

Being a Third Gender: Boon or a Bane in Kamala Das's 'The Dance of Eunuchs'

Ashish Aggarwal

Research Scholar

Department of English

Central University of Himachal Pradesh

Abstract

Life for eunuchs is not easy at all. Though they are like any other normal human being but the behavior which society generally carries for them is beyond the belt and quite unacceptable. They are not treated with due respect and are abhorred to the core of the heart. Through this paper here the researcher tends to highlight the kind of miserable life they lead and what all initiatives as society we need to take in order to make their lives worth living.

Keywords: eunuchs, initiatives, tranquility, behavior, abhorred.

Introduction

They too have dreams

They too have hopes

They too have aspirations

So why not give them a chance too!

Humans are a benign blessing by the almighty. They are created with immense talent, creativity in order to reach and touch the zenith of success. But quite sad is the reality as they misuse this talent and benediction in quite a wrong way by discriminating few beings on the basis of superiority and inferiority as per their convenience. Eunuchs is one such category which is the prey to the discrimination, as according to the society that we all inhabit, they do not fall into the

normal ambit of sexuality. Our society only believes in so called 'compulsory heterosexuality' which is often quoted by Adrienne Rich. This so called pseudo sexuality gives importance to only two kind of sexualities ie; male and female. The one falling out of this sexual ambit is conveniently without any logic branded as 'pervert' or 'deviant' in nature. We need to remember that we all are born naked and equal and rest is all drag which is also highlighted by Ru Paul in the book *Beyond the Binary* which is stated as- "We're all born naked and the rest is drag"(1). We have forgotten this notion and we have restricted our thinking deep only till the binaries like a glue which has almost sidelined and marginalized other creations of the universe .The notion of 'binaries' has seeped down up to such an extent that we have almost forgotten our humanity and gave gone to the lowest rung of the ladder degrading humanity to its fullest.

When it comes to the eunuchs our society has forgotten the times when they were treated with quite a respect and were accorded various prestigious positions in the courts of Mughals. They were kept as guardians of the queens in chambers and were trusted a lot. As they were sexually harmless and they could not procreate due to this, they were trusted a lot. Even though during the Mughal times they were not given lot of rights which they deserved but still their condition was quite better than it is today in the modern context.

The kind of behavior which society today holds for the community of transgender is nothing but a colonial hang over which is left and which we need to shed out as individuals. We often keep on beating the drum of dichotomy which was made a compulsion by the Britishers mainly when they colonized India. But at the same time we need to realize this that they have gone and left us way back and we cannot keep on blaming them and rather should start working on our individual selves first and then try to bring a change in the society further. We need to realize that gender is not everything and we need to build a pluralistic society wherein everyone needs to be respected as an individual first rather than respecting gender first and then the person. The same thing has been highlighted by Nancy Nangeroni in the book *Queer Quotes* wherein she says-

"It is not gender which causes problems; rather, it is the imposition of a gender on an individual by another. When the imposition is removed, polarity of masculine and feminine may remain, but as personal preference rather than imposed imperative."(110)

The quote above stated in itself highlights that we need to shed off the restriction of imposition of certain rules and then the society automatically will become a better place to live in. In the 'The Dance of Eunuchs' Kamala Das too has tried to bring forth the fate of the community of eunuchs by highlighting the painful trajectory of their lives. The poem also seems to be a confessional sort of poem which highlights the pangs of her unhappy married life. As she was married at quite an early age, she was not at all happy in her life. In the poem here she has tried to compare her fate to that of eunuchs which is full of sufferings. She tries to tell how even her life was like a bane or curse like eunuchs as it was full of depression and sufferings.

In the poem she brings forth the pitiable condition of eunuchs how they have to dance their hearts out in order to entertain people, themselves being quite sad from inside. They have to get ready and walk in hot summers outside with tinkling bells in their feet in order to feed their bellies. They have to go from door to door in order to beg and entertain people by dancing. Most of the times they have to pretend to be happy and maximum times they are even mistreated. Through this we can also infer how hypocritic as society we are because when we need them to bless the newly born we often call them and when we do not need them, then we kick them off our doors! This thing in itself highlights and makes one to think that whether their existence is boon or a bane because we tend to use them as per our convenience. Also when they come to the houses for Badhai when a newly born infant is born or on some wedding, then this also shows their helplessness that they can never become mothers or go for wedding themselves in their lives. Also due to this thing they often dance with the heavy hearts beating their chests and the songs which they sing are sad in tone due to their sad and incomplete fate.

In the second half of the poem she tells us the harsh condition which they go through in life. Eunuchs do not have roofs over their heads and two square meals to feed themselves properly. Often their songs and voices are harsh like the sound of crow and they cry for their lovers mostly who have cheated them or left them after using them. As a result they mostly spend their lives in 'vacant ecstasy'. Also the poet uses the imagery of half-burnt logs from funeral pyre which indicates their life to be half burnt like a deceased body and their wretched condition being compared to a malnourished person. Further also their life has been compared

to a barren or dry land which is often hit by a drought of opportunities in life and their lives stand deserted like sand dunes.

In the last section of the poem the poet uses the imagery of crows which also sat silent on the trees when eunuchs came to beg. This also means that even the birds were silent seeing their fate as their fate was much more doomed than them also. The children who were around also mocked seeing them which in general is quite common on daily basis also. At the end of the poem the poet says that there was a downpour or shower of rain which gave solace to the souls of eunuchs and it saved them from the scorching heat also, but at the same time also harmed them as they could not dance and beg then due to it. Thus in nutshell this rain which comes at the end can also be compared to 'The Wasteland' which is one of the most famous poems by T.S. Eliot wherein he says that rain provided solace to all the miseries of the life at the end. The rain in 'The Wasteland' came like a balm on the souls or wounds of the people inhabiting this modernistic era. Similarly this rain can be seen as a healer in the case of eunuchs too, which would put an end to their sufferings.

Conclusion

In nutshell through this paper the researcher has tried to delve deep into the modern context or situation of the eunuchs. The need of the hour is to respect them as they are humans too and we need to develop an inclusive approach where every creation of the universe is equally respected. Laws and regulations are trying their best to safeguard them but it is equally the responsibility of society also to respect them and safeguard them and give them their due!

Works Consulted

B. Leitch, Vincent, General Editor. *The Norton Anthology: Theory and Criticism*. W-W. Norton & Company, Inc, 2001.

Benett, Andrew and Boyle, Nicholas. *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*. Routledge, 2016.

Theophano, Teresa. *Queer Quotes*. Beacon Press, 2004.

Thurer, Shari. *Beyond the Gender: Essays on Gender*. Phoenix, 2023.