

***Kaaya:***

# **Beyond Gender**

**A Window into the Lives of a Transgender Community**





# *Kaya:* Beyond Gender

A Window into the Lives of Transgender Community



German Technical Cooperation



SAHARA

CMAC

### Transgender community that participated in the project

Saiba  
Sapna  
Vidhan  
Madakini  
Munni  
Bijli  
Chanda  
Neha  
Chanchal  
Bobby  
Asha  
Alka  
Rachana  
Anu  
Sandhya  
Lisa  
Babita  
Bhanu

And everyone else from the Yamuna Pushta community who participated in this project.

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Nenghoi Hackip - Counselor  
Malti - Outreach worker  
Pradeep Kumar, Outreach worker  
VK Mang - Care worker  
Madan - Cook  
Lorraine Coelho  
Seema - Counselor

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Design: Parthiv Shah,  
Design assistance: Shraboni Misra, cmac@vsnl.com

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### Project Team:

**Jost Wagner** has been working for GTZ in India until September 2004. He is now working on Tsunami-related issues for the German Embassy in Thailand.

**Parthiv Shah, Director**

Centre for Media and Alternative Communication (CMAC)

**Anjalee Kohli, Shantanu Choudhury**

Sahara, Centre for Residential Care and Rehabilitation

### About this publication

The text of this publication is based on three sources. The personal testimonies of the transgender photographers, the results of the study conducted by Sahara and funded by GTZ and available literature. Between January and July 2004, staff from the Sahara transgender project interviewed transgender community members living in Yamuna Pushta, a slum located along the Yamuna river in Delhi. They utilized a questionnaire that was designed to understand their personal history, experiences, feelings, and behaviors. Eighty transgender were interviewed with this questionnaire.

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*“We too breathe  
like you.  
We too dream,  
feel, perceive and  
wish like you!  
Then why are we  
isolated?”*

## Acknowledgements

The photo project with Transgender was borne out of the IMAGINE Fotoprojekt, a GTZ-supported project where 500 children from 45 countries captured one day of their lives through the lens of the camera. They focused on what is important to them, to tell others “their” story. What was intriguing and unique to that exhibition was that the children and young people involved identified with the project—posing, shooting and selecting their own pictures. They were giving their own perspective.

In the beginning of 2004, while discussing the report of the Transgender outreach project with the project coordinator and the research coordinator of our partner organisation SAHARA, I realised there was so much I did not know about Transgender people in India. However, it wasn't only me who had limited knowledge of the foreign community of Delhi. Even most people who have lived in India all their lives could not answer my questions. Who are they? How do they live? how do they want to live? When I asked my colleagues, Shantanu and Anjalee from SAHARA, what they would think about such an initiative using the IMAGINE approach by providing the Transgender with cameras and showing us their very own perspective of how they live, everybody seemed enthusiastic. Parthiv Shah from CMAC—a Delhi-based development communication specialist, who has impressed me with his earlier work—didn't hesitate to join this project. He worked alongside the transgender community, teaching them to use cameras and then committed himself to help us create an exhibit and book that justly revealed their lives. Furthermore, he connected our joint project with the David and Richard Gere Foundation, who have started an excellent initiative on how art can contribute in the fight against AIDS.

But the real heroes behind the exhibition and the publication you hold now in your hands are the participants of the photo-documentary. Their willingness to open their lives to the public

gaze and to share their beliefs and thoughts is the sole reason for making this photo-documentary a success. They have proudly defined their own identity within the larger community. Their names are Saba, Sapna, Vidhan, Mandakini, Munni, Bijli, Chanda, Neha, Chanchal, Bobby, and Asha. In addition to their efforts, the staff of the Sahara Transgender project must be appreciated for their dedication and commitment to the photo documentary and the research project. Shantanu Chowdhury and Anjalee Kohli of Sahara worked untiringly on the outreach project and keenly the exhibition in particular. For working on the development of a questionnaire that provides an insight into the lives of transgender, Seema and Lorraine Coelho of Sahara must be thanked. Other staff members who dedicated endless hours on this project include Ajay Kwartar, Nenghoi Haokip, Pradeep Kumar, Malti, VK Mang, and Madan. The text of the publication I wrote with the help of Anjalee and Shantanu Choudhury and my colleague Barkha Goel. Last but not least, I would like to thank my own organisation, the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) for supporting the Round Table on drug-related issues and in specific for funding Sahara's Transgender Intervention and for recognising the importance of and supporting the research and photodocumentary projects. In this regard I have to mention my colleagues Susanne Schardt, Richard Francis, Susan Koshy and Hans Steinmann, who encouraged me with this project.

Personally, for me working on the photo-project is one of the highlights of my entire three year stay in India. But just having an exhibition and publishing a book is not a purpose in itself. It is just the beginning. In an effort to address this stigma, awareness and advocacy measures are essential. A Photo documentation project gives a direct window into the community. Through photos, the viewer feels more connected to the people, gaining an understanding of their lives and feelings and circumstances. It helps increase already existing

curiosity and do away with stigmas by making transgender first people and then transgender. Therefore, we hope that the exhibition helps people understand transgender persons better, give an insight into the serious problems they face vis-a-vis mainstream society and last but not least raise support for this highly marginalised community. I hope and I am confident that this exhibition and the related publication will be a small, but valuable contribution on this path.

*Jost Wagner*





# The Third Gender

-Jost Wagner

## Defining the Indian Transgender

Transgender communities have existed nearly everywhere across the world for centuries. If the many interesting anthropological and sociological researches on their history and traditions are taken into account, the transgender have probably existed in India for roughly 4000 years. The most common and accepted term used in India for the transgender is “hijra” (meaning “impotent ones” in the Urdu language). It seems to subsume different kinds of cross-gender identities, attributes and behaviors—transvestites, eunuchs, hermaphrodites or effeminate males.

How did the word hijra come into being in India? It might have been derived from the Urdu—the Persian influenced language of India’s Muslim culture. Two groups, Mukhannathun and Klibas, have constantly been associated with the word “hich”, which designated “something without a proper place”. In this case, the scheme of two sexes: hich-gah means “nowhere”. Another possibility is that the word hijra comes from the word “ezra” – that means a nomad or wanderer.

