonizations, Queer Sexualities, Trans/ national Projects*,

> "MSM," which arose within the sexual health NGO movement in the early 1990s is meant to be a "more culturally appropriate" term for same-sex sexual interaction and desire. During the early activist period sexual health workers and advocates sometimes included self-identified gay men in this category but soon made a distinction between the two groups. For example, activist Shivananda Khan has called for a "*Kothi* Framework" to understand contemporary MSM realities. Many activists, like Khan, have pointed out that within the MSM constellation there are a number of *kothis* (anatomical men who are effeminate, who generally are defined by and desire the "passive" role of being the one who is penetrated, who do "women's work," and who identify with women). *Kothis* include commercial sex workers, generally do not identify as gay and often identify as kothi; they come from poor, low, and middle income sectors from all over India (98-99). Italics, author's.

At which point effeminacy should traverse homosexuality and enter transgenderism makes for a ridiculous query that would thwart the politics of both groups. However, it is the homosexual paradigm that takes precedence in computing infections and safer sex counselling. The next section will delve deeper in the nomination of kothis under MSM under HIV's rhetoric over sexual intercourse.

Cash or Card?

Taking an account of the price for label/s should ideally be a multifarious enterprise but in the face of considering the queered transgender umbrella/ spectrum as it relates to Indian bloggers, the particular complexities allow for a certain concentrated viewpoint. Therefore, a return to the consequences mentioned not so long ago is of prime importance. Transgender, when queered takes in the gay. Or should it be the other way round? Gay, when queered, takes in the transgender. Discussing the provenance of poultry has been revealed to be a fool's errand but the genesis of absorption amounts to erasure and merits commentary. Even

when Bornstein and Stryker's objectives are supposedly chaste, homosexual hegemony[24] looms large. Malika in an early post, "Who Am I?" on the blog, *One from the heart by malika* writes,

> Closet queen, Cross-dresser, Female impersonator, Fruitcake, Drag Queen, Transvestite.
> Well, All those names are for me. I didn't decide that.
> All I know is that I wasn't asked what sex I wanted to be, when I was born. They just decided that I was to be a 'man'. So I just went about it, trying to be a 'man'. What did it mean to be a 'man'. Well, growing up with boys, fighting with them, climbing walls, getting violent, playing 'war games'. And then as a young adolecent, trying to macho and masculine. But, hey! wait a minute, I don't want to do that. The 'boy's' bore me to death with their bravado and their horsing around. Their stupid show of strenght and power.
> BOY'S DON'T CRY! Fuck it!
> I want to cry! I want to express my feelings, 'silly feelings', so called 'girlish feelings'. I want to play house with a doll. I want to be like mummy when I grow up, not daddy who just watches TV and grunts. I want to wear a saree, a pretty lavender saree. Tie my hair in braids and put 'Kohl' in my eyes. I want to cook great meals. I want to sew and embroider a table cloth.
> FAGGOT! QUEEN! EUNNUCH! HOMO!
> Yes I am one. I wear sarees, I wear make-up and I sew and I cook and I CRYYYYYYYYYYYY!!!
> I don't have breasts or an hour-glass figure. I don't have a Vagina or a clitoris. But I am a woman!
> And I'm happy this way.

Malika's nouns (and adjectives) are perhaps more multiple than Stryker and Bornstein's put together but she speaks not of lofty philosophical ambitions. At the same time, her claim to simply be a woman and happy at the end is utterly confounded by the angst ridden preceding lines where she takes in slurs as well as putatively respectful categories, neither of which are of her own choosing (nor is 'woman' for that matter), each with their own baggage and history and claims from other agents. We can read her post as showing the mainstream's failure to recognise her true identity but the same homophobic insults hurled at her also work parallel with the cultural alienation of homosexuality from (trans)femininity which in the words of David Valentine has "shaped the politics of gay gender normativity" (238). Transgender shares an uneasy relationship with male homosexuality[25] and masculine

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[24] Gay discourses are as oppressive as heterosexual ones for those can code trans as imitative of the latter thereby, privileging their own transgressions. See More 260.

[25] Alok Gupta presents this tension when he appropriates the point of view of kothis who according to him view gays as bourgeois and closeted. See Gupta 136.

homonormativity.[26] If the shared physical space between transgenders and homosexuals is/was a historical necessity given the legend of Stonewall, bar culture and contemporary pride parades (abroad and India) then current identity politics would suitably require coalition consciences as is obvious from the readymade stretchable fibre of the catchall category-queer and the ever brimming bowl of the alphabet soup of LGBT...IQQA (More 257; Valentine 29-65; Stryker, *Transgender History* 61).

Opening up transgender as Stryker and Bornstein exemplify brings with it an unprecedented colonisation. Sunitha in "About Me" on *Sunitha's Blog* may flatly describe herself to be "M2F Transgendered" or Living Smile Vidya can protest all she wants to be a "tirunangai" in her blog *Smile's Page*'s "About Me" and autobiography, *I am Vidya* but how independent are those singular categories in the face of enlistment in academic as well as grounded politics? The image that comes to mind is somehow, rapacious. One akin to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's use of Michel Foucault's idea of "epistemic violence" in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" that can, in this case, may occur at the very level of one-to-three syllabled labels before any larger questions of speaking for the subaltern or losing them in ameliorating translations arise. For instance, Rahul Mitra in an essay composed along with Radhika Gajjala titled, "Queer Blogging in Indian Digital Diasporas: A Dialogic Encounter" cites his own post under the blogger name 'livinghigh'. The blogger who studies blogs is in search of Indian queer writings. Having discovered Living Smile Vidya's space, he comments:

> I've come across a Tamil queer blog once also (*Livingsmile*). I don't know how to read/speak the language, and the only way I know it was written by a queer author was because I found it from an online list of queer Indian blogs (416).

Mitra is not to be blamed for not being able to read Tamil but the acutely important fact of LSV's tirunangai life is also erased unwittingly. Had there been a speculation over the profile picture with her visually articulate gendered representation or any such cursory investigation, Mitra may have underlined the location that LSV wants to project. However, enlistment under the queer heading is the only point of signification she is now allowed in the research.

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[26] For an in-depth discussion on Lisa Duggan's coinage of the term, 'homonormativity' see Valentine 133, 240-242.

Mindful (or otherwise) liberalisation of a taxonomy or leaving it loose to its devices to remain inclusive far beyond the minimum qualification of gendered expression is to allow inevitable queering. Homosexuality would hurry in to establish bailiwick, push trans to the margins, and at the same time as Valentine reminds us, maintain difference and an othering ethos to champion its own authenticity to disavow transfemininity and enjoy the political fruits. Promod K Nayar makes it evident in his essay "Queering Culture Studies" sympathising with Hoshang Merchant who finds the "eunuch" slur hurled at gay men disconcerting. Nayar's interpretation of Merchant's views holds gay identity being formed somewhere between heterosexual and transsexual that leads to "trauma and victimization" (121). The formulation pits hijras and straight society ensemble against gays. The picture becomes complicated when homosexual flamboyance shares margins with the trans instead of observing abjuration. Merchant's personal idea of gender is eclectic. Discussing Susan Sontag's notion of 'camp' in Rao's *Whistling in the Dark*, Merchant says,

> If you are asking about the camp of the transsexual on the borders of which I have lived all my life, then I would call that camp of the queen, a whistling in the dark, if not a horrible grimace of the dark, played out in full public glare (2).

In the introduction to the anthology, *Yaraana: Gay Writing from South Asia*, the tension between gay and trans boundaries is explored further by Merchant where Nayar seems to have formed his notion of gender damage done to the gay man.

> Many educated Indians confuse 'homosexual' with 'eunuch'. They think homosexuals lack sexual organs or cannot sustain erections. Many passive homosexuals even today are forced to live with eunuchs even if not become eunuchs through castration[27] (xii-xiii).

Merchant continues to develop his argument over passivity and femininity in a particular kind of gay man aided by a Freudian framework of identification with the mother. This leads to the creation of glamorous and ideal women in show business by gay technologies of make-up and style. The sole purpose of which is human taboo totems for worship and transference of absolute femininity onto the decorated biological woman-icon. In turn, maintaining homosexuality without any self-directed transgender interference. In another instance, he underscores affinity with the feminist subject by the fact of addressing himself with feminine

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[27] Recall, shared spaces.

pronouns (xiv). The playfulness akin to Bornstein's project works successfully in Merchant's Quentin Crisp of *The Naked Civil Servant*-like deliberate and ironically feminised gay structure. According to Marjorie Garber in *Vested Interests*, it "may seem in many ways completely out of date" (138). The hyper masculine representations found today in the westernised global gay culture are filtered in India along the greener pastures of the class divide. Therefore, Merchant's view of the eunuch-homosexual alliance (however, unwilling) holds water. The keywords also shift from queer to homosexual albeit, in a self-consciously jovial manner.

Returning to the question of unclassifiable kothis, Ashok Row Kavi in his HIV activism theorises gender in terms of the verb 'sex' like Rao in his essay, "Kothi Versus Other MSM". He takes kothis to task for their "compulsive disempowerment" which involves the "switch(ing) their effeminacy on and off as a situation requires or demands".[28] Coded within the MSM circle, kothis in Kavi and the behavioural history he charts have come to represent at the level of identity a "more visible and hence, empowered" group (396-397). Even as hijras are unmistakably separated from masculinity, the kothis' somewhat fluidity of gender is clearly a problem. More problematic is their flamboyant spectacle in tandem with their "compulsive disempowerment", the illusion of victimhood that leads to impeding HIV advocacy for both castrated hijras and panthis[29]. What he calls "Kothi politics" is apparently viciousness by a predatory group that police beats up as a last resort (396)! Identity politics is not Kavi's major concern, which is probably why the extravagant instances of performative vengeance kothis supposedly carry out is noted as little more than nuisance that hinders HIV activism. He notes the importance of this work throughout the MSM circle but the contentions arise when identity-construction-politics has already been woven in making such assumptions.

The label under which HIV work takes effect is not one of trans-alternative sexual activity. There are no trans-queer pretentions present, either. Instead, it screams loudly enough in capital letters of men having sex with men (MSM) although, castrated nirvan hijras are a major constituent group. As mentioned earlier, trans-sexuality does not exist. This is an

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[28] Brackets, added.
[29] Panthis can be viewed as the masculine counterparts to kothis in sexual activity. It does not follow that kothis may only get penetrated by panthis and not penetrate ever.

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example of how it becomes intelligible through homosexuality.[30] Additionally, the biological fact of kothis' intact genitals, their heterosexual marital and fertility privileges in Kavi in an instance takes precedence over any gender presentation, fluid or else (395). How to make efforts around an unpredictably oscillating category is treated the same way the feminine mystique would have in another day and age.

If this MSM school of mobilisation did not help the HIV cause, Parmesh Shahani's polemic is more aggressively bent on making success in other areas. His book *Gay Bombay: Globalization, Love and (Be)Longing in Contemporary India* that studies the offline/online group Gay Bombay includes a gay drag queen as one of the interviewed subjects and pauses in places to consider the stark differences between the non-English speaking, largely impoverished, hijra and kothi subjectivities from the more bourgeois and English speaking gay men. The conundrum is not one of assuming an unproblematic homogeneity between hijras and kothis but only so when they stands in contrast with Shahani's gay men to be subsumed later under Kavi's MSM. The imperative therefore, is on how to build bridges across the two worlds. In the conclusive "manifesto" Shahani proposes what one of his interviewees earlier suggests, separation in social spaces and unification in political ones. He finds it "problematic" but "appealing" (293). He adds,

> Within the queer movement, it is easy to get caught up in infighting and identity politics and lose sight
> of the larger common objective that all sexual minorities are fighting against- for example, the repeal of
> Section 377. A strategic interventionist approach would recognize that gay, *kothi*, *hijra* and other
> identities are important on the ground and in people's lives, however reductionist they may appear to
> be theoretically....Adopting strategic essentialism would mean maintaining separate LGBT
> subidentities, but tweaking them when needed and compromising on them, if the situation demands so
> (294-295). Italics, author's.

The astonishing naiveté that especially, the last line inspires would have the reader not ponder on the expenses of this utter annexation composed in a motivational nationalism inspiring language of submission. The questions that arise are: Is there an assurance that the benefits will not be merely statistical for the transpersons? The T that continues to threaten to

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[30] On the sexuality of some hijras and especially, "cada-katla kotis" or non saari wearing kothis, Gayatri Reddy refers to what she is told to be "homosex". The example further shows how sexuality finds expression in either homo or hetero language due to the lack of a trans paradigm. See Reddy, Kindle Location 2981 of 4447. See also, the citation of hijra Mona Ahmed's emphasizing gender over sexuality in Chakravorty 388.

disappear will not be used either as a trope or potential scapegoating in LGBT? The hyperbole of kothis drama, Kavi is weary of will not translate into more pronounced prejudice against supposedly exaggerated feminine gender presentations? All those concerns do not in the end say that that coalition politics will not, in its moments be successful as Shahani had anticipated. The recent victory over 377 is an example of an efficacious union even if trans visibility is on the margins of the gay margin.[31] What the coalition will not do is deflate transphobia and Kavi like orientalist dismissing of trans subjectivities within the Indian LGBT movement besides, other kinds of possible disenfranchisement across the larger group. To assume *au contraire* would lead to making utopic and silly hypothesises. Something like imagining parliament reservations for women to be a solution to misogyny, overall.

Notably, the ability to make suppositions must come from being perched upon a relatively stationary position of privilege. The evolution of enunciation by homosexuals is one such. Foucault's new homosexual started talking back in the language that created, perverted and defined his existence (101). It must have been a sluggishly spontaneous and largely unconscious process throughout history since the 19th century. Maybe one such is underway in the case of our trannie. Therefore, to beg for an immediate discursivising plan is bound to fail given the enormity and weight of the task. Perhaps, it already consists of a voice like Gazal in the post "Who Am I?" where the T of LGBT may serve the community better for it insists on a movement along genders, coherently. Queer could prove to be too ambiguous and open to the threats of hegemony. For Gazal the failure of the category is unavoidable and therefore any efforts, futile:·

> The world is so populated with labels and tags today that in the effort of simplifying the concept of identity, many times, we end up meddling with it, and confusing ourselves as well as others around us. To take my own example, from considering the label 'gay' for a long time to 'pre-op transsexual' further on to 'post-op transsexual' and then 'transwoman', all I have been doing over years is to try and fit myself in. Fitting oneself somewhere becomes an urgent need for survival when every waking moment of the day, one faces the hard truth – that one does not belong.

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[31] One is to consider the media coverage of the movement against Section 377 dubbed as predominantly gay. The popular opinion is thus built around a matter that is about the figure of the criminalized homosexual alone. For an example, see the report, "Consensus likely on repeal of Section 377" on Infochangemedia.com.

Despite, the existentialist doom in store for the label, the voice of Gazal remains located along with those of whom that still want to ground themselves in newer categorisations like, Lady Male from Varanasi for whom South Indian identity of "bala workship"[32] and food is as important as being able to wear a saree in the post, "MARRIED CROSS DRESSER COUPLE" on hir[33] blog, *LADY MALE*; Nimisha Mehandi who introduces herself as a 'bride' in "Dulhan- Bride (for crossdressers)" on *i love sarees*; or Shagufta Hanaphie who in "About Me" on *Transgender Pictories* claims to be an "M2F (Saajid To Shagufta) Post-Op TG Of Indian Muslim Origin". How can anybody be post-operative and transgender instead of transsexual lays the colourful, ameliorable, ironic and (perhaps) self-consciously contradictory seeds of recoveries. Maybe she is joking, maybe she just made a typographical error which we are going to take seriously. Only Hanaphie will be the wiser. The only thing we can know is that she is party to small but significant salvaging processes and if that is really the case, we might discover so after a respectable historical duration has passed and taken notable effect. Long after, her and others have emptied their purses and more paying for these excursions. Much long after Fergie's credit card that does "help me put out the flames" has expired.

Lastly, within the futility predicated and predicted by Gazal, lies not the crises of the category but the struggle for it. Transman author and singer of Indian and European origin, Dhillon Khosla uses the example of bisexuality in his essay, "How the Transgender Label is Causing Confusion and Perpetuating Intolerance" to discuss in a logical manner, the use of the transgender label's supposed neutrality,

> The decision to apply a term that has for decades been claimed by those who do not relate to either the male or female identity to those of us who have fought to claim one of those very identities, is as logical as taking the term "bisexual," proclaiming it to be an "all-inclusive" term, and applying it to both straight and gay people. However, when those of us who have undergone complete gender reassignment surgery question the "transgender" label, we are either ignored or simply told "many people are not quite sure of where they fall within these categories or on the gender continuum, and so the transgender label allows them to explore or question their gender." The problem with this explanation is that it ignores the fact that some of us do know who we are. To therefore say that we

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[32] The author probably made a typographical error in, "worship". Chapter 2 will be in part an attempt to justify my lack of editorial interference in citations of the primary texts.
[33] I use the feminine pronouns for the bloggers throughout the book owing to their MTF convictions. In cases like Lady Male's where a textual/visual androgyny or gender confusion has been deliberately expressed, I will use the neutral, "ze" and "hir" instead of "she" and "her" following Leslie Fienberg.

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should accept a label that does not fit for the benefit of those who are still unsure of their gender identity, would be no different than saying, "well- a lot of people are unclear about their sexuality, so let's just call everyone bisexual." Imagine the outrage from those who identify as gay or straight. Not only would they feel invisible under that label, but the moment they stood up to tell their story, their personal experience would defy the definition of the term 'bisexual' while the moment someone within the bisexual movement stood up to share their view, they would by definition invalidate those on the extreme ends of the sexuality spectrum. This is not unlike what happened to me as I set out to tell my personal story and kept bumping up against the term "transgender."

Khosla, sums up the conundrum that any overarching label presents to a subject involved in the lifelong project of making and maintaining an identity. To some it may be an institutionalised given with social approval and related benefits. To others such as sexual and gender minorities, the day to day negotiations can involve fighting over what to call oneself. A privilege of a point of departure is not found because it is already in conflict. Since, our contemporary culture fails to distribute equally, a preliminary position to begin identity construction. Furthermore, the sheer inadequacy of intellectual critique and commentary over transgender categories in Indian queer writings only impairs the struggle over nomenclature for trans subjects. The conceptual rationale in trans discourses that can be offered must not be either irrevocably submissive or completely hostile. Till such a politics is possible, Khosla like continued "bumping" is unavoidable. Aptly, recovery would be found in a return to unstable and highly individualised illustrations composed in as much presumed effortlessness as Gazal's "Who am I?" that constantly reshuffle one's understanding of what transgender is.

