
October 2022

Cultural Violence, Violent Gendering, and Abjection: Discourses on Sites of Violence through Trans Women's Narratives from India

Tanupriya

Dhishna Pannikot

Follow this and additional works at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws>



Part of the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Tanupriya and Pannikot, Dhishna (2022) "Cultural Violence, Violent Gendering, and Abjection: Discourses on Sites of Violence through Trans Women's Narratives from India," *Journal of International Women's Studies*: Vol. 24: Iss. 6, Article 8.

Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol24/iss6/8>

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

This journal and its contents may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Authors share joint copyright with the JIWS. ©2022 Journal of International Women's Studies.

Cultural Violence, Violent Gendering, and Abjection: Discourses on Sites of Violence through Trans Women's Narratives from India

By Tanupriya¹ and Dhishna Pannikot²

Abstract

The conventional cultural construct of gender and sexuality embedded in the dichotomous paradigm makes it challenging for people with queer and trans identities to fit into an assigned social role. Violent gendering takes place where women are seen as second-order beings, disciplined and controlled by men, the first-order beings. The process of feminization and femininity is linked to women, which fixates on the idea that “one is born a woman” rather than “one becomes a woman.” This violent process of acculturation to these set norms comes with a lot of vulnerability for trans people in the form of abiding by the parameters of femininity and the threat of physical violence against their intersecting and transitioning bodies. Kristeva's conception of “abjection” can be used to understand the discriminatory behavior against outcasts whose sexual or gender practices fall outside of the normative standards and conventions. At the same time, “cultural violence,” which Charlotte Bunch (2015) describes, is the culturally embedded practice and assumption of domination over women in virtually all societies. She also emphasizes that there is a need to understand that all violence against women is supported by cultural attitudes, which she argues is the real cultural challenge of violence. Keeping in perspective the idea put forth by Bunch, this article critically examines the violence reinforced by culture, and the process of gendering, with a central focus on the intersectional experiences of trans bodies as “abject” between gender, sex, and culture. This leads to the systematic violence enacted upon them by the invisible disciplinarians. The article considers 21st-century trans women's narratives, Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* (2015) and *Red Lipstick: The Men in my Life* (2016). This article contextualizes and situates trans narratives, which provide insight into how trans women's bodies are seen as abject and have gone through the violent process of gendering and culturing.

Keywords: Abject, Culture, Gendering, Violence, Trans women, Trans narratives

¹Tanupriya, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor at CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Delhi NCR. She is an awarded gold medalist for her MPhil degree in English. She was also awarded a JASSO (Japan Student Services Organization) fellowship for an internship and attending a conference in Kumamoto, Japan. She has published her works in various peer-reviewed journals, indexed journals, and in edited books. Her research interests are queer visual culture, female and queer body image, trans sexualities and writing the self, and allied aspects related to frameworks of gender and sexuality. She can be reached at tanupriya@christuniversity.in. Her ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1716-0081>.

²Dhishna Pannikot, Ph.D., is an academician with eleven years' experience in teaching at various institutions in India. Her areas of specialization are English language and literature, travel writing, cultural studies and gender studies. She has co-edited a book, *Outcome based Education: Towards a Pedagogic Shift* (2016). She has widely travelled and presented papers in various national and international conferences. She has won the Best Meritorious Ph.D. award from Pondicherry University in 2010 and Venus International Women's award for her contributions as a young woman scholar in English 2017. She can be reached at dr.dhishnapannikot@gmail.com. Her ORCID ID <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4772-7368>.

Introduction

Trans women experience forms of violence as their bodies and their primary and secondary markers of femininity call into question the essentialist domains and traditional warehouses of gender, which still wrong the body because of biology. As Talia Mae Bettecher points out that “the biological materiality of the sex-differentiated body is typically thought to determine the reality of subjective gender identity; furthermore, a gendered sense of self is typically represented as an interior reality that should be aligned with the appearance and apparent meaning of the body” (2007, p. 43). Such a contention creates vulnerability and leaves trans bodies (in this case, *hijras*) invisible and in a state of harm. This conflict of their identity with the ideologies of the state and their legal and medical rights in policy frameworks are yet to be identified. In discussing the marginality of *hijra* identity, it is important to highlight Julia Kristeva’s notion of “abjection” introduced in *Power of Horrors*, where “abjection” is described as “fears and fantasies dominating the cultural imaginary regarding anything which threatens the stability of symbolic order” (Kumar, 2022, p. 4). Kumar describes the state of abjection:

The ‘abject’ does not exist as the subject but as the subject’s perpetual other (emphasis is mine); as it threatens symbolic order; it evokes a psychological disgust – a guttural and aversive emotion with a sickening feeling of revulsion, loathing or nausea. For those being reduced to abjection, abjection is not a psychic process but more of a social experience; the stigmatizing effects of disgust are directed toward persons or groups perceived as abject. (2002, p. 4)

