

Mr Gay World pageant entrant faces threat | Latest News & Updates at Daily News & Analysis



Thahir Mohammed Sayyed

[Yogesh Pawar](#) | Sun, 19 Apr 2015-05:05am , Mumbai , dna

Family threatened with ostracism * Father finds mosque doors shut, faces snide remarks * Imams want Thahir back out and atone

The venue for Mr Gay World (MGW) 2015 in Knysna, South Africa is nearly 7,500 away from Kochi in Kerala. Yet, a whole fortnight before the event, the nomination of Thahir Mohammed Sayyed, 28, as India's third entrant has led to rumblings in the close-knit Muslim community of the coastal city. The contestant's family has been threatened with ostracism if he doesn't withdraw from the contest.

Sayyed, who came out to his immediate family five years ago, told dna, "I had no idea this'll become such a big issue. While being supportive, my parents are deeply religious. My father has had to face snide remarks at the mosque since last week, when the MGW poster showing entrants went on social media. That's how the word spread. Since then he was 'advised' by community elders to not come to the local mosque to pray." The part-time model and fashion designing post-grad from Brisbane, Australia, who works as an executive in a private firm in Dubai, added, "I'm worried about how this pans out. My visa's done.

If I can't go, it is not like someone else can be sent instead of me now. It'll be a huge loss to not represent India. It'll also reflect poorly if India's seen as a no-show."

His 55-year-old father Mohammed said, "I am a five-time namazi. I'd gone to pray in the mosque where community elders asked me, 'Do you know what your son is up to? He's brought shame on our community.'

When I tried reasoning, they made me leave, saying I was unwelcome till Thahir didn't back out from the competition and atone." Though sounding conflicted on the phone, he added, "I'm worried about their threat of ostracism. He is my only son and this is what he wants to do. Why should it be anybody else's concern? But we have to think of the community since we live with them."

Mohammed Ali Sulaiman, a cleric with the community mosque dna reached out to, expressed outrage. "This is haram in our religion. How can it be allowed? Other youth will start getting wrong ideas."

MGW India director and Mr GayIndia 2013 Nolan Lewis hoped better sense prevailed. "Being part of this pageant is not only about glamour, but about becoming a soldier in the fight against homophobia," he said, and added: "I can understand Thahir's double jeopardy of being an entrant from India (at a time) when the country has taken itself back by several decades by re-criminalising homosexuality and also being a Muslim."

Nolan should know. After all in 2013, when he'd represented India, his fellow participant, Mr Gay Pakistan, Amir Rafique, faced a death threat. "The risk's greater in Pakistan, where under Shariat law, homosexuality is punishable by death and the social backlash on his family could be severe. Yet, Rafique resolutely participated and kept saying, 'We all have to die some day.' Whenever I think of him, it strengthens my resolve against discrimination. I hope participants like Thahir draw strength from his example."

Others like actor, VJ, and choreographer Sushant Divgikar, who won four sub-awards at MGW 2014, feel Thahir should have looked at what he was getting into before applying. "Participating in a global pageant like this is a step for India in its battle against exclusion on the basis of sexual orientation. At no cost can I see that being jeopardised. The cause is bigger than any one individual," he opined, and added: "I hope Thahir bravely takes up this opportunity without getting bogged down by what is happening. Only then will he prove himself a worthwhile legatee to my MGW India crown."

TOP