CHAPTER TWO
BLOGGER FROM THE BLOG

Having explored the labile label that is the umbrella/spectrum transgender and the applicability therein, one must now turn to blogs and the particular choice of those in this study. To ask with a minimum pair of syllables…Why blogs? I begin, employing a fairly generic hypothesis that blogs are the most immediately visible sites for Indian trannies to actively create a self but before turning to details and related corollaries, it should be noted that transgender theorists had, in the nineties already, (if barely) touched upon the virtues of the virtual. Their fleeting postulations serve as points of departure for more intricate theorising blogging today lends itself to. Riki Anne Wilchins talking about transgender erotica and erotics in *Read My Lips: Sexual Subversion and the End of Gender,* sees little potential in the internet except for stimulating desire for more desire through an endless assembly of sexual stimuli. Her dismissive acknowledgement of cybersex prevents her from predicating any valuable discursive productions and identity formation online (165-166). Although, Wilchins writes in 1997, Kate Bornstein had, a few years earlier mulled over "the future of gender" which she thinks is "already here today, alive and thriving within the structures of our primitive virtual realities". Noting the nascent status of VR as a site for rehearsal for future, she promotes her agenda of gender playfulness through affirmative anticipation (*Gender Outlaw* 138-139). More recently, Susan Stryker has noted the rise and fall of trans zines of the 90s (*Transgender History* 146).

Double Virtuality

Stephen Whittle takes a giant leap forward in 2002 and writes on what exactly the internet means to the transgender subject. Whittle's essay, "The Trans Cyberian Mail Way" presents a multidimensional perspective. He emphasises "choice" in the matter of self-inclusion in an online politicised arena. He is speaking not of autobiographical fiction sites but activism groups who have evolved their statements of mission making them less about any specific state of embodiment. He says, "It is perhaps this aspect of 'choice' that is most interesting because it is a reflection of the process of re-embodying the self which has taken place within cyberspace" (90). One suspects that this choice becomes more of an imperative as Whittle

constructs cyberspace to be a place above all, one of doubtlessly guaranteed safety. He famously states:

> The real world has medically, socially and legally failed to afford a place in which they (transgenders) can authenticate themselves (83). Brackets, added.

The world is dangerous where passing is seen to be compulsory to avert the persistent threat of getting caught and duly punished for transgression. We are to read the internet then, to be circumspect in providing merely a safe haven with a clearly marked 'enter' sign. Whittle resists this unsophisticated reading for he has already stated in the preceding lines that trans persons are virtual before they go virtual. He is away from Baudrillardean contempt when he says,

> Daily, trans people are involved in portraying a holographic version of the self that cultivates the others' consensual hallucination. Thus, the cyberworld of virtual reality, virtual space and virtual beings is not a new and strange world to the trans person; it is a world in which they have in-built expertise and of which they already have a range of experiences, albeit that these were gained outside of cyberspace. Ironically, the cyberworld in which others have to learn how to manage their virtuality is a world in which the trans person's actual identity can thrive (83).

Whittle echoes Judith Butler's performativity but at an all-encompassing level, not purely, gender. A possible deduction from his reasoning is that since the entire composition of trans identity is consciously constructed in the modus of Butler's drag queen performing gender, the internet would offer what I term, 'double virtuality', where the subject will be cognisant of executing an identity that is by this time should be mindfully performed, in any case. Butler's drag queen in another layer of drag gives an impression of comical reduction yet political fecundity. Double virtuality in the least, reveals the very artifice of construction of a construction. While we may be tempted to read this second artifice as negative, the idea is to consider not the twice removed status of the trannie but to bring to attention the marginality that position holds. For the cisgender/ sexual person who at most times does not trouble gender and is not as painfully aware of the mechanisms of gender trouble as the trannie, takes the same space online which for the latter in full regalia (textual or visual) is far more validating than the hostile real life. Therefore, double virtuality encourages transgenders to hide behind a screen hitherto allowing freedom in a certain abstractly placed locale. Whittle however, exaggerates on the positive in that he presumes and posits the burden of an

"expertise" of virtuality and contradictorily so when he uses casually, the words "actual identity". The virtual cannot be by definition tied down to the essentialist without triggering a negation.

Besides, in the Butlerian paradigm such a paradox does not hold at all. The most beneficial route would involve interpreting the first stage of virtuality as a site of original learning followed by its continuation in the second stage of online virtuality, negotiated through the technologies developed (or developing) in the former (Butler, *Gender Trouble*). Double virtuality thus, rests not on a perfectly curated self but one in progression. This does not imply that when a certain amount of 'expertise' has been achieved or when sex is changed 'completely' like in the case of bloggers, Gazal, Living Smile Vidya and Kalki Subramaniam, the first stage, like a snake's skin can be shed and abandoned. It would amount to presupposing that marginality can also be resolved through mutating identities. Blogs as virtual narrative making sites may prevent such foreclosures. As Kylie Jarett in her essay, "Battlecat Then, Battlecat Now: Temporal Shifts, Hyperlinking and Database Subjectivities" says, "The dynamism of the temporal framework of the blog produces an assembled subjectivity that is necessarily dynamic as well." Denying the subject denouement, the emphasis shifts back increasingly to movement. On a blog you can never write enough. What Wilchins would consider a vicious cycle of desire, Bornstein could explain as welcome and inevitable post-modern explosions. This incompleteness of the blog text and the accompanying critical concerns will be discussed eventually. For the moment, to consider unswervingly relevant notions on why the study of transgenders' virtual achievements, more precisely, blogs are important, Ekins and King's essay "The Emergence of New Transgendering Identities in the Age of the Internet" would throw some light on the matter, when they insist:

> At various times and places, certain stories 'cannot be told'. These stories are taboo and attempts are made to silence their tellers. Such stories,...we term 'unwelcome stories' (26).

Their objective is to excavate the facilitation of the less respectable erotic stories[1] through means of blogging and the internet in general as opposed to the formulaic "respectable" transsexual narratives in western discourses of sex change that have been created in cahoots

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[1] For a detailed account of their point of departure of sexual stories that cannot be told, see Plummer.

with the medical gate keepers of surgery. The more underground narratives are now available easily to identify with (23-42). However, unwelcome stories need not be erotic. Conceivably, it is the particular privilege of a western transgender subject who may enjoy more or less mainstream representation albeit sanitised and filtered. To make a contest to see who is precisely more disenfranchised and underrepresented in degrees is threateningly pedantic when the more pressing concern lies in exploring blogs as a mode of discursive productions.

Mediators

If not blogs, there must be other mediums from where the Indian trannie speaks or has spoken. As far as online is concern, queer historian Ruth Vanita's recent, *Project Bolo:A Collection of Oral Histories of LGBT* (2011) is a recent case in point. Narrations by LGBT subjects, most notably, prominent trans activists like Laxmi Narain Tripathi are examples of an archival video effort by Vanita.[2] Other documentaries include the stylised docu-drama, *A Mermaid Called Aida* (1996) by Riyad Vinci Wadia is about Aida Banajee's transsexual experience. It was also widely covered by the media and also appeared in 'Parsiana', the Parsi community journal documented by Merchant in *Yaraana*; *Main Hijra Hoon: A Eunuch Named Sunita* (1997) produced by TVI; *Being Male, Being Kothi* (2007) by Mahuya Banerjee; *Degham: A Film on the Transgender Experience in India* (2008) by the Mumbai based feminist organisation, Sparrow; and the YouTube release, *Panna Hijra, a transgender born in a village in India* (2011) by the anonymously run documentary organisation, Bharat Katha. These are examples of mediated audio-visual accounts. In stark contrast lie numerous self-made videos on YouTube.[3]

The earliest self-composition in writing appears to be by transsexual Farrah Rustom-Beal of Mumbai in the seventies. She wrote her story in leading journalistic publications according to Facebook user, Asha Kiran, a coordinator for the NGO TransPal Foundation in Bengaluru. She posted a commemorative collage of Rustom's images with a summarising description of her trans life in her album, 'Wall Photos'. In the caption, Kiran adds:

> My Role Model- who I was lucky enough to meet Farokh Rustom who became Farrah Rustom
> under the scalpel of Dr M H Keshwani in 1975 She first wrote her story in the Illustrated weekly Under

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[2] Also published online in streaming video format.
[3] I choose not to shift the focus to trannie videos as those lie outside the scope of this study.

the pseudonym PRIYA before mustering Courage to write under her Own name a 14 page Story in the IMPRINT

A renowned Musicologist and Columnist who held Mumbai (then Bombay) in awe. she regularly wrote **columns for the tabloid 'Daily'**, held music appreciation workshops at the Max Mueller Bhavan and had piano recitals at NCPA. She even went on a Music fellowship to Germany and returned with her German Beau in Tow.

A marriage at the Arya Samaj followed (in 1986 ?) and she followed her husband into thin air.....

God Bless her .... wherever she is..... she was a True inspiration to me and thousands like me

My Role Model—who I was lucky enough to meet Farokh Rustom who became Farrah Rustom under the scalpel of Dr M H Keshwani in 1975 She first wrote her story in the Illustrated weekly Under the pseudonym PRIYA before mustering Courage to write under her Own name a 14 page Story in the IMPRINT

Fig. 1. **Asha Kiran's** *Facebook* dedication to Farrah Rustom-Beal. 25 July, 2012.

The narrative independence of Farrah Rustom-Beal is affirmed by writer Malavika Sangghvi in a *DNA* piece on Ajay Mafatlal's publicised sex change in 2005. In "Human dignity is most valuable" she writes,

Many years ago I spent an afternoon with one of Mumbai's prominent sex-change personalities, Farrah Rustom who I had known earlier as Faroukh-the piano teacher. I sat riveted and repulsed by the blow by blow (again, no pun intended) account of the painful electrolysis, the traumatic penis- removal surgery and the constant, lifelong anxiety of turning into a woman. Here was a person who was willing to undergo mutilation, expenses and ridicule just to feel authentic in their own skin- something that you and I take for granted.

Also, Hoshang Merchant in his pastiche mock-epic poem, *Les Paradis ne sont artificiels* dedicates part of his "Political Canto XIX" to Rustom-Beal:

> What are they trying to prove?
>   -Materialists of the soul
>   spiritualists of the body
> Post-mortem   No scrotum
> So that B'bay's Farrokh Rustom
>   becomes Farah Beal (Mrs) in Co.
>   goes to her piano
>   and no sound comes :
>   She too has forgotten Tchaikovsky
>   due to her brand new body
>   (Better be a fag)

His is a satire pointed in many directions. The dead communist movement, metonymically expressed here curiously through Tchaikovsky ties up with Rustom-Beal's end of maleness and hence, inability to play the Russian composer. She has crossed over into the heteronormative and been pacified. The subversive potential of her gendered and sexual being is over as she can be seen as a sell-out. Furthermore, Rustom-Beal to Merchant is not what Banajee is to Wadia. The fellow-feeling between trans and gay is emphatically produced on screen. One may recall Judith Butler's indulgence with the lesbian filmmaker, Jenny Livingstone whose efforts in *Paris is Burning* are much appreciated for bringing out the marginal trans people of New York's drag-balls. The sympathetic portrayal for Butler was made owing to an honest affinity (*Bodies that Matter* 81-98). If one can approach Merchant's use of Rustom-Beal as a trope to underline American victory over Russian communism in the same spirit then the question of mediation is obliterated. Lastly, Merchant's politics of militant gender rebellion may be the ultimate answer to homo and transphobia but the important issue here is that of who is speaking for whom? By 2006, the time of Merchant's

epic, and Sanghvi's penultimate reflection, notwithstanding Tiwari's dedication of 2012, Rustom-Beal has disappeared from narrative space. Therefore, the missing archives of *The Illustrated Weekly of India* and *Imprint* are the only conspicuously absent points from which she can tell us what it is like to be transsexual. The fact of others speaking on behalf of her, ranging from nostalgic to critical leave much to be desired as far as telling of a tale about oneself goes.

In writing, other examples of arbitrated stories come to mind. Dayanita Singh's *Myself, Mona Ahmed* (2001) about Mona, the hijra is described as "A mix of photobook, biography, autobiography and fiction" on the author's webpage. On the other hand, lie anthropologists like Serena Nanda with *Neither Man, Nor Woman: The Hijras of India* (1999) and Gayatri Reddy with *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India* (2005). Both did not just 'study' hijras, kothis and zenanas but more or less, speciously allowed them textual space to self-narrate, ranging from telling of their life stories to opinions to anecdotes.[4] Although, the problem common between these personal undertakings; anthropology; and history making labours is the requirement of interceding. Nanda writes emphatically on her methodology inhibiting "narrators",

> In the course of telling a life story, selection always occurs in the mind of the narrator as certain events are revealed, others omitted, some exaggerated, elaborated or minimized (113).

The hijra storyteller stands obstinately in the way of Nanda and what she calls the "right information" (113). To obtain their stories on their own terms is unthinkable to the investigative anthropologist. It would be erroneous to imagine Nanda reacting in a different way to a written document given to her by the hijras. Singh is more aggressively acquisitive, for "...it was Mona's own **refusal** to be the subject of such a project that pushed Dayanita into producing, eventually, a 'visual novel'...which is much more the story of an inward journey and a relationship than the documentary account of a different social reality and sexual identity."[5] It is astoundingly apparent that chronicles can be forced out of the trans subject sans alibis of scholarship with surreptitious intimacy. None known examples of an ideal narrative independence seem to exist except for the sole published autobiography, *The*

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[4] Serena Nanda dedicates four chapters in her study to tell stories of her subjects without excessive analytical interruptions. Reddy allows for citations only within the framework of her analysis.
[5] Emphasis, added.

Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story by A. Revathi in 2010. Unlike the western transsexual, it is a question over what Nanda's hijras might consider an 'unwelcome story' that could simply be not told, especially to an outsider. Maybe it can be written after all, given Revathi's articulate rendering of brutalities committed against hijras (133). It is hard to imagine otherwise, at the risk of completely discounting the still unspeakable we will not know and, it is in that spirit that a turn to transgender blogs for discourse that one may turn.

The Real and the Privileged

When we came to the juncture of double virtuality, a third trajectory was not reflected upon. That of the return to the real or offline: an option of translation back into the tactile. For certain queer subjects, the question is irrelevant. In fact, given the more pervasive and socio-culturally institutionalised community formations, they may eschew selectively as a result, the very identity they had laid claim for politically, in the beginning. Julie Rak on American queer blogs in "The Digital Queer: Weblogs and Internet Identity" notes towards the end of her essay:

> These bloggers do not have to present themselves as queer or GLBT in blog entries all the time, and they can present themselves that way some of the time, because they do not experience persecution on a daily basis. This is, therefore, a queer population with some privilege (179-180).

Moreover, Rak's studied subjects "[A]ll represented their experiences (and their subject positions) as real and supported by documentation such as photographs of themselves, the use of their real first and last names, and references to the cities in which they live their offline lives" (179). Bloggers like Malika may find such openness incredible and is perhaps a choice harder for someone like her than Rak's bloggers. Not to forget that in the occasion of transgender, online identity and name may not be as one-dimensional as that of cisgender/sexual persons, closeted queer or otherwise. Before indulging in that debate, one must explore another dimension to the immediate matter of offline subjectivity. Parmesh Shahani's study of Gay Bombay straddles the online/ offline worlds and comes away with an ethnographic analysis of community building at both levels. Not only do participants create narratives within the email list but also organise events. The loosely institutionalised experience that is Gay Bombay is also remarkable for its ethos of grounded activity whether

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in frivolity or select politicking. The participants build narratives[6] and are constantly encouraged to meet in real life and create a civic presence (228-234). In fact his point of departure is David Silver's idea of the "virtualization of the real space and a realization of virtual space" (qtd. in Shahani 26). Shahani's subjects commute between the two realms mediated by a group of handful of Gay Bombay pillar members and email list moderators who enable this kinesis (134-136). Transgenders in India have not seemed to be mobilised in such a way outside NGOs like Humsafar Trust or Vividha[7]. The history of separation of Gay Bombay from Humsafar Trust that Alok Gupta recounts in "Englishpur ki Kothi" and which Shahani asks about from his respondents, shows the alienation of gay men from Humsafar Trust because of its focus not only on HIV and MSM but hijras and kothis (Gupta 125-129; Shahani 248-249). The third trajectory after double virtuality can be seen to be denied to transgenders in India unless taken up at the personal level of which accounts can be sought within the virtual narratives. Malika in the fictional(?) autobiographical story "First Steps" speaks of becoming a woman more completely only after she is coerced into sex in a moving car,

> Tears came out of my eyes. I started to shake his penis which seemed enormous. It was large and stout. My bangles jingled to a tinking beat.
>
> I, Malika had began my journey to become a woman.

More crucial here, than the true realisation of her identity (when recognised) by external agents is that the presumably real life event when recorded online is available strictly singly. To be discovered, read and reposted, repeated or appropriated in that sphere alone and not in a formalised socio-discursive space that actively incorporates the virtual in the method and manner of Gay Bombay. Literally, the personal does become political but remains in the field of the personal i.e. virtual. Contrarily, the crystallisation of an offline institution must have its own downsides to consider, such as erasures of certain narratives as we have learnt from Ekins and Kings' citation of sanitised and surgery focused transsexual novels against the unspeakable erotic blogs. Still conversely, we may then view the rigorously virtual trannie as more liberated and freely expressive, owing to zero accountability in the real.

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[6] Within the privately circulated mailing list studied by Shahani and as contributions to the webpage Gaybombay.org

[7] For a note on Vividha's liaison with transgenders, see Sukhthankar.

What bothers one is still the matter of privilege. Gupta notes discernible economic differences where English is an explicit class marker of the bourgeois gay man and its lack standing for the hijras and the kothis (124-125). Kothis at a cruising spot try to interpellate, subversively if not sarcastically, Gupta as one of their own but different only due to his linguistic upgrade as somehow made obvious in his appearance. Someone, who clearly does not belong in their liminal space. Gupta, the kothi from Englishpur presents this dilemma of identity where the key to access is a certain education than any other efforts at gender presentation (124).

On the adaptation of western queer symbolism and language by Indian queers whose urban movement is relegated to a select English speaking elite and little do with the rest of LGBT persons across the nation, Parvez Sharma protests in his article in *The Guardian*. In "Gay pride only goes so far in India" he writes,

> Last month, out and proud gay men and women marched in Delhi's annual gay pride march. Many posed happily for the news cameras. Rainbow flags were in abundance, as was western terminology such as "gay", "queer" (even transcribed into Hindi on some signs) and "LGBTQ".

> As I looked at photos of the event taken by my Facebook friends, I realised that most came from middle- or upper-class families and would have a degree of ease with the English language. I have often wondered about the need to use western models of emancipation such as "gay pride" marches and rainbow banners in cultural contexts that are vastly different.

