

## ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION OF KHUSRA COMMUNITY OF PAKISTAN

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### ABSTRACT

*In the context of Pakistan, existing literature on male-female transgender persons has majorly focused on health-related issues such as Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS. Very few research studies have gone beyond and explored the socio-cultural aspects of khusra lives and their socio-economic organization. The objective of current research is to focus on the economic organization of khusra community using qualitative research as the research strategy. For the purpose of current research, data was collected from 4 locales; Mansehra City, City Kasur, Rawalpindi and Kot Radha Kishan. In-depth interviews were conducted with sampled respondents from sampled sub-locales of 4 main locales. The findings highlight that set against the backdrop of their lives categorized by structural violence, socio-economic discrimination, and ostracization, khusra community manages to integrate with the wider population through various forms of survival strategies, which for the current study are grouped under economic organization. These forms of survival strategies or livelihood options were the focus of the current research. The data elicited through individual and group interviews highlight dhinga/tola bazar, bidhaee and taarhi. dance functions, and prostitution as the forms of economic organization. These forms of economic organization do not guarantee social security and are transient in nature. Furthermore, the narratives also detail various forms of risks and vulnerabilities (socio-economic and health-related), respondents face while earning through prostitution and other forms of economic organization.*

**Keywords:** Economic Organization Ethnography, Khusra, and Pakistan

### INTRODUCTION

Pakistan, despite historically and culturally being a homosocial and homoaffectionalist society, is asymptotic towards discrimination and ostracization of ‘off the track’, ‘sinfully unconventional’ or ‘deviant’ (Caceres et. al., 2008) individuals of the society. Particularly in South Asia, for people of third gender identity (commonly known as *hijra* or *khusra*), societal intolerance and violence is attributed to strict moral, religious, and legal codes. According to Pakistan Penal Code, homosexual activities are punishable; moreover, strict social norms and religious statute further prohibit such sexual proclivities. With severe consequences to those men and women caught in non-marital sexual activities and prosecution against adultery and infidelity, the more accessible choice for unburdening compulsive sexual urges for men is to get into secretive sexual links with other boys or feminized men (Khan & Khan, 2010). Among these feminized men are the *khusras*; the biological males who are raised as boys but show pronounced inclinations towards inhabiting attires and behaviors of women. Domestically sidelined, socially ridiculed and sexualized, and economically marginalized, *khusras* leave their native areas and join communes called *Dera*<sup>i</sup> where their presences are assured by following organized rituals and customs.

This research has covered certain aspects of the lives of individuals in these communes. The broader areas of thematic focus covered were the framework of their culture, socioeconomic organisation, socialization into socio-sexual environment, and sexual and economic exchanges. The attempt of this research is not to controversialize, sexualize or vulgarize the individuals in these

communities, rather to confirm to the existing body of scholarship, which empirically exposits the health-related issues, seclusion, sexual abuse, and disempowerment of *khusras* and to humanize with their struggle for survival in the environment plagued with fear, threat, intimidation, and violence. Furthermore, this research has explored their options for survival and socio-sexual networks.

The significance of the current research is defined along two axis, methodological and theoretical. The methodological significance is due to in-depth data collected through narrative interviews. The first author lived with the community members, observed day-to-day activities and cross-checked the data by triangulation technique. The authors later analyzed data using thematic analysis as the approach and framework analysis as the technique, which entailed linear process of transcribing, indexing and coding, thematic charting, and theming and sub-theming. The theoretical significance of the study is outlined by the principle of inductivism in which contribution to theory is guaranteed by the collected and analyzed data. This study has not just described various forms of economic organization but also relational, spatial, communal, and cultural dynamics, therein.

### **Socio-Economic Organization of *Hijras* in South Asian Context**

Islamic history unearths three classifications of people of third gender roles: eunuchs, *mukhannat* and *hijras* (Al-Haqq, 2010). Eunuchs were people born with male sexual organs and raised as boys but castrated. Through castration, they did not become females, rather adopted a ‘no-gender’ role, which means having no social and legal gender roles. The second classification of *mukhannat* includes people who are born with male sex organs and raised as boys, but showcase feminine behaviors. The term shows transgender and transvestite behaviors and does not show any particular sexual orientation. In Islamic history, they have been labeled as men with effeminate conducts. However, in medieval times they were referred to as men who played passive roles in sexual intercourse. Third classification of *hijras* includes people who are born with male sex organs and raised as boys, but after reaching the age of puberty they self-identify as women and start dressing and behaving like the opposite sex. More appropriately, after joining the highly structured clans of *hijra* communities they undergo castration process (which involves removal of both testicles and penis) voluntarily. Since *hijras* are culturally defined as women trapped in the bodies of men and because of their strong desires to inhabit the physical, sexual, and social roles of women, they are referred closest to the transgender experiences (Kuggle, 2010). In their attempt to look more feminine they inhabit certain female characteristics, which include adopting female names and dressing, and growing long hair.

Kuggle (2010) argues that in Muslim patriarchal societies where gender binaries as men and women taking legally sanctioned and socially normative gender roles are highly valued, a third gender or transgender experience could be seen as a threat to the socio-cultural fabrics. Since Muslims whether conservative or neo-traditionalists, regressive or progressive, backward or modernists try to reside into Quranic and Sunnah references for solutions of their personal and social issues, Kuggle (2010), also tries to explore some progressive and embracing referential evidences from Quran and Sunnah to accommodate transgender roles. The most dominant among these roles in Islamic history are those of *mukhannath*, who rather than socially referred as sexualized bodies were defined in terms of their ‘speech, gesture, gait, and clothing’. Muslims were not socially secluding towards *mukhannath* as they recognize their (*mukhannath*) proclivities towards femininity as innate that must not be blamed. Islamic historians and commentators distinguish between *Khilqi* and *Takallufi* with former defined as a person who behaves effeminately due to inherent dispositions whereas the later due to self-driven interests and ulterior motives. In Islam, these are *Takallufi* who are blamed because their behaviors do not, express their personalized inclinations and innate dispositions. On contrary, *mukhannath* were given specific gender roles. They had access to private places of women where men were not allowed, and to public places where men dominated and women were not allowed. Some functioned as singers, entertainers, and comedians. Since society, in general, accepted the third gender role, hence *mukhannath* were not socially banished. But there have been instances, when as a result of working as mediators for heterosexual adulteries they have been banished by the Holy Prophet and much later by the rulers of Ummayyad Empire years after the Holy Prophet’s death. Particularly in Ummayyad Empire, *mukhannath* were castrated as punishment for their immoral acts. There are different reasons and interpretations for this punishment. But according to al-Isfahani’s version, the

