

Self-Identity of a Transgender in the Novel “The Danish Girl”

S.Berni ¹

¹ M.A. English Literature, V.O. Chidambaram College, Thoothukudi.

Abstract- LGBT has become a term vast know in the recent trend in literature. This paper throws light on the turmoil that a transgender undergo during her initial period. Identity is one of the most important feature in a person. A person is given his or her place in the society through their identity. In this paper Self identity can be seen in a hassle of a transgender who tried to come out of the inner struggles and to prove her identity as a transgender. The paper brings out the struggles of a transgender who was one of the first person to undergo the sex transplant surgery in 1920s. The paper also deals with the sociological background in which the system of transgender made a drastic tumult among the people.

Keywords: LGBT, Gay Literature, Transgender, Self-Identity.

INTRODUCTION

LGBT is a term that came to vogue in the 1990s that made a recognition for the third gender people. Until the 1990s people who were unheterosexual found it difficult to find a place in the society during the 1860s the people claimed themselves to be third gender people and then they themselves had their own divisions such as the lesbians and gay and the in the later part of the twentieth century the term LGBT came to existence. Despite the fact that LGBT does not nominally encompass all individuals in smaller communities, the term is generally accepted to include those not specifically identified in the four-letter initialism. Overall, the use of the term LGBT has, over time, largely aided in bringing otherwise marginalized individuals into the general community. These people in order to show their recognition in the society started to voice themselves in the form of literature and later gay literature came to life.

David Ebershoff a prominent American writer, editor and teacher has thrown light on the literature dealing with LGBT. Ebershoff is considered as one of the influential writer in the LGBT theme in which he debuted himself in the field of writing through his novel ‘The Danish Girl’, which is inspired by the life of Lili Elbe, one of the first people to have gender reassignment surgery. The novel won the Rosenthal Foundation Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the Lambda Literary Award for transgender fiction, and was also a finalist for the New York Public Library's Young Lions Award and an American Library Association Award. Additionally, it was a New York Times Notable Book of the Year and an international bestseller. In 2017 the New York Times named The Danish Girl one of the 25 books that have shaped LGBTQ literature over the past 20 years. Ebershoff's other works such as Pasadena, The 19th Wife has also been one of the best sellers and has been translated into 25 languages all around the world. David Ebershoff has chosen most of his theme form the histories

with a tint of fictious facts and has brought out the delicate issues during the earlier period into vogue and given a contemporary on sight to his readers.

Self-identification of Lili Elbe:

‘By and large, today's Western audience is unlikely to be roused by the story told in The Danish Girl, although it is based on true events. The artist Einar Wegener is in gender trouble: he was born in a male body, yet finds himself in the position of being unable to identify with it. He therefore embarks on the arduous journey of freeing himself from his bodily prison by eventually undergoing gender reassignment surgery in order to become Lili Elbe.’

Cass model of development theory can be used in the life transformation of Einar Wegener into Lili Elbe. As per the Cass's theory Einar had to undergo some of the crucial steps in order to make himself a part of the society as a transgender during the days in which even the term ‘transgender’ would bring in goose bumps to the people. But Einar in order to bring in Lili to the world had to break the glacier of tradition and society.

Cass's theory put forth some six stages that a LGBT faces in order to develop themselves into their acquired transformed LGBT. These development stages goes hand in hand with Einar during his transformation period. The first stage brings in the Identity of Confusion. Einar, when Gerda asks him to pose as a female model though first reluctant, finds it fascinating and eventually gets into the state of confusion in which he gets some doubts in his identity as a male. Einar thinks Lili to be a different character which marks as a important feature. Einar wanted have Lili to come into the society.”I've been thinking about her”, Einar said. “who's that?”. “then why don't we call her again”.(22)

Einar when he became a female model to Gerda starts to compare his locomotive actions with the other females around him and started to mirror their gestures and found a

satisfaction in it. At this stage Einar was in the second stage in the Cass's model, Identity of Comparison. Einar couldn't stop comparing himself with the other females in the society. When Lili was attending the party she was very fascinated and was comparing himself with the females in the party.

Then Einar gradually came to the third stage Identity of tolerance. Gerda though wanted Lili to be her model in order to accomplish herself as a successful painter was also worried about Einar and so she stopped Einar from turning into Lili. Einar too had to tolerate with all his urges to become Lili. During this stage Einar was forced to undergo some psychological issues. Then later when Einar felt like to become Lili he did his best to tolerate. But later he couldn't bare to see Lili away and brought her back.

Then Einar accepted his identity as a transgender and made his wife also to understand his urges and with Gerda's help became a transgender. Though Lili had to disguise her physical aliment as a male she accepted the fact. Einar during this stage was forced to face the harsh society in which she had to portray himself to the society as a transgender which led him to undergo some social violence in the society. And this lead her to cross the next stages the Identity of Pride and the Identity of Synthesis at ease.

During the stage of Pride Lili developed her own status in the society by boldly facing the society and representing herself as transgender. Lili was ready to undergo all the transformations in order to transform herself into a transgender. Though the reassignment surgeries were just the genesis during the 1930s Lili was confident enough to take any step in order achieve her dream and so she with the help of Gerda visited different doctors and finally found Doctor Alfred Bolk and helped Lili to undergo the surgeries. At this point Lili had her own pride to safeguard her pride of Identity.

And finally Lili occupied the last stage in the Cass's theory, Identity Synthesis in which Lili became part and parcel of the society as a transgender. Lili was very sanguine in her thought of being a transgender. Lili in order to bring in her full-fledged transformation as transgender underwent all the six stages of Cass's Identity Model development.

CONCLUSION:

'The Danish Girl', by David Ebershoff has brought in a sensational turning point in the Gay literature. The LGBT has a, limited accesses in the field of literature and this book has brought in some hope a validity for the LGBT people.

'Before, however, Lili's "ailment" was merely referred to as insanity, schizophrenia, homosexuality or indeed perversion, a condition which needed to be cured by imposing the most extreme measures, such as radiotherapy. The pathologization persists, albeit under a different name (Gender Identity Disorder) and with less immoral remedies being prescribed. In other words, gender identity still is, and is likely to remain for yet some time to come, a prevailing issue in today's discourse, while scholars and activists alike persist in their endeavor to change society's perception and rupture normative body regulations.' Lili had to undergo humpty

number of psychological issues in order to be the way she was. Her step in becoming one in the society stood as a massive pillar in bring out the transgender people in the society. Though Lili eventually died due to her uterus transplant operation her decision to become a transgender and the steps that she took to become can be considered as one of the mile stone for the present transgender people, both medically and psychologically.

Thus, this paper throws light on the self identity of a transgender which has been justified with the Cass's Identity Model. Though Einar in the initial stage had to undergo a lot of struggles to bring in the identity of Lili in the society eventually passed all the stages and succeeded in proving her, self identity as a transgender.

PRIMARY SOURCE:

Ebershoff David , The Danish Girl.

REFERENCE:

- [1] <http://www.ebershoff.com/>
- [2] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT>
- [3] en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cass_identity_model
- [4] <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com>
- [5] www.smh.com.au/the-danish-girl-an-exploration-of-gender-sexuality-and-cultural-expectation