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Lexical subversion in the *hijra* community

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हिजडे के यहाँ बेटा हुआ है
hijṛe ke yahã beṭā huā hai
A *hijra* here has had a child!
-Hindi proverb

The quotation that begins this essay, a well-known Hindi proverb, is used by contemporary Hindi speakers to indicate that the completely unexpected, even the miraculous, has occurred. The hijras,[1] most of whom undergo a castration and penectomy operation after joining a *hijra* community and adopting the feminine dress and mannerisms associated with membership, are marginalized in Indian society for their inability to have children. Perceived as outside the reproducing heterosexual mainstream and ostracized because of it, the *hijras* have created an elaborate network that spans all of India, establishing a divergent social space that both parallels and opposes organizations of gender in the dichotomous system that excludes them. The marginalized nature of this network has led to the development of a specialized in-group vocabulary, created by the *hijras* in order to identify concepts unique to their lifestyle. In this essay, I explore how the *hijras*, ridiculed by society for their "barrenness," have altered the semantics of mainstream vocabulary in order to redefine themselves as a self-sufficient, even childbearing, community.

The term *hijra* literally means "impotent" and is used more generally as a derogatory epithet to denote the ineffectiveness of the referent in question. Most telling in this respect are recent employments of the term by Hindu extremists in reference to the minority Muslim community. The term, deriving its performative effect from a cultural fear of impotence, has been employed by ethnic and religious groups in a variety of contexts as a means of establishing political superiority. Vijayraje Scindia, Uma Bharati, and Sadhvi Rithambara, for example, three Indian women who have, in the words of South Asian scholar Amrita Basu, "emerged as the most powerful orators of Hindu nationalism" (1995:159), regularly employ the term in their speeches as a means of criticizing Muslim or Muslim-friendly political leaders. Anand Patwardhan, producer of a number of progressive documentaries on the Hindu-Muslim conflict in India, captures one such instance in his 1994 film *Father, Son, and Holy War,* in which Uma Bharati says scathingly of the former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Mulayam Singh Yadav: *"ek hijṛe par golī kyõ bekār kī jāye"* 'Why would you want to waste a bullet on a *hijra*?' With this

phrase, Bharati succinctly criticizes her opponent for his inability to influence the future of the state.

Hindi poets and novelists have likewise exploited the term for metaphorical reasons. Hindi poet Ved Prakash 'Vatuk,' for example, in his poems "Today I Saw Jesus Dying" (1977) and "Like the *Hijras*" (1987), offers two extended *'hijra'* similes that suggest political and creative impotence, respectively. In the former poem he incorporates the phrase *pacpan karoṛ hijṛe* '550 million *hijras*' in reference to India's citizens in order to portray them as politically ineffectual; in the latter he compares 'literary critics' to *hijras* in order to suggest their lack of creativity:

hijrō kī tarah	Like the *hijras*,
ve nācēge	they dance,
pīṭēge jāgh	they slap their thighs,
bajāyēge gāl	they blabber.
unhē na prasav kī pīṛā hotī hai	They have neither the agony of labor
na prajnan kā sukh	nor the joy of childbirth.
	-Ved Prakash 'Vatuk' (1987)

Vatuk's poem suggests that literary critics, like *hijras*, suffer from a kind of impotence that prevents them from creating 'children' (or in this case, literary works) of their own. Having experienced "neither the agony of labor nor the joy of childbirth," critics produce little more than pretension.

