



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH: CREATING CONSCIOUSNESS TOWARDS REALISING EUNUCHS AS HUMANS

Dr Sarita Singh
Assistant Professor,
Department of English
Maharaja Bijli Pasi Govt. PG College, Aashiyana,
Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh
India

Abstract: Discrimination, an age long facet of societies all over the world, still persists, right from the topmost hierarchy to the grass root level, in each and every compartment of our social structure. It's been years that the Suffrage movement demanded for the rights of women to vote, the U.N. Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959, granting of legal recognition to the transgenders by the Supreme Court of India in 2014, the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, and many more, yet what is witnessed in the society, is a mockery and non-adherence of all these laws, while the sufferers continue to suffer and tolerate the injustice incurred upon them. Of all these, the transgenders are the ones, who have had the least representation in all the arenas of society, in fact, they are relegated, insulted, deprived and humiliated throughout their life. In the context of such poignant scenario, this paper attempts to elucidate the contribution of literature, in articulating their diabolical predicament, with reference to the writing of some Indian writers in English.

Keywords: Transgender, Autobiography, Gender Studies, Sexuality, Rights.

PAPER

“Not only did she always fulfil her duties as a mother and a daughter but also as a daughter-in-law, with full responsibility, yet you ignore all her qualities and judge her on the inadequacy that she is a eunuch!” (Episode 1026, translated by me) This dialogue from a tele serial *Shakti Astitva Ke Ehsaas Ki*, sums up the marginalisation and negligence faced by the eunuchs in our society. Eunuchs or better known as *Hijras*, in India are castrated males, that choose to discard the masculine attributes of their body. Their presence in our society has been perpetual, in fact, they have been mentioned in the ancient Indian scriptures like the *Ramayana*, *Ram Charita Manas* and the *Mahabharata*. There is an episode in *Ramayana*, when Lord Rama after having killed Ravana, returns to Ayodhya, finds a group of eunuchs outside Ayodhya. They have been staying there for all the fourteen years when Ram was in exile. When Ram enquired, they said that he ordered all men and women who followed him to return back to Ayodhya but he did not leave any instructions for them, as they are neither man nor woman, so they continued to stay in the outskirts of Ayodhya for all these years waiting for his return. Ram was overwhelmed by their devotion and himself took them to Ayodhya. That is why the eunuchs celebrate the Ram Rajya, as it did not make any distinctions whatsoever among anyone. Lord Ram's egalitarian philosophy is evident in these lines of *Ram Charita Manas*, Lord Ram says: “Men, queers, women, animals or plants, who approach me after abandoning malice, are beloved to me.” (Manas 7.87).

In *Mahabharata* also, we find references to eunuchs, viz. Arjun disguised as Brihannala in King Virata's court and Shikhandi, against whom Bhishma refuses to take up arms as he was a female in his earlier life. In *Shiv Purana* also, there is a story that Lord Shiva castrates off his *linga* or the penis on the realization that the universe has already been created while he was meditating underwater; he finds his *linga* to be of no use now. Further in *Bhagwat Purana*, Lord Ayyappa is described as the son of Shiva and Mohini (Lord Vishnu disguised as a beautiful lady). Thus, there are several tales in our ancient scriptures wherein, the eunuchs find mythological support.

In another scripture, Lord Krishna's son, Samba is portrayed as a benefactor of eunuchs. Like all the sects, eunuchs too have their sacred deity, known as, Bahuchara Mata, riding on a rooster, carrying a sword and a trident and a book, is worshipped for her power to bring about progeny especially in issueless couples. There are several stories related to her. She is represented as a valiant woman, who violently attacks her molesters, cuts off their genitals and converts them into eunuchs. That is why the eunuch community worships her and perform religious rites in her name while castrating themselves, in the religious process known as, "Nirvan".

In fact, not only in Hinduism, in other major religious scriptures of Christianity and Islam, we find references to transgenders. Though the word of the Holy Quran forbids castration, yet eunuchs were given special roles as guards of the important religious sites, since they were considered impotent and devoid of any sexually inclinations. In fact, most of the royal households had eunuchs as their special trustworthy servants, especially in the 'zenana' sections of the royalty. Verses 42:49-42:50 of the Holy Quran state: "To God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. It creates what it wills. It prepares for whom it wills females, and it prepares for whom it wills males. Or it marries together the males and the females, and it makes those whom it wills to be ineffectual (barren)". In the same way in the Christianity too, the New Testament refers to the Greek word 'eunouchos', viz. in Matthew 19:12 and in Acts 8:27-39.

Thus, it can be concluded that religions all over the world have always accepted these transgenders as a part of their society and that time and again they have been depicted in various historical texts and literatures. As regards the historical context, the role of eunuchs has been elaborately described in the courts of great kings and in the female quarters. Several historians and foreign travellers have elaborately documented their role, power and status.

