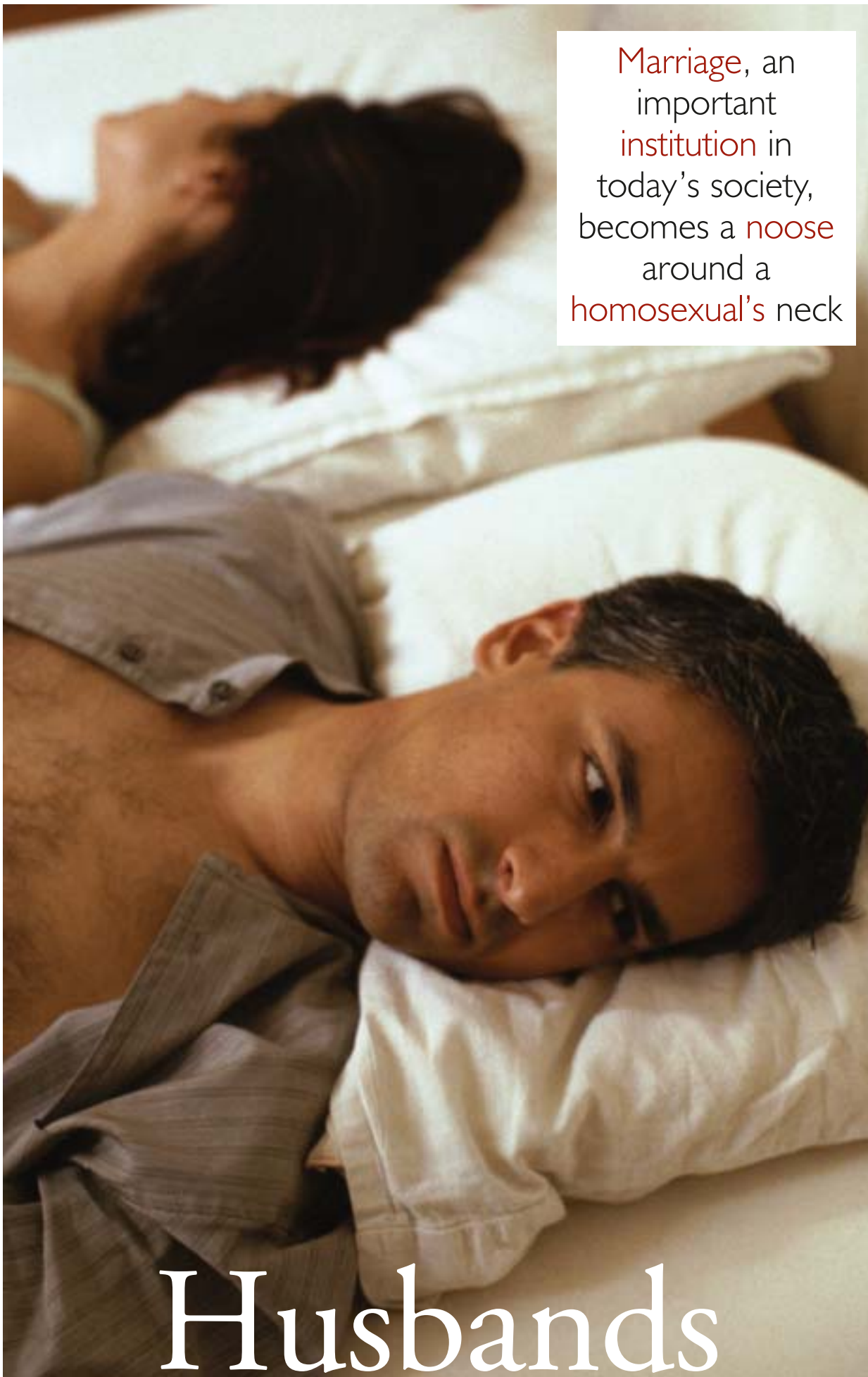


AIDS BUZZ

New Delhi September 2006



Marriage, an important institution in today's society, becomes a noose around a homosexual's neck

Husbands Who Would Rather Be Wives

Marriage is a Hobson's choice for men who want a same-sex relationship.

By **SADHNA MOHAN** in New Delhi

He is 28, yet shy on the question of marriage. "I've not thought about it," he parries. Shiv (not his real name), a commerce graduate, heads a community-based organisation of men who have sex with men (MSM) in Delhi. His evasion is grounded in good reason.

Marriage is a major pressure point for many of his ilk. They may not want to but have to marry because families insist. The only option is coming out of the closet with their sexuality. That is a Hobson's choice. The results are disastrous for all involved.

Lalit (not his real name), also known as *Kalo Haji* or *Mataji*, is reeling under this pressure at age 22. "My family is after me for marriage. Each time I say, 'No', they ask, 'why?' My father hits me with a stick. This time, in response to the fourth offer, I said 'OK'."

"I don't want to have sex with girls. If I get married, I might be able to have a sexual relationship with my spouse but won't be able to stop having sex with men," he says, a repetitive twirl of the hand the only indication of his self-professed identification as a woman.

"I like to talk, sway and be addressed as a girl," says *Kalo Haji*. The only place this boy-girl has the freedom to be oneself is a cruising area where he meets others like him.

Javed, 31, a *kothi* (man identifying himself as a woman) like Lalit, married at 20 on his parents' insistence. He now has three children, two daughters and a two-year-old son.

He is also 'court-married' to a 29-year-old man, an exporter, who he fell in love with a year-and-a-half ago. "*Main us se badhi hun,*" (I am older than my 'husband'), says Javed. The two meet daily at ITO; when they desire physical engagement they spend the night in Javed's second house in Seelampur, take breakfast together and then go to their respective workplaces.

'Night work in office' is the alibi put forth for the wife. "I told her not to interfere in my life soon after marrying her," laughs Javed, adding he's sometimes away for 4-5 days.

Marriage, an important institution in today's society, becomes a noose around a homosexual's neck. It's almost like being taken to the gallows. It's only *raison d'être* is fitting into society and not standing out as different.

Is this fair to the person concerned and the wife he acquires? Why can't a homosexual live the life he wants without being the butt of ridicule of everyone around? Why can't people and the family accept him as he is and see him as a person with his sexuality as just one part of his personality?

These are issues top-most on the minds of some MSM and those working with them. Says Charan Singh, Project Coordinator, Development, Advocacy and Research Trust (DART), a community-based organisation of MSM in Delhi (also running an HIV targeted intervention), "social problems – ridicule, confusion about themselves, broken marriages because of poor sexual performance, etc. – are up on the list of a homosexual. HIV is ninth on the list."