ruler was angry at the musicians and singers because his most favorite slave girl ignored him once to listen to man's singing voice. Due to jealousy, he ordered castration of not only that particular man, but also of *mukhannath* involved in musical entertainment. Moreover, the stories circulated about involvement of *mukhannath* in facilitating romantic interactions between men and women, which was socially reprimanding, also ignited the agitation among rulers against *mukhannath*. The *mukhannath* response towards castration was sarcastically humorous and they agreed to it calling 'another circumcision'. After this punishment there are rare mentions of *mukhannath* in Medina and Macca, according to some scholars they were driven out.

In the South Asian context, *hijra* is defined as a third gender (Nanda, 1999; Abdullah et. al., 2012). Usually defined as an umbrella term for people performing third gender roles, *hijras* include intersex (hermaphrodites), transsexuals, transgenders, cross dressers, homosexuals and bisexuals (Abdullah et. al., 2012). The localized South Asian vernaculars are context specific, and the term *hijra* can be classified into *zenana* (cross dressing men who may or may not be castrated), *khusra* (feminized men who are *usually* castrated), *nirban* (feminized men who are *necessarily* castrated), and *uqwi* (feminized men who are *not* castrated) (Abdullah et. al., 2012).

Entry into the *hijra* communities is driven in the early childhoods by the gender ambiguousness that builds on with passing years. Additionally, the encounters with the *hijras* on various ceremonies urge feminized men to showcase their inner sense of self, gender, and identity by joining *hijra* communes (Nanda, 1999; Reddy, 2005; Abdullah, 2012). *Hijra* communes are divided into households. Each household is governed by the head called *Guru*. Under each *Guru*, 10 to 12 *chelas* (subordinates) work. In this hierarchical setup, strict moral and domestic codes of conduct are to be obligated by the *hijras* according to which they have to perform domestic chores, earn money, and financially contribute to the households, handover a significant chunk of the earnings to the *Guru* as a response of which *Guru* assures social security to *chelas* (Nanda, 1999; Reddy, 2006; Abdullah, 2012).

In the subcontinent, historically, societal positions of *hijras* were different. They used to be the active members of the state and court affairs and were appointed in the harems for serving the needs of wives of emperors and concubines, also in protecting them from forceful external interventions. Respected social roles of healers and social mediators were provided to them. In the previous decades, colonization, modernization, and urbanization have eroded their social roles and relegated them to informal institutional arrangements of entertainment (dance, music, and transsexual prostitution). Naqvi and Mujtaba (1997), while referring to the current status of *hijras* in Pakistan, elucidate two instances from political history of Pakistan. First, in 1960s when as a result of banning *hijra* activities they collected in front of Ayub Khan's house as a result of which the ban was annulled. Second, in 1990 election, a *hijra* candidate was selected to take part from Abbottabad for the first time in the political history of Pakistan. These instances of collective action and political participation are rare and in spite of the provision of Computerized National Identity Cards by Lahore High Court in 2010, and right to contest and take part in 2013 elections, nothing significant has been achieved yet to destigmatize the individuals in these communities. The reason for this being their non-conformist gender behaviors and their involvement in "notorious" activities of prostitution and drug use. Talking about prostitution there was a point of difference recorded between Sindhi *zenana* and Baluchi *Buggas* (a local vernacular for *hijra* in Balochistan) (Naqvi & Mujtaba, 1997). To some of the respondents, *hijras* are not prostitutes, whereas *zenanas* are men with families and children who fake women attires and do *dhanda* (prostitution) for money. To others, *hijras* are most admired by men because of their beauty and relational commitment. This rare study explains reasons for marriages between *hijras* and heterosexual men. The historical reasons for *hijras* to marry men were to get hold over their possessions particularly men possessing donkey carts (a high valued and prized commodity), in some of the references men would marry *hijras* because *hijras* would provide their potential husbands the amounts required to buy donkey carts (Naqvi & Mujtaba, 1997). Another reason explained was the high food in-take and hence greater sexual urge of men that could only be fulfilled by marrying a *hijra*. The study calls in the attention towards the importance of castration in the social uplift within *hijra* communities. For some, castration is an act of spiritual devotion. For those among *hijras* who castrate kill their *nafs*, which means sacrificing male sexual organs to get rid

of sexual desires. It brings respect to *hijras* because they stake their lives as the emasculation process is intense and recuperating period is slow and dangerous (Naqvi and Mujtaba, 1997; Nanda, 1999).

In India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, in addition to *bidhaee*<sup>1</sup> and *bazaar tola*<sup>2</sup>, *hijras* supplement their earnings through prostitution. Working as part-time or full-time prostitutes, *hijras* satisfy their sexual needs performing certain risky sexual acts just for extra cash (Khan et. al., 2009). Exchange of sex for money is constitutive of socio-economic organization of *hijra* communities. The commoditization and objectification of bodies for loveless short-term sexual encounters constitutes an important source of meeting functional needs of *hijras* in South Asia. But for some (particularly more feminine), long-term relationships with men who they call their husband lovers is an ideal situation for emotional, sexual, and financial satisfaction (Khan et al. 2009). Such commonalities are drawn by Nanda (1999) through her case studies on *hijras* of India. Among the most highly valued of their relationships is the marriage with the men who they call their 'husbands'. In Indian culture, marriage elates the societal status of women. And since *hijras* self-concept perceive themselves as women, hence finding a man, getting emotionally and physically involved with him, and ministering to his needs and wants reaffirms femininity in them. Nanda's respondents share reciprocal relationships with their husbands, apart from financial support their husbands supported them emotionally and psychologically as well. *Hijras*, too, share their incomes earned through *bidhaee*, and prostitution. The expressions of love for husbands, observed by Nanda, are fairly dramatic and hugely influenced by the Hindi films in which romantic love and feelings of jealousy coalesce on the verge of melodrama. Among these expressions are also included gift exchanges.

