

**Parenting Transgender Children: An Analysis of Vasudhendra's  
*Mohanswamy***

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**Abstract:**

This paper analyses how transgender people have been trying to come to mainstream platforms to reach and gain acceptance and recognition for themselves as equals. It also tries to analyze the overall characteristics of parents of transgenders and it highlights the aspects of their relationship with their children. This research paper explores how Vasudhendra portrays the evolving relationships between Mohan and his family members, focusing on the struggles of parents' endeavors in raising a transgender child in a conservative society. To retain their pride and honour these parents stick to social norms and marginalize their own children. This paper highlights the emotional journey of social acceptance, identity, and bonding with their family members and friends, while critically addressing social stigma and the misconception surrounding transgender identity. This paper analyses how the protagonists of *Mohanswamy* and other short stories, try to overcome the stereotypes that are constructed around transpersons, and how their family responds to them when it impacts transperson in a vulnerable society. The paper argues how we can understand the emotional complexities of parenting a transgender child and the role of literature in fostering empathy and acceptance in contemporary society.

**Keywords:** Family honour, Gay, Gender identity, Transgenders, Transprejudice.

## **Introduction**

In India, we can see that the transgender people are often facing many kinds of challenges. They are struggling to earn a livelihood, taking on roles such as sex workers, beggars, or being invited to functions to bless people. They are referred to by various names like Hijra, Chakka, Male prostitute, etc. Their distinctive clapping style, often seen when dressed in saris, symbolizes their resistance to marginalization and their desire to be part of the mainstream. In this paper the aim is to show how Vasudhendra is portrayed in *Mohanswamy*, the collection of short stories which deals with how transgender people face challenges with their family members in society. Vasudhendra is a prominent contemporary writer, and he has published novels, collection of short stories and essays. His novels and collection of short stories are translated into many languages. His notable work *Mohanswamy* is a collection of short stories published in 2013. The major themes of his collection of short stories are homosexuality, gender identity, sexuality, and social norms.

In this paper, we are dealing with *Mohanswamy*. This collection of short stories offers a poignant portrayal of these challenges, following a father's emotional journey as he comes to terms with his transgender child's identity. These stories explore the complexities of parenting a transgender child in India, focusing on identity, societal pressure, and parental love. As the father's perspective evolves from rejection to acceptance, the novel emphasizes the importance of understanding and patience in navigating the complexities of gender identity.

The short story *Bicycle Riding* by Vasudhendra delves into the emotional and societal struggles of a transgender child, focusing on the protagonist, *Mohanaswamy*. *The story* explores the emotional and societal struggles within a traditional family structure, focusing on gender roles, familial tensions, and the impact of societal expectations. It highlights the conflict between traditional gender roles and the protagonist's gender expression. When Mohanaswamy's sister tells him to clean the plates he rejects it by saying, "It's not a man's job". This highlights the rigid boundaries between what is considered appropriate for males and females. It is challenging societal expectations. His sister uses the word "Gansu" (Gandu Sule) because he used to not play with the boys and because he is also always playing with the girls. He complains to their mother about it. The mother's violent reaction towards Janaki's teasing reflects her internal conflict - a desire to protect her son from marginalization while struggling to accept his gender identity. This violence also underscores how domestic violence is sometimes normalized as a way of enforcing

societal norms. Mohanaswamy's internalized shame further exacerbates the family's tension, as he believes his feminine mannerisms are the cause of the conflicts, even though the real source is societal rejection of his identity. But when this word used by his mother, it reveals the deep societal disdain for non-conformity. Mohan's mother gradually comes to terms with her child's identity, a process that parallels the broader societal shift towards a greater understanding of gender fluidity and transgender issues.

The emotional complexity of the family dynamic is evident in the mother's sorrow after the violence and Mohanaswamy's quiet submission. His act of cleaning the plates symbolizes his resignation from societal and familial pressures, reflecting a loss of agency and self-expression. This story portrays the destructive impact of rigid gender expectations, the cycle of violence within the family, and the terrible emotional toll that those who don't fit into standard gender stereotypes endure.

The mother's sorrow, "It's just my fate," expresses a sense of helplessness that reveals the generational conflict within the family. She sees the violence as an unfortunate but necessary reaction to the perceived shame brought upon her family by Mohanaswamy's gender expression. This is a painful acknowledgment of how patriarchal and gendered expectations dictate familial relationships, pushing the mother into a position where she must defend the norms, even if it means causing harm to her own children. There is particularly the fear of rejection from loved ones and the societal imperative to conform to gender norms. Mohan's desire to transition is initially misunderstood by family and friends, who are unable to reconcile his son's gender identity with his traditional beliefs about masculinity.

