

Report

Kinnars in Delhi: Traditional Occupation of Begging

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Introduction

Hijra is a multifaceted category of the gender non-conforming effeminate group of individuals rooted in South Asian context. The category complicates the cis-gendered heterosexual binary sex distinction that dominates common understanding around these concepts which roughly marks the starting point of all the extra problems faced by Hijras or Kinnars. The two terms are not to be differentiated at any level except for former terminology's often derogatory usage, latter has come to be more preferred terminology in Delhi. It, in its neutral utterance, refers to a group of male to female transgenders or much less in number, intersex persons living a way of life adopting local idea of femininity by certain rules and regulations and are initiated into a community through another member of the community. All male to female transgenders and intersexed individuals are not males but all hijras are either of the two. A slight change of tone, the term ceases to be a technical term and becomes an abuse hurled at a male, for not adhering to heterosexual masculine standards of the region. Laxmi Narayan Tripathi in an interview defines hijra as "someone who is feminine but not a woman, masculine but not a man, a person beyond the boxes of man and woman. The person follows the rules and regulations of the community, has a guru, lives in feminine attire, may or may not be castrated." (Chettiar 2015, 2)

Male to female transgender alone as an idea, therefore, fails to capture the specificities of the hijra community which doesn't remain consistent in the South Indian context. However, transgender as a technical term becomes helpful to develop a clearer understanding of hijra. Hijras, who in common myths are considered to be necessarily hermaphrodites, in most cases are females trapped in male bodies. That mentioned it is when they are growing up that they realize that they belong to a different gender than they have been ascribed at their birth. The report is based on tracing back to this period of transition from a regular male member of society to a hijra, to question the subsequent ghettoization into certain pockets of a Delhi characterized by a limited number of occupations.

Hijras in Delhi are typically associated with occupations of *tolī badhai*, begging, and sex work, in the decreasing order of the respect associated with each. Literature brings forth the former two as traditional occupations associated with the community. Latter a more complicated occupation that finds no justification more for the inflow of money that it allows (Reddy 2005). The association comes along with the limited knowledge about them and depends on how often and closely is one dealing with a hijra. Mostly, the common parlance misrepresents them based on myths which become of greater importance to understand its usage in these occupations.

Historically, Hijras have not been denied a presence but been granted a space outside of mainstream society through various myths. In the foreword to Gayatri Reddy's (2005) work, Gautam Bhan's starts with "Hijras are invisible and hyper-visible in India" bringing to attention the paradoxical positioning of Hijras in the South Asian context. While, at least in North Indian states of Punjab, Haryana, New Delhi, etcetera, they are visible and known to all, the average understanding fails to accommodate Hijras' existence as of someone that can normally contribute to society. Depending on quality and frequency of interaction with hijras, the information can range from no idea at all to some idea but the mysteriousness about them always remains because since colonial period they have created a close-knit network only slowly giving out to outsiders over a long period of time.

The works by Serena Nanda (1990) and Gayatri Reddy (2005) in their ethnographic work delineating the whole hijra identity gives the details of community dynamics as well as a few case studies

shedding more light on some individual cases. In doing so, they shun a lot of the myths and misrepresentations. They also outline a vivid picture of the nature of their ghettoization in the limited occupations that are of interest to us here. From *Neither Man nor Women* (2005), we know that begging, a lower form of asking for alms than *toli badhai* is traditionally rooted in the mysteriousness and fear of hijras. Hijras have mysteriousness built around mythical stories where Hijras are believed to have certain powers to bless or curse. While *baksheesh toli* goes to houses on special occasions, for example, when a kid is born or someone is getting married, those involved in begging on red lights, trains or other public arena are taking benefit of the principles that work in case of *toli badhai*. In addition to the ambivalence, Nanda (2005, 49-52) notes fear on two accounts- a) the explicit nature of their behaviour in public sphere wherein event of non-compliance with demands could result in abuses being hurled or petticoats being raised to expose mutilated genitals, and b) Noting Preston, Nanda (*ibid*, 50) points out that “Hijra is supposed not only by the common people but even by intelligent Brahmins, to have the power of detecting impotence.” So, while begging as well they receive more than other beggars which can be for multiple reasons- trying to get rid of them as soon as possible, looking for a blessing from a hijra and so on.

Lower in the hierarchy of respect, it is also relatively difficult occupation to be involved in. “In order to earn an adequate amount, one must ceaselessly roam the streets, which is both tiring physically and makes one vulnerable to the ridicule or abuse of the public, especially small boys, and rowdies. Begging can be a steady source of income, however, particularly in larger cities, and is consistent with, and even reinforces, the hijra self-image as religious mendicants” (*ibid*, 50). Like *toli badhai*, one can ask for alms also in a particular area which is divided under various *naiks* and there are further subdivisions at multiple levels.

