chakka

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Abstract:

Warning: this is a derogatory word for 'third gender' in India

छक्का (chakka)

छह का समूह, क्रिकेट में बल्लेबाज़ द्वारा गेंद को इस तरह मारना कि गेंद ज़मीन का स्पर्श किए बिना सीधे सीमा रेखा के बाहर चली जाए, हिजड़ा ; नपुंसक (अपमानजनक एवं वर्जित प्रयोग)।

क्रिकेट के खेल में छक्का शब्द किसी बल्लेबाज़ द्वारा ऐसा शॉट लगाने के लिए किया जाता है, जब गेंद ज़मीन को छुए बिना सीधा सीमा रेखा के पार चली जाती है। यह बड़े हर्षोल्लास का विषय होता है और दर्शक बड़े उत्साह से इसका जश्न मनाते हैं।

लूडो और सांप सीडी जैसे खेलों में, छह के समूह को भी छक्का कहा जाता है।

इसके विपरीत, छक्का हिज्रे के लिए प्रयोग में लाये जाने वाला कन्नड़ भाषा का शब्द है (ಚಕ್ಕು), जिसका प्रयोग अब अपमानजनक समझा जाता है और वर्जित है। ये परिवर्तन समय के साथ आए सामाजिक और क़ानूनी कारणों से आया है ।

किसी भी व्यक्ति में दोनों लिंगों के लक्षण अभियक्त होने से उस को छक्का कहा जाता था और ये एक तीसरा लिंग है। इसका दुरोप्योग ऐसे पुरुषों के लिए लिए किया जाता था जो पुरषत्व में कम हों या कोई बाँझ महिला को नीचे दिखाने के लिए या मज़ाक उड़ाने के लिए भी इस शब्द का उपयोग होता था।

माना गया है की यह शब्द कन्नड़ भाषा से आया है, हालाँकि इसकी उत्पत्ति के विषय में कुछ अधिक जानकारी नहीं मिल सकी।

The word **chakka**, which originated in **Kannada language**, has long been used in common parlance in **India** in tangentially **different ways**. Another Kannada word used for the same is **mangalmukhi** [1].

One meaning refers to the **third gender**, and the other is used with reference to the **game of cricket**, when a player hits six runs. A dice with six sides is also called **chakka**.

Chakka is another **term** for **hijra,** a word from the **Urdu language** used to define the third gender: “Colloquially, a **hijṛā** is also referred to as ‘**chakka**’ for their effeminate comportment and impotency. The words ‘hijra’ and ‘chakka’ are often **used interchangeably as verbal slurs** to express societal disapproval and condemnation” [2].

Kothis are also referred to as chakka. Some other synonyms are **shikhandi**, **ombattu**, **eunuch**, **third gender**, as also the word **kinnar** (P.U.C.L.K., 2005) [3]. Among others, the terms **chakka, hijra**, **kinnar** loosely refer to transsexuals, transvestites, hermaphrodites and eunuchs: “The hijṛā community in one of its commonly stated aphorisms call themselves as ‘neither man nor woman’" (Nanda, 1999) [4].

Most **hijras** are castrated males who dress like females. A few are hermaphrodites born with undifferentiated genitalia (Thappa *et al*., 2011) [5].

This entry aims to show the **complexity of meanings** that the term **chakka** and its synonyms carry, and their **implications in society**.

Etymology:

The word **chakka** is said to have been in use for centuries. The history of **third gender** in India goes back to some **4000 years** (Gupta & Khobragade, 2018) [6]. When used in reference to a person's sexual identity, it might resonate with the theory of the American researcher, **Alfred Kinsey,** who created a 6-point scale of sexual orientation. According to the scale from 0-6, heterosexuals are a 0, homosexuals are 6. Therefore, chakka could be based loosely on that six- point scale.

