

# Chapter 15

## Being Eunuch, the Violence Faced by Hijra's Involved in Sex Work—A Case Study

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### 15.1 Introduction

The transgenders, known as Hijra's, in India have been one of the marginalised sections of society and have remained outside the dominant discourse of marginality. They suffer from the lack of continuity in their identity, lack of self-esteem, over emphasised and unwanted distinctiveness and injustice at every turn. They do not conform to conventional notions of male or female gender but combine or move between the two. Their vulnerabilities, frustrations and insecurities have been historically overlooked by mainstream society. Transgender people are excluded from effectively participating in social and cultural life, economy, politics and decision-making processes. A primary reason of the exclusion is perceived to be the lack of recognition of the gender status of Hijra's and other transgender people. As a consequence, transgender people face extreme discrimination in every field of life such as health, education, culture, employment and social acceptability. Often deprived of information and medical support, they fall prey to AIDS and other fatal diseases. The transgender community has been treated, until recently, as a legal nonentity in violation of Article 14, 15, 16 and 21 of the Constitution of India, which guarantees right of freedom, equality and right against exploitation and has been deprived of fundamental rights. The present paper focuses on the violence faced by the Hijra community involved in sex work, with a case

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study from Hyderabad to Secunderabad. We analyse the lives of fifty Hijra's involved in sex work and look at the physical, emotional and psychological violence faced by them in the day-to-day life. The focus of the paper is to summarise the various issues faced by Hijra's by using the social exclusion framework and highlight the relation between this exclusion and vulnerability. We conclude by showing how the Hijra identity is rooted in a multiplicity of social differences and that their sexual identities are fluid, shifting and multivalent, and that lived experiences and narratives of the Hijra's show that just being a eunuch is enough for the kind of violence that they face in their day-to-day lives.

Transgenders in India have existed for centuries. Yet, the onset of colonial modernity with its assertion of enlightenment categories has created new challenges for India's transgender communities. This has led to ambivalence about the number of transgenders in India and estimates vary. It is believed that an estimated 5–6 million eunuchs live in India (Nanda 1986: 35–54). Uttar Pradesh tops the list among 29 Indian states and seven Union Territories with 12,916 members, Bihar comes in second with 9,987 transgenders and rural Bengal ranks third with 9,868 members of the third gender (India Today 2015). According to the Times of India, India's most recent census yielded the first official count of transgender people, at more than 4.9 lakhs. Transgender activists in the country estimate this number to be six to seven times higher but were excited, especially, with the results in the 0–6-year-old population (Times of India, 30 May 2014). Census results say that 55,000 came from parents identifying their children as transgender, legally recognised by the Supreme Court in India as the third gender, traditionally called Hijra (Census 2011). The Supreme Court of India, in a landmark judgement on 15 April, 2014, has recognised the transgenders as the 'third gender'. The apex court asked the central government to treat transgenders as socially and economically backward community, entitled to reservations in educational and professional fields. The apex body also directed the central and state governments to devise social welfare schemes for third gender community and run a public awareness campaign to erase social stigma. The recent years have witnessed the establishment of Transgender Welfare Boards, but there are reports that this Board in Tamil Nadu which was hailed as a model by many states has been inactive (The Hindu, 15 October 2015).

## 15.2 Data Collection and Methodology

We planned our fieldwork step by step and this included, identifying subjects, making contacts and developing a rapport, setting up goals, choosing appropriate methodologies, designing research instruments and developing schedules and checklists followed this. Building rapport with the Hijra group in their houses and different places in Hyderabad and Secunderabad was done, and this was the most difficult task. Interviews were mainly done in Osmangunj and Koti in Hyderabad and Sitaphal Mandi and Bolarum in Secunderabad. Besides this, we also met some Hijra's near the railway stations in Secunderabad and Hyderabad. Working in

non-conventional settings and methods was beneficial to the researcher. The positive aspect was that no one had taken so much interest in the lives of the Hijra's, and they were very open about their lives and spoke to us freely and did not even mind it if we used their real names in our research. They were all illiterate and were certainly not going to read what we were writing, but they were curious as to why we were interested in their lives and what was it that we or they would get in return.

Looking at the details of the everyday life of the Hijra's helped to build up a better perspective. During the fieldwork, we intensely observed their day-to-day life which added to our information. Observing, questioning, listening, analysing, communicating, recording, creating, assessing, revising and editing were some of the methods used to collect the life stories. By observing and documenting cultural expressions of the Hijra's, from their family stories to community events we made a sketch of their life. Being 'outsiders' looking inside their own and 'others' cultures was very important. Being able to step back and look at cultural expressions as an outsider enhanced tolerance as well as observation skills. Participant observation methods were also employed to see these groups so that we could do a Qualitative Analysis and Case Study Analysis.

### ***15.2.1 Sample Size***

The study explores how sexuality and gender for Hijra's are intricately interconnected with crucial broader, contexts of everyday life, including religion, kinship, class and hierarchies of respect. Since it was difficult to build a good rapport and start interaction with them in this short span of time, twenty personal interviews and two group discussions were done with the Hijra's, and we had a sample size of 50. Snowball and purposive judgmental sampling was done. For data collection, we used the checklist, informal interviews and participatory approach.

### ***15.2.2 Limitation of the Study***

Carrying out the research in a very short span of time was a big limitation of the study. It took a long time to understand the 'body language' and the expression of the Hijra community at the beginning of our field study. Building the rapport was very difficult and time consuming. Since the sexual minority group are versatile and mixed group, it was difficult to figure out a way to understand Hijra's, *kothis*, *panthi*, cross-dresser, bisexuals, transsexuals and so on. It was difficult to distinguish the differences and the similarities that exist between the 'gay' culture, homosexuality and the Queer group of the Western discourse and Indian alternative sexuality group. In India, the unique expression on sexual identity, sexuality, has emerged from the past and continues to exist in the present and finds a lot of social acceptance and support through myths, stories and legends, and this became clear to us through our interviews.

### 15.3 Background

In India, transgender people include Hijra's, kinnars (eunuchs) , shiv-shaktis, jogappas, Sakhi, Jogtas and Aradhis. In fact, there are many who do not belong to any of the groups but are transgender persons individually. Transgender falls under the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) group. The term 'transgender people' is generally used to describe those who transgress social gender norms. Transgender or TG for short is often used as an umbrella term to signify individuals who defy rigid, binary gender constructions, and who express or present a breaking and/or blurring of culturally prevalent stereotypical gender roles. Transgender is the state of one's identity not matching ones assigned sex (Deanglo 2011: 10). Transgender refers to any or various kinds of variations in gender norms and expectations (Stryker 2008: 6).