In addition, Tyler, likewise describes the effect of abjection linked to violence as “not only the action of casting out or down, but the condition of one cast down – that is, the condition of being abject. In this sense, abjection allows us to think about forms of violence and social exclusion on multiple scales and from multiple perspectives” (2013, p. 20). Interestingly, Tyler also discusses the politics of disgust, where “disgust is an urgent, guttural and aversive emotion, associated with sickening feelings of revulsion, loathing or nausea.” William Cohen (2005) argues that “people are denounced filthy when they are felt to be unassailable other, whether because perceived attributes of their identities repulse the onlooker or because physical aspects of their bodies (appearance, odor, decrepitude) do” (p. x; Tyler, 2013, p. 22). Notably, the perspective of being abject and the politics of disgust very well subsume the subjective and collective experiences of *hijras* and their collective stigmatization and exclusion through policy frameworks and social roles.

Keeping the idea of abjection in the background and as a theoretical framework, this study critically explores the question of cultural violence and “social abjects” with a central focus on *hijra* collective experiences. It does so by considering the 21st century *hijra* narratives titled *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* (2015) and *Red Lipstick: The Men in my Life* (2016) by Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, which not only provide the personal account and challenges of being a trans woman in India but also provide a glimpse of trans community experiences. Furthermore, it explores “how this system of gender presentation as genital representation is part of larger and racist systems of violence and oppression” (Bettecher, 2007, p. 43). Furthermore, Laxmi’s narrative is a riveting memoir of coming out as a trans woman, where she navigates through the process of gendering with all its complexities, which is a representation of a society obsessed with gender and culturally violent frameworks. Her sequel autobiography, *Red Lipstick* describes the challenges faced by *hijra* communities in finding partners and in their relationships with men, infused with her own experiences with relationships and consistent discrimination. Further, these accounts represent and establish the lack of policy frameworks or legal and social recognition for *hijras* in India. Subsequently, “they face a lot of challenges,

especially when they are not in a position to earn due to health concerns, lack of employment opportunities or old age” (Pande, 2018, p. 214). It examines how the narratives focus on the challenges faced by trans communities collectively and how they navigate their lives as “objects” within a framework which is gender conventional. It explores how transphobic violence is embedded within the systems of oppression exercised through cultural violence and systematic violence. It becomes important to understand what transphobic violence entails as “transphobia does not necessarily imply the fear of trans people, but simply any negative attitudes (hatred, loathing, rage, or moral indignation) harbored toward trans people on the basis of our enactments of gender. Such attitudes no doubt lie at the root of much violence against trans people” (Bettcher, 2007, p. 46).

It is imperative to understand autobiographical narratives and their framework in the construction of discourse, as they become not only an individual experience but a collective experience of a community. Smith and Watson (2001) provide the constitutive process of autobiographical subjectivity as memory, experience, identity, embodiment, and agency. The autobiographical narrative becomes a means for “passing on” a concealed social past to unleash its potential for transforming the future of and for other subjects. Here, the narrator (Laxmi) interprets her experiential histories in order to recount and apply their culturally accessible discursive schema to what has occurred (Smith and Watson, 2001, p. 34). Thus, identities are often constructed through social interaction (i.e., “dialogical” according to Bakhtin) and identity, which is always “constituted within representation” as Stuart Hall claims (Smith and Watson, 2001, p. 34). The body becomes a site of autobiographical knowledge as well as a textual surface upon which a person’s life is inscribed. The cultural meanings of male and female bodies are socially assigned, and the category of woman is seen as vulnerable in most socio-cultural and political discourses. Trans women’s bodies also bring with them extra vulnerability, which exposes them to transphobic violence, as their existence puts into question the process heteronormative societies conform to. The two narratives together showcase the shades of cultural violence, violent gendering, and social abjection that are infused into the very order of being. The critical reflections on the two narratives offer insights into the silent and violent gendering process, and acculturation to gender norms, which translates to violence in its innumerable forms. It needs to be mentioned that reflection on gendered violence in India reveals a “constant pattern of impunity and silence, forged within the broader political economy of hierarchy and devaluation” (Desai, 2016, p. 68). Trans identities succumb to these societal pressures, which come in the form of violations of their transitioning body, identity, and existence. It is worth noting that “transgendered bodies, especially when viewed as physical bodies in transition, defy the borders of systemic order by refusing to adhere to clear definitions of sex and gender” (Phillips, 2014, p.19).

