

# Difference in Education and Income Status of the Kothi Identified MSM of West Bengal, India

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**Abstract:** *The present research has attempted to study the difference in the educational and income status of the different male to male sexuality practitioners of West Bengal, India. It has tried to find out whether gender attitude difference among the MSM (men sex with men) categories has an effect on the education and economic condition. For this purpose five different Kothi (local effeminate men) identified MSM categories i.e. Ariyal Kothi, Koripese Kothi, Dupli Gupti, Hijra and Parikh were studied. Total 475 participants were interviewed who were selected by snow ball technique. For analyzing the data Chi-square test was used. The result revealed there is a distinction in the educational and economic status of the different MSM categories where gender attitude difference prevailed prominently. Ariyal Kothis and Hijras have low formal education than other groups but in case*

*of income Ariyal Kothis ranked lowest than other groups.*

**Key Words-** MSM, Kothi, Gender attitudes, Education, Income

## Introduction

The term MSM was defined by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2007 as “all men who have sex with other men, regardless of how they identify themselves (gay, bisexual, or heterosexual)”. In India the term MSM (men sex with men) comprise of many identities, gender constructs, and communities. It includes a wide range of distinct categories of men who self-identify themselves as Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (locally called as Kothi or Hijra) or Heterosexual engage in sex with other men. The study on men to men sexuality was started in India in 1990's as a by-product of HIV-AIDS activism (Dowsett, 2003). The research on the

local categories of 'other' genders and sexual identity was made by the scholars like Cohen (1995, 2005), Hall (2005), Jenkins (2004), Khan (2000, 2001, 2005), Morris (1994), Nanda (1990), Purkayastha (1999) and Reddy (2000, 2004, 2005, 2007). They differ and overlap in their frameworks in accepting any unanimous position. Nanda's works (1985, 1990, 1999) on the diversity of gender and sexuality, with emphasis on Hijras<sup>1</sup> have other parallel works (like, Jaffrey 1996; Lal, 1997; Lynton & Rajan 1974; Reddy 2005; Sharma, 1989; Vyas & Shingala, 1987). According to Rosalind Morris, Hijra becomes "a drag queen" who [is] a hero[ine] in a global sexual resistance (Morris 1994: 16). As with any other community in India they are crosscut by a range of other axes that shape their identities (Reddy, 2005, 2007). Cohen (1995) studies Hijras and commented on castration as castration of desire. Hall (2005) posits Kothi (the effeminate males) as a reference point for other sexualities and not as a distinct identity to claim a space within the sexuality

continuum, as they (Hall & O'Donovan, 1996) switch between the use of feminine and masculine gender symbols. Almost in the similar vein Jenkins (2004) locates Kothis/Kotis inside the culture, as lesser men and the most stigmatised in the patriarchal, heterosexist and homophobic framework. Non-Kothi men having sexual engagements with the Kothis perceive about themselves that they just fool around when they have sex with Kothis, just discharging, not really having sex, like a 'real man' (Jenkins, 2004). In contrast to the somewhat similar positions of Cohen, Hall, Jenkins, Reddy's ethnographic fieldwork in Hyderabad found that Hijras fall under the umbrella term Kothis referring to a multitude of identities within the spectrum of male sexuality. Hijras and Kothis are coherent identities crafted by diverse ethical practices which do not construct them merely as sexual identities but as identities articulated by and through a multiplicity of morally evaluated differences (Reddy, 2005). There appeared to be constant movement and flux between the various Kothi 'identities' which Reddy found in

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<sup>1</sup> All who proclaim they are "neither man nor woman", but biologically they are male having feminine attitude and attached with the profession of Hijra (earn by dancing at new born baby's place)

fieldwork at Hyderabad<sup>2</sup>. These categories highlight the complicated nature of each of these subject positions. No easy correlations exist between ideals, embodied desire/praxis and sexual identity. The fluidity is possible because each subject position is variously determined according to lived experience and interpretation of desire, pleasure and morality. Khan in 2001 enlisted male same sex sexuality practitioners within different categories on the basis of sexual practice under the term MSM. Recently Dey et al. (2010) focus on the emergence of the construct of the new categories in West Bengal, similar to Reddy's (2005) observation, within the MSM network. Perhaps, according to Dey et al. (2010), the (sub) categories like Veli or Ariyal Kothi, Koripese Kothi, Dupli Kothi, Dupli Gupti, Hijra, Parikh/Panthi/Giriya/Realman/Heterosexual and Homosexual, Gay and Bisexual are flexible