However, it is only in recent years that efforts have been made to study how the hijras trace their history and define themselves. The hijra community finds a place in Islam and Hinduism alike. Ancient historical texts make references to the “Kliba”, i.e. men who were not castrated but behaved in a feminine manner (like having long hair). The Muslim rulers—the Mughals—used to employ the castrated Mukhannathun as servants and guards in the Muslim principalities and thereby forming an influential and well-organized community. During the Mughal reign, the Kliba and the Mukhannathun became closely interlinked.

While tracing the historical context of their lineage is important, the transgender attribute many of their customs and traditions to the Indian mythology. Like other communities, hijras also trace their origin to myths in Ramayana and Mahabharata. Bahuchara Mata is the goddess worshiped by transsexuals. She is seated on a rooster which symbolises innocence. Bahuchara mata teaches that killing of all animals and creatures is a sin and that there should be nonviolence. In one of the many folk stories associated with Bahuchara mata, the goddess was once a princess who castrated her husband because he preferred going to forest and ‘behaving as a woman’ instead of coming to her bridal bed. In another story, the man who attempted to molest Bahuchara mata was cursed with impotency. He was forgiven only after he gave up his masculinity, dressed as a woman and worshipped the goddess. The temple of Bahuchara mata is located in Shankhalpoot in Gujarat. This holy place is today known as Bahucharaji.

**RAMAYANA:** After being banished from his kingdom for 14 years, Lord Rama, while leaving for the forest turned to his followers and asked all the ‘men and women’ to return to the city. Among his followers, the hijras alone did not feel bound by this direction and decided to stay with him. Touched by their devotion, Rama gave them the power to confer blessings on people on auspicious occasions like childbirth and marriage, and also at inaugural functions. This set the stage for the custom of badhai in which hijras sing, dance and confer blessings.

**MAHABHARATA:** The legend in the Mahabharata is that Aravan, the son of Arjuna and Nagakanya, offered to be sacrificed to Goddess Kali to ensure the victory of the Pandavas in the Kurukshetra war. The only condition that he made was to spend the last night of his life in matrimony. Since no woman was willing to marry one who was doomed to be killed,

Krishna assumed the form of a beautiful woman called Mohini and married him. The hijras of Tamil Nadu consider Aravan their progenitor and call themselves Aravanis.

Other ancient sacred Hindu texts also contain references to the third sex and descriptions of impotent men who danced and cast spells. Interestingly, many Hindu legends depict the hijras in a sanctioned role, especially in the practice of badhai. But owing to the cultural variations in the different regions of India, the understanding of the cultural roles of Hijras differs widely.

Many hijras perceive themselves as a third gender. This is in contrast to the common western perception in which gender roles are dichotomous. Considering themselves neither men nor women, members of this so-called “third sex” generally adopt feminine names and dress. Many were born with deformed genitalia; a small fraction are hermaphrodites (born with a male body, but with a feminine gender identity), and others are homosexual cross-dressers.

### Family and Community

To be officially respected as a hijra, a transgender has to be part of the hijra society. Knowing that they cannot live with their biological families, the hijra community comes to claim any newly born transgender they come to know about. Those who are not parted from their families at this stage, have to venture beyond in search of a new family later on in life.

The number of hijras across India is estimated at between 500,000 and one million, but census data on them does not exist, making accurate enumeration impossible. Hijras persist

as a marginalized and secretive subculture in poorer urban districts of Bombay, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, and Delhi; there are also Hijra communities in southern India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Probably most of the Eunuchs are divided into small groups or families, each being led by a guru. The guru is the leader, overseeing all activities including the social and occupational roles of members, management of the finances, household needs, conflict resolution, and maintaining discipline. He is also the spiritual guide. They are responsible for the welfare of their chela, or student. They typically live together in the traditional commune arrangement of five or more “chelas” (disciples). When a new chela is accepted into a Hijra household, she assumes not only the guru’s surname but also membership in the guru’s “house,” one of seven fictive lineages that confer a sense of kinship and identity, each house having its own history and rules of behavior. Members are expected to contribute to the family either by working outside or maintaining the house. Together, they celebrate festivals, holidays, and conduct ceremonies. They receive training in singing, dancing, and other activities to enable them to earn a livelihood.

As part of a group, a transgender begins a new life—developing new family relationships—often to replace the ones they have left behind. Friends and gurus take on different familial roles, being addressed as parents, cousins, uncles, and aunts. This attempt to recreate the family unit in a new environment reveals the universal need for all human beings to belong, to feel loved, and to enjoy a sense of security.

### Economic situation

Life is much tougher for the transgender as potential sources of employment are limited.

Added to the confusion of an identity crisis in childhood, they face the brunt of societal taboos. They are not welcome in schools like other children. Many run away, hurt and dejected due to mistreatment and ridicule about their identity. Attempts to find employment in organizations, companies, or even small businesses are met with rejection. As a result, their only option is often to take advantage of their identity – something that is considered both strange and fascinating. Below is a brief description of the traditional roles of employment to which the transgender conform:

- The *Gurwars* are community heads or leaders of *kijras* families.
- The Pan Group collect money during marriages or on the occasion of the birth of a child by singing, dancing and showering blessings on the child. They are the ‘license holders’ – a group that controls a demarcated area where only their group are permitted to work.
- The Dhingras are beggars who visit shops and parks demanding money.
- The Khergalas are trespassers into the license holders’ area. This violation can result in mild to severe consequences if they are caught.
- The Khanjras are sex workers.
- The Giriyals are live-in partners of transgender people.

The disintegration of their socio-economic status has been gradual but consistent. Transgender persons who were once given respect and invited to royal gatherings as servants, confidants,

and performers are ostracized as freaks in the 21st century. The transition to social exclusion is not well understood, but the ramifications are evident. Transgenders have become a marginalized group. Unwelcome and physically pushed aside, transgender are forced to live a life of secrecy, hidden from public life. They serve as a vault for ridicule by a public that cannot understand them, and often does not try to.

It is unfortunate that while transgender were given a place of honor in earlier times, they live on the fringes of modern society, shunned and stigmatized owing to a gender crisis that society cannot handle. The marginalization and misconceptions witnessed today are primarily based on a confusion regarding their sexuality. As transgender, they do not fit into traditional concepts of gender vis-à-vis the male and female. They are punished for their inability to fit into a social norm that is both ill-conceived and outdated.

