The Third Gender: A Sociological Exploration of Life of Hijaras of North Bengal and Kolkata

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By

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DECLARATION

I, Lhamu Tshering Dukpa, hereby declare that the research work embodied in the thesis entitled "**The Third Gender: A Sociological Exploration of Life of Hijaras of North Bengal and Kolkata**" submitted to Sikkim University for the Award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is my original work. Any content or any part of this thesis has not been submitted to any other institutions for any academic purposes.

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This is to certify that the thesis entitled "The Third Gender: A Sociological Exploration of Life of Hijaras of North Bengal and Kolkata" submitted to Sikkim University for the partial fulfillment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Sociology embodies the result of bonafide research work out by Miss. Lhamu Tshering Dukpa under my guidance and supervision. No part of the thesis has been submitted for any Degree, Diploma, Association and fellowship. All assistance and help received during the course of investigation have been duly acknowledged by her. We recommend that this thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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SUMMARY

The *hijras* of India can be archetypally defined as the third sex and third gender category occupying the gender liminal position within the Indian society. In academia, the sub-culture of the *hijra* community is typically identified as a cultural grouping wherein they seek legitimacy from the mythical, spiritual and religious tropes and is usually associated with the *Hindu* iconographies of Lord *Ardhanarisvara* and Goddess *Bahuchara.* The *hijras* because of their identity as the third gender and their roles as singers and dancers at certain auspicious occasions, are deemed as a socially marginalized grouping with their own hierarchical classifications of *gurus* (senior/elderly *hijras*) and *celas* (young, newly inducted *hijras* who work under *gurus*). But the current study on the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata departs from such 'generic' understandings of *hijra* identity, culture and community by laying primacy on themes of context, practice, region and experiences. With the espousal of the pragmatic research worldview and paradigm, the research employs an admixture of qualitative and quantitative methods to effectively address the objectives of the study. Pragmatic worldview underscores on the themes of 'workability' and 'practice' due to which it allows for the flexibility of choice of methods. It is primarily because of such mutability that enables the pragmatic worldview to eschew the conformance to one strand of philosophical thought, viz. positivism or relativism. The adherence to a dogmatic philosophical principle entails suitable selection of ontology, epistemology and methodological application in agreement with the rigid philosophical tenets. But considering the nature of the research objectives and the emphasis on 'contexts', it was implausible to adhere to the limitations imposed by dogmatic philosophies and their meanings of metaphysics. The present research has addressed a myriad of research objectives by employing the most suitable research methods and theoretical framework for a proper apprehension and analysis of the findings. Commencing with chapter one, the research begins by invoking extant body of works that have expounded on the religious, spiritual, mythical and cultural attributes of the *hijras* of India that broadly characterized their identity and

community practices. Such a broad exposition of the *hijra* community lays the necessary groundwork for the apprehension of multiple mythical, cultural and religious sources which the *hijras* often recall to legitimize their identity and place within the Indian society. However, when foregrounding region or context as the dominant theme of the study, it is not quite feasible to rely solely on such broad characterizations or a generic portrayal of the *hijra* communities to analyze the regional nuances, cultural permutations/changes of the *hijra* communities of North Bengal and Kolkata. Nonetheless, such works of literature affords a general understanding of the *hijras* across India providing a broad frame of reference when examining the regional specificities of the *hijra* culture and community. Chapter one also mentions the disjuncture between the broader and regional differences of the *hijra* communities across India. By calling upon Reddy's work on the *hijras* of Hyderabad and Secunderabad, the research acknowledges the variances of the *hijra* identity and community practices that have transpired regionally. Such regional variances are also evident in some of the works of literature on the *hijras* of West Bengal where in they have demonstrated the differences in terms of *hijra* identity, community organization, religious and cultural practices. The chapter therefore builds on such regional and generic discrepancies to proffer a rationale of comprehensively examining the regional *hijra* culture, community practices, identity, lived experiences, socio-economic conditions and experiences of stigma and the use of coping mechanisms. In chapter two, the research demonstrates the regional variances in terms of *hijra* identity, emasculation practices, religion and occupational engagements. The *hijra* identity, culture and community practices of North Bengal and Kolkata depart in important ways from the 'generic' conceptualization of the same. The *hijra* identity, for example is impinged by factors such as religion, occupational practices and emasculation. Multiple *hijra* households across North Bengal and Kolkata harbor differing ideologies apropos the *hijra* identity, culture and community practices. The findings further reveals that such multiplicities of ideologies are complicated by the incursion of *Bangladeshi hijras* and their cultural conceptions of *hijra* identity and community practices. Even domestic movement (*hijras* migrating from Bihar to West Bengal) have engendered cultural changes

vis-a-vis the *hijra* community. Thus, factors such as migration and movement have brought about changes with respect to the *hijra* community of North Bengal and Kolkata which diverges from the typical definitional parameters of the *hijra* culture, identity and community. Unlike the generic cultural templates of the *hijras* communities of India, not all *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata deem 'emasculation' as a compulsory rite of passage. The meanings of emasculation also have undergone shifts in terms of how they are perceived by the *hijra* households across North Bengal and Kolkata. The typical association of emasculation with the spiritual and religious meanings are replaced with identity politics of emasculated and non-emasculated *hijras* fueled by the urgency to earn more money, gain power over other *hijras* and areas. Evidently, the act of transition from a non-emasculated to an emasculated state is perceived purely as a means to end, to secure higher earnings and profits when engaging in the usual occupations of the *hijra* community.The practice of emasculation is also viewed as a means to further the ideologies of authentic and inauthentic *hijra* identity wherein emasculation is also seen as the primary determining attributethat differentiates the 'real' vs. the 'imposter' *hijras.* Conversely, some *hijra* groupings view the very act of emasculation as a mark of an inauthentic *hijra* as they consider such emasculated *hijras* to be as 'made *hijras'.* The simplistic generic understanding of emasculation as a rite of passage that confers upon the new recruit powers to bless and to curse is disrupted by the multiplicities of regional meanings of emasculation. The traditional processes of emasculation too are witnessing changes with the advent and intervention of modern technologies and surgical advances. Also, with the burgeoning of NGO's and CBO's and their advocacy/sensitization programs, the *hijras* of the region have become more aware about the health hazards entailed in emasculating oneself via the traditional methods. Like emasculation practices, the religious and occupational practices of the *hijra* community of the region have also witnessed changes primarily because of the incursion of *hijras* across national and international borders. The engagements with *launda* dance in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, begging during festivals (also called *tyohari)* and sex work or *khajra* work have also signaled the occupational variances of the region. Furthermore, such occupational differences are

hierarchically arranged and associated as identity markers to denote superior and inferior *hijras* along with their differences of emasculated and non-emasculated *hijras*. The *hijras* of the region also dominantly identify as *Muslims* observing Islam as their religion and visiting the *hajj* or the Mecca in order to become *hajjis*. However, despite their religious commitments, the *Muslim hijras* also observe other local and *Hindu* religious practices to culturally assimilate with the local cultures. The overall culture of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata therefore is characterized by a plethora of conflicting ideologies advancing their own ideals of authentic and inauthentic *hijra* identity, community practices, religion and occupational engagements. For chapter three, the research quantitatively examines the socio-economic conditions of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata post the Supreme Court Verdict of 2014 by focusing on three aspects viz. a) their access to basic needs, income and expenditure b) access to healthcare, diseases and treatment facilities and c) their social stigma, problems and their social status. As per findings, no center or state government sponsored provisions and measures have been implemented to improve or uplift the socio-economic standards of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata. Instead, the findings demonstrate the disparities between socioeconomic conditions between the *gurus* and *celas,* differences between *hijra* households and their allegiances with the *Bangladeshi hijras* or against them and their choice of occupational engagements which determine their socio-economic status. Therefore, post the Supreme Court Verdict of 2014, the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata continue to languish in socio-economic deprivation with lack of access to education and employment opportunities, social persecution, harassment and prosecution from the law enforcers, inequality and unacceptance. In the fourth chapter, the research qualitatively examines the narratives of stigma and coping strategies used by the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata by employing the theoretical framework of Erving Goffman's stigma. In context to the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata, there two levels of stigma encounters experienced by the *hijras*. The initial state of discredit begins with their encounters with the normals within familial, peer group and locality spaces. It was known that many respondents accept, internalize their stigma or repudiate it all together when interacting with the normals and

coming to terms with their stigma or difference. The *hijras* further transition into another state of discredit after joining the *hijra* community due to their encounters with the community norms of authentic and inauthentic *hijra* identity. The chapter therefore examines the states of transition from discreditable to the discredited and the possible strategies and coping mechanisms used when *hijras* traverse from being discredited (within heteronormative spaces) towards *hijra* communes or milieus. The fifth chapter also employs the qualitative method to study the lived experiences of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata. It subsumes the analysis of gender identity, sexuality, body and self within the rubric of the 'being' of the *hijras* because the study espouses the theoretical framework of the phenomenology of Martin Heidegger. The study situates the *being* of the *hijras* as indivisible with the world, drawing meanings and interpreting their being or *dasein.* The findings reveal that the meanings attributed to the being of the *hijras* is processual and always in a process of becoming because of their constant engagements with their situated worlds. Their experiences of gender identity, body and sexuality are contingent upon their temporalities and their given worlds furthered by their interpretations of existing meanings. Therefore, their experiences of *being* constitutes a series of ready to hand and present at hand based on their interpretations and decisions. The final chapter foregrounds the philosophical worldview of the study (pragmatic worldview) and draws similarities of its central philosophical tenets with the research. Pragmatic worldview chiefly lays emphasis on practice, usability and experiences over grand philosophical assertions on truth and metaphysics. With its emphasis on practice over theory, the present research could apply suitable research methods for effectively answering the research objectives and deploy appropriate theoretical frameworks for the analysis of the results. It is primarily because of the worldview's emphasis on 'praxis' or 'practice' and the flexibility in terms of choice of methods and theories that enabled the researcher to situate the study within the contexts of North Bengal and Kolkata and allowed for a comprehensive regional analysis of the same.

CHAPTER - 1

INTRODUCTION

"I did not know that I was a hijṛā. My partner told me that I was one" – Shonali celā

(Alipurduar District, North Bengal)

1.1 THE HIJRĀS OF INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

According to census report 2011, the total number of transgenders in India (2011) stood at 4.88 lakh. However, the census also issued a caveat stating that the data for the 'third gender' specifically was not collected as such a gender category was not recognized by the census[1]. The *hijṛās*[2] of India, synonymously known as the 'third gender of India' is a subculture known for its unique religious and cultural practices drawing and asserting their identity/customs from a melange of ancient, medieval and colonial sources along with myths, oral lores and related repertoires (Kalra, 2011). The legitimacy of the contemporary *hijṛā c*ulture, community practices and identity heavily rely on events documented in legendary mythologies of Hindu lore, oral stories and events that transpired during periods of medieval history (Pattanaik, 2014, pp. 14-15; Jaffrey, 2009, pp. 63-64; Eraly, 2007). The *hijṛā* 'identity' can be envisaged as an oxymoron especially when considered within the delineations of heteronormative and heterosexual gender and sexuality spaces primarily because it subverts the very conception of identity as imagined within such spaces. In other words, the *hijṛā* gender identity defies conformance to the standards of binary sex

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[1] Census 2011 report on Transgender/Others.
(https://www.census2011.co.in/transgender.php#:~:text=Indian%20Census%20has%20never%20recognized,Lakh%20as%20per%202011%20census.) 29.11.20

[2] The study employs the transliteration of the Hindi word 'हिजरा' (as adopted by Kira Hall, 1995, pp. 24) as hijṛā.

and gender congruency/roles viz. masculinity corresponding to male sex and femininity corresponding to female sex and instead identifies as the third gender documented in cultural and mythical histories. The third gender, more particularly in the contemporary Indian contexts is rendered synonymous with the *hijṛā* identity as it transgresses the normative dichotomy of male and female sexes creating an ambiguous gender nomenclature oft-quoted as 'neither man nor woman' (Nanda, 1999, pp. 17-18). Akin to the occidental terminology viz. transgender perceived as a rubric term, the contemporary *hijṛā* culture too is similarly capacious for accommodating multiple diversities with respect to sexuality, gender identity and corporality (i.e., hermaphroditism, penectomy, emasculation etc.) or more recently, surgically reassigned bodies (SRS) subsuming all under its category. Typically, the primacy of the *hijṛā* identity lies in its ambiguity in terms of external genitalia or gender identity or both. The emasculation ritual called *Nirvan*[3] is deemed as a significant rite of passage as it supposedly endows the newly inducted recruits with powers of *shakti* to bless and to curse at occasions and to embody the ideal of celibacy and ambiguity (Nanda, 1999, pp. 15-16). Colloquially, a *hijṛā* is also referred to as *'chakka'* for their effeminate comportment and impotency. The words *'hijra'* and *'chakka'* are often used interchangeably as verbal slurs[4] to express societal disapproval and condemnation. Across India, there are relatively analogous cultural and regional aggregates of communities exhibiting allegiances towards certain deities for example the *Aravanis*[5] of South India, the *Jogappas* who pledge

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[3]*Nirvan* is often perceived as a rite of passage for a new *hijṛās* recruit enabling the person to be reborn as a hijṛās with special powers conferred by the deity.

[4]Sarangan, R. (2017, June 16). *Why is the 'hijra' a term of abuse and insult?* The Indian Express. https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/why-is-the-hijra-a-term-of-abuse-and-insult-eunuch-4707100/

[5]Aravanis are the transgender community of Tamil Nadu (Mahalingam, 2003)

their devotion to Goddess *Yellamma*[6] and the *Shiv-Shaktis*[7]. The generic *hijṛā* identity and culture is typically defined by its adherence to some common quintessential attributes i.e. a hierarchical ordering of the *nayaks*[8], *gurus* and *celās* living in a *gharana*[9] establishing a chain of command wherein the *nayaks* are usually at the helm of affairs, their abstinence from sexual acts and marital relationships, gender and sexual/genital ambiguity, devotees of deities (for drawing cultural recognition, spiritual powers and social sanction) and their occupational engagements as singers, dancers, beggars and as bestowers of blessings. The word *'hijṛā'* traces its origins from the root word *'hijr'* which is linguistically recognized as a *semitic-Arabic-Persian* language. The root word *'hijr'* i.e., *'hijrah'* connotes migration to places to accrue good deeds and to decrease vices. Similarly, Thomas elaborates on another variation viz. *'hich-gah'* connoting someone/something without a defined place (Thomas, 2013). She contends that the central meaning of the word involves someone who has no set place to call one's own (Ibid). She further likens the etymological origins of the word *hijṛā* with the community's sex/gender ambivalence and their displaced gender identity when considered within the matrices of heteronormativity. In a similar vein, Jaffrey citing Alam states that the word *'hiz'* has its origins in the old Persian Pahlavi language which meant an ineffectual man lacking the properties of manhood (Jaffrey, 1996, pp. 148). Contrarily, Sawant on the other suggests that the persian word *'hiz'* denotes a person exhibiting effeminacy or someone who is deemed ineffectual/impotent (Sawant, 2017). Hence, considering the *hijṛā* community's multiple arabic/persian etymological origins, reliance on *Hindu* myths coupled with their *Mughal* past (as

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[6]The *jogappas* are a discrete community distinct from the *hijṛās* as they primarily are helpers and servants of Goddess *Yellamma* (https://thewire.in/gender/jogappas-goddess-gender)

[7]The *shiv-shaktis are males but express themselves as women* (Ashraf, 2018).

[8]Considered to be the 'head of the hijṛās gharana'/household.

[9]A common residence (sourced from field data).

eunuchs stationed in seraglios), it would be fairly plausible to infer that the *hijṛās* draw on the synthesis of myriad cultures and belief systems to assert and maintain their identity. A general apprehension of a *hijṛā* identity and community would therefore require a holistic examination of antecedent historical periods dating back to the *Vedic* age, mythological and literary histories, events that transpired during the *Mughal* rule, the incursion of British colonialism with its repressive injunctions and the community's subsequent transition to post-colonial times. Considering the syncretic cultural genealogy of the *hijṛās* of India, one can contend the absence of a discrete '*hijṛā* culture and identity' with clearly delineated practices and customs existing since primordial times. Furthermore, the lack of literature chronicling the exact genesis of the community as a distinct cultural unit produces the conundrum of the *hijṛā* lineage and its precise origins in India. With extant scholarship documenting the presence of the 'third gender', same-sex sexualities and gender transitions notwithstanding, and also a repertoire of literary works explicating ambiguities of sex and gender as myths and oral retellings, discrepancies abound when pinpointedly determining the source of a monolith *hijṛā* community and identity in periods of antiquity. Undoubtedly, there are sporadic and interspersed references of eunuchs, their lowly status and roles as singers/dancer's impotency, effeminacy, the third gender and gender/sex transitions in ancient histories but what remains conspicuously lacking is an explicit mention of the '*hijṛā*' community, its 'identity' attributes and cultural properties more specifically in the ancient and early medieval periods. Ironically, despite the absence of scholarship indicating the existence of a discrete *hijṛā* culture and identity, the contemporary *hijṛā* identity, nonetheless, derives its legitimacy from the mythical and factual events that transpired during such periods. It therefore becomes imperative to revisit ancient

and early medieval works of literature that informs about alternative gender and sexualities existent in those times. Various communities, multitudinous religious practices and school of thoughts in the past have viewed non-normative gender, bodies and sexuality from divergent stances, for instance, existing scholarship reveals the lowly status of eunuchs during the *Vedic* period and their roles as singers and dancers (Sharma, 2009). They were considered as harbingers of misfortune and ill-luck (Ibid). The genesis of genital mutilation and the subsequent exploitation of eunuchs in royal households can be traced back to the Vedic periods. Cheney for example informs about the use of the eunuchs during the *Vedic* period who were gifted to emperors and members of aristocracy as presents (Cheney, 2006, pp. 3235). The author also cites *Vatsyayana* who alludes to the custom of severing the tongues of the eunuchs serving in the harem (Cheney, 2006, pp.3242). Preceding corpuses viz. *Arthashastra,* (an economic and administrative treatise written during the *Mauryan* period) also mentions in one of its excerpts, the stationing of eunuchs for espionage within the household premises of the ruler's adversary (Kautilya, 1992, pp. 8515). But the *Mughal* incursion dramatically regularized the use of the eunuchs by rendering them as a functional part of the imperial household. The eunuch slaves were corporally mutilated to serve in the imperial harems (Jaffrey, pp. 25, 1996). Some eunuchs were highly trusted holding positions of power under their royal patrons (Jaffrey, 1996, pp. 37). Their impotency enabled them to be privy to the secrets of the rulers thereby earning trust and loyalty occasionally acting as their personal confidante (Ibid). Quite understandably, changing historical temporalities and cultures (ancient India and the Mughal periods) produced varying beliefs and perceptions on genital irregularities, non-normative genders and sexual desires. Evidently, the ancient

sources, medieval literatures and corpuses on mythology interprets the queer, castrated and impotent in multifarious ways exacerbating the difficulties in outlining a singular socio-cultural site of genesis for tracing the subsequent historical trajectory apropos the *hijṛās* identity and culture. Nonetheless, it is possible to infer that the contemporary *hijṛā* community, as it stands today, is the cumulative cultural consequence of assimilated and synthesized religious beliefs, myths and historical practices. Considering this premise, the following sections will briefly chronicle and examine the literary, mythological and factual histories topical for the formulation of the *hijṛās* community in its contemporary form.

1.2 IN RETROSPECT: A GENEALOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE CONSTITUENT ATTRIBUTES OF THE HIJṚĀ IDENTITY

The members of the *hijṛā* community often invokes historical events dating back to the *Mughal* periods interspersed with narratives of mythological figures transitioning to opposite gender/sexes, instances of cross-dressing and queer desires (Jaffrey, 1996; Pattanaik, 2014; Nanda, 1999). Such socio-cultural discrepancies apropos the *hijṛā* culture and identity becomes manifest in the contemporary everyday lives of the *hijṛās*. For example, field inquiry of the present research demonstrates that despite worshipping *Bahuchara Mata*[10] as their primary deity, there are members of the community who visit muslim pilgrimage sites[11] and celebrate festivals like *Id*. Such discrepancies become more acute when one examines the use of esoteric languages commonly spoken by the members of the *hijṛā* community, viz. *ulti*[12] and *farsi*[13] language. The *hijṛā farsi* language is

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[10]Colloquially known as *Murgi Mai*, she is a Hindu deity sitting atop a fowl. She is considered to be one of the important deities of the hijṛās community.
[11]Elderly *hijṛās* often travel to the mecca (hajj) to pay their respects.
[12]Also known as gupti (secret) language of the hijṛās (https://mittaltushant.github.io/projects/hijṛās.pdf)

believed to have emerged and evolved from the Mughal courts whilst the *ulti* language is predominantly spoken by the *hijṛās* across India irrespective of religion, region or caste differences. As per a reportage[14] published in the Times of India, the *farsi* language is spoken across Pakistan and the Indian sub-continent (Mukherji, 2013). The *ulti* language on the other hand is believed to have existed since many centuries but considering its oral mode of transmission, it negates any possibility of tracing its precise origins considering the absence of its written/documented form. *Ulti* is a popular spoken language amongst the *hijṛās* as it is used to render secrecy to their conversations (Ibid). It is known that the *hijṛās* fashioned the *ulti* language of their own by freely using elements from Hindi and Persian (*farsi)* languages (Ibid). A melange of varying cultures and languages have shaped the *hijṛā* culture and identity as it exists today. Taking into account the influences of the multiplicities of cultures, the following segment will identify and collate key religious, mythological narratives, factual historical events and their perceptions with respect to gender/sex ambiguity, impotency, castration, cross-dressing, the third gender, eunuchs and effeminacy (Ibid). Such mythical, literary and historical accounts collectively consolidate the *hijṛā* identity and culture. Abiding by this approach, it becomes imperative to revisit ancient canonical scriptures, factual repertoire of works, myths and oral traditions of the ancient and the medieval past for evaluating possible cultural and identity linkages of the *hijṛā* community with events/histories documented in the antecedent periods. The segment will thematically probe the ancient and medieval periods keeping in mind the central attributes (i.e., ambiguity, asceticism, the third gender, gender/sex

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[13]A language believed to have originated during the medieval era India.
[14]https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/hijṛās-Farsi-Secret-language-knits-community/articleshow/23618092.cms

transition and the practice of castration) of the *hijṛā* identity and community. Commencing with these themes, it would be important to revisit scholarships that have written extensively on asceticism, ambiguity, and the gender/sex changes. The *hijṛā* community in one of its commonly stated aphorisms call themselves as 'neither man nor woman' (Nanda, 1999). They disregard traditional identity binaries of masculinity and femininity inhabiting spaces of gender ambiguity. The portrayal of androgyny in the form of a merged union of Lord *Shiva* and his consort *S`akti* symbolizes the ambiguous essence of the *hijṛā* identity in its spiritual sense (Pattanaik& Johnson, 2017, "Chapter 5", para. 39). Depicting the composite form of male *(purusha)* and female principles *(prakriti),* it represents the subversion of demarcations imposed by the objective (i.e., world) and subjective (i.e., thoughts/personal perceptions) collapsing into a divine embodied whole (Pattanaik& Johnson, 2017, "Chapter 5, para. 34). Symbolically, the coming together of *purusha* (male energy) and *prakriti* (female energy) in an iconography represents the *Hindu* worldview i.e., divinity derived from ambiguity (Ibid). Goldberg in his work, *The Lord who is Half Woman,* further elucidates the transcendental image of *Ardhanarīsvara* by mentioning about the perception of duality as a false reality in the Hindu worldview (Goldberg, 2002, "Introduction", para. 8). Thus, the *Hindu* philosophy endorsed the state of being 'ambiguous and formless' as divine. Similarly, Jennings in her work mentions the merger of sexes (male and female) represented by the conflation of the *linga* (phallus) and the *yoni* (womb) (Jennings, 2015, "Chapter 1", para 2). Such an amalgamation of the sexes produces forth *'sacti'* or the reproductive divine energy responsible for the procreation of all beings (Ibid). The suggestion, therefore, is that the coming together of the two sexes could symbolically mean the attainment of the esoteric

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divine and the obtainment of generative powers (Ibid). The primordial co-existence of the phallus and the vagina as documented in the scriptures indicate the ease at which such an androgynous symbol presents itself as a fount of divinity (Ibid). Drawing on the trope of ambivalent sexes and the conflation of male and female principles, the *hijṛās* of India seek societal sanction for their cultural identity as the 'third gender'. Additionally, the *hijṛās* are known for their archetypal gender non-conformity in terms of gender/sex transitions, cross-dressing and overall comportment (Mal, 2018; Jaffrey, 1996). To seek legitimacy for their gender transgressions, they often call upon mythical stories wherein deities transmute their sexes and espouse gender mannerisms of the opposite sex. Lord *Krishna*[15] and his transition as *Mohini* to ensure the defeat of the *asuras* (demons) is often recalled as a popular instance of gender/sex transgressions in the Hindu mythology (Pattanaik& Johnson, 2017, "Chapter 5", para 29). The manifestations of ambiguity in mythology depicts the infinitude of forms, multitudinous ways of being and queer whimsical embodiments often espoused by the deities to displace the mundane and the finite. In a similar vein, yogic traditions like *Hathayoga*[16] reaffirms the state of androgyny or *Ardhanarīsvara* as the ultimate divine state. Nonadherence to a particular form and its association with the divine thus constitutes an integral philosophical/metaphysical concept of the Hindu worldview. Furthermore, the repudiation of cultural categories of masculinity and femininity for the divine constitutes a relevant motif when attempting to understand the underlying meanings of ambiguity for the *hijṛā* identity. Oral accounts, in particular, that are transmitted within the *hijṛā* community also informs about

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[15]*Krishna,* a popular *hindu* deity is considered to be the 8th manifestation of god Vishnu (https://www.britannica.com/topic/Krishna-Hindu-deity, pp. 1)

[16]*Hathayoga*, as a practice enables the spiritual practitioner to transcend mundane dichotomies of what is generally understood to be reality to gain enlightenment (Goldberg, 2002, pp. 98-100)

narratives that speak of gender ambiguity (Pattanaik, 2014). In one such instance that transpired in *Ramayana,*[17] Lord *Ram* and his cohorts were ordered by the King of *Ayodhya* to spend a certain period of time in exile (Ibid). Before departing, Lord Ram requested the men and women who had gathered to return (Ibid). Upon arrival, however, Lord Ram witnessed the 'invisible' subjects still awaiting his return as they could not be classed into any of the existing sex/gender categories (Ibid). The arrival also marks Lord Ram's promise of restoring their place and position in the society during the *Kali-yuga* period (Ibid). The oral retelling explicitly underscores social stigma, ostracization and exclusion along with the absence of a socially sanctioned gender identity (Ibid). Ambiguity as a motif, therefore, evokes meanings of divinity, spiritualism, metaphysics and also as a state of social repugnance/stigma. The *hijṛās* of India, nonetheless, draw upon such varied meanings of ambiguity to consolidate and legitimize their gender identity. Another important attribute of their identity is their practice of celibacy and emasculation via which they claim powers to confer blessings or to spew curses (Nanda, 1999, pp. 53). Prior to becoming members of the community, they are ritually ordained into the community by performing emasculation, inducting them as devotees and vehicles of *shakti*[18] deriving patronage and powers of potency from Goddess *Bahuchara*[19] (Nanda, 1999, pp. IX). Similarly, Goldberg (2002), reiterates on the generation of *shākti*[20](power) by observing austerities subsequently resulting in the yield of *tapa.* In a similar strain, Nanda (1999) builds a nexus between the

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[17]*Ramayana* is a prominent epic created by *Valmiki* possibly before 300 BCE.
(https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ramayana-Indian-epic)

[18]Pattanaik interprets *shakti* or*sagun*as a universal force that represents tangibility and flesh which works parallely with another ubiquitous force, *nirgun*(intangible, mind, imperceptible) (Pattanaik, 2016, pp. 1)

[19]Nanda (1999) defines *Bahucharamata*as one of the many forms of mother goddess and as a pivotal religious/cultural element for the *hijṛās*(Nanda, 1999, pp. IX)

[20]*Shākti* or the female manifest energy figures predominantly in the Hindu worldview. The infinite and the ineffable Brahman (or the divine) incarnates itself into intelligible dichotomous forms viz. masculine and feminine deities. The Shakti tradition therefore upholds the feminine energy as the all encompassing and powerful divine. (http://www.studiesincomparativereligion.com/uploads/articlepdfs/74.pdf)

state of impotency (a typical property of being a *hijṛā*) with asceticism (Nanda, 1999, pp. 29). The Hindu mythology views the yield of *tapa* or spiritual fire as an enabler of potency, thus expunging the material impotency engendered by emasculation or by congenital defects (Ibid). Because of their deviant gender identity, the *hijṛās* of India are viewed as a marginalized subculture. Despite their gender aberrant status, the *hijṛās* in India are likened to *sannyasis* or the ones who renounce the everyday (normative) world to join an order consisting of the *gurus* and their *celās* (Pattanaik & Johnson, 2017, "Chapter 1", para 43). Impotency is generally censured in the Indian society but when placed within the purview of the Hindu mythology, impotency in conjunction with asceticism transforms into a medium of acquiring generative powers (Nanda, 1999, pp. 29). The *hijṛās* also call upon other mythical narratives centering on the themes of cross-dressing, impotency and gender/sex transitions to assert the currency of their cultural identity (ML, 2017). In one such case, *Arjuna*, one of the *pandavas, loses* his manhood for a year (ML, 2017, pp. 141). Metamorphosed into the semblance of a woman, *Arjuna* or *Brihannala* offers his services to *Maharaja Virata*[21] as an instructor of singing and dancing (Ibid). The façade of *Arjuna* is described as a man with 'doubtful gender' for he dons the robes and ornaments of that of a woman (Ibid). As a eunuch dancer, *Arjuna* vanquishes the adversaries of King *Virata* when his son is incapable of doing the same (Pattanaik, 2014). The mention of gender ambiguity in the mythical re-telling resonates with the present day *hijṛā* identity and its non-conformity to the existent dual genders of masculinity and femininity. Here, *Arjuna* is depicted in a valorous light and the state of being a eunuch is implicated with positive consequences. The literary tropes of cross-dressing and

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[21]*Maharaja Virata* was the ruler of the *Matsya*kingdom. (http://gaysifamily.com/2018/06/07/queer-mythology-maharaja-virata-and-brihannala/) Accessed 28.11.20

gender transitions in the mythical narrative of *Arjuna* are associated with the positive attributes of courage and righteousness. However, not all mythical incidents positively endorse the ideas of gender/sex transitions, impotency or ambiguity. *Samba,* the son of Lord *Krishna* for example, earns a curse for mimicking the opposite sex thereby jeopardizing the lives of the descendants of the *Yadava[22]* clan (Pattanaik, 2014, "Part II", Chapter 23"). Castration and impotency are thus viewed as a mode of punishment rather than rendering one as divine. Elements of spiritualism and divinity in conjunction with gender/sex change is also evident in the medieval ancient texts, viz. *Padma Purana*, which documents the miraculous sex change of one of the pandavas, *Arjuna* when he intensely yearns to experience the *leela[23]* of Lord *Krishna* (Vanita, 2016, pp. 90-93). Eager in his desire to partake in the lord's play, he immerses himself in an exquisite pool only to emerge as a woman called *Arjuni* (Ibid). The woman is then led by *Krishna* towards his magnificent forests where he divinely sports with her (Ibid). The ease of accommodation of queer desires, sexual transmutations and same-sex relationships in hindu philosophical and mythological narratives therefore suggests the cognizance of the possibilities of sexual bonds and gender embodiments that transcends heteronormative unions, exalting it to the stature of the divine (Ibid). In yet another instance, the story of '*Shikhandi[24]*' (woman) transforming into a man requires consideration as it problematizes the normative correspondence of one's biological sex with one's corresponding gender[25]. *Vyasa's[26]* epic work *viz.*

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[22]The *yadavas* were pastoralists and were from the cowherd dynasty (https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/Temples_of_Kr%CC%A5%E1%B9%A3%E1%B9%87a_in_South_India/pzgaS1wRnl8C?hl=en&gbpv=1) (Padmaja, 2002, pp. 18)

[23] It is believed that all aspects of life (including profound) can be accessed when one becomes playful or adopts the path of playfulness as a way of life (leela). (https://isha.sadhguru.org/in/en/wisdom/article/krishna-stories)

[24]*Shikhandi* was the reincarnation of Amba, the eldest daughter of the king of Kashi who was reborn to seek revenge from *Bhishma.* (http://www.vyasaonline.com/encyclopedia/shikhandi/). 29.11.20

[25]http://www.vyasaonline.com/encyclopedia/shikhandi/ 29.11.20

Mahabharata[27] written during the ancient period elaborately recounts the mythical event of *Shikhandi,* a female who later transformed into a male to avenge her abduction by executing *Bhishma*[28], the invincible. The tale follows the life of the daughter of *Drupada*[29] who was named *Shikhandi* (a male peacock alluding to the gender, man) because of her father's belief in the powers of *Siva* and the lord's boon that his daughter would eventually transform into a man (Pattanaik, 2014). The boon materializes when *Shikhandi* becomes aware of her bodily/genital incapacities that rendered her to be sexually impotent to consummate the marriage with her wife (Ibid). However, she manages to obtain the masculine form bestowed by a *Yaksha*[30] in the forest for a definite period of time which enables her to partake in sensual pleasures (Ibid). In such instances, gender transitions, cross-dressing and the state of being a eunuch is implicated with positive consequences (Ibid). The equivocal stance of the ancient myths and philosophy on crossdressing, gender/sex transitions, impotency and androgyny notwithstanding, the *hijṛās* draw on such sources to sustain their identity. Apart from the *Hindu* mythical and philosophical sources, it is also imperative to examine the *Hindu* canonical scriptures (*Manu-smriti, Arthashastra* and *Kāma-sūtra*) and periods of *Rig Veda* concerning the mainstream perception on impotency, intersexed conditions, effeminacy and the social realities experienced by those who were labelled or identified as such.

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[26]*Vedavyasa*or *Vyasa* was a renowned sage known for writing or compiling the instructional poetry, *Mahabharata.* (https://www.britannica.com/biography/Vyasa) 29.11.20

[27]*Mahabharata* with its instructional content is an epic poem that combines elements of dharma and history. (https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mahabharata) 29.11.20

[28]*Bhishma*was the son of King*Santanu. Bhishma*acted as a guardian for his father's two sons. (http://www.mythfolklore.net/india/encyclopedia/bhishma.htm) 29.11.20

[29]*Drupada*was the king of *Panchala*and the father of *Shikhandi.* (https://amitabhagupta.files.wordpress.com/2018/02/doring_kindersley_mahabharata.pdf) 29.11.20

[30]*Yaksha* belongs to the category of magical beings who are helpers of Lord *Kubera.* (http://www.mythfolklore.net/india/encyclopedia/yaksha.htm)

THEME	MYTH/PHILOSOPHY	MEANING/S
Androgyny/Ambiguity	*Ardhanariswara/*amalgam of *linga*and *yoni/shivashakti/*	The equivalence of the 'formless'/'queer' as 'divine'.
Gender Ambivalence/Gender/Sex Change	Lord *Krishna* to *Mohini*	Divinity equals infinitude of forms and inclusion of queer desires. Subversion of rigidities & structure.
Gender/Sex Change	*Arjuna* becomes *Arjuni* to experience Krishna's Leela	Equivalence of queer desires with the divine.
Social acceptance/unacceptance	Lord *Ram's* departure and the cognizance of 'neither men nor women'.	The acknowledgement and acceptance of non-normative genders/sexes.
Androgyny	The philosophy of *Hathayoga*	Androgyny equals the 'divine'.
Impotency/loss of virility/transgenderism/*cross dressing*	1) *Arjuna* becomes *Brihanalla* 2) *Shikhandi*transforms into a man and aids *Arjuna* to kill *Bhishma.* 3) *Samba's* mimickry of the opposite sex.	The loss of manhood is implicated with positive consequences. Acts of valour and bravery typically associated with masculinity is demonstrated by mythical figures in their impotent/ineffectual form.

Table 1.1: Demonstrates the amalgam of myth and philosophy and its respective meanings which the *hijṛās* invoke to make sense of their identity and gain social legitimacy.
Source: Self compiled

As per *Rig Veda,* the world prior to the genesis or the 'creation' existed sans categories, culture, gender identities or distinctions of sexualities (Zwilling & Sweet, 2000, pp. 101). The poets contemporaneous in the *Ṛg Vedic* periods

characterized such a state by drawing on the intersexed or androgynous imageries[31] of the male deities harbouring a womb and the hermaphroditic cow or a bull (Ibid). Considering the usage of the hermaphroditic imageries, Zwilling and Sweet contends that the *Ṛgvedic* periods proffered the conceptual base for the construction of the category of the 'third sex' (Ibid). It is also known that the word, *napuṃsaka* was used synonymously with the third sex during the later *Ṛg Vedic* periods. The word *napuṃsaka* also denoted a cluster of states viz. impotency, castration, androgynous and hermaphroditism (Zwilling & Sweet, 2000, pp. 104). Despite the word's androgynous connotation, the *Ṛg Vedic* period was characteristically patriarchal in its essence due to the primacy placed on men, their procreative potency and their social status in the society (Zwilling & Sweet, 2000, pp. 101). Moreover, to preserve one's potency or masculine virility, offerings and ritual sacrifices of the animal *napuṃsaka* were made to ensure the continuance of the same (Zwilling & Sweet, 2000, pp. 102). As per ancient scriptural canons and the jain traditions, the third sex and its sexuality were derivative of the two traditional sexes viz. male and female (Zwilling & Sweet, 2000, pp. 123). People of the third sex and their social realities starkly contrasted their exalted divinities portrayed in the *hindu* philosophies and mythical treatises (Zwilling & Sweet, 2000, pp. 120). The androgynous people of the third sex in everyday social milieus were not accorded with veneration and thus were deemed as lowly beings (Ibid). In the later vedic treatises, the *napuṃsakas* (the third sex) along with the *klibas* were mentioned as a sacrificial element to prevent impotency (Ibid). The repercussions of the social exclusion of the third sex were also observed when the decrees of the

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[31]The hermaphroditic imageries continued in the later Vedic periods to characterize the state of the world prior to the existence of any contrasts or identities (Zwilling & Sweet, 2000, pp. 121). For e.g. the *Samhitas* and *Brahmanas* used the iconography of the Lord of all creations, *Prajāpati*who is a male deity but harbours a womb (Ibid).

Buddhist and the Jain traditions (in conformance with the larger societal norms) refused the admission of the third sex into their monastic orders (Zwilling & Sweet, 2000, pp. 121). The early and the later *Ṛgvedic* periods therefore conceptualized the category of the 'third sex' which was synonymous with *napuṃsaka* which meant a multiplicity of states. The characterizations and the realities of the people of third sex also resonates with the contemporary *hijra* identity, their social status and community practices. Apart from the genesis of the third sex, it would also necessitate to examine the canonical corpuses and its injunctions against eunuchs or individuals who diverged from the gender norm as the term *hijra* is a polysemous word harbouring multiplicity of meanings and states. The lawmaker, *Manu* in his treatise *Manu-smriti*[32] for example, expresses his prejudice against the eunuchs by mandating discriminating decrees debarring them from enjoying property rights and religious worship (Buhler, 1896, stanza, 201). The *Manu-smriti* therefore presents itself as a scriptural arbiter of social conduct delineating what counts as appropriate and inappropriate enumerating norms, edicts and decrees applicable to different segments or classes of people (Ibid). In the case of the eunuchs, *Manu* did not outrightly condemn them but instead formulated laws that disallowed them to have access to certain entitlements, viz. property rights (Ibid). They also were prohibited from appeasing the gods by giving offerings (Ibid). According to *Manu*, a eunuch was useless as he was ineffectual in begetting children (Ibid). Similarly, the *Arthashastra* too disapproved of impotency and defective sexual genitalia in men (Kautilya, ed. Rangarajan, 1992). Engaging in sexual practices other than the normative vaginal penetration was regarded as a criminal activity and the perpetrators were liable for prosecution (Ibid). However, the nature and extent of

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[32]*Manu-smriti* is a canonical lawbook of the *Brahmanical* tradition prescribing dharmic laws for mankind to adhere and follow. (Ninan, 2013)

the punishment was not serious (Ibid). The treatise further asserts that the primary reason to marry and procreate would be to reproduce male progenies (Ibid). Quite understandably, the accommodative interpretation of the philosophical worldview exalting the formless divine stands in contrast with the canons of *Manu-smriti, Arthashastra* and the everyday embodied existence of the third sex during the early and the later *Ṛgvedic* periods (Ibid). Evidently, the central constituents (sex/gender ambiguity, androgyny, asceticism, third gender) of the *hijṛā* identity has its share of inconsistencies when surveying the philosophical exposition with the canonical scriptures (Ibid). The themes of impotency, effeminacy and loss of manhood were not wholly accepted or approved by the texts. The meanings sourced from myths, philosophy and ancient canons apropos the properties of the *hijṛā* identity are variant, contradictory and nonlinear. Departing sharply from some positive interpretations of impotency and effeminacy in mythical/philosophical corpuses, few works of literature clearly indicates the usage of specific words such as *napuṃsaka*[33] to make sense of the supposed 'anomalies' of subjects with respect to their genital deficiencies and their gender proclivities (Wilhelm, 2003; Zwilling & Sweet, 1996; Doniger, 2015). Zwilling & Sweet for example, informs about the inclusivity of the term as it subsumes physiological characteristics viz. lack of virility (impotency) in men, the urge to cross-dress, effeminate behavior and the inability to procreate all under one term, namely *napuṃsaka* (Zwilling & Sweet, 2017)*.* The word also incorporates other terms viz. *kliba* and *paṇḍaka* that were used to denote sexual defects and sterility in men (Ibid). In an incident from the *Mahabharata, Krishna* is seen reprimanding *Arjuna* for behaving like a *'kliba'* before the war commences (Doniger, 2015, "Chapter 5", para 16). The word *kliba*

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[33]*napuṃsaka* refers to someone who is gender neutral or someone who does not conform to the binaries of masculinity and femininity (https://www.wisdomlib.org/definition/napumsaka) 29.11.20

carries negative connotations as it represents anyone who digresses from the standardized masculine norm (Ibid). It was used as a pejorative term to express reproach for what seemed to be an effeminate or non-masculine behaviour (Ibid). However, *Vatsyayana* in *Kāma-sūtra*[34] did not employ the word *'kliba'* to categorize individuals who diverged from the accepted sex/gender norms (Vatsyayana, transl. Danielou, 1993). The term *tritiya prakriti* (third nature) was used instead to categorize individuals who deviated from the normative sex/gender standards (Ibid). In the *Kamasutra,* the third nature is represented as a broad rubric subsuming multiplicities of gender/sex comportment, sexuality and behaviourisms (Ibid). For example, *Vatsyayana* speaks of the possibility of sexual role reversal between the two partners wherein the sexual stance of a man could be performed by the female partner while the submissive stance of a female could be performed by the male (Ibid). The nature of one's gender is thus temporarily suspended in coital engagement (Ibid). *Vatsyayana* similarly associates gender behaviourisms and sexuality when elucidating the characteristics of the third nature (Ibid). It is further alluded that people identifying with the 'third nature' prefer a sexual method- i.e., 'oral' sex (Ibid). The people of the third sex engaged in a sexual practice called *Auparishtaka*[35] to derive personal sexual gratification and for catering to the needs of the clientele (Ibid). Similarly, Wilhelm in his work mentions the prevalence of the *Tritiya Prakriti* during the *Vedic* times and employs it as a wide term to denote an assemblage of variegated propensities/comportment that transcends the constraints of heteronormativity (Ibid). Zwilling & Sweet sheds more light on the emergence of the concept of the 'Third Sex' by making the assertion that the

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[34]*Written during the 3rd or the 4th century CE, Kāma-sūtra is an erotic treatise* composed and compiled by *Vatsyayana* (Vanita, 2000)

[35]*Auparishtaka* is a sexual act that involves stimulation of the penis typically performed by the *tritiya prakriti* or individuals identifying as third nature (Lal, 2018). (https://vinaylal.wordpress.com/tag/tritiya-prakriti/)

biological segregation of the sexes and its introduction in the ancient lexicon could be attributed to the traditional schools of medicine (Zwilling & Sweet, 1996). They further mention the *Brahmanical* school of thought that emphasized on the conspicuous physiological features of a person and their genital anomalies as prime markers to subsume a person under the third sex category (Ibid). For example, the length of one's hair and the lack of procreative capacities would render one to be labeled as a third sex (Ibid). The *Jain* school of thought however did not wholly accept the primacy given to the outward characteristics (viz. superficial features and defective genitalia) as a reliable indicator to discern the third sex (Ibid). Besides acknowledging sex differences, they included the attribute of sexual feeling or sexuality to understand the third sex category (Ibid). The classification of the third sex determined on the basis of desires, for instance, to desire a man was called as *strīveda,* to desire a woman, *purusaveda* and the desire of a *napuṃsaka* was known as *napuṃsakaveda* (Ibid). The *Jains* concluded that the inherent sexual essence of people belonging to the third sex was bisexual in nature as they exhibited feelings typical to both the normative sexes (Ibid). The *Jain* school of thought further mentions the use of anus and the mouth during sexual acts (anus and mouth is equated with penetration and the mouth as a receptacle, respectively) renders the individuals as bisexuals (Ibid). The *Jain* school of thought therefore significantly contributed to refining the divisions of sex, gender and sexuality while also postulating that sexual desires cannot be tethered exclusively to a certain gender or one's biological sex (Ibid). Noticeably, the transition from the mythical/philosophical sources to textual scriptures and other traditions demonstrates a marked shift from spiritual and philosophical concerns towards a more pragmatic and epistemological orientation (Ibid). The *Jain* traditions and the

canonical texts primarily sought to label, determine, define and 'other' the third gender/sex, the eunuchs and other gender variants that transgressed the normative standard (Ibid). The *Hindu* myths and philosophy on the other, conversely foregrounds the metaphysics of the 'formless' as equivalent to the divine (Ibid). But such inconsistencies notwithstanding, the *hijṛās* of India draw on these chequered sources to warrant their gender identity. Moreover, the *hijṛās* by quoting the *Mughal* past and their practice of castration, further add to their patchwork of variegated historical past (Jaffrey, 1996). Extant body of works allude that the *Mughal* rule extensively exploited the eunuchs by stationing them in seraglios and as aides in the monarchical household (Eraly, 2007; Jaffry, 1996; Reddy, 2006). The *hijṛās* of India draw kinship ties with the eunuchs of *Mughal* India calling the latter as their ancestors (Lal, 2017). *Marco Polo* in one of his travel memoirs explains the commercialization of eunuchs who were perceived as 'slaves' to be bought and sold (Jaffrey,1996). Excerpts dating back to the 17th century further mention the emasculation and exchange of young boys by their parents to settle taxes with the governor (Ibid). The eunuchs were engaged in multiple tasks as guards in the seraglios and as royal attendants while others were entrusted with secrets by the ruler acquiring positions of power within the royal household (Hambly, 1974). In a similar vein, Francois Bernier in his travelogue mentions the powers conferred to *Chah-Abas,* a eunuch and a valorous soldier commanding three thousand men under him to besiege *Sourate* (Bernier, 1916, pp. 28). The eunuchs often acted as messengers for the nobles and the ladies of the harem for exchanging important reports as direct interaction between the two was restricted (Cheney, 2006). The eunuchs stationed at doorways were made to inspect visitors and their belongings in order to confiscate objects considered inappropriate or

obscene (Ibid). Physical appearances of the visitors were registered by the eunuchs to ensure their return from the harem (Ibid). But apart from executing the role of inspection personnel, some of them occasionally indulged in sensual pleasures with the women in the harem despite their castrated state (Ibid). Their sexual propensities therefore betrayed their emasculated state (Ibid). The origins of the trade of eunuchs dates back to the time of the ancient *Babylonians* (Cheney, 2006). Moreover, it can also be surmised that the purpose of using the eunuchs by the *Mughals* in the Indian sub-continent were relatively analogous with the archaic Persian dynasties (Hathaway 2012; Cheney, 2006). Understandably, a survey of these literatures suggests the multiplicities of names and identity definitions subsumed under the contemporary *hijṛā* identity (Ibid). The *hijṛās* are known for their impotency, effeminacy, powers of *shakti,* celibacy, asceticism and their performative/ritualistic gender identity (Wilhelm, 2003; Jaffrey, 1996). But as is known from the extant body of works, the precise genesis of the word *hijṛās* cannot be traced back to these periods (Ibid). Nonetheless, there are multifarious words viz. *naphunsuk, napuṃsaka, tritiya prakriti* and *khwajasarais* among others that the *hijṛās* often call upon to derive meanings for their identity and to seek cultural and social sanction (Ibid). But the beginnings of the usage of the word *'hijṛā'* was specifically documented in the myths of *Kamalia,* a cult community of the *Bahuchara Mata* in antecedent times (Mitra, 1984). As per a report published by *'The India Magazine',* the genesis of the *Kamalias* is recorded in the *Bahuchas Samiti,* a supposed authentic historical text for the *hijṛās* and the *Kamalias* (Mitra, 1984, pp. 51). The *Samiti* states that the *Kamalias* were made out of *kamal* (dirt) by Goddess *Bahuchara* to fend off a vile demon (Mitra, 1984, pp. 52). The *Kamalias* dressed outwardly as a group of androgynous fierce, devoted warriors of the

Goddess sporting a trident on their hands (Mitra, 1984, pp. 51). The *Samiti* further contends that the *Kamalias* were the original cult devotees of the *Bahuchara Mata* and the *hijṛās* were mere chattels of the *Kamalias* (Ibid). The *hijṛās* were used by the *Kamalias* for sexual gratification and for their *shakti* (power) proffered under the patronage of the Goddess (Mitra, 1984, pp. 52). But with the discontinuance of their service, particularly commencing from the *Kaliyuga*, the *hijṛās* flourished instead in their place (Mitra, 1984, pp. 53). Additionally, the currency of the word, *hijṛā* and its culture was factually documented by the Britishers when the latter realized the community's entitlement to public revenues (Preston, 1987, pp. 372). The *hijṛās* were legally sanctioned to beg and claimed grants of lands and cash as was ordained by indigenous rulers (Ibid). The similarities of the *hijṛā* culture viz. begging, emasculation, demarcation of one's territory, the hierarchical divisions between *gurus* and *celās* and the usage of the word *'hegira' are* clearly recorded since the early 18th century particularly during the Peshwa Maratha rule (Jaffrey, 1996, pp. 218). The regents of the Maratha kingdom offered patronage and support to the *hijṛās* by protecting their territories and codifying their right to beg (Ibid). But memoirs, surveys and documentation notwithstanding, the genealogy of the *hijṛās* is replete with missing links and discrepancies that problematize endeavours to precisely chronicle its identity and cultural beginnings (Ibid). The melange of mythical, factual and religious sources often recalled by the *hijṛās* engenders the conundrum of their exact cultural and identity origins (Ibid). For instance, considering the mythical narrative of the *Bahuchas Samiti* with reference to the *hijṛā* culture*,* it becomes problematic to reconcile the factual with the mythical (Ibid). The *Samiti* mentions the emergence of the *hijṛās* as servants/possessions of the *Kamalias* and the colonial dossiers on the other observe them as a class of

people dependent on the patronage of the rulers (Ibid). But the transition of the *hijṛās* from the latter class to the former (as helpers of the *kamalias*) is never clearly mentioned in any extant literature (Ibid). Furthermore, Roscoe in his work, '*Priests of the Goddess: Gender Transgression in Ancient Religion'* informs about the difficulties of securing credible historical sources to trace the origins of the *hijṛās* before the 18th century and the subsequent conquest of the Britishers (Roscoe, 1996, pp. 211). But Roscoe nonetheless notes that the compilation of poems called *'Boucherâjee Poorân[36]'* (1744) at least proffers a linkage between the myth of the *Kamalias* and the lives of *hijṛās* under the Mughal and Maratha patronage (Ibid). The point of reconciliation is attributed to the origin myth of prince *Jetho* which is itself not wholly credible but as Roscoe suggests that the myth lends an element of historicity because the prince was believed to be the son of *Gaekwad Maharaja* (Ibid). Narrated in the form of a story, the myth follows the *Maharaja* imploring Goddess *Bahuchara* for a son (Nanda, 1999, pp.25). Thus, Prince *Jetho* was born but in an impotent state (Ibid). The Goddess then appears in his dream, bidding him to emasculate himself to be her servant (Ibid). Despite its doubtful historical accuracy, the originary myth is important in many ways as it bridges the disjuncture between the *hijṛās* of the Mughal and Maratha periods and the *hijṛās* as servants of the Goddess and helpers of the *Kamalias.* The myth also inaugurates the theme of emasculation as a ritual rite of passage mandated by the Goddess which is integral to the contemporary *hijṛā* culture and identity. Similarly, Taparia contends that the *hijṛās may* have appropriated the spiritual/religious trope of the *hindu* culture apropos emasculation post the deprivation of the socio-economic prestige afforded under the patronage of the *Mughal* rulers (Hossain,

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[36] Compilation of poems glorifying the Goddess (Roscoe, 1996)

2012, pp. 498). Taparia's argument of cultural appropriation and assimilation can also be extended to include the *hijṛās* supported by the *Maratha* rulers who may have taken recourse to the religious belief systems of *Hinduism* (Taparia, 2011). The *hijṛā* community across India primarily relies on the iconography of *Bahuchara Mata* to legitimize their identity, culture and religious beliefs. Noticeably, all the key attributes of the contemporary *hijṛā* identity viz. emasculation, the veneration of Goddess *Bahuchara,* the right to beg, their roles as singers and dancers and the hierarchical ordering of the *gurus* and *celās* clearly manifest in the historical records/myths from the 17th and the 18th century onwards and as memoirs/observations of foreign travellers (Mitra, 1984; Jaffrey, 1996). The cultural consistency of the past and the present *hijṛās* is further documented and buttressed primarily due to the insistence of the Britishers to verify the authenticity of the *hijṛās* codified access to grants of land, money, the right to beg with the support from the indigenous rulers (Jaffrey, 1996; Preston, 1987). Jaffrey citing Preston notes that the British administrators were not keen on the continuance of the *hijṛā* culture, their demand to beg and access to grants of land and money (Jaffrey, 1996, pp. 213). This primarily roused the British Raj to inquire about the lives and culture of the *hijṛās* or the *hegiras* (Preston, 1987). But it was primarily the Bombay government that sought to urgently address the issue of entitlements of the *hijṛās* sanctioned under the Maratha reign (Hinchy, 2019, Part "1", para 8). In the year 1853, the government of Bombay revoked the *hijṛās* 'right to beg' and by 1847 declared 20,000 *inams* or the money received from lands as unlawful, both being prerogatives of the *hijṛās* (Ibid). In their initial days, the East India company continued their medical and ethnographic probe of the *hijṛās* by examining their emasculation procedure, conducting case histories and

patronizingly labeling their sexuality and identity (Hinchy, 2019, Part "1", para 5). In a case history written by the sub-collector, R.D. Luard in 1836, notes the complete emasculation process severed by a single cut sans the use of any sedative (Jaffrey, 1996, pp. 214). He further mentions the voluntary nature of admission to the community and the primary criteria of being impotent or infertile for being a *hijṛā* (Ibid). Furthermore, the arrival of the East India Company and the establishment of the imperial regime transformed the social landscape of India by mandating decrees and imposing injunctions against social practices such as *sati* and divergent sexual practices among others (Arondekar, 2006; Jaffrey, 1996; Hinchy, 2019). The *hijṛās* of the colonial period experienced the pernicious effects of two injunctions, sometimes operating concomitantly to prosecute and incarcerate them (Ibid). The decrees of Sec. 377 of the IPC (1860) and the Criminal Tribes Act (1871) criminalized, monitored, stigmatized and labelled the *hijṛās* depriving them of their erstwhile prerogatives to collect revenues, inherit or transmit property and to engage in their traditional occupational engagements as singers/dancers and begging for alms (Ibid). The mandate of Sec. 377 legally codified sexual acts into schisms of normative and non-normative standards (Ibid). The injunction of Sec. 377 is derivative of the 'Buggery act[37]' of 1533 which was sanctioned by the British Parliament (Ibid). The Act buttressed by the church condemned and penalized 'unnatural' sexual acts of that of sodomy and bestiality (Dutta, 2018). The decree of Sec. 377 was therefore largely informed by the tenets of the Buggery Act (Ibid). Evidently, Sec. 377 of the IPC is a direct manifestation of the ideals of the church in conjunction with the values of Victorian morality (Ibid). A prominent case in the name of *Queen Empress V. Khairati (1884)* illustrates the colonial

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[37]The Buggery Act of 1533 was sanctioned during the reign of King Henry VIII. The act penalized sodomy and sexual acts of bestiality (Dutta, 2018). (https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/section-377-history-supreme-court-1333075-2018-09-06)

bigotry directed against homosexuality and divergent gender expressions (Arondekar, 2006). *Khairati* was charged under Sec 377 post the examination of a distorted anus and a diagnosis of STI[38] (Ibid). Moreover, the offender was also convicted for cross-dressing and singing in public spaces (Ibid). Legal measures to repress and monitor the eunuchs were further sanctioned by colonial governance (Ibid). The Criminal Tribes Act of 1871[39] legislated a series of dictums that sought to severely constrain the mobility and freedom of the eunuchs (Ibid). The liberty to cross-dress and engage in activities viz. singing and dancing in public spaces was severely policed under colonial rule (Ibid). More specifically, the law prosecuted eunuchs living within the jurisdiction of the local governments consequently depriving them from property acquisition, inheritance and adoption of children (Ibid). The colonial enterprise sought to police the *hijṛā* community apropos their culture and sexualities consequently displacing them from their historically entitled status to a state of deprivation, social persecution and state surveillance (Ibid). The transition to the post-independent/postcolonial spaces also did not guarantee any immediate legal or social reprieve for the *hijṛās* (Opler, 1960). Middle class genteel values of the 19th century coupled with the ideologies and mandates of the colonial era continued to inform mainstream society about gender and sexuality (Hinchy, 2019). Despite the annulment of part II of the Criminal Tribes Act 1871 in the year 1911 which specifically deals with the registration and surveillance of the eunuchs, the echoes of this mandate have nonetheless permeated and influenced the larger society and their perception apropos the *hijṛā* identity and their culture (Ibid). Furthermore, a derivation of the CTA (1871) mandate was reinstated by the

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[38]Sexually transmitted disease (in this case, Syphilis)
[39]By the 20th Century, the law was gradually implemented in all other regions under the British administration (Reddy, 2006).

Karnataka government in 2011 by conferring powers to the police to monitor and regulate the eunuchs of the state (Hinchy, 2019). In 2011, the Karnataka government annulled the legislations of the princely states but retained the Eunuchs Act of 1919 (Ibid). Post-independence, the Indian government completely abrogated the criminal tribes act in the year 1949 and the totality of the 'criminal tribes' were renamed as 'De-notified Tribes' or DNT's (Japhet et' al, 2015, pp. 108). However, the government replaced it with a new statute viz. 'The Habitual Offenders Act[40]' of 1952 which ironically intensified the social persecution and stigma (Sharma, 2017). Understandably, the repercussions of the colonial mandate continued to afflict the supposed 'criminal communities' including the eunuchs or the *hijṛā* which negatively contributed in furthering the marginalization of the community. Nonetheless, the *hijṛās* of post-independent India continued their traditional occupational practices as singers/dancers and bestowers of blessings at propitious occasions. Similarly, Opler in his work, mentions in his observations of 1949 Allahabad that the *hijṛās* aggregated during certain festivals, fairs, festivities, religious ceremonies and during the birth of the male child to sing, dance and bless (Opler, 1960). In the same strain, Carstairs (1967) in his work further characterizes the *hijṛās* as 'male sex workers' and as social outcasts (Carstairs, 1967, pp. 59-60). In Opler's observations, the *hijṛās* describe themselves as gender neutral or as hermaphrodites afflicted with impotency engaging in performative gestures (clapping), dancing and singing popular and regional songs (Opler, 1960, pp. 506). Furthermore, in resonance with the contemporary assertion, the *hijṛās*claimed their hermaphroditic state as natural or congenital disavowing the ritual of castration,

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[40]Sharma critiques the continuance of the archaic colonial law despite its annulment in the year 1949 which was supplanted by the Habitual Offenders Act of 1952 (Sharma, 2017)
(https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/india-must-scrap-the-law-that-tags-some-tribes-as-hereditary-criminals/story-WqdykvPdFNUMPXeW7zBO8O.html)

genital mutilation or the illegal supply of intersexed children (Ibid). In a similar vein, Mitra documents the lives of the *hijṛās* of *Bechraji*in Gujarat (Mitra, 1984). Mitra's empirical narrative on the cult of *Bahuchara Mata* and the powers wielded by the *hijṛās* is consonant with the contemporary understandings of the *hijṛās* identity, culture and community. Mitra's work tapers and reconciles many historical inconsistencies with reference to the *hijṛās* culture and identity from the ancient, medieval, colonial and post-colonial periods. A dissection of the properties of the contemporary *hijṛās* identity and community practices reveals a hierarchical arrangement of the *gurus* and *celas,* the deification of *Bahuchara Mata (Murgi Mai),* their roles as singers/dancers at auspicious ceremonies, their ritual roles as the carriers of *'shakti'* of Goddess *Bahuchara*and their rites of passage or *'nirvan'* (penectomy/complete emasculation) to adhere to their neutral gender identity. Such totality of attributes begins to assume a cogent form especially when surveying the archives from the 17th to 18th century onwards. Mitra further affords a point of reconciliation of the variegated piecemeal interpretations of the attributes of the *hijṛās* community documented in erstwhile works of literature with the coherent contemporary meanings of the *hijṛās* community by citing themyth of the *'Bahuchas Samiti'.* Despite the uncertainty of the myth, it eliminates points of disjunctions and inconsistencies when surveying the evolutionary transition of the eunuchs from their histories of their medieval past to a more contemporary coherent group defined by set cultural attributes, occupational engagements, funeral rites and other ritualistic practices. Considering the contemporary indicators of the *hijra* identity, culture and community and its diverse and variegated historical past, it becomes plausible to advance the argument of syncretic cultural incorporation and the requirement of synthesis and internalization of diverse cultures to

legitimize and draw sanction from society to lead socially viable lives. Despite the conundrum of their historical lineage and their mosaic esque contradictory past, the contemporary *hijṛās* of India freely invoke and coalesce the vast, multiple and antithetical historical events repositories to make sense of their identities, their culture and their pedigree[41]. Also, with respect to the nomenclature, meanings and scope of the word *'hijṛās'*, it would be incorrect to reduce, bracket or equate *'hijṛās'* solely to singular connotations of being i.e., as eunuchs, as *tritiya-prakriti* (third nature), as transgenders, transsexuals, effeminate/impotent men or as celibate emasculated ascetics associated with the cult of the goddess. Considering the community's multiple references to the past and contemporary identity assertions and its idiosyncratic conflation of religion, spiritualism, impotency and gender ambiguity, the *hijra* identity seamlessly binds and subsumes all the aforesaid constituents (albeit having differing degrees of meanings). Additionally, taking into account their complex cultural history, an overarching superimposition of occidental terminologies such as 'transgenders'[42] or their characterization as mere 'eunuchs'[43] by few works of literature and media seems arbitrary, perfunctory and flawed. Such a representation of the *hijṛās of* India bypasses and disavows its amalgam of intricate ontological[44], epistemological[45] and historical complexities.

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[41]Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, a renowned representative of the *hijra* community and an activist calls upon the Indian mughal history and periods of ancient India apropos the *hijra* identity and their place and role in the society. Source- OutlookMagazine. (2019, October 21). *In My Community, There Are Thousands OfNirbhayas: Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, Trans Rights Activist* [Video]. YouTube.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DjCwLnnrVck

[42]In a UNDP report of 2010, the *hijras are* equated with the western rubric term, transgender.
Chakrapani, V. (2010). Hijras/transgender women in India: HIV, human rights and social exclusion.

[43] The National Geographic in their short documentary filmed published in the year 2008 equates the *hijras* as 'eunuchs'.
National Geographic. (2008, September 12). *Eunuchs | National Geographic* [Video]. YouTube.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mC-k27Kvtrw

[44]Pattanaik in his work, *'Myth=Mithya', Decoding Hindu Mythology* interprets metaphysics or ontology by differentiating between subjective truth and the eternal truth. Myth and mythology is equivalent to the truth grounded on belief, culture and faith; whilst 'sat' or the invariable truth is free from any value judgements (Pattanaik, 2006, pp. xv). The metaphysics of the world is further split into *'purusha'* (male)and *'prakriti'* (female) from a genderless being denoting inner and outer realities respectively. (Pattanaik, 2017, pp. 34).

The conquest of colonial governance and the East India Company, in particular, misrepresented the *hijṛās of* India as simply 'eunuchs'. Such reducibility was primarily fueled by Victorian prejudices and condescension indicating the double impingement of colonial cultural hegemony and state repression to alter and undermine the indigenous narratives of the *hijṛās,* their identity and culture. Such western representations of the *hijṛās* continued post independence in academic works by Opler and Carstairs which depicted the *hijṛās by* pejoratively labeling them as 'male sex workers' and as hermaphrodites. The scholarship of the *hijṛās* culture and identity also proliferated from the 1990's onwards with the seminal works of Nanda, Hall and Cohen among others documenting the community's religious practices, dialects and cultural characteristics. Nanda (1999) in her ethnographic work for instance carefully delineates the *hijṛās* of India, their occupational engagements, religious allegiances, asceticism and their 'institutionalized' roles in the Indian society. Furthermore, Nanda also deems the *hijṛās* as an 'institutionalized' third gender identity with their traditionally defined set of social roles and their gender liminal identity (Ibid). The usage of the epithet viz. 'neither man nor woman' conceptualized by Nanda (1990) further rigidifies and defines the contours of the *hijra* identity (Cohen, 1995, pp. 276). Moreover, Nanda attempts an epistemological apprehension of the *hijra* identity by taking recourse to the heteronormative binary genders and sexes of masculinity/femininity and male/female (Nanda, 2003 pp. 193-194). Similarly, Herdt in his introductory chapter expounds the categories of the third sex/third gender as a departure or a deviation from the normative schema of sexual dimorphism (Herdt, 2020, pp. 21). Despite citing works of literature that critique the reductionary tendencies of sexual

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[45]In periods of antiquity, the meticulous epistemological inquiry of Jain traditions apropos sexuality and gender produced knowledge systems of recognizing multiple human desires and corresponding sexualities (Zwilling & Sweet, 1996).

binarism and the third sex, the contributions in the volume nonetheless associate and label the cross-cultural gender transgressions viz. The *'berdache'*, the *'xanith'* or the *hijras* as the third sex or the third gender (Herdt., et. al, 2020). In a similar vein, Hall observes the gender liminal spaces inhabited by the *hijṛās* of India and invokes the observations of Nanda, i.e. *hijṛās as* not complete male or female (Hall, 2014, pp. 228-229). Nanda contends that the *hijṛās* are not considered male primarily because of their impotence and their intermediate gender/sex state (Ibid). Similarly, they are not viewed as 'complete female' due to their inability to bear children and their mimicry and approximation of 'womanly' mannerisms and comportment (Ibid). The *hijṛās* are therefore 'like women' but not 'a woman'; similarly, most of them are born as males but are not real males owing to their sexual ineffectuality and liminal gender categories (Ibid). Similarly, Cohen in his work delimits the culture and identity of the *hijṛās* by defining them within the cultural parameters of the importance of 'penectomy', their allegiance to goddess *Bahuchara*and their powers to grant fertility and confer blessings (Cohen, 1995, pp. 276). Cohen also refers to some *hijṛās as* the 'third' owing to their congenital intersexed condition (Ibid). Understandably, Nanda attempts to circumscribe and define the *hijṛā* identity within the purview of the heteronormative sex/gender binaries. Nanda also associates religious identifiers as markers or attributes of the *hijra* identity drawing from mythical and spiritual sources (Nanda, 2003, pp. 195). She further characterizes the *hijṛās* as celibates and practitioners of spiritual asceticism influenced by the *'hindu dharma'* (Nanda, 2003, pp. 196). Nanda foregrounds abstinence as an integral identity constituent as the *hijra* role supposedly draws powers from their sexually renunciate states (Nanda, 2003, pp. 197-198). M. & Tom (2016) citing Nanda's work alludes that the ethnographer

typifies and essentializes the role of the *hijras* by deeming them as 'asexuals' (M. & Tom, 2016, pp. 1). Nanda further views the *hijṛā* community as an organized social unit primarily because of the presence of a hierarchical ordering of the *gurus* and their *celas,* their traditional occupational roles and their adherence to specific *Hindu* deities and their ritualistic worship (Nanda, 1999). Nanda therefore attempts to secure the parameters of the *hijra* identity, culture and practices by (Ibid). Similarly, Sharma (2009) also fixes the *hijṛā* identity by defining it as a standardized 'third gender' with defined cultural roles (Sharma, 2009, pp. 125-126). Sharma observes that the *hijṛās,* owing to their 'asexuality', genital irregularities or castration experiences continual social stigma and persecution (Sharma, 2009, pp. 125). For Sharma, such 'othering' of the *hijṛās* eventually coerces them to seek recourse to alternative societies viz. the subculture and society of the *hijṛās* (Sharma, 2009, pp. 125-126). In a similar strain, Herdt characterizes the *hijras* as a ritualized category subsuming them under the third sex (Herdt, 2020). Herdt like Nanda centers on the importance of the emasculation ritual or the *'nirvan'* deeming it to be an ideal determiner of their identity (Herdt, 2020). Contemporary scholarship on the *hijṛā* identity and culture continued the exercise of reifying the *hijṛā* identity and culture inaugurated by ethnographers such as Nanda and Sociologists like Sharma in their respective works. For example, Taparia (2011) in her work articulates emasculation as an absolute or as a 'sine qua non' attribute for determining the *hijṛā* identity and culture (Taparia, 2011, pp. 178). She further observes the impossibility of identifying a *hijra* sans the emasculation procedure (Ibid). Taparia thus advances the argument of viewing emasculation as a pivotal ritualistic process that renders the *hijra* identity, community and culture as a discrete category separate from other gender identities.

The author also alludes to the divisions of 'genuine' and 'fake' *hijra* identity wherein the degree of authenticity is discerned by the practice of emasculation (Taparia, 2011, pp. 180-181). Taparia in her analysis of the *hijras* argues the salience of emasculation as a ritualistic process which the *hijras* view it as culturally meaningful by drawing on the *Hindu* philosophical and mythical tropes of asceticism, powers of celibacy and the androgynous state (Taparia, 2011, pp. 177). Like Taparia, Mal &Mundu (2018) too associate 'genital irregularity' as a primary and prerequisite constituent of the *hijra* identity (Mal &Mundu, 2018, pp. 621-622). Similarly, Saxena (2011) attempts to delimit the *hijṛā* culture and identity by equating the 'genderless' state of the *hijras* as eunuchs (Saxena, 2011, pp. 3-7). However, unlike the conventional western understanding of the word, 'eunuch', Saxena characterizes it as the combination of physiological irregularities, the psyche of the *hijra/s* and their cultural way of life (Saxena, 2011, pp. 7). Hall (1996) like Nanda encloses the *hijra* culture and identity within certain definitional parameters (Hall, 1996, pp. 279). She associates the *hijras* with acts of penectomy, espousal of gender comportment/mannerisms of the opposite gender, impotency, inability to bear children and the induction as members of the community (Ibid). An assessment of the aforementioned body of works clearly demonstrates an urgency to reduce and define the *hijra* culture and identity by foregrounding core attributes, identity markers and cultural prerequisites. Clearly, what is endemic of most of these body of works is that it attempts to present a generic and sweeping characterization of the *hijṛā* culture, identity, ritual and community practices which is supposedly representative of *hijras* living across India. While such corpuses undoubtedly lay the foundational and the conceptual basis to comprehend the generic contemporary *hijra* community by objectively attributing it with

definitional markers and indicators apropos identity and culture, but such an exercise also bypasses the enunciation and variations of contexts, spaces and region. The cultural and religious overlays of the *hijra* identity such as asceticism, celibacy, generative powers of potency, emasculation as an absolute rite of passage, their role as an institutionalized third gender in the Indian society and their traditional occupations as singers and dancers represents the *hijra* culture and identity as a monolith and immutable structure which is relatively resistant to change. But the salience of such cultural impositions notwithstanding, it would be imperative to recall and retrospect on the very beginnings of the *hijra* culture, identity and community practices and their gradual transmutations, evolution and their cumulative cultural changes. Evidently, cultural change constitutes as an intrinsic and axiomatic part of the *hijra* community as multiple impingements and intersections of temporalities, political climates/conquests, divergent cultures/worldviews and foreign incursions among others have dovetailed to continually shape and reshape the cultural contours of the *hijras* of India. The generic and overarching definitions produced by some extant scholarships on the *hijras* of India establishes a point of commencement and proffers a meaningful socio-cultural backdrop to begin inquiries apropos the contemporary *hijra* culture and identity but its scope and application is limited when examining the geographical specificities of the *hijras,* their endemic cultural contexts, the possibilities of integration of local and the generic understandings of *hijra* culture and a myriad of other contextually contingent factors that impinge and affect their everyday lived experiences and their perceptions on identity and culture. Therefore, in the study of the sociological exploration of the life of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata, the regional context and culture assumes important axes for the

apprehension of identity and community practices. The following segment therefore examines topical works of literature that specifically places primacy on social and geographical contexts and the different combinations and permutations of culture and identity produced by such intersections.

1.3 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Nanda's ethnography clearly delineated the *hijra* identity and strongly articulated the institutionalization of the *hijras* as the third gender (Nanda, 1990). But Reddy (2006) unlike Nanda, tangentially departed in her ethnographic account of the *hijras* of Hyderabad and Secunderabad. For example, Chaudhry in her review of Reddy's work explains that the author placed primacy on the *hijra's* subjective construction of selfhood and takes into account multiple axes that transgresses the typicalities of the sex/gender schema and the subsequent analysis of the *hijras* as 'third sex' (Chaudhry, 2010). Reddy commences her analysis of *hijra* culture, identity, hierarchical arrangements of *guru/cela* and sequestering of the *hijra* communities by underscoring the importance of the two spatialities and their specific histories viz. Hyderabad and Secunderabad. What distinguishes Reddy's approach from other early ethnographic accounts of the *hijras* is her acknowledgement accorded to the spatial sites, the socio-cultural peculiarities, the realities produced by such geographies and the role it plays in the construction of the *hijra* culture and community (Reddy, 2006, pp. 5-11). As is evident in her work, Reddy proffers novel insights when embedding the *hijra* phenomenon within specific spatio-temporal situatedness of her field sites. Reddy foregrounds the regional economy of *'izzat'* or 'respect' and 'authenticity' as some of the salient tenets informing the construction of the *hijra* identity (Reddy, 2006, pp. 15). The emphasis on 'respect' and 'authenticity' as possible axes produces the possibilities

of viewing the contours of the *hijra* culture and identity as protean, variable and provisional. Furthermore, Reddy mentions the variable of religion as a definitive identity marker for the *hijras* of Hyderabad and Secunderabad (Reddy, 2006). But unlike the typical religious allegiance of the *hijras* towards Goddess *Bahuchara,* Reddy observed that some *hijras* from these cities identified themselves as *'musalmans'* or muslims and conformed to the dictates of their religion (Reddy, 2006, pp. 101). Noticeably, Reddy's account underscores the significance of the regional interpretations of religious practices and its implications on the *hijra* culture and identity consequently displacing the generic narrative of the *hijṛā* identity and practices immune from spatial, temporal and intersubjective interpretive contingencies. By the same token, Goel (2016) in her work on the *hijras* of Delhi challenges the monolithic construction of the *hijra* identity by foregrounding on the situatedness of socio-cultural spaces and its subsequent consequence when interpreting the *hijra* identity and culture (Goel, 2016, pp. 537). Like Reddy, Goel's context specific work on the *hijras* of Delhi reveals variations in terms of their hierarchical arrangements of households, their livelihood avenues, the relative significance of emasculation as a ritual and their *hijra* identity. Goel's work reveals many disjunctions when juxtaposing the specificities of the context with the generic characterization of the *hijra* culture and identity expounded in extant works of literature. For example, Goel informs about the possibilities of negotiating or bypassing the ritualized procedure of emasculation (Goel, 2016, pp. 538). The non-emasculated *hijras* or *'akwas'* were accepted into the *hijra* fold despite their unwillingness to circumcise their 'male organ' (Ibid). Azhar (2018) also alludes to the disruptions of identity that manifest when considering the everyday contextual social realities of the *hijras* of Hyderabad. For instance, the

hijras are archetypally identified as renunciates or as ascetics who chiefly derive their power via the emasculation ritual. But when considering such identity or cultural markers against the lived realities of the 'married' *hijras* of Hyderabad with wives and families, it produces sharp inconsistencies between the ideal and the embodied realities (Azhar, 2018). Such variances and inconsistencies in terms of culture, identity and practice is also evidenced in scholarship on the *hijras* of West Bengal (Mal, 2018; Ganguly, 2016; Dukpa, 2016). For example, Mal (2018) in his work on the *hijras* of Kharagpur, West Bengal, inaugurates terminologies like *aqua, chhibri, chhinni, zananay and khusra*indicative of the multiple physiological or gender embodiments of the *hijras* of West Bengal (Mal, 2018, pp. 81). The usage of such local lingos demonstrates divergences from the ideal markers that characterize the *hijra* culture and identity viz. imperative emasculation, identifying as a gender liminal category and practicing abstinence from carnal desires. Similarly, in his yet another study of the *hijras* of West Bengal, Mal & Mundu (2018) demonstrates the regional variances that diverge from the congealed constructions of the *hijras* of India. As Mal &Mundu (2018) illustrates, these divergences extends to multiple aspects of the *hijra* culture, for instance, the adoption of multiple means of livelihood, espousal of non-traditional/modern methods of emasculation, regionally inflected parlances, heterosexual marital relationships and variances with respect to their hierarchical arrangements of power (Mal &Mundu, 2018). In a similar vein, Dutta in his work of the *hijras* of eastern India alludes to the incorporation of newer forms of occupational patterns (viz. *challa* (begging in trains) and *khajra* (sex work); and identity markers such as *chibbri*and *akua* denoting castrated and uncastrated states within the sites of West Bengal (Dutta, 2012). Apart from such context specific variances, Dey et. al. in

their work proffers insights into the dynamics, conflicts and identity politics endemic to the region of West Bengal. Their work contends that the very basis of conflicts between regional *hijra* households stems from a lack of consensus with respect to their 'genuine *hijra*' identity parameters wherein occupational patterns and emasculation constitute as important determiners (Dey et. al 2016). Quite understandably, multiple cultural fissures and discrepancies apropos the *hijras* become apparent when attempting to apprehend or read region specific *hijra* subculture from the broad generic vantage of *hijra* culture and identity. A generic reading or understanding of the *hijra* culture and identity has substantially reified over the years because of research that delineates the cultural and identity markers of the *hijra* community. The overarching and sweeping generalization of the *hijra* culture, identity and community practices only proffers a basic and preliminary understanding of the *hijra* identity and tradition especially when examining the *hijra* community within the specificities of spatial contexts. Even related research grounding their study on the *hijras* of West Bengal have eluded the explication of the dynamics of the regional vis-a-vis the generic or the monolithic interpretations of the *hijra* community. Furthermore, extant works of literature on the *hijras* across West Bengal have approached the cultural, socioeconomic conditions, experiences of stigma and identity in a piecemeal manner instead of comprehensively apprehending the *hijra* community, their unique cultures, and identity along with regional inflections of language, religion and practices.

1.4 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Understandably, extant literatures have expounded on the 'generic' or the 'typical' understandings of the *hijṛās* of India which bypasses the appreciation of regional

nuances, changes and divergences from the archetypal culture and identity that may have transpired overtime. By situating the *hijra* community within the spatial sites of North Bengal and Kolkata, the present research foregrounds 'context' as an important axis when delineating identity markers, community traditions, socio-economic conditions and lived experiences of their situated social realities. Such critique of the reification of a monolith *'hijra'* identity and culture is also maintained by Hossain in his work on the *hijras* of Bangladesh. Hossain contends that extant scholarship on the *hijras* have ossified the *hijra* identity and culture by only considering India as a sole spatial and cultural site (Hossain, 2018). By foregrounding on the findings of the lives of *hijras* of Bangladesh, Hossain decenters the privilege accorded to India and explores the multiplicities of *hijra* subjectivities which are formed at multiple regional and supra regional interstices (Ibid). Similarly, Reddy in her ethnography of the *hijras* of Hyderabad and Secunderabad reveals the possibilities of cultural permutations for the *hijra* identity and community contingent upon the spatial sites, its dominant culture, religion and the historical past (Reddy, 2006). The present research, therefore, builds on such regional variations and transgressions from the monolithic template of the *hijra* culture and identity endorsed by certain scholarships. Therefore, considering the locus sites of North Bengal and Kolkata, their intra border contiguities with the state of Bihar and international border proximity with Bangladesh, the research attempts to comprehensively address the social phenomenon, namely the *hijras,* their identity, culture and community practises.Considering their experiences with social persecution, lack of social support and censure, the study also attempts to quantitatively assess their socio-economic conditions (viz. income, education, healthcare among others) especially post the landmark verdict of Supreme Court,

2014. The contextual region-specific holistic study of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata therefore examines multiple axes of the *hijra* community by quantitatively assessing their socio-economic conditions and qualitatively examining their lived experiences as *hijras,* their encounters of social stigma and the cultural or community changes that differ from the ideal standardized conceptions of the *hijra* community.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do the *hijras* identify or relate with their cultural gender category?

2. How is the *hijṛā* community as a culture unique within the sites of North Bengal and Kolkata?

3. How do the *hijras* cope with their hyper visible socially stigmatised identity?

4. How effective was the SC verdict in ameliorating societal towards the *hijṛās*? Also, how has it contributed in improving the social and material conditions of the community?

1.6 OBJECTIVES

1. To account for the lived experiences of the self, bodies, desires and gender orientation of the hijṛās of North Bengal and Kolkata.

2. To examine the *hijṛā* community and culture within the sites of North Bengal and Kolkata.

3. To account for their understanding of stigma and their transition from the normal to the non-normal (discredited category).

4. To study the socio-economic conditions (e.g. occupation, legal entitlements, access to amenities, health, lifestyles) of the community post the declaration of the SC 2014 verdict.

1.7 ONTOLOGY, EPISTEMOLOGY, AND METHODOLOGY

The present research underscores primarily on the research lacunae of extant scholarship on the *hijra* culture, identity and community. By centering on the regional context as a pivot of analysis, the research attempts to holistically analyse the variations of culture, identity, practise, experiences of stigma, lived experiences and socioeconomic conditions of the community. Taking into account the wide spectrum and nature of the research, a pragmatic worldview or a pragmatic paradigm was espoused to better apprehend all the aspects of the study. A research paradigm constitutes an integral part of research as it determines the study's ontology, epistemology, methodology and the use of suitable methods (Rehman &Alharthi, 2016, pp. 51). The origins of the word, paradigm, can be traced back to the greek word, *'paradeigma'* which denotes or translates as 'pattern' (Killam, 2013). The introduction of the word 'paradigm' in research and its use in modern day context is attributed to philosopher Thomas Kuhn (Ibid). Paradigm therefore refers to the agreed set of views, beliefs and norms that the researchers use for guidance and framework (Ibid). Guba and Lincoln in their work considers paradigm to be synonymous with metaphysics, a study that concerns itself with the reality of the world and the kind of relations subjects share with such realities (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, pp. 107). Bettis & Gregson in their work likens research paradigm as a proverbial pair of lenses via which one views the world (Bettis & Gregson, 2001, Killam, 2013). They further add that paradigms are typically ways

of answering the questions posed by ontological, epistemological and methodological branches of study (Ibid). Additionally, Kivunja and Kuyini in their work maintains that the selection of a research paradigm for a given study entails the adherence of the belief system and ways of viewing reality prescribed by the chosen paradigm (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, pp. 28). For the present research, the pragmatic paradigm or the pragmatic worldview was chosen to effectively address the scope of the study. Other major paradigms such as positivism and constructivism lie at two ends or extremes of the continuum (Killam, 2013). As per Guba & Lincoln, positivism as a worldview or paradigm had predominated academia for 400 long years (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, pp. 108). Positivism is characterized by an objective stance eschewing any value laden beliefs and personal biases (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, pp. 114). Rehman & Alharthi further adds that Positivism severs the reality of the external world from human beings and asserts that the world continues to exist as an independent entity determined by objective, value free laws (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016, pp. 53). Philosopher and sociologist, Auguste Comte particularly championed the need for a positive paradigm which as a worldview grew in eminence during the 19th century (Ibid). Comte further contended that the deployment of reason, experiments and observations could solely produce reliable knowledge for the social sciences (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, pp. 30). The positivist paradigm endorses the use of scientific and experimental methods to determine knowledge or truth logically (Moon & Blackman, 2017). But the application of the positivist worldview to social sciences have been critiqued on many grounds (Al, Saaadi, 2014). For the social sciences, the sole use of the positivist paradigm does not suffice as it is incapable of apprehending human societies which operate on axes of contexts and

meanings (Rehman &Alharthi, 2016). The major criticism for the positivist paradigm is its emphasis on formulating objective knowledge, truths and laws without the interference of human beings which is suitable for conducting research on the natural world and objects, but the same approach is rendered rigorous and abstracted when dealing with human subjects (Ibid). Contrary to the positivist worldview is the constructivist paradigm which relies on qualitative methods and specificities of context to produce knowledge (Killam, 2013). Unlike the positivists and their emphasis on logical, context deprived and value-free truths, the constructivists maintain that social realities are to be discovered from the constructions of meanings and experiences of individuals, groups and community (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, pp. 110-111). The constructivist or the interpretivist paradigm stands diametrically opposed to the positivist worldview because of its emphasis on 'subjective experiences' and the assertion of the multiplicities of realities experienced differently by subjects (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, pp. 33). But like the Positivist worldview, the constructivist approach also has its drawbacks when generating theories and generalized forms of knowledge (Rehman &Alharthi, 2017). Because of its emphasis on the specificities of subjective experiences, the mutability of reality and context, the approach is critiqued for its 'soft' stance lacking scientific rigour and verifiability (Ibid). The pragmatic worldview on the other combines the strength of both the approaches (positivist and constructivist) of the continuum to resolve the research problems effectively. The pragmatic worldview does not espouse a unitary rigid stance for accessing the realities of the world (Kivunja&Kuyini, 2017). Thus, the pragmatic paradigm is more flexible and accommodative in terms of methods and methodologies used. The ontology,

epistemology, methodology and methods of the pragmatic worldview will be discussed in the following segments.

1.7.1 ONTOLOGY

Ontology in philosophical parlance addresses 'what is to be' or in simpler terms, to exist. It ascertains the nature of reality and of existence by assuming a particular stance to analyze and examine the world (Moon & Blackman, 2017). Al-Saadi in his work further contends that ontology primarily deals with the questions of 'being' and 'reality' (Al-Saadi, 2014, pp. 1). The study of ontology determines the set of assumptions with which the researcher frames the study (Ibid). Smith in his work defines ontology as the existence of something or simply what is to exist (Smith, 2003). As per Killam, the term 'ontology' is derived from- *'ontologia',* a Latin word which simply means 'to be' in Greek (Killam, 2013). As discussed earlier, the pragmatic worldview (adopted by the present research) does not endorse the binary realities advanced by the positivists and constructivists. However, the withdrawal of the pragmatists from such philosophical engagements concerning truth or the nature of reality does not stem from the urgency to simply answer the research questions but from the acknowledgment that such philosophical issues cannot be resolved once and for all (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019, pp. 3-4). In a similar vein, Frey observes that the pragmatic worldview is not concerned with accessing invariable and indubitable truths but is driven by what seems useful and workable for a given study (Frey, 2018). The pragmatists do not view or reduce truth and reality only to objective facts or immanent subjective experiences but reconcile both the premises by maintaining that there is an existence of the outside (objective) world, but such a world is only accessible via human experiences and

meanings (Ibid). Since the present research attempts to comprehensively address the phenomenon of the *hijra* culture and identity along with their socioeconomic conditions, lived through experiences and accounts of stigma, a singular access to reality as advanced by the positivists and constructivists would not suffice as a framework. Considering the nature of the research questions and objectives, the ontology of the pragmatic worldview presents itself as a suitable choice for adequately addressing the research problems. Since the present research is context based (i.e. a regional understanding of the *hijra* communities of North Bengal and Kolkata), it does not claim to produce immutable, generalized and overarching forms of knowledge pertaining to *hijra* culture and identity insulated from changes engendered by temporal/spatial vagaries but instead relies on an admixture of both the external (objective) knowledge forms as well as the internal (nuanced and subjective) realities.

1.7.2 EPISTEMOLOGY

The term epistemology, like ontology originated from the Grecian times from two words viz. *episteme* and *espistenai*which means knowledge or how are things or realities to be known (Killam, 2013). As per Kivunja and Kuyini, epistemology orients the researcher in a stance that enables them to address the multiple possibilities of acquiring knowledge or how it should be gained (Kivunja&Kuyini, 2017). Epistemology is reliant on ontology as it defines or sets the parameters of the questions asked and how to seek the requisite knowledge for addressing the metaphysical issues of truth and reality (Ibid). Epistemology therefore can be articulated as having the know-how of revealing knowledge of a given social phenomenon (Ibid). Taking into account the pragmatist orientations of the study,

the epistemology of the study similarly does not conform solely to the polarities of 'objective' and 'subjective' truths but instead espouses flexibility and functionality for unearthing knowledge out of a given research phenomenon. In other words, epistemology is primarily a philosophical inquiry which guides the researcher with appropriate ways of conducting research, defines the relationship of the researcher with the phenomenon and allows for the production of knowledge (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019, pp. 6). For the present research purposes, the epistemology can be characterized as being 'plural' in terms of approach with multiple ways of obtaining knowledge (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, pp. 35).