These varying uses of the term *hijra* originate from a societal belief that the *hijra*, by virtue of her own impotence, will prevent family members within the household from marrying. This belief, coupled with a social intolerance for the integration of such figures, often leads to the ostracization of boys who are born with ambiguous genitalia or somehow exhibit behavior considered to be "too feminine." Such children are frequently left with no choice but to leave their homes and join one of the many *hijra* communities that exist in almost every region of India. Charu, one of the *hijras* I spoke with in Banaras during my year of fieldwork there in 1992 and 1993, explains how difficult it is for a *hijra* to return home to her family after joining a *hijra* community, encapsulating society's disgust in the final two lines by referring to their use of the epithet "Hey Hijra!":[2]

(1) Ch: hijṛā cāhē, (1.5) apne ghar par calā jāe - vah sambhav nahī hai. iske- ye hijṛā ke jariye hai- dekhiye samāj, aur asamāj kā bāt hai. (2.0) asamāj ho gayā- alag ho gayā, - agar ye jānā cāhenge, - hijṛā jānā cāhenge, - parīvār vāle nārāz hōge. (1.0) khuś bhī hōge, (2.5) khuś bhī hōge ((softly)) ki ye hamārā parivār hai,

Ch: Even if the *hijra* wants to go home, it wouldn't be possible. The *hijra* is the dividing line- you see, it's a matter of social versus asocial. He has become asocial. If they want to go [back into society]- if the *hijras* want to go [back], the family members will get very upset. They'll also be

(1.5) hamārā beṭā hai, - yā hamārā laṛkā hai, - yā hamārā bhāī hai. ā gayā royēge. - magar ek cīz kā nārāzgī āyegā, duniyā vāle bolēge ki "uphu. ye hijṛā ā gayā. (1.5) iske ghar hijṛā ātā jātā hai. - isse hijṛā kā riśtā hai. - iske ghar śādī nahī karēge." (3.0) to ye duniyā ne asamājik banā diya. (2.5) duniyā burī nazar se dekhne lagā. (2.5) "E HIJRA, (2.0) e hijṛā."

happy- they'll also be happy [and think] "He's our family; he's our child; he's our son; he's our brother." But even though they might cry when he arrives, they'll still be angry about one thing: The worldly people will say, "Oh no! A *hijra* has come here! A *hijra* visits that household so they must be related to a *hijra*! We won't arrange a marriage with anyone in that household!" So the world has made him an outcaste; the world has looked at him with an evil eye: "HEY *HIJRA*! Hey, *hijra*!"

The family is, after all, what distinguishes the *hijra* from most other members of Indian society, who are intimately involved in the extended families so instrumental to social organization. But since the *hijra* is thought to act as a curse on this very family structure—a belief based on the idea that her impotence will spread to her siblings and prohibit procreation (see, for example, Mehta 1945: 27; Vyas & Shingala 1987:75; Pimpley & Sharma 1985:42; Sharma 1989:51-59)—she is, in the words of Charu, a "black spot," an existence that brings shame to the family's potency. It is perhaps this fact that leads Charu to describe the *hijras* as occupying the dividing line between society and non-society: if they were to cross this line by returning home, their appearance would be met with anger, fear, even hatred.

Somewhat ironically, the *hijras* gain their livelihood by dancing and singing at birth celebrations, where their blessing is thought to insure the future potency of a newborn son. In many of these celebrations, the *hijras* perform a lively dance in which the guru, or head of the *hijra* community, pretends to give birth to a baby boy. In a celebration recorded in the BBC documentary *Eunuchs: India's Third Gender* (1990), for example, the guru of a Gujarat *hijra* community, in front of a crowd of laughing women and children, stuffs a cloth under her sari to make herself look pregnant. Her fellow *hijras* support her by singing, "Oh yes, oh yes, see how her back hurts! Her womb is full of water and the baby is crying out!" After the *hijras* collaboratively construct a series of jokes about the origins of their guru's pregnancy (e.g., "What's happened to you?" "It's my stomach. The British gave it to me!"), one of them acts as a midwife and 'delivers' her guru's baby as the guru lies on the ground cries out with pain. The guru then wraps the 'child' in her sari, holds it next to her breast, and exclaims:

It's a boy!
He looks just like his father.
His tummy is like his father's sister.

His eyes are like his aunty's.
One more thing ...
His buttocks sag like his granny's.
And he bawls like she babbles!

As the crowd breaks into laughter upon hearing the final insult, the guru takes the real newborn baby from his mother, holds him high, and begins to dance. "Oh, Allah, please bless and protect this child," she cries, demanding rupees in exchange for her blessings. "May he be blessed with success and a long life."