Mrinalini Sinha has used the term, 'colonial masculinity', to describe the relational construction of British and Indian masculinity, along multiple axes of power and difference among or within the colonisers and the colonised, as well as between the colonisers and colonised (Sinha 1995: 1). The virile masculinities legitimised their colonisation which in turn proved their superior masculine prowess and the domination of British masculinity over Indian femininity. Interestingly, homosexuality was usually associated in colonial discourse with the martial races, not with effeminate Bengalis. Yet the colonisers perceived the figure of the Hijra as effeminate, sexually deviant and impotent as a figure of failed masculinity (Hinchy 2014: 275). The term Hijra was also used as an abuse or to berate enemies.

Transgender people may live full- or part-time in the gender role 'opposite' to their biological sex. In contemporary usage, 'transgender' has become a blanket term that is used to describe a wide range of identities and experiences, including but not limited to, pre-operative, post-operative and non-operative transsexual people (who strongly identify with the gender opposite to their biological sex), male and female 'cross-dressers' (sometimes referred to as 'transvestites', 'drag queens' or 'drag kings'); and men and women, regardless of sexual orientation, whose appearance or characteristics are perceived to be gender atypical. A male-to-female transgender person is referred to as 'transgender woman' and a female-to-male transgender person, as 'transgender man'.

Until recently, HIV programs in India included transgender women under the epidemiological and behavioural term—'men who have sex with men' (MSM), although many transgender people did not want to be included under that term. In addition to respecting the preferred term to be used by the transgender women, it is increasingly recognised that transgender people have unique needs and concerns, and that it is better to view them as a separate group that is not under the rubric of 'MSM'. Even the umbrella term 'transgender' may hide the complexity and diversity of the various subgroups of gender-variant people in India and may hinder development of subgroup-specific HIV prevention and care interventions, and policies. For example, some Hijra activists may prefer others calling them 'Hijra's'

and not to subsume Hijra's under the broader category 'transgender'. One reason for this is that they feel Hijra's have a long history, culture and tradition in India, which would not be evident or which might be overlooked when using the catch-all term 'transgender'.

Though some Hijra activists may also identify as 'transgender' for outsiders or in the global platform, they prefer the label 'transgender women' to be applied to those transgender women who are not part of the Hijra communities. However, some other Hijra/Aravani (Hijra's in Tamil Nadu) activists may identify as both 'Hijra's/Aravanis' and 'transgender woman'. Transgender people face multiple forms of oppression.

India has a history of people with a wide range of transgender-related identities, cultures and experiences. Hijra's were once a respected and accepted group in Indian culture. The Vedas, ancient Hindu texts, include eunuchs and characters with both male and female characteristics. They were believed to bring luck and provide special fertility powers. Among their spectators and audiences, they inspiring both reverence and fear, and play upon their own supposed impotence, evoking an almost Freudian subliminal castration anxiety. The transformation of one's biological sex as a source of supernatural powers echoes the magical features found in Hindu mythology. Evidence of Hijra's in South Asia is found in Vedic sources, where there is evidence in the '*Satapatha Brahmana*' of long-haired men, neither 'men nor women', who were used in rituals (Roscoe 1996: 296). Traces are also found in the *Mahabharata* where the hero Arjuna refuses the sexual advances of the celestial nymph Urvasi and is consequently punished to spend a year 'as a dancer and destitute of manhood and scorned as a eunuch'. Even in the Ramayana, there are traces of the Hijra's for when Ram went into the jungle to search for Sita his wife, he was followed by all the people from Ayodhya. He then asked them to leave, but people who were neither man nor woman refused to leave and continued to stay here and when Ram returned after fourteen years he still found them here (Nanda 1999: 13). In these texts, while the third gender is assigned low social status, in its alignment with ascetic sacrifice (by renouncing sex), it develops divine auspices. As Nanda (1986: 14) notes that Hijra's 'sacred powers are contingent upon their asexuality'. The link between asceticism and self-castration is evoked in representations of the great Hindu dancing Lord Siva (of whom Arjuna is considered an embodiment). According to mythology, Siva ripped off his *linga* (phallus), and in so doing extended his power to the entire universe—a symbolic enactment of castration transformed into generativity; asceticism into eroticism; and destruction into beneficence (Doniger 1973: 90). Hindu Hijra's are said to derive religious sanction through Siva, and in particular, the worship of the mother goddess, embodied in Urvasi, but most prominently in Mata Bahuchara, who, as legend has it, cut off her breast, a self-sacrifice for her virtue as she was about to be attacked by thugs. Nanda argues that, the sanctity of this goddess is the source for Indian Hijra's claim for their special place in society and the traditional belief in their power to curse or confer blessings on male infants (1986: 14).

### 15.3.1 *Understanding of Violence and Life of a Hijra*

Violence is a common feature of many people's lives. As per definition, violence can be the exercise or intent of physical force usually affecting or intending to affect injuries, destruction or powerful untamed devastating force, an unjust, unwarranted or unlawful display with the purpose to inflict harm upon, damage or violate (Collins 2014).

