

What Do They Think about Themselves? Exploring the Realities about Eunuchs in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The study presents an overview of perceptions of eunuchs about themselves through the lenses of exploratory research methodology. Being marginalized section of Pakistani society very less information about them is available. Through semi structured interviews of 104 eunuchs of Pakistan a real fact sheet about eunuchs is established. Findings reveal that although eunuchs are suffering through many problems in the society and they demand a responsible attitude from government and society but they are quite satisfied with in their limited circle of life. Pakistani eunuchs are inarticulate and submissive in their behavior, use abusive language while conversation and emotionally very sensitive. Guru-Chaila relationship defines all the life matter.

KEY WORDS: Transgenders, Pakistan, Perception, Semi structured interviews

INTRODUCTION

Study Background

Society is the basic unit for all the humans living in it that classifies them on the basis of gender (1). Gender is different from sex (2) as gender is named as a lens to see the world (3) while sex is based on the genitals. Gender can be male, female or combination of both (4, 5). Gender is the reflection of behaviors and appearance of someone, while sex is dominated by the anatomy of individual (6). Third sex is a biological term (2) while third gender is a socio cultural phenomenon. People who are neither a male nor a female are named as eunuchs (9). Eunuchs are different from gays, lesbians and bisexuals (6). This is the group which has to perform a third gender role which is totally different from traditional male and female role (7). These people are marginalized by the society (8) with stigma and dealt as a subject of criticism with ill treatment (9).

Eunuchs are also named as inter-sexual or hermaphrodites, who have undefined genitalia organs at the time of the birth. Such people have traits of both sexes male and female (10). Some eunuchs are actually men who castrated themselves mostly at early stage of their lives to have major hormonal transformation (11). Yet in many cases people are unaware about their genital anatomy confusions. They come to know about their confused sex at the time of teenage years when complexities arouse and they have no option to define their sex (12). In high class community such people go for SRS (sex reassignments – surgeries) and hormonal therapies and lead a career oriented life with their gender disabilities (13). In modern world first sexual reassignment surgeries (SRS) were performed in London in 1920 on two homosexuals (4). Due the increase in gender education in West, people are interacting transgender more because they understand gender diversity, as compared to East (8). Yet there are evidences of SRS in East too. Iranian sex change surgeon Dr Mir Jalali is one example of that (14). In Western culture emasculation is a natural act.

Yet the concept of Natural is different in East and West (9). Sex change surgeries are done abundantly in West among transsexuals (15). SRS is not transforming from one sex to another, rather it is the process of fixing one sex according to one's mind (14). In Korean Dynasty it was observed that castrated men live twenty years longer as compared to their peers (16, 17).

Eunuchs have an ancient and complex long recorded history about more than 4000 years old (9). Archeologists discovered five categories of eunuchs in Eastern culture. These are Hindu (*Hijra*), Muslim (*Hijra*), Sumerian (*Enki*), Roman (*Gall*) and Jain / Buddhist (*Napumska*). Roman's god *Cybele* and Hindu *hijra*'s god *Shiva* have a lot of similarities. Eunuchism started from the need to have place in Muslim Royal

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Palaces and gradually spread all over (18). During Mughal empire (1526 – 1857) eunuchs enjoyed their golden time (13, 19, 20). They have strong links to *sufi* (saints) and shrines at that time (21).

Eunuchs, in Sub-Continent culture, are mentioned in “*Kama Sutra*”. From olden days men had special attraction for gender variant men who wear bright and colorful clothes to represent them as women (22). Historians found evidence that sons of *Nizam*, ruler of a city of Sub-Continent, *Hyderabad*, fought with each other to marry a beautiful *hijra* named *Rehman* (19). *Mughals* divided eunuchs in two communities *Badshahwalla* (King’s men) and *Wazirwalla* (Minister’s men), both were highly prestigious families among all eunuchs (21). In the Empire, eunuchs were employed to take care of *harams* and some of them became aide of queens. They held very sensitive and important positions in the palaces and their duty was to guard (23, 24) royal *haram* (25). *Haram* is a term applied to those parts of house where male access was forbidden (26). Engaging eunuchs on these jobs secure the sexual lives of royal wives (27). Eunuchs were sexually harmless to the women of *haram* but could done domestic chores efficiently. They were utilized as a mediating entity between men and women in various circumstances (19, 21). They were considered as a special force and walked in front of the prince’s rides with pride (28). Yet many eunuchs succeeded in climbing social status and getting positions like body guards, confidential advisors, ministers, even general and admirals (19, 21, 29).

