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A Third-Sex Subversion of a Two-Gender System*

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The *hijrās* occupy a precarious position in the Indian social matrix, as their ambiguous gender identity provokes conflicting feelings of respect, ridicule, and contempt. Often discussed as a "third sex" by anthropologists, most of India's *hijrās* were raised as boys before taking up residence in one of the many *hijrā* communities which extend to almost every region of India. Since the late 1980's, a number of European and American cultural theorists (e.g., Nanda 1990, 1993, 1994; Bullough and Bullough 1993) have pointed to the visibility of the *hijrā* in Indian society in order to articulate the cultural possibility of a more liberating, non-dichotomous organization of gender. Yet the lifestories of the Hindi-speaking *hijrās* I interviewed in Banaras with Veronica O'Donovan during 1993 reflect a very different reality from that suggested by Nanda—a reality based on familial rejection, cultural isolation, and societal neglect. When the *hijrā* lifestyle is discussed with respect to this contemporary reality instead of historical or mythical representation,¹ their identification as a uniquely situated third sex becomes much more complicated. In their narratives, the *hijrās* seem to view themselves not as the title of Nanda's (1990) book *Neither Man nor Woman* suggests, but rather as "deficiently" masculine and "incompletely" feminine. It may be liberating to believe in the existence of an alternative gender which is not limited by societal expectations, but even the *hijrā* must create self-identity by resisting and subverting a very real and oppressive gender dichotomy—a dichotomy that becomes very apparent in the *hijrās'* own use of feminine and masculine speech.

Although anthropologists and sociologists have alluded to the *hijrās'* unusual speaking styles in their research (Freeman 1979; Lynton and Rajan 1974; Nanda 1990), no one has attempted to analyze the *hijrās'* speech patterns from any sort of linguistic perspective. Lynton and Rajan (1974) remark that the Hindustani-speaking *hijrās* they interviewed "use 'he' and 'she', 'him' and 'her', indiscriminately" (p. 192)—a misleading statement since gender is marked not on pronouns, but on verbs and adjectives.² Similarly Nanda (1990), in the introduction to her ethnography published almost two decades later, explains somewhat simplistically that "Indian languages have three kinds of gender pronouns: masculine, feminine, and a formal, gender-neutral form" (preface, xxii). Nanda interviewed *hijrās* from a variety of different linguistic communities, her conversations mediated by translators in Gujarati, Hindi, and Panjabi. Like Lynton and Rajan before her, she asserts that there is no apparent reason for the *hijrās'* alternations between these feminine and masculine forms, claiming that the choice of gender is completely arbitrary. But in defining all "Indian languages" as having three kinds of gender pronouns, Nanda makes a gross generalization, especially since India hosts well over 2,000 languages and dialects within its borders from a variety of language families. My reason for mentioning these incorrect synopses of linguistic gender in

previous research on the hijrās is not to dismiss such studies as invalid, but rather to illustrate how anthropological fieldwork can be enhanced by an increased awareness of, and attentiveness to, linguistic phenomena. Nanda's work in particular, as the first ethnography to take the hijrās' own lifestories as primary, is an essential contribution to anthropological research. Yet her study would have been even more informative had she approached the hijrās' life narratives from a linguistic perspective as well as an anthropological one.

Although the three Hindi-speaking communities O'Donovan and I spent time with in Banaras are isolated from one another both physically and ideologically, patterns of gesture and speech occur and reoccur. Constrained by a linguistic system which allows for only two morphological genders, Hindi-speaking hijrās, when uttering phrases that are self-referential, must gender themselves as either feminine or masculine. In contrast to the assertions made by Lynton and Rajan (1974) and Nanda (1990), I found that the hijrās, in their daily interactions, alternate between feminine and masculine speech in order to express relations of power—alternations that reflect hierarchical orderings of power in the dualistic gender system that excludes them. Their use of language reflects a lifestyle that is constantly self-defining, as they study, imitate, and parody dichotomous constructions of gender in an effort to gender themselves. Since verbs and adjectives in Hindi are marked for feminine and masculine gender, with verbs being marked in all three persons, the hijrās' attempts at alternating constructions of female and male selves becomes apparent in quite basic choices of feminine and masculine verb and adjective forms.

The alternation between feminine and masculine self-reference in Hindi is quite easy to discern linguistically. The past tense of the verb *honā* 'to be', for instance, is realized as *thā* with masculine singular subjects, *the* with masculine plural subjects, *thī* with feminine singular subjects, and *thī̃* with feminine plural subjects.