In this birth celebration, then, it is indeed "the *hijra* here who has had a child," in contrast to the sentiment on which the proverb that opens this essay gains its meaning. The *hijras*, marginalized by heterosexual society for their inability to have sons, have subverted the outside identification of their community as barren, throwing back to mainstream culture a very creative, and *procreative*, image of the *hijra*. In similar fashion, the *hijras* have altered the semantics of mainstream vocabulary in order to redefine themselves as a self-sufficient and self-perpetuating community. The notion that the *hijras* have a dialect of sorts is not new: Since the 1970s a number of South Asian journalists and sociologists have made allusions to the *hijras'* khās bolī 'special dialect' or koḍbhāṣā 'code language', pointing to the *hijras'* use of secret lexical items in their business dealings with non-*hijras* (see, for example, Mallik 1976; Mehrotra 1977; Singh 1982; Mondal 1989; Lowe 1983). Likewise, the *hijras* I spent time with in Banaras, when demanding payment for their song and dance, employ a monetary numbering system that is unintelligible to the general public. An alternative vocabulary for the numbers 1, 25, 50, 100, 500, together with a secret system of lexical items and claps for different kinds of customers (i.e., 'stingy', 'poor', 'dishonest', 'unemployed', 'exploitable'), allow them to conduct business dealings covertly in front of their clients.

What I want to focus on in the pages remaining is the terminology used by the *hijras* to designate affected kinship relations, terms which ultimately work to reposition the *hijras* as a procreative community. Fundamental to *hijra* kinship is the guru-disciple relationship; the initiate pledges life-long devotion to an older, more experienced *hijra*, who in turn gives her a share of the community's earnings. The system of kin developed around this relationship is extensive, built on the artificial designation of the guru as mother-in-law and the disciple as daughter-in-law. The employment of affected kinship in India among neighbors, especially among villagers or city residents living in close proximity, is well attested in the sociological literature (e.g. Freed 1963; Vatuk 1969a),[3] but the choice of such designations tends to be somewhat haphazard and dependent on individual preference.[4] The *hijras*, on the other hand, have a well-planned system of kinship designation, the nature of which, for the most part, remains constant across communities.[5] *Hijras* rely upon elaborate family structures which delegate various feminine roles to different members of the group, some of which are reported in Table 1, among them dādī 'paternal grandmother', nānī 'maternal grandmother',

mā 'mother', mausī 'mother's sister', cācī 'uncle's wife', dīdī 'older sister', and bahin 'younger sister':

TABLE 1. *Designations of hijra kinship used in Banaras*

Term of address	Meaning in the hijra community	Parallel term of address in standard Hindi	Meaning in standard Hindi
mā or mā guru	guru	mā ['mother']	mother
baṛī mā	guru's older fellow disciple (i.e., guru's older *gurubhāī*)	taī or baṛī mā ['older mother']	father's elder brother's wife (paternal uncle's wife)
mausī	guru's younger fellow disciple (i.e., guru's younger *gurubhāī*)	cācī or choṭī mā ['younger mother']	father's younger brother's wife (paternal uncle's wife)
dādī or dādī guru	guru's guru (i.e., grandguru)	dādī	father's mother (i.e., paternal grandmother)
nānī or nānī guru	a general term denoting a *hijra* elder to one's guru (Nanda 1990:88 identifies this term as used for "an elder *hijra* who is not one's guru")	nānī	mother's mother (i.e., maternal grandmother)
jījī/dīdī/bahan	fellow disiple/friend in another *hijra* household	jījī/dīdī/bahan	sister
beṭī	disciple	beṭī	daughter
potī or potī celā	disciple's disciple (i.e., granddiscple)	potī	son's daughter
nātin or nātin celā	disciple's disciple (i.e., granddiscple)	nātin	daughter's daughter (i.e., granddaughter)
parnātin celā	disciple's disciple's disciple (i.e., great granddisciple)	parnātin	daughter's daughter's daughters or son's daughter's daughter (i.e., great granddaughter)

But what is extraordinary about the guru/disciple relationship is that the guru accepts the *hijra* initiate not merely as her daughter, but as her daughter-in-law, and that the rites of passage that accompany this acceptance correspond to that of a newly married Hindu woman leaving her father's house (referred to in Hindi as pīhar) and moving into her father-in-law's house (referred to in Hindi as sasurāl). The interesting fact about this parallel, of course, is that there is no husband

involved in the exchange per se since the *hijras* identify in the feminine; the guru therefore assumes the role of husband in theory and mother-in-law in practice.