## LOCALES AND METHODOLOGY

Four geographical locales of Rawalpindi, City Kasur, Mansehra and *Kot Radha Kishan* were selected for research. Four Rawalpindi locales are urban centers, which have undergone the most rapid urbanization, industrialization, commercialization, and economic development, although, this development has occurred spatially and has not trickled down indiscriminately. With booming foreign and local monetary influx into the construction and commercial sectors of the city, increasing consumptive nature of the society, and rising proclivities towards the postmodern commodities, the urban center is becoming more monetized. Moreover, social and income inequalities have increased, which can be observed with high inflation inflicting the already-poor societal segments, mounting poverty, and informal settlements around the outskirts of most of the commercial areas of Rawalpindi. Income inequality, in particular, has increased in relation to socio-economic characteristics (age, gender, race, and ethnicity). The impact of this development at the cost of equality innately provides strong locale settings for the study on *hijras*. Rawalpindi is the most thickly populated with *hijras* where they reside in the dungeon dark one-two room settlements of incomplete or under-constructed buildings.

Both Kasur and *Kot Radha Kishan* have been selected purposively because of the locales' strong cultural and historical references of transgender communities. In comparison to Rawalpindi, Kasur and *Kot Radha Kishan* are less densely populated, particularly the latter being a town has a more homogenous and less mobile population. The social interactions are intimate, and social control is regulated by the social institutions comprising of union councils (political institution), police (institution of formal social control), and *panchayat* (in part cultural, in part institution of social control). Mansehra city is part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region of Pakistan. The focus of this research was on Mansehra city, which is the administrative capital of Mansehra district.

Babu Building (Mansehra) and Handaal Chowk (*Kot Radha Kishan*) provided rich locale settings for research on *hijra* communes because these locales are homes to the poorest of the community members. Babu Building is a dilapidated three-storey building with roughly cemented walls and coarse staircase. Each storey comprises four to five small rooms. The room, which I rented during my research was on the second storey, the door to which was coloured green and made of tin. My room was in between the other two rooms rented by two *khusras*. The monthly rent was 3000 Pakistani Rupees. The rents varied in each locale. Usually the *deras* located at or near commercial

<sup>1</sup> Collection of money at marriages and child births through dance performances.

<sup>2</sup> Collection of money doing beggary on the roads and market places.

sectors or residential areas (near Mansehra Main *Chowk* in Mansehra, Darzi Mohallah in Kot Radha Kishan, Raja Sultan Market and Dhoke Kala Khan in Rawalpindi and Haji Fareed Road in city Kasur) were higher than those located at non-commercial and non-residential areas. *Deras* of Pirwadhai in Rawalpindi, though located in residential areas were not costly because of poor people residing in the rented rooms of poor physical infrastructure. Handaal Chowk is situated near railway station and Babu Building near a number of car mechanic shops and truck drivers' stopover points providing a variety of clients to *khusras* for sex-for-money exchanges. The respondents from Pirwadhai, also, responded of most of their clients coming from Pirwadhai Adda (bus-stand) in Rawalpindi. The *deras* at Handaal Chowk were one or two room settlements, the one where I lived was a single room *dera*, which I shared with one of the respondents during initial and final research.

The *dera* at Haji Fareed Road (City Kasur) where I stayed was a double storey settlement, the walls of which were painted pink. Unlike other *deras* from other locales, this one had an attached bathroom. I shared a room with one of the respondents in the upper storey and covered other *deras* in the near vicinity during initial and final research. The *deras* of Kot Murad Khan (City Kasur) were located in a narrow street near a very old tree to which community feels emotionally connected with.

The nature of the study was such that data related to themes such as early lives of respondents, societal perceptions towards them, economic organization and their sexual settings or networks cannot be reliably elicited without being part of the community. Moreover, for understanding discourses of community's language, rituals, ceremonial activities, customs and social structures, it was equally important to live with the community. Initial research was conducted in all the locales. The main objectives of this research were to initially conduct observational studies and build rapport, and then to frame topic/interview guide, and set the social contexts.

A type of non-probability sampling is the snowball, which is highly effective in accessing and listing the 'hard to reach populations', 'classes of deviance' and for sensitive research domains (Berg, 2001). Hence, combinations of peer and snowball were most effective in targeting the hard to reach communities of *khusra*. This research used a phased approach (Gaskell, 2000) in which during first phase (initial research) interviews and focus groups were conducted. After having gathered and analyzed data from the first phase, the second phase focussed on those respondents, covered those research areas and categories, which were more interesting and relevant to the research. Hence initial research was crucial for final field visits and final analysis.

A total number of thirty-three in-depth interviews were conducted in the final research with maximum respondents interviewed from Rawalpindi and minimum from Kasur. The decision on the number of respondents interviewed from each locale was dependent on the number of sub-locales included from each of the main locales and on how much a respondent is contributing towards the research. Total number of *nirban* (castrated *khusras*) and *uqwi* (uncastrated *khusras*) respondents were 4 and 29 respectively. Total number of *nirban* respondents who enlarged breasts through silicone surgery were 2, whereas total number of *nirban* respondents injecting estrogen (female hormones) through medicine and/or injections were 2. Total number of *uqwi* respondents injecting estrogen (female hormones) through medicine and/or injections was 8.

Individual interviews such as Interview guides and narrative interviews and group interviews such as focus group discussions were conducted with the respondents. Preliminary observational studies, and rapport building with the respondents were instrumental in including diverse research areas to the interview guide and excluding the few existing ones either for conceptual reasons or because the respondents had little to respond about them. I had to revisit and modify topic guide thrice during the progression of this research because the research areas, which were important for the respondents of one locale were less important for another locale. Topic guide was used flexibly with other forms of data to explore social phenomena/reality. For this reason, naturally occurring data through participant observation was noted down in a diary.

