



Transgender People and Human Rights Issues in Pakistan

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Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt am Main

Deutschland

2019



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Thesis submitted to the Institute of Ethnology (Anthropology) for the partial fulfilment of the award of PhD Degree in Anthropology

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Germany

2019

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Acronyms

CAT	Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CNIC	Computerized National Identity Card
CRC	Committee on the Rights of the Child
HRC	Human Rights Committee
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICERD	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
ICRMW	International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families
ILGA	International lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex association
IPC	Indian Penal Code
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NADRA	National Database and Registration Authority, Pakistan
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organization
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Right
PPC	Pakistan Penal Code
SC	Supreme Court
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nation Development Programme
UNHR	United Nation Human Right

UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

USAID

United States Agency for International Development

US

United States

Acknowledgement

It is an immense pleasure to express heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor Prof. Susanne Schröter for the utmost support throughout my Ph.D study period. She remained an inspirational force and kept me motivating to continue steady progress. I also could not forget to remember guidance of Prof. Andrea Fleschenberg, who guided me in the formative research, prior to Ph.D. and in Ph.D. field data collection. She was always instrumental and available to show me new horizons.

A very special thanks goes to the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan and Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD) for financial and administrative support. It was not possible to pursuit and complete my studies without their support.

I express deep gratitude to the transgender community of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. They always gave me their precious time and shared detailed information about the culture of hijra community. Particularly, I appreciate the role of Nadeem Kashish, FDI, Guru Safdari, Guru Babli Malik, Sonia, and Roshni.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my colleague Mr. Oliver Bertrand for his utmost administrative support. He has always supported me to fulfil administrative prerequisites of the Goethe University Frankfurt am Main, DAAD, Germany and HEC Pakistan.

I acknowledge patience and support extended by my very special office mates and friends Evin Jacob, Mr. Suneel Kumar, Angela Vardopoulos, Dr. Mohammad Rezaei, Fabian Sinning, and Dr. Homayoun Alam. Particularly, Dr. Swantje Bartschat who always gave me warm feelings and kept me motivating toward the achievement of Ph.D. goal. I am also grateful of help extended to me by Katja Rieck and Mr. Maccario who edited my research articles and gave me their feedback to make it possible for the publication.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family for all their love and encouragement: my siblings, cousins, and aunties. They helped me to rise and rise and made my journey easy to pursuit my dreams.

Abstract

The marginalization of the hijra identity in postcolonial Pakistan perpetuates the inequalities that have dogged the transgender community since the colonial era. Although Pakistan has since ratified all concerned UN treaties aimed at protecting transgender people and preventing human rights violations against them, the country's gender-variant population nevertheless remains vulnerable to these transgressions. As such, this study aims to explore the following inquiry: *“What are the lifeways of the hijra community and how do hijra people face human rights violations in their daily life activities?”*

The identity construction of the hijra is a complex process. Pakistan is a patriarchal society that determines gender based on biological sex. While a genitally ambiguous child is generally recognized as intersexed, the family usually obscures this circumstance or tries to enforce a predominantly male identity onto the child. To some degree, an intersexed child is allowed to perform feminine roles, particularly when compared to a biologically male individual who is inclined toward femininity. They may partake in “girls’ games” or in “women’s chores” like cooking; they may opt to don feminine clothing and jewelry or practice walking and talking “like a girl.” Many family members and relatives consider such actions a threat to family honor and/or an indication of weakness, which in turn renders the child vulnerable to sexual or physical assault. Abuse also causes some gender-variant children to drop out of school. As adults, many hijras do not see childhood sexual encounters as assault, particularly because they considered themselves to be feminine even from a young age. Nevertheless, experiences of isolation, abuse, and exclusion often compel a gender-variant child to seek company outside of his/her family of orientation.

Many transgender individuals see redemption in joining the hijra community: there, a new identity is defined and shaped. New members mirror themselves after more senior hijras. In the community, relationships are solidified through similar childhood experiences and interests as well as a shared freedom to express the outer reflection of an “inner feminine soul.” Here, they accept the childhood label affixed to them by heteronormative society: hijra. In fact, the identity now becomes the key to economic viability and socialization.

The predominant livelihood strategies within the hijra community are dancing and prostitution. New members must adhere to stringent norms and rules; they risk (sometimes severe) punishment if they do not. For example, a new hijra must adopt a very strict feminine appearance; if she does not appear feminine enough she may be socially isolated or physically punished. Similarly, a hijra is required to remain passive during sex. In fact, because hijras are stereotyped as passive and vulnerable, many clients physically exploit or even rape them. If she tries to resist, a hijra may face physical violence and, in extreme circumstances, death. Reporting abuse to law enforcement authorities often leads to further exploitation. As such, whether dancing or performing sexually, hijras are encouraged to do whatever is asked of them.

In the last decade, the Supreme Court of Pakistan has taken significant steps to ensure the rights of transgender people. The Court has similarly compelled local governments to amend existing legislation in order to protect the transgender community. Nevertheless, discrepancies exist in legislative and judicial interpretations of the transgender identity, which continues to impede the struggle for basic rights. Indeed, there is a long way to go in the effort to incorporate transgender people into the folds of mainstream Pakistani society.

Chapter1: The Position of Hijra (Transgender) People: From Past to Present

1. Stating the Problem

Vignette 1: In Pakistan, social interactions with the hijra community are inevitable; after all, the community has a longstanding tradition of visiting peoples' homes to collect alms and practice *vadhai*.¹ Indeed, my first memory of hijra people was in my own childhood home, where I can clearly recall a heavy voice booming from the other side of the half-opened front door: “*Baji mubarik ho bachi ayi hay, Allah ki Rehmat ayi hay!* [Congratulations, a baby is born in your house. She is a blessing from God!]”

I stood in the corridor. Inside the front room, my mother lay on a bed with a baby beside her – my newborn sister. She smiled towards the women at the front door and gave them a welcoming gesture. Two women stepped inside: one was tall with a red dress and the other one was thin. That is how I remember them. They began singing a prayer, asking for good luck and a happy life for my sister. My mother motioned to me to come over to her. She handed me some money that she had kept near my sister's head and told me to give it to them. I obliged. The women – hijra people - clapped and again blessed my sister. Then they left.

I was very curious about them. Who were they? Why did they come? Why were they singing, and why did my mother give them money? Alas, I was still a few years off from the answers.

Vignette 2: Another memory: One of my relatives, an older woman, stopped by and asked for my mother, who was not there. The relative waited for some time but eventually had to leave. When my mother returned, I told her about the visitor. She inquired about the woman's name, but I could not recall it. I described her facial features, instead reporting that she resembled one of the hijra persons who had attended my sister's birth. I told her that she looked “like a

¹ *Vadhai* is spelled differently by different writers. In this research, I employ the spelling “*vadhai*” unless referring to a work by another author. In that case, I use the concerned writer's spelling of choice. *Vadhai* is a legitimate livelihood strategy for the hijra community: in other words, hijra people blessed couples and infants at weddings and birth ceremonies in exchange for monetary compensation.

khudra.” (In the Sindh province, hijra people are also known as khudras.) The comparison perplexed my mother, but she finally deduced the visitor’s identity when I told her where she was from (I had luckily remembered this information). My mother laughed and said, “First, she is not a khudra. She is a woman, and in her past, she was really a beautiful woman. Second, you must not call her khudra. Her name is Gulshan.”

I felt embarrassed. I also learned that day that one should not liken a woman to a hijra person, even though, to me, a hijra person looked like a woman. What was wrong with the comparison? Again, I had no answers.

From these first encounters with hijra people, I developed presumptions about their appearance as well as their social role (i.e., blessing infants). Throughout childhood, I always saw this role executed in the same manner – singing upon an infant’s birth, clapping, (sometimes) dancing, and taking money when it was finished. When hijra people visited a neighbor’s house, my friends and I followed them around until they left the neighborhood – so curious we were about what they did. Nevertheless, we did not see them often because they used to come only for births of the children. Indeed, none of my childhood memories reflects another role for hijra people other than blessing infants. As I grew older, I learned that some hijra people were wedding performers and others still were beggars. Regardless of the roles they adopted, however, their appearance always remained the same: they dressed in feminine attire and adopted hyper-feminine gender expressions. What was most striking to me was their dark makeup, loud voices, and large bodies (as compared to biological women). I was told that they were sexually impotent and were not women at all – but this understanding would change with my first fieldwork experience.

Vignette 3: My anthropology master’s thesis, “Trafficking of Male Prostitute,” was a qualitative study based on in-depth interviews and observations. I conducted the research at Karachi’s *Mari Pur Truck Ada* and ultimately developed a good rapport with my respondents: male prostitutes who also worked as street massagers. The first time I paid them a visit at home, I was surprised to hear them speaking in a feminine manner. Moreover, they referred to one another by feminine monikers, even though I had always known them by assigned men’s names. When I inquired about the name changes, they replied that they were hijra (transgender). I was stunned: I always knew hijra people to be overtly feminine, and these two were not. They wore men’s garments (at least in the workplace, where I had always seen them), while all the hijra people I had

ever known dressed in women's clothing. In fact, it appeared I had no adequate understanding about their identity and was influenced by the subjective knowledge. I soon learned, however, that they assumed feminine identities in their shared living space. They explained that they were *zenana*,² or people who had assigned masculine bodies and feminine souls. One of them added that they were sexually attracted to men, but that they could not “perform this role of *zenana* full time, because of family pressure and fear of spoiling reputation.”³ Another respondent elaborated, “I am married and having a wife and two children. Twice a year I go back to my native village and visit my family. They only know that I have been working in Karachi and earning money for them. However, they do not know what I am working and what I feel about myself.”⁴ Hence, some other questions about the hijra people's lives emerged: why and how do they negotiate their identity? Why is their hijra identity not acknowledged by their families? Why do they not have equal opportunities and rights in the society?

In Vignettes 1 and 2, I knew very little about hijra people, their social roles, and the ways in which they expressed themselves. What I did know was based on the things that I observed in everyday life. Vignette 3, on the other hand, reflects knowledge acquired from direct interactions with hijra people. Nevertheless, even in Vignette 3, what I knew of the hijra identity was incomplete. Moreover, that incompleteness extended, and still extends, to the general population. For instance, if I tell others that some hijra people dress in men's clothing and/or have children, many would reject these statements as falsehood. The Pakistani mainstream society sees hijra identity in one way: overtly feminine and sexually impotent. The latter assumption, impotence, may be partly because most individuals with children choose not to reveal their hijra identities outside of the hijra community. Like many of the hijra respondents of this research, they live far away from their native towns but still fulfill their obligations as fathers and husbands. These aspects of identity communicate the meaning that hijra people are marginalized and socially deprived. In this case, this is a matter of their rights – human rights of hijra people or one can say transgender people.

² *Zenana* is spelled differently by different writers. In this research, I employ the spelling “*zenana*” unless referring to a work by another author. In that case, I use the concerned writer's spelling of choice.

³ Asif (Aqwa Hijra) interviewed with author in 2004.

⁴ Sohail (Aqwa Hijra) interviewed with author in 2004.

Hence, this research asks the following question: *What are the lifeways of the hijra community and how do hijra people face human rights violations in their daily life activities?* To address the full scope of these issues, this research explores the personal experiences of transgender individuals: the experiences of childhood and adulthood, in the family and the hijra community, and among the general population and the public sector. More often than not, these experiences perpetuate a gender-variant person's marginality and social exclusion. As such, this research also examines the human rights mechanisms that address this marginality and protect the transgender community from discrimination and violence.

On the following pages, I conceptualize the terms "hijra" and "transgender." These are the basic terms of this research and they are used interchangeably. In addition, I articulate sexual orientation as integral to the gender-variant identity, in the same way that contemporary human rights discourse contextualizes sexual orientation as a component of gender-variance.

1.1 The Conceptualization of the term Hijra⁵

The root of the word "hijra" goes into the Arabic language word "hjr" means leaving one's tribe. From the Arabic language then this word came into the Urdu and Hindi languages and used variously like hijira, hijada, hijara, hijrah (Mal 2015, 109, Sinha 2016, 178-179). This term is also being used as an umbrella term and includes a variety of sexual and gender identities (Chakrapani 2010)

While different authors conceptualize the term hijra in different ways, most settle on a definition that is related to the bearer's anatomy, livelihood, hijra community membership, feminine gender performance, religious affiliation, and/or spiritual practices. The larger cultural interpretation of the hijra identity revolves around the rituals that hijra people perform at birth and wedding ceremonies in the postcolonial Indian sub-continent (referring India, Pakistan and Bangladesh). Serena Nanda's (1999) ethnographic work which was published in the book "Neither man nor woman" documented hijra people as a third sex and third gender. She argued that the distinct nature of sex and gender determine hijra people's divine right to bestow blessings upon newly married couples and new born babies. She further added that divine power determines

⁵ *Hijra* is spelled differently by different writers (e.g., *hijda*). In this research, I employ the spelling "hijra" unless referring to a work by another author. In that case, I use the concerned writer's spelling of choice.

socially legitimize hijra people's function as a ritual performer. This notion of divine power is also being used to form the core of their self-definition and the basis of their positive, collective self-image (Nanda 1999, 12). Moreover, it is believed that hijra people who bless a newlywed couple's fertility should be "real" i.e., emasculated or intersexed (Nanda 1999, 4-5). However, in her book based on ethnographic field research, "With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India" Gayatri Reddy (2005) states that a real hijra person is a *sannyasi* – a person completely free of sexual desire. Reddy further states that some of the hijra people undergo a complete emasculation which is known as nirvana operation. In this operation the penis and testes are excised. It is believed in return such hijra people endowed with the power to confer fertility on newlyweds which is confirmed by the ethnographic work of Nanda as well. The hijra people who earn their living in this manner are referred to as *badhai hijra*. While, those hijra people who earn their livelihood by means of prostitution are called as *kandra hijra* (Reddy 2005, 56, Nanda 1999).

To move further in the illustration of the hijra concept, I refer Jessica Hinchy (2014a) who describes hijra people as the male born people, who identify themselves as eunuch or emasculated. She further mentions they usually wear feminine clothes and having feminine names (Hinchy 2014a, 274). On the basis of biological differences hijra people usually fall into one of three anatomical categories – intersex, castrated, or bearing complete male genitalia (Taparia 2011, 168). As far as the sexual orientation of hijra people is concerned Hossain (2012) who conducted an ethnographic research in Bangladesh stated that sexually and romantically hijra people are attracted towards "macho"⁶ men (Hossain 2012, 495) and identify themselves neither complete masculine nor feminine (Hall and O'Donovan 1996, 229). Indeed, society generally interprets hijra people as neither masculine nor feminine because they do not fulfill the normative social obligations of either gender (Nanda 1999; Reddy 2005).

However, society's expectations sometimes directly contradict with a hijra person's selfhood. For example, the neither-man-nor-woman status does not apply to hijra people who identify themselves as female (i.e., having a feminine soul). Sexual impotence, castration, and divine embodiment are similarly not universal traits within the hijra community, even though these characteristics are presumed to be true of all hijra people (Nanda 1999, xix-xx). Then who are the

⁶ Masculine man.

hijra people? As to give an answer to the question related to the conceptualization of hijra identity, I will refer Reddy's (2005) definition of the hijra identity:

For the most part, hijras [hijra people] are phenotypic men who wear female clothing and, ideally, renounce sexual desire and practice by undergoing a sacrificial emasculation – that is, an excision of the penis and testicles – dedicated to the goddess Bedhraj Mata. Subsequently they are believed to be endowed with the power to confer fertility on newlyweds or newborn children. They see this as their “traditional” ritual role, although at least half of the current hijras population...engages in prostitution. (Reddy 2005, 2)

As far as the hijra community of Pakistan is concerned, a number of identities fall under the umbrella heading of hijra. *Khusra*, for example, refers to those who are intersexed, in this research *Khwajasira* is being used parallel to the khusra people. *Zenana* or *aqwa* applies to a biological male having feminine gender identities, and a *narban* is a biological male who has been castrated and identifies himself as female (Abdullah et al. 2012, 2; Jami 2005; Umair, Yasin and Umair 2014). The designation *khwajasira hijra* (Chaudhry et al. 2014, 2553) serves as a replacement label for the “pejorative term [known as] hijra” (F. Khan 2016): Faris Ahmed Khan's (2016) study is one of the very few ethnographic research works conducted on the hijra community of Pakistan. Khan has also documented three different types of hijra identity. However, he used the same label *zenana* for two different identities, one possessing male sex organs while the other undergoes castration. Similarly, he has used *khunsa* for intersex people. One finding during my research is this term *khunsa* being mostly used in official documentations and derived from the islamic concept of hijra people; moreover, it is not grounded in the hijra community of Pakistan. Khan described hijra identities in the following words:

In the contemporary period, Khwaja sira serves as an umbrella term consisting of several overlapping sex and gender subcategories that, according to *this research* [emphasis added] may include individuals with congenital irregularities (*Khunsa*), feminine males who [...] are cross-dresser (*zenana*), and *zenanas* who excise their male genitalia and assume a more permanent feminine presentation (*hijra*). *Zenanas* and *hijras* [hijra people] alike consider themselves to have been endowed with a feminine soul since birth. They understand this soul not only to have driven them to be feminine in appearance and gender role but also to have shaped their sexual preference for men. Khwaja siras have a centuries-old system of social organization premised on the guru-chela (master-disciple) relationship through which gender-ambiguous people ritually forge alliances with one another. (F. Khan 2016, 159)

The hijra identity's multiple manifestations create complexity in its conceptualization; indeed, the identity is not limited to a single qualification or attribute (Jagadish 2013, 3). It instead encapsulates a variety of gender and sexual identities, including "eunuchs, transvestites, homosexuals, bisexuals, hermaphrodites, androgynous, transsexuals, and gynemimetic; and as if this multiplicity of terms were not enough, they are also referred to as a people who are intersexed, emasculated, impotent, transgendered, castrated, effeminate or somehow sexually anomalous or dysfunctional" (Lal 1999, 119). Loh (2011) submits that hijra people are "individuals of varied physical being or sexual practices and identifications, including (individually or in combination) transsexual, transgender, transvestite, homosexual, and asexual individuals, as well as hermaphrodites or intersexed individuals, and eunuchs" (Loh 2011, 50).

I will conclude the concept of hijra identity with the words that a hijra person can be an intersexed person, castrated person, and a person with intact male genitalia. Traditionally, hijra people earned a living through *vadhai*, a livelihood strategy that was (and is) largely facilitated by their association with spiritual powers. Today, they also earn money through singing, dancing, and prostitution. Sexually and romantically, hijra people are inclined toward men.

1.2 The Conceptualization of Transgender

Understanding the term "transgender" in its entirety is a similarly complex phenomenon. The simplest understanding of a transgender person is anyone whose gender identity (gender expression, representation and behavior) is different from his/her birth sex (American Psychological Association 2015). In other words, to be transgender is to possess a gender identity that counters one's birth sex and/or deviates from the gender that was assigned at birth. That said, the term is still under the process of construction since it only entered academic discourse in the last three decades (Stryker 2008, 1).

Generally, transsexuals, cross-dressers or transvestites, bi-gender persons, drag queens, drag kings, female impersonators, and male impersonators all fall under the transgender heading (Walter and Charles 2001, 292). However, many gender-variant communities around the world predate the advent of the term "transgender". Consider India's *hijra people*, Samoa's *fāfafina* (Levitt and Ippolito 2014, 1728), the Native American *berdache*, Myanmar's *acault maa*, the *khii* (Walter and Charles 2001, 293) and *kathoey* of Thailand (Grünhagen 2016), the *xanith* of the Arabian Peninsula, the female husbands of West Africa, the *Sambia Boys* in Papua New Guinea,

and the sworn virgins of the Balkans (Agoramoorthy and Hsu 2014; Aldous and Sereemongkonpol 2008).

Beemyn (2014) questions the contemporary tendency to lump all identities of sexual- and gender-variance into the transgender category. In other words, is it appropriate to understand historical gender nonconforming populations through a modern transgender lens? And what can be said of gender nonconforming persons who do not wish to be identified as transgender?

We might start by contextualizing historical gender-variant populations as comprising individuals whose gender did not match their assigned birth sex (Beemyn 2014). Yet we should also recognize that the transgender category has replaced a complete “alphabet soup” of sexual variance and gender diversity that mostly evolved from medical and psychological diagnoses (Hill 1997, 3). In other words, the generality of the term may actually blur the nuances of non-dominant gender-variant identities (Dutta and Roy 2014, 334).

On the other hand, the inherent flexibility of what it means to be transgender lends the term an inclusive foundation to represent gender-variant identities of the past and present. Conversely, the inclusion of other sexual and gender identities limits the sociocultural knowledge and diversity that is embodied in these diverse identities. The term “transgender” is universalized to impose and apply certain knowledge types about gender identity.

Dutta and Roy (2014) share a provisional conclusion of the transgender identity based on its continuing and emerging processes, the epistemology of the term, and its variations at regional and local levels. They furthermore argue that the transgender status is instrumental to the community’s acquisition of services and funding as well as to its political engagement (Dutta and Roy 2014, 334). In other words, though the hijra label has existed in South Asia for centuries, NGOs and state agencies file the identity under the contemporary heading of “transgender” (Dutta and Roy 2014). This transnational term transgender has been applied to define the gender and sexual identities of gender variant people both in India and Pakistan. The identity of transgender has become subject of rights negotiated and imposed upon them by the state politics, and judicial rulings to ensure the well-being of gender variant community (Dutta and Roy 2014, 321). In India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, the third gender is a recognized legal status (Sharma 2012, 65), a condition that analogizes the hijra identity and the transgender identity. As such, this research is framed in the context of “transgender and human rights issues” and employs the terms

“transgender” and “hijra” interchangeably. The transgender identity is modern day discourse, while the hijra archetype is historically rooted and has its own subculture. Indeed, Nanda (1999) distinguishes the hijra identity as separate from the transgender identity, characterizing the former as neither man nor woman.

Though they are not necessarily analogous, both “hijra” and “transgender” are umbrella terms for a variety of sexual and gender identities. Between the two, it is the latter that is utilized by campaigns toward the acquisition of basic human rights. Nevertheless, this research also recognizes hijra people as agents in the same struggle.

1.3 Transgender, Third Gender, Third Sex, and Sexual Orientation

*Tritiya Prakriti*⁷ is Sanskrit for “the third gender,” though some scholars translate the phrase as “the third nature.” In India, both concepts (the third nature and the third gender) are associated with the hijra community (Tiwari 2014, 19). Hinduism is not the only tradition that demonstrates a historical understanding of gender nonconformity. The Buddhist perspective also recognizes four categories of sex/ gender: male, female, *ubhafobyanjanaka* (a dual sexual nature), and *pandaka* (a nonconforming identity and also referring towards deficiency in male sexual capacity. The term *pandaka* was operationalized much later as a “broad third sex category” including intersexed people as well as male- and female- bodied people with physical or behavioral characteristics diverging from the sex specific characteristics of men and women (Sharma 2012, 66).

Jainism also demonstrates a historical understanding of gender nonconformity. The Jain community interpreted gender-variance through a unique lens, where one’s role during intercourse determined one’s gender identity:

In the late canonical as well as the early exegetical Jain literature ... there appeared a fourth sex (the masculine *napumsaka* or *purusanapum saka*). What distinguished the feminine *napumsaka* from the masculine *napumsaka*, given their similar appearance, was their sexual practice – whether they were merely receptive partners in sexual intercourse (feminine), or both penetrative and receptive (masculine), with the penetrative behavior determining their masculine characterization. (Reddy 2005, 20)

In the context of Jain literature, bisexual and homosexual individuals belonged to the third and fourth sex schemes (Reddy 2005, 20-21). The evidence of homosexual behavior is also evident

⁷ “*Tritiya Prakriti*, *Prakriti* meaning nature, in Sanskrit means the third gender which would encompass any gender outside the dominant male and female” (Tiwari 2014, 19).

from the MENA⁸ region. In this region homosexuality was practiced for centuries and historically enjoyed greater acceptance than it does today (Itaborahy and Zhu 2013, 15). The hijra community is likewise steeped in a rich non-heteronormative history, a culture that continues to this day. For example, one of the respondents of Vignette 3 explained that “zenana feel sexual attraction towards male. Therefore, they enjoy to have sex with male.”⁹ Hossain (2012) confirms this inclination, and Nanda (1999) and Reddy (2005) further indicate that a relationship between a hijra person and a man is generally modeled after the heterosexual relationship between a man and a woman. The *māhū* of Hawaii and other Pacific Islands, similarly possess feminine gender characteristics and engage in intercourse with male chiefs. During the encounter, the *māhū* is penetrated and adopts the sexual roles of a woman. That said, *māhūs* are not generally seen as women, but rather as replacements for women. A sexual relationship with a *māhū* is considered convenient, pleasurable, and a relatively pressure-free engagement (Besnier 1996, 301).

Thailand’s third-gender *kathoey* also deviate from the conventional sex and gender binary models. Generally, the *kathoey* are perceived as feminine males who are sexually inclined toward men (Grünhagen 2016, 224-225). Among Native Americans, the *berdache* (who could be male or female) maintained important social roles in the domains of economy, religion, and spirituality. In terms of sexual orientation, male *berdache* were generally inclined toward non-*berdache* men. Some *berdache* were heterosexual while others were bisexual (Roscoe 1996, 335). Others still were identified as transsexuals, transvestites, and homosexuals (Roscoe 1996, 338).

Etymologically, the word “berdache” is traced to the Arabic and Persian terms *bardaj* and *barah* (which refer to the younger partner in a homosexual relationship or a male prostitute). The term was used in North America from the seventeenth century until the nineteenth century. Related words in Europe generally refer to sodomy and pederasty: the English *berdache*, the French *bardache*, the Italian *berdasia*, and the Spanish *bardaxa* or *bardaje* were associated with a “[s]lave

⁸This region covers the territory south of the Mediterranean Sea, west of the Persian Gulf, east of the Atlantic Ocean and north of the Sahara desert. Historically, the region was a part of the ancient Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Phoenician, Carthaginian, Mauritanian, and Numidian civilizations and empires. Since the seventh century, the Arab Muslim civilization has dominated the region and strongly impregnated many local cultures and languages, including those of the Tamazight (Berbers), Copts, Nubians, Kurds, Assyrians, Aramaics, Somalis and Afars. The 22 modern-day countries, which make up the region (excluding Israel), are all members of the Arab League (Itaborahy and Zhu 2013).

⁹ Sohail (Aqwa Hijra) interviewed with author in 2004

or kept boy” (Roscoe 1996, 335; Smithers 2014, 630-631). For early Euro-Americans, a berdache was a homosexual.

The word “eunuch” is derived from the Greek words *eune* (bed) and *ekhein* (to keep): in other words, the keeper of the bed (Nazir and Yasir 2016, 158; Sindhu 2012, Sinha 2016,179). In India, it was the British colonialists who first identified the hijra people as eunuchs. Colonial rule criminalized homosexuality through the Indian Penal Code (IPC) section 377 (entitled *Unnatural Offences*) because it was seen as carnal intercourse against the order of nature (Baudh 2008, 2). Hijra people were perceived as sodomy-addicted prostitutes and/or habitual criminals (Hinchy 2017). Variations of IPC section 377 were inherited in the constitutions of India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Myanmar/Burma, Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei (Sanders 2009, 1). Therefore, in Pakistan, transgender people face structural discrimination in term of sexual orientation that they are unable to reveal their sexual identity in the public spaces.

The provided accounts of the *berdache*, the *māhū*, and the *koethay* indicate that gender and sexual variance identities were part of a sexual and gender scheme. However, heterosexuality as a prime normative practice and according to order of the nature became a reason to criminalize other sexual and gender identities. Consequently, many of these gender-variant indigenous communities were identified as homosexual by non-indigenous people (usually of colonial backgrounds), largely because the sexual behavior of community members deviated from the western gender binary model.

Dicky et al. (2012) demonstrate that the sexuality of transgender men is grounded in their gender identities (Dickey, Burnes, and Singh 2012, 133). The transition toward a more authentic gender identity allows an individual to participate in her/is preferred sexual role (Levitt and Ippolito 2014, 1745-1746). To that end, the American Psychological Association (APA) includes sexual orientation as a component of the personal identity. It is stated:

A component of identity that includes a person’s sexual and emotional attraction to another person and the behavior and/or social affiliation that may result from this attraction. A person may be attracted to men, women, both, neither, or to people who are gender queer, androgynous, or have other gender identities. Individuals may identify as lesbian, gay, heterosexual, bisexual, queer, pansexual, or asexual, among others. (American Psychological Association 2015)

The predominant sexual orientation found within the hijra community – that is, an affinity for men – was well-established by the time the British arrived in India. Nevertheless, the British *raj* criminalized homosexuality in India, an act that engendered structural discrimination against and marginalization of gender-variant people. These discriminative social trends were then inherited in postcolonial Pakistan (Hinchy 2017; S. Khan 2017), even though non-heterosexual orientations are explicitly protected under UN law. The International Commission of Jurist (ICJ), which comprises 29 international human right experts,¹⁰ defines sexual orientation as such, “Sexual orientation is understood to refer to each person’s capacity for profound emotional, affectional and sexual attraction to, and intimate and sexual relations with, individuals of a different gender or the same gender or more than one gender” (International Commission of Jurists 2007).

Gender-variant communities around the world possess substantial histories and well-established social roles. Under the influence of the binary models of gender and sex, however, these communities were and are criminalized and pushed to the boundaries of society.

The following pages present the history of the hijra identity on the Indian subcontinent, as well as its many interpretations: a spiritual subject revered in Hindu mythology, a political subject with a place in the royal court, a social subject with ritual responsibilities on auspicious occasions, and a legal subject whose body, livelihood, and existence are perpetually challenged and criminalized.

2 The Hijra People and the Construction of History from Hinduism

The Indian subcontinent historically tolerated non-heterosexual orientations and gender-variant identities, a trend echoed by the carvings of ancient temples and verses from the *Kama Sutra*¹¹ (Kalra 2012, 121). Indeed, prior to British colonization, India saw a number of gender-variant communities woven into the larger societal fabric. Today, a hijra person’s spiritual power is believed to derive from the identity’s historical placement in ancient Hindu mythology, one in

¹⁰ [I]ncluding a former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN independent experts, current and former members of human rights treaty bodies, judges, academics and human rights defenders, met in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, and affirmed a set of principles drawing on legally binding international human rights law to address the application of a broad range of international human rights standards to issues of sexual orientation and gender identity. (Amnesty international USA 2014)

¹¹ The *Kama Sutra* is the oldest Hindu textbook and is primarily about erotic love.

which a gender-variant person occupied a status of reverence (Nanda 1999; Reddy 2005; Tiwari 2014, 19).

Loh (2011) distinguishes three important aspects of the hijra identity through the lens of Hinduism: its ritual roles, its feminine roles, and the worship of the mother goddess Bahuchara Mata.¹² These characteristics are inspired by the social practices and religious ideas of greater Indian society, and they furthermore provide a religious framework for the rituals that construct and articulate the hijra identity (Loh 2011, 55).

Hinduism sanctions gender- and sexual-variance through a number of texts and imageries. One such text is the *Mahabharata*, a combination of “Indian myths, folkloric motifs, archetypes, proverbs, religious practices and beliefs, and philosophical systems” (Lal 1999, 122). The *Mahabharata* reflects Indian society as it existed during the time that the text was written (Lal 1999, 122); more tellingly, it depicts eunuchs as revered masculine warriors who defeated *Bhishma Pitamah* in the battle of *Kurukshetra* (Sharma 2012, 65).

Gender-variance also shows up in Hinduism’s robust deity roster. For example, an incarnation of the triumvirate Lord Shiva as the two-natured (male and female) *Ardhanarisvara*¹³ is closely associated with the hijra identity, an association that confers respect upon the hijra community in the larger social structure (Nanda 1999, 20). Homosexuality also has a historical place in Hindu mythology: The South Indian deity Ayyappa, for instance, is a product of the same-sex relationship between the male gods Shiva and Vishnu (Agoramoorthy & Hsu 2014, 1453).

Then there is the subject of the hijra’s relationship to fertility through mythology. One Hindu myth recounts how Shiva was tasked by Brahma and Vishnu to create the world.¹⁴ As the narrative goes, Shiva spent a thousand preparatory years under water, during which time Vishnu, per Brahma’s request, created the gods and all other creatures. When Shiva returned from his submersion, he shattered his *lingam* (phallus) and scattered it around the earth because there was nothing left for him to create. This act extended fertility to the entire planet. Though Shiva became

¹² *Bahuchara Mata* (Mother Goddess) is the patron goddess of the hijra community.

¹³ Within the hijra community, Lord Shiva (one of the three primary gods of Hinduism) takes the form of *Ardhanarisvara*, who encapsulates the male form (Shiva) and the female form (Shakti, or power) (Tiwari 2014). The right side of *Ardhanarisvara* is male and the left side is female. A sculpture of *Ardhanarisvara* is at the Elephanta Caves near Mumbai (Sharma 2012, 65).

¹⁴ Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu are Hinduism’s triumvirate deities.

asexual and sterile in the process, his phallus was revered, and continues to be revered, as a symbol of universal fertility (Nanda 1999, 30; O'Flaherty 1973, 130-35, cited in Lal 1999, 124). The takeaway of the myth is that impotence can be transformed into fertility, a phenomenon that lends respect to the contemporary hijra community (Nanda 1999, 30).

Mythology often depicts gender-variance as divinely favored. For example, in the classic *Ramayana* epic, the god Rama fights the demon Ravenna to rescue Sita, his kidnapped wife. Prior to the rescue, however, his father exiles Rama for 14 years. He is followed into exile by a number of his devotees, who he eventually orders to return home when they reach the banks of a river. After some time, Rama returns to the river and finds a small group still waiting there. These were people who identified as neither men nor women and thus felt exempted from his command, which was directed explicitly to “men, women, and children.” Rama blessed the people for their devotion (Jaffrey 1996, cited in Lal 1999, 123; Nanda 1999; Tiwari 2014, 20) and “grant[ed] them a boon, that whatever they will say will come true”¹⁵ (Tiwari 2014, 20).

In short, Hinduism’s influence on the hijra community is not insubstantial: there is the dual-gendered incarnation of Shiva, the historical anchoring to Rama, and the acquisition of spiritual power through emasculation. A hijra’s power is individually sourced but translated universally, particularly in the context of reproduction. Emasculation is the means by which one acquires this power; it furthermore ensures rebirth in the next life.¹⁶ In the Indian hijra community, emasculation (or castration) is executed in the name of the Mother Goddess, *Mata*. Before the ritual, a *dai ma* (the senior hijra person who performs the castration) and her assistant pay worship to Mata (Nanda 1999, 27). The individual receiving the treatment recites the words of Mata during the procedure. The hour after the castration (or *nirvan* operation) is crucial: a period when a tug-of-war occurs “between *Bahuchara Mata* who gives life to the people and her elder sister – who takes life” (Nanda 1999, 28). After 40 days, the *nirvan* becomes like having a new birth and carries mata’s power (Nanda 1999, 27-29).

Even gender transitioning is evident from Hindu mythology: the god Krishna (a male) transforms himself into Mohini (a female) and marries Iravan. Mohini spends one night with her

¹⁵“This is the reason why the hijras even today are seen blessing the child at the time of childbirth and people fear their curses and look out for their blessings.” (Tiwari 2014, 20)

¹⁶ Being impotent is a curse but impotence through emasculation is strategy for rebirth.

husband before he passes away. When he does, she performs all the rituals associated with widowhood, including beating her chest and breaking her bangles. When she is finished, Mohini transforms back into Krishna. The Krishna/Mohini myth is celebrated every year in the hijra community (Hiltebeitel 1995 cited in Agoramoorthy & Hsu 2014, 1452; Nanda 1999, 20).

Another narrative sees Krishna¹⁷ taking the form of a female avatar to destroy a demon named Araka. Upon resuming his original state, Krishna makes a proclamation before the pantheon of gods: “There will be many like me, neither man nor woman, and whatever words will come from the mouths of these people, whether good (blessings) or bad (curses), will come true” (Nanda 1999, 20-21; Tiwari 2014, 19). Some Hindu myths even submit that a male deity takes on the female form specifically to experience sexual intercourse with another male deity (Nanda 1999, 22). For many, the historical place of gender transitioning in Hindu mythology sanctions and legitimizes gender reassignment in South Asia’s contemporary transgender community.

In determining gender, Sharma (2012) submits that a person’s sex is determined by the quantity of his or her seeds¹⁸: that is, an individual with more male seeds is a man while one with more female seeds is a woman. Should the male and female seed count be equal, then that person is considered the third sex (though twins can also occur with this outcome). An equal seed count can also result in misconception or failure, if both seeds (like chromosome) types are weak or lacking in quantity (Sharma 2012, 65-66).

Gender nonconformity has been documented (and legitimized) on the Indian subcontinent for thousands of years. Some figures in ancient Hindu mythology today influence the understanding of the contemporary hijra identity. More modern South Asian history also recognizes the transgender identity, which is particularly true of the Mughal era. The following section discusses the circumstance of the Mughal era transgender person’s in greater detail.

3 The Hijra People during the Mughal Period

The Mughal empire ruled India during 1526 to 1857. In the courts of the emperor and *nawab* rulers, castrated hijra people (or eunuchs) held the dignified responsibility of safeguarding

¹⁷ “Lord Krishna, the eighth incarnation of Lord Vishnu in Hindu mythology” (Nanda 1999, 20).

¹⁸ Here “seeds” refer as chromosomes.

the royal harem. Some individuals were even enlisted as royal advisors¹⁹ (Hinchy 2014b, 415; Tabassum and Jamil 2014, 108; Thomas 2015, 28). Transgender people were identified either as a khwajasira person or as a hijra person. Khwajasira people were perceived as males, and thus maintained a higher social status than hijra people. Nevertheless, there were commonalities across both communities, such as the *guru-chela* (master-disciple) system that formed the basis of the social structure (Hinchy 2014a, 278).

To secure the favor of the political elite, parents were often involved in the castration of their sons (Thomas 2015, 28). The *khwajasarai* (khwajasira) community held an official legal status and performed duties as governmental officials, military commanders, intelligence officials, landholders, and elite household managers (Hinchy 2014a, 278).

Prostitution among the hijra community²⁰ is common in India today, a practice that dates back to at least the early 19th century (Freeman 1979 cited in Preston 1987, 377). Such kind of sexuality has certain meanings in the history of Indian society. As it is evident that during the Mughul era, a sexual encounter with a person of the third gender was considered a symbol of masculinity; in fact, nobility regularly engaged in sexual acts with third gender persons (Schofield 2012 cited in Chatterjee 2012, 955). One particular Hindu sex manual even educates men on how to engage in intercourse with third gender individuals (Tiwari 2014, 20).

During the 19th century, the practice of *vadhai* was a legitimate livelihood strategy for the hijra community: in other words, hijra people blessed couples and infants at weddings and birth ceremonies in exchange for monetary compensation. This is a tradition that continues to this day. Many believe that hijra people have the power to bestow fertility, a power derived from the sacred texts of Hinduism (Hinchy 201a, 275; Nanda 1999; Reddy 2005). According to Lal (1999), a wedding and a male child's birth are two highly auspicious events, and a hijra person's blessings at either occasion can ensure a flourishing future for the subject. Hijra people also have the power to curse: for instance, a bride who looks upon the face of a hijra person may be cursed with

¹⁹ Enlisting transgender people for royal responsibilities (including safeguarding) was also practiced during China's Ming Dynasty, where nearly 70,000 eunuchs served in the palace (Sharma 2012, 65).

²⁰ Prestone (1987) documents that none of the *hijdas* (hijras) interviewed for his study claimed to be prostitutes (Prestone 1987).

infertility (Lal 1999, 123; Nanda 1999). Crucially then, *vadhai* is not only a livelihood strategy, but also serves to reinforce a hijra person's power.

Before British rule, Mughal-era Indian states conferred protection and other benefits onto the hijra community in the form of food rights, land provision, and hijra people had the right to collect money (Hahm 2010, 13). "In each subdistrict there was a *vatandar hijda* [a hijra person], a holder of a hereditary rights (*vatan*) to collect a *hak*, 'perquisite,' from the villagers. On their regular beats the hijdas [hijra people] claimed four *paisa* [cents] from cultivator household and food from fellow *vatandars*" (Preston 1987, 377).

Historically, gender-variant people were identified as either hijra or khwajasira people. While both groups practiced the guru-chela system, the social roles and status of the respective identities varied. The khwajasira were primarily masculine (dressing in men's attire), while the hijra people were more feminine. The distinction can be better understood through the social duties of the khwajasira: they alone were appointed to safeguard the royal harem. The Oxford Dictionary defines a *harem* as "the separate part of a Muslim household reserved for wives, concubines, and female servants." (Online Oxford Dictionary 2015). It is likely that the khwajasira were elected for this task because they were presumed to be sexually inactive (castrated or intersexed) and thus would not sexually engage with harem members. Because royal safeguarding was traditionally the responsibility of male soldiers, the khwajasira maintained a masculine appearance. Some children were castrated by their parents to gain access to the royal court and its associated benefits.

Hijra people, on the other hand, had different roles and social positions both of sexuality and spirituality. Having sex with hijra people becomes a sign of masculinity for the people, while simultaneously, hijra people often called upon the birth ceremony to bless, or to greet at wedding ceremonies. The emperor also granted them the right to collect money from neighboring households. Nevertheless, both of these livelihood strategies were contingent upon social attitudes: while hijras were visible and performed certain social roles, they were not as empowered as the khwajasira community. Yet much would still change. When the binary-conforming British colonialists arrived to South Asia, the concomitant political shifts on the subcontinent deleteriously affected the sociocultural standing of both khwajasiras and hijras. The following section discusses the state of gender-variant people during British colonial rule.

4 The Hijra Community During the British Rule

Multiple sources elucidate the conditions of British colonial rule on the Indian subcontinent. The literature includes government records, census reports/data, ethnographies, and other scholarly contributions. These sources help paint a picture of the perceptions and attitudes of colonialists: how they understood and interpreted social, cultural, religious, and political elements of the people who were native to India (Agrawal 1997, 280).

According to Dutta (2012), British officials collected ethnological data throughout India during colonial rule. The first censuses were conducted from 1868 to 1872, under which individuals with certain physiological characteristics were classified as “eunuchs”. This category included hijra people and was described as a distinct caste group. Later censuses analogously referred to hijra people as *khoja*, *pavaya*, *khasua*, and *mukhanas* (Agrawal 1997, 281; Dutta 2012, 828-829). There were no efforts to understand hijras during this time; in fact, hijra people were not treated with respect to the gender (Agrawal 1997, 281). Colonialists saw two gender categories – male and female – and those not conforming to the binary system were treated as outcasts²¹ (Tiwari 2014, 21). Indeed, gender nonconformity generally perplexed the British:

The appropriation of the feminine cultural symbols by the *hijra* people thus seems to have led to curiosity among the British regarding the status of the *hijra* people’s body. It is apparent that the colonial ‘anthropologists’ were unable to fit the *hijra* community into their notion of ‘intelligible gender’ which was not only binary but also clearly related to a particular kind of body with specific cultural symbols and practices. (Agrawal 1997, 287)

Agrawal (1997) argues that colonial writers accepted that members of hijra community can have male and female members, but sought further inquiry into why people with non-feminine bodies adopted feminine roles²² (Agrawal 1997, 287). The British observed that hijra people deviated from the conventional binary gender and sex models of 19th century discourse. Instead of

²¹ “The 19th century was the time when bourgeoisie middle class in Europe were emerging with their discourses on sexuality and in turn sexuality forms the social order. This was the time of construction of bourgeoisie morality against the aristocrats and the 19th century bourgeoisie chose sexuality as their base for forming their morality and social order. The foundation of a bourgeoisie family was threatened by anyone of a different sexuality because it would be non-reproductive...this socio-political structure which was forming in Britain penetrated to its colonies as well” (Tiwari 2014, 21).

²² “It thus seems that hijras obvious, and often exaggerated, use of feminine cultural symbols in their presentation of self, through dress, hairstyle, names and kinship terms, was in considerable dissonance with their apparent bodily status which was clearly not biologically female. The British attempts at the construction of the hijra people’s bodies as not male, as hermaphrodite, as impotent and as castrated can accordingly be seen as directed at giving a ‘logical’ explanation to the observed discrepancies” (Agrawal 1997, 287).

attempting to understand them, however, the colonial masters marginalized them. Dutta (2012) articulates that the British ethnological literature of the 18th and 19th centuries seems inconsistent in documenting hijra identity, particularly with reference to hijra people's physical morphology. During colonial rules, hijra people were officially identified as eunuchs (Dutta 2012, 829) and eunuch were positioned in the group of dancers and singers. This grouping or categorization also included a number of other groups, like *Perna*, *Ayak*, *Brijbasi*, *Kanchan*, *Dasi*, *Kalwant* and others (Agrawal 1997, 281).

The hijra people were viewed as little more than sex objects, a correlation reinforced by their presumed impotence and sexual passivity. As the British saw it, "all persons of the male sex who admit themselves or on medical inspection clearly appear, to be impotent" are eunuchs²³ (Government of India 1871; Hinchy 2014a, 276).

Historical literature drew a distinction between the "natural" eunuch and the "artificial" eunuch (the latter of whom is castrated), though the terminology was not always consistent. Thurston's (1909) described the *khoja* as castrated eunuchs who were usually employed by wealthy families. Hijra people, on the other hand, were natural (intersex) eunuchs who formed a specific group having specific religious practices.²⁴ Yet in Russell's (1916) *Tribes and Castes of the Central Province of India*, *khasuas* were considered natural eunuchs, while hijras were the artificial ones (Russell 1916; Thurston 1909, cited in Dutta 2012, 829). Therefore, there is no consistency about the documentation of hijra identity: who can be a real hijra? Eunuchs were registered based on their activities: those that were respectable and those that were suspicious. Public performances – such as singing, dancing - fell into the latter category (Hinchy 2014a, 276). Additionally, according to community recruitment patterns, hijra membership was secured in one of three ways. The first was through the birth of a "malformed," "deformed," or "ill-developed" intersex child (Hinchy 2014a, 283), who would typically be given to the hijra community by her/his parents. The second path to membership was forged when the community itself laid claim to a particular child, and the third occurred when an individual chose the community (Hinchy 2014a, 284). Prospective members were (and are) impotent males in homosexual relationships or those who did not identify as male or identify themselves as a female (Agrawal 1997, 284). The

²³ In this sense, subjugation of the word eunuch is derogatory and in Greek language, it has the meaning of a keeper of the bed – an object for sexual lust (Sharma 2012, 65).

²⁴ Castrated males were engaged to guard the "quarters of the royal household" (Sharma 2012, 65).

British were curious about the relationship between the anatomy and the public persona of transgender community members; this curiosity catalyzed them to examine hijras' "private bodies" (Agrawal 1997, 285).

The British considered hijra people "habitual sodomite" and perceived many of their social performances either singing, publicly dancing or collecting alms, as vulgar (Hinchy 2014a, 274), and as such, colonialists took it upon themselves early on to "civilize" them (Tiwari 2014, 21). The colonial-era literature demonstrates a clear discomfort with hijra people and their precolonial sociocultural roles (Agrawal 1997, 281). As such, the British attempted to obliterate the social visibility of the hijra people and their gender identity through the prohibition of their public appearance and performances (Hinchy 2014a).

The criminalization of the hijra identity through the Criminal Tribal Act (CTA) of 1871 (Hinchy 2014, 274) and the Dramatic Performance Act (1876) were attempts to "civilize" Indians. The British treated hijra people as a social threat and thus erased the identity as best as they could (Tabassum and Jamil 2014, 108). The CTA attempted to eradicate eunuchs from public sociocultural spheres, and any violations of the act were met with a two-year imprisonment. The Indian Penal Code (IPC) section 377 (1860) declared homosexuality and gender-variance as criminal acts (Agoramoorthy and Hsu 2014). In addition to this, hijra people were restricted from gathering in public spaces and wearing feminine attire. They were also barred from creating wills and raising children (Hinchy 2014a, 276).

Hinchy (2014a) stated that during British rule, hijra people were documented with a masculine pronoun. According to her, this was a deliberate linguistic strategy to obliterate hijra people's visibility as a distinguish group of people, who deviate from masculine gender. While masculinity was a significant to the British rulers. Eradicating the hijra identity was one-step toward creating a cis-heteronormative gender binary system in India. Hijra people were an aberration of the system: they were "effeminate, sexually 'deviant', and 'impotent'" (Hinchy 2014a, 275-6).

According to Agrawal (1997), the 1891 Indian census counted hijra people as both males and females, with the latter outnumbering the former in many regions. The reasons for the explicitly dual gender classification (male and female) varied. There may have been biological women within the hijra community, and other gender nonconforming individuals were likely

marked by census takers as men, no matter how they personally identified (Agrawal 1997, 282). Moreover, the community itself may have distinguished between the respective gender identities of its members according to conventional gender roles (women's work vs. men's work), though this last proposition remains speculative (Agrawal 1997, 282-3).

The British observed all gender-variant people as eunuchs and/or sex objects and thus marked them as members of one caste (this grouping included hijras, khwajasiras, and other gender-variant singers and dancers). Any respect and dignity associated with gender-variance during the Mughal era was eradicated; this social downgrade was especially palpable in the once-revered khwajasira community. The colonial powers had no interest in understanding gender-variance, opting instead to categorize gender nonconformists according to the conventional binary system of the dominant 19th century discourse. In the eyes of the British raj, gender nonconformity countered masculinity, and its visibility was an affront to decency.

Thus, two general trends emerge here: during the Mughal era in South Asia, gender-variant people were accepted and their social roles were legitimized; British colonialism, on the other hand, rendered them nearly invisible. It would not be until post-colonialism that gender-variance in South Asia would again be permitted outside the confines of the conventional gender binary.

The following section discusses the position of the third gender, along with the emerging notion of what it means to be transgender in postcolonial Pakistan.

5. The Circumstance of Transgender People in Post-Colonial Pakistan

In contemporary Pakistan, there are a number of descriptive terms for gender-variant people: *khusra*, *murat*, *hijra*, *khwajasira*, *zenana*, *buggas*, and *khadra* are just a few of the local labels for transgender people in Pakistan (Aurat Foundation 2016; Collumbien et al. 2009; Pamment 2010; Saddique et al. 2017). While abusive labels include terms like *zankha*,²⁵ *chakka*, and *gandu* (Aurat Foundation 2016). F. Khan (2016) indicates an emerging social trend to move from antiquated labels like “hijra” to revive and contemporary terms like “Khwaja Sira” and

²⁵ Zankha are zenana-identified individuals (within the Khwajasira network) who are homosexual. They are also called *bantha*. Additionally, the phrase “she-male” is a self-identified label among Khwaja Siras (F.Khan 2014a, 71).

“transgender.” The impetus to adopt more empowered labels stems from the country’s growing transgender activism (F. Khan 2016).

Like all labels, those affixed to gender-variance bear a sociocultural meaning that communicates the status of the individual who assumes it. The revival of the term “Khwaja Sira” aims to recapture the essence of its elite status during the Mughal era, while in legal and advocacy spheres, hijras and khwajasiras are simply referred to as “transgender” (AAWAZ Programme 2016; Aurat Foundation 2016; F. Khan 2014a; F. Khan 2016; S. Khan 2017).

Pakistan is a signatory to a number of human rights treaties that demand the state’s obligation in safeguarding all of its citizens, including those who are transgender. These treaties are listed as follows:

- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESR)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

The constitution of Pakistan considers all citizens equal; nevertheless, transgender people are frequently deprived of basic freedoms. They are vulnerable to sexual abuse, harassment, and physical violence. The police institution frequently neglects safeguarding transgender people while it simultaneously harasses them in public. Lower cadre police officials are more often guilty of these offenses than high-ranking officials (Aurat Foundation 2016, XV). Moreover, transgender persons are frequently unable to access healthcare treatment and educational opportunities, resulting in the community’s low literacy rate and infrequent medical attention (AAWAZ Programme 2016, 1; Majeedullah 2016, 18-19; S. Khan 2017, 1292-1293). Indeed, mainstream Pakistani society generally considers hijra people to be outcasts and even subhuman (Sattar 2010; S. Khan 2017, 1293).

In recent years, the Supreme Court (SC) of Pakistan made a series of rulings that favor the transgender community; many rights, including the right to identity, have been officially secured for gender-variant people. The SC considers hijra people to be equal citizens of Pakistan and worthy of the fundamental rights assured by the constitution. The court has additionally banned the unlawful detention of transgender people by law enforcement agencies. In turn, federal and provincial governments are tasked with ensuring the rights of transgender persons to education, employment, and inheritance (F. Khan 2016, 159; Nazir and Yasir 2016, 159; S. Khan 2017, 1293-1294).

The 2009 ruling of the SC “Khaki v. Rawalpindi, Supreme Court of Pakistan (12 December 2009)” was a stonewall moment for Pakistan’s transgender community (Redding 2016, 3). Since then, the community has increased its visibility in the media, public discussions, and talk shows (S. Khan 2017, 1299). Transgender activism has also increased (Redding 2016). A 2011 SC ruling mandated that a third gender category be added to the country’s Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC) system so that citizens could choose to legally identify beyond the male-female binary (F. Khan 2016, 159; S. Khan 2017, 1301).

The right to identification is a significant milestone in the transgender community’s struggle for equality. At the same time, however, the third gender category triggers certain complications. For example, categorizing hijras as asexual and subjecting them to a hormone test to authenticate this status are both matters of dispute between transgender advocacy groups and the public sector (S. Khan 2017, 1294-1295). Similarly, many gender-variant persons identify as females, yet even with expanded CNIC options, some individuals might be forced to check the “male Khwajasira” box. While doing so contradicts one’s self-identity, the male Khwajasira status ensures that person’s eligibility for inheritance rights (such as parental properties) (S. Khan 2017). Eschewing the state’s prescribed identities can endanger a person’s path to familial inheritance.

In contemporary Pakistan, the transgender conversation is squarely on the table, having gained the attention of both judicial institutions and state parties. However, gender-variant people are still subjected to discrimination, violence, stigma, prejudice, and derogatory behavior in mainstream society, even though on paper they are assured the same rights as every other human being in the world (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commission 2012). As such, the following section discusses human rights articles based on United Nations (UN) treaties signed by

the Pakistani government. The treaties are organized thematically (per the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner's *Born Free and Equal 2012*) and are listed as follows:

- The protection of the transgender people from homophobic violations,
- The prevention of torture, inhuman, cruel and degrading behavior against transgender people,
- The decriminalization of homosexuality,
- The prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and
- The assurance of the transgender community's rights to association, peaceful assembly, and freedom of expression.

In this chapter, I triangulate the legislative and constitutional positions of Pakistan with the rights of the transgender community and its marginality in society. As such, the chapter also discusses the following: the global understanding of human rights as it is derived from UN treaties; the responsibility of nation-states to ensure those rights; and the circumstance of the transgender community at the local level.

6. The Protection of Transgender People from Homophobic Violations: Articles from UN Treaties

The phrase “human rights” refers to the primary and inherent rights of all human beings, which cannot be compromised or restricted by any sociocultural practice of any country in the world (Marks 2006, 38). While the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) guarantees coverage to the international transgender community, many UN member states nonetheless fail to prevent discrimination against their gender-variant citizens.

The United Nation Office of High Commission (2012) developed the booklet “Born Free and Equal: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in International Human Rights” to operationalize the act of *protection* as follows:(a) all sexual orientations and gender identities must be recognized as protected characteristics under hate crime laws in order to extend protection to individuals of those identities;²⁶(b) formal systems of recording and reporting hate crimes must be established to ensure the state's responsibility to address a given crime; and (c) to fulfill its

²⁶ The report addresses all people of marginalized sexual and gender identities, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex persons.

obligations to its transgender community, the state must also thoroughly investigate hate crimes and punish perpetrators accordingly. This research utilizes the phrase “hate crime” specifically to describe crimes perpetrated against people of non-heterosexual orientations and gender-nonconforming identities (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commission 2012, 13).

Article 1 (see Box 1) of the UDHR (1948) establishes all human beings as equal. This article applies to both gender-conforming and gender-nonconforming people.

Box 1 The Right to Dignity and Equality

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Article 1: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

Article 3 (see Box 2) of the UDHR (1948) reveals three dimensions to human rights: (a) the right to life, (b) the right to liberty, and (c) the right to security of person. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) reaffirms these rights and protects them by law through articles 6 and 9.

Box 2 The Right to Life, Liberty and the Security of Person

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR 1948)

Article 3: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and the security of person.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR 1966)

Article 6: Every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life.

Article 9: Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person.

The UDHR and the ICCPR contain rights that aim to protect the international transgender community from threats of violence.²⁷ This objective is reaffirmed by the United Nations Human

²⁷ Global murder-rates indicate that a transgender person is murdered every three days (Solomon 2014). According to Freeman and Jones (2012), from 2008 until March 2012, 643 transgender persons were murdered in Central and South America alone. During that same time, 53 transgender murders were reported in Europe, with half of those incidents occurring in Turkey (Freeman and Jones 2012, 5).

Rights press release and Human Rights Council meetings²⁸ (United Nation General Assembly press release 2008; Human Rights Council Nineteenth session Agenda items 2 and 8, 2011). The UN furthermore assigns its member states the responsibility of ensuring the protection of their respective transgender citizens.²⁹

6.1. The Situation for Transgender Persons in Pakistan with Reference to Protection

Pakistan is far from providing consistent protective measures to its transgender community. The country saw the second-highest transgender murder rate in Asia from 2008 to March 2012. (Freeman and Jones 2012). These murders were overwhelmingly the result of transphobia. In one case, three gender-variant people were tortured before they were killed. In another incident, a gender-variant person was shot when she decided to marry, and yet another still saw the killing of transgender individuals who were simply entering a party (Balzer et al. 2012, 40). The period, 2008 to March 2012, likely witnessed far more transgender murder cases than were cited by the media, but many of these killings go unreported. Indeed, Pakistan's prevalent homophobia largely creates an unsafe environment for transgender persons (UK Home Office 2014, 5). Furthermore, the state of Pakistan lacks formal mechanisms to legally process incidents of LGBT hate crimes (Balzer et al. 2012, 40).

Non-heterosexual orientations and gender-nonconformity are not included as protected characteristics under hate-crime laws in Pakistan. Nevertheless, article 153 (a) of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) recommends punishment for perpetrators of religious, racial, linguistic, regional, or caste hate crimes (Ispahani 2012). Article 153 (a) can be contextualized to include transgender people, but it would also be necessary to implement this article in a way to create a protection mechanism, which safeguard transgender people from hate crimes.

Pakistan's transgender community experiences inadequate protection at three different levels. The first level is on-the-ground: gender-variant persons are targets of murder and violence

²⁸ For transgender people, the rights to liberty and security of person are often disregarded by the larger social structure. Transgender persons regularly face stigmatization, harassment, discrimination, prejudice, physical attacks, detention, killing, rape, and torture around the world (United Nations Human Rights Council 2011).

²⁹ Per the right to life, a given state must promptly and thoroughly investigate the murder of a transgender person and sincerely attempt to bring the responsible parties to justice; furthermore, the state must prevent extrajudicial executions of transgender persons (United Nation Human Rights Council 2011).

because their sexual orientations and gender identities are socially maligned. The second level is bureaucratic: Pakistan lacks a formal system to document cases of murder and violence against transgender people. The third level is legislative: although Pakistan's constitution technically safeguards all of its citizens, the PPC does not specifically contextualize sexual orientation and gender identity as characteristics that are formally protected from hate crimes. As such, many transgender victims of violence end up legally unsupported.

The bill "Transgender Person (Protection of Rights) Bill 2017" moved through Pakistan's senate that proposed several rights to the country's transgender community. Some of these rights are listed as follows:

- A transgender person has the right to inheritance, which is determined through the gender documented on a person's Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC). In the case of ambiguous genital characteristics, the share of the property will be determined per the individual's self-perceived gender at the age of 18. It should be taken into consideration that in Islam the share of the property between siblings is specifically determined through gender: The male siblings inherit double as compared to female.
- A transgender person has the right to education. Moreover, the transgender community is ensured a three-percent quota in all spheres of public entities like public sector jobs and universities. Furthermore, transgender people are ensured access to all university facilities. A transgender person's right to a free and compulsory education is guaranteed by article 25 (a) of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (1973).
- A transgender person has the right to employment. Any transgender person may participate in any business and/or lawful occupation according to article 18 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (1973). A minimum three-percent quota of public and private sector jobs is guaranteed to the transgender community.
- A transgender person has the right to political participation as a voter and/or to contest an election. A three-percent representation in local- and national-level political structures is guaranteed to the transgender community.
- A transgender person has the right to rent or buy property and to access public places. These rights are also protected by article 26 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (1973).

7. The Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment of Transgender People: UN Treaties Articles

The Office of the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG) quoted a definition from article 2 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948):

Any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; [and] forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. (Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide 1948)

With reference to the above definition, *prevention* is described as averting any act committed with intention to destroy a group or its members, such as killing, causing mental or physical harm, or damaging the group or individual social life. Moreover, responsibility for prevention or preventing goes to the concerned state of the country.

Articles 5 and 7 (see Box 3) of the UDHR (1948) prohibit torture, degrading treatment, and medical and/or scientific experimentation against any human being without her/his consent. Likewise, article 1(1) of the Convention against Torture (1984) prohibits the use of torture, be it physical or mental, for purposes of confession or punishment; additionally, article 2(1) of the convention requires the state to take effective legislative, administrative, and judicial measures to prevent acts of torture.

Box 3 The Right to Eliminate Torture, and Other Cruel or Inhuman Treatment

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

Article 5: No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

Article 7: No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. In particular, no one shall be subjected without his free consent to medical or scientific experimentation.

Convention against Torture (CAT)

Article 1(1): For the purposes of this Convention, the term “torture” means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions.

Article 2(1): Each State Party shall take effective legislative, administrative, judicial or other measures to prevent acts of torture in any territory under its jurisdiction

The United Nation Human Right Office of the High Commissioner (2012) demands from the state parties a) to prevent torture against transgender persons in police custody b) to properly investigate the crime committed against transgender persons c) to bring offender(s) to justice d) to provide skills training - like dealing with gender issues - for governmental officials, e) and monitor detention facilities.³⁰ Even with these edicts, however, some state actors continue to promote violence against transgender persons, usually on social or religious grounds.³¹ Similarly, harsh attitude of the police force exemplifies a structural gap. Because, it is assumed that police as a state derived institution is a part of structural system and having inadequate skills to interact with

³⁰ “Members of sexual minorities are disproportionately subjected to torture and other forms of ill-treatment because they fail to conform to socially constructed gender expectations [...]” (United Nations Human Rights Council 2011, para 34). Torture, beatings, extortion, rape, and similar abuses of transgender people are often supported or committed by state authorities, including police officers and prison guards (Balzer et al. 2012, 35).

³¹ The Malaysian state remains harsh toward the LGBT community. In 2012, Prime Minister Najib affirmed that there was no place for LGBT activities in Malaysia (Human Rights Watch 2014a). Moreover, in April 2013, Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin accused LGBT activists of poisoning the minds of Muslims and pushing them toward deviant practices (Human Rights Watch 2014a).

transgender persons or any biased attitude towards transgender person is representation of gap existing at structural level (Human Right Watch 2014a).³²

Despite the UN commitment, institutional violence against transgender persons continues at an alarming rate.³³ (See also Human Rights Watch 2014b, 2014c). Gender-variant individuals remain at a high risk for sexual and physical abuses while in police custody³⁴ (see also United Nation General Assembly 2001, para 17-25) and it still occurs in Pakistan. The medical examination of a transgender person to “diagnose” homosexuality is a form of torture that is prohibited according to UN standards (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner 2012, 25).

7.1. The Situation of Transgender Persons in Pakistan with Reference to Prevention from Torture

Article 14 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (1973) guarantees a person’s dignity. Article 14(2) additionally ensures that “no person shall be subjected to torture for the purpose of extracting evidence” (Constitution of Pakistan 1973). Similarly, section 337 (k) of the PPC criminalizes torture as a punishable offense with a ten-year sentence (Pakistan Penal Code 1860). The Police Ordinance 2002, section 156 (d) prevents police officers from exercising torture or other kinds of violence, the violation of which is punishable by a fine and five-years in prison (The Police Ordinance 2002). The provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa replaced the Police Ordinance 2002 with the Police Act 2017. However, the contents of the relevant section

³² Law enforcement officials are also guilty of violence and discrimination against transgender people. In Malaysia, police officials frequently detain Muslim transgender persons under the guise of sharia violations. Once in custody, they are often subjected to physical and sexual abuse by both officers as well as other prisoners (Human Rights Watch 2014a). In Georgia, police officials do not adequately address violent incidents against the LGBT community. In Kyrgyzstan, transgender (and LGB) rights groups divulged at least four new cases of police harassment against at least seven transgender (and LGB) people. Likewise, NGOs in Tajikistan also reported cases of police violence against transgender (and LGB) people (Human Right Watch 2014).

³³ According to Human Rights Watch (2014), Liberia, South African, Zimbabwe, Haiti, Uganda, Honduras, Malaysia, Nepal, Armenia, Greece, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Kosovo, Tajikistan, and Russia have all been witness to multiple cases of attack, imprisonment, violence, and/or discrimination against the LGBT community. There were nearly 3000 cases of LGBT violence in 2012 alone (Human Rights Watch 2014d; Human Rights Watch 2014b). Likewise, in Honduras between 2009 and 2012, around 90 LGBTI people were killed (Human Rights Watch 2014c).

³⁴ Transgender people in detention are at risk of sexual and physical abuse from fellow prisoners and prison guards if incorporated into the general population of men’s prisons (United Nation General Assembly 2001, para 23). LGBT persons are frequently victimized in police custody; the abuse can be sexual (including rape), physical and/or verbal (United Nation General Assembly 2001, para 21).

of 156 (d) are the same except the section number: The section number 156 (d) has been given the number 119 (d) in the Police Act of 2017.