Closest to Charan's heart is the issue of addressing effeminate boys' dilemmas. He's met several adolescent boys who are floundering because they feel 'different' than others and are teased because their voice isn't heavy or they don't play 'male' games like cricket and cards and don't bunk college. Sometimes, as Charan did

continued on page 2

Husbands Who Would Rather Be Wives



UNHAPPILY MARRIED

Sex with wife is quite a non-happening affair for many MSM. A third of 51 married MSM who responded to a survey questionnaire of New Alipore Praajak Development Society, Kolkata, in 2003, said they didn't have sex with their wives in the last one year. The study sought to ascertain the sexual health needs of MSM.

During a focused group discussion in Bongaon, carried out as part of the study, one respondent said that he cried during his wedding and though his relationship with his wife was alright, he was mentally unhappy.

continued from page 1

in school, they put up a show of being 'normal' by talking about girls and lying about having seen adult film shows.

At this time in their lives, they are critically in need of support. They are looking for answers but there is no place to go to. If a boy in this situation meets sexually active MSM that accept him as one of them, he is easily influenced by the prevailing group norms. "I have so many sex partners, that one gave me this present...How many partners do you have?" is common talk that the adolescent would hear.

Lalit, son of a sweeper in Delhi Municipal Corporation, teased by friends for 'working like a girl' because he

cooked food and cleaned up home (his mother kept ill), used to play girls' games too. He'd skip rope and play with *gittas* (small pebbles) when 10 years old. At 15, he gave a love letter to a boy in school and had a physical relationship with him. He was scared that others might get to know about this. The realisation that he wasn't like other boys drove him to attempt suicide by drinking phenyl.

At 17, his aunt's friend's son asked him if he wanted to have

sex with boys. He was taken to ISBT where he saw lots of boy-girls with threaded eyebrows et al buying and selling sex. "I had heard of girls selling sex — this was an eye opener," he recalls.

"*Bahen kahan se ayi ho?*" (Sister, where have you come from) they asked Lalit. "*Gupt kothi hai,*" (she's a hidden *kothi*), replied the escort, Anil, who turned out to be a sex worker.

Anil took Lalit to ISBT urinals, a cruising area where MSM establish contact with one another. He came across 10-15 men called Sharmeele, Mohini, Kashish, and so on, who christened him as *Kalo Haji*.

A 40-year-old man asked Lalit his rate. "I was scared," he remembers. "Inside the urinal for 5 men, you can find 25 men between 8-12 pm, some cover the entrance while others engage in sex," says Lalit. Anil took him to India Gate next time, and Lalit entered the world of casual sex with men soon after. He has been with nearly 25 men since then and at present has about 20 sexual encounters with 4-5 men in a month's time. Lalit is now an outreach worker with DART and pursues a graduation degree through a correspondence course.

Javed — a fair, delicate-featured former tailor, now working with DART — eloped with a girl at age 15 but had no desire to have sex with her during the five days they were together in Meerut. Introduced to the world of MSM-eunuchs called '*khaingallas*' (homosexuals earning a living as eunuchs do, by visiting homes and dancing on festive occasions, but also leading sexually indulgent lives and often selling sex), Javed claims to have had sex with nearly 150 men over 9 years. At parties, he wears sarees and long hair.

"I never repeated a partner. I used to look for a beautiful man like I," he smiles. But now that he's found and married the love of his life, he claims to stick to two sex partners, his wife and husband.

His 'husband' doesn't have a regular wife and doesn't want one. "I insist that he marry a woman and have children because he might miss children later in life and his family will begin to suspect something is amiss," says Javed.

It's Party Time Folks!

Eunuchs and MSM gather at DART, Delhi, every Sunday, mixing pleasure with purpose

At first glance, the place seems given over to frivolity and abandon as the 25-odd men chatter boisterously, some dancing with gusto to the heady beat of the dholak (drum). The amateur drummer and spectators occasionally shout words of encouragement to the dancers or join in with abandon.

The men, in the age group of 19-40, are dressed colourfully, some in sarees and many sporting gaudy jewellery. This is the day of the week - Sunday - when they can (in some cases, literally) let their hair down and relax with their own kind. For this is the weekly meeting ground of the city's men who have sex with men (MSM) and eunuch community.

Rajat, 23, flops to the floor, wiping the sweat from his face with his elbow. A regular visitor for the past two years, he says, "Here, I can totally relax and be myself. I am not judged for what I am, but I'm welcomed because of it."

Like Rajat, Jaikishen, 22, with ambivalent feelings of sexuality since adolescence, confesses to having bunked school to roam the streets "to solicit men for sex". He says, "When I heard about this place, I immediately came here and am a regular now. It is safer to meet men here."

A eunuch, dressed in a gaudy yellow saree with a loosely tied bun on his head, talks quietly to a jean-clad lad in one corner. The 29-year-old eunuch, Shimla, says, "I come here on Sundays with my boyfriend. I like to dance and sing, so I am very popular here." Shimla came from Bangladesh a few years ago with a group of eunuchs, all of whom have settled in East Delhi.

But is it all fun and games for those gathered here? Not so, avers Shimla. "I have a friend who is HIV-positive so I am here also to pick up all the information I can about HIV to help him," he states. As if his remark has struck a bell, those around him form a circle and someone hands over a plastic model of a penis. "Who can show us how to put on a condom?" asks a youth taking charge. After some fumbling and play-acting to the accompaniment of guffaws and catcalls, Shimla accomplishes the task.



"DANCE LIKE A LADY": The heady beats of the 'dholak' transform the gawky young lads into little ladies twirling with joy and abandon

This activity is not singular to the otherwise party atmosphere. A closer look reveals something more on the agenda than just pleasure. HIV/AIDS awareness posters on the walls and neat stacks of condom boxes line the shelves. A banner across the room states boldly: "Development, Advocacy & Research Trust" (DART).

Registered as a non-profit community based organisation in 1998, DART has been working with MSM in Delhi and neighbouring areas. It has supported approximately 25,000 MSM and has two drop-in centres in Delhi that offer information on HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, as well as referrals for treatment. One centre is in Uttam Nagar and the other here at Shastri Park.

"Nearly 100 MSM visit us here on Sundays," claims Charan Singh, DART Project Coordinator. "Our centre attracts MSM because they can meet new people in friendly and safe surroundings but we do caution and inform them about safe sex," he stresses.

Jaikishen and others nod in agreement. "Before I started coming here I knew nothing about condoms," he says. "With the help of DART workers, I have started to read and write and have learnt a lot about HIV. On Sundays, we play games and have dance competitions, but we also have a session talking about HIV prevention and care," he explains. "I have met many men here, but I always use a condom now during sex," adds Rajat.

— NITIN JUGRAN BAHUGUNA

COUNT MY PARTNERS

The More The Merrier

Social standing in the gay community is determined by the number of partners one has had. As many as 5-25 per month are reported by quite a few MSM and also by studies on MSM. What spurs this strong sex drive?

By **SADHNA MOHAN** in New Delhi

"I've had more than 24 partners a day," Ashok Row Kavi smiled gaily as we walked into an Izakaya, a traditional Japanese bar, with an all-woman staff, on a drizzly night in Kobe, Japan.