The dual role of the guru is overtly identified in excerpt (2) by Rupa, a *hijra* who considers herself to be the *pandit* (or 'priest') of the *hijras* in Banaras. She explains that the guru is not only the *sās* 'mother-in-law' but also the provider of *suhāg*, a term used in reference to a woman's married state, or more literally, to 'the state of being in a husband's protection':

(2) Suppose one guru has four *celā* 'disciples'. First of all, there's the oldest *celā*, and then there's the next oldest *celā*. So the second *celā* will call the first *celā jījī* 'older sister'. ... But among us *jījī* means *jethānī* 'husband's older brother's wife' because the position of our guru is like a *sās* 'mother-in-law'. We apply the *sindūr* 'vermillion' in our guru's name, in order to indicate that we have come to the guru's household and are like daughters-in-law to him. We consider our guru to be our *suhāg* [the state of being in a husband's protection]; otherwise, of course, she's our *sās* 'mother-in-law'. When she is no longer alive, we won't put a *bindī* on our forehead anymore [i.e., the decorative colored dot that Indian women, except for widows, wear on their foreheads]. We won't use *sindhūr* anymore; we won't wear *cūṛī* 'glass bangles' anymore. We'll wear the gold and silver bangles that widows wear. And we'll wear simple clothes.

The customs that Rupa describes in this passage as performed by the initiate parallel those performed by a married woman. After a Hindu bride moves into her father-in-law's home, she begins to apply vermillion powder down the part of her hair in the name of her husband so as to symbolize the state of being in his protection; she will also wear a number of other symbols of marriage, like glass bangles. The traditional Hindu woman continues these customs as long as her husband is still alive. If he dies before she does, she will mourn the misfortune of her widowed state by shaving her head, substituting gold and silver bangles for glass ones, and wearing simple, colorless clothes. According to Rupa, the same is true of the *hijras*: After the death of their guru, they no longer wear any of the more colorful symbols of marriage, a requirement that, given the *hijras*' predilection for colorful saris and fanciful ornaments, comes as particularly severe. It would seem that since *hijras* are forced to give up all of their other wordly relationships, they transfer every auspicious life-relationship (i.e. mother, father, husband) to their guru, regardless of the fact that such a transferral, in the eyes of society at least, results in a superficially incestuous system.[6]

Moreover, Rupa's insistence that the address term *jījī* 'older sister' actually means *jetānī* 'husband's older brother's wife' merits further consideration. Because the *hijra* initiate moves into her in-laws' home, all of her relationships with *hijras* in her new home must parallel in-law relationships. Even though the *hijras* address each other with terms denoting natal kinship (as is normally the case in standard Hindi), they actually conceptualize these relations as in-law kinship. Through this double construction, the *hijras* get the best of both fictive worlds, enlarging their families horizontally as well as vertically. By designating the disciple as a unit of marital exchange, the *hijras* are able to extend their families outward and develop

kinship ties across groups, ultimately creating an expansive, interwoven network of cross-community relationships.[7] As Sulekha, a *hijra* who lives outside Banaras in a small village with a male companion, so aptly explains: "It's just like all the doll games that children play. *Hijras* play these games with each other, too. That's how we're related to each other—in these kinds of games. That's how we complete our kinship circles. And we carry them out faithfully."