In light of these decrees, as well as the moral obligation inherited from signing and ratifying the UN's Convention against Torture, Pakistan's senate passed a bill "Transgender Person (Protection of Rights) Bill 2017" to protect all citizens from torture, custodial death, and custodial rape. The bill defines "torture" as follows:

"Torture" means an act committed by any person, including a public servant, or at the instigation of or with the acquiescence of any other person, with specific intent to inflict physical or mental pain or suffering, not incidental to lawful sanctions, upon another person within his custody, for the purpose of (i) Obtaining from that person or some other person any information or a confession; or (ii) Punishing that person for any act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed; or (iii) Intimidating or coercing that person or a third person; or (iv) For any other reason based on discrimination of any kind; or (v) Harassing, molesting, or causing harm whether physical or mental to a female for any of the above purposes. (The Senate of Pakistan 2017)

According to the PPC, the constitution, and the aforementioned police ordinance, law enforcement authorities are forbidden from exercising torture or violence against the accused for any means, including questioning, taking confessions, punishing, and/or coercing. Nevertheless, the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC, 2014) asserts that transgender persons face torture and violence from state and non-state actors in both public and private spaces: torture from government and/or law enforcement officials, and violence from family and/or community members. Furthermore, violence can be emotional, psychological, sexual, physical, and/or verbal (IGLHRC 2014).

Police violence against transgender persons occurs in non-detention spaces as well. In one account, transgender persons were taken hostage in a police vehicle; in another, they were tied up and harassed by law enforcement officers for sexual favors. In the same report, it is mentioned that acts like these are usually executed to extort money from transgender persons and/or their clientele (in the case of transgender prostitutes) (IGLHRC 2014, 34).

For the transgender community, arbitrary arrests, torture during detention, physical humiliation, and physical violence by police are all on the rise. Victims are targeted for their gender-variance, sexual orientation, and/or socioeconomic standing. One prominent social

assumption says that transgender persons are all sex workers and thus deserve to be mistreated (IGLHRC 2014). With reference to the above stated situation of violence prevalence and an institutional reluctance – particularly from the police side - to pursue violation offenders, elicits feelings of depression, helplessness, anger, and sadness within the transgender community.

8. Decriminalizing Homosexuality: Articles from UN Treaties

Articles 2, 7, 9, and 12 (see Box 4) of the UDHR (1948) ensure protection from discrimination, arbitrary arrest, and interference with privacy. Articles 17 and 9 of the ICCPR (1966) similarly touch on liberty, security of person, and detention, while article 26 emphasizes the equality of all people before the law, regardless of sex, color, race, language, religion or other status (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966, 175-177).

Box 4 The Right to Privacy and the Question of the Death Penalty

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Article 2: Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status.

Article 7: All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

Article 9: No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

Article 12: No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

Article 2(1): Each State Party to the present Covenant undertakes to respect and to ensure to all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction the rights recognized in the present Covenant, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Article 6(2): In countries which have not abolished the death penalty, sentence of death may be imposed only for the most serious crimes in accordance with the law in force at the time of the commission of the crime and not contrary to the provisions of the present Covenant and to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. This penalty can only be carried out pursuant to a final judgment rendered by a competent court.

Article 9: Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention. No one shall be deprived of his liberty except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedure as are established by law.

Article 17: No one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honour and reputation.

Article 26: All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Nevertheless, in Pakistan, there are laws that criminalize homosexuality and increase the vulnerability of the transgender persons to accuse them for same sex relation. Despite of this, article 3 of the UDHR, and article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights consider that death penalty due to same sex relation is against the right of life (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner 2012, 28). Within the context of above law, the death punishment of transgender based on the homosexual relations is against the right to life.

At an event celebrating sexual orientation and honoring the Human Rights Day (10 December 2010), UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon emphasized the following: “Together, we look for the repeal of laws that criminalize homosexuality, that allow discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity that encourage violence” (Ki-moon 2010). Ban’s assertion follows a Special Rapporteur (2002) observation on prejudice against sexual minorities:

Continuing prejudice against members of sexual minorities and, especially, the criminalization of matters of sexual orientation increase the social stigmatization of these persons. This in turn makes them more vulnerable to violence and human rights abuses, including death threats and violations of the right to life, which are often committed in a climate of impunity. The Special Rapporteur further notes that the often tendentious media coverage of this subject further contributes to creating an atmosphere of impunity and indifference in relation to crimes committed against members of sexual minorities. (UN General Assembly fifty-seventh session 2002, para 37)

At this point, the question arises, what kind of situation would be prevailing in those countries where the state is not taking proactive measures to repeal discriminatory law towards same sex or transgender persons? To answer this question, I can argue that the criminalization of homosexuality increases stigmatization against members of sexual minorities, including the transgender community. Literature produced about transgender people of South Asia indicates that transgender people have sexual inclination towards males. However, in Pakistan and India, homosexual relationships are illegal under section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. This criminalization infringes on the transgender person’s freedom and status of equality. While the Human Rights Committee requires member states to repeal laws that prohibits homosexuality.

8.1. [Status of Pakistan toward the Decriminalization of Homosexuality](#)

Pakistan is among the few countries where sharia (Islamic law) exists parallel to secular law. Both legal systems stipulate that any sexual relationship other than the one of a heterosexual

marriage is an offense and bears penalty. In such cases, sharia and secular law can be applied separately or jointly.

With regard to homosexuality, secular law takes inspiration from the 1860 Indian Penal Code (IPC), section 377. While this order does not specifically criminalize same-sex relationships, it does interpret homosexual actions as against the “order of nature” (Landinfo 2013). The law states “Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which shall not be less than two years nor more than ten years, and shall also be liable to fine” (Indian Penal Code 1860).

As a Muslim country practicing sharia, Pakistan can be difficult for the transgender person. The Era of Zia ul Haq 1977-1988 is known for introducing sharia laws that strengthen and justify normative practices of Islam. For example, the Hudood Ordinances of the late 1970s banned the practice of *Zina*³⁵ as a violation of the Koran and Islamic legal traditions; as such, violators could be legally stoned to death (Landinfo 2014). IGLHRC (2014) and the UK Home Office (2014, 5) both pinpoint Hudood as a source of criminalizing same-sex relationships and denying rights to sexual and gender minorities. However, Landinfo (2013) disagrees with IGLHRC’s (2014) interpretation. IGLHRC (2014) stated that capital punishment of Hudood law can be imposed on the people of same sex relation, while Landinfo (2013) does not consider the Hudood law applicable to homosexual relationships for three reasons: First, it applies to unmarried people. Second, it applies to those who are not married to each other. Third, they may be from different gender as if one should be male and other should be female. Thus, according to Landinfo (2013), homosexual relationships are not covered by this law. The Hudood law states, “A man and a woman are said to commit ‘Zina’ if they wilfully have sexual intercourse without being validly married to each other” (Zina Hudood Ordinance 1979).

The case of Shumail provide an interesting insight into this. Shumail, who went through re-assignment gender surgery, and biologically is a male now married a girl. Initially, the case came into the court as a matter of forced marriage, as the father of the girl lodged a petition in the

³⁵ Zina refers to a sexual contact or an act between male and female who are not in a marriage contract. The punishment of zina is the same for male and female, means for unmarried people: 100 lashes, while for married people it is death stoning (Hosseini 2010)

court that his daughter was kidnapped and forced into the marriage by Shumail. The court decided in favor of the couple. However, when the same case was brought into the notice of High Court, the judges doubting the gender of Shumail and ordered a medical examination. Although medical report confirmed the gender re-assignment surgery, and Shumail now as a male person, the judges did not accept the report. They sentenced the couple for a three years imprisonment on account of homosexual marriage. Later, the couple challenged the High Court decision in the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court order in favor of the couple as Shumail went through gender reassignment surgery and is a male now. Hence, they cannot be punished under homosexual marriage law (IGLHRC 2008).

In the context of this case, IGLHRC (2008) asserted that if the Lahore court did not accept Shumail's gender identity, then it would be penalized. Additionally, Pakistan's SC recommended the following measures: (a) a repeal of section 377, and (b) the legal acceptance of gender-nonconforming identities, regardless of whether or not the individual in question had undergone gender reassignment (IGLHRC 2008). Nevertheless, unlike Shumail, most transgender persons in Pakistan are male to female, and the majority among them do not undergo gender reassignment surgery. Thus, how does the sexual orientation of these individuals fit into the context of the current legal situation? Under the current situation, these individuals would need to undergo gender reassignment surgery. Otherwise, they would be perceived as same-sex couple and would be vulnerable for the legal punishment. The SC legitimizes the third gender. However, little is said about sexual orientation. This is a complication in the legal system that ultimately elicits structural obstacles for gender-variant people of non-heterosexual orientations.

Thus, with reference to the criminalization of homosexuality, consensual sex and the death penalty are clear violations of international HR treaties. Sociocultural and religious norms cannot provide a basis for criminal acts against the transgender community. Additionally, it is necessary to eliminate vague language from the laws that criminalize homosexuality like against the order of nature, which is interpreted and applied upon same sex relations. Hence, it is the state's responsibility to safeguard the transgender community and ensure its members' fundamental rights.

9. The Prohibition of Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) assert that discrimination is not acceptable for anyone including transgender persons. Additionally, the following articles require states to respect and implement these treaties in their respective territories.

Box 5 Rights regarding Discrimination

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

Article 2: Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status.

Article 7: All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

Article 2(1): Each State Party to the present Covenant undertakes to respect and to ensure to all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction the rights recognized in the present Covenant, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Article 26: All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)

Article 2: The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to guarantee that the rights enunciated in the present Covenant will be exercised without discrimination of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

Article 2: States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW 1979) defines the term “discrimination” in the context of women’s rights: “Any

distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field” (The International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women 1979).

Likewise, International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965) classifies race discrimination in the following words: “Discrimination as any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, descent or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on the equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life” (International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination 1965). International law further characterizes discrimination as follows:

Discrimination as any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference or other differential treatment that is directly or indirectly based on a prohibited ground of discrimination and that has the intention or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of rights guaranteed under international law. (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner 2012, 40)

Society is a composite of different groups that can be organized by socioeconomic status, political affiliation, religious affiliation, race, color, sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation. No person belonging to any of these groups may be subjected to discrimination. Similarly, all people must be ensured universal basic rights, and a dominant social group may not limit or restrict the rights of a minority group. It is the state’s responsibility to ensure these rights for everyone. Sociocultural and religious norms are not accepted as reasons to discriminate.

Many transgender persons have sexual identities that counter the dominant orientation of heterosexuality. The articles in Box 5 (except article 7 of the UDHR) employ the phrase “other status.” The phrase’s open-endedness allows it to cover all sexual orientations, sexual identities and gender roles, even those outside of the dominant narrative (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner 2012). Despite UN initiatives, the LGBT community still faces

social, cultural, economic, and educational obstacles.³⁶ Some LGBT individuals are even refused healthcare services (Grant et al. 2010, 5).

9.1. Transgender People and Discrimination in Pakistan

Article 25 of Pakistan’s constitution states, “All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law” (Constitution of Pakistan 1973). Articles 26 and 27 similarly ensure that access to employment and public places cannot be denied (Constitution of Pakistan 1973). The constitution assures equal rights and protection for all citizens of Pakistan without discrimination (Iftikhar 2012), and this non-discrimination extends to the country’s transgender community. Nevertheless, until there is an article in the constitution that specifically offers protection to all sexual orientations and gender identities, discrimination against the community will continue. Pakistan’s legal system does not adequately protect the LGBT community (United States Department of State 2013, 57), and as such, structural discrimination against transgender persons is excessively practiced in private spheres (United States Department of State 2013). Moreover, homophobia is socially widespread, which exacerbates discrimination in public spaces (United Kingdom Home Office 2014, 5). Transgender persons in Pakistan are vulnerable to discrimination from state as well as non-state actors: the former limits access to education and healthcare, while the latter restricts housing access and property inheritance (United States Department of State 2014, 50).

Pakistan’s constitution fails to adequately protect its transgender community, even though it is required to do so because it has ratified all relevant UN treaties. To that end, a comprehensive new senate bill “Transgender Person (Protection of Rights) Bill 2017” will ensure the community’s access to education, employment, healthcare, accommodations, public services, transportation, and private property – if it passes. The bill also prohibits transgender discrimination and harassment (The Senate of Pakistan 2017).

³⁶ People of gender-variant and non-heterosexual identities continue to experience discrimination and exclusion across Europe (Takács 2006, 6). In Thailand, Indonesia, Mongolia, and the Philippines, people of gender-variant and non-heterosexual identities face discrimination in the health, education, and employment sectors. If a transgender person does find employment, s/he will likely face discrimination in her or his field (UNDP and USAID 2014b; UNDP and USAID 2014d; UNDP and USAID 2014f; UNDP and USAID 2014g).

10. The Transgender Person’s Right to Association, Peaceful Assembly and Freedom of Expression

The following articles (see Box 6) from the UDHR (1948) and the ICCPR (1966) clearly stipulate that everyone has the right to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association. The ICCPR (1966) further elaborates the “freedom of expression” as the right to search, obtain, and communicate information and ideas of any kind, while the “freedom of association” ensures the right to build platforms for collective expression. For the transgender community, this collective expression includes the promotion, pursuit, and defense of common interests (see also: United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner 2012, 55). This expression augments the community’s visibility in the greater social sphere. Violating these freedoms means violating UN treaties.

Box 6 The Right to Peaceful Assembly

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

Article 19: Everyone has the right to freedom of thought and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas.

Article 20(1): Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

Article 19(2): Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.

Article 21: The right of peaceful assembly shall be recognized. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order, the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

Article 22(1): Everyone shall have the right to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

The international transgender community experiences continued obstructions of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.³⁷ To combat these discriminations, the UN Humans Rights Committee holds states accountable in ensuring the community these rights.³⁸

10.1. Situation of Pakistan towards Freedom of Assembly and Association

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (1973) guarantees all citizens the right to freedom of assembly and association, but political divides and religious extremism usually restrict these rights in practice. For example, authorities in some districts have banned public gatherings of more than five people without police permission, while the national government has increased its control over NGOs activities and funding sources (United States Department of State 2014, 26). Likewise, in 2013, the Pakistan Telecom Authority (PTA) blocked an online platform for sexually- and gender-variant (LGBT) people. It was the country's first online networking platform for the LGBT community (United States Department of State 2014, 50).

In 2011, Islamabad held its first LGBT Pride parade with the help of the US embassy. A counter-protest was organized by the Jamat-i-Islami (JI) political party, which claimed the parade was “cultural terrorism” against Islam and Pakistan. Quoting section 377, JI leaders stated that there were no constitutional provisions for sexually- and gender-variant people. They furthermore emphasized that homosexuality was prohibited by sharia. According to JI, people of non-dominant sexual orientations and gender identities were “social garbage” and unworthy Muslims and Pakistanis (BBC 2011).

In the transgender community, birthdays are important and festive milestones. A birthday celebration functions both as a source of community income as well as an opportunity for community members to socialize across a larger network. To hold a big party, event planners are

³⁷ Transgender discrimination often occurs against the rights to expression and peaceful assembly; state authorities around the world fail to provide adequate protection of these freedoms (ILGA - Europe 2013, 90). In 2011, Malaysian police banned the fourth *Seksualiti Merdeka* festival of “sexual diversity” (International Commission of Jurist 2012, 3). According to the same report, authorities in Belarus, Croatia, Moldova, Nigeria, Russia, Serbia and Ukraine similarly banned or imposed violations on LGBT celebrations between 2010 and 2011 (International Commission of Jurist, 2012).

³⁸ The UN Human Rights Committee asserts that it is against human rights values to restrict the expression of transgender persons. A given state must protect a transgender person's right to expression; moreover, the state is prohibited from banning transgender advocacy organizations (Human Rights Committee Ninety-seventh session 2009, 12; International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission 2007).

required to obtain prior legal permission from local authorities, something that is not expected of cisgender people. Moreover, some respondents of this study reported that last-minute permission revocations were not uncommon. These cancellations resulted not only in a loss of money for party hosts, but also elicited anger and depression throughout the community (field interview data 2015).

The situation for transgender people worsens in the light of Islamic values and sharia regulations. In Pakistan, there is an overarching belief that the tenets of Islam are not open to contradiction, and by extension, the rights of non-heterosexual and gender-variant people are not a political priority (International Humanist and Ethical Union 2008, cited in Refugee Review Tribunal Australia, 2009). However, a new bill currently under review in the senate of Pakistan may change that – if it passes. The bill proposes that the as per the rights given in the constitution of Pakistan article 16, the right for freedom of assembly should be ensured for transgender persons. Conversely, this same law also allows administrative authorities to rescind this right if it is in the public's interest to do so (The Senate of Pakistan 2017). That said, it is beyond the scope of the current research to investigate the outcome of this bill. As of this writing (February 2, 2018), it has not yet acquired senate approval.

11. Rationalizing the Research

In Pakistan, hijra people became the focus of public attention with the rise of HIV/AIDS. Since that time, NGOs and development sectors have executed a number of interventions to reduce the transgender community's vulnerability to the virus. Likewise, scholarly literature has attempted to understand the community's attitude and knowledge of STDs as well as its relationship to sexual behavior (Abdullah et al. 2012; Akhtar et al. 2012; Collumbien et al. 2009; Saddique et al. 2011; World Health Organization 2015; Zulfiqar 2015).

A significant shift has emerged in hijra-centered research during the last decade, including increasing interests in hijra community culture and hijra identity (Fatima 2013; Haider 2008; Jami 2005), prevalent myths and their association with the community (Abbas and Pir 2016), the growing presence of hijra people in the media (Pamment 2010), the factors affecting identity disclosure (Saeed, Mughal and Farooq 2017), and even the public's attitude toward gender-variant people (Jami and Kamal 2015). Likewise, since the SC's 2009 ruling, researchers have attempted to contextualize sexuality within the hijra community through the lenses of law and human rights

that were inherited by Pakistan from the British and were introduced during Zia's Era (Human Dignity Trust 2015; Landinfo 2013; Refugee Review Tribunal Australia 2009; S. Khan 2017).

In the last three years, two particular studies have shed additional light on the hijra community subculture by investigating the community's identity politics in the context of social activism, discussing the relationship between the legal and self-regulated hijra identities, exploring the impact of the legal identity upon individual lives, and examining the experiences of gender-variant persons in informal institutions (F. Khan 2014a; Nisar 2016). Both studies were based on ethnographic data derived from extensive fieldwork experiences. Additionally, the Aurat Foundation (2016) and Alizai et al. (2016) assert that hijra community members are still subject to discrimination in Pakistan. Indeed, all of the aforementioned studies confirm that transgender people remain marginalized and prevented from accessing basic human rights (Alizai et al. 2016; Aurat Foundation 2016).

Transgender people in South Asia continue to be subjects of academic inquiry, particularly in the contexts of the hijra identity, hijra community culture, social exclusion, legal status, and marginality. This study is aligned with the current debate of the transgender identity in Pakistan and discusses the discrimination, marginality, and violence imposed upon the community. However, this study deviates from other research accounts to explore the social processes that create a transgender person's marginality in mainstream society as well as within the hijra community itself. This study furthermore indicates that gender-variant people continue to be outcasted in greater Pakistani society, while the hijra community systematically transforms an individual's identity to suit the economic needs of the guru. Hence, joining the hijra community may perpetuate a transgender person's marginality in new ways. This research extensively documents the childhood and adulthood experiences of gender-variant persons before and after adopting the hijra identity. This research also links global human rights practices (particularly those derived from UN human rights treaties) to the Government of Pakistan's responsibility to protect, safeguard, and decriminalize the transgender identity. Lastly, the findings of this research may be employed to formulate future policies addressing the needs of the transgender community, which may in turn reduce its vulnerability and increase its social inclusion.

Chapter 2: Research Methodology

I start this chapter with a number of inquiries to explain my ontological and epistemological positions as well as my preferred methodologies for addressing the main question of this research: *What are the lifeways of the hijra community and how do hijra people face human rights violations in their daily life activities?*

Guba and Lincoln (1994) stated that a researcher interested in ontological questions should explore the “form and nature of reality and what...can be known about it.” Epistemologically, he/she must address “the nature of the relationship between the knower or would be knower and what can be known,” while the methodological angle follows how “the inquirer (would be knower) go[es] about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known” (Guba and Lincoln 1994, 108). To examine these issues, the researcher’s perspective should align to either an objectivist or a subjectivist view (also known as positivist or constructivist, respectively). In the following pages, I demonstrate my ontological and epistemological stance as well as my preferred methodology for exploring the hijra community, its culture, and the human rights violations its members face.

2.1. Setting the Ontological Position: What Constitutes a Reality?

To determine my ontological position in the context of this study, I go back to my first personal encounter with hijras (see chapter one). Through this and other childhood experiences, I developed an *image of hijra persons* based on their appearance, actions, and roles. In other words, because I recognized their feminine attire and gender representation as markers of womanhood, I perceived hijras as women during my early experiences with them. For me, this image remained real until it was challenged.

I am reminded of Keller’s (2014) basic question: “What is the relationship between our representation, i.e. images of reality, we create and share with others, and reality itself?” (Keller 2014, 35). My reality was that hijras were women, but my mother categorically denied this claim when I shared it with her. In other words, my version of reality was falsified because it contradicted my mother’s version of reality, which led me to the “classic philosophical question [of] whether there is a world outside our fantasy and to what extent it is recognizable” (Keller 2014, 35). My interpretation was based on my social experiences in the world and my understanding of the

feminine gender, even though the latter quality meant something entirely different to my mother. The difference in our respective interpretations owed to our variations in knowledge, experiences, and socialization.

Ontology is the study of being (Gray 2013, 19); in the social sciences, it deals with the nature of social entities (Bryman 2012, 32). It has two perspectives on reality: the first sees *reality* as independent of personal experiences and human consciousness and the second sees *reality* fall within our consciousness and come into existence through experiences. In other words, the field of ontology asks if reality exists independently of mind or if we construct the world from our thoughts (Levers 2013). These two positions are referred to as objectivism and constructionism, respectively.

With the assumption that reality is independent of the human mind, we enter the domain of positivism, take the position of realism, and epistemologically follow the perspective of an objectivist. However, if we state that reality exists imperfectly, then we discover that its different versions may be similar but not exactly identical. The proponents of this position ascribe to post-positivism and epistemologically follow a modified dualistic/objectivist position. Lastly, constructivist relativism ontologically assumes multiple realities that are liable to change and are products of the human mind. Epistemologically, constructivists take a subjective position. They believe that knowledge is created through the interaction of investigator and respondents (Guba and Lincoln 1994).

Here, the question arises whether social phenomena are *objective entities* with realities independent of social actors or if they are *constructed* through social interactions and meaning making process. This ontological question can be better understood through an example of organization and culture. An organization (based on rules, regulation, procedures, and hierarchical structure) is a tangible reality that is external to the social actors occupying it. It presents a social order to which individuals learn and conform through following rules and regulations. The same applies to culture: it is a set of shared values and customs, rules, regulations, and structure. Like an organization, it is independent of social actors, though they conform to its prescribed values. Hence, in the objectivist perspective social reality is external to the social actors and is tangible characteristics of an object (Bryman 2012, 32-33). However, constructionist view the reality differently. According to the followers of the constructionism, the order of the organization and

culture is based on the general understanding of the actors, which is negotiated through the social interaction. It means order is not pre-given; it works based on understandings and social order is an outcome of the mutually agreed upon pattern of behavior. So, social order has potential to remain in constant state of change due to diversity of the interaction on various subject matters (Bryman 2012, 33).

To contextualize the above ontological perspective – objectivist and constructionism - I revisit my first encounter with hijras. At the time, I perceived hijras as women, even though they are not. At this point, the hijra identity was beyond my personal experiences and consciousness. From the positivist perspective, reality is apprehend able, which is ontologically referred to as naïve realism (Guba and Lincoln 1994, 109). Contrarily, a reality based on subjective perspectives falls into the domain of relativism (Guba and Lincoln 1994, 109).

In my childhood example, my mother’s version of reality was that hijras “are not women.” According to relativist ontology, her version is not perfect or absolute. My childhood interpretation of hijras, rooted in my own experiences in the social world, was likewise a product of relativist ontology. In the philosophy of relativism, reality can be based on multiple interpretation and experiences (Levers 2013) and influenced by many contexts (Mills, Bonner and Francis 2006, 26). However, multiple hijra identities with reference to context and social understanding represent multiple construction and it is subject matter of constructionism. If this is the case of constructionism, then how do we approach authentic knowledge? What is systematically authentic knowledge? Addressing these questions leads us to epistemology.

2.2. [Stating the Epistemological Perspective: Making Sense of the World](#)

Epistemology is the study of knowledge. It is concerned with what sort of knowledge is acceptable (Bryman 2012, 27) and how a subject makes meaningful sense of the world (Levers 2013). In other words, epistemology is about “how we know what we know” (Crotty 1998, 8). Objective epistemology advocates that meaning and meaningful reality exist independently of human consciousness or the subjective perspective (Crotty 1998, 8). Objectivism is closely related to the theoretical perspectives of positivism (Gray 2013, 20) and post-positivism (Crotty 1998, 9). Levers (2012) combined objective epistemology with critical realist ontology and stated, “[O]bjects are believed to embody essences that are above and beyond the influence of humans,

and these essences are discoverable through impartial observations” (Levers 2013, 2). In this way, knowledge would be universally applicable because the essence of an object does not change; in fact, it is free from external interpretation or factors (Levers 2013).

Constructionism rejects the claim of objective reality. Constructivists believe that through interactions, people construct truth and/or meaning and that these elements are outcomes of the mind. In other words, there is no truth waiting for us to discover it; instead, it is perpetually constructed. This position allows the same phenomenon to be interpreted by different perspectives. Hence, subject and object work together in creating meaning (Crotty 1998, 9) and elicit multiple realities of the social world that can be contradictory but still valid (Gray 2013, 20).

Subjectivism denies the claim of constructionism. For subjectivists, meaning is not based on the construction of the subject’s and the object’s knowledge. Instead, the subject imposes meaning upon the object (Gray 2013, 20; Crotty 1998, 9). Subjectivism additionally advocates that knowledge is filtered through the lenses of gender, language, race ethnicity, and social class (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 21 cited in Levers 2013, 2).

For the purpose of this research, I associate my ontological position as relativist and my epistemological position as subjectivist; I also follow the constructivist mode of inquiry. I take these positions because I adhere to the following, “[R]ealities are apprehend-able in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature...and dependent for their groups holding the constructions. Constructions are not more or less “true,” in any absolute sense but simply more or less informed” (Guba and Lincoln 1994, 116-117).

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), constructive relativism follows the assumption that realities are multiple and sometimes conflict with one other. These realities are the products of human intellect and are changeable if the constructors of the realities are more informed. Epistemology is the belief that knowledge is created through the interaction of investigator and respondents (Guba and Lincoln 1994, 111). Thus, in the case of whether or not hijras are women, epistemology asks who the hijras are, if they have both attributes – masculine and feminine - of the identity, and what the identity would be in the future. In short, because I maintain that social understanding and socially-constructed knowledge have multiple manifestations, I epistemologically consider my position subjectivist and believe that reality is constructed.

To address how we make sense of reality, we need to have a theoretical background. “Theoretical perspective provide a philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria” (Crotty 1998, 3). As an ontological constructivist and an epistemological subjectivist, I follow symbolic interactionism as a theoretical perspective and believe that reality is constructed through social interaction, interpretation, and shared meaning-making process. Moreover, the epistemological basis of symbolic interactionism is deeply rooted in constructionism (Crotty 1998), and consistency in exploring social realities is necessary for quality research practices.

2.3. Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism evolved during the mid-twentieth century. This theoretical perspective examines how individuals create a sense of society through repeated meaningful interactions (Jeon 2004, 251). It follows a bottom-up approach (Carter and Fuller 2015, 1) and allows a researcher to connect directly with the empirical world, examine human interactions within the studied world, and explore human behavior through the meanings people give to their actions (Lal and Suto 2012).

Symbolic interactionism argues that people’s interactions revolve around their interpretation of symbols and the meanings they assign them. The meaning-making process is further followed by people’s actions, which are based on the nature of the meaning (Bryman 2012, 31). Therefore, the aim of the symbolic interactionist is to unfold the process of interpretation, which occur between social actors³⁹ (Bryman 2012, 31).

Mead (1934) provided a basis for developing symbolic interaction as a new theoretical perspective. He provided three important concepts – mind, self, and society – and argued that the mind helps individuals to create and transform the self and society (Mead 1934). Yet it was Blumer (1969) who coined the phrase “symbolic interaction” (Bryman 2012, 31). Based on the views of Mead (Tarr 1987, 72), Blumer developed three premises of symbolic interactionism: meaning, language (as a symbol and a source for debating meanings), and thinking (Aksana et. al 2009).

³⁹ Symbolic interactionism deals with language, symbols, interrelationships, communication, and community. Through the subjective perspective, the symbolic interactionist explores how people develop their perceptions, attitudes, values, and understandings of the world through interactions with one other (Crotty 1998, 7-8; Carter and Fuller 2015, 1).

These premises are associated with other concepts such as social interaction, human society, the actor, the object, the action, and the interconnection among actions (Jeon 2004, 251). These premises also assert that a person's actions toward an object are based on the meanings that other objects have for it. The meanings originate from the social interactions that occur within a particular sociocultural context. The interpretation process is responsible for the creation and recreation of meaning during interactions with others⁴⁰ (Blumer 1969; Carter and Fuller 2015; Tarr 1987, 72; Aksana et al. 2009, 903). In the context of examining meaning, this theoretical perspective tries to answer the following question: "Which symbols and meanings emerge from the interaction between people?"(Aksana et al. 2009, 902).

In symbolic interactionism, the object can be one of three types: social (people), physical (things), and abstract (ideas) (Blumer 1969 cited in Tarr 1987, 72-73). It is social actors who are responsible for giving meaning to these objects (Aksana, et al. 2009, 903). In addition to interpretations based on objects, researchers also interpret scientific literature (Bryman 2012, 31). In the process of interpretation, it is important for the actor to identify the object with which he/she is interacting so that he/she can process the meaning of the object. The interpretation stage comes later, during situational context (Tarr 1987, 73).

Symbolic interactionism follows three main schools of thought: the Chicago School, the Lawa School, and the Indiana School. The proponents of these schools were Herbert Blumer, Manfort Kuhn, and Scheldon Stryker, respectively. Blumer's perspective of symbolic interactionism focused on actors, who constantly create and recreate experiences from one interaction to the next. According to Blumer (1969), society is a continuous process and not a structure. Additionally, social institutions are habits that depend on the specific situations common to the actors involved. He further asserted that meaning is inter-subjected, perceived, and continuously reinterpreted among individuals (Blumer 1969). Behavior is a characteristic reaction to an interpretation and cannot be defined or predicted because every actor has his or her own interpretations and responses. Indeed, to understand behavior, we need to examine the processes an actor uses to interpret and respond to an interactive situation. In other words, an individual is a

⁴⁰ "1) Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them (p.2) 2) The meaning of a thing for a person grows out of the ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the thing. Their actions operate to define the thing for the person (p. 4). 3) These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the thing he encounters (p. 2)" (Blumer 1969 cited in Tarr 1987, 72; Aksana, et al. 2009, 903).

window to understanding social behavior from the perspective of the individual who perceives it (Carter and Fuller 2015, 1-3).

Kuhn and others associated with the Lawa School followed Mead's ideas but deviated from the methodological position of Blumer. They instead believed that quantitative methods of inquiry can provide a systematic testing of Mead's assumptions. Additionally, they saw behavior as purposive and socially constructed (Carter and Fuller 2015, 4).

Stryker posed the idea that meaning and interaction are associated with the social structure, while Mead and Blumer asserted that meaning and self are fluid. Nevertheless, Stryker advocated that role-taking was a structural aspect of interaction emerging from the influences of networks or relationship patterns at various levels of the social structure. These roles were social expectations derived from positions in the social structure that varied according to sociocultural context. Per the normative expectations and previous experiences associated with a given social position, one can assess and predict future behaviors in different social categories⁴¹ (Carter and Fuller 2015, 4).

Applying a symbolic interactionist perspective to the hijra community leads to multiple questions. How do hijra people create a sense of society through interactions, give meaning to actions, and interpret those meanings? How do these meaning-making processes differ from situation to situation and context to context? How do hijra people as social actors interact with social objects – either people, things, or ideas and give them meaning?

When I zoom out to examine the perceptions that hijra people might have about themselves and society, then I believe that meaning-making processes are not only based on interactions (mainly Blumer's idea) but also have structural aspects (Stryker's idea). Differently positioned social objects in the societal structure acquire various types of knowledge that reflect the normative practices shaping and reshaping interactions and perceptions. Hence, the interactions carried out between hijras and mainstream society members are shaped by the positions that the respective actors hold. The situation, context, and nature of these interactions influence the meaning-making process and develop the perceptions and identities of other actors. Therefore, I am keen to pay due

⁴¹ In society during interaction, individuals identify themselves and other with reference to social structure. This interaction revolve around the expectation that they learn from the socialization and become part of the self and conformation of this expected behavior become part of the identity. Through this way, approaching the interaction of the people is an attempt to reduce the gap between macro and micro level gap in the studies, which deals with the behavior of humans (Carter and Fuller 2015, 4).

attention to the process of interaction and its elements of interpretation, meaning-making, and structure, all of which outline normative expectations for human behavior. Moreover, because I believe that realities are constructed and based on subjective perspectives, I choose constructionist grounded theory to explore the answers to this research study.

2.4. Grounded Theory

The emergence of grounded theory (GT) dates back to 1967 and is credited to Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. By 1990, however, each founder had developed his own unique school of thought: Glaserian GT espouses a positivist position while Straussian GT adopts a post-positivist approach (Charmaz 2006, 168; Higginbottom and Lauridsen 2014, 8). Glaser's GT has roots in critical-realism, and its followers strive for objectivity. The Straussian school, on the other hand, was influenced by symbolic interactionism and thus adheres to the state of multiple realities per the constructionist paradigm (Mills et al 2006; Charmaz 2006, 169). Charmaz (2006) developed the constructionist GT approach after criticizing earlier versions for their positivistic assumptions of "(1) an external reality, (2) an objective authoritative observer *positions*, (3) a quest for generalizations, and (4) a treatment of data as given without acknowledging the participation and standpoints of the researcher in shaping these data" (Charmaz 2006, 168, emphasis added).

While the three GT schools share certain fundamentals, they also deviate from one another in some respects. This is particularly true in their approaches to coding procedures, ontology and epistemology, and use of literature (Kenny and Fourie 2015, 1272). I follow Charmaz's (2006) constructivist grounded theory as I believe that realities are constructed through interactions and meaning-making processes are based on subjective perspectives.

2.4.1. Constructivist Grounded Theory

According to Charmaz (2008), GT denotes two things: it is a research product as well as an analysis method for exploring social phenomena. The method starts with an inductive approach during data collection/analysis and then leads to the development of a middle-range theory (Charmaz 2008, 397). Methodologically, constructivist GT is interpretive in nature (Gardner, Fedoruk and McCutcheon 2013).

Charmaz's (2008) constructivist GT advocates examining three phenomena: (a) the relativity of the researcher's perspectives, positions, practices, and situation, (b) the researcher's reflexivity, and (c) the depictions of social constructions in the studied world. Ontologically and epistemologically, Charmaz is consistent with the social constructionist paradigm and describes her position as that of a relativist⁴² looking for an interpretive mode of inquiry. She considers space, time, and context to be matters that influence the process of interpretation from the standpoint of the researcher and the research participants (Charmaz 2006, 168-169). To the constructivist, *truth* is relative to individuals and communities (Cupchik 2001).

In Charmaz's version of GT, actions are products of socially created situations and arise from the social structure (combining structuralism and the interactionist perspective of symbolic interactionism). The constructivist grounded theorist attempts to answer questions of *what* and *how*; moreover, dealing with data and their theoretical samplings leads to additional questions of *why* (Charmaz 2008, 397-398; Charmaz 2012, 4). Charmaz (2006, 2008) does not see the researcher as separate from the research. She argues that researchers make subjective interpretations of the acquired data. In other words, the researcher's ideas are influenced by privilege, perspective, geographical position, and interactions⁴³ (Charmaz 2006; Charmaz 2008, 402). Hence, constructivist GT sees reality as constructed under certain conditions and potentially multiple in number (Charmaz 2006, 168; Charmaz 2008, 402). The approach enhances the understanding of "how people negotiate and manipulate social structures; how a shared reality is created and how meaning is developed through the social interactions with others within defined context" (Gardner, Fedoruk and McCutcheon 2013, 67).

GT is primarily a method of analysis. Charmaz (2012) asserted that codes are conceptual tools for performing the following functions: (a) to create fragmentation in the data and to treat those fragments separately, (b) to explain social processes within the data and (c) to compare data with data. The process starts with coding and moves toward memo writing (or writing extended notes) to discuss and further analyze codes. Later, the sorting/grouping of codes leads to the *tentative* theoretical categorization of data, which is followed by an *emerging* theoretical

⁴² To the constructivists, truth is relative to individuals and communities (Cupchik 2001).

⁴³ Moreover, rather than assume that theory emerges from data, proponents of constructivist GT argue that researchers construct categories based on interpretive understandings of the studied social phenomenon with reference to situation and context of happening (Charmaz 2008, 402).

categorization (Charmaz 2006). This theoretical categorization is central to the data analysis and is associated with theoretical sampling. This means that one should collect data to fill out the properties of a tentative category until the category reaches a point of saturation. Theoretical sampling pushes a researcher to ask more specific and focused questions. It can also employ both inductive and deductive reasoning methods to generate a hypothesis as well as a test (Charmaz 2012, 4, 11). Ultimately, this process of exploration digs out prevalent social processes and constructs theoretical analyses for them (Charmaz 2006).

Methodologically, this study followed Charmaz's GT, which is aligned with my own ontological and epistemological positions. This methodology traces its roots to symbolic interactionism while epistemologically following a subjective perspective and ontologically following a constructivist perspective.

The next section elaborates the research methods used in this study; however, each method had its own theoretical assumptions. As such, I strived for consistency in the selection of research methods with reference to philosophical assumptions (see also Lal and Suto 2012). Before entering the field, I decided I would combine biographic interviews, thick descriptions, and observations with Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory (CGT) to explore the lives of hijra people. However, during data collection and analysis, the need for additional methodologies emerged specifically expert interviews and focus group discussions.

2.4.2. Thick Descriptions in Interviews and Observations

Throughout data collection and analysis, I applied the "thick description" method to the interview process. This method captures detailed information by focusing on context, situation, the nature of the interaction, the roles of the actors, and emotions. The same principle was applied to observations, which were either derived from the *dera* – the residence of hijra people – or in public places, where the focus was on the greater public's attitude toward hijra peoples. I also accompanied hijra people to dance functions and on begging outings. Throughout the process of observation, I was keen to document the details, context, and emotions of each social interaction. Geertz (1973) characterized the thick description as such: what the researcher writes is a construction of his or her interpretation of others, while what others share is a construction of their experiences (Geertz 1973). Nevertheless, one cannot understand the complete essence of an

interpretation without context. Denzin (1989) maintained that while there were eleven types of thick description, a researcher could only capture five at a time: biographical, historical, situational, relational and interactional (Denzin 1989). Ponterotto (2006) operationalized the thick description based on its five central components:

Thick description refers to the researcher's task of both describing and interpreting observed social action (and behavior) within its particular context. The context can be within a smaller unit (such as a couple, a family, a work environment) or within a larger unit (such as one's village, a community, or general culture). Thick description accurately describes observed social actions and assigns purpose and intentionality to these actions, by way of the researcher's understanding and clear description of the context under which the social actions took place. Thick description captures the thoughts and feelings of participants as well as the often complex web of relationships among them. Thick description leads to thick interpretation, which in turns leads to thick meaning of the research findings for the researchers and participants themselves, and for the report's intended readership. Thick meaning of findings leads readers to a sense of verisimilitude, wherein they can cognitively and emotively "place" themselves within the research context. (Ponterotto 2006, 543)

The application of Denzin's thick description typologies helped me illustrate who the hijra people were, how their interactions shaped their behavior, what the identity's historical status has been, and how the feminine gender of a male-bodied person is a sign of inferiority in a patriarchal and masculine heteronormative society. I applied the thick description to biographic interviews as well, inquiring into a given respondent's interactions with family members, friends, and relatives before adopting the hijra identity. I also inquired into how they perceived and reacted upon feminine gender performances. For all inquiries, I specifically focused on the nature and context of interactions. I also attempted to capture the emotional reactions of respondents during interactions with various groups of people.

2.4.3. Biographical Interviews

The self-representation of an individual life is not a new phenomenon; however, it took time to establish the practice as a research method. Since its early use by cultural science, the biographic research method has brought a significant shift to exploring the sociocultural aspects of human life (Brian 2002, 3-4). The development of biographical research has its roots in the interpretive research paradigm; this method later flourished in Germany in connection to symbolic interactionism, hermeneutics, and pragmatism (Apitzsch and Siouti 2007). That said, this method

has historically been associated with the Chicago school of thought (Bornat 2008, 348) same as the symbolic interaction school of thought.

All three methods of inquiry in biographic research – that is, interpretive analysis, oral history, and narrative analysis – perceive the interview as a social interaction based on reflexivity. The common ground of these approaches are subjectivity and meaning-making. Specifically, the interpretive method aligns with psychoanalytical interpretations of meaning-making, while the narrative analysis uses socio-lingual elements as a basis for analysis. Oral history, on the other hand, navigates both of these domains. All three of these methods are associated with one other based on inquiry, i.e., the individual as the focus of attention. This effort endeavors to explain social change over the course of time by studying social relations and the social structure. Through this lens, a person who narrates a story not only describes past events but also provides a window through which a researcher can understand conditions of gender, time, age, relationships, and other social concepts (Bornat 2008, 348-352). A biography is a construction based on social realities and subjectivities of the experienced world⁴⁴ (Apitzsch and Siouti. 2007, 5). The following illustrates the main concern of a biography:

[H]ow individual accounts of life experience can be understood within the contemporary cultural and structural settings and is thereby helping to chart the major societal changes that are underway, but not merely at some broad social level. Biographical research has the important merit of aiding the task of understanding major social shifts, by including how new experiences are interpreted by individuals within families, small groups and institutions. (Brian 2002, 5)

As a research methodology, biographies share certain principles with grounded theory, such as “theoretical sampling, contrastive comparison and theoretical saturation, in the methodological framework of empirical framework for empirical biographical studies” (Apitzsch and Siouti. 2007, 7). Joanna Bornat, author of the chapter “Biographical Methods” in a book “Research Methods published in 2008, stated that biographic interviews revolve around three central themes: interactivity, subjectivity, and structuring⁴⁵ (Bornat 2008, 344-345). However, Fritz Schütze (1984) in “Kognitive Figuren des autobiographischen Stegreiferzählens” discussed four principles,

⁴⁴ The way people construct their biography with reference to various situations and contexts. It uncovers processes related to construction of life histories (Apitzsch and Siouti. 2007, 5).

⁴⁵ By interacting Bornat focuses about the face-to-face interaction. While talking about *subjectivity* she is bringing self as a center of attention. By highlighting about structure she means to structure which a researcher has about his/her mind based on already existing literature and frame the narrative of the respondent in that structure (Bornat 2008, 344-345).

collectively termed cognitive figures that bear multiple dimensions and interlink the narrative structure with the social world, the frame of events, and social experiences. Schütze (1984) additionally identified four types of structural process: (a) action schemes, (b) institutional expectations, (c) potential loss of control over life, and (d) unexpected turn towards transformation in the biography⁴⁶ (Schütze 1984 cited in Apitzsch and Siouti 2007, 9-10). For this study, I used the biographic as a research method to acquire information about hijra people and how they construct their life stories in relation to the institutional forces that resist against their gender and deprive them of necessities. I used the biographic method espoused by Gabriele Rosenthal (2004) “Biographical Research” in an edited book “Qualitative Research Practice”. She presented the sequence of biographic interviews as (1) Period of main narration, (2) Questioning Period: (a) Internal questions, (b) External questions (Rosenthal 2004, 50). Hence, while conducting biographic interviews with hijra people, I went with the initial narrative open questions. After introducing myself, I initiated the interview with the following: “I would like to know about your whole life. Anything that comes in your mind about your life?”

With this line of inquiry, I expected respondents to narrate their respective life stories. It was completely up to them how much they wanted to share. During the interview periods, I used gestures and subtle sounds to maintain my attention and interest, and I did not try to intercept or otherwise restrict respondents. Instead, I took notes and highlighted relevant themes.

The second phase of the biographic interview process comprised internal and external narrative questions (Rosenthal 2004). For the former, I specifically focused on the themes that I highlighted during first phase. External narrative questions, on the other hand, were inquiries of my interest that the narrator did not independently discuss. Some of those themes included the role of the feminine gender in the process of labelling and imposing the hijra identity, the self-perception of one’s own identity, the development of hijra identity, violence and discrimination in the family sphere, and the roles of educational places in the hijra community.

2.4.4. Expert Interviews

As previously mentioned, I did not initially plan to conduct expert interviews, but a need to do so emerged during data collection and analysis. The respondents of these interviews were long-time hijra community advocates from the development and/or NGO sectors; many of them were reputed to be experts in their respective fields. These individuals mainly touched on themes of the hijra identity, its associated vulnerability, hijra community culture, and human rights violations. I also approached professors of *sharia* (Islamic law) to learn how Islam sees the hijra identity, while public sector officials shared insights on the hijra identity, violence and discrimination, and health issues. The broad criteria for these experts were an understanding of the following: (a) technical knowledge, (b) processual knowledge, and (c) explanatory knowledge.

Per this criteria, I aligned my methodological stance to where I believed that data was co-constructive and subjective in nature. Hence, the data acquired from these experts were important to enhance and supplement the findings generated from biographic interviews with hijra respondents. While the expert interviews were semi-structured, I remained flexible by developing certain questions during the time of the actual interview. I adopted the pattern of introducing my research topic and asking respondents about their understanding on these issues, as well as the nature of their interactions with the hijra community. I later followed specific thematic questions that I had formed prior to the interview.

2.4.5. Focus Group Discussion

Just as with expert interviews, I did not initially plan to use focus group discussions as a research technique. That said, during the phase of data collection and analysis, I discovered that there were contradictions in the data, particularly regarding hijra community culture and available identities. Similarly, the emergence of unique categories and social processes were interesting to me, and I wanted to verify certain information by speaking to respondents. As such, I planned three focus group discussions that were conducted at *deras* (residences). In each FGD, six hijra respondents participated. The duration of each FGD were about 40-55 minutes long. As with the expert interviews, the FGDs assumed a semi-structured format. These sessions were invaluable in clarifying my research findings. In some questions, I also tried to verify already discovered social processes (mentioned in chapter 4, 5 and 6).

2.4.6. Entering the Field

I have long been aware of Islamabad and Rawalpindi's hijra communities and the gatekeepers that protect them. Before beginning this study, I realized that having reliable key informants would be instrumental in my introduction to the community. As such, I coordinated with an individual from the community who remained attached to me throughout the duration of the study; she introduced me to many individuals and *gharanas* (households) in Islamabad's Bari Imam and Bhara Keho, as well as Rawalpindi's Pir wadhai and Asghar Mal chock neighborhoods. She was an aqwa hijra, over the age of 45 years, and known to many in the Rawalpindi and Islamabad communities.

I had prior information about certain structures intrinsic to the gharana and dera. For example, it is common for multiple hijra people to live in a group that is led by a guru. This guru has the highest status in a given dera. As such, I made great efforts to develop a rapport with each dera's guru so that I could conduct biographic interviews with her. However, for hijra respondents who lived either independently or at the Asghar Mal chock, I did not follow this same procedure since these respondents were less bound to their gurus.

2.4.7. Sample Respondents and Sample Size

I used the purposive sampling technique to approach hijra respondents for biographic interviews, though I did not predetermine the total number of biographic interviews. I started this study following the principles of constructivist grounded theory and had an idea of theoretical saturation; therefore, I stopped collecting data when new properties were no longer emerging. Similarly, the principle of theoretical sampling guided me in recruiting new respondents; this new information was data derived rather than based on personal interest or motives.

2.5. Data Analysis

All biographic interviews, expert interviews, and focus group discussions were analyzed through line-by-line coding. Per constructivist grounded theory rules, I used codes in the gerund form. As far as line-by-line coding is concerned, I followed Charmaz's (2006) coding principle. According to principles of coding, I remained open during the process. In the coding process I consulted codes and data again and again as to refine emerging trends in the data through development of new codes. I remained close to the data and used terms that might reflect the maximum attributes and characteristics of the data. Moreover, I used simple language for codes to indicate the actions and occurrences in the data. I also applied the constant comparison principle of constructivist grounded theory. The purpose in applying this principle was to understand similarities and differences in the data. This principle of constant comparison was brought into practice in the following ways:

- I compared the data within each biographic and expert interview,
- I compared the data of biographic interviews with other biographic interviews (to identity construction, the joining of hijra community, engagement in livelihood practices, the facing of and coping with human rights violations, etc.),
- I compared data from biographic interviews to data from expert interviews (thematic specific issues), and
- I compared observational data obtained during different times and days.

2.5.1. Assumptions for the Coding

Throughout the coding process, I tried to remain consistent in producing questions and finding the answer to these questions in the data. It also helped me to sample other research respondents and gather data according to emergent themes. Per Charmaz (2006, 51), the following questions of constructivist grounded theory guidelines were employed to determine emergent processes:

- What process(es) is/are at issue here? How can I define it?
- How does this process develop?
- How does/do the research participant(s) act while involved in this process?
- What does/do the research participant(s) profess to think and feel while involved in this process? What might his or her observed behavior indicate?
- When, why, and how does the process change?
- What are the consequences of the process?

2.5.2. Focused and Theoretical Coding: Sub-Categories, Categories and Core Category

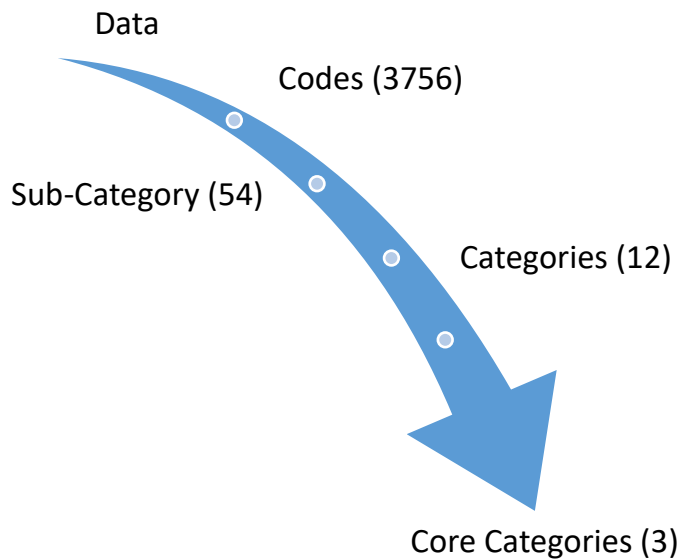
During the second stage of data analysis, I sorted through the codes that emerged frequently and lent themselves strongly to conceptualization. Through focused coding, I tried to code a bigger segment of the data so as to capture their main themes. Through this coding process, I followed the same principle of initial coding/open coding like given codes were reflecting its association with data. Focused coding helped me compare the life experiences of respondents, their lines of action, and their interpretations of past actions/incidents. However, at this point I would like to highlight that during focused coding I conceptualized data into the two following forms:

- a) Category
- b) Sub-Category

The categories conceptualize a big segment of the data and sub-categories were reflecting link, attributes, properties and characteristics of the categories.

Theoretical Coding was developed to make a core category for each of the chapter 4, 5, and 6. In each of the chapter, the core category reflects a social process, which mainly revolves around self and identity. However, at the same time it creates a link between socio-cultural aspects of the lives embodied in the structure of the Pakistani society and the meaning making process through the interaction between hijra persons and people from the mainstream society. The following figure illustrates the data analysis process:

Figure 2.1 Data Coding Types



2.5.3. Memo-Writing and Creating Links between Codes, Sub-Categories and Categories

Throughout the process of data collection and analysis, I wrote memos to understand emergent trends. This memo-writing helped to conceptualize and summarize key ideas. I divided this process into three stages.

During the first stage of memo-writing, I analyzed each biographic and in-depth interview and wrote memos based on complete interviews in which I interpreted the narrator's interpretation. In the first stage of case-based memos, I compared memos from one biographic interview with those of other biographic interviews and adopted the same principle for in-depth interviews and observations. In the second stage of memo-writing, I wrote concept-based memos. These primarily revolved around segments of data based on open coding and focused coding. These memos stated the meaning of codes and the possible social processes reflected by the codes. While, the third stage of memo-writing, which Charmaz (2006) termed "advanced memos," I developed tentative categories and sub categories from the focused codes. I created links between these categories based on their properties and characteristics and defined them according to an analytical framework. I also wrote notes about the contexts and situations in which these categories emerged.

Based on the same principle, I linked different categories. I also tried to discern possible missing links between the concepts and core categories, as well as categories and sub-categories.

Certain questions emerged during the memo-writing process that demanded further clarification and data. These questions were addressed by follow-up interviews, biographic interviews, in-depth interviews, and observations. I also followed a list of questions provided by Charmaz (2006) during memo-writing. These questions revolved around the process of happening like what people are doing in the studied social world. How are people interacting with each other, and what are the social actors saying? How does the structure of society and the context of the social action support the action or influence the social actor to change his/her actions? Who is connected to whom and why? (Charmaz 2006, 80).

An important function of the constructionist grounded theory is to unfold the social process and discover its occurrence in society. While memo-writing, I followed this principle through a series of questions to interact with data effectively. For example, what process is emerging at which situation and which conditions? How do research participants think about this social process and play their roles in it? What are the consequences of this social process? While discovering a social process, a researcher should attempt to answer these questions of “what, why, and how” with reference to the process’s occurrence and its possible change.

2.5.4. Theoretical Sampling and Theoretical Saturation

As previously mentioned, I was aware that hijra people would be my primary respondents and I thus started biographic interviews with them. At the later stage, the principle of theoretical sampling guided me in recruiting new respondents, getting back to the existing sample, and collecting new data based on emergent needs.

The process of data collection and analysis continued until I reached a point of saturation, or theoretical saturation in the constructivist GT. Moreover, data collection and their analysis gave me an opportunity to include other types of sample respondents (mentioned in the previous section).

Per data gathered through biographic interviews, I discovered a number of themes within this study: the representation of the feminine gender in the hijra identity, the construction of the hijra identity, the deviation of hijra persons from masculinity, and the imposition of the masculine

gender upon gender-variant children (later hijras). Moreover, this research witnessed a trend of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse against respondents during childhood in social spaces such as family, school, and society.

The hijra identity and community, the roles of *chela* and *guru*, unique livelihood strategies, oppressive power structures, repeated human rights violations: these data trends compelled me to conduct interviews with NGO officials who I termed “experts” for the sake of this study. Many of these individuals had worked for five or more years on hijra social issues and were involved with projects aiming to increase the well-being of the community. Indeed, some of these experts had themselves conducted research on the hijra community. I also sought interviews with experts from other fields, specifically government and religion, to discuss the hijra identity from an Islamic perspective, an administrative perspective, and/or a human rights perspective. For this study, “experts” were individuals who were well-versed with Pakistan’s hijra community in one or more of the following contexts:

- 1 Hijra community culture;
- 2 The hijra identity through either an
 - a. Islamic perspective or
 - b. NADRA categorization;
- 3 Human rights violations and other discriminations; and
- 4 Early life history before adopting the identity

Exploring how the government of Pakistan categorizes the hijra identity encouraged me to gather additional data from Islamic scholars. One such respondent was a professor of sharia law at the Islamic International University. I conducted a similar expert interview with a *madrasa*⁴⁷ who was involved with *Tableegi Jamat* (an organization that preaches the tenets of Islam). These respondents were selected for their formal religious educations and familiarization with the hijra identity through an Islamic lens.

Based on data from both biographic and expert interviews, I came to know that hijra people face severe discrimination and even emotional and sexual violence while accessing healthcare services. As such, I visited the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) in Islamabad to see how hijra patients are treated, but I did not see a single hijra patient during my observational visits

⁴⁷ Madersas are usually refers to an Islamic religious education place or institution.

(between 09:00 and 17:00 during a five-day period). In fact, the hospital's administration did not have any records of hijra patients because incoming patients were marked as either male or female. To that end, I discovered during follow-up biographic interviews that respondents visit hospitals in masculine dress to avoid humiliation and discrimination.

From the 4th of April 2015 to the 28th of June 2015, there were at least eight hijra people's murder cases across the country, with four of those cases occurring in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. This number was particularly alarming because it may indicate a trend of transphobic violence. Institutional violence occurs as well: both biographic and expert interviews indicated that most hijras experience harsh attitudes from law enforcement. As such, I extended my list of respondents to include police and ministry officials to understand how violence against hijra people is reported and how the police deal with murder cases.

Table 2.1: Sample Size for Biographic Interviews

S.No	Type of respondents	Research Method	Sample size
1	Khwajasira/Khusra/Intersex Hijra Persons	Biographic Interview	2
2	Narban Hijra Persons		6
3	Aqwa Hijra Persons		22
4	Total		30

Table 2.2: Sample Size for Expert Interviews

S.No	Type of respondents	Research method	No. of interviews
1	NGO Officials	Expert Interviews	5
2	Police Officials		2
3	Religious Officials		2
4	Human Right Officials		1
5	Hospital Administrators		2
7	Lawyers		2
8	Total		14

2.6. Clarification about the Terms Hijra and Transgender

In Pakistan, “hijra” is an umbrella term comprising three different sub-identities that are predominantly contextualized within the hijra community culture. Throughout this thesis (particularly chapters 3-7), qualitative quotes are attributed to the speaker’s specific identity rather than the umbrella term.

This study uses the words “hijra” and “transgender” interchangeably. I acknowledge the diversity of the hijra people and also accept and understand the use of the hijra label in the quest for rights of gender-variant people in Pakistan. Additionally, I distinguish a hijra’s childhood period by the phrase “gender-variant child” (or similar variations); I only use “hijra” to indicate an individual once she has joined the hijra community and undergone the rituals of identity transformation.

2.7. Data Management and the Use of MAX QDA

All the interviews for this study were voice recorded. Of those, some were also video recorded and/or photographed, as were certain individual respondents and ritual performances. I sought consent from respondents prior to employing any kind of recording device (audio, video, or photography). Furthermore, I transcribed recorded data the same day as the interview to avoid any loss of context.

I initially data-coded and created memos for paper-based biographic interviews. After coding six of these interviews, I transformed them to MAX QDA version 11. I data-coded and created memos for the remainder of the interviews directly in the software.

MAX QDA was invaluable for managing data: the program is easy and accessible, increases efficiency, and allows cross-comparisons of codes and categories across and between interviews. Video-recorded interviews allowed me to thickly describe voice tones, facial expressions, and interview settings. Moreover, I was able to access the memo of each code – whether open, focused, or theoretical – with one click. However, because I do not have expert-level skills in MAX QDA, I did not use all of the functions, some of which may have been helpful

in the analysis of data. Despite this, I was able to use open coding, focused coding, theoretical coding, constant comparison, and memo writing.

2.8. Trustworthiness in the Research

The reliability and validity associated with quantitative research are characteristics that are often denied to qualitative studies. Nevertheless, dependability, reliability, auditability, and trustworthiness are imperative to qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted that trustworthiness in a qualitative study revolves around the praxes of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Accordingly, credibility is related to the truth of the findings, and findings that are applicable to other contexts having the characteristic of transferability. Consistency in research engenders dependability, while neutrality and avoiding biases are features of conformability (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

According to this criteria, I adhered to the following steps throughout data collection and analysis:

- 1 Maintaining credibility through prolonged stays and persistent observations: During the first bout of data collection, I remained in the field for three months, from April 2015 to June 2015. During these time, I developed a good rapport with the hijra community and was able to observe various rituals, begging outings, dance performances, and other cultural practices (see also Pandey and Patnaik 2014; Lauckner, Paterson and Krupa 2012, 14). I also took note of the interactions between the hijra community and mainstream society. I similarly initiated relationships with NGO and government officials who had further insights into hijra community dynamics.
- 2 Triangulating methods, sources, and analysis: This research study initially planned to gather data only through biographic interviews with hijras; however, a need later emerged to conduct new interviews and group discussions to authenticate respondent information and explore themes/categories from different perspectives. The various levels of rigorous analysis in constructivist grounded theory allowed me to validate and cross-check findings through a multi-structured coding system. The principle of theoretical sampling increased the credibility of this research, as did input from a trained anthropologist who taught at the graduate level. This individual accompanied

- me on my field research, cross-checked my field notes with his field notes, and examined consistency and differences in our respective data and analyses.
- 3 Peer Debriefing: After completing the analysis of the first three biographic interviews, I returned to the same respondents to share my case-based memos with them. I adopted this same practice for in-depth interviews as well. While I did not repeat this activity for all respondents, I did conduct peer debriefing among 30% of them.
 - 4 Transferability: I remained systematic throughout this research to keep transferability viable. The transferability of research is associated with two principles: the thick description and purposeful sampling (Anney 2014, 278). In this study, I not only explained methodologies for conducting research, but I also focused on the context of the social interaction, the emergence of the social process, the development of categories, theoretical sampling, and the final output. As such, the findings of this research can be applicable to Pakistan's wider hijra community.
 - 5 Dependability: In the context of research, dependability is established through the following steps: (a) an audit trial, (b) stepwise replication, (c) a code-recoding strategy, and (d) peer examination (Anney 2014; Pandey and Patnaik 2014). The inquiry audit maintained the dependability and enhanced the credibility of this research (Lincoln and Guba 1985). For the audit trial and stepwise replication steps, I conferred with an American anthropologist who was familiar with hijra community culture in India. While she did not participate in data collection and analysis, she nevertheless provided feedback about this study's research process, emergence of categories, and interpretations of findings. Thus, I was able to revisit my data and to address her relevant concerns and queries as per the objectives of this research. As far as the code-recode strategy is concerned, I depended primarily on the coding strategy suggested by constructivist grounded theory. The strategy's multiple-level coding system and principle of constant comparison is already rigor and multi-layered which refine and demand for going back to the data and its refine association between both. Peer examination was another strategy to enhance the credibility of this study. With about 20 students in a research group working under one supervisor, I availed an opportunity to present my analyses and results to my peers. Based on the first presentation, I gathered additional data to bring further clarifications to my research. The second

presentation comprised my chapterization and research results. Throughout this process of peer examination, I strived to remain consistent and accurate in analyses, category development, social process discovery, chapterization, and conclusion.

- 6 Conformability: To address conformability, I would like to highlight the data analysis utilized in the context of this study. The process comprised coding and categorization, theoretical sampling, saturation, memo-writing, and the emergence of various social processes. These steps are collectively referred to as an audit trial, which is a component of conformability. Additionally, through the diagram I illustrated three different social process in each of the chapter 4, 5, and 6. These social process on the one side provide abstract conceptualization while on the other hand through the various stages of coding system link each other in a systematic way. Finally, I would like to highlight that I went into the field with a broader research question through which I explored the lives of hijra peoples in two parts: life history and life story. Biographic interview questions mainly touched on feminine gender performances during childhood, the development of the hijra identity, hijra community enrollment, experiences of community members, livelihood practices, and human rights violations. On the other hand, thematic interviews were conducted with the people who this study designated as hijra community experts. Themes included identity, violence, constitutional status, and position in Islam.

2.9. Reflexivity in the Research Process

In the methodological debate, the role of the researcher has evolved from one that is objective to one that is collaborative and reflexive. The academic community has demanded that a researcher indicates his or her relationship with the study. This relationship can be influenced by race, gender, sex, religion, ethnicity, class (Brian 2002, 13) and/or other categories that are part of a researcher's personal and social identity.

Per Gentles et al. (2014), the goal of reflexivity is to increase trustworthiness and transparency in the research process. Reflexivity may be contextualized with reference to a

researcher's interactions, stages of the research process, and the researcher's influence⁴⁸ (Gentles, et al. 2014). Reflexivity is further characterized as the following:

[T]he process of reflexivity identifies and acknowledges the limitation of the research. This is important in relation to location, topic, and the specific process. The way the research was contextualized theoretically, the data gathered and the way the data were analyzed are part of that research process, as is the way findings are used to argue the construction of new knowledge. (Engward and Davis 2015, 1532)

2.9.1. Reflexivity

An important aspect of reflexivity is administrable with reference to selection of research design, ontological and epistemological position, selection of methodology and methods. As far as this research is concerned, I have highlighted my inspiration and motives while demonstrating my reflexivity and stance in the methodological perspective. I have strived to remain consistent in my approach through adopting the appropriate methods of inquiry.

Interactions between the researcher and participants can also influence data. During the course of this study, the perceptions of some participants occasionally shifted from viewing me as a Ph.D. researcher to viewing me as a client. Some also assumed that I was an NGO official who could provide money or finance a project. Others still saw me as a resource to help them navigate police issues. In turn, I always maintained my position as a researcher, a position I had reached through rapport-building and consistency in performance. Likewise, I attempted to deflect attention away from my social position and professional experience (which was with NGOs) while enforcing my sexual orientation as a heterosexual (if needed).

