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# **The disembodied self: Understanding the practice of Castration among the transgender**

## *Abstract*

The socially constructed notion of 'self' requires one to derive the idea of 'self' from the body one is born with. The transgender community presents an antithesis to this dominant idea and practice. The term "transgender," being an umbrella category, encompasses diverse people with diverse notions about self, self-expression, and sexuality. It is a social group with its own histories, nomenclature, beliefs, and practices. In India itself, transgenders are known by different names in different places and have different sub-groups/*gharanas* within them. This study focuses on the transgender individuals located in the Chandigarh-Mohali belt of India, known as the *hijras*. This paper tried to historically locate the practice of castration among the *hijras* in the region mentioned. The study also tried to understand the social and emotional impact of the *nirvana* ritual upon the individuals. The study was conducted by employing snowball sampling and qualitative research techniques like observation and unstructured interviews. One of the primary findings of this work is that it is due to the need for self-expression, livelihood and protection that many transgender individuals were forced to leave the society where they were born and join different transgender groups. But the Supreme Court granting *hijras* the identity of the third gender offers a new hope of wider acceptance of their idea of self and self-expression by society. Accordingly, the need to move away and the necessity to be a member of a group that may follow certain practices which an individual may not conform to, is likely to diminish.

**Keywords:** Self, disembodiment, gender, transgender

## I

### **Introduction**

Human beings are considered as social, since they are required to cooperate with one another to achieve their goals be it social, psychological or biological. But since the goals are often diverse and many times conflicting (Parsons, 1937), the construction of a lifeworld with shared stock of knowledge consisting of norms, symbols and their meanings were seen as inevitable to attain uniformity and stability. Any violation of the social norms is seen as a form of nonconformity. One of the first sociologist to explore this concept was Émile Durkheim who, in 1895, noted how deviance and criminality are violations of social norms and thereby concepts created by society. It is the society that grants us a 'social identity' and decides whether the attributes possessed by an individual can be placed within the category of 'normal' or not (Goffman, 1963). Nonconformity to what is considered as 'normal' by society is

connected with a 'stigma'. Stigma is an attribute of an individual that is devalued. Consequently, such a person is considered inferior which reduces his or her life chances. Body or the physical feature is first attribute in an individual which is apparent. Accordingly, at birth, one's identity as a girl or boy (and not as a child) is embedded in the body. The social expectations associated with a particular body type is gradually socialised. Any appearance of deviation from the dominant idea of a 'body' at birth or later is stigmatised (Goffman,1963). This evident in context of the transgenders. As referred by Butler, transgenders are, "those persons who cross-identify or who live as another gender, but who may or may not have undergone hormonal treatments or sex reassignment operations. Among transsexuals and transgendered persons, there are those who identify as men (if female to male) or women (if male to female), and yet others who, with or without surgery, with or without hormones, identify as trans, as transmen or transwomen; each of these social practices carries distinct social burdens and promises" (Butler, 2004: 6). Within the category of transgender, a subtle difference exists between intersex and transsex with the intersex people opposing unwanted surgery and the transsex people opting elective surgery. But they both oppose the dominant societal notion that a natural dimorphism should be identified and maintained. The transgender people have been subjected to various kinds of violence and stigmatisation. Many times, violence inflicted upon intersex children or adults is justified by the society as 'corrective measures' which "often leave those bodies maimed for life, traumatized, and physically limited in their sexual functions and pleasures" (*ibid.*)

### *Third gender: The Indian Context*

In context of India, one can find several texts (both narrative and normative) and oral narratives are formed around the narratives of these texts that highlights the existence of *Kliba* or *Napunsakas* (third gender). Several<sup>1</sup> narratives highlight the fact that even the Gods took the form of *Kliba* during several occasions. In *Ram-charitmanas*, it is mentioned that, 'Gods loves every creature: plants, animals, males, females and queer (*napunsakas*), who give up malice and surrender to his grace'<sup>2</sup> (<https://www.dailyo.in/lifestyle/dharmashastra-manusmriti-karma-devdutt-pattanaik-mythology-hindu-epics/story/1/14814.html>) .But how does one identify what counts as malice? To find this one has to refer the Normative texts like *Manusmriti* and

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<sup>1</sup> Here the researchers have focussed on the narratives associated with Hinduism as the field has reflected narratives associated by Hindu mythology.