The report deals with a group of hijras involved in begging and is divided under three broad headings. The first part deals with giving the details of their everyday work at the bus stand. The second part deals with contextualizing their lives, moving in their backgrounds before finally moving on to the analytical inferences that can be drawn from the first two. From the ethnographic works, the nature of their lives doesn't bring out any particular benefit for them to be living as part of their community vis a vis in a non-community setting. At times, from their narratives, the life comes out to be so hard that one wonders why going for other occupation wasn't even being considered. This acquires more relevance when there is an increasing number of hijras opting for nontraditional jobs with added legitimacy from 2014 NALSA judgment which grants them legal recognition. Was becoming part of the community an obvious answer to them or did they try going to other sectors but failed? The report in its final part will then take into account the details of their entry to the community and the factors that doubly keep them and prevents them from going out of their current setting. Since from the field the term 'kinnar' came out to be a more preferred term of usage, the report will make more frequent usage of the same over 'hijra'.

Research Question

What is the point of breakage of hijras in Delhi from mainstream society?

How does the shift happen from being part of a normal family to being part of a community involved in a limited number of jobs?

Hijras, contrary to common belief, have very less number of people identifiable as one by birth. Most cases include assignment of male gender at birth, followed by realization that one doesn't belong to the gender ascribed at birth as one is growing up. The research set out with the logic that the one must have some number of years growing up in a typical household, gaining some schooling, building relationships with people who are not hijras that would let them go for other occupations if they so chose. However, huge numbers from hijra community are involved in the three typically associated occupations with them which does not come out to be particularly lucrative in hijra literature except for toli badhai, that too not always. These occupations are exclusive to hijras and place them in a very restricted space such that they can be found everywhere but without a normalized exchange with the masses. Then various questions emerge: How did they come to be involved in their current occupation? Was it an obvious choice? Did they try for other occupations? Do they want to work somewhere else? These questions demand a detailed look at their stories before they joined the community if we have to come receive any answers. The point of breakage from mainstream society comes from these back steps in their lives to understand the shift from being an average member of society to a group of femininely clad male looking group of people asserting a distinctive identity associated with a limited number of occupations. The report focuses majorly on begging at a particular bus stand out of all traditional/typical occupations.

Methodology

The research question was approached through a case study of a group of hijras who beg at Anand Vihar Bus Stand, conducted through multiple intensive interviews and group discussions with the members along with participative observation at the bus stand. A total of 26 members' accounts were recorded, including a few from outside bus stand - in NGOs and with those involved in toli badhai - to complement the data received around bus stand.

Occupation	Toil-Badhai	Begging	Sex work	Orchestra	NGO	Job
Kinnars	4	17	**	3	7	1

Table 1. Present/past occupation of the respondents (kinnars)

Those interviewed were presently mainly earning from begging but also had contact with other modes of livelihood at present or in past. If in present, it was on a part-time basis. Age of the sample ranged from 17 to 50 at the time of interview.

Kinnars in Delhi

Hijras in Delhi is a geographically restricted reference to a group within larger Indian context which entails a pan-Indian network. Hijras meet each other on various occasions, any gathering typical including visitors from different states of India. Similarly, recruitment happens from far off places and one travel places on an invitation from a friend. It is a community that exists at a multi-state level, at the least, within boundaries of Indian law. This large community, however, acquires region-specific details given the local variation in an interplay of ideas on gender, religion, law, and etcetera. The system stays quite similar in say Delhi and Hyderabad but the two stands in stark contrast to say the context of Manipur where there is a category of Nupi Maanbis which is very different from hijras. Therefore, geographical restriction helps to put the framework for discussion in place.

In Delhi, every inch of habitable land is divided among hijras themselves with each area known as some particular guru's ilaqa. If the land gets too much to handle and one grows old, a guru divides a part of it among her chelas. One may say it is a large managerial arrangement which expands outside Delhi. Pertinent only among hijras, it is a rather an underground arrangement off any records whatsoever. Stories, names percolate down through generation in oral narratives. The network pans itself across occupations and not just traditional ones. Each location has parallel segregation based on the occupation that they have chosen, that is, an ilaqa will have certain hijras possessing a right to do toli badhai, while others to beg on the same piece of an area. However, while almost every location may be found on toli badhai map, begging gets restricted by a common logic of supply and demand. It is found in those pockets and locations where they can exist through legal loopholes. It may only create an illusion of chaos. Like toli badhai, it is a very systematic affair.