TABLE 1. *Past tense forms of honā 'be, become'*

	<i>Masculine</i>	<i>Feminine</i>	<i>English translation</i>
Sg. 1	<i>maī thā</i>	<i>maī thī</i>	I was
Sg. 2	<i>tū thā</i>	<i>tū thī</i>	you (intimate) were
Sg. 3	<i>vah thā</i>	<i>vah thī</i>	he was/she was
Pl. 1	<i>ham the</i>	<i>ham thī̃</i>	we were
Pl. 2	<i>tum the</i>	<i>tum thī̃</i>	you (familiar) were
Pl. 3	<i>ve/ap the</i>	<i>ve/ap thī̃</i>	they/you (formal) were

The habitual, progressive, and intransitive perfective verb forms in Hindi similarly show gender concord with the subject. These three aspectual tenses are formed by the addition of suffixes and verbal auxiliaries to the verb stem: aspect is indicated through the addition of explicit markers of various kinds to the stem; tense is indicated through the presence of one of the basic forms of *honā* 'to be' (i.e., present, past, presumptive, subjunctive). Again, the appearance of one of the vowels *-ā*, *-e*, *-ī*, or *-ī̃* signals the number (singular vs. plural) and gender (feminine vs. masculine) of the subject of the verb.

TABLE 2. Selected examples of first person verbal marking with *jānā* 'to go'

Verb tense	1st person masculine	1st person feminine	English translation
Future	<i>maī jāūgā</i>	<i>maī jāūgī</i>	I will go
Past	<i>maī gayā</i>	<i>maī gayī</i>	I went
Present Habitual	<i>maī jātā hū</i>	<i>maī jātī hū</i>	I go
Past Habitual	<i>maī jātā thā</i>	<i>maī jātī thī</i>	I used to go
Present Progressive	<i>maī jā rahā hū</i>	<i>maī jā rahī hū</i>	I am going
Past Progressive	<i>maī jā rahā thā</i>	<i>maī jā rahī thī</i>	I was going
Simple Perfective	<i>maī gayā</i>	<i>maī gayī</i>	I went
Present Perfective	<i>maī gayā hū</i>	<i>maī gayī hū</i>	I have gone
Past Perfective	<i>maī gayā thā</i>	<i>maī gayī thī</i>	I had gone

Inflecting adjectives also agree with the nouns they modify in gender, number, and case, with *-ā* or *-e* agreeing with masculine nouns and *-ī* with feminine nouns.³ Moreover, inflecting postpositions agree with the gender of the head noun, so that, for example, the postposition translated into English as 'of' will appear as *kā* when modifying a singular masculine noun, *ke* when modifying a plural masculine noun, and *kī* when modifying a singular or plural feminine noun. The hijrās' varied use of these forms, as well as their varied use of first, second, and third person verbal forms, reflects a unique dual-gender position in a society that views them as neither fully feminine nor fully masculine.

Since the majority of hijrās are raised as boys, they must learn how to project a new gender identity when they adopt the hijrā lifestyle—an identity which distances itself from masculine representations in its appropriation of feminine dress, social roles, gesture, and language. These appropriations often become self-conscious emblems of gender construction in the hijrās' narratives. Sunita, for instance, who although once associated with a hijrā community in Banaras now lives outside of the city with a male companion,⁴ views gender as something to be put on in the way one would put on a *sārī* (a dress traditionally worn by Indian women), an investiture which eventually leads to the acquisition of women's language:

- (2) When I have put on a *sārī*, then I have to act like it. If I walk around like a man, then what's the advantage to wearing a *sārī*? When I've put on a *sārī*, grown out my hair, and put on earrings, I've become a woman so I will live as a woman. Emotions inside mean nothing. When I wear a *sārī*, I am a woman only. I walk like a woman. I laugh like a woman. Those who come here to be hijrās—those who understand everything about themselves—will begin to dance and sing. Then everything happens. Whoever knows his heart will feel at home. Whoever doesn't know his heart won't think right. If she wears a *sārī*, then she has turned into a woman. It is then that she will speak in the feminine.

Sunita continues this discussion by explaining that when she looks like a woman, she correspondingly walks, laughs, and talks like one, employing feminine-marked verb forms like those mentioned in excerpt (3) below, among them *khātīf hū* 'I eat^f' and *jātīf hū* 'I go^f'.⁵ Alternatively, she explains that when she wears a *kurtā* or *lūngī*, both of which are clothes traditionally worn by North Indian men, she speaks as a man, employing masculine-marked verb forms like *khātā^m hū* 'I eat^m'

and *jātā^m hū* 'I walk^m':

- (3) *ādmī kā bāt karnā hogā, to mē sārī*
pahan nahī lūṅī^f/... jab sārī pahan
lūṅī^f, ham mē se to aurat kā bāt hogā,
*... jab sārī nahī pahan lūṅī^f, *tab*
mard kā bāt// ... hā/ jaise mē lūṅī
kurtā pahan lūṅī^f, ... tab "khātā^m
hū," "jātā^m hū," hote hai/ ... sārī
pahankar aurat vālā boltī^f hū,
"khātī^f hū," "jātī^f hū// ... kuch nahī
diqqat hotī hai, ... to jo jāntā hai to
jāntā hī hai na? ... to jāntā hī hai, ...
ki hijrā hai/... abhī sārī pahan liyā
abhī lūṅī kurtā pahan liyā to mard
kī tarah mardānā ho gayā//

If I'm going to have a conversation with a man, then I won't wear^f a *sārī*. When I wear^f a *sārī*, then among us the conversation will be in the feminine; when I don't wear^f a *sārī*, *then it's men's conversation, yes. For example, if I wear^f a *lūṅī-kurtā* [dress and shirt worn by North Indian men], then it's like, "I eat^m," "I go^m." [But] when wearing a *sārī*, I speak^f like a woman, "I eat^f," "I go^f." It's not difficult. He who knows just knows, right? He just knows that he's a hijrā. Now he's put on a *sārī*, now he's put on a *lūṅī-kurtā*, so he's become masculine like a man.