The **gender discourse** has long been dallied with legalities, semiotics, sociolinguistics, anthropology, just to name a few disciplines. There are **multiple terms** used to describe a person's gender/sexual orientation now. In its sexual connotation, **chakka** denotes a person who does not have a defined gender. This **usage** is considered rather **derogatory** and **offensive**, particularly by **activists from LGBT** and **transgender community,** and has thus been restricted. Though in subtle undertones it is used by tiktokers or jokingly or as a colloquial insult in day to day conversation.

The report by **Peoples' Union for Civil Liberties**, Karnataka (P.U.C.L.K.), entitled *Human Rights violations against the transgender community,* presents a study of **kothi and hijra sex workers** in Bangalore, India, Sept. 2003, and mentions:

"*Since their* [Kothis] *feminized behavior does not conform to the masculinity demanded of 'real' males in Indian society, they are stigmatized by their family members as 'not man enough' (thereby bringing shame to the family) and hence fit for abjection (....). Kothis are reviled by society, and abusively addressed as 'gandu', 'chakka', 'khoja', 'ombodu', 'kattavandi', 'gud', and so on. This often results in lack of self-worth and self-esteem which makes kothis even attempt suicide at some point in their lives. Further, they are discriminated and harassed in the workplace*... (p. 20), (P.U.C.L.K., 2005) [7].

Apart from its literal reference to sexuality, the term **chakka** had been in circulation to describe a person who **lacks masculinity**. In a world polarised by two genders, **effeminate men** were also referred to as chakka.

Cultural specificity:

India has had several examples in **mythology** and **history** pertaining to the **third gender**. One such example is **Shikandi** (Princess Amba in previous birth), a character from the epic *Mahabharata*. He/she is **born a female**, but is brought up as a boy and **claimed manhood** when a Yaksha would lend her his male form. He was the cause of the death of Bhishma [a valiant arcier] because, as Princess Amba, she was kidnapped by Bhishma and caused her misfortune. Later, the sole mission of her life was to destroy Bhishma.

The **folk version** of the **Ramayana** from **Karnataka** has the story of how a group of **hijras.** They stood on the banks of river Sarayu for fourteen years as, while leaving for his exile, **Lord Rama**, the Prince of Ayodhya, bid farewell to those assembled there **by using the words brothers and sisters**. And thus the group that belonged to neither genders waited on as their Lord had not asked them to leave. So touched was Rama by their devotion that **he blessed them to prevail in India.**

In the ancient epic *Mahabharata* **Arjun**, one of the five pandavas [Pandu's virtuous sons], **lives as a transgender** for a year to hide his identity. It is worthy to note that Arjun was known for **his masculinity and bravery**, and **cross-dressing** as a transgender didn't dim his powers or image so was the **acceptibility of the transgender in ancient India**.

Before the Kurukshetra War, **Aravan** (son of the Pandava warrior Arjun and Naga snake princess Ulupi) offers his lifeblood to Goddess **Kali** to ensure victory for the Pandavas, to which Kali agrees. On the night before the battle, Aravan expresses a desire to get married before he dies (as in the Kuttantavar cult). As no woman is willing to marry a doomed man, **Lord Krishna** (as Mohini) decides to **marry him**. Connecting to this piece of mythology, in South India **hijras claim Aravan as their progenitor** and call themselves ***aravanis*** [8].

Indian history too is replete with the **power enjoyed by the third gender** in the **royal courts**. Several foreign

travellers to the Mughal courts, for instance, have mentioned in their travelogues about the privileges given to them. For example, the Dutch merchant Francisco Pelsaert who visited the Mughal court in the seventeenth century, noted in his travelogue: "*They can get whatever they desire - fine horses to ride, servants to attend them outside, and female slaves inside the house, clothes as fine and smart as those of their master himself*".

Chakkas or **hijras** were assigned to **safeguard the imperial harems**, as also as the **bodyguards of kings**, in the Sultanate and then the Mughal era. The power of **Malik Kafur** in the court of Alauddin Khalji is well known. When the sultan was ailing, Malik, not a Turk but said to be a Hindu eunuch bestowed with physical beauty who had adopted Islam, placed a puppet ruler, Shihabuddin, on the throne. During the reign of Emperors Jahangir and Shah Jahan, hijras were appointed to guard their harems.