Bus Stand – A site of work

On a regular day, a bus stand in Delhi bustle with honks of buses, voices of bus conductors and vendors with a mix of passengers chit-chatting their time away till they finally catch their bus. In that bus stand, depending on what time of the day it is, there is another louder group talking, teasing each other, uniquely clapping, and intermittently bursting into laughter for some time and then disappearing into different directions. Those benches for that part of the day are their established space where they come back to rest after their rounds. Their job is bus maangna (to ask for alms in buses). Their bench may be left empty for them when they leave for rounds but even when some occupy it, they leave the seats for them on their own or are requested to do so in a tone, which is neither polite nor rude but particularly identifiable with them. “E tu! Hatt na, ja wahan jaa kar baith ja. Hijron ke saath kya baithega. (Hey! Get up, no. Go sit over there. What would you do sitting with us hijras?)”, with their signature clap, that one can hear throughout their parallel conversations. “What does this clap mean?” “We express our love with it. It's our thing. Only we can do it. I don't have to call any other hijra verbally. We clap and other hijras receive our call and respond to it with tali.” But those other kinnars interviewed outside traditional occupation, working in NGOs told it is a symbol of anger. That it is an expression that we have to use to strike fear in people when needed. Taking such responses back to the ones at bus stand showed a contrary reiteration that, “No no! We mean love. We'll clap and bless you. We clap while talking to each other. We don't mean anger. The two meanings come from two different contexts including a difference in location, occupation, and performance of gender. At bus stand, they are involved in an extension of traditional occupation.

In the bus stand, there are a few sets of ‘general people’ (term used among kinnars for those other than transgenders) who are well acquainted with them- including bus drivers and conductors, tea stall vendors, other fleeting vendors, non-hijra beggars and some other miscellaneous people. With staff members from buses, it is not exactly business but a negotiation so that they are allowed to beg in buses. Part of negotiation is also letting them sexually misbehave with themselves or they won’t let you in their buses, something that was constantly mentioned after narration of the sexual abuse that they have to face. Most of these acquaintances are men who get a certain license to misbehave depending on how much of this group’s earning can be stopped by them. So, the local staff would sometimes even come to benches breaching their personal space, touching them inappropriately, even in presence of outsiders who they knew are researching on kinnars there and are, therefore, clearly observing them. There were others as well who would try teasing and misbehave. Since they didn’t have to take these other’s misdemeanor, they would abuse back. One of them said, “If an ‘outsider’ misbehaves we wouldn’t take it. We will beat him well to teach him a lesson. With these bus people, it’s our daily work so we too sometimes share a playful relation with them.”

When the group returns to the benches, they become the center of attraction even now when they have already been doing it for 5-6 years. Only people who no longer pay attention to their activities are the tea stall vendors on one side of the benches, for whom we were the strange ones coming daily and sitting with them. In their eyes, it was rather a repulsion because of the litter that hijras would generate during their break period that would last from 15-20 minutes. The time period could vary further depending on weather, a density of travelers in bus stand, number of hijras at the bus stand and sometimes their general mood.

The bus stand has people working in four shifts, morning (5-9 am), afternoon (2-6 pm), night and late night shift covering (6 pm-12 am). Their break location changes every shift period, during daytime sitting around local buses, in night shift shifting to a location near long route buses. Everything is designed in a very systematic manner. Though they initially said that their head decided it all, it was later uncovered that an NGO intervened to systematize it. The changing locations are like changing the center of gravity during different times of days around where they will find a maximum number of sawari (bus travelers). The density of sawari also influences their dressing. They don’t particularly dress in extravagantly shining clothes and ornaments. Instead, most of them preferred simple clothing, also given the weather in June-July. It is on special occasions, for instance, on festivals, that everyone prefers being dressed up or only a little less, they are dressed up on those week days when they expect more number of sawari. This, however, has another defining factor- age. Younger ones are more fond of make-up and glittery outfits while the older ones are almost always clad in plain clothes with toned down make-up. Their current sub-head who accompanies them to bus stand only applies Surma (a good-for-the eyes traditional kajal). Some of them who have to work till midnight, have light make up during the day, but do makeup again around 6 when the next shift is going to begin and before they shift to another location. The flamboyance of the appearance in their case relatively increased towards night and decreased with age.