> While filming "gay" Muslims around the world, I realised that very often an absence of affirmative language for their sexual selves in their native tongues was what united them. I have always found the word "queer" problematic and find its use on signs in Hindi to be surprising at the very least.

> In so many countries, invisibility is the norm and the preferred option for those who have same-sex desires. I have no doubt that most of the men and women who were busy marching in Delhi waving their banners would not like to be seen at a downmarket venue like the *dharamshala* in Saharanpur and I am not even sure if many of these newly minted "queer" activists from India's big cities would find common cause with the small-town types arrested at this "gay party". Italics, authors.

Sharma is speaking of the 2010 arrests made at the small town in Uttar Pradesh where police busted a homosexual event. Commenting on the irrelevance of the 2009 repeal of Section 377 in the face of the overpowering police, could it be that empowerment has been exactingly urban and bourgeois? If yes, the hallmark of this phenomenon is epitomised by the use of

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English obvious in the stagnantly embryonic transliteration of terminologies on the placards at the pride parade. If queer was once a cuss word for gender/sexual deviants then at home contemporary abuses can be mobilised to redirect the linguistic part of LGBT politics. Why is 'hijra' and 'kothi', the academically applicable categories missing from the banners? For that matter why do we not get to read gandu, khojja, zenana, chakka, lundbaaz, dhurrani, menaka, rani etc? (Bhaskaran 99) If subjects can get past the embarrassing sexual detail in some of these names, then Sharma's suggestion would come to fulfilment at the linguistic level that would produce a politics (even if only in urban centres) that more LGBT persons can relate to across the nation.

Another question of category will seduce this end of the debate to turn to the previous chapter. Moving to the next level but keeping the question of language, one sees that admittance to cyberspace requires English too. Privilege here is more visible in degrees of separation. Most transgender blogs and stories are surely composed in English but there exist many narratives in the colloquially hybrid, 'Hinglish' and many which are transliterated from Hindi into the Roman script, owing possibly to the lack of Devanagri keyboards. Rahul Mitra as 'livinghigh' in "Queer Blogging in Indian Digital Diasporas: A Dialogic Encounter" writes,

> There are some who go against the diktat of "institutional" English, of course. . . .Blogger *does* allow Indian scripts. . . .There's the closeted man (Hanuman) somewhere in Uttar Pradesh who talks about being gay and married, nothing too fancy, a plain white background, and simple black script. Devanagari Hindi. You'd be surprised to know that even gay men in the smallest, least industrialized, most rural towns of the Indian heartland scout for tricks online . . . email and guys4men.com is a great way to make their presence felt in their tiny district (and even though they probably never imagined) in cyberspace (416). Italics, author's.

Ananda Mitra and Elisia Cohen in "Analyzing the Web: Directions and Challenges declare:

> Increasingly, the lingua franca of the WWW is English. This has, however, been contested, and there continue to be arguments about the implications of English becoming the unofficial global language of the WWW. Resistance to this tendency appears in the form of WWW sites written in different languages, some of which might use the English script, but many of which use a different script altogether. Witness, for instance, a site written in Bengali language using Devanagari script (http://www.parabaas.com). The page is produced by creating the documents as file images and then providing the image files as the primary content of the site....Such sites remain inaccessible to readers

unfamiliar with the language. Thus, the reader of the global WWW text could be lost in a sector of cyberspace where the language is unintelligible. For the segment of the global population who can, however, read, write, and understand English, much of the WWW space remains accessible (247).

Much has changed since the time they wrote of preliminary issues on web analysis. Now one can even write in other scripts using free online software that enable phonetic typing and as Rahul Mitra shows, Blogger facilitates the use of regional languages given his surprise at the rural man's search for sex online. The greatest achievement of Hanuman has been however, making the mark in his territory and the language used is means to a specified end. On the other hand, Living Smile Vidya's sole use of Tamil is a glaring reminder of the dearth of linguistic diversity in trans expression online. She is the only blogger discovered so far in this research, to write in her native-regional language. Derivatively, most trans bloggers can also afford some sort of privilege in access to the internet and leisure to compose stories and other narratives. As Malika writes, in "Trans Internet" ardently about her interactions,

> These TGIs (TransGendered Indians) were educated, from a middle or upper middle class urban background, English speaking or at least reading and writing basic English, they had to be, because they were Internet-wise.... Here we in india were in Tabooland. None of them could talk about this to anybody around them. They would be banished from family and social life, forced to join the Hijras and ike out a living begging on the streets. So the internet had become the freedom space, it offered a vast library of information. The USian and Western European transgender person had come out in the open or at least on the internet...T-girls offered their "piccies", dressed up in various feminine costumes to delight and excite the voyeuristic and frustrated TGI. Some gave information that we so wanted to understand our state.

Or as Kalki Subramaniam laments in "Indian Transwoman" on *Kalki's Blog-*

> I see that there are absolutely no Transwoman Indian websites. Sadly, all the famous and accomplished girls of the Indian Transcommunity are either hiding in their homes or are computer illiterates.

> Will it be another 15 years for the next generation of Indian transgirls to be bold, open, honest, educated and liberal in India?

A minimum linguistic and computer application knowledge becomes unavoidable to not depend on arbitrators of identity like Nanda or Reddy or worse still as Malika fears, having to join the hijras who clearly represent the bottom of the transgender barrel unlike the more

liberated and internet savvy westerners. Above all, in Kalki's rhetoric, literacy and liberty go hand in hand. Furthermore, you may write in your own language but to navigate the net and access other perspectives you still need English skills. If you do, then you are fortunate like Patricia Shelly as Radha who in "Chapter 1- Beginnings" of her blog novella found on *Patricia's Indian Transgendered Page* says,

> The Internet is a wonderful thing. One does not need to go through the trouble of finding a publisher to publish one's writings. And a published autobiography can soon become dated because life does not stop! The Internet circumvents all these problems because it is possible to publish newer chapters as soon as events occur in one's life.

Granted one may simply log in, publish a story and log out. Such an artless schema of entry and exit does not hold much value online. It is not about floating bottles with messages but a set up where simultaneous cross connections come to identify a lose group of identifications and fractional memberships due to the nature of the networked randomness of cyber texts. That concern leads to the revelation of further implications in studying transgender blogs. Primarily, it is the supreme question of authorial authority, appropriation, incorporations and plagiarism within blogs related to the concern of the erratic nature of 'hypertexts' with their incompleteness, intertextuality and ephemerality, in turn related to the question of critical interference over inconsistencies and finally, community building. The list need not present a hierarchy of trepidations. Instead, they could be treated as conundrums criss-crossing and producing multiple junctions pointing towards each other. While this chapter emphasises the matter of the author figure in blogs, one should be mindful of the fact that it comes at the cost of less impetus given to the hypertext and far lesser to other queries in the bargain.

Blogger/ Author and the Hypertext

An anonymous non trans blogger in italics wrote on his blog called, *Funny Side of Life*, "*A novice blogger knows he can write about anything. A verteran blogger realizes he shouldn't*".[8] Found in the top search result on "funny quotes on blogging", the above 'truism' holds light in the direction of two pathways in this section. Firstly, in the creation of binaries. Following the Ekins and King school of thought, our trannie falls more in the novice category who can probably write anything and thus, speak the unspeakable. Secondly, the highlighted

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[8] Emphasis, added.

spelling error presents unambiguously, the dilemma of critical intervention of whether the original text that was published without any editing should be meddled with just to clarify the meanings.

Taking that direction, with a hypothetical conviction of writing as speaking, the first consideration is not only the author but the validity of her/hir authority too. Amardeep Singh in a succinctly titled essay "Anonymity, Authorship and Blogger Ethics" ponders over Roland Barthes' pronouncement of the death of the author and Michel Foucault's idea of 'author-function', which were both in reaction to the Modernist transcendence located originally in the Romantic notion of subjectivity. In the case of the blogger-author he contends,

> What the contemporary theorists of Authorship haven't fully addressed yet is the way a technology that allows mass participation in the category of Authorship at an unprecedented level also puts in place the means to supersede in some ways the limitations of individualized ownership of texts (32).

Risking an elevation of genre over matter, Singh is valuable for resisting a conative evolution for everything published on a single blog as the intellectual property of that 'author'. For instance, Nimisha Mehandi's blog, *i love sarees* is indirectly incorporative with sourced texts but credit is not always found to be due. Moreover, contradicting autobiographical accounts by one of her contributors, Sunitapink who in both her stories: "I WAS A HANDSOME BOY - (Written by Sunitapink)" and "A TRUE STORY NARRATED BY SUINTAJI -- I AM MY TWIN SISTER" is a successful business woman but presents two starkly opposing versions of her life calls into question the authenticity of not only her-self but the very textual output of Mehandi. In many other stories on *i love sarees*, it is impossible to tell whose authorial point of view has been presented. An interesting example is her obvious plagiarism of a story titled, "MY CROSSDRESSED WEDDING- SANDEEP TO SEEMA". What seems to be a story by a southern US writer presented with ethnically changed names shows gaps in places where the blogger forgot to replace 'Mason' with 'Mishra' and 'Nick' with 'Neeraj' amidst other slips and examples such as descriptions of Southern vintage architecture. Such excessive carping on one's part arises maybe due to a severe hangover of the author-function if not authorship per se. Maybe Mehandi's name would have been enough to organise the entire oeuvre she presents since 2005. The chink in the suspension of belief grows as she may or may not lend her name to every story even though it is her blog. If one

was to pose this problem to Singh, he would emphasise both the re-emergence of the author figure and his/her/hir simultaneous decline due to the virtue of the form bloggers perform their craft in:

> Although bloggers are supposed to be concerned about giving credit where credit is due (the "Bloggers' Code of Ethics" cited above lists "Never plagiarize" as its very first precept), for many bloggers- especially those who have an interest in commenting on current events- the ability to cut and paste bits of text, images, and video means that one incorporates an unprecedented amount of material by other authors into one's own writing. Most blogs are at least partially collage texts, bound together by a blogger's name, but heavily dependent on citations and excerpts that are effectively intertextual (32).

Presuming, Mehandi never bothered to read any such mentioned code of ethics[9], she may not be consciously making a revolution against authorial authority either, never mind spontaneously pervasive intertextuality. It is the very nature of blogs that allows the ease of "Push Button Publishing"[10] that makes for the effortless incorporations found in the hypertext. Hypertext, according to Mitra and Cohen is marked by 'hyper' due to the linking of an infinite number of sources that belie any beginning or end for any of the participating texts. The hyperlink that makes the text a hypertext also makes it changeable without warning, if not ephemeral. They write, "this disappearance is taken for granted, and authors of the texts do not provide any assurance that the texts are permanent". Although, the infinite and "notoriously impermanent" hypertext/s must be then coterminous to the lack of any "centralized publication and circulation system" which leads to the production of "a Babel of texts" whose authenticity and reliability are constantly called into question because they do not represent the traditional and "authentic...sources of information" (248-253). Deepa works in tandem when she spells out the disclaimer before telling a tale, "RAGGING BY GIRLS......." on her blog *Deepa Creations*:

> *(This story taken from a site and I add more things to make it interesting. I wish you have like this......)*

Had she not, which remains an easy option, one would have not doubted her legitimacy as the author of that particular story. Mitra and Cohen do mention that if we are to question the hypertext's authenticity, we will undermine the very purpose of the "World Wide Web"

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[9] For a detailed blogger manifesto, see Ringmar.
[10] The now defunct slogan of Google's Blogger.com.

(253). Their view is especially relevant to the case of transgender because the fiction one

finds may qualify to be the fact of the matter because of the deep convictions felt in being

transgender. Queer-transgender theorist, Judith Halberstam in her book, *In a Queer Time and*

Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives sums up this ambiguity when discussing trans

representations. She mentions,

> When we read transgender lives, complex and contradictory as they may seem, it is necessary to read
> for life and not for the lie. Dishonesty, after all, is just another word for narrative (74).

If we do discard issues of authorship, authority and author-function, how will one

narrow down a relatively stable text in the first place for analysis? One possible solution

Mitra and Cohen suggest involves looking for the most representable and frequently cited.

Thereby, exploiting the hyperlinks (50-51). Ironically, it has been an easy choice to make in

the Indian transgender bloggers' case since, only a very countable number of blogs seem to

exist which have been discovered through relatively smooth navigations across hyperlinks,

Google search and searches made from reading "Blog Followers" lists. The reason is the

visible paucity of discourse. Other cultures may witness saturation and would have to find

other means of selection processes such as detangling and directory making. As Tyler Curtain

has noted in his view on queer blogs in "Promiscuous Fictions",

> The lists grow large and ragged, and are constructed haphazardly, adding new blogs by sticking them at
> the end of the list. Often, catalogues or filters take up the need to systematize access to blogs based on
> content and interaction styles such as through commenting systems or the ability to join the site to post
> one's own comment.

The hypertext is also relevant on three other accounts: in the intertextuality of visual

citations; inconsistent language; and community building through hyperlinks. One may pause

to take these one at a time while constantly returning to the question of hypertexts in a

restricted field.

An effort to resolve the matter of reading erratic texts published instantaneously sans editorial

aid involves dealing with syntactical, grammatical or simply, typographical errors. To change

or not to change, the text when explicating one, is the question. The authorial agency is of

course not far away in Steve Himmer's view of blogs in "The Labyrinth Unbound: Weblogs

as Literature" as composed in an ergodic system of webbed mathematics. He writes,

> ...without the hurdle of editors, publishers, and corporations between writers and "publication" in some form or another, weblog authors are able to write exactly what they want to, in exactly the way they prefer...An ergodic work,...is multicursal, offering multiple paths for traversing the text. There is not a single defined narrative route, as in *Ulysses*, but instead a variety of possible movements from each point in the work to any number of other points in the work. The text is reassembled-thus rewritten-through the interaction of author and reader with each performance.

The vertigo inducing rabbit-hole geography of the hyperlinked blogosphere should then be free of grammatical and other rules we take for granted in any highly regarded textual analysis. However, if in cases where meaning is particularly hindered, an explanatory supplementing note may be given. Himmer would disagree because he also values not content in his study but the very act and experience of reading. We depart at that juncture as content is valued here, in the face of literary scarcity. The ergodic adventure of Indian transgender blogs end in a *cul de sac* because the luxury of the labyrinth does not apply when dealing with a limited numbers of blogs in existence. Inspiring, therefore, a resolve to study these blogs not as a genre but a specifically located medium for certain transgenders' identity enablement and expedition in much detail otherwise impossible. Patricia Shelly as Radha wrote in her first chapter, "This autobiography will be constantly "under construction" as newer chapters will continue to get added all the time." She has not uploaded since Chapter 18 on 17 July 2010. Note especially, hers is not a concern of hyperlinking her texts to any of Himmer's web of elsewheres at all despite the followers' listings. Her 'labyrinth' if any, would be derisory to herself within her blog and her own unfinished project of transing. Hence, instead of any reading experience, more immediate is the discovered text albeit, inconsistent and erratic.

Caption Blogs

Caption blogs exacerbate the dilemma of citations, visually. They have a misleading name. They usually consist of a random to selectively appropriated image onto which is attached a textual image file[11] with a seemingly impromptu story built around the photograph. Many transgender caption blogs improvise stories on pictures of popular Bollywood actors or

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[11] Recall, Mitra and Cohen's Devanagri website.

models or regular cissexual/gender women to rewrite and write over the fiction the picture may tell otherwise.
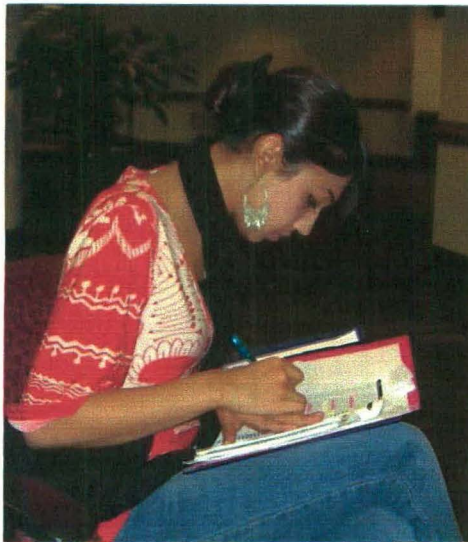
Wearing bra....check

Wearing panties....check

Wearing mascara....check

Wearing makeup....check

Pierced ears....check

Long hairs....check

Hairless body....check

Nailpolish....check

Wearing high heels....check

Typing speed 50 wpm....uncheck

This was the third time Madhu was applying for ADSW (Advance Diploma in Secretarial Work).

Although a college dropout he has been working as a secretary for two years. The boss is very happy with the services he provides (especially those under the table) but said for a permanent job Madhu needs a relevant degree.

Madhu wants a permanent job because there are not many offices in the city which will allow him to come to office wearing a saree or call himself Madhu instead of Mukul.

Do you think Madhu will be selected this time? I don't. I feel when you want to impress the interviewers you must wear a saree and not jeans.

Nidhi

Fig. 2. "The Admission" by Nidhi in *Nidhi's Captions.*
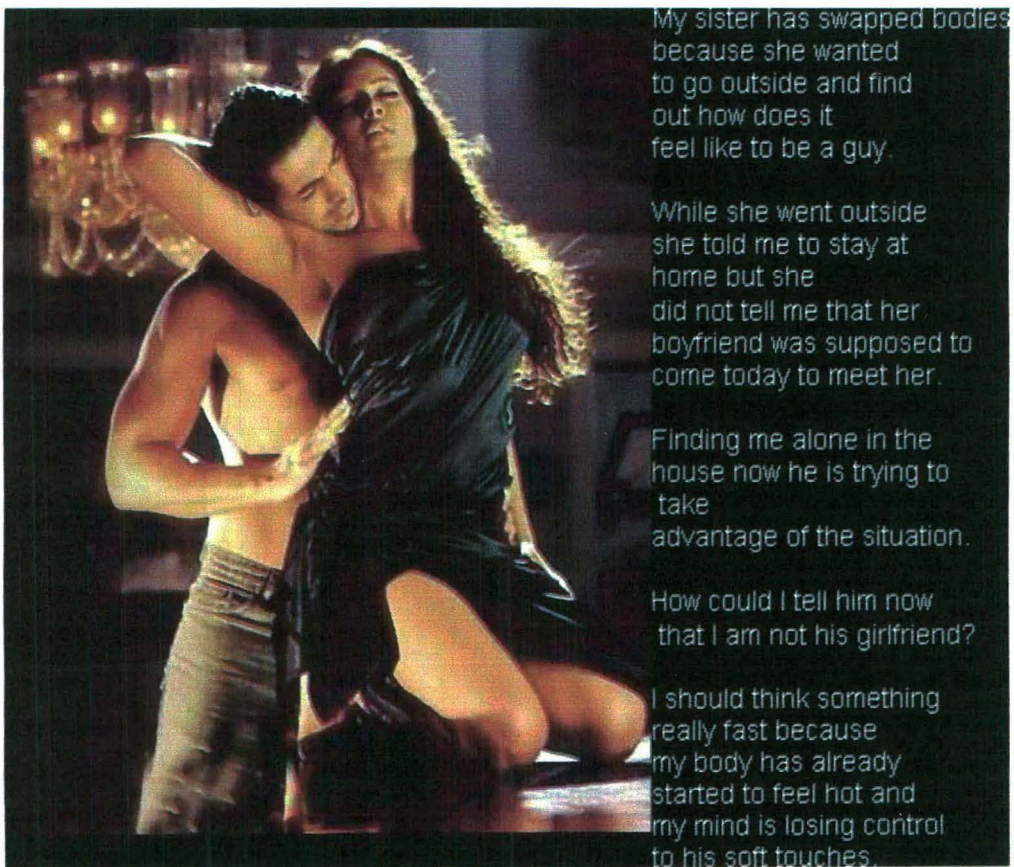
My sister has swapped bodies because she wanted to go outside and find out how does it feel like to be a guy.

