

THE BEGGING HIJRAS OF ISLAMABAD IN THE AGE OF URBANIZATION: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT; *The hijra(s) commonly ridiculed in most parts of the world due to certain misconceptions including questions on their sexual deformity. The South Asian hijra communities have a long history traced back to the harems of Mughal emperors. Pakistan is a home to over a million hijra(s) mostly living below the poverty line and are now commonly seen begging at different traffic signals. The present study was qualitatively designed to study and discuss the issue(s) and problems of begging hijra in the Federal capital territory of Islamabad. Two different points were located and identified for the interview conduct and participation observation. The study is significant as it is debating the impact(s) of urbanization on the overall situation of the hijra community in Islamabad.*

Key words: Transgender, Eunuch, hermaphrodites, Hijra, Urbanization

INTRODUCTION

The term sex is the biological constituent whereas gender is the socio-cultural and psychological component. Social and psychological aspects dimensions of gender are in contradiction with biological or physical aspects. Such conditions dominate the biology and influence the gender role, and also determine the identity of gender. It was further argued that the gender is an affix and people interpret everything through the lens of their decision of what you actually are [1].

Finding outlets for expressing deviant and different behavior and desires is due to the co-production of not acting according to the normative beliefs about gender and sex [2,3]. Forcefully culminate attitude towards deviant especially by family, friends and society may lead to the emergence of small organized support groups where the deviants find appreciation and acceptance regarding their identities and behaviors, these kinds of groups are found with different titles all over the world [1,2].

Different cultures have different set of beliefs about them, in some cultures they are believed to have divine powers and blessings of God [3]. On the other hand some cultures they are taken as neither women nor men, at times not labeled as deviants by occupy respectable positions [4,5].

In Indo-Pak sub-continent, Hijra is an umbrella term mostly used for men who are hermaphrodites, inter-sexed, transgender, eunuch, transvestites, homosexuals or bisexuals [2,6]. Hijras are unique and closely knit groups. On the other hand Nanda explains it as, [4] "He hijras is a third gender role, which neither woman nor man but contains both elements. It can also be explained as impotent inter-sexed man who undergoes emasculation in which all parts of the genitals are removed". Whereas, "Normal male, physically hearty and hale, born with normal testicles and genitals, which may or may not be castrated later and garbs in female attire [2]. It is also important to know that women who wear the clothes of men or try attain the identity of male do not actually fall in the category of hijra.

Pakistan is home to a population of over a million and a half transgender (also called khawaja-sira and hijra in the local language). Historically speaking, khawaja-siras were respected as caretakers of royal harems, masters of art and

culture, and trusted as messengers, watchmen and guardians. Contemporary transgender now live on the margins of the society as entertainers, beggars and sex workers. Hijras are vulnerable in Pakistan because of widespread un-acceptance by the society. In most cases, these people remain extremely vulnerable and secluded from the society and are often repulsed by their own family members. They are consequently faced to join their contemporaries in closely-knit communities of hijras as disciples (chaila) under gurus (as experienced elders in their community are usually called).

Hijra is a unique form of gender role expression in Pakistan. People refer to a man as a hijra who behaves like a woman. The same term is also majorly attributed to abise a man who is womanly, impotent, ineffective, effeminate or whimsical. Hijra community claims the custody of child born with sexual deformity [7]. Hijra strongly portray the identity as individuals who are born with sexual deformity [2].

Hijras of Indo-Pak illustrate their cultural heritage from the Khawaja Sara of Mughal era. Mughals rulers used to hire them to take care of their harems and khawajsaras were eunuchs or hermaphrodites. The attitude towards hijra in Pakistan is not different from most parts of the world, they are treated with biased approach and are mostly discriminated, and are also deprived from education and employment opportunities [2,3,7].

On the other hand Urbanism, increased mobility changing patterns of construction and relaxation of traditional cultural norms yield new patterns of human behavior, which include changes in sexual behavior and the use of illicit drugs. Respondent are also of the view that housing structure(s) are determinates of norms, values and general behavior. But with the passage of time, globalization and urbanization is bringing a drastic change in the patterns of housing structure and with this change people behaviors are also effected [8].

Globalization is being used in academic discourse as an explanation of all social change. "globalization is the development of a truly supranational economic system. Globalization is a generic term used to describe a range of economic, industrial, Social, military, and cultural changes that have created high levels of interdependence, interaction, and integration among different parts of the world, between

people, and between producers and consumers. Globalization along with rapid urbanization increases or even doubles the housing price which forces people to make multiple stories and congested houses; Poor living area due to certain economic reason(s) creates a steady impact on people mental health witnessed in the form and shape of frustration, rude behavior, and hyper tension [9,10].

There is a pervasive pattern of discrimination and prejudice against transgendered people within society. Both economic discrimination and experiencing violence could be the result of a larger social climate that severely sanctions people for not conforming to society's norms concerning gender; as such, both would be strongly associated with each other [11].

In the past sixty years, khawaja siras in Pakistan have faced discrimination and abuse. They have been denied basic human rights, education, health care and respectable job opportunities. "Their story is, or one could easily say 'was,' painful until the summer of 2009," writes Rabail Baig in a recent Foreign Policy article highlighting the recent Supreme Court decisions allowing khawaja siras to register themselves as transgendered on national identity cards and to vote in general elections like other Pakistani citizens. However, the reality of their lives is much harsher than the denial of identity and citizenship by the state [12].