Their rounds which are for about fifteen to twenty-five minutes at once are done about five to six times in a shift on normal days. While resting, one of them generally would point out that they have been taking enough break that they should take a round now. Developing a consensus so, everyone gets up and leaves in pairs of two. “Why pairs?”, “Because that makes it quicker and more efficient to ask passengers on a bus.” Also, now their number has reached a point of saturation since it began. They would enter inside buses which would be almost full but still waiting for a few more

minutes. “We wouldn’t tell you lies, but sometimes we need to use crass language when you are asking for money. We don’t want to but we have to.” A senior one repeated this more than once to us and some other people raising a question on them asking for money in bus stand, “Hum sirf khushi ka paisa maangte hain. Bade-budhe se hum nahin maangte, koi kisi ke daah sanskar pe jaa raha ho ya wahaan se aa raha ho toh hum nahin maangte, kisi apaahij se nahin maangta. (We only ask for money coming from happy moments of people’s life. We don’t ask for money from elderly or say someone coming from or going to death ceremony or a disabled person.)” The list was added with other examples where they wouldn’t ask money as soon as they get to know it’s an unfortunate position or doesn’t have too much of their own. The repetitive description would be added with opposite instances that “instead we give money to the needy. If someone loses their wallet we buy that person a ticket to home, we help the poor who cannot get married on their own with some money”, etcetera. On another occasion, she narrated in a rather frustration about an incident when a person lost his wallet, the local police person brought him to them so that they could buy a ticket for him. She was frustrated and said, “Why couldn’t you buy him a ticket instead of bringing him here to us?” The point of it whole was to counter the ill-name that is given to them for asking for money. While they are presented and perceived in a bad light, looking at their ethics and detailed action, makes previous perceptions not so obvious. The hijras give alms to all other beggars at the bus stand. On one instance they dressed up an old beggar lady into a different saree changing her from the torn-barely-covering-piece of cloth, giving her a sort of makeover.

“The whole bus stand sells us water for ten rupees except for this one”, told one of the elder hijras pointing to the one they sat next to, “he gives it to us for fifteen rupees.” That is still a lower price than what it is available at for rest of the people at the bus stand. Being there for the most part of the day they get some perks. The bus stand features other fleeting vendors selling day to day things. By now a few of them have a good rapport with some of them. One of them borrowing earphones to listen to songs said, “He knows me well, more than anyone here. That’s why he lets me borrow earphones for the day.” There are others, who once in awhile, have their own rest time near those benches. They generate interest of men a lot more than they do for women who by unsaid norm should stay away from them. Resulting from these different gendered expectations, therefore, depending on whether one is a male or female, one’s interaction and seemingly knowledge of hijras would change a great deal. It was mainly the other men at the bus stand who interacted with the kinnars. Interaction with the women, on the other hand, is limited to a few who would sit on the benches asking them about the bus details, only rarely subsequently striking a conversation with them and an old female beggar who would receive alms from them daily.

Guru Chelas - A look into their Background

Everyone who comes to the bus stand belongs to a single dera which can roughly be traced within gharanas. Gharanas overlap with what might also be called as jati within Hijra world and it is worth calling a world given their own language, the network of relations, ritualistic existence, and their own social institutions. They are four gharanas in Delhi- Kalyan, Rai, Sujan, and Mandi. While the former two are raja gharanas, latter two are their mantris. While a naik (a guru high in the hierarchy) from a mantri gharana validated the claims made at the bus stand that Kalyan is the highest jati but it was reiterated that this doesn’t mean anything in terms of special hierarchical privileges in relation to others. The only thing this brought was a little sense of pride when mentioning about it which wasn’t ever done as part of the initial introduction. The commensality depends on how well the two

deras or their gurus share a relation. “Then, is there a way you can tell one apart from another?”, “You just get to know. There are differences in color of clothes and hairdo prescribed and proscribed in a jati. Kalyanis, for instance, would have a high bun”, mentioned a rather young hijra who had only recently joined the bus stand. While others confirmed to there being minute differences, it was so vague that no one could lay down a proper set of prescriptions and proscriptions. In a conversation with another naik (guru), “So, one identified as lowest jati is not discriminated against?”, “Hijron mein jati-bhed nahin hota. (Hijras do not discriminate on basis of caste.)”. She mentioned the difference is more in terms of ritualistic roles that people of different jati are supposed to fulfill in a gathering comprising multiple jatis. The influence of their affiliation to a particular gharanas seemed to play no role in their previously mentioned site of work except for pointing towards the dense network of underground relations.

