

# Communication as an Obstacle for Education: An Analysis on Participation of Hijras in Mainstream Education System of Bangladesh

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## Abstract

Hijra is a term given to the intersex, hermaphrodite and, transgender people who are part of the Hijra community in Bangladesh. In 2013 Bangladesh government gave the official recognition of Hijras as a third gender community. But the society still thing Hijras are aliens they are not supposed to live in society and have a life. Though Hijras have official recognition of their sexual identity they are far away to get social recognition. Education is a basic need for every single person in the world, and education is the best medium of communication to construct the social identity of a person. According to Bangladesh, education policy education is for all. Hijras are also included in the term 'all'. Though they have all the right of being a citizen of the people republic of Bangladesh, we never seen a Hijra in school, college, or any other educational institution. Using a qualitative analysis, this study will focus on why Hijras are not participating in the mainstream education system of Bangladesh though they have official recognition as a third gender community. This paper will also focus on the role of society in making this decision in the education system. This research paper utilizes the co-cultural theory by Mark Orbe and Muted group theory by Ardener. This study use these theories to understand how social influence is responsible for a minority community to stay out of the mainstream education system. The theories used also helped with explaining the reason how sexual Identity became the main obstacle in the path of education.

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*Index terms*— hijra, participation, education, communication.

## 1 Introduction

an, women, and Hijras are humans of the same society, but society has created the gender identity of men and women differently. Till now, society has not given the gender recognition of Hijra people in Bangladesh, though they have an official identity as a third gender according to the law of Bangladesh. When we dig deep to understand this problem, we have found that our education system is the biggest catalyst to construct the gender identity of a human being.

Education is a basic human right for every human being but unfortunately, we don't see third gender people in school though they have all the constitutional right to study into school as their preferred gender or third gender. Create equal opportunities of education for all including any gender identity to establish a society free of discrimination is one aim and objectives of the education policy of Bangladesh.

## 2 II.

## 3 Research Questions

This research will try to answer the following questions-1. What is the rate of participation of Hijra people in mainstream education and how educated are they? 2. What are the obstacles they face if they take part in a

41 mainstream education system? 3. Is there any alternative education program available for Hijra people? How  
42 many of them want to study farther?

43 a) Research Gap Some dissociated researches on gender sensitivity found in textbooks or in the curriculum of  
44 mainstream education in Bangladesh. But No one has done yet no continuous research on this topic. Researchers  
45 have discussed only two genders in all these researches. None of them worked on the third gender. They also  
46 limited those researches into content analysis only. No research on Hijra population's participation in mainstream  
47 education in Bangladesh has done before.

48 This study will serve as a primary source of information to future researchers. The recognition of Hijra  
49 people as a human largely depends on the awareness of mass people. My research is crucially necessary to  
50 increase awareness among people, to ensure human rights of Hijra people and to make the right guidelines for  
51 this community.

### 52 4 b) Research limitations

53 There some problems and limitations of this research.

54 1. Interviewing Hijra people was the most challenging task of this research. Many of them did not answer all  
55 my questions properly, which may affect the result and this a limitation of my research. 2. Hijra children are  
56 often remain hidden in our society.

57 For this reason, I could interview none of them. Those children could have done significant contribution in  
58 this study with information. So this was another limitation.

59 3. Hijras have complained that the information they provide sold by NGOs to earn money. They keep this in  
60 their mind while answering the questions, which increases the chance of getting false or misleading information.

## 61 5 III.

## 62 6 Literature Review

63 In the research article titled 'Education of Transgenders in India: Status and Challenges', Dr. Rajkumar (2016)  
64 shows that despite the laws in the constitution of India, the other sex (transgender) continues to stigmatize.  
65 Transgender people faced discrimination and harassment at family, school and community force them to move to  
66 the other places. The nature of the harassment includes verbal, physical and sexual abuse which has a serious  
67 impact on the mental health. In a democratic country like India, Transgender has no access to the social and  
68 political rights. They are not the part of any welfare scheme. So the researcher suggested for an immense need  
69 to intervene at individual, community and policy level to safeguard the rights of transgender.