While she went outside she told me to stay at home but she did not tell me that her boyfriend was supposed to come today to meet her.

Finding me alone in the house now he is trying to take advantage of the situation.

How could I tell him now that I am not his girlfriend?

I should think something really fast because my body has already started to feel hot and my mind is losing control to his soft touches.

Fig. 3. "Swaping with Sister" by Anonymous in *BOLLYWOOD TG CAPTIONS.*

What the above two pictorials do is stump any questions of authorial authority not only over the text but over identity as well. If the first image could be of anyone or from anywhere, where Nidhi freely scribbles her own ideas of employment boiling down to appropriate clothing, could be a straightforward instance of appropriation with copyright issues out of the immediate view. The second one from *BOLLYWOOD TG CAPTIONS* is too famous to be read keeping the same approach. Bipasha Basu in fugue when reconfigured as transgender in a completely removed context could either be viewed as outright plagiarism or politicised appropriation always in dissociative flux which can be taken away as easily as it was obtained.[12] As Singh mentioned, the ease of cut and paste is one bound to be utilised. Perhaps, another approach is warranted. Meredith Badger in her essay, "Visual Blogs" may have an answer somewhat isolated from, yet reflective of the hypertext when she opines,

> The blog medium is one that allows disparate elements and contrasting styles to co-exist harmoniously,
> rubbing up against each other and influencing the way we respond to the other elements contained
> there. It is hard to think of another publishing medium that creates such a successful blending of tone,
> style as well as the public and private aspects of the one person. Clearly then, images can affect how
> we read blogs and blogs can alter the way we react to images. So seductive, in fact, is this
> word/image/blog combination that it can sometimes lead us astray.

More important than the seduction is the contingency of the image. Visual blogs are a starting point for debate and discussion. They emphasise the present tense as in, "this is what I have seen" or "this is how things look to me from where I stand right now", nearly collapsing other urgings. To emphasise the moment of the pastiche postpones the enthusiastic quest of meaning. The dilemma over originality loses importance over the more pressing identity building exercise.

Blogger/ Author and Identity

Before a brief turn to community building, one must reconsider the above polemic through the novice trannie blogger who is warranted in the face of authorship at the more concentrated level of identity. The non-trans blogger Anonymous' anxieties mentioned earlier are probably over the common foot-in-mouth disease of enthusiastic writers online. Hence,

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[12] Note that Judith Butler ignores such an unstable and vulnerable process that is subcultural appropriation in reading the documentary, *Paris is Burning* where 'Voguing' is adopted from Vogue magazine by coloured trannies of New York and then taken away by Madonna in her video 'Vogue'. From mainstream commercial; to underground; to back to mainstream commercial. See Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 81-98.

bringing in forcefully, identity politics decontextualizes his/her quote but usefully so because noviciate signifies both a place and a period. Trannie as novice who has been deprived of an institutionalised return to the offline must stay afloat in cyberspace which is without any doubt, a hyperspace[13] of suspension. Can one then, really tell the blogger from the blog? The one who writes autobiographical fiction, random snatches of poetry or, unfinished novellas? The one who is constantly writing the self? Or is it the self that is to be read in the writings? Maybe, it is the story which is the self that was always there. The blogger is the blog and the blog is the blogger. Despite the punning echo of the analogy presented here, we may be able to eschew the similarities. The dance must have been so sublime and so thrilling...performed with such exuberance that it moved your senses. In your emotional upheaval you, for a moment or maybe for more than a while, could not tell the dancer from the dance.

Thankfully, taste is not criterion for judgement since Matthew Arnold. So, it does not really matter how well the blogging trannie weaves her/hir words. Our inability to tell the blogger from the blog must, and specifically, the transgender blog is not just because of its 'hyperness' but also because we are not supposed to be very sure about her/hir identity like Halberstam. Identity, which in this case is already in flux, in transing. For instance, most bloggers who write what can be called risqué material like the recently published Ameera Al Hakawati, case in point, use pseudonyms. [14] But in the case of the transgender blogger, it may as well be the real new name by which the blogger wants her/hir identity to grow. For Singh, all pseudonyms, regardless of gender status would not merely be masks but full-fledged sites of that identity (21). One may in favour of the transgender argue that the act of taking a feminine name would be one of the very first and vital steps of conscious restoration like Malika in "Trans Internet" has done:

> I first 'appeared' as Malika on the world wide web back in 1998 and I soon discovered that were a lot of transgender Indians lurking around on the net.

Malika appears in the strict context of transgender. The idea is not to undermine the likes of Hakawati but to underline the importance of motives in the use of pseudonym and their differently located requirements. There is no telling when a different name than the one from

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[13] Accounting for not only Mitra and Cohen's networked hyperlink/text but Baudrillard's Hyperreal of infinite reproduction sans original reinterpreted in our times where one has moved beyond the simulation of a text (email-post) to the simulation of presence (email-address). See Nunes 172.
[14] *Desperate in Dubai*, the 2011 novel is a culmination of Hakawati's blog of the same name.

which they must have been first interpellated from is not the point of departure for valid identity constructing textual productions. An unusual name like 'Living Smile Vidya' is something most people express wonder at as she says in "Article on Tirunangai Life- A Movie Screening":

> A reporter had come around 4.30. He had come from such and such publication, and wanted to gather news regarding the program-screening...He did not accept my name as it sounds foreign, Living Smile Vidya. I think, because of this reason it never turned up in the newspaper (it is really a headache to make these Indians understand my name).

The failure to recognise a name that includes a generic noun and a present-continuous verb, exemplifies our limited understanding of identity and LSV would make that an intrinsically Indian drawback. Kalki Subramaniam and Gazal who changed sex like the tirunangai, LSV write as authors of their consciously chosen name. LSV may have written an autobiography which could 'authenticate' her identity if we are to value the institutionally published over the virtual but others do not have the same privilege (yet). While Subramaniam and Gazal's appearances and citations in popular media again confirm their realities as trans persons,[15] those like Malika, Lady Male, Deepa, Sunitha, Nimisha and many others cannot be similarly located if not verified. Although, such investigations could be seen as ethically suspect, the question of legitimacy of voice still raises itself despite Mitra and Cohen's protest against undermining the "WWW" (50).

Rahul Mitra as 'livinghigh' conceptualises the issue of authenticity in terms of the closet. He writes,

> The notion of physical separation also becomes important when I think of those who are quite "out" in the blogsphere- that is, even if they do not use their offline names in their posts regularly, they have done so earlier, or made some prior mention of it somewhere, so that the majority of the blog's regular readers know who he/she is. By physical separation, I mean a very clear (either implicit or explicit) segregation of the online and offline lives, in terms of (for example) no offline contact by any of the blog readers unless specifically invited to, no attempt to popularize the blog to people in the bloggers' offline circle (personal or professional), and so on. . . . When there is a transgression here, the blogger often decides to shut shop- which happened in the case of three queer blogs I have been a regular reader of, *Uberhomme*, *VenialSin* and *DeviantCore* (418-19). Italics, author's.

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[15] Kalki Subramaniam is a famous transgender activist who runs the NGO Sahodari. See Subramaniam "My Story...". Gazal Dhaliwal's sex change has been covered in the Indian media widely. See Gulab.

The poseur, at the end of the day has an easy escape route in the simple means of the delete and disappear option. Therefore, even if one is to challenge Mitra and Cohen's idea and investigate after the blogger, it would be an unrewarding exercise. Focus can then be shifted to the production of the texts by the blogger.

Brenda Danet in an essay titled, "Text as Mask: Gender, Play and Performance on the Internet" speaks of cross-gender performance in virtual reality texts such as MUDs and MOOs[16] by largely cisgendered males who can be said to infiltrate the feminine by means of textually produced effects. Blogs are more narrative oriented in that there is no real time exchange that may be available in VR spaces. Danet's men in largely, verbal drag would choose a pseudonym to authenticate their supposed femininity and could learn the tropes during social interactions. If all that seems effortless and fun, Danet would disagree:

> At least on the face of it, textual cross-dressing should be much easier than the RL (real life) variety. Nonetheless, it may be much more difficult than appears at first glance (94). Bracket, author's.

She is interested in the procedure of constantly keeping up the fiction in MUD/MOO but since those spaces are now unfashionable and blogs have since then provided a much less paced medium, trannies could thrive in a personally controlled narrative oriented locale.

Before blogs were called by their complete name weblogs, existed personal webpages. In her discussion on those, ethnographer, Christine Hine in *Virtual Ethnography* begins by dismissing any concerns over true identities. "Rather than asking whether Internet interactions are authentic, or whether people really are who they say they are, the ethnographer aims to assess how the culture is organized and experienced on its own terms" (118). Like Danet, she is also interested in the process. Concentrating on website constructions she indicates that it is 'pages', not subjects that try to "perform authenticity" (142). She could not still, ascertain the page maker from the page so decided to treat "identities" in her study as "situated performances". However,

> Where authenticity and identities are performed, a link between the offline and the online is also rendered. People speaking about who they are...are making a statement about a feature of the offline

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[16] Multi User Domain and MUD Object Oriented.

world. Rather than the Internet severing links with the offline, these links are strategic performances. The offline world is rendered as present within the online spaces of interaction. It is true to say, then, that the virtual automatically transcends the real. The spaces of interaction might be differently configured and differently experienced, but they do not lose all reference to offline realities.

The reason why she is tautologically and painstakingly trying to convince the reader about authentic identity configurations of the page makers must lie in the stability of investments which she notes missing otherwise in most "internet interactions" (144). Although, interactions on a page will be markedly different than in Danet's MUD/MOO. Pages like Blogs would provide a relatively stable and privately owned territory to create and promote a certain self but the earnestness of the page maker would be futile in convincing a sceptical reader or 'visitor' as she calls them (142). To convince is the least likely motive for the trannie as 'passing' is more or less irrelevant here.[17] Therefore, no matter how many references to the real/offline ze/she makes, the status of buoyancy in the virtual is retained.

Community

In the least, any act of validation, be it authorship or identity construction must also lie outside the subject as much as within. Namely, in the community. Malika's focused reading and creation within her immediate milieu is her political practise assisted by the hyperlink. Anita Blanchard is keener on using the term virtual settlement than virtual community because the interactivity and movements of a blog show the potential of community building more than an already thriving community in her analysis. Mentioning many levels of interactions including those of hyperlinks, the best that Blanchard offers in "Blogs as Virtual Communities: Identifying a Sense of Community in the Julie/Julia Project" leaves the question of institutibnalisation open. One is ultimately forced to prize form over content and the previous *cul de sac* argument appears weak when the locale is constantly overvalued over the creations of the citizens of that locale.

Tyler Curtain, on the other hand, emphasises the (hyper) connectivity when he says,

A blog creates from the intractable cultural-archival space of the net, a story about its readers, a shared cultural-discursive space, and its relationship to them. Friendships and relationships develop across

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[17] Recall, Whittle.

words and images by people who have never met face to face, and a story emerges about a public, created from links and commentaries, thoughts, reactions, and words.

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He seems more reliable than Himmer and Blanchard put together as his queer community is seen to be possible through narration. Granted, it is only the hyperlink that connects and allows a group of people to come together but little fictions that constellate to develop a large network would be meaningless if connection came to dominate the scenario over what is written, said, discussed and responded to. It is at best, a coin with two sides. The hyperlink and the content stored within. Commonalities are constantly being searched for through navigations.

In another essay on pre blogging era virtual communities titled, "Virtual Communities as Communities: Net Surfers don't Ride Alone", Barry Wellman and Milena Gulia write that "the Net encourages the expansion of community networks. Information may come unsolicited through DLs, newsgroups, and forwarded messages from friends who "thought you might like to know about this" (86). It can then surely be fallacious to assume that an anally focused way on grounds of specific convictions is the only way to build community as would be a lose bunch of tagged headlines of hobby horses. However, they do add that "the homogenous interests of virtual community participants may be fostering relatively high levels of empathic understanding and mutual support" (89).

Rahul Mitra's quotation made in the last section also haunts the question of community as far as the issue of the closet is concerned. His observation of the defunct blogs shows that blogging may be after all, an isolating or masturbatory activity. Conversely, the readership and the followers' list and other hypertextual virtues actively signify in the direction of the formation of cursory identifications which may diminish, grow or remain static. If that is the requirement of a virtual community formation, then trannies with the electronic 'e' intact are a community of sorts.

Wellman and Gulia inspired issues of identification through empathy may not necessarily take centre stage but are an implication of the earlier discussion of the lack of supported return to the offline from the stage of double virtuality. On the other hand, an uninformed insistence on that return may hamper the worth of the virtual. Still conversely, the easy route of contingent, afloat and unfinished spots for a political subject may not be

held onto for a very long time. Blogger from the blog may be caught in a few glimpses but ze/she works still inside the web so assigned. One could take turns in painting the "shimmering protoplasm" inside the leaves as well as "the stiffness of the shape" which need not be 'dead' and thus, be displayed in disparaging contrast with the more glorious enclosed issue, after all.[18]

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[18] Paul, trying to impress Miriam in D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* explains why she would like his painting. "'It's because- it's because there is scarcely any shadow in it; it's more shimmery, as if I'd painted the shimmering protoplasm in the leaves and everywhere, and not the stiffness of the shape. That seems dead to me. Only this shimmeriness is the real living. The shape is a dead crust. The shimmer is inside really.'" See Lawrence 292-293.

I

CHAPTER THREE
READING BLOGS, READING TRANNIE

In a shift from the deliberation and doubts over form, the aim now is to not only submit to and offer critiques of the content contained therein but to perform a privileging of the latter. Almost all blogs are autobiographical and written in the first voice. Therefore, the genre of autobiography calls for prioritisation. Other 'kinds' within this autobiography/ autobiographical fiction can be categorised under romantic-erotic; forced feminisation erotica; magic realism; romance; and stories of alibis for transing. The motive is not one of bottling and labelling as found appropriate but to authenticate different kinds of narratives and genres within what is presumed to be an 'ergodic' and thus 'random', ever growing labyrinth like location of stories (Himmer). Elaborating on the point left in the last chapter, complete disagreement with that view would be fallacious but a complete adherence to a belief in the always escaping nature of the blog that must be read in (ever) continuity might come at the cost of a more nuanced and grounded approach that takes one flighty text at a time. Instead of taking bird's eye view glances, one may adopt a more magnified and micro view of a particular story told in a particular time, still in tandem with the project of fluidity and a valid piece of evidence of identity construction in its own right. In the first section, the project of autobiography will be accorded a closer look in continuation of the previous chapter but from the perspective of the blogger seen through western popular transsexual standpoint and its shortcomings before delving into the different sorts of narratives strategies for transing.

Troubling Transsexual Autobiography

More than dwelling on the autobiographic nature of the trans text in largely American (with infrequent British participation) Transgender Theory one may find an overemphasis and critical attention on the popular Transsexual Novel. It is no wonder, a hostile feminist response like one made by Bernice Hausman in *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology, and the idea of Gender* that tries to establish transsexuals as cunning subjects who con the system as much as they are conned by it, finds an easy target for its misguided Foucauldean

study in accounts of sex change operations.[1] Most critics have concentrated on the much famed stories such as those of Christine Jorgensen, Renee Richards and Jan Morris and shown little effort in finding other places where unmediated discourse could have been achieved (Califia; Prosser; Stryker, *Transgender History*). As a result, the contemporary trans tools for analysing eclectic autobiographical fictions and unfinished autobiographies found online remains primitive. Although, not entirely irrelevant. This section will be a study of two novellas: an autobiographical fantasy novella, titled, *Shagufta by Charlotte Johnson* and the published autobiography of the blogger, Living Smile Vidya, *I am Vidya* which is not a culmination but a vital supplement to her blog. It is a treading outside the strict realm of the blogs which are hardly referenced in her novella that also remains a more linear narrative than her random virtual musings. For Shagufta Hanaphie, it was possible to write aided by Issuu.com's EBook, a long narrative with a beginning, middle and end. Living Smile Vidya chooses the traditional medium to tell an orderly story of how she became a tirunangai. Her novella could in many ways work as a background reading for her poetry and other articles and so, becomes the preliminary but still not an overestimated location. Both however, significantly function outside acceptable notions as propagated by the popular transsexual autobiography read so far in transgender studies.

Jay Prosser in his book, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* conceives the transsexual novel as informed by the Western medical formulation of diagnosis and treatment. One of Prosser's main (Foucauldean) contentions is that the narration that first begins in the clinic is reclaimed in the autobiography. The creation of discourse is inevitable given the confessional requirements by the gatekeepers of surgery.

...because *to be* transsexual, transsexuals must be arch storytellers (113). Italics, author's.

LSV in Tamil Nadu never had the same amenity. Far from it and, she was not concerned unlike Prosser's transsexual to learn and rehash the formulaic to achieve sex change. Her narrative requires her to learn the mores of tirunangai life. Albeit, holding a graduate degree she must learn to beg for alms. What remains common to both is a re-education of tedium and demands of the community.

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[1] Hausman looks at transsexuals as a recent product of the medical discourse. Her stance is however, strictly negative and against elective transformative surgeries which has been much criticised in transgender theory after Janice Raymond's earlier polemic, *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* it owes inheritance to.

Rahul Mitra and Radhika Gajjala in their essay on queer blogging, use anthropologist Tom Boellstorff's idea of "dubbing cultures" largely developed in his article, "Dubbing culture: Indonesian Gay and Lesbi Subjectivities and Ethnography in an Already Globalized World". He uses the metaphor of dubbed films to signify an incorporating and adaptable queer culture. It "…reflect(s) strong national cultural characteristics and intra-national diversity, being created as they were mainly for national audiences[2] (Mitra and Gajjala 416). Also, owing to such a culture, "…queer personal Web sites have begun to move away from a queer-identity-as-*core*-of-self model to a queer-identity-*integrated-into*-self model"[3] (408).