Did he do anything else that day? I wondered. Last week, I went up to Ashok in New Delhi to see if this journalist-turned-gay activist stood by what he'd said and guess what, he claimed to have hit a high of 42 partners a day in his early 30s.

"I finished 5,000 contacts at age 42," came another bit of clinically precise information. The number of partners at a given time was a benchmark of one's social status in the gay community. "I used to keep diaries about the number of partners I had," he explains, adding quickly, "I realise with horror that I got out of it safe and sound. Twelve of my 18 Mumbai friends are dead."

The 42-partner feat consisted of anal and oral sex, as well as mutual masturbation, he says. Money wasn't a factor to reckon with.

In fact, Ashok says he had a very high number of partners – 5 to 10 a day – for 10-12 years. Even today, on an average, a young gay has 5-6 contacts a day, according to him.

A high number of sexual contacts per day and a high number of sexual partners (5-25) per month are reported by quite a few MSM and corroborated by studies on MSM. An average number of 6 male partners in the past 4 weeks was reported by a study of over 6,000 MSM in Andhra Pradesh by Lalit Dandona *et al* in 2005 (AIDS, Vol 19). Sexual partners ranging from 4.6 to 20.5 over the past 60 days were reported by a Gujarat State AIDS Control Society and Resource Centre For Sexual Health And HIV/AIDS study on MSM in Vadodara in 2004. Ashok tells us that 15 per cent of the 60,000 MSM accessed by Humsafar Trust, the organisation he heads in Mumbai, have more than 20-25 partners a month.

Do homosexuals have a stronger sex drive than heterosexuals? "Yes," says Ashok. "No, there's no reason to believe there's a biological difference," says Dr. Raman R. Gangakhedkar, Assistant Director, Clinical Science, National AIDS Research Institute, Pune, adding that he's not aware of any research in this area too.

Apparently, medical science hasn't delved deep enough into the issue. While biological reasons are virtually unexplored, sociological theories are propounded by professionals dealing with MSM. Apart from a higher sexual drive, MSM have an obsession with sexuality, explains Ashok. Many don't have jobs and regular relationships. Sexuality defines their identity and is the common attribute bringing them together, naturally they flaunt it and compete over it, he says.

Accessibility of 'same-gender' people for sex is a major contributing factor, he adds. In our society being seen with the opposite sex is more of an issue than being seen with people of the same sex. Ashok, interestingly, also concurs that claims of high numbers of partners could be exaggerated because "lying is second nature to MSM" – they begin lying to hide their sexuality early in life.

Dr Gangakhedkar says that 'repression' of homosexual activity by the Indian law drives MSM to have more of it. Acceptance of the activity might lead MSM to marry and have monogamous relationships.

Of late, MSM are becoming more 'visible' than before but for purposes of AIDS control, national estimates on the size of this population that is at high risk of getting HIV, have been arrived at only recently by an expert group set up by the design team of National AIDS Control Programme III (NACP III).

MSM in India are conservatively estimated at 2.3 million, double the number of female sex workers estimated by the group at between 0.8-1.2 million.

The number of male sex workers, a highly vulnerable group that can be an entry point to networks of MSM, is estimated at 235,213.

Initially, collation of mapping exercises completed by state AIDS control societies and NGOs was attempted. However, the data available was mostly urban-centric and limited information was available from difficult geographic terrains and conflict zones. There were other problems too, for instance, non-cruisers were ignored in the exercises.

Therefore, the expert team extrapolated data from population-based studies on MSM behaviour to arrive at a state-wise estimation of MSM. The following assumptions, based on a few studies, were made during the process:

- ❖ 65 per cent of the total male population (2001 census) above 15 years is sexually active
- ❖ 5 per cent of all sexually active males had anal sex last year (a Chennai slum study estimated 6 per cent and a Population Council study estimated 9.5 per cent of single men and 3.1 per cent of married men)
- ❖ 20 per cent of homosexually active men have 5 or more partners in the previous month (MSM to be reached by NACP III)
- ❖ 10 per cent of the above are male sex workers (See story 'Male Sex Worker, Low Profile, High Risk' on page 8)

So far, NACP II reached a limited number of MSM; a little over 40,000 of them were accessed by 31 (out of a total of 965) targeted interventions by NGOs. The new estimate mandates a massive scale up and fresh thinking. Will policy makers accept these numbers and work to reach them? We'll have to wait and see.



"Yes, homosexuals have a stronger sex drive"
– Ashok Row Kavi



Illustration: Sheena

Interview



Ruben F del Prado, Deputy Country Coordinator, UNAIDS, India

Photo: Rakesh Sahai

“Time for Talking is Over, We Are Going to Push for Changes”

For the first time in history, community-based organisations (CBOs), governments and donors from 32 countries of Asia-Pacific will together focus on the HIV vulnerability of men who have sex with men (MSM) at the ‘Risks and Responsibilities’ consultation in New Delhi from 23rd-26th September. More than 350 participants are expected.

Organised jointly by India’s National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) and Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the consultation will seek to understand knowledge and programme gaps and identify the way forward in addressing them.

The theme ‘Risks and Responsibilities’ signifies the risks that MSM face through sexual practices and cultural vulnerabilities and the risks of not addressing these with adequate HIV prevention and care and support programmes. It also flags the responsibilities of men for protecting themselves and their partners and the responsibilities of governments, donors and stakeholders to provide good-quality HIV programmes and services.

Ruben F del Prado, Deputy Country Coordinator, UNAIDS, India, on his expectations from the meet:

The topic of male to male sex is taboo, we don’t talk about it. But the time for hypocrisy is over. Too many people are having anal sex without realising they are at risk – they think it is not sex! Young girls are having anal sex to avoid pregnancy.

Mainstreaming unprotected anal sex as a public health issue just like brushing one’s teeth with toothpaste will be a goal of the conference. Condoms and lubricants need to be everywhere, in roadside shops that people can access any time of the night. One shouldn’t have to take a car, auto or ferry to access these!

There *must* be agreement at the conference on removing obstacles that are within our reach. So many obstacles are beyond our control; hopefully strong recommendations for removing them will be made to institutions within whose power those changes lie.

For example, there is the legal challenge. We can’t change the law. Only ministries can. We will push for it. We will go beyond recommendations; we’ll call them ‘imperatives’.

Homosexuality is banned in all but a few of the 32 participant countries. Only Australia, New Zealand and Vietnam are exceptions.

The first day of the conference will examine what we know, what we don’t know and what we need to know to address HIV vulnerability of MSM. We don’t know much in terms of epidemiology and behaviours but the conference will bring in latest information that is available.

Figures presented will be scrutinised by institutions and persons of global and national repute. We will come out with reliable figures. We will also make a strong recommendation for donors to fund operational research that yields strategic information and evidence.