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<sup>2</sup> Various Kothi 'identities' what Reddy found in Hyderabad are as follows- (a) Kada-chatla Kothi- They live 'gupt/ secret' life, not having had the desire to wear sarees or have the operation (genital); (b) Hijra- claim them as Muslim, believe in 'katna' or castration, the castrated are called 'cibri' and non-castrated called 'akkuva', (c) Jogin - claim them as Hindus, don't believe in 'katna' and don't take 'halal' meat; (d) Zenana - claim them as Hindus but take 'halal' meat; (e) Siva sati- same as jogin.

situational usage, but indicates the expansion and intensification of the lived experiences.

The purpose of this research is to study the educational and economic condition of the different Kothi identified MSM categories in West Bengal, India. There is a lack of study regarding the socio demographic state of the MSM. A number of empirical studies have investigated the relationship between education and income among the men and women or boy and girls and they showed there is a distinction in education (Jha & Jhingran, 2002; Subrahmanian, 2005; Sudarshan, 2000; UNESCO, 2004) and income status of the women and men (Dollar & Gatti, 1999; Kingdon, 1998b). By this study researchers have tried to elucidate whether there is any difference in educational and economic situation of the MSM categories where gender attitude difference is prominent (Dey et al., 2014). If yes then what are the reasons? Gender attitude or gender behavior is culturally specific (Mavric, 2012) and it is based on the prescribed social role of men and women (Rubin, 1992 [qtd in Davidson/Moore 48]). The social script (the prescribed rules of

society) defines “how males and females are supposed to act” in a society (Skolnick, 1992:190). The script is learned by human beings during their socialization and it provides directions how to think and behave in a particular situation and also guides their actions (Gagon & Simon, 1973, 1986, 1987). Within the MSM network, there are both types of gender (masculine and feminine) role practitioners who do not overcome the stereotype of heterosexual model (Khan, 2000, 2001). The Kothis and Hijras are feminine in nature (act as insertee in sexual play) whereas Dupli Guptis (act as both inserter and insertee in sexual play) and Parikhs (act as only inserter in sexual play) are masculine (Dey et al. 2010). The present research has tried to understand the explanations if there is any inequality in education and income issues within the Kothi identified MSM categories.

### **Methodology**

The present research has explored the population of MSM in four different regions of West Bengal i.e. Kolkata, Howrah, Mursidabad and South 24-Parganas, where the

participants came from the urban and adjacent areas of these districts. As the population is marginalized, they are hard to reach. The snowball technique helped to expand the network as well as explore the areas. At first a CBO (Community Based Organization) of the MSM at Kolkata was selected purposively and then rapport was created. Apart from the offices of the CBOs, the fieldwork included different spaces of the above districts like station, park, bus stop, pay toilets, ghats (river side) etc.

A total number of 475 MSM participants were identified and involved in this research. The present research has observed same situational usages like Dey et al. (2010) among the MSM of West Bengal, such as Veli /Ariyal Kothi, Koripese Kothi, Dupli Gupti, Hijra and Parikh. ‘Kothi’ has been a general usage of terms of reference to the self-identity of such males, who have feminine self, do everything like a woman and prefer male to male sexual behavior with a ‘Real men’ (‘Parikh’/ ‘Giriya’, only taking an inserter role in sexuality). The Kothis only take the role of the receiver at the time of anal and oral penetrative

