Chapter 6
The Colonial Censu(re/ses) of Transbodies in Nineteenth-Century South Asia

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6.1 Introduction

The transgender population in nineteenth-century South Asia was a diverse one. The most popular representation of this class was the hijra, a group who the colonial administrators of the time thought were castrated men who wore women's clothes and begged for alms, engaged in sodomy and prostitution, sang, and danced. In fact, there was a law created—Part 2 of the Act XXVII of 1871, which was also known as the Eunuch Act—to criminalize this population (see Sangeetha Sriraam's Chap. 8 for more information on this Act, as well as other relevant legislation affecting this populace). However, in the nineteenth century, the heterogeneity within this group was erased, reducing it to a single and relatively monolithic category.

One way that transgender people were expunged is through popular accounts of the censuses in South Asia. These narratives can be seen in the writings of various British administrators who summarized the censuses for a non-specialist audience. In these descriptions, the transgender population was reduced simply to a category of castrated men. For example, in referring to the 1891 censuses, William Crooke (1999 [1896], ii. 495) described the hijra and mukhannas as a "class of eunuchs." Likewise, Robert Vane Russell (1969 [1916]), a census administrator in the 1901 censuses, describes various populations, including the hijra, gondhali, and khasua, as eunuchs. Reginald Enthoven (1997 [1922]), who was in charge of the censuses in 1901, also represents the hijra, fatada, and pavaya as castrated men. In addition, Horace Rose (1980 [1919]) states that the hijra, khunsa, khusra, and mukhannas were all men who had their penes removed. Finally, Denzil Ibbetson (1883), who administered the census of 1881 in Punjab, recorded that the hijra were eunuchs.

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Table 6.1 Aggregate data of gender make-up of hijra, khojas, and eunuchs in 1881, 1891, and 1902 Imperial censuses

Census year	Group	# Areas reporting	Males	Females	Percentage of females in transgender population
1881	Hijra	1	99	42	30%
	Eunuchs	1	95	0	0%
1891	Hijra	8	1458	519	26%
	Khoja	1	95	63	40%
	Eunuch	2	447	224	39%
1901	Hijra	8	1059	335	24%
	Khoja	1	301	152	51%

Yet, despite the accounts of the British authors, this transgender community was more diverse than their descriptions would indicate. When one looks at the census data, there were more than men counted in the ranks of these groups; some census returns indicate that 51% of these so-called eunuch groups were women (see Table 6.1). In addition, many in the transgender community, including the hijra, did not identify as males. In fact, many distinguished themselves from the two-sex model—an understanding of sex that only allows for males and females to exist—by identifying themselves as a third gender.

This notion of third gender is an important one. Several authors in this volume discuss this notion, including Sameena Azhar and Jason Vaudrey, Peter I-min Huang, Shalini Jayaprakash, Ruman Stradhar, and Tanupriya. This term captures a view of gender and the body that opposes the notion of there being only two sexes. Serena Nanda perhaps best captures how the third gender exists in opposition to the two-sex model in the name of her famous book: *Neither Man nor Woman* (1990); this situates people like the hijra as a third discrete sex/gender, one that is outside femaleness and maleness. While there is evidence of so-called women who perform masculinity in the history of South Asia, as discussed by Tanupriya and Agaja Puthan Purayil in the final two chapters of this collection, the most common understandings of this population are of non-binary individuals who perform femininity. The concept of a third gender is one that is based in local ways of knowing. It can be viewed as emerging from the Sanskrit term, tritiya prakriti, which is often translated as "third nature" (Gannon 2002), a conception that Sutradhar discusses in the previous chapter. Suffice to say at this point that this idea of a third gender was one that was suppressed by privileging the two-sex model.

A question emerges from the censuses: if the census data indicated that the transgender population consisted of other than castrated men, why did the popular accounts of these censuses represent them as only men? Why did they erase Indigenous ways of understanding gender and bodies—via the third gender—and, instead, insist that they were only males? This chapter explores this query. In order to arrive at an answer, it will first explore this contradiction in the censuses and discuss the justifications for it. Second, it will discuss two relevant ways that the transgender population was represented in the censuses. Third, it will bring these

various themes together and explain how the erasure of transbodies in the censuses served as a form of colonial control. Specifically, it will be argued that the transgender population represented a site of contested meaning, one that challenged the British understanding of the social world. These people were subsequently erased from the censuses as transgender, instead reimagined as men. This maneuver reconciled their existence with the colonial worldview, thereby privileging the latter over the Indigenous perspective and justifying colonial governance in the region.

This chapter, then, explores how the transgender community was represented in the censuses. However, the term "transgender" can be a problematic word. As Jayaprakash explains in Chap. 2, there is a tension between the broader concept "transgender" and specific terms, such as hijra. The former captures a global way of understanding, while the latter speaks to the local context. Anna Guttman in Chap. 3 makes this relationship explicit: some hijras actively resist the term "transgender," maintaining that it does not capture the nature of their identity. Indeed, in Chap. 4, Huang explicitly connects this debate to colonialism. Valuing the two-sex model is a colonial practice, he asserts, especially when it degrades the conception of the ostensible third gender of South Asia.

This chapter uses the term "transgender" quite intentionally. As will be clear through the following pages, the censuses attempt to erase local nuance and replace it with a monolithic conception of bodies. So, this chapter's use of the word "transgender" is not intended to erase the subtleties of local understandings of sexuality and the body—often understood under the umbrella of third gender—but to highlight how the erasure of such complexities is part of the colonial process. That is, this chapter seeks to highlight the very tension between so-called global ways of understanding transgender and the local ways of comprehending gender and sexuality in South Asia that Jayaprakash, Guttman, and Huang explore.

