IN THE SUPREME COURT OF INDIA

CIVIL WRIT JURISDICTION

WRIT PETITION (CIVIL) NO. 260 OF 2023

<u>IN THE MATTER OF:</u>

Rituparna Borah & Ors. …PETITIONERS

Versus

Union of India ...RESPONDENT

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Date: 26.04.2023

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Additional Note by Ms. Vrinda Grover in response to query posed by the Hon'ble Justices during oral submissions

1. That on 25.04.2023, during the course of oral submissions before the Constitution Bench, a query was posed to the counsel by HMJ SR Bhat, regarding documentation of forms of marriage of transgender persons. It was directed by the Hon'ble Justices that the same may be responded to by filing a short note on the point.

2. That in pursuance of the aforesaid direction, the present additional note is hereby filed, along with two documents for the purpose of illustration, regarding documentation of forms of conjugal and non conjugal intimacies of transgender persons, including marriage. For the sake of brevity, only the relevant chapter(s) has been extracted from the books, and is filed herewith along with the present additional note.

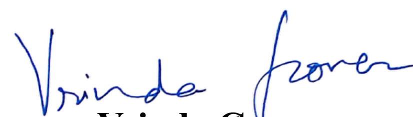
3. The first document being filed is a chapter from the book titled, "*Transgender India : Understanding Third Gender Identities and Experiences*", Douglas A. Vakoch, 2022 Springer. The relevant chapter being Chapter 12, titled, "*"Families We Choose": Kinship Patterns among*

Migrant Transmen in Bangalore, India", Agaja Puthan Purayil, at Pages 183 to 193 of the book. The same is at Page 3-14 in the present additional note.

4. The second document being filed is a chapter from the book titled, "*With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India*", Gayatri Reddy, 2005, University of Chicago Press. The relevant chapter being Chapter 7 titled, "*"Our People": Kinship, Marriage and the Family",* at Pages 142 to 185 of the book. The same is at Page 15-37 in the present additional note.

5. The aforesaid documents illustrate that it is well documented that queer and trans people have relied on conjugal as well as non conjugal social formations and intimacies to provide for caregiving, companionship and inter-dependency, all elements of life ordinarily and customarily identified with family. The lived realities documented in this literature demonstrates that kinship bonds between unrelated persons could be experienced as equivalent of biological or legal ties, especially in the context of queer and trans lives.

6. That this additional note is filed to assist the Hon'ble Bench on the specific query stated above.



Vrinda Grover

Advocate

Date: 26.04.2023

3

Douglas A. Vakoch *Editor*

Transgender India

Understanding Third Gender Identities and Experiences

Springer

Chapter 12
"Families We Choose": Kinship Patterns among Migrant Transmen in Bangalore, India

Agaja Puthan Purayil

12.1 Transmen: The Invisible Population

Transmen or FTMs (Female to Male transgender individuals), terms I will use interchangeably in this chapter, are people who are assigned female gender at birth, but who disidentify with this assigned gender and desire to live instead as men. Jaison Cromwell (1999) discusses four levels of marginalization and invisibility faced by transmen and FTMs. The first level comes from discourses like anthropology, psychology, and history, where the discourses purposefully invisibilize transmen by maintaining that these individuals are actually women, as the truth of their gender identity lies with their female bodies. The second level comes from medical and popular discourses. In Cromwell's view, these discourses articulate transmen and FTMs as pathological women. Third, many FTMs chose to be invisible by living as men. Hence they are invisible as transgender people, but visible as men. Fourth, if society finds out that a particular person is a transman, he will be treated as less than fully real. This may contribute to the loss of partners, friends, and employment opportunities. Hence there is always a danger associated with their trans identity.

As Tanupriya points out in Chap. 11, female masculinities have received inadequate attention in both Indian and Western academia. Transmen are highly invisible in India. Scholarship on transgender people in India discusses extensively the lived experiences of transwomen or hijras (e.g., Reddy 2005 and Nanda 1999). Transmen are invisible in all these writings. Being born female, leaving their biological

Families we choose is a term used by Kath Weston (1997). This term is used by her to indicate the alternate families formed by lesbians and gays in the Bay area of San Francisco. Here this term is used to denote the chosen families formed by the migrant transmen in Bangalore.

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D. A. Vakoch (ed.), *Transgender India*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-96386-6_12

families, and forming groups akin to the groups formed by hijras have been relatively difficult for transmen. Hence, they have remained invisible.

This chapter explores the experiences of transmen who migrated from their birthplaces in villages or towns to Bangalore, the capital of the Karnataka state in India. They built solidarities between themselves. They supported each other, cared for each other, and slowly built a home in the city. Their family consists of transmen brothers and their female partners, providing them with their strongest support system in the city. Some of them call it a family, while others avoid calling it a family for fear of going back to the same system that rejected them. This chapter thus examines the dynamics of kinship patterns among migrant transmen in Bangalore, drawing on field data from transmen who have moved from towns and villages of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and rural areas of Karnataka state.

While having a conversation with one of my respondents, he suddenly told me that whenever he reads any research on trans persons, he always finds that the writers argue that transgender persons are suffering. He then suggested to me, “Why don’t you say to your readers that we are trying to find meaning and happiness in this city, despite difficulties and challenges in life.” This was the starting point for thinking about the concept of Bangalore as a home for its trans migrants. Other chapters in this volume articulate the multiple levels of discrimination transgender persons encounter in their everyday lives. To live a transgender life is difficult in a cisnormative society, as suggested by all contributors to this volume. This chapter focuses on two key questions. First, how do the dynamics of kinship patterns formed by transmen serve as the basis for a strong support system in the city? Second, how do migrant transmen find meaning and happiness despite the marginalization and discrimination they encounter in their day-to-day lives?

12.2 Marginalization and Discrimination in Natal Homes

From villages and towns in South India, a large number of transmen migrate to Bangalore to escape the violence and discrimination they encountered in their birthplaces. Bangalore is characterized by a large population of migrants from across the country. This helps transmen build a safe space in the city, where anonymity helps them avoid frequent questions about their gender and sexual identities, while providing the freedom to express their identities as they wish. Suresh is a 36-year-old transman. (To protect the identity of respondents, all names used in this chapter are pseudonyms.) He migrated to Bangalore in 2003, and he recounts his childhood in Kerala.

> When we grow up, we recognize the changes in the body. I hated being a girl. But society keeps on reminding you that you are a girl. They will always demand you not to do this. I hated to obey. My parents were angry with me. They started harassing me physically and mentally.

Starting in childhood, he used to wear boys’ clothes at home. But when he reached fourth class, his parents asked him not to wear boys’ clothes anymore. He played

cricket at the time and was part of a cricket club, so he tried to convince his parents that since he played cricket, he preferred to wear boys' clothes. His parents were dissatisfied with him, and when he did not obey them, they beat him and even mentally tortured him. However, he could never be happy with his assigned gender. Despite being tortured, he continued to wear the kind of clothes he wanted to wear. He hated wearing girls' uniforms, which was required as he advanced in school, and ultimately he stopped going to school. Many transmen have encountered the same problem, and one of the major reasons for the high rate of dropout among transmen is their inability to conform with expected gender norms.

The physical and mental harassment Suresh received from his parents forced him to leave his hometown. He initially contacted a child helpline for assistance, and the helpline authorities introduced him to a Kerala-based NGO working with sexual minorities. This NGO had contact with a Bangalore-based NGO that I will refer to by the pseudonym Saheli. Through Saheli, Suresh migrated to Bangalore in 2003.

Saheli was formed in 2001 to ensure the rights of sexual minorities. During the early 2000s, it formulated a funding program with the help of a foreign donor to help runaway transmen and their partners. When transmen and their partners came to Bangalore, Saheli provided a variety of support, including food, shelter, protection, legal support, and employment assistance. The organization is not currently providing shelter for migrant transmen, but during its initial stages the support provided by Saheli helped transmen build their own space in the city. Those who came and settled earliest started providing shelter to later migrants, and with Saheli's support they could survive in the city. Many of them are no longer associated with Saheli, but instead are connected to different NGOs in Bangalore. However, those who received initial support from Saheli remember its critical role in helping them surviving in the city.

My respondent Ebin described a similar experience. He is an adopted son of a hijra mother from Mumbai who was a sex worker. She used to visit him only during festival times, so he was fostered by her sisters. His mother never liked him behaving like a boy. She wanted to marry him off and see him grown into an ideal woman. When he disappointed her, she started beating him continuously to correct his behavior. He says that:

> My mother's view was no different from the public. So she knew only three types of gender: hijra, male, and female. This was new to her. So she never accepted me. She started asking questions to me like: Is that possible? How will you get a penis? How will you be able to provide for a child? So I fought a lot with my mother. Hence, she put me under house arrest, and I had to face lots of restrictions. My mother used to gift me pants and shirts on special occasions. Since I behaved like a man and never showed femininity, she thought that I was behaving like this since she gifted me pants and shirts to wear. So she burned all my pants and shirts. She gradually reduced my freedoms, one by one.

Since he could not live under such restrictions and harassment, he tried to commit suicide twice. In 2004, he ran away from his home and moved to Bangalore.

As these respondents tell their stories, they always experienced a conflict between their mind and their body. Heteronormative expectations further accentuate their tensions and conflicts. As Shalini Jayaprakash argues in Chap. 2, transgender bodies

defy societal expectations by not conforming to established definitions of gender and sex. Non-conformity is seen as a threat to the system. This in turn leads to the unleashing of violence against transgender persons.

When transmen choose to run away, they look for anonymity and freedom to escape from the frequent questions about their gender and sexuality. Transmen who run away with their partners look for a safe and comfortable space to live. City spaces provide such anonymity and freedom. The existence of a large migratory population increases the heterogeneity of city spaces. Thus, many transmen choose to migrate from their villages or towns to metropolitan areas, and in South India, many transmen choose Bangalore for migration. The next section examines how Bangalore became the migratory destination of transmen in South India.

12.3 Transmen Migration and Bangalore

Janaki Nair (2005) has tried to examine the growth and development of Bangalore through a historical lens, as she studies the growth and evolution of Bangalore from a small town to a metropolitan city. She argues, “Bangalore has suffered from the general neglect of urban studies in the Social Science disciplines” (17). Nair describes the history of Bangalore as consisting of eastern and western parts. The western part is five centuries old, while the eastern part—also known as the cantonment area built by the British army—dates back only two centuries (25). In her view, the Bangalore region started developing with the invasion of the local chieftain Kempagowda (28). Fortified settlements developed by him attracted artisans and merchants.

In 1949, the Bangalore corporation was formed by bringing together Bangalore and the cantonment under one roof (77). In Nair’s view, it took only a few decades to witness the growth of Bangalore from a small town to a metropolitan city (79). Bangalore was the home of large-scale public sector industries, and more recently, it has become the center of information technologies and private electronic industries (81). State-led industrialization during the post-independence period transformed the economy of Bangalore. Later the city started developing as a center of computer software and hardware, earning it the moniker of the Silicon Valley of India. Also, it became the center of skilled labor in the public sector, and simultaneously engineering colleges started mushrooming in the city. All these led to the city’s growth as a center of attraction for Indian and multinational firms. Hence the city slowly became the IT hub of India (86). The city grew into a metropolitan city. This invited an increasing rate of migration, and the city started accommodating people from across the country, which led to the heterogenization of the population in the city.

Anand is one of my study participants. He was born and brought up in Bangalore. In his view, Bangalore is a very heterogeneous space, and that is the one reason for the city can accommodate migrants across the spectrums. As Anand describes the city,

> Bangalore has a history. Bangalore is not a Kannada kind of space. Bangalore was a hill station. It was not culturally a Kannadiga-dominated space like Mysore. British liked Bangalore very much. British made it the capital of Karnataka. In the entire Karnataka, the best agricultural land was in Bangalore. However, it was destroyed because of the development. The city employed multiple kinds of people, including sex workers. You will get the best anonymity here.

The anonymity of the city is a major factor that attracts transmen, who fear that if people find out their trans identity, they will be questioned and pushed aside. Anonymity will help them to invisibilize their transgender identity and to live as men. Along with anonymity, the specific queer activism and politics developed in the city have also helped transmen migrate and settle in Bangalore. Anand says, "Bangalore earlier did not belong to queer people. They fought and transformed it into a safe space" According to Sunil Mohan, Rumi Harish, and Radhika Raj (2019, 109), "We are arguing that the few public spaces we access without fear have not existed naturally but have been built, nurtured and cultivated under great risk, with great compromise and creativity."

12.4 Kinship Patterns among Transmen in Bangalore

The migrant transmen could develop strong bond and intimacy between them. Some of them preferred to stay together as a collective. Later these bonds translated in to loosely developed kinship system. Elizabeth Freeman (2007) has argued that the most relevant contribution of anthropologists of kinship is that they have started recognizing that kinship is not a matter of biology, but rather it is a cultural fact. However, the gender and kinship studies in India have yet to expand to incorporate alternate families (Kumar 2020). In this section, I will discuss how loosely formed kinship patterns serve as the basis for a strong support system for migrant transmen in Bangalore.

According to Kath Weston (1997), "chosen families" are the families that lesbian and gay men choose, in contrast to their families of origin. Chosen families are created by queer people who are rejected by their blood ties. Weston explains, "Gay or chosen families might incorporate friends, lovers or children in any combination organized through ideologies of love, choice, and creation" (27). She has also called this an "alternate family" (35). She argues that through chosen families, gays and lesbians can create their own families outside of a heterosexual procreative, reproductive framework.

As Weston puts it, family is a contested concept. The traditional model of the family does not accept alternative desires and sexual orientations. Transmen either chose to migrate or were forced to migrate due to rejection and violence from their families. However, in the city, transmen cannot live alone; they need a support system. The rate of survival of migrant transmen in the city depends on their access to resources, and this access is determined by the specific social locations of the transmen. As Ken Plummer (2020, 158) suggests, "Human sexualities are grounded in

intersectional inequalities. Always shaped by class, gender, ethnicity, age, nation, and other human differences." As Andeep, one of my respondents, explains, "There is a loosely formed kinship system among transmen, and it is stronger amid working class folks." The basis of such a kinship pattern is solidarity and shared politics. The friendship and bond between them transform into a strong relationship that substitutes for heterosexual families. Unlike hijras, transmen do not have customs or norms for living with a community. They are scattered here and there in the city. Those who need support live close to one another, with some calling this kinship arrangement a family. Others are afraid to call it a family, as they do not want to go back to the same system that abandoned them. Therefore drawing on Weston, I would argue that Kinship formed by migrant transmen in Bangalore is a chosen family which replaces the biological ties. However unlike in the West, queer people in India do not have the right to adopt and hence they can not form families through reproduction technologies or adoption as Weston mentions.

Bourdieu (1977) in his groundbreaking work titled *Outline of Theory of Practice* has differentiated between official kinship and practical kinship. Official kinship is related to genealogy, and it is the basis of legitimizing the kinship order. In contrast, practical kinship is based on "utilization of connections" (32) and is "non-official" (35). He further defines practical kinship as being based on the practical interests of individuals. Thus, the basis of practical kinship according to Bourdieu is not genealogical, rather is practically motivated. His argument comes from his fieldwork on traditional Arab marriages. However, Bourdieu's practical kinship can be applied to understand queer kinship, which is formed by individuals for a very practical purpose. Migrant transmen who were abandoned by their blood families find an alternative family among their close friends and partners. These kinship ties challenge genealogical assumptions and also serves as the basis of a strong support system for transmen. Thus I would argue that, chosen families formed by transmen come under Bourdieu's practical kinship.

Kinship among the transmen in India is under-explored. There is vast literature on hijra kinship (Reddy 2005; Nanda 1999). Gayathri Reddy (2005) has examined kinship among the hijras of Hyderabad and Secunderabad, detailing ways that hijra identity is constructed through kinship based on guru-chela (master-disciple), husband, and daughter relationships (144). She argues that hijra kinship does not conform with the procreative framework that operates under the caste system in India (145).

Reddy (2005) also points out that hijras' houses include gurus, mothers, and chelas as the crucial kin bonds through which they constitute a lineage and reckon kinship and descent (150). Hijra rules say that the real hijra is the one who renounces sexual desire after nirvana (castration). Once they join the hijra community, they are supposed to break all ties with their natal families. Otherwise, they will not be given due consideration within the hijra family (147). Chelas are bound to respect their gurus, do all the domestic-household work, and also have to give a part of their daily earnings to their gurus. In return, gurus are obliged to look after and protect their chelas, provide them with food and clothes, and train them in the rules and customs of the hijra community (157). If chelas cannot please their gurus, gurus can disown

them and expel them from the hijra family. Nanda (1993) argues that guru-chela relationships provide a substitute for the family system that hijras have renounced to live with their chosen identities**.**

Once part of the hijra system, it is difficult for a hijra to get out of the system even if she wishes. As the hijra Aliya who resides in Bangalore told me, "I am stuck under this system. I wanted to run away. But they won't allow you." I have seen her ruling her chelas, wielding her power as a guru to discipline her chelas. She has also adopted daughters, who are very obedient to her. But still, she is not happy as she has to obey her own gurus and other elder gurus in the household. Hijras try to build a family alternative to their blood ties, and even though their hijra family gives them shelter and protection, it is hierarchical and following every rule is mandatory. The rules are an imitation of the heterosexual framework, where the younger ones are supposed to obey their elders on every matter, even though they do not want to. When the younger ones disobey, they are threatened.

Since the hijras are male-bodied, leaving their house and forming a community was relatively easier. Hijras also connect their stories with the culture of India to validate their historical existence. (For more on the presence of hijras in ancient Indian literature, see Chap. 2 by Jayaprakash and Chap. 5 by Sutradhar.) But being assigned the female gender at birth, for transmen it is not so easy to leaving their houses, making it difficult to develop a kinship and family system like that of the hijras.

I have also met transmen who are accepted by their families. They migrated to Bangalore in search of employment. These transmen did not want to stay under the kinship pattern, but they were connected to other transmen in the city. They invisibilized their trans identities to claim the privileges enjoyed by cisgender persons. Among these groups of transmen, the most privileged ones sought independent life in the city, as their privilege gave them access in the city, and hence they were not in need of a support system.

Some transmen who were initially rejected by their families are now accepted by them. But they do not wish to go back and rejoin their families. Because they cannot live as their true selves when they are with their blood-related families, they create a new family with fellow transmen in a kinship structure that not rigid, lacking the mandatory rules and regulations and the kind of hierarchy practiced by hijras. Suresh describes how this chosen family serves as a support system for runaway transmen in Bangalore:

> At the time when we migrated, the internet or Facebook or WhatsApp was not that widespread. Physical space was important for us. So we had developed a space where people migrated from different places and formed collective solidarity. Today also I would say that such a physical space is important. We built such solidarities. I am having years old connection with Vinu. I have a similar connection with many people here. Even though we stay in different rented houses, we have a relationship that is beyond friendship. If you ask me that, shall we call it a family, I am a bit nervous. Because it will bring us back to the same system which denounced us.

For Vinu, his family in Bangalore consists of transmen brothers and their partners. Vinu migrated from Kerala to Bangalore in 2004, and both of his parents have died.

His relatives abandoned him due to his decision to transgress gender norms. Hijras have started adopting transmen as their sons, and Vinu was adopted by a hijra woman named Nivedita. Vinu's friend Ebin is Nivedita's partner, and Vinu used to visit Nivedita along with Ebin. Slowly Vinu became close to Nivedita, and she adopted him as her son and he later became a member of the hijra family. His other transmen friends know about this, and they do not have any problem with him being part of the hijra family. As Vinu summarizes;

> I have felt that Bangalore is a home for me developed out of friendship networks. Another home is that part of hijra culture. Inside it is part of their family. My father and mother have died. My family consists of my friends. My partner Bhama was Nivedita's friend. After Bhama's death, I had no space to stay. So I lived with people from different communities. I became close to Nivedithamma through Ebin. At that time I did not consider her as my mother. She was a good friend. After that, only she accepted me as her son. Here among friends, I have another family. Let it be Niranjan or Maya [a transman and his female partner]. I consider Niranjan as my elder brother. Pointing out Maya, he says, I am considering her as my sister-in-law. I call her nathoon [a Malayalam term for sister-in-law]. That is another form of relation. Friends are another kind of relationship. Suresh is my friend. For me, his partner is like a younger sister. I also have relationships beyond the community. Some people call me a bhava. Bhava in Kannada means sister's husband. Heterosexual people who work for the community call me bhava. But I have a family in the community. This family consisting of transmen is my favorite.

Pranav is a transman who migrated to Bangalore from a village in Tamil Nadu in 2008. Pranav has a different opinion on this. Pranav says that transmen are imitating hijra kinship. In his view, such solidarities exist only among working-class transmen. He believes that privileged transmen do not need such a support system and hence mostly prefer individual life in the city. Like Pranav says, the transmen who live like a family mostly come from marginalized social backgrounds. They need support and solidarities to survive in the city as they have access to only limited resources in the city. Privileged transmen might be connected to these transmen families, but they do not stay under a family or kinship framework because they do not need a support system like transmen from marginalized backgrounds. The privileged transmen I met preferred independent life. They could also access the wider networks and resources in the city. Thus a family out of shared solidarities was not a necessity for them. He emphasizes,:

> Recently onwards a loosely structured kinship system has developed among the transmen. But you cannot see such a kinship system among urban privileged transmen. They mostly prefer individual life. There are many transmen in the city. But those groups of transmen stand together always. Since they are not privileged that kind of a family unit is very much needed for them.

However it is evident from the narratives that traditional kinship system like that of Hijras is absent among transmen. Pushpesh Kumar (2020) argues that most queer persons in India live a hybrid existence, which means they are connected to their natal families, while simultaneously secretly sustaining their alternate kin networks. Hijras persons; he has studied mention about this hybrid existence. They are married to heterosexual women, and they find it challenging to give up these ties out of fear of losing the honor and dignity of their natal families. However, they secretly

maintain homoerotic relations and follow a 'hybrid' life. Therefore in Kumar's view chosen families advocated by Weston does not exist in India and even if it exists, it is more prominent among elite queers. His argument is limited, because his conclusions are drawn from fieldwork conducted among hijras and he has ignored the existence of transmen. As I emphasized earlier, the kin network found among transmen has replaced biological families, not merely supplemented them as Kumar contends for queer Indians more generally. Moreover as demonstrated earlier most of the transmen who were part of such a kinship, belonged to lower socio-economic locations.

12.5 Bangalore as 'Home'

Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling (2006, 10) differentiate the concepts of house and home. Whereas a house is just a dwelling, "home is a series of feelings and attachments, some of which, some of the time, and in some places are connected to a physical structure that provides shelter." While you might live in your house, you may never feel an attachment with your dwelling, and thus not feel like your house is also a home. The reverse is also possible. A home does not need to be a house. The sense of belongingness that comes with being at home is not restricted to a specific physical enclosure. This is necessarily attached with the concept of home.

Blunt and Dowling (2006) have identified three defining characteristics of the home. First, it is material and imaginative. Second, it is related to identity and power. Finally, home is multi-scalar. Home is material and imaginative because home is an emotional space, with a set of attached feelings. Home does not simply exist; it is created and re-created continually. Second, home is related to people's sense of self. Identities are produced through relations of power, so for example, home may be more closely associated with feelings of isolation for women than for men. Finally, to say that home is multi-scalar means that the home is more than a mere dwelling. As Blunt and Dowling (2006, 29) describe home, "It can be a suburb, neighborhood, nation or indeed the world." Drawing on Blunt and Dowling's conceptualization, I argue that Bangalore is a home for the migrant transmen and their female partners who were forced to migrate to Bangalore from their villages or towns.

While a city is a space that accommodates heterogeneity, it is also a space of marginalization and exclusion. These transmen also have faced issues and confrontations concerning their identities. They find constraints in getting shelter and jobs due to their gender identity. Even though the anonymity of the city spaces provide freedom, before transition transmen encounter many difficulties. Suresh shared with me that while he was traveling in an auto before his transition, the driver quarreled with him and asked him to prove whether he was a man or woman. Similarly, Vinu told me that during the initial stages of post-migration he had searched for employment at various shops. Shop owners used to advise him to come by wearing a saree if he wanted the job. After Vinu's transition, he is able to hide his identity and

hence he manages to escape from such humiliation. Transmen in Bangalore also find difficulty in getting jobs outside of NGOs.

Apart from that, the new trans act passed by the government of India poses a major challenge to the entire transgender community, including transmen. Previously transmen were able to change their name and gender on their identity cards once they managed to get their psychiatrists to certify that they met the criteria for Gender Identity Disorder (GID). But the new trans act gives the district magistrate the power to decide the gender of transgender persons. As Sangeetha Sriraam contends in Chap. 8 of this volume, this is a violation of the 2014 NALSA judgment, which gave transgender individuals the right to self-identification of gender. As Sriraam reminds us, this change could lead to the institutionalization of socio-historical marginalization of transgender persons. Transmen face multiple forms of marginalization and discrimination in their lives, but they have learned to question it, and they are trying to find happiness in the face of challenging circumstances.

Compared to their natal homes, where transmen were born and brought up, Bangalore has accommodated them, it has provided shelter for them, and the anonymity of the city has given them the great freedom to live with their gender and sexuality. Along with it, the language of queer politics in the city has given them a kind of boldness to question the status quo. The bond between transmen brothers and their partners constitutes a family for them that replaces their biological families. All my respondents told me that Bangalore is a safe and comfortable space for them. The anonymity and the specifically migratory nature of the city have helped them to build a home here. None of them want to go back; they feel that Bangalore is their home. As Blunt and Dowling (2006, 10) argue, home is a feeling of "being at home."

12.6 City and Politics of 'Hope': Toward a Conclusion

Bangalore is a migratory destination for many transmen and their female partners in South India. They leave their natal homes to escape the violence and harassment from their natal families. Bangalore has helped them to develop a safe space despite many challenges. Bangalore is a home that they create and re-create continuously. Bangalore is also a space that marginalizes and excludes many of its inhabitants, where access to resources is a determining factor. But compared to the places they were born, Bangalore gives transmen the great freedom to live. It gives them a family based on shared politics. The city of Bangalore has given a 'home' and 'hope' to its transmen migrants.

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With Respect to Sex

NEGOTIATING HIJRA IDENTITY IN SOUTH INDIA

Gayatri Reddy

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7

"Our People"

KINSHIP, MARRIAGE, AND THE FAMILY

In 1995, when I began my research, Saroja had just one cela (disciple), Madhavi, whom she appeared to be extremely fond of. Madhavi had been with Saroja for at least four or five years and had been an ideal cela in many respects. She looked after her guru (master) when she was ill, cooked and cleaned for her, bore all the expenses for her guru's frequent trips to her village, and supported Saroja when the latter did not feel like working. Although occasionally late in her daily payments to her guru, Madhavi never rebelled against this responsibility and was always respectful and considerate of her guru's well being. Saroja, on her part appeared to treat her cela with some consideration, giving her gifts of saris and even gold jewelry on one occasion. For all their power differentials, relations between the two seemed to be perfect.

A little over a year later, however, this situation was dramatically reversed. In December of 1996, Madhavi left to have her *nirvan* (emasculation) operation, despite Saroja's objection to this procedure, which had more to do with Saroja's resistance to relinquishing full control over her cela than with Madhavi's apparent unsuitability for the operation. When Madhavi got back about five days later, having successfully undergone the operation, she found herself without a home or support from any of her erstwhile "family" members. Madhavi had been physically thrown out from under the tank and was ostracized by her guru and all her extended hijra kin. She was extremely weak from the operation, in terrible pain, had nowhere to go, and none of her hijra kin would help her. Her guru had ordered all the hijras at the tank to abstain from helping Madhavi in any way, on pain of social ostracism. Nobody disobeyed this order. Madhavi was alone in her pain and misery, a fitting example of what would happen if a cela defied her guru, Saroja told me.

Thrown out from under the tank, Madhavi set up house on the opposite side of the road, on a little strip of vacant land overrun with weeds and cacti. Along with her panti—"[her] man" or "husband" as she otherwise referred to him—she cleared a bit of space on this land and constructed a little tent out of cardboard boxes, plastic wrappers, and whatever scraps of metal they could find. Husband and wife lived a somewhat self-sufficient, if precarious and dangerous life here, subject to the vagaries of the weather, policemen with eviction orders, and ruffians who wanted some quick and easy money. In addition to her husband, the only other person Madhavi interacted with on a daily basis was her (adoptive) hijra mother. Following her eviction from under the tank, Madhavi was adopted as the daughter of Kamala, another hijra who lived nearby. Kamala was not "related" to the tank hijras any more, although she used to live there in the past. She had changed her (hijra) house and was now living with her panti, selling illicit liquor and drugs for a living. Kamala helped Madhavi when she needed help most. To a large extent, as Madhavi herself acknowledges, Kamala was instrumental in keeping Madhavi alive and well during this trying period in her life.

About a month after her eviction from the tank, Madhavi told me gleefully that she had "[gone] and put the *rit* in the Sheharwala house."[1] Her new guru was a hijra named Renuka who currently lived in Chandigarh, a north Indian city. Madhavi's position as Renuka's cela located her three rungs below the senior-most leader or nayak of the house. As Madhavi recounts her story, she had been a cela of this same nayak before changing houses, from Sheharwala to Lashkarwala, about five years ago. Now, she was happy to accept a position in this same house, two rungs below that she had occupied just five years ago.

This vignette points to two important issues that I explore in this chapter. First, it references the importance of kinship, that is, social arrangements that organize the reproduction of material life, and the vital significance of these bonds for hijra identity. For Madhavi, it was inconceivable to remain without a kin network. She needed kin, whether it was her mother or her guru, and not just for material but also for social and symbolic reasons. One almost never hears of a hijra who lives and works alone. Despite incessant complaining about their burdensome obligations and the abuse meted out to them by their gurus, none of the hijras I interacted with said they would choose to live alone. Hijra authenticity and relatedness are evaluated in terms of belonging—having a *rit*, a guru, and extended hijra kin—factors that signal not just hijra identity, but also their difference and greater izzat (respect) relative to their fellow kotis.

Second, this incident showcases the variety of relationships in a hijra's life—guru, mother, and husband. Contrary to popular constructions of hijras as individuals without enduring kin ties,[2] hijras themselves repeatedly articulate the importance of these relationships in constructing their sense of identity. Their articulations also reveal the hierarchical arrangement of these relationships, wherein primary legitimacy is obtained through a *rit* in a hijra house and the guru-cela bond. Madhavi could have continued living an unencumbered life with her husband and mother. But such a life was not an "authentic" hijra life. In Madhavi's conceptualization, what legitimized and authenticated her hijra status—what in effect made her a "real hijra"—were the *rit* in the Sheharwala house and her relationship with her guru.

Time and time again over the course of my fieldwork, the *rit* was mentioned as a marker of difference and izzat. Those who had a *rit* in a hijra house were perceived to be of higher status than those who did not. The *rit* not only denoted membership in the wider community, but also hierarchized kotis along this axis of kinship. Those kotis who "had a *rit* in the house" were official kin, while "*bina ritwale*," or those without a *rit*, were, technically, not kin.[3] While this did not preclude the latter from identifying as kotis, as non-hijras, it placed them lower in the hierarchy of respect or izzat.

Why this privileging of kinship as a criterion of authenticity and status within the community? What is the meaning of kinship for these individuals, and how does their construction compare with dominant patterns of kinship in South India? How is kinship used as a status marker both within the koti community and outside of it? In this chapter, I address these questions using the axis of kinship as a key marker of self-crafting and the means whereby hijras and other kotis construct their identities and negotiate their izzat.

HIJRA KINSHIP AND FAMILY REDEFINED

Analyses of kinship in India have a long and distinguished history, dating at least from the time of Henry Maine (1822–88) and Lewis Henry Morgan (1818–81). Studies of the family and kinship in this region have ranged from comparative terminological analyses (Morgan 1970) to structural analyses of marital exchange in relation to governing "values" (Dumont 1983), the discerning of "indigenous ideas of relatedness"—what Schneider called the "code" and "substance" of kinship relations (Inden and Nicholas 1977; Ostor, Fruzzetti, and Barnett 1982; Fruzzetti 1990), the logic of the caste system (Karve 1965; Mayer 1960), the purity of women (Yalman 1963), and the ideology of gift-giving in relation to kinship (Trautmann 1981; Vatuk 1975; Raheja 1988). In all of these analyses of kinship, marriage is the central and crucial variable. Problematic as Dumont's assertions might be regarding the ubiquity of the principle of alliance in South Indian as well as North Indian kinship (see Vatuk 1969, 1982; Madan 1975; Uberoi 1989), most scholars working on conceptions of the family and kinship in India have focused on marriage or alliance as the fulcrum of relatedness and the central institution of kinship relations. This is especially true of South India, where "every conceivable pattern of descent and form of marriage is represented" (Dumont 1983).

In fact, as Margaret Trawick notes in her book *Notes on Love in a Tamil Family* (1990), "[a]ny person trying to understand South Indian culture must eventually examine and comprehend [their] elegant patterns of kinship organization" (118). Trawick's ethnography is an elegant, "person-centered account of kinship" in South India, a cataloguing of the patterns of kinship that highlight the importance and fundamental ambiguity of love. Her book is a beautifully written account of the feelings of attachment between close kin in a Tamil family and the webs of signification they weave as they mediate between the texts and contexts of their lives, between an idealized system of kinship and the nature of desire in which the ideal can never be sustained.

Like many other South Indian kinship theorists, however, Trawick has as one of her goals in this book a better understanding of the logic and aesthetics of that fundamental model or ideal of kinship in South India—the practice of preferred or prescribed cross-cousin marriage. As she notes, "A key . . . feature in the pattern of Dravidian kinship is marriage." Without this ideal, "the organization of kinship terms and the basis of the system make no sense" (1990, 119). While Trawick, perhaps more than most other South Asian kinship theorists, acknowledges the significance of variation—"the plurality of wills and desires that make up actual human life"—her ethnography does not really address the specific kinship arrangements of groups such as hijras that do not explicitly acknowledge marital obligations and procreative kinship ideologies, are not moderated by the logic of the caste system and its concern with the "purity" of women (cf. Yalman 1963; Dumont 1983), and are unmediated by the soteriological imperative of the *kanyadana* (gift of a virgin) ideal (see Trautmann 1981; Fruzzetti 1990). Given this context, perhaps the most productive comparisons for purposes of better understanding hijra kinship structures are with those social groups that are similarly located with respect to the *non*-centrality of marriage and

procreative kinship arrangements, that is, "subaltern" communities such as *devadasis*, so-called servants of god or "wives of the god-king" (Marglin 1985) and *tawa'ifs*, or courtesans—groups that challenge the "respectability" of marriage, explicitly or implicitly subvert gender roles, and encode an intricate guru-*sisya parampara* (teacher-disciple tradition) and household structure.

Devadasis, literally "servants of god," are women who are ritually dedicated, often before puberty, to service in Hindu temples. Prior to the early twentieth century, when it was "outlawed," this institution was far more common, although it continues to survive today in many parts of India, especially Orissa, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh. *Devadasis* do not marry (mortal) men. Their dedication to temple service constitutes marriage to the deity Jagannatha, or the ascetic Jamadagni.[4] As Frederique Apfel Marglin notes, "[T]he *devadasis'* kinship practices were considered highly unusual among Hindu women, essentially because they do not marry. The *devadasis* on the other hand are also considered in some ways to represent the married state *par excellence*. Being married to [the deity] and hence never becoming widows, they embody the auspiciousness of the married state" (Marglin 1985, 46; emphasis in original). They are in effect *permanently* auspicious, *nityasumangali*, or ever-auspicious "wife-of-god/woman-with-no-(human)-husband" (Srinivasan 1984, 179; cf. Kersenboom-Story 1987; Meduri 1996; Allen 1997). At the same time, however, *devadasis* are considered impure; an impurity that derives from their engagement with dance and its association with sex work in nineteenth-century India. Subsequent to their "marriage" to the deity, legal marriage was proscribed for *devadasis*, but sex—with a selected patron, often either the king or members of his household, or temple priests—was not similarly proscribed. It is therefore this tension—between the auspiciousness and the impurity of *devadasis* stemming from their engagement both with forms of dance and nonmarital sex—that is particularly interesting in the context of a comparison with hijras.

In precolonial times, *devadasis* were primarily ritual performers, formally engaged in service to the temple. They were also temple dancers—trained and associated with Indian classical dance in the context of Hindu temple worship—an occupation that increasingly defined the understanding and representation of such women from the nineteenth century onward (Vatsyayan 1968; Gonda 1975; Eschmann, Kulke, and Tripati 1978; Bradford 1983; Srinivasan 1984, 1988; Marglin 1985; Meduri 1988, 1996). Women chosen for service as *devadasis* were trained from childhood in the arts of song and dance, and were renowned for their abilities.[5] Such was their

repute, legend has it that when Rama, the eponymous hero of the epic *Ramayana* returned from exile with his wife Sita, his joyous brother explicitly instructed "all masters of musical instruments, and the *ganika* [*devadasi*] in full numbers" to "go out to behold the moonlike countenance of Rama" and welcome him home (Meyer 1971, 269).[6]

Historically, the vilification and subsequent decline in status of *devadasis* stems to a large extent from the association of dance with promiscuity—from an explicit construction of *devadasis* as "temple prostitutes" (Srinivasan 1984; Kersenboom-Story 1987; Meduri 1996; Allen 1997).[7] According to the well-known historian A. L. Basham, the institution of female temple dancers used to be a pan-Indian phenomenon, at least until the turn of the century (Basham 1959). The origins of what is today referred to as classical South Indian dance stem from just such a temple dance tradition (Erdman 1996). By the early twentieth century, however, this tradition had survived in only a few South Indian temples (Bradford 1983; Srinivasan 1984, 1985, 1988; Marglin 1985). It was at this period in Indian history, in the wake of the anti-*nautch* campaign and the restrictive prescriptions of (colonial) Victorian morality, that classical dance became domesticated, reformed, and "secularized"—in effect made "respectable" for middle-class consumption through its dissociation from (Hindu) temple complexes and, by extension, from the purview of "temple prostitution" and the *devadasi* community (Meduri 1996; Allen 1997; O'Shea 1998; cf. Reed 1998).[8] As the anti-*nautch* campaign declared, the association between *devadasis'* dance traditions and their engagement in "immoral" sex necessitated their denigration and subsequent outlawing.[9]

In addition to the reduced emphasis on the institution of marriage and the circulation of the dance/sex/stigma signifiers, the social structure of *devadasi* communities as well as many of their ritual enactments also resonate significantly with the rituals and social bonds established within contemporary hijra communities. According to Marglin, whatever the caste affiliation of *devadasis* prior to their joining the community, once they are initiated, "they are classified simply as *devadasis* who are said to have no rank or caste status" (Marglin 1985, 19), a classification beyond social boundaries that has obvious parallels with the hijra community. In addition, as several of these scholars maintain, the specific rituals involved in the *pottukattu* (initiation) and the *sadanku* (incorporation) ceremonies that *devadasis* undergo not only parallel Brahmin initiation and marriage ceremonies (Srinivasan 1984, 1988; Marglin 1985; Kersenboom-Story 1987), but also bear some resemblance to the various stages of hijra authentication, including the *rit* and *nirvan* ceremonies.

Further, the principal bond for *devadasis* is that with their mother (whether "real" or adopted). This bond is the key to the *devadasi* initiate's lineage, her social standing, and her well-being in the community, often determining her choice of dance guru as well as the basis of her relationship with her guru (Srinivasan 1984; cf. Meduri 1996). Despite the law of equal inheritance for sons *and* daughters in India (a rule that often favors sons over daughters in its "normative" practice), within the *devadasi* community, it is *daughters* through whom descent and inheritance are reckoned, and it is the mother-daughter relationship that forms the principal affective, material, and social bond. In fact, as Srinivasan (1984) informs us, a "telling Tamil proverb remarks upon seeing a dark and gloomy house or atmosphere: Why the mourning? It is as dark as though a boy has been born in a *dasi*'s house" (193). Marglin notes that even the unmarried *devadasis* "along with their brothers and sisters-in-law, [form] a group which has no ties with patrilineality" (1985, 35). Such marginalization of marriage, "male issue," and patrilineality/patriarchy, the implicit or often explicit gender subversion apparent within the *devadasi* community, and the structural patterns of ritual and social organization among *devadasis*, make them a more useful comparison group for better understanding hijra social structures and meanings than affinal groups organized around procreative sexuality.

Another useful comparison group in this regard is that of the courtesans, or *tawa'ifs*, in the Muslim-dominated kingdoms of precolonial India such as Hyderabad and Awadh. These women were also associated with various forms of dance and sex work (Lynton and Rajan 1974; Oldenburg 1984, 1992). In one of the few detailed accounts of *tawa'ifs* that is both historical commentary and contemporary ethnography, Veena Oldenburg provides us with a glimpse of the world of *tawa'ifs* in Lucknow, noting that this world is "as complex and hierarchical as the society of which it was a part" (1984, 134; cf. Chandra 1973; Ruswa 1982).

From the end of the eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, when Lucknow served as the capital of the kingdom of Awadh, nawabs were generous patrons of the *tawa'ifs* (or the honorific, *baiji*) in this city. Well-versed in the arts of dance, music, and entertainment, these *tawa'ifs* were "preservers and performers of the high culture of the court" (Oldenburg 1992, 30) and were highly respected both in the court as well as in society at large. As one scholar maintains, at the time, "it was said that until a person had associated with courtesans he was not a polished man" (Sharar 1975, 192), and Oldenburg notes that "young sons of the nobility [were] often sent to the best-known [*tawa'if* households] for instruction in etiquette, the art of conversation and polite manners, and the appreciation of Urdu literature" (Oldenburg 1992, 30).

There were several *tawa'if* households, or *kothas*, in Lucknow until the establishment of British suzerainty in the mid-nineteenth century. These households served to entertain—and were sponsored by—different nawabs and even the king himself. Each of these *kothas* was run by a chief courtesan, or *caudharayan*, often an older *tawa'if* now engaged in training younger celas or disciples in the arts of dance, music, and gendered *nakhre* (play or performance).[10] These celas were often talented daughters (and nieces) of the household—children of the *tawa'ifs* and their wealthy sponsors—as well as destitute or abused women who sometimes "chose" the freedom of the *kotha* over the confinement of their marital lives (Oldenburg 1984, 1992). In addition to this highly trained and prestigious core group of the *caudharayan*'s celas, the *kotha* also employed people to maintain this "high culture," including special chefs and musicians.[11] It also provided space for women less talented in the "high" aesthetics of pleasure, women called *thakahis* and *randis*, who were of a different class and training than the *tawa'ifs* and provided "chiefly sexual services" for the common man (Oldenburg 1992, 31). As Oldenburg emphasizes, these *kothas* not only provided refuge for many women abused by their husbands and affinal families, but the worldview, lifestyle, and practices of the *tawa'ifs*—primarily their gendered *nakhre* (performance) and their non-confrontational enactments of *capatbazi*, or lesbianism—were "self-consciously elaborated, subtle, and covert forms of resistance against patriarchal culture" (Oldenburg 1992, 23).

Only in the mid-nineteenth century, with the consolidation of British rule in India, did the reputation and prestige of the *tawa'if* tradition decline significantly, gradually becoming synonymous with common prostitution. This decline of their reputation and izzat was as much a response to Victorian morality and the pragmatic need to provide "healthy specimens" for European soldiers, as a result of a deliberate effort on the part of the British to "denigrate nawabi culture," according to the *tawa'ifs* interviewed by Veena Oldenburg (Oldenburg 1992, 33; cf. Ballhatchet 1980). In other words, for *tawa'ifs*, the golden age of their history preceded the British presence in India; their tradition, reputation, and izzat in society were tied to the history and patronage of the nobility in Muslim-dominated kingdoms like Awadh and Hyderabad, a kingdom to which many of them migrated after the exile of the Awadhi king, Wajid Ali Shah in 1856 (Oldenburg 1992).

Much like *devadasis* and *tawa'ifs*, hijras also see their "golden age" in the past, when they received the patronage of the nobility, both Muslim

and Hindu, and were respected for their knowledge and performance of the arts (especially song and dance). Like *devadasis* and *tawa'ifs*, hijras predicate their identities on a subversion of "normative" marriage patterns and gender roles, are associated with a tension between sexual chastity and "promiscuity," and encode an intricate network of kin within their households. Their "houses" include gurus, mothers, and celas as the crucial kin bonds through which they constitute a lineage and reckon kinship and descent.[12] In addition, like those of *devadasis* and *tawa'ifs*, almost all the primary relationships of belonging and caring in hijras' lives center within the social and physical unit that constitutes their community.

Several scholars have noted this intricate network of kin within the hijra community (Opler 1960; Shah 1961; Sinha 1967; Salunkhe 1976; Pimpley and Sharma 1985; Sharma 1989; Nanda 1990, 1994; Cohen 1995b; Jaffrey 1996; Agrawal 1997). In none of these analyses do procreative kinship ideologies centered on the institution of marriage occupy the primary node of hijra relatedness. While the *idea* of marriage and marital relations might circulate as an important symbolic referent for hijras—as the moment of procreative potential that occasions their auspicious presence in the public domain and as the instantiation of desire that is always in conflict with the hijra ideal—the institution is clearly not the fulcrum of the hijra kinship structure. Ideally, marriage—to a man *or* a woman—is proscribed among hijras, and affinal kin are not significant in their kinship alignments. In fact, senior hijras explicitly invoke the rhetoric of asexuality and emphasize the renunciation of worldly ties, including especially marital ties and procreative sexuality. According to hijras in Hyderabad, the status and power of hijras is unequivocally linked to that of celibate sannyasis (ascetics). As Amir nayak said, "Real hijras are those who should have no mental or physical desire for men whatsoever. This is what is important." Thus, hijra identity is primarily indexed by asexuality and the absence of marital relationships with either men or women.

In addition, once they join the community, hijras are expected to cut off all ties with their natal families. Although most hijras were abandoned by their "own" or "blood" relatives (*sontham* or *rakta sambandam*) and remained bitter about this, in some instances hijras themselves, following the ideals of their community, renounced ties with their natal families. Given that the hallmarks of a sannyasi are celibacy and renunciation of family ties, hijras invoked their renunciation of natal family as a valued symbol and practice in this regard, in keeping with their sannyasi self-image.

These interdictions appeared to fundamentally structure hijras' conceptions of family and kinship. As they repeatedly stated, "family" for hijras

was defined primarily in terms of other hijras, especially one's guru lineage; relationships with other hijras (and kotis), rather than natal family or "husbands" and their kin, constituted the most important relational bonds for hijras.[13] "*These* are our people now. It is only hijras who will look after us if anything happens," was the most commonly stated hijra sentiment. Any questions on my part regarding a hijra's relationship with her husband and the possibility of that tie being an enduring family bond was openly laughed at and dismissed outright. "How can they be our family? Family is *manollu* [our people], and they are the only ones who will take care of us when we get older," Shanti told me.

Central to this understanding of family is a notion of caring, indexed principally through a temporal (and spatial) dimension of "being there" rather than biogenetic connections (through "blood" and marriage). As with gay kinship ideologies in the United States, hijra and koti constructions of family appear to invert the association of biology with permanence, by presenting their "chosen" hijra/koti ties as the "*most* reliable and enduring of kinship relations" (Weston 1998, 63; emphasis in original). But while partners are an integral part of the enduring chosen family for lesbians and gay men in the United States, for hijras and kotis, their pantis or husbands are categorically *not* family. By definition, a husband or panti is not a koti and is therefore excluded from "family" categorization or the broader signifier of "our people."

Through such elaborations of belonging, not only do hijras and kotis potentially destabilize our "principles" of kinship—principles of descent and alliance, consanguinity and affinity that have been a staple of anthropological inquiry for decades (Radcliffe-Brown and Forde 1950; Lévi-Strauss 1969)—they also complicate our cultural understandings of "choice" in the context of kin relations. While the incorporation of "choice" in the definitions of family for the gay men and women of Weston's San Francisco "assigned kinship to the realm of free will inclination" (1991, 31), hijra and koti definitions of family do not appear to encode notions of idiosyncratic choice and egalitarian potential in quite the same way. In fact, aside from the *lack* of choice that some kotis articulated in their constructions of self and belonging, the central and only prescriptive bond in hijra conceptualizations of their family—the guru-cela bond—was not purely idiosyncratic, being more often assigned rather than chosen, and involved far more structured obligatory responsibilities than the gay familial relationships described by Kath Weston (1991, 1998).

To better understand hijra patterns of relatedness, we need to understand what, specifically, it means to identify as a hijra or koti in Hyderabad. What

are the particular historical and cultural contexts that mediate constructions of identity and kinship within these communities? And how are these understandings of belonging, authenticity, and relationality tied to broader constructions of self and the patterns of kinship in India? Understanding why pantis do not constitute "family," and how relations of "koti-ness" operate through the particular networks of kin they incorporate is one aim of this chapter. Much like the construction of gay relationships in Weston's United States, "categories of permanence and transience" do indeed structure kotis' relationships, but such temporality is indelibly inflected, measured, and refracted through particular, culturally mediated understandings of love, obligation, and service—that is, *caring* in the broadest sense of the term (see Borneman 1997; Faubion 1997). If, as Kath Weston and others note, individuals make their relationships not as they please but rather within given historical and cultural circumstances, then we need to examine instantiations as well as potential inversions of "hegemonic" kinship ideologies in terms of such specificities in order to better understand the lived meanings of kinship for these individuals. For hijras and kotis therefore, we need to study the specific interplay of history, meaning, and practice in their structures of kinship and belonging—the tensions and fluid relationship between their ideals and experiences, or what Trawick would describe as the "intentional ambiguity" of love in "Indian culture" (1990, 41)—in order to understand what it actually means to identify as a koti and the stakes implicit in this process of subjectivation (see Foucault 1997). It is their affective bonds—of guru and cela, mother and daughter, husband and wife, sister and *gurubhai*—in their historical, cultural, and gendered specificity that we must pay attention to in order to appreciate the webs of significance hijras and kotis weave as they constantly mediate between their longings and ideals of kinship and their actual lived experiences.

In this chapter, I describe the various hijra kinship bonds that most hijras establish, such as the guru-cela relationship and the mother-daughter relationship, as well as the supposedly prohibited relationships such as the *jodi* (bond) with a husband, and the tie to the natal family. The tensions between hijra desires, their structural patternings and "rules" of kinship, and their lived experiences of these various affective bonds are crucial to understanding the meanings of kinship and their resonance with normative kinship patterns. On the one hand, despite claiming nonprocreative sexual identities and defying the perceived centrality of procreative sexuality to the definition of a family, hijras appear to reinscribe hegemonic rituals and principles. This is evident in their ritualized rearticulation of the marital bond and their mirroring of the consanguinal mother-child bond

(Lewin 1998b). Similarly, by establishing both obligatory, hierarchical relationships as well as those relatively more egalitarian relationships based on affection, other self-identified kotis also appear to privilege "normative" familial alignments as significant for their identity and as a means whereby they can acquire izzat. On the other hand, as Kath Weston cautions us, "ostensibly similar formal features of kinship can carry conflicting meanings and embed subtle ideological shifts, allowing 'new' family forms to be read simultaneously as radically innovative and thoroughly assimilationist. In the end, they are intrinsically neither" (1998, 64). It is therefore through the *complexity* of hijra/koti instantiations of kinship and family, that we can understand (and potentially destabilize) the ideal and its often ambiguous relation to lived experience—a goal the rest of this chapter strives toward by describing the central affective ties in the lives of hijras and kotis.

LASHKARWALA/SHEHARWALA *RISTE*: HIJRA HOUSES, THE *RIT*, AND GURU-CELA RELATIONSHIPS

Sushmita and I were chatting in the shade of her hut. She had her legs stretched out in front of her and was reclining against the side of the hut. I was sitting a few feet away, on the same mat. It was quiet, about two in the afternoon, siesta time at the tank. Most other hijras were either sleeping or had gone for a movie. Suddenly, Yamini marched up to where we were sitting and started shouting at Sushmita. She was obviously very upset about something, and from what I understood the issue centered on Yamini's cela, Palamma. Yamini was accusing Sushmita of negatively influencing Palamma and encouraging her to run away from her guru. That morning, Palamma had apparently decided that Yamini was too abusive and had left for her natal village in Warangal. According to Yamini, Sushmita was responsible for Palamma's decision, and she proceeded to abuse Sushmita, using extremely harsh and crude language. "Was something poking you in your ass, you *bhosrivala* [vagina-owner],[14] you *gandu-berupia*? You are an *andoli* [orphan] kojja, and you think you can make trouble for us real kojjas! We, me and my sisters are the real kojjas, not you.[15] Remember that! We have a guru, unlike you . . ." Yamini screamed at Sushmita. She continued in this vein for a while. By this time, everyone who was at the tank had woken up and come to see what the noise was all about. I had moved out of Sushmita's hut, and was standing next to Surekha and Shanti, some distance away. There were at least eight or nine hijras there, but none of them lifted a finger or said a word to stop Yamini's tirade. Sushmita, who is

not particularly small or meek in other circumstances, was just sitting in a corner taking the abuse heaped on her with only murmurs of protest that she had nothing to do with Palamma leaving Yamini.

What this incident reveals, apart from the latent aggression in hijras' lives, is the importance of kin relatedness, or more specifically, the *rit* and guru-cela relationship in symbolizing membership within the hijra community. The other hijras "could not intervene" they said, because Sushmita was an *andoli* hijra. This term implies that she does not have a guru in the hijra community and therefore could be verbally abused by a "real" hijra. Sushmita had acquired a guru and put the *rit* in a hijra house as soon as she joined the community, ten years ago. But her guru had died a few years ago, and Sushmita had not chosen another guru since then. She was illegitimate in some respect—without an official kin network—and hence had to suffer in silence the shame of being abused by other *ritwale*, or "real," hijras.

As the opening vignette of this chapter and the incident above indicate, the *rit* is one, if not *the* most structured marker of hijra kinship. It is not so much an object as a symbolic act of initiation; it symbolizes a ritual enactment or "rite of passage," to use Van Gennep's (1960) phrase, which designates a hijra's formal membership within the community. The *rit* connotes belonging—to a hijra house specifically and to the community more broadly—and consequently indexes one of the most important criteria of authenticity and commitment to hijra identity.

Two hijra houses are represented in Hyderabad: the Sheharwala and the Lashkarwala houses. Their names literally denote their territorial domains, or *ilakas*—the "city" (*shehar*) and the "army camp" (*lashkar*), or Hyderabad and Secunderabad, respectively. The "city" of Hyderabad (what is now referred to as the old city) was the space where the Qutb Shahi kings and the Nizams ruled, while Secunderabad was the site of the British army encampment. The territorial domains of the two contemporary hijra houses, Sheharwala and Lashkarwala, are divided along the lines of this spatial history, with members of each house having the right to "ask" for badhai in Hyderabad and in Secunderabad, respectively. Thus, Lashkarwala or Sheharwala *riste* are the most important relationships for any hijra in Hyderabad and Secunderabad. Almost the first question asked of any hijra is either "Which house do you have the *rit* in?" or, "Who is your guru?" "Most important, if there is no guru and no *rit* with a hijra house, that person does not have izzat . . . and is not recognized as a hijra," Munira told me in no uncertain terms.

So what is the *rit*, how does one "put it," and how does it relate to the process of acquiring a guru and a wider kinship network? Second, how else

is kinship elaborated? Third, what is the wider meaning of "putting the *rit*" in the context of the koti community, and how does it work both as a kinship marker and as a means to acquire status? Finally, what is the relationship between the patterns of kinship articulated within hijra and wider koti communities, and normative kinship patterning? In the following section, I address each of these questions, starting with a description of the ritual involved in acquiring membership in the community—putting the *rit* in a hijra house—before addressing the more abstract issues of its significance within the community and the importance of the guru-cela relationship in this kinship network.

The Ritual of the *Rit*

I witnessed the *rit* ceremony twice during my fieldwork. The first time I witnessed this important hijra rite, I had dropped in to see Irfan nayak one afternoon in October. I walked straight to her house, passing the larger Sheharwala house that is situated directly in front of it. Irfan nayak was at home along with her celas, Shahbaz and Rani, and another hijra I did not recognize. All of them greeted me very amiably, and, following the usual pattern, I sat down while Shahbaz began to make tea for everyone. After about half an hour of general conversation, during which I told the new hijra (a visitor from Delhi who was here for a few days) who I was and what I was doing, two other hijras I had not met earlier walked in. Both of them touched the nayak's feet saying "*paon padti hun*,"[16] and the older of the two greeted the other hijras present with "*salam aleikum*," a marked symbol of equality in status. She was another of Irfan's celas and thereby the other hijras' contemporary, or *gurubhai*. Her name was Saroja, I later learned. The other hijra with her was much younger and seemed utterly scared and awed in the presence of the nayak. Both of them appeared to be expected by Irfan nayak and her celas.

After the preliminary greetings, Saroja asked Irfan nayak "Where are the others?" in a fairly impatient tone of voice. Irfan replied, "They cannot come. Bala nayak has gone out to pay the municipal taxes, and Shafat nayak is not well. So let us not wait; let us do it now." I had no idea what they were referring to, but decided not to attract attention for fear that they would ask me to leave, a non-hijra not being privy to such privileged information. So I just sat quietly and watched.

They arranged themselves in a circle, covering their heads with the ends of their saris. In the center of the circle, they put a steel plate with some *paan* leaves and betel nut that they covered with a towel. Irfan then said, "We are meeting here because this hijra wants to put a *rit* in our house. What

do you want your name to be?" she asked the young initiate, who appeared too scared to reply and just looked at Saroja. Saroja turned to Irfan and said, "Kaushal." Irfan then continued. "Kaushal, do you want to become the cela of Saroja?" Kaushal nodded. At this point, Saroja put four rupees and twenty-five paise on the plate, and Irfan said, "Kaushal is the cela of Saroja, who is the cela of Irfan of the Sheharwala house." All five hijras present, with the exception of Kaushal, then clapped loudly, saying "*din, din, din,*" three times.[17] Kaushal was told to touch the nayak's feet, then the feet of her guru, and then the feet of each of the other hijras in the room. "You are now a real [*asli*] hijra with a *rit* in the Sheharwala house. Don't forget that. And your guru, Saroja, you should serve her well because she is now everything to you—mother, father, husband, sister, everything," Rani said, while blessing her. Kaushal had now become a "real" hijra; she possessed the most important markers of hijra identity for an initiate—she had a guru who served as her immediate family and through whom she reckoned descent, and she had put the requisite *rit* in the Sheharwala house and, by extension, in the hijra community, whose rules she had now publicly acknowledged she would abide by.

While there are some differences between the ceremonies enacted here and the ritual as it has been described in the literature (Sharma 1989; Nanda 1990),[18] the fundamental meaning and structural grammar appears to be the same. Every hijra must have a guru, and initiation into the community—the acquisition or putting of the *rit* (*rit dalna*)—occurs only under the sponsorship of this guru. The guru-cela relationship is the most important bond among hijras and is necessarily central to hijra conceptions of family. It is a mutually beneficial, reciprocal relationship, entailing both social and economic obligations and responsibilities for both parties. Further, the *rit* signifies not only membership within the community as a whole but, more specifically, affiliation with a given symbolic hijra house, namely, that to which the guru belongs. Hijras in Hyderabad referred to the formal kinship bond between guru and cela that resulted from the *rit* in terms of the relationship associated with their symbolic house, as Lashkarwala or Sheharwala *riste* (bonds).

Guru-Cela Relationships

The centrality of the guru-cela relationship to hijra identity—its prescriptive quality and its importance for the initiate's acceptance and advancement in the community ranks—is undeniable. The initiate explicitly acknowledges the social and economic contractual obligations that are inherent in this acquisition of a new family. Although clearly hierarchical, with seniority among hijras (as a principle of both social organization and social control) being reckoned through the unequal power structure of gurus and celas, this relationship is a mutually beneficial, reciprocal one. Celas are expected to be obedient, respectful, and loyal, and to serve their gurus well by catering to all their domestic needs. In exchange for their celas' services and earnings, gurus are required to look after their health and well-being, treat them fairly, provide them with clothes and food, and give them the necessary training and knowledge about hijra customs and manners to permit their rise in seniority. The relationship between a guru and her cela is often highly idealized, with the guru being the cela's "mother, father, husband, sister, everything," to quote Rani. Hence the oft-repeated assertion, "This is our family now. It is only hijras who will look after us if anything happens."

As they repeatedly state, hijras consider only other hijras—or in wider social contexts, the koti community—rather than consanguinal or affinal kin, as their "family." And within this hijra family, it is the guru-cela bond, an iterative relationship,[19] that serves as the primary axis of kinship and genealogical descent.

Celas' responsibilities toward gurus include both economic and social obligations. As part of the initiation, a new cela has to pay a sum of one hundred and fifty rupees to her guru, to be distributed among the nayaks of that symbolic house. Although a cela can change her guru and house (Sinha 1967; Sharma 1989; Nanda 1990, 1994),[20] every time this occurs she has to pay twice the amount that she last paid for her *rit* ceremony. For instance, if a cela changes gurus and houses twice, she must pay her new guru six hundred rupees. By this process of accumulation, the amount paid by a hijra can be as much as the eighty thousand rupees recently paid by a hijra in Bombay, resulting in chronic debt and economic bondage. Why would someone agree to incur this debt and continue to serve as a cela? When I asked this question, I was greeted with incredulity at my naïveté. "It is because we need our gurus, our people, Gayatri," Madhavi told me patiently, the frequent changes being necessitated, in her opinion, by the abuse often meted out by gurus. Munira reiterated this when she said, "A hijra has to have a guru and a *rit* in a hijra house." Otherwise, as she noted earlier, "that person is not considered a hijra." So, whatever the price, one needs to pay the fee necessary to acquire a guru and a *rit* in a hijra house, even if it means paying a large amount because of frequent (perceived) abuse by multiple gurus.

This base amount, however, does not include the fines levied for the infraction of rules within the community. When I witnessed the *rit* ceremony the second time, it was when two kandra hijras, Srilakshmi and her

guru, Rajeshwari, had gone to put a *rit* in the Lashkarwala house. Srilakshmi had recently run away to another city in a fit of anger and had affiliated with another hijra house in that city. In arguing her case with the nayak, Srilakshmi claimed that she had only been *living* with hijras belonging to another house, but had not in fact put the *rit* in that house. After a particularly vociferous transaction with the nayak, both Srilakshmi and her guru were asked to pay an amount totaling five thousand rupees, covering the cost of the *rit* as well as *dands* (fines) for the infraction of hijra rules, namely, not putting a *rit* quickly enough—"living like a *gandu*," as it was termed—and the nonchalant changing of house affiliations. This second act was not exactly an infraction of any rule, but it was frowned upon within the hijra community. The amount of the fine appeared to be fairly arbitrarily decided by the nayak, although it was subject to much loud, vituperative negotiation.

Celas not only incur a debt by virtue of the *rit* transaction, but are economically bound to their guru through the latter's control of their means of livelihood. This is especially true of badhai hijras. Given the nature of their ritual performances, group membership is absolutely vital to survival among this group. A new cela has to learn the songs and dances necessary to her trade, a knowledge base that can be imparted only by her seniors in the community. Further, whenever there is a badhai performance, it is left to the guru's discretion to take whomever she chooses with her. While the money thus earned is not retained by any one cela, those who are good singers and dancers (or are the guru's favorites) not only have an easier life in terms of everyday work, but also, as Vanitha informed me, "get more izzat . . . and acquire a name for themselves as good badhai hijras."

Earning a guru's displeasure can seriously damage a hijra's chances for promotion within the ranks and acceptance among one's peers, in addition to affecting such mundane but important issues as eating and sleeping patterns, household chores, discretionary budgets for a cela's other activities, and the amount of free time one can claim. Many kandra hijras with whom I spoke gave this reason as their justification for why they did not go live in their nayak's house, even though their presence was required or sometimes demanded: "If you go and live in the *chali* [nayak's house], then you don't have izzat there, and they make you do all the household work—cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, fetching things, pressing all their feet, everything. And then they don't even give you enough food to eat, because you have to eat whatever is leftover after all the elders have finished eating. You don't have money of your own to go buy food even! And anyway they will

beat you if they know you have done that. I lived there for a few months, and I don't want to go back there right now. We'll see later," Shanti told me.

As mentioned earlier, the different hijra houses each have their own *ilaka*, or territorial boundary, within which they have the sole right to perform and earn money. All hijras are bound to their particular kin group and therefore territory, and any transgressions incur a severe beating and in some instances even death (Sharma 1989; Nanda 1990). Not only is there nowhere to perform as a single hijra, those who try to live and work independently often suffer social ostracism. Largely on account of this, most hijras did not see this as a viable or sensible option at all and, despite all the indignities, would rather stay with their gurus than try to live alone.

Further, making it on their own is made all the more difficult for celas because gurus have a vested interest in enlarging their own groups as much as possible. The cela's presence is required not merely to enhance a guru's prestige but also to defend a house's territorial boundaries, physically and symbolically. Until very recently, the Lashkarwala hijras in Hyderabad greatly resented their Sheharwala sisters, largely on account of the demarcation of *ilakas*, as well as the former's inability to defend their territory, for lack of a large enough pool of hijra members. Further, aside from their dancing and singing as a troupe, badhai hijras cannot afford to be solitary because they rely on their numbers to threaten and cajole their patrons into parting with money. "Single hijras I can easily deal with, but when they come as a group, that is when they are scary," my next-door neighbor told me.

While it is most pronounced for badhai hijras, the social and economic dependence of the cela on her guru is also evident among kandra (sex worker) hijras. For those living under the tank, every cela had to pay her guru a sum of fifty rupees every single day of the month, irrespective of her earnings for that day. This was greatly resented by the celas, but as Surekha said, "What can we do? We have to give them that money, otherwise they will throw us out or kill us." In addition, celas had to do all the household chores for themselves and their gurus: cooking, washing vessels and clothes, buying vegetables and rations, getting clothes ironed, and fetching odds and ends whenever required. Often but not always, a guru has two celas, permitting a splitting of the tasks and an easing of their individual burdens. Nevertheless, a guru can make life extremely trying for her cela. Some gurus are worse than others. For instance, one of the gurus at the tank, Yamini, can never retain any of her celas for more than a year because of her constant nagging as well as her physical and verbal abuse of them.[21] In the past, after suffering her for a while, these celas have either run away to another city

and acquired a new guru, or gone back to their natal village to live their lives as non-hijra kotis.

Celas are at the beck and call of their gurus, and any delay in responding or inclination to be lazy is punished by either verbal or physical abuse. Further, although less pronounced relative to badhai hijras, kandra gurus also control the time and place of their cela's "working hours." Among the tank group, whose home was also their workplace, gurus retained the right to bring their customers back to their huts, while celas had to be content with performing out in the open or in stray train compartments across the railway tracks. While both gurus and celas engaged in sex work only during the evening and part of the night, gurus could contract with a customer during the day as well if they so chose, although this was rare. If a cela did the same however—especially if she had not fulfilled all her obligations to cook, clean, wash, and fetch—she was beaten by her guru for dereliction of duty. In addition, gurus control their celas' right to perpetuate the power structure by taking celas of their own. Hence, even though Shanti and Surekha had proven themselves "real hijras" by having had their *nirvan* operations and having served their gurus dutifully for more than five years, they were not permitted to take a cela because, as Munira, Surekha's guru, confided to me, this would weaken her (Munira's) control and lower her izzat in the eyes of her nati celas (cela's celas) who would be involved in sex work alongside her.

Seniority in the hijra community is measured both by time spent in the community (irrespective of the age of the hijra) and by the acquisition of celas. Ideally, having undergone the *nirvan* operation and proven oneself a real hijra, the next step would be to acquire a cela. The acquisition of a cela serves to signal "adulthood" in the community, and the ability, or *himmat* (strength), as Rohini once told me, to support another individual and continue the genealogical line. In reality however, there is some tension or ambivalence in allowing celas to acquire celas of their own. By permitting this act, gurus relinquish full control over their celas; they are acknowledging that celas have sufficient *himmat* and therefore must be given a certain amount of respect. Gurus, somewhat predictably, are ambivalent about this step.

Nevertheless, despite the apparently skewed nature of the guru-cela relationship, the fact remains that gurus, too, have a responsibility toward their celas. The guru is obligated to look after her cela in times of ill-health and misfortune, and to speak on her behalf at official hijra gatherings and ceremonies. She is expected to treat her cela as one would a daughter, showing affection and coming to her aid in times of difficulty. If ever there is an altercation involving the cela, the guru is expected to support her publicly, while recognizing that she alone reserves the right to reprimand her in private and even beat her if the need arises. At festivals and important hijra ceremonies, the guru is obligated to provide her cela with new clothes and money. In short, the guru is responsible for the health and happiness of her cela, and the latter's behavior reflects her upbringing, so to speak, and the izzat of her guru, as well as that of her house and the wider hijra family.

One of the guru's chief responsibilities is overseeing the cela's *nirvan* operation. Not only must the guru give permission for this act, she must also care for the cela (at least monetarily) after the operation while she is unable to work. At the end of the forty-day period of seclusion and rest following the operation, during which time it is often the hijra's mother, rather than her guru, who looks after her, it is the guru's responsibility to host the *dawat* (feast) that announces and celebrates the cela's newly acquired status as a *nirvan sultan*. This is one of the most important, and therefore potentially contentious, responsibilities that the guru discharges toward her cela.

Becoming a *nirvan sultan* appears to be a significant prerequisite to acquiring a cela. It is a significant economic burden, both in itself—because of the fees for the doctor, medicines, and food after the operation—as well as in terms of the potential loss of income for those days the cela is incapacitated and cannot "work." Although celas are made to pay back every rupee that is spent on them (at least among kandra hijras under the tank), they usually do so over a period of time. It is the guru's responsibility to advance the money that may be required in the meantime, although, judging from the experience of hijras under the tank, this responsibility is almost never met. Often, celas save up enough money for their expenses, which may be as much as ten to fifteen thousand rupees, before being permitted even to consider this step.[22] Although celas can and mostly do bear the cost of the *nirvan* operation on their own, taking this step without the social sanction of their guru is almost never done and has disastrous consequences, as the opening vignette indicates.

Despite all these hardships, kandra celas living under the tank continued to express ambivalence if not outright reluctance about going to live in the nayak's house. For the most part, they preferred to live their lives under the tank where there was more independence, access to money, the (relative) liberty to eat and sleep whenever they chose, as well as the freedom to satisfy their sexual desires. They chose this lifestyle even while recognizing that it had lower izzat both in the eyes of their community and the wider society. Under the tank, they had more autonomy and enjoyed the advantages of belonging to a distinct hijra community; stigmatized, but

still acknowledged as a part of the larger hijra network across the country. For them, their somewhat precarious, violent, and dangerous life under the tank was preferable both to the constraints of living under the gaze of the nayak and to living as a social outcast without the support of a community.

As evident from the above, the guru-cela relationship is the cornerstone of the hijra kinship network. Ideally, it is a reciprocal bond that entails responsibilities and obligations as well as rights and benefits on the part of both gurus and celas. Without a guru, a hijra's very identity is called into question. She is a *gandu*, or at best, an *andoli* (an "orphan" and therefore an illegitimate) hijra, subject to severe abuse and derision. Likewise, without a cela, a hijra does not have izzat in the community. Acquiring a cela is a way of perpetuating the hijra lineage; in addition, it is a marker of the particular guru's standing in the community and a means of indicating both izzat and seniority. To quote Munira again, "without a *rit* and a guru . . . that person is not considered a hijra."

The guru-cela relationship is a hierarchical obligatory relationship, as evidenced by the nature of the duties and responsibilities toward one another. In addition, in terms of its structural logic, it may be read as a marital or affinal bond. However, this is not how hijras themselves read this relationship. This reading is merely speculation on my part, based on the rituals they engage in and their symbolic meanings outside the hijra community. For instance, on the death of a guru, her cela is expected to enact the role of a Hindu widow, being referred to with the same label, *munda*, as well as being required to wear a white sari and break all her bangles in grief. Further, the *laccha*, or necklace that is tied by the guru on the occasion of her cela's official acknowledgment as a *nirvan sultan* (on the fortieth day after her operation), is also removed. According to some kandra hijras, the *munda* is expected to remain within the confines of her house, isolating herself from the community, although, after the requisite period of mourning, a *munda* hijra can become the cela of another hijra.

Despite the potential (structural) resonance of these rituals with Hindu rituals of mourning on the part of a widow, any questions on my part regarding an affinal or sexual relationship between two hijras elicited the most profound disgust and horror. "Haw, that can never happen! If any hijra did that, it would be disgusting," Surekha told me in answer to my explicit question. The apparent inappropriateness of this relationship was evident in the following incident relating to Srilakshmi's "marriage" to her panti.

Srilakshmi, a kandra hijra, was about to "get married" to her panti, Vijaybhaskar. However, for unavoidable reasons at the last minute, Vijaybhaskar,

who lived in a different city, could not make it to Hyderabad on the day of his "wedding." All of the food and other arrangements had been made already. In addition, this was to have been a double wedding with another hijra, Savita, who would be marrying her panti, Suresh, at the same time. Since both the food and this other couple were ready and waiting, the "elders"—Srilakshmi's guru and her *gurubhais*—decided to go ahead with the ceremony. After Savita and Suresh had tied the knot, as it were (as the most important marker of this ceremony, the "husband" ties a *mangalsutra* [the necklace that serves as the Hindu marker of marriage for a woman] around the neck of his wife), it was Srilakshmi's turn to get "married." In the absence of her husband, and much to Srilakshmi's embarrassment, her hijra mother, Munira, tied the *mangalsutra*. I found it interesting that Srilakshmi's guru, who was also present, was not the one to do so. I had promised to take photographs for the two "wives," but when I raised my camera to take one of Munira tying the necklace, Srilakshmi told me that it was completely inappropriate and that I should not photograph it. Munira, however, enamored with the thought of being photographed, wanted me to take the shot, stating that, "it is not supposed to be this way; but take my photograph." I took the photograph. In the frame, Munira had turned her face completely toward the camera, while Srilakshmi had covered her mouth with her palm in an expression of embarrassment and horror.

If Srilakshmi's guru had tied the *mangalsutra*, would it have been any less inappropriate? The potential structural similarity between the *rit* and marriage rituals and relationships in terms of their prescriptive quality, their binding, obligatory nature, and the possibility (although frowned upon) of their dissolution, are intriguing avenues of future inquiry. Further, potentially mirroring a "traditional" husband-wife relationship, the cela is ideally proscribed from seeing her guru for forty days after her *nirvan* operation (until the *puja* [ritual or ceremony] to mark her transition), following which her guru ties the *laccha*, or necklace, on her cela, rather than her mother, who was the one who took care of her during this period. In addition, the rhetoric used to describe the operatee also appears to be significant in this respect. While getting Nagalakshmi ready for her *dawat*, Rajeshwari told me, "We make her up like a bride. A new sari, nice make-up, flowers in her hair—she should look just like a bride." After the *puja* that she performs, the operatee is taken ceremonially from her mother's house to her guru's, much like the bride who goes from her natal home to her affinal home. Further, like a *kanya* (unmarried girl), a hijra who has never put the *rit* in any house (*kori murat*) is more highly valued as a new member than

one who has. In addition, it is through her guru that the cela establishes a lineage and is acknowledged as kin within her hijra house, much as with "hegemonic" patrilocal affinal relations.

Hence, although this "marital" contract between gurus and celas was not explicitly acknowledged by hijras and in actuality was overtly denied, the structural parallels between "normative" marriage rituals and those employed by hijras are interesting if not culturally significant.

What is the significance of such a rearticulation? Does the fact that hijra kinship alignments potentially mirror normative familial arrangements necessarily make these relationships merely derivative and therefore devoid of specific symbolic value? Or, as Judith Butler might argue, does this very fact, and the variety and complexity of these approximations, "trouble" the ideal of the normative family? By revealing the variety of kin relationships that obtain in the world, anthropologists and sociologists of kinship have established alternative forms and meanings of kinship (Schneider 1968; Stack 1974; Collier and Yanagisako 1987; Strathern 1988; Weston 1991; Stacey 1996; Franklin 1998). Such accounts necessarily question structuralist claims regarding the foundational imperative of heterosexual desire/families, and implicitly highlight the role of such kinship alignments in producing individuated and gendered subjects (Butler 2000; cf. Lévi-Strauss 1969; Lacan, 1978). If the bases of kinship systems (and culture) are not always or only traceable to (structural) rules such as the incest taboo and the Oedipus complex, what then does this signify for "compulsory heterosexuality" as the defining "structure" of normative kinship? These are questions with no simple answers. By examining the variety of hijra/koti kin frameworks in their specific contexts of elaboration, we can begin to generate some answers to such questions and potentially retheorize the analysis of kinship. One such framework is that of love between (hijra) mothers and daughters—*pyar ke riste* (relationships/bonds of love), or Andhra *riste* as they sometimes refer to these relationships.

FURTHER NOTES ON LOVE

While the guru-cela bond is a necessary prerequisite for kinship within the hijra community, it does not appear to be a sufficient one. In addition to this highly valued bond, hijras forge other relationships—what they refer to as *pyar ke riste*, or relationships of love—with members of their community.[23] When asked about these relationships, many of them differentiated between the necessary guru-cela relationships (Lashkarwala or Sheharwala *riste*) and bonds of affection that were not obligatory—what they sometimes referred to as Andhra *riste*, relations of *pyar*, or love. Relationships characterized as Andhra *riste* were not as binding as those of the Lashkarwala or Sheharwala *riste*. They did not entail rigid responsibilities and obligations as the guru-cela bond did, nor were they restricted to members of one's own lineage or hijra house. The most common of such relationships were those between "sisters" (*behen*), and that between a "mother" and her "daughter" (*ma-beti* relationships).

The terms *dudh behan* and *dudh beti*, literally translated, mean "milk sister" and "milk daughter," respectively.[24] These terms are direct references to the nurturing bond between mother and daughter symbolized by the milk that a nursing mother feeds her daughter—milk that is shared by sisters, as daughters of the same mother. In addition to evoking images of affection and love, these terms also reference the very enactment of the ritual that forges *dudh* or *pyar ke riste*.

As Munira states, "Like a mother's milk that is given to her daughter and shared by all her children, who are then sisters," the individuals who are to become *dudh behans* or *betis* enact this nursing ritual. The *dudh ma* (mother) sits cross-legged and pulls up her blouse while holding her *beti* (daughter) in her lap, as any nursing mother would. She then pours some milk, using a cup held over her breast, into the mouths of the prospective *betis*, thereby sealing this relationship with "her" milk. To further seal the bond thus forged, each of the prospective *dudh behans* pricks her finger and lets a few drops of blood flow into the cup of milk, which is then shared by all of them, mother and sisters.

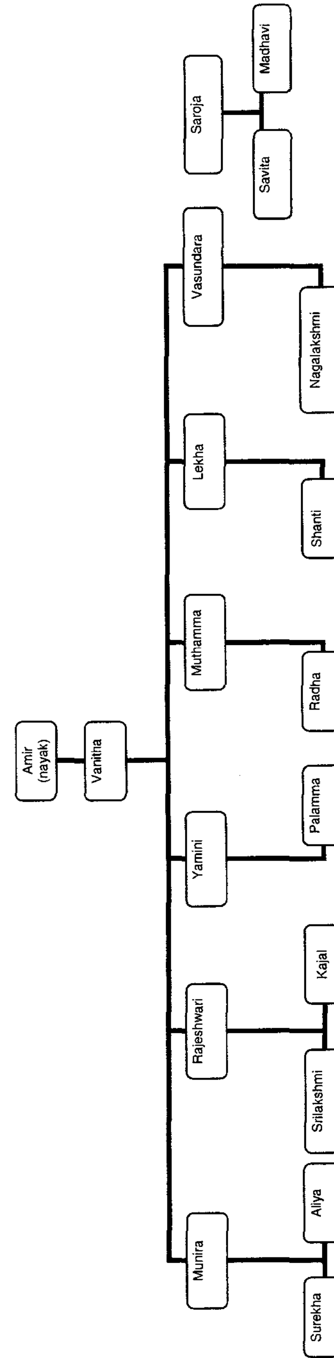
When I asked Rajeshwari why they adopted daughters, she told me it was to extend their kin relations, their *sambandam*. Daughters would more than likely be celas of other hijras with whom they could then form an alliance, she explained. Such relationships also serve *publicly* to strengthen ties between hijras, through a symbolic ritual enactment. By developing these bonds, each hijra is able to establish relationships with other hijras, thereby not only widening the kinship network but also cementing ties, as in Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) notion of "practical kinship." For instance, among kandra hijras, *dudh behans* would "exchange" celas, making these celas their respective *dudh betis*. This made for an extended, interconnected network of relationships between hijras living together. At the tank, for example, Rajeshwari and Munira were *dudh behans*, both daughters of Malamma. To further strengthen their bond, each made the other's cela her *dudh beti*—a symbolic act reinforcing the existing bonds between these hijras and serving as a mark of love and respect between the *dudh behans*.

Although not equivalent to the guru-cela bond either in terms of responsibilities or legitimacy, the mother-daughter bond has an important affective element that is not necessarily evident in the former relationship. The mother and daughter share a certain affection for each other, and this bond is often spoken of more tenderly than the obligatory but necessary kinship link between gurus and celas. Although there is some tension between these roles, in times of conflict, the guru's word is almost always more important and binding than that of a mother. For instance, Rajeshwari once told her daughter Aliya to accompany her to the market the following day to buy some clothes for an upcoming festival. That same evening however, Aliya's guru, Munira, told her that she had to go to Chowtuppal[25] in order to stock Munira's house there. There was absolutely no question as to which one of them Aliya would obey; she explained the situation to her mother and postponed the trip to the market.

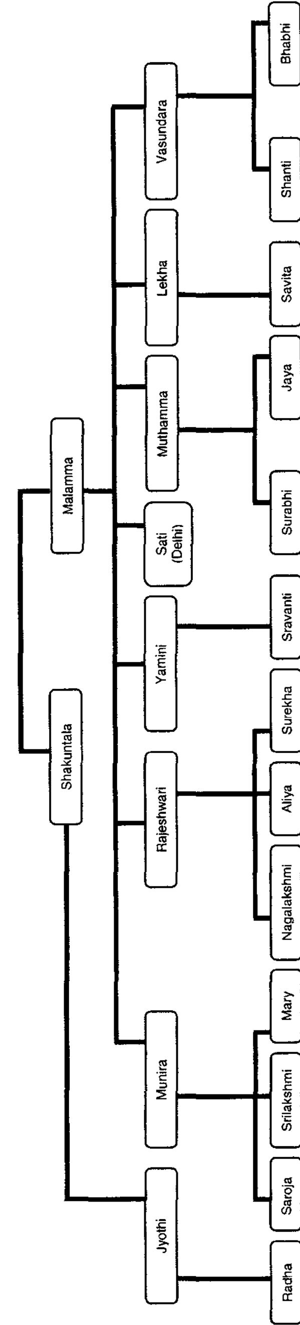
Dudh betis are cared for by hijras like actual daughters. They are taken care of when ill, helped out of crises, given gifts for festivals, and may even be provided with a *kattanam*, or dowry, as happened, for instance, when Munira's daughter had her *nirvan* operation. The *betis* in turn are expected to cook, clean, and serve their mothers, but they are only so obligated if celas are absent. A daughter who did not perform this role would be cursed and derided for laziness but not penalized as a cela would be. Although daughters do not figure in the direct line of inheritance or genealogy, as do celas (i.e., they do not inherit property, wealth, or the nayak title), they are accorded respect and affection for their status as daughters.

Mothers often appeared to have greater affection for daughters than for their celas, even though there was no denying the greater significance and legitimacy of the guru-cela bond over the *ma-beti* one. For example, Munira's first daughter, Mary, had left the tank group about six years ago. It was rumored that she had gone back to her natal village and, having reverted to her "male appearance" (*mogarupam*) and lifestyle, had married a woman and was now "living as a panti."

In November of 1996, Mary returned to the tank. "She" was wearing pants and a shirt, had grown her beard, and looked exceedingly unlike a hijra. After the first welcomes, there was a heated discussion as to whether to accept Mary back into the community. Many of the senior hijras there—Rajeshwari, Vasundara, and Lekha—were against it because they believed that Mary had married a woman and was thereby no longer acceptable, despite her protests to the contrary.[26] Munira was the only hijra present who came to her defense, steadfastly believing in her daughter's "innocence." "First of all, I don't believe that Mary would have done that. If one supposes



Guru-Cela Family Tree (Lashkarwala Riste)



Mother-Daughter Family Tree (Andhra Riste)

Family tree of tank hijras

she did, if she was my cela or anyone else's, that would have been a little different, but she didn't have a guru here. She is my daughter, and I am willing to take on the responsibility of looking after her. Let her stay here if she wants," Munira told them. Mary was allowed to live at the tank and was there until the day I left Hyderabad. There was an undeniable bond between the two, which in later conversations Munira would explicitly acknowledge and evaluate differently from the bond with her celas. This was a *rista* based not on obligatory responsibilities but on love—a *pyar ka rista*, as Munira emphasized.

These *pyar ke riste*, despite being significant components of hijra kinship, have not been noted by many of the scholars writing on hijras. In the literature, only Sinha (1967) mentions these bonds, and only in passing. The fact that they exist is significant, not only intrinsically, but also because they highlight the centrality of affective (mother-child) bonds in hijras' kinship network. The dramatic resonance between the consanguinal mother-child bond—symbolized by "breast feeding"—and the hijras' nursing ritual makes the parallel apparent. The very fact that these bonds are distinct from those with one's guru, with the marker of difference being affection, lends further credence to the potential significance of these relationships as natal or consanguinal ties. As Munira repeatedly informed me, the mother, not the guru, sometimes gives a *kattanam* (dowry) to her daughter, much as parents give a dowry to the bride on the occasion of her marriage. Munira had given Saroja, her daughter, a significant *kattanam*—"everything she might need . . . pots, pans, a mattress, a few good saris, some jewelry . . . just like a new bride," Munira said. Finally, after the establishment of the kin tie, the kinship terms used to refer to these family members are the same as those used by mothers for their daughters—*bidda/beti* and *amma/ma*, in Telugu and Hindi, respectively. Although I do not want to argue that these relationships are mere replacements or uncritical reflections of natal bonds, the resonance between non-hijra consanguinal relationships and hijra mother-daughter bonds is indeed remarkable, an instance of how, at particular moments, our socially produced worlds sometimes become naturalized into "new" forms of caring.

OTHER *RISTE*: THE *JODI* AND HUSBANDS

As noted earlier, one of the relational bonds that hijras explicitly did *not* recognize as characterizing "our people," yet nevertheless did establish and yearn for, was that between hijras and their pantis, or "husbands." Many

of the hijras I knew in Hyderabad had pantis, especially the kandra hijras. And yet, if I asked them about this relationship and the possibility of this tie being an enduring familial bond, they would just laugh and dismiss it outright: "How can they be our family? Family is *manollu* [our people],[27] and they are the only ones who will take care of us when we are older," Shanti said echoing other hijras.

Almost the first question hijras would ask of me, no matter how well they knew me, was "When are you going to get married?" Without waiting for a reply, they would then dreamily imagine the scene: It would be a grand wedding with a big band, I would look very nice, dressed in a silk sari with flowers in my hair, and they would all come and dance at the wedding. Most important, my husband would be a handsome man who would not drink alcohol or beat me, who would take care of me and love me throughout my life. These imaginings highlight two issues in the lives of hijras. First, an idealization of marriage, a yearning for love and acceptance, or what Kakar (1989) refers to as the "desire for a *jodi* [bond]"; and, second, an ambivalence in their feelings toward men wherein the ideal of a non-drinking, kind man are set against the reality of physical abuse and alcoholism among their pantis.

Despite claiming nonprocreative sexual identities and defying the centrality of procreative sexuality to the definition of a family, hijras (especially kandra hijras) idealize marriage and the possibility of a long-term commitment with their pantis. While most kandra hijras in Hyderabad had pantis, those who did not would speak in longing terms of their ideal man: someone who would stay with them through thick and thin, someone with a regular job, who did not mistreat them, bought them gifts, and returned their love.[28]

A few hijras had been with their pantis for as many as ten or fifteen years. Munira and her panti, Zahid, for instance, had been "married" for thirteen years she said. She met him soon after she came to Hyderabad. As she describes it, she was standing in front of the station one evening, waiting for someone. She saw this man look her up and down, before walking into a sweet shop close by. She had noticed him but didn't follow him or react to his obvious interest in her.

> I thought he was a ruffian [*goonda*] because he was hanging around with these other *goondas*. But he came back the next day, and this time he was alone. He asked me to go [sleep] with him, which I did. Like that, slowly, slowly we fell in love. We got married about one year after we met. I went to meet his family, and his grandmother [*dadi*] started saying we don't know if she is a real hijra or what. So,

in a fit of anger, I lifted up my sari. I had become *cibri*. I was a *nirvan sultan* by that time, and I showed her. '*Arre*, this is a woman's body! This is a real hijra,' she said, and since then, no one has said anything to me. I go visit them once in two-three months, say *salam aleikum* and come back.

About three or four years after they were "married," Zahid married a Muslim woman at the insistence of his family. But as Munira tells the story, Zahid got remarried only after getting the approval of Munira and letting his affinal family know that he was "married to a hijra" as well. Zahid supposedly consented to the marriage only after he was reassured that they would accept his first (hijra) wife, Munira. Munira told this to me very proudly, as "proof" of her husband's faithfulness and respectability. Her co-wife has two children whom Munira often refers to as her own, and on whom she seems to lavish much affection and money. Her relations with her co-wife appear to be cordial; they call each other *aapa*, or sister, and share Zahid on seemingly unproblematic terms. This is, of course, Munira's version of the story. Nevertheless, Zahid does visit the tank at least three or four times a week, and appears to genuinely care for Munira. He brings her gifts on occasion, accompanies her on trips to Delhi and Ajmer, and even accepts verbal abuse from her without lashing out—a "good man" indeed.

Not all "husbands" are as caring or accommodating as Zahid. But many of them at least acknowledge their bond, and some do share a significant relationship with their hijra wives. Sati's husband came down with her to Hyderabad from Delhi, openly acknowledging his relationship with his hijra wife, both to the hijra community as well as to his natal family in Delhi. Similarly, Savita's panti visits almost every day, often bringing gifts for her from the shop that he owns in the old city. Surekha and her husband Rajesh also share a husband-wife relationship that is acknowledged by the hijras as well as all his friends. Every time he needs to bathe, have his clothes washed, or requires food or money, Rajesh comes to his wife Surekha, who gladly serves, cooks, cleans, and funds her husband. Hijras appear to perform these "wifely" duties gladly, in marked contrast to the way they care for their gurus. Not all of them live at the tank, as does Rajesh, but they are expected to visit as often as they can. As they approach, their wives are informed that their "man is here." Immediately, hijras stop what they are doing and, more often than not, go into their hut to greet their husbands in private.

There appear to be marked similarities in the gendered attitudes and responses of a hijra to her panti and the responses of a woman to her husband in middle-class India, especially with regard to internalized ideals

of femininity and womanhood. Domestic responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, washing, and sewing are clearly the wife's duties. A good wife, moreover, is likely to respect her husband, to avoid acting promiscuously in public when he is around (whatever her occupation or behavior outside of their relationship), and always to look after him and his needs, especially in times of trouble; in other words, she is expected to be a respectable, self-sacrificing, chaste woman. While hijras are not docile or submissive, they certainly are self-sacrificing and care deeply about how they are viewed by society in their capacity as "wives." Munira was extremely upset one day when she found out that Zahid had eaten at a hotel and slept with his friends on the road that night. She yelled at him when he came to see her the next day saying, "Don't you have a wife and house here? How will it look that you didn't come here? Won't people say she is probably not looking after him well?" Invariably, concern over what it will look like in the eyes of other people is the motive for chastising one's partner. Despite their marginality, concern for their izzat appears to motivate many of their actions. Surekha explicitly expressed this sentiment when she said, "Having a husband gives you some izzat [in the eyes of society]."

While "marriage" or maintaining a *jodi* appears to be a cherished ideal for hijras, it is clearly not without ambivalence. Hijras are officially discouraged by senior hijras from maintaining relationships with pantis. According to the hijra ideal of asexual identity and practice, official "family" does not include husbands or affinal kin. Senior hijras repeatedly deride "bad" or "false" hijras who openly maintain these relationships. "Real hijras" are those who are asexual, like ascetics; they look at neither men nor women, according to the nayaks. And yet, almost all hijras—including the nayaks—maintain such relationships, in their youth if not later in life.

Further, neglect, fickleness, and physical abuse on the part of these men toward their "wives" contribute significantly to hijras' ambivalent feelings toward their pantis, as is evident in the following statements. In response to a question about their relationships with pantis today, Shanti, a slightly older hijra, said, "It is a different thing. It is not desire any more. Now it is companionship and the hope that the person will be there for you later." She then added, "That never happens though. These men are all alike. They stay with you as long as you give them money and look after them. Then they are gone." Aliya echoed the same sentiments when she said, "Today men are not at all nice. They only want one thing [and] they take your money and go."[29]

On one occasion, when a hijra had asked me the question about marriage, Renuka, another hijra who was sitting close by, said "Why do you want to

get married, Gayatri? Husbands only beat you, take your money. You waste all your strength and energy thinking and worrying about them. Don't get married." I later found out that Renuka had just broken up with her "husband" two days before we had this exchange. A few days later, however, I saw Renuka flirting with a man. She appeared very happy and introduced this man as her panti, whom she was going to marry soon. While this statement could be interpreted at face value, it could also be interpreted through the lens of hijras' often mocking attitude toward men. They would distance themselves from all pantis, especially their sexual "customers," and mock their intelligence or sexual perspicacity. "We make *ullus* [literally, "owls"; colloquially, fools] out of these men," Babu Rao told me proudly. "We say we will do *sis kam* [real work] and we do *kavdi* [false] sex.[30] They are in such a hurry and they don't know anything, so we can easily make *ullus* of them." Another time, Saroja said in obvious disparagement, "You just have to say 'ooh, ooh' two or three times, and these people [pantis] think that it is because of them, and they pay you more." Apparently, hijras distance themselves from pantis and use their effeminate role to play with and ultimately to mock supposed male knowledge and power.[31]

And yet, many hijras clearly love their pantis, sometimes to the point of distraction, even attempting suicide on their account. One hijra, a daughter of Mallamma's who lived in a city some distance from Hyderabad, actually did kill herself. She threw herself in front of a train because her panti had left her. While this was the only hijra I knew who had actually killed herself, almost every other hijra, especially among the kandra group, had attempted suicide at least once, more often than not on account of their pantis. Surekha said she had attempted suicide as many as three times because of her husband Rajesh's adultery. He was cohabiting with another hijra in Vijaywada. She was so upset by this development that she "did not see the value of living any longer" and swallowed a bottle of pesticide. She had to be rushed to the hospital and have her stomach pumped to save her life. Munira too had attempted suicide by swallowing insecticide at one point, she confided in me. Her husband Zahid had not come to visit her for a few weeks, and she was sure he was involved with someone else. "But, this was early in our relationship, Gayatri. It was only after learning how to deal with [this other] prostitute, being beaten by my man, after doing all that, that my man is with me now," Munira said. Shakuntala had slit her wrists on account of her panti, leaving scars that were visible seven years after the event. She was reluctant to explain how and why she had attempted suicide, but made it clear that it was because of her unqualified love for her panti.

As with other men and women in India, love or desire in all its intentionally ambiguous forms appears to animate hijra discourse and practice. "If it is at all legitimate to think of 'Indian culture' as an organic whole, a system that can be molded and described as such, then ambiguity must be a key component of that whole, a key feature of the communicative system by which that whole is maintained," writes Margaret Trawick (1990, 41). Perhaps, with regard to hijras' worldview too, it is intentional ambiguity that best describes their "paradoxical behavior." As with Trawick's Tamil family, if such ambiguity or "paradoxical behavior" could be explained at all, it was often in terms of love or desire (49).

OTHER *RISTE*: THE MATERNAL BOND

Yet another relationship that was ideally prohibited for hijras was the link with their natal families. As self-identified ascetics, or sannyasis, hijras are expected to cut off all ties with their "blood/own" (*sontham/rakta*) families when they elect to join their new hijra family. As many hijras repeatedly stated, it was other hijras (and in some instances, other kotis), but *not* their husbands or their natal kin, who were "their people" or "family" now. And yet, despite their explicit acknowledgment of these proscriptions, a few hijras continued to maintain ties with their natal families.

Some hijras had healthy, ongoing relationships with members of their natal families, most commonly their mothers. Many of them occasionally visit their mothers, and sometimes, though more rarely, their mothers visit them in return. As much of the Indian psychoanalytic literature emphasizes, the maternal bond appears to remain the strongest, and some hijras explicitly acknowledge this (see Kakar 1989; Kurtz 1992; Obeyesekere 1990; Ramanujan 1990). For instance, Munira told me that "as long as my mother is alive, I will go back home to visit and will be welcomed [there]. But once she is gone, then my brothers . . . I will never go back. All they care about is money." During the two-year period of my fieldwork, mothers of at least four of the thirty-odd hijras visited them at the tank.[32] Most of these visits lasted a few days at least, the mothers having traveled a considerable distance in many instances. While at least one of these mothers appeared to accept her son's decision[33] and did not try to talk him into returning with her to their natal home, others were still upset and extremely emotional regarding this issue. Although they could and did visit each other, there was an unambiguous (if not explicitly stated) acknowledgment on the part of both consanguinal mother and hijra child that the connection between

them had irrevocably changed. Other hijras constituted the latter's family now, and while her tie to her mother would never be completely severed, there was no returning to her earlier life and natal family at this point.

Despite the retention of this strong link between natal mother and son in practice, such a relationship went against the ideal norms of the hijra community. The renunciation of natal kinship ties is a clear marker of hijra identity, serving to differentiate them from other kotis such as the zenanas, as the latter explicitly stated. "The hijras leave their mothers-fathers and live together in the *haveli* [house], but we don't do that," Rafat told me, pointing out the difference between hijras and zenanas. He also added that doing so required *himmat* (strength) and was an irreversible break that he was not willing to undergo at this point. Iqbal, one of the zenana *baijis* reiterated this difference. He also told me that it was his ties to his natal family that prevented him from joining hijras. His mother had recently passed away, he said, and now he was free to join the hijras and "go live in Irfan nayak's *haveli* [house]." Despite the fact that an absolute break with the hijra's natal family did not always occur, the ideal and its significance for hijra conceptualizations of family and kinship remain undisputed (Trawick 1990).

"*MANOLLU*": KOTI KINSHIP AND THE NEED FOR "OUR PEOPLE"

August 10, 1996, a lazy Saturday afternoon. Munira, Sushmita, Surekha, and Babu Rao were whiling away their time, playing *asta-camma* (a board game).[34] I was sitting with them, watching the progress of their game and chatting with Munira about everything from her conceptions of family to plans for the weekend. Shakuntala was sitting a short distance away, drying her just-washed hair. She seemed to be in a particularly foul mood, cursing someone or something under her breath. Srilakshmi and Kajal were eating their food a little distance away from the bathroom. Greatly involved in the game, Munira and others failed to notice the approach of two men toward Srilakshmi and Kajal. These men wore pants and shirts and seemed to approach without too much trepidation. They were standing and talking to Srilakshmi for a couple of minutes and were clearly intrigued by my presence. From their gestures and body movements, they were obviously asking Srilakshmi and Kajal who I was and what I was doing there. For some reason, this really seemed to irk Shakuntala. She started yelling at them, cursing them in the foulest language. She shouted at them, saying "what do you want here, *bhadvas* [pimps]? Get out of here; otherwise come and lick my ass!" Srilakshmi then piped up and said, "*Arre* Shakuntalanani,

these are *our people* [*manollu*].[35] They are kotis from my village." Almost immediately, Shakuntala calmed down and, after composing herself, engaged them in a friendly conversation by asking what they were doing in Hyderabad. I turned quizzically to Munira, who said by way of explanation, "All kotis are our people.[36] We are one lineage [*kulam*]. But those who have the *rit*, only those [people] are the real thing [*asli ciz*]."

As the above vignette indicates, aside from the privileging of the *rit*, hijras adopt a shifting signifier in their demarcation of an insider/outsider boundary. For the most part, family for hijras refers to other hijras, and yet not all non-hijras are excluded from consideration: non-hijra kotis are also considered *manollu* (our people). The use of this term implies a wider, shared community of actors. It is a contextual signifier, dependent to some degree on the particular actors present. For hijras, *manollu* refers to the members of their own in-group—hijras—in the context of other kotis, but it refers to the *entire* koti community when the social context includes pantis (or narans). Similarly, members of the other koti groups, while recognizing kotis of their self-identified subgroup as their family, would extend this label to other kotis as well, in contexts where the reference group was either their natal families or their pantis.

What, according to its members, is shared by this wider community of actors? For hijras and other kotis, the "male" gender system is conceptualized in terms of pantis and kotis, with the latter identity being opposed to the former, both in sexual as well as everyday practice. Kotis are the receptive partners of pantis in sexual intercourse. In addition, kotis share behavioral norms and moral restrictions, and have their own lexicon, distinct from that of pantis or non-kotis (Hall 1995, 1997).

I was told by my zenana friend Salman, "You have to look at their hands. Kotis can be easily identified by the way their joints move, especially their wrist joints." The limp hand, seemingly unhinged at the wrist, along with the "way a man walks, stands, and looks at you," appear to serve as clearly defined koti identifiers. In addition, the use of what is often constructed in the public domain as "the hijra [hand] clap," is a clear symbol of divergent sex/gender identity. When used by non-hijra kotis, it serves unambiguously to align them with their more flamboyant, readily identifiable fellow kotis. Kotis appear to use this gesture to indicate not only their public allegiance to hijras, but also their knowledge and ultimate use of self-denigratory markers to mock male (heterosexual) power. By employing these gestures in the Public Garden, kotis acknowledge their deviance in the eyes of the public and, by embracing this perceived deviance, parody and potentially overturn the power differential.

All kotis appear to know and use their special vocabulary (Hall 1997). Whether they speak Telugu or Hindi, kotis used their vocabulary as an exclusionary device to communicate with fellow kotis and to set themselves apart from non-kotis. This coded lexicon was employed both to signify membership in the community at large and to distance themselves from the public and mock male power. For instance, in the garden, the most popular cruising and meeting spot for many non-hijra kotis, this code was invoked to make fun of the omnipresent plainclothes policemen. The koti term for these individuals, *ghodi* (mare), is used pejoratively by kotis to make fun of them and their supposed masculine power. Kotis use this term and make explicit fun of these *ghodis*, who appear unaware of this term of reference or the extent of kotis' disdain for them.

On one occasion when I was sitting with a group of zenanas in the garden, a *ghodi* walked up and sat down a short distance away, obviously intrigued by my presence in this all-"male" group. As he was approaching, one of the zenanas, Ahmad, announced to the others, "Hey, a *ghodi* is coming. Lets have some fun [with him]." He then turned to the policeman and staring directly at him, raised his eyebrows suggestively, running his tongue seductively over his lips while he did that. He then got up and walked a short distance away, swinging his hips in an exaggerated manner. The other zenanas were looking pointedly at the *ghodi* and laughing at his obvious discomfort. After a couple of minutes, the policeman got up and walked away. Ahmad made a clicking sound as if to say "Huh, these men!" as he shook his head in obvious disgust, before turning triumphantly back to the zenanas, who greeted his performance with whistles of approval.

All kotis, it seemed, whether hijras, zenanas, or kada-catla kotis, see themselves in opposition to pantis and use their perceived difference to signify their membership within the larger koti community as well as to mock the heterosexual imperative. For them, all kotis are *hamare log* or *manollu* (our people), in opposition to pantis who are "othered," both as objects of desire against whom kotis define themselves as well as subjects who instantiate the gender norm.

Aside from the ideational correlates among the various koti kin ties, there appear to be structural homologies as well. The kinds of *riste*, or relationships that zenanas, kada-catla kotis, jogins, and siva-satis develop resonate remarkably with the kinds of bonds described earlier among hijras. In addition to the *rit* with hijras (in a hierarchically lower position than hijra celas), zenanas had their own network of relationships within their own community. Of the four remaining zenana houses in Hyderabad, each had its own hierarchical structure with a head, or *baiji*, followed by his celas, who had

celas of their own. Each zenana koti had a separate kinship bond with his respective zenana house—what they referred to as *man-pan*. The *man-pan* ritual was similar to that of the hijra *rit* ceremony. Much like the *rit*, the *man-pan* established guru-cela relationships among zenanas. The relationship between a zenana guru and his cela was also reciprocal and involved defined obligations and responsibilities. Given that zenanas did not live in one place together as a communal group, however, these guru-cela responsibilities were marginally different from those between a hijra guru and her cela. The performance of everyday domestic chores was not expected on the part of the cela. Nevertheless, whenever required, a zenana cela was expected to help his guru financially, emotionally, and, if necessary, physically. In turn, the guru was obligated to support his cela, both in public zenana contexts, as well as in times of need. Rafat for instance, felt compelled to lend his cela, Yusuf, some money to help out when the latter's wife fell ill and he needed money. He did so even though he was in no position to help and ended up borrowing money at an exorbitant rate of interest in order to help his cela. In addition, gurus were expected to pay for all their celas' functions and contribute gifts on ceremonial occasions. For all the trouble it entailed, having celas was nevertheless a measure of authenticity and izzat for the guru. It was a concrete kin link that both arranged social relationships within the community, and embodied seniority. As zenanas themselves noted, it was this aspect of their identity—the kinship link with hijras and the resonant relationships within the zenana community—that marked their difference from other kada-catla kotis and *berupias* and gave them more izzat vis-à-vis these other koti identities.

Although kada-catla kotis did not have either a *rit* or hierarchical ties structured in terms of guru-cela relationships, and explicitly disparaged the "traditional" ways of hijras and zenanas, there was an indisputable valence attached to kin that resonated through this community as well. Like *pyar ke riste* among hijras, kada-catla kotis also had structured mother-daughter relationships, sealed by a ritual in which both parties publicly declared their wish and then shared sweets, a practice akin to many non-koti celebrations as well. After announcing the *rista*, the "daughter" would feed her "mother," putting part of a sweet in her mouth and eating the other half, before sharing the box with the other kotis.

This ceremony was usually enacted in Gaudipet, a remote area some twelve or thirteen kilometers from Hyderabad, the koti *dawat* (celebration/feast) space. It was here, away from the public gaze, that kotis felt most comfortable meeting publicly and indulging in koti *nakhre*—joking and teasing each other mercilessly with lascivious speech and exaggerated feminine

gestures and movements.[37] Following a particularly lewd comment by one of the kotis, I was told half-jokingly by Saroja, my hijra friend who accompanied me the first time I attended a koti *dawat*: "I told you, Gayatri. These people really use bad language and even we are embarrassed to listen to them."

These koti *dawats*, usually held on Sundays, would be attended by anywhere from fifty to two hundred kada-catla kotis, and on occasion, some zenanas and siva-satis. Apart from a chance to meet and catch up on gossip and news, these *dawats* also served as the forum to officialize kinship links within the community. On the occasion I was there with Saroja, the ostensible reason for the *dawat* was Viji's desire to make Mahesh his daughter. Unfortunately, we arrived too late to witness the ceremony, but I was told that it was nothing more than a declaration of intent, followed by a sharing of sweets and an exchanging of gifts, after which mother and daughter hosted a feast for their koti friends. The food—chicken curry and seasoned rice—was prepared right there with the help of all the kotis, amid much joking, teasing, and cavorting around. When I left at six in the evening, having been there since eleven in the morning, there were still at least fifty kotis there, eating, dancing, and gossiping with each other.

On the second occasion I attended a koti *dawat*, it was hosted by Avinash to celebrate his getting a new job. When I reached Gaudipet, he was sitting in the center of a circle of kotis, with his "mother" Moggu sitting next to him.[38] They were performing a ceremony to bless Avinash. The following is a description of this ritual from my field notes:

Moggu had set two steel plates in front of Avinash. One had a sari and material for a blouse, and the other had a pile of uncooked rice, two halves of a coconut, some turmeric, and *kum-kum* (vermilion powder). Moggu formally gave Avinash the clothes and, after putting them aside, took a pile of the rice in cupped hands and poured it onto the other plate. He then smeared some of the *kum-kum* and turmeric on Avinash's forehead, invoking a blessing for his daughter's continued good health and fortune. Avinash touched Moggu's feet as a mark of respect three times, each time touching his hands to his eyes. He then sat down. One by one, each of the kotis came up to him and performed the same actions (poured a handful of the rice, put a *bindi* on Avinash's forehead). He did not touch their feet though. After all of them had done this, Moggu, who was sitting by his daughter's side all along, asked for *kattanam* (dowry). He initiated this stage by waving an envelope of money over Avinash's head, before putting it on the plate. All the kotis followed suit, with Moggu announcing, as each koti came up, the amount each paid. Following this show of affection and regard, everyone was asked to sit and eat the food that Moggu, Avinash, and a few of his friends had prepared earlier in the day.