70 Md. Ikramul Islam (2016) in, his research 'Right To Education of The Third Gender of Bangladesh: An  
71 overview shows that -The eunuchs who also known as the third gender is far and beyond the realm of education  
72 in Bangladesh. We know the term third gender uses as Hijra in Bangladesh. They have always remained a  
73 fundamental part of the Bangladeshi society from ancient time. But unfortunately their present state of exi  
74 stence is reduced to wretched poverty, illiteracy, hatred and mockery. The Hijras are still living in the shadow of  
75 rejection from every basic right to equality and education. Our education system is still incompatible for eunuch  
76 people of our c ountry. In most of the cases they become the topic for exploration and research for their strange  
77 appearances. The government has only given them the right to vote, but they face a desolate future with no  
78 access to education. This article describes the steps the authority might take, which for their betterment and to  
79 ensure their right to education. To ensure the implementation of human rights and to use the internal capacities  
80 of the hijras of our country, we should go forward effectively as early as achievable.

81 The right to education for the eunuch people is the human rights issue. In Europe, Article 2 of the primary  
82 Convention of 20 Wal k 1952 to the European Tradition on Human Rights states that the proper to education  
83 is recognized as a human right and is caught on to introduce a privilege to education. Concurring to the  
84 International Pledge on Financial, Social and Social Rights, the proper to education incorporates the proper  
85 to free, obligatory primary education for all, a commitment to create secondary education reachable to all in  
86 specific by the illuminated presentation of free secondary education, and an obligation to create legitimate to  
87 get justiciable access to higher education in specific by the reformist introduction of free higher education. The  
88 right to education moreover incorp orates an obligation to supply essential instruction for people who have not  
89 completed primary education (<http://emmashopebook.com>).

90 "Everyone has the right to education", says Article 26(1) of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.  
91 Declaration of the Rights of the Child proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in 1959 states, 'they entitle  
92 the child to receive education, which shall be free and compulsory, at least in the elementary stages.' From the  
93 Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1924 to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the  
94 Child of 1989, all international declarations and covenants on rights of the child acknowledge children's right to  
95 education (Emma, 1996). It echoes the same in the Dakar Forum on Education for All (EFA) and Millennium  
96 Development Goals in 2000. Bangladesh has been trying unremittingly to uphold the cause of education for  
97 all since its emergence as an independent country. Article 17 of the Constitution of Bangladesh stipulates that  
98 primary education shall be the delicacy of the State. To bear this responsibility, primary education in Bangladesh  
99 underwent a great deal of changes and development during the last few years. Bangladesh is a signatory to the  
100 world declaration on education for all held at Jomtien, Thailand in March 1990. Bangladesh is also a signatory

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101 to the summit of 9 high populous countries held in Delhi . So, as a human being eunuch, people can claim  
102 educational right. But practically they are the ignored class of people.

103 The right to education is crucial to allow eunuch persons to develop to the full of them soon they will include  
104 the community. States must guarantee an effective exercise of their right to education in mainstream schools,  
105 and/or in special schools only if inclusion in mainstream schools is not possible and if they agree this decision with  
106 the parents. This also means that apart from teaching academic skills, education of eunuch people must include  
107 grounding for an independent life, adaptive behaviors and social skills. Adult education should provide the utmost  
108 range of opportunities and include not only special education or participation in mainstream adult educational  
109 programs but also training in basic skills, self-management, living skills, at all ages. Lunch discrimination gratis  
110 educational system to ensure basic rights initiatives to introduce formal, informal and technical educations &  
111 create a quota system to enroll hijra in educational institutes and for higher studies in all Universities (Mckeown,  
112 1988).

113 In Bangladesh, the spirit of the Constitution is to make certain the fortification of fundamental rights of every  
114 citizen. Article 27 of the Constitution provides that all citizens are equal before law and may equal State shall  
115 not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste or sex (Kelly, 2009). So, as a citizen  
116 eunuch, people may definitely get educational right like others. From statistics, there are at least 10,000 hijras  
117 in Bangladesh and they are being denied their rights in various sectors including education because of being a  
118 marginal group which is inconsistency with the constitution IV.