6.2 Contradiction in the Censuses

The first censuses that took place in British India happened in the early nineteenth century. These early censuses were designed to collect data on revenue and population for the East India Company. Of course, there were also scientific reasons for such data gathering; however, the use of the results was often to put into place new revenue systems (Ghosh et al. 1999). The first census of British India that took place was in 1801, when a resident of Benares, Mr. Deane, ordered Zulficar Ali, a Kotwal (or police officer), to conduct a census of the city (Prinsep 1832). Francis Buchanan carried out one of the first censuses of Bengal in 1807. The first attempt to gather numbers of the population in all of British India was in 1822, with subsequent attempts in 1836–1837, 1851–1852, 1856–1857, and 1861–1862 (Cornish 1874). However, throughout this period, several endeavors were made to establish the populations of specific areas, including Dacca in 1832 (Walters 1832), Benares in 1832 (Prinsep 1832), the North-Western Provinces in 1848 and 1853 (Christian 1854) and then again in 1865 (White 1882), Punjab in 1855 and 1868 (Miller 1870), the

Island of Bombay in 1864 (Leith 1864), Ajmere-Merwara in 1865 (Bhagram 1882), and Oudh in 1869 (White 1882).

The most relevant census data, however, is from the Imperial censuses. These censuses, which began in 1871 and 1872, covered all of British India and were carried out every 10 years subsequent to their establishment. It was in these surveys that the data revealed some patterns of the transgender community that were interesting. Tracking the transgender population through these censuses is dependent on the categories that each census sought to collect. In the pre-1881 censuses, nonbinary individuals were depicted as male eunuchs. Some census administrators (Hewlett 1873) argued that they were to be counted as an infirmity. In his *Memorandum on the Census of British India of 1871–1872*, Henry Waterfield (1875, 36) summarizes the 1871 and 1872 census, stating that: "The number of eunuchs and keepers of brothels recorded is 3,581, mostly in Oude, and the remainder in Bengal and the North-West Provinces." From this, it can be seen that eunuchs were categorized with pimps, which captures the sexualized nature that they were thought to have. Moreover, in this census entry, the eunuchs were classified under the larger grouping of "indefinite and non-productive"; that is, they were thought to not contribute to the economic functioning of the state, together with gamblers, professional thieves, "budmashes" or bad characters, and criminals. This categorization links them to the themes of criminality and exclusion. Such a narrative frames this population in terms spelled out in the Eunuch Act. Through another framework, one could also see this group being linked to the metaphor of clowns, a representation explored by Vaibhav Saria in the following chapter.

Several patterns emerged in the censuses of 1881. The first was that the transgender population was constructed as being a caste. In fact, this is one of the first places that the most significant of this population—the hijra—became identified as a caste. Representing the hijra in terms of a caste is a product of the way in which the census was organized. That is, the enumerators had to determine the caste membership of all of the subjects of the censuses, thereby ensuring that caste became an important variable. However, the way that the hijra were included as a caste is significant; through the caste label, they were connected to certain qualities. They were a "mendicant and vagrant caste," (Bhatavadekar 1883; Kitts 1882) a caste of "dancers and players," (Baines 1883; Drysdale 1883; Plowden 1883) and a "miscellaneous caste" (Ibbetson 1883).

In the 1891 censuses, occupation was redefined in such a way as to make the transgender community less obvious. Whereas the 1881 censuses were concerned with workers only, the 1891 version was interested in "the supporting power" and thus cast an eye to "each means of livelihood" (Baines 1893: 88). Consequently, instead of categorizing work in terms of the specific position, such as "dancing eunuch," the 1891 censuses grouped activities in terms of their larger economic function. With such de-emphasis of the social character of occupations and a focus on the productive role, the figure of the eunuch virtually disappeared from occupational statistics. In this way, the categories of the censuses changed how the transgender people generally, if not the hijra specifically, were represented in these official documents.

However, with their near obfuscation from occupational numbers, the position of this population as a caste became more apparent. Again, it can be seen how their characteristics were increasingly constructed through the very categories of the censuses. Yet, in 1891, caste was defined in functional terms, as a group's traditional occupation. Such a definition had the effect of continuing to represent groups like the hijra in terms of their activities—such as dancing, singing, and less reputable actions—while, at the same time, characterizing them as a coherent social group.

In the 1901 Imperial censuses, the operational definition of occupation was altered further. The main categories that were used were as follows: government; pasture and agriculture; personal services; the preparation and supply of material substances; commerce and the transport of persons, goods, and messages, and the storage of goods; professions, learned, artistic, and minor; and indefinite occupations, and means of subsistence independent of occupation. This restructuring of the category further expunged eunuchs from the data. In fact, whereas caste was linked to occupation in the 1891 censuses, it was, in this new series of censuses, associated with racial characteristics. In the words of Herbert Hope Risley (1903), the Superintendent of the 1901 census for all of India:

> An attempt is made in the following pages to show that the race sentiment ... rests upon a foundation of fact which scientific methods confirm; that it supplied the motive principle of caste; that it continues, in the form of fiction or tradition, to shape the most modern developments of the system; and, finally, that its influence has tended to preserve in comparative purity the types which it favors. (i. 489)

Consequently, in order to determine the ethnological characteristics of the various castes, he stated that two elements were important: indefinite physical characteristics, such as color of skin, hair, and eyes; and definite physical characteristics, or anthropometric characteristics. Through this perspective, race and caste became increasingly intertwined, which further reduced the visibility of eunuchs.