The "mother" is obligated not only to officiate at such ceremonies, but also to contribute both money and organizational help for such occasions. In turn, daughters are required to show respect, help out in times of trouble, and be considerate of their mothers' well-being. Deference is to be shown not just to one's mother but to all elders in the community. For instance, during a bantering conversation, Jayaprada (as one of the kada-catla kotis liked to call himself, after a popular Telugu film actress) had cursed his "aunt"—his mother's "sister"—calling him a *bhadva* (pimp).[39] Even though it was obviously meant in jest, Jayaprada was immediately reprimanded by the other elders and made to apologize to Hanumanth, a koti who was five years younger than he was. He apologized immediately without protest.

Given the centrality of desire to their identities, kada-catla kotis and zenanas (like many hijras), seemed extremely ambivalent about their husbands, who alternated between being the most important, loved individuals in their lives and being reviled and mocked for their licentiousness, insensitivity, and abuse. Despite incredible stories of abandonment and neglect, however, kotis continued to yearn for a significant relationship with their pantis, as shown by Frank's life-history, told in detail in the following chapter. Frank, a middle-aged, Christian man in his mid-forties, had suffered untold hardships for his pantis. He had sold his blood to a blood bank, and later his kidney, to earn enough money to satisfy his current panti. He had lost several jobs on account of "his man," been physically abused, and suffered ill health after the sale of his kidney. Nevertheless, he "loved [his] panti and was willing to do anything for him." After being beaten by his panti's relatives one day, Frank had this to say to me:

I told him these people came and hit me. I said who are these people to hit me? He was completely cold. He said you are a character who deserves to get a kicking. Then you tell me how I'll feel. I *loved* him a lot, Gayatri. I still love him. How can I forget him? Why, I ask god, why is god rude with me? I have not harmed anybody. I have not disappointed anyone in life, neither my friends nor the men. I loved somebody, and every man that came up to me in life has played a game. They played with me as much as they wanted to. They enjoyed sex as much as they wanted to, and then they booted me out. I adore you. I worship you [with reference to his panti]. I walked out of my house because of you. I left my house because of you, I left my family because of you, I left my friends because of you. Everybody I left because of you. I'm living *alone* because of you. My mother's last words were: "Frankie, you will be alone in this world. You will die alone. Nobody will come for your funeral. Not your friends, not Ravi [his panti]. In the end, the dogs will sniff you, or the MCH will throw you in the dustbin." My heart bleeds, but I can't cry anymore. I have no tears

left. I used to wait for this man, Gayatri, from seven o'clock right up to one o'clock at night. And he would come at two and tell me the train was late, my cousin died. I came, you should be happy.

Avinash, another kada-catla koti, had a similar story. He too had sold his kidney for his panti, only to be abandoned after giving him the money. Iqbal, one of the zenana *baijis*, told me that he knew only one zenana who had a good relationship with his panti; every other zenana had suffered emotionally and physically on account of his panti. Other kotis told me stories of the physical and verbal abuse they suffered, about their pantis' insatiable appetite for money and gifts, the humiliation they had to swallow on account of keeping up appearances in public for their panti's izzat. Yet almost all of them told me that although "pantis would not support you when you need[ed] them in the same way as koti friends," they still wanted a perfect relationship with their pantis "more than anything else." Despite this overwhelming desire, pantis were clearly "other" in koti conceptualizations—arguably kin but not "family." They were the objects of desire but were hardly ever turned to in times of trouble or need. Kotis were acutely aware of their marginality and pantis' use and abuse of them. But, while they resented pantis for their apparent domination and lost no opportunity to mock male power, they "couldn't help loving them" and were "willing to do anything for [their] men."

"ALL KOTIS HAVE PANTIS": THEORIZING A NEED FOR KINSHIP?

Given the ubiquity of abuse, violence, and abandonment, as well as hijra/kotis' ambivalence toward men in general, why this strong desire for a social *jodi* (bond)? Why do kotis have such an overwhelming need for a loving husband? Scholars from various schools of thought have attempted to answer this question of relationality, or the structures of desire, in the context of broader processes of self-crafting in India, with psychoanalysts and psychological anthropologists providing perhaps the most elaborated theories.

The psychoanalytic literature in India attempts to answer this question in terms of the general "desire for fusion" and the subsequent modal resolution of the oedipal complex in India. In psychoanalytic understandings, this cultural theme of fusion manifests itself as "the unconscious fantasy of maintaining an idealized relationship with the maternal body" (Kakar 1989, 125). Although South Asian scholars differ in their characterizations of what constitutes the "maternal body" (Kakar 1981, 1989; Kurtz 1992), they appear to agree that the individual's goal is "integration, and not individuation" (Kurtz 1992, 30). In India, an individual's sense of self, they argue, is fundamentally connected to a desire for incorporation, for fusion with the (maternal) world, rather than a greater differentiation of self from others. According to these (male) authors, integration, in this context, more often than not implies the desire for an idealized relationship with one's mother (Kakar 1989).

Sudhir Kakar posits a "formidable consensus ... for both men and women" regarding the ideals of womanhood (1981, 63; cf. Raheja and Gold 1994 for a valid critique of this position). This ideal is personified in the image of Sita—the pure, chaste, faithful heroine of the *Ramayana*, Kakar contends. The internalization of this ideal by all Indian women and their subsequent inability to challenge it and demand intimacy and recognition as women from their husbands, results in "aggressive, destructive impulses" directed toward the son. This results in ambivalent feelings toward the mother on the part of the son—she is both "nurturing benefactress and threatening seductress" (1989, 93). The modal resolution of this conflict is achieved through "lasting identification with the mother, which involves sacrificing one's masculinity" (1981, 102). Sudhir Kakar therefore claims that (for men) desexualization emerges as "the favored defensive mode in Indian fantasy" (1989, 144).

Gananath Obeyesekere (1990) makes a similar argument in his characterization of the unique resolution of the "Indian oedipal complex." Echoing A. K. Ramanujan (1983), he argues that the representation and consequent resolution of the oedipal complex in India follows from the particular cultural configuration of family relationships in this culture. The significance of the "erotic-nurturant bond that binds mother and son ... and the patripotestal authority of the father" (Obeyesekere 1990, 81) results in the dominant Hindu form of the oedipal complex, which the son can resolve only though "submitting to the father's will and in effect castrating himself" (Goldman 1978, 363).

Since the "hegemonic narrative of Hindu culture as far as male development is concerned is that of the Devi, the great goddess, especially in her manifold expressions as mother in the inner world of the Hindu son" (Kakar 1989, 131), this form of oedipal resolution clearly allows for its realization. Hence, "if phallic desire was the violent and tumultuous 'way of the fathers,' genital abstinence, its surrender, provides the tranquil peaceful path back to the mother" (124). Given that "Indian myths constitute a cultural idiom that aids the individual in the construction and integration of his inner world"

(135), the myth of Goddess Parvati and her two sons, Ganesha and Skanda, clearly reflects this "hegemonic narrative" and its opposing wishes:

A mango was floating down the stream, and Parvati the mother said that whoever rides around the universe first, will get the mango. Skanda impulsively got on his golden peacock and went around the universe. But Ganesha, who rode the rat, had more wisdom. He thought: "What could my mother have meant by this?" He then circumambulated his mother, worshipped her, and said, "I have gone around my universe." Since Ganesha was right, his mother gave him the mango. Skanda was furious when he arrived and demanded the mango. But before he could get it, Ganesha bit the mango and broke one of his tusks. (136)

Ganesha seeks surrender and fusion with his mother at the cost of his masculinity (symbolized by the broken tusk), while his brother Skanda yields to the pull of individuation, which results in independence but exile from his mother's presence. As Kakar states, "that Ganesha's lot is considered superior to Skanda's is perhaps an indication of Indian man's cultural preference in the dilemma of separation-individuation" (1989, 137; cf. Kakar 1981; Obeyesekere 1984, 1990; Roland 1979; Kurtz 1992; Trawick 1990).

In this psychoanalytic formulation, it is integration with the mother (and subsequent emasculation) rather than individuation that constructs male desire and kinship relations. In a further elaboration of this "consensus," Sudhir Kakar (1989) accounts for gendered differences in the structure of fantasy by arguing that while "desire for fusion with the mother" is what constructs male fantasy, for women in India, it is the yearning for a *jodi* (bond) with the husband. Insofar as one can essentialize this interpretation of "Indian" relationality, therefore, hijras (and to some extent, kotis) would appear to have internalized and enacted both fantasies—male and female—in their desire for integration and in their subsequent bonds of kinship.[40]

In addition to this psychoanalytic interpretation and the ubiquity of the "desire for fusion" or "category mediation," as Margaret Trawick (1990) refers to a similar cultural theme, kotis' desire for kin bonds could reflect a culturally specific construction of self and other, a form of relatedness wherein Indian men and women primarily craft their identities within a relational/social context (Marriott 1976; Shweder and Bourne 1984; Ramanujan 1990; Trawick 1990; Shweder, Mahapatra, and Miller 1990).[41]

Every time I went to see the hijras, especially in the first few weeks of my acquaintance with them, I was questioned not so much about what I was attempting to accomplish and why, but who I was in terms of what my parents were doing, where they lived, how many siblings I had, whether I was

married or not, and whether my siblings were married or not, among other questions. As most South Asian scholars or even casual visitors to India have noted in the past, the aspects of oneself that elicit most interest and commentary are not individual accomplishments but relational networks of hierarchy and exchange. Social relationships and the nature of one's obligations, in many respects, appear to define one's identity and status in India. In India, a person is who they are by virtue of their kin relations and the social context within which they locate themselves unlike Euro-American notions of the self or identity, these scholars maintain (Marriott 1976; Mines 1994; Roland 1979; Shweder and Bourne 1984).

The well-known anthropologist Clifford Geertz stated many years ago that "the Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against a social and natural background is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures" (1975, 48). As some scholars would argue, the "peculiarity" of this notion is manifestly apparent in India, a nation where "individualism stirs but faintly and where the subordination of the individual to the superordinate family interests and relationships is a preeminent value," as Sudhir Kakar (1989) somewhat dramatically puts it.

However stigmatized and marginalized they may be in Indian society, might hijras too be constituted through and by such an ethic of relatedness? Why was it so inconceivable for hijras to strike out on their own and live independently? Madhavi was thrown out of her kin group, and, although she could have lived on her own, the thought of not "belonging" to the community was unthinkable. She was a "pariah" among the Lashkarwala hijras under the tank, as Rajeshwari told her, which led her to change her house and put the *rit* in the Sheharwala house, even if it was in a position lower than that she had held earlier.

Likewise, Tushar, a zenana koti, was from North India and did not really know anyone in Hyderabad. He used to come to the garden to find sexual partners as well as a social group and, after seeing the other zenanas on a few occasions, he struck up a conversation with them. On subsequent Sundays, when he came to Public Garden, he would join the zenana group and hang out with them until it was dark enough to look for sexual partners. Although zenanas did not appear to treat him differently despite his non-kin status, Tushar felt compelled to officially join the community. He became Rafat's cela in an informal ceremony (not the formal *man-pan* ceremony

in the presence of the *caudhary* and *baijis*) conducted in the garden itself. Why this perceived need for kinship? What motivates kotis to establish kin ties, when they could often relate to their self-identified community just as well without these ties? Perhaps, as these scholars maintain, one of the reasons being alone—without a kin network—is so inconceivable in India is because identity is largely relationally constructed and context-dependent to a greater (and different) degree than it is in the West (Marriott 1976; Shweder and Bourne 1984; Ramanujan 1990; Shweder, Mahapatra, and Miller 1990).

This relational explanatory framework, however, much like the psychoanalytic one, leaves several questions unanswered. Aside from their problematic cultural and gendered essentialism, neither of these theorizations accounts for the more interesting patterns of relationship within the hijra and koti communities. Although the "desire for fusion" or "the cultural preference for integration" rather than individuation does address, to some extent, kotis' desire for kinship and perhaps the existence of certain significant bonds, it does not really explain why they adopt the specific kin and the rituals or practices they do, nor does it satisfactorily explain the power differentials evident in other relationships within the community. Likewise, the relational argument potentially accounts for the ubiquitous need for "our people," but it reveals nothing significant about the specific structures of caring and the particular constructions of kinship that I have described among hijras and kotis.

While it is difficult and to some extent pointless to *account* for kotis' need for kinship (or, for that matter, to account for such desires among non-kotis), the elaborations of relatedness within the community and the explicit statements highlighting the significance of such bonds confirm that kinship and elaborations of familial ties are *central* axes of hijra and koti identity. In a recent publication, Kira Hall notes that "the family is, after all, what distinguishes the hijra from most other members of Indian society, who are intimately involved in the extended families so instrumental to social organization" (1997, 444). This statement ignores the existence of the specific elaborations of hijra and koti kinship, the patterns of caring and relatedness within the community, and their fundamental resonance with broader mainstream societal patterns, structures, and sentiments. Joining the koti community obviously does not preclude the possibility of having an extended "family" and a social network much like "most other members of Indian society." The existence of the various koti relationships, patterned as they are on familial/affinal bonds, and the broader *need* for kinship that they express, appear to emulate rather than oppose or deny those of

mainstream Indian society, while simultaneously throwing them into relief and challenging their very definitions of "normativity."

And yet, while there are clearly elements of mainstream ideologies and structures in hijra's articulation of kinship, it is perhaps too easy to analyze these patterns as either the workings of "power" or the apparent reactions to the contrary as "resistant" discourses/actions (see Foucault 1980; Anderson 1983; Williams 1989; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992; Ginsberg and Rapp 1995). Seeing hijra and koti families as either necessarily counterhegemonic or necessarily assimilationist appears to be not just simplistic but uninteresting and counterproductive. Such understandings set hijra defiance of procreative and hegemonic definitions of "family" against their incorporation of such terminologies, rituals, and symbols. Instead, I would argue, understanding these options not as dichotomous ideological oppositions but as subtle tensions reflected through the various polysemic, affective bonds of hijras and other kotis is imperative. Ultimately, as Margaret Trawick notes, "The need to love is as important a force in human society as is the will to power. Power wants to destroy or consume or drive away the other, the one who is different, whose will is different. Love wants the other to remain, always nearby, but always itself, always other" (1990, 242). Hence, rather than understanding hijra and koti structures of caring and kinship, of self and other, through the framework of power and archetypes of resistance, as simple reflections of mythical mainstream patterns, it is more productive to see these kinship patterns as a complex web of significations, a web of emotional tensions between real people, fraught with ambiguous meanings—an "architecture of conflicting desires" as Trawick notes (152)—that fundamentally constitutes hijra/koti identity. If desire or love plays a central role in the lives of hijras and kotis, it is through the various, ambiguous, and conflicting patterns of kinship—the affective bonds of guru and cela, "milk" mother and daughter, sister and *gurubhai*, mother and son, husband and wife—that this love is made manifest. Only through understanding the relations between the idealized systems of kinship that hijras and kotis hold to, and the nature of desire and lived experience in which these ideals are often not sustained, can we *begin* to comprehend the "local pleasures and afflictions" and the cultural patternings of their lives (Nuckolls 1996). With this goal in mind, the next chapter allows hijras and kotis to speak for themselves and allows us to glimpse "what it means to make sexual difference matter" (Cohen 1995b, 277), revealing the multiplicity of ideals and the fundamental complexity of lived experiences.