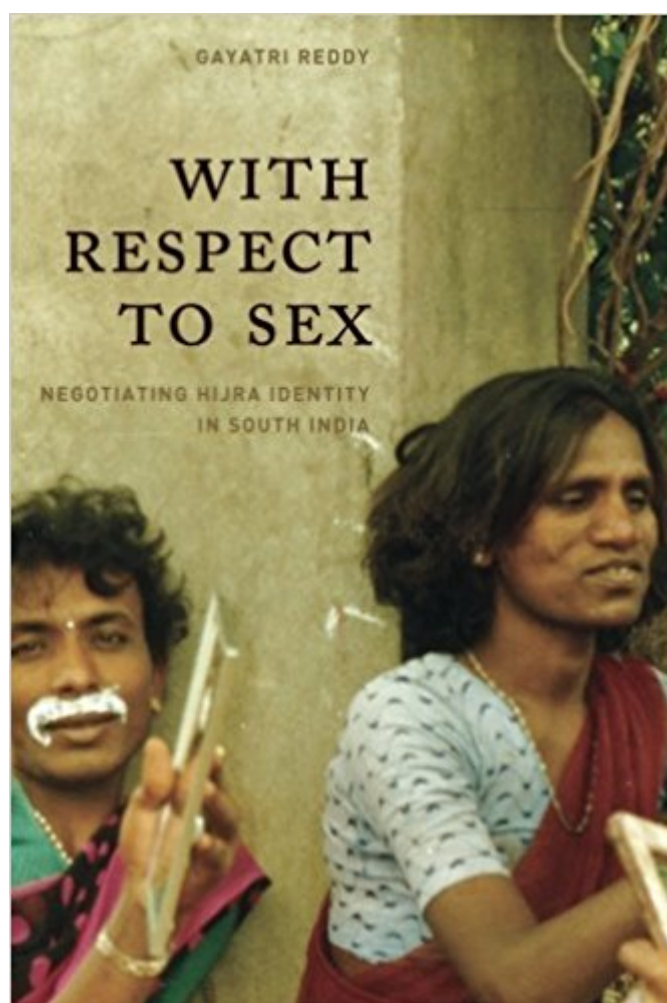


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# With Respect To Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity In South India (Worlds Of Desire: The Chicago Series On Sexuality, Gender, And Culture)



## Synopsis

*With Respect to Sex* is an intimate ethnography that offers a provocative account of sexual and social difference in India. The subjects of this study are hijras or the "third sex" of India, individuals who occupy a unique, liminal space between male and female, sacred and profane. Hijras are men who sacrifice their genitalia to a goddess in return for the power to confer fertility on newlyweds and newborn children, a ritual role they are respected for, at the same time as they are stigmatized for their ambiguous sexuality. By focusing on the hijra community, Reddy sheds new light on Indian society and the intricate negotiations of identity across various domains of everyday life. Further, by reframing hijra identity through the local economy of respect, this ethnography highlights the complex relationships between local and global, sexual and moral, economies. This book will be regarded as the definitive work on hijras, one that will be of enormous interest to anthropologists, students of South Asian culture, and specialists in gender, queer, and sexuality studies.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"This book is an important and significant one. Not only does it add to the field of academic accounts of the hijira and anthropology, but it contributes to gender and sexuality studies." (Shane Gannon *Journal of the History of Sexuality*) --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

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social difference in India. The subjects of this study are hijras or the "third sex" of India, individuals who occupy a unique, liminal space between male and female, sacred and profane. Hijras are men who sacrifice their genitalia to a goddess in return for the power to confer fertility on newlyweds and newborn children, a ritual role they are respected for, at the same time as they are stigmatized for their ambiguous sexuality. By focusing on the hijra community, Reddy sheds new light on Indian society and the intricate negotiations of identity across various domains of everyday life. Further, by reframing hijra identity through the local economy of respect, this ethnography highlights the complex relationships between local and global, sexual and moral, economies. This book will be regarded as the definitive work on hijras, one that will be of enormous interest to anthropologists, students of South Asian culture, and specialists in gender, queer, and sexuality studies.

I teach a class on Gender and Religion, and for several years I've had a unit on hijras, and the book I've used in Serena Nanda's *Neither Man Nor Woman*. Now, I'm considering switching to this book. *Neither Man Nor Woman* presents hijras as an example of a third gender, and it includes potted biographies of several hijras. It is very accessible: a good introductory book. Gayatri Reddy is determined to contribute something new to the discussion of hijras. Consequently, there's a lot of discussion about theories of gender, some of which might be heavy going for students. Those sections are really aimed at fellow anthropologists and theorists. Reddy does not describe the ceremony of castration in great detail because that has already been done by Serena Nanda. However, her determination to present hijras as more than just an example of a third gender does have its benefits. Not only are hijras neither men nor women, they are both Muslims and Hindus. They are Hindus in so far as they worship a Hindu Goddess, Bedhraj Mata (or Bahuchara Mata), but they frequently make the claim that "We are all Muslims", seeing castration as an extreme form of circumcision, a mark of Muslim identity. Reddy devotes more attention to this apparent paradox than Nanda does. Since my class is specifically about Gender and Religion, not just Gender Theory, this might be a more useful book. I cannot agree with the publisher that this is the definitive book on hijras, and I think that Serena Nanda's book is still the best introductory text. But it is still a useful addition to the literature.

I had to read this for class. It was a mostly painful experience of thinking abstractly about the "third gender". As far as gender studies go, which I have very little interest on the academic level, I can imagine worse books. This book at least has narrative portions. Excluding chapter 1 it is actually readable. the idea of respect or "izzat" as being a primary consideration animating life for the Hijra is

interesting. But as far as the foundations of Reddy's ideas, it's mostly the post modern babble students today are used to.... le gender is an essentially unknowable matter of performance and desire rather than a unchangeable reality of the self.

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