At the regional meetings held in various parts of India in June as a run up to the event, not one state AIDS control society representative said ‘I know it all’, affirming the need for more information to address MSM better.

Post-conference, pressure for in-country work on the issue will be maintained by a pan Asia-Pacific network of governments and institutions.

(as told to **SADHNA MOHAN**)

WORLD BYTES



Laura’s Proposal

United Nations: US First Lady Laura Bush has proposed designation of a day in the year as ‘HIV Testing Day’ to ensure more people know about their HIV status.

Addressing a high-level session of the UN General Assembly on AIDS, she stressed the need for spreading literacy, especially among women and girls, as a major tool to fight the disease.

PTI

Malaysia’s First Medical Prison

Kajang (Malaysia): The Alor Star Prison is to be turned into the first medical prison in Malaysia providing treatment and care for prisoners with critical illnesses like AIDS, cancer and tuberculosis apart from physical deformities and mental problems. “In all, 1,800 inmates are HIV-positive,

150 have tuberculosis, 10 are infected with Hepatitis B, 280 have mental problems and 100 are with physical deformities,” prison authorities said.

The prison was chosen partly because it is next to Alor Star Hospital where the prisoners can undergo emergency treatment.



Satya Dandekar

Bernama

HIV Hides in the Gut

California: HIV hides inside people’s intestines. It replicates in the lining of the gut and does much of its damage to the immune system there as gut-associated

lymphoid tissue accounts for 70 per cent of the body’s immune system, Satya Dandekar, chairwoman of the Department of Medical Microbiology and Immunology at the University of California Davis Health System and colleagues reported.

Writing in the *Journal of Virology*,

Dandekar said this study explained why drug cocktails often failed to work completely. “The real battle between the virus and the exposed individual happens in the gut immediately after viral infection. We need to focus on improving treatment of gut mucosa,” she said.

Reuters

Edit Page



MSM, hmm... Now here was a topic one had to brace up for despite having penned articles on almost everything under the sun for innumerable years.

The only Indian 'celebrity MSM' most of us know of are filmdom's Bobby Darling and Sylvie. But knowing about this community's lifestyle, issues and concerns — well, that hasn't really happened.

We explored the lives of several MSM to bring you this issue of **AIDS BUZZ** that touches upon various facets of their little-known lives. The issue raises critical concerns and questions about the way society perceives and treats this section.

Very recently, National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) took up the cudgels for MSM by filing an affidavit in Delhi High Court asking for the repeal of Section 377 of Indian Penal Code that criminalises sodomy. As compared to less than 1 per cent of the general population infected with HIV, 8 per cent of the 2.5 million homosexual population in the country is estimated to be infected, the affidavit said, citing the national sentinel surveillance of 2005.

Section 377 forces MSM groups into "hidden spaces", leaving them with poor access to health care and safe sex information. It impedes the success of AIDS programmes, the affidavit added.

At about the same time, author Vikram Seth reportedly wrote a petition signed by 120 eminent citizens of the country, including former attorney general Soli Sorabjee, actors Amol Palekar and Konkana Sen and Planning Commission member Sayeeda Hamid, demanding decriminalisation of sodomy.

One tends to agree with Gautam Bhan of Voices Against 377, a gay advocacy group leading the effort that will culminate with the release of the letter through a publicity blitz, that people are beginning to care.

What do you think? We would love to hear YOUR opinion about the issues raised in September **AIDS BUZZ**.

Sadhna Motan
Editor-in-Chief



Illustration: Dhir

LETTERS

It's with great respect and immense gratitude that I am writing this letter to you. I have received the March 2006 edition of **AIDS BUZZ** which is very informative and a real eye-opener on the burning issues in the field of HIV/AIDS research studies. Being a post-graduate student in Community Medicine, I would like to receive the newsletter regularly. I think it not only opens windows to the constantly changing world of HIV having updated information on strides in the field but also boundless ideas for post-graduates for proceeding with their research studies in AIDS. It also provides an idea about major NGOs where one can work after post-graduation.

I will be obliged if you can provide me with previous issues of your newsletter. Also I want to be put on RCSHA's email list. I will be ever grateful if you involve this aspiring doctor in your mission to fight the HIV/AIDS disease.

Dr Lekshmy S Pillai,
Department of Community Medicine, Dr PNB Ladies Hostel,
Assam Medical College, Dibrugarh, Assam

I have gone through your newsletter **AIDS BUZZ**. Really, it is very informative, attractive and extremely useful in sharing information on HIV/AIDS. The Indian Institute of Development and Communication (IIDC) is implementing a unique targeted intervention programme on men having sex with men (MSM) in Jaipur city since September 2003 with financial support from RSACS, Jaipur. I shall be highly obliged if you could kindly add our organisation's name in the mailing list of your publication.

G D Mathur,
Chairman, IIDC, 119/126, Agarwal Farm,
Mansarovar, Jaipur-302020,
Rajasthan

Today when I saw **AIDS BUZZ** for the first time I could not believe my eyes this is being printed in India. I would like to congratulate you on bringing out such an excellent, high standard newsletter. You are doing real 'Sadhna' for the professional general public and HIV/AIDS patients by bringing out latest information in an interesting and highly readable manner. I would like to have two copies of the newsletter for my HIV/AIDS Node functioning at Jhansi Cantt for a large number of soldiers and their families. I would like to contribute to it as a HIV/AIDS programme manager working in defence for the past ten years.

Lt Col Narendra Singh, MD (Preventive & Social Medicine),
Commanding Officer, Station Health Organisation & HIV/AIDS Node (Near
MH), Jhansi Cantt-284001 (UP)

I was interested to read the article on the Female Condom as it does have the potential to revolutionise STI/HIV prevention methods. However, some of the negative points about the female condom could have been highlighted more in the article, that is, there is a real danger, given the cost of the condom, that it will be washed and reused, for example by sex workers. Also, whilst it is a female 'controlled' method, it is certainly not invisible to men in the way a microbicide would be. This may limit its usefulness — will it really make condom negotiation any easier? Maybe these things were studied in the research mentioned in your write up but it did not come across. A broader discussion around these and other issues may put some more pressure onto manufacturers to develop newer, improved designs as well as reduce the costs.

