CHAPTER 5
SHAME FREE CULTURES CAN BE MADE SHAME CULTURES

5.1. INTRODUCTION

Kerala is unique in many ways compared to the rest of the country. The National Geographic magazine has named Kerala as one of the ten paradise found in the world. In many ways, Kerala is complete in itself with self-sustaining tropical rainforests, mangrove ecosystems, hills, mountains, rivers streams, brooks, backwaters and wildlife.

The number of firsts to its credit is amazing. The state had achieved 100 percent literacy about three decades ago. Then it went on to achieve the number one position in social infrastructure, transport and communication.

Its physical quality of life is not only better than the rest of India, but also closer to that in the developed countries. It has the highest life expectancy (70 years) lowest infant mortality rate (17 per 1000). It is a state that has not been showing gender bias and has eighty four women more for every 1,000 men (as per 2011 census). Women are, in fact, educationally better qualified in the State.

Much has been written about ‘Kerala model’ of development. Its development has baffled both economists and academicians. The ‘Scientific American’ referred to it as ‘a riddle inside an enigma’. Referring to Kerala’s high standard of living author of the ‘The end of Nature’ said, “Statistically, Kerala stands out as the Mount Everest of
social development”. Nobel laureate, Amartya Sen, said, “The Indian Government should emulate the Kerala experience”

The State that has so many credits has an alter face of shocking too. The State is third in India on suicide rate. Kerala has 24.3 suicides per 100,000 and that is more than two times the national average. Population of Kerala as per the census 2011 is 33387677. Total number of suicide in Kerala during 2012 is 8490. The suicide rate in Kerala for the year 2012 is 25.4/- per lakh. The rate for 2011 was 25.3/ lakh and the total number of suicide reported 8431. The rate of suicide is remaining steady. Compared to other states suicide rate among youngsters and family suicide are also on the higher side in Kerala.

The State tops in related negative indices of liquor consumption rate, road accidents and crime. It registers the highest number of family divorces and highest number of abandoned old people seeking shelter in Old Homes.

In the case of sex and sexuality too Kerala is unique. The MSM categories such as the Hijras and the Thirunangaiar that we see in the neighbouring States do not exist in Kerala for long time. Keralites are generally ignorant of a MSM group operating in the society. They are aware of temporary homosexuality but not of a homosexually oriented group who can enjoy only same sex. The ignorance the general public of a homosexual group not even of Hijras and Thirunangaiar adds to the stigma.

This chapter has two parts, part-1 deals with the same-sex phenomenon in the early Kerala and its presence in the Patriarchal religions such as Christianity and Islam

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in the modern Kerala. In part-II, the same is treated quantitatively to validate the qualitative findings.

5.2. Sex and Sexuality in the Early History of Kerala

It can be assumed that there was considerable freedom in sexuality in the early Kerala. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the Ezhavas, Kaniyans, Panars, Vilkkuruppas, practiced fraternal polyandry. There was nothing extra-ordinary for one or more brothers marrying a woman in the Ezhava caste. The authors such as C. Kesavan (1953: 18-19), Duarte Barbosa: 60 Albert Gray: (386,387), Francis Day: Land of the Perumals’:323 etc. confirms this point.

Even in the 19th century, there was absolute chaos in the sexual practices among the low caste people. They practiced polyandry and polygamy at the same time. Even the Nairs come under this category. Their matrilineal and joint family system too derived its ethos from the indigenous people of Kerala. (Padmanabhamenon: History of Kerala III: 261-262, Anandakrishna Aiyar: Vol11:153-154)

The Thalikettu Kaliyanam and Thirandu Kuli Kaliyanam were celebrated with pomp and gaiety in all the castes except the tribals and the Namboodris. (P.K. Balakrishnan: 1997:338). This is an indication that when the Namboodris came to Kerala there existed already promiscuous sexual relations with the castes. The declaration of the Raja of Karthikappilly giving Nair-men rights to kill the Nair women who show reluctance to man’s desire; Captain Nihoph reported this in 1664. Bishop Menezis reported the same a century ago. These information are given in the Tarvancore Marumakkathayam Committee Report, Enclosure B.P. VIII. Padmabha Menon also writes that the Nairs were uncivilized Dravidians who practiced polygamy. Padmabha Menon, 1912:174.
5.2.1. Devadasi System in Kerala

All the travellers of 11-16 centuries have reported the promiscuity of the Keralites. Their observation is about the most visible community such as Nairs and Brahmins all others were living the extreme promiscuous sexual life. Duarte Barbosa who lived a decade in Kerala and spoke fluent Malayalam describes the *thalikettu* celebration in the 16th century.

The 19th century traveller Francis Buchanan reported that the high caste women enjoyed absolute sexual freedom. His description about the Nair women is an indication. Buchanan is quoted by Karim C.K. (1981: 68-69).

Women of all other high caste communities, except the Brahmin women, could mate with anybody she likes; the only condition was that the man should not be below her caste. The forced sex against the will of the women (rape) was considered a heinous crime. Men, therefore, used to employ all means to entice women. The origin of *Manipravala* poetry has been attributed to this. Venmani literature also developed in praise of women to woo them.

5.2.1.1 Certain bad words in the context

These words have become bad words today; in fact, they had once been meaning dancer or actress. The Sanskrit equivalence of *Threpidichi* = (thevar+adi+achi) is Devadasi. Kooth+Achi= Koothachi is in fact has no sexual connotation. There were *thepidisi stanaam* (dancing podium) in important temples at Trichur Vadakkumnatha kshetram, Kandiyoor Mahadeva kshetram and Suchindram Kshetram. The *Thepidis* 76

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76 The Venmani School of poets were involved in a movement in Malayalam Literature also known as the Venmani Movement. The style of poetry was pioneered by members of the Venmani Illam of Kodungalloor in the 19th century.
were educated, noble and highly skilled dancers. It was an honour to be a dancer, says historian Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai\(^77\) (1963:71-85). There is reference that *Devadasi* practice was there in Trichur as early as 9\(^{th}\) Century A.D. There are references in a number of works, which confirms that *Devadasi* tradition existed in Kerala between 10\(^{th}\) -14\(^{th}\) Centuries.