Yet even though Sunita describes the acquirement of feminine speech as an unconscious process which merely coincides with the decision to wear a *sārī*, she is critically aware of the social meanings attached to her linguistic choices. In her conversations with us, Sunita almost always referred to herself in the first person feminine, yet she adamantly explained that her choice of linguistic gender is variable, and moreover, that this choice is intimately bound up with the role she decides to play in an interaction. It is when she wears men's clothes, she later elaborates, that she gives orders to her housemates or speaks more formally with a non-hijrā man, using the polite form of the imperative. This style of speaking is at odds with the self she presents when she cooks breakfast or dinner in the kitchen, an activity which prompts her to chat casually with other hijrās and neighborhood women in feminine speech, using intimate and familiar forms of the imperative.

Sunita's choice of language, then, is contingent not only upon the social role she is performing at the moment, but also upon the addressee, whose gender calls for an appropriate level of politeness. She is highly aware of the fact that her speech changes with the gender of the hearer, explaining in excerpt (4) that when she converses with a woman she speaks as a woman; when she converses with a man she speaks as a man.⁶

- (4) *mujh ko koī bāt nahī lagtā hai/*
maī aurat jaisī boltī^f hū, ... ādmī
*se ādmī jaisā bāt kartī^f hū, ... *jo*
jaisā miltā hai us se vaisā hī bāt
kartī hū// ... jaise koī ā gayā to
kahtā hai [in rapid speech, falling
intonation], "kyā bāt hai// ...

It's just not a big deal to me. I speak^f like a woman, [but] with a man I speak^f like a man. I speak^f just like the person I meet. For example, if someone [a man] just came over then it would be like [in rapid speech, falling intonation], "What's the problem?"

*jaise hamāre ghar par koī ā gayā,
to us se mē aur khānā na banūḡī^f,
ki [in slow speech, rising
intonation] "maī jā rahī^f hū,"
"maī khā rahī^f hū," ... na?*

For example, if someone came to my house and I [didn't want to] cook^f any more food for him, then it's like [in slow speech, rising intonation], "I am going^f," "I am eating^f." Right?

By the end of the passage, however, it becomes clear that when Sunita claims, "I speak just like the person I meet," she actually means that she makes her speech correspond to the level of intimacy she feels with the addressee. If a male stranger comes by her house uninvited, then using rapid speech and falling intonation, Sunita will respond *kyā bāt hai* 'what's the matter?'—a response which for her represents "men's language." Yet if the male visitor is someone she is intimate with, and even more importantly, if he is someone who wants her to perform a task that she does not want to perform, then she will employ feminine-marked phrases like *maī jā rahī^f hū* 'I am going', *maī khā rahī^f hū* 'I am eating', using slow speech and rising intonation. Sunita later comments that she employs the latter, more-feminine style primarily in her conversations with male friends, who allow her to become fully feminine. By assuming what she refers to as a submissive and coquettish posture, she is able to have *hā hā hī hī*—an interjection which connotes pleasure, laughter, and flirtation.

The acquisition of a feminine persona is not an easy transition for all hijrās, nor is the female/male gender construction as clearly delineated as it is for Sunita in her narratives. Priya, a hijrā from one of the hijrā communities in Banaras, wrestles with the symbolic import of feminine and masculine speech in her everyday interactions. Unlike the other hijrās we interviewed, Priya leads a quiet and secluded life away from her group, seeing her fellow hijrās only during their morning song and dance performances. In the home she shares with a small family, she dresses and speaks only as a man so that her housemates will feel comfortable with her presence, her femininity visible only in her topknot, earrings, nose ring, and understated eye make-up. Priya spent the first sixteen years of her life as a boy, yet never felt wholly comfortable with this role, ultimately deciding to undergo castration so as to adopt the hijrā lifestyle. Since she had spent most of her boyhood adhering to male roles and representations, this transition was not an easy or fluid one. She explains in excerpt (5) that the acquisition of women's speech in particular was a long and laborious process, so much so that it eventually interfered with her status as a hijrā since group members "always and only speak as women when together." Her hijrā peers, for instance, aware of the trouble she was having from the outset, would jokingly refer to her as *bhāīyā* 'brother' or *cācā* 'uncle', designations which brought her great grief:

- (5) *ghar mē, to ... mardānā pahle the^m/
to mardānā bolī bolte-bolte^m haī/ ...
jab hijrā ko jānā partā hai to
parivartan karnā partā hai,*

[Hijrās] were^m masculine before, so in the home they are always speaking^m in the masculine. When the hijrā has to leave, he has to make a change.

