
UNIT 3 GENDERED BODIES

Contents

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Theoretical Part of which the Ethnography *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India* is an Example
- 3.3 Description of the Ethnography
 - 3.3.1 Intellectual Context
 - 3.3.2 Fieldwork
 - 3.3.3 Analysis of Data
 - 3.3.4 Conclusion
- 3.4 How does the Ethnography Advance our Understanding
- 3.5 Theoretical Part of which the Ethnography *The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City* is an Example
- 3.6 Description of the Ethnography
 - 3.6.1 Intellectual Context
 - 3.6.2 Fieldwork
 - 3.6.3 Analysis of Data
 - 3.6.4 Conclusion
- 3.7 How does the Ethnography Advance our Understanding
- 3.8 Summary
- References
- Sample Questions

Learning Objectives



In this unit, you will learn about the:

- concept of gendered bodies;
- society's acceptance of behaviour of man and woman, which do not fall under the prescribed norms; and
- meaning of macho.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Human beings are being born as 'male' or 'female' and based on societal norms, the cultural construction of a person as 'masculine' or 'feminine' takes place. The behaviour of a 'man' or 'woman' is patterned by society and has nothing to do with the sex of a person. In this unit, we will try to understand the concept of gendered bodies from the ethnographies *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India* by Serena Nanda and *The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City* by Matthew C. Gutmann, set in two different cultural settings and how the question is perceived by the subjects of the study.

3.2 THEORETICAL PART OF WHICH THE ETHNOGRAPHY *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India* IS AN EXAMPLE

Nanda's work *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India* is a defining pathway in gender studies. As stated in the introduction, the notion of 'gender' (attributes of masculine and feminine) is socially and culturally constructed, and in the recent past this has been brought to light by many anthropological and historical studies, slowly making it an acceptable fact. *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India*, is an anthropological work among the Hijras of India who do not confirm to the culturally and socially constructed gender norms but prefer to belong to a third category.

3.3 DESCRIPTION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY

3.3.1 Intellectual Context

This work reflects on gender identities which for a long time in most cultures were perceived as either masculine or feminine. This work deals with gender systems that have institutionalised alternatives. The role of the hijras in India from a religious context has been explored in this work. Nanda delves into the role and status of the hijras as neither man nor woman, falling out of the realm of accepted gendered bodies, and their acceptance by society due to socialisation. This work contributes to an interactionist perspective on gender, and how sex assignment and subsequent socialisation has resulted in the acceptance of intermediate or ambivalent gender identity of the hijras in India.

3.3.2 Fieldwork

Nanda conducted multisited fieldwork in different parts of India to capture the lifestyle and essence of the hijra community. The fieldwork was phased out into three phases at different interval of time over a period of six years from (1981-87). Nanda's fieldwork didn't involve living with the hijras as is usually seen in anthropological fieldwork. Thus, the fieldwork in itself reflects on the new age ethnographies that were coming up where the study no longer pertained to the concept of 'living among the natives' at a particular place.

Fieldwork also involved working with interpreters as Nanda was not conversant with the local languages that are spoken in India. Working with an interpreter thus involved training the interpreter, so as to avoid overenthusiasm on the part of the interpreter that could have led the study to go out of focus. Interviews, case studies, life histories and observation were the main techniques and methods used in fieldwork.

Nanda's fieldwork also reflected on the ethical dilemma of representation of a group of people who otherwise had been romanticised and sensationalised. Questions and doubts come in when hijras are being spoken of as 'neither man nor woman', thus, she had to carefully portray the power of the hijras (emasculatation process- surgical removal of the penis and testicles without the construction of a vagina) to transform themselves from men into women without the help of photographs which almost all hijras go through. She writes; 'I would

never feel comfortable showing such (the genital area) pictures, even to a scholarly audience, and that to focus on a disembodied physical part of a person who was my friend would be contrary to my understanding of a human personality as a whole' (p.157).