There were seven types of *Devasasis*. They were, *Detha, Vikritha, Dhrthiya, Bhakta, Haritha, Alankara, Rudraganika (Gopika)*. Some of these types were in Kerala too\(^78\).

5.2.1.2. Devadasi Tradition from the Written Sources

In the plates at Thiruvalla kshetram, reference is made to four *devadasis* of Detha type were given remunerations for dance and singing in the temple during the *Onam* celebration. Such references are available at Kandiyoor temple and Suchindram temple. It is surprising that none of the travellers speaks of *Devadasis* in Kerala, while Marco Polo and Abdul Rasak speak of *Devadasis* at Thanjavoor and Vijayanagar respectively. We do not know whether the *Devadasis* disappeared from Kerala by the time of Buchanan, who while keeps silent about Kerala, speaks about them at Karnataka. In any case, we have very definite evidence of *Devadasis* existing at temples of Cochin and Travancore five centuries ago.

There were *Devadasis* at Travancore in the Vellala community until very recently. An interview with three of them, Lekshimi, Chepakamma and Thirumul, was published in Malayala Manorama, Sunday Supplement, March 11, 1984. They were also known as ‘*Kudikal*’.

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77 Pillai, Elamkulam Kunjan. 1963, Cherasamrajyam Onpathum Pathum Noottrandil

78 Pillai, E.K., (1963) Kerala Charitrathile Iruladanja Edukal, Kottaym p 52
5.2.1.3. The ceremony to become the Devadasi is known as ‘penkettu’.

‘Penkettu’ is known as the marriage between the Devadasi and the Devan (god) of the temple. The ceremony varies from temple to temple. There was the custom of Devadasi ‘sleeping with the Devan’ in the ‘first night’. Who used to spend the night with the girl was not quite sure it could be the Thidampu or the Santhikaran (priest). John Short (1870:182-194) says, often the devadasi girl was deflowered by the Brahmin temple priests.

The Devadasis were experts in dance. Their statues of dance posters were erected in different temples of Kerala. The surviving ones are Thukkulashekaran temple at, Kodungallur, Thrivikramangalam temple near Trivandrum and the Jain temple in Punchavayal, near Panamaram of Waynad district.

By 12th century A.D. Devadasis degenerated into a stage of women prostitutes. Different nomenclatures of Devadasis such as ‘Thevidichi’, ‘Koothachi’ became the synonym of harlots. Still the devotees respected them. There are cases the kings and lords marrying them. Later on not only the castle of the king but also the houses of the devadasis came to be known as Kovil, sacred abode.

According to M.G.S. Narayanan (1973:45), the davadasi’s wealthy succeeding families tried to hide their devadasi origin. However, they continued their dancing and loose sex life in the later times too. In course of time, the Davadasis must have become sub communities of today’s Nair community. In summary, as elsewhere in India, promiscuity was the order of the day in Kerala too in the early centuries before the influence of the Western thought, which condemned Promiscuity.
5.3. Religious Roles and Festivals in Disguising MSM/Gay-Sex Orientation

As we have seen Kerala does not have an MSM community such as Hijras, Thirunangaiar, Kothis or any other group that distinguish themselves as gay. The public too does not recognize one. People are aware of homosexual activities, but they think it is a common phenomenon temporarily practiced by mostly unmarried youth. Hidden from the public eye using different disguises such as religious roles and secular communes the gay community lives in Kerala.

The uniqueness of Kerala extends to the religious realm too. Kerala is the only place in the country, where the three major religions of the country, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity have a balanced power equation. The first Mosque so also the first Church in India built at Kodungallur. The two monotheistic religions, which have strong sexual code in favour of male-female polarity, appear to have inhibited the same sex orientation in Kerala. This may be one of the reasons for the absence of religiously recognized gay groups in Kerala. However, the gay groups have found their way in the religions though different means.

5.3.1. Hinduism

5.3.1.1. Kottamkulangara Kshetram

Kottamkulangara Devi temple (Kshetram) is at Chavara Major, half an hour bus journey from Kollam on the high way towards Alappuzha. Chamayavilakku (the lamp of costume) is the most important annual celebration in the temple. The origin myth of the temple, collected form the people says that the Devi, Vanadhurga, is self-born at Kottamkulangara, which has now become a temple without roof. The place was once dense forest. There was a pond, known as Bhoothakkulam, at the east of the present
temple. The present pond of the temple was at that time a small check dam (Chira). During the monsoon, these two used to overflow into the fields. Thus, the field was fertile and full grass and forest.

**The Origin Myth of the Temple**

The children of the area used to gracing the cattle in the field. One day while gracing the cattle they got a coconut fallen from the tree. They tried to unpeel the coconut on a stone north of the Bhoothakkulam, during the process the metal kit the stone thereupon blood oozed out of the stone. The shocked children informed the elders at home. They immediately contacted the Prashnakaran (soothsayer) on his prasanam (oracle) it was found that a Vanadhurga of ascetic nature is present in the stone and that a temple is to be built for the peace and prosperity of the land and people. That day onwards, the offering, Kottam - the remains of the coconut after squeezing out the milk - is being offered to the Devi. Boys in girls dress offered lamp in front of Devi. A porch with tender coconut leaves was built over the stone and lamps were lit around it. The self-originated Vanadhurga temple became the Kottamkulangara temple (Kshetram). The temple is turned towards west. The oracle also prescribed that the sky should be thought of as the roof of the temple for the omniscient merciful Devi to experience all the changes of the seasons and to shower blessing to the devotees. The temple has neither flag-post not elephants for the celebration. Devi does not like elephants. The entry to the temple is open to all including Muslims and Christians.