Today, our society needs to become familiar with their agony, problems, neglect and suffering. They also have the right to live and participate in the main stream of society. Human society is feeling proud by entering into its era of extreme development, but this section of society is still not able to connect with this mainstream, there are many reasons at its root but the root cause is the class of common people. The common man has nothing to do with the pain of eunuchs.

Literature could be a very pertinent tool in creating a consciousness and dispersing emotional gradient in the society regarding the pitiable condition of eunuchs, but there has been very little writing about the eunuch society, yet still whatever little is being written about them is a significant step towards granting them their own identity. These people also have their basic needs, rights and desire to live like a common man. And thus, the attempts of the few writers who are being bold enough to bring in light this taboo subject which was hitherto considered a matter of shame, must be acknowledged as giving voice to 'the other'.

In this respect this paper attempts to discuss some major literary contributions of Indian writers in English who are treading the unexplored yet explosive issues, like that of the lives of eunuchs.

Keeping aside the depiction of eunuchs in religious and historical texts, their position in the society, especially the Indian society is a very paradoxical one, that on one hand they face oppression and discrimination and on the other hand they are considered to have some divine power to bless the newly married couples and the newly born babies. In fact, the society dreads their power to curse and so gifts them adequately on sacred occasions of marriage and child birth. This is quite ironic that someone who himself/herself is unable to procreate can bless fertility to others. While it is a curse for a woman to give birth to a transgender yet their presence and blessings are considered highly ominous. Their blessings are as much desired as their curses are dreaded. Thus, along with their destiny's mockery of being born as a transgender they also have to face the hypocrisy and intolerant attitude of this society.

For some time, a large number of out-of-the-box books have been written and recognised. But the real credit goes to playwright Mahesh Dattani who explored beyond the physicality of being a eunuch and dwelled deep in to the psyche of their sensibilities and conscience.

Mahesh Dattani's revolutionary radio play, broadcasted as 'Seven Circles Around the Fire' in January 1999 laments the inhuman considerations that the transgender in the play has to go through. The title was further modified as *Seven Steps around the Fire* when the play was staged for the first time in Chennai in August 1999. Discrimination is an important aspect of any society, be it on the basis of sex, caste, creed colour, race, gender, financial status, physical deformity or nationality, yet what eunuchs face, is a discrimination which they can never eliminate, their biological being. The play protests against the role of law, politics, and the society who all collectively play to harass and socially exclude the character, muting his muffled cries of protests and pleas.

The play dramatizes the heart-rending story of a eunuch Kamla, who gets secretly married to Subbu, son of a wealthy minister Sharma who gets her murdered as he cannot accept a eunuch as his daughter-in-law. The blame is put on Kamla's eunuch friend, Anarkali. Her case is investigated by the protagonist of the play Uma, who treats her as an equal and leaves no stone unturned to prove of her innocence. Another eunuch Champa, who is the head of the eunuch community in the play, is disturbed with the negativity adhered with the eunuchs and their plight in the society. She tries hard to keep her community intact because she knows the reality of the outside world. However, in the end, Subbu commits suicide and the empowered ones shut the case down without bringing the justice to Kamla's death.

Thus, Dattani makes a strong endeavour to give focal space in the standard dramatization to the network of eunuchs in the play. Dattani explores the human part of eunuchs who are socially dismissed and even mortified. They are not even allowed the basic dignity of being a human being just because of their sexual disorientation.

A prominent mention may be made of Khushwant Singh's novel, '*Delhi: A Novel*' (1990) which portrays the story of a journalist and his relationship with a eunuch prostitute named Bhagmati. It is an autobiographical novel, exploring the layers of a relationship between a normal man and a eunuch, in the cosmopolitan city of Delhi. The story begins when the narrator who is coming back to Delhi from England picks up Bhagmati and later on both develop an amorous relationship. She even saves his life in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots of Delhi. However, as the novel encompasses various historical and political events, the character of Bhagmati, somewhere gets dislocated and is represented as only a means of satiating the narrator's physical needs.

William Dalrymple's *City of Djinns: A Year in Delhi*, (1993) is another important venture in this regard. Apart from exploring various layers of the development of the city of Delhi, he also digs deep into the intimate details of the lives of eunuchs by focusing on their daily routine of extracting money forcefully from families where there has been a marriage or where a child has been born, or at times when they are seen begging in the trains and on the streets. How they misbehave and curse if they are denied money, all these aspects are portrayed in the novel. It also brings to limelight their plight and discrimination in the society.