After the termination of *Mughal’s* dynasty in Sub-continent, eunuch community suffered a lot. They were criticized for their actions and bodies especially since the British rule in Sub-Continent (9). After 1870, British rulers imposed many laws, including Criminal Tribes Act 1871 and Dramatic Performance Act 1876 which banned eunuchs to work openly and snatched their inheritance and other basic rights. This led them to begging and prostitution as their own families did not accept them (30). Even after Independence, eunuchs do not regain their past eminence (29). Traditionally, they were linked with performing art and performed as temple singers and dancers (20, 31). They also danced at marriage and birth ceremonies to bless fertility. Most of the songs of them were about pregnancy and dances were the reflection of pregnant women (32). Later, when theatre became widespread *hijra* were used in female roles as primarily women were not allowed to perform publicly (33). Hindu kings hired eunuchs as music trainers for their females (34). They remained related to performing art on electronic media of South Asia too (8, 35). In movies, dramas and other programs they are portrayed as beautiful, skilled, entertainers, spiritual and with ritual value of the society (Nergis, S, Personal Communication, September 29, 2013). But gradually they have to lemmatize their activities as people did not even need their prayers now (33). When disrespected, these eunuchs have countless stories of cursing families, of infertility. Families to avoid their nuisance and curse give them money, alms and sweets (4, 9, 13, 21).

In Indo-Pak culture they are not accepted in their own homes (27, 36) and have to bear a cruel reaction from society (9). Most of them are living even below the lines of poverty. They are penalized by the state, declared as criminals, placed at top in wanted lists of police stations and their houses are searched without any reason which destroys their prestige in the society (37). Due to financial scarcity this community yields in sex profession and begging. Although apparently they pretend that their own community discourages such activities (Personal Communication, Reema, 2014, April 24). With the strange sides of blessing and cursing, they adopt prostitution as profession and keep males as their husbands (4, 8). Such bizarre lifestyle may create many health issues but they are well aware of HIV-AIDS and different health concerns (38). Owing to involvement in sexual activities (39), society undermines their highly religious and culturally valued sacred role (40) which also effects their significance in society (9).

Hijra communities have established themselves by adopting those young boys who are excluded or run off their families (37, 39). Majority of them are men who want to gratify their own lust. As lust is considered one of the most influential element for sex between/among men (40). Poverty and sexual penetration by elder men during their adolescence (41) are few strong justifications given by eunuchs to join this community (42). Man who have sex with other man are termed as MSM (43). Some other reasons to become eunuchs are attraction in their society, an easy way to earn money (13), rejection from family (14), fell in love with *hijra* by taking much interests in them due to curiosity, being sold by own parents due to poverty or handed over to *hijra* community out of shame in society (13). The myth that *hijra* community kidnaps the eunuch child from home is not true. All the *hijra* join this community by their own will (44). Yet they are also of the view that they have complete right on any intersexed new born baby (9).

Since longer time, eunuchs are fighting for their identification especially in Indo-Pak societies. In Pakistani society rights are discriminated on the basis of gender by exploiting Islamic laws (45). They were not recognized as national of Pakistan till 2009. When Supreme Court of Pakistan moved an attempt to ensure rights of *hijra* by an order to allow them to identify themselves as a distinct third gender (46) after