In this way, the censuses increasingly linked the transgender community with criminality and caste, while making them less visible. However, another fascinating aspect of how they were represented was that they were reduced to the category of men. During the censuses of 1881, 1891, and 1901, the enumerators of the censuses were told to count transgender people—via the category of eunuchs—as men. Specifically, in 1881, the instructions to enumerators were explicit in the Circular No 11, paragraph 6, column 4, which read: "Eunuchs or *hijdas*, *fatdas*, *pavaiyas* should be regarded as males" (as quoted in Bhatavadekar 1883, 29). Likewise, in the 1891 censuses, the instructions read: "*Column* 6. — Eunuchs should be entered as males. Every entry must be either *male* or *female*" (Stuart 1893, 407). Finally, in 1903, enumerators were provided with similar instructions: "Rule 5. *Column 5 (Male or Female)* — Enter here each person as either *male* or *female*, ... Enter eunuchs as male" (Risley 1903, 154). In other words, the instructions for the census enumerators were that there were only two sexes.

Because of this erasure of non-normative gender categories within these censuses, the transgender population was largely invisible. However, they did emerge in certain categories: hijra, khoja, and eunuchs. What is significant about their

representation is their gender. Prior to 1881, all of the records of the transgender population pointed to them as males. With the 1881 census, the groups that were thought to capture eunuchs no longer consisted of just males (see Table 6.1).

The significance of these three groups—hijra, khoja, and eunuch—is that the British thought that they all referred to castrated men; such a representation erases the third gender. In the 1881 Imperial censuses (Plowden 1883), a logic of how to categorize so-called eunuchs emerged, a framework that largely continued through the later censuses. This categorization emphasized the occupation of these ostensibly castrated men. Eunuchs were of three classes: Class 1, Order 3, Sub-Order 7, who were entitled "Dancing Eunuchs" (96); Class 2, Order 5, Sub-Order 2, Group 17, who were described as eunuchs, serving in Female Apartments (98); and Class 6, Order 13, Sub-order 1, Group 3, who were thought to simply be a eunuch (121). Within this framework, the first classification of eunuch was the hijra, the second was the khoja, and third was a general category. Such a classification obfuscates the gender difference between the groups. While the hijras and eunuchs are represented as transvestites and gendered feminine, the khoja were thought to be masculine and to guard and serve the female-occupied areas (known as zenanas). To be clear, even though women were counted in their ranks, eunuchs were thought to be men.

It is within this context that one can see a contradiction. On the one hand, the British were clear that eunuchs, including hijras and khojas, were males. Not only were they thought to be men, but the administrators of the censuses explicitly instructed the enumerators to register them as male. Yet, these census-takers reported that there were significant women in their ranks. This presents a curiosity. In order to examine this inconsistency and flesh out how it represented a site of production of colonial knowledge, it is important to look at how the British authors justified their description of these groups as eunuchs in the face of evidence to the contrary.

6.3   Explanation for Female Eunuchs

The British were very concerned with whether these ostensible eunuchs were males or females. How did those who analyzed the data of the censuses understand the presence of females among the returns of the censuses of the eunuchs? Simply put: they ignored the data. In other words, they made a decision to represent the social order in such a way that reflected their perspective. While there was evidence of women in the ranks of the so-called eunuchs, the British administrators insisted— albeit unconvincingly—that eunuchs were males. This investment in the maleness of the eunuchs reveals, not just an attempt to understand this social group, but a concerted effort to eliminate deviation from the British perspective of the two-sex model.

The first author to attempt an explanation is Risley in his *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal* (1891). In this book, he argued that the female hijra represent a mistake on the part of "an ignorant enumerator" in Patna. The census-taker, it seems, wrote down that several people belonged to the caste of tijra. Since no such caste existed,

the census clerk recorded hijra. When Risley looked into the matter, he found that the people in question belonged to the caste, Doshadh, a caste appellation that was more commonly known in Urdu as hajra. It was this that the enumerator incorrectly referred to as hijra. Risley's explanation allowed him to continue to define the hijra as a eunuch by explaining the deviation as an error.

Another way to account for this seeming inconsistency is by attributing the existence of women to a caste other than to that of the hijra. Edward Gait (1902) asserted that hijra are also a synonym for pawaria, who were a group of musicians and singers who perform outside of a house when a male child is born to its occupants. Women, according to Gait, belonged to this caste. Also, "[i]t is sometimes said that the women [of this caste] sing and dance in male costume, but so far as my information goes, it is the men who occasionally perform in female attire, and not the women in the garb of men" (i. 444). Thus, he asserted, one might count women in the classification of hijra, but, in doing so, they are misrepresenting the relationship between the two groups. That is, those hijras who are pawarias are still eunuchs; the women, then, are pawarias insofar as they perform at the birth of male children, but not proper hijras.

Finally, William Crooke (1999 [1896]) maintained that the women who were counted under the caste of hijra were not hijra per se, but depended on them. In his words, "[t]he Census Returns show that they have a considerable number of women dependent on them" (ii. 495). Like those discussed above, he insisted that hijra are eunuchs and that the census-takers made an error in counting women in their ranks. Like the other writers, Crooke maintained that hijra are males and any inclusion of women in the ranks of this class does not change this fact.

