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THE TIMES OF INDIA

And she became he to marry her

2 Dec 2008, 2310 hrs IST, Radhika Oberoi, TNN

NEW DELHI: Sitting cross-legged on the uneven floor of their bedroom in Dhobi Gali of old Sabzi Mandi in north Delhi is a coy, newly-wed couple. She is chopping vegetables while he carefully covers her face with a dupatta.

The marriage, sanctified on November 30 at a nearby Shiv mandir, is unique because the groom, Deepak (name changed), was born a girl and has undergone three operations for a complete sex change, only to marry his childhood sweetheart, Savita (name changed).

"The press reported it as a lesbian wedding we're not really two women who've chosen to spend the rest of our lives together. Maine apne shareer ka itna balidaan sirf is liye kiya, kyunki main chahta tha ki hamari shaadi samaj mein mani jaye (I allowed my body to be tampered with only because I wanted our marriage to be recognized in a heterosexual society)," says Deepak. It was a baraat of around a hundred enthusiastic friends and neighbours that danced its way to the mandir.

The couple, graduates from Lakshmi Bai College in Ashok Vihar, reveals that they grew up together in the same muhalla. "We were inseparable right from the start. I was the tomboy hated wearing frocks or ribbons in my hair," says Deepak. The pair had decided in their early youth never to get married. "The idea didn't appeal to me, and since Savita was also not in good health she was prone to seizures we decided we were happy enough with each other as friends," recalls the 33-year-old.

The threshold of adolescence brought with it the trauma of dealing with the monthly period and physical changes. "Khundak aati thi mujhe (I felt enraged). I was trapped in a stranger's body. I behaved like a boy but my body was behaving very differently," he recounts. His mother, Sumitra (name changed), soon realized that her daughter, the second-youngest in a brood of nine children, was different she was not just going through a tomboyish phase but was seriously upset about being born a girl. "Hamne uske gullak mein paise jodna tabhi se shuru kiya (We started collecting money in her piggybank right from childhood)," says Sumitra, a housewife unfamiliar with terms like 'gender dysphoria' but progressive enough to realize her child was not comfortable in her own skin.

Deepak, dealing with a surge of hormones that were in complete contradiction to his male mind, decided to undergo a transgender operation only when he realized his feelings for Savita were of an intimate nature. Savita, who lost her mother to abdominal cancer in 2002 and spent most of her time at Deepak's home, supported him through the three surgeries he underwent to change from 'she' to 'he'.

The first surgery involved the removal of breasts and was followed by a period of rest for three months. The second was to remove the uterus and ovaries and was followed by six months of convalescence. The final surgery was performed to remove the vagina and construct the male genitals.

Dr Richie Gupta, senior consultant, plastic surgery at Sunder Lal Jain Hospital, describes the final surgery as "complex free flab from the forearms and other areas was taken to construct the genitals. It involved joining tiny nerves to create sensation in the organs. It was a long procedure that took around 13 hours."

Prior to the surgery, the person is usually counselled to rule out psychiatric disorders besides being subjected to an endocrine therapy. "He or she is injected with male or female hormones every three weeks, for at least six months," he explains. The entire process costs around Rs 40-50 lakh abroad. "It's less expensive here, one can get it done within Rs 3 lakh," says the doctor. Deepak, who works for a hosiery shop and couldn't afford the surgery, reveals that the doctor charged him less than a lakh. "It's a small price for living life on your own terms."

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