

Unraveling the Eunuch Myth: Men, Eunuchs, and the Multifaceted Nature of their Roles

Samina Yasmeen¹, Jamil Ahmed Sheikh², Hafiz Shuaib Farooq³

Abstract

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The purpose behind this study is to examine the factors contributing to the prevalence of large number of eunuchs worldwide, with specifically focus on Pakistan. The Eunuchs are marginalized subcultural groups that include those who identified as genderqueer women. Their unique begging techniques, such as slapping their hollow hands together, are one of their strategies to divert others attention towards them. Data for the paper was gathered from 12 semi-structured interviews with Eunuch and three semi-structured interviews with Guru in three Dera locations: Taxila, Wah, and Hasanabdal. Their live experiences were also recorded from childhood to old age across a wide range of settings, such as family, school, Guru, Dera colleagues, the workplace, and encounters with the public. The findings showed that, despite the fact that some of the eunuchs that come out in the market may look or behave in a manner that is often associated with eunuchs, most of them are male, and some of them were even married. They adopt it for economic reasons; however, adopting an artificial female role has caused role conflict in their lives. Traditionally, at household level, a male is supposed to take care of the home, such as finances, and appear masculine, but adopting an artificial female role for the male body increases the complications at social and family levels. The men by the name of Bread Winner have been facing exploitation, pushing them to adopt a character that is culturally and socially forbidden in the Pakistani community.

Keywords:

Eunuch, occupation, role conflict, eunuch myth, dual identification

¹ Associate professor, department of Pakistan studies. Allama Iqbal Open University. Islamabad. samina.yasmeen@aiou.edu.pk

² Lecturer, department of Sociology. University of Wah. Rawalpindi.

³ Senior lecturer, department of Islamic and Pakistan Studies. University of Wah. Rawalpindi.

Introduction:

Generally, the term "sex" is defined as the biological construction of a human being, while "gender" is referred to by social, cultural, and psychological definitions and concepts (Jami, 2005). The biological or physical components of gender are in contrast with the social and psychological aspects. Such factors predominate in biology and have an impact on gender roles, which in turn affect gender identity. Further, it was stated that gender is an affix and that everyone is perceived through the lens of their choice of what they are (Chaudhry, 2014). Most societies in the world have only approved of a binary opposition of male and female. According to Anne, this binary opposition is culturally constructed, but it is not natural. She has divided sex into five categories, namely: male, female, hermaphrodite, ferm, and merms (Anne, 2000).

People who do not fit the male or female definitions of gender are referred to as "Khwaja Sira" in South Asian languages. Their sexual inclination makes them social misfits (Ahmed, 2014). Normally, Hijra is an umbrella term that encompasses a wide range of gender identities and expressions, including transgender men, eunuchs, transvestites, hermaphrodites or intersex people, bisexuals, and homosexuals (jami, 2005). Eunuch appears to be a large, unattractive person who dresses in high-tone clothing and makeup (facial hair is visible), has large hands and feet, and engages in nonverbal behaviors such as dirty jokes, clapping, using vulgar language, and gesticulating with disproportionate movements of specific body parts. There are three different kinds of eunuchs: hermaphrodites, who are born intersex or with mixed genitalia; transsexuals, who undergo castration and subsequently turn into eunuchs; and transvestites, who are male but have a feminine sexual orientation and dress and behave like women (Ahmed, 2014). Whereas, Hijra people are often considered physically and psychologically ambivalent because they do not conform to traditional gender roles. This ambivalence can lead to them being stigmatized and marginalized by society (Jami, 2005).

Eunuchs or "Khwaja Sira" communities existed in almost every part of the world, each with their own distinct identity, customs, and rituals. The subcontinent's history revealed the presence of a distinct power of the eunuch community (Ahmed, 2014). Eunuchs were used for a variety of purposes throughout the world. In royal palaces, some of them held positions of great authority. In the past, slaves or servants were castrated to make them more obedient members of the royal court, where proximity to the sovereign could have significant political consequences. As reliable servants, they used to perform household tasks such as preparing the ruler's bed, bathing him,

cutting his hair, escorting him to the bathroom, and even delivering messages. Eunuchs were often seen as more trustworthy and less likely to establish a private "dynasty" because they were thought to have no loyalty to the military, the nobility, or their own family—at the very least, they had no children or in-laws. They were also employed among the women of the household, or in harems or janankhana, to serve and protect them (Sindhe, 2012).