1.7.3 METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

In comparison to ontology and epistemology, methodology is more practise based, methodical and a systematic domain to apply the required research methods necessary for discovering or producing new knowledge (Killam, 2013). Methodology is an applied field of inquiry as it implements the philosophical tenets of ontology and epistemology for generating data (Rehman & Alharthi, 2017). Methodology proffers a blueprint for the researcher to collect data enabling them to decide on the correct methods for fulfilling the objectives of the research (Ibid). In conformance with the ontological and epistemological considerations, the methodology of the present study employs the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to address the diversity of the research questions. The study refrains from using the terminology viz. mixed methods as it engenders other connotations of data collection such as triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data entailing the comparison of the results sourced from such methods which is beyond the scope of the study. In conformance with the epithet of the pragmatic

worldview viz. *'what works',* the present research employs an amalgam of divergent methods in so far as it is only used to suitably address the research objectives. The research is primarily divided into quantitative and qualitative segments with suitable methodologies. The quantitative segment of the research analyses the socioeconomic conditions of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata by using the survey method (structured questionnaires) to assess their social status, mental/sexual health, income and other socioeconomic indices. It particularly attempts to assess changes (if any) post the landmark (third gender) verdict of 2014. Additionally, the research also thematically apprehends the perception of the mainstream society towards the *hijra* community by employing semi-structured interview schedules. The qualitative segment of the study on the other employs methods that are in agreement with the methodology of the theoretical frameworks used viz. Heideggerian phenomenology and Goffman's analysis of stigma and stigma management. Since the research examines the lived experiences of the *hijras,* the methodology of Heideggerian phenomenology was used as it underscores the salience of one's context and one's engagement with the world. And for the analysis of the experiences of stigma and coping strategies of the *hijras*, Goffman's stigma management theoretical framework was employed to study the transitions from a 'normal' to a 'non-normal' aberrant state.

ONTOLOGY	EPISTEMOLOGY	METHODOLOGY	METHODS USED
Pragmatic Worldview a) Is not loyal to	Relationship of the Researcher with the research is contingent	Means to acquire Knowledge	Research methods

any philosophical orientations that seeks to describe 'what exists' from a grand all encompassing narrative b) Seeks to utilize the most suitable mode of inquiry to address the research objectives.	upon the research objective a) The researcher while conducting a socio-economic survey and societal perception will adopt an objective positivist stance to evaluate and statistically analyze the quantifiable data.	a) Quantitative inquiry will serve to interrogate two research objectives viz. socio-economic status of the community and societal perception of the mainstream community.	Quantitative Inquiry a) Structured questionnaires b) Semi-structured interview schedules
c) Is flexible in approach thereby allowing the researcher to engage with multiple epistemological stances contingent upon the research problem.	b) While formulating a phenomenological research questionnaire, the researcher will espouse a subjective lived perspective stance to better formulate questions on temporality and lived experiences of individuals.	b) Qualitative inquiry on the other will be deployed on three accounts. First, to examine the unique culture of the community within the geographical specificities of North Bengal and Kolkata Secondly, to interpret the 'lived experiences' of individual members with respect to self, body, sexual desires and gender identity by relying on the Heideggerian Hermeneutic	Qualitative Inquiry a) Unstructured in-depth interviews b) In-depth semi-structured interviews c) Life Story method (part of Biographical method)

		theoretical framework. And lastly, to trace the transition of non-stigma life experiences to stigma ridden lives,	

Table 1.2 illustrates the ontological, epistemological and methodological orientations of the research. Source- self-complied.

1.8 SETTING THE SPATIAL CONTEXTS: NORTH BENGAL AND KOLKATA

Before the onset of partition and subsequent independence, undivided Bengal witnessed the reign of Muslims for several centuries and the subsequent two hundred years of colonial rule (Mukhopadhyay, 1994, pp. 1). Geographically, West Bengal as a state is enclosed within contrasting terrains. The Himalayas bound the state in the north and the Bay of Bengal surrounds it in the south (Ibid). Considering the vast area (88,752 sq.km)[46] and population of West Bengal, the study for the current research narrowed the field of inquiry into two geographical zones viz. North Bengal and Kolkata. The Northern half of the research site viz. North Bengal is characterized by an admixture of verdant greens, hills, small-scale industries that rely chiefly on agro-based products and flourishing tourism (Bhattacharya et.al, 2014). North Bengal now comprises of eight districts i.e., Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Alipurduar, Cooch-Behar, Malda, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur and Jalpaiguri (Ibid). Enclosed by three international borders, viz.

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[46]Source https://www.britannica.com/place/West-Bengal

Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan, the residents of North Bengal (as an aggregate), exhibit cultural similarities and convergences owing to the confluence of three international regions.[47]Basu in his work, further comments on the myriad cultural and ethnic composition of the region brought about by the colonial reign, the establishment of tea production and partition which engendered mass influx of natives from East Bengal to West Bengal (Basu, 2012, pp. 1). He further remarks in his work that owing to inadequate development on the part of the state government, many regions of North Bengal viz. Darjeeling, Cooch-Behar, Jalpaiguri, Uttar Dinajpur, and Dakshin Dinajpur, haven't been able to keep pace in terms of development with the rest of the state (Ibid). The research was conducted in parts of Darjeeling district (viz. Siliguri and Bhaktinagar area), Cooch-Behar, Malda, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakhshin Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, and Alipurduar. The region of Darjeeling town, Kurseong and Kalimpong (due to absence of population of the *hijrā* community) was excluded from the purview of fieldwork. Owing to the geographical proximity and similarities of the seven districts, the study amalgamates these regions in order to subsume the same under the broad rubric of North Bengal. The Southern half of the research site on the other, viz, Kolkata, has a rich colonial and cultural history (Dutta, 2013, pp. 18). The transition from 'Calcutta' (a name assigned by the colonialists) to 'Kolkata' was because of lingual cultural assertion on the part of natives who wanted to restore its language and preserve its culture (Ibid). The genesis of the name 'Kolkata' per se is an amalgam of legends, stories, myths and geographical features of the region. For example, in one of the instances, a prominent figure from Kolkata, Mr. Bhattacharya, maintains that the name 'Kolkata' needs to be hyphenated into 'Kol' and 'Kata' as Kol

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[47]Report on Economic scenario & Prospects of North Bengal (2016) pp. 4

denotes (in *Bengali* lingo) a 'lap' and kata means 'dent' or 'cut'. Therefore, Bhattacharya, therefore, suggests that Kolkata could, therefore, signify the abandoning (to cut off) of the 'Kol' or lap (natural formations by rivers) to form a new river course. An alternative story (concerning the emergence of the name 'Kolkata') stems from a simplistic story wherein a Britisher inquires the name of a region to a grass-cutter to which he naively replies, "Kal-kata". The grass-cutter (in a state of confusion) assumes that the Britisher must have asked about the 'grass' and the recency of the 'cut' (Ibid). Thus, having replied 'Kal-kata' (cut yesterday), the colonizers presumed it to be the name of the place (Ibid). The present research therefore contextualizes and examines the *hijṛā* community within two specific geographical zones of West Bengal, viz. North Bengal (eight collective districts viz. Alipurduar, Cooch-Behar, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Jalpaiguri, Malda, Uttar Dinajpur and Dakshin Dinajpur) and Kolkata. The regions of North Bengal and Kolkata were chosen primarily because of its contiguities with the state of Bihar and its borders with Bangladesh. Although the entire geographical terrain of the state of West Bengal shares borders with these regions, it was beyond the scope of the study to include all the districts of West Bengal because of time and financial constraints. A sample of 179 *hijra* respondents were selected to address the qualitative and quantitative inquiries of the study. An additional sample of 120 people (from the mainstream society) were selected to apprehend the general societal perception of the *hijra* community. The total sample size for the study therefore stood at 299.

1.9 THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

For the present research, elements such as 'context', 'region' or situated practices assume significance as it is from such sites that one can comprehensively (qualitative and quantitative) assess and inquire about the *hijra* community of North Bengal and Kolkata. Given the elaborate nature of the research and the methodologies employed, it becomes necessary to underline the ontology of the pragmatic worldview which denies the possibility of apprehending the 'reality' of the social world via recourse to a singular dogmatic paradigm. By the same token, even the theoretical frameworks used for the study were primarily selected on the basis of what was most suitable or functional to effectively analyze the research subject or phenomenon under study. For example, the quantitative study probed the socio-economic aspects of the *hijra* community and also thematically examined the mainstream societal perception towards the *hijras.* Quantitative methodologies need to be in alignment with ontologies that postulate the existence of an external social reality which needs to be measured and verified via the use of suitable scientific methods. Despite the relevance and advantages of situating experiences of marginalized genders and sexual minorities from the vantage point of subjective or interactional experiences, it would also necessitate to acknowledge the real-world repercussions of identifying one as such (for e.g., as a *hijra* or transgender). Such repercussions are doubly intensified when situating it within the traditional societies entrenched in the ideologies of patriarchy and heteronormativity. *Hijras* are a fairly conspicuous community asserting their presence in public spaces by their bodily gestures, their loud raucous voices and their garish sartorial sensibilities. They are legally subsumed under the category of the 'third gender' as per the 2014 SC ordinance. But as periods of precolonial, colonial and post colonial

histories show, the *hijras* on many accounts lead impoverished lives and were/are socially deprived. It was from the acknowledgement of their past that the juridical bodies of the country took cognizance of and legitimized their gender identity. Their historical past, experiences of violence, human rights violations and poor quality of living are in itself objective indicators of their overall living conditions. The quantitative methodology of the study by espousing an objective stance examines the socioeconomic conditions of the *hijra* community of North Bengal and Kolkata while objectively appraising the societal perception post the SC verdict of 2014. The urgency to assess their present socio-economic conditions and lifestyles stems from the fact that they have been victims of institutionalized and systemic oppression of patriarchy, male hegemony and heteronormativity. Repressive mandates such as sec. 377 and the ITPA act demonstrate the legislative suppression against individuals professing alternative sex or gender identities. Such decrees demonstrate conformance with the ideologies of heteronormativity and patriarchy. Walby in her work enunciates the six structures of patriarchy which consists of household relations, the economic structures, the involvement of the state, the hegemony of patriarchy and its ill effects on compulsory heteronormativity and the influence of patriarchy over culture and religion (Walby, 1990, pp. 21). Albeit Walby's analysis of patriarchy primarily focuses on the inequalities between men and women, her six structures of patriarchy can also be extended to examine the marginalized social status of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata. Male hegemony or '*hegemonic masculinities'* along with patriarchy constitute as important theoretical points of analysis when attempting to understand the perceptions of mainstream society and the socioeconomic concerns of the *hijras.* Connell's work on hegemonic masculinities builds on the insight that gender

is not merely restricted as individualized roles or individual experiences but is relational in the sense that it creates hierarchies not only between men and women but also within men and women (Yang, 2020). By assessing school children and their hierarchical divisions of superior and inferior masculinities, Connell deduces the premise of multiplicities of masculinities and femininities (Ibid). Masculinities positioned in the upper echelons of the hierarchy fulfill the cultural standards of being a 'hegemonic male' while those who deviate from the norm occupy marginalized or inferior positions (Ibid). The quantitative study therefore examines the results of the socioeconomic survey by coalescing these conceptual axes which effectively discriminates and precludes them (*hijra* communities) from living as equals in the society. The qualitative inquiry of the study on the other hinges on two major theories viz. hermeneutic phenomenology and stigma management propounded by Martin Heidegger and Erving Goffman respectively. The qualitative segment of the research looks into the 'lived through' experiences of the *hijras* vis-a-vis their gender identity and sexualities and the experiences of stigma, their personal encounters, interpretations and coping strategies employed to manage their socially discredited image. In adherence with the principles of the pragmatic research paradigm, the study employs the Heideggerian phenomenological methodology which departs from the Husserlian phenomenology and his emphasis on bracketing, epoche and eidetic reductions. Heidegger contests the possibility of unearthing an indubitable invariant essence of a given phenomenon, for example from experiences of gender identity of individual respondents. Unlike Husserlian phenomenology and its schisms of subjects intending objects, the analysis of the lived experiences of the *hijras* commences from the ontic state of 'being' or as *'daseins'*. It therefore foregrounds on the significance of the tangible 'given world'

by prioritizing on the Heideggerian epithet viz. 'being in the world' by converging on the 'lived experiences' (past/present) of *hijṛās* members with the 'givenness' of their lived world. The qualitative inquiry also incorporates the theoretical framework of stigma as propounded by Erving Goffman to analyze the transmutation from incognito (invisible non-stigmatised state) towards a more visibilized state of stigma. Given the ubiquity of stigma associated with the *hijṛā* identity, the study aims to trace phases or transitions from the discreditable to the discredited state by employing the life story method. Social stigma is a recurrent experience for the *hijras* of India because of their non-normative gender identities and sexualities. As per Goffman, such a conspicuous stigmatised state produces schisms of 'we' vs 'they' which perpetuates the 'othering' process for those exhibiting the 'spoiled identity' (Link & Phelan, 2001). Goffman conceptualizes stigma as an attribute that is disfavoured and ridiculed by the norm thereby eliciting negative reactions or responses from the supposed 'normal ilk' (Link & Phelan, 2001, pp. 364). In the case of the *hijras,* their sex/gender transgressions defies the conventions of heteronormativity which connotes the disruption of heterosexual coupling, procreation and the marriage/family unit borne out of the binaries of masculinity (male) and femininity (female). But the current research does not simply delimit the experiences of stigma within familial and 'normal societal' scapes. It also attempts to explain the encounters, interpretations and phases of transitions from their accepted states to stigmatised/abused states even within their own community. Employing the life story method, the qualitative inquiry on stigma examines the different coping strategies used by the *hijras* in different phases of their lives. The research on the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata therefore uses

multiple methods, methodologies and theoretical frameworks to effectively answer

the research questions posed without taking recourse to any particular worldview.
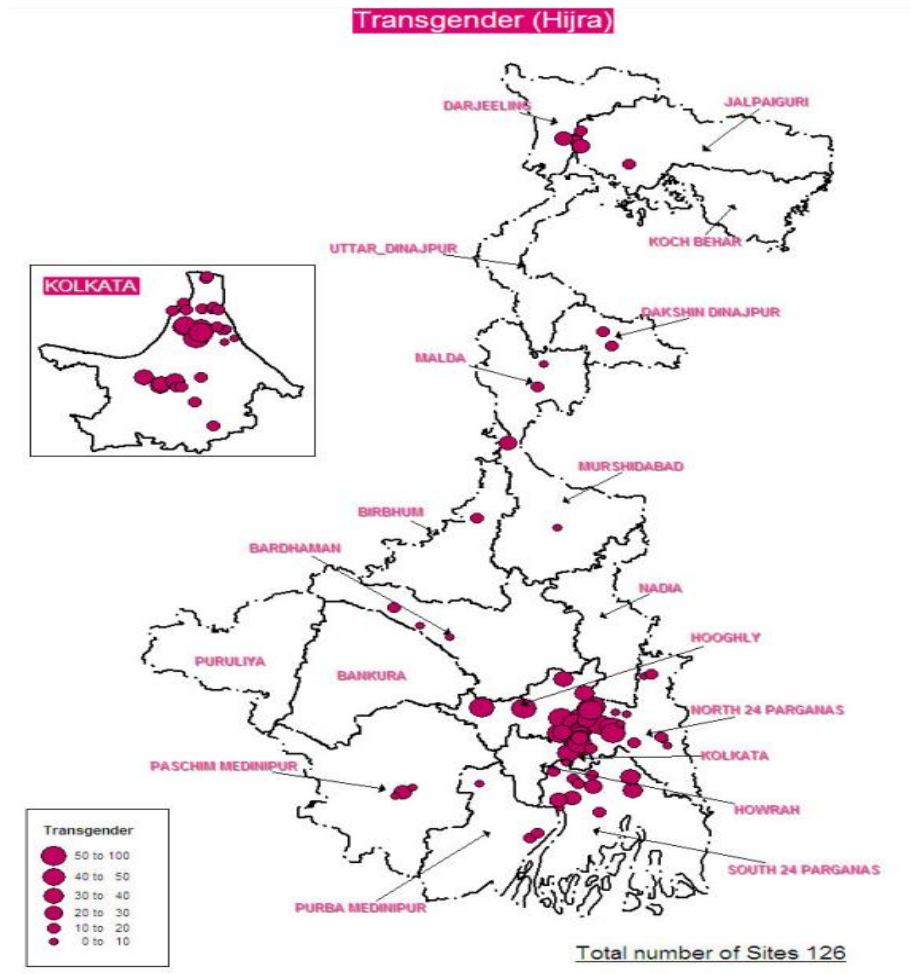
Fig. 1.1: Quest Asia. "Mapping Transgender (hijṛās) sites in the state of West Bengal". Commissioned by West Bengal State AIDS Prevention and Control Society, 2007.

1.10 CHAPTERIZATION

Chapter One

The chapter proffers an overall elucidation of the requisite socio-historical and cultural matrices that embeds the *hijṛā* culture and community. It gleans over primordial beginnings of the ancient period, invasions and implications of the medieval epoch, the colonial mandates/administration and the laws implemented during post-colonial India. The Chapter therefore attempts to holistically reconstruct the genealogical trajectory of the *hijṛās* to better apprehend their origins, identity, community practices and culture. It examines mythological, religious, cultural and historical sites to understand the contemporary coordinates of the *hijṛā* identity, culture and community. The chapter also studies relevant literature to appraise their significance in relation to the region and phenomenon under study to discover possible literature fissures and vacuities.

Chapter Two

With particular focus on the regional culture and community practices of the *hijṛās* of North Bengal and Kolkata the chapter attempts to analyze the intersections of the unique geographical site of West Bengal and its common border thresholds with the state of Bihar and Bangladesh and the possibilities of cultural fusion and assimilation engendered by seasonal migration to the adjoining state of Bihar or immigration of *hijṛās* from Bangladesh to West Bengal. Building up on the close border topographies of West Bengal with Bihar and Bangladesh, the chapter maps the probabilities of cultural/structural/cultural transformation apropos the *hijṛās* identity, culture and community practices. Succinctly put, the chapter studies the

intricacies of interplay between geographical peculiarities of the region and the tentative formation of a viable regional *hijṛās* culture, traditions, systems of occupational patterns, ways of being and community living.

Chapter Three

The chapter deploys the quantitative method to interrogate the socio-economic conditions (viz. healthcare accessibility, monthly earnings, economic provisions, occupational trends etc.) of the *hijṛās* community residing within North Bengal and Kolkata post the *NALSA* verdict of 2014. Simultaneously, it also examines the societal perception of the mainstream society with respect to the *hijṛā* community. Acknowledging the reality of stigma as a social impediment in their lives, the study segregates the population into three age groups viz. the youth, middle and senior age brackets to thoroughly apprehend the degrees of neutral, accepting, tolerating or antagonistic attitudes of the individuals directed towards the *hijṛās* and their culture.

Chapter Four

The fourth chapter centers on biographical narratives of social stigma as an everyday experience encountered by the hijṛās. Engaging with Goffman's theoretical framework of 'stigma' the chapter seeks to trace their journey of transition from states of invisibility (equals less vulnerability) to states of visibility (engendering stigma as an immediate repercussion). Adhering to Goffman's analysis of stigma and impression management, the chapter studies the narratives retold by the respondents about their unique life trajectories defined by their encounters with everyday social circumstances and events. Using life story method

(which is a part of the broader biographical method), the research attempts to discover and highlight causal points of transformation from modes of invisibility to visibility and the measures espoused by the individual to regulate themselves in certain ways while in a given societal context/setting.

Chapter Five

The penultimate chapter departs from the systemic-structural analysis of the preceding chapters to focus on the personal accounts of lived experiences of the *hijṛās* of North Bengal and Kolkata. The chapter centres on the 'lived and embodied' experiences of *hijṛā* members. It contests the overarching narrative of the 'third gender' as the only viable gender identity and 'asexuality' as the only culturally approved sexual orientation. Employing Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology, the chapter describes the experiences as lived whilst engaging with their 'given spatial and temporal spaces'. The chapter foregrounds the importance of historical and contemporary situatedness (read an individual's past and present) for an individual to apprehend and 'live' their experiences on embodied gender/sexuality/body and self. Drawing on Heidegger, the chapter argues for the significance of individual interpretations (as a yield of their everyday worldly engagements) which in turn acts as a meaning grid for future experiences on phenomenon centered on self, body, sexual desires and gender identity. Unlike Husserl's fundamental phenomenological contention of unearthing absolute essences of a given phenomenon (in this case, gender identity, self, body and sexual desires) via suspension of existing presuppositions, the chapter argues for incorporating the preconceptions/suppositions of the individual hijṛās members for grasping their 'lived through' experiences as beings engaged in their given world.

Chapter Six

The research concludes by underscoring on the themes of meanings, context, the primacy of 'being' and its connexions with pragmatism. The research on the *Hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata employed an amalgam of approaches comprising qualitative and quantitative methods to address the divergent objectives of lived experiences, socio-economic conditions, stigma life stories and changing structures within the *hijra* cultures. The pragmatic worldview enabled for a better apprehension and flexibility for collecting personal lived experiences/narratives and objective surveys for socio-economic appraisals post the NALSA verdict of 2014. An important and conspicuous theme that emerges in all findings of the research is the significance of contextuality, temporality, spatiality, one's socio-cultural milieus and one's embeddedness in a given world.

1.11 LIMITATIONS

Considering the comprehensive nature of the research on the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata, the lack of reliable population estimates, paucity of extant regional body of works, violence engendered by identity politics (while collecting field work) and the divergent objectives of the study, the researcher could not include all the *hijras* of the region. The researcher also could not interview respondents from the red-light areas and some (muslim dominated) regions of Kolkata as those respondents were not willing to partake in the study.

CHAPTER - 2

MAPPING THE DYNAMICS OF HIJRA IDENTITY AND CULTURE IN NORTH BENGAL AND KOLKATA

"To construe a hijṛā identity as a cultural identity is to dwell in fallacy. It is less of an identity and more of a lucrative form of business".- Respondent, Bhaktinagar, North Bengal.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Significant volumes of literature have articulated and examined in detail the cultural narratives of the *hijṛā community* who clearly draw their identity and culture from queer *Hindu* mythologies, oral lores and periods of *Mughal* rule wherein castration as a practice proliferated and the eunuchs were posted as sentinels of harems and as close loyal associates of the rulers (Eraly, 2007; Jaffrey, 1996; Nanda, 1999; Reddy, 2006; Pattanaik, 2014). However, such works of literature with respect to the culture of the *hijṛās* fail to account for shifts in occupational trends, changes in identity and community practices that transpires or have transpired regionally/locally (Nanda, 1999, Jaffrey, 1996). Azhar in her work, for example, mentions the dissonance between the mythical, religious and spiritual narratives of the identity of a hijṛā and the contemporaneous stigma ridden relegated position of the *hijṛās* of Hyderabad (Azhar, 2018). Azhar further mentions the disparities in terms of how the *hijṛās* were societally perceived in the past in comparison to their present-day social perception (Ibid). She informs that albeit the *hijṛās s* were subordinated by the colonial administration, they were nonetheless entitled to financial patronage from the indigenous princely rulers

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(Ibid). But the *hijṛās* in modern day Hyderabad on the other lead an even more marginalized, subordinated and stigmatized lives owing to the intersections of multiple factors such as stigma associated with HIV/AIDS, low socio-economic status and their marginalized existence doubly intensifying their experiences of social prejudice and oppression (Ibid). Such changes were not simply limited to socioeconomic indices and their social stature but were ubiquitous in the sense that it affected their identity, community, religious and social practices. In a similar vein, Goel in her work on the *hijṛās* of Delhi citing Reddy and Nanda's work corroborates that there are cultural inconsistencies between the idealized practice of emasculation ritual and the actual everyday lived realities of the *hijṛās* (Goel, 2016, pp. 538). In one of the verbatim excerpts of the work, a *hijṛās by* the name of Kalyani disagrees with the compulsory emasculation ritual which she deems as a pernicious practice producing debilitating consequences on one's health (Ibid). Goel further adds that some *hijṛās* have successfully negotiated with the ideal of the emasculation ritual by not emasculating their genitalia and yet were deemed with respect and acceptance within their community (Ibid). Similarly, Reddy in her ethnographic work on the *hijṛās* of Hyderabad and Secunderabad expounds on the regional variations with regard to religious and funeral practices, ways of greeting one another, food and commensal habits which deviates from the generic cultural template of a majority of the *hijṛās* subscribing solely to the worship of the *Hindu* goddess and conforming to related religious and cultural practices (Reddy, 2006, pp. 101-110). Reddy referring to one of the vignettes in the study reveals the salience of context (region or space) when delineating the cultural attributes of the *hijṛās* (Ibid). The vignette of one of therespondents from the study clearly demonstrates the robust religious association with the *hijṛā* identity (Ibid). The

hijṛā respondents from Reddy's ethnography assert their *'musalman'* (Muslim) identity as a single most defining and pivotal characteristic of being a *hijṛās (*Ibid). The *'musalman'* identity as articulated by one of the interlocutors of the study asserted that it is an embodied identity in the sense that one espouses changes in terms of sartorial choices[48], food habits, name changes, religious practices and the act of circumcision (Ibid). The association of the eunuchs or the *khwajasarais* with Muslim identity and culture is documented in many extant works of literature[49] (Jaffrey, 1996; Eraly, 2007; Cheney, 2006[50]). But unlike other body of works that merely elucidates on the *Muslim* lineage of the *hijṛās,* Reddy's ethnography in her findings shows the decisive influence of the *Muslim* identity when joining as the *hijṛā* community. Reddy likens the practice of being a *Muslim* for the *hijṛās* as that of 'orthopraxy' as opposed to orthodoxy (primacy is placed on belief) wherein 'practice' assumes significance for the *hijṛās* wherein they conduct themselves in a manner that is in conformance with the archetypal cultural template of the *Muslim* identity (Reddy, 2006). Reddy further adds that the *'Lashkarwala[51] hijṛās'* departs (albeit not entirely) from the archetypal *hijṛā template* in important ways (Ibid). For instance, the salience of emasculation or the *nirvan*ritual is often relegated in favour of 'circumcision' wherein only the outer skin of one's genitalia is removed. Circumcision in Islam is deemed as a 'divine decree' which commenced as a

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[48]One of the *hijṛās s* in Reddy's study (Munira) explains that the Lashkarwala*hijṛās s* once inducted into the community is expected to identify as a *musalman*or Muslim. The *hijṛās* is expected to eat *halal* meat (meat which is slaughtered by bleeding the animal), recite *namaz*or prayers, visit pilgrimage sites (hajj), wear green-colored sarees and circumcise one's penis (Reddy, 2006, pp. 101-110).

[49] Jaffrey for example in her work alludes to the multiple historical excerpts sourced from the *Mughal* periods which the contemporary *hijṛās s* often invoke to legitimize their identity (Jaffrey, 1996).

[50] Similarly, Cheney in his work on castration mentions the cultural connections of the eunuchs with the *Mughals.* Eunuchs such as *Malik Kafur*and *Iktiyar Khan* held positions of power and influence under the reign of Alau-Din-Khilji and Akbar (Cheney, 2006).

[51]*Lashkarwala*and *Sheharwala*one of the two houses or *hijṛās* lineages in Hyderabad out of 7 in India. (Reddy, 2006, pp. 9).

practice with Ibrahim the prophet (Alahmad & Dekkers, 2012). In a further report issued by the BBC, circumcision is widely regarded by the *Muslims* as an 'essential' ritual which imbues upon the individual a sense of 'we-feeling' or community belongingness. As a practice, it is also observed for cleanliness and personal hygiene[52]. The cultural elements of Islam such as 'circumcision' typically practised by men were adopted by the *hijṛās* of Hyderabad as a significant and compulsory ritual for anyone who wishes to join the community (Reddy, 2006, pp. 103). Reddy further adds that the *hijṛās of* Hyderabad also embody practices that are usually associated with the women ilk, for example, wearing a *burqa* (black overalls for covering), preference for the colour green during important occasions and refusing to wear a *bindi[53]*. But despite their adherence to *Muslim* praxis, Reddy adds that it should not be construed as a complete disavowal or departure from *Hindu* practices. She further contends that the *hijṛās* of the region continue to worship their chief *Hindu* religious patron viz. the *Bahuchara Mata* alongside other deities of Islam (Reddy, 2006). The ease with which the *hijṛās* of Hyderabad negotiate with divergent cultural elements and the religious praxis specific to *Muslim* men and women signals the salience of the intersections of geography (or one's spatial context), its local history/ (or supralocal history/s) and its specific cultural milieu on shaping *hijṛā culture* and identity. Similarly, Goel by examining the *hijṛā community* from the specificities of region, viz. Delhi mentions the different households *(Badshahwallas* and *Wazirwallas)* which stratifies households

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[52]*BBC - Religions - Islam: Circumcision of boys*. (n.d.). www.bbc.co.uk. Retrieved 2019, from https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/islamethics/malecircumcision.shtml

[53]Wearing of *bindi*(a typically spherical dot placed betwixt one's eyebrows) on one's forehead is an ornamental practice of *Hindu* women (Raja Sekhar, Giri&Sravani, D. &Thulasi, H. & Gopinath, C.. (2017). Life Saving Bindi a Novel Approach to Combat Iodine Deficiency. Pharmatutor. 5. 09. 10.29161/PT.v5.i12.2017.9.)

into hierarchical classes of superiority and inferiority (Goel, 2016, pp. 540). The *gharanas* (household) in Delhi is also hierarchically arranged on the axis of *'izzat'* or respect/honour (Goel, 2016, pp. 542). The *Khairgalla* and the *Pannwalle* households represent two households determined by degrees of *'izzat'* (Ibid). The former is deemed as inferior to the latter primarily due to their lack of hold and power over territories and the prerogative to perform in *toli-badhai* (singing and dancing) in certain marked territories (Ibid). Goel further alludes to the religious divergences from the generic or ideal religious allegiances of the *hijṛā* community (Ibid). Like Reddy, Goel mentions that some *hijṛās* have adopted the Islamic way of life by adhering to the religious practices of an archetypal *Muslim* (Goel, 2016, pp. 541). Like a *Muslim* man, some *hijṛās wear kurta pyjamas* to offer their prayers *(namaz)* in Jama Masjid, a mosque Delhi (Ibid). Evidently, by foregrounding on 'context', Goel and Reddy revealed an amalgam of cultural/religious permutations and significant nuances vis-à-vis the *hijṛā* community which otherwise would have been bypassed when examining it from an overarching and monolithic framework. The variable of 'context' or region also assumes importance when analysing the *hijṛā* identity and culture beyond the spatial confines of the Indian sub-continent. In South Asia, the word *hijṛās is* ubiquitously used in countries such as Nepal, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan (Hossain, 2018). Ellahi in his work on the *hijṛās* of Islamabad for example, informs about the other cultural moniker of the *hijṛās* viz. *Khwaja-siras*who historically occupied positions of guardians, sentinels and as caretakers of seraglios and religious places (Ellahi, 2014, pp. 2553). The *hijṛās* of Pakistan are also known by other names such as *'murat'* and *'khusra'* (Nasir & Yasir, 2016, pp. 158). Similarly, Jami in her work reveals the three types of identity categories of the *hijṛās* of Pakistan such as *khusra* or someone born with aberrant

genitalia/intersexed condition, the *zananay* or the cross-dressing *hijṛās* and the *'narban'* or the one who has undergone emasculation (Jami, 2011, pp. 4-5). Unlike the ambiguous etymological origins of the word *'hijṛās', 'khwaja-sira'* has a discrete historical mention, context and its usage can be traced back to the *Mughal* periods (Khan, 2016, pp. 158; Jaffrey, 1996). Nasir & Yasir's work on the *Khwaja Sira's* of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region in Pakistan, for example, shows that the indigenous term viz. *Khwaja Sira* is used interchangeably with *hijṛās, murat, khusra* and the occidental word 'transgender' (Nasir & Yasir, 2016, pp. 158). Some *hijṛās* or the *khwaja-siras* of *Khyber Pakhtunkwa* region also deviated from the religious and occupational template of the *hijṛās s* of India (Nasir & Yasir, 2016, pp. 168-169). Considering the supremacy and adherence of Islam, some *hijṛās* of Pakistan considered the occupational role of singers/dancers and prostitution as reprehensible and chose to beg instead as they believed that it was ordained by the Prophet himself (Ibid). Contrary to such perception, the *hijṛā* community in India deem *toli-badhai* or singing/dancing in propitious occasions as a ritualized role sanctioned by the *Hindu Goddess* (Nanda, 1990; Mitra 1984). Also, when segregating original/genuine *hijṛās* from the duplicate ones, the occupational practise of singing and dancing is often deemed as a decisive marker that separates the 'real' *hijṛās* from the imposters (Mal, 2018; Dey et. al, 2016). Furthermore, the mainstream *Pakistani* society believed that *Allah,* in order to compensate for their *(hijṛās)* gender ambiguity or 'handicap', bestowed upon them special powers to bless and to curse (Jami, 2011, pp. 7). Furthermore, Jami demonstrates the salience of religion in the lives of the *hijṛās s* as they are expected to visit the city of *Mecca* for pilgrimage (Ibid). The *hijṛās* who return from the pilgrimage are called *'hajis'* and they gained reverential status within the community (Ibid). Understandably,

such empirical findings substantiate the nexus of influence of geography and its effect on subcultures. In a similar strain, the *hijṛā culture* in Bangladesh is relatively influenced by the regional inflections of *Bengali* culture and religion (Aziz & Azhar, 2019). For example, a study on the *hijṛās* culture of Bangladesh demonstrates the compulsory exchange of greetings between *hijṛās (guru and chelas)* in *Urdu* dialect viz. *"assalam alaikum" as* a sign of respect to the *guru* (Dutta, 2017). The study further adds that *chelas* are often forced to pay *'don'* or money levied by the *gurus* for acts of disobedience, misconduct and disrespect (Ibid). Also, the refusal on the part of the *chelas* to formally greet their *gurus* is perceived as an act of disobedience (Ibid). In. a similar strain, Snigdha in her work on the *hijṛās* of Bangladesh further substantiates the nexus between region, religion (Islam) and its effects on the *hijṛā culture* by contending that unlike the religious *Hindu* affiliations of *hijṛās s* in India, the *Bangladeshi hijṛās* adhere to Islamic practices by becoming acolytes of certain *sufipirs* (or spiritual guides) and organizing/attending Islamic religious events, namely *'Orosh'* (Snigdha, 2019, pp. 34). The perception with regard to emasculation as a ritual also diverges in terms of meaning and importance for the *Bangladeshi hijṛās* (Snigdha, 2019). Emasculation for them is a despicable act as it repudiates the religious ordinance of *'Allah'* (Snigdha, 2019, pp. 34). It is believed that all *hijṛās* were created as 'males' by *Allah* and emasculation (as an act) violates *Allah's* sacred principle (Ibid). Apart from their religious allegiances, the *Bengali hijṛās s* also engage in *'hijṛā giri',* a colloquial term used to denote their occupational roles as singing and dancing *(bacha nachano)* and asking for alms in markets and shops *(bazar tola)* (Safa, 2016, pp. 453). Evidently, the intersections of space and religion (Islam) culturally impinges and sometimes alters the supposed essence of the *hijṛā identity* and

culture. By the same token, it would necessitate to underscore 'region' as a significant determiner when examining the cultural aspects of the *hijṛās* of North Bengal and Kolkata. The *Bengali hijṛās* of India are often called as *'Brihonnola', Hijla* and *Hizre* among others (Mal & Mundu, 2018). Unlike the significance of the 'emasculation ritual' for the *hijṛā identity* and culture, the *hijṛā* of West Bengal are subsumed under five identity delineations viz. *Chibbri* (a biological woman not considered to be a genuine *hijṛās), Aqua* (a person who cross-dresses or identifies as a transsexual/transvestite)*, Khoja* (a person who has castrated)*, Zananay* (a gay effeminate and impotent man) and *Khusra* (a born hermaphrodite) among others (Mal &Mundu, 2018, pp. 622). Moreover, the *hijṛās* of West Bengal are further categorized as *'Akwa Moorath'* and *'Nirwan Moorath'* denoting their non-emasculated and emasculated state (Ibid). This clearly indicates that there is more leeway in terms of identity when comparing the *hijṛās* of West Bengal with the generic culture or identity of the *hijṛās* across India. The *hijṛās* of West Bengal also diverge from the culturally sanctioned occupational roles of singers/dancers in *toli-badhai* and engage as dancer performers *(laundanaach)* in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh apart from working as beggars and sex workers, regionally known as *basti/mangti* and *pun* respectively (Mal & Mundu, 2018, pp. 623). Understandably, works of literature underscore on the significance of 'region' thereby jettisoning the narrative of a somewhat congealed and overarching conceptualizations of identity and cultural parameters of the *hijṛā community*. Geographically, the regions of North Bengal and Kolkata share intra border proximities with the Indian state of Bihar and international borders with Bangladesh. This inevitably allows for movement and influx of citizens and cultural exchange across national and international borders. In an article published by the Hindustan Times, West Bengal shares a long

India-Bangladesh border of 2,216 km (Sarkar, 2020). The India-Bangladesh border is the longest boundary at 4096.7 km across India (Ibid). The article mentions that border infiltration and smuggling of contraband/illicit items are commonplace as the borders that segregate the two nations are relatively porous and easy to crossover (Ibid). In a similar vein, Hossain in his work reveals that the *hijṛās* of West Bengal and Bangladesh often traverse across borders to visit one another without any requirement of passports or visas (Hossain, 2018, pp. 325). Hossain further reveals that the *hijṛās* are allowed to infiltrate sans penalty in return for sex with the police or other authorities (Ibid). He further contends that the cultural properties of the *hijṛās* of West Bengal and Bangladesh is analogous in many aspects (Ibid). The cultural attributes of the *hijṛās* of West Bengal is further compounded because of its border contiguities or proximity with the state of Bihar. Frequent migration to Bihar, the neighbour state of West Bengal, is also commonplace for the *hijṛās* of North Bengal and Kolkata as they are often called for dance programs *(laundanach)*, parties and marriage events (Gahatraj, 2018). Such spatial adjacency that these regions (North Bengal and Kolkata) share with Bihar and Bangladesh are particularly pivotal as a point of analysis owing to the entry of people, the import of culture from Bangladesh and the availability of lucrative income opportunities in Bihar. Considering the cultural variations (across regions) in India, the multiple cultural permutations of the *hijṛās* in South Asia (Pakistan and Bangladesh) and the locus sites of the research viz. North Bengal and Kolkata, it would necessitate to unpack and problematise the reifying tendencies of prior works of literature on *hijṛā identity*, culture and community practices by underscoring the factors of region, religion and migration. Furthermore, the characteristics of the generic traditions of the *hijṛā culture* are not necessarily

isomorphic in all respects when comparing it with the everyday cultural realities of the *hijṛā* community in West Bengal. Moreover, a simplistic exposition via reliance on the 'generic traditional-cultural framework of the *hijṛās* of India fails to apprehend the regional variances, subtleties and transmutations with respect to identity, culture, kinship systems and religious beliefs among others. The present chapter therefore attempts to proffer a descriptive account of the culture and community practices of the *hijṛās* of North Bengal and Kolkata. It attempts to understand the intersections/interactions of geography and culture and antecedent traditions which subsequently shapes and informs the cultural patterns of the *hijṛā community* in North Bengal and Kolkata.

2.2 A READING OF THE MEDIEVAL AND COLONIAL PAST: HIJRA CULTURE AND COMMUNITY PRACTICES OF BENGAL

While there is availability of antecedent scholarships on the themes of *Tritiya prakriti* (third nature/third gender), tropes of transgenderism, sex change, queer desires and the practice of emasculation/castration in the *Mughal* past, there is a severe paucity of research concerning regional accounts of the past vis-à-vis, the *hijṛā* community of Bengal. Unlike the contemporary state of West Bengal with its clearly demarcated political and geographical boundaries, Bengal (in pre-independent periods) in the ancient, medieval and the colonial times was not sequestered into two halves viz. West Bengal and Bangladesh governed under separate sovereigns. The political history of Bengal is fraught with social/religious upheavals and drawing and redrawing of geographical and political boundaries (Sengupta, 2011). The partition of Bengal was initiated by Lord Curzon in the year

1905 which was opposed by many (Ibid). A subsequent partition transpired again in the year 1947 wherein the Bengal province was bifurcated into two halves in which *Hindu* half was to be governed by India and the Muslim half or majority was annexed with Pakistan (Ibid). It was in this precise juncture that rendered the contemporary geographical delineations of West Bengal and East Pakistan (Ibid). However, following resistance against West Pakistan, East Pakistan was granted autonomy as a separate nation (Bangladesh) in the year 1971 (Ibid). But when considering the origins of the word Bengal as a consolidated or clearly delineated geographical region, Majumdar in his work contends that such a naming of the region was non-existent in the ancient periods (Majumdar, 1971). The etymological origins of the word 'Bengal' (as used by the Britishers) can be traced back to the word *'Vangala'* which was first adopted by the Mughal monarchs (Ibid). Sengupta further adds that the name 'Bengal' was a recent invention which was not in use prior to the 13th century (Sengupta, 2011). In periods of antiquity (i.e. before the Muslim incursion), Bengal province was sequestered into different regions each having its own name (Majumdar, 1971, pp. 1). Sometimes the name *'Gauḍa'* was used to represent a part or the whole of the Bengal province, *Vanga* represented the south-eastern region, and the rest were named as *Harikala, Vangala* and *Samatata* (Ibid). Apart from *Harikala/kela, Vangala, Samatata* and *Gauda,* Majumdar in his work on Bengal adds other districts and regions namely, *Chandradrvipa, Pundra&Varendri, Dakshina Radha, Uttara Radha Mandala* and *Tamralipta/Damalipta* which (in toto) constituted the geographical integrity of ancient Bengal (Majumdar, 1971). The composite culture of ancient Bengal was characterized by a confluence of divergent settlers, foreign conquests and the Aryan civilization (Sengupta, 2011). Ancient Bengal was infiltrated from the north and

west regions by the Indo-aryans who brought along with them their sanskritic culture, hierarchical organization of people on the principles of purity and pollution and ritualized traditions which inevitably influenced indigenous cultures of the region (Eaton, 1993). Early archaeological excavations in the province of Bengal reveals ruins and artefacts from Buddhist, Islam and Hindu cultures (Ibid). Ancient Bengal was ruled by Gupta, Aryan, Mauryan and other regional monarchs before the rule of *Sasanka,* under which Bengal was recognized as a discrete political region with a distinct ethnic identity (Ibid). While much has been written on the historical and political genesis of Bengal with emphasis on cultures of different dynasties and conquests, there is little or no mention on the themes of alternative sex/genders and the third gender contemporaneous of ancient Bengal (Ibid). Conversely, the transition to the medieval period in Bengal which was marked by the presence of the *Mughals* ushered in social and cultural changes which were to be pivotal for the genealogy of the contemporary *hijṛās.* In ancient Bengal, the presence of the Muslim traders residing in *Samatata*was first documented by *Masudi,* (circa 956) an arab cartographer (Eaton, 1993). But it was in circa 1204 which marked the entry of Turkish troopers led by Muhammad Bakhtiyar laying siege on the North Western part of Bengal (Ibid). It was from this period onwards that Bengal encountered the incursion of foreign powers, their import of culture, political ideas, ideals of monarchy and religion (Ibid). The Mughal households also extensively used the eunuchs in seraglios and as sentinels of the palace (Hambly, 1974). However, castration as a practice was not sanctioned by the canonical (religious) scriptures of Islam such as the Quran and the Hadith (Jaffrey, 1996, pp. 30). In fact, in the Hadith, castration is repudiated as a represensible act due to which the 'eunuchs' working in the medieval courts or households were procured

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from other non-Islamic places (Ibid). Similarly, Chatterjee adds that that the use of slavery and eunuchism can be traced back to the periods of Roman, Grecian and Chinese antiquity which transpired long before the emergence of Islam (Chatterjee, 1996, pp. 59). Also, the exploitation of eunuchs was not simply confined to the provinces ruled under Islamic sovereigns but were found even in regions governed by the Rajputs of Rajasthan and the Jats of Bharatpur (Ibid). But due to the excessive use of the eunuchs by aristocrats, rulers and other elites in the *mughal*period, the contemporary *hijras* of India often recall eunuchs of the Mughal past for asserting their identity and place in the society. In medieval India, the eunuchs were mostly procured from Malabar and Bengal as these regions were known for their skills and expertise with regard to castration (Bano, 2001, pp. 366). Similarly, Hambly in his work, mentions the notoriety of Bengal, or more particularly the border areas of *Dar-al-Islam* Bengal which was known to have perfected the surgical skill of castrating individuals which significantly reduced the rates of casualty (Hambly, 1974, pp. 125-126). As per the travel accounts of Marco Polo, there were numerous eunuchs in Bengal who were sold and supplied to local aristocrats and merchants or buyers across India (Ibid). Similarly, Jaffrey in her work on the *hijṛās* also mentions some excerpts from the travelogues of Marco Polo wherein he describes Bengal as a hub for the trade of eunuchs for Indian buyers and merchants (Jaffrey, 1996, pp. 25). He further mentions that the sheer abundance of the eunuchs in the region can be attributed to the indiscriminate practise of castrating all prisoners who were to be subsequently traded as slaves (Ibid). Sylhet, a north east region of Bengal was also particularly noted for perpetuating the practise of emasculation (Jaffrey, 1996, pp. 47). But in the case of Sylhet, young boys were emasculated by their parents to pay their due taxes to the

governor of the province (Ibid). However, the then emperor, Jahangir strongly condemned acts of emasculation calling it as 'abominable' and issuing edicts to rescind such practices (Ibid). But despite the decrees issued by the royal court under the behest of Jehangir, the practice of castrating young boys continued unabated (Hambly, 1974). For example, Islam Khan, the Bengal *Subahdar* (governor of a given region) dispatched 50 young eunuchs as a gift from Bengal (Ibid). A french man, Francois Pyrard, in one of his accounts contends that the practice of castration continued in the 17th century and describes in detail the practice of emasculation of young boys in Sylhet, Bengal who were completely deprived of their genitalia with only an opening big enough to allow urine to pass through (Hambly, 1974, pp. 129). The french traveller further informs that the young boys were chiefly hired to look after the women folk and assume responsibilities of the house (Ibid). In *Ain-i-Akbari,* the eunuchs of Bengal were mainly categorised into three types viz. *Kafuri, Sandali* and *Badami* (Ibid). For the *Sandali* eunuchs, they were completely emasculated, the *Badami* eunuchs on the other were left with a piece of their penis which was still useful and the *Kafuri*eunuchs were deprived of their testicles which was either crushed or severed off (Ibid). Evidently, the confluence of muslim conquest, the practise of emasculation/castration and slavery enunciated such nomenclatures and traditions of the eunuchs in the medieval periods. Such works of literature also indicate the ubiquitous nature of the slavery and the mutilation of young boys in almost all provinces including Bengal. But when attempting to map the cultural dimensions of the *hijṛās* of medieval Bengal, the practice of emasculation and slavery only figures as a discrete piece of history due to the sheer unavailability of research on the linkages of the culture of the Bengal eunuchs with the contemporary *hijṛās*

community. Despite such discrepancies, the *hijṛās* of modern-day West Bengal continue to call upon such cultures to legitimize their identity and culture. Apart from the eunuchs of medieval periods, it would also necessitate to examine the heterodox and marginalized religious practices of Bengal (viz. Baul and the Fakirs) as their philosophical and esoteric treatises resonate in some respects with the macrocosmic greater traditions of spiritualism and philosophy. The actual origins of the alternative religious sects of Baul and Fakirs in Bengal is not known although the word 'baul' is used in medieval body of works but its meaning remains ambiguous as it is not clear if it referred to the heterodox religious sects or simply denoted someone as 'mad' (Knight, 2011, pp. 28). Knight in her work on the Bauls contends that their mention as a marginalized religious group appears in works of academia from the mid 19th century onwards (Knight, 2011, pp. 29). While the Fakirs of Bengal are said to have emerged from the 16th to the 17th century along with other marginal and syncretic religions of the region (Banerjee & Sen, 2014). The Baul and the Fakirs are groups of musicians practising the religious tenets that diverged from the mainstream religious ideologies of their time (Lorea, 2018). The heterodox religious sects of Bauls and Fakirs also share many common elements such as language, belief systems and their overall philosophy (Ibid). Also, their philosophy of *purusha* and *prakriti* resonates with the greater *Hindu* traditions of the iconography of *Ardhanarisvara* and the unity of the male and female principles (Ibid). Additionally, the Bauls and the Fakirs deem women and their bodies as naturally exalted and in a perfect form than men (Ibid). In fact, practitioners of the tradition aspire to be like a woman by emulating them either mentally/inwardly or via other external expressions (Ibid). The followers also strive to maintain the balance between the male and female energies as they believe that

the androgynous form is the manifestation of the divine[54] (Ibid). Purportedly, the Baul and Fakirs also did not discriminate people on the basis of caste but only segregated them as men, women and the third sex or the *napumsaka* (Ibid). Similarly, another religious sect in Bengal viz. *Kartabhaja*[55] endorses gender transgressions for male and female wherein the male is to transition into a eunuch and the female is to transform herself as a *hijṛās in* order to be worshippers of their religious masters (Lorea, 2018, pp. 189). Although the religious tenets of the *Kartabhaja* sect explicitly prescribes the women folk to transform into a *hijṛās,* it would be naive to draw cultural parallels between the syncretic tradition of *Kartabhaja* and the *hijṛā community*. Evidently, the presence of heterodox traditions in Bengal demonstrates the cultural affinity between the great traditions of *hindu*philosophy and spiritualism with the regional manifestations of the same. The need to cross-dress or to aspire the form of the feminine by the followers or practitioners of such unorthodox religious sects also remains congruent with *Hindu* myths and philosophy which equated androgyny and the queering of sex and gender with the divine. Despite few similarities in terms of cultural and religious elements and scattered references of the *hijṛās*, the medieval history of Bengal however does not proffer a coherent cultural mapping of the *hijṛās* of Bengal. However, the presence of a discrete *hijṛā culture* and community can be inferred but cannot be asserted with certitude due to the absence of documentation and writings from the period. But it was from the 18th to the 19th century wherein one could call upon textual corpuses (especially the ones documented by the colonial

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[54] The Baul and the Fakirs of Bengal believed that the two gods i.e.Caitanya (a medieval Indian saint) and Prophet Muhammad are androgynous in nature. They therefore embody gender transgressions via performative acts to balance the principles of male and female (Lorea, 2018).
[55]Bhaumik contends that the *Kartabhaja*was founded by Aulchand, a saint in the 17th century (Bhaumik, 2020).

administration[56]) to maintain the presence of the *hijṛās* in Bengal (Hinchy, 2019). Beginning from the 1760's onwards, accounts of the *hijṛās* documented by the Europeans began to surface as the East India Company gradually transitioned from their mercantile engagements towards polity (Hinchy, 2019). Hinchy in her work contends that this transition of the East India Company was formalised by their assumption on the revenue rights *(diwani)* in Orissa, Bengal and Bihar (Ibid). It may also be added that the cognizance of such *diwani* rights roused the company to systematically examine the *hijṛā* communities in colonial periods (Ibid). Understandably, like the *hijṛā* across regions of Orissa and Bihar, the *hijras* of Bengal too had access to rights that permitted them to collect revenues and sanctioned their right to beg (Preston, 1987; Hinchy, 2019). Hinchy further alludes to the fact that the colonial administration intended to gradually expunge the *hijṛā* community as they disapproved of their customs of singing and dancing in public spaces, the practice of castration, cross-dressing and asking for alms (Hinchy, 2019). The presence of the eunuchs (if not *hijras*) in Bengal is also corroborated by Chatterjee in her work on the eunuchs or *'Khajaserai'* or *'Khwajasarais'* of Bengal (Chatterjee, 1996). In the 18th century, some eunuchs bought as slaves were engaged as officials working under the *Nizams* of Bengal (hereditary lords of the region) (Ibid). The earliest record of eunuchs engaged in the households of the *nizams* of Bengal dates back to 1772 (Ibid). These records were also known as the *'nizamut records'* which contained a list of eunuchs working as officials under the *nizam* (Ibid). In the year 1873, Kasim Ali a eunuch from Azamgarh figured in the lists of servants or eunuchs working under the Nawab from *Moorshedabad* (a town

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[56]It was from the 1760's onwards that the *hijṛās s* of the colonial period were probed and identified as a discrete grouping. The European writers such as James Forbes and Balthazar Solvyns deemed the *hijṛās* as lowly hermaphrodites primarily engaged as a vulgar class of sex workers, beggars and transvestites (Hinchy, 2019).

in Bengal) (Hinchy, 2019). Interestingly, the eunuchs of the households (particularly those who ranked as officials) in Bengal also employed slaves under them as subordinates (Ibid). Like the contemporary *hijra* community and their hierarchical divisions of *guru* and *chelas,* the eunuchs of Bengal too hired *chelas* (which constituted of young males and females) for their services (Ibid). The eunuchs also demanded money from their *celas* which is somewhat analogous with the relations shared between modern day *gurus* and *celas*of India (Ibid). In a similar vein, Mack in his study of the human testis and castration practices maintains that groups of 19th century eunuchs (circa 1866) from Bengal sustained themselves by working in harems and engaging in sodomy (Mack, 1964, pp. 1) The eunuchs also reportedly purchased young boys who were subsequently castrated by them (Ibid). Although it is possible to draw parallels of the culture of *Khwajasarais* with that of the *hijras* of India, it is also not plausible to assert that they were identical as communities. In a similar strain, Hinchy adds that corpuses documenting the history of the *khwajasarais* and the *hijras* further compound the problem as it is unclear if the two *(khwajasarais* (eunuchs) and the *hijras*) referred to the same community (Hinchy, 2019). For example, existing records of the eunuchs of Bengal show that they were categorised both as eunuchs working for *nizams* in their households as well as 'beggars' of the same region (Ibid). Such discrepancies are further complicated when juxtaposing visual images of the *khwajasarais* and the *hijras* of the colonial periods (Ibid). Hinchy in her work illustrates the presence of *hijṛās* or hermaphrodites from the region of East Bengal by citing photographs from the 1860's (Hinchy, 2019, 'Illustrations'). In the photograph, a *hijṛā named'Gurmah'* is seen standing in the middle along with two other persons clad in white clothes (saree) (Ibid). Also, one of them carries the

familiar *'dholak'* which the contemporary *hijṛās* often bring when performing *tolibadhai* (singing, dancing and blessing of couples and infants) and other related performances (Ibid). Another photograph from the 1870's shows a seated *khawajasara* wearing clothes and a cap distinct from the ones worn by the *hijras* (Ibid). Such a photographic juxtaposition of the *hijras* and the *khwajasarais* clearly reveals the differences between the two groups. Quite understandably, the extant works of literature expounding on the cultural aspects of the *hijras* of Bengal from medieval to colonial periods is fraught with inconsistencies. Barring a few body of works with intermittent and sparse references to the *hijṛās* of Bengal, not much can be known about their social, cultural and community lives. Existing colonial literatures primarily focus on the general social conditions of the *hijras* across Indian provinces with certain allusions to Bengal from which one can infer that the *hijras* of Bengal region shared cultural commonalities with the *hijras* of other (documented) provinces in terms of culture and access to privileges (under the patronage of indigenous rulers). Also, the broad mythical, spiritual and philosophical tenets of the *hindu*traditions and their meanings of divinity vis-a-vis gender/sex transgressions, acts of cross-dressing and androgynous forms, which the contemporary *hijṛās* often invoke, resonate in some respect with the marginal and heterodox religious traditions of Bengal. Furthermore, it also becomes necessary to consider the confluence of Islamic and Hindu religious practices in medieval Bengal which culturally informed and shaped the region (Rahman, 2018; Hossain, 2019). For example, Hossain alludes to the peaceful religious co-existence of *Sufi pirs,* local *Hindu* deities, saints and *Hindu* goddesses (Hossain, 2019, pp. 145). Hossain further contends that the amalgam of *Hindu* and *Muslim* religious practices were concretely manifest in the construction of mosques, temples, shrines and

dargahs in Bengal (Ibid). In fact, the deities of both the religious communities of *Hindus* and *Muslims* were worshipped and deified by the people of both faiths (Ibid). In a similar vein, Rahman in his work also elucidates the presence of multiple religious sects in Bengal (Rahman, 2018). Despite the contrasting essence of Hinduism and Islam, medieval Bengal witnessed the emergence of *Sufi Pirs* or mystics (case in point, the Bauls & Fakirs), *Vaishnavism* which was primarily deemed as a *Hindu* religious practice was also influenced by Islamic *sufi* motifs and the *Kartabhaja* sect (emerged during the 18th century as a consequence of the admixture of *hindu*and *Islamic* beliefs) among others (Ibid). Therefore, for a better appraisal of the cultural aspects of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata, it becomes necessary to acknowledge the intersections of Bengal's regional lineage of religious and cultural syncretism, their colonial past as well as the broader themes of culture afforded by the macrocosmic greater traditions which make up the 'generic' *hijṛā* culture and identity.

2.3 HIJRAS OF WEST BENGAL: CONTEMPORARY READINGS

By employing the insights of preceding works on the *hijṛās* of colonial Bengal and the region's cultural syncretism (manifest in local religious sects and foreign conquests), the following segment examines the contemporary works of literature delineating culture and identity of the *hijṛās* of West Bengal. In sociological parlance, culture creates the possibilities of belief systems and worldviews for people to make sense of the world (Bruce, 2018, pp. 25). Unlike animals, humans are not wired or programmed to act only within their biological instincts (Ibid). Humans harbour the capacities of thought, interpretation and choice to deliberate, refute or transgress such basal biological drives (Ibid). Therefore, it is primarily

due to such human capacities that enable them to construct cultural belief systems, norms, values and general guidelines specific to their given context (Ibid). As per E.A. Hoebel, biology does not determine culture as the latter is acquired only when one learns about the behaviour and cultural patterns of a given society (Bhushan & Sachdeva, 2012). Furthermore, Newman contends that such cultural patternings comprises norms, belief systems, dialects, values and other tangible and intangible elements that make up a society (Newman, 2019). Similarly, Edward Tylor defined culture as an admixture of morality, customs, beliefs, laws and art which are to be obtained via learning processes (Scott, 2017). Additionally, according to Geertz, culture is an acquired system of prior conceptions which enables humans to interact, disseminate and formulate newer knowledge systems and outlook for life (Britannica, 2020). For Geertz, the purpose of culture is to prescribe meanings onto the social world in order to render it as comprehensible to all (Ibid). Considering the definitional parameters of culture, it becomes necessary to invoke the ethnographic accounts of Nanda wherein she has comprehensively articulated the multiple elements constitutive of the *hijra* culture. In her work, the cultural themes of the community are divided into four broad themes viz. a) *hijṛās* and their expected roles in the Indian society b) the liminal gender identity of the *hijras* as 'neither man nor woman' c) the salience of emasculation as a ritualistic process and its religious nexus with Goddess *Bahuchara* and lastly, d) the patterns of community organization, the hierarchical arrangement of the *guru* and the *chela* and their occupational roles (Nanda, 1999). Similarly, Sharma in his work on the *hijras* lays much emphasis on their social roles as an institutionalized 'third gender' of the society (Sharma, 2009). He also writes comprehensively on the relationship between *hijra* members within a household, the duties of the *hijras* and their means

of eking out a living (Ibid). The following segment will therefore examine extant works of literature on the *hijras* of West Bengal by roughly drawing on the cultural parameters proposed by Nanda, Sharma and Saxena among others. Despite the lack of a comprehensive study on the cultural attributes of the *hijras* of West Bengal, there are few studies which have focused on certain regions of the state when outlining the cultural characteristics of the *hijras.* For example, Dey et al. in their work on the *hijras* of Kolkata and Howrah illustrates the community patterns of the *hijṛā* community. Beginning with distinctions inherent in the community, Dey et. al demonstrates the regional identity politics that separates *hijras* on the basis of their occupational pursuits (Dey et. al, 2016). The work further inaugurates regional parlances viz. *Challawalis*, *Badhaiwalis and Khajrawalis* denoting varying types of occupational engagements (Ibid). The *hijra* identity is therefore closely linked with the type of work they do, for instance, the *badhaiwali hijras* typically engage in traditionally recognized occupational roles of singers and dancers in special occasions *(tolibadhai)* wherein they also confer blessings to infants and couples (Ibid). The *Challawalas* on the other are thosewho beg on trains, shops, and other public spaces while the *Khajrawalas* engage in sex work (Ibid). Moreover, the *Badhaiwalis, Challawalis*and the *Khajrawalis* are arranged in echelons of superiority and inferiority with the *Badhaiwalis* classed as the highest and the *Khajrawalis*as the lowest (Ibid). The *Badhaiwalis* have managed to build a consensus amongst others *(challawalis and khajrawalis)* regarding their dominance by alluding to their cultural and religious adherence with established *Hindu* traditions (Ibid). The superiority of the *Badhawalis*is also internalized by other 'inferior' groups of *hijras* wherein they believe that the *Badhaiwalis* are of a 'high caste' tracing their origins since the monarchical times (Ibid). Understandably, the

superiority of the *Badhaiwalis*is relative to the inferiority of the *Challawalis* and the *Khajrawalis* as they are deemed to be lacking in terms of historical and cultural legitimacy and due to their lowly nature of work (Ibid). Dey et. al further contends that such hierarchical segregations produce what they term it as 'identity politics' (Ibid). By attempting to maintain the cultural 'ideals' of the *hijras* and abstaining from profane activities such as sex work, the *Badhaiwalis* and the *Challawalis* maintain that the *Khajrawalis* are 'fake' *hijras* as they do not undergo castration/emascluation and because of their poor occupational choices which they believe tarnish the social image of the *hijṛās* (Ibid). The changing occupational practices and its nexus with the *hijra* identity and one's status clearly depicts the deviations from the conventional *hijra* occupations. Undoubtedly, roles of singers, dancers and cultural performers make up the *hijṛā* dentity, but in the case of the *hijras* of West Bengal, their occupation connotes not only their identity but also their dominance, power and social status. Moreover, the politics of identity also extends over to the ritual of emasculation wherein the religious sanctity and meaning of emasculation is relegated in favour of viewing the castration process as merely a means of elevating one's status within the community. Dey et. al by referring to the binaries of emasculated *hijras* (chibbris) and non-emasculated *hijras* (akwas) reveals that the *akwas* or the non-emasculated *hijras* are often ridiculed and discriminated by the *chibbris* for their inability to prove their absolute allegiance to the 'genuine' *hijṛā* identity and community by castrating themselves (Dey et. al, 2016). The *hijras* of West Bengal therefore are known with new identity signifiers based on their occupation and their emasculated/non-emasculated state (Ibid). Such identity segregations also engender possibilities of internal disputes over what constitutes as a 'genuine' and a 'fake' *hijra* (Ibid). In a similar

vein, Dukpa in her work further asserts in her work that the *hijṛās* of Siliguri (Darjeeling district, West Bengal) often become embroiled in disputes that arise due to issues related to genuine and duplicate *hijṛā* identity (Dukpa, 2016). Discord over identity, therefore, creates further implications with respect to their earnings and livelihoods (Ibid). The *Akowas (non-emasculated hijṛās),* for example, are not allowed to have access to certain prerogatives[57] which the *Chibbris (emasculated hijṛās)* typically seem to enjoy (Ibid). The urgency to forge a nexus between the lack of genitalia and one's identity, therefore, becomes the source for major contention between *hijṛās* who emasculate and those who don't and determines their subsequent occupational membership as a *Badhaiwali, Challawali* or *Khajrawali hijra.* In a similar strain, Mal &Mundu in their work on the *hijras* of Kharagpur, West Bengal elucidates in detail the cultural characteristics of the *hijra* community of the region. With respect to identity and emasculation, Mal & Mundu further adds that the *hijras* of West Bengal are also known with two names viz. *Akwa Moorat h*and *Nirwan Moorath* indicating their non-emasculated and emasculated state respectively (Mal &Mundu, 2018, pp. 624). Similarly, Mal further categorises the *hijras* into five identity types viz. 1) *Aqua-* which means the one who cross-dresses 2) *Chinni-* one who emasculates or castrates their genitalia 3) *Zananay-* an ineffectual man and 4) *Khusra-* one with deformed genitalia (Mal, 2018). Evidently, the *hijra* identity is regionally inflected in terms of regional nomenclatures, newer forms of occupational practices and the practice of emasculation. Apart from the typical *Badhaiwali hijras,* engaging in sex work or *pun,* and *basti* or *mangti* (asking for alms in shops, to businessmen) are also some commonplace occupational engagements (Mal, 2018). Mal in his work also informs

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[57] Having access to better trains while begging and enhancing one's position within one's community.

about the kinship systems of the *hijras* of West Bengal wherein the *hijras* are arranged in a typical hierarchical system of *Nani guru, guru ma their chelas* (Mal, 2018). The *chelas* also refer to one another as *'gurubhai* or *gurubon'* (Ibid). Although, research examining on the cultural aspects of the *hijra* community in West Bengal is limited, it nonetheless adds to the generic understanding of the *hijra* communities of India by articulating about the regional variances and inflections in terms of identity, occupation, emasculation practices and *guru chela* relations of the household. However, what seems lacking in such region centric research is an appreciation of the geographical situatedness of West Bengal, which as mentioned earlier, is contiguous with Bangladesh and the domestic state of Bihar. To enunciate the cultural attributes of the *hijra* communities of West Bengal, it becomes necessary to look into the influx of *hijras* to and from West Bengal, Bangladesh and also Bihar. For example, Hossain in his work on the *hijras* of South Asia contends that the *hijras* of West Bengal and Bangladesh often cross borders to meet one another which hints at the possibilities of cultural exchange between communities of two regions (Hossain, 2018). Also, religion plays an integral role in altering the cultural meanings of *hijrahood* or being a *hijra.* It is possible to infer that the migration of *hijras* of West Bengal to Bihar and Bangladesh or *hijras* from these regions to West Bengal could engender cultural transmutations to some degree which differ from the broad overarching somewhat monolithic understandings of *hijra* identity and culture. Hence, the present study intends to analyse the cultural variations and transmutations in West Bengal in light of Bengal's history, religious and cultural syncretism, geographical contiguities and migration.

2.4 METHODOLOGY, METHODS AND LOCUS SITES

Taking into account the limited works of literature on the *hijras* of West Bengal and the approach of the present research (foregrounding on the variables of region and migration), the study qualitatively inquires about the cultural structures of the *hijra* community. Conforming to the pragmatic worldview of the research, the study adheres to the key tenet of the paradigm viz. 'what methods effectively answer the questions asked'. Holloway and Galvin also in their work similarly underlines the salience of the research problem or the research questions of the study when formulating the methodology for the research (Holloway & Galvin, 2016). Similarly, Creswell & Poth define qualitative research as an attempt to foreground the interpretive, subjective aspects of meanings advanced by the respondents which situates the researcher in an organic setting (Creswell &Poth, 2018). A qualitative study is a humanistic approach towards research and was suitable for the present research as it enabled the researcher to help bridge the differences between the interviewer and the interviewee by building rapport with the respondent in order to extract rich qualitative data. Taking into account the nature of the research objectives (to scrutinize the local *hijṛā* community, practices and customs), it became imperative to gain information from both the *gurus*or their *celas* (depending upon their willingness to participate in the interview). The pilot study findings particularly was crucial in terms of informing the researcher about rampant hostilities and clashes between the *hijṛā* communities of North Bengal and those who live in Kolkata concerning disputes about 'authentic/inauthentic *hijṛā* identity', area usurpation, manipulative/coerced acquisition of *celas* and the ultimate motive to assume power and authority in the household. The findings further revealed that due to the incursion of *Bangladeshi hijṛās,* the local *hijṛās*

have averred that the former have claimed dominance over their native spaces and have also attempted to dispossess them of their property and households. This 'foreign/native' dichotomy supposedly creates disputes between the local *hijṛā* groups over area ownership and the authenticity of the *hijṛā* identity. Considering the volatile and inimical state between *hijṛā* groups, the total number of respondents (from each district) for the study was contingent upon the consent given by the respondents procured via snowball sampling. Considering the unwillingness of some *hijṛā* members to partake in the interview fearing possibilities of friction and physical violence, the researcher had to resort to non-probability sampling technique. Therefore, the research methodology and subsequent methods were selected in order to intentionally segregate groups/individuals in order to avoid possibilities of conflict between the *hijṛā* households of the region. The study therefore employs qualitative inductive approach insofar as it does not form theoretical postulations post assessment of the findings. More particularly, it relies on Inductive TA (Thematic Analysis) developed by Braun and Clarke wherein they define the approach as underscoring the empirical data first which is not shaped or influenced by any theoretical considerations. In a similar strain, Guest et al. mentions about ITA or Inductive Thematic Analysis wherein they define ITA as an approach that allows researchers to code possible themes in the data subsequently allowing them to discover multiple themes for analysis (Guest et al. pp. 213) The orientation of the study is qualitative as opposed to quantitative research because it allows for a better appreciation of human experiences. Dawson in her work evaluates the differences between a qualitative and a quantitative study. Dawson iterates that qualitative research allows for the usages of interview methods in order to extract in-depth rich

data of human experiences and personal perceptions (Dawson, 2009, pp. 14). Taking into account the research objective to descriptively and thematically elucidate community practices, customs and traditions of the *hijṛās* of North Bengal and Kolkata, the study has employed semi-structured interview method in order to effectively understand and apprehend individual perceptions, opinions and experiences concerning community traditions and customs. A sample size of 30 respondents representing North Bengal districts and Kolkata were chosen to gather data pertaining to community practices, culture, identity and to assess systemic changes within the *hijṛā* community. The researcher was informed by the respondents that due to internal and external disputes weren't comfortable in group interviews as there was a possibility of information suppression by the *gurus* or other *chelas*. The total number of respondents totalling to 30 was determined because of the unwillingness expressed by the *hijṛās* to partake in the interview as they were wary about inter-household skirmishes and escalation of violence if they disclosed any information despite having reassured them about anonymity and confidentiality. Snowball sampling method subsumed under the non-probability sampling method was therefore used to interview the respondents. Unlike probability sampling wherein respondents are randomly selected, respondents for the present study were chosen via snowball sampling method. Since it was a semi-structured interview, the researcher when administering the interviews allowed the respondents to steer the interview in the direction, they deemed more relevant (Breen, 2007). Hennink et al. defines researcher reflexivity as an acknowledgement on the part of the researcher to consciously be aware about their personal opinions, subjectivities and the possibility to exert influence over the research study (Hennink et al., 2011, pp. 105). The researcher taking cognizance of researcher

reflexivity used it to eschew bias thereby avoiding dominance of the researcher during the course of the interview by not forcing the questions or interrupting the answers of the respondents (Ibid). All interviews were recorded via mobile devices and field memos with prior permission taken from the *guru* or their *celās* (in-charge) of the household. Respondents spoke in *Bengali* and *Hindi* languages which were later transcribed in english. Words that were specifically spoken in *Ulti bhasa* (spoken language of the community) and other categorically articulated words/phrases narrated by the interviewees were retained to maintain the integrity of the interview. Names, addresses, and other personal identifiers were not disclosed in order to respect the privacy and anonymity of the respondents. The pronouns used viz. he/she or third gender were used as per the preference of the interviewee. Prior to conducting the interview, the researcher intimated the interviewees via telephonic calls informing them about the objective of the interview and other subsequent details. Also, the researcher inquired about the respondents preferred place and time to convene for the interview. The following table summarizes the regions, places and the number of respondents per district and the total number of interviewees of North Bengal and Kolkata.

2.5 RESEARCH SITES

NAME OF THE DISTRICT	LOCALITIES COVERED	NUMBER OF INTERVIEWEES
DARJEELING	SILIGURI (M. CORP), BHAKTINAGAR, JHANKAAR MORE	4
COOCH-BEHAR	NEW COOCH-BEHAR	2

	RLY. STATION	
ALIPURDUAR	NEW ALIPURDUAR RAILWAY STATION	4
JALPAIGURI	DHUPGURI, FULBARI	4
MALDA	GAZOLE, MANGALBARI	2
UTTAR DINAJPUR	RAIGANJ (HIJRA DERA)	2
DAKSHIN DINAJPUR	RAIL	2
KOLKATA	CHETLA (NEW ALIPORE), SEALDAH RAILWAY STATION, HAZRA CROSSING, VICTORIA MEMORIAL (TRAFFIC SIGNALS)	10
TOTAL RESPONDENTS		30

Table 2.1: Shows the segregation of Research sites and respondents.

In the 1970's, thematic analysis as an approach was initially advanced by Gerald Holton but it was particularly in the recent times that it was acknowledged as a recognizable approach with its delineated procedures for social science research (Braun & Clarke, 2016, pp. 201). According to Braun and Clarke, Thematic Analysis is a flexible tool of analysis which allows for inductive or deductive research. The speciality of thematic analysis over other approaches is that it allows the researcher to select ontological/epistemological or theoretical frameworks as it itself does not impose any specific theories. Additionally, thematic analysis also

does not prescribe any ideal yardstick measurement of sample size in order for the data to qualify for the same. Similarly, the present research analysis relies on the field interviews or empirical data which were subsequently transcribed, coded and thematically arranged for an inductive analysis. Selective coding was selected over complete coding because the researcher wanted to identify only relevant codes from the data which may answer the research objectives. Also, selective coding fulfils the requirement of apprehending a communal explanation vis-a-vis theiridentity, culture and customs. Complete coding on the other includes all instances which is pertinent to the research data. The following segment will therefore enumerate the themes coded from selective coding which includes semantic and latent instances of codes citing relevant works of literature to further the analysis.

2.6 FINDINGS

When attempting to map a study on the cultural aspects of the *hijra* community, elements of region and geographies (as aforementioned) constitute as important determiners. Considering the wide currency of the word *'hijra'* in the South Asian context, *hijras* as an itinerant and mobile group and their movement across domestic and international regions, the Indian centric monolithic constructions of the *hijras* as a subculture primarily drawing their identity and cultural legitimacies from *larger Hindu* traditions is somewhat problematic. Unlike the occidental word viz. transgender which simply denotes the gender identity of an individual who identifies in a gender opposite to the one given at birth, the *hijra* identity on the other is a cultural identity wherein its liminal gender category is culturally buttressed by its myriad cultural histories and traditions. Such a cultural blend is

further compounded when considering the *hijra* culture within broader contexts of South Asia viz. Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and India. In each of these regions, the culture and identity of the *hijras* acquire attributes of religion, language and elements of the dominant culture which alters the way how communities are perceived and understood. However, due to the presence of modernizing forces, globalization and movement of people across regions or nations, the contention that the local regions are insulated or immune from the cultural imports of other regions is obsolete. In this case, the terminology of *'translocal'* assumes importance as it speaks of subjectivities that are not limited to one's localized spaces but are extended by movement and mobility (Conradson &Mckay, pp. 168, 2007). Similarly, for the study of culture and identity of the *hijras* of West Bengal, it becomes necessary to embed the analysis within Appadurai's conceptualization of the *'translocal'* primarily because of mobility, movement and migration of the *hijras* across regions and borders. By laying emphasis on the interplay of the local and the translocal, the present study departs from the conventional and somewhat reified understandings of *hijra* culture and identity of North Bengal and Kolkata. The following analysis will therefore pivot the analysis of multiple cultural aspects of the community such as emasculation, occupation and religion by conflating it with the *hijra* identity. Considering the intense inter community disputes vis-a-vis identity, the dichotomies of a 'fake' and a 'genuine' *hijra* and the parameters of the same, it was necessary to draw a nexus between identity and other cultural elements of the *hijra* community in order to assess their mutual effects, for example, the role of emasculation practices, religion and occupation for the formulation of a *hijra* identity and vice versa.
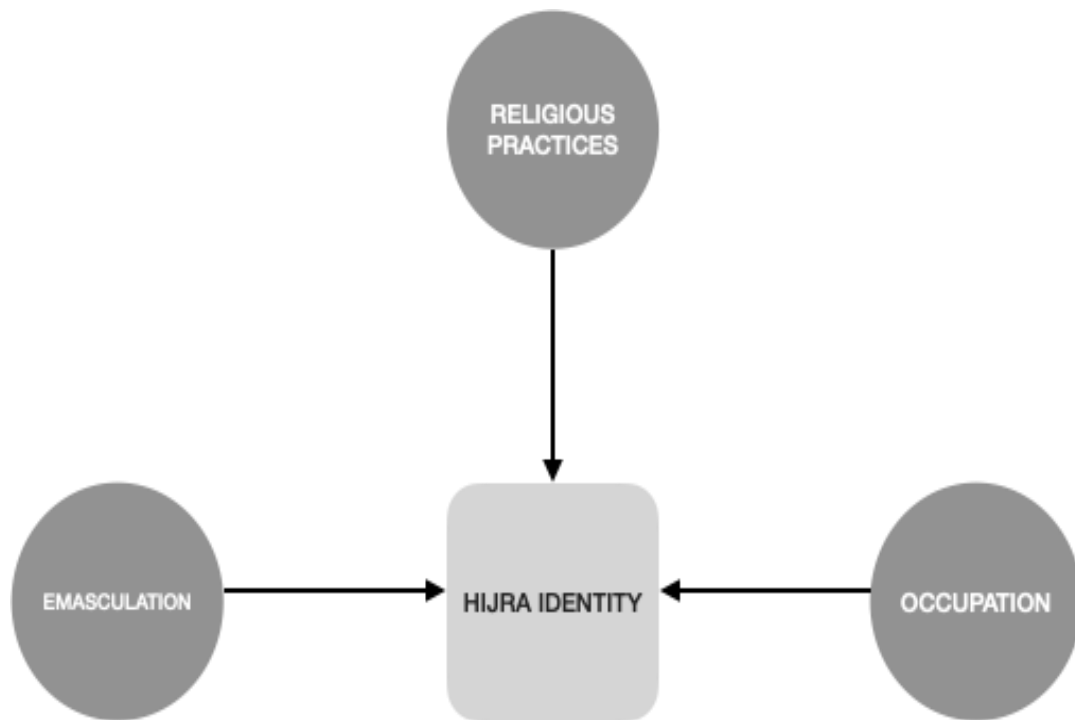
Fig 2.1: A diagram depicting the direct effect of three important axes upon the *hijṛā identity* of North Bengal and Kolkata.

2.6.1 EMASCULATION AND THE HIJRA IDENTITY

Emasculation, castration or penectomy as a standalone cultural attribute or as a determiner of the *hijṛā* identity constitutes as an integral cultural element of the *hijṛā* communities of India (Nanda, 1999; Reddy, 2006). In a similar strain, Taparia in her work draws connexions between the *hijra* identity and emasculation and the multiplicities of interpretation that have transpired vis-a-vis 'emasculation' since the medieval *mughal*periods up till the contemporaneous times (Taparia, 2011, pp. 168). But it was particularly with Nanda's work on the *hijras* that decisively conflated the act of emasculation with *greater hinduized* traditions of Lord *Siva's* severance of genitalia and the cult of the *Hindu* goddess *Bahuchara Mata* (Nanda, pp. 228-229, 1999). However, primary research findings of the *hijṛās* of North

Bengal and Kolkata contests the narrative of the unanimous salience of emasculation as a sacrosanct or an inviolable act because the perception of 'emasculation' varies across *gharanas* of the *hijṛā households* of North Bengal and Kolkata. The overarching narrative of the generic *hijṛā* culture attributes the importance of 'emasculation' as a special rite of passage that ritually admits members into the community inducting him/her with a *hijṛā identity*. Emasculation is also associated with '*nirvan*' or the beginning of a celibate life wherein the new member surrenders worldly engagements to live life as an ascetic (Nanda, 1999). But such a nexus between emasculation and the *hijṛā* identity is problematized by the differential perceptions of identity harboured by the *hijṛās* of North Bengal and Kolkata. There is no harmonious concord or consensus when examining the ritual of emasculation for the *hijra* communities across North Bengal and Kolkata. Primary findings of the study indicates that the *hijṛā* communities of these regions hold differing interpretations or stances concerning the *hijṛā* identity and the emasculation process. One of the most important disagreements between the *hijṛā* households centers on the requirement to emasculate oneself. Surprisingly, the need to emasculate is not a commonplace practice when considering all the *hijṛā* households of North Bengal and Kolkata. In fact, some *hijṛā gharanas* across both the regions condemn the practice of emasculation which is perceived by them as an atrocious act ensnaring naive and economically impoverished *celas* into life-long labour and service under their *gurus*. The *hijras* further contend that the *chelas*are actively persuaded by their *gurus* to emasculate. Also, the *celas* are provided loans by their *gurus* to emasculate themselves which they usually repay by rendering their labour and services to the *guru*. These *hijras* therefore considered the very act of emasculation as reprehensible and abominable. Contrary to such perceptions,

other *hijras* of the regions of North Bengal and Kolkata endorsed the practice of emasculation. Evidently, the *hijra* communities of regions across North Bengal and Kolkata profess divergent conceptions and harbour differing stances apropos emasculation and its significance with the *hijra* identity. Also, such variances are further complicated by the presence of the *'bangladeshi' hijras* and their ideologies on identity and culture. During the course of the fieldwork, it was known that the *hijras* from Bangladesh have migrated and settled in many parts of West Bengal. Therefore, it can be inferred that the migration engendered cultural and ideological consequences with reference to the *hijra* culture and identity. It is primarily due to such incursions that may have produced what can be called as the dichotomy of the insiders (i.e. the native *hijras* of the region) vs. the outsiders (i.e. the *hijras* from Bangladesh) which engendered broader cultural changes in the region. But such cultural changes cannot simply be analyzed as emanating from the two dichotomous camps of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' as there are instances of indigenous *hijras* proselytizing into the belief systems of the 'outsiders'. Even in the analysis of the significance of emasculation and identity, it would be too simplistic to rely on such binaries as the sole and opposing sources of the cultural dynamics. As the following findings will reveal, for an accurate mapping of the dynamics of culture, it becomes necessary to apprehend the cultural changes by constructing a continuum scale which expands on the binarisms of the 'insider' and the 'outsider' dynamics. The scale classifies the *hijṛās* into three categories of perception which can be depicted in the diagram below wherein the two extreme ends of the continuum represent radical differences in terms of perception harboured by the *hijṛās* pertaining to identity and emasculation while the central

category in the continuum represents those who either support with one end of the polarity or oppose both the polarities of the scale.

|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|

| REAL HIJRAS CANNOT BE MADE | EMASCULATION IS OPTIONAL | EMASCULATION IS IMPERATIVE |
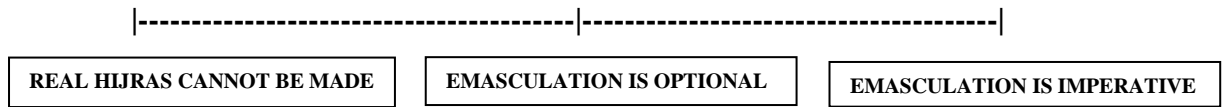
Fig. 2.2: A continuum scale representing the three major perceptions (divided into minor sub-groups) with respect to the nexus between emasculation and identity.

2.6.2 REAL HIJRAS CANNOT BE MADE

Referring to the continuum scale, the first category comprises of those native *hijṛās* who condemn emasculation as they assert that 'genuine *hijras'* are born with ambiguous genitalia at birth. One's ambiguous genitalia therefore figures as an important criterion for the *hijra* identity. The *hijras* of the first grouping also contends that *hijras* 'cannot be made' with the processes of emasculation or castration. Here, the act of emasculation is relegated and labelled as 'reprehensible' and 'discreditable'. Contrary to such perceptions, emasculation when placed within the broader traditions of the *hijra* culture is deemed as an essential ritual or as Nanda articulates it, as the *'dharm'* or duty of the *hijras* (Nanda, 1999). Taparia further contends that during the colonial and post-colonial periods, emasculation was actively deployed by the *hijras* to draw linkages with the greater *Hindu* traditions of Goddess *Bahuchara* and Lord Shiva in order to seek legitimacy and place within the Indian society (Taparia, 2011). Also, when placing the act of emasculation within broader *Hindu* social, philosophical and religious worldview, it connotes esoteric meanings of experiencing the divine, the transcendence from samsaric bondages and also in the case of the *hijras* translates as an act

commitment for their Goddess *Bahuchara Mata* (Taparia, 2011, pp. 174). But conversely, for the *hijras* of the first group, emasculation is viewed as a duplicitous act which the 'fake' *hijras* take recourse to in order to identify as a *hijra.* For example, in an interview conducted in one of the *gharanas* in Siliguri, an elderly guru remarked by pointing to one of her *celas-*

"She is a naphunsuk, can never aspire to be a mother nor think of bearing children of her own. The ones who are impotent by birth or are born with ambiguous genitalia, that person is a naphunsak, a hijṛā. One can never claim to be a hijṛā simply by emasculating or castrating oneself, we don't believe in that sort of practice. We label such people as 'duplicates'. We would never consider them as hijṛās."

The interviewee associates the *hijṛā* identity with the congenital state of gender and sex ambiguity. It is also important to note that by bypassing the act of emasculation they produce the schisms of 'genuine' and 'fake' *hijra* identity. Their 'genuine' identity therefore is relative to the 'fake *hijra'* identity supposedly achieved by undergoing emasculation. However, it also becomes necessary to situate and read such perceptions in light of the 'insider' and 'outsider' identity politics of West Bengal. Although the respondents of the first grouping repudiated the practices of emasculation, it could also be inferred that such a stance was further reinforced by the presence of the *Bangladeshi hijras.* In their attempt to segregate themselves from the 'outsiders', they have maintained the distinctions of 'genuine' and 'fake' *hijra* identities. For the first grouping therefore, identity and emasculation are not simply cultural attributes but also an identity assertion against the so called *'Bangladeshi hijras'.* Additionally, the first grouping is also divided into another subtype of *hijras* wherein the semblance of the disavowal of emasculation is maintained but in actuality is practiced. For example, some *hijṛās* from Uttar

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Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, some parts of Siliguri *(Jabra Bita)* and Kolkata opine that the *hijṛā* identity cannot be asserted simply by emasculating oneself. However, primary field findings also seem to suggest the contrary, i.e. some *hijṛās* of these regions do not disassociate themselves from the processes of emasculation but instead use emasculation as a means to assert their status as an 'authentic *hijṛā*'. Hence, they may clandestinely emasculate themselves or their *celas* in order to claim the 'genuine *hijṛā* identity'. The first category therefore comprises of two subtypes wherein the first subtype perceives 'emasculation' as a despicable act advancing the argument that emasculation equals to an inauthentic *hijṛā* identity whilst the second subtype employs emasculation to alter their bodies in order to claim the authentic *hijṛā* identity status but conceals the very act of emasculation in the process. In a direct quote cited from one of the interviews conducted in Jalpaiguri, a *guru* from one of the households responds-

"A hijṛā cannot be made by simply castrating or emasculating somebody. We don't keep celas here who are not born as hijṛās. All my celas are born as one".

Here the respondent categorically asserts her belief that a *hijṛā identity* cannot be made via emasculation better known colloquially as *'chibbarna*[58]*'* in *ulti*[59] language. However, subsequent interviews with the *celas* of the *gharana* contested their *guru's* narrative pertaining to the induction of *celas*. In one of the interviews, a cela contests-

"We have chibbris as well as akowas in our dayar[60] *but chibbricelas outnumber the akowas because our guru believe that emasculated hijṛās represent the true identity of a*

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[58] In *ulti* language, *'chibbarna'* is an act of castration or emasculation.
[59] Secret language used for ease of communication by the *hijras* of the region.
[60] Household in *ulti* language.

real hijṛās. Also, most hijṛās these days consider undergoing emasculation because they believe that by doing so, they will earn more."

The means espoused to be a 'genuine *hijṛā'* however becomes a point of contention for the two sub-groups as one attributes natal ambiguities while the other emasculates or coerces others to emasculate in order to identify oneself as a 'real *hijṛā'.* It would necessitate to remember here that emasculation is not limited to only the severance of genitalia but could be appended by the ingestion of hormonal drugs/injections, insertion of silicone plants on one's breasts and other means espoused to modify their corporal/sexual appearance. Also, *hijṛās* who receive monetary assistance/loans from their *guru maa* or are financially secure may choose Sexual Reassignment surgery over crude emasculation. Although both the sub-groups make the assertion of being a genuine *hijṛā,* the second sub-group deploys the means of emasculation/surgical intervention to affirm their authenticity. Such coaxed or coerced practice of emasculation also produces other repercussions such as the domination of *chibbris* (emasculated/SRS *hijṛās)* over akowas (or non-emasculated *hijṛās*). In some *hijra gharanas* of North Bengal and Kolkatawhere emasculation is practiced, the *chibbris*are deemed to be superior to *akowas*and are also treated better by their *gurus.* Here it is important to draw similarities with the *Bangladeshi hijra* culture in terms of emasculation practices. For example, the words *'chibbri'* and *'akowa'* are also used by the *Bangladeshi hijras* to denote similar meanings of emasculated and non-emasculated states respectively. Sayed in his work on the *hijras* of Bangladesh mentions the usage of the term, *'chibbri'* which means the severance of one's scrotum, penis and testicles (Sayed, 2009). The usage of such words in the regions of North Bengal, Kolkata and Bangladesh along with the insistence on emasculation as a determiner of a

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'real' or a 'fake' *hijra* identity demonstrates the cultural convergence of greater *hindu* traditions with the cultural import from neighbouring countries i.e., Bangladesh. The respondents from the second subtype can be subsumed under *Bangladeshi hijras* (the researcher was informed via other covert sources and key informants) and native *hijras* who have pledged their ideological alliance with the *Bangladeshi hijras* vis-a-vis identity and emasculation.

2.6.3 EMASCULATION IS OPTIONAL

The second category of *hijṛas* in the continuum scale contradicts the ideological stance of the first grouping and expresses a more liberal and flexible approach with respect to emasculation and its salience for the *hijṛā* identity. They consider the imposition of emasculation as arbitrary thereby permitting their *celas* to decide on emasculation. They also do not necessarily associate emasculation with the *hijra* identity. The *hijṛās* of the second category do not adhere to the schismatic divisions wherein members are coerced to emasculate in order to prove their identity as a genuine *hijṛā* as opposed to an inauthentic one. The *gurus* of the *gharanas* claim that emasculation is left to the personal discretion of the *celas* allowing them complete autonomy over their bodies. But the second category too needs to be bifurcated into two sub-groups i.e., the ones denouncing the act of forced emasculation and secondly, those who remain neutral refraining from demonstrating hostilities against any factions. The first subtype of this grouping challenges the ideology of the first grouping of the continuum. The dissonant group of *hijras* foreground the narrative that not all are born as *hijras* but rather becomes one via emasculation and other surgical interventions. A respondent from Diamond Harbour, Kolkata revealed that almost all *hijṛās* emasculate by calling a dai-maa,

visiting a quack or by sexual reassignment surgeries. When asked about the linkages between the *hijṛā* identity and emasculation, the interviewee responded-

"Emasculation is often used as a means to continue the practice of hijṛāgiri[61] where chibbris are often valued and preferred more than the akowas. More than a cultural identity, to be a hijṛā is to work, to earn money. Emasculation therefore becomes a means to enhance one's status and to widen the scope of one's earnings."