## Human Rights

The pathetic conditions in which the transgender exist today only reflect the cold, inhuman face of our society. Uprooted from their families and communities, without any opportunities for education or sustainable employment, transgender communities are forced to live alternate lives that only underline their exclusion from mainstream society. People condemn their methods of earning money – begging, sex work, and humiliating people if they don’t give money – but do not consider that transgender are forced to take advantage of the discomfort and embarrassment that surrounds their existence in order to simply survive.

Numerous media reports have been published about how the transgender are discriminated against and often abused in our traditional society. What is shameful is that not only are they victimized by professional hoodlums but also by the police at large. Often, harassment

doesn't stop at using sexually violent language or extortion but can be completely torturous and demeaning—rape, beatings, forced sexual acts and illegal detentions.

Maltreatment has led to a consequence beyond that of opportunity exclusion—the unique cultural traditions that have developed over hundreds of years in the community, with customs and ceremonies that are elaborate and affective. A society with a better understanding of these traditions would be far more protective of their human rights.

### **The Way Ahead/ Drawing Inspiration**

The hijra struggle to carve a niche in mainstream society seems to be bearing fruit albeit in a very small way. There are instances of their being courted by some parties for local/state and even parliamentary elections. Without children or family, transgender are often not eyed suspiciously for ulterior motives. It is remarkable that in the past few years, at least six hijras have been elected to public office at the local and state level, defeating more prominent candidates from national political parties such as the Congress (I) Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The transgender are finally speaking up as victims of a hierarchical society. Cases of adolescent boys being forcibly mutilated sexually have sometimes been wrongly attributed to transgenders. Such cases are now being met with protests from transgender against the allegations that they kidnap and castrate boys to keep their society alive.

With a voice which is increasingly receiving attention, they might one day find acceptance in the society. Coupled with their foray into politics, even though marginal, this might help them in redefining their identity as contributing citizens of our country.

### **A perspective within**

The personal, emotional aspect of the transgender's life has rarely been explored and is certainly not understood by the majority of people. To be a human with feelings just like any one else, yet to be discarded/ disowned by one's own family or community is one of the hardest truths to accept. This fate befalls them simply because they are transgender. Rejected by their families, they pick up the pieces of life and try to live, albeit in a climate of oppression and often with no helping hand. In a country, where even the most oppressed sections—including the dalits/ untouchables have some identity, the hijra community feels bereft of support. Though they are outcast from society, like all of us, they seek societal approval. Exploring their lives, their friendships and families, their interactions, fears, and habits reveals and confirms what they themselves say—'transgenders are people too.'

With contributions from:

***Barkha Gool***

***Shantanu Choudhary***

***Anjali Kohli***

### *Glossary of terms used in this article:*

<b>Chela:</b>	<i>Disciple of an Indian spiritual teacher</i>
<b>Chibri:</b>	<i>Castrated Eunuch (without penis)</i>
<b>Dhingsas:</b>	<i>Beggars who visit shops and parks demanding money</i>
<b>Giziyahs:</b>	<i>Live-in partners of Eunuch/transgender people</i>
<b>Gurus:</b>	<i>Eunuch leaders</i>
<b>Hormaphrodite:</b>	<i>Persons who are born with both male and female genitalia</i>
<b>Janum Jath:</b>	<i>Hindi word for people who are born with male and female genitalia</i>
<b>Khetgala:</b>	<i>Eunuchs who make sure other Eunuch families do not work on that family's turf.</i>
<b>Khetjras:</b>	<i>Sex workers</i>
<b>Third Gender:</b>	<i>Human rights term for Eunuch/transgender</i>
<b>Transsexual:</b>	<i>Someone who has undergone surgery and/or hormone treatments to appear and live as the opposite sex</i>

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## Imaging Self

- Parthiv Shah

As a photographer, I always find it challenging to work with marginalised communities. One of the reasons they are marginalised is due to the way they get represented in society. Whether it is the transgender community, sex workers, the diasporic community, tribal groups or religious minorities, they all face similar problems. These communities live on the periphery of mainstream society not only physically but also in their own psyches. And due to little or no information about them they are regarded as "Exotica". Things that are unknown often get romanticised. This then is an issue of identity, pushed outside of the normative - the parameters of which are determined by the mainstream society.

Transgender communities are a part of our society and have created a world of their own. They have their own kinds of relationships, unusual means of livelihood and importantly an identity which constantly underlines their exclusion. For many years now these communities have been subjugated to the roving eye of anthropologists, photographers and their ilk who made them subject of their study and represented them most of the time in a context which is not theirs. A single photograph projects an image of a person / situation mostly out of context. Even a small article with few images cannot in most instances do justice to this community.

*Hijras* or the transgender community enjoys the mystery which surrounds them. This helps them in their business of cruising in zones created by them for themselves. They not only like to appear different in the body sense but also their mannerisms are idiosyncratic. They use this performance/act to iterate the identity that mainstream society has cast them in. To represent the true character of such a group for an outsider is a humongous task. They might allow you to help them in their territory on their terms and conditions for a purpose which they have no





control over. In other words they might seek an outsider's help for lets say health care, education or even legal advice but they never are sure about how they would like the world at large to look at them.

In the 1990's I conducted a workshop with children in Mangolpuri, a resettlement colony in outskirts of Delhi. In that workshop I had given aim and shoot cameras to participants who were in the age group 9 to 15. The participants at the Mangolpuri workshop were all children and they had not taken a photograph or even held a camera in their life. It was my first attempt to understand how children look at things through a camera, how they frame their subject and how they perceive things. The results were astounding. We first printed and exhibited their prints in a *Basaratghar* (Community Centre) where they proudly invited their parents for the inauguration. The exhibition traveled to one of the most prestigious galleries in India at the Centre for photography as an art form at NCPA, Mumbai. I am not sure how much my participants from the workshop learnt about photography but they sure had lot of fun exploring the world of looking and telling! For me- I discovered a new vision- a vision that was beyond my own.

When I started on this project I had imagined that this experience would give me some directions in working with the transgender community. But that was clearly not the case. As I started out I discovered that there have been many attempts to show case transgender

community through photographs, documentaries, books and exhibitions by outsiders. It took several discussions to explore the idea that they are perhaps in a better position to communicate to the world outside of theirs the many facets of their existence. Unfolding the layers of misinformation, exposing and showcasing their lives would be best way to bridge the disconnect. In the process they got involved thoroughly and had one goal in mind that they should be seen as human beings and no less or more.

