

# Sexuality Landscape of Modern Kerala: A Discourse on Male Social Gathering among Malabar Muslim Men

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## Research Article

### ABSTRACT

An enquiry that would light on the past of sexuality and the ways in which the contemporary is of sexuality is produced through its historical legacies. Sexual topics of any kind are avoided in polite conversation in India, and any talk concerning homosociality<sup>1</sup> (male social gathering) is altogether taboo, especially in Kerala (even kiss of love). Here how Malabar became popular for homosociality expedition and its nature and nurture is tracing out. Sketching the process of transformation from homosociality sub culture to a kind of gay politics in Calicut (Kozhikode) is the focus of the study.

**Keywords:** Homosociality; Politics; History; Economics

### INTRODUCTION

Since very earlier times, human beings had some sense of the past, both his/her/[others] own and that of their community or people, through their decades they develop a sense of a description or narration, the past as well as present, but they are not or deliberately considered the crucial or sensitive issues of human being but also the society like, how, what and why of its extent of sexuality determine the scope of history. According to Michel Foucault in his *The Use of Pleasure (History of Sexuality)* 'the object was to learn to what extent the effort to think one's own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, so enable it to think differently'.

Sexuality in General and Malabar in particular is a subject of controversy among scholars as well as Public Sphere. So the scholars of history of sexuality and the students of Kerala history are baffled in their attempt to understand the variants of discourses, due to the confused nature of sources, lack of written records, lack of specific contemporary 'evidences' and more due to the social stigma towards certain aspect. But the most widely accepted conventional view was that the Malabar was highly tolerated towards sexuality in general and Homosociality among Malabar Muslim men are particular.

#### History of gender or/and history of men

Sex which mean physical, morphological, and anatomical differences (biological differences) and Gender means a culturally constructed, historically changing, and often unstable system of differences. Every political, intellectual, religious, economic, social, and even military change had an impact on the actions and roles of men and women, and, a culture's gender structures influenced every other structure or development.

As argued by Joan Scott, "gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power [1]. The word sexuality currently defined as the constitution or life of the individual as related to sex or the possession or exercise of sexual functions and desires, is itself new coming into English and most other Western languages in about 1800. At that point new ideas about the body, changes in marriage patterns, and new concepts of gender differences and new methods of controlling people's lives converged in western countries to create what scholars usually call "modern sexuality"<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Homosociality means the social gathering of same sex men, sharing of same emotion, sexual desire and the like.

Differences distinguished between sex and gender sex is natural, gender socially constructed. Gender roles vary culture to culture and are therefore culturally specific. Biological roles interpreted as reflection of role of each gender in its culture and then beyond it into a universal setting. Sex is seen as existing a priori and gender as a set of attributes<sup>3</sup>.

Historians studied the subjects of politics, economics, religion, and long they began to consider Gender. Sexuality became a topic of extensive historical inquiry only after the development of women's history; which marks a specialized journal, the *Journal of the History of Sexuality* in 1990. Even though some of the most prominent theorist of historical sexuality, the French philosopher Michel Foucault, focused primarily on the male experience just as traditional history had, both because of the timing of their emergence as historical fields and the nature of their subject, gender and sexuality are often closely related. Indeed, sexuality may have the opposite problem from other areas of historical inquiry, in the scholars may need to be reminded of distinctions between gender and sexuality rather than convinced of the importance of gender as a category of analysis when exploring sexuality.

Gender history is that recognizing that femininity and masculinity are to some extent social construct; it investigates how institutions are gendered and how institutions gender individual.

Study of gender focused on

- Social relation of men and women in their normative patterns.
- Peoples basic assumption about the world and its cultural symbols and meanings attached to its normative patterns<sup>4</sup>.
- How gender worked at public sphere.

Literature, in Malayalam there is no serious studies conducted in the category of homosexuality or homosociality sub culture among the so called 'malayalees', excluding the work of Filippo, *Malabar Secrets: South Indian Muslim Men's (Homo) sociality across the Indian Ocean*, *Asian Studies Review*, and Muraleedharan, *Shifting Paradigms Gender and Sexuality Debates in Kerala*, *Economic and Political Weekly*. Reshma et al., is another work for tracing the notion of homosexuality in Kerala, which gave important to lesbian studies.

During 1948 *Mathrubhumi* weekly published an article by Nair titled *Sahithyavum Laigigakaaryaghalum* (literature and sexuality) argued that there are five bad stories(to some of) published in Malayalam recently, *Shabdhalgal* by Vaikam Muhammed Basheer is one of them narrate sexuality and refer to homosexuality. He argued that the attempt was good, narrate the thought about our desires, and he raise such question like why we silent about appearance of sex in the literature.

