

# *“Understanding Masculinities: Culture, Politics and Social Change”*

A Fellowship Programme in South Asia



## STUDY GUIDE

SOUTH ASIAN  
NETWORK TO  
ADDRESS  
MASCULINITIES

**SANAM**

## **Guide note**

South Asian Network to Address Masculinities (SANAM) aims to provide a platform for women, men and trans-people to work together in developing a culture of resistance to gender based violence.

SANAM offers young leaders from institutional and non institutional settings an opportunity to enhance their conceptual understanding as well as build the required skills to effectively work on the issues of men and masculinities in South Asia region and beyond.

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# Background Note on Curricula

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Gender norms and categories are directly related to the distribution of power among genders, and hence to issues of social justice, equity and human rights. ‘Power’, in turn, relates to the control over both symbolic as well as material goods. That is, the *ideas* we hold about men and women – their ‘appropriate’ roles, capacities, and characteristics – along with the access they enjoy to *material resources* go towards determining their positions with respect to each other. Hence, both symbolic and material processes are of crucial importance when we plan upon affecting changes in oppressive social structures and conditions. *All* social contexts are gendered, and the gendered nature of social contexts ‘means that neither male nor female power can be examined entirely in isolation’ (Malhotra and Mather 1997:603). ‘Gender’ is, therefore, a *relationship*.

Hence, the study of feminine, masculine and trans-gender identities concerns the exploration of *power relationships* within the contemporary gender landscape, where certain dominant ideals of manhood impact on women, different ways of being men, as well those identities that may not fit either gender category. This way of engaging with ‘gender’ is an exploration into the taken-for-granted category of ‘man’.

Masculinity refers to the *socially produced but embodied ways of being male*. Its manifestations include manners of speech, behaviour, gestures, social interaction, a division of tasks ‘proper’ to men and women (‘men work in offices, women do housework’), and an overall narrative that positions it as superior to its perceived antithesis, femininity. The discourse of masculinity as a dominant and ‘superior’ gender position is produced at a number of sites and has specific consequences for women as well as those men who may not fit into the dominant and valorised models of masculinity. These sites include: customary laws and regulations, the state and its mechanisms, the family, religious norms and sanctions, popular culture, and, the media. The mass media is one of the most important means for the transmission, circulation and reception of local and global masculine identities. With the rise of new technologies of media and communication, representations of masculinities find both local and global anchoring. In this sense, the media becomes a transformative force field with a capacity to change structures of belief.

In order to stand in a relationship of superiority to feminine identity, masculinity must be represented as possessing characteristics that are the binary opposite of (actual or imagined) feminine identity. However, this is not all. Dominant masculinity stands in a relationship not just to femininity but *also to those ways of being male* that are seen to deviate from the ideal. It is in this sense that masculinity possesses both external (relating to women) as well as an internal (relating to ‘other’ men) characteristics. It is also for this reason that we speak of *masculinities* rather than masculinity (in the singular).

There is also the need to differentiate the linked ideas of ‘patriarchy’ and ‘masculinity’. Patriarchy refers to a *system* of social organization which is fundamentally organised around the idea of men’s superiority to women. Within this system, even those who may not approximate to the male ideal (such as homosexual men) still stand to benefit from the privileges attached to being a man. So, as a parallel, we might think of the situation on apartheid era South Africa where all whites – those who supported apartheid and those who opposed it – were potential beneficiaries of the institutionalised privileges of being white. Though it is difficult to posit simple definitions of ‘patriarchy’ and ‘masculinity’, we might say that patriarchy refers to the systemic relationship of power between men and women, whereas masculinity concerns both inter and intra-gender relationships. And, while it can not be argued that under patriarchy *all* forms of masculinity are equally valorised, there is nevertheless an overwhelming consensus regarding the superiority of men over women. Patriarchy ‘makes’ men superior, whereas masculinity is the process of producing superior men.

The ideas of ‘making’ and ‘producing’ are crucial to the study of gender identities, for they point to their historical and social nature. The gigantic archive of ‘proper’ masculine behaviour – in novels, films, advertisements, and folk-advice – would clearly be unnecessary if it was a naturally endowed characteristic. The very fact that masculinity must consistently be reinforced – ‘if you buy this motorcycle you’ll be a real man’ – says something about the tenuous and fragile nature of gender identities; they must continually be reinforced. Following from this, we might also say that masculinity is *enacted* rather than expressed. For, when we say that something is ‘expressed’, we are working with the idea that it ‘already exists’, and gender identities in particular do not *already* exist (say, biologically). There is an entire task of building and rebuilding, consolidation, representation, and enforcement; in other words we must think of gender identities as works in progress.

A crucial task of this course is to foreground the social nature of gender identities and simultaneously explore possibilities of interventions. When we speak of ‘gender’, we are speaking of *social* and *cultural* attributes within human society. This approach moves away from the biologism that has historically been part of the study of gender and sexual identities. Biologism is the thinking that suggests that gender and sexual identities:

- are biologically derived
- have been historically stable (i.e. the same since the ‘dawn of time’)
- are ‘essentially’ about our ‘private’ lives, and,
- are ‘basically’ the same across different cultures
- are normative.

To imagine identities and behaviours as socially and historically constituted is also to imagine the possibility of effecting change in a desired direction. For, if masculine identities vary across time and space – appear in different forms at different times and are different across societies – therein lies the possibility of formulating appropriate policy measures and programmes and projects to influence the contexts within which gender inequalities persist.

### **Globalisation, Development and Masculinities**

Globalisation has been understood in different ways. However, most people agree that it is about living in a more interconnected world with a definite economic, social and cultural process. Economically it is referred to as the reduction and removal of barriers between national borders in order to facilitate the flow of goods, capital, services and labour. Socially and culturally it connects us through the availability of goods, food, entertainment and information that are produced in any part of the globe to be consumed in any other. Even local work and jobs are dependent on the shifts in the global economy. In this scenario relations between men and women are rapidly changing and gender relations are being redefined. This section will build an understanding of how global processes have a bearing on individuals, families and communities living in different parts of south Asia.

## **Customs, Religion and Masculinities**

The formation of identities through religion and cultures of masculinity is a prevalent feature of the region. Religious solidarities are often mobilized through appeals to a shared masculinity. The public expression of religious symbols is the background against which political formations take shape. The manner of expression of these symbols privileges the issue of gender by linking it to the gendering of the nation, i.e. how national identity and gender become linked contexts. Contemporary religiosity, whose contours are more mobile and unpredictable than before, has revealed itself to be one of the most decisive factors in the constitution of all cultural identity. The one element that this religiosity shows is the crucial importance of congregations in maintaining itself and disseminating its message. Almost all these congregations (mainly communities of men) are tied together by ideas of sacrifice, martyrdom, altruistic suicide. A focus on the making of congregations helps us understand how masculine identities might be constructed through ideas of socio-cultural differences, and how cultural differences inhibit the processes of socio-cultural integration.

The nostalgia for a culturally homogeneous society, for a strict separation between men and women in the public, for a close and literal reading of canonical texts, affects not only the possibilities of public dissent, but also supplies the normative basis of cultural separatism. The move towards homogeneity is made through the vehicle of religious symbols and it becomes important to investigate the scope of such symbols.

A recurrent feature of south Asian cultures is the expression of ethno-nationalism based on the forging of a homogeneous cultural identity. Expressions of ethnic nationalism and linguistic identities are also accompanied with a pervasive collective violence and the cult of charisma. Without exception, the leadership of such movements draws its inspiration from an appeal to a mythic past based on masculinised cultures. The region offers a variety of ethnic movements informed by a series of primordial loyalties.

While ethnic movements seem at odds with the secular consensus of modern states, they also force us to acknowledge that membership to a group can be premised upon an adherence to customary law. Across Asia, the resurfacing of customs that were thought to have been superseded by civil law shows the resilient character of local traditions. Whatever the cultural contents and variations of such customs, the one common factor that they express is that of restrictions to be placed upon women and the role



of men as arbiters. The asymmetrical effect of such custom upon men and women needs to be mapped, especially its authorizing of gender based violence.

One of the main justifications of male violence against women is the ‘cultural rights’ argument, variously posed in the idiom of honour, shame, and the maintenance of solidarity networks. In some societies in Asia, cultural rights have been enshrined as ‘customary’ law, while in others, honour and shame have been replaced by civil procedures of restitution. To trace the complexities of ethnic violence and its persistence over time, a comparative understanding of the custom of ethnic group solidarity would be of invaluable help in delineating cultures of violence.