The first sub-group execrate their anger towards *hijṛās* who, in the name of authenticity, coerce their *celas*to alter their bodies by urging them to undergo penectomy/emasculation or other surgeries to emulate their version of a 'veridical *hijṛā* identity'. In one such interview, a *guru* from Bhaktinagar, Siliguri recounts-

"I have never forced my celas to undergo emasculation. If they wish to be a chibbri it is their personal choice. I have some celas in the dayar who are preparing themselves for emasculation by saving money and taking hormonal pills. Some have also injected hormones directly to lose body hair and muscle mass. I don't see emasculation as a true signifier of real hijṛā identity. For me, the feeling of wanting to be like a woman and behaving like one are true markers of hijṛā identity".

In yet another interview, a *guru* from NJP Colony, Siliguri articulates her concerns about real and duplicate identities-

"I'll tell you this, not even one percent of hijṛās are real. When I was small and not aware about the hijṛās, I had assumed that unlike me, they had a different set of organs, but gradually I learnt that they too were like me, so all those are rumours. They undergo emasculation or sex surgeries when they are small thus their appearance and physique in

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[61]*Hijragiri* refers to the collective occupational practices and the ways of being a *hijra* in terms of speech, body language and comportment.

totality changes. They appear more feminine, no muscle mass, more fat and softer facial features".

Departing radically from the first subcategory of *hijṛās* of the continuum, they question the narrative of perceiving emasculation as an indispensable attribute for the *hijṛā* identity. They also mention the incursion of Bangladeshi *hijṛās* and their supposed illegal settlements in North Bengal and Kolkatafor heightening tensions between local *hijṛās* by creating divides between *chibbris*and akowa*hijras* (emasculated and the non-emasculated). Furthermore, they also make a claim that *Bangladeshi hijṛās* often coerce their *celas*to undergo emasculation in order to ensure an increase in their income earning capacities. They also expressed their grievances against the *Bangladeshi hijṛās* (and other local *hijṛās* who have professed their allegiance with them) for imposing their ideology of an 'authentic/inauthentic *hijṛā*' identity. The respondents further recalled acts of physical brutality against their *celas*who were *akowas*(non-emasculated). They further hold them *(Bangaldeshi hijras)* responsible for inciting violence to usurp power and areas of the local *hijṛās* via reliance on their money[62] and muscle power. Similarly, in an excerpt from an interview, a respondent from Coolipara, Siliguri recalls-

"I have few celas under me and some have emasculated, and some do not wish to emasculate. I have never coerced any of my celas to emasculate as it is their personal decision. But not all hijṛās agree in what I believe in. One of my akowacela was physically bruised and verbally threatened by those powerful 'chibbri hijṛās' of the region. My cela is innocent, she did no wrong as she was minding her business buying vegetables in the local haat (market) but these hijṛās along with their goons assaulted and publicly derided her. I

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[62] The respondents mentioned that the *Bangladeshi hijras* often bribe local goons, the police and indigenous *hijras* to support them and their ideology of *hijra* identity and the binaries of fake and genuine *hijra* identity.

oppose such violence and the deliberate rifts created by such hijṛās between akowas and chibbris."

Quite clearly, the *hijṛās* of the first sub-group condemns the stringent imposition of emasculation of the *hijṛās* and the politics of superiority and inferiority accorded to the *chibbris* and *akowas* respectively. Unlike the dissenting *hijras,* there are *hijṛās* within the second category who do not oppose or support the claim that emasculation is essential for the *hijṛā identity*. They assert that there is no compulsory criterion one must follow to become a member of the community. A respondent from Cooch-Behar asserts-

"Since we don't work under others (nayaks), we don't like to enforce upon others the ritual of emasculation. We welcome all members regardless of them being an akowa, chibbri, zenana (like a man) or zenani (like a woman). What is crucial is not one's emasculated genitalia but the hijṛā culture and tradition that one follows and practices".

In another interview from Alipurduar, a *guru* narrates-

"Afterall it is their lund (organ) and their body, I cannot deprive them of that. Once they emasculate, they cannot revert back to their original selves. Also, as a dayar (household) we don't associate ourselves with the Bangladeshi hijṛās nor their agenda to castrate all the hijṛās to prove the authenticity of the hijṛā identity."

Here the respondent clarifies that their *gharana* does not conform to the compulsions of emasculation for one to identify as a *hijṛā*. For them, the *hijṛā culture*, role and customs precedes the ritual or the salience of emasculation when defining the *hijṛā* identity. Thus, irrespective of one's genitalia, the members once inducted into the *hijṛā community* are deemed as *hijṛās*. Similarly, the *hijṛās of Alipurduar* also acknowledge the presence of identity politics between the

*akowas*and the *chibbris* initiated by the *Bangladeshi hijṛās* but do not adhere to the hierarchical gradings of *chibbris* and *akowas* as they claim that they do not constrain their *celas* to conform to the narrow segregations of *akowas*and *chibbris*. During the course of the research, it was observed that disputes pertaining to identity and its linkages with emasculation were recurrent wherein warring factions of *hijras* across the regions often resorted to acts of violence and staged public protests on the streets and different social media platforms to assert their respective stances vis-a-vis identity and emasculation. Evidently, such assertions redefine the purpose and the significance of 'emasculation' as it has transmuted from the generic meanings of emasculation typically associated with religiosity, as a rite of passage and the patronage of goddess *Bahuchara Mata* towards being a determiner of the authenticity of *hijṛā* identity.Also, the methods and the techniques used for emasculation have departed considerably from the traditional means used by the community *dai-maa* (experienced or elderly *hijra* assigned with the duties of castration) which signals the inevitable effects of modernizing forces altering the very essence of certain cultural attributes of the *hijra* community. Also, the ritualized meanings of emasculation are constantly threatened by the ideological disputes engendered by factions who affiliate or identify themselves either with the cultural conceptions of the 'insider'or the 'outsider' *hijras*.

2.6.4 EMASCULATION IS IMPERATIVE FOR HIJRA IDENTITY

The third category of the continuum stands in contrast to the first and second category and also constitutes an extreme category as it opposes the ideology of the first category particularly the first sub-group. In context to the nexus between emasculation and the *hijṛā* identity, the third category i.e. the *Bangladeshi hijṛās,*

explicitly support and advance the idea of compulsory emasculation. The *hijṛās* of Uttar Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, parts of Malda and Kolkata harbour majority of *Bangladeshi hijṛās* which enabled them to exert dominance in these regions. Like the preceding two categories, the third category too requires to be cleaved into two sub-groups wherein the first grouping represents those *hijṛās* who have migrated from *Bangladesh* to West Bengal with the intention to work and settle down and the second sub-grouping represents native *hijṛās* who work for the *Bangladeshi hijṛās* as *celas* of their *gharanas* and have emasculated their genitalia to conform to the 'genuine *hijṛā* identity'. In one of the interviews conducted in Jalpaiguri, a respondent recounts the history of the *hijṛās* originating in *Bangladesh-*

"The hijṛā culture actually originated from Bangladesh. Once during a courtly meeting, some hijṛās had paid a visit to the raja (king) because he was childless. The hijṛās conferred upon the king their blessings and miraculously, the king was able to father his own children. The hijṛās returned to the court and rightly demanded their share of badhai but the raja, having forgotten his half of promise rebuked and turned the hijṛās s away. Angry with the insult, the hijṛās cursed the king that he would bear hijṛās for children in the future so that he would know what is to be a hijṛās. The hijṛās of Bangladesh are called the bhavrasis and they are the real hijṛās. In the olden days, bhavrasis just had one hole to urinate from. Nowadays, hijṛās s become bhavrasis or real hijṛās because of emasculation and sex change operations. Emasculation and sex-change, I believe is therefore important for a hijṛā identity."

Here the respondent invokes the oral history of the *hijṛās* of Bangladesh to affirm the divisions between real and duplicate *hijṛās*. Also, such anecdotal historical reference is used as a trope to lay emphasis on the cultural salience of emasculation

as an indicator of authentic *hijṛā* identity. In a similar vein, an interviewee from Uttar Dinajpur reiterates-

"The hijṛā identity is something that can be traced back to the periods of Mughal periods and also ancient hindu times. Hijṛās used to work for harems under the mughal rule where they were castrated and stationed outside the chambers of zenani women. Even when lord Ram left for his exile in the woods, he forgot to address the hijṛās as he only referred to the men and women of his kingdom. All these stories point to the gender and sexual ambiguity of the hijṛās. It is in our pratha (culture) to emasculate and be a hijṛā".

Similarly, another *guru* from Jalpaiguri asserts the importance of genital ambiguity-

"The hijṛā identity is important to the hijṛā culture. Emasculation is required to assert one's identity as a member of the community. A man's likum (penis) is of little use to a hijṛā as they cannot marry or bear children. There are hijṛās who carry their likum with them because they are married and have wives and kids to support and look after. I would like to refer to them as behrupiya hijṛās."

The second sub-grouping comprises the local *hijṛās* who by manipulation or by their own volitionabandon their indigenous *hijṛā households* to join the *dayar* of the *Bangladeshi hijṛās* with the prospect of increasing their income and attaining power within their local *ilaka (area).* Because of their transition from being a member of the local/native gharana to being a member of a *Bangladeshi* household, the *Bangladeshi gurus* often reproach their local *celas*for non-severance of their male genitalia. One local respondent recalls her experience of living with her *guru-*

"We are made to work every day, do household work as well as earn money and contribute to the guru. One day, I was helping the other celas in some routine household work when my guru addressed me harshly saying what will you do keeing your nimbumircha? (male

genitalia), it is better you cut it off!. I was hurt because I never wanted to operate my body."

The *hijṛās* of the second sub-grouping on the other often encounter episodes of coercion from their *gurus* sometimes compelling them to emasculate in quack centers in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and by providing loans for emasculation to the economically deprived *celas*of their household. The *guru* expects to extract the loan money from their *celas* by engaging them in *toli-badhai, challa-mangtai*and sometimes *khajra*work (prostitution). However, it would necessitate to mention here that not all *gurus* are of *Bangladeshi* origin. Because of the dominance and power exerted by the *Bangladeshi hijṛās* in the region, the local *gurus* and *celas* proselytize into the ideology imposed by the *Bangladeshi hijṛās.*

Considering the findings represented by the three categories placed within a continuum scale, it is obvious that emasculation and the *hijra* identity overlap with one another and also define (to a certain extent) the cultural patterns of the *hijra* community. Seemingly, the simplistic cultural patterns of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata were altered with the arrival of the outsiders viz. the *'Bangladeshi hijras'.* It needs to be reiterated here that such an incursion is not an instantaneous event but the result of more than three decades of gradual influx and movement across borders. As per field findings, the migration of the *Bangladeshi hijras* towards West Bengal (and also other regions of India, viz. Delhi) can be attributed primarily due to socioeconomic concerns. Owing to the cultural and religious legitimacy of the *hijras* in India, the *Bangladeshi hijras* perceive that the broad mainstream *Hindu* culture is fairly accommodative of their presence and cultural practices thereby ensuring steady means of income and financial security.

Primary data further revealed that the migration of the *Bangladeshi hijras* could also have been motivated due to the fact that Bangladesh is a predominantly a muslim country and its Islamic faith is supposedly incompatible with the *hijra* culture and the practice of emasculation. But Hossain in his account of the *Bangladeshi hijras* contend that due to geographical contiguities with India, the *hijras* have adopted religious syncretism or the adoption of both Islamic and Hindu elements (Hossain, 2012). Hossain further adds that such religious syncretism produces the possibility of engendering the schisms of authentic and inauthentic *hijra* identity primarily marked by one's emasculated or non-emasculated state (Hossain, 2020, pp. 410). Considering the above vignettes from the field, it becomes evident that the ideology of genuine and fake *hijra* identity, possibly engendered by the *Bangladeshi* influx, has permeated across all *hijra* households of West Bengal. Even the usage of terms denoting one's emasculated or non-emasculated state i.e., *chibbri* and *akowa* can be deemed as cultural imports from the *Bangladeshi hijra* communities. However, the politics of identity supremacy and conflicts vis-a-vis 'genuine' and 'fake' *hijra* identity did not surface with the migration of the *Bangladeshi hijras* into West Bengal but rather were commonplace because of the differences in terms of ideology pertaining to emasculation and identity (Hossain, 2020). Considering the convergence of Islamic and Hindu elements, not all *hijras* in Bangladesh have undergone the process of emasculation, which in the South Asian context, is a ritualized *hindu*practice prescribed by the religious traditions (Ibid). The rejection of emasculation can be attributed to the doctrines of Islam wherein emasculation is deemed to be a sinful act as it mutilates the creation of God or *Allah* (Ibid). Such differences of perception consequently produce the schisms of 'genuine' and 'fake' *hijra.* But the

dichotomy of the authentic and the inauthentic *hijra* identity is further complicated when situating such binarisms within the regions of North Bengal and Kolkata. As illustrated in the above diagram, the *hijra* identity and culture is inflected by regional conceptions as well as the dynamics of *Bangladeshi hijra* culture vis-a-vis emasculation practices, occupational engagements and religion. In the first category of the continuum scale for example, the two subtypes inaugurate the regional tensions concerning identity and emasculation. The explicit repudiation of 'emasculation' as a practice could signal the need of the first subtype of the native *hijras* to distance themselves from the *'akowa'* and *chibbri'* identity politics. Their conception of *hijra* identity can be articulated as 'natal determinism' wherein 'naturally born' *hijras* or those with ambiguous genitalia are deemed as a 'genuine *hijra'*. The first sub-group discriminates between born *hijṛās* and made *hijṛās* or *hijṛās* who emasculate themselves labelling the latter as duplicates. Typically, for generic *hijṛās* cultures across India, emasculation figures as an important rite of passage inducting the recruit into the community, but the first subgroup denounces the ritual of emasculation by eulogizing birth ambiguities instead. The *hijṛās* of the group invoke the myths of*Ardhanarisvara* and the tales of *Shikhandi* to interpret the supposed sacrosanct nature of ambiguities present during birth. However, the first subgroup critiques emasculation as a process because it is deployed by other factions of the *hijṛā* community to create segregations of *chibbris* and *akowas*. Theyrecount instances of discrimination, prejudice, disputes and politics engendered by some factions in the regions of North Bengal and Kolkata in which some of their elderly *gurus* and *celas*working for themwere supposedly displaced from their homes and their *ilakas (areas)* consequently denuding them their livelihood. Some *hijṛās* claim that owing to the numerical strength of some *hijṛā*

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factions (viz. *Bangladeshi hijṛās and some local hijṛās),* they often attempt to undermine the authority of other *hijṛā communes* in the region by usurping their areas, asking for their share from the earnings of their *gharana* members*,* threatening to level criminal charges etc. in order to assert their dominance in the region. first sub-group stakes its claim to genuine *hijṛā identity* by calling upon genital ambiguity as the principal determiner for a *hijṛā* identity. Borrowing the words of Nanda, the *hijṛās* of the first sub-group envisage their identities as occupying the liminal spaces of gender viz. *Neither man nor woman* and perceive themselves as ambiguous embodiments of such a liminality. Hence, the primary raison d'etre for the first subgroup to untether emasculation as an attribute for discerning *hijṛās* identity chiefly stems from the need to define their own conception of *hijṛā* identity and their condemnation against identity politics (*chibbri and akowa)* engendered by certain regional factions wherein *hijras* are 'made' via means of castration/emasculation and other surgical interventions. Also, the first subgroup claimed to have inducted members who were born as *hijṛās* implying that they are distinct and superior from the 'made *hijṛās'* of the region. Similar to this stance, the *hijras* of the second subtype also maintain the narrative of disavowing emasculation as a determiner of *hijra* identity. The second subtype consisted of native as well as non-native *hijras.* The *hijṛās* subsumed under the second subgroup belong to *gharanas* from Uttar Dinajpur, some from Malda, Jalpaiguri, few in Kolkata and Dakshin Dinajpur. The *hijṛās* of the second subgroup comprises an amalgam of local and *Bangladeshi hijṛās* andthey intend on maintaining the 'authentic' *hijṛā* identity. Despite their apparent rejection of emasculation, it was still employed by them to maintain their stance that all *hijras* are naturally born with ambiguous genitalia. Considering the ongoing identity

conflicts in the region, such a stance can also be read as an attempt to assimilate with the regional ideologies of genuine *hijra* identity and for avoiding regional disputes with the native *hijras.* But it is precisely with the narratives of the second subtype that the emphasis on the emasculated *(chibbri)* and the non-emasculated *(akowa) hijras* become prominent. The *celas* of the native and non-native *hijras* of the second subtype concede to the admittance of *akowas* and *chibbris* in the *gharana* wherein the *chibbris* are regarded with high esteem as they can claim an ambiguous gender identity when encountered or questioned by the public, police or other *hijṛā* members. Taking into account the hierarchical differences between a *chibbri* and an *akowa hijṛās* and the need to claim the 'authentic *hijṛā status'*, most *celas* and *gurus* alike, emasculate themselves to identify as *chibbri hijṛās.* However, the symbolic, spiritual and ritualistic salience of the traditional emasculation rite diminishes in the process as emasculation of the *hijṛās* in the case of the second subgroup is achieved by myriad means including the traditional method of inviting a *dai-maa* to sever one's likum (penis). The preference given to pseudo medical systems, hormonal therapies and sexual reassignment surgeries, however, surpasses the traditional methods of castration. For the affluent *hijṛās,* they take resourse to sophisticated medical processes commencing with psychiatric counselling, appointments with suitable medical practitioners, drug administration and finally sex re-assignment surgery with vaginoplasty. As per the estimates of respondents, a successful sex transition operation could incur costs between 4 to 5 lakhs. During the course of the interview, it was also observed that New Delhi's Pitampura SRS Center was a preferred choice amongst the *hijṛās* of the region. The financially privileged few or those who have access to quick loans especially from their *gurus* are in a position to choose sexual reassignment surgery over other

cheaper (crude, unhygienic quack centers) or traditional methods of the *dai-maa.* The economically weaker counterparts seeing no other alternative resort to quack centers in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar wherein uncertified staffs operate and sever the organ of the *hijṛās.* For example, Dukpa in her work, mentions the health hazards suffered by some *hijṛās* who have undergone the procedure of emasculation at quack centers (Dukpa, 2019). Evidently, the primary objective of emasculating oneself for the second sub-group does not necessarily signify renunciation from worldly affairs, to practice celibacy or to surrender one's lives to the worship of *Bahuchara Mata.* All these aspects could be secondary but not a primary reason for the emasculation process. There is undoubtedly a shift of meaning assigned to emasculation by the second subgrouping of the *hijṛās* in which the rationale to emasculate or undergo sex change is to reinforce the schism between authentic and inauthentic *hijṛā* identity. Emasculation as an instrument maintaining the parameters between real and duplicate *hijṛā* identity takes precedence in terms of meaning whereas the cultural and ritualistic values traditionally associated with emasculation assumes an auxiliary position. Also, such gradual relegation of emasculation engenders meanings wherein 'emasculation' is simply perceived as a means to an end. It also shows the presence of *'hijragiri'* culture wherein the profession and business of being a *hijra* assumes importance than perceiving *hijra* as a cultural identity. Such a culture of *'hijragiri'* also resonates with the *Bangladeshi hijra* culture wherein the *hijras* primarily engage in two occupations of *cholla* (i.e. asking for alms) and *badhai* (conferring blessings upon infants). As per the field vignettes, the emphasis is more on emasculation or modern surgery as a tool to achieve the status of a 'genuine *hijra*' and to dominate over local areas or *'ilakas'.* Emasculation therefore assumes differing meanings for the two subtypes

of the first grouping wherein the first subtype uses it as a relative binary to segregate themselves as an authentic *hijra* whilst deeming emasculated *hijras* to be 'fake' or 'inauthentic'. The second subtype also denounces the practice of emasculation as they believe that it labels them as a 'made *hijra'*, a category that is generally disapproved of by the *hijras* of the region. But nonetheless continue to practice it as a means to maintain their 'genuine *hijra* identity' image. Emasculation vis-a-vis *hijra* identity therefore has been relegated as a strategy or as a tactic to merely maintain the identity schisms of a born (genuine) *hijra* and a made (fake/imposter) *hijra.* Similarly, it is also used as a 'ploy' to assert one's domination over other *hijras* by claiming their territories, places to beg and perform *toli-badhai.*

The second category of the continuum (emasculation is optional) deviates from the first category as it represents personal discretion allowing the *hijṛās* to discern for their own selves the relevance or the irrelevance of emasculation with respect to the *hijṛā* identity. For the second grouping, the practice of emasculation is 'arbitrary'. They lay emphasis on the cultural practices and identifying oneself as a 'woman' as defining features of the *hijra* identity. Here the conception of *hijra* identity shifts from compulsory emasculation towards adherence ofreligious cultural practices and personal choices of identity expression. The   *hijṛās* from parts of Siliguri, Alipurduar, parts of Malda and parts of Kolkata represent the second subgroup. Emasculation is not perceived as a mandatory criterion thereby allowing for the multiplicities of identities to exist under the rubric of *hijṛā* identity. The second grouping is also branched into two subtypes wherein the first subtype maintains a critical stance against the coercive practices of emasculation imposed by 'powerful' *hijras* (mostly *Bangladeshis*) to maintain identity schisms of 'real' vs 'fake' *hijra*

identity. Whilst the second subtype, despite believing in personal choices vis-a-vis emasculation, maintained a neutral stance against the supposed imposition of emasculation and the identity cleavages of 'genuine and a duplicate' *hijṛā* identity. The *hijras* of the first subtyperedefine the relation between emasculation and the *hijṛā* identity by allowing individual *hijṛās* to interpret and assign their own meanings to emasculation. Here the emphasis is more on upholding the autonomy of the individual *hijṛā* member rather than staunchly conforming to the popular template of a genuine *hijṛā identity*. Having espoused a flexible and liberal conception of the *hijṛā identity* in which emasculation is deemed as a matter of personal decision, theychallenge other *hijṛās,* particularly the *Bangladeshi* and the local *hijṛās* employed under them, for maintaining, perpetuating and coercing the ideology of genuine and fake *hijṛā* identity. They also maintain that such identity dichotomies create hierarchies of superiority and inferiority between the *hijṛās* of the region permitting the former to assert dominance over the others. The *hijṛās* of the first subgroup also allege that such a disunity produces aggregates of *hijṛās* who either support or contradict the ideology of genuine *hijṛā* identity achieved via emasculation and the *hijṛās* who support the same numerically overwhelm the dissenting *hijṛās* which subsequently facilitates in the suppression and dominance of the weaker and less powerful *hijṛā* groupings of the region. They also speak of violence[63] meted out to the members of their *gharana* by those *hijṛās* who intend on promoting the ideology of coerced emasculation supposedly guaranteeing the status of authentic *hijṛā* identity. The *hijṛās* therefore actively advocate the need for greater autonomy over themselves, bodies and identity as they assert that the schisms of real and duplicate *hijṛās* produce unwarranted inequalities, divisions and

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[63] As per findings, multiple acts of physical violence and public shaming were inflicted upon *hijras* who deviated from the ideology of compulsory emasculation and the identity binaries of 'real' and 'fake' *hijra* identity such as stripping them naked, beating them with sticks and shearing off their hair.

conflicts in the region. For the first subtype, the ritualistic fastenings of emasculation also remain undermined as the emphasis of meaning shifts from religious and spiritual commitments towards an assertion of one's self, body and identity. The second subtype, like the first disassociates itself from the supposed hegemonic genuine *hijṛā identity* model but adopts an attitude of neutrality towards all factions. The *hijṛās* of the second subgroup conceive of the *hijṛā* identity that transcends beyond the binaries of genuine and fakeidentity. They foregrounded and endorsed maximum individual agency with respect to emasculation and identity. Considering the serious physiological and mental health repercussions brought about by forced emasculation, the *hijṛās* of the second subtype resist cultural meanings associated with emasculation. Spiritual aspects of celibacy, *moksha* and worldly renunciation also do not hold too much of primacy for the *hijṛās* of the second category as they believe in the multiplicities of identities coexisting under the same household. Surprisingly, the *hijras* of this subtype also entered into heterosexual marital unions, fathered children and cohabited with their biological families. The second category, therefore, reclaims their bodies by eschewing any form of body alteration to conform to the majoritarian ideology of linking ambiguity and compulsory emasculation with the *hijṛā identity*.

The third and final category in the continuum consists of those *hijṛās* who employ militant esque techniques to impose their ideology of authentic/inauthentic *hijṛā identity* achieved by emasculation or sex change surgeries. The *hijṛās* who represent the category belong to the regions of Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur, parts of Malda, Siliguri, Cooch-Behar, Jalpaiguri and Kolkata. The third group is also bifurcated further into two subtypes of *Bangladeshi hijṛās* and the local/native *hijṛās*. The first subcategorically asserts the exigent need for emasculation to

determine the *hijṛā* identity. As the moniker suggests viz. *Bangladeshi hijṛās,* the genesis of emasculated and non-emasculated categories of *akowas* and *chibbris* can be traced back to the *hijṛā* culture and communities of Bangladesh. Interestingly, some respondents even invoked oral histories suggesting that the *hijra* culture originated from Bangladesh. As per the myth, the *hijras* were called as *'bhavrasis'* which indicated their natal ambiguity. The vignette further suggests that emasculated *hijras* are the real *bhavrasi hijras.* The first subtype (comprising mostly of *Bangladeshis)* therefore affirms the divisions between real and duplicate *hijṛās* by referring to anecdotal historical references to legitimize their ideology of *hijra* identity. In a similar vein, the *hijras* of Uttar Dinajpur confirm the ideology of compulsory emasculation as they reason that one's '*likum'* or penis is of little use as they cannot marry or bear children. They also segregate themselves from '*behrupiya hijras'* or imposter *hijras* who do not emasculate, have married and have settled down with wives and children. The second sub-grouping comprises the local *hijṛās* who by manipulation or by their own volitionabandon their native *hijṛā households* to join the *dayar* of the *Bangladeshi hijṛās* with the prospect of increasing their income and attaining power within their local *ilaka (area).* Because of their transition from being a member of the local/native gharana to being a member of a *Bangladeshi* household, the *Bangladeshi gurus* often reproach their local *celas*for non-severance of their male genitalia. They are often reprimanded for not undergoing emasculation and are encouraged by their *gurus* to avail loans from them to visit quack centers for emasculation. However, it would also be necessary to add that some local or native *hijras* espouse the ideology of *Bangladeshi hijras* for their own vested interests. By emasculating themselves or coercing their *celas*to emasculate, they align themselves with the dominant identity ideology enabling

them to lay claim over areas *(ilakas),* earn more money and command more *celas* under them.

2.6.5 EMASCULATION AS A RITUAL

With the onslaught of modern scientific medical treatments, surgeries and the preference for allopathic medicines, instances of traditional emasculation processes have witnessed a sharp decline over the years. Especially, field data seems to suggest that the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata mostly prefer to visit quack centers in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar rather than undergoing emasculation operated by their community *dai-maa.* But medical surgeries and sex transition technologies notwithstanding, some *hijras* of these regions still undergo emasculation via traditional methods. In one of the interviews, a respondent recalled the crude traditional castration method wherein splinters of bamboo were used to castrate the genitals. The respondent narrates-

"In the olden days, the hijras were tied up to a bamboo pole, then from one of the splinters of the bamboo, their organ was cut. After the chibbarna process is over, they buy a new saree which is burned. The ash of the burned saree is then mixed with some red powder to apply it in the groin area".

Similarly, another respondent adds-

"Some 20-25 years back, the hijras used to castrate in their own dayar. A community dai-maa used to castrate them. That time there were no medicines and castration was done in a primitive way. The hands and feet of the hijra were tied and a knife or a blunt object like wood was used to sever their genitalia. The ash of the wood was then used to stop the blood from flowing".

Such methods, it is known, is still practiced in some villages in West Bengal because, as per some respondents, the *hijras* are not educated about the pernicious repercussions of castrating oneself and its effects on one's health. Evidently, in West Bengal the traditional castration methods are gradually supplanted by medical incursions of allopathic medicines, surgeries, hormonal therapies, SRS surgeries and pseudo medical centers operated by quacks. However, the methods used for castration is contingent upon one's finances or one's relationship with their *guru.* Those *hijras* who lack adequate funds often visit places like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to castrate in quack centers while the more affluent *hijras* pay for SRS surgeries which is considered to be a safer, scientific and hygienic process conforming to the medical standards of sex change. Sometimes, the *guru* pays for the castration or SRS process of their *celas*which is performed by a certified doctor. But in this case, the *celas*are obligated to work under their *guru* as servants or as slaves unless they return the money paid by their *guru.* Similarly, one of the respondents adds-

 "These gurus offer money to the chelas, to do srs, but then if they accept this offer, then the chela is forced to work under the guru. Becomes more like a slave. A lifetime slave. And these hijras, if you have to live with them for a lifetime, it is very difficult. They are very moody. You have to think twice before you do anything, you live in fear. You are penalized if you do any wrong".

Another respondent further mentions-

"Sometimes, the hijras visit *quack centers inUttar Pradesh (Lal Ganj) and Benares in order to castrate. And sometimes, certified doctors come at the hijra dayar and within 2 hours the castration is done. The rich hijras are the ones who can afford certified doctors*

who have done MBBS. For them, there is also a nurse in standby when they are castrated. The certified doctors are well paid so they agree to perform castration. The quack doctors on the other charge anywhere between 15-20,000 rupees. As compared to Delhi hijras, these bengal hijras are economically and educationally backward. In quack treatment, their penis and the bags (scrotum) are cut. There is a tube which allows the urine to pass. Then they are prescribed drugs. I had this friend of mine who castrated, his stomach however was swollen because of difficulty in terms of urine passage. But after the obstruction of the urine was removed, his health was restored. He had gone to bihar and done that. For my castration, I had visited a private nursing home to get castrated. I was told not to eat or drink anything. I wore a gown and with a saline, I was administered anaesthesia. This all happened in UP. My guru paid for the castration with her own savings."

As for the sexual reassignment surgery (SRS), a respondent comments-

"See the thing is, if you have the money, you can go for a proper SRS. SRS is a long process which takes about 3 to five years and lots of counseling sessions. In SRS, they test your heart, bp conditions and blood sugar level before starting the treatment. So, all this takes time you see. The hijras therefore opt for the fastest route out because they've the money to give to the doctor".

Also, as per field data, many *hijras* (more than 80%) have had to compulsorily undergo castration. Post castration, the *hijras* often report excessive bleeding in the groin region. Their *gurus* (as a relief measure) splash hot water in the castrated site to cure the wounds. Also, the castrated *hijras* often do not apply medicines as they believe in the home remedies of their *'dadh* or *nan* guru'. Understandably, emasculation as a ritual per se is dwindling as a practice but emasculation or castration is nonetheless practiced by employing other non-traditional, modernized

means. Considering the high fatality rates and cases of severe infection, the *hijras* of West Bengal mostly prefer to operate in non-certified castration centers or certified healthcare professionals. However, it is post the emasculation process that the newly castrated *hijra* is ritually welcomed by their *guru* and other members of the household. In recognition of the new recruit and their *'ling parivartan'* (sex change), the *hijras* wait for six days post which they hold a ceremony. The completion of six days is called *'chattiyar'* wherein ten *hijras* from other households are invited for a feast. In *chattiyar,* the newly castrated recruit is now recognized as a *hijra.* Also, in the altar of *murgamai* and their *kuldevta* (ancestral gods), some items like *nariyal* (coconut) and *phool* (flowers) are placed as offerings to appease the gods and to seek acknowledgement of the newly castrated member as a *hijra.* Understandably, *chattiyar* is important for the *hijra* as it grants them social recognition from other *hijras* and also legitimizes their identity as a *'hijra'.* Following *chattiyar,* the new recruit observes a 12-day period known as *'baraiyaa'* wherein the newly inducted *hijra* is seen as the *cela* of *Bahuchara Mata* for 12 days. During this period, the new recruit ritually enters the *hijra* household and other members break coconuts to mark the entry. Also, the *hijra* recruit participates in a ritualistic marriage ceremony wedded to Goddess *Bahuchara* wherein she dresses like a bride by wearing sarees and smearing vermillion. The other *hijra* members partake in the festivities and as a ritualistic function washes the groin area of the recruit with hot water. After the completion of *baraiyaa,* the new recruit partakes in the ceremony known as *'ghat snan'* or ablutions near a river carrying a *kalash* (copper vessel), some incense sticks, fruits, coconuts and vegetables. The incense sticks are placed on the shores of the river and the *guru* blesses the new recruit. The new recruit then offers some coconuts to the river marking the end of the ritual. The

ceremony of river ablutions is typically carried out after the new recruit fully recovers post castration or usually between 15 to 30 days. Some *gurus* may ritualistically marry their *cela*by applying *sindoor* on the 30th day post castration. This event is known as the *'tees-wa'*. It is from that day onwards, that their *celas*considers their *guru* to be their ritual husband. The ceremony of *godh-bharai*follows after the *cela*is successfully inducted into the community. The ritual of *godh-bharai*marks the last day of the forty-day long ceremony wherein the *chibbricela*or those *celas*who have undergone SRS (sexual re-assignment surgery) (also called *nirbaan hijra*) is presented with five types of fruits and other *gurus* who are invited for the event present the new *hijra* member with gifts. The newly inducted member also receives gifts like bangles, nose rings and jewellery from the *gurus.* Some *gurus* also present them with gifts of cash for buying sarees and jewellery. On the 38th and the 39th day, rituals of *haldi*and *mehendi*ceremony are observed for the new member. Like most *hindu* weddings, the *hijras* practice the ceremonies of *haldi* and *mehendi* because they treat the new *cela* member as a new bride of the household. The *haldi*ceremony fulfils the basic purpose of cleansing the impurities of bodily dirt while the *mehendi*ceremony ritualistically recognizes the new members as bride. The ritual of the *'godh-bharai'* and the *haldi* ceremony finally marks the end of the induction ceremony of the new *hijra* member which is usually observed after the completion of six months or a year. The *hijras* of other households are also invited to partake in the grand feast and celebration to commemorate the event.

2.6.6 OCCUPATION AND THE HIJRA IDENTITY

The overlapping nature of the *hijṛā* identity requires an examination of the *hijṛā* profession and the contemporary fluxes that have transpired in the past few decades in the region of North Bengal and Kolkata. The *hijṛā* identity and profession cannot be extricated or studied as standalone aspects because such an examination would be partial as it would bypass the causal nexus of emasculation, *hijṛā* identity and its consequent effects on *hijṛā livelihood* and profession. Considering the prefatory findings of the connexion of emasculation with the *hijṛā* identity and the identity politics of 'real' and 'duplicate' *hijṛās,* field findings seem to suggest that such identity demarcations is further intensified because the *hijṛās* of North Bengal and Kolkata region assign the *hijṛā* professions in gradings of superiority and inferiority. Such hierarchical gradings of occupation operates synchronously with the *hijṛā* identities of *akowa* and *chibbris* in which the *chibbris* or the emasculated *hijṛās* seem to aggressively demand for better *ilakas* to work and to beg thereby improving their financial status than other *hijṛā gharanas* in the region. The powerful *hijṛās* who have a number of emasculated *hijṛās* working under themstrive to maintain the occupational differences in which the traditional engagement of *toli-badhai*is accorded with the highest respect, followed by *challa-mangtai* (asking for alms) and the lowliest of the three, *khajra* work or prostitution. Additionally, the traditional *hijṛā gharanas* of the region also seek to maintain occupational differences but unlike the powerful *Bangladeshi hijṛās,* with their interests to acquire *ilakas* of other *hijṛā* groupings, they only claim to sustain such differences in order to identify an imposter *hijṛā and* a real *hijṛā.* In a similar strain, Dey et al. in their work informs about the graded occupational divisions of the *hijṛās* of Howrah and Kolkata wherein they are labelled on the basis of their

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occupations (Dey et. al, 2016). The study mentions the presence of three hierarchically positioned occupational labels viz. the *Badhaiwalis, the Khajrawalis* and the*Challawali* which the *hijṛās* of the region identify with (Ibid). The *Badhaiwalis* are deemed to be superior to the other two because they only adhere to the traditional occupation of singing and dancing on occasions at births, marriage ceremonies and so forth (Ibid). The *Challawalis* on the other beg for money standing near traffic signals or while on trains (Ibid). And lastly, the *Khajrawalis* are relegated to the lowest rung of the tripartite hierarchy for they solicit money in return for sex (Ibid). The aforementioned findings of the article resonate with the divisions of occupations prevalent amongst the *hijṛā communities* of North Bengal and Kolkata. But to fully appreciate the nexus betweenemasculation, occupation and the *hijṛā* identity, the study will separate the findings into three prongs of analysis viz. The *Bangladeshi hijṛās,* the orthodox/traditional *hijṛās* and the local/native *hijṛās.* The rationale for the segregation is because the three groups hold divergent views on the occupational engagements of the *hijṛās.* For example, the *Bangladeshi hijṛās* claim to adhere only to the traditional occupational practices of *toli-badhai*whilst repudiating other engagements such as *challa* (asking for alms)*, launda*nach (*hijras* as dance performers in Bihar) and sex work. The local *hijṛās* on the other permit their members to engage in the traditional as well as heterodox occupational engagements. Therefore, the following segment will examine the interplay of occupational engagements and its influence on the *hijra* identity.

2.6.7 BANGLADESHI HIJRAS

The Bangladeshi *hijṛās* or the 'outsider' *hijra* are a pervasive ilk in the regions of North Bengal and Kolkata. Their settlements can be found in parts of Siliguri, Jalpaiguri, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur, Malda, Cooch-Behar and Kolkata. Citing the findings of the aforementioned segment detailing the nexus between emasculation and the *hijṛā identity*, wherein the *Bangladeshi hijṛās* oppressively promote the importance of severing one's phallus for the maintenance of the genuine and duplicate *hijṛā* divide, the Bangladeshi *hijṛās* deploys an additional criterion viz. the occupational segregations of *toli-badhai, challa-mangtai* and *khajra* work to deepen the chasms of differences and inequalities between the *hijṛās.* An interviewee states- *'Toli-badhai is our true culture, it is what we do to eke out a living. There are other hijṛās out there who tarnish the name of the hijṛā community by performing in band party/laundanaach and khajra (sex work). All these engagements deviate from what was religiously ordained to us."* The Bangladeshi *hijṛās* therefore claim to adhere to only *toli-badhai*as a legitimate way of earning one's living as a *hijṛā.* Furthermore, a respondent from Uttar Dinajpur segregates the *hijṛās* who engage in other occupational practices from the ones who only perform *toli-badhai.* The respondent asserts- *"hijṛās who deviate from traditional occupational practices and who don't cut their male organs are to be perceived as duplicates."* Here the binaries of real and fake *hijṛā identity*is reiterated by hierarchically arranging the occupation and one's emasculation status to discern the authenticity and inauthenticity of the *hijṛā* identity.

Apart from the Bangladeshi *hijṛās,* the native *hijṛās* who consider the *Bangladeshis* as their *malik* (heads of the region) also support and implement the dichotomies of

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the aforementioned *hijṛā* identity but some *hijṛās* (requesting anonymity) have contested the claim that the *Bangladeshi hijṛās* only pursue *'toli-badhai'* as their sole means of earning a livelihood. The respondent from Siliguri claims that the *Bangladeshi hijṛās* are comparatively affluent than the local *hijṛās* because of their multiple sources of income making avenues including sex work. The respondent recounts- *"They may make claims of only engaging in toli-badhai but the sources of income are not just limited to one. Since they have amassed wealth, they diversify it into illicit businesses of smuggling goods from international borders like Nepal. They also deal with drugs as they know that it is a lucrative venture. With their monetary clout and muscle strength, these hijṛās demarcate their ilakas and sometimes usurp it from other hijṛās of the region."*

A respondent (guru) from Kolkata further adds- *"hijṛā identity is more about what a hijṛā does for a living, it is called hijṛāgiri. Nowadays, it is more of a profession and less of a culture. The culture itself is commercialized for gains. The celas are emasculated and are made to work. There is money no doubt but there is also discrimination, violence, abuse and also death. All these baro (elderly, powerful) hijṛās earn a lot of money and have both movable and immovable properties to their name."*

Here the native *hijṛās* (working under Bangladeshi *hijṛās*) challenge the narrative of the *Bangladeshi hijras* who claim they earn merely within the bounds of their traditional roles as singers and dancers in *tolibadhai*. A nexus between the *hijṛā* occupation (*hijṛāgiri)* with the *hijṛā* identity is also drawn in which the native *hijṛās* reduce the *hijṛā identity* to their occupation. Similarly, the *hijṛās* of Bangladesh coalesce the *hijṛā identity* with occupation and emasculation. For the Bangladeshi *hijṛās,* emasculation sanctions their authenticity of identity which subsequently empowers them to lay claim on the areas (*ilakas)* of other *hijṛās* of

the region thereby depriving local *hijṛās* of livelihood and income. Some native *celas*with *gurus* working under the *Bangladeshi hijṛās (gurus, nayaks)* have alleged that their (native) *gurus* have urged them to emasculate and have also allowed them to engage in other non-traditional activities like *laundanaach* (dance), sex work to bring in more money to the *dayar*as a certain sum has to be paid to the *Bangladeshi hijṛās* who consider themselves to be the *malik* of North Bengal region. The incursion of the *Bangladeshi hijṛās, therefore,* has impacted the native occupational practices of the *hijṛā* community and while they claim to adhere solely to *toli-badhai*as a way of earning one's income, they have diversified and widened the scope of earnings by resorting to businesses and other unconventional occupational pursuits that are considered as atypical for a *hijṛā* community.

2.6.8 TRADITIONAL/CONSERVATIVE (NATIVE) HIJRAS

The *hijṛās* representing the second group belong to parts of Siliguri and Kolkata and they claim to be different from the *Bangladeshi hijṛās* because they call themselves as Indian *hijṛās* as opposed to *Bangladeshi* outsiders settled in the state of West Bengal. These *hijṛās* also perceive themselves to be distinct from other local *hijṛās* because they claim that some *hijṛās* engage in occupational works considered to be stigmatizing to the community. A respondent from Kolkata elaborates on the ritual of *toli-badhai- "We don't like to mix up with other hijṛās who have soiled the hijṛā identity by engaging in khajra work, laundanaach etc. toli-badhai is something that was handed down by our ancestors, it is what we learned, it is our role in society to bless people. In toli-badhai, about four to five members from the gharana visit the jajman's place along with their dholaks which is sometimes carried by a male member. An obligatory badhai of cash and kind is demanded from the jajman. Depending upon the*

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jajman's willingness to give and his/her economic status, we demand for tel (oil), chawal (rice), saree and jewellery."

Although the steps for performing *toli-badhai* remain relatively the same across all groupings, there are minor differences noticeable between the traditional *hijṛās, Bangladeshi hijṛās* and the heterodox *hijṛās.* For example, in the case of *Bangladeshi* and the heterodox *hijṛās,* the *chibbri celas*may be accompanied by an *akowa hijṛā* who carries a dhol/dholak for *toli-badhai.* Those *hijṛās* who are trained or demonstrate talent in dancing are to perform as dancers whilst the rest of the *celas*and their *guru* sing popular regional and bollywood songs. The traditional *hijṛās* alsoclaim to worship *Murga Mai,* practice celibacy and renunciation and have asserted that neither them nor their *celas*have ever married or formed any sort of romantic alliances. A respondent from Siliguri (Koyla depot) adds- *"Bangladeshis have come and spoiled our image. We were living peacefully in our own households and had good relations with the villagers here. But these bangladeshi hijṛās have levelled serious charges upon us, charges of murder of another hijṛā. One hijṛā I knew (from NJP colony) had to be brought in my dayar because she was convicted of murder. Her forearm was hacked during a tussle with the other hijṛās. We don't want anything from anybody, we simply want our peaceful lives restored."*

A respondent from Coolipara (Siliguri) adds- *"Some bangladeshis have deprived us of our roti (our daily income) by taking away our ilakas (areas) away from us. We are not as powerful as them. They wish to command over us and become our malik, malik of the entire North Bengal region. How is that possible? We have been working here as hijṛās doing our customary roles as singers and dancers and some outsiders come, impose their culture and their power upon us."*

The orthodox *hijṛās* also condemn the local *hijṛās* for diversifying and incorporating other alternative means of earning a living. By local *hijṛās* they imply those who have joined the *dayar* (household) of the *Bangladeshis* or live separately in their own *gharanas* but are obligated to pay a certain sum to the *Bangladeshi malik* out of their monthly income. This criticism is also directed against those native *hijṛās* who have deviated from the traditional norms of the *hijṛā community* and have taken recourse to other forms of earning a livelihood.

A guru from Tollygunge, Kolkata adds- *"We draw our identities from the periods of Ramayana wherein upon the arrival of Lord Ram from exile, the hijṛās were blessed and told that they would rule during the period of Kaliyuga. We follow our customary roles of singing, dancing and blessing children and couples at marriage ceremonies. We refrain from indulging in other polluting activities. Our earnings are meagre, but we want to lead a respectful existence because we are already discriminated upon, we are already marginalized. Those who indulge in other kinds of work are not loyal to the hijṛā culture, not loyal to the hijṛās identity, they are not real hijṛās."*

Noticeably, the *hijṛās* who adhere to traditional customs, norms and occupational engagements also like the *Bangladeshi hijṛās* employ two determiners of ascertaining a genuine *hijṛā identity* viz. one's occupation and ambiguity with respect to one's genitalia.

2.6.9 HETERODOX (NATIVE) HIJRAS

The *hijṛās* of the group promote a liberal approach by espousing occupational practices that lie beyond the traditional scope of *hijṛāgiri* allowing their *gharana* members to engage in other types of activities such as the *laundanaach* (dance), *khajra*work, *challamangtai* (begging). *Hijṛās* from the third group belong to the

regions from Siliguri, Alipurduar and Kolkata. A respondent from *Alipurduar*articulates- *"We are a poor gharana and under me I have celas who have left their homes to earn a living. With their work, they sustain themselves, contribute to the gharana and also help their families. It is not like we don't do dhol (toli-badhai), we visit locality houses to sing and bless infants, but we also augment our income by doing other seasonal activities like dancing in band/orchestra, launda dance, challa in trains, shops, buses etc, traffic signals etc. and also the occasional khajra work. We are compelled to engage in other sources for income because resorting to only toli-badhai would not guarantee our daily sustenance."*

A respondent from Siliguri further adds- *"I often accompany my nati and poticelas for work to beg at shops, trains and streets. We have to go daily for challamangtai as we have to contribute our share to our guru and for the expenses of the household. Sometimes, I allow my celas to go for khajra (sex work) and I permit my celas to decide the number of clients she wishes to engage with. The celas also earn by engaging in khomer (oral sex) with the clients."* Another interviewee from Siliguri adds- *"The local hijṛās often have to surrender their ilakas, their birits (areas) because of the fear of assault and violence by the Bangladeshi hijṛās. Thus we have no option but to seek other forms of work for income. Launda dance for us is a lucrative way for earning more but for this we need to visit far off places in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh."*

Furthermore, a *hijṛā* from Kolkata mentions other occupational practices they engaged in- *"I used to accompany other hijṛās of my dera to go to Jalsa. The Marwari community used to throw parties for marriage and birthday celebrations and we used to pay them a visit as performers to sing and to dance. Earlier for toli-badhai we used to bless infants and newly married couples but in the last decade, I think, all this has changed. hijṛās these days keep a note of all new businesses in the locality like opening of a new shop or inaugural or anything auspicious. Just last week, here in our locality, a new*

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waffle shop had opened so we introduced ourselves to the lady (the owner) and performed toli-badhai, we earned about 5,000 rupees."

Undoubtedly, there is a clear connexion between the *hijṛā* identity, emasculation and the occupation they engage in. The binaries of 'real' and 'duplicate' *hijṛās* undergirds the incentive to create and maintain the segregations in terms of occupation and one's emasculated state which in turn impinges upon the *hijṛā* identity. Because of monetary influence and numerical preponderance, the native *hijṛās* allege that the *Bangladeshi hijṛās* forcibly enforces upon other weaker *hijṛās* to conform to the divides between a real and duplicate *hijṛās*. Some local natives conform and subjugate themselves under the *Bangladeshi hijṛās* by joining their *dayars*or contributing a certain amount from their monthly income in return for protection and non-violence. And those native *hijṛās* who do not comply with their norms often experience intimidation, public threats and violence from other *baro hijṛās*. Understandably, due to the power exerted by the *Bangladeshi hijṛās,* those *hijṛās* who stand in defiance (for example, the traditional and the heterodox *hijṛās s*) often suffer financially because of them being deprived of their *ilakas*(areas) which immediately translates to loss of power. The *celas*working under them too abandon their old *gharanas* to recruit themselves under the *Bangladeshi hijṛās.* Identity polarization of real and fake *hijṛās,* power exertion of the *Bangladeshi hijṛās* over the region and disunity amongst the native *hijṛās* are some of the plausible factors that could have led to the diversification of occupational engagements and possibilities of migration viz. intra state movement (from West Bengal to Bihar and Uttar Pradesh).

2.6.10 RELIGION AND THE HIJRA IDENTITY

Typically, a *hijṛā* identity draws its legitimacy by calling upon the pantheon of *Hindu* gods and goddesses and the related oral histories and myths (Pattanaik, 2014 Nanda, 1999; Sharma, 2009). Religion as an identity has wider implications in context to the *hijṛā community* because it influences the *hijṛā identity*, language, one's culture and way of life. In context to the *hijṛās* of North Bengal and Kolkata, the *hijra* culture and identity is characterized by religious syncretism, accommodation and tolerance of contrasting religious beliefs. Also, due to the influx of *Bangladeshi hijras,* the religious and cultural characteristics of the *hijra* communities have undoubtedly witnessed changes and assimilations. Although there is relative religious freedom afforded to the *hijras* by their elderly members (*gurus or nayaks),* the religious practice and beliefs of the *hijra* household is significantly determined by the *gurus* or the *nayaks*of the household. For instance, *hindu gurus* in cultural events or gatherings would impart religious knowledge by referring to multiple queer mythical stories and episodes from epics such as *Mahabharat* or *Ramayana* to their *celas.* Similarly, those *hijras* practicing Islamic faith may lay more emphasis on the stories of *pirpaigambar*or *sufipirs*to assert their religious identity. However, there is also the possibility of observing *hindu*or *Islamic* festivals or religious events by *hijras* who identify as *muslims*or *hindus.* The dominant religion or religious beliefs of the *hijras* across India varies as it is contingent upon regional contexts. For example, some *hijras* from Kolkata contended that in some parts of Madhya Pradesh, Punjab and Jammu, the local *hijras* may primarily identify themselves as *hindus.* They observe fasts, visit temples and believe in the overall religious tenets of *Hinduism.* However, for the *hijras* of West Bengal on the other, the geography figures as an important

determiner for religion and religious beliefs as it is primarily due this that produces the overall religious belief system characterized by the convergence of *hindu* and *muslim* faiths. For example, migration from Bihar and Bangladesh produces the conflation of two contrasting religions. The *Bangladeshi hijṛās,* for instance, identify themselves as Muslims which in turn determines their lineage and how they interpret their historical trajectories. The *Bangladeshi hijṛās* also aspire to travel to Mecca in order to return back as a *hajji* which is respected within the circles of the *hijṛā* community. As per field findings, it was estimated that almost 85% of the *hijras* in North Bengal were *Bangladeshis.* It is also believed that the *Bangladeshi hijras* practiced and conformed to the typicalities of the *muslim* identity viz. by praying to allah, preferring to eat *halal* meat and visiting pilgrimage sites. Also, it is important to mention that the *Bangladeshi hijras* are not discriminatory when it comes to performing their traditional roles of *toli-badhai* or some other occupational engagements viz. *challa/mangta* (asking for alms) in *Hindu* or *Muslim* families. The *Bangladeshi hijras* change their mannerisms and ways of greeting accordingly as per the *jajman's* (people who give money) religion. For example, the *hijras* often invoke *hindu* myths and epics in the presence of *hindu* jajmans. Similarly, when in the presence of a *musalman jajman,* the *hijras* call upon stories of *sufipirs* and other mystics and its cultural significance for the *hijra* community. It was also observed that the *Bangladeshi hijṛās* also worship *hindu* deities viz. *Murgawali maa* and local deities such as *Manesaadevi* (snake goddess) and so forth but simultaneously worship *Allah,* recite namaaz and celebrate Muslim festivals. Also, as per field findings, many *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata disassociated themselves from *hinduism* as they believed that Lord Ram, at the time of departure, failed to acknowledge the existence of the third

gender. Instead, they choose to identify as a *muslim*because they reason that it was from the *mughal*periods that the *hijras* or the eunuchs were well placed in the society, were granted acceptance, status, power and position. Also, the preponderance of *muslim hijras* in the region can be attributed to the early incursion of the *bangladeshi hijras* working under native *hijras* and their subsequent rise to power as *gurus* and *nayaks.* Thus, the religious affiliation of a given *hijra* community depends on the religion of the *gurumaa*or the *nayak*and their stance on granting religious freedom to their *celas* i.e. permitting them to practice their own religion or coercing them to adhere to their (*guru maa/nayak's*) religious identity. Similarly, even the religious identity of the native or local *hijras* of the region is contingent upon the religious identity of their *gurus* or *nayaks.* Although, the *local hijṛā gurus* or *nayaks* claim that they allow their *celas* to follow and worship their own religious deities and also permit them to choose their own names once they are inducted into the community, there are still instances wherein the *celas*are sometimes coerced to prioritize on the religious beliefs of their elderly *gurus.* But regardless of their core religious affiliations, the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata observe and worship a blend of *Hindu, muslim*or any other religious practices dominant in a given region primarily to earn a steady income from their *jajman.* Their religious practices therefore is an amalgam of *hindu*rituals and *muslim* practices but the degree of importance accorded to such religions depends significantly on the religious ideology and liberal/orthodox stance of the *gurus* or *nayaks.* It is also necessary to add that such religious malleability or adjustability can be attributed to their socially marginalized position within the mainstream society which causes them to adopt multiplicities of local, regional and national religious practices, to seek and to maintain social validation. Case in point, the

cultural and religious adaptation of the *Bangladeshi hijras* professing Islam as their dominant religious belief system and yet observing and practicing the *hindu*religious rituals of *Bahuchara Mata* to seek legitimacy from the society and to ensure financial security for the *hijras* of their household. However, despite the semblance of cultural syncretism, the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata mostly identify as a *Muslim* or are forced to identify as one. The *Hindu hijras* continue to practice their religious beliefs but only within the confines of their home. Any public display of *Hindu* religious beliefs could lead to disputes, violence and deprivation of one's territory and livelihood.

2.6.11 FUNERAL RITES

In *ulti* language, the funeral rite of the *hijras* is called *'roti chatai'* which lasts for a forty-day period. The *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata disassociate the ritual of *roti chatai*from other funeral *hindu*rites viz. *shradh* because they reason that the ritual *'shradh*[64]*'* is imbued with meanings of reincarnation and the continuation of the cyclical patterns of life and death. Considering their daily encounters of social stigma and oppression, the *hijras* do not pray for reincarnation or rebirth. Similarly, a respondent adds-

"Its like shradh but hijras don't want to call it shradh because they don't want any hijra to be born again in that way as they always face discrimination. The 40-day period is divided as the first day, which is chahram, after 10 days its dasma, twenty days it is bisma, thirty days is teesma and after forty days is chalisma. When hijras die, they don't want the dead to be called kinnars again. That's why they call it roti which they observe simply for the ensuring peace to the departed soul".

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[64]Sraddha as a rite is observed for the safe passage of the deceased as they transition from different realms before taking rebirth on earth (Britannica, Accessed on 12.07.2019).

Due to the numerical preponderance of *Muslim hijras* in the regions of North Bengal and Kolkata, the ritual of *roti-chatai* is performed by adhering to the Islamic customs and rituals. The funeral event of *roti-chatai* marks the 'salvation of the soul' or *mukti* (freedom) from the drudgery and the pain of being a *hijra.* But as per some respondents from Kolkata and North Bengal districts, the ceremony of the *'roti chatai'* is not elaborately performed in North Bengal and Kolkata than the *hijras* from Delhi. During the forty-day period, *hijras* from all over India are invited to observe and celebrate the event of *'mukti'* or salvation of the deceased *hijra.* But before the funeral event of *'roti-chatai',* the deceased *hijra* is buried in a *kabristan* (muslim burial ground) and the body is wrapped with a white cloth. Interestingly, the *muslim hijras* are buried with their initial names assigned to them by their family. For example, if a *hijra's* name is *Rani* (when she lived amongst the *hijras* in the household) but her actual male name is *'Ali'* then as per Islamic rituals, Rani will be buried as Ali as the *musalman hijras* believe that God or *Allah* may not accept them after death if they have rejected their gender identity assigned to them at birth. For most *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata who live in the *hijra dayar* (household) they are buried. However, the actual process of funeral rite of *hijras* who identify as *muslims* continues to be shrouded in mystery as members of the *hijra* community are not permitted to witness the actual procession and the burial of the deceased. Similarly, a respondent reveals-

"But the musalman hijras, nobody knows of their death, we hijras cannot accompany them to kabristan because women and kinnars are not allowed. If those women wish to cry and see the deceased, they may do so in their homes, but they cannot accompany the janaja (dead body) to the cemetery".

During the burial process, a *mullah* or a Muslim priest is called upon to recite the last prayers *(Al-Fatiha and Kamali)* or *dua*for the deceased member of the household. However, it is important to remember that the funeral congregation of the *hijras* and the invitation for feasts depends primarily on the deceased *hijra's* position within the community. A prominent *guru's* death may be observed by inviting thousands of *hijras* to pay condolences and offer their last respects whilst the funeral ceremony of a minor *Muslim cela* in the community may be a simple and ordinary affair. A respondent mentions-

"Recently, one hijra died here in West Bengal and 1100 hijras had attended. Arrangements were made for them to stay and eat. And they were also presented with a gift. And this event is sponsored by the money of the deceased or the ones who succeed the deceased".

The above vignette clearly implies that the funeral rites of the *hijras* is contingent upon their lifetime earnings, their wealth and their status within the community which determines the way their last rites are performed. Despite the preponderance of the *Muslim hijras* in the region, there are *Hindugurus* or *celas*who adhere to the *Hindu* funeral practices. Also, *hijras* who live separately in their homes are given the liberty to choose their own religious funeral rites. A *hijra* respondent narrates-

"If I die, they will take me to a shamshaan ghat. For Hindus the funeral ceremony lasts for 13 days and they will conform to the Hindu rituals like pind-daan."

But it needs to be mentioned here that due to the numerical strength of the *Muslim* and the *Bangladeshi hijras,* the *hijras* who actively adhere to the *Hindu* practicesare very scant in number. There may be *hijras* who identify themselves as a *Hindu* but are bound to believe in the religious practices of Islam as they are embedded within a network of *hijras* who primarily identify themselves as

'Muslims'. Any breach of religious norms by the *Hindu hijras* (such as cremating the *hijras* instead of burying them) is met with violent or extreme consequences wherein the *hijras* are stripped off of their areas, territories and denied of their income and means to livelihood. The *Hindu hijras,* fearing violence, renders them to secretively practice their religion at their homes or where they live separately from the *dayar.* It was also known that many *hijras* across West Bengal are not culturally knowledgeable or aware of their community customs than their Delhi counterparts. It can also be reasoned that the *hijras* residing in regions across India (i.e., North, West, East and South) accord differing degrees of importance to the funeral rites. Hence, the spatial context and the ideology of the 'powerful' *hijras* on religion therefore remains crucial when examining the religious practices of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata.

2.6.12 LANGUAGE

Language constitutes an important cultural attribute for the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata as it builds community 'we-feeling', 'solidarity' and allows for smoother communication. The *hijras* of the region deem *'ulti'* language as their *'parampara'* or tradition handed down and taught by their elderly members of the community. Also, considering their marginalization and oppression in the society, their secret code language, *ulti,* enables them to operate more efficiently and alert other *hijras* when they sense danger or any other kind of problem. For example, a respondent adds- *"dekho dengur aaya hain"* in *ulti.* It can be translated as- "watchout, the police is nearby!" For the *hijras,* the primary purpose of the *ulti* language is to maintain secrecy while passing information when communicating in public spaces. It is also used in group gatherings, during *hijra* panchayat meetings

or other ceremonies. They further maintain that the *ulti* language is convenient for them as it is understood by *hijras* across India. As per some respondents, *ulti* is also known by another name viz. *kori* or *karibhasa* (language).

ULTI/KORI/KARI WORDS	ENGLISH/HINDI EQUIVALENT WORDS
Khauri	Jhoothbolna, to lie
Dengur/Dingur/Bilwa	Police
Giriya	One's romantic partner/sexual partner/boyfriend
Likum	Penis
Batli/Bati	Anus
Vhelkarna or lotharkarna	To seduce someone
Jhalka	Money
Chapti/Chipti	Vagina
Khajra	Sex work
Jhorai/Jharui	Ornaments
Chissa	Good or nice
Bila	To do something bad/kharabkarna
Dhuraipittai/dhurpitti	To engage in sex
Don/dund/dun	Slapping penalty against someone who has done something wrong.
Tonni	Girl
Tonna	Boy
Darmaa	Rice
Chiku	Tel
Satra	Saree
Dharki	Woman's chest

Khomer	Face
Takni	Food
Murad	Cela

Table 2.2: Demonstrates some popular *ulti*words used by the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata

Their code language or *ulti* bhasa is believed to be a syncretic language combining linguistic elements of *Hindi, Farsi*[65]*, Bengali* and *Sanskrit* language. The exact origins of *ulti* language however remains unknown primarily because it was orally transmitted from *gurus* to their *cela* many centuries ago. One of the respondents says-

"I don't know the origins of ulti language. I have learned this from community's elder members, and they've learned from their community elders. So, it keeps going on like that".

Some respondents assert that the language may have originated from the Arab or Persian culture. In a similar vein, Aziz and Azhar also mention the usage of *'ulti'* language by the *Bangladeshi hijras* which they contend is an amalgam of *Farsi* and *Bengali* language (Aziz &Azhar, 2019). They further inform that the word *'ulti'* in *Bengali* means backwards (Ibid). Khan et. al in their work also mentions the use of *ulti*language by the *bangladeshi hijras* (Khan et. al, 2008). Similarly, Hossain in his work contends that *'ulti'* is a common language spoken by the *hijras* of Bangladesh and West Bengal (Hossain, 2018, pp. 326). It is also called as *gupti* language (denoting secrecy) and is considered as a marker for the authentic *hijra* identity by the *Bangladeshi hijras* (Ibid). Evidently, *ulti, kori* or *gupti* language conflates the

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[65] The *farsi* language or regionally known as *ulti*or *khori*language spoken by the *hijrās* of West Bengal also traces its origins to the Islamic country of Persia or modern-day Iran.

lingual elements of multiple cultures and is also translocal in the sense that it is spoken and used by *hijras* across political/geographical borders. Apart from the usage of *ulti* language, their everyday greetings also signify cultural and religious syncretism. For instance, *hindu hijras* greet their *muslim*counterparts by communicating in their language and the *muslim hijras* on the other greet their *hindu*counterparts in their language. For example, when a *Hindu hijra* initiates a conversation with a *muslim hijra,* they greet by saying- *"Asalam walekum, rehmatullah warkatu"* which is replied by saying *"walekum asalam". The hindu hijras* assert that to conform to the network culture of the *hijras* across India, one needs to use appropriate greetings. They consider it as maintaining 'professional decorum'. As one of the respondents adds-

"I can't say pranaam to a muslim person in the hijra community. Yeh mera professional life ka majboorihain".

However, while addressing seniors or elderly members of the community, the *hijras* have to greet them accordingly with respect. An instance of such a greeting would be-

"Pailagi dadi, paghe lagu, namaste, ram ram, asalam-walekum, walekum asalam".

Evidently, the linguistic usages employed by the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata in their everyday social interactions is characterized by the linguistic inflections of *Farsi, Bengali, Urdu, Hindi* and also *Bhojpuri* languages. Furthermore, like the *hijras* of *Bangladesh,* the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata too deem the fluent usage of *'ulti'* language as a marker of *'hijragiri'*. The spoken language of *ulti*requires a certain style of enunciation, speed with which one speaks coupled with bodily gestures and the *hijra* 'clap'. For the *hijras*, *ulti*language is an

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integral element of their cultural identity as it defines who they are or their authentic identity as a *hijra.*

2.6.13 THE HIERARCHIES OF GURU AND CHELA

Unlike the typical hierarchies of *guru* and *chela* expounded by extant body of works, the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata is hierarchically divided into three tiers viz. *malik* or *malak,* also *nayak* (region head), *nan-guru* or *dadh guru (nani guru* or *dadi guru)* of the household and the *guru* (head of the household). The first top tier is represented by the *'malik'* or *'nayak'* of the region. They usually command many *hijras* under them and wield monetary, political and numerical power. The *'nayak'* does not directly control the affairs of the household or the *celas* of the household but governs the heads of the households i.e., *gurus* or *guru maa* and all the territories of a given region. As per field findings, the current *nayak* of the North Bengal is *Olievia Hajji* (Olievia identifies as a *Bangladeshi Muslim hijra* and *hajji* is an honorific title given to those who have visited the pilgrimage sites, for e.g., *Mecca*). *Olievia* is also referred as *'Olievianayak'* and it was known that she migrated from Bangladesh three decades back. Typically, a *nayak* has anywhere between 4-6 *guru maas* working under them. In a *hijra* household, however, the *guru* is the head of the household working under the *nan-guru* and *dadh guru* or aged/elderly *gurus* in the household. In many *hijra* households, one usually sees two hierarchical tiers of *gurumaa* and their *celas* but in some other *hijra* households, one notices the presence of three or more generations of *hijras* i.e., *Nan guru, guru, cela, nati-cela* and *poti-cela.*
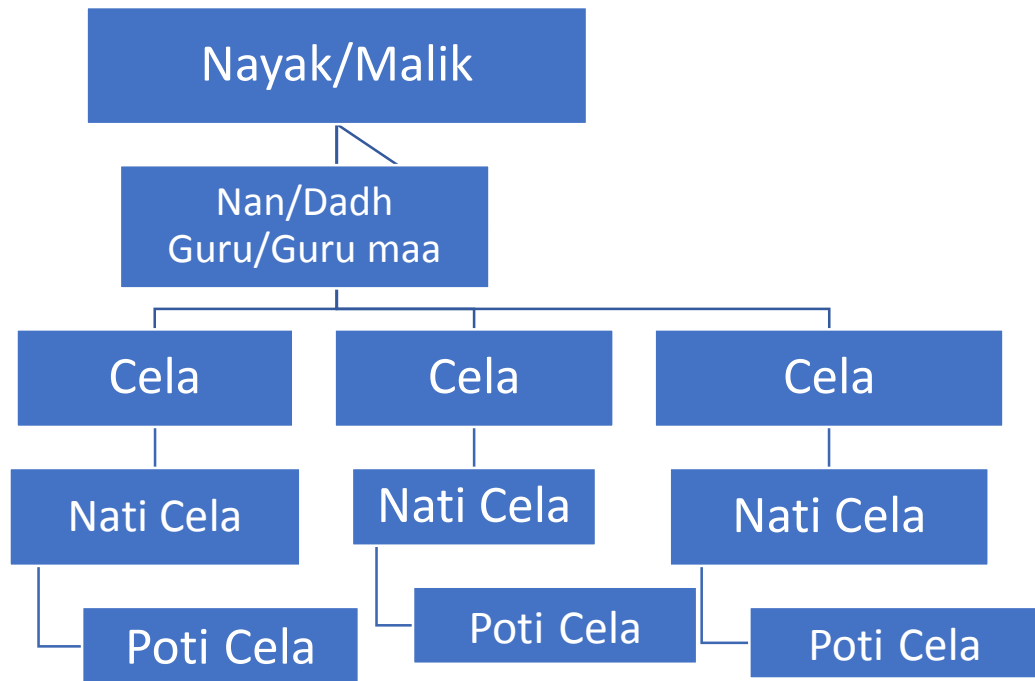
Fig. 2.3: A hierarchical diagram showing the divisions between the three tiers of the *hijra* community.

2.6.14 WORK ALLOCATION OF THE GURUS AND CELAS

Referring to the above tier, the work allocation of the *hijras* is also contingent upon their position within the *hijra* household. The *dadh guru/nan guru* or *guru maa* (whoever is in charge) of the household wields the maximum power and takes major decisions for the household. They usually represent the *hijra* household during important *hijra* conferences, meetings or in *hijra* panchayats. The *guru maa* is considered to be the 'head' of the family and the leader of the *hijra 'kundi'* (household). As per household norms, the *guru maa* is respectfully called as the 'mother' of the household, of the *celas* working under and due to this, the members of the household are obligated to adhere or conform to her instructions. The type and the duration of work hours of the *celas* of the household depends on the temperament and the relationship between the *gurus* and the *celas*. For example, if

the *guru* shares good relations with the *celas* or her nature is kind or considerate then she may not simultaneously assign field (begging, singing, dancing, and blessing) as well as domestic duties (cooking, cleaning) to her *celas.* Also, considering her age, she may accompany her *celas* to work with them in *dhol* or *toli-badhai.* But typically, if the *guru* has many *celas* under her, then she may not accompany them. Conversely, if the *gurus* are of a miserly and vicious temperament, the *celas* may have to multitask and complete household work as well as the task of earning income. Similarly, a respondent from Kolkata adds-

"After coming back, you have to cook at night also. Then only are you allowed to rest. They don't keep any extra help for cooking and cleaning because they don't want to spend extra. So it depends on how the nayak is, her nature".

Therefore, in any given *hijra* household, the *celas* work under the *gurus,* perform in *toli-badhais* and other occupational works and earn income for the household which is then given to the *guru* for further allocation. Few other *celas* on the other are assigned duties to cook and to clean the house. Some *celas* are also expected to look after guests who visit their household. The *celas* are also expected to look into the personal needs of their *nan/dadh guru* or their *guru maa,* like washing their spittoon bowl (where they spit chewed paan), caring for their overall health especially when they are too old to look after themselves. A respondent adds-

"After all the household chores are done, I have to massage the feet of my guru for hours. Our guru doesn't do any work and overburdens us with household and field duties".

Understandably, the work allocation of the *celas* and their *gurus* depends considerably on the head of the household, i.e. *nan/dadh guru* or the *guru maa.* Sometimes, with the demise of the *guru maa* or for some other reasons (such as

health afflictions),the chosen *cela*assumes the coveted position of being a *guru.* With such a transition, the rules of work allocation alter accordingly. Thus, there are no uniform templates that the *hijras* of the household adhere to; instead the work parameters are arbitrary and mutable.

2.6.15 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GURU AND CELAS

Typically, any hierarchical relationship is defined by respect and reverence expressed by the subordinates for their superiors. In a *hijra* household, a *guru* is usually respected and considered in many female kinship roles such as that of a mother, sister, grandmother and that of a friend. All *celas*are expected to pay their respects to their *gurus* by greeting them whenever talking on the phone or while meeting them in person. For instance, when meeting a *Muslim hijra,* the *cela*greets her as – *"Asalaamwalekum guru",* or *"Asalaamwalekum guru, rehmatullahwarkatu".*

If the *guru* is *hindu*then the salutations change accordingly-

"Ram Ramgurubashi maa, pagheylagey, radheyradhey, joishreekrishna, joimahakal".

The *celas* are therefore expected to maintain such basic decorum everyday failing which the *celas*are penalized wherein they are to pay a certain amount to their *gurus* during a *hijra panchayat* meeting. Many *hijras* liken the relations between *gurus* and *celas*as that of a *'saas-bahu'* or mother-in-law or daughter-in-law. Sometimes, it is also described as a mother-daughter relationship which is a rarity considering the hierarchical relations between the two and the norms in which the *celas*are embedded in. Depending upon the *guru* and *cela*relationship, the *celas* may face multiple impositions, regulations and constant surveillance from their *gurus.* A respondent adds-

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"There are many rules and regulations if you are staying in a hijra household. During the night time, you cannot talk over the phone. You cannot look outside the window and look here and there. Because they assume that they are looking at boys and some relationship will happen and all that, so they don't want that to happen. They don't want them to enter into a relationship. Doing this will incur penalty. Western outfits is not allowed. You have to come whenever we tell you to come. So the gurus will allow one giriya because they understand that there is a physical need for sex. Having multiple partners is not something that is approved of".

However, not all *guru* and *cela* are characterized by inimical relations or animosity. There are few instances wherein the *celas* deem their *gurus* to be their mentor, mother and friend. Such *celas* describe their relations with their *gurus* as fond, loving and a warm relationship. Good relationships with one's *guru* is also maintained by taking care of the *guru,* calling her every day and respecting her genuinely. A respondent adds-

"My relationship with guru is a special one. She is like my mother to me. I will inherit everything once she dies. So I am entitled to what she possesses. When she leaves for hajj, I become the guru of the household".

While other *celas* strictly view their relations with their *gurus* as professional, wherein they limit their interactions with their *gurus* for work or money. A respondent commenting on her relation with her *guru* adds-

"My guru she misunderstands me because if I say one thing, she will take it another sense. So I just talk with her relating to work. I don't share my personal life with her."

In another instance, there are *celas* who establish good relations with their *gurus* but inwardly harbour ulterior motives or ill-intentions against them. There are instances

wherein the *hijras,* by using multiple stratagems viz. sycophancy and increasing their numerical strength (which is achieved by quickly recruiting *celas*) usurp power and money from their *gurus.* Some *celas*with murderous intentions may also commit serious crimes such as homicides to claim power, money and property of their *gurus.* The *guru-cela* relations, therefore, varies across *hijra gharanas* depending upon *guru-cela*relations, monetary or property gains or hostilities because of stringent rules or regulations.

2.6.16 DISCRIMINATION OF CELAS

Instances of discrimination and prejudice experienced by the *celas*is commonplace across all regions of North Bengal and Kolkata. The *celas*are primarily discriminated on the grounds of non-emasculation. Non-emasculated *hijras* or *'akowas'* are labelled as *'aadmi'* (man), *'lundwali'* (having a penis) *or 'budda'* (old man)by their *gurus* and other emasculated *hijra* members of the household. Some *gurus* are personally invested in feminizing the appearance of their *celas.* In one such instance, the *guru* of the household expressed eagerness to provide loans to their *celas*for them to emasculate and to purchase drugs in order to enlarge their breasts. Sometimes, *gurus* may be more fond of those *celas*with appearances of a woman and with their physical beauty, charm and attractiveness are capable of earning more than *celas*who are *akowas*with masculine appearances. Due to immense pressure, stigma and constant comparison with their *chibbri* counterpart (ones who have emasculated) many *hijras* are forced to emasculate. It is estimated that about 80% of the *hijras* across North Bengal and Kolkata have emasculated themselves. The *gurus,* for their own vested interests, coerce their *celas* to undergo emasculation or SRS. The poor *celas*are particularly vulnerable as they have no financial means to afford a safe emasculation procedure nor SRS as the latter costs

between 4-5 lakhs. The *guru* therefore offers loan money to their *celas*in return for their lifelong service and labour. The emasculated *hijras* also cannot leave their *gurus* or their *hijra* community because post-emasculation, the *hijras* do not have any choice but to work and serve their *gurus.* Emasculated *hijras* also means more profits and monetary gains for the *guru* because the emasculated *celas*can demand more money from the public by threatening them to show their private parts. Also, due to the differences of superiority and inferiority associated with being a *chibbri*and an *akowa hijra,* the *gurus* prefer *chibbri hijras* more than *akowas* to claim power, prestige and status within the *hijra* community. In some households, *akowa hijras* are debarred from seeking entry into the *hijra* community and the only way to become a member is to emasculate oneself. The religious identity of a *hijra* also plays an important determiner in terms of how they are perceived by their *gurus.* A *Muslim guru* would favour their *Muslim cela*more than those who identify as *Hindus* and vice versa. Such preference engenders favouritism, discrimination and prejudice against the *non-Hindu* or non-*Muslim hijras.* The *celas* are also monetarily deprived of their earnings wherein they are expected to contribute 50% of their income with their *gurus* and also share their income for other household expenses. The competition for power, prestige, status and wealth comprises of some factors that engenders episodes of discrimination, especially for the *celas*within the *hijra* household.

2.6.17 RECRUITMENT PROCESS OF A CELA

The *hijra guru* relies on multiple ways and means of acquiring a new *cela.* A simple method would be to rely on their inducted *cela*to recommend their friends who may be interested in joining the community. Secondly, *hijras* while performing *toli-badhai*interact with younger children or teenagers who identify

with the gender mannerisms and comportment of the *hijra* identity or the transgender identity who in turn express interest in joining the *hijras.* Interaction with other *launda* dance performers also allows the *guru* to recruit new *hijras* wherein she may convince them to join the community for greater monetary benefits and higher incomes. And finally, *hijras* interact and meet other *hijras* from all over India when attending funeral rites viz. *roti-chatai* or other important meetings and conferences wherein *celas* may wish to join the household of a *hijra guru.* The newly acquired *cela* is then formally inducted into the *hijra* household by observing the *'dupatta* ceremony'. The *cela* or the *guru* covers the head of the *cela* with a *dupatta* (piece of cloth) and declares her as the new *cela* in the presence of *gurus* of different *gharanas.* The primary rule is to induct the *cela* in the presence of *hijras* who are of the same level or have the same position as the *guru.* Post the induction ceremony, as per tradition, the *cela* receives gifts (gold/glass bangles, nose ring, earrings) and some money from their *guru.* The feeding of *mithai* or sweets to the new *cela* marks the end of the ritual. In a formal gathering *(hijra panchayat)* however, the *guru* is expected to pay a sum of Rs. 500 to the panchayat committee for the induction of a new *cela.* Here, the *cela* is officially recognized by the *hijra* panchayat.

2.6.18 PROCEDURE FOR RELEASING A CELA

The process of releasing a *cela* is known as *'thukna'* wherein the *guru* formally expels the *cela* from their household. One of the primary reasons for the eviction of the *cela* could be attributed to the defiance of the household norms, for e.g. stealing, drinking and not working. Sometimes, another *hijra guru* may request the *guru* of a certain household to release their *cela* in return for some monetary incentive. But as

per field findings, the *hijra guru* usually avoids the process of *thukna* because she intends on retaining as much *celas* under her to assert her power and dominance to other *hijras.* The process of *'thukna'* is important as it prohibits other *gurus* to adopt the *celas* of another household unless the said *cela* is released by their *guru* before the *hijra* panchayat. After the *thukna* process, the released *cela* becomes completely free and is no longer obligated to work or offer their services to their *guru.*

2.6.19 HIJRA 'PANCH' OR PANCHAYAT

The *hijra* panch or panchayat is a committee comprising of the *nayaks* of the region as key members. The panchayat serves important functions of settling disputes, pertaining to matters of territory, incursion in an area, defiance of household norms, financial settlements and the penalization of *hijras* for committing crimes or other wrongdoings. For instance, a *cela* or a *daagi-murad (cela* with a bad reputation) who is disobedient or defies the norm of the *hijra* household may have to pay a *donn* or *dund* (penalization fee) amount of Rs. 25,000 (or more) to the *panchayat* committee. Sometimes, the *panchayat* may even impose the penalization known as *'chitwan'* wherein the wrongdoer is expected to pay the penalization amount in gold or other precious jewellery. The persecuted *hijra* becomes clean again *(korikatai)* after the payment of the money or jewellery. The *hijra panchayat* also enjoys tremendous powers within the *hijra* community as they mark territories, decide on the residential areas of the *hijras* and monitor their activities. The *nayaks* representing the *hijra* panchayat are the most influential in the region as they have connections with police, local goons and other local authorities.

2.7 CONCLUSION

Quite understandably, when attempting to map the dynamics of the *hijra* culture in the regions of North Bengal and Kolkata, context, migration and influx of people across national and international borders constituted as key elements that have brought about cultural upheaval and have engendered changes in the cultural landscape of the *hijra* culture and community of North Bengal and Kolkata. Unlike the relatively homogenous traditions of the *hijra* culture wherein the community's cultural elements such as the emasculation ritual, occupational practice and religion constituted the *hijra* identity and culture, the *hijra* culture and identity of North Bengal and Kolkata on the other is a variegated mix of the multiplicities of local and regional ideologies wherein each household holds a differing stance with respect to identity and cultural practices. The cultural practices of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata can be characterized as protean and mutable contingent upon the ideologies of the *hijra* households. Clearly, the *Bangladeshi* diaspora *hijra* migrantsand their influx into West Bengal has dramatically transformed the traditional and cultural patterns of the *hijra* community by engendering new cultural practices and beliefs which are either adopted or resisted by the indigenous *hijras* of West Bengal. It is primarily because of the gradual incursion of the *Bangladeshis* that have spawned multiplicities of local and regional ideologies of *hijra* identity, emasculation and religious practices. The influx of the *Bangladeshi hijras,* however, cannot be seen as a sudden event of migration and movement. Conversely, the event of migration as per field findings had transpired over a period of forty or more years. However, as per Hossain, the movement of the *hijras* across borders of West Bengal and Bangladesh is a two-way process wherein the *hijras* of West Bengal traverse across borders to Bangladesh and vice-versa

(Hossain, 2018). The conflation or admixture of contrasting cultures has subsequently led to the rise of *hijra* identity politics, the bifurcation of real vs. duplicate *hijṛā* identity and the usurpation of areas. There are also perceivable occupational shifts as the *hijṛās* of the region have diversified their occupational activities to increase their income sources to sustain and to survive. The smooth and successful execution of everyday occupational dealings are locally termed as *'hijragiri'*. In many respects, the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata and the *hijras* of Bangladesh share cultural affinities, the reasons of which can be attributed to the migration and influx of the *hijras* across both sides of the borders (Hossain, 2018). The usage of *'ulti'* language, the ideologies of authentic and inauthentic *hijras* primarily determined by one's emasculation, the dominance of Islam as a religious faith and the salience of *'hijragiri'* or the business of being a *hijra* (by earning income and learning *hijra* practices) over the cultural and ritual significance of the community are some of the common attributes shared by the *hijras* of both nationalities. Clearly then, for a cultural appraisal of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata, the cultural attributes of the *hijra* community cannot be apprehended by simply imposing the overarching generic cultural narratives of the *hijras* of India. Considering the fluidic and the shifting constituents of the cultural attributes of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata, it would necessitate to transgress and go beyond the geographical and cultural integrity of the *hijras* of India to make sense of such regional dynamics of culture. In other words, such cultural changes which is engendered by mobility and movement across spaces needs to be acknowledged as 'translocal' events, a term coined by Appadurai wherein the localized or regional communities and their meanings because of migration and movement are not restricted to their indigenous spaces and goes beyond regionalization to become

somewhat pervasive across spaces (Conradson &Mckay, 2007). Taking into account, the above findings, it becomes viable to posit that the *hijṛā culture* has transmuted into a profession driven more by profit, personal gains, earnings and less of culture, beliefs, religion, spiritualism and so forth. The commercialization of the emasculation process, the recourse to technology (SRS) and the disjunction of cultural/symbolic meanings from emasculation buttresses the argument that the *hijṛā culture* and identity is losing its cultural essence for which they were revered as the third sex/gender of India. The contemporaneous *hijṛā identity* and culture of North Bengal and Kolkata has undergone changes with respect to the meanings assigned to the cultural processes of being a *hijṛā.* The cultural confluence of *Bangladeshi hijṛā, Bengali hindu hijṛā* and *hijṛās* migrating from nearby adjoining states have produced multiple conceptions and permutations of the *hijṛā identity* and culture with the occasional exertion of power and dominance of the *Bangladeshi hijṛās* over the natives.

CHAPTER - 3

THE NALSA VERDICT AND ITS EFFICACY: A SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT OF THE HIJRAS OF NORTH BENGAL AND KOLKATA

3.1 SOCIO-ECONOMICS: AN OVERVIEW

Business dictionary refers to socioeconomics as an imbrication of social and economic components that alter and influence an individual's quality of living[66]; while the American Psychological Association defines socioeconomic status as a social position or ranking of individuals or groups which is typically determined as an amalgam of income, employment and education[67]. Baker[68] (2014) determines the (SES) socioeconomic status as a combination of one's social standing and economic status. In order to evaluate an individual/group's socioeconomic positioning, certain determinants like income, employment, education and wealth are usually considered (Pampel, 2010). The intersections of these determinants, however, can be widened to include gender, religion and a plethora of other important factors which could either contribute towards engendering discrimination and disparity for some or prove advantageous for others. For example, an article published on the socio-economic status of *Muslim* women in India highlights the widening differences with respect to educational accessibility when compared between urban *Muslim* female at 52.1 percent and urban *Hindu* female at 70.7

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[66]http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/socioeconomic.html
[67]https://www.apa.org/topics/socioeconomic-status/
[68]https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781118410868.wbehibs395

percent[69] for the year 1987-88. Noticeably, considering the above instance, the intersection of religion (muslim) and gender (woman) impacts and determines life chances and impedes one's social agency. Similarly, Purohit and Kaktikar (2019) in their work analyse the socio-economic conditions of the *hijras* of Kolhapur by coalescing the elements of *hijra* culture and identity to apprehend their earnings and expenditures (Purohit &Kaktikar, 2019, pp. 1). The study of socioeconomics, therefore, reconciles the strength of the domains of sociology and economics as opposed to its standalone versions allowing for an insightful and profound understanding of the circumstances and conditions encountered by a specific group/community which allows for a better understanding of indicators that impedes or grants privilege to certain groups over others. Socioeconomics as a study departs from the traditional neoclassical economists assumption of an individual being a rational, selfish and self-seeking being (Etzioni, 2015). Empirically, the claim of man being a perpetual rational being stands contested in many studies. Case in point, Pampel, Krueger, Denny, (2010), demonstrates in their work, *Socioeconomic Disparities in Health Behaviors,* that people with low socioeconomic backgrounds continue to make poor health choices (smoking habits, low physical activity, consumption of alcohol) despite knowing about its repercussions viz. exorbitant healthcare costs. In a similar strain, McGarrity (2014) in her work mentions the salience of the nexus between one's sexual identity (Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual), their health and socio-economic conditions (McGarrity, 2014). Furthermore, Chakrapani[70] (2010) informs about the surge in mental health ailments amongst the *hijras* considering their daily experiences of

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[69]Muslim women in India (chrome-extension://cbnaodkpfinfiipjblikofhlhlcickei/src/pdfviewer/web/viewer.html?file=https://cdn.atria.nl/epublications/1999/MuslimwomenIndia.pdf)

[70]Hijras/Transgender Women in India: HIV/Human Rights and Social Exclusion- A UNDP Report.(https://archive.nyu.edu/bitstream/2451/33612/2/hijras_transgender_in_india.pdf)

trauma, absence of financial security, lack of social support and other related social problems (Chakrapani, 2010). Thus, one's gender/sex identity, ethnicity and race are some of the (important) determiners when analysing the socio-economic conditions of individuals/groups or communities. Understandably, socioeconomics does not solely allude to the per capita incomes of individuals to assess their standards of life but incorporates an array of other factors for example, gender and class[71] to assess the influence of such indices on one's life. A fact sheet published by the American Psychological Association further suggests the interlinkages of one's socioeconomic status with one's health, income and education[72]. Some determinants however coalesce and influence one another, viz. income, education and occupation. One's income at a given point for instance, could at least be fathomed relying on the above three indicators[73]. Socioeconomic analysis brings within its ambit social concerns (like gender) which enriches the study by proffering new insights in a given societal milieu. Socioeconomics thus dilates the scope of analysis by incorporating multiple variables like gender, income, class, education, culture, ethnicity etc. and the possibilities of interplay that produce a range of factors which in turn determine the individual or community's access to socio-economic indices that define the quality of one's life. The Human Development Index, 2018, for instance, deploys per capita income to ascertain standards of life, life expectancy to measure health and one's knowledge by examining education accessibility. The HDI further incorporated gender inequality from the year 2010 in order to statistically demonstrate the implications of gender on economic accessibilities, healthcare and overall empowerment. The gender

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[71] American Psychological Association, Women Factsheet, SES Definition. (chrome-extension://cbnaodkpfinfiipjblikofhlhlcickei/src/pdfviewer/web/viewer.html?file=https://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/factsheet-women.pdf)

[72] Ibid.

[73]An introduction to socioeconomic status. (https://www.thoughtco.com/socioeconomic-status-3026599)

inequality index considers mortality and birth rate ratio, political participation, engagement in the workforce and levels of education to chart the distinctions between male and female[74]. Sen in his work, on Economic Inequality (1973) further illuminates the shortcomings of discerning inequality by only considering two parameters viz. income and assets. He calls for a more context-oriented variable/s to ascertain the causes of inequality[75]. Furthermore, by foregrounding 'context', Roy (1998) in his work mentions the social circumstances in India viz. patriarchal society which in turn produces unfavourable living conditions for women for e.g., gender inequality, increase in female mortality and the subsequent financial disempowerment[76]. In a similar vein, Eswaran (2014) in his work, '*Why Gender Matters in Economics',* reiterates on the near-ubiquitous impact of patriarchal structures upon earnings and employment of men and women. The former is significantly more visible in the public space occupying salaried jobs whilst the latter is expected to engage in the domestic spaces of home as 'unpaid labour'. Gender roles, particularly in an economy dominated by patriarchal ethos plays a pivotal part in determining one's financial and social stature. In a similar vein, a heteronormative society allows little to no scope for sexual minorities to access legal aid, social provisions, privileges and other entitlements. In a similar strain, Majeedullah (2016) for example, constructs a web of deprivation[77]

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[74]Graphical demonstration of Human Development Indices (chrome-extension://cbnaodkpfinfiipjblikofhlhlcickei/src/pdfviewer/web/viewer.html?file=http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2018_technical_notes.pdf)

[75]https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303806237_The_Economics_of_Amartya_Sen

[76] Ibid.

