

STEREOTYPICAL REPRESENTATION OF MARGINALIZED TRANSGENDER CHARACTERS IN INDIAN CANON

Paridhi Chaudhary

Research Scholar, Amity Institute of English Studies and Research,
Amity University, Noida
E-mail: paridhi9@gmail.com

ABSTRACT—*Transgenders have been a part of Indian society and culture for a long time but with time and by the advent of Britishers into India, their status declined. Transgenders are being called from different names in India like hijras, eunuchs, thirunangai etc. The people of this community face discrimination in all spheres of life and enjoy few to no basic rights even. This paper would focus on the stereotypical depiction of transgender characters which is floating around Indian main-stream cinema, television as well as Indian English Literature and the result that these stereotypes lead to in the lives of the transgenders who are treated even worse than animals. Being 'different' from the basic binaries set by the society gives them a unique status which should be accepted and appreciated but barely gets any regard in that sense. They are harassed at all spheres of life and face undue trauma because of the lack of good reputation of them. Through this paper, major Bollywood films, television series and characters from different novels would be taken into light and various representations would be discussed which show the harrowing conditions of this marginalized population in India.*

KEYWORDS: *Transgenders, Hijras, Discrimination, Binaries, Media, Literature, Marginalized.*

INTRODUCTION:

The term transgender is an umbrella term for anybody who feels different from the two set-up binary sexes of the society i.e. male and female. So, if a person is born as a male but does not feel like a man and associates himself with womanly lifestyle and mannerisms and wishes to be a woman, then 'he' would be known as a transgender, and vice-versa for a girl child. The people who do not associate themselves (gender-wise) or their identities to their birth sex are transgenders. Female to Male Transgenders (FTM) are commonly known as Tomboys whereas Male to Female Transgenders (MTF) have been called by different names, especially in India. They are referred to as Hijras, Kinnars, Eunuchs, Aravanis etc. There are over a half a million Hijras residing in the country and yet they are not considered as a part of society.

During the kingships and before British ever came to Indian grounds, the hijras enjoyed a grand status in the society. They were considered as loyal servants, brave soldiers, and even better strategists. They were seen as assets to an empire and helped keenly in the functioning and security matters. They were kept with the queens and princesses and looked after them. One such character is of Neemat as shown in the movie *Jodhaa Akbar* (2008) directed by Ashutosh Gowariker. Neemat has been shown as concern servant to the queen and enjoys the same lifestyle as that of other women who reside in the queen's palace.

The Indian mythology scriptures also bear a witness to the presence of third gender people in the society, which has been called as 'tritiya-prakriti' in *Kamasutra* and has been shown as people with power and grace. *The Ramayana* and *the Mahabharata* also bear witness to the presence of transgenders in the society. Lord Rama, Lord Shiva, Lord Krishna, Lord Vishnu are some of the very common deities who are worshipped by the Hijra community because of the instances that Indian scriptures behold of the deities with hijras. The complicated sexuality of these people have always been put under scrutiny by the researchers who come to an understanding that Indian Mythological texts have always accepted the presence of hijras in the society. Also in *Natyasastra*, the drama manual in classical India, the third gender is placed under the umbrella term 'prakriti' along with male and female gender (Roscoe 212) (Tiwari 2014). So, since the Hijras were an eminent part of the society, the reasons of their low status in the present times is worth noting for.

In the early times of British period, the transgenders were living as they were living before. They had all the basic rights and some states were also providing privileges to the community. But with time and deepening of the Colonial rule in India, the British Council of Ministers started applying their own set of ideology and rules which showed social exclusion

and prohibition of third-gendered people. They were no longer employed in jobs, no longer were allowed to keep their lands and eventually by the late 19th century the hijras were addressed under The Criminal Tribes Act, 1871 and hence became out-casted. (Michelraj 2015)

STEREOTYPICAL REPRESENTATION OF TRANSGENDERS:

A stereotype is a fixed general image or set of general characteristics that a lot of people believe represent a particular type of person or thing. (Collins Dictionary) The concept of stereotype has been readily discussed to show the relationship between the authority who is stereotyping and the submissive group or person who is being stereotyped. The powerful (majority) make apprehensions about the weaker (minority) sections to make fun of the differences or to maintain authority over them. When these known facts become popular, they tend to challenge the real information and become the truth by blurring the lines of truth and fiction.