A reply by GKN titled the *Sahithyavum Laigigakaaryaghalum Adhinte Maruvashavum*, (literature, sexuality and its opposite side) argued that strongly oppose sex appearance in literature and art, which against the morality of literature. On 1946 march 25, *Mathrubhumi* weekly published another article titled *Laigiga Viknjaneeyam* (sexuality knowledge) by Govindhan Kutty Nair that the over curiosity and lack of proper knowledge leads to unnatural activity among malayalees, according to him, 99 percentage of men and women are fear about their unnatural sexuality expedition. He argued that 'if it is true it practiced by poets, thinkers, philosophers and artist and finally rest of the human being and animals, it should be controlled, if we successes it will be a great achievement'. This was the limited literary expression of 1940s malayali attitude towards homosexuality.

### **Homosociality discourse in Malabar**

The discussion over the sexuality in Kerala is debatable during the past three or four decades. The reason was the paradigm shift in gender and sexuality debate, and the part of global discourses. And the regional interest also plays an important role which addresses the local constructions. While addressing homosexuality or homosociality [2] in Kerala in the 1960s and 1970s same sex relationship was popular in secret as well as public, as argued by Muraleedharan Tharayil, the most prominent is widespread identification of the Malabar region especially Calicut, as some kind of Mecca for homosocial expeditions. There is a tendency to 'under estimate' that a particular community (Muslim), practiced homosociality. They use cultural and historical indications to prove their argument (rich Sufi tradition).

Filipo Osella argued that the interstices of wider political and economic transformations taking place within the city in the first half of the 20th century. Observing that intense homosociality has been central to Kozhikode masculine practices and aesthetics, Osella adds that they do not belong to an imagined pre- or alternative modern, but to an aesthetic focused on male friendships and the longing for youth, flourishing in an expanding postcolonial bazaar.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.,p.7

<sup>3</sup> Ratheesh Radhakrishanan, *Masculinity and the structuring of the Public Domain in Kerala: A History of the Contemporary*, Ph. D. Thesis, CSCS, Bangalore, 2006

<sup>4</sup> Viji.m, *History of Gender Historiography*, Tamilnadu History Congress Proceedings, Thirunelveli, 2015, p.442

Osella traces its links to the “mugalil sanghams” (“upstairs associations” – that is, male meeting “clubs”), which were central to the patterns of male socialisation in Calicut.

One of the limitations of Osella’s study is his exclusive focus on the Koya’s, a socially and economically prominent matrilineal Muslim community in Calicut. He does not pay attention to the participation of men from other communities in this culture. It was common during the 1970s and 1980s –and perhaps is even now – for men (mostly married men from other parts of Kerala) seeking male-to-male pleasures to make weekly or monthly journeys’ to Calicut or its suburbs.

A slang of expression related to homolove is the term “kundan”, which is popular in Kerala, commonly used to refer glamour young man, who could play passive role in relationship. But in reality the term is different from Malppuram to Calicut and other regions. In some parts of Malabar, the term means that ‘handsome young man”.

But they also refer to slave but not in sense of feudal system but in a sense of sexual role. The ultimate dictionary in Malayalam by Sreekandeswaram Pathmanabha Pillai (Shabdhattharavali, Kottayam, NBS, 1983, p.599) gives slavery as meaning for the term kundan.

According to Osella, the term has now become synonymous with sex work, but was earlier used to refer to any good looking and beardless youth, but actually it is not exactly correct because of its regional variations. The term ‘monchan’ is familiar among gays in Calicut to denote beautiful boys.

Another term “ammaayi” (ammayikkuttam) denote 40 plus old feminine character man seeking handsome boys, majority of them located in Manachira square of Calicut. The famous phrase ‘ikoru kattachayem onoru biriyaneem’ is devoted to maintaining the effort and expenditure in homolove. S. Sanjeev wrote an article titled “ikkoru chaya onoru biriyani: kozhikkodum kunadanum, chila samasyagalum” explain the local phrase denote to homosexual expeditions.

**Homosociality-modernity discourse**

Modernity consciousness of homosexuality, a debatable, can we put into how the different institutions of state look towards the practice..... So, religion is the backbone of the both government and medical sciences attitude.

Table 1: Homosociality-modernity discourse towards the practice.

