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Hijra/Hijrin:
Language and Gender Identity

by

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University of California at Berkeley

1995

Hijra/Hijrin: Language and Gender Identity

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by

Kira Anne Hall

For Anna Livia

आज मैंने अपना इतिहास दफनते देखा है
और उसकी मजार पर
नाचते हुए देखे हैं
पचपन करोड़ हिजड़े

Today I have seen my history being buried

and over its grave

I have seen dancing

550 million hijras.

                    -Ved Prakash 'Vatuk' (1977)

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Acknowledgements

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CHAPTER 1

Gender Identity and Linguistic Appropriation

In the collection *The Last Sex: Feminism and Outlaw Bodies,* cross-dresser Shannon Bell (1993) discusses her masculinity training at the "Drag-King For-A-Day" workshop, a course held at the Annie Sprinkle Transformation Salon in New York City. During this eight-hour course, women students from a variety of classes, races, and ethnicities are taught how to "pass" as men, or in more postmodern terms, how to "construct" themselves as male in their everyday interactions. The instructors—among them Dianne ("Danny") Torr, a New York performance artist and gender critic, and Johnny Armstrong, a female-to-male cross-dresser and editor of the transgender magazine *Rites of Passage*—offer their clients a crash course on the male semiotic system, teaching them how to perform male gesture, dress, and speech style. Linguistic training is a central focus of the course; the instructors devote a significant portion of the eight-hour day to teaching students how to acquire what they call "men's language." Indeed, this focus is central to the course's own advertising campaign, which asserts, as in the following excerpt from an advertising flyer, that the mastering of male "gestures, phrases and tones-of-voice" is necessary to the creation of a male persona[1]:

> We will teach you simple, repeatable techniques for changing your appearance and creating your own male persona. Moustache, 5 o'clock shadow, bushy eyebrows and flat chest are easily achieved. You will pick a new name, and VOILA! you're ONE OF THE BOYS! You will also learn specific gestures, phrases and tones-of-voice; and you'll be coached on the best ways to convincingly:

DRESS/ACT/TALK/WALK/STAND/MOVE/DANCE/ETC. LIKE A REAL MAN! (Bell
1993:92)

Language, or rather, the acquisition of men's language, similarly becomes central to
Bell's discussion of her Drag-King-for-a-Day experience. In recounting her training at
the Salon, Bell identifies men's language as a language of power, listing a variety of
intonations and vocal qualities which represent, and indeed create, masculinity. Bell
explains that the trainer Torr, whom she characterizes as having "an authoritative low
commanding voice," taught her to slow down her speaking rate and change her
intonation: "Take all the time in the world, talk low, say few words" (92). Through this
linguistic training, Torr claims, her instructor was able to show her "how to stroll into a
room as a man, how to sit, how to hold power, just hold it."

At one point in her essay, Bell recounts Torr's discussion of the "quintessential
male," a person who, in Torr's opinion, is able to project authority and command respect
through gesture and voice alone. Oddly enough, Torr chooses George Bush as her
representative of quintessential male power, urging her students to study and appropriate
his system of gesture and voice. Bell explains:

> Who was Torr's inspiration for the "quintessential male"? President Bush. In the
> circle of power that we as a group form to talk about being male, Torr tells us
> about her study of quintessential male power. "I looked at Bush's State of the
> Union address over and over again. I wanted to see what it was that he was doing
> with his body so that he could convey a sense of importance and authority while
> the content of his speech itself was idiotic. (If you remember, Bush came up with
> such profound words of wisdom as "If you have a hammer, find a nail" and "If
> you can read, find someone who can't.") Torr tells us that she realized that
> Bush's "behaviour, the way he uses his body is opaque; you can't read his face,

nothing is given away. You can't read him." And then for the big disclosure: "His whole body is an exercise in repression"; Torr continues, "And I realized this is what it means to be the quintessential man. It is an exercise in repression." (Bell 1993:92-94)

Bell's narrative seems to indicate that speakers, particularly those who challenge gender constructs in their everyday interactions, have very definite ideas about what constitutes "men's language" and what constitutes "women's language"; moreover, speakers link these ideas directly to relations of power and authority in the social world, associating men's speech with power and women's speech with subordination. For Torr, masculinity is first and foremost a matter of control, or in her own words an "exercise in repression," and she teaches her students to create this control vocally through the employment of steady intonation, direct speech, and verbal restraint.

These assumptions about gender-appropriate language use are not unique to transgender individuals like Torr and Bell, as Robin Lakoff (1990) illustrates in her humorous discussion of "George Bush, the American Tiresias." Lakoff, whose book *Language and Woman's Place* inspired the past two decades of research on language and gender, proposes in *Talking Power* that Bush, in order to win the respect and confidence of his American audience, went through a linguistic "sex change" during his campaign. While Bush's speech patterns at the beginning of his public career were consistent with the linguistic stereotype of women's language (replete with incomplete sentences, speech act and lexical hedges, and even an occasional giggle), by the time of his election he had learned to project a masculine, and therefore powerful, gender:

By the election, all that had vanished. The new President may have opted for a kinder, gentler America, but a sharper, more confrontative George Bush. He stopped smiling. His staff had tried to get him to stop gesturing; failing that, they

remade his gestures. Now they were chopping, stabbing, or pointing—aggressive

masculine moves. His voice no longer trailed off but became tense and

demanding. It still tends to rise in pitch as its owner's passions mount. The

noncommittal grammar improved, though fuzz is still much in evidence.

(1990:273)

After months of training by speech writers and image consultants, Bush was finally able

to turn into Torr's quintessential male, catering to cultural expectations of gender-

appropriate speech and performing a linguistic masculinity. It is perhaps no coincidence

that the Drag-King-for-a-Day workshop has adopted Bush as its hero, a discursive misfit

who overcame an unbecoming language socialization in order to project a more

powerful, masculine image.

But what can we make of the fact that individuals as diverse as Shannon Bell and

George Bush have chosen to employ the same discursive strategies in their projections of

power? What can a cross-dresser in New York and a presidential candidate in

Washington possibly have in common? Bush's and Bell's shared assumptions of

gender-appropriate language use can only be explained with reference to the larger

network of dominant gender ideologies which pervade mainstream American culture—

ideologies which construct men as dominant (active, authoritative, controlled) and

women as subordinate (passive, obsequious, emotional). The system of vocal strategies

appropriated by both Bush and Bell represent one possible mapping of these ideologies

onto language use, but it is a mapping that is favored by a number of dominant cultures in

both America and Europe. Primary to this mapping are the opposing equations of

masculinity with conversational directness and femininity with conversational

indirectness, discursive equations which attract continuously shifting linguistic

expressions as allies. While these expressions vary over communities, cultures,

languages, and historical periods, the fact that certain discursive characteristics become

dichotomously associated with one gender or the other, and that these associations have in turn been recorded in the folk linguistic histories of almost every Indo-European language, would indicate that language use can itself become a marker of gender identity. Moreover, if we accept the findings recorded in the numerous anthropological linguistic studies conducted during the last two decades as true (see Gal 1991, 1992, 1995), these associations do not exist independently of social structure, but rather mirror, and eventually come to symbolize, cultural patterns of dominance and subordination. The indisputable fact that cultures tend to value the discursive characteristics associated with masculinity as authoritative, and devalue those associated with femininity as subordinate, would additionally indicate that these same characteristics can also be employed to maintain a hierarchical social order.

The idea that language can be used as "symbolic domination" is central to a number of influential theoretical discussions on the nature of discourse. While the phrase itself is generally associated with Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) now classic discussion on the "economics of linguistic exchanges," a similar understanding of discursive oppression is also implicit in Antonio Gramsci's definition of "cultural hegemony," Mikhail Bakhtin's assertion that all utterances are "ideologically saturated," Louis Althusser's concept of "interpellation," and Michel Foucault's identifications of "subjugated knowledges." Over the past two decades, feminist theorists have built on these discussions by exploring the ways that hierarchical social orders, particularly gendered orders, are discursively constructed, thereby challenging the essentialist understanding of gender that characterizes early research in literary criticism, sociology, and psychology. Scholars from a variety of fields have argued that gender, specifically the polar opposition of female and male, is a cultural creation instead of a biological fact, and as such, is "fundamentally and paradoxically indeterminate, both as a psychological experience and as a cultural category" (Goldner 1991:250).

After Gayle Rubin linked the cultural polarity of gender to the cultural dominance of heterosexuality in her early essay "The Traffic in Women" (1975), theorists began to deconstruct the categories of female and male with reference to socioerotic identity as well, arguing that the very existence of alternative sexual persuasions serves as an intellectual challenge to the bipolar framework of gender. This same line of reasoning was articulated from a lesbian standpoint by theorist Monique Wittig in her often quoted statement that a lesbian is "outside the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject (lesbian) is *not* a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically" (1981:53). Such challenges suggest that male/female dualism and the accompanying value given to heterosexuality over homosexuality is not the logical outcome of biological determinism, but rather the result of a culturally constructed polarity. In keeping with these developments, feminist sociologists have been careful to distinguish between the terms "sex" and "gender," designating the first as an anatomical identification and the second as a cultural construct.

In recent years, however, a number of feminist theorists have argued that even this distinction is contrived, illustrating that the physical too, in large part, is socially constructed. Their discussions focus on "discourse" itself as the constructor instead of the producers of discourse, as earlier feminists did. The resultant theory is a kind of deconstruction extraordinaire, particularly as its solution to gender oppression is in the philosophical obliteration of all categorical oppositions. Julia Kristeva (1986) predicted this development as a logical outgrowth of what she calls the *third generation* of feminism, a generation which developed in response to the failure of radical feminism. The second generation's emphasis on "difference," Kristeva argues, ultimately serves to further the hierarchical organization of gender construction since it affirms a female/male dichotomy. A departure from this emphasis, in Kristeva's opinion, would involve a theoretical imagining of "woman as whole," so that femaleness is no longer constituted in opposition to maleness.

Third generation feminism, then, parallels what Bronwyn Davies (1990:502) calls a "move towards multiple ways of being," a move which involves the recognition that one's personal identity is not singular in the either/or sense (e.g., heterosexual versus homosexual; male versus female; black versus white) but rather plural and variable :

A move towards an imagined possibility of "woman as whole," not constituted in terms of the male/female dualism. Such a move involves confronting one's own personal identity with its organization of desire around "masculinity" or "femininity." The desired end point of such a confrontation is to de-massify maleness and femaleness—to reveal their multiple and fragmented nature and remove from the meaning of maleness and femaleness any sense of opposition, hierarchy, or necessary difference. This is not a move towards sameness but towards multiple ways of being. (Davies 1990:502)

Only an acknowledgment of multiplicity will precipitate the dismantling of oppressive dichotomies, or in Davies own words, "remove from the meaning of maleness and femaleness any sense of opposition, hierarchy, or necessary difference" (p.502).

The feminism identified by both Kristeva and Davies is clearly born from the theoretical tenets of postmodernism, which Jacquelyn Zita (1992:110) claims in her essay on male lesbianism[2] "make[s] possible the transmutation of male to female as a matter of shifting contextual locations that 'reinvent' the body." Zita identifies the primary difference between modern and postmodern thinking as an emphasis on plurality, arguing that "whereas modernism considers the body to be fixed, by nature, in its sexedness, the tactics of postmodernism suggest that there are indeed more things possible on heaven and earth than we are willing to grant a rightful status of being" (1992:110). Indeed, this is the very emphasis that has been adopted as a political agenda by a number of scholars working within what is now loosely identified as queer theory. Several queer activists

have argued that since it is an unyielding, dichotomous notion of gender that has rendered people of alternative sexual persuasions invisible, a cultural conceptualization of variability is necessary before visibility can occur. The work of Elisabeth Daümer stands as a case in point. In a recent article entitled "Queer Ethics; or, The Challenge of Bisexuality to Lesbian Ethics," she conceptualizes variability from the standpoint of bisexuality. Because it occupies an ambiguous position between fixed gender and sexed identities, she argues that bisexuality can serve as a vantage point for developing a queer ethics, an ethics that would "support and nurture the queer in all of us—by questioning all notions of fixed, immutable identities and by articulating a plurality of differences among us in the hope of forging new bonds and allegiances" (1992:103). This same emphasis on plurality has resulted in a deemphasis of gender-directed oppression within queer politics—a shift that is perhaps responsible for the growing popularity of slogans such as "humanist, not feminist; queer, not lesbian." By negating the two categorizations which entail gender ('not' feminist, 'not' lesbian) and replacing them with non-gendered terms denoting unity and sexual plurality ('humanist,' 'queer'), the slogan asserts that gender is irrelevant to self-identification.

Because the understanding of discursive interaction emerging from queer theory is becoming increasingly influential in academia, it merits some attention here. A key theory, indeed a cornerstone of queer theory, is the performativity of gender. Linguists should have no trouble recognizing the term "performativity" as Austinian, and recalling the way Austin used the term in his short 1955 text *How To Do Things With Words*. Queer theorists like Judith Butler and Eve Sedgewick expand on the Derridean notion of "iterability," which is itself derived from J. L. Austin's ([1955] 1962) theory of speech acts. For Butler and Sedgewick, gender identities are performative in the same way that certain speech acts are performative; that is, they are felicitously produced only if they reiterate an already conventionalized set of norms. Just as the utterance "I pronounce you man and wife" will not be recognized as an action unless it fulfills the proper cultural

conventions,[3] an expression of gender identity will not be intelligible unless it reaffirms a culturally established category. Hence, Butler chooses the title *Bodies That Matter* for her most recent book, since only those bodies that reiterate the norm will, in her own words, "materialize" as culturally meaningful. The political answer to this discursive trap is the pluralization of these cultural conventions, so that dissident voices will also materialize as intelligible.

Because the speaking subject can only produce discourses that have already been conventionalized, the notion of individual or voluntarist agency is irrelevant to Butler's theory of gender identity. Paralleling Althusser's notion of *interpellation* (that is, the process by which an individual "mistakenly" believes herself to be the author of an ideological discourse), Butler argues that the utterers of performative speech acts only think that they are initiating an action when actually they are merely reproducing regulatory norms. It is discourse that produces the subject and not the other way around, because the performative will only be intelligible if it "emerges in the context of a chain of binding conventions":

> Importantly, however, there is no power, construed as subject, that acts, but only, to repeat an earlier phrase, a reiterated acting that *is* power in its persistence and stability. This is less an "act," singular and deliberate, than a nexus of power and discourse that repeats or mimes the discursive gestures of power. Hence, the judge who authorizes and installs the situation he names invariably *cites* the law that he applies, and it is the power of this citation that gives the performative its binding or conferring power. And though it may appear that the binding power of his words is derived from the force of his will or from a prior authority, the opposite is more true: it is *through* the citation of the law that the figure of the judge's "will" is produced and that the "priority" of textual authority is established. Indeed, it is through the invocation of convention that the speech act

of the judge derives its binding power; that binding power is to be found neither in the subject of the judge nor in his will, but in the citational legacy by which a contemporary "act" emerges in the context of a chain of binding conventions. (Butler 1993:225)

Even activities like gender impersonation, in Butler's opinion, would be reiterative, because the impersonator must invoke the very essence of these "binding conventions" in order to make the performance comprehensible. Such performances should therefore be analyzed not as innovative discourses of resistance, but rather, as focused appropriations of an existent norm. Drag, for instance, is subversive only because its producer, in Austinian terms, is "inappropriate to the procedure specified." It is an infelicitous utterance pretending to be felicitous—something like an ironic "I now pronounce you man and wife" from a prostitute dressed in priestly garments. Yet it is precisely these types of infelicitious displays that subvert the social order, calling into question the very norms on which our perceptions of gender and heterosexuality are based.

Butler's theory invites interesting comparison with Davies and Harre's (1990) discussions on discursive interaction, which they define as a "multi-faceted public process through which meanings are progressively and dynamically achieved" (47). Fundamental to their approach is the idea that speakers do not create new conversations, but build on conversations they have had before, choosing from among the multiple subject positions they have assumed in previous interactions. They therefore urge conversational analysts to replace the more static concept of *role* with that of *positioning*, arguing that the latter highlights the fact that any one speaker can assume a multiplicity of subject positions.[4] Like Butler, Davies and Harré acknowledge that these subject positions are not infinitely variable but are reflective of convention; they argue for an approach that will recognize "the force of 'discursive practices', the ways in which people are 'positioned' through those practices and the way in which the individual's

'subjectivity' is generated through the learning and use of certain discursive practices" (1990:43). An individual emerges through the processes of social interaction not as a fixed result, but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate. Since speakers are positioned differently in different conversations, each person is characterized by what Davies and Harre call "a multiplicity of selves."

Davies, in particular, is concerned with the analysis of actual conversational practice and with the uncovering of psychological processes that influence conversational positioning. In a study that she conducted on preschool children's interpretations of feminist fairytales, Davies (1989) found that children tend to interpret narratives in terms of more familiar story lines. Each of the narratives she introduced to the children featured a female hero who did not conform to traditional gender expectations; that is, the hero was not dependent on the prince-in-shining-armour for her happiness, for protection, or for confirmation of who she was. Yet after hearing these feminist reworkings, most of the preschoolers were reluctant to see the female character as a genuine hero. Davies argues that the children heard the story as if it were a variation of a known story line in which men are heroes and women are something other than heroes— a finding which supports Butler's claim that discourse creates the subject and not the other way around. In the same way that the children in Davies' study interpreted the heroine's behavior with reference to other story lines they had heard, individuals engaging in conversation interpret speech acts with reference to past conversations they have participated in.

Yet how can these highly theoretical studies inform the more situationally based analysis of everyday conversational interaction? Since all of these theories are concerned with hegemonic social forces instead of individual speakers, they have been argued to be of questionable use to the anthropological linguist who is interested in conversational agency, and of even less use to the feminist sociologist who is interested in women's

voice as resistance. Even Bakhtin, in his discussions of carnival and satire as discursive deviations, fails to attribute any agency to the individual procurers of these alternative modes of expression; instead, he describes both genres as ruptures of the status quo, which, when institutionalized as deviant, ultimately serve to reinforce the discursive norm. Because these grandiose language theories fail to acknowledge the individual, a number of anthropologists have undertaken the task of rewriting them so as to give voice to the subordinated speaker, analyzing the ways that individual speakers resist hegemonic notions of gender in everyday interaction.[5] This trend, while clearly derived from a postmodern interest in challenging dichotomous and static representations of power, is also reflective of a feminist agenda to portray women as agents of resistance rather than passive receptacles of oppression.

In this dissertation, I attempt to unite the theoretical study of discourse with the practice-based study of conversation by analyzing the linguistic agency of Hindi-speaking *hijṛās*[6] in Banaras, India. Discussed variously in the anthropological literature as "transvestites," "eunuchs," "hermaphrodites," and even "an institutionalized third gender role," most of India's hijras were raised as boys before taking up residence in one of the many hijra communities which exist in almost every region of India. Since the late 1980s, several European and American cultural theorists have pointed to the visibility of the hijra in Indian society in order to suggest the cultural possibility of a more liberating, non-dichotomous organization of gender. Indeed, the hijras' livelihood is contingent upon their inextricable position in the social structure; according to tradition, they are expected to sing and dance at births and weddings, where they are rewarded with gifts of clothes, jewelry, and money.

Yet the lifestories of the Hindi-speaking hijras Veronica O'Donovan and I interviewed in Banaras during the spring and summer of 1993[7] reflect a very different reality from that suggested by these theorists—a reality based on familial rejection, cultural isolation, and societal neglect. Instead of occupying a position outside the

female-male binary, the hijras have created an existence within it, one that is constrained by rigidly entrenched cultural constructions of femininity and masculinity. It may be liberating to believe in the possibility of an alternative gender which is not limited by societal expectations, but even the hijra must create self-identity by resisting and subverting a very real and oppressive gender dichotomy—a dichotomy that becomes very apparent in the hijras' own use of feminine and masculine speech.

In her overviews of research in linguistic anthropology (1991, 1992, forthcoming), Gal urges linguists to study the ways that speakers contest oppressive gender ideologies through discursive practice, specifically through the employment of discursive styles which oppose dominant forms of expression. She reanalyzes a number of cross-cultural studies on women's derivative use of language and proposes a dynamic way of analyzing gender in language use, one that serves as a theoretical challenge to studies that have defined gender relations in terms of static oppositions. In particular, she argues that cultural constructions of gender-appropriate language behavior are not merely ideas that differentiate the genders with respect to interaction; they are themselves sources of power which are enacted and contested in talk. She therefore encourages linguists to study the categories of "women's speech," "men's speech," and "powerful speech" not as indexically derived from the identity of speakers, but as mutually constructed within different social groups. I take Gal's argument as a starting point for my own discussion of the hijras' speech patterns, who shift between "women's language" and "men's language" in order to express relations of power and solidarity (see Chapter 3 and Chapter 4).

Among the articles that Gal reanalyzes are Carol Edelsky's (1981) study on gendered ways of speaking in mixed-sex faculty meetings at an American college and Lila Abu-Lughod's (1986) discussion of the subversive nature of oral lyric poetry performed by Bedouin women and youths. In both of these practices, Gal argues, women speakers locate a contradiction in dominant conceptions of language behavior and

attempt to subvert ideological structures through rival practices. While female participants in the university setting undermine the hierarchical form of meetings in their introduction of a collaborative discourse practice, female poets among the Bedouin subvert dominant linguistic ideologies of autonomy, personal strength, and sexual modesty by performing expressions of dependency, emotional vulnerability, and romantic longing. By reinterpreting women's discursive strategies and genres in this way, or in Gal's own words, by reinterpreting them as "forms of resistance to symbolic domination" (1991:178), scholars will no longer be able to lump women's linguistic practices together as "women's language" and ignore the diversity of women's voices. Instead, they will have to acknowledge variation, innovation, and agency in women's discursive strategies, discussing not only the linguistic enactments of reigning cultural definitions, but also the linguistic resistances to these definitions—resistances which will of course differ across languages, within cultures, over time, and in particular contexts. The same should be true for marginalized gender identities like the hijras in India. As we shall see in the following chapters, the Hindi-speaking hijras in Banaras have developed a number of "rival practices" to undermine the status quo, among them the semantically ambiguous invectives discussed in Chapter 5 and the alternative lexicon discussed in Chapter 6.

Comparable approaches to the study of social interaction have been articulated by a number of feminist scholars in the social sciences, among them Virginia Goldner (1991) in her critique of psychoanalytic conceptions of gender, and Barrie Thorne (1993) in her ethnographic study of two American elementary schools in working class neighborhoods. Goldner discusses how family members invoke notions of femininity and masculinity as power plays in the communicative matrix of family relations, arguing that "insofar as gender relations are power relations, contextualizing gender in this fashion can illuminate the mechanisms by which gender not only organizes mind and relationships but organizes them hierarchically (with men and masculinity in the elevated

position)" (1991:264). Hegemonic notions of gender, then, as differently valued cultural creations, are variously resisted, embraced, and subverted in both the projection of self and in the establishment of relationships.

Thorne similarly demonstrates how such manipulations of gender are realized in a children's community. In a discussion of sissy and tomboy identifications among fourth and fifth graders, she illustrates the variety of ways that children, both actively and collaboratively, produce and defy gendered structures and meanings. But she proposes these instances of fluidity only after an in-depth discussion of the hegemonic constructions which constrain this fluidity—the segregating influences of school regulations, the verbal making of gender in classroom and cafeteria, the gendered geography of lines and lunchroom tables, the divisive nature of play on the schoolyard playground. If Thorne had analyzed such projections as examples of unconstrained mutability, she would have not only denied the hierarchical nature of gender organization, she would have also failed to see the ways gender categories can potentially be used, in the words of Goldner, "to carry, solve, or exploit existential oppositions and dilemmas" (1991:260). In my own dissertation, I analyze the hijras' gender fluidity with an eye to the social conventions that constrain that fluidity. The hijras' gendered performances are not autonomously produced; they become meaningful only when studied against the dominant ideologies they oppose.

The work of these theorists highlights, whether directly or indirectly, the distinction between language ideology and linguistic practice, a distinction that, I would argue, continues to be overlooked by many linguists who study language and gender. The proliferation of psychological and sociolinguistic studies that have been formulated to test the empirical validity of Robin Lakoff's (1975) identification of "women's language" (e.g., Cameron, Mc Alinden, and O'Leary 1988; Crosby and Nyquist 1977; Dubois and Crouch 1975; O'Barr and Atkins 1980) is one telling example of this oversight.[8] Although Lakoff states quite clearly in her introduction that she is interested

not in the quantitative realization of linguistic variables but in the cultural expectations

which come to influence their use, her claims have been dismissed by subsequent

generations of sociolinguists as empirically unfounded.[9] That there is something very

real about her assertions may be seen in the fact that so many consumers of American

popular psychology have embraced her text as part of the "self-help" genre. Although

the linguistic reality Lakoff depicts is rooted in cultural ideologies, it is nevertheless a

reality, particularly because it continues to be accepted by very diverse groups of

speakers as a valid representation of their own discursive experiences. The current

popularity of Deborah Tannen's 1990 national bestseller *You Just Don't Understand:*

Women and Men in Conversation speaks to the persistence of the popular ideology of

gendered language, for Tannen incorporates many of the features identified by Lakoff

fifteen years earlier into her own discussions on women's speech strategies.

Despite the fact that Lakoff's and Tannen's theoretical explanations of the

relationship between gender and discourse are not congruent, with Lakoff locating gender

differences in hierarchical power structures and Tannen in divergent paths of language

socialization, their findings have been embraced by a number of disparate communities.

Besides the many avid readers of communication-oriented self-help books (e.g., P. Butler

[1981] 1992; Elgin 1993; Glass 1993; Stone and Bachner [1977] 1994), there are a

number of groups whose interest in Lakoff's and Tannen's research could not have been

easily predicted by the authors. These groups are as dissimilar as African American

journalists in an East Coast workshp on communication, transsexual communication

specialists who write for the California-based transgender journals *Cross-talk* and

Transsexual News Telegraph, Roman Catholic organizers of "marriage encounter"

weekends in Alabama, female phone-sex employees in San Francisco and New York

City, and speech therapists hired by Hollywood to train male actors to take on female

roles in gender-bending films.

Framed in postmodern terms, then, Lakoff appears to have successfully identified the precise hegemonic notions of gender-appropriate language use that Gal urges contemporary researchers to uncover. The adoption by these communities of a "two-cultures" approach to discursive interaction, specifically their recognition of the mutual incompatibility of feminine and masculine speech styles, not only illustrates that "women's language" and "men's language" are ideological constructs, but also illuminates the very postmodern notion that individual speakers can manipulate such constructs in the expression of personal identity. The cultural expectations that Lakoff locates through her intuitions and observations reflect the ideologically dominant socialization process of middle-class European American women, the influence of which extends far beyond this subculture (Barret forthcoming a, b).

Glass's (1993) popular self-help manual, which she directs primarily to heterosexual couples with communication problems, serves as additional evidence for the existence of these cultural expectations. Glass, a speech pathologist in private practice in Beverly Hills, takes ideologies of gendered language use to the extreme in her itemization of precisely 105 communication characteristics that distinguish women from men, among them characteristics of speech, voice, facial expressions, and body language. Although the empirically oriented scholar would shudder at such a list, Glass's assertions apparently make sense to many consumers of mainstream American culture, if a book's sales are any indication of their cultural intelligibility. The problem with her analysis is, of course, that she tends to view these gendered linguistic differences not as stereotypes or cultural expectations that influence the way women and men speak, but rather as sex-based discursive realities. That these traits are taken as truisms among mainstream European Americans, however, suggests the prevalence of a dichotomous model of "women's speech" and "men's speech."

Ironically, Glass's decision to study gendered language can be traced back to her counseling interactions in the mid-1970's with a male-to-female transsexual whose vocal

and speech characteristics she had been asked to diagnose. With Lakoff's book *Language and Women's Place*, the only available book on the subject, as her guide, Glass was able to teach her new client how to "sound and act like a woman" (1993:17). Her dabbling in linguistic gender-bending did not end there, however; she was later asked to teach Dustin Hoffman to sound like a woman for the movie *Tootsie*, in which, Glass reports, "Dustin portrayed a woman so brilliantly that he won an Academy Award for his performance" (18). Glass also boasts of her linguistic success with actors like Conrad Bain, star of the television situation comedy *Diff'rent Strokes*, whom she taught not only "how to sound female but how to sound like a Dutch female—accent and all" (20), and with Bain's female costar Dana Plato, whom she taught how to speak and behave like a Dutch boy.

Despite all the dichotomous essentialism of Glass's itemized list, her book is covertly postmodern. She implies that gendered speaking styles exist independently of the speaker, illustrating that they can be manipulated for communicative effectiveness at home and in the workplace. Her book clearly belongs to the popular genre that Deborah Cameron (forthcoming) has called "verbal hygiene," a discourse that promotes certain linguistic practices over others for pragmatic, aesthetic, or even more reasons. Ironically, however, when verbal hygienists like Glass encourage their readers to improve their communicative skills through the appropriation of other ways of speaking, they parallel postmodern musings on the discursive construction of gender identity and the related assertion that speakers can assume multiple subject positions (Davies and Harré 1989; Davies 1990). Glass's simple assertion that speakers can learn and appropriate "women's language" or "men's language" for better communicative success (or, in this instance, for happier heterosexual relationships) suggests that language use is not indexically derived from the sex of the speaker but rather is constructed from a vast array of ideological discursive mappings. An especially powerful example of how linguistic ideologies may be undermined is found in the hijras' dual appropriation of both women's

language and men's language; as intersexed agents, the hijras are said to exaggerate the linguistic stereotypes associated with either side of the gender divide (see Chapter 5).

Folk-linguistic discussions should therefore be considered more seriously by analysts of language and gender, for they reveal dominant cultural expectations of gender-appropriate behavior. In a sense, Glass has identified what Sally McConnell-Ginet (1988) refers to as an "interpreted linguistic system." In her review of contemporary developments in language and gender research, McConnell-Ginet argues that gender-differentiation in language should be studied with reference to both the social and the psychological, since "meaning interacts with gender because it links the social-psychological phenomenon of language with the abstract formal notion of a language, an interpreted linguistic system." While she shares Butler's (1993) emphasis on the constraining nature of hegemonic discourses, she encourages analysts to examine how the individual speaker manages these constraints. In particular, she invites sociolinguists to focus on the conflict between the individual ("what she means, her intentions") and the social ("the constraints on the intentions she can have recognized and thereby realized, the social support required for invoking interpretations").

Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet (1992a,1992b) later expand on the nature of this conflict in their identification of gender as "community-based practice," a concept that has generated a number of innovative discussions on the localized nature of gender construction. When discussing the relationship between community practice and linguistic power, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992a) introduce the notion of "symbolic privilege," or rather, the process by which communities of practice "privilege" certain perspectives on language over others. It is this symbolic privileging, they argue, that works to maintain the dominant social order:

> Dominance is sustained by privileging in community practice a particular
> perspective on language, obscuring its status as one among many perspectives,

and naturalizing it as neutral or "unmarked." The privileged can assume their own positions to be norms toward which everyone else orients; they can judge other positions while supposing their own to be invulnerable to less privileged assessment. This privileged relation to a symbolic system, which we shall call symbolic privilege, carries with it interpretive and evaluative authority that requires no explanation or justification. (1992a:483)

While this theoretical stance is comparable to Gal's identification of language as symbolic domination, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet are more directly concerned with the ways that disparate communities of practice come to privilege such perspectives differently. Because "gender is constructed in a complex array of social practices" which vary from one community to the next, they call for a more localized study of language and gender—one that will acknowledge the "varied, subtle, and changing ways" (1992a:484) that social meaning is constructed both across and within communities.

Queer theory, on the other hand, reveals little about distinctions across and within communities, since its definition of gender performativity, by relying on a hegemonic notion of what constitutes culture, is reductive. Gender performances may indeed be intelligible only when they reaffirm an already established category, but the number of culturally established categories available to any speaker at any given time is much greater than many of these theorists imply. As Eckert and McConnell-Ginet point out, speakers also rely on localized norms of gender in their everyday interactions, norms that can readily be uncovered through the practice-based analysis of diverse communities of practice. Because the speakers of every community invoke dominant language ideologies together with their own local ideologies and practices in order to establish positions of power and solidarity, the language analyst must become aware of these belief systems before embarking on the study of discursive identity.

Any analysis of gender and power, then, should first isolate the external language conventions that influence the community under study, and then ascertain the more local conventions which may or may not override those of the dominant symbolic system. Although external expectations can be found in the public discourses that surround and influence the subordinated community, local values can be found in speakers' own attitudes about their linguistic choices. In Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, I juxtapose the hijras' own opinions of their language use with those of journalists and sociologists who have written on the hijra community. After isolating the conventions that constrain the hijras' language use, I then examine how the hijras enact, challenge, and subvert these conventions in their everyday interactions. By analyzing how alternatively gendered individuals perform femininity and masculinity in the vocal sphere, we can not only identify the linguistic traits associated with either gender by the members of such communities, we can also pinpoint the ways in which particular communities (in this case, a community whose very existence is dependent on the divergent performance of gender) choose to map dominant notions of femininity and masculinity onto verbal presentation.

The process of locating ideologies and identifying their enactment in the Hindi-speaking hijra community is the overriding project of this dissertation. Chapter 2 sets the stage for the more linguistically oriented chapters that follow, presenting the hijra community through popular portrayals as well as excerpts from the hijras' own life stories. Chapters 3 and 4 examine the hijras' morphological code-switching between feminine and masculine speech; because verbs, adjectives, and postpositions may be marked for gender in Hindi, the hijras' are able to capture the social fact of gender in linguistic morphology. Chapter 5 is more directly concerned with the ideology of gendered language, as realized in the hijras' conflations of feminine and masculine cursing strategies. The notion of a distinctive "hijralect" is presented in Chapter 6, which explores an array of lexical extensions unique to the hijra community. Taken together,

these chapters present the hijra as an admirable linguistic agent, who transgresses rigidly defined notions of femininity and masculinity through her language use,[10] and by so doing, demands recognition in the social matrix that has marginalized her. It is my contention that the language-based analysis of liminal communities like the hijras will contribute not only to the linguistic study of the workings of gender in discourse, but also to the theoretical study of gender and sexual identity.

NOTES

Portions of this chapter appear in an article coauthored with Mary Bucholtz (Bucholtz and Hall forthcoming), entitled "Twenty Years after *Language and Woman's Place.*"

[1]   My analysis of Shannon Bell's "masculinity training" developed out of several discussions with Anna Livia on the subject. Livia (forthcoming) discusses this passage from a rather different perspective in her article on fictional representations of "butch-femme" speech.

[2]   In her 1992 article entitled "Male Lesbians and the Postmodernist Body," Zita defines male lesbians as biological men who self-identify as lesbians. This identification has now become somewhat standardized, particularly in San Francisco and New York, where a number of men proffer the expression, "I'm really a lesbian trapped in a male body."

3   Austin produced a typology of conditions which performatives must meet in order to be successful, naming them *felicity conditions*. He distinguishes three main categories, which Levinson (1983:229) summarizes as follows:

A.   (i) There must be a conventional procedure having a conventional effect

(ii) The circumstances and persons must be appropriate, as specified in the procedure

B.   The procedure must be executed (i) correctly and (ii) completely

C.   Often, (i) the persons must have the requisite thoughts, feelings, and intentions, as specified in the procedure, and (ii) if consequent conduct is specified, then the relevant parties must so do.

4   More specifically, Davies and Harré (1990) argue that speakers can either position someone else through what they say (interactive positioning) or position themselves (reflexive positioning); because speakers are positioned differently in different conversations, each person is characterized by "a multiplicity of selves." Additionally, Davies and Harré refer to Paul Smith's (1988) distinction between "a person" as an individual agent and "the subject." They argue that individuals are characterized both by "continuous personal identity" and by "discontinuous personal diversity" (46), using the latter term to mean the series of subject positions that a person adopts in the discourses she participates in.

5   That Butler is not interested in the individual subject is evident in the following passage, where she discusses resistance as a reiteration of the hegemonic order instead of as an individualized act: "In this sense, the agency denoted by the performativity of "sex" will be directly counter to any notion of a voluntarist subject who exists quite apart

from the regulatory norems which she/he opposes. The paradox of subjectivation (*assujetissement*) is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms. Although this constitutive constraint does not foreclose the possibility of agency, it does locate agency as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power" (Butler 1993:15). While I agree with Butler's philosophical analysis to some extent, particularly with her understanding of discursive constraint, I also see a need for more discussion of the individual; that is, how the individual *decides* on the reiterations she produces and how these reiterations might serve to affirm or subvert the social order.

6   The correct English spelling for the Hindi हिज्ड़ा, according to the transliteration conventions adopted throughout the remainder of this dissertation, would be *hijṛā*; I have chosen to use the spelling *hijra*, however, for easier reading.

7   I conducted this field research in a joint project with Veronica O'Donovan after concluding an advanced language program during the 1992-93 academic year in Banaras, India, which was sponsored by the American Institute of Indian Studies. Many of the ideas expressed in this dissertation are Veronica's, and I am grateful to her for allowing me to develop some of her thoughts more extensively.

8   Lakoff's claims have been tested empirically in well over a hundred studies, among them O'Barr and Atkins' (1978) empirical study on the use of female register forms in courtroom testimonies, Hirschman's (1974) detailed study of qualifiers such as *kind of* and *sort of*, Crosby and Nyquist's (1977) study on contextual influences governing the employment of female register forms, and Bradley's (1981) and Newcombe and Arnkoff's (1979) psychological studies on hearer-perceptions of the

female register. For the most part, these and other empirical studies of Lakoff's variables have had inconsistent results. See Deborah James and Sandra Clarke (1993) and Deborah James and Janice Drakich (1993) for summaries of studies on interruptions and gender differences in the length of talk.

9   Indeed, Lakoff (1975:5) warns her readers not to test her claims empirically, pointing out that the cultural expectations she identifies would be extremely difficult to locate on tape: "And finally, there is the purely pragmatic issue: random conversation must go on for quite some time, and the recorder must be exceedingly lucky anyway, in order to produce evidence of any particular hypothesis, for example, that there is sexism in language, that there is not sexism in language. If we are to have a good sample of data to analyze, this will have to be elicited artificially from someone; I submit I am as good an artifical source of data as anyone." See Bucholtz and Hall (forthcoming) for a discussion of the academic reception of Lakoff's *Language and Woman's Place.*

10   Throughout this dissertation, I will use *her* and *she* in reference to the hijras since they prefer to be referred to and addressed in the feminine.

CHAPTER 2

Contemporary Realities in the Hijra Community

"Keep your eyes open, we are in a very interesting part
of New York." ...

He nudged Feroza and with an unobtrusive movement of
his chin in their direction, whispered, "I think these are
American-style *heejras*."

Feroza looked about with eyes widened to absorb
knowledge nothing had prepared her for. Feroza was woolly
about the distinction between eunuchs and transvestites, and the
heejras in Lahore were about as different from these glamorous
creatures as earthworms are from butterflies.

-Bapsi Sidhwa, *An American Brat*

The anthropological literature of the 1970s and 1980s is clearly influenced by early feminist rethinkings of gender. When feminist theorists began to challenge dichotomous notions of gender by showing how such notions are constructed psychologically, socially, and discursively in western culture, anthropologists began to challenge the same dichotomy by demonstrating how gender and the related category of sexuality can be plurally constructed in other cultures. The anthropological interest in alternative, non-western gender and sexual identities was certainly not new, as Rubin sarcastically acknowledges in a footnote when she refers to "the exotica in which anthropologists delight" (1975:165). But the research of these earlier anthropologists was suddenly validated by a clearly defined feminist agenda, a validation that resulted in a resurfacing of anthropological studies on the cultural existence of third sex and non-heterosexual categories that defy Euro-American

organizations of gender: e.g., transgender individuals among the Igbo of Nigeria (Amadiume 1987), the xanith in Oman (Wikan 1977; Carrier 1980), the berdache in Native America (Morrison 1973; Forgey 1975; Whitehead 1981; Callender and Kochems 1983; Blackwood 1984; Williams 1986; Roscoe 1987, 1988, 1991), the mahu in Tahiti (Levy 1973), and the hijra in India (Nanda 1985, 1986, 1990). In order to define these alternative identities and sexual persuasions as valid cultural categories, the anthropologist had to offer proof that these existences were both culturally recognized and socially integrated. It is precisely this recognition and integration that were said to differentiate these organizations of gender from the more oppressive, dichotomous organizations in Europe and America.

It is not so surprising, then, that anthropologically oriented studies of alternative identities in western cultures, in contrast to studies of comparable identities elsewhere, have discussed the cultural organization of gender as dichotomous and oppressive instead of plural and liberating. Much of this research, including provocative articles by Suzanne Kessler (1990) and Julia Epstein (1990), has involved illustrations of the ways in which the western female/male bifurcation is medically and legally enforced, so much so that the medical profession has been directed since the mid-1800s to reconstruct the two to three percent of children born with ambiguous genitalia into the mutually exclusive categories of female and male. The result is a forced sexual dichotomy that denies the existence of biological variability and illustrates, in the words of Kessler, "physicians' and Western society's failure of imagination—the failure to imagine that each of these management decisions is a moment when a specific instance of biological 'sex' is transformed into a culturally constructed gender" (1990:26).

In focusing on western structures that deny the existence of alternative gender categories, however, anthropological research has largely ignored the social and historical role of the transsexual. The notion of transsexuality has entered the anthropological literature primarily in discussions of non-western cultures—in an effort to illustrate that the organization of gender in the culture under study is much more fluid than in our own.

Serena Nanda, for example, in her groundbreaking ethnography on the hijras of India, discusses the western transsexual as culturally inferior to the hijra, and asserts that the designation itself betrays that "we view an intermediate sex or gender category as nothing other than transitional; it cannot be, in our culture, a permanent possibility" (1990:123). Yet it would appear that European and American cultures, like many of the exotically portrayed cultures mentioned earlier, are quite antipathetic to identifying those who have undergone sexual reconstruction as entirely female or entirely male, designating them instead in a way that suggests a between-sex, categorical permanence. This sort of cultural thinking is espoused more generally in a large-scale refusal to accept male-to-female transsexuals as women, such as when the organizers of the 1991 Michigan's Womyn's Music Festival proclaimed that male-to-female transsexuals could not participate because they are not "really females," or when a Macy's Department Store in San Francisco fired a male-to-female transsexual employee because she insisted on using the women's restroom.

My reason for bringing up the western construct of transsexualism is not to argue that those who have undergone a sex change should be viewed in the anthropological literature as a third sex category, but rather to illustrate how an intellectual desire for the existence of plurality, coupled with an anthropological interest in the exotic over the familiar, has led to skewed representations of the cultural value placed on alternative gender identities. It might be useful here to borrow Stanley Fish's (1989) notion of the "interpretive community," particularly as it points up the reflexive assumptions and motivations behind any organization of knowledge:

> An interpretive community, rather than being an object of which one might ask "how does it change?" is an engine of change. It is an engine of change because its assumptions are not a mechanism for shutting out the world but for organizing it, for seeing phenomena as already related to the interests and goals that make the community what it is. The community, in other words, is always engaged in doing

work, the work of transforming the landscape into material for its own project; but that project is then itself transformed by the very work that it does. (1989:150)

The "transformations" that Fish mentions in this passage seem particularly evident in the anthropological literature on non-western gender identities: In order to articulate the cultural possibility of a more liberating organization of gender (or in Fish's terms, to "transform the landscape into material for its own project"), anthropologists have often ignored, or at the very least deemphasized, the more oppressive realities that come with community membership.

The intersection of this anthropological trend with the pluralizing notions of queer theory led Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (1993) to include reprints of two articles on non-western gender alternatives in their *Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, both written by American anthropologists: i.e., Harriet Whitehead's article on the berdache of native America, and Serena Nanda's article on the hijras of India. The ethnography from which Nanda's article is taken, entitled *Neither Man Nor Woman: The Hijras of India*, remains one of the few works to take the hijras' own lifestories as primary, and as such is an essential contribution to anthropological research. Her book, based on research that she conducted in an unnamed South Indian city during the early 1980s, is a cogent discussion of the hijra lifestyle; Nanda provides illuminating details on the hijras' social organization, cultural performances, economic adaptations, and even emasculation rituals. Yet at pivotal points throughout her ethnography (e.g., in the opening and concluding paragraphs of several of her chapters), she emphasizes the respected and almost magical status of the hijra in Indian tradition, a status that, in her opinion, has led to the societal recognition of the hijra as a "third gender role." This emphasis is fundamental to the chapter chosen for reprint in the *Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, which also appeared in slightly altered form in one of Nanda's (1986) first articles on the hijras:

But hijras are not merely ordinary human beings: they are also conceptualized as special, sacred beings, through a ritual transformation. The many examples that I have cited above indicate that both Indian society and Hindu mythology provide some positive, or at least accommodating roles for such sexually ambiguous figures. Within the context of Indian social roles, roles for such sexually ambiguous figures are associated with sexual specializations; in myth and through ritual, such figures become powerful symbols of the divine and of generativity. Thus, where Western culture strenuously attempts to resolve sexual contradictions and ambiguities, by denial or segregation, Hinduisim appears content to allow opposites to confront each other without resolution, "celebrating the idea that the universe is boundlessly various, and ... that all possibilities may exist without excluding each other" (O'Flaherty, 1973:318). It is this characteristically Indian ability to tolerate, even embrace, contradictions and variation at the social, cultural, and personality levels that provides the context in which the hijras cannot only be accommodated, but even granted a measure of power. ([1990] 1993:550)

It is certainly true that hijras play what could be called a prominent role in the day-to-day fabric of Indian social life and that they are, in some sense, respected. As a result of their ambiguous sexual status, hijras are thought to have power over procreation; this belief not only invites their attendance at births, weddings, and religious festivals, but also grants them a certain amount of freedom from police and governmental jurisdiction. But the structure of Nanda's essay leads to a concluding focus on the notion of societal tolerance, giving many readers a false impression of the status alloted to these ambiguously sexed figures. While Nanda does acknowledge elsewhere that the hijras suffer from severe marginalization, particularly in her ethnography when she describes the hardships that force many hijras into prostitution, the chapter chosen for inclusion in the anthology ultimately portrays the hijras as "powerful symbols of the divine and of generativity" (550).

Because the lifestories of the hijras I interviewed in the city of Banaras during 1993[3] reflect a very different reality from that suggested by articles like this one, I want to offer a second interpretation of the hijra's place in Indian society, one that emerges when the hijras' own lifestories are juxtaposed with textual representations of the hijra in popular culture. Without discounting the research of earlier anthropologists, particularly Nanda's, which is in many ways pivotal to feminist and anthropological rethinkings of gender, I want to adopt what Stanley Fish might refer to as different "stipulations of relevance and irrelevance" (1989:141), and take contemporary representations as more relevant to my own discussion than ancient literary, historical, or mythical ones.[1] When the hijras' existence is contextualized within contemporary reality instead of historical tradition, their identification as a uniquely situated third sex becomes more complicated. In their narratives, the hijras seem to view themselves not merely as Nanda's title *Neither Man Nor Woman* suggests, but also as "deficiently" masculine and "incompletely" feminine.

The hijras of India have organized their lives in resistance to a social ideology that denies their integration. An article by Nirmal Mitra (1983) in the popular Indian national magazine *Onlooker* reports on the "strange world of the eunuchs," and in expanding on the alleged non-consensual penis castration of a 15 year old boy by a group of hijras living in Baroda, appeals to a cultural intolerance of difference. The author refers to the eunuchs as "slaves to a set of savage practices" (14), detailing their system of inducting newcomers and their "self-deprecating" belief in penance and an afterlife. Although he acknowledges that the hijra leads a difficult life, particularly in a society where "eunuchs are not even treated as human beings and, in fact, feared for their savagery and supposedly uncanny powers" (22), he attributes this difficulty to the hijras themselves, blaming them for refusing to live "with, and within, human society" (14). It is revealing to compare this Indian perspective with Nanda's ([1990] 1993), who also asserts in several places that hijras are not treated as ordinary human beings. But Nanda prefaces her assertion with an emphatic "merely" instead of Mitra's "even," arguing that hijras are "not merely ordinary

human beings: they are also conceptualized as special, sacred beings through a ritual transformation" (550).

Ironically, it is the realities behind the "ritual transformation" performed in Baroda that threw India into an era of anti-hijra violence in the 1980s and 1990s. The incident received national journalistic attention, for the suggestion that some of India's hijras may be medically constructed instead of biologically determined was introduced to the public on a wide scale for the first time. The hijras' lawyer, R.V. Pednekar, took advantage of societal surprise in his own defense, and argued simply that unskilled hijras could not have possibly performed the operation because it is not "humanly possible to cut off the penis and throw it away without an expert's operation theatre and an expert's help" (quoted in Mitra 1983:17). Yet hijras have been performing such operations voluntarily within their communities for well over a century (c.f. Davidson 1884; Ebden 1856; Faridi 1899), to such an extent that more than 75 percent of the hijras living in India today—according to the 1990 BBC documentary *Eunuchs: India's Third Gender,* as well as to one of the more outspoken hijras we interviewed in Banaras—have undergone genital surgery.[2]

This suggests that only a minority of hijras are actually intersexed in the way Epstein (1990) and Kessler (1990) describe when they discuss the surgical reconstruction of new-born infants in America and Europe. Although a number of Indian researchers (e.g., Mitra 1983; Sharma 1989; Singh 1982; Jani and Rosenberg 1990; Sayani 1986) have worked to dispel the cultural assumption that hijras are born as hermaphrodites, reporting in-depth about the life-threatening castrations and penectomies that hijras endure, a large portion of Indian society nevertheless believes that all hijras were born with ambiguous sex organs. This belief originates from a rather unyielding cultural connection of gender identity with anatomical appearance, a connection which overtly contradicts Sue-Ellen Jacobs and Jason Cromwell's assumption that "in societies that recognize [alternative-sex] variations within their culture, anatomy is *not* destiny in terms of sex, sexuality, and gender" (1992:57). That anatomy can indeed become destiny is supported by the case of a

hermaphrodite in Pakistan, who asked for asylum in the United States after undergoing medical treatment to enhance his masculinity (United States Department of State 1992). Raised as a girl in an upper class family, the hermaphrodite feared that if he returned to Pakistan as a man, his anatomy would be considered defective and he would be forced to join the hijras.

An article entitled *Hijṛõ Kī Alag Duniyā, Dhan Kamāne Kā Kutsit Dhandhā* ['The Separate World of the Eunuchs: A Vile Profession for Earning Money'] appeared in a Delhi newspaper shortly after the Baroda incident, and exemplifies the strength of the cultural linking of identity and anatomy. In a condemnation of the hijras' *amānvīy* ['inhuman'] lifestyle, specifically of their tendency to demand high fees for song and dance at births and weddings, the journalist V. K. Shrivastav (1986), after an interview with Khaitri Lal Bhola, the chairman of *Akhil Bhārtīy Hijra Kalyāṇ Sabhā* ['The All Indian Eunuch Welfare Society'], portrays the hijra as a thieving, vulgar, and corrupt presence. Refusing to accept that anyone would undergo such a violent operation volitionally, he instead concludes that gangs of hijras must roam the streets kidnapping *nirdoṣ* ['innocent'] and *bholā* ['simple-hearted'] victims, drugging and castrating them without their consent:

> At the present time there are about 1.2 million hijras in the country, but it is startling that almost 600,000 of them actually have an 'organ'; that is, they are only pretending that they are hijras. The rest of the hijras have no sexual disorder at all, as far as natural anatomy is concerned, and have been turned into hijras by force. Among these there are several with children who, in an effort to keep their families from starving, are now living this disgusting life, terrorized by their gurus into performing this profession. ... Those hijras who are not hijras by birth are tricked or enticed into joining the group by a guru. Taking advantage of their helplessness, they turn them into hijras by force. They make them take an intoxicating substance again and again until they turn them into addicts. Then, at some later date, when

they are in an unconscious condition, they cut off their 'organ.' After that the

individual is in no condition to leave the group, nor can he go back to his family. In

this helpless condition, he is forced to live the life of a hijra. (Shrivastav n.d.,

translated from the original Hindi)

The hijra who is a born-hijra, according to Srivastav, is a corrupt hijra, and the hijra who is

castrated is a helpless victim. The author's insistence that 'real' hijras have a *yaun dos*

['sexual disorder'] would indicate that contemporary Indian society views the hijra not as a

third sex in its own right, but as a derivative and disfunctional one. If we take this author's

opinions to be at all representative of the opinions held by mainstream India, and indeed a

number of prominent articles echo Shrivastav's sentiment, the hijra, in order to validate her

existence, not only has to prove her hijra identity (hence her frequent flashings of genitals

to the public, which the author of this article refers to as "the vulgar showing of organs"),

she must also face the societal discrimination that accompanies this identification. I do not

mean to suggest that hijras never engage in criminal acts, but I do want to argue that

instances like the Baroda affair are uncommon. The journalistic interest in such events

might be said to parallel the American interest in mass-murderers like Jeffrey Dahmer or

Aileen Wuornos, who because they belong to sexual persuasions already stigmatized as

deviant, are quickly appropriated by mainstream culture as indicative of a gay and lesbian

pathology.

This attitude is perhaps responsible for Nanda's observation that even those hijras

who choose this lifestyle long after childhood persistently claim that they were born as

hijras. In our own discussions with a number of hijras in Banaras, almost all recalled a

specific instance in childhood when they realized that they were physically different from

their schoolmates. My interest in the hijras began while I was participating in an advanced

Hindi language program in Banaras during the 1992-1993 academic year, sponsored by the

American Institute of Indian Studies. Every Friday, the Institute would bring in a guest

speaker with a different occupation: The first week we spoke with a laundry man, the second a taxi driver, the third a silk broker. But on the fourth week we were told that the "hijras" would be coming, a proclamation that clearly disconcerted one of the men who taught at the institute. My memories of that Friday afternoon in the fall of 1992 are now somewhat hazy, but I do recall that the teacher in question took the day off; his wife, who also taught at the Institute, informed us sheepishly that he refused to be in the same room as a hijra. The six other students participating in the program had all read bits and pieces about the hijra lifestyle here and there, though nothing substantial, but we all knew that many of the hijras had undergone a castration operation. This opinion was adamantly denied by a second male teacher at the institute, who insisted when we were going over an article on the hijras by V. K. Shrivastav (n. d.) that hijras are just "born that way," echoing the claim that the hijras themselves make. By the time the hijras arrived, we were feeling much of the same consternation that Indians must feel. Our Hindi teacher was unable to answer whether we should refer to the hijras as "she" or "he," nor did he know whether they speak in the first person feminine or masculine; he assumed that we should use the masculine when addressing them, but he admitted that he had never thought about the issue before that point.

The three hijras who performed for us at the Institute lived just around the corner from the house where I was living with an Indian family, and after passing by them every day for five or six months on the way to school, I decided that I wanted to learn more about their community. Together with Veronica O'Donovan, another student on the program who had recently completed a masters degree in Art History, I began to visit them. The hijras in this community then led us to other hijras in neighboring districts of the city; after a few months, Veronica and I had met hijras in four of Banaras' hijra communities, each of which has a distinct reputation in the network of seven to eight hundred hijras who are estimated to live in the city. With the help of Vinita Sharma, a native Hindi speaker who helped us with the project, we continued visiting the hijras until we went back home to the

United States in the summer. Even though we were able to record many of our conversations, excerpts of which have been reproduced in unedited form in appendices A through E, the hijras were generally opposed to having their interactions taped. The research I present in this dissertation, then, is based as much on my recollection of various interactions as it is on recordings of more formal interviews. The tape-recorder is certainly beneficial in terms of linguistic analysis, but it cannot possibly capture the nuances of the community's interworkings.

Two of the communities we spent time with are predominantly Hindu and fall under the leadership of one of the oldest and most powerful hijra leaders in Banaras. While one of these groups speaks reverently of their performance as an art, the other provokes anger in the local community by their shrewd and aggressive business dealings. The hijras of this latter community are never underpaid; to slight them would incite their verbal abuses, or more significantly, their curse. In contrast to these two communities, the hijras of a third community live isolated from the city's Hindu culture, residing in one of Banaras' poorer Muslim districts. Their home, which they share with a number of Muslim families, is located on the edge of a vast field that is reached only after traversing a long, winding labyrinth of back alleys. At the end of this field, which would be deserted if it were not for the occasional hut or lean-to, the community sits isolated without electricity. Unlike the groups located in the Hindu areas, this latter community falls under the jurisdiction of a Muslim hijra who, though renowned for kindness, wields enough power to be able to call together thousands of hijras at any given moment. A fourth community is located outside the city altogether, and is made up of hijras who live in a variety of neighboring villages. Song and dance mark a major source of income for all of these groups, who garner money and saris for their blessings at birth celebrations. Of the hijras we interviewed, some have chosen a life of partial solitude somewhat apart from their community while others have chosen to live with fellow hijras and adopt a group identity; all, however, relate rich and interestingly contradictory details about their lives and the construction of a gendered self.

THE BANARAS HIJRAS

Most of the hijras we spoke with related tragic stories from their youth, explaining how friends and family ostracized and evicted them from their own households. Whether this ostracism is precipitated by actual anatomical difference or by some sort of effeminate behavior is unclear from the hijras' narratives, who apparently feel a political imperative to insist that the designation is entirely physical. Their societal marginalization often begins at an early age when family members, neighbors, and peers respond negatively to their presence. Sulekha,[3] a 38 year old hijra originally from Motihari in Bihar, spoke with great sadness about her childhood, when she was informed because of physical reasons that she was a hijra. The child of a *halvāī,* or 'sweet-maker', Sulekha spoke proudly of her family lineage and regularly alluded to their high social status as Kanya-Kubja Brahmans. Yet when only seven years old, she was forced to realize that in the eyes of Indian society, her existence as a gendered being was questionable, if not reprehensible. She recalls a particular moment when she realized that she was different from her peers, for neither boys nor girls would let her into their playgroup:

(1)   There were a few boys at my school who I used to study with. When I sat with them, they used to tell me that I was a hijra. Then they started telling other people, "This is a hijra! This is a hijra! Don't sit near him! Sit separately!" If I sat with the girls, the girls would say, "This is a hijra! This is a hijra! Don't sit near him! Sit separately!" So I felt very ashamed. I thought, "How is it that I've become a hijra? The girls don't talk to me; the boys don't talk to me. What terrible thing has happened to me?" I wanted to go and play with them, but nobody wanted to play with me. So life was going like that. Nobody would help me.

When we responded to her description of this incident by asking if there was anyone who had tried to help her, she replied, "Who would ever help me with a problem like this one?"

Sulekha's realization that she was unsuitable for either boyhood or girlhood hardly made her feel like a mystical third sex; on the contrary, she explains that her family was so disapproving that she ultimately had no other choice but to leave home:

(2)   What could the members of my family think, after all? They didn't think anything. Or they thought, "Oh! What has he become? He became a hijra! Why doesn't he just die! Oh, why doesn't he just go away! Oh, the name of his father and mother has been doomed!" It became a house of dishonor. They said, "How can his life go on? It would have been better if he had just died!" I used to listen to all of that, and finally I just ran away.

The harsh response of Sulekha's parents, as well as her neighbors who taunted her with the designation *nacaniyā* ['little dancer'], reflects a pervasive societal belief that the hijra, by virtue of her own impotence, will prevent family members within the household from marrying. This belief, coupled with a social intolerance for the integration of such figures, has led many parents to ask local hijra communities to take their child away from them (see Chapter 3 and Chapter 4).

Such was the case with a six-day old child in Gorakhpur, the home district of Rupa, another hijra who spoke with us about her life. Unlike the other hijras we interviewed, Rupa leads a quiet and secluded life away from her group, seeing her fellow hijras only during their daily song and dance performances. At her home which she shares with an Indian family, Rupa dresses as a man, her femininity visible only in her topknot, earrings, nose ring, and understated eye make-up. The child of a Brahman *pujārī* ['temple priest'],

Rupa has now become somewhat of a *pandit* ['religious leader'] among her fellow hijras in Banaras, who ask for her spiritual guidance with respect to the hijra goddess *Bahucarā Mātā*. As with Sulekha, Rupa's family never understood her childhood fondness for girls' games and playgroups, and her continued discomfort with masculinity later compelled her to leave Gorakhpur and join the hijras in Banaras at the age of eighteen. But the unrelated incident of the abandonment of a hijra child in Gorakhpur, even though it took place years after her own entry into the community, is salient to her own life story. When explaining that the hijra lifestyle is anatomically determined, she recalls this child's story in support of her point:

(3)   You just know it from your body. About 5 or 6 years ago, for example, I was in Gorakhpur. There was a *ṭhakur* [a high caste] there who was the landlord. He was from the Devriya district. His wife entered the Gorakhpur hospital; she was about to give birth to a child. When the child was born, the doctor told them, "This child is a hijra." So Thakur Sahab thought, "Wherever we go, we'll be dishonored because dishonor has certainly happened. And when the boy grows up, the hijras will surely come and take him away from us anyway, and it will be very painful. If we take this boy home with us to the village, we'll get a bad reputation." So on that same day, when the boy was only six days old, he found out about the hijras. He took the boy to them and paid them 500 rupees. He didn't even tell them his name or his address. He simply told them, "It's yours. If you want to take him, then take him right now." After that he went home and proclaimed to the world that his child was dead. That way his honor was saved. That boy isn't in Gorakhpur anymore; now he's in a place called Maū.

As we shall see later in Chapter 4, the child referred to in this passage was in fact adopted by a community of hijras living in Maū, a district outside Banaras. But central to Rupa's narrative is the idea that hijrahood is a physical designation; indeed, at a later point she explains that "even those who decide to become hijras later in life still have some kind of *kharābī*," a term that translates into English as 'defect.' "Only then will they become hijras," she adds, "They don't do it just for fun."

Megha, a 25 year old hijra who lives together with seven other hijras in a third community, also had to experience familial rejection first hand. Born into the *gvālā*, or 'cowherder', caste in Patna, Megha explains that she was raised as a girl by her mother until the hijras came to perform at her niece's birth celebration and inadvertently recognized her to be one of them. Yet she had known that she was different from her peers long before that chance meeting, even identifying a particular moment when she abruptly came to realize that she was anatomically unique:

(4)   When I was about five or six years old, I went with the other boys to urinate. I looked at them and saw that they all had things. I thought, "Hey, look at me! They all have *mūlī*'s coming out of them but I'm completely smooth." I said, "What kind of life am I?" Everybody else had a *mūlī* hanging down, but I was just like a girl. I felt very sad that I didn't have what the other boys had, so I told my mother what had happened and she said, "You're a hijrin." ... I kept talking to my mother about it—about what kind of life I had. And she kept telling me, "You are a hijra, so you can't go on living here. If you continue living here, my whole household will be uprooted. Who will marry your sister if they come to know that there's a hijra in the family? Who will marry such and such and so and so? You will ruin all of their marriages because people will think, 'If there's a hijra in the household, we will produce hijras too. How can we marry someone who

has a hijra in the house?'" Because of that, my mother and father gave me
away to this person.

Megha's distress over her own lack of a *mūlī* (a term that translates literally as 'horse
radish' and refers to a white radish shaped like a large carrot) is a classic case of penis envy
except for the fact that Megha is not a girl, but a hijra. As in the case of Sulekha and Rupa,
this fact ultimately leads to her ostracization. Her family gives her away to the hijras late
one night so as to preserve their own honor, telling their neighbors that their child had
drowned in the Ganges river and died. "We're just like everyone else except this one
thing," Megha exclaims, gesturing towards her lap. "We too would have settled into a
household; we too would have had children; we too would have called hijras to dance and
sing for us. But what can we do, *dīdī* ['sister']? We are unfortunate. What can I do about
my fate? It's bad. Sometimes I cry."

It is the societal attitudes enunciated so clearly by these hijras in their narratives that
have made life for them extremely difficult. These perceptions undoubtedly parallel those
expressed by the new wave of "hijraphobic" writers who, like V. K. Shrivastav who
condemns the hijra profession as vile, present the hijra to the public as a dangerous and
immoral being who kidnaps and castrates the innocent (e.g., Allahbadia and Shah 1992;
Bobb and Patel 1982; Mitra 1983; Sanyani 1986). According to the editor of the *Bombay
Dost*, a lesbian and gay magazine distributed out of Bombay, these allegations are rapidly
increasing.[4] Shashi, who joined the hijra community at age eleven and is now an eighty
year old guru, responds to this situation with resignation, claiming that since the hijras can
do little to change these perceptions, they must simply accept their fate:

(5)   We have to wander around here and there the whole day, so what would we
        gain by being unhappy? We have to laugh; we have to cry. Somebody will
        treat us with love; somebody else will scold us; somebody else will treat us

badly. The days somehow pass like that, and in the evenings after we eat, we lie down and think about it. We remember everything—our household, our relatives, our past—and of course we feel sorry. But what can we do? This is life, after all. We can't commit suicide. There are so many people who commit suicide because they're fed up with their lives. But this is life, and life has to be lived.

Shashi's case is particularly revealing, for she asserts that she is the one to have disowned her parents instead of the other way around. Refusing to identify her father's occupation, caste, or education, Shashi angrily exclaims that as a hijra she is free from such designations. At the age of seven, she ran away from home and joined a troupe of *bāī*, women dancers who are often perceived to be prostitutes, at the age of seven: "I renounced my mother; I renounced my father; I renounced everybody!" But what was initially grief later turned into contempt, and Shashi, adamant about the notion that hijras have no ties to the world of men and women, be it caste, class, or religion, blasphemes her own parents: "As far as I'm concerned, my mother and father were all cremated on *Maṇikarṇikā*. I cremated them. I hit them four times with a stick and then I let their ashes flow down the Ganges river. I said, 'You *mādar cod* ['mother fuckers'] flow down the river! Don't ever show your face here again! If you come to my little town, I'll beat the hell out of you!'"

The majority of hijra communities are physically and socially isolated from the cities and villages in which they live. Perhaps in compensation for their own abandonment, hijras rely not only upon their own internal systems of law and order, but also upon elaborate familial structures which dictate various roles (e.g., mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, grandmother, aunt, sister, and daughter) to different members of the group. The guru is thought of as the *sās* ['mother-in-law'] and the disciple as *bahu* ['daughter-in-law'], although in everyday interactions the hijras address each other with terms like *mā̃* ['mother'], *beṭī* ['daughter'], *dīdī* ['sister'], and *mosī* ['aunt']. As we shall

see in the chapters that follow, the hijras have subverted the mainstream usage of such designations in response to their own exclusion from the larger system of sanctioned kinship. Shashi, in a discussion of her own community's tendency to designate even their neighbors as kin, implies that these relationships are created in overt resistance to societal alienation:

(6)   This place here is like a household, for instance. And all of the people in the neighborhood are related to us, too. Someone says *mausī* ['maternal aunt']; someone says *cācī* ['paternal aunt']; someone says *bahan* ['sister']; someone is always saying this or that. We have kinship relations with everyone in the neighborhood. If we don't keep relations with our neighbors, then if some calamity falls upon us, who's going to look after us? If there's no hijra around when it happens, who's going to help us in our misery and look after us? These people are the only ones who will help us. Who else would help us? We have nobody. Who would help us or lend us support? We people have nobody. Except for *Bhagvān*, we have nobody. Nobody at all.

As the poorest and most isolated group of the four I studied, the hijras in Shashi's community are critically aware of how segregation has contributed to their own poverty. All born into Hindu families who ostracized them, they have now adopted the religious practices of the Muslim families they live with, families who in many ways suffer a similar marginalization as residents of a city that is strongly Hindu identified.

Charu, a disciple of Shashi's who came to Banaras from a small city in Mizarpur, expands upon her guru's explanation, commenting that the formation of these kinship systems is "a matter of being outside of society." Particularly noteworthy is her claim that

society has made hijras themselves complicit in this isolation: In response to their marginalization, she explains, the hijras have developed a strict separatist mentality:

> (7)   About the question of remaining outside of society—yes, a hijra has been separated from society but he hasn't been separated from the world. Once a hijra has been separated from society, it's not possible for him to go back home, even if he wants to do so. The hijra is the dividing line between society and non-society. He's been separated from society so if he wants to live in society again, the people of his family will be very upset. They might be happy when they think, "He's our family; he's our son; he's our brother." But even though they might cry, they'll still be angry about one thing: The worldly people will say, "Oh no, a hijra has come! A hijra visits that household so they must be related to a hijra! So we won't arrange a marriage with anyone in that household!" That's how the world has made him an outcaste; the world looks at him with an evil eye. "It's a hijra! It's a hijra!"

Primary to Charu's narrative is the idea that the hijra can never again go back to the *samājik* ['social'] world; as beings who lack what she refers to as the *guptāg* ['secret organ'], the hijras are destined to live out their lives as societal orphans. Comparing the hijra to a prostitute who renounces her family and moves to a *koṭhā* ['prostitute's room'], Charu explains that the hijras are forced to remain in the community for their own livelihood. "If she goes back home, she will act in the same way that she did in the *koṭhā* except that she won't have any red powder," Charu explains. "Her manner of sitting, for instance, will be the same as it was in the *koṭhā* except that she won't have any of the red powder and make-up necessary for her business. So what will she do if she goes home?" A similar account is offered by Sulekha, although she is more directly concerned with the initiate's own

perceptions of her new lifestyle: "It's just like the tooth of an elephant. Once it has broken the skin, even if it wants to go back inside, it can't go back inside.[5] Hijras are just like that. If a hijra comes here and begins to dance and sing, no matter how much you try to catch him and put him back in the home, his heart won't allow it; he won't feel at home. Even if you give him a golden throne, he won't be able to sit on it."

When the hijras describe themselves in their narratives, they do so primarily with respect to a dichotomous notion of gender; that is, they regularly refer to themselves as either deficient males or incomplete females. The notion of "deficiency" is inherent in the meaning of the term *hijṛā* itself, which is used in contemporary society to mean 'impotent'. Rupa illustrates the transparency of this meaning when she explains, "Men who are *napuṁsak* ['impotent, unmanly']—that is, men who are not competent—they are called *hijṛās*." The Sanskrit term *napuṁsak* is used in the grammatical designation of the neuter gender, a gender that in Hindi-speaking culture materializes socially and not linguistically. Rupa's equation of hijras with impotent men parallels a similar juxtaposition in the recent Hindi film *Zākhmī Aurat* ['Wounded Woman'], which presents a well-defined feminist agenda in the format of a popular Hindi movie. A team of women who have been victims of rape (the two leading characters being a doctor and a police officer) decide to take revenge on society by castrating men who are rape suspects. Their comment is that they want to "make them like hijras," a simile that not only suggests that the hijra is a deficient male but also links her with criminal and sexual deviance.

The idea that the hijra is morally as well as sexually deficient is mirrored in the hijras' own philosophy of self. According to the hijras we interviewed, within any community of hijras there are two recognized subsets: the *hijṛā* and the *hijṛin*. A number of researchers have noted the existence of a gender dichotomy among the hijras (e.g., Pimpley and Sharma 1985; Sharma 1989; Vyas and Shingala 1987), but it appears to be realized differently across communities. In the Banaras hijra community, the term *hijṛin* denotes those hijras who are more feminine, often characterized by their peers as having

"softer" and "prettier" features. The hijras themselves claim that there is no essential difference between these two subsets and discuss them primarily as physical designations, yet it is interesting to note that the group leaders of all four communities we studied were *hijṛās* and not *hijṛins*. Charu's description of the difference between the two subsets is as follows:

(8)   In this world only two kinds of births exist: *nar* ['man'] and *nārī* ['woman']. If a man's fate goes wrong he becomes a *hijṛā*; if a woman's fate goes wrong she becomes a *hijṛin*."[6] ... You are *lediz* ['ladies'] and they are *jents* ['gentlemen']. Suppose that the Master has made ((gesturing to one of the men present)) his fate go bad, and it's evident that he doesn't have a male organ.[7] You'll be able to see that there's nothing masculine about him, so you'll call him *hijṛā*; he doesn't have a masculine organ, so he'll be called a *hijṛā*. But suppose that you're feminine and your fate has gone bad, then you'll be called *hijṛin*—in the feminine gender.

While the distinction between these two terms may be used by the hijras in Banaras for predominantly descriptive reasons, it is apparently much more important among the hijras in Punjab, where the hijra/hijrin dichotomy is echoed in community roles as well. Rupa remarks that in Punjab, hijras and hijrins live together "like husband and wife" and are differentiated in dress as well as social role. A Punjabi hijra wears a *lungī*, traditional dress for Muslim men, whereas a Punjabi hijrin wears a *sāṛī*, traditional dress for women. Moreover, during performances at births and weddings, the *hijṛās* play the drums while the *hijṛins* do the dancing.

But in Banaras, the distinction made between *hijṛā* and *hijṛin* is based on moral as well as physical deficiency; that is, the hijras believe that a *hijṛā* is making up for sins formerly committed as a man, while a *hijṛin* is making up for those committed as a woman.

