# Hijra Lives in India: A Historical Reading

## Rimjim Boruah

*Research Scholar, Department of English*
*Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya*
*Nagaon Assam*

---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

*Abstract:*
This article investigates the historical development of India's transgender population. The historical development of the transgender community throughout the Mughal, British, post-independence, and modern periods. Transgenders held important positions in the Mughal Empire, serving as political advisors and administrators. Transgenders profited from the establishment of land and food rights during the British period. In the modern era, the Indian government created new policies and plans for the social protection and welfare of the transgender people.

*Keywords:* Transgender, tritiyaprakriti, napumsaka, hijra, marginalization.

Hijras, eunuchs, Kothis, Aravanis, Jogappas, Shiv-Shakthis, and other transgender people make up the transgender group. Eunuchs have been around since the 9th century BC. Castrated males were in high demand to protect the women's quarters of royal houses. The term has Greek origins and means "keeper of the bed." Vedic society recognised three genders, according to Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism. The Vedas (1500 BC - 500 BC) classify persons into one of three distinct types based on their nature or prakrti. These are also referred to as pumsprakrtistri-prakrti (female-nature) and tritiya-prakrti (thirdnature) in the Kama Sutra (about 4th century AD) and elsewhere. Various writings show that third sex persons were extensively known in pre-modern India, and that they comprised both male and female bodied people, as well as intersexuals, and that they could frequently be identified as children. In ancient Hindu law, medicine, linguistics, and astrology, a third sex is also addressed. The Manu Smriti (200 BC - 200 AD), the foundational work of Hindu law, explains the biological origins of the three sexes: "A male child is produced by a greater quantity of male seed, a female child by the prevalence of the female; if both are equal, a third-sex child or boy and girl twins are produced; if either are weak or deficient in quantity, conception fails." The *Mahabhaya* (200 BC), a book on Sanskrit grammar by Indian scholar Patanjali, claims that Sanskrit's three grammatical genders are derived from three natural genders. The Tolkappiyam (3rd century BC), the oldest Tamil grammar, also mentions hermaphrodites as a third "neuter" gender (along with a feminine category of unmasculine males). The nine planets are ascribed to one of three genders in Vedic astrology; the third gender, tritiya-prakrti, is connected with Mercury, Saturn, and (especially) Ketu. There are additional allusions in the Puranas to three types of devas of music and dance: apsaras (female), gandharvas (masculine), and kinnars (neuter).

For ages, transgender people have been a part of Indian society. In the early literature of ancient India, there was historical evidence of acknowledgment of "third sex" or those who were not confirmed to male or female gender. The notion of "tritiyaprakriti" or "napumsaka" was an important aspect of Hindu mythology, folklore, epics, and early Vedic and Puranic literatures. The name "napumsaka" was used to represent the lack of procreative potential, which was shown by distinguishing between masculine and female markers. As a result, several of the early literature dealt extensively with questions of sexuality and the established notion of third gender. In fact, the Jain literature includes the idea of "psychological sex," which emphasises an individual's psychological make-up as different from their sexual qualities. In the epic *Ramayana*, Lord Rama, who had been exiled from the kingdom for 14 years, turns back to his supporters and invites all the'men and women' to return to the city. Among his followers, only the hijras felt bound by this path and chose to remain with him. Impressed by their devotion, Rama granted them the authority to bestow blessings on people on auspicious events like as childbirth and marriage, as well as during inauguration festivities, which were expected to set

the scene for the ritual of badhai, in which hijras sing, dance, and bestow blessings. In the *Mahabharata*, Aravan, the son of Arjuna and Nagakanya, offers to be sacrificed to Goddess Kali in order to secure the Pandavas' triumph in the Kurukshetra battle; his only condition was to spend the final night of his life in marriage. Because no lady would marry a guy who was condemned to be slain, Krishna disguises himself as a lovely woman named Mohini and marries him. The Hijras of Tamil Nadu claimed Aravan to be their forefather and referred to themselves as Aravanis.

Hijras were well-known figures in Islamic royal courts, notably in the Ottoman and Mughal empires of Mediaeval India. They climbed to prominent positions as political advisers, administrators, generals, and harem guards. Hijras were seen to be bright, trustworthy, and passionately loyal, and they had unfettered access to all locations and sectors of the populace, playing an important role in Mughal empire building politics. The Hijras also held significant positions in Islamic religious organisations, particularly in charge of protecting the holy sites of Mecca and Medina. As people of trust, they were able to influence official decisions and paid great sums of money for being close to kings and queens. As a result, hijra regularly discuss the significance of their position throughout that time period.