The respondents from the bus stand belong to a single dera. In their narratives, refer to an earlier period when everyone used to live together in a single dera, the house being in the name of the highest guru in the hierarchy belonging to this dera. Everyone currently or in past have had a giriya (partner). The highest guru from this dera had one as well who given her HIV positive situation was acting as the substitution for her. He, in turn, had his own wife and a child who all were staying with the guru in her dera with only another celas/chelas on permanent basis. However, she was every day accompanied by one or two of staying away celas which was greatly mandatory in her present condition of sickness. This dera which has roughly around forty-five people had almost all chelas living in an independent arrangement. But everyone was supposed to be staying nearby so that they could be called upon whenever needed. The farthest member lives maximum thirty minutes away from the location of the guru. This arrangement allowed them to have their partner visit them to their place. Older members of the group pointed to this fragmented arrangement as the things that have changed from the past. This seems to expand beyond the particular case of this dera. Another dera in Trilokpuri showed a similar situation where Hijras going for toli badhai could be found living close to everyone else but not in the same dera as the guru. In both the cases, the highest guru has bought an individual flat somewhere else. The data doesn't allow to concretely develop any further on the same. But it is to be noted to contextualize their contemporary way of existence.

The disintegrating dera system would suggest that the gurus wouldn't have any real control either anymore. However, every description in their conversations would suggest that to be a wrong inference, where guru is asserted to be everything, especially to an outsider. This changed over the period of time wherein descriptions relating to particular questions were still answered with guru as everything but in their own general gossip guru wasn't someone who couldn't be criticised. Due to her sickness, there is at least one person at all moments of a day at her service. Who that person would be is decided by the guru herself. No one can deny when asked for to be there. The only avoidance is possible through other tactics.

All the members entered this system through some already existent member of the dera. A person becomes chela to the kinnar who brought her and the latter in turn becomes a guru or the initial source might take the new contact to her own guru. Almost all of our respondents joined this community when they were young and did not get the meaning of their lives. For instance, one respondent revealed that the first interaction of her's with the community people was initiated by a kinnar visiting her even while she stayed with her family and later she started visiting the 'dera'-residence of the hijra community. She narrated that “I knew I was a kinnar and for that reason, I had in-out relations in my current dera”. In her case, she visited the dera because she found it

comfortable to be who she was and to be among other such people. She dressed the way she wanted and could do whatever she wanted to do.

“How did you meet your guru?” received a common response of having met somewhere randomly where they talked and “dil mil gaye” (struck a chemistry). Another member shared her experience of first interaction with the people of this community. She recalls that she came to her brother in Delhi where she met with her guru randomly on street and then she became the part of the community. “Why did you leave your brother’s house?” “What could I have done their anyway? I don’t belong there. I belong with my community.” This commonly used phrase comes from early experiences in life; growing up one faced identity crisis amidst non-acceptance from the people around them, who never understood them but always pushed them towards hijras in general. Despite considerable variations in each of their stories, this is a common thread running through each one’s experience.

Childhood Experiences - Entry to the Guru-Chela System

Most of the kinnars in our sample spend their childhood with their families till the latter started noticing inappropriate behaviors based on their gender identity. At this time some of them were having good relations while some started experiencing the repercussions in the form of physical and psychological criticism and censure.

As narrated by one respondent from Rajasthan working at bus stand “I haven't met my parents and family after I came to Delhi and joined this community. They did not accept me”. But there were other cases in a greater majority which said they have good relations with their parents. “No matter how you are parents always accept you.” A non-hijra NGO worker at Aarohan remarked parents don’t have much problem with their transgender kids in isolation. It is at societal level mostly that things get difficult in a household when hijras start exploring their sexuality. One of multiple such accounts came from a respondent working in an orchestra who said that the situations were not very severed but she left home because family tensions somehow always revolved around her. So even in cases where they visit their parents once or twice every year, the respondents spent a disturbing childhood where the battle for an identity of “who we are” always haunted their conscious and subconscious practices.

One of the hijras recalled that her father never accepted her in the family while mother did to an extent, although now she has very poor relations with them. This suggests that, from their early childhood, kinnars start facing non-acceptance and “social exclusion” from their own family members and relatives, the ones who consider them as a cause of disgrace and stigma for their whole family. But not everyone has the same experience to share as some of them revealed their very good terms with their families, not only in their childhood but now. They do visit them whenever possible.

During this period of identity crisis, there is an effort towards resolving it actively or in desire. Everyone during this period, irrespective of the age when that actually happens, thought that they were the only one. No one could explain to them why did they felt like a woman when they were a man. To quote one, “During this period, society starts defining you. Society starts telling you that you are a hijra before you know it yourself.”

The exit from their houses in all the cases was accompanied by joining a hijra they had established a contact with and thus leading to entry into the community, alternatively referred to as a system of guru chela. The question of choice of occupation succeeds this entry which usually makes a certain option more relevant over the other depending on the point of contact with other hijras. This exit-entry is not a watershed moment that happens in even a month rather the period of transition expands over years of social exclusion living in their homes to finding salvation among people of 'their own kind'. To be in a particular occupation, came as a later concern after the primary problem of identity crisis is resolved.

