CHAPTER 7

IN A SHAME CULTURE LIKE KERALA THE MSMS WILL DEVELOP

IDENTITY CRISIS ALONG WITH COPING UP DEVICES

7.1. PERSONALITY TRAITS OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF MSM IN KERALA

A heterosexual can sense something ‘queer’, or unusual way of behaviour when the MSMS come together. Bound to live a camouflaged life in the society for fear of attack and isolation from the near and dear ones, MSMS show a chameleon type of behaviour quite often. In a heterosexual crowd MSMS can conduct, themselves without being detected imitating latter’s behaviour pattern; in appearances too most of them can mimic the heterosexuals. The true orientations of the MSMS displayed while they are alone without any inhibiting presence. Then, they address among themselves as females do, Edi. Their gestures and movements are that of the female. An outsider would certainly feel, as the girl Akshra felt, there is something special about these people.

Local nomenclatures:

MSMS are known by different names in different parts of Kerala. At Kannur they are known as Ammaiychi, Koduppu, Maassa, Vettichikal, Thaapasi, Kalmivay, Moonchikal etc. At Kozhikode, they are known as Kundan, Prabhakal, Floute, Oothu, Cycling, Levens, Kayappam, Kadppuram etc. Ernakulam, apart from some of the names mentioned above, they are specially known as Menaka. In Trivandrum they are also known as Akkachi, Globista etc.

Biologically MSMS are normal like any other male. Still there is some difference. Some of them by mere appearance and a few by familiarity can be detected. From the claim of the MSMS we know that they are no transsexuals (hermaphrodites)
among them. One can easily guess that there could be a sizable number of them in any population. Outside Kerala, as we have seen, they can find acceptance in communities known as Hijras and Thirunangair. We do not know the presence of them in Kerala as a group. It is possible that the hermaphrodite types too have been incorporated into the MSM community of Kerala.

On the basis of gender (Psychologically), they behave like women and relish the company of women. Their women friendship is superficial just to enjoy the presence. MSMs are easy-going; they live in the present time. There is no order in their life; they can not be restricted to a place or to a routine life. MSMs are generally very emotional however, without any emotional explosion; very few among them who go to tears in face of pain and hardship. They have no enduring relationship among themselves and keep on shifting allegiance. They are very reluctant to take order and obey but incapable of dissent and questioning the authority. MSMs are generally non-assertive.

MSMs are generally very emotional as well as artistic. They are very good dancers, singers and actors. Being good art performers, they appreciate art and art related celebrations. MSMs flock to art festival and competitions. In the school and college art and sports festivals, a good number of participants are MSMs. In the festival site, they can enjoy the art as well as have sex of their choice at the same time unnoticed by the public eye in the anonymity of the crowd.

Gender Expression of MSMs is feminine. Their gestures and body movements are feminine. MSMs talk like women by calling among themselves female names. Some of them have a craving for dressing up like women and always on the look out for privacy to wear women attire. They make copious use of the costumes such as lip-
sticks, powder, eyeliner and eyebrow pencil. They prefer feminine items such as bag, watch, umbrella, chapels etc.

Sexual orientation of MSMs varies from place to place. They generally like male hairy body of hard muscle. Some prefer rough sex in filthy situations of latrines and sewages. Some others said they like the smell of the sweat. Certain human smells are erotic they accept.

7.1.1. MSMs and Adjustment to the Society

As pointed out above, from the researcher’s experience in the fieldwork and interviews that between the typical role model of the male and female, there is a wide spectrum of variation in the behaviour patterns of a sizable number of people in Kerala. This variation is also seen in the sexual behaviours. A traditional society like Kerala, which frowns at even ordinary heterosexual behaviours, wonders at the existence of gay behaviours in Kerala. The Keralites have been thinking that gay sex a Western phenomenon. Persons who show homosexual tendencies attributed with moral degradation and psychological maladjustment. Even educated people who are in the decision-making position are not exceptions to this belief.

