

Marginalized Lives of Third Genders of India and their Evolution

Jeevan Jyoti Chakraborty
Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of History
Sido Kanhu Murmu University, Dumka , Jharkhand
Deoghar, Jharkhand (INDIA)

Abstract:- This paper explores the position of transgenders in Indian society. Ancient India witnessed a great respect for transgenders as they were known as “Shivashakti”. The word Shivashakti is combination of Shiva (God Shiva) and Shakti (Goddess Parwati). India is a country of pious beliefs as Indians worship even stones as their almighty therefore it may not be a subject of curiosity that transgenders witnessed a good and honorable position in society. Their position in society deteriorated tremendously during medieval and colonial India as they were began to known as “Eunuchs”. The word “Eunuchs” derived from Greek language means “keeper of the bed” as they used to guard the royal women quarters. Transgender community is also known as Eunuchs, Hijra, Aravani, Kothis, Jogappas, Shivashakti, Khwaja Sara etc.

Keywords:- Transgenders; Eunuchs; Hijra; Aravani; Khwaja Sara.

I. INTRODUCTION

The fate of transgender society turned prodigiously worse in medieval India and became increasingly difficult in the late eighteenth century. British administration defined them as criminals, unnatural sex workers and kidnappers. The Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 criminalized and marginalized them as they were accused in emasculating children, kidnapping them and dressed like women to dance in markets and social places. Eunuchs have been a subject of controversy since the medieval period.

II. SITUATIONS AND STORIES FROM BRITISH INDIA

Once upon a time in the north India an unusual, tragic and passionate love story of Bhoorah and Ali Buksh would have been a material of chatterboxes for the months. Bhoorah and Ali Buksh were famous in the nearby areas due to their infamous connections. Ali Buksh liked Bhoorah passionately and Bhoorah was happy with him too. Bhoorah was an eunuch (Hijra or Transgender) and used to perform “Badhai” on the birth occasions, marriages and in public spaces. Bhoorah had attained status of a Mentor (Guru) and had lived with her two disciples Mathee and Dullah. Bhoorah had been engaged with his male lover Ali Buksh for two years but suddenly she left Ali Buksh for another man. On the 17th August 1852 Ali Buksh forced Bhoorah to return in the relationship.

Neighbours saw the couple arguing in the street, while arguing they entered their house. After few minutes Dullah came out of the house while crying that Ali Buksh had murdered Bhoorah. In the trials of court, the British judges convicted two suspects of murder, Dullah and Ali Buksh but the British judges finally convinced that Ali Buksh had murdered Bhoorah due to the ‘severance’ of their ‘infamous connexion’. The decisions of British court on the murder case of Bhoorah changed the fate of transgender drastically. Although a transgender (Hijra) was the victim of the crime under trial, the British court criminalized transgender as cross-dressers, ‘beggars’ and ‘unnatural prostitutes’. The North Western Provinces started an anxious discussion on Bhoorah’s death. British administrators claimed that transgender were habitual sodomites, beggars, kidnappers and castrators of children and the province of North West launched an anti-‘eunuch’ campaign. The campaign aimed to achieve the goal of ‘extirpating’ or ‘exterminating’ the transgender community.¹

III. CRIMINAL TRIBES ACT OF 1871

British administration always worked on the theory of divide and rule and following this theory Colonial government imposed many laws based on the religion and castes of India. Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 was one of the laws and that was also based on religion and castes. In the context of eunuchs Criminal Tribes Act 1871 played a cruel role and marginalized them as castrators, kidnappers and unsocial community.