The Hijra community has been a part and parcel of Indian society for so long but yet lack recognition. Media has been a very crucial part of Indian culture and focuses on every detail of everything around. Common Indian man is very easily influenced by media which clearly tells us the power India media holds on the minds of the people. But somehow, the Indian media has never depicted Hijra community in the positive light. Their differential appearance, clothes, make-up, mannerisms, etc have always been ridiculed. The perplexing notions of identity, sexuality and gender have been shown in negative terms only. Hijras tend to make an appearance in the High-end movies as a character that either has been shown to entertain, jokes, fun and ridicule is being employed to show them; or are shown as criminals. The major types of stereotypical representation include:

1) Hijras as a tool of entertainment and ridicule

Hijras have made an appearance in the movies as a tool of entertainment and are seen to be ridiculed or mocked in some way or the other. For example: In the movie *Pyar Kiya Toh Darna Kya* (1998), the Hijra character has been made fun of his mannerisms when he is asked to play a cricket match with boys' team. His feminine mannerisms and the way he tries to throw the ball is all a part of fun and ridicule. Similarly, in the movie *Dil Ne Jise Apna Kaha* (2004), the character of transgender Bobby Darling has been shown in a comic relief way. She tries to woo men and men pay no heed to her who brings up moments of laughter and mockery. This is a very funny plot in a movie when a hijra talks dirty to a man or he runs after a man. Why all hijras are in love with men from head to heels, no one knows. They use it probably to make the audience laugh. Writers cannot seem to decide whether they want to portray a transsexual or a homosexual and end up with the hijra character constantly making eyes at the hero or the male character. (Naukrinama)

Various instances of Cross Dressing has been also mimicked in various movies and television shows like *Rafoo Chakkar* (1975), *Style* (2001), *Apna Sapna Money Money* (2006), *Golmaal* (2006) etc. the list is endless. Cross-dressing is a major part of a transgender's life and society not being able to accept them is something terrible and worth being made them aware about. The Hijras try to show their effeminate side more to highlight the things they value but don't have.

2) Hijras as Criminals

A lot of Hijra characters, over the time have been depicted in villainous roles depicting that the difference in their gendered-identity has driven them to peripheries of mental illness and yet become criminals. Another reason for them to become criminals is that they are socially unaccepted and poor and hence commit crimes. These horrifying images of Hijra characters have brought a lot of negative feedback in their lives. Kids are being told to take care or else they would be kidnapped by a Hijra. Movies like *Sangharsh* (1999), wherein Ashutosh Rana kidnaps a child and wants to offer his body and blood to Bahuchara Mata (the Goddess of Sexuality and the major deity figure for transgenders in India). Such depiction is so horrifying and cruel. Similarly in the movie, *Murder 2* (2011), the main villain is a transgender. He calls prostitutes and kills them. He does so to offer their bodies to Evil God. An older Bollywood movie, *Sadak* (1991) had a hijra character as the main villain, who holds the female lead in custody. (Jain)

3) The Voiceless Hijra Characters

Hijras are shown as either very villainous or ultimately voiceless. There is no in between for them. No normal Hijra character has ever emerged to make a mark on public's mind. Voicelessness of hijras comes from the fact that they have had practically no rights in the country. Even after the Honourable Supreme court granted them the rights and freedom to be a third-gender, they are themselves not aware of those rights. The major example of this type of depiction can be seen in the play *Seven Steps around the Fire* by Mahesh Dattani. The character of Champa(a Hijra) is convicted for a crime that she did not commit. The police know it, the family know it but nobody does anything to save her. She is beaten up by the police and kept in jail for days. She loved and married the son of a minister and has been facing the repercussions of it since then. "*Dattani states that even hijra's long for dignity and when it is denied to them, they try to break the customs by protesting, but their voice is suppressed by the conventional order that succeeds in the society.*" (Govind, 2014).