Despite individual variations, for our concern here about the entry point into this particular dera; the significant one is that all of them came into contact with someone in this dera. There are two subdivisions of members further on- one who has been associated with the dera ever since their departure from their homes, and those who have come to this one from a different dera. The common thread to all of them is that they have always been part of the traditional system since they left their homes, irrespective of whether they left their house on their own or were sent away by their parents. The one who turned out to be their support at this point in their life seems to have defined the occupation they got subsequently involved in, which wasn't their primary concern during the phase. In face of these factors, it didn't matter so much which background they came from. There were people from a range of economic background, from quite well to do so much so that one still owns land in her name to some from a poor background. None of them came from a background where they were expected to follow a particular occupation. Similarly, religion and caste varied as well which seemed to have played no role in the whole process. While in *With Respect to Sex* (2005, 100-120), it comes out that all of them becomes Muslims after they are initiated into the system, there seem to be nothing of sorts happening in their context. Everyone was either Hindu or Muslim and celebrated festivals and had funeral rites performed according to their original religion.

Education:

A part of the exclusion from their early years was obstacles in getting an education. Most of the kinnars in our sample got schooling while they stayed with their families but they faced a variety of challenges in getting themselves educated. Situations were suitable for some while impossible for others. As narrated by a respondent from Trilokpuri involved in *tohi badhai* that "I was not born in a very economically strong family. I attended school till 8th. Till that period I did not like the discrimination I faced being a kinnar. My family tried preventing the word from going out initially but, as time passed by, it got known in my neighborhood". Another respondent from Nepal who loves dancing and has formal education up to 9th grade. She failed in her 10th exams and gave up the studies. Now she wishes she had studied further so that she could have tried for jobs elsewhere. She knows how to read and write in both English and Hindi.

Occupation and Experiences

Having established to an extent their collective context and their own entry and continued placement into the traditional occupations, the report now flows into analytical pointing of certain identifiable patterns from the field studied that keeps them within the system. At one level, level there are those that pull them within the system even though they are not always lucrative. At another level, there are those exterior factors that constantly push them back into the system.

There can be many reasons behind most of them having an average of 8 years of schooling. In some cases, they themselves did not want to carry their studies further. In others, it was the time when they were introduced to people of their “kind” and consequently got that comfort which they were struggling to get in since their childhood.

In some cases it was their own community which makes them blinker, forces them not to do anything out of the society, narrowing their approach towards mainstream society and people. This is substantiated by actual incidents of discrimination in society. In our conversation we realized that they are begging at bus stop either because they don’t have any other option to pursue and they don’t like to be in sex work, badhai-toli where they feel large number of rules make them feel slave or they are here to earn enough so that they can achieve their further goals.

Before, one of our primary hypotheses was that lack of necessary qualification kept them from trying for formal sector jobs and it was the lack of skills that forced them into the traditional occupations instead of trying for informal sector jobs. But we came across several kinnars who had skills and the requisite training to work in the informal sector. Below the different reasons are highlighted, also given is a brief background of the kinnars.

Reena (all the names have been changed) joined the community at the age of 6 is now 26 years old and has studied till class ninth while being in the dera. Then all she wanted to be was a kinnar and hence didn’t finish her studies, which she now regrets. Before coming to Delhi, she was in Pune where she was involved in sex work. She is on very good terms with her family and is currently the sole earner of the family as her father who earlier used to work in a factory but is handicap now. She contributes financially to the education of her nephews and nieces and also funds the schooling of her brother. She dances in nightclubs at times for extra money. She loves modeling and dancing in clubs. Other than that she can stitch and can do salon-work. She dreams of owning a 3-storey house where she can stay with her family and run her own business-salon/tailoring/brothel!; on the ground floor.

Talking to Reena we understand that it is not lack of skills that she has to beg and earn. Rather she is constantly on the look-out for alternate work options. So the reason she doesn’t try for work elsewhere is perhaps the fact that earnings from working in a salon or as a tailor would be lower than what she gets here. And also the flexibility and terms of hours of work/ shift choice/ taking leave etcetera are more here. Her lack of education keeps her from trying for formal sector jobs. And earnings and condition here are probably more lucrative than in informal sector. Familial ties are probably important in the early years of life. But as Reena’s example illustrates that good/bad family relation isn’t the primary reason that forces them into these occupations. But as Meena’s story will reveal that family can play a huge role in the occupation choice.

Meena hails from Delhi and works in the NGO XYZ. Before taking up the work there, she has worked in all the traditional kinnar occupations-bus stand, sex work, toil badhai. Her family was perfectly fine with her transgender identity but did not want her to work and live among hijras. Respecting their desire she looked for other jobs. She started working in XYZ in 2011 and rose up in ranks and now many projects are undertaken and managed by her.