3.3.3 Analysis of Data

Introduction to the book begins with a narrative of her first encounter with a hijra in Mumbai in 1971 and how in the subsequent years her interest in alternative gender studies led to fieldwork for a detailed understanding of the lives of the hijras. Herein, she also tries to define the hijras and the problems related to the definition. The major issue was the disjunction between the cultural definition provided by people in general and the hijras who defined themselves based on a variety of roles played individually in the society right from being born as neither man nor woman, to a conflict with respect of gender identity leading to the emasculation ritual and becoming a member of the third gender, or being initiated as a hijra due to sexual impotence, an ascribed physical condition of intersexuality. Then again the question of hijras being generally referred to as prostitutes, which needed sensitive understanding.

'Hijra Roles in the Indian Society' has been taken up in the first chapter. Hijras in India play a culturally significant role as ritual performers. The author introduces the important social role of the hijras through which they have legitimised themselves and their acceptance in Indian society. The crucial subject of hijras being homosexual prostitutes has also been taken up in this chapter.

This chapter begins with the description of two performances of the hijras, first on the occasion of the birth of a baby boy and second one after marriage. Traditionally, the hijras are known for these performances in India, the birth of a baby boy is an occasion of great joy and celebration as it is believed that the boy would carry forward the family line and name. The hijras are expected to bless. The performance known as *badhai* is marked by singing, dancing and clapping hands (sound generated by beating the hollow palms together which is peculiar to the hijras only). During the performance the leader of hijras examines the genital part of the baby boy and finally blesses the child with the power of creating new life and taking the family line forward, which the hijra does not possess. The author writes; 'it is for this role that the hijras are given the greatest respect, and it is this role that defines their identity in relation to the world around them' (p.3). At the end of the performance the hijras are presented with traditional gifts of cash and goods.

Next description is the performance of the hijras after a marriage at the groom's house. Herein, the author captures the essence of the 'ritual of reversal' in the jokes of the hijras that are targeted at the groom and his family, which in traditional Indian society is always held high in esteem than the bride's family. The ambivalence of the hijras and the fear of their curse are also reflected in the instance where an orthodox groom's family politely refuses the bride to meet the hijras, owing to the belief that the infertility of the hijra would contaminate the bride and prevent her from bearing a son. This chapter further describes the relationship of the hijras with their audience. It is a very peculiar relation as the hijras are regarded with awe much so because of the fear of their curse while at the same time their blessings are also sought and at times also ridiculed as impotent

men (eunuchs). Towards the end of this chapter Nanda broaches the sensitive topic of prostitution. The hijras' dominant cultural role is of a ritual performer, while at the same time it is also known that they are homosexual. She presents the views of the various authors in this chapter and towards the end of the book bring in the views on this aspect (prostitution) as part of the narratives of life histories of the hijras.

Chapter two titled 'The Hijra as Neither Man nor Woman' explores the role of the hijras as an alternative gender category, examining it in light of the Indian cultural context of what it means to be neither man nor woman. The question of neither being a man nor a woman is explained herein taking into account the life stories of the hijras and also the Hindu religious texts and mythological stories. Nanda, the author, first explores the definition of hijra as given by various scholars and it comes to light that there are basically two categories, one who are born hermaphrodite (intersexed) and the other who undergo the emasculation surgery (eunuch). In both categories the connotation is impotence.

In the first section of this chapter, Nanda explores the reasons why a hijra is not a man. From many interviews, she reports that the hijras do not consider themselves as male though most of them were born with male physical attributes. It was mostly stated that they never felt like a male and were not ever interested in females. Hijras enjoy dressing up as females and like to wear feminine accessories and keep long hair, even the ones who at times dress like males. One of the major insults, disgrace and punishment meted out to a hijra is to cut her hair for any misbehaviour. Many of them from childhood had shown keen interest to dress like females and prefer males as partners. Some of the hijras also marry and have husbands; so they do not regard themselves as men.

On the other hand they neither regard themselves as women as they do not have the female reproductive ability. If some of them are raised as girls at the time of puberty they realise their inability to reproduce as they do not menstruate. Thus, they do not consider themselves as real women even if they dress and behave like women. Moreover, the way hijras dress and their mannerism full of sexual connotations, abusive language and gestures is something which is very unladylike, ungracious, inappropriate and outrageous for ordinary women.