Communication strategies:

In **Hinduism**, the place of the third gender was originally that of '***Updevata***' (**sub-deities**), but later it was **degraded to prostitution** as a means of livelihood to survive the marginalization.

The term **chakka** was also used as a **snide remark**, often for **sniggering at a man** who was '**not man enough**'. If a man, challenged to face his adversary, turned his back, he would be laughed at and called a chakka.

Women who were unable to bear were also subjected to **social humiliation and ostracism** in several ways, one being lacking a definitive sexual identity, and thus being a **hijra**.

Over a period of time, as gender identities became more fluid, there was a change, if not in mindset (the orthodox one takes a longer time to change) at least in the restricted use of the word.

It is interesting to note that there is a **strong popular belief** that **transgenders have power to curse or bless people**, that is why as a common practice in India people **avoid any conflicts** with them.

Subversion:

Apart from the **derogative usage**, the word **chakka** has long been used in sports. In **cricket** it has a **positive meaning** (to denote a good shot) and has also been used in many **dice games**. Another **recent subversion** has surfaced in the **Clean India Campaign**, where the word has been re-appropriated in the **song** that promotes the cleanliness drive in **Indore** (a city in Madhya Pradesh) in its cricketing connotation. **Transgender activists** have **vindicated the term** as well, thus subverting it in a positive way.

Use in sports

The **second usage** of **chakka** is associated with its meaning '**a set of six**'. In the game of cricket, it is used with a **great deal of enthusiasm** to denote a shot by a batsman that crosses the boundary without touching the ground. Such a **shot calls for a huge celebration** and Hindi commentators very commonly use the word **chakka** for this. In discussions of a match, people talk about the sixes (chakkas) hit during the match. Some examples of the same are: "*Tendulkar ne gend to antim kshan tak dekha, aur itminaan se silly mid-offke taraf halke se khel diya*", "*do kadam aage badhe aur gend ko ucchaal diya…aur ye chakka…*" [Tendulakar watched the ball till the end,then flicked it through silly mid off ,moved two steps ahead and played the ball …and that's a six…"] [9]; "*Aur yeh Chakka!!!!! Krishna Sreekanth ke chhakkon ne maano Sabarmati nadee mein aag laga dee hain!!!* [And thats a six! Krishna Sreekanth's sixers have set the Sabarmati river aflame!!"] [10].

A **dice with six sides,** such as the one used in indoor games such as ludo, is also a chakka.



Dice with six sides
Image source: https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/stretching-theory/202008/should-you-let-the-dice-decide.



The Clean Indore City Poster
Image Source: https://www.google.co.in/search?q=indore+swachta+ka+chakka&tbm=isch&ictx=1&tbs=rimg:CV6KX1q4Du9XIgheil9auA7vVyoSCV6KX1q4Du9XEU61Si3oF.

Recent usage

A very recent use of the word **chakka** is seen in the '***Swacch Bharat Abhiyan***' (Clean India Campaign), a song being used for the city of **Indore** as being awarded the cleanest city of India for five years consecutively, and is about to receive its sixth award now. The song goes "*Indore lagayega chakka…*", meaning Indore will hit a six. Here is the link to the song: https://youtu.be/OzseBhaWVW4.

In one of the promotional posters being used in the campaign, one can see the cricket ball and the number 6, which is clearly the cricket association.

With Colonial-era Section 377 of Indian Penal Code reverted in **2018**, Supreme Court of India has **decriminalised homosexuality**, giving rights of choice to the LGBT community. Although changes have started to appear in the society, the strict socio-cultural shackles will need time to loosen up. **Change will have to be bottom up**, from the lullabies to traditional stories to wedding songs: a lot needs to be changed before transformation would be complete. Glorification of the strict code of role-based marriage partnership will need to be challenged.