## **Media and Masculinities**

Mass media is perhaps the most important means for the transmission, circulation and reception of local and global gender identities. With the rise of new technologies of media and communications, representations of gender – feminine, masculine and ones that don’t fit this binary – come to be represented in complex ways. Further, media representations of gender are one of the most significant ways in which social and cultural norms regarding gender are both circulated as well as transformed. Irrespective of the regional context, globalization as a backdrop is fundamental to the ways in which contemporary gender identities are produced and negotiated. However, though new forms of media – satellite television and the internet, for example, – play an active role in circulating representations of masculinities, these also draw upon longer cultural histories, memories, and experiences. The sheer pervasiveness of the media as a purveyor of information and entertainment makes it imperative to understand the ways in which it constructs representations of gender, as well as how these intersect with contexts such as class, religion, caste and ethnicity.

## **Institutions and Masculinities**

The idea that the public sphere is a ‘masculinised’ one is the starting point for exploring the relationship between gender and the functioning and structure of institutions. Here, the kinds of questions we need to explore include: How is gender power consolidated through civic associations such as clubs and societies that, either implicitly or explicitly, base themselves upon masculinist ideologies? How are the conjoined contexts of patriarchal privilege and masculinist ideals normalized through public institutions such as state bureaucracies, schools, the legal system and the police? The historic division of social life



as ‘public’ and ‘private’ has simultaneously entailed a division of institution as public and private. And, along with this, there has developed logic of – what might be called – the gender of such institutions. Hence, according to this logic, public institutions have been understood to be the ‘natural’ preserve of men and hence have tended to operate according to a variety of masculinist ideologies. One example of this is that the media quite often provides accounts of public women through describing what they wear, or, how many children they have. Beyond this, there are even more serious issues, such as the denial of equal opportunities to women through masculinity notions of what men can do and what women are capable. It becomes important, therefore, to explore the gender of our institutions in order to devise strategies if change.

## **Patriarchy, Masculinity and Sexuality**

While patriarchy socially embeds the disprivileging of women as a group, masculinity is the process by which the hierarchy of gender orders is maintained. Amongst other things masculinities has often been described as a policing mechanism that maintains social hierarchies not only between women and men but also between men on the basis of class, caste, culture, religion, sexuality, etc.

Since masculinity is not simply a biological state but an unstable process and a state that has to constantly striven towards, it is inherently unstable. This instability means that men have to constantly prove their manhood in various social spheres including their sexual lives. Performance therefore becomes the cornerstone of men’s sexual practices and yet another arena that men have to negotiate within the context of experiencing power.

In this section we will explore the determinants of men’s experiences of sexuality and the linkages between intimacy, love, sexuality, performance and power. The section will also explore the modes by which codes of sexual control are established and practiced in different institutional settings and the consequences of such practices on relations between men and women and between men.

## **Self and Gender**

The invisibility of gender to men and their inability to look at themselves as gendered remains the biggest challenge in creating spaces of self reflection that could contribute to challenging dominant forms and practices of masculinities. This section will provide for self exploratory methods of identifying the role and practice of gender in men's lives. The emphasis would be on delineating the process by which a certain 'normativity' is generated around the experience and practice of masculinities by identifying it as a core or essence of being men as opposed to gender being a relational reflection of the relations between men and women.

## **Conflict and Violence**

Masculinities can be understood in various ways but one element that remains common to most definitions is its relationship with power. The experience of masculinities is about an entitlement to power. An entitlement that may not translate into an actual experience of power in all situations because our social fabric is a pyramid constructed on class, caste, religious, geographical, ethnic, cultural, sexual and segregation but nevertheless the sense of entitlement is what marks most expressions of masculinities from inside homes to institutions outside. And no doubt this tension between a sense of entitlement and in many cases an experience of powerlessness is a contributory factor to many conflicts that men find themselves caught within.

This section will explore the linkages between conflict, masculinities and violence in different social and political settings from within families to its manifestation in communal, ethnic and nationalist expressions.

## **Skills Building**

At the heart of this project is to design a curriculum that works through the triad of epistemology, pedagogy and cognition to generate critical knowledge that can be utilized by

fellows to build grass root interventions that effectively address masculinities and gender based violence. The roots of knowledge around gender, the implication of translating this knowledge into training and curricula that gives primacy to processes of learning rather than prescriptive models of change are the central concerns that will facilitate both the design of the curricula and the training methodologies.

There exists in South Asia a pool of knowledge and skill that has been generated through several years of application in community situation. It is the aim of this project to collate the learning from these interventions and transfer it into a curriculum that generates knowledge not only towards a better understanding of the various ways in which masculinities operates and affects community lives but also provides the skill to negotiate these situations with effective programming. The curricula will set out a skill imparting section that will acquaint the participants with ongoing interventions, strategies and tools that are being utilized. However, importance will be given to critically reflect on these and develop appropriate strategies for each location where the fellows will intervene rather than blindly adopt methods that have been followed by others.

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**Module I:**

**UNDERSTANDING  
MASCULINITIES**

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**Tutors: Prof. Sanjay Srivastava / Rahul Roy**

## I. Introduction

Gender norms and categories are directly related to the distribution of power among genders, and hence to issues of social justice, equity and human rights. 'Power', in turn, relates to the control over both symbolic as well as material goods. That is, the *ideas* we hold about men and women – their 'appropriate' roles, capacities, and characteristics – along with the access they enjoy to *material resources* go towards determining their positions with respect to each other. Hence, both symbolic and material processes are of crucial importance when we plan upon affecting changes in oppressive social structures and conditions. *All* social contexts are gendered, and the gendered nature of social contexts 'means that neither male nor female power can be examined entirely in isolation' (Malhotra and Mather 1997:603). 'Gender' is, therefore, a *relationship*.

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There is also the need to differentiate the linked ideas of 'patriarchy' and 'masculinity'. Patriarchy refers to a *system* of social organization which is fundamentally organised around the idea of men's superiority to women. Within this system, even those who may not approximate to the male ideal (such as homosexual men) still stand to benefit from the privileges attached to being a man. So, as a parallel, we might think of the situation on apartheid era South Africa where all whites – those who supported apartheid and those who opposed it – were potential beneficiaries of the institutionalised privileges of being white. Though it is difficult to posit simple definitions of 'patriarchy' and 'masculinity', we might say that patriarchy refers to the systemic relationship of power between men and women, whereas masculinity concerns both inter and intra-gender relationships. And, while it cannot be argued that under patriarchy *all* forms of masculinity are equally valourised, there is nevertheless an overwhelming consensus regarding the superiority of men over women. Patriarchy 'makes' men superior, whereas masculinity is the process of producing superior men.

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masculine behaviour – in novels, films, advertisements, and folk-advice – would clearly be unnecessary if it was a naturally endowed characteristic. The very fact that masculinity must consistently be reinforced – ‘if you buy this motor-cycle you’ll be a real man’ – says something about the tenuous and fragile nature of gender identities; they must continually be reinforced. Following from this, we might also say that masculinity is *enacted* rather than expressed. For, when we say that something is ‘expressed’, we are working with the idea that it ‘already exists’, and gender identities in particular do not *already* exist (say, biologically). There is an entire task of building and rebuilding, consolidation, representation, and enforcement; in other words we must think of gender identities as works in progress.

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policy measures and programmes and projects to influence the contexts within which gender inequalities persist.

Masculinities have been defined and understood in different ways by scholars and activists. However, what is important for our purpose is to understand its relationship with power and violence. Masculinities are a set of practices that include manners of speech, gestures, social interaction, a division of tasks that define what is 'appropriate' to men and women and very importantly it is the story by which it poses itself as superior to femininity, which is perceived as its binary opposite. Men often feel that masculinities is something that they carry somewhere deep inside themselves and it manifests itself with biological maturation. In other words from boyhood to becoming men is a passage that includes besides biological growth and maturation, a logical and linear development of masculinities. However, masculinity is not an essence that all men carry but socially produced notions and ideas about how men should act and behave. Thus the appearance of facial and bodily hair in adolescent young boys is not merely a sign of biological maturation but is given an added significance by systems of masculinities as transition to becoming a 'real' man, including the attachment of values to hair such as power, prestige, etc. This what we mean when we say that masculinities are socially produced but embodied, that is carried by men on their body, ways of being men. It is this embodiment that makes men feel that masculinities is something that is 'natural' and an essence that they carry.

Masculinities is almost always described as superior to femininity. By posing masculinities as something that is superior, men are able to provide a logic and justification to support their practice of authority, control and sense of power. Therefore, men appropriate for themselves the position of being decision makers or controlling and restricting the mobility of women, which in turn creates and sets up systems of deprivation and discrimination. Since women are weaker they should not venture out is the logic by which women are denied access to education, work and

personal growth and men thus appropriate for themselves the idea of being economic agents and assign the role of home-makers to women.

While masculinity is almost always defined as the experience of power, it is important to note that men's experience of power will also depend on where they stand in the social hierarchy of class, caste, sexual disposition, physical attributes, cultural background, etc. The experience of power is never absolute for men but at the same time because of their gender position the sense of entitlement to power remains intact. Therefore it is more useful to describe masculinities as a sense of entitlement to power that men carry because of their being men but ironically, however hard they may try, this entitlement never translates into an absolute experience. The only space where even men who occupy the lowest rungs of social hierarchy are most likely to experience power is vis a vis women and children in the domestic sphere. It has been pointed out that if masculinities is to be challenged then men need to understand these contradictory power flows that dictate the ways in which they act and behave.