The noteworthy fact about the hijras is their acceptance as the third gender. They also find a place in epic texts and mythologies. Lord Shiva, Vishnu, Krishna all have at one time or the other taken the avatar of hijra, elaborations of which are given in the next section.

'Emasculation Ritual Among the Hijras', Chapter three presents a detailed account of the emasculation ceremony that forms an essential part of the rites of passage in the life of a hijra. The hijras believe that their power (*shakti*) comes after emasculation (*nirvana*). It means renouncing sexual desires to attain a state of liberation which is almost like rebirth. The Hindu scriptures call the beginning of this experience as the second birth, or the opening of the eye of wisdom, the hijras, too translate *nirvana* as rebirth (p.26). Nanda describes the elaborate process of emasculation which consists of three stages of the rites of passages as stated by Van Gennep (1960). Before the emasculation operation a hijra is secluded and not allowed to perform the daily chores for almost a month and after the operation the liminal period is observed and only on the fortieth day after the

ritual *puja* the assimilation and acceptance into the hijra community is complete. The mythological tales which confirm the powers and status of the hijras in Hindu society forms a part of this chapter.

The hijras worship Bahuchara Mata, whose main temple is near Ahmedabad, Gujarat. Nanda states that every hijra household has a picture of this goddess and they visit the temple of Bahuchara Mata atleast once in their lifetime. The emasculation is also done in the name of the Mata; the hijras call upon the Mata to be present during the operation. In addition the hijras also worship Shiva and the Mother Goddess. It is the emasculation operation that links the hijras to two of the most powerful deities in Hindu religion, Shiva and Mother Goddess, which further sanctifies the hijras' ritual role as performers in marriages and births.

Reflection

In one of the versions of Hindu creation myth, Shiva carries out an extreme, but legitimate form of *tapasya*, that of self-castration. Brahma and Vishnu had asked Shiva to create the world. Shiva agreed and plunged into the water for a thousand years. Brahma and Vishnu began to worry, Vishnu told Brahma that he, Brahma, must create and gave him the female power to do so. So, Brahma created all the gods, goddesses and other beings. When Shiva emerged from water, and was about to begin the creation, he saw that the universe was already full. So, Shiva broke off his *linga* (phallus), saying that "there is no use of this linga," and threw it into the earth. His act results in the fertility cult of linga worship, which expresses the paradoxical theme of creative asceticism (p. 30).

Chapter-four 'Social Organisation and Economic Adaptation' is about how the hijra society adapt to and work together to meet day to day needs. The social structure consists of a *guru* and his *chelas* who has a marked territory where all functions are attended by them and hijras from other territories do not encroach. Adoption of a *chela* is a lengthy process in which a *chela* is observed for a few months and once the *guru* is satisfied the *chela* is formally adopted by calling in the *jamat* where the elder hijras from other areas are invited. Five rupee is placed by each elder and once the *chela* affirms the *guru's* name he is accepted as a *chela* and has to pay one hundred and fifty rupees to the *jamat* which is usually borne by the *guru*. A *chela* is also free to leave his *guru* and join someone else on the payment of a fine. Hijras move between hijra houses across India. They stay for short period of times, during which they work as one of the group and also share household chores.

Chapters five, six, seven and eight consist of the life histories of four Hijras-Kamaladevi (a prostitute), Meera (a *guru*), Sushila, who has a husband and Salima (an outcast). The four life histories are well chosen as they focus on different aspects of the life of a hijra. Most of the hijras go through these phases of life except the fourth one who is an outcast. The interviews revealed that all the hijras at some point of their lives had been involved in prostitution. They freely agree to the fact that it is sexual desire that had attracted them to this profession. It normally happened at an age when they were trying to come to terms with reality that though they have been born a man they are not sexually interested in women but desire to be in male company and this is when one of the older hijras had introduced them to prostitution. Some give up prostitution after marriage or when they acquire a steady boyfriend or husband, but Sushila continued to be a prostitute even after marriage as she believed that she had to be self sufficient if her husband

ever left her. These life histories are a revelation as in the initial stages of the fieldwork most of the hijras had reported that they were not involved in prostitution.

