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| **Article:** | **Construction and Reflection of Androgynous Gender in Discourse "A Study of Unique Discursive Practices of Hijra Community of Lahore, Pakistan"** |
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## Abstract

This study is an attempt to shed some light on the distinctive discursive practices of the Hijra (eunuch or hermaphrodite) communities located mostly if not all in the suburb of Lahore. These discursive practices serve as a source to construct and reflect their androgynous gender on different levels of their social discourse, ultimately helps us to identify how they understand reality around them, construct their identities and negotiate their roles as Hijras. A sample comprised 25 members of the hijra communities was selected to investigate what kind of discursive practices they carry out in their everyday interaction within their communities. The data was elicited through interviews and observations of the target communities. The results show that their unique discursive practices, in many ways different from cis genders are characteristics of their hijra world. They prefer to use highly contextual masculine and feminine pronouns as gender is not a fixed category for hijras and they assume masculine and feminine characters according to the masculine or feminine roles assigned to them in their groups.

 **Keywords:** Hijra, Eunuch, Discursive Practices, Discourse Analysis and Gender

## Introduction

In the present study the word '*Hijra'* is being used for a transgender or eunuch due to the socio- cultural background of the study. The study is being conducted in Lahore where '*Hijra*' is a unique form of gender, which is considered neither male nor female but possesses the elements of both (Talwar 1999). The purpose of the present study is to explore that what kind different discursive practices are produced by the *hijras* while constructing their social discourse within the *hijra* community which are of distinguished nature from that of the normative society. Their androgynous identity in their social discourse is reflected and constructed through the various activities and events of their lives which are related to their profession, group formation, genital surgery, punishment system, education system, relation with other groups, gender orientation, roles of male and females, familial structure, clapping, cursing, new born *hijra* and system of *hijra* code language. The current study is based on an in-depth analysis of the distinguished discursive practices, which they perform on different levels of discourse construction in their social life. These levels of discourse reflect each and every aspect of their life and these levels are related to their profession, group formation system, operation system for transformation, punishment system, education system, strength of the group, relation with other groups, gender orientation, roles of male and females, familial structure, clapping, cursing, new born *hijra*, system of *hijra* code language and this dimension also underlines all those levels of discourse which are related to the definition of *hijra* life style. The *hijras* perform different discursive practices on all those levels of discourse which are elaborated in the analysis of the interviews of the *hijras*.

**Literature Review**

The comprehension of gender identity not as an internal and foundational unit, but instead, as a sort of unexpected "suture", built in the structure of socio-historical settings, makes us ask many questions about the stereotypical definition of sex and sexual orientation. These complexities of personality and Identity of oneself can be seen in the field of transsexual and transgender encounters (Butler, 1990; Bergvail, Bing & Freed, 1996; Cameron, 1997, 1998; Stoke, 2000; Weatherall, 2002). They propose us a very significant aspect to reconsider the issue of sex/sexual orientation and unveil the world of static beliefs that just ignores and denies the rights of identity to a complete stratum of society known as transgender and also called by many names such as "*Hijra"* in subcontinent and Eunuch in English (Talwar, 1999; Sharma, 2000; Winter, 2002). So the Transsexual and transgender identities pose interesting challenges to the prevailing understanding of sex/gender and also raise a very important question about the definition of their social discourse, whether a constant gender orientation always reflects in their social communication or it varies according to the context in which they are using it Greenwood (1996) and Zimmermann and West (1975).

Hall and Zimman (2006) worked on the language, embodiment and identity in which they used the term "third gender" for those people whose sexual identity doesn't fall in the category of men and women and they articulate their thirdness by their actions. According to their research, body plays an important role in determining the gender variance because it is a combination of both biological sex and apparently social cues, e.g., lady dresses as male or male dresses as a female won't make it a "third gender", unless he/she possesses all the idiosyncratic characters that are traditionally associated with them. Their research described that the relationship that exists between body and language is recursive, language shapes the conceptualization of the body and their actions are implemented as an important part of the body.

In Pakistan, the *hijras* have socially excluded themselves because of the biased and discriminatory behavior of the public in general (Talwar, 1999; Sharma, 2000; Winter, 2002). Due to the exclusion from the normative society, this group has created their own social structure in which they have their own cultural norms and values and where they can feel free

to express what they actually are. Different types of deviant identities exist in every society (Kessler & McKenna, 1978; Coway, 2002; Winter, 2002). They follow their traditions generation after generation in order to construct their separate identity and preserve their heritage (Ali, 2003; Zafar, 2004). The *hijra* community has altogether different discursive practices which only exist in *hijra* world, e.g., they live in groups, they speak a code language called 'Farsi', they perform castration rituals, they have devised a complete structure of kinship as guru-chela system, etc and these can only be found in *hijra* communities of sub-continent especially in the socio-economic and cultural context of India and Pakistan (Hall, 1995).