In the short story of *Anagha Sinless* the protagonist Kalleshi, is trapped in a terrifying situation, both physically and emotionally. His desperate pleas and suffering depicted through vivid imagery of fear, helplessness, and bodily distress highlight the extreme emotional collapse he experiences. His father, Veerabhadrapa, is emotionally detached, offering no support despite being physically present. This detachment reflects a breakdown in the family's emotional bonds and may stem from unresolved issues such as societal shame, guilt over his wife's death, or personal disappointments. The grandmother, though sorrowful, is physically frail and unable to intervene, symbolizing the generational cycle of trauma that leaves Kalleshi increasingly isolated. The well itself serves as a powerful symbol of decay, representing both physical danger and the stagnation of emotional and psychological

neglect within the family. The well, once a source of life, has become a place of death, further deepened by the tragic loss of Kalleshi's mother there.

Creatures like snakes and bats in the well symbolize the toxic, repressed emotions in the family, with Kalleshi's fear magnifying his sense of powerlessness. His screams for help go unanswered, illustrating how emotional neglect perpetuates trauma across generations. The father's inability to act and the mother's death in the well suggest that unresolved grief and guilt continue to haunt the family, preventing healing and leaving Kalleshi in an environment where his cries for help are ignored, both literally and emotionally. This passage offers a stark commentary on the destructive power of generational trauma and the emotional isolation it causes.

In the short story of *Bed Bug*, the protagonist Shankar Gowda, the youngest son of a powerful village head, is depicted as a transgender individual who faces rejection and mockery due to his feminine traits. His voice, gestures, and body language reflect his effeminacy, and he prefers activities traditionally associated with girls. Shankar prefers playing tennicoit with the girls instead of sports like kabaddi, and volleyball with the boys. In addition, he shows interest in designer sarees and likes to sketch rangoli patterns in his notebook. In front of his village friends, he also imitates like a prostitute, which makes them laugh out loud. He would have been repeating this behaviour countless times, seeking their amusement, which further deepens his sense of humiliation. Despite his family's wealth and status, Shankar's effeminacy makes him a constant target of ridicule throughout his life.

The story explores the painful consequences of Shankar's non-conformity to gender norms, particularly highlighted by a moment in biology class when the teacher while discussing chromosomal mismatches, nastily smiles at Shankar, prompting the class to laugh at his perceived sexual identity. The lives of transgender individuals are further shattered when bullying evolves into physical abuse. Many endure daily torture from a homophobic society, with little recognition of the abuse often originating within their own families. Shankar, too, faced such cruelty at home. Upon returning to school after a brief absence, the narrator is horrified to find bruises all over Shankar's body, inflicted by his parents in a desperate attempt to suppress his feminine traits. The narrator reflects, "But to his ostentatious family, his effeminate behaviour was a bitter pill to swallow. His two brothers, his father, his mother, and everyone else in his family implored him to change. How could he change something natural to him?" (Vasudhendra, 181). In Shankar's suffering, which finally results in his untimely death, this imposition of strict gender roles is clearly visible. Kommi,

the narrator's childhood friend, claims that Shankar did not commit suicide, but was instead murdered by his own brothers and father. The revelation shocks the narrator, who struggles to come to terms with the fact that Shankar's family was responsible for his death.

You know a bed bug, right? It slips into the mattress and bites you all through the night, disturbing your sleep. That son of a bitch was like a bed bug. Just because a bed bug is born in the house people live and grow up there, will they shower love on it? No. If they spot it, they will squish it and wash their hands clean. Thus, this is exactly what his father and brothers did to him. One day, when he was asleep, they smothered him with a pillow. Then they used his blanket to hang his body, and created a big scene next morning, beating their breasts" (Vasudhendra, 190).

The metaphor of Shankar as a "bed-bug" reflects the fragility of his existence, as he is constantly crushed by societal mockery and rejection. Through this portrayal, the story critiques the harsh realities faced by transgender individuals in a society that rigidly enforces gender norms. The tale of Shankar Gowda highlights the deep-rooted trans prejudice in Indian culture, where the honour and dignity of the family are paramount. Gender non-conformity, particularly in the case of transgender individuals, is viewed as a disgrace, leading to extreme measures to force them into conformity. This "shame culture" in India, as discussed by Hoshang Merchant, (Merchant,1999) obstructs understanding of gender performativity and fosters marginalization.