LSV as a young boy starts with feeling like a woman and increasingly acknowledges that joining tirunangais will entail the resulting disenfranchisement and a necessary repression of her university educated self but sees no other option. Hence, she gets operated upon like and unlike many other tirunangais. Like because she was simply castrated and unlike because she was one of those who went to a hospital and not had it performed by a senior peer at home without anaesthesia[4] (16). She may have been coerced into castration which remains illegal unlike sex change, as she in a response to a comment on, "Death" says,

> We cannot say it is compulsory, but sometimes, they pressurize us to get this operation done. In that way you can say, it's compelled. Your question shows that you are living a safe and secured life. But about our life, we cannot say so in words. Either we have to be beggars or sex workers to survive in this world.

LSV, nevertheless, sees her becoming a woman similar to becoming a tirunangai and vice versa. The markedly different categories become synonymous unlike, in Prosser's transsexual narratives which would allow that collapse only after a certain rites of passage and view this transformation of hers as incomplete. She on the other hand, in *I am Vidya* writes,

> I was now a woman. Mine was a woman's body. Its shape would be what my heart wanted, yearned for (16).

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[2] Brackets, added.
[3] Italics, authors'.
[4] Serena Nanda gives a detailed description of the castration rite as performed by the "dai ma" or midwife after coercion by the pledge's guru. See Nanda 27-28. Gayatri Reddy claims that for Hyderabad hijras, "…a daiamma-performed operation is still considered to garner far more izzat (respect) than a biomedical procedure." Brackets, added. See Reddy, Kindle Location 1337 of 4447.

The rhetoric is startlingly similar to the oft repeated sense of embodiment found in western transsexual novels but the fact of the matter is that LSV has only gotten rid of her "maleness" (16). For her it is the "shape" that matters. The silhouette, the scar and the superficial appearance gain the same level of signification like the 'complete' post-op transsexual. LSV unlike Gazal and Prosser's transsexuals may not have on offer prescription hormones and vaginoplasty but she claims as much of the women's space as them.[5]

Kalki Subramaniam's NGO Sahodari Foundation's channel on Youtube in its introduction to the video titled, "thirunangai-the daughter of god" says in the description,

> Tamil video about Second type women. Second type women are special daughters of God. Their life is of extreme sorrows or extreme happiness. They are divine to the divine and dark forces to the dark forces.

Contrariwise, on Thirunangai.net, the matrimonial site started by Subramaniam places tirunangais as transsexuals. The previously mythologizing zeal stands against the more modern outlook on the matrimonial site. Perhaps, between the two and at the dividing margin of the backdoor of the hospital with dubious credentials lies LSV. If with one foot in the divine abode and another in the clinic, LSV could arrive still at a sense of an organic sense it is not without physical and emotional trauma and a continuing sense of alienation. If not for the self, for the larger community in *I am Vidya*:

> Most tirunangais are unlettered. They cannot find avenues of expression as I have done....I poured out all I knew in my blog, based on my own experience. My writing had an impact of people. It had far reaching effects (136).

Therefore, the skilled narration Prosser assumes of the in-diagnosis transsexual comes only from participation in a certain set of conventions and that participation cannot be afforded by all trans subjects even as one of them has become empowered to write. Such simplistic applications must be at all costs avoided. Much like Spivak's unease with employing directly,

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[5] Some of Reddy's hijras consume birth control pills and inject illegally procured hormones troubling further clear cut distinctions between transsexuals, and hijras and tirunangais. Therefore, it might be more rewarding to avoid emphasizing the procedure over representation. See Reddy, Kindle Location 1899 of 4447.

jouissance onto stanadayani Jashoda's body in Mahasweta Devi's story.[6] There may be poetic and political recovery in trans autobiographical action but that does not imply that we can place LSV's writing in much the same way as even her contemporaries like Gazal, let alone, the far removed western transsexual, if one may try to postulate a sense of larger identification within the umbrella of transgender. An existing discourse cannot be representative simply because of the virtue of its existence.

If LSV problematizes the transsexual autobiography by exacerbating the question of license for identity crystallisation, then Shagufta Hanaphie[7] poses a question to the very premise of the autobiographical exercise. Hers is an autobiographical fantasy fiction ironically titled, *Shagufta by Charlotte Johnson*. The romance-thriller set in the UK is about her forced transformation from an NRI boy Saajid to a trophy wife of an eligible British tycoon by a cunning British transsexual woman, Charlotte Johnson[8] who is paid by the tycoon for the arrangement. In fact, that is her very profession. Keeping the critical questions over forced feminisation narratives aside for the moment, one needs to treat Hanaphie's story on two accounts with which it unsettles the genre of autobiography. The title, and the seemingly complete transfer of her bodily power of attorney to an external source. The story follows the same first voice of Prosser's transsexual but the title contradicts it. It is Johnson who literally makes Shagufta through blackmailing and brainwashing but forces all surgical and hormonal interventions except bottom surgery on her. Shagufta after all the conditioning and romancing the life as a rich wife opts for the completion in bottom surgery eventually, on her own.

Still, the title persists and yields not the desire or the name of the man around whom she is to be constructed. Simon Weston, besides being an ideal romance hero is also someone who purchases a bespoke bride despite his apologies that come later. For LSV it was simply the shape that came out of castration. For Simon, it is not what's between Shagufta's legs but what looks perfectly womanish from the outside, clothed. To be noted is the letting go of agential position completely on Shagufta's part only to be reclaimed at the end. In an episode

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[6] Spivak writes, "The role of Jashoda's body as the place where the sinister knowledge of decolonization as failure of foster-mothering is figured forth produces cancer, an excess very far from the singularity of the clitoral orgasm." See Spivak, "A Literary Representation..." 242.

[7] I will use 'Hanaphie' to address the author and 'Shagufta' to address the character in order to clarify their positions.

[8] The use of the last name for Johnson will be to underline her contribution in the narrative as the author of Shagufta's trans life.

where she is kidnapped and rescued, the hero is most worried whether her 'secret' has been exposed and she is amazed when he protests at her decision to get a vagina:

> "Why? Why won't you let me have my operation?" I demanded.

> "Because I love you just the way you are", he said, his voice now more under control, "and I don't care if the whole world knows you are a transsexual woman."

> "That's not the impression I got when you threatened to kill those thugs," I said furiously.

> "Well, it's not just that Shagufta" he said softly, his voice now making me calm down a little as he hugged me from behind. "It's just that, that, you have suffered so much for me, I just don't want you to go through any more pain." (51)

The anger is easily quelled. The genre of romance may allow smooth resolutions but what is more important is the shift of power over the most decisive moment in the novella. On separating transvestites from transsexuals Marjorie Garber famously highlighted the penis as the reassuring "absolute insignia of maleness" after Dr. Robert Stoller (94-98). Garber's TV seeks orgasmic pleasure and gendered reassurance in the penis while TS seeks identity through ridding herself of that male appendage. Where does Shagufta stand in that formulation? Someone who was coerced into becoming a TS from a part time, adventure and pleasure seeking TV. Someone who would have never on her own taken the step, not that she had the resources. Yet, her penis was kept intact and not severed until she wanted to. Maybe it was the only logical last step left mindfully by Johnson to lull Shagufta into thinking she is in control of her own destiny, after all. As far as she may be from any ethical paradigms for transsexual transformations, Johnson gets credit for knowing her limits when faced with the 'insignia'. Simon, too pays due respect to the penis that becomes a symbol of Shagufta's individuation through the exercise of the last choice in its excision. For that matter, Johnson's penis also remains a trope compatible with trans fiction by non-trans writers to not only expose her 'truth' to Shagufta[9] but manages to underline the extremely personal nature of the decision for bottom surgery: something to dwell over before any hasty decisions. If we can call this weightage given to the penis, phallocentricism on Hanaphie's part, such a feminist postulation may be unfair. Had Shagufta given herself completely (including the penis) over

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[9] For an explanation of the climactic moment of penile revelation in trans fiction by non-trans writers, see, Silberman 181.

to Johnson and Simon, everybody would still have a problem. Another view allows going back to Prosser when he speaks of the "lure of the genre" (of autobiography) to integrate oneself after the surgical events (120). This retrospective construction and thus validation is completely inverted by Hanaphie in offering alternatives to cold medical solutions by presenting a prospective document of multitude possibilities in not autobiography but autobiographical fantasy fiction. True that the narrative points labouringly towards the past tense, it is the benefit of the imaginary that can open the grounds for unconventional modes of transformation for the readers who may anticipate visions of their own.

The Erotics of Sissification

In that order, one arrives at the internet enabled 'unspeakable' erotic story as predicated by Richard Ekins and Dave King based on Ken Plummer's idea observed in the previous chapter. With the essay, "The Emergence...", Ekins and King are probably the only critics to have discussed forced feminisation or sissy blogs till date. The impetus for their study is in continuation with their cataloguing of various kinds of transgender identities. They separate Michael Bailey's "autogynephilic transsexual"[10] from the emasculated sissy and go on to claim that:

> The widespread availability of a coherent male sissy identity has in large measure been an Internet creation (37)

The limitations of Ekins and King lie not in a separation of the two identities as I will show they can meet at a juncture when sissies can be transsexuals, but in that they understand sissification, forced feminisation and emasculation only in masculinist terms of phallic loss in "ungendering"[11] and "negating"[12] (*The Transgender Phenomenon* 144, 35-37). This is only part of the story. I propose a theoretical move away from nullification and towards reordering and refiguring. If the penile ejaculation becomes "sissy leak dribble" then it can also be viewed as re-signification in feminine terms and not simply a disavowal of masculinity (177). The process of forced feminisation in Ekins and King's studies of certain blogs and

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[10] The rhetorically inflated term appears to conflate Garber's masturbating TV with the penis hating TS by producing a TS who is aroused by her feminized self. See Bailey.
[11] Ungendering is "...halting, eliminating, or reversing (their) previous genderings."
[12] 'Negating denotes the 'ungendering of those who seek to nullify maleness/masculinity or femaleness/femininity and deny for themselves, the existence of a binary divide."

interviews may be just that: a certain individuals' figurations. It looks to be a sub culture in their writings, though. Especially, in *The Transgender Phenomenon*, they present a pedagogical group with established systems and codes: persons in the processes of training; acquisition of a bed stead with plastic sheets to "dribble" on besides other room décor; subscription to sissy literature; attainment of a dominating mistress who would enable the sissification and may turn the sissy into a sissy maid for paid domestic chores; etc. (147-180).

The blogs present more unhinged representations of forced feminisation. Probably, because to participate in an economy of provided codes must be based on some sort of freedom that precedes that participation. It does not mean, the western sissy narratives and identifications · other than those studied by Ekins and King always perform on scales found in the internet guidelines/handbooks. It is hard to tell, to what extent the Indian bloggers' sissy stories are inspired and informed by the western counterparts and recommendations from, but that is not the intention. The purpose is to offer a reading more nuanced than the previous one in favour of the feminine and not an erased and lacking masculine identity and to cite the conflations of an another identification, namely the transsexual in some blogs that unsettle the pure masochist-erotics of the largely transvestite sissy.

To take first, the matter of re-signification, Ekins and King's sissy's erotic identity lies in the very category of sissy. Analysing their subject Diana's trigger of climax they write as based on her retelling,

> As he[13] orgasms, he is not thinking of his 'sexy' Mistress; rather, he is thinking of what a 'total sissy'
> he is to be behaving in such a way (177).

The literal pleasure of transgression lies not in becoming Diana, the sissy but simply a sissy despite the totality. They also choose to focus not on masturbation in its entirety of an act when Diana's arousal is found over the sexy mistress but only within that defining moment of ejaculation. This goes against the logic of masochism where avid scripting in the oral theatre of fort/da is perhaps more important than any pornographic money shot. Still, to give the Ekins and King's negation of the phallic even in the midst of a literal phallic act critical weight, one must employ rigorously the masochistic workings of the fetish.

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[13] Note, their use of 'he' because the sissy subjects are seen to be purely TV.

Gilles Deleuze in *Coldness and Cruelty* writes:

> Disavowal should perhaps be understood as the point of departure of an operation that consists neither
> in negating nor even destroying, but rather in radically contesting the validity of that which is: it
> suspends belief in and neutralizes the given in such a way that a new horizon opens up beyond the
> given and in place of it. The clearest example given by Freud is fetishism: the fetish is the image or
> substitute of the female phallus, that is the means by which we deny that the woman lacks a penis. The
> fetishist's choice of a fetish is determined by the last object he saw as a child before becoming aware of
> the missing penis (a shoe, for example, in the case of a glance directed from the feet upward). The
> constant return to this object, this point of departure, enables him to validate the existence of the organ
> that is in dispute (31).

He goes on to establish the very erect figure and musculature of Wanda, the leading
dominatrix of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs* and her ilk as 'the' fetish. The
mistresses and other phallic cruel women of blogs are like the glue wielding ones in Deepa's
stories who entrap the protagonist by sticking on wigs, shoes and clothes' knots in stories like
"SCHOOLMATES" where upon "Hearing the name of glue, Rohit start struggling but failed
to undo the grip of girls". Or like Lady Male's wives in "MARRIED CROSS DRESSER
COUPLE" who keep hir hungry and unconscious for two years and communicate through a
hole in the ceiling. In Deleuze's view, they replace the mother's (simply addressed as
'woman' here) penis. The picture becomes complicated when Ekins and Kings assess the
negation of the subject's own penis and hence, masculinity. What will be reordered to be
called a "sissy-clit" can then be seen as a transfer of one's castration anxieties onto the now
twice as phallic mistress in that "negation".

Perhaps, identity can be efficaciously formed elsewhere in the site that is Diana, the
sissy or since, many Indian bloggers who do not use the term 'sissy', quite simply in 'Diana'
which would contain the sissiness to expand and explain only in the narrative that depends
not so much on a negating formula of 'emasculation' but 'feminisation'.

A cited story, "GREAT STORY BY OTHER WRITERS ""Yukis Panties""" by Deepa, is
about an English teacher of undeclared ethnicity travelling along the Japanese countryside in
an empty train. A group of school girls who catch hir trying to look between their legs,
punish hir by forcing hir in their clothes to be abandoned on a deserted station with a note

that "...*in small English letters...read, 'My name is Yuki. Look at my pantis'.*"[14] Yuki being

hir new name is reiterated sarcastically by the girls throughout the act of violence. The

identity is duly resisted and humiliation acknowledged. Without an orgasmic culmination,

Yuki can be perhaps read in the brief moment of creation. The male name of the teacher is

not given. The significant gap is filled by the repetition of Yuki by the unrelenting phallic

teenage wrestler school girls[15] who interpellate the erring voyeur and even paste the label to

drive home a sense of sudden identification. It ceases to matter that the reader does not know

about the teacher prior or after the feminisation but only during and in the act.

There are certainly other narratives that take sissification to other terminations. Seeing

the sissy from the lense of transsexuality first requires its expansion of the meaning when

participating with autogynophilia. For Ekins and King, autogynophilic transsexuality is one

of the two unspeakable kinds of identities that have surfaced thanks to the internet but their

blatant eroticization of autogynophilia is limiting in that auto-arousal and love for oneself as a

woman can be a significant identity in its own right but prevents us to see the entrance of

transsexuality onto other *mise en scenes* of transgendering ("The Emergence of..."). Namely,

sissy. Sissies can be looked at as the more superficial autogynephilics like transvestites who

may masturbate to the idea of their feminised self. If yes, Garber's insignia finds

confirmation here. However, as mentioned earlier, the penis is taken too literally in their

work and mistress dependant sissies cannot be reductively autogynophilic, never mind

transsexual because they still retain the penis! Interestingly, if a forcefully feminised sissy,

Seema in Nimisha Mehandi's "MY CROSSDRESSED WEDDING- SANDEEP TO

SEEMA." like Shagufta is coerced into transsexual surgery, how should she be eroticised?

More interestingly, Seema's story functions in a world where the state's law works to

configure feeble men first into sissies, which is a temporary stage to hormonally and

hypnotically condition the subject into a complete transsexual identification. With ill-fated

resistance against control of the mind, body, will and legal options, the multi-dimensional

feminisation can be seen as a more thorough conspiracy than the one vested in the fetishized

sole mistress. Seema is rendered a prisoner of not glued on clothes but her own mind which

can be controlled by her husband who with the magic words, "You're a sissy, Seema" can

bring back the resisting male side only to be exorcised through painful anal intercourse, so

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[14] Italics, author's.

[15] The protagonist learns that the girls are a wrestling club, reading their T-shirts when ze cannot loosen their grip.

that the female self can rise to the conscious completely. Seema does refigure her penis as a "sissy-clit" and adds,

I felt my satin panties warming as my sissy juices spilled into them again.

Morevover, following Ekin and King's formulation, she does think of the sexy mistress at the *critical* moment of identification but much before the orgasm. Kiran, the remotely possible mistress figure in this instance had advised and Seema remembers,

.....at the moment he cums inside of you and impregnates you with his seed - at that very moment - I want you to open your eyes wide and see that bracelet around your ankle and think of me as his warm spunk fills your little tummy. Italics, author's.

Seema obeys only to later find herself truly feminised, having completed the procedure with her own orgasm. Following these conventions she does not however, become aware of being a "total sissy" like Diana. On the contrary, a real woman who no longer responds to the hypnotic recall phrase by her husband. She has been transsexualised *par excellence* and the next stage is bottom surgery followed by giving birth. This transsexualising above and far beyond the fetish oriented sissy holds its key in the very beginning of the story not when Seema recalls being an unsuccessful male but when her new birth certificate is given to her. She is no longer the masculine "Seemaa" but simply, "Seema". Nimisha Mehandi masculinises the extra 'a' and reveals comically not only the randomness of gender assignment but in refusing to lend a popular masculine name to the male Seema maintains the integrity of her transsexuality from the very start. Sissification then becomes a stratagem to achieve the first steps of that goal. What Shagufta must sleep through, Seema is manipulated into by the workings of the nation state. The devices become visible when it is made clear that only the one who is already feminine or shows supra-potential for femininity must be feminised and unlike in Ekins and King, entirely.

Romance-Plenitude-Alibis

This section takes one deeper into the externalising of agency seen above. In forced feminisation, the 'helpless' victim has been noted to have little choice until the matter of genitals surface. The alibi needed for at least preliminary transing must entail pleasure taking

once more, the methods of the masochist. However, in other narratives that do not entail coercion, threat, dominance or pain, a diagonally opposite world of narrative flow exists where pleasure is sought and delivered not in masochism but through ideations of worldly perfection. Conflicts, prejudices and problems are few and everything falls in place as it should. Here agency is not transferred to a singular phallic maternal other but distributed generously in characters and situations that facilitate and ensure as smooth a transing as possible. The two cases are Sunitapink's two contradictory autobiographical stories published on Mehandi's *i love sarees* and Patricia Shelly's unfinished and untitled novella of adventures as Radha on *Patricia's Indian Transgendered Page*.