The discursive events of *hijra* community which they perform are usually not present in *non-hijra* society. In a book entitled 'neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India', written by Nanda, focuses on the life stories of *hijras* and which proved to be an essential contribution to the literature on anthropology. In 1980, she conducted research on the lifestyle of *hijras* of South India. Her work demonstrated different social and cultural discursive practices of *hijras* of Indian society, e.g., on professional level they carry out the discursive practices of singing, dancing, begging, and performing in private functions and sometimes prostitution. She emphasized in her work that *hijras* have valued status in Indian culture, a status which leads to the recognition of their role as "third gender role" of the society.

Hall's research on the *hijras* of India shows that members of *hijra* community show their distinct position as "neither woman nor man" through the distinctive *hijra* life style. The discursive practices which are observed on different levels of their social life e.g., one of the note-worthy discursive practices which are observed in the *hijra* community is the formation of the groups in their community which they refer to as '*daira' [circle]* and they are in their circles divided by their elders according to the areas. They tag their groups with special names like *'Arwana daira, chandni daira'* etc. Another level of their social life relating to the formation of their kinship system, the *hijras* have different set of discursive practices to perform, e.g., the practice of guru-chela relationship which is equivalent to father- son or mother-daughter relationship and they assign male and female roles to different *hijras* in order to form their familial structure.

Bucholtz (2004) and Livia (2003) have also explored discursive performances of *hijras* which are considered strange for the people outside from the *hijra* community. Mitra (1983) wrote an article "strange world of the eunuchs" in a popular Indian nation magazine "onlooker". The author described them as "slaves to a set of savage practices".

These activities are of very mysterious nature as no one can give a definite verdict about the functionality of these practices among *hijras*, which opens a new window for a new research paradigm.

**Methodology**

**Data Collection**

For data collection, the researcher went to five different communities of *hijras,* living in Lahore, to take their interviews. The researcher spent three hours a day with them in order to observe them in detail.

The method of this survey was **face to face** administration of interviews. This survey consisted of **open-ended questions,** formulated to ensure that in-depth information was provided. Face-to-face administration of interviews and observations provided the direct contact between the respondents and the researcher.

**Population and Sampling**

This study seeks to select such accessible sample that will be the true representative of all the target population. Five communities of *hijras* are taken as the population of this research and group of five people is selected as sample from each population. Thus, sample

size is 25. Appropriate sampling techniques are used to select the sample from various areas of Lahore, Pakistan. In order to get true representative sample, the researcher used stratified random sampling design of probability sampling.

**Research Tool**

The following two types of research instruments have been used to collect the data.

- Naturalistic Observation
- Unstructured Interview (In-depth interview)

**Nature of the data**

This study deals with the qualitative paradigm as it is concerned with an in-depth analysis of the discursive practices of *hijra* community while constructing their discourse. So, it cannot be compacted into the restricted realm of quantitative paradigm. The data also comprises words of three languages in it, i.e., Urdu, Punjabi and English. In order to provide reliable and precise data, the data was collected under natural setting.

**Results and Discussion**

**Processing Analysis for the text production**

During the analysis of the process through which the discourse of the *hijra* community is carried out, the researcher has unveiled many distinctive discursive practices which are exclusive to the *hijra* community and can only be observed in these hitherto vilified and socially marginalized people. Hence, we can say that these discursive practices play a crucial role for *hijras* in the establishment of a separate and unique entity in the social structure in which this community exists. Below is given the interpretation of different discursive activities which the *hijra* community claims to practice:

**Group Formation**

At the level of discourse regarding the group formation ,one of noteworthy discursive practice which was observed in the *hijra* community was the formation of the groups in their community which they refer to as '*daira' [circle],* and they tag their groups with special names like *'Arwana daira, chandni daira'* etc. Unlike *non-hijra* community, mostly the *hijras* live in groups. The head of the group known as *'guru' [teacher]* forms the group and then decides the number of group members who would be living in the group. All the other group members are considered as the sub-ordinates of the guru are known as *'chelas' [student].* In the *hijra* community, different groups have different number of group members in them. If a guru wants to add another chela in his group, then he has to buy the chela from other groups by offering some money. The chela has no personal saying in being a group member of any specific group of his choice. *Hijras* do not follow any caste system or sect system and include any new member in their group regardless his caste and creed. Their groups have a tree structure which means that every group has many sub groups in it and those sub-groups further divide into mini sub-groups and so on. A sub-group is created when a guru allows its chela to have its own chelas and then that chela becomes a guru of its own sub-group and like that *hijras* are able to increase their family structures both vertically and horizontally. These groups of *hijra* community live and earn only in the areas assigned to them by their elders.