**Subsidiary Deities**

Other pantheon deities in the temple are, Sree Mahagenapathi, Sree Dharmasasthavu, Sivan, Yakshiyamma, Madan Bhagavan and Nagaraja.
Offerings

Apart from Kottam offerings, *powerderd kottam payasam, pantheerashi*, the women folk offer *narangavilakku* and *pongala*. During the temple feast the important offering is *Ambolippara*. *Kottam* is made by boiling coconut milk and separating the oil and the solid portion of the coconut and this solid part is called *kottam*. The oil extracted through this process is medicinal.\footnote{Information collected during the fieldworks}

Kottamkulangara Temple Feast

The temple feast is celebrated on according to the Malayalam year, from 28\textsuperscript{th} Kumbam to 11\textsuperscript{th} Meenam. On the 30\textsuperscript{th} of Kumbam, the holy Ornaments will be brought as a procession (*Thalappoli*) from Anadavalli temple at Kollam. The most important two days of celebration is the *Chamaya vilakku* of 10, and 11, Meenam. For the chamayavilakku offering the men folk who have under gone the prescribed fast, abstinence and other austerities according to the oath for getting the desired boon and favour, dress up as women and offer the lamp during the night long celebration on 10\textsuperscript{th} and 11\textsuperscript{th}. Devi, in the *Komaram’s* trance, starts blessing the devotees who would have lined up from Kunjalummoodu in the west to the bathing place at the pond in the east in front of the temple. The Devi’s coming in the form of the *Komaram (Velichappad)* invokes inestimable joy and devotion in the people. *Jeevatha*, the Devi’s image, is carried by the Vellayil Nairs who owns the temple. The Chavatti Kudumbam (house) takes the colourful *muttukuda* (Umbrella). Thattacherry house has the right to be the *Velichapad* in the temple.

The women folk do not participate in the Chamayavilakku they will be just spectators. Young girls before puberty occasionally participate along with the boys who
are dressed up like girls. As the celebration gained visibility and fame through the visual media, people from outside Kerala also participate in large numbers. A majority of the devotees from outside Kottamkulangara is homosexuals who have the double purpose of getting the Devi’s boon as well as to have free sex with like-minded fresh gay men. Several gay sex workers told the investigator that they go there for the excitement of sex and money rather than the boon.

After seeing the Chamayavilakku and the ritual bathing in the form of the Komaram, devi rests in the temporary temple constructed with tender coconut leaves, aeronaut and plantain sheaths after the model of the temple. The Kettukazhcha festivity under the leadership of the four villages (Kara) of Chavara, Pudukkad, Kulangarabhagam and Kottakkakam is an important item. Kettukazhcha is a procession of elephants, horse cart and sacred plots with the accompaniment of drum and pipe music.

**Tandan Caste and the Alternative Myth of Origin**

The Tandan caste has an alternative myth of the origin of the temple. The children of low caste Tandan, Unnithan, Chavatti and Velayam were engaged at country game of vellakka and horse while gracing the cattle. Seeing children play one of the five Bhaagavatis who started their journey from Kodumgallur towards south sat at Kottamkulangara. Bhagavati asked for water as there was no drinking water Karuvakulangara Mooppan offered tender coconut. She wanted to sit permanently facing west. The tender coconut leave that fell while cutting the tender coconut was offered and she sat on it. She wanted to go around the world with the accompaniment of drum and music. She promised that the sea will not come to the place where she sits.
The temple was managed by the Tandan caste until a century ago. The Nair community took over it slowly sidelining the tandans. Melam (drum and pipe music) and fire-works are the two remaining rights retained by the Tandan community at present.

The Relation between Kodumgallur Bhagavati and Kottamkulangara Devi

Kodumgallur Bhagavati is said to be a sister of Kottamkulangara Devi. There are five Bhagavathis towards the South of Kodumgallur. They are Kanichu Ambalam, Thekkenguruvayoor, Minnamthodu, Ayyankovil and Kottamkulangara.

5.3.1.2. Sabarimala Pilgrimage

Bhagavata Purana Myth

One of our primal myths, the ocean was churned by Devas and Asuras in order to get from it nectar, the essence of immortality. The ocean yielded a number of treasures, including the wish-fulfilling cow, and finally, the jar of nectar. The Devas and Asuras quarreled over it and the latter ran off with it. The disturbed Devas appealed to Vishnu for help and he assured them that he would take the form of a beautiful woman, Mohini, in order to entice the Asuras into giving up the nectar jar.

Sabarimala Myth

When Siva heard about the Mohini form of Vishnu which bluffed the Asuras he wanted to see it. No sooner did Siva see Mohini, then he lost all his control and united with her. Mohini becomes pregnant and give birth to a child. The child was known under many names: Bhunathan (living source of all animate beings); Dharma Sastha (one who reprimands the people who are immoral); Parayagupthan (keeper of principle
of truth); Aryathathan (the chieftain of Aryankav) the devotees call him Ayyappan, Hasrihara puthran (the son of Hari and Hara) and Aiyanar.

The child grew up in Kailas under the direct supervision of Siva. One day Siva called him and said: “you are born to annihilate the arrogance of the Mahishi, demon woman and to bring peace to the Davas, for that purpose you would have to live on earth for twelve years. You would have to take the form of a human child and lie down weeping on the bank of river Pampa. My devotee, the Panthalam king, would come for pleasure hunting and he being a child lover would take you to palace and would bring you up. On completing twelve years you would get the energy and courage as well as opportunity to kill Mahishi, the buffalo monstrous. You would have to start immediately. In order to make the name Manikandan meaningful you wear a mani (gem)”. Upon this instruction Manikandan left for the world immediately.