In the first story by Sunitapink, she writes in the first voices as Sunita and in the other as Amita. She also suggests that Amita could be a different person and she may be writing on her behalf. That however, is not explicitly clear so one may take both as her autobiographical-fictional accounts given the overwhelming insistence of 'I'. In both versions, the protagonists face little problems owing to their status as wealthy transwomen.

Sunita says in the very beginning of "I WAS A HANDSOME BOY - (Written by Sunitapink)":

> Apart from my happy family life I am most successful Business Woman.
> I am Managing Director of a group of companies dealing in Manufacturing and exporting various items.

Amita also confirms in "A TRUE STORY NARRATED BY SUINTAJI -- I AM MY TWIN SISTER":

> I belong to a very rich family. My father was two brothers having a big family industrial business on equal share basis. I am the only child of my father.

As is Shelly's Radha in "Chapter 1-Beginnings":

> I was born in the coastal city of Mangalore in the second half of 1958 to Ranganath and Devi Baliga - their younger child. Yes Ranganath, my father, is the third generation owner of a famous brand of Bidis manufactured in the coastal areas of Mangalore. So in a way you could say I was born with something better than a silver spoon in my mouth.

The enablement of a transgender identity is then seen to be ideally fruitful in a lush environment where choice is a direct consequence of privilege and, money is not simply a medium of acquiring products of transing such as appropriate wigs and clothes. The protagonists, Shelly and Sunitapink present are hard to imagine outside their milieus and make a contrast with the more wretched accounts of suffering for identity in Living Smile Vidya and even Shagufta Hanaphie. These romances are in particular different from Hanaphie's because the ease of transformation, surgical and otherwise is uncomplicated from the word, go.

Oscar Wilde famously wrote in *An Ideal Husband*, "Fathers should be neither seen nor heard. That is the only proper basis for family life." Fittingly, a second recurring motif is the absent masculine patriarchal authority that may hinder development of the plot and the re-gendering. LSV and Hanaphie's fathers loom large over the text and are not rid of without emotional trauma. In Shelly's he is present but approves of Radha's cross dressing excursions in the theatre as an adolescent and retires to oblivion blissfully unaware of his married son's transvestitic adventures. In Sunitapink's stories fathers are dead and immediate patriarchal authority as invested in uncles is either easily won over, never an issue, or has them remain outside the country.

Thirdly, romantic love, in cissexual/gender women or men is found and kept. One may recount many more examples of a perfectly drawn universe but such an effort would be tautological. What may be dismissed as an easy cultural product along the line of women's popular romance, one must instead, in both cases turn to the fact of the pleasure of the dreamland of such a text. Preventing any literal reading, Scott McCracken in his introduction to *Pulp: Reading Popular Fiction,* conveys the notion of utopianism which he defines as "popular fiction's ability to gesture to a better world" which contradictorily "has the opposite of a sedative effect. It can prompt the reader to look for something different, something better. The pleasures and transgressions involved in the experience of popular fiction are a constant reminder that a better, more fulfilled life is a possibility." Furthermore, he comments on the name "Pulp" which implies the cheapness of the production in all its mushiness. The shapeless gob signifies unseen potential in moulding itself in other unforeseen and development worthy directions (13-14). Shelly's story then, especially as an ever unfinished business that does not end in Radha saving a Bollywood superstar's wife's valuable jewellery

and making friends with them, points out to something outside its world of perfection. The onus of making meaning and subsequent provocation for searching the "better world" lies with the reader. What should be vicarious becomes a point of departure. The reader of women's romance in McCracken is forever suspended in that point of departure though, with her constant return to the consumption of the genre. Even at the level of narrative he says,

> In its representation of the heroine's desires, the text describes an identity that is not fixed, but in the process of change[16] (79).

The view presents a twofold quandary. Whether to consider this suspension and consequent return as dependency on utopic narratives to be either empowering or debilitating? Maybe such a debate would be diminutive if not depreciating. What is acute to any question of enablement or its denial is the matter of alibis. Radha, the young boy in "Chapter 2- Early Years" starts by being cast as the female lead in an all boys' school play 'Shakuntala' and is startled at hir own delight in transing:

> I was speechless. I did not realise it but of late I was starting to enjoy being dressed up as Shakuntala and each day I was actually looking forward to the rehearsals. In school also, my teacher was intrigued as to how my mannerisms each day were becoming increasingly feminine. I had explained that I was rehearsing behaving like a woman at home with Krishna (hir sister). Brackets, added.

Sunita must trans due to multiple gendered mishaps with the application form for a school exam:

> And from here the story starts: While filling examination form my sister put my name as Sunit Gupta but ignored Mr. /Miss portion to cut the Miss and make it Mr. Sunit Gupta. Then as in practice for herself instead of "Son of" she made it D/o. just a minor mistake without any intensions from her side.

> Then was the photograph of me. Due to sad demise of my father and then my own long sickness I could not go to a hairdresser and as such my head hairs grew some long. Then again my sister fixed my hairs and that was in a feminine way as being a routine for her. Then was the floral print shirt which I was wearing. Photos also came with a small dot in middle of my eye brows just like a "bindiya" Indian girls use to fix and hairs touching my neck. None of us paid any attention to these things and my examination form was submitted in the school.

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[16] McCracken does not directly raise the question of cyclic consumption but perhaps, the circular popularity of the formulaic romance lies in the unfinished identifications.

While as Amita, she claims an unexplained inherent identification:

> I don't know how but I felt that I am attracting towards the clothes of my sisters, especially towards Lingerie of my sisters.

The defence in the first two cases is also only preliminary and let go of, when the surrounding environment is observed to be increasingly comfortable and safe. More impenetrable is the case of Pavan in "Television Star: Chapter 2: Lost Job, wife suggestion." who is helpless when faced with unemployment and must take the job of a soap opera actress at hir wife's behest and becomes Pavani,

> I don't have any choice, i need to earn money to satisfy daily needs. So i said OK to my wife.

Only later, to assume a fictional identification more than perfectly in appropriating pictures of popular soap opera actresses captioned as her own. Tongue-in-cheek, yes but the immediate aim is to draw a focus on the weakness of the alibi in losing currency as soon as plenitude envelopes the subject. For Amita too, cross dressing in public becomes seemingly effortless forgoing any initial problems of passing. One can view the stories of relatively ubiquitous plenitude as situated and composed within the larger framework of alternative trans strategies. Much like, the above treatment of forced feminisation. In sissy narratives, the act of repossession and restoration of agency worked to perform the politics but could a primary diffusion of agency also undermine it in that process? At the literal level, there is simply no need for consciously radical actions when the subject floats in the manipulatively realist fiction-fantasy of prearranged idylls.

As for the cost, McCraken inspired prescriptions fall short of application when the matter is pulpy but not downright commoditised. The fact remains that even if romantic tales exist for the Indian transgender blogger, there are no copies sold anywhere. The circulations are different as discussed in the last chapter and the content is scarce. A trans tool is in order. Gordene O. Mackenzie's idea of transgenders' "discourse interruptus" in "50 Billion Galaxies of Gender: Transgendering and the Millennium" enlarges the framework of alternative textual stratagems. DI incorporates transgender theory, autobiography and other representations made so far in history but the idea here is to delineate the interruptive nature

of differential stories of transformation after LSV's harrowing experience and Hanaphie's growing reveries (195-197). The location in the rhizomatic schema of other texts in DI must not be assumed to be in harmony either. Radha can negate LSV and LSV may, in turn serve the harsher truth and negate Radha and that is but one instance of negotiations within the blogs.

Mythological Realism?

Magical transformations are another mode of fictional self-fashioning found in the blogs. I am reticent to bill these under magic realism though, given not the tinge of exotica that may accompany the genre despite the stress on marginal convictions[17] but the dilemma four narratives present in intertextual tandem with Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai's homoerotic reclamation of a particular ancient sex-change story titled *"Padma Purana*: Arjuni (Sanskrit)" in their collection *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History*. In the tale, Mahabharata's hero Arjuna transforms into a woman named Arjuni temporarily and "sports" with Krishna (90-93).

Firstly, the similar transformation-by-water blog stories must not be simply called magic realism because that may indicate a one dimensional opposition to fantasy. Gabriel García Márquez in an interview with Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza makes that distinction (and loathe of fantasy) clear when he says:

> [Because] I believe the imagination is just an instrument for producing reality and that the source of creation is always, in the last instance, reality. Fantasy, in the sense of pure and simple Walt Disney-style invention without any basis in reality is the most loathsome thing of all. The difference between the one (imagination) and the other (fantasy) is the same as between a human being and a ventriloquist's dummy. Brackets, added.

Not very far along in the interview he insists on the magical in his books as principally grounded in reality and hints at sometimes mere exaggeration which becomes magic realism. Reality can in some cases be the fodder and the performance of it in hyperbole of the imaginative. Hence, magic realism. Avoiding though, the antagonism from the imaginative is an investment in and a defence of the fantastic too. Granted, there may be for Márquez a

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[17] On the issue of Magic Realism as repackaged orientalism from within the orient, understood otherwise to be politically enabling, see Faris.

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strict line between the imaginative and the fantastic, one cannot still, let go of the recent knowledge that the pulpy nature of blogs exemplify propelling productiveness in the narratives. It leads one to invest more sympathy with the pop than the literary. However, one may not stick with the term for too long for the nature of the selected stories pay (maybe, unwittingly) homage to the story of Arjuni and take flight to the realm of the mythological.

Mythological may be unproblematically subsumed into magic realism as Ben Okri in *A Way of Being Free* notes his heritage in the earliest storytellers being "shamans" who "...wrestled with the mysteries and transformed them into myths which coded the world and helped the community to live through one more darkness, with eyes wide open, and with hearts set alight" (35). The conflation is easy in light of his view because the greater good may justify the means. Nonetheless, if we look at the recent queer reclamation of the ancient text by Vanita and Kidwai, another expansive transgender perspective that critiques that act may be provoked timely because it is not so much the magical transformation that becomes vital to 'their' myth but what the motives of Arjuna and Krishna were. Magnifying the mythological slightly more than the magical (which persists) one may be able to reclaim the reclamation.

In "Magic Fountain" on *BOLLYWOOD TG CAPTIONS*:

> Unaware of the fact that the fountain I was visiting was a magical fountain and the first person who takes a bath below it every year gets transformed into opposite gender.

> As soon as the water touched my body, my body started changing becoming more and more feminine.

In "How Do I Repay You Back" on the same blog:

> I had proposed to a girl who was a daughter of a famous magician but he did not want her daughter to marry me.

> So he put some spell on me....I don't know what kind of spell.. and threw me into this river.

> Somehow by God's grace you saw me and jumped in to save my life.

In "Magic Water Did It's Work" on the same blog, again:

> What are you with me Amit? I am feeling very hot from inside. First you threw some water on me
> telling me that you want to show some magic. I don't know what but as soon as you threw that water I
> started to feel different. I don't know how to tell you but I started to feel like my body becoming very
> feminine and curvy. The sensation going through my body was so high that I could
> not understand what was happening to me.

And in the shorter version of the above tale, recomposed by another blogger as a caption story:
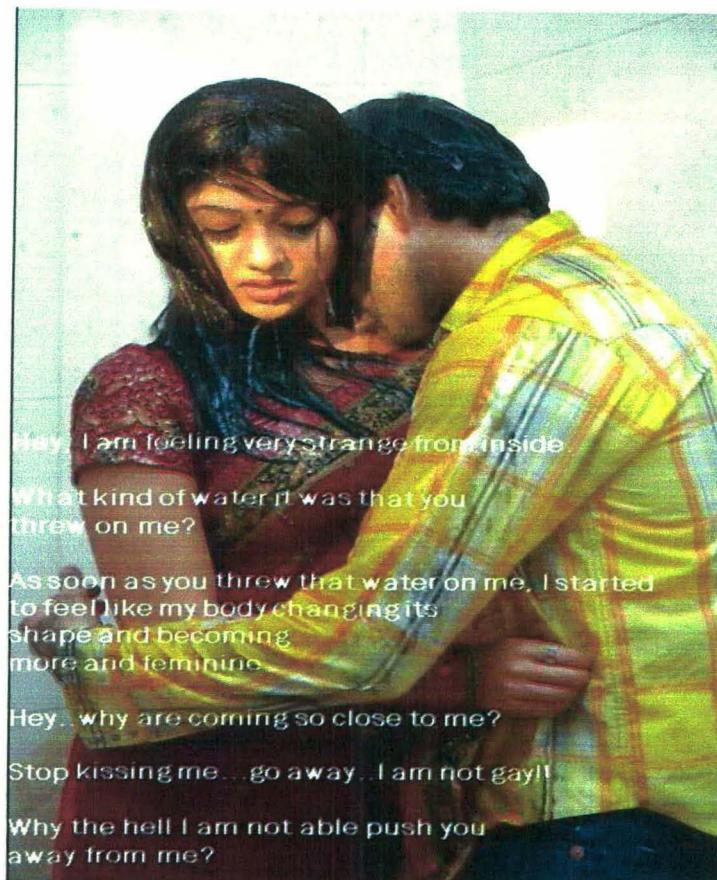

Fig. 4. "Magic Water." By Anonymous in *Being Transgender*.

The last two are the same narrative with the only difference to be found in the relative length. In all the stories, the purpose remains a romantic-erotic one, between the masculine companion and the water altered transsexual woman. The intertextuality is evident explicitly

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in "Magic Water Did It's Work" where the Krishna like companion hastens the sex change of the Arjuna/i like protagonist actively. Krishna enabled it through the lake and Amit simply threw some water. Likewise in, "Magic Fountain", where the man recounts reading about such a magical transformation and the possibility of a solution but that turns out to be only an excuse on his part to fondle his friend as a newly formed woman. All the four stories implicate the now inevitability of sexual intercourse or end where foreplay begins. According to Ruth Vanita's commentary on the story in her subsequent book, *Love's Rite: Same Sex Marriage in India and the West*,

> Arjuni is then made to take another bath and turns into Arjuna once more. Arjuna remembers his
> female incarnation, and feels "depressed and heartbroken." The reasons for this dejection are not
> explained- it could be the typical mystic's depression on returning to earthly life after a brief vision.
> Arjuna may wish he could have remained Arjuni forever. The depression lifts when Krishna reassures
> him, and we are told that Arjuna ultimately goes to Krishna's eternal abode, and remains there,
> knowing the sports of Krishna. We are not told whether he does so in the form of Arjuna or Arjuni
> (86).

Hence, despite the return of Arjuna from the realm of Arjuni, the text remains open-ended. Here, the four water stories are left in pre- or in-coitus. Even if in "Magical Fountain", the woman is turned back to a man, the promise of the Arjuni figure to return remains as much as the very magical fountain. The post-coital-spiritual depression will be resolved in the promise of eternal fulfilment. Such a promise may not be the privilege of the contemporary magic-sex change and sex seeking trannie but transformation may as well be either permanent or not. Vanita's concerns are though, different. For her, "In hearing this cross-sex love story, the devotee is not allowed to totally forget that this is also a same-sex love story" (85). Seeing the prominence of the title of her book, it is the same sex marriage and/or homoeroticism which is conveniently facilitated through transsexual means. The homoerotic makes an explicit presence in "Magic Water" when she says, "I am not gay" even though she can't push him away. Also, in "Magic Water Did It's Work" when the just turned protagonist exclaims,

> Please don't think that I am a gay but I want to tell you that please don't stop whatever you are doing..

And, again in "How Do I Repay You Back", when she responds after the rescue,

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> You want me to kiss you?...hmm....okay...I am not gay...but ...you have saved my life..so I will do
> it....but just one kiss...okay?

In "Magic Fountain", the act is presented as merely sexual, hetero/homo facts are beside the point and for the reader to make. Although, mentioning or denouncing 'gay' does not necessarily entail its affirmation or denial. To presume so would be plain ablative. It could be the strenuous agenda of Vanita that makes her enact the elucidation of homoerotica. She goes on to call ritualistic weddings of hijras with Aravan as "*hijra* male-male wedding"[18] too where "One journalist declares censoriously, "It is inexcusable that men with normal intelligence and physique be permitted to indulge in a useless lifestyle in the name of religion."" (qtd. in Vanita, *Love's Rite* 75-76).

Hoshang Merchant in the introduction to *Yaraana*, states plainly without interjecting gay interpretations on cross-dress worship in India, even as the reader is keenly aware of the homosexual/philic/erotic nature of the compilation. He writes,

> In Thanjavur two priests ritually enact the copulation of the male gods, one cross-dressed as female, with priests enacting the roles of the god's parents, Uma and Maheshwar, as they bless the marriage. In other Tamil Nadu temples the male priest cross-dresses to become Parvati to perform the linga abhishek or the ritual oblation to the linga. The mother-goddess chanting pre-Dravidian chants at Kerala's Theyyam, is of course, well known. The priest there wears a breastplate showing female breasts (xviii).

Gayatri Reddy who does not have any gay political itineraries describes the Aravan ritual in a passion free flat style talking about temporary transsexuality with a return to maleness and does not let it become a vehicle for homoerotica. While gay politics suffers, the price of transsexual sacrifice is not paid textually, either. Both causes take a plunge of neutrality which may be welcome when the only other choice is one of political construal eliding over another:

> Another transsexual transformation invoked by hijras is the myth of Aravan, wherein Aravan agrees to sacrifice himself in battle as long as he marries and makes love to a woman first. As no woman was willing to be widowed in this manner, the god Krishna takes the form of a woman, marries Aravan, makes love to him, and is subsequently widowed. After a brief period of mourning, Krishna assumes

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[18] Italics, author's.

his male form. Hijras and other kotis engage annually in a ritualized enactment of this myth at the Koothandavur festival in Tamil Nadu (Kindle Location 3474-3475 of 4447).

In *Same Sex Love* a heterosexual economy may possibly enter in "Vyasa's *Mahabharata*: "Shikhandin's Sex Change (Sanskrit)" but to rely on such an alternative is an ill-fated risk (Vanita and Kidwai 31-36). Similar arguments are bound to be circular for it will always be a choice between hetero/homo and maybe bi schemata for the trans subject as noted in the first chapter. Yet, a gender based interpretation and indirect intertextual recognition if not Vanita-like outright repossession of the mythologico-relegious narratives can be productive. A mythological realism as it relates in this case with the water stories remains open to be seen as magic realist as well. Both views may do little to refute the overpowering theme of transformation that remains the priority.