For this research, the first author introduced himself to the study subjects as a researcher interested in the lives of male-female transgender persons. Key informants proved to be the most conducive intermediary between me and the study subjects. With the help of key informants and rapport building, the observational studies, which in the initial research design were tentatively planned as noncontrolled and nonparticipatory turned into noncontrolled and participatory. I was

perceived as *kothi* or *moorat* (a feminine man) by *khusra* communes, which further helped me in gaining access to the field sites and to observe their lives in detail. Often I heard, during focus groups, one *zenana* saying to another, “*Kachiyan kalama na khut, ay asa di cheesi shoormi hy.*” (“Don’t tell a lie, she is our beautiful sister.”) and “*Shoormiyan naal kachi ni ay.*” (“Sisters don’t hate each other.”). *Shoormi* in their Farsi language means sister. They consider me their sister and telling a lie to and hiding things from sisters is disallowed in the community.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze data (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). For thematic analysis, thematic framework was constructed. In order to construct thematic framework, all the field notes, and transcribed data from recordings was segmented, initially indexed and then coded, categorized and sub-categorized, themed and sub-themed, and structured under suitable categories.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Dhinga* *tola bazaar*

One of the very old ways to earn for *hijra* community is through *dhinga* or *tola bazaar* (*tola* means a group of people and *bazaar* means market). A group of *zenanas* in *sangat* (group) visit pre-allocated areas asking for alms from passersby at traffic signals or from shopkeepers. The areas include busy markets, commercial zones, thickly populated residential areas and traffic signals. The locales of Rawalpindi (included in this research) are divided amongst *khusras* (from similar or other locales) for *dhinga*. The respondents from Banni Chowk covered Dhoke Chaudriyan and *Bakra Mandi* (locales of this research), *Gulistan Colony*, and *Morgah* for a month. In the same month the respondents from Pirwadhahi covered Banni Chowk and Dhoke Kala Khan (locales of this research), Khanna Pul and Kali Tainki. It would be pre-decided between the *khusras* of Banni and Pirwadhahi to cover areas not similar to each other for a specified period of time (a month usually). The reason of not sharing similar locales is to provide a more equal opportunity to earn from most to least rewarding locales.

It was observed through fieldwork that the earnings from more commercial areas such as Commercial Market, Banni and *Bakra Mandi* were greater than less commercial (*Dhoke Kala Khan* and *Raja Sultan Market*) areas. In Kasur, *khusray* from Khusharh Galli did not allow the *zenanay* from *Haji Fareed Road* to *dhinga* in their locale without permission. Often during fieldwork, the first author witnessed the respondents from *Khusharh Galli* locking one or two *zenana*(y) from *Haji Fareed Road* as captive(s) for roaming for *dhinga* without their permission. Then the *guru* of the captives will seek for mercy from their ancestral rich *khusras*, they will request to free their *chelas*. Only after new set of rules and negotiations the captives would be released. In Mansehra the earnings from more commercial and thickly populated areas (*Cheriyaaan Bazar* and *Dandi Mohallah*) were higher than the less commercial and sparsely populated areas (*Babu Building*). Additionally, there were small outcity areas, informal settlements and villages which the respondents preferred visiting over mainstream locales due to the fear of being recognized by and exposed to family. The amounts earned out of *dhinga* were very low rarely exceeding one or two or five rupee coins (*theepay*) which after having earned were collected in a money box. The box is broken towards the end of the month or after two months. The coins are exchanged by rupee notes from shopkeepers to divide equally amongst the *khusras* usually residing in a *dera*. To Parvati<sup>ii</sup> *dhinga* can be rewarding if a *khusra* is skillful in convincing people of her problems. Usually females are more kind than males; they can be easily tricked for more money.

Parvati: “Females can be tricked easily; they are more kind than men. Men are usually unkind. They bully us, abuse us with dirty language, engage in physical fights with us if we retaliate to their foul language. I will not hide from you, some men do not open their wallets until we show them our body parts, few offer us money in exchange for intercourse.”

Similarly, other respondents stated:

Masoom: “. . . Yesterday I returned home empty handed. Nobody wants to see us begging and roaming at their door steps. Often we ask for work other than *dhinga*, *toli*, *paisha*. Few agree but offer less money, seven thousand, eight thousand. [We] cannot survive with too little. Current situations are really gross.”

Saeeda: “. . . We go and earn fifty from somewhere, hundred or two hundred from another place. Like other people, our daily expenditures are somewhere between eight hundred and one thousand, difficult to earn this much. . Temporary earning (*hawae rozi*).”

Pooja: “There are days when I have to go home empty handed and whatever in pocket is spent also.”

These are the respondents whom main source of income was *dhinga*. Parvati brings in the practical resistances to earn through *dhinga*. She speaks of men obstructing and denigrating her when she is out for *dhinga*, women, to her, can be tricked whereas men agree to pay only after sexual favors. Masoom despite wanting to change her mode of earning from *dhinga* to less condescending ways, but the amounts offered to her are too less to fund her expansive family responsibilities and *dera* lives. The remaining quotes are more explanatory of the impermanent nature of their living with no real stability to their earnings.

### ***Bidhaee and taarhi***

*Bidhaee* is often said on occasions of happiness as a congratulatory expression. For *khusras* across South Asia *bidhaee* is the occupational option in which *khusras* in groups visit a house on the birth of a newly born baby or a newly married couple. Nanda (1999) in her study on Indian *hijras* finds *bidhaee* as the most traditional occupation depicting a *sangat* (collection) of *hijras* of a specific area who mark with a chalk at the doors of newly born or newly weds. This sign is an indication for other *khusras* from another area to not to perform to those houses as those had already been covered or would be covered. Hindu society regards *khusras* for their spiritual prowess. Hindu society fears of raging a *hijra* as it can lead to *hijra* cursing the family that people believe is synonymous to bringing God's curse. Similarly, the *hijras*' blessings will bring prosperity. They are specially invited to shower blessings on the birth of newly born babies and wedding couples to bring happiness and bonanza to their future lives.

As an occupational option *bidhaee* is also famous within the community as *taarhi*. *Taarhi* is a Punjabi word, which means hand/palm clapping. Palm clapping is perhaps the most meaningful of the community's bodily expressions. Number of times the palms are struck against each other and the sound with which the palms are struck convey varied emotions in different contexts. *Taarhi* in *bidhaee* is tantamount to happiness in which *khusras* will be invited to shower their blessings at/after marriage celebrations and pre- and post- baby born ceremonies. Pooja, while eloquently marking the difference between *taarhi* and *dhinga*, revealed that in *dhinga* they are uninvited whereas in *bidhaee* they earn huge even in thousands because they are invited as guests. They are invited to dance, perform skits, make people happy and as a response paid well.