However, even though she is working full time at the NGO as a project manager she earns a sum of INR 12,000 per month which barely allows her to sustain herself. So she is also a part-time sex

worker still working independently on her own conditions earning way more per day than she does at NGO. She mentioned it is something she has to do out of need. “Any person’s sexual desire is fulfilled after having done sex once or twice in a period. One wouldn’t do it beyond that unless one really needs the money which one cannot get through other sources.”

She believes that the main cause behind kinnars not moving out of traditional occupations is *toli badhai*, where their earnings keep them from seeking work elsewhere as it is easy money and *toli badhai* itself sustains because of the myths around hijra identity. According to her *toli badhai* should be banned. She believes a kinnar can achieve anything she dreams of if she works for it. And so according to her, the solution to this problem is to ban begging and *toli badhai* and if not so, to limit the maximum amount that one can earn through these means. This will force people to look for alternatives.

Contrary to this Raina has a completely different approach towards it. She says that it is not money which keeps the kinnars engaged in their traditional activities and prevents them to think something out of the box. She says that we have too many poor people in India who sleep empty stomach daily, and if it is money which kinnars have a lot then why don’t those poor people join this community as it is better to join the community than to die. Both perspectives have their own stand which we may not get right.

Raina also shared her experience as how she was warned by the manager, when she was employed in a company, that she might face difficult situations there. In her description, “even though the owner had no issues in employing me in his company, other employees didn’t want me to work there. I don’t know what did they care, what was their problem....”. She also shared her experience in another company as how the person there tried to ‘use’ her. These dreadful experiences at their workplaces show the lack on part of society. These experiences prevent the few who want to do something out of their community from achieving their dreams.

Seema joined the community at the age of 3 and has had no education. Before working here she has earned through *toli badhai* and also sex work. She comes for the afternoon and the night shift. She has an adopted son and a well-equipped house. She is the only exception in the bus stand in terms of past having worked in NGOs and practically applying for alternative options. While many expressed a desire for a good job so that they don’t have to beg at the bus stand, she presents an exceptional case of constant hustling to find a better alternative in monetary terms. But that is not the only criteria.

Piya joined the community as an infant. She received no education and has never tried for any other jobs. This being the only way of living she has ever experienced and witnessed, she could never a fathom a different life and hence never attempted or even desired something outside of the community. This lack of education till a useful level, as noted earlier, contributed as a factor in multiple cases that prevented them from moving out. Questions on alternative jobs in these cases end on that “we are not educated enough for a good job. A job should pay at least INR 20,000 (a roughly agreed upon figure) for us to be able to survive on it.” This criterion rules out the lower paying informal sector alternative jobs.

Heena is from Rajasthan. She is good terms with her family who cultivate a field back home for a living. She is accepted even by neighbors back home. Before working here she has even worked as a housemaid where her earning was higher than here. But she chose this as “this is where we belong”.

Heena's example shows how a sense of belonging to a community is crucial to the point of choosing a way of living which otherwise would rather be avoided.

Jeena, 23 years old, finished her schooling in Delhi while living with her family. She went as a boy in school. She was a bright student who received a scholarship in school and traveled quite far to go to high school in town. She aspired to become a chartered accountant but due to financial constraints gave up this dream. Her kinnar identity severed ties with her family and now she is unaware of their whereabouts as they moved out of Delhi. She earlier worked with the NGO XYZ but left the job as she liked it here better. NGO didn't grant her steady income where salaries take months to be received. If something happens, her alternative means of sustenance is toli badhai. She would love to be a teacher to young kids but now has come to believe that it is an impossible option for her. In her case, there is a comfort that she gets amongst her own, a steady income source and flexible working hours that acts her reason to stay.

Neena (24) joined the community around the age of 10. Her father who was a water supplier, never accepted her and so was let go by her family. She studied till 5th grade and can write in English. She loves dancing. She is sorrowed by her life. She lives with two of her gurus who oppress her. Neena's example shows difficulties of this community life though on the outside they look happy. She has no time for herself and so considering some other work or taking classes seems unimaginable. She wishes to be a dance teacher but knows not how to achieve that dream. Thus for her, it is the lack of alternate options that forces her to continue here.

There is another chela of the same guru who would end praising her. She recently underwent surgery which was paid by her guru. Depending on an individual's relationship with their guru and the other members of the group, one might not even consider moving out as have been noted as a sense of belongingness within the specific group.