As a stronger alibi and even more powerful stage of plenitude, mythological realism provides visceral verification of the legend in an understanding informed by a previously queered mythologizing. A reclamation of a reclamation should not however, be seen as an intruding performance out to contravene and disaffirm another reading from another margin. At the same time, a margin within a margin that seeks its own redrawing and reconstruction cannot help but jostle for space. Magic realism and mythological realism are two such places being innately fluid. McCracken's mush of fertile pulp finds another resonance as well. Therefore, crossings of genre in the mythological realist writing could become the place for imaginative to fantastic to legendary to historical composed to be a mesh of ethos of the virtual in service of transing. This study has been an initiative in that regard. On the other hand, one should note the obvious management of the excess of identity that may not be accounted for in the real. Extending the itinerary of discourse interruptus, mythological realism is situated next to the arena of plenitude and alibis with not only affirmation in an ancient text but otherwise grounded desires that can in certain situations be understood only through the rationally incomprehensible. There are many other stories that would not have such Mahabharata like affiliations but remain magic realist to a great extent knowing fully well that the motives of the bloggers presented here may or may not have been empathy with Arjuni-esque exemplars. However, the fact that a few stories lend themselves to a particular kind of interpretation hint at their potential as texts with the above declared ever flowing surplus of identity to which the specificities of the manifold genre hold the power to disseminate if not explain entirely.

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CHAPTER FOUR

PUTTING THE 'E' IN TRANNIE

YOU STEP INTO THIS CHAMBER,
SET THE APPROPRIATE DIALS,
AND IT TURNS YOU INTO
WHATEVER YOU'D LIKE TO BE.

TRANSMOG-
RIFIER

-Calvin's 'Transmogrifier' from the syndicated comic strip, *Calvin and Hobbes* by Bill Watterson, 1987?

So far, the category of transgender; the relationship between the blogger and the blog followed by; the content produced and propelled has been dealt with. In this concluding chapter, unlike the previous ones, the focus shifts from the literally textual to the literally visual. A preliminary assumption is made here that the visual might explicate the questions of embodiment more articulately than the merely descriptive textual to excavate and explicate not only the virtuality of the trannie but to question that virtualisation at the same time. Rather, that cyborg-ising. Virtual could be the Transmogrifier's technique of "appropriate dials" not visible in the cartoon and Cyber, the inverted cardboard box as it stands. The word/prefix 'cyber' was so far avoided and 'virtual' as a pure category served the purpose of analysis.

The license that assumption provided must now be dropped to reconnoitre the 'e' of electronic fully. Within the 'e' of trannie will be invested articulately the cyber of cybernetics

and cyberspace because electronic may plainly denote 'digital' (which may or may not, in turn imply connectivity and networks) and remains outside the cyber unless codified deliberately in its systems. If cybernetics is the "science of communication and control in living beings or machines" then cyberspace built through that knowledge as "a consensual hallucination" of William Gibson which is abstract yet, "is the space in software, which in turn exists in hardware, which exists in so-called real spaces..." (Bell, *Cyberculture Theorists* 3; qtd. in Bell; Vasseleu 46). It is within this Matryoshka like 'medium' that interactive virtual reality is discovered. In certain arguments it might become difficult to separate the virtual and the cyber completely when the dolls can share the same face albeit, differing in sizes. Not to mention, the greatest ability of the biggest one (the real reality) to contain all the smaller ones in its belly. Cyber (space/netics) remains the larger containing doll than the virtual, though and precedes it accordingly. Therefore, the usage of the term virtual throughout this chapter will in most places be mindful of that subordination to cyber not in terms of honour of that hierarchy but instead, other indications such as virtual in the sense of a verb; act; interaction; and modus operandi while cyber as a noun; location; medium; and assorted embodiment. As one has already indulged in the method over madness, far too long, what remains to be seen is not how the transgender blogger makes the exertions but what is the nature of those very efforts. Hence, positing cyber over virtual at large. The risk clearly is grammatical heresy because virtual is a legitimate noun.

Hitherto, the politics of the virtual that contain it in action came from what Kate Bornstein calls the "primitive virtual realities" as noted in Chapter 2, the place for rehearsal for the future of gender. One is not too sure of which mode exactly she refers to. She could have been talking about the MUD/MOOs but for that matter should not everything on the internet be virtual by default? A realisation of the default's extreme can be found in the 3D encapsulating environment which is fully simulated and fully interactive. This ultimate virtual reality or virtuality *par excellence* stresses on communication, collaboration and thus, movement. Treating similarly, the minimum virtual which incorporates the ethos of motion to be a verb is defensible politically if not syntactically. One also, has in mind Stephen Whittle inspired double virtuality which expressively denotes traffic. Cyber, on the other hand, becomes the enabling playground and the player becomes the cyborg. How effectively that transpires stands to examination.

Before imposing thoughtlessly, the cyborgic embodiment onto the subject that may transpose her/hir in a particular kind of transgender politics, one must take into account the body as it is presented. If Whittle took for granted the primary virtuality of the trans body, he did not consider the fragmentation of that very virtually "expert" body (that knows how to present its images) in instances of self representations online. Another approach beckons.

Maurice Merlau-Ponty's idea of 'proprioception' is defined concisely by Cathryn Vaseeleu in "Virtual Bodies/ Virtual Worlds" in the following manner:

> Proprioception is the body's so called 'internal sense' of its own position, both spatially and in the relation of parts to each other...In dissected isolation, proprioception encompasses the sensory apparatus of spatial mastery (51).

Calvin can become anything he feels himself to be: a tiger like his friend Hobbes as happens in another episode. Following the conviction, Gayle Salamon in *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality* interprets secondary sexual characteristics to be a person's "phenomenological sex" which should be the felt/ 'internal sense' sex in relation to the world as vital to a trans person as maybe the "beauraucratic sex" which is the official on paper status as granted by the nation state to the transsexual (179-182). The purity given to appearance is more important at a very fundamental everyday level for the transgender in her grounded scheme of physicality that must be anticipated before any realisation is made possible. On a closer look at the landscape, this organically appearing sexed, hence gendered self as projected after calculations can be seen to be composed of multiple components more clearly than in the above definition because for her,

> The body itself, is, finally, a mixture or amalgam of substance and ideal located somewhere between its objectively quantifiable materiality and its phantasmatic extensions into the world (64-65).

Calvin will emerge as a whole tiger from the Transmogrifier. Can the same be said for the trannie? Salamon would not take the trajectory of breaking up the body to put it back together but one that values the felt and perceived body in excess over the existing body, as must apply to most trans subjects. Not only when it becomes crucial to the transsexual but transgender in a presented body, also. One may say that the conviction of the transsexual can now be applied to any of the transgendered, even Garber's insignia obsessed transvestite. To quote Salamon out of context is not to appropriate her specific project of embodiment but to

eke out and separate the matter of practised visual fragmentation on the blogs and the ramifications for the subjectivities it holds. Salamon's melange which one estimates should ultimately become whole when experienced, one component at a time is troubled in her example of alien fragmentation, thrust upon the subject by the culture in upholding only a certain valued signifier (the missing one) at a time. She reads journalistic pictures of FTM subjects whose absent breasts are made conspicuous through a caption that brings to attention the mastectomy scars. What was to be otherwise, an innocent image of a shirtless transman is now not given the option to pass or not. He is transsexualised essentially and especially, in terms of the disappeared body parts. Salamon claims, it has become a ritualistic exercise in the media with the use of captions (111). The esteemed breasts of the transman and the similarly treasured penis of the MTF transsexual inspire mass nostalgia in the mainstream press over their absence.

Salamon, however does not ask how matters shift when any fragmentation and the singular symbolic investments are autobiographical. She does note the importance of "coding" of the sex as explicitly male in homoerotic transmen's pictures who may or may not achieve that maleness perfectly but misses the stances of concentrated and rigorous acts in making and showing specific portions (93). If the "absolute insignia" of femininity in culture are the phallic breasts then the transman is also viewed as a castrated woman. Fittingly, the transwoman is castrated of the penis. Gaining is seen to be never possible for transgenders in the contemporary world by Salamon[1] (113). Therefore, when a *propriocepted* body part is brought to life and circulation in flesh or any other prosthetic through images (or text for that matter) can but employ its self only by according over-importance and resolute reiteration. The overindulgence in the partial object may find associations of fixated libidinal hoardings such as the fetish. To grant that understanding theoretical import is not simply tautological but rudely takes away from the dire conviction of transgenders to legitimate their certain experiences of the mind as drawn over the body. Those are more than pleasures and as have been noted in the autobiographical and medical discourses, to most transsexuals: a matter of life and death (Califia; Hausman, *Changing Sex*; Namaste; Prosser).

Pronounced justifications therefore, undertaken independently in the form of textual/visual narratives, invert the popular and mediated representations in the very nostalgic

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[1] One may recall here from Chapter 3, how Ekins and King interpreted the sissy as negated and emasculated, not enabled in the feminine.

language (of the missing part) that undermined those. Transgender or sexual is beside the point in the retrieved body parts as Judith Halberstam in her study of transgender art in *In a Queer Time and Place* notes that the pictured trans body is almost always transsexual in medical and scientific discourses. Also, that is why self-made visual art is important. (97). The same can be said of the media where someone like Kalki Subramaniam and Gazal could not have possibly gained the same attention had they not gone ahead with the surgery. Perhaps, the transsexual body is more open to yellow constructions than the not yet radically remade transgender body. A simple technology of the transgender self as fixing the hair or putting on a pair of heels cannot be accorded the same level of impression in the media as a sex change operation can. Our literal understanding of construction resists taking seriously the technologies employed by the simply cross dressed person who cannot be taken seriously despite the earnestness. However, Halberstam is useful only in underlining the prominence of all TG efforts in reconfigurations at the bodily level because for the critic,

> The transgender form becomes the most clear and compelling representation of our contemporary state of permanent dislocation (124).

This particular overvaluation of the fragmented trans brought together in an entirety as a trans body and transgender as a figure in self-made art turned into a pervasive symbol to signify a metanarrative then veers dangerously in Baudrillardean arena of all of us as transsexuals. Thereby, effecting erasures through universalising.[2] Resisting that command and coming back to the auto fragmentation, Jay Prosser provides a point of departure at the end of his book *Second Skins* discussing an isolated photographed transsexual organ which must be read from difference located between the viewer and the subject. He adds,

> What needs to be sustained as we write transsexuality into theory is precisely the embodied specificity of the point of regard (234).

Therefore, a deeper understanding of the image would come from thinking about it whether you are trans or not. It ultimately turns out to have been about the reader when the gap is bridged through the act of reading in either othering or identifying (234). Prosser, though is

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[2] See Chapter 1, page 14.

reading not a self-photographed subject but someone clicked "within our community"[3] (230-231). The issue is only slightly similar to auto (or otherwise) clicked subject found on multi author or other blogs to which either a contribution has been made or the provenance of the image remains unknown even as authorship is claimed with or without anonymity. If Prosser deals with a named project with an artistic/ documentation mission with intact copyright like Halberstam, a similar image (but produced outside stringent conditions and functioning in the field of the hypertext as an independently buoyant piece of work) of a singular body part may open other possibilities in reading proprioceptive acts. One is optimistically expectant that any act of photography which does not have a motive of institutionalised publishing in coffee table books or newspapers or academic documentary etc. must be available for more immediately intimate consumption.

In a series of images of brassiere held breasts on the blog *Fashion and Crossdressing* titled, "Showing his Protruding Boobs - Men with Boobs in North Indian Style Saree with Jasmine in her Hairs - as if First Night (Suhaag Raat)" seems erotically motivated and finds a sexual location in being explicitly trans. The title prevents passing by conferring the pairs to "men" in a primary incidence but more importantly, present an isolated object that can be read perfectly as a fetish with a fixed infantile mission of arousal and termination in only itself given the heavy stress on the erotic. It is also open to be read as underlining the importance of a singular phenomenological sexed ingredient in the sexing and creating transgender presence. More conspicuously so, by the absence of "jasmine" and "hairs" which are not seen at all in any of the pictures in the series but become other phantom objects which may be visualised in expectation following the extendable reasoning of proprioception.

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[3] Except for perhaps, transman, Loren Cameron who displays utter control over the photographic process, Prosser's subjects are not as much in charge of their images. Conversely, the central issue is not about who clicked but the facts of differently located circulations and levels of interceding required.

Fig. 5. "Showing his Protruding Boobs - Men with Boobs in North Indian Style Saree with Jasmine in her Hairs - as if First Night (Suhaag Raat)" by Anonymous in *Fashion and Crossdressing.*
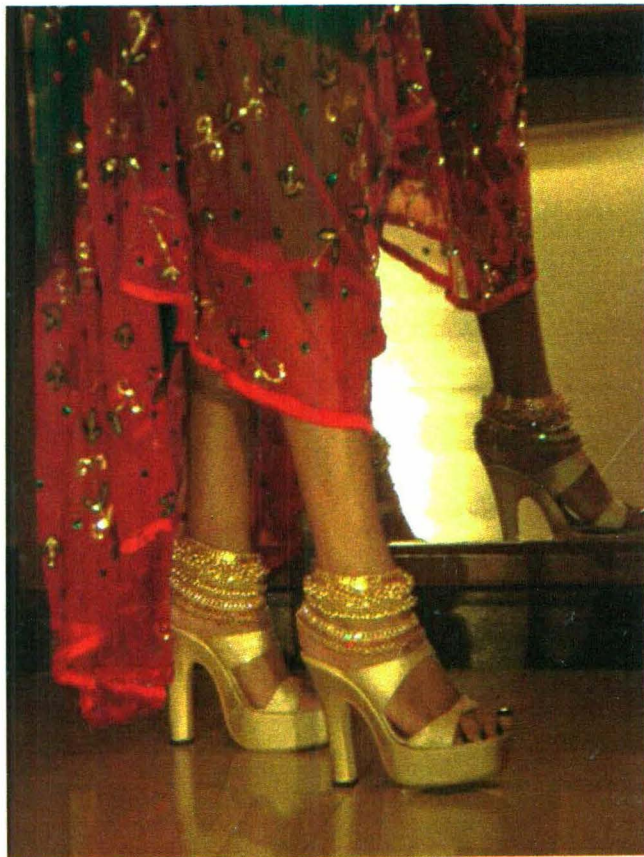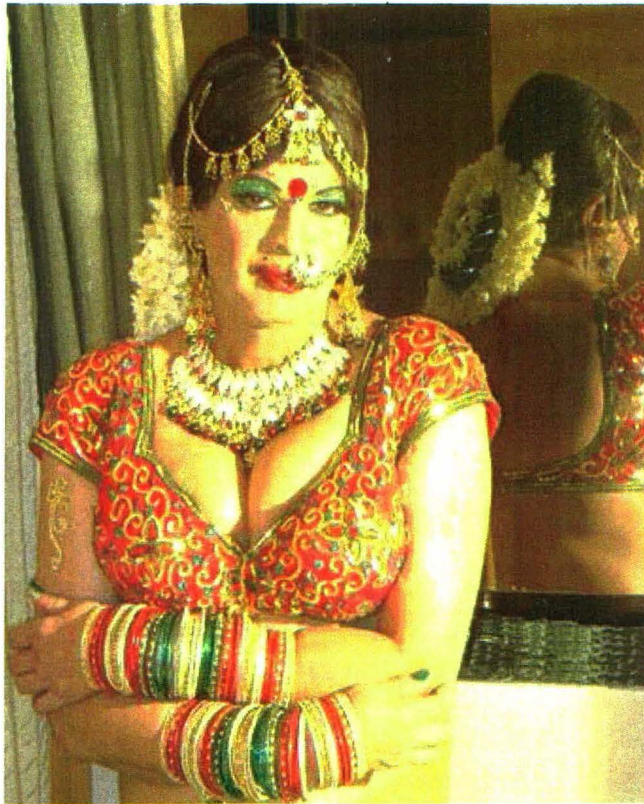
Figs. 6. "Indian Crossdresser as Dulhan :: Ms. Urvashi , the ultimate Indian Crossdresser as Indian Bride" by Anonymous in *Fashion and Crossdressing*.

Maybe the "Showing his..." pictures were never meant to surface on the internet at all. But they have and until deleted will remain accessible. Appropriately, to retain the agential control in the subject who clicked her/hirself or arranged for the act, one must return to the precise moment of the clicking. Anonymous's doing is in tandem with making of a phenomenological sex component but gets frozen when other body parts are simultaneously refused presence. Except for the derriere in the last picture of the series which is the only non-breasts image presented. Would an ideal subject out to develop a perceptible sexed body show more complete portraitures of embodiment? Someone like, Ms. Urvashi in "Indian Crossdresser as Dulhan :: Ms. Urvashi , the ultimate Indian Crossdresser as Indian Bride" on the same blog, who in her series provides many different angles of perception; shots of her legs; as well as head to toe images. She is dressed as a bride and the theme takes precedence over any agendas of disassociated investments.

Nevertheless, what is common to both of them is that they still function on the same podium i.e. blogs. Both must undergo a complete debut disembodiment which is leaving the body as you log in to seek embodiment in cyberspace, even if it entails only their partial parts. At this juncture it is apposite to compare the images with the appropriated ones found in caption blogs. When 'real' looking breasts and only those breasts are the content of the image then passing is a question irrelevant owing to very little evidence to base a judgement on. As a consequence, even if the image belonged originally to a cissexual/gender woman-celebrity or not- does not hold strength as a protest because a singular body part loses its original meaning in the first act of cutting lose from the rest of the body and not necessarily wait for the act of usurping in the posting of it online. As for embodiment in disembodiment, it is something we all agree to as part of our original invisibly embedded pact of consent to hallucinate in Gibson's countryside. *En Garde*, the motive is not Halberstamian-Baudrellardean because embodiment to transgenders is perhaps more of an acute issue than cisgenders. To reiterate, the circumstance remains placed in the acquiescence to disembody as compulsory for everyone who participates. Deborah Lupton in "The Embodied Computer/ User" observes the utopia surrounding the promise of corporeality free cyberspace to add,

> In cyberwriting, the body is often referred to as the 'meat', the dead flesh that surrounds the active mind which constitutes the 'authentic' self...The dream of cyberculture is to leave the 'meat' behind and the become distilled in a clean, pure, uncontaminated relationship with computer technology (144).

Lest, Lupton gently pushes the argument towards a more paranoid investigation for omnipresent and persistent simulacra that should in the future or indeed does at this very moment envelop us completely, the motive will be lost. Hence, to keep the issue grounded one must look at the disembodied and logged in subject as not "an idealized virtual body (who) does not eat, drink, urinate…" but only as the proprioceptors enabled projection of it (145). This is not a description of a 3D VR playmate but that specific computer user who utilises the technology in such a way as to boost her/hir felt body/ body parts. The diagnostic sensors are but a working metaphor to underline the value of the virtual tools concerned.