After the sex-change operation in Bombay, Shankar's transformation into a woman brings shame to his family, leading them to reject him. Despite this, Shankar remains defiant and courageous, refusing to leave his home even when told that property is reserved only for sons. His beauty attracted many men in their village and this is one of the reasons for their family members embarrassment. They thought they lost their family honour because of him and they even blame him for his brother's defeat in an election. Ultimately, the family, unable to bear the shame, takes Shankar's life. Following his death, his brothers seek to claim the money he earned, highlighting the deep-seated exploitation and rejection of transgender individuals in Indian society. Since gender identity hasn't been emphasized until it has a direct impact on their lives, most parents are unsure of how to react when their child discloses a different gender identity. When their own child is involved, even parents who have close LGBTQ+ friends or family may find it difficult. This represents a

significant change in the family dynamics. Shankar's story serves as a powerful commentary on the precarious lives of transgender people, who are often marginalized, subjected to abuse, and supported only by others in their community, as highlighted in Revathi's autobiography.

The philosopher and theorist Judith Butler presents a performative theory of gender in her well-known work *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*. Her well-known book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, published in 1990, elaborated on this idea. Her model of gender performativity challenges dominant gender norms, arguing that gender is socially constructed through repetitive acts rooted in compulsory heterosexuality. She asserts that it is these acts, rather than an inherent gender, that define gender, and while they cannot be fully stopped, they remain ingrained in the individual. In Shankar's case, his gestures, manner of walking, and feminine body language reflect his performance act. By exposing these acts, Shankar has faced harassment because his performances transcend the traditional male-female dichotomy, which is not accepted by some heterosexual people.

As Revathi says, we speak the language of rights loudly and often in our society." However, are these rights available to the marginalized? Sex, sexual orientation, caste, and religion are used as excuses to deny people their rights. Either they must fight or they must reach a compromise. Because I was born a man and desired to spend my life as a woman, I am one such person who has been marginalized (Revathi, 2010).

More than half of young transgender people can't use the restroom that matches their gender identity at school. Transgender children, teens, and young adults can be protected by parental support and a strong family foundation. When a child discloses a different gender identification or asks questions about gender, the way a parent responds can have a significant impact on the child's self-perception and connection with the parent. In Manjammaa jogathi's *Manjanutha to Manjamma*. When she was menstruating as a boy their parents thought that is the goddess's sin. They should submit to him to the goddess in the getting beads tied. These superstitious beliefs started in Indian culture. This would show how the Indian parents believe in superstitious beliefs and when his father confirmed his child to take another gender identity their family members decided to let him as a goddess(jogathi) which means they are officially thrown out of the family. When her mother is sorrowful about her life nobody is ready to hear her word. This shows that even if you don't

have all the answers, it's important to listen, be open to understanding, and show love and support.

These stories have different interpretations. This problem is not only a problem of specific transgenders. Almost all transgenders are facing similar problems everywhere. In Mahabharata also Shikhandi is thrown out by his parents. They have been facing these problems since Mahabharata but in this contemporary society, parents should think about their own children, about how they will survive without their support. When their parents throw them out of their homes, it is one of a huge problem for transgenders. Therefore, they start begging and working as sex workers. When a child comes out to a family member, they are emotionally vulnerable, but the person who receives the news is frequently taken shocked and overwhelmed. Both sides make mistakes when negotiating this unfamiliar area. To assist parents in making the best decision for their family.

### **Conclusion**

Vasudhendra's *Mohanswamy* challenges traditional gender norms and explores the emotional complexities of parenting a transgender child. The short stories delve into issues of identity, acceptance, societal pressure, and parental love, offering a nuanced perspective on gender identity in contemporary Indian society. This collection of short stories portrays the same issues in every family but no one is ready for their child to be a transgender. Specifically, how parents react when their kids reveal a gender identity can have a significant impact on the child's self-perception and relationship with their parent. You don't need to know everything, but it's crucial to listen, show love and affection, and show that you want to understand. It emphasizes that the journey of understanding and acceptance is not only personal for transgender individuals but also for their families. This short story's portrayal of this internal struggle offers profound insights into how familial acceptance can be transformative for both parents and children.

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