This module will be taught through the following sub themes that have been identified by Raewyn Connell as crucial to understanding masculinities:

- (a) plurality of masculinities
- (b) hierarchy of masculinities or how do different forms of masculinities relate with each other
- (c) hegemonic masculinity
- (d) active participation of men in maintaining structures of masculinities
- (e) the contradictions between desires and the logic of hegemonic masculinity
- (f) cultural and historical nature of masculinities

## **I. Plurality of Masculinities**

If we were to ask a group of men in a room to describe their experiences of masculinity, we are most likely to receive a wide range of response that demonstrates that men understand and experience masculinity in very different ways. Often we fall into the trap of seeing masculinities only through the lens of sex roles. This is inadequate because it doesn't go beyond talking about the social experience of learned norms of conduct and behaviour. To understand masculinities we have to look beyond sex roles and examine masculinities as a wide set of practices that reflect the gendered nature of power, which includes the economic and political spheres of our social life. The narratives of the experience of masculinities that will emerge from shared experiences will demonstrate that there is no single pattern to masculinities. Different cultures and different periods of history throw up different forms of masculinities. Some cultures eschew violence and others celebrate it but that doesn't mean that masculinities is absent from cultures that are less violent, these cultures may have a different way of expressing and practicing dominant forms of masculinities. That is why we use the word masculinities in plural. There are different kinds of masculinities based on class, caste, culture, religion, sexual orientation, etc.

The plurality of masculinities is not restricted to different sets of cultures. Even within one cultural setting we will find different practices of masculinities. Within any one community, worksite or peer group there are going to be multiple understanding of masculinities and thereby the gendered response of men.

## **II. Hierarchy and Hegemony**

These different forms of masculinities do not peacefully reside alongside each other, they share a relationship with each other which is fraught with tensions, struggles and alliances.

The form of masculinity which is culturally dominant in a given setting is called 'hegemonic masculinity'. Hegemonic signifies a position of cultural authority and

leadership, not total dominance; other forms of masculinity persist alongside. Also, the hegemonic masculinity need not be the most common form of masculinity but rather the most visible. Hegemonic masculinity is hegemonic not just in relation to other masculinities, but in relation to the gender order as a whole. In other words, while men as a group enjoy a set of privileges and power vis a vis women, hegemonic masculinities appropriates for itself the largest share of these privileges and power.

The concept of cultural hegemony, developed by the Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, refers to the processes by which dominant culture maintains its dominant position. He developed his ideas in the context of the process of moral and intellectual leadership through which the subordinated classes of post 1870 industrial Western Europe consent to their own domination by ruling classes and this consent was created not through coercion or force but through the inculcation of the ideals of the hegemonic group. This consent is sought to be created through beliefs, explanations, perceptions and values spread through systems of education, mass media, literature, etc.

As discussed earlier, men's experience of power is negotiated through a complex web of class, caste and other hierarchies and higher the men are in the pyramid of social hierarchy more will be their share of power. Hegemonic in this context represents the top most form of masculinity which corners for itself the maximum benefits and power and it does so by not only the subjugation of women but also by subjugating other forms of masculinities. So it can be said that masculinity is an expression of the privilege men collectively have over women. The hierarchy of masculinities is an expression of the unequal shares in that privilege held by different groups of men.

### **III. Collective Masculinities**

The gender norms of a society define patterns of conduct as 'masculine' and others as 'feminine'. At one level, these patterns characterise individuals. Thus we say that a particular man or woman is masculine, or behaves in a masculine way. We have seen in the sections above that there is no single pattern to masculinities. In each society and

culture there are always several practices that get associated with masculinity. However there is a collective aspect of masculinities as represented by the army, the police, gangs, sports, institutions like the school, corporations, factories, the state, etc.

In all these instances certain specific kinds of masculinities are constructed and valued and invariably it is the hegemonic variety of masculinity that is not only generated but provided legitimacy through the functioning of these institutions. While different notions and ideas of masculinities may be carried into these institutions by individual men but the structures of these institutions, their systems of training, their hierarchy of levels and rewards ensure that there is an ordering of all these different masculinities hierarchically with the hegemonic variety being the most rewarded and therefore the most sought and most enacted. The collective aspect of masculinities refers to these practices embedded in social processes through these institutions, it is the collective enactment of these different masculinities that help to sustain, perpetuate and circulate the codes of conduct and hierarchical cultures within and outside these institutions.

A number of studies have been conducted on aspects of collective masculinities in different social setting and contexts. Many of these studies have looked at peer cultures of young boys in school or neighbourhood settings. These studies suggest that violence and aggression amongst young boys predominantly occurs through norm setting in these highly organised peer cultures that have very strict codes of conduct. These peer cultures display power hierarchies that have to be constantly regulated and maintained through practices of individual as well as collective aggression. The entry points to these collectives and securing position in these cultures is almost always marked by proving your masculinity, by taking risk These oppressive behaviour patterns are the route to confirm their position and a sense of belonging within the highly hierarchical peer groups. The maintenance of prestige and the achievement of status within these collectives are through an elaborate system of competition marked by behaviour patterns based on humiliation, abusive language, bullying, aggressive body language and

sometimes violence. A process of subordination of other boys through hetero sexist and homophobic talk is a constant reminder within these groups of the importance of rejecting and the putting down of anything perceived as feminine. This in turn makes for the collective expression of masculinity of these groups based on toughness, male bonding and the denigration of the 'weak' and the feminine.

#### **IV. Active Constructions**

Masculinities do not exist prior to social behaviour, either as bodily states or fixed personalities. Rather, masculinities come into existence as people act, as they make choices or as they perform. There is almost always the act of doing that is associated with masculinities, which means that men have to act or behave in certain 'masculine' ways that have been deemed appropriate to their gender and only then will they qualify to be called real men. If men do not follow these rigid norms then they may be called 'not man enough' or effeminate or described through some other term that will have derogatory connotation. These patterns of conducting oneself according to what masculinities decrees as appropriate is a social process that is learnt from early childhood and is practiced in the domestic sphere as well as in all other social institutions. These ways of conducting oneself are important because they ensure whether you will be accepted or rejected as men. They, thus, become both a vehicle of entering the world of men as well as achieving the milestones against which men have to judge their success of becoming 'real' men. So when men follow the path paved by masculinities then they are making a choice and that is what we mean when we use the term active construction, that men are not born with masculinities as a given biological aspect of their lives but that it is a state that men constantly strive to achieve by doing things that are deemed appropriate for men.

For instance, crime is not a fixed masculine character but acts of crime may enable some men to experience power, money, sex, risk taking, etc. And all these elements play an

important role in achieving and proving to themselves that they are men as defined or understood in their peer groups.

## **V. Internal Complexity**

One of the key reasons why masculinities are unstable is that they are not simple, homogenous patterns. By unstable is meant that men's success on the gender scale is always measured against extremely exacting standards of masculinities and this includes being bread winners, protectors, leaders, winners, etc. besides of course sexually potent and performance driven and most men are not able to achieve these standards all the time in all situations and throughout their lives. This often creates a sense of inadequacy as well as a sense of loss at not being able to follow one's heart. It is not uncommon to hear from men that they were forced to take up a certain career or that they couldn't express themselves emotionally in different situations because that is not how men are supposed to behave or conduct themselves. So, masculinities always exerts a pressure on men to present themselves in certain ways that may go against what they desire or feel thereby posing a certain inherent challenge and instability. For instance, we may often hear from women stories of how supportive their fathers were about their education or careers or interest in sports and if dug deeper these stories also reveal the kind of resistance that these fathers had to face, so the presence of masculinities in men's lives does not mean that there aren't desires to move away from the strictures that these systems place on men. It is important to observe and understand this complexity of desires, emotions or possibilities because they are the sources and resources of tension and change in gender patterns.

## **VI. Dynamics**

From the fact that different masculinities exist in different cultures and historical periods we can conclude that norms concerning masculine behaviour are able to change. The layering of masculinities displays the sources of change and the hierarchy of masculinities the motives for change. The fact that there is no one masculinity and the



ideas, notions and practices linked with masculinity keep changing from culture to culture and even within one cultural setting means that we are dealing with not one but several ways of being men and along with that multiple ways in which gender relations are established and organised. Also as discussed earlier these different forms of masculinities are often locked in a bitter battle of trying to prove their supremacy and it is this tension that can be the source of change as far as masculinities is concerned. The other linked factor that there is a hierarchy of masculinities that gets set through several social processes including those of caste, class, sexuality, etc. reflects the real possibility of men rejecting the systems of power that keep pushing them into deeper and deeper conflicts both internally and externally, with other men as well as women.

