

Marginalization of the Hijras in the Indian Perspective in Comparison with the Dalits

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Abstract

Hijras are mostly half-man, half-woman. They are called “Transgender”. They are the marginalized species of this world remaining in some cornered Hijra-ghetto. Again, the Dalits are also marginalized people. They are the downtrodden lower-caste people mostly. Now, as both the ‘Neither Man nor Woman’ of the Hijra community and the Dalit casteist people are oppressed by the society and remain as the struggling survivals of the society, there may remain some similar miserable conditions faced by both of them. In this paper, we will observe how in the Indian perspective both the Hijras and the Dalits have equal status through the discussion of some Indian short stories and personal narratives written about both these communities. At this juncture, it is further informed that this paper will show the deplorable condition of some unpopular characters mostly taken from Serena Nanda’s *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India, Survival and Other Stories: Bangla Dalit Fiction in Translation* (edited by Prof. Sankar Prasad Singha and Indranil Acharya) and *Poisoned Bread* (edited by Arjun Dangle).

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Hijras and Dalits both are the yellow, fallen leaves of the social tree. These leaves remain at the footstep of the main tree --- at the horizontal part of the society. They remain attached to the body of the main tree till there remains some chlorophyll within their body, some potentiality within them. But, after they are used properly, they have to stay outside the society, being sapless effigies. A simple example can make this point clear. In this present India, we may observe the earnest yearning of the politicians. They crave for the valuable votes from the Hijras and the Dalits also. But, after the election is gone, the politicians also become ignorant of their own duties in most cases. There remains only one thing lonely --- the pseudo promise.

Transgender identity and Dalit identity both are only “performative constructs”¹. The identity of a transgender is made through the performance of his/her person as either a female or a male. Dalit identity is a different thing. It is a kind of acquiring Dalitness through the process of suffering, protest/revolt, and negation to get some equality in some social, political, economical and cultural purposes. But, the main aim of these identities is to express their uniqueness in the mainstream society.

Transgender literature and Dalit literature are the parts of the “minor literature”. “Transgenders” are the people with castration (Hijras), or without castration (Zenana). “Dalits” are the normal casteist people (there may be some DalitHijras such as MadhuKinnar). However, the main point here is the issue of castration from the mainstream society --- marginalization on the basis of abnormal gender or abnormal caste/class --- ‘abnormal’ in the sense that both of them are out of the normalcy of social gender division and social caste/class division.

Hijra community has various species --- ‘Eunuch’, ‘Kinnar’, ‘Kothi’, ‘Aranavi’, ‘Jogtihiljras’, ‘Shiv-Shaktis’, ‘Hijras’, etc². Again, Dalitcasteist people have also various species --- Farmer (chasha), Cobbler (muchhi), Shabor, Bauri, Mahar, Poundrakshatriya, Namashudra, etc³. Thus, we will see that there are many margins outside the main margin of the society. There are divisions within the Hijras as well as the Dalits. But, whereas the divisions in the Dalit society are apparently visible, the divisions in the Hijra community are apparently ‘invisible’ in most case. As for example, we cannot say easily whether one ‘hijra’ is a “real hijra” or a “zenana”.

In India, there is class bias, caste bias and gender bias everywhere. Dalits are oppressed somehow or other. We will find it in recent Rohit Vemula case⁴, Sushil Mandi case⁵, or, even Chandan Mondal case⁶. The same atrocities we will find in the case of the ‘Transgender’ hijras also. A ‘kothi’ named Mintu (the name has been changed by the interviewer perhaps) had described his miserable condition to IsabellZipfel, a reporter in July 2008⁷. He was corporeally assaulted by the society. So, the issue of oppression remains same for both the Dalits and the Hijras. Again, in some cases, the society also becomes helpful. As for example, when Ariful Islam (name is changed here) of Pabna, Bangladesh wanted recently to get out of mould of the male life by becoming a female, the doctors of the society became very helpful to him promising him to give a complete female mould. Again, his wife and two sons (who are the part of the society) also remained in their normalcy after hearing that big decision⁸.

Again, the Dalits remain Dalits. They may be some high-ranked officers. But, their identity is same. The society mentions them only as Dalits. If a Dalit becomes powerful, the society will say something about his Dalit identity behind him. Again, by this powerful Dalit the powerless Dalits may or may not gain any privilege. The same matter is applicable to the renowned "Hijras". They may be some service-holders, but the society will observe them as

"Hijras" with their various species. Again, the privileged "Hijras" may or may not support their non-privileged "gurubhais". Everything is possible.