*Dharamasastras* that *has* codified the ‘what is lawful’ and ‘what is unlawful’ or a ‘malice’. The text focuses more on the conduct of the ‘twice-born’ to keep themselves pure and in context of sexual behaviour, homosexuality has been condemned and the following lines indicates the point, “If a twice-born man commits an unnatural offence with a male, or has intercourse with a female, in an ox-cart, or in water, or during the day,—he should take a bath along with his clothes” (<https://hinduism.stackexchange.com/questions/8744/vedas-and-vedic-dharma-on-homosexuality>). The Dhamastra too condemned *Ayoni* (non-vaginal) sex (<https://qrius.com/what-do-manusmriti-and-dharmashastra-have-to-say-about-homosexuality/>)

Again, Sushurata Samhita argues that sexual dimorphism originally evolved from hermaphroditism (cited by Bhisagratna, 1907) which in a way finds expression in Manu’s elaboration of the primordial *Purusha* who had divided his body (cosmic matter) into two parts: male and female. Sushurata Samhita relegated that it is the different proportion of the sperm and ova that determined the sex of the offspring. This different proportion is further determined by the process of cohabitation and the intensity of sexual desires of the parents. Higher intensity on the part of the father culminates into an offspring who possess *puns prakriti* (male) and on the other hand higher intensity of sexual desire on the part of the mother leads to the culmination of offspring with *Stri Prakriti* (female). But if the intensity of both the parents are similar, it leads to the culmination of an offspring possessing *Tritiya Prakriti* (those possessing the characteristics of both male and female) (<https://www.deccanchronicle.com/opinion/oped/170216/mystic-mantra-homosexuality-and-the-vedas.html>). In other words, the existence of three different genders were recognised but the expression of sexuality was restricted. What is normal and thereby acceptable sexual behaviour is clearly indicated. In the contemporary period the word ‘queer’ represents the diversity of orientation that an individual may experience regarding their idea of ‘self’ and expression of sexuality. But since in India the normal sexual behaviour has been defined, it can be argued that the last strand through which the third gender has been linked to wider society is the perception that the third gender attains the power to bless people specially to have children. They are not seen or accepted as someone who can establish sexual relationship within the framework of household. Thus, individuals who do not conform to sexual dimorphism are not given the choice to experience a life similar to the other two genders once their orientation is revealed. Accordingly, the presence of the third genders in other acceptable vocation has been negligible. Therefore, we will see (in the subsequent section) that earning this power ‘to bless’ through castration is considered very important within the *hijra* community.

Though the narrative and normative texts refer them as different and not untouchables, the stigmatisation of transgenders in society has been evident. Despite the discrimination faced by the transgenders in everyday life, the transgender community in India has retained their legacy of existence. However, like the broader society the individuals who assume the identity of transgenders may be 'differently oriented' and therefore rightly termed as 'queer' in the contemporary context. But historically the diversity of this community was not perceived and therefore each transgender community designed a way of life comprising certain values, rituals and customs to attain stability and uniformity. But again, uniformity may sometimes sabotage diversity. It was during one's fieldwork to understand the everyday life of the transgenders it appeared that castration is one of the rituals that they consider sacred yet given the choice to be 'accepted' without it, some would have opted it out given the physical and emotional trauma associated with it. In other words, their newly assumed 'self' too gets embedded in the 'body'. It is this context this paper intends to understand and historically locate the practise of castration among the *hijras* of the in the Chandigarh-Mohali belt of India. The study also tries to describe the experiences of individuals who underwent the process of castration.