The dynamics of masculinities refers to the fact that particular masculinities take form and shape, historically and may also disappear over time or get replaced by other forms. For instance, if we were to take the case of the Gorkhas who are celebrated as a martial race. Their becoming a martial race is linked to colonial history and their gradual absorption into the British army. However, over time now their link to the armies in India and Britain have diminished and the more educated Gorkhas don't want to have anything to do with the past and no longer want to be identified as the Gorkha soldiers who were famous for bravery and masculinity. This however does not mean that masculinities has disappeared from Gorkha society and culture but just that it has been replaced by certain other forms of masculinities, for instance, education and corporate jobs in foreign countries may have become the new markers for Gorkha men to gain prestige and power within the community.

## Glossary of Key Terms

### ***Masculinity***

Masculinity refers to the socially produced but embodied ways of being men. Its manifestations include manners of speech, behaviour, gestures, social interaction, a division of tasks 'appropriate' to men and women and an overall narrative that positions it as superior to its perceived opposite, femininity. It has also been defined as a sense of entitlement to power. An entitlement that men feel is theirs because of their being men. It is important to note here that the word being used is 'entitlement' and not 'experience'. This distinction is important because men do not experience power all the time and in all situations however they do feel a sense of entitlement because of their gender position.

### ***Manhood***

Manhood refers to the qualities and attributes that men achieve through both a biological maturation and passage of rites into adulthood. Manhood is mostly associated with sex roles assigned to the male sex and mile stones men have to cross to be called 'real men'

### ***Manliness***

Manliness refers to the manifestation of qualities that are associated with providing meaning to gender identity and gender roles for men. Qualities such as strength, taking risks, bravery are all signs of manliness.

### ***Feminist perspective***

A feminist perspective includes, the awareness of a wrong, the development of a sense of sisterhood based on a shared sense of wrong, the autonomous definition by women

of their goals and strategies for addressing the wrong and, a vision of the society based on principles of equality and equity.

### ***Women's Rights***

A women's rights movement refers to struggles for winning for women equality with men in all aspects of society and gaining access to all rights and opportunities enjoyed by men in the institutions of that society.

### ***Women's Emancipation***

This refers to freedom from biological and societal restrictions. A freedom to determine and decide one's own destiny. And it also refers to an autonomous social position, that is, the opportunity to earn one's own status and not to gain it through marriage or other relationships with men. It means financial independence; freedom to choose one's lifestyle and sexual preference.

### ***Patriarchy***

This is the manifestation and institutionalisation of men's dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of men's dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power. It does not imply that women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence and resources.

### ***Gender***

Gender is the cultural definition of behaviour defined as appropriate to the sexes in a given society at a given time. Gender is a set of cultural roles. Gender has also been

defined as the structure of social relations that centres on the reproductive arena, and the set of practices that bring reproductive distinctions between bodies into social processes. In other words, gender is concerned with the way human society deals with human bodies and the many consequences of that 'dealing' in our personal and collective lives.

### ***Sex-Gender system***

This refers to the institutionalised system which allots resources, property and privileges to persons according to culturally defined gender roles. For instance it is sex, that determines that women should be child bearers but it is the sex gender system that determines that women should be child rearers.

### ***Sexism***

Sexism defines the ideology of male supremacy, of male superiority and of beliefs that support and sustain it.

### ***Misogyny***

Fear or hatred of women. Misogyny is central to sexist prejudice and ideology and is an important basis for the oppression of females in male-dominated societies. Misogyny is manifested in many different ways, from jokes to literature to violence to the self-contempt women may be taught to feel toward their own bodies. Though most common in men, misogyny also exists in and is practiced by women against other women or even themselves. Misogyny functions as an ideology or belief system that has been part and parcel of patriarchal, or male-dominated societies for thousands of years and continues to place women in subordinate positions with limited access to power and decision making.

### ***Phallogentric***

A term in feminist theory used to describe the way society regards the phallus or penis as a symbol of power, and believes that attributes of masculinity are the norm for cultural definitions. The phallogentric fallacy in disciplines is the assumption that 'person' stands for male and therefore that women's experience has made no contribution to disciplinary methods or content. This perspective makes women unknowable. Feminists argue that phallogentrism is a source of women's oppression in education. Feminist literary critics also draw attention to how phallogentrism in literature establishes the idea that artistic creativity is a masculine quality.

### ***Homophobia***

This refers to an irrational fear and antipathy of homosexual men and women as well as of transgender people which manifests itself through discrimination, violence, humiliation and prejudice. Homophobia can be seen in individual responses, as a culture and also as institutionalised form of discrimination.

### ***Heteronormativity***

The institutionalization of heterosexuality in a society which results in the marginalization of non-heterosexual lifestyles where heterosexuality is viewed as the only normal or acceptable sexual orientation is referred to as heteronormativity. Instances of this include the idea that people fall into two distinct and complementary categories (male and female), that sexual and marital relations are normal only when between people of different sexes, and that each sex has certain natural roles in life. The heteronormative view is that physical sex, gender identity, and gender roles should, in any given person, align to either all-male or all-female cultural norms.

### ***Transgender***

Transgender is an umbrella term for persons whose gender identity, gender expression, or behaviour does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth. Gender identity refers to a person's internal sense of being male, female, or something else; gender expression refers to the way a person communicates gender identity to others through behaviour, clothing, hairstyles, voice, or body characteristics. There is no precise definition to the experience of being transgender and the term is under constant scrutiny and reformulations.

### ***Intersex***

A variety of conditions that lead to atypical development of physical sex characteristics are collectively referred to as intersex conditions. These conditions can involve abnormalities of the external genitals, internal reproductive organs, sex chromosomes, or sex-related hormones.

### ***Transsexual***

Transsexualism is an individual's identification with a gender inconsistent or not culturally associated with his or her biological sex. Simply put, it defines a person whose biological birth sex conflicts with his or her psychological gender.

### ***Transvestite***

A person and especially a male who adopts the dress and often the behaviour associated culturally with the opposite sex especially for purposes of emotional or sexual gratification.

## Queer

Originally, "queer" was simply just another word for strange, unusual, or weird. It was also used earlier as an anti-gay epithet. More recently, it has been reclaimed by non-heterosexuals as a word used to describe themselves. Practices that are not heterosexual, heteronormative or gender binary are part of queer practices. **Queer theory** is a field of critical theory that emerged in the early 1990s out of the fields of LGBT studies and feminist studies. Queer theory includes both queer readings of texts and the theorisation of 'queerness' itself. Queer theory builds both upon feminist challenges to the idea that gender is part of the essential self and upon gay/lesbian studies' close examination of the socially constructed nature of sexual acts and identities. Queer theory challenges either/or, essentialist notions of homosexuality and heterosexuality within the mainstream discourse, and instead posits an understanding of sexuality that emphasizes shifting boundaries, ambivalences, and cultural constructions that change depending on historical and cultural context. "To queer" is to render "normal" sexuality as strange and unsettled, to challenge heterosexuality as a naturalized social-sexual norm and promote the notion of "non-straightness," challenging the hegemony of "straight" ideology. This emphasis on non-straightness lends queer theory its assimilationist, anti-essentialist cast, for when one considers the realms of fantasy, the unconscious, repression, and denial, much that is ostensibly considered "heterosexual" easily falls within the realm of queer.

## *Ideology*

Ideology as a term is rooted in the writings of German philosophers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. They defined Ideology as "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas ... The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production." The entirety or the system of ideas of the ruling class would be the Ideology of a given society. The function of ideology would be the continual reproduction of the means of production and thereby to ensure the continuous dominance of the ruling class. Ideology achieves this by distorting reality. While in fact the split in ruling and



subservient social classes is artificial (i.e. man made) and serves the needs of the economic system, the ideas of ideology makes it appear natural. It makes the subordinate classes accept a state of alienation against they would otherwise revolt. This state of alienation has also been referred to as "false consciousness". This definition has since been critiqued and gone through many changes

The Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci has contributed significantly to expand our understanding of the term. He introduced the concept of *hegemony* by which he means that ideology's power derives primarily from consent as opposed to the use of force. Secondly, Gramsci argued to expand ideology from a set or formal ideas to include "common sense." By the latter he means everyday attitudes, behaviours and habits which have been assimilated from ruling class ideas, i.e. they appear completely natural or commonsensical, yet they originally came into being as artificial concepts that served the purpose of a specific social group. The French critic Louis Althusser built on this concept to articulate two types of "apparatuses" for maintaining dominance: "repressive state apparatuses", for instance, the army, police, etc. which have explicit agendas to exert control and "Ideological State Apparatuses" like the media, education, the family which often function semi-independently and without explicit intent to exert control. Ideology, along with *discourse*, are the two central concepts in understanding the cultural transmission of ideas, values, and assumptions.