The second life history is of Meera (a *guru*) who was also a *dai ma* (one who conducted the emasculation surgery). All her *chelas* (students) staying with her had been operated and her's was the only known house in Bastipore well known for it. Meera had conducted eighteen surgeries and all were successful, though at the time of Nanda's fieldwork she had given up performing the surgeries. Meera stated that the Mata had blessed her in her dreams with the permission to perform surgeries and after a few years it was Mata again in her dreams who had asked her to discontinue and so she stopped. Meera was well known for her successful surgeries and people from Mumbai also came to her; she earned a lot of money during those days besides achieving fame. On retrospect Meera reveals that though she had earned money, it was also spent quickly; she could not hold on to the money earned through performing surgeries.

Sushila had been living the life of a hijra for almost eighteen years but she was yet to go through the emasculation ritual. She could not get the surgery done as she never had enough money to pay for the surgery, though she was saving for it and hoped to get it done soon. Sushila lived with her husband, but regularly visited the hijra house being run by Meera and actively participated in the day to day chores. She also was involved in prostitution. One of the amazing facts about Sushila is that she found a girl for her earlier husband and married him off, so that he could live a complete life with his family. Before marriage she adopted him as her son and so now she has a daughter-in-law and a grandson.

Salima's life history is a case of sorrow and grief. She was thrown out by her guru and made an outcast as it was alleged that she had a relation with the guru's husband. She could not prove her innocence nor could she arrange the amount (five hundred rupees) that she had to pay as fine for being taken back into the hijra fold and thus for several years, she lived the life of an outcast on the streets. She was not allowed to join the hijra parties nor beg for alms in the hijra territories, and as word spread she was shooed away from other territories also. Proudly she stated that even in those difficult times she did not resort to prostitution as she had a boyfriend and believed that he would come back for her. During one of her visits Nanda did meet her boyfriend who had returned and married her. Salima was leading a respectable life as a hijra once again, though then she had taken up prostitution to support her ailing husband. Salima died of a 'broken heart' as she took to heavy drinking when her husband left her to marry a 'real woman'.

3.3.4 Conclusion

The ethnography under discussion is a reflection on the lives of the hijras across India. The study of this community unearths many of the myths that have prevailed about the hijras. Almost all the hijras interviewed spoke of their voluntary entry to the community without being coerced into it. The life of the hijras is really challenging and tough as is revealed by these life histories. Many of them have joined it and stayed in it enduring the hardships. The *guru-chela* relation is one of the most revered and trustworthy relationships, though at times there has been cases of cheating also by either *guru* or *chela*. The emasculation ritual marks the complete transformation of a hijra and the acceptance into the hijra fold is absolute.

3.4 HOW DOES THE ETHNOGRAPHY ADVANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING

Nanda's work on the hijras of India has brought to light the cultural construct and acceptance of a community who are neither man nor woman. This work based on fieldwork is a major contribution to the world of gender studies, as it has put to rest the romanticism that was attributed to the lives of the hijras.

3.5 THEORETICAL PART OF WHICH THE ETHNOGRAPHY *The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City* IS AN EXAMPLE

In *The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City*, Gutmann bases his theoretical conceptions on two works: Antonio Gramsci's "hegemony" and "contradictory consciousness" (here defined as tensions resulting from both consciousness inherited uncritically from the past and one more experientially based), and Raymond Williams' "emergent cultural practice" (the idea that "culture" is not fixed but allows individuals to be cultural creators), which he, in turn, calls "cultural creativity."

3.6 DESCRIPTION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY

3.6.1 Intellectual Context

The term 'machismo' became popular during the mid-twentieth century in Latin American writings. Macho is regarded as equivalent to male chauvinism and a kind of patriarchal structure of gender relations that is basically seen in Latin American communities. The most common expression for a Mexican man is that he is 'macho'; and thus, it brings into the fold all Mexican men without giving emphasis on individual behaviour and actions. This work is a deconstruction of the general understanding of a cultural norm. Gutmann's work is a contribution to the theoretical and empirical construction of gender categories in their constantly transforming and transgressing expressions.