Castration has historically been used for social or religious reasons in several societies, particularly in South Asia, Africa, and East Asia. There are two perspectives on the castration practice, but they are opposites of one another. Castration was a harsh penalty used by battle conquerors to weaken and disable their adversaries. The Byzantine state also applied it as a form of death punishment. Castration was frequently used as a victory sign in warfare. In order to prove their supremacy and prevent them from engaging in subsequent warfare, the victorious party would execute their captives. Castration may additionally be utilized to impede an opponent by restricting them from growing and reproducing. Before being put to death, captives who were sentenced to the capital verdict were frequently castrated.

In the Mughal the Monarchy, eunuchs were highly regarded and had important responsibilities in the imperial palace. This was owing to the fact that they were seen as trustworthy and loyal, and they did not interfere with the monarch's power. Several poor families would even castrate their sons in order to use them as eunuchs in court. This was considered as a way to guarantee his son's peaceful childhood and simultaneously offering a sufficient source of income for his family (Sindhe, 2012). In the seventeenth century, eunuchs were given precedence over women in some roles, such as serving in the emperor's harem. This was due to the assumption that eunuchs were more pure, robust, liable, and intelligent than women. According to the scholar Gerardus, eunuchs were chosen for bedroom duties because they were seen to be more cautious and respectful towards women (Gerardus, 1662).

During the Sui Dynasty, when severe traditional penalties such as the death sentence and castration were popular, a comparable contradiction existed in Chinese culture. Castration was additionally regarded as a symbol of status within the royal palace. On the one hand, it constituted a standard penalty that depicted someone's death. On the other hand, it was a way to get employment, power, and decision-making authority in the king's court (Schneider, 2009).

Among South Asian countries, a subcultural group known as Hijras consists of people who identify as female souls and who are gender-variant. Commonly known as "Khwaja Sira." It is crucial to

emphasize the trans local and regional nature of the Hijra group, as it covers several regions of South Asia. Hijras, who are often illiterate and underprivileged, are found in working-class areas of South Asia, where they are generally accepted. However, they frequently encounter animosity from respectable middle and upper classes who reject them because of their low social position and stereotype them as being cheap, garish, and noisy (Mokhtar, 2020).

It is believed that eunuchs in India desire to be recognized as women, or at the very least as having a unique fondness for female sex. They are also known as "Hijras," and they are thought to act in this way rather than as men. Although some eunuchs have been seen wearing men's attire, most of them dress in saris or salwar-kameez, traditional women's clothing. They also all wear a bra, which is almost certainly padded. Eunuchs are addressed using feminine kinship names like "aunty" and "sister" (Lal, 1999).

People who are Hijras or Khwaja Sira in Pakistan often conceal their identities. Their true identity is obscured by myths and misleading portrayals. They may claim to be hermaphrodites or intersex at times, and assert that they are the third gender. Then, because they are men, they take on the role of a woman to represent womanhood (Jami, 2005). It is commonly perceived in Pakistan that Hijras/Khwaja Sira are those individuals who are born with sexual deformities. However, a study conducted by Zafar in 2004 on the data of 295 participants collected from 9 cities of Pakistan found that this is a misconception. According to the study, only 50% of respondents said that hijra/Khwaja Sira are born with sexual deformities. The remaining 46% believe that they are both hermaphrodite/intersexed and males who behave like females, and 4% believe that they are only men who behave like women. The number of those born with sexual deformity in the hijra community is actually as low as 1% (Zafar, 2004).

