

# Masculinity: Contextualizing and Historicizing the Debate

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**Abstract:** *The paper provides an overview of definitional aspects and major debates on masculinity. There is also an attempt to historicize and contextualize the debates. In doing this it focuses on the emergence of masculinity studies as a separate field and addresses the question of why do we need to engage with men and boys in order to ensure gender equality.*

**Keywords:** Gender, Patriarchy, masculinity, sex role, socialization

## 1. What is Masculinity

The general belief that masculinity is derived from biology is rather unsupported by scientific evidence (Julius 2002) and even when science attempts to justify the biological argument about masculinity and femininity, critical investigation in the practices of science reflect how sexist and gendered imageries find easy acceptance into the so called scientific explanations. Emily Martin (2006) demonstrates how science has constructed a romance based on stereotypical male female roles in explaining human reproductive biology. Collins' Thesaurus has the following equivalents for masculinity- "male, manful, manlike, manish, virile, bold, brave, butch, gallant, hardy, macho, muscular, powerful, rambosque, red-blooded, resolute, robust, stout-hearted, strong, vigorous, well-built (see Bhasin 2005). These universalist assumptions have been disregarded by sociologists, anthropologists and historians who have engaged with the issue. Their scholarly works brought to light how masculinity differ from community to community, across time and under specific circumstances such as natural and man-made disasters and economic changes (ibid). It is not the biology but society defines how boys, men should behave, dress, appear; what attitudes, qualities they should have, how they should be treated etc. (ibid:6).

The most common social science framework for understanding masculinity since mid twentieth century has been 'sex role' and socialization theories (Julius op.cit). One of the dominant conceptions associated with sex role and socialisation theories was expounded by the American sociologist Talcott Parsons (1955). Parsons attributes expressive roles to women and instrumental actions to men which he considered as central to the functioning of a well-ordered society. Expressive roles played by women in private domain of care and nurturance helped maintain modern nuclear families. Family in Parsonian view functioned towards the socialisation of young as per the prescribed norms and stabilization of adult personalities in modern industrial societies. In this structural-functional imagery rational instrumental public world based on competition demanded greater effort from men who returned home exhausted to find respite in women's expressive labour. The social roles, in this understanding provide scripts of femininity and masculinity that are learnt through process of socialisation (see Scott: 72). In more explicit terms, socialisation is gender specific and corresponds to

biological sex; culture elaborates on a foundation provided by nature (ibid). Boys are taught within the families, peer group, schools and other social organisations and institutions the behaviours and traits that are considered appropriate for boys and men. Boys internalize gender specific "appropriate" personalities and behaviours as a result. Masculinity is the identity that corresponds with role of man in social structures.

In addition to sex role theories, cognitive approaches to gender socialisation, posit, further, that once boys embrace the male sex categories for themselves, they actively seek activities, behaviours and modes of presentation that facilitate feedback from others and affirm maleness (Kholberg quoted in Julius op.cit 6).

Sex-role and socialisation theories have been criticised for their essentialism and commonsensical views on gender. Rooted either in functionalist and/or positivist values they fail to consider the implications which sexual division of labour and segregated gendered domains bear for men and women. Essentialist understanding also tends to single out core characteristics to define masculinity but the choice of what characteristics of the core are essential to masculinity is arbitrary (Connell 1995). Positivist approaches while claiming to be neutral, nonetheless assume that people already have been sorted out into categories "men" and "women" and they subsequently proceed to measure the difference between putatively distinct groups (ibid). Connell suggests that masculinity should be understood more broadly as a set of practices by which men and women create themselves in gender relation and produce gendered effects on others and themselves. Moving beyond 'sex-role framework' the 'ethnographic moment' along with certain applied research focussing on practices of masculinity began in English-speaking world during 1980s and 1990s mainly in Australia, United states and Britain (ibid).

### Men and Masculinity as a Field of Studies

Men and Masculinity Studies as a separate field of academic inquiry remains closely associated with men's movement in 1970s as a response to the second wave feminism (see Capraro 2004). Men's movement from the start was a rather divided movement; conservatives emphasized the disadvantage of being male as the rightful heads of families and leaders in public sphere. The pro-feminist men argued the virtues of feminism and in solidarity with the women's movement committed itself to dismantling sexism (ibid). Both of the trends mentioned above continue in the

contemporary West. Men's mythopoetic movement in the US, for example, represents a conservative stance. It begins with the publication of American poet Robert Bly's best selling self-help book for men in 1990 which attempts to re-establish male ideals in contemporary period. According to Bly manhood is adversely affected due to taming and domesticating 'inner warrior' nature of men (Peberdy 2010). Softening of men is attributed to the dominance and influence of the females in men's lives having destructive social and historical implications. A somewhat similar sentiments echoes in antifeminist male organisations like National Congress for Men which projects men as victims of feminism (see Messner 1998).