⁴⁸ "Most of the authors reviewed described how the general objective of reflexivity is to increase transparency and trustworthiness of the research report. At a more specific level, I conceived the meanings and possible aims for reflexivity as varying according to several characteristics. First, reflexivity may involve attention to *varying types of researcher interactions*: researcher influence on participants during data collection, participant influence on the researcher, researcher influence via decisions affecting research processes, researcher influence on interpretation or analysis, and influence of the research on the researcher. Second, one can apply reflexivity to consider and address presence of researcher interactions *at different stages of the research process*: during topic selection or question formulation, throughout the ongoing process of research design, while interviewing or other forms of data collection, during analysis and interpretation, or during writing. Third, researchers may employ reflexivity to *handle researcher influence in different ways*: to neutralize researcher influence, to acknowledge researcher influence, to explain researcher influence, or to facilitate and capitalize on researcher influence. Finally, *one can view researcher effects differently*, either as problematic (e.g., referring to it undesirably as 'bias') or as advantageous (i.e., constructivist views)." (Gentles, et al. 2014, 3)

Gender was an important topic for this study's respondents. Indeed, my status as a male had a certain meaning for them: namely, it was a symbol of oppression. Through a number of narrations, respondents constructed and represented the male gender as oppressive in their lives. I was told that if I wanted to feel like them, I should wear feminine clothes and walk with them in the markets. Some said that a male would not dare wearing women's attire. I learnt that they accepted maleness in specific social roles that were associated with the men in their social organization. I also learned that those men accepted their feminine gender and referred to them respectfully by feminine pronouns. As such, I tried to reduce the representation of masculinity by adopting roles that were against prescribed masculine gender roles. Additionally, I used the same terminology that respondents used, adopted acceptable male gender roles, danced with them, accompanied them to functions, and drove them from one place to another. I tried to eliminate my maleness as a demarcation between my respondents and myself. I accompanied them in the public spaces as to own them and be with them, which is usually uncommon in the social sphere of Pakistani society.

Position of outsider to insider: at the start of this research, I was a complete outsider to the hijra community, and I accept that throughout the research, I was not able to attain the status of complete insider. It would only have been possible if I would have adopted the hijra identity myself. That said, I did manage to get inside to a certain level. I did so by identifying the unique identities within the community and addressing individual respondents by their respective identities. I also familiarized myself with the hierarchical structure within the community as well as the names of the gurus in the hierarchy. Learning the lineages of respondents also helped me to develop a good rapport during interviews and other interactions. Crucially, I maintained a non-judgmental position, which also helped me to win the confidence and trust of community members.

Reflexivity in data analysis: The theoretical stance that data is co-constructed by a researcher and his or her respondents demonstrates the reflexive position of the researcher. Because grounded theory research acknowledges the influence of the researcher, constructivist grounded theory takes a subjective position. The practices of grounded theory – such as theoretical sampling, constant comparison and memo-writing – acknowledge and manage the researcher's reflexivity. Throughout the dissertation, I also highlighted my reflexivity wherever it was needed.

2.10. Limitations in Entering the Research Field

During field research, I developed a rapport with NGO representatives who worked for hijra community rights and police officials who encountered hijra people in various social settings. One NGO representative introduced me to individuals who would later become some of this study's hijra respondents. At an interview with one of these respondents, I quickly realized that the individual in question was largely focusing on two main points: first, how great this particular NGO official was, and second, how bad other NGOs were. I felt that the NGO representative who introduced us had influenced the respondent, and as such, the data's authenticity was at stake. Moreover, this respondent's interview did not align with the data gathered from initial meetings in the community.

In a similar experience, an elderly hijra person called me so that I could help navigate a problem with the Bari Imam police. When I arrived, she explained that somebody in the neighborhood complained about a stranger at their dera (strangers at the dera were a common occurrence); the person had additionally alleged that the hijra residents were spoiling the neighborhood. In response, the police ordered the hijra people to evacuate their rented house within three days, threatening them as well as the property owner. While the owner had no objections to the hijra people living there, he maintained that he could not resist police pressure. As such, the tenants needed to leave.

The respondent who phoned me was crying. When I asked her what I could do to help, she suggested that perhaps I could convince the concerned police officer not to force them out from their home. When I went to speak to him, however, he said that they could not stay because they were involved in prostitution (a livelihood strategy confirmed by previous interviews). I tried again: what about the older hijra person, who was in her fifties and could not use her hand? She earned her money through begging, not prostitution, and was a senior guru at the dera. The police officer relented and agreed to speak with them.

The next day I received another call from the same respondent; she said that the officer would give them another chance as long as they did not practice prostitution. I was not sure if they would fulfill this demand: most of the dera's residents had told me that they either had been or

were currently involved in prostitution. Therefore, it could be difficult to abandon all the attributes of their identity.

This incident brought some limitations to my research. Specifically, some of this dera's respondents began categorically denying their involvement in prostitution, even if they mentioned it in the first round of interviews. Additionally, they blamed a neighboring gharana of hijra people for *their* involvement in prostitution. Ultimately, this blame became so consistent that the other gharana eventually left this living situation.

A typical question I fielded from people outside the hijra community (that is, from mainstream society) was about my sexual orientation: in other words, was I sexually attracted to hijras? That I was an unmarried man perhaps lent to certain perceptions about me. Indeed, during interviews, especially those that discussed a given individual's sexual history, I felt that some respondents began to see me as a potential client. For example, upon the conclusion of one interview, the respondent in question embraced me and seemingly rubbed her breasts against my chest. She then told me, "You felt I have boobs as well." Unsure if her motivation was flirtatious or simply demonstrating her feminine features, I affirmed, "Yes you have feminine body." Then I bid her *Khuda Hafiz* and left. Other hijra respondents mentioned that they thought I could be their client until they realized I was there solely to conduct interviews.

From these experiences, I have learnt that who I am and how I behave in the hijra community can influence the data. Therefore, after the first round of biographic interviews (the study's initial four interviews), I visited the deras on my own and always introduced myself specifically as a student and researcher. Even the sharing details of self-identity can harm the quality of the data.

Chapter 3: Socioeconomic and Demographic Profiling of Hijra People and Types of Hijra Identities

This chapter is organized so as to illustrate that transgender people in Pakistan can and do come from all economic brackets, all levels of education (no formal education, minimal education, or extensive education), and any sibling order (youngest, middle, or oldest). That said, there are distinct sub-identities within the hijra community, known as *aqwa*, *narban*, or *khwajasira*, that are determined by biological factors and/or the individual's sense of self. Individuals bearing the *aqwa* and *narban* identities describe the sense of self as female, while the *khwajasira* describe the sense of self as beyond male or female (in other words, neither male nor female). This sense of self also shapes an individual's spiritual identity, which is often communicated through ritualistic participation and performance in Pakistan.

3.1. Socioeconomic and Demographic Profiling of Hijra Persons

This research was conducted in the cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, though most of the study's respondents originally hailed from different regions of Punjab, Pakistan. With respect to cities of origin, nearly 27% of respondents came from Rawalpindi, followed by Faisalabad (18%), Sahiwal (14%), Sargodha (14%), Jhang (9%), Lahore (9%), and Multan (5%). The smallest percentage of respondents actually originated from Islamabad itself (4%).

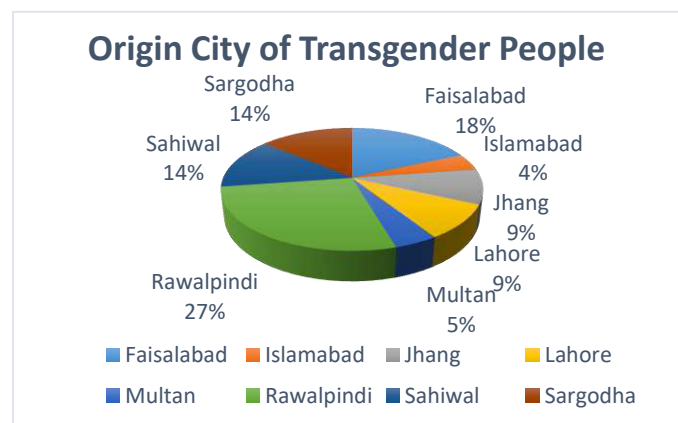


Figure 3. 1: Origin City of Transgender People

Why does a person relocate to a new city? During interviews and detailed conversations, I found that most respondents preferred working in cities to which they were not native. Rana Asif Habib, a lawyer, sociologist, and advocate with the Gender Interactive Alliance (GIA), further elucidated this trend:

This is a problem for transgender people – that they have families. Because they earn money usually through sex work or begging, they opt to work in places other than their cities of origin. If someone is from Lahore, then he might possibly work in Karachi or another city. If someone was born in Faisalabad, then maybe that person will work in Rawalpindi. They work in new cities to hide their identities and secure their reputations. They remain on the move from one city to another for their livelihood.⁴⁹

Figure 3.1 confirms Habib’s account, with nearly 70% of the total respondents hailing from cities other than the locality of the research. While the largest proportion of respondents resided in Rawalpindi itself, the majority actually originated from rural areas (52%), followed by urban areas (43%) and slums (5%).

Most respondents’ households (50%) earned less than or equal to US\$150⁵⁰ per month. Middle-income households, defined as those with a monthly income of US\$150 to US\$300, followed next (41%). High-income households were defined as those that earned more than US\$300 per month and represented 9% of total respondents.

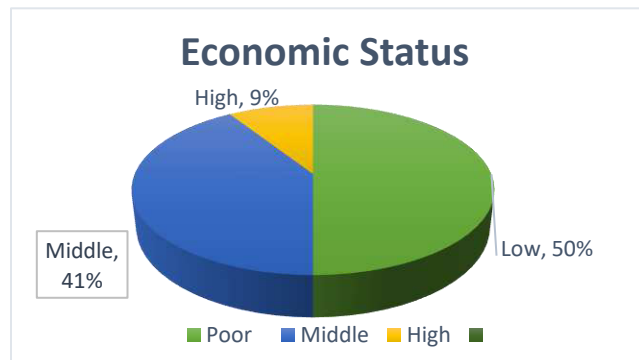


Figure 3. 2: Economic Status

Low-income households reported the following occupations: truck drivers, hotel waiters, merchandise loaders, and salesmen. One individual hailing from this socioeconomic background

⁴⁹ Rana Asif Habib (GIA), interview with the author, April 13, 2015.

⁵⁰ The monetary amounts reported here are estimates. The local economy experienced heavy volatility during many respondents’ childhoods, and currency exchange rates greatly fluctuated at that time.

confirmed that her “father used to load stuff in vans in markets.”⁵¹ Another shared that her father “was a waiter in a hotel.”⁵²

Within middle-income households, the occupations reported were farming, cultivation, and animal husbandry. One respondent shared the following: “Father was a farmer, and we had some land, and mostly harvesting was done there.”⁵³ Another provided a similar description: “Father used to stay at home; he had cows and buffalos.”⁵⁴

Those in the high-income bracket largely attributed their status to capital generated from privately owned family businesses. One individual explained it as such: “Father was a very noble man and had an auto spare parts shop.”⁵⁵

Previous studies have attempted to show a relationship between the number and/or order of siblings and the occurrence of gender-variant children. For example, Schagen et al. (2012) found that most of their transgender respondents were older siblings and hailed from families with an increased sibling sex ratio ((Schagen, et al. 2012, 547)

Similarly, the current study indicates an average of nine siblings per respondent, higher than the average number of children per family in Pakistan (i.e. around 4). Respondents reporting a higher number of brothers (almost 70%) were greater than those reporting a higher number of sisters (almost 30%). With reference to birth order, most of the respondents fell either in the middle or toward the lower end of the order. Generally, most respondents were younger than their siblings, which is consistent with the findings of Schagen et al. (2012).

Most of the current study’s respondents were literate, which is consistent with Sinha (2016). Figure 3.3 illustrates the education levels of the respondents: some held baccalaureate (bachelor's) degrees, while others were educated only through primary school (1st through 5th grade). The largest proportion of respondents received education only through primary school (29%), followed by those who were educated until the 8th grade (24%), termed *middle-level education* here. The lowest proportion, 14%, went to two divisions – those who were illiterate and

⁵¹ Sanwali (*aqwa*), interview with the author, April 6, 2015.

⁵² Shehzadi (*aqwa*), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

⁵³ Ashi (*narban*), interview with the author, April 5, 2015.

⁵⁴ Muskan (*aqwa*), interview with the author, April 9, 2015.

⁵⁵ Honey (*aqwa*), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

never attended school, and those who received an education through the 9th or 10th grade (termed *metric* here).

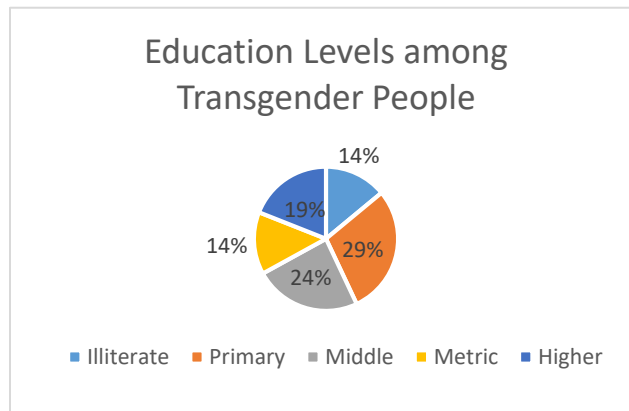


Figure 3.3 Educational level among the respondents of this study

3.2. Types of Transgender Identities

The hijra community of Pakistan recognizes three distinct transgender identities. By outer appearances, the three identities largely resemble one another, though there are some significant differences between them. Nevertheless, they perform similar roles and share the same subculture within the greater transgender community. Hijra community members know an individual's identity, a distinction more difficult for the uninitiated person to make. These identities differ from one another based on the morphology of the body (stemming either from birth or through physical alteration) as well as the sense of self with which the individual identifies. The sub-identities are listed as follows:

- *Aqwa* (these individuals may also describe themselves as she-males)
- *Narban*
- *Khwajasira* (also called *khusra* or *khusri* when describing an intersexed individual, or can be used as an umbrella identity for all members of the transgender community)

The Figure 3.4 shows that 84% of the present study's respondents identified as *aqwa*, followed by *narban* (8%) and *khwajasira* (8%). Contrary to these findings, the respondents of this study anecdotally claimed that *narban* hijras constitute the second most populated subgroup within

Pakistan's transgender community, while the khwajasira constitute the smallest. Sinha (2016) reports the same findings of this research regarding proportion of khwajasira in the general population of hijra persons.

Babbli Malik, a renowned *guru* (teacher) and social activist in the Rawalpindi transgender community, echoed the community's sentiments: "If you find 20,000 transgender people in a day, then 1,500 of them would fall in the category of narban hijra. Only one would be intersexed [khwajasira] and the remainder would be aqwa hijra."⁵⁶

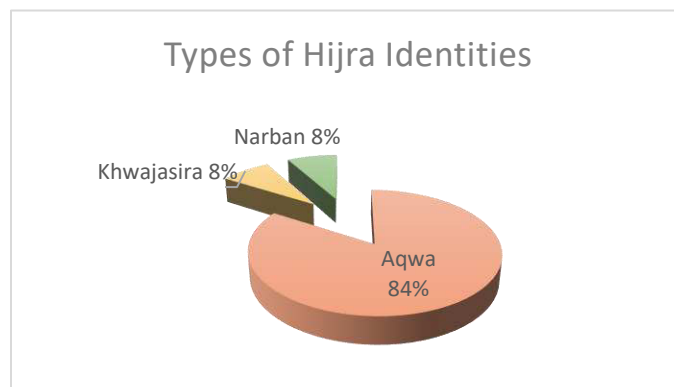


Figure 3.1: Types of Hijra Identities

I have not yet documented the definition of *hijra* (or transgender person), a term that emerged from respondents as a way to conceptualize themselves. The question is, who are the hijra in their own words? In this context, the title contains all the information, attributes, and characteristics that, according to respondents, define a hijra. Nevertheless, it is also pertinent to understand who *cannot* be a hijra, as the transgender identity in Pakistan is based on both inclusion and exclusion criteria. For example, many respondents strongly believe that those involved in any type of criminal activity can be neither hijra nor a part of the community itself.

3.2.1. Revealing Types of Hijra Identity: Who are the Hijra People?

The term *hijra* has existed for centuries, passing through many interpretations along the way. It has applied to multiple social roles and functions in the historical sociocultural sphere of the Indian subcontinent (India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh). Today, the social, psychological, and medical sciences have contributed their own interpretations of the term *hijra*. This increasing

⁵⁶ Babbli Malik (guru, activist, and *aqwa*, Rawalpindi community), interview with the author, April 12, 2015.

interest likely stems from a growing emergence of the following factors: the general visibility of gender-variant practices, a robust western discourse on gender, and the complexity inherent in establishing a separate and independent indigenous understanding of the hijra identity.

For the last few decades, social activism at the global, national, and regional levels has influenced the transgender community in Pakistan, particularly in how members define themselves as either hijra or transgendered. As a result, some community members and advocates have created and/or adopted new types of subjectivity that conform to a more globalized interpretation of the transgender ideal. In other words, new ways to conceptualize oneself exist alongside the historical understanding of the hijra identity. Among the current study's respondents, terms of self-identification varied from descriptions such as *she-male* and *transgender* to *khwajasira* and *moorat*. Moving forward, this study employs the term *transgender* according to its multiple representations within global and national human-rights discourses as well as to reflect its strategic use by the hijra community to obtain rights in Pakistan.

Upon meeting with a respondent, I opened the conversation with the following inquiry: "How do you define yourself?" or, "Who are you?" Based on the individual's responses, I then modified my questions: "Who can be a hijra?" or, "Who are the hijra people?" Responses varied to a great extent, and during analysis, I found multiple characteristics exhibiting numerous axes for conceptualizing what it means to be hijra/transgender.

Consider the following input from a respondent living in a double-story building famous for transgender sex work – in other words, a brothel – at Asghar Mall Road in Rawalpindi. This respondent first declared herself a "she-male" and later stated that she was an *aqwa*. Her build was generally masculine, but she wore her hair long and groomed her eyebrows as a woman might. She explained the following: "We are male. Every part of our body is like a male body and it is perfect; it is just that Allah put a female soul in our inner body or in the inner self."⁵⁷ This interpretation of the hijra identity deals with notions of gender and sex in a clearly transgender context. The respondent positioned herself biologically as a male. At the same time, she internalized a feminine sense of self, which she associated with the word "soul." Further, she believed this sense of self was from God and not something that she produced herself. In other

⁵⁷ Sanwali (*aqwa*), interview with the author, April 6, 2015.

words, because her soul was feminine, and because the soul is something that Muslims associate with God, she believed that whatever she was, she was from God. To that end, Nadeem Kashish, who runs the non-governmental organization She-male Association for Fundamental Rights (SAFFAR), shared the following:

I preferred to wear dresses like girls. I have preferences like girls have, and I think like girls think. Usually a girl feels attraction towards boys sexually and emotionally – it's the same kind of attraction I have towards boys. I never felt attraction towards girls. This was opposite from the usual practices, because I have a male body but have emotions like a female. Similarly, I have feelings of shyness because of having a penis. Sometimes I avoid looking at my penis. It was also clear from my walking style that I did not walk like other male children. So, this was something from my inside which was pushing me to be feminine in my way.⁵⁸

Kashish's description gives further insight into this particular aspect of the hijra identity. In other words, those who assert a feminine soul might gravitate to roles that are usually assigned to women or may be symbolic of femininity. Sometimes this gravitation is externally validated when those who adopt opposite gender roles are then identified as transgendered by hijra community members as well as society at large. Yet in the context of self-identification, Kashish shared that not only did she perceive her soul to be feminine (which encouraged her to subsequently adopt opposite gender roles), but that she also possessed erotic feelings toward men. In addition, she expressed some dysphoria toward her penis and avoided looking at it, particularly during sex.

Another respondent, Khurram, worked as a waiter and presented herself as masculine in the workplace. She stated that it was awkward for her if a sexual partner handled her penis during intercourse.⁵⁹ By many accounts, a penis counters feelings of femininity and thus might disturb the feminine self-imagery that a hijra person possesses. However, I cannot conclude this to be a universal pattern among the hijra people. In fact, there was one respondent who associated her penis with sexual pleasure. Mehroz, who identified as a "she-male" (*aqwa*), said that she enjoyed sex like males do. While she perceived herself as female and preferred to be penetrated by a partner, she was also interested in foreplay that tended to her whole body, including her penis.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, this was the rarest expression of sexual pleasure that I encountered. Most

⁵⁸ Nadeem Kashish (SAFFAR), interview with the author, April 11, 2015

⁵⁹ Khurram (*aqwa*), interview with the author, April 5, 2015.

⁶⁰ Mehroz (*aqwa*), interview with the author, April 6, 2015

respondents preferred to be passive sexual partners (i.e., penetrated) and did not consider the penis as an object from which they could derive pleasure.

Thus, there may be a relationship between physical morphology and the transgender identity, as evidenced in the case of Kashish, who experienced some degree of gender dysphoria. Kashish may choose to eventually pursue castration, though it should be noted that castration is not viewed by the community as synonymous to having a vagina. The relationship between anatomy and the transgender identity sees a number of interpretations. A hijra person may feel discomfort toward her penis, she may opt for castration, she may have been born with ambiguous genitals, or she might experience any variation thereof.

The intersexed genitals are associated with multiple interpretations in the Pakistani hijra community: they may symbolically represent female sexual organs, asexuality, and/or a state beyond the male or female identity. An intersexed transgender person can also be known as a “true” or “real” khwajasira, which one respondent described as having “the same lower part same as a women: it is not being used to penetrate during intercourse.”⁶¹ One of the respondents, 39-year-old Nagina, herself a khwajasira, asserted that “khwajasira are neither from this half [male], nor from that half [female].” She furthermore observed that a khwajasira is “neither a girl nor a boy,” specifying that “we are born as khwajasira from our mother’s womb, nor our mind is of a girl’s, but God has made us like this so we accept what we are.”⁶² Similar to those who describe having a feminine soul, Nagina associated her gender with something inherited at birth. Her identity was not influenced by the social system – that is, an identity as specifically male or female – but instead was something unique that was built into her personality. Thus, she accepted this notion of gender and obeyed God’s wish.

While both Kashish and Nagina identify as hijra, they did not fall into the same identity subcategories. In other words, Kashish was born a male, while Nagina was born intersexed, which is commonly accepted as the “true” hijra. Kashish, who claimed a feminine soul, adopted feminine traits inherited from the social system. Nagina, on the other hand, did not state her sense of self as feminine. She distinguished herself from the binary of male and female and identified instead as a

⁶¹ Sanwali (*aqwa*), interview with the author, April 6, 2015.

⁶² Nagina (*khwajasira*), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

third gender or third sex,⁶³ discussed previously by Nanda (1999). Thus, in my estimation, having a *feminine soul* and being *neither male nor female* are two different interpretations within the hijra community. However, based on appearances alone, it can be difficult to distinguish between an aqwa and a khwajasira: while the latter does not usually describe her sense of self as feminine, she does nonetheless often adopt a feminine appearance and gender roles.

Apart from transgender respondents, I also conducted in-depth interviews with NGO officials and other advocates who have long worked with the transgender community. One respondent claimed to have met nearly 2,000 members of the hijra community throughout the span of his career. I asked him who the hijra were and how the term *transgender* could be defined, to which he replied the following:

Here in Rawalpindi, transgender people are known as hijra, *khusra* and *faqeer*. However, within the hijra community, there are other names for the hijra identities ... The words aqwa, narban and khwajasira are not common terms. These terms are internal terminology for identification of different types of transgender [people] and are based on some particular types of characteristics or attributes. If we talk about aqwa, then they look like males and in some cases ... have families [wives and children]. However, internally they feel their selves as women or have feminine feelings. So, this feminine sense of self guides them toward another world. On the other hand, if you talk about narban, then, according to my understanding, a narban hijra is a castrated male ... [Narban hijras] use medicines and take hormones to transform their bodies to be like a woman's body ... Faqeer refer to transgender [people] who are intersexed. It is my own observation and learned from other transgender [people] that faqeer are very few in number. The way faqeer describe themselves is as neat and clean creations of God. They cannot commit sin. They are pure creatures sent by God to the earth. Faqeer usually feel jealous toward the rest of the transgender community, particularly with aqwa and narban ... People [from outside the transgender community] usually do not like the activities [prostitution, dancing] of aqwa and narban, and faqeer want to have a good reputation.⁶⁴

This passage discusses a wide variety of identities that can confound a person new to the community. *Khusra*, like hijra, is a generalized umbrella term that translates simply to “transgender.” These two terms are used interchangeably in Pakistani society. Khwajasira, on the other hand, is either employed as an honorific within the community or used to denote an intersexed person. Khwajasira is also used in official and legal language. *Mian Ji* (in Punjab) and *faqeer* (in Rawalpindi and Sindh) are regional terms that also describe the khwajasira identity.

⁶³ Nagina (*khwajasira*), interview with author, April 11, 2015.

⁶⁴ Tariq (NGO representative and transgender advocate), interview with the author, April 16, 2015.

In the previous pages, I discussed the transgender identity in Pakistan on the basis of inclusion criteria, or who *can* be a hijra or transgender person. In the following pages, I highlight the exclusion criteria determining gender-variance. Those bearing exclusionary attributes may be known as imposters or pretenders in the hijra community of Pakistan. For example, one respondent from the NGO Naz Male Health Alliance (NMHA) stated that cross-dressing males are not considered hijra by the community. Though they try to behave hijra-like, they are branded as outsiders because they are not a part of the integral *guru-chela* (master-disciple) system. In other words, to be hijra, one must be accepted:

We [hijra community members] can recognize an imposter or pretender easily: they do not involve themselves in the *guru-chela* system. But society as a whole cannot recognize them. Anyone wandering on the road wearing a dress is considered *khusra* [by non-transgender people]. However, this is not the case. Hijra means being involved in the *guru-chela* system. They [hijras] celebrate their *salgirah* [birthday] and keep a record of *challaun* [reciprocity of money] that they return for others' birthday celebrations.⁶⁵

In other words, a person who does not perform the roles and rituals of the hijra community cannot be a hijra, even if she presents as feminine. She would instead be identified as an imposter or a pretender. In this way, the hijra identity is based on community membership, not solely on gender presentation.

The legitimization of transgender sociocultural roles lends another aspect to the identity. Consider this 40-year-old *khwajasira*'s perspective: "We visit people who have newborn [babies] or marriage ceremonies, and people give us respect there. Even if people don't have newborn babies, they still help us."⁶⁶ A transgender health advocate shared a similar view:

Traditionally this is a belief: if a *khwajasira* person comes to your door to beg, then do not send her away with empty hands. In the case that you send her away empty-handed, then do not use harsh words toward her. Try to avoid her curse, because it works and is heard by God.⁶⁷

The link between the hijra identity and the spiritual world is not new. It is a common belief throughout the Indian subcontinent that a hijra person is able to connect to God through spiritual means, and as such, hijra community members are often hired to bestow blessings on auspicious occasions such as births or marriages. This revered status can also afford individuals respected

⁶⁵ Tanzeel (NMHA representative), interview with the author, April 17, 2015.

⁶⁶ Roshni (*khwajasira*), interview with the author, April 9, 2015.

⁶⁷ Tariq (NGO representative and transgender advocate), interview with the author, April 16, 2015.

titles such as faqeer and Mian Ji.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, it should be noted that the cultural responsibility of bestowing blessings is specifically associated with the “true” khwajasira, and accordingly, some non- khwajasira identities may adopt the khwajasira identity to perform the duties associated with it. Nanda (1999) has written extensively about the hijra role in these ceremonies as well as the power acquired when a person adopts a hijra identity. The spiritual attributes of the hijra identity are respected in mainstream Pakistani society and thus represent a traditional livelihood role for members of the community. However, transforming these spiritual qualities into the socio-economic realm can also challenge the traditional attributes of the spiritual identity associated with the hijra community and the individual.⁶⁹

In the last few decades, new trends have emerged in the relationship between the hijra and their role in marriage ceremonies. In the past, a hijra’s primary function during a wedding was to bless the couple, while today she more often provides the entertainment and dancing. Another emergent trend sees a growing division between two groups within the transgender community. One respondent, who self-identified as a “true khusri⁷⁰ [intersexed person] from mother’s womb,” elaborated on the division:

Those cross-dressers who look like hijra and do sex work on the streets, at bus stops, or other places are the source of the defamed reputation of the hijra. They create perceptions that hijra people are involved in prostitution. [On the other hand], people from the villages still believe we only earn money when we [villagers] give *vadhai* at a child’s birth or a marriage ceremony. Those people understand us; those people respect us ... They give us a place to sit. They give us Rs. 500 [~US\$5] along with a suit. If we visit a whole village, then we earn almost Rs 5,000. This amount ... is equally divided between all the people [who performed the *vadhai*]. We have respect in the villages, but we do not have respect in the cities.⁷¹

⁶⁸ While the terms Mian Ji and faqeer are often applied to hijras, they are also both noted male descriptive terms. I do not know why we refer to hijras as males in the context of these two terms. It might be a notion of respect since masculinity is revered in a patriarchal society like Pakistan. It is similar to using the term of *haji* instead of *hajan* again we refer to them as masculine. Thus, sometimes religious habit impresses masculinity on third gender peoples. This habit opens the door for further research perhaps something titled, “Hijra are Masculine: A Religious Construction of the Third Gender.”

⁶⁹ The transformation of the hijra identity’s social status is discussed in Chapter 5 and 6, particularly in the context of prostitution in Pakistani society.

⁷⁰ The respondent elaborated that the term *khusri* means a person born intersexed but having prominent female sexual organs.

⁷¹ Roshni (*aqwa* and self-defined “true *khusri*”), from an interview with the author, April 9, 2015. Regarding her identity, Roshni stated the following: “I have a feminine soul in my body from my mother’s womb and, when I grew with the passage of time, I realized I had no sexual attraction towards females. I was not sexually active as most men are. I did not get erections at all.” I perceived this to mean that she was sexually impotent and identified with the female gender, and therefore she was a “true *khusri*.”

The growing visibility of certain hijra livelihood strategies, particularly those considered “immoral” by greater Pakistani society, has shaped a new perception of the community. Today, a hijra person has ample opportunities to earn money through prostitution and dancing. As such, the perception of hijra people in urban areas is more derogatory than it is in rural areas, where they do not have the same demands for their services. Yet, some individuals will adapt to both scenarios: a hijra person who is involved in prostitution or dancing in a city might bestow blessings in a village. In other words, the setting she works in may influence her livelihood strategy. Different perceptions and attitudes are leveled against her, depending on the profession in which she works.

While it is true that a hijra can earn her livelihood through *vadhai* (a traditional occupation involving the bestowing of blessings), she is also free to earn money through dancing or prostitution. One respondent elaborated on the division, arguing that “hijra-ism includes people ... at shrines, child [birth] and marriage ceremonies, or celebrations.”⁷² Abdullah et al. (2013) described this sociological division in the following terms: *hijrapan*, *khusrapan*, and *zenanapan* (Abdullah et al. 2012). Guru Babbli Malik further clarified these roles:

Overall, there are two groups within the hijra community. One is known as *hijrapan* and the second is *zenanapan*. Both groups share the same culture, but they are two different groups. In *hijrapan*, it is compulsory to go on [to bestow blessings at] a child’s birth, and marriage ceremonies, while *zenanapan* attend more common celebrations, like *salgirah* [birthday] in hijra community and dancing functions. Usually, a *zenana* does not attend a newborn birth celebration. And a clever person like me remains ... on both sides. I am a *chela* [disciple] in *hijrapan* and *zenanapan* as well.⁷³

Apart from the sociological division of hijra community there are three types of hijra identity which are discussed in the following pages.

3.2.2. Aqwa Hijra

Aqwa is a term from the hijra language known as Farsi.⁷⁴ The term refers to a particular type of hijra identity: one who is biologically male but identifies with the female gender. Most of the respondents in this study were *aqwa*, and generally, as evidenced in the graph 3.4, the *aqwa* constitute the largest subpopulation of the transgender community in Pakistan. Guru Malik shared

⁷² Uzma Yaqoob (activist with FDI), interview with the author, April 13, 2015.

⁷³ Babbli Malik (guru, activist, and *aqwa*, Rawalpindi community), interview with the author, April 5, 2015.

⁷⁴ This should not be confused with the Farsi spoken in Afghanistan or Iran (see also Awan and Sheeraz 2011).

a personal estimation of nearly 80% to reflect the size of the aqwa subpopulation.⁷⁵ Abdullah et al. (2012) identify a similar value (80%) to estimate the aqwa subpopulation within the hijra community of Pakistan.

Social activist Uzma Yaqoob defined an aqwa as “a person who does not undergo any surgery or does not castrate [receive castration] [and instead] prefers his male outfit in terms of biology while adopting the feminine gender.”⁷⁶ Another respondent reported that an aqwa has a male body but adopts a female identity through the gendering of her body and the exposure of her femininity:

An aqwa is originally a male, but he acts like a female. He wears female clothing. He likes to perform in functions and have sex with males, and he is not interested in girls. He uses silicon to develop boobs like women. They [aqwa] wear flirty clothes and try to show off their boobs at functions to attract people.⁷⁷

Yet another respondent narrated, “They [aqwa] have male sexual organs and do have physical relations with women.”⁷⁸

These descriptions shed some light onto the sexual orientation of the aqwa. Common beliefs and historical literature assert that hijra people are sexually impotent; however, in the case of the aqwa, this is not true. Aqwa tend to negotiate both gender identity as well as sexual orientation. For example, some aqwa have wives. When engaging in heterosexual intercourse, an aqwa will adopt a masculine role (i.e., the role of the penetrator). In the hijra community, on the other hand, the same individual adopts a feminine identity and avoids sex with women. Thus, context may influence the process of identity negotiation, whether sexual orientation or gender. Nevertheless, it is not within the parameters of this research study to elaborate further on sexual orientation and the aqwa identity; like the gender identity of the aqwa, sexual orientation seems to occupy a more fluid spectrum.

⁷⁵ Babpli Malik (guru, activist, and *aqwa*, Rawalpindi community), interview with the author, April 12, 2015.

⁷⁶ Uzma Yaqoob (activist with FDI), interview with the author, April 13, 2015

⁷⁷ Mehroz (*aqwa*), interview with the author, April 6, 2015

⁷⁸ Muskan (*aqwa*), interview with the author, April 16, 2015.

3.2.3. Narban Hijra

The narban are castrated hijra and the second most common hijra identity in Pakistan. , One respondent described in the following terms: “Narban don’t have anything between their legs, except *cheepti*, which is a castrated penis.”⁷⁹ Another respondent, whose guru was narban, elaborated further: “Narban hijra undergo a surgery. They remove their penis and testes and develop their breasts.”⁸⁰ In the same vein, Uzma Yaqoob elucidated the narban identity as such: “A person with a male body who recognizes a female soul in his body usually goes for a castration. After castration, they’re called narban in their language.”⁸¹

For both the *aqwa* and narban, the sense of self is feminine. However, if this sense of self, restricts from the castration, then identity should be *aqwa* and if a person’s goes for castration than the hijra would have narban identity. In comparison to an *aqwa* hijra, a narban hijra tries to be more feminine by employing medical interventions.

3.2.4. Khwajasira Hijra

Among members of the hijra community, the words *khwajasira* and *khusra* refer to individuals born with ambiguous sex organs, also known as intersexed individuals. In contemporary Pakistani society, social and political activists, particularly those that advocate for transgender rights, have restored the term *khwajasira* to evoke the glorious past of the hijra community (see also F. Khan 2014). The prominent attributes of the *khwajasira* identity revolve around the pure spiritual being and the concomitant power to bless and curse. According to one *khwajasira*, people believe that “God hears our voices, so better to avoid our curse, as we are born pure from the mother's womb and do not have sexual organs to make sin.”⁸² Another respondent elaborated, “We [*khwajasira*] are neither male nor female. God has made us in this way, and we accept what we are.”⁸³

⁷⁹ Arzo (*aqwa*), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

⁸⁰ Sanwali (*aqwa*), interview with the author, April 6, 2015.

⁸¹ Uzma Yaqoob (activist with FDI), interview with the author, April 13, 2015.

⁸² Nagina (*khwajasira*), interview with author, April 11, 2015.

⁸³ Roshni (*khwajasira*), interview with the author, April 9, 2015.

3.2.5. The Dynamics of Hijra Identities: Feminine Gender and the Spiritual Being in Mai Nandi Mythology

The idea that spirituality is inherent to the hijra identity is evidenced by a myth common among the Pakistani hijra community. This myth was shared with me by a number of respondents, each with a slightly different version. To determine the commonalities between the versions, I verified the myth during a focus group discussion. There it was reported to me as follows:

Mai Nandi was a wise creature, and she was born as God's saint. She was *khusra* [khwajasira] by birth. A *zenana* [aqwa] lived with Mai Nandi. Mai Nandi took a *burqa* [a piece of cloth that covers the whole body] whenever she went outside to collect alms. After returning to the *dera* [residence], she counted the money and distributed it in four parts. Two parts went to Mai Nandi, one part went to the *dera* and one part went to the *zenana*. The *zenana* said to Mai Nandi, "We are the same, so we must have the same share of income." Mai Nandi replied, "No, we are not the same." She took off her *shalwar* [trousers] and showed that she had nothing between her legs. She then said, "You have a penis, and God created me. You are *zenana* by your own wish." After seeing this, the *zenana* fled to forest, where she found a *saroot* [a sharp-leafed bush]. By the *saroot*, she castrated herself and fell down. She became unconscious. Then, by the order of God, a deer came and fed her with milk and sucked her wound. This went on for 40-45 days, until the time that her wound healed. Then the castrated [due to castration transformed from *aqwa* to *narban*] hijra went to the house of Mai Nandi, clapped, and stated, "If you do not have anything between your legs, then I am the same." At that moment, Mai Nandi cursed the other hijra with sorrow. She said, "O God, you created me while he castrated herself." Upon Mai Nandi's command, the earth cracked and she jumped in, but the castrated hijra held her by her *dupatta* [headscarf]. Mai Nandi stated, "Son, if the *dupatta* remains on your head, everyone will respect you." Then she disappeared into the cracked earth.⁸⁴

This myth was interesting to me for many reasons. First, it tells the hijra community's cultural perspective on castration. Second, it introduces an important character, Mai Nandi, who is perceived by the community as a "true" hijra with spiritual powers. Third, the narrative legitimizes the hijra practice of collecting alms. Fourth, the myth explains how alms are distributed, with the highest share going to the guru. Fifth, in retelling the myth, Farah (the respondent narrating the myth during the focus group discussion) used masculine pronouns and verbs for Mai Nandi. The Mai Nandi myth illustrates the importance of the *dupatta* and its association with respect. The

⁸⁴ Aqwa and Narban Hijra people, a focus group discussion with the author, April 13, 2015.

myth of Mai Nandi and other stories circulated in Pakistan's hijra community reveal the sense of purity associated with ambiguous sex organs. Nadeem Kashish elaborated further:

They [hijras] were given the duty of cleaning the grave of the Prophet (PBUH), because a woman menstruates and is dirty and the same is the case with a man who does evil deeds or has sexual desires. Hijra people do not have such problems. Therefore, intersex hijras are most suitable to serve at the Prophet Muhammad's tomb and Khana-i-Kaba.⁸⁵

There are accounts in both the literature (see chapter 1) and from the hijra community itself that hijra people were responsible for safeguarding the harem during the Mughal era. They were given this responsibility because they were considered sexually impotent and/or castrated and thus could not have sexual relations with women. Hence, I argue that both purity and spirituality are strongly associated with the hijra identity, though primarily with those individuals bearing ambiguous sexual organs.

3.3. Communicating spiritual status through practice

In Pakistan, hijra community members attain a socially-constructed spiritual status through the performance of various rituals. I refer here to the celebration of Hazrat Ali's⁸⁶ birthday and the performance of *dhamal*, or a dance accompanied by rhythmic drumming. I took part in one such event that had been arranged by the hijra community and was celebrated in a ritualistic manner.⁸⁷ The hijra participants danced before cutting the cake, and many people from the surrounding area gathered to watch (the majority being men and children). Some women stood on the walls and roofs of their houses to see the performance. During the *dhamal* performance, one *Malang*,⁸⁸ who wore a black dress and rings and held a wooden stick, joined the procession. During the ecstatic dance, the performers moved their heads right to left and up and down, bowed their bodies, and even sat on the ground. Symbolically, the performance of *dhamal* represents the devotion and association between the performer and the God.

⁸⁵ Nadeem Kashish (SAFFAR), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

⁸⁶ Hazrat Ali was the fourth *khalifa* (ruler) of Islam and a cousin of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

⁸⁷ This birthday ceremony was organized at the guru Safdari's *dera* (hijra residence). She invited selected hijras from the surrounding areas of Bari Imam.

⁸⁸ A member of a Muslim (specifically Sufi) religious order.



Picture 3.2: Birthday Celebration of Hazrat Ali (R.S.)



Picture 3.1: On the way to Bari Imam on Hazrat Ali's Birthday

The dhamal was followed by the cake cutting ceremony, which initiated with one community member reciting verses from the Quran⁸⁹ and saying a prayer. All the attendees and visitors accompanied her in the prayers. Afterward, the cake was cut and distributed, and all of the ceremony participants were served with food. Then the hijra guests began walking toward the shrine of Bari Imam, performing dhamal to the beat of the drum the entire way. A *malang* accompanied them. They carried trays full of sweets and lamps. They again performed dhamal when they reached the gate of the Bari Imam shrine. Onlookers showered them with money. They ended the celebration with a prayer before the shrine.

⁸⁹ The Islamic sacred book, believed to be the word of God as dictated to Muhammad by the archangel Gabriel and written in Arabic



Picture 3.4: Dancing on the Birthday of Hazrat Ali



Picture 3.3: On the way to Bari Imam on Hazrat Ali's Birthday carrying sweets and fire

During my field research, I observed that hijra community members frequently visit shrines and actively participate in shrine festivals by performing dhamal. As community members grow older, they become more dependent on the profession of begging. With the increase in begging, they attempt to demonstrate more of their spiritual status, particularly when compared to younger individuals.

Figure 3.5 depicts a guru (teacher) with her chela (disciple). The guru wears a black dress and a scarf, similar to a dupatta (which is specifically associated with feminine attire and is usually used to cover the head and chest). The chela, wearing a green dress and a white headscarf that looks somewhat like a turban, accompanies her. Turbans like this one are usually worn by men in rural areas.



Picture 3.3: Performance of ritual at Bari Imam Shrine: praying and lightning fire

In the image, the guru lights a fire in a *diva* (a mud pot), which was filled with oil and a piece of cotton, while the chela raises her hands in prayer in the courtyard of the Bari Imam shrine. This particular ritual is common among people from all spheres of life and is usually performed to fulfill personal wishes and/or to show devotion to the saint. However, I specifically contextualize this ritual as a form of spiritual communication when it is performed by members of the hijra community. The guru elaborated, “Since I am getting old, I feel peace and relaxation when I spend my time at this shrine and offer my Friday prayer here. This is something inside me and I feel responsible for maintaining my status as the spiritual being that God created.”⁹⁰ She further added, “Society also likes us in this role, and this is truly who we are.”⁹¹

Here, I would like to reiterate the following: a) hijra people perceive themselves as spiritual beings and b) to maintain this role, they communicate to society at large through ritual performance. But this remains just one aspect of the hijra identity, one that serves as a strategy to

⁹⁰ Bali (*aqwa*), interview with the author date April 22, 2015.

⁹¹ Ibid.

maintain the spiritual status but does not completely correspond to other hijra sub-identities. The point of reference here is the narban identity.

3.4. Castration and its Interpretation: A Case of Narban Hijra Identity

Castration is something against God's will. God has given them [hijras] male bodies and they have to live with this. They do not have a right to alter their bodies through castration. However, God has created them with feminine souls, and they can live with this without altering their physical state. Those who do castration, they are known as *lun kata sheetan* [devil without penis] and the act of castration is known as *sheetani kam* [an evil act].⁹²

There are several things to consider when interpreting the above account from Kashish. The first is the self-position of Kashish herself: she is an aqwa who worked as a social activist. Her viewpoint on the narban identity can be linked to identity politics within the hijra community. Generally, the status of the narban identity is higher than that of the aqwa. This is because castration not only reflects a strong sense of belonging-ness within the community, but it is also viewed as an effort to abandon male sexuality and identity in order to comply with the feminine self. For some individuals, the values associated with castration signify a stronger commitment to the hijra identity. However, this commitment is lacking from the side of aqwa hijra people. Therefore, I interpreted the Kashish's account with reference to identity politics. She named narban hijra person as the "devil without a penis."

There are also legal and religious grounds, which provide basis for the condemnation of narban hijra people. Castration is not legal in Pakistan and those who undergo castration process are violator of the law. Hence, the aqwa hijra people get chance to condemn the narban hijra people and the castration on the legal grounds.

Similarly, altering the body on the basis of the identified self is not legitimized in Islamic education. Clerics condemn the act and can even symbolically "transform" the dead body of a narban back into a male body for final funeral prayers:

A narban died. The other hijras consulted a *moulvi* [a prayer leader] for the *Janaza* [funeral prayers]. The *moulvi* agreed to offer the *Janaza* with the compulsion that the other hijras should make a symbolic penis from cotton for the deceased so as to give him the symbolic shape of a male body. Then he [the *moulvi*] would be able to offer *Janaza*.⁹³

⁹² Nadeem Kashish (SAFFAR), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

⁹³ Nagina (*khwajasira*), interview with author, April 11, 2015.

Hence, from the above given account I conclude that internal politics in the hijra community, as well as legal and religious pressures, can all serve to criminalize the act of castration and increase marginality of the narban hijra people.

3.4.1. Clerics Perspective about Hijra Identity and Hijra People

Apart from the hijra community, I was also interested to know the perspectives of clerics on the hijra identity: that is, how clerics interpret the hijra identity and status through an Islamic lens. Accordingly, I conducted an in-depth interview with a scholar with the Islamic Sharia at the International Islamic University in Islamabad. During the interview, he categorically condemned the transgender identity: “Those who have a male body and adopt a feminine gender are committing sin, as they are male and they should behave like a male. Otherwise they are committing sin and deserve punishment.”⁹⁴ When pressed on what kind of punishment they deserved, he responded, “They should have capital punishment.”⁹⁵ He considered sexual relations between a transgender person and a biological male to be an act of *zina*, adding, “Whoever commits *zina* should be stoned to death.”⁹⁶ I then asked about an intersexed person with sexual desires – what was s/he to do? He replied, “The person born with ambiguous sexual organs should not have sexual desires.”⁹⁷ If the sexual desire persisted, then “s/he has to control the sexual desire.”⁹⁸

I conducted a similar interview with someone formerly associated with *tableegi Jamat*. He affirmed the aforementioned professor’s sentiments and argued that gender identity stemmed from the biological body. Here, biological body refers to a person born with ambiguous sexual organs who is identified as *khuntha* (intersexed) and *mukhannath* (one who performs the feminine gender). The respondent was of the view that “a person born with an intersex status should be perceived as a male if he has prominent male sexual organs, or perceived as a female if she has

⁹⁴ Prof. Zahid (Professor of Sharia at IIUI), interview with the author date April 21, 2015.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

prominent female sexual organs.”⁹⁹ He further added, “According to bodily status, she or he should be given inherited property on the basis of sex.”¹⁰⁰

Hence, clerical perspectives reflect the essentialist argument that biology determines gender. This type of argument sharpens heteronormativity and continues to normalize it through Islamic education. The crossing of sex and gender boundaries are assumed to be deviant behavior qualifying a punishable act.

⁹⁹ Molana Ashraf, interview with the author, date April 17, 2015.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

3.5. Discussion

Throughout this research, I have found that a *sense of self* is important in determining gender identity within the hijra community. For instance, those who are physically male but adopt a female identity consider themselves hijra. The same is true for those born genitally ambiguous who later either assume a female identity or eschew both male and female identities. Individuals who are morphologically male and align with masculine gender roles may also identify as hijra. So what is common throughout this community? What is the quality that makes a hijra? Is it gender roles, sexual orientation, or something else?

Despite the community's diversity – whether a member completely or partially adopts feminine roles; whether s/he expresses or does not express the feminine gender; whether s/he is sexually active or sexually passive – the most important quality throughout remained a *sense of self*. No matter the anatomical structure or preferred gender practices, all community members vitally identified as hijra. This was what united them.

Nevertheless, those unified but diverse identities vary according to a number of factors: anatomical structure, social role, and/or livelihood strategy, for instance. Some identities indicate a strong sociological division within the community, such as the hijrapan (for whom ceremonial blessing duties are compulsory) and the zenanapan (for whom ceremonial blessing duties are not compulsory).

Within the Hindi, Sanskrit, Urdu and Bangla languages, the most common terms describing a hijra person are *aqwal/janana/anana* (a person with a penis) and *chibray/nirvanal/narban* (a person without a penis). There are also terms that indicate a third gender/sex, such as *trikiya prakrti*, *aravani/ arurvani*, *jagappa* and *khwajasira* (Abdullah, et al. 2012; Hinchy 2014a; Hossain 2012, ; Jagadish 2013; Kalra 2012; Nanda 1999; Patel 2010; Reddy 2003; Sharma 2012). While the Pakistani transgender community comprises a number of specialized identities existing alongside the core hijra identity, these specialized identities – known as aqwa, narban and khwajasira or khusra (the rarest of the three) – are distinct from the conventional gender identities of male and female.

There is some variation and concomitant confusion in the literature regarding the term *kothis*. Some descriptions synonymize *kothis* and *aqwa* (a hijra person with a penis who negotiates her gender identity and sexual orientation). In most cases, *kothis* are studied within the context of male prostitution, though they are documented as feminine males. I refer here to Hall (2005), but there is another history of the *kothis*. According to one study respondent, *kothis* existed long before the emasculated hijra (*narban/nirvana*). Owing to their feminine behavior and disposition, they were appointed as guards to protect the harem of the royal family. Eventually, some *kothis* opted for castration, and the group has since emerged as a distinct identity (Hall 2005, 129).

I am convinced by Hall's (2005) interpretation in one respect: that gender-variant people might at some point opt for castration. However, I am not convinced that an uncastrated person would be given the task of safeguarding the royal harem. Appointing a castrated person seems likelier, as it would restrict illicit sexual contact and maintain an image of purity.

Nevertheless, there is overlap between the *kothis* and the *aqwa*. Uzma Yaqoob explained that uncastrated people who dress femininely and live within the community are known as *aqwa*. However, when these same individuals visit their biological families, they will likely don masculine clothing and be temporarily identified as *kothis*.¹⁰¹

But most of the confusion surrounding *kothis* is about the identity itself: are *kothis* transgendered or simply feminized males? A peer-reviewed ethnographic study by Collumbien et al. (2009) in Pakistan documented *kothis* as feminized male. Patel (2010) concluded the same in India. On the other hand, Soumi Dey (2013), also from India, asserted that *kothis* were transgender persons. All three studies focused on the masculine aspect of the *kothis* identity, although evidence indicates feminine aspects, as well. These studies furthermore anchored the identity in a male-to-male sexual relationship context (Dey 2013). Apart from these studies, Kalra (2012) described effeminate males called *zenana* in the hijra community. These individuals take on the hijra identity to facilitate sexual relationships with males. They may or may not cross-dress and/or continue to wear male clothes, but they do not accept being labeled gay (Kalra 2012, 122).

There is ample literature to indicate *zenana* (feminized males) as integral to the hijra community. Thus, I argue that instead of placing *kothis* in an either/or context (either transgender

¹⁰¹ Uzma Yaqoob (activist with FDI), interview with the author, April 13, 2015.

person or feminized males), we should instead consider them *zenana hijra* (a feminized transgender person), an identity within the hijra community and, in the context of the present study, an *aqwa hijra*.

Of course, many members of the hijra community do negotiate their gender identities, as well as their sexual orientation, depending on the demands of the social space. These spaces might be in the hijra community, in their natal communities, or during specific social interactions. Sometimes these negotiations must concede to professional demands. For instance, I encountered a few *aqwa* individuals who did not expose their identity in the workplace because their occupations required them to perform masculine gender roles and maintain male identities. According to Yaqoob, *aqwa hijra* people may be further divided into two subgroups: one that prominently adopts the feminine gender and perceives the self as *zenana* (feminine), and another that is more fluid and regularly negotiates gender.¹⁰² That said, a sufficient understanding of the distinction between *aqwa* and *kothis* will require further research. Until that time, I refer to the *aqwa* as *zenana* (feminine).

While academic literature has historically anchored the various hijra identities within the context of the English language (i.e. “feminized male,” or similar descriptions), the identities should instead be contextualized within the community itself. English interpretations can create subjectivities that are influenced by western discourse. These subjectivities can consequently impede a thorough understanding not only of the hijra identity, but also of the unique sociocultural dynamics that shape it. Therefore, through this research I did not try to translate the terms *aqwa* and *narban* into any parallel English terms. However, I document these identities under the umbrella of hijra or transgender, particularly in the context of transgender rights in Pakistan.

A similar confusion exists on the application form for Pakistan’s NADRA Computerized National identity Card (CNIC). The CNIC indicates the sex of the card holder, a simple distinction to make for those who ascribe to the traditional binary of male or female. Gender nonconformists, on the other hand, are presented with a third option, which could be “male transgender, female transgender or *Khunsa-e-mushkil*, according to their own preference” (Pakistan Governance Forum 2012, 4).

¹⁰² Uzma Yaqoob (activist with FDI), interview with the author, April 13, 2015.

Here I would like to highlight the confusion present in the official categorization of the hijra identity. To some extent, this categorization reflects the Islamic jurisprudence categorizing hijra people, such as the terms *Khunsa-e-mushkil or Khunsa* referring to intersexed persons (F. Khan 2014a, 38, F. Khan 2014b, 174), *male khwajasira* referring to those who are intersexed with prominent male sex organs, and *female khwajasira* referring to those who are intersexed with prominent female sex organs. While it appears virtuous that the government of Pakistan offers these options, it should be noted that intersexed individuals do not represent a significant proportion of the hijra community and thus the categorization neglects the community majority (since most in the hijra community are people with male sex organs). While the categorization technically fulfills Islamic law in terms of accommodating the hijra identity, it does not reflect the actual needs of the community.

Interestingly, the hijra community also has confusion about these categories, but at the same time they contextualize these categories with the aqwa and narban identities. In other words, aqwa individuals possess male sex organs and thus categorize themselves as male khwajasiras (though they do not like to use the term "male" to describe their identity). On the other hand, narban individuals consider themselves female khwajasira because castration has given them an opportunity to withdraw from the status of maleness.

As umbrella terms, both *hijra* and *transgender* have a wide range of identities beneath them, including *intersex*, *transsexual*, *gender queer*, *transvestites*, and *female* and *male drag* (Stryker 2008). *Hijra* also includes *eunuch*, *transvestites*, *homosexuals*, *bisexuals*, *hermaphrodites*, *androgynes*, *transsexuals*, and *gynemimetics* (Lal 1999). There is also Nanda's conceptualization of hijra as the third gender, i.e., neither a man nor a woman (Nanda 1999). Hinchy (2014a), on the other hand, described the hijra identity by way of anatomy and sociocultural roles: "Hijras are generally male born persons who describe themselves as emasculates or 'eunuch from birth,' wear feminine clothing, usually adopt feminine names, and have sociocultural roles as performers at the time of births" (Hinchy 2014a, 274). Certainly, the hijra community is dynamic. Identities within the community differ on the basis of gender and/or sexual orientation (and associated fluidity), sociocultural roles, ritualistic practices, physical morphology, sexual impotency, and livelihood strategies. I am concerned about the legalization of these identities, again because the terms employed by NADRA to document transgender identities

(such as “transgender male” and “transgender female”) may not be adequate enough to capture the nuances within the community.

Finally, I would like to discuss the notion of castration and homosexuality among Muslims. The purpose behind this discussion is to highlight the historical practices of homosexuality and the criminalization of homosexuality during the course of history.

The Early Modern Muslim Empires socially considered homosexuality a minor sin, and homosexual acts or identities were not to be made public. Yet within the confines of homosexual communities, the rules were largely disregarded. A love for boys in Sufi mystic Persian literature is an established fact. In the works of Rumi, same-sex love was “sublimated” into a love for God. Though homosexual intercourse was criminalized and punishable under Sharia law, boy-man relationships were nonetheless a symbol of masculine social power. Adult men could simply “exercise” these relationships with slave boys. Castration was sometimes employed to maintain a slave/lover’s boyish appearance as well as his position as a passive sexual partner. This practice was also common in other regions of South Asia, where noblemen regularly penetrated eunuchs. The penalties for same-sex relations were reduced in the Ottoman Empire, but historical evidence is lacking to confirm the same trend in the Mughal Empire. The Wahhabi school of thought was that homosexuality should be treated as adultery: married offenders were sentenced to death, while unmarried offenders received 100 lashes (Clarence-Smith 2012, 68-70). According to Khan (2015), the legal interpretation of Sharia dates back to the 9th century (Y. Khan 2015, 51), so jurist contemporary discourse on Sharia law is as old as its interpretation. To some extent, Sharia law challenges normative practices and criminalizes acts that are common in many other cultures.

During the rise of the Wahhabi sect, effeminate men were permitted to perform in wedding ceremonies, but after the capture of Mecca and Medina, the sect initiated steps to rid the holy cities of homosexuality. From Medina, they drove out eunuchs who were associated with the tomb of the Prophet (PBUH), citing idolatry as the motivation; homosexuality, however, was just as likely a cause¹⁰³ (Clarence-Smith 2012, 68-70).

¹⁰³ Transgender communities in Southeast Asia fared somewhat better. In Makassar and Bugis (Indonesia), those who facilitated religious rituals successfully preserved their position after a conversion to Hinduism. While a subsequent conversion to Islam proved more threatening, the community was nevertheless able to sustain its power through an

The various hijra identities, by their legitimization through the myths within hijra community culture, can trace their roots in historical socio-cultural practices. Identity negotiation among certain hijra groups may be a coping strategy to counter radical orientation inherited into the normative practices either by the religion or by law. Hence, it is a matter of concern to develop a flexible categorization for transgender people to reflect diverse gender and sexual identities in an effort to help these individuals gain rights as per global human rights practices.

association with royal families, where they “watched over the purity of the ‘white blood’” (Clarence-Smith 2012, 71-72).

Chapter 4: Gender of Gender Variant Child

The information in this chapter is based primarily on the data gathered from hijra respondents and cisgender advocates for the transgender community through biographical evidence and in-depth interviews, respectively. In Pakistan, the distinction between sex and gender has allowed for emergence of the third gender to emerge. This identity is commonly associated with genital ambiguity, a physiological condition commonly believed to indicate a “true” hijra.

This chapter looks at a broadened the hijra identity that includes individuals beyond those considered genitally ambiguous. Indeed, a number of hijra people are unambiguously male (in the biological sense) and have performed gender-variant roles since childhood. These roles are often perceived as an affront to the child’s family of orientation, and many gender-variant children once exposed are consequently subjected to social discrimination and isolation. In worst-case scenarios, they endure physical punishment, violence, and sexual abuse (see chapter seven for violence and discrimination). Impelled by a feminine sense of self, as well as the wrongdoings they may have experienced, some children develop romantic inclinations toward men. Most gender-variant children are eventually labeled hijra by society as they grow up.

The last part of the chapter examines the practice of mirroring others, a critical process within the hijra community. Many gender-variant children often face violence, social isolation, and public discrimination, and therefore seek refuge and in company of other gender-variant people and/or the hijra network. In doing so, these children not only find personal validation, but they are also provided with the opportunity to assimilate the hijra identity and become members of the community.

4.1. Beyond the Binary Division of Sex and Gender

In the following figure 4.1 the core category “Beyond the binary division of sex and gender” illustrates that Pakistani society provides a provision of third sex and third gender with the associated attributes of marginality and spirituality. This is a true case for those children who are born with ambiguous genitals and are identified as a hijra person. However, a great deal of complexity is evident in the lives of children who born as a male child, perform gender variant roles, later they are labelled as a hijra person and are left with no choice but adopt a hijra identity.

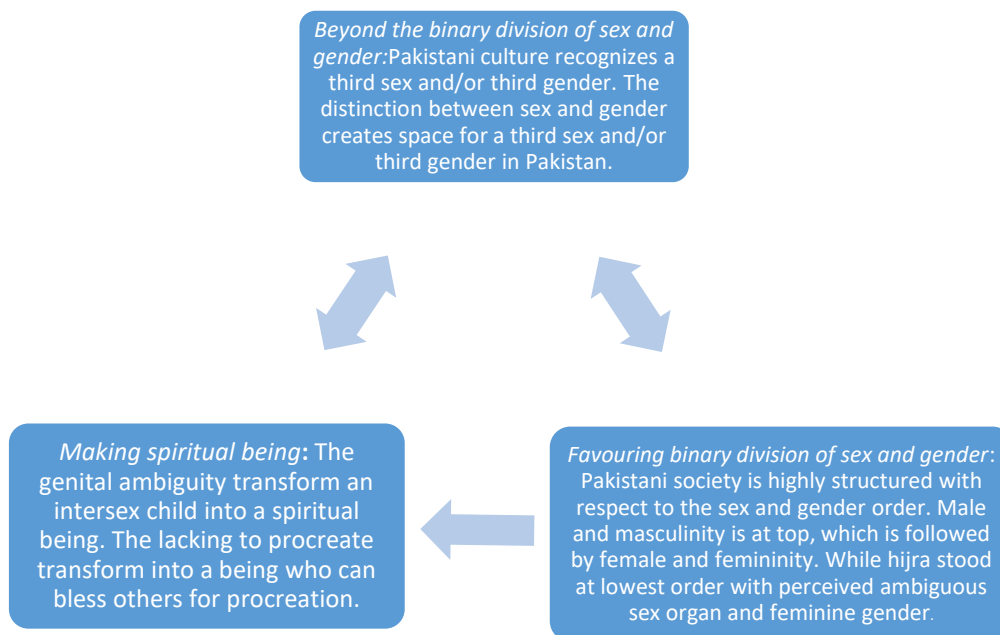


Figure 4. 1: *Beyond the Binary Division of Sex and Gender*

4.1.1. Favoring Binary Division of Sex and Gender

In Pakistan, the third gender and sex is commonly associated with a particular kind of anatomy (i.e., genital ambiguity), but this anatomical condition does not apply to all hijra (discussed in chapter 3) people. The normative practices in Pakistani society revolve around the binary division of sex and gender. The same is depicted in the perceived gender of hijra people. Although they are considered as a third gender and third sex and their gender identity nevertheless is recognized into the preferred feminine gender roles. But it does not restricts them to perform masculine gender roles. They are forced by family to be masculine in gender performance and in

certain cases -like aqwa hijra identity. – Hijra people negotiate their identity from feminine to masculine and vice versa. This negotiation of gender identity is based on certain social needs, particularly familial needs. Male and masculinity are at the top and are followed by female and femininity on the basis of sex and gender scheme while the hijra people stand at the lowest order. Such type of sex and gender scheme is not only obvious by the status of women and hijra in Pakistani society but is also evident from the time when their birth takes place especially when they are intersex. In this case intersex hijra identity is determined since the birth of intersex person. Here, it appears essentialist mood of argumentation, where biology determines the gender.

Unlike Nagina, most respondents of this study were born males and their births were celebrated as males. One individual shared that “in every family, child birth is being celebrated and my birth was also celebrated as a male child.”¹⁰⁴ According to another respondent, her family “celebrated and invited all the family members. They performed *aqeeqah*,¹⁰⁵ as they were cheerful that baby boy was born in the family. They also performed *sunnatien* [circumcision] too, but were clueless about child’s future gender”¹⁰⁶. In addition, an aqwa hijra, recounted the following about her birth: “My birth was celebrated as a male child, and a group of Khwajasiras danced to the tune of upbeat music to celebrate my birth.”¹⁰⁷ Many respondents reported their families would distribute sweets among family and friends to mark their respective entries into the world. Their births in general were treated as conventional male births. “Yes, our birth was celebrated like normal babies where relatives came to offer best wishes and finally food and sweets were served to people.”¹⁰⁸

Although the sample size of the Khwajasira hijra respondents was less, but all of them shared that their families did not celebrate their birth. In the case of Nagina, an intersex hijra, shared that her family and neighbors knew about her intersex status since her birth. As they have seen her genitals, which were not considered as complete penis, but rather it was like a piece of

¹⁰⁴ Honey (aqwa), interview with the author, April, 10, 2015.

¹⁰⁵ A ceremony where the child's head is shaved on the seventh day after birth.

¹⁰⁶ Muskan (aqwa), interview with the author, April 16, 2015.

¹⁰⁷ Arzo (aqwa), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

¹⁰⁸ Honey (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

flesh hanging down, and resembled like genitals cut through the base. Later, my teacher and others came to know that I was not a male child.¹⁰⁹

Nagina's experience illustrates how a body's genital structure can influence a child's identity, and moreover, how others seek to label that child. The passage also elucidates the transfer of information regarding Nagina's identity from home the primary social institution to another that is the school. As she grew up, she carried her khwajasira identity within the context of her school's social expectations, where Nagina felt unfit and non-accommodating.

It is a privilege to be a male and masculinity as nature destined it to be so. In Pakistan, parents usually socialize a male child in a masculine manner and according to masculine social expectations since the children are born as natural males. This practice also extends to boys who are later identified as gender-variant. "Since the time of birth, my parents considered me a masculine child and also socialized me in this manner, same as my other siblings'. They purchased masculine dresses for me, treated and brought me up in this manner."¹¹⁰ Society often imposes heteronormative standards on the relationship between someone's body and its associated gender roles. Children are expected to adapt the gender which is determined by their birth sex, but this expectation may be problematic. While heteronormativity may accommodate many children of opposite sex, it is not flexible enough to include those who are gender-variant. In Pakistan, the family of a gender-variant child often expects himself to conform to a masculine identity, even if that child prefers roles associated with the feminine gender.