Manikandan, in the form a human child lay down in the forest bank of river Pampa as the Panthalam king came for hunting. The king was wonderstruck to see child in a lonely place where there was no human inhabitation. He hesitated for some time thinking what to do. Thereupon Mahavishnu in the form of a Brahmin appeared to the king and assured him that the child belongs to Kshetriya caste and he would do great things after twelve years. The king took him the palace joyfully and brought him up like a prince. It is believed that one of the ancestors of Arakkulam Thekkumcherry Panickar took the child to the palace.

As Manikandan was growing in the palace, a child was born to the king. Still the king wanted to make Manikandan his successor. An envious queen at the instigation of the Minister wanted to kill Manikandan. The queen pretended to be suffering from a sickness, which could be cured by the milk of a tiger. The calculation of the queen and
the Minister were that Manikandan would be killed by the tigers. A very reluctant king after much persuasion allowed Manikandan to go to the forest.

On Manikandan’s arrival in the forest the ascetics in the forest constructed with their divine power a place for his stay. Ponnambalamedu of today is believed to be the place where Manikandan stayed in the forest.

Around this time The Asuras approached Mahishi, woman demon, complaint to her about the Churning of Palazhi and the humiliating defeat of the Asuras. She accompanied by other Chief Asuras went heaven and started attacking Devendran. This has agonized the Devas because they had by this time became weak to stage a counter attack. The Davas approached Dharmasasthav and he promised to put an end to the menace.

Seeing Darmasasthav in heaven Mahishi ran towards his with mountains in hand to kill him. Darmasasthav overpowered her and started dancing on the grounded Mahishi. Recognizing the divine power of Darmasasthav, the Mahishi begged pardon of her curses and vowed unconditional surrender. Pleased by the surrender and the praises of Mahishi, Darmasasthav stroked her body and a beautiful girl emerged out of her. It was Leela, who was transformed into buffalo demon on the effect of a curse and now she has been liberate by Dharmasasthav. She expressed her desire to be the spouse of Dhaarmasasthav. Darmasasthav refused her desire saying that he had vowed *brahmachriyam* (celibacy) and that as sister she could sit on his right side a little away from him. Leela is known as Malikappurathamma.

Darmasasthav accomplishing the mission, Paramasivan appeared and told him to go to the king of Pandalam who is grief-stricken over the departure of Darmasasthav and the women in the heaven will be the she-tigers and the Davas the tiger kitten.
Darmasasthav returned with tigers to the king. Seeing that no human being can do this, the king pleaded for the revelation of the secrets. Around this time Augustiya Muni appeared and told to the king all about Darmasasthav. A contented and joyful king worshiped Darmasasthavu (Narayana Pilla, 2002:28 - 60)

**Alternative version of Ayyappa Legends**

Vishnu assumes Mohini form and deludes the Asuras. Siva wanted to see the Mohini form of Vishnu. On seeing Mohini, Siva loses all defence she becomes pregnant from intercourse with Shiva. Ashamed Vishnu drops the baby to earth, where it is found and adopted by the Pandyan king Rajasekahara of Pantalam. The child grows up to become a renowned warrior. He also gathers an army and fights the bandit chieftains who are ravaging the countryside. One of them is the Muslim pirate Vavar. Overcome in battle, Vavar becomes a close friend of Ayyappa and joins forces with him (Ruth Vanita, 2001:95)

There are several stories of Vishnu’s incarnation as Mohini getting children, though not in the ‘natural’ way. An identical story of Ayyappa is told about the birth of Aiyanar, conceived by Mohini in her hand, with which she caught Siva’s sperm that he lost, enraptured by the sight of this beautiful woman. It should be noted that the Ayyappa legend took place at the time Tamil kings ruling Kerala, in other words, Kerala was part of Tamilnadu.

**Analysis**

The story integrates local cults and local religions. Hariharaputra, whose name literally means, the son (putra) of Vishnu (Hari) and Shiva (Hara), in his embodiment as Ayyappa (father), represents the reconciliation of Vaishnavites and Shaivites who
had often come into conflict in the South India. Endowed with the immense powers of both the preserver and the destroyer gods, he is invincible.

The Ayyappa tradition incorporates Vavar as the inseparable companion of the god, thus symbolizing also a Hindu-Muslim rapport building. The main Ayyappa temple at Sabarimala, believed to have been originally built by Ayyappa’s foster father on Ayyappan’s instruction has a shrine for Vavar. All pilgrims, whether Hindu or Muslim, are supposed to carry an offering of pepper for Vavar along with other offerings for Ayyappa. Muslims who claim to be Vavar’s descendants manage the shrine. Pepper symbolizes the Arab traders to Malabar Coast in search of spices. Since Vavar distributed the major portion of his plundered goods among his followers and the poor people, he had a large number of followers. Thus, he and Ayyappa, both benevolent protectors are complementary to each other (Thomas P.T., 1973:11)

Among the All Night songs of praise and dance drama before the devotees, set out for the pilgrimage, there is a dance performed by two men, representing Ayyappa and Vavar. One carries a knife and the other a sickle. Ayyappa is said to have instructed his foster father to build the shrine for Vavar, saying: Consider Vavar as myself. This phrasing recalls Krishna’s many statements in the Mahabharata, that Arjuna is inseparable from himself (Ruth Vanita 2001:95).