## II

### **Methodology**

The transgenders in India are known by many names in India like *hijra*, *kothi*, *kinnar*, *shiv-shakti*, *aravani* etc. As mentioned above this study is conducted in the Chandigarh-Mohali belt of India where the transgenders are commonly identified as *hijras*. The *hijra* community is broadly divided into seven *gharanas* namely: *Bhendi bazaar wala*, *Lalan wala*, *Poona wala*, *Laucknow wala*, *Bulak wala*, *Hadir Ibrahim wala* and *Dilli wala* (Sonu,2020). Some rituals and traditions are similar in all the *gharanas* and some are unique to each *gharanas*. So, for the present study the *hijras* in the Chandigarh-Mohali belt form the Universe of the study. Due to the paucity of government reports about the *hijra community*, their population and residential location, scattered and closed nature of the community with little access to the outsiders., the researchers had resorted to the snow ball sampling to select the respondents for the study. The researchers had happened to interact with one *hijra* who had helped us to get in touch with the *hijra* community or the *dera* of the *hijras* located in the sector-25 in Chandigarh. Observation along with unstructured interview has been used as the prime technique for data collection. During the course of the study the researchers had tried to interact with as many individuals as possible but have focused on 20 respondents on the basis of the kind information required for

the study and the degree of comfort the respondents had to speak about the issues pertinent for the study. Many *hijras* living in Chandigarh-Mohali region had migrated from different parts of India. Out of the twenty respondents 1 was from Bihar, 7 from Uttarakhand, 1 from Haryana, 2 from Punjab, 1 from Tamil Nadu, 2 from Chhattisgarh, 1 from Karnataka, 1 from Kolkata and 4 born in Chandigarh itself and they all belong to same gharana, that is *Dilli Wala*. There is total seven *gharanas* in India. They follow the similar culture and speak in Hindi and Punjabi to interact among themselves as well as with the general public. The ones who had migrated and are not from either Hindi or Punjabi speaking background have learnt languages for interaction.

### *Types of hijra*

In this study, four types of *hijras* were identified. First is hermaphrodite, it refers to the people who are born with ambiguous genital. Their genitals are not identified as male or female. They are generally called as intersex. They join *hijra* community and become a *hijra*. Second is non-castrated *hijras*, it refers to those individuals who are male at birth but their sexual organ is not functional and at the same time they are inclined towards femininity. They join the *hijra* community and become a *hijra* by following their tradition and customs but sooner or later they are required to undergo the process of castration. The third type of *hijras* comprise of those individuals who are born with male genitals but they are relate to femininity. They join the *hijra* community by removing their genital through a surgical operation. This operation is performed by the *dai ma* (senior *hijra* in the community who performs the surgery)but nowadays doctors also perform this surgery (Sonu, 2020) . Reddy (2006) stated that those *hijras* who are castrated by another *hijra* (*Dai ma*) get more respect within their community and those operated by doctor get less respect in community. Fourth category includes the individuals *who* is a female by birth but do not have functional reproduction system. Such individuals also join the *hijra* community. In *hijra* community castration ritual is mandatory for the second and third type of *hijra* as it is considered that only through this ritual the individual can achieve *nirvana*. In the context of intersex *hijras*, the popular belief is that intersex *hijras* achieve *nirvana* by birth. According to a newspaper report published in the Tribune of 13<sup>th</sup> Oct 1986, Mr Bholu the president of all India *hijra kalan sabha* made a

statement that 98 per cent *hijras* are castrated individuals and only 2 percent are hermaphrodites. According to him this condition is very rare (Sharma, 1989).

### *The social structure of the hijra community*

During the conversation with one of the respondents of the study, who is a senior member in (*hijra*) community provided the following narrative about the social structure existing within the hijra community in India. He stated that there are seven *gharanas* of *hijras* namely: *Bhendi bazaar wala, Lalan wala, Poona wala, Laucknow wala, Bulak wala, Hadir Ibrhim wala* and *Dilli wala*. Each *gharana* having its own head. The head is called as *nayak*. Under each *nayak* there are many *gurus*. Under the *guru* there are many *chelas*; and *chela's chela* becomes grand *chela* to a *guru* (Sonu, 2020). This interrelationship among the transgenders keeps on continuously increasing creating a unique network of non-biological kinship relation. Generally, the *chelas* of same *guru* live in common house (*dera*). A *chela* may not live in the *dera* of his *guru* but the *chela* still remains the part of his *hijra* community or *dera*. Until an individual does not come under any *guru*; he/she is not accepted as a member of their community. Thus, *deras* become the family of initiation to begin a new life in which *gurus* play an important role. Away from their family of orientation, the *dera* becomes their family where they are initiated/socialised to a new way of life , identity, emotional and economic support. The following lines of one of the respondents expresses this fact:

*Ham logo ne apni duniya bna li kyonki hame hamare hi desh me paraya kardiya or koi bhi dhyaan nhi deta, na hi sarkar, na hi pariwar, hamare to koi dost bhi nhi hai* (we have formed our own world because we are made outsiders in our own country, nobody takes care of us neither the Government nor family, even we don't have any friends). (Sonu, 2020)

To maintain solidarity in community life, the existence of a normative structure is inevitable. Similarly, in the context of the *hijra* community, too, a normative structure prevails. Often the norms of one *gharana* may not be same as the other *gharana*, but it was informed that all the *hijras* are required to follow the norms of the *gharana* to which they belong. If one breaks the law of the *gharana*, they may get punished or may have to pay fine; which is imposed by *jamaat*. The *jamaat* system is a powerful political organisation that has the authority to formulate the laws of the *hizra* community as well as to implement it thereby ensuring social control and uniformity. All seven *nayaks* of each *gharana* are members of *jamaat* (Sonu,

2020). A similar description of the structure of *hijra* community and *jamaat* system has been portrayed by Tripathi (2015) in her autobiography 'me *hijra*, me *laxmi*'.

Earning is necessary to carry out one's life. The most common source of income of the *hijras* in the field of this study is seeking *badhai*<sup>2</sup> from the households where a male child is born or in the households where a son is getting married. They also beg money from the passer byes in the different public spaces like traffic signal, bus stand, railway station, market areas etc. In return of the money received by them, they are supposed to bless the individual who had offered them the money. Each *hijra dera* is allocated an area from where they can earn. They are not allowed to earn from areas that are not allocated to one's *dera*. Violation of this law may create tension between the *hijras* and the violator may be punished. Apart from earning from *badhai* some are also engaged in performing dance or drama at stage shows and earn money from there. Another earning source for them is prostitution.

#### *Castration: A Ritual to attain Nirvana*

In the previous section, it was mentioned that a belief prevails that the *hijras* possess the power to bless or curse, and it is supported by different narrative literature. It is believed that castration grants that power. This belief holds the last strand of connection between the *hijras* and the mainstream society. Therefore, the *hijra* community places a lot of stress on the ritual. It involves a surgical procedure which involves removing the male genitals. The community holds the belief that this ritual is necessary to attain *Nirvana* (salvation). *Nirvana* also means annihilation of all desires, incivility and attachment. Through this ritual, an individual who is reborn as a *Hijra* is required to give up sexual desire through the sacrificial ritual whereby the excised male genital is<sup>3</sup> dedicated to the goddess *Bahuchara Mata*. It indicates an identification with the goddess and thereby her power. It is believed that the pain and sacrifice undergone by the individual grants them the power to bless. After the procedure the newly initiated *hijra* is required to follow a particular diet strictly for forty days in the similar manner as is required by a woman recovering after bearing a child. After the recovery period, the person is dressed up as a bride and is introduced to other members of the community. The person is blessed by the guru, given a new feminine name, asked to worship *Bahuchara Mata* and then receives blessings, food and gifts from the other members of the community. After being accepted as a *hijra* they use feminine pronoun and adjectives to refer to one another. It is believed that after

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<sup>2</sup> Receiving money in return of blessings.

undergoing this ritual, the newly recruited *hijra* becomes empowered to bless an impotent man with potency (Sonu, 2020). These ideas and practices are passed from one generation to the next, like other communities. Within the *hijra* community, too the oral narratives are used as a mechanism to socialise potential members, new recruits, about the prevailing practices, beliefs and norms of the community. Internalisation of these ideologies helps in attaining an unquestioning consensus among the members, which in turn helps in retaining practices like castration despite the fear among many to undergo the process.