Now, we have two different types of behaviors of the child at birth. These two types of behaviors are distinguished from each other. This difference of behavior is associated with the type of the genitals of the baby. Those who did not possess proper genitals, remained devoid of any celebration while those who were born as a baby boy, had their birth celebrated with pomp and show. So, if argued, symbolically the celebration of birth of baby boy conforms to masculinity. A child born with male sex genitals intact, would carry on the lineage of the family, be the bread earner for the family and would be responsible for promotion of respect and status of the family. In contrast to this, those children who were born with ambiguous improper genitals, were a lesser source of happiness and celebration for the family due to the stigma associated with the intersex

¹⁰⁹ Nagina (khwajasira), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

¹¹⁰ Roshni (aqwa and self-identified khusr), interview with the author, April 9, 2015.

child. Such child in most of the cases is perceived as a source of spoiling and degrading family respect and not being able to continue family lineage. It is believed that children with incomplete genitals will ultimately join the hijra community and will be engaged in professions like vadhai, begging, or singing which are not in line with typical hegemonic masculinity in Pakistani society. So, such children are perceived as separate from the binary of sex and gender and Nanda (1999) assigned them status of third gender. This third gender has a status of spiritual being in normative socio-cultural practices of Pakistani society. As like it is in India.

4.1.2. Making of spiritual being

In case of intersex children, rather than being masculine with the corresponding ability to procreate or fitting into typical definition of male and female, the focus is now pinned on hijra people having spiritual powers. Society shifts its focus away from their lack of ability to procreate and instead emphasizes amalgamation into spirituality of hijra people. One of the respondents, who identified herself/himself as a khwajasira (intersex), shared the following:

Since birth, my intersex status has been obvious to people. As I grew older, people started to request me for the prayer. They believed that I am khwajasira by birth therefore, God will hear my prayers. One woman had a blind belief in me, because she was convinced that it was due to my prayers she gave birth to a male child. However, I strongly believed that this was a blessing from God, not me. But she insisted me to pray for a better and peaceful life of her family.¹¹¹

From the above passage, a clear linkage between body and status is evidenced. Children born with ambiguous genitals not only inherit a spiritual status but also: a) creates provision for feminine gender representation as socially prescribed gender for intersex children is feminine and b) For such children the hijra label is affixed physical being long before the child can even express her/himself. In Pakistan, the hijra identity is legitimized through certain socio-cultural, spiritual, and ritualistic practices (discussed in chapter 1 and 3), but this legitimization is usually reserved for the khwajasira hijra identity.

4.2 Gender-Variant Children are Hijra

This section discusses the respective childhood experiences of the study's hijra respondents. In early childhood, respondents developed peer ties with the girls, preferring them as

¹¹¹ Nagina (khwajasira) interview with author Date April 11, 2015.

playmates over boys. This inclination may have been influenced by social and cultural conditions and/or the cognitive construction of their gender identity. With that in mind, this section focuses its attention on how respondents performed gender-variant activities during childhood. It also explores the conditions through which society began labeling them hijra.

4.2.1. Aligning the Sense of Self as Feminine: Gender and Games

The segregation of gender roles perpetuates the social division between men and women in a given culture. Pakistani society is highly segregated by gender, a distinction clearly made by the social roles and/or responsibilities assigned to males versus females. This segregation is apparent from childhood and begins early with gender-specific activities. Indeed, many respondents reported to having had a preference for “feminine” games and female playmates during childhood. One shared, “I liked to play the games that girls preferred to play”¹¹². Most respondents also commented that generally “girls’ games” would have been preferred for most hijra people. In other words: “Whosoever is like ‘she-male’¹¹³ from childhood, would play like girls.”¹¹⁴

As children, many hijras people played with their sisters, neighborhood girls, and/or female relatives. One respondent confirmed that “she used to play with the girls from [her] neighbor[hood]”¹¹⁵ during her youth. Nagina elaborated further: “I only played with the girls of surroundings. We used to play *beeti* [a game common among girls in Pakistan]. I did not play with boys’ who had interest in cricket, though my brother often urged me to play with them.”¹¹⁶

Nagina’s statement elucidates two critical phenomena within the sphere of gender and identity in Pakistan. First, as already indicated by respondents, gender-variant children often prefer to play with girls only. Second, the agency of the gender-variant child may be countered by her/his social contacts – in this case, Nagina’s heteronormative brother, who played cricket, a masculine game and urged his perceived brother (Nagina) to also play with the boys. In other words, Nagina’s

¹¹² Bebo (aqwa), interview with the author, April 16, 2015.

¹¹³ Respondent used a term she-male to refer herself

¹¹⁴ Sanwali (aqwa), interview with the author, April 6, 2015.

¹¹⁵ Sonia (aqwa), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

¹¹⁶ Nagina (Khwajasira), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

brother seemed to discourage her gender-variant activities, likely because her interest in so-called “girls’ games” did not align with the heteronormative trends for boys of that age.

At this point, a number of questions come to mind. To begin with, why do gender-variant children prefer playing with girls? The simple answer is that they like the company of girls and enjoy playing with them. One may also inquire the reason for this enjoyment. To this question the respondents predominantly replied that they had feminine souls within masculine bodies, therefore they preferred girls as playmates. I also learnt that gender variant children faced verbal and sexual abuse therefore they avoided to play with boys. In this regard a respondent addressed the topic by explaining that “the boys used to irritate me, by saying ‘khusra,’¹¹⁷ and they did weird things with me.”¹¹⁸ Similarly, another one said, “I did not take interest in playing with boys, because they were inclined towards sex and teased me.”¹¹⁹ Having said that, not all respondents played with girls only. Some professed a childhood interest in “boys’ games” and male playmates, such as Shehzadi, who recalled, “I used to play cricket with my brother and friends.”¹²⁰ Hence, data trends indicates that hijra respondents avoided playing with boys. The possible reasons were feminine sense of self and the experiences of violence, abuse and exploitation. The following pages will explain in detail the dynamics of gender and childhood considering the accounts of gender variant children.

Many respondents reported playing with dolls-as a favorite childhood game. In this game, one feminine doll was called *guddi* while the masculine was named *gudda*; the respective genders were adorned by colorful clothes, ensuring biological features of the dolls. With mutual understanding, the children organized dolls weddings that mimicked actual Pakistani marriage ceremonies. When other friends were invited to participate in the dolls wedding, children accompanying *guddi* were required to make *dowry*,¹²¹ while those with *gudda* participated in *barat*.¹²² One respondent elaborated further: “I had a doll, I invited my friends on my doll’s marriage, I cooked rice, arranged dowry and then I married my doll to my sister’s doll.”¹²³

¹¹⁷ Khusra and hijra are analogous words. Both terms can be employed in a derogatory manner, particularly in the context of Urdu slang.

¹¹⁸ Khurram (aqwa), interview with the author, April 13, 2015.

¹¹⁹ Honey (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

¹²⁰ Shehzadi (aqwa), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

¹²¹ “We organized marriage ceremony of dolls, prepared dowry for dolls and cooked food” (Balli [aqwa], interview with the author, April 22, 2015.

¹²² Barat is when a groom’s friends and relatives ceremoniously accompany him to his bride.

¹²³ Muskan (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

Similarly, another respondent said, “I used to make dresses of the doll and then arranged marriage with another friend’s doll... I liked and enjoyed that game.”¹²⁴

Pakistani society generally perceives dolls to be unnerving toys for the boys, and that is why none of the respondents ever recalled being given dolls as gifts by their parents. Instead they made dolls themselves or acquired from friends and/or sisters. One respondent stated that “we made dolls by ourselves with the help of clothes and cotton”¹²⁵. Another said, “I used to borrow my sister’s doll for playing doll games.”¹²⁶

Playing with dolls was not the only game in which respondents engaged as children. One such game was *baraf* (ice) and *panni* (water). This game was played in one of two ways. In the first version, a child, the chaser, runs after a group of children in order to “catch” them. Those caught become *baraf* and must stand frozen in place of apprehension. The chaser’s goal is to turn all the children into *baraf*, which puts them in “prison.” Those who escaped being frozen could rescue the frozen ones. This was done by touching the captured children and converted them into “melting” status and ultimately into water (*panni*). The round ends when all participants are turned into ice. The game then starts over, and the new chaser is the first person who was turned into ice in the previous round.

The second version is played by two teams of equal number. An open space is preferred for respondents who play in the streets or at a friend’s house. In this version, one team comprises of chasers and the other team comprises those who are to be chased. The aim of this game is also same as the first. The chasers tag the runners in order to convert them into *baraf*, and those being chased may free their teammates by turning them to *panni*. When the entire second team is frozen, the teams switch roles and the game starts over again.

While *baraf-panni* is traditionally played by both sexes, the respondents categorically shared that they played the game only with girls. They furthermore characterized the game as gender-specific (i.e., for girls). One respondent explained it as a matter of exclusivity: “I used to

¹²⁴ Sanwali (aqwa), interview with the author, April 6, 2015.

¹²⁵ Balli (aqwa), interview with the author, April 22, 2015.

¹²⁶ Sonia (aqwa), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

play with girls, mostly *chupan chupai* [hide-and-seek] and ‘*baraf panni*.’ The boys asked many times to play with them, but I always refused”¹²⁷.

Hide-and-peek was another favorite childhood game. In this game, one child responsible for seeking out other participants, who hid themselves in a desolate area. The seeker was chosen through *pukam* (a process of selection). Once the seeker is picked, she he will close his/her eyes and count up to ten before looking out for the hiders. The seeker also tried to avoid being “caught” (or tagged by a hider), but if this should happen, the person who tags the seeker shouts the word “empres”¹²⁸. The seeker must then start over renewed search. If the seeker manages to find all the children, then the hider who was discovered first becomes the seeker in the next round.

4.2.2 Expressing the Sense of Self as Feminine through Clothing Style

As previously discussed earlier, the responsibilities, and practices in Pakistani society are divided on the basis of gender roles. Both men and women construct and reinforce their gender identities through everyday activities, in particular, clothing style is a fundamental attribute of gender expression in Pakistan. The hijras too didn’t remain behind and almost all hijra respondents stated that they wore girls’ clothing during childhood in an effort to be more feminine. Some respondents donned entire ladies outfits, though most only opted for a few articles. Some wore the garments publicly, while others did secretly. Those who had sisters or other women in the family found it more comfortable to slip on women’s attire. In reply to why they donned girls’ garments, the respondents explained that since they had feminine souls, they were interested in the tasks and roles that were designated for girls. One respondent further elaborated that she was inspired by her friends who dressed up in women’s clothing and/or did their makeup. She wanted to be like them and requested them to share their items. Like few others, she explained that the impetus for wearing girls’ clothing was her feminine sense of self. “I used to wear ladies’ clothes as I liked ladies’ clothes since my childhood. I had female friends when I was eight. When they got ready or dressed up, I also insisted that I would like to be dressed up like them”¹²⁹. The same respondent further justified her preference for feminine clothes with these words: “We are like a

¹²⁷ Honey (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015

¹²⁸ Caught

¹²⁹ Bebo (aqwa), interview with the author, April 16, 2015.

female from the inside, our body physically appeared like boys, but our feelings and emotions are similar to girls”¹³⁰.

Indeed, many respondents acknowledged wearing feminine clothing or dressing femininely at some point during childhood, others were unable to do so because of social and family restrictions. One admitted, “I wore male clothing, but I did not like it much”¹³¹. Those restricted from fully cross-dressing tried to occasionally don a *dupatta* (headscarf). According to one respondent, “I used to go to school and *masjid* [mosque] with my sister covering my head with dupatta”¹³². Similarly, another claimed that she modified her masculine clothes to resemble a feminine style: “I wore males’ clothes, but they were tailored like female clothing. I used to design a male dress like a female. For example, I used to stitch *shalwar* like pajama [similar to women’s trousers], keep a handkerchief instead of dupatta.”¹³³

For some gender-variant children, wearing girls’ clothing elicits a sense of happiness and satisfaction. Consider the following input from Arzo, an aqwa hijra, who said “When there was no one at home, I used to put on my lone sister’s dress, footwear, and then danced in front of her. She would laugh and retort ‘why do you pretend like this’, I used to respond, ‘it makes me happy’. I often don *burka*¹³⁴ [A long, loose garment covering the whole body from head to toe] and go out in the streets in veil at some time.”¹³⁵

In the same vein as above a khwajasira hijra person too shared that she had a desire to wear girls’ garments, but she usually opted for a dupatta. Her parents insisted on treating her as a male child, and thus she compelled to wear boys’ clothes during her youth. When she joined the hijra community, she began wearing women’s clothing entirely. She explained her upbringing in these words, “I used to wear male clothing while at home, as my family wanted to see me a male child. By the time when I was in 4th grade I started to wear a dupatta. It was my desire to cover my head with a dupatta. Nobody asked me to do this”¹³⁶. So, the life histories of hijra people indicate that

¹³⁰ Bebo (aqwa), interview with the author, April 16, 2015.

¹³¹ Shehzadi (aqwa), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

¹³² Sonia (aqwa), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

¹³³ Honey (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

¹³⁴ From Urdu and Persian *burqa*, from Arabic *burqu* (Online Oxford Dictionary 2016).

¹³⁵ Arzo (aqwa), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

¹³⁶ Nagina (khwajasira), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

inclination towards feminine attire is an important aspect in the feminine self-authentication and its projection.

The performance of feminine gender and dressing up in women's attire are directly related to the alms collection or contributions from the viewers and it is a livelihood strategy of the hijra community. One respondent, Muskan, referred to the practice when she disclosed that, during her childhood she once donned her sister's clothes and clandestinely left the house to pursue alms collection. She shared, "I wore her dress and without informing my family, travelled to another village for alms with my friends"¹³⁷. Though she was not yet a member of the hijra community, Muskan somehow made the association between cross-dressing and alms collection. She may have publicly observed gender-variant individuals earning money in this manner, or perhaps in the past people perceived her as a hijra child and gave her money. In any case, wearing feminine clothing as children, varied among the respondents. A gender-variant child of around eight- to eleven-years-old usually experimented with cross-dressing first. Muskan confirmed this was true in her case: "I was eight-years-old when the first time I dressed like a girl"¹³⁸, but most respondents began dressing full-time as women only after joining the hijra community.

As they grow older, gender-variant children communicate their burgeoning gender identity to society by publicly challenging gender-based dress norms and social perceptions of gender. This symbolic communication carves out a space for the gender-variant child to advance her feminine identity.

4.2.3. Learning and Enhancing Aspects of the Feminine Gender: Gender and Household Tasks

In Pakistan, domestic responsibilities are predominantly divided according to a heteronormative understanding of masculine and feminine gender roles. Generally, women manage tasks like cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, and child-rearing (hereafter referred to as "feminine chores"), while men assume responsibility for duties outside of the house. This however does not mean that women do not have opportunities to work outside their homes.

Gender-variant children typically learn and perform feminine chores during their childhood at their homes. Per one respondent's account: "I was interested in those household tasks, which

¹³⁷ Muskan (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

¹³⁸ *ibid.*

are commonly associated with the girls. I used to clean house and wash utensils”¹³⁹. Another shared that she enjoyed “cooking, like making *pakory*¹⁴⁰, and preparing food.” But at the same time, she “never took interest in tasks related to shopping of groceries”¹⁴¹. Some children were required to engage in additional domestic errands, particularly if their mothers had extra responsibilities or if there were younger siblings to be taken care of. . As Arzo explained, “I used to cook meals, wash utensils and looked after all house works as my mother usually engaged in judicial court matters related to family issues”¹⁴². Another respondent added that she “used to cook meals and prepare brothers and sisters in getting ready for school.”¹⁴³

As Sitara explained absence of elder sisters also required domestic participation from respondents: “My older sister usually lived with *Nani* [grandmother] and I used to assist my mother household chores”¹⁴⁴. Honey shared a similar account: “I always happily performed domestic chores with my own will like cooking meals, washing utensils etc. When my *bhabhi* (sister-in-law) used to go outside, I mostly performed all the duties”¹⁴⁵.

Some respondents faced criticism at home for attempting feminine chores. Sonia remarked that her older sister initially objected to her interest in household affairs, though she later relented and taught her to cook and navigate other tasks: “Sister firstly strongly objected but later due to of my stubbornness, she made me to learn the tasks. I would usually ask my sister to take some rest, as I could manage all the work without difficulty”¹⁴⁶.

Conversely, Shehzadi shared that her mother never restricted her from domestic work: “My parents never stopped me from doing this type of work since they knew me well and my gender variant activities. I learned these skills from mother.”¹⁴⁷ Other respondents confirmed similar experiences.

¹³⁹ Balli, (aqwa), interview with the author, April 22, 2015.

¹⁴⁰ Traditional crispy fried snack dish of Pakistani food.

¹⁴¹ Honey (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

¹⁴² Arzo (aqwa), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

¹⁴³ Shehzadi (aqwa), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

¹⁴⁴ Sitara (aqwa), interview with the author, April 8, 2015.

¹⁴⁵ Honey (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

¹⁴⁶ Sonia (aqwa), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

¹⁴⁷ Shehzadi (aqwa), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

4.2.4. Performing the Feminine Gender through Language, Body Movement, Gestures, Expression, and Dance

The concept of the hijra is a gender-centric phenomenon. As indicated in the preceding sections, many respondents gravitated toward feminine tasks, garments, and games during childhood. Furthermore to this end, some respondents also adopted feminine self-referential language as children.

Unlike English, Urdu employs grammatical gender techniques, i.e., a verb will take either a masculine or a feminine form depending on the gender of the subject. Consider the phrase: “I am going,” which is gender-neutral in English. In Urdu, its translation would be “*Main ja reha hoon*” for a man, and “*Main ja rehy hon*” for a woman. In other words, in Pakistan, grammar identifies a speaker’s gender.

A cisgender advocate for the hijra community offered the following input: “When hijra people talk, they use feminine gender words for themselves. They say ‘*Main Ja rehye hon,*’ or I am going.”¹⁴⁸ One aqwa hijra respondent affirmed the observation and shared her own insight: “I used sentence such as ‘*Aa rehi hun, Ja rehi hun*’ [fem: I am coming, I am going].”¹⁴⁹

Language is a medium to communicate with people. For the hijra people spoken language partners with body posturing, gestures, facial expressions, and hand movements. Pakistani society frequently nests a person’s body language into a particular gender identity. As such gender-variant children are often perceived to employ feminine communication techniques. This notion is echoed by community advocate Azam: “Such [gender-variant] children will have feminine body gestures.”¹⁵⁰

Gender-variant body language is often questioned by the family. In some cases, it incites anger. Consider this input from one respondent: “Upon my way of talking and walking, my family retorts, ‘how do you behave?’”¹⁵¹ Another shared the following: “My father got angry and verbally

¹⁴⁸ Azam (advocate for the transgender community), interview with the author, April 21, 2015.

¹⁴⁹ Nagina (khwajasira), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

¹⁵⁰ Azam (advocate for the transgender community), interview with the author, April 21, 2015.

¹⁵¹ Muskan (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

abused me because of my body gestures and walking style.” She further added: “My parents ordered me to stop this weird manner or try to walk in masculine style.”¹⁵²

4.2.5. Gender and Dance

In Pakistan, it is socially acceptable for both men and women to dance, though the practice is more often associated with women. Social pressures for dance differ according to gender. A man can dance with friends, siblings, and other relatives at weddings or similar functions, though he is expected to adopt a traditional style while doing so. A man is avoids dancing in a “feminine” manner, so as to shrug off any doubts about his masculinity.

Most respondents of this study characterized their manner of dancing as feminine. Sanwali recounted that, as children, they “used to dance like girls,”¹⁵³ while Arzo affirmed that “dancing was [her] hobby.”¹⁵⁴ All respondents stated that they enjoyed dancing since childhood. Some even reported an immediate association between dance and music that is if they heard music, they felt a strong urge to dance. Embracing dance publicly, however, was another matter. Only a few respondents danced openly as children, while others danced at home with their sisters. In the same vein, Arzo shared the following account: “I used to wear my sister's dress, footwear, and then I used to dance in front of her. She would laughingly quip remark ‘why you do it’”¹⁵⁵.

Some gender-variant children become proficient dancers and are subsequently hired to perform at local weddings and other ceremonies. Of those, some experience a fair degree of fame. One respondent recalled her performing experience in an agreeable tone: “I was fond of dancing from the time I grew up. I used to dance in marriage ceremonies now and onward....I used to dance at home when I heard loud music.”¹⁵⁶ Another recounted dancing at family weddings with relatives: “On cousin marriages, I and my cousins used to dance with fervor and enthusiastically.”¹⁵⁷ It should be noted, however, that hired dancing was less common than simple dancing at relatives’ weddings. The respondents generally agreed that fondness for dancing was

¹⁵² Nadeem Kashish (aqwa), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

¹⁵³ Sanwali (aqwa), interview with the author, April 6, 2015.

¹⁵⁴ Arzo (aqwa), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Nagina (khwajasira), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

¹⁵⁷ Arzoo (aqwa), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

generally common: even Muskan, who was restricted from dancing at home, secretly enjoyed the dancing activity at friend's house: "We all friends would dance on music constantly for hours."¹⁵⁸

Gender-variant children discovered an avenue by which to express her/his gender identity through dance, even if that identity contradicted the assigned sex. In this scenario relatives and neighbors began to perceive the child's femininity and identify her/him as a hijra. The path to reality was not always without obstacles. Some family members would consider dance an inappropriate activity for a boy. Such was the case for Kashish, who reported criticism from elders: "The cousins and neighbors used to express that Kashish danced like a girl. I liked the comments of my peer group who appreciated my performance, but disliked comments of aged people who did not consider dance as a good activity"¹⁵⁹.

Some respondents classified their relationship to dance as (1) influenced by Pakistan's entertainment industry and/or (2) associated with the phenomenon of fame. Sitara, for instance, identified dancing as a childhood career goal, stating, "I wanted to be a film star because I was interested in dancing."¹⁶⁰ A similar response was shared by Anjali: "I liked actress Reema¹⁶¹ because of her dance and tried to dance like Reema."¹⁶² Children who exhibited a proclivity for dance were regularly asked to perform at school events. Khurram reported, "On every Friday we had a sports day in our school. Teachers usually asked me to dance."¹⁶³ Similarly, another respondent said, "In the school, I used to participate in dance activities."¹⁶⁴ Dance performance afforded some respondents a reputation among fellow schoolmates, one that was associated with fame and recognition.

In Pakistan, gender-variant children with an affinity for dance exercise this in a variety of social functions: weddings and/or similar ceremonies, school events, friends' houses, and their own homes. In many cases, the practice acts as a vehicle for the children to further assert and express their gender identities. However, such expression of gender identity are being perceived against family honor.

¹⁵⁸ Muskan (aqwa), interview with the author, April 16, 2015.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Sitara (aqwa), interview with the author, April 8, 2015.

¹⁶¹ Reema is a performer in Pakistan's film industry. She is famous for her beauty, acting, and dancing.

¹⁶² Anjali (aqwa), interview with the author, April 23, 2015.

¹⁶³ Khurram (aqwa), interview with the author, April 13, 2015.

¹⁶⁴ Mehak (narban), interview with the author, April 12, 2015.

4.2.6. The Objectification of Gender-Variant Children as a Threat to Family Honor

Many hijra people are saddled with negative perceptions during their youth. According to one cisgender advocate, “In childhood, gender variant children produced a sense of being female or feminine in their acts.”¹⁶⁵ Gender-variant behaviors create confusion about the child’s gender identity, which can further alienate an already nonconforming child. “These gender variant-practices created the bad perception towards them.”¹⁶⁶ Nadeem Kashish, who runs the non-governmental organization She-Male Association for Fundamental Rights (SAFFAR), elaborated further: “The way a gender-variant child behaves acquire peoples' attention, and they easily recognize her as a feminine gender. So, people whisper about such children, which becomes a gossip and ultimately social stigma, disrespect and dishonor for the family.”¹⁶⁷

Family dishonor and disrespect are two common allegations levied against gender-variant children, primarily because the children are believed to violate the long standing traditional socio-cultural norms of society and, by extension, their families. A gender-variant child often faces social resistance to her/is identity. The outside perception of the child’s sex, sexuality, and sexual orientation can badly damage her/is family’s life. One respondent recounted marriage negotiations between families that were ultimately rejected: “My father asked my brother-in law for my marriage proposal of his sister”. However, he replied to my father ‘your son was a khusra, and he refused the marriage proposal for his sister.’”¹⁶⁸ The marriage proposal was rejected on the ground that the respondent was considered an incomplete man.

Members of the hijra community are frequently stigmatized during childhood, largely because their masculinity is perceived as compromised. Thus, gender-variant children and their families often do not achieve due status and respect in the social sphere and even in certain cases are treated a sex object.

¹⁶⁵ Azam (advocate for the transgender community), interview with the author, April 21, 2015.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Nadeem Kashish (aqwa, SAFFAR), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

¹⁶⁸ Arzo (aqwa), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

4.2.7. Gender-Variant Children as Objects of Sex

In addition to weathering allegations of disrespect and dishonor, gender-variant children are also vulnerable to sexual abuse, particularly at the hands of male family members, relatives, and peers. One community advocate offered this explanation: “Aqwa hijra people during their childhood, is being sexually abused by their family members, school fellows, or by relatives. They are judged by the society as an easy target for sexual abuse and violence”¹⁶⁹. He further added that “due to the representation of gender variant behavior a *khusra* is labeled as a *gando* [sexually passive].”¹⁷⁰ In this case a passive sexuality is being connected with a male who may perform and prefer feminine gender.

Such is the perception of hijra people, which also extends to gender-variant children that they are avidly interested in playing the role of the passive sexual partner and this revolves around their presentation of feminine gender. One respondent elaborated further on this presumption: “I had sex with my cousin at the age of fifteen. He was ten years older than me. He had observed my personality traits and was kind to me. I liked him. One day he stayed overnight at our home and slept in my room. At night, he asked me to have sex with him. Then we had a sex at that night.”¹⁷¹ A third respondent said blatantly, “My cousin sexually abused me when I was just 12-year-old.”¹⁷²

In the context of above given qualitative accounts it is obvious that the gender variant children are vulnerable to sexual abuse. This vulnerability is prevalent due to weaker position of gender variant children, generally in the society and particularly in the family institution. Therefore, they are target of sexual abuse at the family institution from the male relatives. However, such experiences of sexual abuse are not only restricted to family domain despite the fact that chances of sexual abuse increase as greater social interaction among gender variant children. Gender-variant children also experience sexual abuse at school, where the assailant is most often an elder classmate or a teacher. Sometimes the child is sexually abused before his/her start of puberty. As mentioned by Mehroz: “I had sex with a guy in the school’s washroom at the age of eleven.”¹⁷³ Even some of the hijra respondents were being sexually exploited by their

¹⁶⁹ “They [boys] hug me or prick me.” (Arzo [aqwa], interview with the author, April 11, 2015).

¹⁷⁰ Tariq (NGO representative and transgender health advocate), interview with the author, April 16, 2015.

¹⁷¹ Mehroz (aqwa), interview with the author, April 6, 2015.

¹⁷² Bebo (aqwa), interview with the author, April 16, 2015.

¹⁷³ Mehroz (aqwa), interview with the author, April 6, 2015.

school teachers. One of the respondents shared “A teacher was attracted towards me. He gave me extra support in the exams. However, secretly he kissed me and touched my cheeks. Gradually it spoiled my reputation and I became vulnerable to sexual abuse by other school fellows. Finally, I left school.¹⁷⁴ Advocate and aqwa hijra Kashish shared a similar experience: “School fellow tried to sexually abuse me¹⁷⁵. She went further and highlighted the family response against complains of sexual abuse by the gender variant children. She said “In all this social phenomenon, if a gender-variant child complains to her family, then in the families’ opinion, this was all because of our gender-variant role. So, this is you who are responsible for all this mess. So, avoid such gender-variant roles and practices.”¹⁷⁶

Kashish’s statement elucidates a phenomenon known to concomitantly occur when a gender-variant child is violated: rather than offering support, some parents blame the victim’s gender identity. In other words, gender-variant roles are themselves at fault for creating an appeal to potential offenders and enabling them to violate the child’s self-respect.¹⁷⁷ But Kashish’s view is not universal. Another advocate asserted that complaints of misconduct are not shared, and instead are kept secret: “Aqwa and narban hijra people in their childhood have interaction with boys who sexually abused them. In most of the cases, these hijra people do not complain about such sexual abuses, instead they move on with accepting such sexual abuse as a norm perhaps.”¹⁷⁸

Two types of trends emerged from the respondent’s account a) feminine gender representation or outlook makes gender variant children vulnerable to sexual abuse b) by all standards the gender variant children are blamed for sexual abuse. In other words gender variant children’s gender representation objectified them as an object of sex and they internalize this sense of objectification in term of gender representation that can be termed as self-objectification.

¹⁷⁴ Anjaili (aqwa), interview with the author, April 23, 2015.

¹⁷⁵ Nadeem Kashish (aqwa, SAFFAR), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

¹⁷⁶ Nadeem Kashish (aqwa, SAFFAR), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

¹⁷⁷ “I was sexually abused in the childhood. When I did complained to my parents, they then blamed myself that I have problem in my gender representation. So, this is your fault, you are being sexually abused. So, better to bring changes to your pattern of walking and talking.” Nadeem Kashish (aqwa, SAFFAR), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

¹⁷⁸ Tariq (NGO representative and transgender health advocate), interview with the author, April 16, 2015.

4.2.8. The Sexuality of Gender-Variant Children

Many hijra people stated that their feminine sense of self and representation is the impetus for their attraction for men. In these lines all of the hijra respondents narrated their biography and expressed sexuality. Even some hijra respondents stated their childhood sex history was based on their consensual sexual relation. However, same time some of the hijra respondents expressed unpleasant sexual interaction in the context of abuse. In the context of feminine gender sexuality and abuse one of the respondents shared: “I feel myself as a girl. I felt good only with those boys who were known to me, but I didn’t like the bad men.”¹⁷⁹ Another stated: “As a child, I was attracted romantically towards a boy.”¹⁸⁰

Nevertheless, a hijra’s sexual attraction profile is not categorically analogous to same-sex. Neither can it be said that hijra people are *gando* (the passive partner in a male homosexual relationship). While many hijra people are attracted to men, it is critical to note that they often owe this attraction to a feminine sense of self. To that end, many hijra people do not consider themselves gay. In fact, one individual explained it this way: “I think that I am a girl and feel emotional and sexual attraction towards boys.”¹⁸¹

As children, many respondents considered their attraction to boys’ equivalent to the heterosexual attraction between a girl and a boy. One respondent shared her own early experience navigating romantic feelings:

He [a romantic childhood interest] came to identify me through my face, behavior, and walking style that I was a “she-male.” When someone passes through the puberty, it is natural that emotional and mental feelings along with physical changes overcome that person. At that stage, the urge to fall in love with someone becomes strong, as in us, “she-males,” we drift close to that person romantically.¹⁸²

As students, some respondents left school because of their attraction to boys as that would distract them from studies. One individual elaborated, “I used to go to school, but I was inclined towards

¹⁷⁹ Khurram (aqwa), interview with the author, April 13, 2015.

¹⁸⁰ Anjaili (aqwa), interview with the author, April 23, 2015.

¹⁸¹ Nadeem Kashish (aqwa, SAFFAR), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

¹⁸² Shehzadi (aqwa), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

boys gathering and gradually started having physical relations with them and desisted from regularly attending the school so eventually I dropped out.”¹⁸³

Contrary to the direct assertions from hijra people themselves, inverse opinions do exist regarding their sexual orientation and the transgender community in Pakistan. One advocate for the community believes that gender-variant children expressing a romantic interest in boys do so because of some previous experience of sexual abuse. He asserts that those who “repeatedly [endure] sexual abuse in childhood develop gender-variant child's inclination towards homosexuality.”¹⁸⁴ Another transgender community advocate echoed this argument when he stated: “There could be various reasons behind sexual orientation of hijra people. As far as my personal research is concerned, I would say it might be that such children in their childhood were victim of sexual abuse and this occurrence probably played vital role in developing sexual attraction or evoking sexual lust.”¹⁸⁵

The findings shared above reveals that there is a connection between sexual abuse and sexual orientation. However, the account of the hijra respondents find solace in sexual abuse in terms of “sense of self” so as to legitimize their feminine gender. However, this legitimization can be one or another form of *self-objectification*, where a person internalizes socially imposed identity in own self and align this constructed self with the self-image of the person and perform it in the given social settings.

4.2.9. Labeling Gender-Variant Children as Hijra

One respondent identified her “girlish attitude, dance, and playing with dolls” as an impetus for her socially-ascribed identity.¹⁸⁶ Another indicated her “ladies’ dress, bangles, [and] *mehndi* [henna] her socially accepted personality.”¹⁸⁷ In Pakistani society, a shift in attire and branded style from masculine to feminine is considered an exemplary shift in gender. In other words, if a male child starts wearing feminine clothing, then his gender identity is questioned by his family, relatives, and community. The child will likely be labeled hijra and/or khusra in the years to come.

¹⁸³ Mehroz (aqwa), interview with the author, April 14, 2015.

¹⁸⁴ Tariq (NGO representative and transgender health advocate), interview with the author, April 16, 2015.

¹⁸⁵ Azam (advocate for the transgender community), interview with the author, April 21, 2015.

¹⁸⁶ Sitara (aqwa), interview with the author, April 8, 2015.

¹⁸⁷ Mehak (narban), interview with the author, April 12, 2015.

Some respondents received personal nicknames beyond the general hijra label during childhood and/or in adolescence to reflect their burgeoning feminine identity. One individual who received a nickname Muskan by hijra community, explained: “My name is Muskan. Real name was Umer Farooq and people used to call me Umruu. I acquired these nick names due to my gender variant behavior.”¹⁸⁸ The evidence of feminine gender either through verbal, physical or adaptation of certain gender roles in the family environment or having been sexually abused provided sufficient justifications for being labeled as hijra.

4.3. Mirroring oneself after others

To label as a hijra, identification as a passive sexual partner and social isolation push gender-variant children to develop social ties with the hijra community. There is a vacuum that develops inside this deprived class and the empty space leads them to the community best suited to their kind of activity. These ties provide a child with an opportunity for self-exploration for making their place within the community. This category “mirroring oneself after others” is based on two sub-themes a) Networking between gender variant children and members of the hijra community and b) Authenticating the sense of self and adopting the hijra identity.

Category: *Mirroring oneself after others:* To label as a hijra and passive sexual partner push gender-variant children to develop social ties with the hijra community. These ties provide a child with an opportunity for self-exploration and authentication within the community.

Sub-category: *Networking between Gender-Variant Children and Members of the Hijra Community:* Society exercises violence and discrimination against gender-variant children, who then experience isolation from their families and peers. They consequently seek company from the hijra community.

Sub-category: *Authenticating the sense of self and adopting the hijra identity:* Within the hijra community, gender variant children explore their identities through new social, sexual, psychological, and economic roles. These roles are a mirror for their past, present and future lives: they know themselves through knowing the community

¹⁸⁸ Muskan (aqwa), interview with the author, April 16, 2015.

4.3.1. Networking between Gender-Variant Children and Members of the Hijra Community

The members of hijra community attract to gender-variant children for a number of reasons, the most prominent of which is inclination towards performance of feminine gender. In this regard, one respondent, when recalling her introduction to the community, iterated a kind of recognition: “I was liking same things, which hijra people have had performed in their lives like playing with dolls, interest in the dance, music, and cooking.”¹⁸⁹ Kashish shared a similar sentiment: “I had the same attributes and characteristics, which hijra community possessed. I liked to dress up and behave like hijra people. Simply, I aligned myself with them.”¹⁹⁰

Another individual cited social isolation as an incentive to seek outside ties: “Society doesn’t accept us, so we create our own social ties.”¹⁹¹ One hijra respondent alluded to the humiliation that she experienced in her natal community: “When my family started to feel insulted, and people started whispering about my physical change, I decided to leave my home and joined hijra community to spend my next years of life. Now I am happy and satisfied that Allah has been kind to me and blessed me with satisfied life.”¹⁹² And yet another respondent recounted abuse as motivation for abandoning home and joining hijra community: “When I became victim of rape, quarrel and abuse, and when even my family started calling me khusra, then I decided it was high time to join the hijra community.”¹⁹³

A cisgender advocate for the community offered his take on why hijra people leave their families of orientation. He said, “Gender variant children run away from homes because of the difference in perspectives. The families wanted to see them as a masculine child and try to socialize them in a way to develop their masculine personality but the latter felt attraction towards feminine tasks. So, the conflict of opinions forced gender variant children to run away from their homes.”¹⁹⁴

Once society affixes a hijra and/or khusra label to a gender-variant child, discrimination follows him/her and ultimately leads a child towards social isolation and development of

¹⁸⁹ Sitara (aqwa), interview with the author, April 8, 2015.

¹⁹⁰ Nadeem Kashish (aqwa, SAFFAR), interview with the author, April 11, 2015. Another respondent added, “field, like if I am going anywhere, I met with some other she-male, I will behave in the same manner as the other she-male, like talking with shaking hands, will clap too, so we got caught by our acts” (Sanwali [aqwa], interview with the author, April 6, 2015).

¹⁹¹ Mehak (narban), interview with the author, April 12, 2015.

¹⁹² Anjali (aqwa), interview with the author, April 23, 2015.

¹⁹³ Sitara (aqwa), interview with the author, April 8, 2015.

¹⁹⁴ Tariq (NGO representative and transgender health advocate), interview with the author, April 16, 2015.

social ties with hijra community. For gender-variant children, the hijra community offers comfort where they can socialize with people like themselves. For the community, on the other hand, gender-variant children represent fresh human capital to hijra society. One respondent elaborated on this matter: As a child I usually went outside for leisure; there I met a group of *aqwa* hijra people. They asked me to join them, so I became their *chela* [disciple]. They must have found some feminine traits in me and that's why they offered me to join them. I accepted their offer. They said, 'You are very pretty and you will have everything that you want.' What I wanted was similar to what girls wanted. I liked to wear good female dresses and have a boyfriend who would enjoy with me, have fun and could fulfill all my desires. When I met she-males, then I realized that I can follow them and live with them just like they do. I went to various functions and had sex with different people. First, I used to stay with them for 2-3 days, now it has been months since I visited my home. My mother regularly calls me pleading to return home but I do not want to go back there. I am happy here with my life, and my real family with its own life.¹⁹⁵

The above passage illustrates a common pattern: that a gender-variant child's gestures (and other behavioral traits perceived to be feminine) symbolically communicate her identity to other gender-variant people. Additionally, the child's desire to adopt and express femininity becomes an impetus for her to network with the hijra community. As a gender-variant child grows and struggles with her gender identity, she simultaneously uncovers her sexual orientation. Nevertheless, her burgeoning understanding of herself may not be accepted in the home or society. Interactions with other gender-variant people provide the child with an opportunity to exercise her gender and sexual identity within the safety of the community. For some, this is the only place to truly reveal oneself as who one is. One respondent explained that, during her first visit to the *dera* (transgender commune), community members served her well and allowed her to freely express her femininity. This brought the respondent much happiness. As mentioned earlier: "There was a *dera* of the hijra community in the Bari Imam. I, along with my photographer friend, visited that place. They warmly welcomed us and served us food, gave feminine clothes, makeup, and other stuff. This was the first time when I wore feminine clothes, had makeup on the face, danced and enjoyed my visit. This was a memorable visit for me."¹⁹⁶

This sentiment was echoed by a cisgender advocate for the transgender community. He explained: "Gender-variant children feel attracted towards hijra community because, there, they

¹⁹⁵ Mehroz (*aqwa*), interview with the author, April 14, 2015.

¹⁹⁶ Anjali (*aqwa*), interview with the author, April 23, 2015.

can perform all the feminine roles and adopt all the feminine practices restricted by their families.”¹⁹⁷

4.3.2. Authenticating the Sense of Self and Adopting the Hijra Identity

Sexual experiences, society’s negative perceptions, stigma, derogatory treatment by society and/or the family, and one’s own desire to explore the self are all vital factors in a gender-variant child’s decision to join the hijra community. This study assumes that gender-variant children do not adopt the hijra identity, even if they are labeled as such, unless they join the community itself. Self-realization of the identity is contingent upon community membership. That said, it can take a gender-variant child years to fully assume the identity. One advocate for the community offered the following interpretation: “Until [and/or] unless gender-variant children join the hijra community, they do not understand and do not categorize their self as gay or hijra. Even after joining hijra community, gender-variant children take time to adopt aqwa or narban hijra identity.”¹⁹⁸

I am convinced by this response. Upon joining the community, new members receive feminine names to reflect a shift in their personal identity. Beyond its symbolism, the name change also socially establishes the critical transformation from male to female. One respondent shared, “Hijra community gives feminine names to a new member...and compels them to identify themselves as a female.”¹⁹⁹

The hijra community and its members understand the needs of the gender-variant children joining their ranks. The community accepts and treats its new members in a completely feminine manner. In this way, gender-variant children readily achieve a state of psychological satisfaction. In other words, “The hijra community members fulfill a psychological need of the gender-variant children by providing them space to express themselves in feminine manner and feminine appearance.”²⁰⁰

The community also provides role models and mirroring opportunities for new members to establish themselves. These offerings are particularly important since incoming children have

¹⁹⁷ Azam (advocate for the transgender community), interview with the author, April 21, 2015.

¹⁹⁸ Tariq (NGO representative and transgender health advocate), interview with the author, April 16, 2015.

¹⁹⁹ Nadeem Kashish (aqwa, SAFFAR), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

²⁰⁰ *ibid.*

likely experienced social isolation, discrimination, violence, and other derogatory treatment, and are consequently in need of social support. Ultimately, the community allows the children to adopt the hijra identity as per their unique needs and choices.

4.4. Discussion

For over a century, children have remained a subject of study for anthropologists. This history of research with children is uneven and has expanded its boundaries beyond the anthropological discipline. However, in the recent past, theoretical expansions in the field of the *anthropology of childhood* have paid more attention to investigation in youth. Phenomena like poverty, abuse, and sexual exploitation have increased the number of children as study subjects (Bluebond-Langner and Korbin 2007, 241-242).

The word “child” can refer to anyone between the ages of 0 and 18. At either end of the scale, it may be replaced by more age-specific terms, such as “baby,” “infant,” “toddler,” or “teenager.” Generally, the word “child” denotes a young person who has not yet reached social maturity (Montgomery 2009, 53). In some societies, however, the process of social maturity is associated with childhood itself.

The period of childhood is divided into various stages that are based on particular kind of knowledge and social competencies. Social maturity subjects a person by completing these stages, though different individuals pass through the stages at different times. Thus, society may consider a child incompetent if that child has not acquired the knowledge and competency corresponding to a particular stage (Montgomery 2009, 55). However, this conceptualization of childhood is not universal (Montgomery 2009, 61) and furthermore differs from the categorization of childhood development per the modern scale.

Throughout this research and particularly in this chapter, the phrase “gender-variant children” is not used analogously to the common 0-18 age scale. Instead, the research uses the concept of “social maturity” to distinguish between two phases of the hijra identity: the first phase covers the period before the child joins the community, and the second phase denotes when membership and identity assimilation have already occurred. In other words, the child’s decision to join the community is itself a benchmark that distinguishes the status of *gender-variant child* from the status of *hijra*. This milestone also indicates that gender-variant children who leave their home environment have reached a level of maturity that affords them their own agency.

From an anthropologist's position, a given cultural setting plays an important role in the development of an infant. The engagement of a child with her/his a family and community leads to the growth of the person as a whole (Weisner 2001, 1697). In the context of an infant's sex assignment, the socio-cultural constructs and self-experiences of the parents will determine their perception and treatment to the child. Furthermore, parents will assign particular gender roles and promote certain activities based on the sex of the infant. Often, they do this to prepare the child for the future (Best 2004, 203-204) role of either masculine or feminine.

I am very much convinced that, from birth parents begin framing a child's identity according to the gender/sex binary. This research contextualizes the upbringing of gender-variant children who were born either male or intersex. These children are usually given masculine names and are raised according to masculine gender roles. While a male infant's birth is marked with full social regalia, the birth of an intersex child is typically not celebrated at all.

Social interactions between parents and children are shaped by the socio-cultural norms and personal experiences of both parties. It is from these norms and experiences that parents construct notions of gender. Ultimately, these notions direct their actions and practices, which often reflect the normative practices of society.

In Pakistan, there is an additional consideration of the prestige and honor associated with the birth of a male child. Therefore, I have developed an argument that the celebration of a male infant's birth is actually a celebration of masculinity itself, as well as its associated pride. To that end, children born with ambiguous genitals are reared as males in order to stave off social pressures and disrespect from society. The birth of a genitally ambiguous infant is socially perceived as an affront to the family's honor and a violation of the family's dignity. Thus, both types of gender-variant children – intersex or biological males – will likely be reared and socialized according to masculine expectations. Nevertheless, a genitally ambiguous child will also be marked as an “incomplete male” by family and relatives, and as a hijra by society at large.

For boys and girls, differences in early socialization techniques lend to “early gender identification, psychosocial and self-development” (Benson and Leffert 2001, 1698). Best (2004) further elaborates on the influence of such a phenomenon, “Throughout early childhood and adolescence, boys and girls develop distinct differences in appearance, mannerisms, the way of talking, style of dress, interests and games, and preferred playmates. Children learn gender roles

for their sex — the behaviors and social role that are expected of males and females in their particular society” (Best 2004, 199).

Through processes of interaction, agents such as parents, peers, and teachers influence a child’s internalization of sex-based gender roles. These processes shape the child’s understanding of who is a socially-appropriate playmate and what a socially-appropriate gender role is. During the crucial stages of social development, it is not uncommon for a child to perceive “gender segregation, differentiation of interaction styles, and group asymmetry” (Maccoby 1988, 1998 cited in Best 2004, 204).

Similarly, “the notion that children live in and negotiate the worlds that they create for themselves (e.g., play, peer groups, games), world other creates for them (e.g., schools, hospitals), and worlds in concert with others (e.g., families, marketplaces, neighborhoods) must be simultaneously visible in the study of children and childhoods” (Bluebond-Langner and Korbin 2007, 245).

Thus, a child’s sex often determines her/his assigned gender roles, and numerous agents socialize such gender roles through various means. Nevertheless, this generalization is not applicable to gender-variant children, particularly because these children adopt nonconforming gender roles and practices within their social environment. In most cases, these children were born males. As they grew older, they started experiencing gender conflict and confusion. This positioned them as a focus of various social agents in their environment.

Gender-variant children gravitate toward the feminine gender and socialize with female peer groups. In biographical interviews, hijra respondents associated this gravitation with the notion of a “feminine soul.” In this study, all hijra respondents affirmed they had feminine souls within masculine bodies, thus they were interested in feminine tasks and roles. Again, I refer to the point that gender-variant children gravitate to these roles either because of a cognitive construction of gender, or because their internal identity was aligned to tasks that are associated with women.

Some research studies have demonstrated that children begin to understand gender identity around the age of three, while an understanding of gender differences comes around two years later. Transgender children usually start experimenting with cross-dressing around the age of eight

(Intons-Peterson 1988; cited in Kennedy and Hellen 2010, 28-29; Kessler and McKenna 1978, 2). Gender identity is specifically associated with a concept of “self,” which directs one as male, female, or transgender. Because respondents reported having female playmates at an early age, I assume that gender-variant children have a concept of the feminine identity from that age. To that end, many respondents confirmed that they expressed feminine attributes during early childhood. At some point, many gender-variant children will transition to a hijra identity. The hijra people’s sense of self is reinforced through processes of self-realization, self-image, and the ongoing adoption and projection of feminine qualities and attributes.

In the context of understanding gender in Pakistani society, one study explored the construction of gender and how it was represented in school textbooks. The research categorically mentioned that there were unique gender attributes assigned to each sex, “Games and activities are defined along gender lines. For instance, boys play games such as hockey, cricket and football, and work in the fields or outside the home, while the girls are shown mostly at home, in the kitchen, playing with their dolls or skipping ropes”²⁰¹ (Khan et al. 2014, 74).

Thus, in continuation of gender segregation according to the traditional sex-based system, I would like to submit that the binary division persists in many Pakistani childhood games. In this respect, gender-variant children often do not ascribe to the traditional binary system: many showed no interest in games associated with boys, nor were they inclined to masculine games like cricket.

Gender-variant children often engage in games that are associated with girls. They played these games either because of a genuine interest or because of their gender projections. While the “girls’ games” varied, I would like to focus specifically on doll-playing to highlight how play sessions can embody gender-variance.

²⁰¹ Another study also indicated how games differ according to sex and gender: There are some gender differences in children’s errands. Boys frequently go into bushes to fetch wild fruits, hunt birds with homemade slingshots, and drive toys ‘trucks’ they make from household materials. When they take upon the responsibility for tending small animals like rabbits or goats, they often ensure them focus of play as well. Like men, boys have more freedom than girls to move out of home and courtyard, particularly the road, bush, or playing field after school and enjoy the open atmosphere. Girls typically are required to stay in or near their homes, particularly if there are household chores or younger siblings to look after. Their imaginary play includes pretending to be mothers of young children, performing domestic tasks, playing with dolls and stuffed animals, particularly when they have relatives living abroad to send gifts to them. (Paugh 2012, 146)

Children adopt imaginary roles during play; these roles are often based on adult models (Paugh 2012, 173). In this respect, doll-playing contextualizes social roles with which the players may be familiar. For example, children often consider dolls to be companions (Blizzard 2015). Rossie (2005) further characterizes doll-playing specifically as an introduction to child-rearing, which ultimately prepares a female child for the potential role of motherhood (Rossie 2005 cited in Montgomery, 2009, 146).

The same pattern is true for gender-variant children. Since childhood, gender-variant children have gravitated to gender roles that are associated with women. Through doll-playing, and particularly in the context of a doll wedding, a gender-variant child may indicate her/his ideal identity as feminine, which may point to the future adoption of a feminine identity. Dolls that are groomed to be brides receive make-up treatment and are outfitted with dowry, a process orchestrated by the gender-variant child. The child (with playmates) also prepares actual food for the “wedding guests.” The doll wedding follows the patterns of real Pakistani weddings. During the doll wedding, the child replicates an adult role that he intends to assume in future.

Another key figure of a doll wedding is the groom. A gender-variant child might enact an attraction to males and, in certain cases, give them the status of *griya* through the role of the groom.²⁰² This is because physical, sexual, and romantic attractions in the groom relate direction to promotion of self-image. Doll-playing could herald an opportunity to the gender-variant child with to further explore and construct her/his self-image.

In Pakistani society, cooking, washing, and caring for siblings are tasks associated with women or girls (Khan, et al. 2014, 74). Paugh (2012) stated that “girls’ imaginary play includes pretending to be mothers with children, performing domestic tasks like cooking and washing clothes” (Paugh 2012, 146). In view of the results of this research, hijra respondents adopted those same tasks and chores during childhood. Thus, the argument that gender-variant children, guided by a *sense of self*, remain in a feminine *process of being is coherent*. This *process of being* is motivated by the feminine *sense of self*, which gender-variant children align with the roles and tasks they undertake.

²⁰² *Griya* refers to a boyfriend or a husband in “Farsi,” the language of the hijra community. It should not be confused with the “Farsi” spoken in Afghanistan.

However, as previous literature has indicated, the involvement of gender-variant children in feminine tasks endows them with certain attributes. These attributes are distinguished from masculinity and more aligned toward femininity. Some research has indicated that a child of a feminine gender will have more “patience, emotions, and fragility” (Khan et al. 2014, 74). On the other hand, the inverse masculine gender profile presents attributes of “aggression, energy, power and strength of nerves” (Khan et al. 2014, 74). Thus, I articulate that gender-variant children adopt feminine gender attributes and characteristics. They are shy and avoid male gatherings. They are submissive too. They closely associate this trait with their sisters and mothers, a sentiment echoed by Kennedy and Hellen (2010), who found that gender-variant children were more likely to reveal their nonconformity to their sisters and female friends (Kennedy and Hellen 2010, 35). These feminine attributes make gender-variant children vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation. Because of dominant heteronormative practices.

The inclination to participate in “girls’ games,” female peer groups, and feminine tasks (while eschewing “boys’ games” and male peer groups) can create hurdles for gender-variant children. Among transgender and other non-conforming gender identities, UNICEF (2014) has documented increased childhood trends of discrimination, harassment, pressure, and violence (UNICEF 2014, 1). Discriminative behaviors such as these often have roots in homophobia and transphobia within the general heteronormative population. Hijra people face similar discrimination as youth, likely owing to their non-conforming identities. By many accounts, childhood is the period during which children should acquire the cultural traits that will define them as adults specifically within the socio-cultural setting of a given society (Weisner 2001, 1697). In this research, gender-variant children were not fulfilling the societal expectations of their presumed gender. This non-conformity likely lent to the discrimination they experienced.

For millennia, the concept of the third sex and/or the third gender has existed in the Indian subcontinent in the form of the hijra (see chapter one). Gender-variant children are labeled as such when their expressed identity and adopted practices do not match their perceived gender (i.e., based on sex). Traditionally and culturally, the hijra identity has a spiritual aspect and well-defined social roles (see chapter one). Nevertheless, the community is simultaneously marginalized and the term “hijra” is often employed in a derogatory way (Aurat foundation 2016).

An ethnographic study conducted in Japan described children as extensions of their parents rather than separate from them (Goodman 2000, 165 cited in Montgomery 2009, 59). Accordingly, as a parental extension, a gender-variant child can be a source of disrespect and/or dishonor for the family. The same dishonor and disrespect is perceived by the parents of the gender variant children. This hijra identity is a result of labeling process and hijra's individual agency against heteronormativity. Consequently, gender-variant children often face social isolation; exclusion and violence as a form of "discipline" from various socialization agents, particularly those who are male: brothers, fathers, and other relatives (see chapter seven).

In addition, many gender-variant children are ascribed an inferior social status when they are labeled hijra. Discrimination, and violence can be concomitant to this assigned inferiority. To that end, Montgomery (2009) discerns caregiving for its ability to create a "social hierarchy" and "social inferiority" (Montgomery 2009, 122-123). When gender-variant children recognize that they are different from their peers, they may attempt to conceal their identity in an effort to protect their social status (Kennedy and Hellen 2010, 29-30). This is particularly true because a transgender identity occupies the lowest rung of the gender hierarchy in Pakistan.

As children, hijra people begin to perceive the sense of self as feminine, but expectations from the family and society may pressurize them to continue performing masculine roles. Owing to the discrimination they experience, gender-variant children are conscious about where they can safely reveal their identities and where they should not. Kennedy and Hellen (2010) outlined the struggle of gender-variant children as two-fold: one side wrestles with the gender assigned to their sex and another side hides their feelings which are against social expectation (Kennedy and Hellen 2010, 40). In Pakistan, gender-variant children are vulnerable because their gender identities challenge the norms of society. They experience a fair degree of suppression meant to obscure their gender-variant attributes.

Societal pressures can also work to isolate gender-variant children (Kennedy and Hellen 2010, 35), though in Pakistan, this isolation may facilitate a child's connection to the hijra community. Not only will an isolated child seek social ties with like-minded people, but she/he may also attract recruiters from the community. In other words, the imposition of binary gender division and punishing experiences of gender-variant children direct them to seek out others like them (Levitt and Ippolito 2014, 1749). Levitt and Ippolito (2014) further demonstrated that the

social networking between new and old gender variant people, help new gender variant people a) in gender learning process and b) acquiring the confidence to counter discrimination (Levitt and Ippolito 2014, 1741). So is the case with the hijra community of Pakistan.

The process of social networking between gender-variant children and the transgender community applies to the childhood experiences of this study's respondents. This networking gave the children an opportunity to verify their childhood experiences concerning sense of self, feminine gender performance and resistance from society. Furthermore, it introduced them to social spaces where they could fulfill their feminine gender identities. Community members also provided care and socio-psychological support. This support ultimately allowed the children to know the primary hijra identity as well as the associated sub-identities, which helped them find their place in the greater hijra community of Pakistan.

Chapter 5: Kinship and Social Organization of the Hijra Community

This chapter explores how the hijra community recruits new members and how these novitiates assume the hijra identity. To elucidate the process, I have documented two rituals that are integral to an incoming hijra's initiation. The *chatai* ritual is mandatory to recognize a gender-variant person as a hijra. The *choudar* ritual authenticates hijra's identity and affords her certain rights: (a) the right to recruit new *chelas* (disciples), and (b) the right to assume a *guru* (teacher) status.

What happens when a gender-variant person becomes a hijra? To answer this question, I examined the social organization of the community. Upon joining its ranks, a new member will assume her position as a chela in the group hierarchy. From there, she inherits the lineage-based fictive kinship²⁰³ system of her guru: a *Dada guru* (grandfather guru), *Chacha guru* (uncle guru), *Guru Bhai* (brother guru), *Maa* (mother), *Baap* (father), *Khala* (mother's sister), and *Mamoon* (mother's brother). She will also initiate her own non-inherited fictive kinship²⁰⁴ system: a *Griya* (husband), *Bhen* (sister), *Bhai* (brother), and *Sehelian* (friends).

A hijra person serves multiple economic, social, cultural, and psychological functions in her community, and her identity often reflects the needs of a given context. How she adapts herself to her various roles will determine the nature of her relationships. The longer she is a community member, the more authentically she assumes her identity. She then becomes more effective at livelihood strategies such as prostitution, dancing, begging, and vadhai (see chapter six).

5.1. The Hierarchical Position of a Hijra Person and Social Organization

A community's position provides a chela with the opportunity to increase her social relationships through her guru's network. This increase is based on lineage²⁰⁵ and non-lineage fictive kinship.²⁰⁶ A gender variant person who is entering in the hijra community must perform

²⁰³ Inherited fictive kinship is further divided into three parts: (1) inherited fictive kinship, (2) non-inherited fictive kinship based on the sexual relations between a guru and her griya, and (3) non-inherited and non-sexual fictive kinship, i.e., mother, sister, and brother.

²⁰⁴ Non-inherited fictive kinship is further divided into two parts: (1) non-inherited fictive kinship based on sexual relationships, i.e., griya-moorat, and (2) non-inherited, non-sexual relationships, i.e., mother-daughter and brother-sister relationships.

²⁰⁵ The details of lineage-based fictive kinship are given later in the chapter.

²⁰⁶ The details of non-lineage fictive kinship are in later part of the chapter.

chatai ritual to adopt hijra identity and to attain the first stage of chela-hood. The *choudar ritual* marks entry into the second phase. Here, an initiate authenticates her identity and demonstrates her commitment to becoming a hijra, even if the identity is actually “owned” by the community. It is through *chatai* and *choudar* that a hijra person acquires the fictive kinship and social relationships of her guru. These rituals also allow her to extend her kinship ties by recruiting new individuals into her own lineage. *Fictive kinship* refers to kinship that is neither based on consanguine ties²⁰⁷ (through blood) nor affine ties²⁰⁸ (through marriage). The fictive kinship system of the hijra community is modeled after the kinship system of mainstream Pakistani society.

In the hijra community, fictive kinship bonds members of the same *gharana* (household), clan, and lineage. It also creates ties between different *gharanas*. This organizational structure allows a hijra person to develop relationships with members of mainstream Pakistani society, though for developing a fictive kinship she will always assume a feminine role in this context (except the situation when hijra people are engaged in certain jobs categories where they have to perform masculine gender roles. As mentioned in chapter 3, example of guru Safdari and some other chelas is given). That said, non-community members wishing to adopt hijra kinship ties are expected to perform the obligatory rituals that accompany such a relationship.²⁰⁹

For a *choudar*-status chela, there are four available mechanisms, which function to expand her social network. They are as follows:

- a) Inheriting a guru’s lineage-based fictive kinship
- b) Inheriting a guru’s non-fictive kinship
- c) Creating kinship through non-fictive relationships
- d) Creating lineage-based kinship through recruiting new chelas

Before acquiring or creating relationships, however, a new initiate must complete her journey toward becoming a full-fledged hijra. The following section discusses the ritual of *chatai*, which marks the first phase of chela-hood.

²⁰⁷ The guru’s lineage replaces a hijra’s blood ties, i.e., her kinship network.

²⁰⁸ A *griya-moorat* relationship is considered equivalent to a husband-wife relationship.

²⁰⁹ The details of fictive kinship rituals and relations are given in later part of this chapter.

5.1.1. The Ritual of the Chatai: Initiating the Adoption of the Hijra Identity²¹⁰

The word *chatai* means mat (specifically a floor mat used for sitting); the hijra community, however, uses the term symbolically and diversely. For instance, the phrase “chatai-chela” refers to a new chela and connotes the behavioral etiquette surrounding her burgeoning relationship to the community. *Chatai* also refers to the ritual that initiates a given guru-chela relationship. Lastly, *chatai* is used to describe the initiation fee paid by the new chela. Thus, the term is often interpreted contextually and influences the style and nature of a given social interaction. It is also a tool to determine the hierarchical position of a new hijra person: one that comes with certain rights, roles, obligations and limitations.

During the *chatai rasam* (ritual), the guru covers the chela’s head with a *dupatta* (scarf), at which point the chela offers the initiation fee that ensures her community membership. She then acquires a position in the highly stratified social structure as a *chatai-chela*, a relatively low status in the hierarchy. Nevertheless, the *chatai* ritual affords a chela a seat among other hijra people. A respondent Muskan, an *aqwa* hijra, further elaborated the significance of the *chatai* ritual:

Only by attaining the title of *chatai*, you cannot become equal to *khwajasira* [an intersex hijra person], but after *jalsa* [a *choudar* celebration], you can become rank as equal. Without *jalsa*, one cannot be considered complete *khwajasira*, however in the post-*jalsa* scenario, we consider her as complete. After *jalsa*, it is guru’s responsibility to take care of her. While, only with *chatai rasam*, a hijra person does not have equal rights. Anyone can beat’s and scold’s her. The guru will not worry about her and simply no one will own her.²¹¹

In other words, *chatai* alone does not define the membership nor the identity of a new hijra person. It is instead a tool to mobilize her toward *choudar* and the subsequent completion of the hijra identity.

The number of participants in the *chatai* ritual is not fixed, but it usually hovers somewhere between five and fifteen guests. It is mandatory for the chela to pay at least Rs. 125 [US\$1.25] as an initiation fee. One respondent shared an account of her recent *chatai* in these words, “One year back, I made my guru ... and performed *chatai* ritual. I gave *chatai* fee Rs 125 and sweets to my

²¹⁰ The *chatai* ritual initiates a gender-variant person hijra-hood; however, a *chatai-hijra* is not yet considered a complete hijra.

²¹¹ Muskan (*aqwa*), interview with the author, April 16, 2015.

guru. I did make-up, wore feminine clothes and invited other *moorats* [hijra guests] for the ritual celebration.²¹²

During chatai ritual, the initiate's feminine gender is communicated through the women's garments that she and other guests wear. The ritual symbolizes a new chela's acceptance of her identity, her adoption of the hijra culture, and her initiation into the fictive kinship system. Respondent Arzo confirmed undergoing a similar process at her chatai: "My guru puts dupatta on my head and I gave her Rs. 5,000 [to be the new chela]."²¹³

The chatai ritual is a source of entertainment, networking, income generation and celebration for existing community members. The ritual is often marked by dance, salutations, festivities, and a standard distribution of sweets. Guru Sonia affirmed that her chatai adhered to a celebratory theme: "All other khwajasira were invited there at the location of the ritual, and we had a lunch, we danced and enjoyed the music."²¹⁴ That said, an official celebration is not mandatory to mark chatai; whether or not a party is organized is contingent upon the financial capacity of a new chela. To that end, one aqwa hijra respondent shared, "I just performed guru-chela rasam. I did not celebrate with show and pomp because I had not money to give any party."²¹⁵

Chatai participants act as witnesses to the initiation of the guru-chela relationship, though the event can be a low-key gathering. Honey summed up her chatai concisely: "There were 2-3 witness, and guru asked me to give chatai [the initiation fee]."²¹⁶ The initiation money is considered a community gift, but often a guru pockets most of it and distributes small amount to her chelas. According to one respondent, "offers Rs 100 or 200 to guru as well as chela, [but] all amount belongs to the guru, and the guru gives some amount to the chela....If Rs. 5,000 is the total amount, then guru will give Rs. 1,000 to chela."²¹⁷ In this example, 20% is distributed among the chelas, while the guru keeps the remainder.

²¹² Sonia (aqwa), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

²¹³ Arzo (aqwa), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

²¹⁴ Sonia (aqwa), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

²¹⁵ Sitara (aqwa), interview with the author, April 8, 2015.

²¹⁶ Honey (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

²¹⁷ Sonia (aqwa), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

Gift exchange within the hijra community is based on the principle of reciprocity.²¹⁸ The community's local language refers to this reciprocity as *lain-dain* or *baratana*. One khwajasira described the nature of the exchange in these words: "It is like a *bhaji* [gift money] given in marriage. If I have given to someone Rs. 1,000 at the ceremony of guru-chela, she will give me Rs. 2,000 in return [e.g., as a birthday gift]."²¹⁹

The chatai ritual initiates a chela into hijra identity and the community's fictive kinship system. Many hijras people choose to pursue a senior hierarchical position through the choudar ritual, but that is not the case for all chelas. In the course of this research, I met a number of hijra people who had performed chatai ritual, some over a decade earlier and had not yet pursued choudar ritual. Some individuals did not want the additional responsibilities that come with elevation to the rank of a guru, the recruitment of new chelas, the socialization of initiates, and the management of a *dera's* (commune) daily activities. Thus, I concluded that the choudar ritual is a way to own the hijra culture.

5.1.2. The Ritual of the Choudar: Owning the Hijra Identity

The pattern of the choudar ritual is similar to that of the chatai, but its significance is much more profound. Choudar authenticates a chela's ownership of the hijra identity. It also grants her a new status and more responsibility that includes recruiting new hijra people, building inter-gharana relationships, exercising authority over her chelas, and making decisions in the greater interest of the community.

The word *choudar* refers to a piece of cloth that covers the head. The choudar ritual can be performed immediately following chatai or years later. Like the chatai, the guru covers the chela's head, and the chela gives money to the guru (the amount is usually much higher). Once the exchange and ritual are completed, a chela's responsibilities increase, and she is referred to as a choudar-chela (or a *chaudhry guru*). She is given authority for future recruitments and permitted

²¹⁸ Money as a gift-exchange is based on reciprocity. If Hijra A gives Rs. 100 to Hijra B on the occasion of her chatai, then Hijra B is responsible for returning this Rs. 100, plus an additional amount, during a future event organized by Hijra A. Normally, a future gift should be the original amount, doubled. If an equivalent amount is given, then that means the issuing hijra is not interested in continuing the reciprocity. Money as gift-exchange also determines status and relationship strength between community members.