However, in Serena Nanda's ethnographical writing (rather a memoir), *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India*, we will find "the personal narratives of four hijras" (Nanda x). Among them, Kamladevi and Meena are worth-mentioned. As in many Dalit writings we find the marginal and oppressed Dalit people's own voice directly or indirectly, so also we will find in these personal narratives a voice of the Hijra community. We will try here to find out the "strategies by which hijras, and others like them, create a "place for themselves" in Indian society..." (Nanda xiii). The Dalits and the Hijras --- both of them want to survive in the Indian society in their conventional way. But, they are punished severely for seeking some rights to survive. And so, we find that Bapu Patil in Bandhumadhav's short story, "The Poisoned Bread" does not give the writer's Grandpa even a few measures of jowar after his whole-day-long hard toil. Again, we will see in the personal narrative of Kamladevi that she along with others hijras is beaten by the policemen "for roaming in the night like prostitutes" (Nanda 65). Now, we will peep into some Dalit short stories and some Hijra personal narratives to make out the miserable state of both of them.

In the short story, "The Poisoned Bread", we may observe the plight of the Mahar community. Here, the writer's Grandpa, Yetalya Aja is a Dalit who is suffering mentally by the evil remarks of the upper-caste person, Bapu Patil. But, he has not lost his temper and has respect for the 'Anna'(Bapu Patil). "I am your begging Mahar..."(Dangle 168), he says. But, his 'humble plea' only evokes sarcasm in Bapu Patil. He sarcastically mocks at the claiming of the Mahars, the Mangs and the Harijans of equality. He only insults Yetalya. But, the writer's unconscious mind goes against his conscious mind and he retorts the 'Anna' : "...Patil, will you kindly tell me what you meant when you accused us of forgetting religion, abandoning our caste and of polluting the god?...And if our mere touch pollutes the gods, why were the Mahars and Mangs created at all? And who, may I know, who indeed, created them?..." (Dangle 168). Here, we will find a Dalit protest. So, the "snot-nosed brat" (168) can even speak! The "good-for-nothing whelp" (169) can even protest! An educated Dalit (the writer himself) we will find here; he is protesting for the sake of his own community. But, a kind of negation of the society is found here through the words of 'Patil': "...And mind you, even if a Mahar or Mang gets educated, no one will ever call him a Brahmin....One should always keep to one's own position."(169).Then, when the writer wants to know about that "position", 'Patil' explores the "definite hierarchy" (169) to him saying him that "...A chappal is never worshipped in place of God..." (169). So, the upper-caste people's unconscious mind is always ready to establish themselves at the highest rung of society. Thus, we will also find how the personality of a person becomes mostly a reflection of the contents of the unconscious part of the mind as believed by Sigmund Freud, the founder of 'psychoanalysis'. Again, the latent content (desire to be a God-like person all the time) of the unconscious part

of Patil's mind is sublimated by him showing the hierarchal history proudly. 'Sublimation' is a part of Freudian 'defense mechanisms'(other parts are - Rationalization, Projection, Reaction formation, Displacement, Denial, Repression and Regression). Defense mechanisms protect us from anxiety and threats. They are useful and good. But, sometimes they can go too far only to take us into abnormality. Here, Patil has this kind of abnormality as being a 20th century human being he still believes in the age-old hierarchal history only to remain at the highest rung of the society.

Again, the unconscious that we all share is called the "collective unconscious" according to Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), the famous psychiatrist from Switzerland. The latent desire to find out a place in the mainstream society is the common "collective unconscious" shared by all the 'Hijras' and the Dalits --- both being commonly suffering, marginalized human beings. But, if we consider the components of the "collective unconscious" seriously (that are called 'archetypes'), we will find a rather different picture. Here, the 'Self'(one of the archetypes), that is, the personal identity will be different as the 'Hijra'-identity is based on gender, rather 'transgender', whereas the 'Dalit'-identity is based on caste/class in most cases. Again, the 'persona', that is, the 'public self' is same for the Dalits as well as their personal self as they have no artificial self in most cases. But, at this juncture, we must mention that the 'public self' of the Hijras may be either the 'anima' (the feminine side of men) or the 'animas' (the masculine side of women). But, the 'shadow' side (containing feelings of inferiority, source of creativity) may be same for both the communities as they are commonly inferior to other society people.