The World Report on Violence and Health, (WRVH 2002), presents a typology of violence that, while not uniformly accepted, can be a useful way to understand the contexts in which violence occurs and the interactions between types of violence. This typology distinguishes four modes in which violence may be inflicted: physical; sexual; psychological attack; and deprivation. It further divides the general definition of violence into three sub-types according to the victim-perpetrator relationship. These include self-directed violence in which the perpetrator and the victim are the same individual and are subdivided into self-abuse and suicide. Interpersonal violence, between individuals, is subdivided into family and intimate partner violence and community violence. The former category includes child maltreatment; intimate partner violence; and elder abuse, while the latter is broken down into acquaintance and stranger violence and includes youth violence; assault by strangers; violence related to property crimes; and violence in workplaces and other institutions. Collective violence refers to violence committed by larger groups of individuals and can be subdivided into social, political and economic violence (WRVH 2002: 6). Yet another kind of violence which is not spoken about much is the structural violence. Structural violence, the concept of macro, system-level inequality and oppression, finds its root in the modernist discourse through the work of Johan Galtung, a Norwegian sociologist, mathematician and peace studies scholar. Galtung (1969: 170) defined structural violence as violence for which 'there is no such [personal or direct] actor'. Galtung distinguishes between violence created by a known person as *direct*, and that which occurs at the structural level when no distinct perpetrator can be established. A few years after publishing his initial works on structural violence, Galtung and Tord Høivik (1971: 173) extended their analysis and sought to develop a formulaic representation of violence's operationalisation. The authors created a typology of violence, and differentiate between 'violence that kills slowly, kills quickly, violence that is anonymous and violence that has an author'. This entry focuses on the various theories that have informed the concept of structural violence. Structural violence is the most basic or fundamental form of violence. It is expressive of the conditions of society, the structures of social order and the institutional arrangements of power that reproduce mass violations of personhood twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Such violence is accomplished in part through 'policies' of informal and formal denial of civil, criminal and basic human rights for all people. Although institutional and structural forms of violence may work hand in hand with each other, they may also be differentiated. When we consider the lives of the Hijra's, we see that just being a Hijra or a eunuch is enough for the kind of violence that they face in their

day-to-day lives and are harmed, violated and damaged. Besides this, the other kinds of violence including collective violence are also present in their day-to-day lives.

### ***15.3.2 Exclusion and Marginalisation of the Hijra's***

Adapting the social exclusion framework to Hijra's/TG women, one can understand how TG communities have been excluded from effectively participating in social and cultural life; economy; and politics and decision-making processes. They are excluded from families. Most families do not accept if their male child starts behaving in ways that are considered feminine or inappropriate to the expected gender role. Consequently, family members may threaten, scold or even assault their son/sibling from behaving or dressing-up like a girl or woman. Some parents may outright disown and evict their own child for crossing the prescribed gender norms of the society and for not fulfilling the roles expected from a male child. Parents may provide several reasons for doing so: bringing disgrace and shame to the family; diminished chances of their child getting married to a woman in the future and thus end of their generation (if they have only one male child); and perceived inability on the part of their child to take care of the family.

Thus, later transgender women may find it difficult even to claim their share of the property or inherit what would be lawfully theirs. Sometimes, the child or teenager may decide to run away from the family not able to tolerate the discrimination or not wanting to bring shame to one's family. Some of them may eventually find their way to Hijra communities (UNDP Report 2010: 8).

Though Indians tolerate, accept and respect a wide range of differences in cultures, religions, languages and customs, the same cannot be said about the Hijra's. There appears to be limited public knowledge and understanding of same-sex sexual orientation and people whose gender identity and expression are incongruent with their biological sex. Hence, by and large the Hijra's feel an exclusion from family and society in general. Hijra's/TG communities face a variety of social security issues. Since most Hijra's run away or are evicted from home, they do not expect support from their biological family in the long run. Subsequently, they face a lot of challenges especially when they are not in a position to earn (or have decreased earning capacity) due to health concerns, lack of employment opportunities or old age. There is no safe haven, an inclusive society for them to live, except in their own group.

The Hijra's also face discrimination in healthcare settings. Types of discrimination reported by Hijra's/TG communities in the healthcare settings include the following: deliberate use of male pronouns in addressing Hijra's; registering them as 'males' and admitting them in male wards; humiliation faced in having to stand in the male queue; verbal harassment by the hospital staff and patients; and lack of healthcare providers who are sensitive to or trained in providing treatment/care to

transgender people and even denial of medical services. Discrimination could be due to transgender status, sex work status or HIV status or a combination of these (UNDP Report 2010: 8).

An unknown but significant proportion of Hijra's/TG communities consume alcohol possibly to forget stress and depression that they face in their daily life. Hijra's provide several reasons justifying their alcohol consumption that range from the need to 'forget worries' (because there is no family support or no one cares about them) to managing rough clients in their sex work life. However, alcohol use is associated with the inability to use condoms or the insistence of their clients, not to use condoms and thus increase risk.

Many Hijra's are illiterate and consequently find it difficult to get jobs. Moreover, it is hard to find people who employ Hijra's/TG people. Some members of the society ridicule gender-variant people for being 'different', and they may even be hostile. Even from police, they face physical and verbal abuse, forced sex, extortion of money and materials and arrests on false allegations. Absence of protection from police means ruffians find Hijra's/TG people as easy targets for extorting money and as sexual objects. They are excluded from economic participation and have no job security.

The social welfare departments provide a variety of social welfare schemes for socially and economically disadvantaged groups. However, as mentioned earlier so far, no specific schemes are available for Hijra's except some rare cases of providing land for Aravanis in Tamil Nadu. Recently, the state government of Andhra Pradesh has ordered the Minority Welfare Department to consider 'Hijra's' as a minority and develop welfare schemes for them. Stringent and cumbersome procedures need for address proof, identity proof and income certificate all hinder even deserving people from making use of available schemes. Since they lack access to life and health insurance schemes, most Hijra's are not under any life or health insurance schemes due to lack of knowledge; inability to pay premiums; or not able to get enrolled in the schemes. Thus, most rely on the government hospitals in spite of the reality of the pervasive discrimination (UNDP report 2010: 11).

### ***15.3.3 Lack of Options***

One of the great challenges that these transgender people, especially youth, face is in coming to terms with one's own gender identity and/or gender expression which are opposite to that of the gender identity and gender role imposed on them on the basis of their biological sex. They face several issues such as, shame, fear and internalised transphobia, disclosure and coming out, adjusting, adapting or not adapting to social pressure to conform, fear of relationships or loss of relationships and self-imposed limitations on expression or aspirations. As Sikha<sup>1</sup> elaborates,

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<sup>1</sup>Sikha, Personal interview, Secunderabad, 28 April 2012.

*'We feel very depressed after getting bad, disrespectful behavior from different people. The new comers need more support and love in the time of transition. Since they come here by leaving their house, family members, they go into depression very easily. Very good counseling is needed to think positive. Unfortunately, we do not find support from the outside world and have to provide this ourselves. We all take care of the new comers as our sisters, sometimes they work under so much of pressure for earning money and sending money to home'* (28 April 2012).

The biggest violence for the Hijra's is the lack of options for their livelihood and seeing sex work as the only option. As Nayantara<sup>2</sup> said, *'We all are sex workers here and most of us get frustrated to be in sex trade but there is no other option for us. Our plight in the society does not allow us to do even small jobs like washing clothes, cleaning, and the household work. Many of us are addicted to different things like alcohol, smoking, just to ignore the customers'* (5 May 2012).