3.6.2 Fieldwork

Matthew C. Gutmann conducted his fieldwork in a *colonia* of Mexico city. This colony known as Santo Domingo is famous as it was occupied overnight by Mexican families who practically 'parachuted' into the rugged barren land of the Xitle volcanic remains. Fieldwork was conducted over a period of several months between 1992-93. Gutmann stayed in the *colonia* in a rented house along with his wife and daughter who was seven weeks old when he started fieldwork. Fieldwork was conducted using the standard anthropological tools of participant observation, interviews and documentation of everyday life of the residents of the *colonia*.

In one of the chapters Gutmann writes how he became a part of an afternoon bingeing session and one of the ladies rebuked him for leading the men on and he was responsible for all the showing off the Mexican men were involved during the drinking session. Gutmann became a part of the session because he wanted to feel like one of them (participant observation) and understand the drinking

pattern and habits of the Mexican men that is so popular. But days after the incident when he was giped by others he realised that the session was over exaggerated and the Mexican men were actually putting on a show for him getting drunk.

3.6.3 Analysis of Data

The introductory chapter of the ethnography, deals with the issues of gender conventions. The chapter unfolds an argument about Christmas gifts for children between two Mexican men. The underlying truth about the argument is not so much about the gifts but the meaning that are conveyed through the gifts. The question here is who is a good father? The conventional Mexican image of a good father is one who spends money on expensive gifts for his children on Christmas to show how much he cares. The author however in this argument realises that the convention about Mexican working class men being portrayed as ‘hard-drinking’, ‘philandering macho’ is a mere generalisation, mostly created by the works of anthropologists, which is erroneous and harmful (p.2). The portrayal of the ‘typical Mexican Man’ ignores the role of fatherhood in the lives of Mexican men. The introductory chapter thus, sets the mood of the ethnography that is, the deconstruction of the image of the gendered bodies.

‘Real Mexican machos are born to die’, the title of the first chapter of the ethnography, defines the key terms used in the study and reflects on the theoretical issues concerning the study and methodological framework that has been used.

The second chapter reflects on how the city of Santo Domingo came into existence. The city was built on the remains (igneous rocks) of the Xitle volcanic eruption which happened in 200-100 B.C. In 1971, around 20,000 to 30,000 people ‘parachuted’ on this land and occupied space, and over the years built their houses. The entire city was constructed by the Mexican population on their own without any help from the government. The basic amenities (like laying the water pipes, electricity and the constructing of the streets, etc.) were all done by the invaders themselves. It was part of community activity where each resident contributed in terms of labour for building the city. Santo Domingo is surrounded by posh colonies and one such colony is Colonia Romero de Terreros. The residents of this colony erected a ten foot wall making passage between the two communities impossible. Till date the wall remains as a guardian of class privilege, dividing the rich and the poor. The residents of Santo Domingo call it El Muro de Berlin- the Berlin Wall (p.44).

Chapter three explores the question of fathering in Mexico; how much a father is involved in the upbringing of his children? The general myth is that Mexican men are not involved in child care as it does not fall within the purview of machosim. Reflecting upon his own personal experience the author cites an instance when in a cocktail gathering in Mexico the author who was carrying his baby was mildly rebuked by a bank official, ‘We Mexican men do not carry babies’. The emphasis herein is on the gendered body (man and woman) distinguishing the activities that a man is to be involved in or not to be based on his/her gender.

In another instance, the photograph of a man holding a baby and going about the regular task in a musical store in downtown Mexico City created no ripples in Santo Domingo as it was considered normal and routine. The same picture when

showed to anthropologists and people outside Mexico was received with curious reactions like ‘that can’t be true’. The picture of the Mexican man taking care of the baby while at work was beyond what is perceived as a ‘typical’ Mexican man’s behaviour, as it did not fit the image of macho. Closer examination by the author resulted in views based on class differentiation. In Santo Domingo it was seen that men are more involved in child rearing as usually both parents are working and parents have to take turns in taking care of the children. Normally it is the father who teaches his son the traits of his job from a very young age and is also responsible for acquainting him to the ways of the world. Father carrying his son on his shoulder, while firmly holding his daughter’s hand in the weekly market is a regular feature. While, the Mexican men living on the other side of the wall who can afford day care prefer to hand over all responsibilities and thus, usually do not participate in the day to day activities of the children.

