

Celebrating Eunuchhood through (Indian) Cinematic Lens

Ashish Aggarwal,(PhD Research Scholar), Department of English, Central University of H.P. Dharamshala(176215)

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Abstract

Humans are a benign gift of Almighty. The benefactor made us all equal and did not create any distinction. But it is humans who created disparities and notion of disharmony which further led to the notion of 'self' and 'other'. Due to this the notion of polarities developed and which perpetuated up to such an extent that fragmentation and segregation of things came into prominence in every sect and part of society. On the similar grounds even 'Gender' and 'Sex' were described which led to the hazy picture regarding them. The two political categories namely male and female came into prominence due to this notion and the one falling out of this binary structure were viewed with an eye of suspicion. One such alternative category which is multiple times marginalized is Eunuchs/Hijras. They are the ones who are not even treated like humans and are a subject to multiple jeopardy at various levels. Films are one of the most powerful tools and medium in the present times to convey certain set of ideology by keeping people intact and hooked to the screens. People can easily empathize and sympathize seeing movies as, one can relate well by understanding the inherent grammar or language of the film by connecting it to the reality. The paper here will try to form a bridge between the Film Studies and Gender Studies thus, highlighting the issues and matters concerning Eunuchs and will try to create an alternative vision or structure for them. The movie which is for research purpose to highlight the pangs and sufferings of the community is **Shabnam Mausi (2005)**.

Keywords: Celebrating, Eunuchhood, community, language, gender studies.

Introduction

Life as a jigsaw puzzle why only for a few?

When all are born equal, then why to do me and you!?

Life is a beautiful benediction given to humans by the benefactor. The artist or creator of the life pre supposed the fact that humans might live on this planet in a quite harmonious design or fashion. But in reality if we see the today's world then the things supposed by the creator have almost fallen the opposite and lopsided. Human beings have created distinctions, hierarchies at

every step making themselves the supreme beings and placing the humans on the high pedestal of mockery and buffoonery. We all are living our individual lives and paths and are placed together in a great titanic of life by the creator. But unaware of the situation and facts around we humans have developed the innate sense of superiority and bloated ego's up to an extent that without realizing this fact we all are digging our graves directly or indirectly cursing humanity.

In this journey of life which expects us to stick to the titanic of humanity which will help us reach the shore of life smoothly by respecting every creation on this planet, we have started taking the U- turn. We instead of climbing the ladder up, of humanity are climbing the ladder down in the present context of life on daily basis. Humans on daily basis are denigrating on the scale of humanity, defiling all the basic notions of being called as humans and thus proving the very fact aptly that the hell is empty and all demonic and satanic figures are present on this planet or earth. We have become so much selfish and blind that we have forgotten the basic ethics of treating humans like humans.

Since the day we are born, humans are dog tagged with the rope of expectations. We are moulded and brought up in such a fashion which creates a rigid structure in our minds to view certain things. The roles and functions to do certain things are zipped and we are made to blindly incorporate and adhere to them throughout our life. These roles and expectations are such that they later become the shackles of our life which make us blind perpetually forming or shaping our ideologies which are jingoistic, cemented and unshakable. The result of things which are taught since childhood may it be how to behave, what to do, how to walk and talk all form the pre conceived notions of ill will which are further cemented with the passage of time. The result of these notions or passive ideologies is our understanding regarding sex and gender.

Our perception regarding sex and gender is quite hazy in nature. Sex is something which we are born with may it be our genitals, gene pool, chromosomes pool etc; whereas gender is something which is ascribed to us by our society. Gender in this way becomes an artificial construct which tells us how to behave, how to walk and talk and do certain things. It creates a structure for us to do certain things. When we see the things or scenario in Indian context then usually sex or gender are the things which are considered as a taboo to be discussed. The generations which have been brought up generally and of which we are part of are so much hypocritical that though on daily basis they have sex and gender in their nerves or they might practice it on daily basis but when it comes to a discussion on such things then people usually avoid talking about it. Most of the people are usually uncomfortable talking about sex and gender in general life.