Hijra used to take protection and privileges from various Indian governments by membership into the hijra community at the start of the British era in the Indian subcontinent. Furthermore, the perks included the gift of land, food rights, and a lesser amount of money from agricultural families in the specific region, all of which were eventually eliminated by British rule since the land was not passed via blood relatives. The situation altered dramatically with the establishment of colonial power in the 18th century. Early European travellers' accounts revealed that they were repelled by the appearance of Hijras and couldn't understand why they were treated so well in royal courts and other organisations. The British colonial authority actively worked to criminalise the hijra population and deny them civil rights in the second part of the nineteenth century. The colonial authorities recognised Hijras to be a distinct caste or tribe in several sections of India. The Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 includes all hijra who were involved in abduction and castrating minors and dressing up as women in public places. The penalty for such behaviour was up to two years in jail and a fine, or both. This pre-partition past has an impact on the precarious situations of hijra

in the modern world. Nevertheless, the foregoing Act was repealed in the year 1952, yet its enduring impact persists, as evidenced by the existence of numerous local legislations that still embody discriminatory sentiments towards specific tribes, including the marginalised Hijra community. In 2012, an amendment was made to the Karnataka Police Act with the aim of facilitating the registration and surveillance of Hijras who were involved in activities such as kidnapping of children, engaging in unnatural offences, and other related offences. This amendment draws parallels to the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871.

Transgender individuals in India have garnered significant recognition and widespread popularity, emerging as a prominent and widely acknowledged third gender category within contemporary society. The Supreme Court has rendered a decision recognizing transgender individuals as a distinct and valid third gender.

The emergence of the third genders in India has constituted a formidable faction within the realm of LGBT rights. In the present era, the Government of India has implemented numerous welfare policies and schemes encompassing various domains, including but not limited to census, documentation, issuance of citizenship ID cards and passports, social-economic development, and constitutional safeguards specifically tailored to address the needs and rights of transgender individuals. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) represents a significant endeavor undertaken during the 11th Five Year Plan; wherein commendable efforts were made to create employment prospects for individuals identifying as transgender. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation oversees the implementation of the National Urban Livelihood Mission and the provision of healthcare facilities. The present discourse pertains to the multifaceted aspects of societal, economic, and political metamorphosis, with a particular focus on the domain of housing, legal frameworks, police reforms, as well as constitutional safeguards aimed at averting transgressions against the fundamental human rights of individuals within the transgender community. Furthermore, it is imperative to establish institutional mechanisms that are specifically tailored to address the unique concerns and challenges faced by transgender individuals.

During the Mughal period, the transgender community was bestowed with elevated social standing, yet encountered numerous challenges and impediments under the British colonial regime. In order to ensure the protection and well-being of

transgender communities, the government has implemented numerous policies and schemes. This initiative aims to foster the development of the social and economic status of the transgender community. In order to promote the well-being and advancement of the transgender community, it is imperative that the government take decisive action to eliminate the prevailing stigma, discrimination, and human rights violations that persist within society. The incorporation of these elements into individuals' daily routines has the potential to significantly augment the expansion of the transgender community in India.

## References

[1]. Michelraj, M. "Historical Evolution of Transgender Community in India". Asian Review of

[2]. Social Sciences. ISSN: 2249-6319 Vol. 4 No. 1, 2015, pp. 17-19 The Research Publication, www.trp.org.in

[3]. Radhakrishnan. K.S. In the supreme court of India Civil original jurisdiction Writ petition (civil) No.400 of 2012 National legal services authority, judgement, 2013.

[4]. Sharma, Preeti. "Historical Background and Legal Status of Third Gender In Indian Society", IJRESS, Vol. ED – 2 (12), December. 2012.

[5]. Tahmina Habib. "A Long Journey towards Social Inclusion: Initiatives of Social Workers for Hijra Population in Bangladesh" University of Gothenburg International Master's Programme in Social Work and Human Rights, 2012.

[6]. Tripathy, Laxminarayan. In the Supreme Court of India at New Delhi Civil Original Jurisdiction i.a. No. of In writ petition (Civil) P-400, 2013.