*New born member*

In order to study this level of *hijra* discourse, the discursive practices which the *hijra* community carries out on the birth of any *hijra* child are the claiming of that child as their own, collecting the child and if the parents do not want to give away their children, then the *hijra* community approaches the government for the custody of that child. Sometimes they just want to claim the infant and then they pay their parents for upbringing the child until he/she reaches the age of ten.

**Strength of the group**

Another important aspect of group formation is related to the most powerful group in the *hijra* community. Unlike *non- hijra* community, the strength of the people in *hijra* community does not depend on how much money one has but the group which owns greater number of members *(chelas),* is considered as the most powerful group in *hijra* world. That is why *hijras* become very eager in order to acquire the new born *hijra* or any migrated *hijra* so that the strength of the group can be increased.

**Relation with other groups**

Being a community, *hijras* keep good relations with other *hijra* groups and they call them as their *'bradari' [relatives]* and visit them just as normal relatives do. For avoiding any dispute they do not interfere in other areas and they do not take any business from those areas because it is considered immoral according to them. Some of the main findings after the analysis can be seen in the Figure 1
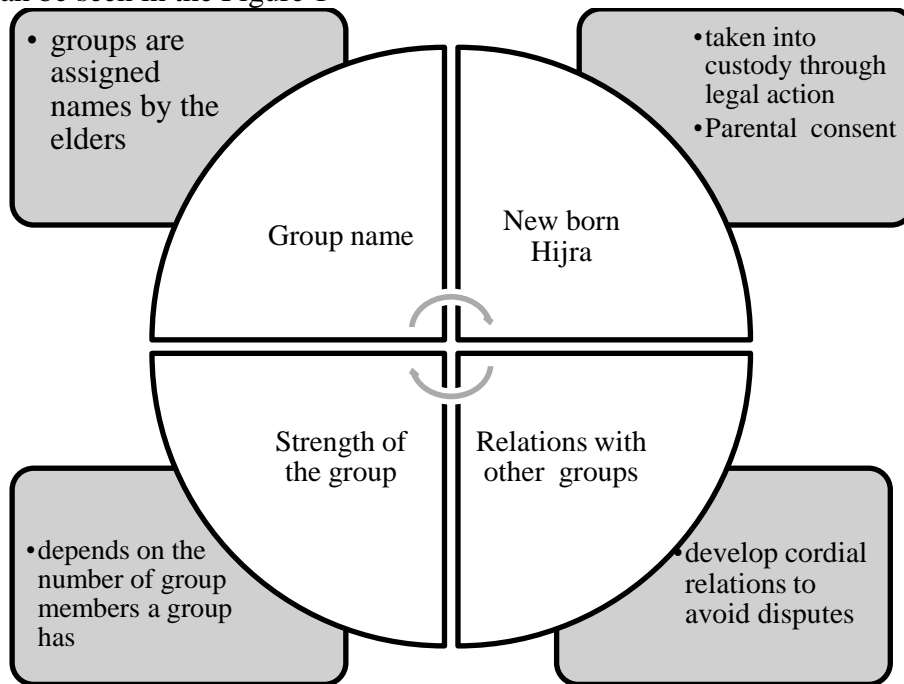


*Figure 1:* Discursive Practices while Group Formation

**Familial Structure**

The *hijras* claimed that in response to the social exclusion, they have created an alternative system of asexual kinship that parallels normative heterosexual kinship structures for living their lives accordingly. This familial structure of kinship delegates various roles of a family to different members of the group. But these roles are rather ambiguous with respect to gender as many of them are assigned with the roles of female and male at the same time. They have a complete hierarchical kinship system. The most important relation in the group is the relation of the '*guru*' who is considered as the *'father, teacher, leader, mother'* of the 'chelas' who performs the role of a *'son, daughter, student'.* He holds the status of the head of the family who is responsible for managing the house and scheduling all the activities of the group. The sons and the daughters of the guru respect him like their parents. All kinds of relations can be found in *hijra* community like *grandfather [dada guru] , grandmother [nani guru] , uncle [chacha guru]* and others e.g. the two chelas of the same guru are *'bhai'* means *'brothers'* and the chelas of one brother are the *'bhatijay'* means *' newphews'* of the other brother.