"The sin we committed in the last birth is responsible for the way we are in this birth," Charu explains. "We definitely must have committed some sin in the last birth to be forced to live like this now." Equating the hijras' deficiency to a physical handicap like blindness or deafness ("The Master has made us so that we will suffer from all of these miserable conditions: He's made some people blind; he's made other people lame; and he's made some people hijra and hijrin"), Charu explains that the hijras go on pilgrimages so as to increase their chances of having a good birth in the next life. According to Nirmal Mitra (1983), hijras do not believe that they belong to the world around them, referred to in religious terms as the *sansārī duniyā* ['world of family ties']; they have instead left their homes and families to lead a life of penitence, service, and discipline, specifically so that they will be born a complete human in their next life. While I would hesitate to agree with Mitra's claim that the hijras leave their families completely on their own accord, his focus on the afterlife is shared by many of the hijras I spoke with in Banaras. In the hijra community, gender is thought of not only as a punishment for immoral deeds in the past life, but also as a reward for moral deeds in this one. To a certain extent, then, the hijras see their own marginalization as divinely sanctioned.

Accompanying the hijra's view of herself as deficient is the closely related notion that she is incomplete. This notion is usually realized with respect to womanhood, an ideal which the hijra appropriates in her imitations and parodies of feminine dress, gesture, and language. All of the hijras we interviewed, with the exception of Rupa who came to the hijra community as an adult, expressed a desire to become a "complete" woman. The following two excerpts from conversations with Sulekha and Megha are particularly telling in this respect. In the first narrative, Sulekha explains how she finally had to come to terms with the fact that she could never be a real woman, as she had hoped; in the second, Megha looks forward to being born as a woman in the next life:

(9) "Oh *Bhagvān* ['God']! What is this thing that has happened to me? How much better it would have been if I had been born a woman!" That's what I used to say when I was wearing a *sāṛī* but hadn't yet joined the hijras. I said, "Why have I become a hijra? Why have I become a hijra? If I were truly a woman, how good it would have been! I would have been married, I would have had a wedding, how good it would have been!" But after I became a hijra and wore a *sāṛī*, I didn't feel that way anymore.

(10) Being a man is no good, no good at all. Because you have to drive a car, you have to drive a truck, you have to drive this, you have to drive that. If I'm a woman, I'll become a bride. I'll observe *purdah* in front of the men of the house and I'll cook food. First I'll massage the feet of my husband, then I'll massage his head, and then I'll sleep with him. ((laughs)) On the honeymoon night, I'll just be sitting at home observing purdah, and when he comes to me, I'll look at him in this way ((makes a coquettish, flirtatious expression)). I'll say to the Master, "Oh Master, in the next birth please make me a woman! ((gesturing towards Veronica, who is laughing loudly)) Make me laugh like she's laughing!" I've given up all the crying and mourning. If the Mother has mercy on me, she'll make me that way. If she has no mercy, she'll make me a man and I'll have to push the *ṭhelā* ['cart'].

The physical fact that the hijra cannot bear children becomes a salient obstacle to achieving the ideal of womanhood, particularly in a society where such importance is placed on the bearing of sons. The incontrovertibility of this fact feeds into the hijra's self-designation as incomplete, so much so that the hijras we spoke with distinguish themselves from women primarily (and often solely) because they are physically unable to give birth.

This desire for completion is underscored by the respect hijras give to the tomb of a particular hijra in the Gujarat, who is said to have given birth to a son. According to the hijras of Shashi's community, who related this story to us with great enthusiasm, this hijra had expressed her desire for a child to *Babā*, the saint buried in Ajmer Sharif and renowned throughout northern India for answering the prayers of pilgrims. Because Baba has a widespread reputation for granting whatever is asked of him, he was compelled to grant this request as well. Shashi, in describing the Gujarat tomb, explains the reasons why hijras view this birth as miraculous despite the fact that both mother and child died shortly after childbirth[8]:

(11)   Once a hijra went to Ajmer Sharif and asked for a child. And a child was born! A hijra had a hijra child! A child grew in the hijra's womb. A child was actually there. But later on, both of them died. A tomb was built for them there. ... Baba has so much power. ... They had to cut open the stomach. Listen! They opened up the stomach just like this ((gesturing across stomach with hands)), and then they took the child out. There was no other way because he had prayed, "Please give me an offspring." You see, the Baba who is still buried there is famous for this one thing: Whoever asks him for something in full faith will get whatever he asks for. So when a hijra went there and asked for a child, Baba had to give it to him because he had to show the world his godliness. But when the baby came into the hijra's stomach, of course, it could only come out by cutting the stomach open. So Baba showed the world his godliness; he showed the world a miracle. After the stomach was cut open, both of them died. Only their history remained, but history had been made. So they built a tomb there, for both of them.

Charu continues her guru's narrative by describing how important this birth is to the hijras in their worship rituals, so much so that thousands of hijras journey each year to the hijra tomb to offer their respect. "Once a year, hijras come from all over the world and offer a shawl to Baba," she explains. "The hijras offer the very first shawl, then the nation, then Pakistan, and then the whole world."

CONCLUSIONS

My reason for questioning the way in which the hijra's existence has been appropriated as evidence for an institutionalized third sex is based upon the fact that hijras themselves interpret their lives with respect to a very powerful gender dichotomy, one that carries with it fixed and exclusionary representations of femininity and masculinity. The observation that cross-cultural discussions of alternative identities tend to ignore the more oppressive constraints on those identities is not new; over a decade ago Harriet Whitehead argued in her criticism of Euro-American scholarship on the Berdache of native America that anthropological investigations of homosexuality have too often overlooked the more limiting elements of the native cultural system. Whitehead acknowledges that the construct of homosexuality is organized very differently in the cultures of contemporary America, native America, and New Guinea, but also finds a common denominator of "deficiency" in each of these constructs, concluding that cultural variability does not necessarily entail infinite variability: "To say that gender definitions and concepts pertaining to sex and gender are culturally variable is not necessarily to say that they can vary infinitely or along any old axis" ([1981] 1993:523). She therefore calls for a theory of variability that simultaneously analyzes the limits on that variability, or in her own words, "a line of sociological inquiry that investigates the relationship between gender constructs and the organization of prestige in a given society" (524).

In the following chapters, I try to investigate this organization of prestige with reference to the hijras' language use. When their narratives are juxtaposed with contemporary representations of the hijra in the Indian popular press, a new interpretation of their place in Indian society emerges, one that challenges the interpretation which has often been used to further European and American discussions of gender fluidity. As the hijra's very existence is explained with respect to either deficiency or incompletion, the question of whether or not she should be interpreted in the anthropological literature as a third sex becomes irrelevant, or at the very least unimportant. What is more important to the discussion at hand is the fact that her own prestige is constrained by the prestige of a rigidly dichotomous gender system, a system that both structures and limits her own variability.

NOTES

1   There are a number of articles and books that refer to the eunuchs in Indian history (e.g., Sharma 1984; Saletore 1974, 1978) and many more that address the notion of "dual" sexuality in Indian tradition and mythology (e.g., Bhandari and Jain 1991; Goldman 1993; Nanda 1990; and O'Flaherty 1973, 1980).

2   One of the hijras we spoke with, in order to indicate that three-fourths of all hijras have had operations, explained that "rupayā mẽ bārah ānā" ['in one rupee 12 annas']. In Indian currency, 16 annas make up one rupee.

3   To preserve the hijras' anonymity, I have chosen pseudonyms for all of the hijras appearing in this dissertation and have avoided giving the names of the four hijra communities we visited.

4   The editor, Ashok Row Kavi, made this statement in response to some questions that arose after he delivered a paper on homosexuality in contemporary India at the University of California, Berkeley, October 1993. Many of these questions were queries on how the hijras fit into the contemporary gay movement. Apparently, the movement has included the prevention of violence against hijras as an agenda item, even though many hijras feel that any association with the gay and lesbian movement will ultimately work against them.

5   Compare the Hindi proverb:

hāthī ke dāt
khāne ke aur
dikhāne ke aur

The teeth of an elephant:
One for eating,
Another for showing.

6   In Charu's own words: *ādmī kā dīn bigaṛ gayā to hijṛā ho gayā; aurat kā dīn bigaṛ gayā to hijṛin ho gaī*, which translates literally as, "If a man's character has gone spoiled, he becomes a hijra; if a woman's character has gone spoiled, she becomes a hijrin." The verbal compound *bigaṛ jānā* could also be translated as 'to become deformed'.

7   The expression Chauru uses is *mard kā koī cīz nahī̃ hai*, which translates literally as, "He has no thing of manhood."

8   This story is also told by a hijra interviewed by Serena Nanda (1990:19) in southern India, though in slightly different form.

CHAPTER 3

Gendered Stances

"Harry! Olivia! Please be jolly! I will tell you a dream I had

last night - you will laugh - it was about Mrs. Crawford. No but

wait, wait - she was not Mrs. Crawford, she was an *hijra* and

she was doing like this." He clapped his hands as one dancing

and laughed uproariously. She was with a whole troupe of them

all singing and dancing, but I recognised her quite easily. It is

true, he said, she does look like an *hijra*.

Olivia asked "What is an *hijra*?"

-Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, *Heat and Dust*

A number of anthropologists have been interested enough in the hijras' language

use to comment on it secondarily in their descriptions of the hijra lifestyle, but not one of

them has attempted to analyze the hijras' speech patterns from any sort of linguistic

perspective. Harriet Ronken Lynton and Mohini Rajan remark that the Hindi-speaking

hijras they spoke with in Hyderabad "use 'he' and 'she', 'him' and 'her', indiscriminately"

(1974:192)—a misleading statement since gender is marked not on pronouns, but on verbs

and adjectives.[1] Similarly, Serena Nanda, in the introduction to her ethnography published

almost two decades later, explains somewhat simplistically that "Indian languages have

three kinds of gender pronouns: masculine, feminine, and a formal, gender-neutral form"

(1990:xviii). Nanda, an American anthropologist, interviewed hijras from a variety of

different linguistic communities, her conversations mediated by translators in Gujarati,

Hindi, and Panjabi. But in defining all "Indian languages" as having three kinds of gender

pronouns, she makes an inaccurate generalization, especially since India hosts well over 2,000 languages and dialects within its borders from a variety of language families.

While Nanda does acknowledge that hijras in some parts of India have "a specialized, feminized language, which consists of the use of feminine expressions and intonations" (1990:17),[2] she asserts that the hijras in the communites she studied alternate between feminine and masculine forms for no apparent reason:

(1)   Hijras, in their conversations, use these [gender pronouns] randomly and indiscriminately to refer to individual hijras. They insist, however, that people outside their community refer to hijras in the feminine gender. When I am quoting a hijra verbatim, I use the gender pronoun used by that speaker if it is masculine or feminine. If it is the gender-neutral pronoun, I have translated it as a feminine gender pronoun. When I am referring to a hijra, I use the feminine gender pronoun to conform to hijra norms, unless I am referring to the hijra in the past, when he considered himself a male. (1990:xviii)

But Nanda's observation that the hijras "insist ... that people outside their community refer to hijras in the feminine gender," a statement completely consistent with the attitudes of the Hindi-speaking hijras we interviewed in Banaras, would suggest that the use of morphological gender is a salient issue in the hijra community, one that comes to symbolize their own acceptance in the society at large. My reason for criticizing previous synopses of linguistic gender in research on the hijras is not to dismiss such studies as invalid, but rather to illustrate how anthropological fieldwork can be enhanced by an increased awareness of, and attentiveness to, linguistic phenomena. Nanda's study would have been even more informative had she approached the hijras' life narratives from a linguistic perspective as well as an anthropological one.

Although the four Hindi-speaking communities we spent time with in Banaras are isolated from one another both physically and ideologically, patterns of gesture and speech occur and recur. Constrained by a linguistic system which allows for only two morphological genders, Hindi-speaking hijras, when uttering phrases that are self-referential, must gender themselves as either feminine or masculine. Their use of language reflects a lifestyle that is constantly self-defining, as they study, imitate, and parody binary constructions of gender in an effort to gender themselves. In contrast to assertions made by previous researchers, I found that the hijras alternate between feminine and masculine speech for identifiable reasons. Since certain verbs, adjectives, and postpositions in Hindi are marked for feminine and masculine gender, with verbs being marked in all three persons, the hijras' attempts at alternating constructions of female and male selves become apparent in quite basic choices of feminine and masculine verbal, adjectival, and postpositional forms. Critically aware of the cultural meaning attributed to their own use of feminine as opposed to masculine speech, the hijras code-switch between morphological genders in their daily interactions in order to express relations of power and solidarity.

VOCAL DEVIANCE

Indian and Pakistani sociologists and journalists often make discussions of language central to their exposure of the hijra lifestyle. Nauman Naqvi and Hasan Mujtaba, for instance, in their article on Urdu-speaking hijras in Pakistan, assert emphatically that "hijras challenge the very order of language" (1992:81). Switching arbitrarily between "he," "she," "his," "her," and "he/she" when referring to individual hijras, the authors articulate the inability of both Urdu and English to capture the intersexed essence of the hijra:

In Urdu the entire cosmos is divided into the masculine and feminine genders; the hijras are neither and both. In English, a neuter gender exists, but the use of the adjective "it" dehumanises the hijra, strips this being of his/her very humanity. And despite the proliferation in English of categorisations related to sexuality—eunuchs, hermaphrodites, transvestites, homosexuals, bisexuals, et al—not one completely defines the hijra. What is the hijra? The masculine and the feminine are two distinct principles, each possessing its distinct mode of being. But the hijra combines traits peculiar to both genders and yet is neither quite one nor the other. (1992:81-2)

Yet Naqvi and Mujtaba's desire to protect the "humanity" of the hijras linguistically is not shared by many Indian authors writing in English, who use the masculine gender unyieldingly in reference to the hijras (e.g., Bobb and Patel 1982; Mehta 1945; Mukherjee 1980; Patel 1988; Rao 1955), or at the very best, a qualified "she" in quotation marks (e.g. Sethi 1970; Sinha 1967; Srinivas 1976), in order to expose what they perceive to be a deviant and unacceptable lifestyle.[3]

These same authors frequently question the hijras' claims to femininity by remarking on the inappropriateness of their vocal presentations. While a number of researchers have commented on the hijras' "high-pitched" voice (Jani and Rosenberg 1990:103; Mukherjee 1980:63; Pimpley and Sharma 1985:41; Rao 1955:521), others have suggested that it is the voice itself that acts as the betrayer of their masculinity. The nature of this betrayal is overtly narrated by Patanjali Sethi in his journalistic exposure of the hijras in Bombay, which he opens by recalling his first interaction with a hijra named Kumari:

Her name was Kumari. She was about 17. She rested her face on the edge of the charpoy on which I sat, a round face with a soft expression, somewhat prematurely sensuous for her age. The eyes held an eloquent appeal. Clean hair,

oiled and tied in a knot. "Must take her photograph," I thought. "Would look unusual in the midst of all the squalor."

I asked if she would pose for one. Kumari nodded assent with delightful eagerness, her eyes suddenly sparkling with anticipation. As she stood in the sun, I asked her to untie her hair.

And then came the shock.

"*Acchaji, khol deti hun!*"—a thick strong male voice.

Yes, "she" was a *hijra* in a colony of *hijras*. When I went closer to make "her" stand in a particular manner, I noticed that there wasn't so much girlishness, after all, particularly the flat chest! Yet so authentic was the appearance that I was still ready to believe it was a girl.

Kumari symbolized the tragedy of the hermaphrodite world—treated as subject of bawdy jest and laughter, shunned by most, misunderstood by all. (1970:40)

The "shock" which Sethi identifies in this passage is the sudden sound of a "thick strong male voice" projected from a body characterized by roundness, softness, sensuality, and eloquence. The author's inability to reconcile this physical contradiction prompts him to qualify all subsequent feminine references to Kumari with quotation marks, ultimately summarizing "her" interactive performance as symbolic of "the tragedy of the hermaphrodite world." Indeed, a photograph of Kumari on the subsequent page sports the caption, "To look at, Kumari 17, is a girl—until you hear her speak in her thick male voice" (1970:42).[4]

The same conflict between a feminine physical appearance and a masculine vocality prompts Sekh Rahim Mondal to argue that even though the hijras he studied in West Bengal wear feminine clothes and jewelry, their "masculine voice" makes them not only "objects of ridicule," but also recipients of "a very painful and pathetic experience from the

conventional social environment" (1989:244). Similarly, Chander Mohan, in his discussion of recent political moves by the hijras of Uttar Pradesh, claims that "no one would mistake [the hijras] for women" since "their faces, their limbs, and their voices have a masculine roughness" (1979:1). And Satish Kumar Sharma's declaration that the hijras, of all those who defy linguistic categorization, are "the most interesting and outlandish freaks of nature" (1984:381) is precipitated by his assertion that the hijras have an "ambivalent physical appearance." Opening his article with the observation that "certainly every society gives linguistic notice of the differential parts individuals are expected to play," he notes a marked exception in the case of "individuals who do not belong to either sex" (381). In Sharma's opinion, the fact that the hijras "shave, smoke, and talk like men but dress and behave in a more feminine way in the society at large" (381) points to their ambiguous status not only in the social structure, but in the linguistic gender system as well.

What is significant about Sethi's narrative, however, is that even though the author is critical of Kumari's masculine-sounding voice, he reports her speech entirely in the first person feminine. After asking Kumari to let her hair down for a photograph, he quotes her as saying in Hindi, "*Acchaji, khol deti hun!*"—a response which translates into English as, "Okay sir, I'll untie it." But by employing the feminine-marked *khol detī ^{f}hū* instead of the masculine *khol detā^m hū*,[5] Kumari identifies herself linguistically as female. Perhaps noticing similar employments of feminine self-reference among hijras in other communites, a number of scholars working with speakers of gendered Indo-Aryan languages have remarked that the hijras "affect female speech and manners" (e.g. Patel 1983) and "become adept in feminine speech patterns and gait" (e.g. Mukherjee 1980:61).[6] The precise meaning of such statements is unclear, yet one thing is certain: the authors remain unconvinced of the hijra's ability to achieve fluency in such patterns. Jani and Rosenberg, displeased with the performances of the Hindi-speakers they interviewed in western India, comment on the hijras' "largely exaggerated female mannerisms and gesturing" (1990:103),

and Haribhai Patel, in his work among the hijras in Gujarat, argues that "in spite of their efforts to look and act like females, their behavior is neither completely masculine nor feminine" (1983:121).

Such criticism underscores a larger societal refusal to accept the hijras' femininity as genuine, and an accompanying disapproval of what is perceived to be a "superficially" feminine lifestyle. Sumant Mehta, reporting on the *pavaiyās* (a term he uses in reference to "castrated eunuchs") in Gujarat, sets the stage for future research when he identifies the hijras' verbal femininity as "bad imitations," "ghastly mimicry," and "caricature":

In the amateur and professional theatrical plays in Gujarat (and probably throughout India), many boys take the part of girls or women and they imitate the gait and gestures of women. As a rule, their attempt is a failure because they overact. Similarly the Pavaiyā's gait and gestures are bad imitations of the feminine gait and gestures. Their features are masculine, their limbs have a masculine shape, their hips are masculine, their voice and shape of the neck (Adam's Apple) are masculine, the chest and the gait are masculine (1945:44).

The speech and manners of Pavaiyās are said to be like those of women. I entirely disagree with this statement. Most of them have a male voice. Their gait is that of a man because of the shape of their pelvis, but Pavaiyās try to imitate the gait of a woman, and I would say that their gait, speech, and mannerisms are a ghastly mimicry or caricature. (1945:46)

Mehta's equivalence of the hijras' behavior with a theatrical performance is a revealing simile. While acknowledging the creative nature of the hijra's gait, speech, and mannerisms by designating them as a kind of performance, Mehta simultaneously reduces these performances to prescribed role-playing, thereby denying his social actors any "essential"

femininity. In the folk-dramas mentioned by Mehta, which most likely approximate what is currently referred to in Hindi as *sāng* (traveling dramas predominantly performed in rural areas) or *nautankī* (traveling dramas predominantly performed in urban areas), women's roles are frequently played by young boys, whose higher voices and smaller statures make them more suitable than older men to the performance of female characters.[7] A number of Indian researchers have not only suggested that many of the actors within these companies eventually turn into hijras, they have also attributed such conversions to the actors' repetitive performances of feminine speech and gesture. In a certain sense, the cultural association alluded to by these researchers parallels the United States stereotype of men in the dramatic arts as gay (particularly those who perform in opera, ballet, or musicals), with one notable difference. In these passages, the authors attribute the hijra lifestyle to the earlier theatrical performance of femininity instead of the other way around; that is, they do not identify the hijra's decision to join a theater group as based on any kind of "essential" effeminate nature.

The connection between linguistic performance and effeminate behavior is made explicit by A.P. Sinha in his psychological analysis of why a child might decide to join the hijra community. Sinha, who notes that over twenty percent of the hijras he studied had performed *nautankī* in childhood, understands divergent linguistic behavior to be a precursor to divergent sexuality. Sinha has definitive ideas of what kinds of behaviors constitute femininity and what kinds masculinity, not the least of which are linguistic in nature:

> Such boys, due to constant impersonation of women and their habits, adopt quite a good amount of effeminate characteristics in their mannerism and habits... once a boy has shown tendencies of girlish habits, effeminacy, and is intiated to homo-sexuality, under suitable circumstances and the 'right' kind of environment, the

process of Sexual Inversion begins and there are chances of his ending up as a Hijra (1967:175).

Sinha continues this passage by overtly advising parents to keep a strict watch on their child's mannerisms and to correct any noted linguistic oddities: if necessary, parents should send their sons to the "right type" of school, where they will be forced to interact with other boys, read boys' books, and engage in boys' games. Poorer children, according to Sinha, are particularly susceptible to effeminate behaviors, because their uneducated parents not only fail to realize "the gravity of the situation" (170), but also lack the money needed to finance corrective procedures.

A comparable opinion is voiced more recently by Haribhai Patel, who lists "speech" as one of several areas where a child might deviate from the "sex-roles, norms, and values" expected of men in Indian society (1988:10). Like Sinha, Patel lists what he calls "changing speech" as one of the stepping-stones to girlishness: after suffering from repeated taunts of *baiylo* ['girlish'] from his peers, a young boy will ultimately be left with no other choice but to abandon the world of men and women for the hijra community:

In Indian society, the behaviour of a male and a female is strongly demarcated by sex-roles, norms, and values. Any deviation, by any reason, is severely criticized. In childhood and youth age, such a child is very strongly criticized and teased by his peer groups and so that child is found mixing with the girls of his age, doing female works, and even a speech is also found changing. The boy is known as a 'Baiylo' (Girlish). If that boy cannot face teasing and criticism by temperament and suffering from mental turmoil, he does not feel himself at ease, feels shy very much, and remains in search of a secured place. He also has a knowledge of the Hijada Community. One fine day he runs away from the normal society and joins the

group of hijadas where he feels most secured and treated very well, given
temptations and taken into confidence. (Patel 1988:73)

The notion of vocal deviance, then, although defined rather vaguely in the above articles, is
clearly an important concept in the minds of these researchers. The hijra's inability to
produce an accurate feminine vocality (as in Sethi's narrative when Kumari speaks in a
low, coarse voice), as well as an accurate masculine vocality (as in Sinha's and Patel's
discussions of the hijra as an effeminate sounding boy), symbolizes her own inability to
exist in a gendered world.

GENDER MARKING IN HINDI

The dissatisfaction articulated by South Asian researchers with respect to the hijras'
vocal patterns may have much to do with the fact that many hijras code-switch between
feminine and masculine self-reference in order to convey certain social meanings. Such
gender shifts are particularly evident among the Hindi-speaking hijras we interviewed in
Banaras, who have at their disposal a linguistic playground of verbs, adjectives, and
postpositions awaiting feminine or masculine morphological marking. The alternation
between feminine and masculine self-reference in Hindi is quite easy to discern
linguistically. The past tense of the verb *honā* ['to be'], for instance, is realized as *thā* with
masculine singular subjects, *the* with masculine plural subjects, *thī* with feminine singular
subjects, and *thī̃* with feminine plural subjects:

	Masculine	Feminine	English translation
Sg. 1	maĩ thā	maĩ thī	I was
Sg. 2	tū thā	tū thī	you (intimate) were
Sg. 3	vah thā	vah thī	she/he was
Pl. 1	ham the	ham thĩ	we were
Pl. 2	tum the	tum thĩ	you (familiar) were
Pl. 3	ve the, āp the	ve thĩ, āp thĩ	they were, you (formal) were

TABLE 1. Past tense forms of *honā* ['to be']

The habitual, progressive, and intransitive perfective verb forms in Hindi similarly show gender concord with the subject. These three aspectual tenses are formed by the addition of suffixes and verbal auxiliaries to the verb stem: aspect is indicated through the addition of explicit markers of various kinds to the stem; tense is indicated through the presence of one of the basic forms of *honā* ['to be'] (i.e., present, past, presumptive, subjunctive). Again, the appearance of one of the vowels -ā, -e, -ī, or -ĩ signals the number (singular vs. plural) and gender (feminine vs. masculine) of the subject of the verb. Selected examples of Hindi verbal agreement are included in TABLE 2:

Verb tense	1st person masculine	1st person feminine	English translation
Future	maĩ jāũgā	maĩ jāũgī	I will go
Past	maĩ gayā	maĩ gayī	I went
Present Habitual	maĩ jātā hũ	maĩ jātī hũ	I go
Past Habitual	maĩ jātā thā	maĩ jātī thī	I used to go
Present Progressive	maĩ jā rahā hũ	maĩ jā rahī hũ	I am going
Past Progressive	maĩ jā rahā thā	maĩ jā rahī thī	I was going
Simple Perfective	maĩ gayā	maĩ gayī	I went
Present Perfective	maĩ gayā hũ	maĩ gayī hũ	I have gone
Past Perfective	maĩ gayā thā	maĩ gayā thī	I had gone

TABLE 2. Selected examples of first person verbal marking with *jānā* ['to go']

Inflecting adjectives also agree with the nouns they modify in gender, number, and case, with -ā or -e agreeing with masculine nouns and -ī with feminine nouns; that is, masculine

forms of inflecting adjectives end in -ā in the singular direct and -e in the singular oblique, plural direct, and plural oblique cases; the feminine forms always end in -ī, whether singular or plural, direct or oblique. Moreover, inflecting postpositions agree with the gender of the head noun, so that, for example, the postposition translated into English as 'of' will appear as kā when modifying a singular masculine noun, ke when modifying a plural masculine noun, and kī when modifying a singular or plural feminine noun. The hijras' varied use of these forms, as well as their varied use of first, second, and third person verbal forms, reflects a unique dual-gender position in a society that views them as neither fully feminine nor fully masculine.

"WOMEN'S SPEECH" AND THE NOTION OF ĀDAT ['HABIT']

Since the majority of hijras are raised as boys, they must learn how to perform a new gender identity when they join the hijra community—an identity which distances itself from masculine representations in its appropriation of feminine dress, social roles, gesture, and language. Again, the rigidity of this socialization process has not been lost on South Asian scholars. Satish Kumar Sharma, for instance, identifies not only how the hijras "[legitimize] the normative order of the home," but also how they teach new recruits their mannerisms.[8] After outlining the hierarchical nature of the hijras' affected kinship systems, Sharma focuses on the "strictness" of the socialization process:

> The family head's responsibilities consist of socialization of the eunuchs, giving continuity to the home by way of recruitment of new members. The socialization, besides legitimizing the normative order of the home, also consists of teaching dancing, clapping, begging, and passing of sexual overtures. The head of the family passes on strict instructions to the inmates of the home regarding their behaviour pattern. Love and affection are the two major allurement factors which

add to the process of proper socialization. ... These tactics, however, do not rule out the use of strictest method, such as beatings etc., on the young eunuchs. (1984:385)

While the acquirement of feminine speech is not necessarily central to Sharma's discussion, A. P. Sinha goes so far as to base his definition of the hijra on this very acquisition. Distinguishing between *jankha*s ("new entrants to the fraternity") and *hijra*s ("full members of the social group or fraternity of a hijra"), he explains that while the former will always wear masculine dress and refer to themselves in the masculine, the latter will always wear feminine dress and refer to themselves in the feminine (1967:169). If we accept Sharma's and Sinha's observations as valid, we must also entertain the suggestion that the Hindi-speaking hijra, at some point in her socialization process, makes a conscious shift from masculine to feminine self-reference—a shift alluded to by Pimpley and Sharma when they claim that "the hijras are exhorted to adopt an exaggeratedly feminine mode of attire, gait, speech, gestures, and facial expressions" (1983:43).

These adoptions often become self-conscious emblems of gender construction in the hijras' narratives. Indeed, Sulekha views gender as something to be put on in the way one would put on a *sārī*, an investiture which eventually leads to the acquisition of what she calls calls "*aurat kī bāt*" ['women's speech']:

(3) Now that I've put on this *sārī*, I have to follow through with it. If I went along considering myself a man, what would be the use of wearing a woman's *sārī*? Now that I've worn *sārī*s, I've worn blouses, I've grown out my hair, and I've pierced my ears, I've become a woman so I have to live like a woman. ... When hijras come to the community, when they know all about themselves, they start to dance and sing and everything falls into place. Whoever feels right in his heart becomes a hijra. Whoever doesn't feel right in his heart won't become a hijra. It's not like, "Oh, when I'm a hijra I've become a woman and when I'm not a

hijra I haven't become a woman." It's not like that. She's put on a *sāṛī*, she's entered the society of the hijras, so her language will become that of a woman's. Finally, she has become a hijra.

In this passage, Sulekha offers her own understanding of the socialization process, one that affirms Sinha's claim that feminine self-reference is a prerequisite to a complete hijra identity. The stepping stones to hijrahood, in Sulekha's opinion, are clearly delineated: first, the initiate wears a sari; second, she joins a hijra comunity; and third, her language changes to the feminine.

Yet her language is not so invariably feminine as the above excerpt might suggest. Sulekha continues her discussion by explaining that when she looks like a woman, she correspondingly walks, laughs, and talks like one, employing feminine-marked verb forms like those mentioned in excerpt (10) below, among them *khātī*[f] *hū̃* ['I eat[f]'] and *jātī*[f] *hū̃* ['I go[f]'].[8] Alternatively, if she were to wear a *kurtā* or *luṅgī*, traditionally worn by North Indian men, she would speak as a man, employing masculine-marked verb forms like *khātā*[m] *hū̃* ['I eat[m]'] and *jātā*[m] *hū̃* ['I walk[m]'][9]:

(4) S: ādmī kā bāt karnā hogā, to maī sāṛī pahan nahī̃ lūgī[f], (0.5) jab sāṛī pahan lūgī[f], ham mē se to aurat kā bāt hogā, - jab sāṛī *nahī̃ pahan lūgī[f], <u>tab</u> mard kā bāt. (0.5) hā̃. (1.5) jaise maī luṅgī kurtā pahan lūgī[f], - tab "khātā[m] hū̃," "jātā[m] hū̃," hote haī. ... kuch pareśānī nahī̃ hotī

S: If I have to use men's speech, I won't wear[f] a *sāṛī*. When I wear[f] a *sāṛī*, I'll of course use women's speech; when I *don't wear[f] a *sāṛī*, <u>then</u> [I'll use] men's speech. For example, if I wear[f] a *luṅgī-kurtā*, then it's like, "I eat[m]," "I go[m]." ... It's not a problem. When I wear a *sāṛī*,

hai. - sāṛī pahankar aurat vālā boltī[f] hū̃,   I speak[f] like a woman, "I eat[f]," "I

"khātī[f] hū̃," "jātī[f] hū̃. - kuch nahī̃ diqqat   go[f]." It's not difficult at all. ... Whoever

hotī hai, ... to jo jāntā hai to jāntā hī hai   knows would surely know, right? He

na? - to jāntā hī hai, (1.0) ki hijṛā hai.   would surely know that [a person talking

(1.0) abhī sāṛī pahan liyā abhī lũgī   like this] is a hijra. First I put on a *sāṛī*

kurtā pahan liyā to mard kī tarah   but then I put on a *lũgī-kurtā*, so [my

mardānā ho gayā.   conversation] became *mardānā* ['manly']

    like a man.

Sulekha's clearly pronounced understanding of "women's speech" (i.e. *zanānā bolī*) and

"men's speech" (i.e. *mardānā bolī*) as two mutually exclusive styles of dress, worn at non-

intersecting times in order to enhance the performance of a gender role, points to a

heightened awareness of the social meanings associated with the use of gendered speech.

In Sulekha's opinion, a speaker will be identified as a hijra precisely because of this

versatility, her alternations of femininity and masculinity signaling to outsiders that she is

allied with neither camp.

     Even though Sulekha describes feminine speech as a spontaneous activity which

merely coincides with the decision to wear a *sāṛī*, she also details the difficulty involved in

acquiring it. In particular, she describes a kind of second-language acquisition process that

initiates must undergo after entering the community, a process guided and inspired by the

behavior of older community members:

(5)   S: uskā ekśan badlā rahtā hai. (0.5) jo   S: His/her actions remain changed. When

     pahle pahle āyegā[m] na? - to uskā ādmī   someone first comes[m] here, you know,

     kā svabhāv rahegā, (1.0) is tarah bāt ho   his/her nature will remain like that of a

     jāyegā, (1.0) kabhī admī kā bāt ho   man's, so that's how his conversation will

jāyegā, (2.5) tab hijṛe mẽ jab ā jāyegā[m]
to rahegā[m], - to dekhegā[m], ki "are maĩ-
sab baṛī[f] ādmī[m] hai, (1.5) ((whispering))
is tarah baiṭhī[f] hai to is tarah baiṭhegā[m]
- is tarah khātī[f] hai to is tarah
khāyegā[m]."

be. Sometimes it will be just like a
man's conversation. But when he joins[m]
the hijras and lives[m] among them, he'll
see[m] [how they act], "Hey! I-
they're all senior[f] people[m]!"
((whispering)) She sits[f] like this, so he'll
sit[m] in the same way. She eats[f] like
this, so he'll eat[m] in the same way.

Like Sinha, Sulekha makes a linguistic distinction between newly joined hijras, referring to them throughout the passage in the masculine singular, and the more experienced hijra veterans, identifying them as feminine. This distinction becomes particularly clear when she reports the initiate's surprise at discovering that the older community members behave somewhat differently, and illuminates this disparity by referring to the initiate in the masculine but to his superiors in the feminine: "She sits[f] like this, so he'll sit[m] in the same way. She eats[f] like this, so he'll eat[m] in the same way!"

Central to the hijras' discussions of feminine-language acquisition is the notion of *ādat,* or 'habit'. The hijras' repeated use of this term invites an interesting extension of Bourdieu's (1977) notion of *habitus,* since speakers develop strategies for expression at an accelerated pace in this alternatively defined linguistic marketplace. The use of feminine speech in the hijra community is in many ways synonymous with the projection of a non-masculine identity, and there is a high value placed on its production. Through an intensive immersion in what Bourdieu would call "positive and negative reinforcements" (1977:654), the hijras quickly "acquire durable dispositions" towards those behaviors deemed appropriate by community members, building them into their own linguistic repertoire. In

the following excerpt, Sulekha explains how initiates are reprimanded for the use of masculine speech, physically as well as verbally:

(6) S: sikhāyā nahī̃ jātā hai. - anubhav ho jātā hai. - dekhkar ke, - koī baccā to nahī̃ hai, usko sikhlāyā jāyegā. ... kaise kar rahe haĩ, - is tarah hamko bhī karnā cāhiye. - nahī̃ karẽge to hijṛā log hamko hansegā. - to kahegā^m ki "are baṛī^f kuḍhaṅgā^m hai, baṛī^f battamīz hai." ((laughs)) hā̃. - "apne man se kah rahā^m hai bhosṛī vālā^m" ((laughs)) sab mārne uṭh jātā hai cappal se. ((3.0)) hā̃. (5.0) dekhte dekhte ādat paṛ jātā hai, - tab vaisā svabhāv ho jātā hai.

S: It's not taught. It's experienced, by watching. After all, he's not a child who needs to be taught. ... [The new hijra will say,] "I should also act just like they're acting. If I don't, hijra people will laugh at me." [Hijra people] will say^m, "Oh, he's very^f ill-mannered^m! He's very^f ill-behaved." ((laughs)) Yes! "He's just saying^m whatever comes to mind, the *bhosṛī vālā*^{m} ['vagina-owner']!" ((laughs)) Then everybody will get up to beat him with their sandals. ((laughs)) Really! So gradually, after watching for a long time, it becomes a habit. Then it just becomes his nature.

Her claim that "gradually, after watching for a long time, it becomes a habit" (*dekhte dekhte ādat paṛ jātā hai*) points to the interactive nature of the learning process; the *kuḍhaṅgā* or *battamīz* initiate (both of which translate into English as 'ill-mannered') is punished for acting without forethought, his behavior rebuked through the utterance of a *gālī* ['obscenity'] or the slap of a sandal. The older hijras' employment of the masculine curse *bhosṛī vālā*^{m} ['vagina-owner'] is particularly telling in this respect, as it reflects their dissatisfaction with the initiate's attempts at discursive femininity. The term *bhosṛī vālā*, when used among nonhijras, is generally used between men and implies that the referent,

although male, has somehow been demasculinized.[10] When used among hijras, the insult

lies not in the accusation of demasculation, since the very definition of *hijṛā* depends on the

notion of impotence, but in the suggestion of maleness.

The acquisition of a feminine persona is not an easy transition for all hijras, nor is

the female/male gender construction as clearly delineated for everyone as it is for Sulekha in

her narratives. Rupa, a hijra from one of the hijra communities in Banaras, wrestles with

the symbolic import of feminine and masculine speech in her everyday interactions. Unlike

the other hijras we interviewed, Rupa leads a quiet and secluded life away from her group,

seeing her fellow hijras only during their daily song and dance performances. In the home

she shares with a small family, she dresses and speaks as a man so that her housemates will

feel comfortable with her presence, her femininity visible only in her topknot, earrings,

nose ring, and understated eye make-up. Rupa spent the first eighteen years of her life as a

boy, yet never felt wholly comfortable with this role; ultimately, she decided to move to

Banaras and adopt the hijra lifestyle. Since she spent most of her boyhood adhering to

male roles and representations, this transition was not an easy or fluid one. She explains in

excerpt (7) that the acquisition of women's speech in particular was a long and laborious

process, so much so that it eventually interfered with her status in the hijra community.

(7) R: ghar mẽ, to - mardānā rahate the[m], to   R: They were living in a *mardānā* ['manly']

mardānā bolī bolte-bolte[m] haī. jab hijṛe   way at home, so they're always

ko jānā paṛtā hai to parivartan karnā   speaking[m] *mardānā* speech. When a

paṛtā hai. ... vahī to bolā, na beṭā?[11] -   hijra has to leave [home], he has to make

jab ghar se cale[m], - jab ghar se āye[m], to   a change. ... That's exactly what I told

ghar kī bolī mardānā to mẽ, to mardānā   you, right dear? When I left[m] home-

bolī bolā[m]. (3.0) bhaīyā ko "bhaīyā" bol   when I came[m] from home, the speech I

rahe haī, - cācā ko "cācā" bol rahe[m] haī,   used at home was *mardānā* speech, so

- aise bol rahe[m] hai. (2.0) to usko parivartan karne mẽ to ṭaīm lagta hī hai. (2.0) to usko parivartan karne mẽ ṭaīm lagta hai. - bolte-bolte bolte-bolte, ādat ho gayī (1.5) sat-chah mahīne mẽ.

I of course spoke[m] men's speech. [At home] they're all calling[m] their bhaīyā ['brothers'] "bhaīyā." They're calling[m] their cācā ['paternal uncles'] "cācā." They're speaking[m] like that. So it does take time to chaı ̩ɛ from that to this. It takes time to make a change. But gradually, after speaking continously, it became a habit--in about six or seven months.

Rupa's transition from what she refers to as mardānā ['manly'] speech to a more feminine variety was a highly conscious process, one that required several months of practice—or in Rupa's own words bolte-bolte bolte-bolte ['speaking and speaking continously'] before it ādat ho gayī ['became a habit']. Like Sulekha, Rupa is aware of the social meanings attached to her language use, so much so that she hides her feminine speech while at home with her landlord's family. In contrast to Sulekha, who primarily refers to herself in the first-person feminine, Rupa consistently employs the masculine first-person plural when in her home, as in the previous passage when she uses masculine-marked verbs like cale[m] ['left'] and āye[m] ['came']. Yet throughout her conversations with us, Rupa also emphasized how necessary it is for hijras to achieve fluency in women's speech, since group members "always and only speak as women when together." This necessity, precipitated by a community desire to distance itself from masculine representation, has encouraged a kind of gendered bilingualism among the hijras. When asked how she became so adept at switching back and forth between these linguistic realms, Rupa again

attributed her proficiency to *ādat* ['habit']: "Gradually, after leading this life," she explains, "you just get used to it" (*rahate-rahate ādat par jātā hai*).

FEMININE SOLIDARITY AND MASCULINE POWER

Sulekha almost always spoke in the first person feminine in her conversations with us, but she insisted that her choice of linguistic gender is variable, and moreover, that this choice is dependent on the context of the interaction. It is when she talks with a man, she elaborates, that she speaks softly and uses polite forms of the imperative. This style of speaking is at odds with the self she presents when she cooks breakfast or dinner in the kitchen, an activity which prompts her to chat casually with other hijras and neighborhood women in feminine speech, using intimate and familiar forms of the imperative. Sulekha's choice of language, then, is contingent not only upon the social role she is performing at the moment, but also upon the addressee, whose gender calls for an appropriate level of politeness. She is highly aware of the fact that her pragmatics change with the gender of the hearer, explaining in excerpt (8) that when she converses with a woman she speaks as a woman; when she converses with a man she speaks as a man:

(8) S: mujh ko koī bāt nahī̃ rahatā hai, maī̃ aurat jaisī boltī[f] hū̃, - ādmī se ādmī jaisā bāt kartī[f] hū̃, - jo jaisā miltā hai us se bāt kartī hū̃, ... jaise ab ham- hai na? - ab- ab- auratõ mẽ haī, (0.5) to - aurat ā gayī to aurat vālā hī bolūgī, "dīdī bahan" kahūgī. - ādmī ā jātā hai to ((softly)) "kyā khāte haī. (1.0) kyā bāt

S: It's just not a big deal to me. [Normally] I speak[f] like a woman, [but]with a man I speak[f] like a man. I use[f] the same speech of the person I meet. ... For example, take my case, okay? If I'm socializing with women and another woman comes by, I'll just speak like a woman. I'll say, "*Dīdī! Bahan!*" If a man comes by [I'll say]

·

hai āpko. (1.0) kyā kām hai."   ((softly)), "What are you eating? What's

                                                  the matter, sir? What brings you here?"

Towards the end of the passage, however, it becomes clear that when Sulekha claims, "I

use the same speech as the person I meet," she actually means that she makes her speech

correspond to the level of intimacy she feels with the addressee. Her insistence that she

uses familiar address terminology with women but the respectful āp ['you'] and third-

person plural verb form with men suggests that she sees "women's speech" and "men's

speech" as serving two mutually exclusive functions: the former solidarity, the latter

distance. According to Sulekha, the distance which characterizes her speech with men is

necessary for the pursuit of her own romantic interests: she employs polite verb, adjective,

and pronominal forms in order to heighten the gender polarity between herself and a

potential male partner. By assuming a submissive and coquettish posture, she is able to

have what she refers to as hā hā hī hī—an interjection which connotes pleasure, laughter,

and flirtation.[12]

In light of both Rupa's and Sulekha's clearly articulated reflections on their

alternating uses of feminine and masculine speech, it is interesting that Megha, a member of

a second Banaras community, adamantly insists that hijras never speak as men under any

circumstances. Like Rupa, Megha creates a number of feminine-marked phrases as

examples of hijra speech, together with a number of intimate second person imperatives,

such as tū khā le 'you [intimate] eat!' and tū pakā le 'you [intimate] cook!':

(9)   M: hā, hamesā auratō kī bolī boltī[f] hai   M: Yes, we always speak[f] women's speech.

          kabhī bhī ādmī ke jaisā nahī boltī[f] hai,   We never ever speak[f] like a man. It's

          - jaise, "mai jā rahī[f] hū jī," "jā rahī[f]   like, "I'm going[f] sir/mam," "sister is

          bahan," "tū khā le," "tū pakā le," "mai   going[f]," "you [intimate] eat!" "you

abhī ā rahī[f] hū̃".   [intimate] cook!" "I'm coming[f] now."

Megha usually makes linguistic claims like those in (9), however, only after issuing a
stream of assertions which might be said to constitute the hijra 'party line': namely, that
hijras never have castration operations, never have relations with men, never take on new
feminine names, and never speak as men. Megha, who has a high profile in her district of
Banaras, is very aware of how her own self-presentation affects societal opinion, especially
in light of the recent increase of anti-hijra violence in northern India; she is more interested
than the other hijras in projecting a self that conforms to societal expectations—a self that is
determined by both ascetic and anatomical considerations. Megha's insistence that the
hijras were not only given feminine names at birth but have also never spoken in the
masculine serves to support the perception that hijras are born as hermaphrodites, affirming
the cultural belief that the hijra lifestyle is not socially constructed, but rather something that
begins at (or before) birth.

Since imperatives in Hindi are not marked for gender, Megha's inclusion of these
forms in the above excerpt as examples of feminine speech works to support Sulekha's
claim that intimacy and familiarity is normally associated with women's language. Her
conflation of feminine speech with the use of intimate imperatives is indeed not so
surprising given the larger system of honorific address in Hindi. Central to the use of this
system is the age and social status of the referent compared to that of the speaker. A
speaker's senior, for instance, is normally addressed with the third person plural pronoun
āp ['you' (3rd person plural)] and referred to with the plural pronoun ve ['they' (3rd
person plural)] and a plural verb; any declinable adjectives or postpositions used in
reference to one's senior will be pluralized. Conversely, close friends, relatives (especially
those not senior to the speaker), and those of lower social status (such as servants or
rickshaw drivers) are normally addressed with the second person plural pronoun tum

['you' (2nd person plural)] and referred to with the singular pronoun *vah* ['he/she/it' (3rd person singular)] and a singular verb. A third pronoun of address *tu* ['you' (2nd person singular)], which Megha employs twice in excerpt (9), is used for extreme divergences from high honorific reference, whether it be to signal heightened intimacy and informality with the addressee (such as with a deity, a young child, or one's husband or wife), or alternatively, to express feelings of contempt or disgust. While the hijras' use of this honorific system is consistent with the larger Hindi-speaking community, they additionally indicate many of these same distinctions through the gender system. Superimposing gender distinctions onto honorific distinctions, the hijras have at their disposal a tool of expression unavailable to the more rigidly gendered nonhijra world.

Most of the hijras we interviewed, with the exception of Rupa who became a hijra as an adult, primarily employ feminine-marked verbs when speaking in the first person or when speaking to other hijras in the second person. When using the third person to refer to other hijras, however, the hijras are much less consistent, their choice of marking dependent on the relative social status of the referent in question. When the hijras speak in the third person and express distance from the referent, particularly when the referent is perceived to be a superior, they tend to make greater use of the masculine; in contrast, when the hijras express solidarity or familiarity with the referent, they tend to make greater use of the feminine. Hijras rely not only upon their own internal systems of law and order, but also upon elaborate familial structures which delegate various feminine roles to different members of the group, among them *dādī* ['paternal grandmother'], *nānī* ['maternal grandmother'], *mā̃* ['mother'], *mausī* ['mother's sister'], *cācī* ['uncle's wife'], *dīdī* ['older sister'] and *bahin* ['younger sister']. Fundamental to this system is the guru-disciple relationship; the initiate pledges life-long devotion to an older, more experienced hijra, who in turn gives her a share of the community's earnings. The affected kinship situation created by the hijras is unique, in that the guru acts symbolically as both *sās* ['mother-in-law'] and *suhāg* ['state of being in a husband's protection']. Having abandoned all worldly

ties upon entry into the community, the hijras appear to transfer every auspicious life-relationship to their guru, regardless of the fact that such a transferral, in the eyes of society at least, results in a superficially incestuous system (see Chapter 6 for more discussion on the hijras' use of kinship terminology).[13]

The hierarchical nature of the community becomes transparent in the hijras' use of feminine and masculine reference. When Rupa explains the import of the guru-disciple relationship, she frames her discussion in terms of a father/son relationship; in particular, she compares the leader of the group to a father and its members to his sons. "It's just like the relationship of a *bāp larkā* ['father and son']," she remarks, later using the Sanskrit phrase *pitā putra* ['father and son'] to imbue the relationship with even more prestige.[14] She similarly explains the structure of the hijra lineage by using masculine terms of reference, among them *dādā guru* ['paternal grandfather guru'], *guru bhāī* ['fellow disciple'], *bare bāp* ['older father'], and *cācā guru bhāī* ['paternal uncle fellow disciple']. She maintains this use of masculine kinship terms, however, only when speaking in the third person about other hijras from the adopted standpoint of an outsider: when Rupa mimics her own interactions with other hijras in the community, especially when using first or second person to do so, as in excerpt (10), she shifts to feminine reference:

(10) R: to apne logõ mẽ "cācā[m]" vagairah nahĩ kahte[m] haĩ na? ki- jaise "mausī[f]," (1.5) "mausī[f]" kahẽge[m], (2.0) "mausī[f]" kahẽge[m], (1.5) apne guru[m] ko "guru[m]" bolẽge[m], (1.5) musalmān log rahẽge[m] to bolẽge[m] "khālā[f]," - "khālā[f] guru[m]," - aise ham hī bāt kartī[f] haĩ. (3.0) zyādātar se strīlĩg calta hai is mẽ. (2.0) strīlĩg, (2.5) auratõ kī bātcīt is mẽ caltī hai. ...

R: But among ourselves we don't say[m] "cācā[m]" ['paternal uncle'], etc., right? Among ourselves we'll say[m] *mausī[f]* ['maternal aunt'], *mausī[f]*, we'll say[m] *mausī.[f]* We'll call[m] our *guru[m]* "*guru[m]*." If Muslim people are present[m], they'll say[m] "*khālā[f]* ['maternal aunt']," "*khālā[f] guru.[m]*" This is the way we talk[f]. Mostly it's in the feminine--in the

abhī ki vo ā jāēngī[f], - to ham isī kapṛe

mē haī, - magar bāt vahī hogā, - "kyŏ

gayī[f] nahī," "kahā thī[f]," "kya kar rahī[f]

thī[f]," "kahā gayī[f] thī[f]," - "badhāī kyŭ

nahī āyī[f]," - "khānā khāogī[f]".

feminine. It's like women's conversation.

... If someone [a fellow hijra] would

come[f] here right now, even if I were in

these clothes [lūṅgī-kurtā], our

conversation would be like this: "Why

didn't you go[f]?" "Where were[f] you?"

"What were[f] you doing[f]?" "Where had[f]

you gone[f]?" Why didn't you come[f] to the

badhāī ['congratulations ceremony']?"

"Will you eat[f]?"

Significant in Rupa's discussion is the stream of feminine-marked verbs she produces in the final five lines as an example of what might occur in group interaction, a digression which stands in sharp contrast to her usual employments of the masculine singular and plural when referring to herself. And while she refers to herself and other hijras collectively in the first person masculine plural at the start of this passage, she later constructs herself as feminine when viewing herself as part of the larger community, a community which aggressively identifies itself as non-masculine. When explaining how she and the other hijras in her community curse, for example, she employs feminine first-person plural verb forms, among them jhagṛā kar lēgī[f] ['we will fight[f]'], bolēgī[f] ['we will speak[f]'], and gālī bhī dēgī[f] ['we will also give[f] curses']. Similarly, what she earlier defined as cācā [m] ['paternal uncle'] becomes mausī[f] or khālā [f] ['maternal aunt'] in this passage, a switch which is consistent with the other hijras' use of mā̃ [f] ['mother'] when addressing their guru and dādī [f] ['paternal grandmother'] when addressing their guru's guru. It is this this same distinction between terms of reference and terms of address

which explains why Rupa refers to her guru as *dādā*[m] in the discussion directly preceding this passage, but as *dādī*[f] when reconstructing a group interaction that revolves around her.

A similar sort of shift is enacted by Sulekha in excerpt (11) below, when she explains how the most well-known hijras in Banaras, namely Channu, Idu, and Chanda, came to be so important within the hijra community. When describing how hijras reach positions of power in the hijra network, and how she herself will someday acquire such a position, Sulekha switches back and forth between feminine and masculine reference. Like Rupa, Sulekha describes the development of the hijra lineage in Banaras by using primarily masculine terminology: *dādā*[m] ['paternal grandfather'], *nātī*[m] ['grandson'], *parnātī*[m] ['great grandson'], and *celā*[m] ['male disciple'].

(11) S: ye log banāras kā-pahle-pahle banāras mē yahī log the[m]. (1.0) ve log thī[f], ve log māgtī[f] thī[f], khātī[f] thī[f] (0.5) to (0.2) uske bād, jab jitnā hijṛā āyā[m], vo celā banātī[f] gayī[f], vo uskā[m] celā[m] vo uskā[m] celā[m] vo uskā[m] celā[m] vo uskā[m] celā[m], tar par tar tar par tar, (0.5) ātā gayā. (1.0) tab nān[ā][m] guru ban gaye[m], dād[ā][m] guru ban gayī[f], (1.0) isī tarah. ham log kā ek koṭhe sā hotā hai. ham log kā bāṭcīt alag hotā hai. (2.0) hã, jaise ((softly)) celā[m]. (0.5) nātī[m] parnātī[m], ((unclear)) kyā bolalā sabhī log kahte haī, ham logõ mē celā[m] hotā[m] hai. dād[ā][m] guru hotā[m] hai, pardād[ā][m] guru hotā[m] hai, (0.5) maīyā[f] hotī[f] haī, (1.0) is tarah kā hotā

S: These people were inabitants of[m] Banaras, those people were[m] the first people in Banāras a long, long time ago. Those people were[f] here, they were[f] demanding[f] their due, they were[f] eating[f]. And from then on, they kept on making any other hijras who came [to Banāras] their own *celās* ['disciples']. That one had her *celā*[m], that one had her *celā*[m], that one had her *celā*[m], that one had her *celā*[m], one right after the other, they kept on coming[m]. Then they became[m] a *nān[a]*[m] ['maternal grandfather'] *guru*, or they became[f] a *dād[ā]*[m] ['paternal grandfather'] *guru*--like that. We have a sort of household[15] here. We have a

hai. jo aksar baṛā admī[m] rahtā[m] hai, isī tarah kahā jātā hai.

different way of talking, yes, like ((softly)) *celā*[m] ['disciple'], *nātī*[m] ['grandson'], *parnātī*[m] ['great grandson']--((unclear)) you know, everybody says these [words]. Among us it's *celā*[m], it's *dād[ā]*[m] *guru*, it's *pardād[ā]*[m] ['paternal great grandfather'] *guru*, it's *maīyā*[f] ['mother']--it's like that, that's how we address someone in our group who's our senior.

Although Sulekha frequently employs feminine marking on the verb when referring to Channu, Idu, and Chanda, particularly in the fourth and fifth lines of excerpt (11) when the three of them act as subjects of a particular action, she consistently employs the masculine kinship term *dādā* [m] when relating their social status. At the end of her discussion, however, when she imagines herself in the same position of power as these three elders, she refers to her future self with the feminine terms *malkin* [f] ['female boss', 'landlady'] and *dādī* [f] ['paternal grandmother']:

(12) S: ab maī yahā kā[m] mālkin[f] hū, (0.5) ab ham--koī āyegā[m] to uskā celā to hamārā[m] celā[m] ho jāyegā[m], (0.5) ab phir dūsrā[m] āyegā[m], to usko uskā celā[m]

S: Now I'm the *mālkin*[f] ['female boss']. Now I- whoever comes here will become my *celā*[m]. Whenever another one comes, I'll make[f] him his *celā*[m] and then

kārā dūgī^f, to maī dādī^f ban jaūgī^f, (2.0)

tab merā h̲ī̲ nām na rahegā, purānī^f to

maī ho gayī^f, to merā nām usī tarah

vahā̃ purānī^f ho gayī^f. to un logõ kā nām

hai, (0.5) m̲ā̲l̲k̲i̲n̲^{f} hai.

become^f the *dādī^f*. That way my name

will surely continue, because I'll have

become^f elderly^f. That's how I'll have a

name when I've become^f elderly^f. So

they'll have a name too [as part of my

lineage]. [They'll say], "She's the

m̲ā̲l̲k̲i̲n̲^{f}!"

Her alternation between feminine and masculine self-reference indicates that Sulekha feels obligated to use masculine terminology when signaling respect for, or distance from, the referent in question—an employment which is of course unnecessary when she refers to herself.

The age of the referent is central to the choice of feminine or masculine terminology in the hijra community, as it is to the choice of either an *āp, tum,* or *tu* pronoun of address in the larger system of Hindi honorifics. In excerpts (13) and (14) below, both Rupa and Sulekha make a gendered distinction between the younger and older members of their respective communities, marking younger members as feminine and older members as masculine:

(13) R: jo bar̤ā^m hotā^m hai to ((softly)) gurū.

(2.0) g̲u̲r̲ū̲. jo choṭī^f hotī^f hai, to kā

bolalā n̲ā̲m̲ se bulāte haī.

R: We'll call someone who is^m senior^m ((softly)) gurū--gurū. But we'll call someone who is^f younger^f by their name.

(14) S: sabse choṭī^f ek to hai hamāre mē. vah   S: There's one in our group who's the

        sabse kam umra kī^f hai. uskī umra   youngest^f-she's^f the youngest of all. Her

        lagbhag 18 varṣ hai. aur 20 varṣ kā^m   age is about 18 or so. Another one is^m

        hai, 25 varṣ kā^m hai. maī 38 varṣ kī^f   20 years old, another one is^m 25 years

        hū̃.   old. I'm^f 38 years old.

Rupa, in her opposing uses of the masculine adjective baṛā ^m ['senior', 'big'] and the feminine adjective choṭī ^f ['young', 'small'] makes this distinction especially clear, her gendered choices echoing the use of the honorific āp for one's senior relatives and the familiar tum for one's junior relatives. Similarly, Sulekha's use of the feminine adjective choṭī and feminine postposition kī ['of'] in reference to the "youngest" member of her group in excerpt (14), but the masculine postposition kā ['of'] in reference to older members in her group, would indicate that extreme youthfulness in the hijra community is indicated through the feminine.

CONTEMPT AND THE USE OF THE MASCULINE

The use of feminine address is so expected from fellow hijras as a sign of solidarity that the use of inappropriate masculine reference will often provoke angry retaliation. An antipathy towards masculine linguistic forms is reflected in the hijras' naming system. When a new member enters the hijra community, she is given a woman's name to replace the name of her former, more male self. This designation, ultimately decided by the initiate's guru, is often a subversion of an earlier family name or nickname that the hijra had as a child, such as in the case of one of Rupa's fellow hijras who was given the feminine name Maṅglā ['auspicious^f'] to replace her earlier masculine name Maṅgal ['auspicious^m']. While some of these names are chosen arbitrarily or on the basis of sound

alone (as when a new group of Banaras initiates were all given names that started with the letter *b* because, in the words of Sulekha, it was a "stream of sounds that sounded good"[16]), the majority of them carry an additional reference to some kind of natural beauty or tranquility, such as the grammatically feminine names *Bulbul* ['nightingale'], *Bahār* ['spring'], *Gitā* ['song'], *Kāntā* ['one who has beauty'], *Basantī* ['of a spring'], and *Latā* ['vine', 'ivy'][17]; or to smallness, such as the name *Bindiyā*, a diminutive of the term *Bindu*, which is best translated as 'tiny one'. In more recent years, the hijras in Banaras have even begun to take the names of famous Hindi-film actresses, including *Rekhā*, *Babītā*, and *Nargis*[18]—an adoption which points to the more theatrical side of the hijra lifestyle.

Other names given to community members, however, are more ambiguous with respect to gender, with many of them interpretable as either feminine or masculine: for example, *Āshā* ['hope'], *Shāntī* ['peace'], *Kiran* ['ray'], *Candā* ['moon'], and *Barkhā* ['rain'].[19] Although all of these names are grammatically feminine, they are regularly used for both women and men, their ultimate gender determination depending on the name that follows: e.g., a masculine *Rām* versus a feminine *Rānī*; or a masculine *Dev* versus a feminine *Devī*.[20] Some names adopted by hijras in the greater Banaras area are grammatically masculine, among them *Andāz* ['guess'], *Bilrī*, *Channu* [a diminutive of Chandā], *Gesu* ['hair'], *Iḍū* ['one who was born on Iḍ'], and *Sukkhu.* ['the happy one']. It is perhaps significant that the majority of these more masculine names belong to the hijras who have converted to Islam.

The only restriction involved in such adoptions, according to the hijras we spoke with in Banaras, is that the new name cannot already belong to another hijra in the immediate vicinity.[21] Because there are sometimes more hijras in a given area than there are desirable feminine names, some hijras are given diminutive nicknames like those mentioned by Sulekha in the following passage:

(15)   There's a Kāntā, there's a Rekhā, there's a Basantī.   These are all famous

names and they're all given to hijras. But nowadays there are so many hijras

we can't find names for all of them! So we'll give them nicknames. We'll call

them *Chaṭankī* ['someone who only weighs a couple of ounces'], *Pacās Grām*

['50 Grams'], *Das Grām* ['50 Grams'], *Cālīs Grām* ['50 Grams']. ((laughs))

You know, *Chaṭankī, Choṭkī* ['tiny one'], *Pauvā* ['one-fourth seer', 'quarter

pint']! ((laughs))

By choosing nicknames like *Pacās Grām* ['50 Grams'] and *Das Grām* ['50 Grams'], and

double diminutives like *Choṭkī* ['tiny one'],[22] the hijras assert their own femininity while

at the same time making fun of this assertion. The names which Sulekha mentions here, all

of which appear frequently in folk drama and are derived from a folk belief that "pure"

individuals weigh less than "impure" ones,[23] are often used by Hindi-speakers in jovial

reference to friends or family members. The fact that the hijras adopt these ludic nicknames

as their own, all of which express an over-exaggerated feminine physicality (realized here

in terms of smallness and lightness), points to a simultaneous subversion of both femininity

and masculinity: while distancing themselves as far as possible from masculine

representations, the hijras also poke fun at the superficiality of such designations in the

larger society.

The hijras are strongly discouraged from referring to each other by their former,

masculine names, yet tellingly, they often employ them in disputes. If a hijra is in a fierce

argument with another member of her community, one of the most incisive insults she can

give is to question her addressee's femininity by using her male name; as Sulekha

explains, "We use them especially when we fight with each other. We'll tell everybody

what the person's real name was, 'Oh, so and so was such and such a name!' Then we'll

call them by that name." The strategy Sulekha identifies here is elaborated upon by Rupa in

excerpt (16) below, when she explains that any use of the masculine in reference to another

hijra will be met with strong disapproval in Banaras. Rupa notes that because all of the hijras living in Banaras identify as feminine (in contrast to the hijras living in Panjab who, according to Rupa, adopt masculine as well as feminine identities), they expect, indeed demand, the use of feminine address:

(16) R: banāras mẽ mardānā janānā koī pasand nahī kartā hai. (5.0) ((laughs)) mardānā kah do to jhagṛā kar lēgī[f]. ... apne logõ mẽ to bolēgī[f] to aurat jaisā. (3.0) aurat jaisā.

R: In Banaras, no one likes to be known as mardānā ['manly']. ((laughs)) Address someone as mardānā and they'll quarrel[f] [with you]! When we're together in our own group, we'll speak[f] like women. Like women.

Rupa goes on to explain that hijras "gālī bhī dēgī, to aūrat jaisā" ['even give curses like women'], meaning that they refrain from using those curses that involve insulting sexual reference to the addressee's mother or sister.[24] The hijras, infamous throughout northern India for their use of sexualized obscenities, attempt to model even their cursing strategies after women; if they were to invoke curses which were derogatory to women, they would, in essence, be cursing against themselves (see Chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion of this passage as well as the hijras' cursing strategies).

Yet not all hijras are as rigid about the use of the masculine speech as Rupa's response would indicate; Sulekha, when creating an interaction that might occur between herself and Megha, reveals that the masculine is used in fun as well as anger:

(17) S: pulin̄g bhī hotā hai. bāt karne mẽ, jaise [Megha] se hamārā bāt hotā hai, "[Megha] suno, calogī[f] nahī kā sinemā mere sāth? cal sinemā dēkhẽ. cal nahī

S: The masculine occurs too. For example, if I'm talking with Megha, [it's,] "Megha, listen! Won't you come[f] with me to the movies? C'mon, let's go see a movie.

[Megha] (1.5) ((switching into Bhojuri))

E! na calbe kare, bhosṛī vālā!" ((laughs))

(4.0) gussā mẽ ho jātā hai, is tarah

mazāk mẽ ho jātā hai. "are sun re!" is

tarah ke ho jātā hai.

Won't you come on, Megha? (1.5) Hey!
Won't you come on? The *bhosṛī vālā*
['vagina-owner']!" ((laughs)) It happens
when we're angry. And it also happens
when we're joking. "Hey, listen to me!"
We'll use it like that.

The employment of masculine address in the above excerpt is perceived as humorous only because it is used ironically: the speaker is not actually angry, but imitating a strategy used in anger in order to get the addressee's attention. In her response, Sulekha is referring not so much to the use of masculine-marked verb forms, as she does in other discussions, but rather to the use of foul speech (e.g., "*bhosṛī vālā*") and impolite commands (e.g., "*are sun re!*")—both of which carry larger ideological associations with men's speaking styles (see Chapter 5). It is also significant that Sulekha code-switches into Bhojpuri when employing the term *bhosṛī vālā*, a dialect that is perceived as less educated (and therefore less refined) than its Hindi cousin.

The negative connotations which Rupa and Sulekha both associate with masculine reference may very well explain Megha's repeated use of the masculine when referring to Sulekha. Sulekha was previously a member of Megha's community in Banaras, but after having a number of serious arguments with the other hijras who lived there, went to live with a male partner in a neighboring village outside the city.[25] Megha, in a manner consistent with the claims she makes in excerpt (9), almost always uses feminine forms when referring to other hijras; yet when she refers to Sulekha, who apparently insulted her guru's authority as *mālik* ['master'] of the community, Megha uses the masculine. Two examples of this employment are reproduced in excerpt (18):

(18) M: bacpan se yahĩ kā^m hai, - ab jākar   M: [Sulekha] belonged^m to this household

      [place name] mẽ rah rahā^m hai, - merā   since childhood, [but] now he left and is

      jajmānī hai, to maĩ un logõ ko de detī   living^m in [place name]. I had *jajmānī*

      hũ.   ['clients'] there, but I transferred those

                                                  people to him/her.

Through the use of masculine-marked postpositions like *kā^m* ['of^m'] and masculine-marked verb forms like *rah rahā^m hai* ['he is living^m'], Megha is perhaps signaling that Sulekha is not only estranged from her, but also inferior to her. Her use of the masculine singular, then, approximates the use of the pronoun *tu* in Hindi, which can signal contempt as well as intimacy. Megha occasionally refers to her guru affectionately in the masculine singular instead of the more respectful feminine or masculine plural, such as when she at one point turned to us, paused, and emphatically pronounced *merā^m Channu* ['my^m Channu'], but her use of the masculine singular in reference to Sulekha is clearly meant as contemptuous.

A similar sort of distancing by use of the masculine gender occurs whenever Sulekha refers to Muslim hijras, with whom, as a Hindu, she feels somewhat at odds. Although Muslims and Hindu hijras often live together harmoniously in the same communities—an arrangement rarely found in mainstream Banaras where the tension between Muslims and Hindus is quite pervasive—Sulekha seems to feel threatened by Muslim hijras, since they hold powerful positions within the Banaras hijra network, and indeed, throughout all of northern India. The contempt Sulekha feels towards Muslim hijras is reflected in her employment of third person masculine-marked verb forms when Muslim hijras act as subjects, as in the short narrative reproduced in (19):

(19) M: apnā upar hai. (1.0) maĩ hindū hũ (1.0) M: It's up to the individual. I'm Hindu so I
to apnā hindū kā kām kartī[f] hũ, jo do[f] the work of Hindus, but whoever is
musalmān hai vah apnā musalmān kā Muslim does[m] the work of Muslims. He
kām kartā[m] hai, (0.5) apnā dharm fulfills[m] his own *dharm* faithfully. I
nibhātā[m] hai (0.2) maĩ apnā dharm fulfill[f] my own *dharm* faithfully. As far
nibhātī[f] hũ, (2.0) ab khāne pīne kā- to āj as eating and drinking is concerned,
kal- (0.5) dom-camār ke yahã bhī khā people nowadays even go and eat with
letā hai. *dom-camār* ['corpse burners' and 'shoe-
makers']!

The fact that Sulekha uses the masculine in the impersonal relative-correlative constructions above would not be so remarkable if she did not regularly use the feminine when the hijras act as subjects of such constructions. Her use of the third-person masculine in (19), in sharp contrast to her use of the third-person feminine in comparable constructions in which Hindu hijras act as subjects, reflects her own opininion that Muslims are below her on the social hierarchy; this is evidenced in her insistence throughout her conversations with us that Hindu hijras existed long before Muslim hijras, and moreover, that it is only hijras from low caste backgrounds who convert to Islam. Moreover, she angrily complained that nonhijra Muslims are much less generous than Hindus when it comes to paying hijras for their song and dance performances: "Muslims will never give to Hindus. If a hijra goes to their door, then they'll say, 'Our door is polluted for forty days!' (i.e., there has been a death in the family)."

Sulekha's distaste for the hijras in Banaras who have converted to Islam is further instantiated by her insistence that such individuals are not true hijras, but "men." This proclamation is premised on her belief that the majority of Muslim hijras in Banaras have not undergone castration operations. For Sulekha, it is this event alone that serves as the

defining moment of the hijra's entry into femininity—an event which, in her opinion, should be rewarded with a more consistent use of feminine reference. In excerpt (20), she is clearly hesitant to give this consistency to Channu, one of the oldest and most prestigious hijras in Banaras, as well as to the Muslim hijras living under Channu's jurisdiction:

(20) S: hã, channū hai, (0.5) [place name] mẽ jo channū hai, to vah bhī ādmī[m] hai. hijṛā to hai nahī. ... vo buzurg hai. vah sab se mālik[m] vahī hai. (1.0) sab se mālik[m] vahī hai. [place name] kā[m]. (0.2) ye vo channū iske sab ādmī[m] haĩ, sab āte[m] haĩ jāte[m] haĩ. kurtā luṅgī pahan lete[m] haĩ, nācne samay sāṛī pahan lete[m] haĩ, (0.2) sabhī jānte haĩ, (2.0) maĩ hamko kahne se kyā?

S: Yes, Channu is--that Channu who lives in [place name] is a man[m]. He's not a hijra. ... He's very old--he's the chief master[m] over there. He's the chief master[m] over there in [place name]. All of the ones under Channū are men[m], all of them who come[m] and go[m] over there. They wear[m] *kurtās* and *luṅgīs*, but when they dance they wear[m] *sāṛīs*. Everybody knows it, so what's the use of my saying so?

B: *lekin vo sab āpreśan karāye hue haĩ?*
B: *But haven't they all had operations?*

S: nahī
S: No.

B: *kuch nahī =hai?=*
B: *Nothing at all?*

S: =nahī.=
S: No.

B: *tabhī aisī =hai?=*
B: *So they're just that way?*

S: =hã.=
S: Yes.

B: *o:::h. (1.0) acchā?*
B: *O:::h. Really?*

S: usko- unko maĩ kaise kahū? usko
S: How can I say anything about them? If

kahũgī to merā bāt kāṭ dēge^m. ... maī

kah dūgī^f (0.5) to ((softly)) maī choṭe

mũh baṛī bāt, hamko isī mē rahnā hai.

(0.5) sab māregā^m pīṭegā^m bāl kāṭ

degā^m.

I'd say^f anything, they'd of course just

contradict^m me anyway. ... If I'd give^f

anything away, then ((softly)) I [would be

like] a small mouth with big talk. I have

to live in this community, after all.

They'd all hit^m me, beat^m me up, cut^m

my hair.

Sulekha's use of the third-person masculine singular to describe the 78 year old Channu

stands in opposition to comparable descriptions by both Rupa and Megha, who, depending

on the immediate context, refer to Channu by using either the respectful third-person

masculine plural or feminine marked adjectival forms, such as when they affectionately call

her moṭī^f vālī^f ['big^f one^f'] and būḍhī vālī ['senior/superior^f one^f']. Since Rupa and

Megḥher moṭī^f vālī^f ['big^f one^f'] and būḍhī vālī ['senior/superior^f one^f']. Since Rupa and

as her grand-disciple), they are perhaps more keen than Sulekha to show Channu both

respect and solidarity, granting the other Muslims under her jurisdiction feminine reference

as well. Sulekha, on the other hand, displeased with her own "smallness" relative to these

Muslim hijras, refuses the entire community any acknowledgment of femininity, whether it

be linguistic or anatomical.