vahĩ to bolc^m na beṭā/... jab ghar se
 āyā^m, ... jab ghar se ayā^m, to ghar
 kī bolī mardānā to mē, to mardānā
 bolī bolā^m/ ... bhāiyā ko bhāiyā bol
 rahe haī, cācā ko cācā bol rahe^m haī/
 ... aise bol rahe^m haī// to usko
 parivartan karne mē ṭāīm to lagta hī
 hai/ ... to usko parivartan karne mē
 ṭāīm lagta hai// bolte-bolte bolte-
 bolte, ... ādat ho gayī--... sat-chah
 mahīne mē//

Here they didn't speak^m like boys.
 When I left^m home- when I left^m home,
 my speech at home was masculine so I
 spoke^m masculine. Everybody was
 calling^m me bhāiyā 'brother', bhāiyā,
 they were calling^m me cācā 'paternal
 uncle', cācā, they were speaking^m like
 that. So it took a lot of time to make a
 change, it took time to make a change.
 But after speaking and speaking for a
 very long time, it eventually became a
 habit--in about six or seven months.

Priya's transition from male to female speech, then, was a highly conscious process, one that required several months of practice (or in Priya's own words *bolte-bolte bolte-bolte* 'speaking and speaking, speaking and speaking') before it *ādat ho gayī* 'became a habit'. It is interesting to note that Priya, unlike Sunita, consistently employs the masculine first-person singular, using masculine-marked verbs like *āyā^m* 'came', instead of the feminine counterpart *āyī^f*.

Throughout her conversations with us, Priya emphasized again and again how necessary it is for hijrās to achieve fluency in women's language. Indeed, the use of feminine speech is so expected within the hijrā community that the use of masculine reference will provoke angry retaliation. Priya adds in excerpt (6) that hijrās "even give curses like women"—meaning that they refrain from using those curses which involve negative reference to the addressee's mother or sister:

- (6) *nahĩ/ banāras mē nahĩ hai/ .. banāras
 mē koī mardānā janānā--koī pasand
 nahĩ kartā hai/ ... mardānā kah do to
 jhagrā kar lēgī^f / .. apne logō mē to
 bolēgī^f to aurat jaisā/ ... gālī bhī
 dēgī^f, to aurat jaisā/ ... mardānā gālī
 nahĩ dete^m haī hijrā/ .. auratō jaisā/
 abhī nahĩ kahēngī^f "terī mā kī," "terī
 bahan kī," nahĩ kahēngī^f/ ... ye gālī
 nahĩ dēngī^f/ ... auratō kī tarah// ...
 mardānā log kahte^m haī, "terī mā
 kī," "terī bahan kī"/ ... "vo salī" ādi,
 ... ye .. "vo chotā sālā," .. uṭāēgī^f vo
 nahĩ //*

No, it's not that way in Banaras. In Banaras, no one--no one likes to be known as a man. Address someone in the masculine and we'll^f fight. Among ourselves we speak^f like women. We even give^f curses like women. Hijrās don't give^m curses like men, but like women. So we will never say^f "your mother's..." or "your sister's..." ; we won't say them. We won't give^f these curses. [We curse] like women. Men say^m "your mother's..." ; "your sister's..." ; "she's a *sālī*" ['wife's sister'; a term of abuse directed to women], etc, these kinds, "he's a little *sālā*" ['wife's brother'; a term of abuse directed to men]. We won't say^f that.

It is interesting that when Priya includes herself as a member of the hijrā community and speaks in the first-person plural, her self-reference switches from the masculine to the feminine. When explaining how she and the other hijrās in her community

curse, for instance, she employs feminine-marked future forms, among them *jhaḡra kar lēgīf* 'we will fight^f', *bolēgīf* 'we will speak^f', *gālī bhī dēgīf* 'we will give^f curses', *kaḡgīf* 'we will say^f'. Although she identifies herself as masculine when referring to herself independently of other hijrās, she constructs herself as feminine when viewing herself as part of the larger community, a community which aggressively identifies itself as feminine. This is perhaps related to the fact that she almost always refers to hijrās collectively in the feminine. In excerpt (5) she used the masculine, but her choice of gender there seems to be determined by the term *hijrā* itself, a noun which is grammatically masculine and which acts as the understood subject in most of her sentences.

The antipathy towards masculine linguistic forms which Priya alludes to in excerpt (6) is also reflected in the hijrā naming system. When a new member enters the hijrā community, she is given a woman's name to replace the name of her former, more male self. The hijrās are discouraged from referring to each other with these remnants of their previous lives, yet tellingly, they often employ them in disputes. If a hijrā is in a fierce argument with another member of her community, one of the most incisive insults she can give is to question her addressee's femininity by using her male name. This is perhaps symptomatic of the fact that hijrās are intensely aware of how they are perceived, not only by their peers, but by other Indians as well. Sunita, for example, is critically aware of how she is addressed when outside of her home. While many men encounter her on the street by using the intimate imperative *cal haṭ*, a form which, when used between strangers, translates rudely as 'move it', she claims that others use the polite form *cal jāie* or 'please move'. It is this latter group of people, she says, who are most likely to address her in the feminine form in public, an address which for her symbolizes respect.