These explanations do not explain the phenomenon satisfactorily. While his justification might make sense in the area of Patna, Risley's analysis failed to explain why the other provinces continue to return women in the ranks of the hijra. Likewise, Gait's assertions were ungeneralizable. Many colonial authors, such as D. Baines (1893), argued that the pawaria caste is unique to Bengal. In associating the pawaria and the hijra, Gait cannot account for the existence of women who identify as hijra in provinces that do not include the former caste. Furthermore, Crooke's reason for this situation is flawed insofar as he maintained that hijra, as a social group, are eunuchs. However, if women identify as hijras, it is difficult to make the argument that they do not include women in their ranks. That is, he does not make a good case for excluding these women from their ranks. Instead of defining the social category of hijra in such a way that would account for the evidence, Crooke simply rearticulated a definition of hijra that is not backed up by the census returns. His argument, like those of Risley and Gait, is designed to maintain the definition of the hijra as eunuchs, in contradiction to the data.

What is significant in the justifications for understanding these so-called eunuchs as males, though, is that any deviation from this ostensible fact is what the administrators took to be evidence of the incompetence of the Natives. The British authors repeatedly blamed the Indigenous people of India for the error. Part of the reason for this blame is that the census organizers would hire locals—such as servants, religious persons, and "school boys"—who were not familiar with the logic used by the

administrators. The reason for this enrollment is that the exercise of the censuses was a large endeavor and required more people than could be sufficiently trained to administer it. As an example, the 1901 census for the North-Western Provinces and Oudh utilized 1283 superintendents and 216,621 enumerators (Burn 1902). It was because of the ignorance of these local enumerators that women were counted as eunuchs, the British writers surmised. In fact, the census compilers often lamented the lack of "understanding" or "education" of the enumerators (Drew 1892; Gait 1902: iv. 30; McIvers 1883: iii. 83). In other words, the British argued that it was the locals who did not understand their own culture that resulted in women being counted in the class of so-called eunuchs. Such an explanation positions the colonial understanding of South Asian culture as more authoritative than the South Asian perception. This is problematic, since it assumes that the colonial administrators understood Indian culture better than those who live it.

6.4   Hijra as a Caste

Why did the British insist that these social groups were eunuchs, despite the evidence to the contrary? Bracketing their colonial logic—the argument that it was due to incompetent enumerators who did not understand their own culture—for a moment, it is useful to approach this question from a different angle. Specifically, it would be helpful to examine how the British administrators understood eunuchs in the censuses. Such a portrayal will reveal how the authors used the discursive site of the hijra to create a population that could be controlled. To unpack this representation, this section will investigate the themes through which eunuchs were examined in the censuses. To do so, two patterns will be examined: the connection of the hijra to caste and the emergence of the hijra as the primary signifier of the transgender population.

The first theme is that the hijra were increasingly associated with caste in the censuses. Caste was a contentious topic in the enumeration of the population. There was much debate over what constituted this variable. Yet, it was an important one: the census enumerators had to assign a caste to every person. However, caste was not a simple metric. There was significant variation in how caste was conceptualized between the censuses. In the 1881 censuses, caste was defined in terms of hierarchy. Despite this representation, the hierarchal nature of caste was contested. In the words of W. C. Plowden (1883), the Superintendent for the 1881 censuses of all of British India:

> It was originally intended that the castes should be classified by their social position, but great difficulty was experienced in carrying this out. Petitions were sent in to my office and to the offices of the Deputy Superintendents of Census in the Provinces complaining of the position assigned to castes to which the petitioners belonged; and the whole subject was shrouded in so much uncertainty and obscurity that the original arrangement was dropped. (277)

No alternate theorization of caste was suggested, thereby leaving it in the hands of the enumerator to decide whether or not the named castes "were merely synonyms in their Province, and these might be grouped together under one common title" (277). According to one official document, caste was deemed a confusing variable, one with no real analytic value (Drysdale 1883). Still, it was an essential part of the way that knowledge about the people of South Asia was collected. It is within this context of ambiguity that eunuchs were imagined.

By the 1901 censuses, caste was reconceptualized from occupation to something else. Risley (1903), who was in charge of the 1901 censuses, defined caste as:

> a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common last name which usually denotes or is associated with a specific occupation; claiming common decent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine, professing to follow the same professional calling and regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogenous community. (i. 517)

While his definition is anchored in his larger assertions of the institution as being one of race, Risley still included elements of occupation, hereditary membership, and social status. With his rise in authority to Chief of the Imperial Censuses in India, he established the notion of caste as being linked to race.

As was discussed above, eunuchs were reimagined as a caste in the censuses. However, the complexities of caste became evident when applied to this transgender population. In the pre-1881 censuses, the hijra were depicted as Muslim male eunuchs. The 1881 censuses saw them being defined as a caste, but through the lens of occupation. These occupations were associated with specific characteristics, which conferred certain attributes onto the caste. Yet, they were still conceived of as eunuchs. In the 1891 censuses, the role of occupation became broader and less detailed; the function of caste became more important. While there was still attention paid to occupation, such a focus was subsumed under the understanding of caste; that is, one's caste was understood to capture one's occupation. With this move to the caste-basis for the hijra, there was accordingly greater attention to detail in describing the hijra in terms of specifics qualities; this is apparent in the minutiae of castes and sub-castes, described below. By constructing the category of the hijra to include formerly specific castes—which, in the British imagination, was the archetypical representation of Indian social structure—these censuses reified the hijra into a discrete social entity.