The closeness of Vavar to Ayyappa is in the context of latter’s celibacy. Ayyappa took a vow of celibacy and refused the marriage proposal made to him by Leela. He agreed to let her live as his companion and instructed his foster father to build a shrine for her as well. Her shrine stands to the left and the Vavar’s to the right of Ayyappa. Vavar too is represented as unmarried in all narratives. The image of Ayyappa riding the tiger, an animal normally associated with the goddess in her fearful
form, and killing the buffalo demon, also a task usually accomplished by the goddess, may suggest that in addition to the powers of Vishnu and Siva, he has the goddess’s powers or himself has female energies (ibid).

Ayyappa’s celibacy is mirrored in that of his brothers, Ganesha and Kartikeya who are bachelors in many traditions and leaders of all-male armies. His devotees who take a forty-one day vow to refrain from sex and other indulgences imitate Ayyappa’s celibacy. Celibacy was almost the only way a person could refuse heterosexuality and live a same-sex community in a society, which had universally accepted marriage and parenthood. Women of reproductive age are not permitted to go on the pilgrimage to Ayyappa, which means that the pilgrims are almost all male.

Forest dwelling was another way for the people who choose not to marry. Puranic texts construct the forest simultaneously as a space of celibacy and as a space of mystery and magic, were sex change, illicit types of sexuality and miraculous birth occur. Sabarimala too is in the forest. The pilgrim performs this journey in same-sex community and finally reaches a temple where god is represented, unlike most Hindu gods, not with his consort but with his celibate friends, male and female (ibid:97)

A Kannada song in praise of Ayyappa explains why Ayyappa had to return from heaven to earth and take up his abode in the forest. The song narrates how Ayyappa replaced Brahma in heaven and decided to change the order of the universe by decreeing that human beings should not die. This makes sense in the context of Ayyappa’s celibacy. Hindu goddesses do not bear children who are related to same sex love. Heterosexuals should produce children and should die thus it is innately related to death. The gods alarmed at Ayyapa’s innovation asked the divine mischief-making sage, Narada to come to their rescue. Narada pretending to praise Ayyappa, asks him
how he is related to Parvati, Siva’s wife, and Lakshmi, Vishnu’s wife, since Siva is his father and Vishnu his mother. Puzzled, Ayyappa leaves Brahma’s throne and withdraws into the forest where he stands to this day, still trying to figure an answer to this unanswerable question. The song shows a cynical awareness of the tension between normative heterosexuality and the person of the god, a tension that animates Ayyappa devotion (ibid).

The female presence is incorporated in the pilgrimage in a no conjugal way through the shrine of the goddess Leela. Ayyappa is said to have told her that he would marry her only when devotees stop coming to the temple. It is the practice that new devotees leave a signal of their presence by way of an arrow stuck on the peepal tree. After the pilgrimage season, there is a ritual wherein the goddess’s image, adorned in bridal finery is carried in procession to the tree. The procession has to return after seeing the arrows, the evidence of devotees still coming. Thus, the devotees actively participate in keeping the god free from marriage. Their presence is crucial to enable him to remain unmarried (ibid).

**Gay sex and Sabarimala Pilgrimage**

The all-male pilgrimage to Sabarimala is a temporary repose to heterosexuals. One-woman researcher who did go on the pilgrimage describes the pervasive atmosphere of elation and joyous camaraderie that begins to dissolve only on the return journey. In her words: “One can sense an air of reluctance to leave. One elderly devotee informed me that he felt carefree here at the holy summit – like a young lad.” (Sekar: 1992: 85-86). Each devotee is addressed himself as Ayyappa, thus, he temporarily shares the freedom and bliss of god’s unmarried state. Hence, in Vishnu-Mohini one can see the divine ‘transsexual’ and in Shiva - Ardhanarishvara the divine
‘hermaphrodite’, the two concepts that are deeply embedded into the pan-Indian culture, particularly the southern subculture, up to the present day.

5.3.3. Kodungallur Bharanai

Kodungallur

Kodungallur is important not only in the history of Kerala but also of India. Kodungallur is the meeting place of all the world religions and cultures. The first Christian Church, the first Muslim Mosque and the first Jewish Synagogue in India were built in Kodungallur. Because of its importance, several wars were fought in its soil. The Samurins, the British, the Portuguese, the Dutch and the Tippu Sultan attacked Kodungallur. Still it maintained its uniqueness. It is said that Elangovadikal wrote *Chilapathikaram* in Kodungallur, and it is from here the poet Kunjikuttan Thampuran rendered the Epic *Mahabharatha* into Malayalam. There was a *Gurukulam* in Kodungallur, which was as famous as the *Nalanda, Thakshsila* and *Sree Kasi*.

The Kodungallur Temple

Kodungallur *Sree Kurumba Bhagavati* temple plays an important role in the history of Kerala. Kodungallur temple is one of the four *Devi* temples, which Bhargava Raman said to have installed in the four boundaries of Kerala. The others are: *Kollur Mookambika* temple in the north, *Hemambika* temple in the west at Karimala, *Balambika* temple in south at Kanniyakumari. The popular belief is that in order to save the devotees from the epidemic of chicken pox the *Lokambika* was installed in the Kodungallur temple by Bhargava Raman.

The responsibilities and rituals in the temple are classified and distributed among different category of people and the rights, duties and titles distributed
according to their work, skill and taste. That Brahmins, symbol of patriarchal religion in India, have no rights in this temple is a thing to be noted. This is one of those rare temples where the Brahmins are not performing the pooja. The officiating priests in the temple are known as Adikal who are outcaste Brahmins.