Qaseeda: “Yes, we visit that family and collect our *bidhaee* from them, “*Bismillah* sister, a baby boy is born to your house, Allah has bestowed you with a boy so give us our *bidhaee*” (“*Bismillah baji apke ghar beta hua hai, Allah ne apko beta dia hai tou humay bidhaee tou do*”). This is what we do and there are a few amongst us who don't have to bother much because they have children, we have to worry, we are the ones who have to go to houses, “*Bismillah sister Allah will keep you happy*” (“*Bismillah baji Allah khush rakhay*”). We have to say it at multiple doors.”

Qaseeda presents a less promising picture of *bidhaee*. Unlike Pooja, her views seem to be more rooted in reality. Pooja brings in the dimension of ‘invited guests’ while expounding the differences between *bidhaee* and *dhinga*. Qaseeda, on the other hand, blurs the differences by saying in a rhythmic tone of a beggar asking for money from a baby's mother. It can be substantiated from fieldwork that with the passage of time the tradition of *bidhaee* has diminished as compared to *dhinga*.

In the more grounded locales of Kot Radha Kishan and Mansehra it was observed that, despite knowing, nobody from the community went for *bidhaee* due to minimal possibility of being well paid or even paid because people consider them uninvited. Qaseeda being a *nirban* and being disowned by her family after castration has to rely on any possible way to earn. It is widely observed in this research that uncastrated men (*zenanay*) are in better economic positions than castrated men

(*khusray*) for the fact that *zenanay* can switch gender roles smoothly, haven't lost ties with their blood relations, are less feminine in their attires and appearances, and relatively more acceptable to the society.

*Jorha* is an Urdu word meaning clothes. In the context of Pakistani Pashtun weddings, *jorha* is a ceremony of displaying to the guests gifted stitched and unstitched clothes and other accessories from both the bride's and bridegroom's families. Items gifted are called *warhi*. A girl's *warhi* will include gifts from bridegroom's family and a boy's *warhi* will include gifts from bride's family. To these functions are invited one or at most three community members to perform on live musical instruments—*dholak* (double-sided drum), *chimta* (musical tongs), *baja* (trumpet), and harmonium. They take musicians along to play music. One respondent explained that *jorha* was different from *vidhaee*, which is an important part of wedding celebrations of KP whereas *bidhaee* is famous in Punjab. It is up to the discretion of invitees to pay (or not to pay) generously.

### **Dance Functions**

Handaal Chowk in Kot Radha Kishan and Babu Building in Mansehra are homes to the poorest of *khusra deras*. With the current security threats, increase in urbanization and education, and growing western values, the traditional community occupations of *jorhaa* and *bidhaee* are diminishing. Dance performances may not always be rewarding as people disapprove of inviting *khusras* to their weddings for dance. As a result of decline in the market demand for their dance performances in weddings, they have expanded the range of the occasions and upgraded their dance skills for diverse audiences. They perform at *melas*, private functions and late night marriage gatherings, which are strictly for male audience.

*Mela(s)* (a *sanskrit* word meaning a cultural or religious festival or a fair) is (are) seasonal. Most of the *mela* festivals are celebrated in the vicinity areas of Kot Radha Kishan; the one attended was in *Pattoki*, which is one of the smaller cities of Kasur district at a distance of roughly 50 kilometers from Kot Radha Kishan. In Punjab, the festive season for *mela* is in winters from October till February each year. *Mela* is usually a cultural celebration integrating food stalls, music, dance performances, and entertainment of different sorts including palmistry, magic and puppet shows to death well stunts. *Khusras* fully clad and prepared to entertain the spectators, perform inside *mot ka kuan* (death well). The show starts with their performances. They, in a group of five or six, enter into the well, and dance on four songs. *Tamashbeen* (spectators) surround them from over the well and throw money over them as a gesture of appreciation, few vagabonds or rowdies lash coins to mock and hurt them. After finishing performances, they wait for the bell ringing, which signals time to leave the well. They climb the ladder up to come out, stand on a wooden bench waiting for the next round of performances. In the meantime, they touch up make up, rehearse for steps and drink lots of water. Cyclist finishes his performance and they climb down the ladder to dance again. There are usually three rounds of performances. The amounts they earn are the money thrown by the spectators, which to my amazement was in thousands in most of the cases. After performances, they enjoy with their *chamkaas* (regular male friends), those interested in prostitution search for suitable clients which is another source of earning and of those who bring their *giryas* (lovers) along make them spend a lot of money. Traditionally *hijra* groups take *miraasi* (musicians) to the functions. In Kasur, few respondents emphasized on the importance of live music and talked at length about the skills of synchronizing dance movements with the live musical beats, though most seemed less interested on performing to live music. The reason is that the greater the number of people taken along the more the division of earned money.

Looking beautiful at a *mela* is also essential as it provides them with multiple socializing opportunities. Many a times during fieldwork, it was heard *khusras* wishing to find a *sareela* (the best looking man) at a *mela* and since it can be lucrative for those interested in prostitution, so they want to look at their best. Those who have enlarged their chests look more feminine than those who haven't. There is quite a possibility of the earnings of less feminine looking being slashed by the more feminine ones. So in order to look more feminine they fill their chest area with doubled balloons filled with water. The pronounced chest area looks like a female chest with large breasts. Emulating femininity is priced high as most feminine looking receive more male attention and hence extract more money. One respondent who is famous for skillful dance, complained of men who prefer beauty



over talent. To her, men should pay for delicate dance and femininity not for *chitti chamrhi* (white skin). Dance training is not necessarily elementary as most are fond of dancing since childhood and by the time they join *dera* they are prepared to perform at functions. All they need to learn though are *mudra* (movements of combination(s) of index, middle, ring, and little fingers with thumbs in classical dance), facial expressions and feet movements. Few in Rawalpindi and Mansehra learnt initials of *Pashto* and *Sindhi* dance from their *gurus* as learning these ethnic dance forms require a different skill set of rhythmic sense and signature dance moves. The songs are mostly famous Pakistani Punjabi and Bollywood songs, old Punjabi songs sung by Noor Jehan (famous Pakistani singer) are the hot favorites. The dance performances observed during fieldwork were suggestive and seductive, the need of which was highlighted by one of the respondents as:

Nisho: "It is liberating, I feel special and precious. All spectators (*tamashbeen*) admire me and my dance, I race their pulses, I make them go mad, I can do whatever I want to without allowing any man to do with me anything against my will. Is not it liberating! Then I enjoy dancing, going to *melas*, meeting [*milli julli daya*] friends, just enjoy it a lot."