Priya is also aware of the social meanings attached to her use of language, so much so that she hides her female speech and mannerisms while at home with her landlord's family, giving us glimpses of it only when she relays group interactions. In contrast to Sunita, then, who sees language as something which can be used to enhance the performance of a gender role, Priya sees language as a deeply personal matter. When explaining the structure of her own hijrā community, she carefully frames her discussion in terms of father/son relationships, perhaps in an effort to make her explanation more acceptable to outsiders. When she describes why hijrās like herself have chosen to live apart from the community, she compares the leader of the group to a father and its members to sons, explaining that "when families have several children, some sons live with their father, others live apart from him." She maintains this use of masculine kinship terms, however, only when speaking in the third person about other hijrās from the adopted standpoint of an outsider. When she mimics her own interactions with other hijrās in the community, especially when using first or second person to do so, she shifts to feminine speech. At a number of points in her conversations with us, Priya pointed out that the speech she was using was very different from the speech she would use in the hijrā

community. When we questioned this claim, she produced as evidence a number of sample conversations that might occur among in-group members, employing feminine marking on first and second person verbs:

- (7) *to ham logō mē cācā vagairah nahī,*
kahte hai/ na, ki apne se mausī,
mausī, kahēgī/ ... mausī kahēgī/ ...
apne guru ko guru bolēgī/ ...
musalmān log rahēgī to bolēgī,
khālā. ... khālā guru, ... aise ham hī
bāt kartī hai// ... zyādātār se strīlīg
calta hai/ is mē/ ... strīlīg, ... auratō
kī bātcī is se caltī hai// ... jāb sath-
sath rahatī hai, to hamesā strīlīg mē
bāt kartī hai/ ... abhī ki vo ā jāēngī,
to ham isī kapre mē hai, magar bāt
vahī hogā/ ... "kyō gayī thī," "kahā
thī," "kya kar rahī thī," "kahā
gayī thī," ... "to badhāi kyū nahī
āyī," "khānā khāogī,"/ ... āpas mē
ham log aise hī boltī hai, "maī kar
rahī hū," "maī jā rahī hū," "maī
khā rahī hū"//

So among ourselves *cācā* 'paternal uncle', etc., isn't said, we call^f ourselves *mausī* 'maternal aunt', *mausī*, we say^f *maūsī*. We call^f our *guru guru*. If Muslim people are present^f, they'll say *khālā*^f 'maternal aunt' [an urdu term], *khālā guru*. This is the way we talk^f. Mostly it's in the feminine--in the feminine. It's like the conversation of women. When we're^f together, we always talk^f in the feminine. If someone [a fellow hijrā] were to come here right now, I'd be in these clothes [*lūngī, kurtā*], but our conversation would be like this: "Why had^f you [intimate] gone^f?" "Where were^f you [intimate]?" "What were you [intimate] doing^f?" "Why didn't the *badhāi* [expected payment for a performance] come?" "Will you [familiar] eat^f?" With each other we speak^f like this: "I am doing^f," "I am going^f," "I am eating^f."

Although Priya referred to her guru as *dādā* 'paternal grandfather' in the beginning of one conversation with us, she later refers to her guru as *dādī* 'paternal grandmother' when she reconstructs a group interaction which revolved around her, describing her by using feminine-marked adjectives.

In light of both Priya's and Sunita's clearly articulated reflections on their alternating uses of feminine and masculine speech, it is interesting that Aruna, the leader of a second Banaras community, adamantly insists that hijrās never speak as men. Like Priya, Aruna creates a number of feminine-marked phrases as examples of hijrā speech, together with a number of intimate second person imperatives, such as *tū khā le* 'you [intimate] eat!' and *tū pakā le* 'you [intimate] cook!' Since imperatives in Hindi are not marked for gender, Aruna's inclusion of these forms as examples of feminine speech works to support Sunita's claim that intimacy and familiarity is normally associated with women's language:

- (8) *hā/ hamesā auratō kī bolī boltī hai*
kabhī bhī ādmī ke jaisā nahī boltī
hai/ ... jaise, "maī jā rahī hū jī"
"jā rahī bahan," "tū khā le," "tū
pakā le," "maī abhī ā rahī hū"//

Yes, we always speak^f women's speech. We never ever speak^f like a man. It's like, "I'm going^f," "sister is going^f," "you [intimate] eat!" "you [intimate] cook!" "I'm coming^f now."

Aruna usually makes linguistic claims like those in (8), however, only after issuing a stream of assertions which might be said to constitute the hijrā 'party line', namely, that hijrās never have castration operations, never have relations with men, never take on new names, and never speak as men. Aruna, who has a high-profile in her district of Banaras, is very aware of how her own self-presentation affects societal opinion, especially in light of the recent increase of anti-hijrā violence in northern India; she is more interested than the other hijrās in projecting a self that conforms to societal expectations—a self that is both ascetically motivated and anatomically determined. Although studies by Indian journalists and sociologists (e.g., Mitra 1983; Sharma 1989; Singh 1982) have worked to dispel the cultural myth that hijrās are born as hermaphrodites, reporting in-depth about the life-threatening testicle and penis castrations that hijrās endure, a large portion of Indian society still clings to the belief that all hijrās were born with ambiguous sex organs. Aruna's insistence that the hijrās have always had feminine names and have never spoken in the masculine serves to support this perception, affirming a cultural belief that the hijrā lifestyle is not socially constructed, but rather something that begins at (or before) birth.

