



Interview with a Troupe of Hijras

conducted in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh
on Friday May 30, 2008

report compiled by Raghvendra Upadhyay
interviewer
finished Saturday June 7, 2008
<http://www.booti.org>
info@booti.org

Table of Contents

Creative Commons Copyright	3
Project Summary	4
Purpose	4
Objectives	4
Methodology	5
Introduction to Hijra Culture	6
Interview Text	7
Survey Integrity	22
Costs	23
Conclusion	24
Credits	25

Creative Commons Copyright

You are free:

- to Share - to copy, distribute and transmit any text or pictures in this document, which is original work created by Sanjeevani Booti, a non-governmental organization in India
- to Remix - to adapt the work to your own needs

Under the following conditions:

- Attribution. You must attribute the work by displaying the name "Sanjeevani Booti" along with the website URL "<http://www.booti.org>" or - for websites - an embedded link to the same URL within the name Sanjeevani Booti. You are free to use Sanjeevani Booti's work for any purpose without any further permission. However, unless you write us and get a written endorsement first, you should not in any way that suggest that Sanjeevani Booti endorses you or your use of our work.
- Noncommercial. You may not use this work for commercial purposes.
- Share Alike. If you alter, transform, or build upon this work, you may distribute the resulting work only under the same or similar license to this one.
- For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the license terms of this work. The best way to do this is to reference Sanjeevani Booti's web page.

Any of the above conditions can be waived with permission from the copyright holder. Nothing in this license impairs or restricts the author's moral rights.

For a more complete description of Sanjeevani Booti's copyright usage, please refer to the below link to information specific to use in India, the United States, and other regions which respect the international aspects of the laws set forth by those countries.



<http://www.creativecommons.org>

Project Summary

On Saturday May 30, 2008, a social worker from Sanjeevani Booti conducted an interview with three hijras at the organization's office in Varanasi. The questions of the interview were centered around what a hijra is and what the business of a hijra is.

Purpose

Sanjeevani Booti, a sexually-transmitted disease education center in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, needed data about hijra culture. Hijras are people who could be described as either males and females with non-standard genitalia or persons who are physiologically born into non-male, non-female gender roles. In any case, Indian culture recognizes them as spiritually-potent because of their gender rarity.

Traditionally in Western culture there has been overlap in HIV / AIDS education and issues relating to gay rights. In India HIV is predominantly spread through heterosexual contact, but the fact remains that HIV itself is more easily spread through male-male contact.

While gay culture does not exist in India as it does in Western society, the institution of the hijra community is ingrained in the populace and the health risks in the hijra community parallel those in gay communities. A motivating factor in conducting this interview is gaining entry into hijra communities for the purpose of introducing sexually-transmitted disease education to them, and hopefully in the future through them.

In addition to the work done at Sanjeevani Booti there is foreign interest in hijra culture. This report is also intended to be freely available for anyone to read for their own interests.

Objectives

1. to gather primary introductory information on hijras from hijras
2. to promote the preservation of hijra culture through documentation
3. to build rapport with the hijra community
4. to foster outside academic study by making hijra information publicly accessible
5. to encourage discussion with the public by being available for questions



Figure 1: Rinki, a male hijra who works near Sanjeevani Booti

Methodology

Raghvendra Upadhyay, a Sanjeevani Booti social worker, invited three hijras (Munni, Asha, and Rinki) to the Sanjeevani Booti office for a paid group interview. These hijras were chosen after meeting several groups of hijras, all of which were found by word of mouth in the vicinity of the NGO office. The hijras in this interview were chosen on the basis of their interest in being interviewed, the price they asked in exchange for the interview (it is standard to ask for money for this), and the extent to which they were active workers in their field.

The hijras traveled to the NGO office at the appointed time and went into a private room with Mr. Upadhyay. Mr. Upadhyay had approximately 250 questions prepared and asked the questions as they appeared in his notes. The hijras collectively responded in some cases, but usually Munni answered for all of them. Mr. Upadhyay wrote down their answers in his notes. Because there were three interviewees speaking he was not able to write down everything each one said about things that were off topic, but their answers to the questions are recorded. When appropriate Mr. Upadhyay asked follow-up questions to certain responses and then recorded both question and response.

After the interview Mr. Upadhyay translated his dictated notes from Hindi into English. He typed the entire text of the interview into digital text, wrote a report about the entire project with the help of a proofreader and editor, and made everything available through the NGO website.