This 'inferiority' is only attributed to their status. That is why they are 'inferior'. We call them 'inferior' as we previously know what the term 'superior' means. 'Hijras' are the 'Hijras' as we, the normal human beings call them so, whatever they may think of themselves (men or women). So, the word 'Hijra' (signifier) is connected to the concept of 'Hijra' (signified) in a purely arbitrary way. Same thing is justified to the Dalits also. So, it is better to take both of them as the common, normal human beings in this democratic India. The writer of the short story, "The Poisoned Bread" wants to establish this fact by saying that --- "...Aren't we also made of the same flesh and blood as the rest of you? We too are born after nine months in our mother's womb...." (169).

Now, in another Dalit short story, "Farmer Gopal's Caste and Creed" (written by Makhanlal Pradhan), we will find a different story. Here, Gopal Ghosh is a person from general caste (farmer). Though he remains in poverty, he does not want to change his occupation from a job holder to a fisherman. His other friends like Shibu Naskar, Manmatha Paramanik, Gopal Naskar, or Sushil Mandal (who are lower in caste) have already accepted the job as a fisherman for earning some money for their family. But, Gopal Ghosh remains rigid that he will not take the job of a lower-caste anymore. He wants to do "...some work which would be urban in nature"(Singha & Acharya 93). But, he had to negotiate with "...the

abhorrent thought of becoming a fisherman..."(98) later on. His lower-caste friends were very helpful to him to make him economically a little sound. They make him realise the fact that "...For the poor, work is the only thing which matters. Even if you are a Brahmin what good is your caste? Will the food come from heaven?..." (98). Manmatha Paramanik, a friend of Gopal Ghosh also suggests him that --- "...Do the poor have any caste? Our work determines our caste....Now let us go for fish farming..."(98). So, it is observed here that the upper-caste people sometimes cross their margin and enter into the Dalit world for economical purpose, for the purpose of surviving. The same matter is true for some normal human beings who disguise themselves as 'hijras' to earn some money for their family though it is non-profitable for the 'real' hijras and so after the revelation the 'fake' hijras are handed over to the police by them.

Now, some valuable matter about the so-called 'hijras' should be mentioned. The rowdies at night, the policemen, the urchins at the street in the day-time are easy botherers of the Hijras. Humiliation at the doorstep sometimes shows a kind of non-respect for the hijras not being a 'full' human being. Their so-called 'husbands' also sometimes go away from them after squandering away all of their money. All of their 'husbands' are not like Ahmed as we will find in the personal narrative of Meera --- "Meera: A New Guru" where Ahmed is Meera's loving and caring husband. So, at least some of the people have some sympathy for the hijras. But, both Meera and Kamladevi (in the personal narrative, "Kamladevi: A Prostitute; it's rather a confessional ethnographical story) complain Serena Nanda about the rough behaviour of the rowdies and the policemen. To them, they are only "...a five-cent piece..."(Nanda 78). The hijras are marginalised from the pure male world because of the "...imperfection or absence of a penis..." (Nanda 15). Again, they are marginalised from the pure woman world for the "...absence of menstruation..." (Nanda 18). A hijra should not carry a child in her womb as we will find in a story mentioned in Nanda's book (Nanda 19).

Like "full human beings", there is also a division in the Hijra community --- some of them are 'mercenary people' and some of them are 'good people' as Meera observed (Nanda 79). In their middle age, the hijras want to "...lead a respectable life..." (Nanda 79). Like other 'normal' human beings the Hijras also want to live a 'normal' life after all. This same yearning to live a 'normal', happy life we will find in the Dalit short story, "The Other Jew"(by Kapil Krishna Thakur) where Bishtu Pandit asks a question --- "'Tell me, you tell me... where is our real home?" (Singha & Acharya 90). Again, Grandpa Yetalya in the story, "The Poisoned Bread", asks a question about "hereditary holding" to Mhadeva (the writer of the story) --- "'Mhadeva, will the Mahars and Mangs never be happy?..."(Dangle 172). So, these yearnings for a normal life by the Dalits are just similar to the yearning of the Hijras "...to be more like a woman..."(Nanda 79) to spend a normal life with or without a 'husband'.

So, in the Indian perspective, the Hijras are also downtrodden and survival in the non-profitable society like the Dalits. Though there is a vast difference between the gender-based

oppression and the caste-based/class-based oppression, the main enigma of oppression is same. But, the marginal gap between the Hijra community and the main society is not as same as the marginal gap between the Dalit casteist people and the main society. The 'Hijras' can at least attend some specific ceremonies and can take a leading role there. They can at least touch the babies to bless them. But, the Dalits cannot attend any ceremony now-a-days in the 21st century also. Chetan Waghela had to suffer for horse ride at his own marriage ceremony by the upper-caste people in April 2016⁹. Again, for sitting on a cot before an upper-caste influential person in Bihar, Sukheo Paswan was beaten with slipper in November 2016¹⁰. Then, remember the ridiculous but miserable state of Pandurang Satwa Waghmare in the short story, "Promotion" (written by Arjun Dangle)?

