

Third Gender in Kashmir Region

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ABSTRACT

Who exactly are these Third Gender people or Hijras? There is not one but a number of descriptions given by few scholars who have attempted in-depth studies on them. One of the beliefs is that they are castrated males and hermaphrodites. Reddy (2006) uses the term Hijra in her study and argues that hijras, as one knows, are men who desire to be feminine; they might be hermaphrodite by birth, or men who choose to castrate themselves or those who merely wear feminine attire. Today, some of them refer to themselves as belonging to the "third" gender.

In most parts of the world, Third Gender or Transgender communities have existed with their own local identities, customs and rituals. They are called by different terms in different communities and countries. E.g they are known as Baklas in the Philippines, Berdaches among American Indian tribes, Serrers in Africa and Hijras, Jogappas, Jogtas, Shiv-Shaktis and Aravanis in South Asia. More than a history of 4,000 years, the hijra community in India, are considered to have special powers because of its third-gender status. They are a part of a well-established 'eunuch culture' in many societies, especially in West Asia. Most of its members held sanctioned positions in royal courts. Hijras trace their origins to myths in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. It is believed that while Rama was leaving for the forest upon being banished from the kingdom for 14 years, asked his followers all the 'men and women' to return to the city. Among his followers the hijras were the ones who were not bound by his direction and decided to stay with him. Impressed with their devotion, Rama sanctioned them with the power to confer blessings on people on auspicious occasions like childbirth, marriage, and inaugural functions. This initiated the stage for the custom of badhai collection among hijras wherein they sing, dance and confer blessings (Narrian, 2003).

Transgender is a broad term used for people whose expression, gender identity, or behavior is different from those who are typically associated with their assigned sex at birth. The transgender are individuals of any age or sex whose appearance, personality, attitude, behavior or personal characteristics are different from the stereotypes which means there is a difference of identity. Transgender is the state of one's "gender identity" not matching one's "assigned sex" (USL LGBT Campaign Transgender Campaign, 2007). Transgender people include transsexual, cross dresser, transvestite, consciously androgynous people, gender queer people who live cross-gender, drag kings, and drag queens. Most of the transsexuals are born as males but see themselves as women. In other words, all transsexual people are Transgender but not all Transgender people are transsexual. The term female-to-

male, Transgender people, are "transman" and "transwoman" refers to male-to-female Transgender people.

The present research paper is a study of the third gender people living in Kashmir region. The paper has attempted to understand the issue of gender identity among the third gender people in Kashmir region and has aimed at understanding the problem of identity among them. The study has further tried to explore the role of these people as an alternative gender category and has examined what it means to be neither man nor woman in the context of Kashmiri culture. The paper has also looked into the socio-cultural life of the said community.

Who exactly are these *Third Gender people or Hijras*? There is not one but a number of descriptions given by few scholars who have attempted in-depth studies on them. One of the beliefs is that they are castrated males and hermaphrodites. Reddy (2006) uses the term Hijra in her study and argues that hijras, as one knows, are men who desire to be feminine; they might be hermaphrodite by birth, or men who choose to castrate themselves or those who merely wear feminine attire. A "real hijra" is said to be like an ascetic or sannyasi (a wandering, homeless ascetic)- completely free of sexual desire. Today, some of them refer to themselves as belonging to the "third" gender. Many studies used the term 'Hijra' to address this community, therefore, in the present paper also the term 'Third Gender' has been synonymously used with the term 'hijra' (kinnars, khusras, manglamukhis, laancc etc.).

Serena Nanda (1999) argues, "He (*hijra*) is a third gender role in India, who is neither male nor female but contains the element of both". She argues that hijras express the most common view, held by both hijras and people in the larger society, that the hijras are an alternative gender, neither men nor women. Some scholars have also used the term 'third sex' to define hijras. In India, hijras are viewed as an institutionalized "third sex" that has always existed. The term, third sex, describes individuals who are categorized (by

their will or by social consensus) as neither male nor female. It is a gender identity separate from 'men' and 'women,' of people considered to be the intermediate sex; in-betweens or neutrals. The third sex is described as a natural mixing or combination of the male and female natures to the point in which they can no longer be categorized as male or female in the traditional sense of the word. According to Talwar (1999), Hijras is a term which embraces both hermaphrodites as well as eunuchs. Ojha (2011) has also used the term "Intersex", for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anomaly that does not seem to fit in the typical definition of female or male. Intersexed people, to whom the term "hermaphrodite" also refers, are people whose physical sexual differentiation at birth is not typical.