Shoba<sup>3</sup> tells us, *'Even a maid who comes to your house will get more sympathy from you and you will help her thinking she is poor but it is not the same for us. First, no one will allow us to enter their houses and we will never get any sympathy so what else options do we have except begging or sex work?'* (18 May 2013). Due to the lack of a proper job and financial security, the Hijra's are exposed to a lot of ridicule and must resort to begging. Rani<sup>4</sup> tells us, *'Many people think we are a nuisance and want to shoo us away. Even when we go to a marriage or at child birth they want to be done with us. Unlike other beggars who can evoke a sympathy, people are in awe of us and we are seen more as a nuisance. Hence while the other beggars may collect a lot of money we are not able to do so'* (15 May 2013).

Hijra's face discrimination in the healthcare settings. Often, healthcare providers rarely have the opportunity to understand the sexual diversities, and they do not have adequate knowledge about the health issues of sexual minorities. Thus, TG people face unique barriers when accessing public or private health services. Barriers in accessing HIV testing, antiretroviral treatment and sexual health services have been well documented. Among our 50 respondents, 47 were seriously ill. Most of the respondents are HIV+. All of them face STIs because of being in the sex trade.

The Head of the NGO, Hijra guru Arunamma<sup>5</sup> explains, *'Almost all the Hijra's are HIV+ in Hyderabad and Secunderabad. Our involvement with the sex trade industry plays a vital role here. Many of the Army and police people and the customers are not ready to use condoms. They harass us publicly sometimes just to have unprotected sex. The gang rapes on the Hijra's also are one of the main reasons to get affected by HIV/AIDS or STIs'* (13 May 2012).

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<sup>2</sup>Nayantara, Personal interview, Secunderabad, 5 May 2012.

<sup>3</sup>Shoba, Personal interview, Secunderabad, 18 May 2013.

<sup>4</sup>Rani, Personal interview, Secunderabad, 15 May 2013.

<sup>5</sup>Arunamma, Hijra Guru, Personal interview, Secunderabad, 13 May 2012.

During the interviews with the Hijra's of Hyderabad, Kavitha<sup>6</sup> says, '*We need money to give our share to the guru, to sustain our family, for daily survival. If our customers ask for unsafe sex, we don't agree with that but we get beaten up. Last month six police found us with our customers and they had unsafe sex one after another with me and one of my friend, they did not pay any money to us. I was shivering in pain and anger. We went to the police station to lodge complaint against them saying that we were raped. But they asked how a 'Hijra' can be raped?*' (8 April 2012).

As Roopkumari<sup>7</sup> says, '*We face terrible situations without any health care. One of the Hijra had an accident in the old city while begging for alms but the organisation and activist could not admit her in the emergency care unit. We did not exist as human beings for them*' (24 August 2012).

### **15.3.4 Exclusion from Political Participation**

The British enacted the Criminal Tribes Act, 1871, under which certain tribes and communities were considered to be 'addicted to the systematic commission of non-bail able offences'. These communities and tribes were perceived to be criminals by birth, with criminality being passed on from generation to generation. In 1897, the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 was amended and under the provisions of this statute, 'a eunuch was deemed to include all members of the male sex who admit themselves or on medical inspection clearly appear to be impotent'.

In July 2009, the Delhi High Court ruled that consensual same-sex relations between adults in private cannot be criminalised. Soon after that judgement, appeals in the Indian Supreme Court objecting to the ruling were lodged but most of the Hijra's in Hyderabad and Secunderabad are not aware of this. The existing Hijra/TG organisations lack basic systems that are essential for effectively running an organisation. It is crucial that the capacity of these organisations be enhanced for effective community mobilisation and providing quality services. Multiple problems are faced by Hijra's/TG, which necessitate a variety of solutions and actions. While some actions require immediate implementation such as introducing Hijra/TG-specific social welfare schemes, some actions need to be taken on a long-term basis such as changing the negative attitude of the general public and increasing accurate knowledge about Hijra/TG communities. The required changes need to be reflected in policies and laws, attitude of the government, public and healthcare providers; and healthcare systems and practice.

Legal issues can be complex for people who change sex, as well as for those who are gender-variant. Legal issues include legal recognition of their gender identity, same-sex marriage, child adoption, inheritance, wills and trusts,

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<sup>6</sup>Kavitha, Personal interview, Hyderabad, 8 April 2012.

<sup>7</sup>Roopkumari, Personal interview, Hyderabad, 24 August 2012.

immigration status, employment discrimination and access to public and private health benefits. Especially, getting legal recognition of gender identity as a transgender woman is a complicated process. Lack of legal recognition has important consequences in getting government ration (food price subsidy) shop card, passport and bank account.

Transgender people now have the option to vote as a woman or 'other'. Sujatha<sup>8</sup> explains '*We don't have any legal rights on property, citizenship, voter identity card for proving that we are also part of this country. After the decriminalisation of Art. 377 our community is trying to get the basic human rights, so that in future we get a chance to live a different life and do away with HIV/AIDS and other different diseases and violence in our day to day life*' (28 February 2012).

The legal validity of the voter's identity card in relation to confirming one's gender identity is not clear. Hijra's had contested elections in the past. It has been documented that the victory of a transgender person who contested in an election was overturned since that person contested as a 'female', which was thus considered a fraud and illegal. Thus, the right to contest in elections is yet to be realised.

The need of address proof and identity proof of all members of the group is the basic requirement to register an association. However, most Hijra's/TG do not have identity and/or address proof or because they have documents only with their male identity. Similarly, opening a joint bank account to carry out financial transactions of their association proves to be difficult. In this context, Chandramukhi<sup>9</sup> shares with us, '*The foundational work for organisations like Darpan Foundation was very tough. The community members were not together. Many of the Hijra's stayed together but they were not working towards it. After so many application and lots of effort we managed to get an office near Secunderabad Rail way station. Arranging for funding was also very difficult in the beginning*' (18 May 2012).

Most of the Hijra's whom we met in the group discussion complained about lack of sensitivity among public department officials. Though they could meet the legal requirements for registration, they had issues with the government officials who are incharge of processing the registration formalities and they felt that they were asked unnecessary and irrelevant queries and there was unnecessary delay. Buying or hiring office space was very difficult. They complained that Hijra's/TG associations rarely get external financial support. Even those funders who might want to support primarily want to fund for HIV prevention activities through the National AIDS Control Programme.