Pro-feminist men represented diametrically opposite worldview in support of feminist agenda. Influenced by student, anti-war, black-power, radical feminist as well as gay and lesbian movements the progressive men's movement was premised on a language of (asymmetrical) gender relation and patriarchal power (ibid). The discourse emanating from pro-feminist men's movement as well as the queer and feminist movements set the background for development of the interdisciplinary field of men and masculinity studies and not the conservative groups' articulations.

Academic research and writings on men and masculinity, the latter includes both books and research articles, have proliferated since 1980s. Exclusive journals like *Men and Masculinity* by the Sage Publications, conferences on the theme and courses offered by many universities across the globe reflect growing significance of the field. Bryce Traister (2000: 274) while documenting the rise of American Masculinity Studies writes succinctly- "Judging from the sheer number of title published, papers solicited, and panels presented in the last ten years concerned with the analysis of masculine gender, it would appear that "masculinity studies" has emerged as a discipline unto itself". Apart from History, Cultural Studies has become an important site of academic debate and analysis of masculinity; the latter, in a great deal, is influenced by Judith Butler's theory of performativity. This notable growth of masculinity research and writing in America, however, is not so perceptible in many other parts of the globe despite United Nations' emphasis on the necessity of addressing the issue of men and boys in its agenda to end gender discriminations.

#### Why do We Need to engage with Masculinity

Feminists both in the West and South Asia have been debating the need to engage with the issue of men and masculinity. Radhika Chopra (2006), an Indian sociologist who has been teaching and researching on South Asian Masculinity argues that women's agency and autonomy which have been very central to feminist theorising and activism are always relational and cannot be looked within the framework of 'autonomous individual' particularly in South Asia. If feminist agenda is the empowerment of women, the latter cannot be fully realised without taking into account women's everyday life and relationships. In this context, we need to understand how men who are parts of women's lives can enable, sustain or prevent women's empowerment. We also need to consider, writes Chopra

(2000), whether men can become players and partners in women's lives and in the process of empowerment, and most of all, whether some men are already part of supportive structures for women.

The concept of relational autonomy and entitlement therefore need to be paired with another concept: men as supportive partners. Post-Cairo conference, the concept has been deployed by various men-as-supportive partner campaigns such as the 'Men in Maternal-health-Programmes' of the Population Council that focus on involving men in reproductive health care. Within the focussed terms of these campaigns, husbands are encouraged to play an active role in specific areas like women's reproductive health. The rationale for this encouragement is to illustrate that pre- and post-natal care is not the work of women alone, but must include men. The attempt at involving men in the health care of their wives and children is also aimed at encouraging men to think of reproductive health as their work as well. Equally, encouraging men to participate in the reproductive health of women seeks to rework men's subject positions within home by expanding and elaborating the role of men beyond sexual, into the intimacies and 'work' of care (Chopra op.cit.2-3).

Kamla Bhashin (op.cit) has remarked that the erosion of male power and privilege in some spheres of life led to psychological and social problem for many men. This decline in social and economic power of men within households as well as in communities can be disastrous, leading some men into greater violence against women; into alcoholism and drug abuse, as antidotes to anger and frustration (ibid). In most cases, it is men who are violent against women; most violent conflict and wars are also started and led by men; men control and direct more resources and decision-making processes. Bhashin also highlights that the global women's movement has demanded equality, development and peace. In her perception, without challenging *masculinism* (and militarism) these goals will remain unachievable and without a re-division of labour it will be difficult for women to participate in public life and be economically independent. She (ibid:5) writes in categorical terms – 'If we want to reduce violence, conflict and wars, if we want peace, we want meaningful relationships, and if we are really interested in sustainable development we will have to understand men and masculinity and develop partnership between boys, men and girls in order to achieve this'.