Our lives generally as individuals of society revolve around the heterogeneous make up of the humans or dichotomous structure. The frame or bent of mind is conditioned in such a way that it only accepts the binary structure of sexuality and the ones who fall out of this ambit are viewed with an eye of suspicion. The thing of judging people with a conditioned mindset can be compared to Milton's *Paradise Lost* in which he says that- mind in itself can make hell of heaven and heaven of hell. This in itself means the way we think and we are conditioned in the same way our mind or thinking tanks work. Our minds are conditioned since the very initial

stages of life to view things only from hetero normative lens, so due to all these reasons we often do not think about the people falling out of the ambit of this umbrella of heterosexuality. There are various other categories which fall out of the binary structure may it be- gays, lesbians, bisexuals and the list is endless. Out of all these transgender communities there is one such category which is multiple times jeopardised and marginalized and this community is of Eunuchs/Hijras.

Eunuchs are the people who can be easily seen on the streets begging with heavy make-up smeared on their faces and usually with a provocative walk and are generally recognized with prototypal claps. They are the people who are generally treated with disgust and are marginalized at various levels. Hijra as a term in itself has acted as a cultural identifier and marker in itself since ages. People usually have made this term to connote this signification to see these people with disgust and for mocking them. People do not have any empathy or sympathy for them on the grounds of their being bereft of certain things or the physiognomy they are born with but rather people take this thing as an opportunity to mock them. Thus, hijra as a term is more often treated in the very sense stated to be as a butt of ridicule connoting it next to a cultural marker rather than empathizing it on the grounds of being a biological descriptor.

The life led by Eunuchs is generally nomadic in nature as they do not have respite at any one place except their gharanas or the places where they live. Leaving their deras aside their life is full of hurdles, obstacles, obscurities and constant flux may it be mental or physical. They are treated as typical outcasts and live a life which is akin to untouchables. If we deeply scrutinize their life then, the life led by them is often worse than the untouchables. As untouchables only face discrimination on the basis of their being at the lowest rung of the ladder but they face it on multiple levels may it be social order, class, gender and the list is endless. This makes them prey to multiple jeopardise. They wander on daily basis hither and thither, with lack of confidence, striving for basic amenities like roof or shelter over their heads, two square meals, basic love and respect which make their life a saga of suffering and excruciating pain. The stigma of being a hijra or eunuch is carried by them over their heads from birth till their graves. Seeing all these things one can easily say that they are the new emerging untouchables of the society who are leading life full of deprivation.

Life of Transgenders has improved a little due to the wind of change and after coming up of Article 377 which has made them to take a little sigh of relief. But this is not the case with the eunuchs. Had they been benefitted out of the laws and various legislations they wouldn't have been found on streets begging and seeking Badhai on various occasions and standing on traffic signals begging for their bellies. There are various rules and laws but they have only benefitted by and large the other deprived communities falling under the ambit of transgender. Life for other communities like gays and lesbians is still a little easier because they can live with hidden identities. If one doesn't reveal the sexual orientation in case of gays and lesbians it is quite difficult to make things out. But this is not in the case of eunuchs. Due to the physiognomy of them they are easily recognized and are shunned to the doors.

If we analyse and see things around in how many houses we see people welcoming them or respecting them or treating them properly? We do not even see them in schools around us, we do not find them in institutions or colleges studying or as peer groups. We do not see them in offices or on government chairs. So on the basis of the very things stated how we can say that they are treated properly or with respect. In India we usually say that there exists unity in diversity and it is home to every tribe, sect and group. But in actual if we analyse the situation then in spite of so much of diversity and heterogeneity there is discrimination at every level which only is visible when we see it through a microscopic lens. The laws or various rights which are made for them merely hibernate on the papers only. The views of the people around still are 'stale and stagnant'. Law and legislations or courts have done their work but it's high time rather to revisit humanity from a neo humanitarian lens from which everyone can be seen equal and placed on the same plane. Various quotas and reservations also will not work until and unless there is change in attitudes and behaviour of the people around. We also need to ponder upon the fact that why only after coming up of verdicts like 377 only we as society have started accepting them. We need to do self introspection at personal level being individuals that why did we need such laws and after coming up of them only we have started respecting them. Also as individuals we need to think that if we as humans are living life of dignity since we are born so why can't these people live life 'breathing fresh air of dignity'. We need to revisit our inner conscience and see what kind of humans or society we have been till today so that we can uproot the evil from its roots.