In the preceding example, Sulekha knew the hijras she was referring to personally

yet still referred to them in the masculine, a strategy she uses to underscore her own

negative evaluation of the referent in question. Not all uses of masculine reference within

the hijra community are necessarily interpreted as negative, however; speakers will

sometimes use the masculine in order to indicate that the referent is unknown to them, such

as in the following comment made by Sulekha in reference to a hijra who had lived in her

house before she moved in:

(21) S: mugalsarāy mẽ jab maĩ calī^f gaī^f thī^f,

       [softly] tab yahhā par calī āī. yahā par

       hijṛā to thā^m pahle, (1.0) ((softly)) vah

       mar gayā^m. u mar gayā^m to khalī jagah

       thā, (0.5) maĩ calī^f āī^f.

               After I had^f gone^f to Mugalsaray, I came^f

               to this place. A hijra was^m here earlier

               who died^m. After he died^m there was a

               vacancy, so I came^f here.

Although Sulekha's employment of masculine verb forms in reference to the deceased hijra is grammatically correct, with the verbs agreeing morphologically with the masculine subject *hijṛā*, it is inconsistent with her usual use of the feminine when speaking of a "*hijṛā*" whom she knows personally. Because Sulekha only rarely uses the term *hijṛā* in reference to a fellow disciple (indeed, she later identifies the term as much too impersonal for friendly use), the structure of the sentence itself reflects a neutrality that goes beyond mere verbal agreement.

EMPHATIC MASCULINITY

The masculine gender is frequently employed as a strategy for expressing emphasis, particularly with respect to reference terms, such as in Sulekha's use of the term *mālik* ['master', 'landlord'] in examples (22) through (24). Although Sulekha normally refers to herself as a *mālkin* ['female boss', 'landlady'], as she did earlier in example (12) when she was explaining the structure of the hijra family lineage, she refers to herself in examples (22) and (23) as a *mālik.* Proud of the fact that she is a homeowner—an accomplishment not shared by the majority of hijras, and indeed the majority of nonhijras, in India—Sulekha underscores the import of her position by portraying herself as a landlord instead of a landlady, using the masculine-marked adjective *akelā^m* ['alone'] instead of its feminine counterpart *akelī*:

(22) A: *to kyū āp grup mē nahī rahtī haī?*　　A: *So why aren't you with a group?*

　　S: ham log grup mē haī!　　　　　　　　S: But we are in a group!

　　A: *to grup ke sāth nāctī haī, gātī haī?*　　A: *So you dance and sing with a group?*

　　S: hā̃, sab hai. (1.0) maī ab- apnā ghar　　S: Sure, everything! I just bought my own

　　　　lekar akelā^m rahtī^f hū̃. yahā̃ apnā ghar　　　　house and live^f alone^m. I've registered^f

　　　　apne nām se akelā banvāī^f hū̃. to maī　　　　my house here in my name alone^m, so

　　　　iskā mālik^m hū̃ to maī is mē rahtī^f hū̃,　　　　I'm it's *mālik*^m and I live^f in it. So four

　　　　(1.0) to hamāre yahā̃ 4 ṭho 5 ṭho āyegī^f　　　　or five people will come^f to my house,

　　　　nāckar, (1.0) apnā hisāb lekar calī^f　　　　they'll dance, take their share, and

　　　　jāyegī^f.　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　leave^f.

(23) S: dūsre mē jāūngī^f gāungī^f nācūngī^f.　　S: I'll go^f and sing^f and dance^f in other

　　　　hamko mazdūrī milegā. (1.0) vahā̃ kā　　　　places. I'll get wages. I just can't^f

　　　　mālik^m maī nahī ban saktī^f. maī　　　　become the *mālik*^m there. I can only

　　　　mālik^m banūgī^f yahī kā.　　　　　　　become^f the *mālik*^m here.

　　A: *keval isī ilāke kā*　　　　　　　　　A: *Only in this area?*

　　S: hā̃. ilāke-ilāke kā. (2.0) thāne kā.　　S: Only in this area right here. In this police

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　district.

Sulekha's use of the masculine in the above examples is clearly influenced by a local

understanding of home ownership as a man's activity. When she refers to herself as a

mālkin in excerpt (12), she is talking about herself not as a homeowner, as in these two

passages, but as a member of the hijra lineage. The issue of home ownership becomes

especially salient in example (23), when she explains that even though she can work and

collect wages in a district designated as belonging to another hijra community, she can

never buy a house in a district other than her own.

The masculinity associated with registering a house indeed appears to override the femininity involved in being a mother, if excerpt (24) is taken as a valid representation of the hijras' perceptions.

(24) S: jo hijṛā rahtā vah usko lekar alag rahtā hai. vah apnā kā mã kī nātā hai. vah-u mālik hai apnā. (4.0) vah mālik hai.

S: The hijra who lives with him lives apart [from the group]. S/he's established the relationship of mother to him, and s/he's [also] the *mālik* of his/her own group. S/he's the *mālik*!

In this passage, given in response to our questions about a community of hijras who had adopted an intersexed child, Sulekha points out the uniqueness in the fact that the son's *mã* is also the leader of a community, underscoring this incongruity by designating the mother as *mālik* instead of *mālkin*.

Although first-person masculine verb forms occur much more rarely in the hijras' conversations than do third person forms, they occasionally surface in highly emphatic moments. Sulekha, when overtly contradicting claims made by Megha, adds extra weight to her words by speaking in the masculine first person, as in examples (25) and (26). Megha had stated in an earlier conversation that hijras are asexual beings and lead ascetic lifestyles; Sulekha, wanting to give us a more accurate account of the hijra community, refutes all of Megha's assertions by speaking in the masculine:

(25) B: *kaise kah rahī thī "ham log ko dukh hotā hai, ham log kā parivār nahī rahtā, ham log kā sambandh nahī rahtā, ham log bhī sote uṭhte baiṭhtc."*

B: *Then why was Megha saying, "We have a lot of sadness. We no longer have a family. We no longer have relationships. All we do is sleep, get up, sit around"?*

S: nahĩ. ye galat bāt hai. - galat bāt hai.
maĩ isko nahĩ māntā^m. - galat bāt hai.

S: No, that's wrong. That's wrong. I don't believe^m that. That's wrong.

(26) S: ādmĩ ke sāth kartā hai sab. - jaise aurat
*mard sambandh hota hai, - usĩ tarah
*hijre - mard ke sāth sambandh hotā hai.
- kitne *hijre- kitne hijre rakh lete haĩ
ādmĩ ko, - kitnā peśāvar hotā hai, (1.0)
peśā kartĩ, tab (1.0) *sau, pacās, do sau,
cār sau, *sabkā peśā kartĩ haĩ. - maĩ
jhūṭh kahtā^m hũ? nahĩ kahtā^m hũ.

S: They all have relationships with men. Hijras have relationships with *men just like women have relationships with *men. A lot of *hijras- a lot of hijras keep men. A lot of them are professionals. Those who do it as a profession charge a *hundred, fifty, two hundred, four hundred rupees, *anything they can get. Do I tell^m lies? No, I don't tell^m lies.

The latter example is particularly telling, since Sulekha colors her commentary with a series of flat-handed claps for added emphasis, a gesture so much a part of the hijras' vocabulary that I have chosen to represent it in the transcription system with an asterisk (see Chapter 6 for further discussion). With five claps occurring in seven short sentences, Sulekha's commentary stands in sharp contrast to the other passages quoted in this chapter; the import of her words is further underscored by her use of maculine self-reference in the final two lines: *maĩ jhūṭh kahtā^m hũ? nahĩ kahtā^m hũ!* ['Do I tell^m lies? No, I don't tell^m lies!'].

CONCLUSIONS

A final example of first person masculinity comes from an interaction that took place among members of a third community in Banaras. All born into Hindu families who ostracized them, the hijras belonging to this community have adopted the religious practices of the Muslim families they live with—families who in many ways suffer a similar marginalization as residents of a city that is thought of throughout North India as the "holy Hindu city." The 80 year old Shashi is the leader of the group, and after 69 years of speaking like a woman, we rarely heard her use any masculine speech. The third time we visited her, however, Shashi's favorite disciple had fled back to her own village after a serious financial scuffle with another community member. Shashi was feeling intense rage at the cause of this dispute, as well as deep grief for her loss. Wailing *merā beṭā, merā beṭā* ['my son, my son'] and clapping in anger, Shashi screamed about the punishment that the hijra who precipitated the fight would receive, venting her anger entirely through use of the masculine first and third person. It would seem that for the hijras, as both Rupa and Sulekha suggest, anger is an emotion which is best expressed in the masculine. Perhaps rage is a gut-level reaction that recalls the masculine forms that the hijra produced prior to her entry into the community, or perhaps masculine forms are simply a dramatic and forceful tool for venting such rage. Regardless of the reason, the hijra is clearly aware of the social meanings such forms convey.

The structure of linguistic negotiations, then, is not arbitrary but influenced by societal ideologies of femininity and masculinity. Although Banaras hijras challenge such ideologies in their conflicting employments of masculine and feminine speech, often subverting the gender system in innovative and unexpected ways, their employment of linguistic gender is still constrained by a very traditional and dichotomous notion of gender. While the hijra tends to make greater use of the masculine when signaling social distance from the referent, whether it be a display of respect or contempt, she is more likely to

employ the feminine when expressing intimacy and solidarity, particularly when addressing

other hijras directly. Occupying an ambiguously-situated position in a society that has

marginalized them, hijras are more attentive than their nonhijra peers to the cultural

meanings evoked by feminine and masculine markings, enacting and contesting them in

their everday projections of self.

NOTES

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Bing, and Alice Freed (eds.), *Language and gender: Theory and method* (coauthored with

Veronica O'Donovan, Longman, forthcoming).

1   Lynton and Rajan frequently allude to the hijras' idiosyncratic language use in their

short introduction to the hijras of Hyderabad; they explain, for example, that the hijras they

interviewed speak Hindustani "with many archaic expressions and constructions" and that

their speech, while "often ungrammatical," is "full of imagery and sometimes has a rather

poetic quality" (1974:193). The authors provide very little linguistic detail in support of

these compelling remarks, however, stating only that the hijras' "manner of speech

suggests a yearning for identity and identification with a social group," and moreover, that

"the confusion of their terminology is a constant reminder of the sexual confusion which

brought them into the group" (192) (see Chapter 5 for further discussion).

2   Nanda refers specifically to Freeman's research in the 1970s, who noted that certain Oriya-speaking hijras (whom he calls "transvestites") use "women's expressions and feminine forms of address" (1979:294). Freeman quotes the speech of a hijrā named Kula in great detail, explaining that he "delighted in using peculiar and distinctive expressions that called attention to himself" (295). See Chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion of Freeman's presentation of Kula's narrative.

3   Indeed, an anonymous article in the political gossip paper *Bombay Blitz*, entitled "Wipe Out the Hijra Menace," refers to the hijra scathingly as "it": "On their raising a cry, some passers-by chased the hijra, beat "it" up and restored the purse to the lady. But the enraged "Friday brigader" soon returned, viciously swinging a thick wooden log at the public, which was then set on the run. ... This hijra menace has been assuming threatening proportions and the police have done nothing to stop it. It is time the Police Commisioner cleaned up the city steets of these violent 'monstrosities'" (January 10, 1981, p. 3). I have chosen to use 'her' and 'she' to refer to the hijras throughout this dissertation, since the hijras I interviewed prefer to be referred to and addressed in the feminine.

4   The finality of the linguistic evidence in Sethi's narrative invites comparison with Sunaina Lowe's (1983) account of her first meeting with a hijra in Bombay named Lata: "Lata was a surprise. If it hadn't been for Navalkar's keen eye, I would never have thought her a *hijra* at all. Her face was smooth and hairless and with eyebrows plucked to a fine arch, she was really quite pretty. Her sari hid any masculinity of build and her gestures were entirely feminine. She would use her arms and hands with the effectiveness of an actress. But Navalkar said the swaying walk was a dead giveaway. They all walked like cancan girls at rehearsals. *And once they spoke, their masculine tones left no doubt.*" [italics mine]. A similar sentiment is expressed in Moses Manoharan's (1984:27) brief

introduction to the hijras in New Delhi: "They dress in saris, have exotic hairstyles and wear heavy make-up, *but their voices give them away*—they're India's eunuchs. Now the eunuchs are raising their voices for a better deal after centuries as a despised and downtrodden community" [italics mine].

5   Throughout this dissertation, I will use the transliteration system adopted by Snell and Weightman (1989:7). The superscripted *f* and *m* represent feminine and masculine morphological marking, respectively.

6   Mukherjee's study involves hijras living in Lalbazar, Calcutta, and West Bengal, but she appears to have lifted all of her linguistic observations directly from Rao (1955), whose research was conducted three decades earlier in Hyderabad: "In Hyderabad and other cities, there are a class of male sexual inverts, commonly called 'Eunuchs,' who dress like women, part and dress their hair in the fashion of women, wear ornaments and adopt most tastes and habits of the female. Their speech and gait are also feminine, they adopt feminine names and their instincts, passions, and expressions correspond to those of females" (Rao 1955:519-20). Mukherjee's explanation of the hijras in West Bengal is almost identical: "Both groups [castrated and uncastrated] wear feminine dresses, part and dress their scalp hair in the feminine way, wear ornaments like those of females, and accept most of the tastes and habits of females. They adopt feminine names, become adept in feminine speech patterns and gait, and emulate instincts, passions, and emotions of females" (1980:61).

7   While both men and women participate in *nautanki*, all of the actors performing in *sāng* are men. The women who do particpate in *nautanki*, however, are frequently stereotyped as prostitutes, and women viewers are normally not welcomed in the audience.

For more information on the the Nautanki theatre in northern India, see Kathryn Hansen's (1992) *Grounds for play: The nautanki theatre of North India.*

8   Similarly, Bobb and Patel, in their negative evaluation of a hijra community's alleged kidnapping of a 15 year old boy in Baroda named Vora, summarize the socialization process as follows: "For an entire week, he was kept locked up and beaten regularly to instil a fear complex to prevent him from attempting to escape. After satisfying themselves that Vora was suitably terrified of retribution, he was given feminine garments and started accompanying the eunuchs on their rounds. For three months, he was part of the group and taught how to behave like them, the seductive walk, the obscene gestures, and the ritualistic hand-clapping peculiar to the tribe" (1982:84). Other authors who have discussed the hijras' socialization process in some detail include Sharma (1987: 72-86).

9   I have tried to transcribe each of the Hindi passages <u>as spoken</u>, maintaining any anomalies in gender agreement which occurred in the tape-recorded conversations. In excerpt (4), for instance, there are a number of markings which are inconsistent with standard Hindi, such as when Sulekha treats the feminine noun *bāt* ['conversation'] as masculine, modifying it with the postposition *kā^m* instead of *kī^f*. These agreement inconsistencies are related to the fact that the Hindi of most of the hijras referred to in this article was influenced by various regional dialects, particularly Bhojpuri. The transcription conventions I have used in the transliterated passages are adapted from Jefferson (1984); they include the noteable additions of a superscripted *f* or *m* to designate feminine and masculine morphological marking, respectively, and an asterisk to designate the flat-palmed clap used by the hijras for emphasis. Other transcription conventions used in this chapter include the following:

(0.4)	indicates length of pause within and between utterances, timed in tenths of a second
a - a	a hyphen with spaces before and after indicates a short pause, less than 0.2 seconds
but-	a hyphen immediately following a letter indicates an abrupt cutoff in speaking
(( ))	double parentheses enclose nonverbal movements and extralinguistic commentary
( )	single parentheses enclose words which are not clearly audible (i.e., best guesses)
[ ]	brackets enclose words added to clarify the meaning of the text
<u>what</u>	underlining indicates syllabic stress
CAPS	small caps indicate louder or shouted talk
:	a colon indicates a lengthening of a sound (the more colons, the longer the sound)
.	a period indicates falling intonation
,	a comma indicates continuing intonation
?	a question mark indicates rising intonation at the end of a syllable or word
...	deletion of some portion of the original text
"a"	quotation marks enclose quoted or reported speech

10   I should add that this insult is so offensive to Hindi speakers that the Banaras
resident who typed our transcripts refused to include this word, typing an ellipsis in its
place. The word is used differently from the American insult 'cunt'; it is primarily used in
reference to men in order to indicate that they are somehow emasculated. The term *bhosṛī
vālā* is itself masculine; its feminine counterpart *bhosṛī vālī* does not exist in contemporary

usage. Ved Prakash Vatuk (personal communication) offers a succinct explanation as to why this curse is never used in reference to a woman: "A woman already has one, so why would it be a curse to tell her so?"

11   Rupa addresses our research assistant Vinita with the masculine term *beṭā* ['son'] instead of the feminine *beṭī* ['daughter'] throughout this passage. Hindi-speakers (especially parents) sometimes address younger women or children by *beṭā* in order to show affection, a reversal clearly derived from the value given to sons in Indian culture.

12   Sulekha later expands on this distinction: "Everyone talks to their girlfriends and women companions. Everyone becomes girlfriends and talks with each other about what they feel inside. We need to have that kind of conversation, of course. But when you talk with your own man, it's a different thing altogether, and that's what I enjoy most. For example, I can easily sit around with other women and say, 'Eat *dīdī*, drink *dīdī*.' We'll sit together, we'll go for a walk together, we'll go to the cinema together, we'll see a movie together, we'll do everything together. But there's something more that goes on with a man. It's a lot more fun to talk to a man."

13   I owe this insight to Ved Prakash Vatuk (personal communication).

14   Rupa's explanation invites comparison with a statement made by a hijra living in Baroda, reported in Mitra (1983): "Just like you have a *saas* (mother-in-law) and *bahu* (daughter-in-law) at home, you have a similar relationship among the hijras. I was kept in the *akhada* like a *bahu*. The guru is equal to our father. Like a father and a son. Whom does the father have hope in? He would like his son to grow up and earn money, and when

he falls ill, he would like his son to bring him a glass of water. Just like that, among hijras, there is a guru and a *chela*. This is our life" (1983:21).

15   Sulekha uses the term *kotha* ['room'] when referring to her hijra-family lineage, a term frequently used by Hindi speakers in reference to the room of a prostitute.

16   Sulekha was originally named *Bahār* when she joined a hijra community in Banaras, the reasons for which she identifies as follows: "I used to live in Calcutta with three or four hijras, and when I came to Banāras there were three or four hijras here too. There was a hijra named Bādal when I came here, and shortly after that Barkhā came here, too. So everybody was named by a name beginning with 'b'. We had a Bādal and a Barkhā and a Bindiyā, so I was named Bahar. And so on and so forth. That's how we were named, so that we'd have this stream of sounds that sounded good—Bādal, Barkhā, Bindiyā, Bahār. It sounds good, doesn't it?"

17   The name *Basantī* is actually an adjectival derivative of the Hindi word *basant* ['spring'], and the name *Kāntā* is derived from *Kāntī* ['beauty'].

18   Both Nargis and Babītā are popular actresses in the Hindi film industry. In addition to her leading roles in Hindi films such as *Avārā* and *Mother India*, Nargis was nominated to the upper house of the parliament as a representative. According to Sunita, the name *Rekha*, also the name of the popular Hindi film actress Rekha Ganeshan, is extremely popular among hijras, a popularity that might have much to do with the fact that Rekha played the role of a prostitute dancer in the box-office hit *Umrāv Jān*. In it, Rekha plays the character of a misunderstood woman, pure at heart but forced into the profession by an uncaring society.

19   The name *Candā* ['moon'] also carries connotations of 'beloved'. *Barkhā* is derived from the Sanskrit term *varṣa* ['rain'].

20   This practice is even more common in Sikh names, where gender is often marked only by the masculine ending *Singh.* or the feminine ending *Kauv.*

21   Sulekha explains the naming procedure as follows: "It doesn't make any difference what you look like physically. It's just like—no one else in Banaras is named Andaz, so we have an Andaz. You name someone in such a way that no other person will have the same name in the Banaras area. No one else is named [Sulekha] in this area, for example. There's a [Sulekha] in Kachva, but not here. ... That's why my name is [Sulekha], within this very limited area. When [Megha] came here, there was no one else named [Megha] here either. We always choose names in this way. We make sure that no one else is called by the same name. If the same name were given to more than two people, then the hijras would all be looking at each other and saying, 'Which one are you talking about?' ... There are a lot of hijras named [Sulekha] in other areas: in Delhi, in Bombay, in Kathmandu, in Panjab, in Agra. But in this nearby area—in Banaras, or Mugalsaray, Ramnagar, or Cunar—I'm the only one named [Sulekha].. In any given area, you take a name that's not already taken."

22   The term *choṭkī* is a double dimunitive: *choṭī* ['small'] > *chuṭkī* > *choṭkī*.

23   In one popular folk drama, the princess *Nauṭaṅkī* ['one who weighs 1 1/2 *chaṭāk*'] registers this weight everyday when weighed with flowers, until the day she falls in love. When her weight increases, her subjects know that she is no longer pure. (A

chaṭāk is a small unit of measurement; 16 *chaṭāk*s make up a *ser* ['seer'].) In folk drama, such names are usually given to beautiful but flirtateous female characters.

24   The *mardānā* curses which Rupa refers to in this passage are known in Hindi as *mā-bahin kī gālī* ['mother and sister curses'].

25   Sulekha describes this conflict as follows: "When I came to Banaras, I was living in [Megha's] house. But there was a lot of bickering there too, so I left. I'm a very straightforward person, you know, but they're very cunning over there. That's why they started to quarrel, so I ran away from there and went to Mugalsaray again. Finally, I came to this place."

CHAPTER 4

Reported Speech and the Discontinuous Self

I was disowned by the Hindus and shunned by my own

wife. I was exploited by the Muslims who disdained my

company. Indeed I was like a *hijda* who was neither one

thing nor another but could be misused by everyone.

-Khushwant Singh, *Delhi*

The hijras' heightened awareness of the social meanings portrayed by the use of

feminine as opposed to masculine speech is perhaps symptomatic of the fact that they are

intensely aware of how they are perceived, not only by their peers, but by nonhijras as well.

Because the hijras frequently make these perceptions transparent when they quote the

reactions of others, reported speech becomes one of the most clearly defined contexts in

which the hijras code-switch between feminine and masculine self-reference. The

distinction made in English between indirect and direct quotation does not hold in more

traditional Hindi; the speech of others is incorporated into the speaker's own discourse in a

form which closely approximates what linguists have referred to as *Reported Speech and*

Thought or *Indirect Free Style* (Banfield 1973; 1978). The existence of this pattern in the

language enables the hijra to express how she is evaluated by other people, her quotations

of earlier conversations often resulting in what might be called a "gendering of respect."

Consistent with the other uses she makes of the linguistic gender system, she will quote a

referent who is supportive of her lifestyle as addressing her in the feminine, but one who is

unsupportive as addressing her in the masculine. In this chapter, I will focus on two

aspects of the hijras' narratives in which reported speech is essential to the telling of the

story: (1) when they imagine interactions with nonhijras in different regions of India, and (2) when they recall interactions with their own family members. In both instances, their gendering of reported speech reflects their own perceptions of how society feels about them, pointing to the discontinuous nature of their gender identity not only with respect to their diachronic history, but also the present.

REPORTED SPEECH AND THOUGHT IN HINDI

In Hindi, reports of statements and questions are frequently made by citing the exact words attributed to the speaker. In such constructions, the words of the referent in question are incorporated into the discourse in a manner approximating how the referent herself would have uttered them, and the subordinate clause which contains the referent's words is linked to the main clause by the conjunction *ki*. Although in recent years this pattern has been influenced by the way speech is reported in English, particularly in more literary or western-influenced prose, colloquial Hindi still follows this more traditional pattern. In the Hindi used by the majority of the hijras we spoke with in Banaras, for instance, the subordinated clause in the sentence that translates into English as "Gita asked me how I was" would feature a second person subject and a present tense verb form; that is, Gita's words would be reported directly as "how are you" instead of indirectly as "how I was" (see example 1). In more westernized Hindi, however, the same sentence might follow a pattern similar to that of English, with the embedded subject realized in the first person and the embedded verb realized in the past tense (see example 2):

(1) *Gītā   ne   mujhse   pūchā   (ki)   ap   kaise   haĩ*

     Gita   obl   me-to   asked   that   you   how   are

     (Literal translation: Gita asked me (that) how are you.)

     Gita asked me how I was.

(2) *Gītā* *ne* *mujhse* *pūchā* *(ki)* *maĩ* *kaisā* *thā*

Gita obl me-to asked that I how was

(Literal translation: Gita asked me (that) how I was.)

Gita asked me how I was.

The appearance of the pattern demonstrated in example (1) is quite pervasive in Hindi.

Sentences expressing a person's thoughts or feelings are also cast in this form, as

illustrated in example (3); and while the use of the third person subjunctive is commonly

used to report indirect commands or requests, many speakers frequently report such

commands directly, as in example (4).

(3) *usne* *socā* *(ki)* *maĩ* *banāras* *jāũgī*

she-obl thought that I banaras will go

(Literal translation: She thought (that) I will go to Banaras.)

She thought she would go to Banaras.[1]

(4) *usne* *mujhse* *kahā* *(ki)* *banāras* *jāiye*

she-obl me-to said that banaras go

(Literal translation: She told me (that) go to Banāras.)

She told me to go to Banaras.

Hindi speakers often make use of these constructions to illustrate their own social status

with respect to the quoted speaker in question, specifically through the attributive choice of

intimate, familiar, or respectful pronouns, address terms, and verb forms. But the hijras,

because they occupy a gender position that is perceived to be neither fully male nor fully

female, are able to express these same relations by gendering the speaker's address as either

feminine or masculine. Because these subordinated quotations frequently lead to lengthy discursive reenactments, often continuing through several sentences, reported speech and thought offer the linguist a way of identifying how the hijra interprets the way others perceive her.

THE GENDERING OF *IZZAT* ['RESPECT']

The notion of societal *izzat*, or 'respect', is central to the hijras' narratives; they express their anger at having so little of it, their desire to have more of it, their gratitude for what they do receive. Their perceptions of how outsiders view them, whom they contrast with their own community variously as *bāhar ke log* ['people of the outside'], *bāhrī ādmī* ['people on the outside'], *duniyā dār* ['worldy people'], and *duniyā vāle* ['members of the world'],[2] become particularly evident in their reports of hijra/nonhijra interaction. Because the hijras' retellings of these interactions almost always involve reported speech and thought, social relations ultimately become linguistic relations, their employments of linguistic gender acting as a mouthpiece for their reception in the society at large.

Close transcriptions of the hijras' conversations illustrate the ease with which they perform divergent gendered stances in their reports of interactions with outsiders. Sulekha, like all of the hijras we spoke with in Banaras, is critically aware of how she is addressed when outside of her home. While people of questionable character will encounter her on the street by using the intimate imperative *cal haṭ*, a form that, when used between strangers, translates rudely as 'get out of my way', more sensible outsiders will use the polite form *jī haṭ jāiye*, or 'ma'am/sir, please get out of my way':

(5) S: jo samajh<u>dār</u> ādmī hote haĩ, vah aurat   S: People who are sensible will talk to us

kā nām (?) karte haĩ. "ē jī, haṭ jāiye,   like they'd talk to a woman. "Hey *jī*

(1.0) ((softly)) kahā jānā hai āpko, -   ['ma'am/sir'], please move out of the way.

caliye baiṭhiye." - aur jo akhkar badmāś   ((softly)) Where do you have to

hotā hai kahēgī, ((rapidly)) "<u>HAT</u>! kahā   go, ma'am/sir? Please come on, please

jaibo. <u>CAL</u>!" ... donõ mē bāt karte haĩ. -   sit down." And those who are rude and

donõ mē bāt karte haĩ. - kitnā mard hai   loose charactered will spot us and say,

jo kahte haĩ ki (rapidly) "aRE, hijṛā,   "GET OUT OF MY WAY! Where are

kahā jātā^m hai. cal <u>hat</u>!" (4.0) kitnā hai   you going? MOVE IT!" ... They speak to

ki kahēgī, ((slowly)) calī^f jāiye, <u>kyā</u> isī   us in both [masculine and feminine].

kar rahī^f haĩ āp? - calī^f āiye bhī strīling   They'll address us in both. There are a

ho gayā.   lot of men who'll say, "Hey! Hijra!

Where are you going^m? Get out of the

way!" And then there are a lot who'll say

((softly)),"Please come^f on. What are^f

you doing, ma'am/sir?" Even "please

come^f on" is feminine, of course.

Interesting in Sulekha's narrative is that the kind of people who use the polite imperative *haṭ jāiye* ['please move'] are the same ones quoted as addressing her in the feminine, an address which for her symbolizes respect. She is extremely scornful of those *"badmāś"* ['loose-charactered'] types who, though complete strangers, address her in *tu* imperatives and masculine-marked verb phrases, such as those she reports in the quoted phrase "*are hijṛā, kahā jātā^m hai? cal hat!*" ['Hey hijra, Where are you going^m? Move it!']. She instead prefers the *samajhdār* ['understanding'] people, who indicate respect through the use of *āp* imperatives and feminine-marked verb phrases. Softening her voice to a level she

deems appropriate to such displays, she reports them as saying, "cal$\bar{\imath}^f$ jāiye, <u>kyā</u> is$\bar{\imath}$ kar rah$\bar{\imath}^f$ ha$\bar{\imath}$ āp?" ['Please come^f on, what are^f you doing, ma'am?'].

The strategic gendering employed by Sulekha in (5) is used by Megha as well, although from a rather different perspective. Megha takes her position as spokesperson of the hijra community very seriously, and as discussed earlier in Chapter 3, she clearly wants to represent her community in a positive light. She too was essentially kicked out of her household at age ten because of her ambiguous genitalia, with her mother and father reporting to the neighbors that she had drowned in the Ganges river, but unlike the other hijras, she focuses more on the notion of respect than on that of derision. For Megha, societal approval is reflected in the linguistic acknowledgment of her femininity, a point she makes clear in the exchange reproduced in excerpt (6):

(6) A: *to āp log ko kyā samajhte ha$\bar{\imath}$?*

    A: *So how do they think of you?*

    M: aurat ke jaise. yā kahĕge "hijṛin log."

       "hijṛin log."

    M: Like women, of course, or they'll say

       "hijrin^f people"- "hijrin^f people."

    B: *ācchā. to āp- to āp log ko kahĕge*

       matlab - ham <u>bā</u>har ke log. matlab, ap

       log ke b$\bar{\imath}$c mĕ nah$\bar{\imath}$.

    B: *Oh. So they'll call you- you- I mean,*

       we're talking about what <u>outside</u> people

       [call you]- not among yourselves, but

       outside people.

    M: yah$\bar{\imath}$ pūchĕge, kahĕge "kahā̃ jāyĕg$\bar{\imath}^f$

       d$\bar{\imath}$d$\bar{\imath}^f$."

    M: They'll ask- they'll talk to me in the same

       way: "Where will you go^f, sister^f?"

    B: *hā̃. to aurat vālā bol$\bar{\imath}$ bolte ha$\bar{\imath}$.*

    B: *Right. So they speak to you like women?*

    M: hā̃. (1.0) "kahā̃ jāyĕg$\bar{\imath}^f$ d$\bar{\imath}$d$\bar{\imath}^f$," to ma$\bar{\imath}$

       kah dũg$\bar{\imath}^f$ "daśaśvamedh jāũg$\bar{\imath}^f$,"

       "<u>Go</u>dauliyā jāũg$\bar{\imath}^f$," "naṭrāj jāũg$\bar{\imath}^f$," (0.5)

       yah$\bar{\imath}$ bolt$\bar{\imath}^f$ hũ.

    M: Yes. "Where will you go^f, sister^f?

       And I'll answer^f, "I'll go^f to

       Daśaśvamedh," "I'll go^f to Godauliyā,"

       "I'll go^f to Naṭrāj." That's how I talk^f.

It is highly unlikely that outsiders actually refer to Megha's community as *hijṛin log* ['hijrin people'], since the term *hijṛin* appears to be an in-group designation unavailable to non-hijras. Her insistence that outsiders refer to her as such, however, reflects her own conflation of anatomical gender with linguistic gender: While the word *hijṛā* is grammatically masculine, the word *hijṛin* is feminine. If a nonhijra were to employ this term in reference to a hijra, they would, in essence, alter the very nature of the linguistic designation, identifying the community as anatomically feminine instead of masculine. Moreover, because the term *hijṛā* is used in the larger society as an insult, implying impotence and uselessness (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 5), the outsider who refers to the community as *hijṛin* will not only honor them through a feminine designation, but also avoid the derogatory meanings associated with its masculine counterpart.

Megha's comment that outsiders refer to her in the same way that she refers to herself is also telling; she encapusulates their recognition of her social status in their repeated use the phrase "*kahā jāyēgī[f] dīdī[f]*" ['Where will you go[f], sister[f]?']. Megha told us a number of things that the members of other hijra communities strongly disagreed with, one of the main ones being her claim that Banaras, as the renouned Hindu city, was particularly supportive of its hijra population. Arguing that Banaras citizens always speak to the hijras with *izzat* ['respect'], she again reports them as addressing her community in the feminine:

(7) M: kāśī jitnā mān hote haī aur koī śahar M: The respect you get in *kāśī* is not like the

   itnā mān nahī hotā hai. izzat se sab bolte respect you get in any other city.

   haī. "kahā jā rahī[f] ho, kahā se ā rahī[f] Everybody speaks to us respectfully,

   ho," goḍā pakṛte hai "mujhe āśīvārd do. "Where are you going[f]? Where are you

mere ghar mẽ baccā ho, to nācne ke liye ão."

coming[f] from?" And then they touch our knee and say, "Give me your blessings. If I'm blessed with a childhood in my household, come and dance."

Evoking the sacred perception of the city in Indian tradition by referring to it as *Kaśī*, an older and more religious name for Banaras, Megha alludes to the sacred position of the hijras within traditional Hinduism, which expects their blessings at the birth of a child. For Megha, such respect is marked linguistically not through the use of formal address, since she reports ousiders as addressing her with familiar verb forms and imperatives instead of formal ones (e.g., *jā rahī ho* ['you are going'], *dō* ['give'], and *āo* ['come']), but through their use of the second person feminine.

Megha's optimistic account of the treatment of hijras by Banaras residents is not confirmed by the other hijras, who all complained bitterly about their marginalization in the Indian social matrix. When asked if the hijra community in Banaras is particularly well-known or advantaged, Shashi responds angrily about the lack of societal support she has received, comparing her own impoverishment with the more lucrative position of the Bombay hijras:

(8) No, no, there are hijras all over the country—a heap of them. Where are the hijras here, anyway? There aren't any hijras here. If you want to see hijras, go to Lucknow, go to Delhi, go to Panjab, go to Madras. Just observe those hijras; they're millionaires! They have cars, motorcycles, jeeps, and so on. But what do we have? We're all dying of hunger here in Banaras. We eat just enough to fill our stomachs. There's only enough for us to eat because God is merciful to us. So don't come here if you want to see hijras. Go to Delhi, go to Panjab, go to Bombay. Yes, go to Bombay. Your heart

will be _so_ happy seeing those hijras! If you go to Bombay, sister, they live such a good life, you can't possibly recognize that they're hijras! You'll think, "Hey, these are full-fledged women; they're telling us lies!" Sister, you won't be able to believe them. I bet my life on it!

In the last two lines of the passage, Shashi anticipates our own response to the Bombay hijras by quoting us as referring to them in the feminine (i.e., _ye to pūrī^f aurat^{f}haī; ye jhūṭh boltī^{f}haī_ ['these are full-fledged^f women^f; they're telling^f us lies!']), a designation she clearly perceives as unusual. Her statement, with its implication that such a reception is markedly different from how an outsider would respond to the hijras in Banaras, suggests that the use of feminine reference identified by Megha is not as pervasive as she claims.

A number of scholars writing on the hijras have asserted that village residents tend to be more respectful of the hijras than more educated (and therefore, in their opinion, less provincial) city residents (e.g., Naqvi and Mujtaba 1991:89; Aruna Har Prasad 1990:44).[3] While Sulekha supports this statement for the most part, explaining how she has reciprocal relationships with most of the residents in her small village, she still quotes her neighbors as referring to her in the masculine. When she remarked that she and other villagers regularly watch the Sunday television movie together, an interaction that would rarely occur between hijras and nonhijras in the city, we asked her to identify what the villagers thought of hijras in more precise terms:

(9) A: _yahī gāv ke log hijṛõ ke bāre mē kyā socte haī?_

A: _So what do these village people think about the hijras?_

S: _yahā kā? (1.5) yahā kā koī soctā hī nahī hai, kahtā hai ki "vo to hijṛā hai_

S: _The people here? The people here don't think anything special. They'll just say,_

((sighs; softly)) rahne do, kaun mẽ paṛā hai, apnā khātā - apnā kām rahtā hai, rakhne do.

"Oh, s/he's a hijra. ((sighs; softly)) Just leave him/her alone and let him/her lie in the corner. He eats[m] his own food, he minds[m] his own business. Let him/her be."

While the response reported by Suleka may be read as sympathetic, the villagers nevertheless seem to pity the hijra lifestyle. Responses like *"rahne do "* ['leave him/her alone'] and *"rakhne do"* ['let him/her be'], while certainly not hostile, point to an outside opposition not lost on Sulekha. She articulates the villager's defense of her position not in the feminine, but in the masculine; while she clearly means their words to be supportive, she is not quite willing to portray them as unconditionally accepting.

Rupa explains that the displays of respect identified by Megha are much more characteristic of the people living in Gujarat. According to Rupa, the people in this region of India honor the hijras in the same way that they honor the hijra goddess, Bahucarā Mātā, who was born in Gujarat and is worshipped by both hijra and nonhijra devotees:

(10) R: ((pointing to picture)) yah ham log kā devī hai gujrāt mẽ. bahucarā mātā. murg kī savārī. ye gujrātī log bahut mānte haĩ. gujrātī baṛe se baṛe lakhpati-karoṛ pati rahẽge agar kār moṭar se jā rahe haĩ to sāmne ham log paṛ jāyẽge to moṭar se utar kar pair pakṛẽge. das-bis jo hogā dekar ke "mātājī[f] āśīvad do. merā kām

R: ((pointing to picture)) This is our *devī*--in the Gujarāt. Bahucarā Mātā. She rides a hen. The people in Gujarāt respect her a great deal. Even the greatest millionaires or billionaires among them-- if they're going by car and see us in front of them--will immediately stop the car, get out, and touch our feet. They'll give

siddh ho."

us 10 or 20 rupees, whatever they have [and say], "*Mātā jī*[f] ['mother'], give me your blessing so that my work will be accomplished."

Like the other hijras, Rupa regularly reports approving outsiders as referring to hijras in the feminine and disapproving outsiders as referring to hijras in the masculine. In this case, Rupa enunciates this respect by quoting Gujarati citizens as acknowledging her femininity: upon seeing her on the roadside, they address her politely as *mātā jī.* The term, formal for 'mother', not only recalls the image of the goddess Bahucarā Mātā, who is commonly addressed as *mātā jī*, but also recognizes the hijras' privileged position with respect to her.

These varied perspectives on the treatment of hijras in different geographical areas of India merit further investigation. If my study had taken place in Gujarat, where many of the hijras are wealthier than the hijras in Banaras and carry a more direct association with an admired religious tradition, my results may have been rather different. The same is true with respect to language use, of course, since the hijras' gendered strategies are formed in response to local ideologies of femininity and masculinity, in addition to larger societal ones. In her conversations with us, Rupa implied that the gendering of respect would be very different for the hijras living in Punjab, who self-divide into feminine and masculine roles (see Chapter 2). Naming these roles *hijṛā* and *hijṛin*, respectively, Rupa explains in excerpt (11) that the hijras designated as masculine and feminine in this region of the country live together like husband and wife, adopting the roles associated with either gender[4]:

(11)   It doesn't happen like that in Banaras, but it does in the Punjab. In the Punjab, the ones who are more manly[5] are 'hijras' and the ones who are more womanly are 'hijrins'. And they'll live together like husband and

wife. The manly one will always wear a *lungī* and *kamīz*, and the woman will always wear a *sārī*. The manly one will play the *dholak* and the woman will dance. But this only happens in the Panjab—sleeping, getting up, sitting together, and all of that. It doesn't happen in our Banaras.

Not surprisingly, this kind of role-playing also affects their reception in the larger society, since being addressed in the masculine, in the opinion of many Panjabi hijras at any rate, is not an insulting gesture. Rupa notes this linguistic oddity in excerpt (12) below, when she again contrasts the linguistic situation in Punjab with that in Banaras:

(12) R: banāras mẽ to aurat ke samān hai. ...
((?)) panjāb mẽ to mardānā bhī boltī^f
haī, - sab "muṇḍā^m" bolēgī^f. jo hijṛā
vahā par rahegā usko "muṇḍā^m" bolēgī^f.
- aur usko "khusrā^m" bolēgī^f. (3.0) to
jajmān bhī jāntā hai ki inkā ādmī hai.
(2.0) agar vah akelī^f jāyegā^m, to "kyũ?
((campā)) admī kidhar gayā^m. (1.0) vah
nahī āyā^m tere sāth mẽ dholak bajāne."
(1.0) jānte haī ki vah hijṛā <u>hai</u>, - lekin
bāt aisī karte haī.

R: In Banāras, we treat everyone like women. ... But in Panjab, they also speak^f in the masculine. Everybody will say^f *muṇḍā^m* ['boy']. They'll call^f a hijra who lives there *muṇḍā^m* ['boy']. And they'll call^f him/her *susrā^m* ['father-in-law']. Even the *jajmān* ['patrons'] know that they have husbands. If he'll go^m somewhere alone^f, then [it'll be] "Why ((are you alone))? Where did your husband go^m? Why didn't he come^m with you to play the *dholak?*" They know that it's a hijra, of course, but they still talk like that.

While I am unable to test the validity of Rupa's assertions, her commentary points to a fruitful area for future research. Should the situation in Panjab be as different as Rupa

claims, the hijras there will certainly adopt very different strategies for expressing relations of power and solidarity—strategies that may have little in common with the ones used by the hijras in Banaras. This observation again underscores the need to study language strategies as created within local "communities of practice" (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1990; 1992; 1996); while the hijras' language use may certainly be influenced by popular representations of gender in the mass media and other outlets, the Hindi film industry being no exception, their manipulations of these constructions will depend on local uptake.

GOING HOME TO THE FAMILY

The notion of going home to the family is central to the hijras' narratives, who were all, with the exception of Rupa, forced to leave their homes at an early age. The family is, after all, what distinguishes the hijra from most other members of Indian society, who are intimately involved in the extended families so instrumental to social organization. But since the hijra is thought to act as a curse on this very family structure—a belief based on the idea that her impotence will spread to her siblings and prohibit procreation[6]—she is, in the words of Sulekha, a "black spot," an existence that brings shame to the family's potency. It is perhaps this fact that leads Charu to describe the hijras as occupying the dividing line between society and non-society in excerpt (13): if they were to cross this line by returning home, their appearance would be met with anger, fear, even hatred:

(13) Ch: hijṛā cāhẽ, (1.5) apne ghar par calā[m] jāe - Ch: Even if the hijra wants to go home, it
vah sambhav nahĩ hai. iske- ye hijṛā ke   wouldn't be possible. The hijra is the
jariye hai- dekhiye samāj, aur asamāj kā   dividing line- you see, it's a matter of
bāt hai. (2.0) asamāj ho gayā[m]- alag ho   social versus asocial. He has become

gayā^m, - agar ye jānā cāhẽge^m, - hijṛā
jānā cāhẽge^m, - parīvār vāle nārāz hõge.
(1.0) khuś bhī hõge, (2.5) khuś bhī hõge
((softly)) ki ye hamārā parivār hai, (1.5)
hamārā^m beṭā^m hai, - yā hamārā^m
laṛkā^m hai, - yā hamārā^m bhāī^m hai. ā
gayā^m royẽge. - magar ek cīz kā nārāzgī
āyegā, duniyā vāle bolẽge ki "uphu. ye
hijṛā ā gayā^m. (1.5) iske ghar hijṛā
ātā^m jātā^m hai. - isse hijṛā kā riśtā hai. -
iske ghar śādī nahī karẽge." (3.0) to ye
duniyā ne asamājik banā diya. (2.5)
duniyā burī nazar se dekhne lagā. (2.5)
"E HIJRĀ, (2.0) e hijṛā."

asocial. If they want to go [back into society]- if the hijras want to go [back], the family members will get very upset. They'll also be happy- they'll also be happy [and think] "He's our family; he's our^m child^m; he's our^m son^m; he's our^m brother^m." But even though they might cry when he arrives^m, they'll still be angry about one thing: The worldly people will say, "Oh no! A hijra has come^m here! A hijra visits^m that household so they must be related to a hijra! We won't arrange a marriage with anyone in that household!" So the world has made him an outcaste; the world has looked at him with an evil eye: "HEY HIJRA! Hey, hijra!"

Charu's use of the masculine in this narrative would suggest that the family is unable to acknowledge their child's new-found femininity, a feeling expressed on a more personal basis by all of the hijras we spoke with. If the child were truly feminine, her appearance in the household would no longer be interpreted as a threat; in fact, she would no longer be a hijra according to societal definition, since the term is itself based on the notion of male, not female, deficiency. The family, as instigators of the hijra's marginalization, will continue to think of their child as a beṭā^m ['son'], laṛkā^m ['boy'], or bhāī^m ['brother'] gone wrong, as a child whose asamājik ['asocial'] nature provokes, in Charu's own words, their burī nazar ['evil eye'].

Sulekha articulates a similar response from a more personal standpoint when she recalls how her family reacted to her effeminate behavior when she was a child. Like Charu, she too expresses how impossible it is to go back home, particularly since her family disowned her at such an early age. A close transcription of one of her narratives, a portion of which was included earlier in Chapter 2, reveals Sulekha's own gendering of approval and disapproval: While she consistently refers to herself in the feminine, even when referring to herself in the past, she quotes her family members as referring to her in the masculine:

(14) A: *āpkā parivār kyā soctā hai?*

S: jab ghare nahī jātī hū- jātī hū to sab samajhte haī ki "mar gayā^m, (1.0) khatam ho gayā^m, (1.5) nātā riśtā khatam ho gayā."

B: *acchā. jab āp choṭī thī to āp ke bare me kyā socte the?*

S: kyā soctā log? kuch nahī soctā thā log. (0.5) kahtā hai log ki ((lowering voice)) "are, i kyā ho gayā^m. hijrā ho gayā^m. (0.2) mar bhī nahī jātā^m hai, (0.2) are nikal bhī nahī jātā^m hai, are bāp mahtārī kā nām khatam ho gayā."

B: *hameśā bolte the?*

S: hā. (4.0) beizzatī kā ghar ho gayā.

A: *What does your family think?*

S: When I don't go home--even if I do go^f home, everybody thinks, "He died^m! He's^m finished! All of our ties [with him] are finished!"

B: *Oh. But what were they thinking about you when you were small?*

S: What could people think? People didn't think anything. Or people said ((lowering voice)), "Oh, what has he become^m? He became^m a hijra. Why doesn't he just die^m! Oh, why doesn't he just go away^m! Oh, the name of his father and mother has been doomed!"

B: *They always said that?*

S: Yes. It became a house of dishonor.

"kaise zindagī calegā iskā. mar jātā to acchā rahtā." (2.0) maī sab suntī^f thī^f apnā nikal gayī^f. (5.0) jhūth kah rahī^f hū? (6.0) maī jhūth nahī boltī^f. (5.0) jahā par bāt gayā to jhūth bolkar kyā karūgī^f? (1.0) hā? (1.0) hame to koī lauṭ āyegā nahī. maī kaise kah dū ki nahī.

[They said,] "How can his/her life go on? It would have been better if he had just died^m!" I used^f to listen^f to all of that, and then I just ran^f away. Am I lying^f? I don't lie^f. When no one cares what I say anyway, what would I gain^f by lying? Right? Nobody will take me back anyway, so why should I tell you otherwise?

Through the use of masculine self-reference when reporting the speech of her family members, Sulekha is able to illustrate not merely the rigidity of their perceptions with respect to her anatomical gender, but also their refusal to accept her new lifestyle.

Sulekha extends this hesitancy to her neighbors as well, quoting all outside reference to her earlier behaviour in the masculine. While she refers to her former self in the feminine when reporting her own speech, she quotes her neighbors as insulting her with masculine terms like "*nacaniyā*^{m} ['little dancer']"—a double diminutive derived from the feminine noun *nacnī* ['dancer'] and used by Hindi speakers to indicate that a male referent is "unnaturally effeminate." At one point, Sulekha recalls the neighborhood's reaction to her decision to dance with a local *maṇḍlī* ['troupe']; distraught by their discovery, the neighbors began to gossip about her, enunciating their disapproval of her activities through the masculine:

(15) B: *to ghar vāle bol dete the nācō?*   B: *Did the members of your household give you permission to dance?*

S: nahī̃. cupke-cupke nāctī thī. log kahte the   S: *No. I was[f] dancing[f] secretly. Then*
"arc! ye to nacaniyā̃ nikal gayā!"   *people started to talk, "Oh! He's turned[m] out to be a nacaniyā[m] ['little dancer']!"*

While Sulekha's reports of masculine reference in this particular passage are related to the fact that she is referring to a time that preceded her entry into the hijra community, her family's disapproval of her lifestyle, and their corresponding use of masculine reference, continues through contemporary accounts. "Even if I were to go back after five or six years," she later explains, "everyone would say, 'Oh no! He's come[m]! He's come[m]! He's come[m]! He's come[m]! He's come[m]!'" ("*are! ā gayā[m] ā gayā[m] ā gayā[m] ā gayā[m] ā gayā[m]!*"). Sulekha's use of the masculine in such quotations reflects her own distancing from a former masculine self; the fact that friends and family still refuse to refer to Sulekha in the feminine underscores their own hesitancy to let go of what they perceive to be her essential gender.

THE DISCONTINUOUS SELF

Such linguistic shifts point to the fact that many of the hijras we interviewed have what might be called a discontinuous gender identity—an identity which gradually changes from masculine to feminine after arrival in the hijra community. It is perhaps for this reason that the hijras sometimes refer to fellow hijras as masculine when referring to them in a pre-hijra state, such as when they tell of each other's childhoods. Nanda alludes to similar linguistic shifts in the preface to her own ethnography when she explains her translation techniques, pointing out that she translates pronouns which refer to the hijras as

feminine, unless "referring to the hijra in the past, when he considered himself a male" (1990:xviii).

It is perhaps for a similar reason that Sulekha refers to Megha as feminine without fail except for two instances: first, when she mentions that Megha worked as a dancer and singer before entering the hijra community, reproduced in excerpt (16), and second, when she explains where Megha and two other hijras lived as children, reproduced in excerpt (17):

(16) S: vah jhūth batā rahī^f thī^f, na? ... ek nācne gāne vālā^m thā^m, to maī hī āī^f. usko hī kyō kahū̃? ((unclear)) to jab maī apne ghar par thī^f (0.5) tab maī bāzār mē nāctī^f thī^f. (2.0) maī maṇḍlī mē nāctī^f thī^f.

S: She was^f telling^f lies, you know. ... He^m was^m a dancer and singer. But I came here the exact same way, so why should I just talk about him? I came^f here the exact same way. When I was^f at home I danced^f at the *bāzār* ['market']. I danced^f in a *maṇḍlī* ['troupe'].

(17) S: bindiyā hamāre eriyā kā^m hai. ek tho aur hijṛā hai. (2.0) latā. (0.5) uskā latā nām hai. aur tīn ādmī ham log ek eriyā kā hai. - [Megha] patnā kā^m hai.

S: Bindiyā is from^m our area. And there's another one, Latā, her name is Latā, so that makes three of us from the same area. And [Megha] is from^m Patna.

Sulekha's portrayal of Megha's pre-hijra self as masculine, as well as Bindiya's, is at odds with her portrayal of her own self as feminine; she is clearly much more willing to acknowledge the earlier masculinity of her fellow hijras than she is her own. Still, by using the masculine she is able to highlight the fact that she is speaking about a former self, not a present one. In such passages, masculine morphological marking, because it locates the

referent in a time prior to her entry into the hijra community, often replaces the need for any overt marking of tense.

The precise moment of the hijra's shift from the masculine past into the more feminine present is unclear in the hijra's narratives, although there seems to be much more involved than simply joining a hijra community. In addition to the rigid socialization process outlined in the previous chapter, where the initiate is taught the art of dressing, gesturing, speaking, singing, and dancing like a hijra, the initiate is also encouraged to undergo a castration and penectomy operation. The notion that the hijra's transition is somehow dependent upon this operation was touched upon only lightly in Chapter 3 and merits further attention here. While the decision to undergo an operation is ultimately left up to the individual, there is a general feeling among the hijras that the success of the hijra trade is contingent upon it. Because the hijras sing and dance primarily in front of women, their financial success depends upon the solidarity they establish with their female clients.[7] This fact, articulated by Sulekha in the two passages below, compels them to appropriate a femininity that is as genuinely *non*-masculine as possible. If they were discovered to have male genitalia, Sulekha explains, they would no longer be able to have a *dīdī* ['sister'] relationship with their clients, and their profession would subsequently suffer:

(18)   After he's operated on, he becomes a *hijṛī*. Then he'll start sitting with the women folk, socializing with women, and calling them *dīdī* ['sister'], *cācī* ['paternal uncle's wife'], and all that. But how would a person who is not going to have the operation say anything? He'll feel shame, of course. Just like I'm talking to you, you know—calling you *dīdī, dīdī* and so on—how would he be able to be intimate with the women? If you came to know that that I was a man, you'd take your sandals off and hit me, right? Am I lying? You'd hit me with your sandals again and again and again, right?

So that's why a man who becomes a woman has to have an operation. This is our profession, so how long would I be able to hide the fact?

(19)   When it's our job to be among women all the time, how long can we hide ourselves as men? How long can we hide ourselves? If the secret gets out in the open, they'll beat us and beat us with their sandals and we'll be dishonored.

In these discussions, Sulekha introduces the word *hijṛī* as a third grammatical alternative to the word *hijṛā*; although grammatically feminine like *hijrin*, it seems to be based entirely on anatomical considerations, denoting an initiate, either *hijṛā* or *hijṛin*, who has been castrated. It is the *hijṛī* who is able to socialize with other women as a sister or an aunt would, her new physicality granting her a certain linguistic authenticity with respect to femininity.

Social scientists M. D. Vyas and Yogesh Shingala (1987) have also commented on the necessity of this operation to the hijra trade, though from a very different perspective. They report a revealing interaction with Haji Mushtaq, the oldest *zanānā* in Delhi, a term they use for men who, like hijras, earn a living by singing and dancing in women's clothes at births and weddings, yet unlike hijras, do not undergo castration.[8] Angry that many of her disciples have opted for a hijra lifestyle instead of a zanana one, Haji identifies the motivating factor behind this betrayal as financial. The reasoning is simple: Dancers without genitals make more money:

"*By dress, and by manner, he seemed like a hijra. So I asked, 'How are you different from hijras?'*"

"We both earn money in the same celebrating births and marriages of other people. But there is one big difference. The hijras were all like you and me once. They were males who had all the genitals, which are gifts of God to us. But they chose

to have them cut off; tempted by other hijras, these hijras are always trying to defile

the minds of the less God fearing zenanas."

"But why should anyone lose his genitals? I won't."

"I won't either." He said loudly, "Because I fear God." But many young zenanas

are tempted by money.

"Do hijras earn more money than zenanas?"

"A hundred times more. When a hijra lifts up his saree before a gathering,

celebrating the birth of a new-born, the women say, 'Oh! What a pitiable creature!'

and give him a lot of money, whether out of pity, or horror, or shame. Sometimes,

a group of hijras gets as much as 5,000 rupees a day. A hijra can bargain with his

saree lifted. But if a zenana shows his organ in a gathering? He can even be beaten

up." (1987:44)

As Haji indicates in this passage, hijras frequently expose their genitals to unsuspecting

outsiders, often in an attempt to shame their addressee into giving them money (see Chapter

6); indeed, this activity has been a hijra tradition for well over a century, its realization

recorded by a number of British colonialists in the 1800s (Goldsmid 1836, as reported in

Preston 1987; also Bhimbai 1901; Russel, Bahadur, and Lal 1916).[9] The

interconnectedness between the operation and the hijra profession is therefore clear,

particularly since society has even come to expect this display. While Sulekha does not

specifically use the term *zanānā* in her narrative, her portrayal of the organ-intact hijra is

strikingly similar to Haji's portrayal of the organ-intact zanana; any improper exposure will

provoke physical retribution from the women who are present at the gathering.

The distinction Sulekha makes between *hijṛā* and *hijṛī*, as well as the distinction

Haji makes between *hijṛā* and *zanānā,* can perhaps explain the hijras' linguistic reactions to

an intersexed child who was adopted by a neighboring hijra community. A high-caste

police inspector in the district of Gorakhpur, ashamed to have given birth to an intersexed

child, was apparently confronted by a group of hijras as he went to hide all evidence of the birth. Faced with the hijras' anger, he appeased them by allowing them to adopt the child as their own, paying them an additional 2,000 rupees to do so. The child, now ten or eleven year old, has been living with a group of hijras in a distict called Mu for almost his entire lifetime. But even though Megha identifies the child as "neither man nor woman" in excerpt (20), she nevertheless refers to him in the masculine, a designation strikingly different from her usual feminine references to fellow hijras:

(20) M: uskā baccā^m- darogā kā^m- kam se kam-   M: His child- the police inspector's- is at

ham batāye, - das- das sāl kā^m hai. (1.5)   least- I told you- ten- ten years old. He's

das-gyarah sāl kā^m·(2.0) ṭhākur kā^m about ten or eleven years old. He's the

laṛkā^m. (1.5) darogā kā^m laṛkā^m hai.   son^m of a *thākur* ['lord', 'landlord',

(1.5) baccā hotā rahā, - vah nahī̃ rahā, -   'highly honored person']. He's the son^m of

na nar mē̃ na nārī mē̃, to phẽkne jātā   a police inspector. They had a child, but

rahā, - hamare log udhar se guzartī^f āyī^f,   he was neither man nor woman. They

- to dekhā, - to ham log ko de diyā, (1.0)   went to throw [him] away, but my people

do hazār rūpayā dakshiṇā diyā uske ūpar   came^f passing^f by over there and they

se.   saw us. So they gave [him] to us. And

they gave us a 2,000 rupee donation, in

addition.

Megha identifies the child four times with the masculine postposition *kā* instead of the feminine postposition *kī*, a fact not readily apparent from the English translation. In addition, she refers to the child as a *baccā*^{m} ['child'] and *laṛkā*^{m} ['boy'] instead of their feminine counterparts *baccī*^{m} and *laṛkī*^{m}, and while the masculine versions can refer more generally to both girls and boys, Megha almost always overcompensates toward the feminine when given a choice. That she does not do so with respect to the child in

Maū would indicate that there is more to being a hijra than living with a hijra community.

The use of masculine reference in this particular case is even more surprising given the fact that the hijras are aware of the child's anatomical specifics. Rupa describes the child's intersexed genitalia in some detail, showing notable surprise at the size of the boy's testicles:

(21) R: vah laṛkā^m gorakhpur mẽ nahĩ hai. - ab mū mẽ rahtā^m hai.

R: That boy^m isn't in Gorakhpur anymore; now he's lives^m in Maū.

B: *chah din kā baccā pāl liyā?*

B: *They brought up a child who was six days old?*

R: hã.

R: Yes.

B: *kis tarah se pālā? usko mā̃ kā dūdh bahut zarūrī hai.*

B: *How did they bring him up? He needs his mother's milk.*

R: nahĩ, (1.0) pāl liyā. - usko likhā- thokar mẽ hai to kyā karegā. - dūsrā rahā hotā to mar gayā hotā. - vo kyũ marne lagā^m. - aur kyũ marne lagā^m. - vo apnā, pañc-chah sāl kā^m huā^m. (2.0) to usko- kyā bollalā- do (1.0) golī thā, (0.5) bas itnā baṛā golī thā.

R: They brought him up somehow. It was written in his fate, so what else could have happened? If someone else had been in his place, maybe that person would have died. But why should^m he have died? Why should^m he have died? When he got to be^m about 5 or 6 years old, he had- what should I say?- he had two little balls. ((indicating size with fingers)) He had balls only this big!

What it would take to cause Megha and Rupa to begin referring to the child as feminine is difficult to discern. It could, of course, have more to do with the child's own personal commitment to hijrahood than it does with the physical fact of whether or not he has had

his penis and testicles removed; because he is only ten years old, he is perhaps not yet ready to commit to the hijra lifestyle, even if his anatomy might be indicating otherwise. But since the hijras all insist that being a hijra is ultimately "a physical, not mental matter," it would seem that the operation must somehow play a role in the linguistic designation of femininity, even for those whose physical masculinity, in the eyes of society at any rate, is visibly deficient.

This supposition is confirmed by Govind Singh (1982), who spent several years among the hijras in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh before publishing a relatively positive account of the community in his book *Hijṛõ kā Sansār* ['The World of the Hijras']. Singh reports several life stories from the hijras he interviewed, and because he writes entirely in Hindi, his chapters provide a wealth of linguistic information lost in comparable articles written in English. The gendering of his narration is faithful to the idea of a discontinuous self, with the former self masculine, the latter feminine. For Singh, the dividing line between past and present is the operative event, after which the hijra speaks, and is referred to, in the feminine. In a chapter entitled *"Sāt Rang"* ['Seven Colors'], the name of a particular hijra sect located in the vicinity of Agra, Singh reports the life story of a hijra named Jamuna, formerly named Shiv Prasad, whose right testicle was destroyed in an accident when only ten years old. As a result of this deficiency, she suffered many hardships on the way to adulthood, not limited to a failed marriage with a neighborhood woman, who after a few months, exposed the fact of her husband's impotency to the extended family. Ultimately beaten up and kicked out of the home, Jamuna wound up in Sikri with an older hijra named Cunnan Jan, who changed her name from masculine to feminine and taught her how to dress up in women's clothes.

Even after this point, however, Singh continues to refer to Jamuna in the masculine. The author's choice of linguistic designation is not affected when Jamuna "forgets" the existence of the former Shiv Prasad (i.e., *chunnan jān ke sāth rahate-rahte use apnā nām siv prasād bhī bhūl-sā gayā thā; ab vah svayam ko jamunā hī mahsūs karne lagā[m] thā[m]*

['While living with Chunnan Jan, he had almost forgotten his name Shiv Prasad; now he had[m] perhaps begun[m] to feel like Jamunā'] (p. 24); nor is it affected when Chunnan adopts her as a little sister ("*vah chunnan ko choṭī bahan ban gayā[m]*" [he became[m] Chunnan's little sister]) (p. 24). It is only when Jamuna becomes unconscious after undergoing a castration and penectomy operation in Agra that Singh finalizes her femininity with the use of feminine verbal morphology: "Jamuna became[f] unconscious" (*jamunā behos' paṛī[f] thī[f]*). For the remainder of the chapter, Singh refers to Jamuna consistently in the feminine. Because "the last sign of manhood had been destroyed" (*uskā puruṣcinh samāpt kar diyā gayā thā*) (p. 26), Jamuna could begin her new life as what Hindi-speaking hijras call *lāl*, a newborn child (see Chapter 5). "Now she began[f] to laugh and speak," Singh reports. "Her clothes, her lifestyle, everything became like that of a woman" (*ab vah hāsne-bolne lagī[f] thī[f]. uskā banāv-s'angār, rahan-sahan sab striyõ ke samān ho gayā thā*) (p. 27).

The theoretical implications of this transition from a Lacanian standpoint are almost embarrassingly obvious. From a sociolinguistic standpoint, however, Singh's narrative would suggest that the notion of community involvement is less salient to the appropriation of women's speech than the fact of anatomy. While I would argue that Singh's use of masculine and feminine verbal morphology is a bit too rigid, since the hijras do in fact alternate between feminine and masculine self-reference both before and after the operation, there is certainly some truth to his portrayal. The simple fact that Singh reports the hijras as speaking to each other in the feminine is itself motivation to consider his choices of linguistic gender seriously, especially since many Indian authors fail to acknowledge the hijras use of verbal femininity at all, under any circumstances. If what Singh represents in his narratives is also reflected in the hijras' own language use, the issue of anatomy would appear to play an even greater role in the determination of gender identity than it does among male-to-female transsexuals in the United States; in the transgender community in San Francisco, for instance, a preoperative transsexual will be referred to as "she" by other

community members, even if she has no intention of ever undergoing a sex-change operation. Sulekha's comments in excerpts (18) and (19) additionally indicate that Singh's portrayal is at least partially valid, with the operation resulting in a more authentic linguistic femininity. My interactions with the Banaras hijras suggests that group members do in fact reward the initiate's successful recovery with a more consistent use of feminine reference, and that the initiate, in turn, begins to refer to herself almost exclusively in the feminine. It is not so surprising, then, that the hijras often project a discontinuous self in their daily interactions: the masculine self that precedes the operation is juxtaposed with the feminine self that follows.

This discontinuity is exemplified by interactions between the focal characters in Michael York's (director) and Aruna Har Prasad's (screen writer) documentary entitled *Eunuchs: India's Third Gender*. The film, produced by the BBC in 1990, presents hijras from a variety of communities in India, spanning from Gujarat to Bombay. The relationship between Kiran and Dinesh acts as a frame for the entire screenplay, their personal narratives on their mutual romantic involvement beginning and ending the documentary.[10] Not so surprising from a sociological standpoint is the fact that their relationship is gendered morphologically, with Kiran frequently using feminine self-reference and Dinesh always using masculine self-reference. But in spite of Kiran's self-designated femininity, Dinesh refers to her in the masculine, a choice perhaps precipitated by the fact that their romance began when Kiran was not yet a hijra anatomically; in fact, she underwent the operation only four months before the BBC interview took place. Because these kinds of linguistic shifts are not at all apparent in the English subtitles of the Hindi, I have included a transcription of the first interview with Kiran and Dinesh in its entirety[11]:

1	D:	āj se pāñc sāl pahle mile the, aur us
2		din vah paiṇṭ-śarṭ pahne hue thā^m.
3		hamārī mulākāt bhī pikcar mẽ huī thī,
4		sinemā mẽ. jab se vah paiṇṭ utārā^m aur
5		maĩ jab milā, uske bād tīn sāl tak vah
6		paiṇṭ pahantā^m rahā^m. tīn sāl ke bād
7		maĩne socā ki usko nimṇi karā diyā jāye,
8		kyõki vah peṭīkoṭ pahankar rah saktā^m
9		hai.
10	I:	*kyā āp batā sakte haĩ ki āpkā pyār kaise*
11		*huā?*
12	D:	hamārā pyār to- aise pahle to- usko
13		pahale aisā lagā ki usko lorī vālā mil
14		gayā hai. usse thoṛā paisā mil jāyegā^m,
15		isī vāste usne socā. [unclear] jab usne
16		aisā socā, aur maĩne kyā socā thā-
17		maĩne socā, calo, thoṛī der rukegā^m,
18		thoṛī der rahegā^m hāīkorṭ mẽ. hoṭal mẽ
19		nahĩ ṭhaharnā paṛegā, uske ghar mẽ
20		ṭhaharẽge, maĩne aisā socā thā. unhĩ
21		dinõ maĩ āyā aur tīn din iske sāth rahā,
22		aur tīn din mẽ gāṛī lekar calā gayā. aur
23		bād mẽ āyā pandrah din ke bād. tab
24		vah- usko mere se pyār ho gayā thā.
25		mere bin nahĩ rah- vah bolā ki tere bin

	D:	We met each other five years ago, and at
		that time he was^m wearing pants and
		shirts. We met in a movie theater- in the
		cinema. From the time we met when he
		wore^m pants, he still wore^m pants for
		three years. After three years I thought
		that he should have the *nimṇi* [castration
		operation] because then he could^m live
		wearing a petticoat.
	I:	*Can you tell us how you fell in love?*
	D:	Our love well- let's see. At first it just
		seemed to him that he'd found a lorry
		['truck'] driver, someone he'd get^m some
		money from- he was thinking like that.
		But while he was thinking that, what was
		I thinking? I thought, okay, at least he'll
		stay^m with me for a little while, he'll
		live^m with me for a little while in
		Highcourt. I won't have to stay in a hotel
		anymore, we'll stay in his house. That's
		what I thought. So at that time I came
		and stayed with him for three days, and
		after three days I took my lorry and went
		away. Fifteen days later I came back,

26	nahī̃ rah saktā^m.	and he- he had fallen in love with me.
27		He couldn't live without me- he said^m, "I
28		can't^m live without you."
29	K: jab maĩ sāth miltā to maĩ samajhtā^m ki	K: When we were together I felt^m that my
30	merī jindagī pūrī ho gaī. kahī̃ bhī maĩ	life had become complete. If I go and
31	jaū̃ ki do din maĩ rūktī^f hū̃ to bād mẽ	stay away for a couple of days, I feel that
32	aisā lagtā ki merī jindagī adhūrī rah	my life isn't complete- that my life isn't
33	gaī- ki merī jindagī pūrī nahī̃ hai. aur	fulfilled. And when he goes somewhere
34	vah bhī kahī̃ jāyegā na, to aisā lagtā hai	too, he'll feel like, "Kiran is at home,
35	ki kiraṇ ghar pai hai, kyā karegī^f, kyā	what will she do^f? Will he eat^m or will
36	khānā khāyegā^m ki nahī̃ khāyegī^f, ki	she not eat^f, she'll just be^f sitting^f there."
37	idhar baiṭhī rahegī^f. aur vah bhī sahī	And it is true that when he goes away
38	bāt hai ki vo- vo gāṛī leke jātā hai, apnī	with his truck to do his job, then I lose
39	sarvis pai, mere ki bhūkh bahut kam	my appetite at home. I don't eat^f, I don't
40	lagtā hai, maĩ khānā nahī̃ khātī^f, roṭī	cook^f.
41	nahī̃ pakātī^f maĩ.	
42	D: jaise mard aur aurat haĩ, aise- aur ismẽ	D: It's just like a man and a woman, and in
43	dūsre ko ismẽ sukh miltā hai. koī	this we've found happiness with each
44	problam nahī̃ hai. aur- aur merī bhī	other. It's not a problem. And it's also
45	icchā yahī hai ki jab tak maĩ jiū̃ isī ke	my wish that as long as I live I'll live
46	sāth jiū̃, aur marū̃ to bhī iske sāth marū̃-	with this person, and when I die I'll die
47	aur kahī̃ nahī̃. aur iske liye apnī jān de	with this person-nowhere else. I would
48	dū̃. cāhẽ kuch bhī ho jaū̃- iske liye. aur	even give my life for this person. I don't
49	iske binā aur ke sāth na rahū̃- kabhi nahī̃.	want to live with anyone else. I would
50		never live with anyone else.

Kiran had her operation only four months ago, so her competence in women's speech is still being developed. This fact might explain her use of masculine self-reference in line 29, when she comments on how she felt when she first met Dinesh: *"jab maĩ sāth miltā to maĩ samajhtā[m] ki merī jindagī pūrī ho gaī"* ['When we were together, I felt[m] that my life had become complete']. Although veteran hijras like Sulekha and Megha often reconstruct their entire pasts as feminine, speaking in the first person feminine even when reconstructing childhood interactions, Kiran's masculine past is much more immediate. By self-referring as masculine, she is able to identify thoughts and feelings as belonging to a time associated with a previous self, in this case, a time associated with meeting Dinesh. The more emphatic reasons identified in Chapter 3 as associated with masculine self-reference do not seem to be at all relevant in this particular instance.

For the most part, however, Kiran refers to herself as feminine throughout the documentary as she does in lines 39 through 41, with only occasional exceptions. Yet Dinesh almost always refers to Kiran in the masculine, not only in reference to her pre-hijra self during this interview, as in lines 2, 4, 6, 8, 14, 17, and 18, but also when addressing her directly. The conflict between these two gendered perspectives might have something to do with Dinesh's own self-identification as a nonhijra man, since the majority of outsiders generally think of, and refer to, hijras in the masculine. But it is also possible that Dinesh is simply not yet accustomed to referring to Kiran in the feminine, particularly since she had her operation only four months earlier, and has, perhaps, only recently begun to refer to herself as such. Indeed, Dinesh even quotes Kiran as using masculine self-reference in lines 25 through 28 (e.g., *"mere bin nahī̃ rah- vah bolā[m] ki tere bin nahī̃ rah saktā[m]"* ['He couldn't live without me- he said[m], "I can't[m] live without you"']), a quotation clearly based on Kiran's former, not present, self.