The Deities Venerated in the Temple (Prethishtakal)

Though the Goddess (Devi prathishta) is facing the north, importance is given to the southern gate (thekke nada). The eastern gate is important because the Holy of Holies (Rehasiya Arra, literal meaning, the secret chambour) is facing to the east. The chakras installed by both Bhargava Raman and Adi Sankarachariar are in the secret room. The Ganapathi Prethishta is in the southeast corner facing the west. The seven-mother- deities (saptha mathrulkal prethishta) are facing the north. The sword and the ornament (pallival and chilanka) of the Goddess are venerated in the Pallimada Kshetram in the northern side. Thavittu Muthi, facing west and Vasurimala Kshetram facing north are situated outside the encircling wall (chuttambalam). One ‘Chicken Stone’ (koshikkallu) in the eastern gate and two ‘chicken stones’ at the northern gate are eructed.

Siva is the main deity venerated in the main temple (sreekovil) today. The other pantheon deities mentioned above are eructed according to the rites and prescriptions of a Siva temple. Some of the essential deities Dhwara Palakar, and Nandi as well as the flag post (kodimaram) that goes with the Siva pantheon are missing in the Kodungallur temple and one can surmise that it is because of the uniqueness of the deity.
Kodungallur Thalla / Amma

Chamundi, one of the seven-mothers, is venerated and worshipped in the temple and the rites and rituals are patterned after appeasing Goddess Chamundi. A serene composed Devi with eight hands after killing Dharuka is venerated in different incarnations. This is said to be the uniqueness as well as the glory of Kodungallur Mother Goddess (Amma). Devi is worshipped as Saraswathi during Navarathri festivities, Mahalekshmi during Thalappoli festivities and Dhurga during Meenabharani celebrations. The Tamil devotees venerate Devi as Kannaki. For the people of Kodungallur, Devi is Kodungallur Amma. For other devotees Devi is Amma, Amma Thamburati, Thalla, Thamburati and the like. Over and above Devi takes different forms according to the different times of the day. Accordingly, Devi is considered to be Saraswathi in the early morning, Dhurga in the late morning, Bhatra Kali in the afternoon and Parvathi in the evening. Some devotees think that the same Deity of Lokanar Kavu near Vadakara in the northern Kerala venerated as Kodungallur Amma and that is the reason why the people of Vadakara gets special importance in the Kodungallur Bhagavati Kshetram. The peculiarity here is that though people venerate the Deity under different forms, there is no difference in the rituals.

The deity at Kudungallur is in fact a despised widow according to the great religious tradition of India. On a closer look, we can summurise that the widow hatred is comparatively a later phenomenon originated probably with the subjugation of women by the patriarchal religions. This is an indication of the antiquity of the Kodumgallur celebration.
Kodungallur Meena Bharani

Among the high feast celebrations (Maholsawams), the most important and the most famous is the Bharani festivity. Though the celebration is simple without elephants and other accompanying extravaganzas of similar temple feasts, thousands come from all over Kerala and from Tamil Nadu.

Meena Bharani celebration lasts more than a month from the Bharani of the month of Kumba to the day of Pooyam of the following month of Meena. On the day of Kumba Bharani begins the celebration with flag hoisting. Covering of Koszhikallu, which is the beginning of the high celebration, is on the day of Thiruvonam in the month of Meenam. The celebration reaches its peak on the three days (stars) of Revathi, Aswathi and Bharani. On Revathi the important ritual is seeing the ‘Revathi Lamp’ and on Aswathi, the ritual of Thrichambaracharthu. On the day of Bharani, is the famous ritual of Kavu Theendal, after it the entrance (Nada) is closed and it will be opened only on the day of Pooyam, after seven days. With this the celebration comes to an end.

Devotees come for the Bharani in groups wearing red clothes and with sword, rode, aramani (small bells tied to the waist) and chilanka (anklets that make sound while walking) in a devotional trance rhythmically running and jumping, and melodiously yelling and shouting ‘Devi Sharanam’ and singing sexually foul songs (poorappattu). They march as if they were going to the battlefield. The continuous flow of such small and big groups to the temple from far off places is a rare sight in temple celebrations.

The devotees believe that Devi will protect them from their misfortunes out of enmity, evil spirit, the effect of black magic and from all dangers in life. The emotions
of fear, devotion, hatred, jubilation, in short all *rasas* (emotions) displayed by the devotees as they march towards the temple entrance. In fact, it is a celebration of total emotions and the devotees indulge in it in the presence of Kodungallur *Ammma* without any inhibition.

The participants in the celebrations are known as *Bharanikkar* (people who come for *Bharani*). Those who come from the south are known as *thekker* (people from South) and those come from the north, *vadakker* (people from North). Within the temple premise, the devotees address themselves as *Mooppan* (elder). It is commonly believed that the most important day of the festivity is the day of *Aswathi* but from the point of view of the people’s participation and emotional involvement and display, the day of *Revathi* (i.e. the day before the *Aswathi*) is more important. This is the day the lower caste people from all over the State and Tamil Nadu come to worship *Thalla* (the goddess).

The *Velichappads* invariably and the groups of people who come singing foul songs appear to be MSMs. They are good dancers like women with long hair. Their gesturing, movements and body language all suggest that they are of third gender orientation. On our closer study, we came across the startling revelation that most of the people connected with the temple celebration in general are of third gender orientation. It is usual for the homosexuals to flock together to sacred as well as secular celebrations. Being emotionally vibrant and changeable, they are good histrionic performers.
Keezhkkavu (Low Caste Temple)

The **Pulaya** family attached to the temple has its own rights and it is maintaining a parallel small temple known as the *Keezhkkavu* (low caste temple). The *Pulaya* has certain clear and important rights in the temple celebration.

The *Keezhkkavu* is traditionally managed by a *Pulaya* family known under the special title ‘*Vallon*’ which has the rights and special privilege in the Kodungallur temple. In the *Melkkavu* (Upper Caste Temple) celebration the *Keezhkavu* has a significant role in the performance of rites and rituals.