These relations are made with mutual understandings and with the permission of the guru. Then the day is celebrated by inviting all the *hijra* groups. This discursive practice of *hijras* highly depends on the context and the person whom they address as sometimes in one

context a *hijra* is being called as an 'uncle' but on other occasion called as an 'aunt'. Some of the main findings after the analysis can be seen in the Figure 2.
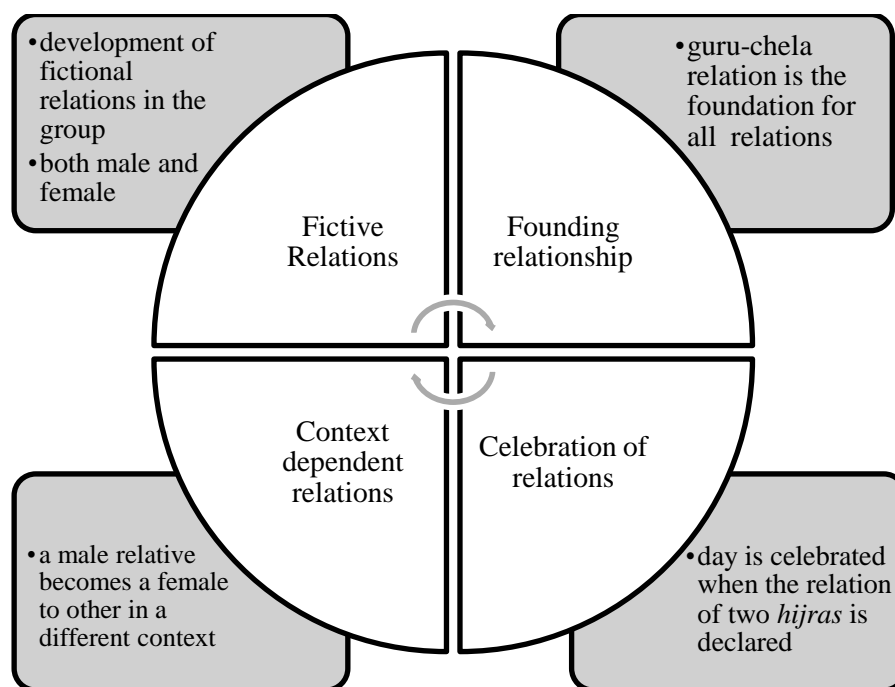


*Figure 2:* Discursive Realities regarding Familial structure of hijras

**Gender Orientation**

This level of production of *hijra* social discourse concerning the gender orientation process within *hijra* community possesses a great challenge to the traditional dichotomy of gender orientation into binary male and female. It seems that rather than creating any rigid definition of gender specification, the *hijras* have liberated themselves from it and they have developed their own gender ideologies through their discursive practices and have drawn their own patterns of use of masculine and feminine speech. The detailed view of gender employment process through their discursive styles is under the following:

**Female and Male Roles of Hijras in the Group**

The *hijra* community claimed to have a special system of assigning roles of males and females to the *hijras* within the group. Some *hijras* stay at home and do all the domestic chores like cooking, cleaning etc, just like a typical domestic woman does. On the other hand some *hijras* perform the role of a male means they have to go out and earn for the family. Some *hijras* perform the roles of female relations like ,*'beti'[daughter], 'nati'[grand-daughter], 'behna' [sisters]* and likewise some performs the roles of male relations like, *'beta'[son], 'pota'[grand-son], 'bhai'[brother]*.

**Hijras and Concept of Female Soul**

The *hijras* often claims that they have female soul in them and they are women by heart. According to them, they always portray themselves as females because it never occurs in their minds that they should behave like men just because they are born in the body of a male. They want to live as a woman, treated as a woman and to be addressed like a woman.
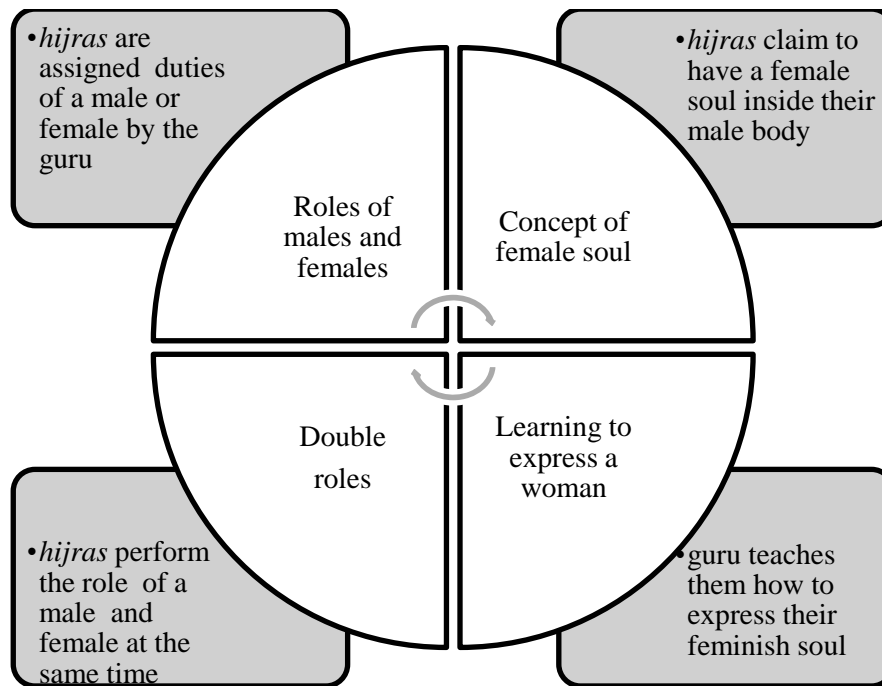
*Figure 3:* Discursive Practices regarding Gender Orientation