The idea that the initiate's entry into the *hijra* community parallels a woman's entry into the in-law's home has also resulted in a number of subversions of vocabulary items traditionally associated with sanctioned kinship in non*hijra* society, reproduced in Table 2:

TABLE 2. *Selected terms used to denote aspects of the guru/disciple relationship*

Term	Source	Place	Etymology or related terms	Meaning in community
baiṭhnā	Hall 1993	Banaras	literally: 'to sit down (with)'; figuratively: 'to marry without proper ceremony'	v., to join the *hijra* community; to become the disciple of a guru (as in the expression: *maĩ apne guru ke yahā pandreh sāl se baiṭhā hũ* 'I've been sitting at my guru's house for fifteen years')
chādar uṛhna	Ibbetson, MacLagan, and H.A. Rose 1911:v2, 332	Panipat	'to cover oneself with the sheet'; 'to marry without proper ceremony'	v., to be initiated into the *hijra* community
dahej	Singh 1982:48	Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh	dowry	n., gift given to a guru at the time of initiation
god bharāyī	Shrivastav 1986	Delhi	a celebration in which an engaged woman is given auspicious gifts by her inlaws as a wish for prosperity	n., the process of becoming a *hijra*
rīt	Shrivastav 1986	Delhi	custom	n., relationship-giving ceremony
toṛ	Saksena 1980		break-up price, separation price; from *toṛnā* ['to break']; the concluding line of a stanza in a song; the crux of a matter	n., a payment made to a guru in exchange for a *cela*

That the act of designating such affected relationships is called *rīt* 'custom' in certain *hijra* communities (Shrivastav 1986) is itself telling. In standard Hindi, the

term *rīt* is conceptualized in opposition to the term *sanskār*, with the former term used in reference to worldly customs and the latter to divine ones. It is perhaps for a similar reason that the *hijras* in Banaras use the verb *baiṭhnā* 'to sit down' when they speak of their own initiation into the *hijra* community, a term normally used by non-*hijras* when referring to a union performed without any formal recognition or ritual, as in the case of an elopement. The verb *baiṭhnā* points to a kind of illegitimacy when used in this context, denoting a wordly union instead of divinely sanctioned one. The terms reproduced in Table 2, then, all point to the notion of the *hijra* as bride; indeed, in the Delhi community commented on by V. K. Shrivastav (1986), the monetary gift that the initiate offers to her guru when she becomes his disciple is called *dahej*, the Hindi term for 'dowry'.

The *hijras*' use of the term *god bharāyī*, as reported by Shrivastav, is also revealing. This term normally refers to a premarital ceremony in which the bridegroom's family fills the lap of the bride with auspicious presents, an action that expresses a wish for prosperity. Shrivastav remarks that Delhi *hijras* use this term in reference to the process of becoming a *hijra*, a semantic extension that again underscores the notion of the initiate as bride. In the case of the *hijras*, the wish for prosperity involves disciples, not sons, but the parallel is clear: The prosperous *hijra* will "give birth" to as many disciples as possible, who will in turn carry on the lineage by giving their guru granddisciples and great granddisciples.

Indeed, Banaras *hijras* refer to a prosperous disciple as a *murg* 'cock', a term that not only underscores the *hijras*' identification with the goddess Bahucara Mata, who rides a *murg* as her vehicle, but also points to the disciple's indispensible position as progenitor of future generations. This point is made clear by Sulekha in excerpt (3), when she describes the animosity that would result if a guru of one house were to take over the *murg* of another house without proper permission:

(3) S: āpas mē sambandh mē rahatā hai. (1.0) ab koī jvar-paṛ jātā hai, jaise ham- uske- uske mē ke hijṛā dūsre gol mē calā jāyegā. dūsre ke hijṛā uske gol mē calā jāyegā to apne mē **jhagṛā** laṛāī ho jātā hai. (0.5) ki **hamārā** ko- hamārā ghar kā celā ko tum kyõ rakh li^f? (0.5) hamāre ghar ke murg ko tum **kyõ** bādh li^f.˞(0.5)to iske liye apne mē laṛāī hotā jhagṛā **sab** - ve hijṛā ek jagah baiṭhkar uskā pañcāytī kartā hai sab˞ - ki us par rok lagātā hai. ki ṭumko hamāre ghar ko nahī karnā hai, to **maī** ghar kā nahī karūgī^f. (0.5) to maī bhūkhe