It is no surprise that some of the census-takers had difficulties when it came to recording the caste of the hijra. However, partially as a result of the way in which the censuses were organized, the hijra became depicted as a caste (complete with a variety of sub-castes, according to some census-takers). For example, D. Baillie (1894), complier for The North-Western Provinces and Oudh, discusses nine different sub-castes for only Muslim hijra: Banihashim, Gangarami, Hijra, Khuji, Khuwaja sara, Khwaja Zad, Pathan, Sheikh, and Tikalba. Edward Maclagan (1892), administrator for the 1891 census in Punjab, on the other hand, discusses 11 sub-castes, again of only Muslim hijra: Dhol, Hajel, Handam, Hasra, Makhans, Manhas, Moli, Moni, Pasawri, Qureshi, and Rai. As is evident with these two authors, there

was little consensus on what sub-castes would construct the hijra caste. The hijra did not fit into the definitions of caste—and many of the compilers knew it. Charles O'Donnell (1893), for instance, counted the hijra under the category of occupation, rather than that of caste. Baillie (1894, 320), despite his attempt to incorporate sub-castes into the category of hijra, wrote that he does not consider the hijra to be "properly caste entries." This parallels Charles Luard's (1902) comments that the hijra are not a caste.

Given this challenge of fitting the hijra into the category of caste, why were the hijra represented as a caste? The way that the various censuses were designed predicated a particular conception of Indian society, a vision that could not but be replicated by the executing of the censuses. With the categories that were provided by the various censuses—sex and age; religion; occupation; infirmities; education; nationality and caste; or, alternatively, caste, race, and tribe—and that each person counted *had* to provide an answer for all of the questions, there were limited options for persons to pick from. That is, the organizing principles for the censuses determined what categories the enumerators would find. For example, since each individual had to indicate to which caste they belonged, the necessity of having a caste as part of the colonial framework of intelligibility emerged with the necessity of answering the question. The process of conducting the census created an ostensibly empirical reality that proved the existence of those aspects that the census set out to measure. This, of course, explains why the hijra came to be associated with caste only with the beginning of the Imperial censuses.

This association of the hijra with caste is significant because it located the former in the social framework of the Indian cultural milieu with which the British officials were familiar. For the colonial administrators, the caste system represented a classificatory schema within which all Indian social groups could be located and ranked (and, in the work of some writers, correspondingly associated with biological/racial types). By including the hijra in this system, the writers were able to understand them as a distinct Indigenous class that could be linked to their supposed degradation and disreputable nature, qualities that were established and criminalized in legislation. In fact, through the seemingly objective character of the censuses, such disdained qualities were situated, not in the attitudes and beliefs of the colonial administrators, but in the minds of the "Native" population. That is, the criminality of the hijra was not understood as a colonial invention, but an Indigenous one.

The defining of the hijra as a caste, then, functioned to construct the hijra as a distinct social class, even if it were an unintended product of the way in which the censuses were organized. Caste served to situate the hijra in a South Asian social context, one in which the poor ranking of this group was thought to be, not of a British invention, but of an Indigenous tradition. Furthermore, the language of caste allowed the colonial recorders of the censuses to discuss the group of people whom they called the hijra as an aggregate, with particular qualities. Thus, through this taxonomy of caste, the hijra were represented as a definite collectivity whose nature could be established and anchored. The logic of connecting individuals with caste became more predominant, to the point that many census compilers ceased seeing a problem in defining a group such as the hijra as a caste. To be clear, the framework

of intelligibility that was constructed through the logic of connecting each person with a caste was such that caste seemed inevitably associated with all South Asian groups, including the hijra. Within this perspective, the different meanings of caste became associated with the hijra. Perhaps most significantly, insofar as caste represented a structure of an ostensibly Indigenous hierarchy, the caste system was understood in the British imaginary as a social organization in which the "Natives" ranked their population. If the British enforced such a system, in their minds, they were governing via the enforcement of local laws and not colonial ones. Within the contested meaning of caste within the censuses, an ostensibly Indigenous class was created, one that allowed the British to govern them by their own norms.

6.5   Hijra as Primary Signifier

A second and related theme that emerged in the discussion of eunuchs in the censuses was their reduction to a single group: the hijra. There was a struggle over how to imagine the variety of transgender groups in South Asia. Over time, as more census data was collected, eunuchs transitioned from being represented as a loose aggregate of men without penes to being portrayed as a particular class with specified traits. In the reification of eunuchs, one type became increasingly visible: those who were called the hijra. This collapsing of groups under a single umbrella allowed for the colonial understanding of what constituted transgender to supplant Indigenous understandings.

By subsuming many diverse castes under the category of hijra, the censuses privileged the hijra as the main way to imagine the transgender population in South Asia. The variety of formerly distinct subgroups that were captured under this main category included the fatada (also written as fathada, phathada, and fatdas), the pavaiya (alternatively spelled as pavaya, pavya, pawyu, pawariya, and parwaniya), the khusra (additionally known as khusre, khunsa, khasua, and kunjras), and the mukhannas.

This process of incorporating different social groups under a single umbrella had two effects. First, it collapsed all of the differences between the various social classes into one. This created a way of understanding eunuchs within the classification of hijra. Combined with the representation of hijra as a distinct caste, this situated the hijra as the primary signifier of the transgender community. No longer would the British have to explain all of the nuances between the various groups, since they are now understood as belonging to a single category.