While speaking about other *hijras* in the third person, usually *hijras* have the tendency to address other *hijras* in the feminine ( e.g., chachi, mami) but sometimes they address other *hijras* in the masculine ( e.g., chacha. mama). The reason behind such terms for the gendered distinction actually defines by the discursive context in which they are being used. This discursive practice of calling themselves as females seems contradictory whenever a *hijra* speak with a 'thick loud male voice' which comes out from a person dressed like a women. Some of the main findings after the analysis can be seen in the Figure 3.

**Cursing**

This level of discourse is concerned with the *hijra's* employment of verbal insult and this discursive practice considered exclusive to this community. They claimed that it generates and accentuates the fear for their sexual ambiguity among the people who belong to the *non- hijra* world, because *hijras* are considered to have some kind of supernatural power of cursing over procreation. Apparently, it seems quite ironical as they cannot procreate themselves but in anthology, they are portrayed as "powerful symbols of the divine and of generativity". This very belief justifies their presence at religious festivals, births and weddings.
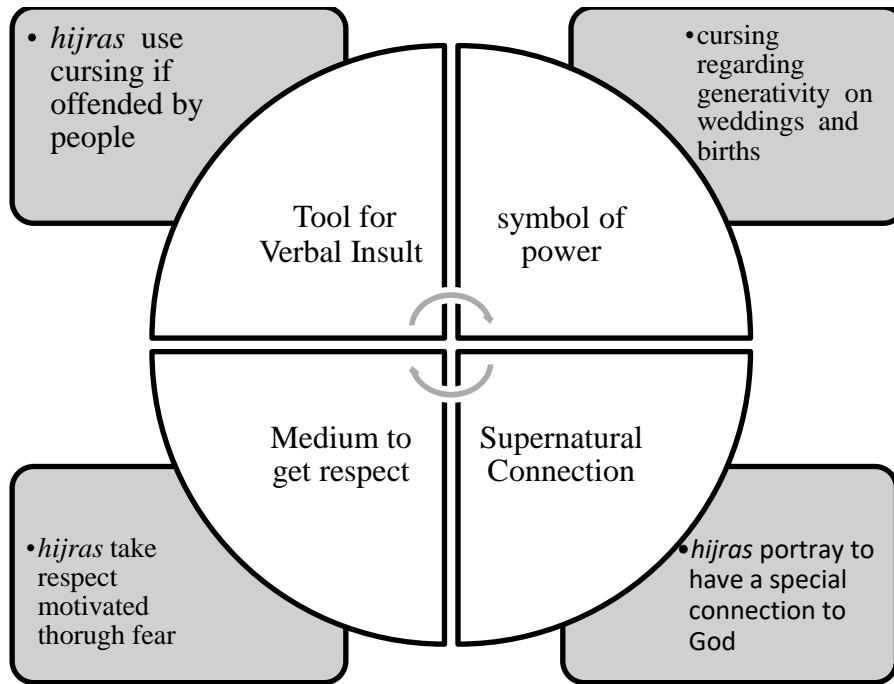
*Figure 4:* Discursive Practices while Cursing

Due to this reason, people usually treat them with respect as they are afraid of the curse that *hijras* might give them in return f or misbehaving with them. So, the respect of the people of society is not out of regard for them but rather motivated by fear. According to them, they do not want to do it on purpose but sometimes people offend them to the extent to do it.Some of the main findings after the analysis can be seen in the Figure 4.

