



## THE EXISTANCE OF THIRD GENDER: A CHALLENGE IN MODERN INDIA

Aparna Sharma

Utkarsh School of Management and Technology Bareilly (U.P.)

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article History:

Received 20th November, 2016  
Received in revised form 19th  
December, 2016  
Accepted 24th January, 2017  
Published online 28th February, 2017

#### Keywords:

Third Gender, Trans sexual, Society,  
India

### ABSTRACT

As literature is said to be a mirror of society for it reflects the real picture of the contemporary world clearly. It provokes our thinking and compels us to think afresh about problems. Mahesh Dattani, a Sahitya Academy Award winning playwright from India left a burning question regarding the social status of eunuchs (or third gender) in the developing India. Here, in this article I have taken his play "Seven Steps around the Fire" which articulates the voice of the oppressed sections of the society whose identity is shrouded in the cover of myths and social prejudices. The play is a protest play against the social exclusion of the eunuchs and such exclusions can be found everywhere in the Indian society like the caste, religion, or inclination based bias, but the hijras suffer this on the basis of their neuter gender.

Dattani's play raises many questions regarding hijra identity, their constitution, connotations, their social acceptability and tolerability. They are the 'invisibles' in the society who face a double jeopardy as they are the victims of nature as well as of the society. There is an aura of disgust and dislike related to them.

In a developing country where everyone is talking about development, it is the high time to contemplate on such issues. Why do we read about them and forget? How long will we shy away from these taboo issues and let them prevail in our society. The awareness about the sufferings of the marginalized community is a realization of the perception of life that can ensure better understanding of human relationship. This paper is a humble attempt to highlight the condition of this neglected section of Indian society.

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### INTRODUCTION

India is a developing country with a chequered history. So, here, the concept of development and the way people respond to it, is quite different. This response consists of absorption of the modernization process by the traditional order, without disruption of its own organization and pattern of life. In such a changing society where we are claiming to be very open-minded we always have a fear in touching some of the taboo subjects.

As literature is said to be a mirror of the society for it reflects the real picture of the contemporary world clearly. It provokes our thinking and compels us to think afresh about problems Mahesh Dattani, a Sahitya Academy winner playwright from India left a burning question regarding the social status of eunuchs (or third gender) in the developing India. In this play 'seven steps around the fire' he has really taken a bold step by bringing it closer to the real life experiences and tried to articulate the voice of the oppressed sections of the society whose identity is shrouded in the cover of the myths and social prejudices. The play is protest play against the social exclusion of the HIZRAS. Such exclusion can be found everywhere in the Indian society like the caste, religion or inclination bases bias, but the hijras suffer this on the basis of their neutral gender.

"Seven Steps around the Fire exposes the position of the eunuchs in Indian society. Dattani assets: 'there are transsexuals all over the world and India is no exception. The purpose of the study is to show their position in society. Perceived as the lowest of the Low, they yearn for family and love. It is a gruesome tragedy in the life of transsexual and also who loves and shoe sympathy towards marginalized eunuch community. The transsexuals are not considered as respectable and acceptable human beings. They dress up themselves in women costumes but they are not considered women. Transsexual is neither he nor she so pronoun "it" is used for denoting their neuter gender.

The society accepts a hijra for gracing the ceremonies of marriage and birth but would not allow them to portrayed of such ceremonies, the author has ironically portrayed this aspect which would not have been given any head, for any matter related to them is of no importance to anyone. The heart rendering story about a hijra that she is murdered simply because she has fallen in love with Subbu, a young man having the status of importance ion society, fills us with horror and sense of injustice.

The whole play has been dedicated to the hijra cause and has brought the margin to the centre, the underdogs to the forefront. Their fears and frustrations are spotlighted. They are human beings with no voice, no sympathies, no love, no consolations, no justice and probably no hope of acceptability in the society. The case of hijra is focused in the play who

\*✉ **Corresponding author: Aparna Sharma**  
Utkarsh School of Management and Technology Bareilly  
(U.P.)

marries the son of a minister and has to bear consequences. Here, the role of the police, politician and the society as a whole is questioned. Thus, the play is the mockery of gender oriented social system where dramatist sympathetically accepts human identity of eunuchs and the struggles to construct their voice so that they might identify their oppressions and register their voice of protest.