Second, this mechanism connected the hijra with the varied attributes of the distinct social classes. Specifically, through the connection with these various groups, the attributes assigned to them became semiotically linked with the hijra. To illustrate this process, it would be helpful to provide some examples. In the second volume of his *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the North Western Frontier Provinces and the Protected Territories of the North Western Frontier Provinces*, Rose (1980 [1919], 331) stated that a hijra is "a eunuch, also called *khunsa*, *khusra*,

mukhannas." Likewise, in his chapter, entitled, "Pavayas in Gujarat populations, Hindus" in the ninth volume of *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency,* Kirparam Bhimbhai (1901) stated that fatdas is a synonym for hijda and pavaya. In both of these sections, the attributes of the various groups are collapsed into a single category, so that the classification comes to refer to the same characteristics. In this way, linking the hijra to these other groups—the fatada, khusra, pavaiya, and the muhkhanna—effectively links the former with the meanings associated with these populations. Such a metonymical relationship imputes the meaning of the classes onto the hijra, effectively creating a semiotic field in which the hijra represents all of the characteristics of these formerly varied groups.

Moreover, these different groups were all subsumed by the two-sex model. These classes were imagined as men. Certainly, they were considered to be castrated men, but men nonetheless. Through being included within the category of the hijra, these castes—the fatada, the pavaiya, the khusra, and the mukhannas—were imagined as males. This reduction negates the understanding of these groups as both varied and part of the third-gender community.

This creation of a semiotic field can be found in writings of both the census administrators and others. Some of the authors of the censuses explicitly linked the hijra with these groups (Maclagan 1892; Plowden 1883; Risley 1903). By equating the hijra with these other social classes, the censuses implicitly connected all of the diverse characteristics associated with the different classifications to a single figure: the hijra. This can also be seen in the non-census literatures (Bhimbhai 1901; Crooke 1999 [1896]; Enthoven 1997 [1922]; Faridi 1899; Rose 1980 [1919]; Russell 1969 [1916]).

The semiotic field that was created, both in the census and non-census sources, was diverse. These different groups were originally associated with a variety of characteristics: the fatada were connected to impotency, begging, and performing; the pavaiya were linked with begging, performing, sodomy, and prostitution; the khusra were connected with performances and sodomy; and, finally, the mukhanna were identified with sodomy. By connecting the hijra with all of these groups, the former became a representative of a semiotic field that linked all of these characteristics, ones that were outlawed in the Eunuch Act. In other words, the hijra became a single caste that represented all of these criminal attributes.

The characteristics that were included in the semiotic field were not just criminal: they were also gendered. Through the site of the hijra, the transgender population was represented as impotent and effeminate males. They were portrayed as men who wore women's clothing and engaged in feminine pursuits such as singing and dancing. These qualities can be seen as being linked to these classes through the censuses. Of course, these attributes became criminalized through the Eunuch Act, but it is significant to note that they are, arguably at their core, gendered.

The result of creating a primary signifier and subsuming all of the different attributes of the formerly unique social groups under it had an effect. It anchored how the transgender population qua eunuchs was envisioned in South Asia. By collapsing all eunuchs into a single category, one that invoked all of the negative qualities—both criminal and gendered—that the British associated with South Asian

eunuchs, the administrators of the censuses effectively created a category of trans-gender people that could be governed. Indeed, there was already legislation in place—the Eunuch Act—that was designed to punish eunuchs with the very qualities that were anchored in the signifier of the hijra. In other words, through discursively associating the larger body of eunuchs with the hijra, the British authors effectively linked the transgender population with criminal characteristics.

6.6 Colonial Foundations

How are these two pieces—the presence of women in a category defined as consisting only of men and the two themes of the representation of the hijra in the censuses—connected? By setting up the narrative in this way, this chapter seeks to link the masculinization of the transgender population to colonialism. Simply put: the reason that the transgender people of South Asia were represented as males was to advance the colonial project. Such logic is present in the two themes of the censuses discussed in the previous pages. This section ties all of these strands together to make the larger argument clear.

The administrators of the censuses struggled with how to understand and categorize the South Asian population. The way that they struggled with the variable of caste captures this confusion. This perplexity is also evident in the way that the hijra was constructed as a primary signifier to capture all of the complexities and diversity of the various so-called eunuch categories. Through grappling with this confusion, the organizers of the censuses created a way to understand eunuchs in South Asia: they were a single caste of men, consisting of the criminal qualities of castration, sexual deviation, and sodomy. All divergence from this understanding—including the representation of women in their ranks—was erased. Such a maneuver effectively made the Indigenous understanding of transgender invisible, instead privileging a colonial perspective.

The reason, then, that the architects of the censuses were so concerned with representing the hijra specifically, but the transgender population generally, as males was because it fit their framework of understanding. In the context of trying to grasp the culture of South Asia, the British imposed their ways of knowing—their "truth"—onto it. Given that this form of knowledge privileged a two-sex model, the administrators framed eunuchs as necessarily male. Any deviations from this representation were perplexing mistakes. Recall that that British blamed the recording of women in the ranks of eunuchs on the Natives. This move effectively blamed any deviation from the two-sex model on to the Indigenous people.

This struggle over meaning was not simply value-neutral. It did not merely represent a way to understand the culture in South Asia, but it was an active attempt to reframe it in terms that the British understood. In the context in which the census returns indicate a resistance to reducing the transgender population to the two-sex model, the census administrators responded with a corrective decree: all eunuchs must be counted as males. Any deviations to such a commandment were read as

indicative of stupidity or ignorance, thereby positioning the colonial way of understanding as authoritative. This colonial logic was reproduced in the popular accounts of the censuses; these narratives were a misrepresentation of the census data that continued to represent the hijra specifically, but the transgender people in South Asia generally, as castrated males.