Traditionally, the media has always represented exaggerated stereotypical images of khawaja sira on the television, however a recent news report showed the funeral of a transgender person for the first time in Pakistan's media history. The reporter explains that in the South Asian culture, there are a number of myth's surrounding the burial services of khawaja siras, many people believe that the khawaja sira take their dead to the graveyard at night and bury them standing straight up. The report throws light on an important aspect of transgender life that most South Asians fail to even consider: transgender people are normal human beings like everyone else and follow the same religions, rituals and beliefs as the rest of the society around them [12]. According to an SDPI's report, the continued discrimination and repulsion for the transgender community has left them in poverty and other chronic social evils. They continue to be deprived of basic human rights in Pakistan, including respectable access to services like education, health and job opportunities. Discrimination against them is not structural to a society but largely rooted in how they are perceived as equal members of the society. In most cases, they are widely ridiculed and grossly mocked at even if they try to make efforts towards a decent living for themselves [13].

METHODOLOGY

The present study has focused to explore the issues of impact(s) of urbanization on begging hijra(s) in Islamabad. The study has used the purposive sampling method to select six begging hijra at two different points in Islamabad, hence making a total of 12 in-depth interviews. The three begging points included the Koral (Airport) chowk, and Khana Pul chowk. An in-depth interview was designed to ask open ended questions from the targeted community. The data has been analyzed along with participant observation done at

two different points. The present topic has not been studied in detail before; the study offers insights to the begging hijra and their problems.

FINDINGS

The hijra were found begging at various points in twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. They are usually seen begging at morning times and mostly in the evening till late night. Most of the hijra were found knocking at the car windows asking for money at traffic signals. It was also found that they usually operate in a group of three to four members. They scatter when the traffic stops at the signal and carefully select the potential cars and people to beg from.

Most of the hijra expressed that the rapid urbanization has created a mammoth impact on the general attitude and behavior of the people towards them. It was shared that the hijra were less engaged in begging and even worst begging at traffic signals. One of the hijra respondents clearly stated that "if people allow us to do respected jobs, or at least treat us equally. Why would we beg on roads in harsh weather".

It was also shared that hijra are not just discriminated but also treated harshly with rapid urbanization and changing culture, as one of the respondent argued that "even media ridicule us, how would then the coming generation treat us equally or at least with some kind of respect". Migan Sinnott shared a review of the ways in which the Thai print media presents images of transgendered and/or homosexual identities or what may be termed 'gendered/transgendered sexualities'. The author argues that the varied, and at times contradictory, images of gendered sexualities used by the print media can be understood as discursive devices in broader social debates within Thai society [14].

A group of hijra expressed that they were earlier helped and supported financially by the respective communities. It was also shared that the elderly community members used to give them monthly ration and even used to support in celebrating the new born of the community, their birthdays and were the only source of entertainment at different wedding ceremonies. It was sadly expressed that the urban culture has no space for them and they are pushed to a limit where they are left to beg on traffic signals.

On the other hand a hijra respondent expressed that the urban culture and modern cities do not believe the way the previous generation used to believe in their ability to bless a new born or a newlywed couple. It was further shared that now people have other avenues and people to arrange blessings at different ceremonies. It was argued that people no more call or even invite them in different ultra modern pockets at ceremonies which were earlier incomplete without the blessings of hijra.

CONCLUSION

It was shared that people either call modern models/actresses or entertainers at such ceremonies or the religious people to bless. A group of respondents enthusiastically argued that "we the hijra are the amalgamation of both entertainment and blessings". It was said that the urbanization has created special place for entertainers and religious people and have also created special place, respect and profession for them but the hijra are not even endorsed as equal humans

nowadays. It was shared that they are now socially excluded and the attitude towards them is brutal. It was also expressed that hijra(s) see a dark future ahead with no hope but urbanization creating more economic and social pressures on them.

The findings of a study in Bangladesh also show that as the hijra populations are excluded from all the economic, civil and social rights because of their different gender approach and culture, the social work activists have concerned both the community's quality of life and the social changes to ensure the social inclusion. Therefore, they counsel the community to make awareness about their rights as well as advocate some part of mainstream society in favor of hijra, for instance, neighbor area, hijra family, the policy maker, religious scholars etc. [15].

It was also shared that there is no job market or job quota for them; it was also argued that even if they get a job they are ridiculed and discriminated badly. A study in Bangladesh supports the argument that their deprivations are grounded in non-recognition as a separate gendered human being beyond the male-female dichotomy. Being outside this norm has prevented them from positioning themselves in greater society with human potential and security. They are physically, verbally, and sexually abused. Extreme social exclusion diminishes self-esteem and sense of social responsibility.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The hijra should be considered as a separate identity.
- The hijra should be treated equally as humans.
- The separate identity should be legalized and implemented in public machinery.
- Media should play a sensible and balanced role in protecting the identities of hijra.
- The grass root level organizations should work hand in hand with religious scholars to promote equal rights for hijra.
- Government should implement the job quota for hijra.
- Public service messages should include to respect and bring hijra in mainstream economic market of the country.

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