If the Mexican men are machos, what about the females? How do they influence the lives of their sons? This question is being taken up in the next chapter, ‘motherly presumptions and presumptuous mothers’. In Santo Domingo the author has seen that the mothers are very active. During the early years of the occupation of Santo Domingo when the men were out for jobs it was the women who looked after the children and also defended the City from outsiders during the day. In a gathering of the mothers the decision to build the street and pave it was accepted. Women most actively participated in all the events of the *colonia* thus, depicting the richness of the community life and the ways women participate in it. The life of women in the *colonia* is explored in the multiple spaces that a woman has from being a housewife to looking after her children and as time passed finally coming out of the houses to take up jobs so as to financially support the family and make ends meet. The mothers were the prime support mechanism for a child during the growing up years and this was reflected in the statements when men stated about the role that their mothers played in making them boys and eventually men. Gutmann reflected that “most [men] define their masculinity in relation to the women in their lives...[A]s often as not for these men, manliness is seen as whatever women are not” (p. 89).

‘Mens Sex’ tries to unearth the present meaning of machosim among Mexican men in the present era. “Mexican male identities used to be wrapped up in adultery, polygamy, and siring many children, especially male children” (p.112). It was at one point of time common for a Mexican man to have many children from different relationships and the male child was valued more. A man who had less than five to six kids was often made fun of and not considered as macho. With the passage of time the thoughts began to change and Gutmann’s interviews with the *colonia* of Santo Domingo reflected the changes. Today Mexican men are becoming aware of sexuality and to a great extent have also accepted that there is a possibility that there are multiple sexualities and it does change. Young girls are being initiated by parents mostly mothers at the time of menstruation about the ways of life and procreation. Fathers normally talk it off with their sons and mostly the young get educated in school from their respective female and male teachers. The male cultural standard of Mexican men to have a male child was also one of the core areas of the author’s discussion. One of the earlier presumptuous beliefs by Mexican men was that a male offspring is the irrefutable conformity of a man’s seed and his male potency. This was also not so rampantly found in Santo Domingo, one of the residents of the *colonia* had even done vasectomy so as not to have children.

'Diapers and dishes' is yet again a chapter that breaks the image of the stereotypical Mexican men. The author reports that the interviews with the older generation in the *colonia* revealed that there was division of labour between men and women. Household chores and looking after children were mainly the concerns of the womenfolk whereas the men were the breadearners. The younger generation on the other hand spoke about equally sharing the household chores, cooking though was still considered to be the women's forte. The involvement of the menfolk in the household activities like washing dishes, changing diapers, grocery shopping, etc, was attributed to *por necesidad* (or necessity) due to women taking up jobs to support the families. Children from a very young age were encouraged to perform tasks on their own. The author once observed a father give confidence to his five year old son to walk up to the *tortilleria* (a shop where tortilla — a type of thin flatbread made from finely ground wheat flour) is sold on his own. When the little boy returned with the tortillas wrapped up in a cloth, the father was seen beaming with pride at his son's accomplishment, a task which for a long time was considered to be a woman's job. "Picking up the tortillas is today less and less associated with women; thus a symbolically charged activity has become less gendered" (p. 151).

'Degendering Alcohol' and 'Fear and Loathing in Male Violence' are two chapters that look into social issues- abuse of alcohol and domestic violence. 'Mexican men are drunkards' is a commonly used phrase and it is considered normal for a Mexican man to drink. But the question here is. Is the generalisation of Mexican men as drunkards correct? Does it hold true for every Mexican man? Gutmann's work reflects that all Mexican men like to drink but most try to control their drinks. It is not as if every man goes bingeing. Men in Santo Domingo are usually seen drinking in their own age groups outside one of their friends' house or with family at home, preference for drinking alone is rare. This refutes the general conception that all Mexican men visit the *La Cantina* (all men bar) where the custom still prevails of only having washroom for men. It is normal for a grown-up man to take upto three pints of beers in a day, while alcohol is consumed on weekends and special occasion. Interviews revealed that drinking by women is a recent trend and for not many years ago women did not drink in the company of men. Alcohol abuse in some of the households was also seen though not always related to wife beating. Some men who were not heavy drinkers were also wife beaters though on the other hand some men who were habitual drinkers did not engage in wife beating. A few men who otherwise were impulsive were reported to be quite mellow after a few drinks. Use of alcohol thus, depended on the individuals and was not a national character. Gutmann also reported tolerance of teenagers drinking and at times going overboard by the elders of Santo Domingo. The residents of Santo Domingo view drinking and alcohol abuse by teenager's as part of growing up, a phase that many young men go through but that passes and they become responsible adults. Rebuking the teenagers for alcohol abuse and public drinking was not seen in the *colonia* as every youth was considered to be a member of the community; and each individual was going through adolescence.