The present myth circulated on the *Keezhkkavu* by the high caste is this: The couple, *Vallon* and his wife Chakki belonging to the *Pulaya* caste immigrated to the present place out of fear of *Asura* called *Daruka*. This place is known as *Pulappadam* as only *Pulayas* inhabited the area. The chieftain of the *Pulayas* was given the honorary title ‘*Vallon*’ for looking after *Pulappadam*.

After beheading *Daruka*, *Bhatra Kali* came to the *Pulaya* hut with *Daruka*’s head to dispel the fear of the *Pulaya* couple and she lived with them for fourteen days. While living with *Pulaya* couple, (*Devi*) ate fried husk, toddy and chicken. A happy and contented *Devi* blessed them and disappeared saying that her presence will be always there and the food that was served to her can be made offering to her by the devotees.

The king who came to know about this built a small temple and erected a statue that is being worshiped even today.

*Devi* also promised *Vallon* that she would come to the *Pulayappadam* seven days in a year so that he need not take the trouble to go to the *Melkkavu*. From that day
on ward no male member from the Vallon family go to the Melkkavu for worship; women are not strictly following it. Though the men from Vallon family do not go inside the temple they do go to pay respect (darsanam) to Devi from outside the temple and to take holy bath from the temple pond. They follow these practices even today.

Kerala of the first millennium when the promiscuity was order of the day, separate celebrations for the third gender were a possibility. We have already seen that different forms of homosexuality existed world over before the morality of the Semitic religions became norms for the other religions. We will soon see that the homosexuality remind very much concealed even within the Semitic religions. Third gender orientation is something very normal is a late knowledge for the modern person. However, it was quite an early understanding for the indigenous people. It must be noted that people who celebrate the Bharani are people from the Tribe and Dalit sections.

The Kavu theendal, which resembles a war is, as a matter of fact, the celebration of the high caste men. The Kavu theendal that takes place on Aswathi, is the celebration of the male. Muscled men occupy their respective thara almost forcefully evacuating the simple people who had unwittingly occupied during the celebration. One hardly see any women or lower caste in this celebration of Kavu Theendal.

Kodungallur Bharani - A Highly Complex Ritual Celebration

The Kodungallur Bharani celebration becomes highly complex which is a deposit of the contradictions of its long and unique history. The entire stratum of the society and culture is represented, as it were in a mirror, in a month and more long ritual celebration. Once extinct ruler (Thamburan) of the place is still the head of the celebration. Along with him there is a people organization known as Onmukrureye
Aayiram Yogam (nine hundred and ninety nine brotherhood) looking after the administration of the temple as well as the annual feast celebrations. Over and above the Devasam Board, Government machinery has its own controls and claims over the temple.

Different castes all over Kerala have their right and share in the temple through their Althara (a small platform around the pipal tree). There are numerous castes that have direct involvement in the ritual celebrations. Nairs, Palakavelan, Pulayan, Chaliyas, Vallovan Arayan and several other castes have either rights or ritual involvement in the temple. The Adikal are the officiating priests. Brahmins have only nominal role outside the temple for vechunivathiyan. How this ex-untouchable castes and high castes worked together for centuries in the Kodungallur temple is a fascinating enquiry.

When we look at the celebration from the point of ‘Third Sex’, it makes sense. The devotees of same sex orientation from all caste flocked together at Kodumgallur temple forgetting all caste differences can be a plausible explanation.

Comparison of the Gay Ritual Celebrations in Kerala

In Chapter II we have seen some of the Gay Rituals of the Thirunangaiar and Hijras. The Kerala gay-rituals have many things in common with the Thirunangaiar and Hijras rituals. First, the gay rituals are open to believers of all religions. In all the above-mentioned Kerala gay-rituals, the celebration is open to all, Muslims and Christians. At Kottamkulangara gay rituals, a Muslim called Vettikadan Muthlali has the right to conduct the Ganamela (Musical concert). In the Kodungallur Bharani Pattu Christian as well as Muslim sexuality is described in the sexual songs. In the Sabirimala celebration the Ayyappan and Vavar friendship and the ritual integration in
the pilgrimage is well-known. Over and above, the devotees include people from all the faiths in all these celebrations.

Secondly, in the gay-festivals at Kuvakam and Pillaiyarkuppam in Tamilnadu, Mohini is worshipped as the widow in the second day of the two-day festival. It is counter to the mainstream Indian custom of despising the widows perpetuated by the infamous sati. At Kodungallur, the Devi is worshipped as widow. This is a clear indication that it is a non-Aryan celebration belongs to the indigenous Dravidian stock.

Thirdly, identical to the ritual of Thirunangaiar dressing up as women in Pillaiyarkuppam, at Kottamkulangara the gay men in the attire of women offer lamp to the devi.

Fourthly, all the Kerala gay ritual celebrations are started at the time of Dravidian kings Tamilnadu. The stigma and discrimination of the third gender and the widows are the handiwork of the men dominated culture.

Lastly, the Kerala gay ritual celebrations share each aspect of the Kuvakam and Pillaiyarkuppam rituals. While Kodungallur rituals adopted the widow aspect, the Kottamkulangara ritual adopted the Mohini aspect of changing the attire and offering the ritual lamp and at Sabirimala, the Mohini myth and the pilgrimage.

During the field investigation it is experienced that most of the Komarams and Velichappad in the Kodungallur Devi temple in particular and in other temples in general are having different sexual orientations.
5.4. Christianity

Some of the Western countries such as Belgium, Netherlands, Brazil, and British Columbia granted homosexuals recognition similar to that of married couples, while France, Sweden, Dutch, Canada, Texas etc. pacts have been established to regularize some situations connected with same sex couples. This has evoked fresh relook at Christian teachings on the same sex behaviours. The Church authority not only clarified its moral position but also produced medical and scientific research findings to establish homosexuality is not normal.