Discourses of Violence

According to the World Report on Violence and Health (WRVH, 2002), there are four modes in which violence may be inflicted—physical, sexual, psychological attack, and deprivation—inflicted either by an individual or a group on a person or a group, irrespective of gender, age, colour, caste, or class. “WRVH also identifies collective violence committed by larger groups of individuals as subdivided into social, political and economic violence” (2002, p. 212). Scheper Hughes and Bourgois, in “Introduction: Making Sense of Violence” introduces that “violence also includes assaults on the personhood, dignity, sense of worth or value of the victim. The social and cultural dimensions of violence are what gives violence its power and meaning” (2004, p. 1). According to Kenway and Fitzclarence (1997),

violence could occur along a continuum and involve physical, sexual, verbal and emotional abuses of power at individual, group and social structural levels. In the

context of social minority groups, one's ingrained beliefs and ideologies dictate one's actions and are used to justify violence on marginalized individuals and communities. (p. 117)

Trans individuals and communities are more vulnerable to these forms of social, political, economic, and cultural violence. Despite the prevalence of this violence being highlighted repeatedly, nothing significant in terms of policy making and improvement has occurred. Sexual violence is visible through the means of dichotomy and heteronormativity, as “binary sex is turned into binary gender, a political, externally imposed patriarchal hierarchy with two classes, occupying two value positions: male over female, man over woman, ‘masculinity’ over ‘femininity’” (Evans, 2020, p. 20). We agree that “this designation of societal significations to human experiences and activities as ‘female’ and ‘male’ is associated to various forms of violence that constitute a range of physical, psychological, representational, discursive, and situational violations of human and, particularly, women’s rights” (Bahun and Rajan, 2015, p.2). Violence is shaped and constituted because of gender arrangements and the association of social power with men, and the hierarchical subordination of women on the gender scale. In this context, Galtung (1990) defines “cultural violence” as “those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence” (1990, p. 291). Another form of violence, structural violence, is the most basic form of violence, which is expressive of the conditions of society, the structures of social order, and the institutional arrangements of power that reproduce mass violations of personhood. Such violence is accomplished in part through “policies” of informal and formal denial of civil, criminal, and basic human rights for all people (Pande, 2018, p. 212). Different bodies experience violence differently based on the intersections of gender, sexuality, class, age, ability and caste. This shows that women are not a homogeneous category but that the experiences are based on and experienced in a multitude of ways. Evans in *Transgender Body Politics* mentions that, “alongside inequality based on race, economic class, and other markers, there is a distinctive form of inequality directed at women as such, by virtue of their belonging to the class of people sexed as female and the social consequences that arise from this” (2020, p. 10).

Gendering is a process of socialization that provides a manual on gender performance according to the dominant gender norms and gendered body, which, as Caudwell notes, “remains central to processes of exclusion, rejection and abjection” (2012, p. 399). The alternative gendered body, in particular, remains rejected and socially stagnant. Judith Butler (1996) also elaborates on the concept of “abjection” to understand the mechanism of gender construction. She elaborates on the mark of gender, which qualifies bodies as human bodies after the classification of the infant as either boy or girl. In this humanizing process of gender, Butler articulates that “those bodily figures who do not fit into either gender fall outside the human, indeed, constitute the domain of the dehumanized and the abject against which the human itself is constituted” (1993, p. 3).

This “interpellation” of gender, as Butler states, is seen clearly in the case of abjected beings who find their gender identity outside the binary. She does not directly refer to the transgendered beings, but she formulates that “the construction of gender operates through exclusionary means, such that the human is not only produced over and against the inhuman, but through a set of foreclosures, radical erasures, that strictly speaking, refuse the possibility of cultural articulation” (Butler, 1996, p. 8). The “interpellation” of gender roles or gender norms is when people are given ideas about what men and women are supposed to do from a very young age.

Violent Gendering and Cultural Violence: Invisible Disciplinarians

Queer and trans communities are seen as “unproductive” to development or as destructive to the imagined national community and its modernization goals (Lind, 2010, p. 1). It is pointed out by numerous past studies that male violence, institutions and ideologies of the state justify it being unacceptable for a woman to be in terms with her sexuality, desires, and pleasures. Similarly, the control of the institution and its ideology also operates upon trans women’s identities, where their identity and private lives are threatened. The private realm of one’s life is often “tied up with state and neoliberal governmentalities; that is, how axes of ‘personal life’ are organized in such a way in modern nation-states that queers are legally excluded and spatially excluded from public life” (Lind, 2010, p. 1). Such regulations of private lives have largely affected the development of queer and trans identities globally and in the Indian context. *Hijras* are an Indian cultural identity for trans women who are also known as eunuchs, transsexuals, castrated, effeminate men, and, most of the time, transgender. However, there are regional terms that have circulated over time in various states of India, such as *aravani* in the Chennai area and *kinnar* in northern India, which have become an expression of self-identity, which is homogeneous in nature. *Hijras*’ are denied basic social and legal rights, including the right to protection against violence and discrimination, the right to equality under law, and the right to a life with dignity, which, among others, are the indicators of their status in society.