eleven months of hearings (13). The initiative of Supreme Court action was the result of the protest of more than hundred eunuchs in front of Secretariat against the illegal charges on them (47). After that many wise eunuchs have activated their activities like leaders (41). Almas Bobby, leader of Pakistan's transgender community fought for their ID card status (48). Resulting that they were given the right of holding ID Card where they can write their third gender instead of men or women (13). Bindiya Rana, another renowned *hijra* established an organization named GIA for the betterment of *hijra* community. She also participated in politics along with other few eunuchs for the first time in Pakistan. They registered them as contestants for election 2013 (49). Yet there is a poor ratio of registered eunuchs in National Database Regulation Authority (46). Pakistan Supreme Court not only considered them as a third gender but also initiate many supportive actions like to be appointed as debt recovery (13). Government was advised to adopt some mechanism like quota for literate eunuchs (41) and to support their fundamental rights. Parents were forbidden to deliver a child to any *guru*. Moreover, *Bait-ul-Mal* and *Benazir* Income Support Programs (Pakistan need based scholarship programs) were bound to support them financially. They were given rights of education, job, sexual security, inheritance right, vocational training and health facility without any fee. Forced castration was also banned by Supreme Court of Pakistan (47). As Islam forbids all human beings to restrain any sort of right of any human being (49).

In spite of orders of Supreme Court in December 2009, eunuchs of Pakistan do not receive their due status (13). There is no single evidence of any sexual minority attaining government job. When they are ill they are placed in male wards and when they commit a crime, they are put in male jail. While traveling they are pushed to male section (47). They also have no access to education, employment and health (30). They want to get education but they are not facilitated by the society and are forced to quit the schools (13, 36). They go for self treatment in case of illness, taking silicon injections and castration without the help of any surgeon (13). The process of castration itself is very painful and inhuman. In most cases this surgery is unhygienic, unscientific and life threatening (50). Eunuchs are facing violence, abuse and rape all over the world. In Pakistan, a eunuch Alisha, working as social activist died after gunshot for six times and then being denied medical treatment at hospital only because of her being a transgender (51, 52). They are deprived of all their basic rights. Although according to law equality is on the basis of citizenship not on the basis of gender yet these laws are firmly violated by the societies in respect to eunuchs (53).

Significance of the Study

Eunuchs are marginalized section of the society, treated as a taboo. Such treatment restricts public not to know about them. Most of the studies conducted on them are from out side. No doubt observation is one of the strongest tool to explore any society. Yet no one can deny that members of the society know very well about them selves. There is very less documented data available, on governmental and academic levels related to eunuchs in Pakistani society. Present study helps further researcher to have a complete demographic data on eunuchs through their own lenses. This will also helpful for general masses to construct a better understanding about gender variant eunuchs with in the social system of Pakistan.

Statement of Problem

Eunuchs do not disclose themselves much in front of others. Society also does not want to know them. All this has created so many confusions about this marginalized section of the society. The basic purpose of the study is to know real stories, routines, backgrounds, life style, problems and sufferings of the eunuchs in Pakistani society through their own point of view. So that a true picture of eunuchs can be drawn.

No research can be conducted in a vacuum. Society is like a social organism, where some part can be less participating than the other. Social science research deals with the social problems with in a society and tries to reform them (54). Eunuchs, being a taboo are neglected in our society and there was no authentic data available about them. So it was necessary to use exploratory cultural analysis for data collection to obtain the objectives of the study. This method needs unbiased approach (55, 56). Cues and patterns were searched instead of evidence. Individuals and groups both were interviewed in their natural atmosphere using so many empirical methods (57). Researcher at a time works as interviewer and observer. Interviewing is the standard method for ethnography in the field (58). After conceptualizing the issues strategies were made. Total 104 eunuchs (by birth, castrated, real men adopting appearance of eunuch) were interviewed through semi structure technique from Punjab, a province of Pakistan (28% from *Multan* (the place of research), 14% *Rawalpindi/Islamabad* (capital of the state) and 12% *Bahawalpur*. Rest belonged to other small areas of the country. Convenient sampling technique was observed with the help of key informer and research suppliers.

- 1- To investigate the original thoughts of eunuchs about them selves.

RQ 1: What is the original thought of eunuchs of Pakistan about themselves?