### ***Discourse***

Discourse is generally used to designate the forms of representation, codes, conventions and habits of language that produce specific fields of culturally and historically located meanings. In the humanities and sometimes the social sciences, 'discourse' refers to a formalized way of thinking that can be manifested through language, a social boundary defining what can be said about a specific topic

Discourses are seen to affect our views on all things; it is not possible to avoid discourse. For example, two notably distinct discourses can be used about various jihadi movements describing them either as "freedom fighters" or "terrorists". In other words, the chosen discourse provides the vocabulary, expressions and perhaps also the style needed to communicate.

Discourse is closely linked to different theories of power and state, at least as long as defining discourses is seen to mean defining reality itself. This conception of discourse is largely derived from the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault.

## **Suggested Readings**

Connell, Raewyn; Masculinities, University of California Press, 2005

Roy, Rahul; A little book on men, Yoda Press, 2009

## **Suggested Films**

When Four Friends Meet, dir, Rahul Roy, 2000

**Module II:**

**CONFLICT, VIOLENCE**

**&**

**MASCULINITIES**

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**Tutor: Dr. Dilip Simeon**  
**SANAM Lead: Rahul Roy**

## I. Introduction

While masculinities are produced and structured through specific practises of everyday life in every society, conflict, violence and war may be seen as the swift horses on which they ride like the horsemen of the Apocalypse to spread and reinforce themselves.

The central concern of this module is to develop a mode of understanding how specific practices of masculinities and femininities are produced by violent conflict and in turn contribute to producing violence. While the areas of development and conflict have received a lot of attention from researchers, there hasn't been adequate attention paid to the linkages between these areas of study through the lens of gender.

In the light of contemporary neo liberal economic surge, marked by massive shifts in the nature of agricultural societies and their produce, privatisation of public services and resources, destruction of labour protection and the under employment of male workers along with exploitation of female labour, it becomes imperative to examine the intersections between gender, violent conflict and development.

It has been suggested by many researchers that contemporary globalisation buttressed by an unprecedented militarisation at the global and local level is neither temporary nor an incidental aspect of capitalism but its very nature and that conflict and war are its organising principles.

An important aspect of this globalisation of conflict and militarisation of economies is its sustenance through the production of specific kinds of gendered ideologies and practices, not so much because of but as centrally embedded ideas of this mode of organising nations and their relationships with each other. Within this module we will examine this aspect in the context of 19th century histories of the relationship between the colonisers and the colonised in south Asia.

## EXAMPLES OF PERCEPTIONS OF WAR AND CONFLICT

Gender hierarchies that were based on traditional norms of a domesticated femininity and a public masculinity were the norm during this phase. They were obliquely reinforced by the writings on war of authors like Ernst Junger. Comparing modern war with elemental eruptions like volcanic outbursts, Junger saw war as the supreme force essential for the survival and good health of nations.

“...our elemental substance, the deep primordial strength of the Volk remains untouched... With admiration, we watch how German youth, at the beginning of this crusade of reason to which the world’s nations are called under the spell of such an obvious, transparent dogma, raise the battle cry: glowing, enraptured, hungering after death in a way virtually unique in our history.

If one of these youths had been asked his motives for taking the field, the answer, certainly would have been less clear... but perhaps he would have offered the response, “for Germany” – that phrase with which the volunteer regiments went on the attack. “(Ernst Junger, Total Mobilisation, p133)

Such glorifications of violent conflict have been seen as masculine posturings that reinforce the divided gender identities of men and women.

“... the fundamental difference between creating life in the act of childbirth and that of destroying it in that of war... The meaning and importance given to a military weapon and to the sexual weapon are equal. Man uses his weapon like he uses his gun: to conquer, control and possess. The whole of macho society must be unveiled, and condemned because in the present system, one tries to obtain material goods and territory, not in order to enjoy them, not out of need, but to enlarge one’s domain and authority...”

(Evelyne Accad, The Little Magazine, Vo 2 no. 1, 2001)

It is thus important to understand the broader historical background to the emergence of war as an organising principle of nation states and global economies and become aware of some of the key concepts in contemporary scholarly work on modernity, nationalism and conflict.

This module will be taught through the following three sub themes:

- a) **The evolution of modern warfare:** The emergence of levee en masse and total mobilisation transformed warfare from an exploit of the elite to a totalising activity that now dominates the world system and its ruling ideologies. The democratisation of war and its consequences on families, society and nation states.
- b) **The development of reactionary modernism:** Nationalism emerged as the new religion of the state that contained the potential of turning into an enemy of truth and reason. It included the expansion of empires (along with 'scientific' theories of racial superiority); as well as the movements against them, that developed ideologies of a 'glorious past' as a means of countering imperial arrogance. Invariably some of these became counter-discourses of military heroism, technical excellence in some bygone golden era, etc, and crystallised as defining myths of new nation-states.
- c) **Nihilism, violence and political action:** Animus-ridden nature of modernity is an expression of patriarchal culture and is inextricably linked to perpetual war, patriarchy and annihilationism.

## II. Evolution of modern warfare

*War is the Father of all things:* Heraclitus, The Dark One

On one estimate, the past 5600 years of written history have recorded 14,600 wars. This works out to between two and three wars per year (Hillman, 2004). As Hillman remarks, 'All wars are the same war because war is always going on.' But if there is something perennial about war, it lies in the militarist spirit enacted by real warriors, not something God-given, but created. As John Keegan writes at the end of his assessment of Alexander the Great, "His dreadful legacy was to ennoble savagery in the name of

glory and to leave a model of command that far too many men of ambition sought to act out in the centuries to come.” (Keegan, 2004)

However, with the growth of modernity and the rise of nation states, the concept of war itself underwent a profound transformation. Being part of a nation implied the involvement of the common people in its affairs, including defence or offence against other states. From 1792, *levee en masse* (requisition of all able-bodied men for war service) became the practice in Revolutionary France and spread to other nation states as well. Wars were no longer fought in restricted forms by armies of professional soldiers and mercenaries (known as *cabinet wars*). As a result of the *levee*, modern states could account for far larger armies than earlier.

Closer to our time, Ernst Junger (1930), saw modern warfare as requiring the involvement of the entire population – “total mobilisation”, as he named it in a seminal essay written between the two world wars. As Richard Wolin writes in the introduction to Junger’s *Total Mobilisation*, “... Junger viewed the energies released by the Great War (World War 1) as a heroic counter movement to European world-weariness: as a proving ground for an entire set of masculinist warrior virtues that seemed in danger of eclipse at the hands of an effete, decadent, and materialistic *Zivilisation*.”

The use of child soldiers, small arms, new technologies and indiscriminate mass terror to obtain political control, along with the creation and maintenance of a climate of hate, fear, and insecurity, are among the characteristics that distinguish the “newest wars”, and may be seen as confirmation of Junger’s analysis.

In her study of Rio de Janeiro, a city that can be considered an example of a “newest war-zone”, Tatiana Moura (2005) analyses “masculinised” actors within such wars and women’s resistance to masculinised practices in contexts of “formal peace.” She concludes that ‘the near-monopoly by men on the use and possession of firearms’ manifests socialization in a ‘violent and militarized masculinity’, which equate firearms



possession with power. Hegemonic and militarized masculinity, she says, is the common backdrop that unifies the cultures of violence present in all the scales of war (the "old", the "new" and the "newest").

How was warfare transformed from an exploit of the elite to a totalising activity that now dominates the world system and its ruling ideologies? How and why was war 'democratised'? Knowledge of the 'levee en masse', or conscription during the French revolutionary wars and the Napoleonic period helps us understand the 'total wars' of the twentieth century. The confrontational element in nationalism is the crucial factor that led to the crystallisation of international relations into what the psychologist John Mack names an 'enemy system' (Mack 1990). The subversive concept of democracy was itself subverted by state-sponsored military conscription; and via the emergence of fascist ideologies. Clausewitz's theory of war had profound implications, as did the general breakdown of the world system in the European crisis manifested in the Great War (1914-18) and the Second World War.

While the struggle of the ordinary people led to the establishment of democracy in many European nations and in America, we must not see democracy as being limited to a political rule by the majority. It had and has various strands, some of them progressive while the others that welcome conservative or even reactionary ideologies, which we shall discuss in the next section. What is important to note here is the fact that while reactionary movements like Fascism and Nazism embrace democracy, they do so to defeat it. Their majoritarian approach to democracy is tyranny. This is embodied in the concept of the nation as an abstraction worthy of worship and the view of the 'other' as an enemy worthy of total annihilation or subjugation. It is little wonder then that such ideologies began involving the *volk* (people) more and more in wars of 'total mobilisation' against a tangible 'total enemy' which blurred the distinction between the combatants and the civilians.

