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## Social Profile of Homosexuals in an Indian male prison

### INTRODUCTION

Prisons in India are unisex institutions, where besides many deprivations, heterosexual expression in its normal and healthy sense is completely absent. It is for this reason of sexual deprivation for an unusually longer period of time that the prisons naturally become fertile grounds of sex abnormalities and face manifold problems of sexual aberrations (Clemmer 1958 : 249). Of all these problems which prisons face, homosexuality is by far the most troublesome and perplexing (Smith 1954 : 582).<sup>1</sup>

But with all said and done, it is surprising that the empirical research on the subject of prison sexuality is very much limited. Only a few studies have been conducted in the West which demonstrate that many convicts adjust to the prison world by establishing a homosexual alliance with compatible partners as a marriage unit.<sup>2</sup> In India, however, no such attempt has yet been made by researchers working on prisons and other punitive or reformatory institutions.

The present article makes an attempt to describe the phenomenon of homosexuality in an exclusively male Indian prison (Central Jail, Bareilly) and reports the social profile of homosexual male 'couples' (twenty-two 'actives' and twenty-two 'passives')

### METHODOLOGY AND COLLECTION OF DATA

All the 400 inmates (selected on the basis of a systematic random sampling method from an universe of 1700 long-term prisoners) were

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interviewed by the author and were encouraged to discuss, amongst many things, matters pertaining to sex in their day-to-day life. The author, while probing into the inmate respondents' sex life, very carefully made special enquiries about the nature and pattern of prison homosexuality and persuaded them to divulge the information regarding the known homosexuals amidst them. On the basis of such inmates' accounts pertaining to the sexual orgies of the homosexual inmates, the author scanned their case histories in the Prison office to find who of them have ever been punished, reprimanded or warned on the charges of homosexuality or whose deviations were ever brought to officers' notice. This exercise helped the author to drop at least 20 per cent of the cases about whom the allegations of homosexuality were levelled by other inmates without any definite evidence which could be easily ascertained from the prison records of the inmates-concerned. Closer scrutiny of the inmates-records revealed that in the 400 cases selected for the study, the charge of homosexuality was found correct only in the case of 44 inmates who are committed or casual homosexuals and who have established a married couple-like sexual alliance with some other inmate of the prison. Incidentally this number significantly reflects upon the incidence of homosexuality in Indian prisons (11%) which is far lower than that prevalent in the Western prisons (there it is estimated to be as high as 60 to 70 per cent).<sup>3</sup>

These homosexuals, when contacted for interrogation, were by and large found to be very much shy and evasive in explaining the nature of their homosexual alliances. The passives particularly seemed hard nuts to crack. But with intensive persuasion and rapport, they, however, agreed to respond to the author's queries well. The response of the actives to all types of the author's questions was surprisingly contrary to that of passives. Some of them appeared to be brutally frank in explaining their sexual deviations in fullest details. In fact these were the people who supplied the bulk of information both about themselves as well as about their passive partners. They revealed everything which relates to homosexuality and homosexuals in the prison.

Besides the homosexual inmates' own description, the author himself could observe many things which abundantly explain the behaviour of the homosexuals and their accompanying personality traits.

#### THE ANALYSIS OF THE IDENTIFYING DATA

The data which identifies the personality type of prison homosexuals and the social class they come from, has been presented in Tables 1-12.

The following significant sociological facts emerge from these :

- (1) that passive homosexuals are generally younger in terms of age when compared with their active partners ;
- (2) that in choice of partners, religion has no important role to play ;
- (3) that upper caste inmates hold a coercive dominance over the underdogs in the prison, and exploit them for their sexual gratification;
- (4) that lingually and culturally speaking there is no apparent difference in the behaviour of the inmates which could in anyway be attributed to their places of birth ;
- (5) that the sexually experienced inmates with homosexual liking catch young, boyish-looking, unmarried inmates for the satisfaction of their sexual desires. In the prison world it is always the young ones who are often sexually exploited by the active homosexuals, who, beside being aggressive, also wield enough formal power in the community of prisoners;
- (6) that the incidence of homosexuality is highest amongst the illiterate inmates, who, for several reasons, find indulgence into homosexuality by far the most interesting diversion in the prisons' cultural milieu;
- (7) that the homosexual couples (actives and passives) are found to have acquired almost identical levels of education;
- (8) offence-wise speaking, the incidence of homosexuality has found its fullest expression amongst the inmates sentenced under Sec. 396 of the IPC (dacoity with murder). Among those sentenced under Sec. 302 of the IPC (murder and culpable homicide) the incidence is far too low ;
- (9) that prison itself is a breeding ground for the development of homosexuals alliance amongst the inmates. For those committed to it much before their entry into prison world, it is merely an extension of their childhood habit.