This community was counted in 'female' category in 2001 census and according to the sources the recent 2011 census included them in 'others' category. Through the Census office, it was found that according to the 2011 census report, in all, 296 third gender people are living in the UT of Jammu and Kashmir region out of which 106 live in Kashmir Region. The census office could not provide the exact addresses and locations of these people in Kashmir so the interview was done with the help of snowball sampling. Third gender people (hijras) are given a special place in Kashmiri culture and society i.e. that of a Middleman. The identity of third gender people living in Kashmir is different from the third gender people (hijras) living in other parts of the country as well as from those living in Jammu Region. As they are addressed as middleman, so one would find them dressed up as wearing kurta pajama and having make-up on face.

Identity is the coherent conception of the self, made up of goals, values and beliefs to which a person is solidly committed (Erickson, 1968). Identity formation is a healthy, vital process that builds on the achievement of earlier stages i.e., trust, autonomy, initiative and industry and thus lays the groundwork for coping with the psycho social issues of adult life. 'Gender' refers to the maleness and femaleness or person's internal sense of being male and female. Gender identity refers to the individual's internal feelings and experiences of gender, which may or may not resemble with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of body and other expression of gender, which include dress, speech and mannerisms. For many of the people, the gender identity matches with the sex assigned to them at birth. For example, a person born as female identifies herself as a girl and later as a woman but for a transgender, this may not match with what the society has expected or assigned. Transgender is an umbrella term used to describe anyone whose gender identity or manners fall outside the stereotypical gender norms, or whose gender identity does not match with the assigned birth gender. Transgender is defined as living life in the identified gender role rather than the biological sex. (Jayakumar, 2016).

According to the hijras dual-gender figures are more powerful than any other identification. Hijras are men who dress and act like women. They consider themselves as belonging to third-gender category or a sub-cast and do not consider themselves to be men or women. They are classified as eunuchs, which are castrated men. Not undergoing these

types of operations and surgeries make them feel worthless and useless. Undergoing this operation classifies the hijras as being "True" Hijras. This operation is so important as it gives them (hijras) the honored right of being addressed in a feminine pronoun and also makes them believe that they have achieved the same honor that generations and generations of Hijras have achieved before them (Ojha, 2011).

The gender identity with which third gender people in Kashmir region usually identify was the combination of both masculine and feminine identity. It was seen during interaction that maximum respondents dressed up and behaved like females as well as male. They wear attire, which is a combination of both men as well as of women. Like males, they wear Kurta pajama, a very few of them were seen in pant shirt, jeans- t-shirt etc. and do full make up on face, outlining their eyes to highlighting their lips with a lipstick as being done by other females in society. They have long hair with shoulder cut. Their dressing sense does not hide their identity but reveals it prominently which helps them to find out their customers for match making. They all have male names from childhood, but took female names when they left their home and started living as a middleman. Thus, the 'actual social identity' (i.e. identity of being a, Middleman/ Laanccch) was the reason for their earning and therefore, third gender people in Kashmir region, didn't hide their actual social identity.

Economy

The economy is the social institution that organizes the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services. The economy of the community depends directly on the type of occupation. Nanda (1999) argues that hijras are primarily associated with a few traditional occupations, the prominent among them being ritualized performances at childbirth and marriages. Their performance consists of dancing and singing, accompanied by a two-sided drum, and the blessing of the married couple or the child in the name of the mother goddess. In return for these blessings they receive *badhai*, traditional gifts in cash and goods, which also include some sweets, cloth, and grains. Hijras also beg in the streets for alms from passersby and from shops and these activities are generally regulated on a daily rotational basis by the elder members of the hijra community. Although prostitution is considered deviant within the hijra community, but many hijras earn a living from it. In most of the places prostitution is carried out within a hijra household, under the supervision of a house manager or "madam," who then collects part or all of the prostitute's earnings in return for shelter, food, a small allowance, and protection from the police and rowdy customers. Though many young hijra prostitutes feel that they are being exploited by their "madams," so few live and work on their own. Moreover because of their historical role as performers, hijras sometimes dance in non-ritual roles, such as at stag parties, for college functions, or in films.