S: We have restrictions. If we have a fight, for example, if a *hijra* of one group moves to another group, or if a *hijra* of another group moves into that group, then of course there'll be a quarrel: "Why have you kept^f the *celā* 'disciple' of my house? Why did you tie down/lasso^f the *murg*^m'cock' of our house?" For this reason, there are fights among us, quarrels— everything. All of the *hijras* sit down in one place and call a *pancāyat* 'council'. Then they set down restrictions, "You don't have to destroy our house if I won't

mar jāūgī^f, jab tumhārā ghar hogā- bhī bhūkī marogī^f. (1.5) āj tumhārā celā- hamārā celā tum kar logī^f ((to tab)) tumhārā celā maī bhī kar lūgī^f. hamārā bhī barhīyār ho jāyegā,"(1.0) isliye apne mē- hijṛā log apne mē **bandh** lagā dete haī.

destroy^f your house. I'll die of hunger, when your house will be—when you'll die^f of hunger too. If you take^f your *celā*- my *celā* today, then I'll take^f your *celā* too. Our [house] will be increased too.˞ For this reason, the *hijras* place restrictions on this kind of behavior.

The apparent contradiction in Sulekha's use of feminine verbal address when quoting the speech of other *hijras* and a masculine term like *murg* in reference to the valued disciple is rectified only when the dual nature of the *hijra* as both bride and provider of *suhāg* is taken into consideration. As a potential husband (and alternatively mother-in-law) for a new *hijra* bride, the disciple is instrumental to the future of her guru's lineage, and hence to her guru's welfare in old age.

The understanding of the *hijra* initiate as procreator is also responsible for the designation of a newly castrated *hijra* as *lāl* in some communities (Singh 1982), a term used in standard Hindi for a new-born son as well as a precious ruby. Even though the *hijras* tend to use feminine address for the *hijra* who has undergone the emasculation operation, as I have discussed in greater detail in other articles (see Hall & O'Donovan 1996 in particular), it is the *lāl* 'son' and not the *lālī* 'daughter' that is valued in Hindu culture, specifically because of his ability to carry on the family name. So too with the *hijra* initiate, except that she will do so by conflating the roles of both mother and son. This conflation becomes strikingly apparent in a castration narrative recorded by Govind Singh (1982:21-30). The initiate Jamuna, after losing one of his testicles in a childhood accident, is ultimately left with no choice but to join the *hijra* community and go to the city of Agra for a castration operation. While participating in the ceremony at the home of Shahjadi (the *hijra* overseeing the operation), the *hijras* sing the words "*ayā re āyā, hamārā lāl āyā, āyā re āyā, hamārā lāl āyā*," a phrase that translates into English as 'He came, oh he came, our *lāl* came; he came, oh he came, our *lāl* came!'

This phrase reveals one of the most developed metaphorical extensions used in the *hijra* community, which is based on the equation of castration with rebirth. This equation has been conceptualized in the *hijra* community for at least 150 years; a number of early British officials writing on the *hijras* have noted the belief, among them R. D. Luard in 1836 (quoted in Preston 1987:374-375) and R. E. Enthoven in 1901.[9] The *hijra* who comes into the community as a bride is transformed through this ceremony into a new-born *hijra*, with the detachment of her penis paralleling the cutting off of an umbilical cord. In effect, she is both mother and child, the *bann*⁻ *ı* 'bride' and the *lāl* 'newborn son'; and the terms used in a variety of linguistic and geographical communities for the emasculation ceremony reflect this idea. Selected terms expressing the notion of *hijra* rebirth are included in Table 3:

TABLE 3. *Terms expressing the notion of hijra rebirth*

Term	Source	Place	Etymology or related terms	Meaning in community
nirvaan; nirvan; nimni	Lowe 1983:37; Nanda 1990:26-37; Yorke/ Prasad 1990; Hall 1993	Bombay; South Indian city; village outside of Bombay; Banaras	salvation; rebirth (derived from Old Persian *nirmān* 'hermaphrodite', 'half-man half-woman')	n., rite of emasculation; emasculation operation; n., one who has undergone the emasculation operation
lāl	Singh 1982; Hall 1993	Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh; Banaras	gem, ruby; new-born son	n., the 'reborn' hijra (i.e., after castration operation)
chhattee; chhaṭṭhī	Mitra 1983 (from Salunke); Mehta 1945	Baroda and Indore; Gujarat	standard Hindi *chaṭī*; a ceremony celebrated by both Hindus and Muslims that takes place on the sixth day after the birth of a child, in which the mother who has given birth comes out of the pollution chamber; the child is fed milk by another family member as a sign of acceptance	n., celebration that takes place on the sixth day after the castration operation, when the patient is bathed; "this is an occasion for merriment; the hijras assemble and eat a mixture of coarse wheat-flour, jaggery, and ghee" (Mitra 1983:24-25)
suvavad	Vyas and Shingala 1987	Baroda	delivery of a child (?)	n., care for postoperative hijra
bannī	Singh 1982:26	Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh	bride	n., the hijra about to undergo the emasculation operation
murg	Hall 1993	Banaras	cock	n, a valued disciple; a potentially prosperous disciple
dai ma; dāī	Nanda 1990:26; Singh 1982:25-26; Preston 1987:375 (reporting on early 19th century)	unnamed South Indian city; Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh; Pune	midwife	n., the hijra who conducts the emasculation operation

The most commonly reported term for the emasculation operation, as well as for the *hijra* who has undergone the operation, is *nirvāṇ* 'salvation', the use of which is identified by Serena Nanda (1990:26-37) in her research in South India, by Sunaina Lowe (1983:37) in her account of the *hijras* in Bombay, and by Michael Yorke and Aruna Har Prasad (1990) in their documentary on the *hijras* in Bombay and Gujarat. The fact that the *hijra* who performs the operation is referred to as *dāī*, a term that means 'midwife' in standard Hindi, again points to the metaphor of castration as birth, only that the *hijra* midwife severs the newborn not from the umbilical cord but from the penis. The conceptualization of the *hijra* doctor as *dāī* was evident even in the 1830s; Lawrence W. Preston (1987) reports on a number of letters written in 1836 by the Subcollector of Pune that offered this and other "birth" details of the initiation rite: "All the reported life histories point to the conclusion that castration was a ceremonial occasion marking the transition from one state of life to another. Although not wishing to belabour this point without possessing much independent testimony of the *hijḍās* themselves, it is surely significant that the senior of the community who performed the operation was called the *dāī*, literally midwife" (374-75).

Moreover, Nirmal Mitra (1983) and Sumant Mehta (1945) report that *chaṭī* is celebrated on the sixth day after the operation, a ceremony perfomed in mainstream culture on the sixth day after childbirth. With this lexical extension, the conflation of the *hijra* as both mother and child comes full circle. The *hijra*, as the initiator of her own childbirth, is bathed to symbolize her own exit from the pollution chamber; as a newborn child, she is fed not milk but wheat-flour, jaggery, and ghee, foods thought to increase potency and normally given to a new mother in postdelivery confinement. M. D. Vyas and Yogesh Shingala (1987:91) report that the *hijras* they studied give the castrated *hijra* a new name on this day as well, an activity consistent with the local Muslim custom of naming a newborn child on the sixth day after birth. As with the designation of the *hijra* doctor as *dāī*, the celebration of *chaṭī* has been a *hijra* tradition for a number of generations, its realization noted as early as 1922 by Enthoven.

In sum, then, the *hijra* enters the *hijra* community as a bride to her guru, who acts symbolically as both husband and mother-in-law. Through the castration ceremony, the *hijra* is transformed into a newborn child; yet despite the fact that this transformation wins her a more consistent use of feminine address, she is designated referentially as 'son' instead of 'daughter' because it is the son, not the daughter, who is valued in the larger culture as the progenitor of future generations. Through these kinds of lexical extensions, the *hijras* affect the customs of heterosexual society while at the same time recognizing their own illegitimacy within it.