**Profession**

In the analysis of the discursive practices which are found on the level of discourse depicting their professional life, they claimed that traditionally, *hijras* are associated with singing and dancing at births and weddings where they are often compensated with money or gifts like clothes and jewelry. They also claimed to earn their livelihood by begging alms on the birth of a male child after performing their dance and songs. People also hire them for performing at their private functions and parties. Apart from that they do not have any other alternative source of earning money. *Hijras* are contingent upon such a livelihood due to their inextricable situation in the social structure. Some of the main findings after the analysis can be seen in the Figure 5.
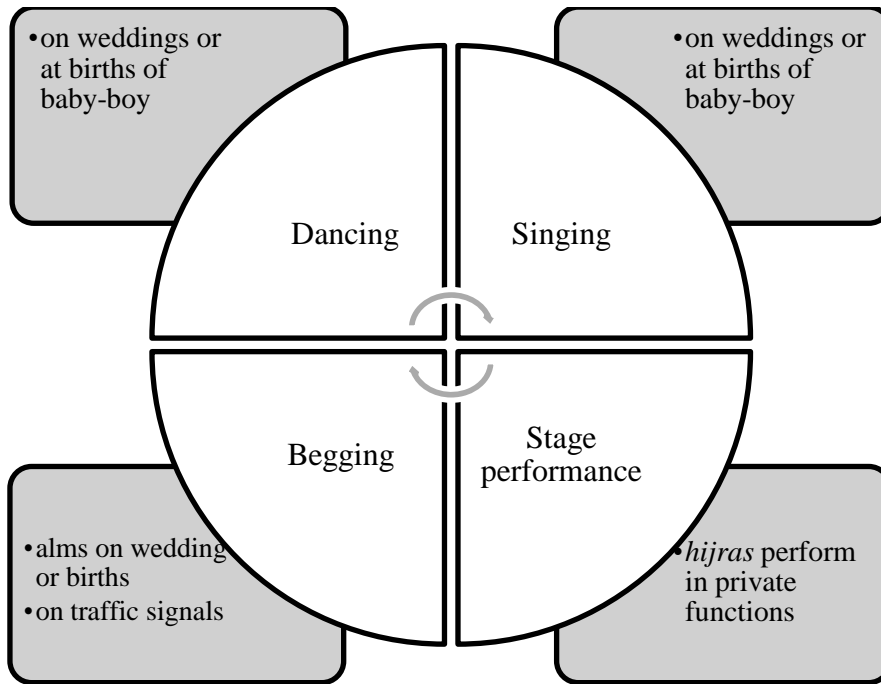
Dancing
• on weddings or at births of baby-boy

Singing
• on weddings or at births of baby-boy

Begging
• alms on wedding or births
• on traffic signals

Stage performance
• *hijras* perform in private functions

**Figure 5:** Discursive Practices while carrying out the Profession

**Education System**

At this level of *hijra* discourse regarding the education system of *hijra* community, the discursive practices which they carry out in their community present a very gloomy and shady picture. Unlike other people of the society; the *hijras* are denied the basic rights of getting education. They are not welcomed in the schools or colleges because they claimed that are being mocked for their effeminate gestures by other fellows if they go to school. That is why they are only given the education of dancing and singing by their gurus by keeping them homes. Some of the main findings after the analysis can be seen in the Figure 6.
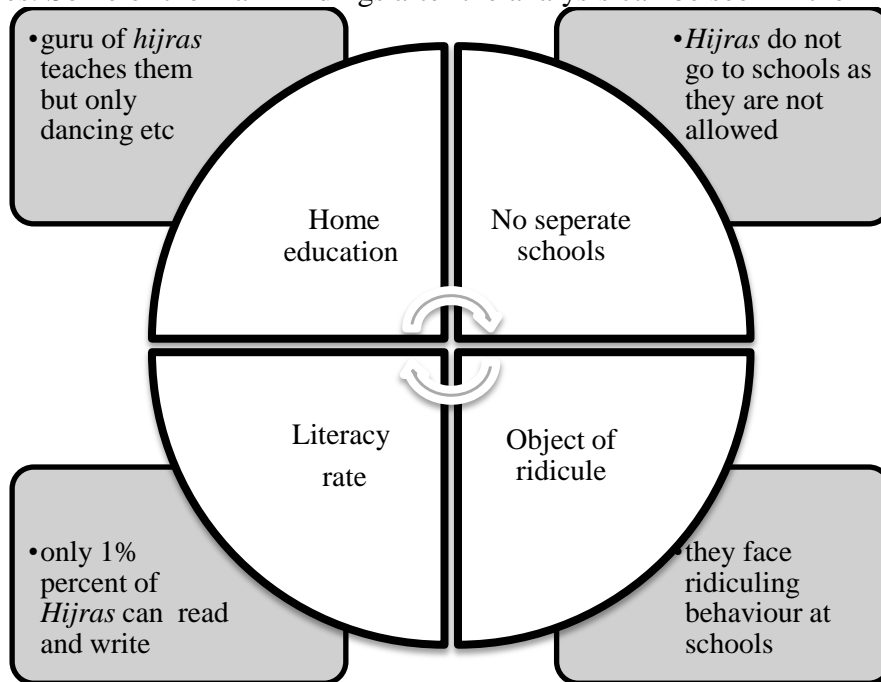
Home education
• guru of *hijras* teaches them but only dancing etc