The important traditional role of the third gender people (hijras) in Kashmir region is that of Middleman or marriage broker locally known as *Laanch*. Middlemen/ or Hijras generally carry a diary with them in which they record the details of boy/girl as well as of their family and this is how they earn their living whenever a marriage gets arranged. Some of

them also sing and dance at marriage functions unlike badhai collection in Jammu region. They dance with any singer or group when called upon for doing this. There is no segregation of area to any particular third gender (hijra), any third gender (hijra) can perform dancing in any area and can also work as a middleman for anybody who wants. The most important factor which helps to identify a third gender person (hijra) is their attire and makeup. They are usually found with all feminine make-up on their face, with long hair, wearing a male kurta pajama and carrying a handmade bag, so they carry an identity of middleman which helps the general people to identify them. A middleman earns only when a marriage gets arranged otherwise their moving around is worthless. There are no fixed rates for arranging the marriage as it depends upon the financial condition of the families. Besides this with the change coming in, they were seen in other occupations, besides their traditional occupation of middleman.

In Kashmir region, marriages are arranged only during summer season as in winters it is very difficult for people to manage due to snowfall. So third gender people (hijras) in Kashmir earn only during summer season and it is very difficult for them to manage in winter season without any income. One significant observation during the fieldwork was that in Kashmir region third gender people (hijras) now-a-days are not able to earn enough for living through their traditional occupation. It was seen as well as argued by some of the respondents that sometimes in order to survive they have to beg money from the people in the markets, besides this some changes were also seen in their occupation in recent times e.g. some respondents worked as domestic servants and few of them are opting for private jobs. "The financial condition of third gender people (hijras) living in Srinagar is not very good, a very few have a good life, but mostly they are struggling for living" as argued by one of the respondent. Further, it was seen that there is no uniformity in the occupation of third gender people (hijras) in Kashmir, as most of them work as a middleman only, some work as a middleman during the day time and dance in night parties, few of them are interested only in dancing and few of them have started badhai collection also.

Religion

Religion is central to every culture on earth, and sociologists seek to understand how religious practices and beliefs guide human societies. They offer no comment on the meaning and purpose of human existence, nor can they pass judgment on any religion as right or wrong. Rather, scientific sociology delves into the consequences of religious activity for larger social life (Macdonis, 1986). Serena Nanda (1999), in her book, while talking about the religion of hijras argues that at a deeper level the hijra's claim to power is through the ritual sacrifice of the phallus, as the identification with Shiva suggests, at the more conscious and culturally elaborated level, it is the devotion to the Mother Goddess (specifically Bahuchara, who is one variant of the Mother Goddess) that is the focus of the hijra community and the most explicitly acknowledged source of their powers.

Third Gender people (hijras) who were interviewed, mostly belonged to Muslim religion. Unlike, the third gender people (hijras) of Jammu region and Northern India, there is no

particular diety or god of the third gender people (hijras) in Kashmir region. They argued that their names are given to them by their parents. Therefore, one finds that the third gender (hijras) of Kashmir region are given an identity through names by their parents. Like other Muslim women, third gender people (hijras) in Kashmir region do not wear bindi on their foreheads, but were seen with full make-up on their face which includes kajal, lipstick etc. However, in Kashmir region there were no convertees, perhaps they belonged to the Muslim religion and were practicing the occupation of a middleman and if there was any Hindu, there was no pressure for conversion.

Family and Household

The family is a social institution that unites individuals into cooperative groups that oversees the bearing and upbringing of children. These social units are, in turn, built on kinship, a social bond, based on blood, marriage, or adoption, that joins individuals into families. Although all societies contain families, which are included under the umbrella of kinship have varied through history, and varies today from one culture to another (Haralambos & Heald, 1980). During the twentieth century, most members of our society have regarded a family unit as a social group of two or more people, related by blood, marriage, or adoption, who usually live together (Macdonis, 1986). In case of third gender, family is a social unit formed by adoption of new members in the community.

Third gender people's (Hijras's) non-confirmation of their gender, which is exhibited by the negative messages they receive from the society, all creates confusion to them about their self-image and identity. Their feminine side is frequently disavowed, ignored and largely ridiculed. They leave families and start living on rent. Getting an accommodation on rent for third gender people in Kashmir is not easy either. Rarely house owners in Kashmir region provide them rooms that is only when they promise to behave 'properly'. In most of the cases they fail to pay the rent on the prescribed times because of the lack of livelihood and enough income from their traditional occupations. They don't have any particular dera or group in which they can live together like third gender people (hijras) in other parts of the India. Most of them live independently on their own. Few of them have good relations with their family members so they live with their families and work as a middleman only.