Most of the hijrās we interviewed, with the exception of Priya who became a hijrā as an adult, primarily employ feminine marked verbs when speaking in the first person or when speaking to other hijrās in the second person. When using the third person to refer to other hijrās, however, the hijrās are much less consistent, their choice of marking dependent on the relative social status of the referent in question. When the hijrās speak in the third person and express distance from the referent, particularly when the referent is perceived as either a superior or a subordinate, they tend to make greater use of the masculine; in contrast, when the hijrās express solidarity or familiarity with the referent, they tend to make greater use of the feminine. In excerpt (9) below, for example, Sunita explains how the most well-known hijrās in Banaras, namely Idu, Shanti, and Shabdana, came to be so important within the hijrā community. When describing how hijrās reach positions of power in the hijrā network, and how she herself will someday acquire a position of power, Sunita switches back and forth between feminine and masculine reference. Hijrās rely not only upon their own internal systems of law and order, but also upon elaborate familial structures which delegate various feminine roles to different members of the group, among them *dādī* 'paternal grandmother', *nānī* 'maternal grandmother', *mausī* 'mother's sister', *cācī* 'uncle's wife', and *bahin* 'sister'. Fundamental to this system is the guru-disciple relationship, which Sunita describes using only masculine terminology: she uses the masculine *dādā* 'paternal grandfather' and the masculine *celā* 'male disciple' instead of the feminine *dādī* 'paternal grandmother' or feminine *celī* 'female disciple'. Although Sunita sometimes employs feminine marking on the verb when referring to Idu, Shanti, and Shabdana, particularly in the first few lines of the following excerpt below when the three of them act as subjects of a particular action, she consistently employs the masculine kinship term *dādā* when relating their social status:

(9) *ye log banāras kā-- pahle-pahle
banāras mē va *hī log the^m// ... ve log
thī^f, ve log māgtī^f thī^f, khātī^f thī^f, ...
to ... uske bād, jab itnā hijrā āyā^m, ...
vo celā banātī^f gayī, vo uskā^m
celā^m, vo uskā^m celā^m, vo uskā^m
celā^m, vo uskā^m celā^m, tar par tar tar
par tar, ... ātā gayā/ ... tab nān[ā]^m
guru ban gaye^m/ dād[ā]^m guru ban
gaye^m, ... isī tarah/ ham log kā ek
kōṭeśan hotā hai/ ... ham log kā
bātcīṭ alag hotā hai/ ... hā/ jaise [in a
soft voice] celā^m/ ... nātī^m parnātī^m,
... hā ... (?) sabhī log kahte hāī, par
ham logō mē celā^m hotā^m hai/ ...
dād[ā]^m guru hotā^m hai, pardād[ā]^m
guru hotā^m hai, ... māīyā^f hotī^f hāī,
... is tarah kā hotā hai/ jahā bhi barā
admī^m rahtā^m hai, isī tarah kahā
jātā hai// bare logō ko// ... māī yahā
kā^m mālkin^f hū, ... ab hamē koī
āyegā^m to uskā celā to hamārā^m
celā^m ho jāyegā^m ... ab phir dūsrā^m
āyegā^m, to usko usko celā^m kārā
dūgī^f, to māī dādī^f ban jāūgī^f, ... tab
merā *hī nām rahegā, ... purānī^f to
māī ho gayī^f, to merā nām usī tarah
jaise vahā purānī^f ho gayī^f to un logō
kā nām hai, ... mālkin^f hai//*

These people from^m Banaras-- the very same people [Idu, Shanti, and Shabdana] were^m in Banaras a long, long time ago. They were^f here, they were^f begging^f, they were^f eating^f. Then after a while, when so many hijrās came^m, she [Idu] made^f [someone] a celā^m 'disciple', then he [made someone] his celā^m, he [made someone] his celā^m, he [made someone] his celā^m, he [made someone] his celā^m, and so on and so on it continued. Then they [Idu, Shanti, and Shabdana] became^m a nān[ā]^m 'maternal grandfather' guru, then they became^m a dād[ā]^m 'paternal grandfather' guru. This is the way our system works. We have different words, yes, like [in a soft voice] celā^m, 'disciple', nātī^m 'grandson', parnātī^m 'great grandson'. Everyone says [?], but among us it's celā^m, it's dād[ā]^m guru, it's pardād[ā]^m 'paternal great grandfather' guru, it's māīyā^f 'mother' [respectful]. Wherever an important person lives^m, this is what is said--for important people. At this house I'm the mālkin^f 'landlady'. If someone comes^m to me now, then his celā will become^m my celā^m. If someone else comes^m and I make^f him his celā^m, then I'll become^f a dādī^f 'paternal grandmother'. Then *even I will have a title, but only when I've become^f old^f. So in the same way that I'll have a name when I get^f old^f, those people have a name. [Now] it's mālkin^f.