For the first meeting when I entered the SAHARA clinic at Yanuna Pustta, the largest slum of Delhi, with Anjalee and Shantanu from SAHARA we heard lot of music and laughter. Not knowing what to expect, I found we were greeted by a room full of *ghyaa*. They were as anxious as we were. As I greeted them I realized in this project there are going to be no directors, no experts, no subjects and no underdogs. To break the ice I had taken few books which I shared with them. As they started looking at images they got interested in the costumes and makeup of people in those images, the situation in which it was taken and started laughing and sometimes even quarreling. After some discussion they told me that they would like to do this project. They were very willing to participate but will have to take permissions from their respective Gurus.

I took this to be a good sign as they were all willing and excited about this newfound activity. This was not just to be an experience of clicking photographs and looking at themselves only, but also about meeting new people like us. In next meeting we discussed further about how to proceed. We discussed some themes which would allow them to look at things around them. The group of participants was never the same. They would come and go. I realized that this is going to be pattern and I will have to accept the situation. The good rapport that Sahara had with the community facilitated the discussions on many instances.



The *Hijra* community lives all across Delhi and they have their areas marked for their business/work. It became easy for us to distribute cameras according to the area they stayed. We made pairs of two and they took their first film rolls with great excitement. Two weeks later I received about 10 film rolls, each one labeled with names. When I saw prints I was amazed with the results, perhaps, because I did not know what to expect I took these prints for our next rendezvous and I shared them with both the groups the one who shot these images and the next group who would be shooting. They were really excited and wanted to shoot more. They talked about each of these images they had selected and why. This was then recorded and translated for the catalogue and exhibition. They were asked to select two to three photographs, which they would like to exhibit. They also created the narration for each of the photographs that they selected.

When I see these images which are photographed, modeled and selected by *Hijra's* themselves I feel reassured that our decision to make them part of this entire process was completely valid. These images work at many levels. For one in it allows you to a journey into their lives from their point of view. It is clear from the pictures that they want to share, want others to know how they live - that this is how they eat, bathe, dance, feel sad, and survive. I kept my role as minimal as possible as I wanted very little outside influence in this venture. This visual journey defines their very identity. The transgender community in this project has unveiled their lives into the public space. Perhaps this is one of those rare instances where they have modeled, photographed and written about themselves for a book and exhibition which is meant for a world outside their own. I personally believe that this effort will contribute to doing away with stigmas. An increased understanding of their lives, will help them be people first and then transgender.



*Photographs: Parthiv Shah*

*“Sometimes I can’t help but direct my hate towards society. They should accept me the way I am.”*



# Alka

Name:

**Alka**

Age: 45 yrs. Birthplace: Kashmir

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I lost my parents and my siblings to communal strife when I was just a child. My grandmother cared for me and showered me with love and attention to ease the impact of my trauma. Around the same time, I discovered that I had biological features of a eunuch. I was eight years old.

On learning of my transgender identity a local *hijra* visited me and told me that others of my ilk lived together in a community and that I was free to join them if I wished to. A little later, the locally settled transgender community tried to stake their collective claim for my adoption but my guardian flatly refused to let me go. Fortunately for me, my sheltered existence protected me from experiencing the usual social responses to eunuchs, such as, intense curiosity, discrimination and illtreatment. Nevertheless, the eunuch community kept a watchful eye from a distance and when I was orphaned a second time with the passing away of my grandmother I was absorbed into the eunuch social order in what seemed an almost logical step. I was just sixteen .

I was introduced to hashish and brown sugar (an impure form of heroin) by other *hijra*'s. The eunuchs coerced me into drug abuse till I had reached the point of addiction. This was done as they were jealous of my good looks.

Twenty years have now gone by, ten of those years I have lived with an HIV positive status. I have had a relationship with a *giriya* during this time and despite the arrangement being devoid of sexual contact it has been fulfilling and we have been supportive of each others needs. Till date, my *giriya* has tested HIV negative.

With age catching up, I deliberately avoided wondering what my fate will be to morrow. Just for today, I am the queen in her parlour.

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Name: **Rachna**

Age: 43 years Birthplace: Bihar

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# Rachna

I come from a lower middle class family. My father died when I was eight years old. As the primary income earner, his death caused the family a great deal of financial crisis. My mother was forced to become a maidservant. She had to juggle her job and her parental duties that involved taking care of me and my two brothers and four sisters. However, the family' income remained meager prevented us meeting even our basic needs.

I hid my identity as a *hijra* from the family. In fact, I hid my transgender characteristics so well that my family pressured me into marriage. Right through my married life and the birth of my four children I masked my biological and emotional individuality from my wife.

Unhappy and stifled, I left my wife and children in Bihar and traveled from city to city till I came to Delhi where I shed my carefully cultivated homemaker disguise and pursued sex work with a heady abandon. I had morphed into a *janana* – a transgender with a female disposition but clothed in a pants and shirt. My anonymity also afforded me the pleasure of being literally 'out of the closet'.

In Delhi, I met another *janana* and developed a relationship with her. We began to live together both engaging in sex work as a livelihood. In spite, of having a high level of awareness about HIV/AIDS and

safe sex, I continued to indulge in high risk behavior and have faced many problems. I frequently bleed from my anal aperture. Several visits to doctors have proved unfruitful. Finally, at Bara Hindu Rao Hospital in Delhi, I secretly underwent surgery fearing that my wife in Bihar would chance upon my dual life due to the nature of my illness.

Word, however, spread and my wife heard of my operation and like a dutiful wife traveled to Delhi to nurse me back to health. Upon discharge, we returned to Bihar where I once again pretended to be part of a model family. After a year of self-suppression, I could take no more of the thinly veiled façade suffocating me and I returned to Delhi.

It was during my second sojourn in Delhi that I came in contact with Sahara. After counselling, I opted to take a test for both tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. I began to acknowledge that my line of work and recurrent illness had placed me at risk for HIV/AIDS. I tested positive for HIV. At this juncture my relationship with my live-in partner broke off.

Homeless, desolate and forsaken I spend my days and the nights sometimes inside and sometimes outside the '*pilli kothi*'. The transgender project takes care of my food and medical needs and though Sahara may not have the answer for my broken heart they show that they care by simply being there.

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**Name:** Anu

**Age:** 30 years **Birthplace:** Uttar Pradesh

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I was born and grew up in Uttar Pradesh. I was the second child in my family. Curiosity and awareness of my own budding sexuality led me to experiment with sex. With typical naiveté, I engaged in anal sex, at a very young age, with a cousin of mine. One day the two of us were caught and were subjected to humiliation and severe physical punishment.

