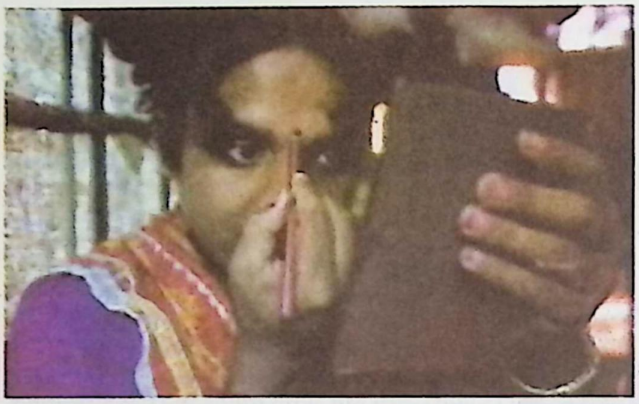
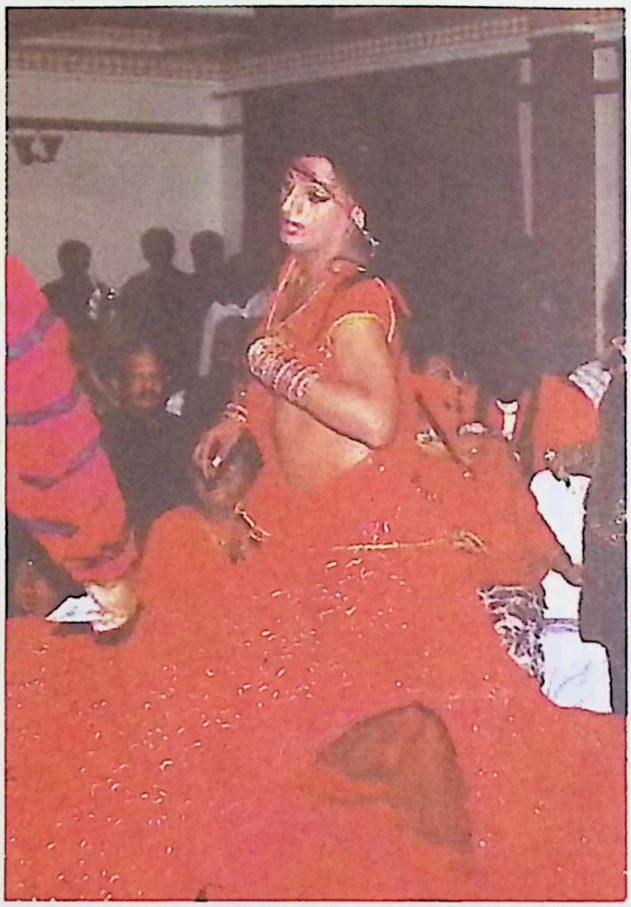




Bangladesh is so far quite undeveloped in terms of recognising this third gender and giving them rights and an identity in society. But they are citizens of the country.

Hijras are left with no choice; they have to identify themselves as either male or female in those documents.

As hijras reveal, despite the general bias of the society they live in, they are still sought after. There is a high demand for hijra sex workers. Continuous issues between professional female sex workers and hijras (whether actual or not) seem to be customary in red light quarters or brothels of big urban centres in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. Reasons are vague and should be looked for in the South Asian gendered social structure. Having a trans-cultural, trans-religious and trans-national identity, hijras truly represent all aspects of South Asian population. They come from Hindu, Muslim and Christian backgrounds. They can be educated or illiterate; they can belong to the lower strata of the population or being the sons of urban elites. Yet while the reasons to join a hijra community may vary, once being initiated they all know prostitution should be avoided. At odds with such rule, hijras are increasingly abandoning their traditional a rule linked to a glorious past (the Moghul courts and ancient Hindu mythology) and embrace a lifestyle grounded on sex work.

While overall HIV prevalence remains under 0.1 percent among the general population in Bangladesh, there are risk factors that could fuel the spread of HIV among high-risk groups. Prompt and dynamic action is needed to reinforce the quality and coverage of HIV prevention programmes, particularly amongst the high risk group including Hijras(Transgender). Hijras are found all over Bangladesh. They suffer from different types of social and political marginalisation. Hijra communities in the country are discriminated against, only due to their sexual identity. Lack of education is a major problem for them, because of which they are not aware of their rights. In Bangladesh most Hijras are involved in selling sex to clients. Due to their low educational status, lack of alternative profession, associated stigma, discrimination and violence, Hijras are most at risk of getting infected as well as transmitting HIV to their clients. HIV prevention activities are one of the components of an UNFPA programme implemented through Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of Bangladesh. Under this country programme, UNFPA emphasises on prevention of HIV among Hijras group to contribute to national response for HIV prevention. Accordingly, it has outsourced BSWS(Bandhu Social Welfare Society) with reducing the risks of STI/HIV transmission among Hijras in Bangladesh as well as improve their livelihood. The project is being implemented by BSWS since 2007 in coordination with Shustha Jiban. There was another Hijra organisation involved since 2007 till 2008 with the project which is currently working with HATI project in Chittagong.