The daily lives and narratives of these *Hijra's* reveal the complicated, multidimensional and fluid nature of identity and differences. Our interviews showed that the adolescent period is very crucial for them. In this time, they face all the dilemma of their body and mind. The case studies of men who became women reflect on men, who had feminine attitude in their body language and were ostracised by their

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<sup>8</sup>Sujatha, Personal interview, Hyderabad, 28 February 2012.

<sup>9</sup>Chandramukhi, Personal interview, Secunderabad, 18 May 2012.

friends, family and others. Mohini<sup>10</sup> shared her story with us. She was born in a village in the Nizamabad district of Andhra Pradesh. Her name at birth was Madan. She really liked doing women's work, such as cooking, cleaning and playing with the girls and wearing girls' clothes as a child. She had to face a lot of physical violence due to this, and there were various attempts by her family to make her behave and act like a boy.

She also liked dancing and trained herself in dancing. She still earns money through dancing and she got trained by her guru when she became a Hijra. Her guru has helped her in many ways to survive, while all her family members were opposing her. Finally, she left her family and joined her guru. Once she came here, she got into the sex trade for sustaining herself. She likes her Hijra family in Banjara Hills and tells us that she has a real comfort level here for no one questions her or passes judgement (13 March 2012). We found that cross-dressing was a very important act of childhood, and this served as a precursor of their emerging identity.

### 15.3.5 *The Hijra Gurus and the Gharanas*

The word *gharana* comes from the Hindi word *ghar* which means house, and the term refers to shelter, safety and belongingness. In the context of Hijra, the *gharana* serves as a place of shelter as well as a place where they are groomed and guided to be women (Thomas 2013: 11–12). From the time of the Nizami rule since seventeenth century, the *gharanas* of Hijra's became very prominent in Hyderabad. There are mainly six *gharanas*, *Badi haveli*, *Pechar ghar*, *Rangeen haveli*, *Bondakgadda haveli*, *Beach ka ghar* and *Chudi ghar*. All Hijra guru and chela come under this six *haveli* or *gharana*.

The most important element of Hijra's is the Hijra role in the guru–chela relationship. Each recruit to the Hijra community is sponsored by a guru from the *gharanas* who pays the new member initiation fee and takes responsibility for her material subsistent, and they receive a portion of their chela's earning in return. Hijra's in Hyderabad and Secunderabad are an organised social community with local, regional and national structures. In Hyderabad city, the gurus from a *jamat* or council of elders make a committee, demonstrating the construction of gender dichotomies but also the possibilities of gender diversities. Marginalised by the mainstream community, denied any legal assistance and dispossessed of many rights, the Hijra's turn to their own community to take care of them and nurture them. In these *gharanas*, there is no caste, religious or economic differences of being rich or poor. Hijra's can choose their own gurus and can also shift from one *gharana* to another with ease.

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<sup>10</sup>Mohini, Personal interview, Hyderabad, 13 March 2012.

Nagma<sup>11</sup> is a Hijra in Osmangung, Hyderabad. She started feeling her changes when she was 14 years old. Even in childhood, she liked playing with her sisters but not her brothers. As boy child, it was difficult for her to study in a boys' school with other boys. She was 'lucky' that she saw Arunamma (her present guru) while roaming on the road and Arunamma rescued her and gave her shelter. Thus, her Hijra life began (29 March 2012). The guru plays a very vital role in the beginning of a Hijra life. They are born as men, and Hijra's initiate to leave their paternal families to develop new identities by joining Hijra communities as *chelas* (students) of *gurus* (teachers, appointed by other Hijra's). The organisation of guru-chela relationship cannot be defined in a 'normative' way, but this is the most important relationship of a Hijra which makes her identity in the Hijra community.

### 15.3.6 Sex Trade and Beggary

A guru named Lakshmi amma<sup>12</sup> in the red-light areas of Hyderabad notes that sometimes families make this decision on a child's behalf. When they find their kid leaning towards girly behaviour, they usually kick him out of house and they prefer this to be a better option than to be shamed in their community (23 February 2012). Seema<sup>13</sup> another guru in the red-light area explains that prostitution is quicker and easier than spending all the time and money to doll up for a function and then to be told that you are not wanted. Prostitution, according to Seema, equips one with the skills to 'deal and tackle', to better negotiate the oppressive social landscape. Except for senior Hijra's aged 45 or older who either have to resort to begging for a livelihood or become gurus, some of them have their own husbands. Most of the Hijra's interviewed were practicing prostitution in addition to earning through *badhai*.

Seema (see footnote 13). explains that prostitution is a way to find a companion: 'We also have a heart. We like someone (a customer) and like him to come again' (14 April 2012). Legally, they were denied adoption of *chelas* and further criminalised for their public appearances. Any eunuch so registered, who appears, dressed or ornamented like a woman, in a public street or place, or in any other place, with the intention of being seen from a public street or place, or who dances or plays music, or takes part in any public exhibition, in any public street or place or for hire in a private house, may be arrested without warrant. But now after the decriminalisation of Article 377 of Indian Penal Code, the situation is much more conducive for them. In the *Kamasutra*, the *tritiya prakriti* a 'third nature' is mentioned and these are people of two kinds, according to whether their appearance is masculine or feminine. Those with a feminine appearance have breasts, while those with a masculine aspect have

<sup>11</sup>Nagma, Personal interview, Hyderabad, 29 March 2012.

<sup>12</sup>Lakshmi amma, Personal interview, Hyderabad, 23 February 2012.

<sup>13</sup>Seema, Personal Interview, Hyderabad, 14 April 2012.

moustaches, body hair, etc. Buccal coition as practiced by both kinds is a part of their nature (Danielou 1994: 183). However, only few Hijra's accepted that they were into sex work and most claimed that they earned their living by singing and dancing. The notion of sexual abstinence may thus have operated as a disguise to gain religious and social endorsement.

In any case, for the Hijra's, in the context of social exclusion and the absence of welfare, prostitution provides the means of survival while also subverting high morality, putative sacred categorisations and continuing legal restrictions.