sexual act. There have been two other distinguishing sub categories among this category, i.e. a) 'Ariyal Kothis/ Veli Kothis' prefer make over to look like women and use feminine make-ups in any of their public events and wear feminine dresses. They like flamboyance in their public appearances to attract the 'Real man' and are willing to be sexually penetrated by them always, b) 'Koripeshe Kothis' do not prefer to use feminine make-ups or to wear feminine dresses, but like other Kothis they wish to perform feminine roles in sexual acts for the 'real men' and to seek pleasure only with the role of insertee/ receiver. 'Dupli Gupti' is another category. They appear always straight and in 'normal' gesture, have versatile sexuality, like to penetrate and to be penetrated by their partner at the time of sexual act. The role varies depending on the desire of the partner. Most of them are found as bisexual. 'Hijra' is an intentional transformation of Kothis into Hijras through an initiation process in a specific Hijra 'Khol/Gharana' (clan). They have their own sub-culture, have particular profession known as 'Badhai toli' (earning by performing dance at

new born babies' place) and have traditional acceptance. Sometimes they go through emasculation (called them as 'Chhibri') or without emasculation (called 'Akhua'). The 'Real man' (exclusively inserter in sexual performance) of the Kothis is addressed as 'Parikh /Giriya/ Panthi' by the insiders of the MSM community, generally this term is not used for self-identification of a 'Real man'. They self identified themselves as 'Real' man/ Purush/ Mard. They believe themselves as 'straight' heterosexual as the representative of the hetero-normative society. Generally they marry a woman and have children.

Among the 475 participants, 105 Ariyal Kothi, 95 Koripese Kothi, 63 Dupli Gupti, 92 Hijra and 120 Parikh were interviewed. Prior to data collection in every case their consent was taken for ethical purpose. The investigation was started in 2010. A semi-structured schedule was prepared to collect the data of on socio-demographic variables like age, educational status, reason of dropouts, occupational status and income level. Data on the perception about the obstacles of the educational and

economic constrain were collected to understand the context. Snowball technique helped intensifying network as the population is hidden and hard to

reach. Chi-square test was taken up for the statistical analysis of the obtained data.

## Results and Discussion

**Table 1. Age wise distribution of the Participants**

Age group (yrs)	Categories N= 475				
	AK	KK	DG	H	P
18-25	42	33	16	14	40
26-33	37	35	25	37	48
34-41	22	21	14	39	27
42+	4	6	8	2	5

AK= Veli/Ariyal Kolti, KK= Koripese Kothi, DG= Dupli Gupti, H= Hijra, P= Parikh

Table 1 reveals the age group wise distribution of the MSM categories in West Bengal. The maximum number of the participants belongs to the age group of 18 years to 33 years except the case of Hijras. Table 2 is showing the educational status of the participant. Most of the Veli/ Ariyal Kothis (41.90%) have dropped their education in middle standard. Only 8.57% has reached graduation level. 30.47% has reported that they have compelled to leave their study due to extreme humiliation at educational institutions by the students for their feminine attitude. One of the reasons behind dropouts from education was financial problem in the family. Besides discriminatory attitude and

avoidance of the larger hetero-normative society, further with high emotional disturbances pushed the Ariyal Kothis to discontinue their education. The Koripese Kothis have relatively higher education than Ariyal Kothis. As they used to hide their effeminacy by their gesture, they can carry out their education (better than Ariyal Kothis) with main stream people. 42.10% has passed higher secondary level and 15.79% has reached graduation level. The main reasons of the dropout they revealed as financial problem in their family or unwillingness for emotional disturbances. They also admitted that they were devoid of friends as they possibly not capable to merge with the

other boys of their class freely. Only 7.36% has shared the cases of humiliation at school/ college. In case of Hijras the maximum members are in low education level. 8.69% has no educational back ground. Majority i.e. 51.08% of Hijras have left their study in middle standard. The reasons of dropout they have revealed are same as Ariyal Kothis. On the contrary, 46.03%

of Dupli Guptis have reached higher secondary level. Most of them narrated that they leave their school either for financial problem or for unwillingness in study. The Parikhs are found from different economic level of the society and their educational levels are dispersed type. 28.33% has qualified higher secondary level and 25.83% is found graduate.