The spectators are married and unmarried, young and old, drunk and unfrank men. Alcohol intake is common. Women are not part of such gatherings. Men want to do things they cannot do in the presence of their female members. They want to be entertained and shower hundreds and thousands of rupees on their favorite dancers. According to one respondent, men want to have *shugal* (fun) and if dealt tactfully they can throw their golden chains and even wallets on us. It was observed once in a private party in Mansehra, where a man emptied his entire wallet on a *khusra*. The trick is to keep a sharp eye contact with a man who seems to be the most interested, dance closer to him, pass him tempting smiles, and make special dance moves (bending body down and moving hips round, placing middle finger of a right hand on a cleavage and slipping down to lower torso, biting lower lip with teeth, and jerking head right and left to sway long hair).

Winters are not considered very productive for the *khusras*, they try to be part of most of the functions they can before winters become unendurably chilly. Functions tend to decrease so are the earning options in colder regions of Pakistan. Likewise, in Mansehra where temperature drops considerably during winters, *khusras* migrate to tropical areas looking for earning options. Just like weathers, their earnings are seasonal because festivals and functions are seasonal.

### Prostitution

Nanda (1999) and Reddy (2005) observe prostitution as the most viable way for the *hijras* to earn a living. Poverty seems to be the only reason for male-female transgender persons to prostitute. This research observes that *khusras* are socialized into such settings that despite having other occupational choices they could not help resorting to prostitution. There are reasons to this. Firstly, sexuality works as a catalyst for many involved in flesh trade. Secondly, the quest to earn easy money. Thirdly, internalizing the fact that their bodies are sexual objects to be commoditized. Fourthly, helplessness: few helpless due to sexual urges and most due to economic hardships. And lastly, intimacy and quest for love.

Pooja: "Reason is that they don't like going outside a lot. They prefer to stay at *dera*, whoever comes, in what number comes they adjust all. They find no reason to roam around for money when they can earn staying at *dera*. . . . They don't leave whoever comes, they don't let anyone go without money, from beautiful to ugly, from white to dark . . . . Money is crucial, it has to be there. They say yes to money. They put forward their price demand, if agreed then fine if don't then, "Go away" (*"karay kara"*)."

Sassi: "They are not that helpless. They are but their problems can be no different from ours. They fear from hard work. What helplessness! It is tough for them to leave their cozy beds and earn through hard work when there is freezing cold outside. They prefer staying at *deras*, calling in five customers (*chaamkay*), and receiving one thousand in an hour, when this is an option then why to work too hard. They are scared of putting in effort (*"dardiyaan ae khawariaan toon"*)."

Nargis: “Few *khusras* prefer it over other sources of income, it is fast, relatively easier, and quick money.”

Despite the fact that all the respondents in this research had engaged in sex-for-money exchanges, prostitution is stigmatized and disdained even within the community. Initial and final research at Kot Radha Kishan was conducted in winters and Sassi’s opinions about her most beloved *chela* had hardly changed over almost a year time period. Kot Radha Kishan is moderately cold in winters; hence many *khusras* from KP, Sindh, and other cities of Punjab flock to make a living out of dance at functions and festivals of Kot Radha Kishan. Sassi’s comments about her *chela* of not leaving a ‘cozy bed’ and ‘freezing cold outside’ signify that her *chela* despite having an option of earning through hard work opts to earn through shortcuts. Her claim of five men entertained in an hour seems a little too stretched, however, it was observed in detail through fieldwork that three-four clients can be entertained in an hour. The amount of one thousand for five clients (two hundred from each) is more or less similar when compared to the amounts earned by sexually active *khusra* prostitutes of other locales. Earnings through traditional occupation of dance can be much more but with minimum surety of being paid and maximum likelihood of being abused, most prefer to earn quick by prostitution. Pooja’s take is more or less same with the addition of uninhibited explanation of clientele type-ugly, beautiful, white, and dark-depicting that those involved in prostitution as the only way to earn will yield to any clientele if paid to their likings.

Another respondent articulated as:

Nomi: “First sexual satisfaction, second money. Money is a bonus. They talk bad, high on explicit sexual things, sharing experiences, ways to tap sexual satisfaction, taking drugs, losing control, and engaging in mutual intercourse. All of it raises their lust. For these reasons I prefer to stay alone. I don’t mix up with most of them or become part of their gatherings. I am telling you the truth. I fear that I may succumb to their talks. It usually happens, their stories can entice others to do the same which they do. Keeping various *giryas*, keep on standing near road sides, and finding multiple men younger, older, lean, fat, smaller, bigger. . . .”

Nomi’s comments are the depiction of socio-sexual settings in which *khusras* typically function. *Dera*, peculiarly during evenings when it turns into a meeting point, provides a base for *khusras* to indulge in sexual talks. Often first author heard them discussing bodily characteristics of their *chaamkay* (regular clients), pleasure from different sex positions, foreplay techniques which in turn raises the curiosity and excitement of exploring the unexplored. Multiple sexual partners are in part the result of this curiosity and in part of building sexual frustration.

Noori explains her inclination to earn through prostitution as:

“The first time, yes I remember... Some men took advantage of my young age first time. They took me to some shabby hotel, torn my clothes, and then you know what they would have done. I was bleeding and they threw me on a road. I was half naked. It is very common in our line. At school, too, boys used to stop my way and take kisses of me forcibly. I got so upset that I decided not to go to school ever again. After I reached puberty I knew prostitution [*pann*] to be the only option for me.”

Reema also give opinion as:

“A pedophile (*londay baaz*) keeps an eye on a *khusra*. He will take him to some place, will give him some pills, do whatever good or bad with him, the result will be that a feminine man will be driven towards prostitution. His body will become receptive to titillation and bodily touch (*harkat*). Most will become part of *deras*, he will become she, she will be part of adult gatherings, injecting drugs, drinking alcohol. . . . Her body will become prone to touch. She was innocent just like other kids in her childhood staying with sisters and mothers, hesitating to interact with men. *Londay baaz* will lure him through attention, food, and money. They may abuse him sexually then he will join us after observing us and our lives.”