### 15.3.7 *Coming Out of 'Closet'?*

As Madhavi<sup>14</sup> describes, they can no longer disguise that their '*soul is female*' (10 April 2012) and Chandramukhi<sup>15</sup> says, '*Allah has made us different*' (18 May 2012). Socially considered less than a man, a Hijra takes on a persona that is also more than a woman, adopting a 'burlesque femininity', incongruous to conventional female demeanour. Falling outside of the social prescriptions that regulate gendered behaviour and lacking female and often male reproductive organs many of these hijra's felt that they were women trapped in a male body.

Certain Hijra communities in Hyderabad differentiate between *zenana* (in this context literally an effeminate male, a cross-dresser) and a 'true' Hijra (without male organs). As Sudha Nayak<sup>16</sup> the Hijra guru explains, '*Real Hijra's are those whose bodies (sexual organs) have no strength and who should have no mental or physical desire for men whatsoever. We are like sanyasis and this is what is important*' (Group interviews, 7 May 2012). On the other hand, Namitha<sup>17</sup> says, '*All Hijra's desire men. Otherwise how do they become Hijra's? Those who say "we do not do this" they are lying*' (Group interviews, 20 May 2013).

Nanda (1999) makes a point here noting that, by being castrated and thus becoming a Hijra, one removes oneself from the *zenana* category. In the fieldwork of this study, we found that there is a casual acceptance of both into the broader fabric of the Hijra community. The question that derives, is the phrase 'coming out of closet' be appropriately used in the context of the Hijra's? Is the celebration of 'out of closet' in the Western discourse similar with the coming out of the Hijra's in Indian Hijra tradition?

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<sup>14</sup>Madhavi, Personal interview, Hyderabad, 10 April 2012.

<sup>15</sup>Chandramukhi, Personal interview, Secunderabad, 18 May 2012.

<sup>16</sup>Hijra group interviews and interactions, Secunderabad, 7 May 2012.

<sup>17</sup>Hijra group interviews and interactions, Hyderabad, 20 May 2013.

### 15.3.8 *Love for Family, Desire for Motherhood*

Younger Hijra's yearn for enduring sexual-affectionate relationships with particular *panthi* 'husbands', whom they often support financially and practically. Performing the daily caring tasks, an ordinary wife might offer in preparing meals and ironing clothes, whereas the Hijra 'wife' even goes up to the extent of joining into sex trade just to help the *panthi* 'husband'. Senior Hijra's, however, commonly renounce sexual activity (often denying that they ever engaged in it), thereby cultivating an 'authentic' a sexual Hijra identity and honour (*izzat*) and coming to support themselves primarily as ritual performers—singing, dancing and offering potent blessings at weddings and births.

Nakshatra<sup>18</sup> explains, '*We are like women our mind is like women, our dress is like women, our talk is like women, but we are unable to bear children. We want to be a mother that's why we always like going to the houses to see infants and bless them*' (27 April 2012). In leaving their paternal families and because of their inability, in some cases refusal, to procreate, they disrupt the patrilineal system. The Hijra challenges not only social but also biological determinations of gender. According to Nakshatra, 'Motherhood fulfills our womanhood, becoming a mother makes us so happy, many of us adopt street children or children who are abandoned. We have a family where every kind of people are allowed, they can be sexual minorities, differently abled or children without a family. In my family I am a Hijra "wife", "my husband" is *kothi* and I have my son who is adopted' (27 April 2012).

It is necessary to point out here that motherhood overlaps Hijra identity, and the normative motherhood is not desired. Many of the Hijra mothers are single or sometimes they do not have a stable relationship. The structure of the family is also very different form a defined family.

## 15.4 **Crossing the Boundaries and the Binaries**

Saleema,<sup>19</sup> one of the Hijra from the old city says, '*I'll try anything darling!*', and she enjoys her supportive Hijra family structure, as she consciously acknowledges, '*I am a man*' (23 March 2012). Public manifestations of gender and sexual bending are generally unimaginable to the lower and middle classes, where most Hijra's hail from and which are governed by more stringent socio-religious gender and sexual parameters. The Hijra community accommodates different personalities, sexual needs and gender identities. Within the Hijra community, social class differentiation is subverted by the status individuals earn as performers. Through the gurus,<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Nakshatra, Personal Interview, Hyderabad, 27 April 2012.

<sup>19</sup>Saleema, Personal interview, Hyderabad, 23 March 2012.

<sup>20</sup>Muniramma, Hijra Guru, Personal interview, Secunderabad, 26 March 2012.

Hijra's learn the rituals of the community and the skills necessary to earn a livelihood, ranging from *badhai* (collection of alms by conferring fertility blessings at wedding and birth ceremonies), dancing, prostitution, to housework and tailoring (Muniramma, 26 March 2012). Some Hijra's are aware of contemporary television personalities, even gestured into their circle iconoclastic male homosexuals, bisexuals and transgendered performers like Rose in Tamil Nadu. The Hijra guru Arunamma<sup>21</sup> explained about the Hijra icons, '*Sure they are one of us, he might be a boy but if he can afford to ride in both boats that's ok, she is showing future job prospects for our community*' (13 May 2012).

The separation of the hijra community from 'normal' social life has led to claim that Indian Hijra's '*do not seem to have developed justifications which challenge the rules of society. On the contrary, they respect the normative order of the society as long as they remain away from it*' (Sharma 2000: 59).

### 15.5 Mocking at 'Normativity'

Lakshmi dressed in a colourful lady's shalwar kameez and painted in garish make-up, jostled between the vehicles begging for alms and quite possibly soliciting customers as a prostitute. Hips swinging, she made a flirtatious approach to a group of young men in an auto in the old city.

Lakshmi extended her open hand to the men, looking for financial recompense. Getting nothing in return, she squeezed the driver's bottom and began hurling abuse at the boys. The performance was witnessed by us along with hundreds people across the street. Although an ordinary daily feat for the Hijra, acts are simple clap and a pinch, laced with flagrant verbal malediction, constitute strong, if playful, political interventions in the public domain. While the Hijra community remains on the periphery, it is never entirely isolated from the social order, rather, its members interpret normative sociopolitical codes, embodying an unstable site where identities of gender, class and politics are not determined but performed.