Through her autobiographical narrative *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* (2015) and its sequel *Red Lipstick* (2016), Laxmi Narayan Tripathi delves into an abject life to present the reality of *hijra* lives where they have faced and resisted police violence, bare means of survival, lack of rights, dangers of sex work, and a lack of civil protection. This brings us to the fact that transitioning bodies, whether medically or socially, are located in marginalized narratives, where trauma is surfaced not only on the body but also on the psyche as a result of interactions with sexual and physical violence, as well as day-to-day harassment in the public sphere. In this context, Jyoti Puri in “Transgendering Development: Reframing Hijras and Development” (2010) mentions a report, *Human Rights Violations against the Transgender Community* by the People’s Union for Civil Liberties, Karnataka (PUCL-K), which documents “the vulnerability of hijras in the family, the law, the medical establishment, and the media alongside the day-to-day harassment, abuse, and sexual violence at the hands of the police and ordinary people” (2003, p. 41). Highlighting this, Laxmi recounts various instances of sexual violation, rape, and violation of her dignity at an early age, projecting an exclusionary framework of the state with regard to alternative identities. This exclusionary policing of *hijras* also comes from the colonial sense of superiority, where the British in nineteenth century India labelled *hijras* as “habitual sodomites” and gender deviants (Hinchy, 2014, p. 281). These assertions under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 (CTA) have created challenges for transgender individuals and communities even after decades. Another reflection that arises from the narrative is the vulnerability of gender liminal identities as transitioning bodies which become a site of physical and psychological trauma caused by dominant state ideologies.

The framework of “cultural violence” as defined by Galtung (1990) highlights the way in which the acts of direct violence and structural violence are legitimized and thus rendered acceptable in society. With the term cultural violence, Galtung emphasized those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence. Cultural violence becomes an invisible disciplinarian, which undergirds discrimination as seen in the autobiographical narratives; to begin with, in Laxmi’s narrative, it is reflected in the act of dancing. Dancing is inherently considered a feminine pursuit, and any other gender, particularly males, who practice this art are regarded as effeminate and feminine. In response to Laxmi’s (2015) inclination towards dance, she was labelled as *chakka* (derogatory word for

an effeminate man) and a homosexual. These aspects of culture make one question the linkages of gender to body movements and art. In turn, these rules create disparity and lead to a culture of violence and cultural violence against non-conforming identities. The notion of violence, as is evident, is not just physical but also psychological and cultural. Galtung stresses that direct violence is an event; structural violence is a process with ups and downs; and cultural violence is an invariant, a “permanence” remaining essentially the same for long periods, given the slow transformations of basic culture (1977, p. 291). In a constant attempt to find her identity, Laxmi navigates through violence inflicted by the cultural norms of being masculine or feminine, which induces a sense of psychological trauma. The vulnerabilities of identities arise from the body, which is a passive medium of change and also a site of trauma and violence by the dominant other. In this case, the dominant other is represented by rigid structures and a heteronormative other. In continuation to the dominant ideologies that directly affect culture, these agents directly affect gender liminal identities, including trans women, where “discrimination, tolerance, acceptance and equality are on a violence continuum. They can be discussed under the framework of four concepts: homophobia, heterosexism, heterocentrism and compulsory hetero-sexuality” (Joseph, 1996, p. 2229). These set structures of violence are reflected in the narrative by Laxmi through her body image concerns, where she constantly questioned herself: “am I abnormal?” (2015, p. 25). “The culture preaches, teaches, admonishes, eggs on, and dulls us into seeing exploitation and/or repression as normal and natural, or into not seeing” (Galtung, 1990, p. 295). In effect, Laxmi describes that “the mere touch of a man’s hand creeps down my flesh. I screamed if a man tried to make any sort of physical contact with me.” The transgressions of the fixed culture of sexuality are often stigmatized and made to fit in the structures and binaries of social and gender roles. In the context of transgression, Toril Moi opines, “the oppression of women and people who transgress heterosexual norms occurs through systemic processes and social structures which need description that uses different concepts from those appropriate for describing subjects and their experience” (Young, 2005, p.13). As shown in the selected narratives, violent gendering and cultural expectations to fit into social and gender roles are seen as a part of Laxmi’s life. She is constantly realigning herself and navigating her way through gender structures. She defines gender as “[...] an unromantic box. And so it is that people like me, who fall nowhere in this binary, or somewhere in between, or even leap beyond—to me, the term ‘transgender’ has always implied ‘transcending gender’—are considered misfits in society” (Laxmi, 2016, p.9).