Kiran, in contrast, ignores Dinesh's masculine designations and quotes him primarily as speaking about her in the feminine. When she illustrates how he worries about her in lines 35-37, for instance, she articulates his references to her in the feminine with just

one, perhaps inadvertent, exception: "Kiran is at home, what will she do[f]? Will he eat[m] or will she not eat[f]? She'll just be[f] sitting[f] there!" While it is of course impossible to determine Kiran's motivations for reporting Dinesh's speech in the feminine, a number of explanations are plausible, all of which are interesting from a sociolinguistic perspective. It might be, for example, that Dinesh addresses Kiran as feminine in more intimate situations, and simply chooses to withold his use of the feminine in this more impersonal interview. On the other hand, Kiran might be overcompensating towards the feminine in light of her new-found anatomical femininity, wanting to represent respectful outsiders as acknowledging this transition as well.

CONCLUSIONS

Kiran does not always report outsiders as referring to her in the feminine, however. In a later interview recorded in the documentary, Kiran describes how her parents reacted to her becoming a hijra. Like the reports of the Banaras hijras presented earlier in this chapter, Kiran quotes her parents as expressing their disapproval not in the feminine, but in the masculine: "*Are, hamārā[m] betā [m]aisā [m]ho gayā [m]hai!*" ['Oh! Our[m] son[m] has become[m] this way[m]!']. Her oppositional genderings of her parents' and Dinesh's third person reference seems to reflect not only a temporal disparity, with her parents as part of the masculine past and Dinesh as part of the feminine present, but also an attitudinal one.

The fact that Kiran, who lives in a small village outside of Bombay, uses many of the same discursive strategies identified earlier in this chapter as characteristic of the Banaras hijras points to the fundamental nature of these genderings to hijra self-expression. While I of course do not want to claim that these same strategies are used by hijras across the many different languages and regions of India, I would assert that comparable strategies must exist in the language use of other hijra communities, especially given the discontinuous nature of the hijra's self-identity. The pervasiveness of reported speech in

colloquial Hindi may be language specific, but a means of incorporating outside perspectives into one's own speech is available in every language. How these incorporations are then linked to local ideologies of gender and language remains a question to be answered by the researcher.

NOTES

1   Due to the influence of English syntax, this sentence is ambiguous in contemporary Hindi. Under a second interpretation, the first person subject of the embedded clause can refer to the speaker of the entire utterance. In this case, the sentence would be rendered in English as "S/he thought that I would go to Banaras," where the "I" of the embedded sentence is not coreferential with the subject of the main clause.

2   Sometimes the hijras will even use the term ādmī in contrast to themselves, which is translated in the plural as 'men' or 'persons'.

3   In contrast to this commonly held opinion, Satish Kumar Sharma (1987), in a case study of 19 hijras from a variety of different areas, found that the hijras who grew up in rural settings tended to leave home earlier than the hijras who grew up in urban settings: "The information indicates that hijras with rural backgrounds had a shorter stay with their parents in comparison to hijras born in urban areas. The reason being that the identity of an individual is difficult to conceal in a rural setting. The ecological structure of village society is such that it provides a milieu of physical proximity with each other and has certain places of common gathering where all sorts of information about the village is disseminated and discussed. ... Their asexuality could not remain a secret in their respective villages. The

stigma of asexuality compelled many of these hijras and their parents to depart from each other. The stay of some of them was even limited to a few days" (1982:33-34).

4   M. D. Vyas and Yogesh Shingala, referring to an article by Mehta Harkishan and Sujit Chakrovarty (1977), delineate a similar in-group dichotomy in Gujarat: "The eunuchs having dominant male characteristics keep husband-wife type relationships with those eunuchs having dominant female characteristics" (1987:31).

5   Rupa repeatedly uses the term *mardānā* in this passage, which I have translated as 'manly'.

6   For more detailed discussion of this particular belief, see Mehta (1945: 27), Vyas and Shingala (1987: 75), Pimpley and Sharma (1985:42), Sharma (1989: 51-59).

7   Sekh Rahim Mondal (1989:245) also notes that "rapport with women" is essential to the success of the hijra profession: "It is important to mention in this connection that the use of female dress and ornaments worn by the eunuchs and their women-like behaviour helps them to establish rapport with women, which is necessary to perform their profession of singing and dancing."

8   This interaction is apparently taken from Raghuvanshi Manoj and Pramod Navalkar (1980:10-19), although I have been unable to locate the article. The definition of the term *zenānā* varies considerably in the literature; Nirmal Mitra, for instance, who also interviewed Haji Mushtaq in Delhi, identifies zananas as "hermaphrodites." He designates them as a subset of hijras, contrasting them with both "castrated male homosexuals" and "impotent men" (1983:22).

9   K. Bhimbhai (1901:507) in his entry on the Gujarat Population for the *Bombay Gazatteer*, which is repeated verbatim in Enthoven (1901:228), explains: "If any one fails to give them alms they abuse him and if abuse fails they strip themselves naked, a result which is greatly dreaded as it is believed to bring dire calamity." Likewise, Russel, Bahadur, and Lal (1916:vol. 3, 209), in their entry "Hijra, Khasua" in *Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India*, offer the following aside: "Some of them make money by allowing spectators to look at the mutilated part of thier body, and also by the practice of pederasty." But the earliest report is given by H. E. Goldsmid, Assistant Collector to R. Mills, Collector of Pune, in 1836 [as reported by Preston 1987:377-78]: "[t]he claims of this degraded wretch are promptly liquidated; for the Hijera . . . accompanied by numerous others, which join it . . . for the purposes of feasting on the bread collected from the Wuttundars, proceeds to the different villages, and demands payment from the Ryot, who, forthwith, produces the pice, under the dread founded, apparently of experience, of a refusal to render prompt payment, being followed by the whole of the wretches lifting up their Soogras [jhugra, petticoat], and outraging the feelings of the females of his family, by the most shameless and abominable exposure of person."

10   I should add that many of the hijras who viewed this film in India and Pakistan were upset by the focus on homosexuality, fearing that the portrayal of the relationship between Kiran and Dinesh would threaten their already precarious position in society. Nauman Naqvi and Hasan Mujtaba, for instance, interview a more devout hijra named Shaantal, who is interested in emphasizing the more ascetic aspects of the hijra lifestyle: "Shaantal is very emphatic about the piety of the hijras. 'In earlier times being a hijra was like being a *fakir*,' she maintains. 'We vist shrines and we go to weddings and childbirths where we bless people. Now there are a lot of people masquerading as hijras just for kicks.

They do all sorts of evil things that give us hijras a bad name.' Shaantal, incidentally, was extremely offended by the overwhelming focus on homosexuality in the BBC documentary on hijras, *The Eunuchs of India*" (1992:84). Her association of castration with piety is reminiscent of the attitude of activists such as Bhishma Brahmchari [literally, "Fierce the Celibate"], who castrated himself during the freedom movement so that he would be able to dedicate his life to the nation.

11   Since videos of the documentary are readily available through the office of the BBC, I have not included any extralinguistic commentary in my transcription, with the exception of the identification of feminine (superscripted *f*) and masculine (superscripted *m*) verb morphology.

CHAPTER 5

Hijras and the Use of Sexual Insult

And always, licensed and provocative, hanging around the

stalls, like a decayed reminder of Lucknow's past, were the

transvestites and eunuchs of the ghetto, in women's clothes

and with cheap jewelry, making lewd jokes and begging:

the darkness of the sexual urge finding this ritual, semi-

grotesque, safe public expression.

-V. S. Naipaul, *India: A Million Mutinies Now*

Marginalized both socially and spatially, the hijras have created an elaborate network that spans all of India, establishing a divergent social space that both parallels and opposes organizations of gender in the dichotomous system that excludes them. Although they exist relatively untouched by police jurisdiction, the hijras have divided themselves according to municipal police divisions, in accordance with the demarkation of districts in mainstream society. They elect their own council of elders to settle group disputes, referred to as *pancāyats*, who rule over the different hijra communities within the city. They have regional meetings as well: Simply through word-of-mouth, tens of thousands have been known to converge upon a single area. In order to facilitate the organization of such meetings, hijras in North India can now travel free-of-charge on government trains,[1] knowing upon arrival in any new city precisely where to go for hijra company. The extraordinary factor at work here is that these hijras, as they are representative of all of India, are also representative of the approximately two thousand languages and dialects spoken on the subcontinent, and yet they are easily identified as

part of one group by what might be referred to as a flamboyant and subversive semiotic system—a system identified through dress, gesture, claps, and obscenity.

A number of European and American anthropologists have pointed to the existence of this network as evidence of a larger social tolerance with respect to gender variance, but I argue instead that this network exists only because the hijras have created it in resistance to systematic exclusion. It is the network, not the government, which is responsible for the 1936 decision to give hijras a government pension, a ration card, and the right to vote (Shrivastav n.d.),[2] the 1952 and 1977 decisions to allow hijras to run for local office as women (Singh 1982), the decision in the 1960s to lift Ayub Khan's ban on hijra activities in Pakistan (Naqvi and Mujtaba 1992:85); and the recent 1994 decision to give hijras the right to vote as women in the upcoming election.[3] The same network is also responsible for the organization of a variety of national gatherings, among them the 1969 All India Hijra Conference at Nadiad, in which the hijras demanded to be counted as women in the national census (Mohan 1979); the 1979 celebrations in Ahmedabad for the 50th anniversary of a hijra named "Dada Guru" Shankar and in Panipat for the coronation of a successor to the Delhi takia[4]; and the 1981 All India Hijra Conference in Agra, which is said to have brought together over 50,000 hijras from throughout India and Pakistan (Singh 1982). Hijras are not accorded respect in contemporary society; they demand it.

In this chapter, I discuss how the hijra community reclaims space normally unavailable to them through the use of verbal insult—a discursive practice which both accentuates and constructs the same sexual ambiguity for which they are feared. I begin by tracing a history of the eunuch's verbal "insolence": as reported by European travelers to the Mughal courts in the 17th and 18th centuries, by British officials living in India during the 1800s, and finally, by Indian journalists and sociologists in the present century. I then move to a discussion of the hijras' contemporary cursing strategies, depicted by some North Indian journalists as their "aślīl evaṁ dviarthī bhāṣā " ['obscene

and double-meaning language'] (e.g., Singh 1982). By employing semantically

ambiguous invectives, hijras are able to assume a position of control in their interactions

with the public, inviting their nonhijra listeners to enter a linguistic space which questions

dominant ideologies of gender and sexuality. Mapping their own sexual ambiguity onto

linguistic ambiguity, hijras are able to locate themselves on an otherwise inaccessible

social grid.

INSTITUTIONALIZED VULGARITY

The eunuchs, throughout their various incarnations in Indian history, have been

portrayed as providers of verbal as well as sexual relief: as overseers of the king's harem

in the 4th century B.C.E.; "shampooers" in the Hindu courts during the 2nd and 5th

centuries; protectors of the royal ladies of the harem in Medieval Hindu courts;

administrators under the Khiljis of Delhi during the late 13th and early 14th centuries;

servants in the Mughal courts from the 16th to the 19th centuries; slaves in the houses of

Muslim nobility in Awadh (formerly called Oude) during the 1900s; and finally, as the

independent performers variously known since the early nineteenth century as khojas,

khusras, pavaiyas, and hijras.[5]

The hijras' predilection for abusive language has been recorded in the literature

for centuries, particularly in European travelogues. The lively stories narrated by the

Italian physician Niccolao Manucci in the mid-1600s about his interactions with various

eunuchs during the reign of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb serve as but one example.

In his lengthy *Storia do Mogor* (translated by Irvine 1907), Manucci tells of the

"immeasurably stingy" I'tibār Khan, sold into Mughal slavery at a very young age by his

Hindu parents, who later delighted in helping Aurangzeb make the elderly Shāhjahān

(Aurangzeb's father and I'tibār Khan's former master) unconditionally miserable (v. 2,

76-77); of the faithful Daulat, who carried the bones of his deceased master 'Ali Mardān

Khān all the way to Persia in order to bury them in the tomb of his forefathers, only to

have his nose and ears cut off by the King of Persia in return (v. 2, 215-16)[6]; and of an

unnamed "insolent" underling, a gatekeeper to Prince Shāh 'Ālam's seraglio, who tricked

him into giving away his money through a verbal slur on his family (v. 4, 225).[7] At one

point in the *Storia*, Manucci gives a brief but telling account of "that sort of brute" known

as the eunuch, describing their greed, their vanity, and most significantly in terms of the

present discussion, their "licentious tongue":

> Another of their qualities is to be friendly to women and inimical to men, which
>
> may be from envy, knowing what they have been deprived of. The tongue and
>
> the hands of these baboons act together, being most licentious in examining
>
> everything, both goods and women, coming into the palace; they are foul in
>
> speech, and fond of silly stories. Among all the Mahomedans they are ordinarily
>
> the strictest observers of the faith, although I knew some who did not fail to drink
>
> their little drop, and were fond of wine. These men are the spies for everything
>
> that goes on in secret, whereby they are always listening among the kings,
>
> princes, queens, and princesses. Fidā'e Khān, of whom I have spoken, aware of
>
> the character of these monsters, did not allow such to be employed in his house,
>
> although he retained two young men who acted as pages; he was indifferent to
>
> the fact that this sort of people are kept in the houses of princes and great men.
>
> This suffices for a brief notice of what the eunuchs are. (Manucci, translated by
>
> Irvine 1907: v. 2, 80-81)

Manucci's depiction of the court eunuchs as "foul in speech and fond of silly stories," as

well as "spies for everything that goes on in secret," is significant, particularly as it sets

the stage for narratives on the eunuch during the next three centuries. The castrated

servants of the Moghal court were of course a different entity from the hijras of the 20th

century, but because today's hijras conceptualize themselves as descendents of these earlier court eunuchs, frequently rattling off folk legends about sharp-tongued eunuch administrators, they merit some attention here.

According to early accounts, many of the eunuchs that served the Mughal emperors, or *khwajas* as they are sometimes called, were either kidnapped or sold into slavery by their Indian parents; others were brought from Ethiopia, Egypt, or Sudan as part of the slave trade. R. N. Saletore (1974, 1978) gives perhaps the most comprehensive historical account of the institution of eunuch slavery in India, although there are innumerable references to the practice in the memoirs of various Mughal rulers and European travelers. Francois Bernier (translated by Constable 1891), for instance, a French physician in the court of the "Great Mogol" Shah Jahan during the 17th century, records one instance when the Ethiopian King sent the court "twenty-five choice slaves, nine or ten of whom were of a tender age and in a state to be made eunuchs. This was, to be sure, an appropriate donation from a Christian to a Prince!" (1891:135). The practice apparently extended well into the mid-19th century in certain areas of India: William Knighton (1855) identifies the eunuchs as slaves in his narrative on the household of Nussir-u-Deen, the King of Oude; and Richard Francis Burton (1886-8, v. 1, 70-2n), who campaigned against the practice of slavery in general and took it upon himself to trace the development of pederasty in the eastern world, provides an explicit account of the castration operation used on abductees from Darfur (i.e., "The parts are swept off by a single cut of a razor, a tube (tin or wooden) is set in the urethra, the wound is cauterised with boiling oil, and the patient planted in a fresh dunghill. His diet is milk; and if under puberty, he often survives").[8] The subject of court eunuchs in Indian history merits a full book in its own right; unfortunately, I mention it here only as a means of contextualizing present-day ideologies about the hijras' language use.

Certain eunuchs, both before and during the Mughal period, did indeed rise to high positions in the royal courts, as suggested by some researchers when discussing the

status of contemporary hijras (e.g., Nanda 1990; Sharma 1984; Naqvi and Mujtaba 1992:85). Their impotence was said to make them especially faithful servants, and some of them apparently became influential in court politics: e.g., Malik Kāfūr, Ala-ud-din Khilji's favorite eunuch, who led the annexation of Gujarat in 1297 and a raid on southern India in 1310 (see Rawlinson 1952:226-27; Saletore 1974:202); I'tibār Khan, who in the 1600s remained one of Aurangzeb's most trusted servants (as reported by Manucci); and Khwaja Saras Hilal, appointed in Agra as one of Sai'd Khan's 1200 eunuchs, who later joined the Emperor Jahangir and named the town Hilalabad after himself (see Saletore 1974:203). Yet behind all these sporadic tales of valor is the awareness that the eunuch is an orphaned servant, and an emasculated one at that, who exists without family or genealogy. This point is made especially clear in one of Manucci's narratives, in which he gives an eyewitness account of how I'tibhār Khan reacted to two elderly visitors from Bengal claiming to be his parents. After surmising that their claim was indeed true, I'tibhār Khan angrily ordered them to receive fifty lashes and cried: "How have ye the great temerity to come into my presence after you have consumed the price of my body, and having been the cause, by emasculating me, of depriving me of the greatest pleasures attainable in this world? Of what use are riches to me, having no sons to whom I could leave them? Since you were so cruel as to sell your own blood, let not my auditors think it strange if I betray anger against you" (v. 2, 78-79).

Yet it is this very emasculation that allowed I'tibhār Khan to become the gossiping governor of Aurangzeb's fortress, whose physiognomy, in the words of Manucci, betrayed the "vileness of his soul" (v. 2, 77). The eunuchs, in the minds of European travelers at any rate, were thought to lead a contradictory existence: Their emasculation made them faithful but their orphanhood made them mean. Bernier, when reporting on a eunuch rebellion in Delhi provoked by an out-group murder of one of the seraglio eunuchs, articulates this contradiction overtly:

It seems nevertheless to be the general opinion that he cannot long escape the power and malice of the eunuchs. Emasculation, say the *Indians*, produces a different effect upon men than upon the brute creation; it renders the latter gentle and tractable; but who is the eunuch, they ask, that is not vicious, arrogant, and cruel? It is in vain to deny, however, that many among them are exceedingly faithful, generous, and brave. (Bernier, translated by Constable 1891:131-32)

Because of their neutered status, many Moghal eunuchs served as protectors of the palace women; indeed, they were the only "non-women" allowed into the women's quarters. But their association with feminine secrets won them simultaneous notoriety as court gossips, and cruel ones at that. Later in his travelogue, Bernier describes the procession of the seraglio in Agra and Delhi, in which the participating women were protected on all sides by eunuchs: "Woe to any unlucky cavalier, however exalted in rank, who, meeting the procession, is found too near. Nothing can exceed the insolence of the tribes of eunuchs and footmen which he has to encounter, and they eagerly avail themselves of any such opportunity to beat a man in the most unmerciful manner" (373).[9]

The precise point at which the *khwaja* of the Moghal courts became the *hijṛā* of today is unclear. During the early 1800s, the status allotted to the court eunuch was mapped linguistically onto the "natural" hijra: The term *khoja*, a derivative of *khwaja*, came to represent hermaphrodites in addition to court eunuchs, and both were defined in opposition to the more vulgar, artificially created *hijṛā* (see H. Ebden 1855:522; Russel, Bahadu, and Lal 1916:206).[10] Later in the same century, the more prestigious term *khoja* was, for the most part, lost on Hindi-speaking society, and natural eunuchs as well as castrated eunuchs were conflated under the single term *hijṛā*. But the perception of the emasculated orphan as "insolent" remained constant, continuing through reports made by British colonialists in the 1800s, who systematically objected to the hijras' vulgar manner of acquiring alms at births and weddings. Indeed, Lawrence W. Preston (1987), in his

cogent discussion of the role of British colonialists in the oppression of the hijras in the nineteenth century, explains that the vulgarity associated with the hijras' begging techniques, particularly their fondness for verbal obscenity and genital exposure, led the Collector at Pune to direct an edict against its realization. The Bombay Presidency ultimately denied the Collector's request for legislation on the grounds that education, not law, would eventually solve the problem, but it was nevertheless in support of the sentiment:

> No doubt ... the evil will soon be mitigated, as far as it is susceptible of remedy in the present state of society, and that it will ere long altogether cease to exist, even in respect of the infatuated victims themselves, as other abominations have done under the advantages of education, and under a Government which will not tolerate them. (R. T. Webb 1837, as quoted in Preston 1977:379)

The hijras' verbal "abominations" continue to be central to colonialist narratives throughout the late 1800s: John Shortt (1873:406) in his report on the "kojahs" of southern India (a term he uses for both natural and castrated eunuchs), identifies them as "persistent [and] impudent beggars, rude and vulgar in the extreme, singing filthy, obscene, and abusive songs"[11]; Fazl Lutfullah (1875:95), in a short discussion of the hijras in Ahmedabad, refers to their "obstreperous sallies of witty abuse"[12]; and F. L. Faridi (1899:22), in his entry on the Gujarat "Híjdás" for the Bombay Gazetteer, remarks on their "indecent clamour and gesture." "Woe betide the wight who opposes the demands of a Hijda," Faridi exclaims. "The whole rank and file of the local fraternity [will] besiege his house."[13]

The designation of the hijra as a loose-tongued upstart has continued to the present day, although it is now Indian journalists and sociologists who carry on this descriptive genre. Authors frequently point to the hijras' idiosyncratic and nonconforming use of language, particularly to their mixing of feminine and masculine speech styles, as indicative of both gender dysphoria and sexual perversion. They contrast hijras with women by referring to their lewd jokes, their love for excessive obscenity, their aggressive conversational style; they contrast them with men by referring to their penchant for gossip, their tendency to chatter excessively, to babble without content. Like the court eunuch described by Manucci in the 1600s, the hijra is portrayed as a foul-mouthed gossip; her dual nature, in the opinion of modern-day authors, enables her to outdo the most negative verbal stereotypes associated with either side of the gender divide.

Govind Singh, the Indian author of a popular study entitled *Hijṛõ kā Sansār* ['The World of the Hijras'],[14] is but one progenitor of this descriptive trend. He portrays the hijra as a linguistically conflicted entity who, as he explains in the two excerpts reproduced below, shifts between positions of coquettish cursing and foul-mouthed flirting:

> When several hijras are together, they can never shut up. Even the hijra who lives alone can never be quiet. Some Don Juan will tease him, and with a clap he'll turn around and give him a quick answer. This answer is often very foul-mouthed and obscene. Hijras, together or alone, always speak and converse in this way. They can be identified by their effeminate gestures in a crowd of hundreds and even from a long way off, and moreover, their style of speaking is just as peculiar. (1982:94, translated from the original Hindi)

They keep a storehouse of obscene words and they use metaphors that will shock all of those listening. The use of obscene words in Banaras is singularly unique and exceptional, but when face-to-face with the vocabulary of the hijras, Banaras speech pales in comparison. No one can keep up with the rhythms of the hijras' obscene pronunciations. On any particular day one of them might get angry at another hijra. When a hijra gets angry, he usually gesticulates in a coquettish manner and flares up. He is not bent upon exchanging blows or serious mischief, but the hijra can't remain silent either. He will certainly begin to rave and babble. When they want something from someone in a crowd, they'll gossip about that man. (1982:95, translated from the original Hindi)

In these passages, Singh employs certain Hindi terms which work together to portray the hijra's existence as linguistically troubling. In interactions with both the public and her own community, the hijra rebels against cultural ideologies of gendered language, assuming a linguistic position that is neither fully feminine nor fully masculine. She appropriates the masculine through her use of *kahā-sunī* ['verbal impropriety'], *garmāgarmī* ['heated verbal exchange'], and *apśabd* ['abusive words']; her speech is *phūhar* ['coarse-grained'] and *aślīl* ['obscene, vulgar']. Conversely, she appropriates the feminine through her use of effeminate *hāv-bhāv* ['gestures'], as well as through her tendency to *maṭkānā* ['move in a coquettish manner'] and to *baknā* ['babble', 'chatter', 'make disjointed utterances']. The hijra, in the opinion of Singh, is some sort of a linguistic maverick, and her refusal to adhere to hegemonic notions of either feminine or masculine speech becomes almost an instantiation of her refusal to adhere to a particular gender.

Not surprisingly, the hijras' use of obscenity tends to interest authors far more than their use of gossip; Indian journalists will often devote full paragraphs to the hijras'

abusive displays, not just at birth performances but also in their daily interactions with innocent bystanders. The hijras' strategy of shouting obscenities at outsiders appears to be just one contemporary realization of what has been traditionally identified as the hijra "curse." Since the early 1800s (and perhaps long before that), people in a variety of Indian communities have believed that the hijra, by virtue of her own impotence, has the power to prevent the birth of male children; her curse has therefore been viewed as a performative in the Austinian sense, which, if uttered in the context of the birth celebration, will serve to interrupt the family lineage. Because this belief is still extant in many communities, particularly in Indian villages, the hijras often provoke fear among their clients. Rupa, who considers herself to be the pandit of the hijras in Banaras, focuses on this point; she explains that Banaras residents, fearing the pronouncement of a curse like "may your child die," will respond to the hijras with *izzat* ['honor', 'respect']:

(1)   They're very afraid of us. If someone has a child and we go to their door, they'll always talk to us with folded hands—whenever they talk to us. Why do they talk to us like that? Because they're afraid that something bad might come out of our mouths. And sometimes that really brings its fruits. They're afraid that we'll say something absurd,[15] for example, "*jā, terā baccā mar jāy!* ['may your child die!']." We say that sometimes in anger. And because they're always afraid that their child might die, they'll say, "Don't ever say anything to them, because if something bad comes out of their mouths, something bad will happen to us!" So they alway have fear in their hearts, and they always speak to us with respect.

But because this respect is motivated by fear, the hijras are situated precariously in the social structure. Even though many residents, as Rupa explains, still fear the curse of the

hijra, an increasing number of Hindus and Muslims are angered at the hijras' manner of inspiring fear to collect alms, and are deeming the hijras' power over impotency mere superstition. The modern-day hijra is left with little choice but to up the verbal ante with a sexual chip. And so it is that P. N. Pimpley and S. K. Sharma (1985:41) depict the hijras as "making overtures to onlookers" and "cracking sexually charged jokes at men"; Kavitha Shetty (1990:52) describes them as "intimidating those who are wary of their queer appearance and outrageous behaviour"; and Nauman Naqvi and Hasan Mujtaba (1992:89) focus on a hijra in Mazimabad who "hurl[ed] the most vociferous abuses" that a man was "forced to disembark from the bus in shame."[16] Indeed, the United States Department of State (1992:1-2) even commented on the hijras' use of sexual insult when they answered a request for an advisory opinion on an asylum application made by a Pakistani "hermaphrodite" (see Chapter 2). Referring to information obtained from their embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, the Department informed the San Francisco Asylum Unit of Immigration and Naturalization Service that "their performances, despite the fact that they often involve crude sexual jokes, are considered more socially acceptable than real female dancers (who more often than not are also prostitutes)."

The hijras' fondness for obscenity has led a number of researchers, particularly those interested in the human psyche, to theorize on its psychological origins. Gautam N. Allahbadia and Nilesh Shah, who identify the hijras' collective existence as a "subhuman life," pose this question directly in their introduction to a brief article on the hijras in Bombay:

> The style of begging is very aggressive. In groups of three or four they confront individuals, clapping and making gestures with their fingers. Give them money and they will bless you and your family and pray for increased libido for you and for male heirs for your family. Refusal is followed by abuse, and obscene

gestures, and some of them will lift their petticoats, exposing their genitals and cursing. ... Why do they live like this? (1992:48)

While Allahbadia and Shah, for the most part, shy away from answering the question of "why," other researchers have tackled it head on, including Sumant Mehta writing half a century ago, who offered a sociological explanation for the hijras' "indecent gestures" and "mincing and inviting gait": "It is not merely the lewdness which revolts," he explains, "but the fact that the Indian Society has so degraded and inhumanised these people that, without actually meaning to invite an unnatural sex intercourse, these people behave as lewdness-loving people expect them to behave, just in order to earn a pi[e]ce or two" (1945:47-48).[17]

But Mehta goes on to attribute the hijras' behavior (which he variously identifies as "malevolent," "unscrupulous," and "abased") to both the "inferiority complex" and "resentment complex" (51), a claim more in sync with contemporary explanations. Satish Kumar Sharma, who conducted extensive research on the hijra community in the 1980s, works from the standpoint of Freudian psychology and links up the hijras' sexual overtures with their "feeling of deprivation at the psychological level" (1984:387). He is not so concerned with the societal marginalization spoken of by Mehta, but with the hijras' inability to perform sexual acts, a state that, in his opinion, will logically lead to the use of obscene language:

An interesting feature of eunuchs is that they pass on sexual overtures to the general population, especially to the males. Why do they do so? The enquiries revealed that though they are biologically incapable of performing sex, yet when they see couples in the society at large, they have a feeling of deprivation at the psychological level. The idea of sex and their imagination of performing sexual acts is gratified by passing sexual remarks, etc., on others. They do not have any

physical sexual urge, but sex invades their mind. Thus they, in majority of the cases interviewed, have frustration of an unusual kind, i.e., no physical urge but psychologically they think of enjoying sex. This frustration, as revealed by some of the eunuchs, leads to the practice of sodomy, etc.

Sharma's claim that the hijras compensate for their own impotence by "passing sexual remarks" demands futher investigation. There is a long-standing folk association in northern India of foul language with sexual frustration; the work of many popular psychologists builds on the notion that a lack of sexual virility results in verbal degeneration. One need only to turn to the scores of popular works on Indian sexuality to see the pervasiveness of this association. Dayanand Verma's (1971) *An Intimate Study of Sex Behaviour* offers but one example. In a chapter entitled "Male Superiority by Sex Capacity," Verma attributes the verbal practices of both "name-calling" and "eve-teasing" to male impotency, explaining that a man who uses foul language "at least [proves] that he is potent and can have sexual relations with a number of women" (75). Verma is primarily concerned with the male employment of insult terms like "father-in-law" or "brother-in-law," which if used out of a sanctioned context will imply that the speaker has had sexual relations with the addressee's mother or sister, respectively (see V. Vatuk 1968:275). "A man's main asset is his virility," Verma proclaims, "if a man has all other qualitities like courage, patience, etc., but is impotent, that is, he is incapable of having sexual intercourse, he isn't worth being called a man" (74). By calling other men "brother-in-law" and "father-in-law," as well as by speaking sexually to women, the impotent man will "declare his manliness" and hence save face: "What he wishes to convey by narrating such incidents is—'Now at last you should believe that I am not impotent. I possess in abundance the main quality of manliness, namely a wolfish hunger for women. I may not be brave, courageous or patient but I can certainly handle a woman in bed. Whenever you want, I can furnish proof of this quality of mine'" (76).[18]

The connection between impotence and foul language is again expressed, albeit from a female perspective, by Mayal Balse (1976) in *The Indian Female: Attitude Towards Sex*, apparently written as a companion piece to Jitendra Tuli's (1976) *The Indian Male: Attitude Towards Sex*. The book is replete with personal accounts of marriages that failed because of male impotence, among them Roopa's, who had the misfortune of having an arranged marriage with an impotent man sporting a "deformed sex organ," and Sheila's, who had to live without sex because she was married to a homosexual. To set the stage for these and other accounts like them, Balse hypothesizes about a group of men who in a cowardly way left their wives on a sinking ship only to find themselves on a deserted island. Entitling her narrative "A Male Dominated Society" followed by a question mark, Balse points out that without women, men would be doomed to procreative impotence:

Know why women were the protected sex? Know why men always stood on sinking ships or "burning decks" and shouted: "Women and children first?" Know why they battled those urges to jump into the first available life-boat and make for dry land?

Men were bothered about the survival of the race. Suppose the ship went down with all the helpless women on board while the men swam merrily to shore, what would happen?

For a time the men would look at each other and cluck sympathetically. Then they would wring their hands, scratch their heads and say: "You don't say it's an inhabited island!" Next day they would sigh: "Oh for a woman!"

Then tell dirty jokes. Or become homosexuals.

It would not matter very much if it were only a question of sex. But the question of progeny made it a grave matter. Those men were doomed. It meant their race would end there.

Although Balse does not specifically mention the hijras, her suggestion that isolation will ultimately provoke men to "tell dirty jokes" or turn to homosexuality echoes the opinion of Sharma, who asserts that impotence causes the hijra to utter sexual remarks and engage in sodomy.

A few American and European anthropologists have also connected the hijras' language use with their sexual confusion, frequently conflating the two as similar instances of perversion. Harriet Ronken Lynton and Mohini Rajan (1974), in their short introduction to the hijras in Hyderabad, are a case in point. Reminiscent of Singh's and Sharma's analysis of the hijra's use of obscenity, the authors draw a causal link between the hijras' "manner of speech" and what they perceive to be the hijras' self-motivated withdrawal from the rest of society:

> The self-mutilation of these impotent wretches and their acceptance into the Hijra community is a kind of allegory of suicide and rebirth, while their manner of speech suggests a yearning for identity and identification with a social group. So together they have built a world for themselves. In Hyderabad, as in most of India, people are addressed less often by name than by the title which shows their precise status and relationship within the extended family. So also with the Hijras, with the added detail that the confusion of their terminology is a constant reminder of the sexual confusion which brought them into the group. (1974:192)

While Lynton and Rajan are not referring to the hijras' obscene language *per se*, their use of the words "self-mutilation" and "suicide" is telling. Both terms imply that the hijras voluntarily choose to leave the 'normal' world of women and men in order to be reborn into the 'abnormal' hijra world—a world which, in the opinion of Lynton and Rajan as well as many other social theorists, is identified by linguistic as well as sexual ambiguity.

Isolation leads to a need for what M. D. Vyas and Yogesh Shingala (1987:89) identify as "vicarious gratification"; in the opinion of these two authors, many hijras can achieve sexual satisfaction only by talking about the "normal sex life" of men and women.

CONTEMPORARY CURSING STRATEGIES

Hijras do not have the corner on the Indian obscenity market; a variety of communities have been discussed as breaking expectations of linguistic purity. These communities include, but are certainly not limited to, children in Western Uttar Pradesh who invoke a "triad of sex, shit, and sadism" in play-group humor (V. Vatuk 1968); female singers of *gālī* songs in Eastern Uttar Pradesh who provide ritualized entertainment at weddings (O. Henry 1976); Oriya-speaking male "charioteers" at the Bhubaneswar Chariot Festival who chant sexually obscene limericks and songs to the devotees of Lord Lingaraj (Freeman n.d.); and Rajastani village women who at annual festivals and life cycle celebrations sing of sexual engagement with spouses and lovers (Raheja and Gold 1994). But what sets the hijras apart from these communities is the fact that obscenity is critical to their own survival. The Hindi-speaking hijras we interviewed in Banaras point to their use of verbal insult not as a logical consequence of a self-motivated withdrawal from society, but as a necessary survival technique in a society that enforces their marginalization.

In this sense, the hijras' curse is comparable to that of the Hindu widow who, because of the extremity of her marginalization, is given free range to defy the social order through her language use. This point is made clear in Shivarama Karanth's novel *Mukajjī*: The novel's main character is a widow who, in many ways, is the most powerful woman in her village.[19] Since she has already suffered the worst curse possible, namely widowhood, she has nothing to lose if the other villagers curse her back; the other villagers, afraid of her curse, try desperately to remain on her good side. The

hijra and the widow have much in common in this respect; not only are both of these unmarried states considered to be a curse, but the words for "widow" and "hijra" in a variety of Indian languages are considered curses in themselves. A well-known Hindi proverb *rāḍ se pare koī gālī nahī* translates roughly as 'there is no curse greater than calling someone a widow',[20] but to call a nonhijra a hijra is no minor transgression either, especially as it implies that the addressee is sexually impotent and therefore incapable of continuing the family lineage.

Nanda incorrectly states that the word *hijṛā*, unlike its Telegu and Tamil counterparts *kojja* and *pottai*, is "rarely used" as a derogatory term in Hindi; in fact, its employment as such has been well recorded since the 1940s, when Mehta (1945:52) wrote that "timid people are often abused as 'Hījaḍā' in Gujarat." Nirmal Mitra (1983:25) implies that the term is used throughout India in reference to more "effeminate" men, in a way that is perhaps comparable to the use of "faggot," "fairy," or even "sissy" in contemporary American slang (i.e., "Even before turning into a eunuch, a passive homosexual in Gujarat would be referred to as a *hijra*. This is also true of the rest of India"). This usage is affirmed by the hijras we spoke with in Banaras, who explained how they were repeatedly dubbed "hijra" when they were young because of their fondness for dolls and other girls' games; as well as by writers like Bapsi Sidwa (1983), who in her novel *The Crow Eaters* has the father Freddy call his son Yadzi a "eunuch" after finding out that he is writing love poetry.[21] But the BJP's recent employments of the term in derogatory reference to the Muslim community, as reported in Anand Patwardhan's 1994 documentary *Father, Son, and Holy War*, would suggest that it is used more generally as an abusive epithet: *ek hijṛe par golī kyō bekār kī jāye* ['Why would you want to waste a bullet on a hijra?'], a female BJP leader says of the now former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Mulayam Singh Yadav. Indeed, some Hindi poets and novelists have used the term metaphorically to suggest the ineffectiveness of the referent in question, including the Hindi poet Ved Prakash 'Vatuk' (1977a, 1977b,

1987; 1995) in a number of political critiques and the novelist Khushwant Singh (1989) in passages like the one that begins Chapter 4.

Both hijras and widows, then, are perceived to be outside the reproductive fold, and because death would be a more welcome existence than life for those in such an unfortunate state, or so mainstream society thinks at any rate, the destitute have nothing to lose through verbal defiance. As illustrated by a well-known epithet from Kabir (i.e., दुर्बल को न सताडिये, जाकी मोटी हाथ, बिना जीव की स्वास से, लोह भसम हो जाय 'Do not torment the weak, their sigh is heavy; Breath from a bellows can reduce iron to ashes'), the sigh of the weak, or in this case their voice, is thought to have the power to destroy the lives of those situated higher in the social hierarchy. Central to the hijras' narratives is the idea that because they live only tangentially to the world of women and men, they are a people without *śarm* ['shame']; that is, a people freed from the constraints of decency that regulate the rest of society. Sulekha identifies the lack of *śarm* not only as the primary trait that distinguishes hijras from women, but also the motivating factor behind their use of obscenity:

(2)   We just speak from the mouth. Hijras aren't counted [in the polls] as women, after all. Hijras are just hijras, and women are just women. If there's a woman, she'll at least have a little *śarm* ['shame']. But compared to the hijras, how open can a woman be? No matter how openly a woman walks, she'll still have a little *śarm*. But hijras are just hijras. They have no *śarm* . They'll say whatever they have to say.

Sulekha considers her own status to be so low that she is completely outside the social order altogether, a fact that gives her free range to defy the propriety associated with caste and class affiliation through her language use. Like the Hausa Muslim 'Yan Daudu studied by Rudolph P. Gaudio (1995), who as "men who act like women" are said to be

"shameless" in their employments of sacreligious proverbs, the hijras push their hearers to the verbal limit, leaving them with no other choice but to pay the requested alms.

The fear of hijra shamelessness is nicely articulated by the Hindi novelist Shani (1984) in his book *Sāre Dukhiyā Jamnā Pār.* When describing his frustration with the city of Delhi, the narrator refers to an incident involving hijras, who arrive at his door unexpectedly and demand an *inām* ['reward']. Although the narrator initially refuses to succumb to the hijras' requests, their *gāliyõ kī bauchār* ['shower of abuses'] is too much even for him. When they threaten to expose themselves in front of onlooking neighbors, he is compelled to pay the requested 51 rupees in order to preserve his *izzat*:

The first day in Mayur Vihar, the night somehow passed and morning came. But it was a very strange morning; as soon as it arrived, it seemed that evening had begun. I hadn't yet finished my morning tea, when someone rang the bell. The door opened, and I heard the sound of bells, clapping, dancing, and singing, and behind that, the sound of drums. They were hijras. They came to get their reward. Reward? What for? You've come to a new house. House? Whose house? We're just renters, go find the owner. We were answered with louder claps, faster drum beats; we were showered with curses instead of songs. When we protested, they began to strip naked, and in a few minutes there was such a spectacle in front of our gate that all of the people in the neighborhood came to their windows and doors. If you care about your honor, please quietly give them whatever they demand and get rid of them, even though you know you're being black-mailed.

We paid them 51 rupees and got rid of them, even though we knew that if someone asked us what we celebrated, we would have nothing to say.
(Shani 1984:64-65)

Shani's account is paralled by a diary entry written by Vatuk (1985), who recalls an actual incident in which the hijras came to his door in Meerut: "*hijre āte haī. ve beśarm haī. unkī koī izzat nahī. ve kisī ke prati uttardāyī nahī. unkī zabān par koī niyamtran nahī. atah ve har avasthā mē vijyī haī*" ['The hijras came. They are shameless. They have no honor. They are answerable to noone. Their tongue has no restraint. They are victorious in every exchange'].

It is interesting to compare Shani's and Vatuk's accounts, both of which are clearly written from a nonhijra perspective, with Sulekha's own description of the hijras' begging technique. Also concerned with the notion of *izzat*, Sulekha explains that the hijras use obscenity during their performances as a means of reclaiming respect:

(3)   *Suppose you went to sing and dance somewhere and people didn't show you any respect, or they didn't give you money. Then you'd curse them and they'd be afraid of you, right? They'd be afraid of the hijras?*

Yes, yes, yes!

That's what she's asking about.

Yes, yes, yes, yes. If they don't give us money, we'll feel sad in our hearts. So we'll swear at them, we'll curse them, we'll wish them evil, we'll cut them down to size.

Does society give hijras a lot of respect, then?

Yes, a lot of them do.

So how do you feel about that? Do you like it?

If they give hijras respect we feel good. If they don't give hijras respect we feel bad. Then we'll strip down and start to fight with them. We'll shout *gālīs* ['obscenties'] in order to get some money. But if someone gives us respect, touches our feet, and lets us sit down with him, even if he gives us less money than the others, we won't fuss about it. If someone

gives us respect we'll leave him alone. If someone doesn't give us respect, we'll fight with him like crazy.

Throughout the passage, Sulekha identifies the hijras' linguistic behaviour with a variety of different verbs, among them *gālī denā* ['to utter obscenities', 'to swear'], *sarāpnā* ['to curse'], *kosnā* ['to wish someone evil'], and *kaṭnā* ['to cut someone down to size'].[22] It is significant, however, that she consistently uses the Hindi term *sarāp dena* ['to curse'] instead of the more traditional *śarāp dena,* distinguishing the former from the latter as a matter of referential perspective. The term *sarāp* differs from its Sankrit counterpart *śarāp* in that it is associated with the powerless as opposed to the elite; while a *śarāp* is given by saints and those in power, a *sarāp* is considered to be an instrument of the poor, uttered by people who are otherwise helpless, such as widows, outcastes, or in this case, hijras. Although both terms mean 'to curse' or 'to imprecate', *śarāps,* according to Sulekha, are uttered by people in respected positions as a means of maintaining the social hierarchy, while *sarāps* are uttered by the marginalized as a means of fighting against it. Forced to live on the outskirts of Banaras both socially and spatially, Sulekha and her fellow hijras employ *sarāps* (i.e., curses used by those in inferior positions) in an effort to save face in a society that has, in her own words, unmasked them. (I should add that Sulekha also uses the expression *nangā honā* ['to become naked'] in the above passage, which can be interpreted both figuratively as 'to become shameless' and literally as 'to expose oneself'.)

The reactionary behavior which Sunita describes involves the overt employment of *gālīs* ['verbal abuses'], as well the more subtle employment of semantically ambiguous puns, rife with sexual innuendo. The invective reproduced in excerpt (4) below serves as an example of the former. Shouted by a Banaras hijra to the owner of a tea shop who had made sarcastic reference to her promiscuity (Singh 1982:33), its derogatory meaning is clear. What distinguishes this expression from the many other

genres of *gālī*-giving in India is not so much the individual terms themselves, but rather the concentration of these terms in a single utterance[23] :

(4)	nāspīṭe, mue, harāmī ke jāe, terī bībī	'You worthless fool, good-for-nothing,
	kuttā khāe, kalmunhe, khudā-kahar barsāe	son-of-a-bastard, may your wife be eaten
	tujh par, randue!	by a dog, may you be dark-faced, may god
		shower calamities on you, you widower!'

This series of invectives is, of course, not without some suggestion of sexuality. The phrase 'may your wife be eaten by a dog', indirectly implies (a) that the addressee is not able to satisfy his wife sexually, (b) that the addressee's wife is potentially unfaithful, and (c) that the addressee's wife has no discrimination with respect to sexual partners. Similarly, although the common interpretation of *mue* is 'one who is dead' and therefore a 'good-for-nothing', the term is occasionally used to suggest impotence or emasculation. Finally, the term *randu* ['widower'] suggests promiscuity, pointing up the instability between the Indian identities of 'widower' and 'pimp' (compare, for instance, the Hindi proverb *rāṇḍ to raṇḍāpā kaṭ le, raṇḍuve kāṭṭnā dē to* which translates roughly as 'The widow would be true to her widowhood if only the widower would allow it'). But these are all familiar Hindi insults, and the sexual references they were founded upon are not necessarily salient to present-day users.

The insults reproduced in Table 3, however, are quite different from those in example (4). Representative of what Singh (1982) calls the hijras' "*aślīl evaṁ dviarthī bhāṣā*" ['obscene and double-meaning language'], none of the words used in these expressions, with the exception of the vocative *mue* ['good-for-nothing'], are inherently offensive when uttered alone:

Expression in hijra dialect	Literal translation into English
(1) *khasam kā gannā cūs*	'Go suck your husband's sugarcane'
(2) *khasam ke yār sāre bāzār ke kele cāṭ le, peṭ bhar jāyegā*	'Husband's lover, go and lick all the bananas at the bazaar, then you'll get full'
(3) *pattal kuttā cāṭe hai, terā bhāī hai*	'The dog who licks the leaf-plate is your brother' (i.e., 'You are just like a dog who eats other people's leftovers')
(4) *thūktā jā aur laḍḍū khātā jā, mue*	'Keep on spitting and eating *laḍḍu* (ball-shaped sweets), you good-for-nothing'
(5) *lakṛī bec lakṛī*	'Sell that stick!' (Singh 1982 glosses this expression as follows: "In other words, the addressee should open up a store for selling his private parts")
(6) *gilās mē pānī bharkar soyā rah, mue*	'Fill the glass with water and go to sleep, you good-for-nothing'
(7) *terī saut ko kutte kā bāp rakhe thā. tab to kuch na bolā. ab ṭirr ṭirr kare hai.*	'When that father of a dog kept your co-wife you never said a word. Now you're complaining?

TABLE 3. Selected examples of hijra verbal insults

Source: Singh (1982)

(recorded in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh)

It is important to note at the outset that these are all in-group insults, directed not to unsuspecting outsiders but to fellow hijras as a sign of solidarity. There is a strong element of performance in this vituperative banter, as the hijras issue these slurs to each other when in the presence of eavesdropping bystanders. Indeed, some hijra communities have a special *thālī* ['clap'] used expressly for signalling the onset of this discursive activity (referred to by in-group members as *ḍeḍh tālī* ['one-and-a-half clap']), which

they perform by producing a 'full clap', where the palms are brought together with straight, spread, raised fingers, followed directly by an *ādhī tālī* ['half clap'], where the palms are brought together in the same manner but no sound results. When one of the hijras gives this signal, the uninitiated nonhijra becomes witness to a rowdy display of put-downs which demand a highly sexualized interpretation (see Chapter 6 for further discussion on the hijra *tālī*).

The majority of these insults, as in the first five examples reproduced in Table 3, involve an extended metaphor of the marketplace: the buying and selling of fruits and vegetables, the exchange of wares, the satisfaction and dissatisfaction of voracious customers. The bazaar is one of the most public sites in the community and is traditionally a man's domain. The social moral geography of the community is such that the bazaar is off-limits to 'respectable' women, as illustrated by the existence of the Hindi term *bazārū aurat* ['market woman'], which translates variously as 'loose woman', 'woman of low morals', 'woman who has no shame', even a 'prostitute'. Hijras often supplement the income that they receive from public performances at births and weddings by working secretly as prostitutes, despite popular perceptions of the eunuch as a sexless ascetic. The metaphors employed here by the hijras about the bazaar are meant to be understood ambiguously in sexual terms. These images—which, of course, often carry euphemistic reference to male genitalia, as in the case of *gannā* ['sugarcane'], *kele* ['bananas'], *laḍḍū* ['sweets]', and *lakṛī* ['stick']—highlight the hijra's own knowledge about the closed and open spaces of the social geography. By referring to secret domains, in this case the male body and indirectly prostitution, the hijras embarrass their male listeners and shamelessly collapse traditional divisions of the secret and the known, private and public, home and market, feminine and masculine.

At this point, it would be appropriate to again consider Rupa's statement that hijras "even give curses like women," alluded to earlier in Chapter 3. Priya, who insists that hijras always speak like women when together, also asserts that they refrain from

using those curses which involve insulting reference to the addressee's mother or sister. These kinds of curses, she explains, are *mardānā* ['manly'] curses, and oppose the more feminine variety of curses used by women:

(5) R: gālī bhī dēgī^f, to aūrat jaisā. (7.0) mardānā gālī nahī dete^m haī hijṛā. - auratõ jaisā. auratõ jaisā dete^m haī. (2.0) abhī nahī kahēngī^f "terī mã kī, terī bahan kī," nahī kahēngī^f, - ye gālī nahī dēngī^f. - ye gālī nahī dēngī^f. jaise chinrī, bucrī, ganjī, kanjrī, ye sab banaēgī^f aūratõ kī tarah. (3.0) mardānā log kahte^m haī, "terī mã kī, terī bahan kī, - bhosṛī vāle, ye- vo-coṭṭā, sālā," (1.0) uṭāēgī^f vo nahī.

R: We'll even give^f curses like women. Hijras don't give^m *mardānā* curses; they curse^m like women. Like women. We won't say^f " *terī mã kī* ['your mother's...'], *terī bahan kī* ['your sister's...']," we won't say^f them. We won't give^f these curses. We won't give^f these curses. [We'll say,] for example, "*chinrī* ['loose one'], *bucrī* ['earless one'], *ganjī* ['hairless one'], *kanjrī* ['low-caste loose woman']," we'll form^f all of these in the same way that women do. *Mardānā* people give^m curses like " *terī mã kī* ['your mother's...'], *terī bahan kī* ['your sister's...'], *bhosṛī vāle* ['vagina-owner'], *coṭṭā* ['thief'], *sālā* ['wife's brother']." We won't say^f those.

In Hindi-speaking Banaras, the genre sometimes referred to as "*mardānā gālī*" ['men's curses'] are thought to involve mention of sexual violence to women, in opposition to "women's curses" that generally only wish the hearer ill. The curses that Rupa identifies as *terī mã kī* ['your mother's...'], *terī bahan kī* ['your sister's...'], and *sālā* ['brother-in-law'] are known in Hindi as *mã-bahin kī gālī* ['mother and sister curses'], and because the speaker who utters them asserts his own sexual prowess with respect to the

addressee's female relatives, women do not tend to use them. Oddly enough, these are precisely the terms that Verma (1987) claims are used by impotent men to make themselves seem more potent to the rest of society, a facade that is clearly meaningless to hijras who identify with the feminine. Preferring to project a female persona instead of a masculine one, the hijras use "softer" curses that focus on either physical defects or sexual immorality, such as *chinrī* ['loose one'], *bucrī* ['earless one'], *ganjī* ['hairless one'], and *kanjrī* ['low-caste loose woman']. Even in the structure of their curses, according to Sulekha, hijras assert their identity as female, opting for less offensive phrases.

Yet in contrast to Rupa's claims, the hijras in Banaras do in fact employ *mardānā* curses in everyday conversation, as evidenced by Shashi's angry employments of the term *mādar cod* ['mother fucker'] in reference to his birth parents (see Chapter 2), and Sulekha's more humorous uses of the term *bhosṛī vālā* ['vagina-owner'] when addressing fellow hijras (see Chapter 3). As with the latter term, which when used among hijras ironically implies that the addressee is too "masculine," the in-group examples recorded in Table 3 also carry an overt and, I would argue, deliberate confusion of feminine and masculine second-person reference. The authors of expressions (4) and (6) address their fellow hijras not with the feminine *muī* but with the masculine *mue*, a term which is itself generally thought of as a 'soft curse' used primarily by women. The first six of these examples point to the addressee's insatiable sexual appetite, which in (1) can be satisfied only through size (i.e., sugarcane), in (2), (3), (4), and (5) only through quantity (i.e., the bananas at the bazaar, regular supplements of sweets, leftover leaf-plates, a store of stick-buying customers), and in (6) only though pacification (i.e., a cold glass of water at bedtime). Yet while the first four examples attribute an aggressive femininity to the hijra addressee, placing her squarely in the feminized role as the husband's lover or wife, the last three highlight the addressee's masculinity, pointing disdainfully either to her machismo, as in the reference to her insatiable *lakṛī* ['stick'] in example (5), or to her

emasculated nature, as in the reference to her inability to control her indiscriminating *saut* ['co-wife'] in example (7).

With these verbal shifts of perspective, the participants in this insulting banter challenge dominant cartographies of gender and sexuality. In order to make any sense of the hijra's seemingly innocuous and nonsensical utterance, the passer-by must enter into what he believes to be the hijra's frame of reference, a linguistic space involving sexual innuendo, crudity, and gender fluidity. Yet by doing so, the hearer must additionally admit to himself that he in many ways also inhabits that same space. Through this verbal play, then, the hijras, who have a precarious status in the Indian social matrix, are able to compensate for their own lack of social prestige by assuming linguistic control of the immediate interaction, creating alternative socio-sexual spaces in a dichotomously gendered geography.

NOTES

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1   I should add, however, that the Indian Railway often gives travel discounts to national meetings; participants traveling to and from All-India conferences, for instance, are standardly given a 50% discount on train fares.

2   The newspaper article in which this information appears, entitled *Hijṛō Kī Alag Duniyā, Dhan Kamāne Kā Kutsit Dhandhā* ['The Separate World of the Eunuchs: A Vile Profession for Earning Money'], is highly inflammatory, condemning the hijra lifestyle as well as the government's superficial support of it. The author V.K. Shrivastav (1986) wrote the article in response to a public interview with the chairman of *Akhil Bhārtīy Hijṛā Kalyāṇ Saghā* ['The All Indian Eunuch Welfare Society'] on October 13, 1986.

3   *The Hindustan Times*, November 7, 1994: "More than 1.2 million eunuchs in India will now be able to cast their votes, an official said Monday. Eunuchs had been fighting for voting rights for more than ten years, a eunuch spokesman said. 'Our organization had been fighting for the rights of eunuchs for over a decade,' Khairati Lal Bhola, president of the All India Hijra Kalyan Sabha, told United Press International. Thanks to a government decision to allow eunuchs to choose their own gender on voting polls, many eunuchs will vote for the first time."

4   The information about the meeting in Ahmedabad is provided in an anonymous article entitled "A National Get Together of Eunuchs," *Times of India*, February 2, 1979, p. 5; for a discussion of the meeting in Pakistan, see Chander Mohan (1979).

5   Other terms used in reference to the hijra since the mid-1800s include *khunsā*, *khasua*, *fātādā*, and *mukhanna*.

6   This story is particularly moving, as the deformed Daulat, hiding away in a house in Lahor full of shame, asks Mannuci to make his nose and ears grow again, thinking that as a physician he might be able to conjure a remedy. When Daulat finally comes to the terms with the fact that there is no remedy for his deformity, he exclaims: "I know not what sins I have committed to be made an out-and-out eunuch twice over, first in my inferior part, and, secondly, in my upper half. Now there is nothing more to deprive me of, nor do I fear anything but losing my head itself" (v.2, 216-17)

7   It is not clear whether Manucci, even after recalling this exchange for his travelogue, recognizes that he has been duped, but the eunuch was clearly in control of

the interaction. After drawing blood from the prince Shāh 'Ālam, Manucci was given

400 rupees in payment, a great sum of money particularly in the 17th century. When

Manucci went to leave the seraglio, however, a eunuch at the gate remarked off-the-cuff:

"It seems to me that you could never have had as much money in all your life." The

statement was immediately interpreted as a slur by Manucci, the proud son of a chief

physician of the King of Spain. His response? "At once I took the salver and emptied

out on the ground all the money in it in the presence of the gate-keepers, telling them I

made them a present of it. Then I turned to the eunuch: 'Do you not know that I am the

son of the chief physician of the King of Spain, who is lord over half the world and owns

the mines of silver?'" (225) Manucci appears to think that he is the winner in this

dispute, but I'm not so sure; the insolent eunuch, after all, became 400 rupees richer.

8   Burton additionally explains in his article "How to Deal with the Slave Scandal in

Egypt" (recorded in Wright 1906, v. 2, 195-210) that castration increased the value of the

slave by anywhere from 5 to 80 pounds, depending on the age of the boy in question.

9   This passage points to an additional association of the eunuch with physical

cruelty, which probably developed in response to the fact that they were often assigned

the unpleasant task of inflicting royal punishments on offending persons. The eunuchs'

penchant for physical cruelty was recorded even in the 19th century; William Knighton

(1855:161), for instance, comments that they carried out this task with "*gusto* and

appetite":

> Whether it was that I felt an antipathy to the class, or was prejudiced against them
>
> by the accounts I heard, I can not now tell; but my impression is, that the greater
>
> part of the cruelty practised in the native harems is to be attributed to the

influence and suggestions of the eunuchs. They were usually the inflicters of punishment on the delinquents; and this punishment, whether flogging or torturing, they seemed to inflict with a certain degree of *gusto* and appetite for the employment.

10   True hermaphrodites (or those thought to be so) were apparently considered more deserving of respect than castrated hijras, and so Edward Balfour's ([1858]1976, v.5, 564) *Enclopaedia Asiatica* defines *khoja* as a "corruption of Khaja, a respectable man, a respectable term for a eunuch," apparently in opposition to terms that were perhaps not so "respectable." John Shortt (1873:404), however, reverses the semantics of hijra and khoja in his article on the "kojahs" of southern India (which is later quoted extensively by Thurston 1901 in *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*), and identifies the "artificially created" eunuch as *kojah* and the "natural" eunuch as *hijra*. Ibbetson, MacLagan, and H. A. Rose (1911, v. 2, 331) delineate the linguistic distinction between court eunuchs and hijras as follows: "a eunuch, also called *khunsá, khojá, khusrá, mukhannas*, or, if a dancing eunuch dressed in woman's clothes, *zankhá*. Formerly employed by chiefs and people of rank to acts as custodians of their female apartments and known as *khwaja-sará, nawáb* or *názir*, they are still found in Rájputána in this capacity. In the Punjab the hijra is usually a *deradár, i.e.,* attached to a *dera.*" W. Crooke (1896:495) identifies the term *khoja* (or rather, "khwâja") as a Muslim subclass of *hijra*, a distinction which further points to an association of the khoja with Muslim courts.

11   "They go about the bazaars in groups of half-a-dozen or more singing songs with the hope of receiving a trifle. They are not only persistent but impudent beggars, rude and vulgar in the extreme, singing filthy, obscene, and abusive songs to compel the bazaarmen to give them something. Should they not succeed they would create a fire and

throw in a lot of chillies, the suffocating and irritative smoke producing violent coughing, etc., so that the bazaarmen are compelled to yield to their importunity and give them a trifle to get rid of their annoyance, as they are not only unable to retain their seats in the bazaaars, but customers are prevented from coming to them in consequence. With the douceur they get they will move off to the next bazaar to resume the trick." (Shortt 1873:406)

12   "At Ahmedabad not only the Hijdás but some of the Bhawayyás, or strolling players, claim presents on the birth of a boy with a pertinacity that is not satisfied till the whole of their demand is paid. The person claiming the gift is generally the clown or fool of the troop. He does not dance or sing, but by his obstreperous sallies of witty abuse tries to make his stay so annoying that to get rid of him no expense is thought to great. To avoid the nuisance some people satisfy his demands at his house by going and making a present of one or two shillings." (Lutfullah 1875:95)

13   This turn of phrase is repeated verbatim by R. V. Russel, Rai Bahadur, and Hira Lal (1916:209) in their entry "Hijra, Khasua" in *Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India*: "The hijras [artificial eunuchs] are beggars like the Khasuas [natural eunuchs], and sometimes become very importunate. Soon after the birth of a child in Gujararāt, the hated Hijras or eunuchs crowd round the house for gifts. If the demand of one of them is refused the whole rank and file of the local fraternity besiege the house with indecent clamour and gesture." K. Bhimbai (1901:507) similarly comments on the hijras' abusive techniques: "In begging they stand in front of some villager, clap their hands, and offer him the usual blessing, 'May Mother Bahucharáji do you and your children good' or 'Ado Bhaváni,' that is 'Rise goddess Bhaváni.' If anyone fails to give

them alms they abuse him and if abuse fails they strip themselves naked, a result which is greatly dreaded as it is believed to bring dire calamity."

14 The existence of this book was pointed out by Priya, the only hijra we spoke with who had learned to read and write. Unlike other hijras in Banaras, Priya became a hijra at a very late age after receiving a childhood education. When showing this book to my research partner Veronica O'Donovan, Priya enthusiastically explained that "everything you need to know about hijras will be in this book." I have translated the excerpts in (1) from the original Hindi.

15 Rupa uses the term *aṇḍ-baṇḍ* here, which translates variously as 'absurd', 'incoherent', 'meaningless', or 'irrelevant'.

16 Naqvi and Mujtaba (1992:89) narrate the story as follows: "Hijras are appalled when they are ridiculed by 'normal' people. They maintain that such an attidude is not merely irrational, but sacrilegious. 'God has made us like this,' says one hijra. 'So if anyone ridicules me I swear at them.' When a hijra boarded a bus in Mazimabad, a young man clapped mockingly in imitation of the standard hijra practice. The hijra in turn proceeded to hurl the most vociferous abuses at the man, who was eventually forced to disembark from the bus in shame."

17 Mehta's decision to use the term "lewdness" in reference to the hijras is clearly influenced by their exhibitionism as well: He later remarks, "I once saw four handsome Pavaiyā youth about 20 years old expose their backsides in the most crowded locality of Bhadra in Ahmedabad." As with Manucci and Bernier in their descriptions of the court eunuchs, however, Mehta also notes the hijra's faithful and trustworthy nature:

But on the whole the Pavaiyas have the reputation of being particularly honest, loyal, reliable and incapable of betrayal. Their life is simple, their wants are simple, and they have no wife and children to worry about. It is an account of this well-known trait of honesty that they flourish as sellers of milk, because it is believed that they would not adulterate it. Usually their instinctive behaviour and mode of thought is masculine.

18   I should add that Verma also asserts that women have their own verbal strategies for indicating "sex-superiority," namely, what he refers to as "pleading innocent" (85). Regarding women who claim to be victims of rape, he argues: "It is for her own good that she denies having felt any pleasure, even if she has actually felt it. It is in her interest to declare that the entire act was loathsome to her and that she had been forced to submit. Therefore, pleading innocent, she demands all those rights which the society gives to a respectable woman" (85).

19   I am grateful to Ved Vatuk for bringing this novel to my attention.

20   This belief is prevalent across India: M. N. Srinavas, for example, writing over half a century ago, points out in his study of Kannada speakers in Mysore that "the worst word of abuse in the Kannada vocabulary is to call a woman, married or unmarried, a widow (*munde*)" (1942:117).

21   Again, I am grateful to Ved Prakash Vatuk for sharing this passage with me; Sidwa narrates the exchange between Freddy and Yadzi as follows:

Freddy could feel an angry vein throb in his forehead. He was furious and horrified that a son of his should write such emasculated gibberish. As for poetry, "The Charge of the Light Brigade" he could tolerate, but this!

In a cold rage, he scribbled beneath the last line of the poem: "If you must think and act like a eunuch, why don't you wear your sister's bangles? And don't tear pages from your notebook!"

He tucked the notepaper into a fresh envelope and addressed it to Yazdi. (1983:146)

22   The verbs *sarāpnā* and *kosnā* are very close in meaning, except that the former activity is generally associated with non-verbal cursing and the latter with verbal cursing (e.g., 'May your two sons die tomorrow!'). The verbal activity subsumed under the verb *kosnā* is generally associated with women instead of men.

23   See Raheja and Gold (1994) for an engaging summary of research on genres of verbal insult in North India.

CHAPTER 6

Hijralect

हिजड़ों की तरह
वे नाचेंगे
पीटेंगे जाँघ
बजायेंगे गाल
उन्हें न प्रसव की पीड़ा होती है
न प्रजनन का सुख

Like the hijras,

they dance,

they slap their thighs,

they blabber.

They have neither the agony of labor

nor the joy of childbirth.

-Ved Prakash 'Vatuk' (1987)

The previous chapters in this dissertation have analyzed the hijras' language use on the level of discourse, focusing on the hijra's alternating employments of feminine and masculine verb morphology, as well as on their discursive manipulations of gendered cursing strategies. Yet a number of researchers (e.g., Lowe 1983; Mallik 1976; Mondal 1989; Singh 1982) have also alluded to the existence of a specialized hijra vocabulary, created by the hijras in order to identify concepts unique to their community. While the specific realizations of such lexical items vary across languages, the concepts provoking

their creation appear to remain constant. The belief that the hijra community is like an extended family, for instance, has led to cross-linguistic subversions of vocabulary items normally used in the larger society to designate blood or sanctioned kinship, with the identification of the guru as mother-in-law and the disciple as daughter-in-law appearing in a variety of languages.

If the hijra network is as interconnected as the discussion in Chapter 5 suggests, it is only logical that hijras in varied linguistic communities will develop similar patterns of semantic extension, whether it be to delineate affected kinship or to express other concepts fundamental to hijra lifestyle, religion, or profession. In this chapter, I will explore the notion of a definitive *hijralect* in the Hindi-speaking hijra community, a notion supported by sociologists and journalists who have done research among Hindi-speaking hijras, as well as by my own fieldwork among hijras in Banaras.

THE HIJRA *KOḌ BHĀṢĀ* ['CODE LANGUAGE']

When I began my fieldwork, friends of mine who were residents of Banaras explained to me that research on the hijras would be very difficult, not only because of the antagonism I might confront as an outsider to the community, but also because of the unintelligibility of the hijras' *khās bolī* ['special dialect']. My research assistant Vinita was particularly emphatic about this point; after an early meeting with Shashi, she told us that when the hijras spoke among themselves she was often unable to understand them, an observation that is somewhat surprising given her fluency in a number of local dialects. When we asked Sulekha in an interview if the hijras do indeed have some sort of special dialect, she enthusiastically replied that they have an *alag bhāṣā* ['separate language'], identifying it as a way of speaking that nonhijras are unable to understand:

(1) *So we've heard that the hijras speak a special dialect. Is that true?*

Oh yes, yes, yes!

What is it?

We people have a different way of talking. We have a separate language. Our way of conversing is different. If there are ten hijras sitting here and ten men sitting there, for example, we'll talk among ourselves and the men won't be able to understand us. Like the other day, when there were two hijras and two of you people in the same room, we were saying this and that and you couldn't understand anything that we were talking about, now could you? ((laughs))

So what did you say that we didn't understand?

You people won't understand us! ((laughs)) We have a separate language!

Many of the other hijras I spoke with in Banaras did not agree with this assessment, but Sulekha's subsequent itemization of a number of special terms used by hijras to identify different kinds of monetary values, performance tricks, and dance, as well as in-group distinctions like *hijṛā, hijṛin,* and *hijṛī,* convinced me that there is some truth to her assertion. While I do not want to claim that these terms constitute a separate language, or even a separate dialect for that matter, I would nevertheless argue that they do in fact point to the existence of an extensive alternative lexicon. Given the strength of the hijra social network, a strength clearly developed in response to the severity of their societal marginalization, I would venture to assert that this specialized lexicon is shared by hijra speakers in a variety of linguistic and geographical communities.

The role of the lexicon in what is often referred to as India's "underworld argot" has interested scholars since the early 1800s, among them W. H. Sleeman (1836) in his now infamous study of a "secret vocabulary" used by the Thugs; T. Grahame Bailey (1902) in his study of the "secret words" of the Cuhras; and M. Kennedy (1908) in his report on the language of the criminal classes of the Bombay Presidency. More research of

this nature was conducted in India during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s: for example, D. N. Shankara Bhat's (1968) article on the "secret code" of South Kanara devil dancers; R. R. Mehrotra's studies of the "secret parlance" of Banaras *pandas* ['Hindu priestly agents'] and the "slang" of the Banaras silk *dalals* ['brokers'] (1975, 1977); Sabyasachi Mookerjee's (1970) article on the "secret language" of criminals; Bhakti P. Mallik's numerous glossaries of the "underworld argot" of West Bengal (1976, 1963, 1965-66, 1970, 1971a, 1971b, 1976, 1977); and Ramdin Pandey's (1966) work on "*slaing prayog*" ['slang use'] in a variety of Hindi-speaking subcultures.

It is telling that many of these authors, among them Bhakti P. Mallik (1977) in *Dictionary of the Underworld Argot* and R. R. Mehrotra (1977) in *Sociology of Secret Languages*, include some mention of sexual minorities as instigators of underworld argot. Mehrotra never specifically mentions the word *eunuch* or *hijra*, but he does identify "homosexuals" as one of many "criminal and semi-criminal groups" in India:

> The Indian scene, for instance, can offer a ready laboratory for observation and study of the fascinating argot of various criminal and semi-criminal groups like the thieves and dacoits, burglars and smugglers, kidnappers and eveteasers, hippies and homosexuals, pimps and prostitutes, and even a large section of *dalals* (brokers) and *Pandas*. (1977: 19)

Although Mehrotra's discussion of homosexual slang in Hindi is limited to his identification of the word *dukān* ['shop'] as meaning 'anus', his decision to mention homosexuals as part of the "communication matrix" of Indian criminal subcultures, and his accompanying plea for further research on such subcultures, is telling. "The primary aim of such studies, particularly at the hands of sociolinguists," Mehrotra explains, "should not be the exposure of the nefarious activities of the underworld, but a critical examination of how a deviant channel of communication influences and is influenced by deviant norms and

deviant behaviour in various interaction relationships" (1977:13). Mallik (1976), writing from the standpoint of lexicography instead of sociolinguistics, unfortunately avoids any discussion of such influences, but he nevertheless glosses a number of lexical items as originating among not only "homosexuals" (51) and "sodomites and catamites" (53), but also "eunuchs" (52, 73, 77) and "eunuchs and hermaphrodites" (8, 13, 24, 45, 46, 53, 67, 76). Indeed, he designates each of these communities as an underworld "class or profession" alongside burglars, car thieves, convicts, gamblers, illicit liquor dealers, luggage-lifters, pickpockets, students, thieves, and vagrants.

Mallik's matter-of-fact inclusion of a high proportion of lexical items as originating from eunuchs and hermaphrodites, and his failure to offer any explanation for this choice, would indicate that the idea of a specialized hijra vocabulary is understandable to his readership. But Mallik is not the only Indian researcher to assert that the hijras have their own lexicon. Govind Singh, after spending several years with hijras in Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh, portrays Hindi-speaking hijras as speaking a number of terms belonging to *"apnī bhāṣā"* ['their own language']; in his chapter entitled *"Bātē Karte Haī Is Tarah"* ['They Converse Like This'], he even identifies a number of *"koḍvarḍ"* ['code words'] as part of the hijra *"koḍbhāṣā"* ['code language']. Sekh Rahim Mondal, in a study of sixteen hijras in the district of Howrah in West Bengal, also comments on "the great importance of code language in the life of the eunuchs," remarking that "the behaviour of the eunuchs is unique in all respects and this uniqueness is noticed even in the use of distinct terms for the identification of different objects" (1989:248). And Sumaine Lowe, in an essay on the Bombay hijras that appeared in the popular magazine *Imprint*, defines this code language as "their own heathen tongue":

> *Hijras*, I have discovered, have their own language and although everybody in this
> *chawl* speaks a civilised Tamil or Kannada, they sometimes converse in their own
> heathen tongue to members of their sect who come from different parts of the

country. As a special concession, Lata has taught me the words for 'man' and 'woman'. (1983:31).

Unfortunately, Lowe does not identify what the hijra lexemes for "man" and "woman" are, but her point is nevertheless clear. The hijralect is not confined to a particular language group or geographical area, but is understood by speakers of a variety of languages; indeed, the hijra tongue is employed by "speakers from different parts of the country" as a means of understanding one another.

Sulekha was quick to confirm this notion as well, explaining that the hijras use their language to bridge cross-linguistic misunderstandings. In the following discussion, she claims that if she were to meet a speaker of "Madrāsī," a term she uses more generally to denote Dravidian languages, she and her conversational partner would, in her own words, "just indicate to each other in our own language that we're hijras":

(2)   *Is it that way everywhere in India?*

Yes, yes, everywhere in India.

So you all understand this hijra language? Is that so?

Yes, yes, everybody knows it. ...

If you met someone from Madras, would you be able to talk to each other?

If he'll speak Hindi, of course I'll be able to understand him. But if he speaks Madrāsī, I won't be able to understand him. When we talk to each other we won't say, "We're hijras, we're hijras." We'll just indicate to each other in our own language that we're hijras.

What will you say?

Haven't I already told you? We'll just tell each other in our own language that we're dancers and singers.

How would you tell each other that?

How can I tell you? There are so many different ways. There's not just one way that we talk to each other. A rupee, for example, is called *thappū*, a hundred rupees is called *barū*, fifty rupees is called *adhīkāṭ*, and 25 rupees is called *pāvkāṭ*. Our dancing is a separate language, too. We have our own separate language just like the prostitutes who dance in a *maṇḍlī* have their own separate language.