Noori, a victim of sexual abuse, for a significant period of her life, considered coerced sexual intercourse as the only form of sexual contact a person can have with another person. Repeated sexual abuse, at a young age, shaped her sexuality to the point that after reaching puberty, she started

working as a professional prostitute. She calls her body a commodity, which yields huge favors to her. She claims of covering each road of Rawalpindi as a cruising site. Another *khusra* prostitute from Kasur shared that she was repeatedly abused by her father after her mother's death. At the age of 12, she found the incestuous relationship with her father too complex to grapple with. As a consequence, she ran from her hometown and joined *dera* commune. Early onset of sexual contacts in the life of a feminized man urges him to be in multiple sexual links with men, which will eventually lead him to earn through prostitution. Reema's explanation of a *zenana*'s body becoming immunized to touch after being sexually abused coupled with alcohol and drug intake will make her more dependent on earnings through prostitution.

The following excerpts explain about the reasons for prostitution:

Masoom: "There are many, what I mean-- Helpless *zenanay* driven out of their homes abandoned and left out from families. They open *deras* and sit inside to earn through *pann*."

Shamshad: "Others are helpless because functions are occasional especially during off seasons. Sometimes wait is too long, after one or two months comes a single function, which may or may not be rewarding. There is always prostitution (*pan*) when there is no function..."

Reema: "Reason nothing except helplessness. Few are helpless because of their bodily needs, few for money, most are forced into it, beaten up and raped."

Masoom in her remarks states helplessness as the main reason for *khusra* to prostitute. Helplessness is observed to be due to bodily needs or poverty. Existing literature identifies social isolation as an indicator of prostitution in transgender communities. This research confirms to the existing scholarship on prostitution as many respondents joined *dera* and hence prostitution after being socially secluded. Shamshad relates helplessness to unavailability of functions compelling *zenana* to prostitute and Reema relates to both financial and physical needs.

Qaseeda: "Some do it by choice for pleasure, for attention, and for intimacy. Others are immune to it, cannot think of living without it. They go like, "I am a human being, my heart goes in favor of doing it. I can fall in love too." I have been in love with a man, this ongoing year is the ninth one. Sometimes, we fight to the extent that we don't talk. Recently, we had a fight and I am not with him these days, not with anyone nowadays, not a permanent one what I mean to say. Very few of us have life time partners. Most of us claim to have but that is not true. Ask them if they have those partners then why are they prostituting for few money? [pause] Having a special loving, caring, man is extremely rare and if found it's perhaps the most precious thing in our lives. Commitment is rare in these relationships."

Another respondent said:

Nomi: "So it is better maintaining a distance. I have always managed to maintain it. In Lahore, too, I was settled in a *dera* quite faraway from other *deras*. I never had to earn through *pann*, I was fortunate enough to earn through other means. Friendships, I like. They are personal, intimate, and reliable, much more than a few minutes' sexual contacts. Selling body for money, I don't like it. Just for money! That is lame. With money lust mounts."

A fairly recent literature and research is emerging to ask this question: What's love got to do with prostitution? As contradictory as it may sound but studies on South American transgender persons have shown the search of love as the reason for many to enter into prostitution. Studies on Indian *hijras* have also shown that social discrimination and marginalization leave *hijras* with minimum chances of social interactions with population outside their communities. In this scenario, forms of economic organisation are the only opportunities left for individual or group interactions with people (men) outside the community. Prostitution being a lucrative occupational choice becomes a hope of finding 'true love of a real man'. Nomi, while alluding to the difference between personalized and de-personalized relationships, thinks she is fortunate for being in a relationship, which to her is intimate than distant and mechanical sex-for-money exchanges. It will be discussed in following sections that money is as instrumental in *more* personalized relationships as it is in *less*

personalized relationships. Qaseeda's depiction starts by hinting towards few *khusras* who seek for emotional relationships through prostitution, she, then, talks about 'not a permanent one' indicating that she is in temporary relationships for survival and finally juxtaposed the contradictions of those who prostitute inspite being in permanent relationships. The relationships both Nomi and Qaseeda are taking about, though transactional, are 'precious' and 'reliable'. Whereas, in prostitution the interaction is short lived and perfunctory. The following excerpt from a focus group explains the relational dynamics of those who prostitute:

Queen in conversation with the moderator articulated that:

Queen: "Usually they [clients] are quite. It is like when you go to a market you buy something and pay for it. Like a shopkeeper asking for money first then buyer giving price after having satisfied with a product, "Take this money, come on take off your clothes, do it, and go."

Moderator: How much do you earn through *panpaisha* (prostitution)?

Queen: "It has been a year being part of it. Now I don't have anything to do. I earn just to scrape through, just to bear my daily expenditures. After getting laid whatever clients agree with 100, 200, we carefully spend it. [We] spend hundred and keep the rest for rainy days. You can even check my pockets now I don't have anything."

Seemi: "Money. Yes money, due to money. Our hearts want it to happen just with our special ones, with others it's just for money."

Queen's description of sexual exchange is like an economic exchange, where one party is a seller other a buyer, a seller after being paid gives the commodity (body) to a buyer. Seemi in the next lines marks the difference of money between the sex-for-money exchanges and transactional nature of relationships. To her, people like her, give in sexually to men (who they don't know) to fill financial needs, whereas with 'special ones' they are consensual and money may not be the only drive.

Meenu shared that:

"A person directed me towards prostitution. He observed femininity in me. I used to go to learn embroidery from his center. He showed greater interest in me than other of his students. This is what usually happens. Men approach us with affection and love and since we are so fond of male attention we easily get attracted towards whom after using us leave and we become prone to physical relationships with men. They spend on us, pay us money in exchange of sexual favors. Such relationships fill our emotional appetite, meet our physical needs, fulfill our materialistic wants, and we become habitual."