TABLE 1

## Age Composition

Age in years	Actives		Passives		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
20-30	2	4.54	9	20.43	11	24.97
30-40	8	18.18	6	13.62	14	31.80
40-50	9	20.43	4	9.09	13	29.52
50-60	2	4.54	2	4.54	4	9.08
60-70	—	—	1	2.27	1	2.7
70 and above	1	2.7	—	—	1	2.7
Total	22	49.96	22	49.95	44	99.91

TABLE 2

## Choice of Partners in terms of Age

Age of Actives in years	Age 20-30		of 30-40		Passive 40-50		Partners 50-60		(in years) 60-70		70 & above		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
20-30	1	2.7	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	2.7	—	—	2	5.4
30-40	3	6.81	5	11.35	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	8	18.16
40-50	5	11.35	—	—	4	9.09	—	—	—	—	—	—	9	20.44
50-60	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	4.54	—	—	—	—	2	4.54
60-70	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
70 and above	—	—	1	2.7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	2.7
Total	9		6		4		2		1				22	

TABLE 3  
Religion and Caste Composition

Religion and Caste	Actives		Passives		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Hindu	14	31.78	18	40.86	32	72.64
A. Upper Caste	11	24.97	3	6.81	14	31.78
B. Middle Caste	2	4.54	6	13.62	8	18.16
C. Lower Caste	1	2.27	9	20.43	10	22.70
Muslim	8	18.18	4	9.09	12	27.27
Sikh	—	—	—	—	—	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>49.96</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>49.95</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>99.91</b>

TABLE 4  
Choice of Partners in terms of Religion and Caste

Hindu Actives	Hindu Passive		Partners				Muslim Passive Partner	
	No.	%	Upper Caste No.	Middle Caste No.	Lower Caste No.	%	No.	%
No. 14	% 31.78							
Upper Caste No. 11	% 24.97	1	2.27	3	6.81	7	15.89	
Middle Caste No. 2	% 4.54	2	4.54	—	—	—	—	1
Lower Caste No. 1	% 2.27	1	2.27	—	—	—	—	1
Muslim Actives No. 8	% 18.16	—	—	2	4.54	3	6.81	3
								6.81

TABLE 5

## Rural / Urban Background

Rural/Urban background	Actives		Passives		No.	Total %
	No.	%	No.	%		
Rural	5	11.35	9	20.43	14	31.78
Urban	17	38.59	13	29.51	30	68.10
Total	22	49.94	22	49.94	44	99.98

TABLE

## Choice of Partners in terms of Rural/Urban Background

Urban Actives		Rural	Passives	Urban	Passives
No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
17	38.59	7	15.89	10	22.70
Rural Actives					
No.	%				
5	11.35	2	4.54	3	6.81
Total	22	9	20.43	13	29.51

TABLE 7

## Marital Status

Marital Status	Actives		Passives		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Married	17	38.59	3	6.81	20	45.40
Unmarried	4	9.09	19	43.13	23	52.22
Widower	1	2.27	—	—	1	2.27
Total	22	49.94	22	49.94	44	99.89

TABLE 8

Choice of Partners in terms of Marital Status

Active	Passive				Total	
	Married No. %	Unmarried No. %	Widower No. %		No.	%
Married	2 4.54	15 34.05	—	—	17	38.59
Unmarried	—	4 9.09	—	—	4	9.09
Widower	1 2.27	—	—	—	1	2.27
Total	3 6.81	19 43.14	—	—	22	49.95

TABLE 9

Educational Background

Education	Actives		Passives		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Illiterate	8	18.18	16	36.36	24	54.54
Literate	4	9.09	3	6.81	7	15.90
Primary	8	18.18	1	2.27	9	20.45
Junior Secondary	—	—	2	4.54	2	4.54
Secondary	1	2.27	—	—	1	2.27
Intermediate	1	2.27	—	—	1	2.27
Total	22	49.99	29	49.98	44	99.97

TABLE 10  
Choice of Partners in terms of Educational Background

Actives	Illiterate		Literate		Passives		Total							
	No.	%	No.	%	Literate Primary No.	%	J. Secondary No.	%	Secondary No.	%	Intermediate No.	%	No.	%
Illiterate	8	18.88	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	8	18.18
Literate	1	2.27	—	—	3	6.81	—	—	—	—	—	—	4	9.08
Primary Junior	—	—	5	11.35	1	2.27	2	4.54	—	—	—	—	8	18.16
Secondary	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Secondary	—	—	1	2.27	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	2.27
Intermediate	—	—	1	2.27	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	2.27
Total	9	20.45	7	15.89	4	9.08	2	4.54	—	—	—	—	22	49.96



TABLE 11

Criminal Background

Offence	Casual Offender				Habitual Offender				Total	
	Actives		Passives		Actives		Passives		No.	%
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Murder and Culpable Homicide Sec. 302 IPC	1	2.27	4	9.09	2	4.54	1	2.27	8	18.17
Murder and Dacoity, Sec. 396 IPC	—	—	—	—	19	43.13	17	38.59	36	81.72
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2.27</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9.09</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>47.67</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>40.86</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>99.89</b>

TABLE 12

Commitment to Homosexuality

Actives	Total		Passives		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
A. Before Prison incarceration	6	13.52	7	15.89	13	29.51
B. After Prison incarceration	6	36.36	15	34.05	31	70.41
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>49.98</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>49.94</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>99.92</b>

## NOTES

1. Taft found it natural in prisons and said, "put the most normally adjusted men in a womanless society, and there will be increased resort to substitute for the normal sex relationship" (Taft 1962 : 509). Victor Nelson in his oft-quoted book *Prison Days and Nights* rationalized it some what differently : "to the men dying of hunger and thirst it makes little difference that the only available food and water are tainted. Likewise, it makes little or no difference to an average prisoner that the only available means of sexual satisfaction are abnormal. It is merely a matter of satisfying as best he can the hunger that besets him" (Nelson 1932 : 143).
2. See Nelson 1932; Fishman 1934; Kinsey 1948 ; Wilson, J.G, and M.J. Prescor 1939.
3. See Barnes and Teeters : *New Horizons in Criminology* 1966, p. 574.

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