[77]Majeedullah employs chambers web of poverty (2005,2007) to demonstrate the same for apprehending the socio-economic position of the Khawaja Siras.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292137866_Living_on_the_Periphery_The_Khawaja_Siras_of_Pakistan

encountered by the *Khawaja Siras*[78]of Pakistan considering their gender identity embedded within a conservative heteronormative society. The author further demonstrates that a plethora of economic hardships and insecurities experienced by the *Khawaja Siras* is primarily due to their 'third gender status' denying them their rights to avail occupation, social support, healthcare, security and basic social amenities. Hence, their gender identity directly determines their low social stature and socio-economic status. In a similar study, Sharif and Mir[79] (2018) highlights the series of pernicious socio-economic circumstances confronted by the transgenders of *Rawalpindi*, Pakistan. In one of their findings, they quantitatively demonstrate the appalling numbers of transgenders having lack of access to higher education. As per the study, the rate of illiteracy stood at 50.8% and a paltry 2.5% for transgenders who had obtained graduate degrees. In another assessment, the study showed the skewed social support received by the transgenders from their families. Standing at 90.8%, the families of transgender individuals largely disfavoured their identity while a minuscule 9.2% constituted families who represented acceptance and support for them. In a similar vein, Kang (2016) in his work on *Ladyboys*[80] shows how gender directly circumscribes and determines the nature of occupation/s (for example beauty and hospitality industry and soliciting sex) that one engages in thereby shaping their socio-economic statuses. Similarly, Swararao (2016) elucidates on the socio-economic status of the *hijras* of India by referring to their limited avenues of earning income (e.g. singing and dancing, flesh trade, begging, extortion etc.) which is primarily caused due to their non-normative

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[78] (Often considered respectful) to address individuals identifying as Transgenders and Transsexuals in Pakistan.

[79]http://www.ijsar.in/Admin/pdf/Socio-economic-problems-faced-by-the-transgender-in-district-Rawalpindi-Pakistan-2.pdf

[80] Ladyboys are used interchangeably with Kathoeys in Thailand to denote transgender women. https://www.academia.edu/25413623/Ladyboys

gender and sexual expression (Swararao, 2016, pp. 518). Goel on her work of the *hijras* of Delhi further reveals that the occupational avenues of the community tapers towards the practice of traditional *toli-badhai*(singing/dancing in auspicious occasions) and socially disapproved engagements viz. prostitution and beggary (Goel, 2016). In a similar strain, Chakrapani in his work further alludes that the *hijras,* because of their socially stigmatized identities, experience social and familial persecution along with deprivation of social support and monetary aid (Chakrapani, 2010, pp. 9). The UNDP report further informs about the multiple barriers confronted by the *hijras* severely delimiting their chances of eking out a livelihood (Ibid). Similarly, Saxena in his work refers to multiple 'verbatim' narratives of the *hijras* of India to demonstrate the enormous struggles encountered by the eunuchs to sustain themselves (Saxena, 2011). At a nascent stage, the *hijras* are usually disowned by their family fearing social stigma and ridicule (Ibid). The want of resources therefore forces them to join the *hijra* community or the flesh trade which subsequently reduces their chances of accessing education and employment (Ibid). Social ostracization, unacceptance, educational and employment deprivation cumulatively affects their life chances and social standing (Ibid). Their gender/sex ambiguity when assesed within the confines of heteronormativity renders them to lead a life of social and economic deprivation. The matrices of heteronormativity, as per Chakrapani, creates inimical spaces wherein the *hijras* are treated unfairly by multiple sectors of the society for not adhering to the norms of ideal masculinity (Chakrapani, 2010, pp. 8). Chakrapani mentions lack of educational/occupational opportunities, unacceptance of family and dispossession of property as some repercussions of deviating from the convention of heteronormativity (Ibid). Moreover, Khatri in her work, *'Hijras: The*

21st Century Untouchables' (2017), also contends that the *hijras* of India experience the double effects of class deprivation and gender marginalisation owing to the influence of the hegemonic patriarchal structure engendering gender disparity (Khatri, 2017, pp. 398). A socio-economic appraisal of the *hijra* community therefore allows for a better apprehension of their social standing as it entails the analysis of the intersections of gender with one's social stature when embedded in the hierarchical ordering of heteronormativity (as the norm which inevitably translates as being superior) and alternative/queer gender identities (as inferior/deviant) (Singh, et. al 2017, pp. 1).

3.2 A SURVEY OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE HIJRAS OF INDIA THROUGH THE AGES

Neglected and stigmatised, the *hijras* of India have continually experienced low social stature, disapproval and contempt for their non-normative and effeminate ways. The term *hijra* is a fairly broad rubric encompassing multiple connotations of non-normative embodiments/states viz. impotency, effeminacy, transvestite/drags, transsexuals, eunuchs, non-emasculated men and transgenders among others primarily because the *hijra* identity is a consolidation of many attributes or properties. Their low social standing is documented in factual, canonical and epic/mythical repertoires with the exception of some *hindu*regents and *Mughal* rulers employing eunuchs wherein they enjoyed royal patronage and were assigned positions of power (Sharma, 2009, pp. 30). In the vedic periods, the eunuchs were deemed as inferior, lowly and as harbingers of misfortune (Sharma, 2009, pp. 29). References are also made about their inauspicious and vile presence (Ibid). The eunuchs were socially relegated to the lowest position in the hierarchical rung

consisting of the non-aryans (*Mlechchhas*) and oil-men with the eunuchs being subordinate to all (Ibid). However, contradicting this narrative, Wilhelm in his work, *'Tritiya-Prakriti: People of the Third Sex'* (2003), mentions the accomodative spirit of the vedic periods which allowed the 'third gender' to have access to all social and occupational entitlements (Wilhelm, 2003, pp. 6). They were also permitted to marry and maintain their own social enclaves (Vasumathi &Geethanjali, 2018, pp. 63). The *kliba*or the impotent man could pass off as a normal man by wearing regular male garments or crossdress and live as a transvestite. They were particularly famed for their flair in singing, dancing, acting and as hairdressers (Wilhelm, 2003, pp. 6). The transvestites were also engaged for work in the female quarters in the palace and were called upon in auspicious occasions as their presence was considered propitious (Ibid). The meanings of impotency and the state of being a eunuch were also positively interpreted by the philosophical/spiritual corpuses and mythical sources wherein the state of sex/gender ambiguity were elevated to the state of godliness (Vanita& Kidwai, Pattanaik, Danielou). The *hijras* of India therefore suffered a variegated mix of destiny apropos their social standing, status and social perception. Owing to their *'tritiya prakriti'* or third nature, their state of impotency and ambiguous gender identity, the *hijras* were often assigned less reputable positions of a masseuse, barbers, harlots, singers or dancers, as amusers in the harems or the courts, as sentinels in the seraglios and as cooks among others (Jaffrey, Doniger, Meyer, Tiwari). Hall further alludes to the roles fulfilled by the eunuchs as supervisors of the harem in the 4th century B.C.E.; and the role of shampooers in the 2nd and 5th century in the *hindu*courts (Hall, 1997, pp. 432). In *Kautilya's Arthashastra,* the eunuchs were engaged in the women's quarters, as spies and as personal helpers for

the king (Kautilya, transl. Rangarajan 2010). The *Arthashastra*also debars the

eunuchs from inheriting their property. The *Arthashastra*subsumes the eunuchs

along with the outcasts, idiots, the blind, the insane and the lepers under the label of

the 'disinherited' (Kautilya, 2010, Part "VIII", para 14). In a similar strain, the

erotic ancient manual, *Kamasutra* mentions the practice of oral sex/fellatio

typically performed by the eunuchs and people of the third nature for their male

clients (Tiwari, 2010, pp 7-8). Furthermore, Wilhelm alludes to the multifarious

occupations the *tritiya prakriti* or the people of the third nature typically engage in

(Wilhelm, 2003, pp. 250). He further mentions the divisions of the third nature into

two types viz. masculine and feminine along with their suitable occupational

engagements (Wilhelm, 203, pp. 91, 305). The former usually engaged as helpers

of the mercantile class, as barbers and masseurs or as temple priests whilst the latter

worked as a prostitute (Ibid). Even in the *Mauryan* period, the eunuchs were

employed as servants to serve the king and assist them in political matters (Ghosh,

2018, pp. 107). Multiple references are made in the mythical and religious sources

eulogizing their valour, spiritual powers and esoteric divinity of the third

gender/eunuchs, but inconsistencies abound when chronicling the reality of their

actual social stature throughout periods of history (Nanda, 1990, pp. 29-30). But it

was particularly during the medieval period that they rose in social stature and

financial prominence. The present day *hijras* often call upon the medieval *Mughal*

past to recall their reputable position in the imperial harems, as personal aides,

confidantes and attendants of the *Mughal* and the *Hindu* kings. Marco Polo in his

travel memoirs for example, indicates the ubiquitous presence of the eunuchs in the

palace of the Great Khan in the region of Bengal (Jaffrey, 1996, pp. 25). In periods

between the 13th and the 14th century, the eunuchs were appointed as

administrators working for the *Khiljis*of Delhi (Hall, 1997, pp. 432). Similarly, an excerpt from the *'Ain-i-akbari'* 1590 indicates that some eunuchs were assigned with important roles (Jaffrey, 1996, pp. 37). The chief eunuch, *I'timad Khan* or the trusted one was appointed as the head of the revenue department after Akbar realized the incompetence and corruption of his other officials (Ibid). Francois Bernier, a traveller from France wrote in one of his travelogues regarding the immense trust placed upon the eunuchs by their *Mughal* rulers (Jaffrey, 1996, pp. 55). In the palaces of the *Mughal* rulers, the eunuchs were also permitted to move about between the two places of *mardana* (men's quarters) and *zenana* (women's quarters) (Ibid). The exalted social and economic stature of the eunuchs is further corroborated by another Dutch merchant, Francisco Pelsaert (Roychowdhury[81], 2018). Pelsaert informs in his writings, the prerogatives usually enjoyed by the eunuchs. For instance, the eunuchs had access to all the luxuries afforded by their masters. Like their owners, they rode on well bred horses, had servants and female slaves to cater to their needs and wore clothes similar to that of their rulers (Ibid). Similarly, NiccoloManucci, a man of Venetian origin recounts in his travelogue, his experience with the governor of *Agrah, I'tibar Khan,* who was a eunuch (Jaffrey, 1996, pp. 65). Manucci writes of the high social stature and powers exercised by the eunuch who looked into the matters of the state as a proxy to the emperor (Ibid). However, Manucci also mentions the differential rungs of power and the hierarchical divisions the eunuchs were segregated into. The principal eunuch commanded over other young and old subordinate eunuchs and was entrusted with the duty of overseeing expenditures (Jaffrey, 1996, pp. 83). The

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[81]Roychowdhury briefly mentions the elevated social status and power enjoyed by the eunuchs during the medieval period.
https://indianexpress.com/article/research/eunuch-security-guards-bihar-mughal-empire-history-5266102/

chief of eunuchs or the *nazir* was highly regarded by the emperor and was endowed with all the material comforts not necessarily accessible to other eunuchs (Ibid). Similarly, written in his memoir, *Muraqqa-i-delhi* (1739), *Durgah-Quli-Khan,* a courtier further observed the importance accorded to *'Taci',* the emperor's favorite eunuch who had unrestricted access to the private rooms of the palace and claimed ownership to a variety of weapons and garments (Jaffrey, 1996, pp. 121). *'Taci'* was also the head of all the eunuchs which was also called the *'mukhannaths'* (Ibid). Ghosh further adds that the eunuchs were also regarded as divine beings as they were simultaneously entrusted as guardians of religious places such as *Mecca* and *Medina* (Ghosh, 2018, pp. 108). Apart from this, some court eunuchs exerted great influence as they often guided important decisions taken by the state rulers (Ibid). The eunuchs therefore were generally perceived as 'reliable' and 'virtuous' owing to their castrated state which ensured the safety of the women in the harem (Ibid). Reddy further indicates the commodification of the eunuchs as they were deemed as 'valuable goods' capable of loyalty and physical strength owing to their male physiology and absence of vested interests or any personal/ulterior motives due to their inability to procreate (Reddy, 2006, pp. 22-23). Because of their loyalty, responsibility and trustworthiness, the eunuchs were often compensated generously by their masters (Micheraj, 2015, pp. 18). Even prior to the colonial conquest of the East India Company and British imperialism, the *hijras* continued to draw support, protection and patronage from their native regents (Hinchy, 2019, Part "1", para 4). The colonial administrators took serious cognizance of the community only post their awareness of the *'diwani rights*[82]*'* the *hijras* or the eunuchs were entitled to(Ibid). It was primarily due to this privilege of theirsthat

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[82]The *hijras* were granted the right to collect revenues from lands and begging for alms from certain marked regions by their indigenous rulers (Hinchy, 2019, Preston, 1987).

roused the colonial administration to document the lives and form assessments about the *hijras* of precolonial India (Hinchy, 2019, Preston, 1987). Before the transfer of powers and responsibilities of polity to the British administration, the Maratha rulers had codified theright of *hijras* to access the perquisite of *'sanads[83]'*. Such sanctions perhaps emboldened the successivegenerations of *hijras* to claim their *'vatan'* or their acquired right to collect revenue/money from the villagers (Arondekar, 2009, Chaper, "Two", para, 7). However, not all eunuchs were conferred with the title of a *'vatandar hijra'* (Preston, 1987, pp. 377). As Preston suggests, a single *'vatandar hijra'* resided in each sub-district to lay claim to their hereditary perquisite or *'hak'* (Ibid). Preston further quotes colonial resources that disapprovingly mentions the various tactics often employed by the *hijras* to beg and extort money from the villagers (Preston, 1987, pp. 378). Evidently, the colonial administrators deemed the *hijra* community as a social abomination and were not eager to continue the tradition of the *'vatandar hijras'* (Preston, 1987, pp. 386). It would be important to note that the available literature of this period sourced from the observations of British merchants and travellers and from official survey dossiers reveal the biased, condescending and derogatory nature of the narratives which weakens its credibility as an objective secondary source. But such prejudices notwithstanding, these sources proffer a general understanding of the social status of the *hijras* during the pre-colonial times. For instance, Balthazar Solvyns, an artist of the contemporary colonial period depicted the *'hidgra'* or the *hijra* in a poor light (Hinchy, 2019, Part "1", para, 4). In his illustrations and writings, Solvyns represents the *hijras* as an immoral and repulsive lot comprising of mendicants, sex-workers and transvestites (Ibid). In an earlier writing by James

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[83]*Sanad* here refers to property holdings, title deeds and lands of the *hijras* (Preston, 1987, Arondekar, 2009).

Forbes, an anglophone merchant articulates the status of the hermaphrodites as 'cooks' for the Maratha troops and mentions his observations about the androgynous garments[84] worn by them (Preston, 1987, pp. 373). Similarly, a colonial officer commissioned in the Deccan further validates Forbes assertion by characterizing the *hijras* as hermaphrodites wearing a blend of clothes for the two genders (Ibid). The officer also mentions them as 'beggars' asking for alms in upper caste households and viewed them as reprehensible, repulsive and filthy beings (Ibid). The eunuchs further fell into disfavour with colonial governance because their practice of castration was perceived with disgust and strong condemnation (Jaffrey, 1996, pp. 213-214). Evidently, it was precisely from this point in history that the socio-economic stature of the *hijras* witnessed a gradual descent from a life of privilege, esteem and opulence to wretched penury and social persecution. The colonial conquest sought to implement a slew of legal and social 'reforms' in alignment with their principles of victorian propriety and morality. Edicts were issued by the Britishers (The British India Company) against *hijras* to censureand prohibit them from engaging in alms extortion and claiming their revenue prerogative (Jaffrey, 1996, pp. 216-217). The edict was particularly directed against a *vatandar hijra,* a resident of the *Nizam* of Hyderabad. The *hijra* was charged for outraging public modesty by exposing its genitals and forcibly asking for alms (Ibid). Further changes apropos state sanctioned privileges were made by the sub-collector of Pune in the year 1842 (Preston, 1987, pp. 383). The *hijras* under the rule of King Sahu had acquired 41 acres of land or *inām*which were rent free (Ibid). Upon inquiry it was further learned that a document (1730-31) sanctioned by King Sahu officially permitted the *hijras* to hand down such land

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[84]Forbes in his observations maintains that the hermaphrodites were seen wearing a medley of clothes typical to both the genders. For instance, the garments of a woman and a turban of a man (Preston, 1987, pp. 373).

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*inams*to their disciples (Jaffrey, 1996, pp. 219). The sub-collector of the then colonial regime therefore sought to oppose and bring about legal reform for prohibiting the *hijras* to claim their inherited right to *inam* (Preston, 1987, pp. 383). The Bombay presidency acknowledged the legitimacy of the *inam*but changed the duration of the *inam*from generational to the current holder of the entitlement (Jaffrey, 1996, pp. 219). The Bombay Presidency further instituted a new mandate viz. the 1852 Act XI called the 'Bombay Inam Commission' which sought to eradicate the tradition of collecting revenue, alms, and claiming of *inams*permanently (Ibid). The regime therefore altered the traditional law of the erstwhile rulers to deter the succession of future *hijra* populace via social and monetary deprivation (Jaffrey, 1996, pp. 221). However, Preston contends that these legislations, particularly the Bombay Iman Commission, weren't wholly successful in expunging the *hijra* community. The colonial initiative to cleanse India of its supposed 'cultural depravity' via recourse to mandates and decrees to purge the *hijra* community never fully materialized as the *hijras* migrated outward to cities and continued to thrive as mendicants and prostitutes (Preston, 1987, pp. 387). But the colonial pursuance to prosecute and socially persecute the *hijras* continued in the form of IPC sec 377. The Indian Penal Code was crafted by Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay[85] and was enacted in the year 1860 (Arondekar, 2009). The statute of section 377[86] reads- *"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 may*

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[85]Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay was assigned the role of the chair of the Indian Law Commision in 1883. The Commision was instituted by the Parliament during the regime of the East India Company (Sec. 377 Judgement, Part- "Judgement", pp. 6)
(https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article24880700.ece/binary/Sec377judgment.pdf

[86]As per the 2018 judgement of Sec. 377, the actual enacted law of Sec. 377 is considerably different from the draft submitted by Thomas Babington Macaulay (377 Judgement, Part-"Judgement", pp. 10).

extend to 10 years and shall be liable to fine" (Rao, 2015, pp. 149). Apart from policing unnatural sexual acts, the mandate also created inimical implications for the eunuchs of the colonial period. Hinchy for example, mentions the case of *Khairati,* who was deemed as a 'sodomite' by the colonial administration despite lack of evidence (Hinchy, 2019). *Khairati*was charged for crossdressing and singing in the public and upon inspection had a contorted anus in the form of a 'trumpet' (Rao, 2015, pp. 150). The labelling of the crossdresser as a regular sodomist was based on the colonial assumption of intrinsic 'deviancy' which the socially marginalized lot had supposedly acquired at birth (Hinchy, 2019). A consecutive colonial decree, namely the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871[87] further intensified monitoring, state surveillance and social persecution for the *hijras.* The act primarily sought to register the *hijras* and other deviant and supposedly unlawful tribes (Jaffrey, 1996, pp. 231). The colonial regime officially stigmatised the *hijras* of India by labelling them as 'criminal tribes' or tribes who harboured inherent delinquent propensities (Kapadia, 1952, pp. 99). The British government by interpreting the caste system of India as a tradition which predetermines one's occupation inherited from one's forefathers (for e.g., a carpenter's son will be a carpenter) imposed a similar framework when criminalizing the social outcastes, the nomads and the *hijras* (Ibid). The key purpose of the Criminal Tribes Act was to register, monitor and gradually expunge the very existence of such 'criminally oriented tribes' (Ibid). Nigam in his work further contends that the colonial administration by taking recourse to its juridical, medical, revenue corpuses and other written observations constructed a framework of knowledge to create schisms

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[87]The Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 was formulated and instituted by the British governance conferring powers to their police to detain, arrest and monitor tribes registered under the act. A total 150 tribes were subsumed and declared as 'hereditary criminals' (D'Souza, 1999, pp. 3576).

between the normative and the non-normative 'deviant' ilk (Nigam, 1990, pp. 131). The Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, therefore, was deployed as a legal apparatus to control/monitor its indigenous subjects and to eradicate any culture or community they deemed as vile, polluting and reprehensible (Ibid). Hinchy in her work, *'The long history of criminalising Hijras'* (2019) further adds that the CTA Act of 1871 was bifurcated into two parts wherein Part I enunciated decrees against marginalized 'criminal tribes' (Hinchy, 2019). Hinchy further reveals that few communities were declared 'criminals' because of their itinerant lifestyles and for some others due to their unproductive and inefficient use of lands/forests (Ibid). The implementation of new policies was primarily to thwart and supplant existing indigenous ordinances (Ibid). Part II on the other pronounced edicts against the eunuchs for acts of sodomy, castration and kidnapping (Ibid). The CTA Act consisted of a series of legal clauses with its jurisdiction extended to the local governments in toto (Jaffrey, 1996, pp. 231). The Act mandated the local governments to recruit officers and maintain registers to ensure adherence of the same (Ibid). The Criminal Tribes Act was issued and sanctioned by the Governor General of India in 1871 with clauses '24 to 31' specifically mentioning the ordinances directed against the eunuchs or the *hijras* (Jaffrey, 1996, pp. 231-233). Clause 24 (a) of the Act operated in conjunction with Sec. 377 of the IPC for criminalizing the eunuchs on child kidnapping charges, conducting coercive castration and engaging in unnatural sexual relations (Ibid). Clause 26 particularly mandates the repression of the eunuchs and curtails their freedom and the mobility by prohibiting them from cross-dressing in public spheres or any public exhibition of singing/dancing or acting (Ibid). The clause further states that the infringement of the same would result in the custodial apprehension of the eunuchs without any

issuance of a warrant (Ibid). Moreover, the eunuchs were legally deprived from making testaments, were debarred to adopt sons or present gifts (Ibid). The Act further decreed the registered eunuchs to disclose their movable and immovable properties (Ibid). The inability or the unwillingness to furnish the same was deemed as an offence under IPC 176 and 177 (Ibid). The colonial governance via its laws and policies sought to coerce its ideology of 'hereditary crime' to segregate, stigmatize and label the eunuchs (Arondekar, 2009). The British administration with their prejudices and assumptions of the Indian caste system regarded the 'criminal tribes' and their propensities to commit crimes as a congenitally acquired condition (Kapadia, 1952, Hinchy, 2019). The onslaught of the East India Company and the British imperialism radically altered the socio-economic stature of the *hijras* by instituting decrees that penalized, policed and repressed their gender identity, gender expression, bodies, sexualities, their culture, property inheritance and deprivation of means of income/livelihood. Even post-independence, the *hijras* continued to experience the negative repercussions of the colonial mandates of that of societal stigma, persecution, lack of social support and unacceptance. As Opler citing Carstairs suggests, the *hijras* lead solitary lives as social outcasts (Opler, 1960, pp. 505). Furthermore, as Carstairs observes, the *hijras* eked out their living by singing and dancing at certain occasions and by begging for alms (Ibid). In 1949, a few years after independence, Opler documented the *hijras* of Allahabad who apparently sustained themselves by singing and dancing on certain religious[88] and birth occasions (Opler, 1960, pp. 506). Quite understandably, the socio-economic conditions and the lifestyle of the

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[88]Opler in his work writes an account of the *hijras* of Allahabad who partook in the festivities of the Magh Mela, sang and danced for the veneration of river Ganges and Jumana and for the birth of a boy child (Opler, 1960, pp. 506).

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hijras of India did not transform instantaneously following the years after independence. However, it was in the year 1911 that a portion (Part II) of the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 which policed and monitored the *hijras* was partially repealed by the colonial regime (Hinchy, 2019). The act was completely abrogated by the Government of India on August 31st, 1952 (Japhet et. al 2015). But the partial annulment by the colonial administration notwithstanding, Hinchy contends that even in contemporary postcolonial spaces, the annulled mandate continues to influence mainstream societal perception concerning the *hijras* and their community (Hinchy, 2019). Furthermore, some Indian states have adopted parts of the colonial mandate and have reinstated it in its state legislation (Ibid). The amendment of the Karnataka Police Act in 2011 demonstrates the direct implication of the colonial ideology of criminalizing 'hereditary tribes' in contemporaneous periods (Hinchy, 2019). Similar to the colonial decree, the state mandate sanctioned the registration, monitoring, and surveillance of the *hijras* to keep note of their purported crimes viz. kidnapping of children and engaging in unnatural offences (Ibid). The re-introduction of colonial mandates is indicative of the 19th century cultural ethos derivative of and in adherence with the victorian ideals of the colonial regime (Hinchy, 2019, Ghosh, 2018). Hinchy further adds that the emerging 19th century 'middle class' Indians, in their attempt to disassociate themselves from the antecedent Indian nobility class readily espoused the colonial tenets of morality along with their notions of honour and respectability and reinterpretations of their traditional values (Hinchy, 2019). Hinchy therefore contends that the morals, ethos and values pertaining to sex, gender and sexuality of the post-independent India was considerably shaped by the 19th century 'middle class' strata of Indians which burgeoned during the colonial regime. Evidently, the

socio-economic stature of the *hijras* suffered from the reverberations of the colonial past. In 1984, an article published in the *'India Magazine'* mentions the *hijras* as a wandering community of worshippers and carriers of the *'Bahuchara Mata',* the Goddess of *shakti,* granter of potency and the divine patron of the *hijras* (Mitra, 1984). Furthermore, Nanda in her seminal work demonstrates that peculiar social position of the *hijras* of India which causally circumscribes their scope of eking a living (Nanda, 1990, pp. 50-52). Nanda asserts their ritualized third gender position within the Indian society which elicits contradictory responses of mockery, fear, reverence, indifference or sheer ridicule (Ibid). Such a socially deplorable state often pushes them to operate in the deviant/disapproved occupational fringes of the society (Ibid). Nanda's ethnographical account recounts multiple narratives of *hijras* who had to take recourse to prostitution to sustain themselves (Nanda, 1990, pp. 51-53). A 2004 medical study on the *hijras* of Punjab conducted by Gorea et. al revealed the practice of voluntary and coerced castration which was primarily done to increase the size of the members of a particular *hijra* household (Gorea et. al, 2004). Such coerced castration or penectomy practices is indicative of the low socio-economic status of the *hijras* forcing them to purportedly abduct children to ensure a steady source of income and future security of the *gurus* (Ibid). The study also refers to the *hijras* as professional 'catamites' which directly implies their limited means of earning a living (Ibid). Likewise, Sirohiwal et. al in their study of castrated *hijras* mentions 'dancing' as one of the means of earning income (Sirohiwal et. al, 2012). Moreover, Dhall & Boyce in their report of non-normative subjects also builds a connexion between low socio-economic conditions and the occupational scope of the *hijras* (Dhall & Boyce, 2015, pp. 15). They contend that the *hijras* often have to choose from a limited set of occupation or means of income

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primarily due to their educational/social deprivation along with prohibition to acquire property and eviction from their natal homes (Ibid). A medical journal on the eunuchs of Madhya Pradesh shows the relative socio-economic deprivation of the *hijras* when contrasted with males and females (Hongal et. al, 2014). For instance, in their quantitative assessment of educational qualifications and professional capabilities, a majority of illiterates (72%) and unskilled labourers (99%) constituted the *hijras* or the eunuchs (Ibid). This demonstrates their continued reliance on traditional means of occupation and recourse to prostitution rendering them to lead socially declassed positions. Such marginality and deprivation can be viewed as a culmination of the colonial project to subdue and monitor the supposed 'wild' indigenous subjects. Azhar in her insightful work contends that the dual forces of the colonial repressive project in conjunction with the nation building process post-independence contributed towards building a mass consciousness of sexual propriety, moral policing and the appropriation/derivation of the Victorian ideals (Azhar, 2018, pp. 19-20). Although not as conspicuous as Sec. 377, the ITPA[89] Act of 1956 (amended in the year 1986) also operated from a similar moral ground of the 377 mandate (Ibid). Because of their occupational engagements in flesh trade, the *hijras* were often persecuted and charged by the law enforcers under the ITPA Act (Ibid). Incidents of sexual violence and physical abuse inflicted by the police against the *hijras* are fairly commonplace (Jayant, 2018, pp. 263). Apparently, the *hijras* are also arbitrarily confined by the police when they decline to pay the *'hafta'* (extortion money) (Ibid). A PUCL-K report on

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[89]The Immoral Traffic Prevention Act (earlier known as The Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls Act (SITA)), penalizes acts of soliciting and procurement of sex workers and the maintenance of brothels (Narrain, S. (2003); Kotiswaran, 2018). Retrieved July 13, 2018, from https://frontline.thehindu.com/social-issues/article30219509.ece)
(https://www.epw.in/engage/article/how-did-we-get-here-or-short-history)

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the *hijras* and *kothis*further alludes to the convergence of the dual mandates of Sec. 377, the ITPA Act alongwith the law enforcers, the judiciary and the larger mainstream society which primarily functioned in tandem to expunge the practice of prostitution without considering the implications of such measures on the lives of the *hijras* and other sex workers (PUCL-K, 2003). In a similar vein, Azhar in her article builds on an intersectional causation of social stigma and deprivation. Azhar contends that the *hijras* are doubly marginalized because of their deviant gender identities, their association with sex work and the mainstream perception of the *hijras* as carriers of venereal diseases viz. HIV/AIDS (Azhar, 2018). In a similar study, Giri in his introductory chapter mentions the indignities continually experienced by the *hijras* in their personal and public spaces (Giri, 2019, pp. 267). Giri further asserts that even in post-independent or modern India, the negative societal treatment and perception continued unabated (Ibid). This assertion is further confirmed by Mushtaq & Ahmad in their work wherein they mention that the *hijras* often experience lack of familial support which subsequently coerces them to abandon their homes to seek inclusion elsewhere (Mushtaq & Ahmad, 2019, pp. 1577). Familial and social exclusion compels some *hijras* to engage in other non-traditional means of earning a living (Purohit, 2019). For example, Purohit in her socio-economic study of the *hijras* of Kolhapur informs that a staggering 35.90% of her total respondents reportedly solicited sex to eke out a living (Purohit, 2019, pp. 139). Additionally, a small percentile of 5.13% also engaged in the sale of betel quid and tobacco owing to their educational and social hindrances to secure regular jobs (Ibid). Likewise, Arunagiri et. al in their socio-economic study of the *hijras* of Chennai district reveals a majority of them as beggars (62%), dancers in bars (18%) and as sex workers (8%) (Arunagiri et. al,

2018, pp. 99). Employing the framework of social exclusion, Chakrapani mentions the difficulties encountered by the *hijras* to secure jobs in formal and informal sectors compelling them to work in the flesh trade (Chakrapani, 2018). In a similar strain, Ray in her dissertation also mentions the everyday episodes of harassment, violence and unfriendly treatment encountered by the *hijras* when they go about begging or while engaging in sex work (Ray, 2016). Chakrapani et. al corroborating further, suggests that their socially deviant occupations elicit a systemic response of social stigma, hostility and unacceptance (Chakrapani et. al, 2004). Post independence, the *hijras* of India clearly have sustained social persecution and prosecution inflicted from multiple levels and were stripped of their basic fundamental rights and other requisite yet commonplace entitlements. In a similar study, Dey documents multiple ethnographical accounts wherein she demonstrates the decisive influence of familial unacceptance as a direct determiner of poor socio-economic conditions (Dey, 2013). Therefore, a robust contention of suppressive web of centre/state apparatuses working concomitantly with pernicious colonial/contemporary injunctions and unsympathetic familial/personal spheres can be advanced as causational factors that severely marginalize and disempower the *hijras* making them unequal citizens (Chacko &Narrain, 2013-14). Their general socio-economic conditions therefore suffered a relatively similar fate throughout the hitherto 21st century with the exception of the inclusion of the 'E' category in identity documents such as passports and voter cards in the year 2005 & 2009 and the landmark Supreme Court Verdict of 2014 entitling them to choose their gender identity and granting access to social welfare schemes and reservations to ensure equality on all grounds (Azhar, 2018, pp. 20).

3.3 IN CONTEXT: THE SOCIOECONOMICS OF THE HIJRAS OF WEST BENGAL

In comparison to the scholarship of the *hijras* across India, the *hijras* of West Bengal and more particularly North Bengal and Kolkata have received little scholarly attention with respect to the community's socio-economic status. A review of the prior body of works demonstrates that the socio-economic conditions of the *hijras* of West Bengal can be likened to the socioeconomics of the *hijras* across India (Mal &Mundu, 2018; Dey et. al, 2016). Dey & Das reveals that the *hijras* of West Bengal mostly engage in singing/dancing, sex work and begging on trains, shops and streets (Dey & Das, 2015). With low education (a majority of the *hijras,* 51.08% dropped out from middle schools), financial distress, poverty and social stigma, the *hijras* of West Bengal engage in socially undesirable occupational engagements viz. beggary, singing/dancing and prostitution earning upto 7,000 to 10,000 rupees every month (Dey & Das, 2015, pp. 580-582). Correspondingly, Dutta in his work mentions the three occupational types the *hijras* of West Bengal usually engage in (Dutta, 2012). The three primary occupations were divided into the honourable *toli/badhai* or singing/dancing/blessing at occasions (*badhaiwali), challa* or asking for alms at trains or at streets *(challawali)* and *khajra* or sex work *(khajrawali)* (Dutta, 2012, pp. 835-836). Similarly, Banhishikha in her work on the *hijras* of Burdwan, West Bengal cites everyday stories of the *hijras* wherein it is known that the *hijras* enter the community and engage in occupations typical to their ilk because of the early abandonment from their natal homes (Banhishikha, 2016). Episodes of socio-economic deprivation of the *hijras* of West Bengal (Kolkata) is further documented by Mondal et. al by referring to the multiple narratives of the *hijras* and their

experiences with financial insecurities, unemployment and prejudice in the workforce (Mondal et. al, 2020). One of the respondents from their study recalls that they were unable to join the regular workforce owing to the preconceptions and biased notions harboured by the employers while others mentioned the absence of affirmative laws or government aids/policies to better their living conditions (Ibid). In a 2011 coalition report published by SAATHII organization on people living with HIV (PLHIV) and sexual minorities group (SMG) of West Bengal and Orissa, a number of human rights infringements against these groups were enumerated viz. a) harassment inflicted by law enforcers, locality people, family, healthcare personnels, sexual abuse and workplace maltreatment (SAATHII, 2011). Moreover, Mal in his study of the *hijras* of Kharagpur, West Bengal too reveals a similar finding apropos the socioeconomic conditions of the marginalized community (Mal, 2015). Mal mentions a plethora of social, economic, political, health and legal problems continually encountered and experienced by the *hijras* (Ibid). Mal informs that the *hijras* are deemed as socially revolting and sexually polluting beings especially when working in regular/office workspaces (Ibid). Mal further adds that owing to the dismal support extended by government hospitals of the state, the *hijras* often counsel private hospitals for treatments (Ibid). As demonstrated by Mal, the *hijras* of West Bengal (Paschim Medinipur District) are plagued by health problems such as obesity (64.91%), alcohol and drug abuse, increased mental stress plausibly caused by the usage of steroids, cardiovascular diseases, venereal diseases and accumulation of adiposity or fats (Mal, 2018). In a 2014 report published under the aegis of Ministry and Health and Family Welfare and NACO, West Bengal accounted for 13,310 deaths caused by AIDS and other related venereal diseases (NACO, 2014). The total number of fatalities comprised

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of high-risk groups, male, female, transgenders, men who have sex with men (MSM) among others (Ibid). Apart from ailments such as HIV/AIDS, STI's, diabetes, hypertension, arthritis and heart problems, a disconcerting percentile (68.6%) of Bengali *hijras* reportedly suffer from depression (Mal, 2019, pp. 101). Additionally, Dukpa in her work on the mental/sexual health of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata also mentions episodes of suicidal tendencies and mental distress triggered by a plethora of factors viz. loss/betrayal of a loved one, failed relationships, familial/social unacceptance, physical abuse and sexual violence (Dukpa, 2019). Subramanian et. al. in their study on social support of the *hijras* also mentions the absence of familial support as the root cause of socio-economic deprivation as the *hijras* hardly receive financial and social/emotional support from their homes (Subramanian et. al, 2016). As outcastes, the *hijras* are socially debarred from asserting their basic fundamental and legal rights ordained by the constitution (Ibid). A majority of the *hijras* are unable to extract themselves out of penury and social persecution primarily because of the inimical repercussions of intersectional factors of heteronormativity, patriarchy and gender inequities. Quite understandably, such a systemic and social besiegement disempowers the *hijras of West* Bengal to improve their socio-economic status.

3.4 THE NALSA VS. THE UNION OF INDIA: A SUMMARY OF THE 2014 SC VERDICT

On April 2014, Justice KS Radhakrishnan Panicker and Justice AK Sikri declared an unprecedented verdict upholding the rights of transgenders (National Legal services authority Vs. Union of India and Others), colloquially known as the Third Gender ruling, which primarily sought to safeguard the fundamental rights, access

to necessary provisions and measures in order to improve the lives of the transgender individuals in India (Mason et. al, 2018; Semmalar, 2014). The landmark verdict of 2014, citing unconstitutionality and the breach of articles 14 (Equality before Law), 15 (prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth), 16 (equal opportunities for all), 19 (freedom of speech) and 21 (right to life and liberty), commissioned the central and state governments to implement court directives of reservation, provision of welfare schemes and other measures to fully include them within the social system (Sukey, 2018). Goel in her work further informs that the ruling recognized the *hijras* as the 'third gender' further providing reservations under the OBC[90] category (Goel, 2016). The original judgement informs about the collective efforts by the forerunner, NALSA[91] (National Legal Services Authority) who filed a writ petition- 400 of 2012 which was subsequently supported by the lawyers collective, activist Laxmi Narayan Tripathi and members of *Poojya Mata Nasib Kaur Ji*[92] to bring to light the pernicious consequences of not legitimizing the transgender identity (Nalsa vs. Union of India and others, 2014, pp. 2-3). Prior to the landmark judgement, an expert committee instituted under the aegis of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MOSJE) put forth recommendations for the third gender verdict[93]. The committee advises that transgender should be identified as the 'third gender' directing the apex court to confer individual rights to self-identify their gender identity (Dhar, 2014). Foregrounding on human rights, the committee recommends that action should be initiated against healthcare personnel or family members for

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[90]The parameters of fulfilling the criterion of the OBC category is social, economic and educational deprivation along with inadequate representation in government jobs and other related services (Verma, 2019).
[91]NALSA was instituted by the Legal Services Authorities Act of 1987 to offer legal support or services pro bono to the disadvantaged and disempowered groups of the society (https://nalsa.gov.in/about-us/introduction).
[92]Poojya Mata Nasib Kaur Ji is a civil welfare society (ngo) (nlsa-vs-union-of-india)
[93]https://translaw.clpr.org.in/case-law/nalsa-third-gender-identity/

unaccepting the third gender individuals and imposing gender conversion treatments (Ibid). The committee citing constitutional impartiality with respect to sex emphatically mentions the word 'person' which is compatible with the transgender as well as constitutional provisions, clauses and acts (Ibid). Taking into cognizance, the transgenders and their experiences with social bigotry, prejudice, discrimination and violence, the committee further recommends the government to mandate and implement inclusive decrees for the benefit and welfare of the third gender individuals (Ibid). The judgement further calls upon the personal narratives of Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, SidhharthNarrain and Sachin (a transgender) among others to acknowledge the atrocious life experiences of transgender individuals, their blighted living conditions and their severely impoverished life chances (NALSA vs. The Union of India and others, 2014). The verdict then articulates the definitional parameters of the transgender identity deeming it to be a broad umbrella rubric representing the disjunctions between one's biological sex and gender identity (Ibid). It further adds that the contemporaneous currency of the word, transgender indicates a wide spectrum of gender experiences, identities, transsexual individuals and non-operative people among others (Ibid). To further buttress the contention of the transgender identity, the verdict referred to the historical timeline commencing from epics, mythical stories, ancient/medieval periods and the repressive colonial periods that documented the existence of the non-normative gender category (Ibid). As a consequence, the judgement takes into cognizance a wide array of cultural identities viz. the *hijras,* the *shiv-shakti's,* the *jogtas/jogappas,* the *aravanis* or the *thirunangais* and the eunuchs to be subsumed under the rubric of transgender identity (Ibid). The judgement also employs the reference of the *'yogyakarta principles'* which was constituted in the year 2006 by

a panel of human rights experts in Yogyakarta, Indonesia[94]. The principles embody and ensure the right to equality, enjoyment of human rights, the right to recognize their gender/sexuality, freedom of expression and thought, privacy and protection from medical exploitation (NALSA vs. The Union of India and others, 2014). The Yogyakarta Principles also directs the states to comply with the universal guidelines and introduce requisite laws in alignment with the same (Ibid). The judgement therefore assimilates international mandates viz. the Yogyakarta principles and the UN Convention to apprehend and employ the same in their understanding of human rights, gender equality, identity and sexual rights (Ibid). The verdict also expounds on article 14, 15 & 16, 19 and 21 of the constitution, its legal definitional parameters and the violations of such decrees in context to the transgenders of India.

Article	Statement/Implications of the Article	Violation of the Article and its impact on the lives of the *Hijras*
Article 14	Article 14 confers complete entitlements to freedom, rights, equality before law and protection to all 'persons'. Here, it would necessitate to underscore the salience of the word 'person' as it is free from the gender binaries of man/woman or sexes male/female.	Acts of inequality and deprivation of rights constitute a perennial problem for the *hijras* of India. Sukey in her work on the *hijras* mentions their political, economic, occupational and social deprivation (Sukey, 2018). The verdict citing prior research also mentions that the *hijras* owing to

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[94]The panel of experts in Indonesia adopted the *yogyakarta*principles as an international and universal set of principles ensuring human rights to all which requires the adherence of all states.
Yogyakartaprinciples.org – The Application of International Human Rights Law in relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. (n.d.). Retrieved 2019, from http://yogyakartaprinciples.org

		center/state mandates are deemed as unequal citizens making them as easy prey to law enforcers and other related violence (NALSA vs. The Union of India and Others, 2014).
Article 15 & 16	Article 15 & 16 prohibits the State from discriminating individuals on the basis of one's sex. Article 15 further allows access to public spaces to all citizens (public property, restaurants etc.) Article 16 mandates that all Indian citizens shall have access to equal opportunities and forbids discrimination of employment on the basis of sex, religion, race, descent among others.	Contradictory to the constitutional rights, the *hijras* are debarred from existing as equal citizens in public spaces (Hotchandani, 2017). Hotchandani in her study reveals that the *hijras* are deemed as social outcastes and rejects (Ibid) Sukey further reveals that only a handful of *hijras* can be considered as 'skilled/trained' personnels in regular jobs (Sukey, 2018) Majority of the *hijras* are unable to secure employment and equal access to opportunities and often rely on the traditional engagements of singing and dancing (Ibid).
Article 19	Article 19 decrees that all citizens of India have the freedom of expression and speech. Article 19 is particularly salient as it allows for the self-recognition of one's gender and gender expressions.	Saxena in his work on the *hijras* of Mumbai demonstrates that individual autonomy over one's gender identity and expression is constantly negated by the strictures of the heteronormative society (Saxena, 2011). Sharma in his sociological study of the *hijras* of

		Chandigarh too reveals that the *hijras* are severely condemned and denounced by their family, locality and the larger society for expressing their desired gender identity (Sharma, 2009).
Article 21	Article 21 safeguards one's honour and dignity of one's life. It also protects the right to privacy and autonomy of all citizens.	Despite the gender-neutral constitutional language, the *hijras* continually experience danger to life, sexual violence and physical abuse (Saxena, 2011, Mal, 2018). The *hijras* experience rape, eviction from homes, are murdered without consequence and social unacceptance (Ibid).

Table 3.1: The above table demonstrates the unbiased nature of the constitutional statutes for all citizens but the transgenders, owing to their gender identity, are deprived or stripped of their rights thereby forcing them to lead a marginalized existence.

Like the above juxtaposition, the SC verdict refers to multiple works of literature and research that documents the actual everyday grim social realities of the transgenders of India (NALSA vs. The Union of India and others, 2014). The equality and fairness of the mandates of Article 14, 15 & 15, 19 and 21 notwithstanding, the verdict acknowledged the unprivileged, impoverished and degraded state of affairs of the transgenders of India (Ibid). Hence, considering the case of transgender individuals continually beleaguered by social, economic, political and legal problems, the Supreme Court in the year 2014 introduced a new gender category viz. 'third gender' to include all citizens that transgressed beyond the normative binary. The verdict therefore enumerated nine declarations in favour

of the transgenders of India- 1) the introduction of a separate 'third gender' apart from the traditional gender binaries. It further decrees that the eunuchs and *hijras* may be subsumed under the category of the 'third gender' for protecting their constitutional rights. 2) The judgement grants autonomy to transgenders to self-identify their gender identity (i.e., male, female or third gender) and directs the center and the state governments to provide necessary recognition. 3) It decrees the state and center governments to introduce required measures and reservations to avail educational opportunities and public service appointments. 4) Considering the alarming rise of sexually transmitted diseases amongst sexual minorities, the ruling mandated the center and state to install sero-surveillance centers to cater to the needs of transgenders afflicted with sexual diseases. Also, adequate medical facilities, infrastructure and other allied amenities are to be provided. 5) The verdict directs the center and state governments to introduce suitable measures to eradicate social stigma and exclusion by implementing social welfare schemes that fosters inclusivity and equality enabling them to be equal citizens. 6) The judgement orders the governments of centre and states to provide medical attention in hospitals and other allied institutions with requisite infrastructural amenities such as a separate toilet for the transgenders. 7) The judgement also underscores on the implementation of social welfare provisions and schemes to improve their living conditions. 8) The verdict directs the governments to sensitize and create mass awareness for the social inclusion of the transgender individuals. 9) Lastly, the judgment orders the center and the state to restore their earlier social position of respect, social stature and acceptance (Ibid). The nine directives of the apex court safeguards personal autonomy, social and economic inclusion, occupational and educational opportunities, reservation and healthcare support from the government

apparatuses. Quite clearly, the affirmative verdict entitles all transgenders protection of their rights and freedom along with additional measures, provisions and schemes to better their overall life and living conditions. Thus, taking into account the nine declarations or directives of the honourable Supreme Court. its socio-economic implications for the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata and the paucity of scholarly research on the same, the study attempts to map the socio-economic conditions of the community post the SC 2014 NALSA verdict.

3.5 LOCUS SITES, METHODS AND SAMPLE SIZE

Considering the nature and rationale of the chapter and the overall research paradigm of pragmatic worldview, the chapter employs an amalgam of open and close ended questionnaires in the form of survey formulated to quantitatively appraise the hitherto impact of the Supreme court verdict 2014 on the lives of transgenders in North Bengal and Kolkata. All the seven districts from North Bengal (excluding the newly declared Kalimpong district) were included in the study, viz. Darjeeling, Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri, Cooch-Behar, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur and Malda. For Kolkata, the research sites consisted of the metro region and the outskirts of the city area. A series of preliminary informal interviews were conducted in the two regions of North Bengal and Kolkata prior to the actual field survey to better acquaint the researcher with possible sites within the districts/metro city, build a rapport with the *hijras* of the region and ngo/cbo members working actively for the welfare of the *hijras* to obtain requisite information which subsequently allowed the researcher to frame topical survey questions apart from the standard socio-economic questionnaire template. Deriving from the preliminary field insights and the declarations put forth by the SC verdict,

the survey was constructed by subdividing it into three parts or prongs to separately approach the multiple aspects of the socio-economic conditions of the *hijras*. Inpart one i.e. the demographic profile, questions were designed to collect data pertaining to their income, educational qualification, marital status, financial dependence and accommodation among others. Part two of the survey consisted of their sexual/mental health, their accessibilities of treatment, their sexual behaviour and an assessment of state implemented health schemes and provisions. And lastly, part three pivots on the issues of social status, experiences of social exclusion and socially induced trauma among others. The socio-economic research did not intend on limiting or reducing the responses by adhering to the typical 'closed' questionnaire template as doing so would eschew multiplicities of responses articulated by the interviewees. Certain open questions asked were more personal and intimate which required descriptive elaboration and simple responses such as 'yes', 'no' or 'I don't know' with the corresponding numeric values wouldn't suffice. Also, considering their marginalized status, different life experiences, itinerant lifestyle and gender/sexual identity, socio-economic scales such as the Kuppuswamy scale was not adopted by the study. The Kuppuswamy scale also includes the variables of urban and rural milieus to better apprehend the socioeconomic conditions but considering the temporary residency of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata, their inter-*gharana* disputes and their itinerant proclivities, the study does not include the variables of rural and urban sites. Descriptive and survey answers were subsumed under multiple themes assigned with numeric value which were tabulated and quantified. In the following findings, themes for the three segments have been included and excluded depending on the response of the interviewees.

NAME OF DISTRICT/CITY	RESEARCH SITES	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
DARJEELING DISTRICT (SILIGURI)	KOYLA DEPOT, JABRA BITA, NJP COLONY, COOLIPARA, BHAKTINAGAR, JHANKAAR MORE	10
ALIPURDUAR	NEW ALIPURDUAR RAILWAY JUNCTION	10
JALPAIGURI	JALPAIGURI TOWN, DHUPGURI.	10
COOCH-BEHAR	CHAKCHAKA, KOCH BIHAR (M)	10
UTTAR DINAJPUR	RAIGANJ TOWN	10
DAKSHIN DINAJPUR	GANGARAMPUR, SHAMSANPARA	10
MALDA	ENGLISH BAZAAR, BAGBARI, SONATALA	10
KOLKATA	TOLLYGUNGE, HAZRA CROSSING, KIDDERPORE, SONAGACHI, CHETLA, NEW ALIPORE, SANTRAGANCHI JUNCTION, BELILIOUS LANE, BARRACKPORE, SRERAMPORE, SEALDAH RLY. STATION	30
TOTAL		100

Table 3.2: The above table includes all districts in North Bengal (except Kalimpong) and Kolkata city with the selection of 10 respondents from each site in North Bengal and 30 respondents from Kolkata.

The total sample size of the socioeconomic study is 100 wherein 70 respondents were selected to represent the seven districts (10 in each district) of North Bengal and 30 respondents for Kolkata metropolitan area to maintain the uniformity of representation. Due to unreliable estimates on the total population of the *hijras* of

the two regions, the nature of the questions asked, the unwillingness expressed by the *hijras* to participate and the hostile regional politics between *hijras* of multiple households, the research employed the non-purposive sampling technique viz. snowball sampling to select and interview the respondents. The researcher further relied on key informants (also acquainted via snowball sampling) for their valuable insights to the study and their connections with the *hijra gharanas.* Key informants from cbo's/ngo's and in the *hijra* households were crucial for the study as they enabled the researcher to interview and gain access to *hijra* households across the regions. The research has conformed to all the ethical parameters whilst collecting the data from NGO's, CBO's and *hjira* households. Prior permissions to conduct interviews were taken via email (for NGO's/CBO's) and telephone where proof of identity of the researcher and her affiliation were disclosed. The first page of the survey sheet lucidly summarizes the purpose of the survey. The respondents were further ensured that their personal details would remain confidential at all times. A consent form to partake in the survey along with the signature and personal details of the respondent was also attached in compliance with the research ethics. A *bengali* translator (whenever available) was hired during the data collection process to help respondents to understand and answer the questions posed more effectively. While filling out the survey form, respondents were given the choice to write or speak with the researcher asking them questions. Questions posed were translated to *Bengali/Hindi* whenever needed. All survey interviews were also digitally recorded and transcribed while collecting the data to ensure that there was no missing information or data inconsistency.

3.6 FINDINGS

NORTH BENGAL

3.6.1 DARJEELING DISTRICT

SEGMENT I- DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Basic Necessities /Amenities	Findings	Findings	Findings	Findings
Food	60% of the *hijras* had access to three meals per day.	While 40% revealed that they only consumed two meals every day.		
Water	40% depended solely on municipal locality tap.	10% reportedly sourced water from their landlord's private well and occasionally purchased plastic potable water.	40% relied on the municipality tap as well as purchased potable drinking water.	10% sourced their water from their rent homes and locality taps.
Access to ration supplies	Half of the respondents (50%) relied on the local kirana store.	40% relied on weekly haats (market) and the local vendor's shop.	10% purchased their everyday groceries from the weekly bazaar.	
Sanitation facilities	50% of the respondents shared a common 'pucca'/concrete toilet with other members of the household.	30% of the respondents had to share a makeshift toilet with tin roof with other members of the household.	20% who lived separately had sole access to 'pucca' toilets	
Electricity Access	All respondents had 24/7 access to electricity.			

LPG Gas	A majority (80%) reportedly had no LPG connection. They relied on small portable gas cylinders.	20% on the other had had access to LPG gas connection.		
Current place of residence	Almost 70% lived together with their guru and other chelas in a common rented room.	While 20% reportedly lived separately from their gurus in rented rooms.	A handful (10%) lived only with their guru in a one room rent.	

3.6.2 LEVEL OF EDUCATION AND REASONS FOR DISCONTINUING EDUCATION

Level of Education	Findings
Class I-VIII	A staggering 80% of respondents dropped out from school between classes 1-8.
Matriculation (complete)	A handful (10%) successfully completed their matriculation.
Class X (drop out)	While the rest (10%) dropped out of school before completion of matriculation.

Reasons for discontinuing education	Findings
Lack of familial support and experiences of social stigma in one's locality	20%
Financial problems and disinterest in completion of education or pursuance of higher studies	50%
Experiences of repeated social stigma perpetuated by one's neighbours and locality people.	30%

3.6.3 MONTHLY INCOME/EXPENSES/ CHIEF INCOME SOURCE/OCCUPATIONAL ENGAGEMENTS/MOVABLE/IMMOVABLE PROPERTY/FINANCIAL DEPENDENTS

Monthly income	About half of the respondents (50%) earned between Rs. 5,001-10,000 per month.	40% of the *hijras* earned a monthly income of Rs. 1,001-5,000	While 10% of them earned more than Rs. 20,000 p.m.		
Chief source of income	A majority (60%) of the respondents relied on *challa/mangta* and *tolibadhai* for earnings.	While 10% only depended on the traditional *toli-badhai* as a source of income.	30% of the respondents on the other relied on *challa/mangta* and sex work *(khajra).*		
Monthly expenditure	50% of the *hijras* expended between Rs. 5,001-10,000 per month.	20% of their monthly expenditure amounted to Rs. 10,1001-15,000 per month.	While 30% of them expended between Rs. 1,001-5,000 rupees per month.		
Items they expend on per month	30% of the respondents mostly spend on buying new clothes and cosmetics.	While the other 30% spend on *hijra gharana* expenses, on their partner (boyfriend), family and for social work.	20% of the *hijras* spend on their family, personal expenses, contributed to theirhousehold and for entertaining guests from another *gharana.*	The rest (20%) expended on grooming products, garments and family needs.	
Movable Property	30% of the *hijras* owned few gadgets (mobiles) and jewellery.	10% of the respondents owned kitchen appliances and mobiles.	10% of the *hijras* owned both appliances and furniture.	10% of them owned a single bicycle.	40% of the *hijras* did not own any movable possessions.

Immovable property	A majority (80%) of the respondents did not possess any property	While (10%)have inherited a piece of land from their family.	The rest 10% owned a one storey house.	
Prior occupational engagements	10% of the respondents were community-based members.	While the other (10%) engaged in farming.	A majority (80%) of the *hijras* were not working elsewhere before joining the community.	
Future financial securities	50% of the *hijras* have not planned or saved any security for the future (old age).	40% of the respondents have had simple savings accounts in banks.	While 10% of the respondents have personally saved their monthly earnings.	
Financial dependents	50% of the respondents did not have any financial dependents.	30% of the *hijras* had to financially support their old parents and siblings.	10% of the *hijras* had wives, children and their parents/siblings who depended on them financially.	10% of the respondents stated that they had to look after their younger siblings (sister, brother).

3.6.4 PART II-SEXUAL BEHAVIOR, HEALTH (MENTAL AND SEXUAL) OF THE HIJRAS & GOVERNMENT INTRODUCED SCHEMES AND PROVISIONS

Access to treatments/ hospitals	40% of the *hijras* preferred private hospitals for treatment.	While 30% of them referred to both the government and private hospitals for care.	The other 10% depended on government hospitals and local chemists.	10% of the *hijras* also relied on alternative medicines (ayurvedic/ homeopathic drugs) as well as private clinics.	The rest (10%) primarily referred to government hospitals for treatment.	
Treatment of doctors/me dical staffs	40% of respondent s experience d positive treatment with doctors and nurses working in private hospitals.	While 20% of the respondent s encountere d neutral treatment from medical staff working in private hospitals.	10% of the respondent s who preferred private clinics also encountere d/experien ced affirmative treatment.	While 10% of the *hijras* encountere d neutral treatment from the doctors/staf fs of government hospitals.	20% of them on the other received good treatment from governme nt medical staffs, doctors and nurses.	
Diseases/a fflictions	Almost 30% had gastric related ailments.	20% reported of infection and abscess formation in groin area post emasculati on.	10% of the *hijras* also reported of infection in the anal region.	10% of the respondents suffered from obesity and fever.	Also, another 10% of the *hijras* complaine d of being obese and chronic joint pains.	Another 20% complaine d of mild fever and gastric issues.
Mental	About	About	Another			

ailments	40% had no known history of mental ailments.	20% of the *hijras* reportedly exhibited suicidal tendencies and experienced prolonged sadness at some point in their lives.	40% experienced extreme mental stress, confusion due to their gender identity and sexuality.			
Sex category (at the time of birth)	Almost 50% of the *hijras* were born as males.	While 10% of them were born with ambiguous genitalia.	Another 40% were born with a small penis.			
Reasons to emasculate (for *hijras* born as males)	30% of the respondents underwent the emasculation process as they identified as a woman.	While the other 30% emasculated because they identified as a *'hijra'*.	20% of the *hijras* experienced coercion from their *guru maas* and other household members to emasculate.	The rest (20%) held the notion that their 'penis' or their 'manly organ' was useless and thus had to be severed.		
Emasculation technique/ process	A majority of the *hijras* (80%) visited quack clinics in Bihar and	While 20% of the respondents underwent the legitimate medical	Another 10% of the *hijras* still called upon their community *dai-maa* to operate.			

	Uttar Pradesh to emasculate.	process of SRS to change their sex.				
Sex work (*hijras* who earlier stated their engagements with sex work)	40% of the *hijras* engaged in sex work apart from their traditional occupational roles.	60% on the other denied any such engagements in sex work.				
Condom procurement (for safe sex)	50% of the respondents claimed that the clients brought their own condoms.	30% of the *hijras* bought condoms from the local drugstore.	While 20% used the ones distributed by local cbo's/ngo's.			
Sexual assault/abuse	30% of the respondents stated that they have experienced physical violence and molestation.	Almost 30% have experienced rape attempts and molestation.	10% of the *hijras* stated that they experience molestation (frequently) while travelling on trains, buses and in other public spaces.	While 40% on the other, did not report of any experiences vis-a-vis sexual violence.		
Social support	30% of the *hijras* considered their	10% of the *hijras* relied on their	While 20% of the *hijras* relied on	20% of the respondents on the other did not	Another 20% depended on their	

| | mother, their *guru* and their *celas* to be their support system. | *gothiya* (sisters within the community), their *giriya* (romantic partners) and their siblings for support. | their *gurus, celas* and *giriyas* for social support. | trust or depend on anyone for social support. | *guru, celas* and *gothiyas* for support. | |

3.6.5 PART III- SOCIAL STIGMA/EXCLUSION, STATUS, TRAUMA AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS

Experiences of Social stigma/problems/exclusion	Findings	Findings	Findings
Age when joined the *hijra* community	60% of the respondents joined the community between ages 14-15.	30% of the interviewees entered the community between 17-18 years of age.	10% of the *hijras* joined the community between 20-21 years of age.
Reasons for joining the *hijra* community	A majority of the respondents (70%) joined the *hijras* primarily due to poverty and their feminine proclivities.	While another (10%) was evicted from their homes, experiencing social stigma. They lucrative nature of the *hijra* profession also lured them to join the community.	20% of the respondents had to leave their homes following the death of their parents and the unfair treatment meted out to them by their relatives.
Social Problems	40% of the *hijras* mentioned that they shared inimical relations with the *hijras* of Bangladesh as they were depriving them of	For 20% of the *hijras,* disrespect, stigma and social ostracization constituted as major social problems. They	40% on the other, consider that *hijras* are often perceived as 'sexual objects' by the males. For them, rapes, threats

	their territories, *celas* and livelihood.	believed that society treats them as 'thugs' and 'thieves' simply extorting money.	to murder and molestation constitute as burning social problems.
Social Exclusion	40% of the respondents asserted that they encountered familial exclusion and social discrimination from employers when applying for jobs.	40% of the respondents on the other experienced episodes of social exclusion in school, public spaces and from peer groups.	20% of the *hijras* on the other have complained of torture, disrespect, violence which they view as being exclusionary as they feel that they are not entitled to all the rights available to a common man/woman.
Guru/Chela Relationships	30% of the respondents shared 'good' and 'cordial' relations with other community members.	While 20% on the other shared that they have experienced hostilities from their *guru/celas* concerning money and disciplinary issues.	50% of the *hijras* however have likened their relationship as that of a parent and child.
Access/Availed any Government schemes/provisions	All (100%) stated that they haven't availed any government schemes or provisions.		
Recommendations for the Government	30% of the respondents suggested that the *government* should deploy multiple mediums to spread awareness and sensitize people about the community.	40% of the *hijras* recommended tighter regulations in border areas to prevent the influx of 'foreign' Bangladeshi *hijras* depriving them of their livelihood.	30% of the interviewees on the other demanded for reservations in education, occupation and healthcare support to ensure that no one is forced to join the *hijra* community.

3.6.6 ALIPURDUAR DISTRICT

PART I- DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Access to basic necessities/amenities/Residence/education	Findings	Findings	Findings	Findings	
Food	80% of the *hijras* consumed three meals everyday	20% of the *hijras* due to work related travel only consumed two meals daily.			
Water	70% of the *hijras* relied on a common locality tap for water.	20% reportedly had no access to a steady water source. Sometimes, they had to purchase water from their neighbours or shops.	10% of the *hijras* depended on the municipality water but complained of its high iron content.		
Sanitation Facilities	40% shared a common 'pucca' toilet with other members of the household	40% who lived with their gurus and had access to semi pucca (made of corrugated tin sheets)	Remaining 20% who lived separately had access to 'pucca' toilets		

		toilets.			
Electricity Access	100% All respondents had access to electricity at all times.				
LPG Gas	80% had to resort to mini/portable gas cylinders	The remaining 20% used the stove to cook food.			
Current Place of Residence	80% of the *hijras* lived separately in rented rooms.	While 20% lived in rooms/flats with their gurus (*hijra* households).			
Level of Education	69% of the *hijras* were educated between standards 1 to 8	7% completed their matriculation	8% of the *hijras* were reportedly illiterate.	8% were home-schooled by parents when young.	8% of the *hijras* completed their senior secondary (+2).
Reasons for not pursuing higher education	10% of the *hijras* were evicted from their natal homes.	30% experienced stigma, bullying and unacceptance at school and from peers. They also were harassed in their locality.	Due to impoverishment and social harassment, 10% considered dropping out from school.	50% of the *hijras* had to discontinue studies to earn and look after their parents/siblings.	

3.6.7 INCOME SOURCE/ OTHER OCCUPATIONAL ENGAGEMENTS/MONTHLY EXPENSES/FINANCIAL SECURITY/INCOME/MOVABLE/IMMOVABLE PROPERTY

Income/expenses/income source/financial dependents/property/occupation	Findings	Findings	Findings	Findings
Monthly Income	64% earned Rs. 5,001-10,000 per month.	18% earned a monthly of Rs. 10,001-15,000	9% of the *hijras* earned about 20,001-25,000 rupees p.m.	Remaining 9% of the *hijras* earned anywhere between 45,001-50,000 p.m.
Chief source of Income	60% of the *hijras* solely relied on *toli-badhai* for income.	10% of the *hijras* eked out a living by depending on sex work, begging and the *toli-badhai.*	20% begged in trains, shops and in festivals while also relying on *toli-badhai.*	10% of the *hijras* relied on a mix of *toli-badhai* and *lagan.*
Monthly expenditure	40% of the *hijras* typically spend between Rs. 5,001-10,000	40% on the other spend between Rs. 1,001-5,000.	20% of the *hijras* expend between Rs. 10,001-15,000	
Items/monthly expenses	20% of the *hijras* expended on paying fines, distributed to charity, bought clothes and ration supplies.	The other 20% mostly bought clothes, ration supplies, grooming and cosmetic items.	30% stated that they spend most on their poor parents/siblings, clothes and cosmetics.	While 20% reportedly spends on charity work, house supplies, ration.
Movable Property	60% of the *hijras* possessed no movable property.	20% owned mobiles, television and other electronic	10% of the *hijras* owned gold jewellery	The other 10% owned furniture made of wood and steel.

		gadgets.		
Immovable Property	All (100%) of the *hijras* possessed no immovable property.			
Financial security for future	60% of the *hijras* haven't planned or saved for the future.	30% saved money from their daily earnings for old age security.	While the remainder of 10% had opened a savings bank account.	
Family Dependents	Almost 50% stated that they had no dependents.	20% reportedly had to financially support their parents and siblings	While 30% of the *hijras* had to monetarily support their elderly parents.	

3.6.8 SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR, MENTAL/SEXUAL HEALTH &

GOVERNMENT INTRODUCED SCHEMES/PROVISIONS

Treatment of ailments, behaviours of Doctors/Nurses, diseases, emasculation, social support	Findings	Findings	Findings	Findings	Findings
Current Ailments/diseases	30% of the respondents complained of pain and abscess in the genital area.	30% of the *hijras* suffered from chronic stomach ailments, headaches	10% of respondents complained of nose and eye pains.	20% of the respondents had painful 'pus like' formation in their anal region.	While the remaining 10% of the *hijras* reported no known diseases.

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		and pain in the abdominal area.			
Mental illness/stress	A majority (70%) of the *hijras* experienced prolonged stress, anxiety and distress.	While 30% of the *hijras* experienced stress and depressive symptoms.			
Sexual violence/abuse	80% of the *hijras* were molested in public spaces.	While the rest (20%) recounted multiple experiences of sexual harassment, physical violence and molestation.			
Treatments and hospitals	Half (50%) of the respondents preferred local government hospitals for treatment.	While 20% of the *hijras* felt safe and referred to private clinics and hospitals	30% of the respondents on the other hand only relied on local chemist shops rather than referring to medical professionals.		
Behaviour/treatment meted out to the *hijras* by Doctors/nurses	60% of the *hijras* noticed that the behaviors of doctors and nurses	40% stated that they had positive experiences with the doctors and			

	were neutral towards them	the nurses.			
Emasculated/ Non-emasculated state	60% of the *hijras* stated that they have emasculated their genitals.	While 40% of the *hijras* reportedly have not severed their genitalia.			
Reasons for emasculation	60% of the *hijras* emasculated because they identified as a woman.	40% of the emasculated *hijras* stated that they were coerced by their *guru ma*.			
Emasculation procedure opted	Half of the respondents (50%) took recourse in the traditional method by calling their community *dai-maa*.	40% of the *hijras* consulted and operated from quack clinics in Bihar	While 10% travelled to Uttar Pradesh to operate from quacks.		
Social Support	40% of the *hijras* considered parents to be their biggest social support	30% of the respondents stated that they were closest with their friends and siblings.	20% felt close with their *guru* and shared all their problems with them.	While 10% of the *hijras* considered that they were closer with their *chelas*	

3.6.9 SOCIAL STIGMA/EXCLUSION AND SOCIAL STATUS

Age for joining the *hijra* community	40% claimed that they joined the community in 14-15 years of age.	30% joined the community in 16-17 years.	10% of the *hijras* started as young as 12 years of age.	20% of them joined when they were 19 years old.
Reasons for being a *hijra* or joining the community	40% succumbed to social stigma and unacceptance from family, forcing them to join the *hijra* community	50% of the *hijras* asserted that they identified as a woman.	10% were forced to earn a living quite early on because of financial difficulties.	
Relationship with guru maa	50% of the *hijras* shared very close relationships with their *guru/s* and considered them to be their parents.	30% on the other stated that they shared a strictly professional relationship with their *guru.*	20% of the respondents asserted that they enjoyed amicable/cordial relations with their *guru.*	
Problems encountered by the *hijras*	50% of the *hijras* complained that they were treated with little to no respect by mainstream society.	30% stated that they were labelled with multiple pejorative names and were harassed verbally.	While 20% observed that due to their gender identity and expression, they were unable to work in regular jobs. Financial insecurities and constant threat of unemployment poses a big problem for the *hijras*	
Social	70% of the	While 30% of		

Exclusion	*hijras* were evicted by their parents and locality members.	them experienced social exclusion and unacceptance from their siblings and single parents.		
Government aids/schemes availed	All *hijras* of Alipurduar agreed that neither the state nor the central governments have introduced or implemented any schemes for the *hijras* with respect to healthcare, food subsidies or social benefits.			
Recommendations of the *hijras*	About 60% of the *hijras* recommend that the concerned government should organize social sensitization programs and recruit *hijras* in suitable employment sectors.	20% of the respondents laid emphasis on financial security by suggesting pension allowances, food subsidies and access to healthcare schemes.	While 20% of the *hijras* suggested that they should be absorbed into all available employment sectors and should be paid equally for their work.	

3.6.10 JALPAIGURI DISTRICT

SEGMENT I: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Basic necessities/food/ residence/water/ electricity/educa tion/sanitation	Findings	Findings	Findings	Findings
Access to food	60% of the *hijras* have access to three meals daily	While 30% only consumed two meals every day.		
Ration	50% relied on what their patrons or *jajmans*gave them during *tolibadhai.* For example, rice, oil, potatoes etc. They also visited the local grocery store for other supplies. They haven't availed any government aided food subsidies	While the other half (50%) relied solely on local *kirana*stores.		
Water	40% of the *hijras* depended on the locality tube well as their water source.	While 10% relied on private sources for purchasing water.	20% had access to their own private well.	30% of the respondents had to depend on the local municipal tap.
Electricity	All respondents had 24/7 access to electricity.			

Sanitation facilities	50% of the respondents had access to a common pucca toilet which was outside their rooms.	20% of the *hijras* had access to a makeshift tin common toilet.	30% of the respondents had the convenience of a pucca attached toilet in their rooms.	
LPG connection	70% of the *hijras* had access to LPG connection.	While 30% of them relied solely on stoves and mini cylinders.		
Residence	10% of the *hijras* resided at their *guru's own* house.	10% of the respondents owned a single storey house.	60% of the *hijras* lived separately in rented rooms.	While 20% of them lived with their *gurus* at their rented place.
Education	50% of the *hijras* were illiterate	20% were educated between standards 1-8	20% of the respondents completed their matriculation.	While 10% finished their graduation degree.
Reasons for discontinuing education	Familial poverty forcing them to earn when young (60%)	Gradual disinterest in education (10%)	30% experienced lack of support from their teachers, peer groups and family.	

3.6.11   INCOME   SOURCE/   OTHER   OCCUPATIONAL ENGAGEMENTS/MONTHLY   EXPENSES/FINANCIAL SECURITY/INCOME/MOVABLE/IMMOVABLE PROPERTY

Monthly Income	About 40% earned anywhere	30% of the *hijras* earned Rs. 10,001-	10% of the *hijras* reportedly	10% earned a monthly income of	While the rest (10%) earned above

	between Rs. 15,001-20,000 rupees.	15,000 p.m.	earned between Rs. 5,001-10,000 p.m.	20,001-25,000	25,000 rupees.
Chief source of income	About 70% of the respondents relied solely on *toli-badhai*for their earnings.	10% of the *hijras* engaged in challa-mangta or begging in trains and other public spaces.	While 20% relied on *toli-badhai*and *challa-mangata*for their livelihood.		
Monthly expenditure	Half of the respondents expended between Rs. 5,001-10,000 p.m.	The other half estimated that they spend anywhere between Rs. 10,001-15,000 p.m.			
Things they expend on	About 70% stated that they spend on ration and household items and on charity work.	While 20% expended on buying new clothes (sarees) and other personal expenses.	10% of the respondents invested primarily on cosmetics, jewellery and grooming products.		
Prior occupational engagements	80% of the *hijras* were not employed before joining the community.	10% stated that they were employed in the capacity of anngo member and a counsellor.	While the rest (10%) worked as field labourers.		
Movable	30% of the	While 50%	10% of the	Another 10%	

Property	respondents owned jewellery, gadgets and appliances.	stated that they had no movable property.	respondents only owned jewellery	reportedly owned furniture, appliances and jewellery.	
Immovable Property	50% of the *hijras* claimed that they had no immovable property to their name.	30% of the *hijras* stated that they did not own any property but their parents owned houses and lands.	While 20% of the *hijras* inherited lands from their father.		
Savings (for future)	40% of the respondents have saved earnings from their monthly income.	While 20% have opened savings accounts for future security.	30% have not anything planned for future security.	And 10% of the *hijras* were dependent on their *celas* expecting them to look after them when old.	
Financial dependents	60% of the *hijras* reportedly had no financial dependents.	20% of the respondents had to support their younger siblings.	10% said that their old parents expected financial help from them.	While the rest (10%) had to support their poor family.	

3.6.12 PART II- SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR, MENTAL/SEXUAL HEALTH &

GOVERNMENT INTRODUCED SCHEMES/PROVISIONS

Access to treatments	50% of the *hijras* relied	While 10% also relied on	20% on the other	While the other 20%	

	on private clinics and chemist stores for treatment.	the local chemist shop and also used homeopathic drugs.	referred to government hospitals for treatment.	primarily relied on local chemist shop for medicines and treatment.	
Treatment of doctors/medical staffs	About 30% of the respondents observed neutral treatment from the staff in a government hospital.	20% of *hijras* on the other noticed a more positive treatment/behaviour in chemist shops/local drugstores.	While another 20% experienced positive encounters with the government hospital staffs and doctors.	The rest (30%) experienced a neutral stance/behavior when interacting with the local chemist shops.	
Diseases afflicted with	A majority (40%) complained of abscess and injection in genital area.	While 10% on the other complained of anal rupture.	Another 10% suffered from joint inflammations, general muscle aches and restricted mobility.	30% of the *hijras* had no known history of diseases.	The rest (10%) were afflicted with liver disease.
Mental ailments	50% of the respondents experienced chronic episodes of prolonged sadness and anxiety.	While the other half (50%) experienced confusion, disturbance and were plagued by stress.			
Sex category at birth	70% of the *hijras* were born as males.	30% on the other with a deformed penis.			
Reasons to	10% of them	A majority	While 30%	20% of the	

emasculate (those born as males)	stated that they intended to conform to the *hijra* identity.	(40%) wanted to emasculate to fulfill their desire of being a woman.	on the other were forced by their *gurus* and community members to emasculate.	*hijras* on the other viewed emasculation as a means towards a more lucrative career as *hijras.*
Emasculation method used	70% of the *hijras* relied on quack clinics of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh to emasculate.	While 20% still adhered to the traditional practice of severing it with the services provided by the community *dai-maa.*	10% of the *hijras* visited Delhi's SRS clinics to undergo sex change.	
Sex work	80% of the *hijras* of Jalpaiguri claim that they haven't engaged in sex work.	While 20% stated that they occasionally have sex with their male partners and sometimes with clients.		
Condom procurement	60% of the respondents said that the clients usually brought condoms themselves.	While 40% of the *hijras* brought their own condoms.		
Social	50% of the	While the	20% of the	The rest 10%

| support | *hijras* relied on their *gurus, celas*and other community members for social support. | other 20% relied on their mother and *celas*for support. | *hijras* considered their *giriyas* (romantic partners) and *celas*to be their support system. | were closes with their siblings and some *celas*from their community. | |

3.6.13- SOCIAL STIGMA/EXCLUSION AND SOCIAL STATUS

Age they joined the *hijra* community	Almost 40% of the *hijras* joined as early as 10-12 years old.	20% of the respondents joined when they were about 15-16 years old.	20% of the *hijras* joined when they were 17-18 years of age.	While 20% of them entered the community in their early 20's.
Reasons for joining the community	60% of the respondents entered the community due to intense social stigma from peers, society and lack of familial support.	30% of the *hijras* asserted that they identify as a 'hijra', therefore voluntarily joining the community.	10% of the respondents were forced by their locality/neighbourhoods and parents to join the community.	
Relations with guru	50% claimed that they shared a very close relationship with their *gurus.* They likened it to a child-parent relationship.	30% of the respondents asserted that their relationship was strictly 'professional'.	20% of the *hijras* asserted that their relationship with *gurus* was warm, friendly and cordial.	
Social problems encountered by the *hijras*	40% of the *hijras* feel socially oppressed,	30% of the *hijras* are of the opinion	While 30% of the *hijras* consider social inequality	

	victimized and stigmatized.	that they continually experience stress due to financial instability while working within the community. The risk of unemployment and financial insecurities therefore constitutes two major problems for them.	and lack of government support or provisions as social problems.
Social Exclusion	50% stated that they were unaccepted by their peer group, locality/neighbourhood/	While 20% of them experienced social exclusion solely because of their parents.	30% of the respondents asserted that their family (parents and siblings) socially shunned them.
Government Schemes/provisions	100% of the respondents agreed that they haven't availed or received any provisions or schemes from the government.		
Recommendations given by the *hijras* to center/state governments	50% of the respondents recommended that suitable schemes for the *hijras* should be implemented by the governments. They also underscored	30% were of the opinion that the government should introduce vocational training	While 20% of the *hijras* opined that separate laws should be mandated for the benefit of the *hijras.* They further

	equality in terms of access to all entitlements available to all.	programs which promise income, educational and employment opportunities.	emphasized on mass-sensitization as an essential measure to reduce social stigma.	

3..6.14 COOCH-BEHAR

SEGMENT-I DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Access to food	Almost 60% of the *hijras* consumed three meals per day.	While 40% of the *hijras* only had access to two meals every day.		
Access to water	10% of the respondents stated that they had access to water provided by their landlord. They also purchased filtered water from shops.	50% of the *hijras* had to use the common municipal tap as a water source.	40% of the respondents on the other said that they did not have access to any reliable water source. And had to purchase potable water for cooking and drinking.	
Electricity	A majority of the *hijras* (90%) had access to electricity (at all times).	While 10% of the respondents complained of irregular electricity, constant power cuts.		
LPG connection	Almost 70% of the *hijras* did	While 30% of the respondents		

	not have an LPG connection. They relied solely on a mini gas cylinder.	used both mini cylinders and stoves.		
Ration Supplies	60% of the respondents depended on the nearby *kirana*store for ration purchases.	40% on the other purchased both from their local store and weekly *haat*bazaars.		
Sanitation	70% of the *hijras* had access to one (common) *pucca* toilet	While 10% of the *hijras* used a common makeshift (tin corrugated) roof toilet.	20% on the other (living separately) had access to private *pucca* toilets.	
Residence	A majority of them (60%) lived separately from their *gurus* in rented rooms.	While others (40%) lived with their *gurus* in rented rooms.		
Education	77% of the *hijras* never attended schools (illiterate).	8% of the respondents on the other attended/completed school between standards 1-8.	8% of the *hijras* on the other, completed their senior secondary exams.	While 7% completed their matriculation.
Reasons for discontinuing education	70% of them stated that they had experienced social stigma and familial unacceptance due to which they had to drop	While 20% attributed it to their family for forcing them to drop out from school.	10% on the other stated that due to poverty, their family were reluctant to support their education. They were instead	

| | out from their school. | | expected to earn. | | |

3.6.15   INCOME   SOURCE/   OTHER   OCCUPATIONAL ENGAGEMENTS/MONTHLY   EXPENSES/FINANCIAL SECURITY/INCOME/MOVABLE/IMMOVABLE PROPERTY

Monthly income	Majority of the respondents (80%) earned between Rs. 5,001-10,000 per month.	10% of the *hijras* earned between Rs. 10,001-15,000 every month.	While another 10% earned between Rs. 45,001-50,000 per month.		
Chief source of income	70% of the *hijras* earned by engaging in *toli-badhai*and *challamangta*.	While 30% of the *hijras* depended on *tolibadhai*as well as *khajra*(sex work) for earnings.			
Monthly expenses	30% of the respondents expended between Rs.	50% of the respondents spend between Rs.	While 20% of the *hijras* expended		

	1,001-5,000 every month.	5,001-10,000 every month.	between Rs. 10,001-15,000 per month.		
Movable property	10% of the respondents owned appliances and furniture.	10% of the respondents owned jewellery.	10% on the other owned electronic gadgets, cycle and furniture.	10% of the respondents had mobile, jewellery and cash.	A majority of the respondents did not own any movable property.
Immovable property	20% of the respondents stated that they had paternal lands in their village.	10% on the other owned *pucca* one storey house with 5 rooms.	70% on the other did not own any immovable property.		
Financial dependents	80% of the *hijras* stated that their family expected financial support.	20% on the other stated that they had no dependents.			

Future planning/security	A majority (80%) of the respondents had not planned of any financial security for future.	20% on the other invested in bank savings.			

3.6.16 SEGMENT-II SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR, MENTAL/SEXUAL HEALTH & GOVERNMENT INTRODUCED SCHEMES/PROVISION

Access to treatments	Almost 50% of the respondents preferred private doctors and local chemists for treatment	While the other 40% referred to local government hospitals.	A small percent of respondents (10%) primarily relied on their local drug stores for medicine and other related treatments	
Behaviours/treatment of doctors/nurses	A majority of the respondents that is 90% experienced affirmative treatment and good behaviour from doctors and other medical Staffs	while small percent 10%, experienced ill treatment from the same.		

Diseases	Almost 80% of the respondents suffered from anal rupture and infection.	10% of the respondents complaint of recurrent fever and cold.	While the other 10% experienced high libido levels and infections, general aches because of accidents in the past.	
Mental illness	Almost 70% of them experienced episodes of chronic stress and depression.	while the other 30% experience feelings of sadness and mood swings.		
Emasculated/non emasculated state	A majority of the interviewees, 60% were emasculated.	While another 30% were non emasculated.	A small percentage of respondents, 10% were born with a small penis.	
Methods/procedure for emasculation	80% of the hijras visited quack centres in Bihar to operate themselves	10% of the hijras were operated by a community known doctor in Bihar.	while the other 10% were operated by a community known Bangladeshi doctor.	
Sexual abuse and assault	About 50% of the hijras experienced molestation and physical abuse.	10% of the hijras have suffered rape and physical assault.	20% of the hijras have complained of frequent manhandling while travelling in trains or buses.	About 20% of the respondents have complained of inappropriate groping by railway personals and other authorities.
Social support	30% of the hijras depend on their	While the other 30% consider their	Another 20% of the respondence	The rest, 20%, relied

	celas for emotional support.	friends and members of the hijra household as social support.	trusted their guru maa for support and were close to them.	on their parents for support.

3.6.17 SEGMENT-III SOCIAL STIGMA/EXCLUSION AND SOCIAL STATUS

Age (when respondents joined the *hijra* community)	30% of the hijras were inducted into the community at a young age of 12.	About 20% joined the community when they were 15 years of age	30% of the total respondents joined the community between 17 to 18 years of age.	20% of the hijras gained entry into the community when they were 19 years old	The rest (10%) joined the community in 21 years of age.
Reason for joining the *hijra* community	50% of the *hijras* identified as a woman and wished to embody femininity.	30% on the other, identified as a transgender and voluntaril	While 20% on the other identified as a *hijra.*		

		y joined the communi ty.			
Relations with *guru/celas*	50% of the *hijras* considered their *gurus and celas*as family.	20% on the other did not trust their communi ty members and shared a hostile relations hip with their *guru.*	While 30% of them considered their *gurus* and *celas*as their parents, siblings and as elders of the community.		
Social problems	60% stated that extreme social stigma constituted as one of the major social problems	40% on the other considere d unaccept ance			

	they encountered.	from family and social exclusion as two major problems for the *hijras.*			
Social exclusion	About 70% observed that the general public, particularly in public spaces (trains, streets, buses) disliked their presence avoiding them in the process.	While 30% of the *hijras* were of the opinion that their own family disowned and excluded them when			

		young.			
Government schemes availed	All (100%) of the respondents stated that they haven't availed or know of any government schemes, provisions, food and health subsidies or other programs for the *hijras*.				
Recommendations	70% of the *hijras* were of the opinion that the government should introduce mass-sensitization programs to educate the masses and reduce social	While 30% suggeste d that the governm ent should introduce suitable schemes for the			

	stigma.	benefit of the *hijra* community.			

3.6.18 UTTAR DINAJPUR

SEGMENT I: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Access to food	Almost 80% of the respondents had access to food 3 times a day.	While the rest, 20%, only consumed 2 meals every day.	
Ration and food supplies	60% of the interviewees sourced their supplies from local grocery store.	10% on the other relied on gifts off kind such as rice, oil and other edible items received during *tolibadhai.* they also depended on the local *kirana* store to shop for supplies.	30% of the respondents sourced the grocery items from the local store as well as the weekly Bazaar.
Access to LPG	A majority, 70%, had no access to	The other 30%, had LPG connection.	

	LPG connection.		
Water source	50% of the respondents had access to private well.	30% on the other had to rely on locality tube well as a water source.	While 20% depended on the common municipal tap.
Electricity	All respondents, 100%, had access to electricity 24/7.		
Sanitation facilities	A majority, 80%, had access to attached common *pucca* latrine facility.	While another 20% had access to *pucca* common sanitation installed in the front yard.	
Current residence	60% of the *hijras* lived at their *gurus*own residence (two storey bungalow)with other *hijras*.	10% on the other lived separately in their rented rooms.	20% of the *hijras* had their own residential property and lived with their *celas.*

Level of education	30% of the respondents completed	20% of the *hijras* completed their	While the other 20% finished	A small percentage (10%) of	But 20% of the total respondents

	education between standards 1-8.	matriculation	their higher secondary studies.	the respondents have completed their graduation degree.	were reportedly illiterate.
Reasons for dropping out	60% of the respondence stated social stigma and lack of acceptance as two major reasons for discontinuing education.	While the other 40% dropped out due to severe financial difficulties and to sustain oneself financially.			
Monthly Income	Almost 50% of the respondents earned	While 20% of the respondents had a monthly income Rs.	30% of the *hijras* on the other earned between		

	between Rs. 5,001-10,000 p.m.	10,001-15,000.	20,000-25,000 every month.	
Chief source of income	Almost 80% of the hijras relied on tolibadhai for earnings.	while another 20% depended on tolibadhai and challamangta for earnings.		
Monthly expenditure	About 50% of the respondents expended between Rs. 5001-10,000 p.m.	30 of the *hijras* had monthly expenditures between the range of Rs. 1,001-5,000.	20% of the *hijras* on the other had expenditures amounting to Rs. 10,001-15,000 every month.	
Items they expend on	Half of the total	40% of the *hijras* expended	While 10% of the	

	respondents (50%) spend on cosmetics, household expenses and garments.	on ration supplies, household items and social service (donation to the poor).	respondents spend on ration, paying fines, clothes and donation.		
Movable property	30% of the *hijras* possessed few gadgets, and jewellery.	While another 30% owned household electronic appliances and mobile devices.	30% of the *hijras* on the other, did not possess anu movable property.	10% on the other owned jewellery and one SUV vehicle.	
Immovable property	10% of the interviewees were owners of one storey pucca house.	While another 10% were owners of three storey *pucca* house with a front yard.	80% of the respondents however did not own any immovable properties.		
Future savings	A majority (80%) of the	While a small percentage			

	hijras had not planned for their future security.	(10%) were dependent on their *celas*expecting support from them.		
Financial dependents	For 10% of the *hijras,* their siblings depended on them for monetary support.	While the other 10% had to support their parents as well as siblings.	80% of the respondents on the other, however, did not mention of any financial dependents.	

3.6.19 SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR, MENTAL/SEXUAL HEALTH & GOVERNMENT INTRODUCED SCHEMES/PROVISION

Access to treatments	A majority of the respondence referred local private clinics to	while 30% on the other relied on local government hospitals for the		

	avail treatments.	same.	
Treatment and behaviour of hospital staff	20% of the respondents observed friendly behaviour and quick treatment in private clinics	30% on the other received very good treatment add a government hospital.	While 50% observed neutral behaviour from doctors and nurses.
Diseases	10% of the respondents suffered from anal rupture and infection.	while another 10% suffered from the side effects of emasculation that is body fat , knee pain and anxiety.	A majority, 80%, did not report of any diseases
Mental ailments	about 30% of the respondence experienced episodes of stress, anxiety and prolonged sadness.	20% on the other suffered from anxiety issues and bouts of depression	Conversely, 50% of the hijras did not suffer from any mental ailments

Emasculated or non-emasculated state	50% of the respondents were not emasculated	20% of the hijras were emasculated.	20% on the other were born as intersexed.	10% of the respondents had undergone SRS surgery.
Reasons for emasculation	70% of the respondents emasculated as a means to increase income.	Well 30% were pressurized from there *gurumaa*		
Emasculation method	60% of the hijras visited quacks in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh to emasculate.	20% relied on certified on call doctors.	While another 20% adhere to the traditional practice of emasculating it with dai maa.	
Social support	About 50% of the hijras considered their gurumaa to be their social	10% of the hijras deemed their romantic partners as the ones they	While 40% of the hijras considered both their guru	

	support	are closest with.	maa and celas to be their social support system.	

3.6.20: SOCIAL STIGMA/EXCLUSION AND SOCIAL STATUS

Entry age	40% of the respondents joined the community when they were between the ages of 11-12.	50% of the respondents entered the community between 17-18 years of age.	10% on the other joined in as young as 10 years of age.	
Reasons for joining the community	60% of the respondents stated trauma induced by social stigma and ridicule forced them to join the community.	Similarly, 40% also cited stigma, mental trauma and familial pressure to join the *hijra* community.		
Relation with *guru/chela*	40% of the *hijras* described it as a	While 60% of the respondents		

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	professional relationship.	described their relationship as that of a mother-child relation.		
Social problems	70% of the *hijras* considered stigma and frequent physical and mental abuse as major social problems.	30% of the respondents also agreed that the *hijras* continually face mental abuse in their everyday lives as well as experiences of physical violence from the law enforcers.		
Schemes availed	10% of the respondents availed subsidized rates while buying medicines.	While 90% on the other have not availed any government implemented schemes.		

Recommendations for the government	50% of the respondents recommended that the government should implement measures for employment and educational opportunities.	20% of the *hijras* on the other underscored on the salience of providing employment opportunities.	30% of the respondents stated that the government should initiate measures for health care schemes.	