**Table 2. Educational status of the MSM**

Category	Non literate	Primary	Middle Standard	Secondary (IX-X)	Higher Secondary	Graduate	Total (N)
AK	3	3	44	25	21	9	105
KK	1	2	16	21	40	15	95
DG	0	5	14	9	29	6	63
H	8	24	47	10	2	1	92
P	5	14	16	20	34	31	120
Total	17	48	137	85	126	62	475

AK= Veli/Ariyal Kokti, KK= Koripese Kothi, DG= Dupli Gupti, H= Hijra, P= Parikh

The Veli/ Ariyal Kothis who leave their study early, have started earning for their survival and to help their family financially. Majority of them are engaged themselves as Commercial Sex Worker due to economic burdens, extreme humiliation and exclusion from public sphere of works, family rejection and serial rejection of the Parikh/s or Panthi/s (real man), whom they love. Now-a-days some of them work also as CBO

employees. Ariyal Kothis have taken other jobs also for their survival, sometimes exclusively like dance performer (sometimes as londa), or dance/drawing teacher, or beautician in Salon/Parlor and family ceremonies, decorator of 'Tawttos' (the gifts of bride family's to groom family or vice versa), body massager, barber, catering boy, hotel boy etc. along with sex work, because on one hand sex work is a more lucrative profession where they can



earn more money. On the other hand, it helps them fulfilling their sexual urge of having sex with other males. Sometimes, they choose to work in CBOs as well as in other professions, because they do not want to disclose that they are into the profession of sex work, which is a highly stigmatized. The Ariyal Kothis who have comparatively higher education shared that for their feminine attitude within a male body, they had rejected by a number of repudiated non-governmental companies. Even when they went for interview, evaluators used to laugh or whispered on them and made them disappointed. 18.94% Koripese Kothis have also reported about this kind of discrimination at work place. To them, people immediately understood their feminine body language and reject them instantly. Koripese Kothis are found in the job like small scale business to service such as labor in shops or work as salesman, or few who have higher education work in private company or

govt. office. Several of them have engaged themselves in sexwork beside their primary occupation. And few have found their subsistence solely as sexworker. Both Ariyal Kothis and Koripese Kothis confessed that as they are woman trapped in male body, they cannot provide much strength in the jobs that are typically masculine (e.g. manual labor, coolie, bus driver etc.).

Table 3 reveals that most of the Ariyal Kothis (42.85%) and Koripese Kothis (33.68%) have earned bellow 4000 rupees per month, and among this level of income group, 15.23% Ariyal Kothis earn rupees 2000 or bellow per month. Among the Koripese Kothis 26.31% is in rupees 4001 to 7000 income level and 15.79% is in rupees 7001 to 10000 level. Most of the Dupli Guptis earn bellow rupees 7001. They are found in several occupations in our society from service to business to sexwork. Unlike effeminates, they think themselves as just like other men who can do any type of work, from heavy masculine work to light work.



**Table 3. Income Level Per Month (N=475)**

Category	Unemployed	Rs.	Rs.4001-	Rs.7001-	Rs.10001-	Rs.13001-	Rs.15001+
		>4000	7000	10000	13000	15000	
AK	4	45	29	11	9	7	0
KK	5	32	25	15	8	5	5
DG	3	9	20	11	7	8	5
H	0	13	15	29	9	17	9
P	19	11	22	20	10	9	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>69</b>

AK= Veli/Ariyal Kokti, KK= Koripese Kothi, DG= Dupli Gupti, H= Hijra, P= Parikh

The traditional profession of the Hijras is 'Badhai toli' (dance)<sup>3</sup>. This Badhaiwali Hijras are recognized as original, traditional and royal. They are the top in Hijra occupational hierarchy. Though Badhai is the primary occupation, a number of Hijras have also shared that they used to do sex work secretly, without informing their Gurus (Boss). There are two another groups, named as Chhallawali/Mangnewali and Khajrawali<sup>4</sup> who also

claimed them as Hijra. The present study has only encountered the Badhaiwali Hijras. Majority i.e. 31.52% of Hijras belong to the income level of 7001-10000 rupees per month. Most of them in this income level group are mainly from Kolkata and Howrah. The income of Hijras is depended on the area from where they collect money. Usually who collects money from posh city/ urban areas earned more than other. Among the below 4000 rupees income level group they are mainly found in Mursidabad and South 24-Parganas.