Taking a cue from Krissi M. Jimroglou's "A Camera with a View: JenniCAM, Visual Representation and Cyborg Subjectivity"[4], the trannie will not leave the body at the moment of going online but become a hybrid of the machine and the erstwhile human? Just like JenniCAM did? In Jimroglou's somewhat literal formulation of the cyborg:

> JenniCAM represents a subject that is constituted by fusing together disparate identities: the corporeal and the mechanic. In doing so, JenniCAM offers a unique presentation of subjectivity, called here 'cyborg subjectivity'…Through the integration of body and technology, JenniCAM is a hybrid, neither fully human nor fully machine yet constituted, in part, by both (262).

Her application of Donna Haraway's cyborg signifies to wholeness under the tutelage of "cyborg" as it divides JenniCAM into two: Body and Machine. The split comes together in a literal reading of the website's name: Jenni + CAM = JenniCAM. If a harmonious bifocal blend of human and the machine inspired Jimroglou to read JenniCAM as cyborg, then it is not technically a misreading. The only protest is that such a formulation pre-empts readings of other complex hybridization in JenniCAM or JenniCAM like cyborgs. Jimroglou goes on to consider the multiplicity beyond the unified dimorphic entity JenniCAM is, only when the latter insists on breaking up her body parts.

> In an excessive and overt manner, Jenni (nota bene: the singular name) breaks apart the image of her body and offers it to her viewers as a way to get to know her…the hegemonic portrait of the fragmented female body offered by Jenni is positioned next to an autobiographical description of the fetishized object. In contrast to the body part in isolation, these body parts are supplemented with a caption written by Jenni herself. (268) Brackets, added.

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[4] The infamous JenniCAm of the 90s showed the mundane as well as the erotic everyday life of a girl named Jenni in the 90s through strategically placed webcams user paid an annual fee to view.

Jimroglou mentions this fetishistic fragmentation in passing as only one of the strategies of JenniCAM's feminist body reclamation through manipulation of masculine voyeurism where the fetish is presented as an object only to be taken away from the voyeur and politicised outside the economy of the gaze by the self authored caption. Noteworthy is again, not the preliminary fetishizing of the object but the fact that it is deliberately autobiographical in the second instance. Even in that moment, she wouldn't let Jenni leave her body when logging in because her cyborg by strict definition keeps the corporeal half. She prevents one from viewing the ridding of the meat to participate, even if at the abstract level in cyberspace. The flesh for her remains unavoidable albeit, split multiply with assorted images and their descriptions.

However, Jimroglou's JenniCAM is not concerned with any felt sense of any singular body part and its realisation in the image. Its politics is found only in the fragmentation which is outside the transgender kind of proprioception because she is concerned with not making her body in the manner of Salamon's body found in the space between the calculatedly assigned physicality and the more transparent substitutions and extensions but in opposition and resistance to patriarchally bound commercial pornography found elsewhere on the internet (267). Trannie on the other hand could be the kind of cyborg who escapes temporarily into the cyberspace, aided by virtual technology and builds a phenomenological sex through one body part in a moment that need not bring together an all-inclusive and obligatory head-to-toe project, whatsoever. Going against Calvin's inverted cardboard box too which will not allow singular freedoms for breasts, jasmine or hair.

Donna Haraway has an overt anti-wholeness plan even if applied in terms of proprioception. In the eponymous, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" she mentions how "our sense of connection to our tools is heightened" taking the example of paraplegics and other disabled persons who may have the most intense experiences of complex hybridization with other communication devices" (178).This liaison is integrative not in linear mathematics but as a blur, at best. There cannot be an account of where one ends and the other begins even when we are dealing with two condensed units looking to fuse together like in the illustration above, because,

> Why should our bodies end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin? ...These machine/organism relationships are obsolete, unnecessary. For us, in imagination and in other practice, machines can be prosthetic devices, intimate components, friendly selves. We don't need organic holism to give impermeable wholeness... (178)

A more concise definition of the non-dimorphic cyborg is found in *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse™*, 1997 where she undercuts for a second time any completeness:

> The cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a fusion of the organic and the technical forged in particular, historical, cultural practices. Cyborgs are not about the Machine and the Human, as if such Things and Subjects universally existed. Instead, cyborgs are about specific historical machines and people in interaction that often turns out to be painfully counterintutitve for the analyst of technoscience (51).

Haraway is against the "total woman" in the first instance, feminist or otherwise. Even her political connections, identifications and networks in cyborgic figurations must be partially realised and contingent yet, intimate. Much like the relationship with the machine emphasised in the second quotation. More specifically, it is not just the interaction but the act of it "in interaction" that cyborgs subvert the rationalist and objective scientist, formulated as Modest_Witness here who is the masculine voice of reason. Someone, who stages his own humbleness and transparency through discursive acts.

Haraway in this subsequent exploration of cyborgs especially looks up to feminist science fiction to find more polluted creatures. She introduces a character who seems promisingly transgendered. The Female Man of the novel *The Female Man* in "Cyborg Manifesto" is from the "the story of four versions of one genotype, all of whom meet, but even taken together do not make a whole, resolve the dilemma of violent moral action, or remove the growing scandal of gender" (178). The Female Man created by author Joanna Russ in 1970 is bought to her[5] fuller potential as a cyborg in *Modest_Witness* where the newly interpreted FemaleMan© mocks the ridiculousness of copyright being not the author of herself but the product and as a creature of multiplicity and unoriginality (71, 74-75). More importantly, she remains in the book "about the contingent and disrupted foundational category of woman, doppelgänger to the coherent, bright son called man" or Modest_Witness (22). However, to ground FemaleMan© as transgender is to undercut not only Russ's

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[5] FemaleMan© is referred to in the feminine pronouns in *Modest_Witness* by Haraway.

technotopic feminist story but also, (not the hybridity but) the contradictory nature of the figure. On the other hand it would prove to be an overvaluation of FemaleMan© as a symbol even as the name remains temptingly gender subversive. The closest trannie can come to FemaleMan© is that the latter is a product of discourse and "queer" (120). Ms. Urvashi with her legs and her contemporary's breasts are though, not in opposition to the total woman even if the latter becomes a cyborg. Any such fears are likely to be rudimentary because it is not simply the broken parts that signify a process rather than an ideation but also, the intercourses with the machine are loudly telling a tale of cyber politics found not against Modest_Witness like authorial complete figures. On the contrary, those are based on more immediate and righteously narcissistic concerns of finding one's own body in profusions. Henceforward, looking for proto trans-metaphors like FemaleMan© may be a conjectural mistake.

A more beneficent corollary from *Modest_Witness* may come out of Haraway's reading of a cartoon in a Norwegian feminist journal by Anne Kelly that Harway titles, *The Virtual Speculum* which is a technotopic satire on the Sistine Chapel's *The Creation of Adam*. In the cartoon, a naked woman much like Adam touches a keyboard instead of meeting God's finger while gazing at the image of a foetus on the computer screen. In a final reading after multiple considerations, Haraway makes two vigorous comments. First, over what is not on the screen that is the chord of the computer and the rest of the umbilical chord and placenta. Therefore, "The pregnancy is ectopic, to say the least" (187). Secondly,

> If Kelly's fetus cannot be the woman's reflection, the unborn being might be her, or someone's, project. More likely, the fetus in cyberspace signifies an entity that is constituted by many variously related communities of practise (187).

Taking the latter view into account first, Ms. Urvashi poses in front of a mirror that reflects her back and her profile faithfully but she does not look into it. There is no one on one exchange with her and the mirror in a private moment of identification captured by the camera. She looks instead at the lens of the camera which multiplies her already multiplied body. Even her legs are reflected extended out and similarly replicated. Therefore, what she is not, is the foetus. Of herself or anybody else. Not because the foetus might be an open project like in Kelly but because she may constitute herself in that one moment but does so more than once due to the reflections that do not go back and forth as in Kelly and the foetus but largely in one direction, shooting out from the mirror. Also, she cannot be conceived in

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the simpler terms of extrauterine conception because to view her as giving birth to herself immediately outside a previously specified womb location would be a misreading given the very layered and jutting-out-output of the image.

Furthermore, for Haraway, the computer hardware works as a 'metafetus' making the mise en scene in Matryoshka containment. In Ms. Urvashi's pictures, there stands her; her mirror reflections; and also, enters the transgender reader who may find identification in either those planes at random. Introducing the reader here especially complicates the picture. One could at this point get into the questions such as, who is looking at whom? Is one looking at her/hirself being looked at? Or is it a case of pure identification of a type who seeks to make her/hir image in that type? To restate, the picture is not of a foetus who is constituted by hovering parental cells, however arrogating they may-be. The trannie, Ms Urvashi has produced her images not as her own offspring or herself as her offspring but as a certain projection found to be an outcome of an original felt sense of what she must be like. Hence, the language of biological reproduction albeit virtual, may be limiting in this instance which is multi-protrusive. It is only the virtual exchange which signifies more growth. The act of communication (albeit, differently mobile) common to both Kelly's nude and the trannie.

Conversely, in many textual examples, the mirror reflection would serve as a wholesome if somewhat traditionally encompassing recognition. As Shelly's Radha writes before a luncheon with Bollywood royalty in "Chapter 14- Meeting the Big B",

> Carefully, I wore the saree and pleated the pallu. I pinned the saree on to my blouse at the back. The pleats were just perfect. The border of the Kanjeevaram saree was exactly aligned with the shoulder stitch of my blouse and the upper border was precisely centered on my right breast.

> I looked at myself in the mirror for a while scrutinizing everything and when I was satisfied, I walked towards the telephone. As if on cue, the phone rang.

The mirror here becomes an ordered part of an ordered scene where the script is perfectly in place. Even the phone cooperates with her somewhat anal meticulousness in the face of an important narrative juncture. On the other hand, when Seema in "MY CROSSDRESSED WEDDING- SANDEEP TO SEEMA" recognizes her sissy self in bridal glory in the mirror, she is overwhelmed:

Looking in the mirror again, I saw the bride-to-be in her petticoats, and tears began to well up again.

And jubilant the second time when,

Feeling forlorn, I started back to the living room. Along the way I passed a large floor-to-ceiling mirror.

There she was - The Bride. Seema. Me. She WAS truly a vision. "Hmm," I thought as I studied her. I turned to the left, then the right. I turned my back to the mirror, then looked coyly over my shoulder and smiled. "She is, I mean - I am a beautiful bride," I thought. I turned to face the mirror, and in my most feminine voice said, "Hello, Seema. You ARE a foxy girl!" I giggled, swaying in my lehenga, the match of my maroon lipstick.

Seema may be more spontaneous than Radha before her own big event of first ever sexual intercourse after the wedding but what is remarkably analogous in both cases is that they are in tandem with the mirror scene of the western transsexual novel as critiqued by Jay Prosser. He however, also recalls an earlier mirror scene, as a supplement to the Lacanian infantile mirror stage, the first realisation of gender dysphoria in the transsexual is made in front of the mirror in the narrative where the body gets broken down in parts and must be put together with surgical interventions, eventually. He writes,

Almost to the degree of the expected surgery scenes, mirror scenes, we might say constitute a convention of transsexual autobiography...A trope of transsexual representation, the split of the mirror captures the definitive splitting of the transsexual subject, freezes it, frames it schematically in narrative....Yielding this recognition that I am not my body, the mirror sets in motion the transsexual plot: it is once it is shattered in its visual reflection, once the material body is seen not to be the felt body that the material body can be approached in bits and pieces- an assembly of parts to be amputated and relocated surgically in order that subject may be corporeally integrated (100).

Taking surgery to be one solution when considering not only transsexual but differently identified trans subject for whom proprioception is as vital as the former, if we substitute the adverb 'surgically' to 'technologically' then the mirror gains more importance in the second type mirror scene of recovery which in turn raises the importance of reordering of the "bits and pieces" by the transgender her/hirself. It should not in turn weaken the significance of surgery for the transsexual but allow technologies of the self more latitude in the first act of extending that felt body part into the world. Especially, in the case of a trannie inspired by

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Boellstorff's "dubbing culture" where Prosser's expert transsexual narrator falls short of application, again. Consequently, cyborg subjectivity becomes one possible choice at the minimum level of sexed body parts which when represented need not signal an undeviating linear process of embodiment. Disembodiment on the other hand to gain embodiment need not be refuted in that singular instance of partial experience. The lesson of the blogs if any is in the refusal of coherence much like the cyborg.

Putting the 'e' in the Trannie is an act of splitting similarly inspiring deliberate inconsistencies. One must first separate the non-electronic 'e' or replace the 'y' of the alternative spelling, 'tranny' with an 'ie'. Afterwards, the split and the insertion of electronic opens up one train of thought over the disembodied 'e' which is renewed in itself, independent but informed of the politics of transgender. Hence, 'e' as embodied, after all and at the same time not essentialist in its proprioception because found in fragmentation. 'e' then like the singular and free floating breasts are as much a property of trannie and all the trannies who read those breasts as their felt and therefore legitimately experienced attachments.

One may protest that such a politics could be redundant where the virtual techniques located already in an escaping abstract place called cyberspace, leads to the making of convenient resolutions at the most crude levels of narrative production, namely breasts (trans and otherwise). Note that Calvin also needed a device (albeit, to become a whole creature) or rather a chamber like location where the propelling fuel was imagination. An exteriorised medium becomes necessary to ease his transformations. The 'convenient resolution' is therefore evidently, possible and infinitely repeatable suspiciously only in cyberspace where not everyone practises isolating and magnification of their select body parts which tell the tale of a mode of liberation available currently to a particular group who must exploit it, copiously. The motive has been to not discount grounded politics as such where the fully functioning and organic self is the first criterion for participation, taken so much for granted that it is an undetectable issue. The real driving force behind this polemic has been to take into account that which slips under that grass root and well-intended action and can come out to play only in the strictly private. For Mitra and Gajjala, the queer blogger's private space must be essentially sexualised therefore, more susceptible to secrecy. They exercise a formulation of routinized shame when they write,

However, the individualization enabled through online blogging of the Indian GLBT blogger removes the performance of queer identity from the home location of the blogger in a way that maintains the invisibility of the sexual practices of the queer blogger. This reproduces the *ghar* and *bahir* (private and public) binaries. This allows for a separation of sexual practice (which takes place in private spaces invisible to mainstream society) and queer performativity (which becomes acceptable as signaling participation in a neoliberal and modern transnational economy) (410). Italics and brackets, authors'.

The deeply personal even at the most miniscule level which may sometimes appear to be frivolously sensual and severable from the performative political outside to many is irredeemably politically charged, as well. The *ghar* which becomes the secret place is unlikely to be pulled out into respectable activism and performance of the *bahir*. Tt does not follow that the former is irrelevant (granted, the handicap of invisibility) because there lies the fact of active whispers of transmissions symbolised in trannies' example by breasts, hair, et al. A good start for such infinitesimal transgender politics could be found in the continuation of the project of constantly making and breaking the body. Alone or along with others. Be it in words, pictures or video. Given the scarcity of Indian trans expression online those would be much welcomed and elating flourishes.

CONCLUSION

Run for life

Your world is made up of water

You have to show your talent

By swimming fast

Swim, swim fast

My freedom is inside this four walled tank

Alike, this whole universe is for me

-From the poem, "Swimming" by Living Smile Vidya, 2012.

Metaphoric disservice is ubiquitous. Trannie goes shopping; writes out her purchased name in a warren with a dead end; makes alibis and such to be what she is; lights a holy lamp for a mythical hero(ine?); only to then chop off her breasts and legs. A defeatist crude summary of the previous chapters toils not to disprove one's own polemics made so far with a wave of a hand but to reflect over arguments being always a matter of perception. One can offer yet another glimpse to add another dimension to trans existence as found online but a cyclic exercise is best avoided. Fact of the matter remains that blogs are a liberating source of realisation of, and actively creating a self but open only to a certain kind of user with assorted privileges and in certain instances which cannot be overvalued to the extent of a universal transgender-humanism. Trannie, the shopper; author; hyperlinked entity; virtual expert; auto-biographer; sissy; excuse maker; legendary warrior on sex-vacation; cyborg; and mirror-reflecting cyborg posits all these and more possibilities through the medium in which she practises hir/ her craft.

For every trannie with an 'e' there will be uncountable those who cannot afford to purchase that empowerment of the electronic as the great numbers of hijras, kothis, tirunangais dependent on NGO led empowerment and queer coalitions show. To repeat an example, that politics may be acutely necessary but what trannie blogs stand to illustrate is that the most profoundly subjective that is not taken into account for, in revolutionary rhetorics; health work; rehabilitation; employment issues; and other areas is gradually diluted. In that scenario, the only place for a fantastic and wish fulfilling story of transformation rests in an intimate interaction. More specifically, transgender intimate interaction. The internet is one domicile that comes to mind as an afterthought, especially to the last chapter. If it's the

best available choice of narration is a moot point given that voices always find their way in each epoch so any overemphasis remains unwarranted. The condition and the imperative although, are clear in Living Smile Vidya's words, above. The life is at stake and expression necessary. She knows that she is bound by her defined space but chooses to view it as a symbol for an open universe. In the least, she sums up the dilemma of the internet. One must create stories within what is at hand but the enclosed environ[1] signals to an open field of possibilities, unforeseen. The result surely is the creation of narratives in circulation.

Efforts have been made, so far to establish trannie and her writings as an active discourse. The narratives must be viewed flowing towards the building of a politically ripe body of work and not simply an anti or counter discourse to the hegemonizing western transsexual medico-legal discourses; the western transsexual novel; the Indian queer politics of mobilisation; anthropological and ethnographical studies; and cyborg feminism. Trannie may work sometimes in stark opposition to these fields of discursive drama but one is hesitant to use the language of directly applied antagonism in all instances because that would redirect the course of agency in political affirmation through an essentialist sense of hostility that in turn could saturate the subject. The discourse counters in its occasions indeed, but is that the most important aspect of it? For that matter, another margin is likely to push its envelopes soon. Perhaps, one in the form of oral histories sans mediators, away from the largely English scripted blogs which are not representative of all trans sensibilities. Which is why, 'counter' is a troubled term that signifies towards an unconditional status of principally evocative stances of a harmonious group formed along as other to primary agents in each and every visible case. Perhaps, the error is the same as that of the label of transgender. If this label is as much of a costly changeling then that merits another detailed discussion. Having said all that, the trannie must not be assumed to be divorced from the awareness of her own marginality and that of those like and unlike her to dissolve into her own individual cell of cyberspace. To do so would be dangerously fallacious. What one cannot turn away is from her animated reality but above all, a celebration of having found a voice must always be grounded in context with that which cannot be accounted for yet and not only that which is directly above it.

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[1] Recall, Matryoshkas.

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