The anger, fear, confusion and hurt that followed only helped to magnify the problem and we ran away from home. We lived together for a few months till one-day my cousin decided to return home. Forlorn and left to my own devices; I began to experiment with womanly attire and cosmetics.

Coming into my own, I gave full expression to the feminine spirit that had long been repressed and always threatening to break free. I began to cross dress and live like a full-blown woman. I eventually joined the *hijra* community but not before I was married twice. My inability to conceive a child inevitably led to divorce.

I, now, live with my *giriya* and work periodically as a sex worker. My *giriya* also works but earns less than me. The need for extra income

compels me to pursue sex work along with *toll* and the patented song and dance routine at childbirth and marriage celebrations.

I approached Sahara for help due to my deteriorating health. General debilitation and extreme fatigue had weakened my ability to function normally. A health care worker/counselor was assigned to understand my health and other problems and to address my needs. I have been diagnosed with tuberculosis and am currently being treated for it through Sahara's out patient department.

Prior to being associated with Sahara, I had little knowledge and awareness about HIV/AIDS. It was this lack of information that led me to indulge in risk behavior such sex without protection little realizing that was it these very acts that had resulted in my falling ill. The Sahara staff has, over time, has deepened the personal relationship with me and has hammered out a partnership that works in sync to piece together the broken bits of my life.

Anu

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Name:

**Sandhya**

Age: 50years Birthplace: Kolkata

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I am from Kolkata. My family consists of two brothers and three sisters. Even as a child, I loved dancing, wearing girls clothes, and using cosmetics. Whenever I acted in plays, it was a foregone conclusion that it would be me who would enact the role of the girl.

I came to Delhi and merged into the *hijra* community after the death of my father. My *giriya*, mother, sister and I share one home. I have been living with my *giriya* for the past fifteen years and work as a *pan toli*. My *giriya* works in a production house and a part of the pooled earnings go to my *giriya's* ex-wife and child.

Prior to meeting my *giriya*, I was married twice. My wife, unable to conceive because of my biological condition ultimately divorced me. One of my strong characteristics is that I am highly opinionated. As a *hijra* I do not pay attention to the obscene remarks directed at me. I

say, "Let them say whatever they feel like-it does n't make any difference to me. What you see is what you get."

I began to visit the Sahara transgender project for the treatment of the many minor illness that befell me. In due course, learning of the Sahara's expertise in weaning people off narcotic and alcohol addiction, I confessed my dependence on liquor. I now have a health care worker assigned to me full time and part of my care package involves receiving, understanding and practicing safer behaviours related to sex and alcohol use. Though I suspect that I could be HIV positive due to the extent of my exposure to the virus, I have as yet not consented to test. Sahara is in no hurry preferring to wait until I am ready and have made an informed and definite choice.

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Sandhya

# Lisa

**Name :**

**Lisa**

**Age :** 30 yrs **Birthplace:** Bihar

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I am the youngest child among five brothers and four sisters. I am the apple of my parents' eye and am much loved. I have had no interest in studies since childhood. I studied upto Class II but dropped out after that. I always preferred to sing, dance and attend parties instead of studying. I took a keen interest in all things feminine like make-up kits, women's clothes and even mimicked girlish behavior. Since my childhood days I participated in all the functions where the presence of *hijra's* was required. Deeply unhappy with the way my life was shaping up, I left home and came to Delhi in search of work and the elusive urban dream. I was all twelve years old but I acted like I was a full-grown woman.

I was addicted to alcohol but probably due to my lucky stars or a predestined fate was not exposed to sex work. I was also fortunate to be blessed with good health and did not contract any serious illness during my time in Delhi. I was equally fortunate to have escaped the lecherous eyes of local thugs and slumlords that amuse themselves by abducting and outraging the modesty of people like me.

I came to the Sahara transgender project for a general health check-up and was admitted in the facility for quite some time. I have also benefited from having a generous and sensitive guru who gave me the duties of a

*pan toli* and who took care of all my needs. After awhile a misunderstanding resulted in the falling out between my *guru* and me. I left to take up residence with her *giriya*. I never used condoms in my physical relationships with my *giriya*. After a while I even left my *giriya* and began to live alone. I have not considered going home believing that my family name will be sullied due to my recent conduct.

My family, however, know about my becoming a *hijra* and have no reservations or problems with my gender choice but I am wary and afraid of discrimination by the wider community.

I had no previous knowledge about HIV/AIDS, safer sex and other sexually transmitted diseases before I came in contact with the Sahara transgender project. Now, I have been educated about all the health risks and have even undergone an HIV test. The result of my test is positive.

I face many psychosocial difficulties and say, "Sometimes I can't help but direct my hate towards society. They should accept me the way I am."

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# Babita

**Name:**

**Babita**

**Age:** 36 yrs. **Birthplace:** Bihar

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I was born and brought up in Bihar. I come from a lower class family. I have three sisters and two brothers. All my siblings live with my parents who are landless farmers and my family can barely make ends meet. Fed up of my present situation, I left home and came to Delhi to earn a livelihood by working as a porter knowing that this was the only job I could probably get as I had not been to school.

I was confused about my sexuality right from my early childhood. My feminine characteristics and inclinations were trapped in a man's body. No one in my immediate family noticed or even suspected my behavioral inclinations.

Arriving in Delhi, I worked in the Darya Ganj area. One day on returning from work a policeman on the beat accosted me. I was forcibly taken to a deserted park and forced into anal sex. Fearing retribution I kept silent about the whole episode. This incident, somehow, crystallised my thought processes and confirmed my intention to be a woman not a man.

I started taking interest in men. I had, however, had not become a *hijra*. Parental coercion and societal pressures had forced me to marry a girl back in my village but my preference for men had over ridden all other human relationships. I also had three children of which the eldest has died and the youngest is also dying of a mysterious illness.

Recently, I developed rash, weakness, fatigue and loss of appetite. I also have anal warts, which is an indication of the presence of sexually transmitted illness. I am presently undergoing treatment from Sahara's transgender project and have undergone an HIV/AIDS test too. The staff of the project has educated me about HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. I have also been counselled about the treatments necessary for the cure of my illness.

