



## REPRESENTATION OF HIJRAS IN ART AND LITERATURE: A COMPARATIVE CULTURAL STUDY

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### ABSTRACT

Hijras, the Eunuchs, in India have basically no reputable identity in a community. They are not accepted and not defended from injustice and mistreatment they receive in society. The inequity against them often converts into violent behaviour. The important factor behind the violent behavior is that society does not consider the fact that hijras do not conform to the accepted gender division. Male and female are the only sexual categories that the society approves. Individuals apart from these two classes have to tolerate social exclusion, segregation and dislike. Politically, legally and socially the hijras are marginalized and victimized. The imperceptible control of social forces does not allow the hijras to shape their own way to life that is recommended and accepted by society. The present paper tries to depict the representation of hijras in the Indian mythology, literature and film.

**Keywords:** Hijras, injustice, discrimination, marginality, exclusion, literature, film

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“In a historical sense, literature as we understand it is a fairly new innovation, and the current concept of homosexuality is even fresher from the cultural oven. It's no great surprise, then, that gay literature — or even gay characters in literature — are so relatively new as to still be shiny”  
— Kilian Meloy, "Influential Gay Characters in Literature”

Due to the everyday discrimination or antagonism to homosexuality in many cultures of the world throughout the history, LGBT people often turn to literature as a source of legalization, considerate understanding, and adornment of the same-sex magnetism. LGBT literature depicts the emotional stress and the estrangement that is suffered by the gay society. They are very often become the prey of prejudice, AIDS, self-loathing, maltreatment, cruelty, spiritual disapproval,

denunciation, suicide, pestering, and other such impediments.

The themes of love between the two or more persons of the same sexual category can be found in a variety of antique texts that are available throughout the world. The Ancient Greeks, in particular, looked at the theme on a variety of diverse levels in the works such as Plato's *Symposium*. In India we have the example of these people in *Ramayana*. The King Dasharatha, Rama's father ordered him to leave Ayodhya and go into the forest for 14 years. As he went, the whole state followed him because they loved him so. As he came to the banks of the river at the edge of the forest, he said to the people by calling them as Ladies and gents to wipe out their tears and leave him. But those people who were neither men nor women did not know what to do and they waited there for 14 years because they thought that Rama

had not asked them to go. When Rama returned from Lanka he found those people contemplating there. And he blessed them all. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, much of LGBT writing has achieved a level of superiority and many works have earned compliments from the prominent writers including Michael Chabon, Alan Hollinghurst, and Alan Hollinghurst Jamie O'Neill. LGBT themes have also turn into more visible in a budding body of high-quality young adult literature, with notable authors, including Perry Moore, Stephen Chbosky, Alex Sanchez, David Levithan, Anosh Irani and Shyam Selvadurai.

Mahesh Dattani gives a voice to the voiceless hijras of India and articulated their feelings and predicaments in the English drama through his play *Seven Steps Around the Fire* and other plays. The hijra in this play secretly marries the son of a minister and has to bear dire consequences. The role of the law, politicians and the community as a whole is questioned in this play. It is a remonstrance play against the social exclusion of the hijras. Such segregation can be found in all places in the Indian society like the social group, caste, class, belief or inclination based bias, but the hijras have to experience it on the basis of their nonaligned gender. 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. It raises numerous queries regarding the hijra identity, their formation, connotations, their public acceptability and tolerability. They are the invisibles in the social order. They form the lowest position on the steps of social hierarchy. They face a twofold difficulty as they are the sufferers of both the nature and the society. The preconception against them is even worse than the class, caste or religious bias. They are not recognized as the human beings.

In *Natrang*, a Marathi film, there is an concentrated layering of references to sexual identities, accepted culture and earlier dramatic traditions. Guna Kagalkar whose role is performed by Atul Kulkarni tries to conduit this transgressive energy into the account of his own life by writing a play to let the people know who he is. Guna and his

friends have established a Tamasha Mandal of their own. Where, his guide, Pandaba, takes him to Naina, a dancer to let her convince to be a part of their Tamasha Mandal. She agrees, but she puts a condition that changes the life of Guna. She says:

**Naina:** There should be a *Nachya*. Else there is no fun.

**Pandoba:** Those days are gone. In earlier days when women didn't participate men used to dress up like females. Is that what you're talking about?

**Naina:** No. Isn't there a man gesticulating like a female *in the movies*? We can do without the mimicry artist but not the *Nachya*. Then the *Tamasha* will be *like one in movies* and we will draw large crowds. (Emphasis added)

**Guna:** There are plenty of *Tamasha* shows without a *Nachya*.

**Yamunabai:** And there are plenty that shut down. People come to watch the show only if you offer them novelty. Forget everything if you don't have a *Nachya*. (Palekar (Tr.), 2012: 866)

Then Guna himself becomes a *Nachya* as no one is ready to be taught. He gets enough training from Naina and the first performance of their Tamasha takes place, all the people think of Guna as impotent. They even ask his wife whose son, she had borne? The years pass and he fails in love with Naina, but she says that to live as a wife of *nachya* is impossible. Then Guna feels the need to write his own story in which he writes about Arjuna and his eunuch alter-ego Brihannada "between the older versions of Hindu gods, with their slippery forms, and the newer visions of the same, formulated and put into circulation by the propaganda machine of right-wing Hindutva, does not end well" ( Palekar, 2012: 868). This example proves that not only hijra, but the person who performs the role of hijra has to tolerate a lot though everyone knows that the performance is only an art and not the reality.