#### United Nations Commission for the Status for Women: Engaging Men and Boys in Gender Equality

In early 2004, the Commission for the Status for Women at the United Nations adopted a resolution to actively engage men and boys in creating gender equality. It was based on a document formulated by the UN Secretary General Expert Group which met at Brazil in October 2003 (<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/men-boy-2003/reports/Final/pdf>). The document cites various international declarations and conventions which emphasized the need to involve men and boys in creating a gender just social order some of which are worth recording here.

- The Beijing Declaration following the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 affirmed that equal sharing of responsibilities and a harmonious partnership between women and men were critical to their well-being and their families as well to consolidation of democracy (para 15). It further emphasized that principle of equality of women and men had to be integral to socialization process to the extent of encouraging men to share equally in child care and household work.
- A special session of the United Nations General Assembly on Population and Development held in New York in July 1919 highlighted that all leaders at all levels as well as parents and educators should promote positive male role models and facilitate boys to become gender sensitive adults and enable men to support, promote women's sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. Research should be undertaken on men's sexuality and their reproductive behaviour (para 53).
- The Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS adopted at twenty-sixth General Assembly on HIV/AIDS highlighted the need to challenge gender stereotypes and attitudes and gender inequalities in relation to HIV/AIDS encouraging the active involvement of men and boys (para 47).

The Report of Expert Group meeting cited above mentions that patriarchy suppresses both men and women; patriarchal ideologies eclipse the human capacities of men to care and love. Men pay significant costs within current structures of gender relations. Men predominate in dangerous industries such as mining and they have greater vulnerability to alcoholism, sexually transmitted infection, imprisonment and homicidal violence. Conventional division between men's and women's role and expectations also narrow men's cultural experience. In education, for instance, boys and men predominate as students in "technical" courses and natural sciences but are underrepresented in humanities, creative arts, social sciences and human services. Power oriented masculinities are often associated with ethnocentrism, rejection of other cultures and maintenance of inflexible and rigid barriers to change. According to the Expert Committee, there are clear benefits for men from involvement in creating a gender-equal society. In a world of gender equality, there will be less risk for men in experiencing and expressing the complete range of human emotions. Men will be able to enjoy more intimate, trust worthy and respectful relations with women and other men. Men will have more opportunity for sharing the care and contributing to the growth of young children – both as fathers and as professional caregivers. The possibility of a richer personal life and a fuller humanity is an important benefit of transformed and more equal gender relations. Moving toward gender equality does not mean loss of masculinity. It does mean that men as a group will in fact be able to share and be part of a broader, richer cultural experience. Another key potential benefit for men from gender equality is to live in a world where arbitrary inequalities of all kinds are rejected (Also see, Karlsson and Karkara 2003; Malik et. al.2006)

### Historicising Masculinity

Mrinalini Sinha (2012: 37) writes—'Until recently, the urgent task for women's history, as well as for gender studies and feminist scholarship more generally was to make

the history of women visible. It soon became apparent, however, that in many ways it is men who have no history'. The entire corpus of 'gender neutral' historical scholarship is and always has been doings of men and not as Michael Kimmel (1993) suggests the critical investigations into construction of masculinity and experience of manhood. It would also require an examination of the ways in which meanings of manhood and masculinity have differed across different groups and classes and changed over the course of history, and a critical analysis of the ways in which the pursuit of an always-elusive ideal of masculinity has animated some of the central events of history (Sinha op.cit.). Victor Seidler (2006) remarks that within Enlightenment vision of modernity, European white heterosexual masculinity often learnt to talk for others rather than exploring the complexities of talking more openly and directly about themselves. This is partly because emotions are interpreted as 'feminine' and so as a threat to male identities and partly because masculinities are identified with self-control as a mode of dominance in which reason supposedly silences inner emotions, feelings and desire (ibid). George L. Mosse (1996) describes how self-control and certain normative standards of appearance, behaviour and comportment related to white, heterosexual bourgeois European masculinity was created through a new artistic sensibility of male beauty during the second half of eighteenth century. This was popularized by the celebration and revival of Greek sculpture particularly the male athletes' body. Johann Joachim Winkelmann the famous archaeologist and art historian in mid eighteenth century popularised the beauty of Greek sculpture through a mixture of scholarly research, pithy phrases and aesthetic judgement. In his works, the young athletes through the structures of their bodies and their comportment exemplified power, virility, harmony, proportion and self-control. This cult of male beauty became a an integral part of bourgeois at the beginning of nineteenth century when the public buildings were decorated with frescoes symbolising the virtues of city or nation (ibid:34). This ideal of manliness with a blend of virile body and self-control was considered as the mortar which drove the nation and society at large (ibid).