It is interesting that at the end of the passage, when Sunita imagines herself in the same position of power as these three elders, she refers to her future self with the feminine kinship term *dādī*. This shift indicates that Sunita feels obligated to use the masculine when signaling respect for, or distant from, the referent in question—an employment which is of course unnecessary when she refers to herself.

A different sort of distancing by use of the masculine gender occurs whenever Sunita refers to Muslim hijrās, with whom, as a Hindu, she feels somewhat at odds. Although Muslims and Hindu hijrās often live together harmoniously in the same communities—an arrangement rarely found in mainstream Banaras where the tension between Muslims and Hindus is quite pervasive—Sunita seems to feel

somewhat threatened by Muslim hijrās, as they hold powerful positions within the Banaras hijrā network, and indeed, throughout all of northern India. The distance Sunita feels towards Muslim hijrās is reflected in her use of the singular *musalmān*, itself considered masculine, and in her employment of third person masculine-marked verb forms when Muslim hijrās act as subjects, as in the short narrative reproduced in (10):

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>(10) <i>maī hindū hū, to apnā hindū kā kām kartī, jo musalmān hai, vah apnā musalmān kā kām kartā^m hai, apnā dharm nibhātā^m hai, maī apnā dharm nibhātī^f hū//</i></p> | <p>I'm Hindu so I practice^f my Hindu customs, he who is Muslim practices^m Muslim customs. He performs^m his dharm, I perform^f my dharm.</p> |
|---|--|

This passage invites comparison with Priya's reference to Muslims in excerpt (7) above: *musalmān log rahēgī^f, to bolēgī^f, khālā, khālā guru* 'If Muslim people are present^f, they'll say^f *khālā^f* 'maternal aunt' [an urdu term], *khālā guru*'. Priya not only pluralizes the masculine *musalmān* to *musalmān log* 'Muslim people' so as to include the feminine, she also employs feminine-marked verb forms like *rahēgī^f* and *bolēgī^f*. Sunita's use of the third-person masculine in (10), then, perhaps reflects her own opinion that Muslims are below her on the social hierarchy, evidenced in her insistence throughout her interviews with us that Hindu hijrās existed long before Muslim hijrās, and moreover, that it is only hijrās from low caste backgrounds who convert to Islam and eat meat.

A comparable instance of such distancing can be found in Aruna's references to Sunita. After a fairly serious argument with Aruna, Sunita left Aruna's community in Banaras and went to live with a male partner in a neighboring village outside the city. In a manner consistent with her claims, Aruna almost always uses feminine forms when referring to other hijrās; yet when she refers to Sunita, who apparently insulted her authority as *mālkin* of her community, Aruna uses the masculine. Two examples of this employment are reproduced in excerpt (11):

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>(11) <i>bacpan se yahī kā^m hai/ ... ab jākar [a neighboring village] mē rah rahā^m hai/ ... merā jajmānī hai, to maī un logō ko de detī hū//</i></p> | <p>He [Sunita] has been^m here since childhood, [but] now he left and is living^m in [a neighboring village]. It's the home of my patron, but I gave him away to those people.</p> |
|--|--|

Through the use of masculine-marked postpositions like *kā^m* 'of^m' and masculine-marked verb forms like *rah rahā^m hai* 'he is living^m', Aruna is perhaps signaling that Sunita is not only estranged from her, but also inferior to her.

An interesting kind of masculine self-reference sometimes occurs when the hijrās refer to themselves as boys or tell of their childhood. As mentioned earlier, Aruna rarely employs masculine first person verbs, yet at two points in the telling of her life story—when she was recalling her past and explaining how she came to

realize that she was a hijrā—Aruna does in fact employ the first-person masculine, as reproduced in (12):

(12) *hā/ māī bolī^f ki paṭna mē rahne se
merā to beizzatī hogā/ merā ghar vālō
kī māī aisā dūr calī^f jāū, ki logō mē
beizzatī nahī hogā/ ... koī log
pūchēnge, kahēge, to kah dēnge kī
pānī mē rūbkar mar gayī^f/ ... merā
gaṅgā jī ke kināre ghar thā, merā mā-
bāp bolā ki "calo/ ... jāne do/ isko
acchā lagegā"// ... to māī gyārah
baje rāt ko āyā^m ... apne ghar se/ ...
māī apne guru ke yahā pāc sāl se
baitā^m huā^m//*

I told^f them that dishonor would come from my living at home. I would go^f so far away from the people at home that there would be no dishonor among them. If some people would ask them [about me]--would talk--they should say that I drowned in the water and died^f. My house was on the bank of the Ganges. My mom and dad said, "Come on, let him go, it will be okay." So at 11:00 at night, I left^m home. I was^m sitting^m at the house of my guru at five years of age.

During this short narrative, Aruna moves from feminine self-reference in the first line to masculine self-reference in the last two lines, shifting directly after she reproduces a childhood interaction between herself and her parents. Nanda (1990) alludes to similar linguistic shifts in the preface to her own ethnography when she explains her translation techniques, remarking that she translates pronouns which refer to the hijrās as feminine, unless "referring to the hijrā in the past, when he considered himself a male" (xviii, preface). The linguistic shift in the above excerpt perhaps reflects the fact that Aruna, like many of the other hijrās we interviewed, has what might be called a discontinuous gender identity—an identity which gradually changed from masculine to feminine after arrival in the hijrā community. As in the previous two examples, the hijrā's use of masculine marking in this case might reflect her own distancing from her previous self, a self that continuously provides an unpleasant reminder that her femininity is appropriated instead of genuine.