One person who has been leading this crusade in India is **Lakshmi Narayan Tripathi,** a **transgender** and an **activist**, who became the **first transgender to represent Asia-Pacific in the UN in 2008**. An art graduate and a proficient Bharatnataym dancer with a Postgraduate degree, she currently heads the Kinnar akhada (monastery). The biggest **religious acceptance** came **in 2019,** when instead of 13 traditional monasteries, the 14th monastery of Kinnars, headed by Lakshmi Narayan, also took part in the **biggest Hindu pilgrimage** gathering on earth, Kumbh which is held every 12 years.

In **April 2014,** Justice KS Radhakrishnan declared **transgender to be the third gender** in Indian law in National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India. Hijras, eunuchs, apart from binary gender, are now to be treated as 'third gender' for the **purpose of safeguarding their rights** under Part III of Indian Constitution and the laws made by the Parliament and the State Legislature.



Hijra and transgender rights advocate Laxmi Narayan Tripathi speaking at a conference in Australia in 2017. Photo by Timothy Herbert Wikimedia Commons: http://bit.ly/2vxqSww, cited in: https://rpl.hds.harvard.edu/religion-context/case-studies/gender/third-gender-and-hijras.

Officially, **transgender community** prefers the use of the term ' **Kinnar**' to address them. A tweet from well- known Indian mythologist, Devidatt Paitanik, clearly explains the origin and meaning of the term 'Kinnar': Kinnar is an old Sanskrit word, kim = who/what; nara = man; Kim-nara = what men. It refers to celestial half-bird beings who sang and made music in Hindu/Buddhist myths, but in North India it came to refer third gender entertainers (source : https://twitter.com/devduttmyth/status/1292487155118256128?lang=en).

Discussion:

- what is the word/words that define **transgender individuals** in your country? Is it a derogatory term? when is it used?
- the terms **chakka** and **hijra** refer to both a **lack of masculinity** and a **lack of femininity** (they are also used for women who cannot bear children). They both indicate a lack, since they directly refer to **sterotyped gendered characteristics**. What is your opinion of considering a **lack** the condition of **not conforming** to societal/cultural expectations?

References/Further Readings:

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- Gupta, A.K., Khobragade, G. (Eds.) (2018). *The Third Gender: Stain and Pain*. Maharashtra, Latur: Vishwabharati Research Centre. ISBN: 9789387966024. Full text available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354399928_THE_THIRD_GENDER_STAIN_AND_PAIN
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Links:

- [1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kannada
- [2] http://14.139.206.50:8080/jspui/bitstream/1/7659/1/Lhamu%20Tshering%20Dukpa%20Ph.D%20Thesis%202021.pdf
- [3] http://pucl.org/sites/default/files/reports/Human_Rights_Violations_against_the_Transgender_Community.pdf
- [4] http://14.139.206.50:8080/jspui/bitstream/1/7659/1/Lhamu%20Tshering%20Dukpa%20Ph.D%20Thesis%202021.pdf
- [5] http://14.139.206.50:8080/jspui/bitstream/1/7659/1/Lhamu%20Tshering%20Dukpa%20Ph.D%20Thesis%202021.pdf
- [6] https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354399928_THE_THIRD_GENDER_STAIN_AND_PAIN
- [7] http://pucl.org/sites/default/files/reports/Human_Rights_Violations_against_the_Transgender_Community.pdf
- [8] http://www.shanlaxjournals.in/pdf/ASH/V3N2/Ash_V3_N2_025.pdf
- [9] Commentator Sushil Doshi: https://groups.google.com/g/rec.sport.cricket/c/aL4YQl8Q8iE
- [10] Commentator Ravi Chaturvedi: https://www.indiancricketfans.com/topic/4707-some-memorable-commentators-quotes/

More info:

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hijra_(South_Asia)#CITEREFNarrain2006
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hijra_(South_Asia)

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