No seperate schools
• *Hijras* do not go to schools as they are not allowed

Literacy rate
• only 1% percent of *Hijras* can read and write

Object of ridicule
• they face ridiculing behaviour at schools

**Figure 6:** Discursive Realities regarding the Education system

**Punishment System**

*Hijras* claimed that majority of the *hijra* community rely upon their own developed systems of law and order and does not plea to the national courts for the resolution of their

disputes due to their socially isolated status from the society. The discursive practice which is observed in *hijra* community regarding the settlements of their conflicts is the formation of *'panchayat'*. They select a committee of the elders mostly leaders of different clans of *hijra* community and they call this committee as *'panchayat' [assembly of five]*. If any conflict is meant to be solved then this committee is called and the groups of other areas also sits there as a witness of the hearing. The mistakes which are considered punishable are disobedience of guru, breaking the laws of *hijra* community and if any *hijra* trespasses in any others territory. The punishments by the committee are of monetary nature but sometimes physical as well.
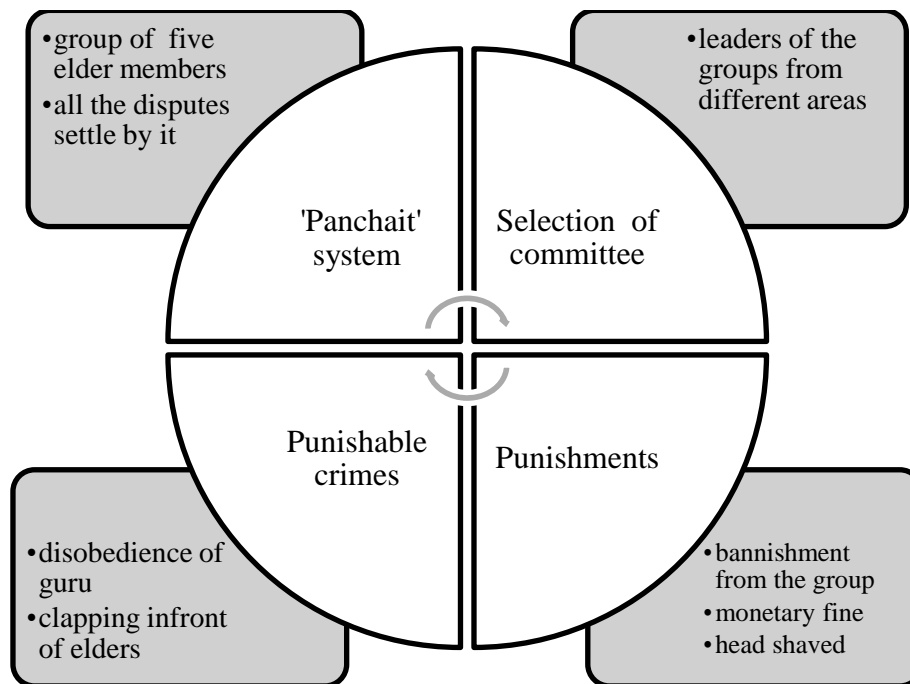


**Figure 7:** Discursive Practices regarding Punishment System

**Name Assigning system**

Another major discursive practice is carried out in *hijra* community when a *hijra* is welcomed in the group for the very first time; a choice of changing its name from a masculine to a feminine, is given to him which he never had in its previous life. This is a great day of celebration for *hijras* and they consider it as the day of    *'re-birth'*. At this day, they distribute sweets and call all their relatives and friends.