3.6.21 DAKSHIN DINAJPUR

SEGMENT I: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Access to food	50% of the respondents consumed three meals every day.	While 50% on the other, only ate two meals every day.		
Water	40% of the respondents relied on their own private well as a water source.	30% on the other relied on common locality tube well as a source.	A small percentage (10%) had to buy water for their daily needs.	20% on the other relied on the local municipal tap.

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Ration	60% of the *hijras* depended on their locality grocery store for their ration needs.	40% on the other relied on charity of kind (rice, oil, dal etc.) provided by *jajman*and also their locality store.		
LPG access	60% of the respondents had no access to LPG	While 40% on the other had access to the same.		
Sanitation facilities	70% of the *hijras* had access to a common *pucca* toilet.	30% of the respondents on the other had access to common makeshift toilets with tin roof.		
Electricity	100% of the respondents stated that they			

	had access to electricity daily.			
Current residence	A majority of the respondents (70%) resided in rented rooms.	30% of the *hijras* lived in their own house.		

3.6.22 INCOME SOURCE/ OTHER OCCUPATIONAL ENGAGEMENTS/MONTHLY EXPENSES/FINANCIAL SECURITY/INCOME/MOVABLE/IMMOVABLE PROPERTY

Level of education	A majority of the respondents (30%) completed matriculation	20% on the other studied between classes 1-8.	A small percentage (10%) were home-schooled.	20% of the respondents completed their graduation.	20% of the respondents were illiterate.
Prior occupational engagements	10% of the *hijras* were masons and construction workers before joining the community.	Another 10% worked as agricultural labourers.	10% on the other worked as staffs in HIV/AIDS facilities.	10% of the *hijras* had worked as counsellor and member in Community based	A majority (60%) of the *hijras* did not work in any capacity before

				organizations.	joining the community.
Monthly Income	20% of the respondents earned between Rs. 5,001-10,000 p.m.	10% of the *hijras* on the other earned between Rs. 10,001-15,000 p.m.	20% of the *hijras* earned between Rs. 15,001-20,000 every month.	While 20% on the other earned between Rs. 20,001-25,000	30% of the respondents earned the highest, between 25,001-30,000 p.m.
Chief source of income	About 50% of the respondents relied on sex work, *tolibadhai*and challa/mangta for earnings.	40% of the respondents on the other claimed that they only engaged in *toli-badhai*for work.	10% of the respondents on the other relied on challa/mangat and *toli-badhai*for income.		
Monthly	20% of the	50% of the	30% of the		

expenses	respondents expended between Rs. 3,001-4,000 every month.	respondents spend between Rs. 5,001-10,000 per month.	*hijras* expended between Rs. 10,001-15,000 every month.		
Items spend on (monthly expenditure)	30% of the *hijras* expended on cosmetics, garments, family and household expenses.	60% of the respondents expended on ration supplies and charity work.	10% on the other expended on medical expenses and household items.		
Movable property	A majority (70%) of the respondents did not own any movable property.	10% of the *hijras* owned one two-wheeler cycle.	10% of the *hijras* owned gadgets and appliances.	10% of the respondents on the other owned jewellery, gadgets and electronic	

				appliances.	
Immovable property	80% of the respondents did not own any immovable property.	20% on the other owned a one storey house.			
Financial security/savings	60% of the respondents had not planned anything or saved for the future	While 20% of the respondents had invested earnings in savings bank account.	20% on the other expected their *celas* to look after them in old age.		
Financial dependents	70% of the respondents did not mention of any financial	10% of the respondents on the other stated that their	10% on the other had to look after their mother and siblings	10% of the *hijras* on the other had to support their brother and	

| | dependents. | old parents expected financial support from them. | with their earnings. | nephew. | |

3.6.23   SEXUAL   BEHAVIOUR,   MENTAL/SEXUAL   HEALTH   & GOVERNMENT INTRODUCED SCHEMES/PROVISION

Access to treatments	A majority of the respondents (40%) referred to private clinics for treatment.	30% of the respondents visited their local chemist shop for treatment.	10% of the respondents specifically referred to Patna private hospital for treatment.	20% on the other referred to government hospitals and doctors.
Diseases	A majority of the respondents (70%) did not mention of any known diseases.	10% of the respondents on the other suffered from infection in the groin area.	10% of the *hijras* complained of knee and leg with restricted mobility.	10% on the other complained of anal infection.

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Mental Illness	A majority (60%) of the respondents experienced episodes of stress and mental disturbance.	20% of the respondents complained of bouts of depression.	10% of the respondents on the other complained of melancholia and prolonged stress and anxiety.	10% of the *hijras* on the other did not suffer from any mental ailments.
Treatment/behaviour of doctors/nurses	70% of the respondents stated that they experienced neutral behaviour from doctors and medical staff.	10% on the other specifically mentioned that shared friendly relations with the doctors and staff in private clinic.	20% of the respondents experienced good behaviour and treatment from government doctors and staffs.	
Emasculated/non-emasculated state	40% of the respondents were emasculated.	10% on the other did not emasculate as they were born with a small	20% of the respondents were born male.	While 30% were born with a small

		inward penis.		size penis.
Emasculation process/technique	10% of the respondents relied on private on-call doctor to emasculate themselves.	20% on the other performed SRS surgeries.	50% of the respondents relied on quack clinics from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.	20% of the *hijras* relied on the traditional method of calling upon a *dai maa* for severing the organ.
Reasons to emasculate	60% of the *hijras* asserted that they identified as a woman.	20% of the *hijras* succumbed to the pressures of *guru* and community members to emasculate.	20% of the respondents on the other identified as a 'hijra' which led them to emasculate out of one's volition.	

Sex work	About 40% of the *hijras* also earned their living by soliciting sex from their clients.	60% of the *hijras* also engaged in sex work with their regular partners, boyfriends and clients.	
Condom procurement	60% of the respondents said that their clients buy their own condoms.	30% of the *hijras* said that they used condoms distributed by NGO/CBO's .	10% on the other relied on their local chemist shop.
Major problems/episodes of violence	20% of the respondents were victims of frequent molestation.	60% of the respondents were raped while dancing in programs in Bihar. They were also molested	20% of the *hijras* have also mentioned episodes of physical assault from one's own *celas.*

		during *badhai.*		
Social support	10% of the *hijras* did not have any social support.	40% on the other relied on their own community members.	30% on the other relied on their siblings and mother for social support.	20% of the *hijras* on the other depended on their *celas*and romantic partners for support.

3.6.24 SOCIAL STIGMA/EXCLUSION AND SOCIAL STATUS

Entry age	60% of the *hijras* joined the community between the ages of 16-17 years.	10% of the *hijras* joined at a young age 12 years old.	30% of the *hijras* joined between the ages of 18-19 years.	
Reasons for	40% of the	30% on the	30% on the other	

joining the community	respondents joined the community as they identified as a woman.	other joined the community because of social stigma and unacceptance.	joined the community as they identified as a *hijra.*	
Social exclusion	60% of the *hijras* experienced social exclusion from family members and locality people.	30% of the respondents reportedly experienced exclusion from locality, peer group and family members.	10% on the other experienced social exclusion from peer group in school and their friend circles.	
Guru/chela relation	60% of the *hijras* shared good/cordial relations with their community members,	20% of the respondents described their relation as that of a parent-child relationship.	20% on the other considered their relations with other members as professional.	

Social problems	40% of the respondents assert that lack of employment opportunities constitutes as one of the major problems for the *hijras*.	20% of the respondents on the other consider disrespect and inequality as social problems.	20% of the *hijras* on the other raised financial concerns as a major problem in the lives of the *hijras*.	20% of the respondents considered unemployment, unacceptance, inequality of lack of government aid as social problems.
Government schemes availed	All (100%) respondents stated that they have not received any benefits or provisions from the government.			
Recommendations	40% of the respondents suggested	While 20% on the other demanded	30% of the *hijras* considered their lives to be fraught	10% of the *hijras* recommended

	better healthcare benefits and employment opportunities for the *hijras.*	more inclusion, respect and equality for the *hijras.*	with dangers and instability, thereby recommending the government with educational opportunities and alternative/suitable livelihood measures for the *hijras.*	that the government should provide pension schemes for the elderly *hijras.*

3.6.25 MALDA

SEGMENT I: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Access to food	60% of the respondents had access to only two meals per day	While 40% of the respondents consumed three meals every day.		
Ration	40% of the respondents relied on their local *kirana*store for ration.	40% on the other relied on ration shop and their local grocery store.	While 20% of the respondents depended on the rations given by jajman and their area grocery shop.	

Water	30% of the *hijras* relied on locality tube well as water source.	10% of the respondents on the other bought water from private sources.	30% on the other had access to locality municipal tap.	30% of the *hijras* had their own private well.
LPG	60% of the respondents did not have access to LPG connection.	40% of the *hijras* on the other had access to LPG.		
Electricity	All respondents (100%) had access to electricity at all times.			
Sanitation	40% of the respondents had access to common *pucca* toilet outside their house.	30% of the *hijras* had access to a semi *pucca* common toilet.	30% of the *hijras* on the other hand had common *pucca* toilet inside their house.	
Residence	20% of the *hijras* lived at their guru's rented place	20% on the other lived at their *guru's* own house.	40% of the respondents lived separately in rented rooms.	20% of the respondents on the other lived with their parents and

				sometimes with their partners.

3.6.26 INCOME SOURCE/ OTHER OCCUPATIONAL ENGAGEMENTS/MONTHLY EXPENSES/FINANCIAL SECURITY/INCOME/MOVABLE/IMMOVABLE PROPERTY

Level of Education	30% of the respondents were illiterate	30% on the other completed their matriculation.	20% of the *hijras* studied between classes 1-8	20% of the respondents however were graduates.
Movable Property	30% of the respondents owned jewellery, gadgets and appliances.	40% of them had some monetary savings.	While 40% on the other did not own any movable property.	
Chief source of income	50% of the respondents earned by engaging in	10% on the other engaged in sexwork and begging in	While another 10% engaged in sex work and	30% on the other earned by begging in trains and

	tolibadhai, begging in trains and dancing in certain festivals.	trains.	challamangta.	doing challamangta.
Immovable property	50% of the respondents did not own any immovable property.	30% of the *hijras* inherited some familial property (land).	20% on the other owned a one storey house.	
Monthly income	20% of the *hijras* earned between Rs. 5,001-10,000 every month.	20% on the other earned a monthly of Rs. 15,001-20,000.	60% on the other earned between Rs. 20,001-25,000 p.m.	
Monthly expenses	30% of the respondents expended between Rs. 5,001-10,000 p.m.	While another 40% spend between Rs. 10,001-15,000 every month.	20% of the respondents spend between Rs. 15,001-20,000	10% of the *hijras* spend Rs. 20,001 upwards.

Monthly expenditure (items they expend on)	*60*% of the respondents spend on *hijra* household expenses, jewellery and cosmetics.	40% on the other had to bear medical expenses, donation to charity work and their personal expenses.		
Financial dependents	24% of the respondents said that their parents and siblings expected their financial support.	While 60% of the respondents did not have any dependents.		
Future security (financial savings)	10% of the *hijras* relied on community support in old age.	30% of the *hijras* on the other invested in savings in the bank.	30% of the respondents had their own personal savings.	While 30% of the respondents had not planned or saved for the future.

3.6.27 SEGMENT II: SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR, MENTAL/SEXUAL HEALTH & GOVERNMENT INTRODUCED SCHEMES/PROVISION

Access to treatment	40% of the respondents referred to private clinics in their region for treatment.	20% on the other relied on traditional community methods and their local chemist shop.	20% referred government hospitals for treatment.	20% on the other consulted private hospitals for treatment.
Treatment of medical staffs/doctors/nurses	40% of the *hijras* experienced neutral treatment/behaviour in their encounters with medical staffs in private hospitals.	20% of the *hijras* complained of late treatment, absence of separate toilets and wards (for *hijras)* in government	10% of them experienced positive treatment/behaviour from staffs of their local drugstore.	30% on the other received good treatment in local government hospitals.

		hospitals.		
Diseases	60% of the respondents suffered from infection due to emasculation, anal infection (because of intercourse) and hormonal changes due to oral consumption of pills.	10% on the other suffered from back and joint aches.	30% of the respondents on the other were not afflicted with any diseases.	
Mental ailments	About 40% of the respondents suffered from bouts of suicidal thoughts and anxiety issues.	10% on the other experienced intense mental distress because of community disputes.	50% on the other did not experience/suffer any episodes of mental ailments.	
Emasculated/non-emasculated	A majority, 80% of the respondents were emasculated.	While 20% of the respondents did not		

		emasculate.		
Reasons for emasculation	40% of the *hijras* disliked their masculine body and wanted to align their feminine identity with their body.	While 20% on the other emasculated to please their male romantic partners.	30% of the respondents emasculated because they identified as a *hijra.*	10% of the *hijras* on the other emasculated to widen their income earning avenues.
Emasculation procedure	70% of the respondents visited quack clinics in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh to operate.	10% of the respondent referred their personally known doctors.	20% on the other underwent vaginoplasty and breast implants than just mere emasculation in SRS clinics.	
Condom procurement	About 30% of the *hijras* bought condoms from available chemist shops.	70% on the other said that their clients brought their own		

		condoms.		
Social support	About 60% of the *hijras* relied on their own community members for social support.	While 30% on the other depended on their siblings and celas for emotional and social support.	10% of the *hijras* looked for support from their *giriyas*or boyfriends.	

3.6.28 SEGMENT III: SOCIAL STIGMA/EXCLUSION AND SOCIAL STATUS

Entry age	About 60% of the respondents entered the community between 15-16 years of age.	10% of the respondents joined the community between 10-11 years of age.	While 30% of the respondents entered the community between 17-18 years of age.	
Reasons for joining the community	40% of the respondents stated that their need for	20% of the respondents on the other	40% on the other considered their identification as	

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	feminine expression was fulfilled by joining the community.	asserted that they primarily joined the community as a means of sustaining oneself.	a *hijra* to be the sole reason.	
Guru/chela relations	40% of the respondents considered their relations with community members as 'professional', wherein everyone is expected to work daily and earn.	40% on the other compared their relationship with others as that of 'parents' and 'children' or a mother daughter relationship.	20% of the *hijras* on the other deemed their relationships as cordial and friendly.	
Social problems/exclusion	60% of the respondents considered the systemic oppression at	40% on the other consider financial paucity and lack of		

	familial and social levels as problems that impedes them from accessing all entitlements such as education, employment and equality.	employment opportunities as major social problems.		
Schemes availed	All respondents (100%) did not avail any government implemented schemes or provisions.			
Recommendations	30% of the respondents suggested the implementation of pension scheme for elderly *hijras.*	40% on the other demanded reservations for jobs and education.	30% on the other suggested mass sensitization to spread awareness and lessen the stigma.	

3.6. 29 KOLKATA

SEGMENT I: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Access to Food	A majority (70%) of the *hijras* had access to three meals per day.	While 30% of the *hijras* only consumed two meals every day.		
Ration	About 60% of the *hijras* relied on their locality grocery store and vegetable *mandi* (market) for supplies.	While 40% on the other depended on their BPL and ration cards to have access to supplies from the government ration store.		
Food Subsidies Availed	About 70% of the respondents had access to ration and BPL cards.	While 30% of the *hijras* did not have access to any food subsidies.		
Water	40% of the respondents depended on municipal	7% on the other relied on tube well as a water source.	13% on the other had access to locality taps	40% had access to modern plumbing

	corporation taps.		but also purchased filtered water for cooking and drinking.	systems for water.
Electricity	All respondents (100%) had access to electricity at all times.			
Residence	37% of the *hijras* lived in rented rooms.	While 27% of the respondents resided in *hijra* gharanas (rented rooms) managed by their *gurus.*	13% on the other chose to live at their partner's residence.	23% of the *hijras* on the other lived in their own house/ flats.
Sanitation	About 80% of the *hijras* had access to common *pucca* toilets attached with rooms.	20% of the respondents had access to common *pucca* toilets constructed in their yards.		

Level of education	A majority (37%) of the respondents completed their matriculation.	27% of the interviewees on the other studied between standards 1-8.	17% of the *hijras* completed their HSC (or plus two).	While 13% finished their graduation degree.	It was only a small percentage (6%) who were illiterate.	
Reasons for dropping out	33% stated lack of financial support as the primary reason for dropping out.	20% on the other cited the absence of familial support and financial burdens as reasons for dropping out.	17% of the *hijras* on the other were disinterested in pursuing studies.	A small percentage (3%) reportedly experienced bullying and harassment in their school causingthem to drop	20% of the *hijras* experienced double encounters of familial and social stigma which in turn discouraged them	While another 7% experienced harassment from their peer groups and teachers

			out.	from pursuing their studies any further.	forcing them to discontinue their studies.	
Monthly income	A majority (37%) of the *hijras* earned an income of Rs. 5,001-10,000.	17% of the respondents earned between Rs. 10,001-15,000 p.m.	While another 17% fell under the income bracket of Rs. 15,001-20,000 p.m.	A small percentage (10%) of respondents earned between Rs. 1,001-5,000 p.m.	19% of the respondents on the other earned more than Rs. 20,000 per month.	
Chief source of income	33% of the respondents relied only on *toli-badhai* for earning one's income.	13% of the respondents on the other depended on *challa* and *toli-badhai* as	16% of the *hijras* engaged in laundanaach, tolibadhai and	10% of the respondents worked as launda dancers and in *khajra* or sex	10% of the *hijras* worked as dancers in programs and also engaged as	Another 10% of the *hijras* depended on *toli-badhai* and *tyohari* for	While another 8% solely relied on dance programs

		two chief sources of income.	marriage functions (lagan).	workers.	sex workers.	income.	and *launda*na ach as sources of livelihoo d.
Monthly expenditu re	A majority (77%) of the *hijras* expended between Rs. 5,001-10,000 every month.	While another 17% of the *hijras* spend between Rs. 1,001-5,000 p.m.	A small percentage of respondent s (6%) had expenses above Rs. 25,000 every month.				
Items expended on	24% of the total respondents expended on clothes, cosmetics,	10% of the respondents spend on clothes, cosmetics and	13% of the respondent s expended on everyday	16% of the respondents spend on *gharana* expenses, personal	20% of the *hijras* expended on clothes, jewellery and	17% on the other spend on familial expenses and shares	

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					gharana expenses.	given to *guru.*	
	familial expenses and share given to their *guru.*	contributed to *guru's share.*	personal expenses and gave a portion of their earnings to *guru.*	expenses, share given to *guru* and farewell ceremony for the *guru.*			
Movable Property	20% of the respondents owned jewellery	While another 7% owned both jewellery and furniture.	A majority (70%) of the respondents did not own any movable property.	A small percentage (3%) of the respondents owned one two-wheeler cycle.			
Immovable Property	12% of the *hijras* owned one room and one toilet flat in Kolkata.	3% of the respondents owned a two-storey building in *Belghoria,* Kolkata.	3% of the respondents owned a two-bedroom house, ground floor in	3% of the *hijras* owned 0.83-acre plot of land in Narendrapur, West Bengal	While another 3% owned 0.24 acres of land and house in Sonarpur.	3% of the respondents owned two BHK, common toilet flat in Kolkata.	Conversely, 73% of the *hijras* did not own any immovable le

			Kolkata.			property.
Future Savings	37% of the *hijras* invested in savings account for furture security.	While 13% of the *hijras* had invested in life insurance.	17% of them had personally saved money for future use.	Conversely, 33% on the other had not planned, saved or invested for future financial security.		
Financial dependents	A majority of the respondents (57%) stated that they had no financial dependents.	9% of the respondents mentioned that their younger siblings depended on them for monetary support.	20% of the respondents had to support their entire family financially.	14% of the respondents on the other had to monetarily support their parents in their old age.		

3.6.31 SEGMENT II: SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR, MENTAL/SEXUAL HEALTH & GOVERNMENT INTRODUCED SCHEMES/PROVISION

Access to Treatments	23% of the respondents referred to private hospitals and clinics for treatment.	While 3% on the other relied on private and homeopathy clinics.	27% of the respondents referred to government hospitals for treatment.	Another 27% of respondents only referred private clinics for diseases and treatment.	7% of the *hijras* referred to both private and government hospitals.	13% on the other only referred to private hospitals for treatment.
Treatment meted out to the *hijras* by medical staffs.	47% of the respondents replied in affirmative saying that they received positive treatment.	23% on the other said that the staffs were unprofessional and experienced tardy treatment.	While 30% on the other received neutral responses from the medical staff and doctors.			
Diseases	73% of the respondent	6% of the *hijras*	Another 3% was	6% of the respondents	3% of the respondent	9% of the interviewees

	s did not report of any diseases.	suffered from anal skin rupture and jaundice.	diagnosed with heart problems due to consumption of breast enhancement drugs.	on the other complained of chicken pox and dengue.	s on the other were diagnosed with arthritis.	experienced pain due to accumulation of pus in genital area.
Mental illness	70% of the respondents were not diagnosed with any mental illnesses.	17% of the *hijras* mentioned their past experiences with psychological abuse and torture induced chronic mental trauma.	While 13% on the other experienced bouts of suicidal tendencies.			
Natal sex category	17% of the respondents were born with a	A majority (73%) of the hijras were born males.	10% of the respondents on the other were born			

	small penis.		as intersexed.		
Emasculation procedure	Almost 70% of the respondents mentioned that their surgery was performed by quacks.	10% of the respondents on the other claimed that they were operated by a private certified doctor.	17% of the *hijras* on the other chose not to emasculate.	3% of the interviewees adhered to the traditional method of castrating it by calling upon the community *dai-maa.*	
Reasons to emasculate	Almost 37% of the respondent claimed that their *guru maa* pressurized them to emasculate.	27% of the respondents on the other identified as a woman and considered emasculation as crucial to align their body with identity.	20% on the other asserted that their identity as a *hijra* compelled them to emasculate.	6% of the respondents on the other stated that their family pressurized them to emasculate.	10% of the respondent reasoned the futility of 'keeping the organ'. Thus, the respondent simply wanted riddance

					from the organ.	
Procurement of condoms (for sex workers)	13% of the *hijras* relied on the local chemist store.	77% of the *hijras* received condoms from local NGO and CBO organizations .	10% of the *hijras* on the other said that their clients brought their own condoms,			
Sexual abuse/physical assault	Almost 46% of the respondents have experienced molestation.	7% of the respondents have experienced the trauma of rape.	27% of the *hijras* on the other have suffered from familial physical abuses.	7% on the other have experience traumatic physical and sexual assaults from their *giriyas*or romantic partners.	3% of the *hijras* who engage in sex work have suffered sexual abuse from their clients.	10% of the *hijras* on the other have experienced physical violence in the *hijra* household.
State sponsored healthcare	A small percentage 7% have	93% of the respondents on the other				

provisions	availed the provision of buying medicines at subsidized rates.	have stated that they haven't availed any provisions.				

Entry age to the community	20% of the *hijras* joined between the ages of 15-16.	13% of the *hijras* joined between the ages of 18-19.	19% of the respondents entered the community between 13-14 years of age.	13% of the *hijras* joined between the ages of 16-17.	13% of the *hijras* on the other joined between 11-12 years of age.	9% of the respondents joined as early as 9-10 years of age.	While 3% of them joined when they were 20 years old.

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Reasons for joining the community	A majority (83%) of the *hijras* stated social stigma and unacceptance from family/locality as reasons for joining the community.	While 16% of the respondents stated financial problems as well as unacceptance from family as reason for joining the community				
Relationship with *guru/chela*	33% of the respondents said that they shared a cordial	20% of the *hijras* described it as a mother-daughter relationshi	Similarly, 3% of the *hijras* described it as a close relationshi	While 43% on the other deemed it as a professi		

	relationship.	p.	p.	onal relationship.			
Social support	10% of the respondents considered their *guru maa* to be their biggest social support.	17% of the *hijras* considered their *gothiya* or sister in the community as someone trustworthy and close.	3% of the respondents considered their siblings to be their biggest social support	while 3% of the interviewees considered their mother as social support.	7% of the respondents deemed their romantic partners and wife for social support	40% of the respondents deemed their *guru* and *celas* as social support.	20% of the respondents considered their friends and siblings to be their support system
Social problems	20% of the respondents	40% of the respondents considered	20% of the respondence asserted that lack	20% of the respondents on			

	considered lack of education, healthcare facilities, employment opportunities, family torture, stigma, sexual violence and financial insecurities as major social problems.	societal unacceptance and lack of familial support as major social problems.	of government support which directly translates as unemployment, social stigma and sickness ask social problems	the other considered poverty and absence of familial support as extremely problematic.			
Recommendations	10% of the	30% of the hijras	40% of the respondent	while 20% of			

	responde nts suggest that the governme nt should improve healthcar e, conduct sensitizati on programs, reservatio ns, social welfare programs and equality for the hijras.	recommen d the governme nt should implement measures for economic upliftment and schemes to benefit old age hijras.	s recommen ded that the governme nt should implement gender equality for all, provide free education and vocational training and employme nt opportunit ies.	the respond ents suggest ed that loans should be easily availabl e for the hijras, marriag e laws should be amende d, and social sensitiz ation should take place.			

3.6.33 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

ACCESS TO BASIC NEEDS

As per Chiappero& Martinetti, the concept of basic needs or BN can be defined as an admixture of all the essential requisites that are needed for the sustenance of a fairly fulfilling life (Chiappero& Martinetti, 2014). Essential goods, commodities and services such as access to food, potable water, clothing, healthcare, shelter and education are typically needed to ensure a decent life (Ibid). They further dilate the definitional parameters of basic needs by incorporating other needs such as expression of individuality, personal autonomy and independence (Ibid). McGregor in his work further expounds on human needs by dividing it into four prongs viz. physiological or bodily needs (which also includes safety and security), social needs or the need to gain acceptance and belonging in their social milieus, the fulfilment of individual aspirations, the need for social recognition, social status and respect and lastly, the need for self-growth and development (McGregor, 1960, pp. 313-315). McGregor's approach resonates with the earliest literature on 'basic needs' propounded by Albert Maslow in the year 1942 (Emmerij et. al, 2009). Maslow identified five divisions of needs which are categorized into hierarchical rungs (Lester, 2013). Maslow commences with the fundamental human needs (required for proper body functioning) and then proceeds with other cultural and social needs (Emmerij et. al, 2009). Drawing on such hierarchical rungs, the International Labour Organization (ILO) conceptualized basic needs as having access to food, shelter, transportation, education and clothing (Ibid). Similarly, the NALSA verdict of 2014 also safeguards freedom of expression, speech and dignity of one's life under article 19 and 21. The socioeconomic analysis of basic needs of

the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata therefore employs the definitional framework of the above formulations and subsumes access to food, water, access to ration supplies, sanitation facilities, electricity access, LPG gas connection, residence and education under the rubric of BN or basic needs. In terms of daily access to food, all *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata consumed meals at least twice a day. However, not all *hijras* had access to three full meals a day, which is a standardized nutritional requirement. The *hijras* of Darjeeling (60%), Alipurduar (80%), Jalpaiguri (60%), Malda (60%), Uttar Dinajpur (80%), Dakshin Dinajpur (50%), Cooch-Behar (60%) and Kolkata (70%) consumed three meals per day. The rest of the *hijra* respondents from Darjeeling (40%), Alipurduar (20%), Jalpaiguri (30%), Malda (30%), Uttar Dinajpur (20%), Dakshin Dinajpur (50%), Cooch-Behar (40%) and Kolkata (30%) had to sustain themselves only on two meals every day. Such disparities in terms of meal consumption can be attributed to 1) the hierarchical divisions of *gurus* and *celas*wherein the latter is delegated with household (cooking and cleaning) and field duties (such as begging for alms and *toli-badhai*) due to which the *celas* forego their meals. It is also necessary to mention that not all meals they consume meet the nutritional standards. For instance, while going about their field duties, they often consume whatever is quickly available in small tea joints or in other small eateries. 2) The nutritional disparity can also be attributed to the demands of the *guru* imposed upon their *cela*to earn a certain sum by the end of the day due to which they may skip their meals or just consume two meals per day. However, there are instances wherein the *celas* have deliberately chosen to overwork in order to earn more for themselves. Understandably, when inducted into the *hijra* community, access to adequate food and nutrition is relatively contingent upon one's rank within the household. The

pressure to earn more and the urgency to contribute to one's *guru* and household physically and mentally exerts the *celas* thereby precluding them from leading a healthy lifestyle. Another important element under the basic needs rubric is access to water. The *hijras* across the regions of North Bengal and Kolkata had private and public access to water. Those who were more affluent than others could afford internal plumbing systems to meet their daily water requirements while others had to resort to public water dispensation systems. In Darjeeling district for example, only 20% of the *hijras* could source their water from their rented places and the landlord's private well supplemented with occasional purchase of potable water. While 80% on the other had to resort to municipal locality taps as well as potable water. In Alipurduar, a majority of the *hijras* i.e. 80% depended on public taps for water high in iron content while the rest 20% purchased water from shops to cook and drink. They also requested their neighbours to supply them water. 70% of the respondents in Jalpaiguri relied on local municipal water sources and locality tube well for water supply, while 20% had their own private well. 10% on the other resorted to purchasing water from private sources, such as their neighbours and some shops. In Cooch-Behar, 50% had to rely on public municipal taps, 10% on the other had access to water provided by the landlord and also purchased drinking water from shops while 40% did not rely on any source and had to purchase water. The *hijras* of Uttar Dinajpur relied on a combination of public and private water sources i.e. 50% of them depended on locality tube well and municipality tap while the other 50% relied on their own private well. In Dakshin Dinajpur, 40% were privileged to have access to their own private wells but another 50% had to rely on public water sources. A small 10% purchased water for their daily needs. While in Malda, 60% of the *hijras* depended on public tube well/hand pumps and taps. 30%

on the other had their own private wells and 10% purchased water from private sources. In Kolkata, 60% depended on public sources such as taps and tube well/hand pumps but also had to purchase potable water. 40% on the other had access to internal plumbing systems at home. Like food and consumptive patterns, access to water is also determined by their place of residence (rented rooms, flats or own homes) which is usually chosen by their *gurus.* Some *hijras* choose not to live at their *guru's* residence giving them the freedom to choose their type of residence. Evidently, not all *hijras* have steady access to water at all times. As is clear from the data, *hijras* depend on multiple public and private sources to meet their daily water requirements. This in itself is indicative of the fact that they still encounter difficulties whilst accessing water owing to their location of the *gharana* (household) or paucity of water due to which they may have to purchase the same. Some *hijras* especially from Malda, Uttar Dinajpur and Kolkata were more privileged as they seem to have easy access to private wells and installed plumbing systems to supply water from the ground and other municipal sources. Barring a handful of *hijras* from few regions who had access to BPL and ration cards, a majority of the *hijras* across North Bengal and Kolkata had to purchase food and ration supplies from the local grocery store and weekly bazaar at usual retail rates. Quite many respondents also depended on their *jajmans*to procure everyday ration items such as oil, lentils and rice. Despite their crippling socioeconomic status, the majority of the *hijras* across North Bengal and Kolkata did not avail any state or central government initiatives with reference to food subsidies. Similarly, even with cooking fuel, especially LPG connectivity, a majority of the *hijras* across both the regions of North Bengal and Kolkata did not have access to LPG due to lack of identity proofs, documentation and simply financial paucity. Only 20% from

Darjeeling district, 40% from Dakshin Dinajpur and 40% from Malda had LPG connectivity. Conversely, in Jalpaiguri district and Kolkata, 70% and 60% of the *hijras* respectively cooked their food in LPG gas. The rest used portable mini gas cylinders and stoves fueled by kerosene. On the contrary, almost all respondents had access to electricity at all times. When it comes to sanitation facilities, the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata had access to well-constructed *pucca* toilets as well as poorly built *kuccha* toilets. Depending on their place of residency, the *hijras* had to either share a common toilet with other household members or enjoyed the privacy of having access to separate attached toilets in their rooms. Many respondents in the study could not afford to rent or buy a place of their own due to which they had to dwell with the others, share their room and sanitation facilities. During the field study, it was also noticed that in some *hijra* households in North Bengal, there were no separate bathrooms. As per data collected, the respondents used three types of sanitation structures i.e., solid concrete build *pucca* toilets, semi *pucca* toilets constructed of cement/bricks and corrugated tin sheets for ceiling and makeshift toilets made of unreliable and cheap materials such as plastic overalls, mud and bamboo. About 30% of the *hijras* in Darjeeling, 40% in Alipurduar, 20% in Jalpaiguri, 10% in Cooch-Behar and 30% in Dakshin Dinajpur used makeshift toilets which indicates that not all *hijras* have access to safe and sanitized latrine facilities. Their makeshift toilets lacked facilities of modern plumbing systems installed with taps and flushing mechanisms. It was also observed that their toilets were not connected with underground sewage systems. Clearly, such precarious installations pose multiple health hazards while adversely affecting living conditions. In terms of place of residence, not all *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata adhere to the traditional practice of living together with *gurus* and

*chelas*under one roof. The *hijras* who lived separately however, were still expected to contribute financially and help their *guru* manage household and other related works. Many *hijra* respondents did not own places they resided in and had to share rents with their community members, *gurus* or their partners. However, there were some *hijra* gurus who could afford to purchase and live in their own residence such as flats or a one to three storey house. Some *hijra* households from Malda, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur and Kolkata owned such properties but comparatively, they figure as a minority. But such property ownership is only asserted by the *gurus* indicating the heavy financial dependence of *celas.* Another important element of basic needs is access to proper education as the completion of it may determine one's social and economic position. About 80% of the respondents from Darjeeling district, 69% from Alipurduar, 20% from Jalpaiguri, 8% from Cooch-Behar, 30% from Uttar Dinajpur, 20% from Dakshin Dinajpur, 20% from Malda and 27% from Kolkata only studied between classes 1 to 8. As per the data there were only few instances wherein some *hijras* could complete their graduation degree. The reason for high rates of school dropouts in North Bengal and Kolkata can be primarily attributed to social stigma experienced in one's family, locality and neighbourhood, acute financial difficulties, harassment from peer groups and school authorities and gradual disinterest in pursuing studies.

3.6.34 INCOME, FINANCIAL SECURITY, INHERITANCE

Barring few cases of accessibilities of basic needs, the overall access to the same still falls short when considering the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata. In a similar strain, the second segment examines other fundamental needs required for one's daily sustenance, viz. one's earnings, their expenditure, their occupational

engagements, financial dependents and future financial securities. The majority of the *hijras* of Darjeeling, Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri, Maldah, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur, Cooch-Behar and Kolkata earned a maximum of Rs. 10,000, 10,000, 20,000, 20,000, 10,000, 30,000, 10,000 and 10,000 respectively. The monthly income range is contingent upon multiple factors such as one's position in a household (i.e., whether one is a *guru* or a *cela)*, one's hold over *ilakas* or marked territories to beg and engage in *toli-badhai*or one's choice of trains or other public transportations to engage in beggary. The *Bangladeshi hijras* for example enjoys more power in terms of numerical preponderance, dominance over territories and monetary or political clout. Inevitably, the *Bangladeshi hijras* are more affluent and powerful than the local or the native *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata. Such income inequities invariably affects one's standards of life, access to essential commodities and their overall lifestyle. Individual household norms such as the allocation of income between *gurus* and *celas*and the freedom to earn from other lucrative sources (i.e., other than the traditional engagements of *toli-badhai*) also determines the monthly income scale of the *hijras* across North Bengal and Kolkata. Similarly, a majority of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata relies on a blend of *'toli-badhai'* and *'challa-mangtai'* or *'gaarimaangna'* as their chief source of income. Due to the incursion of the *Bangladeshi hijras,* the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata have adopted the occupational patterns of *challa-mangtai*wherein the *hijras* ask for alms on trains, buses, on the streets, during festivals and to shop-keepers. Also, because of West Bengal's proximity to Bihar, the *hijras* of West Bengal have adopted the lucrative occupational practice of *'laundanaach'* or dance performers at events, social gatherings and other festivals. Some *hijras* of the region also engage in *'khajra'* or 'sex work' which deviates

from the traditional occupational norms of the *hijra* community due to which the *khajrawali hijras* (those who engage in sex work) are often condemned and disapproved of by the more traditional *hijras*. For want of income and identity politics in the region, the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata have diversified over the years primarily to augment their income. The findings further reveals that a majority of the *hijras* of these regions were not employed anywhere before joining the *hijra* community. However, some *hijras* were engaged as unskilled labourers such as agricultural labourers, minor construction workers and as field workers of non-governmental or community-based organizations. This clearly indicates that the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata (owing to poor educational background and socio-economic deprivation) were compelled to take recourse to low paying unskilled jobs to monetarily sustain themselves before joining the *hijra* community. With their monthly earnings, the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata typically expended on personal items such as cosmetics, clothes, share to their *gurus* and also financially contributed a portion of their income to their families. A majority of the *hijras* across both regions had to spend on make-up items, jewellery and new clothes because of their demanding profession of *hijragiri*. The *hijras* are often called to dance at events, birthday parties, marriage events and social gatherings as entertainers due to which they are always expected to appear 'attractive' and 'pleasing'. Surprisingly, despite experiencing social stigma, eviction from homes and familial unacceptance, many *hijras* of the region continued to shoulder financial responsibilities for their parents and siblings. Some of the *hijras* also took the responsibility to finance the education of their younger siblings, build or buy houses/flats for their parents and support them for their healthcare needs. But reportedly, many *hijras* felt that the degree of social stigma and unacceptance had

lessened over the years because of their financial support extended to their family. A major portion of their earnings are also expended to contribute towards social work and to purchase everyday items required for the *hijra* household. The *hijras,* in order to improve their social image or to prove themselves as good or noble members of the society often engage in philanthropic activities, such as distributing food and blanket to the poor. Sometimes, due to breach of community norms, disobedience, incursion to other *hijra* areas and reprehensible behaviour of the *hijras,* they are financially penalized by their *guru maa* or other *hijras* of the community wherein the perpetrator is expected to pay a certain amount (for e.g. 10,000, 30,000) to the *hijra* panchayat and the complainant. The *hijras* are also fined by other authorities such as the police personnel and railway police officials for beggary and sex work. Considering their profession, want of basic needs and their experiences of social stigma/societal unacceptance, many *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata had to spend their income on improving their relations with family and society, for their profession (to earn more) and to pay their dues leaving little for their own financial (future) security such as savings and investments. Perhaps, this is the reason why, many *hijras* are unable to secure their future financially. As per findings, a majority of them have not planned for any financial securities or savings. About 50% from Darjeeling, 60% from Alipurduar, 30% from Jalpaiguri, 80% from Cooch-Behar, 80% from Uttar Dinajpur, 60% from Dakshin Dinajpur, 30% from Malda and 33% from Kolkata had not planned for any future financial savings. Most of them relied on their personal savings of cash and jewellery and a few had opened savings bank accounts. The *hijras* also relied on their young *celas*and expected them for financial support and aid in their old age. As for their inheritance and ownership of immovable properties such as houses,

bungalows, lands or flats, only a minor segment of the *hijras* across North Bengal and Kolkata claimed ownership over lands and houses. While the *hijras* of Darjeeling (10%) inherited a piece of land from their family and 10% on the other owned a one storey house, the *hijras* of Jalpaiguri (20%) inherited paternal lands. 10% of the *hijras* from Cooch-Behar owned a *pucca* one storey house with 5 rooms while 20% of the *hijras* from Uttar Dinajpur are owners of houses (1 to 3 storeys high). Similarly, 20% of the *hijras* of Dakshin Dinajpurowned a one storey house. The *hijras* of Malda on the other inherited some family property (30%) and 20% on the other owned one storey house, while 27% of the *hijras* of Kolkata claimed ownership of properties like one BHK flat in Kolkata, two storeys building in *Belghoria,* two-bedroom house in Kolkata, 0.24 acres of land in *Sonarpur*and 2 BHK flat in Kolkata. For movable property, many *hijras* of both the regions possessed jewellery, mobile, gadgets, furniture and few owned cars and cycles. As per findings, the *hijras* who are financially secure (such as *Bangladeshi hijras* or native *hijras* working under *Bangladeshi hijra*s) claimed more ownership over movable and immovable property. It is possible to infer that the income and financial security of the *hijras* of the region largely depends on the affiliation or association with the *Bangladeshi hijras* who are considered as a politically powerful and financially strong community exerting dominance across *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata. One's affiliation and diversification of occupational engagements therefore determined their monthly income, expenses and overall life and living standards.

3.6.35 SEXUAL/MENTAL HEALTH AND ACCESS TO TREATMENT, GOVERNMENT SCHEMES AND PROVISIONS

Dukpa in her study on the *hijras* of West Bengal mentions about the plethora of mental and sexual health diseases that the *hijras* are afflicted with (Dukpa, 2019). The study further informs that the *hijras* are plagued with multiple mental health issues such as anxiety issues, stress, depression and suicidal tendencies (Ibid). They are also debilitated by sexual diseases such as HIV/AIDS, syphilis and gonorrhoea which can be attributed to their engagements with sex work (Ibid). Similarly, as per findings, the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata complained of mental, physical and sexual afflictions. Anal/anus rupture, obesity, fever, hormonal disorder, mental stress, complications post emasculation and gastric ailments were some of the health issues experienced by the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata. Many *hijras* from North Bengal and Kolkata mentioned their anal and groin area infections, anus rupture, abscess formation, obesity, mood swings, mental stress and joint paints as their recurrent health problems. Because of their professional and cultural demands, such as engagements in sex work, compulsory emasculation, hormonal treatments such as ingestion of hormonal drugs and injections (for sex change), obesity and joint paints (which is the subsequent effects of hormonal treatments, sex change and emasculation), mood swings (because of hormonal pills, professional and community pressures). Understandably, many ailments (physical and mental) of the *hijras* are associated with their culture and profession. For example, emasculation as a popular practice engenders many health complications such as pus formation and abscess infection in the groin area. Additionally, it is necessary to note that not all *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata have access to hygienic healthcare centres and certified doctors and nurses to ensure safe surgical

removal of their genitalia. Many *hijras* resort to quack centres in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh to have their organs emasculated as they are much cheaper than other medical hospitals. The *hijras* also feel 'reportedly' safer in quack centres as they are not penalized for undergoing castration or emasculation. While some *hijras* are fortunate enough to have access to certified health care professionals to undergo emasculation, not all *hijras* have access to the same. The reasons for emasculation too varied across *hijras* of the regions but mostly many respondents mentioned that their reasons to remove their organ was to augment their income and to conform to the norms laid down by their *gurus*. For mental health ailments, the *hijras* often relied on their friends, families, romantic partners and their *gurus* for social support. But for many *hijras,* their mental health ailments (depression, suicidal tendencies, mental stress) were triggered because of gender/sex identity confusion, identity crisis and past trauma (such as rape, sexual and physical abuse, molestation). Sometimes, such mental health ailments are also triggered by inter-household violence or disputes between *hijras* of the same area. Such disputes sometimes escalate to extreme cases of physical violence and murder. Evidently, many of the problems associated with the health concerns of the *hijras* can be attributed to their community practices, norms, occupational choices and community disputes. When asked about their preference for medical treatment many respondents replied that they relied on private chemist shops and private hospitals for treatment. However, there were others who relied on both private and government hospitals for consultation and cure. Some others also depended on alterative medicines such homeopathic treatments and their community prepared medicine. Barring few respondents in Kolkata who had access to subsidized

medicines, other respondentsdid not mention or avail any state or central government schemes and provisions specifically introduced for the *hijras.*

3.6.36 SOCIAL STIGMA/EXCLUSION AND SOCIAL STATUS

As per findings, the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata to experience public derision, familial unacceptance, lack of suitable employment opportunities, lack of healthcare provisions and educational facilities. The *hijras* of the regioncontinued to suffer from societal stigma and familial unacceptance which forces them to take recourse to the *hijra* community. The findings further seem to suggest that *hijras* across the regions of North Bengal and Kolkata did not receive any employment, healthcare benefits, food subsidies/ration and reservations. The elderly *hijras* of the region mentioned the lack of government aid in terms of financial support (such as providing pension benefits) or other state assisted care (old-age homes for the *hijras*). It was also known that the *hijras* were continually abused and suffered discrimination in the hands of the law enforcers, experienced stigma within their families/localities and even within their own communities.

3.6.37 MAINSTREAM SOCIETAL PERCEPTION OF THE HIJRAS

As an appendage analysis of the efficacy of the SC verdict of 2014, the following segment will thematically examine the societal perception of the mainstream society with regard to the *hijra* communities. The Supreme Court ruling of 2014 in its fifth directive to the central and state governments instructs them to introduce measures and schemes in order to facilitate social inclusion and to ensure equality for the transgender ilk. The transgenders and the *hijra* community of India, because of their conspicuous difference is instantaneously 'othered' and 'segregated' by the

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mainstream society. Kalra & Shah in their work on the *hijras* of India observes that constant experiences of stigmatization and marginalization on the *hijras* have had adverse effects on their mental health (Kalra & Shah, 2014). Similarly, Mal in his work on the *hijras* of Kharagpur, West Bengal mentions that they continually encounter episodes of mental abuse, physical assault and sexual trauma (Mal, 2015). Furthermore, Mal adds that the *hijras* are deprived of their basic human rights and lacks access to social, political and legal entitlements easily available to other citizens (Ibid). Also, as discussed in the precedent chapters, the *hijras* have been victims of social stigma through ages dating from periods of antiquity, medieval epochs, colonial and post-colonial periods (Jaffrey, 1996; Nanda, 1999; Sharma, 2009). Therefore, as an added inquiry to the socio-economic assessment of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata post the Supreme Court Verdict of 2014, a set of semi-structured interview questions were asked to individuals from the mainstream society primarily to apprehend their opinions, beliefs and perceptions of the *hijra* communities and their culture. The total sample of 120 was selected for representing respondents across the North Bengal Districts (Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri, Malda, Cooch-Behar, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur) and Kolkata. The total respondent count for each district was 15 wherein the samples were chosen via snowball sampling method. Considering the extent of homophobia, transphobia and social stigma directed against non-normative gender identities (such as the *hijra* community) and sexualities, the following thematic findings will examine the societal perception of the mainstream ilk to assess any changes of attitude and outlook vis-a-vis the *hijra* community post the Supreme Court ruling. The findings will be segregated into common themes as many

respondents across regions of North Bengal and Kolkata expressed commonalities in terms of responses and perception.

ABNORMALITIES OF GENITALIA AND THE BINARIES OF SEXES

Many respondents are of the view that the *hijras* are a result of biological aberrancy and abnormal sexual defects. They believed that it is primarily because of such gender and sex defects that the *hijras* have to live separately from the mainstream society. The respondents further expressed the need to cure such gender and sexual defects by medical intervention such as shock therapy and surgical interventions to correct their intersexed condition and gender confusion or dysphoria. The respondents also asserted that there are only two sexes with corresponding genders (male, masculine; female, feminine) which they deemed as normal sex/gender categories. They were also of the view that the *hijras* should conform to the binaries of heteronormative sex and gender identities if they are to be accepted by the mainstream society. The interviewees were also of the view that the *hijras* should abandon their cultural roles as singers, dancers and beggars to engage in conventional jobs which would in turn would help improve their social status and finances. They believed that the *hijras* were a strange lot living separately from the mainstream societies in their own communities and did not contribute anything productive to the society. Recalling their encounters with the *hijras,* many respondents were of the view that the *hijras* were an unruly and aggressive lot, extorting money from passer-by's or travellers by molesting them or groping their private parts. They were also of the view that the *hijras* would threaten to show their private parts if they were paid less or were if someone refused to pay. The respondents considered such acts to be a public nuisance which had to be

discouraged. They considered their reasons for begging for alms in return for blessings as 'bogus' based on 'old rumours'. When asked about the SC verdict of 2014, the respondents were of the view that the *hijras* need to be categorised under the binaries of either male or female sex but the ruling should provide necessary measures and entitlements to the community that would enable them to leave their engagements as singers/dancers or as beggars and gain re-entry into the society by engaging in modern conventional employment and livelihood options.

HIJRAS ARE HUMANS TOO

Unlike the first group of respondents, the second thematic grouping perceived the *hijras* as just another 'human' or human beings who should be treated with equality and respect. The respondents asserted that the *hijras* have the right to personal freedom and liberty as they are equal citizens of the country. Even with choices concerning gender identity and sexuality, the respondents were of the opinion that the *hijras* should be given freedom in terms of how they wish to express themselves and society should extend their full support. The respondents acknowledged and supported the Supreme Court Ruling of 2014 and believed that a separate third gender category would enable *hijras* to have access to education, basic needs and employment opportunities. However, they expressed disapproval with regard to their aggressive and bold behaviour when begging at public places. The respondents condemned against acts of extortion and molestation when *hijras* asked for money at trains or on the streets. Moreover, the respondents disapproved of their livelihood means as 'beggars' and they refused to believe in their powers to bless and to curse. The respondents, by considering them as 'humans' believed that the *hijras* had the capability of engaging in any domain or field of work and

believed that they could contribute efficiently to their society. The second grouping also held the belief that it is because of societal disapproval and outright unacceptance that the *hijras* are continually stigmatised and segregated from the mainstream society. In order to address this, the respondent considered it necessary that the society must undergo a major mindset shift in terms of the perception of gender and sexualities. The respondents reasoned that it is because of systemic failures that the *hijras* are 'othered' in the society. They held the view that the *hijras* face ridicule and discrimination when attempting to fit into the conventional normative society. They further reasoned that their inability to procure jobs, education and a decent livelihood proved that they were treated as sub-humans by the society.

HIJRAS ARE A COMMUNITY OF RICH AND POWERFUL PEOPLE

The third grouping of respondents are of the view that the *hijras* are an affluent community who owns bungalows, cars and earn millions. They think that the *hijras* are simply conducting their business of asking money from the rich during marriage events, dance programs and other social gatherings. They further opine that the *hijras* deliberately remain secluded from the mainstream society to enjoy higher incomes because as per them, the *hijras* charge anywhere between Rs. 35,000 to 50,000 per event. The respondents therefore believe that regardless of any government schemes or measures, the *hijras* would continue to clap, dance and beg for a living. The respondents however were of the opinion that such practices should be stopped as they believe that the *hijras* are not contributing anything to the society. The respondents further asserted that the government should intervene and provide them with suitable jobs. They held the view that the *hijras* created a lot

of unnecessary nuisance to the public just to earn more for themselves. Some respondents asserted that their *(hijras)* monthly income was higher than the national average as they believed that they earned anywhere between 300-400 rupees every day. While others expressed anger that despite government and legal measures, the *hijras* were unwilling to leave their community engagements to live a 'normal' and 'conventional' life.

HIJRAS ARE DIFFERENT FROM US, THEY SHOULD LIVE SEPARATELY

The final grouping of respondents sympathized with the conditions of socio-economic deprivation of the *hijras*but they also discerned them as a separate grouping from the mainstream society. They contended that the *hijras* are dramatically different from the 'normal society' in terms of behaviour, gender identity and in their ways of living. They acknowledged that their gender identity made them special and conferred on them special powers to bless people. They also took cognizance of the fact that the *hijras* cannot be blamed for their gender identity as they were born that way. They further asserted that the *hijras* should be given means to have access to better livelihood options, employment and educational opportunities. But conversely, they also believed that the *hijras* cannot adjust or assimilate into the mainstream society primarily because of their difference. When asked about the Supreme Court Verdict, the respondents agreed that the *hijras* should be subsumed under a separate third gender category for ease of accessibilities, but they asserted that the *hijras* should live in separate enclaves. The respondents reason that because of their 'gender' and 'sexual' difference and

chromosomal abnormalities, the *hijras* are to live separately from the mainstream society as they cannot adjust with the societal norms and lifestyles of the people.

3.6.38 CONCLUSION

Quite understandably, even after the declaration of the third gender verdict by the apex court in the year 2014, there are no significant changes in terms of the overall socio-economic conditions of the *hijra* community of North Bengal and Kolkata.An important development in West Bengal post the NALSA verdict of 2014 was the establishment of a separate board in July, 2015 namely, the West Bengal Transgender Development Welfare Board (Chaudhuri, 2017). The board was installed following the Supreme Court mandate of 2014 that directed the state and center to initiate necessary measures to engender social inclusion, opportunities and other requisite entitlements for transgender individuals (Ibid). Headed by Dr. Shashi Panja (minister for women and child development) as the chairperson along with 13 other members including Dr.ManabiBandopadhyay (first transgender principal of India) as the vice-chairman of the board, the West Bengal Transgender Development board organized its first meeting on the 28th of July, 2015 (Ibid). The meeting deliberated on pertinent issues, ranging from inclusive school curriculum, enhanced and sensitized medical staffs and facilities (especially Sexual Reassignment Surgery), building of basic amenities viz. restrooms specifically for transgenders and suitable employment opportunities among others (Ibid). In a similar vein, there were mentions of multiple provisions (in process of implementation) for the transgender community (Ibid). Construction of separate restrooms, SRS facilities and a medical panel of experts (specifically for sex-change) in government hospitals and segregated hospital beds with free treatment

among others were some of the proposed schemes/provisions designed by the West Bengal government for the benefit of the transgender community (Ibid). However, in spite of a positive start, the West Bengal Transgender Development Board failed to initiate and implement any concrete/effective measures for the transgenders even after completion of three years post its installation (Ibid). Ranjita Sinha, member of the Transgender board, activist and a key member of ATHB (organization in Dumdum, Kolkata) voices her scepticism with reference to the announcements made by the board concerning healthcare/SRS facilities, construction of restrooms for transgenders and other appropriate measures for their welfare (Ibid). Sinha asserts that a lack of effort on the part of members and the sporadic convening of meetings could be held responsible for the absence of any progress and development post the establishment of the board (Ibid).In another instance, Tista Das, a media personality and activist adds that the progressive initiative to install sexual reassignment surgery facilities in government hospitals across the state remains an unfulfilled promise. She further adds that the materialization of the SRS initiative would have enabled economically backward individuals to successfully undergo sexual reassignment surgery at a nominal cost. Similarly, an article published by the Centre for Law & Policy Research proffers an incisive analysis citing three major reasons for the failure of the board (CLPR, 2017). Firstly, it mentions the sheer lack of representation of the transgenders as members of the Transgender development board (Ibid). The broad rubric viz. 'transgender' subsumes an array of identities (transmen, transwomen, hijras, kothis etc.) and an absence of representation from each of these identities indicates the arbitrary selection of members constituting the board (Ibid). Secondly, the conceptual disagreement and identity politics between members, activists and individuals

concerning the 'transgender identity' produced confusion which may have impeded the implementation and development process (Ibid). And lastly, the sheer paucity of inflow of funds may have restricted various projects and effective implementation of provisions (Ibid). Furthermore, it mentions about the board's complete monetary reliance upon Bengal Government which hitherto has sanctioned only a paltry sum (Ibid). From a socio-economic vantage point, it critiques that the Transgender development board of West Bengal for being unable to satisfactorily mete out basic requirements viz. employment and educational benefits, purveying housing facilities and safeguarding their constitutional rights (Ibid).Similarly, as per primary findings, many *hijras* still don't have access to basic entitlements that are easily available to others. Institutionalized practices of patriarchy and heteronormativity further exacerbates their conditions as it makes them susceptible to experience social stigma and physical/sexual violence. Because of systemic oppression and lack of acceptance (which typically begins from their homes), the *hijras* are forced to join the *hijra* community wherein they are expected to engage as sex workers and dance workers which greatly increases their chances of sexual assault and murder. The *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata therefore suffer greatly in all aspects of life starting from their access to basic needs (such as clean water, food, education, residence), their lack of social and familial support, absence of a functional healthcare system, their poor health engendered by compulsory community practices, attempts of rape and homicide and inter household disputes pertaining to issues of area, power and dominance.Thus, taking into account the sub-par progress of the board, the flaws within the system that impeded any substantial development for the transgenders of West Bengal and the continued state of socio-economic deprivation of a majority of the *hijras* of North

Bengal and Kolkata, it becomes plausible to assert that such conditions continue to exist primarily due to poor policy planning and inadequate implementation.

CHAPTER - 4

NARRATIVES ON STIGMA: LIFE STORIES ON COPING, INTERPRETATIONS AND TRANSITIONS

"Thus, I was thrown out of my home by the very person who fathered me. I was left alone in the world, with nowhere to go"- Neha, Maharashtra (Saxena, 2011, pp. 245)

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Since antiquity, human societies have placed injunctions, decrees, and proscriptions against acts of deviance, behaviours that do not adhere to the 'approved' or normative societal standards. Drawing on the sociological conceptualization of 'socialization', individuals in a given society are continually indoctrinated to accept the norms, customs, ways of comporting, approved ideologies and belief systems usually promulgated by the dominant group or consensus (Harm & Marianne, 2000, pp. 47). Acts of rebellion against the existing status-quo or the unwillingness to conform often elicits penalization and policing against non-conforming entities (Janowitz, 1975, pp. 84). Here, it would necessitate recalling another crucial sociological concept viz. social control that simultaneously operates with socialization to preserve and maintain group consensus and to actively preclude any violations of the same (Janowitz, 1975). Social control deploys formal or informal agencies to regulate patterns of behaviour and to discipline the populace (Ibid). Legislations, peer groups, family, law enforcement et al. collectively constitute formal and informal agents of social control (Ibid). In a similar vein, societal disapproval, negative reactions, and expressions of disavowal are directed against individuals who violate accepted norms or who, owing to some personal defects of

character, physiology, immorality or depravity become subjected to such informal agencies of social control (Scott, 2006). In other words, individuals who deviate from societal parameters of 'normalcy' are typically inflicted with stigmatization and discrimination (Goffman, 1986). However, departing from the literal connotative meanings of the word viz. stigma, the structural-functional school of sociological thought perceives stigma in a varying light. With Emile Durkheim being the key proponent, the structural-functional school of thought advances the argument that acts of deviance catalyse or reinforce the norms and values (for e.g., being virtuous and functional) required for the maintenance of social equilibrium (Erikson, 2003). Furthermore, structural functionalists assert that deviance renders society into two schisms viz. the majoritarian normative/conforming ilk and the deviant 'other', or in other words the bifurcation of 'us' vs. 'them' (Ibid). Emile Durkheim posited that such a bifurcation re-affirmed and underscored the set normative values and beliefs of the society that were accepted and approved (Ibid). For instance, the binaries of heterosexuality and the 'tabooed' homosexuality, exemplifies the above theoretical assertion (Ibid). Particularly, in context to colonial India, the then judiciary decreed the arbitrary sec. 377 (1860) of the Indian penal code defining homosexual acts as reprehensible and violative of the 'natural order' (Hinchy, 2019). In Arondekar's work, *For the Record, On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India*, she invokes the colonial decree of Sec 377 (1860) that polices any sexual acts that defies the order of nature (Arondekar, 2006).Although the mandate does not explicitly direct its penalization by using the word 'homosexuals', it does make it clear that same-sex acts, acts of sodomy or sex that is tantamount to non-vaginal penile insertion are to be disapproved and prosecuted (Ibid). Hence, the colonial mandate legally emblazoned the cleavages between the

'natural/accepted' and the 'unnatural and deviant' sexual acts (Ibid). The repressive extent of the decree of sec. 377 manifested in one such case called *Queen-Empress vs. Khairati*, Allahabad (Ibid). *Khairati*was labelled as a 'habitual catamite' thereby convicting him as a sexual offender (Ibid). It is clear that the language used in the verdict articulated *Khairati's* condition as pathological, offensive and as an aberration. Sec. 377 and its subsequent verdicts, therefore, sought to reify and distinguish the 'normative lot' from the 'non-normative sexual other', subsequently engendering sexual hegemony and hierarchies (Hinchy, 2019; Arondekar, 2006). In a similar vein, Foucault in his work, the *Will to Knowledge* engages with the genesis of Victorian bourgeoise's imposition of prudery during the 17th century (Foucault, 1990). Foucault also foregrounds the Victorian enforcement of limiting sex for familial and procreative purposes only (Ibid). Therefore, in the process of moral policing, even verbal transgression and use of language referring to sexual pleasures in disagreement with the conjugal marital heteronormative sex were sanitized or repressed altogether (Foucault, 1990, pp. 2-3). The extensions of the Victorian culture manifested yet again in the Indian context by segregating cross-dressers from the rest of the natives by prosecuting them under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 (Jaffrey, 1996; Hinchy, 2019). They were arbitrarily labelled as offenders owing to their mannerisms, sartorial sense and primarily for identifying as a *'hijra'* (Ibid). Hence, they were further separated from the natives under the rubric of 'criminal tribes' (Ibid). Moreover, coupled with the mandate of Sec. 377 they were doubly oppressed by the then administration which was to carry negative repercussions in the days to come (Hinchy, 2019). An article published by Human Rights Watch asserts that the decree of sec. 377 also impacted colonies once subjugated under British administration viz. Uganda, Malaysia and continues to

influence countries in Asia, Africa and the Pacific Islands[95]. Furthermore, the article illustrates that the colonial mandate of sec. 377 also prosecuted individuals even after their respective countries gained independence (Human Rights Watch, 2008). For example, in countries like Uganda and Malaysia, groups and individuals were unfairly targeted by the state, media, law-enforcers and society under charges of conducting peaceful rallies for advocating the rights of the queer community and for committing acts of sodomy respectively (Ibid). Noticeably, the above instances validate the postulation put forth by the structural-functional school of thought wherein societies tend to exhibit the propensity to produce binaries viz. the 'normative' and 'non-normative other'. Binaries of similar sort continued to exist even in the post-independent Indian era (Wieringa, 2014; Bacchetta, 2014). Bacchetta for example in her work,argues that the Hindu nationalist organization, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) conceives of an 'ideal *Hindu* nationalist man' as someone who is virile, exhibits courage and courtesy (Bacchetta, 2014). Furthermore, these ideal Hindu men were expected to be a 'celibate asexual' (Ibid). However, Bacchetta cautions the reader not to interpret the word 'virile' along queer connotations of asexuality but virility that is very much embedded within heterosexual matrices (Ibid). Bacchetta posits that nationalist groups like RSS, therefore, propagate the ideology that a model Hindu man is a heterosexual who renunciates the familial/materialistic world to serve as a 'soldier' (Ibid). All others who do not conform to this paragon of 'manhood' was deemed to be as 'queer' expressed in a disparaging sense (Ibid). Popular political factions like these clearly outline the contours of 'model masculinity' and defines male sexuality that conveniently concurs with the ideal gendered conception of a 'Hindu man' (Ibid).

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[95]https://www.hrw.org/report/2008/12/17/alien-legacy/origins-sodomy-laws-british-colonialism

Understandably, the Hindu right-wing group of India defines and fashions the ideal masculine 'gender' and 'sexuality' (Ibid). In fact, they go a step further to create sharp schisms between a supposed 'queer male' and the 'virile Hindu male' (Ibid). Moreover, such schismatic and hierarchical undercurrents of gender and sexuality are more or less ubiquitous across India (Ibid). Apart from right-wing propaganda, one of the chief reasons that engender gender inequities is institutionalized patriarchy and the ideologies of the same which legitimizes the ordering of men and women in roles of superiority and inferiority respectively (Yang, 2020; Walby, 1990). Kakar in his work, deploys literary sources to examine the gender disparities between boys and girls (Kakar, 2009). He cites the works of Mrinal Pandey to foreground the experience of being a girl in an Indian family wherein the birth of a boy is treasured and valued much more than that of a girl (Ibid). Additionally, Kakar shores his argument by referring to empirical census demonstrating gross gender inequities and instances in which case the girl child is highly susceptible to encounter and experience gender discrimination and prejudice (Kakar, 2009). In a similar strain, Sumanjeet in his work, revealed disturbing figures on gender disparity in India (Sumanjeet, 2016). The article informed that India stood at a grim 0.48% which indicated exceedingly high rates of gender inequality as per the 2015 Mckinsey Global Institute report (Ibid). Furthermore, the author mentions that comparatively, India lacks in almost every criterion with respect to gender inequality index from other neighbouring countries viz. Pakistan and Bangladesh (Ibid). The author further advances the assertion that gender inequalities in India can be primarily attributed to patriarchy (Ibid). Likewise, Amutha in her work, validates the above claim by attributing patriarchy as one of the many social reasons that contribute towards gender discrimination (Amutha, 2017). Amutha

further points out that in terms of gaining equal access to the labour force, education and employment, the preponderance of male access over female continues unabated in India (Ibid). Clearly, gender disparities and the presence of patriarchy produces far-reaching and pernicious consequences. In India, the age-old socio-cultural belief systems of male superiority, male patriliny, son preference, dowry et. al stigmatizes and relegates the women ilk disempowering them from accessing education, employment, and healthcare (Kakar, 2009). Considering the case of gender identities and roles in India, stigma as a deterrent was pervasive and salient in the sense that it aided in the reinforcement of practices viz. gender inequalities, maintaining archetypal modes of gender behaviour, sustenance of gender hierarchies, supporting the patriarchal ideology and the gender modes of being that was 'accepted and approved' by the larger society (Sharma, 2009). In a country largely dominated by patriarchal and patrilineal ethos, the burden of stigma therefore heavily subjugates the 'other' of the gender equation viz. women, transgenders, homosexuals and so forth (Kakar, 2009; Chakrapani et. al, 2018). Hence, it is within such social matrices that the present chapter seeks to address the taboo ridden and marginalized societal position of the *hijra* community which exists as a separate 'third gender' subculture. The hegemonic dominance of patriarchy is all-pervasive because it transcends the heteronormative enclave to subjugate all other genders and sexualities that do not conform to the parameters of compulsory heterosexuality (Walby, 1990; Menon, 2012). Menon in her incisive examination of sexual violence in her work, rightly mentions about the connexion between the legal apparatuses and the patriarchal structures of the country that works in conjunction to protect patriarchal traditions and customs (Menon, 2012). Menon informs that sec. 377 of the IPC ensures that heterosexuality (vaginal penile

insertion) continues to be the approved norm (Ibid). Menon adds that heterosexuality invariably upholds and sustains the structures of patriarchy and patrilineal descent (Ibid). Furthermore, patriarchy and the ideology of heteronormativity perpetuates the dehumanization of individuals who deviate from or challenge the correspondence between sex and gender congruence (Yang, 2020). In concordance with the subject under study, the marginalized *hijra* subculture and their experiences of social stigma and discrimination exemplify the direct repercussions of not conforming with the same. The *hijras* express themselves in ways contrary to the archetypes of masculinity, viz. to be virile, domineering, aggressive or bold. Their conspicuous effeminacy in terms of dress, comportment, speech and their atypical sexualities contrast and contest the heteronormative masculinities (Yang, 2020). In a similar strain, sociologist R.W. Connell in her work postulates about the hierarchical divisions that grade men into different rankings wherein the 'hegemonic masculine male' figures in the upper echelons wielding power whilst the homosexual/effeminate males occupy subordinate 'lowly' positions (Ibid). Considering the *hijra* community's liminal existence and the pervasive presence of patriarchy, one can draw parallels with and apply the insights proffered by Connell wherein hegemonic masculinities invariably assumes a powerful status only to repress the ones below them (Ibid). The *hijras*, therefore, are highly likely to experience public derision, mockery and social stigma because they explicitly contest the notions of masculinity as perpetuated by the systems of hegemonic masculinities (Chakrapani, 2010). To illustrate further, Saxena in his work, documents the experiences of stigma using narratives of the hijras living across India (Saxena, 2011). Saxena observes that the *hijras* experience episodes of sadness and loneliness early on in their livesbecause of their experiences of gender

identity and physiological changes (Saxena, 2011, pp. 239). Additionally, continual experiences of mockery, humiliation and derision were part of their lives (Saxena, 2011, pp. 228). Noticeably, their early encounters with the segregation between normalcy and aberration negatively impacts their overall lived experiences. Similarly, Chettiar in her work, foregrounds the problematic and exploitative relation between the *hijras* and the law enforcers (Chettiar, 2015). Chettiar brings to light of one such unfortunate incident, wherein a hijra beggar recalls her encounter of extreme sexual violence perpetrated by a group of policemen (Ibid). Furthermore, Mal in his work on the *hijras*,mentions the high susceptibility rate (about 87%) of the *hijras* to experience social persecution because of their gender identity (Mal, 2018). Moreover, he informs that most have had to suffer from a lot of problems before acknowledging their gender identity (Ibid). Therefore, taking into account the permeating presence and effects of stigma on the lives of the *hijras,* the present research attempts to apprehend and document their experiences of social stigma, their hitherto journey, struggles and interpretations of the same by employing the life story method, a subset of the broader biographical method. The findings of the study will be analysed within the theoretical parameters of Erving Goffman's seminal work, *Stigma-Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963).

4.2 GOFFMAN'S STIGMA AND THE LIFE STORY METHOD

According to Merriam Webster's dictionary, a stigma is a mark of shame or discredit[96]. In the antecedent periods, particularly in the Grecian era, stigma was perceived as a literal mark on one's body to signify aberrations of moral character or flaws, for e.g., a convict or someone who may have committed treachery

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[96]https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stigma (Accessed on 01.05.2019)

(Goffman, 1986, pp. 1). Invoking the earlier argument of structural functionalism, stigma produces unequal differences between the conforming and the non-conforming groups in order to suppress and persecute deviant acts and to encourage compliance (Erikson, 2003). Hence, social stigma also acts as a deterrent to regulate behaviours of the populace by discouraging acts of rebellion and dissent in the process. However, a discourse on stigma wouldn't suffice without referring to Erving Goffman's ground-breaking work on stigma wherein he proffers an incisive analysis of stigma redefining the concept as a relative attribute that needs to be examined by situating it within certain contexts or socio-cultural matrices (Goffman, 1986). To reiterate, it is important to acknowledge that the attribute that elicits reactions of stigma is relative and contingent upon spatial/temporal/cultural contexts. Goffman whilst defining stigma observes that stigma per se does not reside in the individual or the audience but rather the relationship between the 'stigmatising attribute' and the audience (Goffman, 1986). For Goffman, therefore, 'stigma' is not tantamount to an immutable external universal principle that binds people and societies across time and space but rather is predicated on how societies, groups or communities structure what is to be desired and undesired which too transmutes from one period to the next. Thus, there are no fixed sets of attributes that constitute the essence of stigma. In other words, for Goffman, stigma is devoid of any essence. Goffman further defines stigma as a 'deeply discrediting' attribute in a given circumstance or context rather than inherently associating stigma with characteristics of discredit or disrepute. Additionally, Goffman sorts stigma into three categories. Firstly, the aberrations of the body (i.e., physical abnormalities), secondly the character defects of individuals and lastly the stigma of nation, religion and race or the tribal stigma that is inherited via the line of descent.

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Goffman further defines and delineates the contours of 'normalcy' and 'stigma' by referring to individuals who conform to the anticipated beliefs as 'normals' as opposed to stigmatized individual who deviates from the 'expected/desired norm' (Goffman, 1986). Link and Phelan in their insightful work, further refined the conceptual definition of stigma as theorised by Goffman (Link & Phelan, 1999). They put forth the argument that for the stigma to exist, five constituents were to be deemed imperative (Ibid). Firstly, the human propensity to label differences in people produces segregations (Ibid). Secondly, labelled persons are associated with negative attributes and stereotypes (Ibid). Thirdly, the 'normal people' then create distinctions between themselves and the stigmatized 'other', or the bifurcation of 'we' vs. 'them' (Ibid). Fourthly, following the repercussions of the earlier constituents, the labelled individual experiences loss of social stature, position and good repute (Ibid). Lastly, stigma fully culminates as the individual feels disempowered and vulnerable for he/she lacks access to social, economic and political power (Ibid). Following the argument advanced by Link and Phelan, it is plausible to make an assertion that the *hijras* of India experience all the phases of 'stigma' in their everyday encounters with their family and peer groups. Since the *hijras* identify themselves as the 'third gender', their non-normative gender identities create sharp divisions between the normative and the non-normative genders and sexualities. In this context, it would necessitate recalling Simone De Beauvoir's seminal work wherein Beauvoir mentions that the non-compliance of expected gender roles defined within the gendered dichotomies of masculinity and femininity and sexual congruency further elicits societal stigma and ostracization (Beauvoir, 2015). Similarly, women who identify as a 'lesbian' in India would typically experience the double oppression of being a woman and being a

homosexual (Fernandez & N.B., 2003). Fernandez and N.B. in their pioneering work, informs about the instances wherein lesbian women are often made to encounter experiences of social derision and unacceptance (Ibid). Stigma, therefore, impedes the personal process of coming to terms with one's sexuality, bodies and gender identities[97] (Ibid). Similarly, individuals identifying themselves as transgender or *hijras* are labelled as gender outcastes as they deviate from the dominant heteronormative gender schemas (Jaffrey, 1996; Sharma, 2009). In a similar strain, Sharma's insightful work, *Hijras the Labelled Deviants* is particularly pertinent as it mentions about the repercussions of the impingement of heteronormative ideologies on societal perceptions allowing for the relegation and marginalization of the *hijras* (Sharma, 2009). He further adds that the *hijras* are negatively perceived because of their sexual deformities and gender identity (Ibid). Moreover, the *hijras* are socially shunned because they are typically viewed as a sex worker, as carriers of venereal diseases such as HIV/AIDS, child abductors and so forth (Reddy, 2005; Jaffrey, 1996). Understandably, such association engenders social stigma precluding them from accessing social and economic entitlements. Therefore, as postulated by Link and Phelan, the *hijras* in their everyday encounters experience all the five constituents of stigma viz. labelling, segregation, characterization of negative attributes, loss of social status and deprivation in terms of accessibilities and entitlements. Reverting to the earlier point of Goffman's conceptualization of stigma, it would necessitate to ingeminate and establish the fact that intrinsically stigma cannot be characterized as possessing any desirable or undesirable attributes (Goffman, 1986). Goffman instead foregrounds the interplay or relationship between an attribute and a stereotype and the negative discrepancies

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[97]https://www.tiss.edu/uploads/files/8The_Nature_of_violence_faced_by_Lesbian_women_in_India.pdf
(Accessed on 02.02.2019)

between the two that engenders stigma (Ibid). To illustrate the negative relationship between an attribute and stereotype, Goffman introduces two distinct categories of identity, viz. virtual social identity and actual social identity (Ibid). The former indicates expectations, beliefs or values imputed by people to individuals prior to knowing them (Ibid). The latter on the other indicates the actual attributes the person may possess (Ibid). Stigma for Goffman, therefore, would mean negative discrepancy between virtual social identity (what was expected) and actual social identity (attributes they possess in actuality) (Ibid). Therefore, Goffman asserts that the 'attribute' which ascertains the negative discrepancy depends on the expectations/stereotypes imposed by the audience or the 'normals' (Ibid). Hence, when individuals interacting with the 'normals' departs negatively from the 'expected stereotype', then the possibilities of labelling and stigma arises (Ibid). In other words, when the virtual social identity is inimical or incompatible with the actual social identity, the individual interacting or encountering the 'normals' are believed to possess a discrediting attribute/s that is perceived to be shameful, unacceptable or condemned (Ibid). Additionally, apart from stigma, Goffman articulates the strategies adopted by individuals to avoid the consequences of stigma (Ibid). In his analysis of the 'discredited' and 'discreditable', Goffman foregrounds the two distinct states of perceivable and hidden stigma and how one negotiates to circumvent, bypass or elude the pernicious repercussions that stigma elicits (Ibid). Goffman conceptualized discredited state as a state wherein the stigmatized individual assumes that his anomalies or differences are already visible or perceivable when interacting with the 'normals' (Ibid). Discreditable state on the other assumes that stigma is not conspicuous or known when interacting with the normal (Ibid). The *hijras* of India for example typically experiences the 'discredited

state' and the repercussions of the same viz. eviction, ostracization, deprivation and social stigma at a relatively young age. For instance, Jaffrey in her work mentions the early realization of 'anomalous' bodies experienced by the *hijras* and their internalization of stigma (Jaffrey, 1996). In yet another narrative instance, Jaffrey observes that the *hijras* experience eviction from homes and their subsequent entry into *hijra* households (Ibid). In a similar vein, Mazumdar in her dissertationelucidates the experiences of societal scorn, disapproval and familial unacceptance encountered by the *hijras* (Mazumdar, 2016). In her study, she informs about the institutionalized and systemic oppression often encountered by the *hijras* when attempting to interact or adjust with the mainstream society (Ibid). Their lack of familial support coupled with socio-economic deprivation produces inimical social conditions that consequently impels them to abandon their family and the larger matrices of the heteronormative society (Ibid). Evidently, owing to the physiological aberrations and experiences of gender dysphoria, the *hijras* experience social stigma and lack of familial and social support early on in their lives. Hence in Goffman's conceptualization, the *hijras* (in most cases) almost immediately experience the 'discredited' state because of their conspicuous corporal differences and gender preferences (Sharma, 2009; Mazumdar, 2016). Furthermore, once their identity as a *hijra* is socially acknowledged, they have to experience an additional transitional phase descending from the discreditable to the discredited state whilst living within their own *hijra* communes. Here, Goffman's earlier postulation of stigma's dependency upon particular socio-cultural contexts needs to be foregrounded (Goffman, 1986). Once a recruit identifies herself/himself as a *hijra* and lives with a *hijra* household, the discredited state or the stigma of identifying as a *hijra* diminishes only to be supplanted by another potential

discredited state, viz. the identity and occupational politics of the hijra community (Dey et al., 2016). For instance, Dey et al. in their insightful work on the *hijras* informs about the hierarchical occupational arrangement of the *Badhaiwali, Challawali and Khajrawali*hijras (Dey et al., 2016, pp. 141). The status of superiority to inferiority descends from *Badhaiwali* (being the most respected) to *Khajrawali* (being the least respected) (Dey et al., 2016). Here *Badhaiwali hijras* implies those who engage in the traditional roles of the *hijras* as singers, dancers and performers at birth or marriage occasions whilst the *Khajrawalis*primarily engage in sex work (Ibid). Similarly, Mal in his work mentions about multiple ofmarkers of the *hijra* identity that engenders the distinctions of superior or authentic *hijra* identity and inferior or inauthentic *hijra* identity (Mal, 2018). The authenticity of the *hijra* identity is primarily ascertained by one's emasculated or non-emasculated state (Ibid). Understandably, invoking Goffman's conceptualization of stigma, the *hijra* recruit experiences the 'discredited' state for different reasons when in the mainstream society and when living with the *hijras* in their communes (Goffman, 1986). Therefore, the present chapter intends to trace the progression from the discreditable to the discredited state of the *hijras* by foregrounding their personal life stories. Additionally, the study also attempts to examine the strategies, interpretations and points of negotiations employed by the *hijras* to control and manage stigma and its consequences. The study will therefore examine the experiences of transition from the 'discreditable to the discredited' states by segregating it into two discernible phases viz. one experienced while in their natal homes and the second experienced when inducted as a *hijra* member and dwelling in a *hijra* commune.

LARGER MAINSTREAM SOCIETY	DISCREDITABLE (STATE)	DISCREDITED (STATE)
While residing within familial environments/localities.	In so far as individuals align their natal sex categories (male/female) with the corresponding gender identity.	Open declaration of their preferred gender/sexual identity, or if known from other sources, or to be conspicuous in terms of dress, manners, speech etc.

Table 4.1: Showing the states of discreditable to discredited whilst living with family.

The above table demonstrates that when embedded within the heteronormative social matrices, the *hijras* typically experience stigma if they do not conform or adhere to the matrices of heterosexuality and corresponding gender identities. Understandably, in this context, stigma is contingent upon the hierarchical binaries between heteronormative gender identities and transgender identities.

HIJRA HOUSEHOLD/ COMMUNITY	DISCREDITABLE	DISCREDITED
When living with the hijra household/community	In the struggle for identity supremacy, the identity politics that transpires within a hijra household or between multiple hijra households or hijra territories is that of the binaries between 'genuine' and a 'duplicate' hijra. Most powerful hijra households maintain the currency of hierarchical differences with respect to occupational segregations. Colloquially, they are referred to as *Khajrawali, Badhaiwali and Challawali*.	If it is already discernible that a hijra's occupation is a *khajrawali*, then she/he is relegated as an unimportant member and usually treated with contempt.

Table 4.2: Table illustrating the states of discreditable and discredited experienced by the hijras living in a hijra household.

On the other hand, when a *hijra* lives within acommunity, they may experience the pressures to conform to the approved identity parameters imposed by the community. As asserted by Dey et. al, most *hijra* households often discriminate identities on the basis of occupational choices (Dey et. al, 2016). This further creates hierarchical bifurcations between a 'real' and a 'duplicate' *hijra* (Ibid). Hence, it is possible to reason that a 'duplicate' *hijra* may attempt to employ strategies to conceal the disapproved identity. By the same token, the stigma of being labelled as a 'duplicate' *hijra* further produces inequities and discrimination even within a *hijra* commune. Taking into account the differences of experiences of stigma discernible and segregated into two phases in the life of a *hijra,* it would necessitate employing a research method that examines experiences of stigma in its entirety. Also, it would require mentioning that individuals are meaning-making beings and the interrogation of experiences of stigma would entail understanding such experiences from the interpretive stances espoused by the *hijras* themselves (Adorjan& Kelly, 2017). Life story method, for example, allows for a subjective and personal elucidation of one's life experiences with respect to stigma (Atkinson, 1998). Atkinson in his work, *The Life Story Interview* defines the method as all-encompassing which is qualitatively conducted to unearth the rich subjective experiences of the respondent (Ibid). In a similar vein, Vidya's autobiographical work, epitomizes the salience of the life story method conferring absolute liberty to the narrator to recount stories of personal encounters retelling experiences of trauma, social stigma, confronting adversities and their subjective interpretations of the same (Vidya, 2014). Vidya in her work documents a gradual and descriptive transition of her life experiences since childhood, as an adolescent and as a young adult (Ibid). Her life story enables the reader to interpret and view circumstances

from her personal vantage point proffering rich insights imbued with meanings pertaining to coming to terms one's gender identity, body and sexuality along with societal unacceptance, consequences of stigma and the subsequent life choices she chose and pursued (Ibid). In her work, Vidya speaks about the difficult life choices she made when her natal family refused to accept her wish to pursue a different career path and her desire to identify as a woman (Vidya, 2014, pp. 22). Her personal narratives inform about the beginnings of the transitional phase from the discreditable state to the discredited state (Ibid). In this context, Vidya narrates about the familial discord elicited by her behaviour, speech, comportment, and choice of garments (Vidya, 2014). But despite their disapproval, she continued to assert her identity and also joined the *thirunangai*[98] community (Vidya, 2014, pp. 69). In her quest to embrace her inherent femininity, Vidya willingly acquiesced to the vicissitudes of identifying as a *thirunangai* (Ibid). In a similar strain, Tripathi in her autobiographical work shared her experiences of social stigma emanating first from her own familial space (Tripāṭhī, 2015). Tripathi experienced the initial phases of the discredited state when disclosing her identity as a *hijra* to her family members (Tripāṭhī, 2015, pp. 49). For many *hijras,* their most fundamental aspiration is to identify oneself as a 'woman' which as a precursor to being a *hijra,* remains unfulfilled (for most) due to the constrains and straitjackets imposed by heteronormativity (Vidya, 2014; Kita, 2010). Similarly, Revathi's workspeaks of experiences of reconciling with one's own gender and sexuality and their initial encounters of familial stigma (Kita, 2010). Revathi employs simplistic first-personnarratives to retell life experiences of the *hijras* and their painful encounters of social and familial unacceptance, their initial contact with the *hijra* community

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[98]A transgender woman (I am Vidya, 2014)

and their overall coping and coming to terms with social stigma (Ibid). In one such story, Senthilkumar recalls the atrocities she had to bear when she revealed her identity as a *hijra* to her family (Ibid). In her narrative, her experiences of disclosing her identity to her family proved to be a horrifying experience wherein she was continually tortured by her father and younger brother (Ibid). Such narratives or stories intimately acquaints the reader with their everyday experiences of social stigma. The life story method therefore enables the researcher to examine personal experiences of stigma transpiring at different points of time under varying circumstances and contexts (Atkinson, 1998). It grants autonomy to the respondent allowing them to coalesce their stories together encouraging them to interpret and understand their own personal experiences of stigma (Ibid). Etherington in her work, defines life story method as personal retellings of certain experiences embedded in the particularities of context and local narratives and meanings (Etherington, 2009). Moreover, the life story method places thrust on the significance of meanings and humans as interpretive beings making sense of the encounters and experiences as they wend their way through life (Ibid). Stigma exists objectively as well as subjectively, but the former (objective) elucidation of stigma is incapable of explaining the subjective perceptions of stigma experienced by individuals who continually experience the effects of the stigma. The transition from tracing the discreditable to the discredited or the bypassing of such phases in entirety requires a careful, thorough, subjective and descriptive examination of the lives of individuals as they encounter, manoeuvre, navigate, interpret, succumb or stand in defiance to social stigma and societal oppression. In short, the present study intends to foreground and underscore the salience of subjectivity and individual interpretation and attempts to study the interplay between the two to

understand the dual experiences of stigma typically confronted by the *hijras* in their family and in their own community spaces.

4.3 SAMPLE SIZE AND LOCUS SITES

Owing to the qualitative, subjective and descriptive nature of the life story method and also the reluctance expressed by the *hijras* of the region to partake in the interview, the researcher limited the sample size to 24 interviewees in which each district of North Bengal and the metropolitan city of Kolkata received an equal representation of respondents. Also, because of the lengthy and personal nature of the questions asked in the life story method, the researcher selected the respondents by employing the snowball sampling technique. To maintain equal representation of respondents across districts of North Bengal, the researcher included all the seven districts (barring Kalimpong, owing to the absence of *hijra* settlements in the district) ensuring even distribution of respondents. Due to the low number of respondents interviewed, the limitation of the study remains that the *hijras* of the district were less forthcoming to partake in a personal qualitative interview thereby greatly restricting the total number of respondents. Gurus of the *hijra* communes and members of CBO's/associations were approached by the researcher to explain the rationale of the study and nature of the method to the respondents.

NAME OF DISTRICT	NO. OF RESPONDENTS
DARJEELING	3
UTTAR DINAJPUR	3
DAKSHIN DINAJPUR	3
MALDA	3
ALIPURDUAR	3
JALPAIGURI	3
COOCH-BEHAR	3
KOLKATA	3
TOTAL	24

Table 4.3: Illustrates the segregation of districts and the number of interviewees per district.

4.4 FINDINGS

The following segment documents the findings of the life story method interview. The researcher spoke in Hindi, Bengali, English and Nepali with the respondents digitally recording their answers and accurately transcribing each word and sentence spoken by the respondents in English. Prior permission to record their answers was sought and all other research ethics were complied with. Additionally, the respondents requested the researcher not to divulge their names in the final research work. The researcher has also retained certain local words used in emphasis by the respondents to maintain the authenticity of the transcribed interviews. The life story interview will be divided into two phases viz. one's familial/locality spaces and one's household/*hijra* community space. Following Braun and Clarke's work on qualitative research, the findings will be presented

thematically which will be subsumed under discrete experiences emanating from familial/local spaces and the *hijra* communes (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Thematic analysis allows the researcher to identify key codes from the field data which when collated together generates a theme (Ibid). The generated theme/s will then be elucidated descriptively wherein the interpretation of the respondent will be solely foregrounded and examined. The analysis of the findings will proceed by approaching individual cases of stigma as experienced in two settings viz. the familial/locality/neighbourhood spaces and the *hijra* community. The themes developed in the analysis will be integrated into the conclusion segment for further scrutiny and summarization.

4.5.1 DARJEELING DISTRICT-SILIGURI (COOLIPARA) RESPONDENT ONE 39 YEARS

EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA (FAMILIAL/LOCALITY SPACES)

The first respondent *(cela)* from Coolipara, Siliguri, Darjeeling district recounts the experiences of stigma and transition from the earlier discredited state (in one's biological family) towards other the other possible state of discredit (for example, in one's own *hijra* community). The respondent speaks of her initial experience of stigma and her difference- *"I was born in Siliguri and I used to live with my elder brother. I used to feel different from others in the sense that I disliked being or behaving like a boy. I and my brother were deprived of both of our parents at a very young age. It was probably around the age of 13-14 years that people around me started to take notice of me and thus behaved and spoke differently with me. They were now aware that I was non-normal in terms of gender and sexuality."*

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The above excerpt informs about the respondent's cognizance of her difference from 'normal' others quite early on as she despised being identified/labelled as a boy. The difference, therefore, was visible to others which resulted in them behaving or treating her differently. The shift from the earlier discreditable state to the discredited one, therefore, was engendered by the respondent's own preference to identify in a gender different from the one assigned to her at birth. Her own affirmation of her non-normality in terms of gender identity shows her acceptance of the constraints of heteronormativity existent within her own locality. The imposition of 'othering' is almost instantaneously experienced once the respondent conspicuously expresses her 'non-normal' gender identity. The phenomena of 'othering' in context to gender and sexuality entails recalling the concept of gender stereotypes existent in a given social milieu. Gender stereotypes embedded and practiced in heteronormative spaces ensures the compliance of approved typicalities of gender with one's biological sex (Ellemers, 2018). Similarly, Peake in her work, mentions the signifiers viz. marriage, reproduction and family deployed by heteronormativity to assert and bolster its legitimacy within the society (Peake, 2016). Non-normative individuals on the other tend to espouse such practices to seek assimilation into one's society. In the case of the respondent, she acquiesces to the binaries of her identity being subsumed and relegated to a place of deviancy. The respondent further recalls- *"Because of experiences of how I felt inside, amidst the company of other boys, the need to identify as a girl and the desire to wear feminine clothes and apply make-up confused and saddened me to no end."* The respondent here mentions about coming to terms with one's desired gender identity which because of being embedded within heteronormative matrices engendered feelings of anguish, sadness and confusion. Such experiences can be attributed to

the internalization of the dichotomies of cisgender normativity as opposed to transgenderism. This creates conflictual chasms in the psyche of the respondent wherein it requires her to conform to the gender straitjackets of masculinity while the latter demands her to address the needs of expressing oneself in a gender identity different from the one assigned to her at birth. She adds- *"One day, I wrapped a long garment around my waist and applied some colour on my face. I expressed myself in my new avatar by walking in a feminine and delicate gait and by swirling around. I was ecstatic for I believed that at that precise moment, my external appearance was finally in harmony with my internal 'self', to feel and embody the identity of being a girl/woman. The feeling however was short-lived as locality boys leered at me shouting unpleasant names like, 'girly', 'ladies', 'hijra',*

Respondent conscious of the approved structural /societal heteronormative matrices → Experiences episodes of stigma via interpersonal exchanges with one's locality members and family. → Accepts the dominance of the heteronormative strictures but resists adherence to the same. → Respondent spontaneously attempts to manifest own conception of gender identity leading to intense social stigma. → Respondent rejects societal expectations of gender and espouses the life of a *hijra*.