Domestic violence had its own history too. Many of the young men shared that they had gone through the same in life at the hands of mothers and thus, some considered it a part of cultural upbringing. While many are also aware that it is not normal and thus, freely join the *Centro de Atencion a la Violencia Intrafamiliar* (CAVI) for counselling. There are many reasons for domestic violence and the

issues of power and control loom large. As said earlier the issue of cultural upbringing and a history of abuse for some are also reflected as a major cause for domestic violence. Thus, in this chapter Matthew tried to look beyond the theories of alcohol abuse, faulty child-rearing patterns, urbanisation, male testosterone levels, and primordially brutish mores (a.k.a. machismo) (p.199).

The chapter on 'Machismo' is a discussion of the meaning of the term and how the Mexicans relate to it. Macho or machismo is used normally for a man who shows aggressiveness and is equivalent to male chauvinism in terms of literature. While in Santo Domingo a man who 'has kids all over' (children born out of wedlock) is normally referred to as macho. The older generation on the other hand liked to distinguish between two types of man-machos and *mandilones* (meaning female dominated man), herein the term macho refers to a man who is able to financially support his family and is honourable. The younger generation on the other hand is happy to be known as a 'man' a third category neither a macho nor a *mandilone*. This category largely comprises of the working class men of Santo Domingo, where both husband and wife has have to take up paid jobs to manage the ever increasing cost of living. As the man today has to help in household chores and most claim not to be a wife beater (wife beating is considered as an attribute of machos) Mexican men consider such terms as pejorative and not worthy of emulation (p.222).

3.6.4 Conclusion

Mexican men as machos as being unfurled in this ethnography shows that it is in reality much ado about nothing. The gendered body/description of a Mexican man as a macho is created by the academia at large. In reality things have changed and Mexican men as studied in the *colonia* of Santo Domingo shows that they are men who are involved in their family lives and shares as much household chores as any American. Being macho is not a national character as has been depicted in many academic writings. The Mexican men act and behave like any other men, they too get drunk or rise to a bet when provoked but this does not make every Mexican a drunkard or a wife beater. Though such cases have been reported from the *colonia*, this does mean that everyone has to be tarnished with the same brush of being a macho. In the *colonia* even the term macho is used in various other connotations other than the ones reported by academicians.

3.7 HOW DOES THE ETHNOGRAPHY ADVANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING

The ethnography is a study which tries to undo the perceived gender identities and unfurl the misconception of attributing certain behaviour as national character. Every Mexican men is considered to be a macho who is rugged and has a drinking problem. This ethnography helps us to understand the meaning of mascho as perceived and understood by the Mexican men and what they consider as being mascho. The anthropological study has infact helped to undo the myth of a Mexican man and his social construction of gendered behaviour. The study deconstructed the unitary meaning of Mexican masculinity into multiple Mexican masculinities.

3.8 SUMMARY

One of the important contributions of anthropology is to show that the reality is far different from the beliefs that may be collectively held. Both the ethnographies discussed in this Unit substantiate this assertion. The first ethnography on hijra is one of the first anthropological works to understand the construction of the third gender, and its interactions with the other two genders. The second ethnography shows that the popular image of men as 'macho' in Mexico is very different from the place of men in families and societies.

References

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Nanda, Serena. 1998. *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India*. UK/US: Wadsworth Publishing.

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Sample Questions

- 1) Discuss the life of hijra as understood from the ethnography *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India*
- 2) The term 'macho' is used to describe Mexican men. Discuss 'macho' from your understanding of the ethnography, *The Meaning of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City*.
- 3) Analyse the role of hijras' in ritual ceremonies.