Introduction to Hijra Culture

In India there is a societal institution relating to sexual orientation which does not exist in Western society. A "hijra" is a mystic who identifies as a third gender, being neither male nor female. Biologically, this person could possess the primary sex characteristics of either males or females, but in either case, there is something biologically different about the genitals of the hijra. A hijra is a person who has obvious biological differences from both males and females, despite vestiges of either male or female genitalia.

Sanjeevani Booti, a North Indian non-governmental organization (NGO) in which promotes HIV education and sexual health, arranged an interview of some hijras by a social worker who transcribed the interview into this report for the purposes of documenting their culture and to raise awareness of alternative ideologies to traditional Western notions of sexuality and biology. This report is part of a project to document what a hijra is both in actuality and in popular understanding.



Figure 2: Asha, a male hijra, meditates while listening

For those reading this who have never heard of the concept of hijra, the following are some of the preconceptions from which discussions about hijras usually begin. Some of these ideas may be invalid, ignorant, biased, or otherwise wrong, so please do not consider them authoritative.

- an appreciable number of males are born without penises; these people are by definition hijras
- an appreciable number of females are born without vaginas; these people are by definition hijras
- an appreciable number of humans are born with gender-non-definitive sex organs; these people are by definition hijras
- Hijras should live in a community with other hijras
- Hijras should participate in a guilded training system
- Hijras should learn their guild work under a guru
- there is spiritual power in the universe
- spiritual power can be harnessed to useful ends by humans
- spiritual power has something to do with sexuality
- hijras have extra spiritual power by virtue of alternative sexuality
- Hijras can use their training and spiritual power to bless marriages with prosperity
- Hijras can use their training and spiritual power to bless childbirths with prosperity
- Hijras can use their training and spiritual power to curse individuals with misfortune

Interview Text

1. What is your name?
Munni, Asha and Rinki
2. What is your occupation?
We are Hijras and this is our occupation.
3. How long have you been doing that?
Since we became matured.
4. How much do you know about hijras?
I think we know everything about our society.
5. How much do you know about lavandas?
Everything.
6. Are you a hijra?
Yes
7. What is a hijra?
There are two kinds of hijras, male and female. Male hijra is one who have no penis and female hijra is one who has either no Brest or a vagina or both.
What do you mean by no breast or vagina?
Female hijras have sometimes no breast or they have a undeveloped vagina. Their vagina never develops. It is always very small like a female baby vagina and it is very tight, it has no flexibility.
8. Are you a lavanda?
No.
9. What is a lavanda?
Lavandas are only professional male dancers who dress like women,
10. What is the difference between a hijra and a lavanda?
They have a normal penis but we don't have. We have some special spiritual power to curse or bless someone but they don't have anything like this. We don't eat anything touched by them and they don't eat anything touched by us.
11. What is the difference between being hijra or lavanda and being gay?
We have some spitiritual powers that gays don't have. I think sexual desire is same but sometimes they have sex with females also but never do sex with females.
12. Is being hijra the same as being gay?
No.
13. Is it polite to call someone a hijra?
Why not if they are hijra.
14. Is it polite to call someone a lavanda?
I don't think there would be any problem to call lavanda to a lavanda.
15. How should people refer to hijras? (for example, is it okay to say "He is a hijra" or should a person say, "He is a performer?" or something else)
We are hijra and there would be no problem to call hijra to a hijra. We are not only a performer, I have told you the difference between hijra and a performer. Lavandas are only a performer.

16. How does a person become a hijra?
It is god creation.
17. Are hijras born hijra?
Yea.
18. Why do you think that?
God knows, I don't know.
19. Do society or culture make a person hijra?
No they are always born.
20. What is the difference between a hijra and a man who is not a hijra?
Men can have sex with women and but we can't have.
21. At what age does a person usually find out that they are hijra?
Female hijra comes to know about they are hijra after the age when they are supposed to develop their breast or menses time. Earlier these changes would took place after the age of 15 but nowadays it is so early like after 8 or 9. Male hijras come to know that they are hijra after the age 12.
22. When does the birth family of a hijra find out that their child is hijra?
Right after the birth of a male hijra but they don't know if their daughter is a female hijra till she becomes physically matured. If a man's penis doesn't stand it means he is also a hijra. So sometimes it could be late. So in this case family doesn't know but the person comes to know that he is a hijra.
23. How can a family determine if their child is hijra?
They should give the baby to Hijras.
24. What is the family's response when they discover that their child is a hijra?
They are not happy so sometimes they try to hide it but they can't hide it forever. When our society comes to know that there is a hijra in some family we go their and take them.
If family doesn't want to give the baby, then?
We will beat them or go to police or court.
Do you have legal rights to claim for that baby?
Yes, we can go to police to claim for the hijra baby and then it is police's responsibility to get us the hijra.
25. Is it true that a baby can be determined to be hijra?
Why not if he is a hijra.
26. Are most hijras discovered when they are babies?
Yea.
27. Is it true that families give hijra babies to the hijra community?
Yes.
28. How do families respond when their child joins a hijra community?
They are not happy but they can not do anything.
29. If a child joins a hijra community, what kind of support do they give him (money, other help)?
Sometimes they give money if we need. Usually it doesn't happen because guru takes care of us.
30. How often should a hijra go and visit his birth family if he does not live with them?
I go once in 4-5 years but I am always in touch with my family on phone.

31. What responsibility does a hijra have to support his birth family and parents when he starts working and making money?
No responsibilities. We have our own society and world. They are just our family and we help them sometimes if they need but it is not compulsory for us help them continuously.
32. If a person is a hijra can that person stop being a hijra?
No.
33. Some people say there are three genders, those being male, female, and hijra. To what extent do you agree that classification?
Yes, it is true. We are different than male and females.
34. When a hijra completes an official form and there is a space to mark “male or female” what should a hijra mark?
We write that we are *kinnar* (another word for hijras).
35. Can a girl who is born female become a hijra?
No.
36. What religious practices do hijras have which other people do not have?
We have our own goddess, goddess of Hijra. She is goddess Bahuchara, her temple is in the state of Gujrat. We have her photo and we pray her like other people pray to their god or goddess.
37. What role do hijras play in Hindu religion?
Goddess Bahuchara is a Hindu goddess and we are praying to Hindu goddess so we are practicing Hindu religion.
38. Tell me what you do in a typical day.
After waking up we take a shower, then we pray our god then we go to our guru if we are not living with her then we touch her feet and decide about today’s program. Then we go on work and when we are done from our work we go to our guru back and give all the money we made that day to guru. Then guru gives us some money and then we return to our home if we are not living with our guru. In the night time we watch TV, cook food and have dinner and go to bed. Same routine next day.
39. With whom do you live?
(Munni rents a home and lives alone. Asha and Rinki live with guru in guru’s home.)
40. How long have you known those people?
I know my guru since I discovered that I am hijra.
41. What is your relationship with each of those people?
I live with my guru and he is our everything.
Everything means?
Our guru is our mother, father, husband, wife, brother, sister, he is our everything.
42. Are any of those people hijras?
My guru is a hijra.
43. What do you think of the people with whom you live?
My guru is very gentle person. She takes care of us. We like her a lot.
44. Where you born with a typical penis and testicles?
No.

45. Do you still have a typical penis and testicles?
No. (Munni said that she has a very small (undeveloped) vagina that she uses to piss only. Asha and Rinki said that they have a small hole where they are supposed to have a penis. That hole is very small that you can't see if you don't see it carefully.)
46. Some people say that hijras cut, alter, or remove their own penis or testicles. How often does this happen?
It is a lie. You will die if you cut your testicles or penis.
47. Have you ever heard people say this about hijras?
Few people say but it is not true.
48. Some people say that hijras cut, alter, or remove the penis or testicles of newborn babies. How often does this happen?
It is not true.
49. Have you ever heard people say this about hijras?
A lot of people say different things about hijras, I don't know why they do it.
50. Why do people say this about hijras?
I don't know, may be they don't know.
51. How common is it for hijras to have genitalia which is altered?
I have never heard of it.
52. What kind of genital alteration is expected of hijras?
Don't know.
53. Can a person be a hijra without altered genitalia?
I don't think so.
54. To what extent do you believe that you have the same kind of body as any man?
We have hand, leg, mouth, hair everything as a man but our sex is different.
We are not men.
55. To what extent do you believe that you have the same kind of mind as any man?
We could read, write, understand the things as men can do.
56. To what extent do you believe that you have the same kind of body as any woman?
We have everything but girls can sex get a penis penetrated in their vagina but we always sex in our booty.
57. To what extent do you believe that you have the same kind of mind as any woman?
There are few differences that are physical, there is no difference between mind. We are better than them in playing dholak (instrument) and dancing.
58. Have you ever worn women's clothing?
Always.
59. Why did you wear women's clothing?
Because we are not male.
60. What did you wear?
Sarees and Punjabi suits.
61. Why did you wear this?
Because we are not male and it is comfortable in dancing.
62. Have you ever worn men's clothing?
Sometimes. Girls wear boy's dress nowadays so we also do sometimes.
63. Why did you wear men's clothing?
Just for fun when we are out of city of not working.

64. What did you wear?
Jeans, pants, shirts, t-shirts.
65. Why did you wear this?
Just for fun.
66. When do you wear women's clothing?
Everyday.
67. When do you wear men's clothing?
Sometimes.
68. When is the last time you wore women's clothing?
Always.
69. When is the last time you wore men's clothing?
3-4 years ago.
70. Is there a difference in your behavior depending on whether you are wearing men's clothing or woman's clothing?
No.
71. Which type of clothing do you prefer to wear in your daily life?
Female's dress.
72. Have you always been a hijra?
Yea.
73. At what age did you realize that you were a hijra?
(Munni said when she was 13. Asha, 10 and Rinki, 11.)
74. To what extent do you feel that hijras are different from other people?
We have different body, different work, different life. We are and sleep same way but our life is different.
75. What work do hijras do?
We dance, play music, and bless people.
76. Why do hijras do this kind of work?
This is our culture (hijra society)
77. Hijras are sometimes involved in weddings. What can you tell me about this?
People call us to dance and bless married couples.
78. What do hijras do at weddings that other people do not do?
We have special power to bless couple that nobody else has.
79. To what extent would you say that hijras are performers at weddings?
Depends, sometimes we are only performer but usually we are called to give blessings.
80. What do hijras do at weddings?
Bless and dance.
81. Why do hijras do these things?
Because we have that power to bless and that is how we make money and survive.



Figure 3: Munni, a female hijra, did most of the talking

82. What spiritual significance do these things have?

When Ram was to leave for the forest for 14 years all the people, including hijras, from his kingdom went to see off him. He was supposed to cross a river to reach the forest. When Ram and other people reached at the bank of the river Ram told everyone to return to their homes. Everybody returned to their home but hijras stayed there and waited for him for next 14 years at the bank of river.

When Ram came he asked hijras why they were there waiting for him. Then hijras replied that Ram said, "Please, all men and women should go back to your homes." But they were neither a man nor a woman so Ram's order didn't implement on them. That is why they waited at the bank or river for 14 years.

So Ram became happy and granted them a boon that they would rule the world in *Kalyug* (*Kalyug* is period of time when all the bad things will happen in the world. We are living in the first stage of *Kalyug*). Ram said that number of hijras will increase rapidly during the *Kalyug* and they will rule the world and he gave them this spiritual power to bless or curse someone.

So that is why we have this special power that if we bless someone it becomes true.

83. How do hijras accomplish these things?

The world knows that we have that power and it has been proved in different people's life.

84. Do hijras do this work alone?

Usually we are in a group and work together.

85. How many hijras does it take to do this work well?

We need at least 3 hijras. One to play dholak, one to sing and clap and one to dance.

86. What is the minimum number of hijras required to do this work?

Three.

87. What different responsibilities do different hijras have when performing?

One is supposed to play dholak, one to sing the song and clap and other one is supposed to dance. Then we all together collect the money.

88. Hijras are sometimes involved in celebrating the birth of a child. What can you tell me about this?

We go there to involve in someone's happiness and bless the child.

89. What do hijras do at baby celebrations that other people do not do?

Blessings.

90. To what extent would you say that hijras are performers at baby celebrations?

We are always supposed to bless the baby. Everybody needs us to bless the baby. If we don't bless then we will be just a performer.

91. What do hijras do at baby celebrations?

Dance and blessings.

92. Why do hijras do these things?
To share their happiness and give good life to the baby by blessing him. We bless them to make lots of money in future, have good family etc....
Because we depend on them. We have only one work. If they have new baby then we get opportunity to make some money and if they have money then they give us good money. So that is why we bless them. So that they can have good and prosperous life because our prosperity depends on them.
93. What spiritual significance do these things have?
I have already explained that we have power to bless people.
94. How do hijras accomplish these things?
(They asked me if I was blessed so I said no. Then they tell me to ask someone who was blessed by them.)
95. Do hijras do this work alone?
We can bless someone alone.
96. How many hijras does it take to do this work well?
It is not necessary to have more than one hijra to bless someone.
97. What kinds of people want the services of a hijra?
Everyone.
98. Why do these people want the service?
Because they want to have good life and we can bless them to have it. After all it is a social thing also. All the people are supposed to have hijra blessing in weddings and for a new born child.
99. What kinds of people do not want the services of a hijra?
It could be a family thing. Some times some families say that hijra blessing could be bad for their family.
100. Why do these people not want the service?
I don't know. Just family system.
101. Should a hijra perform at a childbirth for a close relative?
No.
102. Why?
We can send someone to bless a close relative's child but we never go. We can not bless our people, this is the system of our culture.
103. Should a hijra perform at a wedding for a close relative?
No.
104. Why?
Same answer as last one.
105. If your family wanted the services of a hijra for a childbirth, what would you do?
I will tell my hijra friends to go there.
106. If your family wanted the services of a hijra for a wedding, what would you do?
Same answer as last one.
107. Are hijras homosexual?
Yea.
108. Are all homosexuals hijra?
No.

109. What is the difference between a homosexual man and a hijra?
They have a penis but we don't have. They can have sex with females but we can't have.
110. Is there any connection between being a hijra and being homosexual?
No.
111. Are hijras usually sexually attracted to men?
Yes.
112. Are hijras usually sexually attracted to women?
No.
113. Would an average hijra like to have a long-term sexual relationship with a female?
They can fall in love and live with each other if they like.
114. Would an average hijra like to have a long-term sexual relationship with a male?
Yes.
115. Would an average hijra like to have a long-term sexual relationship with another hijra?
Sometimes.
116. Would an average hijra like to get married?
We all are married.
To whom?
To our guru. All the hijras are married to their guru. Our guru is our everything. We wear the bindi, bangles and other ornaments that are symbol of a married women, in the name of our guru. We will not wear any ornament after our guru is dead.
Did you have a proper marriage like all the rituals?
No, it is just relation of heart. It is not performed in public, we don't need any priest to get it done, it is just done in our mind.
Do you have any hijra style of rituals for wedding of hijra?
No, nothing.
What about male hijras, are they also married to their guru?
Yes.
How many wives can a guru have?
As many disciples they have.
Do they have relations with all of them?
Could be.
117. Would an average hijra like to have children?
It is impossible so we never think about it.
118. May I ask you some questions about your personal sexual history?
Yes.

-----personal questions-----

119. Are you married?
Yea.
120. Do you have children?
No. When I become senior hijra, after my guru die, then I will treat all my disciples as my children.

121. Would you like to have children someday?
We never think about it because it is impossible.
122. Are you sexually attracted to females?
No.
123. Are you sexually attracted to males?
(Everyone said yes.)
124. What do you think when you see a good-looking female?
Nothing special.
125. What do you think when you see a good-looking male?
Nothing special but sometimes if we are in feeling of sex and we see any good looking male so we ask him to have sex with us.
126. Have you ever had sex with a female?
NO.
127. Have you ever had sex with a male?
Yes.
128. How important is sex in your life?
As it is for others.
129. Have you ever erotically touched someone else's vagina?
We have seen not touched erotically.
130. Has any female ever erotically touched your genitalia?
No.
131. Have you ever performed oral sex on a female?
NO.
132. Has any female ever performed oral sex on you?
NO.
133. Have you ever engaged in vaginal sex as a penetrator (active party) with a female?
No.
134. Have you ever engaged in anal sex as a penetrator (active party) with a female?
We can't do this because we don't have a penis.
135. What other sexual things have you done with a female have I not asked about?
Sometimes we use some penis shape things to fuck us or other hijras.
136. Have you ever erotically touched someone else's penis?
Yes.
137. Has any male ever erotically touched your penis?
We don't let anyone touch or see our genital.
138. Have you ever performed oral sex (on a male)?
Yea. Blow job.
139. Has any male ever performed oral sex on you?
No.
140. Have you ever engaged in anal sex as a penetrator (active party) with another male?
Can't do. Use dildo sometimes for other hijras.
141. Have you ever engaged in anal sex as a receiver (passive party) with another male?
Yes.

142. What other sexual things have you done with a male have I not asked about?
Nothing.

-----end of personal questions-----

Assume that a hijra and a female fall in love, make each other happy, and want to live together.

143. Would it be morally right for a hijra to marry a woman if the hijra and woman want to marry?

No because then hijra can't satisfy a women sexually and have children.

144. Would it be morally right for a hijra to have sex with a woman if they were not married, but if both people wanted to have sex?

They can have sex if both are agree.

145. Would it be morally right for a hijra to have sex with a woman if they were married, and if both people wanted to have sex?

Same answer as last one.

Assume that a hijra and a male fall in love, make each other happy, and want to live together.

146. Would it be morally right for a hijra to marry a man if the hijra and man want to marry?

Why not.

147. Would it be morally right for a hijra to have sex with a man if they were not married, but if both people wanted to have sex?

Yes.

148. Would it be morally right for a hijra to have sex with a man if they were married, and if both people wanted to have sex?

Yes.

149. When hijras wear women's clothing, what is the difference between what hijras wear and what a woman would wear?

No difference.

150. Do hijras who wear a sari also wear women's undergarments, like a bra or panties?

Yea, sometimes few male hijra don't wear bra.

151. What is the difference between a hijra's sari and a woman's sari?

No difference.

152. Who looks better in a sari, a good-looking hijra or a good-looking woman?

Both look good.

153. What hobbies do you have?

Playing music, dancing, singing, watching TV serials, traveling.

Are you in sports like cricket or anything?

We don't understand games.

154. What talents do you have?

We are good dancers.

155. Do you have any formal qualification?
Munni is 8th passed, Asha – 4th and Rinki – 5th
156. How important is it for hijras to go to school?
They can go but what will they do if they have a degree. After all they have to join our society and do what we do.
157. How important is it for hijras to get good education?
It is not important.
158. How important is it for hijras to study anything?
Not important.
159. Why do you say this?
Because we have our fixed job which we are supposed to do. After we become senior we will have lots of time then we would like to read magazines to pass time.
160. What are the most important skills for a hijra to have?
Dancer, singer and a good dholak player.
161. How do these skills contribute to the success of a hijra?
Some blessings are in form of songs so we need to know those songs.
162. Do hijras have a special guru for hijras?
Yes.
163. How does a hijra come to meet this guru?
We have to join a society and all the hijra home have a guru. Sometimes we they come to our home to take us.
164. Is the guru always a hijra also?
Yes.
165. What does the guru teach the student?
Dancing, singing, playing dholak, everything.
166. How long does it take for a guru to teach a student?
Depends on the skill of student, how early can he adopt. Some hijras are very smart and learn things quickly but sometimes it could be a wrong process with *Chutiya* hijra.
167. How does the guru treat the student?
Like parents.

Some people say that hijras have a spiritual power to give blessings.

168. To what extent can hijras bless people or things?
Have already explained the story.
169. Who else has spiritual power like this?
Only hijras. Some Sadhus, baba and religious person could also bless.
170. Where do hijras get the power to give these blessings?
Have already explained this.
171. When does a hijra bless people?
Whenever they go to weddings, child birth or when somebody touches their feet.

172. How often do hijras take money to give blessings?
 Never. We bless people and if they are happy they give us money and we take that money but we never bless for money. A lot of people touch our feet and we bless them for nothing.
 Some people say that hijras have a spiritual power to inflict curses.
 Have already explained in question no. 86
173. To what extent can hijras curse people or things?
 Whenever we are angry. Like when somebody tease us and we are already in bad mood then we curse them. Or sometimes people disturb us or abuse us then.
174. Is this because of a spiritual power that hijras have?
 We have power to curse anyone.
175. Who else has spiritual power like this?
 No one.
176. Where do hijras get the power to inflict these curses?
 Have already explained.
177. How often do hijras take money to inflict curses?
 Never.

There are popular rumors that when a hijra dies, other hijras drag the dead body along the road to the cremation ground instead of carrying it respectfully. The rumors go on to say that the hijras will beat the corpse with shoes and slippers, insult it, and then burn it in a shameful and insulting way.

178. Have you ever heard these rumors?
 Yea a lot of people say this but it is not true.
179. To what extent are these rumors true?
 Completely false.
180. How often does a dead hijra receive a funeral like this?
 Never.
181. Have you ever heard of a funeral like this?
 Never.
182. What happens during a hijra funeral?
 When a hijra dies, other hijras stay at the home and weep or just show their sadness because females are not allowed to go at funeral place. We ask neighbors to give shoulder to the body and get it cremated or buried, it depends on religion. We pay them and they get it done.
 Few people say that no one has seen the funeral of a hijra, why?
 Because they don't know that the body belongs to a hijra. It is carried by the general people. When they go to cremation place they tell that body belongs to their some relative. So nobody knows if the body belongs to a hira.
183. What is the difference between a hijra funeral and anyone else's funeral?
 No difference.
184. What things about a hijra funeral do people say that is not true?
 Nothing is true.

185. What do you know about HIV?
Can you tell the word in Hindi?
It is a very common word. Have you ever heard of this word?
No.
186. What do you know about AIDS?
If a couple have sex for all day and night then they get AIDS. Everything should have a time to do and sometimes couples start having sex for all day and night like 20 times a day then they get AIDS. After getting this they go to doctor and doctor give them medicine. In some cases they can get rid of this disease but if god has decided them to die then they die.
187. Have you ever known anyone with HIV?
Don't even know the word.
188. Have you ever been tested for HIV?
No.
189. Do you know anyone who has ever been tested for HIV?
NO.
190. If you wanted to get tested for HIV, where would you go?
I don't know what is this. Maybe we can ask a doctor.
191. How is HIV spread?
Don't know.
192. What can a person do to prevent the spread of HIV?
Don't know.
193. How would you feel about working with Sanjeevani Booti at some point in the future?
You can call us whenever you want.
194. How would you feel about having your picture taken for public advertisements?
No problem.
195. What do other people say about hijras?
Some people call us sister, bhabhi (wife of elder brother), or hijra.
196. Why do they say this?
To make fun of us.
197. How do other people treat hijras?
Most of the people respect us but some vandal kind of person misbehave us. That is why we never come out of our home after 11'o clock night time because only vandals are on road that time and they could abuse (sexually) us.
198. Why do they act in this way?
Sometimes just for fun and sometimes they want to make relations with us.
199. How do you feel about the general treatment that the public gives to hijras?
Good.
200. In what ways do hijras get the same treatment in public as any other person?
In most ways we are not treated as others. It depends on the people's character. Few people treat us as other and few people make fun of us.
201. When do hijras get better treatment in public than other people?
When we are on fire or they need something from us.

202. Why do hijras get this better treatment?
People know that we can beat, bless and curse anything.
203. When do hijras get worse treatment in public than other people?
When there are bad people around us.
204. Why do hijras get this worse treatment?
People's character.
205. To what extent do you agree with this statement: "Hijras have the same civil rights as anyone else."?
We should have rights as others because after all we are also human being.
206. Do you know of any NGO or any organization for hijras?
There are few in Delhi but we don't know about them.
207. What hijra communities exist to protect the rights of hijras?
Don't know.
208. How do you feel about government classifications - such as railway reservations or identification papers - in which a person must identify as either male or female?
No problem, we can write that we are a *kinnar*.
209. What do you think that people inside India should know about hijras?
Should know everything.
210. What do you think that people outside India should know about hijras?
Everything.
211. What do you know about hijras in other countries?
Everything.
212. What do you think life is like for hijras in other countries?
They don't go to bless at weddings and child birth but they also make money as we do. They perform in bars and night clubs, give sexual service.
213. Have you ever met a hijra from another country?
Yes. During Akhil Bhartiya Hijra Mahasammelan. (All India Hijra Conference.) We met hijras from Afghanistan and Italy.
214. Have you ever heard stories about hijras in other countries?
Yea there are Hijras everywhere.
215. What problems do hijras have that other people do not have?
Some social problems like few times they don't get treated well.
216. Why do these problems exist?
Don't know.
217. What do you like about being a hijra?
We have good life and spiritual power.
218. Is it good to be a hijra?
No. Sometimes when I am alone in my room then and think about myself, I wish I could die because we don't have a family, we don't have a normal life.
219. In what ways is it good?
We make good money. if somebody is hijra so he should enjoy it because this is the only think he can do.
220. In what ways is being a hijra difficult?
Social problem.

221. If it was possible to stop being a hijra would you want to do this?
It is not possible.
If it was possible, then?
No.
222. Why do you give that answer?
Because I am happy the way I am.
223. At what points in your life have you ever wished that you were not a hijra?
Sometimes when I am alone, I think about it.
224. Who are some of your heros or role models?
Andaz (a name)
Who is he?
Biggest guru of hijras in Varanasi city.
225. Why do you like these people?
He is our biggest guru.
226. Who are some famous hijras that inspire you?
Andaz guru.
227. Why do these people inspire you?
They treat us very well and they know a lot about our society. If our guru is not able to solve some problem we contact him.
228. To what extent do you feel socially connected to other hijras?
We are very well connected to each other but we don't let them make money in our area and they don't let us enter in their area. We are good friends but no compromise with work.
229. Why do you feel connected?
Whenever we meet each other we discuss about each other's life, have good time. We help each other.
230. To what extent do you think that the things you have said apply to all hijras in Benares?
100%
231. To what extent do you think that the things you have said apply to all hijras in Uttar Pradesh?
100%
232. To what extent do you think that the things you have said apply to all hijras in India?
100%
233. To what extent do you think that the things you have said apply to all hijras in the world?
Almost everything.
234. What else is there which I have not asked about, but which you think I should?
You asked everything.
235. Is there anything else that you think I should know for this interview?
Nahi.

Survey Integrity

Ideally, the information gathered in this interview about hijras would be representative of the entire hijra population. However, the following describes some problems with the integrity of the collected data.

The sample size was small. This was a single interview of a working group of hijras, so it cannot be understood to be representative of the views of all hijras. What really needs to be done is a large-scale survey of many hijras so as to give more credibility to these answers, but funding is still a limiting factor in Sanjeevani Booti's operation and these studies cannot be done until finances permit them. Please see figures 4 and 5 below for information about the time and money which went into producing this report.

The report was not audio recorded, and therefore a lot of things which were said were not included in this report. The interviewer recorded the answers to the questions which were asked, and also asked follow-up questions when applicable, but the best way to conduct interviews is with audio recording and transcription of everything said, and not by just presenting the things which are on-topic. A lot of off-topic information is interesting and related to hijra culture, but perhaps not as relevant for the purposes of creating an introductory report. Unfortunately, a single interviewer is unable to write everything that is said during a four-hour interview with three interviewees.

It is not a standard academic interviewing practice to simultaneously interview three parties at once, but in this case the hijras wanted it. They work together as a group and they felt safest together, so they insisted on all being interviewed at once. Because they were together they could have given different answers than they would have had each one been alone.

The hijras were paid for this interview. In various cultures some occupations are expected to give interviewees freely, and some are expected to ask for pay. It is entirely appropriate within Indian society to pay hijras for an interview. There are different reasons for this, one being that the hijras saw no personal or community benefit in having their lifestyles documented for public review, and thus needed money as an incentive for participation. The fact that they were getting paid to talk could have influenced the way they answered questions.

Overall, the social worker who conducted the interview and the reviewers who read it thought that the hijras were excellent and forthright interviewees, and think that their interview went wonderfully.

Costs

The following table shows the payable hours which applied to producing this event, conducting this survey, and compiling this report.

work description	hours	staff	total
question writing	2	2	4
interviewee recruitment	3	2	6
survey conduction	4	1	4
Hindi to English translation	2	1	2
report writing	3	1	3
formatting / photoshopping	2	1	2
proofreading	1	3	3
total hours	-	-	24

Figure 4: time cost of interview

As of June 2008, Rs 40 = \$1 US.

expense	price in rupees	units	total (Rs)	total (US)
labor per hour	200	24	4800	\$120.00
pens and stationary	100	1	100	2.50
transportation	200	1	200	5.00
tea and snacks	50	1	50	1.25
hijra pay	500	3	1500	37.50
	-	-	Rs 6650	\$166.25

Figure 5: financial cost of interview



Figure 6: the interviewed hijra troupe stands in the Sanjeevani Booti office

Conclusion

The social workers met the stated objectives.

Two social workers walked around neighborhoods local to the Sanjeevani Booti office and asked where hijras could be found. Lots of hijras were found, and the Sanjeevani Booti members decided to do an interview with one particular troupe. The interview is preserved in this report, and it met the objective of collecting primary information.

The interview was converted to digital text and made available online at the organization's website <<http://www.booti.org>>, meeting the objective to take a step to preserve hijra culture. Also the hijras agreed to be photographed, which further preserves their ideas. The hijras who were interviewed agreed to do future work with the NGO, meeting the objective of opening future discussion.

Plans are in place to distribute this report indefinitely. Besides being available through a website, Sanjeevani Booti does general advertising and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Finally, social workers at Sanjeevani Booti encourage anyone to ask any questions they like about this interview or any related topic. Interested persons should email, write by post, fax, talk over Skype internet phone service, or call directly by phone.

by email
info@booti.org

by post
Sanjeevani Booti
B2/225
B-6-A, Bhadaini
Varanasi-221005
Uttar Pradesh
India

by fax
(001) 206.984.1165 (American number forwards to Indian office)

by Skype <<http://www.skype.com>>
username nandanupadhyay
email me to make an appointment to talk for free through your computer microphone

by phone (GMT +5.5 hours, +12.5 hours Pacific time, USA)
(0091) 993.618.0896 (India)

Also the interviewed hijras themselves are available to answer questions if our social workers make arrangements with them.

Credits

Thanks to Sanjeevani Booti's continuing donors who make this work possible. Without dependable, regular, pledged donations we would not be able to organize this kind of basic work from which to build larger projects.

Thanks to Asha, Munni, and Rinki for agreeing to be interviewed.

Thanks to Raghvendra Upadhyay who conducted the interview.

Thanks to Lane Raspberry in America who edited some formatting of this report.