Dr Meena Gandhi
Consultant, RCSHA

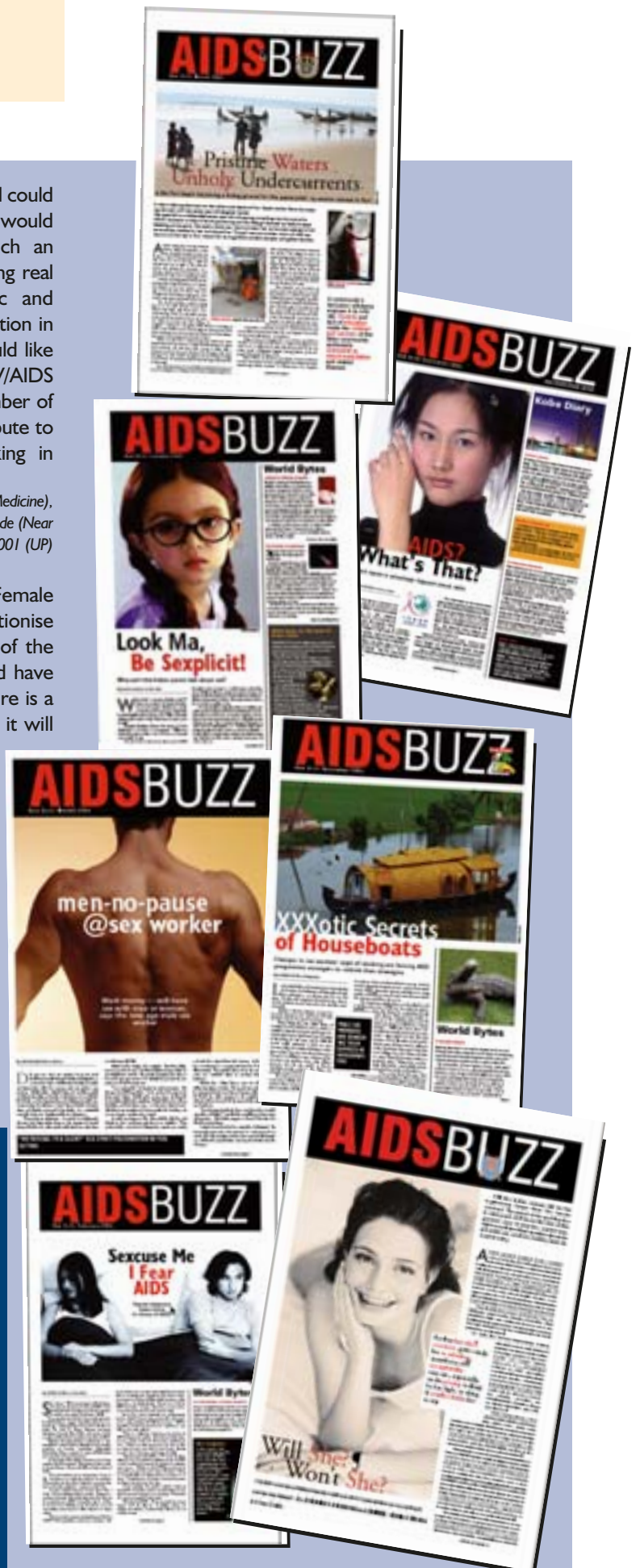
Thanks for the latest edition of **AIDS BUZZ** — as always some fascinating articles on challenging topics, and good to see you picking up some presentations from the recent research conference in New Delhi. However, I feel moved to write about two things. First, I was really disappointed in the second sentence of the Microbicide article: "It would ensure safe and enjoyable sex - something that's not been possible ever since HIV came on the scene". I find that a very negative and unhelpful sentence. Surely the first article, on the female condom, is all about how to have safe and enjoyable sex? Surely, we promote male condoms for safe and enjoyable sex? Surely, for that matter, faithfulness is promoted as a way of enjoying safe sex? I do not think that any of us who work in sexual health

should be saying that ever since HIV came along, safe and enjoyable sex has not been possible.

The other thing I wanted to give feedback on is the letters section. When it first started, it was OK to print some letters praising **AIDS BUZZ** and asking for more copies, but doing this edition after edition is starting to look like you are flattering yourselves too much. Letters pages are for feedback, debate on the issues and comment - Not for printing people's addresses for sending more copies. Do you really get no letters giving opinions on the articles? If not then ask for some!

It's a high quality publication - don't shoot yourselves in the foot!

Joanna Reid, Senior Health Adviser, DFID India, B-28 Tara Crescent,
Qutab Institutional Area, New Delhi



Don't Call Us Parasites Any More

“Don't Call Us Parasites Anymore!”

MILK MAID: Manu Masi earns a living selling the milk of her goat, setting an example for the community



Photos: Pankaj Shukla

Eunuchs, dismissed by many as parasites and reduced to the status of beggars or sex workers,

and MSM are being empowered to earn a living with self-respect.

By **AMITA BUCH**
in Ahmedabad

“Is Mona ben here?”

“Please have a seat. She is just coming.”

Mona: “Hello! What do you wish to get done?”

Client: “Eyebrows, hair colour and pedicure.”

Mona: “It will take time to get all this done. I hope you have the time with you?”

Client: “Yes. I do.”

The dialogue is between a beautician and a client. But the beautician is special. She is a transgender who was known as Mohan Chavda, but now wears her new identity of Mona with pride and runs her beauty parlour in Ahmedabad.

Earlier, someone like her would have had only one way out – to join the *akhada* (the eunuch commune) and live by gatecrashing on occasions like engagements, weddings and festivals and harassing families for *baksheesh* (money given to the poor). Society would have barely tolerated her.

But now, even though she has a eunuch guru, she has chosen to remain with her family, living with her mother on the ground floor, while her elder brother and his family live on the floor above. Says Mona, “If I were not there, no one would keep my mother.”

Her brother's daughter has joined her in the beauty business. Says Mona, “If all families accept their eunuch child the way my family did, they would be protected and better accepted in society and would not have to struggle for their existence.”

Mona passed Class 10 from a boys' school. But she could not pursue her studies further due to the mental conflict she had about her sex. “When it came to marriage, I told my family point blank that I am not attracted to women and projected myself as a eunuch,” she states. Though as a child she was scared of eunuchs, she got in touch with them later and chose to make Sonia Masi her guru. She didn't join the *akhada* as she had her own dreams to chase. Instead, she learnt to apply *mehendi* designs and gradually got into the beauty parlour business.

Getting society's acceptance was not easy for Mona. Chuvhal Gram Vikas Trust (CGVT), an organisation working for the rehabilitation of eunuchs and MSM, helped her get a loan to set up the parlour. Initially, services were offered very cheap to lure customers. Once the women were satisfied with her work, word spread, and today she boasts of doctors, corporate officers and businesswomen coming to her for beauty treatment.

There are others like her who've chosen to merge with society rather than opt out and join the *akhada*. There is the MSM trio of Maheebub alias Puppy, Raju alias Kajal and Bhuri who runs an omelette shop near the renowned National Institute of Design. All of them say they earn much more than what they would have from the traditional *baksheesh*.



MEET MONA BEN FOR THAT MONA LISA SMILE: Mona ben beautifies a client

Even the *akhada* eunuchs are forging a new identity and acceptance for themselves. Manisha Masi and Puja Masi of Naroda area are into social service. They have brought up two orphan girls, educated them and got them married. They are now bringing up another orphaned girl and a boy. They baby-sit for their neighbours and look after their livestock whenever needed.