²¹⁹ Nagina (khwajasira), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

to supervise her recruits, two privileges that are normally associated with a guru. She is also granted the social honor of presenting her gharana at hijra gatherings.

The significance of the choudar-chela role does not belittle of those who accept it: “After choudar rasam, all responsibility falls on me [being a guru], and in case if I fail to solve any problem of my chelas, I will request my guru for her support or help.”²²⁰ Another one explained that “after that rasam, she [the choudar-chela] will be responsible for all deeds of her chelas.”²²¹

If a choudar-chela wishes to move to a new guru, she is expected to offer payment to her old guru to reimburse any expenses incurred during her edification. Her new guru may choose to cover these costs, but no payment will be expected if the new guru socially outranks the previous one.

During this research, I attended the ceremony of choudar for a chela who was changing gurus. The ritual’s facilitating guru, a senior figure in the community, took the chela’s consent for the initiation and endorsed her decision to switch teachers. The facilitator also telephoned the chela’s previous guru to ask about the disciple’s moral character and financial liabilities. Upon clearance from the previous guru, the facilitating guru proceeded with the ritual. One choudar-chela respondent explained that the choudar ceremony ensures that “one becomes a permanent student. If she will move towards other guru, then she will have to pay an amount to [new] guru and [new] guru will hand her over to the former guru.”²²²

Unlike the chatai ritual, a chela is obligated to organize a celebration, or jalsa, for her choudar. During her jalsa, a choudar-chela must offer gifts to her guru’s fictive kinship relationships, those based on both, lineage²²³ and non-lineage.²²⁴ The ritual and accompanying festivities are quite exorbitant and cost at least Rs. 100,000 (US\$ 1000) for the entire event. Many hijra people postpone or avoid a choudar simply because they cannot afford to underwrite the expense. As Arzo shared, “Yes, if I would have Rs. 100,000, only then I will in a position to perform choudar rasam.”²²⁵ Yet, the upper limit of expenditure is not fixed for this ritual; it depends

²²⁰ Sonia (aqwa), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

²²¹ Khurram (aqwa), interview with the author, April 13, 2015.

²²² Muskan (aqwa), interview with the author, April 16, 2015.

²²³ Chacha guru, Dada guru, par-Dada guru, etc.

²²⁴ Mother of the guru, husband of the guru, etc.

²²⁵ Arzo (aqwa), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

on the chela and the jalsa. According to Sitara, “It is normal to hold a function and make subsequent expenditure. It costs almost Rs. 150,000 (US\$ 1500). This is for food, chaudhry gurus, dupatta amount, and other necessary expenditures to entertain guests.”²²⁶

The hijra community systematically regulates its functions, which are largely reflected in the collection and distribution of money. During a choudar, the money received in the shape of gifts is divided between the chaudhry gurus of the four available gharanas, along with the celebrant chela’s guru. The distribution varies between the four gurus: the one with the highest number of choudar-chelas has a right to receive a larger amount of money. One aqwa respondent described the procedure as follows:

In the past choudars, chela’s used to allocate [] Rs 20,000 (US\$ 200 for four clan’s Choudhry gurus. But now it has exceeded the previous amounts and is now approximately Rs. 36,000 (US\$ 360). Some share of the amount is also given to *Chacha* gurus and *Dada* guru. The purpose behind giving this amount is to show a gesture of respect. During the ritual, the chaudhry of my clan will put choudar towards me. If the chelas of chaudhry who took choudar are twenty in number, then the distribution of amount will be made for twenty, too. Each choudar cost Rs. 150 and it is made out of Rs. 36,000 and the remaining money is distributed again among all.²²⁷

In an effort to remain transparent, the hijra community maintains written records of all choudars performed in the name of any local clan or guru. The record is maintained by a senior guru. As respondent Arzo shared, “Because all get together, and she records calculation of all *chaudharies* and we have one eldest guru who lives in Rawalpindi, maintain a register for all and joins each rasam. It's obligatory for her maintain this task.”²²⁸

The choudar ritual sustains social and economic ties between various clans. It furthermore provides each clan an opportunity to display its strength and progress of expansion. Most importantly, the chatai and choudar ensure that a chela inherits the fictive kinship relationships of their guru and regulate functions of social organization through certain structural positions, which a hijra person holds either as a chela or as a guru.

²²⁶ Sitara (aqwa), interview with the author, April 8, 2015.

²²⁷ Arzo (aqwa), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

²²⁸ Arzo (aqwa) and Sonia (aqwa), interview with the author, April 11 2015.

5.2. Inheriting Relationships from Fictive Lineage-Based Kinship: Family of Orientation

The guru is a basic unit of lineage and non-lineage based social organization in the hijra community. However, in this section I am trying to illustrate how three kinship types are inherited by a hijra person, who has completed the chatai and choudar rituals. These rituals do not only transform the chela's identity, but also the structure of her social relationships. Attaining a complete hijra status provides a replacement for her original kinship ties.

- a) Fictive lineage-based kinship (Recruiting new chela)
- b) Fictive kinship based on sexual relationships (Boyfriend/husband)
- c) Fictive non-lineage based kinship (Mother, sister, friends, brother)

The reference point for inheriting a relationship is Ego, who acquires all three types of fictive kinship within the fictive family of orientation. In the kinship structure of the hijra community, the guru is a father figure (and sometimes a mother figure). A chela belongs to her guru and thus she derives all of her kinship ties and social relationships from her guru. As a choudar-chela, she fully assumes a place in her lineage and thus acquires her kin: *Dada guru*, *par-Dada guru*, *Chacha guru*, and others.

5.2.1. Family of Orientation: Fictive Lineage-Based Kinship

Once a gender-variant person becomes a chela and adopts the hijra identity she ultimately acquires a role in the community's fictive kinship system. The following figure 5.1 illustrates the kin that a chela inherits through her guru. All fictive lineage-based relationships are known through the masculine identity of the guru. In the figure, for example, Ego's guru is known as Dada Guru, and the guru parallel to Ego guru's status is known as Chacha Guru. The words "Dada" and "Chacha" are masculine denominations (the details of which are discussed later in this section).

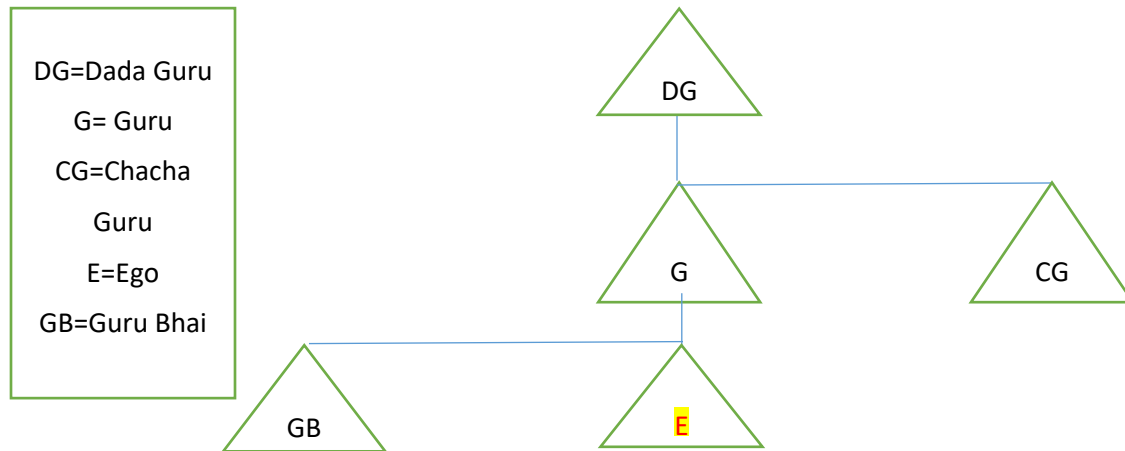


Figure 5. 1: Fictive Lineage-Based Kinship within the Family of Orientation

5.2.2 Fictive Kinship Based on Sexual Relationships within the Family of Orientation

It is common for a hijra person to have a boyfriend or a husband. Within the community, this male partner is known as a *griya*, while the hijra is referred to as a *moorat* (in the context of the relationship). A hijra identifies as a woman in this non-lineage sexual partnership.

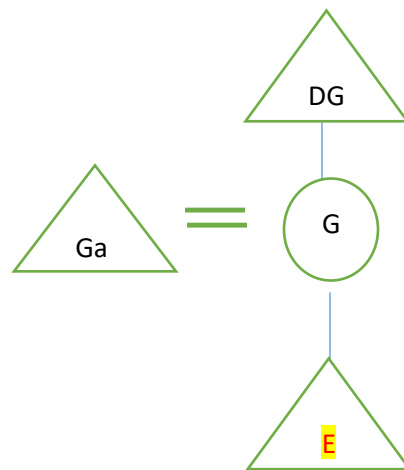


Figure 5. 2: Fictive Kinship Based on Sexual Relationships

5.2.3. Fictive Kinship Based on Non-Lineage and Non-Sexual Relationships

A hijra person also derives fictive kinship ties from non-lineage and non-sexual relationships, where she creates social bonds with persons either from mainstream Pakistani society or from within the hijra community itself. These non-lineage, non-sexual relationships are cemented by mother-making, brother-making, and sister-making rituals. In all of these relationships, the one role that a hijra person cannot assume is that of the brother, who must come from outside the community. The hijra instead adopts the role of the sister in this relationship. In fact, in all of these relationships, a hijra's role is a feminine one.

The following Figure 5.3 indicates these fictive kinship ties.

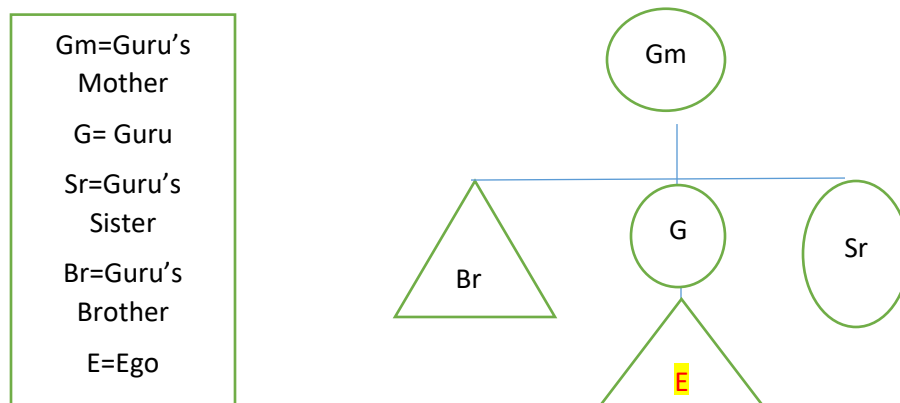


Figure 5. 3: Fictive Kinship Based on Non-Lineage and Non-Sexual Relationships

Through the aforementioned fictive kinship types, a chela inherits and/or expands her social network, which in turn increases the girth of the hijra community's social organization.

5.3. Extending Relationships by Creating New Fictive Kinship Relationships

Once a chela attains complete hijra status, she receives provisions to create new relationships that will extend her social organization. By their nature, these new relationships are molded on the basis of sexual partnerships (such as griya-moorat) and/or other non-lineage kinship, i.e., those relations formed outside of the guru's lineage. These fictive relationships are created through different community rituals. The common thread between these rituals is the

centrality of the chela's feminine gender. The following list comprises the relationship types a chela forms and/or acquires:

1. Non-lineage fictive kinship
 - a. Creation of kinship through the rituals of mother, sister/friends and brother making
 - b. Creation of Kinship through ritual of griya-moorat relationship
2. Lineage-based fictive kinship (Already discussed in the previous pages)
 - a. Creation of kinship based on recruitment of new chelas
 - b. Creation of kinship through inheriting relationship by guru

5.3.1. The Formation of Non-Lineage Fictive Kinship

As indicated above, fictive kinship is divided into two types and in each of the types kinship is further divided into two parts. However, in this section focus of attention will remain non-lineage ties: the mother, brother, sister, and griya relationships which fall under category of Non-Lineage Fictive Kinship.

5.3.1.1. *The Mother-Making Ritual*

The mother-making ritual creates a non-lineage fictive relationship between two hijra people or with a cisgender from mainstream society. However, I am referring a case of mother who is taken from the hijra community. It means mother would be a hijra person as well.

In this ritual, one person assumes the role of a mother and another of a daughter. Between the two, the mother figure is more experienced hijra. This self-regulated relationship is voluntary and cemented through the ritual.

The mother figure is an ideal: she has a moral reputation, is generous and nurturing, and holds enough experience to be parental caretaker. She offers guidance and support if her daughter faces trouble within or outside of the community. These sympathetic characteristics are given considerable weight when forming this relationship, and a hijra person in possession of these characteristics is regarded as a suitable candidate for motherhood.

I would like to draw a parallel between the “ideal mother” archetype and the childhood experiences of many hijra respondents. To that end, I learned that mothers of respondents frequently supported their gender-variant children in situations of conflict. Moreover, after leaving home, respondents often made efforts to remain in contact with their biological mothers. That said, the community’s shared interpretation of an ideal maternal figure is likely patterned on a cognitive idealization of the mother, one that is influenced by actual mother-offspring experiences during childhood. In other words, in developing the mother-daughter relationship, many hijra people follow a cognitive map based on their own biological mothers. Interestingly, the community’s normative criteria suggests that the mother should be more affectionate than the guru (the father figure), perhaps to satisfy the psychological need for a compassionate authority figure.

Age doesn’t matter in the mother-daughter fictive relationship; in fact, a mother can be younger than her daughter.²²⁹ As far as a case of mother from the mainstream society is concerned, “It is compulsory [for her] to perform the rasam. In this rasam, the mother cooks food, gives money as a gift, and arranges dress for her daughter.”²³⁰

Whether the mother hails from inside or outside the community, the mother-making ritual requires certain obligations from both participants. The ritual itself replicates the process of childbirth. The mother feigns pregnancy by padding material under her clothes so that her belly appears rounded. During the “delivery,” she moans as if she is experiencing labor pains. One respondent confirmed that “it is just supposed to be [like giving birth]. With clothes stuffed around the belly that is ready for delivery and shrieking with imaginary labor pain, she takes the mother hijra in another state of mind that is from conscious to unconscious.”²³¹ Other simulations follow the delivery: “A mother feeds her daughter by giving her breast in the daughter’s mouth. While, actually a glass of milk is given to the daughter to drink milk and it is a part of the ritual.”²³²

The mother-daughter relationship revolves around notions of care, affection, and attention. Nagina shared the following:

The mother does not take anything from the daughter, but guru – in father role – expects something [money or gifts] from the chelas. The mother gives some money on every

²²⁹ This is also true of the guru-chela relationship: a guru can be younger than her chela. Both relationships are defined by status and experience.

²³⁰ Sitara (aqwa), interview with the author, April 8, 2015.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Nagina (khwajasira), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

special occasion such as Eid [a religious festival], *Shab-e-Barat* [The Night of Salvation – a religious festival]. The mother hijra gives away us bed, utensils and gifts, just like [a mother] gives to daughters.²³³

A daughter is also expected to care of her mother. During the ritual, it is obligatory give her mother gifts, such as money and dresses. Sonia shared that her “daughter gave a dress and some amount to her mother that raises her status in the Hijra community”.²³⁴

The extension of social organization is an important attribute of the non-lineage mother-daughter kinship. A newly inducted hijra is granted certain rights when she attains the status of choudar-chela, and one of these allows her to participate in the mother-making ritual.²³⁵ The mother-daughter relationship expands a chela’s network of support and protection, which may come into play if the chela experiences social isolation and neglect from her guru. Sitara explained that “if a guru doesn’t support, alternatively the mother provides all care and support to the daughter hijra.”²³⁶

Because a mother is a symbol of love and care, normativity dictates that she should not demand prostitution from her daughter. One respondent elaborated, however, that this was not always the case: “If I tell you the truth, many asked me to become her daughter, but personally, I think that I will perform this rasam when I will feel true love...if I chose a mother, she should reflect true love and care for me. There are many mothers who persuade their daughters to perform sexual activities. But I didn’t like it.”²³⁷

Socially driven expectations also exist for the daughter. One mother ended her relationship with her daughter because the latter’s griya had a bad reputation: “I made a daughter, but soon I ended this relationship, as the hijra community started gossiping about my daughter’s griya.”²³⁸

The mother-daughter is a mechanized functional relationship that creates equilibrium within the hijra community. Nevertheless, status of the mother is not equal to the guru²³⁹.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Sonia (aqwa), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

²³⁵ A hijra is also allowed to perform this ritual with women from outside the community, i.e., from the heteronormative mainstream Pakistani society.

²³⁶ Sitara (aqwa), interview with the author, April 8, 2015.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Arzo (aqwa), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

²³⁹ The fictive mother offers enhanced protection to a chela, her daughter. The relationship also expands the chela’s burgeoning social network. The “ideal mother” archetype, an image heavily shaped by childhood experiences and

5.3.1.2. *The Brother-Making Ritual*

Like mother-making, brother-making extends non-lineage fictive kinship in the hijra community. The brother's role is adopted by a male with a masculine identity who belongs to mainstream Pakistani culture. "The brother will not be selected within the khwajasira community."²⁴⁰ For her part, the hijra who initiates this relationship assumes the role of the sister. A number of respondents shared that they had previously participated in the brother-making ritual.

Similar to its appearance in mother-making, milk also plays a significant role in the brother-making ritual. The ritual demands that a prospective brother gives a glass of milk to his hijra sister: she drinks half of it, he drinks the other half. According to respondent Sitara, the resulting bond can be stronger than a biological one: "Like If I want you to be my brother, I will offer you milk and you would be my brother much better than a real one."²⁴¹

The practice of milk-drinking in the brother-making ceremony is inspired by the practice of breastfeeding itself. In other words, those who partake of the same milk are children of the same mother, even if, in this case, the bond is not biological. Islam recognizes the concept of *razai*, which endorses those who are not born of the same mother but are nevertheless siblings (so much so that sexual relations are prohibited between them). To that end, the use of milk in the brother-making ritual symbolically reveals the story of breastfeeding from the same mother, even though there is no designated mother character in the ritual.

The sequence of milk-drinking also bears some significance. A number of respondents shared that it is standard for the sister figure to partake of the milk before her brother does. The drinking order indicates that she occupies a higher social status, one that is associated with respect and authority. In some cases, a brother will also present gifts, money, or dresses to his sister, a

normative expectations of a Pakistani mother, is integral to the relationship. As parental figures, a guru (father) and a mother establish a binary relationship, with separate and distinguished roles for each one.

²⁴⁰ Khurram (aqwa), interview with the author, April 5, 2015.

²⁴¹ Sitara (aqwa), interview with the author, April 8, 2015.

pattern demonstrated at Honey's brother-making rasam: "At the ceremony, my brother gave me a gift of dress and we offered the milk rasam."²⁴²

The brother-making ritual empowers a hijra person to create new social ties; it also endows her with a sense of strength. She develops the brother tie in routine activities and uses it as support when it is needed. This support can be social, moral, psychological, and/or financial. Though it is not common, as support can sometimes also come from the brother's family:

Three days back, I was in a need of money. He [her brother] took me to his home and served meal. My *bhabhi* [sister-in-law] observed my tense facial expressions and body language that I was stress and not feeling comfortable and enquired if I was feeling well. 'I told her I was in need of money'. 'Certainly,' bhabhi said, 'Why you did not ask him [to brother]? Why you made him brother?' So being a brother, he gave me desired money.²⁴³

Most hijra people assert that they maintain fictive kinship ties for support value, but the data indicates that the fictive relationships do not usually extend to include the brother's family (as per Honey's example of her bhabhi). Thus, I only partially agree with the notion that a brother-sister relationship fulfills a support mechanism, and I am furthermore unconvinced that a fictive brother's family is in strong association with his hijra sister. In fact, the data indicates that when a fictive brother's family comes to know about the relationship, they are usually eager to disrupt it. To them, the relationship is often unacceptable.

From field observations,²⁴⁴ I concluded that the brother-sister relationship did not require attention only from the brother, but also from the sister, who was expected to see to her brother's

²⁴² Honey (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Field Observation: Honey once invited me to conduct an interview at her dera. There were two men present when I arrived. I gave them both a smile and we shook hands, then I sat beside them on the floor. Honey introduced one man as her brother and the other as her brother's friend. I asked if it was standard for a hijra's brother and his friend to be at the dera. Honey explained that he was her brother through ritual and that he had financially supported her in the past. She then explained to her brother that I was a researcher studying the hijra community. Her brother was there because he had just finished work (he worked as a crafter) and stopped by the dera to eat with his sister. She told him that there was no food, but that she could make something if he provided groceries. Her brother gave her Rs. 120, which Honey gave to a neighborhood boy. The boy returned with eggs, bread, onions, and tomatoes. Honey cooked the meal for her brother and his friend, which they finished in fifteen minutes. Her brother told me that whenever he visited Honey, his son took care of his work. At this, Honey assumed a curious facial expression. When I asked her the reason for her reaction, she explained that the son was no more than twelve-years-old. It seemed that the son took care of business in addition to going to school. Honey asked her brother to go so that he could take care of his work, and he obliged. I felt that Honey did not want him to stay longer. Later, Honey explained that her brother was the griya of another moorat. She also shared that before his current moorat-griya relationship, her brother was involved with another moorat who took drugs and was now physically paralyzed due to an unknown disease. Thus, he started his current griya-moorat relationship.

various needs being fulfilled. . The financial obligations are more often met by the brother rather than the sister.

5.3.1.3. *The Sister-Making Ritual*

Sister-making is another type of ritual that expands a hijra's non-lineage fictive kinship. According to some respondents, sister-making is also known as making *sehlian* (a gender-specific word that indicates a friendship between two girls). As one respondent shared, "through this ritual we become sisters, and sehlian. We cover each other's heads with a dupatta. ." ²⁴⁵

A hijra person can make a number of sisters/sehlian. In fact most hijra respondents reported having several sisters/sehlian. The majority of the hijra's sehlian would be made in the city where they first joined the community, a trend echoes by Arzo's experience: "I have many friends in Sargodha city where I performed a ritual to place dupatta on them and my friends did the same for me." ²⁴⁶ The ritual bonds two hijra people as sisters, though a hijra person may also take a sister from outside the community that is from mainstream Pakistani society. That said, no respondents reported having a sister outside of the community.

Like other rituals, the sister-making ritual strategically serves to extend the community's social organization and to develop social ties between individual hijra people. Because the community is marginalized by mainstream society, it is pertinent that members foster relationships to replace those of their pre-hijra existence. In the words of one respondent: "As society doesn't accept us, so we build alternative relations." ²⁴⁷ These rituals-bound relationships provides a strong base on which to construct additional kinship ties.

Chapter 3 asserts that the dupatta has great significance to the hijra community, owing primarily to its role in the seminal *Mai Nandi* myth. In the sister-making ritual, the use of a dupatta is central and serves to create a sisterhood between two hijra people. ²⁴⁸ In the words of Muskan, "If two khwajasira are going to become sisters, then they will share dupatta with each other." ²⁴⁹

²⁴⁵ Nagina (khwajasira), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

²⁴⁶ Arzo (aqwa), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

²⁴⁷ Mehak Malik (narban), interview with the author, April 12, 2015.

²⁴⁸ The dupatta is also used in the guru-chela relationship, but its significance is slightly different there. When a guru places a dupatta over her chela's head, it communicates that she is taking the chela under her influence will protect her from challenges originating in mainstream society.

²⁴⁹ Muskan (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

When a hijra ritually places a dupatta onto the head of a prospective sister, she communicates the respect and affection she feels for her. The sisterhood also symbolizes a commitment of protection and support whenever it is needed. These traits – respect, affection, protection, and support – are associated with sisterhood in mainstream Pakistani society and Hijra community. Thus, I have no doubt that the hijra sisterhood is modeled after the mainstream interpretation of sisterhood.

According to one respondent, milk-drinking is also integral of the sister-making ritual: “I placed dupatta on her and she did the same, then I offered her milk and she too reciprocated in the same manner”.²⁵⁰ As in brother-making, milk symbolically enjoins two individuals as siblings. This respondent also reported her sister-making ceremony as a social occasion, where friends and family helped celebrate the sisterhood.²⁵¹

5.3.2. The Griya-Making Ritual

The griya-moorat ritual is another non-lineage fictive kinship that extends a hijra person’s social network. This kinship type is based on the relationship between a moorat (a hijra person who assumes a role of girlfriend/wife. This term is also refers to a young beautiful hijra) and a griya (hijra person’s boyfriend/husband). Sexual and economic factors predominantly govern this relationship.

Hijra people are generally attracted to and fulfill their sexual needs from men.²⁵² In the griya-moorat relationship, a moorat assumes the role of a wife and a griya assumes the role of a husband. In both personal and public contexts within the hijra community,²⁵³ moorat communicates the husband-wife dynamics very clearly. While the primary purpose of this relationship is to fulfill sexual and economic needs, a moorat may additionally fulfill other domestic responsibilities associated with a wife. Arzo explained further:

I have a friend [griya]. We live together and have sexual relationship. We both make love, hug, and kiss each other. I consider him as a husband and wash his clothes. He was married and had two daughters, but he divorced his wife before making the relationship with me.

²⁵⁰ Honey (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

²⁵¹ “I made sister, and invited all moorat. All danced and enjoyed.” (Honey [aqwa], interview with the author, April 10, 2015).

²⁵² In this relationship, a hijra positions herself as a woman. For more information on the topic, see chapter four.

²⁵³ Public occasions include the following: guru-chela rituals, griya-moorat rituals, brother-making rituals, sister-making rituals, and *salgira* (birthday) celebrations.

He has been with me for eight years. He did not get a job, but he has been trying. I asked him to find a job soon since I cannot manage and maintain the house single-handedly. ²⁵⁴

While Arzo fulfilled the economic needs of her griya during the time that he was unemployed, their situation was not ideal according to hijra community standards. Indeed, the community expects griya to provide finances to his moorat, as a husband commonly does in the Pakistani society.

5.3.2.1. *The Griya-Moorat Nikah*

The griya-moorat ritual is performed according to the patterns of the *nikah*²⁵⁵ and the relationship is expected to strengthen the bond-ship between moorat and griya. . In some cases, a griya and moorat also perform *ijab o qabool*,²⁵⁶ where oaths may also be exchanged: “*Gadvi, gadvi main phool...Bol banday, tmko yeh moorat kabool?* [A pot in a pot with a flower...Speak oh man do you accept this moorat?].”²⁵⁷

One hijra respondent shared a vivid account of her *nikah* ceremony:

In Lahore, there was a boy named Attah who fell in love with me. I was beautiful and young. To get rid of him, I showed greediness and demanded gold ornaments, car and other expensive stuff with an intention that he will leave me. But he fulfilled all my wishes. I performed this rasam [the griya-moorat ritual] with him. He did *nikah* with me and wanted to celebrate *suhaag raat* [sex on the wedding night] with me, I said I am with my friends, and we don’t celebrate this night. He forced me for the sex and, in return I left him at the same time in front of my guru.²⁵⁸

During a data reliability check, I inquired into the practice of *nikah* in a griya-moorat ritual. A very small number of respondents denied that an exchange of narrated words was necessary to validate the relationship. However, according to renowned guru Babbli Malik of Rawalpindi, the exchange of *ijab o qabool* may indeed be performed at a ceremony that bonds a moorat to her griya.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁴ Arzo (aqwa), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

²⁵⁵ A *Nikah* is a consensual marriage contract between a man and a woman that legitimizes their sexual relationship.

²⁵⁶ The phrase refers to the consent from both parties to perform a *nikah*/marriage.

²⁵⁷ Honey (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

²⁵⁸ Ashi (narban), interview with the author, April 9, 2015.

²⁵⁹ Babbli Malik (aqwa), interview with the author, April 12, 2015.

5.3.2.2. *The Celebration of the Griya-Moorat Ritual*

The griya-moorat ritual is a ceremonial one. The moorat invites her sehlian (hijra sisters), and sometimes the griya invites his friends. Guests are served by the moorat's entourage, though it is the griya who bears any expenses associated with the function. In general, the event is a festive occasion featuring dancing, feasting, and sometimes a ring for the moorat. It is also a time that the couple can show their affection; "he offers ring to me and praised me on *salgira* in front of friends, and danced with me."²⁶⁰ Another respondent shared, "I invited all my friends, and griya came with his friends. They did the ring presenting ceremony and brought sweets also. All his friends offered gifts to me with plenty of pleasure and joy. I danced and my griya who gave me Rs. 2,000 (US\$ 20)."²⁶¹

Possessing a griya is a symbol of pride for a moorat, and assuming the role of a wife confers upon her a strong sense of womanhood. The griya-moorat ritual is celebrated in the way that a wedding is celebrated in the larger heteronormative culture, where the couple receives gifts and the guests enjoy the occasion filled with dancing, music, and food.

5.3.2.3. *Griya-Moorat Relationship Responsibilities*

Like all relationships, the griya-moorat partnership too comes with responsibilities and obligations. According to respondents, a moorat is entitled to loyalty and attention from her griya, and she is expected to be loyal and responsive in return. If either individual is unfaithful, then a penalty is lodged; "If any of the partner of griya-moorat relationship is reportedly has an affair with someone, then they are subjected to *dand* [penalization]."²⁶² Nevertheless, affairs do occur, and when they do, they may disrupt the peace at home: "Once I had sexual relations with someone without letting him [griya] know, but when he came to know he subjected me to severe physical violence and instructed me to do whatever I wanted other than having sexual relations with any other person."²⁶³

²⁶⁰ The song lyrics to which Honey danced were, "*Aa chl māhiyēa pyar krien* [Come make love, my beloved]."

²⁶¹ Muskan (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

²⁶² Nagina (khwajasira) interview with the author, April 11, 2015. The respondent also shared the following: "There is only physical relation with the griya, and if it is stolen [if a betrayal occurs], then it is another case without anybody knowing about it."

²⁶³ Arzo (aqwa), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

In addition to sexual relationship, a griya is responsible for providing social, financial, and emotional support to his moorat. One respondent frankly uttered her expectations from her griya: “He must support me in every odd situation and provide protection, care and love to me.”²⁶⁴ Another respondent illustrated how financial obligations might intersect with domestic policy: “When I was running out of money, he was always helped me. When I was sick, he used to bear all my treatment expenses....Once I went outside for begging, he scolded and thrashed me and yelled ‘if I am here to fulfill all your needs, then why do need to beg.’²⁶⁵ Very few respondents believed that a moorat should support her griya: “Often there are some ‘she-males’ who do function and earn for theirs griyas. It is better to do own work and earn for yourself.”²⁶⁶

Ultimately, nearly all respondents shared that they would rather face obstacles with the support of a partner than live on their own. Many also agreed that they appreciated the social importance of the relationship imparted to others. A moorat is frequently at the center of her griya’s attention, this obedience can elevate her status within her community. For example, Honey’s griya was quite devoted to her: “It was a memorable time, we spent together. Firstly, he was a self-esteemed person, and secondly, he only asked me little work, in spite of fact if there were twenty other moorats present. He preferred to be served by me.” Conversely, if a griya belittles a moorat’s social importance, it can result in the end of the relationship.

I asked [the griya] to meet my she-male friends and we did dinner in the hotel. Despite the fact that, my griya had given me money to make a payment. He had given to my friend. It made me sad and felt socially neglected. Later, I complained to him, however he refused to take my concern seriously. I said it’s your life, do whatever you want to do. So, he broke up after that incident.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ Ashi (narban), interview with the author, April 9, 2015.

²⁶⁵ Muskan (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

²⁶⁶ Sanwali (aqwa), interview with the author, April 6, 2015.

²⁶⁷ Mehroz (aqwa), interview with the author, April 14, 2015.

5.3.4.3. The Dynamics of Fictive Kinship and Gender Performance

The previous sections have extensively thrown light on lineage-based and non-lineage fictive kinship within the hijra community and the details of the rituals which create various types of kinships and provide basis for social organization. At this point, I would like to offer the following conclusions:

- a) The performance of the hijra identity is based on the situation and context. A hijra person who attains the status of guru is responsible for regulating functions within the community. As a guru, she will adopt masculine gender roles and masculine kinship gender titles (i.e., lineage-based fictive kinship: guru, Dada guru, and Chacha guru).
- b) The hijra identity is also extensively communicated through the feminine gender in many social contexts. To expand existing fictive kinship and to create new non-lineage fictive relationships, a hijra will adopt the feminine gender and perform feminine gender roles (e.g., mother-making, brother-making, and griya-making rituals). For this purpose hereunder are social processes that illustrates, how a hijra person acquires hierarchical position by enhancing the performance of her identity.

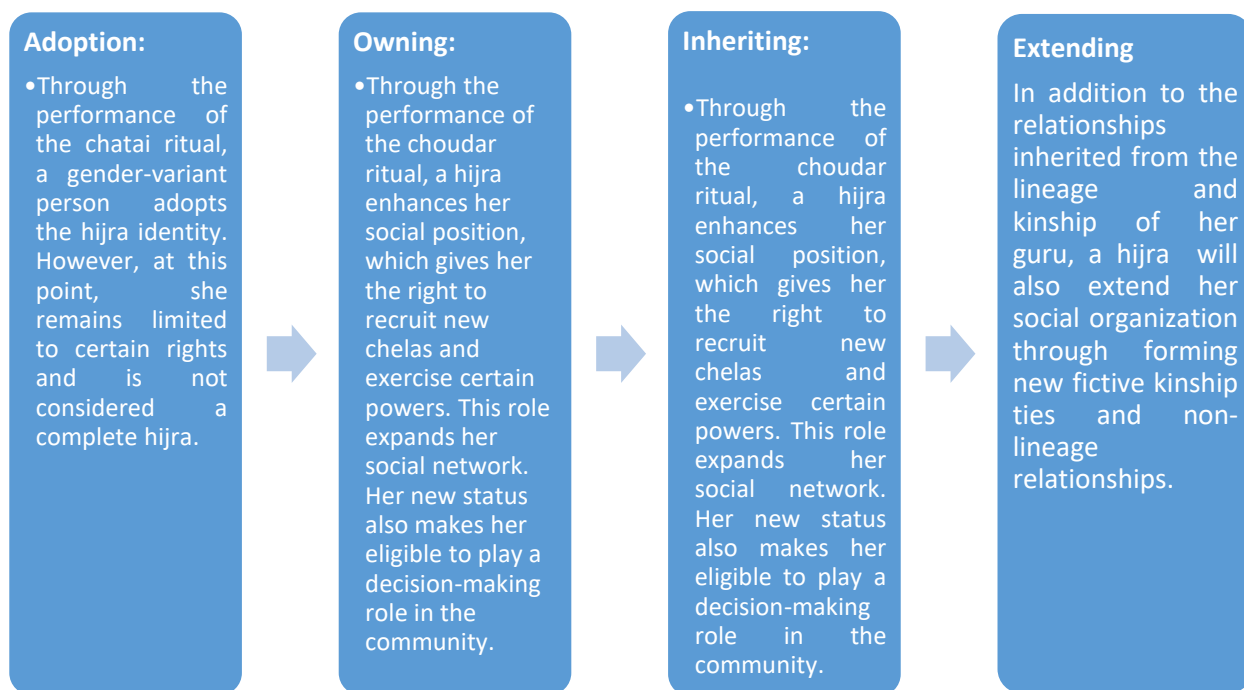


Figure 5. 4: The Dynamics of Fictive Kinship and Gender Performance

c) I have argued that the adaptation of gender can be masculine or feminine, and moreover it is contingent upon the context of a given social interaction, whether inside or outside the community.

In light of the above conclusion, this researcher will focus on gender dynamics in the fictive kinship system. Furthermore, the researcher will highlight how gender is presented in the kinship structure and interactions between hijra people and members of mainstream Pakistani society.

5.4. Gender Negotiation and Types of Social Organization

A guru negotiates her gender identity according to the given social context. This is particularly true of the chauthry guru (choudar-chela), the individual responsible for socializing new chelas and safeguarding them from social vulnerabilities. As such, a guru adopts a masculine gender identity that mirrors its counterpart in larger Pakistani society. The following list comprises descriptions of gender role negotiations among hijra people.

1. **The performance of masculine gender roles in fictive kinship:** In Pakistani society, the father is a figure of authority and protection. Mirroring this archetype during the guru-chela

ritual, a guru assumes the role of the father while the chela becomes the daughter. These role assumptions symbolize the guru's obligation to protect the chela and guide her activities. In the lineage-based kinship system of the hijra community, a guru is identified with masculine denominations.

2. **The performance of feminine roles in creating fictive kinship based on sexual relationships:** A hijra person performs a feminine role in the context of a romantic partnership with a man. This relationship is legitimized and authenticated through ritual performances that embed it in the community's greater social organization. The focus of attention in this relationship is performance of gender, and the couple consequently forms a fictive kinship based on a sexual relationship.
3. **The performance of feminine roles in creating fictive kinship based on non-sexual relations:** A newly inducted hijra person creates fictive kinship ties by becoming a chela. She performs feminine gender roles. As a chela, her relationships augment her support system and sense of security.²⁶⁸ Additionally, this role enhances her sense of self as a female. Examples of this fictive kinship type include mother-making, brother-making, and sister-making rituals.

Category: *Gender negotiation and types of social organization:* The hierarchical position and performance of a given hijra identity determine the adaptation and practice of gender roles that can be either masculine or feminine. The adopted gender is contingent upon the situation and context of the social interaction.

Sub-category: *Fictive lineage-based kinship as a source for the determination of gender:* A hijra person with a higher social position in the family of orientation of a fictive kinship system may perform masculine gender roles and adopt masculine titles. This happens when she is expected to take on the role of a protector and supporter, qualities that are associated with masculinity in larger Pakistani society. At a higher status, her roles and responsibilities will determine her gender identity.

Sub-category: *Fictive kinship, based on non-sexual and sexual relationships, as a source for the determination of feminine gender:* The performance of the hijra identity in larger Pakistani society is associated with the performance of the feminine gender. Through this performance, a hijra person develops social relationships in mainstream society. These relationships can be based on a sexual partnership (in the case of *griya* and *moorat*) or a non-sexual partnership (in the case of mother-making, brother-making, or sister-making ritual), but in all cases, a hijra will adopt a feminine gender identity.

²⁶⁸ As described earlier in this chapter, this occurs in the mother-daughter and brother-sister relationships.

5.4.1. Fictive Lineage-Based Kinship Determining the Masculine Gender within the Family of Orientation

The *family of orientation* describes the family into that an individual is born; this study employs the phrase to refer to a hijra's guru and her associated lineage. In Figure 5.5, Ego represents the chela, and the figure illustrates her relationships in the lineage-based fictive kinship network. The hijra community's social organization is based on patrilineal descent, and a hijra with a high social status adopts masculine gender and performs masculine gender roles. This pattern reflects the larger Pakistani assumption where the masculine gender is likely to provide protection and support to the weaker elements.

As aforementioned, a guru represents the father figure. The guru's peer disciple (or "brother") is known as Chacha guru, with "Chacha" being the Urdu word for uncle. Similarly, a guru's guru is known as Dada guru, with and "Dada" being the Urdu word for grandfather. According to one respondent, "We consider guru as like a father", if any hijra does not have guru, then hijra community will term her as a bastard [Urdu translation: *Agar kissi ka Guru nahi ho ga to bollain gay kay yeh khusra haram ka hay*]."²⁶⁹

This researcher has provided the Urdu translation to emphasize the masculine grammatical identity of the guru. In the phrase "*guru nahi ho ga*," [will not be my guru] the words "*ho ga*" [will be] indicates the masculine gender. The words of another respondent are referred to further illustrate this pattern: "*Jiss Guru kay Deray say pehli dafa zenana kapray pehn kar niklon to wo meray liay qabil-e-ihtram hain. Kyun kay wo meray Ustad hain ...Meray Guru Kehtay thay, appnay kam par tawaja do kyun kay rozi-o-roti kamany ja rehye* [The position of a guru is respectable for us, from where we wear ladies' garments for the first time, because he is the teacher. My guru said, pay attention on your work because soon you are going out for earning your livelihood]."

Like "*ho ga*" [will be] in the previous phrase, the bold letters in the above passage indicates a masculine subject; in this case, the guru. Nevertheless, for the hijra community, gender in

²⁶⁹ Nagina (khwajasira), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

language is often negotiable. The same respondent who described her guru in the masculine also described her in the feminine: “*Pehlay wali Jo guru thi wo function kam kia karti thi* [Prior to this guru, earlier guru was not fond of doing functions].”²⁷⁰ In this case, the bold Urdu words *karti thi* [was doing] categorically describe the guru femininely: both “*guru thi*” (the female guru was) and “*karti thi*” (she was doing).

The terminology of the hijra community’s social organization is patrilineal, particularly when it is applied toward descent. Ego identifies and describes its descent generations in the masculine denominators. Male titles may furthermore be used to describe parallel hijra people of the same lineage. For example, two chelas of the same guru may refer to one another as *chela Bhai* (chela brother). This terminology extends in a parallel context to the rank of guru, with *guru Bhai* (guru brother). Other than discussing lineage, in normal routine conversation, they refer to each other in feminine pronoun.²⁷¹

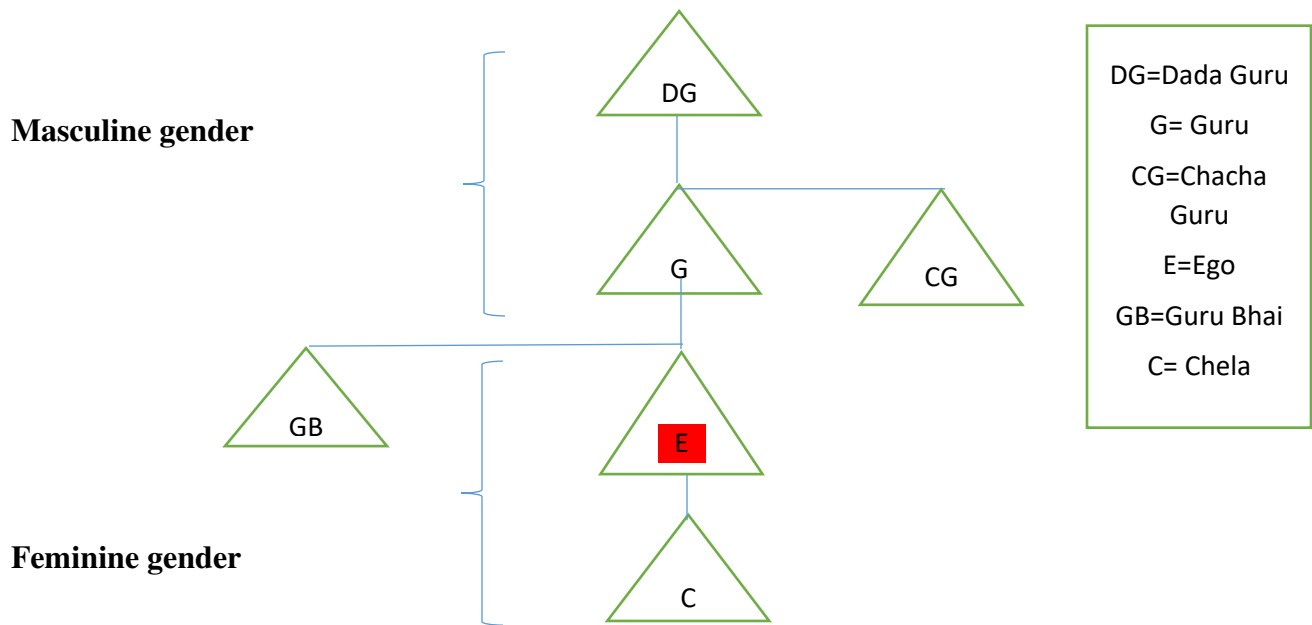


Figure 5. 5: Gender and Lineage Based Fictive Kinship

²⁷⁰ Honey (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

²⁷¹ The nature of gender in this context works in ascending order. The lineage above ego is masculine whereas lineage parallel to or below Ego are feminine.

Note: The social organization of the *hijra* community is based on a number of factors. In the Figure 5.5, Ego/chela identifies her guru as masculine. This masculine reference includes all the relationships based on the principle of master-disciple. In this structure, when Ego/chela talks about her elders, she use masculine nouns and verbs.

Table 5. 1: Relationship Terminology Based on Lineage among the Families of Orientation and Procreation

Relationship	Terms for Family of Orientation	Terms for Family of Procreation	Gender of Family of Orientation	Gender of Family of Procreation
Guru-Chela	<i>Baap</i> (Father)	Beti (daughter)	Masculine	Feminine
Guru’s Guru	Dada Guru (Grand Father)	Poti (Paternal granddaughter)	Masculine	Feminine
Guru’s Brother (Guru Bhai)	Chacha Guru (Paternal Uncle)	Bhatiji (Paternal niece)	Masculine	Feminine
Parallel relation family of procreation ²⁷²				
Guru’s Chela	Chela Bhen (sister)	Bhen (sister)	Feminine	Feminine

Source: Field data

5.4.2. Fictive Kinship Based on Non-Sexual and Sexual Relationships Determining the Feminine Gender

The performance of the hijra identity in Pakistani society is associated with a performance of the feminine gender. Through this performance, a hijra person develops both sexual and non-sexual social ties in mainstream society – a griya-moorat relationship²⁷³ in the case of the former, and mother-making, sister-making, and/or brother-making in the case of the latter.

Figure 5.6 illustrates fictive kinship based on sexual relationships and the determination of gender. In the previous Figure 5.5, Ego (guru), is depicted in a sexual relationship with a griya (Indicated by “Ga”). Contrary to her usual role as a father figure, in this case a guru assumes the role of a mother, and her griya is referred to as *baap* (father). This is a non-lineage fictive kinship context. Likewise, when this gender designation extends to one generation in the family of

²⁷² Community members use the feminine gender to refer to one another until the time they become gurus themselves.

²⁷³ Creating a relationship on the basis of a sexual relationship is another kinship source within the hijra community. The ritual of griya-moorat is legitimized within the community to regulate the sexual relationships of hijras. This relationship is considered a respectful one in the community.

orientation, then the character normally known as dada guru will assume the role of a grandmother, and her griya will be referred to as grandfather.

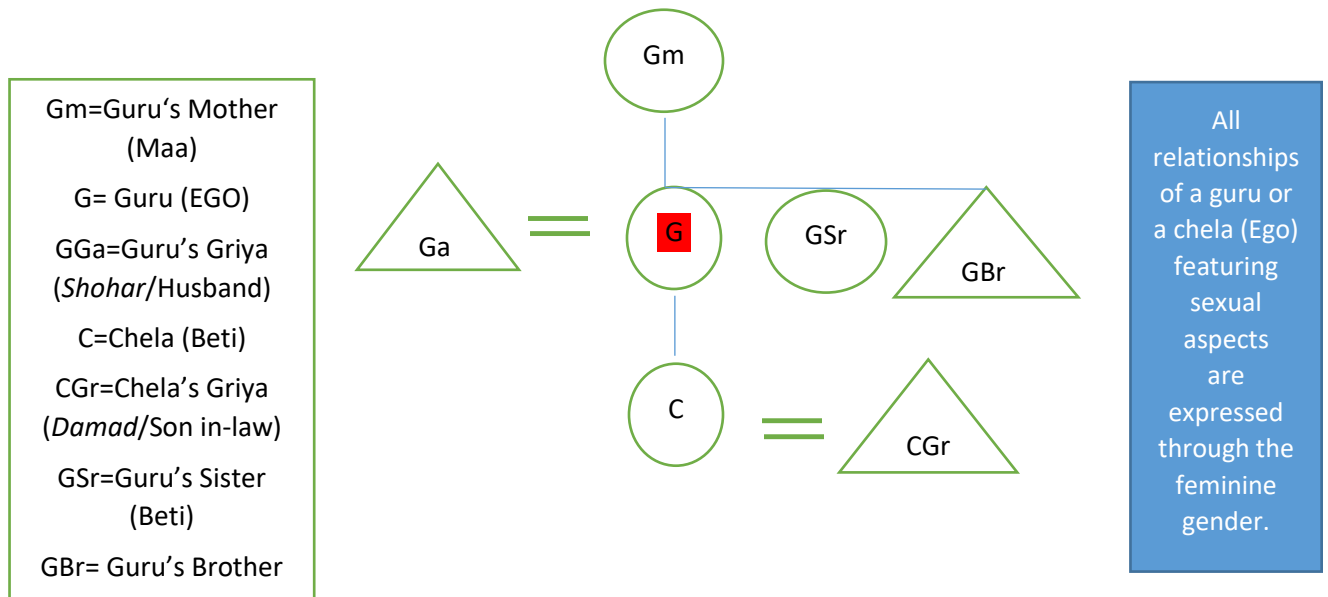


Figure 5. 6: Guru as Ego determining Non-Lineage Based Fictive Kinship Relationships

Figure 5.7 is a replica of Figure 5.6, with the exception of Ego's changed role. In this Figure, Ego represents a chela instead of a guru, and any relationship titles and genders are described as Ego's new perspective. Thus, the guru is a mother to Ego, and the guru's griya is a father. Similarly, the guru's brother becomes a sister. Both guru and chela are feminine.

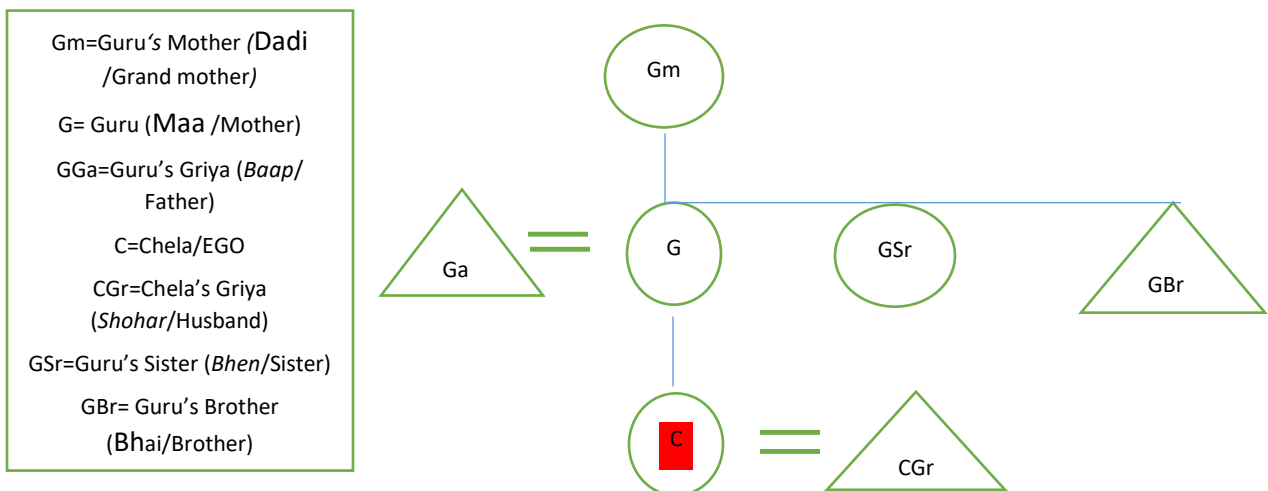


Figure 5. 7: Chela as an Ego Determining Non-Lineage Based Fictive Kinship Relationship

The following table 5.2 indicates two separate but related kinship patterns: the relationships of the families of orientation and procreation, and the possible genders of the actors involved in those relationships.

Table 5. 2: Relationship Terminology Based on Non-Lineage Families of Orientation and Procreation

Type of Family	Relationship	Term for Hijra person	Term for other actor	Gender of Hijra	Gender of other actor
Family of Orientation: How Ego identifies and labels her guru and relations.	Guru's griya-moorat	<i>Maa</i> (Mother)	<i>Baap/Aba</i> (Father)	Feminine	Masculine
	Dada guru's griya-moorat	<i>Nani</i> (Maternal Grand Mother)	<i>Nana</i> (Maternal Grand Father)	Feminine	Masculine
	Guru's brother	<i>Maa</i>	<i>Mamoon</i>	Feminine	Masculine
	Guru's sister	<i>Maa</i>	<i>Khala</i> (Maternal Aunty)	Feminine	Feminine
	Guru's mother	<i>Maa</i>	<i>Nana</i> (Grand Father)	Feminine	Feminine
	Guru's Daughter	<i>Maa</i>	<i>Bhen</i>	Feminine	Feminine
Family of Procreation: How a guru identifies and labels her chela and relations.	Chela's griya-moorat	Beti (Daughter)	<i>Damad</i> (Son in-Law)	Feminine	Masculine
	<i>Chela's</i> brother	Beta (Son)	Beta	Feminine	Feminine
	<i>Chela's</i> sister	Beti	Beti	Feminine	Masculine
	<i>Chela's</i> mother	Beti	Bhen	Feminine	Feminine
	<i>Chela's</i> daughter	Beti	Navasi (Grand Niece)	Feminine	Feminine

Source: Field data

The hijra fictive kinship system allows an individual to express different gender identities based on the role she occupies at that time. In one type of kinship, i.e., fictive kinship based on lineage, a guru's social role within the community is perceived as masculine (or fatherly).

Conversely, according to the structure of fictive kinship based on non-sexual relationships, the role of that same hijra person is determined in conjunction with her own griya-moorat relationship. Thus, in that context, she will be feminine (or motherly), and her griya will be masculine (or fatherly). Gender negotiation, then, is contingent upon a few factors: a hijra's status (hierarchical position), the context of the social roles, and the overall situation itself.

5.5. Discussion

The guru-chela relationship is the basic unit of social organization within the hijra community. The hijra community of Pakistan comprises two sociological divisions namely, *Khusrapan* and *zenanapan* (Abdullah 2012, 5) and four gharanas *Rawana*, *Chandani*, *Muhafti* and *Miraza*²⁷⁴. The community sometimes refers to gharana as *daira* (circle). However, hijra community of India possesses seven gharanas *Lashkarwallah*, *Punawallah*, *Lalanwali*, *Bendibazar*, *Dongriwallah*, *Bulakkawallah*, and *Chakklawallah* (Thomas 2013, 12).

In India, Nanda (1999) and Thomas (2013) found the gharana²⁷⁵ to be populated by *nayaks*, *gurus* and *chelas*. Ahmad (2010) has stated the same for the Pakistani hijra community, distinguishing these identities by their roles and responsibilities in managing the *dera* (Ahmad 2010, 7). However, not every *dera* has all three actors. Contrary to the findings of other studies (Nanda, 1999; Thomas 2013; Ahmad 2010), I did not see many *nayaks* residing in *deras* or *gharanas*.

This study is consistent with other studies in documenting that a senior guru serves as an independent head of the *dera* or *gharana* (Dutta 2012, 832; Ahmad 2010). Moreover, there can be multiple *deras* of the *gharana* originating from one lineage in the same locality (Dutta 2012, 832). All hijra community members trace their respective lineages according to their designated *gharana*. Members of the same *gharana* often express a sense of solidarity. For example, during rituals and other functions, hijra people introduce themselves according to their respective *gharana* affiliations. This practice lends to a collective identity for members of the same household. I have observed that all four *gharanas* in Pakistan share the same hijra culture and structure. The same is reported by Thomas (2013) for India's seven *gharanas* (Thomas 2013, 120-21).

The hijra community's initiation rites bear similarity to the initiation rites of certain Hindu sects (Nanda 1999, 43) as well as Islam's mystic Sufi tradition. In the latter, a *mureed* (follower)

²⁷⁴ The Rawana household traces its lineage to hijras who served directly under the emperor. Member of the Chandani household, on the other hand, historically, worked as catering servants. Muhafzti members safeguarded the royal harem, and the Merzai were associated with the *wazir* (the administrative head under the king).

²⁷⁵ Nanda (1999) and Thomas (2013) both refer to *gharana* as a communal residence. *Gharana* can also refer to a clan.

carries out the spiritual lineage of his/her *peer* (spiritual master). As Nanda (1999) described, the guru-chela relationship resembles the association between a spiritual master and his/her disciple (Nanda 1999, 45). The hijra community's basic unit of social organization, the guru-chela relationship is a replication from Islamic and Hindu mystic traditions. Additionally, the subculture of the hijra community is an amalgamation of cultural elements and practices from both Islam and Hinduism (Dutta 2012, 859; Nanda 1999, 42).

A hijra person's very life resists the social structure that inhibits her integration into mainstream society (Hall and O'Donovan 1996, 238), and accordingly, the hijra community forms a subculture within the larger Pakistani culture. In India, the patterns embedded in the community's fictive kinship system mirror the patterns of the extended joint-family structure in greater Indian society (Nanda 1999, 47-48). The same is true for the Pakistan's hijra community: its fictive kinship structure imitates the family structure of mainstream Pakistani society.

The finding of this research is consistent with the research findings of Khan (2014a) in documenting the term *griya* for a husband or boyfriend of a hijra person (Khan 2014a). However, in a term *marakh* (The Pushto word for the boyfriend of a hijra person) was equivalent to *griya* in the region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Ahmad 2010, 9). In the hijra community, the *griya-moorat* relationship legitimizes the sexual union of a hijra person and a man. Kalra (2012) echoed this assertion with a similar one; that a hijra person performs feminine gender roles and adopts a feminine identity in the context of her relationship with a man (Kalra 2012, 122). This *griya-moorat* relationship also helps to extend kinship structure of hijra community.

The performance of femininity remains central to the formation of (non-lineage) fictive kinship within the hijra community. Historically and presently, this integral performance is and was embodied through sociocultural practices on the Indian subcontinent.²⁷⁶ I associate this *centrality of femininity* that serves to validate a hijra's identity.

I refer to Zulfiqar (2015) for a list of kinship terms employed by the hijra community: *maa* (Mother), *shoorma* (brother), *shoormi* (sister), *guru Chāchā* (guru's brother) and *maa khala* (mother's sister) (Zulfiqar 2015, 12). Incidentally, while two of these identities, *shoorma* and *guru*

²⁷⁶ India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

Chāchā, refer to a brother figure, it should be noted that the former refers to a relationship a chela creates for herself, whereas the latter applies solely to the brother of one's guru.

Both words hail from Urdu. For any relationships inherited directly from her guru, a chela should affix the honorific "guru" to the respective titles of the older generation.

Guru-inherited kinship terms vary area to area. In the locale where this research was conducted, respondents used the word *bhaimeka* for brother (in the context of a brother-making ritual) and *bhen* for sister (in the context of a sister-making ritual). While, a study conducted in KPK documented *shoorma* for brother and *shoormi* for sister (Zulfiqar 2015, 12).

When determining a gharana's lineage in the lineage-based fictive kinship system, the gender of a hijra person is mostly considered masculine. In some situations, however, the gender switches back to the feminine. It is through the use of language that one determines gender and the context of social interaction. Literature written about the community has extensively demonstrated an interchange of masculine and feminine grammar; however, there is not always a specific reason behind grammatical gender negotiations (Nanda 1990, xviii cited in Hall and O'Donovan 1996, 230). Hall and O'Donovan (1996) owe grammatical gender switching to "identification reasons" of solidarity and power expressed in *social interactions* (Hall and O'Donovan 1996, 230-1, emphasis italic) and communicated with *social meaning* (Hall and O'Donovan 1996, 235, emphasis italic). According to a respondent of one study, junior hijra people were referred to as masculine, while senior hijra people were referred to as feminine (Hall and O'Donovan 1996, 242). On the other hand, the current study indicates that the adoption of the masculine gender by community elders signifies a responsibility of protection and authority. This signification mirrors mainstream cultural practices in Pakistan, whereas a patriarch is often associated with those same qualities; protection and authority.

Despite the importance of the masculine guru, femininity itself is integral to the hijra identity. New chelas are socialized according to feminine expectations, while existing community members frequently adopt feminine gender identities during ritual creations of fictive kinship. Hall and O'Donovan (1996) asserted that, because of previous socialization, junior hijra persons develop a habit of mimicking and adopting the social roles of senior hijra individuals. If a new hijra person errs, or is otherwise unable to perform her prescribed social roles, then she will likely

be punished through verbal abuse and/or will be labeled as ill-Mannered (Hall and O'Donovan 1996, 242-3).

With reference to the literature and the above discussion, I have outlined the following societal features of the hijra culture:

- a) The relationship between social organization and social interactions, and
- b) The relationship between social organization and the social system.

The social organization within the community works to create ties between its members; moreover, the hijra culture recognizes relationships created with outside actors. The structure of the community's social organization facilitates a collective identity – the hijra identity – among gender-variant persons. The adoption, ownership, and performance of this identity grants a hijra person certain rights that allow her to earn a decent living within the geographical territory of her guru. Social organization also allows a chela to inherit the fictive kinship ties of her guru.

The findings presented in this chapter demonstrate that the performance of hijra identity is central in the creation of the social system and the development of social organization. In other words, a hijra person attains a given hierarchical position through enhancing the performance of her identity. This position allows a hijra person to increase her social relationships inside and outside of the community. In the same vein, this chapter also highlights the categorical division between the social roles of chelas and gurus. These social roles stem from the hierarchical position of the individual who adopts them. For example, the responsibility of protecting a chela from vulnerabilities falls to a guru, who embodies the role in a masculine manner. On the other hand, in the context of socialization and legitimization, the hijra identity is considered almost exclusively feminine.

Chapter 6: The Economic Organization and Structure of the Hijra Community

This chapter discusses the interrelated proxies of economic organization and control, which together functions to regulate the structure of the hijra community. Four major livelihood strategies are highlighted in the community's contemporary economic practices: (a) *vadhai* (bestowing blessings), (b) dance, (c) prostitution, and (d) begging. This chapter addresses how these occupations are adopted and whether they carry any social repercussions.

This chapter will examine the elements of dance and prostitution that leads to hijra identity toward hyper-femininity. While the features of a feminine appearance do not remain consistent throughout lifetime of hijra people, femininity itself plays an important role in earning a livelihood and attaining prominence within the community.

How do the existing members of the hijra community approach and mobilize a gender-variant person to join their network? Members often use their own experiences as motivation, though they may also point to the gender-variant person's marginalization by mainstream society. An incoming hijra person's socialization is completed in stages that introduce her to the community's sociocultural norms and practices as a first step. Her socialization process furthermore ensures that she internalizes the supremacy of her guru, who maintains dominance through a hegemonic structure that mirrors the patriarchal system of larger Pakistani society. In the context of symbolic conversation, a guru is described as a chela's father, protector, supporter, and rescuer. These characterizations are especially significant because most chelas feel abandoned by everyone they know, including their biological kin. For many chelas, a guru becomes a hero figure, someone more compelling than even a biological father. Accordingly, new chelas quickly develop strong affinities, for both the community and their new identities.

This chapter explores the functional roles of respect and status within the community. A chela who embodies an authentic hijra identity is an asset to her guru. As such, many gurus vigilantly monitor their chelas' activities to ensure their "authenticity." As a father figure, the guru is responsible for making her chelas productive community members, a process largely executed through observation and imitation. She may also impose restrictions over a chela's social mobility

and sexual activity. In short, the guru is a figure of unquestionable authority in the community. Both respect and status substantially contribute to her clout.

In this governing social structure, many chelas choose to pursue status, but reaching the objective requires a strong commitment. During the course of this study, it was discovered that the community's hierarchical structure directly and indirectly benefits the guru. In turn, she maintains societal law and order. As such, many chelas remain at a lower social standing and advanced positions remain elusive. Chelas are more likely to experience discrimination and violence lower in the hierarchy, further leading to their social impediment.

The final part of this chapter describes the ways in which a guru exercises control over a chela. If she does not meet her social obligations, a chela may face financial, social, physical, and/or verbal punishments. This authoritative regime works firstly to develop a fruitful and productive identity, and secondly to groom a hijra person according to her professional demands (i.e., usually prostitution and dancing). An ideal identity aligns with and perpetuates the socio-cultural understanding of the hijra archetype in mainstream Pakistani society.

6.1. Recruitment in Hijra Community: Structure of the Conversation between a Gender Variant Person and Members of Hijra Community:

All the gender-variant people perceive a connection between *self* and *gender*. As such, hijra community recruiters often construct initial interactions and conversation, which revolves around the praxis of the socio-psychological positioning of gender with reference to its identity and marginality at individual as well as at societal level.

It is crucial to note that when a gender-variant person first interacts with the community, she is often in the process of exploring her gender identity. In other words, she does not necessarily self-identify as a hijra person, but is rather in the process of self-identifying as feminine. Community members often recognize this struggle and present the hijra identity/community as an option for the gender variant people. This option provides an avenue to investigate and express preferred gender identity. Mehroz, an aqwa respondent born in Lahore but living in Rawalpindi, revealed her first interaction as hereunder:

I used to roam outside, where some khwajasira observed me and spotted feminine gender attributes in my personality. They approached me, exchanged some pleasantries and onwards became frank. One of them praised my personality and said, ‘you look really attractive. You may join our community. I will teach you everything and will provide you whatever you want.’ She asked me if I have a desire to wear feminine clothes and want to have a boyfriend. She promised she will make this possible for me.²⁷⁷

Mehroz’s account underscores the provisions, opportunity, and support that the community offers and/or promulgates. These conversations are often carried out against the backdrop of gender-variant person’s hardships and marginalization. Hijra community members understand the objectives of the gender-variant person they engage, and initial interactions focus on these objectives (e.g., safety, community, and individual expression). For their part, gender-variant individuals remain curious about the possibility of embodying the desired gender identity, which the hijra community sanctions and encourages.