Gay men in Kerala are grouped mainly under income and employment. There is a first group of gay men who have good jobs and come together for same sex satisfaction. They do not mix with others and are interested in keeping their identity hidden. There are lawyers, doctors, engineers, teachers and political leaders in this group. A second grouping is based on age. The old senior gay men who had been ones MSMs now ran out of market still come to the cities for their gay sexual needs. They quietly have their gay sex in the lonely areas of the cities and are happy in their seniority. The MSMs, sex-workers, are generally of low-income; and are of low
education form the third group. A number of them are dance teachers and otherwise employed mainly in shops. These employments for them are a cover to come to the city to do sex and earn more money.

The MSMs are further divided into different sub-categories based on appearance, ordinariness, and unruly conduct etc. There is a group of MSMs who are good looking and girlish. They cluster together and form into groups. These are very choosy in their clients and extract big sum for each same-sex encounter. The second subcategory is the MSMs who are from villages and are of low income and education. They come to the city to earn money and have same sex satisfaction which is difficult in a village set up. A third subcategory of MSMs are the unruly ones. They are from the suburbs and have the confidence to be open about their sexual identity. These groups openly and aggressively canvas for clients. They also run the risk of being beaten up. A fourth subcategory is the gangster MSMs who are out to extract money form the clients through hoodlum. They lock up the clients in room and forcefully take the money without having sex. There is a fifth subcategory who are ex-MSMs who have made enough money through MSM activity now settled, some are married and no doing commercial sex, nonetheless, sympathetic towards the work that made them what they are today.

In big cities like Ernakulam and Kozhikode there goon leaders who would protect the MSMs and they collect their regular share known as ‘Dada-contribution’. MSMs are generally very much attached to their houses, however, their own close relations, may be sensing abnormality, are not proportionately attached as the MSMs to them. Still, they are pampered at home because of their feminine behaviour. The families tolerate their dressing like girls and helping in the kitchen chores but they would never tolerate the same sex activities if they come to know about it. In cases
where the family came to know about their having sex with outsiders the rejection was outright. Many of the poor houses have become very rich from the earnings of the MSM sex-work. Nevertheless, the benefited households do not know the source of the income.

The MSMs in Kerala have devised their own techniques and strategies to counter the various attacks of the society. Their first effort is to keep their family and locality away from knowing their sexual activities. Most of them, therefore, immigrated to the city giving several alibis. In the anonymity of the city, their biggest threat is the ridicule by the people. This they counter by retorting in the same coin. For example, when ridiculed for shaking the buttocks, instead of shying away, they assert doing it more times in an exaggerated way. When husband points out them to the wife as queer people in a ridiculing manner, they go in front of the wife and expose themselves. The people on refusing the invitation to sex often beat up the MSMs. The youth is another category who attacks the MSMs regularly on identifying them. Alcoholic drunkards who become aggressive on intoxication beat up the fragile MSMs for sports. MSMs survive in the hostile situation by running away from the scene or disappearing in the crowd. MSMs have developed, as all oppressed and weak people in history, a special skill for escape.

The MSMs do not want to come out as they think that the society will not accept and recognize their sexual orientation and behaviour. Some fear that coming out would make the life of their siblings, particularly sisters, very difficult and that they may be thrown out of their house. Left to themselves MSMs are not troubled by guilt still they think their sexual behaviour is unethical and it may invite the wrath of the public. Some are afraid if their identity is revealed they may lose their job. The biggest
hurdle in revealing the identity is the law of the land and the police. Homosexuality is a crime still in this country and the police can arrest them any moment accusing them of engaging in unnatural sex, which is a heinous crime before our law. (Recent Supreme Court verdict on Article 377 is changed the situation).