This attempt to replace the Indigenous ways of understanding sexuality and the body—as is represented by the third gender—with a colonial one is one of the hallmarks of colonialism. This ideological sleight of hand takes place when the colonial conception—in this case, the belief in the two-sex model—is presented as the objective reality. The global understanding supplants the local one in such a way as to make the latter seem inaccurate and backward. The censuses were then vital in actively attempting to replace the Indigenous model with a colonial one. In some ways, this process mirrors the earlier discussion of the tension between the terminology of "transgender" versus local terms, such as hijra, fatada, khusra, pavaiya, and muhkhanna.

This insistence that the so-called transgender population were men also belied another colonial concern. It pointed to the perspective that the Indigenous people could not govern themselves. Such an understanding was predicated on the way that this group of eunuchs was represented: as failed men. The hijra were constructed as not just men, but as men who performed femininity, cross-dressed, and engaged in sodomy. Many scholars have written on the link between the colonial Other and effeminacy (Banerjee 2005; Chowdhury 1998; Matar 1999; Rahman 1990; Reddy 2003; Rosselli 1980). This relationship takes on a subtlety with the hijra. They were not simply represented as being effeminate. Rather, they were portrayed as men who failed to be masculine. This notion of failure is significant, because it does not just evoke femininity, but the inability to perform masculinity. In other words, it is not just that the hijra were characterized as effeminate, but that they could not perform the qualities that the British associated with masculinity. This construction of hijra as failed men maps onto the various transgender groups through the construct of the hijra as primary signifier. In this way, the transgender classes of South Asia were conceived of as being failed men.

Not only were transgender people being represented as effeminate, but they were also being constructed as impotent. This impotence is often linked to their castration, although, as noted in Supriya Pal and Neeta Sinha's Chap. 10, many hijra are not physically castrated; rather, the castration is spiritual. Nonetheless, even if one were to discount castration, there is still a link of groups like the hijra to impotence. As Vinay Lal (2003, 187) argues, masculinity and impotence are linked: "[t]o speak of impotency, moreover, is to conjure up the image of masculinity, however deformed, dysfunctional, or deficient: only men may be impotent." This relationship between castration and impotence is evident in the Eunuch Act. The author of this legal work, James Fitzjames Stephen, writes that: "The term 'eunuch' shall, for the purposes of this Act, be deemed to include all persons of the male sex who admit

themselves, or on medical inspection clearly appear, to be impotent".[1] In defining the eunuch in terms of impotence, Stephen expands the definition of eunuchs so that all of the relevant classes would be included.[2] In other words, the definition of eunuch in terms of impotency was intentionally designed to include groups that the British legislators wanted to criminalize. Impotence is central to the British representation of this criminal class of ostensible eunuchs. In this way, impotent men are not just men; they are failed men, associated with criminality.

The framing of the so-called eunuchs in terms of effeminacy and impotence was part of the colonial project. By representing the transgender population in terms of a failed masculinity, the British constructed the culture in which these groups were embedded as incapable of governing themselves. This maneuver demonstrates how masculinity is a powerful trope in colonial notions of governability. Several scholars have written on the link between masculinity and colonialism (Bacchetta 1999; Benton 1999; Nandy 1983; Sinha 1995). Perhaps the colonial understanding of the relationship between the two is best exemplified by James Mill (1826 [1817], ii. 133), who states: "In truth, the Hindu, like the Eunuch, excels in the qualities of a slave." That is, masculinity is associated with the capacity to govern.

Broadly speaking, the qualities that the British associated with masculinity—such as decisiveness, agency, and integrity—were ones that they associated with proper governance. From this perspective, those who were not masculine could not govern. As argued by Ashish Nandy (1983, 8), the British conception was such that effeminacy in men was "perceived as the final negation of a man's political identity, a pathology more dangerous than femininity itself." Indeed, Mrinalini Sinha (1995) maintains that the colonialists used the notion of masculinity to define the colonial Other as weak and effeminate. A particular type of colonial masculinity, one embodied by the British, was then thought to be necessary for proper governance. Any deviations from this masculinity were indicative of a failure to govern.

Not only were the South Asians represented as being unable to govern because they were constructed as effeminate—if not failed men—because of the portrayal of the hijra, but they were also characterized as criminal. Since the hijra were increasingly defined in terms of criminal qualities, the larger South Asian culture was colored with the same brush. That is, because the hijra emerged out of an Indigenous culture that allowed for such criminal activities, South Asian society was thought to be equally criminal. After all, as is clear from the previous discussion of caste, the hijra were represented as indicative of an Indigenous culture. Since criminality was thought to be incompatible with the ability to rule, the British used the figure of the hijra to justify a colonial belief that the so-called Natives could not rule themselves.

In this context, by associating the hijra with the failure of masculinity, both in terms of effeminacy and impotence, and framing them in South Asian culture—one that allowed for criminality—the colonialists effectively constructed South Asia as

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[1] British Library (hereafter B.L): IOR/L/PJ/5/14. Act XXVII of 1871, The Criminal Tribes and Eunuch Act: Section 24.

[2] B.L.: IOR/L/PJ/5/14. Statement of the Members of the Sect Committee of the Council of the Governor General for making Laws and Regulations 1871.

unable to govern itself. In the colonial view, any culture that would allow for such failed masculinity, especially one grounded in criminality, could not govern. The portrayal of the effeminacy and impotence practiced and supported by the South Asians, through the figure of the eunuch, was present in many different characteristics: sodomy; licentious sexual behavior; physical mutilations and castration; and other practices that were considered barbaric. However, through the censuses, these attributes were consolidated in the semiotic field of the hijra and made to be characteristic of the larger Indigenous culture.