Regaining some semblance of health I left for Bihar to be by the side of my sick child. Being a closet *hijra* I do not have to fear the taunts and the ridicule that transgender people are subjected to just for amusement sake.

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Name:

**Bhanu**

Age: 26 yrs Birthplace: Haryana

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# Bhanu

I am the youngest child among five siblings. I have studied upto class ten. My father died during my school days and because of this I could not study further. My mother works as a labourer and takes care of the family. Since my mother is the only bread earner, the family faced a lot of financial crisis. It was then that I decided to leave home and come to Delhi in search of work. My first job was that of a porter in a railway station.

In Delhi, my relative forced me into anal sex. My life became very miserable. Slowly, it was this particular incident that made me into a sex worker. I became habituated to sex and obtained all my pleasure through my newly adopted profession. I also hooked up with a *giriya* and lived with him for four years.

One day while coming back from work I met with an accident. I could not continue my profession so I went back home to live with my family. No one in the family even remotely suspected me of transforming into a *hijra* and because of my little secret I face no difficulty either with my family or in my community.

I now work as a supervisor in the health department in Haryana but cannot deny my longing to live the life of a transgender person and that

too out in the open without fear of reprisal. I left my job and came back to Delhi not due to any torment or disgrace but more as a matter of personal choice.

I again involved myself in sex work, and I sometimes go begging too. My body parts are that of man. I have a penis but all my characteristics are that of a woman.

I came to know about Sahara through my friends and I have been given treatment for my physical illness which, included treatment for an abscess on my right leg. Dressing is done regularly. My other needs are also addressed.

I had no knowledge about HIV/AIDS, safe sex and other related sexually transmitted diseases before I came in contact with Sahara. I have never used condoms before. I have been given an education about diseases and though my knowledge is not yet adequate I am careful to make choices that do not harm my health any further.

Socially, I face no difficulties but say, "Sometimes I feel bad towards society, they should accept me the way I am."

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## GLOSSARY OF TRANSGENDER TERMS

AWKHTWA- Eunuch with a penis  
CHHIERI- Eunuch with castrated penis  
BATOOL- Anus  
BATOOL BEELA- Anal warts  
BATOOL DHOORANA – Anal sex  
CHEPTA DHOORANA –Thigh sex  
KHAMAR – Oral sex  
CHAM – A-know-it-all person (used with sarcastic intent)  
KOTI – Effeminate males  
GIRYAH- Husband/boyfriend  
GURU/MUMMY – Eunuch leader or head eunuch  
HIJRI –Eunuch wearing female attire (Sari & blouse)  
JENANI –Eunuch wearing male attire (Pants & shirt)  
PAN- License holder area-wise  
KHERGALA – Eunuch trespassing in other eunuchs' territory  
DHINGNA – Begging at shops, parks, signal lights etc.  
KHANJRA – Sex work

*Note: Conversation with transgender communities have resulted in the collation of the above terms. The transgender colloquial and its use by the Sahara Transgender Project have allowed the field and the center staff to initiate and develop rapport resulting in a greater sense of acceptance by the target group.*



***“Why are we deprived  
of humanity?”***





*“Does being human refer to only  
a man or a woman?”*

I like this picture because I look good. I also like the way I have worn the sari. Since my childhood, it has been my deep desire to wear female clothes. Whenever I see this picture, it gives me a sense of fulfillment and an impression of being a beautiful woman.

*Neha*





PHOTO.3 (Vidhan Sabha) We respect our Guru more than our parents. Whatever task our Guru tells us to do we try our best to accomplish it. Whenever we have free time we go to her house to serve her. At times when he is sick her followers (*chela's*) take her complete care even work like combing her hair, cook food etc. we take her blessing before going to work.

*Vidhan Sabha*

## Vidhan Sabha

In a traditional household mother - in - law blesses her daughter -in - law. Eunuch follow the same tradition.

Eunuchs treat their *Guru* like their own mother. They respect their *Guru* and they have to do whatever they say. They also share a lot of warmth and love among themselves. The *Guru* too love their chela.









I was born a boy. But from my childhood I preferred to live like a female. I played a lot as a child and loved playing *holi* with my friends. When I look at this photograph I remember that day.

*Vidhan Sabha*



PHOTO. 3 (Asha) We are going to work at this time along with our leader 'Guru'. We prefer to go to work than sitting at home.

Asha

Bobby

I love to sing, dance and dress up like a woman, do make up, wear bangles, ring, earring. We have parties in which some play drums, some sing and some of us dance. In the party I sing and dance a lot and enjoy myself to the core.





### *Bobby*

After looking at this photograph people might find it odd but looking at it makes me feel very happy because it shows I have breast like a woman, which I wanted from my childhood. I always wanted to have breast like a female and today it has come true. Now I feel really delighted when after make up I completely look like a female, which was my childhood dream.

From my childhood I had a hobby to cook and dress up like a female. From the time I left my house I have been cooking food and taking care of my new house all by myself. Whatever I liked is achieved henceforth I am very happy.

*Bobby*





PHOTO. 2 (Bijli) It is the most beautiful photograph because it has my boyfriend in it. I also like it as it shows me dressed like a female. I love my boyfriend very much and like to stay as his wife forever. I like this photograph very much as it reveals my true feelings about how I want to live my life.

I visit my one room village house to meet my wife and my little girl. I like to wear a shirt and a cap. I go to my hometown wearing gents' clothes. I go home with my *giriya* though I have a wife, child and my mother in law stays at my place. This photograph reminds me of *holi* when guests visit us. We serve them sweets, *ladoo* and *bhujia*. I am happy with my life. This photograph makes me remember my house in my village.







I like this photograph as it reveals that my childhood dreams have come true. When I was a child my family member used to dress me up as a boy, this was one of the main reason I hate them. Today I am free. Looking at this photograph gives me a great feeling as it shows me drying my hair after a bath like all other females.



I am very particular about my food regimen. I have food on time, drink juice and eat fruits. It is my hobby. I have fruits everyday after food. Grapes are my favorite. Whenever I am free, the first thing I do is to clean and decorate my house. After work I do not go anywhere and manage my other work from home. This picture reflects the monotonous routine of my life. I have no social life at all. I am a lonely and sad person.

*Bobby*



The reason why I don't like this picture is because my picture is not clear and my friend looks like a person who is intoxicated.



## *Bobby*

I was always neat and clean as a child, I dreamt that when I grew up I would look after my family and decorate my house as a woman does. After looking at this photograph I have realized that I have all the goods required in a household and that I am looking after my family like a woman.