The large number of organizations of Hijras existing throughout India is independent, autonomous units. At the same time, each of these units is related with other units, either, due to regional affiliations or other organizational links. Each Gaddi or Dera is headed by a leader known as Guru and has other occupants known as chelas, who normally number 5 to 10. The living arrangement of hijra Dera is parallel to family organization. The head of the household is the Guru, regarded as mother, and all the chelas are considered as sons and daughters (Sharma, 2009). Nanda (1999), argues that though all the chelas, as per the role requirements are supposed to act as females and male, a third gender role, yet gender distinctions are maintained within the dera. A third gender person (hijra), either male or female who performs dancing is recognized as daughter whereas the drum beater and harmonium player is called as son. Notwithstanding the gender

distinctions drawn on the basis of role performed the important dimension of hijra dera is that it has patterned set of role relationships.

Few of the third gender people(hijras) in Kashmir region admitted that they had made gurus when they started their lives as a third gender or hijra or middleman but they never lived with their guru. They only occasionally visited their gurus but they managed their life and earning on their own. Hence, there is no hierarchy of guru-chela relationship as there is no institutionalized organization of the third gender individuals in Kashmir region. They all live on their own and earn their living alone.

Marriage

According to Bowman (1960), the basic objects of marriage are: sex gratification, desire for home and children, companionship, social position and prestige, and economic security and protection. Popenoe (1951) has talked of five elements of marriage: mating urge, division of labour, desire for home and children, comradeship (sexually as well as non sexually covered), and economic security. Bowman has rejected 'fulfilment of personality' as the object of marriage. He says that it is not the purpose but the result of marriage(Ahuja, 2002). Due to sexual deformity, the third gender people(hijras) are not able to enter into the institution of marriage. As inability to reproduce, in view of the cultural traditions of Indian society, is socially disapproved.

While "marriage" or maintaining a Jodi appears to be a cherished ideal for third gender people (hijras), it is clearly not without ambivalence. Hijras are generally discouraged by their elder/senior hijras from maintaining relationships. Senior hijras repeatedly ridicule "bad" or "false" hijras who openly maintain these relationships. "Real hijras" are those who are asexual, like ascetics; they look at neither men nor women according to the nayaks. And yet, almost all hijras-including the nayaks- maintain such relationship, in their youth if not later in life (Reddy, 2006).

Ideally, marriage- to a man or a woman- is prohibited among hijras, and affinal kin are not significant in their kinship alignments. In fact, senior hijras explicitly invoke the fustian of asexuality and emphasize the denial of worldly ties, including marital ties and procreative sexuality (Reddy, 2006). The institution of marriage was absent among third gender people (hijras), but it was found that they enter into the ceremony of the imagined marriage during their life time thereby displaying their virtual social identity by becoming either bride or bridegroom.

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In Kashmir region, marriage and having husbands or having boy-friends was an important and for some third gender people (hijras) the most important, social relationship in the life. Most of the Third Gender people (hijras) had boyfriends and a few were married also.

Conclusion

Thus, besides being socially secluded and stigmatized in the mainstream society, third gender people in Kashmir region form the Identity of their own which helps them to built a strong organizational structure. At this point, the third gender people of Kashmir region putforth that if their role is not anti-social then why are they stigmatized and unfit to live within the family of their origin? Moreover, they are also accepted on certain celebrations. Dabla (2018) in his study argues that Transgender people want the government to help them in achieving financial independence, and they are calling on the leaders to foster the bedrock virtues of tolerance and acceptance. As far back as the 16 century, transgender enjoyed a respect in Jammu and Kashmir State. They were considered caretakers, trusted messengers and skilled entertainers during the Mughal period". But presently they are facing discrimination as today most of the Kashmiris consider any form of gender reassignment unacceptable. Families (despite transgender bill-2019) reject transgender for fear of being stigmatised by the society.

Until the rights of the transgender persons are protected, they will be considered outsiders and a minority group like disabled people. Moreover there are no legal provisions for them. Bund (2013) argues that in Kashmir, people don't support transgenders and they are considered to be abnormal and become outsiders. Society considers that they are only there for matchmaking or singing and dancing. Due to hostile environment and bullying, they are left with no choice but to leave their studies, which make them ineligible for white-collar jobs. In order to be fit socially, sexually and psychologically, it becomes mandatory to invent support systems where they can vent off their repressed feelings. They start living on rent and leave families.

One concludes that the third gender people expect society to know that they want to be looked at as a group which is no doubt different and unique in its own way. It is an honor to the third gender people to have achieved that great name. The third gender people in Kashmir region keep their head held high no matter what people in society have to say about their discussion to become this type of gender or group in society.

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