Now, from the above discussion, it may be observed that the 'Hijras' are somehow Dalits in respect of their marginalised status, but they are privileged in the tangible sense. 'Untouchability' is not the hard-core feature for them. They can touch at least. We, the normal men or women, fear or hate them only for their gender-difference, but we hate or fear the Dalits for their 'untouchability'. We are like the 'Selfish Giant' whose only duty is to keep away the hijras and the dalits from our society thinking them as the 'trespassers' and ignore the fact that they can be beneficial for our society with their permanent attachment to it.

However, we cannot deny our love, our responsibility for the oppressed 'Hijra' community as well as the Dalit people. The society, the Governmental board is also coming forward slowly to help these oppressed. And so, it becomes possible for the Adivasi community of Darjeeling Hills to get promise from the chief minister to form a separate development board¹¹; it becomes possible to get headlines on the newspaper mentioning --- 'Four held over attack on Dalits in Haryana'¹²; 'Transgenders In the City to get Public Toilets soon'¹³; or, 'Over 250 Bihar eunuchs to sit for board examination'¹⁴. As it is important to ensure the birth of many Babasahibs for the well-being of the Dalits, so also it is entirely significant to ensure the emergence of many 'Transgenders' like Madhu Kinnar¹⁵, Manabi Banerjee¹⁶, Kajal Mangal Murti¹⁷, et al as the real inspiration for the so-called 'Hijras' --- the "Ardhanarisvara" (Nanda 20).

Notes & References

1. Judith Butler, an American philosopher and gender theorist of 21st century, has used the term "performative constructs" to show the relationship between 'Identity' and the 'subject' by saying that one arrives at an identity as a male or a female through the performative act of behaving like a male or a female (as mentioned by Pramod K. Nayar in his book, Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: From Structuralism to Ecocriticism, published in 2010, pp. 189).
2. <https://scroll.in/article/662023/hijra-kothi-aravani-a-quick-guide-to-transgender-terminology>

- through this link we will get an article named, "Hijra, Kothi, aravani : a quick guide to transgender terminology", written by Aarefa Johari, published on April 17, 2014, where we will know about some well known or unknown terms about "Hijras".
3. These terms about the Dalits we will find in the book named, *Survival and Other Stories: Bangla Dalit Fiction in Translation*, edited by Prof. Sankar Prasad Singha & Dr. Indranil Acharya, first published in 2012.
4. The details of this matter will be found in a report named, "Rohit Vemula, death of a philosopher to purify higher education", published in Hindustan Times by Kancha Ilaiah on January 20, 2016.
<http://m.hindustantimes.com/static/rohith-vemula-an-unfinished-portrait/>
5. <https://www.google.co.in/search?q=sushil+mandi&oq=sushil+mandi&aqs=mobile-gws-lite.0.0l2>
- go through this URL link for details.
6. We will find about this matter in The Statesman published on 14 February, 2017, in a report named, "JU student alleges 'mental harassment' by hostel super".
7. "Transgenderism in India : 'People just use us for sex'", first published on Friday 4 July 2008 04:00 EDT.
<https://www.google.co.in/amp/s/amp.theguardian.com/world/2008/jul/04/india-gender>
8. AnandaBazarPatrika, 31 January 2017, Tuesday, Kolkata.
9. The Statesman, 23 April, 2016, Kolkata.
10. The Statesman, 3 November, 2016, Kolkata.
11. The Statesman, 14 February, 2017, Kolkata.
12. The Statesman, 1 February, 2017, Kolkata.
13. The Statesman, 15 February, 2017, Kolkata.
14. The Statesman, 3 February, 2017, Kolkata.
15. Madhu Kinnar is India's fifth transgender mayor. See details in ---
<http://m.timesofindia.com/india/Chhattisgarh-Eunuch-Madhu-Kinnar-wins-Raigarh-mayoral-election/articleshow/45750881.cms>
16. Manabi Banerjee is the first transgender college principal of India. See details in ---
<https://thelogicalindian.com/story-feed/exclusive/meet-the-first-transgender-college-principal-of-india/>
17. Kajal Mangal Murti is a transgender who has been fighting a battle for mainstream jobs for her community and has also been indulging in philanthropy. We will observe her name mentioned in a report titled, "Trendsetter transgender sets goal for community", published in The Statesman on 14 February, 2017.

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