'chakka', 'gandu' etc. When my brother was aware about my activities, he berated me angrily for wearing 'inappropriate clothes' and for behaving like a woman."

Fig 4.1: The diagram represents the trajectory from the discreditable towards the discredited (within one's family/locality/neighbourhood) in which the transition

between the two states is almost non-existent because the respondent resists to deploy stratagems to hide/conceal her stigma.

Despite the apparent stigma associated with expressing one's gender identity and being cognizant of living within heterosexual matrices, the respondent attempts to address her own conception of gender identity by engaging in gender performative acts of the opposite gender. Despite the impingement of stigma on the respondent's psyche, she was unable to repress the urgency of her intrinsic need to express her true gender identity. The respondent further adds- *"My brother never could understand or sympathize with my feelings and desires to be and live like a woman. Being aggressive and insensitive as he was, he abandoned me to migrate to the city to earn a living and to perhaps settle down. From that day on, we haven't met or communicated with one another. I was isolated again and now with no one to call as my family member, I joined the hijra community at the age of 14. Mockery, discrimination, molestation, threats of rape and unacceptance in my locality forced me to surrender this pathetic life as a 'nobody' in my locality. A hijra from a nearby area was apparently observing me and my situation and offered help in the guise of joining as a member in the hijra household. Seeing her behaviour, speech, choice of garments and her gentle mannerisms, I broke down and wept uncontrollably. She consoled me and embraced me tightly. From then on, I left my old life for a new one, a new life where I expected to finally feel like a cherished member and not like an oppressed outsider."*

Here the respondent categorically labels her life amidst the 'normals' as a *'pathetic life'* in which she had to experience the severity of repercussions for expressing her real gender identity'. But instead of conforming to the gender expectations of the society, she chose to abandon her previous life to join the *hijra* community at a relatively young age of 14 years. Noticeably, the above narrative demonstrates that the respondent never attempted to conceal or manage her stigma when

encountering the normals (locality people, family members) which obliterated any scope for managing her stigmatized state. In a similar vein Frank in her work, critiques Goffman's linear prediction of stigmatized individuals coping and adjusting to the standards imposed by the 'normals' in order to conceal their stigma (Frank, 1988). Instead, she demonstrates in her empirical study of three respondents (with congenital deformities) that the emphasis is more on enabling/empowering oneself rather than managing their stigma to gain acceptance/approval of the normals (Ibid). Albeit the respondent was conscious of her stigma, she preferred not to address or reconfigure her supposed 'gender difference' within the parameters of heteronormativity. Thus, instead of stigma management, the respondent's narrative exemplifies defiance expressed against the societal strictures of heteronormativity. As a recourse from the social opprobrium experienced by the respondent, she favoured the life of living and identifying as a *hijra* as she could embody the desired identity and experience liberty from the compulsory gender dictums imposed by the society. Thus, the respondent quickly cascaded from the discreditable to the discredited state as she refused to employ stratagems to conceal her real self which inevitably produced odious consequences structurally debarring her from accessing opportunities and equality with respect to life chances. Despite all the difficulties experienced by the respondent, she disavowed the constraints placed upon her by the society and instead adopts the identity of a *hijra.* Now with her visibly discredited state of being a *hijra* she recounts experiences of adoption and adaptation when inducted into the *hijra* community- *"I was inducted into a fairly liberal hijra household. My current hijra guru was kind and generous to celas regardless of their caste and class backgrounds. A low caste cela in the household was regarded equally as any other. Our household maintains a*

scruple that regardless of caste or ethnic backgrounds, all members are hijras and identify as one and that is our unity. There are members here who identify themselves as a Bihari, nepali, Marwari hijras and yet we all live in accordance with this principle. We were a five-member household with four celas under our guru. As a household we have collectively organized pujas for Bahucharamata, observed fasts, held pujas for Durga devi and have visited places like Baroda to celebrate festivals like Chatt Puja. My guru however has one important rule that she taught us right from the beginning. She never discriminated against us on anything but she did speak about the occupational segregation existent in the hijra community. I was fortunate to be inducted as a member in a household that earns its livelihood by following traditional/cultural roles assigned to the hijra identity.''

As a *hijra*, the respondent is objectively discredited by the society.

The respondent repudiates the stigma imputed to the *hijra* identity.

She adjusts, adapts and aligns with the *hijra* culture and community positively affirming her *hijra* identity.
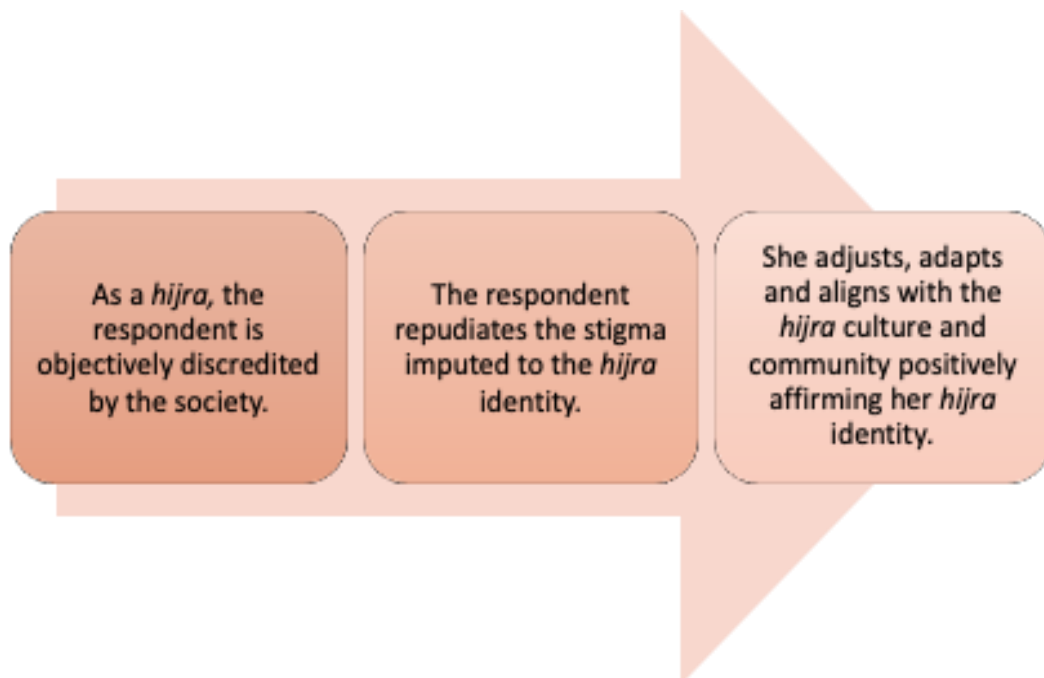
Fig. 4.2 Post transition, the respondent (now socialized and inducted into the *hijra* identity) fully accepts her role as a *hijra* member and views her experiences of the commune as one of belonging, solidarity and acceptance.

Once admitted into the community, the respondent recounts experiencing a feeling of oneness with one's members within the community. Although labelled as a *hijra,* the respondent managed to transition from the state of discredit and social stigma towards that of support, solidarity and security within the enclaves of the *hijra* community. The respondent perceives the community as a safe haven wherein she is permitted to be her own genuine self with other members who share similar aspirations with respect to expressing oneself in alternative gender identities and sexualities. With the disavowal of the heteronormative matrices and corresponding gender expectations, the respondent assimilates herself into the *hijra* community embracing its culture and identity. She favourably imputes her identity as a *hijra* member and disregards the stigma associated with it. The respondent thus views her transition into the *hijra* culture and identity not with remorse or discredit but as a beneficial/positive development in her life.

Meisenbach in her work, enumerates Goffman's stigma strategy alternatives when individuals with disability experience stigma (Meisenbach, 2010). One such stratagem, Goffman mentions is the voluntary disclosure of stigma as a way for individuals to respond to one's disability (Ibid). In the case of the respondent, she chooses early on to express and disclose her real gender identity despite acknowledging her embeddedness within the heteronormative matrices of her locality. She further adds- *"We were taught by our guru that it was best to avoid sex as a profession or to be a khajrawali as it would bring social stigma and taint the reputation preserved by the predecessors of the household. We were also taught the futility of the penis and were advised to castrate or emasculate to sever off all attributes of being a male. My guru maintained that we all were a 'naphunsuk', a person who has no distinct sex genitalia and a penis for her was a useless organ. I wouldn't say she coerced me to*

emasculate but she made me realize the traditional role of the hijras, the powers of shakti conferred to us by Bahuchara Mata and our customary place in the society of issuing blessings and curses. Considering her explanation, I agreed to emasculate, and an auspicious date was fixed. A dai-maa from Jabra Bita removed the male organ thereby freeing me from all the remnants of masculinity. I felt like a complete woman after the incision. As for the social stigma, I was never made to feel inferior by my inmates and guru for having the male organ. In fact, it was my own decision to sever the organ as it precluded me from expressing my true feminine identity. Nonetheless, my guru adhered strictly to the occupational hierarchies of the hijra community wherein she believed that toli-badhai was the most respected way of earning one's livelihood. She expressed great disdain for hijras who solicited sex in return for money and also hijras who asked for alms in buses, trains or shops. Having grown and socialized into such a commune, I never challenged or questioned her decision for I too believed that her choices and principles were sound, reasonable and socially approved".

Here the respondent is further introduced into the second circle of strictures and constraints imposed upon by the *hijra* culture pertaining to identity, emasculation, occupation and one's role in the society. Taking into account the experiences of the respondent, she was to follow the stipulations exhorted by her *guru maa.* But unlike

the gender expectations prescribed by the heteronormative matrices, she willingly espoused the parameters decreed by her community.

Fig. 4.3 The diagram represents the processual transition of the respondent from the state of discredit towards a favourable/affirmative state of being a *hijra.*

Goffman in his seminal work, '*Stigma and notes on spoiled identity management'* advances the argument that the stigma does not inhere in the attribute possessed by the discredited individual but varies across group, contexts and time (Meisenbach, 2010, pp. 1). This postulation resonates with the second cycle of constraints experienced by the respondent after having transitioned from the first viz. the societal constraints of gender expectations. The two cycles however are disparate because the former (societal constraints) was coerced upon the respondent engendering the ordeal of social stigma and ostracization whilst the latter was voluntarily chosen. In the second cycle, the stigma consists of not identifying as a *hijra* but the denial of requisites that makes one a respectable *hijra.* Such requisites comprise of emasculation, choosing traditional occupations and adhering to the culture of the *hijra* community. The respondent readily conformed to the strictures mandated by her commune thereby eschewing experiences of stigma within her community. Considering the subjective experiences of the respondent and her interpretations of stigma, it becomes plausible to assert that the respondent momentarily internalized the stigma of being a gender non-conformist because of moments of doubt and uncertainty produced by her interactions with the 'normals' of her locality. Here it would necessitate to recall Edgar's work wherein he cites Goffman's understanding of the discreditable individual and the dilemma he/she experiences with respect to his/her stigma and the disclosure of the same (Edgar,

1994) Citing Goffman, Edgar mentions the process of deliberation as information control wherein stigmatised individuals consider their decisions of identity disclosure or concealment (Edgar, 1994, pp.1). The respondent on the other, experiences moments of intense societal segregation, social stigma and episodes of trauma but does not attempt to conceal or manage her discrediting attribute to 'pass as a normal' even in moments of extreme confusion, anxiety and doubt. Hence, in the case of the respondent, self-disclosure of her identity, embracing oneself along with acceptance of the *hijra* culture constitutes as ways to encounter and interact with the 'normals'.

4.5.2 RESPONDENT TWO, 66 YEARS (KOYLA DEPOT, SILIGURI) NARRATIVES ON STIGMA: FAMILIAL/LOCALITY SPACES

In the second case, a respondent from Koyla Depot, Siliguri reminisces her experiences of living with her immediate family members- *"I was born in Benares and I lived with my parents and brothers. Due to financial insecurities, I was never enrolled in any learning institutions nor pursued any other vocation. While in Benares, my parents expired and left us with nothing. Because of severe economic problems, my brothers started working in some odd jobs in Benares to sustain the family. Considering all the problems, I did not wish to be a burden to my brothers any longer and thus migrated to Siliguri at a young age of 10. However, unlike other hijras who had to encounter terrible episodes of stigma inflicted by their family members, my brothers were liberal, understanding and accommodative. But since I did not wish to stain their honour and respect within our local neighbourhood, I thought best to leave them and settle elsewhere to start life afresh".*

In the above instance, the respondent alludes that her siblings were aware about her 'difference'. Owing to her ambiguous genitalia, the respondent implies that her

discrediting attribute or stigma was instantaneously known to her inner circle viz. parents and siblings. Because of her visible corporal difference, the narrative suggests that the respondent also experienced an early realization of one's difference with respect to her gender identity and body. Works of literature also inform the added prejudice and medical scrutiny experienced when born intersexed. Karzakis and Davis in their work mentions the utilization of surgical interventions and other technology aides to make the atypical body conform to the heteronormative binaries (Karzakis & Davis, 2015). They further reason that people take recourse to gender/sex alignment surgeries in order to eschew stigma and its odious societal consequences (Ibid). The heteronormative undergirding in a given society therefore compels the subject to conform to the pre-given gender/sex templates. In a similar strain, Hofstätterin his work, characterizes heteronormativity as a structure wielding power over socio-cultural spaces (Hofstätter, 2011). Drawing on the conceptualization of heteronormativity, the respondent acknowledges her stigma of being born in a body that defies the parameters established by the heteronormative milieux and seeks to address her stigma by abandoning her family to save them from shame, dishonour and social denigration. Also, the respondent avows her difference and internalizes/accepts her attribute as discrediting. Albeit she didn't experience the repercussions of her stigma whilst living with her family, she nonetheless espoused the strategy of concealing her state of natal genital ambiguity from others (locality, neighbourhood etc.) by migrating from Benares to Siliguri. This coping mechanism ensured her that she deflected any episodes of stigma that could have brought disrepute to her and her family. She further adds- "*At a very early age, my brothers noticed that something was different in me in terms of how I spoke, my behaviour and my choice of friends. I never freely mingled with*

the local boys and refrained from talking with them. However, I felt at ease with girls my age and preferred playing with them. I always dreamt of being a woman but since I was born as an intersexed person, I knew that my dream would never materialize. But looking back, I feel happy that I was saved from social stigma and societal seclusion as I quickly left my native place for Siliguri. My guru had once visited Benares for pilgrimage purposes and a chance encounter with her led me to accompany her back to Siliguri where she was the guru of the Koyla Depot household. Fortunately, my brothers too understood and sympathized with my reasons to leave my hometown and even today they pay a visit when in Siliguri bringing gifts and sarees for me".

Noticeably, the respondent here accepts her difference as an attribute that defies the straitjackets of
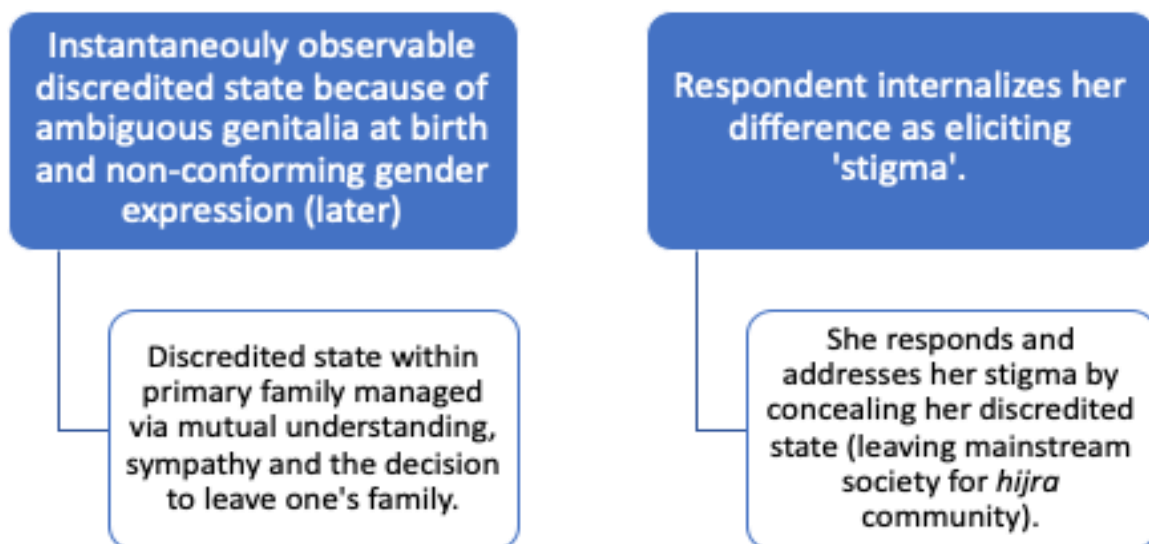
Fig. 4.4: The diagram represents two trajectories tracing the discreditable to the discredited state in two contexts viz. family and one's social milieus.

heteronormativity thereby debarring her from freely identifying/expressing her chosen gender. The respondent was also cognizant of the consequences engendered by embodying gender expression/sexuality that is discordant with the dominant

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ideology of heterosexuality. The above diagram illustrates the transition of the two states from 'discreditable towards discredited' in two disparate contexts viz. one's primary family and one's social spaces. In the first trajectory, the respondent experiences her difference at a very early age and her immediate family members also are conscious of her difference since birth. Subsequently, the respondent further manifests her gender difference via gender expressions and behaviours which is brought to the awareness of her family. But her 'difference' notwithstanding, her family does not inflict upon her the need to adhere to the standards imposed by the heteronormative milieu, impel her to join the *hijra* community nor coerce her to alter her genitalia to conform to the binaries of gender/sex congruence. The respondent hence does not recall episodes of stigma because her family expressed sympathy for her difference but knowing the implications of her discrediting attribute upon her family members, she chose to mitigate the discredited state from descending further into the social state of discredit by leaving her family. The respondent recalls- "*Fortunately, my brothers too understood and sympathized with my reasons to leave my hometown and even today they pay a visit when in Siliguri bringing gifts and sarees for me*". Here, her family tacitly approves her decision to leave in order to settle with the *hijra* community consequently saving herself and her family from social persecution, stigma and persecution. The respondent's narrative implies an unspoken understanding between her siblings and herself. Thus, she managed or rather controlled her own discredited state and her family's discreditable state from plummeting into a visible discredited state by migrating to a distant region and espousing a new identity, culture and way of life. Transitioning to the stigma experiences of the *hijra* commune, the second respondent (like the first) also introduces schisms of

normative and non-normative categories relevant for the *hijra* identity and culture. She reminisces- *"Quickly after my guru died, I was chosen by my celas to be the next guru for our dera. My relationship with my guru was warm and friendly one. She always considered me as her confidante and guided me like how a mother would guide her child. As a guru, I strove to continue maintaining and leading the dera with the principles and morals my guru had once taught me. The celas under me belong to multiple ethnic backgrounds and have migrated from different parts of the country. Some have come from Kolkata, Bihar and Rajasthan. In total, we are a six member household and my celas considered me as able enough to be a guru because of my qualities like leadership, being a problem solver and for being responsible. Although I am the eldest member of the household, my celas never considered age to be a sign of a true leader. In our dera, a guru therefore had to possess the skills to be considered and chosen as one. Its been many years now that I am the guru of the household but I stick to few specific rules and that is to keep the utensils of the lower caste separately when they are done eating. The lower caste celas also eat separately and keep their utensils in a separate place. Also, in terms of occupational choice, I disapprove hijras belonging to other deras in Siliguri who engage in sex work and begging for alms. I have always taught my celas the right way to earn and that is to practice toli-badhai and to have faith in our principal deity, Besraji Mata. I also do not encourage my celas to befriend hijras who pursue such immoral occupations. Considering our marginalized existence and social taboos that we have to encounter for living and identifying as a hijra, I think it would be ideal for all hijras across India to follow their cultural and traditional roles of singing, dancing and blessing in auspicious ceremonies"*.

The respondent here mentions about her acceptance and positive adjustment in the *hijra* household. She quickly learns and adjusts to the customs, traditions and culture from her predecessors. This indicates an affirming transition to the *hijra* community from her earlier discredited state. The respondent now as a *guru* of the

hijra household introduces further schisms of differentiation to maintain the traditional patterns of the *hijra* community and culture. Like the demarcations created by the heteronormative society to create distinctions between 'normal' and 'non-normal' sexualities and gender identities, the respondent similarly creates divisions of 'us' vs. 'them' or the 'accepted' and 'unaccepted' categories even within the *hijra* community. She therefore lays down the strictures for her *celas*to follow to make them conform to the traditional *hijra* identity and culture. Noticeably, she creates binaries of morality and immorality within her own commune engendering stigma and hierarchies in the *hijra* communities. In a similar vein, Dey et. al in their work, mentions about the occupational gradings existent within the *hijra* community of West Bengal wherein the *Badhaiwalis* (ones engaged in traditional occupations) are considered to be comparatively superior to those engaged in *Challamangtai*(begging) and as *khajrawalis*(sex work) (Dey et. al, 2016). Such intra divisions create supplementary chasms of the approved and the stigmatized ilk within the *hijra* community. In a similar strain, Bolen in his work, also informs about the politics of identity reification with respect to gay and lesbian identities in which 'proper' and 'correct' ways to identify are prescribed for others to adhere and follow (Bolen, 2016). Dukpa in her work, informs about the prevalence of *hijra-normativity* in the Siliguri region of West Bengal in which she mentions about the parameters imposed by the *hijras* to maintain the 'real' or 'authentic' *hijra* identity and to segregate it from the 'duplicate' *hijra* identity (Dukpa, 2016). Such proclivities to discriminate the *hijras* on the basis of occupational parameters subsequently creating distinctions between what is allowed and prohibited is thus reflected in the respondent's approach towards the delineation of the *hijra* identity, culture and tradition. The respondent further

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recollects- *"My life within my own dera was relatively stable but trouble brewed when hijras from other parts of North Bengal district claimed ownership of our area. In the past few years, I have experienced multiple disputes with the gurus of Uttar Dinajpur for they forcefully claimed and staked ownership over our areas. They have also tried to create a lot of misunderstandings between the members of our dera causing some to leave and join their own dera. One of our dera members was recently convicted for a false murder case for which she was jailed for three days. I also have a reason to believe that these usurpers migrated from Bangladesh and using their power and money, they've bought the police as well as some local goons. I know for a fact that these hijras engage in all sorts of illegal activities and they often threaten us with severe consequences if we do not comply and give them their hissa (a portion of what we have earned) and consider them our malik or guru. The Bangladeshi hijras are attempting to overpower and overthrow us with their power and money. I believe they are gradually colonizing all the areas owned by native siliguri hijras and depriving the guru of their celas by buying them. I have a simple rule and that is, everybody has the right to earn their roti, their income and someone mighty cannot oppress the weak to the point where they are deprived of their livelihood. This area, our dera and our profession is how we live and survive. We already live in the fringes of mainstream society and experience social stigma for our identity and profession, but this inter household wars between the hijras is further exacerbating the stigma problem by making us seem more lowly in front of the public gaze. Each household has their own defined and legitimate area to make their living, and no one is obligated to pay their portion of earnings to someone else claiming to be the 'malik' of the area. These days we hardly earn enough as we need to reserve a share for the malik from Raiganjdera."*

Here the respondent mentions about inter-household disputes that have led to the deprivation of earnings because of area usurpation by 'powerful *hijras'*. Because of their numerical preponderance, political power and monetary clout, these powerful *Bangladeshi hijras* allegedly create differences in terms of *hijra* identity and

occupation. Noticeably, a three-tiered bifurcation of social stigma manifests at the socio-structural, inter-community and intra-household level wherein the respondent experiences stigma at the first two levels and creates it in the last. At a social-structural level, the respondent experiences a sense of distinctness from her heterosexual counterparts. She is instantaneously rendered visible because of her conspicuous genitalia and her biological inability to conform to the 'normal' standards of gender with the corresponding sexes. The respondent therefore internalizes the chasms of hierarchical difference created by the mainstream society. It is primarily because of her avowal of her stigma that renders her to leave her hometown in order to conceal it from her locality/neighbourhood. Also, due to the acceptance of her stigma, the respondent creates distinctions even within her household wherein she implements certain constraints to maintain the traditional sanctity of her community. This can be viewed as an effort on the part of the respondent to manage the already discredited state (that of being a *hijra*) from descending into what can be termed as the state of 'extreme discredit'. Goffman limited himself to two states of discreditable and the discredited only but in certain sub-cultural contexts (for e.g., the *hijra* community), discredited individuals may further attempt to conceal their discrediting attribute.

STIGMA (LEVEL)	SITES	RESPONDENT'S INTERPRETATION OF STIGMA	STIGMA EXPERIENCED BY	STIGMA MANAGEMENT	

| Social/Structural | Heteronormative Milieu | Accepts and internalizes the differences imposed by the society. | Respondent experienced spontaneous discredited state within one's family

Respondent's family experienced the possibility of discreditable state transitioning to discredited. | Respondent quickly transitions to a different life in the *hijra* community by relocating to a different state. This allows her to maintain her family's discreditable state from descending into the discredited state. | |
| Inter-community | Bangladeshi *hijra* communities vs. Native *hijra communities* | Rejects the violence and associated stigma inflicted by the *Bangladeshi* | Discredited state of stigma was experienced by the respondent along with her household | Because of the disputes and assaults, the respondent attempts to maintain the | |

		hijras.	members.	'traditional role' of the *hijras* to prevent added stigma from societal quarters.	
Intra-Household	Respondent's own household.	Respondent prescribes parameters to uphold and maintain the traditional/authe ntic culture of the hijracommunity.	Low caste *celas* and *celas* who don't conform to her conception of *hijra identity*, occupation and culture.	No reported strategies to control/man-age stigma.	

Table 4.4: The above table demonstrates the stigma level, the consequent experiences of stigma and the ways employed by the respondent to control/manage it.

The respondent manages to control her discredited state by disassociating herself and her *gharana* from the *Bangladeshi hijras,* their culture and their conception of the *hijra* identity. She intends to circumvent the possibility of 'extreme discredit' from society by stringently implementing the rules handed down by her

predecessors pertaining to *hijra* culture, occupation and identity. The concept of 'extreme discredit' can be further illustrated by referring to Goffman's workwherein he mentions the difference between virtual social identity and actual social identity (Goffman, 1963). The former refers to the 'expected' attributes that an audience demands from an individual and the latter refers to the attribute/s that the respondent may actually be said to possess (Ibid). As per Goffman, the discrepancy between the virtual social identity and the actual social identity produces stigma. In the case of the respondent, she attempts to implement and reinforce the notion that the *hijras* occupy the cultural niche of the third gender following traditional occupations as singers and dancers. She intends to align herself and her household members within such cultural parameters because it is what the mainstream 'normals' typically expect when interacting with the *hijras.* Most 'normals' imagine the *hijras* as a secretive cult, worshipping Goddess *Bahuchara*and conferring upon blessings at auspicious occasions. They believe that the *hijras* have a cultural role to perform as singers and dancers. The mainstream ilk also believes that they are accorded with special powers to bestow upon *dua*(blessings/prayers) or hurl curses as and when necessary (Nanda, 1999). Hence, they perceive the *hijras* with mixed feelings of reverence, fearfulness, diffidence and mockery. Such expectations from the *hijras* can be labelled as 'virtual social identity' which the respondent intends to maintain. The respondent thus reasons that the resistance of such societal expectations could further push them into a liminal existence exacerbating their 'discredited state' into a state of extreme discredit.

4.5.3 RESPONDENT THREE, 51 YEARS (BHAKTINAGAR, NJP) NARRATIVES ON STIGMA-FAMILY/LOCALITY

The final respondent from Darjeeling district recalls her experiences of stigma when living with her family members and in her local commune- *"I've lived a life quite atypical for a hijra. I was born in Rangapani, district Darjeeling. My parents expired when I was young. I was never quite sure about my gender and sexuality and also never attempted to express it openly. I just knew that I was a bit different, but I couldn't quite make complete sense of it. I never liked the company of boys in our area and felt awkward playing with them. I was more drawn to the company of girls and spent more time with them. I used to like cleaning my house, cooking, sweeping and washing. I wanted to keep my hair long and was fond of singing and dancing. Since we were gripped with poor finances, my parents could not afford to send me to a school. Post my parents death, I was coerced by my relatives to marry when I came of age. An auspicious date and a local bride was arranged and I reluctantly obliged to marry her. Perhaps, it was post marriage and my unsatisfactory physical relationship with my wife that made me acknowledge my own sexuality. I am not romantically or sexually attracted to my wife. Our relationship is only namesake, but I appreciate her because she is responsible and understanding. She bore me two sons and being a dutiful wife, she shouldered all the responsibilities of a typical housewife."*

The respondent expresses her uncertainty and her inhibition with respect to her gender identity and sexuality. Unlike the first two respondents, she does not assert her identity with certitude, nor does she contest the heteronormative norms governing her social milieu. The respondent comes to terms with her 'difference' and subsequent confusion as opposed to a delineated identity. The respondent nonetheless insinuates her difference by engaging in womanly chores and by embracing the typical feminine gender expressions. The respondent further

mentions that her relatives coerced her into a heterosexual union and being in a discreditable state, the respondent couldn't verbalize/express her difference fearing stigma. Marriage as an institution therefore becomes a primary site of promoting the discourses of the heteronormative imperative in a society (Ward & Schneider, 2009, pp. 435). Citing Goffman, the respondent conformed to her 'virtual social identity' as opposed to her 'actual social identity' to pass as a 'normal' (Goffman, 1986). But the strategy to maintain the 'discreditable state' to cloak her difference elicits problems for the respondent because she realized that her gender and sexuality was not in agreement with the heteronormative framework of gender and sexuality. She further adds- *"Despite all this, I was still deeply dissatisfied and yearned for relationships with men. It was then that I gradually learned about the hijras in Siliguri and grew fascinated by their identity and lifestyle. One day I met them in Bhaktinagar and the following week, I was admitted in their dera. However, I made sure that my wife, my sons and my locality people remained unaware about my outings to the hijra community. It was with my earnings as a hijra that greatly helped in financially securing my family, especially the future of my sons. Now, years have passed that I am a hijra guru and my wife too is aware about my identity. However, in front of my sons and society, I wear the guise of a man in order to avoid any shame or social stigma for them as well as for the family honor. So thus, I continue to lead dual lives, one being a hijra guru and the other as a family man. Marta kyanahikarta? (a frustrated/disappointed person is willing to do anything) it is primarily because of my family that I have to lead such a dualistic life. It is because of my hijra profession that I can afford to send my sons to English medium schools and buy them things they need. Additionally, I also feel happy that when I am with my celas in the dera, I can be my own self. I am doing all this only for my family, had I been single, I wouldn't have cared for social stigma and judgements of other people. My wife doesn't have any qualms about me engaging in the profession as she knows that I am the one sustaining the family".*

The inability on the respondent's part to express her sexuality and embody her gender difference generates anxiety and frustration. The coping strategy of passing as a normal by repressing her 'real self' thus places conflictual demands on her psyche thereby producing mental stress, disturbance. In a similar vein, Lee in her work (citing Smart & Wegner) proffers insights on the strategies of concealment which in turn elicits 'mental stress' (Lee, 2015). Referring to Smart and Wegner, Lee further adds that the stigmatised individual may constantly strive to maintain 'normalcy' by being wary and secretive especially in the presence of 'normal others' (Ibid). The study also mentions that despite experiencing moments of respite from one's stigma, the individual also risks experiencing heightened levels of stress (Ibid). Hence, Lee concludes that although the individual conceals its real self in an attempt to reduce the stigma but as a contrary effect, the individual also experiences stigma because of continual suppression of one's real self/identity (Ibid). The analysis advanced by Lee therefore resonates with the respondent's state of mental stress, frustration and anxiety when coerced to conform to the heteronormative patterning of gender and sexualities. The respondent further informs that despite her experiences of anxiety and frustration, she retained her strategy of concealment even after inducting herself into the *hijra* community. She reasons that she doesn't intend to tarnish the repute of her family and especially that of her son by conspicuously embodying her *hijra* identity. Because of sustenance of her family and for their overall welfare, the respondent continues to resort to concealment strategies to create a semblance of being a 'normal family man' in the presence of others whilst concomitantly leading a life diametrically opposite to the heterosexual norm, viz. identifying and working as a *hijra.* The respondent therefore is conscious of the societal implications of her visibility which

includes socio-structural ramifications of her family being deprived of education, societal equity and future opportunities or life chances. In a similar strain, the work of Link and Phelan's analysis and refinement of Goffman's stigma assumes relevance as they coalesce four categories of repercussions experienced by the stigmatized ilk when one transitions from the discreditable to the discredited state. Particularly pertinent is the fourth constituent of their analysis of stigma theory which mentions the deprivation of status, repute and position when stigma is rendered visible to an audience of 'normals' (Link & Phelan, 2001). However, what remains striking in the case of the respondent is her differing rationales to deploy her 'strategies of concealment' for different contexts. When embedded and living with the 'normal' others, the respondent chose to adhere to the heteronormative expectations of being a 'man' by entering into a heterosexual union with a woman and fathering two sons. Fearing ostracization and stigma, the respondent uses the mechanism of repressing her difference to adjust with the normals. But post realization that she couldn't continue masquerading as a 'man', she chose to transition into the *hijra* community. The respondent categorically mentions her defiance against the gender standards imposed by the 'normals' post her conversion as a *hijra* and asserts that her continuation of the concealment strategy was to save the honour of her family and her children. This shift with respect to the respondent's rationale can be attributed to the impelling need for embodying one's gender and sexuality whilst simultaneously fulfilling familial and parental obligations. The overarching apparatus of heteronormativity therefore coerces the respondent to fit into the 'normal' gender and sex straitjackets. Apart from negatively impinging upon the psyche of the respondent, the structures of heteronormativity pervasively permeate into varying social structures and

institutions enforcing its ideology of gender/sex binaries to the extent that anyone who departs from such bounds experiences deprivation, lack of agency and socio-economic disenfranchisement (Link & Phelan, 2001).

4.5.4 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA- HIJRA COMMUNITY

Post proselytizing into the *hijra* community, the respondent further recalls- *"Oddly enough, I faced a lot of discrimination and prejudices when I became a hijra. Some cela from my dera betrayed me and left the household to work for another dera. She revealed to them that I was a married man living dual lives, one as a family man and the other as a hijra. My non-castrated state or me being an akowa was also disclosed by my cela. Initially, I had assumed that all hijras were admitted into a dera regardless of their castrated/non castrated state or being single or married. But gradually I realized about the hijra politics pertaining to identity and what constitutes as a genuine and a fake hijra. The hijras living in other deras labelled me as a behrupiya, a duplicate hijra attempting to strip me of my identity, profession and area. I knew that these hijras were mighty and powerful because of their money. Most of them have migrated from Bangladesh to settle down in North Bengal because Bangladesh being predominantly a musalman (muslim) country wouldn't allow them to earn a living out of toli-badhai. Despite their repeated attempts to scare me and my celas, we never succumbed to their power and pressure"*.

Counter-intuitive to the expectations of finding refuge and social support within a *hijra* community, the respondent mentions betrayal, stigma and added oppression once she became a *hijra.* The experience of stigma stems from the disagreement in terms of the contours of *hijra* identity delineated and prescribed by the *hijra* communities across the region. However, two main factions are markedly discernible viz. the *Bangladeshi hijras* as opposed to the native *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata who harbour contrasting beliefs on the *hijra* identity. The

former enforces its own conception of the *hijra* on the latter generating disputes and conflicts between the two. The respondent opposes the identity parameters imposed by the allegedly powerful *Bangladeshi hijras* and hence suffers as a consequence. She adds- *"I knew that these identity markers were imposed by those Bangladeshi hijras to assert their dominance and power over the region. I know that I am a hijra and to be a hijra you don't need to castrate yourself, follow certain occupations or remain unmarried. What is most important to me is that I am sincere in terms of what I speak and I speak the truth when I say that I identify as a hijra. When I can sing, dance, behave, act or talk like a hijra, why can't I identify as one? These so called powerful hijras make a ridiculous claim that a genuine hijra is born and not made. However, I confidently challenge this by pointing out that all the hijras across India are made and not born hijras. Who are they to impose the idea of a real and a fake hijra? I am not scared of them. I felt different and had same sex sexual desires since I first realized about my gender and sexual identity. I also dislike doing masculine work and I feel happy and at peace with myself when I do womanly chores. But I don't consider it necessary to show how true of a hijra I am by castrating my organ, following only traditional occupations and by remaining single. The biggest irony of these so-called genuine hijras is that they would never allow a real born (intersexed) hijra to survive as she may be brutally beaten or murdered by them. I think that these castrated hijras feel insecure and threatened by the presence of a real born intersexed hijra. They have bought the police walas and the local public in their favour. If they come across a big ilaka or area, they threaten the local hijras to give up their areas. These so called 'baro hijras' because of their money and muscle power also buy celas and ilakas to deprive the local hijras of their area. These hijras aren't concerned about the welfare of their celas. They coerce them to castrate and exploit them by taking away their profits. Basically, they have commercialized the hijra profession by creating divisions between an akowa and a chibbri hijra. The public too have become aware about the differences between a real and a fake hijra and some from my locality were often*

questioned by people if they are real or a fake hijra. How do I explain to these people that there are no such categories of hijras? All hijras aren't born but made. It is extremely despicable to force castration upon somebody specially someone who lacks knowledge or someone who is very poor. I have heard of instances where hijras have succumbed to abscess/infection when they visit quacks to castrate. There is a proper way of doing all these things like taking help from a healthcare professional or to take counselling for SRS. We take our blessings from Mata Rani and we become hijras but one doesn't become a hijra by resorting to all such acts of violence and coercion. I feel bad for the akowas as they are publicly humiliated and thrashed by these baro hijras and hijras who work for the bangladeshis. The hijras who have come under the influence of the powerful bangladeshi hijras often perpetuate their ideas of a genuine hijra. Most of the local hijras are gradually castrating themselves and some are taking drugs to inhibit testosterone and facial hair. These Bangladeshi hijras earn humongous amounts of money per day, about 50,000 rupees and it is because of their income that they can control DSP's of police and the local ministers. Due to their strong financial footing in the region, they recruit celas to work for them. They proudly claim that-'Merapallabharihain, aao mere dholmeinkhato', (we are more powerful and affluent and we haven't come to India to earn paltry sums of money, come and work under me). Considering their akowa/chibbri identity politics, they've made our lives miserable to the point where our celas cannot roam freely without fear in their hearts."

Noticeably, the respondent experiences violence and abuse because she stands in defiance against the dichotomies of 'real' and 'fake' *hijra* identity prescribed by the *Bangladeshi hijras*. She embodies her rebellion by engaging in non-traditional occupations such as sex work, performing as *launda*dancers and begging at trains *(gaarimangna).* Additionally, the respondent also does not conform to the belief that emasculation determines the 'authenticity' of the *hijra* identity. *Bangladeshi*

hijras purportedly advance the schisms of emasculated and non-emasculated *hijras* to discriminate between duplicate *hijras* from the genuine ones. Visibly, the monetary supremacy of the *Bangladeshi hijras* and their numerical strength (in terms of members inducted/acquired from other households) allows them to assert dominance in the region.
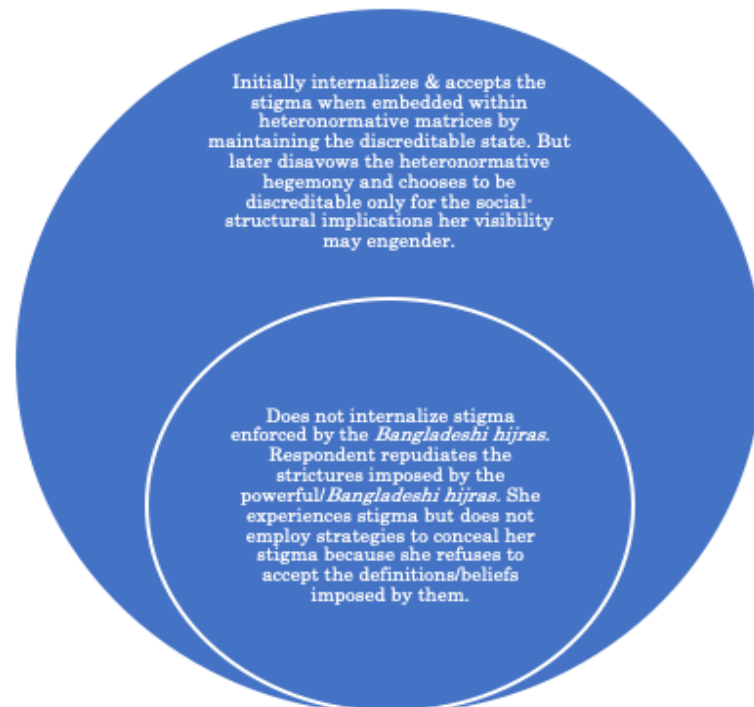
Fig.4.5: The diagram illustrates the two circles of stigma/violence experienced by the respondent. The first circle represents the stigma and the stratagems deployed by the respondent to remain discreditable within heteronormative bounds and the second circle represents the violence/abuse and discrimination experienced by the respondent within her own *hijra* ilk.

The respondent therefore experiences stigma at two levels viz. within the bounds of the heteronormative imperative and secondly, within the *hijra* culture milieus. The reason for the occurrence of stigma however shifts from one level to another as the two levels advance differing ideals to create norms and approved forms of behaviour. It would necessitate to recall Goffman's precept of stigma wherein he postulatesthat stigma in itself is not inherently discrediting but rather depends on

the spatial/temporal and cultural contexts the subject is embedded in (Goffman, 1986). Similarly, the respondent experiences stigma at both the levels because the reasons for stigma varies from one context to another. The reasons for stigma therefore is susceptible to change depending upon the specificities of contexts (Ibid). However, in certain instances like the *hijra* subculture of North Bengal and Kolkata, the stigma of 'real' and 'fake' *hijra* is often a corollary effect engendered by the stigma produced due to cultural idealistic standards of the mainstream matrices. To illustrate this premise, one needs to examine the rationale advanced by the *Bangladeshi hijras* to maintain the schisms of real and fake *hijra.* One of the reasons advanced by the *hijras* is the need to seek validation and approval from the larger 'mainstream society' as they reason that the public have become discerning and observant when they are asked for alms. This sentiment is shared by both the *Bangladeshi hijras* and some native *hijras* but supposedly implemented aggressively by the former. The larger mainstream ilk in India perceive the *hijras* as a sub-culture with a discrete gender identity viz. the third gender. They typically associate the *hijras* as singers and dancers who they believe were born with ambiguous genitalia drawing powers from *Goddess Bahuchara.* This belief in 'natal ambiguity' therefore has translated into violence and abuse as *hijras* of differing factions claim superiority of being 'born as a *hijra'* to the extent where they strictly impose and standardize it as a norm to be followed and adhered. Understandably, the reaches of the mainstream cultural norm therefore does not limit itself within its own matrices but directly or indirectly influences other sub-cultural domains, for example the *hijra* community. Hence one of the reasons for the occurrence of stigma within the *hijra* factions is the urgency to comply with the definitional limits promulgated by the heteronormative normal 'other' in order to

retain their recognition and acceptance. Such a rationale advanced by the *hijras* who endorse the schisms of real and duplicate *hijras* can be termed as a 'corollary reason'. The corollary reason therefore can be attributed as one of the rationales given to stigmatise individuals who do not conform to the 'ideal norm' of being a *hijra* as prescribed by *Bangladeshi hijras* and some native *hijras*. The diagram (Fig. 6) is representative of the above premise of 'corollary reason' wherein the larger mainstream circle imbricates upon the inner circle of the *hijra* milieus. In the larger heteronormative context, the respondent deploys the coping strategy of concealment by wearing the guise of a 'man' to salvage his family's honour whilst in the second circle, the respondent disavows the label as a discredited person challenging instead the norms and strictures imposed by other *hijra* factions. Durkin & Bucklin in their work, cites Davis's conceptualization of deviance disavowal which resonates with the respondent's response to the stigma experienced within the *hijra milieu* (Durkin & Bucklin, 2001). Durkin and Bucklin (referring to Davis's work) views disavowal and justification of one's state also as a stratagem to engage and interact with normals and also to perceive oneself as a normal (Ibid). In a similar light, the respondent's rebellion, disavowal and acceptance of oneself within the *hijra* contexts can therefore be interpreted as a coping mechanism or as a stratagem to maintain and defend her authenticity and legitimacy. It should also be mentioned that the stigmatized group of the *'hijras'* by adhering to the romanticized ideals of the *hijra* identity harboured by the mainstream society, engages in what can be termed as 'stigma profiteering' by enforcing norms of 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' *hijras*. The public beatings, violence and surveillance imposed by the powerful *hijras* on weaker *hijras* can be viewed as the internalization of the romanticized idea of the *hijra* identity

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conceived by the mainstream society. Such an idealistic conception of the *hijra* identity by the mainstream can be termed as what Goffman calls as the 'virtual social identity' (Goffman, 1986). However, there are *hijras* who do not conform to the standards of the 'virtual social identity' imposed by the mainstream and the powerful *hijras.* By repudiating the schisms of authentic and inauthentic *hijras,* they claim their actual social identity. Their 'actual social identity' can be considered as an act of rebellion and also as a coping strategy that unsettles the ideals of the powerful *hijras* and the mainstream society. The powerful *hijras,* as their way of presenting themselves in alignment with the virtual social identity of the mainstream attempts to resolve the discrepancies between the 'virtual social identity' and 'actual social identity' by exerting their power upon weaker *hijras.* Also, the maintenance of such an alignment also enables them to reap monetary profits by claiming to be a genuine *hijra.* But the weaker *hijras* on the other displaces the conceptions of such virtual social identity by stating their refusal to conform to the ideologies of the powerful *hijras.*

4.6 MALDA DISTRICT

RESPONDENT FOUR, 28 YEARS, EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA-FAMILY/NEIGHBOURHOOD/LOCALITY

Unlike the narratives of the above respondents, the interviewee from Malda recounts affirmative experiences when she was with her family. She recalls- *"I was born and raised in Sahapur, Malda. As far back as I can recall, I never saw myself as a man. I always viewed myself as a girl and later as a woman. I liked the company of girls over boys and liked to engage myself in all sorts of girly activities like cooking, cleaning etc. I used to request my friends to get me a saree and lend me their accessories so I could*

wear them and look like a pretty girl. I was never attracted to girls but when I saw them, I wanted to be like them. I was also involved romantically with some boys I knew in my hometown. I used to feel happy when they touched and kissed me, like they would, to a girl. I felt like a complete girl at that moment. I did not complete my education as I did not appear for my matriculation exams. Nonetheless, everybody at school, especially the teachers were fond of me as I was good in my studies. Despite my non-normal gender expression, choice of clothes and feminine behaviour my parents never complained about it. Instead, they were supportive of whatever I ventured to do. Even when I decided to join the hijra community when I was 15-16 years of age, they never intervened or frowned upon my decision. They simply said that my happiness was more important than anything else."

The respondent narrates an atypical instance of experiences of stigma when living with one's family and locality. The respondent asserts that she knew about her 'difference' early on and expressed no qualms in embodying it. Because of her conspicuous gender expressions, (cross-dressing and behavioural emulation of a girl) her peer group, friends, family and her teachers were already conscious about her 'difference'. However, unlike the usual responses of societal stigma and social ostracization experienced by stigmatized individuals, the respondent informs that despite her visibly 'discredited state' she was not treated with hostility or mistreatment by her family or locality people. Instead, she reportedly experienced positive, affirmative experiences of sympathy and social support. Kornblatt in her work, cites Hamburg et. al to define social systems as a network of associations consisting of individuals who proffer support, aid, strategies and feedback to stigmatized individuals about their behaviour and comportment to improve their competence (Kornblatt, 1984, pp. 40). Kornblatt deems social support systems as a crucial aspect in the lives of almost all individuals as the constituents of social support viz. family, peer groups, professional contacts, colleagues and one's peer

groups typically provide important appraisals, social guidance, their opinions and feedbacks to facilitate in shaping a happy and a fulfilling life (Ibid). The respondent's family and locality members therefore can be said to constitute her social support circle facilitating and empowering her in her journey to self-discovery. She further recalls- *"Luckily, unlike other hijras, I wasn't subjected to social stigma in my neighbourhood. Also, I was blessed with loving parents." One day, a group of hijras had come to our locality to perform toli-badhai and I was immediately fascinated by their colourful garments and jewellery. It was at that moment that I met my present guru. Post the meeting, I decided to join the hijra community for a different life. However, I also continued to support my family as they relied on me financially. On that day, I realized that I had finally found my kind of people."*

In spite of the heteronormative contexts which the respondent found herself in, she was allowed to make autonomous decisions in her life and embrace her difference. The respondent inducted herself into the *hijra* community because of her own desire/preference to identify as a *hijra* thereby transitioning into a distinctive and hyper visible state of being socially discredited. Despite living in a milieu which was supportive along with parents who were sympathetic to her difference, the respondent chose to transition from leading a life within the mainstream ilk for life as a member in the *hijra* community primarily because of financial difficulties. Social/structural impediments such as lack of education and monetary paucities therefore severely limits the availability of alternatives to eschew the socially discredited state of a *hijra.* Unlike other respondents who express their coping mechanisms to deal with the discredited stigma of difference whilst living with the 'normals', the respondent here speaks of admitting oneself into the community because of personal preference and to eke out a living for herself and her family.

Apart from personal choices, one's economic condition also can be viewed as a major impetus to alter one's state from being socially discreditable to a visible discredited state. In a similar vein, Ahmed in his work, informs about the substantial percentage (78.57%) attributed to poverty for being the reason to join prostitution (Ahmed, 2020). Typically, in conservative societies, prostitution is devalued and equated with shame, dishonour and stigma. Similarly, in the case of the respondent, the culture and the profession chosen i.e., to be in the *hijra* community is considered denigrating and is perceived to be an act of deviance (Sharma, 2009). The respondent takes recourse to the *hijra* community for financial security and partly because of the wish to live with her own kind. Although the respondent did not report of any instances of stigma, it can be interpreted that her financial support for her family was employed as a compensatory coping stratagem in order to compensate for her 'gender/sex difference'. Being the sole member to earn a livelihood, the respondent's monetary assistance to her family thus can be a way to ensure the continuity of familial support.

4.6.1 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA- HIJRA COMMUNITY

She further recalls her experiences within the *hijra* communes-

"After I became a member of the hijra community in Malda under my present guru, she introduced me to a lucrative dance profession known as launda dance. I owe a lot to my guru because it is due to her guidance that I am able to earn for myself and for my family. I accompanied my guru to Bihar wherein she told me to learn how to dance. After some initial visits, I performed some launda dance events in Bihar where I was paid handsomely. Sometimes, I earn in lakhs depending on the demands and seasons. Later on, I decided to castrate my male organ and now I am a chibbri hijra. I am aware about the identity

politics between a chibbri and an akowaHijra but I chose to voluntarily castrate because I wanted my body to align my inner gender identity. Since I have already castrated, I haven't faced any such problems from the hijra community. Although, I have heard of instances wherein akowa hijras are debarred from begging at certain places and prohibited from alighting trains to earn their daily income. Apart from all this, there are certain dangers when I visit Bihar to perform Launda dance. Launda dancers aren't respected in these parts and they are often subjected to molestation, rape and even murder. I have witnessed the abduction of a launda dancer by some group of men. She was held at gunpoint and raped by them. Fortunately, I never had to experience any such traumatic incidents. But one thing is for sure that the hijras who perform launda dance in Bihar are hardly treated with respect. Actuallylaunda dance is like a parampara, a tradition wherein blessings are sought from the dancers but most of the spectators who come to attend the show aren't interested to follow traditions but only to see the dancers. Yes, it is a dangerous profession no doubt but also a lucrative one".

The respondent does not report of any stigma experiences within the *hijra* commune but her occupational choices i.e., *laundadancesupposedly* opens up the possibility of being susceptible to sexual violence, episodes of disrespect/stigma and serious crimes like murder. The spectators of the *launda*dance performance are mainly male members of the village/town in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Here, the performers are called upon to dance during festivals or for special occasions like marriage/parties. The respondent mentions the dangers of her profession and the assaults/violence inflicted upon the performers. Although the respondent does not report of any experiences of stigma within her *hijra* commune or when performing as a *launda*dancer, she does become victimized due to her 'gender difference' as she is embedded within a heteronormative/patriarchal matrix. Such matrices negatively impinge upon those who depart from their parameters of ideal

masculinity. As a *launda* dancer, she becomes sexually commodified as an object vulnerable to sexual violence and abuse. In a similar strain, Szymanski & Moffitt in their work elaborates on the negative impacts of objectifying bodies which produces serious mental health concerns, anxiety issues about safety and the acceptance of self-objectification (Szymanski & Moffitt, 2011). The respondent too, post her transition to the *hijra* community experiences the imminent possibility of sexual abuse, physical violence or even murder. Here the stigma of being a *hijra* (gender identity) coalesces with the male (objectification) or the male gaze to produce inimical circumstances for the respondent. Their hyper visible discredited state (of being a *hijra launda* dancer) and their profession as dancers (also discredited) entertaining audiences mostly comprised of men make them easy targets of horrific crimes committed by men who perceive the *hijras* as mere sexual objects and lowly humans. The effects of patriarchy, male dominance and the hegemonic male standard continues to impinge upon the lives of the *hijras* even post the transition to the *hijra* community.

4.6.2 RESPONDENT FIVE, 35 YEARS (STIGMA EXPERIENCES: FAMILY/LOCALITY)

The respondent narrates her episodes of stigma, social opprobrium and rejection from her peers, teachers and some family members. The respondent exemplifies the effects of 'discredited' state or in this case, when one chooses to express their gender difference. She recalls- *"I've always seen and identified myself as a girl. Even when I was a child, I had this inner urge to behave and be like a girl. I was enrolled in a co-education school and there was this particular male teacher who had taken a fancy of me. He used to compliment me about my looks, saying that I was beautiful. I used to like his admiration for me, I felt like a woman and it made me feel good about myself. As days*

passed, the male teacher started becoming more sexually forward with me. He used to teach me about the intimate relationship between a man and a woman. He used to molest me and derive pleasure from it. Apart from this incident, I was sexually abused by my neighbour when I was just 15 years old. The strange thing was, I derived pleasure from all these activities. I was scared of my own sexual urges. I suffered from mental anguish and sadness and slowly isolated myself from my peers and friends."

The respondent here clearly becomes a victim of sexual abuse because of her perceptible 'discredited state'. She reportedly experienced sadness, grief and apprehensiveness because of her gender and sexual difference and her inability to conform to the heteronormative standards imposed by her society. Corrigan & Watson in their work, divides stigma into two prongs viz. public and self-stigma (Corrigan & Watson, 2002). They refer to public stigma as something that is externally determined, defined and perceived by the larger mainstream ilk which comprises of the 'normals', while self-stigma refers to the internalization of such perceptions and the effects it has upon the individual's conception of self and his/her health (Corrigan & Watson, 2002, pp. 16-17). The respondent therefore experiences self-stigma because she internalized the gender/sex role expectations imposed by her locality/social milieu which in turn produces feelings of confusion, sadness and anguish. She further adds- *"In school, another male teacher advised me not to behave like a girl. He told me to act like a man, grow a moustache and play football. I disliked what he said to me and felt more alienated and misunderstood. Gradually, my friends also avoided my company to the point where I felt very lonely. In moments of desperation, I wanted to commit suicide but it was during such trying times that my mother infused me with strength and positivity. My father too encouraged me to continue with my studies and slowly I reconciled to the fact that education was actually crucial if I wanted to be someone in life. Life has been a mixed bag of happiness and sorrows but I have learned*

to take everything in a good and positive stride. Particularly, I am lucky that I have a mother and a grandmother who are strong mentally and emotionally and who helped me immensely to emerge from mental desperation, sadness and depression".

The respondent spontaneously chooses to identify and embody her gender identity as a girl but she experiences disapproval from all quarters. In the discredited state, the respondent fails to adhere to the attributes imputed as 'normal' or 'expected' for someone born as a male. According to Goffman, such failure to conform to the gender stereotypes engenders stigma (Goffman, 1986). These expectations can be attributed to the nexus between two institutionalized structures of compulsory heteronormativity and patriarchy. The former shapes, sustains and upholds the ideologies of the latter. Chowdhury in her work, refers to Hartmann's marriage of heterosexual marriages with Patriarchy which allows for the perpetuation of gender/sex roles of men and women conceived and reified by the patriarchal structures of the society (Chowdhury, 2009, pp. 601). Such gender/sex roles are hierarchically divided into positions of superiority and inferiority. Similarly, Connell in her work, informs about such divisions by placing the powerful 'masculine' men at the uppermost rung whilst placing the women ilk and the homosexual/effeminate men at the lower rungs subordinated and controlled by the hegemonic males (Connell, 1984, pp. 326). Patriarchy ensures the supremacy of men (who exhibits archetypes of masculine behaviour) and deploys institutionalized forms of practices such as heterosexual marriages, family, reproduction, the continuation of the male lineage and heteronormative gender/sex identities to create dichotomies of masculinity and femininity. It is therefore plausible to posit that hegemonic masculinities and patriarchy works concomitantly with one another to suppress subordinate sexes and other alternative sex/gender

identities. The respondent recalls an incident wherein she was admonished by the male teacher for her heterodox expressions of gender identity. This instance can be viewed as an indoctrination of the heteronormative/heterosexual ideologies and to adhere to the binaries of 'man' and a 'woman' with the corresponding biological sexes. Unable to conceal her 'discredited state', the respondent experiences mental distress and depression. It is primarily because of her internalization of the heteronormative norms that she is unable to effectively manage or control her stigma.

4.6.3 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA—HIJRA COMMUNITY

Despite garnering support and sympathy from her family, the respondent decided to leave her home to induct oneself as a *hijra* but was reverted back by an elderly member of the *hijra* household. After coming of age, the respondent gained entry into the *hijra* household. She recalls –

"When I was about 16 years old, I decided to flee from home to join the hijra commune. I hadn't completed standard ten and this time too, I was advised by a hijra member to complete my education and then to become a hijra. Since I was still a kid, the elderly hijra told me to return after the full completion of my education. I did listen to him and completed my education. Later, I joined their community only to dislike their line of work, that is, singing/dancing or begging. So currently, I am a hijra as well as a businesswoman engaging local women and unemployed persons by teaching them how to sew bags, \furnishings and cushion covers. I also encourage underprivileged people to work with me in my business. I am a hijra myself and I have engaged in the hijra profession, but it is not something that I have a passion for. It's not something that I like to do wholeheartedly. Nonetheless, my celas are earning and contributing to the dera because and simultaneously, I am contributing to the household by engaging in business as well as hijra

profession. As of now, I haven't experienced any such traumatic incidents within the hijra community but yes, I am aware about the identity politics of the hijras pertaining to akowas and the chibbris. There are some hijras in Malda who under the pressure of their gurus have taken loans from them to castrate themselves only to be treated as bonded labourers later on. These days, the hijra profession has become more of a lucrative business than a subculture practicing traditional and customary roles".

Noticeably, the respondent deviates from her usual line of work to engage in a regular profession (small scale business) atypical for someone identifying as a *hijra.* She breaks the occupational stereotype of the *hijra* ilk by empowering not only the *hijras* and but also the deprived sections of the society. Having identified as a *hijra,* the respondent attempts to cope with her socially discredited state by attempting to engage with other economically deprived women of the society working towards collective financial empowerment. Despite her discredited state, she nonetheless manages to reconcile with some segments of the mainstream society.

4.6.4 RESPONDENT SIX, 36 YEARS (EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA: FAMILY/NEIGHBORHOOD)

The respondent almost instantaneously experiences labelling and segregation from the normative ilk when she chose to express her difference once she was cognizant of it. She recounts- *"I was born in a village in Malda. I behaved differently from the other village boys and the villagers used to assume that I was an abnormal boy. They used to tease me by calling names like 'girly boy' or 'ladies'. I had befriended some girls in the village and I sometimes used to borrow their toys, dresses and creams. It was a happy phase but it did not last long. My father passed away when I was very young. Having no financial support, I couldn't educate myself nor have access to even basic needs.*

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Considering my desperation, I decided to try my hands doing some odd jobs. I worked as a cleaner, a porter and a labourer for which I was paid a paltry sum of Rs. 5. But nonetheless, I liked working in such jobs but my mother strongly disapproved of it. This continued for some time and then a village fellow told me that I should venture into launda dance. He complimented me that I had the looks for laundagiri. Following his advice, I started to grow my hair and pierce my nose and ears. Thus began my long career of laundagiri spanning for about 14-15 years."

Because of her acknowledgement and acceptance of her gender difference, her discrediting attribute was immediately visible to her peers, locality members and her family. Despite the negative feedback received due to her gender expression, she never resorted to stigma management or coping mechanisms to reform her discredited state. To support her impoverished family, she engaged in manual labour for a brief period of time later switching to a long career as a *launda*dancer. Surprisingly, despite cross-dressing and dancing as a woman amidst a large gathering of men, her family never chastised her for not conforming to the typicality of gender norm of that of a man. Instead, her family heavily relied on her earnings for their survival. She further recalls- *"It was because of laundagiri that I was able to sustain myself and my poor family. Since my family subsisted on a hand to mouth existence, they were dependent on me to make ends meet. My family was wary about my profession and was worried about my safety but because of severe financial difficulties, they gradually reconciled with my line of work. We hijras aren't paid well and we need to look for lowly or menial jobs to earn a livelihood for ourselves and our family. Because of social stigma, I was forced to participate in launda dance events and to do hijragiri. Nobody is interested in hiring us for jobs that allow me to earn a respectful/decent living. On the personal front, I was in a relationship with a giriya but because of social stigma and my identity as a hijra, we had to part our ways. His parents weren't happy with our*

relationship and disapproved of it from the beginning. I think that a hijra's life is one of social ostracization and isolation".

The respondent mentions her family's reconciliation to her profession as they are financially dependent upon her. The word reconciliation signals meanings of an earlier disagreement with her family over her occupational choices but due to the lack of any other viable alternatives, the respondent's family gradually came to terms with her ways of earning a living. The term reconciliation also hints at the acceptance of the respondent's decision to earn as a *hijra* along with other socially disapproved earning avenues of eking out a living. Although, the respondent embraces her gender difference and does not attempt to employ coping strategies, her financial assistance to help maintain her economically deprived family intentionally or unintentionally can be interpreted as a stratagem to ameliorate her heterodox gender identity and occupational choices. Her non-conforming gender identity (discredited state) on the other nonetheless engenders unfavourable circumstances as she is embedded within the enclaves of heteronormativity and patriarchy. The simultaneous influence of such institutions directly affects marital bonds, intimate relationships, kinship, gender identities, economy, education, law and government policies. For the respondent, the conjunction of her gender/sex deviance coupled with her poverty ridden state amplified the consequences suffered in terms of lack of employment opportunities and the inability to lead a fulfilling personal life which all are the direct ramifications of social/structural inequities.

4.6.5 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA—HIJRA COMMUNITY

Post her conversion as a *hijra,* the respondent further recounts- *"After laundagiri, I was initiated into the hijra community. Since I was not as energetic as before and because*

of some health issues, I became a member of the hijra community. Although I wanted to continue with laundagiri but considering my age and the advice of a malik hijra, I took refuge in the hijra community for future security. But hijragiri also has its own set of problems. While begging in the trains, one must always be careful of the railway personnel or army men lest they molest or rape the Hijra. There have been multiple cases of molestation and police atrocities. I have also witnessed some of the hijras being bullied and manhandled by some powerful hijras because of identity politics. I don't wish to castrate my organ but I am aware about the schisms between an akowa and a chibbri hijra. Powerful Bangladeshi hijras have attempted to disrupt the local systems of hijragiri. I was never coerced by my guru to castrate myself or to perform only in traditional roles, i.e. tolibadhai. I was fortunate enough to have a liberal guru. These powerful hijras are perpetuating intolerance and violence against the uncastrated hijras. These days, even the public demand to see our private parts to ascertain whether we are a 'real' or a 'fake' hijra. This creates unwanted trouble for us when we go about doing our duties."

The respondent here experiences stigma both at the societal as well as community level. Her discredited identity and occupational engagements often elicit violence, sexual abuse and possibilities of murder. Because of her visibility in terms of dress, speech and her comportment as a *hijra* while walking at public spaces, she becomes instantaneously vulnerable to the 'male gaze' and male inflicted violence. Also as someone who begs on trains, the respondent renders herself as an easy target for the 'powerful *Bangladeshi hijras'* to force upon their ideologies of 'real' and 'fake' *hijras.* Additionally, with the public questioning her identity and authenticity as a *hijra,* the respondent experiences the repercussions of her discredited state from multiple quarters. Her occupational choices to engage as a *launda* dancer and begging for alms at trains therefore debases her identity as a *hijra* in the public as well as within the *hijra* community.

4.6.6 COOCH-BEHAR DISTRICT

RESPONDENT SEVEN, 37 YEARS- EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA- HETERONORMATIVE SPACES

The first respondent from Cooch-Behar describes her experiences of stigma as transitioning from discreditable to the discredited when she discovered that she had to reconcile with her identity without attempting to conceal it. She narrates- *"I was born in Ambari, Cooch-Behar. When I was a child, I felt different and avoided the company of boys or men as I felt terribly shy in their company. My father used to take me along to help him in the fields. Sometimes he would order me to collect firewood, chop it and stack it at our outer ledge. I despised him for forcing me to do this sort of work. I reluctantly followed his orders but deep within me, I knew that I would like to help my mother in the kitchen in cooking and cleaning. I was not enrolled in any school as my parents were poor farmers".*

The respondent speaks of her awareness that she was different from the rest desiring to engage in the activities of the opposite sex. But she also expresses her frustration and her sheer inability to embody her difference because of the need to camouflage her identity. The respondent however does not express ambiguities or confusion with respect to her gender identity and asserts early on, her desire to identify as a woman. She therefore coerces herself to adhere to the heteronormative standards of gender and sex congruency despite her inherent desire to be otherwise. Therefore, the respondent does not internalize her stigma to the point of acceptance but only insofar to maintain her state of invisibility thus precluding stigma.

4.6.7 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA- HIJRA COMMUNITY

The respondent further adds- *"As I grew older, I became more certain about my gender and sexual identity. I had also befriended a local hijra and at the age of 16, I left my home for the hijra community. My father was furious with my decision and didn't speak to me for years. One day, I was dragged by my father from the place where I currently lived (my hijra dera) and was bolted shut in one of the rooms of our house. I was kept in isolation for two days without food. In exhaustion, I had fainted and when I had the strength I opened my eyes only to see my family members all glaring at me angrily. My father ruthlessly thrashed me for identifying as a hijra and for earning money by doing laundanaach. He declared that I was now a nobody to him and for all the other family members as well. I accepted my wrongdoings, apologized and left the house never to see them again, save my mother".*

The respondent internally and outwardly asserts her gender identity by joining the *hijra* commune. Her assertion therefore can be considered as a way to reclaim her 'true self' wherein she foregrounds her own desires and needs to identify as a woman even if it stands in defiance to the normative gender constructs of her cultural milieu. She nonetheless experiences the ordeal of stigma with her transition to visibility as her family members vehemently opposed her decision to be a *hijra*. The intrinsic need to embody her difference surpasses her fear to conform to the larger normative gender/sex delineations of the society. Also, her interaction with the *hijras* of the locality allows her to interpret her discredited state from a different vantage point in which she begins to positively view her 'difference'. The act of affirming her gender identity and positively asserting it can signal her acceptance of her difference. Such an acceptance released her from the constant anticipation of fulfilling the expectations of the normals. Her departure from her family members

and locality symbolizes her rebellion against the existing structures/constraints of normativity. The decision to not attempt for reconciliation with her family and the willingness to remain in the discredited state demonstrates the respondent's subjective interpretations and response to her situation which was further facilitated and encouraged with her interactions with other *hijra* members. Adorjan and Kelly in their work, *'Interpretive Sociology'* (2017) mentions the importance of interpretation or *verstehen* when examining social life and its subjects. They posit that individuals should be viewed as 'subjective beings' capable of holding their own meanings and interpretations of social situations unfolding in their lived experience (Adorjan, Kelly, 2017, pp. 1). Such a postulation offers plausible insights especially with respect to the respondent's preference of retaining the 'discredited' state. The respondent thus exemplifies the interactive premise that human beings are not mere passive subjects retaining and embracing what the society imposes upon them but rather actively engages with their milieu, creating meanings, interacting with others and engendering changes.

4.6.8 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA-HIJRA COMMUNITY

The respondent further narrates her experiences of stigma experienced within the *hijra* community. She speaks of exploitation, discrimination and acts of coercion. She recalls-

"My guru wanted me to castrate so that I could earn more. I was personally not interested in altering my body but because of money constraints, I did sever my male organ. Nobody in my family is aware about the castration except my mother. My guru wanted me to look more feminine and attractive and therefore urged me to castrate. She deemed it to be useless as for her it didn't serve any purpose. I was already engaged in laundadance but

she also told me to do gaari that is to beg in trains. I have to pay my rozhissa (daily portion from my income) to my guru as I live in her dera. No doubt I earn quite much from doing launda dance to begging in trains but as a hijra, you are deprived of a life of dignity and respect. I earn about 50,000 rupees monthly when I beg in the trains but the public behaves very rudely and sometimes they abuse us verbally. Some of them don't even wish to speak with me and treat us as non-existent beings. Sometimes, I wish for a low paying but respectful job and if given the choice, I would leave the hijra profession for it."

Evidently, the respondent experiences the second level of stigma and discrimination within the *hijra* communes. Because of the power relations existent within the community wherein the *gurus* expect their *celas* to work under them, to earn money and share their incomes with them, the respondent expresses her consternation when her *guru* monetarily exploits and demands her to increase her income by engaging in other kinds of work. An element of coercion also exists between the respondent and her *guru* in which the latter forces her to emasculate her genitalia if she is to continue working in her household. Even within the *hijra* household the respondent experiences episodes of stigma and prejudice because of her phallus. The *guru* attempts to discipline the bodies of her *celas* by enforcing upon them the templates of femininity. The demand for the severance of the phallus for a more feminine appearance demonstrates the unequal power relations between the *gurus* and their *celas*. The respondent adds- *"Hijra profession is fraught with greed, power, violence and money. The guru of the dera is only concerned about how much profit I am bringing to the house. There are some celas I know in North Bengal who were fortunate enough to have gurus who didn't force them to undergo castration. They also share a warm relationship with their gurus and it is more of a parent child sort of a relation. To identify as a hijra has its own painful consequences, castration being one of them. I had to risk my health and even possible death to become a chibbri hijra."*

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In the second level of stigma, the respondent counters the stigma experienced within the *hijra* community by adhering to the parameters of identity advanced by her *guru* for which she experiences perilous consequences. Like the precedent respondents, the respondent too experiences two levels of stigma i.e. as a *hijra* within heteronormative spaces and within one's own *hijra* commune. Because of stigma internalization, the respondent desires for a regular 'respectable' job (with low pay) approved by the heteronormative society. The respondent also clearly acknowledges that the *hijra* profession is considered 'lowly' by the mainstream society and it was primarily because of her lack of any alternative to financial recourse and personal freedom that she chose to be a *hijra.* Despite her need to eschew the presence of her parents, she still avows her gender identity and her profession as an act of 'deviance'. Even post transition to the *hijra* community, she continues to define the *hijra* profession and identity negatively as she considers it to be embroiled with identity politics, asserting power and dominance over other weaker *hijras.* It becomes possible to infer then, that it is primarily due to stigma avowal that the respondent adheres to the identity norms of her community. She agrees to emasculate herself to fit into the idealistic social and *hijra* community perceptions of *hijra* identity. The internalization of stigma therefore causes her to adhere to the community norms of emasculation to preclude her descent into further state of discredit.

4.6.9 RESPONDENT EIGHT, 38 YEARS (HETERONORMATIVE SPACES-FAMILY/LOCALITY)

Here the respondent speaks of 'instantaneous visibility' when living with the 'normals'. She recalls-

"I wasn't fortunate enough to have a loving, supportive family. People in my locality used to tease me incessantly about my feminine attributes. They used to call me names like half ladies and chakka. Neighbours used to berate me for behaving like a girl. They used to say that since you were born as a man, you need to behave as a man. My parents too were worried about my behaviour. However, for the sake of my parents, I tried my best to be like a boy. I wore clothes and acted like how all the village boys behaved but I failed terribly. I also made friends with some local boys to learn their mannerisms but just couldn't. I was sexually attracted to boys and men but could never be like one. I preferred the company of girls, leaving my hair long just like them and was fond of playing with them."

The respondent faces criticisms for her demeanour and comportment and attempts to enact acts of masculinity as expected by her family and society. The respondent, because of not coming to terms with her identity and sexuality does not initially acknowledge her difference and she struggles to maintain a semblance of normalcy. This phase can be referred to as the discreditable state and it is typically in such a state that individuals try to sustain the facade of social conformity. Goffman in his work distinguishes between two states i.e. discreditable and the discredited by referring to the former wherein the individual may attempt to manage the stigmatizing information whereas in the latter, the individual may try to dispel tensions during face to face interactions (Goffman, 1986). Her attempts at performing and enacting the masculine role therefore is a way to camouflage her socially discrediting attribute of being 'girly' or 'effeminate' (Ibid). Such information is actively controlled by the respondent when engaging in face to face interactions with her family and the normal others (Ibid). However, because of her intrinsic orientation to be woman-like or womanly, the respondent fails to produce an 'authentic emulation' of masculine attributes. Because of her spontaneous embodiment of her gender difference in the presence of 'normal others', the

respondent fails to suppress her 'authentic self' thereby experiencing social stigma despite attempting to control/manage the information of her devalued attribute. Goffman further articulates about social information which can be gathered via symbols. These symbols can be further bifurcated into stigma symbols and prestige symbols (Goffman, 1986, pp. 43-44). Goffman cites multiple examples such as lapel buttons or insignias to demonstrate 'prestige symbols' and conversely, the devalued attributes or signs which signal 'stigma symbols', for example a shorn off head of women engaged in world war II constitutes as a stigma symbol (Ibid). The respondent's embodied expression of difference in itself becomes a site for conveying the 'stigma symbols' as she organically represents her true self when interacting with the normal ilk. Her body therefore becomes a ground for suppressing her 'real self' in the presence of others whilst spontaneously expressing it which in turn risks the possibility of visibility. The respondent further narrates-

"During my school days, I was infatuated with one of the boys from school. I secretly liked him from a distance but never had the courage to propose. However, I approached him and proposed. His answer broke my heart- 'you are not a girl, how can I love you back?'. I felt sad and angry with myself wanting to inflict self-injury and to commit suicide. I confessed to my mother but she didn't show sympathy or support. Instead, she was very disappointed and angry with me. They enrolled me in a local school but before I could complete class 10, I dropped out. One day I confronted my parents saying that it was not my fault that I was like this, or behaved like this. It was not a deliberate act but something that I truly felt. They did not sympathize with me, instead they threatened to evict me from the house. I was devastated and felt hollow from within. I couldn't reason with them considering their behavior towards me. I decided to end the torture by ingesting poison. However I survived the ordeal as they had admitted me to a nearby hospital. Post that

incident, they haven't said anything to me and we are neutral with one another. They don't reproach/communicate with me nor do I bother to visit them".

Despite wanting to adhere to the templates of 'masculine gender' imposed by her society, the respondent expresses her unsuccessful attempts at enacting or embodying the masculine qualities expected out of her. Post episodes of rejection, lack of social support and denial by her family and friends alike, she experienced a disconnect with her own self unable to comprehend her difference. However, she reconciles and reclaims her body and gender difference by questioning instead the gender norms enforced by the society. The respondent therefore transitions from the acceptance of her 'stigma' towards the repudiation of the stigma. She therefore descended into the state of discredit wherein her discrediting attribute was now wholly perceptible. As a consequence she experienced enormous mental trauma, failed suicide attempts and subsequent acceptance of her 'self' and 'identity' and alienation from her parents and family. The respondent's partial internalization of stigma produced personal ordeals endangering her life and health. In a similar vein, Nanda et. al in their work, mentions the pernicious health effects such as decreased self-confidence, confusion and death produced due to stigma internalization (Nanda et. al, 2009, pp. 7). The internalization of stigma thus renders the stigmatized individual to acquiesce or view themselves from the standards of normalcy which produces internal conflicts within the self, manifesting as confusion, sadness, frustration and possible death.

4.6.10 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA-HIJRA COMMUNITY

The respondent further articulates her experiences post her transition to the *hijra* community-

"Initially, I did not know about the hijras and their community. But one day I met some members from the community and decided to join them. My guru nani taught me to earn money from gaari (begging on trains) and I also was a laundanaach dancer. My guru nani taught me all sorts of 'kamaney ka dhandha' or ways of earning money. I was also engaged in prostitution for a brief period when I was between 16-17 years old. Although I haven't faced much stigma within the hijra community, I was verbally and physically abused while out at work. The police walas extort money from us and intercept us for trivial reasons or sometimes for no reason at all. Even if we are simply begging or going about our jobs, the police level charges against us with some invalid reasons. They hardly take us seriously because even if we lodge a complaint or FIR we are viewed with suspicion instead. Also, they do not provide any help. Basically, there are no safe spaces for us. Even when we go to Bihar for laundanaach, we also have to remain cautious. I have been assaulted and molested multiple times by those men. I have blade bruise marks on my arms and the back. I was also abducted once and sexually violated by those men in a desolate area. They take the liberty when they see a hijra because they know that nobody will hear or register our complaints. This sheer lack of social support has jeopardized multiple lives including mine."

The respondent recalls episodes of mistreatment, violence and sexual abuse whilst engaging with the 'normals' at public spaces. Particularly, she becomes the victim of the 'male gaze' wherein she is sexually targeted for being the 'deviant/relegated other'. In a similar strain, Goffman's conceptualization of the 'known-about-ness' of the discredited individual needs to be recalled as he further distinguishes between the state of visibility and the state of known-about-ness (Goffman, 1986). The respondent's hyper visibility as a *hijra* can be referred to her known-about-ness as she renders herself to be immediately conspicuous in the presence of others. Goffman further introduces the term 'obtrusiveness' and 'perceived focus' when assessing the stigmatised individual's face-to-face interactions with the normal

(Ibid). In the stream of everyday interactions between the stigmatised and the normal, Goffman considers obtrusiveness of stigma as an important element as it disrupts the flow of a conversation, meeting or interaction with the normal others (Ibid). However, what concerns Goffman is the perpetual disruption or the continual unwelcome intrusion of the 'stigmatizing attribute' in the midst of a conversation, interaction or a meeting. Referring to the respondent's narratives, her discrediting attribute as a *hijra* obtrudes her interaction with the normalsi.e. while begging at public spaces, interacting with the law enforcers or while performing as a *launda*dancer. Such an intrusion of her stigma renders her to be susceptible to discrimination, societal persecution, sexual violence and unequal treatment. But unlike Goffman's trajectory for the discredited, the respondent is unable to cope with her discrediting attribute because she embodies all the symbols of the devalued attribute on a regular basis. The symbols of cross-dressing, the clap of a *hijra,* the easily recognizable inflected tone of her voice, her speech, gestures and body stances obtrude in her everyday interactions with the normals which prohibits her from concealing her identity, gender and sub-culture. Institutions such as heteronormativity, practices of transphobia, sexual violence, male domination and suppression therefore constitutes as key sites constraining and reducing the respondent as a sexual minority with severely limited life chances/opportunities, lack of agency and socio-economic disenfranchisement.

4.6.11 RESPONDENT NINE, 42 YEARS: EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA (FAMILY AND LOCAL SPACES)

The impingement of 'heteronormativity' is directly experienced by the respondent when she realizes her gender difference living amidst her family and locality members. She recounts-

"I was born male but inwardly I harboured feminine propensities. Because of acute financial problems, I could not complete my education and dropped out of school at standard 9. I started doing all kinds of household chores like preparing meals, washing utensils and clothes. In fact, I had confided to my mother that I was more interested in this line of work. If someone would pay me a decent sum for this work, I would readily accept it. I was aware about my femininity and expressed it more in the company of other girls by talking or just being with them. There were some boys who wanted to be friends with me but I wouldn't allow it. I was painfully shy with them. One time, one boy from school tried to get hold of me forcibly and tried to kiss me. I somehow managed to free myself and I told my mother about the incident. She told me to behave like a boy to avoid such sorts of encounters."

Here the respondent is cognizant of her incongruous corporality, gender identity and sexuality. She is aware about her inherent feminine proclivities which she attempts to conceal from her male counterparts. She expresses and embodies her difference by engaging in typical feminine household tasks and only discloses her 'real self' in the presence of her female peers. Due to the lack of social support from her family, the respondent had to continually suppress her identity or her difference in their presence. The respondent clearly demonstrates her discreditable state as she chooses to relegate her identity and gender expression for the sake of her family's honour. In a social milieu governed by the binaries of masculinity and femininity, coping with her difference therefore becomes difficult as it manifests organically when going about her everyday activities and especially in the presence of the 'normals' or her family. Therefore, her tendency to behave like a girl and adhere to the tasks considered womanly becomes her 'stigma' symbols and it is primarily because of such symbols which disrupts her attempts at complete concealment of her real gender identity. She further continues-

"As time passed, I partook in a local drama club called 'ManoshaGaan' and our group was further selected to represent our locality in other dramas too. People around me were now noticing me for my talent and praised our group. One day, one of the dancers approached me and said- "Babu, will you go to Bihar to dance?" and I replied affirmatively. Looking back, I am happy that I agreed to perform in Laundanaach because of its lucrative scope. However, laundanaach does come with its own risks. Although we were poor, I knew that for my parents respect was very important for them. I used to send them money from what I earned in Bihar but never disclosed them about my profession. I have also experienced heartbreak, loss and rejection when I was in a relationship with a man who I met during one of my trips to Bihar. He was gentle and loving and promised to marry me but eventually his marriage was arranged elsewhere with a woman. When I communicated with him, he had already married. I had spiralled into a dark phase in my life and it took about a year for me to fully recover from the shock. Because of society viewing us differently, we hardly have anyone to interact with or share our feelings with."

As a way to control information pertaining to her 'discreditable state' from her family and neighbourhood, she migrates away from her place as a mechanism to camouflage her identity and her societally disapproved occupational choices viz. a *launda*dancer and later becoming a *hijra*. The paucity of financial means, incomplete education, the strictures and matrices of heteronormativity and the absence of familial support disempowered her from exploring or engaging in other means of earning a living. Such structural impediments consequently lead the respondent to accrue additional stigma owing to occupational engagements. Also, because of not wanting to bring disrepute to her family's honour, she rejects her own intrinsic urge to embody and identify as the opposite gender. Also in an attempt to appease her parents, the respondent promises to support them financially. The respondent therefore responds to her stigma by employing

stratagems of concealment (i.e. migration and the subsequent struggle to maintain the semblance of normalcy) and providing financial support for her family.

4.6.12 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA- HIJRA COMMUNITY

After transitioning into the *hijra* community, the respondent was made to experience stigma within her own community. She recalls-

"When I was 18 years of age, I realized that I had to join the hijra community. Initially I was scared of them but nonetheless, I followed a group of hijras one day back to their dera and asked them to take them as their member. I was told by my guru-maa that I had to castrate myself if I was to live with them. She had told us about how some gurus exert dominance over other gurus because their number of castrated celas were comparatively more than non-castrated ones. I was reluctant at first to castrate but slowly I succumbed to the pressure of my guru and other celas who had recently castrated. Before my operation, I could see a change in the behaviour of my guru with regard to her treatment towards me and other celas. She suddenly started to scold me more often and berate me needlessly. She however was very kind to other celas and spoke gently with them. Sometimes, I was not given food or served bland food than other celas. I realized later that since I had not castrated, I was treated bitterly by our guru."

The respondent narrates her experiences of stigma elicited by the identity divisions in the *hijra* household. Because of the hierarchical gradings of the *hijra* identity into *akowas*(non-castrated) and *chibbris*(castrated/emasculated), the respondent encounters stigma because of the non-severance of her organ. The guru of the household exhorts her to castrate and warns of annulling her as a *cela/*member if she does not comply with the identity parameters delimited by the household. The genitalia therefore becomes a primary site for generating stigma and ascertaining

power relations between *hijras* of multiple households. Contrary to the norms harboured by the mainstream heteronormative and patriarchal society wherein the primacy was accorded to the potent male organ and its agreement with masculinity, the *hijra* households on the other (referring to the respondent's narratives) considers the absence of the male phallus as a determiner of a real *hijra* identity. The respondent therefore experiences stigma in both the contexts but for differing reasons. The discrediting attribute shifts from approving the potent phallus and upholding the nexus between masculinity and the male sex towards viewing the phallus as an unwanted organ which carries the possibility of labelling the individual as a duplicate/imposter *hijra.* Noticeably, stigma in itself does not diminish or expunge when one abandons a certain restrictive social milieu. It transcends particular social contexts to permeate into multiple other milieus with varying yardsticks to measure desirable and undesirable/devalued attributes. As Falk in his work mentions about the proclivities of groups or communities to maintain the strictures of stigma in order to sustain the categories of 'us' vs. 'them' (Falk, 2010). He further suggests that aggregates of people rely on certain indicators to galvanize people based on commonality and segregate those considered to be different or non-conforming of such markers (Falk, 2001, pg. 3). In the heteronormative/patriarchal matrices, stigma persists in order to create bifurcations between normal and non-normal genders/sexualities whilst within the *hijra* communities, attributes of stigma endures due to identity politics of the 'real and the duplicate' *hijra.*

The respondent further adds-

"To survive in a hijra community, it is actually a requisite to keep the guru happy monetarily. Knowing this, I borrowed some money from my guru maa, went to Bihar in a quack's clinic and then castrated myself. I returned back to my dera the following day and my guru splashed a bowl of boiling hot water on my groin. I cried with pain and couldn't move for days. Luckily, the infection did not spread and I could revert back to my duties again. Honestly speaking, it is a gruelling task to work for a hijra guru. Apart from performing toli-badhai, begging in trains, shops or during festivals, a hijra is also expected to perform all the household chores like cooking, cleaning and taking care of one's guru. Being a cela means getting exploited in the hands of the guru."

Stigmatised individuals often form groups wherein members of the group share a common devalued attribute in order to draw upon social support and sympathy. Bodies like civil societies for example NGO's, CBO's (community-based organization) or small informal groups (temporary/permanent) convening for support are instances of such groupings which the discredited individual often takes refuge in as a coping mechanism to assuage feelings of social alienation, difference and social stigma. In the case of the respondent, she experiences instead, the stigma of being 'different' and 'devalued' even when dwelling with people who share a commonality of being a *hijra.* Hence, the respondent espouses corrective surgical measures to appease her *guru,* her household members thereby sustaining the binaries of 'real' and 'duplicate' *hijras* in the process.

RESPONDENT TEN, 36 YEARS: EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA (FAMILY/LOCALITY)

Knowing about her gender difference quite early on, the respondent expressed no regret or self-pity for her socially devalued attribute. She narrates-

"I was born in an area called Birpara in Alipurduar. I knew right from the beginning that I did not wish to be like other village boys playing in the dirt and wearing loose clothes. I wanted to be a fashion queen, a fashionista when I grew up. I aspired to be like one of those Bollywood actresses. But fate, it seems, had other plans for me. Due to my inability to complete schooling because of family problems and a lack of interest, I dropped out before I could complete standard 8. Villagers and locality people knew that I was different because I liked to defy all the norms of gender expression imposed on me. I was tall and I liked to dress up in patiala, sarees, kurtis or kurta pyjamas and apply make-up. So you could say that I stood out distinct from the rest. Although my parents did not express direct anger, they definitely did not approve of it. I was their only son and they had expected me to shoulder the responsibilities of the family and my sisters after I grew up. But I knew in my heart that I couldn't be like a man or marry a woman. Because at the end of the day, I would be spoiling two lives, mine and hers."

The respondent publicly portrays her desired gender identity by wearing clothes of the opposite gender and by making declarations of her intrinsic need to identify as a woman. The respondent further reasons that she is unwilling to uphold the gender/sex norms imposed by her parents and society as she would experience personal dissatisfaction, frustration and would deprive her from leading a fulfilled life. She disavows the parameters of identity and societal constraints and

foregrounds instead her difference by embracing and embodying it conspicuously. She therefore becomes an object of 'discredit' and 'ridicule' for flouting the general conventions of her society. She nonetheless disregards the negative responses elicited by her difference and continues to affirmatively assert and accept her gender divergences. She further adds-

"I used to like the presence of boys and I had affairs with many of them. I had no qualms then, I have no qualms now because it is who I am, what I desire. Local villagers, locality people and my own parents would mock me for not being a man, since I was born a man. Often, the village elderly would reproach me for shirking my responsibilities of being a son. I tried to reason with them that I could never identify as a man nor fulfil the role of one but they would never understand. Although, I did help my mother in other kinds of chores like filling and refilling pails of water from the local municipal tap, sweeping the house clean and cooking food for my parents. I was also interested in sewing and would love to create an outfit out of a piece of garment. My parents, dissatisfied as they were with me, never threatened to abandon me for they constantly worried about my future prospects. Although I loved my family, I knew that I had to meet my kind to feel at peace with myself."