Eunuchs admit that they are misfit in the broader culture of the society, yet they also claim to be an important part with in this circle. But they are quite very satisfied what the life they are spending. They are very happy in their limited circle. They knew about their century's old roots. Some very old *Gurus* even have records of their territorial rights given by the king of that time. They have these records in the form of copper plates, as these are ancient one. They revealed in discussions that in olden days when there was kingship in the Sub-Continent, eunuchs had a very high status and king has distributed different areas among them as mentioned by Hooda, (21). They collect alms, *badhai*, gifts with in their area. (9), 4 and 13) mentioned in their studies that eunuchs were use to had alms and gifts from specific places. They were bound not to interfere or collect money in any other eunuch's jurisdiction.

Most of them do not know about their families. Yet those who knew said that family members did not want to maintain contact with them. As along with gender problems, they have to bear cruel reaction from their families especially of father. All male members of their family including brother(s) and uncle(s) repel them, scorn at them, beat them and kick them out of their homes. Occasionally, only mother or some time sister(s) meet them. When they have no safe place at home they wander in the streets where people mock at them, tease them and some use them for their sexual desires. They have to face comments, bad talks from the people around them. An enormous eunuch phobia was observed among the public. People felt fear of their curse. Community maintains a bit relation with them but such intimacy could not be disclosed in the society. As society considered them a taboo so having any sort of involvement with taboo defamed some one. Even Pakistani male dominating society enjoyed the company of eunuchs. In dual standard of society to be eunuch was shameful, having societal relation with eunuch is liable, but establishing physical relations and amused in ceremonies by eunuchs is not actionable, yet secrecy should be maintained. This privacy was not for the betterment of eunuchs, rather this was to keep respectable dignities of the society to be honored. All such situation ruined emotional and physiological lives of the eunuchs.

- 2- To establish a real fact sheet about eunuchs in Pakistan on the basis of their own perspective.

RQ 2: What are the names, age, socio economic status, education, profession and living style of the eunuchs of Pakistan?

They all have a male name after their birth, but as they disclose themselves as *hijra*, they opt a feminine name. Mostly this name is of any famous filmstar of Pakistan or India like *Chandni*, *Reema*, *Boby*, *Nergis*, *Mumtaz* etc. Or the name is unusual one that attracts the male gender like *Piari*, *Raseeli*, *Chamki*, *Illaichi*, *Mitthi* etc. Eunuchs do not know about year of birth. An estimated age group of most of eunuchs is late 30s, *guru* ae of late 40s. No child eunuch is found during data collection and very young *hijra* are less in number.

98% of the eunuchs are uneducated due to their low socio-economic status and because they have to bear harsh attitude of class mates and teachers at school as also discussed by Jamil (59) and Tufail, (36) in their researches. So they leave school. 40% of eunuchs can not read even the Muslim religious book *Quran*. They earn money through begging, alms, dancing and performing at different functions. They danced at the parties, marriage ceremonies and child birth especially of a baby boy. They all love to dance and take it passionately. They are trained in dancing by their *guru*. They do their house course like cooking, washing, sewing, cleaning etc because they can not afford to keep servants. They prefer simple food and do not like hoteling due to less income.

Publicly, they got money through dancing. But due to change in societal culture trend of inviting *hijras* on auspicious occasions has been decreased. So they go to private male parties where they also serve as cheapest prostitute. This is a secret and biggest way of their earning. Eunuchs with low socio economic status are surviving only through prostitution and begging. Such life style puts them and their customers at the high risk of HIV/AIDS. MSM community is already declared vulnerable toward HIV/AIDS (43). Very well established and very few eunuchs have different kind of occupations. They are working as business persons, reformers, politicians, property dealers etc.

All eunuchs belong to different area but living at some other places. Their homes (*Khol*) are very small and ordinary. Most of *Chailas* live on rent. Well established *gurus* have their own homes but they are not also so much big. *Guru*'s house or at least his room is fully furnished. Rich *guru* has air conditioner and LED in their rooms. All *guru* and *chailas* have TV set with cable connection in their homes. They considered television as the biggest source of entertainment.

RQ 3: What are the physical characteristics of eunuchs of Pakistan?