The only religious group that said to approve MSM activity is the Muslims. Though their religious leaders strongly condemn because it is referred as most unnatural sin in Quran, in practical life religious leaders themselves and the Muslim community, by and large, if not encourage, tolerates it. MSM activity is nick named in Kerala ‘Malabar pani’ or ‘Quilandy pani’ (‘pani’ = sex) by other religious communities. Somehow, gay sex has come to be identified with Islam. While serving the questionnaire for filling the same stereotype opinions were voiced by the respondents in Islam-minority areas, “Same-sex is the phenomenon of Quilandy and Kozhikode”. The main reason seems to be the circumcision. As we have seen early, with the circumcision, the boys are early initiated into sexual activities, as the ceremony itself is recognition of early sexuality. A penis without foreskin is said to be easily excitable by rubbing against the cloth and other objects and the young boy develops a penetration complex. For masturbating a penis without foreskin, the entire trunk of the penis is to be stimulated and it may make the penis unusually big in size.

In addition to the early circumcision, the life pattern of the Muslims also congenial for MSM activity early in life. There is strict gender as well as social separation in Islam. At home number of boys in varying age sleep together in their joint families and there is all chance of the elder ones initiating the younger ones into same sex. Being a commercial community most of their coming together is in the night and which promotes chances for same sex. Commercial communities are generally open to
new experience. There is great respect for the elders in Islam and that can be used for sexually exploiting the young. Islam is a marrying religion and they have no guilt in sex and sex-related matters.

**7.1.2. Different Patterns of Homosexual Behaviours**

*Saathi,* a Vijayavada based MSM support organisation has published a profile of MSM Community in India (see picture below). The complexity of the same sex orientation is clear from the sketch. Still, more investigation is to be done to get an in-depth understanding of different groups. Given below is the summary of an interview with one of the staff from the agency. The common characteristic of first Cluster of Birupie, Akwa, Hizara and Nirvana is that they are transvestites. The Birupie dress like women and make money by singing. Akwa dress like women keeps their male sex organ untampered. The Nirvana dress like women but they remove the male organ, mostly engage in anal sex. Hizaras are same as Hijras. The cluster of Ganacharies, Sivasakthies, Gangammas, Krishnadasis, Bagavati, Bhairavi, Mathangi, Basavi etc. are groups dedicated to different deities all over India. The practice is that if the parents pray for a girl child and a boy child is born that child is dedicated to the deity whose intercession is sought. Such children are known under the names of different gods and goddess. In Gujarat these are generally known as Krishnadasi and Bhagavati, In Assam they are known as Bhairavi and at Orissa they are known as Mathangi and Basavi.
7.1.3. MSM Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SHSM</td>
<td>Situational Homosexual Men = Soldiers</td>
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<tr>
<td>RHS</td>
<td>Recreationally Homosexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MGM</td>
<td>Married Gay Men</td>
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<tr>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>Male Sex Workers = Temporarily</td>
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<tr>
<td>BBSM</td>
<td>Behavioually Bisexual Man</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBSM</td>
<td>Situational Bisexual Man</td>
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<tr>
<td>DD</td>
<td>Double Decker = mutual Sex</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIGM</td>
<td>Self Identified Gay Men</td>
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7.2. Quantitative Analysis

7.2.1. Quantitative Study

The quantitative sample study among the MSMs of Kerala yielded certain interesting information. The basic information of 286 MSMs from 14 towns one each of 14 districts in Kerala are collected using an interview schedule. The data processed on basic variables are as follows:

7.2.1.1 Age

Out of the total 286 MSMs 82.2% belongs to the age group between 18-35 and only three below 18. 93.4% of MSMs are below forty years old. Above 50 years, only .7%, that is, only two persons in a sample of 286 above 50.

7.2.1.2. Religion

In a total sample of 286, Hindus are 165, Christians, 44 and Muslims74. The assumption was that the MSMs are distributed more or less according to the percentage of each community in the State. However, the MSM activity is more visible among the Muslim Community for various reasons described above. This reflected in the study. While the Christians, Nairs and Thiyyas under represented in the State percentage of population, the percentage of MSMs from Muslim community are almost same 25.9%, their population in the State.
7.2.1.3. Caste Distribution

There are 2.1% Brahmins, 8.4% Nairs and 9.8% Thiyyas in the sample of 286. The MSMs in Nairs and Thiyyas communities, as in the Christian community, are fewer in number. About 37.41% of the MSMs are from other castes. This is much above their population in the State. This data corresponds with the MSM reality in other parts of the country. The recognized groups of Hijras and Alis consist of mostly members from the lower caste and from poor set up. There can be several reasons for this phenomenon, the most important being lack of a shame attached to their culture to inhibit them from different sexual orientations and poverty.