## 119 7 Theoretical Framework & Methodology

120 This study uses Co-cultural Communication Theory to examine the experiences of Hijra people in the mainstream  
121 education system of Bangladesh. Cocultural theory serves as an analytical framework that looks at culture as an  
122 uneven site of communicative relations. One of its central assumptions is that it structures societies in hierarchical  
123 terms. This creates a dominant position for certain cultural groups while they marginalize other groups (Rubén,  
124 2008). In this research, the researcher focus on how the Hijra or third gender people traditionally marginalized  
125 in our mainstream education system. And with the help of the Muted group theory, the research provides insight  
126 into the dynamics of the perceptions and experiences of Hijras who sit in silence in the education system of  
127 Bangladesh. According to Social anthropologists, Ardener and Ardener advanced the notion of muted group  
128 theory based on the observation that there is a dominant group in society and there are groups silenced by the  
129 dominant group (Mears et al., 2004). This study draws several phenomenological inquiries that inductively  
130 gathered from the in-depth interview from hijra people of Bangladesh.

131 V.

## 132 8 Data Analysis and Discussion of Interview

133 We have analyzed the data in the light of purpose and question of this research, theoretical framework and selected  
134 research method . Co-cultural communication theory and muted group theory have been used to analyze the in-  
135 depth interview of Hijras to understand their participation in mainstream education system. We have presented  
136 overall result as the answers to research questions.

137 Here, to analyze the data found from the indepth interviews of 9 people from Hijra community researcher have  
138 used the theoretical framework of Cocultural communication theory and muted group theory. Researcher has  
139 measured the participation of Hijra people in mainstream education system using some indicators. Those are -

### 140 9 a) Sexual identity is the prime obstacle

141 Sexual identity is the largest obstacle for Hijra people to take part in mainstream education. Society have forced  
142 many Hijras to drop out from schools just because they are "Hijra", as they do not behave like proper "man"  
143 or "woman."

144 Hijra Anonna (39) said, 'My sexual identity was the main problem to get the education. My male classmates  
145 have done their masters and doing a good job; female classmates are doing great work or living in abroad. But  
146 I'm the only ill-fated Hijra who didn't finish education or to reach my desired goal.'

147 A person is being deprived of basic rights like education just for his/her sexual identity. From teachers to  
148 students, everyone used to misbehave with the Hijra students in schools. Such as nobody wanted to sit beside a  
149 Hijra student, verbal bullying and so on. We can define this treatment using muted group theory, as the culture  
150 of definitive male-female is the dominant one in our society and they will always try to oppress the culture of  
151 sexual minorities.

152 Another Hijra, who has received no education at all, HijraMunni (23) said, "I could not study because I am  
153 Hijra. They wouldn't let me sit in class. I've always had the confusion of whom to sit with, boys or girls? If I sit  
154 beside boys, they would say that I was a girl. If I sit beside a girl, they would say I was a Hijra. They used to  
155 taunt me a lot. So much that I had to quit school in just a few days."

156 Hijra Kajol (28) was saying, 'I couldn't go to school because I was Hijra. Classmates used to misbehave.  
157 Therefore, I couldn't study. ?? According to Hijra Choto (23), "I am Hijra. Both boys and girls used to tease  
158 me if I sit beside them. Where would I sit then? Even my teacher used to tease me saying why am I like this.

## 11 C) HIJRA PEOPLE HAVE NO ALTERNATIVE OPTION TO TAKE EDUCATION

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159 But he never understood I differed from others. And this continued for a while, and then I left school. I cannot  
160 study in a place where everyone teases me.”

161 Hijra people are being mistreated for their sexual identity for a long time now. Everyone in school used to  
162 avoid them. Like other boys and girls, education is a basic right for Hijra people. But the dominant men and  
163 women of the society is keeping them away for their basic rights.

164 Hijra Kotha (27) said, 'I used to get ignored by my classmates. Some would say they wouldn't sit beside a  
165 girlish boy like me. I didn't understand what they meant properly, but I felt bad. And after some time, I had  
166 to leave school because of this.' Hijra Khushi (26) was saying, 'I was too poor to study, still used to go to a  
167 government school. I used to always mix up with girls and went to school with them, sit beside them. Boys used  
168 to disturb me by asking why I am always with girls or behave girly. They called me half ladies. At some point,  
169 I couldn't bare anymore and left school. ?? To summarize all these statements, sexual and social identities and  
170 their behaviors were the biggest problem for Hijra people to take part in mainstream education system. We can  
171 define these using Cocultural communication theory as the dominant gender culture of our society keep s Hijra  
172 people away from mainstream education. Also, using the muted group theory, we can say that, dominant gender  
173 of our society, precisely men are making an environment for Hijra people to leave mainstream education system  
174 and eventually leave schools.