Most of the eunuchs are smart and have feminine features included breasts, prominent hips and long head hair. Yet they have broader shoulders, slight hair on beard and moustache, big hands and feet like men. Very few have delicate hands and feet, less facial hair and narrow shoulders. Although their features are womanly, yet their voice is manly. A great majority of eunuchs are very into fashion. Young eunuchs wear excessive make up (*Tarava*) and accessories. Groomed eunuchs are expert in make up. Moreover, high gentry's customers demand well groomed, flamboyant and stylish shemale to present as their special friend. All eunuchs wear girlish dress (*Firqa*), except very senior *guru* who dress up in a simple *kurta shalwar*, a traditional male dress of Pakistan and avoid make up or jewelry. Yet all of them, either *guru* or *chaila*, carry *dupata* with their dress. Eunuchs who belonged to middle economic class were not too much groomed and clean. They dressed up in casual attire, very tight and vulgar dresses. To attract men they often expose their cleavage. Mostly are thin and tall yet the eunuchs of late forty's are obese. They have brown to black hair. Some up to date and young eunuchs have sticking in their hair too, a process of applying hair dyes. Most of them look fair through make up yet have a dull color complexion.

RQ 4: What sort of behavioral characteristics they have?

Eunuchs have strange behavioral traits. Most of the them are inarticulate and submissive. *Guru* is authoritarian, passed the orders and took all decisions while *Chailas* are passive and bound to obey the order of *guru*. Yet among *chailas*, hierarchy is also followed strictly. Senior *chaila* is close to *guru* and junior *chailas* have to follow even the order of senior *chaila*. *Chailas* have no right to argue against *guru*'s instructions. Mostly they are self sufficient and perform their all tasks themselves. They can sew, stitch, cook and even ride a bike at the need of time. Young eunuchs are sexually provocative yet they all pose to be modest. There is a strong jealousy among eunuchs and the biggest factor is a handsome (*Cheesa*) and rich (*Thipar Das*) boy friend (*Giriya*). Latest dresses, lavish accessories and updated make up are also elements of jealousy. They are, mostly, short tempered. They start shouting, clapping speedily and imprecate on very small incidents.

RQ 5: What sort of conversational characteristics eunuchs have?

Language of eunuchs is not refined. They use abusive words during conversation. In manly voices they laugh loudly and clap during their conversation (*Salati*). The young eunuchs are very talkative and spontaneous in conversation. Most of them have no good speaking skills and manners. They use to talk in their own language within their own community they called it *farsi*. They use this language in front of a stranger to keep something secret. The language is not common and difficult to understand for those who are not eunuch. Some example words they used are, *chaska* (tea), *kary karaan* (get a side silently), *firqa* (female dress), *giriya* (boy friend), *cheesa* (handsome man), *cheesi* (beautiful lady), *khilwa khalonda piey* (be ware, that man is drunk) etc.

RQ 6: What are emotional characteristics of the eunuchs of Pakistan?

Being marginalized section of the society eunuchs are emotionally disturbed individuals. Eunuchs are very emotional in nature. They become sad and happy on very small things. They have feeling of isolation from their parents and with in the larger circle of the society because people do not interact with them. In need of any civil requirement they are treated very disgustingly. But the most astonishing, teasing, ridiculing, insulting and humiliating attitude are of police towards them. At police stations they are harassed sexually, physically and verbally. They are burnt by police officers with burning cigarettes. When they have to travel they also face a lot of problems. People especially females did not allow them to sit with. And when they join male portion, situation is even worse as male do flirt and pass vulgar comments. Contrary to all above they do not take pity on themselves. They are quite happy what they are. They have no any regret from their lives or ALLAH to making them so. They take all the things in their lives normal.

3- To find out general information about eunuchs of Pakistan.

RQ 7: What sort of Guru-Chaila Relations exists in this community?