### 15.6 Religion, Rituals and Emasculation

Most Hijra's in Hyderabad serve *badhai* ritual performers at some point in their lifetime. Here, most importantly Hijra's of all religion go for *badhai*. As Muniramma<sup>22</sup> describes, '*We all are both Hindus and Muslims now. We worship and pray Bedraj mata before emasculation and all the "Nirvana hijras" are Muslims now because they had emasculation....religion, caste is no more*

<sup>21</sup>Arunamma, Hijra Guru, Personal interview, Secunderabad, 13 May 2012.

<sup>22</sup>Muniramma, Hijra Guru, Personal interview, Secunderabad, 26 March 2012.

*important to us*' (26 March 2012). Conferring blessings, traditionally at weddings or birth ceremonies in return for gifts or financial reward is a regular source of livelihood for them. Muniramma tells us, '*Badhai presents a performance mode where spiritual and social functions convene and characterises elements of us, the Hijra's. We dance in public performances that reappear in other contexts. More conventionally, at a wedding or birth ceremony, invited or uninvited, we enter there as a group of Hijra's, decked in female attire and makeup, announcing our entrance with our characteristic clap, accompanied by the drumbeat of musicians. Singing praises to the newly married couple or to the parents of a newborn child, we herald virility and administer fertility blessings*' (26 March 2012).

13.1 The hijra's find enough opportunities to intervene in a birth ceremony of a new born child or the wedding ceremony of the newly weds through their performances, which can turn either way. In dance and with often gestural and verbal play, they bristle against conventional propriety and caricature traditional feminine behaviour by provocatively teasing the assembled male guests with sexual gestures. They issue warnings that if appropriate reparation is not forthcoming by audiences giving *badhai* (a gift of money, food items or clothes), they will engage in potentially outrageous acts, occasionally exposing their genitalia but more commonly by hurling loud and embarrassing sexual abuse at reluctant patrons. Considered to hold special powers, as '*sanctified hierophants*' (Senelick 2000: 12), they confer fertility blessings: a *dua* (prayer) 'from Allah', but alternatively, if treated poorly, issue a *bad-dua* (bad prayer or curse), which is considered to be especially unlucky.

## 15.7 Health

Among the fifteen case studies and two group discussions that we did, we found that being HIV+ was a major issue. All of them face STIs because of being into the sex trade. As Rupkumari<sup>23</sup> tells us, '*We are not born with these diseases. We are born like normal people and are healthy but acquire these diseases in the line of our work. However, the hospital staff and the others have no sympathy with us and think we lead an abnormal life and we are the one responsible for getting these diseases*' (24 August 2012). The criminalisation and stigmatisation of commercial sex can worsen the discrimination and marginalisation that transgender people already face. Transgender sex workers reported high levels of harassment and violence, often at the hands of police and feel very helpless in doing anything about this. Saleema<sup>24</sup> also explains, '*We always get harassed by the police, mostly at night. Often my friends and I were arrested if we did not agree to have sex with them. Sometimes they take away all our money. We have to bribe them for*

<sup>23</sup>Rupkumari, Personal interview, Hyderabad, 24 August 2012.

<sup>24</sup>Saleema, Personal interview, Hyderabad, 23 March 2012.

*everything or pay by having free sex on their terms and conditions*' (23 March 2012). In the group discussions that we had with them, many of the Hijra's reported experiencing inappropriate touching, sexual harassment, humiliation and violence at the hands of police officers.

We found that these people involved in the sex trade face higher levels of negative outcomes, likely in part due to the compounded stigma based on their transgender status and involvement in the sex trade.

They had accepted these as part of the occupational hazards but it really pained them when they did not get a serious attention like others, when they suffered health hazards like AIDs, which were life threatening. The very nature of society needs to accept the existence of transgender people and acknowledge their particular experiences. According to Foster, the most influential people in communities are as much a part of the body of people on the sidelines as the people on whom they exert influence. A community's sense of morality, accountability and entire value systems are in the hands of community leaders. It stands to reason they should be drawn very closely in all programmes for social change.<sup>25</sup>

Hence, the issue of violence against the Hijra's needs to be extended to include the Hijra community. The causes of violence against women, vulnerable men and sexual minority group cannot be isolated from complex factors including power inequities and an acceptance of violence in the wider environment. It can impact on every aspect of the victim's life, including his/her health. The Hijra Community Health Centre and the NGO based in Hyderabad are engaged in activism around their health issues, and have highlighted the absence of Hijra visibility, particularly the issue of violence against Hijra's.

Counselling programme is a site at which the most amount of same-sex violence cases is reported. Those who attended counselling sessions with the in-house counsellors stated that the police would further abuse them if they have had complained. The police are ignorant of the problems of the Hijra community to report cases of violence or abuse. While they are more comfortable speaking about issues of violence in the counselling sessions, they refused to take these matters up with the Legal Officer, while privately the police view same-sex violence as a 'fair fight', 'they are not willing to take it up publicly'.

Problem of Hijra violence, launched specifically in response to the under-reporting of same-sex violence, explores different experiences of violence as well as their acceptance of their sexual orientation. People are currently still talking about themselves and have not made the step to talk about what they have been subjected to in their homes.

We were informed in the group discussion that Darpan Organisation is now getting to the point where they are comfortable talking about violence in their own relationships, homes and in streets among themselves but they are not sure about

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<sup>25</sup>Nitasha Moothoo-Padayachie (2004) in 'Lesbian Violence Explored' in *Agenda*, No. 60, Contemporary Activism, pp. 81–86, quoting, Foster LA (2003) 'Violence against women: the problems facing South Africa' p. 4.

the outside world. The long-term goal of this project is to make Hijra's more visible in the public, to create a deeper understanding of violence on Hijra's and to ensure that authorities take violence between and against lesbian women seriously.

It is hoped that once people are comfortable talking about their experiences in a safe environment at the centre, they will be inspired to become positive Hijra role models to other young Hijra's facing violence.

Hijra's are not allowed to 'own' the term 'queer', which has come to represent solidarity and pride in being homosexual or the 'other sex'. Hijra's feel safer supporting their family members at home than being in the public eye because of the pressure from their communities to denounce their homosexuality, but due to bodily changes they can never manage to do that. Reporting her experience of same sex violence, one of the respondent, spoke of an incident in Hyderabad in which the police escorted a person, who reported an occurrence of same-sex violence, back to their home, and did nothing about her complaint but informed the perpetrator, that should the violence continue, they would be arrested. Arunamma<sup>26</sup> says, *'The police need to be trained. Some are not aware of the protection order that they can give. She says that the police do not exercise their ability to grant protection orders'*. While heterosexual violence is treated in a similar manner by officials in the criminal justice system, people reporting same-sex violence are doubly discriminated against as their complaints are not often recognised as legitimate.