Sulekha's concluding identification of lexical items used in reference to monetary amounts (i.e., *thappū, barū, adhīkāṭ,* and *pāvkāṭ.*) would suggest that this "language" is more lexical than morphological or syntactic (or at least, as is typical, that speakers are more aware of the lexical than other levels); moreover, her subsequent classification of "dancing" as a separate language as well would suggest that extralinguistic factors like gesture might figure prominently in its realization.

THE LEXICALIZATION OF PERFORMANCE

As Sulekha implies in the preceding passage, many of the lexical items that constitute a distinctive hijralect refer to aspects of their song and dance performances at births and weddings. Because these performances are crucial to their own livelihood, the hijras have developed a number of vocabulary items that allow them not only to speak more specifically about the tools of their trade, but also conduct business dealings covertly in front of their customers.

The words used by the hijras in reference to song and dance are for the most part semantic subversions of lexical items commonly used in standard Hindi. Banaras hijras refer to the dance itself as *jhamkī*, a noun that brings out the more feminine aspects of their performance in its association with the Hindi *jham* ['the sound of small bells']. The verb 'to dance' in the Banaras hijralect is reported variously as *jhamkī karnā* or *jhamak karnā*, the latter of which relates to the verb *jhamjhamānā* ['to make soft noises,' 'to produce a tinkling sound'] in standard Hindi. Perhaps not surprisingly, this activity is not normally

associated with men: Whereas a woman's gait will often be referred to in standard Hindi as

jham jham, particularly if she is wearing a number of dangling ornaments, a man's gait

would rarely be referred to as such; indeed, to do so would imply that the referent is

effeminate. By labeling their dance as *jhamkī,* the hijras underscore the feminine nature of

the performance event, realized in its close association with both women and childbirth.[1]

Many of the other terms used in reference to performance build on this association, as

illustrated in Table 4 below:

Term	Source	Place	Etymology or related terms	Meaning in community/
badhāī	Hall 1993; Nanda 1990:1	Banaras; unnamed South Indian city	traditional gifts of cash and goods received as payment	n., the birth performance
jhamkī karna	Hall 1993	Banaras	from Hindi *jham* ['sound of small bells']	v., dance
jhamak karna	Hall 1993	Banaras	from standard Hindi *jhamjhamānā* ['to produce a tinkling sound']	v., dance (as in the expression *jhamak kare* ['dance!'])
chamkāno	Mallik 1976:73	West Bengal	"cf. cham--tinkling sounds of small bells" (p. 73); Mallik identifies this word as "professional argot"	n., dance.
chumki	Mallik 1976:77	West Bengal	Mallik identifies this word as meaning (in Bengali): "a string of small bells worn round the ankle, cf. jhum jhum. ono[matopoeia]" (p. 77); compare Hindi *jhumki* [a kind of ornament worn around the ankles]	n., baby (girl)
dhamṛī	Hall 1993	Banaras	from the Hindi onomatopoetic *dham* [sound of a drum]	n., *dholak* ['drum'] n., a performance activity that involves the *dholak*

latāmī	Singh 1982	Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh	origin unknown	n., the honorarium hijras receive at the time of childbirth
cichā	Mallik 1976:66-67	West Bengal	"cf. ciz--a precious thing." (p. 67) Mallik glosses this word as meaning (in Bengali) "1. n, a girl; 2. adj., stolen wine" (p. 66)	adj., beautiful

TABLE 4. Hijra terms relating to performance

It is noteworthy that Mallik reports *chamkāno* as the hijra word for 'dance' in West Bengal, a term clearly cognate with the terms used for 'dance' in Banaras. He also reports the related word *chumki* as meaning 'baby girl', which he explains as a derivative of the Bengali onomatopoetic *jhum jhum*--a term that, like its Hindi parallel *jham jham* or *cham cham*, is used to refer to the sound made by "a string of small bells worn round the ankle" (p. 77). The fact that the terms for both 'dance' and 'baby girl' have developed from a similar kind of semantic extension again instantiates the connection between dance and femininity in the hijra community.

The term *dhamṛī* [the action of beating the drum] is formed similarly to *jhamkī* in that it is derived from the onomatopoetic *dham*, a term used in reference to the fall of a heavy object, or in this case, the sound of a drum. The *dholak*, a small drum played on both ends, is the essential instrument used in the hijras' performances, and the fact that they have developed their own designation for it comes as no surprise. But the term *dhamṛī* in the Banaras hijra community seems to indicate much more than the action of beating the drum; many hijras also use the term in reference to a prescripted performance activity in which one hijra angrily orders another hijra to go and get the *dholak*. This activity, labeled by Sulekha as the *dhamṛī cīz* ['dhamṛī thing'], is performed by the hijras in order to capture the attention of potential customers. Because it is staged in such a way that a

physical fight results between two of the hijras involved, it works as an effective attention-getter, a fact enunciated by Sulekha with great amusement in the following excerpt:

(3) And there's also the *dhamṛī* thing.

What's that mean?

Whenever I do the *dhamṛī*, it means that we won't leave until we do the *pher.*

But what does 'dhamṛī' mean?

Like the other day I said, "Go and get the *dholak*! Play the *dholak* so we can dance. If they give us a lot of money, I'll give you a part of it." After I did the *dhamṛī* thing, I gave her a slap and she said, "No, I won't. I don't want to be involved in your business." So I slapped her again and said, "Go and get it!" And with that I sent her away. Then she went and fetched the *dholak*, brought it back, and we all began to play.

And then they gave you money?

Sure, they gave us money! They gave me 60 rupees. ((laughs))

When Sulekha uses the word *pher*, which literally means 'circuitous', she is referring to that part of a celebration ceremony in which participants circle a rupee note or gift around the head of the honored person for good luck before donating it to a bystander or performer, in this case, the hijras. By telling a fellow hijra to "go and get the *dholak*," Sulekha instigates the activity she refers to as *dhamṛī*, indicating to the other hijras that they should milk their customers for all they are worth and see the performance through to its end, i.e., the *pher*. The staged antagonism between fellow hijras is instrumental to its success, particularly as the hijras are infamous for their verbal artillery (see Chapter 5) and few bystanders would want to miss out on witnessing a hijra *tête-à-tête*.

The kind of game-playing reflected in the hijras' staging of the *dhamṛī* event has also motivated the creation of a number of lexical items having to do with money and customer relations. Indeed, Sulekha indicates that the hijras' code language is primarily used as a means of discussing private business matters when in the presence of nonhijras, or more specifically, as a way of covertly determining how much money the group should demand from a customer while in the customer's presence. Mehrotra (1977) discusses comparable strategies of expression among the Banaras silk brokers in some detail, identifying how the brokers not only participate in staged performances like "the swagger trick" (68),[2] but also use unintelligible phrases regarding "whether a customer is to be detained or dismissed" (71), as well as a set of secret numbers ranging from one to a hundred thousand. Similar strategies appear to be used by the hijras, primarily as a means of carrying on the same types of covert alliances identified by Mehrotra as characteristic of the *dalali boli* ['broker dialect']. Selected terms used by the hijras to identify different kinds of customers and customer relations, as reported by Singh (1982), are included in Table 5:

Term	*Source*	*Place*	*Meaning in Hindi*	*Meaning in community*
thālī	Singh 1982	(same)	'large plate'; also associated with offerings	n., customer (as in the phrase *thālī ke pās jānā hai* ['you have to go to the customer's home'])
aṭherī	Singh 1982	Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh	origin unknown	n., someone who is so poor he is deserving of pity
cākaṛ	Singh 1982	(same)	'servant, one who has a job'; compare the Hindi *cākri* ['job, employment']	n., someone who has a lot of money and can easily be exploited
ghisī rakam	Singh 1982	(same)	*literal:* 'rubbed coin'; *figurative:* 'an experienced person', 'one who has seen a lot of action'	n., a very stingy customer

u̱t̠hāū cūlhā	Singh 1982	(same)	*literal:* 'portable cooking burner' *figurative:* 'person who has never settled anywhere', 'vagabond'	n., a very dishonest person, a crook (i.e., someone who cannot be trusted because he moves around)
phakr̠ī	Singh 1982	(same)	appears to be a feminine form of *phakkar̠* ['one who has nothing, one who is carefree'], which is itself a diminutive of the term *phakīr* ['Muslim or Sikh mendicant']; (feminine *phakīrī*)	n., someone who is penniless and unemployed, who will not be able to pay even half-price
jākar̠/jākr̠ī	Singh 1982	(same)	'one who holds tightly, who won't let go'; from *jākarna* ['to hold tight']	n., someone who is miserly and stingy, who won't give up any money unless harassed
caltī karnā	Singh 1982	(same)	'to get rid of'	v., to entertain one customer after another (Singh glosses *caltī karnā* as: "to finish off and get rid of one customer, only to have another man take his place.)

TABLE 5. Hijra terms used to define customers

Whether Singh is identifying terms having to do with performance or prostitution is unclear, since he frequently conflates both of these aspects of the hijra lifestyle as their *peś* ['profession']. But the fact that the hijras have so many terms for delineating different kinds of customers--e.g., poor customers (*a̱t̠herī*), gullible customers (*cākar̠*), stingy customers (*ghisī rakam*), dishonest customers (*u̱t̠hāū cūlhā*), umemployed customers (*phakr̠ī*), and miserly customers (*jākar̠/jākr̠ī*)--is itself noteworthy; the items listed here point to the hijras' predilection for speaking of *bahrī log*, or nonhijras, in terms of their potential monetary contributions, and thus separating them from their own community as people on the other side of the counter, so to speak. More practically, such designations enable the hijras to indicate to one another whether or not they should press their customer for more money. If a hijra pronounces a customer *cākar̠* ['gullible'], for instance, as

opposed to *atherī* ['poor'] or *phakṛī* ['unemployed'], the group will remain at the site of the birth celebration until they are given what they consider to be an appropriate amount of money. It is also noteworthy that the terms created for customers unable to pay significant sums of money tend to be grammatically feminine (*atherī^f*, *phakṛī^f*), while those referring to more wealthy customers are primarily masculine (*cākar^m*, *ghisī rakam^m*, *uṭhāū cūlhā^m*).

The hijras in Banaras also have a monetary numbering system that they use during performances as a means of determining how much they should ask a patron to pay. While this system does not appear to be as sophisticated as those used by the Banaras silk merchants, diamond dealers, and fruit and vegetable sellers reported by Mehrotra (1976: 79-83),[3] its very existence points to the fact that the hijras' livelihood is based largely on their own bartering strategies at performances, especially when most residents of Banaras, at least in modern-day times, do not readily give alms to unsolicited hijras. Terms used to identify monetary amounts, as reported by Sulekha in Banaras, are included in Table 6:

Term	Source	Place	Etymology or related terms	Meaning in community
dāl	Singh 1982; Hall 1993	Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh; Banaras	lentils	earnings (as in the phrase *sārī dāl saṭkar gayā* ['he's gobbled up all the earnings']. Compare with the Hindi expression: *sab kuch dakār gayā* ['he has birped up everything', i.e., he has digested the meal and is completely satisfied]). The hijras' use of the word *dāl* parallels the employment of the compound *āṭā dāl* [literally 'dough'] in standard Hindi, which is often used to mean 'livelihood'.

thappū	Hall 1993	Banaras	origin unknown, although the term is perhaps related to the standard Hindi *uppā* 'seal', used for the government seal stamped on paper currency	1 rupee
pāvkāṭ	Hall 1993	Banaras	from Hindi 1/4 plus *kāṭ* ['cut']	25 rupees
adhīkāṭ	Hall 1993	Banaras	from *adhī* ['half'] plus *kāṭ* ['cut']	50 rupees
barrū/baṛū	Hall 1993	Banaras	phonetic alternative to *baṛā* ['big']	100 rupees
pãc baṛ pattā	Hall 1993	Banaras	'five banyan/big leaves'	500 rupees

TABLE 6. Hijra terms used to identify monetary amounts

These lexical values, which are for the most part unintelligible to Hindi speakers, are used strategically at birth performances to determine the appropriateness of a payment. If one of the hijras leading the performance decides that a customer could be persuaded to pay as much as 500 rupees, for instance, she might say, "*isko cāb rahī hai to pãc baṛ pattā liyā jāyegā*" ['she's suffering from an itch, so let's take five banyan leaves'].[4] This phrase takes its meaning from a remedy associated with Indian folk medicine, in which the paste from the *pattā* ['leaves'] of the *baṛ* ['banyan tree'] is rubbed on the skin to cure skin diseases. Indeed, the word *pattā* is frequently employed in more colloquial Hindi to mean 'paper bill' or 'buck', as in the anti-bureaucrat expression *phāil sarkāne ke liye māl-pattā cāhiye* ['everybody needs goods and grains (i.e., bribes) in order to move their files']. But the Hindi word for 'banyan tree' (*baṛ*) is itself cognate with the Hindi word for 'big' (*baṛā*), a reasonable extension given the fact that banyan leaves rank among the largest of tree leaves. It is quite likely that the hijra word *baṛū* is also a phonetic alternative to the Hindi *baṛā* ['big'], and because the hundred rupee bill is the largest circulating bill in Indian currency, the hijras use the term *baṛu* in reference to it. With these sorts of extensions, the

hijras are able to determine the monetary fate of their customer in the customer's presence, embedding numerical values in superficially nonsensical phrases.

THE HIJRA *TĀLĪ* ['CLAP']

Similar sorts of negotiations, according to Singh (1982), are expressed through the hijras' system of *tālī*, or 'claps'. The hijras are well-known throughout northern Indian, indeed throughout all of India, for their resonant, hollow-handed clap. Journalists and sociologists alike have focused on this clap, along with curses, language use, and dress, in their exposures of the hijra community. Nirmal Mitra (1983:15), for instance, describes the clap as "short, sharp, and seductive" and lists it as one of the behaviors that all hijras must learn after entering the community. His claim is echoed by Dilip Bobb and C. J. Patel (1982:84), who list it as one of the activities that the 12 year old boy Mohamed Hanif Vora was forced to learn after his alleged kidnapping by the Baroda hijras, and identify it as "the ritualistic hand-clapping peculiar to the tribe." P. N. Pimpley and S. K. Sharma (1985:43), in their study of hijras in Chandigarh, Kalka, Ludhiana, Jullundur, Patiala, and Delhi, mention the clap in a footnote to the "exaggeratedly feminine mode of attire, gait, speech, and gestures" that hijras are "exhorted to adopt," describing its formation in careful detail: "The hijaras clap rather loudly by bringing the hollow of the palms together and giving a twist to the wrists at the moment of impact" (50). Other writers identify this behavior more specifically as a "begging technique," among them Gautam N. Allabadia and Nilesh Shah (1992:48), who refer to both clapping and "finger gestures" in order to emphasize the aggressive nature of the hijras' monetary demands; Aruna Har Prasad (1990:44), who identifies the hijras' clapping as a prelude to their "lifting their skirts to reveal castration scars and threatening with obscenties if money is not given"; and an anonymous staff writer for the inflammatory *Bombay Blitz* (1981:3), who condemns the hijras as "filthy, palm-slapping, alms-begging transvestites and eunuchs who infest the street of Bombay."

Two of the most interesting accounts of the hijra clap come from authors who have very little in common: Sumant Mehta, an India sociologist who conducted research on Gujarati hijras in the 1940s, and Anne Ogborn, a Caucasian American male-to-female transsexual who went to India and joined the Delhi hijra community in 1994. Excerpts from their discussions are juxtaposed below:

We also make our traditional clap, a hollow handed, sharp cracking sound that carries for blocks. It's our communication device to call the group to a "find." Our clap is the most distinctive symbol we have. No non-hijra in India would ever clap that way. (Ogborne 1994:28)

These people greet each other and the rest of the people by a characteristic ringing clap of the hands in which the palms are kept hollow. This is called *tānī, tapākā, patākā, tamdā, and tanoṭā.* This clap alone reveals them to be Pavaiyās [hijras]. It is reported to me that these claps are rhythmic in character and are an external expression of very intense sorrow in their inner vitals. It is perfectly true that they are so depressed mentally, economically, and socially that there cannot be any pleasure or joy of life for them, but whether the clap is an outer cry of an inner anguish or perhaps a mimicry of the sexual act requires further investigation. There is an inner urge and whilst talking at intervals, they give a smacking clap. (Mehta 1945-46:48).

While the optimism backgrounding Ogborne's personal account of her experiences with the Delhi hijras stands in almost ludic contrast to Mehta's Freudian influenced pessimism, both authors nevertheless recognize the essential symbolic value of the clap, with Ogborne naming it "the most distinctive symbol we have" and Mehta identifying it as the sole revealer of hijrahood.

Still other authors point more directly to the coded meanings indicated by different kinds of claps. Sekh Rahim Mondal (1989:248) remarks that "certain types of clappings symbolize certain meanings as well as feelings among them," although he unfortunately offers no examples in support of his claim. A slew of examples is offered by Singh (1982), however, who gives one of the most detailed accounts of the hijras' clapping strategies. Although he also echoes Mehta's and Mondal's sentiment and asserts that the hijras use these claps as an expression of their *dukh-sukh* ['sorrow and happiness'] (1982:101), he is more concerned with their employment as, to borrow the words of Ogborne, a "communication device":

> Most hijras talk to each other by clapping. It is a very strange kind of clapping that
> comes out of their palms; when you hear the sound, you can immediately guess
> that the clapper is a hijra. In many ways the hijra clap is like a quotation mark.
> Before beginning and after finishing any sentence, the hijra will inevitably clap; it
> is the comma, the semicolon, and the full-stop of the hijras. With straight,
> hardened, spread, raised fingers, the hands themselves indicate that they are about
> to speak. If there is a braille writing system for the blind, clapping is the code
> language for the hijras. Only they can understand it. (Singh 1982:101, translated
> from the original Hindi)

Again, I would not support Singh's claim that the hijras' system of clapping is a language in its own right; it is certainly not as sophisticated as his braille simile might imply. But in a manner comparable to their use of the alternative lexical items discussed earlier in this chapter, the hijras employ these claps in order to express certain concepts covertly, particularly when dealing with reluctant customers.

In his chapter entitled *De Tālī* ['Clap'], Singh offers a revealing example of how the hijras in one of the groups he studied use coded claps during the birth celebration. The

hijra leading the ceremony, according to Singh, claps after each blessing she utters for the newborn child; and the number of claps she performs will indicate to the other hijras how much money they should demand of their customers. The standard blessing sequence performed in the ceremony studied by Singh is as follows:

> *terā lāl jiye* [one clap]
> 'May your son have a long life!'
>
> *terā lāl dūdhõ nahāye* [one clap]
> 'May your son be bathed with milk!'
>
> *terā lāl sau baras jiye* [one clap]
> 'May your son live for a hundred years!'
>
> -Singh (1982:99)

When the leading hijra claps only one time after each blessing, as in the preceding quotation, she indicates to the other hijras present that they will ask for the standard fare, which for the hijras Singh studied in the early 1980s was 101 rupees. If the hijra claps twice after each blessing, however, she will indicate that they should charge only half as much (i.e., 51 rupees); and if she claps several times in succession, she indicates, in the words of Singh, "*fūṭo bhāī- fūṭo iske pās se, pārṭī kañjūs- makkhī cūs hai!*" ['It's worthless- It's worthless. Let's get out of here, this party is full of stingy misers!'].

Singh also identifies several different kinds of claps used in everyday conversation, among them the *ādhī tālī* ['half clap'], the *ḍeḍh tālī* ['one-and-a-half clap'], and the *ḍhāī tālī* ['two-and-a-half clap']. Like the lexical items employed by the hijras to distinguish outsiders (see Table 5), many of these claps are used humorously, even sarcastically, as a way of evaluating nonhijras. The form and meaning of such claps, as reported by Singh, are reproduced in Table 7:

Form	Meaning
(1) *ādhī tālī* ['half clap'] (a half clap is performed by bringing the palms together without making any sound)	an indication of disapproval (e.g., with respect to the performance of a particular action)
(2) *dedh tālī* ['one-and-a-half clap'] i.e., a full clap followed by a half clap (a full clap is performed by bringing the palms together with straight, spread, raised fingers, resulting in a loud, crisp sound)	a negative or abusive evaluation, often used in reference to a fellow hijra (e.g., *hāye hāye mue pīche lage haī*)
(3) *dhāī tālī* ['two-and-a-half clap'] i.e., two full claps followed by a half clap	a signal of danger; a warning that there is danger in the vicinity (e.g., *calo calē. uṭho, calne ke liye taiyār ho, hośiyār, khatrā hai* ['C'mon, let's get out of here, get up, be ready to go, be alert, there is danger'])
(4) four short claps followed by placing a finger on the cheek	An indication that an outsider is a real sucker (i.e., a hijra, after noticing that an outsider is fascinated by their conversation, uses this clap to indicate that they should demand a lot of money from him)
(5) a raising of the middle finger followed by a full clap	a single farewell (i.e., 'I'm leaving now', '*namaste*')
(6) a raising of the three middle fingers followed by a full clap	a joint farewell (i.e., 'C'mon, we're all leaving now')

TABLE 7. Selected examples of hijra *tāliyā* ['claps']

(Source: Singh 1982)

The physical realizations of these claps, as well as the meanings associated with them, will of course vary from community to community. A clap similar to the one identified by Singh as "four short claps followed by placing a finger on the cheek," for instance, is performed in Banaras by alternating one hand over the other and tapping both cheeks in quick succession with the three middle fingers. Although it is quite possible that the clap is sometimes used as an indicator of a customer's gullibility, as Singh reports, it seems to be used in Banaras more commonly as an ironic device. Whenever Megha reveals

an obvious falsehood about her community--e.g., hijras do not have emasculation operations; hijras do not take on new feminine names when they join the community; all hijras are born as hermaphrodites; all hijras were raised as girls--she follows her discussion with this particular clap (although she sometimes abbreviates it to a simple tap on each cheek). Its employment allows Megha to say an untruth without really lying; by performing the clap, she has indicated, at least according to the rules of her own community, that she is speaking ironically.

Sulekha is particularly clear about the ironic nature of this strategy in the following excerpt, after we pointedly asked her the meaning of Megha's repetitive uses of this gesture:

(4)   *It seems to us that whenever Megha lies, whenever she says things like, "Hijras never have operations," then she claps like this ((performing four alternating claps and tapping each cheek)) and makes a face.*

Yes, that just means that you asked her one thing and she felt that she had to tell you a different thing--that she had to tell you a lie. She had to save herself, in other words. So if you ask her a question about operations, she'd have to say, "No, no, it doesn't happen among us. It doesn't happen among us!" ((performing four alternating claps and tapping each cheek))

Why does she do that?

In order to hide the real truth.

She only does that when she's lying?

Oh, you know, it's like, "I won't tell you that! I won't say such a thing!" If I'm talking to you and you already know that operations do in fact take place--that this takes place and that takes place, that this many of us are men, that this many of us are women, that this this many of us simply dress like women--if you've come to know all of those things, I'll think, "Why are you asking me questions like that? You just keep on asking me questions that you already know the answer to and tell me that I'm hiding the truth!" If I didn't want to answer one of your questions, I'd have to say something,

right? Like, *"are are"* ['oh, oh'], or something like that. So in the same way, Megha just said the words *"nahī̃ nahī̃"* ['no, no'], "we don't do that," and clapped without thinking.

Is that way of talking particular to hijras?

Yes, it's one of our responses. For instance, we'll always say, "I'm not saying anything! I'm not doing anything!" We all have our own ways of saying things.

In addition to the ironic clap described by Sulekha in this excerpt, the Banaras hijras have a second clap that expresses anger, used by Shashi when her disciple left her after the financial argument described in Chapter 4. While crying over the loss of her *beṭā*, Shashi punctuated her distress by alternating her hands one over the other and producing a steady stream of firm, loud, hollow-handed claps; she continued this gesture throughout the entire conversation. A third clap, produced by slapping the palms together with the fingers spread apart and back, is used for emphatic purposes, such as when Sulekha overtly refutes Megha's portrayals of the hijra community (see example 26, Chapter 3).

The verbal response quoted by Sulekha at the end of excerpt (4), realized in Hindi as *maĩ kuch nahī̃ kah rahī hū̃; maĩ kuch nahī̃ kar rahī hū̃* ['I'm not saying anything; I'm not doing anything'], is also used by the hijras as a means of avoiding the exposure of community secrets. I say this with some amusement, because when I first met Anne Ogborne at a transgender gathering in San Francisco and attempted to broach more controversial subjects with her, she remained faithful to her hijra sisters and offered this very reply, in Hindi no less. The similarity of her response with that of the hijras in Banaras again points to the interconnected nature of the larger hijra community, and suggests that many of the lexical and clapping innovations reported as occurring in very different geographical regions may well be intelligible to the larger hijra community, as Sulekha so adamantly claims. As a case in point, Veena Oldenburg (personal communication) notes that the courtesans she studied in Lucknow frequently make fun of

the hijras by employing the same *ḍeḍh tālī* ['one-and-a-half clap'] identified by Singh as an

abuse. As women associated with the higher classes, the courtesans are discouraged from

using the language of obscenity, so they often overtly mimic the gestures of the "poor

man's prostitute" (i.e., the hijra) to accomplish the same effect.

THE LEXICALIZATION OF HIJRA KINSHIIP

A discussion of the hijras' lexical innovations would be incomplete without some

mention of the the terminology used to designate affected kinship relations. As discussed

previously in chapters 3 and 4, the hijras have developed an extensive system of affected

kin, built around the artificial designation of the guru as mother-in-law and the disciple as

daughter-in-law. The employment of affected kinship in India among neighbors, especially

among villagers or city residents living in close proximity, is well attested in the

sociological literature (e.g., Freed 1963; Vatuk 1969)[5], but the choice of such designations

tends to be somewhat haphazard and dependent on individual preference.[6] The hijras, on

the other hand, have a well-planned system of kinship designation based on the

guru/disciple relationship, the nature of which, for the most part, remains constant across

communities.[7]

A number of authors working with the hijras in very different regions of India have

remarked, in general terms, that individual hijra communities identify as a family. Others

have given more detail on this point, noting in particular that the hijra disciple will address

her guru as "mother": e.g., Pimpley and Sharma (1985:43) in reference to the hijras in

Chandigarh, Kalka, Ludhiana, Jullundur, Patiala, Delhi; Sharma (1984:384-85) writing

more generally on the hijras in Panjab; Shah (1961:1328) in his discussion of the hijras in

Gujarat; and Sinha (1967:173-74) in his work on the hijras in Lucknow. But what is more

extraordinary about the guru/disciple relationship is that the guru accepts the hijra initiate

not merely as her daughter, but as her daughter-in-law, and that the rites of passage that

accompany this acceptance correspond to that of a newly married Hindu woman leaving her father's house (referred to in Hindi as *pīhar*) and moving into her father-in-law's house (referred to in Hindi as *sasurāl*). The interesting fact about this parallel, of course, is that there is no husband involved in the exchange *per se*; the guru therefore assumes the role of both, acting as husband in theory and mother-in-law in practice.

Both Satish Kumar Sharma (1989) and A. M. Shah (1961) have spoken in some detail about how the hijra initiate is brought into the community as a bride, an observation that is even more significant given the fact that the authors worked in two geographically distinct communities. Sharma notes that during the initiation ceremony, which the hijras he studied apparently refer to as "a red letter day," the guests will offer *shagun* [auspicious articles] to the Guru, just "as it is done on any wedding in a Hindu society":

> Second is the custom of accepting the young hijra as daughter-in-law or bride by the head of the Dera [house] when the former steps into the profession and starts earning his livelihood. Widely known as the initiation ceremony, this occasion is called a red letter day in the life of a hijra. He/she vows to perform his/her role obligations with full honesty and for the happiness of the Guru. On that day, the Guru invites his nears and dears to witness the ceremony. The Guru holds a feast and the guests are honoured with Shagun and new clothes as gifts. That day the guests also offer Shagun to the Guru, like it is done on any wedding in Hindu society. Sometimes, apart from accepting the new comer as a daughter-in-law, the guru accepts his chela as his bride and celebrates Suhagraat. In this affair, there is no bridegroom and no sexual act as such is performed. This is merely a ritual. (116)

Shah similarly points out that "if the mother is rich enough he celebrates a mock wedding of his daughter," but adds the additional detail that a hijra of some other household often

acts superficially as the bridegroom: "A Hijaḍā of some other akhāḍā [house] becomes the bridegroom.[8] A feast is given to the Hijaḍās attending the wedding. The latter give gifts to the host according to their fictional kinship relationship. A Hijaḍā raises his status in the community by celebrating such a wedding" (1328).

The hijras in Banaras do not appear to designate fellow hijras as bridegrooms, as Shah indicates, but they do perceive of the guru as fulfilling the roles of both husband and mother-in-law in a manner similar to that identified by Sharma. The dual role of the guru is overtly identified by Rupa in the following passage, when she explains that the guru is not only the sās ['mother-in-law'], but also the provider of suhāg, a term derived from saubhāgya ['good luck'] and used in reference to a woman's married state.[9]

(5)   Suppose one guru has four celās. First of all, there's the oldest cela, and then there's the next oldest celā. So the second celā will call the first celā "jījī" ['older sister']. ... But among us jījī means jeṭhānī ['husband's older brother's wife'], because the position of our guru is like a sās ['mother-in-law']. We apply the sindūr ['vermillion'] in our guru's name, in order to indicate that we have come to the guru's household and are like daughters-in-law to him. We consider our guru to be our suhāg ['the state of being married']; otherwise, of course, she's our sās ['mother-in-law']. When she is no longer alive, we won't put bindīs [the decorative colored dot that Indian women, except for widows, wear on their forehead] on our foreheads anymore. We won't use sindhūr anymore; we won't wear the cūṛīs ['glass bangles'] anymore. We'll wear the gold and silver bangles that widows wear. And we'll wear simple clothes.

The customs that Rupa describes in this passage as performed by the initiate parallel those performed by a married woman. After a Hindu bride moves into her father-in-law's home,

she begins to apply *sindhūr* [vermillion powder] down the part of her hair in the name of her husband so as to symbolize the state of being in his protection; she will also wear a number of other symbols of marriage, like *cūṛīs*, or glass bangles. The traditional Hindu woman continues these customs as long as her husband is still alive; if he dies before she does, she will mourn the misfortune of her widowed state by shaving her head, substituting gold and silver bangles for glass ones, and wearing simple, colorless clothes. According to Rupa, the same is true of the hijras: After the death of their guru, they no longer wear any of the more colorful symbols of marriage, a requirement that, given the hijras' predilection for colorful *sārīs* and fanciful ornaments, comes as particularly severe. It would seem that since hijras are forced to give up all of their other wordly relationships, they transfer every auspicious life-relationship (i.e., mother, father, husband) to their guru.[10]

Rupa's insistence in excerpt (5) that the address term *jījī* actually means *jetānī* merits further consideration. Because the hijra initiate moves into her inlaws' home, all of her relationships with hijras in her new home must parallel in-law relationships. Even though she might address an older disciple living in her home as *jījī* ['older sister'], the designation will actually mean *jeṭhānī*, a kinship term reserved for inlaw relationships and meaning 'husband's older brother's wife'. Sylvia Vatuk (1969a), in her study of an urban *mohallā*, gives illuminating examples of how individual residents decide to structure fictive kinship with other residents, with the basic area of concern appearing to be whether to establish *pīhar* [natal] kinship or *sasurāl* [in-law] kinship.[11] This same distinction is clearly relevant to the hijras' structuring of fictive relationships as well; according to Rupa, even though they address each other with terms denoting *pīhar* kinship (as is always the case in standard Hindi), they actually conceptualize these relations as *sasurāl* kinship. Through this double construction, the hijras get the best of both fictive worlds, enlarging their families horizontally as well as vertically. By designating the disciple as a unit of marital exchange, the hijras are able to extend their families outward and develop kinship ties across groups, ultimately creating an expansive, interwoven network of cross-

community relationships.[12] As Sulekha so aptly explains: "It's just like all the doll games that children play. Hijras play these games with each other, too. That's how we're related to each other--in these kinds of games. That's how we complete our kinship circles. And we carry them out faithfully."

Moreover, the hijras in Banaras address their guru's older *gurubhāī* ['fellow disciple'] as "*baṛī mā*" (or "*baṛī bāp*") and younger *gurubhāī* as "*mausī*," a distinction which parallels mainstream society's use of "*baṛī mā*" ['elder mother'] for one's *taī* ['father's elder brother's wife'], and "*choṭī mā*" ['younger mother'] for one's *cācī* ['father's younger brother's wife'].[13] These distinctions are delineated in Table 8 below. Other terms of address used by the hijras in Banaras include those for grandguru, great grandguru, granddisciple, and great granddisciple, reported in Table 9:

Term of address	Referent	Parallel term of address in standard Hindi	Meaning in standard Hindi
mā or *mā guru*	guru	*mā* ['mother']	mother
baṛe bāp or *baṛī mā*	guru's older fellow disciple (i.e., guru's older *gurubhāī*)	*taī* or *baṛī mā* ['older mother']	father's elder brother's wife (paternal uncle's wife)
mausī	guru's younger fellow disciple (i.e., guru's younger *gurubhāī*)	*cācī orchoṭī mā* ['younger mother']	father's younger brother's wife (paternal uncle's wife)

TABLE 8. Selected terms used in Banaras to denote guru and *gurubhāī* relations

Term of address	Meaning	Parallel term of reference in standard Hindi	Meaning
dādī or *dādī guru*	guru's guru (i.e., grandguru)	*dādī*	father's mother (i.e., paternal grandmother)
nānī or *nānī guru*	a general term denoting a hijra elder to one's guru (Nanda 1990:88 identifies this term as used for "an elder hijra who is not one's guru")	*nānī*	mother's mother (i.e., maternal grandmother)
jījī/dīdī/bahan	fellow disiple/friend in another hijra household	*jījī/dīdī/bahan*	sister
beṭī	disciple	*beṭī*	daughter
potī or *potī celā*	disciple's disciple (i.e., granddisciple)	*potī*	son's daughter
nātin or *nātin celā*	disciple's disciple (i.e., granddisciple)	*nātin*	daughter's daughter (i.e., granddaughter)
parnātin celā	disciple's disciple's disciple (i.e., great granddisciple)	*parnātin*	daughter's daughter's daughters or son's daughter's daughter (i.e., great granddaughter)

TABLE 9. Other designations of hijra kinship used in Banaras

As discussed in some detail in Chapter 3, even though the hijras tend to address fellow hijras in the feminine (e.g., *dādī, nānī*), they sometimes refer to them in the masculine (e.g., *dādā, nānā*) when speaking about them in the third person. Because the gendered distinction between terms of address and terms of reference is often dependent on the discursive context, I have not noted the masculine realizations in the above tables.

The idea that the initiate's entry into the hijra community parallels a woman's entry into the *sasurāl* has also resulted in a number of subversions of vocabulary items traditionally associated with sanctioned kinship in nonhijra society. That the act of designating such affected relationships is called *rīt* ['custom'] in certain communities (Shrivastav n.d.) is itself telling. In standard Hindi the term *rīt* is conceptualized in opposition to the term *sanskār*, with the former term used in reference to worldly customs and the latter to divine ones. It is perhaps for a similar reason that the hijras in Banaras use the verb *baiṭhnā* ['to sit down'] when they speak of their own initiation into the hijra community, a term normally used by nonhijras when referring to a union performed without any formal recognition or ritual, as in the case of an elopement. The verb *baiṭhnā* points to a kind of illegitimacy when used in this context, denoting a wordly union instead of divinely sanctioned one. Ibbetson, MacLagan, and H. A. Rose, writing in the early 1900s, report the use of a parallel term by the hijras in Panipat: The hijras there who join the community are said to *cādar oṛhnā* ['to cover oneself with the sheet'], a verb that, when used by nonhijras, refers to the act of marrying without proper ceremony. These and other terms of this nature are reproduced in Table 10 below:

Term	Source	Place	Etymology or related terms	Meaning in community
baiṭhnā	Hall 1993	Banaras	literally: 'to sit down (with)'; figuratively: 'to marry without proper ceremony'	v., to join the hijra community; to become the disciple of a guru (as in the expression: *maĩ apne guru ke yahā̃ pandreh sāl se baiṭhā hū̃* ['I've been sitting at my guru's house for fifteen years'])
chādar uṛhna	Ibbetson, MacLagan, and H.A. Rose 1911:v2, 332	Panipat	'to cover oneself with the sheet'	v., to be initiated into the hijra community

dahej	Singh 1982:48	Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh	dowry	n., gift given to a guru at the time of initiation
god bharāyī	Shrivastav n.d.	Delhi	a celebration in which an engaged woman is given auspicious gifts by her inlaws as a wish for prosperity; compare standard Hindi *god bharnā* [literally: 'to fill the lap'; figuratively: 'to be blessed with motherhood'], *godbharī honā* ['to have had a child'], *god lenā* ['to adopt a child']	n., the process of becoming a hijra
loṭā	Singh 1982:96	Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh	pitcher made of brass or stainless steel	n., someone who has begun the hijra profession
rīt	Shrivastav n.d.	Delhi	custom	n., relationship-giving ceremony
toṛ	Saksena 1980		break-up price, separation price; from *toṛnā* ['to break']; the concluding line of a stanza in a song; the crux of a matter	n., a payment made to a guru in exchange for a cela

TABLE 10. Selected terms used to denote aspects of the guru/disciple relationship

The terms reproduced here all point to the notion of the hijra as bride; indeed, in the Delhi community studied by V. K. Shrivastav (n. d.), the monetary gift that the initiate offers to her guru when she becomes his disciple is called *dahej*, the Hindi term for 'dowry'. In contrast, Vivek Saksena (1980:20) reports that the payment made by one guru to another guru in exchange for a disciple is called *toṛ*, a term derived from the verb *toṛnā* ['to break'].[14] The word *toṛ*, when used in standard Hindi, generally refers to the concluding (and hence most important) line of a stanza in a song as well as to the 'crux' of a matter, as

in the expression "*tor kī bāt kyā hai*" ['what is the point?']. The same semantic finality is evident in the hijras' subverted use of the term: The guru who "buys off" another guru's disciple, so to speak, has the last say on the household and breaks it up conclusively. Through these kinds of lexical extensions, then, the hijras affect the customs of heterosexual society while at the same time recognizing their own illegitimacy within it.

The hijras' use of the term *god bharāyī*, as reported by Shrivastav in his article on hijras in Delhi, is also revealing. This term normally refers to a premarital ceremony in which the bridegroom's family fills the lap of the bride with auspicious presents, an action that expresses a wish for prosperity. Shrivastav reports that the hijras he studied use this term in reference to the process of becoming a hijra, a semantic extension that again underscores the notion of the initiate as bride. In the case of the hijras, the wish for prosperity involves disciples, not sons, but the parallel is clear: The prosperous hijra will "give birth" to as many *celās* as possible, who will in turn carry on the lineage by giving their guru granddisciples and great granddisciples.

Indeed, Banaras hijras refer to a prosperous disciple as a *murg* ['cock'], a term that not only underscores the hijras' identification with the goddess Bahucarā Mātā, who rides a *murg* as her vehicle, but also points to the disciple's indispensible position as progenitor of future generations. This point is made clear by Sulekha in excerpt (6) below, when she describes the animosity that would result if a guru of one house were to take over the *murg* of another house without proper permission:

(6) S: āpas mē sambandh mē rahatā hai. (1.0) S: We have restrictions. If we have a fight,

ab koī jvar-par jātā hai, jaise ham- uske-   for example, if a hijra of one group

uske mē ke hijṛā dūsre gol mē calā   moves to another group, or if a hijra of

jāyegā. dūsre ke hijṛā uske gol mē calā   another group moves into that group, then

jāyegā to apne mẽ jhagṛā laṛāī ho jātā
hai. (0.5) ki "hamārā ko- hamārā ghar kā
celā ko tum kyõ rakh līf? (0.5) hamāre
ghar ke murg ko tum kyõ bā̃dh līf." (0.5)
to iske liye apne mẽ laṛāī hotā jhagṛā sab
- ve hijṛā ek jagah baiṭhkar uskā
pañcāytī kartā hai sab. - ki us par rok
lagātā hai. ki "tumko hamāre ghar ko
nahī̃ karnā hai, to maī ghar kā nahī̃
karū̃gīf. (0.5) to maī bhūkhe mar jāū̃gīf,
jab tumhārā ghar hogā- bhī bhūkī
marogīf. (1.5) āj tumhārā celā- hamārā
celā tum kar logīf ((to tab)) tumhārā celā
maī bhī kar lū̃gīf. hamārā bhī baṛhīyār
ho jāyegā," (1.0) isliye apne mẽ- hijṛā log
apne mẽ bandh lagā dete haī.

of course there'll be a quarrel: "Why have
you keptf the celā ['disciple'] of my
house? Why did you tie down/lassof the
murgm ['cock'] of our house?" For this
reason, there are fights among us,
quarrels--everything. All of the hijras sit
down in one place and call a pancāyat
['council']. Then they set down
restrictions, "You dont have to destroy
our house if I won't destroyf your house.
I'll die of hunger, when your house will
be- when you'll dief of hunger too. If you
takef your celā- my celā today, then I'll
takef your celā too. Our [house] will be
increased too." For this reason, the hijras
place restrictions on this kind of behavior.

The apparent contradiction in Sulekha's use of feminine verbal address when quoting the speech of other hijras and a masculine term like murg in reference to the valued disciple is rectified only when the dual nature of the hijra as both bride and provider of suhāg is taken into consideration. As a potential husband (and alternatively mother-in-law) for a new hijra bride, the disciple is instrumental to the future of her guru's lineage, and hence to her guru's welfare in old age. Nanda also comments on the importance of the hijra's procreative role, although she links it entirely with motherhood, comparing the hijra to a Hindu woman whose "most important obligation" is marriage and procreation: "The process of becoming a guru involves procreation: One only becomes a guru by social

recruitment of chelas, that is, assimilating new members from the larger community, an activity that can be seen as analogous to having children" (1990:125).

The understanding of the hijra initiate as procreator is also responsible for the designation of a newly castrated hijra as *lāl* in some communities (Singh 1982), a term used in standard Hindi for both a precious ruby and a new-born son[15] Even though the hijras tend to use feminine address for the hijra who has undergone the emasculation operation (see Chapter 4), it is the *lāl* ['son'] and not the *lālī* ['daughter'] that is valued in Hindu culture, specifically because of his ability to carry on the family name. So too with the hijra initiate, except that she will do so by conflating the roles of both mother and son. This conflation becomes strikingly apparent in a castration narrative recorded by Singh; the initiate Jamuna, after losing one of his testicles in a childhood accident (see Chapter 4), is ultimately left with no choice but to join the hijra community and go to the city of Agra for a castration operation. Throughout the narrative, the hijras participating in the ceremony at the home of Shahjadi, the hijra overseeing the operation, sing the words "*ayā re āyā, hamārā lāl āyā, āyā re āyā, hamārā lāl āyā*," a phrase that translates into English as 'He came, oh he came, our *lāl* came; he came, oh he came, our *lāl* came.' A portion of Jamuna's castration narrative, as reported by Singh (1982:25-26), is reproduced below:

In the morning, after massaging him continuously, they had him drink warm milk and a yellow colored liquid. When he finished drinking the liquid, he felt intoxicated.

A short time later, several people came inside; they lifted him up and took him outside.

There was a kind of concourse outside.

They were clapping, beating dholaks, and singing songs.

'He came, oh he came, our *lāl* came; he came, oh he came, our *lāl* came.'

While the dance and celebration was going on, Jamuna was laid in a corner in an intoxicated state. It was as if his body was floating in the air. He lay there without moving. Suddenly, the sounds of the dholaks and songs grew louder and his feet went completely numb.

With one blow something was cut off from his body. He jumped up suddenly; his eyes popped out. He could see in the hand of the "$d\bar{a}\bar{i}$" ['midwife'] who was performing the operation a bloody knife, the size of a razor, which was used for this particular type of occasion.

The $d\bar{a}\bar{i}$'s eyes were shining and in Shahjadi's hands was a sash.

"Is it a $l\bar{a}l$? My $bann\bar{i}$ ['bride'] has given birth to a $l\bar{a}l$."

Everyone was singing and dancing, intoxicated. Jamuna became unconscious. Her thighs were bloody. Her body was bleeding as much blood as it could, because all of these people believe that the softness of the $l\bar{a}l$'s body will be in proportion to the amount of blood shed.

(Singh 1982:25-26, translated from the original Hindi)

The narrative continues with a discussion of the ointments and oils used to facilitate recovery, and concludes with a graphic representation of an anal penetration ceremony involving a stick striped with seven different colors. At one point in his narration, Singh remarks that a doctor in Delhi informed him that up to 70 percent of the hijras who undergo this operation die; the hijra sect joined by Jamuna, however, referred to locally as $s\bar{a}t\, ra\tilde{n}g$ ['seven colors'], has a high recovery rate due to their use of a special medicinal lotion handed down through the generations.

Singh's very descriptive narrative reveals one of the most developed metaphorical extensions used in the hijra community, which is based on the equation of castration with rebirth. This equation has been conceptualized in the hijra community for at least 150 years; a number of early British officials writing on the hijras have noted the belief, among

them R. D. Luard (1836) [as reported by Preston 1987] and R. E. Enthoven (1922: 227).[16]

The hijra who comes into the community as a bride is transformed through this ceremony

into a new-born hijra, with the detachment of her penis paralleling the cutting off of an

umbilical cord. In effect, she is both mother and child, the *bannī* ['bride'] and the *lāl*

['newborn son']; and the terms used in a variety of linguistic and geographical

communities for the emasculation ceremony reflect this idea. Selected terms expressing the

notion of hijra rebirth are included in Table 11 below:

Term	Source	Place	Etymology or related terms	Meaning in community
nirvaan; nirvan; nimni	Lowe 1983:37; Nanda 1990:26-37; York and Prasad 1990	Bombay; unnamed South Indian city; village outside of Bombay	salvation; rebirth (derived from Old Persian *nirmān* 'hermaphrodite', 'half-man half-woman')	n., rite of emasculation; emasculation operation; n., one who has undergone the emasculation operation
lāl	Singh 1982	Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh	gem, ruby; new-born son	n., the 'reborn' hijra (i.e., after castration operation)
chhattee; chhaṭṭhī	Mitra 1983 (from Salunke); Mehta 1945	Baroda and Indore; Gujarat	standard Hindi *chaṭī*; a ceremony celebrated by both Hindus and Muslims that takes place on the sixth day after the birth of a child, in which the mother who has given birth comes out of the pollution chamber; the child is fed milk by another family member as a sign of acceptance	n., celebration that takes place on the sixth day after the castration operation, when the patient is bathed; "this is an occasion for merriment; the *hijras* assemble and eat a mixture of coarse wheat-flour, jaggery, and ghee" (Mitra 1983:24-25)
suvavad	Vyas and Shingala 1987	Baroda	delivery of a child (?)	n., care for postoperative hijra

banni	Singh 1982:26	Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh	bride	n., the hijra about to undergo the emasculation operation
dai ma; dāī	Nanda 1993:26; Singh 1982:25-26; Preston 1987:375 (referring to early 19th century reports)	unnamed South Indian city; Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh; Pune	midwife	n., the hijra who conducts the emasculation operation

TABLE 11. Terms expressing the notion of hijra rebirth

The most commonly reported term for the emasculation operation, as well as for the hijra

who has undergone the operation, is *nirvāṇ* ['salvation'], the use of which is identified by

Nanda (1990:26-37) in her research in South India, by Lowe (1983:37) in her account of

the hijras in Bombay, and by York and Prasad (1990) in their documentary on the hijras in

Bombay and Gujarat. The fact that the hijra who performs the operation is referred to as

dāī, a term that means 'midwife' in standard Hindi, again points to the metaphor of

castration as birth, only that the hijra midwife severs the newborn not from the umbilical

cord, but from the penis. The conceptualization of the hijra doctor as *dāī* was evident even

in the 1830s; Lawrence W. Preston (1987) reports on a number of letters written in 1836

by the Subcollector of Pune that offered this and other "birth" details of the initiation rite:

"All the reported life histories point to the conclusion that castration was a ceremonial

occasion marking the transition from one state of life to another. Although not wishing to

belabour this point without possessing much independent testimony of the *hijḍās*

themselves, it is surely significant that the senior of the community who performed the

operation was called the *dāī*, literally midwife" (374-75).

Moreover, Nirmal Mitra (1983) and Sumant Mehta (1945) report that *chaṭī* is celebrated on the sixth day after the operation, a ceremony perfomed in mainstream culture on the sixth day after childbirth. With this lexical extension, the conflation of the hijra as both mother and child comes full circle. The hijra, as the initiator of her own childbirth, is bathed to symbolize her own exit from the pollution chamber; as a newborn child, she is fed not milk but wheat-flour, jaggery, and ghee, foods thought to increase potency and normally given to a *jaccā* [new mother] in postdelivery confinement.[17] Vyas and Shingala report that the hijras they studied give the castrated hijra a new name on this day as well (1987:91), an action consistent with the local Muslim custom of naming a newborn child on the sixth day after birth. As with the designation of the hijra doctor as *dāī*, the celebration of *chaṭī* has been a hijra tradition for a number of generations, its realization noted as early as 1922 by Enthoven.[18]

CONCLUSIONS

Govind Singh (1982) concludes his chapter on the hijras' conversational patterns by remarking that the hijras' "*alag śabdāvlī*" ['separate vocabulary'] can serve as an introduction into their internal lives; he implies that the study of their language use will be invaluable not only to psychologists but also social scientists:

> The hijras' style of conversing is the strangest of all conversational styles. It encapsulates their whole lifestyle. In Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and South India, hijras all have their separate vocabularies. This is proof of the fact that the hijras have their own separate social environment, and it is this very environment which can serve as an introduction into their internal lives. Living in their language, their circles, and their sadness, we see them bending at the waist and clapping before the world, yet inside they are entangled in peculiar knots. S. V. Rasam once said,

"Research on the hijras is very important to psychology. To understand the relationship between sex and psychology, go among the hijras and study their lives closely" (1982:97). Why don't today's sociologists pay them more attention?

In this chapter, I have merely scratched the surface of a research area that promises to reveal much about how the hijras conceptualize their community. There are a number of specialized vocabulary items clustering around certain semantic fields that I have been unable to address in sufficient detail: e.g., coded lexical items for male, female, and hijra genitalia, terms delineating in-group distinctions like *hijṛā*, *hijṛī*, and *hijṛin*, specialized designations for hijra geographical divisions and households, and even words used to identify different kinds of in-group conversation. While the research conducted on the hijras to date has, for the most part, avoided any detailed discussion of the hijra lexicon, with Govind Singh's popular book providing the most comprehensive account, it is my hope that the semantic extensions identified in this chapter will inspire further cross-linguistic research on the notion of a distinctive hijralect.

NOTES

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1   Nanda also appears to have run across a similar term in her study of the hijras in South India. She quotes one of the hijras as saying, "While I'm playing the dholak, I might sing along with the others, but I never put bells on my ankles [danced]" (1990:102). Although she does not explicitly mention the original vocabulary item used by the hijra in question, her translation points to a comparable semantic extension.

2   What Mehrotra identifies as "the swagger trick," a prescripted performance between silk broker and shopkeeper, invites comparison with the *dhamṛī cīz*, particularly in its staging of a antagonistic hierarchy: "According to this method, the *dalal* is required to assume the role of a superior, and the shopkeeper that of an inferior. The *dalal*, in accordance with this assumed role, behaves in a domineering way and talks in a boastful manner. Entering the shop he snubs and scolds the shopkeeper for one thing or the other in the presence of the customer, who feels happy that the *dalal* is taking his side and fighting for his benefits as a sincere well-wisher. The way he behaves and the hectering tone in which he speaks gives the impression that he were the lord and master of the whole establishment. But the shopkeeper does not mind this feigned snubbing and takes it with the levity it deserves. In the course of his snubbing and scolding, the *dalal* manages to convey his demand to the shopkeeper by using a simple code of word-signals embedded in the scolding language in a natural manner" (1977: 68).

3   The secret number-names used by Banaras silk merchants, for example, include designations for the numbers 1 through 50, as well as for the numbers 60, 70, 80, 90, 100, 1000, 10, 000, and 100,000 (Mehrotra 1977: 79-80). The hijras would have little use for such numerical detail, however, since they deal with much smaller quantities of money and need only to indicate general ballpark figures to the other hijras present.

4   This example if taken from Sulekha, who contextualizes its usage as follows: "For example, if we wanted to indicate to each other in our own language that we had to get 500 rupees from you, then in our own way we'll say something like, *isko cāb rahī hai* ['she's suffering from an itch'] so let's take *pāc baṛ pattā* ['five banyan leaves']."

5   Freed (1963), in a study of kinship relations in the North Indian village Shanti

Nagar, found that the use of kinship terms was extended to almost all members of the

village, with the noted exception of recent immigrants. S. Vatuk (1969a) finds a similar

situation occurring in an urban *mohallā*, in which most of the residents had established

some kind of fictive kinship with the other residents. (It is noteworthy that South Asian

Americans frequently establish fictive kinship in local communities as well.)

6   This seems to be true of the urban residents in the newer *mohallās* studied by Sylvia

Vatuk, at any rate, whose living situation more closely approximates the hijras than that of

the villagers studied by Freed. Vatuk explains: "An analysis of fictive kinship usages in

the urban *mohallā* shows that there exists no internally consistent fictive genealogical

system comparable to that described by Freed and recognized by urban residents to have

existed in their home village" (1969a:255). For a more general discussion on the structure

of Hindi kinship terminology, see S. Vatuk (1969b).

7   Early reports of the hijras affected kinship system include a brief comment made by

Ibbetson, MacLagan, and H. A. Rose in their entry on the "hijṛa" in *A Glossary of the

Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province,* vol. 2: "The eunuchs

of the Punjab have divided the Province into regular beats from which *birt* or dues are

collected. Pánipat contains a typical Hijrá fraternity. In that town they live in a *pakka*

house in the street of the Muhammadan Báolis and, though retaining men's names, dress

like women and call one another by such names as *mási*, 'mother's sister', *phuphi*, 'aunt,'

and so on" (1911:331).

8   In standard Hindi, the term *akhādā* translates more accurately as 'troupe'.

9 *Sampat* ['wealth'], *sut* ['son'], and *suhāg* ['the state of being married', or in other words, 'a husband's long life'] are said to be the three things most desired by women in Hindu culture. A common blessing for elderly women in certain areas of India, for instance, is *būḍh suhāgan ho* ['may you become old with your husband']. The converse of this blessing, which translates into English roughly as 'may you be a widow tomorrow', is considered to be a curse. The term *suhāg*, considered a blessing, refers to the married status of a woman; the term *rānd*, considered a curse, refers to the widowed status of a woman; and the term *duhāg*, considered bad luck, refers to the state of a woman being separated from her husband.

10 This transferral is perhaps not so surprising, given the fact that the guru is thought to be the third "god" living on earth in Indian culture, next to one's own mother and father. Consider the Sanskrit prayer *mātṛī devo bhav, pitṛī devo bhav, ācārya devo bhav* ['May you become one whose mother is like a god; may you become one whose father is like a god; may you become one whose guru is like a god'].

11 Sylvia Vatuk quotes one of her residents as explaining: "We don't think it is proper to call people by name, so in the *mohallā* we call everyone by some kin term. We can use terms appropriate to the *sasurāl* [husband's village] or to the *pīhar* [woman's natal village]. All of us are newcomers here, so if we choose we can establish *pīhar* kinship between us. For example, our tenants are Banias. When they moved here she said to me, 'Let us make *pīhar* kinship, not sasurāl kinship.' So we call each other *bahenjī* (eZ) and call each other's husbands *jījājī* (ZH). Our children call them *mausī* and *mausā* and their children call us the same" (1969a:266). (This statement, of course, illustrates a woman's viewpoint; a man can also establish fictive kinship, which will then be extended.)

12   Although Nanda does not discuss the in-law parallel directly, she succinctly explains how the hijras' extended network promotes geographic mobility: "These social networks are the foundation for the geographic mobility that is so characteristic in the hijra community, especially among is younger members, and so useful as an element of economic adaptation. This ever-expanding network of fictive kin permits a hijra to move from place to place, because it provides a welcoming environment and a base from which to earn a living wherever she goes" (1990:47).

13   Nanda also notes that a "guru's 'sister' becomes an 'aunty'" (1990:47) in the south Indian city she studied, although she does not mention any kind of lexical distinction made between older and younger *gurubhāī.*

14   Saksena (1990) explains, "When one hijra wants to leave her guru and live with another guru, the second guru gives the first guru a fairly good amount of money, which they call *toṛ*" (20 [translated from the original Hindi]). Nanda describes this buying and selling process in some detail (1990:43-45), referring to the payment made by the second guru as the "initiation fee." The hijras she studied in South India apparently refer to the initiation fee more practically as *daṇḍ* ['fine'] (43).

15   Compare the occurrence of the term *lāl* in the birth blessings quoted earlier in this chapter in the section on the hijra clap (from Singh 1982:99):

> *terā lāl jiye* [one clap]
> 'May your son have a long life!'
>
> *terā lāl dūdhō nahāye* [one clap]
> 'May your son be bathed with milk!'

terā lāl sau baras jiye [one clap]
'May your son live for a hundred years!'

16   In his entry on the *pavaya* (a synonym for *hijra* used primarily in Gujarat) for the *Tribes and Castes of Bombay*, Enthoven (1901:227) explains: "Behind a screen set up for the purpose the cutting is performed with a razor by the person himself without any assistance. This is held to correspond to a birth ceremony which makes the patient a member of the caste."

17   This kind of food is referred to as *pāyar* in Western Uttar Pradesh.

18   According to Enthoven (1922:v.3,227): "On the 6th day after the operation, coarse wheat flour mixed with mollasses and clarified butter is distributed among the caste people."

CHAPTER 7

Concluding Remarks

हिजड़े के यहाँ बेटा हुआ है

A hijra here has had a child!

-Hindi proverb

Throughout the pages of this dissertation, we have seen a variety of different English terms used to identify the hijra in Indian, European, and American scholarship. While contemporary sociologists and journalists living in India and writing in English generally refer to the hijras as "eunuchs"[1] , European and American researchers refer to them variously as "transvestites" (e.g., Freeman 1979; Preston 1987; Ross 1968), "an institutionalized third gender role" (Bullough and Bullough 1993; Nanda 1985; 1990), "hermaphrodites" (Opler 1960; Ross 1968), "passive homosexuals" (Carstairs 1956), and "male prostitutes" (Carstairs 1956). The inconsistency of these translations underscores the inherent difficulty of translating the concept *hijṛā* into western scholarship.

A closer look at portrayals of the hijras by South Asian researchers writing in English reveals many more terms besides that of "eunuch," among them "abominable aberrations" (Raghuramaiah 1991), "ambiguous sex" (Mohan 1979), "hermaphrodites" (Mohan 1979; Pimpley and Sharma 1985; Sethi 1970; K. Singh 1956; Srinivas 1976), "castrated human male" (Mohan 1979), "hermaphrodite prostitutes" (Sanghvi 1984), "labelled deviants" (Sharma 1989), "male-homosexual transvestites" (Rao 1955), "sex perverted male, castrated or uncastrated" (Sinha 1967), "sexo-aesthetic inverts coupled with

homosexual habits" (Sinha 1967), "sexual inverts" (Rao 1955), and "third sex" (Mondal 1989). The diversity of these designations, which are in many ways irreconcilable, would indicate that India has also had difficulty interpreting the notion of hijrahood during the past forty years. While scholars like Satish Kumar Sharma (1984:388) have argued that the hijras would be much better off if they were "as in the west, accepted either as male or female," others have called directly for rehabilitation, such as Chander Mohan (1987:i) when he concludes his article with the blunt refrain: "Can we rehabilitate these people whom we treat as outcastes?" It is indisputable that the status of the hijras in Indian society was adversely affected by British colonialism, which Lawrence Preston (1987) and Alyssa Ayres (1992) have so admirably argued. But this knowledge does little to alter the contemporary reality of hijras living in India now, who speak out against an attitude that is now native.

In the preceding chapters, we have seen how the hijras use language to reclaim space in a landscape that has denied their integration. Not only do the hijras use obscenity as a means of gaining a livelihood, employing invectives that shame their listeners into giving them alms (Chapter 5), they also alter the semantics of mainstream vocabulary in a way that defines them as a self-sufficient, even childbearing, community (Chapter 6). Both of these strategies are made possible by their own ambiguous position with respect to femininity and masculinity, a status that itself encourages innovative subversions of linguistic ideologies associated with either side of the gender divide. Their alternating use of feminine and masculine verbal morphology is a case in point; the hijras switch between feminine and masculine reference in a way that affirms the societal gendering of power and solidarity while simultaneously subverting it (Chapter 3). Yet this referential code-switching is provoked by temporal considerations as well; the hijras, raised as boys before appropriating women's dress, gesture, and speech, also cross the linguistic divide as a means of expressing their own gender discontinuity (Chapter 4).

For the hijra, then, who is either born as an intersexed infant or undergoes castration in order to adopt the hijra lifestyle, it is the body itself which determines her ambiguously situated linguistic position, a body that has been interpreted as something outside and therefore inferior to the female/male dichotomy. Because the hijras have a kind of between-sex status in contemporary India, their very existence serves as a theoretical challenge to previous characterizations of women's speech and men's speech as discursive styles indexically derived from the sex of the speaker. The hijra, as an intersexed entity synchronically as well as diachronically, has a privileged position with respect to the linguistic gender system, her experiences on both sides of the gender divide allowing for strategies of expression unavailable to the monosexed individual.

In conclusion, I suggest that the gendered negotiations discussed in the chapters of this dissertation, although perhaps particularly overt in the Hindi-speaking hijra community, are not unique to third sex identities; rather, women and men of all communities manipulate cultural expectations of femininity and masculinity in order to establish varying positions of solidarity and power. That speaking styles recognized culturally as "women's speech" or "men's speech" are not determined by the sex of the speaker, but rather constructed collaboratively in social interaction, is a point made salient by linguists working at the intersection of linguistics and queer theory: Rusty Barret (1995, 1996) in his exposition of discursive style-shifting among a community of African American drag queens; Rudi Gaudio (1996) in his discussions of the appropriation of feminine speech styles by Hausa-speaking 'yan daudu; Naoko Ogawa and Janet Shibamoto Smith (1996) in their work on appropriations of Japanese "women's language" by gay men in Tokyo and Osaka; and Anna Livia (1995, 1996) in her articles on the varying uses made of the French linguistic gender system by male-to-female transsexuals, hermaphrodites, and gay drag queens.

In the interactions reported in these articles, which take place within four very different linguistic communities on four separate continents, the speech ideologically

associated with masculinity and femininity, and indeed sometimes the linguistic gender

system itself, is used to express much more than mere gender differentiation. Linguistic

gender, in its close association with one of the most basic divisions in social organization,

is used as a tool for evoking a wide range of societal discourses on power and solidarity,

difference and dominance.

NOTES

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1   Writers who haver referred to the hijras as "eunuchs" include Bobb and Patel 1982;

Gautam and Shah 1992; Lakshmi and Kumar; Mitra 1984; Mohan 1979; Mondal 1989;

Patel 1983, 1988; Raghuramaiah 1991; Sayani 1986; Sethi 1970; Sharma 1984; Shetty

1990; Sinha 1967; and Vyas and Shingala 1987.

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Appendix A

A CONVERSATION WITH SULEKHA

(Translation into English from the original Hindi)

The following tape-recorded conversation took place on a Sunday afternoon in the main room of Sulekha's own home during April of 1993. Sulekha lives in a small village outside of Banaras, which takes approximately an hour to get to by local transportation. The participants in this conversation are Sulekha (labeled as 'S' in the text), Veronica and myself (whom I have labeled jointly as 'A' in the text for ease of transcription), and our Hindi-speaking research assistant Vinita (labeled as 'B' in the text). Vinita frequently provokes Sulekha in the interview by asking questions of a very personal nature; her insistence on pursuing such topics, however, often leads to lively discussion. We first met Sulekha while visiting Megha in Banaras. Apparently angered by Megha's answers to our questions, Sulekha had insisted that we visit her in her own village and get the "real truth." When we arrived at her house, Sulekha's male partner greeted us and left. The four of us then sat down on a cot in the main room, where the following conversation took place. Sulekha was dressed in a casual *sārī* during the conversation transcribed here, but later put on a more colorful *sārī* when she asked us to photograph her.

A: *How many hijras live in Banāras, in your opinion?*

S: I'd say that there are at least 150 in Banāras.

A: *And how many are there in Rāmnager?*

S: There are about three to four groups in Rāmnager as well. There's a *mālik* ['master'] over there who has *celās* ['disciples'], so now there are about five or six groups.

A: *How many groups are in Banāras?*

S: There are about four or five separate groups in Banāras. There's another group in Lohatā, another one in Durgā Jī, and another one in Lahurābīr. You can get there by bus.

A: *Is that in Golgaḍḍā?*

S: Yeah, it's near Golgaḍḍā.

A: *We've heard that Banāras is famous for its hijras. Is that true?*

S: No, that's not true. Banāras isn't especially famous. Hijras live everywhere--they live in Delhi, in Punjab, in Bombay, in Calcutta, and they also live in Banāras. So it's not right to say that Banāras is famous for hijras, because hijras live everywhere.

A: *How do you make your groups?*

S: Well, what those other people told you just isn't true. Originally, hijras had their own profession. Originally, Māī Muliyā[1] lived where the hijras live nowadays in Banāras, and she was a hijra by birth. Those people held her in high esteem. Māī Muliyā was the first hijra ever by birth in Banāras. She's our Devī, so of course I worship her.[2]

A: *They were telling us that they worshipped some Devī from a place called Bachar?*

S: Yeah, the devotees I'm talking about came from there--from the Devī of Bachar-- and some of those devotees became hijras. There are two types of hijras, you know. First, there are those who are hijras by birth. But nowadays we've become a new world; everything is becoming new. People have operations. When their hands get cut off, they get new ones made. Women are being turned into men and men are being turned into women. You've heard of that, right? Hijras are made into hijras in the very same way. Even men are made into hijras.

B: *But not all people in your group want to have the operation. There are some who don't, right?*

S: Yes, yes, a lot of people come into the profession because they're interested in singing and dancing--they have a special talent for it, they can sway their hips this way and that way--or because they really want to become hijras. These are the ones who are made into hijras. But the ones who are hijras by birth, they're something altogether different. For example, you heard about the hijra in Maū who is a hijra by birth--who adopted a child who also became a hijra? But many people become a hijra when they're ten years old, many when they're twenty years old, many when they're thirty-five years old. People can become hijras at any age, after all. But anybody can wear a *sārī* and blouse--anybody can sing and dance. I mean, how

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[1]   Māī Muliyā translates literally into English as 'original woman' and means 'mother'.

[2]   Sulekha was the only one of the hijras we spoke with in Banaras who mentioned a Devī named Māī Muliyā. In this passage, she seems to equate Māī Muliyā with the hijra goddess Becrā Mātā (i.e. "the Devī of Bachar"), although she later explains on page 10 of the interview that the hijra goddess is not Becrā Mātā, but rather Binasarā Devī. Unfortunately, I failed to notice this discrepancy until after I returned home to the United States and studied the transcript in more detail, so I was unable to ask her to clarify these distinctions.

can you tell if someone is a hijra, anyway? How can you tell what someone is-- whether he's a man or not? So everybody wears a *sārī* when they dance. Now among those who dance and sing and dress up like hijras and put on eye make-up, there are hijras too. But those who don't want to be counted among hijras, who consider this profession bad, they just dance and sing. Some people think that the hijra's work is good; others think that it's bad. Some people even worship this work and think that hijras, since they're neither men nor women, are greater even than the gods--they think that hijras should be given something. But some people consider the hijras to be bad--like the Muslims for example. Muslims will never give to Hindus. If a hijra goes to their door, then for forty days they'll say, "Our door has become polluted!"

A: *So what kind of Muslim hijras live over there?*

S: Yeah, that too. I'll tell you that too.

A: *Because Channu and the others who live there are Muslim, right?*

S: Yes, Channu is. That Channu who lives in Bazarḍīhā is a man. He's not a hijra. ... He's really old --he's the chief master over there. He's the chief master over there in Bazarḍīhā. All of the ones under Channū are men, all of them who come and go over there. They wear *kurtās* and *luṅgīs*, but when they dance they wear *sāṛīs*. Everybody knows it, so what's the use of my saying so?

B: *But haven't they all had operations?*

S: No.

B: *Nothing at all?*

S: No.

B: *So they're just that way?*

S: Yes.

B: *Oh! Really?*

S: How can I say anything about them? If I say anything, they'd of course just contradict me anyway.

B: *Okay, so that old man is Channi's guru bhai ?*

S: If I'd give anything away, then I'd be like a small mouth with big talk.[3] I have to live in this community, after all. They'd all hit me, beat me up, cut my hair.

B: *They'd cut your hair too?*

S: Oh yes! And then where would I go? What would I eat? What would I drink? Our profession is such that anyone who comes into it--anyone who leaves his mother and father--has to follow through with it. Whether we do so by dying or by living, we have to follow through. If I were to go against the hijra's rules, if I didn't listen to what they told me, then of course they'd beat me up. They could also kick me out of their group. How would I eat on my own? I don't have the option of going home anymore. Our faces have been blackened.[4] What would I take home with me? At least here we serve society peacefully--we dance, we sing. How could I possibly go back to a house which has two respectable brothers and an honorable family?

B: *Where are you in your family with respect to your brothers and sisters?*

S: I'm number three, after two brothers and one sister. Did you understand everything I said?

B: *Yeah, we understood completely.*

S: Have I lied to you?

B: *No.*

S: I know your name. If you tell other people about our conversation, I'll come to your house. You live in that house with the doctor, right?

B: *No, no, I live further down the alley. But nothing's going to happen to you. We're doing this work now because we're leaving Banāras in a month. And anyway, we don't gossip like that.*

A: *So in Banāras, are there differences from group to group?*

S: No, they're all the same. They all have the same way of living. The same way of living, working, dancing, singing, wandering around, and so on. All of the groups are the same. There aren't any differences from group to group.

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3   The expression Sulekha uses here is *maĩ choṭe mũh barī bāt*, which translates roughly as, 'I [would be like] a small mouth with big talk'.

4   Sulekha uses the expression *ham log ke mũh mẽ karkhā putā gayā hai*, which is translated literally as 'black has been soot-plastered on the faces of us people'.

A: *But they differ in number, right?*

S: Yeah, they differ in number. In some groups, for instance, there are ten people, in some four, in some only two. And I'm all alone, for example. So some have four, some have ten, some have five, and so on and so forth.

A: *Do the different groups converse with each another? Are all of them in close contact with each other?*

S: Yeah, we're in contact with each other. Sometimes we have fights, especially if a hijra of one group moves to another group, or if a hijra of another group moves into that group. Then of course there'll be a quarrel, "Why have you kept the *celā* ['disciple'] of my house? Why did you take over the *murg* ['cock', 'hen'] of our house?" Then all the hijras sit down together and call a *pancāyat* ['council']. Then they set down restrictions, "I won't destroy your house if you don't destroy our house. If I die of hunger, you'll die of hunger too. You might take my *cela* today, but tomorrow our strength will increase too." Because of these kinds of conflicts, the hijras control this kind of behavior. There are so many hijras in Banāras who can tell you the same kinds of things I'm telling you. I'm just giving you one example. What can we possibly do alone? We're bound to each other. There are restrictions that keep me from going alone to dance and sing, and restrictions that keep others from being considered a part of my group. Each group has its own rules and regulations. If I go to their group or if they come to my group, there'll be another fine.

A: *Are there a lot of hijras who live alone?*

S: Yes, yes, a lot of hijras live alone.

A: *Why do they live alone? Why don't they live with a group?*

S: Well, those who can afford it live alone. Or if they establish new relationships, they can live in 2s or 3s. I live in the village, for example, but there's no *bāzār* ['market'] here like in the city. Where can you get sweets or *pakauṛās* ['fried vegetables']? There's nothing for you here. Where can you go see movies or go dancing? So hijras don't really like to wander around in the village. I'm not lying, you know. In the city you can get a rickshaw, you can go to movies, you can wander around. People are coming and going all the time on the streets. But what's there to do here in the village? You just sit around the house. So nobody lives in the village; they live in the city. Nobody likes to live in the village. Where can you have contact with people in the village? That's why our people are few in the village; you can only get 25 to 50 rupees in the village, but in the city you can get 500 rupees, or at least 200 to 250.

B: *But even in the city they don't give that much anymore, right?*

S: Oh, sure they do, they do! In the city they'll give up to 5,000 rupees, or sometimes up to 2,000 rupees. And transportation is better in the city since you can go by rickshaw. You can go to all sorts of neighborhoods in the city; you can drive around for the whole day. But what can you do in the village? If I dance and sing in the city, by the evening I've earned 250 to 300 rupees. But who wants to walk a mile on foot in the village--a mile on foot to get there and a mile on foot to get back? In the city you can travel back and forth with rickshaws, so of course everybody prefers the city.