Another attempt to address their grievances has been taken up by Jeet Thayil who in the novel *Narcopolis* published in 2012 focuses on the business of opium in the underworld of Mumbai and presents the life of Dimple, a eunuch prostitute working in the opium dens. However, this novel only portrays the life of a eunuch as a prostitute and other deliberations are skilfully omitted.

A similar book describing the pain of transgender society has come from Sakshi Sharma, a budding writer from Rajasthan. At the age of nineteen, Sakshi, in her book, '*Let's Live a Wierd Life*', published in 2018, has underlined the pain of the eunuchs and has raised many sensitive and serious questions related to this community. The book pens the life of eunuchs, in the crowd, in the streets, in the courtyard of houses dancing and blessing, sometimes applauded and mostly sneered at. She sketches the character as one wishing to be treated with the dignity and respect. They too have desires, which this society doesn't permit license to. She herself visited these marginalised communities and witnessed the dire conditions in which they survive. The particular book raises some novel and pertinent questions regarding their right to education and job opportunities, without being segregated on the basis of gender.

Of late, a latest trend in the literary arena is being witnessed in the writings that aim to address the issue of transgender, that is of transgender autobiography. Many eunuchs themselves have now taken up the cause to redeem themselves and their community by writing autobiographies. Some important works in this regard are worth mentioning, viz., '*I Am Vidya*' (2007) by Vidya, '*The Truth About Me*' (2010) by A. Revathi, '*Red Lipstick: The Men in my Life*' (2016) and '*Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*' (2015) by Laxmi Narayan Tripathi. These autobiographies not only encapsulate various experiences of the eunuchs but also intricately describe their whole journey from

discovering themselves as different from other two genders, leaving their families, getting surgically treated, exploring their sexuality both physically and emotionally and craving for an acceptance in the society. Since these are autobiographical narrations, the readers get real peep and insight into their social milieu. Their despicable and distraught condition is expressed in these hard-hitting lines from *I am Vidya*, “Dalits have a voice, feminists are heard, they can hold rallies, demand their rights. But transgenders are the Dalits of Dalits, the most oppressed women among women. They enjoy no freedom, no fraternity. They continue to lead a wretched life devoid of pride and dignity.” (141)

A very significant, pathbreaking and valuable contribution in this field has been made by writer and social activist Arundhati Roy whose second novel, ‘*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*’ created a world wide hype with its content enveloping the significant socio-political events of our country, through a story that weaves around Anjum, a eunuch. Beginning with the Emergency of 1975, cruising through the 1980s riots, Kashmir valley insurgencies, Gujarat unrest and Maoist turbulence in Chhatisgarh, Anjum witnesses everything. The kaleidoscopic narration tells the story of Anjum and Tilo’s journey, their struggles, the shattering of dreams and identities holding on to a ray of hope to carve out a niche of their own, in this socio-religiously intolerant and indifferent society. The book applauds the 2014 judgement of the Supreme Court of India, which declares transgender people as a ‘third gender’ and even issues directions in regard to the construction of separate toilets for transgenders. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is a eulogy celebrating the right to equality for everyone, irrespective of their genders.

Thus, it is apparent that literature can serve as an effective tool in creating an enlightenment and consideration regarding the third gender. The above stated literary works on the transgender community, an integral part of our society, intend to make our society aware of the pain, sorrow, and terrible tragedy of the eunuchs. However, there’s need still for the kind of literary works which would portray their audacity and fortitude to fight the injustice incurred upon them, and their success in doing so. Such kind of writing would prove to be a beacon for other members of the society. Wishing for all the liberation that other two genders enjoy, this society today stands up for its respect and rights, which needs our support. We need more literature in this field to recognize the real lives of the eunuchs, so that by understanding their agony, their suffering, their marginalization, we may make appropriate efforts for their rights, dignity and respect. This is also the purpose of this article.

References:

1. www.youtube.com/watch?v=1eOJAE8q5M4
2. www.thequint.com/videos/this-diwali-revisit-ramayana-with-ram-transgender-devotees
3. www.matatraders.com/blogs/ethical-fashion/indias-eunuchs
4. www.shakir2.wordpress.com/2016/08/06/transgendered-eunuch-in-islam/
5. www.bible.com
6. www.52578-Article-Text-81264-1-10-20100310.pdf.
7. Dattani, Mahesh. 2000. *Collected Plays*. New Delhi. Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd.
8. Darlymple, William. 1994. *City of Djinnns*. Haryana. Penguin.
9. Tripathi, Laxminarayan. 2016. *Red Lipstick: The Men in My Life*. Gurgaon. Penguin Viking.
10. Vidya. *I am Vidya*. 2007. Chennai. Oxygen Books.
11. www.yourstory.com/hindi/f7a0ce7578-sujata-first-honored-m
12. Roy, Arundhati. 2017. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* Hamish Hamilton, an imprint of Penguin Random House India.