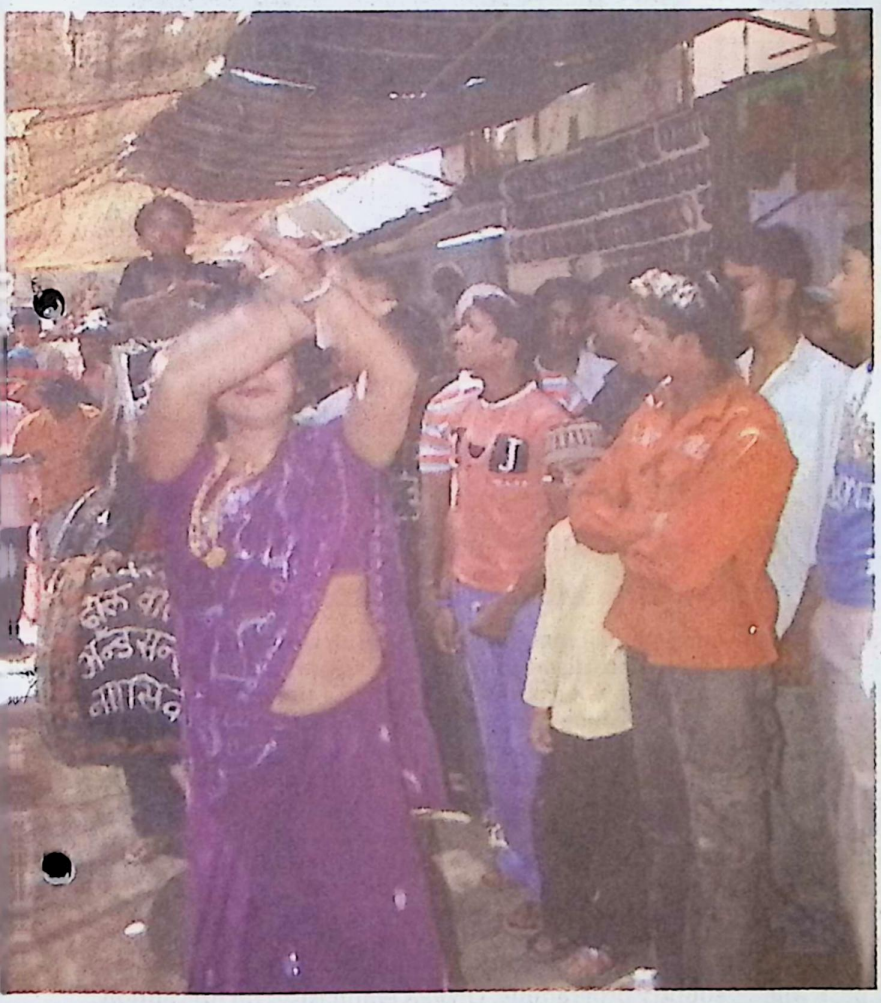
Outcasts



The everyday life of Bangladeshi hijras is far from being a laughing matter. With the spread of modern forms of entertainment --particularly TV-- the call for hijras is decreasing.

hence lack the necessary qualifications to get proper jobs. It's almost impossible for them to become educated, to get a passport, or even to open a bank account."

Pinky Hijra of Badhan Hijra Sangha comments, "there are no authentic statistics on how many hijras are there in Bangladesh. According to newspaper reports, the number varies from 30,000 to 150,000. Hijras get little sympathy from society. We are commonly subject to ridicule and rejection. Naturally, survival instincts make us live together as far as possible. We live in small groups and each headed by a senior leader called Guru Ma, who trains the newly joined hijras to dance, to sing, and to use musical instruments." Shale Ahmed Director of Bandhu Social Welfare Society says "A lot of people assume hijras were born hijras. Their parents hide them from the eyes of society for as long as they can, ashamed of their 'sexual anomaly'. At one point these people 'come out' and start living the way they do. However, in reality there are many who simply decide to enter this community because of hardships they suffer in life, economic or otherwise. Some are forced into it. They leave their old family and find a new one. They all have to be castrated, according to the rules. Many of them try getting this operation done in the hands of quack doctors and die. So there are only just a few properly castrated hijras out there".

According to Joya Hijra "We are not only deprived of human rights, but also abandoned by family members. We can go home till our parents are alive. But after their demise, siblings reject us and refuse to communicate with them." She further adds "I went to village when my father had died. Then I was rejected by family members. Like me, every hijra has a tragic history". Leila Hijra adds, "The hijras in Bangladesh are predominantly Muslim. There are some Hindu ones too. The community is an amalgam of many religions. We are buried in accordance to whatever religious background we came from. However, this is done secretively. We want to avoid any sort of possible conflicts regarding whether or not to treat the dead body as male or female".

According to our constitution, equality before law is guaranteed on the basis of citizenship not on the basis of sex. But the Hijra community is essentially deprived of several rights under Bangladeshi law, because Bangladeshi law recognises only two sexes, male and female. All Bangladeshi governmental documents therefore are meant to be prepared for male or female citizens.