One of the major reasons why Khwaja Sira in Pakistan often conceal their identities is because the family, biradari, clan, and community are the basic institutions of social protection and social cohesiveness. Due to the rupture of these institutions, the Khwaja Sira community faces a lack of access to education, socioeconomic protection, legal protection, and medical healthcare. The expulsion of Khwaja Sira is multidimensional, including socio-cultural, economic, and political factors. The subjugation of particular norms, behaviours, cultural traditions, and lifestyles that exclude particular people or groups is referred to as having socio-cultural elements of exclusion. Socio-political characteristics of exclusion include restricted access to institutions, constitutions, laws, and policymaking as well as a lack of voting and citizen rights. The analysis of Eunuch's

experiences will also make use of this multidimensional model of social exclusion. Discrimination based on gender orientation is a direct relationship between exclusion and rights. Minority racial, religious, and linguistic groups, as well as those with disabilities, are sometimes referred to as excluded groups by researchers (Khan et al, 2009).

According to extensive research, the Khwaja Sira community has faced a number of discriminatory practices in their cultural context. Hijras in Pakistan by (Rehan et al. 2009) divert attention from the abnormal sexual behaviors that risk the lives of transgender people and those who have sex with them due to HIV transmission. According to similar studies published by PNACP (Pakistan's National AIDS Control Program) in 2007, the Hijra sex workers (HSWs) are among the high-risk populations who are exposed to HIV infection through unprotected sexual intercourse and several sexual partners. Other studies, including those by de Lind van Wijngaarden, Schunter, and Iqbal (2012) and Mayhew et al. (2009), have shown that the Hijras experience severe forms of discrimination, sexual exploitation, and abuse as a result of their label as homosexual prostitutes. They are also viewed as social outcasts and viewed as immoral, and they are subjected to abuse and stigma. Lastly, the Islamic Sharia forbids homosexuality, and same-sex partnerships are prohibited in Pakistan. Castration is also prohibited in Islam because Muslims believe that God gave humans the potential to reproduce (Alizai, 2016).

Objectives:

- Why there is a large number of eunuchs in our society.
- The attitude of the people towards eunuchs.
- How the number of eunuchs is linked with socio-economic conditions.
- The diverse range of roles and contributions of men who identify as eunuchs in contemporary society.

Research Methodology

A convenience random sampling method was used to collect data for this paper. A total of 15 respondents participated out of 101 in the study, including 12 eunuchs and 3 Gurus who were interviewed face-to-face at three sites: Dera Taxila, Wah, and Hasanabdal. An additional focus group discussion (FGD) with respondents was also conducted at the Dera of Guru.

Results and discussion

The eunuch community in Pakistan is governed by a system of social relations known as the Guru-chela system (master-disciple). Each eunuch community resides in a Dera, which is managed and supervised by a Guru (senior eunuch). The Guru also acts as the supervisor of the other younger eunuchs, and is responsible for maintaining the social network of the eunuch community and connecting it with other Deras in the city. The Guru is also the keeper of the community's secrets, and knows everything about each member, from birth to death. For example, the Guru would know whether a particular member was a true hermaphrodite or had undergone castration or emasculation.

The Guru is responsible for the proper socialization, supervision, and direction of the newest members throughout their lives. They take care of the junior members and live with them like family, with love and respect. The Guru's duties include feeding, clothing, safety and security, mediating during conflict, and even performing death rituals when no one else is available. This is why all eunuchs respect and listen to their Guru.

The concept of eunuch is a schism between the cultural concept of gender, sexual orientation, one's social role, gender identity, personal identity, and one's life experience. There are several ways to interpret this disjunction. For example, eunuchs in Pakistan often work as traditional performers and engage in sexual and begging activities. In addition, it is acknowledged culturally that Khwaja Sira people are neither male nor female, but rather possess a female soul. Studies have shown that individuals whose sexual significance is psychological rather than biological may choose the eunuch role and identity. This means that it does not matter if they are biologically or naturally male or female, but rather it is dependent on the soul, which could be female or male. The psychologically powerful desire that leads someone to be a female, especially in a patriarchal society like Pakistan, is difficult to understand.

Furthermore, the Guru reported that they refused to take on any roles or participate in any activities that were related to their birth gender almost from the start. However, they altered or provided meaning, direction, and definition to roles and responsibilities according to their psychological soul. Therefore, it is the soul that plays an important role from very early childhood. In the FGD,

a few respondents reported that they were involved in household activities such as washing clothes and utensils, cleaning the house, and using cosmetics. Later in life, they even wore and adopted culturally constructed women's roles and even behaved like women. Additionally, removing body hair gave a feminine touch to the body, which was manifested in their movements, feminine behavior, speaking style, and even shyness.