A: *Are there any hijras in Banāras who are really famous?*

S: Sure, I've already told you about that.

B: *Which group?*

S: First of all Channu, then Idu, and after that Chanda.[5]

B: *Where do they all live?*

S: Haven't I already told you? Chanda lives near Golgaḍḍā. And I told you about Idu. At first she was living close to Aurangābād and then she sold her household wares and moved to Lohatā.

A: *Why are those people so famous?*

S: As far as Banāras is concerned, those people were the first people who were in Banāras a long, long time ago. Those people were here, they were working, they were eating. And from then on they kept on making any other hijras who came [to Banāras] their own hijras. That one had her *celā*, that one had her *celā*, that one had her *celā*, that one had her *celā*, one right after the other, they kept on coming. Then they became a *nān[a]* ['maternal grandfather'] *guru*, or they became a *dād[ā]* ['paternal grandfather'] *guru*--like that. We have a sort of household[6] here. We have a different way of talking. Yes, like *celā* ['disciple'], *nātī* ['grandson'], *parnātī* ['great grandson']--you know, everybody says these [words]. Among us it's *celā*,

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5   All of these names are nicknames. Idu is a Muslim name, while Channu and Chanda are primarily Hindu names. Chanda, meaning 'moon', is popular among both women and men. The name Channu is derived from Chanda; Punjabi speakers often address their lover by this name.

6   It is interesting to note that Sulekha refers to the hijra household (or lineage) as a *kotha* ['room'], a term frequently used by Hindi speakers in reference to a prostitute's room. When Madan compares the lifestyle of hijras with that of prostitutes in Appendix E, for instance, she continuously identifies the prostitute as one who "sits on a *kothā*."

it's *dād[ā] guru*, it's *pardād[ā]* ['paternal great grandfather'] *guru*, it's *maīyā* ['mother']--it's like that, that's how we address someone in our group who's elderly. Now here I'm the *mālkin* ['head of household']. Whoever comes here will become my *celā*. Whenever another one comes, I'll make him my *celā*'s *celā* and then become the *dādī*. That way my name will surely continue, because I'll have become elderly. That's how I'll have a name when I've become elderly. I'll have a name among those people. [They'll say], "It's the *mālkin*!"

B: *You say that you live alone, so why aren't you with a group?*

S: But I am with a group!

A: *So you dance and sing with a group?*

S: Sure, everything! I just bought my own house and live alone. I've registered my house here in my name alone, so I'm it's *mālik* ['master'] and I live in it. So four or five people will come to my house, they'll dance, take their share, and leave. Those who want to stay with me stay, those who don't want to stay with me leave. I used to live in Banāras myself but the group there got too big, so I left it and came here. Then that group had one less person. When people join a group there may be as many as ten, but after they go there may be as few as one.

A: *How many hijras are in your group?*

S: In my group all the hijra-ish people are old. My guru is still alive, she's 85 years old now.

A: *Who's your guru?*

S: She lives over in Raniyā, and she's very, very old. She lives far from here; it costs a rupee to get there. She's totally old. There's another one [in my group] who is her *guru-bhāī* ['fellow disciple'],[7] and then I have my own *guru-bhāī*s too, who are younger than I am. They also visit me occasionally.

A: *So what are all of their ages? Who's the youngest?*

S: There's one in our group who's the youngest--she's the youngest of all. Her age is about 18 or so. Another one is 20 years old, another one is 25 years old. I'm 38 years old.

A: *Are all of them from different castes?*

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7   The term *guru-bhāī*, which translates literally as 'guru-brother', is used for a person who has the same guru as the referent in question.

S: Yeah, they all belong to different castes. Some are *sonār* ['goldsmiths'], some are *kumhār* ['porters'], some are Muslims, and some are *camār* ['leather workers'].

B: *If there are Muslims in your group, do you share meals with them and interact with them?*

S: No, no, but that kind of thing is up to one's own conscious. Whoever's conscious lets him will eat with Muslims. Whoever's conscious won't let him, won't eat with them. It's up to the individual. I'm Hindu so I do the work of Hindus, but whoever is Muslim does the work of Muslims. He fulfills his own *dharm* faithfully. I fulfill my own *dharm* faithfully. As far as eating and drinking is concerned, people nowadays even go and eat with *dom-camār* ['corpse burners' and 'shoe-makers']! After all, they're just hijras. Anybody who wants can join [the hijras]--a *camār* can join, a *dom* can join, a *mushar* can join, a *khaṭīk* ['basket weaver'] can join, anybody can join. They're all made equal. Those people who belong to higher castes--who are Pandits or Brahmans or *halvāī* ['sweet-makers'], those people who can eat and drink what we give them--they're fine. But the ones who are *camār*, *mushar*, or *khaṭīk*, they all convert to Islam. All of them convert to one religion. To get initiated into Islam, they have to recite the Koran. Then they become one religion.[8]

B: *The lower castes?*

S: Yes.

A: *Do you all worship the same Devīs ['goddesses'] and Devtās ['gods']?*

S: No, no, no, a Muslim will worship in the Muslim way, a Hindu will worship Hindu *Devīs* ['goddesses'] and *Devtās* ['gods'].

A: *Is there a special hijra Devī?*

B: *We heard that hijras worshipped a Devī from the Gujarat.*

S: Yes, yes, didn't I already tell you? Māī Mauliyā ['the original mother'] and--oh look, I forgot her name.

B: *Is it Bahucarī Devī?*

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[8] In this passage, Sulekha implies that Hindu hijras are superior to Muslim hijras because they maintain caste distinctions. When she repeatedly emphasizes the *ek dharm* ['one religion'], she underscores the fact that converted hijras give up the caste hierarchy, a decision which she, as a child of a comparatively well-situated family, does not find particularly desirable.

S: No, no, wait--it's Binasarā Devī.

B: *And she's Muslim?*

S: No, no, she's Hindu! Originally all hijras were Hindu, but nowadays all of these lower caste hijras have converted to Islam. They're even trying to convert Hindus to Islam in order to increase their numbers. If we die, you know, we'll be cremated, and once we're cremated that's the end of our name. Then it'll be over completely-- finished. But if you become a Muslim, you'll get thrown in a graveyard, and after you're thrown there, you'll become famous--you'll become immortal. Because the people will ask, "Whose grave is this?" And someone will say, "It's the grave of so and so. This grave belongs to the such and such land of the so and so family," and all that. But if you're Hindu, then once you're cremated it's all over with.

A: *Do the Muslims also worship Binasarā Devī?*

S: Oh yes, the Muslims worship her too because she's the Devī of the hijras.[9]

A: *Do the people in your group come from different places?*

S: Oh yes. The hijras come from all over, and they go everywhere too. Some go from here to there, some go from there to here. If I want to, I can go to Bombay and stay there. I can wander around there, I can become a *celā* in Bombay, I can even live in Bombay. And if somebody comes here, they can live here. There are no restrictions on where the hijras can go.

A: *So are there any groups which have children?*

S: Yes, in Maū.

B: *Oh right, in that Maū place. Do you mean the inspector's son?*

A: *So Megha was right about that?*

S: Yes, yes.

A: *Does your group sing and dance only in _this_ area?*

S: Yes, our areas are divided.

B: *Which is your area?*

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[9] Again, Sulekha is the only hijra we spoke with who mentioned Binasarā Devī; her insistence that Binasarā , not Becrā Mātā, is the *devī* of the hijras, is inconsistent with what all of the other hijras told us. See Footnote 2.

S: Our area borders on Mizarpur and goes to Koṛiyā Ballāṭ, because the entire area comes under one *thāṇā* ['police district'] called Avalhār Thāṇā.[10] Other groups work in the city *thāṇās*. A third group works in Cunār Thāṇā. A fourth group works in Rāmnagar Thāṇā. That's how we divide our areas. Everybody agrees to accept these divisions. Mugalsarāy has its own *thāṇā* too.

A: *So you never go to the other areas?*

S: No, no, I'll go and dance in other places. I'll work there. I just can't be the *malik* ['master'] of another area. I'm the *malik* of this area only--only this area, this *thāṇā*. So since that person works in another area and that person works in a third area, we can come and go as we please, we can wander around. I can do everything I want, I just can't <u>live</u> in another area.

A: *How old do you have to be to join the group?*

S: It's not fixed. It's not fixed. Someone might be 20 years old, someone might be 15 years old, someone might be 30 years old. But nobody says, "I came here in childhood"--like Megha was telling you, "I came in in childhood." That's wrong.

A: *At ten years old?*

S: That's wrong.

A: *When do people usually come here then?*

S: When someone comes to consciousness. When a man comes to the realization, "I have a talent for dancing and singing, and now rumours are spreading that I've turned out to be a *jankhā*."[11]

A: *So when did Megha come here?*

S: She was 16 or 17 years old--18 years old.

A: *So how did she come here?*

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[10]   Municiple areas in Uttar Pradesh are frequently divided up according to police jurisdiction, and are referred to as *thāṇās*, or 'police stations'. Other geographical divisions include *paragnas* (administrative subdivisions comprising a number of villages), and *tahsīls* (administrative sub-divisions of a district). Normally, three to four *thāṇās* constitute a *paragna*.

[11]   The term *jankhā* is frequently used in reference to men who are comparatively effeminate.

S: She was telling lies, you know. He was a dancer and a singer. But I came here the exact same way, so why should I just talk about him? When I was at home, I danced at the *bazār* ['market']. I danced in a *maṇḍlī* ['troupe'].

A: *Did the members of your household give you permission to dance?*

S: No, I was dancing secretly. Then people started to talk, "Hey! He's turned out to be a *nacaniyā̃* ['little dancer']!"[12]

A: *Then how were you allowed to go to a maṇḍlī?*

S: There were all these *maṇḍlī* people in my village playing instruments.

A: *Didn't they forbid it?*

S: Yes, they forbade it. They forbade it. I went secretly but I was caught a number of times and was beaten. Sometimes they cut my hair. But of course I kept on dancing. I wouldn't listen to them. Finally, I left home and began to dance with the hijras. I mean, a girl isn't born a prostitute, is she?

A: *Not at all.*

S: So how does she become one? She falls in love with someone, he makes her elope with him, and then he leaves her. Then what can she do? The honor of her father and mother is already ruined, so how can she go home again? She can't go home because they'll think of her as a prostitute. So she goes to the street of the prostitutes and is called a prostitute. She's born a prostitute only at the home of prostitutes; she becomes a prostitute only when she's with other men. So it's the same way with hijras. Those who come and join the hijras are the sons of great families. But they don't go home again in order to save their mother's and father's honor. Take my case, for example. I have a good household. One of my brothers is a big boss in a bank. There are servants in our household, there's a shop-- everything is there.

A: *So the people from your family don't come to see you?*

S: The people from my household did come here, but I chased them away. I said, "Now I've become a hijrin. I've joined the hijras. If I'll go back to your house, you'll lose your respect because of me, too. They'll say, 'But he had a brother who

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12 When a Hindi speaker refers to another man with the masculine term *nacaniyā̃*, it is usually meant as derogatory, implying that the referent in question is 'unnaturally' effeminate. The term is a double diminutive; it is derived from the feminine noun *nacnī* 'dancer', which is itself derived from the masculine *nacnā*.

became a hijrin! He became a hijra! What a dishonorable thing! Isn't it a matter of shame!'"

A: *How many people are doing business with your family?*

S: There are a lot.

A: *But you could have worked there too, right?*

S: Our household is very honorable. I'd give up my life before I'd sacrifice my family's respect. What good is it if ten people lose their honor because of one person?[13]

B: *But why don't you just go visit them secretly? Nobody would see you.*

S: What do you mean nobody would see me? If I went home, the neighbors would surely know!

B: *No, I mean, your neighbors didn't know you were a hijra before you came here right?*

S: No, no, they didn't know.

B: *So okay, your family members knew, your mother and father knew, but you could have still helped your family in their business--in the sweets business. You could have helped your father, right?*

S: Yeah, you're right. I could work there, I could come and go there, it's true. But I don't want to. If I were to earn money and send it home, what would happen to me when I got old? You should save your money, build a house for yourself, then it'll be useful to you in your old age. As far as my own family is concerned, they have their own house. There's a brother at home who's a *mālik*. He has fields there that he can cultivate, but of course I won't get any share from that. It's all settled, as far as they're concerned. So I want to do something for myself, too. And secondly, it's a matter of dishonor. If I were to go back after five or six years, it'd be, "He's come, he's come, he's come, he's come, he's come!"

B: *How many years ago did you come here?*

S: I came here about 12 years ago.

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[13] Compare the *manusmṛitī* quotation: *tyajekam kulasyārthe* ['for the welfare of the family, let one be sacrificed'].

B: *Is your group like a family then? Like, someone is called cācī ['paternal uncle's wife'], someone is called nānā ['maternal grandfather']?*

S: Yes, yes, yes, haven't I already told you? The one who is oldest is called the *guru*, and the one who is younger is called the *celā*. Then, of course, if his *celā* gets a *celā*, he's called a *nātī* ['daughter's son'] *celā*, or he's called a *potī* ['son's daughter] *celā*. Some of us also establish *bahan* ['sister'] relationships, so in this group I became a *bahan*. Then of course, if I accept someone as my *biṭiyā* ['daughter'], I'll become her *mammī* ['mom'] and she'll become my *biṭiyā*. If during this time I tie a *rākhī* ['sacred thread'][14] to some man's wrist, then he'll become my *bhāī* ['brother']. That's how it's done. It's just like all the doll-games that children play. Basically, hijras play these games with each other too. That's how we're related to each other-- in these kinds of games. That's how we complete our kinship circles. And we carry them out faithfully.

A: *What's your daily routine?*

S: What else is there for me to do besides dancing and singing? I'll dance one day, then I won't dance for four days. And then I'll feel scared, so I'll go to Banāras. Then I'll go to Mugalsarāy, or I'll go somewhere else outside this area. I'll go to Sultānpur; say. I'll go wherever I feel like. I'll go wherever I want to go.

B: *Why do you visit Megha if you had a fight with her? Are you on good relations again?*

S: What's unity among the hijras? Suppose hijras are fighting with each other, suppose there's a quarrel among them. Then they'll sit and decide to punish you 2,000 rupees, or 5,000, 8,000, 10,000 rupees, and so on and so on. They'll decide on a fine. If I give them the money, we'll be united again. If I don't give them the money, they'll hit me, beat me up, and kick me out. But what would I be able to do alone in my cottage?

A: *So do you dance everyday?*

S: I can dance everyday or I can choose not to do so. It's up to me.

A: *So do you just dance and sing, or do you also tell stories, like in folk-dramas?*

S: Yes, yes, we sing *sohar* ['birth songs']!

B: *No, no, I mean, do you sometimes do things like nauṭaṅkī ['folk dramas']?*

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[14] During the *rakṣā bandhan* festival, a woman will tie a *rākhī*, or sacred thread, onto the wrist of a brother who promises her long-life protection.

S: Well, basically the people who do that join a *maṇḍlī*. There'll be a *nauṭaṅkī* in some city and they'll go there. There are two types of hijras, you know. The ones who can sing and dance--they'll sing film songs, they'll sing *kavvālī* songs, they'll sing *gazals*, they'll sing *dādarā ṭhumrī*--they can sing all of those. So if somebody knows all of those things, they might decide to join *nauṭaṅkī*, just like anybody else. But if they just sound like a buffalo, like "HO HO!," then who's going to like that? But if someone has a good voice--he sounds good, he sings good--then everybody will like him. And that's why I dance.

A: *So how old were you when you found out that you were a hijra?*

S: I was grown-up.[15] I came here when I was 15 or 16. Or maybe 17.

B: *No, no, I'm not asking about when you came here, but about when you found out that you were a hijra.*

S: I came to know that I was a hijra when I was very small.

B: *How small?*

S: After I was seven or eight years old.

B: *How did you find out?*

S: Everybody was saying, "He's a hijra, he's a hijra, he's a hijra!"

B: *How were you acting? How did people come to know that you were a hijra?*

S: No, no, I wasn't doing anything. You just figure it out on your own--whether someone is a man or a woman or a hijra or a hijrin.

B: *Were you dressing like a girl then?*

S: Sometimes I dressed like a boy, sometimes I dressed like a girl. It depended on the situation.

A: *Did they call you by a boy's name?*

S: Yes, Anil Kumar.

A: *So how did you realize that you were a hijra--was it physical or mental or emotional? What was it?*

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15   Sulekha uses the word *sayānā* here, which can be translated variously as 'grown up', 'clever', 'cunning', or 'knowledgeable'.

S: It was neither emotional nor mental. I just saw with my own eyes that I was a hijra. And everybody said, "He's a hijra. He's a hijra!"

A: *So when you found out, did you talk to your family or friends about it?*

S: [nods]

A: *So how was it?*

S: There were a few boys at my school who I used to study with. When I sat with them, they used to tell me that I was a hijra. Then they started telling other people, "It's a hijra! It's a hijra! Don't sit near him! Sit separately!" If I sat with the girls, the girls would say, "It's a hijra! It's a hijra! Don't sit near him! Sit separately!" So I felt very ashamed. I thought, "How is it that I've become a hijra? The girls don't talk to me; the boys don't talk to me. What terrible thing has happened to me?" I wanted to go and play with them, but nobody wanted to play with me. So life was going like that. Nobody would help me.

B: *Nobody would help you?*

S: Who would help me with a problem like this one? I'd play with anyone who felt at ease with me--whether he was a boy or a girl. If nobody played with me, then my sisters and brothers would play with me. All of my brothers and sisters played together in the household.

B: *So is that why you left home?*

S: Haven't I already told you all that? Number one, I was a hijra. Number two, it was a dishonor for my family. And number three, our family is very high-class. For all of these reasons, I started to dance and sing. And when I started to dance and sing, my heart grew. It's like this. When you start to wear a *sārī* and dance and sing before the public, your mind becomes something altogether different. It's just like the tooth of an elephant.[16] Once it has broken the skin, even if it wants to go back inside, it can't go back inside. The hijras are just like that. If a hijra comes here and

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[16] Compare the Hindi proverb:

hāthī ke dā̃t
khāne ke aur
dikhāne ke aur

The teeth of an elephant:
One for eating,
Another for showing.

begins to dance and sing, no matter how much you try to catch him and put him back in the home, his heart won't allow it. He won't feel at home. Even if you give him a golden throne, he won't be able to sit on it.

A: *Did you know any other hijras before you joined the community?*

S: Yes, yes, I knew a lot of them. I knew the hijras from Calcutta. A hijra used to come and go around where my family lives. Nowadays, who <u>doesn't</u> know hijras? Everybody knows hijras.

B: *When did you go to Calcutta?*

S: I dance and sang in Calcutta, but I was given a lot of trouble there. So when a lot of the hijras fled from there, I left too. And then I started to live in Paṭnā in Bihār. But I was given the same kind of trouble there, so I fled and went to Gayā. When I was given trouble there too, I went to Mugalsarāy, and then I came to Banāras. When I came to Banāras, I was living in [Megha's] house. But there was a lot of bickering there too, so I left. I'm a very straightforward person, you know, but they're very cunning over there. That's why they started to quarrel, so I ran away from there and went to Mugalsarāy again. Finally, I came to this place. There was a hijra here who died. And after he died this place was vacant, so I came here and started to work secretly. But then the other hijras caught me, "Why are you working in our area secretly? Let's go and get her!" So I brought all the hijras together and apologized to them properly, and I paid them 4,000 rupees as a fine. Because our people have these kinds of punishments, you know. We have different code words. We have a different language. We used that language to make a truce. Then I became a hijra and I sat down with them.[17]

B: *Have the hijras in your group had operations or are they all hijras from childhood?*

S: Of course they've had operations! Where <u>wouldn't</u> a hijra have an operation these days?

B: *About how many hijras have had operations?*

S: A lot of them. In one rupee there are twelve annas.[18]

B: *Is Bindiyā a hijra by birth?*

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[17] The Hindi expression which translates into English as 'sit down with' is also used for a woman who marries without ceremony.

[18] Sulekha uses the expression *rupayā mē bārah ānā* ['in one rupee 12 annas']. Since 16 annas make up one rupee, Sulekha is indicating that 75 percent of all hijras have had an operation.

S: How do you know Bindiyā?

B: *We met her in the other group.*

S: Then you know her?

B: *We just asked them all what their names were.*

S: What were they doing?

B: *They were all going off to dance. It was the first time we visited them over there. So is she a born-hijra or a made-hijra?*

S: I don't want to tell you that! I'm not going to tell you because I'm not going to lie to you. I've told you very frankly that 12 annas out of a rupee are male. Only four annas are hijras by birth. It's a caste secret, you know.[19] If I tell you that, what's left? I'm not going to sacrifice my honor for money. Even if you pay me, I'm not going to tell you. I'll just tell you that *dīdī* ['sister'] is lieing, and you can figure the rest out on your own.

B: *So suppose there are a hundred hijras. How many would have had operations and how many would be hijras by birth?*

S: 75 would be hijras by operation, 25 by birth. These days operations are taking place right out in the open, you know. But you're living in the same neighborhood [as those other hijras], so why would I lie to you?

B: *Are the hijras who are hijras by birth more respected?*

S: A hijra is just a hijra. They're all equal. There's no difference between one hijra and another hijra.

B: *Are all of your friends hijras?*

S: Yes.

B: *Are all of your friends from your own group or do you have hijras friends from outside your group, too?*

S: I have friends everywhere. Wherever I go, I'll become someone's *dīdī* or *cācī*. We can always find a way to get along with strangers, and then a new group will be formed there.

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19   Sulekha refers to the hijras here collectively as *jātī* ['caste'].

B: *What does your family think [about your being a hijra]?*

S: They think, "She went away, she died, she moved somewhere." When I don't go home--or even if I do go home, everybody thinks, "He died! He's finished! All of our ties [with him] are finished!"

B: Oh. But what were they thinking about you when you were small?

S: What could people think? People didn't think anything. Or people said ((lowering voice)), "Oh! What has he become? He became a hijra! Why doesn't he just die! Oh, why doesn't he just go away! Oh, the name of his father and mother has been doomed!"

B: *They always said that?*

S: Yes. It became a house of dishonor. They said, "How can his life go on? It would have been better if he had just died." I used to listen to all of that, and then I just ran away. Am I lieing? I don't lie. When noone cares what I say anyway, what would I gain by lieing? Nobody will take me back anyway, so why should I tell you otherwise?

B: *Are some hijras taken by force?*

S: No, never. Everything is done voluntarily.

B: *But what about the children? Because some people say that you kidnap children from the outside, raise them, and then operate on them.*

S: No, that statement is totally wrong. Nobody has been kidnapped and brought here. Those who sing and dance join the hijra groups by themselves. They come here dressing in *sārīs* and then they're operated on. Who would want them to be operated on, anyway? There's no force involved. If he wants to do it, he'll do it. If he doesn't want to, he won't. There's no force used. After he's operated on, he becomes a *hijrī.* Then he'll start sitting with the women folk, socializing with women, and calling them *dīdī, cācī,* and all that. But how would a person who is <u>not</u> going to have the operation say anything? He'll feel shame, of course. Just like I'm talking to you, you know--calling you *dīdī, dīdī* and so on--how would he be able to touch the women? If you came to know that that I was a man, you'd take your sandals off and hit me, right? Am I lieing? You'd hit me with your sandals again and again and again, right? So that's why a man who becomes a woman has to have an operation. This is our profession, so how long would I be able to remain silent?

B: *So what do you think about yourself? Do you feel that you're just like a woman, or maybe a little like a man, or do you feel that you're just a hijra? I mean, your body is like a hijra's, but what do you feel like inside?*

S: Like a woman. Like a woman. I feel completely like a woman--in thought and in deed.[20] For example, now that I've put on this *sāṛī,* I have to follow through with it. If I went along considering myself a man, what would be the use of wearing a woman's *sāṛī?* Now that I've worn *sāṛīs,* I've worn blouses, I've grown out my hair, and I've pierced my ears, I've become a woman so I have to live like a woman.

B: *But how do you feel inside? Do you feel like a woman inside?*

S: I don't have any feelings inside. All I know is that when I wear a *sāṛī,* I'm completely a woman. I talk with women, I walk with women, I laugh with women.

B: *So your experience yourself as a woman?*

S: Yes, I experience just what a woman experiences.

A: *Do you have relationships with other people--like with a man, or with a woman, or with other hijras? What kinds of relationships do you have?*

B: *In other words, are the relationships that hijras have like relationships between men and women, or are they something else?*

S: Yeah, hijras have relationships too, just like men and women have relationships.

B: *But Megha said it doesn't happen.*

S: That's a complete lie.

A: *So are the relationships you're talking about with other hijras or with men?*

S: They all have relationships with men. Hijras have relationships with men just like women have relationships with men. A lot of hijras--a lot of hijras keep men. A lot of them are professionals.[21] Those who do it as a profession charge a hundred rupees, fifty rupees, two hundred rupees, four hundred rupees, anything they can get. Am I telling you a lie? No, I'm not telling you a lie. Naturally it happens,

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[20] Sulekha's words echo the Sanskrit proverb *mansā vācā karmṇā* ['in heart, word, and deed'].

[21] Sulekha frequently uses the term *pešvār* ['professional'] to mean 'prostitute'.

because it's like this--she'll wear a *sāṛī* and a blouse, she'll stand at the half-open door with all kinds of make-up on, with red color on her cheeks. Then she'll call the men in that way and they'll of course all think that she's a woman. Then she'll ask, "Where will we go?" And he'll say, "Let's go there." And she'll say, "How much will you give?" And he'll say that he'll give 200 rupees. "Okay," she'll say. "Let's go to the hotel so we'll be safe." So she takes the 200 rupees and they go.

A: *Is it that way in every group?*

B: It wouldn't be right to say that every group is the same. If somebody feels like doing that, they'll do it.

A: *So are relationships like that permanent or for one night only?*

S: Relationships with who?

A: *With the hijras.*

S: Well, you probably noticed that a man is living in my household.

B: *But that's because you hire men to play the drums, don't you?*

S: Yes, a lot of men are hired to play the drums, but there are also a lot of hijras who keep men permanently. But you've already seen that, of course, so what can I say?

B: *What do you mean? [Are you talking about] the person who was working over at Megha's?*

S: How can I tell you? If I told you, I'd be dishonored. You've already seen it with your own eyes anyway. If I say something, the secret will be out in the open tomorrow and my life will be like death.

B: *No, Sulekha, don't worry about it. We won't tell anybody.*

S: You've already seen it with your own eyes. What more can I say?

B: *Don't worry! We'll never say anything to anybody.*

S: But you've figured it out anyway, right?

B: *With who then? With Megha?*

S: I'm not going to name names. Why should I name names? You just guess it!

B: *With Andaz?*

S: [nods]

B: *Oh, Andaz! That's the elderly person over there. How old is he?*

S: 70 years old. No, 68 years old.

B: *But he was so young!*

S: So what? What's the big deal? What's it matter if they're young or old? And I'm not just talking about those people over there, mind you.

B: *Are most [relationships] like that?*

S: Almost all of them. Everybody keeps men like that. It's not just Megha; it's everybody. Didn't you notice that I have a man here too? I keep two, you see. Everybody keeps a man. Because what kind of life can you have without any support from a man?

A: *So do couples sometimes adopt a child and become parents?*

B: *You mean a hijra child?*

A: *No, just any type of child.*

B: *Suppose that you adopted someone, would you act like a mother and father and bring them up?*

S: Yes, yes. It's like--this is my household, this is my very own household. We have money, we have a lot of wealth. If I don't find a hijra, I'll adopt someone. And if I'm on good terms with someone--suppose I'm on good terms with you--well, I'll say, "Let me adopt the child of this person. Please give him to me, *dīdī.* He'll always be with you even when he's with me." So that way I can adopt a child. I'll adopt him and think that I'll marry him oif some day. I'll give him all my love. He'll live in our household, and I'll give everything to him. He can inherit everything I have. He'll call me *mammī* ['mom'], he'll call me *cācī* ['aunt' or 'younger mother'], he'll call me *baṛī mā̃* ['older mother']. So I'll adopt him and give him all the wealth that I have. I won't give him any money until I've adopted him completely, of course--only then will I give him money. That's just so he'll give us food when we're old; otherwise, people would be giving money to anybody for no reason. That's the way it is. Even if I only get hijras to live with me, that's the way it goes. They'll also get the household and inherit everything, because that's the only way they'll do something for me. Otherwise, there's no incentive. In modern times, you can be assured that no one will give something for nothing.[22] Who's

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[22]   There are no governmental agencies for adopting children in India, as in the United States. Most children are adopted within the extended family by another family

going to take care of anybody in these modern times? Do you think that anybody would? You've come here from across the sea, for example. You've come here because you're going to gain something from it. But at the same time there's some gain for me too, of course. That's why I'm telling you all this--for the gain. I'm telling you this because I'll gain something. If I was going to lose something, I wouldn't talk to you, right?[23]

B: *There's a group somewhere who has a child in their group, right?*

S: Yes, but they don't really keep the child. The hijras and the child live in different places.

B: *There's a name of a hijra that everyone keeps talking about who has a child, right? Is that who the child lives with?*

S: Yes, he lives separately.

B: *What do you mean 'separately'?*

S: With a hijra. The hijra who lives with him lives apart from the group. He's established the relationship of *mã* ['mother'] to him, and he's also the *mãlik* of his own group. He's the *mãlik*.

A: *So why did Megha tell us that hijras don't have relationships with men?*

S: That's wrong. That's wrong.

B: *If you have a relationship with someone, why would you want to keep it secret?*

S: Because people would say, "Hey! Look at him. He's a hijra and he keeps a man!"

B: *Then why was Megha saying, "We have a lot of sadness. We no longer have a family. We no longer have relationships. All we do is sleep, get up, sit around"?*

S: No, that's wrong. That's wrong. I don't believe that. That's wrong. Whatever she's doing, she's doing it for her own happiness--so she'll have an easy life. Anyone who gains from keeping someone will keep someone; anyone who doesn't gain from it, won't. If somebody feels that a relationship is a noose around the neck, he'll cut it off, right? Nobody would ever force somebody else to have a

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member. It is unclear from Sulekha's narrative how she might go about adopting a child, but I have heard scattered reports of comparatively wealthy hijras adopting the children of poorer brothers or sisters.

[23]   Sulekha repeatedly uses the terms *naphã* ['gain'] here.

relationship. But when you look at the hijras, you'll see that 100 percent of them keep men. Wherever I've gone, I've seen that. Practically everybody keeps men. Maybe I've run into a couple of places where 25 percent don't keep men, but even so, 75 percent <u>definitely</u> do.

A: *Are there some hijras who are more masculine than other hijras?*

B: *In other words, are there some who are just like men--who are strong physically? Are there some hijras who are more powerful, who are stronger, who have masculine tendencies?*

A: *And likewise, are there some who are more feminine?*

S: Yes, yes, yes.

A: *Is that a good thing? Are they respected more or are they respected less?*

S: No, no, there's no respect for hijras anyway. There's no respect among the hijras. There's no one who's really strong. Whoever's strong and powerful remains strong. But whoever's weak remains a hijra. If a person is strong and masculine, then why would he become a hijra? We're all bound to this life. If someone among the hijras is strong and has a big family of ten, so what? And if someone's alone, then so what? As far as hijras are concerned, we live in the hijra society, so you're bound by the rules of the hijras. We are bound by the rules of the hijras.[24]

B: *So everybody's equal? Are there any favorites? Bindiyā, for example, is really beautiful, so do people somehow pay more attention to her?*

S: Sure, we give her appropriate respect, but only for dancing and singing. We push her toward the front because the men like her; they'll give us 20 rupees instead of 10. But otherwise, it doesn't matter.

A: *Is there any role-playing of feminine and masculine roles? In one group, say, will some hijras cook and clean while other hijras do the heavy work?*

S: No.

A: *So everyone's equal?*

S: Everyone. There are no differences between the hijras. Everybody is the same. Everybody will cook, everybody will dance, everybody will sing, everybody is

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24   The phrase Sulekha uses here is *hijraõ mẽ pāband hai* ['they are bound by the hijras'].

equal. It's not like another hijra becomes a woman so I'll say, "I'm a hijra who'll become a man." No, no, everyone is equal.

B: *Are all of the hijras in Banāras from Hindi-speaking areas?*

S: Yeah, yeah, they all speak Hindi.

B: *Do some of them speak Bhojpuri?*

S: Sure, they also speak Bhojpuri. When I was in Bihar, I spoke Bhojpuri, of course, like, ((in Bhojpuri)) "*khālā jī* ['eat sir/ma'am']," "*pīlā jī* ['drink sir/ma'am']," "*ye nā karab* ['stop doing that']," "*kā kahā̃ jāt haī jī* ['where are you going, sir?']." I learned Hindi by living with Hindi-speakers. And I was also educated in childhood, so it became my nature to speak Hindi.

A: *What language do you use when you're in your group?*

S: I'll speak Bhojpuri, of course. When I go to my own group I speak Bhojpuri; when I go to a Hindi-speaking group I speak Hindi. If I go to Banāras, for example, I'll say, "*salām!* ['peace']," and then they'll say, "*vāle kum salām* ['may you live in peace']." Or I'll say, "*kā kartā tū, cal sinemā dekhē cal* [let's go and see a movie']," "*āj kā pākī guru?* ['what was cooked today, guru?']." I'll say, "*khāīb dāl bhāt pakālē* ['will you eat? we've cooked *dāl-bhāt*']," "*ī karale sinemā dekhē* ['let's go and see a movie']," "*kā man karat hai, bhaīyā āj kahā̃ jāyal jāy* ['how do you feel? brother, where should we go today?']." That's Bhojpuri, right? But if I meet someone who speaks Hindi, I'll just speak Hindi.

A: *Was Bhojpuri the childhood language of everyone in your group?*

S: No, no.

A: *So everybody spoke different languages?*

S: Yes.

A: *And they started to speak Bhojpuri when they came here?*

S: Well, people speak whatever languge is spoken where they live. A hijra who comes to Banāras doesn't have to take up residence in Banāras. There are a lot of hijras from Banāras who live in other places, and there are a lot of hijras in Banāras who have come from elsewhere. Bindiyā is from our area, for instance. And there's another one Latā--her name is Latā--so that makes three of us from the same area. So all of us speak Hindi. And Megha is from Patna, so we're all from Bihar. But after living here, in a non-Bihar area, we all started to speak Hindi. Now we also all spoke Hindi before we came here, of course, because everybody is taught how to speak Hindi. If I spoke Bengali it would mean that I had learned Bengali,

but everybody speaks Hindi. Is Hindi ever taught? No. But if I were speaking English or if I were speaking Bengali, it would mean that I had learned them.

A: *So what does your family speak?*

S: Everybody spoke Bhojpuri there.

A: *When you came here, did you have to learn a special style of speaking?*

B: *For example, I came from a Bhojpuri speaking area, so when I came here I had to learn to speak Hindi. Did you have to learn any special language?*

S: No, no. I didn't learn any special language.

A: *No, I'm not talking about a special language, I'm talking about style. Did you learn a new style of speaking that you didn't use when you lived at home with your family?*

S: Yes, yes, yes, when I was living with my family, I spoke Bhojpuri. But I also spoke Hindi because everyone speaks Hindi. When I came here and started to dance and sing, I also learned Panjābī songs. I learned Panjābī songs and started to sing Panjābī songs. I learned Mārvāṛi songs so I started to sing Mārvāṛi songs.[25] I learned Bengālī songs so I started to sing Bengālī songs.

B: *Is there any difference in the way you speak?*

S: Sure, because I speak Hindi. I'm not Mārvāṛi, I'm not Bengālī, I'm not Panjābī, so my vocabulary is really limited. I can only manage to speak two or three words in each of those languages.

A: *I mean, do you think that your Hindi is different from before?*

B: *In other words, is the Hindi that you are speaking here today different from what your mother and father spoke?*

S: No.

A: *What about style or mannerisms, such as your facial expressions or your gestures. Has there been any change in that?*

S: Yes, everything has changed. Everything has changed.

A: *How so?*

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25   *Marvār* is an area in Rajasthan.

S: When I was living at home, I was wearing a *kurtā*. That's what I wore. But here you have to wear a *sārī*. When I lived at home, I had to have my hair cut regularly. But if I were to cut my hair here, I'd have to pay 500 rupees as punishment! If I were to shave it off, or even if I were to have a western-type haircut like a bob, I'd still have to pay 500 rupees!

A: *What do you call other hijras?*

S: I've already told you that. I've told you everything. If I establish a relationship with someone as my sister, I'll call her *dīdī* because she's my sister. I can call her *jījī* ['sister'] or I can call her *dīdī*.

A: *Can you have a bhāī ['brother'] too, or do you only use feminine terminology?*

S: Yes, you can establish that kind of relationship with a person who follows the rules of society.[26] If I establish a brother-relationship with someone and tie a *rākhī* ['sacred thread'] to his wrist, he'll be my brother. Hijras don't have those kinds of relationships with each other, although the person who plays the drum can be made a brother. We have a drum player with us, you know, and whoever he lives with will make him a *bhāī*.

A: *It seemed to us that whenever Megha lied, whenever she said things like, "Hijras never have operations," then she'd clap and make a face.*

S: Yes, that just means that you asked her one thing and she felt that she had to tell you a different thing--that she had to tell you a lie. She had to save herself, in other words. So if you ask a question about operations, she'd have to say, "No, no, it doesn't happen among us. It doesn't happen among us!"

A: *Why does she do that?*

S: In order to hide the real truth.

A: *She only does that when she's lieing?*

S: Oh, you know, "I won't tell you that! I won't say such a thing!" If I'm talking to you and you already know that operations do in fact take place--that this takes place and that takes place--if you already know how many of us are men, how many of us are women, and how many of us simply dress like women. If you've come to know all of those things, I'll think, "Why are you asking me questions like that?"

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26 Sulekha uses the term *dūniyā dār* ['worldly person'] in reference to non-hijras. She clearly considers herself to be outside the social fold; only 'worldly people' can be made brothers.

You'll just keep on asking me questions that you already know the answer to and tell me that I'm hiding the truth. If I didn't want to answer one of your questions, I'd have to say something, right? Like, "*are are*" ['oh oh'], or something like that. So in the same way, she just said the words "*nahī̃ nahī̃*" ['no, no'] without thinking.

B: *Is that way of talking particular to hijras?*

S: Yes, it's one of our responses. We'll always say, "I'm not saying anything. I'm not doing anything." We all have our own ways of saying things.

A: *When hijras come here do they change their names?*

S: Yes.

A: *Do they only have one name or do they have a lot of different names?*

S: You have a different name when you live with your family, and when you join the hijras that name is changed.

A: *So do you ever use your family names with each other?*

S: What do you mean by that?

A: *Are you ever called by your family name?*

S: No. My old name was Anil Kumar, but nobody ever calls me by that name anymore. Everybody knows me by Sulekha and everybody calls me Sulekha.

A: *So is 'Megha' a real name?*[27]

S: Yes, it's a real name.

A: *Because Megha said that she's had that name since childhood.*

S: No, no, everybody takes a different name.

B: *What was Bindiyā's other name?*

S: How can I tell you all that? It's not my job to find out whose name was what! If I tell you about everybody else, they'll just grab me by the throat and ask, "Why did

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27   'Megha' is of course a pseudonym. Her actual hijra name, however, could have in fact been her given family name, since it is a name used for both women and men (i.e., it is a woman's name when followed by 'Rani' and a man's name when followed by 'Ram').

you tell them that? Why did you tell them that? You can tell them anything you want about yourself--that's your business. But you earn your own money, you eat your own food, so you shouldn't be concerned with everyone else! Why did you tell them about all of us?" I'm not telling you a lie. Am I wrong? Am I telling you a lie? I'll basically tell you whatever you ask me about myself. I've told you that everybody has a name, and when they become hijras they change their names. I'm not lieing to you. I don't tell lies, *dīdī*. Whatever the truth is, I tell it clearly and frankly. You keep on referring to Megha and bringing up her name. But I'm scared to tell lies, so I'm scared to say anything. What would happen to me if something came out in the open? They'd ask, "Why did you talk about us? Why did you utter our names?" So I'll just talk about myself. Ask about me and I'll tell you everything. But why is it necessary for me to talk about other people? Why should I utter someone else's name? It's true that sometimes I tell you things. But just let me tell you my own things, only my own things. You can ask me anything about myself and I'll tell you. But I don't see why it's necessary to tell you about someone else. *Dīdī*, am I lieing? Am I wrong about this?

A: *Okay, okay, we understand! No problem!*

S: ((laughs))

A: ((laughs)) *Do hijras choose their own names? Why did you choose your name?*

S: Well, what can I say about it? I used to live in Calcutta with three or four hijras, and when I came to Banāras there were three or four hijras here too. There was a hijra named Bādal when I came here, and shortly after that Megha came here, too. So everybody was named by a name beginning with 'b'. We had a Bādal and a Megha and a Bindiyā, so I was named Bahār.[28] And so on and so forth. That's how we were named, so that we'd have this stream of sounds that sounded good-- Bādal, Megha, Bindiyā, Bahār. It sounds good, doesn't it? But later there was someone here named Latā, so I changed my name to Sulekha. The two of us were dancing together a lot, singing and dancing and all that. She was dancing, I was dancing, we were dancing like crazy all the time. Her name was Latā, and "Sulekha-Latā, Sulekha-Latā, Sulekha-Latā" sounded good, so I changed my name.[29]

A: *So is [the choice of name] based on your personality?*

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[28] *Bahār* translates as 'spring'.

[29] *Latā* translates into English as 'ivy'. Sulekha is probably recalling the popular singer Latā Mangeśkar here, who with her sister occupied a central position in the Hindi film industry during the past fifty years. (The appropriateness of the juxtaposition Sulekha-Latā is not readily apparent, since I have chosen the name Sulekha as a pseudonym.)

B: *Or, for example, Bindiya is a beautiful, feminine name, just like Bindiyā herself. So is [the choice of name] based on physical characteristics?*

S: No, it doesn't make any difference what you look like physically. It's just like--no one else in Banāras is named Andāz, so we have an Andaz. You name someone in such a way that no other person will have the same name in the Banāras area. No one else is named Sulekha in this area, for example. There's an Sulekha in Kachvā, but not here.

B: *Oh, I remember seeing her once. She came here with a big bindī on her forehead, right?*

S: That's why my name is Sulekha, within this very limited area. When Megha came here, there was no one else named Megha here either. We always choose names in this way. We make sure that no one else is called by the same name. If the same name were given to more than two people, then the hijras would all be looking at each other and saying, "Which one are you talking about?"

A: *Do you always give names that are popular? Sulekha seems like a popular name, for example.*

S: No, there are as many names as there are hijras. Every hijra will have a different name.

A: *But are there any names that are particularly popular? Are a lot of hijras in different places named Sulekha, for example?*

S: Oh yes, yes, there are a lot of hijras named Sulekha. In Delhi, in Bombay, in Kathmandu, in Panjab, in Agra. But in this nearby area--in Banāras, or Mugalsarāy, or Rāmnagar, or Cunār--I'm the only one named Sulekha. In any given area, you take a name that's not already taken.

A: *So are there any names which are taken more frequently than other names?*

S: How do I know about what names are given and what names aren't given, *dīdī?* There's a Kāntā, there's a Rekhā, there's a Basantī.[30] These are all famous names and they're all given to hijras. But nowadays there are so many hijras we can't find names for all of them! So we'll give them nicknames. We'll call them *Chaṭankī* ['someone who only weighs a couple of ounces'],[31] *Pacās Grām* ['50 Grams'], *Das*

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30 *Kāntā* translates into English as 'beautiful', while *basantī*, derived from the Hindi word *basant*, translates as 'spring'.

31 The names which Sulekha mentions here frequently appear in folk drama, and are often used by Hindi-speakers in jovial reference to friends or family members.

Grām ['50 Grams'], *Cālīs Grām* ['50 Grams']. ((laughs)) You know, *Chaṭankī*, *Choṭkī* ['tiny one'],[32] *Pauvā* ['one-fourth seer', 'quarter pint']. ((laughs))

A: *Do you ever use your original names--the old names given to you by your parents?*

S: Yes, yes, sometimes we do, especially when we fight with each other. We'll tell everybody what the person's real name was, "Oh, so and so was such and such a name!"[33] Then we'll call them by that name.

A: *We call you 'hijras', but how do you address each other?*

S: Haven't I told you? We call the older people *guru*, and we address the younger people by their names.

A: *So you don't call each other 'hijra'?*

S: No, of course not. ((laughs)) When we address each other we wouldn't say, "Hey hijra! Listen to me!" We call each other by our own names: "Oh Sulekha, listen to me! Oh Basantī, listen to me! Oh Bādal, listen to me!" And so on.

A: *But if someone asks you whether you're a woman or a man, would you say that you're a hijra?*

S: Of course I'd say that I was a hijra. How could I call myself a woman or a man? A hijra is just a hijra, you know.

A: *When you talk to other hijras, do you address them in the feminine or masculine?*

S: Neither in the feminine nor in the masculine--no, no, I mean, we don't address each other in the masculine. We only talk in the feminine.

A: *Only in the feminine? You never use the masculine?*

There is a common folk belief in India that the more pure one is, the lighter they will weigh. In a popular folk drama, for instance, the princess *Nauṭankī*, whose name translates literally into English as 'one who weighs 11/2 *chaṭāk*', registers this weight everyday when weighed with flowers until the day she falls in love. When her weight increases, her subjects know that she is no longer pure. (A *chaṭāk* is a small unit of measurement; 16 *chaṭāks* make up a *ser* ['seer'].)

[32]   The term *choṭkī* appears to be a variation of a double dimunitive: *choṭī* ['small'] > *chuṭkī* > *choṭkī*.

[33]   Sulekha uses the joint expression *phalānā-ḍhikānā* ['such and such and so and so'].

S: No, no, the masculine occurs too.

A: *Like when? When you're conversing?*

S: Yes, I'll tell you about it! If I'm having a conversation with Megha, for example, I'll say, "Megha, listen to me. Won't you come with me to the movies? C'mon, let's go see a movie. Won't you come on, Megha? Hey, Megha! Won't you come?" And if she still doesn't say anything, I'll say, "Hey! Won't you come? You *bhosṛī vālā* ['vagina-owner']!"[34] It happens when we're angry. And it also happens when we're joking. "Hey! Listen to me!" We'll use it like that. It's not true that hijras will always be spoken to like women ((softly)), "What will you eat? What will you listen to? Will you eat^f or not? Will you drink^f or not? Will you come^f along or not? Are you listening^f?" And so on and so on. It's not like that.

A: *So you only use the masculine when you're joking then?*

S: Our conversation happens in every way. It happens in the masculine too; it happens in the feminine too. It happens in every way. It's not true that our conversation will only be in the feminine. It's not true.

A: *So how do the people on the street address you, in the feminine or in the masculine? How does a rickshaw driver address you, for example?*

S: People who are sensible will address us just like they would address a woman. "Hey *jī* [ma'am/sir], please move out of the way." ((softly)) Where do you have to go, ma'am/sir? Please come on, please sit down." And those who are rude and loose charactered will spot us and say ((rapidly, loudly)), "Get out of the way! Where are you going? Move it!"

A: *But do they address you in the feminine or the masculine?*

S: They'll speak to us in both masculine and feminine. They'll address us in both. There are a lot of men who'll say, "Hey! Hijra! Where are you going^m? Get out of the way!" And then there are some who'll say ((softly)), "Please come^f on. What are you doing^f, ma'am?" Even "please come^f on" is feminine, of course.

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34   I should add that this insult is so offensive to urban middle-class Hindi speakers that the Banaras resident who typed our transcripts refused to include this word in the transcript, typing an elipsis instead. The word is used differently from the American insult 'cunt'; it is primarily used in reference to men in order to indicate that they are somehow emasculated. The term *bhosṛī vālā* is itself masculine; its feminine counterpart *bhosṛī vālī* does not exist in contemporary usage. Ved Prakash Vatuk (personal communication) offers an interesting explanation as to why this curse is never used in reference to a woman: "A woman already has one, so why would it be a curse to tell her so?"

A: *So do people tend to use the feminine or the masculine more often when addressing hijras? For example, do they address you half the time as a man and half the time as a woman?*

S: Outsiders[35] who see a hijra will say, "It's a woman. It's not a hijra." They won't think, "It's a man."

A: *Are there some hijras who like to be referred to in the masculine?*

S: No, no. If you're wearing a *sārī* and blouse, how could anyone call you a man?[36]

A: *But when hijras first come to the hijra community, do they speak like men or like women? For example, would a hijra who wants an operation speak like a man before he has the operation? And then after the operation he-*

S: No, no, it's not like that. When hijras come to the community, when they know all about themselves, then they start to dance and sing, and everything falls into place. Whoever feels right in his heart becomes a hijra. Whoever doesn't feel right in his heart won't become a hijra. It's not like, "Now I'm a hijra so I've become a woman and now I'm not a hijra so I haven't become a woman." It's not like that. She's put on a *sārī*, she's entered the society of the hijras, so her language will become like a woman's. Finally she has become a hijra.

A: *But if you spoke like a man your whole life before entering the hijra community, wouldn't it be difficult to switch and speak like a woman?*

B: *In other words, suppose there's a man who spoke men's language all his life, then he was operated on and became a hijra. Don't you think it would be difficult for him to start speaking like a woman?*

S: No, no, no, no.

B: *It's not difficult?*

S: No, no, no, no. Once she wears a *sārī*, she feels that she has become a woman. There's no change in her as such; she was just hiding her true feelings before. If your mind is set on an operation, you get it. If it's not, you don't.

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[35]   The term Sulekha uses here in reference to a non-hijra is *bāhrī ādmī* ['a person on the outside'].

[36]   In Sulekha's own words: *sārī-blāūs pahankar to koī ādmī kaise bulāyegā?*

B: *But doesn't she have to pay special attention to her language? I mean, suppose she was speaking like a woman and then a man's voice were to come out of her mouth? She'd have to pay careful attention to her speech, right?*

S: No, no. It's very easy. For example, take my case, okay? If I'm socializing with women and another woman comes by, I'll just speak like a woman. I'll say, "*Dīdī! Bahan!*" But if a man comes in [I'll say] ((softly)), "What are you eating? What's the matter, sir? What brings you here?"

B: *But would you speak like a man or a woman?*

S: I speak just like everyone else speaks. ... If I have to use men's speech, I won't wear a *sāṛī*. When I wear a *sāṛī*, I'll of course use women's speech; when I don't wear a *sāṛī*, then I'll use men's speech. For example, if I wear a *luṅgī-kurtā* [a cloth-wrap and shirt traditionally worn by North Indian Muslim men], then it's like, "I eat^m," "I go^m." It's not a problem. When I wear a *sāṛī*, I speak like a woman, "I eat^f," "I go^f." It's not difficult at all. Whoever knows would surely know, right? He would surely know a person talking like this is a hijra. First I put on a *sāṛī* but then I put on a
luṅgī-kurtā, so my conversation became *mardānā* ['manly'] like a man's.

B: *You mean after the operation?*

S: What's all this talk about operations-operations? I've told you so many things! Have I told you the truth or have I told you lies?

A: *The truth.*

S: I didn't tell you a lie, did I?

A: *No, no, only the truth! ((laughs))*

S: ((laughs)) You've asked me so many things and I haven't told you a lie. There were only three or four things that I didn't tell you--secret things. Why would I tell a lie?

A: *Yes, yes, that's right.*

S: Whatever I've told you, I've told you truthfully. I've only hidden five or six things from you, which I just can't tell. If I told you--I have to live with them, I have to eat with them, I have to drink with them, so how can I tell you everything, *dīdī*? Am I telling you a lie? I've told you everything very clearly. I've hidden only four or five or six things, which I just can't tell.

A: *When someone comes to your group, does his style of speaking change?*

B: *Suppose, for example, that a man comes to your group. Do all of his actions stay the same way as before?*

S: His actions change. When someone first comes here, his nature will be like that of a man's, so that's how his conversation will be. Sometimes it will be just like a man's conversation. But when he joins the hijras and lives among them, he'll see how they act, "Hey! Look at me! They're all elderly people. ((whispering)) She sits like this, so I'll sit in the same way. She eats like this, so I'll eat in the same way."

A: *So is he taught how to act?*

S: It's like women, among us. It's not taught. It's experienced, by observing. After all, nobody's a child here who needs to be taught.

A: *But how does he learn it? By observing other hijras?*

S: "I should also act just like they're acting. If I don't, hijra people will laugh at me." They'll say, "Oh, he's very ill-mannered! He's very ill-behaved."[37] ((laughs)) Yes! "He's just saying whatever comes to mind, the *bhosṛī vālā!*" ['vagina-owner'] ((laughs)) Then everybody will get up to beat him with their sandals. ((laughs)) Really! So gradually, after observing them for a long time, it becomes a habit. It becomes his nature.

A: *So do you always speak like a woman?*

S: It's just not a big deal to me. Normally I speak like a woman, but with a man I speak like a man. I use the same speech of the person I meet.

A: *When do you speak like a man?*

S: For example, if a man comes to my house, then it's [rapidly, loudly, with falling intonation], "What's up?" I won't be talking to him like a woman. I won't say [softly, slowly, with rising intonation], "I am^f going, I am^f eating."

A: *What's the difference between speaking like a man and speaking like a woman?*

S: There's no difference. I talk just like whoever I meet.

A: *No, I mean, is it mental or physical?*

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[37]   Sulekha actually uses conflicting adjectival reference here, referring to the new hijra initiate as *baṛī^f kuḍhaṅgā^m* ['very ill-mannered'] and *baṛī^f badtamīz* ['bad etiquette']

S: We just speak from the mouth. Hijras aren't counted as women, after all. Hijras are just hijras, and women are just women. If there's a woman, she'll at least have a little shame.[38] But compared to the hijras, how open can a woman be? No matter how openly a woman walks, she'll still have a little shame. But hijras are just hijras. They have no shame.

A: *So we've heard that the hijras speak a special dialect? Is that true.*

S: Oh yes, yes, yes!

A: *What is it?*

S: We people have a different way of talking. We have a separate language. Our way of conversing is different. If there are ten hijras sitting here and ten men sitting there, for example, we'll talk among ourselves and the men won't be able to understand us. Like the other day, when there were two hijras and two of you people in the same room, we were saying this and that and you couldn't understand anything that we were talking about, now could you? ((laughs))

A: *So what did you say that we didn't understand?*

S: You people won't understand us! ((laughs)) We have a separate language!

A: *Like what? Can you give us an a example?*

S: For example, if we wanted to indicate to each other in our own language that we had to get 500 rupees from you, then in our own way we'll say something like, *isko cāb rahī hai* ['she's suffering from an itch'] so let's take *pãc baṛ pattā* ['five banyan leaves'].[39]

A: *paṭā diyā jāyegā?*

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38 Sulekha uses the dual expression *lāj śarm* ['shame-shame'].

39 The word *baṛ* is ambiguous here, as it could mean either 'banyan' or 'big'. In Indian folk medicine, paste from the *pattā* ['leaves'] of the banyan tree are rubbed on the skin to cure skin diseases. Sulekha also explains, however, that the word *baṛū* is used in the hijra dialect for the Hindi *baṛā* ['big']. Since the hundred-rupee bill is the largest circulating bill in Indian currency, it is probable that the hijras use the term *baṛ pattā* ['big leaf' or 'big bill'] in reference to it. The word *pattā*, also meaning 'playing card' in Hindi, is frequently employed in slang to mean 'paper bill' or 'buck', as in the following expressions often spoken in reference to bureaucrats: *sabko māl-pattā cāhiye* ['everybody needs their goods and grains (i.e. bribes)'], or *phāil sarkāne ke liye māl-pattā cāhiye* ['everybody needs goods and grains in order to move their files'].

S: No, no, *pattā liyā jāyegā.* And there's also the *dhamṛī* thing.

B: *What's that mean?*

S: Whenever I do the *dhamṛī,* it means that we won't leave until we do the *pher.*[40]

B: *But what does 'dhamṛī' mean?*

S: Like the other day [I said], "Go and get the *ḍholak* ['drum']! Play the *ḍholak* so we can dance. If they give us a lot of money, I'll give you a part of it." After I did the *dhamṛī* thing, I gave her a slap and she said, "No, I won't. I don't want to be involved in your business." So I slapped her again and said, "Go and get it!" And with that I sent her away. Then she went and fetched the *ḍholak,* brought it back, and we all began to play.

B: *And then they gave you money?*

S: Sure, they gave us money! They gave me 60 rupees. ((laughs))

A: *Can you give us one more example?*

B: *Yes, we're really enjoying this!*

S: ((laughs)) Oh, we have so many. We talk in our own language just like we're talking now. We can say everything.

B: *How do you people learn all that?*

S: We learn gradually. After living together for a long time, you just learn everything.[41]

B: *How much time does it take?*

S: No, no, we just learn after living together for a long time. Nobody ever teaches anybody anything. We all learn by listening. "Hey, what are you saying? You people walk differently, get up differently, sit differently." Those kinds of things.

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40   The word *pher* literally means 'circuitous'. Sulekha is referring to that part of the celebration ceremony in which participants circle a bill around the head of the honored person for good luck before donating it to a performer or bystander (in this case, the hijras).

41   The expression Sulekha uses here is *rahte rahte sab ā jātā hai.*

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B: *Is it that way everywhere in India?*

S: Yes, yes, everywhere in India.

B: *So you all understand this hijra language? Is that so?*

S: Yes, yes, everybody knows it.

B: *So tell us one more example.*

S: Talk to me about something and I'll tell you. What can I tell you? For dancing we say *jhamkī karnā*.[42]

B: For dancing?

S: Yes, *jhamak kare* ['go and dance']![43]

B: *If you met someone from Madras, would you be able to talk to each other?*

S: If he'll speak Hindi, of course I'll be able to understand him. But if he speaks Madrāsī,[44] I won't be able to understand him. When we talk to each other we won't say, "We're hijras, we're hijras." We'll just indicate to each other in our own language that we're hijras.

B: *What will you say?*

S: Haven't I already told you? We'll just tell each other in our own language that we're dancers and singers.

B: *How would you tell each other that?*

S: How can I tell you? There are so many different ways. There's not just one way that we talk to each other. A rupee, for example, is called *thappū*, a hundred rupees

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42 Literally, the term *jhamkī karnā* means 'to produce a tinkling sound'. It is used among the hijras in reference to a very feminine and seductive dance.

43 In Hindi, the word *jham* is used to refer to the sound of bells. If a woman is wearing a number of dangling ornaments, for example, her walk will be referred to as *jham jham jham*. The verb *jhamak karnā* ['to do the *jhamak*'] is translated as 'to make soft noises', an activity which is not normally associated with men. (A man's gait, for instance, would rarely be referred to as *jham jham jham*.)

44 Sulekha uses *Madrāsī* as a general term in reference to the languages of South India.

is called *barū* [*barrū?*] fifty rupees is called *adhīkāṭ*, and 25 rupees is called *pāvkāṭ*. Our dancing is a separate language, too. We have our own separate language just like the prostitutes who dance in a *maṇḍlī* have their own separate language.

A: *Are you happy?*

S: Where?

B: *In this life?*

S: No, I'm not happy in this life. I don't know about anyone else, but I can say this about myself. Somehow I keep on going. I always ask *bhagvān* to help me carry on, but it would have been better if I had died. This life is useless with respect to money. What's in it for me, anyway? Only earning some money, eating food, earning some money again, and going to sleep. My family will never increase, nor will my household. All I do is get up, clean the house, and sit around. I can't come and go as I please. I can't take anything from anybody, nor can I give anything to anybody.[45] Our Hindu caste will not allow us to be integrated. The Muslim caste will allow us to be integrated a little bit. Most of the hijras who keep on going home are Muslims, for instance. If there's a child born in a Muslim family, he'll go and visit them at their home. They not only have a tradition of dancing and singing, they can also marry their cousins. They can marry their nephews and neices to each other and nobody cares. They can do everything. They don't have to avoid anything.

B: *Yes, they only have to avoid the mother's milk.*[46]

S: Yes, hijras can go and visit them all the time. They're more receptive to hijras than others are. Everything is free among them. But the Hindu caste has so many restrictions! If a hijra goes home to visit them, they won't let him take part in the *hukkā pānī birādrī* ['pipe, water, clan/caste'].[47] How can you try to go visit them

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[45]   With this sentence, Sulekha indicates that she is unable to have a reciprocal relationship with anyone.

[46]   With this expression Vinita points out that Muslims are not allowed to marry their own mother's children; i.e., they are not able to marry someone who drank milk from the same breast.

[47]   Sulekha uses this expression to indicate that she is an outcaste, i.e., that Hindus will not allow hijras to socialize with them. The *hukkā* ['hubble bubble'] is a pipe shared by members of the same caste in friendship and solidarity, while the term *pānī* ['water'] refers to the sharing of food and water among fellow caste members. The Hindi idiom *hukkā pānī band karnā*, which translates literally as 'to stop sharing the *hukkā* and water', means 'to outcaste [someone]' (see Sulekha's own use of this idiom in note 49).

if there's a brother acting as guard who won't let you? We are *halvāī* by profession, and the kannojiā[48] are a very high caste. If I try and go home--if I sit down and eat and drink with them--the people from the neighborhood will see it and they'll immediately stop giving them their their *hukkā pānī*.[49] My mother and father would only be rejoined by going through a purifying ritual that costs a lot of money. Am I lieing to you? After I thought about all those kinds of things, I decided never to go home again.

S: *But Megha says that since everyone is afraid that hijras might curse them, they treat them with respect.*

S: Treat who with respect?

B: *The hijras. Suppose you went to sing and dance somewhere and people didn't show you any respect, or they didn't give you money. Then you'd curse them and they'd be afraid of you, right? They'd be afraid of the hijras?*

S: Yes, yes, yes!

B: *That's what she's asking about.*

S: Yes, yes, yes, yes. If they don't give us money, we'll feel sad in our hearts. So we'll swear at them, we'll curse them, we'll wish them evil, we'll cut them down to size.[50]

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48   The *kannojiā* or Kanya-Kubja Brahmans, often considered the 'highest' of Brahmans, have a very rigid caste identity. The caste is itself divided hierarchically into twenty different levels called *biswās*, all of which are expected to follow a variety of intercaste regulations. (*Biswā* is literally a land-measuring unit; twenty *biswā* are equivalent to one *bighā*, a unit of measurement roughly equivalent to two-thirds of an acre.) For example, a woman is only allowed to marry a man from a higher *biswās*. So while a '19' *biswās* daughter can marry a '20' *biswās* son, a '16' *biswās* son cannot marry a '20' *biswās* daughter. A number of Hindi proverbs poke fun at the ethical cleanliness of the *kannojiā*, including the saying *nau kannojiā terah chulhe* ['nine Kannojiās, thirteen hearths']. For a more thorough account of the customs of this caste, see R. S. Khare's (1970) *The Changing Brahmans: Associations and Elites among the Kanya-Kubjas of North India.*

49   Sulekha uses the expression *hukkā pānī band kar dēge* ['they'll stop sharing the *hukkā* and water'].

50   The verbs Sulekha employs here are *gālī denā* ['to utter obscenities', 'to swear'], *sarāpnā* ['to curse'], *kosnā* ['to wish someone evil'], and *kaṭnā* ['to cut someone down to size']. The verbs *sarāpnā* and *kosnā* are very close in meaning, except that the former activity is generally associated with non-verbal cursing and the latter

B: *Does society give hijras a lot of respect, then?*

S: Yes, a lot of them do.

B: *So how do you feel about that? Do you like it?*

S: If they give hijras respect we feel good. If they don't give hijras respect we feel bad. Then we'll strip down[51] and start to fight with them. We'll shout *gālīs* ['obscenties'] in order to get some money. But if someone gives us respect, touches our feet, and let's us sit down with him, even if he gives us less money than the others, we won't fuss about it. If someone gives us respect we'll leave him alone. If someone doesn't give us respect, we'll fight with him like crazy.

B: *But why don't the hijras who go through with the operation just get married and lead a normal life? If it's so difficult to live like a hijra, why do they choose to do so?*

S: Anybody who comes here has no other choice but to live here. So after a while he just starts to say, "I like it here now."[52]

B: *No, I'm talking about the people who have operations.*

S: Haven't I already told you all that? When it's our job to be among women all the time, how long can we hide ourselves as men? How long can we hide ourselves? If the secret gets out in the open, they'll beat us and beat us with their sandals and we'll be dishonored.

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with verbal cursing (e.g., 'May your two sons die tomorrow!'). The verbal activity subsumed under the verb *kosnā* is generally associated with women instead of men. Moreover, the term *sarāp* differs from its Sankrit counterpart *śrāp* in that it is associated with the powerless as opposed to the elite. While a *śrāp* is given by saints and those in power, a *sarāp* is considered to be an instrument of the poor, and is given by people who are otherwise helpless, such as widows, outcastes, or hijras. Compare the medieval Hindi verse: *nirbal ko na satāiye, jākī moṭī hāy* ['Don't ever be cruel to a weak person because his sigh (i.e. his *sarāp*) will be very heavy'].

51 Sulekha actually uses the expression *naṅgā hokar* ['becoming naked'], which can be interpreted both figuratively (becoming shameless) and literally (flashing the genitals).

52 Sulekha's statement echoes the sentiment expressed in the well-known Hindi proverb, *gīdaṛ paṛā jhere mẽ to yahĩ bisrām hai* ['A jackal falls in a dry well (and says), here (is where) I rest'].

B: *Were you born a hijra or did you have an operation?*

S: I'm not going to tell you everything.

S: *Okay, that's fine.*

S: How would I be able to go on living if I told you everything?

A: *It must be such a big sacrifice to have an operation! It seems to me that it would be a very difficult decision to make.*

S: Yes, this is a life of sacrifice.[53] A big part of our life is over.

B: *Then why don't hijras live normal[54] lives? Why don't they marry? Why do they decide to join the hijras?*

S: I don't know. If they don't, they just don't.

B: *But why don't they?*

S: It's up to the individual. Someone wants to become a professional,[55] someone else is searching for a man and wants to be kept by a man, someone else sleeps with a man to make money or feed his stomach. How can he possibly sleep with a woman? You have to understand that anyone who is searching for a man is <u>not</u> going to sleep with a woman. Do you understand that or not?

A: *No, I don't really understand.*

S: It's like this: What would someone who sleeps with a man and does sexual things with a man possibly do with a woman?

B: *'Men' people, you mean?*

S: No, hijra people.

B: *No, no, what I mean is this: Suppose that you were a man who had an operation later in life. Why would you have chosen this profession? Why would you decided to have an operation and become a hijra? Why wouldn't you just get*

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[53]   Sulekha uses the expression *tyāg kā jīvan hai* ['it's a life of sacrifice'].

[54]   Vinita uses the term *sādharaṇ* ['ordinary', 'usual', 'common'].

[55]   Again, Sulekha uses the term *peśvār* ['professional'] to mean 'prostitute'.

married and settle down with a family? That's what I mean, why would you choose this line of work? How would it be advantageous for you?

S: There are so many men hijras who come into this profession for money. You know, if they do so much work they'll get so much money.

B: *So do you get good money?*

S: Yes, I get good money. And there are also a lot of men who join in order to sing and dance, and eventually it just becomes their way of life.

B: *In my street there's a boy whose hands and legs are just like those of a woman, but he's not a hijra. And he doesn't ever want to join the hijras.*

S: So he won't join the hijras. That's his business. But if he <u>had</u> joined the hijras, he'd be one. Do you understand?

A: *So is it just a matter of money, or does it have more to do with how you feel inside? Is it because you feel like a woman inside that such a big sacrifice is necessary?*

S: Oh yes, we feel like women, but we also join for the money. What should I say? Some people join so that they can sing and dance. We don't just become hijras for any one reason. It's a combination of several different factors. Sometimes people even just stay half a woman. Some people feel that when their gestures become like women's gestures, they'll begin to feel like a woman. Thinking, speaking, actions-- everything will be like that of a woman. Others are greedy about the money, and still others feel good when they walk around dressed in a *sārī*. When all these factors come together and become one, they go through with the operation. But they can also just wear a *sārī* and keep on living without the operation. Everybody does whatever they feel like doing. But when we have to go and mix with women, when we have to talk to them and live among them, we have to wear *sārīs*. We're not going to get married anyway, so why not go through with the operation? Do you understand?

A: *Let me ask you another question. Do hijras enjoy speaking to women more or to men more?*

S: When we talk with other hijras, we'll talk to each other in our own language; otherwise, we'll talk like women. We'll say, "Eat *mātā jī* ['mother', respectful], won't you eat? Sleep *mātā jī*, sleep *guru jī*, what are you doing?" I'll talk to them that way.

A: *No, no, I mean, who do you enjoy talking to the most--women, men, or hijras?*

S: The hijras enjoy talking to other hijras the most. I'm not talking about myself, of course, because I enjoy talking to men more. We can hold each other, we can touch

each other, we can laugh openly with each other, there's a lot of *hā hā hī hī*.[56]
What would I do with a woman? You'll talk a little and it'll be all over. But there's
a different kind of enjoyment with men.

A: *I asked that question because the hijras in America really like to talk with women.*
      They'll call them 'sister' and 'girlfriend'.

S: Yes, yes, everyone talks to their girlfriends and women companions. Everyone
      becomes girlfriends and talks with each other about what they feel inside. We need
      to have that kind of conversation, of course. But when you talk with your own
      man, it's a different thing altogether, and that's what I enjoy most. For example, I
      can easily sit around with other women and say, "Eat *dīdī*, drink *dīdī*." We'll sit
      together, we'll go for a walk together, we'll go to the cinema together, we'll see a
      movie together, we'll do everything together. But there's something more that goes
      on with a man. It's a lot more fun to talk to a man.

B: *Do you think that your life is just like everyone else's or do you feel like you live*
      outside of society?

S: No, no, our way of talking is different. Our way of eating, drinking, sleeping,
      getting up, and talking to other hijras--it's all different.

B: *So you won't really mix with people like us?*

S: Sure, I'll mix with you people. Everything will happen.

B: *But only when you come to sing and dance at our houses, right? So do you ever*
      feel that you're somehow separate from the rest of society?

S: How can we be separate from the rest of society? We're all part of this society. If I
      live in the street, I'm living in this society. If I build a house for myself, my name
      will even be registered on the voting list.[57] And I've done that. I can even get a
      ration card.

B: *You mean hijras can vote?*

S: Of course we can vote!

B: *Are you sure?*

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56   Sulekha uses the expression *hā hā hī hī* to indicate flirtatious laughter.

57   Officially, anyone who has a place of residence or an address in India can vote.

S: Yes, of course.

B: *But Megha was telling us that hijras can't vote.*

S: No, that's totally a lie. We can vote. I myself vote! I have a household, I have an address, I'm a resident of this place, and anyone who is a resident of this place can vote. It's written in the book of civics that if you live in a country for five years, you can become a citizen of that country, so you'll of course have the right to vote. Everyone has the right to vote. Isn't that so? So it's my right too. I've been living here for ten years. I have a card and a house number, so why shouldn't I be able to vote? Now if someone doesn't <u>want</u> to have contact with anyone, or if someone doesn't have a house to live in and can't register his name, then that's a different matter. If a hijra doesn't want to vote, then of course he won't vote. There's a person who comes to your door and asks you to write down your name, your family's name, and the number of family members, so I asked him to write down the names of ten hijras. If someone doesn't want to give them his name, he won't. If he doesn't have an address or a household, his name won't be registered. After all, they come to your door and make you write everything down--your name, your family's name, how big the family is, all that. So we have our own group here. That's why everytime they come and ask us who lives here, we'll tell them we have a family of ten. ((laughs)) People are always coming and going at my place anyway, and if I didn't have a ration card for them to use, how would I be able to feed them? I've been living here for ten years, so I've become a citizen here.

A: *Are you active in politics?*

S: Sure, because my name is registered! So I'll go and vote. Somebody will come here with a big tractor and we all climb on and drive together to the voting place.

A: *So you <u>are</u> a part of Indian society, then?*

S: Yes, yes, yes. If we live in Indian society, of course we're Indian. If we live in a village, we're the citizens of that village. If a villager comes by here, I have to be willing to talk to him.

A: *So what do the village people think about the hijras?*

S: Nothing special. They'll just say, "Oh, that poor hijra. Just leave him alone and let him lie in the corner."

A: *So they're just like regular neighbors?*

S: Sure, they're just like neighbors.

B: *Do you ever visit their homes?*

S: Sure! Today's Sunday, for instance, and there's a movie on television.

A: *Oh, really?*

S: Sure! Don't you know that there's a movie on television every Sunday? So after I go and visit 5 or 10 houses in the village, I'll go and see the movie. Then at 9:00 I'll come back here, cook some food, and go to sleep.

