

Vol. 8, Issue-II (April 2017)

ISSN: 0976-8165

THE CRITERION

An International Journal in English

Bi-monthly, Peer-Reviewed, Open Access eJournal



UGC Approved Journal [Arts and Humanities, Sr. No. 40]

Editor-In-Chief - Dr. Vishwanath Bite

www.the-criterion.com

About Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

Contact Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

Editorial Board: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

www.galaxyimrj.com

Dalitness of the Transgender (Hijra) Community in the Indian Perspective : The Dual Survivals of the Common Destiny

Diptapratim MidyaChowdhury
Research Scholar,
Department of English,
Vidyasagar University,
Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal.

Article History: Submitted-25/03/2017, Revised-14/04/2017, Accepted-17/04/2017, Published-30/04/2017.

Abstract:

“Struggle for Existence” is common for both the Dalit community and the Transgender community in India. Transgenders, who are called the so-called “Ardhanarisvara”, are mostly half-man, half-woman. They are called “Hijras” in general. 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 Transgender community and the Dalit people are tortured 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 notice how in the Indian perspective both the Transgenders and the Dalits have equal status through the discussion of some Indian personal narratives and Indian short stories written about both these communities. Again, 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* and *Poisoned Bread : Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature* (edited by Arjun Dangle). Again, in this fact-finding matter, some websites, The Ananda Bazar Patrika and The Statesman become helpful.

Keywords: Transgenders, Dalits, Hijras, community, survival, marginalized, downtrodden, Indian.

The oppressed/tormented people in this Indian society have always a common destiny somehow. They are always trying to be free from the cruel clutches of the oppressors in this society. The Transgender people (Hijras) and the Dalits -- both are the fallen yellow leaves of this 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, economic 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 people (there may be some Dalit Hijras such as Madhu Kinnar). 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.

Transgender community has various species --- ‘Eunuch’, ‘Kinnar’, ‘Kothi’, ‘Aranavi’, ‘Jogtihiljas’, ‘Shiv-Shaktis’, ‘Hijras’, etc. Again, Dalit people have also various species --- Farmer (chasha), Cobbler (muchhi), Shabor, Bauri, Mahar, Poundrakshatriya, Namashudra, etc². Thus, we will see that there are many margins outside the main margin of the society. There are divisions within the Transgenders as well as the Dalits. But, whereas the divisions in the Dalit society are apparently visible, the divisions in the Transgender 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 caste bias, class bias and gender bias everywhere. Dalits are tortured somehow or other. We will find it in recent Rohit Vemula case, Sushil Mandi case, or, even Chandan Mondal case (The Statesman, 14 February, 2017, Kolkata). 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 Isabell Zipfel, a reporter in July 2008. He was sexually harassed by the society. So, the issue of torture/harassment remains same for both the Dalits and the Transgenders (mostly, “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 the structure 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 structure. Again, his wife and two sons (who are the part of this society) also remained in their normalcy after hearing that big decision (AnandaBazar Patrika, 31 January, 2017, Tuesday, Kolkata).

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 'Transgender' hijras. They may be some service-holders, but the society will observe them as "Hijras" with their various species. Again, the privileged 'Transgenders' 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"(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 Transgender (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..."(xiii). The Dalits and the Transgenders --- 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 alongwith other 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" (taken from the book, *Poisoned Bread : Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature*, edited by Arjun Dangle), we may notice 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..."(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 for 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?..."(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 Transgenders (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) 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, 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 for not becoming 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 marginalized from the pure male world because of the "...imperfection or absence of a penis..." (Nanda 15). Again, they are marginalized 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 Transgender "Hijra" community -- some of them are 'mercenary people' and some of them are 'good people' as Meera has observed (Nanda 79). In their middle age, the hijras want to "...lead a respectable life..." (Nanda 79). Like other 'normal' human beings the Transgenders (Hijras) also want to live a 'normal' life after all. This same yearning for living a 'normal', happy life we will find in Grandpa Yetalya in the story, "The Poisoned Bread", when he 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 yearnings of the Transgender "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 Transgenders (Hijras) are also downtrodden and survival in this non-profitable society like the Dalits. Though there is a vast difference between the gender-based torture and the caste-based/class-based torture, the main enigma of torture is same. But, the marginal gap between the Transgender (Hijra) community and the main society is not as same as the marginal gap between the Dalit 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 2016 (The Statesman, 23 April, 2016, Kolkata). Again, for sitting on a cot before an upper-caste influential person in Bihar, Sukheo Paswan was beaten with slipper in November 2016 (The Statesman, 3 November, 2016, Kolkata). Then, remember the ridiculous but miserable state of Pandurang Satwa Waghmare in the short story, "Promotion" (written by Arjun Dangle)?

Now, from this above discussion, it may be observed that the Transgenders (Hijras) are somehow Dalits in respect of their marginalized status, but they are privileged in the tangible sense. 'Untouchability' is not the most active peculiarity 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 Transgenders (hijras) and the Dalits from our society thinking them as the 'trespassers' and ignoring the fact that they can be beneficial to our society with their permanent attachment to it.

End Notes:

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. 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.

Works Cited:

Dangle, Arjun. Ed. *Poisoned Bread : Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature*. Hyderabad(India) : OrientBlackSwan Private Limited. 2009. Print.

Nanda, Serena. *Neither Man nor Woman : The Hijras of India*. II. Canada : Wadsworth Publishing Company. 1999. Print.

Website Cited:

Bhattacharya, Snigdhendu. "Kolkata : JU student missing after being shamed on social media for 'misbehaving'". www.google.co.in. 04 Feb. 2017. Web.

<https://www.google.co.in/search?q=sushil+mandi&oq=sushil+mandi&aqs=mobile-gws-lite.0.0l2>. Accessed 18 March 2017.

"Defense mechanism of Freud". www.mskright.com. n.d. Web.

http://www.mskright.com/library_data/106b04fskg.pdf. Accessed 23 March 2017.

Ilaiah, Kancha. "Rohit Vemula, death of a philosopher to purify high education".

m.hindustantimes.com. 20 Jan. 2016. Web.

<http://m.hindustantimes.com/static/rohith-vemula-an-unfinished-portrait/>. Accessed 18 March 2017.

Johari, Aarefa. "Hijra, Kothi, aranavi : a quick guide to transgender terminology". [Scroll.in](http://scroll.in). 17 Apr. 2014. Web.

<https://scroll.in/article/662023/hijra-kothi-aravani-a-quick-guide-to-transgender-terminology>. Accessed 20 March 2017.

Jung, Carl G. "The Concept of the Collective Unconscious". bahaistudies.net. n.d. Web.

<http://bahaistudies.net/asma/The-Concept-of-the-Collective-Unconscious.pdf>. Accessed 27 March 2017.

Zipfel, Isabell. "Transgenderism in India : 'People just use us for sex'". www.theguardian.com.

04 July 2008. Web.

<https://www.google.co.in/amp/s/amp.theguardian.com/world/2008/jul/04/india-gender>. Accessed 19 March 2017.