Eunuchs perform various activities. The Guru stated that performing at weddings is their primary source of income. From the mehndi to the wedding, these eunuchs are involved in a variety of activities. For example, on the day of mehndi, they perform late-night dances in the male sphere. A respondent reported that normally, after a combined mehndi event with women, a separate arrangement is made outside of the home. Normally, the arrangement is organized by the groom's friend. A few respondents also narrate that at these events, some illicit and sexual activities are also performed. In return, they receive a handsome amount.

Begging is also a part of their profession, especially when they get older and can't perform any other duties. The basic technique they use to gain people's attention is to clap loudly. The Guru reported that their sharp, hollow clapping is two-dimensional: on the one hand, it quickly conveys their presence and orientation to ordinary people. On the other hand, it allows them to assess whether a person is likely to help them based on their facial expressions and other attributes. Thus, the clap both diverts people's attention and carries coded internal messages (an extension of their physiological identity). In contrast to the typical applauding clap, which uses a vertical palm and closed fingers, the eunuch clap is a distinct horizontal flat palm striking against and perpendicular to each other.

During research, it was found that the number of actual hermaphrodites is far lower than the number of eunuchs in Pakistan. There are two main arguments received on why there are so many eunuchs in Pakistan. The first argument is that poverty compels many men from rural areas to join this profession. Their low socio-economic status forces them to do so. The second argument is that eunuchs are fundamentally different, or that their sexual orientation and child-rearing practices are predominantly of the opposite gender.

A key informant reported that some eunuchs engage in these activities for financial gain. For example, it was found during studies that some of them were married, had children, and even supported their families. However, some of them divorced as a result of their jobs, physical changes, and participation in transgender and sexual activities.

In an interview with a Guru, he supported the first argument and said that if they are by birth, a female soul, and it has nothing to do with money. This raises several questions. Why do mostly poor people come into this profession? Why get married and have a child as well? Why do most people divorce while only a few do not? Why are they mostly not declared in their own region and working there? Why did most people join this profession later on? Why are they involved and interested in homosexuality? Etc.

Rehan, a 21-year-old male, has five sisters. He has three older sisters and two younger sisters. He was raised with his sisters, and his parents did not allow him to go outside the home. From childhood, he played with his sisters and was involved in all sorts of activities that were considered women's domain. Later, he found that his dressing, talking, and even thinking patterns were just like women's. His father pushed him a lot to change himself and behave like a man. He argued that as he continued to act femininely throughout his teens, most of the family members had abusive and harsh behavior. He felt that his family's behavior was inappropriate and deviant in comparison to his other siblings. They initially encouraged his feminine behavior and then stigmatized and refused it. However, he was not satisfied by a male company, and a female company would not allow him to enter their domain as his age passed. He ran away from home at the age of 16 and began living at a Dera, where the Guru accepted him. While serving at the Dera for several years, he felt unsatisfied.

Ismail, a 27-year-old man narrated his life story consists of misery. He was an individual striving to earn money to survive and support his family, but he had to deal with prejudice and difficulty. Due to his interactions with transgender people, he abandoned his job and failed to discover another one. To make enough money to survive, he had no other option other than to perform at weddings and beg, and he still only made barely enough. In order to become a member of the eunuch group and earn a more reliable income, he was ultimately obliged to castrate himself.

It was also discovered during the investigation that around 39% of the Khwaja Sira interviewed were married, and of these situations, 17% had submitted paperwork seeking separation. When asked why certain men had never separated from their partner whereas others had, they answered that they had been forced by circumstance to do so or that they were aware they had a kid and could relate to the difficulties that women go through following a divorce. Divorced women in Pakistani culture are frequently stigmatized and have trouble getting a job and a place to live. Additionally, Khwaja Siras are frequently in charge of supporting their families because women and children require money to be taken care of.