The hijra community members often encourage prospects to investigate gender through the lens of the self. They employ the following or similar lines of inquiry from the gender variant individuals. Out of curiosity they would ask a common question; *Who are you?* In the response to this question, I would like to share an illustrative account of Muskan when she had a first hijra interaction at the age of twenty. “After a couple of meetings with hijra people, I came to know emphatically that we are *like-minded people* and should be with them.²⁷⁸

For the prospective hijra, an emphasis on self-exploration and like-mindedness living style may impel her to join the community. For their part, community members often play up these similarities to create a sense of familiarity for the prospective newcomers. Members may additionally forecast the potentially grim future that awaits the gender-variant person. The following quotes illustrate these bleak future prospects:

I had encountered hijra people before joining the hijra community. They explained to me, ‘you cannot marry, you will not have anyone to care for you when get older. You will have no money; neither you will have a brother nor sister besides you to help in old age. Once brother will get married, no one will take care of you. Ultimately, hijra community will be the only option for you. So come and join us now.’²⁷⁹

²⁷⁷ Mehroz (aqwa), interview with the author, April 15, 2015.

²⁷⁸ Muskan (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

²⁷⁹ Sanwali (aqwa), interview with the author, April 6, 2015.

It should be noted that the above respondent, Nagina, is an intersex hijra person (khwajasira). As such, the patterns of her early interactions with the community differ slightly from the norm. The projections of “you cannot marry” and “no one will take care of you” indicate that members likely knew of Nagina’s intersex status; from there, they constructed her isolated future. The method was ultimately successful after her brother married, Nagina left home for the community.

In a society that does not afford gender-variant people many opportunities to express themselves, the hijra community offers the refuge. It accepts and encourages occupational strategies in that a hijra can earn money and survive economically. Muskan, who worked in the sex industry prior to joining her dera, shared her first encounter with her guru, “I met her [her future guru] first time, at a function. She offered me to become her chela. She further added that ‘I will find functions for you, and if some guest or customer visits our dera, then you can have sex with them and can earn money.’ This will be beneficial for both of us in terms of earning money.”²⁸⁰ Muskan’s experience illustrates a common trend in the practice of hijra recruitment: the one where a prospective member is motivated by the financial gains and steady work promised through hijra community membership.

Hence, initial contact and conversation between the gender variant person and the members of hijra community revolve around exploration of self and gender expression. This conversation not only highlights the vulnerability of a gender variant person in mainstream Pakistani society, but also provides the opportunity of earning money through adaptation of hijra identity and hijra community.

²⁸⁰ Muskan (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.



Figure 6 1: Recruitment in Hijra Community

6.2. The Making of a Hijra: Socializing New Recruits

All the professions like vedhai, dancing, prostitution and begging are mainly regulated by the hijra community and these professions are being socialized to a new hijra person. In this section I have tried to create linkage between economic activities and socialization process. Femininity and performance of feminine gender is a vital force of hijra identity and responsible for shaping culture of hijra community. As it makes a hijra person a distinct individual.

After a gender-variant person joins the community and the guru-chela relationship²⁸¹ is established, the new member engages in a ritual called *firqa*. This ritual marks the first time a chela wears women's clothing at her new dera in the company of her cohabitants. Firqa serves a number of purposes, but its primary objective is to validate and lend confidence to a hijra person who is only just embracing her gender identity.²⁸² The firqa also creates a symmetrical cohesion between senior and junior hijra people, expressed through the feminine clothing worn by all attendees. During the ritual itself, the guru begins the process of constructing the chela's identity, which

²⁸¹ See chapter five the guru-chela relationship.

²⁸² While many respondents expressed the desire to wear to feminine clothes during childhood, the act would have likely incurred a punishment.

further grooms her for her embodiment of the feminine. In turn, she is prepared for future work as a dancer and/or prostitute, if those occupational roles should be her future. In this sense, it would be argued that through the process of socialization a particular notion of feminine gender embodied with the attributes of hijra identity and preferred passive sexual orientation on the model of binary of sex and gender is internalized as a component of the ideal self. In all this process a strong bond of guru-chela is created and maintained. To that end, Honey shared the following sentiment: “Wearing first time feminine clothes at the guru’s dera gave me confidence to feel my identity. The performance of firqa was most respectable ritual. A hijra person who performs firqa ritual is considered as a child of the guru.”²⁸³

The phrase “a child of the guru” is frequently employed to characterize a hijra’s socialization process as well as the parental nature of the guru-chela relationship. In this respect, Honey elaborated that “the guru’s dera is a place where a chela first time wears feminine clothes and performs ritual of firqa, and it is recognized as the most respected ritual because guru is like a teacher.”²⁸⁴ Thus, during the time that the feminine hijra identity is taking shape, the previous masculine identity is slowly being discarded. This transition is symbolized through the ritualistic adoption of women’s clothing.

Some hijra people are ascribed new names at a firqa, such as Muskan while my original name was Umar Farooq. My guru gave me a new name at hijra’s community during firqa ritual. Since then I opted for my new name ‘Muskan.’²⁸⁵ That said, the firqa naming practice has declined in recent years. Many chelas come to the community already bearing feminine appellations; they typically carry these names into their identities as hijra. Like clothing, assuming a woman’s name projects a feminine self to the outside world.

After the guru-chela initiation ritual²⁸⁶ and the subsequent firqa, a chela is expected to familiarize herself with the responsibilities that are socially associated with the hijra identity. Her edification is overseen by her guru and other senior community members to ensure that she is well-acquainted with the socio-economic features of the identity.

²⁸³ Honey (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Muskan (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

²⁸⁶ See chapter 5 for the guru-chela initiation rite.

During the data analysis I came across the question: *What are the roles of the adopted gender?* In the case of this study, the adopted gender is the hijra identity itself. Once a chela realizes and adopts this identity, she enters the stage where she learns to publicly perform her role as a hijra. By doing so, she introduces her self-realized gender identity to the society at large. In turn, her public performance becomes inextricable from society's expectations of the hijra identity.

6.2.1. Learning Socio-cultural and Traditional Hijra's Roles: Tradition of Khusrapan/Hijrapan

Vedhai predominately being practiced among the hijra people of Khusrapan/Hijrapan tradition. However, other hijra people of Zenanapan tradition also earn money through vedhai. The hijra people from both traditions learn typical customary role of hijra people, which they perform at the birth and marriage ceremonies and earn money through vedhai and alms collection. In this regard one of the respondents shared:

When I started to live with them [the hijra community], they taught me how to collect money through vadhai, through attending childbirth and marriage ceremonies. To collect money from people and families is an art. There are various patterns for collection of money on different occasions and places. This is a tough job and collection of money needs skills and professional expertise. Similarly, one of my hijra colleague with whom I started to live taught me all the tactics and skills of hijra community.²⁸⁷

The socialization process largely works through observation and imitation. Once a hijra person completes firqa, she then has the right to accompany her sisters for vadhai, begging, and/or dance functions. She observes them and tries to imitate them. One of this study's youngest respondents, Bebo, described her timidity the first time she accompanied her sisters on a begging assignment: "I went with my *sehlian* [group of hijra friends] but I felt shy. This was the first time for me to go out with makeup and wearing a feminine dress. At the first day, I did not beg for money from people. I just observed them how they were begging money."²⁸⁸

²⁸⁷ Nadeem Kashish (aqwa, SAFFAR), interview with the author, April 11, 2015. Kashish hosts a radio program that raises awareness on the plight of the hijra community. She once mentioned on-air that she had reservations about the structure and functions of the hijra community, and that these reservations motivated her to advocate for hijra rights. She stated that she is against the guru-chela relationship and hijra community culture in general. She asserted that gurus financially exploit new chelas, and further cited gurus as a source of violence and prostitution in the community. (Interview with the author, April 11, 2015).

²⁸⁸ Bebo (aqwa), interview with the author, April 16, 2015.

In fact, most hijra people begin their professional lives through vadhai or begging. A hijra respondent narrated her first experience of vedhai collection in these words.

Since I initiated in hijra community, my guru taught me how to talk in proper feminine way. She always emphasized on the correct delivery of words and hands movement. She also taught me a typical style of clapping. First time, after 15 days of initiation, I accompanied my guru along with 3 other hijra people for vedhai. My guru directed and assigned roles to each hijra person in the group. I was youngest and asked for collection of money and clapping. While, my guru along with another hijra person started to sing and other two hijra persons started to dance. After couple of songs Guru started to bless the child and mother. The guru was loud and parsing for the family. The father of the child tossed the money upon the dancing hijra fellows that I gathered and handed over to the guru²⁸⁹.

The new chela observes her fellow hijra interacting with people on the occasion of vedhai ritual and begging on the street, at which time she simultaneously overcomes her hesitation surrounding makeup and women's clothing. She practices speaking in the feminine manner that other hijra's speak, particularly when conversing with people from mainstream society. Once she becomes comfortable, she start begging and offering vadhai alongside her sisters. These behavioral patterns shape a hijra person into the archetype that society expects her to be. In turn, she secures financial gain for her dera and guru. In other words, from the start, a hijra person is an economic subject of her community, expands her scope of activity earning money either through the performance of traditional roles in broader Pakistani society or through prostitution.

6.2.2. Learning the Zenanapan Profession: Prostitution

Prostitution is predominately practiced among the hijra people of Zenanapan tradition and it is one of the major professions, which distinguishes the two traditions i.e. Zenanapan and Hijrapan/Khusrapan.

Guru is the person responsible to regulate economic activity of the dera. In order to achieve this purpose the guru recruits new chelas and engages them in economic activities. In the context of prostitution, a hijra respondent, who was a member of zenanapan tradition shared, "When I joined the hijra community I was thirteen or fourteen years old. One day my guru asked me to have

²⁸⁹ Muskan (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015

a sex with a client. Before this, I was informed by other hijra persons that in coming days, you [the respondent] will experience your first sex.”²⁹⁰

A guru also functions as a sex booking agent, though it is often other community members who inform a young chela of her upcoming sex appointments. As per Bebo’s account, many senior hijra fellows mentally prepare their junior counterparts by sharing pep talks and cautionary tales. In a sexual relationship, a hijra’s femininity is central. By extension of her identity, she adopts the sexual practices associated with heterosexual women. Within the boundaries of the hijra community, sex between a hijra person and a man is legitimate, normative, and sanctioned. More often than not, a young chela’s first adventure into prostitution is guided by her hijra sisters.

But why is prostitution so prominent within the community? Throughout this study, I have learned that hijra people are not female but idealize to be female. A perceived essence of womanhood remains central to their identity. Often, hijra people characterize their sexual orientation as heterosexual, because their inclinations toward men are considered an appropriate match for their feminine identities. During the socialization process, a hijra person internalizes a particular sexual preference that later is exploited to enhance the endeavors of prostitution. This preference is one of sexual passivity, i.e., being penetrated by a sexual partner. In other words, the sexual position of a woman.

6.3. The Performance of the Feminine Gender as a Determinant to Securing a Livelihood

To better understand *the performance of the feminine gender as a determinant to securing a livelihood*, I tried to explore relationship between body and performance of feminine gender. This is because at the time of joining of hijra community, a gender variant person possesses a masculine body and feminine soul. So I contextualized body and gender in the context of economic activities and posed following questions to respondents:

- How is a masculine body converted into a feminine one?
- What is the purpose of this transformation?
- How is the feminine gender employed to earn money?

²⁹⁰ Bebo (aqwa), interview with the author, April 16, 2015.

- What happens when it becomes difficult for a senior hijra person to acquire work?

In the light of above given questions, I learnt the process of transformation from masculine body to feminine body and its functional utility to ensure livelihood. Again I would be interested to highlight the importance of socialization in this transformation to achieve hijra identity archetype and the economic profitability of the body.

6.3.1. The Gendering of the Body

To align body with gender is an essentialist component of hijra identity same as performance of feminine gender. However, there are certain variations among different types of hijra identities in the degree of bodily transformation. When discussing narban hijra people, most respondents focused on their feminine appearance and physical transformation; namely, an augmentation of the breasts and a castration of the genitals. In comparison, aqwa hijra people do not make permanent changes to their bodies. In hijra community spaces, aqwa hijra people maintain the hijra identity and perform feminine gender roles. Conversely, when visiting their families, those same aqwa hijra people adopt masculine identities and perform masculine gender roles. In other words, while narban hijra individuals create a feminine physique and discard a masculine one, aqwa hijra people exploit both. To describe the changes made to a given anatomy and/or appearance in the name of gender, this study employs the phrase *gendering of the body*.

In the gendering of body, castration is an important milestone. In this regard, the age at which a castration occurs has its implications. As Kashish explained, the younger the narban, the more evident is impact of castration:

After the castration operation, body of a castrated hijra person starts to turn into the body of a female, in terms of growth of beautiful hair on the head, smoothness in skin, and the body starts taking feminine shape. In case, castration is carried out at an early age, then the body hairs will stop growing like male body and will fall down [fall out] within one year. However, if someone undergoes castration at a later stage or after the age of puberty, when the body hair has already grown up, then it will take almost four years for hair from the body to fall down.²⁹¹

²⁹¹ Nadeem Kashish (aqwa, SAFFAR), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

For these physiological changes to successfully take hold, nearly all narban hijra people use requisite medications and undergo multiple hormone treatments. They get their hair long and pay particularly close attention to enlarging their breasts and augmenting their hips. Some treatments are temporary and require biannual maintenance injections. Forgoing these injections will result in a loss of breasts. To that end, one advocate for the community shared “a narban hijra gives a prominent look of a girl. For narban hijra person, this would be her prime desire to transform herself into a girl, as far as she can.”²⁹²

The primary purpose in gendering the body is to adopt a more feminine appearance, a quality that is particularly advantageous for those hijra people who have taken up prostitution and/or dance as a profession.

6.3.2. Earning through Prostitution and Dance

The source of income of most respondents of this study was prostitution and/or dance. Indeed, there is a growing trend in the hijra community to abandon traditional roles in favor of more contemporary ones.²⁹³ In Pakistan, professional dance and prostitution are commonly associated with women. Femininity is a symbol of entertainment in these spheres, and the hijra community capitalizes on association that is more apparently distinguished.

In the larger hijra social circle, dance and prostitution are recognized under the zenanapan tradition. While all hijra people adopt a degree of femininity, hijra people belonging to zenanapan tradition embrace hyper-femininity: in fact, the more feminine a hijra person appears, the more financially successful she is. Thus, alongside personal motivation, there exists an economic incentive to undergo castration and breast augmentation.

Prostitution is quite common among hijra people in Pakistan today, but the flow of work depends on a number of factors: age, perceived beauty, location, and the clientele itself. One respondent regularly charged “Rs. 1,000-1,500 [US\$ 10-15] for two to three hours sex from

²⁹² “Narban hijra people are castrated male and tries their level best to transform their male body into a female body. For this purpose, they extensively use medicines to enlarge their boobs, grow their hair and pay attention on the development of hips...for this purpose, they use steroids and injections” Ashima, interview with the author, June 4, 2015.

²⁹³ While colonial-era literature indicates that hijras were involved in prostitution, their status as spiritual beings was not challenged at the time. This is changing today, largely because prostitution and dance are now majority professions throughout the community. This growing visibility affects society’s general view of hijras.

customers.”²⁹⁴ These rates were considerably high, but the location of her beat was the wealthy F-10 Markaz area of Islamabad. Her clients were mostly residents and visitors. On the other hand, another respondent worked in a congested area of Rawalpindi, notorious for its transgender brothels. This respondent stated that her clients mostly “pay Rs. 400 to 500 [US\$ 4-5] for one-time sex.”²⁹⁵

Competition exists in the sex industry. To adapt to the saturated market, many hijra people take any available client and drop their prices if necessary. One respondent shared, “On a daily basis, I used to have sex. I think that my friends are earning more, so should I.”²⁹⁶ According to another respondent, “Hijra sex workers become ready to have sex even at the lowest price Rs. 50 [US\$0.5 or 50 Cents] for sex.”²⁹⁷

As the previous section establishes, the more feminine a hijra person is, the more successful she will be at building her sex clientele. Likewise, in the context of dance, the two most common hijra identities – narban and aqwa – employ feminine appearances to perpetuate success. Narban hijra people in particular are so successful at embodying the feminine that they are frequently hired to replace female dancers. This was a trend confirmed by respondents: “I have met with five or six such narban hijra persons, who used to make really functions successful with their outstanding performances. I know one of the narban hijra persons, Maryam, she was living here, but now she is living in Heera Mandi,²⁹⁸ Lahore. She earns money through dancing performances at functions and she is more famous than the female dancers over there.”²⁹⁹

Body gendering plays an important role in ensuring a successful livelihood. Similarly, a hyper-feminine appearance – breasts, long hair, and castration – influences the nature of a hijra’s social network and clientele. In other words, as a body changes from masculine to feminine, a hijra’s social relationship dramatically changes, too.

²⁹⁴ Muskan (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

²⁹⁵ Sanwali (aqwa), interview with the author, April 6, 2015.

²⁹⁶ Khurram (aqwa), interview with the author, April 5, 2015.

²⁹⁷ Sanwali (aqwa), interview with the author, April 6, 2015.

²⁹⁸ Heera Mondi is well-known for its brothels.

²⁹⁹ Azam (advocate for the transgender community), interview with the author, June 6, 2015.

6.3.3. The Influence of Body Gendering on Social Circles and Identity Negotiation

The transformation of the body from masculine to feminine increases professional success, it also decreases options for reconciling or perpetuating social ties with the family of orientation. Narban hijra people engage with their biological families considerably less than aqwa hijra's do: "Hijra persons, particularly narban hijra, live apart from their families and have less contact with them."³⁰⁰

Because aqwa hijra's do not make permanent changes to the body, it is easier for their families to accept their identities. As mentioned above, some aqwa hijra people even assume masculine roles at home. For them, a flexible body is a flexible identity. According to one respondent: "When aqwa hijra people wish to visit their homes, they increase their shaves and will try to adapt to a masculine identity. Back at the home, they have wives and children. When they return home they pretend to be a male is visiting his family."³⁰¹

In the hijra community, maintaining family ties is often proportional to earning a good income. In fact, many hijra people opt to monetarily contribute to their families of orientation. With the passage of time, some families learn to accept their transgender member, particularly if the relationship grows into a symbol of economic empowerment. Contributing to the household is a method by which a hijra person can revive the family network.

Remaining economically viable is a crucial concern for hijra people, especially those who work in prostitution and dance. To adhere to the social expectations of the identity, hijra people must negotiate their sexual orientation. That said, some negotiations run counter to the identity's traditional role of an impotent and passive sexual partner. Indeed, though some hijra people's express patterns of bisexuality, those patterns are often suppressed in favor of the status quo. In keeping with the trends, the impetus for the suppression is frequently an economic one.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

6.3.4. Negotiating Sexuality

The socio-cultural understanding of the hijra activities has deemed her impotent and unable to penetrate during intercourse. Contrary to this assumption, some aqwa hijra people have wives and children, proving them capable not only of penetration, but also of procreation. Outside of the domestic realm, many aqwa hijra people also perform penetration in the professional sphere. Indeed, according to one respondent: “Aqwa hijra person has more demand as sex worker because they can participate in sexual activities as a passive and as an active partner/penetrator.”³⁰² Thus, when considering that many aqwa hijra people assume the roles of both penetrator and one who penetrates, then perhaps bisexuality would be a more apt characterization than sexual impotency.

The hijra community generally eschews bisexuality, primarily because it undermines the traditional understanding of a hijra’s sexual orientation. That said, sexual fluidity does exist in a hijra’s professional environment: “All the people of different age categories visit us for sex purposes. After fulfilling their sexual desire, they claim they fucked [penetrated] us. Actually, this is not a case. There are some clients who come and offer Rs. 3,000-4,000, and ask us to penetrate them.”³⁰³

In fact, the penetration role among hijra so shunned that if a hijra person is found to have enacted it, she will face a penalty imposed by the Hijra community’s power structure. To that end, though some aqwa hijra people penetrate for economic gains, they often deny in order to maintain the traditional appearance. At both an abstract and a conceptual level, this trend entreats further exploration. In other words, within the hijra community power structure, there is a need to know the factors that cause a gender-variant person to deviate from her sexual preferences?

6.3.5. Dancing Hijra

Dance is an essential attribute of hijra identity. It remained a part of it since centuries and centuries in the form of traditional roles in the performance of rituals at the birth and marriage

³⁰² Nadeem Kashish (aqwa, SAFFAR), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

³⁰³ Sanwali (aqwa), interview with the author, April 6, 2015.

ceremonies. In the hijra community, the profession of dance can be divided into three broad categories:

- Dancing at weddings
- Dancing at *melas* (festivals)
- Dancing at shrines

Most respondents claim to have been dancing since childhood. For many, the first time they earned money was through dance. Some respondents revealed that they initially left home in the company of the *mirasi* (an occupational caste of musician). As one aqwa hijra person, named Muskan shared: “I was about twelve years when I escaped from home with *mirasi* and remained five years away.”³⁰⁴ During this absence from home the respondent used to dance with the musician and made his living. Hence, the relationship between musician and the hijra people is a proven phenomenon. Even, in the case of Muskan, she accompanied musician before her joining of hijra community and adapted to hijra identity. Even after joining of hijra community, hijra people maintain contact with the *mirases*, who in turn book hijra people for dance functions: “*Mirases* hire and take us for dancing function. Usually they pay Rs. 2,000-3,000 (US\$ 20-30) for the functions nearby. However, when they offer us a higher amount like Rs. 5,000 [US\$ 50] then we do not bother about the distance. For the dancing function, we wear women dress and apply a little make over for the dance performance.”³⁰⁵

A given *mirasi* group typically has a large number of male dancers. When the group performs with hijra individuals, the men play *dhool* (drums) and collect *valain* (money showered by the audience) while the hijra group member dances. One aqwa hijra person described the group composition as such: “Usually three *khwajasarah* [hijra people] perform dance. Two of the males remain at *dhool*, and other two o males gather money.”³⁰⁶

Melas (festivals), particularly those organized through circus companies, provide another opportunity for professional dancers. Like *mirasi* functions, the *mela* audience tosses money at performers, which is then theirs to keep. Money can be earned through solo acts or in partnerships.

³⁰⁴ Muskan (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

³⁰⁵ Sanwali (aqwa), interview with the author, April 6, 2015.

³⁰⁶ Muskan (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

During the *well-of-death*³⁰⁷ performance, visitors throw money to their hijra dancer of choice, which she alone is supposed to retain. During group or partnership dances, the money showered on the dancers is divided equally among performers. One khwajasira hijra, who worked in the circus for years, explained the industry's economic organization as such: "We danced in the well and whoever liked the dancer, tossed the money at her which becomes her share of earnings. In case we agreed to partnership, the money earned through joint performance would be divided equally among partners."³⁰⁸

At shrines, hijra people most often perform the *dhamal*, a folk dance that honors saints (see chapter three). Many respondents reported participating in the *dhamal* at the Bari Imam shrine, where thousands of devotees visit every month.³⁰⁹ The shrine is located in a rural area of Islamabad, and devotees come to perform rituals and attain the blessings of the saint (*manat*). A significant number of hijra people are disciples of Bari Imam. In fact, one study asserted that the Bari Imam shrine is among the few places where transgender people can publicly perform religious rituals (Batool, Chaudhry, and Hadi 2015). In turn, the transgender population near the shrine maintains significant social visibility.

There is a small room, situated, almost 20 meters to the left of the main entrance within the Bari Imam shrine. This is the fire room: a dwelling for a flame that burns 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Many devotees bring wood to feed the fire, which is often transported on the backs of camels. When the beasts of burden enter the *Noorpur Shahan* (This is new name of Bari Imam, Islamabad) area, local hijra people perform the *dhamal* before them and their riders. This dance is an expression of religious devotion; in return, arriving devotees shower money on them. As Sitara explained, "At the shrine of Bari imam, people give fire woods as *nazar nayaz* [distribution of goods on the name of saint or Allah], so we perform *dhamal* and show our happiness and affection."³¹⁰

³⁰⁷ Well-of-death is a wooden made barrel shaped cylinder. It is constructed in the carnival for motorcycle and car show. At the top of this well is a platform where transgender dance and sometime transgender dance at the base between the empty spaces within the well.

³⁰⁸ Nagina (khwajasira), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

³⁰⁹ The real name of the Bari Imam is Abdul Latif, who lived between 1617 and 1705 AD (Hijra 1026). The saint's devotees come here to fulfill *manat* (desires and wishes).

³¹⁰ Sanwali (aqwa), interview with the author, April 6, 2015.

Sitara further elaborated that the type of dance a hijra person performs is often contingent upon what the audience is seeking. Some hijra people are asked to perform dhamal at wedding ceremonies. As one of the respondents shared:

The hijra people also keep in mind the demands of the organizer of dance function in term of formation of the dance party. Some organizers of the functions demand to have beautiful and young hijra individuals who are good dancers. Those who are not beautiful can have more opportunities of success in case when learn to become good dancers.³¹¹

One aqwa hijra person, deemed young and beautiful by her peers, shared:

I tried to learn a good dance, but I could not become a very skilful dancer. She [referring to another hijra person] is my senior. She performs a good dance. When we go to the functions, some people demand a fine and attractive dancer, but some wish to see only beautiful *moorats* [hijra]. I will go if beautiful moorat is the requirement and my senior will attend, if a good dancer is needed.³¹²

“Beautiful” dancers are also in high demand for erotic performances, though, as Mehroz shared, these functions can “irritate.”³¹³ Most hijra people understand that the demand for beauty stems from a culture of sexual harassment: “As compared to hijra people, girl [women] dancers have to resist against sexual molestation during a dance performance since, hijra people do not have the tendency to resist. So, the majority of people like ‘she-males,’ enjoy with them.”³¹⁴ While many respondents expressed visible discomfort recounting tales of harassment, they accepted such behavior as a standard.

During the course of this research, I observed a dance function near the small village of Noorpur Shahan Bari Imam. There were about 60 guests present when I arrived, and the event organizer soon after arranged the seating and lit the venue. A group of six hijra people, under the supervision of Guru Safdari, took their respective positions. There were two narban hijras and four aqwa hijra individuals, one of whom was responsible for collecting money. As for the attire, one aqwa and the guru were dressed in men’s clothing, while the others were dressed femininely. The first dance of the evening was performed by the aqwa hijra person in men’s attire, but she left immediately following her number. There was another aqwa hijra person who did not dress like

³¹¹ Sitara (aqwa), interview with the author, April 8, 2015.

³¹² Mehroz (aqwa), interview with the author, April 14, 2015.

³¹³ Her full quote is as follows: “We go in functions. There are some drunk people who demand beautiful moorat for dance. When I dance, people make us irritate.” (Mehroz [aqwa], interview with the author, April 15, 2015).

³¹⁴ Sanwali (aqwa), interview with the author, April 6, 2015.

the others: she was older and her clothes were dirty. It was her job to collect the money that was tossed by the audience, which she then gave directly to Guru Safdari. The rest of the hijra people, a trio, performed for nearly three hours, taking multiple breaks.

On the whole, the dancers paid more attention to the audience members who threw money. Nevertheless, they playfully encouraged all spectators, even nonpaying ones, to join the entertainment. While dancing, one male spectator attempted came so close to a performer, he lifted her in his arms and pressed his body against hers. The hijra person out of detestation retaliated and pushed him away and tried to scratch his face with her nails. A quarrel ensued, which the guru and event organizer quickly quelled.

Near the end of the performance, the hijra dancers/performers themselves made extensive bodily contact with audience (participants of function). In turn, the event organizer asked the dancers if one of them could perform a lap dance for an older gentleman, who was a special guest at the function. One hijra person obliged, becoming the recipient of handfuls of money whenever her body made contact with the old man. By performing this final dance, the hijra people were able to bring home a suitable amount of money.

One aqwa hijra person shared the following trade secret of erotic dancing: “During the dance performance, some of the hijra dancers also try to sexually provoke the audience of the dance by sitting on their laps and hugging them.”³¹⁵ She later modified her statement and said that this behavior should not be considered dancing, as it is the reason that hijra people gain a bad reputation.³¹⁶ Yet, more often than not, a hijra person’s dance takes a lewd turn because the paying audience demands in consideration.

The function at Noorpur Shahan Bari Imam ended around 11:00 pm (the government restricts late night functions), but before it did, many party attendees and performers exchanged phone numbers. Some male guests even expressed willingness to visit the dera. It is through events like these that many hijra people get a chance to establish griya-moorat relationships or other sexual associations. In any case, all relationships must go through the guru. As such, Arzo explained “We exchange cell number and invite them at our home.”³¹⁷

³¹⁵ Sitara (aqwa), interview with the author, April 8, 2015.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Arzo (aqwa), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

Economically, a dance function typically nets around Rs. 1,500 (US\$ 15) per hijra person. A *mela* is usually more rewarding, as indicated by Muskan, who earned: “Rs. 9,000 in three days.”³¹⁸ Rs. 5,000-10,000 (US\$ 50-100) is the rate at which a hijra person is booked for a dance party. The number of functions that a dancer attends varies with the festival season and the individual hijra’s fame. Mehak, a young narban, shared that she performed at “seven to ten dancing functions monthly,”³¹⁹ though the average number is between three to five functions a month.

According to most respondents, dancing is not as lucrative as prostitution. Consequently, many of them take up sex work during the festival off-season. Nagina confirmed, “Whenever I earned less in the festivals/carnival, I did sex, and when there was a gap between the carnivals, in those times I had remained busy in physical relations.”³²⁰

Livelihood strategies within the community often depend on an individual hijra’s age and the perceived status of beauty. As a hijra grows older, her dance and prostitution opportunities diminish. It becomes difficult to find customers and the hijra’s adopt to begging, which earns them at least some income to make ends meet.

6.3.6. Begging as a Method of Livelihood

With the passage of time, the loveliness and gorgeousness of the hijra people shrinks and she is consequently left with fewer income options. Begging becomes a more prominent income source among older hijra people. If she has chelas, an older hijra person may find herself more dependent on them. However, the same time many young hijra people who were in their late 20s and 30s also shared that they earn money through begging. So, it is not a universal phenomenon that an old hijra person will always be earning money through begging. It is logical to state that begging is a substitute profession for those hijra people who do not find dancing function and avoid indulgence in prostitution.

However, general field observations and data analysis indicate that an older hijra person is likely to take on a masculine role (i.e., more managerial and authoritative) among chelas, sometimes adopting an appearance to match. Two elders in the community, each of whom had a

³¹⁸ Muskan (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

³¹⁹ Mehak (narban), interview with the author, April 12, 2015.

³²⁰ Nagina (Khwajasira), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

fair number of chelas, worked as booking managers for them. Other elderly hijra people similarly rely on their disciples, while those without support from elderly hijras are forced to beg. Frequently, the latter group is more inclined toward spirituality and work in the shrine circuit, especially in comparison to younger hijra people.

One narban hijra person shared that she only earned money through begging. Often, the amount was comparable to what she would earn as a sex worker: “I earn Rs 1,000 to 1,200 only from begging. I do not work as a sex worker.”³²¹ Because this respondent was still young and attractive, which may give her better financial success. Typically, elderly hijra people don’t fare as well, as illustrated by Rossini’s predicament: “Now I have paraplegia and I have become older, I cannot perform dance very well. Therefore, I am dependent on begging. The passersby give me Rs. one or two. Although, I am Khwajasira by birth.”³²² Some hijra people take up begging as a replacement of sex work: “Since four years, I am not involved in sex work. Instead I earn by begging or *vadhai*.”³²³

While a number of respondents reported begging as an occupational strategy, the amount of money earned varies from individual to individual. Factors such as age, degree of femininity, and the perceived status of beauty all play a role in determining net earnings. But begging, *vadhai*, prostitution, and dance are not the only economic strategies available to hijra people: many receive money from their griyas. While an allowance is not a traditional job, I nonetheless classify it as a livelihood strategy, albeit one that stands outside the larger.

6.3.7. Acquiring Money from a Griya

For many hijra people, receiving money from a romantic partner is one of the modes of livelihood, but the amount itself varies among individual recipients. One respondent shared that though her griya only visited her occasionally, he was nonetheless obligated to pay her rent: “Mainly he has to pay house rent of Rs. 4,000 every month. He comes once a month to see me.”³²⁴ Other respondents received a spending allowance, as was the case for Sonia: “[He] gives me Rs.

³²¹ Ashi (narban), interview with the author, April 9,2015

³²² Roshni (Khwajasira), interview with the author, April 9,2015

³²³ Nagina (Khwajasira), interview with the author, April 11,2015

³²⁴ Arzo (aqwa), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

100 -200 daily.”³²⁵ On the other side of the spectrum, Muskan was happy to report that her griya gave her “Rs. 5,000 per week.”³²⁶

The griya-moorat relationship works in multiple directions. It fulfills the sexual needs of both partners, and it furthermore produces the desired feminine roles that many hijra people wish to assume. As a moorat, she is presented with new avenues of support, both emotional and financial. As such, many hijra people focus on initiating this relationship for the sake of its economic benefits. That said, the overall structure of the griya-moorat relationship is complex, and it is difficult to contextualize it only in an economic framework.

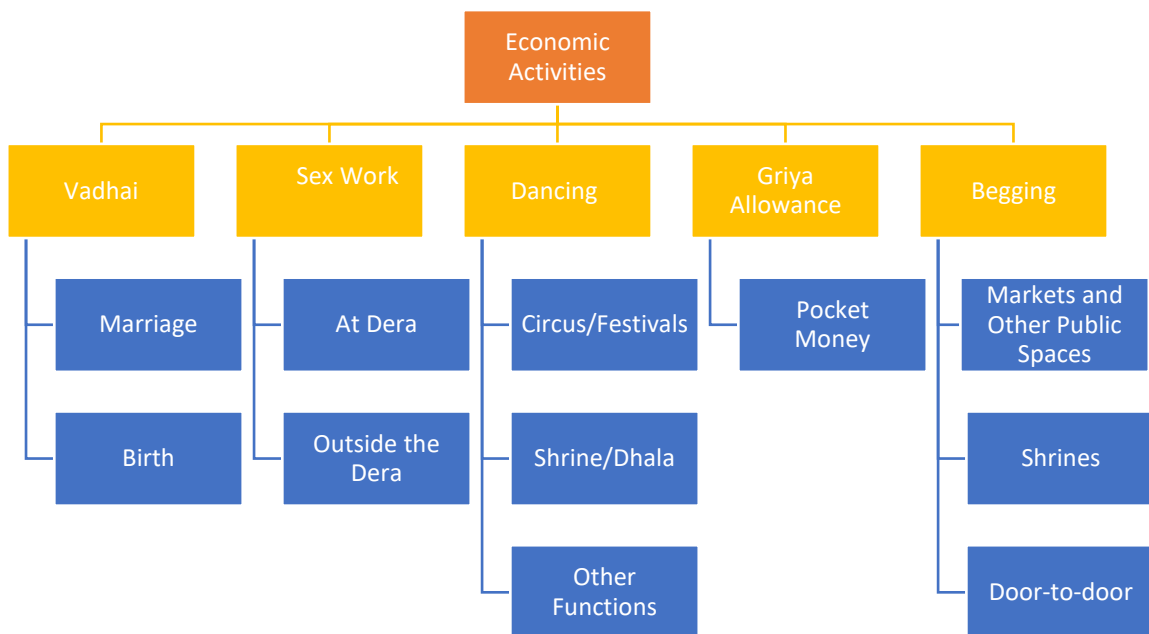


Figure 6 2: Economic Activities of Hijra Community

6.4. Support and Protection as a Mechanisms of Exerting Control

Unless a chela does not have a guru she would be directionless and will not become part of the hijra community. Similarly, she will not be protected by any member of the hijra community. She will be identified as a bastard if she is without a guru. It would be difficult for her to survive with gender-variant identity without joining the hijra community. Guru

³²⁵ Sonia (aqwa), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

³²⁶ Muskan (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

provides all the support to the chela. In return chela has to comply with all the rules and regulation of the hijra community. If a chela is going to perform function, then, prior to function, she should inform guru. She would also give money from her income to guru. These things are already defined between chela and guru.³²⁷

In terms of support, a guru provides many things: a living space at the dera, occupational facilitation (as a booking agent or a territory procurer), and protective services. Societal perceptions of hijra people, particularly those perceptions that malign, push new chelas to seek additional support from their gurus. The dynamic resulting from this interaction reinforces the power structure of the community. As a guru becomes more powerful, she has more opportunities to interfere in the lives of her chelas, ultimately deriving further economic gains. She ensures her gains by conducting systematic monitoring of her dera.

The support system extended to new hijra people establishes the very foundation of the community. It perpetuates inter-generationally and maintains controls over the chela's lives and the economic well-being of the guru. In other words, new chelas who are lavishly supported eventually pursue the guru status themselves, which acts as a cycle to preserve the community structure.

Protecting chelas from social vulnerabilities is a standard community procedure. Many hijra people have experienced sexual, physical, and emotional abuse since childhood. Additionally, some of the livelihood strategies, which the community faces like – dance, prostitution, and/or begging – extend to hijra person's vulnerable social standing. Abuse from clients is not uncommon, especially in the fields of prostitution and dance. Many hijra people also have negative encounters with law enforcement. As such, a guru will offer support and/or protection in any of the aforementioned scenarios.

Look, if we go to a function booked by the guru, the client deposit advance that only goes to guru, and when we dance, but the amount or *vallain* [tossed money] that is showered on us by people goes in our pockets. If the total amount of earning from performance is Rs. 10,000, with the four performers, then guru gives Rs. 1,500 to each performer and remaining amount the guru pockets himself. The guru takes more than double the amount because the function is booked by guru. If someone directly coordinate with us, then

³²⁷Ashima, interview with the author, June 4, 2015.

whatever we earn belongs to us. It depends on us how much amount we will give to the guru.³²⁸

As a booking agent, the guru accompanies her chelas to events and, while there, issues directives that they cannot defy (this is true economically as well as sexually). On the flip side, if chelas book their own events, they themselves decide how much to pay-out to the guru. Nevertheless, they still inform the guru of the function's schedule, largely to ensure that they will continue to have access to protective services, should the need arise. The guru did not book the event she will most likely not accompany her chelas. That said, she is entitled to a cut in either scenario.

Many chelas find their earning histories monitored to ensure that their pay-outs are appropriate. This monitoring also extends to a chela's behavior, which the guru analyzes for authenticity. The incentive here is of economic one – the more authentic the identity, the larger the economic gains. That said, monitoring itself is also a mechanism of protection, i.e., if a chela finds herself in a vulnerable situation, her guru will be able to quickly come to her support. One more function of economic cut is to ensure authority of the guru and this authority over economic activities are internalize through the socialization process.

To maintain respect and authority over chelas, a guru takes a particular percentage of the chela's income. She also punishes chelas and charge fine on them in case of embezzlement in matters of income. In case, a chela earns Rs. 200 and reports to the guru that she had earned Rs 100 only and gives out share from Rs. 100 to the guru then it could create a serious problem. At a later stage if the guru comes to know that the chela lied to her, then the guru has the right to punish her chelas through financial penalty and the amount of financial plenty depends solely on the guru's will. Other than this, the guru has right to punish physically and shave her head along with the one month social boycott.³²⁹

Perhaps more crucial than money, respect for the guru undergirds the entire economic structure of the hijra community. In this vein, respect also serves a tool to legitimize the guru's use of power and control over the chelas lives. As mentioned above a guru is legitimized to impose financial penalty and exercise verbal, physical and psychological violence upon hijra people. All these forms of violence are legitimized in the cultural practices of hijra community and internalize in the hijra

³²⁸ Mehroz (aqwa), interview with the author, April 6, 2015.

³²⁹ Sonia (Aqwa) interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

identity through the process of socialization. Particularly the notion of “Guru’s respect” functions as an instrument in this process of exploitation.

6.4.1. A Culture of Respect and Support

A senior guru is respected by all in her community. When she advances in years, her chelas create a support network to help her meet age-associated challenges. That said, I was curious to know the consequence if a chela neglected to support her elderly guru. The question was generally met with astonishment. Malik replied, “No, it never happened. My guru has 26-27 chelas and every single chela can sacrifice each and every thing for her.”³³⁰

It is an interesting point of departure to consider the belief system surrounding the status of the guru. The norms and socio-cultural practices of the hijra community regulate this belief system so that the community may remain traditional. The hijra social structure is sustained through its traditions. A respect for cultural values fortifies the belief system that keeps the guru in a position of authority. Values are internalized by new chelas, which compel them – whether they are chatai-chelas, choudar-chelas, gurus, choudar gurus or dada gurus – to conform to the hijra system. This conformity is embodied by the unwavering respect that chelas have for their guru. After all, it is a guru who brings a chela from social marginalization into the safe haven of the community. It is also the guru who socializes her and gives her a new life. The making of a hijra, in other words, is the birth of a new human.

One advocate shared her own experience with the community’s support network:

Hijra community has a support mechanism as well...Once a guru turned to be an aged hijra and suffering from some diseases, she has not enough money for her treatment. So, her chela organized a grand get-together and invited a number of hijra persons from the hijra community. The chela placed her guru’s chair in the middle of hall. All the guest hijra persons were coming to eat food and at the time of departure, they were dropping some money for the guru. The amounts ranged from Rs. 500 to Rs. 20,000 [US\$5-200]. Through this get-together, the participants of the party generated required money for the treatment of the guru. This is a support mechanism, which works within the hijra community to support guru.³³¹

³³⁰ Babbli Malik (guru, activist, and aqwa, Rawalpindi community), interview with the author, April 12, 2015.

³³¹ Ashima (NGO official and part of the project executed for the awareness and social activism among Hijra people) interview with the author, June 4, 2015.

Thus, on the one hand, support is provided to chelas as a safety network and to motivate them as productive units of the hijra community. On the other hand, those same chelas regulate the support system for the benefit of their guru.

6.4.2. The Functional Mechanisms of the Guru

The following figure 6.3 illustrates “Functional Mechanism of the Guru”. Together, these mechanisms create a complete cycle outlining the symbolic journey of the hijra. During her process, a hijra person will create and assume an authentic identity, will economically serve her guru as a productive community unit, and will ultimately regulate the socio-cultural practices of the greater social structure. As a guru, she creates a meaningful control system by providing support and monitoring the activities of her chelas.

Respect for her guru is embedded in a new hijra person during her socialization process; this ensures that she remains a supporting element to her guru. By these means, a guru sustains the entire culture of the community.



Figure 6 3: Functional Mechanism of the Gurus'

6.5. Creating Fear to Regulate Behavior: Punishment in the Hijra Community

It is commonly believed that a chela obeys any and all orders issued by her guru. As such, when a transgression occurs, a punishment is levied. As a curiosity, I asked respondents what would happen if a hijra person refused her punishment. Babbli Malik, Rawalpindi's renowned guru, regarded me with a surprise: "This is possible that a chela can refuse to obey her parents, but she can't say no to her guru...We have respect for our gurus. We accept all the punishments that are given by the gurus and obey them"³³²

In other words, through the socialization process, a chela internalizes enduring respect for the authoritative guru, a respect that is partly enforced through mechanisms of control and monitoring. If these methods do not suffice, then the provision of punishment should be enough to maintain the guru's authority and preserve order in the hijra structure.

6.5.1. The Punishment of Social Isolation

Social isolation is a severe punishment in the hijra community, one reserved for the most serious of transgressions. As a social mechanism, it has a converse effect in inclusion. Combined, social exclusion and inclusion function to balance the hijra structure. In Urdu, the punishment of isolation is referred to as *huqa pani band hona* (social boycott). The hijra community models this punishment technique after a similar method found in mainstream Pakistani culture, where a *biradri* (clan) can withdraw all social relations from a relative who has somehow erred. One respondent recounted the fate of an errant friend facing social isolation: "*Huqa pani* [social boycott] has been imposed. She cannot go to any other khwajasira's house."³³³

If social isolation is issued against a chela, then her guru employs the whole of her social network to restrict the offender's access to other gharanas. For the targeted hijra person, the situation is indeed a dire one. One community advocate explained further: "Exclusion from the hijra community is a major penalty. To revoke this penalty, chela organizes a function and gather

³³² Babbli Malik (guru, activist, and aqwa, Rawalpindi community), interview with the author, April 12, 2015.

³³³ Sanwali (aqwa), interview with the author, April 6, 2015.

all influential gurus and request them for forgiveness. Then the senior gurus request to concerned guru to revoke the punishment.”³³⁴

A senior guru is instrumental to bringing an offending hijra person back into the folds of the community. Once she returns, she is expected to again recognize community traditions and norms. The punishment of social isolation is usually imposed on those for whom earlier punishments (i.e., financial or physical) were not effective. In other words: “When a chela did not obey the [previous] punishment, then guru removes her from the status of chela and publicly announces this message that she removed chela and none of the guru accept her as a chela.”³³⁵

6.5.2. Financial Punishment

In the hijra community, a financial punishment is referred to as a *dand*. It is the most common penalty levied against the norm-offending hijra people. An accused chela may be required to either pay her fine on the spot or after a designated time period; the payment plan is contingent upon the issuing guru as well as the nature of the offense. The spectrum of possible violations covers social, cultural, moral, ethical, sexual, and economic ground. Simply put, “It is just like a penalty for doing such acts that are forbidden.”³³⁶ If contention occurs between a chela and her guru, then the levied fine goes directly to the guru. If the contention is between a chela and her griya, then the fine is collected by the party, which is not at fault, either griya or moorat. And the matter should be decided by the guru.

One senior community member narrated the story of a hijra person who seduced another moorat’s griya, a misconduct that earned her a financial penalty. She narrated: “The *dand* [fine] was collected by the moorat from the one who had committed physical relations with the griya... In a case of a transgender, if a griya gives “looks” to other transgender, then *griya* will pay the fine. And if any other transgender or eunuch have given space to flirt – attempt to have physical relations – [then she] will have to pay the fine.”³³⁷

A narban respondent revealed that she was once issued a fine for missing a dance function, even though the situation was unusual. She had originally committed to perform alongside her own

³³⁴ Tariq (advocate for the transgender community), interview with the author, April 16, 2015.

³³⁵ Sonia (Aqwa hijra and a guru), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

³³⁶ Nagina (khwajasira), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

³³⁷ Ibid.

new chela. At the eleventh hour, the new chela went missing, along with a number of the respondent's possessions. As such, the respondent too fled the dera. As a result, her fellow dancers arrived late at the engagement, and the guru's respect and reputation were compromised. She narrated, "When I came back [to the dera], there was nothing [because her chela had taken it all]."³³⁸ I became tensed. It was my function, so I had to face embarrassment. I paid Rs.5000 as penalty to my guru. In our community, if we do something wrong, we have to pay penalties."³³⁹

6.5.3. Physical Punishment

While reports of physical punishment were not readily shared, one respondent did divulge the outcome that awaited her when she could not reciprocate her jalsa money:³⁴⁰ "Guru was furious. She pounded me physically and screamed, 'if you were not able to present gift of the same amount or higher, which you had received at your function, then why you did function and received money?'"³⁴¹

Even more severe than beating is having one's head shaved. In the course of this research, I met a number of respondents with short hair. Many of them reported to having had recent haircuts in anticipation of a family visit, but two of them confirmed that their heads were shaved as punishment. They added that they planned to grow their hair so that they would be long enough again to perform.

³³⁸ During this interview, we sat in the same room that the respondent had shared with her chela. While telling the story, she constantly looked around the room and repeated that it had been emptied of her belongings. Of her novitiate, she said: "While she fled from the dera, she took all my belongings. Even my dresses and also make-up boxes." (Ashi [narban], interview with the author, April 9, 2015).

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ According to community reciprocity rules, any money-gift must at some point be gifted back to the original benefactor at a doubled rate.

³⁴¹ Sonia (aqwa), interview with the author, DATE April 7, 2015

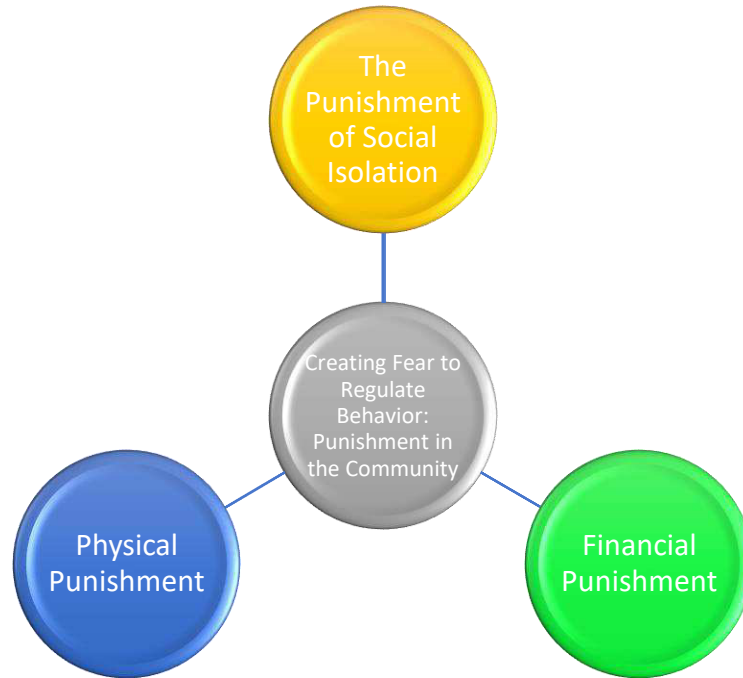


Figure 6 4: *Exercise of Power and Punishments in Hijra Community*

6.6. Discussion

In the hijra community, there is no meaningful distinction between households on the basis of the profession; indeed, all households were found to be actively engaged in the occupations of dance, vadhai, prostitution, and begging (see Nanda 1999, 40). The professional differences between hijrapan and zenanapan, on the other hand, are clear. Renowned guru Babbli Malik is a member of both traditions; she asserts that most hijra people opt for hijrapan as a lineage and vadhai as a livelihood strategy³⁴². Hijra people who prefer prostitution or erotic dance, on the other hand, belong to zenanapan. Abdullah et al. (2012) documented that hijras (hijra people) who follow *khusrapan* (also known as hijrapan) trace their genealogy to the Khwajasiras of the Mughal era; however, I am not convinced by this assertion. In the course of this study, I have met members from both traditions who glorify a lineage to the Mughal era. Abdullah et al. (2012) have also documented that *khusrapan* followers only appoint intersex hijras as gurus, but I am also unconvinced by this stance.

Within the hijrapan tradition, earning money through prostitution and/or begging is not considered respectful. Hijrapan followers believe these acts reduce the social standing of the larger community, and as such, the tradition only sanctions the occupational strategies of vadhai and/or alms collection. Though zenanapan hijras practice the more contemporary occupations of begging, dance, and prostitution (Abdullah et al. 2012, 4), the distinction between individual followers is not always clear to the proverbially untrained eye (Jami and Kamal 2015, 173).

The gharana tradition provides support for new hijra people to develop normative behaviors through the process of socialization. Incoming chelas are bound to accept gharana norms as standard policy. Once a new hijra person becomes a member, community elders expect her to adopt feminine gender roles as a part of her character development (Thomas 2013, 115-120). In fact, the essence of femininity is inextricable from her socialization process as well as from her identity. If she is going into the field of entertainment, she will likewise be socialized in dancing and singing (Rehan, Chaudhary, and Shah 2009, 180).

³⁴² Babbli Malik (guru, activist, and aqwa, Rawalpindi community), interview with the author, April 12, 2015

Generally, a chela cannot survive outside of her guru's shadow (Nanda 1999, 46), though there are individuals who move away from the gharana in favor of living independently (Nanda 1999, 45). This current study is consistent with these findings: at some point, many hijra people leave their dera and live on their own. However, this does not suspend their membership of hijra community, unless their membership is formally suspended by the community.

It is the guru's responsibility to discipline her chelas according to community norms and morality standards. Generally, chelas are required to earn money for their gharanas and maintain respect for their elders; they are also prohibited from stealing (Thomas 2013, 132). Another study claimed that chelas are bound to clean the dera and contribute to its monthly rent, but, in keeping with the theme, obeying the guru is utmost (Zulfiqar 2015, 11).

A guru socializes her chela to remain a gharana member once she has her own disciples, thus ensuring continuity in lineage. For professional training, the guru imparts a particular style of clapping that is used during money collection; indeed, this style is so ubiquitously employed that its association with the hijra community is a priority.³⁴³ Chelas are also trained to beg, dance, and perform sex work. While these socialization processes are typically executed with affection and care, the punishment is always a possibility if a chela strays from her expectations (Sharma 1984, 385, cited in Hall and O'Donovan 1996, 389).

At some point during her socialization process, a hijra person shifts her self-referential identity from masculine to feminine (Hall and O'Donovan 1996, 240). She adapts her walk and talk to reinforce her femininity, particularly when she's wearing women's clothes. She conversely highlights her male attributes if she wears men's clothing. The purpose behind these gender negotiations is to enhance the quality of her gender role in a given social setting (Hall and O'Donovan 1996, 240-1). In the context of livelihood, the hijra identity's feminine aspects are particularly integral to the practices of prostitution and dancing.

The dera is an economic structure whose permanent members are required to share in its upkeep. While cost-sharing proportions vary according to the status and income-level of each resident, a simple framework can be found in the *Mai Nandi* myth.³⁴⁴ (See chapter three)

³⁴³ It is considered disrespectful for a junior hijra to employ this manner of clapping before a senior hijra.

³⁴⁴ The *Mai Nandi* myth is extensively discussed in Chapter 3.

Accordingly, any income funneled into the dera should be divided into four equal shares: one share for the dera, another for the chela, and the remaining two for the guru.

A dera-residing chela is expected to turn her salary over to her guru, though she does see a small amount re-allocated back to her for spending money (Abdullah et al. 2012). The dera's collective pot, funded by its residents' salaries, pays for rent, utility bills, transportation, and preparation for functions (Abdullah et al. 2012, 4). As such, the notion of the gharana as an economic unit (Nanda 1999, 39) from that the guru executes economic activities (Zulfiqar 2015, 9) is a compelling one. Additionally, the dera is a social hub that either hosts performances or books off-site functions for its chelas (Nanda 1999, 39; Zulfiqar 2015, 9).

A chela's payments to her guru ensure her welfare (Thomas 2013, 119). Each dera has its own specific territory where members are permitted to work (Dutta 2012, 832); after her initiation, a new chela is entitled to join these professional ranks (Nanda 1999, 43-44; Dutta 2012, 832). There, she may perform begging, dance, or prostitution (Dutta 2012, 832). She requires additional permission, however, if she wants to perform vadhais, particularly if the function is outside of her prescribed professional parameters (Dutta 2012, 836). Within a guru's established territory, non-dera members or "pretender" hijras (hijra people) are not permitted to work. Transgressors "will be beaten or fined or both" (Nanda 1999, 44).

Traditional roles such as vadhais are slowly being replaced by prostitution, erotic dancing, and begging (Jami and Kamal 2015, 153). Regardless of the livelihood strategy that a chela adopts, she must submit some of her earnings to her guru. If a chela decides to pursue castration, her guru will set aside money for the procedure, also sourced from her salary. Some gharanas require a particular monthly contribution, as in the case of one hijra person who stated she was bound to give Rs. 3000 every month (Thomas 2013, 119).

Once a chela leaves her gharana,³⁴⁵ she is no longer obligated to fund the household upkeep (Thomas 2013, 119), but physically leaving the dera does not erase all of her obligations. Out of respect, she should continue to give a portion of her salary to her guru, though the amount is not fixed or obligatory in this context. Within the Pakistani hijra community, respect money is called *haq* (right). Indian *hijras* (hijra people) additionally demonstrate respect by bowing down before

³⁴⁵ Here gharana and dera are used interchangeably.

the guru, a practice called *pampaduthi* (Thomas 2013, 117-118). The Pakistani hijra community observes a similar ritual.

In the hijra community, status is directly proportional to responsibility. The community power structure functions to regulate the hijra society and sustain it as a cultural entity. As such, a guru has the responsibility of aligning her chela's behavior to expected socio-cultural norms. If a chela exhibits resistance or inadequacy in conforming to these norms, then her guru may issue a course of discipline.

The values of integration and respect are socialized into new hijra people to ensure that the gharana runs smoothly. A new chela quickly learns that her errors can put her dera to shame. As such, a formal system of control exists to maintain respect for the guru and regulate behavior (Thomas 2013, 131-35). The findings of this research align with the findings of the research studies mentioned above. Through means of respect mainly gurus secure financial and political means to exercise power and maintain control over the lives of chelas.

A very feminine hijra is likely to attract many clients, which is lucrative for her gharana. As such, if a chela is unable or unwilling to fully embody the expected hijra identity, she may face punishment (Thomas 2013, 120). Her femininity serves dual purposes: it is a source of her livelihood, and it reflects her internal sense of self. Though the latter might eventually lead her to a griya-moorat relationship, such intentions do not always align with the guru's financial interests. From the guru's perspective, each chela represents an investment whose obligation as a productive economic unit should supersede any personal relationships.

Thomas (2013) stated that a guru will restrict her chela's outside social ties to prevent any looming financial losses. Likewise, for the offense of engaging with "unapproved" men, some chelas endure physical assault from their gurus. To escape these patterns of abuse, many chelas leave their gharanas to live independently or with a partner (Thomas 2013, 107). Indeed, most participants of Thomas's (2013) study faced harassment at the gharana, which incentivized them to seek outside romantic partners (Thomas 2013, 110). Nanda (1999) observed a similar pattern, in which dera-associated burdens motivated many chelas to eventually leave (Nanda 1999, 45). This research study confirms these trends: that is, if a chela is exploited for economic profit and she has the opportunity to see this, then she will eventually leave. Nadeem Kashish is a prominent example of life-after-the-dera: when she left, she took up community activism and is now openly

opposed to the guru-chela system. In her words, the “culture of hijra community is an organized system of exploitation.”³⁴⁶

At the dera, deviance incurs punishment. The majority of these punishments are prescribed for moral code violations (i.e., disrespecting another hijra person, the guru, or the community). Penalties may also be imposed if a chela disregards her community-fixed sexual boundaries, i.e., if she has sex with another hijra person or penetrates someone during intercourse. Not being “feminine enough” is yet another transgression worthy of penalization.

Punishments can be financial, physical, verbal, and/or social. Financial penalties are usually determined by the guru and vary according to the nature of the crime. Shaving a hijra’s head falls under the heading of physical punishment. This retribution lowers the social standing of the offender and is reserved for severe acts of misconduct. Symbolically and socially, shaving her head destroys a chela’s femininity (see Nanda 1999, 41). There are a number of online videos posted by Pakistani hijra community members that depict a guru shaving a chela’s head. In some cases, this punishment socially shames not only the chela, but also her guru.

Social isolation is perhaps the most severe form of punishment in the hijra community, but as such, it is rarely prescribed. While, operationalized act of severe mistake is taken as an “assaulting or abusing” to a guru. If it is imposed, the offender will be refused entry at every gharana or dera across the country. It is not, however, a proverbial death sentence: this punishment can actually be rescinded by community elders (see also Nanda 1999, 41). Hence, regulation of hijra community culture revolves around the use of power that creates vulnerability for the hijra people to face various types of violence. However, same time this system is an only option of support to the transgender people. Therefore, they try to remain attached with hijra community and avoid to receive punishment of social isolation. As, hijra people are marginalized, social isolation from the hijra community increase their vulnerability for the economic, psychological and social depravedness.

³⁴⁶ Nadeem Kashish (aqwa, SAFFAR), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

Chapter 7: The Dynamics of Human Rights Violations in the Lives of Hijra People

This chapter provides an overview of the transgender person's life, paying particular attention to the structural violence and discrimination that affects the transgender identity. It also discusses Pakistan's constitution, which officially extends legal protection to gender-variant persons while simultaneously perpetuating their vulnerability. To properly examine these phenomena, this chapter adopts both sociocultural and legal lenses.

For the purpose of this study, a transgender person's life is divided into the two parts. The first part comprises the formative years and the social spheres of family, friends, and schoolmates. During this phase, the child is groomed to adopt masculine gender roles but instead gravitates toward feminine roles, a practice that likely engenders her vulnerability. She is particularly susceptible to mistreatment from a brother, a father, male relatives, and (male) teachers, who attempt to impose prescribed masculine gender roles upon her.

The second part of her life marks her entry into new world when she joins the hijra community and adapts to their way of life. Interactions with mainstream society often illustrate that she has been a prey to inequality beginning from her childhood. In Pakistan, the social perception of the hijra identity relegates transgender people to the category of outcasts. Their identity attributes revolve around their recognition as a dancers, entertainers, sex workers, beggars, alms collectors, disease spreaders, environment contaminator, and/or gender-identity converter (see chapter five and six). In other words, transgender people are perceived as disrespectful and disgraceful creatures in Pakistan, and as such, structural violence erupting from loathing toward them is not uncommon. In fact, discrimination against the hijra community is so widespread that many belonging to this hamlet have been reportedly banned from public transportation, hospital treatment, and bank services.

Pakistan's constitution considers all people equal and prohibits discrimination based on sex. At the same time, it contains discriminative clauses that restricts a transgender person's well-being (see chapter one). Recent Supreme Court rulings have created new spaces about ensuring

rights of the transgender community. For their part, federal and provincial government agencies have created various initiatives to mobilize the community through the provision of skills-training, identity protection, budget allocation, census inclusion, and employment quotas. There is still a long way to go in eradicating homophobia/transphobia and safeguarding the rights of transgender people in Pakistan.

7.1. The Conceptualization of Discrimination

Discrimination is a biased behavior that may cause maltreatment or marginalization of one group to favor another (John et al. 2010, 9). Discrimination has two important elements: (a) the special treatment given to someone based on his/her social identity or group membership, and (b) the *judgment* that the given treatment – based on group identity – is unfair and disadvantageous (Major and Sawyer 2009, 90). In other words, “treatment judged as both underserved and as based on social identity is likely to be perceived as discrimination” (Major and Sawyer 2009, 90). Age, religion, race, nationality, origin, sexual orientation, disability, class, marital status, and domestic responsibilities can all provide a basis for unfair treatment. Moreover, discrimination has various manifestations and can be direct or indirect.

Within the context of international jurisprudence, the UN defines discrimination as follows, “Discrimination as any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference or other differential treatment that is directly or indirectly based on a prohibited ground of discrimination and that has the intention or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of rights guaranteed under international law” (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner 2012, 40). The United Nations Human Rights are applicable to all humans regardless of gender identity and sexual orientation (United Nations Human Right Office of the High Commissioner 2012). Under this edict, Pakistan’s transgender community should be protected from homophobia and transphobia, yet community members continue to regularly face hate crimes and prejudice from larger society.

To articulate incidents of human rights violations, this research defines discrimination as an act that creates distinctions, restrictions, and/or exclusions of a person based on her/his gender identity or sexual orientation, which then damages the individual’s self-identity and creates hurdles in her/his social, psychological, emotional, educational, and physical well-being.

The transgender respondents of this study have collectively faced many types of discrimination since childhood. Discrimination against gender-variant children is more obvious and prominent among those who are born male than those who are born intersex. Maltreatment can come from the family, the community, or the educational institution, and it often follows transgender people into the social and professional spheres of adulthood. To recapitulate, the transgender respondents of this study have been denied access to the following institutions, services, and locations: living accommodations, health care, national identity cards, bank accounts, public transportation, education, public spaces, and/or private social gatherings.

7.1.1. Discrimination and Unequal Treatment in the Family

Vignette 1: “I came to know that my sister is interested in marrying our cousin. I discussed the matter with my elder brother but he angrily said, ‘We know what we have to do. You do not need to poke your nose into these matters.’”³⁴⁷

Vignette 2: My mother was sick and needed proper care and attention but my sister in-law and brother were not taking appropriately care. When I asked both to leave my mother with me so that I could take care of her, they became furious and blamed me for being disrespectful and earn money by begging and prostitution. So I should not worry about the mother’s health.³⁴⁸

Both the afore-mentioned cases feature a male relative who out rightly refused to accept the participation of respondent in a family matter. The reason for a gender-variant person’s fragmentation from the family is located in the patrilineal, patriarchal, and heteronormative structure of mainstream Pakistani society. Furthermore, while some in the hijra community financially support their families, but biological beneficiaries should not reveal this support publicly. By doing so the society strongly detests such financial support from begging, dancing and prostitution all disdainful livelihood strategies in Pakistani culture. Money earned from such occupations is believed to taint the family’s honor.

Transgender persons are invisible family members, often excluded from gatherings such as weddings and funerals. Their invisibility is an embodiment of discrimination against their gender identities and sexual orientations. Indeed, a significant number of respondents confirmed

³⁴⁷ Shehzadi (aqwa), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

³⁴⁸ Nadeem Kashish (aqwa, SAFFAR), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

that they did not attend family functions³⁴⁹ and were cognizant of the reason for their exclusion: “I did not attend my grandmother’s funeral, because all relatives were there and my presence could be embarrassment for them. I saved my family’s honor through remaining absent from the funeral of my grandmother.”³⁵⁰

In Pakistan, the family is a primary and a visible social institution, one that maintains and strengthens a patriarchal image and resists any slights to its masculine character. In this vein, the non-conforming behavior of a gender-variant child is a point of contention that compromises this patriarchal image. The family restricts and shields the gender-variant child’s visibility from the public rebuke and isolates her to avoid embarrassment.³⁵¹

The participation of a transgender person in gatherings within the family sphere is often denied. Symbolically, this exclusion enforces the perceived inferior position of the transgender individuals. Such acts of marginalization at homes in turn reinforce and enhance heteronormativity in the family and society. In response to the discrimination levied against her, a transgender experiences alienation, guilt, and stress, leading her to sometimes question her own being. In short, she begins to assimilate the feelings of inferiority and inadequacy that have been imposed upon her.

7.1.2. Discrimination and Unequal Treatment in Society

Vignette 3: During the course of this research, I traveled from Faizabad to Islamabad by public transport. At the zero point stop (name of the stop), a hijra boarded the van. Pakistan’s public transportation system seats male riders and female riders separately, there was some confusion about where she should sit. Though there was a vacant seat in the front row next to a female passenger, the van refused to accommodate the transgender person. She cited, “Hijra is *he* [emphasis added], how can a male sit with a female?”³⁵² There was another vacant seat in the men’s section near the back of the van; however, the adjacent elderly passenger also refused to accommodate the transgender person. He stated loudly, “They are male but pretend to look like a female. They are cursed. I would not allow him

³⁴⁹ Most respondents reportedly provided financial help to their families; however, this assistance did not gain acceptance from relatives. In fact, for many families, a transgender person’s presence at homes is construed as an insult. This is particularly true in the context of a sister’s wedding.