We need to realize the fact that the community of Eunuchs have really suffered down since ages and have been denied the justice since long. Acceptance and mingling of them into the mainstream society and broadening the vision or perspectives on things will act as the real healer of the wounds in true sense. Only then the hanging situation of them in air will come to the ground and their oscillating position between the two extremes will come to rest and solace.

Scrutinizing Eunuchs/Hijras through Cinematic Lens in the movie Shabnam Mausi(2005)

Shabnam Mausi is one of the renowned movies which depicts the suffering and agony of the main character Shabnam here; that belonged to hijra community. From the starting do we see how hijras are shown begging on the streets, in trains, roads and in every possible nook and corner of Mumbai as a city which in itself is a harsh reality of this world. Then the scene shifts to a family which is so called normal and the ones who safeguard our society ie; family of a police guy. We are shown that his wife gave birth to a hijra child who is taken away by the hijras when they come to seek Badhai. The culture of badhai is highlighted here. Then further we are told that hijras take this baby to their dera and they bring her up and give her name of Shabnam. The Amma of the dera gives the baby to one of her chelas who brings the baby up. Further in this way the dera cult is highlighted how they go to earn money and seek Badhai for their sustenance and the daily routine of hijras is brought to forth. As the movie progresses there is another aspect which comes across and that is the power politics which goes in the hijra dera too. The Amma who is the head of the dera starts prostitution in her dera in order to mint money. She starts selling the body of hijras and when Halima, the mother of Shabnam comes across this very aspect of Amma, she warns that she would tell it to all the members of the hijra

community. Being terrified from this very thing the Amma kills Halima. Unfortunately this murder is witnessed by Shabnam and the Amma cooks a story and lays a trap for Shabnam. Shabnam is sent to jail and there she is treated badly by the police and is also beaten. From there she is called back to cremate the body of her mother who had brought her up. Then Shabnam confronts the Amma here of the dera and runs away catching a train to start afresh. Then she reaches a village in Madhya Pradesh and there while she was in the temple, she finds that the goons of the village were trying to rape a girl. She being a hijra saves that girl and reaches her home. There she is welcomed and accepted by the family of the girl. Then the same day as there was a tussle going for the power and politics, we are told that the person who wanted to fight election, his son loved that girl and he was behind all this. Further we are told how goons reach and they try to kill Shabnam, the hijra and how the entire community of villagers come together to save Shabnam Mausi. They fight for her and accept her.

Meanwhile all this again they use Shabnam Mausi for votes and try to exploit her on the basis of votes and elections. Amidst all this they kill the father of the girl they had tried to rape where Shabnam was staying. Shabnam takes the responsibility of the girl and as motherly figure tries her best to do anything and everything for her. She was further blackmailed for taking her name back from elections. But she was quite stubborn and quite hell bent upon to contest elections and win. Even one of the famous goons called Madan Pandit is hired for killing her but he too goes through a change of heart thus sacrificing his life while saving Shabnam from other goons. Thus, at the end we come across that how Shabnam defeats the person in opposition and win the elections and come out with flying colours. The entire community of the village accept her and make her victorious and make the impossible task, possible too. Thus, in this way the entire movie is nothing but a celebration of this community which tries constantly to work and uplift this community. At various levels do we see how movie in itself tries to highlight the pang and sufferings of the entire community of hijras.

Conclusion

The movie Shabnam Mausi thus in itself becomes the celebration of hijras or marginalized community. It tries to celebrate the eunuchhood or the qualities or attributes of the very community at large. From the very start till the end may it be the hijras taking up of the child and bringing her up, further the desire of the hijras to be as a motherly figure and protecting child like her own and bringing up of the child, facing various odds of life with audacity is depicted at large. Also the hijra cult, life of deras, how do they spend their lives and how they earn their living and tussle with each other at various levels is highlighted in the movie. Also, on the other side we are told how the hijras have to face the challenges of society at every phase and how are they ridiculed initially if they want to do something good in life. Also it is shown how we as society try to oppose and make their lives hell at every level. But at last the movie ends on an optimistic note conveying how if we accept these people their lives can get a meaning to survive and a purpose to live. Thus, in nutshell the movie becomes celebration of this entire community from start till the end, highlighting the roller coaster journey of this community by and large.

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