The twentieth century was witness to between 175 million to over 250 million unnatural deaths in the course of war, massacres, genocide and other politically inspired conflicts. If we assume casualty figures for the two wars as being 20 million dead in the Great (first) War, and 60 million in the second, the proportion of soldiers to civilians in the total number of dead was roughly 43% in 1914-18, but came down to 28% or less in the Second World War (1939-45). In time, the distinction between combatants and non-combatants evaporated and belligerents began targeting civilian populations; evidenced by the large-scale terror-bombings and massacres committed by all sides in World War Two.

Such processes were aided, because as Andrea Dworkin expressed it: men develop a strong loyalty to violence. Men must come to terms with violence because it is the prime component of male identity. Institutionalised in sports, the military, accultured sexuality, the history and mythology of heroism, it is taught to boys until they become its advocates — men, not women. Men become advocates of that which they most fear. In advocacy, they experience mastery of fear. In mastery of fear, they experience freedom. Men transform their fear of male violence into metaphysical commitment to male violence. Violence itself becomes the central definition of any experience that is profound and significant...'

Evelyne Accad, in her essay *On Sexuality and War* (2001), asks whether total annihilation is the only answer to violence. Her own answer is: 'The answer to violence is not violence but non-violence. Jean-Marie Muller has explained it well in the significance of non-violence. For him, "we must find means of action which will not lead us into the mesh of violence, which could quickly take us on a path where we could not master our own violence, and we could become perverted by a logic of destruction, the opposite of what we wish to realise for society and for our children."

Hence, modern warfare evolved from a limited engagement of professional soldiers to a 'levee en masse' in which ordinary citizens were conscripted to fight for the state. Such

escalating conflict had its roots in the rise of modern nation states, particularly Revolutionary France. The upsurge of reactionary ideologies like fascism and Nazism further developed the art of war into a deadly game of 'total mobilisation', which involved the entire population. The glorification of the cult of the male hero aided this transition from limited conflict to total warfare, which led to the death of millions of combatants as well as non-combatants.

### **III. The development of reactionary modernism**

Modernism is usually couched in growth and 'moving forward' and 'becoming modern' but this is problematic because being modern does not really mean being progressive. One can be modern and anti-progressive. This section explores how these seemingly contradictory phenomena meld together in the modern world.

The early modern Enlightenment was an intellectual campaign to reduce the power of religious dogma and authoritarian government and to assert the authority of human reason; in particular the rationality of the new mathematical and experimental sciences. All versions of the Enlightenment attempted to 'eliminate restrictions placed upon bringing to light the truth about human experience' (Stanley Rosen, *The Elusiveness of the Ordinary*; 2002, 46).

However, two significant features of capitalist modernity have altered the pattern of Enlightenment rationality. The first is the sacralisation of the Nation, in other words, the emergence of nationalism as a secular religion; and the second, the adaptation of science and technology to nationalist ends. The first feature nullifies the rationalist challenge to religious dogma, by substituting (or adapting) traditional religiosity with another sacred object, viz., the Nation. The second channelizes scientific pursuits towards the militarist structure of modernity, contributing a new constraint to the pursuit of knowledge. As for religion, it has been transformed from a moral guide and source of ethical knowledge into a badge of political identity.

Science and technology are impressive achievements of the human spirit. But they are ethically neutral, as is mathematics. They cannot be treated as a guide for the journey of the spirit. Monarchical and pre-modern autocratic regimes used the constitutional dogma known as the Divine Right of Kings to govern. With the overthrow of this dogma as the basis of the State, there arrived the idea of democracy, the rule of the demos, or people. But its meaning was contested. Seen institutionally, conservatism sought to counter the idea of democracy and universal adult suffrage via the policy of adult conscription, that is, by making the army open to the public at large. Technology thus became wedded to the pursuit of national might and military power. The project of the nation-state transformed politics and technological pursuits into a means of controlling humanity as a resource for glorious ends. Nationalism is not merely affinity for one's home, which is a natural part of being human. Rather, it is an ideologically enforced affinity, the religion of the state, which requires the mobilisation of sentiment to control large populations. This is why it requires irrationalism, obscurantism and ignorance to sustain itself.

Thus, nationalism always contained the potential of turning into an enemy of the very truth and reason that the Enlightenment had set out to achieve in the modern era. Reactionary modernism is a concept that engages with the actual history of that turn. This history includes the expansion of empires (along with 'scientific' theories of racial superiority) as well as the movements against them, which developed ideologies of a 'glorious past' as a means of countering imperial arrogance. Invariably some of these became counter-discourses of military heroism, technical excellence in some bygone golden era, etc, and crystallised as defining myths of new nation-states. These developments were not homogenous, and often the national movements against European (later to include Japanese) imperialism witnessed fierce internal contests over the defining principles of the emergent demos. Colonial India was the arena for one such prolonged contestation, which arguably, has by no means exhausted its potential for violent conflict. Such are the lines along which civil wars become international ones.

The radicalisation of conservatism in the 20th century, and the concept of 'total mobilisation' witnessed its clearest manifestation in the rise of fascism, which transformed the entire state into a machinery for militaristic expansionism. Fascist ideologies embrace democracy to defeat it, and a majoritarian approach to democracy is tyranny. Today many modern democracies are leaning towards majoritarianism and increasingly being controlled by arms industries.

Rabindranath Tagore defined a nation as “that aspect which a whole population assumes when organised for a mechanical purpose. Society as such has no ulterior purpose. It is an end in itself.” This could be re-framed as follows: nationalism is the metaphysic of capitalist modernity; and the nation-state is a necessary institutional arrangement in global capitalism. Since nations define themselves in terms of relative power equations and various real and imaginary histories of contestation, the dynamic equilibrium of nations-states or conglomerates may be conceptualised as an enemy system.

Ernst Junger's essay under the title, 'Total Mobilisation' can be seen as both a representative political text of modern militarism and fascist mobilisation; as well as a means to explore the thesis that from ambivalent beginnings, capitalism has developed into reactionary modernity. This is a modernism that subsists on the perpetuation of conflict and the generation of animus. This points us towards the argument that patriarchal structures are a bulwark of modernity, and that the demand for women's equality is inassimilable, i.e., that such a reform cannot be implemented without systemic transformation.

The emerging concept of the nation-state and its concomitant ideology of nationalism were not limited to the Western World. During the colonial period, the concept of nationalism also arose in many subjugated countries as a reaction to the exploitation by the imperialist countries.

### ***Responses to Empire***

Nationalism emerged in the colonies of European empires – as attempts at overcoming humiliation. Since colonial subjugation was invariably accompanied by memories of military defeat, nostalgia for warrior cultures played a major role in this process of ‘regaining’ national pride.

Unfortunately, sometimes the path taken by different communities for such self-assertion diverged along communal lines. Hence, some Hindu nationalists harked back to a ‘golden age’, when Hindu rulers had supposedly ruled over a land of plenty and prosperity. Similarly, some Muslim nationalists viewed the era when the Mughals had held sway over India as the period of ‘righteous’ rule. Both sides of communal nationalists tended to underplay or reject the contributions of an interlinked, syncretic culture. For these ‘nationalists’, a result of such ‘tinted’ viewing was that the main arena of contention shifted from a fight against British rule to a contest between different communities that resided side by side within India. Very often, the same events were witnessed with diametrically opposed views in competition with each other. However, beneath the apparent differences, spoke in a kind of masculine unison. Here are two alternative interpretations of eighteenth century Indian history:

*Akbar succeeded in establishing a strong empire... in retrospect it may be said that during the sixteenth century ‘Hindustan’ disappeared completely and was absorbed in ‘Pakistan’. Under Aurangzeb the ‘Pakistan’ spirit gathered in strength. This evoked the opposition of the Hindus and Aurangzeb had to carry out long drawn-out wars against the militant Marathas... During the eighteenth century, the crisis in Mughal India deepened, and the conflict between the Muslims and the Hindus gained in intensity. The militant Marathas spearheaded the movement for the resurgence of Hinduism and came to knock at the very gates of Delhi. (Zafar 1982, 6)*

*Just take up the map of India around 1600 AD. The Muslims ruled all over Hindustan unchallengeably. It was a veritable Pakistan realized not only in this province or that, but*

*all over India. Hindustan as such was simply wiped out. Then open the map of India about 1700 to 1798 AD and what do you see? The Hindu forces are marching triumphantly throughout India. The very Mogul throne at Delhi is smashed to pieces literally by a hammer Sadashiv Rao Bhao, the Generalissimo of the Marathas! (Savarkar 1949, 41)*

Both quotations are anachronisms, and both present the same story. They are separated by forty years and the India-Pakistan frontier. Their common approach is (philosophically), that history is a prolonged account of military contestation; and secondly, that India's central conflict was a continuation of the tension between two monarchical-autocratic traditions. The first quotation is from a Pakistani textbook by M.D. Zafar (1982) who cites the New Education Policy: "to inculcate a true spirit of patriotism, love and affection for our country, religion and culture through the clear understanding of the ideology of Pakistan." (Here is an example of state-sponsored obscurantism.) The second quotation is from a speech to the Hindu Mahasabha by its president V.D. Savarkar in 1942. The speech continued: "The Pakistan actually realized by the Muslims was entombed and out of it rose up once more Hindustan, resurrected and triumphant. The conquering Muslim... got so completely crushed and weaned of his dominating dreams that even today in his heart of hearts he shudders to think of his fate as soon as he sees the probability of the consolidated strength of the overwhelming Hindu majority."