7.2.1.4. Education

59.6% of the sample has an education below SSLC and those who have a degree are just 10.1%. Vast majority, 86.5% of the sample, has not completed the degree. In spite of all claims, the high correlation between poverty, caste and education has been established in several studies both inside and outside Kerala. The outcomes of those studies have been established once again in our study. The most important findings here is that the people of same sex orientations belong mostly to the poorer section of each religious community. The argument is that it is not their poverty that drive them to the same sex activity but rather the non-shame nature of their subculture which gives the transparency to give expression to their sexual orientation. Nanda, 1990, says in his article that during his extensive fieldwork among the Hijras, he found only one Brahmin as a Hijra.
7.2.1.5. Occupation

64.3% of the sample is employed in different small works. Of the employed 23.1% are coolie workers and 10.5 are employed in small temporary works. 9.1% are Artist, Musicians and Dance teachers and another 9.1% are engaged in salaried works. The remaining are employed in different works such as small business (3.1%), skilled works (3.5%), self employed (3.5%), business executives (1%) and running small business (1.4%).

7.2.1.6. Income

Sixty four percent of the sample is below the income of Rs. 3000/- per month. Another 16.8% are below Rs. 5000- and the remaining 19.2 are above Rs. 5000/- of which 2.4% belong to above Rs. 25,000/- income group. The data shows that the MSMs belong to low-income group.

7.2.1.7. Marital Status

Interestingly 29.1% are married persons. Those belong to the marriageable age of 26-35 alone are 46.1%. This is not surprising; the permanently gay persons normally do not marry. Most of them get marry to escape the stigma out of family compulsions. Marriage, for many, is a way to get into the mainstream society. They duly marry and even beget children, however, for sexual enjoyment, they seek same-sex partners. Left to themselves most of these married MSMs would like to remain single or in same sex wedlock.

Most of the MSMs are the third child in the family. There is an assumption that the chance of the last boy child becoming gay out of over pampering, 14.3% of our
sample are the last child in the family. 68.9% MSMs belong to families less than four children.

7.2.1.8. First Sexual Experience

The first sexual experience of 56.3% of the sample is between the ages of 11-15. In the 5-10 age group 17.5% had their first sex experience. Only a few (1.7%) had their first sexual experience below the age of five. 24.5% had their first experience above the age of sixteen.

7.2.1.9. Self Recognition of Gay Sex Orientation

Most of the sample, 57.7%, came to know that they had gay tendency between the ages of 16-20. Between 10-15 age group 38.5% recognized their same sex tendency. Before 10 years of age only 3.5% came to know about their gay orientations. Only one person reported that he came to know about his same sex orientation when he was above twenty.

7.2.1.10. First Sex-Experience Partners

Maximum number of MSMs had their first sex experience from the neighbours. The next big group is those who had their first experience with relatives. From the classmates 16.4% and from the teachers 13.3% had their first sex experience. Only one person had his first experience from a doctor.

Equal number of samples had their Paternal and maternal uncles 21% each. Four of them reported to have their first sex experience from their fathers. Number of them, 57.5%, refused to fill in this question.
7.2.1.11. The Place of First Sex Experience

Maximum number 36.4% had their first sex experience in the neighbour’s house. In the open place - 22.7%, own house – 13.6%, Relatives house – 14.7%, School and Hotel – 5.6% had their first experience. Three persons in the hospitals, 10 persons in the school and hostel and one person in the tailoring shop had their first sex experience.

