

Strategic Essentialism: A Manoeuvre of Voiceless

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Abstract

Strategic Essentialism is strategy for aphonic communities who are ostracized from the society based on gender, class, caste, race and religion. It is first proposed by Gayathri Spivak, the most influential post colonial intellectual. Transgender community is one among those communities which is doubly marginalized in the society. Redefining Realness is a memoir of a transwoman Janet Mock which substantiates that marginalization is universal irrespective of nation and culture. This paper deploys strategic essentialism as a device for the amelioration of the transgender community through Janet Mock's "Redefining Realness".

Keywords: Strategic Essentialism, Marginalization, Strategy, Memoir.

Strategic essentialism is first proposed by the most influential post colonial intellectual Gayathri Chakravorty Spivak. Spivak has raised her voice for the voiceless people in the society. Her "Can A Subaltern Speak?" has created vibrancies in subaltern study. Her contributions for the subaltern studies are worth notable in the history of literature. This theory Strategic essentialism is tactics for the marginalized people to fight for their rights and identity. Society has marginalized many people in the name of caste, creed, race, gender and so on. The marginalized people can fight for themselves based on shared gender, culture and political identity. Though there are strong differences prevails among the group members it may help them to "essentialize" their identity. They are dehumanized, suppressed and exploited by the abuses in their life.

Transgender is the state of one's gender identity not matching one's assigned sex. It does not imply any specific form of sexual orientation. It is term which is mystic and disgusted at times in the society. This community is ostracized from the hegemonic group based on the gender. The problem is they are not even taken for consideration as marginalized. Hence, they are marginalized from the marginalized. Their existence in the society is under privileged. It has been said that around one million transgender are living in India but the pathetic condition is that they are devoid of their identity and been doubly marginalized by the society. Transgender are considered as symbol

of shame to the family and they are forced to run away from the native. Trans genders are born with some chromosomal changes in their body and it is innate. They identified their real gender in their teens. For example, a boy loves to play with girls and is interested in doing household activities rather than hanging out with boys. Attraction towards boys arouses a conflict in his mind. The behavior of the boy like walking, dressing and gestures showcase the original gender to the family and society. The stress given by the society and family add to the complexity. As a result of this, the boy is forced to run away from the family and seek refuge with the transgender community. Each and every transgender faces the above problem in his or her life and finally resort to begging or prostitution for their livelihood. The strange laws of nature have created not only in humans but also in animals, birds and even fishes and reptiles. Ironically, only man the highest form of all creations, is ruthlessly in his inhuman treatment of the transgender. Though science and technology has attained an incredible development, human minds are yet to be civilized in the field of humanism even in this twenty first century.

Janet Mock, a trans woman of Hawaii has written her memoir *Redefining Realness*. She is an American Writer, Speaker, and a social activist. She is one among those few people in the world who have broken the glass ceiling laid above them. Since she is a transwomen she has faced all kinds of abuses in her life. Memoir is a kind of autobiography in which the writer produces only the significant incidents. Her memoir is very profound and courageous attempt in which she establishes herself as a resounding and inspirational voice of transgender community. It deals with her process of feminization and her path to womanhood. This memoir proves that the problems and abuses faced by the transgender community are universal irrespective of the nation and culture.

Redefining Realness is her path to womanhood and the hardships she had faced throughout the path. It is set as an example about the "transworld". The world is made up of many small worlds. "Transworld" is filled with harshest treatment, exclusion, discrimination and violence. These women stand in between at the intersections of race, gender, class, sexuality and personal economy on the margins of the society. Janet has faced the first sexual abuse as a kid by her half brother Derek. She took years to understand that it is nothing but molestation. Derek has used her vulnerability of gender to feed his nasty thoughts. She has become a prey to sexual abuse at the age of eight.

"Derek took something away from me when I was only eight years old and left me with a lifetime of murkiness surrounding issues of intimacy, sex, pain, love, boundaries, and ownership of my body" (Mock47)

In India child sexual abuse rate has been getting higher every year. Most of the kids are abused by the close relations or members of the family. Gender non- confirmation kids are not an exception to this. They have faced the abuses in schools and teachers. The gender chaos of

the kid is taken for advantage and they are threatened to not to disclose the secret to anyone. The family acceptance is also a horse horn to transgenders. Janet has never revealed her real identity to anyone not even to her mother. The apprehension that she has that, her real identity may not be accepted by others and she may chuck out of the family. This is a major issues faced by the transgenders across the world. The family which celebrates a daughter who is behaving like a son humiliates the son who is behaving like a daughter. The femininity is always considered as inferior to masculinity. The gender non confirmation kid has been bullied by the friends and family. Family members considered them as a symbol of shame. They even go to the extreme of giving them burnt scars and poisoned them. So when the life is at stake, the kids run away from the family. They find people of same feather and join their hands with them. This change is not a progressive one rather it is just a fly from fire to frying pan. They will lose their education and they have to come to streets for livelihood and many people put an end to their life. In India there are lots of derogatory terms to address transgender like *ali*, *ombothu* etc. In Hawaii people address them as *Mahu* and in English as *Dyke*, *Nigger*, *queer*, *tranny*, *Sissy* and *faggot*. The verbal abuse starts from their childhood. Janet is used to these words because she as Charles she come across these words from friends, schoolmates and family.

Most of the time, transwomenism is getting confused with drag queens. Dragqueens are those who act as women for a show but Tran's womanhood is not performance or costume but their identity.

"Femininity in general is seen as frivolous...meaning that to don a dress, heels, lipstick and big hair in artifice, fake and a distraction....my femininity is more than adornments; they were extension of me enabling to express myself and my identity."(Mock 147)

In the process of self- discovery, transgender have to come across the surgery called SRS (Sex Reassignment Surgery). Everyone deserves access to quality health care yet access is challenging for transgender across the world. In India, it is far worse. The surgery costs much that transgender cannot afford. The surgeries are not done by doctors rather a skilled person in that. Pre-surgery and Post-surgery treatments are not available in India. It is more like a butcher shop that a operation theatre. But Janet is quite privileged to access the hormone therapy before her surgery. In order to earn the amount, she has taken sex work as her profession. Transgenders either educated or not are not given proper employment from the higher level to low level work. The stigma in the people's mind make them to take begging, club dancing and sex work as their profession. Janet says,

"My experience mirrors that of the vulnerable girl with few resources who was groomed from childhood, who was told that this is the only way, who was not comfortable enough in her body to truly gain any kind of pleasure from it, who rented the pieces of herself" (177)

The trauma faced by transgenders throughout the life is inexpressible. Now-a-days they are fighting for their rights and identity but the effect and impact is comparatively less. Strategic Essentialism is armor for the transgender to fight against marginalization. The ostracized people like Dalits, Tribes, and Women can join hands together to demand their rights and to “essentialise” their existence in the society. Though they have difference in their opinions and community the aim is justice for all. So that the vibration becomes stronger and they can find a path of progress. It is the duty of the democracy to make life comfortable for every human being in the country. Unfortunately the voice of this voiceless community it is yet to reach those people who can bring about a change in their life. This humble research paper is a stone thrown into the ocean, a ripple that can draw the attention of the society towards transgenders, who have been, in a way betrayed by God himself.

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