According to some Khwaja Sira, there are several reasons why they get divorced or do not frequently meet with their partners, children, or families. For instance, they claim that in terms of their activities and viewpoints on their physical appearance, their look is more similar to that of women than that of ordinary males. Furthermore, they argue that as they are involved in activities like dance and entertainment, they are unable to offer their spouses and kids the time and affection they deserve. This is because they often discover it harder to portray their family publicly owing to their appearance. As a consequence of this, they frequently get criticized by community.

A guru who works with Khwaja Sira has said that they often engage in activities that are associated with being a woman, such as styling their hair, applying makeup, wearing jewelry and dressing in colorful clothing. However, he points out that these activities are socially constructed, not biologically determined. He also notes that in Pakistani society, children are born into a patrilineal society and are expected to participate in societal decisions. Therefore, it is difficult to understand how a child raised in this way could have a female side

The study also elaborates that about 26.7% of those who join this profession do so for economic reasons. Others generally claim that the percentage of other souls was around 43%. However, the main reason is that they are brought up in this environment at a young age and socialized as female, through female perception and shaping their bodies in a specific way. Particularly in Punjab, the emergence of the ingredient in marriage is considered to be the rendering of the services of the 'dancer' specifically for men. In this ceremonial event, the groom's best friend arranges a kind of party, which is called a 'eunuch party'. Where mostly young married and unmarried people participate in and enjoy the dance party. Normally, this party is conducted near the groom's home,

fully furnished with sound and completely covered. It is normally not accepted and forbidden socially and culturally to have relationships with them or to eat and talk with them. However, this event creates a space for them in society. To make marriage colorful and enjoyable, people invite and render the services of a eunuch. Though this is a temporary relationship, it mediates the interaction between the community and the eunuch. Both of these relationships are not based on respect or matters of honor, but rather they are based on exploitation and money. We could call it a 'master-slave' relationship, where the owner exploits its partner on the basis of the economy. Because much of the economy and life revolve around these kinds of functions, the other partner accepts and allows it most of the time. This exploitation sometimes exceeds that which has been set and for what they paid for, such as sexuality, for example. However, in any case, it is a capitalist society in which a small additional amount or threat to these eunuchs works a lot to end these activities. In addition to that, eunuchs do not even have the right to file a lawsuit against someone, as doing so requires paying a fee or, in other words, sharing their share with other parasites.

There is another factor. The commencement of female eunuchs in this profession has weakened the status of male eunuchs compared to a few years ago. There is also confusion about whether they are female eunuchs or female sex workers. However, the entry of female eunuchs has minimized the earnings of male eunuchs. This has had two effects: first, people prefer female sex workers; second, it has degraded the value of male worker. A Guru of these male eunuchs reported that they rarely advance and only earn around 3,000 to 5,000 rupees, which only covers the cost of the vehicle. The real earnings depend on "while". While the earnings of female sex workers range from 50,000 to 150,000 rupees, depending on their age. As a result, they are forced to beg, in addition to dancing.

During the FGD, it was disclosed that the community overall does not openly accept them, but they are called out during weddings, mostly in the male sphere. According to Hindu tradition, they steal bad luck. In the same way that they steal bad luck, they can also put a curse on anyone, and we are almost following the same traditions. They demand cash, and people are obliged to pay them cash or be subjected to obscene gestures and profane language. As a result, most people avoid using profane language and gestures and instead pay them money.

Conclusion:

Eunuchs in Pakistan have historically been marginalized and discriminated against. They have less space in our sociocultural, economic, and political realms. Traditional social structures do not allow them to enjoy the power and privileges enjoyed by other segments of society. For example, the eunuch community has less access to socio-cultural, legal, educational, and health care services. Political, economic, and sociocultural factors all rule out Eunuch's contribution and even existence, and he is regarded as "abnormal" and alien. The study concluded that the Eunuchs have been subjected to severe deprivation, alienation, and hostility since they were earlier excluded and isolated from main stream society. This is a serious problem that needs to be addressed. There are a number of things that can be done to improve the lives of eunuchs in Pakistan, including:

- Increasing awareness of the challenges faced by eunuchs and challenging the stigma associated with them.
- Providing eunuchs with access to education, employment, and healthcare.
- Ensuring that eunuchs have equal rights under the law.
- Creating safe spaces for eunuchs to live and work.

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