Institution	Machinery	Attitude
Government	Police	Considering homosexuality as a crime
	Media	
	Educational and other public sphere	
Medical sciences	Psychology and psychiatry	Homosexuality as a cure
Religion	Holly books	Both cure and crime
	Customary codes	

**From homosociality sub culture to gay polttics**

Filippo is concerned with transformations in forms of male sociality and same-sex intimacy among Muslim men from Calicut. He focus in particular on the way in which a) the globalization of capital and labour markets – in particular, b) long-term migration to the Gulf countries of West Asia, a predominantly male affair – has produced novel forms and spaces of homosociality. By highlighting c) long-term religious and trade connections between Kozhikode and the Arabian Peninsula, the article problematising hegemonic representations of masculinities and same sex relations in India as an expression of a specifically “Indian culture” and provides a more nuanced understanding of the effects of the disciplining power of hetero normativity associated with Indian modernity.

Here we can see that he use the term ‘homosociality’ instead of homosexuality, to emphasis the importance of “homo-culture’. The term ‘homo-love’ instead of homosexuality to give the importance of deep feelings and emotions within the homo-culture which address the whole aspect related to same sex culture.

He discus with the transformations of Muslim male sociality in Kozhikode with critical analysis of gender, time honored forms of male sociality , from friendship to same sex intimacy which are progressively eroded and marginalized some transformations in public and private life brought about by the influence of Islamic reformism, and the effect of post 1991 Indian economic liberalization.

A refashioning of familial relations and expectations of conjugal life, together with the purification of “un-Islamic practices”, indicates the successful circulation of hegemonic regimes that bring together middle-class sensibilities and new forms of religious morality to produce novel subjectivities [3].

These transformations have been understood as an ongoing process of heteronormalisation taking place within colonial and post-colonial modernity in which diverse social actors and institutions discipline practices and bodies in an effort to regulate, and repress, hitherto fluid and open-ended relations.

The redefinition of masculinities and femininities, the regulation of sexuality within the conjugal pair and the criminalization of same-sex practices all contribute to the normalization of sexual relations within the confines of neo-patriarchal gender hierarchies. In Kozhikode, the globalization of capital and labour markets – specifically long-term migration to the Gulf countries of West Asia, a predominantly male affair – together with the increased influence of Islamic reformism, has produced novel forms and spaces of homosociality in which expressions of same-sex desire are hidden from the public gaze, while intense male friendship is reinscribed as a (n Islamic) moral value. Rhetoric of discretion and secrecy allows men to continue to enjoy male-to-male intimacy while participating in public critiques of openly homoerotic forms of sociality and in calls for greater control of women’s lives – their sexualities in particular – which, together, further reinforce local heteronormative discourse.

The styles and fashions emerging in the Gulf allow for transformations of male practices back in Kozhikode suggests that, whether they are migrants or not, Kozhikode Muslim men’s social and emotional lives are negotiated and experienced across the shores of the Indian Ocean.

By highlighting long-term religious and trade connections between Kozhikode and the Arabian Peninsula and by delineating the contours of a specifically Muslim male aesthetic and economy of desire, he intend to disrupt hegemonic representations of masculinities and same-sex relations in India as an expression of a specifically ‘Indian culture’, always implicitly marked as “Hindu” and “traditionally tolerant” of homosexual desires.

That alleged “tolerance”, however, articulates with the eroticization of Muslim bodies and the concomitant criminalization of Muslim sexualities. There was (is) a general assumption that Muslim men as uncultured fanatics with an aggressive sexuality, which framed by colonialism. The blind analysis that to blame that Muslim’s and Islam spread homosexuality to India, and popular understanding that all Muslim men are homosexuals.

### **Koyilandi and Calicut**

Kozhikode the Muslim capital of Kerala, with historical route was commercial hub between West Asia, South East Asia, and South Asia over the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Kozhikode Muslims keep a trade relation with Arab partners, and colonial and postcolonial economy boosted local trade in Kozhikode and Emerging as a major rice market in the region, the city also saw a resurgence of trade from the Arabian Peninsula. In the late 1970s, the timber trade declined; following the Gulf oil boom. 1980s Kozhikode’s economy has become dependent upon the revenues and remittances from Gulf migration.

Koya community and their trade activity were important in Kozhikode history. And also Kuttichira pond and old mosque provides a focal point. Muslims are always in opposite side historically during the 8th century Islam was come to India. Kasargode, Mangalore, Calicut is the main centre of Muslims.

Mappilas are belonging to the lineage of Arab missionaries, traders and merchants. So the simply added that the homosexuals of Malabar were the lineage of Arabs. But homosociality is not only a sub culture of Malabar but also the others. According to Gyanendra Pandey that the Hindu writing of history argued that the trade expansion of Islam mainly via two themes, like invasion and through over sexual desire, this argument create a commonisation of Muslims into they are highly sexual [4].