The role of the nation state also plays an important role in dividing the structures into binaries and reinforcing one over the other. The state’s turbulence with regard to sexual culture leads to the propagation of sexual violence against sexual and gender minorities. Interestingly, Kumar, in this context, mentions:

Cultures of sexuality or sexual cultures in a given context determine what erotic acts and practices are tolerated and what are stigmatized, what is celebrated and what is despised, how certain sexual violence passes off as legitimate while the assertion of sexual freedom is represented as threats and ‘excess.’ (Bhan, 2005, p. 20)

The location of power always seems to reside within the binary. Thus, transcending the binaries of heterosexual/homosexual, man/woman, and masculine/feminine, is always considered as aggressive and thus leads to the subordination of the ‘other’ on the power framework. The othered beings here are trans identities, and their vulnerabilities reside in transgressing socially and culturally created notions. These dissonances are evident through Laxmi’s narrative:

I wondered about all this as I went on with my life, checking the boxes I was tagged under as a gay man, as a drag queen. But the question of my identity, that dialogue with myself, remained unanswered, unaddressed. Who am I when it's just me, alone in my room? Who am I for the world? Are these two selves different, do they have to be? (Laxmi, 2016, p. 11)

This in turn leads to a question, is identity fluid or reduced to checking boxes? The everyday violence of despair, and humiliation that destroys socially marginalized humans with even greater frequency is usually invisible or misrecognized (Scheper-Hughes, 1992, p. 2). Social structures also play a key role in stabilizing or destabilizing identities. It also leads to the domination or subordination of individuals on the line of marginality. In critiquing the powerful masculine over the dominant feminine, Laxmi mentions, “my vulnerability made me worry about my brother Shashi, whom I wished to protect at all costs. But unlike me, Shashi was masculine and this was the weapon that would save him from harm” (2015, p. 23) This shows the “lack” that Laxmi represents, i.e., the lack of masculinity, which represents the dominant one, leaving Laxmi vulnerable to a form of violence. Bourdieu considers gendered oppression to be a classic example of symbolic violence whereby hierarchies are naturalized into a common-sense discourse shared by the dominated and the dominant (Scheper Hughes and Bourgois, 2004, p. 2). Young (2005) mentions that “I conceive the feminine also as a set of normatively disciplined expectations imposed on female bodies by male-dominated society.” In discussing how social structure plays a role in subordination, Young also discusses how “social structures position individuals in relations of labor and production, power and subordination, desire and sexuality, prestige and status. The way a person is positioned in structures is as much a function of how other people treat him or her within various institutional settings” (2005, p. 20). Extending the argument to gender structure, Young also suggests that gender structures are historically given and condition the actions and consequences of individuals. It can be traced to how individuals are questioned about their sartorial style, which further reflects multiple structures and the possibilities of conforming to the structures or transgressing them. Laxmi’s persona reflected that “however limited the choices or the resources to enact them, individuals take up the constrained possibilities that gender structures offer in their own way, forming their own habits as variations on those possibilities, or actively trying to resist or refigure them” (2005, p 20). Laxmi asserts,

But the problem was that I was feminine despite being a boy. So, when I wore bangles because they looked so good, red and shiny on my wrists, I would be told off by my friend’s mother. I would often refer to myself as one— ‘Main abhi aati hoon,’ I would say, and immediately be reprimanded for doing that. ‘*Ladkiyon jaisi harkat mat kar* (Don’t act like girls),’ I would be told. When I decided to grow my hair because long hair is beautiful, it really disturbed my father. He made sure I had it cut, because ‘*Achche ghar ke ladke aise nahi karte* (Boys from good households do not behave this way). (Laxmi, 2016, p. 9)

The assigning of roles to a biological sex base is a process of violent gendering, and thus distributes the tasks and processes as masculine and feminine. Laxmi’s narrative is built around growing up in a biological male body while identifying with the criticalities of being a woman. In narrating the experiences of a transitioning body subjected to invisible forms of violence and a state of dissonance between mind and body, a state of constant mental unrest, a need to pass as a woman, and the violence of being identified as an effeminate boy, the text offers reflections on how transgressing bodies are made to go through gendering and cultural rites of passage as if bodies are designed to conform to the dominant.

A relatively different stance is provided by Moira Gatens, where she mentions the feminine body and often the bodies that transgress, they are often silenced and are violently silenced by the dominant voices. Such instances are a part of Laxmi's narrative vividly, where she endured violence for her digressing behavior in her childhood and suffered physical and sexual violence. Gatens also talks about two strategies that seem to be used most often in the history of feminist interventions to silence people who do not agree with the dominant ideas. The first is to "animalize" the speaker; the second, to reduce her to her "sex." Women who step outside their allotted place in the body politic are frequently abused with terms like harpy, virago, vixen, bitch, and shrew, terms that make it clear that if she attempts to speak from the political body or about the political body, her speech is not recognized as human speech (Gatens, 1893, p. 95). Such an intervention holds true for *hijra* identities as portrayed through the narrative of Laxmi. Their existence is often violated if they transgress the biological sex, and their identity is reduced to a derogatory existence (spread through language, everyday conversations, and placing identity in a colonial context). The effect of violence is not always physical, but the study tries to explore how these acts of violence produce social categories, subjects, norms, and behaviors, including violent actions themselves. In this regard, and looking at *hijra* narratives, it is imperative to question "on what grounds can we assume that violence occurs always at the surface, that its effects are always visible, that it constitutes an action performed by one or more individuals" (Winter, 2012, 196).