The four hijrās who make up a third community in Banaras, all born into Hindu families who ostracized them, have now adopted the religious practices of the Muslim families they live with—families who in many ways suffer a similar marginalization as residents of a city that is thought of throughout North India as the "holy Hindu city." The 80 year old Chandra is the *dādā* of the group, and after 69 years of speaking like a woman, we rarely heard her use any masculine speech. The third time we visited her, however, Chandra's favorite disciple had fled back to her own village after a serious financial scuffle with another community member. Chandra was feeling intense rage at the cause of this dispute, as well as deep grief for her loss. Wailing *merā beṭā, merā beṭā* 'my son, my son' and clapping in anger, Chandra screamed about the punishment that the hijrā who precipitated the fight would receive, venting her anger entirely through use of the masculine first and third person. It would seem that for the hijrās, as Priya suggests in excerpt (6), anger is an emotion which is best expressed in the masculine. Perhaps rage is a gut-level reaction that recalls the masculine forms that the hijrā produced prior to her

entry into the community, or perhaps masculine forms are simply a dramatic and forceful tool for venting such rage. Regardless of the reason, the hijrā is clearly aware of the social meanings such forms convey.

I would like to conclude this article by suggesting that such gendered negotiations, although perhaps particularly overt in the Hindi-speaking hijrā community, are not unique to alternative gender identities; rather, women and men of all communities manipulate cultural expectations of femininity and masculinity in order to establish varying positions of power. Yet the structure of these manipulations is influenced by, and indeed sometimes determined by, societal ideologies of femininity and masculinity. While the Banaras hijrās challenge such ideologies in their conflicting employments of masculine and feminine speech, their employment of linguistic gender is nevertheless influenced by a very traditional and dichotomous notion of gender. While they tend to make greater use of the masculine when conducting business, giving orders, speaking with men, or signaling distance from the referent, they are more likely to employ the feminine when requesting, cooking, flirting, speaking with other women, or expressing intimacy and solidarity. Occupying an ambiguously-situated position in a society that has marginalized them, hijrās are perhaps more attentive to these linguistic ideologies than their non-hijrā peers, enacting and contesting them in their everyday projections of self.

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NOTES

1. For more extensive discussions of transsexuality in Indian tradition and mythology, see Goldman (1993), Nanda (1990), and O'Flaherty (1973, 1980).
2. The term *Hindustani*, although seldom used today, refers to one of the lingua francas which developed during the last two centuries as a result of increased trade and pilgrimages between linguistically disparate regions. Although for the British administration the terms *Hindustani* and *Urdu* were essentially synonymous, Indian speakers distinguished *Hindustani* from *Urdu* as a more colloquial and less refined language.
3. More precisely, masculine forms of inflecting adjectives end in *-ā* in the singular direct and *-e* in the singular oblique, plural direct, and plural oblique cases; the feminine forms always end in *-ī*, whether singular or plural, direct or oblique.
4. I have chosen pseudonyms for all of the hijrās appearing in this article and have avoided giving the names of the three hijrā communities we researched to preserve their anonymity. I have also chosen to use 'her' and 'she' to refer to the hijrās since they prefer to be referred to and addressed

in the feminine. (It is interesting to note that when Indian journalists are sympathetic to the hijrās they tend to refer to them in the feminine, but when unsympathetic they use the masculine.)

5. The superscripted *f* and *m* in the Hindi transcriptions and English translations stand for feminine and masculine marking, respectively. Other transcription conventions I have used include:

,	rising intonation, signaling more to come	< >	pauses of one second or more, measured
/	falling intonation, signaling more to come	*	syllabic emphasis
//	falling intonation, signaling conclusion	--	false start
..	pauses of less than .5 second	" "	embedded quotation
...	pauses of more than .5 second, unmeasured	[]	extra-linguistic commentary

I have tried to transcribe each of the Hindi passages as *spoken*, maintaining any anomalies in gender agreement which occurred in the interviews. In excerpt (3), for instance, there are a number of markings which are inconsistent with standard Hindi, such as when Sunita treats the feminine noun *bāt* 'conversation' as masculine, modifying it with the postposition *kā^m* instead of *kī^f*. These agreement inconsistencies are related to the fact that many of the hijrās we interviewed spoke a number of languages and dialects, the most common of these being Northern Bhojpuri. Like Hindi, Bhojpuri features gender-marking in all three persons of the verb, although the distribution of these markings and their phonological realizations are quite different. I plan to discuss gender inconsistencies like those in excerpt (3), together with the hijrās use of Bhojpuri, in a subsequent article.

6. Interestingly, Sunita's claim here parallels an earlier claim that she made when we asked her about her use of Bhojpuri as compared to Hindi. "When I speak with a Bhojpuri speaker I speak Bhojpuri," she explained. "When I speak with a Hindi speaker I speak Hindi."

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