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Ph.D Thesis Title: Sexuality, Negotiating Masculinities and Politics in Contemporary Kerala

Abstract

This thesis focuses on the relations of domination, subordination and resistance in the context of diverse articulations of sexuality and masculinities in contemporary Kerala. It argues that both sexuality and masculinities are historically embedded and socially constructed phenomenon in the context of Malabar, South India. The thesis documents the hierarchical character of masculine articulations on the one hand and the process of resistance to the hegemonic masculine expression on the other. Thus the expression of sexual identities and politics is perceived as contextualised and embedded in social processes and institutions rather than an autonomous discursive sphere.

The study perceives sexuality as a set of social practices constituted through the social relations mediated through the dialectical relationship between ideology and material realities. This perspective, but does not dismiss the biological preconditions of sexuality. As a relational concept masculinities are conceived as configuration of social practices within gender relations. Though masculinities are discussed in relation to different genders, the present study is delimited to multiple masculinities among the social category of men. This conceptualisation allows to understand various meanings attached to masculinity thereby disentangling the notion that masculinity is a fixed and universal essence trapped within the male body. Capitalism and patriarchy are viewed as the structuring forces of organising the social relations in exploitative ways. In this regard, on the one hand, this approach will allow to conceptualise sexuality and masculinities as social as well as historical product and part of social life. On the other, it will be instrumental in explaining domination, subordination and resistance in the context of the intersection of sexuality with masculinities bounded up with the exploitative social relations.

As sexuality and masculinities are constructed within specific institutional settings, the thesis analyses the interface of institutions, i.e. the state, religion and caste in configuring sexual practices and determining boundaries between socially conforming and non-conforming and legitimate and illegitimate sexual practices in the contemporary. The intersection of sexuality with

masculinities is examined to unravel the hegemonic masculine expression in the context of sexuality. The ideologies as well as the interventions of the state, caste Hindu and Muslim organizations and women's movements are studied as part of this effort. It further combines this with the experiences of men who negotiate their sexual practices and engagements of Malabar Cultural Forum-a collective of self-identified Male having Sex with Male (MSM) with an aim to unfold the forms of reforms and propositions of resistance to the hegemonic masculine expression in the contemporary context of Malabar.

The dissertation follows structural analysis to study the research problem. The subject matter of the study seeks a complex analysis of the society in which the reality exists. Considering the criticism against structural method that gives over emphasis on institutions and ignores the process of social life, the present analytical method encompasses experiences of social actors along with institutions.

With the help of the analysis, the present study explores the relations of domination, subordination and resistance in the context of sexuality and masculinities. The present study shows that heterosexuality legitimized through (monogamous) marriage and family is seen as hegemonic sexual practice and heterosexual household provider is found as hegemonic expression of masculinities cutting across religion, caste and class in the contemporary. It establishes the role played by the state, caste Hindu and Muslim organizations and women's movements in the process. Exploring negotiating practices of men under the socially conforming and non-conforming sexual practices, this dissertation argues that varying meaning, experiences and sites of tension exist under the hegemonic conceptions of sexuality and masculinities in the context. Investigating forms of reforms and questions of resistance to the hegemonic sexual practices, this dissertation further argues that though the collective of men who follow socially non-conforming sexual practices transgresses the boundaries of social conformity, the politics of sexuality is limited to human rights in the context. The role of moral codes is also noticed in determining boundaries of socially conforming and non-conforming sexual practices and directing the politics of sexuality in the local milieu.