Another interesting fact comes into limelight that when the Criminal Tribes Bill was introduced in 1871 c.e. by T.V. Stephens, a British official said that people from time immemorial have been pursuing the caste system defined job positions like weaving, carpentering, and such were hereditary jobs. So there must have been hereditary criminals also who pursued their forefathers’ profession.⁶

IV. PATRONAGE AND DETERIORATION IN MEDIEVAL PERIOD

During the rule of Slave and Mughal dynasties Transgender occupied well known positions as generals, guards of royal harem as well as political advisors. They were in good books of Islamic religious institutions and their Caliph, therefore they used to guard the holy places of related to Islam like Mecca and Medina. Eunuchs or Hijras were rewarded often with huge amount of money as had

been good relations with queens and kings. Transgender community is also known as Eunuchs, Hijra, Aravani, Kothis, Jogappas, Shivshakti, Khwaja Sara etc.² The word “Eunuchs” derived from Greek language means “keeper of the bed” as they used to guard the royal women quarters. Being a guard of harem does not seem a prestigious work and this is the why that author has mentioned deterioration in the subtitle.

V. PRESTIGIOUS ANCIENT POSITION OF TRANSGENDERS

The existence of transgender have been for centuries in Indian society. They had a great and respected identity in the ancient Hindu mythologies as “Tritiyaprakriti” (Third gender) and “Napumsaka”. Hindu ancient religious texts acknowledges the existence of third gender. There are multiple examples of third gender in the epic Mahabharata. SHIKHANDI, who is born female but identified as a male entity. BHANUCHARI MATA is worshipped by hijra community as their patroness. One of their names Aravani is related to the Mahabharat era. Transgender worship Aravan as their Progeniter. Every year they visit to a village Koovagam situated in Tamilnadu to marry their single night husband Aravan. Koovagam is a village in Villupuram district of Tamilnadu. Next day they become widow again as they believe that their husband Aravan is died. According to Hindu Mythology Mahabharata Aravan was son of Arjuna and Nagkanya Ulupi. He offered himself to be sacrificed to Goddess Kali to secure the supremacy of Pandavas in the Kurukshetra war. Aravan was happy to be sacrificed himself for a great and pious reason but he made a condition that he wants to be married for the last night of his life. No woman was ready to marry Aravan as they were going to be widow next day. Krishna himself assumed as a woman known as Mohini and married Aravan to fulfil his last desire. In the early phase of British rule Hijras entertained few facilities like allocation of land security, rights of daily rations and economic rights through the local princely states.

VI. CUSTOMS AMONG HIJRAAS

Tradition of Guru Chela (teacher and disciple) is very common among the groups of Hijras. The rules for being a disciple are very strict and both the teacher (guru) and novice respect each other. A novice has great respect for her guru just like a parent and a teacher treats a novice as a child. Among Hijra community a novice is treated as a newly born child of her guru. When a teacher or guru took any eunuch as her disciple, she dresses up her novice with a new cloth and gives her a nose ring. After nose ring ceremony a novice becomes the child of her teacher and they sing and dance to celebrate and remember the day. If a novice disobeys or her teacher she has to pay fine and even expelled from the community. The fine against disobedience may be Rs 500, Rs 1000 or even more than Rs 5000. This fine is defined as a lesson against misbehave or disrespect. If a novice disrespects or leaves her guru, she is shunned from the community and she does not get the food and water. This whole process of punishment is

famous as “HUKKAPANI BUND” among transgender. Once she pays the fine she also has to beg

VII. REFORMS IN INDEPENDENT INDIA

In a historical decision, The Supreme Court of India in April 2014, transgenders have been placed as an esteemed third gender in India. Justice K.S. Radhakrishnan noted in his judgement that transgender society remains detached from equal protection of law and therefore they have to face a great level of hatred from the mainstream society, including rape, sexual assault, etc. Mainstream society usually identify them as Hijra society and often they have to face hatred of common people. forgiveness while singing a special forgiveness song and teacher embraces and forgives her. They sing “Gunaahon ne meri kamar tod daali.. Mera hashar mein hoga kya Ya Ilaahi..

(My sins have broken my heart.. What will happen to me, God in the next life.. the angels will ask me ..) as their forgiveness hymn.⁷

VIII. CONCLUSION

Evolution of transgender society took place after facing countless discrimination and problems for centuries. Finally “Eunuchs”; “The keeper of bed” of Medieval India got the equal rights as third gender and placed as common people of society. But the education remains as a burning problem faced by the transgender society. The lack of education pushes them into the dark and nasty life of prostitutions often.

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