Manisha Masi and her team of 21 eunuchs live in a three-storied building. Educated only till primary school level, they run a dairy with a couple of buffaloes, a cow and six goats. Though cattle rearing brings them some money, their main source of income remains the *baksheesh*. Manisha Masi says, “These days we do not earn as much *baksheesh* as we used to earlier and we thought cattle rearing would help us meet our needs of milk, buttermilk and ghee.” They do not rule out expanding their business in the future.

CGVT claims to have helped integrate 100 eunuchs and MSM into society by providing them technical and financial assistance to set up a business. Chandubhai Patel, Managing Trustee, says, “We help them network for getting business. If they face any social problem, then we help too.” The trust helps them procure water and electricity connections, open bank accounts and get ration and election cards, which were being denied to them earlier. It also encourages them to form self help groups, which give social, medical and financial assistance.

In 2000, a CGVT survey identified 30,000 MSM and eunuchs in Gujarat; 10 per cent of them were eunuchs (castrated and living in *akhadas* with only one among them having been born a eunuch).

Earlier, *akhada* eunuchs used to have one or two partners, but in recent years they, as well as MSM, are said to take on multiple partners. “The first case of HIV alarmed us and the Government as well. NGOs like us got involved in making them aware of safe sex,” Chandubhai says. “We hypothesised that having jobs would reduce their sexual activities,” he adds.

Accordingly, when Asha Masi, a eunuch in Vadaj area, wished to be self-supportive, CGVT pitched in. Since she knew sewing, the trust bought her a sewing machine and her daily income jumped by Rs 150.

CGVT started its work among eunuchs 11 years ago, initially facing resistance as many eunuchs were “not happy having men mixing with them”. But once they realised that the trust had no selfish motive, many began seeking its help.

“The trust tries to bridge the gap between them and the rest by integrating them into society,” says Chandubhai. “We persuade them to change their behaviour with the community and make common people acknowledge their skill and talent.”

* In Gujarat, eunuchs are categorised as ‘*asli*’ (real - castrated) and ‘*nakli*’ (non-castrated MSM who dress as women), according to Chandubhai Patel.



TEA AT MOHINI'S: Mohini in mythology tricked the asuras into parting with the elixir Amrit, but this Mohini provides the modern-day elixir, sweet, spicy tea, at a “kitli” tea stall in Ahmedabad

Male Rape Comes Out In The Open

TUMBLE IN THE CLOSET Male Rape Comes Out In The Open

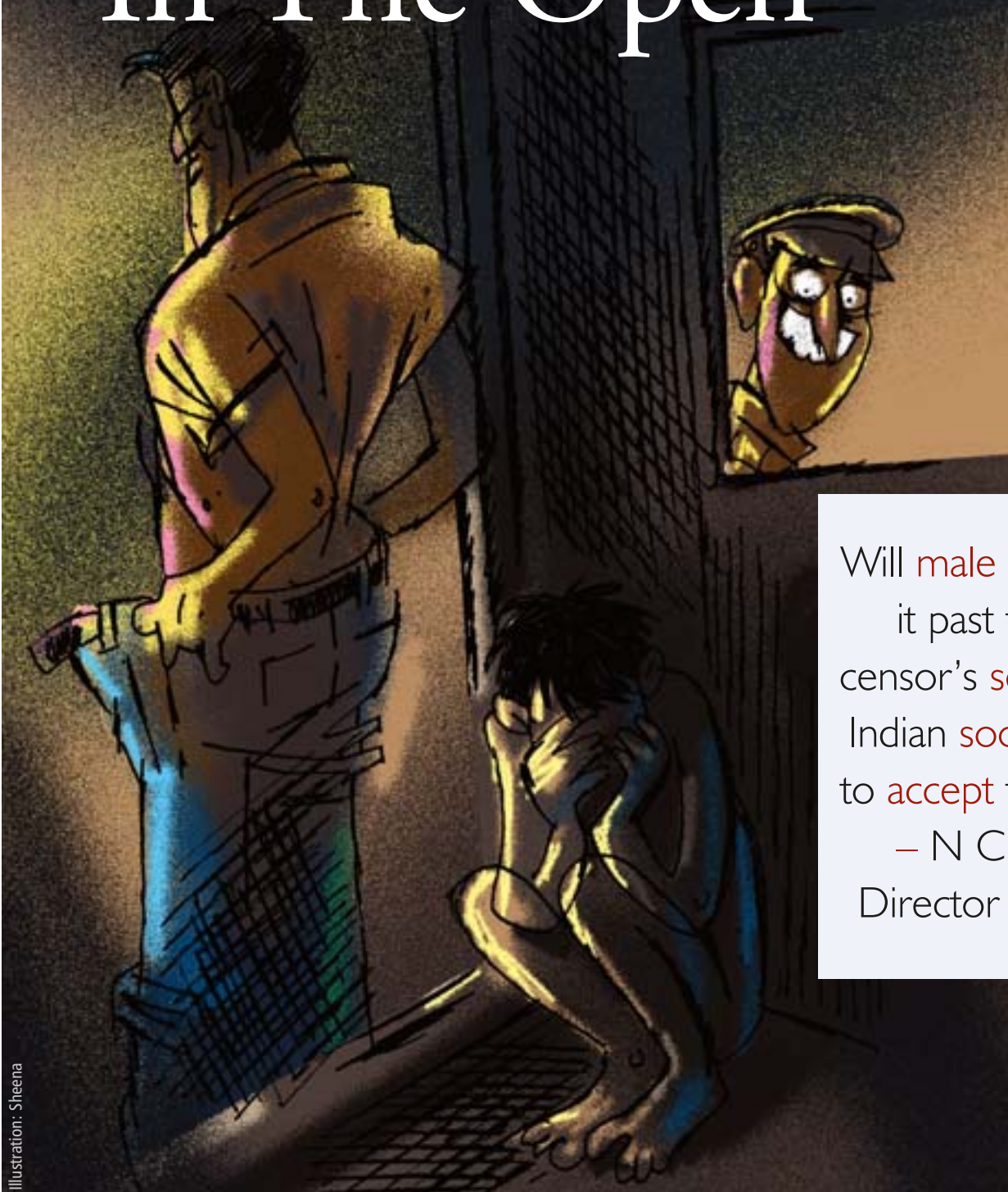


Illustration: Sheena

Men are said to be tough and macho, a far cry from being a rape victim. Yet an increasing number of boys, MSM or eunuchs find themselves being violated by their peers or persons in authority.

By **SADHNA MOHAN** in New Delhi



Film Director N Chandra

Why is male rape almost missing in Indian cinema? With the exception of a couple of recent Hindi films, the subject has been taboo for most film makers.

"We, as a society, close our eyes to issues such as male rape and domestic violence," says noted film director N Chandra, whose super-hit *Tezaab* few can forget. Society does not openly accept the fact that these things are happening, adds this producer-director-writer-editor who has portrayed urban criminality in a large number of his films.

