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Portrayal Of Eunuchs In Bollywood

Hands clapping, gruff and hoarse voices singing in unison, teasing the heroine or the villain with lewd remarks and gestures, mainly to support the hero or on his behalf – this is how eunuchs are generally portrayed in Bollywood movies. They bear the brunt of crude jokes and are generally shown as buffoons and objects of ridicule.

In mainstream Hindi cinema, eunuchs have so far existed more as clowns than humans with hearts. During the so-called 'Golden Era' of Bollywood, i.e. the period from mid 50s to mid 60s, eunuchs were generally shown as companions to heroines, similar to those of queens in harems. Some of the cast, either lowly rated comedians or even lead actors, would cross dress with deliberate crudity, so as not to be mistaken for women but be clearly identifiable as eunuchs, in an attempt to evoke laughter. Even the legendary actor Amitabh Bachchan has been guilty of this offence. One can easily remember his '*Mere angane mein*' number from the 1981 super hit *Lawaaris*. The late Prakash Mehra, producer and director of the film, went to great lengths to make the megastar look as ugly, repulsive and bizarre as possible in that song. From the star's exaggerated

histrionics, flashy makeup and lewd gestures, it was clear that he was not trying to act like a woman but was actually mimicking a eunuch. Barring a few examples, the scenario has not changed much as yet, be it Govinda in *Aunty No 1* or Ajay Devgan, Tushar Kapoor etc in *Golmaal Return*. The majority of Bollywood actors are guilty of portraying eunuchs in a highly demeaning manner. Such movies might be entertaining to watch but are they fair in their treatment of eunuchs?

It was the late comedian Mehmood who, for the first time, represented eunuchs in a respectable manner in his blockbuster *Kunwara Baap*. He turned the tide, using real eunuchs for a longish song and dance number in this movie. Perhaps, for the first time ever, *hijras* were happy to be a part of a Bollywood movie, never mind if it was just one loud song in a lengthy film.

After the liberalisation of 1991, the scenario changed a little bit for the better. A new breed of rebellious movie makers represented eunuchs as normal human beings and not as clowns. For the first time in the history of Bollywood, movie maker Mahesh Bhatt cast actor



Sadashiv Amrapurkar as the vile and inhuman 'Maharani'

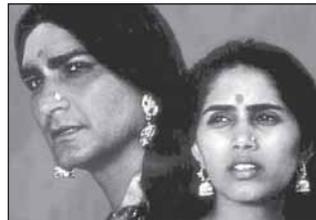
Sadashiv Amrapurkar as 'Maharani', a eunuch who was the lead villain of the movie *Sadak*. The portrayal fetched the actor the coveted Filmfare award but the role did little to improve the image of eunuchs in society, since Maharani in *Sadak* came across as a

vile, inhuman specimen. Once again, the rebel in Mahesh Bhatt showed courage and he made the much appreciated *Tamanna*, based on the actual life of a eunuch, 'Tiku'. The role was enacted brilliantly by the versatile Paresh Rawal. The character underscored the fact that often, people born genetically as men may be physical embodiments of manhood but in their hearts and souls, they are not man enough to do their duties. Tiku was more of a man than all the men put together in the film, yet had to bear the taunts of his own community, in addition to the harassment by 'normal' folk. However, in contrast to this stellar role, Rawal has also been guilty of mocking eunuchs, through his role as a pseudo eunuch in a scene in Umesh Mehra's multistar debacle *Vardi*.



Rawal portraying the human aspect as 'Tiku'

Kalpana Lajmi's *Darmiyan* was a brave effort, which was based on the relationship of a mother, an actor by profession and her eunuch child. The roles were effectively portrayed by Kirron Kher and the late Nirmal Pandey. Mani



A still from the movie '*Darmiyan*'

Ratnam's *Bombay* was also such a film, which showed that a eunuch can be tender as well. In a touching scene from this movie, based on the 1992-93 communal riots of Mumbai, one of these often ridiculed souls offers shelter to twins born to a Hindu father and a Muslim mother.

Through this well sketched scene, Mani Ratnam proved a point that this was the only human being who was not bothered about community or religion.



'Shabnam Mausi', the eponymous movie based on a eunuch MLA

In recent times, movies like *Shabnam Mausi* and *Welcome to Sajjanpur* were landmark films, in the sense that they showed eunuchs as clean politicians, mirroring real life incidents of eunuchs winning elections. It is a common feeling that the whole political class is

corrupt. The cause of this corruption is greed, to provide best of the world to near and dear ones. On the contrary, eunuchs who do not have families to feed or children to support, can be very good politicians, devoid of any lust or greed.



'Welcome to Sajjanpur' portrays an honest eunuch politician

Queens! Destiny Of Dance, is a movie that portrays aspects of the *hijra* community, without resorting to the cheap gimmickry that has characterised the portrayal of eunuchs in Bollywood for the most part.



Queens! Destiny Of Dance

The movie features actor Seema Biswas and eunuch Laxmi Narayan Tripathi in pivotal roles.

Launched at the 799th Urs of Sufi saint *Khawaja Moinuddin Chisty* in Ajmer on June 12, 2011, '*... Aur Neha Nahin Bik Payee - Life Of A Eunuch*' is an anecdotal documentary about eunuchs, the misery that they have to endure, living as bonded labourers and how they are traded like cattle . The film traces the life of eunuchs and depicts the harsh reality that is the fate of eunuchs, yet sensitively portrays their human side and their hopes and desires, similar to that of common folk. The film has been made by Salvation Of Oppressed Eunuchs, an NGO working for the upliftment of eunuchs in India.

While sympathy towards eunuchs is a recent one or two decade old phenomenon in Bollywood, its western counterpart, Hollywood has always been more or less sympathetic to the community. Movies like 'Between the Lines - India's Third Gender', 'India's Ladyboys', 'Bombay Eunuch', 'Butterfly Sword', 'Eunuch of Western Palace', 'Harem', 'Better than Chocolate', 'Big City Blue', 'Buffalo Girls', 'Just Like a Woman', 'Lai Shi', 'China's Last Eunuch', 'The Half Naked Truth' etc portrayed the cause of eunuchs and TG/TS people in a far more sensitive manner.