Understanding Social Abjection of Transitioning Bodies

Tyler discusses the idea of "social abjection" and mentions that "I develop social abjection as a theoretical resource that enables us to consider states of exclusion from multiple perspectives" (2013, p. 20). In a similar context, Pushpesh (2022) also adds to Butler's (1996) idea that abjection is not a permanent contestation of social norms but a struggle to articulate the terms of symbolic legitimacy and intelligibility (quoted in Taylor, 2013, p.13). The idea of abjection as Tyler describes helps us to understand abject trans identities: "social prohibitions are dependent upon the (re)intrusion of that object, practice, thing or person which has been constituted as an abject, cast out and illegalized" (Taylor, 2013, p.19).

Trans individuals in an Indian context, as a part of the social apparatus, are secluded and ghettoized. Because of the lack of inclusionary policies, Laxmi mentions that "there were generally hijras who were in three lines of work—*badhaai* (hijras blessing newlywed couples or a newborn baby), *mangti* (begging and threatening with curses), and *dhandha* (sex work)." Pande (2018) also highlights that transgender people are excluded from effectively participating in social and cultural life, the economy, politics, and decision-making processes. The root cause of this is the lack of employment opportunities and lack of resources for education. Trans women in India choose between culturally associated roles of clapping and begging or sex work. Often, they are deprived of information and medical support when they are affected by fatal diseases such as AIDS. Recent research has focused on the transphobic setting in India, which is deep-rooted in the healthcare industry. The Indian medical system does not offer a trans-friendly healthcare service as the healthcare workers consider individuals who do not conform to heteronormative gender identity as mentally unstable. The idea of "social abjection" provides a framework to discuss social exclusion and highlights the relationship between this exclusion and vulnerability in the case of *hijras* in India. The process of the last rites of *hijra* brings to the forefront the myths and divergence in the emancipatory sector of *hijras*: "When a hijra dies, we wait for dusk, for everyone to fall asleep. Then we steal through the night like thieves to offer last rites to our comrades, escaping everyone's attention. Was this life? Or mere existence?" (Laxmi, 2016, p. 48). Indian policy frameworks related to the rights of *hijras* in India have failed to engage with issues of "beggary" and "sex work" which are the major sources of livelihood for the majority of *hijra* women (Pushpesh, 2014, p.

6). As rightly informed by Kumar, despite the legal freedom obtained by queer and trans subjects, the latter is still fighting for substantive socio-economic entitlements since 2014 (2022, p. 5).

As *hijras* engage in sex work as a means of livelihood, Laxmi's narrative presents a gripping instance of the disappearance of Subhadra, a *hijra*, who left for sex work in the evening, but her whereabouts were unknown after that day. She was found dead after two days, and "Subhadra's death had opened our eyes to the dangers of being a *hijra*" (Laxmi, 2015, p. 146). As Pande similarly presents, narratives of the *hijras* show that just being a eunuch is enough for the kind of violence that they face in their day-to-day lives (2018, p. 208). Not only the physical violence, but violence inflicted by systems, which Laxmi refers to as "bureaucratic harassment," is also evident throughout the narratives. She mentions a tedious process conducted by the police, where they gave evasive answers like "our informants have told us." No in-depth details were given on the murder. The result of this incident showcased a positive effect through collective community upliftment. After the murder, Laxmi emancipated her fellow *hijras*: "I taught them how to face the cops, when to abuse, when to be gentle." The survivors are the focal point for analysis because the lived reality of sexual trauma is a bodily enactment of power.