A new theme of Indian English drama has been introduced through this play. Conservatives and social activists should not turn blind eye to reality, we have to accept the reality of life, and however, painful that might be. An estimated 5-6 millions eunuchs live in India. In modern day India, they live often a ghetto-like existence, in their own communities; they are an important and integral part of Indian society. No celebration is considered complete without their participations and blessings, but this is an irony of their fate that the two events in the mainstream Hindu culture where their presence is acceptable marriage and child birth are the very privileges denied to them by man and nature.

It is quite obvious that attitudes, orientations or behavior, which takes the interests, intentions or need of other people into account, has played some role in defining the idea of principle of social development. Social development is about putting people at the centre of development. Now, the question arises to which group or society, eunuch community belongs. The eunuchs of India have virtually no safe places, not even in their families, where they protected from prejudice and abuse. A report on human rights violation, against the transgender community has documented the kind prejudice that hijra face, this report shows that this prejudice is translated into violence, often of a brutal nature, in public-places, police stations, prisons and in their own homes. These conditions Dattani has beautifully demonstrated along with the socio-psychological crisis of eunuchs who are entangled between social customs and personal ambitions. In Indian society, the society, the community of eunuchs perpetually survives under the cover of "shame" and "silence". The main factor behind the violence of society against them is that society is not able to come to terms with the fact that eunuchs do not come to the accepted gender divisions which makes this community one of the most disempowered groups in Indian society. The systematic violence they face is reinforced by the institutions such as the family, the media and the medical establishments and is given legitimacy by the legal system. The hijras face many kinds of state and societal harassments such as:

- Harassment by the police in public spaces
- Harassment at home
- Police entrapment
- Abuse/ harassment at police station
- Rape in jails

Social development means a commitment that development process need to benefit people, particularly but not only the poor, but also a recognition that people, and the way they interact in groups and society and the norms that facilitates such interaction, shape development processes and eunuch community being an integral part of our society should be

included as a group because they are given homogenous social identity, irrespective of their physical or endocrine status. They remain neglected and even humiliated section of our population. Although they have endocrine dysfunction, no systematic attempt has been made to evaluate asses and improve their endocrine health. This is in sharp contrast to the yeoman work done by other scientist from allied discipline, to destigmatize the eunuchs. Therefore, a concerted effort is needed by social activities and allied specialties to understand the endocrinology of eunuchs

Mahesh Dattani really deserves an accolade for raising such a relevant but untouched question before Indian society which is claiming constantly to move towards advancement and modernity the eunuch community is deprived of several rights under civil law because Indian law recognizes only two sexes. Even a Sanskrit term "TRITIYA PRAKRITI" or third nature, it is used to classify them. While the sexual identity of eunuchs is considered homosexual by the general public, no work has been done to assess their sexual orientation or endocrine status. Dattani play raises many questions regarding hijra identity, their constitutions, connotations, their social acceptability and tolerability. They are the 'invisibles' in the society who face a double jeopardy as they are the victim of nature as well as of the society. There is an aura of disgust and dislike related to them. Dattani projects the plight of the eunuchs without offering any suitable solution.

It is true that the living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have developed only in mechanics and in technologies but as human beings from within we are far from developments. Though, we wish for a longer life, why we do not long for a quality life. We have almost put the word 'humanity' under suspicion by our treatment to this community. They have no grudge against normal human beings because they have accepted their sexual; identity as their destiny.

In spite of being constantly ignored in society, the community is beginning to make a mark in national main stream as well. A member of a eunuch community Shabnam Mausi was elected as a member of the legislative assembly in 1999. Others have been elected Mayors and Municipality presidents. They are struggling for their identity. This is the high time that both the government and the human right movement in the country begin to take this issue with the seriousness it deserves.

In a developing country when everyone is talking about development, it is the time to contemplate why we overlook such issues? Why do we read about them and forget? Why do we not revert back to the reality and work to form a concrete solution? How long will we shy away from these taboo issues and let them prevail in our society. It is the correct time to wake up believes me. This is the high time because the psychic subjugation has far reaching consequences the awareness about the suffering of the marginalize community is a realization of the perception of life that can ensure better understanding of human relationship.

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### How to cite this article:

Aparna Sharma .: The Existence Of Third Gender: A Challenge In Modern India. *International Journal of Research and Current Development* 2017; 2(2): 74-76.