The respondent continually deflects the imputations of gender expectations endorsed by the society. Goffman mentions the discrepancy which arises when individuals deviate from the accepted stereotypes or expectations of a particular category. Such deviations creates the possibility of transitioning from the discreditable to the discredited state but the respondent rejects the imposition of the discredited state of the mainstream heteronormative society and instead tries question or challenge the social suppression. Similarly Goffman explains in his work about the defensive stance espoused by some stigmatized individuals or groups in which they do not appear to express guilt or remorse for their devalued

attribute (Goffman, 1963). In a similar vein, the respondent accepts her divergent gender identity, sexuality and sexual desires not acquiescing to the societal pressures of the larger society (Ibid). She does not internalize the strictures of the society and in Goffman's own words, defends her position by embodying the socially devalued attribute (Ibid). Additionally, Page in his work further adds the insight of 'rejection' of one's stigma via formal or informal means (Page, 2015). He posits that stigmatized individuals may express rejection either openly/explicitly in the presence of others for instance by campaigning or participating at protest marches or by simply stating their difference to others. He further mentions that individuals may also espouse the passive stance in which they do not publicly announce or proclaim their 'difference' (Ibid). He further elaborates on the conceptualization of 'stigma disavowal' which he sub-divides into two prongs, viz. formal and informal disavowal wherein the former denotes disavowal of one's stigma by seeking redressal from the concerned authorities or official organizations (Ibid). In the latter, one repudiates one's stigma via informal means which is rendered possible by virtue of his/her standing with respect to class, status and power (Ibid). Similarly, in the case of the respondent, she expresses her rejection of her 'stigma' explicitly via means of embodiment, cross-dressing, holding dialogues with one's family/locality members and engaging in same-sex activities. Because of her economic deprivation, lack of formal education and overall disempowerment, the respondent engages in strategies readily available to her i.e. direct engagement with the audience or the normals and expressions of defiance wherein one's body becomes a primary site for contesting traditional conventions of gender and sexuality (Ibid). The respondent's lived embodiment of gender expression and sexuality therefore becomes emblematic of her resistance,

repudiation and her affirmative reconciliation with her difference. She harbours a fairly straightforward interpretation of her devalued attribute which she perceives to be an unalterable and invariable aspect of her 'selfhood' which is not amenable to changes. It is due to such personal conception/perception of her identity that enables her to disregard the norms imposed.

4.6.14 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA- HIJRA COMMUNITY

The respondent speaks of the affirmative changes post her conversion as a *hijra*. She speaks of support and freedom she received from her inmates and her *guru* within the *hijra* commune-

"I was travelling from Siliguri to Alipurduar and en route, I met a hijra who started a conversation with me. At first, I was taken aback because my parents had informed me about the hijra community and this was the first time that I had spoken to a hijra. Instantly, I could feel a connection with her and she mentioned her address in Alipurduar and told me to meet her once. Some days later, I decided to meet her at her place near Alipurduar Railway Junction. I met her and her guru and we conversed for hours. I told them about my life experiences and they offered me a place in their household. I instantly agreed to be a hijra and work as their cela. Life so far has been smooth living under them in their rented place. My guru is a fairly open-minded person and she allows me to roam and keep romantic relationships with giriyas. The only thing that is expected out of me is to contribute financially for the upkeep of the household, food, ration and electricity bills and also a portion of my earnings is to be given to my guru. I am lucky you know, that I have a guru maa like her because I can share anything with her and she sympathizes and cares for me like a mother would to her child. I am aware about the atrocities and the crimes committed by some hijras against powerless hijras but our dera is somewhat immune to all this because my guru doesn't allow any of these elements to disrupt our lives. However, we

do experience bullying in the hands of other hijras when we go about doing our duties. We have been forced by some hijras to disembark from trains because they claim that it is their area and we were also roughed up on other occasions because of the divisions between akowa and chibbris. Our guru maa never imposed upon us to castrate or to be like a chibbri hijra to earn money. She simply said that it was your choice, because it is your body, and nobody can impose their will on you. However, our earnings have declined because of all these incidents due to identity divisions".

The respondent here experiences social stigma and deprivation of livelihood because of the discrimination and violence inflicted by other powerful *hijras.* Owing to identity mobilization and the segregations between *'akowas'* and *'chibbris'* in which the former is relegated under the latter, the privileged *hijras* (who allegedly have a large number of *celas* working under them, money, relations with the law enforcers (police) and muscle power) often exert their dominance by labelling other monetarily/numerically weak *hijras* as 'duplicates'. The powerful *hijras* and their arbitrary imposition of the *hijra* identities therefore engenders inimical situations and circumstances of hostility between multiple *hijra* factions. The respondent therefore experiences stigma emanating from the hostilities and disagreements between those groupings who adhere to the ideologies of the powerful *hijras* and those who defy or oppose the same. Also, belonging to a minority grouping, the respondent is unable to retaliate to the repressive/violent tactics of the powerful *hijras.* Due to the differences of opinion with respect to the *hijra* identity, the respondent, her guru and other members of their household do not internalize the parameters of identity imposed by the powerful *hijras.* The respondent therefore does not accept the stigma forced upon her and subsequently does not espouse strategies to conceal or manage her 'discredited state'. This

implies complete disavowal or rejection of the norms enforced by the majoritarian/authoritarian *hijras* of the region. The suppressive/abusive measures enforced by the powerful *hijras* instead can be interpreted as a stigma management technique to disassociate themselves from other 'duplicate *hijras'* in order to maintain the public image of authenticity. Here authenticity is tantamount to one's severed genitalia via which the powerful *hijras* assert their claim of being a real *hijra* when encountering the normal others. Such coping strategies of the majoritarian/powerful *hijras* however adversely affects minority *hijra* groupings as they are strategically deprived of their daily earnings even within their own *ilaka*or locality. Despite the possibilities of experiencing deprivation and the constant threat to one's life, the respondent chose to remain in the discredited state of being an *'akowa'*. The sociological concept of 'verstehen' or interpretation/understanding advanced by Max Weber needs to be foregrounded while referring to the experiences of stigma recounted by the respondent. The decision to transition from a discreditable to the discredited state ultimately lies on the respondent's discretion. In the continual process of interaction with others and personal interpretation of one's circumstances, the individual may choose to internalize one's devalued attribute or repudiate it entirely. Drawing on the meaning of *'verstehen', i.e.* understanding, it becomes plausible to assert that every individual views their 'devalued attribute' in differing ways. Such difference in perception can be attributed to the interactive and interpretive tendencies harboured by individuals which enables them to reason, discover personal meanings and form judgements. It is primarily because of such proclivities that individuals either acquiesce to or resist the restrictive standards enforced by larger societal structures or powerful dominant groupings. Case in point, the respondent here instantaneously rejects the prescribed

gender norms of her social milieu to embrace and embody her difference. She interprets her 'gender difference' as an invariable and unchanging aspect of her selfhood thereby refusing to conform to the standards of her society. She espouses what Goffman calls a 'defensive' stance with respect to her discredited attribute. Similarly, when living within her own *hijra* communes, she opposes the standards of identity forcibly enforced by other powerful *hijra* factions. It is primarily because of her ability to reason, to think, interact and to interpret which enables her to resist the mechanisms of dominance and the ideologies of 'real' and 'duplicate' identities perpetuated by the powerful *hijras.*

4.6.15 RESPONDENT ELEVEN: 45 YEARS- EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA, FAMILY/LOCALITY

While in the discreditable state, the respondent experiences her first encounter of her sexual difference and she responds to her 'deviant state' by internalizing her social milieu's negative stance towards same sex sexualities. She recalls-

"I was born and raised in Mathabhanga, Alipurduar. My family wasn't the supportive type. Because of a large family and low income, I had to drop out of elementary school. I had to discontinue studies when I was in standard 1. My family expected me to work and help them in bringing income and sustain the family. I accompanied my father to the fields, worked sometimes as a helper doing odd jobs and helped my mother at home. When I was 12-13 years of age, I realized that I was attracted to boys. At first, I felt a deep sense of shame for my sexuality but eventually when I met others of my kind, I accepted my gender and sexual identity. I would sometimes dress up as a girl and roam the streets of Alipurduar town. One local village boy had taken notice of me and approached me saying that I was beautiful and different. I grew to like him and we had a long relationship of about 5 years. We were also involved physically and had made plans to elope and marry.

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But my parents came to know about the affair and that was the end of our relationship. My family stripped me of my feminine clothes and rubbed make-up off my face. I was also beaten up by my father for bringing shame and dishonour to the family. I tried to reason with them that all these feelings of femininity were something that was inherent in me and I could not identify like a boy."

Because of her socialization into the heteronormative matrices, the respondent initially expresses remorse for her 'difference' but later revises her response towards her socially devalued attribute when she interacts with similar cohorts of people. Her interactions with individuals exhibiting similar sexual proclivities allows her to perceive her 'denigrated status' from a differing vantage point. Such interactions and alternative perceptions of her stigma therefore affected the respondent emboldening her to assert and embody her identity at public spaces. The encounter 'with her own kind' also provided an impetus for the respondent to acknowledge and embrace her difference. Such positive cognizance of her body and gender enabled her to interpret her identity and difference as an immutable aspect of her 'selfhood'. The respondent's understanding of her situation allowed her to counter her family's physical and verbal abuses as she continued to assert and defend her difference. Frost et al. in their work, mentions the multiple vulnerabilities sexual minorities are continually exposed to (Frost et al., 2013). Owing to their sexual/gender difference, they often become victims of homophobia and transphobia. They further assert that individuals identifying as homosexuals have to cope with multiple stressors stemming from social prejudice, unacceptance and the possibilities of aggressive behaviours/assaults. Despite experiencing familial pressures, the respondent nonetheless transitioned from simply internalizing the typical societal perceptions against her 'devalued attribute'

towards actively interpreting her discredited state challenging the social opprobrium and social stigma. Here, the respondent actively questions her 'discredited state' forcibly imposed by her social milieus. By her acts of contestation, she dislodges any remnants of stigma internalization. In a similar strain, Green in her work, mentions the deviance disavowal as a technique to absolve oneself from one's faults or wrongdoings (Green, 2009). In the case of the respondent, she attempts to reason with her family that her identity and sexuality are immanent and intrinsic to her 'real self' and expresses her unwillingness to conform to the expected gender roles.

She further recalls-

"I couldn't live in such an environment and decided to leave. My parents did not object then, but it is all sorted now as I sometimes go to their place and they come to mine. Because of my hijra earnings, I have also supported them financially and helped in funding my siblings educational needs. My parents have grown old and weak now and albeit I could never be their son, I have fulfilled all the responsibilities by being a hijra."

The respondent exemplifies the instance of overcoming her stigmatized position via disavowal of her own stigma by perceiving it not as a 'devalued attribute' but as an integral and immanent part of her identity. The respondent reconciles her differences with her family by asserting her inability to fit into the masculine roles and the subsequent expectations of being a son. She nonetheless continues to provide financial security which also helps in the reconciliation process with her family. She therefore transitions from a discreditable state towards a discredited one by embracing and interpreting her identity and self as an invariable essence choosing to abandon her family and locality for wanting to live and identify as a

hijra. Her acknowledgement of self, acceptance of difference and the willingness to provide financial security for her family enables her to cope with her stigma.

4.6.16 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA- HIJRA COMMUNITY

Post inducting oneself into the *hijra* community, the respondent recalls of physical assaults, harassment at public spaces and labelling. She narrates-

"I came to know about the hijra community via my friend. She told me to meet them once, so I visited the hijra community near Alipurduar Railway Junction. I was initiated into the community at the age of 18. Although I was fortunate to have good natured inmates and a loving guru, it was when I went about begging for alms on the trains that I was physically abused. One day, I was going about my daily work and was about to board a train heading for Siliguri when a group of hijras accosted me and took me aside. They began asking me if I was an akowa or a chibbri. I said that I was an akowa hijra and the moment I said that these hijras started beating me with sticks telling me that I was bringing shame to the hijra community by being an akowa, a duplicate hijra. That day, I was thoroughly bruised and couldn't walk back home by myself. I had to call my other friends from the dera to help me get back. I know for a fact that the gang who intercepted were celas of those Bangladeshi hijras. If I am to tell you honestly, these Bangladeshis are slowly usurping the regional power of North Bengal. They are damaging the unity of the local hijras by buying local members to work in their favour."

The respondent here recounts her experiences of stigma stemming not from her commune but from the disputes generated because of the disagreements between *hijras* belonging to two factions viz. the *Bangladeshis* and the native/local *hijras.* The former group (supposedly stronger in numerical strength and monetary power) attempts to exert its influence upon the weaker local *hijra* groupings. Owing to the

differences of stances in terms of identity parameters and the standards of authenticity and inauthenticity, the two *hijra* groupings express antagonism and hostilities against one another. Recalling Goffman, the two factions hold differing stereotypes of desirable and undesirable attributes with respect to the *hijra* identity (Goffman, 1986). The stereotypes of *hijra* identity harboured by the groups therefore acts as a yardstick to measure and assign certain characteristics they deem as accepted and unaccepted (Ibid). Belonging to the *hijra* faction which opposed the identity delineations of the *Bangladeshi hijras,* the respondent was instantaneously relegated to the discredited state in their presence. Being an *akowa*or a non-castrated *hijra* implied that the respondent in her embodiment resisted the coercive enforcements of the *Bangladeshi hijras.* As a subculture that is embedded in the margins of the heteronormative society, the *Bangladeshi hijras* coercive measures against the local *hijras* can be viewed as a coping mechanism to appease the larger mainstream society and their expectations/stereotypes of the *hijra* role. The respondent because of her 'discredited state' experiences episodes of physical and mental trauma for not conforming to the identity dogmas of the *Bangladeshi hijras.* The respondent however does not internalize the stigma engendered by the *Bangladeshi hijras* as she asserts that the latter are seeking to dominate other *hijra* factions simply for acquiring locality, area, power and monetary gains. The respondent does not accord the *Bangladeshi hijras* with reverence or deem them to be important. Instead, she perceives the *Bangladeshi hijras* as a divisive group engendering disunity and distrust between native *hijras* of the region. She further recalls-

"These hijras are also diversifying into other businesses like flesh trade, drugs, smuggling of foreign goods and narcotics. Their powers are so pervasive that even the police-walas

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take their side and treat us with indifference. Our guru was threatened by them to give up the area and they had brought along local goons and weapons. However, because of the villagers presence, they could not harm us. Their agenda is to tarnish our names and label us as imposters who extort money from the public. Those celas or gurus who are unwilling to be complicit in their agenda is beaten up mercilessly and also, they level charges against the gurus and celas for crimes like murder, theivery or involvement in illegal activities. Although our household hasn't encountered any such misfortune, I doubt if it will last long."

Clearly, the respondent does not internalize the stigma assigned by the *Bangladeshi hijras.* She instead perceives them as an 'outsider' attempting to disrupt the consensus and unity between multiple local *hijra* households. Unlike the internalization of stigma wherein the individual expresses uncertainty and frustration for one's difference, experiences mental stress and psychological trauma and considers oneself to be in a subordinate/lowly position in comparison to the 'normals', the respondent here does not exhibit similar tendencies when exposed to stigma and labelling by the *Bangladeshi hijras.* Being the purported dominant group, the *Bangladeshi hijras* forcibly attempts to subjugate non-conforming local *hijras* by using their non-castrated bodies as corporal sites of stigma. In a similar strain, Tyler in her work, informs about the tradition of inscribing stigma on the individual's body to render conspicuous their 'disgraceful attribute' (Tyler, 2020). Citing Michel De Certeau, Tyler mentions the nexus between power and stigma and the corporal manifestation of stigma is attributed to the apparatuses of power which maintains the hierarchical relations between those who impose the mandate and those who are afflicted with it (Ibid). Although Michel De Certeau refers to the state, law and the deviant individual, it is nonetheless applicable in the contexts of

the *Bangladeshi* and the native *hijras* wherein the former by virtue of their power (monetary, political and numerical strength) enforce stigma by labelling native *hijras* as 'imposters' or 'duplicates' by discerning their bodily status of emasculation or non-emasculation (Ibid). Similarly, it would necessitate here to refer to Falk's work wherein he postulates the enduring presence of stigma in human societies (Falk, 2010). He refers to the ubiquitous presence of 'stigma' as almost all groups or communities exhibit the tendency of segregating people into binaries of 'we' vs. 'them' (Ibid). Falk conceptualizes the binaries as 'insiders' and devalued 'outsiders'. For instance, the racial distinctions and groupings of the Caucasian white vs. black, intra sectarian divisions of *Shias* and *Sunnis* or the stigma of identifying as a homosexual in a heteronormative society. The propensity of the *Bangladeshis* and the native *hijras* can therefore be associated with their need to set clear boundaries separating their kind from the rest. Hence, the values of 'deviancy' and 'acceptance' outlined by the *Bangladeshi hijras* are repudiated by the respondent and her commune as they do not accept their parameters of 'approved' and 'disapproved' *hijra* identities. The respondent hence does not employ stigma control strategies or coping mechanisms to conceal her 'discredited attribute' because her non-emasculated state itself is a primary constituent of her personal conception of the *hijra* identity.

4.6.17 RESPONDENT TWELVE, 47 YEARS: EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA-FAMILY/LOCALITY

The respondent recalls her experiences of familial unacceptance and reproach when revealing her identity to family members. She recalls-

"I was born into a peasant family. We were a family of five. We were a conservative family so perhaps that was one of the reasons why my parents did not accept me for who I am. When I was about six years old, I would play with my towel and wrap it on my head pretending to be a girl. I also liked to wear blouses and sarees and just play like girls typical of my age. My elder sister often reprimanded me for my behaviour. My mother however would intervene saying that it was just a phase and would go away once I grew old."

Here the respondent experiences what may be called as the normative surveillance when she organically expresses her gender difference to her family. The annoyance of her sister and the casual response of her mother concerning her difference demonstrates their unacceptance, displeasure and the tendency to trivialize her gender expressions as a transitory phase. The respondent further adds-

"This femininity was to stay with me forever. I had the spirit and the soul of a woman and no matter how hard I tried, I just couldn't act, behave or identify as a man. My father was deeply disturbed because of my behaviour for he expected me to toil and work with him in the fields. My mother loved me dearly but was also sad because of the way I was. She continually worried about my future as I had confided in her that I had no wish to marry a woman. My father once pressurized me to marry a suitable girl but was extremely furious when I finally told him clearly about my gender identity and my sexual orientation. Relatives of the family tried to reason it out with me saying that I would be jeopardizing my life and the lives of my sisters if I continued this way because nobody would be willing to marry them. I tried explaining to them that regardless of what happens, my identity and femininity would never change because it was something that I felt within me. However, I could not continue living with my family due to daily disputes and constant mockery/exclusion from the neighbourhood. I decided to shift from my home to start a new life and also to earn my own living."

The respondent does not attempt to deploy any strategies to conceal her 'stigmatized attribute' in the presence of the normals. Instead she acknowledges and accepts her 'stigma' affirmatively and refuses to conform to the gender/sex standards of her heteronormative social milieu. Falk in his work, classifies stigma into two categories, viz. 'existential stigma' and 'achieved stigma' (Falk, 2010). He defines the former as something which was not deliberately caused by the individual thereby rendering his/her stigma as unmanageable or beyond one's control (Ibid). The latter however is the stigma which is earned or achieved by individuals because of their acts, behaviours and efforts to attain the stigmatized state (Ibid). Similarly, the respondent's personal interpretation of her difference as something intrinsic, organic, invariable or as Falk articulates it, an existential stigma enables her to confront her family's opposition and lack of acceptance with respect to her gender identity (Ibid). In Goffman's terms, the respondent does not internalize her 'stigma' as she chooses not to reform/modify her socially 'devalued attribute' to fit into the masculine mould of societal expectations (Goffman, 1986). The respondent's early cognizance of her immutable gender identity represents her interpretations of her psychosomatic state, her differences and her interactions with the external societal world. Understanding the instinctual/organic need to express and embody her difference, the respondent refuses to adjust, adapt and integrate into the heteronormative spaces. She cascades further into a 'discredited state' by manifesting her difference as a member of the *hijra* community. Her indifference for her 'stigma' rendered her to transition from a hidden 'discreditable' state to a publicly discredited identity.

4.6.18 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA: HIJRA COMMUNITY

Once transitioned into the *hijra* community, the respondent narrates her experiences of violence, physical abuse and public humiliation inflicted supposedly by the *Bangladeshi hijras.* She recalls-

"We are a small group of hijra members in Alipurduar. I was initiated into the community when I was 20 years of age. I was happy for a while because I had the good fortune of having a generous guru along with other good members of the household. We equally contributed and shared whatever we had with one another. Also, there were no such impositions upon us to castrate ourselves to increase our daily income. But with the incursion of the other hijras in our area, I was publicly humiliated and derided for being an akowa. It so happened that I was going to the local market to buy the daily ration but was soon intercepted by a group of goons and some hijras. I was held tightly and brutally beaten up and stripped naked in front of everyone. They publicly shamed me by shouting out loud that I was an imposter, a behrupiya who earns her living by engaging in laundanaach. At that time, I was engaged as a launda dancer as well as in hijragiri. They condemned me for my occupational choice and for having a penis while claiming to be a hijra. Later that day, the police took me and my friend into custody where we were slapped and interrogated by them. I know that I am an akowa hijra and I don't consider it necessary to inflict self-injury to prove my hijra identity to anyone."

Referring to the respondent's narratives, *Bangladeshi hijras* purportedly assume the powerful/dominant position wherein they intend to subjugate local *hijras* by publicly censuring them for their male organ. The *Bangladeshi hijras* denounced the local *hijras* for not castrating their male organ as they perceived non-emasculated *hijras* as imposters or duplicates pretending to identify as a *hijra.* Additionally, they also stigmatise those *hijras* who engage in other non-traditional

occupations such as *launda naach* labelling them as duplicates. Such a systematic segregation of the *hijras* is predicated on their occupational engagements and their bodily status of emasculation or non-emasculation. The *Bangladeshi hijras* forcibly attempts to stigmatize/condemn their 'inauthentic' local counterparts by seeking 'public approval' to justify their violence and abuse inflicted upon the native, non-emasculated *hijras.* The powerful/*Bangladeshi hijras* therefore creates a matrix of power and domination buttressed by monetary strength, political and administrative connections, numerical strength and muscle power to establish reified identity within the *hijra* milieus. In a similar strain, Guo in his work citing Parker and Aggleton proffers the insight of 'stigma appropriation' by individuals, the state or the community to sustain and reproduce social inequalities (Guo, 2016). Similarly, the respondent experiences repercussions of labelling and stigma imposed by the *Bangladeshi hijras* directly impinging upon their earning capabilities, livelihood and relegating them to positions of inferiority. The respondent however does not acknowledge theidentity binaries of *'akowa'* and *'chibbri'* to determine the authenticity of a *hijra.* She perceives it as unnecessary to alter her body resisting the imposition of 'genuine *hijra* identity template' in the process. The respondent hence does not view the labelling of an inauthentic *hijra* as a devalued attribute and instead sees her non-emasculated body as emblematic of the *hijra* identity. Similar to the heteronormative hegemonies which draws its dominance from multiple components of the societal grid viz. group consensus, legitimacy from the legal, religious, social/cultural and political quarters to justify its pervasive presence, the *Bangladeshi hijras* also draw their imposition of the *hijra* identity binaries of authenticity and inauthenticity primarily from the mainstream heteronormative society in order to fulfil the *hijra* role expectations (the third gender role) by

engaging in traditional occupational roles of *toli-badhai*and undergoing emasculation to make their bodies conform to the template of an ideal *hijra* identity. The respondent however in her everyday occupational engagements and expressions of *hijra* identity betrays the archetypal expectations of the *Bangladeshi hijras*. The respondent therefore perceives and interprets the labelling as enforced and unnecessary generating intra-community disputes and disruption of unity.

4.6.19 JALPAIGURI DISTRICT

RESPONDENT THIRTEEN, 36 YEARS- STIGMA EXPERIENCES (FAMILY/LOCALITY)

The respondent here speaks of her early experiences of stigma as she chose to render visible her gender difference. She recounts-

"I am originally from Dhupguri. I was born into a lower middle-class family. Our family had its own share of problems, particularly worrying was our financial insecurities. My father was the only one who earned in the family but he made sure that we received education. However, I discontinued my studies after standard 11 because I had begun to lose interest. I was very much like a girl in terms of walking gait, speech and mannerisms. In school, I was teased by all the boys and the teachers would reproach me for not behaving like a boy. One time, the principal called me and advised me to keep my hair short and not to apply make-up. I did not listen to him and perhaps that was one of the reasons to discontinue my education. I have experienced that when you are different, people around you seem to see you in a different light. I wasn't close to anyone in school and was a loner. My father however was saddened by my behaviour for he expected me to study well and get a job in the government sector. My mother pleaded and coaxed me to change my ways but I knew that it was something so natural in me that just couldn't be changed. I had befriended some local boys and I used to like their company. But someone

spread the rumour all over the neighbourhood that I was secretly in relationships with the boys of the locality. My father, now tired of me, tried every means possible to cure me of my so-called disease. We went to a psychiatrist to a physician and even witch doctors to make me a normal boy but all his efforts were in vain. I had spoken with some counsellors from Siliguri about my situation and they had clearly explained to me that it was not a disease to be afraid of. They also educated me about words like gays, homosexuals, transgenders etc. I tried to educate my parents about human sexuality, but they were unwilling to listen to anything I said. Because of suppression and mental despair, I couldn't live with my family for long and decided to join the hijra community at the age of 19."

Because of her visibly discredited state, the respondent experiences social antagonization and persecution from multiple quarters. Her open disclosure of her nonconformity renders her to encounter suppressive measures to discourage her from transgressing the heteronormative gender/sex norms. Some of the repressive methods espoused by her family to 'rectify' her deviance were medical and traditional interventions like psychiatric counselling and consulting a witch doctor. Here the respondent's stigma is pathologized/viewed as a disease amenable or receptive to external measures or cures. The respondent initially internalizes the societal perceptions of her stigma and views her discredited state as a changeable and amenable part of her identity but later revises her perception when she acknowledges her gender difference as immanent, organic and invariable. Furthermore, because of her interactions with the local NGO's and CBO's, the respondent learns about multiple terminologies pertaining to gender identity and sexuality which enables her to view her 'difference' affirmatively. Quite clearly, the respondent's subjective interpretation of her discredited state changes from internalization of stigma in which she attempts to change her devalued attribute

towards self-acceptance and positive interpretation of her 'difference'. The respondent therefore spontaneously transitions from the discreditable to the discredited state but later experiences uncertainty because of her family's repeated efforts to make her conform to the heteronormative strictures of gender and sexuality. Being a meaning making/interpretive being, the individual instead acknowledges her gender difference as organic and visceral and thus not responsive to changes brought about by external interventions. The respondent further chooses to leave her family to join the *hijra* community. Instead of managing her visible stigma of gender difference, she further slips into another 'discredited state' of identifying as a *hijra*. Her discontinuance of the negative internalization of her difference and her subsequent departure from her family and locality is indicative of her resistance towards the larger heteronormative structures. She defends her discredited state and chooses not to employ coping mechanisms to conceal her stigma. Her justifications and conspicuous disclosure of her gender identity in itself becomes a means to encounter her stigma.

4.6.20 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA: HIJRA COMMUNITY

The respondent further recalls her experiences within the *hijra* commune. She recounts-

"My first experience of stigma as a hijra was when I was begging on the train. It so happened that I had asked for some alms to a group of middle-aged men and women. At that time, since I was a young member of the community, I did not have much idea about the identities of akowas and chibbris. Some hijras came up to me and asked me to show my genitalia in front of everyone so that they could decide for themselves if I was an authentic hijra. They also threatened to hand me over to the police if I turned out to be an imposter.

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Feeling humiliated and deeply embarrassed, I fled from the situation as fast as I could. Later that day, I asked my guru who was from Bangladesh about the castration of one's genitalia and she advised me that for my own survival, I had to castrate and be a chibbri hijra. I have personally experienced discrimination and inequality as an akowa hijra because my guru knew that I would not earn as much as a chibbri hijra. Chibbri hijras were more beautiful and have feminine features than an akowa and they would use their beauty to solicit sex from clients thus guaranteeing more income to the guru and the dera. Because of my low earnings, my guru would always treat me unfairly and we shared a very professional sort of relationship. There was no sense of comfort or camaraderie between us. My guru worked under another nan guru in Raiganj who was a Bangladeshi herself. She would listen to everything the nan guru directed her to do and the nan guru indirectly controlled our dera via our guru. The celas who live under our guru are simply treated as workers who would serve and earn for her. They are also bought and sold to different gurus if they do not like a particular cela or if they think that the cela is disobeying them."

Similar to most interviewees in the cases above, the respondent experiences prejudice, inequality and discrimination within her own *hijra* commune. Additionally, she also experiences social persecution at public spaces when she seeks for alms on trains/shops or localities situated within her *ilaka*(area). Her non-emasculated corporality produces socio-economic barriers because of the delineations of *hijra* identity imposed by the mainstream ilk and the supposed *'Bangladeshi hijras'*. The respondent's refusal to conform to the standards instantaneously renders her to experience the 'discredited state'. For the respondent, the repercussions of stigma and ostracization are extended to public and interpersonal community spaces wherein she is continually suppressed because of her 'bodily inferiority'. Because of the near ubiquitous presence of the identity parameters undergirded by emasculation, the respondent suffers from economic

deprivation, constant social humiliation and instances of violence and threats. As a response to her stigma, the respondent avows and acknowledges her 'devalued attribute' and attempts to modify it by undergoing emasculation. The respondent therefore accepts the identity limits imposed by the *hijra* communities and the expectations of *hijra* identity imputed by the mainstream audience/public. Even within her commune, the respondent is devalued by her *guru* because of her low earnings and masculine appearance. The respondent's *hijra* commune therefore becomes susceptible to the ideal *hijra* identity configurations promoted by the mainstream society and the *Bangladeshi hijras*. In a similar strain, de Oliveira et al. in their work, mentions about the influence of the heteronormative discourses on the workings of homosexual identities (de Olieveira et al., 2013). Citing Rosenfeld, they inform that the heteronormative ilk relies on the patterns of heteronormativity in order to 'pass' the acceptable standards prescribed by heteronormativity (Ibid). They therefore advance the argument that homonormativity renders itself susceptible to the influence of heteronormativity thereby surrendering or engaging with the very apparatus that intends to oppress them (Ibid). Similarly, the respondent here experiences the dual dominance of the mainstream heteronormative society and their characterization of *hijra* identity which is further supported by the *Bangladeshi hijra* communities. Such acquiescence by the *Bangladeshi hijra* community indicates the willingness on their part to be controlled by the larger heteronormative strictures to 'pass' as an authentic *hijra* identity. The respondent thus internalizes and accepts her 'attribute' as reprehensible and as effort to manage her stigma of being an *akowa hijra,* she aligns herself to the corporal straitjackets of ideal *hijra* identity imagined by the mainstream public and the *Bangladeshi hijras.*

4.6.21 RESPONDENT FOURTEEN, 32 YEARS-STIGMA EXPERIENCES (FAMILY/LOCALITY)

The interviewee recalls receiving support, sympathy and acceptance from her family members for her gender difference. She recounts-

"I was born into a poor but loving family. My mother especially was very fond of me as she would pamper me to no end. When I was small, I always looked forward to festivals like durga pujas or the saraswati pujas. Here we have a tradition of wearing our best clothes to participate in the event. My mother would purchase sarees for my sisters for the puja and I would also insist my mother to buy for me. To humour me, she would buy me a set and me along with my sisters would wear our best clothes and attend the ceremony. I used to love spending time with my sisters, listening to their talks, playing with their toys and makeup and trying on their clothes. They were never angry with me and instead played along. In school however, I was constantly teased by names like ladies finger, a mauga, a double decker, a hijra etc. School therefore became a challenging experience for me and I could not continue with my regular classes. I therefore requested the teacher to speak with the Principal so that I may have to attend school only during exam time. The Principal was kind enough to oblige and thus I continued with my education. Eventually, when I was in the eleventh standard, I thought to myself that I could not co-exist with mainstream society because they would never understand me. I therefore transitioned into the hijra community identifying myself as a hijra. But, I did not inform my family about the decision to become a hijra. I had seen them in the streets once and I could feel a wave of happiness when I saw them. They had taken notice of me too and asked me my name and address. They commented that I looked similar like them, like a mauga (ladies like) and asked if I was interested in being a hijra. The sense of alienation, lack of understanding and experiences of social stigma compelled me to answer in affirmative."

Despite having received familial support for her 'different' gender expression and visibility, the respondent expresses her inability to cope within the matrices of the heteronormative society. She becomes cognizant of her 'gender difference' when she interacts with the 'normal others' or her peers at school. Citing Goffman's conceptualization of social information wherein he elaborates on the symbols conveying prestige/status or stigma while interacting with the normals, the respondent too can be said to have embodied 'symbols of stigma' when encountering her peer groups at school. Such visible and conspicuous manifestation of her 'gender difference' via speech, behaviour and comportment can be viewed as perceptible 'stigma symbols' communicated by the respondent when she encounters the heteronormative normals. It is because of her easily discernible stigmatizing attribute or stigma symbols that renders her to experience denigration and labelling. In a similar strain, Meyer in his work mentions about the frequent episodes of mental stress experienced by individuals who do not conform to the normative sex/gender binaries or who identify themselves as homosexuals (Meyer, 2003). Meyer further adds that such stress is engendered by social discrimination and prejudice which in turn may adversely affect their mental health (Ibid). The respondent associates her experiences of stigma with feelings of alienation, lack of support, sympathy and unacceptance. Familial support notwithstanding, the respondent preferred not to deploy coping mechanisms to pass as a 'normal' to continue living within the heteronormative bounds. Unable to manage her stigma effectively, the respondent chose to join the *hijra* community to seek support, sympathy and to live amongst her 'own kind'. The respondent descends into a state of further discredit by identifying as a *hijra* but chooses not to disclose her new identity to her family. This can be viewed as a coping strategy on the part of the

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respondent to preclude any further dishonour or bring social stigma upon her family.

4.6.22 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA: HIJRA COMMUNITY

The respondent experienced stigma within thecommunity because of not conforming with the ideal bodily template of being a *hijra*. She narrates-

"As an akowa hijra, there are always instances of prejudices and acts of discrimination for not conforming with the real hijra identity standards. My guru used to tease me by saying that it was futile keeping that thing with me. She reasoned with me that the thing' was infertile, impotent and just a useless organ. She would often tease me and would coax me to get rid of it. What I have realized is that the hijras and more particularly the gurus are in search of celas who would look after them in their old age and become useful around the house by working for them and earning money. Apart from inequities between an akowa and a chibbri, an akowa hijra like me tends to lead a lonely life. Hijras keep giriyas (male lovers) and I was in a relationship with a giriya for more than a year. He too, like my guru, urged me to castrate myself and take hormone injections so that I would appear more feminine and attractive. He was repulsed by my male organ and threatened to leave me on multiple occasions and eventually he did leave me to marry a woman. The hostilities between chibbris and akowas have led to violence and terror in the region. The mainstream public sometimes act very rudely with us be it in trains, while dancing in ceremonies or when simply walking on the streets. Additionally, these days, the gurus also force their celas to perform in a risky relatively new profession known as the laundanaach wherein the hijras are expected to perform in front of a large crowd. Considering my life as a hijra and all the risks/prejudices associated with it, I am now considering leaving the hijra community to start life anew as a social worker or as a member of a local NGO."

The respondent experienced two levels of stigma emanating from the heteronormative milieu and within one's own *hijra* communes. The typicality of masculinity and the delineations of the ideal *hijra* identity placed constraints upon the respondent to adhere to the standards approved by the normative and dominant groups. Because of her stigma symbol (i.e., her phallus), the respondent's discrediting attribute becomes instantaneously conspicuous to other members of the commune. She was labelled as an *'akowa' hijra* which was considered as a subordinate position in terms of earning capacity and prestige than a *chibbri hijra* who because of her emasculated state is viewed favourably by her *guru* and other *hijra* members in the commune. The respondent is continually reminded of her inadequacy and inferiority as a *hijra* by her *guru* and her male partner. The additional stigma of identifying as a *hijra* also engenders social prejudices, stigma and violence while at public spaces. Albeit the respondent is conscious of her discredited state, she does not avow or internalize her 'stigma'. She therefore does not employ coping strategies to conceal her devalued attribute or alter her body to comply with the identity configurations of the 'real *hijra* identity'. She instead critiques upon the mechanisms of oppression sustained by her *guru* and all other *hijra* households who conform with the 'emasculated/non-emasculated' *hijra* identity ideologies. The respondent speaks of episodes of violence stemming from the disparities and disagreements between the *akowas*and *chibbris*and the dominance of the latter in dictating the *hijra* identity delineations. She thus reasons that her devalued state is because of an arbitrary determiner viz. emasculation enforced by the dominant/powerful *chibbri hijras* who for their own interests sustain the hierarchies and binaries between 'the emasculated' and the 'non-emasculated' *hijras*. Disillusioned by the *hijra* community, the respondent chooses

to leave the community rather than manage her already discredited state. She prefers to revert back to the mainstream normative society by identifying as a 'social worker' that stands distinct from her earlier discredited identity as a *hijra.*

4.6.23 RESPONDENT FIFTEEN, 35 YEARS: STIGMA EXPERIENCES (FAMILY/LOCALITY)

The respondent recalls her early cognizance of her difference in terms of gender identity and sexuality as a child. But her conspicuous gender expression was disapproved by her family. She narrates- *"I used to like the company of girls when I was a child because in them, I saw a sister and a best friend. I was born to a lower middle-class family. As I grew older, my parents discouraged my friendship with the village girls and would teach me to be a strong and bold boy like any other boys my age. I loved to apply kohl in my eyes and wear girly-coloured clothes but my parents reprimanded me for behaving like a girl. They expressed their disapproval by saying that I was not wearing colours and clothing appropriate for my gender. They discouraged me from growing my hair long or plucking my eyebrows. I never used to like their suppression and often used to wonder why did they disapprove of my identity or the way I wanted to be? Even at school I was treated differently by my peers for my appearance. I was called names and discriminated against for behaving in effeminate ways. During those days I used to carry a double layered pencil box and would hide my lipstick and kajal in the box below. I used to visit the toilet and apply my makeup. My classmates used to tease me and say what is this boy doing? But I would retort back to them saying don't refer to me as a 'boy'. My parents received complaints from school about my behaviour and actively attempted to discourage me from expressing my gender inclinations. Because of my visibility, I had to experience social stigma from all quarters (my family, peer group, at school and locality).*

Understandably, the respondent recognizes her gender differences quite early on but despite familial and social suppression or disapproval, she continued to express her desired gender identity. Her acceptance and her embodiment of gender difference rendered her transition from a discreditable to a discredited state. The respondent, because of her unwillingness to conceal her 'stigmatising attribute' i.e. gender difference becomes instantly visible when encountering the 'normal ilk' thereby rendering her virtual identity as stigmatised or discredited (Goffman, 1986). There are no discrepancies between virtual and actual identity for the respondent, as she does not attempt to conceal her discrediting attribute. When living within the normative matrices of the mainstream, the respondent experienced episodes of stigma primarily her virtual identity did not conform to the gender stereotypes harboured by her family, peer groups and the larger society. In a similar strain, Fothergill citing Simmel mentions that socially stigmatized group (for e.g. homeless people) in a given society are perceived, judged and thought of in a certain way which in turn engenders social stigma and social prejudices (Fothergill, 2003). Her visibility and to socially 'aberrant' gender identity challenging the norms of heteronormativity was repeatedly suppressed, as in this case, her gender assertion disrupts the stereotypes of gender and sexuality (Ibid). Also, the interviewee does not mention of the internalization of stereotypes or stigma perpetuated by the 'normal' ilk. She in turn questions the normalcy of gender and sexuality stereotypes endorsed by the societal mainstream. Similarly, Vogel et. al in their study distinguishes between 'public stigma' and 'self-stigma' wherein the former operates within the stereotypes of the general social consensus and the latter constitutes the process of internalizing such notions of stereotypes by the discredited individual (Vogel et. al, 2013). But in the case of the respondent,

because of her repudiation of gender and sexual stereotypes advanced by the mainstream, she jettisons the internalization process or self-stigma as she does not remedy or alter her 'gender difference' to fit into the gender templates approved by the society. Understandably, not all stigmatized individuals and their encounters with the 'normals' motivates them to espouse multiple 'concealing strategies' or other stratagems to control the information pertaining to their discrediting attribute. The individual interpretive agency therefore should be considered as an important element when examining the effects of stigma on the discredited individual. Here, the respondent clearly rebuffs the stigma imposed by her family and peer group by refusing to align herself according to their gender and sex straitjackets. The respondent can be said to employ the strategy of 'deflection' wherein she refuses to acknowledge her gender identity as a discrediting attribute. In a similar strain, Thoits in her work introduces the tactic of 'deflection' wherein she conceptualizes as it as a strategy used by patients diagnosed with mental disorders wherein the patient refuses to acknowledge their mental disease. Such a refusal however, stems from the patient's acceptance of mental disease as deeply discrediting but in the case of the respondent, she espouses the tactic of deflection not to repudiate her gender identity but to challenge the heteronormative norms of gender identity and sexuality.

4.6.24 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA: HIJRA HOUSEHOLD/COMMUNITY SPACE

The respondent transitions from her discredited state to a state of further discredit by joining the *hijra* community. The respondent reasons that she joined the

community to support her family and to seek refuge in the community. She narrates-

"My encounter with the hijras was when I met them in my locality. They instantly recognized that I was like them, a feminized male. One of the hijras approached me and asked about myself, my family and without any second thoughts, I immediately told them about my family, the ordeal of wanting to be like a woman and my dissatisfaction with life. The hijra invited me to come over at their place nearby to join their community. The next day, I went to their locality to meet them and it was from then on that I became a part of the hijra culture and community. I felt a sense of belonging when I was with them, I could be like myself and wear what I wanted. But my guru maa expected me to emasculate for which she was willing to fund for my operation. I knew that my penis was not much of use anyway so I decided to opt for castration. I knew that being a castrated hijra would also ensure more earnings with which I could also support my family. After castration, I was warmly welcomed by my guru as a new bride. I received a lot of love and you could say 'preferential treatment' after the emasculation process.

Unlike other respondents, the interviewee does not experience any episodes of stigma when inducted as a *hijra.* Conversely, the respondent felt at ease and experienced belongingness when living with other *hijras.* The respondent also adhered to the household norm of emasculation post the induction ceremony. In the second phase therefore, the respondent therefore transitioned from a discreditable state towards a state of acceptance within her community as she adhered to the norms of the household. For most *hijra* households, 'emasculation' is a primary determiner of authentic and inauthentic *hijra* identity wherein non-emasculation is often deemed to as an undesirable attribute. Due to financial paucity and intense societal stigma, the respondent readily accepts her new role as a *hijra* and accepts

the identity parameters of the 'real' and 'duplicate' *hijra* identity. Because of her internalization of the community consensus on emasculation and *hijra* identity, she effectively managed to bypass any possibilities of stigma by conforming to the community norms.

4.6.25 UTTAR DINAJPUR

RESPONDENT 16 (EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA-FAMILY/LOCALITY/NEIGHBOURHOOD)

The discrediting attribute of the respondent is instantaneously known to her immediate family members as she was born intersexed. The family, in their attempt to conceal the discrediting attribute, coerces the respondent to identify as a male. The respondent narrates-

"I was born in Raiganj to conservative Muslim parents. They knew that I was born with ambiguous genitalia and used to actively discourage me from behaving differently. I knew about my difference and used to secretively dress and behave like a girl in the absence of my family members. I could not be like a man and used to loathe dressing or acting like one. I often used to steal kohl and lali from my sister's room to look like a girl. One day I was caught red-handed by my sister who was already suspicious of my behaviour. She complained to my parents after which they refused to talk with me for many days. I was also deprived of food for one day. My father especially was furious because of my behaviour and told me repeatedly to reform my ways. My mind was in a state of distress and I felt terribly ashamed of my body and my feelings. One day, my family was out of town and I decided to visit one of my friends. While at her place, I applied some cosmetics and jewellery and we decided to roam about in town. Unbeknownst to me, my neighbour had taken notice of my difference and reported the same to my parents. That day I

confronted my parents that I was unable to be what they wanted me to be. They never did sympathize with me nor were able to comprehend my desired gender identity. Out of frustration, I strode out from my home. I communicated with my friend and lived with her for a few months while working in a NGO in Malda. I was earning a decent living but could not continue for long as I decided to join the hijra community. As a member of the ngo I had befriended some hijras from the local community and yearned to experience community we-feeling, more earnings and open expression of my identity. My family disapproved of my decision to join the hijra community, but I knew that I had to accept my gender difference and had to sustain myself. I was sure that I could not revert back to my old life with my family and I could not continue as an NGO member because of low pay."

The respondent here experiences episodes of doubt, uncertainty and frustration when her stigmatising attribute is revealed to her family members. Despite her intersexed condition, the family expects her to conform to the binaries of sex and gender. The respondent attempts to conceal her gender identity by expressing her gender identity while in private or in the absence of her family members. She expresses her feminine identity by applying cosmetics and wearing garments suitable for a women. But despite the stratagem to conceal her stigma from others, she transitions from a discreditable to a discredited state. As a discredited person, she internalizes her stigma because of societal and parental pressure. But the internalization does not last for long as the respondent transitions from a state of stigma acceptance towards refusing to view her stigma as discrediting. Such a repudiation caused her to seek her own kind by joining NGO's and subsequently the *hijra* community. The repudiation of the stigma was strengthened by her interactions with other NGO members and other *hijras* who enabled her to understand the meanings of multiple gender and sexual identities. In a similar strain, Kumar et. al in their study of stigma mentions the support from NGO's and

family as significant coping mechanisms that allows individuals to effectively cope with their stigma (Kumar et. al, 2015). Similarly, the respondent relied on other *hijra* members and members of the NGO as a social support mechanism to deal with her stigma. Therefore, her encounters and engagement with similar communities of people emboldened her to take decisions repudiating the norms of the social mainstream.

4.6.26 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA-HIJRA COMMUNES

The respondent, because of her acquaintance with local NGO's and other *hijras* from the area could easily transition into a *hijra* community. The respondent recalls-

"I already knew some hijra members as they were my friends during my NGO days. They introduced me to my present guru maa and she said that she would accept me if I fulfilled her condition to transition as a female. I agreed but knowing about my financial condition, my guru decided to fund my transition. I had to repay the loan money to my guru by working under her and earning for her. I was told to engage in toli-badhai as it was an approved way of earning a living for the hijras. As for experiences of stigma, I was fortunate to not have encountered discrimination within my household or elsewhere because I readily agreed to transition fully in a female body. Also I was privileged to be working under a kind and a considerate guru. I was however called as 'chapti' by some hijras in the region referring to my transitioned state. These hijras were mostly akowas and they used to despise me and my household members for emasculating ourselves in the name of hijra identity. But their labelling did not affect me much because I was certain of my identity and was happy with my body post-surgery."

Conforming to the identity ideology of most *hijras* of the region, the respondent agreed to undergo sex transition surgery for maintaining the honour of her *guru* and the household. The transition to the *hijra* community therefore worked for her favourably as she underwent sex change surgery (which is in alignment with her gender). Also, the respondent took recourse to the *hijra* community for financial empowerment which would enable her to be independent from her family and the normative society. Such a transition can be read as a coping mechanism and also as a process of 'coming out' (Vaughn et. al, 2015). Vaughn et. al in their work mentions that the coming out process for sexual minorities can be divided in to six stages wherein it progresses from phase to the other (Ibid). The progression of 'coming out' begins with confusions pertaining to one's gender/sexual identity and resolves with the synthesis and the resolution of identity (Ibid). Similarly, the respondent progresses from states of gender/identity confusion towards gradual acceptance of her gender difference (Ibid). Such a progression was facilitated by coping mechanisms of interacting with NGO and *hijra* communities, the entry and acceptance into the *hijra* community.

4.6.27 RESPONDENT 17 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA-HETERONORMATIVE SPACES

The respondent recalling her experiences of stigma mentions her visibly discredited state of being an effeminate male wherein she was sexually objectified by men. She recalls-

"I used to study in a primary school, there was male teacher who used to make me sit on his lap. So I had made a wall, where in I used to think I am heroine and my teacher is my hero. So my teacher used to tell me to catch his penis and make him masturbate. So he told

me that all of this is normal, it happens between a boy and a girl, so even I did not think much of it, so he used to bring chocolates and other gift items for me. But then my heart was broken after I came to know that he had married to someone else. Then another teacher had come, then even I started liking him. Then it was that teacher who said that all this is not good, don't be like a girl, you are a male, be like a male, dress like a boy you will look handsome. Then I did not feel good after what he said but life went on as before. Then again, I experienced molestation and penetration by local neighbours when I was 15 years. I was feeling a lot of pain, then I suffered from cold because of oral sex. Then after that, I was having problems with my friends, I started to feel very lonely, I felt that I would want to commit suicide, then my mother told me that you are not alone, she said its god-gifted and she accepted me but my father was not supportive at all. He told me to leave my studies and told me to sit in his shop, do business. But then I only had one thing in mind that I had to study and move forward. My mother has helped me a lot and this is where I am right now, I have struggled so much in life and now I have a small sewing business. There is a mix of happiness and sadness in life, its okay, its life, so I just move forward thinking positively".

It would necessitate here to recall the conceptualization of gender stereotypes and the impact of such stereotypes in the labelling and stigmatizing process of sexual minorities. The respondent experiences recurrent sexual violation because of her visible gender difference. Because of her conspicuous gender identity, she becomes a victim of the male gaze who views her merely as a sexual object. As per Fredrickson & Roberts, objectification refers to the perception of an external observer who views for e.g. a woman or a transgender as a body that can be objectified and measured (Calogero, 2012). Instead of viewing 'woman' or a 'transgender' for her individuality, objectification relegates the meanings of 'self' or the integrity of the self (as conceived by the woman or others) and focuses

instead on their body or body parts (Ibid). Similarly, the respondent, because of her experiences of molestation and rape is reduced from a whole human being to that of a sexual object. Her visible gender identity therefore produces instances of stigma and sexual violence perpetuated by gender stereotypes and objectification. Also, the visibility of a feminized man engenders reactions of gender stereotypes, viz. comments such as *"be like a man, play sports".* Because of her noticeable gender difference when interacting with the normals, the respondent continually experiences alienation, mental stress and feelings of unacceptance. Unable to effectively manage her stigma, the respondent abandons her home to join the *hijras.*

4.6.28 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA- HIJRA COMMUNITY

The respondent, as a way of dealing with the stigma and the distress caused by her gender difference, joined the *hijra* community. The respondent narrates-

"When I was 16 yrs old, I left my home at that time. Then a hijra apprehended me when I was roaming on the streets. He gave me some food to eat and advised me that you are still a small child and you can't do tolibadhai. She told me that I could join after I was old enough. I did join the hijra community for some years wherein I had to be a cela and earn by doing bacha-nachana (dancing at birth occasions). I did all this, but I was never happy inwardly, I knew I had to be something else. To be a hijra requires a certain mental attitude and the willingness to do things but I was never keen on continuing the hijra profession. My guru was supportive of me but there were differences and disputes with other hijra members of the society. I disliked their practices of castration and did not want to castrate myself. See the reason for being a hijra now is you have to know the profession and you should do it properly, otherwise community members are bound to get angry with you. I shared a cordial and friendly relation with my guru, but I could not continue as a

hijra for long as I was not willing to castrate myself just to increase my income. After a few years of life as a hijra, I left the community and continued my studies. Now I have master's in social work and a small sewing business. My mother still continues to support me, and things have more or less sorted out in the family front".

The respondent, in her transition from one state of discredit to another i.e. when she chooses to join the *hijra* community, continues to encounter episodes of stigma because of her unwillingness to conform to the identity templates of her *hijra* household. The respondent also does not fully accept her role as a *hijra* because of the differences between gender identity, emasculation practice and the willingness to engage in multiple *hijra* professions. The respondent experiences difficulties in internalizing the *hijra* role and occupation due to which she abandons the community after her few years of engagement. Goffman calls this as 'delusional', as the stigmatized individual does not align her gender identity with that of her group or the *hijra* household (Goffman, 1986). Here too, the issue of stereotypical roles comes into the fore as the respondent is expected to act or behave like a *'hijra'* (Ibid). Prior to her transition as a *hijra,* the respondent is reprimanded for not adhering to the gender role of a 'man' and is urged to 'be like one'. But the respondent, nonetheless, repudiating such stereotypes, continues to live life in her own terms. She positively deflects the stigma engendered by her interactions with the 'normals' and the stereotypical role of a *hijras* approved by the *hijra* community.

4.6.29 RESPONDENT 18 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA-HETERONORMATIVE SPACES

The respondent immediately experiences social stigma when interacting with the normals in the society. Her presence is instantly perceived as discreditable to 'normals' and is labelled as the deviant 'other'. The respondent narrates-

"When staying with my parents, I used to seclude myself from locality or society people because they did not treat me well, called me a mauga and a hijra. Then at that time, I was small, so I could not do much, I just wept alone. Even in school, all this happened, they used to call me, hijra, ladies because of which I felt isolated. I used to complain to the school authorities about all this but they never took any action against them. Instead of school, I loved to play with dolls and help my mother in the kitchen. Then gradually when I grew up, I befriended a hijra who told me to join the community. She advised me that I would be financially independent as a hijra and also have social support from the community. It was because of this decision of mine, to be hijra which saddened my mother. She was devastated. My father also was not happy with the decision and could not bear the daily bickering he'd have to face. Because of this decision, my parents used to fight a lot and I could not handle the stress. I even thought of attempting to kill myself. My mother and my sister used to cry almost every day because of my decision. One day, I could not take it any longer and decided to leave my house to live with the hijras in their household. Even today, I don't stay back in my house because I feel uncomfortable. I just help them in whichever way possible, but the tensions haven't eased."

Because of her difference in terms of speech, mannerisms and body language, the respondent is instantaneously labelled as a *hijra* or a *mauga* (like a woman). The respondent, therefore, in her attempts to avoid or minimize interaction with the 'normals' chose to seclude herself at her home. Understandably, the respondent

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because of stigma internalization deemed her attribute to be deeply discrediting due to which she decided to join the *hijra* community as a coping mechanism to avoid the direct presence of 'normals', for social support and financial security. But because of her internalized stigma, the respondent also experiences moments of extreme mental stress and the urge to commit suicide. The respondent experiences a sense of guilt, sadness as well as relief when she transitioned to the *hijra* community.

4.6.30 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA- HIJRA COMMUNITY

Post her transition to the community, the respondent does not experience any negative or extreme instances of stigma. She recalls-

"I actually feel fortunate to have joined the hijra community and I am lucky to have a supportive guru who saves my earned money and keeps it safely. After months of joining the community, I decided to castrate because it was the only way I could prove my allegiance to my guru and the household. Also, castration did ensure higher earnings which enabled me to provide for the hijra household and also for my family. Sometimes, I did fight with the members of the household regarding job allocation but overall, I did not face too much of troubles with the hijra community".

The respondent positively recounts her transitions to the *hijra* community wherein she fully adapts to the role of a *hijra.* The respondent also willingly agreed to emasculate in order to adhere to the group norms and to pledge her loyalties to her *guru.* She therefore aligned her 'self' and body as per the norms of the *hijra* community (Goffman, 1986). The respondent did not resist or repudiate any of the practices of the *hijra* community as it is because of her transition to the same that enabled her to cope with her stigma and empowered her financially.

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4.6.31 DAKSHIN DINAJPUR

RESPONDENT 19- EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA, FAMILIAL/LOCALITY SPACES

From a young age, the respondent accepts her gender difference due to which she had to experience familial problems. The respondent recalls-

"When I was small, I loved to play with girl toys, with utensils and all that. My family noticed this, and they were very angry with me. I just used to feel like a girl, I wanted to be like a girl, and I used to dress up like one. Wearing girly tops, t-shirts, skirts and shoes, I used to love doing that. When I was in school, I was taunted by my school friends, they used to say that I acted weird for a boy. They used to call me 'aunty', 'girly boy', hijra and I did not quite know how to react to that because I was still making sense of my identity. But all these taunts forced me to drop out of school. Gradually when I started learning the 'ulti' language of the hijras, I started to know more and more about my gender identity and sexuality. I had familial problems, because they used to feel very uncomfortable when I used to dress up like a woman. So, considering their uncomfortable situation, I used to dress like a man when stepping outside but used to change back to a saree or other feminine garments when in the hijra community. I have faced a lot of disrespect from my locality people and also family members, but I still choose to live like this".

Because of her perceivable gender difference, the respondent had to experience a lot of shame and stigma. The respondent outwardly expressed her gender identity in public spaces and in her school and she was segregated and ridiculed in both the spaces. Because of her evident difference, she could not cope or manage her stigma in her encounters with the 'normals'. She gradually sought recourse to the *hijra* community, learning their language and mannerisms. However, to protect her

family honour, she did not disclose her *hijra* identity to outsiders. It was particularly with her encounters of her 'own ilk' i.e. the *hijra* community

4.6.32 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA- HIJRA COMMUNITY

"When in the hijra community, I was under a lot of pressure from guru because she used to insist that I need to castrate myself. This was because she too experienced mockery and ridicule from other hijras who used to call me a 'nimbumircha' hijra, a lundwali or a likum hijra. In our region, there is this constant comparison between guru hijras across households wherein they counted their number of chibbri or emasculated hijras to ascertain their power and dominance. Given the circumstances, I visited a local quack centre in Bihar to get myself castrated in order to be a chibbri hijra. Before castration, I received less than half of what I earned daily from my guru than other chibbri hijras. Since I was also new to the trade, I did not know the proper way of conducting hijragiri, or the smooth execution of the hijra role. This created bad experiences for me because my guru used to allot household tasks of cooking and cleaning as well as going to the field to earn. But now, with years of experience, I have learned how to do hijragiri and have also castrated myself."

Similar to other respondents, the respondenttoo experiences another level of stigma discredit for not conforming to the norms of the *hijra* community. But because of stigma internalization, she gradually adjusted herself in the community.

4.6.33 RESPONDENT 20 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA- HETERONORMATIVE SPACES

The respondent experiences stigma because of her perceivable difference but despite her discredited state, the respondent does not not resist or control her stigma. She narrates-

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"I did not know anything about all these big words like transgender. We used to identify simply as 'kothi'. Kothi people are those who are male, but they prefer to be like a female or a woman. When I was 10 years old, my mama (mother's brother) sexually abused me. I used to feel very strange in his presence and his sexual overtures. He used to force me to do it but I never felt good about it. As far as I can remember, I know that I only desire boys and not girls. Then gradually, my sexual trysts with other boys in school began to grow and I made sure that my parents were not aware of it. Then it was in the 7th standard that I fell in love with a guy which lasted for 6 more years. When I was in school, I used to participate in all kinds of cultural events particularly those which involved dancing and singing. But my mother and my brother disapproved of this and sometimes use to confine me in the house or in my room whenever I used to exhibit feminine qualities. When I was small, my mother used to dress me up like a little girl because she dearly wanted a daughter after giving birth to her elder son. But she never expected me to be like a feminized man, a womanly man. Right from the beginning, I wanted to be like a woman, just like my mother, a pativrata patni, I wanted to be like that. Gradually, my mother and my brother came to terms with my identity and accepted me the way I am. Despite familial support, I still experienced and continue to experience locality stigma and name calling. One day, one of our neighbour's son made fun of me as a 'sister' to my brother, a lady in the family. Then in another instance, one aunty from our area commented that I was appearing and behaving more girly every day. However, all this did not affect me that much because I had the support of my family".

4.6.34 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA- HIJRA COMMUNITY

"I have associated myself with the hijra community without anyone's knowledge. My guru is liberal as a person and she allows me to do what I like. Like I have married my boyfriend and I live with him and she knows that my guru. She does not express any disapproval. She just expects me to support her financially by parting with a certain sum of

what I earn daily. She expects me to wear a saree and adhere to the traditional occupational roles of a hijra i.e., to work in toli-badhai. I am happy in my hijra household and the work I do, because I can share my earnings with my mother as well as my guru. My guru is supportive, and she puts her trust on me and thats all that matters. I actually feel that I am fortunate to have a family that supports my transgender identity and a loving husband".

The respondent positively transitions from a state of discredit towards fully accepting *hijra* community, culture and practice.

4.6.35 RESPONDENT 21 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA-HETERONORMATIVE SPACES

The respondent acknowledges her gender identity quite early on and internalizes the stigma associated with it. But gradually, she transitions to the phase of visibility wherein she does not attempt to conceal her 'discrediting attribute' for fear of social stigma and disrepute. The respondent recalls-

"I lived with my two brothers and parents. When I was about 11 years or so, I realized that I was different. When I was in school, I had secret affairs with the boys of our school, but I did not let anyone know about this. I loved to dress up, wear nail polish and bright lipsticks. I used to love bright colours and clothes. But my locality people used to always make some mean or derogatory comment on my appearance. I did not let that affect me, so I continued to live life in my own terms. Actually, at that point of time, I was very happy with all the male attention. I used to go out on dates with men and boys. Of course, this lifestyle of mine was not approved by my mother and my brother. They did not want me to be like a woman and sometimes pressurized me to settle down. One day, I confronted them about my identity and sexuality and my unwillingness to identify or live like a man. My mother was devastated, and my brother was furious at that time. I was locked in my room

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and was not allowed to go anywhere for many days. Later I realized that my family and relatives planned to marry me off as they had already chosen a girl for me. I tried to reason with them that they will be spoiling two lives i.e., mine and hers but they would just not listen. Despite all this, I have settled down in this union and now have to meet their financial demands."

When living with her family, the respondent in her early years secretively expressed her femininity but as she grew older, the respondent chose not to suppress or conceal her gender difference as she gradually came to terms with her gender identity and sexuality.

4.6.36 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA- HIJRA COMMUNITY

"After marriage, I told my wife that I cannot be your husband. But I would ensure that they are looked after and that they are provided financial security. Few months after marriage, I knew one of the hijra members of the locality and decided to join them. My wife knew about this and she knew that it was my majboori (my need). The community guru however was not happy when she knew that I was a householder. Barring few celas, I was constantly derided even within a hijra household. My guru used to remark- "balbaccheaurlikamlekehijragirikaisekarey?" (how will you do hijragiri without castration and as a householder?). Other members of the household too were not at all supportive. I did what I had to do, I went out and I earned for my guru for my household, and you could say, money wise, I did my contribution not only to the hijra household but also to my family. My guru was worried all the time that because of me, she would fall into disrepute and other hijras would label her as a 'behrupiya hijra'. Because of my uncastrated status, my guru used to always send me to beg on trains and on the streets. While other castrated hijras were allotted with other traditional tasks of 'toli-badhai' and marriage ceremonies. But I know that severing my organ is not the answer as I know that it will bring shame and dishonour to my family and parents".

Because of her castrated organ, the respondent experiences unacceptance and disapproval even within her own community. But unlike other respondents, she reasons emasculation is not the solution as it would further engender shame and discredit to her family.

4.6.37 KOLKATA DISTRICT

RESPONDENT 22, AGE 45 YEARS: EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA-FAMILY/LOCALITY

While encountering or interacting with the 'normals', the respondent experiences stigma due to her unbridled expression of gender and sexuality that defied the heteronormative norm. The respondent recalls-

"I was born in Tollygunge, Kolkata and I lived with my brother and parents. We belonged to a middle-class family and my parents ensured that all of us had access to proper education. I am a literate and have completed my plus two exams. I have worked in NGO's and CBOs as a counsellor and as a member. When I was about 12 years or so, I realized that I was different. It was in school that I was infatuated with boys in our school. Unbeknownst to my parents and brother, I had secret relationships with some of them. I liked to wear colourful shirts and tight vests and had unusual tastes for a person born as biologically as male. My neighbourhood people too took notice of my whimsical appearance and mocked when I passed by. When I was 17, I started having multiple affairs with boys and men. I seemed to like all the attention, admiration and company. The female in me was ecstatic because of so many male admirers. I also had casual sexual liaisons with some of them. But little did I know that my brother and my mother were keeping a watch over me. I would make an excuse of some sort to meet the boys thinking that my mother would believe in me but on that day, my brother caught me red-handed. He took me back to my house and thrashed me multiple times. I cried and sobbed, pleading him to stop

and when he finally did they had a solution ready for the issue. I was in my early twenties and they had already fixed a bride for me to marry. I tried to explain to them that I was not attracted to the opposite sex and felt like a female, like a woman from inside but they wouldn't understand. Therefore, I was pressurized to marry and bear children of my own. Now, I have been married for many years now and my wife and kids depend on me to meet their financial needs."

Because of her openly discredited state, the respondent experienced physical abuse and mental trauma due to her unwillingness to conform to gender/sex norms. The respondent also becomes a victim of coercion wherein she is forcibly married off to a woman despite her non-normative gender and sexual identity. Despite her visible state of stigma, the respondent does not attempt to remedy her problem to conform to the norms of the society.

4.6.38 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA: LIFE AS HIJRA

The respondent in her narrative recalls that she made no attempts to conceal her discredited state of being a 'married *hijra'* due to which she had to experiences of stigma and inequality even within the community. She recalls- *"I joined the hijra community in my late twenties. And since the day I joined the community, I was treated differently than other celas because I was married to a woman. My guru did not approve of my marriage and my children for she believed that hijras are impotent and have no family. She also did not approve of the string of men I knew and socialized with. Nonetheless, I continued to work for her and contribute to the hijra household. Also since I was an akowa, I wasn't treated fairly like the other celas who had castrated themselves. I feel that the decision to castrate should be a personal choice and I also think that those hijras who have castrated themselves don't have much alternative in their lives, because once they castrate, they can never resume a normal life if they leave the hijra community. Since most*

of the hijras in West Bengal are economically and educationally backward, they force it upon other hijra and their celas to castrate in order to claim the status of being a natural born hijra thereby earning more in the process than a non-castrated one".

Here the respondent is doubly stigmatised by her *guru* for not conforming to the norms of the household and for refusing to emasculate as she chooses to remain an *akowa*. The respondent repudiates the stigma associated with non-emasculation and defends her discredited position by maintaining that the effects of emasculation cannot be reverted back once one undergoes surgery. Instead of stigma internalization, the respondent condemns the practice of emasculation which she perceives it as an abominable practice. She experiences the effects of her stigma but she does not avow it to be a 'discrediting attribute'. Her rejection of stigma, her unwillingness to emasculate and employ stigma coping strategies can be viewed as an effect of her interactions with local NGO/CBO bodies and other peer group counselling organizations which may have led her to revise her beliefs and values. Such encounters with the communities can also be read as coping mechanisms for the respondent, enabling them to encounter the normative 'others' of the *hijra* community (Goffman, 1986).

4.6.39 RESPONDENT 23 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA-HETERONORMATIVE SOCIETY

The respondent speaks of her experiences of identity crisis and her inability to make sense of gender difference. It was because of her discrediting attribute of gender difference that caused her to experience unpleasant social encounters with the normal others. The respondent recalls-

"When I was small, I did not know what going on with how I felt or how people perceived me. I knew that something was different in me, some boys used to touch me everywhere and I sometimes used to get attracted to them. And it was because of my difference that caused a lot of problems for me and my family. I tried to make small changes in me to `be more like a male, like not allowing my breasts to droop, wearing manly clothes and standing tall (like a man) while walking".

Understandably, the respondent in an effort to conform to the masculine norm attempts to change her femininity by attempting to appear more 'manly'. She does so by improving her posture, covering her breasts and wearing clothes typical to that of a man. The respondent therefore attempts to adjust within the enclaves of the heteronormative matrices by conforming to their notions of gender identity. The respondent, therefore, is cognizant of her social stigma, accepts it as an undesirable attribute and then tries to remedy it which can be understood as what Goffman calls it as the mechanisms to manage one's stigma (Goffman, 1986). Her coping strategy therefore, is to adhere to the gender stereotypes of men in order to reduce her actual gender visibility. She further adds-

"So this continued for a while but not for long because I met some people from the hijra community, they taught me their language of ulti, then I met folks from the ngo and cbo sectors who educated me about many sexual and gender identities. Then I gradually changed and had inner confidence within me to make sense of my own identity. Then gradually I started expressing my gender identity more and more, like applying kajal, lipstick, wearing my favourite saree and wearing woman lingerie. I also have grown my hair long to be in alignment with my feminine identity. Then after that, I started doing badhai as a hijra. Previously, I used to have problems with my parents but now they are habituated. Even the locality people are not mean to me anymore like before. But of course, all this did not happen instantaneously as I had to struggle a lot with them and

their prejudices/judgements. My family and locality members used to verbally abuse a lot, but they never assaulted me physically. But right now everything is okay. Previously, locality people used to call me 'bodhi', 'chakka' and 'mauga' but then I did not understand, I did not have knowledge back then, so I tried to be like a boy. I had an identity problem back then".

There is a clear transition from how the respondent coped with, viewed or managed her stigma before and after meeting people from the *hijra* community, NGO and CBO sectors. With education and sensitization of the multiplicities of gender identities and sexualities, the respondent became aware about her own gender identity making it easier for her to accept and to come to terms with it. Similarly, Ganju&Saggurti in their work on the transgenders of Maharashtra mention the encounters of everyday social stigma experienced by the transgenders and *hijras* engaged in sex work (Ganju & Saggurti, 2017). As a means to avoid societal oppression and stigma, the transgenders seek recourse to peer group educators or workers from the NGOs to understand and cope with their stigma (Ibid). Similarly, for the respondent, members from the NGO's and community-based organization created an important network of social support system for the respondent to enable her to make sense of her identity and cope with her stigma (Ibid). Here, the respondent effectively manages to cope with her stigma by positively deflecting the earlier interpretation of her gender difference as a discrediting attribute. Her earlier interpretation of her gender difference was pathologizing, othering and aberrant which were internalized because of the influence of the 'normal' others. But with the interaction of other similar groups and individuals, the respondent reclaims her gender identity as a normal attribute of her 'self'.

4.6.40 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA-HIJRA COMMUNITY

Many respondents viewed entry into the *hijra* community not only to meet and interact with individuals for social support but also as a viable source of livelihood. The respondent too joined the community to financially sustain herself. She narrates-

"After acknowledging my feminine identity, I gained entry into the hijra community primarily to earn money. I am an akowa hijra because I don't want to mutilate my genitalia to earn more money or please my guru. Whatever I earn I give her share and also contribute to gharana expenses. These chibbri hijras are always creating divisions between us and them because they consider themselves to be a real hijra. I have always given back to my guru with whatever I earn. There are also some Bangladeshi hijras who try to force their ideas on us. One time, when I was boarding a train to ask for alms, a group of Bangladeshi hijras tried to rough me up but since the railway personnel was there, they did not beat me. These kinds of instances are common for me as I have not castrated myself. They have also penalized me with some amount for begging in their trains but I am a poor hijra, how can I afford to pay them their demands? They ask for huge amounts of money, 30,000 or 50,000 rupees. And if not paid, they threaten to physically abuse us. But I remain loyal to my guru and her household, but I know that hijra is my profession and I do it well".

The *hijra* community provides the respondent with financial recourse and a sense of belongingness. But nonetheless, she becomes a victim of social stigma when *hijras* from other households attempt to ridicule her in public spaces. The constant ideology schisms of 'real' or a 'fake' *hijra,* of emasculation and non-emasculation and occupational practices creates gradations of hierarchy wherein a *hijra* is continually judged on the basis of these determiners (Dey et. al, 2016). The

respondent, being a non-emasculated *hijra* is pejoratively labelled as an *akowa hijra* which makes her susceptible to experiences of social stigma and exclusion even within the community. The respondent therefore accepts her label as an *'akowa'* but does not view it in a derogatory sense. Because of her differences of perception of *hijra* identity and community and her acceptance from her household members and her *guru,* the respondent does not feel the need to align her *hijra* identity to the norms of other *hijra* households.

4.6.41 RESPONDENT, 24 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA-HETERONORMATIVE SPACES

Similar to the respondents above, the interviewee expressed her denial to conform to the gender identity roles and expectations of a man. She narrates-

"I never liked being a male or a man or wear manly clothes. I was very small, and I still remember that I was very fond of girly things. And I did not want anyone to know because I knew that the society people would call me 'ladies' or 'chakka' and so I used to do all this without anyone's knowledge. But gradually my mind started to change when I started attending my school, inwardly I started feeling a bit different. I knew that I was different from the outside (like a male) but inwardly, I felt like a woman. I used to roam around with some locality boys, and we used to go to school together. Those boys used to talk about their girl crushes and their romantic feelings for their girlfriend but me, I never had any of those feelings, I never was attracted to any girl. Then when I was around 11 years old, people started calling me 'ladies' because of the way I walked and talked with them. I desperately wanted to hide my true identity from my teachers and school friends. I pretended and I really tried to act like a 'man' but then despite of all my efforts, they knew that I was different than others. But after a certain point, I stopped trying altogether because I felt too much of mental distress and sadness. I slowly embraced my feminine

identity and I also expressed it outwardly. After that, I loved to dress like a woman, wearing clothes (t-shirts, kurtas) etc. to assert my identity. My mother especially was unhappy with my gender identity and sexuality as she expected me to be the breadwinner for the family and shoulder responsibilities of siblings. I come from a poor family and it was difficult for us to make ends meet. But because of my gender identity and incomplete education, I could not engage in regular jobs. To sustain myself and my family, I had to join the hijra community".

The assertion of gender identity begins early on from her childhood wherein she disliked anything to do with masculinity. But due to the internalization of stigma, the respondent was unwilling to express it outwardly. The respondent also acknowledges her sexual desires as deviant or departing from the norm but does not intend on expressing it outwardly. The respondent therefore desperately attempted to maintain the consistency between her virtual social identity and actual social identity. The respondent views her gender difference as a concealable stigma and performs 'masculinity' when encountering the normals to reduce experiences of stigma. The respondent, in her attempts to fit into the gender norms and expectations of her family and society, pretends to be like a man in terms of speech, behaviour and mannerisms. She disregards her actual gender identity fearing social stigma and opprobrium. Lewis et. al in their insightful on sexual minorities contend that individuals identifying as Gays or Lesbians have added stressors to deal with apart from their other life problems (Lewis et. al, 2003). The added stressor is a direct causation of their sexual identity and their fears of homophobia, internalization of stigma and being unwilling to express their sexual identity outwardly (Ibid). Similarly, the respondent is acutely aware or conscious of her own stigma when encountering the 'normals' and in her everyday interactions with

them (Ibid). And because of her internalization of transphobia, she employs strategies of performing the male gender simply to 'fit in' to the gender norms. However, in her attempts to 'fit in', she experiences what Lewis et. al calls as mental stressors of anxiety, sadness and frustration (Lewis et. al, 2003). It is primarily because of such added stressors that impels the respondent to come to terms with her actual identity and her acceptance of her gender difference despite knowing about the repercussions of stigma (Ibid).

4.6.42 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA: HIJRA COMMUNITY

Considering the double stressors of life (i.e. financial insecurity and family obligation) and personal mental stressors (coping with gender difference), the respondent decided to join the *hijra* community for want of freedom from the constraints of the heteronormative norm and for financial security. She recalls her experiences when living with other *hijras-*

"Due to my circumstances, I joined the community. I also knew that apart from the hijras no one would accept me. But despite being with the same kind of people, I still had to struggle because of identity issues and community norms which were sometimes too binding and suffocating. Sometimes, when I had to leave for home for some work, or to look after my sick mother, I had to face a lot of constraints from my guru as she used to taunt me that I am a lundwali hijra (non-emasculated hijra) shirking away from work, from one's responsibilities. She used to call me a 'behrupiya' and often forced me to emasculate myself. My guru also restricted my movement for she had forbidden me to move around freely or to keep a giriya (lover, romantic interest). She only told me to focus on work, to do toli-badhai, khajra (sex work) to earn more money. I was always treated as unfairly by my guru for my lack of feminine appearances. But despite of all this household tensions, I choose to live life as an akowa hijra".

A *hijra* household is typically perceived to be a safe haven for those respondents who have experienced intense social stigma and unacceptance from the mainstream society for their gender identity and sexual preferences. But owing to the community norms, regulations and the hierarchical orderings of the *gurus* and *celas,* not all *hijras* experience complete happiness and freedom from constraints. The respondent, despite being a *hijra* and living amongst other *hijras* experiences the stigma of being an *akowa hijra.* Even within *hijra* communities, individual *hijra* members are stigmatised because of identity distinctions of being a *chibbri (emasculated) hijra* and an *akowa (non-emasculated) hijra.* In a similar strain, Vaughn et. al in their work on the lesbians mentions the double intersections of stigma experienced by disabled lesbians (Vaughn et. al, 2015). Especially, physically disabled lesbians experienced more episodes of stigma within lesbian communities than those whose stigma was not readily visible (Ibid). Similarly, in the case of the respondent, her discrediting attribute of being a non-emasculated *hijra* (akowa) is seen as a physical defect which is immediately recognized by other *hijra* members. Here too the respondent experiences stigma because of her disability and unwillingness to conform to the household norms imposed by her *guru.* Despite having transitioned as a *hijra,* the respondent continues to experience societal stigma because of the norms of her community. But the respondent, however, chooses to remain as an *akowa hijra* despite the external pressures. This indicates that despite her discredited state, the respondent chose to maintain her bodily integrity and autonomy rather than conforming to the identity templates of the *hijra* community.

4.6.43 CONCLUSION

Erving Goffman's seminal work on stigma and the stratagems deployed by the individuals to maintain their semblance of 'normalcy' in the presence of the 'normals' proffers an insightful analysis of stigma from the vantage point of everyday social interactions (Goffman, 1986). Goffman in his work commences by outlining certain objective societal markers and definitions of stigma that have existed since periods of antiquity (Ibid). Grounding stigma on contemporary everyday encounters with the 'normals' and the 'stigmatized individual', Goffman conceptualizes multiple terminologies on coping with stigma, managing one's stigma, the transition from the discreditable to the discredited state and other bifurcations of identity such as the differences between virtual and actual social identity (Ibid). Although profoundly insightful in many respects, Goffman's work however neglects individuals and their capacities as meaning making agents who sometimes resist the compulsion to label, belittle or view themselves as stigmatised individuals. The present chapter for example, whilst tracing the points of transition from the discreditable to the discredited state in heteronormative milieus and the *hijra* communes reveal that not all *hijras* actively attempt to manage or control their stigma in the presence of the 'normals'. The findings also demonstrate that not all respondents agree with the trajectory of transitioning from the discreditable state to the discredited. For example, some *hijra* respondents positively view their entry into the *hijra* community wherein they have access to social support and financial security. Although, objectively, such a transition would not be socially approved, considering the rigidities of sex/gender and strong patriarchal values of the Indian society, some *hijras* would not view the transition as a descent to disrepute but as something that guarantees personal freedom and financial empowerment. The

findings also mention instances wherein individuals have resisted the labels of the heteronormative societies and the *hijra* commune to maintain their own individual understandings of identity. Conversely, the findings also reveal many instances wherein respondents have experienced social isolation, alienation and lack of support because of their internalization of social stigma. Here, the stigmatized respondent experience disrepute and descend into what can be called as the state of 'extreme discredit'. The term, 'extreme discredit' was conceptualized to analyse the present findings that trace the transition of discreditable to discredited states in heteronormative and the *hijra* communities. As per findings, the terminology of 'extreme discredit' implies the fear of further descent into the discredited state when encountering the 'normals'. For example, some *hijras* may (out of fear) impose regulations on their community *hijras* to emasculate and conform to the traditional occupational roles in order to be in alignment with the societal perception and expectations of the mainstream society. The findings further reveal that most *hijras* transition from the heteronormative milieus (families, localities) towards *hijra* communities to seek refuge, support, as an act of resistance against the mainstream society or as a coping mechanism to deflect stigma. Typically, it is assumed that the *hijra* communities are safe havens for new *hijra* members as they all identify in the same category, but it is here precisely, that some *hijras* experience another level of discredit even when living within the *hijra* communes. As per findings, some respondents were stigmatised by their *gurus* and other community membersbecause of their non-castrated status. A non-castrated *hijra* is often deemed to be an inauthentic *hijra* who is sometimes compared with an 'imposter *hijra'*. The concept of stigma and the strategies employed by the *hijras* to cope with the same is an extremely relevant field of research wherein, as per

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findings, the attributes deemed discrediting and shameful is not fixed a normative space such as the heteronormative milieu but transcends to other spaces to create its own normativity. For e.g., some *hijras* maintain *hijra-normativity* and maintain schisms of emasculated and non-emasculated *hijra* to prevent the state of extreme discredit (Dukpa, 2016). Stigma, therefore, is an objective fact only in so far, it is deemed as one by a group or social consensus. However, as Goffman contends, such stigma ridden attribute is not inherently stigmatizing but is only considered as 'discrediting' because of the meanings conferred to the same (Goffman, 1986). Such consensus that dictates the attributes considered shameful and discrediting however are provisional and mutable considering the social dialectics of meanings that engenders changes and shifts in terms of social perception. The decriminalization of Sec. 377 of 2018 and the third gender verdict of 2014 are some exemplary instances wherein the discrediting meanings attributed to homosexuality and the third gender have transitioned into positive meanings of equality and acceptance. Stigma experienced in heterormative or *hijra* milieus are therefore not immutable and is always subject to change and revision.

CHAPTER – 5

FOREGROUNDING LIVED EXPERIENCES OF THE HIJRAS OF NORTH BENGAL AND KOLKATA: A HEIDEGGERIAN PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

5.1 PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF THE HIJRAS

The word 'lived' or 'lived through' connotes meanings of 'being-in-the-world', of experiencing life as a stream of nowness (Manen, 2016). The term *'Erlebnis'* (a German word) consists of the word, *'leben'* which means to simply 'live' or life (Ibid). Phenomenology emphatically foregrounds on the significance of the 'lived or lived through experiences' which places primacy on human 'experience' as the source of knowledge (Ibid). But the conceptualization of the lived experience is heavily contingent upon the school of phenomenology wherein seminal thinkers of this field have operationalized experience in myriad and antagonistic ways (Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2008; Zahavi, 2003). Prima facie understanding of the concept of the 'lived experience/s' appears to be a novel way of examining social phenomena or phenomenon wherein the experiences in itself is given importance than objective realities or any other a priori entities. But a more thorough analysis of the lived experience in phenomenological traditions presents an intricate and complex nature due to the contesting interpretations advanced by Husserlian and Heideggerian Phenomenology. The present chapter on the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata attempts to explicate on the themes of 'self', 'bodies', desires and gender identity but assumes an ontological stance instead of an epistemological one. But conversely, the ontological orientation of the lived experiences of self,

bodies, desires and gender identity does not analyse it as a discrete phenomenon but subsumes all the phenomena under the rubric of being (Dreyfus, 1991). For a proper explication of the 'lived experiences' of the *hijras,* it is imperative to contextualize or situate experiences within their given worlds and the meanings which emanate from the same (Ibid). A Husserlian phenomenological study of the experiences of the *hijras* would divest the situated *being-in-the-world* apprehension of experiences abstracting the phenomenon from the realities of the everyday world (Ibid). Husserl's phenomenology advances the postulation of separating the phenomenon by bracketing it from a priori conceptualizations, presuppositions, knowledge, theory and one's stock of knowledge (Sokolowski, 2000). The application of the *Husserlian* phenomenological framework on the apprehension of the 'self', 'body' or 'gender identity' would alienate the very meanings of self, body of gender identity emanating from the flux of everyday 'lived through experiences' as it suspends one's pre-existing knowledge, notions and beliefs to unearth the 'indubitable' essence of the phenomenon (Moran & Cohen, 2012). When attempting to apprehend the lived experiences of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata, it becomes imperative to incorporate their culture, spaces and temporalities that define their experiences of the phenomenon under study. The *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata particularly, are already embedded in the multiplicities of culture, tradition and community practices and the extrication of the lived experiences from such myriad factors strips the experience from its contextual richness and embeddedness. For example, to understand the lived experiences of gender identity of the *hijras,* it becomes necessary to lay primacy on the dynamics of interpretation or meanings attributed to gender identity that emanates from one's region-specific cultural elements, one's constant hermeneutic

dialogue with the world and one's ability to 'understand' and create new meanings (Mal &Mundu, 2018). The upshot is to view experiences that are always already situated in the world because individuals, as Heidegger notes is flung into the world or thrown into their specific worlds wherein with their innate abilities to understand imbue experiences with meanings (Dreyfus, 1991). An abstracted and bracketed phenomenological stance on experiences contradicts the very meaning of lived experience, as the word 'lived' can only be understood within the domains of everyday living, in the flux of one's realities and situatedness in the world. Thus, the present chapter attempts to understand the lived experiences of *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata by examining the ontological experiences of being-in-the-world.

5.2 RATIONALISM, EMPIRICISM AND EXISTENTIALISM

Prior to any scholarly exposition of phenomenological 'lived experiences' of beings requires philosophical invocations stemming from periods of antiquity, more specifically thinkers belonging to the Grecian intellectual ilk, viz. Plato, a disciple of Socrates and who was to be credited for bringing to the fore, works by Socrates and additionally, expanding on his own theory of 'ideal forms' (Stonehouse et. al, 2011; Kindersley, 2015). The Grecian thinkers inaugurated inquiries on what constitutes 'a human being', their relentless search for 'knowledge' via the dialectical method, ideal forms that can be sourced by perceiving the spirit as a fount of reason and knowledge gathered through empiricism (Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2011). Albeit, of particular significance for current research purposes, is Plato's interpretation of forms existing not in the everyday material realms but one that belongs to the otherworldly domain accessed

via reason (Robinson & Groves, 2014). Drawing on the popular 'allegory of the cave', Plato lays the initial philosophical foundations of rationalism which was later to be built upon by successors viz. Descartes, Leibniz, and Spinoza among others (Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2011). In the allegory of the cave, Plato interprets that forms and phenomena manifest in the worldly mundane dominion as imperfect and flawed when juxtaposed with the ideal forms of the same, existent in the 'world of ideas' (Kindersley, 2015). However, to understand the chasm between reason and empiricism introduced in Plato's theoretical corpus, it becomes necessary to apprehend the central ideas of dialectics as promulgated by his predecessor, Socrates (Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2011). Socrates, because of his dogged method of questioning every phenomenon was to subsequently succumb to hemlock poisoning in 399 BCE as a death injunction for challenging the morality of his time (Taylor, 2019). Socrates sought the truth of phenomena by engaging his contemporaries in a series of interrogative dialogues questioning their beliefs and stances and allowing opposing perspectives to challenge or proffer a more coherent explanation for the same (Ibid). Socrates claimed to have possessed no knowledge and it is with his supposed knowledge vacuum that he commences to challenge and dislodge 'taken for granted' assumptions, beliefs, statements or theories to reveal the discrepancies and dissonances inherent within them (Kindersley, 2015). To illustrate further, Professor Hubert Dreyfus[99], when delivering a series of undergraduate lectures on Grecian Philosophy, Heidegger and the essence of Soren Kierkegaard's existentialism mentioned Socrates's need for laws or principles which define phenomena or abstract ideas, for example, what are the principles of eros, being

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[99]Hubert Dreyfus (1929-2017) was an eminent professor emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley, who has authored multiple works on Martin Heidegger and AI technology.

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right or pious[100]. Responding to Socrates's inquiry of the principles of truth and knowledge, Plato articulates the pre-existence of the 'soul' of beings that harbours 'innate knowledge', thereby attempting to answer Socrates's epistemological inquiry of a domain, phenomena, abstract ideas, et al. Plato with his premise, therefore, creates a cleavage between the material and the immaterial realms viz. the all-knowing spirit that harbours reason and the body/world which is relegated as an inferior manifestation of the ideal forms of ideas. Understandably, the precedence of 'reason' is reinforced in Plato's thesis which is informed from Socrates's dialectical method employing reason as a crucial means to acquire knowledge which Socrates considered as immutable absolutes[101]. Aristotle, a student of Plato however departed from the epistemological enquiry method as deployed by his mentor and instead underscored the significance of empiricism (observation or experiences) as a means to examine the essence of beings or objects[102]. Despite the dissonances of approach between Plato and Aristotle, Plato's central thesis acted as a springboard for future rationalists and Aristotle's empiricism later burgeoned into the works of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume[103]. The rationalists for example, Rene Descartes in his work, reiterated on the rational argument by foregrounding 'reason' as a superior method which would produce indubitable knowledge of the world (Descartes, 1998). In alignment with his philosophical conviction, Descartes harboured extreme doubts about the existence of everything including his own corporal existence (Kindersley, 2019). This radical scepticism harboured by Descartes against sense perception as experienced by a corporal being is a point of departure for his consequent analysis of ascertaining

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[100]Intellectual Deep Web, Video lectures of Hubert Dreyfus on Heidegger, 2019.
[101]Ibid
[102]Ibid
[103]Ibid

veracity in phenomena, objects or statements (Clarke, 2003). The famous expression *"cogito ergo sum"* put forth by Descartes succinctly encapsulates his salient premise viz. the polarized division between *res cogitans* (the mind) and the *res extensa* (objects extended in space, including the body) (Ibid). This distinction enabled him to root his existence as a thinking being first, which in turn would guarantee his material existence (Ibid). Descartes was mistrustful of his own experiences afforded to him by his senses and espousing 'reason' as a technique, he doubted everything to a point where he couldn't repudiate the existence of his own mind; thus, deducing that a 'thinking being' takes precedence over a somatic one (Bracken, 2012). The clear schisms between the mind and body domains are further pronounced in Immanuel Kant's work wherein a priori knowledge constitutes deductive theoretical knowledge acquired by reason and posteriori knowledge as one gathered by empirical experiences (Guyer, 2010). Understandably, the epistemological inquiry to obtain knowledge was fissured into rationalists and empirical school of thoughts. In spite of the disparate approaches employed by the rationalists and empiricists to arrive at invariable objective 'truths', the ultimate intention of both the schools remains the same viz. to discover enduring essences of objects or phenomena external to the 'self' (Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2011). Such a theoretical premise to underscore the salience of universal and pervasive truths relegates the agency of a being (or more specifically, a human being) as a passive entity divesting them of their ability to make sense of the world and their personal experiences. Descartes, particularly, emblazoned and explicitly represented the proposition of mind/body dualism thereby ushering in the philosophical conundrum of how the mind could interact or engage with the external world (Kindersley, 2015; Clarke, 2003). Plato however pioneered the rift between the finite (body) and

the infinite (mind, spirit) and he viewed the human self as a combination of the two which could be pried apart wherein, ideally, the mind or the spirit was to eventually triumph over the body (Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2011). Plato held the belief that the set of factors viz. the body and the spirit makes a disparate combination immanent within the human self-wherein the needs of the material/corporal is inferior to the needs of the eternal spirit (Ibid). But in spite of the prejudices against the callings of the 'corporal', Plato advocated that the 'self' is required to espouse a stance in order to resolve the conflict of the demands of the 'body' and the 'spirit', deeming the latter as 'essential' (Ibid). However, critiquing the 'combination premise', Blaise Pascal, an early albeit less acknowledged existential thinker viewed the self as a 'synthesis' rather than a 'combination' in which one needs to take into cognizance the 'tensions' rising from the conflicting domains of the 'mind' and 'body' and in his own words, 'to live within the intervening spaces' instead of dwelling in the extremities of the temporal and the eternal (Ibid). Pascal incorporated elements of Judaeo-Christian beliefs with the 'syntheses of a set of forms to illustrate how one grapples with the finite and the infinite simultaneously (Ibid). For Pascal, the synthesis of the self was made viable by emulating the ways of 'God' (Jesus) but however, on a more mundane level, this method as manifested by the divine was not easily realizable for mortals (Ibid). Building on the thesis of Pascal, Soren Kierkegaard[104] conceded with him on his postulation of a 'self' being a synthesis where a singular part of the self cannot be surrendered to glorify the other; and simultaneously advanced a more viable suggestion for managing the contradictions of the finitude and infinitude[105] aspects of the self (Ibid). Kierkegaard adds to the

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[104] Soren Kierkegaard was a Danish Philosopher, author and Theologian who was considered to be the father of Existential school of thought.