In her analysis, Shalini Jayaprakash mentions that it makes no difference to the society if abject bodies die, are hurt, humiliated, or ridiculed, and no one grieves them (2022, p. 20). The abject body of the *hijra* transgresses borders and boundaries, becoming a site of oppression by the dominant patriarchy. It is believed that an estimated 5–6 million eunuchs live in India (Nanda, 1986, p. 37) and yet the *hijras* of India remain a socially and economically disadvantaged group. Collecting alms on trains and street corners is a part of their everyday struggles and desires (Saria, 2021, p. 13). *Hijras* have no support system to safeguard their interests, and "many trans bodies are reliant on medical care, legal protection, and public accommodations from the very same institutions and apparatuses that functionalize gender normativities and create systemic exclusions" (Haritaworn & Snorton, 2013, p. 66). As far as health issues are concerned, the government's anti-AIDS programmes are hardly directed at *hijras*. These also bring to light concerns reflected in the narrative, where they are often unable to engage in everyday activities, such as commuting, without confronting bias and discrimination or being targeted by violence or threats of violence. This reflects the fact that *hijras* rarely have legal recourse against discrimination by the police or society in general. As reflected in the narratives, they face issues with identity papers and records (name change, driver's license, birth certificate, passport, and school transcripts). Laxmi narrates the instance of visiting the passport office for her passport, but the officer says that it is the first time a *hijra* has come for a passport and he is not sure about the process. On asking his head office, he was told that Laxmi would have to show proof that she is a *hijra* through a document. She did not have any such document because she identified herself as a woman during the transition process. Laxmi is dealing with a slew of social, medical, and legal issues as she transitions. The narrative also surfaces barriers in medical treatment for *hijras*. Where a *hijra* was raped, "not only did the police refuse to file an FIR, but the doctors were also unwilling to treat her till the police did their job." Keeping this exclusionary politics in mind, it is relevant to cite Jin Haritaworn and C. Riley and Snorton who highlight that, "it is necessary to interrogate how the uneven institutionalization of trans politics produces a trans normative subject, whose universal trajectory of coming out/transition, visibility, recognition, protection, and self-actualization largely remains uninterrogated in its complicities and convergences with biomedical, neoliberal, racist, and imperialist projects" (2013, p. 68).

Conclusion

The rather violent process of gendering and cultural violence due to gendered norms comes with a lot of physical and psychological vulnerability attached to *hijras* in the form of abiding by the parameters of social roles. The vexed cultural expectations of conforming to the conventional frameworks of gendered identities creates a hostile process for *hijras* and comes with physical and mental violence to transitioning *hijra* bodies. Laxmi's narrative provides an important stance on the cultural and systemic violence experienced by *hijra* identities. Therefore, trans women often find themselves in unsettling spheres in terms of establishing their identity, where their intersecting identities are abused and violated. Such an effect creates dissociation between the mind and the body for *hijras*, as reflected in the narratives. The selected narratives depict daily encounters with forms of violence that are not physical but which are ingrained in the hierarchy of power, dichotomy, and culture. Kristeva's abjection and the idea of social abjection bring to the fore the troubles of discriminatory behavior where *hijras* are treated as outcasts. The narrative provides a basis to discuss not only individual experiences, but the collective experiences of the *hijra* community. Das states that "the title of Laxmi's autobiography foregrounds her hijra identity using 'Me,' which is associated with the public self rather than 'I,' which is more private. By doing so, it strategically places the work under the militant genre of 'testimonio' that claims to record the collective trauma of the community" (2015, p. 199). The cartographies of violence are spilled because of the cultural and systemic transactions that are constantly practiced rather than destabilized. The postmodern stance on gender in neoliberal India attempts at radicalizing the discourse around the fixity of identity on the spectrum. The power of the dominant other, which is often also in power because of the nation, state, and ideologies, further propagates the marginalization of trans people by not recognizing their lawful rights in policy frameworks. *Hijra* emancipation appears to be contingent on public displays of respectability and responsibility, as well as individualized comparisons to their lack and backwardness (Kumar, 2022, p. 28). The current study presents a careful assessment of the trajectories of physical, cultural, and psychological violence and its roots, which are often traced to the process of acculturation and gendering of social and cultural norms, which germinate the seed of fixity around identities, and thus *hijras* are reduced to "abjected marginal." *Hijras* have started to refuse transphobic abjection to survive, to thrive, and to revitalize gender diversity. It is relevant to conclude with a reformatory stance manifested through law, legislation, and their enforcement either in the direction of instituting democratic norms where "subjugated genders and sexualities" can breathe freely with a sense of dignity and bodily integrity, or, it can go in the opposite direction (Bhan, 2005, p. 161).

References

- Bahun, S., & V.G. Julie Rajan. (2015). Violence, Gender and Global Connections. In *Violence and Gender in the Globalized World: The Intimate and The Extimate*, (pp. 1-10). England: Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- Bettcher, T. M. (2007). Evil Deceivers and Make-Believers: On Transphobic Violence and the Politics of Illusion. *Hypatia*, 22(3), 43-65. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2007.tb01090.x>
- Bhan, G. (2005). Challenging the limits of law: Queer politics and legal reform in India. In A. Narrain & G. Bhan (Eds.), *Because I have a voice: Queer politics in India*, (pp. 40-48). New Delhi: Yoda Press.
- Butler, J. (1996). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limit of sex*. London and New York: Routledge.

