

# Mumbai Male Masseurs

A Photographic Exhibition by Charles Fox



13 July – 22 September 2012

SAMABHAVANA  
dignity in life



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*Mumbai Male Masseurs* is a photographic exhibition that sensitively portrays and tells the stories of these individuals whilst exploring the lives of this closed and secretive community. The subjects of the photographs are known by their initials and age in order to respect their wishes for anonymity due to the social stigma that surrounds their profession.

The masseurs live in various slums across Mumbai, in small but closely knit communities. Accommodation in Mumbai is prohibitively expensive and much of the city's transient work force live in multi-occupied single room dwellings. These rooms operate as tiny communities with shared duties. Going out to work the streets of Mumbai at night and occasionally by day they primarily provide simple massages but in addition to this, if requested, sexual service to male clients using hotels as discreet meeting locations.

The Masseurs are predominantly heterosexual and many of them are married with children and view their job purely as an economic necessity. The pressure to send money home is a constant concern. The masseurs "Mumbai lives" are generally a secret from their families. However, it is not unknown for several generations of the same family to have worked in Mumbai as masseurs.

The majority of Mumbai's male masseurs come from rural Mathura in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. Historically Mathura was a centre for "Akhadas" (wrestling schools). In these all male environments massage is used in the schools to relax muscle pain after strenuous wrestling practice, desensitizing the wrestlers to male on male contact. Massage has been practiced for thousands of years in India which creates a convenient veil for this male-on-male contact.



Notwithstanding the current legal position on homosexuality in India, homosexuals are socially stigmatized and this stigmatization has meant that historically bi-sexual and homosexual men have resorted to clandestine meetings and using the services of male sex workers masquerading as masseurs.

Photographer, **Charles Fox** has worked closely for over two years with **The Samabhavana Society**, Mumbai, the only organisation that runs projects to support this community. This exhibition has been made possible by the generous support of a number of private individuals.

**BRUNEI GALLERY, SOAS  
THORNHAUGH STREET  
RUSSELL SQUARE  
LONDON, WC1H 0XG**

**OPEN: Tuesday – Saturday 10.30 – 17.00 (Thurs late night opening until 20.00)**  
**CLOSED: Sunday, Monday, and Bank Holidays**  
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