Ute Frevert (2003) outlines the significance of duelling, the combat between males, as very central to European aristocratic and later bourgeois masculinity till early twentieth century and then she goes on to map the changing images of masculinity in Germany. The excerpts from her essay would help to illustrate how images of masculinity might shift and get reframed as a result of change in economic and political conditions during different phases of history. Duelling, as she writes, represented 'manly consciousness', 'manly pride', 'manly virtue', and even 'manly holiness' in many parts of Europe. The above expressions were used to describe the motivational structure of duellists. Brawls and fist fights of working class males were considered dishonourable and ladies' duel were regarded as insincere and ridiculous in contradiction to prestigious male duelling. Women were educated to hold physical vigour and courage in high esteem and 'to look up to man as a hero who has defended his honour with blood'. In Germany, as Frevert describes, respect for weapons and admiration for the bearers of arms increased as the nineteenth century declared all men as destined to defend the



nation conferring an unmistakable gender identity on men drawing a sharp boundaries between masculinity and femininity. Military and academic institutions helped to make duelling a prominent feature of nineteenth and early twentieth century culture. Frevert later makes very interesting points about the changing cultures of masculinity in Germany. She demonstrates how there was an urgent need for new images of masculinity after the Second World War. The new 'civil' role models for men that were compatible with democratic society had to be created. At this time, the image of American soldier served as an attractive alternative. American movies since 1950s stepped in to propagate male gender roles that praised strong, self-confident and autonomous male able to defend themselves without, however, dealing with institutionalised forms of violence such as duelling. During 1950s and 1960s good education and hard work were emphasized. The need to rebuild Germany and re-cultivate the heavily destroyed country very much shaped the image of masculinity throughout 1950s. An *ideal* man was the one who worked longer hours, was thrifty and did not spend time or money for things unworthy and was family-oriented – manly pride was based on man's capacity as breadwinner. Simultaneously, when male income became inadequate to satisfy family needs, it jolted the self-confidence of men. When office jobs assumed significance the classical masculine worker gave way to smart, well dressed clerk whose manliness according to Frevert were far less outspoken. During 1960s, many male monopolies—in education, in labour market, in politics, even in military—were dissolved. Compared to 1920s and 1950s with decreased working hours fathers tended to spend more time with their children and they even seem to enjoy their new roles. To Frevert, there is no such thing as hegemonic masculinity as it existed in duelling societies of 19<sup>th</sup> century or in racist warrior societies of fascism. A more recent research on transnational managerial masculinity in globalising world finds a break with the former old bourgeois masculinity; the study brings out that managerial masculinity is still related to power but has turned more tolerant to diversity while also experiencing a heightened insecurity about one's place in the changing world and gender order (see Connell and Wood 2005).

Based on many existing scholarly investigations of gendering in colonial India Mrinalini Sinha (2012) provides an account of colonial ways of constructing masculinities during the period. She mentions that after the revolt of 1857, an elaborate colonial ethnography of 'martial' and 'nonmartial' races in India appeared for the purpose of reorganising the recruitment of Indians to the Indian army. The contrast in imperialist thinking between the so called 'manly' peoples of Punjab and of the North-west frontier provinces and the 'effeminate' peoples of Bengal and more settled regions of British India was well internalised by certain class of Indian elite. Ashish Nandy in his book, *Intimate Enemy* (1993) demonstrates how British hypermasculinist imperial ideology reshaped fluid and diffused gender identities in Indian tradition. For the masculinised ethos of aggressive-but-gentlemanly competition among the British was accepted by much of nineteenth century Indian male elite who took the existence of British domination as proof of masculine superiority