Guru and *Chailas* both are well aware about their duties, responsibilities and rights. They have established their own relationships with in their own community. They name other *chailas* of their own *guru* as their sisters; they call *guru* of *guru* as grand *guru* (*Dad Guru*). *Guru* declare any of her *chaila(s)* as their daughter(s). Mostly *chaila* live with their *guru*. Or even if they were living alone they have to server their *guru* with money. *Guru* is responsible for food, shelter and all basic necessities of her *chailas*, who were living with her. There are

enormous stories of being in the custody of any *guru*. Many say that their parents themselves handed over them to *guru* due to social pressure or financial constraints. Some say that they themselves went to the *guru* after repulsion and rejection from their homes and society and few tell that they were taken by the *guru* as they took birth. Moreover, when any *guru* wants to own any other's *chaila* than she has to buy that *chaila*. They all are reluctant to tell more about their *guru*. They just exposed the name of their *guru* in very general talks. Yet few revealed that *guru* have a very strict control over them. They snatch their all money and beat them, forbid them to meet their families. Every *guru* has its defined territory or area for business. Her *chailas* move in their allotted areas. No eunuch enters in the territory of other eunuch. If someone does so than it is considered as a great offense.

RQ 8: Is there evidence of involvement of eunuchs in sexual activities?

In their early age eunuchs are sexually abused by some one elder around them. And gradually this practice leads them to work as a sexual worker later. Although deviant sexual behavior is not accepted behavior in societies (40). Yet findings of People's Union for Civil Liberties (39) support the findings. As compared to female sex workers in the Pakistani society, eunuchs are easy to access and economical to utilize. And furthermore, Pakistani male dominating society takes it as an adventure. To gratify their lust they establish sexual relations with eunuchs and declare them as their keeps. They even have strict control over their eunuch friend. If the eunuch who is the keep of any male finds involved with some other guy too then the first lover behaves so brutally. A recent example is case of a transgender beaten by her boyfriend (Express, 13 November, 2016). Although eunuchs are involved in prostitution but they don't know about safe sex yet they are fully aware about AIDS and confirm that they use all precautions to prevent AIDS during sex (38). On the other side they refuse to be involved in prostitution.

4- To find out perception of eunuchs about media of Pakistan?

RQ 9: How media is treating eunuchs near to them?

They have a list of complaints against media they say that media is not projecting them as they were. Males, who are performing the role of *hijra* on television screen, are not their representatives. Problems of eunuchs are not highlighted by media neither their real picture is portrayed. Real eunuchs are not criminals, street beggars as shown on screen. They collect *badhaiyan*, alms and donation for their survival. Beggars in streets are actually males in disguise of eunuch. Moreover, media is making fun of them. Maximum presentation of eunuchs is hilariously. Roles which were given to the eunuch characters are negative and tokenistic.

CONCLUSION

There is lack of activism, deep silence on sexualities and covert status of this class which are the obstructions in revealing the realities of eunuchs. Eunuchs are not aliens; they are humans so they should be treated like other humans. Quran says "And indeed we have honored the Children of Adam" (49). Study concludes that being gender variant, they are not treated equally in the Pakistani society. Although in Pakistan women also are not given their due rights like men (45), yet eunuchs are marginalized for their basic needs even. *Guru* has very strong control over the all activities of his *chailas*. They present them more feminine from their name to their appearance as compared to masculine. Most of them are unaware about their real family. They have emotionally disturbed and psychologically complexed personalities.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Researcher recommend following suggestions for further studies particularly and for society generally. Eunuch child has to suffer through mental and psychological problems through out his life. Parents should understand the predicament of the child who is not behaving in a socially accepting way. Such children should be given proper treatment by a psychiatrist/ psychologist or even a surgeon for necessary treatment, whatever is needed. Parents should have a strict control and check over the friend circle of their children. There should be a keen observation on the association of their offspring with elders, in and out of the family. Media should provide eunuchs with rational and emotional liberation on screen instead of pointing out their lives so that society can also accept them. Researcher suggested that if content related to transgender/eunuchs is made part of the curriculum then there are less exaggerated negative attitudes among the people especially youth (3). Government/ local administration should have to take responsibility to provide job opportunities for eunuchs so that they can survive. Government promised for 2% quota for them in government jobs like other minorities but

practical implementation is not seen. There should be firm enforcement of law and strong penalties on forced/self castration. There should be true representation of eunuchs in the parliament so that their representatives can raise voice for their rights.

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