³⁵⁰ Sitara (aqwa), interview with the author, April 8, 2015.

³⁵¹ “For my sister’s marriage, I will contribute financially and will buy furniture for her. However, I will not attend marriage because people will gossip about my presence and my identity. There will be large number of relatives, even those who have neither met nor heard about us. So, we feel ashamed, and secondly, everyone can judge that I am a khusra from my face. , My sister-in-laws would be there, so my real sisters can have problem when someone would point out that my brother is a khusra, so what will they think?” (Sanwali [aqwa], interview with the author, April 6, 2015).

³⁵² A woman in public transport, observed by the researcher, May 19, 2015.

to sit beside me.”³⁵³ The transgender passenger in turn angrily addressed the refusing persons: “Do we have any contagious disease that you are afraid of sitting beside us? When you will have a hijra in your own family, then you will realize the truth.”³⁵⁴ Although some witnesses looked sympathetic, no one spoke in her favor. After some time, the elderly male passenger begrudgingly allowed her to sit beside him.

In Pakistan, the social perception of the hijra identity is a fractured one, and treatment of transgender people is classically ambiguous. A hijra person is considered a holy figure yet is relegated to societal outskirts. Further, while many believe that hijra people are just men in women’s clothing, they do not interact with them as they do with other men. Stereotypes and stigmas often dictate a transgender person’s interactions with the larger society. The ambiguity surrounding her identity perpetuates the discrimination against her. Many in the transgender community have today attained prominence as social advocates or activists, but they still experience discrimination

Refusing to communicate with a hijra person often stems from the prevalent homophobia and/or transphobia in Pakistan. Transgender individuals are sometimes treated as a social pathology; other times they are denied basic social interactions that would build their confidence. Even, it appears that if they are not entitled to enjoy the public facilities to the fullest. One respondent, Shehzadi shared that when she and a friend visited a park, they were denied entrance by the gatekeeper while other visitors roamed around as they pleased. In response, Shehzadi demanded, “Just because we are hijras, we cannot go inside the Public Park?”³⁵⁵

Prejudice against transgender people also comes to limelight when the real estate market obstructs their entry. During the course of this study, I visited a number of locations where transgender individuals’ had rented properties largely substandard and pitiable conditions with nearly non-existent facilities. Respondents explained that they were not allowed to live in “good” neighborhoods, because their presence would not be tolerated by existing residents. As is often the case in Pakistan, transgender people tend to reside where most other people will not. To add insult to injury, a transgender person is often forced to pay higher rent than a cisgender person would for a comparable property.

³⁵³ A passenger in public transport, observed by the researcher, May 19, 2015.

³⁵⁴ A transgender in public transport, observed by the researcher, May 19, 2015.

³⁵⁵ Shehzadi (aqwa), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

Malik and Shehzadi's accounts indicate that society has not yet legitimized or normalized its sharing of public spaces with transgender people; in fact, their presence alone seems to offend heteronormative Pakistani society. As such, many transgender people avoid violating the imposed boundaries in public spaces. Moreover, in the context of living spaces, they are often relegated to ghettos.

In order to avoid the hassles and harassment associated with public transportation, many hijra people hire private cars when they need to travel: "Most of time, we hire a whole auto while traveling, as people behave towards us in derogatory manner in the public transportation."³⁵⁶ Sometimes these "derogatory manners" spill into sexual harassment and assault. She shared, "Once I was traveling from Lahore to Islamabad in a public bus. A boy seated next to me started fondling my body and asked me for cell phone number. I felt irritated but was afraid of complaining against him. I was not sure if people would believe me and if I will get another place to sit."³⁵⁷

The public mistreatment awaiting a transgender person spans the gamut from neglect and humiliation to bullying and sexual assault. Indeed, in public spaces, a hijra (and other transgender identities) persons did not enjoy the same rights and respect afforded to a cisgender person. As such, she is prohibited from presenting herself freely, and her dignity and respect are often compromised.³⁵⁸

7.1.3. Discrimination in Employment

Vignette 4, Appearance impression to researcher: Upon my first visit to the *dera*³⁵⁹ (commune) of Nadeem Kashish,³⁶⁰ the door was opened by a beautiful person with large brown eyes and cascading silky hair. Initially, I thought this person was a young and handsome man, but I soon realized that she was an *aqwa* hijra dressed in men's clothing. She was Kashish's young *chela* and introduced her to me by the name of Khurram.

Vignette 5, Kashish's – guru's - response: "She [the *chela*] has an appearance of a boy because of the nature of her job. She has been working as a waiter at Sareena Hotel, Islamabad. The job demands her to look like a boy. However, whenever, she wishes to

³⁵⁶Sonia (*aqwa*), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

³⁵⁷ Shehzadi (*aqwa*), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

³⁵⁸ Many respondents reported experiencing homophobia and transphobia, two phenomena that are often engendered by religious teachings. Biologically male hijras enjoy far less social acceptance than intersex hijras, owing in part to presumptions about sexual orientation. Society generally considers hijras to be behaviorally deviant; as such, hijras are often kept at arm's length in public spaces.

³⁵⁹ The *dera* comprised three rooms and a courtyard.

³⁶⁰ Nadeem Kashish is an *aqwa* hijra working as a social activist, a make-up artist for a national news show, and a host for her own radio program.

fulfil her psychological need to be hijra / transgender. She comes here at the dera. The last rented room of the dera belongs to her, where she lives as a transgender. She would otherwise, all day long behave like a boy at her work and other social surroundings.”³⁶¹

Vignette 6, Khurram’s – chela – response: My name is Khurram, a male and a man at workplace because I got this job with masculine identity. It could be impossible for me to get this job with the aqwa identity. My boyfriend told me about this job who had already been working there. He knew about my aqwa identity and at the same time he knew, I would not get this job with a hijra identity. Therefore, I applied for this job as a male and with the help of my friend, I managed to get the job.³⁶²

Khurram’s case illustrates the standard gender discrimination. To circumvent the practice, a transgender person modifies her identity to meet the demands of the potential employer. Adopting a masculine appearance often facilitates employment, and by extension, many transgender people do not reveal their feminine identity in the workplace. If the feminine identity does come to light, the tone of the work environment may dramatically shift: “The behavior of people change suddenly when they see a feminine gender reflection in my personality. They laugh at me, crack jokes and do not take me seriously nor pay respect to me as compared to other male waiters.”³⁶³

In the professional settings transgender people are being judged by their feminine gender representation and in certain cases negatively treated. One respondent explained, “I started working at my uncle’s shop. Soon people from the surrounding shops started gossiping about me. They joked about the way I talked and walked. My uncle, realizing the sensitive situation asked me to stay at home.”³⁶⁴

In Pakistan, transgender prejudice is largely embedded in the structure of the social system itself. , This prejudice against transgender persons greatly disadvantages opportunities of securing a job. Even in case they get a job they remain vulnerable to maltreatment of the public who constantly bully them. The misery of transgender people increases many fold when they are deprived of the basic necessities of life like health and education.

³⁶¹ Nadeem Kashish (aqwa, SAFFAR), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

³⁶² Khurram (aqwa), interview with the author, April 5, 2015.

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Rimal (aqwa), interview with the author, May 10, 2015.

7.1.4. Discrimination in Healthcare Services

Transgender persons obscure their identities in an effort to be eligible for healthcare services. In most Pakistani medical facilities, patient organization follows a strict gender binary system. For example, to register for treatment in a hospital, a patient must check either “male” or “female” on the intake form and likewise choose the appropriate gender-designated line. Beds too are organized in a similar manner; transgender is too “manly” for a woman’s bed, besides a transgender person will likely experience harassment and abuse in the men’s ward. To adapt to the binary structure, many transgender persons do men’s clothing and assume masculine identities while requiring medical treatment; otherwise, they risk contempt and discrimination. Respondent Sonia confirmed: “Most of the time I visit hospital in a male appearance.”³⁶⁵

Even as visitors to the hospital, many respondents reported discrimination from patients and staff, both male and female. One of the hijra respondents of this research shared, “once she was admitted to a male ward in masculine dress. However, her hijra identity was obvious to the other patients of the ward who made mockery of her identity. Similarly, once some hijra friends visited her but other patients and hospital staff disliked it”.³⁶⁶

Thus, just as most of the hijra respondents hired private cars to avoid discrimination in the public transportation system, some hijra individuals likewise availed private medical services to avoid discriminative behavior.

7.1.5. Discrimination in the Education System

Education is one of society’s most important institutions in Pakistan as it plays a vital role in perpetuating the structure of heteronormative society. That said, access to education is integral to the well-being of a child, particularly one who is gender nonconforming. The academic system can enormously benefit a gender-variant child, equipping her/him with the tools to navigate the complexities of a largely oppressive power structure. Similarly, educated transgender people have more options in livelihood strategies than those who are not well educated (see also Grant et al. 2011).

³⁶⁵ Sonia (aqwa), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

³⁶⁶ Mehak (narban), interview with the author, April 12, 2015.

Childhood games are often gender-specific. As such, most gender-variant children do not participate in “boys’ games,” because they are more closely aligned to girls. If a non-conforming child shows interest in boys’ game, she is often belittled and discouraged from participating. According to one respondent, “It was quite common that male students made blunt comments about me that its boy’s game and only boys play with them. So, they did not allow me to play.”³⁶⁷ Peers were often purveyors of bias, particularly if the gender-variant child performed exceptionally well academically. One respondent, shared her experience as follows:

When I was a student, I experienced discrimination a number of times at my school. I was good in my studies, and therefore in accordance with school policy I supposed to get a chance to be head-boy of the class, commonly known as monitor. The head boy was given tasks to maintain discipline in the class and stop nuisance among other boys in the absence of the teacher. However, in my case, I was not given a chance to be the head boy or monitor of the class. Moreover, whenever the teacher asked the questions from the class, I raised my hand to answer the question. Nevertheless, this also did not work well in my favor. The teacher denied my active participation in class. This was because I was feminine in my behavior. In response I learnt to respond against such unfairness by enhancing my performance. I started to work hard and maintained my position to get the highest marks. It worked. The opinion of the class fellows started to change about me. They used to seek my help in studies.³⁶⁸

Gender-variant children are not often praised for performing well; neither are they rewarded with the honors like tasked with nominated class monitor, as this was reserved for comparably performing cisgender peers. Some gender-variant students do attempt to counter the stigma by enhancing academic performance and attempting to change their peers’ opinions, but their number was very small. Discrimination is institutionalized as early as in primary school, where a teacher may be reluctant in highlighting model behavior from a transgender student: “My teacher disliked the reflections of feminine gender in me. Therefore, in most of the cases, he discouraged my class participation. The teacher’s attitude was different for other boys who were always appreciated.”³⁶⁹

Only a few respondents attended a co-education primary school, where the incidents of structural violence against transgender children were significantly lower than they were in all-boys schools. Moreover, the behavior of female teachers and female peers was reported as non-

³⁶⁷ Sonia (aqwa), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

³⁶⁸ Honey (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

³⁶⁹ Rimal (aqwa), interview with the author, May 10, 2015.

discriminatory. It was noted that most respondents of this study discontinued their educational pursuits in the face of overall discrimination and structural violence in the education system.

7.1.6. Obstruction of the Freedom of Expression, Assembly and Association

The birthday is the only event that we organize for ourselves. We gather our friends from the transgender community as well as from outside. We receive gifts and entertain ourselves with dance. Last year, I organized my birthday party, booked a hall, and arranged food as well. I did a great shopping for this function. However, before the start of the function, police came and refused to allow us to celebrate. They also reprimanded owner of the hotel, as to why he had given us the hall to organize such kind of event. The owner had no choice except to cancel our booking and apologized. We decided to go to another hotel to carry on our celebration. However, the police restrained the owner of this hotel as well and we were refused permission. Ultimately, we returned to our dera with heavy heart.³⁷⁰

The celebration of a birthday is an important function within Pakistan's hijra community. In many cases, the event planner (who is also the guest of honor) organizes the function at a hotel restaurant or similar venue. She collects and saves money throughout the year to ensure that the celebration will be memorable and enjoyable for the attendees. Guests are invited from all over the hijra community; sometimes people from mainstream society are invited, as well. During the function, the hijra guests perform dances and exchange trinkets with one another. If the event is honoring a chela's birthday, then the chela is expected to bring a present for her guru. In turn, she receives gifts from the rest of her guests. Considering the planning and effort invested in such a function, one can understand the disappointment when authorities cancel permissions at the last minute. Respondents reported that occurrences like these were not uncommon, and that police and other authorities often declared the allegations of vulgarity to justify the revocation of event permissions.

One respondent, Muskan, became visibly emotional while sharing an account of her obstructed celebration. She fired a line of questions at me, questions to which I had no answers: "Why this happens to us only? Why can't we gather to celebrate our birthdays? Does this happen to other people also? Do they need to get permission for celebration of the birthday? Does the police spoil birthday celebrations of other people too?"³⁷¹

³⁷⁰ Muskan (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

To circumvent potential hurdles with the authorities, some hijra people take preventive measures: “Before organizing our birthday we get permission from area police and bribe them not to create any hurdle in our celebration. However, we remain unsure to the end if we will complete the function on a successful note.”³⁷²

7.2. The Conceptualization of Violence

The conceptualization of violence is complex issue, largely because the violence is multifaceted and socially constructed (Haan 2008, 28; Hastru p 2003, 309-310; WHO 2002). Initially, violence was an issue filed under criminal justice; today, it is also considered a public health concern. The context of human rights is a prominent paradigm within which to study violence (Tjaden 2005, 217-219).³⁷³ The shift from criminal justice to human rights as a context to understand violence is necessary to bridge a gap between subjective and objective perspectives.

As a lens to analyze violence, criminal justice limits the scope of defiant behavior and does not include psychological and emotional violence. Similarly, a public health perspective only contextualizes violence as socio-cultural practices such as honor killing and genital mutilation (Tjaden 2005, 219-220). A human rights lens, on the other hand, is broader and more comprehensive – it brings the roles of the state and culture into discussions on violence (Tjaden 2005, 220).

The domains of law, culture, human rights, and public health all define violence differently. For instance, the law considers violence as an illegal use of force to harm others (Haan 2008, 28-29). Nevertheless, there are a number of examples where an “illegal use of force” is sanctioned and institutionalized as a cultural practice. In these cases, it is more often than not women who are the targets of structural violence, sometimes directly at the hands of men. A biological male with a feminine gender identity is likewise a common target. Because a patriarchal society (like Pakistan’s) often relegates transgender individuals to pariahhood, they have very little recourse to address the structural violence when it occurs. This is particularly true when it is in form of “punishment.” That said, any type of gender violence is technically prohibited by law in Pakistan.

³⁷² Sana (Aqwa), interview with the author, May 12, 2015.

³⁷³ Violence was first discussed as an influential social phenomenon during the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights, the 1994 World Conference on Population and Development, and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women.

Haan (2008) demonstrated that the perception of violence varies with the perspective of a given actor: that is, the perpetrator, the victim, or a neutral third party. Its characterization is also influenced by the context within which it occurs: schools, intimate relationships, gangs, the domestic sphere, the professional sphere, and among youth, to name just a few. Violence can be symbolic, structural, or systematic. It can be physical, verbal, social, or psychological. Lastly, it can be individual or collective (Haan 2008, 27-28).

To fulfill the objective of conceptualizing violence, this study adopts its definition from a 1994 UN treaty that contextualizes its relationship to gender. This definition includes transgender and other nonconforming perspectives: “[A]ny act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering...including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life” (UN Declaration on the elimination of violence against women 1993, article 1).

7.2.1. Emotional and Psychological Violence

Emotional or psychological violence includes, but is not limited to, being insulted (e.g. called derogatory names) or made to feel bad about oneself; being humiliated or belittled in front of other people; being threatened with loss of custody of one’s children; being confined to or isolated from family or friends; being threatened with harm to oneself or someone cares about; repeated shouting, inducing fear through intimidating words or gestures; controlling behavior; and the destruction of possessions. (World Health Organization 2013, 23)

Emotional and/or psychological violence is common to marginalized individuals; the transgender community is no exception in this regard. This type of violence usually starts early and within the family sphere. Male family members, such as brothers or fathers, are frequent offenders. As a gender-variant child grows older, the elements of the emotional/psychological violence that she experiences undergoes a shift: the nature of the exchange, the actors involved, the social context, and the spaces of occurrence.

7.2.1.1. Emotional and Psychological Violence in the Family

In the family sphere, emotional and psychological violence is exercised through name-calling, threats, and gender-bullying. Identifying a gender-variant child as a *khusra* or *hijra* is often derogatory, largely owing to gender-variance’s associated social stigma.

The emotional and psychological violence levied against a gender-nonconforming child stem from an *identification* of the child's gender-variant roles, mannerisms, and practices. Most respondents of this research shared that it was their families who first victimized them.³⁷⁴ According to one respondent, "Whenever my brothers got angry upon me and quarreled, they called me khusra. I did not like this word."³⁷⁵ She further added, "In my presence, women of the neighbor[hood] remain polite and affectionate. However, I could hear their whispering, which they made about me that I am khusra/ Hijra."³⁷⁶

The above respondent, Nagina, is an intersex hijra. This transgender status, referred to as khwajasira, generally enjoys more tolerance than other identities.³⁷⁷ Though Khwajasiras do experience emotional violence, the motives are usually unique to the identity. For example, because an intersex person is perceived as unable to perform masculine sex roles (i.e., penetration), a khwajasira compromises her family's masculine image. In Nagina's account, her brother used the term "khusra" to advance his viewpoint that she was genitally incomplete and deformed.

Larger societal pressures can further exacerbate mistreatment from siblings. As one respondent shared: "My brother was afraid of being insulted because of my weird behavior. He used to tell me that people outside remarked that, 'your brother danced in a function, he is a khusra.' So my brother remained in stressful condition and used harsh words for me to give vent to his inner feelings."³⁷⁸

One respondent described an incident from childhood in following words:

Once, my uncle's family visited us. I was sitting in my room. Suddenly all the children rushed in my room and started to yell that 'there is a girl inside of the room'. The father of the children clarified that 'the boy sitting inside is not a girl, she is a khusra'. My mother was taken aback and felt embarrassed due to this situation. She got angry upon me and instructed me to meet the relatives and behave like a male.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁴ Chapter 4 discusses the adoption and performance of gender-variant practices during childhood.

³⁷⁵ Nagina (khwajasira), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ See chapter six for the hijrapan and zenapan traditions of the hijra community. In the former, followers maintain traditional livelihood practices (such as vadhai and alms collections). Zenapan followers, on the other hand, earn a living through dance and prostitution.

³⁷⁸ Honey (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

³⁷⁹ Sonia (aqwa), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

Other transgender identities, i.e., narban (castrated) and aqwa (intact male genitalia) hijras also experience emotional and psychological violence. In fact, even intersex hijra people sometimes distance themselves from cisgender people: “In my childhood I felt irritated when one of the woman relatives used to call me hijra .I preferred to be identified either as a khwajasira, *mian ji*, or *faqeer* instead of a hijra or khusra.”³⁸⁰

The “hijra” label is often considered derogatory. As such, many transgender persons preferred to be identified by female pronouns or by “khwajasira,” which typically connotes more respect. “Moorat” is also acceptable and is primarily used by younger transgender persons. According to Faris Ahmed Khan (2014), the rise of social activism has introduced the term “transgender” itself to the literature and discourse surrounding gender-nonconformity in Pakistan (F..Khan 2014a; 2014b).

Many in Pakistan consider the hijra community a “bad influence on society.” There is a fear that the hijra community can convert other people’s children, a grossly misinformed assumption that further aggravate the community’s stigma. According to one respondent: “They used to gossip that she [the respondent] can affect our children.”³⁸¹ .

Many gender-variant people avoid visits with family members; this is particularly true in the case of married sisters. Often, a transgender person fears that an identity disclosure will bring stress to her sister’s in-laws, who will in turn harangue her sister. One respondent claimed that it had “been years” since her sister married. She continued, “I had not seen her and my relatives. Even if I see someone, I turn my back [to avoid them].”³⁸²

In Pakistan’s transgender community, social avoidance and social invisibility (particularly with in family sphere or public gatherings) are common strategies to avoid stigmas, prejudices, bullying, and name-calling – in other words, psychological and emotional violence. Almost all of the transgender respondents of this study were either isolated from or in minimal contact with their families. One respondent explained, “If we visit our family, there will be more relatives pouring

³⁸⁰ Nagina (khwajasira), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

³⁸¹ Arzo (aqwa), interview with the author, April 11, 2015,

³⁸² Bebo (aqwa), interview with the author, April 16, 2015.

in, even those who had never seen us and never heard about us. So, first, we feel shame and second from our appearance everyone can judge us that we are hijra.”³⁸³

7.2.1.2. Emotional and Psychological Violence in the School

A school plays an important role in the socialization of a child, but for gender-variant and gender non-conforming children, the academic experience can be deleterious to his/her personality. Generally in Pakistan, the environment in both private and public schools is hostile, derogatory, abusive, violent, and discriminative toward gender non-conforming students.

The gender-variant child is perceived as different from the other students because the child does not conform to the expected standards, or is “not masculine enough.” This perception in difference leads to a trend of *othering* that is frequently accompanied by a slew of questioning. Indeed, one respondent shared: “Children used to ask me why I talk and walk like a girl. This question was quite confusing for me because I had no idea how to answer them. Later my class fellows and school fellows started to call me khusra and hijra.”³⁸⁴

The question of identity led gender-variant children to *identity confusion*, where they did not see themselves reflected in the social structure in respect of their gender-variance and non-conforming behavior. A child often copes with coexistent socio-psychological pressure in one of two ways: (a) either by adopting silence as a safe tacit, or (b) remaining consistent in identity presentation and rejecting the pressure of social codes. In the case of the latter, Khurram stated, “I used to wear a scarf in the school. My teacher used to order me not to wear scarf. ‘Otherwise, I will punish you.’ However, I refused to do so and I said, ‘I would rather drop out of school but will continue to wear scarf.’”³⁸⁵

The above accounts illustrate two trends: (a) the identification, labeling, and subsequent *othering*³⁸⁶ of a gender-variant child, and (b) the imposition of masculinity upon that child. During

³⁸³ Sanwali (aqwa), interview with the author, April 6, 2015.

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Khurram (aqwa), interview with the author, April 13, 2015. Likewise, another respondent added the following: “Since people from the neighbor[hood] and fellows from the school came to know about my identification as a khusra, they used to call me by saying it. It hurts me. Therefore, I left going to school.” (Nagina [khwajasira], interview with the author, April 11, 2015).

³⁸⁶ See chapter four for the practice of *othering* alongside respondent accounts of gender-variance in childhood.

childhood, nearly all respondents eschewed the masculine gender roles prescribed by peers and teachers. As such, they were threatened, bullied, and abused.

7.2.1.3. Emotional and Psychological Violence by the Griya

In many cases, a griya (boyfriend or husband) can restrict his moorat's (his transgender partner) social mobility, contacts, and means of livelihood, especially if she does not adhere to his commands. In the context of emotional and psychological violence, some griyas manipulate their moorats by inflicting self-harm: "He restricted my interaction with other boys. However, once I took an opportunity to contact another guy. However, he came to know and got furious. I tried to handle the situation and lied but my lie did not go well with him and in heat of moment he harmed himself by cutting through his wrist."³⁸⁷ Another respondent shared a similar account: "Once, we had an awfully bad fight, he became extremely angry and hit himself with a stone."³⁸⁸

Limiting professional opportunities is also a frequent manipulation tactic. One respondent shared: "When I was with my friend [griya], he used to give me pocket money but advised me and refrain from attending functions and begging."³⁸⁹

In many situations, a moorat finds herself in a vulnerable position if she failed to acknowledge the superiority of her griya. Likewise, many moorats have been threatened so severely that they had no choice but leave their cities and place of residence: "He asked me to stay with him, 'otherwise, I will not let me live in Lahore.' Therefore, I left Lahore, as he was not of my choice."³⁹⁰

7.2.2. Physical Violence

The World Health Organization (2013) defines physical violence as follows:

Being subjected to physical force, which can potentially cause death, injury or harm. It includes, but is not limited to: having an object thrown at one, being slapped, pushed, shoved, hit with the fist or with something else that could hurt, being kicked, dragged,

³⁸⁷ Khurram (aqwa), interview with the author, April 13, 2015.

³⁸⁸ Anjali (aqwa), interview with the author, April 23, 2015.

³⁸⁹ Muskan (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

³⁹⁰ Mehroz (aqwa), interview with the author, April 6, 2015.

beaten up, choked, deliberately burnt, threatened with a weapon or having a weapon used against one (e.g. gun, knife or other weapon).³⁹¹ (World Health Organization 2013, 23)

In Pakistan, these aforementioned acts of violence are all too common in the lives of transgender people. The motives, methods, and locations of physical violent acts vary with the individual hijra identity.

Within the community itself, members face physical punishment if they do not fulfill their social obligations and ascribe to expected norms. This is particularly true if an individual's interpretation of the hijra identity is not adequately feminine. Moreover, the livelihood strategies common to Pakistan's transgender community often put implementers into vulnerable positions. In the professional sphere, the stereotypical perception of the hijra revolves around dancing, singing, and/or being sexually assaulted. Any resistance to curb this stereotype behavior increases a transgender person's likelihood of experiencing physical violence.

7.2.2.1. Physical Violence in the Family

Gender-variant children often face physical violence from the public for reasons that are construed as “disciplinary.” Offenses in the eyes of counter forces are against the disciplined gender-variant roles, wearing feminine clothes, dancing at hijra-sponsored functions, making older friends, and engaging with the hijra community. In nearly all cases, it was a brother and/or father who doled out physical punishments. Mehak elaborated further:

Once, I wore dress of my sister and stood in front of the mirror admiring myself. I felt excited. I was unaware of my brother's presence who was sleeping in the next room. All of a sudden he burst into my room and saw me in feminine dress. He lost his temper and started beating me. He continued to abuse and shout at me and that really frightened me. My mother came to my rescue and hugged me and questioned ‘why I wore feminine clothes?’ I replied that I was compelled by my heart and felt attracted to wear sister's clothes.³⁹²

Mehak's narrative illustrates two trends common to a gender-variant child's experience with domestic physical violence: (a) the social and familial intolerance for cross-dressing, and (b) the mother's inclination to mediate violent matters. In fact, a significant number of respondents shared

³⁹¹ The definition further stipulates: “These acts are operationally defined and validated in WHO survey methods on violence against women. Other acts that could be included in a definition of physical violence are: biting, shaking, poking, hair-pulling and physically restraining a person” (World Health Organization 2013, 23).

³⁹² Mehak (narban), interview with the author, April 12, 2015.

positive and supportive profiles of their mothers. Male family members, on the other hand, were more frequently characterized as rigid and violent.

One respondent, Honey, reported that she had been performing as a dancer since childhood and later adopted the profession as an adult. That said, she did not find early support from her family; indeed, her dancing was sometimes met with violence. In this regard, she narrated, “I went to a marriage function with my friends. My friends were aware of my dancing skills. They asked me to dance. My brother’s friends were also in the same function. They recorded video of the dance and they showed it to my brother. My brother was very indignant and thrashed me.”³⁹³ Another respondents shared similar narratives: “I went with my khwajasira friends for mela [festival]. I danced there in ladies’ dress. My brother saw me, dragged me aside and gave me a good beating.”³⁹⁴

Physical violence sometimes follows the transgender person to another city. Consider Khurram, who was a resident of Faisalabad. She accompanied community members to a function in Lahore, the news of which incited anger in her family, particularly her brother. She explained, “My brother arrived there and started beating me. Some of the local people rescued me. But, he vowed to bring me back. He threatened that ‘he will shoot me, if he sees me on road.’”³⁹⁵

Other male relatives are also regular perpetrators of violence. Mehak asserted, “I was with ‘she-males,’ and my cousin saw me. When I came to home, he stroked me hard.”³⁹⁶ She further remarked: “Once I was wandering with my friends near river side, my cousin spotted me pulled me out of the company beat me badly and asked to stay at home.”³⁹⁷ Uncles are reported to be strict and suspicious of activities, as well.

The inclination for both proximal and distant male relatives to administer physical violence illustrates the reach of “family honor.” The men often feel justified in dispensing their brand of discipline because they believe it remedies errant behavior. Many families disapprove of a gender-variant child’s engagement in dancing and/or begging, and physical violence is an attempt to restrict these behaviors. In particular, public beatings are a display of hyper-masculinity, executed

³⁹³ Honey (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

³⁹⁴ Muskan (aqwa), interview with the author, April 16, 2015.

³⁹⁵ Khurram (aqwa), interview with the author, April 13, 2015.

³⁹⁶ Mehak (narban), interview with the author, April 12, 2015.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

not only to instill fear in the child, but also to socially communicate that the family rejects cross-dressing and gender-variance.

7.2.2.2. Physical Violence in the School

Gender segregation in the education system is normative in Pakistan. In other words, a boy is expected to adopt masculine gender roles, while a girl should adopt feminine ones. These gender norms are imposed through systematic traditional practices, and deviances are often considered unusual discipline. Consider the following account from Babbli Malik, who was abused at the hands of a peer and further by a teacher: “I was in grade 6 when an elder male student hit me because I had applied nail polish, wore frock and *dupatta* [headscarf] of my sister. I approached the class teacher complained against the boy. However, instead of remedying the situation the teacher started to abuse me because of cross dressings.”³⁹⁸

Similar to incidents of emotional/psychological violence in the school, reports of physical abuse numbered significantly less from female teachers in comparison to male teachers. Likewise, those enrolled in co-education or all-girls primary schools saw fewer cases of physical violence.

³⁹⁸ Babbli Malik (guru, activist, and aqwa, Rawalpindi community), interview with the author, April 12, 2015.

7.2.2.3. *Physical Violence in the Hijra Community*

A guru is responsible for managing the *gharana* (household) and the community. To that end, many gurus employ physical abuse as a punishment to correct chela's behavior in accordance with norms of the community.

Beating, kicking, slapping, and even hair-cutting are common methods of inculcating "discipline" by the guru. According to one respondent, "Once I had a harsh conversation with the brother of my guru. She [the guru's brother] complained of my behavior to my guru. Resultantly, my guru punished me by cutting my hair."³⁹⁹ Another responded shared, "I quarreled with a hijra person as she was trying to interfere with my clients. The matter went to the guru and she found me guilty. While, I was explaining to her situation, she slapped me."⁴⁰⁰

Some respondents did not perceive a beating from the guru as an act of violence, but rather a legitimate method to align errant behaviors and remedy the flaws. When further probed on the subject, a significant number of respondents replied that because it is normal for a father to beat his child in Pakistan to put him on right path, the same is true for the paternal guru. Thus, the act could not be termed as violent. That said, it is noted that this study considers socially sanctioned beatings as acts of violence.

7.2.2.4. *Physical Violence by the Griya*

Per normative practices in Pakistan's transgender community, physical abuse by a griya is not only legitimized, but considered a symbol of affection and care. A griya is like a husband.⁴⁰¹ In fact, the act of beating a moorat is considered not violent rather integral to maintaining a harmonious relationship.

The community acknowledges that certain acts of physical abuse do cross the line. In the majority of these reportedly unacceptable instances, the respondents were no longer engaged with the griya in question. In other words, according to the community, beating is context dependent; it is either a sign of affection, or it is grounds for dismissal.

³⁹⁹ Sonia (aqwa), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

⁴⁰⁰ Sanwali (aqwa), interview with the author, April 6, 2015.

⁴⁰¹ The griya-moorat ritual is discussed in Chapter 5.

The majority of respondents explained that physical abuse by a griya is sanctioned as a strategy to control or put brakes on moorat's dance commitments. Respondent Bebo explained further:

My boyfriend did not want me to perform in the functions. Once, he caught me performing in a dance function. Later, he came and hit me. As a result we broke up because of physical violence exercised upon me by the griya. Now I go to dance functions and I am praised because in our community every one praise others. It is much satisfying to earn through hard work rather than get involved in sex activity."⁴⁰²

There are two factors to highlight in Bebo's account. The first is the physical abuse she suffered, and the second is her income from dancing which was praised as an honor in the community. Bebo did not end her relationship because of her griya's violence; rather, she ended it because he attempted to restrict her performing dance. Furthermore, the griya's restrictions were not sanctioned by the community.

Then there is the case of Muskan, who, at the time of this interview, was still active in the relationship, where she got a beating. Incidentally, the word "beating" is deliberately used here instead of the phrase "physical violence," because Muskan did not contextualize the abuse as violent. She explained: "When I would run out of money, he always helped me. When I was sick, he used to bear all my treatment expenses. Once I went outside for begging, he disliked this act and he pounded me with fists and assured me: 'As long as I am here to fulfil all your needs then you do not need to go outside for begging.'"⁴⁰³

Honey, who is well-educated and worked as a teacher in a private school, similarly elaborated that a griya's possessiveness was a sign of his love and affection. These tender emotions consequently granted him the right to beat his moorat. Like Muskan, Honey did not see her griya's actions as violent:

Once we along with other friends went for swimming. One of our friends was making fun with me. My griya got angry and hit my friend badly. I told him that we came here for fun and enjoyment and why he was creating trouble. However, same time I realized that how much he loves me. He was short-tempered. Whenever he saw me with someone, he used to slap me and hit me. This happened very often. He used to remain suspicious about me."⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰³ Muskan (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

⁴⁰⁴ Honey (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

Inflicting self-harm as a strategy of emotional manipulation is employed by both griyas and moorats. During one interview, where both the respondent and her griya were present, I asked the couple to share their history of fighting. The respondent smiled and looked at her griya, pointing to old wound on his head. She elaborated: “Once we had a heavy fight. He was angry and hit me hard. He felt sorrowful and to give vent to his regretful act hit himself with a stone.”⁴⁰⁵ The griya smiled when I inspected his wound. Another respondent chipped in: “They were showing love to each other [All respondents laughed.]...Look at these marks: these are love marks which they had given to each other.”⁴⁰⁶

Self-harm can sometimes take a serious turn, as was the case of Sitara: “I had a relationship with a guy and I loved him a lot. However, he started to have an affair with another moorat. This was heart-breaking for me. We had bad fight on this issue and at the night of the fight, I ate broken pieces of glass. However, he took me to the hospital and I survived.”⁴⁰⁷ Another respondent shared that an acquaintance who ended a physically abusive relationship turned to drugs to ease her sorrow. According to the respondent, the person was now drug-addicted, ill, and alone.

A griya’s physical abuse can follow a moorat even after the relationship has ended. Ashi shared the following account, “Once he came in night, I was standing at doorstep. He caught me forcefully and smashed my head against the wall. Guru awoke at the unusual sound and started shouting for help. Three or four boys who were in the street came and slapped my griya but he managed to escape. Later, he threatened me and I was pretty afraid so, I moved from Lahore to Islamabad.”⁴⁰⁸

Griya-moorat relationships can easily take a dangerous turn. During the three-month period of this study, six murder cases of hijra people were registered in Pakistan. All of the victims had been tortured before being killed. In none of the cases was a murderer identified, but many respondents felt that the griya was the likely suspect. In the griya-moorat relationship, a moorat is perceived as the property of her griya; as such, controlling her life is a griya’s fundamental “right.” Disobeying a griya often results in physically violent consequences.

⁴⁰⁵ Anjali (aqwa), interview with the author, April 23, 2015.

⁴⁰⁶ Khurram (aqwa), interview with the author, April 13, 2015.

⁴⁰⁷ Sitara Sonia (aqwa), interview with the author, April 8, 2015.

⁴⁰⁸ Ashi (narban), interview with the author, April 9, 2015.

The griya-moorat relationship is modeled after the typical husband-wife dynamics found in larger heteronormative Pakistani society. As such, the griya-moorat relationship is generally an unequal one. Moreover, it is often relatively short-lived, largely because the griya will eventually seek a biological wife to bear his children – something a hijra person is unable to do. As such, she is perceived as an inadequate woman, a characterization that often draws further abuse.

7.2.2.5. *Physical Violence from the Client*

The major livelihood patterns of the transgender community are dancing, begging, vadhai, and prostitution.⁴⁰⁹ Nearly all transgender respondents reported incidents of physical violence while working. Sanwali, who worked as a prostitute, shared the following account:

Few days ago, I took a shower and got dressed up for visit to the shrine as I do on every Thursday. I work rest of the weeks except on Thursday. Once, on my return from the shrine, six boys on bikes obstructed me, one of them insisted to have sex with him. However, it was against my routine therefore, I refused. My refusal made him angry and he slapped me. His companions took him away and tried to calm him down. All other ‘she-males’ who had been living in the same building gathered at once, to rescue me.⁴¹⁰

Another shared a similar experience when a drunk client insisted on sex:

Drunk people come on dera [commune] and misbehave with us. Few days back, one boy came and entered in my room. I was getting ready for a function and was in hurry and had not any intention to entertain client for sex. He forced his way into the room, he insisted on having sex. I refused straight away and told him that I had to go to a dancing function. He became persistent and locked the door. He undressed himself and asked me to hug him. I was frightened and unable to go out. He was trying to hit me as well. I was scared and helpless. Suddenly my brother [of a fictive kinship] rushed in, and I asked to throw him out. Without the help of my brother, I was unable to secure myself.⁴¹¹

Many clients see hijra people as little more than sex objects.⁴¹² Rape can and does occur. The unequal power balance between a client and a transgender person makes the latter vulnerable. Respect, dignity, and consent are often carries no importance for the client, and victims adopt a number of coping strategies in response. Some navigate the situation through a particular *self-realization*: they believe that because they are involved in prostitution, they do not have the right

⁴⁰⁹ See chapter six for the livelihood strategies of hijra people.

⁴¹⁰ Sanwali (aqwa), interview with the author, April 6, 2015.

⁴¹¹ Honey (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

⁴¹² See chapter four for detail about a transgender person as a sex object.

to resist any sexual advances. Often, a transgender person in this position will give in instead of risking losing a client. In other words, the importance is seemingly placed on earning money rather than resisting rape. On the other hand, a significant number of respondents negatively characterized violent behavior of clients. In fact, the behavior was so maligned that, in many cases, it had to be fought off collectively.

In general, transgender persons live in group settings to mitigate any potentially violent situations; unfortunately, the strategy is not always successful. The community-wide prevalence of client-helmed violence means that being sexually violated has become a norm for transgender prostitutes in Pakistan.

7.2.2.6. Physical Violence at Dance Functions

During the course of this study, I had the opportunity to attend a wedding at which members of Guru Safdari's dera performed. In addition to running her own dera, Guru Safdari also worked as a cook for the local police force. That evening, her group comprised one narban hijra and four aqwa hijra persons. The night's first performer was a dancer with a masculine appearance while subsequent acts incorporated feminine dancers. The performers wore revealing clothing and heavy make-up: in other words, not standard wear for women in Pakistan.

Throughout the evening, many wedding guests repeatedly attempted to touch the performers, some of them targeting the breasts and buttocks. This behavior eventually earned one offender a slap in the face and a torn shirt from a dancer. A brief struggle ensued, but an elderly hijra and the guru soon intervened on behalf of the dancer. Shortly thereafter, the wedding planner escorted the man away from the dance floor.

As the evening lingered on, the style of dance generally grew more provocative. One dancer laid down in an elderly man's lap,⁴¹³ which the event organizer encouraged her to do again. She repeatedly obliged his request, which earned her a decent pay-out for the evening.

⁴¹³ In Pakistan, revealing the body and laying in someone's lap is interpreted as vulgar and symbolizes an invitation for sex.

Sexual harassment and sexual assault are not unusual occurrences at dance functions such as this one. Performers are often fondled or coerced into sex, and a rejection of such advances increases the dancer's state of vulnerability. Consider the following account from Sitara:

Once after function, the organizer gave me a separate room for rest. However, already there was a man in the room. He started to tease me as I was close to sleep. He was interested in carrying out dirty talk. He also asked me to hold his dick. He wanted a word of appreciation for his cock. I told him repeatedly that I had come over for dance function not for sex. Nevertheless, when I saw his undesirable attitude, I started fighting to secure myself from his advancements. He scolded me and threatened to shoot me. He dragged me from hair. I continued to resist against his advancement and scratched his face with my nails. Look at this scratch. [She pointed to a scar.] He has bitten me hard here and wounded me. Later, on my shouting screaming, people and other transgender gathered and they rescued me. I did not want further problems. Therefore, I along with other transgender left the place in the mid of the night. In fact, I was frightened and felt my life in danger⁴¹⁴

Sitara's account illustrates an alarming trend: that resistance against rape can engender additional violence from perpetrators. As such, some transgender dancers do not resist. Per one respondent, "On functions, many mishaps occur like, if, someone slap us, we slap him back, and situation becomes heated and turns into a brawl. In order to avoid a scuffle, most of the transgender people do not resist against violent behaviors at the functions and fulfil demands of the people."⁴¹⁵

When transgender dancers attend these functions, it is a standard practice that they inform their guru of their whereabouts. As such, the guru can dispatch immediate help if the need arises.

⁴¹⁴ Sitara (aqwa), interview with the author, April 8, 2015.

⁴¹⁵ Honey (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

7.3.1. Sexual Violence

Sexual violence often plagues a transgender person throughout her life. During childhood, abusers include immediate family members, other relatives, peers, and teachers. As adults, sexual abuse can come from the police, healthcare providers, and clients.⁴¹⁶

The World Health Organization (2013) defines sexual violence as:

Any act through which people are sexually harassed, “being physically forced or psychologically intimidated to engage in sex or subjected to sexual acts against one’s will (e.g. undesired touching, oral, anal or vaginal penetration with penis or with an object) or that one finds degrading or humiliating.” Sexual violence also includes any kind of rape by a person or a group of people. (World Health Organization 2013, 23)

7.3.1.1. Sexual Violence in the Family

The gender-variant child who experiences sexual assault will likely know her violator(s). These assailants exploit a sense of familiarity and the child’s trust in order to take advantage of her. Such was the case for Shehzadi, who shared her experience in the following words:

At that time, I was 14-year-old. In the beginning, my older male cousin was very kind towards me. He used to talk with me in friendly manner, never questioned my feminine gender presentation. Then one day, he took me to his friend’s house and offered me a drink which was alcohol. I could not recognize that bitter taste. When I complained it is not good, then he consoled me with kind words and said, ‘it is safe, and nothing will happen’. His friends were there as well. After a few moments, I felt dizzy and then they sexually abused me.⁴¹⁷

Another respondent also recalled an abusive cousin who regularly visited her home and slept in her room. She was a teenager and he was a grown up man. One night, he sexually abused her, which set off a pattern of subsequent assaults. Sometimes, there were multiple perpetrators:

⁴¹⁶ In Pakistan, the reason for sexual violence toward transgender people is two-fold: (a) the vulnerability of performing the feminine gender, and (b) a public knowledge of the victim’s sexual inclination towards males. A low socioeconomic status and engaging in the fields of prostitution, begging, and/or dance also increase vulnerability (See chapter four and six).

⁴¹⁷ Shehzadi (aqwa), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

When I was fifteen, my elder male cousin had sex with me. At the time, my cousin was around 24-years-old. He had observed my feminine gender and was kidding with me about my habits. He was kind towards me and got closer emotionally. One day he stayed at our home and tried to sleep with me. I resisted a lot but he forcibly slept with me. My mother asked me to sleep with him. ‘It’s okay; he is your cousin.’ At night, he started doing sex. Later one he gathered other cousin and invited me at his home. I was not aware of their plan. They abused sexually and gave me money. Gradually, it became their routine but the time I could not do anything except to avoid them.⁴¹⁸

In Pakistan, male relatives are generally not perceived as harmful company for a gender-variant child, even if the assumption is sometimes false. Moreover, the child’s visibly feminine qualities make her vulnerable to the advances of a sexual predator, especially one who is familiar to her.

7.3.1.2. Sexual Violence in the School

Identifying and labeling a gender-variant child as “hijra” usually attracts the attention of other students. This is particularly true in the case of older male peers. What comes to the minds of cisgender students when they observe gender-variance in a peer? Why do other students label a gender-variant child as transgender?⁴¹⁹ Why are older male students particularly drawn to making friendships with their gender-variant peers?

From the input of this study’s transgender respondents, I contextualized the above questions with reference to the expression of gender-variance. This expression functions as a “symbol” to other students – a socio-cultural symbol embedded into the practices of heteronormative Pakistani society. In other words, the performance of gender is interpreted in a way so as to facilitate the labeling of a gender-variant child as transgender.

Male peers often sexualize the identity of a gender-variant student, a process that makes the latter a target for sexual abuse and violence. Intrinsic to this sexualized perception is an erotic relationship, one in which the male student sees his own role as governed by the sexuality and masculinity embodied into the power relation. He characterizes the gender-variant child, on the other hand, as the passive (penetrated) partner in a homosexual relationship.

One of the hijra respondents stated that, as a child, she “usually had kisses and held the *hekam* [penises]” of boys. She continued, “I did first sex in the bathroom of school at the age of eleven

⁴¹⁸ Mehroz (aqwa), interview with the author, April 14, 2015.

⁴¹⁹ The practice of labeling a gender-variant children as “hijra” is discussed in Chapter 4.

years, while another boy was fifteen-years-old.”⁴²⁰ A transgender community advocate further explained that “in the schools, gender-variant children face problem of sexual abuse by the other fellows. If a child sits on the front desk, then children of back desk try to touch her ass.”⁴²¹ Uzma Yaqoob, an activist with the Forum for Dignity Initiatives (FDI), confirmed that “sexual abuse in educational institutes is very common.”⁴²²

If an abusive peer is not successful in assaulting a gender-variant student in the school building itself, he may stalk her coming to or going from the facility. This is particularly true in rural areas, where the distance between the school and the home is often considerably greater than it is in urban areas. Sitara elaborated further:

“I was coming back from the school. On the way to home, some of the elder boys of my school were coming behind me. They caught me near the sugar cane crops and asked for having sex. I was afraid and resisted against sexual abuse. However, they were older than me and they were three in numbers. Therefore, I was not able to do anything. They fucked me with cruelty. I was injured and bled. .”⁴²³

Gender-variant children are at risk of sexual abuse and assault in the education system, which is itself a social institution that promotes heteronormativity. As such, deviance from the gender binary system enjoys little to no support.

7.3.1.3. Sexual Violence from the Teacher

Sexual abuse is one of the most traumatic forms of violence that a gender-variant child can experience (or indeed that any child can experience). A student’s gender-variance can be a draw for a teacher’s sexual predation. Yaqoob elaborated further, “If we talk about schoolteacher’s behaviors towards gender-variant students, then transgender women reported that the first time in their life they were abused [was] by their teacher. As they were sent to boys’ school, and after realizing reality [the child’s own gender-variant behavior], teachers did rape. In most of the cases, this happens when they are in sixth or seventh grades.”⁴²⁴

⁴²⁰ Rimal (aqwa), interview with the author, May 10, 2015.

⁴²¹ Nadeem Kashish (aqwa, SAFFAR), interview with the author, April 11, 2015

⁴²² Uzma Yaqoob (FDI), interview with the author, April 13 2015.

⁴²³ Sitara (aqwa), interview with the author, April 8, 2015.

⁴²⁴ Uzma Yaqoob (FDI), interview with the author, April 13, 2015.

Sanwali shared an account of sexual assault so detrimental that she discontinued any further educational pursuits:

He [teacher] asked me to hold his penis, and asked me for masturbation which followed by ejaculation. I asked him that I never have had sexual experience before, and if my family came to know about sexual relations with you then, they will not spare you. The teacher got little scared after hearing my warning. After having oral sex and discharge, the teacher allowed me to go home. Since then, I quitted school. When my family asked about the reason of leaving the school. I told them that ‘I do not want to continue studies anymore rather I am interested in work.’”⁴²⁵

Clearly, Sanwali’s teacher sexually assaulted her. As such, both perpetrator and victim had a fear of the child’s family. In the teacher’s case, this fear prevented him from having intercourse with Sanwali – he instead forced her to perform fellatio and masturbated in her present. Sanwali, on the other hand, was afraid of inciting her family’s blame.

Indeed, many gender-variant children do not divulge their sexual assault to their families. According to respondents, this is largely because they are afraid that their feminine identities will be the scapegoated for the crimes perpetrated against them. To cope with this situation, many juvenile victims either remain quiet or avoid future confrontations with the assaulter. Sanwali adopted these strategies and was successful to an extent.

Some teachers exploit the academic grading system to invite sexual favors from gender-variant students. Roshni explains, “My English teacher in college sexually abused me in exchange for providing higher marks in the subject.”⁴²⁶ It should also be noted that in none of the aforementioned scenarios was the assailant a woman. For the transgender child with a female teacher, school can be a markedly different experience:

Female teachers were well aware of my feeling and type. My class teacher never tried to abuse me, and even in that school my female class fellows were nice towards me. They neither questioned about my identity nor humiliated me. When I moved to boys’ school, then I felt that my class teacher was inclined towards me and used to touch my body. . I felt uncomfortable. One of the teachers in school went to the extent of expressing his love towards me. I was stupid and could not understand his intention. Ultimately, his likeliness came out in the form of sex and my teacher fucked me. He became used to do sex with me

⁴²⁵ Sanwali (aqwa), interview with the author, April 6, 2015.

⁴²⁶ Roshni (aqwa), interview with the author, April 9, 2015.

on a daily basis. Some of the boys noticed about our sexual relations and asked me for sex too. Ultimately, it became difficult for me to continue my education in that school.⁴²⁷

Another respondent in favor of female teachers shared the following: “My female teacher used to care for me, and she even asked my parents if she can look after my mental and physical growth.”⁴²⁸

According to respondents, there is a clear behavioral difference between a female teacher and a male teacher, particular as it relates to gender-variance. A female teacher is more likely to accept a gender-variant child’s identity without humiliating her, a factor that creates a safe and trusted environment for the student. A female teacher is also less likely to perceive a gender-variant child as a sex object. On the other hand, a significant number of respondents reportedly left school because they felt unsafe in the presence of a sexually abusive male teacher.

Nevertheless, this study does not generalize that all male teachers are sexually abusive. A number of respondents indeed appreciated their former male teachers. Sonia said: “I liked teaching style of my class teacher and his way of caring for me.”⁴²⁹ In the same vein, Muskan shared, “my class teacher made me prefect of the class and made me feel that I can perform better. Therefore, I had started to work hard and improved my performance.”⁴³⁰

In fact, some teachers, both male and female, made considerable efforts to safeguard gender-variant students from harassment. Sometimes this protection occurred directly in the classroom, where a teacher “changed the seating of the gender-variant child so as to secure them from the sexual abuse.”⁴³¹ Honey’s teacher afforded her protection that extended outside of the classroom, though the protective measure was later corrupted by peers. Honey shared “when I reported about the sexual molestation from the fellow students, then teacher had asked me to leave school fifteen minutes before the end of the school working hours. But students started to spread rumors that the teacher had an affair with me, therefore, he was protecting me and giving special favors.”⁴³²

⁴²⁷ Rimal (aqwa), interview with the author, May 10, 2015.

⁴²⁸ Khurram (aqwa), interview with the author, April 13, 2015.

⁴²⁹ Sonia (aqwa), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

⁴³⁰ Muskan (aqwa), interview with the author, April 16, 2015.

⁴³¹ Nadeem Kashish (aqwa, SAFFAR), interview with the author, April 11, 2015.

⁴³² Honey (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

The rape of a gender-variant child can have a number of deleterious and lasting effects. Yaqoob shared that the educational status of a sexually assaulted transgender child is often compromised in the long-run. She added, “Our research on tracking the status of transgender youth, and factors associated in terms of getting education, revealed that the transgender youth literacy rate is declining because mostly rape cases are faced in schools. This is the main reason why gender-variant students don’t want to continue their education.”⁴³³

Indeed, gender-nonconforming students remain vulnerable to sexual violence, verbal abuse, and physical assault in Pakistan’s education system. These ills stem from a socially-constructed perception of the transgender identity. As such, transgender children face a double-vulnerability: the first is in association with the status of being gender-variant, and the second is associated with the presumption that the child is a sex object. As a result, many gender-variant children discontinue their studies.

7.3.1.4. Sexual Violence in Healthcare

In Pakistan, transgender persons are vulnerable to sexual abuse in the healthcare system. In fact, a significant number of respondents reported being violated by medical providers. Guru Safdari of Bari Imam shared, “I went to the doctor here in Bari Imam. I asked the doctor for medicine. He did my check up and said that he will give me an injection. He took me to the other observation room and asked me to take off shalwar, as this injection should be injected into the hip. I did so. However, after the injection he started to rub my ass and finally sexually abused me.”⁴³⁴

Community activist Uzma Yaqoob shared a similar account, also emphasizing the frequency of these incidents:

Once a moorat told me that she was going to see her mother in hospital. Doctor appreciated her attitude of care towards her mother. The doctor asked her to meet before leaving. When she went to the doctor’s room, the doctor locked his room and without consent of the hijra person, he did sex with her. My question to that moorat was: ‘Why did you not shout?’ She said: ‘Who would have listened to me? If I would complain, people would say that you are immoral creature and attracted him and you are guilty.’”⁴³⁵

⁴³³ Uzma Yaqoob (FDI), interview with the author, April 12, 2015.

⁴³⁴ Guru Safdari (Bari Imam), interview with the author, May 18, 2015.

⁴³⁵ Uzma Yaqoob (FDI), interview with the author, April 13, 2015.

Many transgender people do not resist unwanted sexual advances because they perceive themselves as faulty outcasts. In any case, many believe that complaining would not be the best remedy that would safeguard them; instead, they believed they would be blamed. As with similar cases, sexual assaults by healthcare providers often fall to silence.

Yaqoob emphasized that transgender people with a better socio-economic standing are less likely to experience sexual abuse in healthcare.⁴³⁶ Additionally, there are more effective mechanisms in place for them to report abuses.

7.3.1.5. Sexual Violence in the Workplace

Transgender persons often look for work outside of the community in order to integrate into the larger social structure. They may seek positions in domestic help or retail assistance, but in any case, the prejudice and stigma attached to the transgender identity follow them. A significant number of respondents reported histories of abuse in the workplace. Shehzadi, for instance, shared the following account: “I was doing cooking job in a house. The owner’s son kept a wicked eye on me. He insisted me for sex. I used to refuse him. However, once he got a chance to give me drugs and then sexually abused me. I reported this incident of sexual abuse to his father. The father of the boy compensated the act of his son through giving me money. I further worked there for a month and then left the job.”⁴³⁷

Sometimes a transgender person is given a job solely for the purpose of sexual exploitation. For example, one respondent was offered a job by a friend who owned a shop. The respondent was instructed to work partly in the basement storeroom and partly on the sales floor. During her tenure with her friend’s company, the respondent was repeatedly violated by the shop owner.

Fortunately, this individual was able to leave the abusive situation: “She informed administration of the factory, where a friend of her brother was also employed. He helped her and switched her duty from store room to the administration under his supervision.”⁴³⁸ In other words,

⁴³⁶ “If you pick health issue, it’s not about facilities providing, it is about family background that where transgender coming. If transgender is coming from elite class, then situation will be different, economically too, as obviously everything revolves around economics. If TG is coming from very low income group, and little hospitable too, then you will find a different situation which is humiliating most of time” (Uzma Yaqoob [FDI], interview with the author, April 13, 2015).

⁴³⁷ Shehzadi (aqwa), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

⁴³⁸ Honey (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

those who are well-connected usually have more options to mitigate abuse in the workplace and remain safe.

7.3.1.6. *The Role of the Guru in Sexual Violence*

Uzma Yaqoob is critical of the guru-chela system, maintaining that gurus misuse their power to exploit their chelas. For hijra people “main exploitation is done by the gurus. Transgender persons who remain safe from sexual abuse within their families, face sexual abuse and are raped because of guru’s involvement in it after they join hijra community.”⁴³⁹ Another respondent, Bebo, observed the same:

I was thirteen- or fourteen-year-old by the time when I had first sex at the dera. This was consensual sex. My other transgender friends told me about sex work. They also informed me about the guru’s demand from the chelas to earn money through prostitution. In hijra community, they call it *seal khoolna* [to lose one’s virginity]. Hence, I had first sex of my life at dera. Guru received money from the client and gave me a share from the money.⁴⁴⁰

Though Bebo perceived the above sexual experience as a consensual one, her underage status tells a different story. Teenaged chelas are regularly sexually exploited by their gurus for financial gain. Furthermore, a chela’s socialization influences her to accept the practice as normative. This first sexual encounter usually marks her entrance into prostitution.

Another respondent, Sonia, shared a similar story of exploitation, but in her case, she was not aware of what awaited her. Neither was she aware that her guru had already collected an associated fee. She visibly exhibited anger while recounting the experience, believing that her own guru organized and profited from her gang rape:

Once my guru asked me to accompany her for a dancing function. We were three transgender persons along with our guru. The function was in a village, far away from Rawalpindi. This was a private dance party. We danced all the night. At the end of the dancing function, guru demanded from us to do sex with the organizer’s friend. We were not prepared for the sex as we came with the intention to dance. However, because of the pressure of guru and fear of the drunk people we did sex. This was an unpleasant incident and since then I have declined to trust my guru.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁹ Uzma Yaqoob (FDI), interview with the author, April 13, 2015.

⁴⁴⁰ Bebo (aqwa), interview with the author, April 16, 2015.

⁴⁴¹ Sonia (aqwa), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

In the hijra community, sexual exploitation can come from any authoritative figure. For example, the mother produced in the mother-making ritual⁴⁴² can be as exploitative as a guru:

If I tell you the truth, many asked me to become her daughter, but I think personally that I will perform these *rasam* (ritual) when I will feel the true love of particular relation. For example, if I make mother, so she should exhibit true love and care for me. Many mothers ask their daughters to do sex etc., so I do not like it.⁴⁴³

7.3.1.7. *Sexual Violence at Dance Functions*

To an audience at a hijra-sponsored performance, a transgender person is a dancer, a prostitute, and an entertainer. These stereotypes immoral acts function to perpetuate the transgender performer's vulnerability. For example, many attendees attempt to caress their bodies against dancers or otherwise fondle them. This behavior is perceived to be part and parcel of the performance. Sonia explained, "People ask me to kiss them, hug them, and cuddle. They try to touch me but I always ignored them."⁴⁴⁴

Some male audience are more aggressive and try to rape dancers. A long-time community advocate revealed that one dancer had been raped by an astonishing twenty men. In this regard he said, "Once a hijra person told me that around twenty people raped her in the dancing function. They kicked, punched, and slapped her. Throughout the incident, she cried, moaned and begged them to leave her alone. However, in response to her implore, abusers kept yelling: 'What problems you have? You are a hijra. You do not need to cry rather just enjoy the sex. We will give you money as well.'"⁴⁴⁵

The dignity, self-respect, and self-esteem of a transgender person are often concomitantly violated when she is sexually assaulted. Her "being" of human values is negated. In the above account, the victim was treated as a non-human object in the name of sexual pleasure. She was not even permitted to cry. Some performers do try to resist unwanted sexual advances of function attendees, even if it is not always possible. Some offenders become violent when refused: "People do misbehave and become violent to the extent that they tear our dresses. They beat us and demand

⁴⁴² See chapter five for the mother-making ritual.

⁴⁴³ Sitara (aqwa), interview with the author, April 8, 2015.

⁴⁴⁴ Sonia (aqwa), interview with the author, April 7, 2015.

⁴⁴⁵ Tanzeel (NGO representative and hijra community advocate), interview with the author, April 17, 2015.

sex from us.”⁴⁴⁶ Ashi elaborated further, “I went on a function in Sahiwal. After the function, a drunk boy asked me to have sex with him. He took me along himself in different homes, but he did not find any place. I was drunk too but luckily found a taxi and left that place. I do not know what happened after me.”⁴⁴⁷

Per the above reports, sexual abuse during the performance in a function is not only common, but guaranteed. Other than the support network offered by their gurus, transgender victims largely do not have a mechanism in place to counter these incidents. In fact, sexual violations are considered normative and integral to dance. As such, a significant number of victims do not resist or report these acts.

7.4.1. Economic Violence

Economic violence occurs when one group exercises power and control over another group for the sake of economic objectives (Rutherford, Zwi, and Grove 2007, 677; WHO 2002, 5). Purveyors of economic violence acquire control through restricting access to money. For the disadvantaged, options for livelihood revolve around patterns determined by the abuser. The economic abuser may also try to influence the victim in her/his expenditures (United Nations Fund for Women [UNIFEM] 1999, cited in Fawole 2008).

The relationship between a guru and a chela exemplifies much of the above criteria. A guru socializes her chela to adhere to the rules and regulation of the hijra community. In this way, she maintains economic control over the life of her chelas.

7.4.1.1. *Economic Contraventions and Violence from the Guru*

A guru is at the center of power in the hijra community. Her relationship with the chela is not only the basic unit of social organization, but also serves as a unit of economic organization. In the guru-chela relationship, the guru is always the primary economic beneficiary. She derives her financial gains through imposing punishment fines, claiming shares from her disciples’ salaries, and receiving “respect” money (a chela’s monetary demonstration of reverence).⁴⁴⁸ One respondent explained further, “everyone gives money to guru happily. If we earn Rs. 10,000

⁴⁴⁶ Muskan (aqwa), interview with the author, April 16, 2015.

⁴⁴⁷ Ashi (narban), interview with the author, April 9, 2015.

⁴⁴⁸ See chapter six for further details of the hijra community’s power structure.

[US\$100], guru will take Rs. 3000 [US\$30]. The guru's share becomes double if the money is earned in a function booked by guru, the remaining amount is shared equally among chelas who participated in the function."⁴⁴⁹

The dera (commune) adopts a particular allocation strategy to divide the chelas' incoming salaries. This strategy is adapted from the community's seminal *Mai Nandi* myth.⁴⁵⁰ According to tradition, 50% of total earnings goes to the guru, 25% goes to the dera, and the remaining 25% goes to the chela or group of chelas who earned the money. This allocation strategy is only employed if the guru booked the function or if a chela lives at the dera.

When a chela moves away from the dera, she is still expected to give a share of her income to her guru. In this case, however, she has more liberty in deciding what to pay. Honey explained further, "if we do have proper function, and earn Rs. 10,000-15,000 [US\$100-150], then we give at least Rs. 1,000 to guru as a respect. This money is given to keep smooth relations with the guru as we know that in case of any emergency and problem, the guru would be the only person who would support us."⁴⁵¹

According to advocate Yaqoob, some gurus encourage their chelas to undergo castration so that they may appear more feminine. Indeed, the more feminine a chela looks, the more lucrative she will be. Yaqoob explained further:

Let me tell you one thing. A narban moorat [a castrated hijra] never ever become the narban. This is guru's pressure [to] compel chela for the castration operation because it causes hormonal changes, and chela gives more feminine look which is symbol of beauty. It increase chances for earning more money. From this earning, a major share goes to the guru. Most of the gurus are not concerned about the side effects of the castration operation and do not take proper medical care. In case the chela suffers from any infection due to castration operation, then they try self-remedy.⁴⁵²

Castration is an irreversible operation. This research indicates that in many cases, narban (castrated) hijra people suffer from psychological depression, guilt, stress, and health problems

⁴⁴⁹ Muskan (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

⁴⁵⁰ See chapters three and six for *Mai Nandi* myth.

⁴⁵¹ Honey (Aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

⁴⁵² Uzma Yaqoob (FDI), interview with the author, April 13, 2015.

after the procedure. Furthermore, as Yaqoob explained, gurus often eschew medically-sanctioned options to heal the wound and instead employ traditional remedies.

The policies which regulate functioning of hijra community are also a vital source of economic violence. For example switching of one guru to another is also bound to payment of the money to the previous guru. During the course of this research, one respondent expressed a desire to switch gurus, a process that comes with financial retributions. She participated in the guru-switching ritual, which marked not only the switch but also celebrated the initiation of her new guru-chela relationship. To officially complete the ceremony, the respondent had to pay the requisite Rs. 16,000 [US\$160] fee, which goes to the old guru.

Gurus may impose financial punishments on chelas who are perceived to exhibit errant behavior. A significant number of respondents reported having received numerous financial citations since joining the community. This fine is a legitimized disciplinary method.

A guru has multiple avenues through which to economically control the lives of her chelas. The unequal power distribution intrinsic to the community structure allows the guru to increase her earnings in the names of respect, support, punishment, protection, and the anatomical restructuring (castration) of her chelas.

7.4.1.2. Economic Violence from the Police

This study contextualizes institutional theft and bribery as economic violence. In Pakistan, many transgender people earn money through prostitution, even though the profession is not legal. Many police officers take advantage of prostitution's illegality to financially benefit themselves. One respondent explained, "Police once stopped me, and snatched all the money. I told him that I am going to see my mother, but they did not hear me and also verbally abused me."⁴⁵³ Another revealed: "They take all the money whether it's Rs. 1,000, Rs. 2000 [US \$ 10 - 20], or more."⁴⁵⁴ Yet another insisted, "Yes, even police officers twice snatched money amounting to around Rs. 2,000-3,000 from me. Once from Karachi Company and once from F -10, Islamabad."⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵³ Honey (aqwa), interview with the author, April 10, 2015.

⁴⁵⁴ Muskan (aqwa), interview with the author, April 16, 2015.

⁴⁵⁵ Khurram (aqwa), interview with the author, April 13, 2015.

Regarding the matter of institutional theft (or “money-snatching,” as it is locally described), advocate and guru Babbli Malik shared the following: “Basically after function, police extort money from us. They consider their share in the function’s earning.”⁴⁵⁶ Guru Safdari disapproves this practice and laments that police should refrain from snatching our hard earned income.”⁴⁵⁷

Transgender persons earning money through prostitution and dancing are considered social outcasts. Their lower standing perpetuates their marginalization and leads to their exploitation. The transgender persons find it almost impossible to safeguard themselves from harassment when confronted with law enforcement agencies. Many try to resolve the issue on the spot most often through bribing the officials.