(Nandy quoted in Sinha 2012). Bengali *bhadralok* (elite or respectable class) throughout the nineteenth century, was perhaps most noted for its peculiarly symbiotic relationship with the colonial elite. Sinha brings out that there was a particularly physical dimension to the Bengali *bhadralok*'s self –perception of effeminity that was manifested in the new physical cultures of *akharas* (gymnasias) in nineteenth century and later in the masculinist subculture of secret terrorist societies in early twentieth century. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee tried in his writings to respond to Bengali effeminacy (the *bharata kalanka* or the Indian stigma) by reconstructing the iconic figure of Krishna, cleansed of his famed qualities of sensuality and playfulness (Sudipta Kaviraj quoted in Sinha, op. cit). In Nandy's arguments M.K. Gandhi's profound challenge to British colonialism also *inter alia* countered the superiority of colonisers' masculinity premised on rationality, materialism and physical strength (see Sinha op.cit). Ramakrishna Paramhansa defiantly and ambivalently appropriated masculine and feminine in his own presentation (see Sumit Sarkar 1992) which according to Sinha (op.cit. 43) constitutes a response that prefigured Gandhi's construction of his persona as both father and mother to his disciples. Sinha (ibid) mentions that many scholarly works on colonial India which shed light on heightening of communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims and constructions of masculinity in the communal discourse; men of rival communities were constructed as rapists and abductors of hapless women (also see Gupta 2001). The hypermasculinist rhetoric of Hindu communalism, reconstructed the 'virility' of the Hindu not just in relation to women and to men of 'other' communities, but also against men who, although defined as part of the same community, were held responsible for the decline and emasculation (Sinha op.cit). Militant Hindu organisations, ever since 1940s have periodically raised the question: 'How Mahatma Gandhi with his feminine *charkha* (spinning wheel) can possibly be considered the Father of Nation?' (ibid: 47).

### Hegemonic and Multiple Masculinities

The concepts of hegemonic and multiple masculinities were proposed by the Australian Sociologist Raewyn Connell (1987; 1995). Connell is regarded as one of the leading authorities on men and masculinity research (Ashe 2007). In a number of influential texts she devised broad theoretical framework for analysing masculinities that has had a wider interdisciplinary theoretical appeal (ibid). In problematising masculinity, Connell uses the concept of hegemony—a pivotal concept in Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*. Donaldson (1993: 8) attempts to elucidate hegemony as

[T]he ways in which ruling class establishes and maintains its domination. The ability to impose a definition of the situation, to set the terms in which events are understood and issues discussed, to formulate ideals and define morality is an essential part of this process. Hegemony involves persuasion of greater part of the population particularly through media and organisations of social institutions in ways that appear "natural", "ordinary", "normal". The state through punishment for non-conformity is crucially involved in this negotiation and enforcement.

Gramsci thus highlighted the centrality of ideological struggle and alliances in the process of building hegemony (Ashe op.cit). Appropriating Gramsci's ideas of hegemony, Connell (1995) conceives masculinity as configuration of social practices in a given historical context rather than 'defined sex role'. She maintains that gendered power is relational—it only exists in contrast to femininity and other non-hegemonic forms of masculinity which she calls marginalized masculinity and subordinated masculinity. While men disadvantaged in terms of race and class create marginal masculinity example of which may be black and working class men in the western context, sexuality creates subordination to dominant masculinity. Gay men who stand in opposition to heterosexual norms exemplify subordinate forms of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is a social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contents of brute power into organisation of private life and cultural processes (<http://www.csub.edu/jgrnskog/inst205/Connell.htm>). In other words, ascendancy is not achieved at the point of gun but embedded in religious doctrine and practices, mass media content, wage structures, the design of housing, welfare taxation policies and so on ([http://writing.colostate.edu/files/classes/7875/file\\_62](http://writing.colostate.edu/files/classes/7875/file_62)). Connell clarifies that ascendancy though not achieved through brute force is not necessarily incompatible with it; the connection between hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal violence is close though not simple (ibid). Hegemonic masculinity does not mean total cultural domination of alternatives; other groups are subordinated rather than eliminated (ibid). It could exercise a complex collective strategy in order to obtain the consent of women in being consistently skewed towards domesticity and towards violence, towards misogyny and towards heterosexual attraction (ibid).

The idea of hegemonic masculinity can be applied in gendered analysis to explain how certain ideals of masculinity become 'exalted' and 'legitimized' and operate to justify unequal relationship between men and women more broadly (Ashe op.cit). Connell (1997: 8) writes that hegemonic masculinity is heterosexual, aggressive, competitive and homosocial (excluding women from its networks). She at the same time is aware that hegemonic masculinity emerges more in fantasy—in large number of consent—than in actual everyday life of (hegemonic) men. Few men actually fit in the characters played by Bollywood stars like Humphrey Bogart and Sylvester Stallone in the US but many collaborate in sustaining these images; men in general benefit from subordination of women, the latter constituting 'patriarchal dividend' in terms of higher income as formal benefit and informal benefits including care and domestic service from family women (see Connell 1995). There is no hegemonic femininity; hegemonic masculinity sustains through the institution of heterosexual marriage, 'emphasized femininity' meaning women's compliance with gender inequality and their orientation towards accommodating the interests and desires of men, and a contempt for gay masculinity (ibid). The American adolescent white boys become masculine through continual repudiation of 'fag' identity (Pascoe 2005). Classism and racism are equally inherent in acquisition of masculinity; dancing and care for clothes would constitute a compromise

with masculinity for white American boys but for African-American boys they demonstrate membership in a cultural community (ibid).