Another way of approaching this is to examine the phenomenon of nationalist insurrection, and the culture of martyrdom that it invoked. (Refer 'Permanent Spring', Dilip Simeon <http://www.sacw.net/article1376.html>).

Competitive politics as something enacted upon a 'ground shared by enemies', requires our attention. This ground is the culture of warrior-hood and glory-seeking. To see this, it is necessary to ask the right questions. For instance, we may observe insurrectionary movements in South Asia, and what they have in common - the position of and

idealisation of women, and the ideal of heroic martyrdom as the defining element of masculine pride. If we add to this the experiences of women during the partition of India in 1947; and the partition of Pakistan in 1971, a clearer picture emerges of the links between masculinity, militarism and the kind of politics they engender.

#### **IV. Nihilism, violence and political action**

The word *nihilism* stems from the same root as ‘annihilation’ – viz., *nihil*, or nothingness. The debate around it is a philosophical one, but remains a useful place to locate our reflections on the roots and nature of modern conflict. It also enables us to see how far the animus-ridden nature of modernity is an expression of patriarchal culture. Nihilism evokes and describes the modern sense of a loss of meaning. The most dramatic evocation of nihilism is Nietzsche’s announcement that God is Dead. It is also manifested in everyday observations such as that all opinions are equally valid, or that every standard is as good as any other, that there is no such thing as truth; and that life is meaningless and ethical judgments pointless. The replacement of dialogue by cynicism is one prominent consequence.

“Nihilism is fundamentally an attempt to overcome or to repudiate the past on behalf of an unknown and unknowable yet hoped-for future. The danger implicit in this attempt is that it seems necessarily to entail a negation of the present, or to remove the ground upon which man must stand in order to carry out or even merely to witness the process of historical transformation. The mood of boredom or hopelessness that is the most visible negative manifestation of nihilism testifies to the incoherence of the hidden essence of nihilism.” (Stanley Rosen; *Nihilism*; 140)

This segment will discuss the larger implications of the foregoing, and examine why *nihilism* is the proper rubric under which to explore our current predicament. It will cover the following:



**A)** The consideration of patriarchal and militarist culture is at root a question of human action and its justifications. Why do we flit easily from one justification to another? Why do so many political actors place themselves beyond good and evil? What exactly is 'ideology'? The colloquial usage conflates ideology with political doctrine. Actually ideology is a mixture of empirical observations with sentiments and faith. As such it expresses the visible tendency of modern politics to assume a religious form. The sacral odour of nationalism is just one example of this.

**B)** One ramification of the nihilist dissolution of meaning and purpose is the divorce between reason and goodness. This is a consequence of the idea that truth can be produced only by mathematical sciences. Are the natural sciences the sole repositories of truth? What kind of truth? As Weber said in 1919, science does not provide us with answers to questions such as what should I do? How should I live? Are such questions not amenable to intelligible thought and reason? Since mathematics is ethically neutral, we are left with a value-less world, where ethical questions are banished to the realm of speculation. Science is a great product of the human spirit, but cannot be elevated to the status of the supreme guide to that spirit.

**C)** The nihilist ambience surrounding modern thought and politics also results in the abolition of objectivity and the enforced legislation (by state or totalitarian forces) of belief. Totalitarianism and relativism (the idea that all truth is relative to the perspective of the observer) mirror each other. Totalitarianism treats truth as a fixed and unchangeable Absolute; the relativists treat it as a plastic substance with no stability whatsoever, thus placing all ethical and political choices in the realm of whim and artistry. Both approaches imply dissolution of object into subject, because the world is seen in effect, as a creation of the knowing subject, rather than as enjoying its own status in reality. The idea that 'real truth' can only be produced by mathematical sciences is an outcome of the Cartesian rationalism that begins from the solitary observer and ends in the separation of mind and body. It also starts by posing the goal

of subjugating nature and, confronted with the futility of this misplaced endeavour, ends with artistic lament and militarist posturing.

D) Nihilism is not merely a mood or outcome of mistaken philosophical beliefs. It is manifested in political and military institutions and economic structures with their attendant systems of ideological justification. Thus nation-states dressed up in semi-religious linguistic finery such as glory-seeking and virile pursuits. The modern state system has the capacity to absorb and neutralise all resistance via the logic of violent confrontation. This section will explore the hypothesis that nihilist modernity is inextricably linked to perpetual war, patriarchy and annihilationism.

## IV. Conclusion

The current phase of globalisation is putting tremendous pressure on older and more traditional norms of gender hierarchies that were based on a domesticated femininity and a public masculinity. While the intense social and economic changes are challenging these traditional hegemonic practices by undercutting the material basis for these to survive, the ideological underpinnings of these practices are still thriving and therefore contemporary masculinities and femininities are in a state of flux. So, while on one hand, large groups of men are structurally under employed and losing access to traditional modes of asserting and reinforcing the dominant norms of masculinities, on the other, women are increasingly being absorbed into the wage labour market. While equal opportunities for women has to be the bedrock for any movement towards gender equality what also requires closer examination is whether this is contributing to greater gender justice. Any move in this direction would have to carefully consider the nature of development being witnessed globally and to what purpose are masculinities and femininities being deployed in this process. An uncritical conflation of women's employment growth with gender justice ignores the nature of women's employment and the needs of women workers, which point towards much lower wages, greater

exploitation and missing labour protection systems. Thus, in these uncertain times, contemporary conflicts and violence may also be viewed as the new mode for masculinity to garner for itself what it holds as its entitlement: power, status, benefits and leverage. The critical issue here is to also examine how new expressions of masculinity is intensifying the militarisation of civil society and how both masculinity and femininity are being deployed into the process of economic growth that draws its sustenance from conflict and war.

This module will seek to achieve the following objectives:

- An understanding how specific practices of masculinities and femininities are produced by violent conflict and in turn contribute to producing violence
- An understanding of how war evolved from a limited engagement of professional soldiers to a total mobilisation of entire populations
- An awareness of how men develop or are incorporated towards having a strong loyalty to violence
- An understanding of how the twin ideals of truth and reason were subverted by a form of reactionary modernism
- An appreciation of how reactionary modernism developed through a sacralisation of the concept of nation and the diversion of scientific discovery to militaristic ends
- An awareness of how total mobilisation supported and was in turn aided by the rise of fascistic state structures
- An understanding of the fact that some of the nationalistic responses to imperialism followed communal and masculinist pathways
- An understanding that nihilism is the mirror image of totalitarianism and fuels violent conflicts

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# **Module III:**

# **SELF & GENDER**

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**Tutors: Dr. Ambreen Ahmed / Maria Rashid  
SANAM Lead: Maria Rashid**

## Preamble:

At the end of this module you will be able to:

- have deeper insight into the personal experiences, social and cultural processes that have gone into the making of your gendered identities.
- to reflect on the privileges and costs associated with this socialization, in the context of your life and understand and share the vulnerabilities produced by it.
- use this increased self awareness and ability to deepen your knowledge around course modules on masculinities and gender.

## I. Introduction

This module will provide for self exploratory methods of identifying the role and practice of gender in our lives; a look at the costs, privileges that it brings to our lives and those of others around us. It will also explore socialization and our own peculiar subjectivities in an attempt to create self distance from dominant gender stereotypes and aim to create spaces to talk, and share, where discontent and resistances can be recognized and named.

The module addresses the self/history of the person within the context of that person's gender. However, discussion on the construction of masculinities is a lens that we are adding to this debate on self without necessarily subtracting the usual focus on women. Our approach follows from the notion that 'gender' is relational and in order to fully comprehend its meaning, we must explore how different genders – women, men, and trans-genders – relate to each other.

The module for self and gender has been developed based on some key assumptions.

**Firstly**, as products of patriarchal societies, we have been influenced by our socialization processes. The process starts at birth and seeps into our identity in crucial and undeniable ways. These sites of socialization include the family, schools, religious institutions, public spaces



etc. They influences who we are, what we do, how we think, the relationships we form, the way we form them, how we live, love and experience the world around us.

**Secondly**, the module recognizes that while there may be commonalities in our experiences, the process of identity formation and gendering is also an innately unique process. Our personal histories, the kind of people our significant others/parents were, our own abilities or disabilities, encounters with violence, love, affection and abuse have shaped us into the kinds of persons we are.