Some of the oral narratives that are part of the life world of the *hijra* community, describing the history and significance of castration as narrated to the researcher, have been presented below:

#### First Narrative:

Once, the parents of a prince wanted their son to get married, but the prince was not ready for marriage. His parents selected *Bahuchara Mata* for marriage and forced him to marry her. The prince and the goddess were both very beautiful. After the marriage, the prince did not sleep with his wife on the first night, and he went to the forest. Later, it became a regular practice of the prince and about six months passed. The goddess decided to investigate where the prince went during the night. As the goddess followed the prince at night, she saw that her husband was behaving like a *female* in the forest. She returned home and later questioned her husband about his need for a wife; on hearing this, he confessed his real identity as a *hijra* to her. The goddess was filled with wrath, and she immediately cut off his genitals and said he had spoiled her life, so she will spoil his life too. She said people like him will be castrated, and for castration, they would seek her power (cited by Sonu, 2020).

This story in a subtle way reflects the fact that in society, many individuals are not able to express their true 'self' in front of society due to the fear of stigmatisation, and society often forces individuals to get engaged in heterosexual relation. In such cases, the needs of the other person are compromised. So, the story suggests that individuals not conforming to sexual dimorphism are required to get castrated and thereby assume a new identity. But along with the new identity, such individuals are also required to fit into the role tailored for them and also renounce their sexual desire, as it will not fall under the ambit of heterosexuality. Thus 'body' remains central in shaping the idea of the self and identity. Here, one's desire for self-expression requires compromising with other (sexual) needs, which too is also an inevitable aspect of one's self-expression. It is due to such an arrangement that many individuals are afraid to reveal their true self.

### Narrative 2:

The Champaner's king Bariya was childless. He was unable to take part in child reproduction because his sexual organ did not function properly. One night, he was sleeping, and *Bahuchara Mata* came in his dream and said she would bless him with a son if he wears a green sari and castrates himself.

Indian culture holds a lot of significance for married couples to have children. So, a barren woman or an impotent man is considered incomplete in mainstream society and is often ridiculed. Therefore, a belief exists that if an impotent man sacrifices his genitals and offer to *Bahuchara Mata* and joins the *hijra* community, he will be blessed with a son. (cited by Sonu, 2020)

### Narrative 3

A king prayed in front of *Bahuchara Mata* for a son. The goddess blessed him with a son but the son was impotent and his name was *Jetho*. One night, the goddess appeared in *Jetho's* dream and asked him to castrate himself and wear female clothes and become her servant. *Jethos* obeyed her (cited by Sonu, 2020).

Similar, stories exists in southern part of India (Nanda, 1999) .

### Narrative 4:

Lord *Vishnu* and *Barahama* requested to *Shiva* create the world. *Shiva* agreed and went for meditation. He spent thousands of years in meditating. *Vishnu* and *Barahama* were worried about the world. They started creating the world; when the lord *Shiva* returned from his meditation, he saw that the world had already been created, so he got angry, removed his penis and threw it on the ground (Cited by Sonu, 2020).

So, in the *hijra* community, while performing the castration by *dai ma*, in a similar way, she chops the genitals and throws it on the ground. Thus, the oral narratives play a key role in justifying castration and provide legitimacy to the existence and significance of the *hijra* community.

### *Experiencing castration*

During the study, some of the respondents revealed their experiences of undergoing castration. One of the respondents stated that initially she began living in the *dera* as a guest. But after a few months, a senior *hijra* expressed her feeling to make him (the pronoun is changed after castration) her *chela*. He agreed, but the senior had told him that he would have to castrate him

first if he wanted to become a part of the *hijra* community. He was frightened by this suggestion. The following is his narration about the instance:

*mai sunte hi buri tarah se dar gai. Kyon ki maine kafi hijro se suna tha k castraion me apne ling ko puri trah se katwana hota hai jisme bohot khoon baihta hai or kbhi kbhi kuch hijre mar bhi jate hai ( Sonu, 2020)*

(I was terrified after hearing this, as I had already come to know from some of the *hijras* that this is a genital removal process which is painful and leads to a lot of blood loss from the body and in some cases, the person even dies).