- Caudwell, J. (2014). [Transgender] young men: Gendered subjectivities and the physically active body. *Sport, Education and Society*, 19(4), 398–414.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2012.672320>
- Cohen, L. (2005). Kothi Wars: AIDS Cosmopolitanism and the Morality of Classification'. In V. Adams & Stacy L. Pigg (Eds.), *Sex in Development: Science, Sexuality and Morality in Global Perspective*, (pp. 269–303). Durham: Duke University Press.
- Das, R. (2015). Representation and Categorization: Understanding the Hijra and Transgender Identities through Personal Narratives. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 7(3), 196-205.
- Desai, M. (2016). Gendered violence and India's body politic. *New Left Review*, 99, 67–83.
- Evans, H. B. (2020). *Transgender Body Politics*. Australia: Spinefex Press.
- Galtung, J. (1977). *Essays in Methodology*. Copenhagen: Ejlers.
- Galtung, J. (1990). Cultural Violence. *Journal of Peace Research*, 27(3), 291-305.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343390027003005>
- Gatens, Moira. (1893). Corporeal Representation in/and the Body Politic. In K. Conboy, N. Medina & S. Stanbury. (Eds.), *Writing the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, (pp. 80-90). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Jayaprakash, S. (2022). Re-writing the Subject and the Self: A Study of Hijra Life Writings. In D. Vakoch (Ed.), *Transgender India*, (pp. 19-37). Switzerland: Springer Nature.
- Jessica, H. (2014). Obscenity, Moral Contagion and Masculinity: Hijras in Public Space in Colonial North India. *Asian Studies Review*, 38(2), 274-294.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2014.901298>
- Joseph, S. (1996). Gay and Lesbian Movement in India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31(33), 2228-2233.
- Kenway, J., & Fitzclarence, L. (1997). Masculinity, Violence and Schooling: Challenging 'Poisonous Pedagogies'. *Gender and Education*, 9, 117–134.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09540259721493>
- Kumar, P. (2014). Queering Indian Sociology: A Critical Engagement. *CAS Working Paper Series, Centre for the Study of Social Systems*, 4(7), 1-32.
- Kumar, P. (2022). *Sexuality, Abjection and Queer Existence in Contemporary*. New York: Routledge.
- Lind, A. (2010). *Development, Sexual Rights and Global Governance*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Lombard, N. (2018). *The Routledge Handbook of Gender and Violence*. New York: Routledge.
- Nanda, S. (1986). Cultural and Individual Dimensions of an Institutionalized Third Gender Role. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 11(3-4), 35–54.
- Pande, R. (2018). Being Eunuch, the Violence Faced by Hijra's Involved in Sex Work—A Case Study. In A. Bhattacharyya & S. Basu (Eds.), *Marginalities in India: Themes and Perspectives*, (pp. 66-76). Singapore: Springer Nature.
- Phillips, R. (2014). Abjection. *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, (pp. 1-2). Durham: Duke University Press.
- Puri, J. (2010). Transgendering development: Reframing hijras and development, Development. In A. Lind (Ed.), *Sexual Rights and Global Governance*. New York: Routledge.
- Saria, V. (2021). *Hijras, Lovers and Brothers: Surviving Sex and Poverty in Rural India*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Scheper-Hughes, N., & Philippe, B. (2004). Introduction: Making Sense of Violence. In N. Scheper-Hughes & B. Philippe (Eds.), *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*, (pp. 1–27). New Jersey: Wiley Blackwell.

- Smith, S., & J. Watson. (2001). *Reading autobiography: a guide for interpreting life narratives*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- Snorton, C. R., & Haritaworn, J. (2013). Trans Necropolitics: A Transnational Reflection on Violence, Death, and the Trans of Color Afterlife. In S. Stryker & D. McCarthy Blackston (Eds.), *The Transgender Studies Reader Remix*, (pp. 193-207). New York: Routledge.
- Tripathi, L. (2015). *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Tripathi, L. (2016). *Red Lipstick: The Men in my Life*. Gurgaon: Penguin Random House.
- Taylor, I. (2013). *Revolting subjects: Social abjection and resistance in neoliberal Britain*. UK: Zed Books.
- Westbrook, L. (2021). *Unlivable Lives: Violence and Identity in Transgender Activism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Winter, Yves. (2012). Violence and Visibility. *New Political Science*, 34(2), 195-202. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07393148.2012.676397>
- WRVH. (2002). World report on violence and health. In E. G. Krug, J. A. Mercy, L. L. Dahlberg, A. B. Zwi. & R. Lozano (Eds.), Geneva: World Health Organization.
- Young, I. M. (2005). *On Female Body Experience: Throwing like a Girl and Other Essays*. New York: Oxford University Press.