### 175 10 b) Society Harassed Hijra People

176 Teacher and classmates often harassHijra student in the School. Sometimes thi s extends to sexual harassment.  
177 Society is very much concern about eve teasing with girls, for Hijra people it is very common. Some terrible  
178 stories unfold upon asking for the harassing experience Hijra people faced in schools.

179 Hijra Anonna (39), working in Bondhu Social Welfare Society, said, 'A Hijra person doesn't understand what  
180 she is at the young age. Everyone from teacher to classmates makes her understand that she is a sexual minority,  
181 she doesn't belong to school, she belongs to street, what she will study in sc hool ? Society won't give you  
182 validation. Ultimately, you got to be in the streets, begging for money. So there's no point of studying. Entire  
183 society uses the word Hijra as a slang .'

184 Sexual harassment is a lifel ong scar for anyone. Women give up workplace, family or even society being the  
185 victims of sexual harassment . Hijra students cannot tell anyone about their sexual harassment since society  
186 consider them as 'male' in our society. Dominant gender group of society oppresses sexual minorities like that to  
187 keep them away from mainstream society.

188 Hijra Kajol (28) was saying her terrifying experiences, 'I was in class six that time. One day some 4-5 classmates  
189 got me in the toilet and wanted to see exactly what I am. They harassed me sexually that day. I was in a terrible  
190 place but couldn't tell anybody. Who would take seri ously that a boy got harassed in school?'

191 Verbal abuse was also a c ommon phenomenon alongside sexual harassment. They get insulted every day.  
192 Since the word 'Hijra' itself i s a slang in our society, it is no big deal shaming Hijra people for their sexual  
193 orientation. They get shamed for not behaving properly like a 'man' or 'woman', which we can c onsider as the  
194 'standard' in our male d ominant society.

195 Hijra Joya (24) was saying, 'I used to study in a boys' school. There was no problem until I was in class  
196 five. Problems started when my women-like features became visible. It wasn't sexual harassment, but more like  
197 stigmatizing me for my behaviors. They used to call me bitter names like half-ladies, girly boy, etc. I felt so  
198 bad and asked myself if I really am different from them. What if I belong to a different society?' Another Hijra  
199 person, Hijra Bithi (18) said, 'They used to tease me with all the dirty words. Even my teacher used to harass  
200 me i f I did not submit my homework. He would say things like dancing in front of the class or to sing a song .  
201 They used to make fun of me, and I couldn't take it easy.”

202 Our male dominant society was not happy just abusing them verbally or physically. Showing physical force  
203 is the ultimate way to dominate over someone. And they did exactly that. Male students in schools beat those  
204 Hijra students.

205 Hijra Chot o (23) was saying, 'Boys used to throw stones at me. They wouldn't take me to play cricket with  
206 them. They didn't let me sit with them to have tiff in saying I am Hijra, I cannot sit with them. Both girls and  
207 boys treated me the same way. My teacher used to beat me for behaving like girls.' From all this discussion above  
208 Hijra people face a tremendous amount of harassment to take part in mainstream education system, such as,  
209 stigmatizing, teasing, sexual harassment. In the light of muted group theory, we can say that dominant gender  
210 group creates an environment of harassment for the weak and minor gender group so they steer away from social  
211 institutions like school and thus the dominance continues.

### 212 11 c) Hijra people have no alternative option to take education

213 It should be natural to have an alternative education system for Hijra people since they cannot do so in mainstream  
214 system. But unfortunately there is not any such institution. For instance, there are specialized schools for special  
215 needs children, but none for Hijra children. Also, there is no adult education system for Hijra people either.