But after a few days, he agreed to undergo the process. His *guru* praised his decision. His *guru* gave him the address of a doctor in Farukhabad (U.P) along with a sum of ten thousand. The doctor was an expert for castrating. The next day, he took a bus to Farukhabad and went to the doctor's clinic. He told the doctor that he wanted to remove his penis. The doctor charged eight thousand rupees, and on the same day, the doctor had operated on him. He was not aware of the process as he was unconscious. But after he woke up after twelve hours, he felt very weak. The doctor discharged him on the second day of the operation. After the operation, when he returned to the *dera* of his *guru*, he was there to welcome him with flowers. He took rest for forty days for recovery; which is a tradition within the community. During that period everyday a *hijra* would wipe his wounded area with warm water and gave him fruits to eat. After the recovery period of forty days, his *guru* invited all the *hijras* of Chandigarh to the *dera* and in front of all, the *guru* laid her hand on the head of the respondent and announced, 'she has become my *chela*'. The *guru* offered him a *chunni* (head cover worn by women) bangles, and a nose pin and gave him a new feminine name. The respondent had then touched the feet of *guru* and other *hijras*. A feast was organised for all the *hijras*. The ceremony continued for four days and during these days other members performed dance and sang songs (Sonu, 2020).

Another individual revealed that after few months of joining *hijra* community; his *guru* asked him to undergo with castration. In her words,

*muje pta to tha k castration karwae bina mujhe hijra samaj bhi accept nhi krega par bohot dar lagta tha. Fir bhi mujhe ye karwana to para hi tha*

"I knew that without castration even the *hijra* society would not accept me; I was afraid but still I had to get it removed".

He had later decided to undertake castration surgery as well as breast enhancement treatment. He collected money and went to Faridabad (UP). He too had learnt from a senior member that there was doctor in Faridabad who was an expert in the castrating surgery. He was charged

20000 rupees for the surgery. His surgery was scheduled on the next day. Before the surgery, the doctor gave injection and made him unconscious. He said after 15 hours he woke up and as he touched himself, he found his penis was not there. On the same day he had returned to Chandigarh. He felt weak and he did not do any work for two months. Hardly, he was able to cook food for himself.

Another individual narrated her experience as:

*Mai ek hijra hu lekin maine castration nhi karvaya. Jaise taise maine castration karwane ka decide kiya or main castration karne Meerut (Uttar Pradesh) gai. Jab mai waha doctor k pass pahuchi buri tarah darr gai or mai wahan se wapis bhaag aai. Mai taiyar nhi hu castration k liye.*

“I am a hijra but I have not undergone castration yet. Somehow once I had decided to undergo castration; therefore, I went to Meerut (Uttar Pradesh) to get myself castrated. When I reached the doctor’s place; I was so terrified that I ran away from there. I am not ready for castration”.

Though he was not yet ready for castration, his guru and other the *hijras* were insisting him to get the castration done and also kept giving addresses of doctors who castrates *hijras* but he was still in a dilemma about it.

Two other individuals had narrated about their experience. They had said that the procedure undertaken by *dai ma* is more painful as no medicines are provided and the flow of blood is not stopped. But when it undertaken by doctor, the process is less painful and proper medication are prescribed. A senior member of the community revealed that if castration is performed by *dai ma*; there are chances that the castrated individual *may* die. She said that one out of ten individual has chances of dying when castration is done by *dai ma* because of the loss of blood. But again, the traditional belief within the community is that blood flows from the male part of the body is necessary and therefore it should not be stopped. Only after that the female blood remains in body. Due to this belief, there are more chances that the castrated individual may lose their life in such cases. The castrated *hijras* are called as *chibra hijra* and non-castrated are called as *akwa hijra* (Sonu, 2020).

Another individual provided the following narration of the pain that she had experienced during and after the castration process to attain *Nirvana*. This procedure was undertaken by *dai ma*.

*Mere guru ne kaha agr hijra community me rehna hai to castration karwan pardega. Mujhe majburi me karwana pardeya kyonki iske ilawa mai jati bhi to kahan. Tou castration karwane ki icha maine dai ma ke samne rakh di; to wo kuch din baad wapis aai. Aane k baad usne fir mujhse pucha ke mai castration karwana chahti hu ki nhi?, to maine jwaab me han kaha, to wo mujhe ander wale kamre me le gae jahan*