One respondent, Muskan, confronted the police officers who harassed her: “Police already snatched money from me and were still misbehaving. I started to feel annoyed, and in rage I threatened them and said: ‘I will complain to your boss in the morning. I will make sure you are without police uniform from tomorrow.’”⁴⁵⁸ Nevertheless, Muskan is an exception. Most transgender people do not feel empowered enough, and many simply avoid the police whenever possible.

This study does not generalize all police officers as violent. Indeed, a significant number of respondents had favorable views of the police. One reported, “ten percent (10%) of the police mainly fall in abusive category. It means ninety percent (90%) of the police officials were not involved in snatching money or abusing hijra people.”⁴⁵⁹ Another shared, “some of the policemen behaved well with khwajasira [hijra person].”⁴⁶⁰

Some respondents asserted that a police officer’s attitude depended on his/her rank in the force. Yaqoob elaborated further:

There are two categories of police officials. Those who humiliate and abuse them physically and sexually, and that behavior is common in low-ranked police officials like constable, *moharer* [the person who files the report] and S.H.O. However, transgender

⁴⁵⁶ Babbli Malik (guru, activist, and aqwa, Rawalpindi community), interview with the author, April 12, 2015

⁴⁵⁷ Guru Safdari (Bari Imam), interview with the author, May 18, 2015.

⁴⁵⁸ Muskan (aqwa), interview with the author, April 16, 2015.

⁴⁵⁹ Sana (Aqwa), interview with the author, May, 12, 2015.

⁴⁶⁰ Sanwali (Aqwa), interview with the author, date April 6, 2015.

persons are happy with D.S.P and other higher ranked officers, since hijra people directly get a chance to talk with them. They support hijra community and register transgender people's complaints.⁴⁶¹

Yaqoob also asserted that many police officers treat transgender people better if the latter is perceived to have a high socio-economic standing: "Concerning treatment of the police towards hijra people, there are two stories. If hijra people coming from better socio-economic background they will be treated differently as compared to the rest of hijra groups."⁴⁶² Another respondent shared that the frequency of police violence may vary with city size. In this regards, Tanzeel added, "In big cities, hijra people are in contacts with influential people. Therefore, they get justice. However, in small cities, the situation is worst. In small cities hijra people do not resist and take violence and discrimination as a routine matter in their lives."⁴⁶³

Many respondents do not question police authority: "The police officials ask questions. It's their duty. We tell them that we are coming from functions or wherever we are going. We frankly respond to their inquiry."⁴⁶⁴ By extension, many hijra people also consider dera surveillance visits as standard practice. For example, a well-known transgender brothel in Rawalpindi⁴⁶⁵ sees frequent police inspections, but residents there do not feel threatened by the visits:

Every day in the evening, police comes. They know well that its prostitution area. They know the exact timings of client visiting times , so they come at that time. The police does not disturb people who sit with patience and talk with us. . However, the police captures those who are using drugs, medicine over-the-counter drugs, or found drunk. Then police takes them in their custody [and] entertains our complains against drunk people.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶¹ Uzma Yaqoob (FDI), interview with the author, April 13, 2015.

⁴⁶² Ibid.

⁴⁶³ Tanzeel (NGO representative and hijra community advocate), interview with the author, April 17, 2015.

⁴⁶⁴ Mehroz (aqwa), interview with the author, April 6, 2015.

⁴⁶⁵ This brothel is a double-story building: the ground floor comprises various shops, and the second floor is the residence of many transgender people. Every person there has a room; each room is furnished with a bed, carpet, cupboard, fan, and necessary utensils. Feminine clothes hang from the wall; makeup kits are on small tables. This building has a notorious reputation, and as such, many people avoid it. That said, it is well-known to people who engage with the hijra community. Many residents sleep all day and stay awake at night. I visited around 14:00, and at that time, everyone was just waking up.

⁴⁶⁶ Sanwali (aqwa), interview with the author, April 6, 2015.

This respondent furthermore asserted that some police officials were clients: “Many policemen are our customers as well. They come, do sex, and give us money, and go away. But, some are like our brothers too.”⁴⁶⁷

Though violence from law enforcement agencies has generally receded in recent years, there is still more work to be done. In fact, one community activist shared that “violence from police is a great problem and hijra people feel insecure and harassed.”⁴⁶⁸ This sentiment was echoed by another respondent who asked, “Why police do violence against us and not with all? Are we not humans?”⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ Tanzeel (NGO representative and hijra community advocate), interview with the author, April 17, 2015.

⁴⁶⁹ Mehak (narban), interview with the author, April 12, 2015.

7.5. Discussion

Transgender people face discrimination and violence on a regular basis. Discrimination is embodied in practices from bullying and name-calling to sexual harassment and abuse. In Pakistan, members of the transgender community are also regularly denied housing, employment, and healthcare services. Some are disowned by their families and unlawfully stopped by the police (Bazargan and Galvan 2012). The school, domestic sphere, job market, religious community, and workplace are all spaces of discrimination against them (Moolchaem et al. 2015, 161). Similarly, they often face verbal, psychological, and physical violence (Chandra 2017, 882; Rajkumar 2016). Even her own community can bring violence into the life of a transgender person (Moolchaem et al. 2015, 161). This is particularly true in South Asia, where the community is based on an unyielding hierarchical structure and the guru-chela relationship is the basic unit of social and economic organization. In this unequal power distribution, a chela is vulnerable to human rights violations even by her guru.

For a transgender person in Pakistan, violence often starts during childhood (Moolchaem et al. 2015, 144, cited in Khan 2009) and continues throughout her life. As a consequence, the individual becomes vulnerable to institutional mistreatment in the education system, the economic structure, and the healthcare industry (Lombardia et al. 2001, 97).

This discussion is divided into two parts. The first part discusses how, where, and what kind of human rights violations occur in the transgender community. Further subdivisions reflect the context of *social spaces* (family, school, and workplace) and the perspective of a given perpetrator (griya, guru and police).

The second part of this discussion explores the articles from Pakistan's constitution that criminalize the transgender identity while simultaneously ensuring its fundamental rights. It also examines current legislative developments and policies that are advantageous for the transgender community of Pakistan.

7.5.1. Discrimination and Violence in the Family

This research indicates that the families of gender-variant children in Pakistan often feel a sense of shame. On the whole, transgender children are treated differently than their cisgender counterparts. Laxmennaryan Tripathi's (2015) herself a famous social activist holding identity of a hijra, in her autobiography shows that transgender persons are bullied and labeled as girlish since childhood. Family members often behave hysterically upon first seeing the gender-variant child in feminine clothing; in fact, many desire to transform the child's gender identity from feminine to masculine (Tripathi 2015, 165-166). In the family sphere, a son's identification as transgender is considered a sign of disrespect for the family. Many transgender persons are not welcomed at home, particularly while wearing women's attire (Nanda 1999, 87, 89).⁴⁷⁰ According to Tripathi (2015), a Pakistani family's characterization of a male child's gender-nonconformity is akin to experiencing a death in the family (Tripathi 2015, 47). If the transgender person has a sister, then her well-being is also a concern for the parents, as it is presumed that her in-laws will likely give her grief about her sibling (Tripathi 2015, 59-60, 69, 139).

The family idealizes the transgender person as a son (Tripathi 2015, 122). They may even try to obscure her identity. In one of the country's recent transgender murder cases, the victim's family identified and claimed the body specifically as a male one. The family furthermore denied murdered hijra's affiliation with the hijra community.

Transgender persons distance themselves from their families of orientation so as not to compromise the family's social status or respect (See UNDP and USAID 2014b). In fact, a transgender individual is not likely to reveal her identity in her original city, opting instead to move to an entirely different location to express herself. Some gender-variant people re-adopt masculine identities if they visit their families of orientation. In fact, many transgender people remain in a constant state of gender-identity flux, a trend that is especially true for aqwa hijras.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁷⁰ It is shameful for many families to have a third gender or transgender child (Saddique et al. 2017, 9051).

⁴⁷¹ This identity negotiation is part of a strategy to cope with rejection from the family (Rajkumar 2016, 21).

One study found that 57% of transgender people in the US were rejected by their families, and every fourth transgender person faced domestic violence by a family member: i.e., beating, insulting, cursing, and blaming (Grant et al. 2011, 88). Many transgender youth are barred from seeing their friends (UNDP and USAID 2014c). Moreover, families often threaten to disown gender-variant kin, citing norm violations, effeminate behavior, and even long hair as offenses. Family rejection leads to a greater likelihood of prostitution, HIV, homelessness, and suicide (Grant et al. 2011, 88; UNDP and USAID 2014c; UNDP 2016, UNPF 2015). Those who experience familial acceptance, on the other hand, fare much better (Grant et al. 2011, 88).

To perpetuate the image of a masculine identity, many Pakistani families ask their transgender kin to (heteronormatively) marry and have children (see also UNDP and USAID 2014a; Khan et al. 2009, 445). Needless to say, these marriages often end in divorce. A significant number of aqwa hijras are active husbands and fathers. These individuals negotiate between a masculine role in the domestic sphere and a feminine role in the hijra community.

7.5.1.1. Discrimination and Violence in Schools

This study discusses violence and discrimination in the school in three aspects: (a) male peers as perpetrators, (b) the male teacher as a perpetrator, and (c) the structurally discriminative practices that are enforced through binary gender practices.

After home, school is the second most important institution for educating and socializing a child (Human Rights Watch 2016). Nevertheless, many gender-variant students are stigmatized for being too effeminate or nonconforming. In Pakistan, the enrollment rate of gender-variant children is low compared to cisgender students, while the inverse is true for drop-outs (Rajkumar 2016, 19).

Gender-variant students face discrimination from the classroom to the playground. One a daily basis, they are bullied with terms like *gando*, *hijra*, or *khusra* and are told to leave the school. Indeed, at the core of most jokes is a belittlement of the child's feminine appearance and gender expression (Chandra 2017, 882; Khan et al. 2009, 444; Rajkumar 2016, 19; UNDP 2016, 40; UNDP and USAID 2014a).

Discrimination also impacts the child on an institutional level. A non-conforming student must wear boys' clothing and register as a male student, even if she does not identify as masculine. In fact, while many prefer to wear feminine attire (see also UNDP 2016, 40), cross-dressing is either forbidden or incites excessive harassment (UNDP and USAID 2014c).⁴⁷²

The teacher is also a perpetrator of violence, harassment, and discrimination.⁴⁷³ Teachers verbally abuse gender-nonconforming students in an effort to change their feminine behavior. School authorities blame gender-variant students that they are spoiling school's environment and societal code of conduct. Moreover, some male teachers sexually exploit gender-nonconforming students (see also Khan et al. 2009, 444; Nanda 1999, 58).⁴⁷⁴

This research indicates a number of trends regarding transgender students and the Pakistani education system: (a) for a significant number of transgender persons, the school is the first place where sexual exploitation occurs; (b) the school environment is generally hostile and insecure for gender-variant children (see also Islam 2016, 29); and (c) compared to their male counterparts, female teachers and peers are generally friendlier and less violent toward transgender students. Unfortunately, the public education system in Pakistan is gender-based, and most public schools are separated by gender. There are very few opportunities for co-ed study.

Harassment, discrimination, and violence in the school increase a gender-variant child's social vulnerability, a pattern that can carry over into the future. Many gender-nonconforming children adopt sex work later in life. Moreover, the trauma of violence (psychological, physical, or sexual) can lead to an eventual experimentation with drugs and alcohol (Grant et al. 2011, 46). Lastly, compared to their cisgender peers, gender-nonconforming students have fewer opportunities to obtain employment in mainstream society (Islam 2016, 29).⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷² Uniform regulations are inflexible: boys have to wear blue pants; girls, blue skirts (UNDP and USAID 2014c). The same dress code exists in Pakistan.

⁴⁷³ A significant number (one-third) of students faced harassment from their teachers (see also Grant et al. 2011, 46).

⁴⁷⁴ Often, a schoolteacher sexual abuses a transgender student because her feminine gender identity entices him. As a result, many gender-variant children leave school (Nanda 1999, 58).

⁴⁷⁵ In India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, there is a big disparity in the literacy rates of the hijra community and the general population. In all three of these countries, hijras are known as the *third gender* or *third sex*. The status is officially recognized. That said, no formal education system exists specifically for the hijra community. The community also does not have access to formal mechanisms of protection from discrimination and violence. An oppressive environment in Pakistan's school system often causes gender-variant children to abandon their studies.

7.5.1.2. Discrimination and Violence in Employment

Generally, under-educated transgender people have fewer opportunities to participate in the job market; in fact, around the world, transgender persons are excluded from much of the workforce (UNDP 2016, 41-42). The same holds true for the respondents of this study. Khan et al. (2009) asserted that a lack of a proper education and the stigma of a transgender identity makes procuring work extremely difficult for a gender-nonconforming person (Khan et al. 2009, 445).

As far as employment matters are concerned, this research demonstrates two trends. The first indicates fewer work opportunities for the transgender person (see also Khatri 2017; Moolchaem et al. 2015, 161).⁴⁷⁶ If the individual does find a job, she encounters the second trend: an increased likelihood of harassment and violence in the workplace. As a counter-strategy, she might adapt her appearance to look masculine and obstruct her feminine identity to protect her job.⁴⁷⁷ One respondent of this study, an advocate for Pakistan's transgender community, observed a similar trend: "Some of the hijras got jobs but eventually were dismissed when employers learned of their feminine attitudes."⁴⁷⁸

Hiding one's gender identity at work is a way to circumvent discrimination, harassment, violence, and even dismissal (Lombardia et al. 2001, 97). Nevertheless, more often than not, a transgender person is not able to hide her identity. Attributes of the feminine gender are reflected in her presentation,⁴⁷⁹ which perpetuate the discrimination and violence toward her.

Ultimately, this reduces their employment options in mainstream society and perpetuates their stigmatization (Islam 2016, 31; Rajkumar 2016, 21).

⁴⁷⁶ One community advocate asserted that "people do not hire hijras for a job. Because people think that hijras will affect other employees and transmit disease" (Tanzeel [NGO representative and hijra community advocate], interview with the author, April 17, 2015).

⁴⁷⁷ According to an American study, 90% of transgender people face harassment at work. Likewise, nearly half (47%) of that study's respondents were fired, not hired, or denied promotion because they were transgender. Likewise, the majority (71%) of them hid their identities in the workplace (Grant et al. 2011, 51; UNDP and USAID 2014c).

⁴⁷⁸ Uzma Yaqoob (FDI), interview with the author, Date April 13, 2015. This respondent continued: "We, because of our feminine gesture, do not have access to any job. We are always kicked out from the job on the grounds of 'destroying' the job environment."

⁴⁷⁹ "A hijra was working at the boutique. She used to hide her hijra identity. However, once a customer rapped her because of her gender identity. She went to the owner and complained about the incident. However, owner ignored her complained and did not take any action" (Tanzeel [NGO representative and hijra community advocate], interview with the author, April 16, 2015).

Limited space in the job market diminishes a transgender person's opportunities to find work outside the hijra community. This, in turn, prolongs her dependency on the community and its livelihood strategies of dancing, begging, vadhai, and prostitution. It also perpetuates poverty in the transgender community.

7.5.1.3. Discrimination and Violence in the Health-Care System

Institutionalized discrimination against transgender people exists even in Pakistan's healthcare delivery system. Similar to academia, healthcare delivery accommodates patients according to a gender-binary model: male ward vs. female ward, male queue vs. female queue, male toilet vs. female toilet, and male patient's records vs. female patient's records. Because a gender-variant person does not conform to the binary model, there is a greater likelihood for that person to experience structural discrimination.

Transphobia deleteriously influences the well-being of a transgender person (Miller and Grollman 2015, 812), yet the community is often deprived of healthcare services (Grant et al. 2011, 72). Consider the case of Alisha, who was shot and brought to a hospital for treatment. Confusion about her gender identity prolonged her intake process long enough that she actually died of her wounds (Saddique et al. 2017, 9049).

Literature produced in India and Bangladesh indicates that transgender persons usually avoid visiting government (public) hospitals because they fear they will be mistreated.⁴⁸⁰ Sexual abuse from another (male) patient is another legitimate fear (Chettiar 2015, 755-756; Khan et al. 2009).

A transgender patient with a sexually transmitted infection (STI) is not likely to divulge this condition to her healthcare provider. Owing to the stigmatized presumption that hijra people are promiscuous, some doctors have limited access to medical services for transgender individuals with STIs. By extension, some transgender people hide their gender identities entirely (Khan et al. 2009, 447). Generally, the respondents of this study confirmed that they donned masculine clothing when they were in need of medical care to avoid discrimination.

⁴⁸⁰ Some doctors see hijras as another species or as zoo animals (Chettiar 2015, 756).

This research indicates that respondents faced sexual abuse by both private and public healthcare providers.⁴⁸¹ In other words, transgender persons are at risk no matter where they go, and as such, the community has a greater likelihood of compromised health (Miller and Grollman 2015, 826).

Many healthcare providers have limited knowledge about the hijra culture and its sexual practices. According to this study's respondents, many doctors are judgmental and even afraid to treat hijra patients (see also Khan et al. 2009, 447). Moreover, nearly 50% of service providers do not have adequate knowledge about transgender healthcare (Grant et al. 2011, 72).

Generally, conditions in the healthcare system do not favor transgender patients (Khan et al. 2009, 447). There are multiple barriers to overcome before a transgender person can even access medical services: for example, the community faces service refusal, verbal harassment, and abuse in medical facilities (Grant et al. 2011, 84). These trends increase the community's overall vulnerability.⁴⁸²

7.5.1.4. Discrimination and Violence in Housing

The social degradation of a transgender person is reflected in her residential patterns. Most transgender persons live in poor conditions and inappropriate dwellings. Indeed, insufficient housing in the transgender community is an international trend (Human Rights Watch 2014d, 44; Mal 2015, 114; Show 2015; Transgender Europe 2016, 4).

In the US, housing insecurity within the transgender community is nearly at a crisis-level (Grant et al. 2011, 121). Every fourth transgender person in the US faces discrimination in the housing market, while every tenth person faces eviction (Grant et al. 2011, 106).⁴⁸³ Some individuals do not reveal their gender identities when scouring the housing market, but many

⁴⁸¹ Private healthcare providers assume that other patients will be scared of hijras; as such, they turn transgender people away even when they can pay (Khan et al. 2009, 447). Khan et al. (2009) also observed that a transgender person is vulnerable to discrimination in health care (447). If some hijras are successful in accessing healthcare facilities, they still face the possibility of harassment. Even doctors have been known to discriminate against and harass transgender patients (Grant et al. 2011, 72).

⁴⁸² The HIV rate is four times higher among transgender people than cisgender people (Grant et al. 2011, 72). Similarly, many transgender people take drugs or use alcohol to alleviate symptoms of stress (Grant et al. 2011, 72). Likewise, the suicide rate is nearly 40 times higher for transgender people over cisgender people (Grant et al. 2011, 72; Miller and Grollman 2015, 826; Bazargan and Galvan 2012).

⁴⁸³ The rates of sex work and HIV are higher for transgender people who are homeless (Grant et al. 2011, 106).

nevertheless dwell in under-equipped accommodations (Mitchell and Howarth 2009, 40-41), a trend reflected by the housing patterns found within this study.

In the US, transgender renters and buyers mitigate obstacles in the housing market by seeking accommodations in neighborhoods that are less expensive and/or less desirable. Some choose to live with friends or family, while others still offer sex in exchange for a bed (Grant et al. 2011, 106). These particular residential patterns are not reflective of housing trends in Pakistan's transgender community. Though the neighborhoods are not always perceived as "good," hijra people are nonetheless able to tap into the networks of their respective gurus in matters of housing. In other words, if a transgender in Pakistan cannot find somewhere to live, she will go to her guru's dera before she returns to her family.

Deras remain under the close scrutiny of police and neighbors. I came across an incident faced by a group of hijra respondents of this research (see chapter two). Roshni – main character of the incident – along with other hijra people residents in one housing unit were asked to vacate their rental in one week. At that time Roshni – self claimed khusra - was ill and paralyzed. Understandably, it was a hassle for her to move from one place to another in such a short time. As such, she became depressed and frustrated, crying bitterly when she shared the account. She condemned police who ordered her eviction and said that "being transgender meant one was worthless, uneducated, unhealthy, jobless, and homeless."⁴⁸⁴

7.5.1.5. Discrimination and Violence by the Police

This research indicates that law enforcement officials in Pakistan regularly threaten and extort bribes from transgender persons.⁴⁸⁵ Many are also purveyors of sexual abuse (see also Chettiar 2015, 757; Pande 2018, 214-215, 223-224; UNDP and USAID 2014c, 45).⁴⁸⁶ Respondents reported that some officers order transgender detainees to undress for genital examination. The police institution generally considers hijra people to be men (see also UNDP and USAID 2014d,

⁴⁸⁴ Roshni (khwajasira), conversation with author, April 9, 2015.

⁴⁸⁵ The police threaten, extort money from, and illegally detain transgender people who work as prostitutes. In many cases, the required First Information Report (FIR) is never even filed. Illegal detention allows the police to swindle bribes from gender minorities (PUCL-K 2001, 13; Pande 2018, 214; UNDP and USAID 2014c, 31).

⁴⁸⁶ Transgender people have been gang-raped by the police in public parks, in custody, and at police stations. As such, vulnerability to STIs and HIV continues to increase (Chettiar 2015, 757; Pande 2018, 214-215, 223-224; UNDP and USAID 2014c, 45). In Nepal, the police force carried out a "sexual cleansing drive" against transgender people (UNDP and USAID 2014a).

21), a presumption that discourages transgender people from interacting with officers⁴⁸⁷ because they believe their identities will be belittled and diminished.⁴⁸⁸

The institutional prejudice exhibited by law enforcement agencies is influenced by socially-constructed presumptions of gender and sex. Transphobia maintains that members of Pakistan's transgender community are men and that the identity is one of pretense. Furthermore, homophobia leads to prejudice against transgender individuals involved in sex work.⁴⁸⁹ In fact, the practice of homosexuality is outlawed in Pakistan. These prejudices continue to keep the transgender community vulnerable to police harassment and abuse (see also UNDP 2016, 45).

7.5.1.6. Violence from the Griya

This research employs the phrase “intimate partner” to refer to a person who has or has had a romantic, emotional, and/or sexual relationship with a transgender person. In the hijra community, this intimate partner has the status of a husband and is known as a griya (*pantis* in India). The relationship between a griya and a transgender person is not only prone to violence, but also to sociocultural, religious, and legal restrictions that may further elicit discrimination against intimate partner of transgender person.

In Pakistan, it is not unusual for a transgender person to face physical violence from her partner. The partner may also restrict her interactions with family, friends, and the larger transgender community. Further offenses include rape, humiliation, and intimidation (UNDP 2016, 39; WHO 2002, 15). Additionally, some griyas taunt their transgender partners because they cannot give birth (India HIV/AIDS Alliance 2015, 3).

This research indicates that a number of griyas force their transgender partners to have sex with their friends. These incidents of rape not only increase vulnerability to HIV and STIs, but

⁴⁸⁷ According to one survey, transgender victims do not report attacks to the police because they fear mistreatment and/or believe that their complaints will not be taken seriously (Mitchell and Howarth 2009, 40).

⁴⁸⁸ . One study reported cases of rape by police officers against transgender victims. These rapes occurred when the latter attempted to lodge complaints against the police (Pande 2018, 214). In one case, a transgender person was dismissed by police when she attempted to report her parents' gender-based violence. She was told she should follow her parents' instructions (UNDP and USAID 2014c, 36). In general, transgender people avoid the police due to fears of discrimination, violence, and blackmailing (Wong and Noriega 2013, 21).

⁴⁸⁹ Sodomy is against the law in Pakistan. Similarly, *public order*, *public nuisance*, and *vagrancy* laws are weaponized by the police to harass transgender people (UNDP 2016, 45). Organized criminal networks and law enforcement agencies share an understanding that allows the former to rape transgender individuals without retribution from the latter (Wong and Noriega 2013, 11).

also induce feelings of trauma, depression, distrust, anger, and alienation (see also India HIV/AIDS Alliance 2015, 3; Moolchaem et al. 2015, 162; Tripathi 2015; UNDP 2016, 39).

In a transgender relationship in Pakistan, intimate partner violence often follows a gender flow pattern from male to female – that is, violence often stems from a masculine partner and is imposed onto a feminine (transgender) partner (India HIV/AIDS Alliance 2015, 3). Faris Khan (2014) documented that this relationship’s power dynamic allows a griya to dominate his transgender partner through general strictness, verbal abuse, and physical abuse (F. Khan 2014a, 162-165).⁴⁹⁰

Socially, legally, culturally, and religiously, the intimate relationship between a transgender person and a male is not legitimized. Often, the male partner is forced to hide his relationship and sexual preferences, which compels him to adopt homophobia and/or transphobia (see also India HIV/AIDS Alliance 2015, 3).⁴⁹¹ The male partner also fears belittlement by his peers. Because they are only allowed to express their feelings behind closed doors, both partners may begin experiencing feelings of suffocation and depression (see also F. Khan 2014a, 165).

Transgender people are also susceptible to violence from the intimate partner’s family. In fact, Thomas (2013) shared a brutal account of transgender person who was beaten and tortured by her lover’s family: she was dragged, kidnapped, and forced to dance in front of dogs (Thomas 2013, 108-109). Nanda (1999) observed that a griya’s family might exercise violence as a mechanism to expel the transgender person from her lover’s life (Nanda 1999, 66-77).

A lack of social acceptance, pressure from the family, structural discrimination, and cultural and/or religious constraints deleteriously influence the intimate relationship between a transgender person and her griya, often leading to its termination (see also F. Khan 2014a, 162-165). Nevertheless, many transgender individuals believe that an intimate relationship authenticates the hijra identity (Moolchaem et al. 2015, 162). That said, if it goes wrong, it has

⁴⁹⁰ “I was appalled to observe Khurram mistreat Tamanna one afternoon at her guru’s house. He [Khurram] scolded and pushed her whenever she stood in front of the window in plain sight of her neighbors ... Griyas tended to treat their partners the same way they believed women should be treated. Male dominance was thus reinforced in griya-moorat relationship and to some extent, khwajasira expected and encouraged it” (F. Khan 2014a, 162-165).

⁴⁹¹ Mainstream society places a taboo upon the relationship between a hijra and a man (Thomas 2013, 109).

also been known to elicit depression and suicide attempts (F. Khan 2014a, 163; Nanda 1999, 93; Reddy 2005, 159).

7.5.1.7. Violence from the Guru

In the hijra community, the guru-chela relationship is both the basic unit of social organization and an unequal power structure in itself (Reddy 2005, 156-157). As a symbol of power, the guru is responsible for socializing new members according to hijra community norms. For the sake of effectiveness, the guru is legitimized in using various psychological, physical, and financial punishments to control her chelas' lives.⁴⁹² Thomas (2013) contextualized these punishments as a form of violence integral to the gharana (household) (Thomas 2013, 98).

A chela is assigned responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, and entertaining guests. She is expected to cover her head in front of male guests and maintain respect for her guru. She must also participate in dance functions, prostitution, vadhai, and begging. If she does not fulfill her prescribed roles and responsibilities, she faces verbal, psychological, emotional, and physical abuse from her gurus (see also Nanda 1999, 45-46; Reddy 2005, 159).⁴⁹³

The chela is a more lucrative economic unit if her appearance is very feminine. Thus, gurus often compel their chelas to wear their hair long and adopt feminine mannerisms (see also Thomas 2013, 92). The feminine beautification process sometimes includes castration, particularly because the procedure can diminish masculine attributes if it is done young enough.⁴⁹⁴

This research indicates that most narban (castrated) hijra people are not happy with castration and at some point even regret it. The larger social structure considers castration to be against the will of God; as such, some narbans are referred to as *lun kata sheetan* (castrated devil).⁴⁹⁵ Such characterizations can elicit further psychological stress, guilt, and grievances.

A chela is judged by her perceived level of beauty. A fair complexion is believed to be more "beautiful," and as such, a fair chela is dearer to her guru. She likely brings the most money

⁴⁹² See chapter six for the power structure of the hijra community.

⁴⁹³ Even though the hierarchical structure puts a heavy workload on the chela, she does not always get adequate food and often must eat the leftovers of senior hijras (Reddy 2005, 159).

⁴⁹⁴ Many gurus try to convince their chelas to undergo castration. (Reddy 2005, 94)

⁴⁹⁵ This concept is discussed in Chapter 3.

into the gharana (Thomas 2013, 95) and consequently enjoys a position of higher status over the other chelas (see also Nanda 1999, 44-45).⁴⁹⁶

A significant share of a chela's income goes to the guru in the name of support, respect, protection, and dera management. This unequal financial distribution starts from a chela's very first day with the community. In one case, Nanda (1999) documented that a chela was allowed to keep Rs. 5 out of Rs. 150 that she received at her initiation ritual (Nanda 1999, 59).⁴⁹⁷ Unequal distribution plagues a chela throughout her relationship with her guru. In some cases, a guru takes nearly 100% of a chela's hard-earned income (Nanda 1999, 46) yet does not always provide adequate food (Reddy 2005, 159).

Financial penalties are imposed on chelas who commit errant behavior per hijra community guidelines. It is the guru who decides the amount an offending chela should pay. If a chela insults or contradicts her guru (considered a grave transgression), then she will be boycotted – a punishment considered social suicide for any hijra (Nanda 1999, 41-48).⁴⁹⁸

This research documents that wherever a chela goes, she must first take permission from her guru.⁴⁹⁹ Interactions with men from outside the community are strictly monitored: that is, a chela must first seek her guru's permission before engaging with a man, otherwise she risks verbal and/or physical abuse (see also Thomas 2013, 92). A guru will also restrict a chela's relationship if it obstructs the gharana's income (Thomas 2013, 107).⁵⁰⁰

The studies indicate that a chela's life in the gharana can be difficult, something even one guru admitted: the chela earns all the money, does all the housework, and receives verbal and

⁴⁹⁶ If a prospective chela is deemed economically unviable, she will not be brought into the hijra community. Her initial assessment considers whether she can earn money through dancing, singing, begging, and prostitution (Nanda 1999, 60).

⁴⁹⁷ It is important to note that this Rs. 150 is considered the chela's initiation "gift."

⁴⁹⁸ According to an account from Nanda (1999), one chela who received the social boycott spent her life on the street in miserable conditions. She could only return to the community if she paid a Rs. 500 fine to her guru (Nanda 1999, 98-99). In another account, a chela underwent castration against her guru's will; she was also excluded for ignoring the guru's directive (Reddy 2005, 142). A senior guru has the right to socially exclude a chela in cases of serious transgressions (Thomas 2013, 134).

⁴⁹⁹ This pattern is discussed in Chapter 6.

⁵⁰⁰ A chela's romantic partner may object to her involvement in prostitution. This objection can ultimately compromise a guru's income. As such, gurus often exercise violence upon chelas in relationships (Nanda 1999, 106) or generally try to restrict their freedom (Thomas 2013, 97).

physical abuse in return. Furthermore, some chelas feel that it undermines their autonomy to relinquish their incomes to their gurus. Ultimately, the gharana culture can drive a chela from her dera and/or saddle her with depression, poverty, and even suicide attempts (Nanda 1999; Reddy 2005; Thomas 2013, 92-100).

In Pakistan, a transgender person leaves her house in search of support and acceptance, but the gharana often does not meet her expectations. Far from a new home, the gharana instead functions as a backdrop to human rights violations and additional hardships. Within Pakistan's transgender advocacy network, there is a growing trend of spotlighting the abuses wielded by hijra community gurus. Thomas (2013) asserted that a gharana is not a proper substitute for a family. Moreover, there is an increasingly urgent need for state and law enforcement agencies to address cases of violence reported within the transgender community (Thomas 2013, 130-131).

This discussion section concludes and emphasizes that transgender people face discrimination and violence throughout their lives. Both discrimination and violence start early in the family sphere and carry over into the education system. As such, most transgender individuals leave their families and abandon academic pursuits. To mitigate further oppression and stigmatization, many join the hijra community, but community membership often does not signal the end of institutional violence. Indeed, in Pakistan, a transgender person experiences human rights violations whether she is a member of mainstream society or the hijra community sub-culture.

The second part of this discussion turns its attention to the following factors: (a) those that enable systematic transgender discrimination, and (b) those that criminalize the transgender identity. It also highlights the constitutional articles that ensure and extend equal citizenship to Pakistan's transgender community. Lastly, it discusses current legislative moves, Supreme Court (SC) rulings, and government policies that protect the rights of transgender people.

7.6. Human Rights Treaties and State Responsibilities

The first chapter of this thesis discusses articles from various human-right treaties that apply to the following identities: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex.⁵⁰¹ Having

⁵⁰¹ The concerned articles are discussed in Chapter 1.

said that, this research specifically reviews the treaty articles that apply to the transgender identity.⁵⁰²

Pakistan has ratified the following human rights treaties: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). As such, the government is obligated to develop human rights laws and policies that conform to UN standards. In light of best practices, the state should protect transgender people from homophobic and transphobic violence and ensure protection from torture and/or inhumane, cruel, and derogatory treatment. Moreover, the state should be responsible for decriminalizing homosexuality and extending the right of assembly and association to the transgender community. Lastly, through legislative amendments, the state should be obligated to safeguard the rights of transgender people and eliminate the laws that discriminate against them. In other words, sexual orientation and gender identity should be considered grounds for non-discriminatory practices.⁵⁰³

Currently, Pakistan's socio-legal environment is not in favor of the transgender community, even though the transgender identity is legally recognized. Pakistani law reflects both sharia (Islamic law) values (Hudood Ordinances⁵⁰⁴) as well as the country's colonial legacy (Indian

Penal Code [IPC] Clauses 377 and ⁵⁰⁵ 294;⁵⁰⁶ the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871⁵⁰⁷). At the same time, the constitution also guarantees certain rights that are classified as secular law.⁵⁰⁸ This amalgamation – sharia, colonial law, and secular law – provides some basic rights to transgender

⁵⁰² The concerned articles are divided into five categories: (a) protection, (b) prevention, (c) decriminalization, (d) freedom of expression and assembly, and (e) prohibition.

⁵⁰³ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁴ The Hudood ordinance of the late 1970s criminalized *zina* as an offense against the Koran and sharia. Through the ordinance, those accused of *zina* could be sentenced to death through stoning (Landinfo 2013). IGLHRC (2014) points to the Hudood law as the impetus for criminalizing same-sex relationships and denying basic rights to people of non-hetero sexual orientations.

⁵⁰⁵ Clause 377 banned homosexual relationships.

⁵⁰⁶ Clause 294 introduced punishment for obscene acts like singing (Aurat Foundation 2016, 3). However, the word “obscene” was not defined, and the clause is often applied to any act of public annoyance.

⁵⁰⁷ The Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 prohibited hijras in the public sphere (Hinchy 2014a, 274), and the hijra community was subsequently surveyed and registered as a measure of control. Later, the inherited IPC was used to further ban hijra activities (Aurat Foundation 2016, 3).

⁵⁰⁸ Articles 25A, 26, and 27 reflect the values contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

people (an equal citizen status) while simultaneously depriving them of others (the criminalization of homosexuality).⁵⁰⁹

In the following pages, I discuss the elements of Pakistan's constitution (1973) that both ensure and deprive the transgender community of basic rights. Many of the following articles are an impetus for discriminatory practices toward the transgender community.

Article 141 - An assembly of five or more persons is designated an "unlawful assembly" if the common object of the persons composing that assembly is...To commit any mischief or criminal trespass, or other offense.

Article 268 - A person is guilty of a public nuisance who does any act or is guilty of an illegal omission which causes any common injury, danger or annoyance to the public or to the people in general who dwell or occupy property in the vicinity, or which must necessarily cause injury, obstruction, danger or annoyance to persons who may have occasion to use any public right.

Article 269 - Whoever unlawfully or negligently does any act which is, and which he knows or has reason to believe to be, likely to spread the infection of any disease dangerous to life, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to six months, or with fine, or with both.

Article 290 - Whoever commits a public nuisance in any case not otherwise punishable by this Code, shall be punished with fine, which may extend to six hundred rupees.

Article 294 - Prohibits any "obscene" public acts, songs, music or poems.

Article 371A - Whoever sells, lets to hire, or otherwise disposes of any person with intent that such a person shall at any time be employed or used for the purpose of prostitution or illicit intercourse with any person or for any unlawful and immoral purpose, or knowing it to be likely that such person shall at any time be employed or used for any such, purpose, shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to twenty-five years, and shall also be liable to fine.

Article 377 - Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which shall not be less than two years nor more than ten years, and shall also be liable to fine. Penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse necessary to the offence described in this section

The aforementioned constitutional articles provide a basis for the institutional exercise of discriminative authority and power upon transgender people. The articles likewise perpetuate mainstream society's stigmatization of and prejudice against transgender people.

In Pakistan, dancing, singing, and prostitution are important elements of the hijra community's livelihood activities.⁵¹⁰ That said, mainstream Pakistani society debases these

⁵⁰⁹ The concerned articles are discussed in Chapter 1.

⁵¹⁰ See chapter six for livelihood strategies of hijra people.

occupational strategies. A transgender person's adoption of these roles incites public annoyance and aggression, which are both legally safeguarded by Articles 268 and 290. Similarly, singing can be considered as a violation of Article 294.

A transgender person's sexuality (that is, the inclination toward men) is criminalized by Article 377. The sexual engagement of a transgender person with a male is legally contextualized as a homosexual act and is punishable by up to ten years in prison (F.Khan 2014a, 173). Sharia, on the other hand, recommends death by stoning for the "offense" (Landinfo 2013). Article 371A contributes to institutional discrimination and violence against transgender prostitutes, while Article 269 targets carriers of HIV/AIDS or other STIs.

The colonial-era British state and the post-colonial Pakistani state share similar methods to legally objectify transgender people. During the former's reign, the transgender status was criminalized. Colonial rulers perceived transgender people as habitual sodomites, a perception that is reflected by the British use of the word "eunuch."⁵¹¹ Etymologically, the word hails from the Greek for "keeper of the bed" (Sharma 2012, 65).⁵¹² The current research indicates that the social perception of the hijra as a sex object (i.e., "the keeper of the bed") has remained largely unchanged since British rule.

The British considered the public visibility of transgender people to be vulgar and against morality (Hinchy 2014a, 274), a perception that still exists today.⁵¹³ The British colonial structure also considered itself responsible for safeguarding Indian society (of which Pakistan was then a part) from the threat of the transgender community, which it considered criminal (see also Agoramoorthy and Hsu 2014; Agrawal 1997; Hinchy 2014a; Tabassum and Jamil 2014; Tiwari 2014). To eradicate the perceived vulgarity of transgender people, the British introduced legislation against them. As a post-colonial state, Pakistan not only incorporated IPC clauses into Pakistan's constitution, but also inherited its social perception of transgender people.

⁵¹¹ See chapter one for further discussion.

⁵¹² Ibid.

⁵¹³ Dominant beliefs against same-sex sexuality in Pakistan stem from a combination of religious and cultural beliefs. The notion of sin, the fear of God and an afterlife, and views on morality and propriety shape the ways in which both the public and khwajasira view sexual behaviors and lifestyles. In addition, negative attitudes toward alternative sexualities are rooted in patriarchy, marriage and familial obligations, the importance of maintaining ancestral bloodlines through reproduction, and the concept of respect (F.Khan 2014a, 179).

Constitution of Pakistan clearly states in following articles no discrimination on basis of race, religion, caste, sex, residence or place of birth;

Article 25 A - Equality of Citizen

25(1). All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law

25(2). There shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex

Article 26 - No Discrimination in Respect of Access to Public Places

26(1). In respect of access to places of public entertainment or resort, not intended for religious purpose only, there shall be no discrimination against any citizen on the ground only for race, religion, caste, sex, residence or place of birth.

Article 27 - Safeguard against Discrimination in Services

26(1). No citizen otherwise qualified for appointment in the services of Pakistan shall be discriminated against in respect of any such appointment in the ground only of race, religion, caste, sex, residence or place of birth.

Since Pakistan's inception, the state has been negligent in safeguarding the rights of gender-variant people. The community has the lowest indicators of health, education, and employment in the country. The transgender identity's associated stigma and prejudice restricts access to the most basic of facilities. In general, discrimination follows transgender people through all spheres of life, and as such, they remain vulnerable to physical, psychological, emotional and sexual violence.⁵¹⁴

In Pakistan, the plight of the transgender community became a focus of attention with the arrival of international agencies combatting the spread of HIV/AIDS. At the time, many studies indicated that transgender people were the most likely community in Pakistan to carry the virus, largely due to the its involvement with prostitution and a low awareness of safe sex practices. The intervention of international advocacy groups impelled many community members to become activists themselves.⁵¹⁵ Since that time, the number of organizations advocating for the community have risen significantly.

⁵¹⁴ Religious and cultural notions of morality and decency play a role in shaping the legal and activist discourse around 'transgender' rights in Pakistan. The discourse on the emancipation of khwajasira in the Supreme Court rulings and in Pakistani media aimed at making them 'decent citizens.' This reasoning emphasizes the need to create job opportunities for khwajasira in order to prevent them from leading an immoral life of begging, dancing, and prostitution (F.Khan 2014a, 179-180).

⁵¹⁵ khwajasira activism started around 2005, when several activist groups began to mobilize and publicly challenge the status quo. Several factors facilitated the development of khwajasira organizing in Pakistan. First, the economic

In recent years, community activism has produced some seminal Supreme Court rulings. Cases heard in the SC have resulted in their legal protection, a guaranteed quota in employment sectors, and the right to vote and contest an election.

Supreme Court Rulings in Favor of the Transgender Community:

December 2009:	The supreme court of Pakistan ruled that members of the country's hijra community should be issued national identity cards indicating their distinct gender.
November 2011:	The Supreme Court of Pakistan ordered the Election Commission of Pakistan to collect data from the hijra community and register its members as voters.
September 2012:	The Supreme Court of Pakistan affirmed that transgender citizens should be given the equal basic rights of all citizens, including employment and inheritance rights.

In response to the December 2009 ruling, “NADRA began issuing ID cards to transgender community with the sex male khwajasira, female khwajasira or mukhannas” (Aurat Foundation 2016, xv). Nevertheless, these categorizations were unclear and ambiguous. The Aurat Foundation study, as well as the current research study, indicate that “male Khwajasira” refers to an uncastrated and biologically male hijra. This identity is known as “aqwa” in the transgender community. A “female khwajasira” is a castrated hijra, who the community calls “narban.” “Mukhannas” is the term for an intersex person (Aurat Foundation 2016, 25). This research concurs with National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) method of categorization on the basis of biological characteristics.

The SC ruling of 2009 was celebrated as ground-breaking and revolutionary, but the Aurat Foundation (2016) maintains that community members themselves have had mixed responses. Some felt that they already had an identity based on their biological sex, and they did not need another – especially one that would bring further discrimination. Others said that an ID card

liberalization of the early 1990s introduced changes in trade policies, strengthened the private sector, and increased the transnational traffic of people and ideas. Second, the sexual health and advocacy programs that were set up to contain HIV/AIDS created opportunities for sexual minorities to organize and learn about rights activism. Third, the Supreme Court's ruling in favor of khwajasira further encouraged such activism in the country (F.Khan 2014a, 176).

indicating a legal khwajasira status would incur humiliation without the social acceptance to accompany it. Individuals with wives and children felt the identity status conflicted with their familial roles, while those wishing to perform Hajj⁵¹⁶ faced another dilemma – Saudi Arabia did not recognize the third gender, and thus the new ID card would bar them from performing Hajj.

In short, many transgender people simply were not interested in a computerized national identity card (CNIC) that bore the khwajasira status. As a khwajasira, the CNIC would list the carrier's guru as the father, replacing the biological father of the original designation. This move would nullify the CNIC carrier's claim of parental inheritance. Oppositions aside, however, a fair number of transgender individuals did express appreciation for the new CNIC cards, considering them a sign that conditions would soon improve for Pakistan's transgender community (Aurat Foundation 2016, 25-26).

One study claimed that NADRA is a showpiece for the gender binary system and heteronormativity that limits the scope of recent legal reforms as some of the officials seek medical certificate for the authentication of transgender identity. For instance, the khwajasira *mard* (trans man) identity is unacceptable for many *aqwa*, who do not see it fit to describes themselves in a masculine manner (AAWAZ Programme 2016, 4).

Per an SC directive to conduct a census of transgender persons, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Punjab provinces reported populations of 2,167 and 324, respectively (AAWAZ Programme 2016, 4). The 2017 National Census indicated 10,418 transgender persons in the entire country (M.Khan 2017), and still other sources estimated the number between 80,000 and 300,000 (Baig 2012). For its part, the Aurat Foundation (2016) placed the population at between 0.4 million and 1.5 million individuals (Aurat Foundation 2016, 3).

The November 2011 SC ruling facilitated the right to vote for the country's transgender community. As such, the 2013 election was the first in which the community could participate as voters or contesters.⁵¹⁷ That year, the total registered transgender voters were 1,457 out of 97.02 million voters in Pakistan (Ghauri 2017). Similarly, the KPK government passed a resolution granting voting rights to KPK's transgender community. The KPK government demanded the

⁵¹⁶ Hajj is one of the five pliers of Islam and it is pilgrimage to Mecca.

⁵¹⁷ Bindia Rana, a transgender person and a social activist, contested the 2013 election from the PS-114 constituency.

Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to adopt the required measures to ensure the transgender community's participation in the upcoming 2018 election (Mashal 2016). Thus, since the 2011 SC ruling, the transgender community has been incorporated into the political atmosphere to perform their due role as equal citizens of Pakistan.

According to the 2017 census, Pakistan's transgender community is in decline. This trend worries community activists, who believe the population was underestimated or undercounted. If the reported population is considerably less than the actual population, then the transgender community will not receive its due allocations of budget, employment, academic seats, and healthcare services (Ebrahim 2017). In fact, the province of Punjab officially stated that its transgender population was too small to warrant a minimum job quota (Jan 2015).

Since the SC rulings, Pakistan's provincial governments have been asked to create jobs for transgender people (Jan 2015). In response, transgender people in Sindh were hired to collect municipal debts by singing and dancing "outside the houses of defaulters to embarrass them into paying up" (Boone 2016) – an act that of course further stigmatized the community instead of uplifting it. Eventually, three transgender persons in the province of Sindh were given desk jobs. One of them, Riffy Khan, was the first transgender person to hold a government position in that province. The job quota in the government sector for transgender people is a minimum of 2% (SDPI 2014). The same way, the Peshawar High Court (PHC) has asked from the concerned provincial government to allocate a minimum job quota for the transgender community in KPK (Amin 2017).

In addition to adopting employment quotas and creating new jobs, the provincial governments of Sindh, Punjab and KPK also initiated skills-training programs for the transgender community. In 2012, the Vocational Training Institute (VTI) Chunian⁵¹⁸ introduced a remarkable vocational training course (Technical and Vocational Education and Training Reform 2016) that allocated Rs 200 million to safeguard the welfare of the transgender community (Khattak 2016); this amount is slated for financial assistance, vocational training, psychological support, and other health services (Amin 2017).

⁵¹⁸ Run by the Punjab Vocational Council (PVTC).

Additionally, the KPK government conducted a consultative meeting with representatives from the transgender community, the province's Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system, the social welfare department, and the civil society. The purpose of the meeting was to ensure friendly transportation services for transgender people (Izhar Ullah 2017) after repeated incidents of discrimination, harassment, and violence.

The transgender community achieved another milestone with the launch of the All Pakistan Transgender Election Network (APTEN)⁵¹⁹ in time for the 2018 elections. This network includes representation from all four provinces and focuses on making voting a more intuitive process. To that end, APTEN demands more gender sensitivity in the political system and enables the participation of transgender persons as both voters *and* candidates. Similarly, APTEN demands having at least one transgender representative in every assembly. Lastly, the network has a general commitment to ending the institutionalized discrimination that originates in political parties (PAK NGOs 2017).

Pakistan has shown promise in incorporating UN human rights articles into its legal system. For example, to protect civil and political rights, the government launched the National Action Plan on Human Rights in 2016 and the National Commission of Human Rights in 2015 (Human Rights Committee on the Implementation of the Provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 2017). Similarly, a recent senate bill orders the government “to provide for the protection, relief and rehabilitation of the rights of the transgender person and their welfare and for matters connected therewith and incidental thereto.” The bill is a comprehensive one:

- It allows transgender persons to determine their own gender identities,
- It prohibits any harassment or discrimination that obstructs a transgender person from employment, trade or occupation, education, health care, accommodation, travel or movement, and enjoyment of public services,
- It obliges the government to establish protection centers and safe houses for transgender persons,

⁵¹⁹ APTEN is a network of organizations including TransAction Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (TAP), Sindh Transgender Welfare Network (STWN), Punjab Transgender Association (PTA), Balochistan Alliance for Transgender and Intersex Community (BATIC), Blue Veins, PHRO, Hewad, Peace Justice and Youth Organization, and Youth for Democracy and Development.

- Similarly, it obliges the government to provide medical facilities, psychological care, counselling, adult education, vocational training, and business loans to transgender persons,
- It protects access to education, inheritance, healthcare, public spaces, and employment for transgender persons,
- It guarantees the transgender community a minimum 3% quota in the public job sector, and
- It guarantees transgender people the right to vote and assembly (Senate Government of Pakistan 2017).

For the last ten years, transgender issues have been a hot topic across the country. The plight of the community has been taken up by the senate, the parliament, the public forum, and the media. Federal and provincial legislative changes have been realized through the growing social activism both within and outside of the community. The 2017 National Census was the first time in the country's history that transgender individuals were officially included in the count. At the provincial level, headway has been made by the Insaf health card – providing health services through health insurance - professional development programs, increased recruitment in the public sector, budget allocations, the creation of community centers, increased protective measures in public transportation, and community consultation for participation in upcoming elections.

That said, the other side of the coin remains alarming. The last three years (2015-17) bore witness to extreme violence and discrimination against transgender persons. According to community activist Tamur Kamal, at least 54 transgender persons have been murdered in KPK alone since 2015 (Ahmad 2018). The community continues to face structural violence in the form of torture, murder, rape, extortion, arson, and homophobia/transphobia. In Swat, KPK, it was reported that the police force banned transgender dance performances and ordered transgender persons to vacate the area of Swat. Similarly, in some cases, police were also not cooperating to register an FIR against culprits (The Express Tribune 2017; Firdous 2016; Khaliq 2016; Pakistan Today 2017).

The start of 2018 has not been different. Akbar (2018a) reported a case in which an eighteen-year-old transgender individual was raped by nine men for the entirety of one night. When she reported the incident to police, they refused to register an FIR against the accused (Akbar

2018a). Moreover, an attempted rape in the Swabi district of KPK resulted in three transgender dancers being shot (Akbar 2018b). One community activist asserted that at least 28 such incidents (sexual harassment, assault, provocation, etc.) were reported within the period of one month in KPK (Akbar 2018b). Like Swat, the police force in Bannu (KPK) banned dancing as a profession and demanded that transgender persons grow facial hair or vacate the region (Jadoon 2018). Dancing is a major source of income for the transgender community. Its criminalization would force more individuals to be dependent on prostitution, which would in turn exacerbate the community's vulnerability and marginalization.

This chapter indicates that, at state level, Pakistan has demonstrated improvements by legally recognizing transgender persons as citizens of equal status and thus deserving all basic citizen rights. Moreover, a sweeping new bill should provide further security and protection for the community. Nevertheless, homophobia and transphobia persist in the social structure. Thus, there is a dire need to execute state-sponsored campaigns to modify the behavior of mainstream society and government officials.

The family must play a model role in creating institutionalized tolerance and acceptance of the transgender identity. Until the transgender person has family support, the identity's stigma will not be eradicated. The family is a primary social institution that is capable of eliciting a new and inclusive normative order. A bottom-up approach is required to make effective changes in the country's top-down legislative structure. Nevertheless, due to sociocultural and religious values, a transgender person's sexual orientation is still not a part of the transgender discourse in Pakistan. The criminalization of homosexuality by Article 377 is a hurdle that continues to restrict the sexual well-being of a transgender person. Thus, Article 377 must be repealed to create a friendlier, safer, and more inclusive environment for Pakistan's transgender community.

Conclusion

I started this research with the following question: “*What are the life ways of the hijra community and how do hijra people face human rights violations in their daily life activities?*” Topics that further guided the research include the process of hijra identity construction and the socioeconomic structure of the hijra community. These inquiries led me to explore various stages of hijra life: from early childhood, when the hijra label is socio-culturally affixed to a gender-variant child despite a lack of hijra community affiliation, to the period up to and beyond a gender-variant person’s formal self-identification as a hijra and a hijra community member. The present study also explores the various human rights violations faced by hijra people due to their gender and sexual identity. Finally, a conceptualization of the hijra identity in the Transgender Protection Bill 2017 and its limitations in the context of human rights violations is demonstrated.

The present study reveals that hijra people construct their identity “with the sense of self as being feminine” which is metaphorically referred to as a “feminine soul.” This self-identification impels gender-variant children to learn, align, express, and perform the feminine gender; indeed, the trend for a feminine identity persists beyond the individual scale. Certain societal stereotypes, for instance, demand that hijra people are sexually passive. The experiences of violence and discrimination during childhood attracts gender-variant children to adult hijras who have experienced the same disdain during their own childhood. The process of “mirroring oneself after others” helps gender-variant persons to construct their socially-prescribed identities as hijra. To that end, the hijra identity is the result of a complex interaction between self and society.

Hijra people construct their identity to fulfill their social and psychological needs, making those needs meaningful and authenticating them through the process of negotiation in their social world. This hijra identity is being used as an umbrella category comprising three sub-identities: a *khwajasarah* or *khusra* (a person born with ambiguous genitals), a *narban* (a person born with unambiguous male organs who is later castrated), and an *aqwa* (a person born with and retaining unambiguous male organs).

The perception about the hijra sub-identities is varying at great extent among mainstream society, religious scholars and even within the hijra community. For example, adherents to the

khusrapan tradition distinguish themselves from other hijra identities by claiming a “true” spiritual nature and having an exclusive economic dependence on alms collections. Many *aqwa* people condemn *narban* people as *lun kuta shetan* (devils without penises), while the latter in turn decry *aqwa* people for possessing male sex organs.

Similarly, proponents of Islamic practices only recognize a hijra identity that is based on genital ambiguity and demand that gender identity matches a person’s biological sex. It means a) a person being born with the male sex organ cannot be hijra or transgender, b) a person being born with genital ambiguity should adopt either masculine gender or feminine gender, and c) the determination of masculine or feminine gender should base on dominancy of sex organs either male or female. Hence, Islamic law does not provide space for the third gender as the way hijra community of Pakistan has been pronouncing; instead, Islamic scholars demand that one should be either masculine or feminine in his/her gender representation (see Alipour 2017, 93; Uddin 2017, 227-228).

The findings of this research show that hijra identity is central to the social and economic organization of the hijra community. Within and outside of the community, one’s hierarchical position, interactions, and relations will influence the gender roles one adopts in a given context. For instance, a guru often adopts masculine gender titles such as *guru bahi*, *chacha guru*, and *dada guru*. That said, if the same guru develops a *griya-moorat* relationship or earns money through dancing, prostitution, or *vadhai*, then she assumes a feminine role in those contexts. While the hijra community generally deviates from the predominant social order, it nevertheless espouses many of the same structures of the larger society. When interacting with mainstream Pakistani society, many hijra people prefer to do so through a feminine lens – unless she does not want her identity revealed.

Once a hijra person inherits a fictive kinship system and develops relationships within her community, she can then sustain herself economically with the help of her guru and other community members. Economic sustainability is a complex process that comprises a number of factors: a) the recruitment of new hijras, b) a familiarization with the hijra identity and performance of the feminine gender, c) the feminizing of the body, d) engagement with the larger support system, and e) the exercise of power and the rendering of the hijra person as an economic object.

This research further demonstrates the interrelated proxies of economic organization, control, and power, which together function to regulate the structure of the hijra community. These proxies revolve around the centrality of the hijra as a spiritual being and/or as a feminine entity in the spheres of prostitution or dancing. The performance of the feminine gender is essential to the identity, and “more feminine” hijras usually have greater economic viability. The economic productivity of a hijra person is directly related to her feminine body; however, an advance in age usually increases dependency upon begging or vadhai. That said, an elderly guru with an elevated hierarchical position may take financial cuts from her chelas’ incomes.

Hijra identity is the result of both— a socially constructed knowledge and a sense of self. But important here is the element of an economic independence of hijra people. To gain economic independence hijra people usually perform in the society through socially constructed knowledge rather than only satisfying their sense of self. When a hijra person joins the hijra community, the community itself imposes a socially constructed identity on the hijra people. It is not merely the “self-representation” of a person who wants to adopt the hijra identity. Through this, hijra people absorb the social pressure of socially constructed knowledge, which people impose on them and simultaneously, it gives hijra people the chance to earn money by adopting the socially constructed hijra identity. For example, having passive sex roles, or performing like a feminine in the society (which in fact hijra people want to perform), is a response to socially constructed knowledge in which the economic aspect is equally important as a sense of self.

However, other hijra identities like *aqwa* and *narban* do not conform to the socially constructed knowledge. *Aqwa*, although a hijra identity, but biologically is a male and performs like a hijra only in the hijra community. Outside the hijra community he takes on the male identity and behaves like a male. But as *aqwa* identity does not confirm the socially constructed knowledge about the hijras, for example, how can a male be hijra? Similarly, a *narban* is a castrated male, whereas the idea of castration is not a part of the socially constructed knowledge. Hence, I argue that such identities are more to satisfy the sense of self rather than to perform through socially constructed knowledge.

The hijra identity also revolves around the human rights violation and discrimination. To distinguish the dynamics of this violence and discrimination, a transgender person’s life is divided into two parts: before and after joining the hijra community.

A hijra person is susceptible to mistreatment from a brother, a father, and male relatives and teachers who attempt to impose prescribed masculine gender roles upon her during childhood. Her marginalized position, along with concomitant prejudices and stereotypes, heighten her vulnerability to sexual, psychological, emotional, and physical abuse. As such, many gender-variant children slip into social isolation from families, among friends, and within society at large. Consequently, many escape from their families to join the hijra community and adopt the hijra identity. While children born with ambiguous genitals are also pressured to adopt masculine gender roles, feminine gender roles are not as restricted for them as they are for biologically male children. The socially constructed knowledge of the genitally ambiguous spiritual being reduces (but does not end) the genitally ambiguous child's vulnerability to violence and discrimination.

In Pakistan, a hijra is an outcast; the social presumption of her identity is one of a dancer, entertainer, sex worker, passive sexual partner, beggar, alms collector, disease spreader, environment contaminator (immoral), and/or gender-identity converter. In other words, transgender people are perceived as disrespectful and disgraceful creatures in Pakistan, and as such, structural violence towards them is common. In fact, discrimination against the hijra community is so widespread that many transgender individuals report being barred from accessing public transportation, hospitals for treatment, and other public services.

The underlined structure of the violence in the mainstream society and in the hijra community shares some commonalities like imposed prescribed gender and sexuality for gender variant people. However, prescribed gender roles for gender variant children in mainstream society are completely against their sense of self whereas, in the hijra community the imposition of the feminine gender roles are a reflection of the hijra people's sense of self. So, in this case, the dynamics of hijra identity are complex and broad. Hence, I can conclude that the hijra identity is a reflection of the sense of self but goes beyond that in everyday life. Although the social hijra identity is characterized by certain attributes like passivity and impotence that make the hijra identity a static one, hijra people perform these identities to conform the socially contracted knowledge. However, in its true sense the hijra identity is situational and fluid, too. It maintains its fluidity through the process of negotiation and identity politics to counter multiple challenges which arise from socio-cultural and religious perspectives, and this broadens the chances of human rights violation and discrimination.

As far as originality and novelty is concerned, this research deviates from similar academic endeavours in terms of its methodology and approach, which was being used for this research. In the recent past, significant literature has been produced on Pakistan's hijra community; I refer specifically to F. Khan (2014a) and Nisar (2016) as standard studies based on extensive field work and ethnographic methods. Although the hijra identity remained central to both works, F. Khan (2014a) explored the identity in the context of social activism, while Nisar (2016) focused primarily on public spaces. In contrast, the current research methodologically follows constructionist grounded theory (Charmaz 2006) and demonstrates significantly different results from previous studies. One outcome of the current study is the elucidation of the forces – those of structural, interactional, and individual agency – impelling the process of hijra identity construction, while some of the previous studies restrict the scope of the identity and associate it with limited factors, like mythological, literary narratives, spirituality and sufiism (see Abbas and Pir 2016; Jaffer 2017; Loh 2014). However, the current research based on biographies of hijra people shows a life span in terms of identity construction. This construction process is presented in the form of *stages* reflecting the principle of LGBT identity development models, also referred to as stage models (see Bilodeau, Brent L. and Kristen A. Renn 2005). Hence, this research is unique as it reflects the life span approach (see D'Augelli 1994) on the pattern of already existing identity stage models, while methodologically following the constructionist grounded theory.

Moreover, Levitt and Ippolite (2014) conducted their work in the United States and highlighted the development of transgender identities with reference to “modern day US context” (Levitt and Ippolite 2014, 2). They specifically stated that their presented transgender identity development does not correspond to third gender identity of for example two-spirit Native American and hijras, although these identities are of old origin in the US and even deeply rooted in the Indian and Pakistani society. The identity construction model presented in this research highlights that the existing concept of hijra is being used to label gender variant children in Pakistan, so that children perform socially constructed knowledge. This does not happen in the modern day US context: Here a gender variant child is not labelled on the basis of traditional knowledge.

The current research also deviates from the other researches in terms of focusing on the “development of a person’s self-concept, relationships with family, connections to peer groups, [and a] community” (Brent L. Bilodeau and Kristen A. Renn 2005, 28), as well as it is focusing on identity politics through sub-identities, identity negotiation, its representation and limitation in the categorization of hijra identities in the legal system.

Finally, this research highlights that the government of Pakistan draws upon the Islamic Jurisprudence concept of intersex people (*khunta*) in the formulation of categories for the Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC). Here, the categories of male *khwajasira*, female *khwajasira*, and *khunsa-e-mushkil* are given. Concurrently, the senate has approved a bill (2017) in which the identity of a transgender person is based on a “sense of self.” So, there are discrepancies in the use and representation of the term “intersex.” For example, the CNIC categories are based on biological representations as determined by Islamic Jurisprudence and they furthermore misinterpret the existing sub-identities of the hijra community. The same issue appears in the bill, where the terms “transgender woman,” “transgender man,” and *khwajasira* are used. Furthermore, the bill, which purports the protection of transgender people, neglects to extent that protection to non-heterosexual orientations. The bill also mentions eunuchs – defined as a person who is born male but elects to undergo castration – even though the procedure is legally prohibited in Pakistan. Indeed, the terminological and legislative ambiguities of Pakistan’s judicial and legislative systems create a great deal of discrepancies in interpreting the hijra identity, which in turn obstructs community members from acquiring the rights meant to protect them.

Glossary

Aqwa	The term “aqwa” is biologically male, but identifies herself as female gender.
Baap	Father
Baraf-Panni	Ice-and-water: A game plays by children
Bartana	Refer to a customary practices of gift exchange in hijra community
Beta	Son
Beti	Daughter
Bhabi	Sister in-law
Bhai	Brother
Bhen	Sister
Chatai	A ritual of initiation in Hijra community
Chela	Disciple of a guru (Guru-Chela relationship is a basic unit of social organization in hijra community)
Chepti	Castrated genitals, this word specifically used to refer “Narban Hijra People”
Choudar	A ritual performed in hijra community to authenticate status of chela, which increases hierarchical position of a hijra person. The performance of this ritual grants rights of recruitment of new chelas and decision-making roles in the issues of chelas.
Chupan Chupai	Hide-and-peek: A game plays by children
<i>Dada Guru</i>	Grand Master/Teacher also refer as a grand father
Damad	Son in-law
Dand	Financial Plenty
Dera	Communal space of hijra people
Dhamal	A type of dance performs in the devotion of saints
Dupatta	A long piece of cloth used to cover head and body or some time use as a scarf
Gandu	Use as a slang and abuse towards passive homosexual
Gharana	Clan: Pakistani Hijra Community is divided into four clans
Griya	Boyfriend and sometimes also refers to a husband of a hijra person
Griya-Moorat <i>Nikah</i>	Ritual to create a bond of union between a hijra and her boyfriend
Gudda	Male doll
Guddi	Female doll

Guru	Master/ Teacher and also refers as a fatherly figure in hijra community
Guru Bhai	Parallel disciple of same guru
Hekam	Penis
Jalsa	Function organizes in the hijra community for the performance of rituals
Khala	Aunty
Khusra	Intersex/ Transgender
Khusrapan	A school of thought mainly idealizes and follows hijra people's roles as a spiritual being and earn money through vadhai
Khwajasira	Refers to transgender person with respect and sometimes also refers to a intersex person
Maa	Mother
Mamoon	Maternal Uncle
Masjid	Mosque
Mian Ji	Refers To transgender person with respect
Moorat	A young transgender
Nana	Maternal grand father
Nani	Maternal grand mother
Narban	Castrated transgender
Pajama	Trouser
Pukam	A process of selection
Peer Shab	Spiritual leader
Rasam	Ritual
Salgirah	Birthday
Shalwar	Trouser
Sehlian	Gender specific term for friendship between females
Shohar	Husband
Ustad	Teacher
Zanana	Feminine
Zenanapan	A school of thought in hijra community who earn money through performance of dance and prostitution
Zina	Unlawful sexual relations
Lan dan	Gift exchange
Lun Kata Shetan	Devil without penis (Refer to Narban Hijra)
Mela	Festival

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