NOTES

1. The correct English spelling for the Hindi हिजड़ा, according to the transliteration conventions adopted throughout the remainder of this chapter, would be *hijṛā*; I have chosen to use the spelling

hijra, however, for easier reading. (Throughout this chapter, I use the transliteration system adopted by Snell & Weightman 1989:7)

2 . The transcription conventions I have used in the transliterated Hindi passages are adapted from Jefferson (see Atkinson and Heritage 1984: ix-xvi); they include the noteable additions of a superscripted *f* or *m* to designate feminine and masculine morphological marking. Other transcription conventions include the following:

(0.4)	indicates length of pause within and between utterances, timed in tenths of a second
a - a	a hyphen with spaces before and after indicates a short pause, less than 0.2 seconds
but-	a hyphen immediately following a letter indicates an abrupt cutoff in speaking
(( ))	double parentheses enclose nonverbal movements and extralinguistic commentary
( )	single parentheses enclose words which are not clearly audible (i.e., best guesses)
[ ]	brackets enclose words added to clarify the meaning of the text
what	bold indicates syllabic stress
CAPS	small caps indicate louder or shouted talk
:	a colon indicates a lengthening of a sound (the more colons, the longer the sound)
.	a period indicates falling intonation
,	a comma indicates continuing intonation
?	a question mark indicates rising intonation at the end of a syllable or word
...	deletion of some portion of the original text
"a"	quotation marks enclose quoted or reported speech

(I have not used these same conventions in the English translations, since extralinguistic features like intonation and emphasis are not parallel.)

3 . Freed (1963), in a study of kinship relations in the North Indian village Shanti Nagar, found that the use of kinship terms was extended to almost all members of the village, with the noted exception of recent immigrants. S. Vatuk (1969a) finds a similar situation occurring in an urban *mohallā*, in which most of the residents had established some kind of fictive kinship with the other residents.

4 . This seems to be true of the urban residents in the newer *mohallās* studied by Sylvia Vatuk, at any rate, whose living situation more closely approximates the hijras than that of the villagers studied by Freed. Vatuk explains: "An analysis of fictive kinship usages in the urban *mohallā* shows that there existss no internally consistent fictive genealogical system comparable to that described by Freed and recognized by urban residents to have existed in their home village" (1969a: 255). For a more general discussion on Hindi kinship terminology, see S. Vatuk (1969b).

5 . Early reports of the hijras affected kinship system include a brief comment made by Ibbetson, MacLagan, and H. A. Rose in their entry on the "hijéra:" "The eunuchs of the Punjab have divided the Province into regular beats from which *birt* or dues are collected. Pánipat contains a typical Hijrá fraternity. In that town they live in a *pakka* house in the street of the Muhammadan Báolis and, though retaining men's names, dress like women and call one another by such names as *mási*, 'mother's sister', *phuphi*, 'aunt,' and so on" (1911: 331).

6 . I am grateful to Ved Prakash Vatuk (personal communication) for this insight.

7 . Although Nanda (1990) does not discuss the parallel with in-law relationships directly, she succinctly explains how the hijras' extended network promotes geographic mobility: "These social networks are the foundation for the geographic mobility that is so characteristic in the hijra community, especially among its younger members, and so is useful as an element of economic adaptation. This ever-expanding network of fictive kin permits a *hijra* to move from place to place, because it provides a welcoming environment and a base from which to earn a living wherever she goes" (1990: 47).

8 . In his entry on the *pavaya* (a synonym for *hijra* used primarily in Gujarat) for the *Tribes and Castes of Bombay*, Enthoven (1901: 227) explains: "Behind a screen set up for the purpose the

cutting is performed with a razor by the person himself without any assistance. This is held to correspond to a birth ceremony which makes the patient a member of the caste."

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