For Connell, the relationship between power and masculinities can be analysed across four main social dimensions; at the global level of transnational arenas, such as world politics, transnational business and media; at the regional level of culture or nation state, at the local level of face to face interaction with families and organisations, and in the arena of bodily reflex practices (Ashe op. cit 149). Moreover, she fleshes out strategies of resistance within these arenas (ibid). There have been several criticisms of Connell's ideas of hegemonic masculinity which she responded to through her article entitled *Hegemonic Masculinity : Re-thinking the Concept* which appeared in *Gender and Society* in 2005.

### South Asian Masculinity

Scholarship on South Asian masculinity has not progressed as much as the other social aspects like caste, gender, development and social movements. Within the growing body of knowledge on South Asian gender and Sexuality during past several decades, sociological research and writing on masculinity has only taken off recently (Caroline Osella, Filippo Osella and Radhika Chopra 2004). We are yet to experience an incremental growth in the field of sociology of masculinity. The edited volume, *South Asian Masculinities* by Chopra et al. (2004) attempts to address what it means to be a man in various arenas of daily social life and the ways in which masculinity may be performed. Some of the issues delineated in the texts include masculine self in South Asia, homosocial spaces, women as agents in legitimizing notions of dominant masculinity, masculine aesthetics, denial and re-negotiation and recovery of manhood, aspects of modern masculine identity, specificity of Indian modernity contributing towards Hindu public sphere and its articulation of muscular Hindu masculinity, cinematic landscape and construction of muscular heroism and (upper) caste (male) body, marginalised masculinity in urban spaces, popular media, bodily practices and male-male intimacy. The volume engages with theoretical and conceptual frameworks of masculinity and their empirical evaluation in specific historical and cultural context of South Asia.

Following the above volume Caroline and Filippo Osella's ethnographic exploration of South Indian masculinity appeared in 2006. This book is based upon several lengthy periods of joint fieldwork in a rural paddy-growing area of central Kerala (the *panchayat*, Valiyagramam) and some short fieldworks in Kerala's state capital Thiruvananthapuram from 1989 to 2002. The ethnography demonstrates the growing significance of cash as an important sign of success and masculinity. The authors remark that a man is someone with liquidity not just assets. Even illegal money, such as that which comes from smuggling or cheating on a property deal is better than no money at all. As gold is especially associated with women, cash appears especially linked with men. Wealthy men make large cash donations to temples, churches or mosques, the names and amounts recorded on notice-boards and in the printed festival calendar booklets distributed to houses in

catchment areas enhance masculine prestige of the donors. Successful gulf migrants who have access to and can flaunt a considerable amount of cash are commonly represented as hypermasculine.

S. Ananadi et al (2002) have written on changing Dalit Masculinity in a Tamil Village. According to this paper, the unemployed and casually employed dalit youngsters who have severed their ties with oppressive agrarian relations due to heightened dalit consciousness in the village, are in the centers of re-working masculinity. One of the important ways in which the dalit youth re-assert their new masculine selfhood is by asserting control over public spaces in the village and by public display of violence of varying degrees-ranging from petty quarrels to sexual harassments of upper-caste women. This finding, however, has received criticism in terms of simplification and omission ( see Lakshmanan 2004).

Thomas Blom Hansen (2005) talks about the local 'big man' who is ubiquitous in everyday life, and is central to most relationships between authorities and ordinary people in urban India. These men are not necessarily respected but always feared and even admired for their ruthlessness and their ability to 'get work done' (*kam*). Most of the activities of these men defy conventional distinction between legality and illegality. These men can also possess sometimes the ability to eliminate life with impunity and might enjoy a very successful political career.

Radhika Chopra's (2006) edited volume brings very interesting stories of what she calls, 'supportive practices of men'. The essays in the volume concentrate on profiling the life stories of individual men from different regions of India who have overturned the stereotypes in extraordinary ways.

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