When questioned if they were aware of the NALSA judgment; most of them weren't. And when we explained the content and significance of the judgment, they weren't able to fathom how it would make their life easier. It is as if now they can't recall of no point where the official recognition for them could create a difference. "What do we do with 'the third gender status if the government isn't coming up with a better scheme for us. Everyone knows about the hardship we face we face but no one does anything for us."

It seems NALSA has an intrinsic value of its own but does not really translate into any real advantage for kinnars.

The whole of this in addition to actual discrimination, makes one require an extreme will to go for alternatives to not just practically move out of the system but to move out of thought system as well. Living in this particular context, the job alternatives loses its meaning. While one may think of various options technically, sitting in the zone in which they live their everyday life, there seems to occur no meaningful option available to go for, in a similar fashion to how NALSA judgment loses its significance. At the same time, while being lower in the hierarchy one has to face many hardships but one also knows that as time passes and when one rises in the hierarchy, one has a safety net in forms of income to her own generations of chelas.

Conclusion

Given the sample size, the report doesn't aim to make generalization for why hijras go in traditional occupations. But having interviewed and observed members from a particular dera involved in a particular occupation, the attempt is to abstract the dimensions that played role in their currently being in a traditional occupation that might play the role somewhere else as well which needs further research for validation. Multiple factors contribute to the kinnars earning their livelihood either by begging/badhai toil or by sex work. They have either gladly resigned to this way of life, believing this is how it is meant to be for them or they are unable to get out. Illiteracy keeps them from being part of the formal sector. If literate enough for the formal sector; the employer is not accepting; vaguely if not outright. This highlights the pressing need for improving the gender sensitivity of the population. Those not educated enough to try for formal sector jobs, they do not even try in the informal sector as conditions and pay are lucrative in the traditional occupations than in informal sector.

If what is desired is that all kinnars get involved in more meaningful occupation then the only solution that seems would be successful is an outright ban of begging and toli badhai. But will those in these jobs be absorbed in the informal sector or will this just rob them of their means of living?

The restrictions that are put and the special efforts that are required to be of a particular gender they desire to take up a big part of their identity formation to point of overpowering their existence when they are not amidst the people of their kind. It is very easy for a cisgendered heteronormative man or a woman to endorse masculine and feminine qualities, respectively. Performing gender happens during all hours of the day. Starting from getting ready in morning donning certain to going out to work to survive or gaining an education, to thousand other activities. Gender, therefore, might seem just another aspect of ones' life in a normal case but is actually a filter that changes the whole picture. In their case, that filters mismatches with what society asks them to have. It also means especially in the early years of their lives, in absence of any decent knowledge of gender, they are not able to reach a point where they can relegate gender to the back of their head and focus on things beyond that. Life to a great extent becomes about rebelliously being of a gender that one desires to but is not expected to be. This also explains the prototypical endorsement of local ideas of femininity along with rest of the moral framework of society.

More than a different way of earning, what they need first is acceptance on part of society. They want to be viewed and treated as any human being would be. Gender sensitization drives, especially in schools are required. Advertisements by the government can have wider and stronger impact.

The beliefs that they are supernatural beings who have the ability to bless/curse, work for the benefit of those in toli badhai, but outside of that context, this belief has subjected those outside the toil to being alienated from the mainstream society. Though on the outside the community lifestyle may seem healthy as they try to resemble a normal family and have friends whom they can be with. But having spent time with them; most of them live alone as they value their freedom. Hierarchy plays a crucial role in the community; the younger members having to do all the chores while those up in the hierarchy live a comparatively decent life. Some have left jobs to be a part of the community. So being part of the community has its cons; though valued differently by everyone. Being part of the community ensures easy money especially when employment elsewhere is not possible, but the community does not really meet emotional needs of the members which become

evident when one moves towards uncovering layers of the nature of these relations which at hidden level comes out to be an economic relationship.

This short report could take into account chain of things that contributes in exclusion of a whole section of society. These at the same time also points the specificity of what could be targeted towards alleviating this exclusion. At one level, the school curriculum that teaches and hardens the idea of heteronormative, cisgendered sex distinction into minds of its students could instead replace it with a more apt understanding of sex and gender. That would help prevent a situation of identity crisis demanding a desperate resolution for transgender students and also decrease instances of discrimination. They would get to understand their own self in better circumstances, instead of being told by society about who they are in a derogatory manner.

This is followed by a need for alternative organizations where they can meet people of their own kind. Anjali Lama, India's first transgender model to walk in Lakme Fashion week, found an inspiration for modeling from her peers at Blue Diamond Society. Despite coming from a poor background and initial failures, she is successful today. This case points to a possibility of a different point of contacts resulting in a different scenario and also, raises a question to be further enquired taking cases of those outside traditional occupations to understand as to what lead to a different scenario in their cases.

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