The income level of the Parikh group is also dispersed type. Most of the Parikhs (24.16%) are found in the income group of above rupees 15000 per month. Majority of them are service

<sup>3</sup> This is a dance performance which they perform after a baby's birth. The elder most member of the client's family gives them money after the bargaining process of their demand.

<sup>4</sup> They are recently emerged but the internal characteristics are same as Badhaiwali. Chhallawalis are found collecting money in train, buses, roads, traffic signals and parks. Like Badhaiwali Hijras, these Hijra categories have their own Guru and having an Elaka (area). The other group who used to earn money by doing sex work overtly is Khajrawali. In the view of former two groups i.e. Badhaiwali and Chhallawali, these Khajrawalis have downed their prestige. So they call them as

form of disguise. Sometimes they have Guru or sometime not.

man, besides, some have small scale business (like mobile phone shop, grocery shop, stationary shop, road side food/tea stall etc), some work as labor (like furniture maker, factory labor etc) and few drive office car or auto rickshaw. Among the Parikhs, 15.83% is unemployed of whom majority are student.

In the table no 4,  $\chi^2$  test results reveals that there is the difference among the different MSM categories in both the cases of education ( $\chi^2 = 158$ ,  $df = 20$ ) and income status ( $\chi^2 = 129$ ,  $df = 24$ ). The difference values are significant ( $P > 0.05$ ) in every case.

**Table 4. Chi-square test of Education and Income status of the MSM**

Differences within the groups				P > 0.05 level
AK, KK, DG, H & P				
Category	$\chi^2$	df	P	
Educational	158	20	0.000	AK= Veli/Ariyal Kothi, KK= Koripese Kothi, DG= Dupli Gupti, H= Hijra, P= Parikh
Level of Income	129	24	0.000	

### Conclusion

The findings confirmed that there is a significant difference in education and income level of the MSM categories of West Bengal, India. The difference is due to the manifestation of different gender expression and the influence of social construction which expect specified behavior from male and female. Due to its most explicit challenge to hetero-normativity, the Kothis particularly the Ariyal Kothis suffers the most vulnerable position in education as well as occupation in contrast to their partners, who are able

to reinforce the hetero-normative order of power and represent the safest position among all the MSM identities (Chellan et. al., 2011). The array of findings pointed out an overall higher vulnerability in Ariyal and Koripese Kothis (those who are feminine) than other MSM groups as they are more stigmatized and discriminated (Chakrapani et. al., 2007) for societal un-acceptance due to having different gender appearance [publicly] (Dey, 2013). The Kothis and the Dupli Guptis do not live in any conventional framework of community, hence

unprotected by any traditionally accepted social back-ups (though somewhat relieved by the support of the newly emerging CBOs), whereas the separate and locally adapted subculture of the Hijras can consolidate authority as long as the larger society sustains its present practices (Khan 2004). Thus the Hijras who are the transformation of Kothis may earn better than Kothis in spite of they have low formal education (UNDP, 2010).

The researchers are well aware about the limitations of the study as the population is marginalized and hard to reach. The sample size is not enormous. The present research is just an effort to aware the people and the government regarding the social position of the local MSM. Government has taken up so many educational policies (like National Policy on Education 1986, Programme Of Action 1992, Sarbo Sikshya Abhiyan 2001, National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level 2001, Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan 2009) for 'gender mainstreaming' to remove the gender gap between boys' and girls' in educational drop out. Even 2011 census report showed that the educational gap

become narrower (16.6%) than earlier census reports (India Govt. Census, 2011). But there is no such policy in India for the MSM particularly for the Kothis or Hijras. Education is more important for empowerment of the individuals irrespective of the identity of 'man' or 'woman'. This affects the economic and social privilege. The above discussion confirms the possibility of further empirical exploration for future research and of intervention of action initiatives by the professionals for enhancing the overall development of the population.

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