[105] For the early thinkers of existentialism, the spirit and the body stands for multiple connotations viz. eternal and temporal, infinitude and finitude et al.

thesis that for the self to reconcile and reinforce the contradictory polarities of spirit and body, one's 'self' needs to relate to the 'other' in an unconditional commitment so as to simultaneously manifest and conflate the finite and infinite thereby manifesting one's identity sans any despair (Ibid). For Kierkegaard, the inability to conflate and acknowledge the finite with the infinite (body and spirit) results in despair of existence (Ibid). Thus, for Kierkegaard, for the self to truly emerge, one needs to infinitely pursue the finite, and consequently in the process embody and manifest both the body and spirit and consequently setting one's 'self' free from despair (Ibid). Kierkegaard also foregrounds 'subjectivity' as 'truth' and the 'individual' as the 'universal', thereby implying a radical departure from the ways in which rationalists conceive of the 'self' (Ibid). However, what remains of pertinence for the present research is how the metaphysics of the 'self' is approached, conceived and defined by the rationalists and the existentialists. The former posits the 'self' to exist as a thinking 'self' whose ability to think in an objective, detached and dispassionate manner precedes one's subjective and material existence whilst the latter categorically critiques the objective conception of the 'self' and emphasizes on the situated subjective experiences conflated with the temporal to apprehend the 'self' (Ibid). Kierkegaard therefore sets the stage for successors of existentialism to examine the situated 'self' that integrates body and the spirit to define oneself (Ibid). This conception of the 'self' therefore becomes imperative in the analysis of the 'lived experiences' of self, gender identity and sexuality of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata as the Heideggerian philosophical tradition is in some respects inspired by the early existential elucidation of the 'self' proffered by Soren Kierkegaard. Therefore, reverting to the prior juxtaposition and comparison between two schools of philosophy viz.

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Rationalists and Existentialists (phenomenologist Martin Heidegger however repudiated the label of existentialism), it becomes obvious that a careful analysis of 'lived experiences' of humans requires forsaking the prior assumption of the cleavages of mind and body in order to extract rich embodied and situated phenomenological experiences of beings as it transpires during one's life course. However, unlike Husserlian phenomenology's core assumptions on consciousness, intentionality, suspension of the natural world and its search for apodictic truths derived via pure experiences, the tenets of Heideggerian Phenomenology resonates deeply with the lived human experience as it commences with a simple assertion, that human beings are always already amidst 'living in the world' as opposed to experiencing the world via suspension of the natural attitude (Manen, 2016; Zahavi, 2003; Dreyfus, 1991). The following section will therefore deliberate and examine the varying strands of phenomenological traditions (Husserlian phenomenology and the successive phenomenological/existential thinkers) and will subsequently provide a rationale for the espousal of the Heideggerian-Hermeneutic phenomenological tradition over Husserlian phenomenology for examining the 'lived experiences' of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata.

5.3 INTERROGATING THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL TRADITIONS AND THE LIVED HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In the 20th century, Phenomenology as a discrete branch of human science study was inaugurated with the pioneering work of Edmund Husserl, viz. *Logical Investigations* published in the year 1900 (Cerbone, 2009). Edmund Husserl was a Czech German Philosopher born in 1859 in Prossnitz, Czech Republic (Ibid). From obtaining a doctorate degree in Mathematics from the University of Leipzig,

Husserl transitioned into Philosophy from the year 1880 onwards (Ibid). The impetus for Husserl to switch from Mathematics to Philosophy can be attributed to the lectures of Franz Brentano on Psychology and Philosophy in the 1880's which roused the interest of Husserl who in turn decided to dedicate himself to Philosophy (Cerbone, 2009; Van Manen, 2016). Inspired by the discourses on Logic and Arithmetic in Brentano's school, Husserl began his formulation for his initial ideas (Crowell, 2009). Additionally, Husserl also owes the conceptualization of 'intentionality' to Franz Brentano for he observed that the directedness of the consciousness towards something is the 'mark of the mental' (Cerbone, 2009.) In *Logical Investigations*, Husserl establishes his central postulation on Phenomenology being a presuppositionless study, i.e., to examine things by suspending knowledge, theories, ideas, beliefs et al. (Zahavi, 2003). Husserl in his work, *Ideas I*, initiated the concept of 'natural attitude' or *'die naturlicheEinstellung'*which for him signifies the way humans perceive the world in a common-sensical way with their notions, beliefs and knowledge (Moran & Cohen, 2012). The natural attitude assumes that the world and all its things are 'already there' for humans to experience (Ibid). Husserl while giving his lecture on natural attitude to Kant society defines the natural attitude as a way of practical thinking that aids humanity during their natural course (Ibid). Husserl further elucidates that the natural attitude precedes the scientific attitude because the latter too begins its inquiry with the assumptions of the natural attitude viz. the belief that the world is on hand/present *(vorhanden)* and real/actual *(wirklich)* (Ibid). Drawing from the earlier argument of Rationalists vs. Existentialism, Husserl's assistant, Eugene Fink draws parallels of the natural attitude posited by Husserl with that of the shadows postulated by Plato's allegorical cave (Ibid). Husserl feared that the

'natural attitude' could quickly descend into the 'naturalistic attitude' which would rigidify the taken-for-granted beliefs of the world and its objects reducing them to absolutes (Ibid). To disrupt the continuation of 'naturalistic attitude', Husserl in his work, introduced the method viz. *epoché* for bracketing the 'natural attitude' to bring forth the 'phenomenological attitude' wherein it was to be characterized as the deferral of the 'taken for granted' knowledge, meanings and theories (Finlay, 2008). For Husserl, the application of *epoché*means an act of 'putting out' or suspension of the 'natural attitude' wherein beings aren't simply functioning sans any questioning but simultaneously reflecting on their experiences of the world (Ibid). Husserl's phenomenological enterprise therefore seeks to discover pure experiences and the essence of these experiences without analyzing, interpreting or elucidating it (Zahavi, 2003). By suspending the 'taken for granted' attitude of the world, Husserl expects to extract knowledge obtained from instantaneous experiences (Van Manen, 2016). However, when referring to the 'essence', Husserl emphatically clarifies that his study stands in contrast with the natural sciences or the discipline of Psychology because for him, Phenomenology does not concern itself with external factual realities but rather centers on the immediacy of experiences which would subsequently yield indubitable essences (Ibid). Husserl formulated Phenomenology as a 'rigorous science', a study which would proffer scientific theories to create an indubitable knowledge base, a science of all sciences or *Wissenschaftslehre* (Moran & Cohen, 2012; Sheehan, 2014). When juxtaposing *Husserlian* Phenomenology and the positivist sciences, one can discover certain resemblances considering the propensities of both the disciplines to unearth facts for the sciences and indubitable essences for phenomenology (Ibid). But what sets *Husserlian* phenomenology apart is the thrust given to the 'nowness' of experience

as opposed to the overarching objective/detached theories or universal laws to secure knowledge (Ibid). It is important to reiterate that whilst the positivist sciences endeavours to ascertain the external/objective independent realities, *Husserlian* Phenomenology on the other confers primacy to the 'things themselves', i.e., things as they appear in one's consciousness (Ibid). Additionally, *Husserlian* phenomenology's distinction from the natural sciences can be attributed to the methods conceived by Husserl, namely *epoche*(reduction) and *eidetic* variations which allows one to discover apodictic essences derived from the stream of pure intentional experiences manifesting in one's consciousness (Ibid). Adhering to the dictum conceptualized by Husserl, *"back to the things,* Husserl emphasizes the salience of reverting to the 'things' or the intentional experiences of the consciousness i.e. the directedness of the consciousness towards external objects (Manen, 2016; Zahavi, 2003). By employing the methodological reductions, *Husserl,* unlike most rationalists, did not intend on unearthing knowledge by espousing a theoretical stance but instead envisaged to create a philosophy of human science predicating knowledge on pure experience and thus in the process, discovering the structures of consciousness (Ibid). For Husserl, the 'things' themselves meant the manifestations of things on one's consciousness as opposed to the external object (Ibid). Here it is essential to recall again, rationalist Descartes's key principle viz. '*I think therefore I am'* as it resonates with the tenets of *Husserlian* phenomenology wherein he emphatically foregrounds the intentional directedness of consciousness towards objects (Ibid). The similarity between Husserlian phenomenology and Descartes's rationalist philosophy is the propensity of both the philosophical strands to foreground the conscious/thinking mind or in Husserl's case, consciousness. Similarly, Harwood mentions the use of 'scepticism'

by Descartes as a tool to doubt everything that he encountered via his sensory experiences (Harwood, 2010). Weber in his work on *Descartes*[106]mentions Descartes's emulation of the works of similar thinkers viz. Gassendi, Galileo and Newton who studied the natural sciences and the subsequent effect it had on his philosophy. Here, it would also necessitate to recall the previous juxtaposition of rationalists vs. empiricists; more specifically, the philosophical arguments advanced by Plato because of his affinity with Descartes's search for indubitable truths. One can further recall similarities between Plato and Descartes's thought by referring to Plato's allegory of the cave (Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2011). Plato was distrustful of experiences mediated by sensory experiences which according to him prohibited beings to access the reality of the world (Ibid). Plato likens those dubious experiences with the shadows projected by the light in a dark cave wherein the captives assume the shadows to be the absolutes in terms of reality (Robinson & Groves, 2014). Plato therefore exhorts in his philosophy to acknowledge the falsehood of sensory experiences and the inability of the senses to guarantee invariable and infallible knowledge (Ibid). Descartes was influenced by Plato because of the former's cognizance of the uncertainties of sensory or bodily experiences which he remained distrustful of (Ibid). As a mathematician and a rationalist, Descartes intended to unearth absolute immutable truths which according to him could only be guaranteed with the espousal of extreme doubt and deduction, a method used in the natural sciences (Bracken, 2012). Following the philosophical traditions of the Grecian periods and the problem of the metaphysics posed by Aristotle wherein he claimed that the form exists in matter, Descartes critiqued the conclusion of Aristotelian metaphysics proposing an alternate dualist

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[106]http://www.sophia-project.org/uploads/1/3/9/5/13955288/weber_descartes.pdf (Accessed on 03.04.2019)

view of reality (Smith, 2015). The metaphysics of Cartesian dualism was advanced by Descartes wherein he posited the segregation of two substances viz. *res extensa* (the material/tangible world) and *res cogitans* (thinking/immaterial substance) (Ibid). Descartes sought to resolve the issue of metaphysics by resorting to the methods of geometrical science viz. observing axioms and deduction (Weber, 2012). In a similar strain, Harwood's work informs about Descartes's insistence on grounding philosophy on the foundations of certainty which in turn led him to make use of deduction and scepticism as methods to predicate philosophy and metaphysics on the robust foundations of indubitable knowledge or truths (Harwood, 2010). Taking into account his preceding requirement for certitude, Descartes following the principles of mathematics commenced his enterprise of philosophy by casting radical doubt on all experiences afforded by his sensory perceptions (Ibid). He rejected all beliefs and experiences emanating from his senses as he believed that it was based on precarious or fallible footings (Ibid). He further reasoned that these sensory experiences and beliefs could be engendered by a wicked demon or it could simply be surreal/ dream like states (Kindersley, 2015). Descartes therefore repudiated the lack of doubtlessness brought forth by these experiences and instead deployed radical scepticism to discover unambiguous truths or axioms to base his subsequent philosophical postulations. In a similar strain, Chappell in his work expounds and enumerates the six meditations which led to the culmination of Descartes philosophical treatise wherein he undermined the material world in order to position the conscious mental substance or *res cogitans* over and above the tangible or the *res extensa* (Chappell, 1997). In his first meditations, Descartes begins by contesting and dismantling the existing epistemic structures of knowledge and the multiplicities of theories proffered by the

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antecedent thinkers critiquing their tenuous and precarious interpretations of the reality of the world (Ibid). Descartes therefore commences his first meditations by doubting all his experiences, beliefs, prior theories and dubious knowledge systems (Ibid). In the second meditations, he acknowledges and realizes that his own existence is beyond any doubt in so far as his existence is sustained by a conscious mind (Ibid). Understandably, in his quest to secure philosophy by undergirding it with the certainty of science, he initially used the deduction method to repudiate any experience or knowledge claim by deploying radical scepticism (Ibid). Eventually, post the completion of casting radical doubt on all and sundry, Descartes was impelled to accept his own existence as 'real' for it survived his method of extreme doubt (Ibid). He further reasoned that it was primarily because of his own conscious mind that allowed for the existence of his corporal self (Ibid). The statement of thought (thinking) preceding existencewas a culmination of Descartes meditations on structuring a novel metaphysics grounding the study via reliance on scientific principles (Ibid). It was particularly at this crucial juncture and the principle borne out of it that afforded Descartes to infer further premises on the 'thinking self' (Ibid). He further deduced from the pivotal principle of the conscious/thinking self that a being's essence is fundamentally determined by his/her capacity to think or to be a conscious self (Ibid). With his findings, Descartes progresses towards the third meditation wherein he examines the existence of 'God' via the framework of scientific principles and his earlier philosophical objective to discover indubitable and unchanging truths (Ibid). The fourth meditations constitute of the sanctity of God's veracity of being and the postulation that it was the individual who erred harbouring their own set of flaws and judgements insulating God's being from the follies of human nature (Ibid).

However, his fifth and sixth meditations provide a better apprehension of the schisms between body and the mind because it is in the penultimate meditation that Descartes clarifies the nature of tangible substances (Ibid). He conceptualizes material substances as things that extend out in space or things that occupy the three dimensions of spatiality (Ibid). Spatial extension according to Descartes constitutes the very essence of *res extensa* or the physical things as opposed to the thinking essence of the immaterial mind (Ibid). It is in the sixth meditation that Descartes finally delineates or rather draws discrete boundaries between the mind and the body and advances his philosophical thesis that his mind remains as a distinct thinking entity different from his corporal self which by its essence is, quite simply an extension in space (Ibid). The mind-body dualism proffered by Rene Descartes therefore becomes a significant point of departure and contention for subsequent philosophers as it creates the conundrum of how the mind with its conscious/thinking essence could possibly interact with the body with its essence of space extension (Ibid). To respond or rather bypass the philosophical impasse of sorts, Edmund Husserl, a mathematician and phenomenologist sought to circumvent the issue by avoiding analysis of the mind-body dualism (Smith, 1995). Husserl was instead more concerned about examining the contents of consciousness or the things as they appeared in the mind (Ibid). However, this does not imply that Husserl challenged the method and the thesis of Descartes's rationalism in its entirety. In a similar strain, Rickard in her work mentions the similarities between the two thinkers (viz. Descartes and Husserl) by invoking an excerpt from Husserl's Paris lectures wherein he underscored the need to dismantle existing knowledge structures in order to construct new knowledge systems for

anyone seriously undertaking the philosophical enterprise[107]. Similarly, Descartes in his meditations envisaged the possibility of reforming philosophy with the scientific approach of the natural sciences and he commenced his analysis by demolishing the extant 'dubious' philosophy/knowledge of his time[108]. Sabou in his workfurther informs that Husserl went on to describe phenomenology as a Cartesian study of the twentieth century (Sabou, 2015). Both Descartes and Husserl were disenchanted by their contemporary knowledge systems because for them, a thorough scrutiny of the 'taken-for-granted' assumptions needs to assume precedence prior to any serious philosophical exposition (Ibid). Descartes sought to accomplish this via the espousal of the method of doubt and Husserl intended to dispel such preconceived notions/assumptions by bracketing or suspending the natural attitude (Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2011). Husserl in his inauguration of pure phenomenology sought to study the structures of consciousness by reverting back to the things intended by consciousness (Manen, 2016). But such similarities notwithstanding, Rickard also mentions the points of contention between Descartes and Husserl which led to the subsequent divergence of Husserl's school of thought from the philosophy of Rene Descartes[109]. On one hand, Descartes gives primacy to the ability to think which he claims ensures his material existence while on the other, Husserl gives salience to intuition and experiences given in the

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[107]Rickard, K. G. (n.d.). *Husserl, Descartes and "I."* Academia. Retrieved 2019, fromhttps://www.academia.edu/930904/Husserl_Descartes_and_I

[108]Ibid

[109]Rickard, K. G. (n.d.). *Husserl, Descartes and "I."* Academia. Retrieved 2019, fromhttps://www.academia.edu/930904/Husserl_Descartes_and_I

consciousness whilst bracketing the natural attitude[110]. Rickard further suggests that Husserl veers towards empiricism as it relies on the senses to apprehend experiences to manifest on one's consciousness[111]. But Descartes unlike Husserl intends to study the metaphysics via reliance on scientific principles and the method of deduction which Husserl is wary of, as such a proclivity, for Husserl precludes the possibility of freeing the study from prior pre-conceptions, notions, theories and knowledge[112]. Nonetheless, despite differences and similarities in their approaches, Husserl's work was undoubtedly influenced by such major philosophical strands preceding him. Similarly, Murphy in his work shows that Husserl acknowledges the intellectual debt of Descartes and Hume for the formation of his phenomenological theory (Murphy, 1980). Noticeably, despite being influenced by two thinkers who were categorically subsumed under two broad strands of philosophy, viz. rationalism and empiricism, Husserl produced a novel study called phenomenology wherein absolute primacy was given to the objects of consciousness as they manifested in the stream of experiences achieved via the methods of *epoche* and *eidetic* variation (Ibid). It would necessitate to reiterate here that Husserl did not intend on resolving or confronting the Cartesian problem of the segregations of the mind and the body but instead intended to ground his epistemology by examining the contents and structures of pure consciousness (Sokolowski, 2000). Unlike Descartes who scrutinized the nature of *res extensa* or the material world whose reality could be determined with reason and intellect, Husserl chose to eschew the question of the validity of the existence of the external world, deliberating instead on the manifestation of the internal objects of consciousness (Ibid). In his exposition of the *'lived experience'* or

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[110]Ibid
[111]Ibid
[112]Ibid

*erlebnis*as he called it, Husserl distinguished it from modern empiricism because he viewed the latter as a narrow discipline conceiving of experience only within the confines of sensualism (Moran, 2001). Rickard in her work further adds that Husserl diverged from pure empiricist thought because he did not reduce Phenomenology merely as a discipline examining sensory experiences but instead using such experiences as objects of consciousness to determine the very essence of a phenomenon[113]. Rickard further explicates that Descartes and Husserl convened and diverged on many aspects but fundamentally both thinkers intended to uproot the 'taken for granted' attitude albeit their methodological approaches may have been disparate[114]. Unlike the empiricist school of thought which deemed sensory experiences with veracity, Husserl envisaged experience as things manifesting in one's consciousness and he conceived of phenomenology as a discipline which allowed for the discovery of the underlying and invariable structures of consciousness via suspension or bracketing of the natural attitude. But when locating such conceptions of experience and consciousness within the inquiry of 'lived experiences', the Husserlian phenomenological approach renders itself as an inadequate method to discover and extract rich embodied 'lived through' experiences of human beings (Dreyfus, 1991; Manen, 2016). Van Manen in his work, explicates Husserl's definition of phenomenology as a descriptive enterprise wherein the salience of the givenness of the things in one's consciousness is foregrounded unsullied with interpretations, presuppositions, theories or prior knowledge (Van Manen, 2016, pp. 89). In Husserlian parlance, *'Erlebniswesen'* or

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[113]Rickard, K. G. (n.d.). *Husserl, Descartes and "I."* Academia. Retrieved 2019, from https://www.academia.edu/930904/Husserl_Descartes_and_I

[114]Ibid

the essences generated via lived experiences was primarily what Husserl intended to unearth in order to secure the foundations of philosophy via reliance on the indubitable knowledge emanating solely from experiences (Ibid). Like Descartes, Husserl was concerned with the transformation of philosophy by relying on the principle of absolute certitudes (Ibid). But unlike Descartes, he did not employ the method of 'radical scepticism' wherein he deduced the importance of the *cogito* or the mind assuming that his existence depended on the condition that he was a 'thinking being' (Zahavi, 2003). Husserl on the other allowed the 'truths' to emerge from the 'things themselves' or how they manifested in one's consciousness rather than doubting it (Van Manen, 2016). He strove to ascertain the apodictic truths by suspending or bracketing prior knowledge, presuppositions, beliefs, ideas et. al but not repudiating their veracity altogether (Ibid). Husserl, therefore, via his methodological techniques of *epoche* and *eidetic* reductions postpones the judgement of the veracity of the external reality of the world but does not directly doubt the existence of the same (Ibid). Here lies one of the primary causes of distinction between Descartes and Husserl's view with respect to one's approach when it comes to unearthing fundamental truths or realities (Ibid). Husserl thus commenced with the givenness of the phenomenon in one's experiential stream manifested in consciousness (Ibid). This manifestation presents itself as a 'pure' form when filtered by the *epoche* (bracketing) and *eidetic* variation (Ibid). Husserl considered that the dual methodological reductions were imperative to obtain the indubitable essences afforded by lived through human experiences (Ibid). Taking into account Husserl's philosophical enterprise and his conception of 'lived experience', it would necessitate to recall the aforesaid cleavages between rationalism and empiricism and the refusal of Husserl's phenomenology to conform

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to the binaries of the same. Instead, Husserlian phenomenology derives an amalgam of attributes from the positivist propensities of the rationalists and the sensory emphasis of the empiricists to fashion phenomenology as a human science (Van Manen, 2016). The coupling of lived experiences and the essences thereof, along with the reliance on the need of the senses for the manifestation in one's consciousness uniquely constitutes Husserlian phenomenology. Additionally, the strand of Husserlian phenomenology also cannot be subsumed under existentialist school of thought which was initiated by Pascal and Kierkegaard with Kierkegaard structuring the initial foundations of existentialism and MartinHeidegger subsequently furthering it (Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2011). Although Heidegger repudiated the label of an 'existential philosopher'[115] he nonetheless foregrounded the 'ontic' importance of 'being' in his magnum opus, *Being and Time* (Raffoul& Nelson, 2013). Heidegger questions the taken-for-granted assumptions of epistemologists with which they begin their inquiry whilst conveniently bypassing a significant primal question, i.e., "what is to be?", or "what is being?" (Dreyfus, 1991). Husserl, particularly, in his phenomenological inquiry, eschewed such fundamental 'ontological' interrogation of existence thereby rendering his work as epistemological in nature (Ibid). Husserl was devoted towards understanding the commonalities of structures of experience when consciousness is directed towards external phenomena/objects (Van Manen, 2016). Martin Heidegger, a phenomenologist and a protege of Edmund Husserl therefore significantly deviated in his phenomenological approach from Husserl as he approached Phenomenology as an ontic human science enterprise (Dahlstrom, 2013). The inspiration that Heidegger drew from existentialist, Kierkegaard's work

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[115]Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy

becomes more manifest when reading his conceptions of leading an inauthentic life (or the life of the *Das Man*) instead of the *dasein* which is relatively similar to Kierkegaard's ideas of leading lives wherein the self relates to the self in a negative unity (viz. by following the Grecian principles of preferring the spirit over the body) or by not acknowledging the contradiction of the 'self' which eventually leads to despair (Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2011). Heidegger figures as a prominent phenomenologist for he critiqued Husserlian phenomenology for continuing the legacy of Descartes and perpetuating the chasms of mind and body (Ibid). Additionally, Heidegger also doubted the efficacy of Husserlian Phenomenology to extract rich embodied 'lived' experiences of beings via *epoche*and *eidetic* reductions because Heidegger reasoned that the 'lived experience' of a phenomena/phenomenon cannot be understood with the suspension of the 'natural attitude' (Ibid). Husserl perceived the 'natural attitude' as a taken for granted stance that individuals already assume when existing in the world (Cerbone, 2009; Luft, 2012). Husserlian phenomenology examines 'lived experiences' with the bracketing/suspension of 'presuppositions', 'beliefs' or 'stock of knowledge' to study the intentionality of experience harboured in one's consciousness (Luft, 2012). Husserl conceives of lived experiences as mental states and employs the word '*erlebnis*' to specifically signify subjective mental processes (Ibid). But to reiterate Heidegger's ontic orientation towards phenomenology and lived experiences, Husserl's emphasis on a presuppositionless study to discover essences falls short of apprehending the rich embodied lived experiences that invariably manifests in the specificities of social, temporal, historical and cultural contexts (Moran & Cohen, 2012; Dreyfus, 1991). The study of 'lived experiences' needs to be located within the context of everydayness or how one goes about doing things

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in their daily lives (Dreyfus, 1991). The disparities in conception of such everyday lived experiences are what produces the points of contention in terms of Husserl and Heidegger's approach to phenomenology (Ibid). Similarly, Overgaard in his work, illuminates the discrepancies of approach between the two thinkers in terms of how they conceptualize everyday experience (Overgaard, 2014, pp. 10-11). Unlike what is perceived of Husserlian phenomenology, Overgaard clarifies Husserl's stance on the lifeworld or the *'lebenswelt'* (as is known in Husserlian parlance) by mentioning about the cognizance expressed by Husserl with regard to everyday natural attitude (Ibid). Husserl acknowledged that individuals in their everyday experiences perceived the external world and its objects not as 'pure objects' but viewed it as a meaningful component fitting into the larger backdrop of other meaningful objects (Ibid). To illustrate further, Husserl recognized that the objects of the world existed not in vacuity of meanings for the subject but conversely how the subjects actively managed, used and negotiated with meanings when encountering everyday objects or while experiencing phenomena (Ibid). In everyday experiences, subjects in their lifeworld do not view objects in perceptual isolation, for instance, a hammer is not given to subjects as a 'pure object' bereft of any meaning or significance when one is engaged with the world (Ibid). Overgaard in his work further clarifies that one of the basic differences between Husserl and Heidegger's approach is the degree of salience accorded to the exposition and analysis of the pure experiences of objects (Ibid).

5.4 AN INQUIRY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCE IN HUSSERLIAN AND HEIDEGGERIAN TRADITION

Before examining the foundations of 'lived experiences', the inquiry of the very nature of the 'self' as an agent and an enabler of experiential content becomes imperative. Invoking the earlier juxtaposition of the rationalist, empiricist and existentialist schools of thought, the 'self' renders itself as a contentious site because of the dissimilarities expressed by the aforementioned philosophical strands. Husserlian phenomenology draws on the ideas of rationalists, empiricists and philosophers like Franz Brentano to conceive of a distinct branch of study viz. pure phenomenology, whilst Heidegger on the other copiously contributed to the existentialist body of work inaugurated by Pascal, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche (Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2011). Unlike existentialists like Pascal and Kierkegaard who elaborated on the conceptions of the 'self' and sought to bring closure to the philosophical debates dating back to Plato, Husserl did not intend on deliberating much upon the metaphysics of the 'self' (Ibid). The two philosophical worldviews viz. rationalists and existentialists represented by Plato/Descartes and Kierkegaard/Pascal respectively advocated divergent and opposing assertions of the 'self' (Ibid). The rationalists foregrounded the importance of the 'universal' over the 'individual' laying emphasis on the 'a priori self' whilst the existentialists advanced the argument wherein the 'individual' preceded in importance over the 'universal' (Ibid). The disagreement between the two schools of thought with respect to self and metaphysics further influenced the successive crop of thinkers from the phenomenological ilk (Ibid). Rationalists like Descartes influenced Husserl as Husserl approved Descartes's search for certainty (Ibid). A similar emphasis is also noticeable in Husserlian phenomenology which seeks to unearth

veridical essences of the phenomena (Ibid). Whilst rationalists like Descartes laid emphasis on reason and the thinking mind to constitute one's very existence, Husserl abandoned the enterprise of radical scepticism employing instead the method of suspension. The emphasis on transcendental subjectivity and 'the things themselves' sets apart Husserlian phenomenology from rationalist philosophy as it does not deliberate upon the reality of the self or the external world via recourse to reason and rational thinking (Ibid). Similarly, Zahavi in his work informs about Husserl's apparent disinterest about resolving the question of metaphysics, the examination of the veracity of external reality and the possibility of acquiring knowledge sans one's mind (Zahavi, 2003, pp. 8). Zahavi further mentions that Husserl's phenomenological inquiry is more oriented towards epistemological concerns than metaphysics (Ibid). Such concerns are also manifested with regard to the 'experiential self' in Husserlian phenomenology (Ibid). Similarly, Luft in his workalludes to Husserl's preoccupation with transcendental subjectivity and the bracketing of the 'natural attitude' in order to answer the epistemological inquiry- *"how to make knowledge possible?"* (Luft, 2005). For Husserl, the experiential self does not reside in the usual subject-object dichotomies popularized by philosophers like Plato and Descartes (Ibid). Instead, he conceptualizes subjectivity (or the self that experiences) as transcendental in order to view the world from a phenomenological attitude (Ibid). Unlike the rationalists and empiricists who underscored the importance of reason and sensory experiences respectively for analysing the 'self, Husserl drew on the subjective 'lived through' experiences to formulate a distinct eidetic science (Zahavi, 2003). However, for a better appraisal of Husserl's stance on the experiential self, it would necessitate to distinguish between early Husserl and Husserl's later transition to transcendental subjectivity

(Zahavi, 2003, pp. 7-42). In Husserl's earlier work, *Logische Untersuchungen*(Logical Investigations), the commonplace conceptualization of the self or subjectivity receded in importance for Husserl as he focused on the thesis of intentionality (Zahavi, 2003). He intended on supplanting the precedent epistemological orientations defined by positivism and empiricism for intentionality or object directedness of the consciousness (Ibid). Because of his propensity to obtain knowledge via the deployment of epistemology, the subjective experiential self was relegated in terms of importance (Ibid). Similarly, in *LogischeUntersuchungen,* Husserl critiques the very basis of psychologism for reducing logic to the psychical and empirical domains (Ibid). In fact, for psychologism, Husserl dedicates his initial segment or *Prolegomena zurreinenLogik*in his work, *Logische Untersuchungen*(Zahavi, 2003, pp. 7). Since for Husserl, the experiential self-resides primarily as consciousness intending an object, psychologism for him, commits the error of perceiving consciousness within the limits of empirical sciences (Zahavi, pp. 8). Considering the factual and empirical stance espoused by psychologism, Husserl dismisses the discipline for erroneously reducing the epistemology or the 'process of knowing' the consciousness within psychical parameters (Zahavi, pp. 9, 2003). Husserl accuses psychologism of examining consciousness as a phenomenon that elapses in a temporal frame (Ibid). Clearly, early Husserl departs from the typicality of subjective experience towards aspiring for the 'ideality' manifest in disciplines like mathematics and logical subject domains (Ibid). Thus, when examining the experiential self or subjectivity, Husserl disregards the commonplace epistemological processes of knowing because he intends on designing phenomenology as an approach that discloses principles of ideality with recourse to

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one's experiences (Ibid). He likens ideality by referring to mathematical formulas or principles of mathematics that are invariable in nature and do not transmute or undergo changes when situated in differing spatial/temporal contexts (Ibid). Also, reverting to the earlier mentioned epistemological schisms perpetuated by the rationalists and the empiricists with respect to metaphysics, early Husserl clearly explicates his stance with regard to the question of the status of metaphysics of the world (Ibid). Husserl believes that the principles of ideality continue to exist all the same with or without the world (Ibid). Husserl, hence, focuses on epistemology over metaphysics and considers the manifestation of phenomena in one's consciousness and by that token experiential processes as a primary site to discover indubitable principles (Ibid). He repudiates the epistemological reduction of consciousness to the limits of psychical or subjective parameters and instead views subjective consciousness from the cognitive domain (Zahavi, pp. 10, 2003). In the following segment of *LogischeUntersuchungen,* Husserl further reiterates on the presupposition-less stance espoused by him concerning the question of metaphysics (Ibid). In alignment with his enterprise of obtaining principles and ideality, Husserl in the ensuing segment of Logical Investigations advances his thesis of 'intentionality' as one of the primary invariable principles of consciousness (Ibid). Furthermore, Husserl bypasses the need to study the empirical and biological apparatuses of consciousness focusing solely on the essence or the structures of the same (Zahavi, pp. 13, 2003). In his exposition of experiences and consciousness, Husserl eschews the conundrum of metaphysics and underscores phenomenology as simply a practice of proffering a true account of that which manifests as subjective or as physical objects (Zahavi, 2003). Therefore, the question that Husserl addresses is not centred on external realities existing independently of the

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mind, or the thinking mind existing in insulated solipsism but rather deliberating upon the epistemological possibilities of generating knowledge via objects that appear in one's consciousness (Ibid). However, it would be necessary to mention that subjective experiences in Husserlian phenomenology does not equate to the commonplace belief that subjective experiences are immanent in one's consciousness (Ibid). Conversely, in the domain of subjective idealism, the experiential content is reduced as contents of the mind (Ibid). Husserl categorically critiques such stance of subjectivity by positing that the objects experienced are not immanent in the mind primarily because such immanence cancels out future possibilities of experiencing the object in differing ways (Ibid). Husserl therefore does not intend on speculating the status of the reality of the object perceived but instead asserts the salience of 'intentionality' as one of the principles of consciousness (Ibid). The metaphysical dichotomies of real, unreal or fantasy objects cease to be important for Husserl because their status of reality notwithstanding, consciousness is always directed towards objects (intentionality) be it in a dream or a recollection, memories, thoughts or concrete external objects (Ibid). A further illustration of the metaphysical abandon in early Husserl is his interpretation of intentionality wherein he does not question the existence of the consciousness or the external object but rather considers experience and object directedness as two prerequisites to fulfil the process of intentionality (Ibid). By the same token, early Husserl also responds to the age-old philosophical impasse of how subjects relate to objects (Ibid). Such problems were engendered because of the emphasis placed on the binaries of the mind and body perpetuated by the rationalists, especially Rene Descartes (Ibid). Such schisms between the body and mind thus produced the conundrum of how the mind meets or interacts with the

body (Ibid). Early Husserl therefore addressed the philosophical predicament by invoking intentionality and referring to the object directedness attribute of the consciousness which in turn acts as a medium to direct the mind to the object/s (Ibid). Early Husserl also departs from empiricism as he does not confer salience to the sensory givenness of experiences (Ibid). Instead, he defines experiences in terms of signitive, perceptual intuition and categorical givenness (Ibid). The signitive givenness refers to the intending of consciousness when the object is not manifest in its complete form or as Husserl articulates it in its *leibhaftig*or fleshly existence (Moran and Cohen, 2012, pp. 104). Perceptual intuition on the other refers to the directedness towards external objects, for example intuiting their size, colour and other dimensions (Ibid). However, such a perceptual givenness for Husserl does not entail the reduction to empiricism because he also includes the categorical givenness or *Wesensschau*within the ambit of intentions (Ibid). The categorical intentions are distinct from everyday perceptual intentions as they are characterized by their ideal concepts like justice or numerical figures (Ibid). Husserl therefore does not delimit his study of discovering the principles of consciousness only within the constraints of perceptual givenness but also how consciousness intends categorical ideas (Zahavi, 2003). Additionally, it is primarily because of intending categorical concepts that permits the possibility of discovering indubitable apodictic essences (Ibid). Thus, in *LogischeUntersuchungen,* Husserlclearly maintains a neutral position when addressing metaphysical concerns (Ibid). He considers phenomenology to be a descriptive enterprise but unlike his predecessor, Franz Brentano, Husserl does not distinguish between the intra-mental (inward intuitions) and extramental objects (Ibid). For the same reason, Husserl's interpretation of lived experiences does not entail subjective experiences or first-

person experiences harbouring those experiences inwardly (Ibid). Instead, he focuses on how things manifest when intuited by consciousness in varying modes of givenness (Ibid). However, Husserl does acknowledge the metaphysical shortcomings of his descriptive study in his successive work, *Ideen zueinerreinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie I* (Ibid). Husserl therefore introduces the concept of a 'presuppositionless' study in order to secure his descriptive study upon absolute foundations (Ibid). Furthering the argument of presuppositionless-ness, Husserl critiques the prior epistemological and metaphysical presumptions espoused by the positive sciences as these sciences, for Husserl, fail to deliberate on their own presuppositions (Zahavi, pp. 44, 2003). In order to anchor descriptive experiences as they are intuited, Husserl introduces the process of suspension or *epoche*in order to bracket the 'natural attitude' (Ibid). Husserl contends that the positive sciences and theoretical disciplines attempt to align their findings within the parameters of theory and conventional knowledge systems (Ibid). With epoche, Husserl intends to confer salience and precedence to originary experiences as he asserts that experiences should in turn dictate extant knowledge and theories (Zahavi, pp. 45, 2003). However, as a caveat, Husserl adds that using the *epoche*does not necessarily mean challenging the validity of the external world (Zahavi, pp. 45, 2003). Instead, for Husserl, *epoche*allows for altering the ways of perceiving the reality (Ibid). With the suspension of a priori knowledge, Husserl underscores on the givenness of things via first person subjective experiences (Ibid). It would be necessary to reiterate here that Husserl's understanding of subjective experiences does not imply the examination of personal feelings, experiences and other emotions in isolation (Ibid). Husserl in his successive works clarifies that he intends on foregrounding 'transcendental

subjectivity' obtained via *epoche* or the suspension of presuppositions in order to discover invariable experiences verifiable by intersubjectivity (Ibid). Husserl interprets transcendental subjectivity as a domain which is obtained after one employs the *epoche* or the bracketing which allows the phenomenological practitioner to suspend opinions, prior knowledge, epistemological/metaphysical stances and other beliefs (Moran, pp. 2, 2002). In his subsequent works post Logical Investigations, Husserl strives to fashion phenomenology similar to the orientations of the positive sciences wherein he seeks to unearth indubitable essences (Moran, 2002, pp. 62). Earlier in Logical Investigations, Husserl avoided the explication of the 'ego' and considered ego to be as an aggregate of *Erlebnisse* or acts but in his later works, Husserl defines ego in transcendental terms (Ibid). Ego therefore transmutes as a transcendental ego which Husserl attributes it as harbouring the meaning and being of the world (Ibid). Husserl articulates the transcendental ego as a conjunctive domain that conflates all the experiences (Ibid). He further clarifies that the transition to transcendental ego does not imply receding away from the world in a state of insulation from empirical realities but conversely integrating all experiences in the ego (Moran, 2002). Additionally, for Husserl, the empirical ego stems from the transcendental ego as it constitutes consciousness and the world (Zahavi, 2003). Husserl therefore conceives of the experiential self as not a factual and empirical self but rather self as a transcendental ego capable of harbouring all experiences and intersubjectivity once the ego brackets all prior beliefs, presuppositions and empirical notions of the self (Ibid). But when one considers the Husserlian contentions of the lived experiences, consciousness and the transcendental ego for the analysis of gender identity, self, body and desires, it renders itself as a problematic phenomenological framework as it negates the

significance of the specificities of the subject's worldly context which in turn impinges upon the stream of 'lived through experiences' (Ibid). Although Husserl speaks of the 'transcendental ego' as a domain tethered to the world but his methodological reductions viz. *epoche* and the *eidetic* variations cancel out the possibilities of harbouring worldly experiences with all its richness as it suspends all prior knowledge, ideas, notions, opinions, stock of knowledge and beliefs harboured by the knower (Ibid). Also, the search for absolute search for essences of experiences essentializes or rigidifies the experiences lived through by the subject which is achieved via eidetic variations to constitute as indubitable essences (Ibid). In a similar strain, Oksala in her work, contends that a classical reading of phenomenology in relation to gender and sexes is an unviable enterprise as the transcendental ego precludes any corporal and worldly impressions as the ego puts the status of their reality in brackets (Oksala, pp. 230, 2006). Since the transcendental ego suspends the material and worldly notions of gendered and sexed bodies living through their concrete everyday social milieus, it becomes difficult to engage in the examination of the 'lived experiences' particularly when gendered identities, sexual desires and sexuality constitute as important aspects of everyday experiences (Ibid). Furthermore, Husserl's methodological conception of *epoche* and *eidetic* variations for discovering indubitable essences problematizes and fixes experiences of gender identity and sexuality as immutable essences (Ibid). The use of *epoche* and *eidetic* variations ossifies experiences to discover the possibilities of 'essences' thereby negating the validity and veracity of multiple interpretations and meanings of gender identity and sexuality (Ibid). Husserl problematizes the conception of 'ego' and 'subjectivity' understood in commonplace psychological domains as he perceives 'ego' not in empirical or

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physical terms but as a domain that is obtained via recourse to the deployment of phenomenological reductions. In a similar strain, Carman in his work, informs Husserl's turn towards transcendental subjectivity (Carman, 1996). His transition was marked with the disavowal for articulating his study as a 'descriptive psychology' terming instead as 'pure phenomenology' (Ibid). This metamorphosis signals the incorporation of Husserl's transcendental reduction wherein the act of intentionality constitutes the dual correlates of noesis and noema (Ibid). Rassi and Shahabi in their work, mention that the correlates of noesis and noema are imperative for intentional acts (Rassi&Shahabi, 2015). Furthermore, they clarify that the *noesis* is discrete from the *noema* in the sense that it denotes the actual concrete mental content and real character of the intending act whereas the noema represents the essence of the thing intended (Rassi&Shahabi, pp.1, 2015). Similarly, Carman in his work further expounds on Husserl's departure from subjectivity as is ordinarily understood due to the application of eidetic and transcendental reductions (Carman, 1996). These dual reductions produce a discrete distinction between the commonplace/empirical understandings of 'subjectivity' and 'transcendental subjectivity' which in turn becomes the primary site for the inquisition of pure phenomenology (Carman, pp. 847, 2007). The eidetic reduction prepares the site for examining the transcendental subjectivity as it sets aside *'noesis'* (concrete or real acts of intending) and the *'hyle'* (sensation) in order to foreground 'noema' or the ideal essence of the intending acts (Ibid). The Husserlian conception of transcendental phenomenology therefore problematizes the enterprise of examining human 'lived experiences' as it ultimately seeks to subject such experiences to the rigor of the essences (Ibid). Conversely, dramatically veering away from his mentor, Martin Heidegger jettisoned the epistemological and

metaphysical concerns engendered by thinkers from Plato onwards in favour of an ontological examination of the primordial question of 'being' (Ibid). In a similar vein, Laverty in her work, highlights the divergence in Husserl and Heidegger's phenomenological enterprise wherein the former is primarily oriented towards an epistemological inquiry concerning the relationship between the observer and the phenomena of the study while the latter focuses his question on the ontological concerns of the nature of reality (Laverty, pp. 14, 2003). By the same token, lived experience therefore assumes divergent forms when subsumed under the Husserlian and Heideggerian traditions. For Dilthey, lived experience entails an instantaneous and pre-reflective awareness afforded by the self while in a state of unawareness (Manen, 2016). While Husserl envisages 'lived experience' as a method to revert to the things themselves and philosophically reflect on the experiences manifested as contents of consciousness, Heidegger on the other foregoes the need to espouse lived experience as a recourse towards grasping the structure of one's consciousness (Keller, 1999). Departing from the epistemological inquiry of human experiences and the subject as the 'knower', Heidegger foregrounded the salience of *being-in-the-world* as a precedence to subject-object ways of knowing and experiencing (Dreyfus, 1991). Notwithstanding Husserl's claim to commence a novel inquiry for philosophy and his attempt to depart from the Cartesian tradition, Heidegger critiqued Husserl's notion of intentionality as the essence of any experience because it reinstates the subject-object schisms engendered by Rene Descartes and adhered to by the positivists (Ibid). Heidegger's ontological orientation therefore views 'lived experience' not as subjective consciousness intending objects but as operating from the holistic contexts of the world of the lived experience or the *umwelt* (Sheehan, 1993). For Heidegger, the question of

being assumes precedence before the inquiry of the lived experience (Ibid). It is primarily with being-in-the-world that sets the context and allows for meanings to emerge while individuals engage in the everyday experiences with their world (Ibid). As opposed to Husserl, Heidegger does not deprive experiences of its presuppositions, beliefs and other knowledge forms that exist organically as constituents of the lived experience (Ibid). Heidegger subsumes the divergent notions of 'self' advanced by the empiricists, rationalists and Husserl's conception of intentionality of consciousness as simply multiple and derivative ways of 'being' (Dahlstrom, 2013). For Heidegger, the discrete 'knower self' does not step into an unfamiliar and unknown world imposing meanings on phenomena intuited in one's consciousness but rather finds oneself already in the world saturated with meanings. With reference to the lived experience, Heidegger does not commence with a discrete individualized self that is completely insulated from the world (Pascal, 2010). As per Guignon, Heidegger dismantles the traditional epistemological inquiries of the 'subject' existing separate from 'objects' (Guignon, 1993). Heidegger's analysis begins with the acknowledgement of 'existence' as something that is already in the world (Ibid). Such an existence is always already inextricably fused with *'the they'* or its society comprising of other people and their meanings (Dalhstrom, 2013). Heidegger particularly is interested in human existence which cannot be understood by employing the Cartesian schisms of subjects and objects (Keller, 1999). Unlike Husserl who underscores on the salience of the structures of consciousness to apprehend human existence, Heidegger lays emphasis on understanding and being in the world as the foundational basis for human existence and experience (Ibid). In other words, Heidegger does not deliberate on the issues of subjects intending objects and the

inquiries of reconciliation between the two but rather begins the investigation of human experiences by foregrounding on being, understanding and the beings of humans as it is only humans whose beings questions the being of beings (Keller, 1999; Dreyfus, 1991). Heidegger departs radically from his mentor, Husserl because Heidegger jettisons Husserl's immanent conceptions of human experiences and the world as it is experienced internally by a subject (Keller, 1999). By rebuffing the Cartesian tradition, Heidegger begins with 'existence' or *Dasein* in order to make sense of the human nature (Ibid).

5.5 THE 'DASEIN' AND THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF THE HIJRAS

An understanding of the dasein would require an inquiry into the meaning of being or being there (Dreyfus, 1991). Since Heidegger repudiates the usage of terminologies such as 'consciousness' and 'autonomous meaning making beings', he begins with the basic elucidation of 'being' or the being of humans which simply connotes existence or to be, a trait that is commonly shared by all human beings or a human (Ibid). For Heidegger, it is only the being of human beings that possess the capacity to understand or interpret things unlike other beings or entities such as rocks, trees or chairs who exist as Beings but cannot be classified as beings who understand (Ibid). Since human beings are beings who possess the capacity to understand their own being, a basic structure of being or Dasein needs to be formulated (Ibid). Heidegger therefore is not concerned about the consciousness of individuals intending external objects but instead lays primacy to the beings of human beings (Ibid). In other words, Heidegger is not concerned with the singular *Dasein* but the ways in which *Dasein's* are being or their ways of their being (Ibid). For Heidegger, *Dasein* is the particular way of being that is peculiar to human

beings (Inwood, 2019). The word, *Dasein* is originally a German word which simply means being there or there being (Pascal, 2010; Inwood, 2019). Its emphasis on being there connotes the contextual necessity of existence (Keller, 1999). *Dasein* characterizes the being of human beings because for humans, their being or ways of being is not marked by any fixed or invariable characterizations (Ibid). Unlike the beings or essences of rocks or trees which are similar and immutable, the beings of human beings on the other does not have any fixed or pre-defined essence (Ibid). The being of human beings or the *Dasein* therefore, is interesting because it allows for the multiplicities of ways of beings that are to be decided by the *Dasein* (Ibid). According to Pascal, Heidegger in his influential work, *Sein und Zeit* focused primarily on the investigation of *being* or *Dasein* (Pascal, 2010). The word *dasein* is different from the word 'individual' in important ways because the former implies that the individual is always fused or conflated with the world while latter denotes an autonomous subject distinct from the world (Ibid). It is because of such inseparability that Heidegger states that for the being to exist, the world is a prerequisite and for the world to exist, the being is a prerequisite (Ibid). The analysis of the *Dasein* involves the acknowledgement of the temporal (past, present and future) and the contextual nature of the *Dasein* (Ibid).The present chapter looks into the lived experiences of self, body, sexual desires and gender identity of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata. However, when employing the Heideggerian phenomenological framework of the lived experiences and its departure from the Cartesian traditions of self/subject and object, it is implausible to commence an analysis of the 'self' as a discrete all-knowing/meaning making self-contained entity (Dreyfus, 1991). The integrity of the 'self' as advanced by Cartesian philosophers and Husserl's emphasis on an internal consciousness is supplanted by

Heidegger's promulgation of 'being-in-the-world' (Ibid). Conforming to the Heideggerian tradition of being or human existence which is foundational for an analysis of the 'lived experience', the present chapter will not sequester the phenomena into 'gender identity', 'sexual desires', body and the 'self' but will integrate all experiences under the concept of being or *Dasein*. For the present study, the term *Dasein* refers to the being of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata and not individual *hijra* respondents because it is the embodied and situated being that experiences the totality of self, body, gender identity and sexual desires in the flux of everyday lived realities (Ibid). The research also employs the Heideggerian Hermeneutic circle to engage with the dynamics of meanings as is generated with the circularity of past, present and future structures of the *Dasein* (Pascal, 2010; Wilcke, 2002). The branch of Hermeneutics was first initiated by Friedrich Schleiermacher who defined hermeneutics as the method of understanding or interpreting language in its spoken or written form (Schmidt, 2014). The tradition of Hermeneutics was modified and carried forward by Wilhelm Dilthey which propounded the premise and importance of 'understanding' while examining human experiences (Ibid). Such a conceptualization of hermeneutics was adopted by Heidegger in his work which was subsequently refined by Hans Georg Gadamer wherein hermeneutics was fashioned as the conflation of past and present horizons for a better 'understanding' of the phenomena under study (Ibid). For Heidegger, hermeneutic phenomenology primarily focuses on unearthing meanings of human lived experiences via the method of understanding (Laverty, 2003). Heidegger espouses the method of hermeneutics primarily to make sense of, or understand being or being in the world *(Dasein)* (Dahlstrom, 2013). In hermeneutic phenomenology, the emphasis is on understanding the lived through process while

existing in the world (Cohen et. al, 2000). Unlike Husserl, Heidegger's phenomenology does not attempt to search for inviolable and indubitable essences of a phenomenon by bracketing the world from the experience (Ibid). Conversely, for Heidegger, the world constitutes as an integral pre-given aspect of human existence and experience or the facticity of existence wherein the world and its meanings are never of its human experiences (Schmidt, 2014). Instead, in hermeneutic phenomenology, by acknowledging the unity of mind and body, meanings and the interpretations of a given experience is given due prominence (Ibid). By employing the metaphor of the spiral hermeneutic circle, Heidegger contends that understanding always begins with one's fore-structures or one's history/past that commences the interpretive motion wherein circle always moves back and forth between parts and the wholes of experience to make sense of experiences (Laverty, 2003).

5.6 METHODS AND SAMPLE SIZE

For the present study, a total sample size of 24 respondents were selected to represent the districts of North Bengal and Kolkata wherein three respondents each represented a district or region. Considering the nature of the questions asked, snowball sampling method was used to interview respondents who were recommended by members of the NGO/CBO's and other members of the *hijra* community. In-depth unstructured interview method was employed to apprehend the lived experiences of the respondents which were digitally recorded in portable sound recording devices for transcribing and coding the interview. Each interview recording was carefully transcribed and coded for finding possible themes on the lived experiences of the phenomena explored. The codes generated from the field

findings were further subsumed under common themes and such themes were analysed using Heideggerian phenomenological framework of the lived experience along with the Heideggerian hermeneutic circle to initiate the analysis by using 'understanding' as a fulcrum that produces or generates meanings of experiences.

5.7 FINDINGS

Adhering to the Heideggerian tenets of phenomenology, the following findings and the phenomena under examination will be subsumed under the rubric of *Dasein,* or the being-in-the-world of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata. For Heidegger, it is *dasein's*being that engages and understands the world (Inwood, 2019). The *hijras* too in their everyday lived experiences engage in interpretations or *'Auslegung'* to create meanings of their being or existence (Ibid). It is also important to remember that *dasein* is also a temporal being in the sense that it can anticipate or worry about the future, contemplate about the past and think about the present (Ibid). The following finding segment will therefore employ the structures of the *Dasein* such as care *(sorge),* temporality and interpretation among others (wherever applicable) to analyse the meanings generated from such accounts.

BODY/GENDER IDENTITY/SEXUAL DESIRES

Prior to commencement of any interpretation, it would necessitate to initiate the helical interpretation by invoking the researcher's prior assumptions or pre-conceptions of the experiences that are to be understood (Dahlstrom, 2013). In Heideggerian terms, *Vorstruktur*or forestructure (comprising of presuppositions, prior beliefs and knowledge), is integral for the initiation of the helical hermeneutic circle which is to be supplemented by the lived experiences and the subsequent

fusion of the parts and wholes are to be considered as constitutive of provisional meanings because such meanings are constantly under revision with the coming of newer meanings or forestructure. The forestructure of the researcher will be informed by the researcher's past knowledge or presuppositions which will initiate the hermeneutic circle of meanings (Dahlstrom, 2013). An analysis of the lived experiences of 'self' and 'body' coupled with the experiences of gender identity and sexual desires of the *hijras* would be considered as a contradictory enterprise, one that refutes the Heideggerian principle of the indivisibility of the self with the world (Ibid). The analysis therefore foregrounds on *dasein* or being instead of the discrete concepts of 'self' and 'body'and situates *dasein*as an interpreter of experiences when they are thrown into their world of everydayness (Dreyfus, 1991; Dahlstrom, 2013). The study employs the two forestructure of experience, i.e., one for the researcher and the other of the *hijras* to engage with the meanings generated from such experiences. The following analysis will collate similar experiences of the *hijras* intothemes and employ the helical structure of interpretation to analyse the experiences from the vantage points of the parts and the wholes (Dahlstrom, 2013).Extant works of literature expounding on the gender identity and sexual desires of the *hijras* of India define them as 'asexual', as neither man nor woman or someone practicing celibacy who do not express any interest in forging marital alliances or sexual relationships (Nanda, 1999; Jaffrey, 1996; Sharma, 2009). Such body of works represent the broader or mainstream conception of the *hijras* and their gender/sexual identities but it would necessitate to juxtapose such 'interpretations or understandings sourced from the academia with situated experiences of the *beings* of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata and their interpretations of the same. Such a juxtaposition of meanings and interpretations

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will allow for the fusion of horizons of past and present structures to create new meanings and understandings (Dahlstrom, 2013).

Fig. 5.1 Helical hermeneutic circle demonstrates the fusion of meanings of two horizons (Dahlstrom, 2013).

The beings of the *hijras* of India, as enunciated by the past works of literature primarily focus on their cultural roles and their third gender status within the Indian society (Nanda, 1999; Sharma, 2009). Particularly, the origins of the third gender/third sex in India can be traced back to periods dating before 320 C.E. (Zwilling & Sweet, 2000). The *hijras* of India often label or call themselves as the third sex/third gender drawing from a myriad of mythical, literary and oral stories to sustain their identity (Ghosh, 2018; Nanda, 2014; Pattanaik, 2014). The identity of the *hijras* is further compounded by the vicissitudes of foreign conquests and cultural variations across historical epochs that have impinged and altered the gender and sexual dimensions of the *hijras* of India (Ghosh, 2018; Reddy, 2006). A more contemporary reading of the *hijra* identity and sexuality proffered by Nanda places them as a liminal gender category occupying the threshold of gender identities (Nanda, 2014). Nanda further explains that the *hijras* are not men because of their absence of virility or their state of impotency and the *hijras* are not women because of their exaggerated gender mannerisms and comportment in public spaces

which is atypical of a womanly behaviour (Nanda, 2003). Ideally, the *hijras* are also known as renunciates or ascetics who abstain from the carnal desires and sexual pleasures (Ibid). But Nanda also adds that despite sexual abstinence being the desired norm, there are *hijras* who depart from the ideal and engage in sexual or romantic relationships with their partners or husbands (Ibid). In the parlance of Heidegger's phenomenology, the aforesaid body of works constitutes the forestructure that initiates the hermeneutic circle of the being of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata. Unlike the presuppositions that constitute the forestructure of existence of the *hijras* across India, the situated (temporal and contextual) lived experiences of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata on the other clearly depart from such understandings. Laying emphasis on the concept of *in-der-welt-sein* or being in the world as one of key structures of *Dasein,* it becomes necessary to mention that the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata depart in some respects pertaining to identity, sexuality and community practices from the generic traditions of the *hijra* community (Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2011). It is primarily because of the thrownness or *Geworfenheit* of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata into such spatial and geographical contexts that it becomes necessary to conflate the regional interpretations with the larger generic forestructure of the *hijra* community (Dahlstrom, 2013). With reference to the lived experience of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata, the realization of their 'difference' dawns prior to their identification as a *hijra.* The espousal of the *hijra* identity as a gender and sexual identity therefore occurs as gradual progression when the *hijras* later choose to join the community. In their thrownness, the *hijras* or the beings of *hijras* (dasein) commonly experiences their differencesrelative to the normalcy of the others. It is primarily because of their difference that integrates their sense of self,

sexual desires and gender identity. The difference therefore becomes the fount from where they commence their interpretation of their existence or being.The difference, additionally, enables experiences of simultaneous sexual and gender awareness that the *hijras* realize gradually when they temporally progress from childhood towards adulthood.Additionally, the meanings or *Bedeutung*attributed to the existence of the *hijras* (self, body, gender identity and sexuality) is already beginning to form or is in the process of formation even before gaining entry into the *hijra* community. The presence of *'the they'* or the *'das man'* is particularly crucial for the *beings* of the *hijras* to become cognizant of their difference. The being of the *hijras* is thrown into milieus of heteronormativity and patriarchy or the milieus of the *das man* wherein, because of their everyday encounters with immediate members of the family or locality, they experience their difference and attempt to comprehend the same. For example, a respondent from Siliguri adds- *"I was born in Siliguri. Right from a small age, I used to feel like a girl. Like you know about saraswati puja, so all the ladies of the house used to don themselves in sarees, and they used to dress me up too in a saree. The way I used to feel comfortable in a lady's apparel, I could not ever feel that comfort in jeans and other men's apparel. I have retained memories of wearing female apparel and feeling good about it. But I couldn't share this with anybody, as I was small. And also because of the fear of social stigma, where people may call us as ladies or chakka. So I used to avoid doing all this. Even when I was small, I used to dislike playing with boys. They used to coerce me into playing with them, but I used to sneak out and play with the girls. It was between 7 to 8 years of age that I desired to be a woman."*

A respondent from Maldah narrates-

"I was most closest to my sister and my junior friend in my locality, who was a gay. When I shared my innermost feelings, I felt as if a great burden was lifted off my chest. I was in relationships before, and when I was in one, I used to think of myself as his girlfriend and him as boyfriend. Whenever he used to try and kiss or embrace me, I used to think, I wish I was a girl. It would have been better, if I was one. I used to think that my partner was uncomfortable with me but my partner never had any such issues. He never asked me to transform my body. I don't have the power or capacity to be a top. So I always used to be a bottom. In a sexual act, I never had the interest to be in a top position, I liked being a bottom. In a sexual act, when I am in the bottom role, simply putting it, I feel like a woman, like a girl."

Here, their experiences affords them with meanings which subsequently enables them to make sense of their own gender identity and sexuality. Prior to becoming the *hijras* or identifying as the third gender, their urgency or a need to identify as woman can be rendered as *'zuhandenheit'* or ready-to-handedness (Watts, 2014). In Heidegger's parlance, *zuhandenheit*refers to what is available for the individual (Ibid). For many respondents, their need to identify as a woman assumed greater significance and meaning in their early lives. Such desires to identify as a woman continues even post joining the *hijra* community wherein the *hijras* may choose to transition herself into a woman by castration or SRS (sexual reassignment surgery) options. Therefore, the gender identity of 'wanting to be a woman' can be considered to be 'ready-to-handedness' that occurs prior to the gender and sexual identity of the *hijras.*Therefore, identifying as a woman and expressing sexual desires similar to that of a woman comes organically to the *hijras* in their everyday encounters with the *das man* and their worlds. Their ready-to-handedness with the

gender category of a 'woman' also implies their inextricable nexus with their worlds, the meanings of gender and sexuality attributed to the category, woman. Because of her thrownness into the world, the beings of the *hijras*situated in the specificities of the given context, make sense of their gender identity and sexuality.A respondent recalls-

"My body is that of a male and my soul is that of a female. Am I wrong to say this?. With my boyfriend, I used to think that I was his girlfriend and his wife. I could never imagine myself as a male counterpart. I never gave too much importance to outer appearances".

Similarly, in another instance, a respondent from Kolkata recounts-

"*My soul is transgender. And I don't have to insert jellies or be castrated to be considered as a transgender or a transwoman. So if those authorities start judging along those lines, then we can never categorize ourselves in any categories. I know who I am, that is more than enough for me".*

But despite such assertions, the *beings* of the *hijras* with their entry into the *hijra* community experiences another instance of alienation and difference primarily because of their encounters with the norms and regulations imposed within the *hijra* culture. The *hijra* community, because of identity politics, impose multiple ideologies that delimit the *hijra* identity and sexuality (Dey et. al, 2016). Here, their assertions of their 'being as woman' transitions into the gradual espousal of the *hijra* identity primarily determined by emasculated and non-emasculated states (Mal &Mundu, 2018). A respondent recalls-

"When I was a member there, my guru told me to go for castration, as you cannot get married or have babies. It is better if you castrate yourself. You're like a behrupiya, an imposter, so it is better to castrate and be a hijra".

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However, there are instances wherein the *hijras,* despite being embedded into the *hijra* culture,advances their 'meanings' and interpretations of gender identity. This primarily manifests as discrepancybecause their lived world or *Umwelt* and the experiences there of *(Erleben)* informs them of about their conscious decisions apropos gender identity and sexuality (Guignon, 1993). For example, it is in their relations with the world, their interpretations of the *hijra* identity and their unacceptance of the emasculation ritual that allows the respondents to create meanings of their own identity. It is in their interactions with others and of being-in-the-world as engaged beings that allows them to make sense of their own identities and sexualities.The repudiation of the *hijra* identity stems from their encounters with other beings and the meanings derived from such encounters. For example, some *hijras* because of their engagements with the NGO's and CBO's produces new interpretations of gender and sexuality. For example, a respondent narrates-

"Then, I delayed my castration and made excuses to them. There were some who discouraged me to castrate as they said that you're the only one with manly organs. And some used to say, what will you do with your nimbu-mircha? It is better to castrate. But my decision was, I don't ever want to castrate. My sole interest was to be a female. And i want to transform my body in such a way, that I would want my body to resemble a female not a kinnar. I want to be a transgender woman. To be from male to female. I always aspired to be a dance teacher and be a beautician and work in a parlour. When i started doing kathak, people used to say, why kathak? Then my mother enrolled me in hip hop classes, because you will feel like a male. But then I did kathak. Because you get to wear make-up and clothes. I like adorning myself, to groom myself and groom others. I knew about Laxmi ji, and I used to think that she is a kinnar and can open a dance school, then why can't I open such an institute?".

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The *hijras* who receive sensitization of new identity terminologies of gender and sexuality, such as transgender or transwoman effectively manage the identity impositions placed by the *hijra* communities. Also, sexual and intimate acts with their partners such as hugging, kissing, engaging in sex and being in a relationship were some of the experiences which the respondents recalled to interpret their own gender roles and sexual desires. The lived experiences of the being of the *hijras* apropos their gender and sexual identity therefore needs to be apprehended as a series of *Vorhandenheit*(present-at-hand) and *Zuhandenheit* (ready to hand) primarily because the *hijras* in their everyday experiences with the world encounter episodes of gender and sex confusion engendered by their interactions within the heteronormative (their family, peer groups, schools, locality etc.)and the *hijra* community with their identity politics and ideologies of the same(Dahlstrom, 2013). For example, *hijra* respondents in their lived experiences emphasize or organically associate with attributes they relate with, for example, wearing womanly paraphernalia, harbouring aspirations of being a woman and keeping male romantic partners which can be referred to as a *Zuhandenheit* or an organic response to their gender identity and sexuality. While their experiences of *hijra* identity can be equated with that of *Vorhandenheit* or 'objectively present', which they espouse, adopt or perform when going about their everyday tasks of singing/dancing and begging.

MEANINGS GENERATED FROM *VORSTRUKTUR* OR FORESTRUCTURE OF DASEIN AND CONFLATION OF PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

TEMPORALITY	GEWORFENHEIT /THROWNNES	VORHANDENHEIT/PRESENT AT HAND	ZUHANDENHEIT/READY TO HAND	MEANINGS
Past	Thrownness to their specific worlds- Heteronormative milieus wherein they experience multiple 'differences' in terms of body, gender identity and sexual desires.	Cognizance of one's body (not in alignment with one's identity), thereby rendering it to be present-at-hand.	Immediate and organic embodiment of being a 'woman', of desiring to be a 'woman', wanting t be in a receiving role.	Embodying and idealizing woman-hood, aspirations to become one with one's preferred identity, sexuality.
Present	Thrownness to the *hijra* milieux's, community norms and their communes.	*Hijra* identity, politics of emasculation and non-emasculation.	a) Identifying as a transwoman, transgender or as a woman and feels like a woman during coital acts, feels pleasure as a receiver, as a bottom. or b) identifying as a *hijra.*	Because of their being-in-the world with other beings, the *hijras* make meanings because of their

			engagements with others, the meanings of the 'they' or 'das man', understood and interpreted by them. While others, in their being, attribute meanings of financial security andsexual liberty for identifying as a *hijra.*
Future	Continued thrownness to the *hijra* milieus Or The decision to leave the *hijra* community.	Pressures of conforming to the identity templates of the *hijras,* i.e. to be a emasculated *hijra* as unready to hand.	Identity choice as *hijra,* or for continued financial and social support, the *hijra* identity is rendered as ready-to-hand.	*Hijra* identity as profession driven, perceived as *hijragiri*than actual gender

| | | The contradiction of *hijra* identity (emasculated state) with one's sexual desires (ejaculation of semen from penis). | | or sexual identity.

Or

The actual espousal of the *hijra* identity and sexuality. |
|---|---|---|---|---|

Table 5.1: The transitions from past, present to future and the meanings formulated thereof.

Reverting to the earlier helical structure comprising of parts and wholes, the researcher's prior assumptions, meanings and knowledge on the *hijras* is rendered generic and monolithwhen juxtaposed with the lived experiences and their meaningsattributed by the being of the *hijras.* The institutionalization of the third gender or third sex, as advanced by extant scholarship reifies the *hijra* identity by defining it within cultural and religiousdomains (Nanda, 1999; Jaffrey, 1996). However, such an interpretation when juxtaposed with the lived experiences of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata seems to contradict the 'ideal representations' of the *hijra* community as wandering ascetics, identifying as neither man nor woman who draw their powers primarily from a *Hindu* goddess (Ibid). Therefore to fully appreciate the lived experiences of the being of the *hijras* of North Bengal and

Kolkata, the researcher, taking cognizance of the *Geworfenheit* or 'thrownness' of the research context, incorporated regional works of literature that were better able to illuminate regional differences in terms of *hijra* culture and identity. The beings of the *hijras* of the region have mostly diverged from the idealistic conceptions of the *hijra* identity (third gender/third sex) primarily because the regional conceptions of *hijra* identity and sexuality have dramatically deviated from such conceptions. Similarly, Hossain in his work informs about the shifts in terms of how the *hijra* identity is conceptualized trans-locally by the *hijras* across Bangladesh and West Bengal (Hossain, 2018). As per Hossain, the *hijra* identity is not perceived as an identity but more as a type of business wherein one expects to earn from multiple lucrative sources (Ibid). Similarly, Mal & Mundu in their work mentions the variances of identities within the *hijra* community determined by the markers of emasculation and occupational engagements (Mal &Mundu, 2018). In a similar strain Dey et. al informs about the identity politics endemic to region of West Bengal wherein the *hijra* identity is segregated into the hierarchical divisions of *khajrawali* (sex work), *badhaiwali* (those who do *toli-badhai)* and *challawali* (begging) (Dey et. al, 2016). Evidently, the regional dynamics of the cultural identity of the *hijras* problematizesand displaces the earlier conceptions of the generic definitional parameters of *hijra* identity and sexuality.Such regional mutabilitywhich is primarily engendered by translocal events and migration across borders (Bangladesh and West Bengal) constitutes the everyday *in-der-welt-sein* or being in the world (with others/das man) of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata. But considering the lived realities of the beings of the *hijras,*the meanings of *dasein* (under which, the study subsumes gender identity, body, gender identity, sexuality) are in a state of perpetual flux primarily because of the *dasein* and their everyday

engagements with their world.In the fusion of the horizons of meanings (in the forestructure of the researcher) of parts and wholes (wherein parts are represented by the experiences of the *hijras* and the wholesare represented by researcher's knowledge), the provisional meaning that emerges from the hermeneutic circle is the protean characteristic of the *hijra* identity and sexuality which is attributed with multiple meanings embodied in the flux of everydayness wherein some attributes are viewed as ready to hand and some are objectively viewed as unready to hand. The being of the *hijras* because of their being-in-the-world with the norms of the *hijra* community which dictates their gender identity and sexuality produces multiplicities of meaningswherein some meanings are organically accepted whilst some are accepted while in their engagements with the everyday world. For example, the aspirations of being a woman and feminine sexual desiresare immediately accepted as a meaningful experience whereas the coercion of conforming to the *hijra* identity is deemed as less meaningful and thus viewed objectively; whilst conversely, the beings of the *hijras* meaningfully accept and embody the *hijra* identity as they assert their identities and sexualities as the third gender. However, these meanings are not standalone subjective meanings but are formulated because of the their engagements with others, in this their concern for sexual freedom, to receive (as a woman) and to give (as a man). Also, because of their heterosexual unions and their children, the *hijras* meaningfully associate themselves with the *hijra* identity as it ensures financial stability and security. For example, a respondent asserts- *"I identify as a hijra, but I am also a householder with wife and kids. I have penetrated as well as received. But I would not say I completely identify as a woman. I simply identify as third gender, not woman, not man"*. Such meanings of identity and sexuality however, are not subjective

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meanings, but meanings engendered due to their engagements with their given worlds. The worlds of such beings of *hijras* are constituted by the regional definitions of *hijra* identity based on the politics of emasculation, the gradings of occupation and religious affiliations. Like the hermeneutic circle, the lived experiences of gender and sexual identity of the *hijras* are not congealed but rather open to multiple processes determined by their decisions of ready-to-handedness and present-at-handedness.

CHAPTER - 6

CONCLUSION

I

Grounding on the broad framework of the pragmatic worldview, the research on the *Hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata employs an amalgam of approaches comprising of qualitative and quantitative methods to address the divergent objectives of lived experiences, socio-economic conditions, stigma life stories and the changing structures of *hijra* cultures and tradition. The *Hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata, unlike other *hijra* cultures across India diverges from the generic and typical understandings of the *hijra* culture, identity and community. Because of West Bengal'sshared international border contiguities with Bangladesh, the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata (in terms of ideology differences and culture) are directly affected by the movement or migration. The research has attempted to map the dynamics of *hijra* identity, culture and tradition, examined stories and narratives of social stigma and their ways of manoeuvring around/navigating or resisting the same. Quantitatively, it also assesses the socio-economic conditions of the *hijras* of India by looking into three broad segments of basic needs/income, healthcare/diseases and their overall experiences of social stigma/social problems and social status. The pragmatic worldview enabled for a better apprehension and flexibility for collecting personal lived experiences/narratives and objective surveys for socio-economic appraisals post the NALSA verdict of 2014 (Rehman &Alharthi, 2016). Given the admixture of subjective and objective nature of the research objectives, the research would have rendered itself as unsound if it

adhered to the limitations imposed by the philosophical ontologies of realism or relativism (Ibid). Because of the a priori theoretical straitjackets imposed by realism and relativism, the analysis of the qualitative and quantitative research findings renders itself as a contrived and unreliable exercise when assessed from such binary worldviews (Ibid). Hence, in light of the contrasting nature of the research questions posed in the thesis, the research study sought to address and answer the same by taking recourse of the pragmatic worldview which emphatically underscores on the importance of selecting the most suitable research methods to effectively respond to the questions posed. In a similar vein, Morgan in his work encapsulates the proponent of pragmatist philosopher, Dewey's statement by citing his two words- "what works?" (Morgan, 2014). The pragmatic worldview clearly acknowledges the need for employing diverse and contradictory research methods to robustly answering the research questions. Such weightage on producing efficacious research enables the researcher to disengage from the esoteric and overarching metanarratives and metaphysics pursued by a priori philosophical schools. Additionally, Kaushik and Walsh in their work, citing Thomas Kuhn, defines the research paradigm/worldview as an overall belief structure or set of ideas that informs or guides the research (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Furthermore, the selection of a paradigm directly produces implications for other aspects of the research such as ontology, epistemology and methodology (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Differing worldviews or paradigms such as postpositivist worldview offer contrasting stances with respect to ontology, epistemology and methodology when compared to other paradigms (Ibid). Post positivism for instance entails quantitative methods, generalizability and objectivity as elements of the research inquiry (Ibid). Conversely, the pragmatic paradigm does

not design the methodology or the orientations of the research prior to knowing what the research objectives involve (Ibid). The idea therefore is to remain open to the possibilities of engaging with the multiplicities of research methods determined by the research investigation (Ibid). The present research is comprehensive in the sense that it covers all the aspects of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata by examining their specific cultural and community practices, their socio-economic conditions, their identity politics, experiences of stigma and coping mechanisms employed and their lived experiences of gender identity and sexualities. The study area comprised of the nine districts of North Bengal viz. Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri, Malda, Cooch-Behar, Dakshin Dinajpur, Uttar Dinajpur and Kolkata. The present research consists of six chapters wherein chapter one examines extant works of literature on the *hijras* of India and West-Bengal. Chapter one primarily attempts to delineate the historical trajectory of the *hijras* of India, the salience of spiritual, mythical and religious traditions on the *hijra* culture and identity, the age of the *Mughals,* their patronage of eunuchs and their need for seraglios. The colonial injunctions, acts and decrees directed against the *hijras* of the period and the post-colonial period which was marked by the presence of the *hijras* as followers of the *Bahuchara Mata.* The following sections of chapter One examines topical review of literatures on the basis of which (research gap, lacunae) the research questions and objectives were formulated. The chapter further elucidates on the ontology, epistemology and methodology, the research sites, theoretical underpinnings and the scheme of chapterization is mentioned. Chapter two and three of the research is based on the field findings wherein the dynamics of the cultural and community practices are expounded, whilst in chapter three, it examines the socio-economic changes post the Supreme Court verdict of 2014.

Chapter four and five on the other theoretically and empirically examines the life stories of the *hijras* and their experiences of social stigma while chapter five, by employing the Heideggerian Hermeneutic method, examines the lived experiences of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata by analysing their gender identity and sexuality. Chapter four employs the theoretical framework of interactionist, Erving Goffman in order to apprehend the stages of stigma viz. discreditable to discredited within the heteronormative milieus and the *hijra* community. Chapter five on the other foregrounds the theory of Heidegger's phenomenology and the hermeneutic tradition to extract meanings from the lived experiences of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata apropos gender identity and sexuality. The Heideggerian tradition of phenomenology begins with an analysis of the *dasein* or 'being there' wherein with the aid of the hermeneutic circle, new meanings on gender identity and sexuality are generated via the method of the fusion of parts and wholes wherein the experiences are always situated in the wholes and vice versa. The sixth or the final chapter, conclusion provides a summary of the research, its findings and analysis.

II

Despite the regional segregation of the research viz. North Bengal and Kolkata, the findings from of both the study area generated relatively similar results. The second chapter on culture and tradition of the *hijras* for example revealed that the *hijras* across the regions of North Bengal and Kolkata were afflicted with the problem of 'insider-outsider' identity politics wherein the insider referred to the indigenous *hijras* and the outsiders were referred to as the *Bangladeshi hijras.* The second chapter demonstrates that the structures of culture and traditions of the *hijras* is

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closely associated with and contingent upon the geographical embeddedness and the specificities of region. Invoking Appadurai's conceptualization of 'translocal events', the *hijras* across West Bengal share cultural affinities with the *hijras* of *Bangladesh* which is engendered primarily because of influx and two-way movement of the *hijras* across borders (Conradson &Mckay, 2007). This produces 'translocal culture' or the spread of cultural attributes that transcends geographical specificities (Ibid). But migration and movement also engenders regional disputes between *hijra* households and ideological differences with reference to occupation, *hijra* identity, emasculation and religious practices. It is primarily because of such translocal events that produced the fundamental shifts of how the *hijra* community and culture is perceived by the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata. The meanings of the *hijra* community have shifted from the idealized notions of being a religious subcultural drawing powers from the Goddess to bless and to curse towards meanings of *hijragiri*or a means of conducting business. Chapter two identifies major shifts in terms of changes of *hijra* identity, emasculation ritual, the diversification of occupational roles and religious practices. Migration, movement and the differences in terms of ideology of insider and outsider *hijras* have produced a plethora of belief systems that contradict or agree with one another. Chapter three on the other quantitatively attempts to assess the socio-economic developments in the lives of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata post the Supreme Court Verdict of 2014. The findings are divided into three major prongs viz. demographic profile, sexual and mental health (and schemes introduced by the government) and social stigma/social exclusion. Despite the progressive nature of the verdict directing centre and state governments to introduce schemes and provisions for ensuring the overall welfare of the *hijras,* the findings seem to

suggest the dearth of government aided measures or provisions/schemes for the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata. The data of the socio-economic profile of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata were collected in the year 2016-17 and the results of this period did not show any marked improvement in terms of their socio-economic conditions, social status and stigma. However, it was known that the *hijras*, because of their hierarchical divisions of *guru* and *cela* had unequal distributions of wealth and basic needs wherein the *gurus* wielded more power, had access to household resources, commanded over her *celas* and had monetary influence. The *celas* on the other were expected to fulfil domestic as well as the tasks of earning monthly income. The differences of such socio-economic conditions were exacerbated by the differences created by the native and the *Bangladeshi hijras* and the incompatibilities of ideology. The fourth chapter of the research on the other, qualitatively examines and applies Goffman's theory of stigma and the management of the discredited identity (Goffman, 1986). The chapter analyses multiple narratives of stigma, uses of coping mechanisms, stigma deflection and avowal of stigma when transitioning from the discreditable state to the state of discredit. The chapter also introduces a new term, viz. 'extreme discredit' wherein some *hijras* fearing extreme discredit (i.e., transitioning from the earlier discredited state to a lower one) enforces community norms and regulations when interacting with or in the presence of thenormals of the society. The fifth chapter qualitatively examines the lived through experiences of the *hijras* by examining their gender identity and sexuality. The analysis was achieved by employing the Heideggerian phenomenological framework along with the hermeneutic circle wherein experiences were analysed by juxtaposing and eventually fusing it with the broader understandings of *hijra* identity and sexuality.

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III

Sire in his workmentions that the word, worldview, can be defined as the fundamental basis for values and beliefs that determine the ways in which humans act and think (Sire,2014). Similarly, in the present research, thepragmatic worldviewguides the overall orientation of the study (Ibid). One of the primary thrusts of pragmatic worldview or paradigm is functionality or usability of the research methodology while examining research problem (Ihuah& Eaton, 2013).The stress on the 'functionality' or 'workability' of the paradigm is reflected in its methodology wherein because of the paradigm's flexibility, a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods can be used depending upon the objectives or the research questions asked.The philosophical underpinning of the pragmatic worldview is based on the philosophy of pragmatism (Bacon, 2012).The word, pragmatism as a philosophy was originally inaugurated by Charles Sanders Pierce, John Dewey and William James (Ibid).Deviating sharply from the Cartesian school of thought, philosophies of the universals, absolutesand relativism, the pragmatist school of thought propounded the salience of praxis or meanings grounded in human practice rather than deliberating on the metaphysics of reality wherein reality is either viewed objectively or subjectively (Dickstein, 1998; Bacon, 2012). In other words, the philosophy of pragmatism lays primacy to the human practices sans deliberation on the resolution of transcendental and abstract issues of the truth of reality (Dickstein, 1998).When juxtaposing pragmatism with the philosophy of positivism and constructivism, pragmatism presents itself as an appealing school of philosophy primarily because of its repudiation of anchorage to any specific dogma or worldview that defines rigid and singular ways of apprehending the reality or the 'truth' (Pihlstrom, 2015).Similarly, pragmatism as a school of philosophy does not

claim to harbour an underlying essenceand it is primarily because of its absence of such 'essences' that renders it to be an open, mutable and malleable philosophy (Ibid).Furthermore, pragmatic philosophy is not deductive or inductive in the sense that it does not prescribe the precedence of theory over practice or vice versa; rather it grounds the knowing or the knowledge in experiences and human praxis (Ibid).For pragmatism, therefore, there is no decisive finality of truth to be disclosed or unearthed (Ibid).Similarly, the ontology and the epistemology of the present research is not determined or limited to the constraints of the metaphysics claiming to have access to a universal reality and truth (Ibid).Adhering to the tenets of pragmatism, the present research sociologically explores the life of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata. The theme of the pragmatic worldview viz. human practice, workability and experiences is pervasive and manifest in all the chapters and findings of the research. Chapter one lays the necessary groundwork for the research on the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata by scanning extant works of literature and their usability when studying the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata. Essentially, the research takes cognizance of the salience of situated realities, context and spaces when examining the third gender of North Bengal and Kolkata.Chapter one begins by acknowledging the discrepancies when comparing works of literature that articulate the *hijras* as a homogenous cultural community as opposed to those body of works that emphasize on the differences when situating the *hijras* within a certain spatial site (Reddy, 2006; Nanda, 1999; Sharma, 2009).The contingencies of the regionproduces multiple permutations and variances that diverge from the institutionalized conceptions of *hijra* culture and community. It is from such regional contingencies and discrepanciesthat the present research departs from the broader conceptions of the *hijra* communityand culture.

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Taking region as the primary fulcrum, the research expounds on a holistic understanding of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata.Considering the paucity of qualitative and quantitative research on the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata, the research builds on a regional analysis of the multiple aspects of the community. Using the flexibility of the pragmatic worldview, the research deploys inductive and theory-based framework when analysing the findings of the chapters. In chapter two for example,the overarching and monolithic conceptions of the cultural constituents of the *hijra* community viz. the meanings of emasculationritual, *hijra* identity, religious and occupational practices is problematised when viewed from the regional sites of North Bengal and Kolkata.The variances of *hijra* culture is an admixture of translocal events and broader cultural practices that produces multiple differences with respect to their identity and cultural practices.As per findings, the regional understanding of *hijra* identity cannot simply be understood as third sex/gender sub-culture drawing powers from *Bahuchara Mata* and identifying as ascetics abstaining from the material world. What makes the culture of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata distinct is their multiplicities of ideologies concerning the constituents of *hijra* culture and identity. Some ideologies aremore dominant because of political power, affluence and numerical strength whilst others often experience imposition and coercion of the ideologies of the powerful *hijras.* The pragmatic worldview allowed for the usage of a thematic analysis to better apprehend the regional specificities of culture and identity. Chapter three on the other, diverges from the qualitative nature of the study to quantitatively assess the socio-economic conditions of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata.A socio-economic appraisal of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata was especially needed as they are identified as a marginalized and economically deprived ilk (Mal

&Mundu, 2018). The research especially intended on measuring the differences of socio-economic conditions post the Supreme Court Verdict of 2014 and as per findings, it is known there haven't been any substantial changes with respect to their living standards, access to basic needs, social status, healthcare and employment opportunities. The ideologies of culture and community practices particularly, played a significant role in determining the overall socio-economic conditions of the *hijra* community. For example, the *Bangladeshi hijras* earned comparatively more and wielded more power than the indigenous *hijras* of the region. Thus, socio-economic conditions of the *hijras* are complicated by factors such as the dichotomies of insiders vs. outsiders, ideological differences, norms of the household, occupational choices and disparities between *gurus* and *celas.* The flexible approach of the pragmatic worldview allowed for the application of the quantitative survey method covering socio-economic indices of *hijra* community. Apart from the absence of government reforms or schemes/measures for the welfare of the *hijra* community, the socio-economic findings also revealsthe internal factors or the internal mechanisms of the community which determine the economic status and power wielded by a particular household.Like the emphasis given to practice and usability of methodology by the pragmatic worldview,the research could extractthe regional community dynamicsthat influence indices of income, expenses, access to basic needs and status within the community. In chapter four, the life story method is employed totrace the encountersof stigma and the strategies deployed to maintain a semblance of normalcy. Here too, the themes of region andpractice comes to the fore because the encounters of stigma is doubly compounded by the intricacies of stigma perpetuated by the *hijras* harbouring diverging ideologies concerning the 'ideal *hijra* culture and identity'. With

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Goffman's conceptualization of the discreditable to the discredited, the *hijras* (as is known in prior literatures) encounter instances of stigma from their family and the locality (Mal &Mundu, 2018; Sharma, 2009). But the concept of the states of discredit is also encountered when they transition to the *hijra* communes. The communes, because of the differences in terms of ideology and subsequent norms, enforce what constitutes as 'authentic and inauthentic' *hijra* identity. Here, the norms that regulate the stigma is different because in the heteronormative spaces, the encounters are with the 'normal others' which engenders reactions of unacceptance and ridicule while within the *hijra* communes, the stigma is primarily associated when encountering with the 'authentic others'. As Goffman identified, the discrediting attribute in itself does not engender stigma but is contingent upon contexts (Goffman, 1986). Chapter five examines the 'lived experiences'of the *hijras* of North Bengal and Kolkata apropos their gender identity and sexuality primarily to understand the dynamics of meanings attributed to the gender identity and sexuality under the theoretical framework ofMartin Heidegger's phenomenology. Using the hermeneutic circle characterised by the wholes and the parts wherein the wholes are represented by thebroader and regional works of literature and the parts are demonstrated the individual lived experiences of gender identity and sexuality, the findings reveal the meanings generated when beings are engaged in the flux of 'everydayness' and their indivisible connexion with their given worlds. Heidegger rejects the premise of the self (subject) and the world (object) as two separate and discrete domains but instead conflates the two to characterise it as being or *dasein.* The findings demonstrate that the meanings of gender identity and sexuality should be analysed within the helical or circular processes of the 'wholes' and the 'parts' wherein the meanings are to be seen by

situating it within the two horizons. The pragmatic philosophy and the pragmatic worldview, therefore, allowed the researcher to apply suitable research methods and theories to address research objectives that are region centric. Pragmatic philosophy primarily prioritizes on effectually addressing the task at hand which implies that the tenets of the philosophy ismutable or changeable depending upon the issues or the objectives of a given study. Pragmatic philosophy, because of its emphasis on practice over dogmatic theories allowed for a holistic research grounded and contingent on the themes of region and multiplicities of meanings.

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Appendix

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

ABOUT THE STUDY

The following set of questions was prepared chiefly to understand the current perception, stances and beliefs of members or representatives of an organization, NGO or a CBO towards the Hijra culture and identity. Additionally, the study seeks to know about any initiatives, programs and welfare schemes organised or implemented by the organization for the development of the Hijras and their community.

Owing to the secretiveness of the Hijra culture, the study also aims to know about challenges (if any) confronted by the members of the organization when implementing the programs/schemes or when interacting with them (the Hijras). The information collected from the study will be used as data for a PhD thesis entitled: 'The Third Gender: A Sociological Exploration of the Life of the Hijras of North Bengal and Kolkata' to be submitted to Sikkim Central University. The identity of the respondent (for example name and age) will be kept confidential and only required data will be used and retained.

PERSONAL DETAILS

NAME   OF   THE   REPRESENTATIVE/MEMBER:

▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬

AGE: _____

NAME OF THE ORGANISATION THE MEMBER REPRESENTS:

_____

TODAY'S DATE: ___/____/____ (DD/MM/YY)

SEX _____

CONSENT AND CONFIDENTIALITY FORM

I, _____, agree to participate in the interview and I have been informed that my answers will be used as data for a PhD thesis entitled: 'The Third Gender: A Sociological Exploration of the Life of the Hijras of North Bengal and Kolkata'. I have also been informed that my name and the name of the organization along with other personal details will be kept anonymous.

SIGNATURE: _____

The following section focuses on perceptions and opinions held by the members of an organization towards the Hijras and their culture.

*The following questions are open-ended and descriptive in nature. Kindly provide your answers in the space provided below.

a) In your own words, how would you define a Hijra?

b) What are your thoughts on their culture and occupation?

c) Have you participated in programs or involved yourself in any kind of welfare schemes and other activities specifically concerning the Hijras? If you have answered yes, please mention your experiences.

d) According to you, what could be their (Hijras) gravest of problems?

e) What sort of measures, procedures or initiatives could be implemented to mitigate the same?

f) Are there any members in the organization who identify themselves as Hijras? And if so, do they actively participate in activities organised by the institution? For example taking part in rallies, advocacy programs etc.

SECTION TWO: INITIATIVES/PROGRAMS INITIATED/IMPLEMENTED BY THE ORGANISATION

g) What is the chief objective/s of the organization/NGO concerning the Hijras and their community? For instance, does it limit itself only to sexual health programs (e.g. STI, HIV/AIDS) or does it include counseling (for mental trauma) psychiatric care and other programs that facilitate the well-being of the community?

h) How has the organization/NGO aided the Hijras and their community? Please mention in detail.

i) Do the organization and its members confront any difficulties or challenges when implementing initiatives specifically designed for the Hijras? If yes, then kindly enumerate the problems faced.

j) The recent establishment of the West Bengal Transgender Board was considered to be an important step that would ensure development in the lives of the sexual/gender minorities of the state. Post the installation of the board, has there been any alliance programs/initiatives executed by the board and the organization that you are associated with concerning the Hijras? If yes, then kindly mention the name of the project and how it was effective in bringing about change.

k) Are you aware about any state governmental policies or schemes created solely for improving the conditions of the marginal community? If yes, then please specify the objectives and scope of the policies/schemes.

l) Has the organization conceived of any future plans or projects keeping in mind the Hijras? If yes, then kindly mention in detail the nature of the projects and its possible impact on the marginal community.

***************Thank you for your time and co-operation ***************