216 Hijra Kotha (40) was saying, 'There is no school for Hijra people. Though government has said they will give  
217 some money to Hijra children for education expenses. That means government will provide special scholarship  
218 to Hijra children so they can continue their study. But till now there is no attempt to open a specialized school

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219 for them. Neither from government nor from NGOs.' Hijra Khushi (26) said, 'I've never seen such thing in my  
220 entire life. I've been active in this community for like 10-12 years but seen nothing like that. I cannot even rent  
221 a house and open a school s for us. ?? Hijra Munni (23) said, 'There is no separate school for Hijra children.  
222 No government or NGO haven't been able to provide us such a facility.' Hijra Joya (24) was saying, 'There is no  
223 such school for Hijra children to exist in our country. There are special school s for transgender people in foreign  
224 countries. They build those schools for them.'

225 There are no alternative schools for Hijra children and for adults. Adult education program is running on  
226 many parts of our country, but none for Hijra people. Different NGOs in Bangladesh provide them different  
227 facilities but not adult education.

228 Upon asking on the availability of an adult education program for Hijra people, HijraAnonna (39) was saying  
229 , 'Some NGOs provide HIV awareness program, sex education, mental and physical health programs but no  
230 formal education program for us. Government has taken no steps either. In Bangladesh there's no scope for  
231 adult education for Hijra people.' Hijra Kajol (28) was saying, 'There's no way I can take an education at this  
232 age. I couldn't study when I was a child, neither I have any scope now. There is no such school for Hijra people  
233 of my age.'

234 From the discussion above we can see there is no alternative education program available for Hijra people.  
235 They cannot study in schools neither in young age nor there is any school for them after being an adult. We  
236 can define this using muted group theory as a dominant gender group like men are making them stay out of  
237 school and the communication among these powerless group of people are being controlled and behaviors are  
238 being imposed on them by the dominant group.

## 239 **12 d) Less educational qualification yet eager to be literate**

240 During the literature review for this research we have seen that rate of literacy is very low among Hijra people.  
241 We have taken an in-depth interview of nine Hijra persons for thi s study and only two (Ananna and Kotha)  
242 of them have passed Higher Secondary (HSC). Rest of them could not continue to study more than 8 th grade.  
243 Munni did not receive any education at all. She cannot even write her name. We cannot make literacy percentage  
244 among Hijra people since researcher did not do any survey here. But from the data of interviews, we can say  
245 that the percentage is very low. One more notable point is, despite the low literacy rate Hijra people Hijra's are  
246 eager to be literate.

247 Hijra Choto (23) was saying, 'I've studied till class eight and wanted to go farther. I will study again if I  
248 have given a chance.' Hijra Nodi (19) saying, 'I studied till class seven and wanted to do more because of all the  
249 mocking from boys. I left that place cause nobody liked me there. They forced me to leave.' Those who have  
250 passed HSC are in a better place than others. They don't have to beg on streets or be sex workers. But they  
251 wanted to study more. Pressures from society and lack of family support was the main culprit for them to be in  
252 darkness. But they believe that they have the p otential to be a national asset by educating themselves i f the  
253 society gave them a chance.

254 Hijra Anonna (39) was saying, 'I have passed my HSC. But I, Anonna, believe that I am not literate at all. I  
255 didn't get any facilities to study. But now if I had time to study in a university I hope I would do good. There  
256 are so many like me who have passed secondary or higher secondary but couldn't go farther. If government could  
257 ensure a warming environment for us to study, I'm sure there wouldn't be so much of us uneducated. We d on't  
258 want to be the burden of society, rather we want to be an asset. We have that ability and courage. Just give us a  
259 chance to grow up.' Hijra Kotha (40) was saying, 'I've studied till HSC by my willpower and c ourage. I wanted  
260 to be a doctor. But family society; nobody helped me. My willpower wasn't enough, and I had to drop out .  
261 Then I got separated from my family. I used to learn to dance and was a listed dancer in Shilpokola Academy. I  
262 got involved with those cultural activities and eventually gave up studying. ?? We can define these statements  
263 using Cocultural communication theory and muted group theory as the dominant class of our society negatively  
264 influences this powerless community of people of their mind setup of taking education. These results huge drop  
265 out rate against their will. Thus the literacy rate stays low. In short, uneven distribution of resources and unfair  
266 implementation of force from the d ominant class is the main reason of a low percentage of literacy among Hijra  
267 people.