"I can only recall two Hindi films, *Chandni Bar* and *Page 3*, which have dealt with male sexual abuse and none on the issue of domestic violence," says Chandra. Earlier, the 'gay' topic was taboo for Indian society, it was like an iceberg whose depth people couldn't conjecture, he reasons. Film makers would've thought that people were not interested in films on the subject. And the censor board would've further scared them away.

Of late, film makers are trying new subjects and Hollywood's *Brokeback Mountain* will probably pave the way for topics like male rape surfacing in films. But will the censor

board relent? "If cigarette smoking is banned in films, will male rape be allowed?" wonders Chandra. "If films are to mirror society, then the censor board has to be bold," he states.

Men are macho, men are strong – they are not rape material is what people like to believe, ignoring all evidence to the contrary. In fact, young boys are raped or sexually abused more often than you think. Within the span of a month beginning mid-March this year, national newspapers and news agencies carried at least three telling reports:

In Mumbai, Additional Sessions Judge PS Paranjape convicted two British ex-Royal Navy men, Duncan Grant (62) and Alan Waters (58) for sexually abusing young boys at Anchorage shelters in the city. Grant had set up three shelters in Mumbai from 1995-98 and Waters was a regular visitor.

Pramod Jadhav, 42, brother of a Raj Bhawan employee, was alleged to have lured a 12-year-old boy to his house near the Raj Bhawan estate in Malabar Hill on March 10 and committed sodomy.

In Chennai, more boys than girls reported sexual abuse in some form in a sample study conducted by a city-based NGO, Tulir Centre for the Prevention and healing of Child Sexual Abuse.

In all, 42 per cent of the 2,211 Class XI children covered – 1,364 girls and 847 boys – between the ages of 14 and 16 years reported sexual abuse. Among the boys, 48 per cent said they had been abused while the figure among the girls was 39 per cent. Over 400 city schools were contacted but only 24 gave permission for data collection.

Children said that fondling, touching of private parts, exhibitionism and being forced or tricked into watching pornography were the most common forms of abuse. The popular misconception that sexual offenders are shifty, suspicious strangers was proved incorrect with the finding that close family and acquaintances, including domestic help, family friends, teachers and neighbours, were involved in severe forms of abuse such as oral sex and rape.

When the male in question is a homosexual or a sex worker or both, his sexual abuse is even more invisible to society. A Peoples' Union for Civil Liberties, Karnataka, report on human rights violations of *kothi* (man identifying himself as a woman) and *hijra* sex workers in Bangalore in 2003 details first-hand accounts of sexual abuse in police stations and jail.

The study was necessitated when, in 2002, four *kothi* sex workers were picked up from the streets by the police and taken to the Sampangiramanagara police station in Bangalore, where they were harassed and severely beaten up. They were later released, without any charges, but with a warning that they should not be seen on the streets again. Soliciting clients is a crime under section 8(b) of the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act (1986).

In the report, Nasir, a 27-year-old *kothi*, narrates an incident when he was in police lock up on a false charge. In jail, 12 men allegedly forcibly had anal and oral sex with him.

A recent in-depth study of 10 HIV-positive *kothi*-identified men who have sex with men (MSM) by Dr Venkatesan Chakrapani, a Chennai specialist in venereology, throws up fresh evidence of forced sex by the police and ruffians. The affected MSM are very angry and want to pass on HIV to the ruffians who have raped them.

"They took us to the police station and in the night, a policeman asked me to come to the bathroom (toilet). He had sex with me in the back. I did not have condoms at that time since I was only in my underwear; I also could not talk about condoms. Even if we show condoms, they beat us on our hands with *lathi* (baton)," one of the victims said.

"Ruffians have sex with us; we can't talk about condoms with them. They beat us; they also show us a knife. They have hurt me using (shaving) blades; they also take away our money..." said another.

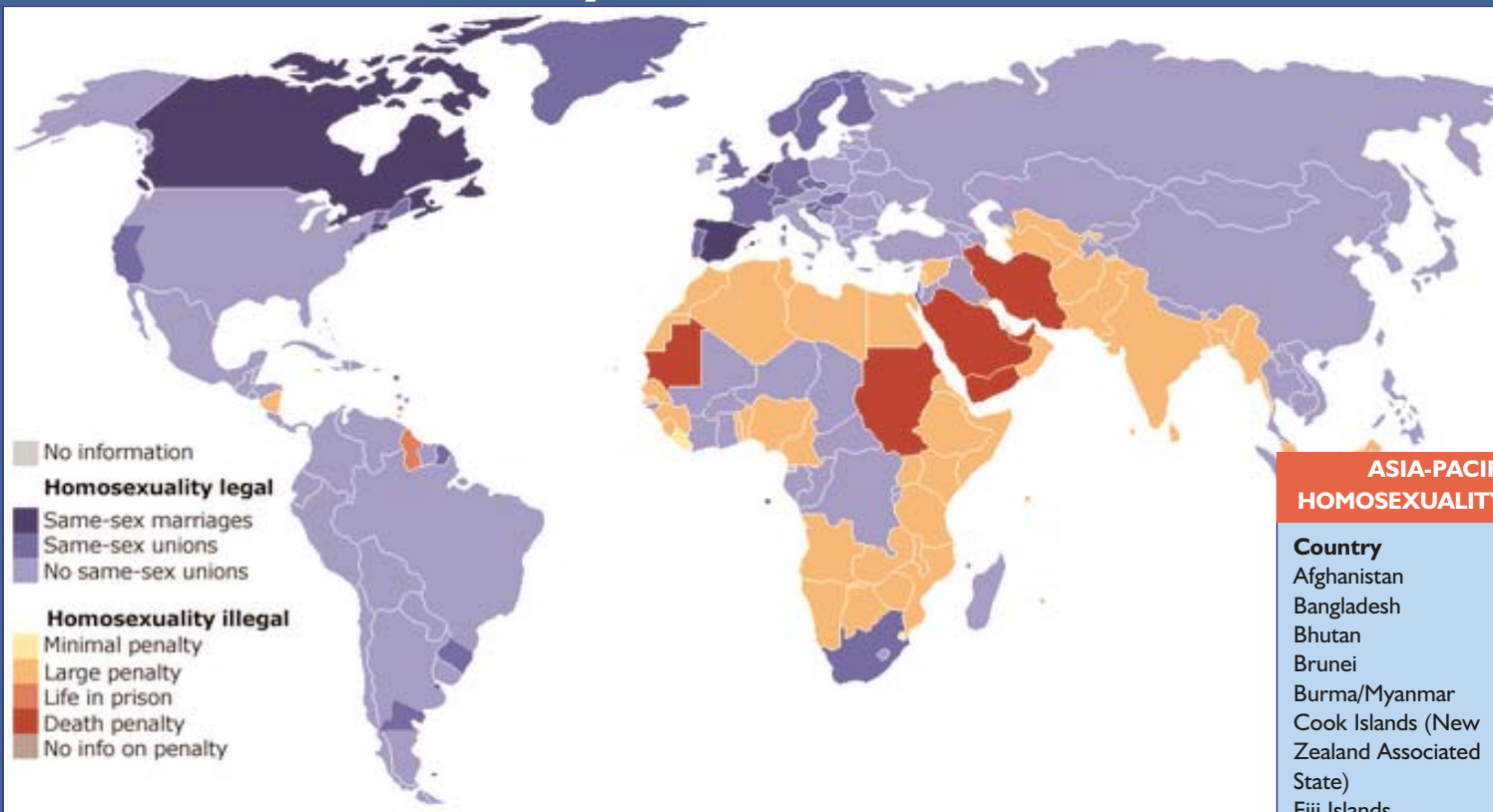
Admitting he had a burning desire to seek revenge, one of them said, "even if that *beeli* (ruffian) wants to use a condom, I'll say, 'what pleasure will we get if we use a condom, let's do it without it.'"

