

LAXMI NARAYAN TRIPATHI

b. December 13, 1978

INDIAN TRANSGENDER RIGHTS ACTIVIST

She is among the most influential figures in India's LGBTQ community.

"It is only through faith that the original status of the transgender people ... can be reclaimed."

Laxmi Narayan Tripathi is an Indian transgender rights activist, dancer and television star. She is among the most influential figures in India's LGBTQ community.

Tripathi was born male in Thane, Maharashtra, near Mumbai, to an orthodox Brahmin family. Brahmin is the highest caste in Hinduism. Growing up, Tripathi was sexually abused by a close relative and bullied by her classmates.

Tripathi graduated with an arts degree from Mumbai's Mithibai College and a postgraduate degree in Bharatanatyam, a form of Indian classical dance that often expresses religious and spiritual themes.

After starring in several dance videos directed by Ken Ghosh, an Indian director and producer, Tripathi took up choreography and became a well-known dancer in Maharashtra. When the state shuttered its dance bars, Tripathi organized protests against the decision.

Tripathi identifies as a female in the Indian sense of hijra. Considered nonbinary, hijras can be intersex, transgender or eunuchs. Historically, Hinduism viewed hijras as divine. In the late 1800s, when India was a British colony, transgenderism was criminalized. For centuries, transgender Indians have lived as outcasts. Tripathi is working to reclaim the hijras' holy status.

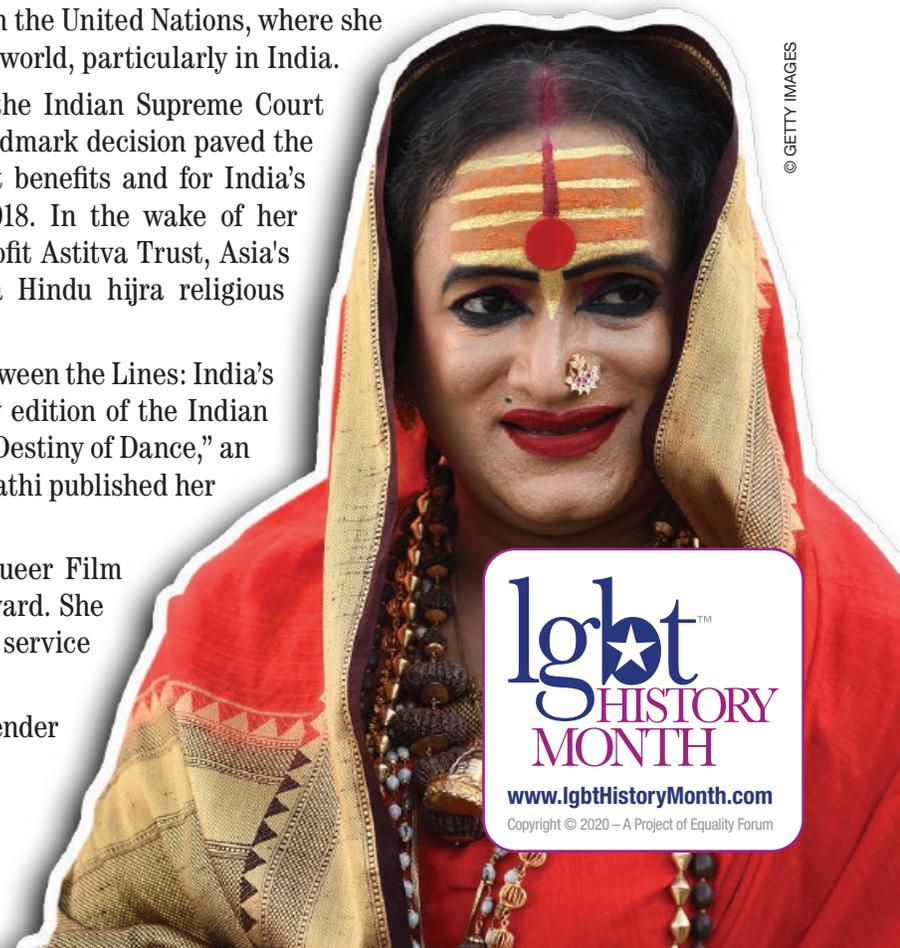
During India's HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1990s, Tripathi was one of the first activists to demand that the national anti-AIDS program include hijras as a separate category. She attended the 2006 World AIDS Conference in Toronto, Canada, and participated in HIV/AIDS activism at other international forums. In 2008 she became the first transgender person to represent Asia Pacific in the United Nations, where she spoke of the plight of sexual minorities around the world, particularly in India.

Thanks to Tripathi's successful petition, in 2014 the Indian Supreme Court ruled to officially recognize a third gender. The landmark decision paved the way for transgender people to receive government benefits and for India's decriminalization of same-sex relationships in 2018. In the wake of her Supreme Court victory, Tripathi formed the nonprofit Astitva Trust, Asia's first transgender organization, and established a Hindu hijra religious order, the Kinnar Akhara.

Tripathi was featured in the 2005 documentary "Between the Lines: India's Third Gender." In 2011 she starred in the celebrity edition of the Indian reality television series "Big Boss" and in "Queens! Destiny of Dance," an acclaimed Bollywood film about hijras. In 2012 Tripathi published her autobiography, "Me Hijra, Me Laxmi."

In 2017 at the KASHISH Mumbai International Queer Film Festival, Tripathi received the Rainbow Warrior Award. She received the Sree Narayana Guru Award for social service the same year.

Tripathi lives with her fiancé, Aryan Pasha, a transgender man. The couple has two adopted children.



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