Transgender emerges as a powerful metaphor in colonial notions of governability. The British represented the transgender population through the trope of the hijra as a criminal and effeminate caste. By portraying the hijra as a deviation from the two-sex model, one which anchored the transgender population with criminality and gendered them in terms of a failed masculinity, the British represented the hijra as a site in which South Asian culture could be understood as requiring colonial governance. In other words, the hijra represented a larger figure than simply a castrated male: they came to embody everything the colonial regime detested about the South Asian context and provided a body which allowed the governing gaze to criminalize such attributes.

Through this overview, it is clear that the logic of erasing transgender bodies from the censuses was necessarily part of the colonial project. The popular accounts of the censuses demonstrate the way that the transgender population was understood: as men. By imposing a two-sex model onto the colonial population—especially at the expense of the Indigenous understanding of the third gender—and representing the figure of the hijra as a criminal caste of failed men, one that is a by-product of South Asian culture, the census administrators assured that the colonial way of understanding was made hegemonic. Any deviations from this understanding were blamed on an ignorant Native population. The characteristics that made up those in this caste were consolidated through the censuses so that the hijra, as a primary signifier, included everything that the British disliked about the South Asian culture, especially criminality. Through these representations, the transgender people became illustrative of the need for colonial governance.

6.7   Conclusion

In this book, several themes emerge. Two related topics with which this chapter engages are as follows: how the hijra connect to marginality; and what is the criteria of group membership for the hijra. The first of these subjects is the most common. In Chap. 9, Azhar and Vaudrey explore how those who identify as the third gender, including the hijra, are increasingly at risk of HIV. These researchers found that among the reasons for such vulnerability to the virus are stigma and prejudice. Indeed, in Chap. 8, Sriraam refers to this community as one of the most marginalized in India. She links such marginality to the colonialism that has served as an underpinning for the decrease in the status of the hijra.

The second theme was one of identity: who really were the hijra? In Chap. 10, Pal and Sinha provide an overview of how the hijra have been understood, an account that emphasizes their marginality. In Chap. 2, Jayaprakash presents a series of narratives of the hijra through their own eyes. She captures how the hijra have become an "umbrella term" for non-binary people in India. In the previous chapter, Sutradhar adds to this exploration by investigating how the hijra were understood within the context of religion, a perspective also shared by Pal and Sinha.

One aspect of the hijra identity that this chapter explicitly engages with is that of the role of castration. Sutradhar and Jayaprakash, for example, represent castration as a necessary part of the hijra identity; for them, the contemporary hijra are castrated males. Pal and Sinha also explore castration, but they note that it is not always a physical removal of the testes, but can be understood as a spiritual one. Yet, even in this account, the hijra are portrayed as men. Such an understanding demonstrates how the colonial two-sex model has become hegemonic. This colonial understanding is one that represents the world as either males or females—a portrayal that sits in opposition to Nanda's description of the hijra as "neither man nor woman"—and erases the Indigenous understanding of the third gender.

These two themes of marginality and identity were explored in this chapter in such a way as to illuminate their history. That is, this chapter indirectly asked: why were the hijra marginalized and their identities forged? In exploring this history, this chapter focused on how these themes were consequences of colonial processes. In this way, the positionality and oppression of the hijra can be traced back to how the colonial administrators created the identity of the hijra, one that erased local understandings of them and privileged a version—one that continues to this day—that enabled a colonial hegemony.

The censuses, then, demonstrate how a consensus on who the hijra are was being constructed, one that understood them as a distinct social group, anchored in South Asian culture, with a range of specific attributes. Ignoring local understanding of sex and the body, the administrators insisted that the transgender population were men. All accounts of women were erased. This erasure was part of a larger process of constructing the hijra as a caste and primary signifier, emphasizing their effeminacy, impotence, and criminality. By positioning them as marginal citizens, a portrayal that continues to this day, the colonial authorities represented them as indicative of a culture unable to govern itself. In this way, the censuses directly constructed the transgender population as a justification for the continued colonial project of the British.

Put another way, the social group that is constituted by these censuses is one that enabled British governance in the region. The transgender population, through the figure of the hijra, was constructed by the censuses as devalued and criminal, not through British attitudes, but through local culture—or so the colonial writers would have us think. Exemplifying the necessity for political, if not moral, intervention, the unmanly hijra demanded the end to the social evils of South Asian traditions.

In this way, the erasure of transbodies in the nineteenth-century South Asia Imperial censuses is more than a methodological misstep. It serves as way to examine how the colonial project was justified and continued. It also reveals how the

larger trope of transgender—in its link to a "global" culture—was used in colonial processes. In the end, it is clear that the hijra justified the Imperial endeavor, by constructing South Asia as a land demanding of governance; that is, the figure of the hijra legitimated colonial rule in the region. The hijra served as a site in which those aspects that were considered deviant from the British conceptual framework were made governable. This was accomplished through the censuses. They served to construct the hijra as a figure and a body worthy of governance. Yet, in doing so, these governable attributes became criminal, thereby making the specific traits illegal; that is, through making the hijra—and by its semiotic field, all transgender people in South Asia—criminal, the associations that the hijra have are also criminalized, allowing for a particular form of governance to be justified.

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