B: *Oh right, I heard that there's a good film on television today. Is it "Sannī"?*

S: Oh, I don't know which film it is. I haven't had a chance to look at the paper because I've been working since early this morning--taking care of you, cooking food, taking a bath, washing my clothes. And now it's almost 12:30. I'll go at 2:00, when you leave. ((laughs))

B: *Do you ever go to the cinema?*

S: Of course I go to the cinema! Don't you know that the last time you saw me in Banāras I had watched three different films in one day? ((laughs)) Whenever I go to Banāras, I see all the movies that are playing there. When I went this last time I saw *Balmā*, and in the Vijyā movie theater I saw *Divyaśaktī*. And I also saw some new film.

A: *So which actor do you like the best of all?*

S: I used to like Jitendra the best.

B: *But who do you like nowadays?*

S: Oh, there aren't any good actors nowadays. I used to see every show that Jitendra was in! ((laughs))

B: *You don't like Amirkhān?*

S: I don't like any of them nowadays! ((laughs))

B: *But Amirkhān is so good! I like him a lot!*

S: Which films did he act in?

B: Oh, in *jo jītā vo sikandar* ['He who wins is Sikandar'], in *kayāmat se kayāmat tak* ['From destiny to destiny'], and in *dil* ['Heart'].

S: Yes, I've seen *dil.*

B: *The hero in dil was Amirkhān.*

S: He was okay, I guess.

B: *No, no, he was great!*

A: *So do all of the other hijras live just like you and vote in elections?*

S: No, no, they don't. They'll only live like me if they have a house of their own and live in it, if they have a good relationship with their neighbors, if they go and visit them and vice versa. How can you trust a person who just rents? "Today I rent this house, tomorrow I rent this house." You can't depend on a person like that.

A: *So is your group in some way a reflection of Indian society, in your opinion? Like, in the larger society everyone has different roles, Brahmans will do this sort of worship and-*

S: Māī Muliyā. Yes, we worship Māī Muliyā.

B: *No, no, that's not what she means. Everybody has a different role in society, right? So, for instance, we won't worship when we're not in the presence of a pandit, or we won't have our head shaved without a barber. What kinds of roles do you people have?*

S: I'm telling you that if someone's a Hindu, he'll act like a Hindu, but if he converts to Islam, he'll have to go through a conversion ceremony. All of those things are done.

B: *No, no, I mean, would you say that the hijras are sort of like a mini-society?*

S: Yes, yes, we're a small unit of India, and that's why we get the respect that we do. If we weren't a small unit of India, nobody would care about us at all.

B: *Are hijras sort of like a caste then? Are you your own unit?*

S: Yes, yes, we're a unit.

B: *What does Indian society think about you?*

S: How do we know what they think about us? As far as we're concerned, everybody has a reciprocal relationship with us. We just eat, drink, and live. We don't know what Indian society thinks about us. Maybe the Indian government knows what society thinks about us! ((laughs))

B: *Do you ever feel like you're an outsider in Indian society?*

S: No, no, they don't consider us outsiders. They don't think that we're people who don't belong to them, or anything like that. Everybody talks to us, everybody calls on us. I'm settled down here, after all. They consider me an inhabitant of the same village, a child of the same land. So we laugh with each other, we joke with each other.

A: *If you had a choice, would you rather be a man, a woman, or a hijra?*

S: In the next birth?

A: *Yes.*

S: Who knows about the next birth? Only *bhagvān* knows what will happen.

B: *But even so, can you give us an answer?*

S: As far as this life is concerned, I regret it.[58] If I did good deeds in this life, then I suppose that if *bhagvān* wished it, I'd become a human being.

B: *But would you become a man or a woman?*

S: Who knows about the next birth? I can't say anything about it.

B: *But what would you like to become?*

S: I don't think about that. I just think that it would be good if *bhagvān* would give me death, so that I can be relieved from this life. It's not like I want to become a man in the next birth. I'm suffering from whatever *karma* I did in the last life, but who knows what will happen in the next birth? Who knows whether I'll become a woman or a man or a dog or a cat? What should I say? Tell me, what should I say? Suppose I were to lie to you and tell you that I wanted to become a man, or that I wanted to become a woman. It won't happen. I'll become whatever is written in my *karma*. I'll have to pay for whatever I do. All human beings are born, of course. Some are rich, some are poor, some are beautiful, some are ugly. Am I telling you a lie? Some are black, some are white. And what can we do about it?

A: *Do you ever wish that your body was somehow different? Do you ever wish that you had a man's or a woman's body instead of a hijra's?*

S: Yes, yes, I think about it. My body has the structure of a woman's.

A: *But my question is, did you ever wish in childhood that you were a man or a woman?*

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58   Sulekha uses the term *pachtāvā* ['regret'] here, implying that she is somehow responsible for being a hijra.

S: I'm not going to tell you that. I'm neither a man nor a woman.

B: *But would you have liked to have been a woman?*

S: Would I have liked to have been a woman?

B: *Yes.*

S: In the beginning I used to feel, "Oh *bhagvān*! What is this thing that has happened to me? How much better it would have been if I had been born a woman!" That's what I used to say when I was wearing a *sārī* but hadn't yet joined the hijras. "Why have I become a hijra? Why have I become a hijra? If I were truly a woman, how good it would have been! I would have been married, I would have had a wedding, how good it would have been!" But after I became a hijra and wore a *sārī*, I didn't feel that way anymore. Because then I became a woman.

End of conversation.

Appendix B

A CONVERSATION WITH RUPA

(Translation into English from the original Hindi)

The following tape-recorded conversation took place in the front room of Rupa's home in March of 1993, which she shares with a small Indian family. Unlike the other hijras we interviewed, Rupa leads a quiet and secluded life away from her group, seeing her fellow hijras only during their daily song and dance performances. At the time of the interview, Rupa was dressed as man, her femininity visible only in her topknot, earrings, nose ring, and understated eye make-up. Rupa spent the first eighteen years of her life as a boy, yet never felt wholly comfortable with this role, ultimately deciding to move to Banaras and adopt the hijra lifestyle. The participants in this conversation are Rupa (labeled as 'R' in the text), Veronica and myself (whom I have labeled jointly as 'A' in the text for ease of transcription), and our Hindi-speaking research assistant Vinita (labeled as 'B' in the text).

A: *How many hijras are in Banāras, in your opinion?*

R: About 700 or 800.

A: *How many communities are there?*

B: *Or since you were saying that you define communites by dholaks ['drums'], how many dholaks are there?*[1]

R: Yes, you can estimate it by however you want, by *dholaks* or whatever. The entire area is divided up into *dholaks*. Our area, for example, extends from Sonāpurā to Ṭikrī Tārāpur. The whole area is divided up like this. One group's area extends from Pāṇḍe Havelī all the way up to Pakke Mahāl. Another group has their area on the other side of the Ingliśiyā Lain ['English Lane'], and some people have their area in Kamacchā-Kamacchā.

B: *How many groups are there?*

R: Channu's group is one, Andāz's two, the older Channu's three, Sukkhu's four, Iḍū's five, Chandā's six, Bulbul's seven, and then there's one person whom we call Bilrī

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[1]   The *dholak*, a small Indian drum played on both ends, is played by the hijras in their musical performances.

but her real name is Gītā so that makes eight, Gesu's is nine, so all together there are about ten or eleven.

B: *On this side of the Gaṅgā?*

R: Yes, and there are a couple of other groups on the other side of the Gaṅgā in Rāmnagar.

A: *We've heard that Banāras is famous for its hijras. Is that true?*

R: No, it's the same everywhere--not just in Banāras, but in all areas. There are more hijras in Bombay or Delhi than there are in Banāras.

A: *How do hijras choose their communities?*

B: *In other words, how do you decide whether you should be working in this group or in that group? What kind of relationship do you have with the other groups? How does it all happen?*

R: When we find out that a hijra is born, we come and get him. If a hijra is born in someone's household, we'll come and get him.

A: *So you don't live with the same group for your whole life?*

R: Generally we do, but if some kind of conflict arises, we'll leave and go to another group.

B: *So that means you don't necessarily work in only one group? Suppose you've brought a hijra to your group from somewhere else, for instance, then he won't necessarily live his whole life in your group?*

R: Yes, he can change.

A: *Which group is the largest in Banāras?*

R: Channu's.

B: *Which Channu are you talking about?*

R: Channu *cācā* ['paternal uncle'] *jī*'s group . The elderly Channu. It's the largest group in Banāras, and he's the *mālik* ['master'] of it.

A: *And the most famous, too?*

R: Yes, yes.

A: *Are the different groups approximately the same size?*

B: *What she means to ask, cācā jī,*[2] *is whether some of the groups in Banāras have more people while some have less people? Or does every group have about the same number of people?*

R: Yes, some groups have more people and some have less. Some have ten, some have twenty, and some groups have only two. In the same way that some families have two children and others have ten children, some groups have two *celās* ['disciples'] and others have ten *celās*.

A: *Do a lot of hijras live apart from the group?*

R: Yes, a lot of them live alone just like I live alone. But they still belong to a group because they have to have connections with a group. Even though we might cook and eat separately, we still have to work with a group.

B: *But you live alone and don't live with anyone else?*

R: Right, I have a separate *koṭhrī* ['small room']. It's just like a mother and father who have four children: some of the children will live with their father and others will live apart from him. But their father is still their father. He's still their *mālik* ['master'].

A: *How many hijras are in your group? What are their ages and castes? Are there any children in your group?*

R: There's no children in our group. We have a *guru* who is about 70 or 80 years old, and I have two *celās*. One of them is about 25 or 26 years old, and the other is about 35 or 36.

B: *Cācā jī, how do you find out if a hijra has been born in a family?*

R: When we go to dance, we hold them in our laps and play with them, and then we just look.

B: *Oh, we were wondering about that! So when you find out, do you take them with you immediately?*

R: No, a few days later.

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2   Since Vinita, our Hindi research assistant, has lived around the corner from Rupa's house for a number of years, she refers to him affectionately as *cācā jī* ['paternal uncle'], as do many of her neighbors.

B: *But this area is so spread out. How do you find out when a new child is born?*

R: From the hospital.

A: *Is everybody in your group from Banāras?*

R: Yes.

A: *Does your group only dance in one area? Do you ever dance outside your area?*

R: No.

A: *Who is the youngest in your group and who is the oldest?*

R: The oldest is our *guru*, of course. Then there's me, and then my *celās*. One of my *celās* is the youngest.

B: *Are most of them educated?*

R: There's a hijra living near the subdivision of the police station who has passed *intar* ['intermediate college'].[3]

B: *Is he living with his mother and father?*

R: No, he lives alone. He's from Mahārāṣṭra.

B: *Is he still studying?*

R: No, his studies are over, but he's not in a group. He's some sort of a *celā*, but he never goes to get the *badhāī* ['gift given in exchange for a congratulatory ceremony'].[4]

B: *If he doesn't go, then what does he do?*

R: He does the work of *jhār-phūṅk* ['shamanism', 'exorcism']. His name is Bulbul.[5] He lives near the subdivision of the police station.

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[3]   An *intar* education, acquired in two years, is rougly equivalent to a junior college education in America.

[4]   See Ved Prakash Vatuk and Sylvia Vatuk's (1976) article "The Social Context of Gift Exchange in India" for a discussion of the social complexity of gift-giving in rural western Uttar Pradesh.

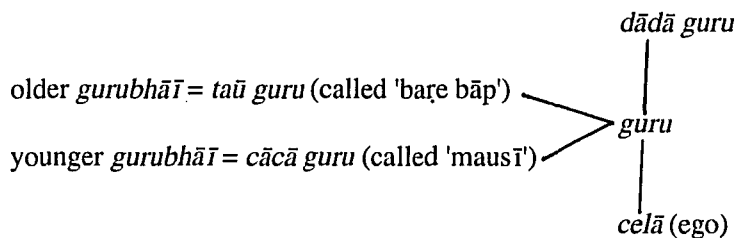[5]   Bulbul, a women's name, translates into English as 'nightingale'.

B: *I know about another Bulbul who used to be with you. She danced really well.*

R: Yes, there was a different Bulbul who stayed with us for 25 years.

B: *Yes, yes, sāvitrī dīdī[6] used to tell me that she danced really well. We were very small children at the time, but I still remember her clearly.*

A: *What do you do for a living? Do you ever have jobs or do you just dance and sing?*

R: No, we don't have jobs.

B: *But if you wanted to have a job, cācā jī, would you be able to get one?*

R: No, I wouldn't be able to get one.

B: *Is there any kind of government law with respect to that?*

R: No.

B: *Do some hijras ever try to get jobs?*

R: No, never. We earn our living by means of this profession only.

A: *Do the different people in your group play different roles? For example, you said that there's a boss in your group, so what's his role? And what is your role with respect to him?*

R: Well, it's just like the relationship of a *bāp laṛkā* ['father and son']. It's just like that of a *pitā putra* ['father and son'].

B: *So how do you help out your guru?*

R: Well, mainly we help out by never leaving him. When he gets old, we'll remain in the household just like any son would.

B: *Do you mean that you provide nourishment for your guru in the same way that sons provide nourishment for their parents when they're old?*

R: No, no, not just nourishment, we'll give him everything that we earn. And he'll give back to us whatever he feels like giving back us.

B: *Oh, that's how it works?*

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6   *Sāvitrī dīdī* is one of Vinita's neighbors.

R: Yes, because when he dies, he's of course not going to take what we give him with him. Where would he take it anyway? So whatever remains will be ours in the end.

B: *Oh, I see. You say that your group is like a family. Are their different children for different people? Is someone, say, a cācā ['uncle'], and so forth?*

R: Yes, for instance, my *guru* Channu, the big woman I was telling you about? Whoever is elderly will be our *dādā guru.*

B: *The elderly woman?*

R: Yes, yes, that elderly woman is my *dādā guru.* And if someone is older than my *guru* and also his *guru bhāī* ['fellow disciple'], we'll call him *bare bāp* ['older father'].

B: *Oh.*

R: And if someone is younger than my *guru* and also his *guru bhāī,* he'll be my *cācā guru bhāī.* But we don't actually call them "*cācā,*" etc. We'll call them "*mausī*" ['mother's sister'], we'll call our *guru* "*guru.*"[7] This is the way we talk. Among the Muslims, *mausī* is *khālā.* So if there are Muslim people living with us, they'll say "*khālā,*" or they'll say "*khālā guru.*" Mostly, we'll use the feminine gender. When I say "feminine," I mean the way that women talk.

A: *So when you're together, do you always talk in the feminine gender?*

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7   Rupa's explanation of hijra address terminology parallels the three address terms in Hindi involving the term *mā* ['mother']: *barī mā* ['elder mother'] (i.e., one's *taī* ['father's elder brother's wife']), *mā* ['mother'], and *chotī mā* ['younger mother'] (i.e., one's *cācī* [father's younger brother's wife']). The equivalent address terms used by the hijras, according to Rupa, are *bare bāp* [i.e., guru's older fellow disciple], *guru,* and *mausī* ['mother's sister' or 'guru's younger fellow disciple'], respectively.

A skeletal tree diagram would look as follows:

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                                              dādā guru
                                                  |
older gurubhāī = taū guru (called 'bare bāp')  ⟍   |
                                                 ⟍ >guru
younger gurubhāī = cācā guru (called 'mausī') ⟋    |
                                                  |
                                              celā (ego)
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R: Yes. For instance, if a couple of people from my group were to come here right now, even if I were in these clothes,[8] we'll talk like this: "Where were[f] you? What were you doing[f]? Why didn't didn't you come[f] to the *badhāī.* Will you eat[f]?"

A: *Is it difficult to switch from masculine to feminine, or do you have to think about it?*

R: Gradually, as we lead this life, it becomes a habit.

A: *So they never talk in the masculine then?*

R: No, we live like this, nobody lives like that.

A: *What's your daily routine? What kinds of things do you do from morning to evening?*

R: We get up in the morning, take a bath, and clean ourselves. After that, if we're Hindu, we'll do *pujā* ['worship']. If someone is Muslim, he 'll do his duty; if someone is Christian, he 'll do his duty. After that we'll cook food, or we'll eat whatever is left over from last night. Normally, we cook at night and keep it for the next day. After we've done all the morning chores, we eat. Then we'll change our clothes, take the *dholak,* and go to work. By the time we come back, it's usually around 3:00 or 4:00 or 5:00. And then the same thing begins again. We'll cook again, eat again. We always cook fresh food in the evening--*cāval* ['rice'], *dāl* ['lentils'], or whatever we feel like. And after we finish cooking, we 'll eat and go to sleep.

A: *Who do you worship?*

R: Our own *devī* ['goddess'].

A: *And who is that?*

R: Bahucarā Mātā. She's the *devī* of our whole group. No matter which area you go to, the people of that area will be worshipping her. You won't find such a *devī* anywhere else.[9] ((Rupa leaves the room and brings back a picture of Bahucarā Mātā.))

B: *Where did you get the picture from?*

---

8 Rupa was wearing men 's clothes (i.e. a *luṅgī* and *kurtā*) at the time of this tape-recorded conversation.

9 Rupa is underscoring how unique it is for there to be a universal *devī* worshipped by people in all areas of India.

R: In the Gujarāt. I'm the *pujārī* ['priest'] of the people here.

B: *Do all of the hijras worship her?*

R: All of the hijras worship her, whether they're Hindu or Muslim. Anyone who has joined our group--whatever caste they belong to--has to worship Bahucarā Mātā.

B: *That's amazing!*

A: *((looking at picture)) But this is Durga, isn't it?*

B: *No, I think she just looks like Durga. Could you tell us a little more about her?*

R: It's a very long story. It's a very long story to tell in one sitting. There's a book about her. If you'd like to read more about her, I'll give you the book.

B: *It would be wonderful if you'd give it to us.*

R: But you have to return it to me.

B: *Oh yes, of course we'll return it to you!*

R: Don't be taking it from here to there and from there to here.

B: *No, no. There's nothing to worry about. Of course we'll return it to you.*

R: So this is our *devī*--in the Gujarāt. Bahucarā Mātā. And she rides a hen. The people in Gujarāt respect her a great deal. And because of that, Gujarātī people also respect us a great deal. Even the greatest millionaires or billionaires among them--if they're going by car and see us in front of them--will immediately stop the car, get out, and touch our feet. They'll give us 10 or 20 rupees, whatever they have, and say, "*Mātā jī* ['mother', respectful], please give me your blessing so that my desires will be fulfilled."

B: *Oh.*

R: Now there are different customs in Mārvāṛ,[10] of course. Every place has its own customs.

B: *Do the hijras who live in Mārvāṛ live a Mārvāṛī way of life?*

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10   Mārvāṛ is an area in Rajasthān.

R: In Mārvāṛ they'll wear a veil this big ((indicating size with hands)), and they won't unveil themselves in front of men. They'll only unveil themselves in front of women.

B: *I see.*

R: They'll only unveil themselves when they dance and sing in front of women. When they come before the men, they'll veil themselves again.

B: *Do they dance in front of men, too?*

R: As long as they're out in public, they'll wear a veil, just like the women do. It's different everywhere, of course. If they're in the Punjāb, they'll wear a *salvār kurtā*. If they're in Kaśmīr, they'll wear Kaśmīrī dress. Every place has a different way of dressing. In Pakistān, they'll wear Pakistānī dress; in Arabia they'll wear Arabian dress. When our people gather together for the big rallies, they come from all over--from Pakistan, Kuwait, from everywhere. Your people are the only ones who don't come. ((laughs)) But that's because we're not in touch with the people who live in your country. Otherwise, we're in touch with people from everywhere. Your people are the only ones we haven't been able to get in touch with yet. This is our custom. You go wherever you feel like going. It doesn't matter whether you know someone or not. All you have to do is arrive.

A: *Does your group sing and dance every day?*

R: ((nods))

A: *Do you ever perform for each other when you're alone, or do you dance only when you go outside?*

R: No, we don't dance for our own entertainment. We don't do that. We only dance for other people. What's our own entertainment anyway? What I mean is, somehow this life has to pass. There's no such thing as our own entertainment.

A: *Do you only dance when a child is born?*

R: When a child is born and also at the time of weddings. And also when a boy's hair is cut or when he's given a sacred thread by the Brahmans, as is the custom among us Brahmans.

A: *Do you have a tradition of telling stories, too?*

R: No, we don't tell stories.

B: *Suppose, cācā jī, that a child is born and when he grows up, he comes to know that he is like you. How does he feel? Bad or good?*

R:	Bad, of course. He has to feel bad. He can't possibly feel good about it.

A:	*How old were you when you came to know about yourself?*

R:	I came to know about myself after I was 17 or 18 years old. And then I came here. These people already knew about me, but hadn't yet taken me.

A:	*When you were small, were you brought up as a boy?*

R:	Yes, when I was small, my conversation was just like this.

B:	*What do you mean? Did you behave like a girl or a boy?*

R:	No, no, I behaved just like the girls. I was always playing with dolls, marrying them away, doing this and that--ever since I was very small. From the very beginning.

B:	*But were you also wearing girl's clothes?*

R:	No, no, as far as clothes were concerned, I dressed like a boy.

A:	*How did your parents treat you?*

R:	They talked to me like a boy, but I behaved like a girl. I would sit wherever the girls were sitting. If they were singing songs, I would sit down and sing songs with them. If they were singing *bhajans* ['devotional songs'], I would sing *bhajans* with them. And if the girls were marrying their dolls to each other, I'd join in the wedding. I was doing all of these kinds of things from the very beginning.

B:	*Where did all that come from? From within?*

R:	Yes, from within of course. All of these things come from within. After you're born, these kinds of gestures or behaviors--one or the other--just come naturally.

B:	*Oh, is that boy from Chedī-Bedī like that, then?*[11]

R:	*No, he's not.*

B:	But everything about him is that way!

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[11]	Vinita is referring to an effeminate boy who lives in her neighborhood. For more discussion about him, see Appendix 1.

A: *How did you find out that you were like this? In other words, was it emotional or mental or physical? How did you find out that you were a hijra?*

R: You just know it from your body. I must have been a boy of about 5 or 6 years old. I was in Gorakhpur [an area north of Banāras] recently. There was a *thakur* [land-owning caste] there who was the landlord. He was from the Devriyā district.[12] His wife entered the Gorakhpur hospital; she was about to give birth to a child. When the child was born, the doctor told them, "This child is a hijra." So Thakur Sāhab thought, "Wherever we go, we'll be dishonored because dishonor has certainly happened. And when the boy grows up, the hijras will surely come and take him away from us anyway, and it will be very painful. If we take this boy home with us to the village, we'll get a bad reputation." So on that same day, when the boy was just six years old, he found out about the hijras. He took the boy to them and payed them 500 rupees. He didn't even tell them his name or his address. He simply told them, "It's yours. If you want to take him, then take him right now." After that he went home and proclaimed to the world that his child was dead. That way his honor was saved. That boy isn't in Gorakhpur anymore; now he's in a place called Maū.

B: *So the hijras brought up a boy who was only six days old?*

R: Yes, they did.

B: *Really? But how did they do that? He needs his mother's milk, doesn't he?*

R: No, they brought him up somehow, because it was written in his fate. What else could he have done? He had to remain alive. If there was someone else in his place, maybe he would have died. But why should he have died? His fate was to live like a hijra for the rest of his life. That was his fate. When he got to be about 5 or 6 years old, he had two little balls about this big ((indicating small size with fingers))--only that big!

B: *Did they cut them off or just leave them alone?*

R: When they're only so big, they just leave them alone.

B: *So some people don't have anything? Anything at all?*

R: Well, this kind of thing happens in both men and women, of course. In a man it'll be just so big ((indicating size with fingers)), and in a woman there won't be hardly anything at all.

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12 Devriyā is a district in Uttar Pradesh.

B: *Oh, so there's a difference between men and women? Do some people have surgery?*

R: Yes, some people have surgery. Bulbul was operated on, for example. But it wasn't successful.

B: *How much did he have to pay the doctor? Do you have to give fees for that?*

R: No, nobody took any fees from her since the doctor was just doing experimental research. They just said, "Let's see what happens. If the surgery works, then fine. But if it doesn't work, we won't take any fees."

B: *Is Bulbul like a man or a woman?*

R: No, Bulbul's exactly like a woman.

A: *When you found out that you were a hijra, did you talk to your family about it?*

B: *Cācā jī, what she means to ask is, when you found out that you were a hijra, did you just keep it to yourself or did you talk to your friends about it?*

R: I kept it to myself. I didn't even discuss it with my own family members.

B: *Cācā jī, tell me one thing. Do you have any particular terms that you like to be addressed by? Are you addressed by any name other than 'hijra'?*

R: There might be other names in other places, but in our Banāras we're just called 'hijras'.

B: *And outside Banāras?*

R: Outside Banāras, like in Bombay, they'll say *cakkā* ['circle'].[13] In Mārvāṛ they'll say *bāī* ['prostitute'].[14] In Madhyā Pradeś they'll say *hansuā* ['sickle'].[15] Every place has its own words for it. Mārvāṛī people say *khusro*. They'll all have their

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[13] *Caklā* is the name used for red-light districts in India; the people who work the street in Bombay are sometimes referred to as *cakkā*.

[14] *Bāī* is a respectable term for 'prostitute', normally used in reference to women and meaning 'motherly'. In Gujarati, the term *bāī* means 'mother'.

[15] The term *hansuā*, a kind of sickle, is sometimes used by people in smaller villages to refer to a beautiful woman, in much the same way that a term like 'knock-out' is used in English. A comparable expression in Hindi is *gaṇḍāsa* ['fodder-cutter'], also used in reference to a *femme fatale*.

own names according to their own languages and their own castes. But if they live here, they'll just be called hijras.

A: *When you found out that you were a hijra, did you leave home?*

R: No, I stayed at home until I was 18 years old. I left home at the age of 18.

A: *Where did you go then?*

R: Banāras.

A: *How far is your home from here?*

R: I won't tell you that. You probably know it anyway, but it's not proper for me to tell you that.

A: *Okay, if you don't want to tell us, that's fine.*

R: I'll just say that my home is in Gorakhpur.[16] Suppose you came from Gorakhpur to Banāras, and you can figure out how far it is.

B: *Is Gorakpur in eastern Uttar Pradesh?*

R: Yes, near the Nepal border. My whole family lives in Gorakhpur. They're all from Gorakhpur.

A: *When you left home, did you know any other people who were hijras?*

R: No, I didn't know any. I saw them dancing once, and that's all I knew about them.

A: *How did you know where to go, then?*

R: Someone brought me here.

A: *Who brought you here?*

R: My *guru.*

A: *Oh, I see. This might be a strange question, but I don't know much so I have to ask. How many hijras are hijras from childhood and how many become hijras later on?*

B: *In other words, do some people become hijras later in life through an operation?*

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[16]   Gorakhpur is a district as well as a city.

R: Yes, some people are born hijras and others are made into hijras. But even those who decide to become hijras later in life have some kind of *kharābī* ['defect'][17] in them. Only then will they become hijras; they don't do it just for fun.

A: *Do you give them all the same respect?*

R: Yes, they're all the same. Whether they're hijras by birth or hijras by surgery, they're all treated equally.

A: *Are most of your friends hijras?*

R: Yes.

A: *Do you have some friends who are not hijras?*

R: Everyone in this household is my friend, everyone in the neighborhood, everyone outside, I have friends everywhere--whoever I meet, whoever I talk to, whoever comes here and sits down with me, drinks tea and water with me. Everyone is my friend.

A: *So are all of your hijra friends from your own group?*

R: No, no, not just from my own group. I also have friends who live alone.

A: *How much time do you spend with your hijra friends?*

R: As long it takes to get together for singing and dancing. I'll stay with them for a couple of hours, and after that I'll just take my share and go home.

A: *Why did you decide to live apart from the group?*

R: I already told you that everyone has their own way of life. Some people eat meat, some people eat fish, and some people drink. I don't like any of them, and because of that I wanted to live alone.

A: *How do you refer to yourself?*

B: *What she means is, how do you think of yourself in your heart--a man, a woman, or nothing?*

R: Nothing.

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17 The term *kharābī* translates variously as 'defect', 'wickedness', 'badness', or 'fault'.

B: *But in the beginning you told us that all of your activities were like women's activities, so you must lead your life feeling like you're a woman.*

R: Yes, yes, I consider myself to be a woman. Yes. Because all of our activities are like women's. We have to wear *sārīs* like women. Our conversation, our activities, the way we cook and eat, all of these things are like women's things. So within our hearts, there's of course a feeling of womanhood. We of course know that we're hijras, but all of our activities are like women's activities. But since we know that we're hijras, how could we possibly say that we're women? We won't say that we're women, because if we did, how could we possibly say that we're hijras?

A: *Do hijras ever have relationships?*

B: *In other words, can a man have a relationship with a woman hijra? Or can a man hijra have a relationship with a woman hijra?*

R: It doesn't happen like that in Banāras, but it does in the Punjab. In the Punjab, the ones who are more manly[18] are 'hijras' and the ones who are more womanly are 'hijrins'. And they'll live together like a man and a woman. The manly one will always wear a *luṅgī* and *kamīz*, and the woman will always wear a *sārī*. The manly one will play the *ḍholak* and the woman will dance. But this only happens in the Panjab--sleeping, getting up, sitting together, and all of that. It doesn't happen in our Banāras.

B: *Do they have any other kinds of relationships, then?*

R: Well, nothing like that really happens here. You just cook, eat, and go to bed.

B: *Then you never have children?*

R: No, of course we don't have children. We'll go to bed together, sit around together, and talk with each other, but only as a joke or for fun. Nothing else.

A: *Are some hijras more masculine than other hijras? And if so, what do people think about them?*

R: Why would outsiders[19] ever think about us anyway?

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18   Rupa repeatedly uses the term *mardānā* in this passage, which I have translated as 'manly'.

19   Rupa uses the term *bāhar ke log*, which translates literally as 'people of the outside'.

B: *No, not outsiders, but people in your own group. Suppose that someone in your group is more feminine looking. Is that considered a good thing? Bindiya, for example, looks a lot like a woman.*

R: Yes, and Megha looks a lot like a woman, too.

B: *Bindiya looks exactly like a woman!*

R: Yes, and now I even have a *celā* who looks exactly like a woman. You've got to see her! But in any given group people look differently, so you can't generalize. If there are seven people in a group, there'll be seven different looks, and that's all there is to it. If there's a good-looking person, we'll say that they're good-looking. If there's a bad-looking person, we'll say that their features aren't good. We'll just say whatever we see. After all, there aren't any men here. We're all hijras.

A: *Do you have different roles in your group? For example, do some hijras do masculine work and others feminine work?*

B: *Like in any household, women will work at home and men will work outside because they're stronger. Are there divisions like that among the hijras?*

R: If someone walks by, you just say, "Lift it!" ((laughs))

A: *((laughs))*

R: If it's a hijra, we'll just say, "Do this work." And if they're weak, we just won't say anything.

A: *Do Banāras hijras mostly speak Hindi?*

R: Yes.

A: *Do most of the people in your group speak Hindi or Bhojpuri?*

R: When people from a Bhojpuri-speaking area come here, they'll of course speak Bhojpuri. Bindiya is from Bihar, for example, so she speaks Bhojpuri. If they come from Bihar, they'll speak Bihārī.

B: *But when you're together, do you speak Hindi?*

R: Yes.

B: *We've heard that the hijras here speak a perfectly standard Hindi. Like "maĩ khā rahī^f hū ['I am eating'], maĩ kar rahī^f hū ['I am doing']." Do you speak like that?*

R: Yes, when we're together, we always speak like this: "*maĩ kar rahī^f hũ* ['I am doing'], *maĩ jā rahī^f hũ* ['I am going'], *maĩ khā rahī^f hũ* ['I am eating']."

A: *Does Bhojpuri show feminine and masculine gender too?*

R: Yes, if a man is talking to another man, he'll address him like a man. He'll say ((in Bhojpuri)), "*kahā̃ jāt hai* ['where are you going'], *yahā̃ kā karat hai jī* ['what are you doing here, sir?']," But if he's talking to a woman, he'll address her like a woman, "*haine āī^f* ['you came here'], *le jāī^f* ['take it'], *raũā kā karat vānī^f* [what are you doing, ma'am?']." But when we speak to men we'll say, "*raũā kā karat* [what are you doing?']." We'll speak like that.

B: *I don't think she speaks Bhojpuri at all. I think she's pretending! ((laughs))*

A: *What did they speak in your parents' house?*

R: Gorakhpurī.

A: *What's the language of Gorakpur? Is it Hindi or Gorakhpurī?*

R: Gorakhpur is just like the language spoken in Bihar, since it's on the border too. So we speak like the people from Bihar.

A: *Are there any special mannerisms or styles of speech which you found yourself adopting after you left home and became a hijra?*

B: *In other words, since the Bhojpuri in Gorakhpur is different from the Bhojpuri in Banāras, did you find any special differences in the speech of this area?*

R: Yes, I did. When I came to this side, I learned to speak the language of this side and stopped using the language of the other side. A lot of time has passed now--30 or 40 years.

A: *But did you also have to learn a special style of speaking when you came to Banāras?*

R: There's nothing special about it. We'll talk to each other in the same way that we're talking to you. We're always using the feminine, of course. Like, "*ap kahā̃ jā rahī^f haĩ* ['where are you going?'], *kyā parh rahī^f haĩ* ['what are you reading?']," and all that. But otherwise, there's no difference. When we're sitting around with each other, we'll just say whatever comes naturally. "*tum kidhar jā rahī^f ho* ['which way are you (familiar) going?'], *idhar ā* ['come this way'], *kyā kar rahī^f ho* ['what are you doing?'], *khānā banā rahī^f ho* ['oh, you're cooking food?'], *acchā banā lo bhāī* ['okay, then go on and cook, you guys']."

A: *When you're with other hijras, do you address them by a particular name?*

R: Yes, we address them by whatever relationship we've established with them.

A: *What kinds of relationships do you establish?*

R: Suppose one *guru* has four *celās*. First of all, there's the oldest cela, and then there's the next oldest *celā*. So the second *celā* will call the first celā "*jījī*" ['older sister'].

B: *Jījī* means *dīdī?*

R: No, among us *jījī* means *jeṭānī* ['husband's older brother's wife']. Because the position of our *guru* is like a *sās* ['mother-in-law'].[20] We apply the *sindūr* ['vermillion'][21] in our *guru's* name, in order to indicate that we have come to the *guru's* household and are like daughters-in-law to him. We consider our *guru* to be our *suhāg* ['the state of being married'].[22] Otherwise, of course, she's our *sās* ['mother-in-law'].[23] When she is no longer alive, we won't put *bindīs* [vermillion

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[20]   All of the hijra's relationships with one another, then, parallel in-law relationships.

[21]   *Sindūr* is the reddish powder that Indian women apply to the part of the hair in order to symbolize the state of being in a husband's protection. A few notes on marriage customs in India are perhaps needed here. When women marry in India, they leave their father's house, known as *pīhar*, and move into their father-in-law's house, known as *sasurāl*. From then on, the wife will apply the *sindhūr* ['vermillion'] in the name of her husband.

[22]   *Sampat* ['wealth'], *sut* ['son'], and *suhāg* ['the state of being married', or in other words, 'a husband's long life'] are said to be the three things most desired by women in Hindu culture. A common blessing for elderly women in certain areas of India, for instance, is *būḍh suhāgan ho* ['may you become old with your husband']. The converse of this blessing, which translates into English roughly as 'may you be a widow tomorrow', is considered to be a curse. (The term *suhāg*, derived from the term *saubhāgya* ['good luck'] and considered a blessing, refers to the married status of a woman; the term *rānd*, considered a curse, refers to the widowed status of a woman; and the term *duhāg*, considered bad luck, refers to the state of a woman being separated from her husband.) The affected kinship situation which Rupa descibes in this passage is extremely unique, as the *guru* acts symbolically as both mother-in-law and husband. The hijras therefore transfer every auspicious life-relationship to their *guru*, regardless of the fact that such a transferral results in a superficially incestuous system.

[23]   In Indian culture, the guru is frequently thought to be the third "god" living on earth, next to one's own mother and father, as represented in the Sanskrit prayer *mātra devo bhav, pitra devo bhav, ācārya devo bhav* ['May you become one whose mother is like a god; may you become one whose father is like a god; may you become one whose teacher is like a god']. It seems that since hijras are forced to

marks] on our foreheads anymore. We won't use *sindhūr* anymore; we won't wear the *cūṛīs* ['glass bangles'][24] anymore. We'll wear the gold and silver bangles that widows wear. And we'll wear simple clothes.

A: *We don't have much more to ask--just a few more questions. Okay? Are all of the roles like women's roles, then? Does everyone call you by women's terms? They never address you like a man?*

R: It's that way in Banāras, at any rate. We treat everyone like women here. We change our names and are called *mausī, nānī, dādī, cācī.* But things are different in a place like the Punjab. The hijras there are called *muṇḍā* ['boy'] and *susrā* ['father-in-law']. But even their *jajmān* ['patrons'] know that a certain person is a certain person's *celā.* If the *celā* goes somewhere alone, they'll ask him, "Where did your husband go? Why didn't he come with you to play the *ḍholak?*" They know that he's a hijra, of course, and that he has no husband as such, but they still talk to him like that.

A: *Do all of the hijras change their names when they join a group?*

R: Yes, the *guru* changes their names.

A: *Oh, the guru changes them?*

R: Yes.

B: *Do they have a big celebration on that day?*

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give up all of their other wordly relationships, they transfer all such bonds to their *guru.* Compare the well-know Sanskrit prayer, uttered by many Hindus daily after *pūjā.*

tvamev mātā ca pitā tvamev
tvamev bandhusca sakhā tvamev
tvamev vidyā ca draviṇaṁ tvamev
tvamev sarvam mama devadev!

You are my mother, you are my father,
You are my brother, you are my friend,
You are my knowledge, you are my wealth,
You are everything to me, my lord of the lords!

24   *Cūṛī* are the glass bangles (as opposed to silver or gold ones) worn by married women. After the death of their *guru,* hijras no longer wear any of the symbols of marriage.

R: Yes, they have a celebration.

A: *Do they only give you one name, which stays with you for the rest of your life?*

R: Yes, you keep that name until you die. And they'll keep on using the same name not only during life, but also after death. For example, my *dīdī* was Channu's *guru*. His name was Mangal.[25] The name that she had is now used by someone else, who I call *nānī*.

A: *Do the hijras ever use their old names?*

R: No.

A: *How do you decide on a particular name? Do you choose it because it has a good meaning? Or because it's popular?*

R: They just give it to us after they think about it for a while.

B: *Like, "Oh, this name will be right for this girl"?*

R: Suppose two or three elderly people are sitting there. They'll ask, "What name should this person be given?" Then they'll just choose a name and give it to him.

B: *But are some names more popular than other names?*

R: Well, they're all movie stars nowadays, of course--Nargis, Babītā, like that.[26]

B: *So the guru just looks at her and says, "Well, this is the kind of face she has, so let's give her that name"?*

R: A lot of the time they'll just choose a name that's similar to the family name or to the nickname they had at home. So if Mangal was someone's name at home, when he becomes a hijra he'll be called Manglā. They'll just make it feminine.

A: *When people join the group, does their way of speaking change in anyway?*

R: When I lived at home I was manly, so I was speaking like a man. But when you have to leave and join a group, you have to change accordingly.

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25   Mangal, a man's name, translates as 'auspicious'.

26   Both Nargis and Babītā are popular female movie stars in the Hindi film industry. In addition to her leading role in the Hindi film *A vārā*, Nargis was also nominated to the upper house of the parliament as a representative.

A: *In the beginning, when you met these people here--*

R: That's exactly what I'm telling you, *beṭā*.[27] When we left our home, we were speaking manly language. The speech we used at home was in a manly style, so of course we were speaking men's language.

B: *So you were treating each other like boys?*

R: Yes, I was calling my *bhaīyā* "*bhaīyā*." I was calling my *cācā* "*cācā*." I was speaking like that. It took some time to change from that to this. But after speaking it continuously, it became a habit--in about six or seven months.

B: *So when you're in the group, do you alway speak like women?*

R: Yes, we always speak like women, never like men. Whenever we come home, we'll say ((in Bhojpuri)), "*guru, kahā̃ jāt hai* ['*guru*, where are you going?']." If we speak in pure[28] Hindi, then we'll say, "*kahā̃ jā rahī*[f] *haī* ['where are you going[f]?']." Otherwise, we'll simply say, "*kahā̃ jāt hai* ['where are you going?']."

B: *So "kahā̃ jāt hai" is feminine in Bhojpuri?*

R: Yes, "*kahā̃ jāt hūā*" and "*kā karat hūā*" are masculine.

A: *Do hijras want society to treat them like men or like women?*

R: When they look at you, and you look like a woman in the way you look and the way you dress, they'll consider you to be a woman and they'll talk to you like you're a woman: "*kyā bahan jī* ['what is it, sister'], *kahā̃ jā rahī*[f] *haī* ['where are you going[f]?']." They don't talk to us like that everywhere, but whenever we meet each other, we'll always say, "*kyā bahan jī* ['what is it, sister?'], *kahā̃ jā rahī*[f] *haī* ['where are you going[f]?'], *jā rahī*[f] *hū̃ bahan jī* ['I am going[f], sister'], *zarā kām hai* ['I have a lot of work to do']."

B: *Yes, I remember when I was small, there was that śyāmā, and we always talked about her like, śyāmā āī hai ['śyāmā has come'], śyāmā gaī hai ['śyāmā has gone']. We always talked about her exactly as if she was a woman. And about Channu too, my mother and her friends always talked about her exactly as if she was a woman whenever she came by.*

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27   It is noteworthy that Rupa addresses Veronica with the masculine term *beṭā* ['son'] throughout this passage. It is considered a complement in Hindi to address to a girl with the masculine *beṭā* instead of the feminine *beṭī*; the term is frequently employed to show affection.

28   Rupa uses the term *theṭh* ['pure'] here.

R: But not all hijras will speak that way. It's only the outsiders[29] who'll say *mammī, nācne vālī^f ā gaī^f* ['Mommy, the dancer has come!'].

A: *Are there some hijras who like to be referred to as men?*

R: No, not in Banāras. In Banāras nobody likes to be known as *mardānā* ['manly']. If you call someone *mardānā*, she'll quarrel with you.

A: *Do you ever feel like you speak like a man sometimes and like a woman at other times? Sometimes when I'm angry, for example, I feel like I speak more like a man. ((laughs)) Do you speak like a woman even when you're angry?*

R: When we're together in our own group, we always speak like women.

A: *Even when you're angry?*

R: Yes, always like women. We even curse like women. We don't give men's curses, only women's. We won't say, "*terī mā̃ kī* ['your mother's...'], *bahan kī* ['your sister's...']"[30]. We'll say things like *chinrī* ['loose one'], *bujarī* ['earless one'], *gañjī* ['hairless one'], *kanjrī* [low-caste loose woman][31] --just like women do. Manly people will give curses like *terī mā̃ kī* ['your mother's...'], *bahan kī* ['your sister's...'], *bhosṛī vāle* ['vagina-owner'],[32] *coṭṭā* ['thief'], *sālā* [wife's brother], we won't say those.

A: *Are you happy?*

R: So far I've been happy with my fate. What's the use of crying about it when you have to go on living in the same situation anyway? It doesn't matter whether you're happy or you're unhappy. It's not a question of happiness. Who could live happily

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29   Rupa uses the term *bāhar vāle* here, which translates literally as 'the ones who are outside'.

30   The men's curses which Rupa refers to here are known in Hindi as *mā̃-bahin kī gālī* ['mother and sister curses']. While men's curses in Hindi generally involve some mention of sexual violence to women, women's curses generally only wish the hearer evil.

31   All of the curses which Rupa lists here, generally used between women, are considered minor curses.

32   Perhaps because of its offensive nature, the man who typed up our Hindi transcripts in Banāras failed to include the term *bhosṛī vāle* ['vagina-owner'] in the typed transcript, replacing it with an elipsis.

in this kind of situation, anyway? No one could be happy. We just have to pass the days, and so life goes on.

A: *You have no other choice?*

R: No.

A: *Do you feel like you lead a normal life? Or do you feel like your life is somehow different from the rest of Indian society?*

R: No, it's not different from the rest of Indian society. Why should it be any different? It's the same everywhere, in every place. We get up, a child comes, we sing the *badhāī* ['congratulations ceremony'], we go home, we eat, we go to sleep. It's not any different. Everybody behaves the same way everyday.

B: *But do you mean to say that there's no difference between the hijras and the rest of society?*

R: There's not much of a difference. Even though we wear *sārīs*, we eat in the same way as you do, we carry out whatever religion we belong to faithfully in the same way as you do. A Hindu will say *rām-rām*, a Muslim will say *allāh-allāh*, a Christian will say *god-god*. We'll remain in the same religion that we're born in. There are people of all religions and all castes among the hijras. We're Hindus, we're Muslims, we're Sikhs, we're Christians, we're all of these. All of these religions belong to India, and so we live like Indians.

B: *Do you consider yourself a small unit of the bigger society, then?*

R: Didn't you know that a hijra ran for office recently?

B: *So you have voting rights?*

R: No, we can't really vote, but we can run for office. The person who ran for office was very educated. He runs his group happily, but he doesn't ever go to any of the *badhāī*, etc. He has some *celās* who go here and there with the *dholak* ['drum'], but he doesn't ever go anywhere himself; his *celās* earn money and give it to him. But he didn't win the election, of course. Someone else was actually responsible for getting him to run so that his opponent would lose votes. He's an educated man.[33]

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[33] The tone of Rupa's statement *vah paṛā-likhā hai* ['he's an educated man'] is somewhat negative. A common folk image in North India is that of the educated man as 'cunning'; see Ved Prakash Vatuk's (1969) article "An Indian Folk View of the West and Western Institutions" for an interesting discussion of popular views of the English-educated Indian. (Vatuk, for instance, quotes the popular Indian proverb, "Little educated, good for no work; better educated, good for nothing but to leave the village.")

B: *So you don't have any rules as to who should run and who shouldn't run?*

R: No.

A: *What does Indian society think about hijras?*

R: How do we know what people think about us? We don't ever go and ask them, "What do you think about us"? Of course we're not going to do that!

A: *So they don't really think anything about hijras, then?*

R: They might be thinking things about us, but we don't really know what they think. Not too long ago, the chief mininster of Uttar Pradesh, Mr. Bahugunā, [34] came here and said, "We'll build a colony for you. We'll build settlements for you here and there. We'll do this. We'll do that." But of course nothing ever happened. But we don't really do much, anyway. We just earn a normal living and eat whatever we can get. They might be thinking things about us, but we don't pay much attention. Our only business is just to do our job and earn a living.

A: *Do people in Indian society respect you?*

R: Yes, yes, they do. They're very afraid of us. If someone has a child and we go to their door, they'll always talk to us with folded hands--whenever they talk to us. Why do they talk to us like that? Because they're afraid that something bad might come out of our mouths. And sometimes that really brings its fruits. They're afraid that we'll say something absurd,[35] for example, "*jā, terā baccā mar jāy!* ['may your child die!']." We say that sometimes in anger. And because they're always afraid that their child might die, they'll say, "Don't ever say anything to them, because if something bad comes out of their mouths, something bad will happen to us!" So they always have fear in their hearts, and they always speak to us with respect.[36]

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[34] Hemvatīnandan Bahugunā was the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh during 1975 and 1976.

[35] Rupa uses the term *aṇḍ-baṇḍ* here, which translates variously as 'absurd', 'incoherent', 'meaningless', or 'irrelevant'.

[36] Again, the kind of cursing which Rupa refers to in this passage is thought of as the power of the weak; see M. N. Srinivas for further discussion. See also Karanth's novel *Mukajjī*. Although the novel's main character Mukajjī is a widow, she is the most powerful woman in her village. Since Mukajjī has already suffered the worst curse possible (i.e., widowhood), she has nothing to lose if the other villagers curse her back. The other villagers, afraid of her curse, all try to remain on her good side. Compare the Hindi proverb: *rāḍ se pare koī gālī nahī* ['there is no curse greater

A: *But do you like it if they give you respect only because they're afraid of you?*

R: Yes, we like it. You see, if a very old man were to die here and someone were to call us, we'd go. But otherwise, we never go at the time of death.[37] Even if someone were to die on our own street and we were invited, we still wouldn't go. If someone dies and we really want to go and have one last look at him, we'll go; but we'll never participate in the feast or take their money. Our elders have forbidden us to do that during such a time. We're restricted from visting people during inauspicious times. If someone were to find out that we did such a thing, we would have to pay a fine. We also have to pay a fine if we get our hair chopped off.[38]

B: *So you never have your hair cut, then? But a lot of women have their hair cut short nowadays, right?*

R: Well, short hair is of course in vogue nowadays, but we can't cut it off regardless. After my mother died, for example, I shaved my head during the mourning period.[39] And because of that, I had to pay 101 rupees to the hijras as punishment, even though there was a death in my family.

A: *If you had a choice, would you rather be born as a man or as a woman?*

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than calling someone a widow']. I am grateful to Ved Vatuk (personal communication) for bringing this novel to my attention. The same appears to be true of the hijras; since they have neither husband nor child, they have nothing to lose. For someone in such a destitute state, even a curse of death would be considered welcome.

[37] Although hijras are only allowed to attend auspicious occasions, as Rupa explains in this passage, the death of a very old man is in many ways considered auspicious, particularly if he has lived a long life and has had many grandchildren. Such a person's death will often be acknowledged through a celebration: the body will be carried to the funeral pyre in a beautiful chariot, for example, instead of a simple carriage as is customarily used, or a marching band will be invited to play in the funeral procession.

[38] Rupa is making an indirect association between the inauspiciousness of death and the inauspiciousness of widowhood; widows traditionally shave their hair off after the death of their husbands.

[39] The person who performs the Hindu funeral rites after the death of a mother or father will often shave off their hair during the period of mourning.

R: How can I have a choice now? I'm already born this way so I can't possibly choose now. When I was living at home I wanted to live like a man, but now I live like a woman.

B: *But when you were young, what did you want? To live like a woman or to live like a man?*

R: At the time I wanted to live like a man, and that's what I did. But after I came to this side, all of this happened. And who knows what will happen after I die? Don't ask me what might happen after death.

B: *Is there something special that happens after death? What will happen?*

R: Nothing happens. If you're Hindu, you'll be cremated; if you're Muslim, you'll be buried. A meeting takes place and people get together. That's all.

B: *Nothing else happens?*

R: No, just meetings. There's no *pūjā pāth* ; there's no *piṇḍadān* [giving of food for the ancestors]. People will just be invited over to eat, and we'll have a feast.[40] It doesn't matter whether you have the feast in six months, in a year, or in two years. There's no fixed time for it. You just have it whenever you can have it. If you can't do much--if you can only afford to do a little bit--then you just invite poor people and feed them in the name of the person who died.

End of conversation.

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[40] The hijras' death customs differ sharply from those traditionally performed by members of the larger Hindu and Muslim society. Normally, Hindu survivors will perform *pujā* every day for thirteen days after a relative has died until they celebrate the *terāmī* or *ariṣthi* [thirteenth day ceremony] in her memory. (Alternatively, Muslims celebrate the *chālīsvā* [fortieth day feast]). In the first year after her death, the deceased is remembered every month on the date she died in the Hindu calendar during what is referred to as the *mahīnā*; on the year following her death, she is remembered annually during what is referred to as the *barsoddī*. In addition to these ceremonies, fifteen days out of every year in the Hindu calendar are dedicated to the memory of deceased ancestors, a period of time referred to as *shrāddha*. It is significant that the hijras do not recognize any of these death customs; see Chapter 2 for further discussion.

Appendix C

A SECOND CONVERSATION WITH RUPA

(Translation into English from the original Hindi)

The following tape-recorded conversation is a short follow-up to the first conversation with Rupa, taking place approximately two weeks later. The participants in this conversation are Rupa (labeled as 'R' in the text) and Veronica (who I have labeled as 'A' in the text).

A: *I've heard that if there's a quarrel among people in your group, you don't ever consult a lawyer. Is that true?*

R: We don't use lawyers. We only have a *mukhiyā* ['head man']; we don't have a lawyer. Whatever dispute we have among ourselves, the *mukhiyā* will give the last word. He'll solve the problem. The resolution of conflict doesn't have anything to do with the courts in our group. Those kinds of things don't happen among us. We'll leave whatever is to be resolved among us up to the *mukhiyā*, and he'll decide about it. He can give us physical punishment, he can give us financial punishment, he can give us whatever punishment he wants. That's what happens. We all accept his decision.

A: *Do you elect the mukhiyā?*

R: Yes, we elect him.

A: *Does everyone get together to do so?*

R: Yes, we all get together and vote.

A: *Is it a life-long position?*

R: We'll elect someone else when he dies, of course. Anyone who is capable of becoming a *mukhiyā* will become a *mukhiyā*.

A: *A second question--are there special sacraments about death? What kinds of death rites do you have?*

R: If they're Hindu, they're cremated; if they're Muslims, they're buried. If they're Christians, they're also buried. The last rites will be according to whatever religion they belong to.

A: *Is it the same for everyone?*

R: No, no, no. It's not the same, because among us there are Hindus, there are Sikhs, there are Muslims, there are Christians, there are all castes. The last rites will be according to whatever religion they follow. For example, I'm Brahman. I follow my *dharm*, and I'm very firm about my religion. So when I die, the people of my religion will take me and cremate me. But most hijras are Muslims. There are a lot of Hindus who change their religion. But those who don't want to change their religion--who remain firm about their religion--die according to their religion.

A: *But I've heard that hijras can't attend the funeral pyre. Is that true?*

R: No, we can.

A: *A third question--I don't really understand the difference between 'hijra' and 'hijṛin'? Can you tell me what the difference is?*

R: Well, the difference is this: those who are women are called *hijṛin*. And those men who have become impotent and useless are called *hijra*.

A: *How do you know when someone is a hijra or a hijṛin?*

R: Well, you just know it.

A: *Would I be able to tell whether someone is a hijra or a hijṛin?*

R: As far as looks as concerned, they'll look the same. They all look like women. So you just know it.

A: *Do they have different roles in the group?*

R: No, they all live in the same way.

A: *I have another question about funeral rites. I've heard that the hijras who wear sārīs can't attend the funeral pyre. Is that true?*

R: When we die, the other hijras won't take us to the cremation ground. If I were to die, for instance, the hijras won't go in the procession when my body is taken to be buried. Only the neighborhood people will go. Hijras won't go to the cremation grounds in the same way that women won't go to the cremation grounds.

A: *Right, that's what I heard. If you don't go yourself after someone dies, what do you do? Do you ask your neighbors to go to the funeral pyre?*

R: We stay at home. The people at home will dress up the one who has died, clean him, bathe him, and then ask the other neighborhood people to take him. Not the hijras. The hijras will sit at home and cry. That's why outside people never come to know who died--whether it's a hijra or someone else.

A: *How do you dress the one who has died?*

R: In the same way as anyone else. In white clothes.

End of conversation.

Appendix D

A CONVERSATION WITH MEGHA

(Translation into English from the original Hindi)

The following excerpt comes from a tape-recorded conversation that took place on a Saturday afternoon in March 1993. The participants in the conversation are Megha (labeled as 'M' in the text), Megha's 68-year-old guru Andaz (labeled as 'G' in the text), Veronica and myself (whom I have labeled jointly as 'A' in the text for ease of transcription), and our research assistant Vinita (labeled as 'B' in the text). Megha is 25 years old and lives together with seven other hijras in one of Banaras' hijra communities; the interview was conducted in the main room of the hijras' home. Born into the *gvālā* ['cowherder'] caste, Megha was raised as a girl by her mother until she left home at age ten and joined the Banaras community.

A: *How many hijras are there in Banaras?*

M: There are at least 2,000 in Banaras--or at least 1,000.

A: *How many groups are there?*

M: For example, in my group there are eight people, but in some there are about ten. And in other groups there about thirteen or fourteen people, in others twenty, in some only two, in others four.

A: *We've heard that the hijras in Banaras are especially famous. Is that true?*

M: Yes, that's true?

B: *Is there anything special about Banaras compared to other places?*

M: No, there are hijras in Bombay, in Panjab, in Delhi, in Agra, in every locality. There is only one case where there are no hijras--in your country.

B: *No, no, it's not that--*

M: Listen to this one thing I say. If I've said something wrong, you tell me and I'll answer to that. See, this is the way it is here *dīdī*. Children are born. Then we go to the place where the child is born. We dance, we sing, and they give us *bakhśīś* ['tip', 'blessing']--100 rupees, 50 rupees, 150 rupees, 200 rupees. Whatever they give us, they give it happily. Then they try to please us by touching our feet and saying " *Mā Jī* ['Mother'], aren't you happy with us?" And we say, "Yes, we're

very happy with you." Then I come back to my house, I cook, eat, and stay home. I live in my own house. I'm not just a useless[1] person who does nothing in life.

A: *Is Banaras special?*

M: Yes.

A: *Why?*

M: Why? Because it's the *kāśī* city, and the respect you get in kāśī is not like the respect you get in any other city. Everybody speaks to us respectfully, "Where are you going[f]? Where are you coming[f] from?" And then they touch our feet and say, " Please bless me. If I'm blessed with a child in my household, please come and dance."

A: *Do the hijras choose their own communities?*

B: *In other words, how do you select your group? How you decide whether to go in which group. For example, you're in the Ravindra Puri group, why didn't you go somewhere else?*

M: I can go somewhere else.

B: *Can you go forever?*

M: No, not forever. Please listen to me. Suppose I have a friendship with you people, for example. If I go to your house, then I can stay there for ten days, or eight days, or five days, and so on. But if I choose not to stay with you, I don't have to.

B: *But could you stay there forever?*

M: I wouldn't stay forever. I wouldn't stay with another group forever. I've been here since childhood. I've had a guru since childhood in Bhadainī. My guru[2] is in Bhaidini--the Bhaidainī people's guru is my guru, and I came to their place in childhood.

B: *Who's your guru?*

M: Channu--that fat person who comes here.

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[1] Megha uses the term *phāltū* here, which translates as 'redundant', 'useless'.

[2] Megha uses the masculine singular here in reference to her guru, perhaps because the word *guru* is itself grammatically masculine.

B: *Oh, I see.*

M: So that man ((gesturing towards Andaz)) is Channu's *cela* ['disciple'], and I'm his *celā*. Ever since I was eight or nine or ten years old--ever since I've been living here--I haven't gone to anyone else's house. I only go to other people's houses if I want to take a walk somewhere.

B: *So in a word, __this__ is the place that you will live forever, and you won't go anywhere else.*

M: Yes.

B: *When you feel like going somewhere else, like to take a walk or go on a journey somewhere, do you just go?*

M: Yes, I'll go, but I'll ask my *guru* before I go. I'll say, "*Guru jī*, I'm going."

B: *Why did you decide to join this group instead of another group?*

M: How could I go to any other group? Ever since these people accepted me as their own, they've been giving me food to eat and water to drink, clothing me, and bringing me up, so why would I go to any other group?

A: *What's the biggest group in Banaras?*

M: The largest group in Banaras is in Lohtā.

A: *Which group is the most famous?*

M: The most famous group is my guru's group, of course. He is the *mālik* ['master'] of everyone. He's the guru of all the groups, and he's also my *mālik*. Any dispute that arises in Banaras will be decided here. He's the one who is going to decide about the disputes, nobody else. ((softly)) My Channu.[3] Nobody else can do that. If he doesn't go to the birth, we won't go either. And it's the same with *sammelans* ['conventions']. Do you understand?

A: *Do groups vary in size? For instance, is your group bigger than other groups or about the same size? Is there any difference from group to group?*

M: Of course, why not?

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[3]   Here, Megha refers to his guru with the masculine singular (*merā^m Channu*) instead of the expected respectful plural *mere^m Channu*, a grammatical device sometimes used by Hindi speakers in order to show heightened affection to a superior.

A: *Do the different groups communicate with each other?*

M: Of course. We're always conversing with each other and visiting one another. All of that takes places.

A: *Do some hijras in Banaras live apart from a group?*

M: No.

A: *Does anyone live alone?*

M: No.

A: *Is there anyone in Banaras who is especially famous?*

M: Only this one--Channu. Everybody knows Channu. Channu and Channu's *celā* ['disciple'], these two people are the most famous in Banaras.

A: *What's his celā's name? Andaz?*

M: Yes, Andaz and Channu.

A: *How many people are in your group?*

M: There are ten people in my group?

A: *How old are they?*

M: One of them is 20, someone else is 25, some of the the others are 35, 40, 50, this one ((pointing to Andaz)) is 60, and Channu is 70 to 75.

B: *Andaz is 70 years old?*

M: Yes.

B: *But he doesn't look like he's that old!*

A: *What are the castes of the people in your group?*

M: I'm a Brahman. Channu is Muslim, Kān is *baniyā* ['merchant'], someone else is *teli* ['oil man']. We're from all different castes here, someone else is a *thākur* [land-owning caste'], someone is a Brahman. All castes are represented here.

A: *Does everyone live according to their own religion, or does everyone live according to a single religion?*

M: Yes, everyone lives according to their own religion.

A: *Do you follow your own religion?*

M: Why not? Of course we follow our religion.

A: *Do you eat with Muslims?*[4]

M: No, we don't eat with Muslims.

B: *But suppose you were celebrating Īd here, and you were making meat and so forth here and Andaz came over. He's Brahman, right?*

M: Yes.

B: *But Andaz is a Muslim name?*

M: His real name is Kamla.[5]

B: *Oh.*

M: To all the *jajmāns* ['clients'].

B: *I see, among the jajmāns her name is Kamla.*

M: Otherwise, she is Tivārī.[6] She's from Madras.

B: *Does she eat at the homes of Muslims?*

M: No.

B: *Oh. So she must be cooking with a great effort of cleanliness?*

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4   The notion of *jātī* ['caste'] in India can be defined by whom a person eats with and whom a person marries, hence the significance of this question.

5   Kamla, also the goddess of wealth, is a name given to Hindu women.

6   *Tivārī*, also called *trivedī* [one who has read three vedas], is a subcaste of Brahman. The caste hierarchy is as follows: *caturvedī*, also called *caube* [one who has read all four vedas], *trivedī*, also called *tivārī* [one who has read three vedas], *dvivedī*, also called *dube* [one who has read two vedas].

M: Yes, either she cooks with her own hands or I cook for her, or this person
    ((gesturing towards another person in room)) cooks for her. Only these three
    people cook for her.

A: *Do you have any children in your group?*

M: No, only in Maū. There's a child there who is about ten years old. He's about ten
    or eleven years old. He's the son of a *thākur.* He's the son of a police chief. They
    kept on having children over there who were born dead, but finally they had a child
    who was neither man nor woman. They were going to throw him away in a
    drainage somewhere. But we were passing by over there and they saw us, so they
    gave us the boy. And in addition to that, they gave us a 2,000 rupee donation.

A: *Does your group dance and sing only in this area?*

M: Yes, only in this area.

A: *From where to where?*

M: Listen, our area stretches from Laksā, Godauliyā, Natrāj, Sigrā, MahMūrganj,
    Madūādī, all the way up to Rānipur, Jakkhā, Citaīpur. All of this is our area. On
    this side--from *Daśāśvamedh* to *Bangālī Barā* to *Assī Ghāṭ*--all of this is our area.

A: *What's the minimum age for people in your group? Do you have to be a certain age
    to join?*

M: This is the way it takes place, *dīdī.* We find out that a boy is born in such and such
    a household. Now listen to me, *dīdī.* For example, suppose I went to dance at
    your home but you told me that a child was born somewhere else. Then I'd go to
    that place to dance. They'll give us the *badhāī, badhāī, badhāī,* and then I'll look at
    the child. I'll take the child in my lap and play with him. We'll all play with him.
    I'll undress him, look at him, and then start to make demands. If the child is born a
    hijra and they don't give him to us, we'll make a big fuss about it and take him to the
    police station.[7] We'll take the child with us.

B: *But nobody gives you their child, do they?*

M: Yes, they do.

A: *What's the average education of the people in your group? When people come to
    your group, have they had any education?*

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7   Since all of the hijras regularly insisted that they never interact with the police,
    Megha's statement here is somewhat contradictory.

M: Yes, yes, we do occasionally. This person ((gesturing to another person in the room)) was educated until the eighth grade when she was living in her parents house. But I didn't study even a single letter of the alphabet.[8]

B: *How long did you stay in your parent's house?*

M: I stayed there until I was ten years old.

B: *How did they find out?*

M: My guru had gone to Paṭnā to a hijra convention. I was sitting at home when those people came to dance and get the *badhāī*. They started to say, "Oh! It seems that this is a hijra here! It seems that this is a hijra here! She's a hijrin! She's a hijrin!" Then they came up to me and said to me, "Do you want to come with us, *beṭā* ['son/daughter']?"[9] And I said, "Yes."

B: *So they asked your father and mother, "What kind of child is this?"*

M: Yes. My father said, "It can be either one. He was born a hijra." My mother and father didn't make a fuss about it, nor did they quarrel. They gave me to those people in order to save their honor.

B: *Do you ever go visit your parents?*

M: No, never.

B: *Do they ever come to see you here?*

M: No.

B: *Nobody ever asks, "Where did your child go?"*

M: No. If someone asks, they tell them that I'm in Banaras.

A: *Do the different people in your group have different roles?*

B: *Take your group, for example. Channu is the oldest, then Andaz, and then you. So what kinds of roles do you all have with respect to each other? How do you carry out your duty to each other?*

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8   Megha uses the expression *maĩ to eko akshar nahĩ paṛhī hũ* ['but I didn't study even a single syllable'.]

9   Although masculine, the term *beṭā* is frequently used in reference to daughters as well as sons in order to show affection.

M: It happens this way: I'm younger, so if I were to fight with you, the elderly people would try to explain to me why I shouldn't do so, "If you fight in your own household, it will be bad for you. Your head might get cracked and broken because of it." That's why they persuade us not to fight. He's the master of all of us. Whatever can be done, he's the person who can do it. Nobody else can do it. Only Andaz can. Nobody else.

B: *Oh, Andaz--because he's the eldest of all. Does he also go to dance with you?*

M: No, he doesn't go. He stays at home, just like other elderly people stay at home. Yes, just like your mother and father. When your brother grows up and is old enough to earn a living, then he'll go work and your parents will stay at home, right? So my family is run in the same way that your family is. I've been sitting at my guru's house for fifteen years. We'll tell him, "Why would I take you with me when I go? When we're not here, then you can of course go wherever you want for a day or two, if necessary, but I won't take you with me."

A: *Is your group like a family? For instance, do you have a dīdī, a cācā, etc?*

B: *In other words, when there's a mother, father, sister, and brother in a family, they'll call each other cācā, nānī, etc. So how do you address each other? For instance, do you say nānā or nānī?*

M: Take Channu, for example. Channu's *celā* is my guru.

B: *So what do you call Channu? Do you call her guru?*

M: No, I call her *nānī.* Those who are elderly are called "*nānī.*" I'll call Channu's *celā* "*mā̃ guru*" ['mother guru'] because she's my elder. And whoever is a *celā* like me but younger--if I'm a *celā* too but older--we'll call each other *bahan* or *dīdī.*

B: *So in other words, you address each other in the same way that people in a family address each other?*

M: Yes, we address each other just like a family. The whole group is just like a family. Andaz is just like a mother to me.

A: *What is your daily routine? What kind of things do you do everyday?*

M: I go in the morning--

B: *What time do you get up?*

M: Listen to what I'm saying. I get up early in the morning around 4:00 or 5:00. At 6:00 I wash my face, bathe, and tell everyone else to bathe. Then I'll have my

breakfast and leave home. I'll go and wander around in the streets, and I'll ask someone who's standing around, "In whose house was there a marriage? In whose house was a baby born?" And some *dīdī jī* will say, "A child was born in that house over there." And then I'll go to that house and dance--I'll sing, dance, and then demand money. And if I go a little further down the street, I'll ask again, "*Dīdī jī*, who had a child in your neighborhood?" They'll tell me that a child was born in such and such a house, so we'll go there--we'll sing, play instruments, and make them happy. Then we'll come back to our own house. We just wander around in one or two streets, but the little bit of money we get doing that is enough for our meals. Everyday we go and do this.

A: *Do you do pūjā ['worship']?*

M: Of course.

A: *Who do you worship?*

M: I worship Śankar Jī[10] and Durgā Jī.

B: *Do you go to the Durgā temple?*

M: Yes. And during Navrātri I keep the fast. So beginning tomorrow I'll also keep the fast.

B: *No, no, Navrātri began today.*

M: No, they start tomorrow. Oh, I don't remember whether they begin today or tomorrow. But beginning tomorrow we'll worship Durgā Jī, then Śankar Jī, then Santoṣī Mā,[11] then Bankaṭī,[12] then Hanumān. We worship all of them.

A: *Is there a special hijra devī ['goddess']?*

M: Yes.

A: *Who?*

M: ((softly)) Becrā Mātā.

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10 Śankar is another name for Lord Shiva.

11 Those who worship Santoṣī Mā keep the fast every Friday, eating only *guḍ* and *cannā*. The practice of worshipping Santoṣī Mā, which is said to have originated in Panjab, was recently popularized by a movie on the subject.

12 Bankaṭī is a forest goddess.

B: *Where is she from?*

M: She's from a place near Madras.

B: *Is there a story about her that you can tell us?*

M: I don't know any stories about her. I only know that there is some goddess Becrā Mātā, that I have a photograph of her, and that we worship her.

B: *Is there a special day during the year set aside for worshipping her--like there is for Durgā Jī?*

M: Yes, during the Sāvan [fifth month of the Hindu calendar, i.e. July-August].

B: *Which day does it fall on?*

M: On the 25th day of the Sāvan.

B: *Is that in July or August? I really don't know the Hindu calendar.*

M: I don't know anything about July or August. I only know that it's during the Sāvan.

A: *Do you dance and sing every day?*

M: Yes, daily.

A: *Do you dance and sing only when a child is born or do you also dance and sing among yourselves--for fun?*

M: No, we dance only when a boy is born or when a marriage takes place--at the time when the bridegroom places the *sindhur* ['vermillion'] in the part of the bride's hair. That happens only once in a lifetime, you know, and it's a time of happiness. Then the children come, and that's also a time of happiness. We dance only during these two occasions--only during matters of happiness. We don't dance during matters of sorrow. If there isn't any happiness in your family, why would we want to go there? We wouldn't go there.

A: *When you are alone among yourselves, do you dance for each other?*

M: I won't go dance alone. I'll go dance with someone else. If my group doesn't take me with them, I'll go with someone else.

A: *No, I mean, do you dance among yourselves for your own enjoyment.*

B: *Suppose you're alone in your group and you don't feel like going out to dance and sing. Do you dance among yourselves for your own entertainment?*

M: No.

B: *Not to entertain each other? Not to make each other happy?*

M: No, we go to movies. I saw the movie *Balmā* ['Beloved'] three times!

B: *Oh my god! Why?*

M: In order to memorize the songs.

B: *You don't have a tape recorder?*

M: Yes, I do, but it's broken.

B: *So do you take a cassette into the movie theater, record it, and then listen to it?*

M: If we just listen to the music a couple of times, we can memorize it.

B: *Which song?*

M: ((sings))

are bãsurīyā ab mujhe pukāre
are ā balmā nadiyā ke kināre
tere oṭhõ se lālī curā lũngī,
terī ãkho se nidiyã curā lũngī,
bãsurīyā ab ((ā balmā nadiyā ke kināre)).

The flute calls me,
Oh dear one, come to the bank of the river.
I will steal the redness from your lips,
I will steal the sleep from your eyes.
The flute calls me,
Oh dear one, ((come to the bank of the river)).

B: *Wow!*

M: merī saheliyo mere pās āo,
cūṛiyā pahnāo, kaṅgnā khankāõ,
kahĩ to mil jāyegā merā bālmā

Oh my companion, come near me,
Put some bangles on me, let them jingle,

I'm sure I'll find my beloved somewhere.

I also do can dance disco really well! ((laughs))

A: *((laughs)) Do you also tell stories?*

M: What kind of stories?

B: *Like film stories or plays?*

M: No, I don't do that. I only dance disco.

A: *How old were you when you found out that you were a hijra?*

M: When I was about five or six years old, I went with the other boys to urinate. I looked at them and saw that they all had things. I thought, "Hey, look at me! They all have *mūlī*s [literally 'radishes', i.e., 'penises'] coming out of them but I'm completely smooth." I said, "What kind of life am I?" Everybody else had a *mūlī* hanging down, but I was just like a girl. I felt very sad that I didn't have what the other boys had, so I told my mother what had happened and she said, "You're a hijrin."

A: *When did that happen?*

M: When I was about five or six years old.

B: *Before that time, did your mother think of you as a boy or a girl?*

M: My mother said, "This is a girl." I had hair this long ((pointing to hair)). Look at my hair! My hair was this long. Would I lie to you?

B: *Wow.*

M: My fate is bad, so I came here.

B: *How did your mother refer to you? Like a boy?*

M: My mother called me [Megha].

B: *She called you by a girl's name?*

M: Hijras don't have anything. Listen to what I'm saying. Look at me! ((lifting *sārī*) Look! ((pointing to genitals)) You're a woman, right? Look women, there's nothing there!