*Tamanna* ( Desire) is a Hindi film directed by Mahesh Bhatt released in 1997. The setting of the film is Mahim, Bombay and the year is 1975. It is a story of Tikku (Paresh Rawal), a eunuch, the only child of Nazneen Begum. She had a hard time, and she is reliant on Tikku. He does make-up/hairdressing of Bollywood actresses. When she dies, her funeral takes place. He, then, witnesses a

woman leaving a infant in a dust bin. Tikku accepts her as his daughter decides to bring her up. He names her Tamanna.

Moreover, he sends her to St. Mary's High School's hostel for schooling. When she completes her school, she returns home and finds Tikku in the costume of a hijra and avoids him, but subsequently changes her mind. Then Tikku finds out that Tamanna, whose role is performed by Pooja Bhatt in a film, is the daughter of Ranvir Chopra, a politician. He tells her, and she goes to their splendid house. It also shows that the girl whom he brought as his daughter also dislike him only because he is in the guise of hijra.

The hijras are the members of the holy society of the men who dress and act like women and whose culture centers on the worship of Bahuchara Mata. She is one of the many versions of the Mother Goddess worshiped all over India. There are many myths, legends, rituals, spiritual roles and themes in Hinduism which considers the notion of sexually indistinct or dual sex manifestations. A true hijra is born intersex which means that an individual person exhibits both the male and female sexual characteristics and organs. While being intersex is rare, true hijras are also considered as individual persons that have had an emasculation operation, referred to as nirvana (cessation of rebirth) by hijras. During this operation, their genitals are removed to let them become the vehicles of the Mother Goddess's power. The emasculation ritual is considered a rite of passage for hijras as they are reborn from an ineffective male into a hero, a person gifted with Sakti (power).

The relationship between hijras, emasculation and Bahuchara Mata is told in the following legend of the origin of Bahuchara Mata's worship. She was a pretty, young maiden in a party of travelers passing through the forest in Gujarat. The party was assaulted by thieves, and, fearing that they would outrage her modesty, Bahuchara drew her dagger and cut off her breast, offering it to the outlaw in place of her virtue. This act, and her consequent death led to Bahuchara's deification and the practice of self-mutilation and sexual abstinence by her devotees to secure her favour.

Hijras also refer to Indian epic literature in order to legitimize their existence and to gain respect in Indian society that we know about *the Ramayana*. In *Mahabharata*, hijras point to the following story involving Arjuna as the story of their origin. Yudhisthira, one of the Pandava brothers, is seduced by his opponents in a game of dice in which the stake is that the beaten party should go with his brothers into exile for 12 years and remain underground for the 13<sup>th</sup> year. The Pandavas lose the game and go into the exile as it was decided. When the 13<sup>th</sup> year comes around, Yudhisthira asks Arjuna what disguise he will take up for the 13<sup>th</sup> year in order to remain undiscovered. Arjuna answers that he will conceal himself in the guise of a eunuch and serve the ladies of the court. He describes how he will spend the year, wearing white conch shell bangles, braiding his hair like a woman, dressing in female clothing, engaging in unskilled works in the inner apartments of the queens, and teaching the women of the court singing and dancing.

Just as Arjuna had taken part in births and weddings as a eunuch, hijras perform their traditional roles by dancing and singing at propitious occasions and by bestowing the blessings of productiveness on infant males and on newlyweds. Mohandas Naimisharay, a Hindi writer, talks about this tradition in his novel *Muktiparva* (2004) where the hijras come to Banshi's house to name his son. In the process of bestowing the blessings in the name of Bahuchara Mata, hijras are capable to give the power of creating new life, of having many sons, and of carrying on the continuity of a family line. The faith in the powers of the hijras rests on the Hindu confidence in sakti. Moreover, hijras are also known for their power to curse. If hijras believe that they have not been rewarded (badhai) fully for their presentation, their audiences may face some extremely shocking behaviour. Arjuna is considered as the only "mard," he did not bother to disguise himself as hijra. Here the decision of Arjuna should be deconstructed as the hijra's are also people and we are not much different from them. So one needs to change his way of thinking about them. Moreover, the story that Guna creates in *Natrang* also have the same message, so entitles his character as Arjuna Birnahada.

Considering hijras are unable to have children, they are engaged in various patterns of enrollment in order to continue their heredity. For instance, parents themselves may offer an intersex child to the hijras, or upon growing up, the persons themselves may join their group, or in exceptional cases hijras may assert an intersex child as their right. Samina Ali's *Madras on Rainy Days* (2004) also portrays the life of hijra people. Sameer, a husband of Layla, is in homosexual love with his friend Naveed. Though Sameer marries Layla, he goes to meet Naveed and his body doesn't support him when he is in company of Layla. His mother also tells her to take him with her to America so that the family dishonor can be avoided. When she decides to run away from the house as she knows that to share a bed with such a man is seen according to Quran, her family members lock her inside the house. When Layala and Sameer go to Madras to get a visa for America, Naveed follows them, in a disguise of a woman, to Madras and asks his friend to not to leave him. When she goes back to her maternal house, her uncle says to her:

We are not as strong as women– some women – who can control themselves, save themselves till they are married. Men like Sameer, young men, strong men, virile men, they must seek companionship..... Recreational sex, nothing more. (Ali, 2004, 241).

So the representation of the hijras is positively portrayed in mythology or legends, but we know that the people, now a day, are marginalized for they belong to a neither sex. They have to do a work of any kind to live their life. The Supreme Court, India's judgment (2013) went against the homosexuals and their condition is becoming worse than the past. The government does not provide them the training, education or employment opportunities, so their marginal position continues in the future. They must be looked as a sexual minority.

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