My sister-in law, sister and I love each other a lot and never fight. We do arguments sometimes. We enjoy playing among ourselves.

*Bobby*



Women sit and chat in their free time. We eunuchs, too, sit together, chat, gossip, crack jokes and even play ludo during our free time. By chatting we get to know each others' secrets.





We both are four siblings of one family, but we both Guru-bhai is special. We love each other so much that if we do not see each other atleast once a day, we are not at ease. We love our (TG) community more than we love our blood relatives.

After looking at this photograph, I feel that I have got what I wanted since my childhood. Like most females I like to cover my head with 'chunni'. I clean and decorate my house everyday. I really like to apply make up and wear bangles. I prefer to eat food cooked by me.

*Chanchal*





It gives me great disappointment when I realise that I can never become a mother. We stay together as a family. I left my previous family and started a new life but did not feel sorry for the act because the love, which I got from my friends and Guru (leader) over here, I never received it from my previous family.

## *Chanchal*

I dislike this photograph because it was taken when I was very sick. The medicines prescribed to me by some local doctor did not help at all. I was restless throughout the day. I became very skinny and my health was deteriorating day by day. I thought my end is near. Looking at this photograph makes me recall that horrible time.











This photograph shows my brother in law, my friend, my boyfriend "*giriya*" and myself. It pleases me to look at this photograph as it shows that we stay together as a family. It also shows part of my room with things kept properly in required place. I always wanted to take care of my family as a woman right from my childhood. It does no matter to me that I had to leave my family and make a new family.

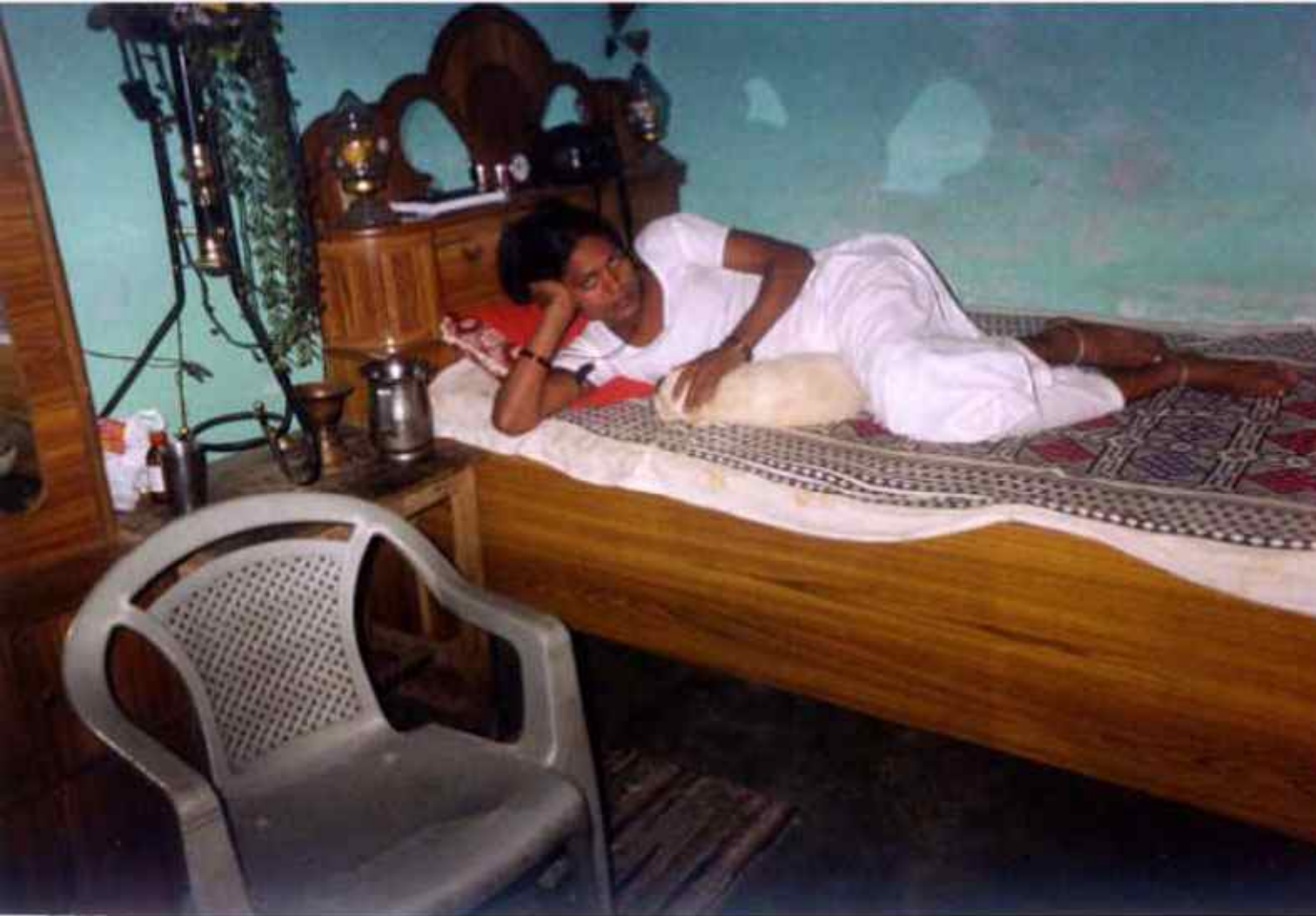
Saiba

From my childhood I like to decorate my room. After looking at the photograph you will come to know that there is hardly any empty space on the wall as in most places I prefer to stick posters or put up a wall hanging. After having bath I like to dry my hair by wrapping towel around them as the act makes me feel like a female.





I am expressing my indepth feelings. I like this snap as I feel like a female. I live like a normal female which is my desire. Nobody has any pressures on me unlike a female living in the society who has millions of restrictions on her.



This photograph show that I am lying down on my bed with my child. I feel like a mother that is why I care a lot for this baby dog and I love it very much. I treat this dog as my own child because I know that I cannot have children. I also feel and know that I am lying down on the bed like a housewife. I had a hobby to decorate and take care of my house as a woman. I like to stay with my boyfriend and my child as a family. I do not like to stay alone. I have all the goods required in a household I am very happy with my life as I feel like a woman by living in this lifestyle.