Forty-two percent had been attacked when others came to know about the same sex orientation. Maximum number in the sample 18.2% had been driven away, spat upon - 2.8%, thrown at – 2.1% hitting – 7.7%. The others were attacked by all these means mentioned. The type persons who attacked MSMs are mostly the youth, 16.8%. Different combinations of youth, goons and others have attacked them.

7.2.1.12. Suicidal tendency

Of the sample 33.2% suffer from suicidal tendency. The counseling support and the group feeling helped a number of them to get rid of the tendency.

7.2.2. Gay identity Test

In order to test the MSM Identity, we have chosen six aspects, they are (i) MSM personal self-esteem (ii) MSM collective self-esteem (iii) MSM attitude of personal setbacks to social prejudice (iv) MSM activity as a personal choice / ideology (v) MSM community consciousness (vi) Internalization of gay-sex by the MSMs.

7.2.2.1. Personal Self-Esteem of MSM

To the personal self-esteem of MSMs, 20.4% respondents “strongly agree” and 22.9% “agree” and the cumulative percent of “strongly agree” and “agree” is 43.3%.
The “no opinion” response is 22.2%. The mean value calculated from the difference is found to be 3.31. The Z-value is 11.02 with zero significance. This shows that the MSMs have fairly good self–Esteem. However, our assumption was that the MSMs are of poor self-esteem. The reason for this shift appears to be that the sample is chosen from the MSMs from the group exposed to public services. During the interviews, many of them said that they had improved their self-image having come to contact with the public services.

7.2.2.2. Collective Self-Esteem of MSM

To the collective self-esteem of MSMs, 18.9% of the respondents “strongly agree”, 30.9% “agree”, and cumulative percentage of agreement is 49.8%. The “no opinion” response is 21.8%. The mean difference from three is 2.95. The Z-value is 1.67 and the significance is 0.095. The collective self-esteem of MSMs is found to be low. The MSMs, who engage in same sex for money, are generally very reluctant to be known to the public as a group.

Individually, they are willing to reveal their identity; of course, they have to do that to find clients. As we have seen early, the gay men who have permanent, biological, same-sex orientation among the MSMs are willing to be known to the public. Numerically the gay are a minority and the MSM interest prevails over the Gay’s.

7.2.2.3. Attributions of Personal Setbacks to Social Prejudice

Attributions of Personal Setbacks to Social Prejudice, 15.7% “strongly agree”, 28.7% “agree” and the cumulative frequency is 44.1%. Twenty two percent has “no opinion”. The mean difference from three is 3.23 and the Z-value 4.74 with 0
significances. The MSMs attribute the reasons for their setbacks to the social prejudice. This is in line with our assumption that MSMs with poor self-esteem would blame the society for their failures. During the interview, many accepted that they have benefited from counselling supports towards taking up responsibility for their failure. However, for the support and training of the counselling support, the MSMs would have refused to take responsibility for their personal failures. 62.6% respondents found agreeing with the question: “I have become a MSM because the elders used me sexually”. This question was included because the investigator had picked up similar statements in the informal interviews.

7.2.2.4. MSM Activity as a Personal Choice/ Ideology

MSM activity as a personal choice or based on an ideology, 19.2% “strongly agree” and 21% “agree” and the cumulative percent of agreement is 40.2. Twenty-nine responded with “no opinion”. From the mean difference 3.27 and the Z-value 6.11, it is seen that the respondents remain MSMs on their personal choice, whether it has developed into an ideology is doubtful because the majority is not keen to reveal their identity. Only 32.9% disagree with the question.” There was a time in my life when I could have decided to be a heterosexual.”

7.2.5. MSM Community Consciousness

To the MSM community consciousness, 17.1% “strongly agree” and 24.5% “agree” and the cumulative percentage of agreement is 41.6%. The “no opinion” response is 27.6%. The MSMs register fairly good community consciousness. The mean difference is 3.56 and the Z-value is 13.03 with zero significance. To the question: “I think all MSMs should join together to end hostility to same-sex”, only 18.2 % disagreed with it. MSMs are united community when come together
anonymously; however, they are not willing to be known to the public as a community due to poor collective self-esteem resulted by the social stigma and discrimination.