4) Presence at Auspicious Occasions

Since Lord Rama blessed the Hijras who stayed by the river for fourteen years in his wait, Hijras got powers to bless others. Lord Rama told them that no family shall be able to start a happy married life or a happy familial life until they seek your blessings. Hijras take pride in their lineage and

mythology. They consider it seriously and go to bless everyone around on the auspicious occasions. But due to their poverty, shabby living conditions and joblessness; Hijras became fluent about asking for 'shaguna' which usually is given in cash. With the growing need of money and still no jobs around for them, they have made it a business to collect money from marriages and child-births. This scene is very commonly discussed in many books and movies. One such example is the novel *Muktiparva* by Mohandas Naimisharay where the Hijras come to bless the child of Banshi. (Govind, 231) This common scene is also a part of *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* (1994) movie in which the Hijras come with their loud clap signature and seek 'shaguna'.

CONCLUSION

The latest advent in the lives of Indian Hijras lies in their own narratives. The literate Hijras are coming out, taking a stand and writing in order to educate about themselves. "hijras are capable of more than just begging and sex work" (Revathi, 2010: v) (Ramos, 2018). With this attitude the Hijra literature is flourishing in India at this point of time. Their narrative helps us to know the mental state, their agony, living conditions from a closer view; it "helps us cross the agonies of our souls, a possibility to cure the bruises and internal wounds. Beyond this therapeutic dimension, writing immortalizes events" (Ramos, 2018). With books like *I am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey Me Hijra, Me Laxmi, The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* etc have paved ways for others also to come up and show the society their truth. The truth of their agony, pain, struggle, psychological turmoil, social exclusion, denial of basic rights, etc. it is the time when the hetero-normative society needs to be challenged and should see that there is a class of people who does not fit into the hetero-normative binaries and seek help; the help of understanding and acceptance. The film-makers should also need to understand the hazards of showing a community in negative aspects only. Art is the reflection of society only to make amends wherever necessary. This is one field where all the Indians need to unite and accept the presence of a Hijra near him/ her. Be it in a school, or office, or any public space. They want recognition, acceptance, understanding and a chance to live their lives like other 'normal' people. In A. Revathi's words, "want to do something different. We want to tell others about our lives so that they can understand us. And we too want to live like those around us" (Revathi, 47).

REFERENCES:

- [1] Butler, Judith (2012). *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge. Print.
- [2] Dattani, Mahesh (2000). *Collected Plays*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd., 2000. Print.
- [3] Govind, Saykar Satish. "Representation of Hijras in Art and Literature: A Comparative Study." *RJELAL*. 2.4(2014):230-233. Web. 18 April, 2019.
- [4] Jain, Tanya. "(Mis)Representation of Hijras in Popular Media." *Feminisminindia* [Online], (2015). Web. 20April, 2019.
- [5] Michelraj, M. "Historical Evolution of Transgender Community in India." *Asian Review of Social Sciences*. 4.1 (2015): 17-19. Web. 14 April, 2019.
- [6] Naimisharay, Mohandas (2004). *Muktiparva*. Anurag Publication: Delhi. Print.
- [7] Nanda, Serena (1999). *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India*. London: Wadsworth Publishing House. Print.
- [8] Ramos, Regiane. "The Voice of an Indian Trans Woman: a Hijra Autobiography." *Indialogs* [Online], 5 (2018): 71-88. Web. 21 April, 2019.
- [9] Reddy, G (2005). *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India*. Chicago Press. Print.
- [10] Revathi, A (2010). *The Truth about Me: A Hijra Life Story*. Translated by V. Geetha, New Delhi: Penguin Books. Print.
- [11] Tiwari, Esha. "Distortion of "Tritya Prakriti" (Third Nature) By Colonial Ideology in India." *IJLA* [Online], 2(2014):19-24. Web. 22April, 2019
- [12] Tripathi, Laxmi Narayan (2015). *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*. Translated by R. Raj Rao and P. G. Joshi, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- [13] Vidya, Living Smile (2013). *I am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications.