Dissertation Abstract

This dissertation concerns itself with the everyday lives and love affairs of hijras of two districts, Bhadrak and Kalahandi, in the eastern state of Orissa, India. Hijras are now an easily recognizable figure of what is referenced as the ‘Third Gender’. Based on eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork, I trace the various claims made by the social on the hijra body. I begin my study by looking at the forms of flirting that take place in the town markets between the hijras and the men of the village to critique easy readings of marginalization, exclusion, and stigmatization. I argue that the hijra, far from being at the outskirts of the social, actually reveals to us, through her offerings of sexual pedagogy, the erotic dynamics between the householder and the ascetic; the household and the world outside; or what I articulate as the texture and the dynamics of the social.

I then proceed to locate the hijra within her family and map out her movement in the web of kinship. I do so in order to show that though the hijra stands apart from the rights and responsibilities of reproductive heteronormativity, her participation in various transactions of care render the domestic space salubrious and prevents disputes within kinship from becoming lethal. My research proceeds to offer evidence that complicates ideas about begging and the economic transactions hijras undertake on trains. I contrast the money hijras earn and collect with notions of daan, dakshina, dalaali, bhiksha and haq to offer a more complicated reading of the hijra as a citizen of the state waiting for its rights and dues.
As a study of love affairs between hijras and their men, the dissertation offers an ethnographic elaboration that challenges the recent provocations of queer theory that focus on temporality and notions of futurity. I study love affairs not only as an instantiation of queer desire but also as an experience of time that undoes any easy association between sex and the future. I conclude by offering some thoughts of what implications my research might have on our understandings of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

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Introduction: Part 1- That Limpid Liquid Within Young Men

This dissertation is based on the research I conducted on the lives of hijras in rural Orissa, a state in eastern India. Hijras were translated as eunuchs in much of colonial discourse and in the English language dailies till quite recently. The efforts of activists and scholars on the heels of the urgency of the HIV epidemic have resulted in hijras becoming a recognizable term and figure. Hijras are now indexed as South Asia’s ‘Third Gender,’ following the imperative to globalize categories and desires of the LGBT movement in the 1990s. An earlier re-iteration of the trope of universal sexual deviancy, albeit with different moral charges, was seen in the hypothesis of the Sotadic Zone. This hypothesis, put forward by Richard Burton, during the mid-nineteenth century was built on thinking about sexuality geographically; in climactic and constitutional terms and was drawing from and contributing to the orientalist imagination.

Against this background, the hijras were included by the British Raj in the Indian Criminal Tribes Act of 1871. This was at the insistence of a Law member of the drafting committee who believed that they were managers of “an organized system of sodomitical prostitution” and particularly unwilling to “adopt ‘honest pursuits’.” Though the act prohibited the hijra from appearing in public wearing female clothing, the fact that hijras were also performers, actors, and theatre artists made it particularly difficult for the colonial police force to effectively enact this criminalization.


3 Thomas R. Metcalf, Ideologies of the Raj (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 125. Furthermore, the propinquity of the hijra to various traditions of performance can be seen not only in their participation in continuing events of festivals and rural theatre but also in the terms that are still used to describe the plurality within the hijra population- such as jankhas, bhand, zenanas etc.
annexation of various princely states at the end of the 19th century, in the courts of which Hijras hitherto had fairly respectable positions, the claims that hijras held to land and property (gifted by the royal family), along with the right to collect money from the exchequers of these principalities, were also dissolved, resulting in an impoverished community by the time of independence.⁴

Hijra re-emerged in prominence in the mid to late 1990s which saw LGBT movement of India appropriating the hijras and reframing them as legitimizing historical figures of queerness. The HIV epidemic has reframed hijras not as signifiers of oriental excess but of a sexual excess of the more secular kind. The urgency of the epidemic resulted in hijras being recruited as local experts who are trained to practice and disseminate safer sex advice, given that they are associated with selling anal sex. My dissertation is based on fieldwork I conducted among the hijras of rural Orissa, one of the poorest states of India, in the district headquarters of Bhadrak and Bhawanipatna. The hijras in the first field site of Bhadrak mostly earned their money through selling wares near a shrine of a Muslim saint (mazar), by begging on the trains, collecting money on ritual occasions of childbirths and weddings, dancing at religious festivals, and sex work. Out of all the districts in Orissa, Bhadrak has the highest percentage of Muslims, and the several mazhars that dot its countryside are of particular importance to the lives of hijras.⁵

This detail introduces the particular way in which the hijra inhabited the Hindu-Muslim universe. Hijras historically have not been easily relegated either through self-

⁵ I collect this information from the 2001 census of India. The information regarding concentration of populations based on religion is not available from the 2011 national census. Please see “Table C -1 Population by Religious Community Table For Orissa.” Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, accessed September 5, 2014. http://www.censusindia.gov.in/DigitalLibrary/MFTableSeries.aspx
identification or through religious practice to either Islam or Hinduism. And while I had both Hindu and Muslim informants, their beliefs and practices would often adhere to one while being claimed as characteristic of the other. Therefore, this dissertation practices a certain fidelity to the way the crossovers between Hindu and Muslim theologies were lived, that is, both as an instantiation and a limit of concept like religious syncretism.

The mobility of hijras because of their begging on trains resulted in my introduction to other hijras, who did not live in Bhadrak but passed through its train station everyday. I was able to become friends with one such group of hijras, who lived in Jajpur, a neighbouring district. My stays in Jajpur were always very brief primarily because I conducted my interviews with the hijras of that district when they would be resting in Bhadrak, waiting for the train in which they would both beg and also go back home. Sometimes, I went with them to Jajpur on the train, but return in the evening, the duration of the journey being approximately an hour. I did accept their invitation to stay in the hijra household in Jajpur for two months in 2012 and this gave me an opportunity to compare the set of freedoms and restraints that living in a traditional hijra household afforded. Thus, though I met the hijras of Jajpur often, I did not stay there as long as I did in Bhadrak and Bhawanipatna. I went to Bhadrak and Jajpur in the summer of 2008, and then again in the summer of 2009. In the second trip, I also went to Bhawanipatna for the first time. I spent 16 months in these districts from May 2011 to September 2012 and returned for a brief visit in the summer of 2013.

I chose to conduct my fieldwork in these three districts for several reasons. The first was to study the relationship between hijras and their families. Hijras, when they are

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6 Please see chapter 5 of Gayatri Reddy’s ethnography cited and discussed throughout this dissertation. The chapter titled, “We Are Al Musalmans Now”: Religious Practice, Positionality, and Hijra/Muslim Identification” provides the historical conditions for this kind of confusion.
initiated into a hijra community or household are required to sever all ties with their families and natal homes.  

This separation is obviously overstated and previous ethnographies that I will discuss throughout the dissertation have shown that hijras continue to maintain a relationship with their families in varying degrees and kinds. The second reason was to study how the rural became more viable for the hijras to make a living. The figure of the hijra has always been tethered to the urban but my research showed that the increasing spread and density of railway connectivity allowed them to make a better living in rural areas than in the cities where not only the cost of living was higher, but the demands from the traditional hijra communities in terms of rules to be followed were more stringent.

The third reason was to understand how sexual transactions and affairs were conducted given the lack of anonymity that marked the rural. This familiarity with the men that the hijras had sex with disturbed the divide between the categories of lover and customer in several ways. In the rural not only was there always the possibility of the customer becoming the lover but also the sexual relationship between the hijra and her lover/customer was predicated on other forms of relating - such as neighbor, fellow vendors of the marketplace, fictive and other forms of kinship. The rural field site is the reason why the data I have collected takes the form of intimate portraits of a few individuals rather than observations on a large community. Every city, large or small, in South Asia will have the presence of a hijra community comprising of groups who share

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7 Several hijras would tell me that the word ‘hijra’ comes from the Arabic word Hijr which means to break, leave, or renounce. I am not sure whether this etymology is historically true or verifiable and seems an instance of re-writing one’s history. Though hijra is a Hindustani word and other South Asian languages have their own words which translates as hijra (for e.g. aravani in Tamil, Maichiya in Oriya), the word ‘hijra’ is often used interchangeably with other words denoting the “third gender” regardless of the language being spoken.
living space (i.e. a household even though it does not consist of biological kin) and in turn will be able to draw their genealogical relationship to the several traditional hijra dynasties of South Asia. The rural, though was a different matter. Most of the hijras I knew lived with their families. They would, in addition, rent a small room near the train station if their natal homes were an hour or two away. In these rented rooms they would rest between begging on trains and conduct sex work. The second field site of Bhawanipatna, the district headquarters of Kalahandi did not have a railway station and the hijras earned their money mostly through sex work conducted in the night along the highway that passed through the district. The number of hijras in these three rural districts was small when compared to the cities, but is definitely increasing rather than dwindling.  

Let me offer some information that will illuminate the mode in which my fieldwork was conducted but also the position of the hijra in the social sphere of rural India. When I returned to Bhadrak for the long stretch of fieldwork, I had a lot of difficulty finding a place to stay. Although I had all the markings of somebody not from rural India, my research topic- the sexual lives of hijras- resulted in a lot of disapproval. I gave up trying to find a place to stay near the district headquarters where a lot of government officials lived, and decided to live near my informants in a small settlement, called Shankerpur, adjoining the market place and shrines of two Muslim saints (Sarkar

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8 I had met 8 hijras when I first came to Bhadrak in 2008, but by the time I left in 2012, there were 15. The hijra guru in Jajpur told me that in the last thirty years, her household had grown from 5 members to 28. This increase is not marginal if we account for the many that the guru claimed had died because of HIV and old age. I had pressed her into thinking in numbers but I would always get a vague answer like “many.” Of the “many” hijras who died, I was able to collect from guruma, fragments of stories of their lives and accounts of their deaths. The number of hijras in Bhawanipatna has also increased between 2009-13. During my first visit, I met 4 hijras, but there were 12, when I left. The increase had resulted from the return of many hijras from cities like Nagpur, Indore and Jamshedpur where they found the rules and discipline of the traditional hijra households too strict to adhere to.
Baba and Jumman Baba). A certain Mrs. Jain who also lived in Shankarpur and stitched blouses for a living had a side business of making bangles. This business was not doing well and she used to ask Jaina, my primary informant, to read the Koran in the bangle factory and pray for her good fortune. Jaina was given some money every week for this service. Jaina told her about me, a fellow hijra, and Mrs. Jain offered me a room in the factory in return for my prayers as well.

Jaina and the other hijras answered questions about my presence in their company with the reply that I was a hijra as well. This made it easier for me to remain with my informants for long swathes of time while they worked at marketplaces and shrines, and to join them when they begged on trains, collected money at shops, and danced at festivals. It was not just my sexuality but also my long hair and female clothing that made me be recognizable as a hijra and enabled me to linger next to the highway with other hijras where and when we would have long conversations between their sex work.

In his short story The Unwriteable, Mark Doty wrote the following on the dysfunctional relationship between language and sex: “I have the language of pornography, I have the language of anatomy or medicine, I have the language of euphemism and I’m happy with none of them.”9 My fieldwork presented a similar dilemma. For instance, the English word “sex” was used mostly in the rooms of DAPCU (District AIDS Prevention Control Unit) and other organizations during safer-sex training sessions but not in the public spaces inhabited by the hijras. The word chodhana was used most often when hijras were talking to hijras, family members, various people in the market, and me in various tones of jest, anger, and seduction. The word fuck comes

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closest to *chodhna* in its pliable polyvalence. The only difference between the uses of the word *chodhna* and fuck that I must mention is that while fuck in some uses erases the divide of penetrating or being penetrated (as in, “Let’s fuck”), *chodhna* would always mean to penetrate. For example, my question posed to hijras, “*Tum kya usko chodh rahi ho?*” which could be translated as “Are you fucking him?” would result in a lot of giggles because hijras don’t penetrate and are penetrated. The more accurate conjugation would be “*tum kya use chudhwa rahi ho?*” or “*woh kya tumhe chodh raha hai?*” which would be translated as “Are you getting fucked by him?” or “Is he fucking you?”

Euphemisms were never used by the hijras or anybody else, for that matter, to refer to sex between hijras and men, or any illicit sexual transactions. Rather, they were reserved mostly for the relationship between husband and wife. Women would often say to hijras that their husbands were not sleeping with them, not speaking to them, or not coming to them. Hijras, when unsure of how the brazen invitations to fuck would be taken - for example, when they were meeting a man for the first time and wanted to find out whether he would be amenable to fucking, - would use the word “*kaam*” which would be translated as work. So, when Shonali struck up a conversation with a young man at a train station by asking the innocuous question, “Are you from Jalsore or are you here for work?” The man answered that his family was in Cuttack but he worked in Jalsore. Shonali then asked in a sweet, coy manner, “*Aapka kaam kaise chalta hai agar bibi se itna dur rehte ho?*” which could be translated literally as “How does your work get done if you live so far away from your wife” but a more accurate translation would be, “How do you get by if you live so far away from your wife.” The word *kaam*, therefore, would be used as a metaphor for sex but only in anaphoric speech, in which the
metaphoricity was made clear by signalling the “work” that takes place between husband and wife. In other words, ‘kaam’ would be used for ‘sex’ only after the purpose of the conversation had been made clear.

I have used fuck rather than sex throughout this dissertation not only to show how rarified the clinical air around intimacy and passion was in the everyday life of the hijras but also to highlight that there is a difference between the pleasures of fucking and the pleasures of sex. 10 The endeavour to spread safer sex information to halt the HIV epidemic has come across difficulties in translating the clinical discourse of safer-sex primarily because the biological is very rarely the universal; and scientific-medical discourses about sex has taken different routes as well as different roots across the globe. Thus, how, when and where the clinical has become vernacularized and colloquialized is dependent on differentiating factors, such as class, race, caste, etc. 11 In other words, I do not want to risk portraying a de-eroticized version of the hijra’s sexuality because it would confirm rather than dispute or complicate the accusations of excess and pathology that have re-framed deviant sexuality post-HIV. Furthermore, I have tried to show the various ways in which the sexual act was referred in contexts different from flirting, such

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10 One of the ways in which this difference has been located, as argued by Richard Halpern, is through the notion of sublimation. His argument, “... instead of regarding art as the displacement of sexual aims, ... posits Shakespearean homosexuality as itself a product or effect of the aesthetic” marks an intervention in queer theory that had hitherto limited itself with the task of making visible or recognizing same-sex passion instead of historicizing the subject of desire. Richard Halpern, Shakespeare's perfume: sodomy and sublimity in the Sonnets, Wilde, Freud, and Lacan (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 21.

as when it became a concern for people other than the hijra and her lover, in forms of gossip, rumours, etc; in such moments sex was referred by the word ‘it’ or ‘that.’

The first chapter of this dissertation tracks the hijras’ presence in the marketplace. It records and studies their flirtatious conversations with the men they hope to seduce and fuck. I argue that the hijra, who seduces men by flattering or insulting them, in turns, regarding their virility, prowess, and fertility, slackens the ropes of domesticity that bind men to their families and their households. They provide relief from the chafing demands of being human and return the men fortified to their families. I further point out that this negativity of their sexual labour is the triangulate of preservation that sustains the dialectic of creation and destruction of the Hindu theogony. Given that the hijra reveals the price that becoming human entails, the chapter questions easy notions of marginality that has attached itself to the figure of the hijra.

The second chapter follows the hijra’s participation in her own family and argues that by opting out of fathering sons and daughters, she affords to take care of aging mothers, widowed sisters and their children; figures who quickly become a burden for the hijras’ brothers when they become householders and fathers in their own right. Through this labour of providing care both material and otherwise, not only does the hijra give back voice and care to these vulnerable figures but in doing so she prevents families from the inevitable betrayal that the passing of time entails. She further colludes with her brothers’ wives so as to keep the atmosphere of the home salubrious. The chapter concludes by arguing that the lived lives of the queer and the family do not reveal a clear antagonistic opposition but a much more complicated relatedness marked with

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12 Lawrence Cohen writes, that sexual desire or even same-sex desire was often “unnamed but instantly recognizable “this”” in "Holi in Banaras and the Mahaland of Modernity" in GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies 2, no. 4 (1995): 421.
tenderness, calibrations of care and reminders to remain human and modulate the violence of the family drama.

The third chapter follows the hijras to the trains where she collects her money from passengers and asks what is elided in framing such exchanges through the shorthand of ‘begging’. I compare and contrast the exchange that takes place between the hijra and the passengers with other forms of alms-giving that take place in the moral economy of South Asia. I show that this exchange of money bears only partial similarity to other moral-religious monetary exchanges, to point to something beyond the logic, rules, and laws of dharma and ahimsa (non-violence). I argue that the use of the word Haq (right) by the hijras makes the exchange more akin to taxes and this in turn reveals a logic of compassion and non-cruelty. I further trace the participation of hijra in spectacles orchestrated by both the state and the public to argue that the hijra lubricates the acrimonious relationship between the polis and its citizenry, one that is marked with accusations and perceptions of corruption and tax evasion. This lubrication, I argue, further points towards the logic of compassion and accountability that the hijra demands when she demands to be paid in trains by the passengers.

The last chapter of this dissertation studies love affairs that hijras conduct and argues that the sex and love between hijras and their lovers does not mark the failure or futility of making meaning, but can be seen as points of a grander design in whose unfolding, meaning is yet to come. I draw a parallel between the love affairs of the hijras with sufī mystical exercises and tantric designs, not to assert that hijras, sufī mystics and tantric practitioners share a common principle of social organization, but that they all hold their loves and lives in service to a sacred geometry whose grand design is still
unfolding. The complete picture of this design, which when realized, will transform the rules and laws of the world or in other words. The purpose of this chapter is to link the sexual act not just to a possibility of risk, danger, and disease, but also to promise and potential of discovering love and intimacy that will refuse to be measured or translated into any terms offered by the world.

The title of this dissertation comes from a conversation that took place between Nandita and me in Bhawanipatna in the March of 2012. It was around four in the morning; Damru and I were lolling about unable to sleep. Nandita, returned from the highway and walked over to us after parking her cycle. She looked quite giddy and I thought she was drunk. She showed me a used condom and between fits of laughter said, “I finally ate Saajan”.

Swaying with joy and laughter, she, then, proceeded to empty the contents of the condom in her mouth. She spat the semen back into the condom, laughed and said, “Ah, seven months of thirst is finally quenched”. I asked her why she spat it back into the condom instead of swallowing it and she replied that she will put it in her mouth again and repeat it till its all gone. “I want his smell in my mouth, so that I can smell him every time I breathe, it’s like perfume, it makes me heady (nasha)”. How are we to read this conflation of metaphors? Perfume is swallowed, water is spat out and nasha (the word translates and is used to describe drugs {and love} and their effect) is not inhaled but exhaled. The metaphor fuses several binaries and this is where I begin.

Leo Bersani, in studying another text famous for the fusion of metaphors, writes, “The natural inclination of Flaubertian desire is toward dangerous fusions; in other terms,
desire leads to the nightmare of a loss of form.”¹⁴ I want to totter forth with this loss of form in Nandita’s statement as a beginning to a study of desire predicated upon sexual transactions much like the one that had just occurred between Nandita and Saajan. Richard Halpern in his analysis of a Shakespearean sonnet writes,

> But if the image of perfume and glass is vastly ill-suited to its stated purpose of figuring sexual procreation, it is as more than one critic has noticed, perfectly suited to another, implied purpose: that of figuring poetick procreation. The diminutive, unchanging perfection of the perfume bottle thus represents not a baby but a sonnet. The glass womb is the male womb of Shakespearean verse, in which the young man’s essence will be perpetuated, not as another living and therefore perishable blossom but rather as eternal though static lines of poetry.¹⁵

If perfuming the semen in the Shakespearean sonnet is a kind of procreation, what is it exactly that is being engendered in Nandita’s womb? I should hasten to point out that Nandita, in a way, conflates her mouth and her rectum as well, given that Saajan had fucked her in her batli¹⁶ but his semen had not entered her body through there or then but through her mouth and hours later.

> We might borrow Jane Guyer’s notion of enhancement, which she uses in the context of body decoration in Southern Cameroon to suggest that such fusions offered a certain “lightness of life.”¹⁷ The first chapter will argue precisely that - flirting and fucking outside the confines of the domestic provided succor and sustenance that made life within the domestic bearable. The domestic even though a formidable institution

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¹⁶ Batli was the word used for the rectum in the hijra language- it neither corresponds to rectum or vagina.
seems a very fragile and precarious entity enabled only by a proper expelling of semen. Valentine Daniel writes that “One of the causes ascribed to congenital deformities, the birth of weaklings and impotent sons, is the careless expenditure of valuable semen by the father prior to the moment of conception, so that when he joined his wife in order to conceive, he was in short supply of the potent substance.” This rule though is not just limited to the householder and his family, but the priests as well in Valentine Daniel’s ethnography. The priest or acari who is supposed to consecrate the house must abstain from sexual intercourse because it is a “heating transaction” and violations of such a rule would result in the house being eaten by white ants. Valentine Daniel writes,

Sexual indulgence is punished by the destruction of the house by white ants. White ants eat away the beams and woodwork of a house, not only weakening the structure but also leaving behind a leprous appearance. Here, too, the punishment may be seen as befitting the crime. Karaiyan (“white ants”) is etymologically derived from karai (“stain, blemish, defect, impurity, rust”). A piece of wood wasted by white ants has the blemished appearance of a man’s skin wasted by leprosy (kustam). Furthermore, leprosy is a wasting disease thought to be caused by indiscriminate and promiscuous sexual liaisons, which is exactly what the Acari has been warned against. For in the context of planting the mulaikkal, any sexual relationship, even with one’s own wife, is indiscriminate, if not promiscuous.

I cite the above as an instance of the “economy of semen,” a shorthand that I will use throughout this dissertation to study the sexual transactions between the hijras and their lovers, customers, and young men. Alain Bottero used the phrase in his study of the semen-loss syndrome of India to highlight the ayurvedic logic that determined the production, retention, and expenditure of this divine nectar. A lot has been written about

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20 Bottero writes, “Men have to use this essential substance, a true aura vitalis, appropriately and with parsimony, for their reserves unfortunately are not endless: It is up to them to dispose of it with discretion if
Indian semen—on the dialectic of its retention and consequent potency, proper expulsion for fertility, relation to heat and cold, anxieties about its loss, value, quality— in texts ancient and modern, that a summary would not be helpful let alone possible within the limits and concerns of this dissertation. Lawrence Cohen’s essays form the exemplar for any work on non-reproductive sexuality in South Asia and perhaps a more pertinent example of the economy of semen would be the conversation he records in, “The History of Semen: Notes on a Culture-Bound Syndrome.” A hustler educates Cohen in a park of Benares where men cruise by saying, “These city boys, these sons of great Seths, come with their father’s money and I give them something. They take my strength [referring to his semen] and I take some money.” Semen in Cohen’s ethnographic incident becomes an object that finds its equivalence in money when the sexual transactions cut across the urban/rural and class divisions. Apart from arguing that the anxieties of semen loss becomes more of an orientalist object of an imperious public health discourse when seen as a cultural tautology, Cohen makes an important intervention in making space for failures in everyday strivings to uphold the model of culture. He relies on Batille’s work to point out that while there are very strong imperatives to retain and make semen more potent, it is actually its luxurious expenditure that allows for life to be lived “against the grain.”

The sexual transactions that took place in Bhadrak and Bhawanipatna did not transgress either class or the urban/rural divide thus requiring us to take forward Cohen’s inspiration and ask how hijras and their lovers accounted for the luxurious expenditure of

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they want to avoid a premature decrepitude. A complete hygiene programme, an “economy of semen,” results from this.” Please see, Alain Bottéro, "Consumption by semen loss in India and elsewhere," *Culture, medicine and psychiatry* 15, no. 3 (1991): 308.

semen. The babies that the hijras would refer to in their flirting, the pregnancies they would claim and would refer to in myths make me invoke rather than engage with the notion of amogharetas, as an example of the relationship between desire, power, and semen. Doniger writes that

In Hindu mythology the instances of unilateral female creation are by far outnumbered by unilateral male creation. The male seed is fertile in itself, particularly the seed of a great ascetic who has kept it within him for a long time and is therefore “one whose seed is never shed in vain” (amogharetas); that is, he engenders a child every time he sheds his seed, no matter where he sheds it. Even an ordinary man’s seed is basically the source of life, as is evident from the Upanisadic tradition; in Dharmasastra, too, the seed remains more important than the womb. The seed shed by a powerful male may fall into any of a number of womb substitutes (a pot, the earth, a river or someone’s mouth) and produce an embryo.22

The idiom of pregnancy that the hijras use then gives the man a sense of being omnipotent, and to the list of places that Doniger recounts where men shed their ever-fertile seed, I would add the rectum as well. The production of omnipotent men was one of the labours of loving in rural Orissa.

When we look at the answers given to the question “Why do men have sex with men?” in India’s National AIDS Control Organization’s (NACO) publication titled, Targeted Interventions Under NACP III: Operational Guidelines for core high-risk groups- the reasons link Ayurvedic and Unani understandings of the body such as, “pleasure and enjoyment from discharge (‘body heat’),” to culturally prescribed norms such as, “Wife will not perform anal/oral sex or husband is ashamed to ask.” The answers further link the anxiety of pleasure with the substratum economy of semen as it is inherited and understood through the Hindu-Muslim cosmogony, in reasons such as “Anus is tighter than vagina and gives more pleasure,” “Protecting a girl’s virginity,

maintaining chastity,” and “No commitment to marriage.” One other reason states, “play” and curiosity.” The limit of this economy of semen, to the extent that it does not and cannot offer anything in exchange to the hijra, is also the limit of the hermeneutic of desire and would be a prefiguring of purpose. If we were to ask what the hijra receives in exchange for her services then we would also be in effect asking what comes after sex; and as Lee Edelman reminds us ““After” thus stands in relation to “sex” as “heteronormative” stands to “queer,” or as “history” stands to “repetition,” or the “social” to the “antisocial.””

Lawrence Cohen studies political pornography to argue how the desire to be penetrated cannot find representation where it serves as a metaphor for the realpolitik, in other words, it expresses the position of the Indian Everyman vis-à-vis the political order: he is being fucked, metaphorically speaking. I cite this essay because the political pornography that Cohen is studying differentiates oral and anal sex through the exchange of semen and offers a view of the structure and representation of being penetrated. Cohen writes,

Fellatio differs from anal penetration in Holi cartoons. The fellator is represented as actively desiring the submissive position of taking in another man’s ling, whereas the man who is penetrated is represented as passive and his desire irrelevant. Fellatio sets up an exchange in space—semen for marked abjection—but anal penetration sets up an exchange only in time, and then only if the participants are able under the sign of carnival to circulate and the penetrator to penetrate.

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Semen, invisible in this genre of representation of anal sex, does not function narratively as a gift.²⁶

But that is porn and Cohen, through a masterful juxtaposition of ethnographic scenes argues that even when the world is divided into the fucked and the fuckers, there are ways to penetrate and be penetrated that are not inscribed with the violence of the world. His analysis is consistent with the Foucauldian imperative that seeks to transform relationality from the hermeneutics of desire to bodily pleasures. This dissertation seeks to explore how the politics of penetrations that take place between the hijra and her lovers is lubricated through the invocation of semen that is never shed in vain, and which, while never gifted in political pornography that Cohen describes, does bear fruit in real, mythic and fantasized time. The sexual transactions between hijras and men by insisting on the visibility of semen, then, play out across the axis of time although inevitably as a failure.

Lee Edelman’s argument in No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive would reframe the hijra in Lacanian terms as a subject that threatens to undo the symbolic, but more importantly as a subject who by resisting “the viability of the social … [insists] on the inextricability of such resistance from every social structure”²⁷ Edelman continues to argue for the paradoxical relation between the symbolic and the excess that it produces, that is, the death drive; or the futurism insisted by reproductive heteronormativity and the future-annihilating queer. Leo Bersani raises the question of how not to have an investment in futurity in his blurb at the back of Edelman’s book, where he writes “The paradoxical dignity of queerness would be its refusal to believe in a redemptive future, its embrace of the unintelligibility, even the inhumanity inherent in sexuality. Edelman's extraordinary text is so powerful that we could perhaps reproach him only for not spelling

²⁶ Ibid., 404
out the mode in which we might survive our necessary assent to his argument.” Bersani’s playful reproach is an entry point for anthropology to enter the dialogue because, simply put, not everybody’s experience of time sutures the past, present and future in a manner that might give birth to futurity. Furthermore, given that children sometimes grow up to be men that hijras fuck, may one, then, not passively support the reproductive futurism of others? The anthropological truth - that it takes a village to raise a child - could be reformulated when viewed through Edelman’s scintillatingly poisonous articulation of sexuality to read- you may raise them to fuck them.28 I am being, perhaps, pointlessly provocative but in the following chapters I hope to show how hijras perform Edelman’s edict to not participate in reproductive futurism to the extent that they are not signatories to children and contracts of lineages. But to the extent that they do participate in the various scenes of the social that erases the queer’s trace while being sustained by that negation at the same time, they pose a more profound challenge to the simple command to not reproduce.

I would also like to add that the subtraction of the child would also necessarily require from the hijras a theological explanation given that the child in the Hindu world also saves one’s soul. The sloka punnamno narakad yasmat trayate pitram sutah tasmat putra iti proktah svayam eva svayambhuva cited in several ancient texts including the Manusmriti has been translated by Patrick Olivelle as “The Self-existent One himself has

28 Edelman responds to Bersani’s question through a reading of Hamlet in which Bersani’s question is rendered unanswerable. Edelman writes, “What Hamlet does not and cannot teach, and what we can never know, is how to escape the will-to-be-taught, the desire for a lesson- a profit, a one- to take the place of the zero; how to allow for not saying “yes” to the imperative of life; how to let the future be by being what lets the future” in Lee Edelman, "Against Survival: Queerness in a Time That's Out of Joint" Shakespeare Quarterly 62.2 (2011):169.
called him “son” (putra) because he rescues (tra) his father from the hell names Put.”

Robert Goldman’s translation is more colloquial – “Since a son saves (trayate) his father from hell called Put, he was therefore declared to be ‘put-tra’ by Brahma himself.”

The soul is the location through which we can qualify the hijra’s asceticism; this will be the focus of part two of the introduction. How one experiences, organizes, and marks time when one subtracts the “order of the child” when it is also the order of the symbolic is also a concern for Ascetics. Ascetics or sanyasis as Veena Das writes represent the category of the asocial (in these that they are outside the domain of the family, kinship, and caste) and one belonging to it “can force God to establish a relation with him if his austerity is severe enough.”

The hijras’ eroticism would follow Edelman’s argument, which has been called “The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory” and their asceticism would give them the place of the asocial pace Das’s analysis of the nexus of relations between the king, the brahman and the sanyasi.

The instantiation of eroticism and asceticism within the figure of the hijra reminds us that there is a third function in the Hindu trimurti, besides creating and destroying, and that is of preserving. Edelman’s argument regarding what negativity does seems to me very much like the function of preserving.

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33 Indeed, Lauren Berlant insists on the term “sustain” in its various conjugated forms in her conversation with Lee Edelman. She is obviously not speaking of Hindu theology, but the fact that this concept cropped up in her dialogue regarding negativity and the social means that I am not alone in my suspicion. The function of preserving is delegated to Visnu, whose thousand names, in the Visnu Sahasranama would also include the task of sustaining. Please see, Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman. Sex, or the Unbearable. Duke University Press, 2013.
offers us a way to answer the question of what non-heteronormative temporality might look like, or what it does look like, at least, for the hijras in rural Orissa.
Chapter 1 - A Prodigious Birth of Love

The Laughter

Bergson in, “Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic,” undertakes the task of revealing the logic of laughter, from its inception to its infection, to show how it sustains the social. He writes, “[Laughter] indicates a slight revolt on the surface of social life. It instantly adopts the changing forms of the disturbance. It also, is afroth with a saline base. Like froth, it sparkles. It is gaiety itself. But the philosopher who gathers a handful to taste may find that the substance is scanty and the after-taste bitter.”

Let us take Bergson’s proposition to study laughter “as a living thing” and study how it relates to the fucking between the hijras and the men of Bhadrak, Orissa. This chapter begins by looking at how hijras use laughter, flirtation and seduction to inflame their lover’s body with desire, and offers some deliberations on the particular freedoms and restraints that this form of fucking or loving offers. In other words, it studies the carnality that emerges from the relationship between the asceticism and eroticism of the hijra that allows her to fuck in a particular form and not any other. Bergson interestingly defines the comic as a form of asceticism (although not in so many words) when he writes, “Any individual is a comic who automatically goes his own way without troubling himself about getting into touch with the rest of his fellow-beings.” We will see further on how this asceticism is bound with eroticism in a different way for the hijra than the ones most apparent in the many scenes from South Asia that have been studied.

The presence of other people is important for laughter because as Bergson explains, “our laughter is always the laughter of the group” and if laughter is supposed to be a corrective then I imagine it would require more than one person, so I begin with the
following scene. By evening, lots of young men would gather in my room in the bangle factory, tired after a long day’s work, to lounge about, chatting, living a bit dangerously by having prurient conversations with Jaina, Azgari and whoever happened to be visiting. Jaina would inevitably get tired of conversations that would be a strange mash up of flirting that would not result in sexual proposals, religious diktats and singing and would start pretending as if she were in labour. She would untie her lungi and tie it around her neck like women who tie their petticoats when they go bathing in public. She would then start writhing on my straw mat, squealing loudly about the pain she was in and grab her perfectly round belly. The boys would be extremely amused and soon be hysterically laughing and, teasing would ensue- “Whose child is it, Jaina?” they would enquire, and Jaina would reply either by uttering the name of the boy or gesturing towards him on whom she had harboured a crush for a while (if he was there) or she would say, “the one whose child it is knows, why don’t you go ask him? (if her current object of lust and affection was not present)” Azgari would often join in the drama and begin giving advice, “Why aren’t you drinking water, the baby will come out swimming?” “Shall I rub soap in your vagina so that that baby slips out?” The whole impromptu drama would end with everybody laughing hysterically. I want to study the implications of this comic performance, the “artificial mechanisation” of the body, because as we shall see it shores up the various other ethnographic instances of conversations and discussions about the hijra’s body and the open question as to whether she could give birth to children.

Bergson writes that it is the relationship between the “irsksome ballast of” a body to the “soul eager to rise aloft,” that results in the mechanical and hence the comical. The body of the comic, for Bergson, illustrates the discomforting disciplines and the
anatomical limits of the social which laughter allows us to trespass. The laughter provoked by the pregnant hijra, then, can be read not just as indexing a particular vexed relationship with the world, but enfleshing it in a way that tames the moral impulses carried in kinship. Does depositing semen in the rectum and wasting its vitality? In other words, is the immorality of this fucking offering some respite? The moral for Bergson in this essay is colluding with the social’s choreographing of the bodies as opposed to being out of tune with it, which he argues is the characteristic of the comic. He writes, “Any incident is comic that calls our attention to the physical in a person when it is the moral side that is concerned” and furthermore, that the comic suggests, “a person embarrassed by his body.” The scene and the laughter in my room can be read as the hijra’s disappointment with her body, but the boys that the hijra teased and flirted with were the ones that were laughed at by the others, who were always present since a lot of seduction and flirting happened at the market place, usually in Azgari’s shop. Not only was the hijra’s mechanised body found humorous, but through her statements, the body of the youth who refused to indulge in immorality also got laughed at. The laughter, then, is also an invitation to men, forwarded by the hijra, to enter this cleavage between her body and the social and enjoy the pleasures of betrayal afforded by the temporary suspension of the moral in this space. The laughter will perhaps allow us to see a relationship between the force of a moral persuasion as it simultaneously acts on the body and the social, such as kinship, and the tenor and tone of freedoms and restraints that arise through its betrayal and the desire for anal sex (both giving and taking).

I lived behind Azgari’s bicycle shop and would often go there to sit and have tea. During these times, she would often start talking loudly about how many boys came to
fuck her last night. She would usually divulge this information in the presence of some boy that she was teasing for his lust that she had satiated last night. Through that satiation and this form of recollection, Azgari was inviting him for another visit but it also might be, for her, another chance to get the fertilizing fuck that will render her pregnant. When she was trying to seduce somebody by provoking them she would either say, “Oh he used to talk so big about how he would impregnate me at the first shot, fuck me till I wouldn’t be able to take it, fuck me so hard that he would send me to the hospital, but when it came the time to do it, his cock was so small [measuring with her hand to show the length of her middle finger].” The boy at this point, if he had already fucked her, would often start blushing, and smiling to himself and start concentrating on his bicycle and the task of pumping air into its tires. Usually his friends were near, they would also tease him. “What is she saying? You don’t have any power” Size, prowess, virility and the ability to fertilize all signified by a large cock. If the boy had not fucked her she would change the tense of her statements to- “Oh, he talks big but I am sure his is very small, that’s why he can’t fuck me, that’s why he doesn’t come- how will he come sister [turning to me] what will he do if he comes, he is so small he can’t fuck.” The reaction of the boys usually would be the same as it was towards their counterpart who had fucked her. The laughter was in this case directed towards the boy who refuses to become a man and go through the rite de passage of losing his virginity, of fucking one of these old bawdy pushy hijras. Usually the poor youth was forced by the merciless teasing of his friends to prove Azgari’s claims wrong by, as luck would have it, fucking Azgari, herself. This is how Azgari and the laughter she provoked, would, in Bergsonian terms, “corrects men’s manners.”
The Flirting

The correction tendered by Azgari, which can be seen as repositioning her lovers from following one set of rules to another, operates in the mode of seduction. Seduction cajoles one into committing acts that are not definitively marked by coercion or consent. I want to offer the following ethnographic incident, which I want to study in terms of the corrective qualities of the hijra’s seductive wiles.

Once, soon after I had reached Bhadrak in 2011, Shamsheri asked me to take her and buy her some slippers. I agreed and a charming young chap, not much older than 15, but with the airs and efficacy of a person much older, was helping her while the owner of the shop was sitting and chatting with a friend of his. Shamsheri started flirting with the boy by accusing him of showing substandard slippers, which the chap denied, to which she said, “You make everything I say into lies.” The chap smiled, puzzled and asked to which statements was she referring. Shamsheri replied, “you refused to acknowledge the unborn child in my stomach as yours, you say I am lying when I tell you it’s yours.” The owner and his friend who were talking to each other, started laughing and the boy turned away, red with embarrassment. This encouraged Shamsheri, and she continued, “Will you deny you come to my house at night?” The owner asked Shamsheri, “really?” Shamsheri replied, “Yes, of course, ask him. In the middle of the night he will keep on knocking on my door, waking everybody up and drag me to the field, won’t let go of me till the morning breaks.” The owner and his friend started laughing and teasingly caught the boy by the scruff as he turned to Shamsheri and laughingly asked, “Why are you dragging my name through mud?” Shamsheri, as a parting shot, threatened that she will
throw the baby in the river and when people will ask her she will put all blame on the boy because he refused to acknowledge paternity and she was rendered helpless.  

I found the boy’s answer very interesting, since he did not outrightly deny the accusations leveled against him, instead his reply, “Why are you dragging my name through mud?” could be seen as a mild reprimand against Shamsheri making public, the secret of their sexual affair, secrecy which Alfred Gell has suggested is central to any love affair.  

If the accusations are false then through her playful teasing, ostensibly made to generate laughter, Shamsheri had made known to the boy that she was interested in having sex with him. The boy, in turn by not denying the crime he had or had not committed (yet) made Shamsheri know that both were possibilities- and the night, which suddenly seemed full of promises was yet to come. This ambiguity in his response and the (im)possibilities that have emerged from it, allows the incident to be framed as flirting. Simmel writes, “The distinctiveness of the flirt lies in the fact that she awakens delight and desire by means of a unique anti-thesis and synthesis: through the alternation or simultaneity of accommodation and denial; by a symbolic, allusive assent and dissent, acting “as if from a remote distance”; or, platonically expressed, though placing having and not-having in a state of polar tension even as she seems to make them felt concurrently. In the behaviour of the flirt, the man feels the proximity and interpenetration of the ability and the inability to acquire something. This is the essence of “price.” With that twist that turns value into the epigone of price, flirtation makes this

35 Since the funeral rituals concerned with a dead baby, or a miscarried foetus, require for proper burial, paternal acknowledgement, the throwing of the baby into the river that both Jaina and Shamsheri referred to continuously can be read as teasingly declaring the men as moral cowards and failures who have refused to take on their responsibilities and threatening them with public shame.

36 Alfred Gell, “On love,” Anthropology of this century 2 (2011)
acquisition seem valuable and desirable.”\textsuperscript{37} The boy’s reply reveals his positioning in the world, which is suggestible to change. Shamsheri’s words don’t fall on deaf ears, they are absorbed and through that absorption, the boy reveals that the terms in which he sees the world can shift or be corrected. What was previously not there- the figure of the hijra in the landscape of pleasure- has now through flirting made an appearance; her pregnancy is now both an ability and inability.

There is in this correction, enabled by seduction, a certain agony that emerges from shifting somebody’s picture of the world. Margaret Trawick writes about the agonizing quality of seduction and love when she writes of her teacher and informant-

Themozhiyar saw himself as my guru and me as his student. He wanted me to believe in his god and to follow his path toward that god. (...) When I was still in Madras, he had performed initiation (\textit{gurdiksha}) on me, by surprise and against my mild protests, by giving me a secret mantra of twenty syllables. I accepted the role of disciple, as being the most appropriate one under the circumstances, though as I got to know Themozhiyar better I found it increasingly difficult to bow to him, even as a nominal gesture. I argued with him frequently, as did his other students, but I was probably more vehement and stubborn than they. I wanted to learn from him, but I also wanted to be in control of the situation in which the two of us found ourselves. I told him that he should consider me a child, that in my ignorance of Tamil culture I was a child, and needed to be taught everything from the foundation up. Themozhiyar agreed to that. I acted as humbly and innocently as was possible for me. But I did not enjoy being treated as an inferior.\textsuperscript{38}

Further on, she writes, “The poem is also about the love between guru and disciple, how each travels a long way and changes very much in order to meet the other, how each out of love, causes pain to the other, how each, out of love, endures this pain.”\textsuperscript{39} I mention this quality of seduction because I want to study what the implications are of the

\textsuperscript{38} Margaret Trawick, \textit{Notes on Love in a Tamil Family} (Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1992), 18.
\textsuperscript{39} ibid., 23.
corrective abilities of the sexual pedagogy as proffered by the hijra. The following is an ethnographic example, which I want to study as one instance of sexual pedagogy between the hijra and her lover. Jaina would say,

A hijra can never set up a house with a man. He is a man, he requires children, heirs, he requires *din-duniya* (religions/customs-world/society). With a hijra, he won’t have any children, he won’t be able to set up his *duniya* (home/world) with her. But then, not all men are the same, very rarely there is one in a million, who forsake the *din-duniya* and the desire to have children and then he sets up a house with a *maichiya* and marries her. But then they can’t desire anything else, they don’t think about anything and can spend their days in the manner they want. Every man, no matter how much he loves a hijra, and no matter how long they live like husband and wife must leave her to set up *din-duniya*. Look at my case, I spent ten years with Kutty, like husband and wife we lived. He wouldn’t eat anywhere but from my hand. The whole world knew. But his sister’s husband came to me once, when he had gone to Balasore and said, “Look, Jaina, allah and I know how pure your love is but “Kutty will need to set up his home, settle down according to religion/law/customs of the world, he will need to worry about children.” If you won’t help us in convincing him to get married he will never get married. In the night, his sister and mother came to me, pleading to convince him to get married. He was always refusing to get married. So I told him, “I will live with you, I will do *this* whenever you want, wherever you want, but settle down, you will have children, you need to work for your future, what will you get staying with me, I can’t give you children or heirs, this is wrong, what is all this?” He said, “You want me to get married, you go find a woman.” So, I went to the place with the family when the marriage was happening and then when they asked, “who gives the permission for this marriage” they pointed towards me, “I was so embarrassed because it is the mother or the father’s right to give permission.” But Kutty said, “No, Jaina will have to give the permission.” So I got them married and came back. After the marriage celebrations, Kutty, that bastard landed up at my place in the middle of the night and refused to go to his wife. I was scared, about the girl’s side, since they were staying with Kutty’s family.

They, the brothers of the girl came to look for him, they told me, “please send him home it’s one in the morning” but he wouldn’t leave. I was in such a fix, what if they get angry, it takes only a second for men to become animals, what if they kill me, for stealing their son, brother, brother-in-law. I was so scared that they would start abusing, wake up the entire village. Won’t it cause trouble if he doesn’t go near his wife? He has gotten married, people will abuse him if he doesn’t go to his wife. So, I figured out how to send him, I start touching his penis, pleading all the time, when he got hot, I quickly had sex with him and then I told him to go to his

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40 *Maichiya* is the Odia word for Hijra and is used interchangeably in this paper as it was in my conversations in Orissa.
wife. He went away. God knows, what he did with her, he was back at my place with the morning azaan. I thought this guy is going to get me beaten up, bastard. I told him, “At least spend the first night completely with your new wife.” He said “shut up” and slipped into my bed. Men will always go to women, there is nothing to feel sad about this. This is the world’s dastoor (ways/tradition/rule) and we are barkhilaaf (out-of-joint/ out-of-step/against) from this dastoor. What to do allah pak has made us Maichiyas, but to marry men is not our work, this is our shauq (enjoyment), marrying men is not what allah made us capable to do, it is very wrong, for men to set up dinduniya is not wrong.

This story illustrates the agonizing quality of seduction and the antagonism inherent in the flirting because with the invitation to participate in a carnality that frees the body from the disciplines of the moral and the social, the hijra must remind the boy of the restraints and the risks he runs in renouncing the moral altogether. The hijra must also calibrate the relationship in such a way so as to push the young lad back into the world so that he can become the householder, if he is not one already. Calibration refers to the etiquette through which the risks and the freedoms can be negotiated to sustain not only the social but the carnal as well that refuses to stick to the social amicably. Instance of calibration or etiquette can be seen in Malinowski’s Sex and Repression in Savage Society, in which he mentions a variety of sexual taboos in the Trobriands and the varying charges of moral shame attached to them. While the incest between brother and sister threatens the futurity of the social, Malinowski is still able to document an incident, in which, the siblings “were able to brave it out and lived in incest for several months till she [the sister] married and left the village.”41 He cannot document any incidents of mother-son incest and there were many instances of breaking the exogamous rules called suvasova which resulted in shame and “eruption of boils all over the body.” Thankfully, there was magic to cure the bodily infliction and the shame for the woman was

accompanied with admiration for the man’s plucky nature. The case of the infraction of
the incest taboo was resolved through the sister’s marriage.

The sexual act, within the household, must be carefully positioned within axes of
kinship, generational distance and rules of endo or exogamy to resist incest and result in a
viable child, family and future. The sexual act, in the field between the hijra and her
lover, if not controlled, threatens with a formless future - they don’t desire anything else,
they don’t think about anything and can spend their days in the manner they want. The
pedagogy in both Malinowski’s analysis of sexual encounters and in the fucking fields is
the teaching to the lovers the contradiction in the heart of the social, around which it
congeals and which gives it its kinetic force. The primal myth of the death dealing incest
committed between a sister, who falls in love with her brother, results in a spot that has
springs where lovers must bathe, and a spot where a plant that is needed for the magical
ritual of ensuring success in love grows from the chests of the dead lovers. Deaths of the
incestuous siblings make fertile the land for all the other lovers. Incest also explains the
social etiquette of siblings in the Trobriands; if the brother and sister are supposed to
avoid enquiring about and addressing each other directly to ward off the threat or
suspicion of incest, even though they are inextricably linked with each other for life then
what is this form of etiquette supposed to do? Is this the force of the moral that
anthropologists have articulated in kinship? What threats, emerging from the social and
to the social. Is the seduction and fucking of the hijras supposed to domesticate? Let us
begin by studying the etiquette, the threats it wards off, the contradictions that it hides
and reveals, and resolutions offered in the fucking fields where the hijras meet their
lovers.
The Dead Babies

The hijra, referring to her baby all of a sudden, uninvited every evening in multiple ordinary conversations that would take place much to the amusement and giggles of everybody present, would often, be the flirtatious reminder to everybody, in case they had forgotten that they were invited to impregnate her or at least fuck her knowing that one possibility was pregnancy. Sometimes, in the late evenings, Jaina, if in an exceptionally licentious mood, would stand in the middle of the road and lament loudly, “Aao re- seat khali hai- baccha kar do” [Come one- there is an empty seat/vacancy- impregnate me]. The following are some of the examples of how the baby was mentioned by the hijra-

a) When Shamshe refused tea offered by Azgari, she said, “No, the baby will get burnt (nahin baccha jal jayega)”- referring to the tamsik or heat producing quality of tea.

b) When somebody wanted flowers, Jaina said, “Come, impregnate me (Aao Baccha kar do)- signaling how enamoured she was with the handsome boy, but also mildly irritated by the fact that he was very business like with her and would not respond to her flirtations.

c) When somebody asked Azgari how he was, she answered, “The baby dried up (Baccha sukha gaya).”

d) Jaina referred to herself in the third person, when I asked her whether she was a bit mad? She said, “Somebody has abandoned Jaina after getting her pregnant (Jaina ko koi pet se kar ke bhaag gaya).”
e) When Jaina asked me, “What are you writing?” Akhtari replied, “she is making a baby/fucking (Baccha kari hai).”

f) Once Mangu who lives in Charampa, was dropping me to the auto stand so that I could go back to my hut, started flirting with an incredibly handsome young autorickshaw driver. The man giggled amusedly and playfully pretended to punch Mangu’s stomach. She squealed, “what if the baby gets hurt? (Baccha ko lag jayega toh?)”

g) Jaina asking a boy to call his friend and when he asks why should he come Jaina screams, “He has left me pregnant, now he won’t even come to take care of me (Baccha kar ke chor diya abhi khayal kaun karega?)” When the boy comes, she says, “You have left your baby in my stomach, won’t you take care of me, bring me some fruits, bananas, pomegranates, milk, butter, meat?” The boy irritated by this rubbish leaves and Jaina is left amused and a bit embarrassed by this careless and unnecessary insult.

Statements about the baby or references to the pregnant state of the hijra did not surprise any of us that were lolling about because they happened everyday and would be an established pathway of humourous disruption of mundane everyday concerns. Disruptive because even when it was not unintelligible, it would appear all of a sudden and even if it wouldn’t surprise us, it would make us laugh. Bergson in his analysis wrote, “In a comic repetition of words we generally find two terms: A repressed feeling which goes off like a spring and an idea that delights in repressing the feeling anew.”

Might we read the constant re-appearance of this ghastly baby as a form of repetition? If

42 Bergson, Laughter, 85.
so, then the flirting and fucking as sustaining for the social body, in Levi-Straussian terms, the animal in the human to be repressed and released. The way that Jaina, Shamsheri and I would amuse ourselves in the hot summer months would be by playing tricks on a certain blind old maulvi. Whenever we came across him in our early afternoon/before lunch rambles, Jaina would drag me in front of him and say, “Oh maulvi saheb please breathe on her, she is not being able to get pregnant. The maulvi saheb would touch my head with my long hair bunched up and would be convinced that I am a woman and would breathe and mumble some lines while Jaina and Shamsheri would be at pains trying to control their laughter. They would finally start laughing hysterically while I would look amused at this trick, which was growing old after the twentieth time we had done it. Jaina would speak breathlessly, “oh you’re sure to get pregnant tonight.”

The baby was in many instances in the market place an invitation to flirt, to flatter men about their virility or to provoke them into proving their prowess, but as I have mentioned it is also pedagogic. Siegel writes, “There is always a trickster in the game, a joker in the deck to prevent the rules from becoming oppression, the contest from becoming tedious or dull in losing its surprises and enchantments.... Through his lies, pranks, games, and jokes, turning the world upside down, the trickster-divine, human, or bestial- in the heavens, court, market, village, or jungle-is the guardian of humor, prompting us to laugh at ourselves, to take nothing seriously, to realize that profundities are but vain inventions of desperate intelligence. He exists in order to remind us of the game, that the game is all.”

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negotiating the chafing social. The bestial hijra reminds her lover that the world, the family and the household is all a game, but it is a game that he must necessarily play, and the fucking is a constant reminder that the rules of the game are never in one’s favour, the carnal even though mediated through the social will never sit with it comfortably. The stakes, hijras remind them here, are mortal, and coming to endure a social, which at its heart exacts a cost that cannot be survived intact.

Whenever I would tie my laundry into a small bundle Jaina would insist on taking it to the launderer. Her insistence I later found out, stemmed from the fact that there were various men in that neighbourhood with whom she would spend hours flirting and whiling away the evening. I discovered her flirtations after thinking it odd that she thought my clothes were *napaak* (unclean), meaning she would never touch my clothes, insisting instead that I tie the bundle, but which she had no problem carrying. Whenever she would pick the bundle up she would start reciting the same old lines in the same manner of loud lamentations- “Oh, why are you asking what’s in the bundle? My baby is in the bundle, I suffered a miscarriage last night.” If she wasn’t in a hurry and there was an audience, the recitation would become an extempore – “My husband beat me up so brutally because I lost the baby – I am taking the bundle to the river to throw it away- what else can I do?”

As usual, this bit of drama would cause a lot of laughter and could last from five minutes to an hour, depending on the size of the audience and the amount of encouragement their laughter provided. But the reference to the dead foetus took another tone when Jaina recounted this incident from her past to me-

When I was very young, I hadn’t gotten into this sort of *work* then. I was very young, must have been 13 or 14. I was very beautiful and Siddhiqui had called me
home. When I went there, I saw these two handsome men, I knew them, but they were rich, I was poor. I used to work at that time in Kaalu’s hotel. Remember I had taken you there? Yes, Kaalu’s father used to run it. I didn’t know but Siddhiqui had called me because the men wanted to get “work” done [kaam karwana chahte the - it means that the men wanted to have sex. Kaam or work was the metaphor used most often to denote sex]. I had not experienced any sex then, I was just told that Siddhiqui wanted to see me. When I reached, there was lots of good food, alcohol, paan etc. They all spoke very nicely to me and then Siddhiqui went outside, the men started touching me, and kissing me and I liked it very much. There was also desire in my mind. They were also young, then they grabbed my breasts and I didn’t know what was happening, my body was on fire, but when they pushed it inside, I couldn’t take it, I tried to tell them to stop but they had their hands on my mouth. After they were both done, I was in a lot of pain and I was crying and there was blood everywhere. Siddhiqui heard me cry and came inside and screamed at the men, “He is a child, you should have been gentle, it was his first time, how could he have taken it so quickly? You should have put it inside slowly. Is this any way to treat somebody when they are not used to this sort of work? The men felt very bad and gave me some money and left. Siddhiqui asked me to sleep over because if I were to go home there would have been questions about the blood on my clothes and why I had been crying. So, I slept there. Siddhiqui himself washed my clothes that night and left it to dry. Soon, I became unwell, my head was spinning, I was vomiting, everything I would eat would come out. My stomach was aching all the time, medicine was not helping. I didn’t know what was happening. After two or three months, I went to shit in the field and I was in so much pain that I fainted. The other people who I worked with came looking for me, including the hotel’s owner, Kaalu’s father. The next morning, he called me and asked me what had I been up to. I replied nothing and he said that I should tell him truthfully, otherwise he will beat me. I was young, so I told him what had happened. He then went in search of those two men and when they came, he shouted a lot at them, he told them that when he picked me up from the field, he saw that an embryo had come out of my body. You won’t believe what a karishma (miracle) had happened, Vaibhav, it was an embryo. They were shocked and said that was impossible, so he took them to the field, and showed them and they were young, they didn’t know what bacche ka chala (an ulcer of pregnancy) looks like. So they said, the old man was just making it all up, so the old man asked whether he should call other people and ask them to tell them what it was? They got scared and requested that he forgive them. He gave them a warning and let them go.

The most poignant story that I heard about a hijra’s pregnancy came from Lovely Kinnar. Lovely was considered, by far, the most beautiful hijra in the 6 districts of coastal Orissa that were connected by the Calcutta-Madras train route. Word about her beauty
had spread far and wide and Lovely knew about it. She was always beautifully dressed in shimmering sarees, the birth control pills\textsuperscript{44} that Hijras take had had a very good effect on her face, it was without any facial hair and wasn’t pock marked at all by the constant \textit{darsan}\textsuperscript{45}. The breasts that she grew were a nice commendable size, would have only grown bigger if she had done silicone. We all looked at her with much envy. I would always stay with her when I went to Jajpur, her room had one bedroom and a kitchen. The bedroom had very pink walls and one of them was covered with a very large plastic poster of a white naked baby with blue eyes. It had always been there, but I had never enquired about it till now because of all the babies that had filled my life suddenly. I turned to her and asked, “Why do you have this poster?”

Lovely flicked her doll like eyes up from cutting vegetables and said,

Last year, I had great pain in my stomach, no medicine would help, everybody thought I was pregnant; Guruma thought I was pregnant as well because the symptoms were exactly that of pregnancy you know, like the ones pregnant women have. I was vomiting, my head was spinning, I couldn’t eat, everything I would eat would be vomited.\textsuperscript{46} Guruma even conducted a puja to our goddess thanking her for the miracle in allowing this pregnancy to happen. My husband and I, upon the Guruma’s advice, bought this poster because if you look at a beautiful baby when you’re pregnant then your baby will also be beautiful. My husband took me to the doctor and because I look like a lady, after I told the nurses the symptoms they all told me I was most probably pregnant and the doctor asked me to wait so that he could see inside with the computer. I did not tell them that I was a hijra. When the doctor was looking inside my stomach, and in the computer, he looked very confused, because he could see that there was no child. He said to the nurses, “Lovely Sahoo is a man.” The nurses looked at him and said, “But this is Lovely Sahoo.” “I know,” the doctor said, “but Lovely Sahoo is a man.” They didn’t know I knew English, both the nurses looked at me

\textsuperscript{44} The hijras who cannot afford silicon implants take birth control pills to grow breasts, which sometimes result in discharge from their nipples. It’s considered a great event when a hijra lactates and causes a lot of excitement. Both Reddy and Nanda have documented this practice in their ethnographies.
\textsuperscript{45} When a hijra joins a hijra household she becomes a cela of the guru of that house. She is given a brass tweezer that is called darsan. Darsan also refers to the practice of plucking one’s facial hair that hijras practice rather than shaving which is considered very masculine. I would argue shaving also is very embarrassing given its masculine connotations.
\textsuperscript{46} Lovely belonged to a traditional hijra community where she had been initiated as a cela or disciple. The hijra household that Lovely was a part of consisted of a hijra guru, her celas and nati-cela (grand-disciples).
astonished and did not know what to say. They kept on staring, and the doctor then gave me some medicine and Aijaz and I came back. When we came back, everybody was very sad, but they also made fun of me, Guruma said, “This is what Jagannatha wanted.” But I was very sad, you know, for a moment I believed as well that I was pregnant. I know it is impossible but for a few days I had hoped that it was true what everybody was saying, that I was pregnant. I never got rid of the poster. She went to the poster and said, “now this is our baby,” she pinched the poster baby’s penis and said triumphantly, “When you grow up, tear everybody’s cunt.”” She whipped around and went to cook.

Hijra’s babies did not always cause amusement and humour. When one’s audience is not the young men with whom one is flirting or in love; or when the scene is not that of seduction then the story often turns wistful like Lovely’s did – she almost believed that she had been pregnant. Akhtari told me this story on a hot afternoon when she was uncharacteristically despondent.

At Chisti’s dargah,47 in Ajmer, there lives a sada suhaagan (one whose husband is always alive/always married/never a widow) she is a hijra. She is not actually married to a man or the baba but she dresses that way, her hands are full of bangles and her body covered in beautiful gold jewellery. A person has to go and plead to her and say, “Suhaagan, we don’t have a child please ask the khwaja to bless us with a girl or boy whichever they want.” If somebody wants a child they have to go to the dargah, the khazim over there will direct them to the suhaagan. Then the suhaagan will start pleading to Allah, “Ya allah, look, this woman has come, asking for a child, its been so long since she’s married, why haven’t you given her a child?” She will become very passionate in her pleadings. She is very beautiful, more beautiful than women. She will not leave till it becomes Allah’s wish to give the woman a child. She will remove her jewellery and break her bangles in josh asking allah, “tell me are you going to give a child or not?” Finally, Allah will change his mind and say, “Go, girl, go home, in nine months you will have a child in your lap.” After Ramzan, during Eid, the first shroud at the khwaja saheb has to come from a hijra, a maichhiya, otherwise the stove will not catch fire, nobody will be able to make the wood burn for the feast. Nobody else is supposed to put the first shroud besides a hijra. There was a maichiya that used to live with Chisti, she was well versed in the Quran, so her name was Hafiz Jamal, but she was a hijra. She had started talking to a rich man’s son, and soon they became lovers. They both were very beautiful. Soon, people got to know that

47 Akhtari is referring to the famous shrine (dargah) of the sufi saint, Moinuddin Chishti. There were well-planned bus tours that took people from Bhadrak in the east, across the subcontinent to the north western city of Ajmer. A lot of daily talk was about how to raise money for family members who wanted to take these bus tours.
they were in love, the villagers went to the seth, “your boy is roaming around with a hijra, aren’t you scared he will become spoilt? The man went to his son and asked why he was roaming around with the hijra? The son replied because he loved her, why are you displeased with this? No, people are starting to talk, you are my son and she is a hijra, she is not a woman, what can she give you (Tumhara usse kya kuch hoga). The son replied but she is also a beloved by Khwaja sahib like all of us. The boy and the hijra both went to the Khwaja and told him, “This is a seth’s son and I am a hijra. You know everything about me, Do one thing, give me a child of my lover in my stomach, that looks exactly like my lover, and as soon as I give birth kill me.” After a few days, she was pregnant. They went to the doctor who was so surprised. He took the baby out through an operation. After the child was born the word had to be kept that she had to die, but as she has asked, the world knew that a hijra had given birth to a child. The child died as well with the mother. But the whole world knew that her love was true because Khwaja Saheb had given her a child. Her mazhar is still there and it is written, Hafiz Jamal Bibi, now that she had become a mother.

VS: “What happened to the boy?”

[Akhtari looked a bit confused]

A: He got married to someone else.

[I was a bit surprised and extremely disappointed that he hadn’t killed himself because of the pain of being separated from his beloved, but Akhtari didn’t register that and was lost in her story-]

A: “Since then the hijra’s chaddhar is the first chaddhar to go on the shrine on the 10th day of Rajab, 3 months after Muharram.”

There are many different versions of this story, floating around. The other version, recounted by Gayatri Reddy in her ethnography conducted in 1995, goes as

48 This demand for resemblance can be traced back to the laws governing adultery in Manushashtra. Doniger writes, “In The Laws of Manu there are two different, conflicting models of paternity, expressed through a single agricultural metaphor: the sower of the seed is the biological father, who may or may not be the legal husband; the woman is the field, and the owner of the field is the legal husband. The son born in the field (the wife) by a man other than her legal husband is known as the ksetraja (literally “born in the [husband’s] field,” the wife’s natural son). But there are two ways of looking at this metaphor. The first assumes that the man who owns the field (i.e., the wife) owns whatever crop is sown in the field. Manu assumes that the field is entirely neutral, and that the crop (son) sown in it will always resemble the seed (the father). Therefore, you should never waste your seed by shedding it in another man’s “field” or wife, but you are not harmed if another man sheds his seed in your wife (in that you own the son resulting from that act). Manu thus forbids a man to commit adultery in another man’s wife but encourages him to let a brother produce a levirate heir in his own wife, through the Indian practice of niyoga, in which the widow of a man who has produced no male heirs is appointed to have a son by that man’s younger brother (emphasis mine,163). The hijra’s demand for resemblance is then also a demand for the legal proof for paternity. She is owned by that man, and the baby is his. Please see Wendy Doniger, "Begetting on Margin: Adultery and Surrogate Pseudomarriage in Hinduism," in From the Margins of Hindu Marriage: Essays on Gender, Religion, and Culture, ed. Lindsay Harlan and Paul B. Courtright (Oxford University Press, 1995), 160.
follows—“There was once a hijra named Tarabai who desperately wanted children of her own. So she went to Ajmer Baba and asked for this wish to be granted. Only, she said, “I want a child to be produced in my womb,” and did not explicitly ask for it to be born. So her pregnancy continued for several months and finally, unable to bear the pain and burden any longer, Tarabai slit her stomach and removed the baby, killing herself and the baby. But to this day, hijra who go to Ajmer baba’s dargah inevitably pay homage to Tarabai as well.” 49 Yet another version was told to Serena Nanda when she was conducting her ethnography in 1981.

In Ajmer, in North India, there is a holy place that belongs to the hijras. It is called Baba Darga, and it is on top of a hill. One time, during Urs, many people were going up the hill to pay respects to Baba. One hijra was also there. She saw a lady with four children and offered to carry one or two of them. The lady became very angry and told the hijra, “you are a hijra, so don’t touch my children.” This made the hijra feel very sad, so she asked Baba for his blessings for a child of her own. But she only asked for a child and didn’t ask Baba to bring the child out. The pregnancy went on for ten months, and her stomach became very bloated. She went to the doctors but they didn’t want to perform an operation [Caesarean section] on her. Eventually she couldn’t stand the weight any longer so she prayed to the Baba to redeem her from this situation. But Baba could only grant her the boon, he could not reverse it. When the hijra felt she could stand it no more, she found a sword at the darga (sic) and slit herself open. She removed the child and placed it on the ground. The child died and the hijra also died. Now at this darga prayers are performed to this hijra and the child and then to the Baba. 50

There is yet another widely circulated version, but one that you will never hear from the hijras. The Khwaja saheb was mocked by a hijra that he was no saint and he could perform no miracles, challenging him that if he could perform miracles then he should be able to make her pregnant. The hijra got pregnant, but because she could not give birth since she had no vagina, so she prayed to Khwaja to relieve her and asked for

49 Gayatri Reddy With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India. (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2005), 134-5.
50 Serena Nanda The hijras of India: Neither Man nor Woman (Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1999), 19.
his forgiveness. The Khwaja could not take the child back so she died along with the baby in her but since then, the hijras have flocked every year to pray, and ask for the Khwaja’s blessing. The Chisti dargah is not the only one associated with myths or legends of saints and their ability bestow fertility on hijras. I was told a similar story of the saint Ganj Rawan Ganj Baksh whose shrine is near Aurangabad. His powers to bestow fertility was mocked by a hijra as well, who then found herself to be pregnant, and as the story goes, she gave birth but both she and the baby died at childbirth. As in Ajmer, the tombs of the hijra and the baby are near the shrine and the fruits of the trees of this shrine are supposed to make an infertile woman pregnant. Similar to the workings of the primal myth of incest in Malinowski that becomes the basis of socially sanctified love, the one that renews the social, the dead hijra and her baby offers a resolution when the social threatens death in the form of infertility. A resolution riddled with pathos because it’s also an allegory of what is survivable.

Each version, differing ever so slightly, was told to make a point to the anthropologist. For Malinowski, the slight variations point to a complete cultural formulation, or “picture”; for example, Reddy’s informants told her the story to make comprehensible to her that hijras were different from women. Reddy analyzes the story to ask “are hijras primary agents of gender subversion in the Indian cultural context, or are they uncritically reinscribing gendered categories through their desires and practices?” and concludes that hijras’ “gender performances instantiate their “inherently ambiguous” and axial position in the Indian imaginary.”51 While a great deal of scholarship reiterates the point about the “ambiguous nature” of hijras, and some do it with good intentions, the

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formulations end up with the categories of resistance, subversion and re-signification of the already given to forefront the normative in Indian sexualities. But suppose we make a different move instead and locate the hijra within the larger Indian imaginary and ask how in Akhtari’s story, religious idioms and myth make comprehensible the topography of desiring men and reveals pathos in such desires that can never achieve currency. In Simmel’s words, desires that cannot twist themselves into a price and hence acquisition, exchange and possession and can only lead the desiring subject to her death, as shown in the stories above- but deaths from which the social sustains itself and ensures fertility and futurity.

While Reddy’s analysis is precise and helps us to realize that the hijra has placed herself outside the complementarity of the male/female, we will need to place it next to Nanda’s conclusion that focuses instead on the register of asceticism in the hijra. Then, the hijra appears not only outside the male-female binary, but also outside the project of the family and its various economies and moral constraints in a certain way. Nanda writes of the story, “On the one hand it [i.e., the myth] expresses the wish of some hijras to have a child, yet, on the other hand, acknowledges its impossibility. The death of the hijra and the child suggests that hijras cannot become women- in the most fundamental sense of being able to bear a child.” But one may, nonetheless ask: how can one respond to impossible desires and longings? The impossibility of a desire that does not cool down no matter how crippling the discouraging evidence, and tugs at the carnal to seek comfort, solace or release, makes a claim of a different sort on the subject and on the anthropologist.

52 Serena Nanda The hijras of India: Neither Man nor Woman (Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1999), 19.
Contiguities

There are two sets of concerns that I want to study here; the first being the contiguity between God, the Khwaja, the hijra or the sadaa suhaagan, and the couple that want a child. The asceticism of the Khwaja and the asceticism of the hijra, in Ajmer come together here to bestow the infertile couple with a baby, while the fruits from the trees growing near the grave of the pregnant hijra in the mazhar of Aurangabad are supposed to grant fertility to an infertile woman. Lives and families are lived in the wake of the dead hijras and their babies and the wood in their stoves will only burn after the hijras have given their shroud to the Khwaja. The form of exhortations of the hijra from the khwaja are telling, they can also be read as flirtatious, sweetly coercing the god to bless the infertile couple with a child. The khwaja is similar to the hijra to the extent that his desires are focused towards god and consequently he steps out of the domestic economy as well a different set of kin obligations. In the story Akhtari told me, the miracle giving powers of the Khwaja is relied upon to bring meaning to the claims of love that the hijra feels towards her man. The father interrupts the love affair by saying that the hijra won’t be able to give anything, or will be useless in the task of setting up home. He dismisses the love precisely because it cannot transform the man into a father or a householder and thus push him into the economy. The hijra then has to make visible her love and it is this act of making visible that also gives value to her love in a form that will be recognizable by the father, here standing for the social. She does so by giving birth to a baby. But the baby and the hijra both must necessarily die because the point of the child was to show the world that the love was true; that the love was valuable. The implication of this death is that perhaps the love between the hijra and her lover cannot survive in the realm of
visibility and value; it can only endure in the darkness of night. It can only exist in invisibility and outside economy, exchange and value - like the one in a million men that Jaina spoke about, who fall in love with the hijra and leave the world of men to spend their remaining life doing whatever they want.

In the last version of the myth that feature the hijra mocking the saint, the hijra becomes the skeptic; she questions the value of the khwaja’s grace and his proximity to god. The khwaja is, then, called upon to give visibility/value to his love for god. He does so through a miracle; he makes the hijra pregnant, but once again this sign of love, the hijra’s baby, cannot survive in the realm of visibility/value nor can it gain entry into the public and a foothold in the social and both the witness and the visible form of that love must die. The khwaja and the hijra are, then, not only contiguous but congruent as well in the way their desires find a moment of visibility, but then quickly disintegrate to return to a priceless world, which is free of questions of value and fruition. It is the inextricability of value and the baby that prevents the hijra’s love from having any currency. In other words, her love will never become valuable because she cannot have babies and the moment she does, she won’t remain a hijra anymore, she will become a woman - a possibility impossible to sustain even with the help of god. This set of myths also offers us a key to the understanding of the love between the hijra and her lover. If the

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53 I want to signal here the multivalency built into the word Artha, it refers to “wealth” in Thomas Trautmann’s translation Arthashastra: The Science of Wealth (Allen Lane, an imprint of Penguin Books, 2012). Olivelle translates Artha it as “statecraft” (pg. x), “political success” (pg. xvii), as “Success” (pg. xxxiii). See Patrick Olivelle’s The Arthasastra: Selections from the Classic Indian Work on Statecraft (Hackett Publishing Company, 2012). Artha is also defined as “arth, vulg. arath, s.m. Object, aim, purpose, intent; cause, motive, reason, account, sake; interest; advantage, profit, benefit, use, utility; concern, business, affair, matter; thing; substance, property, wealth, opulence; worldly prosperity; substance, material, stuff; suit, case in the dictionary” in John T. Platt’s dictionary. The proximity of economy in these definitions with concepts of object, aim, purpose - hopefully allows me to extend my analysis of the hijra’s love as one not having currency. Her love in reaching fructification twists value into price and currency but also endangers the social and death then relegated her love back into the realm of non-currency and purposelessness.
khwaja and his god are placed exactly in the same position as the hijra and her lover, then we might ask what are the implications that same-sex desire and love in this site where the lover is deified.

The *sadaa suhagan* is the point where the hijra and the khwaja meet, this figure reveals the form of loving that Akhtar’s myth was signaling. The following are a few lines from the poetry of the Sufi Madho Lal Husain to illustrate the figure of the *sadaa suhaagan*.

*Shak gia beshaki hoi ta mai augan nacci na*
*je shahu nal mai jhumar pava sada suhagan sacchi hai*
*jhuthe da mukh kala hoya ashak di gall sacchi hai*
*shak gia beshaki hoi ta mai augan naact hai*

The doubt has vanished and doubtlessness is established, therefore I, devoid of qualities, dance

If I play (thus) with the Beloved I am ever a happy woman [*sadaa suhaagan*]
The liar’s face (he who accuses) has been blackened and the lover’s statement has been proven true.
because the doubt has vanished and doubtlessness is established, therefore I, devoid of qualities, dance.

The contiguity between the Khwaja and the hijra, who both meet at the point of the sadaa suhagan, would explain why so many men would come to Jaina and ask her to breathe on a small vessel of water after reading the Quran. Upon enquiring, Jaina would say, “His wife is pregnant, and ill so that her health and the baby’s health is not harmed and to ensure everything happens smoothly, they will take the water and cook their dinner with

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55 Sultan Bahu, the seventeenth century saint has also mentioned *Sadaa Suhagan* in at least one of his poems. The one that comes to mind is - *zabani kalma her koe pad-dha, dil da pad-dha koi hoo/ Jithe kalma dil da padhiye uthey mile zabaan na dhoi hu/ Dil da kalma aashiq perdhe ki janan yaad galoi hu/Aeh kalma asa nu pir parhaya bahu main sada suhagan hoyi hu* (Everyone recites the creed of the tongue, few say the creed of the heart/ Where the creed of the heart is said, there is no room for the tongue/The lovers say the creed of the heart, what do sophists know?/It is this creed that the master taught us, Bahu, and now I am eternally blessed[*sadaa suhagan*]) in Sultan Bahu, and Jamal J Elias. *Death before Dying: The Sufi Poems of Sultan Bahu.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
it.” Apart from having the power of barakat, Jaina made her living by making garlands of flowers, and only her garlands were allowed in the mazhar. The Khwaja and the hijra in their turning away from the world into a formless future, which some would call liberation, point out the inevitable failure of the social in organizing bodies, anatomies and least of all the carnal. The tomb of the khwaja, the fruit and leaves growing out of the carcasses of the hijra and out of Malinowski’s siblings lovers make fertile grounds for the social to sustain itself. The sexual pedagogy makes apparent the uncertainty of the world, the contradictions that the social harbours within it and that the alternative to this meaning and value giving game is a formless future, which for the khwaja, is liberation and consummation with god. The hijra finds her liberation in fucking, in consummating with every body who might be seduced.

**Unbearable desires**

I was confused as to what the embryo that had been shat out was supposed to commemorate, perhaps, the loss of Jaina’s virginity, the passion that her youth and beauty had generated in men or perhaps how close she had come to becoming a woman. Trawick, in writing, “On the ground are such people with their various longings, supporting the continuation of the kinship ideal by investing their different personal dreams in it, but in that very process pulling against each other, making the possibility of each other’s total fulfillment all the more remote,” renders the structure of kinship as one of longing- the father’s longing for continuity and the son’s longing for independence, the daughter’s longing for continuity and the mother’s longing for independence, the sibling’s longing for each other, which must be denied and the spousal longing for an
impossible resolution. Perpetuity can only be achieved through the failure of fulfillment, but in that failure resolution is reconfigured. In Trawick’s ethnography, the cross cousin marriage transfigures the relationship through the consummation of their children’s marriage, incest is allowed, but only after spatial and temporal deferral have attenuated its poison into something correct and restorative. If the failures of fulfillment guarantee perpetuity within the house, then, what was being guaranteed by the failures outside, in the fucking fields with all the dead fetuses littered about?

Furthermore, what can we make of the sense of coming very close to a threshold that they could not cross or were at the cusp of achieving the impossible despite overwhelming skepticism? Lovely almost believed she was pregnant. Jaina was pregnant but couldn’t bear it just like the hijras in the Reddy and Nanda version of the myth, who came even closer to childbirth than Jaina, but were tricked by Khwaja. They didn’t ask for the child to be born just that they had one in their stomach. The fact that the hijras died in all the versions and in the version Akhtari recited, the lover lives on and marries a woman, denies the hijra and her lover the legendary status of those couples who died because they loved each other, withering in the unrelenting landscape of domesticity and the violence of the social. What do we make of the unbearability of this kinship in which neither the hijra nor the baby survive the world? What can we make of this form of love that cannot survive visibility and valuation, that fails to resolve itself either in domesticity or in death, that doesn’t flower or fructify? And ultimately, leaves behind nothing but the residues of desire itself. Desires might very well be impossible, but unfortunately that its hardly a discouragement from them being carnalized. So, what do we make of the carnal in the flames of desire that is allowed to come close to fulfillment? Does the social, in

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mediating the carnal, in creating the human or taming the animal, results in a chafing that allows for invitations as minute and subtle like a glance, to spark an inferno?

The men, too, were obsessed with the hijra’s reproductive capabilities. Whenever Lovely, the beautiful hijra, would come to Jaina’s flower shop in Bhadrak while she was also waiting for her train to Jajpur, she created a hungama (pandemonium) with her spangly sari, revealing her breasts and the inviting sway of her hips with which she walked. The men would smile and stare, with desire dripping from their eyes. Jaina would not help matters by screaming loudly throughout the market to Lovely’s embarrassed amusement, “Come somebody buy her for tonight, 700 rupees for one night.” The men would not ask Lovely directly but would come to Jaina, especially the barber, where I would get a shave, would ask Jaina, “Can she give birth? Can she get pregnant? (baccha kar sakti hai kya?). Whenever a particularly feminine, young, woman like hijra would appear in the public places, the boys and the hijras that they did know would embark upon a long conversation on whether the hijra had got herself operated, whether that operation also meant that she could now give babies and how that was possible. I find both the men’s enquiries as well as the hijras’ answers very interesting. The fact that the question was asked would allow the hijra to say, “yes, of course, she can, the doctors in Calcutta, Delhi, Bombay can do all this now.” If Jaina was asked this question, her answers varied depending on her mood; the hijras would sometimes be able to give birth, when she was flirty and not tired (Of course, she can, why don’t you try? Come tonight, you can see for yourself), but when she was cross and sleepy the answer would rob the hijras of the miraculous operation that would allow them to give birth (No,
how will she give birth? you mad fucker). The questions would, then, be whether she could get penetrated, the answer to which would always be yes.

What does this encounter consisting of questions repeatedly asked in the face of all evidence to the contrary tell us about how these statements about the babies are being received? The men know that the hijras can’t give birth then why do they hold onto the hope? Does their persistence show that perhaps they could one day achieve the impossible goal with the help of doctors in large cities, actualize a miracle similar to the one performed by the Khwaja Garib Nawaz? What, then, is being heard in these repeated references to this phantom baby? What can we make of the laughter that ensues? What of the serious questions asked, not just out of curiosity? Even when they receive misleading answers, the questions don’t go away, they appear once again at the appearance of a beautiful new face or an old familiar face just looking very beautiful at that moment. If repetition belies the impossibility of choice then the anxiety that the persistently asked question signals is one that Jaina has already mentioned—men require din-duniya, no matter how beautiful the hijra is, she can’t give them children, just terror and beauty. The hijras, with their laughter and unbearability, signal the same anxiety that Siegel writes about—“Buddha negated the value of empirical existence, of family, society, and self, for the sake of liberation from the world of life and death. His negation was an affirmation of the possibility of liberation, of the great joy of extinction. The satirist, on the other hand, affirms the value and necessity of social, domestic, and personal interaction. His liberation is in, not from, the world.”57 Both the men and the hijra want to have babies; they unfortunately can’t have them with each other. This incongruence is the scratching

of the social against the carnal, felt in the wistful repetitions, sympathetic clucking, resulting in the never ending violent play between the human and the animal, manifesting in the idea of the sex drive, and excused in the idea of instinct. The affirmation of the social and the resolution, ironically comes from this wild sex, the satirist, the hijra, like Jaina tells her lover, “you have to set up your house, din duniya,” that is where liberation is, otherwise one becomes an ascetic, a hijra facing a formless future, the “great joy of extinction,” the pleasures of castration. The difference in the two forms of liberation also offers a resolution to the impossible desires, the inevitable failure, the threat of the animal, like the risk of incest is also attenuated through temporal and spatial deferral.

One day Jaina and I ran into an old man. As he hobbled along, leaning on his stick, he called Jaina away for five minutes, whispered something into her ear and went away. I asked Jaina who he was and what he wanted. She said, “Oh, his name is Ghaffoor babu, he is the grandfather of that man who came yesterday to your hut.” I said, “Oh, what was he saying? Was he asking you to not do kaam [fuck] his grandson?” Jaina laughed and said, “He might be walking with a stick but he himself is ever ready to fuck.”

“Have you ever fucked him?”

J- “Yes, when we were both young, now I am scared by the way he is out of breath that he will die fucking me.”

“You’ve fucked him and his grandson?”

J- “I’ve fucked his younger brother, both his sons, and two of his grandsons”

I will confess this is not what I had in mind when I came collecting narratives of love affairs and was a bit gobsmacked by this largesse that didn’t pay any heed to laws of
incest. When I finally undertook the daunting task of drawing kinship charts, I discovered Jaina, Shamsheri, Azgari, Akhtari, Mehraaj and Mangu had between them fucked generations of men. Perhaps this might be the sweet sad resolution of repeated failures of fertility, repeated attempts that fuel the play between failure and hope, animal and human, nature and culture, the social and its carnality through sons and grandsons- an allegory of survivability.

**Listening**

There is a limit even to this form of liberation though within the larger arch of temporality against which even babies cannot provide any respite. Siegel writes, “One function of social satire is the establishment of such secret groups, such refuges in which both hostility and despair are aligned with pleasure. But the pleasure cannot hold. The refusal to suffer cannot last. Satire is painful comedy. There is a sadness intrinsic to it, the sorrow of all transience. When the laughter ceases, as it inevitably must, the circle disappears and those who have laughed realize that they are inextricably a part of the decaying world at which they have looked in amused indignation, a world that will devour them and absorb their laughter.”

What, then, is happening in the conversations between hijras and men? Scholars have pointed out “if irony is not always an intentional ‘discursive strategy’, its reception cannot be interpreted in straightforward terms of successful comprehension or misfire.” To study the reception then, we turn to Cohen’s essay, which deals with listening ironically. Even though he is studying senility, the pathology and perversity that the categories of senility and homosexuality entail brings them close enough to warrant a look. Cohen argues that what senility allows is the

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58 Ibid., 148.
“radical removal of the voice from culture” because not only does it threaten the cosmic order, the everyday norm, it also “challenges the very continuity of culture.” These are also the things that one would associate with anal sex, but the laughter, the questions of hijra’s reproductivity, the love affairs, the sex in all its pleasurable, erotic, and violent forms would lead one to believe that unlike the senile voice there are ways in which the faint strains of the hijra and her lover’s voice remains in culture.

Lest one is accused of romancing this form of fucking, I should add that what I am trying to point towards is a place where one has not escaped the pathologies, the perversity, the impossibilities of trying to become pregnant through anal sex, but where one has, to a certain extent, found ways to side step them, even if it is for varying periods of time that all come to an end eventually because the rectum is a grave no matter how much we refer to it as pussy, which all hijras did. Cohen, in his analysis of the movie Complaints of a Dutiful Daughter, writes that the filmmaker, by freeing her mother from their shared history, allows her to once again become coherent and cleaves the present from its history. This is what Cohen calls the “ironic time of now” and in its reach “beyond expected correspondences, unexpected recognitions occur.” One can make a similar argument with the hijra’s statements about her babies, the men’s laughter, their fucking, their enquiries about the possibilities of pregnancy amongst the hijras- it removes the body from its history and for a moment in the fucking the rectum does become the vagina and for a moment the semen does fertilize a doomed foetus. The men too, by the way, sometimes provoke laughter and the hijra into bed-“I will [gesture fucking with hand] so hard that you will be sent to the hospital,” “I can do it so hard that I can impregnate you.”
Cohen writes of this ironic temporality- “Since within it words neither correspond to the expected referents of a shared history (that is, are coherent) nor are they necessarily radically beyond coherence. Senility heard ironically offers no redemptive or hidden speech, but neither does it of necessity reduce the voice to pralapa.” Likewise, one must resist the temptation of placing the burden of being subversive or redemptive and likewise the burden of resistance and reinscription on these dramatic and ironic utterances of the hijra, but read it as a way of giving meaning, however unstable, to a certain form of fucking and responding to a longing for everlasting love and fulfillment that you cannot get anywhere, which in turn is indicative of the pulls of the carnal, the animal, against the disciplines of the social, cultural and the draining domestic. “To hear ironically is to hear language and its correspondence and everyday work in unexpected ways” (132). That is why the hijra can get impregnated everyday and by several men; everyday she might shit out fetuses and get new ones.

**Rasa**

Let’s call this form of conversation, this laughter, the flirting, the sympathetic clucking over the hijra’s incapability to produce babies, following Geertz- etiquette.

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61 Geertz uses this word to understand the ritualization of interaction between people marking their various similarities and difference so as to counter the unpleasantness, shocks and realities of the world with an order that brings in predictability, politeness and art- in other words a certain aestheticization of everyday life. But for our purposes here, not etiquette but rasa, a concept borrowed by the Javanese, which Geertz analyzes as etiquette is more important. One of Geertz’s informants helpfully clarifies this for us- “What is the aim of life? (The informant, a teacher- leader (guru) of a mystic sect, was giving me a kind catechism of his group’s beliefs.) The aim of life is to seek emotional peace; other than that there isn’t any. No one seeks upset, disturbance; everyone just seeks peace. Now each person starts out on this search for inward peace with a certain amount of capital, as in the market, only it is not in the form of money but of rasa. This capital is neither more nor less than the ability to make other people feel at peace…..Every person has a capital of rasa to accomplish this. When I came to his house he emerged in proper style to meet me. This was his capital because it put me at ease; and so I was in turn polite to him, and so he was at ease and his capital of rasa increased. You often see written and hung in people’s houses, or hear people say: “Men must have etiquette-feeling (rasa sopan-santun).” This etiquette-feeling, this form of politeness, is a kind of
Aaron Goodfellow studies Geertz’s notion of etiquette and shows how etiquette allows relationships to congeal despite the resistance of language or more precisely kinship terminologies, to accommodate them in an easy fashion. He writes, “Displaying such etiquette is both a matter of language and behaviour, since it is brought about through the use of words and rests on the linguistic expression of a formality or on actively using language to index specific formal structures and positioning the speaker and the addressee within their frames of reference.” He continues to write, “It is the force of such etiquette, one that respects, while refusing, the capacity of kin terms and kin grammars to obstruct the life of relationships by obscuring their expression...”

Our situation can be studied in a similar fashion, but I don’t think respect and refusal would describe the hijra’s statements of her babies. Instead, one can see them as the realization of the futility of hoping for a baby, but still, nonetheless (or inevitably), relying on the language of pregnancy and fruition to allow a relationship to develop between them and their lovers. In other words, the etiquette of hearing flirty statements, and seductive invitations and responding to them likewise unmoors the body from its biologistic understandings of time and space and leaves it open to the improvisational forms of relationship that might emerge from the play of desire and pleasure along the lines that demarcate the carnal from the domestic.

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instrument or tool for making other peaceful within, and thus yourself also; a kind of capital of rasa, because all movement is from rasa and so this politeness has rasa. If you meet a man on the street and you coast by and don’t say, “Where are you going, Pak?” in high-Javanese (the typical Javanese greeting), he will feel upset; and later his upsetness will react back and you will feel upset.” Geertz, in charting the topography of prijaji religious life, connects etiquette with art and mystical practice- the implication of this connection can bring us closer to the meaning of life, or in other words the ethics of conducting a life aesthetically, or still in other words, the ethics of corporealizing a life through rasa. Clifford Geertz, The Religion of Java (London: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1960), 242.

To understand rasa as something that protects one from the unpleasantness of the world, let us understand the context of Sanskrit literary traditions from where it emerges. Sheldon Pollock argues in his article, “The Social Aesthetic and Sanskrit Literary Theory,” that “The broader history of Sanskrit literature- we saw precisely this in the history of the idea of rasabhasa - fully testifies to a progress, slow but certain in the elimination of core varieties of conflict, a gradual retreat to an ever more complete disengagement from the world of life’s unpleasant realities, in favor of a single moral vision. In literature if not in life, as Bhoja says, “it must be the good guy, not the bad guy, who wins- jīgisuna gunavataiva bhavyam na dosavata.” The text is where the passions are a virtue, not something that inhibits ones’ life plans.

“The indifference of commentators on the “social and moral imagination of Sanskrit literary” is a consequence of “the social and moral as forming a unified sphere of knowledge in premodern India.” 63 Thus if the text is supposed to make heroes of its readers, its heroes themselves must be morally upright. This, in turn, means that the passion or rasa of the text cannot be generated through desiring improper objects. Which leads both the authors and the readers into a quandary; how would you then account for the desire of the villain, who the hero will eventually slay, but who in order to make the hero heroic must equal him in all respects, in rasa. That is why the rasas or passion itself can’t be inappropriate, the words of the villain exhorting his love are as tasteful as the rasa of the hero for the heroine, but it is the object of his affection that is inappropriate. The author and the reader both must acknowledge the validity of the villain’s desire but also recognize it as being morally wrong, and this is done by disaggregating the text and

emphasizing it differently at different time. The reader acknowledges the rasa of the character, but remembers at the end that he must not be like the villain and desire the improper object, but be like the hero. This lesson is an important one because it allows for the sacred to absorb the profane even if for a short duration, and explains to us the space created in time by the hijra’s laughter and seduction. Her passion and desire get a response, acknowledgement and recognition and more often than not, are also actualized in sex, but in the end, the laughter must die only to be renewed somewhere else, at some other time.

Pollock masterfully traces how the language of the hero and the villain, which must be same in its rasa but aimed at two opposite ends - moral and immoral. The two forms of writing that emerged, - the rasa and the rasabhasa are similar in their aesthetic sensibilities, but differ in their moral goals. But once again the difference could not be sustained due to the possibility that the object is not inappropriate such as in the case of unrequited love. There the hero desires the appropriate object, but is met with failure. That is when the burden of recognizing the passion, but its inappropriateness was split and placed equally on the text and the rasika, the knowing reader. He writes,

In addition to the assumption, implicit everywhere, that literature is not supposed to surprise with deviations from the typical, rasa and rasabhasa become the principle locus where criticism of the literary work and criticism of life intersect, where literary practice becomes a social practice. If propriety lies at the heart of rasa, rasa becomes the heart of a moral economy of literature. It can produce its effects only to the degree that the imaginative discourse represents, and thereby inevitably serves to reproduce, what is appropriate to a given situation, which in turn is intelligible only in terms of a unified vision of a the social order. Thus when one learns what literature is, how it works and when one learns to be a good reader, a rasika or a sahrdaya, one is learning what is normative in the everyday world. To produce readers of Sanskrit literature is to produce certain kinds of social subjectivities. Rasabhasa and the anaucitya that provides its logic are the
locus where criticism of literary form and criticism of literary representation – criticism of life – intersect.\textsuperscript{64}

The text must then have a larger point (\textit{mahavakyarth}) that works through the aesthetic of suggestion which then must require from the reader an “innate receptivity, (\textit{upahitasamskara})” of right and wrong, which in turn requires yet another realm of meaning which the reader and the text both share, the \textit{paro mahavakhyakarthah}.

When we return to our scene of evenings spent in the tea shoppes with the hijra regaling everybody with laughter, the \textit{hasya rasa}, that leads to an erotic relationship between her and her lover, the \textit{sringara rasa}, it would make sense to read the drama, pace Pollock dis-aggregately. The statements and the desire for a baby in the myth is the desire for moral validation that will recognize the relationship of desire as one of love as well, the rectum as the womb, rasabhasa as rasa; the baby even when dead is an attempt towards that, but bears the temporal marking of that relationship, it is born, just like any other baby, but it cannot survive like the ones to the manor born. The relationship between the rasa and the rasika, the hijra and her lover, the character and the reader “can theoretically be regarded in three dimensions: as a dimension of a textual object, as a competence of a reader-subject, and as a transaction between the two. It is a process that exists as totality even while its moments can be analytically disaggregated, and it is this analytical disaggregation- or rather the different emphases that such disaggregation permits-that marks and makes the history of Indian thinking on the subject.” \textsuperscript{65}

Transactions, which are only possible if the reader and the text, the listener and the

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 215.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 209-10.
speaker both inhabit a common realm of meaning. Pollock gives an example of this in the following poem.

   It is a very heavy water jug I’m carrying, 
      my friend, and I’ve come back quickly. 
      I’ve got to rest a second since I’m weak 
   and sweating and sighing from exhaustion

“Now, it is perfectly true that what makes it possible for the sensitive reader to understand that this verse is about “concealing stolen love-making,” as Mammata puts it, is the “specificity of the speaker.” But the only thing that allows us to specify this specificity is the reader’s participation in and acceptance of a particular universe of social meaning as made available in the texts of a literary culture.”66 This is how the boy in the shop understood Shamsheri’s invitations to fuck, this is how a lot of men understand the hijras’ coquetry.

The transaction between the hijra and her lover follow in similar ways: the laughter is important, it makes lives in Bhadrak, one of the poorest districts in India, bearable, it is a transaction of sukha dukh. Once when a child not yet in his teens was staring at Jaina’s breasts with a lot of hunger, she picked up her lungi and flashed the seductive darkness of the region between her legs and screamed, “Come fuck me.” I started laughing uncontrollably but Amrita, the NGO tranny, told me not to encourage Jaina67. Later I asked Jaina, Akhtari, and Shamsheri- why do you always talk like that? Why do you do that? Jaina said, “I try to make everybody laugh, even you, who have

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66 Ibid., 206-7.
67 NGO tranny refers to a transsexual or a transgendered person who is usually from the cities and works in NGOs that constitute the network of AIDS cosmopolitanism that depend on imparting public health wisdom to Female Commercial Sex Workers, Hijras, Kothis, Active and Passive Men who have Sex with Men. They are a conduit and travel to and fro between the local sites where the infection takes place and conferences across the world where global speak, health, and wisdom take place and to which they are invited so as to gain legitimacy for their concerns. Some don’t identify as hijras because of their class and caste differentials whereas some hijras on the other hand are invited precisely because of these differences for legitimacy offered through their role as local experts.
come so far away from your mulk [land], you must feel strange here, by laughing, the heart becomes light. These men they come to me to talk, they share their sukha dukha and their problems and I try to make them laugh and make their ji halka (lighten the heart/chest/soul).” Ji Ghabrana is when the heart beats fast because anxiety and worry has gripped it in the face of some problem that one cannot surmount and in Bhadrak there were problems a plenty, the external conditions of structural poverty in all its guises, consequences and effects was present. Men were forever signaling Jaina and the others to come aside and animated whispering would take place between them, when asked about the surreptitious conversation, Jaina would tell me in confidence of course, what the man said about the problems he was facing. Laughter (or hasya one of the sthayibhava of srngara) that made the ji halka, was a form of care that the hijras offered, the references to the baby and the fucking would arouse the men- and would reveal the pleasure of desiring and result in the pleasure of being desired in men that were scarcely desired in the world next door. It is this form of sharing sukha dukh and making the ji halka that allow the burden of life to be borne by beautiful men that would result sometimes in love; love, manifested through the feeling of being pregnant of carrying its moral witness, the baby. The baby that would transform by its very existence, and likeness, dead or alive, the hijra into an appropriate object of desire- a woman. Hijras through their theatricality inherit a form of aesthetics that I have argued above can be read as Rasa. Rasa is the making an emotion present when it is not an experience that one has gone through; this aestheticization of the everyday through srngara help form a buffer against the world.

The Preserver
What form of caring is done by the sharing of *sukh dukh* (happiness and sadness) and by associating the laughter and the fucking? It is not the economy of creation and destruction, but I would argue the actions of preservation, of sustaining and sustenance. Looking at the care afforded by the erotic relationships of hijras through the eyes of preservation or more accurately of sustenance would, then, allow the hijra to enter the economy of life diagonally. She is bent or *banka*. Rasa as Geertz and Pollock have studied it preserves us from the despair of this transient world, it is what triangulates and makes possible the economy of creation and destruction. It is also the form of care taken upon by the sadaa suhaagan who implores passionately for a child to be given to the barren woman. Sadaa Suhaagan cannot produce children and the family, and like Jaina she doesn’t destroy the possibility of the householder in men. This form of care sends the lover to his wife, asks Allah to give the child to the woman, blesses the child and the woman with prosperity, fertility and fortune so as to make her life bearable in the world, while opting out directly from these projects at the same time. The care that makes the *ji halka*, cannot remove or solve the problems of the world, but it fortifies its inhabitants to bear its knocks once again. The men would speak of the carnality of the fucking in explicitly constitutional ways—“There was so much heat build up in my body, *kaam karne ke baad* [doing work/fucking] the body has turned calm.” The anxieties of the world, the heat generated through desire, all of this calmed by the fucking.

The sharing of the *sukh dukh* allows her to partake in the world in a certain way. This is what qualifies her renunciation, her diagonal entrance into the economy, she is not inside or outside of the home and world, but lives besides it. This also explains the laughter, the irony, Siegel in his study of the laughter of Krishna, an avatar of Vishnu, the
preserver writes, “Within the history of religion of Krsna there has been a dialectic at work between the theologian and the comedian, one that balances the god and creates an invigorating tension. The theologian, stressing the absolute divinity of Krishna, makes the god serious; the comedian emphasizing the absolute humanness of Krsna, makes the cowherd funny. The more divinely serious he becomes, however, the greater his potential for comedy, for comic revelations of his humanness; conversely the more comic he is, the greater his appeal, the greater his potential for being taken seriously. Comedy vitalizes, then, the very devotion of which it makes fun. It preserves what it seems to destroy.\textsuperscript{68}

The rectum, then, might be the grave, but the semen it ingests is an accursed share and its death inevitable.

The hijras experience of the physical space, interestingly, is congruent with her being beside the world, for example, Jaina lives in a bricked one room that is attached to the house where her mother, brothers, their wives, their children all live. The house is half constructed, had two floors and the rooms have been divided between three brothers with separate kitchens. Jaina’s room shares its back wall with the left-side wall of the house, but you enter it separately from the street. There is no door that connects the room with the house, but they share a wall; they are attached. This affords Jaina all the privacy she needs to entertain her lovers, allowing the family and Jaina to live under the salubrious conditions of being blind to and cultivate obliviousness to what is going on under their nose. This spatial arrangement allows me to extend the metaphor of being beside the household and the economy of the world but participating in it sideways. It also explains the necessary presence of the hijra when there is a wedding and a baby born, they are neither the bride or the groom, nor the father nor the mother but their

\textsuperscript{68} Siegel, “Laughing Matters,” 370
blessings are sought precisely for those occasions, events that they have opted out of. To understand the dynamics, limits and possibilities of endurance, sustenance, perseverance and preservation and how fucking sustains both the hijra and her lover I once again rely on rasa and how it is used in a text that predates all the texts that Pollock has studied in his article, the Bhagwata Purana.

The plenitude celebrated by the hijra in the form of blessing other people’s babies and marriages, through which they earn their living and materially sustain their existence gets related to the laughter and fucking through the myth retold by Akhtari. She reads a myth of fertility bestowing fruits and shrines as one emerging from a love story failed by the world, the connection is offered through rasa. The granting fertility and the sexual pedagogy that hijra instantiates alleviates the cruelties of the world and the domestic that result in ji ghabrana. Let us re-examine rasa to understand the various ways in which its dynamics and economics allow for the sharing of sukh dukh. The first set of lines from the Bhagwata Purana that I want to study is as follows-

“My dear gopis, what auspicious activities must the flute have performed to enjoy the nectar of Krsna’s lips independently and leave only a taste for us gopis from whom that nectar is actually meant! The forefathers of the flute, the bamboo trees, shed tears of pleasure. His mother, the river on whose bank the bamboo was born, feels jubilation, and therefore her blooming lotus flowers are standing like hair on her body.”

The nectar of Krishna’s lips is being savoured by the bamboo flute while the gopis are tasting the rasa through mediations of sound and songs. Krishna’s nectar or rasa

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69gopyah kim acarad ayam kusalam sma venur
damodaradhara sudham api gopikanam
bhunkte svayam yad avasista rasam hradinyo
hrsyt-tvaco sru mumucus taravao yatharyah
Bhagwat Puran- Canto 10, Chapter 21, Verse 9. (Translated by Prabhupada)
here keeps on expanding exponentially to give pleasure first to the bamboo flute, then the
gopis who are listening to the music, the trees who feel pleasure to see one of their own
being held to Krishna’s lips and the river which feels pleasure because her water
sustained the bamboo that made the flute that Krishna has taken to his lips. One can
juxtapose with this scene of conjugal bliss between Krishna and the flute, the scene
where the baby being born between a man and a woman, is being blessed by the hijras
who are also celebrating the occasion along with the whole family. Thus the nectar
(semen) of the man even though it is produced by him and consumed by his flute
(family), seems to be tasted by everybody around him. The hijra, too, can be seen to share
and taste the pleasures of fertility and reproduction when they come to auspicious
occasions and thereby participate in the magical expansion of the man’s nectar. When I
used to walk the streets of Bhawanipatna with Damru, Nandita, Pawan hijra, Ghungi and
the others, men would always stop us and ask us to come and bless the opening of their
new shop, a wedding, the birth of a baby. This struck me as odd since in the urban areas
of Calcutta, Delhi, and Bombay, while the presence of the hijras was considered
inevitable on certain occasions, their ritualized appearances was often viewed with fear
and dread given their tendencies to extort money and not back down from a fight. These
invitations to participate can be understood through their necessary presence to help
expand the nectar of the man by tasting it in various ways and forms.

The complementarity of the scene is a bit nauseating, given that its purpose is to
sustain the conceit of masculinity regarding their powerful nectar/semen; semen which
the boys in Bhadrak would never stop praising as something that would not only make
the hijras pregnant, but pregnant like dogs with four and six babies. One could argue that
the statements about the babies transfigures caring into fucking because it does make his semen magical if it can result in embryos in the rectum. Reading semen, nectar and rasa as one, then, makes the various statements one heard in the market place of Bhadrak where the men would say how they fucked their wives 12 times and needed to fuck more. How they would need to fuck at least 4 times every night and would keep on fucking for hours and hours till the hijra would break out in sweat or the poor woman would pass out with exhaustion. The hijras in praising and desiring the virility/strength/prowess of the penis, by calling it a *hathiyar* [weapon] not only eroticizes the violence of it, but also preserve it as “phallus and penis and signifier and gender and god.”- in castrating themselves and seducing the penis to dispense with its precious nectar, they also destroy it.70

Since the bamboo trees in the lines above are not explicitly labelled as the flute’s fathers, there is yet another and equally valid and much more palatable explanation given by Sanatana Gosvami. He explains the trees are weeping, not tears of joy, but tears of unhappiness because they themselves are not being held at Krishna’s lips. His explanation continues as follows, “One may object that the trees in Vrindavana should not lament for that which is impossible for them to obtain, just as a beggar certainly doesn't lament because he is forbidden to meet the king. But the trees are actually just like intelligent persons who suffer when they cannot obtain the goal of life. Thus the trees are crying because they cannot get the nectar of Krishna’s lips.” The lines, at once, recognize through lament that they couldn’t achieve their life’s goal which was the nectar of Krishna’s lips. This ambiguity built into the lines reflect the hijra’s position when she

celebrates the new born child which is streaked with the sadness of knowing that the babies will never be her own, but is at least her lover’s.

The second set of lines are as follows-

With their flowing waves- the deep rivers drenched their banks, making them damp and muddy.

Thus the rays of the sun, which were as fierce as poison, could not evaporate the earth’s rasa or parch its green grass.71

The sun is later described in the purana as samudram daihikam bhaumam rasam samvartako ravih rasmibhih pibate ghoraith sarvam naiva vimuncati (The sun with its annihilating form can drink up the terrible rays all the water of the ocean, of living bodies and of the earth itself without giving anything in return). And when the sun is not taking on such an annihilating form, but is fierce then it is the rivers drench their banks and give rasa to the earth, sustaining life. Focusing on this line might be reiterating the earlier point made already about the rasa, one that preserves one from the exposure to the poisonous sun’s rays, but it leads us to the question of whether the hijra should be seen as one of the many characters that serves the incompetent if not impotent family to reproduce itself. Or do we read in her caring and providing sustenance a certain criticism of the poisonous world which is ever threatening to annihilate everything. This caring undoes the hijra herself and forces her to enter the protocols of the world to sustain the very households from where she escaped. Does her form of care result in a certain temporal existence in which she becomes a virgin every night- like the waves on a bank that flow continuously- each wave, providing sustenance and refreshing the earth?

71 Agadha toya hradini- tatomibihir
drabat purisyah pulinaaih samantatah
na yatra candmsu kara visolbana
bhuvo rasam sadvalitan ca grhnate
Bhagwat Puran- Canto 10, Chapter 18, Verse 6 (Translated by Prabhupada)
Conclusion

Even a brief look at the great epic will reveal that sexual reproduction to ensure continuity, perpetuity and futurity, is extremely difficult between a man and his wife and involves the participation of a whole host of personalities that emerge from the margins to contribute to the success of the grand event. The epic details three generations of a dynasty that had produced heirs from everywhere and everybody, but the husband of the woman. Ambika and Ambalika, wives of Vicitravirya, after his death, sleep with Vyasa, the author of the epic, to beget Dhrtrastra and Pandu. Vyasa, was incidentally begotten by the women’s mother-in-law, Satyavati through the sage Parasar, not her husband. Thus, the half-brother seeds the fields owned by the King. The two sons born produced heirs also through a lot of difficulty and a lot of ready help given to them by gods. Kunti produced five sons with the help of Indra, Dharma, Vayu, and the two Asvins- her husband was cursed to die if he touched his queen.

Dongier studies these myths and the laws of the Manushastra to make the point about the ever expanding boundaries of the Hindu marriage, she writes, “Hovering on the borders of legitimate marriage to define it by demonstrating what it is not, adultery and the niyoga [levirate] together demonstrate that Hindu marriage is, in itself, an elusive institution caught between a rock and a hard place.”72 The earlier point I made about resemblance is important because if the son/crop that grows in the woman/field owned by one’s brother then the child has to resemble the owner of the field/the husband, he will be the father, not the one who spilt his seed. If the child resembles, not the owner, but the man who generously gave his seed, then this would undo the leviratic contract at least as

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mentioned in the *Mansushastra*. This sexual act in Doniger’s argument not only shows how biology is unmoored when the aim is to sustain the social, but also how a space in time is created for laws to be suspended precisely so that they can then sustain themselves. A space is created by the sacred for profaning that consolidates it, which it accommodates to handle the insufficiencies of the family to reproduce itself. These are what gods and sages did in times long ago, and I want to argue that this what hijra does as well, she obviously doesn’t beget heirs, but her form of loving and fucking allow for laughter, and for the sharing of *sukhdukh*, it makes one’s *ji halka*, in other words, it provides relief from the maddening illusions of the world, the abrasive social and the deceptively comforting shelter of domesticity.

In the chapter, I have shown the various ways in which the forms of life that the hijras inhabit are both within the larger Hindu and Muslim universe of sociality and outside it - a posture I describe as being diagonal to that world. This position is implicated in the following ways and under a larger rubric of endurance or preservation. The first involves a type of ironic speech that is geared toward producing the aesthetic emotion of *sringara* - or love with laughter as its main foundation (*sthayi bhava*), but with swirling moods of melancholia, hope, sadness, and euphoria surrounding it. Secondly, I show how the talk of children allows an impossible desire to find expression in the world even if the protagonists are doomed to die, but that expression here is anchored on the availability of a shared symbolic universe of myth and ritual available in such figures as the *sada suhagaan* and the permutations of asceticism and eroticism that the various actors inhabit. Thirdly, the forms of sociality engendered through sex has the double movement of taking away the male from the world of domesticity and returning him as a
more fortified to meet the demands of domesticity. Fourthly, I argue that the hijras offer the world a mode of care that is recognized at both collective and individual levels in the acts of blessing that are particularly efficacious for the fruition of sexual and reproductive desires that are embedded in the world of domesticity.

Siegel wrote of laughter, “Comedy can be refuge, if not redemption; its laughter can be solace, if not release.”\(^{73}\) The fucking can offer respite while running the risk of rendering one a hijra ascetic as well but there is a limit to this relief and it comes in the figure of the fetuses that the hijras shit in the fucking fields. While desires might be resolved through the lover’s son and grandson as she is impregnated every evening, the hijra’s repeated forms of love, in their ceaseless waves can result in a very melancholic experience of temporality with no liberation in sight. But at least there is laughter and fucking.

\(^{73}\) Siegel, “Laughing Matters,” 5.
Chapter 2 – In False Brothers, Evil Awakens

The Land Belongs to the Future

Given that the hijras rarely become householders, their participation in their families was never in the role of fathers or husbands. When the hijras grew older, the relationship between them and their families was not mediated through their fathers but through their brothers who had taken the place of their fathers as the head of the household. We can picture their movement, over time, across the web of kinship, as diagonal; they remained brothers and sons, but transformed into uncles. This chapter studies how the hijra even when caught in the web of kinship maintains forms of relatedness that defamiliarizes notions of asceticism and participation in kinship.

Jaina had been working since she was ten years old and her jobs have included milking cows for the Marwari cow trader, working in two biscuit factories in the neighbouring district of Baripada, and in construction. She was also a cook in a small roadside eatery where she made meals for migrant workers. After working for fifty odd years and helping her mother raise her two brothers and two sisters, she returned to Bhadrak in 2006 to a room from where she sold small amounts of spices. She also ran a small flower shop where she made garlands for the mosques nearby. Though her flower shop was going to be demolished to make room for bigger shops, Jaina was unfazed because she could no longer afford the flowers to make garlands anyways - the flowers come from Calcutta and the floods had destroyed a lot of flowers in the last Ramzaan (August of 2010), which was the month when Jaina would have earned the most. Because she had a place to stay and took her meals with her brother, she was never more than a bit disappointed by these turns of events which would have made other shopkeepers far more
worried. I asked her why she still peddled spices and flowers when both jobs were obviously not going very well. She replied, “I can’t ask my brothers for money every day, they might give me money on some days but they will start complaining afterwards. I can’t ask money for every little thing I need, and the money I give to Muneeza (Jaina’s brother’s third child who is four years old and who comes every hour repeatedly pleading Jaina to give money for small snacks).” This sense of awareness Jaina had about the limits and possibilities of kinship with her brothers made me prick up my ears because right at the beginning of fieldwork, in 2008, she had claimed that her brothers loved her, and everybody in the family loved her as well. Her statement, “you eat everyday here, you tell me, can’t you see how much they love me? They never insult me and when I am ill they buy me medicines,” had led me to frame, mistakenly, the relationship between the hijra and her family in terms of either acceptance or ostracism; triumphs of either filial love or family honour.

While Jaina claimed that there was affection, she was also aware that she could not completely depend on her brothers for expenses of small luxuries that arose daily. She feared that she would then become vulnerable to her brothers’ accusations of sponging money while giving nothing in return. The restraint exercised in not asking for money everyday, and the love that was proudly claimed, revealed a certain tension among brothers that the hijra was hard pressed to negotiate since she had not exactly remained ‘a brother’. This form of calibrating transactions of money and food at home to maintain amicable relationships and a pleasant atmosphere was also seen to be put in effect in other spaces and times where different transactions took place. Jaina’s brothers would never come to her shop or to her friends’ shops because raunchy conversations
about fucking and cocks abounded in that space. Their presence, Jaina told me would obviously change the atmosphere, and nobody would be able to tease and flirt ‘freely’. “Won’t you feel ashamed to talk about fucking and touching men in front of your family members?” I replied in the affirmative. “So, why are you asking such stupid questions like why don’t your brothers come here? I have told them that they shouldn’t say salaam to me or even talk to me in public. Whatever they need to say they can wait till I am home. If people get to know that they are related to me, people can point fingers at them as well. They will tease them by saying, “Oh your brother is a maichiya, she fucks so many men. I don’t want them to feel ashamed because of me.”

But given that everybody, including her brothers, knew that Jaina was a hijra who got fucked by a lot of boys, it seemed that what was at stake was a certain performance of attentiveness that the brothers showed Jaina in keeping away, and thereby allowing her to flirt freely. Her brother who used to work at the post office often used to tell me, “We all know, even our mother knows what Jaina’s nature is. What to do, just like Allah has made each of the five fingers of the hand different, Allah has not made everybody the same (hum sab jaante hai, Ammi bhi jaanti hai, unka nature kaisa hai, kya karenge aur kya, Jaise Allah pak haath ka paanch ungli ek samaan nahin banaya hai, Allah sab ko ek rakm ka nahin banaya hai).” The brothers explicitly stated Jaina’s desire (to be fucked) as natural, but different like the thumb is distinct from the four other fingers. The presence of a hijra sibling was not seen as a breach of nature as much as a breach of structure. The hijra, in not leaving the family and remaining in the household led, as we shall see, to a conundrum, which obscured and thus punctuated the movement by which brothers became householders, who are then positioned against each other.
One day, when we were returning from a visit to Jaina’s widowed sister, Jaira Bai, in Nuasahi, a neighbouring village, she pointed to a tract of land she had bought thirty years ago (a rectangular piece that stood out because it was the only part of the large area that was uncultivated while its four sides were furrowed, and the land around it stuffed with paddy). She said, “this belongs to me.” I was a bit surprised because till then, I had never thought she had owned anything. She said, “The land is worth 6 and a half lakhs rupees but my brothers are asking me to sell it to them for 4 lakhs.” I asked her that if her brothers took care of her then why wouldn’t she sell it to them? She said, “They take care of me because they want the land, they will throw me out after I give it to them. I am a hijra. There is nobody in front of me [referring to her lack of children]. When I can no longer work, how will I expect to live? My brothers won’t look after me - they will look after their own children. They will not think twice before kicking me out on the streets.”

Before I turn to another incident, to understand the plaiting of claimed love, calibrations of care, and the suspicions of betrayal that coordinate the hijra’s relationship with her family, let us look at the different temporal frames that Jaina inhabited vis-à-vis her family and their enactments of love. The first temporal frame is defined by the tendency towards tenderness on the part of her brothers that took place in the register of the everyday. For instance they bought medicines when Jaina fell ill, gave her food to eat and took care of her when her business floundered, and more importantly they

74 I borrow this notion of tendency towards tenderness from Freud to frame the calibrations of care that the hijra and her brothers undertook towards each other for several reasons. The first is the place of ambivalence that is highlighted in tenderness, which gives the care a pre-deliberative quality; the second is that this ambivalence also implies the play of multiple temporal arcs. Freud wrote, “The relation of a boy to his father is, as we say, an ‘ambiguous’ one. In addition to the hate which seeks to get rid of the father as a rival, a measure of tenderness for him is also habitually present.” S. Freud, “Dostoevsky and Parricide,” in the standard edition of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. (1928), 4559.
negotiated public spaces in a way so as to not embarrass Jaina when she flirted. Avoiding her in public was also a way to prevent situations from arising in the future when Jaina might be used as a way of insulting the brothers and the family. When speaking from this temporal frame, Jaina would be proud of the love she claimed and received from her family. The other temporal frame Jaina spoke from consisted of the transformation of brothers into householders and fathers, marked by the movement of land through inheritance, which was expected to take place in the future but could cast its shadow on the present. The materiality of land gave Jaina a language to talk about how her relationship between brothers may corrode over time.

These two temporal frames resulted in an everyday where the future was already a part of the present thus bringing about conflict by the mixing of tenderness and potential aggression. Jaina was held hostage to the future in the everyday. This made Jaina prudent in her demands of her brothers: she could ask for some help but doing so made her vulnerable to accusation of sponging off them. Land appeared in this case, both as the imagined cause of her brothers’ possible betrayal and, paradoxically, also as a point to leverage one’s security against that very betrayal.

Shamsheri recounted an instance of the tension produced by these two temporal frames, of the present and the future, as it materialized through land, to me. She told me that sometime around 15 years ago she was tricked into marriage through jaadu tona (magic). At that time she didn’t know that she was getting married to her brother’s kept woman. Her brother had asked her to marry this woman and her mother had also agreed and every time I ask her why she agreed to the marriage she replied, “Magic was done on me [Mujh pe jaadu tona hua tha].” Shamsheri told me
She [her ex-wife] is a prostitute. She eats from a hundred places, how can she eat only from one place? She says so herself. She is so fat. She told me, “You are a mosquito, I am a she-elephant, how can I stay with you?” In our dharm, “when a woman sins, it goes on her man, and when a man sins it goes on his son.” She did some magic on me, and with such magic even the jungle’s tiger will get trapped.

Azgari who was fiddling with bicycles nearby chipped in-

The marriage was done very silently, nobody knew. There were rumours and when we went to ask Shamsheri, “Listen, we have heard that you are getting married is it true?” She denied it. Then one day she came with the woman. The next morning Shamsheri came to me [Azgari] and said, “the woman’s blouse was wet, I asked her why was it wet and I saw that milk was coming out of her breasts. She told me that she had been pregnant but had aborted the baby (baccha gira diya).” Shamsheri continued sleeping next to her mother and the prostitute-wife was so upset that she went around telling everybody in the morning that Shamsheri sleeps next to her mother and does not come to her at night. It was true, she is a hijra, how can she have sex with her - she doesn’t have the hathiyar (weapon/instrument/penis). It was later that she [Shamsheri] found out that the woman had been sleeping with Shamsheri’s brother and continued to do so. When he [Shamsheri’s brother] left his concubine after a year or two, she went back to her mother’s place. It was then when she filed a lawsuit against Shamsheri for maintenance expenses. When she couldn’t pay, the court decided that she would stay in the jail for six months every year.

At this point, I must mention that Shamsheri though a practicing Muslim invoked a particularly Hindu concept of Karta in which the person who commits the sin puts at stake not only his but also the lives of people he is related to for duties of expiation.75 A vast scholarship has shown that the everyday lived reality of South Asia is characterized by the interweaving of Islamic and Hindu thoughts and concepts. Hijras stand as a particular example of such interweaving and I have sought to privilege the way they have

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75 Please see, for an introduction to the concept of Karta in Hindu law, Rocher, Ludo. "" Lawyers"" in Classical Hindu Law." Law and Society Review(1968): 383-402. For a gendered reading of this concept, as it was inherited by the modern Indian state, please see, Tanika Sarkar, Hindu wife, Hindu nation, community, religion, and cultural nationalism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 37-44.
used terms and concepts to show their absorption of and in both Hindu and Muslim worlds of rural Orissa.

A Community Based Organization (CBO) called Santi Seva, comprising of sexual minorities at high risk for HIV/AIDS working under a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) called The Fellowship Project, decided to help Shamsheri free herself from the lawsuit of maintenance expenses. She had to sell the three katthas of land that she inherited from her father and her mother had to sell one kattha of land which Shamsheri would have inherited after her mother’s death. 76 Some other day when she was recounting, partly to herself, partly to me, how her brother betrayed her, she suddenly whispered to me, “I have been paying the property taxes for the two katthas of land for my mother for the last thirty years but in my name. 77 Since I have taken care of my mother all these years I will make sure she will testify in the courts that the one kattha of land she sold was not for my lawsuit but for her food and medications, because the other two boys do not take care of her. So that the other two katthas can come to me and they cannot say that I have already eaten my share. I will take the other two katthas and ruin my brothers. I want to ruin him (her brother whose mistress she had married). He didn’t even come to see me in jail.”

Jaina, who was half dozing nearby, woke up shocked when she heard this and said, “No, don’t do that. Let these things be bygones, now live cordially. You are alone,

76 To make the numbers more clear. Shamsheri’s father had bought 12 katthas of land and each of his three sons received 3 katthas along with their mother after his death. The mother’s three kattha would have gone to her three sons, a kattha each. So, in effect, Shamsheri, entire inheritance was sold for 53,000 Rupees. Out of which (s)he paid the maintenance fees of 35,000 to the prostitute-wife. (S)He spent 8000 on fixing his rented house, buying some goats and chickens. (S)He has lent the remaining 8000 to a neighbor for an interest. In all the legal documents that were produced because of the divorce settlement, Shamsheri was not referred to as a hijra with a pronoun of she but a man. Neither was the affair between Shamsheri’s wife and her brother was mentioned as the reason for marriage or divorce.

77 Shamsheri is referring to the space provided by law that allows for ownership can be contested on the merit of payments of property taxes in the absence of a title deed or a will.
who will take care of you when you are old? If you forgive your brothers then they will take care of you.” Shamsheri did not pay heed and began looking out the window. Jaina walked out, fuming and furious. Even I was a bit puzzled by Jaina’s insistence on this reconciliatory position. I turned to her, “How can you say forgive your brother when you know what he’s done? He forced Shamsheri to marry a woman because he couldn’t marry her. And did not take care of her when he left her and so many problems happened- when the lawsuit happened - did not even go to the police station?” Jaina said, “No, no she shouldn’t look for vengeance.” After muttering to herself for a while, she turned to me and said, “You think her brothers don’t know she is plotting this against them - of course they know, this village is not so big - everybody knows what is happening in everybody’s house. People have killed each other for so little land (she stretches her hands to show her entire wingspan). I am scared that they will cut her throat if she does all this. After the mother dies, she will be left all alone, who cares whether she lives or dies- they will kill her and nothing will happen. She should be careful.”

Shamsheri was not upset about the fact that her brother used her for playing the field. Shamsheri herself would not be morally troubled by the fact that she had taken part in such illegitimacy. But what she did mind was that her brother didn’t show any concern or tenderness when he was put in jail and was being taken to the cleaners by his mistress. It was the absence of care at that time, or at that present, that marked the brother’s betrayal, and made Shamsheri plot against him inheriting his land. Both the ethnographic incidents reveal only one aspect of kinship relations that plays out on the substrate of land and the inheritance of property. Shamsheri’s brother did not betray her because of land and neither is Shamsheri planning to betray her brother because she wants the land for
herself but it is only through land that she is capable of redressing the wrong done to her. Jaina also inadvertently contradicts herself and shows us the grain of fraternal intimacy in kinship when she remarks that Shamsheri’s brothers might kill her if they find themselves robbed of their land. If brothers can kill each other for land, then why does she think that her brothers love her because they want her land when they can take it from her by murdering her? That can hardly be the reason why they are attentive towards her. Consequently, why be skeptical of the care afforded to her everyday. In short, if betrayal is the general condition of being relational then land provides the vehicle or material for enacting such a desire. It reveals to us how time and more specifically futurity infects the grain of fraternal intimacy.

**More Than Kin, Less Than Kind**

The argument that land gives expression to kinship relations runs the risk of reducing land into purely symbolic language, not only because of the affective intensity it generates but also because its inheritance connects the family with ancestors. The materiality and income-generating potential, especially in rural-agricultural India cannot be ignored when one has children for whom one has to provide. I am however arguing that land’s economic value cannot be the sole reason given that the intensity with which fights over land are conducted threatens one not only with bankruptcy but also with loss of one’s life.

A large part of the anthropological canon would testify to the relevance of property transmission to kinship. Though land inevitably becomes the ground on which fraternity between hijras and her brothers is staked, it is neither sufficiently the cause nor
the result of intimacy or violence. We could draw some support from Freud for this argument, because the implication of his hypothesis in Totem and Taboo that brothers can never fight about who is fucking whom. A fight over that issue would result in a descent into animality and would be a breach of the most fundamental law that gives form not only to the social but the human. I argue that in the ethnographic scenes above, the ambivalence inherent in kinship gets rerouted through land. Shamsheri attempts to redress the wrongs done against her by her brother’s lack of care by planning to rob him off his land. This is a vehicle for inflicting pain, for making one hurt, oddly enough both in the present and the future. Jaina understood land to be the reason why tenderness was afforded to her and also why it could be taken away. Shamsheri did not find the fact of her brother’s fucking around problematic, neither did Matru, Jaina’s brother- its their nature. But all of them use property rights to fight each other and to remind themselves that all brotherhood is false and eventually brothers seek out ways to kill each other.


79 Freud, in Totem and Taboo writes, “Sexual desires do not unite men but divide them. Though the brothers had banded together in order to overcome their father, they were all one another’s rivals in regard to the women. Each of them would have wished, like his father, to have all the women to himself. The new organization would have collapsed in a struggle of all against all, for none of them was of such overmastering strength as to be able to take on his father’s part with success.” Sigmund Freud, Totem and Taboo (New York, London: W.W.Norton and Company, 1950), 178-9.

80 Juliet Mitchell offers a more nuanced reading of fratricidal violence implicit in Totem and Taboo. Mitchell argues that the archetypal poet “claims that the murder of the primal father was not the work of a group of brothers but the solitary act of the poet himself. This is ‘the lie’. History recounts this solitary heroic deed in the epic and then all the other brothers come to identify with the poet-hero. The poet tells his story of derring-do and thereby puts himself as heroic revolutionary killer in the place of the father. Thus if Freud, along with some nineteenth-century anthropologists, postulates the primacy of a matriarch, then it will not be the father that is being killed and identified with- it will be the triumphant oldest brother.” Juliet Mitchell, Siblings: Sex and Violence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 15-6.
The Indian family drama begins after the father dies and the elder brother takes over the role of the father. Fights over land are not only proverbial but also deflected through the wives of brothers who refuse to live with each other. Land crystallizes in itself this particular vision of the family drama in the Indian context. Let me offer a re-reading of a legal case analyzed by Oliver Mendelsohn that will show the affective aspects of property holding which allowed for killing, as well as exercises of restraint. Put another way, land and property can be seen as the literal material for the crystallization of fraternal antagonism and thus the very vehicle for allowing brothers to remain human while fighting like animals, in a way that is expected and inevitable.81

The case-in-hand were the property disputes raging between one Jagat Singh and his cousins. The disputes began with the fragmentation of properties after the death of Jagat Singh’s great-grandfather. Jagat Singh returned to his ancestral land in 1965 to consolidate his holdings, but faced a lot of resistance from his cousins, who also claimed legal rights over several properties. Jagat Singh’s side of the family had prospered over the generations and had been educated and was far more familiar with the legal system than his cousin. The cousins, however, because they had remained in the village received loyalty from the large family and often used physical force to take over the properties that were claimed by Jagat Singh, while Jagat Singh had only his son by his side.

While Mendelsohn writes, “The inconclusiveness of litigation in relation to the basic conflict is certainly characteristic of litigation over land in India”, he barely acknowledges the various reasons that contribute to this inconclusiveness and dismisses

81 Psychoanalytically, it could be argued that these property disputes operate as a mnemonic device that reminds brothers of their capacity and perhaps even predilection towards killing each other.
Jagat Singh’s cousins’ position as being faulty. The complex calculations of kinship are barely acknowledged and dismissed by writing, “(f)amily relations are peculiarly ‘multiplex’ and they often serve to entrench and ramify a dispute beyond the bounds of a similar material conflict between socially more distant people.”

Both residence and affiliation are factors that allow claims over land to be legitimate but do not offer any resolution given that the disputes have been raging between the brothers for thirty years. Furthermore, being related contributed to keeping the conflict alive rather than resolving it, given that claims of ownership, made in courts are made through arguments of lineage and inheritances, while claims of ownership in the village, outside of courts, were consolidated through physical force commanded through the consent of distant and immediate family members.

Mendelsohn offers a portrait of the affective nature of property that doesn’t align clearly with economic interests. He writes, “It can be conceded that a measure of material satisfaction may well have induced Raghbir Singh [the poor cousin] to give up his

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82 Oliver Mendelsohn, “The Pathology of the Indian Legal System” in Modern Asian Studies 15,4 (1981). On the importance of locality or residence he writes, “Rather, problematic social relations have been enlisted to deepen what is basically a conflict over land” (836). This is in reference not just to the physical force, manpower, and coercion over local government officials that the cousins could muster because of their long, continuous residence in the village, but also because of their historical use of the land through residing in the village. Please see Sylvia Vatuk, “ “Family” as a Contested Concept in Early-nineteenth-century Madras” in Unfamiliar Relations: Family and History in South Asia, ed. Indrani Chatterjee (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press), 161-192, for an account of how precisely these “problematic social relations” were pressed into service in colonial India to negotiate the imperious attitude that followed the annexations of various principalities.

83 ibid., 836. I am taking issue with the very neat divide between ‘family relations’ and ‘socially more distant people’ because it is precisely because this divide is never clear that family relations become multiplex. Please see, Michael H. Fisher’s “Becoming and Making “Family” in Hindustan” in Unfamiliar Relations: Family and History in South Asia, ed. Indrani Chatterjee (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press) 95-121 for a multiplex account of the family in South Asia.

84 While there are many studies that have analyzed the various components of the Indian legal system. I want to cite Daniela Berti’s “Hostile witnesses, Judicial interactions and out-of-court narratives in a north Indian district court” Contributions to Indian Sociology 44,3 (2010): 235-263. I do so to give an example of how logics and claim that do not have any legal valence can still affect and define the outcomes of the court. Though the legal system, as Mendelsohn notes, provides a very necessary site to make claims, Berti’s case study shows that it can still be manipulated to fit to a different standard of legitimacy that are difficult to discern but may appear as pathology or corruption.
struggle, at least temporarily. But what incentive would Jagat Singh have had to give up any of his land? For him harmony is a minor value. When it is opposed to legitimate self-interest, and his standard of legitimacy is the law of the land. He would have been prepared to make only the most minor concession to his opponents, so minor that it would scarcely have satisfied them.\textsuperscript{85} This is the point where I place my argument that the hijras, by remaining with their family members teach us how to create harmony in the face of the antagonistic intimacy of fraternity. Property disputes, I would argue, stem from the condition of fraternity that, over time unfolds as competing householders.\textsuperscript{86}

Given that hijras do not have marriages that result in supportive affinal relatives and since they do not produce sons, alliance actually makes them more vulnerable to fraternal violence as it plays out through land, as exemplified in the case of Jaina. In the remainder of the chapter, I shall demonstrate how hijras intervene in the everyday life of the family, which cannot be seen as acquiescing to the violence of the family but as adhering to a standard of legitimacy that is not necessarily the law of the land, but is the logic of sustenance, or preservation.

**Tomorrow Creeps in a Petty Pace**

Veena Das in her analysis of women as witnesses of violence in “The Act of Witnessing: Violence, Poisonous Knowledge and Subjectivity” writes how the temporal

\textsuperscript{85} ibid., 836-7. This divide between harmony and self-interest is suspect given that disputes take decades to resolve and the cost of fighting often outweighs the gains, thus, the issue is of claims of legitimacy felt by brothers and in the case of this chapter the different set of laws that the hijra offers. Please see, Sumit Guha, “The Family Feud as Political Resource in Eighteenth-century India” in *Unfamiliar Relations: Family and History in South Asia*, ed. Indrani Chatterjee (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press) 73-95, for the complication of the divide between harmony and self-interest.

\textsuperscript{86} Juliet Mitchell in the book cited argues for a focus to be put on lateral relationships (siblings), which according to her argument has been dispensed for the focus on vertical relationships (parental) in psychoanalysis. I borrow these terms not to mark two different set of peoples with whom an Ego can and does have relationships but to mark that *relationships themselves change* with the same set of people as time passes and life projects are undertaken such as marriage and fatherhood.
depth in which one constructs one’s subjectivity “shows how one may occupy the signs of injury and give them a meaning not only through acts of narration but through the work of repairing relationships and giving recognition to those whom the official norms had condemned.” I want to borrow this idea of temporal projections to compare the ways in which Jaina and Shamsheri negotiated land transactions that demonstrated the ways kinship could be lethal. Jaina inhabited the present in which a relationship could survive because of an imagined future, by preparing herself for the betrayals that were projected to take place in the future. Shamsheri on the other hand, felt the betrayal in the present deeply, and imagined vengeance in the future.

A re-iteration of inhabiting these temporal projections is the change in one’s brothers’ status resulting from becoming householders and the consequences this had for the relationship between brothers. An example of this change could be seen in the story Jaina told me about her sister, Jaira Bibi. Jaira was widowed very early in her youth and was left with four children- two sons and two daughters. Her husband’s family was poor and had not been able to help her at all, she had had to move out of her husband’s home and had returned to her natal home. Jaina had taken over the responsibility for her care and raised all four children and in turn earned all of their affection and love. Apart from getting the boys apprenticed at the ironmonger’s who had once been her lover in her youth, she had organized the daughters’ marriages. She told me, “I went to my three

88 While Das has used the notion of temporal depths I have used the notion of temporal arcs. Though there are different implications between the two notions, I am trying to point to one similarity they do share, which is that they make the present polyvalent by suturing the future in different ways. By multiple temporalities I mean the ways in which the memory of the past (of being brothers) is felt to be eroded in the present, and thereby allowing the future to be projected as a plausible transformation of a relationship. While Das’s use of depth allows her to intimate the span of her informant’s marriage, which would go beyond this mortal life to the next, the hijras were concerned with the future of the present life.
brothers and said, “look you walk with your families, I don’t. If you can give me some money for the marriage then that is okay, but I won’t force you. They gave me some money but I had to raise most of the money by myself.” She had been selling bits and pieces of her land to raise money for the marriages and was able to easily raise loans to take care of the rest. Most of Jaina’s life and material resources had been spent in raising her sister’s orphaned family. Jaina was extremely proud of the loyalty and goodwill she had garnered by the work she had done for Jaira’s family. She would often tell me the story of how one day she had fallen ill and fainted, and when she came about, she found Jaira’s family gathered around her bed, weeping, worried.

Jaina knew that her brothers would not help their widowed sister get her daughters married. They would not give her enough money and she would understand and excuse her brothers’ betrayal by saying that their primary responsibility was to their wives and children not to their widowed sister. Taking care of the widowed sister and her children is a form of participation in the family drama that shifts the stakes in maintaining kin ties, because Jaina has no direct stakes in their lineage, and thus the future it promises. They do not carry her name, and Jaina would teach me irately about the ways of the world when I would ask her why she didn’t live permanently with Jaira’s family since they clearly loved her so much - “You don’t have a brain, will they see to their own family or to me? They have wives and children to take care of now. Kuch aql nahin hai - unlog apne parivar ke saath chalenge ki mujhe dekhenge-unka family ho gaya hai, family ka dekhbhaal karna hoga.”

It must be emphasized that the betrayals Jaina talked about do not have the same moral valence than the betrayals that Das mentions in her ethnography. The ones I
mention are the inevitable betrayals that result from brothers becoming householders; the hijras’ critique of this form of kinship comes in the form of Jaina helping her widowed sister. But Jaina could only help Jaira because she did not have a household of her own. It is this form of kinship that I argue prevents kinship from becoming bestial, or prevents kin relations from becoming relations between animals, by re-configuring circumstances, which would have made betrayal inevitable, and rendering brothers and sisters into burdens that are resented. Let me offer another ethnographic case to clarify what I mean.

The Mahabharata of this world

Mehraaj lives in a one-roomed hut made of mud and straw, which had its entire back wall precariously tilting outwards. She usually tried to grow some vegetables in the patch of land next to her hut, which was a huge garbage dump. The floods often ruined her crops which already had their viability threatened given the putrid run off from the garbage heap. She mostly lived on the alms she got by begging near the mosque, or zakat (obligatory charity) during the holy month of ramzan. Her lovers at a nearby eatery took care of her and let her do some odd jobs like waitressing or washing dishes and gave her food and money in return. She had a bull calf whose balls she would often grab and make sex noises and ask the animal whether he would fuck her. Mehraaj was also having a rough time because the Community Based Organization (CBO) believed that she had a lot of money saved in a bank account. Akhtari had once seen Mehraaj’s pass-book and spread the rumour that she had thousands of rupees. Mehraj had asked me, “If I had so much money would I be living like this without any clothes, slippers, with a broken wall, a door and no food? The money that Akhtari had seen was the money that my mother collected from her children [Mehraaj’s brothers] and given it to me for safekeeping. How
can I spend it? What if she asks for it? She is an old woman, she will need it for her funeral, if I spend it then what will I give her then.” At that moment a girl from the neighbourhood came and asked Mehraaj why she hadn’t eaten. Mehraaj screamed and said- “who will prepare, cook and take on these hassles of the world (Kaun banayega, pakayega, duniya ka mahabharat).” Every interview with Mehraaj over the last five years had in some way focused on her toothache. Because she wouldn’t brush her teeth, she was losing them and was in constant pain. I would take her to the doctor every year, and the doctor would prescribe medicines which we would later buy, but Mehraaj would inevitably stop gargling or taking the medicines after a week saying, “I don’t like it.” She would irritably spurn any suggestion of taking medicines by saying, “Who will bother with the mahabharata of the world?”

It is the ubiquity of the references to the Mahabharata that makes me turn to it. While philosophers and indologists have seen it as a canonical text, there is a certain vocabulary that it secretes that seeps into the everyday. Mahabharata, the great epic of fratricidal violence would often be used to index the family drama in rural Orissa. Mehraaj used the word to signal how irritated she was with the world. She would use the word to signify any bother that one has to undertake to live in this world- from cooking, to taking medications, to going out for errands, fixing her house, working, etc. Her experience of time was not marked with anxieties towards her future but her mother’s funeral. Putting oneself onto a temporal arc that focused on one’s mother’s death and not on one’s own, transformed Mehraaj’s present in ways which I shall discuss below.

Mehraaj was the only person that all the hijras said had the right to beg because unlike Akhtari, who had three sons-in-law to support her, Mehraaj did not have any
relatives. She had also never held a job in her life and lived by begging and what I suppose can only very vaguely called be prostitution, because Mehraaj would never solicit customers nor would she ask them for money. Men would slip into her hut at night and some of them would sometimes give her some money. I asked her why she didn’t ask for money from all of them and she said, “Who will bother asking them? They won’t even give ten rupees if they don’t want to.” Her ten chickens were not big enough to lay eggs and neither were her five ducks. Her lovers were usually rickshaw pullers or workers at the small dhaaba (road side eatery). I use the term lovers instead of customers because not only were they not anonymous but their relationship also went beyond monetary or sexual transactions. I imagined these men cared for her because they would allow her to work erratically at the small eatery and take some dinner in return. None of Mehraaj’s neighbours, lovers, or other Hijras expected that she would ever return the money she borrowed because they knew she had neither family nor a job and was now too old to join a traditional Hijra gharana. I discovered later that Mehraaj did have family, but she would never go visit any of them. They came once or twice a year with some food for her but that was the extent of their interaction. When I asked her why she didn’t go visit them she would lament, “I don’t like all this, I want to stay away from the mahabharata of this world.” The word referring to the epic in these allusions might be seen in some instances as a metonymy for the world, in others, as an allegory for everything that happens in this world.

When I asked Mehraaj why couldn’t she sell the chickens and the ducks she said, they were not big enough. Mehraaj did not have the money to buy feed, so she collected the garbage from the eatery where she ate which comprised mainly of used tea-leaves and
vegetable peels and mixed it with water to feed her animals. This made the animals incredibly unhealthy and like in the previous years that I had known her, the animals died before becoming marketable. Since Mehraaj expected them to die, and yet hoped they would remain alive, the way she treated them is interesting, often cursing them because of their constant hungry clucking and quacking but then worried if she couldn’t find them.

I want to highlight the pedagogical quality of this scene. A lot of young hijras were treated quite brutally by their family members. I remember Pawan Hijra looking subdued and then noticed that she was covered in bruises. I asked Damru what the matter was and she told me that her family members must have beaten her up. When I asked why? Damru said, “till you give money in the house you have no value –keemat- they will keep on beating you. They used to beat me up, they used to beat Gungi. When I started earning and Gungi started doing dhandha (sex work) then they were very nice. Pawan hijra does not have a job, who will pay her to have sex with her, she is so ugly! In fact she has to give money to them to sleep with her.” The animals that Mehraaj had had no value either - like children who did not earn, they were unhealthy, would die every year, and she had a bull instead of a cow with milk, yet she took care of them, irritated by their clucking, but concerned nonetheless. I will rely on the concept of animality and its reflection on kinship through the remainder of the chapter, to argue that Mehraaj and her animals offer us a way of negotiating kinship that prevents it from becoming bestial.

I have framed Mehraaj’s relationship with her animals as one of kinship, to highlight the analogy that I am drawing between being animal and being kin. While there were others way of talking in ordinary language about being related, there is evidence in
other material to show a certain durability of the figure of the animal seen in analogies and metaphors when describing the corrosion of familial relations. This durability makes me want to open up the theme of the animal even if I am unable to take it to a conclusion.

I will discuss some of the relevant material later in this chapter and will take it up again in the next one. For now, I want to rely on the allegory of familial intimacy articulated through the animal as one that illuminates a certain disappointment that the hijras felt in their kin relations.

_Yannehasti Na Tadkvacit- What is not here is nowhere else_

It is said of the Mahabharata, the great epic of fratricide that “what is not here is nowhere else.” Unsurprisingly then, this is where I begin to trace the relationship between hijras and her brothers. A.K. Ramanujan wrote, “Not _dharma_, the good life of right conduct but _dharmasuksmata_ or the subtle nature of _dharma_ that mixes good and evil in every act, the impossible labyrinth of the moral life, is the central theme of the _Mahabharata_. So, the character of every person and the propriety of every major act is the subject of endless debate and moral scrutiny.”

I have said before that Jaina’s awareness of her brothers’ refusal to help the widowed sister because they have to look after their own families is an awareness of the inevitable betrayal of intimacy. The morality of this betrayal, in Ramanujan’s words cannot be pinned down very easily. It is the act that arises out of the individual who is split between his duties as a householder and brother.

Veena Das writes in her seminal essay on Punjabi kinship, “Brothers who are fighting over property are described as dogs fighting over a bone. The term _sharika_,

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which may be translated as male agnates, or co-parceners, implies conflict. [...] Thus hostility between brothers, though expected and to an extent natural, is considered less than human. It implies that greed over property has made them relinquish even the biological ties established by their having shared the same womb and sucked the same milk. This hostility can never be legitimized, either in terms of human values or in terms of moral values of honour and face”.

While I agree with Das that fratricide can never be legitimized in any terms, I argue that the presence of land or property inflects such hostility and renders squabbling between brothers not in terms of moral values of honour and face, but precisely in terms of dharma and thereby legitimizing fratricide precisely in the inescapable terms she offers above—“natural,” “expected,” but “less than human.” The dharma that I am referring to is what Jaina interprets as brothers forsaking their siblings to look after their own sons and daughters and what Shamsheri refers to as the moral relationship between fathers and sons. In other words, fratricide might not be legitimized but violence between brothers is also the violence between fathers who need to secure inheritances for their own sons.

In an article titled, “India Bihar Families Fight for 66 years over a Plot of Land” carried by the BBC, a journalist reports that two families in Bihar had continuously been fighting over a plot of land over four generations and preparing the fifth to carry the baton. The land itself has been inundated and “turned into a riverbed” and is now worth

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90 Veena Das, “Masks and Faces: An Essay on Punjabi Kinship,” *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 10,1 (1976): 5. The legal claims made over property have always been complex in Hindu law. As Imitaz Ahmad notes, “Hindu law was not traditionally uniform and varied greatly from one part of the country to another. Mitaksara law, which prevailed over most of north India, defined coparcenary as a person and his sons and their progeny, but in Dayabhaga law there is no coparcenary between a man and his sons even if they live in a single household.” Imitaz Ahmad, “Between the Ideal and the Real: Gender Relations within the Indian Joint Family” *Family and Gender: Changing Values in Germany and India*, ed. Marget Pernau et al. (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003), 44. The difference in Hindu and Muslim law, or the ambiguity in the statutes would not help the hijras escape the claims or the violence of their brothers and siblings who made claims to the land because the hijras had no children to bequeath their property.
fifteen thousand rupees, hardly worth the two million rupees that one family had spent on the litigation. Even when the court ruled in favor of one family, the case was not settled and appeals were filed by the other. One litigant in the reportage explains this form of self-destruction, “Now, it is more a battle for honour and prestige than for a piece of land.”  

This is a version of what Jaina meant when she said that her brothers will have to walk with their families, look after them, rather than look behind, after Jaina or their widowed sister.

I want to offer a reading of the figure of the dog as it appears in the Hindu cosmos that might offer an argument for legitimately becoming a dog, that would illuminate how certain intimacies require us to become bestial. “As Yudhisthira proceeds with the dog, Indra appears, inviting him to enter heaven in his human form. […] Yudhisthira requests that the dog be allowed to accompany him, but Indra refuses. Yudhisthira insists. Then, as if by magic, the dog is transformed into the god Dharma, who tells Yudhisthira that he disguised himself in order to test Yudhisthira.”  

The fact that Dharma, here in the role of Death, can take the form of a dog implies that certain intimacies are death dealing. I am forced to rely on dharma to complicate Das’s analysis of fratricide because the word was used by Shamsher to make me understand where exactly her grievances lay. It also makes clear the narrative of the householder; his concerns and loyalties shift when his

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93 I am aware that dharma has been studied across disciplines and for centuries and indeed is the crux of the scholarship that deals with the Mahabharata. The point that I am making here of dharma is a basic one that differentiates it from morality and ethics, and in fact it subsumes these dichotomies to allow for immoral and unethical actions to be a part of dharma. I borrow this reading from Wendy Doniger’s The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology (University of California Press, 1976) 94-139. Also Adam Bowles’s Dharma, Disorder and the Political in Ancient India: The Apaddharmaparvan of the Mahabharata (Leiden: Brill’s Indological Library, 2007) 190-280. Apaddharma refers to dharma that is applicable in times of crisis/emergency.
intimacies include his wife and children, and this shift might have painful repercussions for his siblings and parents. But is expected and is not treated so much as immoral as the inevitable corruption of relationships that time brings about. The relationship that Jaina, Shamsher, and Mehraaj have with their families make much better sense when we view the family drama through the lens of the Mahabharata. Land is the necessary medium for that fight but that is less because of its economic value and more for the strong affect value it carries in this world.

The epic fight between the Kauravas and the Pandavas and the competing claims between the two sets of patrilateral cousins have been well studied, I want to focus on one particular moment in this struggle - the incident that came after the Padavas came back from their exile. The kingdom had been divided between the two sets of cousins, but as Matilal notes, “On the whole, it did not produce any good result. For the hostility between the Kauravas and the Pandavas started with redoubled force when the Pandavas became both prosperous and popular enough to arouse envy in the mind of Duryodhana.”94 After the period of their exile was over, the Pandavas demanded the return of their half of the kingdom. They were told by Sanjaya (who had been granted divine vision and thus could see the future) that, “If the Kurus will not grant you your share, Ajata-shatru (lit. One who had vanquished all his enemies), without resorting to war, then in my opinion, a life of begging in the kingdom of the Andhaka Vrishnis would be better than winning your kingdom through war.”95 The Pandavas refused to give up their plans to go to war but offered a compromise saying that they would bear patiently

95 na ced bhagam kuravo ’nyatra yuddhat/ prayaccherams tubhyam, Ajatasatro, bhaiksacaryam Andhaka|Vrsnirajye sreyo manye na tu yuddhena rajyam (CSL edition, Mahabharata- Book V, 27.1 , pg 175).
all the insults that had been heaped upon if they were given five villages: “Give a single region of your kingdom to us, for we want peace: Avisthala, Vrikasthala, Makandi, Varanavrata, and let some boundary area be the fifth part. Give five villages to five brothers, Suyodhana.”  

Duryodhana hearing of this request assumed that the eldest of the Pandavas, Yudhishthira was settling for such a small share of land “because he is afraid of [Duryodhana’s] army and power.” Not even five villages from the powerful kingdom were parted with to be given to the Pandavas. Vidur says to him, “The Pandavas want to take just five villages, my lord, but you have no intention of giving them to them- you will not make peace.”  

Dhritarashtra, the blind king who is Duryodhana’s father and the Pandavas’ paternal uncle, is emblematic of what I want to remark about kinship; he is neither willing to go against his son and forbid him from war, nor is he willing to broker peace by giving five villages let alone half of his kingdom. He will certainly not give up the entire kingdom, which belongs to his nephews according to some arguable rules. His anger is directed at himself for his inability to turn away from war and fratricide (and towards his son for not compromising) when he as the king can put an end to the conflict by dividing the kingdom. His son obviously sees no reason to give up even five villages. Land is not the issue over which the brothers are fighting. If it were, then five villages would have been given to the Pandavas. Peace, though desired, is rendered unattainable because the Pandavas will not live under Duryodhana, but land is the necessary substrate over which the great drama can take place. Thus, while property and

96 rajyaikadesam api nah prayaccha samam icchatam: Avisthala, Vrakasthala, Makandi, Varanavatam; avasanam bhavatv atra kin cid ekam ca pancamam. bhratronam dehi pancanam pancagraman, Suyodhana! (CSL edition, Mahabharata- Book V, 31.20, pg 222-3).  

97 ibid 55:30, 509.  

98 Vidur was the half brother of the blind king, Dhritarashtra, and of Pandu. He was also a reincarnation of Dharma cursed to be born of a shudra mother. He was, thus, in some respects the uncle of the Kauravas and the Pandavas. In some retelling of this folktale, Duryodhana said that he would not give to the Pandavas, even the amount of land that would fit on a needle’s tip, let alone five villages.
kinship obviously are related, the relationship is not causal; rather property renders visible what is hidden in kinship.

I offer the battle of kurukshetra as an instance of fratricide that is the condition of kinship. In Bhadrak however, the battle rages on at home because of the brother’s transformation into a householder. As Veena Das has mentioned, “In the context of the joint family, then, the rules of kinship morality stress the disguising of ties generated by shared sexuality, as well as ties generated by procreation.”\(^99\) Das was writing on the simmering hostilities between the householder’s wife and her husband’s family, which often brings the householder to choose between his loyalties to his wife (sexuality) and to his mother/brother/father/sister (kinship). We can read Shamsheri’s brothers’ betrayal in a similar vein. Das’s informants’ show of remorse for slapping his brother “for a mere woman” by saying that he was going to kill himself, and when prevented from doing so, that he would “cut off his own hand with which he had slapped his brother,” resulted in assuaging hostilities among brothers. We see that Shamsheri was not upset about the fact that her brother had used her to gain a second wife - sexuality was understandable - but with the fact that he did not come see her in jail even to feign contrition, let alone express actual regret. This was the betrayal that was deeply felt by Shamsheri and that she was going to redress through robbing him of his land. The division of the householder over his loyalties to his biological family, and his own family sprung through his sexuality brings to relief the temporal frames over which he is divided as well. One frame involves the circulations of money and medicine that he can offer to his siblings and the other is one of circulation through the inheritances and bequeathments of land that he has to offer

to his children. This is also a dialectic of kinship and sexuality or of amity and affinity, each undoing but also fertilizing the ground for the other.

Jaina often made fun of Shamsheri’s morose lamentations. She would ask her to laugh and joke, to inhabit a present, by forgiving her brother rather than plotting to exact revenge. I don’t think Jaina was asking Shamsheri to give up the fight because she was going to lose it anyway; but to walk away from it, or in Mehraaj’s words- “stay away from the mahabharata of this world.” Though Jaina often claimed that she could sell her land if she needed the money, in fact, she never did sell the land. There were sporadic attempts, furtive whisperings between Jaina and several men who wanted to buy her land, but no deal ever went through. Jaina, even if she wanted to, could not sell her land because as she pointed out, she might be murdered. Shamsheri, even if she won the fight with her brother and got the land, would not have anybody to whom she could bequeath it and her brother’s family would eventually claim the land. Jaina was asking Shamsheri to wake up to this truth and to not become like a dog fighting over a bone. If householders become animals over property, and in Das’s words, forgot the kinship they had with their mothers because of the sexuality they shared with their wives, then the hijras offered us a glimpse of what it would mean to not become animals, to not forget kinship and to stay away from the Mahabharata of this world. In what follows, I argue that this staying away, and remembering to be human, to not turn into animals, is an exercise in restraint and a form of doing kinship that the hijras taught.

Sold by Fate

Lawrence Cohen in his work *No Aging in India* plots the various cultural idioms that are used to render the body aged and the movement of the father from the powerful
position as a head of the family to the space of dying. He writes, “Two transitions marked the shifts in the perception of the old person’s voice and weakness: the loss of authority and the loss of usefulness. Both were gradual and contested processes, but each marked, fitfully, a shift in how an old parent was heard. […] The loss of usefulness, that is, of any significant interpersonal role within the household, was associated with emerging criticisms of the old person babbling meaninglessly—bakbak, pat pat, barbar.”

Cohen presents the tragedy that awaits the householders. The hijras, I argue, teach us a way of modulating that tragedy. Jaina by taking care of her widowed sister Jaira; Shamsheri and Mangu by taking care of their mother prevented the Family’s descent into the Bad Family. Shamsheri’s mother lived with her because none of her sons wanted to keep her. Shamsheri often lamented the fact that she did not have money for her mother’s medicines and medical treatment but would be seen taking care of her dutifully. The old blind woman, in turn, begged for food for herself and her hijra offspring and that is how both of them would take care of each other. Jaina’s sister once told me that when she returned, as a young widow with four children, all below the age of seven, none of her brothers besides Jaina offered her anything. Mangu, who I shall mention later in the chapter, begged as well to make sure she could meet her bed-ridden mother’s expenses.

By opting out of certain expectations of masculinity, the hijras also opted out of the dialectic of biology and sexuality as it played out in kinship. The temporal ramification of this dialectic needs to be teased out. Since they were not going to become householders, their sexuality was never in contradistinction to their kinship. In fact, quite the opposite, their opting out of procreation allowed them to participate in kinship in a way that would prevent their mothers from becoming voices pointing towards the bad

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100 Lawrence Cohen, No Aging in India (University of California Press, 1998), 241.
family. Jaina knew that she could not participate in the temporality of property transmission, much as she held on to the possibility. She was trying to tell Shamsheri that fratricidal impulse is only meaningful when there are sons for whom one can fight one’s brothers. In staying away from the mahabharata of the world, she would save her life - losing it would hardly be a sacrifice as there would be nobody to reap its rewards, or even be witness. Jaina’s participation in the temporality of the everyday, and not necessarily in the temporality of property transmission can be seen in other sites as well.

These are the relationships Jaina shared with her brothers’ wives’ who were quite demonstrative about their love for Jaina.\footnote{A love that was different from what emerges out of cross-cousin marriage in which the wives are substitutable, thus being too close or too distant from your brothers wife is a problem. Different, because Jaina as a hijra, could never be the substitute for any of her brothers. Other hijras who were married to women would often live in a different village, town or city and would pay periodic visits to their wives. They would always carry the threat of bringing shame to their wives and would negotiate this threat by going in kadi. Kadi in the coded hijra language means to be a man- wear men’s clothes, walk and talk like a man, not behave like a hijra basically.} I wasn’t aware of their secret transactions at the beginning of my fieldwork but their beautiful relationships unfolded as I started to notice that a certain conversation would take place furtively without speech in front of everybody’s eyes. Jaina, the child Muneeza and I would lunch together, not with the male members, and in her room, and in between the time the men and women lunched. Once I remarked that there was unnecessary abundance of food placed before Jaina, Muneeza and me to which Jaina replied that both her bahus insisted on giving her food from their kitchens- “if I eat from one kitchen, the other one will feel bad, so I told them both to give me food every day and for every meal, so that they don’t fight and don’t think I love one more than the other.”

While we were supposed to be napping, the women would often come surreptitiously to the window and slip some money ranging from 50-300 rupees, never
more, into Jaina’s hand. They hardly ever said anything because Jaina, who I thought was dozing, would be quite alert to the movements outside her window. If she had dozed off, they would come and whisper, “Bade Bhaiyya,” and Jaina would get up. If there were other people of the neighbourhood present, they would come to the window and pretend to rest their hands on the windowsill and slip the money into Jaina’s hand while loudly scolding Jaina, to distract the onlookers, “Bade Bhaiya, why are you spoiling my children, you give them money to buy rubbish to eat from the market and now they won’t eat rice properly.” Nobody would suspect that behind these visits ostensibly meant to harmlessly chide Jaina for her avuncular indulgences, the women of the house were betraying their husbands.

This screaming would wake me from my siesta and after a few weeks, with my curiosity piqued, I too like Jaina began to pretend to be asleep and poked my head up whenever the transactions would occur, much to Jaina’s mild irritation and amusement. After I figured out what exactly was being slipped and hidden in some tins in Jaina’s cupboard, I goaded Jaina into telling me what was going on and she with an exhausted sigh finally relented and let me into the secret. The sisters-in-law would often save or earn money from their household expenses, the odd jobs they would do like filling rolled bidis with tobacco, the small amounts given by their relatives during their visits for the children, money given by various friends and relatives including me during the festival of Eid, and give it to Jaina to deposit in a post office savings account for them. I asked Jaina why they did this and why it was so important that their husbands don’t catch wind of it. She said:

Because they love me and trust me, they know I won’t tell their husbands, they come running, saying “Bade Bhaiyaa, please deposit this money for our children.”
If the husbands come to know they will take it away, they might also beat them up and say, “when I am here, what is the need to do all this, do we not take care of you and your children that you have to save money, do you not have any faith/trust (bharosa) in us.” My father was also like that, once when I was very young, eleven or twelve, we needed a lot of money. My mother told me to go sell her heavy silver armbands. My father, when he discovered this, beat her up very badly, screaming at her, “everybody will now know they will taunt me that I can’t run my own house.” That’s why I secretly go and deposit the money in their accounts.

The relationship between the husbands and the wives that is described here is not one in which legalistic definitions of cruelty or domestic violence has any bearing - there was without a doubt a lot of love between the married couples but a structural tension and currency of distrust that travels a specific constellation of intimacy was also present. Das has written lucidly about the relationship that the woman’s natal family continues to maintain even after the woman’s marriage. They enquire about her conjugal house and worry about the sexual adequacy of her husband and if the young woman looks unhappy, members of the family with whom a joking relationship is shared can use their privileged familiarity to find out what troubles the young bride.102

Jaina on the other hand prescribed a very strict etiquette for the woman if she was unhappy in her marriage. While Das remarks that, “Parents, for all their advice to the daughters to consider the conjugal house as their own, would consider it unnatural if the daughter followed that advice to the letter, especially in the early years of marriage.”103

Jaina said -

If a woman gets married and her husband doesn’t touch her and he has told her on the first night of the marriage, “I did not have the heart to get married and my murhabbi got me married forcefully, I don’t have anything- this - my honour is now in your hands. If the wife now has pride, honour and if she has knowledge (ilm), qualities (sifat), she will keep everything to herself - this is very personal.

103 Ibid., 6.
and delicate talk between a husband and a wife. After a few months of marriage, the woman has to go to her grandmothers. They will ask her and enquire whether she is okay, whether she has been impregnated or not. If they see she is sad they will enquire and she can either say, “I have not come to your house in mourning but then you tell me why else would I be so sad.” They will understand immediately that the husband has not touched her and she has not felt the pleasures of a married woman. They will then see what needs to be done, whether she should get divorced, they will talk to the boy’s family and everybody will know that the husband is not a man. But if she is an intelligent, honourable woman then she will tell them, “Listen, this is between my husband and me, why are you asking me all this? She will tell them, everything is okay” After a few years, she will obviously not be pregnant, people will still enquire, she should then say, “Everything is fine between my husband and me but if I don’t have children in my destiny (naseeb) then what can I do.” Then that woman has no other choice but to hope that death comes to her quickly in a few years. The husband must then realize that “if my wife has opened her mouth, I would have been insulted and humiliated, people would call me a hijra, a maichiya, but she kept her mouth shut. She had knowledge, good qualities, she hid everything about me.” So now, he has to give her respect, he has to go to her grave often and offer a new shroud, garlands of flowers, incense because he has to be grateful that his wife has kept everything within herself and protected him.

This edict issued to the woman to quietly suffer explains the relationship Jaina had with sisters-in-law. She was aware that they might be suffering quietly, resolved to their fate, and to make their lives bearable she colluded with them in betraying their husbands.

Veena Das in her essay, “Kama in the Scheme of Purusharthas: the story of Rama” writes that Sita had to renounce her life to irrevocably establish the legitimacy of her sons and consequently restore the lineage of her husband.104 Jaina prescribes an equally harsh prescription for the daughter-in-law who has to wait patiently for death if married to a husband who cannot sexually satisfy her and use god and her cruel fate as an excuse to explain her childlessness to others to save the honour of her husband. Given such rules, the tensions arising from suspicion and accusation towards the daughters-in-

law can be understood as enough to drive them to death, as has been recorded and studied by generations of scholars, writers and thinkers. Jaina’s collusion with her daughters-in-law attenuated these tensions through secrecy and solidarity, tensions that not even goddesses have survived. Jaina placed the betrayal away from the fight over land inheritance to the everyday. These betrayals, I argue, not only sustained the lineage, given that the women were saving up with their intention to spend it on their children who bore their husband’s name but also sustained the family in the everyday existence of the domestic.

The Hindu god Ram himself could not protect his lineage from being maligned as polluted and was required to renounce Sita. Jaina’s brothers were only mortal, and in the local moral world of Bhadrak, even little gestures such as hiding money secretly earned would have been enough for them to be denigrated as incompetent and unmanly. The relationship between Jaina and her sisters-in-law, and her widowed sister’s family, and the relationship Shamsheri, Mangu, Mehraaj and a lot of other hijras in Bhadrak had with their mothers brokered the domestic space in their brothers’ household. The hijra asks us to re-examine the self-sufficiency of heteronormative reproduction. She presses the irony that though the family may be created through the relationships between the father, the mother and the children, the domestic requires a host of other characters to determine the mood of the house, and render it livable, or preserve it from destroying itself.

105 Das’s article “Masks and Faces” has the daughter-in-law being accused of driving a wedge between her husband and his brother; Satinder slapped his own brother “for a mere woman.” Daughter-in-laws, Das reminds us, can be replaced.

106 My argument is taking forward Veena Das’s argument in "Secularism and the Argument from Nature," in *Powers of the secular modern: Talal Asad and his interlocutors*, ed. David Scott and Charles Hirschkind (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006): 93-112. Das in her reading of Rousseau sees Sophie’s presence as chimerical because she is indispensable for making the individual social but in doing so also makes him sexed and mortal. Her necessary exclusion allows for the sovereign to give life. In rural Orissa,
The hijra’s position though makes her vulnerable to fraternal violence when seen through the logic of alliance. Given that she does not marry and does not produce children, she refashions the protocols of intimacy not only to make a place for herself in the domestic if not the family but also to instruct in practicing kinship, adhering to laws which may not be legal in any formal sense. For example the relationship between what was a male body and his sister-in-law’s became not one of leviratic possibility but one of friendship. In punctuating the transformation of a son into a householder who usurps the authority from his father and betrays his mother “for a mere woman,” hijras also stayed away from the mahabharata of the world in a way that allowed them to not become dogs and instead remain humans and take care of old parents. The renunciation of the hijra might at first glance seem to place her in opposition to the family, but her participation in kinship via her mother, sister, sisters-in-law helps in sustaining certain family relations. I want to read these ways of participating in the family as a diagonal entrance, one that does not create or destroy but preserves families and hence lineages. The difference and the distance between creating and preserving, and preserving and destroying, is the difference and distance between value and price, a dead sister-in-law and a live one.

**Families We Fuck**

Lest I be accused of fetishizing the relationship between hijras and their mothers and other women of their family, I must offer another scene of redoing kinship. Tappi lives in Gabasahi, which is a small settlement between Bhadrak town and Charampa train station on a large piece of land worth Rs.32 lakhs that belonged to her grandfather and now is divided between her father, her uncle and her paternal aunt. The brothers would often beat their wives, and I want to read the fear of the father as the affective emphasis of Das’s reading of the relationship between the father/the citizen and the family/the state.
father’s piece of land had three small rooms under one hut, out of which one room was occupied by Tappi and the other two rooms are given out to rent for 325 and 350 rupees to three men from Dhamnagar who come to Bhadrak to sell their wares at the train station. The land also has an outhouse and a tubewell shared by her and her uncle who lives in another more solidly built house of bricks next to her hut. The unmarried, constantly inebriated uncle and Tappi’s grandmother live together with Tappi’s male cousin (FZS). There is a lawsuit pending between Tappi’s father and his sister, Tappi’s aunt, regarding the division of land because all the siblings including another aunt, the eldest sister, had received shares; in fact, the aunt lives directly behind Tappi’s plot and they share a border. Tappi lives on the rent collected by her from the tenants. Her father had a job at the railways at Paradeep, a neighbouring district, and rarely came to Gabasahi and lived in Paradeep with his wife, Tappi’s mother, and their other son. Tappi’s mother often asked her elder son and his cousins to beat Tappi up because she was roaming around wearing saris, bangles and make-up. Tappi had run away to Gujarat and Rajasthan to escape her family and worked at a thread factory in 2006 and had returned in 2009 when I had made her acquaintance. She returned, not to her mother, but her Aunt’s house, which is behind her present location. Her father had built these three rooms after the supercyclone of 2005, which had destroyed almost everything in that area because of the floods. Tappi told me that her father is very fond of her but since her mother controlled the purse strings in the house - she added a bit irritatedly - her father could not do anything in front of her mother. Her mother often came to Bhadrak with her elder son threatening to put an end to Tappi’s way of living, and everybody got used to
getting panicked phone calls from Tappi asking for help because she feared that she was going to get beaten up by them.

Her mother often told Tappi that because Tappi earns money by fucking around, *dhanda karke*, there was no need for her to ask for money from home, that is, to take the rent that was collected from the tenants. Once she even threatened to kick Tappi out of her room and give that up for rent as well. I too began to receive phone calls asking me for my help, Jaina stopped me from going by saying, “This is her daily problem, nothing will happen, don’t worry.” When I looked unconvinced she said, “I live here, I know everything, if you go you will also get beaten up, don’t worry, smoke a cigarette, drink your tea, Tappi has plenty of men to help her, she will raise one finger and ten men will jump up to save her.” I complied and the next day when I met Tappi she didn’t look any worse for wear. I asked her what had happened the day before and she said, “she [her mother] doesn’t live here, so people don’t know her and her son, if they beat me up, all the men here who know me will come to save me, remember the last time you came and you saw my aunt’s son and asked me what had happened to him because he was so hurt and wounded, he couldn’t even walk? I said it was nothing, my mother and my brother came to kick me out, they started beating me, I screamed loudly and all my men [chahne waale] came and thrashed the three of them. Since then they come and threaten but they will not touch me, they have learnt their lesson, I have no problems. Come, say whatever you want to say, I won’t be here to listen, I see them, I run away.” Nobody ever took Tappi’s panicked calls seriously because they knew that there would be lots of people there to save her, not least because she had slept with most of them but also because her tenants/lovers were three muscular men who were very fond of her. Her house would
have a constant stream of visitors dropping by to smoke ganja, drink, or fuck. In fact, during all my interviews the place would always had people coming in and out to smoke, drink or have sex. She would also charge exorbitantly for sex, rupees six hundred for a fuck but only from men she didn’t know and were not from the areas she was familiar with. When asked why, she said, “the men here already do so much for me, and I can’t charge them, they are brothers/friends (bhaīyoī). But outsiders, I will charge them and I won’t do it anywhere but a lodge.”

Kath Weston in her groundbreaking ethnography on gay kinship observes: “When lesbians and gay men in the Bay Area applied kinship terminology to their chosen families, they usually placed themselves in the relationship of sisters and brothers to one another, regardless of their respective ages.” To that I would add regardless to rules of incest as well, in Tappi’s case because all the men with whom she undertook transactions of care were called, bhaīyoī, elder brother. I am aware that this word is a common way of addressing the entire world of South Asia but the men milling around Tappi would often tell me, “We are like her elder brothers, she cooks for us when we come to Bhadrak, she takes care of us, won’t we take care of her?” One of her lovers, who at that time was her most important lover, told me, “I can give my life for her as well. Brothers are always ready to sacrifice their lives for their sisters.” As Weston pointed out, the families we choose usually don’t have intergenerational relationships but fraternal and congenial ones - brothers and sisters, friends and lovers.

The antagonism between Tappi and her family arose from the fact that Tappi was a hijra; she fucks around, wears make-up and saris. Once again it played out through

land. Her mother’s demands that Tappi stop fucking around and stop behaving like a hijra are inextricably conflated with the demand that Tappi stop taking the rent from the land and stop using up one of the rooms by living there. However, Tappi participated in the mahabharata of the world and wrested control of the land, but has nobody to whom she can pass it on. The Pandavas who won the Mahabharata faced a similar problem after all their kin had died in the war, which was finally resolved by Krishna reviving a dead baby for the world to continue. I am sure the dispute between Tappi and her family would be resolved in the future with Tappi’s death and her brother’s children inheriting the land, but for now she had it and she protected her right over it with her lover-brothers.

Tappi can be seen as participating in the mahabharata of the world, in the fratricidal war over land but not because of land. The absence of somebody to inherit her land pushes the analysis of kinship and land towards questions of temporality. By this I mean how does one remain brothers and sustain tenderness and arrest time whose inexorable march demands that brothers betray each other to become fathers and look to the future? In Tappi’s case, there are no fathers or sons anymore, between and for whom the land is entrusted, instead we have a strange country where the logic of kinship dilates to calculate everybody as brothers, and with that dilation the rules of incest are also collapsed with lovers becoming brothers. This becomes a mimetic reflection of

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108 Bimal Krishna Matilal writes, “The victorious King Yudhisthira suffered from a supreme depression after the war. Finally, when he decided to give up the throne, and to go on his last journey, called the Mahaprasthan, it was even difficult to find a successor to the throne. For even the five sons of the five Pandavas had been killed. Abhimanyu, son of Arjuna, had been killed much earlier. Uttara, the widow of Abhimanyu, gave birth to a dead son (for he was already killed by Asvatthaman’s fatal arrow, which by its magic power entered the womb of Uttara) but Krsna revived him. He was called Pariksita. Thus he was the chosen successor to the throne, which Yudhishthira left behind. And thus ended the great rivalry between the two sides of the royal family, the Kauravas and the Pandavas.” In “The Throne: Was Duryodhana Wrong?” in *The Collected Essays of Bimal Krishna Matilal* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 120.

109 This obviously has echoes of what in the anthropological canon was studied under classificatory kinship and group marriage.
segmentary affiliation where it’s not brothers who shared a womb against the world, but unrelated men - strangers becoming brothers and fighting against the brothers related by blood.

This is how the Land Lies

Till now, my argument has been that the hijras, by living with their families experience kinship in two different temporal orders, the first one being instantiated by the performance of attentiveness offered by their brothers in the present everyday circulation of food, money and medicines and the second one being the imagined future transmission of property. The hijras, in sidestepping the order of reproduction and procreation, are wary of participating in the fratricidal war that inevitably takes form via land - inevitable because brothers become householders in order to agonizingly reproduce the social. Walking away from becoming householders allows hijras to also walk away from participating in this war. It’s temporal implications, I have shown, are the following: they take care of their mothers, which prevented the latter’s voices from becoming barbar, and their families to become the “bad family.” Walking away from participating in lineage but not in families, households, and the domestic, in the case of Jaina, prevented her widowed sister from becoming a burden. Furthermore, Mehraaj, Mangu and Jaina, instead of betraying their brothers for land, would collude in betraying their brothers everyday. Mehraaj and Mangu by saving up for their mother’s funeral, away from the prying eyes of their siblings, whose responsibility it should be in the first place; and Jaina, by conspiring with her sisters-in-law to render the mood of the house more salubrious.
Leo Bersani in his article *Father Knows Best* offers a provocative reading of Claire Denis’s film *Beau Travail*. He reads the film, which is about a group of legionnaires posted in Djibouti as a “family story”. He elaborates the inexplicable antagonism between the master sergeant, Galoup and the beautiful legionnaire, Sentain as indicative of a “fratricidal impulse” that is consolidated by the “fraternal bond” which the legion and the father figure in the film, Forestier, constantly signal. Bersani’s provocation emerges from his reading of the last scene and more specifically the last shot of the film. He writes, “stand up and simply leave the family tragedy by which Western culture has been oppressed at least since Oedipus’s parricide. […] Leave the violence of a desire for the father and the son, a violence that transforms brotherhood into fratricide.”

I would like to propose that Hijras can be seen as walking away from the family drama and the future promised by becoming a householder; but unlike the master sergeant they do not do so after an agonizing education in the violence and criminality that founds family. They are more than aware that brothers kill each other and while they remain with their families, they “modulate its obscene destructiveness” by participating in it in ways that adhere to logic of sustenance, which might not be the most apparent law of the land that posits harmony against self-interest. Their betrayals in the present prevent betrayals in the future. As such, Hijra brothers don’t become like dogs fighting over the land.

Thus, while the hijra, when fucking in the fields, offered to her lovers a respite from being human, she offered in her house respite to her brothers from becoming animals: to not fight like dogs and not relegate their parents’ voices into abject, meaningless sounds. Mehraaj goes a step further and makes animals her kin, she takes care of her animals, even though they are not and do not become economically viable.

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She shows concern when they are lost like they were her kin, even when being irritated by their constant clucking in hunger that she cannot afford to assuage properly. They take care of parents and punctuate the ceaseless pathological or even perverse repetition of social reproduction of animals undertaken by householder brothers. Let me offer a few thoughts to clarify the hijras’ intervention, which might also be called an inversion of the diktat of the Indian cosmic theory that gives form to the tense battlefield that is the household.

Lawrence Cohen writes on a widely circulated folktale that allegorizes the transfiguration of a man from a son into a householder, and later into a burden of a family. He writes,

A man’s aging is illustrated through a bestiary. Against the cosmic theories of asramadharma [...] [there is] a reconfiguring of the life course in term of three distinct but each unpleasant forms of dehumanization. Adulthood here peaks at forty, envisioned as the burden of carrying along one’s wife and weak sons. Sixty remains the time of political inversion, when the meaning of debility shifts from the burden of the powerful (the father as ox) to the subordinate duties of the grandfather (the father as dog). After sixty, the voice becomes central, the abject request of the man forced to beg from his own son. At eighty, a different meaning of senility is offered, not the political abjection of the dog, but the far more embodied decay of the voiceless old man, for whom the request has degenerated thoroughly into meaninglessness: the monkey.111

The tragic narrative above is a gendered narrative. Cohen argues that for women, becoming dogs was a formal resistance to becoming like cows - holy but a hassle nonetheless. The hijras in their participation, I have argued, prevented their mothers from becoming holy hassles, and prevented their voices from signalling towards the bad family, senility or abject dehumanization. Their brothers were prevented at least in one count from fighting like dogs.

111 Lawrence Cohen, “No Aging in India” (277).
To understand the temporal implications of this humanity, and humanization, I must begin by looking at the line in the Bhagwat Purana that reads- “One should treat animals such as deer, camels, asses, monkeys, mice, snakes, birds and flies exactly like one's own son. How little difference there actually is between children and these innocent animals.” The fact that children who are like innocent animals become householders who then subsequently treat the aging bodies of their parents (and are later treated themselves) like animals is the way of the world in Bhadrak. In a different vocabulary, it could be said that in refusing to subscribe to this series of transfigurations and its temporality, the hijras were subscribing to a different order of semiosis. The hijras in taking care of their mothers, and by not fighting with their brothers over land, established a different suturing of the present to the past and to the future. Resisting the order of history that made parents into dogs and monkeys meant that the past did not remain as past, and in not fighting with their brothers, by staying away from the mahabharata, the future too did not loom as the future. Instead what remained was the present and a republic, where all were human, even animals. Let me offer an instance of how the past, present and the future were reconfigured, or sutured differently to allow for a different self as temporality of semiosis with different commitments and entitlements.

A Life Well Died

112 Bhagvata Purana Canto 7, Book 14, line 9 – “mrgostrakhramarkakhurasirisprakhagamaksakah
atmanahputravatpasyetairsemantaramkiyat”

113 Paul Kockleman writes, “The self as temporality of semiosis is essentially the temporality of semiosis understood from the signer’s point of view: one’s commitments and entitlements to signify and interpret at any moment in one’s life and across all moments of one’s life. In particular, as a sign event may be understood as establishing a present, with a past and future, a signer may be understood as establishing a presence, with a history and fate. Indeed, the life, biography or bios of a signer may be understood as the chaining together of such presences (into a finite length), which itself is located between two absences (of infinite extent).” “From Status to Contract Revisited: Value, Temporality, Circulation and Subjectivity” Anthropological Theory (2007; 7): 168
Mangu’s house lies on a plot of land owned by her maternal grandmother but now belongs to her mother. The house has 8 members, Mangu, her bed-ridden blind mother, Mangu’s sister, the sister’s husband, the sister’s husband’s sister’s daughter (who had run away from her husband’s house after being beaten up by him) and this young woman’s child. Mangu’s other sister’s two sons. Mangu has the responsibility of running the entire house, when I asked her why her nephews didn’t contribute, she said in an even tone without resentment.

M: No, they don’t contribute at all, they eat here, sleep here, both of them have jobs but they won’t give me even one rupee.
V: Well, you should kick them out then, why do you have to feed them.
M: (calmly) No, that’s not possible. When you came here two years ago, didn’t you see how the house was falling, you had to bend completely to enter and you had gotten up too quickly and hurt yourself with the iron rod, do you remember, how much blood came out of your back?
V: Yeah I remember [I removed my kameez to show her the scar]
M: Well to fix the house, they asked me for 60,000 rupees and they said, “if you don’t give it then we will throw you out.”
V: But how can they do that?
M: They can, they will say oh this is a hijra, doesn’t give anything but just eats here why should we let you stay here.
V: but they should share (mil baat) and live.
M: That’s what I tell them but they don’t listen- they don’t care about their own nani, they will throw both of us out, they are young men, where will I go with my mother?

Mangu’s position as a hijra made her vulnerable to being utilized in a particular way by her family members. She was well aware of the fact that they would kick her off the land that she was living on and that she would not be able to handle the court expenses that the litigation would entail. This resulted in Mangu sustaining a household which lived off her earnings.114 I suppose there is nothing wrong in supporting ones’ family and other

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114 Mangu works very hard, she is also the most experienced hijra in terms of begging on the train, since she has been begging since she was 15. Thirty years of begging have made her very bold and brassy and she manages to procure at least Rs.200 on each train by coercing, cajoling, teasing and tormenting the male
animals if it wasn’t for the fact that every time Mangu would fall ill and was unable to go begging, her family would slowly and surely start complaining about the expenses of her medicines, the trips to the hospitals, the lack of food in the house, the demanding task of taking care of Mangu. Mangu would then escape to a nearby Majhar (shrine of a muslim saint) and live there till she recovered enough to resume earning.

Mangu had once whispered to me that she had saved 10,000 rupees for herself and 10,000 for her mother because she was sure that after her death nobody would bury her properly. They would say, “oh this is a hijra, there is nobody of her own (aage peeche koi nahin) who will waste money on her funeral.” Then she said, pleased as a punch, “Now, if I have money, why will I ask somebody to take care of me when I die, I will just say this is my money, please do this and this after my death. You need to do all this, because if I have money only then I can carry my mother on my shoulders. Otherwise, what face will I show Allah, that I let my mother go alone to her grave?” Her faith in the world and her selfish family to use the money she would give them for the purposes of a proper funeral puzzled me. Mangu would often talk with subdued excitement about how she imagined her funeral to take place, her eyes would light up and her face would have a slight, charming smile. I mention this because I want to point out that the conversation would never seem morbid to either of us. She would begin, “you know, when I go, I want passengers. This makes her also the most favoured companion with whom the other hijras want to go begging on the trains. In theory, she could earn Rs. 24,000 every month just from begging but there are days when she is very unwell, and the weather particularly inclement thus she manages to earn Rs. 8000. Madhubabu Pension Yojana gives her Rs. 200 a month and the local NGO gives her Rs. 4000 a month for her work of distributing condoms. She also has 2 ducks, 5 geese and 2 hens- the eggs from all give her another Rs. 1000. She also sells cowdung cakes at Rs 1 for one while she buys them wholesale at three cakes for one rupee resulting in a profit of Rs 300. She also goes dancing at festivals, which gave her another Rs. 1000 this monsoon season. During the wedding season around the winter, she earns almost 800 per wedding. Mangu also goes to jatra (open air theatres) in Chandbali to solicit customers in the spring, which gives almost Rs. 2000 every spring. In the last month of September during which the Ganesh Puja, Durga Puja festival celebrations Mangu earned Rs 15,000 in total.
them to take out my corpse with a lot of celebrations, bathed and washed with a lot of expensive fresh flowers.” Mangu’s insistence on the beautiful funeral can be seen as her putting the final punctuation on the story of her life, in which she had been rendered helpless by her family. Her funeral would render her the signatory of her life and would in effect legitimize her existence. The abject present would be impotent in the light of the splendid funeral and would recast her life, these present moments, with new meaning. The meaning of her life was yet to come and the betrayals of daily life would be erased. This is why I suppose in the evenings Mangu was at most stony-faced and never bitter or angry, with the demands of her greedy, parasitical family.

I last met Mangu on August 6th of 2013. She was once again at the Majhar, doing very poorly. I had gone to say goodbye as I was leaving for Calcutta the next day. I had gone to her place first, where her sister had begun complaining before I had even alighted from the motorbike. I zoomed away as soon I heard ‘Majhar’ upon enquiring Mangu’s whereabouts, leaving the shrieking harpy behind. Mangu spoke about how she was not feeling well, and now that her death was palpably near she did not mention anything about her funeral. I stared at her wondering why a part of her neck was throbbing as if a bird was struggling to get out. We remained silent, at the peaceful majhar, listening to the sounds of crickets, frogs, monkeys, dogs, cattle, distant motorbikes and other sounds that I could not make out. When dusk fell, I squished some money in her hand and left; Jaina later assured me that the sister would snatch the money. Mangu died the next day and I got a call from Jaina from the hospital that the sister was complaining about the lack of money for the funeral. Upon enquiring, we learnt that the family claimed that the money saved had gone into treating Mangu and taking care of the house, and that they had no
money, which nobody believed because everybody knew that the nephews were working. Jaina was broke because she had already given 15000 rupees to the sister for Mangu’s expenses and nothing remained of that either. I offered to pay but Jaina told me that it would be useless since I wouldn’t be there to supervise the spending, and they would just take the money and would not conduct a proper funeral. She said, “They will ask for ten thousand but they won’t even spend two thousand.” I asked her to oversee the funeral but she said that it would result in a fight because the sister would say, “Mangu is our family, just give us money and we will take care of it, you are an outsider.” She continued in an exhausted voice, “You don’t understand they are only after money, what kind of a world is this.” Finally, with a lot of complaining about the expenses, Mangu was buried by her family without the funeral she wanted.115

I started writing this chapter about Mangu five months before her death. I was going to offer it as evidence of a hijra negotiating her family by inhabiting a lifeworld in which her abjection and helplessness would be erased in the event of a splendid funeral - a negotiation whereby the act is cleaved from accreting meaning immediately. Sophie Day remarks that the sex workers in Britain, organized their biographies in such a way that the past or the future appeared as a snapshot- an image, view, or resource that isolated the present in such a way that restricted “a disagreeable period in sex work to the short term, apart from the flow of life...” She chose the term snapshot not only because it implied distance between the sex work of the present and the family of the past or future,

115 Rani Ma is a term used across India for old Maharani, it translates literally as Queen Mother and carries the same sort of honour and dignity attached to it as the term implies. Amrita, the NGO Tranny mentioned in the previous chapter was one of India’s first transgender activist; she is lovingly referred to as T-ran(i)ny ma by a lot of people. She was the one who introduced me to Mangu.
but also because that distance also bracketed the present. Mangu’s funeral was in her mind, if anything, a snapshot - an image that allowed her to bracket the misery and exploitation that she faced in the hands of her extortive kin. If the funeral had been as grand as she wanted it to be then it could have been seen as a signature to her life and the ultimate revenge. A signature that would have wrested her life back from the hands of her relatives in such a way that she was not seen as living an abject existence in which she had been rendered helpless in her attempt to provide her mother a decent life and funeral. Nadia Seremetakis reminds us that a good death is marked by a good funeral that further testifies to the good, or ethical life led by the dead person. A good funeral for Mangu, in a similar manner, would have been her signature, preventing a reading of her life as abject. I am now not sure whether I should see it as an instance of failure or success; the former because there were no fresh, expensive flowers or an expensive shroud, the latter because the snapshot made Mangu’s past/present somewhat bearable because in the certitude of a beautiful funeral she was never upset and dealt with the spongers in an enviably unruffled manner. Perhaps it is both and an instance of the modulation of the obscene destruction of the family that mortifies flesh and renders one animal.

Conclusion: Rooms and Ruins

If one cannot address kinship through land or land through kinship, the loss that fraternal violence implies could be seen as melancholia. The loss of an object, the intimacy between brothers, results in a fight that takes form through the substratum of

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116 Sophie Day, “Threading Time in the Biographies of London Sex Workers” in Ghosts of Memory: Essays on Remembrance and Relatedness, ed. Janet Carsten (Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2007) 185. Day continues to write, “The term “snapshot” suggests a distance for, close up, this family could never evoke such nostalgia or longing. Such a family never had existed, nor could it exist but, in the hugely segregated environment of sex work, pictures of past domesticity and intimacy were significant in orienting women towards a future that would be very different from the constraints of the present” (189).

property but not because of it. By this I mean that brothers will inevitably participate in or make gestures towards forms of fratricide, or in other words, will fight like dogs once they have their own families and their loyalties are divided. The hijra occupies the place of a pedagogical figure: she betrays in the present, rather than the future, and she does so to make the house livable. She turns away from becoming animal and asks her brothers to do the same, in this she adheres to laws that are not the laws of the land. The law of the land is that every householder becomes an animal at the hand of his sons, thus the battle the brother might have won is a preamble to the war that he will lose to his own children when he becomes an old man. To fight like dogs also means to become abject like the dog and then meaningless like the monkey and finally nothing, when even one’s voice is not heard. The hijra as a pedagogical figure shows that this becoming animal through adherence to kinship, which is the obscene destructiveness of the family, is not necessary and can be modulated, thus signalling towards the laws of preservation and sustenance.

Freud wrote in his iconic essay, “Mourning and Melancholia,” “[…] the patient is aware of the loss which has given rise to his melancholia, but only in the sense that he knows whom he has lost but not what he has lost in him.” 118 All the hijras in Bhadrak and Bhawanipatna were aware that they would lose the affection and loyalties of their brothers, attributed to their greed for land, and through that loss and greed they would also lose a certain form of intimacy. But the difference between the brothers and the hijras is the difference between mourning and melancholia. The brothers had new objects to love and take care of - in fact, it was because of these new objects in the form of wives and sons that this narrative of loss would take place. The hijra on the other hand would

not. For them, the loss remained as melancholia. This unapproachable quality of loss coded again and again in the phrase “now they have wives and children, they will have to look to or walk with their own family”, became available through ethnography.¹¹⁹

The brothers must have felt a loss as well, but not one that was unconscious. They were fighting but this fighting like dogs, or becoming animal, was excused, rendered understandable and even expected because they had to now walk with their own families. The hijras’ loss was inevitably melancholic for them because there was no reason made available to them that ratified this violence; or in other words, they could not understand why kinship mortified the flesh in the way it did. But I want to argue that their participation in kinship was what Leo Bersani has called a “subversive passivity.”¹²⁰ The hijras in Bhadrak, by remaining with their families and by participating in the institutions that reproduce the social, perhaps, just repeat the violence that is inherent in the oedipal drama. But this is a repetition that is different, in that it punctuates progress - kin does not become animal, but animals become kin, all become brothers, and the funeral of the future robs the present of its sting. Let me offer a comparison of two sets of rooms and ruins to clarify my point.

One malevolent night in Bhawanipatna, all of us had returned from the hot spot where hijras solicit customers irritated for some reason. We were getting on each other’s nerves and, very soon, squabbling broke out. We parted ways and Nandita and I ended up with each other. We sat on the road and she started speaking-

My parents didn’t educate me so I could not study. Two friends of mine and I, when we were little, had to steal from the market, stuff which we would later sell

and get things for the school - like a bag, pencil box and other things. Only if a child is given these things will he want to go to school, hai na? I was not given anything and my parents were not strict with me so I started doing whatever I do. I won’t lie to you but I used to steal a lot because my parents didn’t give me anything. Once I had asked my father to divide the land between us so that there was no fighting between us but my brothers who wanted my land came to me with a knife, saying they will kill me if I ask for my share. Only Dev [her nephew] protected me and only because I had given him five thousand rupees for his tuition. I am not like Damru, I have no guroor, [pride] I eat with what I earn – main apna paisa ka khaati hoon. My eldest brother’s wife has never slept with him, she has always slept with her Devar – my second brother. She stopped him from getting married and when he wanted to get married and have children- I told him listen get married, I will give you one lakh rupees’, but she stopped him and said, “Are my children not your children?” Dev, Robin and their two brothers call him Bappa [they call their younger paternal uncle ‘father’]. Isn’t that shameful? I would have left this place but what can I do, I have built this house, spent so much money- they will be happy to see me leave but why should I? I have built this house. I had put window-panes but my nephews broke that- they broke the sofa I bought, they broke everything - the cups and glasses, the windows and everything. They do nothing and are not even grateful that I give them food to eat everyday. You have seen how they are always lounging about sleeping in my bed all the time watching my television. They are eyeing my money. Since there was this motorcycle accident Dev is trying to get me to give him information about this account so that he can get the money but I am scared he will run away with the money. I can easily go to Jharsuguda to beg on the trains but I don’t want to leave my home behind, I have built it. Naina has asked me so many times to come to Jharsuguda to come beg with her and she is very nice and I can do it.

After some talk about something else she said,

When I went to Jharsuguda, Naina only took me once with her- don’t you think, that because she is my friend and she has brought me there she should show me the ways of how to beg. She should take me with her, but after just one day she told me to go with some other hijra whom I didn’t know.

VS: Why did she do that?

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121 Nandita’s husband took her scooty over the railway tracks and broke it, Nandita had to shell out 10,000 rupees to get it repaired and the insurance will now pay 5000 rupees for it but she is a bit skeptical about the promise of insurance, Dev, her nephew and Damru’s boyfriend had gone to Bhubaneshwar to get the spare part required and got it fixed and ran around for it and now wants the 5000 rupees but Nandita refuses to give her bank account information required to get the money sent so Dev is very angry and upset with her. Nandita fears that he will try to take away they money already deposited in the bank account. Dev stole her passport size photographs and threatens to open a bank account in her name, I think so that he can have the 5000 rupees of the insurance sent to that account and acquire the money. But Nandita refuses to give any information because she fears that he will get money transferred from her existing account to the new account and run away with all that money.
Nandita: Maybe because she would earn more money if she went alone and the thing is they have sex on the trains right? So she could not have sex in front of me because she is pretending to be sati (holier than thou) with me.

Nandita’s house consisted of four rooms and everybody slept there because she had got one of her lovers in the neighbourhood, an electrician to steal electricity from the nearby government transformer. The electricity meant that the television was always running and more importantly there was an air cooler for hot summer nights. Since everybody was lounging there, fights also took place resulting in everything being mostly broken. She could only extract support from her nephews because she was feeding them three square meals and paying for their expenses like travelling, tuition and clothes. She resented it but was helpless as to how she could consolidate her inheritance and her investments. The rooms she built was on a plot of land and hers were the only set that were built of bricks, the other two sets of rooms were under two huts and belonged to her two brothers. She wanted the land to be divided so that she could kick her family out but nobody was going to help her do that.

The other set of rooms, which were in ruins belonged to Bhawanipatna’s most beautiful hijra - my primary informant in whose house I lived during my fieldwork. Damru herself was badgered all the time by her family regarding land matters. She and her mother lived in one of two rooms, which constituted half the hut. I lived in the other room. The other half was where her sister lived. Her sister had fallen in love with a Muslim man and the man had been thrown away from the community. They both had showed up at Damru’s door and Damru had chosen to protect them. They now have a five year old kid. The neighbourhood revolted by blocking the entrance to their house with a thatched wall. To enter their house one had to take a twenty-minute walk and enter
from the back of the house, which was on the field where everybody went to shit. It was only when she got a tubewell fixed in her courtyard that the neighbourhood removed the wall because it was more convenient to get water from there than the government tubewell down the road. Damru was more than aware of this bitter compromise.

There were four rooms that were built besides the hut but they had no roofs, just bricks cemented into walls and partitions- there were no furniture, paint or lime to smoothen the walls, half built and in ruins. Damru’s mother would constantly ask her every morning to get them fixed and completed. I asked her why she wasn’t getting it fixed. She replied,

Look, once I get it fixed, my sister and brother-in-law will move here permanently. Now that the man and my sister have been accepted by his community because they have a child - nobody can fight their grandchild - they will sooner or later have to accept them. They are showing no signs of returning. Every week they say they will return but they are not returning. I know why. They want this land. Once I get these rooms fixed, they will move in there completely. My other sister whose husband has left her for an old ugly prostitute will also move in here. Then her husband will also return and they both will take over the land. What will I do? I am a hijra, no sons to take care of me or give my land to, they will kick me out. Now I have some land, they respect me, they need me, they need my money. But once they are here permanently who will protect me? Don’t they have money? Why can’t they build it themselves?

Both the houses were in ruins but while Nandita’s ruins offer a narrative of violent kinship, in that her hard work in building, painting and making her house inhabitable was treated with carelessness by her nephews, Damru’s ruins are anti-narrative. They were never completed or ever used and were already falling in disrepair. One of the rooms was used by everybody as a urinal and a trash dump - the past, present, and the future of those ruins were not very discernible. Her family continued to live in their old thatched hut next to it, divided by an almirah, and a hastily put together wall. While both of these hijras
were repeating the familial drama of fratricide, dispute over property and loss of intimacies, Damru’s ruins evoked Nandita’s ruins but with a promising difference.

Butler brings Freud closer to the scene that I am trying to analyze. She writes, “If in melancholia a loss is refused, it is not for that reason abolished. […] If the object can no longer exist in the external world, it will then exist internally, and that internalization will be a way to disavow the loss, to keep it at bay, to stay or postpone the recognition and suffering of loss.”122 I want to read the negotiations that the hijras set up with their families as this form of melancholia that defers the inevitable loss of land in the future. I suggest that Damru’s refusal to complete building the rooms, like Jaina’s betrayals, does repeat the narrative but with a difference that creates a temporal disturbance and domesticates the violence of the family.

The hijras’ participation in their families is one version of the momentous possibility that Bersani discovers for us. The trash-can within us, the fratricidal impulse, is inevitable for all of us, but there are ways to be noncruel, ways to modify the obscene destructiveness of the family. Jaina calibrates her demands made on her brothers and Damru defers the future when her sisters and brother-in-laws will kick her out of her house. Against Nandita’s realization that there is betrayal in every intimacy, familial and non-familial, Mangu, Mehraaj and Tappi offer forms of being which prevents brothers from becoming dogs, and teaches us to practice human kinship in a way to create a world where all are related, even animals, in the effervescent present, which is the best we can hope for in the face of an inevitably violent future.

Introduction: Part 2- Standing at a slight angle to the universe

One hot day, a man from OSACS (Orissa State AIDS Control Society) landed in Bhadrak to conduct a meeting with the hijras, in which he posed the question, “Who is a hijra?” The gathered hijras looked confused and he reformulated the question to ask, “What kind of human beings are called hijras?” Lakshmi said, “In the whole of Bhadrak, I am the only hijra who is real (asli). I am the only one born from mother’s stomach as a hijra.” Lakshmi was referring to being born with genitalia that was recognized as neither signifying male or female and that this fact of being hijra by birth and not through castration accorded her a lot of respect. She considered every other hijra as false (nakli).

While I was interviewing Anto and Bhatto, I asked them how many kids they have and after they answered, I asked them whether the kids were theirs. Anto answered an emphatic yes. Shonali who was sitting nearby, burst into laughter and said, “Look, with such pride she is saying she is the father of the children.” That same evening, when we were returning from Anto and Bhatto’s house she suddenly said disgustedly, “Are they hijras? Producing three- four kids… they’re just gandus, who would call them hijras?”

I asked her what is a real hijra then and she said, “those who don’t marry and have children.” Anto and Bhatto would not consider Jaina, Shamsher, Azgari, Akhtari or Mehraaj to be hijras because they did not wear saris but lungis (the sarong/loincloth worn by males). Jaina et al. would defend themselves and say that since they didn’t have to go begging on trains they did not have to wear saris. Furthermore, Jaina explained that

123 ‘Gandu’ might be translated as faggots or sodomites and is a common pejorative term used in South Asia towards homosexuals who liked to be fucked in their arse (gand). It is also a term used by hijras towards other hijras whom they perceived to not be hijras at all but just somebody who liked being fucked, in other words, hijras that they saw or felt as lacking a certain authenticity which was and could, as I will show, always be located elsewhere. Gandus are also what, pace Lawrence Cohen, the Indian everyman is forced to become vis-à-vis the political order. Gandus are thus abject subject positions, which offer no representation in the structure let alone hermeneutics.
while she and her friends wore lungis, they always wore blouses and not kurtas (shirts worn by men) and carried chunnis (the flowing garment worn by women) instead of wrapping a towel around themselves like men. Jaina said definitively, “People who are in the know will know we are hijras by even the little hint of a slip of a towel, we don’t need to wear saris like those prostitutes.”

The guru of the Jajpur household of hijras used to often chastise her celas (followers/disciples) and nati celas (followers of followers; grand followers as in grandchildren) by screaming that they were not hijras but just gandus because they would take such a long time to get castrated. She would say, “it is a matter of great shame when people in the market see them and they have penises as large as elephants’ trunks swinging between their legs.” Meanwhile her celas would disdain Shonali and the hijras of Bhadrak because, “They don’t have a guru, they have not intitated themselves into a gharana they are just gandus who beg on the trains.” According to the Jajpur hijras they had a right to beg on the train because they belonged to a proper hijra gharana.124

Madhubai who belonged to one of the oldest and most prestigious hijra gharana (household) in eastern India gave me her opinion. According to her and the hijras of her house and the other old, respected hijra houses in the country, the hijras who beg on the train were not considered real hijras, the real hijras were those who collected money at weddings, childbirths and other auspicious events like the inauguration of a new shop, or factory, or business venture.

124 Gharanas are usually translated as houses but not in the sense of a fixed domicile but in the sense of a lineage/dynasty/tradition. The closest example of using gharanas in social organization in South Asia would be the various gharanas of musical tradition, in which musicians are initiated and trained in interpretation and rendition of music/singing that is particular to and recognizable as being of that house. Gayatri Reddy whose ethnography I will rely on heavily throughout the dissertation translates gharana as house and that seems to be the closest we can get if we want to impart a sense of belonging and identity that membership in a Gharana affords.
The point I am making is that the hijra’s authenticity could not only be proven or disproven at multiple locations, but that those points themselves were subject to contestation and calibration.\textsuperscript{125} Lawrence Cohen writes in, “The Pleasures of Castration: The Postoperative Status of Hijras, Jankhas and Academics”, “when I first started learning from and reading about hijras, I was struck by the centrality of the rhetoric of the false hijra, and of the power of this hijra insight in writing against the appropriation and misreading of the radically regendered body by those with perhaps less at stake.” Cohen concludes this essay by arguing that instead of looking at non-castrated bodies as either a way station or false hijras, we might actually see it as “coherence to pleasures which grow out of [one’s] community’s performative traditions.”\textsuperscript{126} More than a decade later, Cohen offers a much more succinct explanation of the relation between asli and nakli hijras. He writes, “The anthropology of hijra life has tended to portray the relation between true hijras (who are intersexed or have had the operation, or have been accepted into the community by a hijra guru) and false hijras (who dress and dance as women but are not a third gender, or have not been accepted into the community) in terms of denunciation. But the border between authentic and inauthentic hijra embodiment, or belonging, is as much an improvisational exercise in creating a form of life under varied conditions of patronage and violence as it is a difference constitutive of sexual ethnicity.”\textsuperscript{127}

While Cohen disabuses us from seeking an authentic hijra we are still left with the

\textsuperscript{125} The problem of authenticity belies a deeper problem of classification, which I do not have the space to address here, but for an inkling please see the lucidly written article by Vinay Lal, "Not this, not that: The hijras of India and the cultural politics of sexuality." \textit{Social Text} (1999): 119-140.
task of qualifying the hijra’s asceticism. I should hasten to add that the hijras are not the only population whose asceticism is not easily discernible. Michael Carrithers in his study of Buddhist ascetics of Sri Lanka wrote, “One anthropologist was driven to describe the Sangha’s salient characteristics as ‘amorphousness’, by which I think he meant its perpetual division into small units- individual monks, single monasteries, or at most small groups of monks related by pupillary succession and only notionally attached to any larger group.” The same definition could be very aptly and accurately describe the way hijras organize themselves into households under gurus who could trace their belonging to one of the seven documented hijra gharanas. Extending Das’s argument about ascetics being able to force a relationship between themselves and god and extend her argument to claim that the ascetic lubricates the relationship between the various actors of the social- the king, the brahman, and the householder- by the intensity of their ascetic practices. The third chapter is a demonstration of that lubrication.

In the previous two chapters I put forward the idea that the hijra enters and participates in the social diagonally, following the tangential trajectory of a ray, touching but not crossing points. I found it an appropriate metaphor because if we take the tangent back to its mathematical roots in trigonometry then the ray is what forms triangles. The hijra was located similarly and triangulated the duality of man and woman. If two points determine a line and three, a plane, then demarcated difference is dependent on a third point, or planar surface. In other words, it is only through the third point, one can establish the distinction between the two points establishing a line, thus enabling man and

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128 Sangha usually refers to a community of Hindu, Buddhist or Jain ascetics, mendicants.
woman to be determined as distinct locations as opposed to existing on a continuum.

The shorthand “third gender” affixed to the hijra testifies to this triangulation and the tangent to the relationship they have to the opposite and the adjacent (sexes). Apart from a convenient if not clarifying mathematical metaphor, I offered the relationship between the human and the animal as the interpretive valence of the hijra’s diagonal participation. I suggested that while she allowed her lovers to become animal in the fucking fields to return as human to the domestic hearth, she allowed her brothers to remain human, instead of becoming the animals that householders do. Veena Das shifts the divide between human and animal to domestic and wild. One is sacrificed and the other is hunted. Humans are seen related to pashu (domestic animals) and in making this shift, Das argues for a difference between nonviolence [ahimsa] and non-cruelty [anrhamṣya] to be taken seriously; for her, the difference gathers force “from the fact that a disposition is generated through the experience of togetherness.”

The summary of Das’s argument is that while the dharma of nonviolence disavows intimacy of any kind; the dharma of non-cruelty arises from the relational. The difference is necessary because if one follows the rule on nonviolence then one would not be able to live since one would not be able to eat, the resultant melancholia from such inevitable loss and damnation is mitigated by non-cruelty. One might be damned for living but one’s irrational affinities still have a force, an energy that makes one act caringly. In the third chapter, I shall borrow Das’s argument of non-cruelty that is necessarily taught through intimacy with animals to argue that the hijra in some sites and moments becomes the animal to impart precisely this pedagogic lesson.

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Before proceeding, it might be helpful to remind ourselves of the debate that took place in the late 1950s between the anthropologist G.M. Carstairs and Morris E. Opler in which the former contended that hijras were male prostitutes while the latter argued that they were ritual specialists. The fact that they are both of the above forces us to explicate the relationship between eroticism and asceticism that is at once familiar and not. Wendy Doniger demonstrated that the most obvious figure who offers the clearest instance of the braiding of eroticism and asceticism is the Hindu god Shiva. However, he can hardly be the exemplar for the hijras given that the economy of semen is reversed. Shiva’s asceticism or retention of semen leads to his eroticism and makes his semen fertile when and where he sheds it. The complementarity of eroticism and asceticism of the hijra is not one of retention to make more fertile when shed, but the opposite. They are ascetic not only because they refuse to shed the seed ever but also because they absorb and consume the semen of others. Thus their asceticism stems from their eroticism, whereas for Shiva, the eroticism is the result of his ascetic practices.

We might look for the hijras’ asceticism elsewhere or, in other words, the work her asceticism does must be something else if it is not making her seed more fertile. Doniger also notes that, “These Indian ascetics are after power, not goodness - and they are after it for their own use; they win something, but they do not grow into anything; they possess something new, but who they are does not become something new. They

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exist in “nontime” or “collapsed time.”” This definition not only positions the hijra as taking part in, or as an exemplar of Edelman’s thesis of a non-heteronormative temporality but also takes further the interpretive merit of the images that I have invoked in the previous chapters. The diagonal entrance to the social, which allows for a relationship between the human within the animal and the animal within the human in men, which in turn allows for respite from the social and preserves the hijra’s brothers and lovers for the world can also be seen as allowing a certain break in the heteronormative temporal unfolding of the life projects of householders. The last chapter of this dissertation will demonstrate how the hijras’ asceticism and eroticism makes her live in what Doniger has called collapsed time.

Sophie Day hints at what this collapsed time might offer and imply when she points out the similar temporal undulations of asceticism and eroticism in the lives of sex workers. She observes that, “While many women [sex workers] sustained relationships with the world they had left over significant periods of time, they also abandoned the effort of stitching together the past and future with the present, the far away with the close at hand, and they joined an alternative counter-public.” Day adds in the footnote at the end of the sentence cited above that she is using the term counter-public “in

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133 Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 65-6. I must mention that elsewhere in the book Doniger briefly mentions the feminization of asceticism but not in the context of Shiva. She writes on page 44, “‘In popular folklore in India today, it is believed that when a yogi retains his seed, the seed is transformed into milk; “Semen of good quality is rich and viscous, like the cream of unadulterated milk” (Carstairs 1958, pp. 83-84). The yogi actually develops breasts, just as a pregnant woman does when her “seed” (i.e., menstrual blood) is obstructed. It is also said that the yogi becomes “pregnant” as his stomach swells with the retained seed.” The yogi thus becomes like a productive female when he reverses the flow of his male fluids.” I refrained from discussing this passage because Doniger’s aim is to show the transsubstantiality of milk, which can transform into both, semen and breast milk. Furthermore given that her ascetics have amogharetas, they don’t help us understand the hijra’s asceticism or eroticism but do help us to a certain extent understand Shiva’s transgenderism.

reference to Warner’s (2002) definition rather than Fraser’s (1990), connoting a non reproductive stance towards both biological and social reproduction.”135 The point that I am trying to make with this rather turgid reading of Sophie Day’s work is not just that anthropology offers us glimpses of Edelman’s non-heteronormative temporality, but also, and perhaps more importantly that the sexuality advocated by Edelman also finds itself articulated precisely via asceticism. This is not mere co-incidence and the final observation that I borrow from Days work is her comparison of sex workers to religious ascetics, with both of them sharing similar ideas of freedom that emerge from inhabiting such forms of collapsed time. Day writes,

Sex workers’ views of freedom might be compared, however to highly valued religious and secular practices of transcendence in the Western imagination such as those associated with solitary religious ascetics, performers, or competitive sports. Such values indicate that a sense of coercion attaches inevitably, in our view, to the long-term relationships we inhabit. They show that our idioms of freedom delineate a non-relational and, at time, nonreproductive world as much as a social world of equals.136

I don’t need to compare asceticism to sex work because hijras are both ascetics and sex workers at the same time, a fact that seemed impossible for Carstairs and Opler to imagine. But I do offer in the last chapter a certain picture of the freedom that comes from collapsed time, or non-heteronormative temporality. I replace Day’s sartorial metaphor and argue that the life process, and thus time, as experienced by the hijras can be seen as an unfolding of a mystical design, and though one cannot be aware of the final image or purpose of this design, it rendered the present, as free from the weight of the past, the future or the ‘after’ of sex as, a possibility, even if that possibility were unimaginable.

135 Ibid., 831, note 21.
136 Ibid., 830.
Chapter 3- Something Rotten in the State

Hijras in the district headquarters of Bhadrakh, Jajpur, Balasore, Cuttack and Khorda often fought amongst themselves regarding in which trains could each group of hijras beg. These fights, which would often turn physically very violent, were resolved by the hijras themselves by calling a committee of elder hijra gurus who did not beg on the same trains to arbitrate and pass judgment. The trains at the heart of these disputes plied the eastern coast of India between the cities of Guwahati and Hyderabad and went through Orissa’s railways stations of Balasore, Jala sore, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Cuttack, Khorda and Bhubaneshwar. One confrontation was settled after it was decided the train called Falaknama SuperFast Express would be divided in the following manner- Shonali and her celas (disciples) would beg on the train from Balasore to Bhadrak, while the hijras from Bhadrak would beg on the train from Bhadrak to Cuttack and the hijras from Cuttack would beg on the train from Cuttack to Khurda. Since the passengers would not pay each group of hijras that would come aboard the trains in a single trip, the days of the week were divided as well. Thus, one group would beg on that particular train, in this case, Falaknama SF express, on Monday, another group on Tuesday, another group on Wednesday and so on and so forth till all the days that the train travelled were covered. Fighting would usually break out during the months when there were more days than groups and each group would want an extra day, or in other words an extra train. Since Falaknama ran seven days a week, it was a particular bone of contention for the hijras of Orissa.

Superfast or Express trains that travelled between large cities were especially lucrative because not only did they transport a large number of passengers but these trains
carried passengers who were more rich. Since the Superfast and Express trains ply between large metropolis and because they cater to a middle class population in air-conditioned bogies, the hijras could coerce them to part with larger amounts of money – fifty rupees, if the person was travelling alone or ten rupees per person if there was a vacationing family. Thus a group of hijras may travel from the town they live in, for example, Bhadrak, and beg on the Falaknama on Tuesdays and Thursdays going down to Cuttack, and then they might have to wait for a local train which ferried the local population to and from the state capital to the district headquarters. The riders of crowded local trains, usually the poorer rural population, would not part with their limited resources readily as they were not as easily intimidated by the hijras. The hijras might get, at most, Rs. 5 per person. Thus, the fights would usually be over gaining control of the superfast and express trains by the various groups of hijras. A usual day of earning money would consist of getting on a local or superfast express trains early in the morning between 5 am and 7am, collecting money till the decided designation- for hijras in Jajpur it would be till Bhadrak and for hijras in Bhadrak it would be till Cuttack. Hijras of Jajpur, henceforth called the Jajpurias, would then relax under some trees at the Bhadrak railway station and then take a local train back to Jajpur, begging as they went, where they would have lunch and a siesta and repeat the procedure with two other trains in the evening, from 6 pm to 11 pm.

The fights would usually happen in the Bhadrak railway station when and where the Jajpurias would be relaxing. They were often accosted and attacked by the hijras of Bhadrak, henceforth Bhadrakalis, if they had gone begging on trains that had not been assigned to them. Begging on somebody else’s train would be called *gari maarna*
(stealing the train) and it was an easy and often committed infraction. Even if the Jajpurias were assigned a train, for example, the Coromandel Express, it would have to run through Bhadrak first if it was going south, and the Bhadrakalis could easily get on that train by skipping lunch and taking a local train up to Balasore, collecting the money from the passengers from Balasore to Bhadrak, then getting off and hiding at home. Fights would also ensue if a power vacuum was perceived among the hijra gurus. For instance, fights broke out when Shonali, the hijra guru based in Jaleswar, took on several hijras in Bhadrak who were without a guru till 2009 as her celas, thereby increasing her authority over four districts in Orissa and challenging the once strong Jajpurias. In fact, Shonali even convinced several hijras from Jajpur to leave their guru and join her gharana.

When I reached the field, I had asked Mangu, one of the Bhadrakalis to take me on the trains with her. She agreed, but when I reached the station she had told me to come back another day, and to wear a sari when I did. She said I looked very unconvincing as a hijra in salwaar kameez. When I came back a few days later in a sari, she asked me whether I would be able to fight if the passengers refused to give money and created trouble. I replied that I wouldn’t and she looked a bit worried and said that she would take me on the local train later in the evening. I sensed her reluctance and while I was walking back I ran into the Jajpurias, who were having some snacks waiting for their train back. They said that they would take me begging on the trains- “we even take our lovers when they don’t have money for their tickets. You are a hijra, we can take you easily, this is how we teach young hijras when they first come.” After a week, I asked the guru of the Jajpur house to ask her celas to take me begging on the trains and she told her
celas in front of me, “take her with you and ask with pyar aur santi (love and peace) don’t start a fight.” I got ready and a bunch of us walked to the train station but when the train came I found myself alone with a visibly miffed Lovely. I asked her what the matter was and she said, “Look, Guruma said she would take you on the train so she should have taken you, you are new, so you cannot fight or handle the passengers if they start to create trouble, so obviously, whoever goes with you will earn less, because they will have to see how much they can take without creating any trouble. What if they fight, how will you protect yourself? Guruma should have taken you, she earns more than everybody else because we all give her a part of our earning every day. I don’t mind taking you but I won’t be able to earn that much alone, and they all left me, saying you are my friend so I should take the responsibility. How will I earn? Why will the passengers give me money if I don’t threaten them? Not even a mother feeds a child if the child doesn’t cry.”

Lovely fell silent, and after a few minutes I said, “Listen, I don’t want to create trouble and I won’t be able to fight so why don’t you go alone and I’ll go home.” I insisted on leaving and the train had arrived so Lovely didn’t have much time to disagree. What had been glossed as begging in the literature I had read and seemed such an obvious concept to translate slowly began to unfold as an incredibly complex transaction. I finally went begging on the trains with Shonali and the chapter’s ethnography comes from those travels. Shonali pooh-poohed all my concerns about fighting and said she could handle everything and she has taught many hijras before. “Look at Paayal,” she said, “She is now getting on trains without fear, when she first came, she would not say anything, would not ask anything and would walk holding the end of my sari, hiding behind me.” I went begging ten times with Shonali and four times later with Biju and
Anto, before I had an accident, which put an end to my begging on trains. I should hasten to add that I am using the word begging in this introduction as a heuristic or as shorthand. Given that the majority of the literature on hijras translates the transactions that take place in the trains between hijras and the passengers as begging, there is some merit in using the word, since it introduces us to the broad category of economic exchange that is the mainstay of a hijra’s income. However, I will complicate the use of the word and further differentiate it from the way other economic transactions are seen and studied in order to argue that the way hijras talk about begging hints at a different corner of the moral economy. By moral economy I am referring to exchanges and transactions that include money changing hands but are necessarily mediated by notions of purity and pollution; and actors here include not only priests but also ancestral spirits, gods, and goddesses. Part of the moral economy is the economic relationship between the householder and the ascetic, or the king and the brahman that governs the status of the donor’s soul. The next section will look at these circuits of exchange.

**Dana, Dakshina, and Dalali**

One of the ways in which the issue of begging divided the community was repeatedly told to me by the hijras who were members of the traditional hijra gharanas. I met Dolly just once but when she found out who my friends were her face screwed up in disdain and disgust. She said, “We don’t think they are hijras, those who beg on the trains. They have no honour and are just *gandus*.”¹³⁷ For the hijras like Dolly, who belong

¹³⁷ Lawrence Cohen in his article, “Song for Pushkin” *Daedalus*, Spring 2007 writes that, “there are true (asli) hijras, and there are false (nakli) ones. The anthropology of hijra life has tended to portray the relation between true hijras (who are intersexed or have had the operation, or have been accepted into the community by a hijra guru) and false hijras (who dress and dance as women but are not a third gender, or have not been accepted into the community) in terms of denunciation. But the border between authentic and inauthentic hijra embodiment, or belonging, is as much an improvisational exercise in creating a form of life under varied conditions of patronage and violence as it is a difference constitutive of sexual ethnicity.”
to these old, respected, established hijra households with large numbers of celas and nati-celas, whose right to take money at weddings and childbirths was undisputed and even protected by the police, begging on the train was an activity that was shameful. The hijras who did beg on the trains and were comfortable doing so would never use the word begging to describe what they did, which is what leads me to believe that begging is not the correct word for the transaction. The other hijras who would often express the shame they felt from begging were those who were skeptical about the hijra community’s moral right to the money and would yearn for a more secure source of income - like Masterani. Or, they would be like Nandita, Damru, and Suman, who were ashamed of begging but not of earning money through sex work, where they said they had staked their bodies and “worked hard” to earn money.

The hijras considered - or accused - of being nakli, or false, because of begging on the trains, and more recently at traffic signals, would disavow the shame through the use of the phrase challa mangna. They would say, “X challa mangne gayi hai” or “gadi mangne gayi hai” (she’s gone to ask train). The substitution of challa and gaadi with bheek (alms) would not require the grammatical structure of the sentence to be changed;

Related to denunciations is the haloed economy of izzat (respect/honour). Please see Gayatri Reddy’s ethnography for a magnificent charting of the economy of honour and shame as it pertains to hijra aspirations and accusations. Gandu is a pejorative term and its use by hijras for each other strips them of all respectability/izzat accorded by asceticism, ritual practice, and spiritual power and reduces them to their desire for getting fucked.

it would read with substitution as “X bheek mangne gayi hai” (She’s gone to ask for alms) or “bheek mangne gayi hai” (She’s gone begging). While there is no syntactical dissonance created with the substitution, a semantic difference is highlighted with the use of bheek. First of all, nobody ever said, bheek mangne gayi hai (she’s gone begging) upon casual enquiry about a person’s whereabouts. “Bheek” was used by hijras like Dolly who wanted to assert their authenticity and denounce the falseness of other hijras. Nandita, Damru, and Suman used it to make their discomfort felt in asking for money that they did not feel they had earned through hard work. Suman would say, “I feel very ashamed to ask for bheek, why should I ask them, when god has given me a body, I can work hard and eat, they [the passengers] might also wonder and ask- why should we give her money when she has her hands and feet.” Finally, bheek was used by Masterani to associate the shame of begging with its instability. She was looking for a job in an NGO and when I told her that salaries don’t come frequently or on time at NGOs, she acceded to my point but didn’t revise her position on begging.

Let me give an instance of the semantic difference between the use of the word challa and bheek as it became clear through the explicatory use of the word haq. Some activists from Bangalore and New York ended up in an NGO office in the district headquarter town of Bhadrak to talk to some hijras. Lovely, Jaina, Anto, Bhatto, a few others, and I were asked to come talk to them. I will not analyze the conversation here but on hearing the fact that one of them was a lawyer, Lovely asked, “Do the hijras have the haq to ask for challa on the trains or not? -hijra log ko train mein challa mangne ka haq hai ki nahi hai? ” The man who had come from Bangalore answered that according to India’s laws the hijras don’t have the right to beg for money.” Lovely looked highly
unconvinced but didn’t say anything in reply and tuned out of the rest of the conversation. The reason why Lovely looked unconvinced at the lawyer’s answer is because regardless of the colonial and modern history of policing and criminalizing of the hijras in public spaces, the practice of collecting *challa* (begging on the trains), *badai* (begging at weddings and childbirth), and performing at religious festivals in public spaces has persisted. The failure to police and discourage hijras from practicing their occupations is similar to the failure of contemporary efforts to make the hijra more respectable in terms of their economic activity. Scholars have argued that the failure to police hijras is primarily because of the fractured nature of colonial policing and governmentality.\(^{139}\) Without either bolstering or discounting this argument, I want to suggest that there is another reason why hijras themselves have persisted in collecting money through performances, blessings and curses in the public space. These failures, or from the perspective I would like to offer, this insistence on the right to collect money, such as Lovely’s, can be understood only through the notion of *haq* that not only renders what they do on trains different from begging but also implies different stakes in giving up such a right. This argument becomes clearer when we look at what the hijra is willing to do to collect the money she believes rightly belongs to her.\(^{140}\)

One day, Rekha was removing a large pin from her sari and I asked her why she used such a large one and she said, “If there is ever a fight in the train, then to protect ourselves, we can take a pin out and poke them.” She also told me that that morning a

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young man travelling on the train told her that he did not have any change and she told him that she would give him change after she had finished collecting money from the rest of the bogie. He gave her a five hundred rupee note and she tucked it in her blouse and ran away without giving him the change she promised. Rekha ended recounting this story by saying, “Why should I give back the money that belongs to hijras? hijralog ka paisa wapas kyon denge?” The similarity between the hijra’s sense of the money, properly belonging to them like the citizen’s money properly belongs to the state, forces one to read challa not so much as part of the moral circuit of begging, which I shall discuss below, but in terms of ethical payment of taxes, to which they have a right, or haq.

The third incident that made collecting challa similar to collecting taxes took place in a train that was plying between Bhadrak and Jaleswar. Shonali and I had gone begging one day and after making our way through the train we reached the last of the second-class bogies. The second and the first class compartments are usually cordoned off and kept apart so one cannot hop from a second-class bogie to the first class cars. Hijras are not allowed by the police to beg in the first class. I had stayed behind at the entrance of the last second-class car to take notes, waiting for Shonali to turn around and return to me given that it was the last “open” bogie. I saw a man step out of the loo and on seeing Shonali returning, exclaim “Arre baba!” and go back to hide inside the loo. Shonali came back and asked the man’s friend to give her some money, and when he refused, she abused him and physically harassed him by throwing her body’s full weight on his lap. The friend came out of the loo and said, “I don’t like them at all, they take money from you by force, and if you don’t give it to them, they will abuse you.” What
struck me as similar about collecting *challa* and collecting taxes was the way the man evaded Shonali. He, like the other passengers did not question why hijras should be given money but tried to get out from or escape paying them. I shall build on this subtle difference to qualify the logic of exchange that took place between the hijras and the passengers. Also, what seemed odd was the manner in which the man felt threatened by the abuses and light physical harassment when he could have retaliated blow by blow and overpowered the hijra with the help of his fellow passengers.

I want to begin studying the transactions in the train by comparing it with *Dana*. “*Dana*, translated as gift, generosity, gift-giving, alms and hospitality, describes a key religious practice of making merit as well as a central social value of hospitality widely affirmed in South Asian religion.”141 Jonathan Parry has argued in his article, “On the Moral Perils of Exchange” that the passing of sins is central to a certain set of economic exchanges in Hinduism and affects various other forms of exchanges that constitute the economy of the local moral and economic world of Benares. *Dana* as understood by Parry is the gift given to the funerary priests who perform rituals to transform “the malevolent ghosts of the unincorporated dead (*preta*)” and rituals towards “the incorporated ancestors (*pitras*)”.142 Given that the ideal moral transaction would entail the priest give away what he received as *dana* “with increment” -because as a renouncer he cannot concern himself with accumulation of wealth- is impossible. The exchanges between the priest and the donor offer us a glimpse of how the moral person is split to

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facilitate an economy. There are two moral-temporal orders at work here, those of artha and dharma.

The term artha refers not only to the realm of politico-economic power which is the third of the four conventionally enumerated goals of human existence, but more generally also has the sense of ‘means’. Thus artha, as material and coercive power, is the ‘means’ by which man may attain the sensual delights of kama and sustain the moral order of dharma. What Hindu thought rejects is that these means should become the ultimate end. Artha must be pursued in conformity with the hierarchically superior dictates of dharma. [...] the strict disjunction between the two realms- and the thoroughgoing ideological subordination of the politico-economic domain-cuts it loose from its moral moorings and deprives it of real meaning. [...] Denied ‘the slightest value or intellectual interest’, almost anything goes; and to a significant extent it is this devaluation which condemned the Indian polity to perpetual instability. By only a slight extension of the same argument, we can see that commerce suffers a similar semantic impoverishment, and the condemnation of its abuses is consequently robbed of real force. Emptied of moral content it cannot be a major source of moral peril.\(^{143}\)

So for example, while the transactions that the priest conducts are beset with moral peril (they have to digest the sins of the donor and the death pollution of the dead), the transactions of the trader is not because “the acquisition of commercial wealth is a legitimate and laudable objective, but it is one which is ultimately justified by the generosity with which it is then disbursed.” The acquisition of wealth through rapacious and unscrupulous means is allowed for the trader because it is his jati-dharma, his code of conduct, but he too must eventually dispense of the wealth by giving them to the priest to cleanse himself of sins. Parry reminds us that the king too, like the trader is split, “The traditional Indian is recognised as having much in common with the bandit; and it is by violence, conquest and plunder that he is supposed to fund the sacrifice, or the gifts which replace it”.\(^{144}\)

\(^{143}\) ibid., 83
\(^{144}\) Ibid., 80 and 81
The orders of dharma and artha are relevant because it will determine the legitimacy of the hijras’ right to collect money from passengers in trains - mostly coercively, but not always. For the present, I cite Parry’s work to differentiate, dana from the hijras’ collection of challa, which did not follow the circuits of moral perils. The dana that the Mahabrahman priests in Benares were collecting came with a certain moral charge of expunging the sins of the donor; no such meaning was ever referred to by the hijras in relation to challa. Parry’s ethnography makes the point that the priest cannot pass on the dana with an added increment because not only does he have to provide for his family, he also has no other source of income, a failure to follow a rule resulting from the dual temporal orders of morality- of artha and dharma.\textsuperscript{145} Jenny Huberman whose research was also based in Benares wrote on the young boys and girls who worked as tour guides for foreign visitors, and compared the moral perils of Dana as Parry has studied it with the Dalali that the young people did. She translates Dalali as “both the business of commission or brokerage work and the commission itself.”\textsuperscript{146} Huberman’s ethnography argues that Dalali or commercial work was morally perilous as well, similar in some ways to the dana that Parry has studied. Huberman’s drawing of these similarities troubles the divide between the artha and dharma, a divide that both the anthropologists have noted to not be clear in the first place given that both artha and dharma have a bearing upon each other. This is a moot point but it has implications that

\textsuperscript{145} Parry writes, “The root of the problem, however, is that in the real world the professional priest is constrained to retain most of what he receives- and the greater the disproportion between receipts and disbursements the greater the burden of accumulated sin. It is the money and goods, which are siphoned out of the flow of exchange by being, retained which are really barren, and which infect the family fortunes with their evil sterility, ‘when you give seventeen annas having taken sixteen, then that is auspicious (shubha). From this no shortage will result. But if you do not give (in this way), then there will always be a continual decline…” in Parry, “Moral Perils,” 78.

qualify what kind of earning is justified, which in turn is relevant to study the legitimacy of collecting *challa*.

Huberman notes the following similarities between *dana* and *dalali*. The first is that the money earned from both forms of exchange is barren. She writes, “… like the proceeds of *dana*, the commissions (dalali) these boys earned were also described as forms of ‘bad’ (galat) or ‘barren’ money- people in the neighbourhood of Dasashwamedh frequently maintained that they could not save this money or put it to productive use.”\(^{147}\) The barrenness of the money stemmed from the fact that it was polluted by the sinful manner in which it was earned. Given that the young boys sometimes earned the money by selling drugs, Huberman’s informants reiterated that the harm caused to the tourists, and by extension to the tourists’ families through drug use, cursed the money to be barren for the children. Secondly, as Huberman notes that “some people explained that guiding was a form of cheating because it was predicated upon lies and deceit. In the first instance, tourists were led to believe that these boys were interested in establishing friendships with them when in reality they were concerned with doing business. And in the second instance, it was pointed out that tourists were coaxed into paying high prices for relatively worthless goods.”\(^{148}\) And finally because “sporting fashionable clothes and chaperoning tourists through the bazaar, often sharing meals and movies, seemed a far cry from the work world of the *ghats*, where the Mallah livelihoods were secured with calloused hands and physical labour” the money earned through *dalali* was “talked about

\(^{147}\) Huberman, 401.

\(^{148}\) Ibid., 410-1
as a kind of unearned income, qualitatively different form the money of hard work (mehnat ka paisa).”

Huberman’s point in drawing these similarities is that money earned from dalali or commercial work had the potential to become polluted and barren just like dana, but the analogy breaks down. Dana carries with it the sins of the giver to be purified by the Brahmans but none of the tourists who conducted any form of economic exchanges in Huberman’s ethnography were suffering from death pollution. While Huberman might be correct in pointing out the similarity in the barrenness of the money collected through Dana and Dalali, Parry himself locates the difference between these transactions elsewhere. Using the notion of the gift as studied by Mauss, he writes, “Where we have the ‘spirit’ reciprocity is denied; where there is reciprocity there is not much evidence of ‘spirit.’” In other words, the effect of pollution on the money that is accrued through Dana and Dalali might be the same but the sites of the pollution are different; for Dana it is the death pollution that the priest has to ingest while for Dalali it is the pollution of the immoral transactions themselves that the youth undertake. My point in offering such an extensive elaboration is to differentiate challa from both Dana and Dalali. None of the aforementioned arguments were even remotely raised in connection with the challa either by the hijras or by the men of Bhadrak that used to travel on those trains, weekly to Calcutta to collect goods to be sold in the village market. The money collected was never seen as tainted, polluted, or barren, even though hijras sometimes cheated and often coerced the passengers. The reason for that was because the money, according to all the

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149 Huberman, 414 and 413-4.
150 Jonathan Parry, "The gift, the Indian gift and the 'Indian gift'." Man (1986): 463.
hijras I ever spoke to, rightly belonged to them and the passengers in refusing or hesitating to give them the money were the ones cheating.

The hijras worked very hard to earn their money, getting up at the crack of dawn to get ready to jump onto trains. Getting ready entailed bathing, putting on make up, wearing clean, gaudy saris, and hiding large pins, in case a stubborn passenger got violent. It was also labor performed in the wake of another pile of social work negotiating a form of being, so it isn't bound to the train itself. Since the trains stopped in Jajpur and Bhadrak early in the morning, the hijras would travel first from their home to the town where their jurisdiction had been allotted and then take another train back. They would quickly have lunch and rest and get on another train in the late afternoon and similarly travel back from the allocated town. They would return to have dinner and crash, only to repeat the entire journey the next day. Since collecting *challa* from the trains also meant that they would have to travel through all the compartments, they were always on their feet and rarely paused for rest. Neither were they whimsical regarding the number of times they went to collect *challa*. They dutifully got up and went to collect *challa* everyday, and when they missed the train because it was hard to get up from bed in the early winter mornings, they would sulk and say, “I missed the train.” In fact, fieldwork initially was very difficult given the tight schedule the hijras followed, because it left very little free time for them to lounge about and chat with me. It was only when I started travelling with them on the trains that I realized how packed and exhausting their working day was. When they were not on trains, they were cooking, cleaning dirty dishes, washing clothes, or mending their houses. The hard work they did was often implicit not only in their schedules but also in the manner senior hijras blessed the junior
hijras. Whenever a cela wanted to go settle somewhere else if the hijra guru allowed, the
guru would give her blessing by saying khato aur khao- work hard and eat.

This blessing would be used in different circumstances as well, for example, if a
cela wanted to leave the hijra guru’s house, she would have to pay a fine and then would
be blessed, khato aur khao and allowed to leave. The hijras would often proclaim their
legitimacy by saying, “we don’t eat at the mercy of somebody else, we work hard and
eat- humlog kisi ka nahin khaate hai, khat ke khate hai.” Thus, the money collected was
neither seen as tainted with the sins of the passengers nor was it seen as accruing
pollution or barrenness by being earned in the manner Huberman has detailed. It was
seen as earned through hard work, and if harm was caused in the process of earning then
it was because their haq was being breached or they were being denied what they saw as
rightfully belonging to them. While the money earned was not seen as transferring
pollution, the hijra in some ways was similar to the Brahmans in that she could negotiate
the relationship between god and the householder - by cursing the men with
impotence/childlessness but also death to the householder’s children - for an exchange of
money. This partial similarity between the hijra and the brahman rotates around the figure
of the sanyasi, the ascetic renunciate who is sometimes structurally opposed to the
brahman and sometimes parallel to him.151

The hard work that went into collecting challa is not what prevents it from being
recognized as a form of begging. James Staples in the context of begging undertaken by
lepers has remarked on the long hours of labor undertaken by them in less than salubrious
conditions that included the inclement weather and hostile police. I want to juxtapose the

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151 Please see Chapter 2- “On the Categories Brahman, King and Sanyasi” in Veena Das’s monograph
I shall be discussing the figure of the Sanyasi later in this section.
begging undertaken by lepers as studied by James Staples with the collecting of *challa* as undertaken by hijras, not only to draw on similarities which would qualify the hijra as an ascetic because she feels she is deserving of a share of the other person’s earnings but also on differences that distinguish them from lepers and other recipients of *Dakshina*. *Dakshinas* are a supplement to *dana*, and not always synonymous and is given to various figures associated with the temple economy, such as lepers.\(^{152}\) Dakshinas denote “the end of the cycle of activities” associated with sacrificial voyage and terminates the relationship between the priest and the householder/king. Only after the Dakshina is given is the person who authorized the sacrifice allowed to “take the fruits of the action.”\(^{153}\)

The deformed body of the leper is crucial not only in legitimizing his or her begging but also because the deformity can be exaggerated in the theatrically performed act of begging, thereby eliciting more pity and consequently resulting in higher earnings. James Staples writes, “The recognizable effects of leprosy socially legitimated the use of their bodies in practice, like begging, that elicited moral disapprobation outside the context of religious mendicancy…People knew that they could enhance their earnings as beggars by exposing the physical signs of leprosy, but this was seen as compensation for the affliction they had suffered […]”\(^{154}\) The body of the hijra even when not seen as deformed did play a crucial role in the money they extracted from the passengers in the train. Paayal told me that when she goes on the train, the young boys would often tease and ask, “Sister, how come you don’t have breasts? *Didi, aapke chaati kyon nahin hai?*

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\(^{154}\) James Staples, “Disguise, Revelation and Copyright: Disassembling the South Indian Leper” in *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 9, no. 2 (June, 2003), 299.
Paayal used to clap her hands and said, “If hijras had breasts what would be the use of having girls in this world?” The body of the hijra would often result in puzzlement rather than pity, I was often asked by random strangers, who were told by shopkeepers that I used to live with hijras - “Is the top part of their body female and the lower part male, or is the lower part of the body female and the top part male? Do they have a hole down there but cannot produce children?” The hijra body is also put into display when collecting *challa* by being wrapped in gaudy saris and decked in jewellery. Apart from the clothes and jewellery, the hijra body also announces itself by the distinctive clapping called *thigri* and the threatening stance taken by the loud voice demanding money- no obsequiousness beseeching for alms here. But this threatening stance is calibrated according to other influencing factors such as the strength that comes from begging in numbers. Let me explain this further.  

One evening Bhatto, Anto, Varsha and I were drinking. Bhatto started recounting how when they would get bored on the trains while begging or when they would not get as much money as they wanted, they would start pretending like they had severe physical deformities, not only to laugh at the passengers recoiling in disgust but to also increase their collection. Amidst loud peals of laughter from everybody, Bhatto showed how people would screw their faces in repulsion and terror when Meena Kisu and Bhatto would walk with an exaggerated limp or crawl on their hands. Given that they would also be highly inebriated, Bhatto laughed and showed how Meena and Varsha would bring

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155 Please see, Greenough, Paul Robert. *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal: The Famine of 1943-1944*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982 for an account of how the body was displayed during the famine of Bengal in the 1940s. Please see Das, Veena. *Critical events*. Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1995 for how women displayed their bodies after the Sikh riots in the 1980s demanding accountability from the state for the violence done to their community. Both the accounts result from events of extraordinary violence, which were absent from the accounts of begging and display that I am studying.
their faces smelling of country hooch close to the passengers’ faces and make loud
decipherable noises to get them to part with their money quickly. This was done
because while the hijras could and would grab the balls of young men to make them part
with money, they were quite at a loss as to how to deal with middle-aged men if they
were not begging in a large group. One of the tactics that passengers used, to not give
money or discourage the hijra from pressing for money was to take an inordinately long
time to stop what they were doing, look for their wallet, take it out and then look for the
amount of money they were willing to give, look for loose change, count it and then
finally hand it over. Given that there were lots of bogies to go through, the hijras would
get very irritated at these stalling tactics and ask the men to hurry up, but they knew they
would be unable to intimidate those men if they were not begging in a large group. The
older the man was the less threatened he felt by the hijras, probably because he was
already a father or grandfather and threats of impotence were ineffective for him. These
men were also capable of creating a ruckus and often grabbed hold of the hijra if she was
became too violent in her demands, and beat her up and complained to the train
conductor with whom the hijras had tacit agreements on how to beg.

This possibility of violence in collecting *challa* differentiates it from the begging
undertaken by lepers. Staples notes that, “When a benefactor does not fulfill the expected
criteria, the beggar also reserves the right to go elsewhere. For example, few of Bethany’s
beggars now visited the Jain businessman who gave away food packets and cash
incentives because, as one informant put it, ‘he expects us to eat the food there and wait
around a while.’ In the time that it takes to consume what he has to offer, an individual
could have secured greater gains through conventional begging.”156 While the leper decides to not create a ruckus, the hijras who would beg on the trains would often be prepared for fights especially if they were travelling in a large group. Anto, Bhatto, Varsha and Meena Kisu were the hijras of Bhadrak who would go begging together but would have to fan out in ones to cover all the bogies. Consequently, they would have to be more careful not to start a fight given that they would not stand a chance if the passengers decided to gang up on them. This also explains why they would pretend to have physical deformities or mental problems and replace the threat of physical coercion and violence with the threat of pollution and disgust similar to the lepers so as to not anger passengers. The hijras of Jajpur who belonged to a traditional gharana would go collecting challa in a large group of twenty and even when they would fan out throughout the train they made sure nobody begged alone in a bogie. They did not need to rely on disgusting the passengers into giving money and often went a step further by tricking passengers into giving more than they wanted.

Apart from large pins that hijras kept hidden in their saris, the hijras would also get carried away and stun passengers with hard slaps if the passengers were being difficult. Chandni was often told to control her anger and keep calm since she would often get into fights, which would threaten to erupt into a lot of physical violence. In such instances, the other hijras would in such instances then beg forgiveness and fall on the feet of the passengers. The passengers were not always helpless when threatened by hijras. Once I was called by Lovely to come to the Railway Police Station in Bhadrak where I found her in tears and nursing a sprained elbow. The story I gathered went as

156 James Staples, “Begging Questions: leprosy and Alms Collection in Mumbai” in Livelihoods at the Margins: Surviving the City edited by James Staples. (California: Left Coast Press, 2007), 175
follows: the hijras from Bhubaneshwar stole the train from the hijras of Jajpur and had tried to force some young man to give them more money. When he refused they caught hold of him and roughed him up and he started bleeding from a wound to his head. When the hijras from Jajpur got on the train to rightfully collect their challa, ignorant of what had occurred, the passengers caught them and beat them up, even though they argued that they were innocent and not the ones who had beaten the young man. The passengers refused to listen to them or believe them and handed them to the railway policeman in Bhadrak, who looked even more harried when I appeared on the scene.

The possibility of violence on the part of both the hijras and the passengers marks the difference between collecting *challa* and begging, and brings us closer to understanding the way in which the hijra exhibited a certain logic of extraction. The possibility of violence existed because of the notion of *haq*, translated as rights, that the hijra felt she had over the money. While their *haq* was not disputed by the passengers, the amount of money that the hijras claimed rights over was often questioned. Once, late in the evening, I had just alighted from the train in which I was begging, when a young lad of seventeen came up to me. I had often seen him roaming around the bazaar, so I smiled. He said, “please tell your friend to not trouble me, she is very naughty. If I give her five rupees, she will ask for ten and when you don’t give it to her, she will do a lot of *badmaashi*, she will sit on you, pinch you, she once even slapped my friend.” I was very touched by this polite request and by that time Shonali had joined me. She got down from the other side of the train - she had taken the second-class, A/C bogies and I the general class. I told her, “Shonali, don’t take money from this boy anymore.” Shonali looked disinterested, said, “Why shouldn’t I take money from him?” and walked away.
shrugged my shoulders helplessly at the lad and left. While the displaying of the body and performing the deformity is partially similar between the lepers and the hijras, the possibility of violence differentiates it.

_Bhiksha and Haq_

It should be apparent by now that I am trying to show that collecting *challa* is only partially similar to various forms of monetary exchange. Let us consolidate this by further distinguishing *challa* from *bhiksha*. Michael Carrithers in his study on Buddhist monks mentions that the manner in which the Bhikkhu begs is central to the aspiration and attainment of Buddhist asceticism to the extent that the Bhikkhu cannot ask - let alone coerce - anybody to give him his alms or daily meal, and even “the basic framework of the day is founded on the necessity of begging and eating the main meal before noon.”

The hijras obviously do not collect *challa* without coercion but do organize their everyday life around that activity as I have described above. While the argument that the hijras’ insistence on their right to collect money qualifies their asceticism will hardly be contested, the manner in which they conduct their begging requires more attention. I want to briefly cite the relationship between Brahman, Ksatriya, Devatas/gods to differentiate them from ascetics, which will also clarify the logic of extraction that the hijras-as-ascetics practice. Romila Thapar writes, “The brahmana as priest had a relationship of reciprocity with the ksatriya embodying political power. The sacrificial ritual was an exchange in which the gods were the recipients of offerings, bali, the priests were the recipients of gifts and fees, dana and daksina and the ksatriya as the one who orders the ritual, was the recipient of the benevolence of the gods.

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and of status and legitimacy among men.”¹⁵⁸ To understand the labour performed by the ascetic we must look at the notion of bhiksha.

Carrithers in his work has insisted that the difference between Buddhist and Jain ascetics lies in the exchange that takes place between the ascetic and the laity. He writes, “There is no prescription that the muni owes anything to the laity, not even the ‘gift of the Teaching,’ which the Buddhist bhikkhu owes the Buddhist laity. Munis do, of course participate in the relationships de facto, but it is important to stress that such relationships are not recognized in the conception of the muni in the formal language of Jains concerning munis. Relationships, in other words, are irrelevant to the muni’s defining characteristic, self-mortification.”¹⁵⁹ He clarifies this relationship, which is of dependence but not of reciprocity when he says, “To receive such alms (but not give anything in return) is indeed the munis’ only formal and prescribed interaction with the laity.”¹⁶⁰ The hijra is similar to the Buddhist Bhikkhu to the extent that her day and her asceticism are both qualified through begging, but different from them because she offers no services otherwise- officiating ceremonies, teaching, etc. In this respect, she is similar to the Jain monks because while she lays a claim to the money, she is not expected to give anything in return. But given that the Jain monks/munis cannot ask let alone coerce the laity into giving them anything, the hijras continue to differ from them. The coercion that hijras practice stems from them displaying their bodies in a way, that is sometimes parallel and sometimes identical to the begging that lepers undertake - hijras as I have mentioned above when not strong in numbers would pretend to be deformed. But not only are the lepers not aggressive like the hijras in their deformity, pretended or real. More

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 227
importantly, as Staples’s ethnography has shown, the lepers are expected to expiate the sins of the alms giver. Thus the relationship between them is that of reciprocity, which is not the case with the hijras.

Veena Das in her monograph, *Structure and Cognition: Aspects of Hindu Caste and Ritual* has argued, “Thus, while the king has political power, the sanyasi can acquire esoteric power, which can be transformed into political power.”¹⁶¹ This definition of the sanyasi (ascetic) differentiates Buddhist and Jain asceticism from Hinduism but does not resolve the matter of trying to locate the logic of extraction that the hijras practice. The hijra does use her asceticism to make a political point, quite literally, as the next sections of this chapter shall document, but she does not square very easily with the sanyasi that Das is studying. Das notes, “The renunciatory ideal followed by the sanyasi in the Dharmaranya Purana and in other Puranic texts is one which stresses a complete independence of the sanyasi from the world of the householder.” The Hijras while transforming their acquired power into political power and walking away from kingship as the myth Das studies illustrates, do not abandon the world at all. They, in fact, call upon the world to give up money upon which they claim their right.

The partial similarity that the hijras’ logic of extraction had to Dana, Dakshina, Dalali, and Bhiksha can be understood in the same vein as their participation in the social and the domestic. The image of the arc, its diagonal entrance and tangential trajectory, with which I have studied the hijra’s position in the social sphere, can also be applied to understand their logic of extraction and their participation in the moral economy of South Asia. While their begging touches all the aforementioned prescriptive types of exchange, it is never congruent with any of them.

The use of the word *haq* made the threat of violence on the part of the hijras justifiable and the passengers also implicitly assume it, given that nobody imagined the hijra as not having the right to the money even when they try not to part with it. The use of the word *haq* not only made the hijra have a right over the money of the passengers, but also a responsibility towards that they could not shirk. The use of the word *haq* by the hijras to defend their asking for *challa* also explains why the attempts made by the good-hearted people to employ hijras in different professions fail. Spivak who has written on the difficulty in translating the word comes closest when she writes, “*Haq* is the “para-individual structural responsibility” into which we are born- that is, our true being. Indeed, the word “responsibility” is an approximation here. For this structural positioning can also be approximately translated as birth-right. Whether it is right or responsibility, it is the truth of my being, in a not quite English sense, my *haq*.”\(^{162}\) The prefix “para” in Spivak’s definition explains, firstly, why hijras would lament their fate, which had doomed them to collect money at weddings, childbirths, trains, and religious festivals in spite of the violence they would or could face. Lament, because it was inescapable; to not collect *challa* would be to give up on one’s *haq* and consequently the truth of one’s being. Secondly, it also explains why the passengers did not ever question why they gave money; the answer to which cannot be the threat of physical injury because as I have seen and shown, passengers too can gang up on hijras.

Spivak invokes *haq* like the hijras, to imagine a different mode of exchange, not of begging, and one not determined by violence, when she writes, “Imagine yourself and them - as both receivers and givers- not in a Master-Slave dialectic, but in a dialogic of

accountability.”\textsuperscript{163} I cite her because her invocation of \textit{haq} arises out of the contemporary moment of unequal exchanges where accountability is foregone. This same foregoing of accountability is what defines the relationship between the state and the public which is why the hijra is elected by the electorate and recruited by the state to mark the corruption of exchange/ accountability between the state and its citizens. The remainder of this chapter will discuss this phenomenon.\textsuperscript{164} Furthermore, I am arguing from the ethnographic scenes of the train that we learn from the hijras what Spivak has asked us to learn; that is, not only what exchange is in the current moment but also what it should be - a dialogic of accountability. Spivak further says that, “without an education into an epistemic transformation whose most efficient description I happen to find in \textit{haq}, capital- industrial and finance- cannot be persistently checked and turned around to the interest of the social as practically laid out in the Marxian passage, which has not grown old. I am further arguing that this social practice of responsibility based on an imperative imagined as intended from alterity cannot today be related to any named grounding-as in Kant or Islam.”\textsuperscript{165} The hijra’s \textit{haq} educated the passengers in the train, the citizens of the state, and the state governing its people into how capital can be “persistently checked and turned around to the interest of the social.” The form of checking and transforming of capital that the hijras conducted is miniscule within the larger scale of global capitalism but it is the most familiar exchange, given that it takes place everyday for a large population that travels on trains.

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\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 350.
\textsuperscript{165} Spivak, 346.
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The hijras who belonged to a gharana and begged in large groups were able to collect a tidy sum. Reddy, in a footnote, remarks “It is difficult to talk of class and to place hijras in a particular class based on income, the “traditional” parameter for this differentiation (e.g., see Béteille 1982; and Dickey 1993 for a problematization of this criterion). In terms of actual income, hijras probably qualify as upper middle income or at least middle-income people, which ordinarily connotes a very different lifestyle-equivalent to that of a semi affluent middle-class- than the one they live. Judging by their lifestyle, they would probably be classes as low-income/upper-middle-class.”166 This discrepancy between the class implied by the monthly income of the hijra and the class implied by the privileges they inhabit not only reveals the terrain of gender and caste at play in the difficulties faced when trying to transform financial capital into social and cultural capital but also raises the question of where money can go- or in other words, the futurity implied by capital.

The money hijras earned would inevitably go to their family, even while they complained about the greediness of their family members. Though hijras claimed that family members only used them for their money and did not actually love them, the money would find its way to meet the expenditures of the family. Hijras neither thought of saving, nor of investment, at least not at the cost of refusing money to their family members. They would give money for medical treatments of their aging parents, tuition and college fees for their brothers and sisters, and clothes and presents for various occasions. They would shoulder a large part of the expenditure for the weddings of their nieces, nephews, younger brothers and sisters. While this is where the money collected through begging by lepers would go as well, the difference lay in the position of the hijra

in the family. Staples notes that the large amount of money earned through begging enabled lepers “to reclaim some of the status their leprosy had cost them.” One of his informants claimed that “the people in his village cared less about his deformities and saw him as a ‘big man’ to whom ‘the Gods have shown favour,’ all as a direct result of his economic prowess.” This transformation never took place for the hijras; they never accreted respect because of their economic advantage. This failure of transforming financial into social or cultural capital for the hijra was not solely because of the source of their income. Staples showed that even when the villagers and neighbours of the leper knew that they earned their money through begging, they did not ever address it or raise it as an issue: in fact begging was never mentioned and instead ambiguous terms and phrases were used to address questions regarding the leper’s livelihood, something that Staples calls a ‘language of concealment’.

Hijras in Bhadrak and Bhawanipatna on the other hand, were well aware that there was always a sharp risk that they might bring shame onto their families through their very existence, even while their money was being used to ward off other potential shame-inducing events. I want to press the irony of these circumstances. Bodies considered impotent, incapable, and damaged for the social like the hijra, and the leper to some extent, were in fact providing the labour and capital for the sustenance and transformation of bodies that are capable, potent and fit for reproductive heteronormativity. I am not exactly arguing that the roles of impotency and potency are reversed here but that people don’t appear to be what they are; in short, that we live in the era of kalyug, when nothing is what it seems or should be.

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The Hijra Tax Collector

Before we move on to a discussion of Kalyug, I want to argue that the logic of extraction that the hijra operates on, understood through the notion of haq, with partial similarity to a host of other moral-economic exchanges, signals a logic of non-cruelty. The logic of extraction that the hijra exerts is acknowledged by the state in several ways. The first is through the recruitment of the hijra to collect taxes. The BBC carried an article titled, “India eunuchs turn tax collectors” in 2006. I cite the report in full so that we have a clear narrative, against which I will set up its various iterations across newspapers and online news channels.

Tax authorities in one Indian state are attempting to persuade debtors to paying their bills-by serenading them with a delegation of singing eunuchs. Eunuchs are feared and reviled in many parts of India, where some believe they have supernatural powers. Often unable to gain regular employment, the eunuchs have become successful at persuading people to part with their cash. The eunuchs will get a commission of 4% of any taxes collected. In Bihar’s capital, Patna, officials felt deploying the eunuchs was the only way to prompt people to pay up. “We are collecting taxes for the municipal corporation, collecting money form those who have not paid their taxes for years,” said Saira, one of the eunuchs on the streets of Patna. “Tax payment is necessary. When the corporation won’t have any money how will they look after the people?” Accompanied by police officers, the eunuchs approached shopkeepers and large defaulters on their first foray into tax collection. “Pay the tax, pay the Patna Municipal Corporation tax,” the eunuchs sang as they approached Ram Sagar Singh, who owed 100,000 rupees (£1,180), the AFP news agency reported. Mortified by the commotion, Mr. Singh reportedly agreed to pay up within a week. The eunuchs collected about 400,000 rupees on their first day of work, authorities said, sharing 16,000 rupees (£188) amongst themselves. Bharat Sharm, a revenue officer, told the Associated Pess agency he was pleased with the eunuchs’ work.
“We are confident that their reputation and persuasive skills will come in handy,” he said.  

The news report was repeated across the channel by USA Today under the title “India unleashes eunuchs on tax cheats.” The word ‘unleashes’ brings forth an image of a weapon or a pet monster and this allusion is further cemented when we read further about how the state is at its wits’ end in trying to collect taxes. The USA Today article goes on to report, “[…] 20 eunuchs in bright saris began going from shop to shop, asking the owners to pay overdue municipal taxes in Patna, the capital of Bihar, one of India’s most impoverished and lawless states” where the “city’s tax arrears ran into the millions” and where “only 2000 of […] nearly half million residents regularly pay property taxes and water charges.” The municipal administrator, Atul Prasad states, “Tax collection has slipped to 200 million rupees ($4.34 million) a year from the anticipated 700 million rupees ($15.2 million).” The report also warns the readers “the eunuchs will be asked to help collect outstanding taxes from private homes soon.”

Before the Bihar state municipality government thought of using hijras to collect taxes, a foreign bank operating in India had already implemented the idea a little less than ten years before the abovementioned news reports. The Sydney Morning Herald of Australia reported on June 14, 1997 under the title, “Gender-benders give debtors dressing down to make them pay up; India’s repo ‘men’.” The news report went on to say, “When a foreign bank operating in India found recently that traditional methods were not succeeding in recovering bad debts, they turned to a secret new weapon: cross-

dressers hurling abuse.” Hijras are reported as “threatening to snatch or curse children unless protection money was paid. […] Their vile insults and innuendos persuade many well-heeled families to cough up, such is the psychological power of the “third sex”.”

This article reveals to us what kind of a weapon the hijra is imagined to be by the state: like a cobra that is defanged but not known to be so; scary and appears lethal. Though one is cautioned against confusing the metaphor with the content I must mention another newspaper report, this time from across the border, to underline that while the hijra is seen as a weapon, the state is using them because it is trying not to harm its citizens. The Guardian carried a newspaper report titled, “Pakistan’s tax dodgers pay when the hijra calls,” in which the head of tax collection for the Clifton cantonment board in Karachi, Qazi Aftab identifies the hijras’ “clapping, shouting and generally making a scene” as “the nuclear option.” Boone reports, “The authorities are extremely pleased with their efforts to combat the tax dodgers. Aftab says recovery rates are up 15% from when

170 The article though reporting the use of hijras by Citibank, suddenly without any explanation begins talking about the difficulty landlords face in collecting rent. The implication being that both the bank and the landlord face similar difficulties and hence employ similarly unorthodox methods to get their money. The article then switches topics seamlessly again to talk about the credit economy in India. I am thus reading into the parallel that the article is drawing between cobras and hijras used by landlords and banks respectively. I reproduce the article in full here-

The resort to unorthodox collection methods reflects the frustration of business and industry with debt defaulters, bad tenants and the legal system. […]. Citibank found that even using agents could cause problems. Repo men working on one of the bank’s bad loans repossessed the wrong car, giving rise to an expensive out-of-court settlement and bad publicity.

But with hijras, whose stinging barbs guarantee instant compliance, the balance of terror may have shifted decisively in the bank’s favour. Landlords are also resorting to novel ways to look after their interests, particularly the large tracts of real estate in the capital occupied by tenants still paying 1940s rents on leases signed before India gained independence from Britain. One landlord in the eastern State of Bihar came up with a novel solution to the problem when he engaged a snake charmer to release cobras into the homes of recalcitrant tenants. A colleague of the landlord said: “The charmer defanged the serpents first, but when you discover a cobra in your water closet, you do not wait to find out if it is venomous.” After that, efforts to evict some tenants and persuade the others to pay market rents went smoothly. The lack of a national identification system and the failure of credit card companies to share information provides a happy hunting ground for artful dodgers.
Conventional tax collectors often clashed violently with the householders. That never happens with the hijras, he said.”

The hijra, apart from tax collection is also used by the state to fight crime and “clean up” Bombay, to improve the birth and death registration rates and to improve border security. These projects of the state, I emphasize, are more in the way of spectacles for the media rather than even remotely

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171 Jon Boone, “Pakistan’s tax dodgers pay up when the hijra calls,” The Guardian, June 8, 2012, accessed January 31, 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jun/08/pakistan-hijra-transgender-tax-collectors. The article also records how begging divides the hijra community in Pakistan and though there is an offer of respectability given by working for the state, not everybody takes it. It is precisely the logic of extraction that is afforded by shameless begging that the state is utilizing, thus, contradicting its own project to make the hijras more respectable. I cite the article here to give another glimpse of the intersection between shame and begging that the hijras negotiate. The article goes on to record, ““Begging and sex work is not an honourable job,” says Nirma, a thickset 30-year-old wearing heavy eye makeup and a green sari. But she claims to earn £20 a customer and is not impressed by the tax collectors’ £90 a month salary. Other say the government should find them jobs singing on television shows. Then again, times are tough, Nirma concedes. Another group of hijras has been encroaching on her patch, she says, and customers are turning to the growing number of female prostitutes in Karachi.” The report goes on to cite a hijra, called Natasha who voices the contradiction in this project of respectability. “It’s just so demeaning,” says Natasha. “It’s no different from begging.” […]

172 Jan McGirk, “Army of eunuchs set to clean up Bombay,” The Observer, December 14, 1997. This report concerns itself with a certain Govinder Ragho Khairnair, a 53-year-old “who fell foul of local political bosses three years ago” and who “is recruiting more than 400 castrated males and hermaphrodites from the port’s notorious red-light districts. With their help, he plans to take on the gun-runners, smugglers and property swindlers who offer bribes to public officials.” Khairnair’s “improbable army will use shame and public humiliation as its weapons. Eunuchs will surround an offender and shout insults while raising their saris to flash their mutilated genitalia. “This will be done to those who misuse the law to harass people,” says Khairnar, who was sacked as deputy commissioner on the Bombay Municipal Corporation after running up against the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Manohar Joshi, and the radical Hindu chauvinist, Bal Thackeray.”

173 Imran Khan, “Bihar to use eunuchs to improve birth registration,” Indo-Asian News Service, March 4, 2012, accessed February 2, 2014, http://www.mynews.in/News/bihar_to_use_eunuchs_to_improve_birth_registration_N434777.html. This article reported that “Worried over the lowest birth and death registration figures in Bihar, the state government has decided to engage eunuchs and traditional cremation workers called ‘doms’ to improve birth and death registration rates in the state.” The principal secretary of the Planning and Development Department, Vijay Prakash goes on record to say, “eunuchs visiting families on auspicious occasions like births is an age-old tradition. Their visits would be more fruitful, if they can be engaged to improve the birth registration rate in the state.” Both the hijras and the state officials rely on an ideological past to further justify this move. The official says, “For ages, eunuchs have been known for collecting information about the birth of children in different localities in each village, town and district.” Chandni hijra, “a leader of the eunuchs, said: “ We have suffered a lot for centuries and most of us live in abject poverty. We want restoration of our recognition on the pattern of the Mughal era.” The newspaper report clarifies that Chandni was referring to the practice of “eunuchs being used as palace guards by the Mughals.”
serious suggestions to modify state policy. Furthermore, they borrow and feed into an idea of the past when eunuchs were respected and given powerful positions.\textsuperscript{174}

Veena Das argues that the power wielded by men as the holders of the state is made vulnerable in the light of the sexuality of the woman, because these men are also bearers of desire. The idea I want to borrow from Das is that the ethical imperative of this vulnerability is that of non-cruelty rather than non-violence. I want to position these scenes where hijras are recruited as tax collectors, birth registration officials and border security guards, as scenes of the vulnerable state as well. This is confirmed by the way in which hijras are defined as weapons- poisonless cobras or nuclear weapons pointed at citizens that don’t inflict the damage that actual nuclear weapons might when pointed on enemies. The fact that the state has other options to pursue all these problems but chooses the hijra not only relies on the logic of extraction that she offers, but also on a method that does not result in violence. More importantly, the non-cruelty that Das talks about also addresses how the hijra, though exhibiting a tangential similarity to many forms of

\textsuperscript{174} Please see the newspaper article with the mildly offensive title, J. Dey and Bipin Kumar Singh, “Eunuchs may prove potency at border,” \textit{Mid Day}, May 10, 2010, accessed February 3, 2014 \url{http://www.mid-day.com/articles/eunuchs-may-prove-potency-at-border/81190}. This article reported that the Arunachal Pradesh home minister, Tako Dabi, wrote to the then Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram, in a letter dated February 23, 2010 suggesting that the hijra “community can be put to use to secure Indo-China frontier.” He states, “Eunuchs will discharge effective duties along the international border areas if scope is created for them, […] if engaged in policing and other paramilitary forces, they may do good service.” Furthermore, “Dabi has suggested that eunuchs can be employed with minimum remuneration. Usually living in poverty and begging for a living, they may prove quite useful to the nation.” It seems like this is a win-win situation because not only will hijras gain their once lost respect but it will also keep the borders of the state intact. Tako Dabi believes that since “they do not have any family, their selflessness is borne out of this detachment which sets them apart from other humans.” This selflessness expresses in a way that makes “eunuchs […] more nationalist than any other people.” The minister also believes that because “they’re physically strong and can be gainfully employed for national security” the “eunuchs are exceptionally fit for national development duties.” The minister mouths the popular belief that the hijra is very physically strong and hence just as the train passengers are helpless in the face of such strength when harassed for money, the Chinese military along the disputed region will also be helpless when they attempt to breach the borders of India. The reproductive impotency of hijra is transformed into exceptionally lethal potency, like the weapon, army, and border patrols. The New Indian Express carried the same story and added, “Faced with isolation, poverty and public ridicule, eunuchs, popularly referred to in India, as ‘hijras’, often resort to prostitution for economic survival.” Syed Zarir Hussain, “Use eunuchs as border guards: Arunachal minister,” \textit{The New Indian Express}, May 11, 2010.
exchange, cannot explicate the rules of why she must be given money other than by saying that it is her *haq*. Das writes, “First the quality of non-cruelty is demonstrated across species and at moments when it is not through language or through appeals to distant moral concepts as ‘obligation’ or ‘rule-following’ but through a sense of togetherness that has developed by the sheer contingency of having been brought together- the fated circumstances of togetherness. Second, that is from within a scene of intimacy that dispositions develop.” 175

What I am trying to suggest is that it is this togetherness of the hijra and the passengers in the Indian social world that allows for an extraction to take place because when push comes to shove, the hijra can be violently prevented from collecting her *haq*. The fact is that in spite of coercion, she is never refused and her legitimacy never questioned, is evidence of the togetherness, or intimacy between her and the passengers. This calibration of coercion to avoid violence should be read as adhering to non-cruelty rather than rule following; of accounting for others in Spivak’s terms rather than as moral obligation. This is seen most clearly when interaction between hijras and passengers does erupt into physical and brutal violence because even though such violence would resolve the question of whether the hijra can or should collect *challa*, it is precisely the resolution that both the parties hope to avoid. Her intimacy with the passengers and the laity/polity allows the state to press her into service, or her logic of extraction into service when they are also helpless with only violence as the other option.

The being together that Das is invoking is necessarily understood through animals because it brings to relief the “violence that joins life and death,” as in, “the

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contemplation on the killing of animals in sacrifice.” 176 I would like to position the hijra, in this chapter as that animal that reminds the passengers not only of the violence that is life and death but also, through that animality, of togetherness which she demands being accounted for. Continuing one of the threads of interpretation of this dissertation, I should remind my readers that the hijra who makes her lovers into animals, and prevents her brothers from becoming one, in the context of the corruption of our times, becomes an animal herself. And by becoming animal, the hijra reminds us to account under the rules of compassion and not under the rules of markets and moral merits. 177

**The Hijra Politician**

I want to look at another set of newspaper articles that completes the picture of togetherness and results in intimacy between the polity and the hijra, located at a different site from the trains. An article titled ““Incorruptible” eunuch takes on political giants in Indian polls” published in 1996 interviews Kali Hijra as she stands for office in the “parliamentary elections as head of the Judicial Reforms Party.” Kali says, “People believe in what I promise because they know as a eunuch I cannot be lured with wealth, women or sex. They also know we (the JRP) have no religion or gender bias.” She also clarifies that “These leaders have to think of their children when they are out of power and thus they are vulnerable. I am free of all such worries.” There are several points that I want to highlight in this short article, the relation between them I suspect bears explaining. The first is that children make one susceptible to corruption and consequently

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being childless renders one free from being torn between loyalties to the family or the nation, whose interests are in conflict. “The saree-clad eunuch, who had taken on a female identity, said Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, the father of seven, or Bihar chief minister Laloo Prasad Yadav, the father of nine, are more vulnerable to the temptation of carving out political fiefdoms for their offspring.” Hijras, like Kali, on the other hand cannot be invested in her own children but wants “to fight for free education for children.” 178

The second is that while the hijra’s power to shame and curse with impotence is utilized by the state to force its citizens to pay taxes in the first set of articles in the second set of articles, the same power is used to shame the state. An article playing on the word loktantra- democracy- is titled “Joketantra: The semiotics of castration,” and reports, “[…] the sexless person in question was effectively used by the electorate to castrate the caste oligarchy which had been running the show all these years […]” The article astutely points out that it is not just the Dalits “for whom it is easy to count themselves among the castrated politically speaking” who voted for Shabnam Mausi but the Brahmins as well, “to get better of their rivals, the Rajputs.” The author goes on to say that electing a eunuch to the state assembly is “a prank played not so much on democracy- people, after all, did vote- but on the way it is turned into a joke.” The voters according to the newspaper article are expressing their own impotence in convincing the state to fix “bad roads, bad water, bad houses, bad administration, bad money.” The author remarks that “the laughter that the eunuch so sadly provokes is double-edged:

people are taking a laugh at themselves too, which is where democracy really starts working because it is a question thrown back at its complacent certitudes.” 179 I want to read this laughter of the people as an acknowledgment of the vulnerability of the state and while recognizing that rules are not being followed, they are also bringing to relief that perhaps rules are too strict to be followed.

In these articles, where the householder is constantly re-iterated as being split between his duties to the state and his family, or between Dharma and Artha, the hijra offers herself as the ideal candidate to run the state because she does not have a family.180 Another article reports “Observers said the tendency to elect Hijras was a sign of voters’ frustration with traditional politicians.”181 Kamla Kinnar as evidence of her impotence that translates as asceticism that results in honesty and incorruptibility, says,

I have no written or ambitious manifesto. Whatever I earned by entertaining people was invested on the welfare of poor, especially for the marriage of 20 girls from impoverished weaver families. Now, I want to raise my voice for addressing the grievances of farmers and weavers whose interests have been destroyed by successive governments. […] Everybody is working to defeat me, whether it is the UP minister or the jailed sharpshooter. But I am not afraid of either the wealth of the ruling party or the bullets of Sujit Belwa. Agar is chunav mein meri jaan bhi jaati hai to janta ke liye jayegi.”

The last line that is in Hindi can be translated, as “Even if I lose my life in the elections, it will be lost for the public.”182

180 Lawrence Cohen makes a similar point when he writes, “Ordinary eunuchs were revealed as the real leaders in the same movement that revealed ordinary leaders as the real eunuchs. To put it differently, the embodied sign of the operation- both as presence (the wound, the scar) and absence (the hijra’s “hole,” her lack of male genitals)- came to have a paradoxical relation to the embodied effect of the operation: the modern sovereign’s inability to constitute filial relations with ordinary citizens” in Lawrence Cohen, “Operability: Surgery at the Margins of the State,” in Anthropology in the Margins of the State, ed. Veena Das and Deborah Poole (Oxford University Press, 2004): 185.
181 “Eunuchs make ideal politicians, says India’s first eunuch deputy,” Deutsche Presse-Agentur, March 7, 2000
Mangesh Bharat Khadye, who ran for the Thane Lok Sabha seat in 2009 "woefully points out that while people overlook the shameful deeds of politicians and parties, a eunuch who talks of protecting the neglected is greeted with smirks and insults." This might be because the hijra cannot distance herself from the political vocabulary that deploys them as symbols of impotence. The hijra might be attempting to translate her impotence into political honesty but this is not how the public voting her into power is reading her. An article carried by *The New York Times* titled “Katni Journal; A Pox on Politicians. A Eunuch You Can Trust” reports that persuading Kamla Jaan to run for mayor was “meant as sarcasm, a way to snub the major parties, whose candidates were deemed to be worthless hacks even if of more discernible gender than Ms. Jaan.” According to the article, “Reviled, sniggered at and feared as obnoxious and even sorcerous, eunuchs would seem to make unlikely political heroes. But for those who want to express contempt for the political establishment, a eunuch’s fallen social rank is a mark in favor.” Electing eunuchs seems to be a way that the disenchanted public can attack an ineffective and corrupt state of a place where “democracy is seldom practiced within the political parties themselves, where candidacies are doled out as spoils with an eye toward preserving power at the top. Local government is unresponsive to the needs of the people. Elected offices are often thought of as personal property for those foraging for bribes, municipal budgets, always small in a poor country, get squandered, with civic improvements ever outpaced by urban decay.”

While the idea of a eunuch heading government bodies free of corruption-causing families has delicious potential, the public it seemed, had not voted for a eunuch because

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183 Nitin Yeshwantrao, “Eunuch is odd man out in Thane Race,” *Times of India*, April 15, 2009
she was beyond dishonesty. For them it was a “mere prank” and they were “tickled by the idea.” The article by Jyotsna Singh for BBC titled “Eunuchs boosted by voter disillusion” cites a twenty six year old Ayaz who says, “They are speaking the truth. Our politicians beg us for votes during elections and don’t show up after that. They are not bothered about the people. Why should we vote for them?” The reporter writes “there may not be many yet who support the eunuchs but a large number of people share the disenchantment pointed out by these eunuchs.”

While reading these scenes as staging of the vulnerability of the polity would not be disputed, it needs to be pointed out that the form in which such vulnerability is staged, is once again sexual; the impotence of the hijras and the imperative to reproduce a family that corrupts the politician. The politicians then here are strikingly similar to the mahabrahmans of Parry’s ethnography; and it can be argued that in electing the hijra, the polity is acknowledging the dilemma of *artha* and *dharma* instead of calling for punitive action against the rule-breakers. We must look at another article by Parry, which will complicate the notion of corruption, and is in line with the argument about the state that Das has made.

In, "The crisis of corruption" and the "idea of India": a worm's eye view,” Parry writes, “In some ideal world it may be true that offering a bribe is wrong. But this is not the world that Adhikari sees about him, and he not unreasonably concludes that it is quite unproductive to loose sleep over anything so abstract. […] At the retail level, at least, giving bribes is doing no more than accommodating oneself to brutal reality.” The ethnographic evidence Parry is studying is the widespread participation in corruption by the very same people, who complain about its prevalence in the same breath. Parry

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resolves this contradiction by arguing: “if corruption is the misuse of public office or assets for private interests, then the notion obviously presupposes a clear conceptual separation between the two. In the administration of the Mughal Empire no sharp distinction was drawn. [...] It needed rational legal authority with the idea of public office, impersonal rules and the demarcation of public and private, office and home, to create the discourse of corruption, as we know it.” 186 We can see Parry as making the point that regardless of one’s perception and complaint about corruption, one cannot always fight it without dire consequences. What recourse can one take when rules cannot be followed not just by the other but also by oneself? Das has offered the notion of non-cruelty that emerges from togetherness and I want to suggest that the electing of the hijra politicians reveals not just the perception of corruption or the togetherness of the hijra and the polity, who offers herself as a metaphor for impotence, but the texture of our times when we are hard-pressed to negotiate the violence of the world.

The Freedom of Bondage

Clifford Geertz writes, “If haqq negotiates “is” and “ought” by construing law as a species of fact, dharma does so by construing fact as a species of law, which is very much not the same thing.” 187 Geertz’s definition of haq and its differentiation from dharma is sapient indeed because it explains why the state found it logical to unleash the hijras upon its constituency and why the public found it fitting to vote for the hijra politician. The mode in which both were extracting what they considered their due from each other - tax, registration, uncorrupted governance – is legitimized because they were negotiating an ‘ought’ and an ‘is’. The violence that is present in all the scenes associated

187 Geertz, Local Knowledge,198.
with the hijra, the state, and its people is never questioned precisely because it gains its lawfulness or is a species of the fact that it is the Kalyug - a time when nothing is as it ought to be. Before I turn to the myth that the hijras have regarding Kalyug, I want to clarify the relationship between the state and its citizens that is brought to fore by their use of the hijra in collecting taxes and fighting corruption. This deployment of the hijra, I suggest, is possible because of the form of interaction that takes place between the hijra and the passengers of a train, which I argue is different from begging, and is closer to a form of collecting taxes because of the threat of violence, once again, on both the part of the hijras and the passengers. This relationship between the state and its citizens make sense only when, pace Veena Das, we see citizenship as a “claim rather than a status, which one either has or does not have.”188 This conceptual move allows Das to show that there is “an underlying allegiance to the idea of preserving life both at the level of the individual and that of the community [which] comes to be expressed in the moment when the State is able to put aside its function to punish infringements of law - thus allowing claims of life to trump claims of law.”189

One can argue that the state reveals the precariousness of its being when it recruits the hijra’s ability collect their *haq* from passengers to collect its *haq* which are taxes and information, from its polity. These are moments in which the state is also making a claim on its citizens and hence one can see the promise in this relationship in so far as that the citizens recognize that the state can and does have claims over them. This is a terrible state of affairs, where the State as well as its people both are vulnerable vis-à-vis each other but are also dependent on the promise that claims of life, which can be shorthand to

189 ibid., 330-1.
give somebody their *haq*, will trump the claims of law. I would like to however use a
different way of formulating the relationship of the state with its people as made visible
through the prism of the hijra. This is not only because I want to preserve the integrity of
the urban poor that people Das’s ethnography, but also because dilating the notions of
precariousness and promise that Das uses would not bring into relief the relationship
between the state and its citizens that arises specifically because and through the hijra. I
want to borrow Das’s theoretical move however, to see citizenship as a claim rather than
a status to clarify the relationship between the state and its citizens, both of whom are in
turn threatened by each other with the impotence of the hijras. This move is necessary to
understand the threat that the hijra carries, of impotence, which appears lethal, like a
defanged cobra.

Simmel wrote, “Sociability is, then, the play-form of association and is related to
the content-determined concreteness of association as art is related to reality.” This
sociability, play-form, or “social game” is necessary because it calibrates the claims that
the individual and the social can make on each other. Simmel continues to write further
along in the essay,

Sociability is the play-form also for the ethical forces of concrete society. The
great problems places before these forces are that the individual has to fit himself
into a whole system and live for it: that, however, out of this system values and
enhancement must flow back to him, that the life of the individual is but a means
for the ends of the whole, the life of the whole but an instrument for the purposes
of the individual. Sociability carries the seriousness, indeed the frequent tragedy
of these requirements, over into its shadow world, in which there is no friction,
because shadows cannot impinge upon one another.190

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If sociability is a play-form that calibrates the individual to the social and vice versa so as to not prevent the tragedy of such compromises; if it is what Simmel later calls, “the freedom of bondage” then I suggest that what takes place between the hijra and the passengers, and by extension between the state and its citizens is a play that averts the tragedy of claims that citizens and state make on each other, to preserve what Das citing Didier Fassin identifies as the “politics of life.” While both the citizen and the state have other options to extract their claims, or haq- a revolution on the part of the citizens or imprisonment on the part of the state- they use the hijra, who can infect one with impotence and shame but not really. They are like defanged cobras that look poisonous and appear lethal but are not really - like Simmel’s shadows. I argue that what is implied by this mode of extracting claims is a politics of life as well, in that it prevents the tragedy, which extracting claims can result in. The scene of collecting challa in the trains that serves as an allegory of claiming haq prophesizes the physical violence that can result between the state and its citizens. We must read Das’s conceptual move of seeing citizenship as a claim rather than a status as an addendum to Simmel’s definition of sociability as a play-form, because when one is playing a game there is a certain set of claims that we make on the other players - to follow certain rules - which in this case is to try and preserve life in the Kalayug.

Kalyug

Before I analyze the myth of the Kalayug that the hijras have, a brief description of South Asian chronology by Romila Thapar.

Each major time cycle, mahayuga or great cycle, also referred to as the caturyuga of four cycle, is divided into four cycles, the yugas-Krta (or Satya), Dvapara, Treta and Kali- the names derived from the numbers at the throw of dice from the highest to the lowest and therefore carrying the suggestion of fate implicit in time.
The condition of man and the world has changed from the earliest times which were utopian to the ultimate decline in the fourth Krta (or Satya), Dvapara, Treta and Kali- the names derived from the numbers at the throw of dice from the highest to the lowest and therefore carrying the suggestion of fate implicit in time. The condition of man and the world has changed from the earliest times which were utopian to the ultimate decline in the fourth yuga, the kali-yuga, which is the current cycle.\textsuperscript{191}

We must begin with Thapar’s delicate suggestion that the current age, the Kaliyuga is when the throw of dice or the chances are against us. The reason for such bad luck is because as the Manusmriti states “There is one set of laws for men in the Krta Age, another in the Treta, still another in the Dvapara, and a different set in the Kali, in keeping with the progressive shortening taking place in each Age. Ascetic toil, they say, is supreme in the Krta Age, knowledge in the Treta, sacrifice in Dvapara; and gift-giving alone in Kali.”\textsuperscript{192} We are coming closer to an understanding of exchange in our current day and age. Neither asceticism, nor knowledge, and not even sacrifice is enough to strengthen our chances to survive these times. This is because “In the Krta Age, the Law is whole, possessing all four feet; and so is truth. People never acquire any property through unlawful means. By acquiring such property, however, the Law is stripped of one foot in each of the subsequent Ages; through theft, falsehood, and fraud, the Law disappears a foot at a time.”\textsuperscript{193}

What Olivelle has translated as law is Dharma, which can also be defined as ‘the proper rules of conduct’. Dharma is represented as a bull, which makes the image of our time, the kalyug, as a bull without any legs more illuminating. The Manusmriti further states that “Krta-age, Treta-age, Dvapara-age, and Kali-age- the king’s activities

\textsuperscript{192} Olivelle, Patrick, ed. The law code of Manu. (Oxford University Press, 2004), 91 chapter 1 verse 85
\textsuperscript{193} Ibid., 91 verse 81
constitute all these; for the king is said to be the age. When is asleep, he is kali; when he awake, he is Dvapara; when he is ready to undertake operations, he is Treta and when he is on the march, he is Krta.”¹⁹⁴ The unchecked corruption that defines our age is seen allegorically through the image the king who is sleeping, unaware of the injustices taking place in his realm. Dharma, or law is incapable of checking anybody, having lost all his legs and only gift giving reigns supreme, more effective than asceticism, knowledge, and sacrifice. Here lies the difference between haq and dharma as noted by Geertz, which Das clarifies- the rules of Dharma, according to Das’s reading of Appadharma, can be suspended, and substituted with another set during times of distress, thereby rendering some claims or haq viable which at some other time would not have existed. Now before we proceed further, let us look at the widely cited and recited myth of kalyug that the hijras have.

Rama, the seventh avatar of Vishnu, was ordered by his father the King Dasharatha to relinquish his right to the throne and undertake an exile in the forest for fourteen years because of the plotting of his father’s other wife. When he left to go to the forest, the whole kingdom came to see him off, they were weeping with sorrow at his departure. At the edge of the forest he commanded all the men and women to return to their homes and resume their daily lives. Since he had not told the hijras what to do, they remained there for fourteen years waiting for his return. When Rama returned, he was amazed to see them and asked them why they had not gone back. The hijras replied that Rama had just addressed the men and women and did not say anything about or to the hijras. Rama was very moved by their faith and granted them the boon that during

¹⁹⁴ ibid., 205. verse 301
Kalyug, hijras would rule the earth.\footnote{This myth was also recorded very briefly by Gayatri Reddy and by Serena Nanda, in slightly different versions to make different points; in Reddy’s ethnography, the hijras retold this myth to make a point about better times to come and in Nanda’s case, the hijras used the myth to justify the respect they command in India.} This myth was recited to me as well, one night in Bhawanipatna, when four men who were driving by in a car stopped Damru, Nandita and I while we were strolling around. The man asked Damru and Nandita to come with him next week to another district headquarters town, and they agreed. When the men drove off I asked them who they were and what they wanted, Damru said that those men worked for the local MLA and whenever his party members went to give speeches in various villages, he would take the hijras with them. All the hijras would have to do is testify to the people that the politicians were not corrupt and that the hijras support him. Damru continued that everybody believes the words of a hijra because they don’t have any reason to be corrupt, thus re-iterating the hijra as a figure that cannot be corrupted.

A newspaper article titled “The Kalyug Rulers” evokes this myth when reporting about Asha Devi, the ex- MLA from Gorakhpur. It reports- “If nothing else, Devi has the scriptures backing her claim. Lord Rama had prophesied that eunuchs would rule once Kalyug descended on earth. It officially arrived in February this year when Shabnam Mausi won a seat from Sohagpur constituency in Madhya Pradesh as an independent candidate. With Asha Devi, Kalyug seems to be truly upon us.”\footnote{Sunita Aron “The Kalyug Rulers” in The Hindustan Times 13\textsuperscript{th} December 2000.} I find it necessary to cite one more definition of Kalyug to reach my conclusion, this time from the Mahabharata. The third book of the Mahabharata titled the Vana Parva has for its content a conversation between the great king Yudhisthra and the great sage Markandeya. Yudhishtra requests to hear Markandeya’s “account with the causes of everything.”\footnote{J.A.B. van Buitenen The Mahabharata, Volume 2: Book 2, The Book of Assembly and Book 3, The Book of the Forest (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1975), 586.}
Markandeya, in describing the Kalayug says to Yudhishtra, “Householders, out of fear of the burden of taxes, will become thieves, and others hiding under the guise of hermits will live off trade….” Markandeya continues to say, “The Brahmins will become like crows. […] as they are oppressed by the Dasyus and are constantly oppressed by evil kings with the burden of taxes; and giving up their poise….”

This version of the Kalyug would fit very well with the fact that the citizens of the state feel the need to escape paying taxes and give up only when threatened with shame if not impotence. This would obviously follow the unquestioning manner in which the passengers also give up their hard earned money to hijras when they come aboard the trains. Unfortunately, hijras are not incorruptible. Even a brief glance in the archives would disprove these claims. They do not shy away from injuring passengers as the ethnographic scenes above have demonstrated. They also do not shy away from injuring railway officials when they ask them for railway tickets. Another telling newspaper article titled, “Eunuch among five arrested for murder” informs us that “A eunuch and her four friends were arrested for murdering and robbing her ‘godfathers’ in Himachal Pradesh two years ago, police said Friday [sic].” The article cites a police officer saying, “Asha was in a live-in with Babloo. She frequently visited her godfathers with her colleagues, and tempted by their wealth one day decided to rob them.” The official continues, “Afraid that she would be identified, Chaudhary and Khan slit the throat of the victims and the gang fled from the spot.” Another newspaper article titled, “Eunuch held for killing live-in partner” has the police inform the reporter “A eunuch was arrested here [New Delhi] on Saturday for killing her live-in partner in a fit of rage.” The police

198 Ibid., 587 (emphasis mine)
199 Ibid., 596 (emphasis mine)
200 IANS “Two railway Officials Attacked by Eunuchs,” 18th November, 2011
continue “Nisha used to help him financially, Nisha also helped him in setting up a shop at Sona Vihar and used to spend money on him […] Two years ago Nisha came in contact with Hasmukh and started living with him. Hasmukh too exploited her and extorted money from her.” The article continues to cite the police, “Frustrated with Hasmukh, she deserted him and came back to Surender … [A]fter buying a car and bike with Nisha’s money Surender was pressing her to buy a house. Surender also stole Nisha’s Rs. 3.5 Lakh… When she asked for the money Surender hit her. Unable to bear the humiliation, Nisha hit him on the head and stabbed him to death.” Yet another newspaper article titled, “Eunuch gang leader killed in encounter with Noida police,” reports that “Atique, a leader of a eunuch gang in Ghaziabad, was wanted in more than a dozen cases, He came to the limelight after he was made the prime accused in the murder of an Eunuch from a rival gang.”

The hijras’ were not different from Parry’s priests who were constrained by the real world to retain the money they received, and hence unable to add more to the amount to give back as dana. Newspaper articles such as the one titled “2 eunuchs found killed, jewellery and cash missing” inform us that “Vimlesh owned the three-storey residential complex and four cars…” The article went on to suggest that Vimlesh’s adopted son and her driver who have been missing with one of her cars might have killed the two hijras. The investigation yielded the following: “It has been reported that Vimlesh and Khalil had some sort of physical relationship. But that changed when Sultan reportedly became

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202 Shashank Shekhari, “Eunuch gang leader killed in encounter with Noida Police” in MidDay posted on 8th June, 2009.
new companion of Vimlesh.”\textsuperscript{203} Another article titled, “Eunuchs robbed of Rs 50 Lakhs” which informs us that “Around a dozen masked robbers targeted a ‘dera’ of eunuchs in Kalka during the intervening night of Tuesday and Wednesday and made away with Rs 50 Lakh in cash and jewellery including 800g gold.”\textsuperscript{204} The point I am trying to make using these newspaper articles is that the hijras do not escape the constraints of the real world, and their money, like that of the Brahmin priests of Parry’s ethnography is also tainted. Against Damru’s narrative that hijras are the ‘saccha fakirs’ - authentic fakirs/mendicants/ascetics - there were lots of instances of hijras stealing money, and other things from their clients when their trousers were down. How are we then to make sense of the myth that the hijras will rule the earth during Kalyug? The hijra politicians, who are seen as evidence for this prophecy coming true, argue against the fact that the public elected them because they wanted to shame the corrupt, impotent government. They claimed that the public elected them because hijras could not be corrupted, not as a joke undermining the authority of the state.

Hijras do rule the earth during our current time of the Kalayug but not in the way the hijra politicians would argue. If the current government is beleaguered in the face of a thieving public that shames them and equates them with hijras to mark their impotence, then we must expand our definition of hijras and include the government into the category of hijras as well. Furthermore, the public that is oppressed by the burden of taxes and is impotent in the face of evil kings in this time when Dharma is standing on just one leg must also then be included in the definition of the hijras. In other words, both the state and the public align and include themselves with the hijras when facing each

\textsuperscript{203} Dwaipayan Ghosh, “2 eunuchs found killed, jewellery and cash missing” in \textit{The Times of India} 21\textsuperscript{st} October, 2009.
\textsuperscript{204} Rajinder Nagarkoti, “Eunuchs robbed of Rs 50L” in \textit{The Times of India}, 5th of May 2011.
other. Everybody is a hijra. As Markandeya had warned, everybody will be equal to the Sudras. The hijras themselves rather than being incorruptible exemplify the corruption of the world. Their promises like those of the politicians’ are empty, they collect and hoard money, which like the money of the priests cannot fructify and brings about their death. They endorse politicians for money and sell their reputation of being authentic ascetics who would only have the best interests of the public at heart.

Veena Das has argued that “the relation between the other yugas and Kaliyuga, then, is that of the conceptual order to the empirical order.” The hijras instead of being estranged from the state reflects the politics of our time, when there is either corruption or a perception of corruption in the state’s bureaucracy, and amongst the citizenry as well. The hijra emerges as a figure that lubricates this acrimonious relationship. Like a defanged cobra, the hijra threatens with a virtual bite. The appearance of the threat, in Simmel’s words, carries the seriousness and the tragic consequences of the social into a shadow world and thereby attenuates it. The fact that such deception can often be worse than the actual violence that it seeks to prevent and contain, is itself the quality of Kalyug, when things are not what they seem and there is no grounds on which one can know the correct rules of conduct. At such times, we cannot but yield to the debts and liabilities of compassion.

\[205\] Das, Structure and Cognition, 89

\[206\] I add this possibility in the end because even though I am not sure how to carry it forward to its conclusion I do want to register that accountability in the discipline of anthropology is in no way a new topic or concern. The possibility that I mention above, that is the hijras themselves might be perpetuating Kalyug rather than making life bearable in it arises from the provoking words of John Borneman: “... While memory over time seeks accountability, money over time evades accountability.” In John Borneman, “On Money and the Memory of Loss,” Etnografica, VI, 2 (2002): 288.
Chapter 4- Courses of True Love

When I returned to Bhadrak for my long stint of fieldwork, there was a spat going on between two of my informants, Jaina and Azgari. Though their shops were on the same street, with a couple of other shops separating them, Jaina refused to go to Azgari’s shop and have tea with her. When I asked her why that was the case, she replied, “Ask her, so much trouble has been created over one boy.” The “trouble” was told to me in bits and pieces over the course of a month. A young boy207 had moved to Bhadrak a year ago and had struck up an amorous friendship with Azgari. The boy, Bablu, usually referred to as Khalifa’s grandson, would always be found at Azgari’s shop. Azgari and Bablu would while away hours, chatting and buying each other sweets and snacks. Azgari had a longstanding festering feud with the younger brother of Bablu’s father. Azgari and Bablu’s uncle had been given the charge of collecting donations from the rich people of Bhadrak for the annual cricket tournament. Azgari had complained that Bablu’s Uncle would never do any work, but would show up for the feast at the end of the tournament every year. She had eventually got him kicked out of the committee. Obviously, this had not gone down very well with Bablu’s uncle.

Once Bablu had a fight with some of the boys and ran away and hid in Azgari’s shop in the middle of the night. Azgari wrapping up her day, was bathing at the tube well nearby. When Bablu’s family eventually came looking for him, Azgari said that she had no idea where Bablu was even though she had seen him slip inside her shop. When Bablu reappeared in the morning, the carpenter who worked across from Azgari’s shop,

207 I don’t know the boy’s exact age. The constraints of ethical research did not permit me to make any kind of contact with him. All of the information recorded here was heard in the marketplace recounted by the members of the panchayat, of which one was Jaina. I was told that he was in the final year of high school, so I can safely assume his age to be between 17-19, if not more.
informed Bablu’s uncle that he saw Bablu emerge from Azgari’s shop in the morning. The uncle then complained to other people that Azgari had “spoilt the boy- bigaar diya” and that she should be taught a lesson. A panchayat (local tribunal) was called where the uncle asked his nephew whether or not he had spent the night with Azgari. The boy lied and said “No”. He was asked whether he had ever done “it” -uske saath kiya hai ki nahin- with Azgari and once again he replied, “No”.

A little more must be said about how Bablu came to be with Azgari in the first place. Bablu was living with his mother’s family in another district before he was moved back to his father’s place in Shankarpur, Bhadrak. His father had asked Azgari to keep an eye on him and to teach him the cycle repair trade in case the boy showed any interest. During the panchayat proceedings described above the uncle began beating the boy mercilessly and demanded that he tell the truth, but the boy continued to deny spending the night or having done “it” with Azgari. People stopped him and said “if you beat him like this of course he will say ‘yes’.” Azgari recounted telling the uncle, “if you have any doubts then let us go to the mazhar and we will take an oath; whoever lies will fall ill on the 15th day.” However, Bablu’s uncle refused to do this, however, and Azgari continued, “I was saved because I would have had to take a false oath and would have fallen ill.” People disbanded and the hullabaloo sort of died down, but the boy continued his visits to Azgari’s shop. After a week of me being there, Azgari came to me and said, “I have told him to not come to my shop anymore.” I asked her, “Why?” She replied, “Because when he used to sit there, he would touch me, pinch me, tease me, people would see and after all the jhamela (problem/ruckus) they would start thinking again, maybe, something is going on here after all, so I told him not to come here anymore.”
A week or two after our conversation Azgari came to my room late in the night and said in a tired, melancholic voice, “What did they get from creating so much trouble? So what if he was sitting at my shop and teasing me and pinching me and buying me some small things like tea and snacks - how was it harming anybody? If I took a small vessel of water from the ocean is the ocean poorer?” I looked visibly confused at this metaphor, but wondered whether the youth was an ocean of love? Azgari noted the confusion and tried to explain it by starting to say, “A man is like an ocean …” but then looked confused herself and ambled away into the night. After a few weeks, Azgari again came to my room once again in the middle of the night with some paan and a cup of tea. She told me a story that made the metaphor she used much clearer.

Once, a long time ago, a pir was asked by God to leave India and travel somewhere else to preach Islam. After travelling for days, months and years he settled on a place, but that a very rich Jewish man owned that piece of land. He asked his followers to bring him a small vessel of water so that he could wash himself and begin his prayers. His followers went to the lake but the King who had heard that this preacher had come to his land had ordered his soldiers to prevent the men from collecting water. The followers returned to the preacher and the preacher himself went to the lake and asked for the permission to collect some water. After hearing the soldier’s deny him – the entire lake itself came to the shore and poured itself into the small vessel.

In a solidly argued article, “Parasurama and Time”, Lynn Thomas investigates the anachronistic presence of Parasurama in the Mahabharata. She asks, “How are we to understand Parasurama’s intervention in the events of the epics at all, set as they are so far apart and so long after his own lifetime?” And she gives us three implications of the temporal dissonance that is created by the presence of the immortal, axe-wielding,

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kshatriya killer in the chronologies of the epics. His presence, firstly “…brings into focus the scale of the massacre about to take place; and suggests that the reasons for it are similar, namely to relieve the earth of her burden of adharmic ksatriyas.” Secondly, Thomas argues, Parasurama is ever present “at the critical junctures between yugas” and finally, “Parasurama acts in a clearly demarcated arena, reaches the limits of his task, and then disappears back to the spatial and temporal sidelines, where he will wait until his reappearance at the next yuganta.” The mythical Parasurama, through his appearance, makes sensible the going-ons of the epic, not just to the readers, but also to the epic’s characters themselves. If these mythical figures, avatars of Vishnu, themselves have to tap into the mythical time of other yugas to comprehend or make comprehensible what is unfolding before them, then I want to argue, accordingly, that Azgari similarly connects the folktale of the pir with his magical powers to her affair with the young boy, through her fragment, “A man is like an ocean”, thus signalling towards some other sensible understanding of sex.

First, I want to discuss is the consent of the boy to the sexual encounter, made apparent by drawing a parallel between the water of the lake and him. Just as the water came willingly into the pir’s small vessel – the impossible made possible – due to the powers of the pir and his proximity to God, the boy came willingly to Azgari, testifying to the truth of her love or purity of her intentions. To understand the issue of consent at stake here, we must also examine how the politics of penetration complicate it. The phrase bigaar diya suggests something other than non-consensual sex. Literally, it means,

\[209\] ibid. 83
\[210\] ibid. 84. Yugas are epochs in which time is divided in Hindu thought. There are four yugas and the current one is the Kaliyuga, marked by sin and immorality. Thomas points out that Parasurama is always present at the transition from one epoch to another.
“spoil,” – as in the case of spoilt children, *bigda hua*, or spoiling somebody’s well laid out plans, *kaam bigadna*. With each of these semantic possibilities in mind, the accusation against Azgari made more sense. Firstly, she was never accused of raping the young man as rape was thought of narrowly as penetration in Bhadrak and was limited to the rape of women. Stories about details of young college-going girls being raped were often told to me with the word “rape” rather than *bigaarna*. Young men jilted in love would often threaten to rape the women who rejected them, who were viewed as being coy and playing hard-to-get or not interested in them. Here, the accusation of *Bigarna* connotes impropriety because the unmarried youth was not being taught how to live and organize his life in a manner deemed fruitful, or proper and profitable. Lawrence Cohen has written about how anal sex in India is organized along the axis of the *gaandu*, the one who gets fucking, and *londabaazi*, the one who takes “pleasure in young men” or pederasty, a pastime or hobby of the rich- *navabi shauk*. This nawabi pleasure of fucking aligns itself with the sexual metaphors of feudalism and its various and variegated iterations in and of modern India.

When we add the dimension of age to the axis of the *gaandu* and the *nawab* then we see proliferations of the *londebaaz* and his secular, globalizing cousin- the paedophile. The latter I will now bracket and address at the same time as paedophilia does not concern itself with consent. The notion of paedophilia works to uphold the legal fiction of the child unable to give consent to sex before the decided age and a very valid argument can be made of the necessity of this fiction. Also, paedophilia does not concern itself with

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being fucked or fucking, when both positions are highly charged with semanticity, erotic
and otherwise. A cultural and a psychoanalytic critique of the panic surrounding the
child’s sexuality can be made but I doubt it will gain any currency in the current moment
of paranoia and hysteria. 212 Let us return, therefore, to the former, the londebaaz, to
connect the pleasures of fucking to the crises of economy that it entails.

Ruth Vanita, in an indispensable work of translation, Chocolate and Other
Writings on Male Homoeroticism, by the author Pandey Bechan Sharma, writes, “The
word chocolate, which Ugra [Bechan Sharma’s nom de plume], in his foreword, claimed
to have invented as a synonym for the popular term laundebaazi (boy chasing), rapidly
came to be used by everyone in the debate, including supporters and opponents of Ugra,
as well as indifferent parties like Nirala. Today, this connotation of the word is no longer
widely known, but from the mid 1920s to the mid 1930s, it functioned in the Hindi
literary world as a convenient code word that enabled avoidance of more explicit
language.” 213 Vanita herself offers a few explanations underlining the logic behind this
code. She speculates that “Chocolate is one of the most widely amiable consumer items
in India; it is so indigenized that its name has become a Hindi word, yet it is non-
Indian in origin, compared to Indian sweetmeats like laddoos [...] it suggests that an attempt to
eradicate homosexuality in modern India would be self-defeating and anti-pleasure as an
attempt to eradicate the taste for chocolate.” Interestingly, after stating that “the
connotation of the word is no longer widely known” she records a comment by a “woman
activist who works with a sexuality rights organization” who, upon hearing Vanita

212 I must add that the juridical is being forced to address, amend and modify the simple equation of child
and sex equals exploitation of a pure victim in the increasing number of cases where children of the age
deemed exclusive to sexuality are committing sexual violence.
213 Ruth Vanita, introduction to Chocolate and Other Writings on Male Homoeroticism by Pandey Bechan
Sharma (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009) xxix
present an earlier version of the paper, remarked that ““Chocolate” is still used as street lingo among some groups of non-English speaking homosexual males to refer to an attractive effeminate man or boy.”

Though none of the stories translated explicitly mention whether ‘chocolates’ are the ones who are fucking or are fucked, the sex itself between the chocolate and the man assumes the reader’s knowledge or is communicated through an ellipsis: the youth is always coded in a way that renders him as penetrated. For example,

He admitted to the Thakur at the start that such love becomes infernal when it grows impure and perverted by desire. So at the outset he would gaze upon him from a distance and consider himself the equivalent of Majnun and Farhad
And:
“Gradually the rustic boy’s face began to lose its beauty. Its boy-ish innocence and tenderness began to be replaced by a prostitute’s shamelessness and harshness.”

Within the narrative logic of the stories, the youth is cast implicitly, into the role of the legendary female lovers (Laila and Shirin), and more explicitly, in that of a prostitute because of his coquetry. As expected, we never read the voice of the youth in the short stories because, as Cohen has shown elsewhere, in this world of karna and karwana, of doing and being done to, the pleasures are taken by feudal landlords in exploitation, in fucking. There is no depiction or form given to the pleasures of being penetrated; it remains abject and beyond description. Though Vanita does not remark on the politics of penetration in these stories and commits to an argument that prevents an easy reading of the stories as purely moralistic or didactical in order to recuperate the political purposes of translating such a text, there is, however, a discernible economy of being

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214 ibid. xxx
215 ibid. 63 and 64
fucked and fucking present. While the laundebaaz, upon discovery of his shauk or love, faces public shame, calumny, excommunication and imprisonment, the beloved (the chocolate or the fucked) either dies of tuberculosis caused by homosexuality, more specifically by being fucked, or is let go off in the narrative, figuratively with only mild punishment. The implication here is that nobody would want to be fucked, youths and chocolates have to be seduced and become wayward. They have become spoilt, if you will, and can be made to see the light and follow the right path. The laundebaaz, in these stories, retain an inflated agency, given their age, and are considered immoral given the way they use their agency to seduce.

One of the characters whose eccentricity, Vanita notes, undermines his strict moral preachings says,

O beautiful young men! You do not yet know what this world is like. You are filled with enthusiasm and curiosity. You do not know the difference between good and bad. That is why I say to you, do not consider my words a joke. This is not the age to learn bad things. you should not play the drama of love now; do not get seduced and hide your face on anyone’s chest. Refrain from understanding the mysteries of embraces and kisses. Don’t sell your beautiful bodies, your blossoming cheeks, your red lips! [...] Otherwise, once this beauty is destroyed, this dazzling face is blackened, the redness of these fair lips dries up, the shyness of these eyes dies, you will face nothing but hatred and disgust in the world. [...] As soon as nature or men steal these from you, you will become three a penny. [...] Don’t let any man kiss your lips, don’t let any intoxicated one stroke your cheeks, don’t let any demon press your tender chest to his iron heart! You are not sex objects. You are men, you are gods, you are God. [...] 217

While the fucker just gets off with discipline and punishment, the fucked is either seen to not have the desire to be penetrated and when he does, it results in him dying of tuberculosis, or the beauty of his face being replaced by a “prostitute’s shamelessness and

Lawrence Cohen offers a touching ethnographic snippet of a man who sketches his penis on a card to gift to his beloved, thereby forcing the anthropologist to locate the grammar of love, sex and penetration that go against depictions of sodomitical violence. I mention this blink and miss portion of Cohen’s iconoclastic essay because it argues against the immorality of Bechan Sharma’s laundebaaizi. Yet have to account for the ethnographic scene that I began this essay with, in a place where no feudality existed, whether in terms of age - as Khalifa’s grandson was considerably younger than Azgari - or in class, as Bablu’s family was neither richer nor poorer than Azgari. So this was not the bigaarna or spoiling of the kind that the laundebaaz or the fucker does; rather, it was a different bigaarna. Something that, I suspect, would not have resulted in such a ruckus, had Azgari not picked a fight with the boy’s uncle or had the carpenter not tattled.

I will now take a detour, not only because I want to offer a different reading of chocolate, pedagogy, penetration, consent and coercion than the aforementioned one, but also because it will help us complete the picture that folds against itself when age is thrown into the equation of londebaazi, karna and karwana. Azgari had been repairing cycles for years and had taught several boys the practices of the trade. These former apprentices were now spread across Bhadrak and were one reason why Azgari was much-loved and respected. When swamped with customers, she would send them to her former apprentices and would also receive customers from them in turn. When offering a history of all the boys who had passed through her hands, she remarked on how her generosity prevented her from becoming an easy target for bullying or harassment. She used to say,

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218 Ibid. 64
“People know if they say something or do something, all my boys will come armed to save me.” I asked her where she had learnt her trade and she griningly told me the story of her master. She recalled with much amusement: “I was very young when I started working in a shop near Charampa. He was a big man, a pathan. Whenever I used to make a mistake, he would fuck me. For years it went on like this - if there was ever a mistake he used to first fuck me then he used to tell me how to do it correctly. Oh, he was a big karnewala. He also used to take good care of me, feed me, and give me money and chocolates, chai, and other things to eat. Then, when I turned sixteen or seventeen, he helped me open my own shop.”

Previous ethnographies on hijras as well as my own were replete with narratives of bigarna and bigaarna. Vyas and Shingala’s The Life Style of the Eunuchs records the following, “[O]ne explained that he was the school boy from a well reputed family, his teacher used to call the students at his place for teaching purpose. The teacher was not charging the fees. But exposed him towards unnatural sexual relationship. The boy become habituated and used to act as a female. People used to laugh at him for his behaviour. And it was unmanagable and uncontrolable for him to live. He met this people and became a eunuch [sic].” Yet another hijra told them, “Saheb, how little you know the world. A damned sodomite in the chawl in which I lived misused me even before I had grown a moustache. He buggered me by force and often. After a while I begun liking it too. When I was 21, I was glad to get myself castrated [sic].”

These stories might sit very well with simplistic notions of desire, pleasure and violence, and especially with the moralistic notions of bigarna that Ugra warns us about; but when Gayatri Reddy probes

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deeper these narratives begin to lose traction. The hijras in her ethnography tell her, “I liked only men and was spoiled by them early in life. I used to make up games where I was the wife, and this boy I liked was my husband, and I would make him spoil me.” 221 She writes, “The extraordinary violence that each of them suffered appeared almost ubiquitous in all their lives. Several koti222 narratives would date their entry into “this line” from the point in their lives when they were “spoiled” by their friend, neighbours, and teachers.”223 Suresh, a koti told Reddy, “I entered this line first when I was ‘raped’ by my teacher in school. I was nine or ten years old, and my teacher told me that he wanted to talk to me after class. Then he ‘raped’ me. I didn’t know anything at that time about ‘homosex,’ or kotis, or anything. I didn’t enjoy it at all that time, but slowly, slowly I began to enjoy, and now I am a ‘homosex.’”224

Yet another vignette in Reddy’s ethnography goes as follows,

I still remember the day he came to our village, […] It was a Saturday. We did not have school on that day and so I was playing in the garden. I saw this man on the road. He was wearing a very smart uniform and he looked so handsome, I cannot tell you! He looked at me straight, and my heart was going dhud-dhud.” Over the next couple of years, as Vikas grew to late adolescence, the navy serviceman and he “became good friends.” One day, his friend invited Vikas into his house and “spoiled” him. He then quickly added, “I should not say that I did not enjoy. I also enjoyed. But once you enjoy like that, once you enjoy ‘homosex,’ you cannot go back. 225

Reddy analyzes the notion of spoiling and writes,

221 Reddy, Respect Sex, 46.
222 The divide between koti and hijra is uneven geographically as well as conceptually. For the time being, I would erase the divide between the two because the difference is often seen as an argument for authenticity rather than anything else. Please see Lawrence Cohen, “The Kothi Wars: AIDS Cosmopolitanism and the Morality of Classification,” in Sex in Development: Science, Sexuality, and Morality in Global Perspective. Eds. Vincanne Adams and Stacey Leigh Pigg (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) 269-303.
223 ibid., 203.
224 ibid., 203.
225 ibid., 207-8.
The “spoiling” (*cedu* or *cedugottu* in Telugu) referred to the sexual experiences of many hijras and other kotis when they were either receptive partners in their sexual relationships with men, or as they indicated in a few instances, “raped” by them. Most of these Kotis said they were “spoiled by these men *because* they were kotis, that is, they actively desired receptive, anal intercourse, and the men they had sex with knew kotis enjoyed their sexual practice. Others however said that it was this first sexual experience that “spoiled” them for future penetrative/heterosexual intercourse, “weakening [their] organ” and subsequently making them either impotent or able to “enjoy only ‘homosex’. ‘” Whatever their causal attribution, as they categorically states, “Now [we] are kotis and there is nothing [we] can do about it.”

The cause of spoiling, notwithstanding the violence of their first sexual encounters, is conflated with the result of spoiling in these narratives and makes clear the irony in Ugra’s moralistic tales. The penetration did not result in spoiling. Hijras find it necessary to tell Reddy that they were already kotis and would make the men “spoil” them. The biological gloss given by them regarding their impotence, which they claim, made them like homo*sex* is undermined by the acknowledgement, albeit in disgust, of hijras and kotis who are married and have children. Clearly then, penetration does not result in impotence, and even if it does, the impotence is not the reason why they become kotis and hijras. Reddy writes,

In one case, however, I was explicitly asked to intervene by “talking sense into” one koti (BR), who had abandoned his wife and children and temporarily joined the hijras. The other kotis- BR’s friends- told me to try to get BR to “live a decent life and go back to his wife.” It was significant that only after BR joined the hijras was he believed to be leading an indecent life. Prior to this, he had been cruising the park with his other koti friends for at least ten years. Even though he had been married all this time, the koti lifestyle was not considered transgressive in the same way as his current (proto) hijra lifestyle.

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226 Ibid., 47.
227 Ibid., 244.
The circularity of this logic - spoilt because they were hijras and becoming hijras as a result of being spoilt - is most clear when hijras say they became so because they were made impotent (by being spoilt), while also acknowledging that some could father children, as in the example above. The circularity emerges from trying to understand that which is common to all these narratives of becoming hijra; - which is the pleasure in homosex or in being penetrated; since even the ones who are married want to leave their wives and kids and be fucked. The pleasure is refracted and traced from the first glance, which made the heart go dhud-dhud, and carried through the repeated fucking and finally taken to the moment when they cannot enjoy anything else besides being fucked. The spoiling then refers to the transformation of the violence of penetration to the pleasures of being penetrated.

Leo Bersani, in his article “Pedagogy and Pederasty” writes that the penetrated boy in a pederastic relationship “will be worthy of becoming a free adult Greek male Citizen only if, while accepting the desires of the pursuant man, he manages not to share any sensations with him - that is, to experience any sexual pleasure. A kind of sublimation of sexuality is apparently possible within the sexual act itself: it is by mastering the pleasure of passivity in a situation in which he is defined as passivity that the boy lays the foundation for the spiritualizing transformation of sex into the socially acceptable relation of philia, or friendship.” 228 Penetration is never or rather should not be pleasurable for the boy. It is pleasurable for the man only to the extent that he discovers that it is truth that he loves through boys. The hijras, in their narratives, resist sublimation and are failed subjects, politically and in every other way. This would hardly

be news if Bersani had not rescued failure by reading Foucault against himself by writing, “The writer’s resistance to his culture can lie - as Foucault had abundantly shown in his earlier work - not in the factitious power of a mind mythically exercised into a kind of self-divestiture, but rather in the excessive passivity of his surrender to the coercive seductions of what he ‘silently thinks.’”

Azgari, and all the other hijras, in resisting sublimation and surrendering to the pleasures of coercive seductions are failures, but there are also some resistances of failures that brings us closer to understanding the “spoiling” that Azgari was doing in being penetrated, rather than penetrating.

In his monograph on Henry Darger, Michael Moon constructs a beautiful argument that veers readings of Darger’s paintings away from being symptomatic of his personal history or fantasies of sexual violence. Instead, he argues that far from being strange depictions of extraordinary violence, given the history of the figure of the child in the Christian cosmos of the West, Darger “took on the role of witness to the terrible ordinariness of violence in the history of the twentieth century - especially violence against children, and specifically against girls.”

Moon reconstructs the milieu of the early twentieth century in which orphans like Darger grew up through the literature that was found in Darger’s room and the various pulp fictions, which Darger “plagiarized” to create his own magnum opus. Moon juxtaposes Darger’s work against other literatures of fantasies – or fantasies of literature that are well-known, notably those written by the Bronte children, but carried into adulthood by Branwell Bronte. Moon writes, “I understand both Branwell Bronte’s and Henry Darger’s apparent (and shared) predilection for scenes of gruesome and grotesque mortality as the strong desire they also

229 Ibid., 20.
shared to expose and explore what they perceived as the rottenness of the rule of cosmic law in their respective worlds. Both artists at times seem consumed by their similar visions of the ungrounded and ungroundable foulness that is all that ultimately establishes the law the supposed foundation of the worlds each of them makes.”231 He concludes by arguing that, “The almost intolerable truth that makes both their bodies of work still such unwelcome- and indeed in most ways unreceived- “news” is that the rottenness of much of what they have to show us may be neither an effect nor a symptom of their personal histories or psychologies, but a fundamental and constitutive element of their-and our-worlds.”232

The rule of cosmic law whose rottenness, ungrounded and ungroundable foulness, that Azgari exposed was that which governed the economy of semen. As I mentioned in the introduction, much has been written about semen in South Asia and its resultant contradictions. Veena Das writes, “The man in his young adulthood faces a peculiar contradiction whereby abstaining from sex is considered to bestow great power and good health and yet satisfaction of instinctual urges is also considered necessary.”233 Lawrence Cohen has written convincingly of the inevitable failure of economy that is implicit in the inheritance of this contradiction, which is recognized metonymically through the much-discussed anxiety of semen-loss syndrome. In short, he argues that even though there is much emphasis on semen retention, its preciousness valorized in many texts and contexts, the rules of exchange that are prescribed can hardly be followed, not even the gods can adhere to them - it would be like ‘out ejaculating’ the atom bomb. In fact, “

231 Ibid., 77
232 Ibid., 78
The conservative logic of accumulation makes possible the expensive play of semen, its prodigious and potlatch exchange, its passionate waste.”

The fact that life is lived against the grain and rules are broken was obvious to the people of Cohen’s ethnography as well as to the good people of Bhadrak. It was probably also the reason why Azgari’s affair with the boy did instigate a moral dilemma and outrage for the villagers who did not beat Azgari up or take her to the police station, but it still provided enough ground for the boy’s uncle to use it as an excuse to address other grievances and grudges.

To understand what Bersani pace Foucault calls the resistances of the failure and what Cohen has read in the hijra body as “[the] utterly abject yet indestructible and ultimately triumphant body,” we must understand the ways in which the rotten law that governs the exchange of semen is subverted by the hijra. The various contradictions in the rules of semen exchange that have been recorded by Cohen circulated in Bhadrak as well. Youths would often retort to the hijras teasing them, “My parents spend so much money to feed me so that my power increases, why are you making me waste it.” They would often come to the hijras and me and ask in whispers about what they could do about their “nightfall” (nocturnal emission/wet dream). Jaina would naughtily reply, “If you don’t give it to us, then this is what will happen,” but these were the boys who did come to the hijras to fuck them. While they received a lot of care and attention from their families on the one hand, and their “power” increased with the sacrifices made by their

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families to feed them, the youth realized that their semen lost its value very soon, if it could not be converted to money.

The Osellas, who have studied masculinities in Kerala for decades, write, “For boys in the poorest laboring families, adolescence hardly exists: they move from an impoverished and deprived childhood in which their parents are unable to protect them from the knowledge of adult realities into a young manhood, which immediately demands that they take their share of responsibility by dealing with those realities.”236 Youths would not need to leave Bhadrak to learn the hard lessons of life. Their lives would change overnight and they would be expected to tackle the world, without any warning, and with the odds against them.

In the mornings, Jaina and I used to sit in a small shack to have our breakfast where an old couple would sell some food. Incidentally, their only son had died in Calcutta some years ago in an accident at a construction site where he had worked. Another old woman used to have her breakfast there as well. Though I had noticed her before, I never paid her much attention. One such day, a boy of about twelve, if not younger, got off his bicycle and asked her for some food. She refused. The boy turned to the old man who was frying some puris and asked him for some food. The old woman forbade the old man from giving him any, “If you give him food, I am not paying for it, you can give it out of your own wish.” The boy became a bit belligerent and screamed, “Give me some food, I haven’t eaten the whole day.” The old woman did not say anything and continued eating. I looked at Jaina and gestured with my eyebrows and she piped up to the boy as he was leaving, muttering away to himself angrily. “Oh, come I’ll give you

236 Caroline and Filippo Osella, *Men and Masculinities in South India* (London; Anthem Press, 2006) 40
some food,” Jaina said, but the boy was cycling away furiously already, crying. Jaina chuckled and the old woman turned to us and said, “No, there is no need, don’t spoil him. If he is so hungry, he will find a way to earn money. [bhuk lagega to apne aap paisa kamana seekh jayega.]” The old woman paid and left.

I remember thinking what a cruel old woman she was. Jaina probably read my thoughts, chuckled and said, “Oh, this old woman turned out to be a big fucker, she will fuck everybody—oh, yeh budiya to bahut bari chodhnewali nikli, sab ko chodh ke rak degi.” I want to argue that against the fucking of the old woman and the spoiling that giving a hungry youth some food entailed, Azgari through her form of fucking, spoilt the youth in a similar way. The instance of spoiling that the grandmother was warning against was that which would endanger the capacity of the boy to earn money for food. He would not learn to work hard to feed an empty stomach. The spoiling Azgari offered would put in danger the value of semen, so precious and being expensed so luxuriously in a hijra. The second instance is predicated on the first because the chances of meeting the backbreaking expectations of masculinity are slim and it strips one of health, youth and flesh. Fucking luxuriously are where expectations are met, and success tasted.

The family, as the Osellas have noted, forces the poor youth to become men. His semen, which is constructed as a synecdoche for his masculinity and the value of his body, is expected to result in him earning and supporting the family. The family expects the sacrifices made by them to increase the semen, the power of the youth, to yield some returns. Unfortunately, young boys often discovered that not everybody is that invested in them and that they are dispensable and the odds are stacked against the illiterate young men of Bhadrak. Becoming a householder, a husband and a father, would have re-
inscribed potency and value to their semen. In fact, marriage, as the Osellas have noted was an important rite of passage for non-brahmanical youths in becoming a man. Yet, though sought after, marriage was often out of reach for the young men in Bhadrak, given that parents often preferred their daughters marry employed, financially stable young men, even if it meant that the girl’s conjugal house would be elsewhere. During my fieldwork, people in the village would often deliberate the dangers of getting their daughters married off to Arabs who come bride-hunting to India, and lament that they were forced to do so given that there were no eligible boys in town.²³⁷

In his ethnography Timepass: Youth, Class and the Politics of Waiting in India, Craig Jeffrey observes a similar trend in North India. He writes, “Educated unemployed young men are often unable to marry. They frequently find it difficult to leave home and purchase or rent independent living space. […] They are also commonly dogged by a sense of not having achieved locally salient norms of masculine success; they might conform by dint of their education to a particular vision of successful masculinity but lack the resources necessary to assume the role of male adult provider. Public discourses of educated unemployed young men as “louts” or hypermasculine and violent “threats” to the state and civil society exacerbate this gendered crisis.”²³⁸ ‘Timepass’ refers to the activities the young men of Meerut would indulge in to kill time, which they had in plenty, given their unemployment. Jeffrey writes, “in contrast to the rich Jat farmers, who

²³⁷ I am not sure how much of this is stuff of folklore and rumour and how much of it is an actual practice, irrespective of that doubt, the fact remains that a lot of boys remained unmarried till in their thirties given their poverty, unemployment and inability to get suitable jobs.
²³⁸ Craig Jeffrey, Timepass: Youth, Class and the Politics of Waiting in India (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 2010) 11.
tended to imagine time as a commodity that should be “invested”, many young men appeared to think of time as valueless - to be “passed” or “killed.” 239

I refer to these ethnographies on young men to convey the contradictions that they inhabit in rural India, where their lives unfolded in slow realizations that their time, space and bodies were increasingly valueless, and argue that the hijras in their hunger for cock and semen provided a continued valorization of their semen and consolidated a masculinity that was fractured everywhere else. If fucking boys, laudebaazi, is the luxury, shauk, of the nawabs, then, it is through fucking hijras that the youths enjoyed and tasted that luxury, wasting their precious semen that nobody else in the world cared about after a point in time, not even their family if it did not bring the bread home. In Ugra’s homoerotic economy, the chocolate that is candy was offered to chocolates [boys] in exchange for the pleasures of fucking them in their ass. Chocolate as candy stands as a metonymy for childhood, a luxury for children. It was offered by Azgari’s master and by the men in Ugra’s short stories to boys, fucking whom was a luxury, like chocolate, but for grown men. The failed subjectivity that defines hijras in their refusal, to sublimate their sodomized histories and to learn to become the sodomizer (the fucker) and to remain the fucked, offers the youths a chance to participate in another form of exchange. Azgari did not give chocolates to get ‘chocolates.’ She would give chocolates and other little snacks to seduce young men, and then ask them to fuck her. In this economy she was giving chocolates and her ‘chocolate’ to young men, who could not afford any form of luxury in the world. But what was she getting in return?

239 Ibid., 75 Also see, Craig Jeffrey, Patricia Jeffery, and Roger Jeffery, Degrees Without Freedom: Education, Maculilities, and Unemployment in North India (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 2008). Especially chapter 6, “Muslims’ Strategies in an Age of Insecurity” for a portrait of Muslim youths who faced additional alienation in the face of saffronization taking place in India.
The protagonists in Ugra’s short story, “In Prison” have the following conversation—

“Once again, prisoners fought over a boy,” replied the warder. “A Pathan threw down another Muslim man and bit off his nose with his teeth.”

“For a boy!” I was surprised. “Are minors also kept in these prisons? Are there boys here too? Do noses get cut off and people get beaten over them here too?”

The warder replied, “Minors are not kept in this circuit, but who bothers about age in prison? Prisoners are long time sinners. Their boys can be anything up to sixty years old.”

Jaina was often called grandmother by people, Jainani; and Azgari was often called Nana, grandfather, but never by the boys with whom they were having affairs. In 2013 Jaina was seventy and Azgari, sixty and these boys were often decades younger. Though their lovers and other youths in Bhadrak treated them with a lot of affection and respect, there was a noticeable lack of acknowledgement of their age in their everyday interactions between them. Azgari and Jaina themselves never spoke about their age, or even referred to their aging bodies. I had been struck by the fact that the boys never made fun of them because of their age, like they did with other old people roaming around the market. In the economy of giving chocolates and the pleasures of anal sex, the hijras realigned their bodies as well as those of the youth to match the picture of pederasty. The boys became penetrating men with the luxury of dispensing semen and acquiring the truth of the world, and the hijras remained young, like nubile “chocolates.”

Azgari’s mythological frame of reference then highlighted the perpetuating rottenness of the world, which, while having a larger claim on the oceanic water/semen of the boy, contradicted itself by not valuing it when it couldn’t transform into other material values. Furthermore, the world reprimanded Azgari, for spoiling the boy. What

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catastrophe would a small meal or a quiet fuck in the night in this cruel world have entailed? What did they get from creating a ruckus about the little pleasures of life?

If the pedagogic purpose of being penetrated is to learn how to become the penetrator, in continuing to remain the penetrated and failing to learn the lesson, the hijra’s flesh in Michael Moon’s words, “stay weird.” He writes,

Early in In the Realms, Darger writes that although some girls (and boys) may be weak and vulnerable, it is a widely known fact that the toughest girls are tougher than any boys. Who knows what early experiences of late fantasies of Darger’s may subtend his confident assertion of this “fact”? Let us take the boy genitals with which he depicts so many of his “nuded” heroines as a sign that he declines to resolve the matter that vexes so many of his fellow pulp writers, the transformation of “weird flesh” […] back into some normal state. Flesh in Darger tends to stay weird. Perhaps that is the most lasting sign of the legacy of pulp in his work- and of pulp’s largely foreclosed promise of providing alternative histories of childhood and other conditions that Darger sees as forms of slavery, abuse, and atrocity.241

The hijras, who I would like to see as heroines of Bhadrak sometimes with boy genitals were like Darger’s weird flesh in many ways. Let me offer two ethnographic scenes to anchor my analogy.

I cannot remember when I came to know that the first person who fucked Bhatto was her maternal grandfather. Bhatto’s mother had died and she was sent to her maternal grandparents’ place to live because her father had re-married. I do remember asking Bhatto about it, and she related, amidst loud guffaws of laughter, of how when she was ten years old, her grandfather had done it with her in the middle of the night, after returning from the liquor shop. If we read this act of penetration in psychological terms, we could see Bhatto as struggling to return to a “normal” state. Apart from the fact that Bhatto attributed her preference to have sex with old men to her grandfather fucking her,

I am hard pressed to find evidence of a struggle given that there was never any mention of moral outrage, let alone pain.\textsuperscript{242} It was an instance of flesh remaining weird, providing an alternative history to one of “abuse and atrocity.” The failed pedagogy of penetration then that keeps on wanting to be fucked, I argue keeps the flesh weird or makes the hijra.

Another instance of this keeping the flesh weird came from Akhtari, who the other hijras used to reproach mildly for being in a relationship with her own nephew (sister’s son). When I asked what was wrong with getting fucked by your nephew, the hijras who were gathered during the discussion told me. “He is a family man, if his wife gets to know, there will be a fight, she might leave him. How can one destroy one’s own family?” When I asked who in the family could fuck them, the answer formed a pattern. It was not the male nephew from either side, nor the husband of any female relative (sister, niece, mother, grandmother, daughter), nor men to whom they would have been nephews (FB, MB, MZH, FZH) They could get fucked only by youths who were first cousins (FBS, MBS, FZS, MZS) and the sons of these first cousins - youths to whom they would be grandparents (sons of their nieces and nephews from either side).

While sex between cousins was legitimized through cross-cousin marriage, the omission of a generation to allow sex only between one’s grandfather’s generation and one’s grandson’s generation, but not one’s own grandfather or grandson, is obviously telling - not in its formulation but in its infringement. These rules were broken by Akhtari and Bhatto (who was at that time carrying on with her sister’s husband) and more importantly, the positions here were reversed. Hijras were fucked by the youth and did

\textsuperscript{242} Bhatto was forty-five in 2012. The fact this is an older person recounting a violent incident from her childhood clarifies my argument that to become a hijra, one would have to have a different relationship to sexual violence. In other words, the afterlife of such incidents for hijras is different from the ones faced and remembered by men and women. A difference made possible because violence itself is not a transparent category.
not fuck them like Bhatto’s grandfather did. This, as I have argued above, renders the sexual act as a gesture of tenderness that consolidates the masculinity of the hungry, horny youth. The breaking of the rules also gestured towards the rottenness of the laws of incest, the ones that are incipient to the social. Akhtari would often retort to the mild reproaches with smart, poetic comebacks like the following: “I tend to the tree, why should somebody else eat the fruit? [Gach hum lagaye, aur phal koi aur khayega?]” And “Its my possession, I know best how to take care of it. [Humara saaman hai, hum jaante hai kaise sambhalna.]” And “why speak of nephews - I have no objections in getting fucked by my own son.” [Bhanja, bhatija ka kya, mujhe apne ladke se bhi chudwane mein koi aitraaz nahin hai.] When one finds the whole world rotten, then why should one adhere to its rules? Invoking the rules of incest and then encouraging its transgression, but with the roles of penetration reversed, is the resistance that the hijra offers through her failure, her subversive passivity, and her weird flesh.

Let me clarify Moon’s notion of weird flesh and its consonance with the love affairs between the hijras and their lovers. Michael Moon repudiates psychologized readings of Darger’s heroines’ endowment with what has been recognized as penises by offering a more empirical analysis. He argues that if Darger was tormented by the violence caused on little girls during his times, his drawing of ambiguous genitalia on the little girls of his artwork suggests that he imagined these girls to have the potential to refuse to become victims that being “little girls” implied. In other words, the potential to refuse being pathologized as little girls and hence victims. Comparing and contrasting Darger’s superheroines with other superheroes of the time, Moon observes that while most superheroes transformed back into a normal state, the superheroes in Darger
remained weird, that is, they never became normal little girls. That is the radical potential of Darger’s paintings. Little girls did not need to grow up or eventually become little girls; they could remain something else, something weird.\footnote{Please see another essay of Michael Moon, which explicates the argument he is making in his book, \textit{Darger’s Resources}. Michael Moon, “Do you smoke? Or, Is there Life? After Sex?” in \textit{After Sex?: On Writing Since Queer Theory} ed. Janet Halley and Andrew Parker (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 55-65.} In Bhadrak, the hijras including Bhatto, Akhtari and Azgari also refused to become victims of what could be easily read as paedophilia, incest, abuse, or trauma, and in fact by disavowing the language of pain but by remaining penetrated, they became something that was not a victim, but something else, something weird, a hijra. What else could we call the form of carnality that does not register the breach of incest in expected ways? Weirdness is contagious though, a contagion that I read as pedagogic. Pedagogic because it imparts to the youth the lesson that the rules of the world are just that – rules – that can be broken.

Let me offer some instances where and when some rules were meant to be broken in order to adhere to another set.

Varieties of incest when committed, carried in the various prescriptive texts of law, and expectedly so, a variety of penalties. I want to focus on a myth where one faces opprobrium for \textit{not} committing incest.

The celestial courtesan Urvasi fell in love with Arjuna and propositioned him, but he said she is like a mother to him and clapped his hands over his ears. Furious, the spurned nymph gave him a curse to be a dancer among women, devoid of honor, regarded as an impotent man (\textit{kliba}). But Indra, the father of Arjuna, softened the curse and promised Arjuna that he would spend only a year as a dancer and then would be a man again. Years later, when it was time for Arjuna and his brothers to go into exile in disguise, Arjuna put on a woman’s clothing (though he failed to disguise his hairy, brawny arms) and told his brothers: “I will be a \textit{kliba}.” He offered his services as a dancing master to the women in the harem of a king. The king was suspicious at first, remarking that Arjuna certainly
did not look like a kliba, but he then ascertained that “her” lack of manhood was indeed firm and so let “her” teach his daughters to dance.²⁴⁴ Wendy Doniger compares this myth with others that concern themselves with the transformation of women into men to point out a paradox: “one Hindu view of gender makes it easy to slough off as a pair of pants (or a dress), but this view is often challenged by myths in which skin is more than skin deep, in which the soul and the memory too are gendered, an intrinsic part of the moral coil that is not quite so easily shuffled off.”²⁴⁵ But it is the psychoanalytical reading of this myth that makes it pertinent to the hijras. Robert P. Goldman, in a magisterial article, reads a large corpus of Hindu myths in the light of the Oedipal drama. The first intervention that he makes - and that I think should be pointed out here - is that of substitution. He writes, “It was in fact the recognition of such substitutions that led Freud to his most fundamental discoveries about the operation of the unconscious and therefore about the science of psychoanalysis itself. For it was his realization that the figures of friends, colleagues, etc., in his dreams and those of his patients were in fact representations of parental and other important figures that enable him to produce *The Interpretation of Dreams.*”²⁴⁶

James L. Fitzgerald while acknowledging Goldman’s groundbreaking analysis, substitutes substitution pace Wittgenstein with resemblance to offer a more anthropological reading of the Oedipal drama in the South Asian context. Fitzgerald argues that differentiating between the langue and the parole of the narratives of Indian families will enable us to see “elements that definitely resemble the classic ‘Oedipal’

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 70.
triangle occur and recur in this story, but also ... that these contribute only a part of to some larger tableau of meaning that can be ethically construed in pragmatic social settings.” 247 I rely on Fitzgerald’s argument to make my point that it was not important that the hijras follow a certain generational distance to calibrate the incest taboo. It was not only because the hijras in their families substituted for and resembled figures of authority especially to their grand nephews but because they broke the taboo all the time and faced only mild reproach. If they broke one formulation of the incest taboo to adhere to another, then we could have argued that they were legitimizing some form of intimacy to serve a larger purpose - the Hindu rules of leviratic marriages and other niyojana rules of procreation are an example. However, it is because they were breaking all the rules of incest, including the ones that they themselves had set up, they were signalling towards a different realization of the world, a realization that all rules can be broken and that all rules rot the flesh.

Let us return to the myth of Arjuna’s refusal to commit incest to clarify what I mean. Goldman has read the particular myth, mentioned above, to consolidate his argument of the existence of the Oedipal drama in Indian narratives. He sees Arjuna’s refusal to have sex with his ancestress as the renunciation of the mother who is the sexual object of the Oedipal rivalry, thereby resulting in a negative Oedipal resolution, which is the passive homosexual identification with the father. 248 Fair enough, but if Bersani insists that there is resistance in this failure and I have argued that this resistance is pedagogical, then, what can the act of committing incest like the ones enacted by Akhtari

and Bhatto through the reversal of roles in incestuous fucking teach? What does it mean to be fucked by your grandson, rather than to fuck him? Why is Arjuna cursed for refusing to commit incest?

The reason for this is to be found in another set of texts, according to which he has broken one set of rules in upholding another. In his study of the Gita Govinda, Lee Siegel cites Sir John Woodroffe’s *Introduction to Tantra Sastra*, “… it is said in Sruti, ‘talpagatam na pariharet’ (She who comes to your bed is not to be refused), for the rule of chastity which is binding him [the yogin] yields to such an advance on the part of a woman.” 249 This rule, according to tantric texts, extends to one’s mother and sister and is a part of profaning rituals that are sacred or of sacred rituals that are profane. Sacred and profane are words used by Siegel, but as scholars after Siegel have argued, this dichotomy hardly works in the South Asian context. 250 Here is Siegel again, “A passage in the *Tantras* instructs the initiate to indulge in forbidden, sexual, incestuous, blasphemous activity in order to secure liberation: “…inserting his organ into the mother’s womb, pressing his sister’s breasts, placing his foot upon his guru’s head, he will be reborn no more.” Perhaps this means simply that he who is liberated is beyond all morality, all good and evil beyond even dharma; but the verse is also taken by commentators to be written in a code language, the ‘twilight language’ or ‘intentional language’, sandhya –bhasa.” 251

Siegel goes on to offer an analysis that reads the tantric cited above allegorically, building on previous scholarship that has seen it as a coded reference to yogic practices, where the mother’s womb refers to “muladhara or base centre of the yoga body, the sister’s breasts’ are the heart and the throat centre (anahata and ajna) respectively, and the guru’s head is the brain centre”252 and thus translating it as instructions for a yogi. Without discounting this reading, I want to ask what might be the implication of the use of such metaphors and if we can actually read incest, as performed by hijras, as a way of teaching her nephews and grandsons to be beyond dharma, liberated beyond morality.