Will male rape make it past the film censor's scissors & is Indian society ready to accept this reality?

– N Chandra,
Director of *Tezaab*

Gay World

World homosexuality laws



SAME-SEX MARRIAGE
Performed nationwide in
 Netherlands (2001),
 Belgium (2003), Spain
 (2005), Canada (2005)
Performed statewide in
 Massachusetts, USA (2004)
To be performed in
 South Africa (by
 December, 2006)

ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES WHERE HOMOSEXUALITY IS ILLEGAL AS ON 31.07.2005

Country	Gay Male	Max Penalty
Afghanistan	Illegal	Death
Bangladesh	Illegal	Life
Bhutan	Illegal	Life
Brunei	Illegal	10 years
Burma/Myanmar	Illegal	10 years/fine
Cook Islands (New Zealand Associated State)	Illegal	14 years
Fiji Islands	Illegal	14 years
India	Illegal	Life
Kiribati	Illegal	14 years
Laos	Not available	Unknown
Maldives	Illegal	Life
Marshall Islands	Illegal	10 years
Nauru	Not available	Not available
Nepal	Illegal	Life
Niue (New Zealand Associated State)	Illegal	10 years
North Korea	Unknown	Unknown
Pakistan	Illegal	Death
Papua New Guinea	Illegal	14 years
Singapore	Illegal	Life
Soloman Islands	Illegal	14 years
Sri Lanka	Illegal	12 years
Tokelau (New Zealand Associated State)	Illegal	10 years
Tonga	Illegal	10 years
Turkmenistan	Illegal	2 years
Tuvalu	Illegal	14 years
Uzbekistan	Illegal	3 years
Western Samoa	Illegal	7 years

Source: Lawyers Collective web site
 * The International Lesbian and Gay Association World Legal Survey cites instances of homosexuals in Afghanistan being buried under walls collapsed on them in 1998 as per Sharia law.

HIV+MSM: INNOCENTS ABROAD

HIV prevalence rates among MSM are high — at 29 per cent in Manipur, 27 per cent in Delhi, 13 per cent in Andhra Pradesh, 11 per cent in Karnataka and 9 per cent in Goa per NACO's sentinel surveillance in 2003.

Are HIV-positive *kothi*-identified MSM in a position to protect themselves and others? Dr Venkatesan Chakrapani, a Chennai venereologist, sought to find out through an in-depth study of 10 of them in Chennai.

Some participants reported cutting down the number of sexual partners while a few claimed to have reduced anal sex. General reasons for inconsistent condom use included decreased sexual pleasure, misconceptions about HIV risk, lack of accessibility to condoms, loss of sexual performance and perceived

sero-concordant HIV status of one's partner.

"How can I always use that rubber? I do want to enjoy...", said a few. Some 'always' used condoms for oral sex because they didn't like the smell associated with the practice but were not so particular about their use for anal sex.

Presumptions about a partner's positive status were made: "I've



seen him having sex with three positive *kothis*. He might have already got HIV...so I did not use condoms with him."

Fear of losing a sexual or paying partner ("We get Rs. 10 or Rs.20 from some clients, we do not want to lose even that"),

difficulty in explaining the need for condom use to one's wife and forced sex by the police were other contributing factors. Norms about sexual communication didn't help either: "*Panthis* come and just ask me to show my back and insert...no talk about sex..."

Post-test counsellors were said to be unwilling to discuss same-sex behaviour. Doctors said, 'Do not have sex'. "On becoming HIV-positive should one no longer have sexual feelings?" asked a participant.

Participants discussed being left largely on their own in facing challenges around sexual behaviour in terms of negotiating safer sex and having information about risks to themselves.

Dr Raman R Gangakhedkar, Assistant Director, Clinical Science, National AIDS Research Institute, Pune, points out that MSM need considerable support with ARV adherence. Failure in this regard could lead to the spread of transmitted drug resistance, he cautions.

— SADHNA MOHAN

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Indian Association for the Study of Sexually Transmitted Diseases and AIDS in collaboration with COTTISA and RCSHA is holding the 2nd STI Certificate Course for medical practitioners in Chennai from 11th to 19th October. To apply, visit www.iasstdaids.org or contact sucheta@rcsha.org
 Closing date: 15th September, 2006

MALE SEX WORKER: LOW PROFILE, HIGH RISK

He exists and is very vulnerable to HIV. The male sex worker (MSW) is a present-day reality, confirmed by almost all studies on MSM in various parts of the country. The studies have shown that commercial transaction takes place between partners; it may or may not be determined before engaging in sex. The pay off could be in cash or kind.

Most times, his primary identity wouldn't be that of a male sex worker. He could be a shopkeeper, a masseur, a hotel boy, an aspiring actor or anyone else, says an RCSHA resource pack on MSM. His visibility to the public, therefore, naturally, remains low.

Men and women clients served are in the ratio of 4:1. Since there is no public identity that an AIDS prevention programme can target, targeting the larger MSM population becomes the route to this population, according to the resource pack.

In all, 9 per cent of the 6,661 MSM studied in Andhra Pradesh by Lalit Dandona et al (AIDS, Vol 19, 2005) said they



Illustrations: Sheena

were male sex workers (MSW). Praajak's study on a sample of 252 MSM in 2006 showed a very high percentage (62) was involved in a commercial transaction. A pilot study on MSWs in Kolkata, Ahmedabad and Vijaywada by Network of Indian Male Sex Workers in 2005 found that male sex workers engaged in sex work to augment their poor economic status. Poor levels of correct knowledge about HIV and AIDS increased their risk of acquiring HIV. It noted regional variations in their profile and status. In Kolkata, MSWs were younger than their clients and better educated and employed than MSWs in the other two cities. They also indulged in sex for 'recreation'. In Ahmedabad, the sex workers were comparatively older while their clientele was younger. In Ahmedabad and Vijaywada a large number of them were illiterate and had poor vocational skills. The result — they resorted to selling sex for survival.

— SM



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