Gigolos are famous in Kuttichira and Pallikandi; richest people want beautiful boys for their sexual activity. They offer gift like food, biriyani and other dishes and also money in cash. There was a link in SK Pottakad’s, Oru Deshathinte Katha in his character Kalam was a men prostitute. The role of merchants and traders are important they are spread homosexuality among coastal areas, merge with fisherman (e.g., Koyilandi). Here interesting that homosexuality is itself called as Koyilandi Perupadi <sup>5</sup>. A kind of cure affected due to oral sex namely ‘Paraggiyunnu’ (in Koyilandi) which can see that the influence of Portuguese in homosexuality activity <sup>6</sup>crossing <sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Interview with K.N.Ganesh (Retd. Professor, University of Calicut) dated on 17/02/2015, Calicut.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Mk Madhu, former guest faculty of centre for folklore studies, university of Calicut, 24/03/2015.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Ashokan Mundon, Professor, Department of History, University of Calicut, 19/03/2015.

When I was interviewed with a faculty (University of Calicut), a native of Koyilandi, told that, he is hiding his place name from others due to laughing at him on the name of homosexuality brand of Koyilandi. Nandi, Anakkulam are famous for homosexuality desires, which in Koyilandi.

Actually homosexual activity is not a problem in Koyilandi but which is a problem in outside of Koyilandi because of the intervention of media and the massive moral attitude. A lot of queer party and fashion show conducted by queer organizations in Calicut which participated by gays, transgender, and lesbians.

However trace the route of homosexuality in coastal areas due to the trade relation with merchants from foreigners they use children's for their sexual entertainment, because of the lack of availability of heterosexuals.

Thalassery is another centre of homosexual expedition, Cheyi, a Muslim community in Thalassery they are looking glamour. This Kannur image was framed by Portuguese extraction. The product of Portuguese men and native women children's became beautiful. Barami a group of Muslims in Calicut practice homosexuality, for a jock mappilas are considering it is a halaal, not a sin.

Muslim food dishes are another reason which condoned heavy fact, that's why they should release sperm. Madrasa usthadh get fat food from Muslim houses that are one of the reasons for their highly sexual eroticism<sup>8</sup>. Patriarchal system in Muslim culture is another reason, which resulted into male dominant society. Their orientation will change.

A lot of wife's of Muslim men are aware about their husband's homosexual relationship they are hide it from other family members, due to family broken. Some of the ladies also practice homosexuality, where ever suppression, there will be homosexual women, even they have no right to laugh loud. During the 1960s homosexual expedition was very high in Malabar which was a usual talk in their discussion.

Manjeri, Area codes are a high range of homoeroticism practiced. There is no clear evidence about the homosexuality in Jewish settlement in Kerala, but practiced in Koyilandi and Vatakara. The dalit community also highly tolerated homosexual relationship, due to their family system. Congested family relationship led to spreading of homosexuality among the dalit community.

Another agency of homosexuality is religious institutions, madras or Dars in Islam, and convent in Christianity. In Dars Usthad sexually abuse his disciples.

Because in early time Mollakas (local name denote to Usthad or Islamic scholar) are like nomads, they have no family so, community was not ready to marriage alliance with them due to insecure of their job, they had no fixed salary and accommodation.

Automatically they were look towards the available sexuality. In Christian convent priest keep a kind of relationship with inmates for sexual entertainment. Nuns also did sex with each other.

Lesbians are less discussed moreover there was no clear idea about this kind of sexual orientation. Lesbians are common in south Kerala among the Christians but it doesn't considered sexual abuse it depends up on mutual understanding of two women.

Another agent of homosexuality is nationalism, which means a nation need masculine male for its integrity and security, liberate motherland from foreign power.

During 1890s and 1990s Abhinava Bharatha stand for making a nation and liberate from British's they need masculine unmarried youth, Familial bond decrease their commitment. Automatically they choose mere available sex. Management provides sexual control activities like yoga; prescribe other activities for sexual control.

## CONCLUSION

In concluding, the process of homosexuality expedition in Calicut is classified in to two, the period of Homosociality and the period of queer identity. Upto 1990s there was a homosociality sub culture in Calicut in genral, particularly among the Muslim male.

But due to sexuality revolution the nature and structure of homosociality is replaced by Gay culture, the first step of queer politics. Then the public sphere of sexual minorities is change to a collective organization with in the different strata.

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