While I question the reliance on metaphoric incest in tantric sex, David Gordon White in studying a subgenre of tantric sex, the kaula, questions whether it is a merely metaphoric reliance. He writes, “The tendency, toward a literalization of symbolic statements or practices, is one that David Shulman has also identified as a hallmark of many extreme forms of south Indian devotionalism. Most importantly, […] much of the Tantric terminology makes sense only if it is read literally; indeed, I would argue that the ritual edifice of early Tantra only stands, that early Tantra only functions as a coherent system, if these terms are put into literal practice.” The hijras are not tantrics, but can we see in the incest performed by hijras, in which they seduce youths to whom they are related and are also penetrated by them, as pedagogy of a different sort? Not of yogic emancipation but of teaching the ways of the world in which consolidating a masculinity needs to go beyond strict laws of dharma and morality? If such instructions can only utilize metaphors of incest then actual incest must be imagined as a practice of some value other than that of immorality. This brings us back to the economy of semen and the

252 Ibid., 188
ways in which value is imparted to it in the practice of ritualized tantric sex, either through allegorical or actualized incest. 253

I offer a very truncated version of tantric sex, as studied and summarized by David Gordon White in his masterful study Kiss of the Yogini. This summary will also explicate the tantric philosophy only hinted at by Siegel. Very briefly then, yoginis are a set of semi-divine goddesses, an externalized form of the godhead, who are embodied by human women and who through their being possessed by the goddesses “carried in their bodies the germ plasm of the godhead, called the “clan fluid” (kuladravyam), “clan nectar” (kulamrta), “vulval essence” (yonitattva), or simply the “fluid” (dravyam), or the “clan” (kula). While this fluid essence of the godhead flowed naturally through these female beings it was absent in males.”254 The “son of the clan” or kulaputra is required to have sex with yoginis, offering them his semen in exchange for the germ plasm that flows through the sexual fluids or lotus juice of the women. These yoginis are also related to the mother goddesses and can be seen as ancestresses of clans who must be pleased through the offering of semen. While the women of the clan are obviously the bearers of children, they are not seen to carry the clan fluid; it can only be passed through the men who acquire it by having sex with yoginis. These goddesses, if not pleased, will devour the infants of the clan and must be pacified for the safe birth and life of the clan’s children. Related to ensuring the safety of the progeny of men, the yoginis impart supernatural powers to the men, which explains the patronage offered to tantra by kings looking to consolidate and amplify the power of kingship. David Gordon White writes, “[L]ater Tantric sexual practice came to be grounded in a theory of transformative

254 ibid., 11.
aesthetics, in which the experience of orgasm effected a breakthrough from “contracted” self-consciousness to an expansive “god consciousness,” in which the entire universe came to be experienced as “self.”

The hijras, like these yoginis, would give them supernatural powers by seducing men and by breaking the rules of incest and by feeding on their semen. Very much like Darger’s heroines, yoginis and hijras kept the flesh weird, and by making the flesh weird of their men would make them into superhuman men and ward off being cursed with impotence. Serena Nanda offers an ethnographic example that would tie all of this together.

Sushila spoke very warmly of her husband and was disconsolate because she could not give him a child. She very much wanted this for him, because she thought it was necessary that he lead “a normal family life.” [...] When I returned to Bastipore in the summer of 1985, Sushila had quite an achievement to tell me about. She was now a mother-in-law and a grandmother! How had this come about? “She proudly told me that she had adopted her [former] husband as her son and had arranged his marriage with a neighbour’s sister. The girl was poor, but respectable, and quite pretty. The couple now had a son, making Sushila a grandmother. They were living with the boy’s mother in another part of the city, but they visited Sushila nearly every day and I often met with them Since her “son’s” marriage Sushila had found another husband, a man who does not live with her but often comes to spend the night.

Sushila, Nanda’s informant retrospectively, transformed her sexual affair with her husband into incest but did so for a desire to give him a child, a family and to consolidate his kula, something that would need superhuman powers in the face of all the adversities - like the curses of impotence or child mortality because of devouring mother goddesses - that can befall a man trying to create a family and continue his lineage, institutions that are as suffocating in their fragility as in their ideology.

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255 Ibid., 14-5.
256 Nanda, 93-4.
I want to study another set of narratives of love affairs between hijras and their men to show the damages of transforming lovers into sons. Hijras, even if similar to yoginis in their power to transform men into superhumans through transacting in semen, and to Darger’s heroines in keeping their flesh weird and making flesh that came into contact with them weird as well, were after all human. In the following ethnographic narratives, I attempt to show the aftermath of love affairs. Masterani, a hijra in Jajpur, would spend the entire night on the phone with her lover. All the hijras of Jajpur used to sleep in one room in their hijra guru’s house. Guruma used to sleep in another room, and Radha got a separate room because she was the senior most cela. When I was living there, I was given a blanket and asked to sleep in that room as well. Masterani would cover her head with the blanket and we used to hear slight mutterings, cooings, and murmurings emerging from under the blanket throughout the night. After a few days, I caught her alone and asked her about him who had stolen the sleep of her nights. Masterani blushed and said, “I had gone to Talcher to visit a friend and I saw this young man there, I asked my friend to get his number because I fell in love with him as soon as I saw him. I called him and soon we were talking all the time and we fell in love. When I was twelve years old, I decided that I wanted to marry a man who would realize how much love I have for him in my heart. I don’t care if he keeps a physical relation but he must recognize what’s in my heart. You won’t believe how much I love him. If a child shits on his mother’s lap will the mother cut away her limb? No, she won’t mind it at all; she will calmly clean it and then take the child back on to her lap. Just like that, I love him, even if he shits on me, I will like it, I will never get angry but continue to love him.”
The analogy struck me as odd before, and when I thought about it more I realized why it had seemed to me as a bit misplaced. Usually the mother’s love is taken in contradistinction to the erotic love of the wife—blood versus sexuality. In Masterani’s usage, however, the distinction was collapsed, the singularity of a mother’s love for her child was used as an analogy to measure and compare the erotic love that she felt for this man. This love was not made comprehensible in terms of gods and devotees, analogies used by Nanda’s hijra or master and servant or husband and wife, but with the mother and child. In fact Masterani used to say, “I want to be his brother, sister, mother, father, friend, everything.”

She would often use the example of a child shitting on a parent’s lap to explain the inevitable betrayals, disappointments and pitfalls that accompany all and any type of intimacy in and with this world. She would often say that hijras could never love another hijra completely: “If you shit on your mother’s lap will she cut the limb away? No! She will continue to love you, but hijras, even if you fart in their presence, will kick you out of the house.” Let us attempt to understand the damages of being everything to somebody—mother and wife, brother and sister, father and friend—of not getting angry with your lover for shitting on you. I want to study a myth that was told to me that gives form to this exercise of achieving this impossible task of being everything to your lover, and of obliterating the self’s boundaries in love. To make a myth that was told to me in connection with the hijras’ desire for a lover, their “husband fever,” I must repeat the myths of Bahuchara Mata, the patron goddess of hijras that has been recorded by scholars and was told to me as well. The first myth is as follows—

Bahuchara was a pretty, young maiden in a party of travellers passing though the forest in Gujarat. The party was attacked by thieves, and fearing that they would
outrage her modesty, Bahuchara drew her dagger and cut off her breast, offering it to the outlaws in place of her virtue. This act, and her ensuing death, led to Bahuchara’s deification and the practice of self-mutilation and sexual abstinence by her devotees to secure her favor. Bahuchara is also specifically worshipped by childless women in the hope of bearing a child, particularly a son.\textsuperscript{257}

The second myth is as follows-

In one story, a king prayed to Bahuchara for a son. She granted him his wish, but his son named Jetho, was impotent. One night Bahuchara appeared in a dream and commanded Jetho to cut off his genitals, dress in female clothing, and become her servant. Jetho obeyed the goddess and from that time on, it is said, impotent men get a call from the goddess in their dreams to be emasculated. Indeed, there is a belief in Gujarat that impotent men who resist the call of Bahuchara to get emasculated will be born impotent for seven future births.\textsuperscript{258}

The third myth repeated in slightly different versions recorded by Reddy and Nanda is as follows-

Once there was a prince whose parents wanted to get him married. The boy did not want to get married, but his parents insisted. They selected this goddess as his wife, and the marriage took place. He was a very handsome boy, but the Mata was also a very beautiful lady. But after the marriage the husband and wife never joined together. On the first night, leaving the goddess alone in the nuptial room, the prince rode away into the forest. The goddess waited till dawn and felt very angry that her husband had left her. This went on for some months. The goddess felt very hurt and decided to investigate. So one night she followed him on a path to the forest clearing where the prince had been acting like the hijras. She was puzzled by what she had seen and returned home. When her husband returned, she said to him, “I want to ask you something, do not get angry at me. Don’t you feel that you must have your wife by you?” Then the prince fell at her feet and told her, “Mother, if I had the urge for a wife and children I wouldn’t have left you and gone away. I am neither man nor a woman, and that is the truth.” The goddess got very angry and said, “They have spoiled my life by hiding the facts, and therefore your life will also be spoiled. Hereafter, people like you should be nirvan [undergo emasculation in order to be reborn].” So, saying she cut off his genitals. After cutting off his genitals she said, “people like you, who are going to have this nirvan, should call me at that time.” After this the prince took on the form of a woman.\textsuperscript{259}

\textsuperscript{257} Nanda, 25.
\textsuperscript{258} Ibid., 25.
\textsuperscript{259} Ibid., 25-6.
I mention these myths to make sense of the myth that was told to me by Madhu Hijra when she was trying to explain why hijras’ relationships with their men inevitably failed. She said,

Bahuchara mata is neither man nor woman. She did not have any family; she had not married, and did not have children. She had no desire for anybody, she was nishkama and would roam around singing kirtans and begging. Whatever she would earn from begging, she would cook and eat at night. Once she was roaming around begging from house to house and singing, and she was clapping her hands. A child, just like her had been born in a house in that village, she heard her clapping, and came running to her and told her, “I want to be like you, take me around with you.” So Bahuchara mata took her and they started living together. Once this cela was roaming around with mata, she fell in love with a boy, a son of a Rajput family. Knowing that love and desire was forbidden to her, the cela transformed her lover into a mosquito and hid him in her coiffure. Later, that night, when Bahuchara Mata and her cela returned home, Mata put out two plates for dinner and two plates ended up becoming three. Each time she would put out two plates, they became three. She asked her cela why this was happening? The cela said, she did not know and could not tell. The Mata got angry and grabbed the cela’s hair and the coiffure came undone and the mosquito flew out. She understood immediately that the cela had fallen in love and recognized the mosquito as the Rajput boy. She told her cela, “What you have done is not right, you have given your mind and body to somebody else. I cannot live here, I am going to Patal” and she cursed the cela by saying, “In Kaliyuga, you hijras will find it as difficult to find a lover as it is to catch a mosquito. The cela cried out, “Mata, how can you leave me like this, how will I live? How will I eat? You cannot leave like this.” As the Mata was going down to Patal, the cela grabbed her hair and Mata said, “Just like you heard my claps and came to me, so will others come hearing your clap, and that’s how you will also find celas. You will be castrated, you will not live happily with your lingas and will earn your life through begging. You will keep your hair long like mine so that people may pull your hair like you are pulling mine. 

I want to read the narratives of love stories that was told to me, as well as the narratives recorded by Nanda and Reddy in their ethnographies, in light of this myth - finding and keeping a lover is like trying to catch hold of a mosquito, nearly impossible.

Reddy is puzzled by the resilience of hijras’ desire for a husband/lover in the face of

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260 Patal refers to the seven regions that exist beneath the earth. It is distinct from hell where souls are damned.
glaring evidence that deems it is impossible. She writes, “Given the ubiquity of abuse, violence, and abandonment, as well as hijras’/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?” She tracks through an impressively exhaustive set of literature and concludes, “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.” I quote at length the conclusion she reaches to explain the yearning for a husband and lover when one knows that the search will end inevitably in betrayal and failure.

…[I]t 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 [...] 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 patterning of their lives.

Let me offer some scenes to clarify the pattern according to which love affairs unfolded amongst the hijras’ in Bhadrak and Bhawanipatna. This pattern does not deviate from those recorded so faithfully by Nanda and Reddy. One evening, Nandita and I were cycling around in Bhawanipatna when she asked, “Listen, my husband has asked me for

261 Reddy, 180.
262 Ibid., 184.
263 Ibid., 185.
25,000 rupees. Do you think I should give it to him?” She asked in a tone of indecision, and I used the opportunity to air what I had been wondering regarding material transactions in love affairs, which was a constant trope when recounting these affairs, usually in terms of use, abuse and exploitation. I replied, “Why don’t you want to give it? If you love him and he loves you, who else will he turn to if he needs the money? He can’t ask strangers for help, he will obviously ask you, and if you love him, who else will you give the money to?” Nandita remained silent and said, “You are right, he is my husband, if he doesn’t ask me who else will he ask?” Damru’s friends would constantly warn her that she shouldn’t spend so much money on her lover, who she was trying very hard to seduce - he hadn’t slept with her as yet. Friends would tell her that men would just use them for money and that her lover would leave her when she wouldn’t be able to give him anything. Damru blew up one day and since I was the one with her, she turned to me and screamed, “Why shouldn’t I give him anything? Everybody gives their boyfriends all sorts of things - they buy them motorcycles, clothes, everything. Why shouldn’t I also give my boyfriend things?”

There was a pattern to which all love stories conformed in Bhawanipatna and Bhadrak. Hijras would often seduce a man by giving him presents. These presents would create the largest dent in their budgets. They would work very hard, or steal, or borrow and beg from friends to buy their lovers presents that would range from everyday things like clothes, food, and beer, to more expensive things, such as watches, motorcycles, computer tuition classes, etc. Reddy offers ethnographic narratives of two kotis who had even sold their kidneys for their lovers. “Frank, a middle-aged, Christian man in his mid-forties, had suffered untold hardships for his pantis [lover]. 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.”\(^{264}\) The mortification of Frank’s flesh can be seen as nothing besides the carnality of kinship but the difference that separated kinship and love in this instance lay in the fact that the bodies of hijras, after their monetary value had been squeezed out were nothing else- forgotten and abandoned, unlike in kinship, in which the bodies became old, animal like, and history and if forgotten and abandoned, then resulting in opprobrium. There was no invocation of a breach of morality here, which was explained either by “Alzheimers, the bad family, and other modern things.” Instead there was puzzlement. Damru once asked me, “Why do they do this to us? Don’t their hearts pain when they do this?” I turned and looked ahead because I didn’t have an answer and Damru said, “Well, this is what lovers do.”

If guilt and shame can be attached to kin for their betrayal and ill-treatment of their family members, its absence here forces us to re-evaluate the pattern of love affairs here. What exactly is the impossible in finding a lover to whom you are everything, of catching a mosquito? Hijras would begin their love affairs by spending all their hard earned money on their lovers. Speaking of another hijra, one hijra whispered to me one night in awe, “She has even bought a car for her husband.” The extent to which they converted their entire existence into money and other objects for their lovers was often told to me either by them, when remarking on their lover’s betrayal, or by their friends in melancholic awe. Damru told me that Pawan hijra, who had a hard time earning money in the first place, given that she was not the most sought after hijra prostitute, had “pawned

\(^{264}\) Reddy, 179. The other koti who had sold his kidney in Reddy’s ethnography was Avinash but Reddy does not have an extensive interview with him (180).
her cell phone, sold off her cooking stove and cycle and other things that she possessed, so that she could have some money to give to her then lover, Sonu.” Pawan hijra would rob from her clients, and if they took her to their house, then she would steal anything and everything she could lay her hands on so that she could later sell the items and give the money to her lover. She would often be caught and beaten up, given that she also stole property from her house, like the gas cylinder, stove, jewellery, etc. Her brothers would beat her up upon discovery. In Reddy’s ethnography, the property that was placed for sale extended to the hijra and kothis’ blood and kidneys as well.

While the hijras were warned and reproached for putting everything up for sale, they were also discredited if they did not go beyond themselves for their lovers. After fucking Nandita, Sajjan said that he had borrowed thirty thousand from his father and now has spent it so does not know what to do. I said to Nandita, “So he didn’t ask you for money. Why are you upset?” “But he said it in a way so as to imply that he wanted me to give him the money.” Nandita took this disillusionment with Sajjan very badly and vowed to never take his calls and forget him and abused him for being selfish. Damru made quite a lot of fun of her behind her back, “Look she kept on chanting Sajjan, Sajjan but at the end he wants her money and she can’t even give it to him. She wanted to make him her husband and she couldn’t even give her husband thirty thousand. What sort of love is this?” I found it interesting that Damru criticized both, Sajjan for asking for money thus casting a doubt over his love, and Nandita for refusing to give it: “You can’t even give money to the man you love. The man you want to make your husband.”

There would be a point beyond which the hijras would be incapable of selling anything. The lovers, who were now seduced by gifts, however, would keep on
demanding money and presents. The love affair would begin with a hijra surprising the man with a gift, then the number of gifts would increase, and the love affair would be consummated when an especially large request made by the lover was fulfilled. For a while, gifts were given and requests met, but when the requests kept on coming and the hijra was no longer able to satisfy them, then a point was reached where the lover had to prove that his love was true and not just pure greed. At this juncture the hijras would not give anything and withdraw all their material support, but expect the lovers to remain with them in spite of not receiving any material benefits. This was the moment that Nandita had reached with her husband, who had asked her for twenty-five thousand rupees and was wondering whether he was with her because she gave him money or whether he truly loved her. Michael Hardt writes,

The expression “for love of money” is generally used to indicate the two extremes, which cover between them the entire spectrum. “I wouldn’t do that for love or money” means I wouldn’t do that in exchange for anything. It can be interesting, however, to read that or as marking not an opposition but a common function that love and money share, somewhat like the or in Spinoza’s famous phrase “deus sive natura” which claims polemically, that god and nature are two names for substance itself. I do not intend to propose that love and money are the same thing, but rather, that putting them in relation can reveal the power to create and maintain social bonds that is proper to money and can (and perhaps should) be also the vocation of love. Posing love in relation to the power of money can help us construct a properly political concept of love.\textsuperscript{265}

I will argue later that the love affairs conducted by the hijras is the exercise, though often met with failure, of a concept of love that can have certain political implications. Before I do that, I want to place the love affairs in Bhadrak and Bhawanipatna alongside Hardt’s line of argument that does not pose love and money in opposition, but as sharing a common function of valuation. Lauren Berlant, in her

\textsuperscript{265} Michael Hardt, “For Love or Money” in \textit{Cultural Anthropology}, vol. 26, Issue 4, 676.
commentary to Michael Hardt’s argument, writes, “What could interrupt the translation of all social relations into propertied ones? What other kinds of infrastructure for proximity can develop that will bind us to the world in which we find each other; or bind us to each other and, in such binding, make a world? It’s hard even to lasso the right phrases together to get the rhythms of sociality in sufficient sync to render a habitable material present, or world.” The sequence in the love affairs conducted by hijras is the inverse than that studied by Hardt and Berlant and hence its political ramifications are both apparent and not. The love affairs did not attempt to translate social relations into propertied ones, but attempted to translate the exchange of property, such as kidneys, blood, and other gifts into a social relation that belonged to another world.

The gifts and presents were not exchanges calibrated according to the logic of kin-making but were more similar to, albeit slightly different, from the logic of potlatch. The hijras would go beyond what they could afford and what was considered appropriate to collect money and buy presents for their lovers. They would sell their bodies, kidneys, and blood. Beg, borrow, and steal to buy quotidian objects that their lovers, who were young men, desired - cars, motorbikes, cellphones, clothes- objects that circulated in advertisements and markets and worked as markers of masculinity, class, respect, and power. The hardships hijras faced in procuring the required amount of money were often recounted as if stories of a battle proudly fought. After a point, the lovers were expected to respond, to reciprocate, not similarly in kind, as in the potlatch, but similarly in spirit. They were to give love that was equivalent to the love of the hijras, not by giving presents but by a loving that went beyond any material profit. They were required to

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mortify their flesh and souls by giving love that had no anchors to the material world - love without any benefits, a love that did not have a price. Equivalent because if the hijra’s mode caused her body to disintegrate by placing itself completely in the market, where everything is bought and sold, then the lover was expected to disintegrate his body, by refusing any comfort that comes with translating that love into a property, or even worse, profit.

This was seen in Masterani’s demand that she be everything to her lover: mother, father, brother, sister, and friend. If one acquiesces to have just one social relation and then refuses to translate that into a propertied one, then the transformation of the self required is nothing if not tremendous and as Berlant writes, “[I]n the vernacular of love it is impossible to tell the difference between destructive and world-building impulses. We see that revolutionary impulses are destructive, too, but the spin it puts on that points to productive destruction (of the mommy-daddy-me machine, and yet families are still the fundamental imaginary and economic unit).”

Mangu introduced me to Biju and her husband Dhabala in the summer of 2009. Mangu probably took me there because I would constantly ask questions about love and given that she did not have a husband or a paramour, she was quite indifferent and unsympathetic to my cynicism and desperation for love. She took me to Biju’s hut, and I started asking them about their relationship. Ten years ago, Biju and several other hijras had gone to Dhabala’s village to dance at a religious festival to earn some money. Dhabala fell in love with her and they got married the next morning at a nearby temple, and he left his family and home to be with her. Dhabala said his family did not stop him.

267 Ibid., 690.
they had two other sons, and he had seen them once three years ago since he got married. Dhabala accompanies Biju when she goes to dance at weddings, religious festivals, and childbirth, and plays the dholak. This would have represented the idea of world-making that Masterani and other hijras wanted, in which one social relation suffuses the whole world and is valuable beyond price. In the years since, Biju began drinking hooch very heavily, and in 2013, when I finally grabbed her, she was drunk at eight in the morning. I had heard about her drinking and the consequent fighting with Dhabala over the years. Varsha told me that last year, Biju had once fallen unconscious near the railway tracks and foamed at the mouth because of adulterated hooch. Dhabala had taken her to the hospital and taken care of her. I asked Varsha why Biju drank so much. Varsha said, “Biju needs to be drunk to go begging on the trains. Her husband told her that she doesn’t need to beg if she has to drink, he started earning by selling boiled eggs at the train station but after three or four months, Biju started drinking again.” Varsha did not have any answers as to why Biju drank so much when her husband told her that she did not need to beg.

I grabbed Biju’s hand and asked, “What’s going on? Everybody has told me that you are drinking so much. Dhabala loves you so much, why are trying to ruin such a beautiful love? Will you like it if he leaves you?” Biju’s skin had discoloured, and she had become bloated and looked very unhappy. She just smiled, kissed me on my cheek and boarded the train. I offer this ethnographic narrative to buttress Berlant’s ambivalence of love that is not dependent on being translated into propertied relations. It might be seen as destructive, or more accurately, as a failed attempt at remaking a world. Hardt writes, “Love is thus always a risk in which we abandon some of our attachments
to this world in the hope of creating another, better one.” Hardt’s article argues for transformative love from a reading of Marx and it can be argued that Biju and Dhabala lost that wager in a way, but in comparison to other failures hijras met with in their hunt for mosquitoes, for a social relation that would resist any kind of propertied or even material translation, Biju and Dhabala would still count as a success, but perhaps not of the kind we expected. Berlant warns us about this expectation, “If we could cluster around it [love] a genuinely realistic and visionary set of transformations that do not overstate the consoling promises that sacrifice the human to an idealized vision.” 268 If our expectations are just that the lovers of hijras do not consider hijra bodies expendable and dispensable - painful stories of which abound - then, yes, love did not transform Biju and Dhabala’s world to the extent that money was replaced by love.

Hardt writes, “Love or money, Marx tells us, that is our choice. It is significant in my view that, by establishing this alternative, Marx poses love on the same level of money: love operates not only in terms of intimate relations but also in a primary role of social organization. This same comparison, however, diminishes the power of love, in my view, insofar as it leads Marx to consider love only in terms of exchange. “If you love unrequitedly,” he writes, “i.e. if your love as love does not call forth love in return, if through the vital expression of yourself as a loving person you to become a loved person, then your love is impotent, it is a misfortune” (p.379).” 269 Besides Biju and Dhabala’s love affair, most other affairs were impotent; it did not result in the loving person becoming a loved person. Nanda wrote of one such affair “Even though she had an educated husband, he would eat off her hands only and didn’t contribute toward the

268 Ibid., 690
269 Hardt, 680
household expenses. This made Kamladevi fall ill, and she had had asthma before, so she passed away."

I was constantly told of Suman, who I had met in 2009, but who had died in 2011 before I returned to Bhawanipatna. When I returned and enquired about Suman, who I was very fond of because she was a vivacious personality- funny, beautiful, and charming and we had become very fond of each other - I was told that she had sold everything off for her lover, her little eatery, her jewellery and when she lay dying, her husband abandoned her and returned to his parents.

Hijras were more than aware of the impotence of lovers - when a man did not get what he wanted from one hijra, he would try his luck with others. Rajesh had a boyfriend, Bulu, but she realized that he was only after her money. Sapna seduced him by giving him what he wanted and then he demanded seven thousand rupees for a mobile. But Sapna, after promising him the money, was unable to give it to him. Now Bulu was calling one hijra after another in Bhawanipatna, offering his services and beauty in order to find a more generous patron. Each hijra that he called made false promises that they would give him the money and have had sex with him. The hijras knew his demands, took his phone calls, and tasted his services, but laughed behind his back and said, “We told him, yes, we will give you the money if you let us suck your cock. Then we just don’t receive his calls.” The lover who does not rise to the challenge of reciprocating the generous spirit of the hijra with a generosity of his own, which resists translation of social relations into material ones, becomes as impotent as the hijra - used, abused, and a joke.

Michael Hardt, analyzing Marx’s brief comments on love, writes, “Love, like the other senses, is conceived as a social organ or, really a human power to create social

\[270\] Nanda, 70
bonds. Like new powers to see and think we also must gain a new power to love. Perhaps we should call these social ‘muscles,’ rather than ‘organs,’ because we develop them through use and practice, breaking them down and building them up to strengthen and expand out human relations to the world, that is, our powers to create and manage social bonds. The development of a new sensorium, increasing our power to love and the strength of the other social muscles, is inversely related to the rule of private property.”

Hardt’s reading of love is strikingly congruent to the spiritual exercises of Sufism, which were taught through the tales of hindavi romances. These two sets of such disparate literature have in common the faith that love transforms. They also have in common the principle that the form that the transformation of the self and the world take is not known; its potentiality signaled, and its need felt, but it is inevitably marked with failure, an impossible place to go, or rather an impossible task to achieve, perhaps like catching a mosquito. Lawrence Cohen remarks on Michael Hardt’s delicious proposition and brings it closer to the geometry of love that I am drawing. He writes, “[T]he only love worth its name is not that which can be bought but that which has been achieved through a worked-on self encountering its equal in labor.”

I will defend my use of the word geometry when I draw a parallel between the spiritual exercises of Sufism as allegorized through romantic love and the exercises of valuation, labor and exchange as undertaken by the hijras, but Cohen has already initiated this parallelism by using the phrase “not that which can be bought.” This is precisely what the hijras desired, a love from their lovers that cannot be bought through gifts and the exchange of presents but necessarily passes through those points to reveal the extent

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271 Michael Hardt, 680.
to which hijra’s bodies, labour, time, and efforts were at the disposal of their lovers. These notions of stages, or points of revelations, and recognition are also words that code the ostensibly ornate romances as pedagogic tools of Sufi spiritualism. Cohen raises the possibility of such a love affair. Is it possible to catch a mosquito? Is it possible for anybody, let alone the lovers of hijras, to respond in a way to go beyond the triad “of family, property, and honor”? He writes, “If, for a time, homosex was good to think as a figure exercising a conception of love beyond property and the nation, it was as most figures are for some people and not others and with a series of gendered effects. Its ability to stand for an alternate present, let alone another future, was limited. But perhaps we ask too much of organs like love, even that nonunified true love we do not yet know, to give us the positive transformation to come.”

Love and its promise of a transformed world that is palpable and can be achieved through the exercise of spiritual muscles was the fundament of the sufi romances of Sultanate India. Aditya Behl, in his posthumous publication, *Love’s Subtle Magic: An Indian Islamic Literary Tradition, 1379-1545*, writes, “The poets of the Hindavi Sufi romances commonly use the phrase “the shadow of paradise on earth [*janu kabilasa utari bhui chava*]” to describe elements of their fictional landscapes. […] These references to shadows of an elusive paradise are the hallmark of a genre of Sufi romance that is assumed to put forward “the equation of human love and love for a divine being.” Hijras in asking of their lovers a love that resists transformation into materiality/property, were in effect, asking for a paradise, whose shadows could be felt on earth. It was the same paradise whose possibility Hardt is arguing for, one where lovers are asked to have

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273 Ibid., 695
274 Aditya Behl, 29.
a stake in each other at a register that overrides exchange, circulation and economy, or in Simmel’s terms- resists the slide from value to price.

The manner in which the hijras staked their bodies for their lovers can also be seen also as an emotional or spiritual exercise analogous to the ones undertaken by the heroes of Sufi romances undertake. The romances, however, always end happily, in various forms of mystical annihilation, *fanaa*, when the lovers have achieved a certain spiritual enlightenment. After having purged themselves of the baser elements of human desire, they are able to distill themselves into appropriate mirrors of godhood and love. *Fanaa*, at least in one form does not allow itself to be translated as an experience of radical alterity resulting from an asceticism that takes one out of this world. When he juxtaposes the many Sufi romances against each other, Behl highlights that *fanaa* is accessible to all and does not require one to sacrifice one’s world but transcend it. He writes, “The only annihilation is of the seeker’s own carnal nature, which gives him the concrete power simultaneously to stay in the world and to transcend it […]” 275 In asking their lovers to purge themselves of their carnal nature, the hijras signal towards the shadows of paradise which can transform this world into something else - an impossibility, perhaps, but a task worth undertaking.

Mohammad Habib offers a translation of *fanaa* that not only reveals the manner in which it was grafted onto the South Asian context, but renders it less esoteric than it reads in Behl’s work. He writes, “To the *Kharrazis* or followers of Abu Sa’id Kharraz belongs the credit of having re-stated the age-old conception of *nirvana*, the expansion

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275 Ibid., 285
Thus, fanaa or the spiritual exercises of the Sufis referred to annihilation but not in any dramatic way, but in the manner that the soul expands limitlessly by being attached to the Absolute. Fanaa then does mean annihilation but only to the extent that the soul does not remain as it was previously - in other words, it becomes weird. The relentlessly fucking hijras with their contagious weird flesh would in a way reveal to the youth that the rules of this world do not exhaust it. That there is a margin between the rules and the world and another form of being can be achieved - is possible - by recognizing that gap.

I have used the word geometry here to signal a similarity between the patterns of Sufi romances and the love affairs of hijras. The birth of desire, the claims of love, the mortification of flesh in the service of this love, the disappointing failure or the misfortunes of love – all of which refer to men not recognizing the potential of love to transcend this world, or in Hardt’s words, to transform the world. In the essay, “The Symmetry of Madhumalati” appended to Behl’s translation of the text, Simon Weightman organizes the narrative into points of coincidence and opposition to write, “The story is circular and a brief scrutiny of other Shattari works reveals that the circle was their favourite and most persistent symbol used in expressing the cosmology of the Order, as well as in many other applications.”

The following is the graphic representation of the symmetry as drawn by Weightman. Through delineating several geometric patterns embedded in them, he has forcefully argued its consonance with tantric symbolism. Both Behl and Weightman have studied Sufi romances to argue for a

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certain mutual intelligibility achieved during the Delhi Sultanate era, between Hindu and Islamic philosophies through creation of texts such as Madhumalati. I cite their work in order to recognize love affairs between hijras and their men/husbands/lovers as an exercise similar to spiritual ones that feel the possibility of transcending/transforming the experience of this world.

This transcendence and transformation is also a part of the romance as Weightman has noted, though in this religious work it is more concerned with god than with men. Reddy’s informant Frank, in giving a narrative of his love affair to Reddy, says, “I adored you, I worshipped you,” I said, “You are my god. My people know, but my people are not proud of you. […] Okay, 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, I left my neighbours because of you, I left my cousins, my aunties, my uncles, everybody I left because of you. I’m living alone because of you.” 278 Nanda’s informant tells her, “But Ahmed is like a God to me, because when he came back he saved me from all this humiliation. […] God and he are one to me. I used to be so thin, as thin as Sushila. I had asthma, and I was always short of breath. Ahmed didn’t mind that at all but would always make me sleep beside him.” 279 Pawan hijra once got frustrated with my constant probing regarding the way hijras would put everything in the service of their lovers and said, “When a hijra falls in love, her panthi becomes her god. She doesn’t look left, she doesn’t look right, if her man says it is morning when it is night, she will believe it is morning. She goes mad.”

The sufi romances are an allegory of the relationship between a novice and his god - he has to love god, who in the narrative is revealed as a woman with divine beauty, uniting with her would result in the experience of fanaa, a world that transcends the current base one. The love affairs in rural Orissa were mimetic of this allegory - lovers became gods, but unfortunately, there were a lot of false gods out there. Weightman takes the pattern cited above and highlights yet another. He has highlighted in the same pattern, the yogic symbol, the Coincidentia Oppositorum of love, and now the Shattari Sufi cosmology. Paul Kockelman’s beautiful essay, “Value is life under an interpretation: Existential commitments, instrumental reasons and disorienting metaphors” allows me to expand the similarities I have drawn between the Sufi/Yogic exercises and the love

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278 Reddy, 201
279 Nanda, 78
affairs of the hijras. Till now I have argued that both forms of spiritual exercises imagined that a different regime of valuation was achievable; this was also the potential of love held out by Hardt, and the hope or the good faith with which hijras fell in love. Kockelman’s essay uses maps as the metaphor to shed light on how value is imparted, arranged, and most importantly interpreted. He writes, “One weighs the relative desirability of possible paths by comparing them to a set of prototypic or exemplary paths.” Kockleman relies on notions of prototype and exemplar to break down the division between instrumental and existential valuation. This is pertinent to my argument when we read that the paths that people take or the choices they make depend upon the way they map their values. Kockleman writes, “And part of the issue is to be able to articulate where the values came from, historically, or why we should follow them, rationally. Stereotypically, this may involve disclosing values in a public setting, arguing for them, and communicating such values and arguments to others.” When Masterani told me that her lover should recognize what is in her heart, or when hijras expected their lovers to be with them at the cost of material gifts, benefits, or profit, they were articulating a desire for recognition of a certain valuation that they were giving to the men and were expecting in return. The recognition of that form of valuation would entail following a map that would take them elsewhere - in the words of Sufi poetry, to paradise, rather than this world where social relations are translated (read measured) in propertied terms.

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281 Ibid., 156.
282 Ibid., 158.
The reason why lovers who would not rise to the challenge of taking on the path of love were often tricked into fucking, lied to and cheated because in their choosing of material benefits they had revealed themselves as men who were concerned with profit and had failed to recognize the value of the love that the hijra offered. The hijras, in their constant preoccupation with lovers and love affairs, were holding out the possibility that somebody would recognize the value of their valuation, one that was different from what the world had imposed on the poor, illiterate, youths of rural Orissa.

Let us return to Weightman and Hardt to clarify the point of loving ceaselessly. Weightman argues that each of the six levels of narrative symmetry corresponds to the six “levels of manifestation of the Absolute” (see figure below) and “The first world, called the Martaba al-Ahadiyat, or the Level of Oneness, [which] is beyond all attribution and determination.” I highlight this to re-iterate the similarity in the argument made by Hardt regarding the world that can be made possible through love and resists translation into material wealth with the Sufis who transcend the material world. I argue that hijras, in their love affairs, also signal towards the shadows of paradise that they feel on this earth, the world that can be, and even though they are cursed to fail at this attempt because catching a mosquito is impossible, they don’t give up.

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During my research, people would offer explanations as to why hijras fuck so much. A man who worked at an NGO in Bolongir told me in 2009, ponderingly, “There is something in the sun’s heat/ray (dhup) of Bolongir that makes people fuck so much, there is something in the climate of Bolongir that people just fuck so much.” Another man who worked in another NGO in Bhadrak told me in 2013, “Hijras have too much sexual, that’s why they are constantly fucking, no matter how they are feeling, sick, or well, they always want to fuck.” The words ‘climate’ and ‘sexual’ were used in English and were versions of climactic or constitutional understandings of the relentlessly fucking hijras. Against those two, I offer another reading; that of a hunt for a mosquito, for a lover, and of an attempt to remake one’s world so that it transcends this one, to make a world which is beyond attribution and determination. The relentless fucking of the hijras
might keep their flesh weird, like Darger’s heroines, and it can be argued that it is similar to the weird flesh accompanying any spiritual exercise. There may be no evidence for success in these impossible pursuits, but that may be because the story hasn’t ended. The grand design is still unfolding; failures are just junctions or points in the journey one undertakes to achieve the impossible. But just like any other shadow, the shadow of paradise may not be sharp or clear in its lines but its features are still palpable enough to convince one to keep on striving for the impossible, to remain in the pursuit of love.
Introduction: Part 3 – I have immortal longings in me

The first chapter of this dissertation traced the relation that hijras have with men in their local moral world. It argued that flirting, seduction and sex consolidated the householder and concluded that hijras should be seen as diagonal rather than marginal to the social. Their centrality to the reproduction of the social highlighted their roles as ascetics. While the ascetic is positioned outside the schema of the social, the social derives its values only by turning towards the ascetic. Heteronormatively, asceticism is opposed to the eroticism of the householder, but the figure of the hijra in her particular permutation of eroticism and asceticism, demonstrates that the householder and the hijra are both related and contribute to each other.

The second chapter argued that the hijra demands us to question the self-sufficiency of the family. The reproduction of the family, when considered in biological terms is seen as natural rubbed against the social in ways that led to its own destruction. The hijra, in her participation of the family, sustained the family from destroying itself and prevented her siblings and parents from becoming animal. While the broader argument that the biological and the social are absorbed within and produce each other may be a moot point, I argued that the figure of the hijra offered a glimpse into how the experience of time can be reconfigured to punctuate or pause the obscene violence of the family drama.

Throughout the dissertation, I have shown how the particular Hindu-Muslim cosmology that hijras inhabit argued against easy readings of religious divide. Even though a certain religious syncretism could be identified amongst the hijras, we should refrain from readings suggesting a naïve notion of religious harmony. One instance
of this religious crossing can be observed in the notion of Haq that the hijras employed to argue for the legitimacy of their extraction money from the citizenry. Though the hijras collect money on several auspicious occasions, the extraction of which would follow the various circuits of exchange in South Asia, their collecting of money on trains does not conform to any route, but aligns with their other practices of monetary exchange. I have argued that this exchange signals a certain logic of accountability and compassion to which the hijra holds the polity. This logic is confirmed in other sites, such as those in which the hijra is elected as a politician or commissioned as a tax collector, because it offers a way out of accusations and perceptions of corruption that beleaguer both the state and its citizens.

The last chapter shows that the sexual act cannot be viewed as geared towards the future only under the limits and conditions of disease. The labour of loving is that it makes life bearable under circumstances that are already pushing life and lives into negation. In considerations of these sexual transactions, I raised the idea of legendary love stories of South Asia that see life as continuously unfolding and pointing towards a world yet to come or even the possibility of another world. The implication of this commitment is that while hijras may not have a stake in futurity, which queer theory has rightfully maligned, they do show us that faith in another world can preserve and sustain our lives. Finally, this dissertation identified preservation, which is one point of the triumvirate of Hindu theogony that takes further the dialectic of creation and destruction or of structure and excess, or meaning and its negation.

Every dissertation, in bringing to light a certain aspect of the world, throws into shadow some others. While the discourse of HIV and AIDS is addressed by a robust
Public Health discourse, I have sought to follow the hijra’s sensibility in keeping that
discourse veiled precisely to look at the void that exists between making and following
rules. This research project began with the intention to understand the limits and
conditions under which we might have sex without condoms. Neither ‘accusations of
illiteracy’\textsuperscript{284} nor ideas of ‘condom fatigue’ have any merit in rural Orissa, especially
among the hijras. Everybody I spoke to and befriended were well aware and well trained
in practices of safer sex. Moreover, the epidemic in Orissa does not have the history it
does amongst the gay men of Euro-America for a subculture of barebacking to be
illuminating.\textsuperscript{285} While anxieties about contracting HIV did not result in a similar
suffocating hold over life in Orissa as it did for the gay communities elsewhere, resulting
in relief when gay men tested positive, the discovery of one’s status did result in extreme
distress.\textsuperscript{286} I was repeatedly told the story of one hijra, whom I never met, who drank
herself to death upon discovering her status. Rumours of someone’s status, whether true
and untrue, circulated through whisperings to sexual partners, lovers, and the general
population of men that inhabited the marketplace of Bhadrak and Bhawanipatna.

Mangu once dismissed the use of condom by saying, “When a man is fucking,
even if a tiger approaches to kill him, he won’t stop having sex, he will first finish then he
will see to the tiger, how will he stop to wear a condom.” This dissertation has attempted
to show what is at stake in the sexuality of the hijras that would muffle the discourse of
the risks of contracting HIV. The pathology of the disease is such that it lends itself to a

\textsuperscript{284} Cohen, Lawrence. "Accusations of Illiteracy and the Medicine of the Organ." \textit{Social Research: An
\textsuperscript{285} Dean, Tim. \textit{Unlimited intimacy: Reflections on the subculture of barebacking}. University of Chicago
risk that is never then and there, like a tiger, but later in a future and meshed in a set of relations that is always uncertain. Over the course of six years, we told each other our statuses, offering that piece of information to consolidate or commemorate the togetherness we had shared. The topic would come up when yet another hijra would die of AIDS; but never with a note of urgency, but with a sense of uncertainty that would be punctured with Damru beginning to dance or somebody distracting everybody with their tales of passionate attraction. I, too, stopped raising the topic, after a few years—what would have been the point? I once asked Guruma of Jajpur whether a lot of hijras had died of AIDS to her knowledge. She replied, “a lot of my sanghwalet died in the last twenty years, now that I think of it, I know it was because of AIDS, at that time we thought it was because they were alcoholics, or got TB, or diarrhoea.” Guruma did not express this with anger or grief but a barely discernible tinge of pathos. She didn’t say anything more, and I did not know what else to ask.

The dissertation reflects what did concern the hijras I got to know: love, sex, family, money— not HIV/AIDS, condoms, health, and death. Concerns of the everyday triumphed over the future that became more and more uncertain with seroconversion. Several of the hijras that I became friends have died as I write this conclusion; some were only in their twenties and thirties. I would hesitate to use the word tragedy for the lives I have discussed because it does not make self-evident at all what was lost. The lives of hijras that I have tracked in the preceding chapters show that their lives were more

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288 Sangha is a Sanskrit word that literally means association, used also to refer to groups and units of monks and ascetics in Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism. Sanghwalet was the word used instead of friend, for fellow hijras who were not celas or nati celas, hinting at the structure that is common to all communities of ascetics.
concerned with the aesthetics of living – the flirting in the marketplaces and the fucking in the fields, the participation and modulation of the violence in the domestic, the demand for accountability arising out of a logic of noncruelty in the transactions in the trains and finally the labour of loving, maybe without optimism, but always with the hope that another world will unfold.

Mangu’s observation on sex was similar to what Foucault wrote in The History of Sexuality, “Sex is worth dying for. [...] And while the deployment of sexuality permits the techniques of power to invest life, the fictitious point of sex, itself marked by that deployment exerts enough charm on everyone for them to accept hearing the grumble of death within it.” Though Foucault was writing before the birth of the epidemic, his words are prescient in so far as the grumblings of death made by the disease and the epidemic via biomedicine were accepted by the hijras about whom I have written. Accepted, because refusing that grumbling would not mean avoiding sex, given the availability of condoms, but that the refusal would be a refusal of the possibility of love and living, if not life.

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289 Foucault, Michel, History of Sexuality: An Introduction (New York: Pantheon, 1978) 156. For another hearing of this grumble of death, from which I borrow my reading, please see, Goodfellow, Aaron. "Pharmaceutical intimacy: sex, death, and methamphetamine." Home Cultures 5, no. 3 (2008): 271-300. 290 For a more heteronormative version of my argument please see the brilliant article by Josephine Aho and Vinh-Kim Nguyen, titled Neglecting Gender in HIV Prevention and Treatment Programmes: Notes from Experiences in West Africa in Klot, Jennifer, and Vinh-Kim Nguyen, eds. The Fourth Wave: Violence, Gender, Culture & HIV in the 21st Century. UNESCO, 2011. The authors note that HIV positive women would drop out of ART programmes after they recovered to resume life, that is to get pregnant, which would result in them developing resistance to the medication. For the resistance to life that living with HIV entails even with medication please see the work of Dominik Mattes. He argues that while access to treatment remains a problem for the HIV positive population, it does not resolve the issue of how to resume life plans and projects in the proximity of death that the epidemic heralds. His analysis takes Vinh Kim and Aho’s argument further in Mattes, Dominik. "I am also a human being!" Antiretroviral treatment in local moral worlds." Anthropology & medicine 19, no. 1 (2012): 75-84. Please also see, Mattes, Dominik. "Caught in Transition: The Struggle to Live a ‘Normal’ Life with HIV in Tanzania." Medical anthropology (2014).
Foucault claimed in an interview that what bothers people is not that two boys have sex but that they “wake up the next morning with a smile on their faces, … hold hands and kiss each other tenderly and thereby affirm their happiness.” There is a relationship between sex and love for the hijras that I describe here, neither the stranger intimacy that has been studied by queer theorists (though there was a lot of that as well in rural Orissa between hijras and the men that travelled through the train stations of these districts). Neither is it the gay love that Foucault is talking about, one that entails tenderness, even though there was a great deal of that as well. The relationship between sex and love that I do want to point is the one where sex is always seeded with love, allowing for beneficial misrecognitions that sustain living, if not life.

Leo Bersani writing on S/M critiques Foucault’s formulation of gay love, for desexualizing pleasure and points out that, “the most radical function of S/M is not primarily in its exposing the hypocritically denied centrality of erotically stimulating power plays in “normal” society; it lies rather in its truly shocking revelation that for the sake of that stimulation human beings may be willing to give up even a minimal control over their environment.” Through this reading, Bersani recovers the sex that Foucault seemed so willing to forsake and extends Foucault’s argument to make place for fantasies and writes, “the shadowy figures of the loving child and the daddy he coaxed out of his terrorizing and terrorized castrating identity, figures who may have helped them, Foucault’s couple, to spend a night of penile oblation.” The hijras of Orissa warn us of a strict separation between love and sex and from reducing sex to genitalia. The labour of their loving reminds us that there are immortal longings in us, worth living and dying for.

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Curriculum Vitae

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Awards
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- Women, Gender and Sexuality research grant, summer 2007- Johns Hopkins University
- Nominated for Freeman, Nugent and Robie Medals- University of Arizona

Publications
- “The Pregnant Hijra: Laughter, Dead Babies and Invaluable Love” in Living and Dying in the Contemporary world: A Compendium edited by Veena Das and Clara Han (forthcoming)

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- “To be some other name: The Naming Games of the Hijras in Rural Orissa” The Annual Conference on South Asia, 2014
- “In the Service of Love: Sex, Semen, and Sons” – The Society for Cultural Anthropology Biennial Meeting, 2014
- “The Perfumed Semen: Notes from the fucking fields” March 2013, JHU Department of Anthropology Colloquium Series

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