*koi nhi tha; fir mere sare kaprde utar kar kursi par laate upper kar ke baithne ko kaha. Dai ma ne mere samne Bahuchara Mata ki tasveer ko rkha or kaha ke bas maan me mata ko yad rakhu or mata, mata pukarte rhu; fir dai ma ne apna chaku nikala jo ki bohut tikha tha; usne ek hath se mere ling ko andde samet pakrd liya. Mai puri tarah se dari hui thi or maine apni ankhe band kar li; fir ek hi jhatke me dai ma ne mere ling ko alag kar diya or khoon tezi se baithne lga. Mujhe bohut dard ho rha tha lekin dai ma ne khoon ko rokne ki koi bhi koshis nhi ki. Bas upper se garam pani dalte gai kuch der baad khoon ruk giya; or mujhe dusre room me bhej diya giya. Us din se har roz ghar me raihne wale hijron ne meri bohut sewa ki, mujhe chalis dino tak ghar ke ek kamre me hi raihne ko kaha giya or kate hue bhag ko kabhi tel se saf kiya jata tha to kabhi pani se, mujhe sbhi aisi chizo ko khane ko mana kiya giya jis se motapa hota hai. Isse kata hua bhag khrab ho skta tha. Chalis dino ke bad jub mujhe kamre se bahar nikala, tou maine nae kaprde paihne. Kafi sare dusre hijre bhi ghar me aae hue the. Mujhe jameen par baitha diya giya or sabhi hijron ne mujhe ashirwaad diya, gift me saree or shagun bhi diya. Kuch is andaz me mera swagat kiya gya or kate gae ling ko jameen me dafna diya giya un chalis dino me. (Sonu, 2020)*

“My guru had said that if I wanted to live in the community then I have to undergo the process of castration. I did not have any other option so I had agreed to it. I expressed my wish to *dai ma*; she came after some days. After she came, she asked me again for my consent. I said yes then she took me to inner room where nobody was present. Then she removed my clothes and made me sit in the chair with legs in upward position. She placed the image of *Bahuchara Mata* in front of me and said I should bring her image in my mind and keep saying *Mata, Mata*. Then, *Dai Ma* picked up her sharp knife in her hand. She held my penis and testicle in the other hand. At that moment I was terrified and had closed my eyes. Immediately she had slashed my genital in a single swipe and blood started flowing very heavily. I was feeling a lot of pain but *dai Ma* did not made any effort to stop the flow. Just warm water was poured on wounded part and after some time blood flow stopped. I was then shifted to another room and from that day onwards all the hijras who were living in the home took a lot of care of me. I was asked to live in a room for forty days and wounded part was washed with oil or sometimes by warm water. I was prohibited to have fatty food as it might create difficulty in healing of the wounded part. After forty days when I came out of my room, I wore new dress. Many other hijras were present in the house. I was asked to sit down on the floor and all the hijra gave blessings, *saree* and *shagun* (good omen) in the form of gift. In this way I was welcomed by them and the chopped penis was buried during the recovery period”.

## **Conclusion**

Thus, this paper tries to argue that in context of India, historically the existence of the third gender has been accepted. But their existence has been accepted within a certain framework or arrangement to reinforce the norms related to heterosexuality. The normative and the narrative literature plays an important role towards this end. So, people who do not conform to sexual dimorphism are disowned by both family and society. It is the *hijra* community that accepts such individuals and gives them an identity but for that castration is an essential criterion. Though shunned by society at many levels, this community has maintained their existence due to this arrangement which conforms the norm of heterosexuality and heterosexual household

system. But the stigma associated with the newly granted identity does not allow them to fully participate in public life and take up a vocation of their choice. Therefore, how a body of an individual is presented, gazed upon and evaluated by others is socially constructed. The ritual that intends to annihilate of all ‘bodily’ desires or disembody ‘self’ too ends up ‘re-embodiment’ self.

Again, on one hand individuals not conforming to heterosexuality are not able to enter an acceptable sexual relation but on the other hand many times due to unavailability of earning avenues, sometimes due to strong sexual desires, sometimes due to coercion, the *hijras* get engaged in prostitution but are often abused in the process. The legal changes in the contemporary period in the form of recognising the ‘third gender’, formation activist groups and social communities for and by the people who are diversely oriented holds a lot of promise to ‘disembody’ the self. This further offers a hope to the individuals who are differently oriented to opt for avenues according to their ability and the freedom of self-expression.

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