## 268 **13 e) Hijra people have their own idea of an education system**

269 As answers to the question of how Hijra can be a part of our mainstream education system, they have given some  
270 different ideas. All of them believes a change of perspective in society and government efforts like: specialized  
271 school, adding lessons about Hijra people in textbook among others will help them take part in mainstream  
272 education system.

273 Hijra Kajol (28) said, 'If they gave us a separate school and colleges we could have continue studying even after  
274 leaving our families, as we have something to hold on to.' Hijra Munni (23) said the same, 'It will be a helpful  
275 if we get a specialized school. We could study well then.' Hijra people understand that there is no alternative of  
276 education to improve their lives. At the same time they hope for help from both government and mass people.  
277 Government has to take efforts and people in our society need to change their perception to Hijra persons. Hijra  
278 people gave some ideas to implement these.

279 Hijra activists Anonna (39) was saying, 'Government has no magic wand that can change the situation  
280 overnight. First, we need to work on minimizing the distance between us and other people through heavy  
281 campaigning. We need to aware people in every sector of the government system. Along with that, to ease to life  
282 of next generation we can add a chapter in the primary education discussing the life and culture of Hijra people.  
283 If we can educate mass people from the elementary level, we will change the situation in a good way in next 10-20  
284 years.' Hijra Khushi (26) was saying, 'To improve the lifestyle of newborn Hijra children we need to convince our  
285 civil society to look at them as a general human being. Ensuring them a proper education. Government gave  
286 us some rights, but we cannot use them. Only giving rights aren't enough, they get to implement those.' Hijra  
287 Kotha (40) said, 'Teachers in school should know about the rights given by the government for Hijra people,  
288 so that those who need the right can claim. There should be an option to register Hijra children as a separate  
289 gender from male or female in the school admission form. That will minimize the hassle for the guardians of  
290 Hijra children.'

291 If we analyze these statements with Co-cultural communication theory and muted group theory, we can say  
292 that dominant gender class has gagged the voice of Hijra people by forcefully implementing a communication  
293 system that even eventually makes them leave mainstream society. But now, if these dominant gender class  
294 helps the Hijra community then they will be no more a muted group. Rather, they have the potential to become  
295 an important part of the society.

## 296 14 VI. Recommendations to Associate Hijra People with Main- 297 stream Education System

298 Many people from Hijra community have given their different ideas on how we can associate them into the  
299 mainstream education system. Here's a list of recommendations for associating Hijra Population into mainstream  
300 education.

301 1. We need to change our perception towards Hijra people. We have to remember, Hijra people are human  
302 being like ourselves. Their sexual identity differs from men and women. We should acknowledge that and protect  
303 them from the social harassment. 2. We need specialized schools for Hijra children and adults. We need to  
304 implement The Hijra development Act to ensure their safety and development. 3. We can include a chapter or a  
305 story of Hijraculture in primary level textbooks so that all children can know about these people. That will help  
306 to change the perception towards Hijra people positively. 4. There should be an option to register third gender  
307 in any educational institution's admission form, so that teachers will have a clear idea about students sexual  
308 orientation. 5. Government should launch a campaign and other social events to minimize the distance among  
309 Hijra people and mass population. 6. The government can take steps to educate Hijra children about sensitive  
310 topics like eve teasing, sexual harassment, etc. So they can claim legal help in need. 7. Hijra rights must not  
311 stay limited into pen and paper, rather government has to take efforts to implement them.

312 VII.

## 313 15 Conclusion

314 The research found that Hijra people have next to no participation in mainstream education in Bangladesh.  
315 They cannot continue to study much longer because of their sexual orientation. And through this the society  
316 marginalized them and make them deprived from basic right like education just because they are Hijra (third  
317 gender). Teachers, students and every other citizen of society believe that schools are not for Hijra people and this  
318 dominance ideology of the society eventually makes Hijra community invisible. Without the right to education  
319 it will be difficult for them to survive with respect, dignity and generous life. As a result, they leave schools;  
320 they leave society and start living on their own. But the situation is changing slowly. Now the people of the  
321 third gender should be positively welcome in the society, media is trying to create their presence in our society;  
322 and the government, the civil society and the Non-Governmental Organizations should stand by them through  
323 ensuring their rights to education. And the assurance of right to education to the Hijras (third gender) may  
324 support and preserve the image of liberal Bangladesh.

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