Saiakka<sup>27</sup> told us, *'The NGOs take a lot of initiative towards HIV/AIDS. Mainly they need to work with the hospitals to make arrangements for the affected patients to admit into the hospital for many Hijra's die without any medicine and doctors observation. Even simple cut or injury can be really difficult for the AIDS patient. Even this year three Hijra's died either because of accident or because of AIDS without any medicine and health checkup'* (8 June 2012).

Sexual violence against Hijra's remains a serious problem even today. In spite of repeatedly seeing this violence at the forefront, nothing significant has happened about the prevalence or consequences of sexual violence. Sexual violence is understood to be a complex set of cultural practices used to enforce and maintain not only sexism but multiple forms of oppression. The traumas produced by that violence provide a nexus from which to explore how oppressions operate to divide women and men across racial and class lines.

The survivors are the focal point for analysis, because the lived reality of sexual trauma is a bodily enactment of power. As Cvetkovich writes, 'trauma becomes the hinge between systemic structures of exploitation and oppression and the felt experience of them' (2007: 465). In these discussions, feminism is represented as an old set of politics rather than an ongoing political project. Since feminism has presumably achieved its goals, it is no longer needed in current discussions of Hijra lives.

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<sup>26</sup>Arunamma, Hijra Guru, Personal interview, Secunderabad, 7 March 2012.

<sup>27</sup>Saiakka, Personal interview, Secunderabad, 8 June 2012.

## 15.8 Conclusions

Foucault's classic work on the proliferation of sexual discourses in the Victorian era (1978) is helpful here as a way of understanding how supposed openness does not offer a subversion of dominant ideologies. The multiplication of contexts in which we discuss sex and sexual violence does not necessarily ensure counterhegemonic discourse, talk as a form of action that shifts power relationships. We would argue that the *disguise of openness* about sexual violence places survivors at risk in many places, where their lived experiences are referenced in ways that may expose them to additional, insidious trauma. Linked to the disguise of openness is the false comfort of concern, a social strategy of avoidance designed to keep discussions about Hijra's experiences of sexual violence contained within contexts that cannot subvert dominant norms about either sex or violence.

There is often great reluctance to understand that sympathy elicits a false sense of personal understanding absent an awareness of sexual violence as oppression, at least partly because sympathy allows the perceiving 'self' a certain distance. The space between one's own and others' experiences provides a safe zone, wherein the listener assumes the position of an innocent bystander whose sympathy both is easy to evoke and requires no action.

Unprepared for the general dismay and outrage mingled with disgust is the overwhelming situation in which most of the Hijra's find themselves. Their defence featured much resentment of 'political correctness'. Concern for 'innocent' victims focuses primarily on Hijra's who are viewed as 'abnormal'. These demarcations of innocence have a long history, particularly in India. Race, class, caste and other forms of social difference serve to support oppressive assumptions that divide women who share histories of sexual violence. Although rape overall may be declared wrong, Hijra's are considered less innocent than others, and thus, the ugly realities of rape, incest and other forms of sexual violence are minimised by distinguishing between the normative sexuality and the minority sexuality. Clinical diagnoses are influenced by perceptions of victims' social positions and then become another means to divide some survivors from others. This also helps us understand why some Hijra's may prefer to avoid health care and counselling services after experiencing sexual violence, since survivors may perceive these institutions not as sources of help or advocacy, but as locations of blame and additional trauma.

When different members of social institutions bring the obstacles above into discussion, social diversity present becomes a major factor in moving from concern to conscious resistance. To understand both the dangers and the rewards of engaging in such a process, various forms of resistance and moments of discomfort that have arisen over the period of time. The analyses and activities in this project emerged from various discussions. In the process, we acknowledge the difficulties that are likely to arise when attempting to move a diverse group of people, including researcher, towards a critical analysis of sexual violence.

The Hijra trope by moving in the third space of gender, class and politics has the gift of theoretically upsetting the tyranny of boundaries and the secure world of logos, offering a cultural frontier that disturbs the hegemonic designs of the established orders. Against the phallic expression of power, these performers trigger signs that travel from traditional wedding and birth ceremonies. Amidst the ruthless power play, crass corruption and cold injustice, *hijraism* mocks the pageantry of pomp. The guru–disciple relationships, becoming members of *rits* (a formal marker of kinship that signifies allegiance to a *Hijra* house or lineage) and creating ‘milk’ tie of maternity and sisterhood through rituals of nursing. Hyderabad *Hijra*'s are all identified as both Hindus and Muslims as a central part of their identities, while dedicating their lives to the Hindu goddess Mata Bahuchara, and they also go to the Mosque for prayer. *Hijra*'s also transcend dualities, after they become *nirvana Hijra* (rebirth or emasculation), they are partly both and neither male and female, and at the same time subverting as well as reinscribing normative gender categories.

All the respondents (*Hijra*) were very close to women neighbours as friends and saw themselves as very near to women in important respects (such as in their vulnerability to the brutality, drunkenness and callousness of men, and their performance of daily housewifely tasks). Many of the respondents in our study did not see themselves as men. ‘*All thirdness is not alike*’ is quite widely understood and accepted concept, when it comes to the Hijra identity. They do not consider themselves as man at all, but they admit that they were men before the transition. In their fundamental complexity and intimacy, crucial understanding and theorising about sexual identity creates a platform for the ‘alternatives’. The Hijra identity is rooted in a multiplicity of social differences; that sexual identities are fluid, shifting and multivalent. There is a need to explicate more about the alternative sexualities in India. We need to see how the Western concept of transgenderism differs from Indian Hijra culture or Hijrapan. There is a need to see changes in the Hijra tradition from the past to the present. Transgender people who struggle to support themselves and their families are placed in an extremely challenging situation due to the stigma, violence and discrimination they face, which is often compounded by caste, poverty and marginalisation. In a situation of lack of options, many turn to sex work to sustain themselves, and become vulnerable to harassment, assault and arrest. The experiences that transgender people have in the sex trade are extremely diverse and multifaceted. The lived experiences and narratives of the Hijra's of Hyderabad and Secunderabad shows that just being a eunuch is enough for the kind of violence that they face in their day-to-day lives.

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