*Chanda*



I like this photograph because even I feel like giving donation in temples, Masjid and gurudwaras and I feel it is also necessary and good to do that. In this photograph I felt very happy when I offered a bed sheet in the durga and I also helped in the serving of food. In doing this good deeds I will be blessed and get peace. Before going to work in the morning or evening I always visit a temple or a mosque and pray to keep my family intact and happy forever.



The policeman likes me a lot. He told me that he loves me and want to get a photograph of both. I said I don't mind and he felt good about it.



I like to cook food and keep the house clean. I also like wearing scarf on my head and sit like a normal women. In this photo I look like a women and I think I feel like I am cooking food for the family. Looking at the photo I feel good because I look like a women.

*Chanchal*





In this photograph my daughter Pinky (the baby dog) was in lot of trouble and had stop eating. Day by day her health deteriorated I pick her up and ran to the hospital. I love pinky very much and treat her like my own child. I am looking upset in this photograph because I am thinking about how good it was and how we used to play together when the pinky was healthy. When I think about this I feel very sad and I don't feel good about anything. When pinky was completely healed I cried, as I was very happy.

From my childhood I always wanted to dress up like a woman. I wanted to have real breast. I wanted to work at home like a women and live my life as a women. That's why by looking at this photo I think and feel like a women. I used to dress up like a man and now I look like a woman. I feel very happy when I think about this

*Mandakini*







From childhood even though born like a boy  
I used to stay like a female. I behave like a girl.  
I feel very shy when I see my nude photograph.

*Munni*



I like being photographed along with my boyfriend (giriya) though I have difficulty in looking at the photograph clearly still I like it because it has my boyfriend, I love him a lot because I do not have anyone in this world except him.

*Munni*

I feel good of this photograph because it reminds me of the times whenever we hire a van or car and go to work in groups and that we can also do something in life and a sense of being productive or self dependent.



Both the sisters are sharing their happiness & sadness together, talking about their husband's inability to earn a living for the families during the time of their rest after coming back from work.









I like this photograph because it reminds me of my family in which my giriya (boyfriend) and my mother-in-law and my neighbor

*Sapna*

The kids seen in the snaps are also eunuchs. They are our followers who respect us a lot. We also love them like our own children and they love us also. We are like a family. We can leave our parents but cannot leave these children as they are a party of ours now.





By looking at this photograph I remember the festival of holi. During holi we visit the crowded markets and enjoy singing, dancing and collecting donations (money) from shopkeepers. They mostly give donations happily but sometimes we have to fight with them and demand they give us a donation.

*Vidhan Sabha*



Just like when anybody dies in the general community or society and the final rites are performed like in Hindu they cremate the body and in Muslim they bury the body similarly the eunuch's deal with the dead in the same manner. We hear people say that when eunuch's die the dead bodies are taken in the night, a garland of sleepers is put around their neck and they are taken away but this is not true.



Among eunuchs also like when a common man dies people visit the family or the house to pay their respects and share condolence, which means they share the sorrow, sadness and pain by consoling the family members of that house. Even all the neighbors come to the house without thinking badly about the deceased or the eunuch's community because the general belief is that everyone has to die someday.

*Vidhan Sabha*



In this photo you see that even when a eunuch's (hijras) dies the whole community or family of eunuchs are served food by the Guru's of the deceased in the loving memory or name of the dead person for the soul to rest in peace.



When I think about my life it makes me feel sad. There is no one in this world for me, which makes me feel lonely and sometimes makes me cry. God neither made me male nor a female. I pray to him to make me as a female in the next generation.

*Munni*

I know I cannot become a mother. After I look at this photograph it makes me feel good because in it I look like a mother in whose lap child sleeps. It would have been great if I could become a mother.







# CMAC

Centre for Media and Alternative Communication (CMAC) is a not-for-profit organization based in New Delhi that uses media and art to create communication campaigns and education materials on a range of social issues including culture, human rights, environment, and public health. The key objective of the organization is conceptualising and implementing specially designed campaigns, mounted on excellent technological skills. It works with visual and audio communication employing traditional media and conventional advertising techniques towards creating awareness. To reach diverse constituencies CMAC uses public media such as print, web, and television. The organization also uses other traditional communication methods such as street plays, songs, puppets, story telling, posters, leaflets, and wall graphics to reach groups that cannot be reached by modern methods of communication. Some of the key projects undertaken by CMAC include Haman Hain Ishq, an audio-visual project on communal harmony, released by Sony music and supported by Channel V and the ongoing six nation Campaign, "We Can" end violence against women.



The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH is an international cooperation enterprise for sustainable development with worldwide operations. It provides viable, forward-looking solutions to political, economic, ecological and social development in a globalised world. GTZ promotes complex reforms and change processes, often working under difficult conditions. Its corporate objective is to improve people's living conditions on a sustainable basis.

We work mainly for the German Federal Government. Our main client is the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Currently, we are implementing some 2,700 development projects and programmes in over 130 countries. We have our own offices in 67 of these countries, and in 2003 our turnover was almost 900 million euro. Of our circa 10,000 employees, some 1,000 people are employed at our Head Office in Eschborn near Frankfurt am Main.

Our main focus in international cooperation is on so-called Technical Cooperation. Far from being centred on transferring technical knowledge, this involves primarily communicating knowledge that enables people to shape their present and future on their own. For this, we strengthen individual initiative and the capabilities of people and organisations, and lay the basis for stable development – for future generations as well. In our work, this is what we mean by sustainability.

The GTZ was established in 1975. It is organised as a private company owned by the German Federal Government. We work on a public benefit basis, using all funds generated as profits exclusively for projects in international cooperation.



Sahara, an NGO established in 1978, works with substance users and persons living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. Sahara's projects have been designed to suit the specific needs of populations that face high levels of stigma and discrimination. In addition to efforts of care and support, detoxification, rehabilitation, reintegration, income generation, and other services, Sahara has played a lead role in advocacy, community awareness and sensitization, and training other organizations in the implementation of projects. Today, Sahara runs 35 projects in Delhi, Manipur, Pune, and Mumbai. These projects address the wide spectrum of issues affecting persons who use drugs, have HIV, and their families. This includes Michael's Care Home, one of the first care homes for people living with HIV/AIDS, a continuum of care for homeless substance users in Delhi, a health and HIV prevention project with transgenders, a day care for street children, and rehabilitation and harm reduction projects in Manipur.



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