7.2.6. Internalization of Gay sex

To the Internalization of Gay Sex, 19.6% “strongly agree”, 24.2% “agree”, and the cumulative percent of agreement is 43.9%. The “no opinion” response is 17.5%. The mean difference is 3.18 with a Z-value 3.93 with zero significance. The MSMs recognize their same-sex orientation and accept their uniqueness. Our assumption was, MSMs entertain resentment against their same sex orientation and would like to come out of their same-sex orientation if offered a chance. However, the mean difference of the components is lowest here next only to collective self-esteem, which is significant by 0.095, as we have seen above. To the question: “I wish that I could develop more erotic feelings women”, only 50% answered affirmatively and of which only 12.6% strongly agreed. The MSMs are not very keen to change their sexual orientation. To the question: “I would like to get professional help in order to change my sexual orientation from MSM to straight,” only 50% as agreed, indicating thereby that half of them want to remain as there are in their sexual orientation.

7.2.3. Findings

1. 43.3% respondents have individual self-esteem. Our assumption was that still less of them will have self-esteem. This many respondents have self-esteem because they are from the field work experience which has helped in enhancing their self-esteem.

2. 49.8% of the respondents have collective self-esteem. Our assumption was it is still higher as they folk together being psychologically non-assertive and physically weak. The MSMs who are temporarily engage in gay sex have no
interest in their collectivity, whereas the real gay among the MSMs are interested in building up their community.

3. 44.1% of the respondents attribute their personal set backs to the Social prejudice.

4. 40.2% of respondents continue to be MSMs by their personal choice. The personal conviction has not taken the shape of an ideology for want of collective self-esteem.

5. Only 41.6% of the respondents are conscious of their community. The gays are highly united when gathered namelessly. In the hostile situation of Kerala they never had a chance to come together freely. A few occasions they gathered it was done very secretively.

6. Forty three percent of the respondents has internalized their gay sex and happy with it. Those who accept that they have internalized their gay sex orientation are those who are gay among the MSMs. The MSMs generally dissatisfied with their orientation and keep on blaming the society for its prejudice towards them and the people who have initiated them in the same sex orientation.

7. In all the Reponses to the six components, the percentage of “no opinion” and “agree” scores highest. This indicates the undecided nature of MSMs in taking strong stand in favour of them.

8. As all the six components tested, fall below 50% our assumption that the MSMs have identity crisis is true. The scoring would have been much low had the sample drawn from the MSMs who do not come under the any external influence.

9. In the components of Individual Self-esteem the “strongly agree” responses are more than that of the Collective Self-esteem. When compared the cumulative
percentage of the “strongly agree” and “agree” The Collective Self esteem is high. Thus, one can conclude that while the Collective Self-esteem of the MSMs is higher than the individual self-esteem.

7.3. Conclusion

In sum, more than half of the MSMs in Kerala do not have an identity of their own. The findings appear to be according to our assumption, “In a middle class value dominated society, which espouses shame culture, the MSMs will develop identity crisis”. We have seen above, the collective self-esteem as well as the collective self-esteem of the MSMs is poor and they like to exist in the society secretly. In other words, they suffer from an identity crisis due to the hostile climate existing in the highly stigmatized Kerala society. To the specific question: “I have no objection in my family members knowing that I am an MSM”, 79.4% of respondents disagreed indicating thereby their identity crisis.

Moreover, The MSMs by their very nature bound to be incognito even in less stigmatized society. They will be more so in a shame culture like Kerala. The data also proves our assumption that one third of who are known to be MSMs are not pure MSMs but in fact Gay who is willing to assert their identity in public but for the pressure from the MSMs who form a majority. The non-gay MSMs are more powerful and aggressive regarding keeping the identity camouflaged to escape the wrath of the stigmatizing society temporarily.