B: ((surprised)) *Oh god. That's so sad!*

M: We're just like everyone else except that we lack this one thing. We too would have settled into a household; we too would have had children; we too would have called hijras to dance for us; we too would have called hijras to sing for us. But what can we do, *dīdī?* We are unfortunate. What can I do about my fate? It's bad. Sometimes I cry.

B: *Oh, it's not really that sad.*

M: ((pointing to a fellow hijra in the room)) The same is true for her. She's also from my district.

B: *She's from Paṭna?*

M: She's from a place a little further away. But what can she do? Her fate is bad too. She's from Betiyā Sarāy.

A: *Do you feel like a woman inside? Is your being a hijra also emotional or mental?*

B: *In other words, do you live like a woman lives? Do you think like a woman thinks? For example, women tend to get sad quickly. Are you hurt easily? Do you cry easily?*

M: I cry like a woman; I think like a woman. I cry, "Oh, *mālik* ['master']! You should have either given me a good life or no life at all!"

A: *When you realized that you were a hijra, did you talk to your family about it?*

M: I kept talking to my mother about it--about what kind of life I had. And she kept telling me, "You are a hijra, so you can't go on living here. If you continue living here, my whole household will be uprooted.[13] Who will marry your sister if they come to know that there's a hijra in the family? Who will marry such and such and so and so? You will ruin all of their chances to marry because people will think, 'If there's a hijra in the household, we will produce hijras too. How can we marry someone who has a hijra in the house?'" Because of that, my mother and father gave me to this person.

B: *But why did you go to that conference where you said you met Andāz?*

M: Why did I go to the conference? I didn't go to the conference. These people went to the conference ((gesturing towards other hijras in the room)), and afterwards they stopped at my house for four days. My older sister had given a birth to a son, so

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13   Megha uses the phrase *ujar jānā* here, which translates as 'to be destroyed', 'to be devastated', 'to be uprooted'.

they went to dance at her house. My mother had given me a silver coin, so I gave that silver coin to those people. And then I gave them a *dhotī* as a remembrance. They looked at me and said, "Why is this girl sitting here?" I was already dressing like a girl and all that, so I said, " I'm just like you." My mother said, "What kind of nonsense are you telling them!" I said, "I'm not good for anything. I'm not worthy of your household. I can't get married. I can't have a wedding. So what would I do living in your house?" I told her, "Why don't you place my fate in their hands?" So I came here. And then they made me dance, they made me sing, they educated me in their trade.

A: *And you were ten years old at the time?*

M: Yes, I was ten years old when I came here with them.

B: *Was Andāz the one who brought you to this group?*

M: Yes, I said, "If I live in Paṭnā, I'll always have *beizzatī* ['dishonor'], and so will the people of my family. Let me go so far away that these people will have no *beizzatī*. Some people will ask about me, of course, but just tell them that I drowned in the water and died!" My house was located on the bank of the Ganges. So my mother and father said, "Okay, let her go, it will be good for us. If someone asks about her, we'll just tell them that she died." So that night at 11:00 I left my house.

A: *Do some hijras have operations?*

M: No, no.

A: *Because in America they have operations--*

M: It's not like that here. Because if there's even the slightest wound left, the man would die. So how could anyone do such an operation? If someone were to operate on himself, he'd die, right? A doctor can't cure everything, after all! All of the veins are in it, right? All of the veins are connected to it. 36 veins join together there, so how could anyone perform such an operation? We don't have such operations.

A: *Okay.*

M: It may be possible in America, but we don't do that here.

A: *Are all of your friends hijras? Do you have any friends outside of your community? Do you have some friends who aren't hijras?*

M: We go to Delhi, we go to Bombay, we go every place. Suppose we were to go to your house, wouldn't you consider us your friends? Maybe you would consider us your friends. In that case, I'd go to your place and call you *dīdī*, and you'll surely

call me *dīdī* lovingly in reply. So in this way we go outside to different places, and if we know you people, we'll say, "Call her *dīdī*." Just like you people visit each other, we'll visit those places where we have *dīdī* relationships. In two to four days we'll be calling them *dīdī*, *mā̃*, *nānī*, and then we'll come back with honor. They'll give us gifts in our honor just like you people give gifts to your children. They'll feel like we're their daughters or their grandchildren. They'll give us a *dhotī* as a going-away present, or they'll send us off with a fifty or a hundred rupees.

B: *You're talking about people from your own hijra group, but I was asking if you're ever friends with people like us.*

M: No, no, no. We don't make friendships with those people.

B: *Are all of your friends in your own group or are they in a lot of different groups?*

M: They're in different groups.

A: *Only in Banaras?*

M: No, no, not only in Banaras. We can go to Delhi, we can go to Bombay. We can go to their houses, they can come to our houses, and so on.

A: *Suppose you're living with a group and you have some kind of hardship--like sickness, for instance--who would help you?*

M: If I have any hardships, I'll talk to my guru and my guru will help me.[14] If you are someone else's *celā* ['disciple'], then you'll tell your own guru. It happens in this way; only my guru can help me. Only the guru can do it; no one else can do it.

A: *Do you ever talk to your family? Do you have any contact with them at all?*

M: None whatsoever.

A: *But the ones who do come visit you here, when do they come?*

M: They come in the evening, they come in the morning, they come in the afternoon.

B: *How many times do they visit you in a year?*

M: Nobody comes everyday in a year, you know! Some people don't come at all.

A: *No, no, I mean your family members--your parents.*

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[14]   Megha uses the phrase *pūrā karnā* here ['to fulfill', 'to make complete', 'to help']

M: My parents will come visit me either once in a year or once every two years.

A: *How do they feel when they see you?*

M: They get really happy when they see me. "Oh! He's eating well. He's earning a living. He's dressing well. He's not suffering from any hardships."

A: *What about your brothers? Do they come visit you too?*

M: Yes, they all come. In the beginning I was very thin, but now I'm fat--I'm solid. Because now my *malik* ['master'] has given me health. So they'll of course be happy when they look at me now. They'll be saying, "Wherever my child lives, let him have a good life. Let him live well!" My mother and father will certainly give me their blessing. They will never give me bad blessings; they will never wish me ill. They'll say, "Wherever he lives, let him live happily."

A: *Do hijras ever have relationships? Like with men?*

M: No, no, no. That doesn't happen here. That doesn't happen here. That kind of work doesn't happen here. As far as this place is concerned--listen. For example, my guru has a brother who is Brahman and lives here. He didn't get married so he's living here.

A: *Oh, you're talking about that man who was cleaning up here earlier?*

M: Yes, and because he lives here I consider him to be my *nānā*. So I call him *nānā*, I call him *cācā*. He's just like a *bāp* ['father'] to me. We call him *bāp*, we call him *nānā*, but we don't do that kind of work with him. I'm not just talking about today, but even when we were living in Assī Ghat--even then we were living with great manners. We never do that kind of thing. We've never done anything wrong. You can ask in Banaras. We've never done anything wrong in Banaras. This man was even born in Banaras.

A: *Are there some hijras who are more like women and others who are more like men? For example, are there some who do the heavy work while others do the cooking and cleaning?*

B: *In other words, since you say that you feel just like a woman inside, your way of living must also be like a woman's--like cooking and cleaning and all of those things. And I would imagine that you would let men do the heavy work, is that true?*

M: I don't do any heavy work. Do you understand?

A: *What kind of work do you do?*

M: We don't do the heavy work ourselves, nor do we lift heavy things. We carry on the household, for example, but the servants do the real jobs. We only cook our food, eat our food, and wash our clothes. Sometimes the washermen even wash the clothes. But we don't do heavy work; we have the men do it.

B: *So who does that kind of work then? Are they male hijras?*

M: Not a single hijra in my group is a man. At least not in Banaras. All of them are of this same mode.[15]

B: *What about work other than heavy work that is considered men's work? Who does that kind of work?*

M: We do that kind of work ourselves.

B: *All of it?*

M: Yes, we dust, we clean, we plaster, we do everything. What heavy job would we have to do anyway? There aren't any heavy jobs for us to do here.

A: *Is everyone in your group from a Hindi-speaking area?*

M: Yes, they're all from Hindi-speaking areas.

A: *Are they all Hindi speakers.*

M: Yes, nobody speaks English here.

A: *But do some of them speak other languages?*

M: No, everyone speaks Hindi.

A: *What about Bhojpuri?*

M: We can speak Bhojpuri if we want to, of course. For example, I come from Patnā and the speech of that place is like, *kahā̃ ā chī, kahā̃ jā chī.* They talk like that in Patnā.

B: *That's Maithlī.*

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15   Megha uses the phrase *sab yahī rang kā hai* ['all of them are of this same mode'] to mean that the other hijras are all feminine like her. (In Hindi, the phrase *ek hī rang mẽ rang jātā* translates as 'to become the same', 'to adopt the same lifestyle'.)

M: *kahā jāichī e babunī kā karat ho? taḍ kaise āyal baḍ kaise jātāḍ?* ['Where are you going, dear sister? What are you doing there? What brings you here? Where are you going?'] That's the speech of Paṭnā.

A: *What language do you speak among yourselves? Do you speak the Paṭnā language among yourselves?*

M: No, I've lived in Banaras for almost my whole life, so we speak standard Hindi among ourselves: "Where are you going, *jī?* Where are you coming, *jī?* What kind of work are you doing? Please do it just like this." This is the language of Banaras. But the language of <u>that</u> place is like, "*e babunī kahā kahelu ho. nā kahalū kāhe na karat taḍ*" ['Hey Babu, what do you say? Why don't you say something? Why don't you do what I'm telling you?'] That's how my parents speak: "*e babūnī ī kām kaile! pahinle baḍ kī nā pahinle bāḍū?*" [Hey Babu, do this work! Why don't you dress up like this?]. ((pointing to a silver ornament)) This is my mother's. My mother gave this to me. My mother died a year ago.

B: *Did you go home?*

M: Yes, I went home because my mother loved me a lot. My mother had said, "Give this one thing to Megha." But nobody greeted me. Nobody said anything like, "Look who has come! Brother, you have come!" and so on. They didn't say anything.

B: *Did the neighborhood people say anything?*

M: The neighborhood people didn't say anything either. They asked, "Who is this?," and my family members said, "Oh, she's just a woman who belongs to such and such a place."

B: *Oh.*

M: ((pointing to the silver ornament)) It's a half-kilo.

A: *When you came here, did your speech change in any way?*

B: *You were speaking Bihārī before so you must have learned to talk differently when you came to Banaras, right?*

M: Yes, after coming here I learned a different way of speaking--not immediately after coming here, but gradually. I kept trying to guess how they spoke here. They kept saying, "Oh, look at her. What kind of language is she speaking? ((in a mocking voice)) *āichī jāichī* ['I go, I come'] *tarkārī do to bhāt do* ['give me *tarkārī*, give me *bhāt*]." In this area, of course, they don't call rice *bhāt*, they call it *cāval*. And they say *dāl*. ['lentils']. I used to say "give me *jhol*" instead of "give me *dāl*." But the

speech here is*dāl, cāval, sabzī, bhājī*, of course. So I kept on learning, and they kept on teasing me.

A: *What about your mannerisms? Did they change in any way? Did you feel that your behavior was changing when you were learning all that?*

M: Yes, I kept going with these people. The first day that I came here, these people went to dance. I kept speaking in my Patnā speech and these people didn't understand anything I was saying. They just kept making fun of me, "What is she saying? She's a Biharī! She's a Biharī!"[16]

A: *Did they teach you how to dance--how to move your hands and your body and all that?*

M: No, no, nothing of that sort. I just stood up and they said, "Dance!" So I danced--I was doing this, I was doing that. And now, of course, I'm dancing disco too. At first I didn't know better, but now I know everything. Now I can speak Banaras speech just like a native: "Hey you, where did you go? Hey you, you took this thing!" And so on and so forth. When I go to Panjāb, I speak Panjābī; when I go to Sindh I speak Sindhī. In Sindhī, they say *tūssī* ['you'], *assī* ['we'], that kind of language.[17] But I don't know Madrāsī, of course, nor do I know Bengālī. I know a little Bengālī, like *bhālo* ['good'], but that's about all I can say, *dīdī.*

A: *When you're with other hijras, do you call them bhābhī jī, dīdī, and so on?*

M: Yes, when I'm with other hijras, I'll call them *bhābhī jī, mammī, pāpā, ḍaiḍī.*

A: *But how do you refer to each other, exactly?*

M: For example, ((gesturing to another hijra in the room)) I call this person *bahan* ['sister']. She's my *bahan.* I call her *bahan* because she belongs to this neighborhood. And I tell her, "You are my sister birth after birth after birth."

B: *Let me ask you one thing. Tell me, do you have a period every month?*

M: No.

B: *Oh.*

M: But if it did happen, so what? It wouldn't be a problem.

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[16] The term *Biharī* is used as an insult here; the citizens of Bihār are often made fun of in jokes as being of lesser intelligence.

[17] These are actually Panjabi pronouns.

A: *Did you change your name after you came here?*

M: No, my name is the same from the very beginning: [Megha] Rānī. It means [cloud].

A: *But hijras are given new names when they join the community, right?*

M: No. This person's name is [Sulekha] Rani, for instance.

A: *Since childhood?*

M: Yes, he has belonged to this place since childhood. But now he left and is living in Nārāyaṇ Pūr. I have some *jajmāns* ['patrons'] there, so I transfered them to him.

A: *So the hijras aren't ever given new names?*

M: No.

A: *Are there any hijras who were raised as boys when they were young?*

M: They didn't raise me as a boy; they raised me as a girl.

B: *Did you wear a salwār kurtā?*

M: Yes, I wore a *salwār kamīz*, and I also put on a *dupaṭṭā* [scarf], just like the girls. I didn't dress like the *jeṇṭs* ['boys'].

B: *((Megha's guru Andāz enters the room)) Is it a problem if we go on asking you questions?*

M: No, no, why would it be a problem for my guru? My guru isn't like that.[18] She's very straight-forward. She's very straight-forward.

B: *Will she talk to us?*

M: Yes, she'll talk to you, although she doesn't talk very much. She's my *mã* ['mother'], after all!

A: *After new hijras arriver here, does their style of speaking change at all?*

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[18]   Megha refers to her guru in the masculine singular in this sentence (see footnote 4), probably in agreement with the word *guru* itself, which is masculine. In the next sentence, which does not contain the word *guru*, she switches back to feminine reference.

M: Yes, it changes. Because of this, I cry a lot. I'm not lying.

B: ((laughs))

M: I'm not telling you a lie; there's so many changes in the way we speak. ((pointing to Andāz)) This *mātā jī* has brought me here. She's 68 years old.

B: ((to guru)) *You don't look like you're 68 years old! You don't look like it at all! When you told us that, we were amazed. I can't believe it.*

M: Yes, it's true. She looks very youthful. In comparison to her, we all look old.

B: *No, no.*

M: I look like an old woman. My teeth are all broken.

A: *Do any hijras ever speak as men?*

M: No. They all speak like women.

A: *So it's always women's speech? Like, "I'm going^f, I'm coming^f"?*

M: Yes, it's always women's speech. Nobody ever speaks like a man; we don't ever speak like men. It's like: "I'm going *jī*; *bahan* ['sister'] is going; you eat; you cook; I'm just coming back."

A: *I've heard that the hijras have their own language. Is that true?*

M: What do you mean by that?

A: *I mean, I've heard that the hijras have a special way of speaking? Do you have a different way of speaking, or do you speak just like us?*

M: No, we speak just like you people: "Come; get up; repent."

B: *You mean you speak just like us as <u>women</u>?*

M: Yes. I'll say, "Do this! Do that!"

A: *When someone sees you on the street--a rickshaw driver, for example--do they think of you as a man or as a woman?*

M: Neither man nor woman; they just think we're hijras.

B: *But since you wear sāṛīs, how do they address you?*

M: Oh, like women. They'll speak to us like they speak to women, of course. They'll say, "The hijrin people are coming!"

B: *But I'm not talking about how you talk among yourselves, but about outsiders--how do outsiders address you?*

M: Well, they'll ask me questions in the same way. "Where will you go[f] ? *Dīdī, dīdī*, they'll call me *dīdī*. And I'll answer, "I will go[f] to Daśāśvamedh, I will go[f] to Godauliyā, I will go[f] to Naṭrāj." I'll speak like that. "I'm telling[f] you *bhāī* ['brother']!" Mostly, everybody uses the feminine gender.

A: *Mostly everybody uses the feminine gender?*

M: Yes, they always call us *bahan* ['sister'] or *dīdī* ['sister']. Definitely.

G: What she's saying is right, because feminine and masculine are definitely two different things. Feminine is a separate thing; masculine is a separate thing. Feminine and masculine are two different categories.[19] Look, I'm telling you, those who belong to the feminine category have bodies like us--like women--and they come and join us. It's these people who come and dance and sing with us in our musical gatherings. But then there are those who are really still masculine, who have small organs but useless ones nevertheless, and these are the people who you've probably seen dressed up as *bhaḍetī* ['jesters'][20] at marriage parties and so on.

B: *Oh, I know who you're talking about! The people who go in the marriage procession and use wigs--I've seen them dancing in front of the band. But they're mostly village people, of course.*

G: Yes, they're sent from the village to perform at wedding parties. We only go among the women, of course, but they always have their own separate parties. In earlier days, for example, prostitutes used to be invited to dance at wedding parties and a couple of boys would always go with them. So they're like those people. They dress up in men's clothes and sometimes in women's clothes, too.

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[19] It is noteworthy that Megha's guru uses the term *jāt* ['caste'] in reference to gender categories.

[20] The term *bhaḍetī*, similar to the terms *bhāḍ* and *bhaṇḍelā*, is used in reference to male entertainers who dress in colorful clothes, dance, sing, and play instruments at wedding parties; they frequently mock the onlookers in the crowd. Like the hijras, such performers are considered to be "shameless" in contemporary Indian society and are granted little respect.

B: *Oh yes, yes, I've seen them in marriage parties. There are some low-caste people in my neighborhood, and sometimes they'll have a marriage party in the middle of the street. It's always the village-type people who come and perform--with a really filfthy band. They always stay overnight. And the boys tease them a lot.*[21]

G: Yes, so the people belonging to our caste will not mingle with the people belonging to that caste. We are always separate. We go only when a child is born and only among the women. Because these hijras are *striling* ['feminine'], which means that they are women. And that means that we will only work among women, but marriage parties are all male. When we dance in someone's house, no man will be sitting there. This is our profession. I give the *mahānagar pālikā* ['metropolitan municipality'] 9,000 rupees a year for that.

B: *Really? What for?*

G: To get information about where a child has been born.

B: *Oh, so those people tell you everything?*

G: Yes, they tell me all the places where children have been born in this *muhalla* ['district']. If a child is born in your household, for example, I wouldn't know about it, but you'd certainly register the birth somewhere, regardless of whether the child is born at home or in the hospital.

B: *So you don't go to the hospital to find out?*

G: No, we find out from the *mahānagar pālikā* ['municipal office']. We go there once a week, and they write down the name of every child born in the seven *halkā* ['wards'].[22] We have a fixed sum that we have to give them, just like when someone pays the off the municipal office in order to bring in liquor or other produce from the field--sometimes it's 4,000 rupees a year, whatever they want.[23] They're just like a *jajmān* ['patron'] to us. Suppose there's a child born in my house, then they would be the ones who would tell me about it.

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21   The boys who perform with these groups are normally young in age, i.e. teenagers; hence the teasing from other boys.

22   *Halkā* ['wards'] are city districts; each *halkā* elects a representative to the municipality.

23   Megha's guru is describing a kind of bribe here; her community pays 9,000 rupees to the appropriate governmental authorities in exchange for information on childbirths. Hindi speakers refer to this sort of exchange as *cay-pānī* ['tea-water']; although officially illegal, such bribes are standard fare in many Indian cities.

B: *But suppose my child is born in the hospital. Do the people in the hospital send the name on to them?*

G: Yes, they send it on.

B: *Oh, I see! So that's how it happens, because we're always amazed when you find out!*

A: *((Andāz leaves the room; to Megha)) Are you happy with your life?*

M: Yes, I'm happy with my life. One mother renounced me, but another one has taken her place. She fulfills the role of mother, so I'm happy. ((begins to cry, theatrically)) Sometimes I remember my mother and cry, "Oh my mother, oh my mother!" I'll sit down in the corner and cry for the whole day. But when I come to my senses a little bit, I realize that I'm useless for that work--for the life of a woman or a man--so why would I go there? That's what I'll think. Look at this face: she's wearing earrings and noserings of gold!

A: *Do you think that your life is different from the lives of other people in Indian society?*

M: I'm outside of Indian society. What I mean by that is, I can't be a part of India, but I can't go anywhere else either. I'll just stay at home, earn my living, eat in my home, and I'll remain happy or unhappy as the case may be. Do you understand that? This is my fate, after all. Someone gets a lot of money, someone gets a little money. That's just the way it is.

B: *What she means is, we people lead a normal life; do you feel that you lead a normal life too?*

M: No, we don't lead a life that's normal by other people's standards, but it's normal to us. We look after each other and share each other's misery.

B: *Do you feel that you have anything in common with people like us?*

M: Well, now that I've come to know you, I can meet with you. If I were to have some kind of hardship, for instance, and didn't have any money--if I had to go to the doctor or something--I could ask *dīdī* for money and you could give me 10 rupees or so.

B: *Do you mean that we deal with each other on an equal basis then? So you don't feel that you're really separate from the rest of society?*

M: No, no, for example, that *dīdī* lives next door to me; she calls me *dīdī* and I call her *mã* ['mother'] and all that. When she comes over here, she'll call us *mã*

['mother'], she'll call us *bahan* ['sister']. In that way, we're not separate from the rest of society.

A: *What does Indian society think of the hijras?*

M: Outsiders think, "This one is a hijrin."

B: *Do they consider you a mistake, good, bad, or what?*

M: No, no, they say, "These people are very good people. These people are like *pujārī* ['devotees']. These people do lots of *pūjā* ['worship'], after all. These people are like *devī* ['goddesses']." They touch our knees; they touch our feet. The people of Indian society are very nice to us. "These people aren't involved in any wrong doing. Some of them may be lonely, but they keep to themselves and live with satisfaction nonetheless. They never fight among each other, nor do they ever bicker. They don't get involved in trivial matters, like 'oh, that's mine not yours!' They just eat what is theirs and go to sleep. They aren't involved in any wrongdoing or any criminal acts." They are very happy when they see us; they feel good. "The *mālik* ['lord'] has given them a bad life, but they are good nevertheless. Whether or not we're good or bad, they must be thinking, "They are such a decent community, so why has the *mālik* made their lives so miserable? They only miss one thing; otherwise, they lack nothing."

A: *So society respects you a lot?*

M: Yes, they respect me, yes. When I go in the morning to my jajmān's [patron's] house, they touch my feet and greet me, "*rām-rām hare rām, mã jī* [Mother *Jī*], are you happy? Are you alright?" So I say, "Yes, I'm happy." Society knows us to be very good people. They never think bad of us. Their perception of us is always favorable.

A: *If it were up to you, would you choose to be a man, a woman, or a hijra?*

M: None of them.[24]

A: *Why not?*

M: If I were born a woman, if my *mālik* made me a woman, I'd get married and go with my bridegroom to his house. If my husband's mother is nice it's one thing, but if she's not it's another. If I say anything wrong, they'll always be angry with me. But if you're born as a man, you marry somebody, bring her to your home, and then you have to feed her. If you don't appease her, she'll run away. So neither of them is good. What's good about being a man anyway? After you marry her, you have

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24   Megha's words echo the Vedanti belief that birth is in itself bad.

to earn money to feed her. It doesn't matter whether you're dying or living, you still have to feed her. But on the other hand, if I'm a woman, then every morning I have to get up and do the dishes for my husband. I have to wash the clothes of ten people every day; I have to cook for them; I have to serve them in every way; I have to massage them with oil. And even after you serve them every single day, they'll still kick you four times. If you have the added misfortune of having a husband who is a drunkard or a meateater, [25] then what can you do? So how do I know which one is good and which one isn't good? Let's put it this way: We have a better life. It's better because we don't drink, we don't do drugs, we don't have any bad habits. I eat *pān* ['betel leaf'] every so often, of course, but I don't smoke cigarettes.

B: *Nobody drinks liquor in your group?*

M: Nobody.

B: *Nobody smokes cigarettes?*

M: ((gesturing towards Kamla)) She smokes cigarettes, and I eat *pān*.

A: *But do you sometimes hope to get a woman's body in the next birth?*

M: Yes, I say, "In the next birth, may my *Mālik* give me the body of a woman." That's what I pray, in the morning when I get up and also in the evening.

A: *So what would you like to become in the next life--a woman or a man?*

M: Being a man is no good. No good at all. Because you have to drive a car, you have to drive a truck, you have to drive this, you have to drive that. If I'm a woman, I'll become a bride. I'll observe purdah[26] in front of the men of the house and I'll cook food. First I'll massage the feet of my husband, then I'll massage his head, and then I'll sleep with him. ((laughs)) On the honeymoon night, I'll just be sitting at home observing purdah, and when he comes to me, I'll look at him in this way ((makes a coquettish, flirtateous expression)). I'll say to my *Mālik*, "Oh *Mālik*, in the next birth please make me a woman! ((gesturing towards Vinita, who is laughing loudly)) Make me laugh like she's laughing!" I've given up all the crying and mourning. If the Mother has mercy on me, she'll make me that way. If she has no mercy, she'll make me a man and I'll have to push the *thelā* ['cart']. This is the way things happen in this society, *dīdī*. But just take it from me: This life is a lot better. There's no fighting with anyone, there's no quarreling, there's no conflict.

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25   Megha uses the term *śarābī-kabābī* here. There are three kinds of men traditionally held as disreputable in Hindu orthodox society: those who drink liquor (*sarābī*), those who eat meat (*kabābī*), and those who frequent prostitutes (*raṇḍībājī*).

26   Megha uses the expression *ghūghaṭ kāḍha* ['to observe purdah']

A: *Then you want to be born the same way again in the next birth?*

M: No, no, no, in the next birth I want to become an Englishman in Pakistan!

A: *In Pakistan?*

M: No, no, in America. I'll speak English, I'll court this lady ((gesturing towards Veronica)), and I'll marry her. And then I'll tour India with her. I'll learn Hindi here and I'll teach it to her! ((everyone laughs)).

A: *((laughing)) Okay, the conversation's over. ((turns off the taperecorder))*

Appendix E

A CONVERSATION WITH SHASHI AND CHARU

(Translation into English from the original Hindi)

As the poorest and most isolated group of the four I studied, the hijras in Shashi's community are critically aware of how societal marginalization has contributed to their own poverty. Their home, which they share with a number of Muslim families, is located on the edge of a vast field that is reached only after traversing a long, winding labyrinth of back alleys. At the end of this field, which would be deserted if it were not for the occasional hut or lean-to, the community sits isolated without electricity. The following excerpt is taken from a conversation that took place on a Thursday afternoon in the courtyard outside of the hijras' home. The participants in the conversation are as follows: Shashi (labeled as 'Sh' in the text), an 80-year-old guru who first joined the hijra community at age eleven; Charu (labeled as 'Ch' in the text), a disciple of Shashi's who came to Banaras from a small city in Mizarpur; a 32-year-old hijra whom the others refer to as 'Pandit' (labeled as 'P' in the text); a group of approximately 25 neighbors (jointly labeled as 'N' in the text); Veronica and myself (whom I have labeled jointly as 'A' in the text for ease of transcription); and our Hindi-speaking research assistant Vinita (labeled as 'B' in the text). At the time this conversation took place, Veronica and I had met these hijras only in passing, a fact that becomes readily apparent in the excerpt. Although Shashi and Charu were eager to talk to us, for the most part, Pandit continued to view us with distrust throughout the interview. In addition, Shashi and Vinita have a personality clash from the start, and while this fact leads to interesting linguistic data, with Shashi sarcastically insulting Vinita's middle-class sensibilities (e.g., angrily dismissing her questions, using foul language and gesture, demanding payment for the interview), their exchanges frequently escalate to an uncomfortable level.

A: *How old are you?*

Sh: I'm eighty years old.

A: *Did you say eighty years old?*

Sh: Yes, ((pointing to a neighbor)) and this is my son![1]

A: *Really? Wow, what do you eat to make your hair is so black?*

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[1]   Shashi's community is unique among the communities we studied in that the hijras live in close proximity to their non-hijra neighbors and have developed an extensive affected kinship system with them.

Sh: This is my sister's son!

A: *My god, not a single hair is white. Can you believe it? She's eighty years old!*

Sh: Oh *dīdī*, all of my hair is white. I've just colored it black.

A: *Oh, I see. It's not black hair, it's Black Night![2] ((laughs))*

Sh: Yes, I'm eighty years old. I'm old. What did you take me for?

A: *Oh, she's very modern, then! She's very cunning and modern! ((laughs))*

N: No, no, she's not cunning, just knowledgeble.

Sh: Even *Baba* said,[3] "No, no, no, I won't believe that you're eighty years old." Oh, *bahan* ['sister'], don't tell me that I'm not eighty years old. Don't tell me that. I'm definitely eighty years old! Call Charu Jī here and ask him. He'll tell you so, too. ((gesturing toward one of the neighbors)) This is my child. And she has *nātī-potā* ['grandchildren'] too!

B: *If that's true, then I suppose it's possible.*

Sh: Yes, she has grandchildren; her daughter's child is so big ((showing height with hands)). And this is my <u>child</u> I'm talking about!

A: *What religion do you belong to?*

Sh: Both religions are the same to us.

B: *But which religion were you born into?*

Sh: I was born into a Hindu family. This is the way we think about religion: We don't have anything to do with caste and such matters.[4] We have <u>nothing</u> to do with caste and such matters. We're not ever going to arrange marriages and invite you; we'll never have to extend any kind of formal invitation to you. And it's only in those situations that people say, "This man belongs to such and such a religion." Since we don't do that, what's it matter to us? If you want to come over and eat and

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2   "Black Night" is a kind of hair dye.

3   Shashi uses the term *bābā* ['grandfather', 'old man', 'ascetic'] in reference to an elderly man who lives in her neighborhood.

4   Shashi uses the echo expression *jāt pāt*, which can be translated as 'caste, etc.'

drink with us, fine. Otherwise, go to hell![5] What kind of give and take is there for us, after all?

B: *That's true.*

Sh: What else can I tell you?

A: *Where is your family from?*

Sh: My family is from the West.

B: *What's that mean? Where in the West?*

Sh: ((the neighbors all start to talk)) Everybody can't speak at once. Let me explain. Shut up! Suriyāvā. Suriyāvā. Yes, Suriyāvā.[6]

B: *Oh yes, it's on the way to Delhi, right?*

Sh: No, not Delhi. It's near Bhadohī.[7] Have you seen Bhadohī? It's just a little farther on. Jāghai-Suriyāvā.[8]

B: *Oh, I see, I see.*

A: *What did your father do?*

Sh: I don't have a clue what my father did--whether he was cremated, whether he went to Maṇikarṇikā[9], whether he went somewhere else, whether he ended his life, whether he went to hell,[10] I don't have a clue!

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5   Shashi uses the expression *daphan ho jāo*, which translated more literally as 'go and be buried'.

6   Suriyāvā is a city in eastern Uttar Pradesh, located to the west of Banaras.

7   The district of Bhadohī, famous for its carpet industry, has gained recent notoriety for its explotation of children in the workplace.

8   Villages in India are often defined by a neighboring village; Jāghai and Suriyāvā are adjacent villages.

9   Maṇikarṇikā is a ghat ['bank'] on the Ganges River in Banaras where corpses are burned.

10   Shashi uses the word *jahannum* ['hell', 'inferno'].

B: *Didn't you live with him?*

Sh: I don't know. I only know that I renounced my family when I was a little child.

B: *But at the time you did that, what was he doing?*

Sh: I was just playing around like other children.

B: *No, no, I mean what was your father doing?*

Sh: How would I know? I was only so big. I've grown up now and I still don't know
        what he was doing. All I know is that the hijras took me and brought me here.

A: *Oh, I see.*

Sh: The hijras came, they took me, and they told me, "Let's go. What will you do here,
        anyway? Come with us." So I started to dance and sing.

B: *Please tell us what your father did.*

Sh: I don't even know whether he was educated or not--whether he was a clerk, a
        landlord, an usher, I have no idea what he did.

B: *We'll ask this question again later; then you'll tell us!*

Sh: Yeah, yeah. So I came here and I began to dance. We dance, we sing, we earn our
        living, we eat, we live our lives peacefully. What do I care about my mother or my
        father? What do I care whether or not they've been cremated in Maṇikarṇikā?
        Whatever they want to do, they can do. I didn't go to school so I don't know
        anything.

B: *Did you have any education at all?*

Sh: I didn't study even one letter.[11] I don't know anything about education.

A: *How many hijras are in Banaras, in your opinion?*

Sh: Do you think I've kept a record? I haven't kept a record! Only *Bhagvān* knows
        how many there are!

A: *Can you guess?*

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11   In Shashi's own words: *ek akkhar bhī nahī̃ paṛhā* ['not even one syllable']

Sh: No, I couldn't possibly guess. Oh my god, I have so many brothers and sisters in Banaras, I couldn't possibly guess. Wherever you look, these *bahanī* ['sisters'] are all jumping up and down, ((clapping and singing, in a mocking tone)) "What's this? What's that?" ((the neighbors all laugh)) So how could I possibly know how many there are?

B: *You're making fun of yourself by clapping and singing like that!*

A: *Would you say there are about a thousand? Fifteen hundred?*

Sh: Yeah, it couldn't be less than that.

B: *How many groups are there and how are they divided? Is it like, "This is our ṭolā ['neighborhood']; this is someone else's ṭolā." Are they divided like that?*

Sh: Yes, we're divided like that. But *bahanī* ['sister'], what do I know about these things?

B: *No, no, no, you know everything. You're just pretending.*

Sh: Listen to me. This is the way it is: People just come and go here. I already told you that you should go to Lohata. You'll find at least ten of them there. But at this place there are only two.[12]

B: *But people come and visit you here, right?*

Sh: Yes, of course they're always coming over here. Someone will come from one place; someone else will come from another place.

B: *When there's business to do?*

Sh: Yes, they come when it's time to work. And afterwards, when the job is over, they collect their loot,[13] put it in their bundles, and go home. And what do I care where they go? I have nothing to do with them after that.

A: *Is Banaras famous for it's hijras?*

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[12]   At the time of this interview, only one other hijra lived in the small house where Shashi lived; Charu lived around the corner.

[13]   Shashi uses the term *pīsān* here to mean 'earnings', which translates literally as 'stuff to be ground'.

Sh: No, no, there are hijras all over the country--a heap of them. Where are there hijras here, anyway? There aren't any hijras here. If you want to see hijras, go to Lucknow, go to Delhi, go to Panjāb, go to Madrās. Just observe those hijras; they're millionaires! They have cars, motorcycles, jeeps, and so on. But what do we have? We're all dying of hunger here in Banaras. We eat just enough to fill our stomachs. There's only enough for us to eat because our *Mālik* is merciful to us. So don't come here if you want to see hijras. Go to Delhi, go to Panjāb, go to Bombay. Yes, go to Bombay. Your soul will be <u>so</u> happy seeing those hijras! If you go to Bombay, *dīdī*, they live such a good life, you can't possibly recognize that they're hijras! You'll think, "Hey, these are full-fledged women! They're lieing to us!" *Dīdī*, you won't be able to believe them! I bet my life on it.

B: *Yes, we've heard about Bombay hijras. They all live in grand style.*

A: *How do people decide which group to join?*

Sh: How can I tell you anything about that? How do I know? Why did you come to this place, for example? Why didn't you go to another group? Listen *dīdī*, a person will get his food and water from whatever place the gods write in his fate. He'll live and die in whatever place the gods give him. In that place he'll live; in that place he'll die; in that place he'll get his food. Otherwise, a man can keep on hitting his head against a wall until he dies, and he still won't find a place. It's up to his mercy: You'll get food from whatever place is written in your fate; otherwise, you won't get anything.

A: *Do you stay with the same group for your whole life?*

B: *So, for example, if you and your guru constitute a group, will you spend your whole life in that group?*

Sh: No, no, no, no, there's no guarantee of that. You can just say, "Hey, Let's take our stuff and go to another place." What give and take do we have, anyway? Why would it matter if I left here today, my dear?[14] We don't have to settle down in one place just so we can marry our daughter off to somebody. We can go anywhere we can earn a living. I haven't signed any kind of contract to live with you forever, for instance. Listen, it's like this: When you've brought up a child so that he's capable of standing on his own feet and working with his own hands, he's not going to listen to you anymore. You've made him suitable for this world, so he doesn't need you anymore. That kind of child will stop listening to his parents. If he doesn't renounce them and run away, he'll leave them for his own wife and children. But we're hijras after all, so we can't even do that.

B: *I agree with you completely.*

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[14]   Shashi uses the highly affectionate term *betvā* when referring to Veronica.

Sh: Even real sons, when they get married and grow up, renounce their parents and go away? Isn't that true?

B: *Exactly.*

Sh: We're hijras, after all. God knows what our caste is or where we come from. As long as we feel like being together, we'll stay together; otherwise, you'll go your way and I'll go my way, and then what? If one left in order to earn his living in some other place, what would he have to do with us, then?[15]

B: *So you don't belong to a group? You're all by yourself, and anyone who wants to come and live with you can come and live with you?*

Sh: Yes.

A: *Which group in Banaras is the biggest? Or rather, which one is the most famous?*

Sh: What do you mean by "famous"? Do you mean the largest *partī* ['singing group']?

B: *Which group in Banaras is the most well-known, in other words? For example, Channu's group is really big and a lot of people know about it in Banaras. And Andāz' group is well-known, too. Which group, in your opinion, is the most famous?*

Sh: The one belonging to Andāz.

A: *Do peɔp.. work with only one group or do they work with a lot of different groups?*

Sh: The groups are all separate, so people work with only one group. After they distribute the collected goods among them--like rice or whatever--they take their share and go home.

A: *Do most of the hijras in Banaras live with a group, or do most of them live alone?*

Sh: Some of them live in 2s, some in 3s, some in 4s. Hey! Why don't you bring one or two of them over here, okay? ((laughs))

B: *Don't joke around with me. When we've finished our business, you can joke around all you want.*

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[15]   In other words, thɛ hijras have only each other, noone else.

N: Oh, people are only attracted to groups with good names, so why would they ever want to join this group, anyway?

B: *Your name would be more famous if more people joined, wouldn't it?*

Sh: Oh, I don't know anything about a name. Who knows what would happen? Just give us money. Give us rupees. Give us a present. Then we'll talk about it.

B: *Yes, yes, we will. But first let's talk. When the work is over, you'll get your present.*

Sh: But I've already told you so much! What would happen if I told you everything? Then what? ((laughs))

A: *((laughs))*

B: *Listen, the poor women have already brought you a gift, without your having even told them to do so!*

Sh: Then why don't they give it to us? ((laughs)) Put it in our hands and then we'll know that you really brought us something! First put it in our hands, then we'll talk.

B: *The reality is this: I have to write down all of this conversation for them—*

Sh: Now *dīdī—*

B: *And if you don't talk to us, I won't be able to. ((laughs))*

Sh: Hey, look! ((gesturing towards Veronica)) Look at your hair! We must be using the same shampoo! Speak in Hindi *dīdī*, do you know any Hindi? ((sweetly)) It doesn't matter whether or not you read Hindi, you just stay here, okay?

A: *Are there any hijras who are especially famous?*

Sh: If you go over there to Jalālīpur or Lātasraiyā, you'll find Baḍhru's group or Gītā's group or Buddhū's group—you'll find the groups of so many people! Hājī Jī lives there, for example.

B: *There's a big fair that takes place there, right? There's a big graveyard and all that.*

Sh: Yes, yes. Just next to the *Idgāh*.[16]

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[16]   An *Idgāh* is a place of assembly for offering *namāz* and holding a fair during the Muslim festival known as Īd.

B: *Oh, right. Near the Ídgāh. Yes, yes, I've been there a couple of times. My mausī ['mother's sister] lives there--on the other side of the railroad crossing. Yes, yes, I remember. There's a big church there, right?*

Sh: Yes.

A: *Why is she so famous?*

Sh: Because she's gotten old. She's been in business for a very long time, so long that she has a house of her own. And now he has become a *hāzi-navājī* [17], and he has ten children in his house. I told you that everybody knows him--in Bombay, in Kānpur, in Ilāhābad and so on. In Mizārpur, Jaunpur, Phūlpur, Bhadohī-- everybody knows him.

A: *How old is she?*

Sh: You have to go there and ask her yourself! How can I tell you her age? She has to tell you her own age. How can I tell you other people's ages? I can only say how old I am; you can only say how old you are. ((pointing to a neighbor)) You can't tell me how old this woman is, for example! Do you understand my point? Do you get it?

A: *Okay, okay, I understand, I understand!*

Sh: Give me money. ((everyone laughs)) First give us money, then I'll tell you everything. But you have to give us money first.

B: We're not going anywhere; we're staying right here. Just let us ask you a few questions first, okay? You can ask anybody where these people are if you want to find them. They're going to school for the whole year; every year there's a class for people like them at the same place. It didn't just start today; it's been going on for at least ten years. You'll get your money. We're not running away.

A: *If you're not in a group, how do you find work? Do you ever go out and dance alone?*

P: ((to Shashi)) These people are going to take everything away from us! They're going to take all of our knowledge and spread it all over the country--everything that is being recorded there. They're going to spread it all over their country, too.

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17   The term *hāzi-navājī* is used in reference to those Muslims who have made a pilgrimage to Haj, implying that they have fulfilled all of their spiritual duties.

Sh: Give us money then, and we'll tell you how we dance, how we do our routine, how we beat the drums. But you have to give us money first.

B: *No, later. First you have to talk to us. We have to talk to you first, okay? If you want us to go, we'll go.*

Sh: Hey, look at *dīdī's dupaṭṭā* ['scarf']!

B: *Why do you keep on talking like that? You were saying that you live alone and that you're not with a group, so how do you find work?*

Sh: No, no, there are three of us. ((pointing to the camera)) Why don't you take a photograph of us?

B: *Not now, not now.*

Sh: When? When are you going to take a photograph of us?

B: *Later on.*

Sh: Then give us money first. Give us money.

B: *You just want money, money, money. People will say that you're greedy!*

Sh: Okay, okay, then go, go, go. We're greedy, so you can just go on your way.

B: *No, no, I'm not going to go. I wasn't the one who said that you're greedy; that's what other people say.*

Sh: ((pointing to film canister)) What's that?

A: *Film.*

Sh: So take a photograph.

A: *Now?*

Sh: Yes, I want you to take a picture of me totally nude!

A: *What?*

Sh: Yes, I'll dance nude!

B: *If you were truly a woman, you'd know that you can't do that! ((laughs))*

A: *Do you feel that you live with each other like a family? With your guru, for example, or with Charu?*

Sh: Yes, we're like a family.

A: *Do you have different roles? For example, does one of you behave like a mother, another like an uncle, another like an aunt, and so on? Does each person have a particular role?*

Ch: She's the *mā* ['mother'] and I'm the *beṭī* ['daughter'].

B: *Yes, that's exactly what I mean.*

A: *What's your daily routine? In other words, what kinds of things do you do from morning to evening?*

Sh: Well, when I come home I prepare food. I've already told you, dear sister, I can get up at 6:00, I can get up at 8:00, I can get up at 7:00. How do I know when I'm going to get up? I can get up at 4:00 in the morning, if I want. After all, we don't know when we're going to feel bad or when we're going to feel good--when we're going to be sick or when we're going to be well. Listen, dear sister, it all depends on what the day is. That's how we live. So how can I possibly know? Look, sister, it's just like a fart--how can I possibly know when it's time to go and fart?

B: *Well, at least let me know before you're going to, and I'll leave, okay? ((laughs))*

A: *Do you just dance and sing or do you also tell stories?*

Sh: No, we don't tell stories. We just play and dance.

A: *Do you ever sing when you're alone, or do you only dance and sing for other people?*

Ch: Yes, she dances when she's alone.

B: *In other words, do you dance for your own entertainment?*

Sh: We're so tired when we come back home after singing and dancing for the whole day, so why would we want to sing and dance among ourselves?

Ch: ((singing)) "Somewhere or another I'll get my beloved." But my beloved is already dead!

A: *How old were you--*

Sh: I told you, I'm eighty years old!

A: *No, I mean, how old were you when you realized that you were a hijra?*

B: *How old were you when you came here?*

Sh: ((making gesture with hands)) About this big--fifteen years old.

A: *How did you find out that you were a hijra?*

Sh: Listen, *bhāiyā* ['friend'], it's like this. If you eat well and cook well, somebody will be jealous of you. When they see you, they'll get jealous: "Oh, he's eating so well! He's earning so much money! What can we do to spoil his life? What can we do to make him this way? What can we do to make him that way? What's he eating? What's he cooking? Let it go to hell!"[18] There are enemies like that on the outside too, of course. But today we're just earning our keep and eating here. Every hijra is jealous of other hijras.

Ch: *Every man is jealous of other men.*

Sh: We own a house, for example, so the people who don't own a house willl say, "Oh, you don't care for us! You don't ask us to sit down with you because you have a house!" They're always saying bad things about us. But we're paying 1800 rupees in rent. You give us the rent and we'll give you the house.

Ch: It's like this: Every man is different; every art is different; every job is different. So how much can we tell you, after all? Everyone is different.

B: *But how did you find out that you have this trouble?[19]*

Sh: Hey, just leave me alone!

B: *Why?*

Sh: Because I have to go piss!

A: *Okay. ((laughs))*

N: If you do that in public, these people will tell everybody about it!

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18 Shashi uses the expression *cūlhē bhāṛ mẽ jāy*, which translates literally as 'let it go on the hearth/parcher's oven' and figuratively as 'let it go to hell'.

19 Vinita uses the term *pareśānī* ['difficulty'] in reference to hijrahood.

B: *No, we won't do that.*

N: Take a photograph now.

P: Yes, take a photograph.

B: *No, I'll take a photograph later when there's more light.*

Sh: No, no, no. You can't believe these people; everything is later, later, later. Give us money so that we can get some *pān* ['betel leaf'] and tea. Will you drink some water? Drink, *dīdī.* How much for the tea? ((counting the crowd)) One, two, three, four, five. Give us five rupees for tea. ((A man enters the courtyard)) Look! That's my *ādmī* ['husband'].[20] That's my husband. Look! This is my husband. And this is my *devar* ['husband's younger brother']. And now I'm making the arrangements to marry him. The negotiations are being held, but he keeps on making demands like: "Give me 2 lakh rupees as a *tilak* [initial dowry]! Give me a *mārutī* car!" But we don't have that much money, so how can we possibly give it to him? Oh look, he's gone away now. ((to a neighbor)) Bablū, go and get five cups of tea. ((to us)) Listen to me. Listen to what I'm saying. Give us the money. First you give us the money *dīdī,* and then I'll tell you the best names among all the hijras. You can go to those hijras, and they'll tell you everything you want to know. But first give us the money.

B: *((laughs)) You have to take care of your liquor before you can face other people!*

Sh: I took care of my liquor yesterday. ((laughs))

B: *No, no, you haven't taken care of it yet. First let's have a conversation and then we'll talk about the money.*

Sh: No, no, give us the money.

N: Why don't you just answer their questions?

B: *I'm very upset now. Why is there so much commotion here? Do you know how difficult it is for me to write all of this down? Why are all of these people making so much noise?*

Sh: ((to the children)) Hey, you children go away. You won't understand anything anyway. This isn't for you. Listen to me! Go away.

B: *Did I come here to talk to all of these people? I know Banaras pretty well; I live in Assi. Am I crazy or what?*

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20   Shashi uses the phrase *hamārā ādmī* ['my man', 'my husband']

Sh: How do I know whether you're crazy or not? Just make the payment.

B: *I've already given you money for tea. Just listen to me and then after we talk, we'll give you money.*

P: Hey *dīdī*, listen! When you ask somebody to do something for you, you have to have patience.

Sh: Yes, but they're leaving in 25 days, so they need to talk to you now. I know plenty about you already. Don't think you're going to give me any new information, because Andāz's group lives right by my house and I see about fifty of them everyday. We'll just go to their house and get the information there, if we have to.

Sh: Listen *dīdī*. This is my child! She's like a daughter to me. Listen *dīdī*. This is my child. This is my son.

B: *Why are you trying to teach me this? None of this is new to me.*

Sh: Then why do you keep on bothering us? ((gesturing to the two other hijras)) Both of them are getting mad. You haven't given us a single rupee and all of this talk has been useless. We're not going to say anything!

B: *((to the children)) All of you children, go on and leave. You can come back after we're finished talking. Go on. We hardly ever come to this neighborhood, so please leave and let us talk.*

        ((Vinita continues arguing with the hijras for several minutes, while Veronica and I try to calm her down, without success.))

A: When you were small, did your parents refer to you in the feminine or in the masculine.

Sh: Didn't I already tell you? They called me [Shashi] Devī.

A: *When you found out that you were a hijra, was it physical or emotional? Did you feel unhappy about it?*

Sh: This is how it happened with me: When I realized that I wasn't comfortable with the way I was living, I saw some people dancing and singing so I joined them. I renounced my mother, I renounced my father, I renounced everybody. As far as I'm concerned, my mother and father were all cremated on Maṇikarṇikā. I cremated them. I hit them four times with a stick, and then I let their ashes flow down the

Ganges river. You mother fuckers flow down the river[21]! Don't ever show your face here again! If you come to my little town, I'll beat the hell out of you! So I kicked my father and mother out; I hid them away.

A: *But how did you come here? You were a small child then, after all.*

Sh: These *bāīs*['women dancers', 'prostitutes'] were just wandering around in their normal way; they were dancing and singing. So I started dancing and singing with those people, too. They said, "This is a hijra," so I said, "Take me with you." I started going to wherever a *nāc tamāśā* ['dance show' or 'folk drama'] was taking place, and I started to dance and sing with the other people who were dancing and singing. When they saw my face they said, "This is also a singer and dancer!" So I said, "Come on, take me with you. No one will care. Don't you see that I'm just like you? *Bhagvān* has given you two eyes to see, after all!" ((extending hands)) See, my hands are just like your hands. Touch me!

B: *Oh my god, they're so tender!*

Sh: Yours are really tender, too. Did you ever notice that? Bhagvān has given you two eyes, dear sisters, so you should be noticing things like that. Extend your hand to me. Do I have any kind of beard? No!

A: *Did you know any other hijras before you left home?*

Sh: No, I didn't know anybody.

A: *Did you come here right after you left home?*

Sh: No, I went to Calcutta and lived there for five or six years.

A: *When did you come to Banaras?*

Sh: After a long time.

A: *Why did you come to Banaras?*

Sh: I said, "Well, I'm doing this work here and I'll have to do this work there, too. It's the same work whether I do it here or whether I do it there. A lot of people live in Banaras, so let's go to Banaras." You go wherever you get pledges. And you go wherever you feel comfortable. There's no fixed reason for why you decide to go somewhere.

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21   Shashi uses the offensive expression *mādar cod* ['mother fucker']. The term *mādar* means 'mother', of course, while the term cod is formed from the verb *codnā* ['to copulate with']. A *codū* is one who indulges in excessive sexual intercourse.

A: *When you're with other hijras, do you speak Bhojpuri or Hindi?*

Sh: I just speak like I speak.

A. *What language did you speak when you were living with your parents?*

Sh: They spoke the language of the Suriyavā or the Bhadohī district.

B: *Was that Bhojpuri?*

Sh: No, no, no, Bhojpuri is spoken in Bihar.[22]

B: *No, no, Bhojpuri is spoken in Banaras, too!*

Sh: No, no, they all speak Hindi here.

B: *Is there a special Bhojpuri language that you speak when you're talking with other hijras?*

Sh: No.

B: *For example, when we were here the other day, you were all talking among yourselves, and I couldn't understand anything.*

Sh: We say plenty of things among ourselves. Why should we go to other people when we want to ask something? Why should we leave our house?

B: *No, no, that's not what I'm talking about. How do you talk among yourselves? How would you explain to someone, for instance, that you speak Madrasi or Bengali?*

Sh: No, no, I don't know any Madrasi or Bengali. It's just like: ((in Bhojpuri)) "I came and I went, I came and I went." That's our language, okay?

A: *After you left home, did you take on any new mannerisms?*

Sh: Yes, yes, I did. What did I know, after all? I didn't learn it from the womb.[23] Nobody learns anything at birth. Somebody had to teach me what I know, of course. Somebody had to tell me how to do things.

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[22] Bhojpuri is spoken in the district of Bhadohī, although it is a slightly different dialect from the Bhojpuri spoken in Bihar.

[23] Shashi's statement echoes the Hindi proverb *mā ke peṭ se to koī sīkhkar nahī āyā* 'noone comes from the womb with knowledge'.

A: *Did your mannerisms change after you came here?*

Sh: Yes, everything changed. I myself have changed.

A: *How did you change--in your way of speaking, in your mannerisms? How?*

Sh: Yes, I changed my accent; I changed my way of speaking; I changed my behavior. ((Charu enters the courtyard)) Charu lives on the same street but sits behind a curtain in a *koṭhā* [prostitute's room] because she's very beautiful.

B: *Yes, she's very beautiful.*

Ch: Whoever lives in a *koṭhā* was also brought up in a house. She just turned out to be of bad character, even though she was born among men. So she didn't stay at home like she should have.

B: *But women are also forced to become prostitutes.*

Ch: It doesn't matter whether she's forced to become a prostitute or whether she becomes one on her own. If she goes back home, she'll act the same as she did in the *koṭhā.*, except that she won't have any red powder. Her manner of sitting, for instance, will be the same as it was in the *koṭhā* except that she won't have any of the red powder and make-up necessary for her business. So what will she do if she goes home? Those things are all necessary to her business.

B: *Completely.*

Ch: So in the same way, those who take on this line of work have to change their mannerisms completely.

Sh: Yes, he has to change. He has to be taught. He has to change the manner of every action, of every thing. If you were my child, for instance, I'd teach you all of my mannerisms--I'd teach you how I made myself beautiful, right? I'll tell you how to do it, right? And only then will you learn! Listen to me, because after you've learned all these things and I've become old and can't go to work anymore, you'll go for me because you're my children. You'll earn money and bring it home.

B: *Just like when a mother and father become old.*

Sh: Yes, exactly!

A: *When people join the hijra community, do they change their names?*

Sh: ((nods))

A: *Do they take on one name or two names?*

Sh: Only one name.

A: *Did you change your name?*

Sh: Didn't I tell you my name was [Shashi] Devi? How many times do I have to tell you that!

P: Speak to them gently. Just explain it to them gently, okay?

Sh: But I've already explained it to *dīdī* several times, you see. I've explained it to them at least four times. They just don't get it!

A: *Why do they take a different name? Is there a special meaning in the name they take?*

B: *For example, is the hijra given a name that somehow matches her thinking or her beauty? Bindiya is very beautiful, for example, so they called her Bindiya. Is there any special reason behind the choice of name?*

Sh: No, no, it has no particular meaning. And my name didn't change.

A: *Do hijras speak like women?*

B: *When the hijras come visit you here, for instance, do they speak women's language--like "I'm going*f*; I'm eating*f*"? Or do they speak men's language?*

Sh: No, no, they speak women's language.

A: *Did you speak like a woman when you were small, too?*

Sh: Yes.

A: *Do you use the feminine when you talk about other hijras?*

Sh: Yes, we use women's names.

A: *What do outside people call you? Do they call you by women's names, too?*

Sh: Yes, [Shashi]. They call me [Shashi].

A: *So they use the feminine?*

Sh: Yes, they call me *cācī*, they call me *mausī*, they call me *dādī*. Some people will call me *buṛhiyā māī* ['elderly mother'].

A: *Are there any hijras who speak puliṅg ['masculine']?*

Sh: What are you saying? It's time to *phūlnā* ['blossom'] now? ((laughs))

B: *No, no, she said puliṅg, puliṅg. You can joke later, okay?*

Sh: I don't know whether you're saying *puliṅg* or *phuliṅgu!* I'm just a simple village person.[24]. How do I know what you're talking about?

B: *You've spent you're whole life in Banaras and you're talking nonsense!*

Sh: So now I'm talking nonsense, am I?

A: *Does anybody talk like a man?*

Sh: ((to Vinita)) Hey *mātā jī* ['mother'], listen to what I'm saying![25] ((neighbors all laugh))

B: *Hey, don't talk to me like that.*

Sh: No, no, I'm listening to you. You're talking like Charu Ji, Charu Ji. Oh *betiyā* ['daughter'], you're just blowing up your speech. I already told you that nobody speaks like a man.

A: *How do people speak--*

Sh: Hey, I'm feeling testy, okay? Give me some water. Give it to me.

Ch: Nobody speaks men's speech. It's *strīliṅg* ['feminine'], not *puliṅg* ['masculine'].

A: *So you'll say, "I'm going^f"--*

Ch: Yes, we'll say, "I'm going^f".

B: *Why did you take the name Charu?*

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24   Shashi uses the term *dehātī ādmī* here, which is translated literally as 'villager person' and implies that the referent is not sophisticated.

25   Shashi is making fun of Vinita by calling her *mātā jī*, a term of address used for more matronly women.

Ch: I had it in my childhood.

B: Oh, I see.

A: *You say that you speak just like women, but do you feel like women inside?*

Ch: We're neither women nor men, as far as feeling goes. We're neither feminine nor masculine.

B: *But you do all the work of women, so don't you feel like a woman inside?*

Ch: If you want to take it that way, you can take it that way.

Sh: Look! ((gesturing to one of the neighbors)) This is my son and this is my daughter.

A: *She's your daughter? How can that be?*

Sh: She's my sister's daughter.

Ch: If someone accepts you as their daughter, then you're their daughter.

Sh: She's my sister's daughter, so she's my daughter too. This is my sister! This is my sister! I've taken her as my sister so she's my sister. Don't you understand the word ((in English)) "sister"? Don't you know that "sister" means *bahan*? Or do you think it means *ādmī* ['man']? ((laughs))

B: *You can teach these people English when we have more time, okay? That's enough!*

A: *Are there some hijras who are more feminine than other hijras? And if so, is that thought of as a good thing?*

Ch: In this world only two kinds of births exist: *nar* ['man'] and *nārī* ['woman']. If a man's fate goes wrong, he becomes a hijra; if a woman's fate goes wrong, she becomes a hijrin.[26]

B: *We want to ask you more about those two terms, hijra and hijrin.*

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[26]   In Charu's own words: *ādmī kā dīn bigaṛ gayā to hijra ho gayā; aurat kā dīn bigaṛ gayā to hijrin ho gaī*, which translates literally as, "If a man's nature has gone spoiled, he becomes a hijra; if a woman's nature has gone spoiled, she becomes a hijrin." The verbal compound *bigaṛ jānā* could also be translated as 'to become deformed'.

A: *What do you mean by hijrin?*

Ch: You are *leḍīz* ['ladies'] and they are *jents* ['gentlemen']. Suppose that the *Mālik* has made his fate go bad, and it's evident that he doesn't have a male organ. [27] You can see that there's nothing masculine about him, so you'll call him *hijra*. He doesn't have a masculine organ, so he'll be called a *hijra*. But suppose that you're feminine and you're fate has gone bad,[28] then you'll be called *hijrin*--in the feminine gender.

A: *How do you know whether someone is a hijra or a hijrin?*

Ch: You'll just know.

A: *But how?*

Ch: Because hijras have moustaches and beards. But a hijrin is a woman whose fate has gone wrong

A: *So do you think that it's just a physical thing, then? Or is it also mental?*

Ch: There's nothing mental about it!

Sh: Nothing at all.

Ch: He's made over there--like a clay toy. We're all made over there. Someone became crooked, someone became blind, someone became one-eyed, someone became tall, someone became this, someone became that, someone has this organ but doesn't have that organ. For example, recently we went to a place where a girl had been born. The mother-in-law had said to us, "If my daughter-in-law gives birth to a boy or a girl, I'll make you very happy. Please pray for it." And it happened. So we went there, but when we got to the house, there was no happiness, only mourning. They weren't happy; those people were angry! After we went there, we saw that a beautiful girl had been born. She gave us the child in front of everyone and said, "Why should I make you happy for this? I didn't do anything wrong, so why did this happen? Everything is fine except for the fact that she doesn't have any eyes. Both eyes are missing!" So we said, "Go to a doctor and have it cured." But they couldn't do anything about the baby's eyes.

B: *You can't create something that's not there in the first place.*

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27   The expression Charu uses is *mard kā koī cīz nahī̃ hai*, which translates literally as "He has no thing of manhood."

28   Since the phrase that Charu uses (*āpko bigaṛ gayā*) lacks a subject, it could also be translated as 'Your organ has become deformed.

Ch: No, the structure behind the eyes wasn't there, so there wasn't any kind of pill that would help her from the inside. It's like that with *Bhagvān*. Some people don't get this and some people don't get that. Some people don't get ears and some people don't get eyes.

Sh: Some people live this way and some people live that way.

Ch: It's the same with respect to the secret organ.[29] It can be made properly or it can be made deformed. Do you understand? It's an inside thing and only *Bhagvān* knows about it.

Sh: Everything that *Bhagvān* makes is good in his eyes.

A: *Do you feel like you live outside society? Or do you think that you're a part of this society?*

B: *I've heard about operations--*

Sh: I haven't heard anything about any operations! What would be the use of an operation, anyway? They've started operating on everything nowadays! What don't they operate on? There are operations for everything!

Ch: About the question of remaining outside of society--yes, a hijra has been separated from society but he hasn't been separated from the world. Once a hijra has been separated from society it's not possible for him to go back home, even if he wants to do so. The hijra is the dividing line between society and non-society. He's been separated from society so if he wants to live in society again, the people of his family will be very upset. They might be happy when they think, "He's our family; he's our son; he's our brother." But even though they might cry, they'll still be angry about one thing: The worldly people will say, "Oh no, a hijra has come! A hijra visits that household so they must be related to a hijra! So we won't arrange a marriage with anyone in that household!" That's how the world has made him an outcaste[30]; the world looks at him with an evil eye. "It's a hijra! It's a hijra!"

A: *So society doesn't respect the hijras, then?*

Ch: Well, some people respect us, but other people look at us with an evil eye. The one who is educated--the one who is wise--he always treats us with respect. But the one who is illiterate and hasn't learned anything in life, what would he say? For

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[29]   Charu uses the term *guptāg* here.

[30]   The term Charu uses is *asamājik*, which translates literally as 'asocial'.

this reason, the life of a hijra is like that of an orphan. Hijras think of themselves as orphans.

A: *Orphans?*

Ch: Yes, people who have nobody except for God.

A: *So is that why you build a new family for yourselves?*

Ch: I'm not talking about relationships between hijras; we have that too, of course. This place here is like a household, for instance. And all of the people in the neighborhood are related to us, too. Someone is saying *mausī* ['maternal aunt']; someone is saying *cācī* ['paternal aunt']; someone is saying *bahan* ['sister']; somebody is saying this or that. We have kinship relations with everyone in the neighborhood. If we don't keep relations with our neighbors, then if some calamity falls upon us, who's going to look after us? If there's no hijra around when it happens, who's going to help us in our misery and look after us? These people are the only ones who will help us. Who else would help us? We have nobody. Who would help us or lend us support? We people have nobody. Except for *Bhagvān*, we have nobody. Nobody at all.

A: *Do you worship any particular devī ['goddess'] or devtā ['god']?*

Sh: Yes, we do. We worship both Hindu and Muslim *devīs* and *devtās*. I'm a child of a Hindu family; when I was born, all of the sacramental deeds done in my house were Hindu. But I believe in both of these communities. Take yourself, for example. You say that you're English. An English person eats everything. Do you understand? He eats everything. So if you eat everything and there's love between you and me, I'll eat whatever you eat. Do you understand me?

A: *Sort of.*

Sh: If there's love between us, we can even eat food from the same plate. It doesn't matter which caste you belong to. We have nothing to do with caste.

Ch: For example, we're Hindu so we believe in Bhagvān; Muslims believe in Allah; and you people believe in God. We're Hindu so we of course believe in Bhagvān, and we also believe in a lot of gods and goddesses.

B: *Yes, I've heard that you worship a goddess from Gujarat.*

Sh: Yes, yes, Becrā-- Becrā Mātā. Yes, there's a Becrā Mātā and I worship her.

Ch: Look, there's always a context for any belief. Take Ajmer Sarīf,[31] for example. Hindu women go there; Muslim women go there; everybody goes there in the hope of getting a child.

Sh: Once a hijra went to Ajmer Śarīf and asked for a child. And a child was born! A hijra had a hijra child! A child grew in the hijra's womb. A child was actually there. But later on, both of them died. A tomb was built for them there.

A: *But if she got pregnant, she must have been a woman, right?*

Sh: No, she wasn't!

A: *Then how did it happen?*

Sh: Because Bābā[32] has so much power.

A: *How was it born?*

Sh: They had to cut open the stomach. Listen! They opened up the stomach just like this ((gesturing across stomach with hands)), and then they took the child out. There was no other way because he had prayed, "Please give me an offspring." You see, the Bābā who is still buried there is famous for this one thing: Whoever asks him for something in full faith will get whatever he asks for. So when a hijra went there and asked for a child, Bābā had to give it to him because he had to show the world his godliness. But when the baby came into the hijra's stomach, of course, it could only come out by cutting the stomach open. So Bābā showed the world his godliness; he showed the world a miracle. After the stomach was cut open, both of them died. Only their history remained, but history had been made. So they built it there, for both of them.

A: *What did they build?*

Sh: A tomb. The hijras are given great recognition there. Hijras come from all over the world and offer a shawl to Bābā; once a year they'll offer a shawl to him. And at that celebration, the hijras will offer the very first shawl. After the hijra people offer a shawl, the nation offers a shawl, and then Pakistan offers a shawl.

N: *Do you mean the president?*

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[31] Ajmer Śarīf is a place in Rajasthan where there is a great Mausoleum of a Muslim saint.

[32] Shashi uses the name *Bābū* in reference to the saint buried in Ajmer Sarif, renouned throughout northern India for answering the prayers of pilgrims.

Sh: No, no, I'm not just talking about the president, but the whole nation, and after that, Pakistan, and after that, the whole world.

A: *I have another question about the difference between hijra and hijrin. Is there any difference in the way the two groups speak?*

Ch: Everybody speaks the same.

A: *But is there any difference in the style of speaking? Does one group speak in a more feminine manner, for instance?*

Ch: No, both hijras and hijrins speaks in the same way. I'm going to prove it to you, okay? A lot of women walk like men and talk like men. There's a girl who lives here for example, who'll be coming here soon, and she always curses like crazy. She fights and talks just like a man, and she looks like one too. So in the same way that she walks like a man and curses like a man, there are also a lot of men who use feminine speech--like, "You'll eat[f], you are going[f], you are coming[f]." There are plenty of men like that, too. And some people, even if they have children, still have that kind of nature.

A: *But are there some hijras who weren't that way in childhood and had to change their mannerisms when they came here?*

Ch: Of course, why wouldn't they change? What we're saying is, when a girl is raised in a particular household but later goes and sits in a *koṭhā*, she'll start to put on all kinds of make-up and pretend to be Hemāmālnī.[33] She has to beautify herself for her business, right? But once she's occupied the prostitute's *koṭhā*, there's no other path available to her. The 10, 20, or 50 rupees he'll give her is only for her beauty, right?

Sh: ((looking at Kira)) Kiran, do you understand? She must have been trained in London! ((laughs))

A: *Are you happy?*

Sh: Yeah, we're happy. We're happy and we're angry too--we're both. We do the same thing everyday. We have to wander around here and there the whole day, so what would we gain by being unhappy? We have to laugh; we have to cry. Somebody will treat us with love; somebody else will scold us; somebody else will treat us badly. The days somehow pass like that, and in the evenings after we eat, we lie down and think about it. We remember everything--our household, our relatives,

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[33]   Hemā Mālnī, a famous actress, could be said to be the Indian equivalent of Marilyn Monroe.

our past--and of course we feel sorry. But what can we do? This is life, after all. We can't commit suicide. There are so many people who commit suicide because they're fed up with their lives. But this is life, and life is to be lived.

A: *If you could have chosen your destiny before childhood, would you have wanted to be a hijra, a man, or a woman?*

Sh: Before childhood? What do we know about the time before childhood?

B: *Imagine your next birth, then. What would you ask Bhagvān to give you? The life of a man, a woman, or what?*

Sh: I wouldn't ask Bhagvān anything. You're talking nonsense again!

B: *No, no, no, everybody wants something in the next birth, right?*

Ch: Who wouldn't want a better life in the next birth? Tell me. People will always say that they want a better life.

B: *But would you want to be a man or a woman?*

Sh: Only Bhagvān knows what will happen.

B: *But what is your desire? Do you want to be a dog, cat, horse, what? What is your desire?*

A: *Do you ever hope that you'll be born as a man or a woman?*

Sh: We are neither men nor women.

A: *But sometimes don't you wish for something?*

Sh: That's not up to us. We can only know about it after it happens. What do we know about such things, anyway? We don't know anything. Everybody hopes, "Oh Mālik, make my next birth a good one." But not, "Oh, don't make me a man, make me a woman." Only Bhagvān knows that; that's up to him. Nobody can ask for something like that.

Ch: All we'll say is: "Oh Mālik, give us a good life."

A: *Do you know hijras in other cities, or only in Banaras?*

Sh: We know them; we know them--in Calcutta, in Bombay. There's no fixed place for the hijra.[34] It's like this: Our Indian government has relieved us from paying train fares. Since we don't have to pay a fare, we can go anywhere.[35] If you want to use the train, you can use it. And if you don't, you don't have to. They'll charge us to ride the bus, but not the train. So since they don't charge us anything, we can travel wherever we want. We can go to Calcutta, we can go to Bombay, we can go wherever we want. We can't go abroad, of course, so we couldn't travel to your country. But what would we do there, anyway? There aren't any hijras there for us to visit.

Ch: Back to the question about whether we're happy or not. In the heart of every hijra is a desire to do a pilgrimage: "Let's go to Gaṅgā Sāgar; let's go to Jagannāth." Or, "Let's go to Āgrā and see the Tāj Mahal. Let's see a little bit of that too." There are hundreds of places like that that we can visit, of all kinds. There's Ayodha, for instance. There's a lot of places like that. So other than traveling around and being a tourist, why would a person want to travel to such places? Because he wants to go there and ask for blessings[36] : "Please forgive us for any sins[37] we have committed in this life. And in the next life, please give us a good birth." Are you understanding me? We've been given this hijra life because we committed some sin in the last life. The sin we committed in the last birth is responsible for the way we are in this birth. So we definitely must have committed some sin in the last birth-- we definitely must have made some mistakes--to be paying for it now. The *Mālik* has made us so that we will suffer from all of these miserable conditions. He's made some people blind; He's made other people lame; And He's also made some people hijrin. What would we do with money alone? That's why we want to go on these pilgrimages. We go to the godly places in order to ask for blessings. Hijras have gone all the way to Makkā Madinā to do the Haj! This is all for this life, don't you understand? That's how it is.

A: *What's your name again?*

Ch: Charu.

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34 The implication in this statement is that hijras are like saints, with no ties to the world of humanity.

35 This appears to be an unwritten law; homeless people and *sādhūs* ['religious mendicants'] are also allowed to ride the trains for free.

36 Charu uses the term *duā*, meaning 'prayer', 'blessings', or 'godly favor': *duā karnā* means 'to pray'; *duā māgnā* means 'to ask for blessings'.

37 Charu repeatedly uses the term *gunāh* in this passage, which can be translated variously as 'sin', 'fault', 'guilt'.

A: *Are you from Banaras or outside Banaras?*

Ch: I'm from the West.

A: *Where in the west?*

Ch: Mizārpur. I'm from Aurāhī.[38]

A: *What's your caste?*

Ch: What can I say? The caste system is within Hindu. I have nothing to do with caste.

A: *I have one more question about your language. When you were small, did you speak puling ['masculine']?*

Sh: Look! They're doing the same thing to us again! ((in mocking tone)) *phūle, phūle* ['pop up, pop up']!

A: *But isn't there any hijra who--*

Sh: ((sarcastically)) We'll *phūlegā* ['blossom'] during the Sāvan, okay?

A: *((to Charu)) When you were small, did your parents consider you a boy or what? Can you tell me a little bit about that?*

Sh: Yeah, yeah, you've already asked that question! She's talking so much!

Ch: If a child is born and the organ becomes defective--if the inner thing has gone wrong--then if the body is that of a boy except that the organ is not there, they'll name it a boy. And if she somehow looks like a girl except that the organ is not there, they'll name it a girl.

A: *Is it difficult for some hijras to learn women's mannerisms?*

Sh: For those who find out at a later date that they're a hijra, yes. They have to be taught.

Ch: By living with each other and listening to each other, their language will change.

A: *But is it difficult?*

Ch: What's difficult about it?

End of tape-recorded conversation.

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38   Aurāhī is a small city in the district of Mizārpur.