On 31st July 2003, the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, published a document entitled, “Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Persons”. The document says, “There are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God’s plan for marriage and family. Marriage is holy, while homosexual acts go against the natural moral law”. The document continues, “Homosexual acts close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved” (Ibid).

The Catholic Church also maintains the position that homosexuality is a mental disorder and it can be treated effectively. Its spokesperson in an interview said recently: “homosexuality was diagnosed and treated as a psychiatric illness – abnormal behaviour – until 1973, when it was removed from the Diagnostic and Statistic Manual in psychiatry because of political pressure.” The interview, however, accepts that all homosexuals cases could not be treated, one third remain without any result after

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80 The news appeared in ZENIT, the official news letter of Vatican, on 1st August 2003
81 The interview appeared in ZENIT, the official news letter of Vatican, on 19th September 2003
treatment: “The Spitzer report from the Archives of Sexual Behaviour, which will publish in October, surveys ex-homosexuals who were out of the lifestyle for five years, and it found that 64% of the men and 43% of the women considered themselves to be heterosexuals after they received treatment.” Dr. Spitzer of Columbia University led the task force of the American Psychiatric Association in 1973 that removed homosexuality from our diagnostic manual.”

The Catholic Church is vehemently against same sex marriage, the spokesperson gives the reason for the opposing of same sex marriage: “Marriage between a man and a woman is based on commitment and is an expression of Judeo-Christian morality. Same sex unions are based on neo-pagan, Kinseyian morality that does not expect loyalty. In a recent study from a major journal conducted on males, it found that males in same-sex unions stayed together for an average length of two years.”

The spokesperson clarified the Church’s position on adoption of child by the homosexual couples. He said, “The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith released a document on homosexuality that addressed adoptions by homosexual couples. The statement noted that intentionally depriving a child of a father or mother is doing violence to that child. Also, raising children in an environment with same-sex parents goes against the values of the common inheritance of humanity. The absence of a father in the home leads to sadness, anger, difficulty in trusting and conflict disorders. The absence of a mother is worse…Children should not be subjected to this cruel deprivation, as it does serious damage.”

82 For more information look up The Catholic Medical Association at www.cathmed.org
The Document condemning the same-sex marriage, however states, “Nonetheless, according to the teaching of the Church, men and women with homosexual tendencies must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity”.

The position of the American Episcopal Church leaders to consecrate Rev. V. Gene Robinson, the first openly gay Bishop of New Hampshire, against stiff opposition from the Christian Churches all over the world, is revolutionary and very much in line with the understanding alter-face to the Catholic Church. The appointment of a gay person as Bishop is a proclamation that being gay is natural.\textsuperscript{83}

From the documents and interviews, the Catholic Church is uncompromising on legalizing the same-sex marriage and treating same-sex orientation as normal.

The Church in United States was subjected to terrible embarrassment due to the clerical sex-abuse scandal in 2002\textsuperscript{84}. Several priests had abused young people over many years and the Bishops responded to those grave offences in wholly inadequate ways. The accused were sued for compensation of millions of dollar so much so some dioceses went bankrupt. The U.S. Government set up a commission to clean up the mess. Seminary formations were toned up to avoid the recurrence of it in future. Though the Church’s official declared stand was so uncompromising, no offender was not directly punished by the concerned Church.

In 2006 the BBC reported that a whole seminary in Australia was closed down due to the entire seminary turned to be a centre of gay- research, activity and dissemination of gay materials. Though there is such open approach and acceptance at

\textsuperscript{83} The Hindu, 7th August, 2003
\textsuperscript{84} More details look up ZENIT, 19th July 2003
least in some denomination of the Church, these trends have no effect in the Christianity of Kerala’s shame culture.

5.5. Islam

From the previous discussions, it is obvious that on the one hand Islam theoretically condemns homosexuality and promotes it through the practice of compulsory circumcision on the other hand. Muslims, largely, believed to be of gay orientation by other communities. There are several stories mocking at the typical stereotype of Muslim gay sexuality. People in other communities believe that circumcision is the cause for it. Circumcision at a young age makes the Muslim male sexually alert and a penetration complex can be developed consequently.

In the shame culture of Kerala the Muslim boys who are initiated early into the sex consciousness, sex-related practices and sex promoting food habits and living are comparatively free of sex shame. They appear to be uninhibited in sex talk and bold in taking to and enticing the girls of their age, particularly of other communities. The early sex awakening and the peer group support makes them energetic to engage in gay sex. The Muslim joined family system as well as the cluster living are congenial for the gay sex. Still, when it comes to recognizing the various sexual orientations in the shame culture of Kerala, they are inhibited, perhaps, not as intensely as the other patriarchal religious believers.

5.6. Conclusion

A small percentage of persons are MSMs in Kerala as in other places. A one third of them are born gay who cannot be changed through psychological treatments. As we have seen above, the Catholic Church against homosexuality too accepts that
one third of same sex persons cannot be changed. All the religions have created devices and structures to absorb the persons with same sex orientation. The more intolerant a religion sounds against gay the more rampant the organized structure to accommodate persons of same sex orientation in it. The patriarchal religions are the most intolerant to MSMs through their proclamations. The negation of gay sex in non-Vaishnavite traditions of Hinduism in Kerala appears to be of recent origin. The evidence for it can be seen from the remnants of the celebrations of Kotamkulangara Devi festival, Shabirimala Pilgrimage and in the Kodungallure Bharani Celebration. However, consideration of humanity is largely safeguarding the sexual minorities in almost all the religions and keeping it as very confidential.

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