Meenu's response to the reason on why she prostitutes is perhaps the most comprehensive. Her reply includes almost all the reasons aforementioned. The deceptive self-driven male interests towards *zenanas/khusras*, their (*zenanas*) budding likeness towards men, the sexual debuts at early age followed by physical vulnerabilities of getting into multiple sexual contacts, emotional, financial and bodily fulfillment these factors in isolation or in combination are decisive in shaping not just a *zenana's* sexuality but also her dependence on earning a living through prostitution.

There are varied forms of male-female transgender prostitution with respect to cruising areas, soliciting cites, *dera* communities and other informal settings. In city Kasur, Steel Bagh Morh and small taverns in Chandini Chowk are the more visited sites for *khusra* prostitutes. To most, *dera* communes are the business centers; hence turn out to be the formal socio-sexual place for most clients to seek sexual services. *Dera* brothels were identified in Gandhi Bazaar of Kot Radha Kishan and Babu building of Mansehra. These are just like other *dera* communes, the rooms of which are rented to other *khusra* for prostitution. Two *khusra* friends, despite living with their families, visit their *guru's dera* at Gandhi Bazaar. The two bring clients or clients visit them. The three get ready in the evening waiting for the clients to choose one of the three. Whoever chosen will equally share amongst the three the money earned. The clients are men of age group ranging fifteen to fifty. Most are travellers from the nearby villages and towns, rich or poor urbanites, taxi or truck drivers, landlords, policemen, rowdies, criminals, peons, security guards and students. Respondents in all four locales talk about their preferences, few took pride in saying 'no' to rowdies who were willing to give thousand rupees

for one time, others preferring to bring into *dera* or going along with the good looking men only, others preferring money over looks and health-related risks.

*Khusras* visit cruising cites to find potential clients from where they get picked by cars. They apply heavy make up, wear revealing clothes, cover them with black shawls, and stand near road sides at nights or at the corner of a busy market place or at bus stops, give signals to seemingly interested clients through winking and suggestive hand movements. Men stop their cars, agreeable prices are decided after that they either go with the men, or find some deserted place or to some cheap rented rooms of taverns or hotels. The cruising timings usually start from evening till late night, for those functioning through *deras* the business hours are from noon till evening. Customers prefer fully dolled up and fearless *zenanay* who are uninhibited while performing dance or providing sexual services. They can also find potential clients while being at festivals and marriages. Respondents in Mansehra told that after having exchanged mobile numbers they get invitations to which they agree only when the *tamashbeen* agree on taking them to hotel rooms or homes. This may not hold true for the *zenanay* of Rawalpindi, most of them think that an open deserted place is apt to escape in case of danger and for quick sexual exchange. At functions, it was observed that interested men zeroed in on *zenanay* they liked the most, approaching them after the show to take contact numbers. Often they contacted after a day or two to ask for sexual favors, the ones interested would go preferably during the days as winter nights are dark and long in Mansehra. The more informal socio-sexual settings are interactions through friend circles. A *zenana* would introduce another to her close client who, then, will introduce her to other men. Potential clients are even shared sometimes. For instance, in Handaal Chowk one *dera* is one door away from another *dera*. If Raheela (first *dera* at the start of *chowk*) sends a *cheesa chaamka* to Khushboo (fifth *dera* in a row), then next time Khushboo will send him to Raheela. It wasn't observed in other locales as most want to be laid by good looking men saying "If I won't she will and that too at a lesser price".

The number of clients entertained varies. One respondent used to say '*rozi aye hai*' ('a client is here'-*rozi* is an urdu word meaning earning, in this context a source of earning, a client who is a source, in this case) each time there was a knock at the door. When asked how many clients a *zenana* usually entertains she replied:

"Mostly ten. Few days are spent alone with no *rozi* but most of the days there is a knock at the door after every half an hour."

The time spent is correlated with the amounts paid. The *rozi* is divided into three groups. First one is a ten minutes *rozi* who agrees on paying 200 rupees. The next is a twenty minutes *rozi* who pays four hundred. The ones who offer more than five hundred are thirty (or more) minute's *rozi*. They are the ones who are high in demand from the community but low in supply from the clientele. The greater the amount the greater will be the pleasure and time allotted. The clients are mostly *active* males, although few reported of *passive* clients too, who want from *khusra* to hide their sexual orientation as passivity in intercourse is stigmatized and strictly forbidden for men.

*Pannpaisha* (prostitution) as a survival strategy may seem to be lucrative. And it is for many in this field as few respondents earned between fifty thousand to one lac rupees during my fieldwork. In festive seasons, prostitution can be a smart occupational choice to add on to incomes in addition to dance and *dhinga*. But once season is off, the earnings will fall considerably. There is no such real stability to the earnings. Social discrimination and isolation further bottlenecks already-stigmatized ways to earn a living for the *khusras*.

## CONCLUSION

The current research has explored various forms of economic organization of *khusra* communities residing in four different locales of Pakistan. These forms are neither economically rewarding nor stable. As explained in the preceding text, the forms of *bidhae*, *jorha*, *tola bazar*, dance functions and prostitution depict marginalization of *khusra* community. On the other hand, as a result of lack of livelihood options, whatever options available to *khusras* further stigmatize the community primarily because of the fact that their major source of income is prostitution. Qualitative research methods have helped in understanding the communal dynamics of socio-economic organization of the *khusra* community and in deciphering the layered narratives of structural discrimination, and paucity of

livelihood options. The forms of economic organization are seasonal, momentary, unstable and risky. Some are inter-generational such as *bidhaee*, *jorha* and *tola bazar*, hence are considered respectful despite being least monetarily rewarding, time consuming and laborious, whereas *panpaisha* despite yielding quick-money and less-laborious is not considered a respected form of earning money. Although most of the narratives from respondents narrate that resorting to *panpaisha* is inevitable for *khusras*. Some forms such as dance functions require greater physical, artistic and communication skills than other forms. However, all forms, as stated by respondents, detail incidents of physical abuse and/or sexual violence. These form also build relational dynamics among *khusras* and the wider population such as with clients for those who are into prostitution. These relations can be short- or long-termed depending upon whether the relation has turned into a reciprocal or an emotive one or not. The reasons for resorting to these different forms are also quoted by respondents ranging from poverty, sexual proclivity, communal conditioning or inter-generational pre-requisites.

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<sup>i</sup> Defined with respect to community as to what they mean what a *Dera* is.

<sup>ii</sup> Fictitious names have been used in the write-up.