The names assigned to the members of the community are mostly female names. It seems that by choosing the names like *'Tara' [star], 'Rose' [flower] or 'Jugnu' [firefly]* etc, the *hijras* try to assert their femininity because all the names they choose are feminine in their grammatical gender. Some of the main findings after the analysis can be seen in the Figure 9.
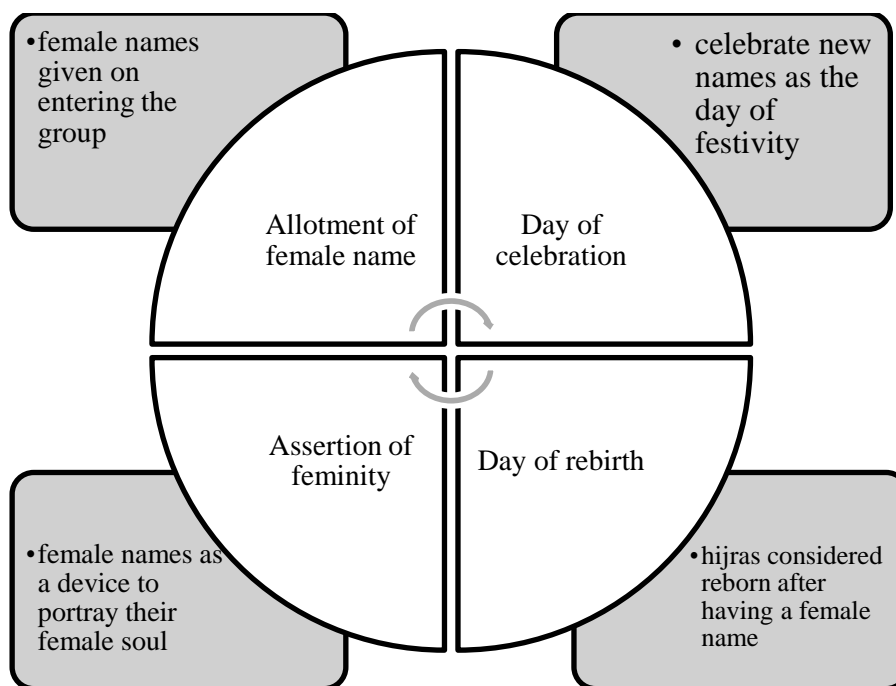
*Figure 8:* Discursive Practices regarding Name Assigning System

The *hijras* strongly dislike if they are being called by their earlier masculine name and it is considered as the most incisive insult for a *hijra*. This usually happens whenever they are indulged in any heated argument.

**Conclusion**

The study revealed some very distinguished social realities of *hijra* community under the analysis of this research and these distinctive discursive features immensely contribute in constructing their androgynous reality which makes them unique. Such as the production phenomena of the discourse showed that the themes, topics, occasions and activities of *hijra* community for the text production is altogether of different nature than that of *non-hijra* community. These distinguished themes were executed through different discursive practices of that community. A complete picture of their social, economic and cultural world has been portrayed after the analysis of their discursive practices. The researcher found that they live in groups and in *hijra* community every group has its own name *i.e. chandni dera, rawana dera* and*, muhatia daira etc*. They have developed a complete artificial familial structure and their relations are somehow similar to ours. They assign different roles to different *hijras*. The most note-worthy relationship in *hijras* is the relationship of *guru-chela*. They also have the fictional relationship of mother, father, sisters, brothers, aunty etc. According to them, if there are two chelas of same guru they would be brothers but if one *hijra* wants to be the sister or brother of any other *hijra* then they organize the occasion and celebrate to bind them in a relation. The rules in *hijra* community are very strict and they obey the order of their leader who is called *'guru'* in their language. They settle their disputes in *'panchayt'* which is the group of elders including guru, dada guru, par dada guru and gurus of other groups. Whenever a new *hijra* is entered in the group, guru teaches her singing, dancing and the language of the group and even assigned with a new feminine name. Name assigning activity is a big occasion of celebration in *hijra* community. It was also found that they do not go to schools because of the discriminatory behavior they have to face by the hands of the students and the teachers that is why most of them are illiterate. They have their own education system for the *hijras* that if someone knows anything she will teach the other. Due to their illiteracy they do not get any prestigious job and ultimately they have to turn to the same traditional profession of the *hijra* community like singing, begging and dancing. Regarding their gender

orientation, they use masculine and feminine pronouns during their discourse but the use is highly contextual. In *hijra* groups, they play the masculine and feminine roles at the same time e.g., if any *hijra* is a sister to someone so in that context she will call herself as female but on other hand if she had made a bond with someone as a brother then she will call herself in the masculine pronoun. But they always refer themselves as females if they are describing themselves in the first person and it shows that gender is not a fixed category for them, as it is presented in the behavior of *hijras* that most of the time they display and construct gender identity through their verbal pattern. The purpose behind the development of all these distinguished features seemed to be the establishment of their identity as a *hijra* rather than labeled as a confused creature: neither woman nor man. In a nut shell, this study has made a significant endeavor in exploring and uncovering the different social realities of Pakistan's socially excluded community known as *hijras*. The patterns of their discourse as how they build or carry out their discourse which is very different from the discourse of the straight people because the discursive practices of this communities is all of a different nature than that of *non- hijras* community.

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