Another concept that guides this module is emotional health and how that can be challenged or compromised by our life experiences, rigid societal expectations of men and women. Looking at emotions is a key way of problematizing existing models of masculinity where the limited list of acceptable masculine emotions can be restrictive. Being emotionally healthy involves being able to take a critical yet accepting look at ourselves, understanding our emotions and reactions, learning to accept our selves and through that process and others. It also requires that we are able to translate this competence in our relationships with others, through expressing our emotions and needs assertively without being aggressive or passive and being sensitive and responsive to others especially those less powerful or privileged than us. As activists, seeking to understand and question social and cultural process , our struggle must essentially be grounded in the study of the self and it is this grounding that allows us to heal and connect with the lives of others in a more empathetic and sensitive way. Without attempting to understand, know and accept our own selves, attempts to know, understand or accept others invariably remain half measures, incomplete and distorted. In other words, there is an inevitable link between regard for self, self awareness and awareness, respect and regard for others. So this module will require participants to look at the mirror and enhance their awareness of who they are – warts and all.

**Lastly**, it has become increasingly clear over the years of work on gender that there is a need to build a perspective on oppression and violence that does not limit it to gender and patriarchy. It is important to encompass other markers of inequality and subordination such as religion,

ethnicity, class, sexuality and nationality. There is a need for an intersectional understanding of oppression and violence so that we can better understand the dynamics of power and also our own personal positions within that discourse.

### ***Definition of key terms***

#### **Emotional health/intelligence**

- Emotional intelligence is the habitual practice of using emotional intelligence from ourselves and other people, integrating this with our thinking and using these to inform our decision making to help us get what we want from the immediate situation and from life in general. (Sparrow and Knight, Applied Emotional Intelligence 2006)
- Emotional health refers to a person's feeling about him/herself, his/her feelings and behaviour with others, her/his capacity to meet the demands of everyday life. This includes :
  1. *Self-awareness*: The ability to reflect on one's own life and self with a critical, yet understanding, eye and the awareness of one's strengths/weaknesses, emotions, needs, etc.
  2. *Management of feelings/emotions*: The ability to monitor and control one's emotions. Control, however, does not mean stopping emotions, but having enough control over them to be able to express them in variety of ways -- and then, consciously and responsibly, deciding how to best express them in a given situation.
  3. *Motivation*: The driving force, energy, and hope that comes from having a purpose, goal, and interest in one's life.
  4. *Interpersonal skills*: The ability to relate to other people and to form healthy, fulfilling, and meaningful relationships in one's life.
  5. *Empathy*: The ability to understand other people's feelings and needs and to be able to look at things from their point of view. (Daniel Goleman, Emotional Intelligence 1995)

## Gender

- Gender refers to the array of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis. Whereas biological sex is determined by genetic and anatomical characteristics, gender is an acquired identity that is learned, changes over time, and varies widely within and across cultures. Gender is relational and refers not simply to women or men but to the relationship between them”. (INSTRAW, Glossary of Gender-related Terms and Concepts).
- “Gender is a way in which social practice is ordered. In gender processes, the everyday conduct of life is organized in relation to the reproductive arena defined by the bodily structures and processes of human reproduction This arena includes sexual arousal and intercourse, childbirth, and infant care, bodily sex difference and similarity. I call this a ‘reproductive arena and not a ‘biological base to emphasize ....., that we are talking about a historical process involving the body, not a fixed set of biological determinants. Gender is a social practice that constantly refers to bodies and what bodies do, it is not social practice reduced to the body...Gender exists precisely to the extent that biology does not determine the social” –(R. W Connell, Masculinities 1995 ).
- Gender is not what culture created out of my body’s sex; rather; sex is what culture makes when it genders my body. (Wilchins, transgender activist, quoted in Monro, Surya, 2006, Gender Politics: Citizenship, Activism and Sexual Diversity)

## Patriarchy and Masculinity

- **Patriarchy** refers to a system of social organization which is fundamentally organised around the idea of men’s superiority to women. Within this system, even those who may not approximate to the male ideal (such as homosexual men) still stand to benefit from the privileges attached to being a man. Though it is difficult to posit simple definitions of ‘patriarchy’ and ‘masculinity’, we might say that patriarchy refers to the systemic relationship of power between men and women, whereas masculinity

concerns both inter and intra-gender relationships. And, while it cannot be argued that under patriarchy all forms of masculinity are equally valorised, there is nevertheless an overwhelming consensus regarding the superiority of men over women. Patriarchy 'makes' men superior, whereas masculinity is the process of producing superior men. (Srivastava, Sanjay (2009) 'Gender: Addressing Unequal Power and Voice. Technical Background Paper for the UNDP Human Development Report for the Asia-Pacific'. Colombo: UNDP).

- **Masculinity** refers to the socially produced but embodied ways of being male. Its manifestations include manners of speech, behaviour, gestures, social interaction, a division of tasks 'proper' to men and women ('men work in offices, women do housework'), and an overall narrative that positions it as superior to its perceived antithesis, femininity. (Srivastava, Sanjay (2009) 'Gender: Addressing Unequal Power and Voice. Technical Background Paper for the UNDP Human Development Report for the Asia-Pacific'. Colombo: UNDP).

## Intersectionality

- Intersectionality is a sociological theory suggesting that—and seeking to examine how—various socially and culturally constructed categories of discrimination interact on multiple and often simultaneous levels, contributing to systematic social inequality. Intersectionality holds that the classical models of oppression within society, such as those based on race/ethnicity, gender, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, class, or disability do not act independently of one another; instead, these forms of oppression interrelate creating a system of oppression that reflects the "intersection" of multiple forms of discrimination. (Knudsen, Susanne. "Intersectionality—A Theoretical Inspiration in the Analysis of Minority Cultures and Identities in Textbooks)
- Gender is a way of structuring social practice in general, not a specific type of practice, it is unavoidably involved with other social structures... Gender intersects with race and

class...constantly interacts with nationality and position in the world order. ( R.W. Connell, Masculinities 1995)

\* This has implications for the analysis of masculinities for instance they are constructed not only in relation to women but also to other men e.g. of a different class, ethnicity, sexual orientation etc.

## **II: Analysing the key concepts**

The invisibility of gender to men and their inability to look at themselves as gendered beings remains the biggest challenge in creating spaces of self reflection that could contribute to challenging dominant forms and practices of masculinities. Looking inward can be challenging for men for two reasons. On the one hand, because the overt message from a patriarchal society for men is that 'You are OK simply because you are a man'. On the other hand the somewhat covert message is that 'to be men you must be strong, powerful, potent, an aspect that provides the link with masculinity. We could argue that men are socialized into being 'outward' looking and not exploring their problems, blemishes or owning up to chinks in their armour because they have to struggle against two forces, viz., patriarchy and masculinity.

Consciousness raising in feminist practice has been linked to sharing personal stories that trace the trajectory of socialization and experiences around injustices and victim hood. These have been at the heart of the women's struggle against discrimination and personal histories of violence have fuelled the women's movement and as such the notion that woman are the natural constituents for change in the struggle for a more gender just society has firm roots in our imagination.

***Is there a parallel process for men or for groups that do not wish to identify with this binary?  
Is there value in sharing in mixed groups?***

We also see that within the definition of masculinity all forms and ways of being a man are not equally valorised. All men do not always make it to this higher ideal and that men unlike women do not always talk about it. What are the standards of masculinity and are these

internalized expectations of masculinity possible to satisfy or attain? According to Michael Kauffman *‘Whether it is physical or financial accomplishment, or the suppression of a range of human emotions and needs, the imperatives of manhood (as opposed to the simple certainties of biological maleness), seem to require constant vigilance and work, especially for younger men. The personal insecurities conferred by a failure to make the masculine grade, or simply, the threat of failure, is enough to propel many men, particularly when they are young, into a vortex of fear, isolation, anger, self-punishment, self-hatred, and aggression’*

***Are there stories that can be told and like the stories of women, can they be used to understand private fears and discontents through a collective process?***

If we understand gender as social practice, then we need to understand that it is generated through definite structures and sites. According to Connell, *‘practice that relates to these structures and sites, generated as people and groups grapple with their historical situations, does not consist of isolated acts. Actions are configured in larger units and when we speak of masculinity and femininity we are naming configurations of gender practice’*. Analysis of this practice can be individual- often referred to as personality and character; other sites of analysis can be family, culture or religion and also institutions such as the state, workplace, media and school. Each of these sites contribute to the making of our gender identities through messages; spoken or unspoken, overt or implied over the course of our lives. These messages are internalized and continue to shape and be shaped by experiences in our lives.

Messages are inherently part of the socialization process for *both* males and females. These norms lead to inflexible gender stereotyping which impact women in obvious ways e.g. restricted mobility, withdrawal from school, control over interactions with males (Greene, 1997. “Watering the neighbours” garden: Investing in adolescent girls in India”) and heightened threat and presence of violence (Verma, R.K. 2005). From research to action- addressing masculinity and gender norms to reduce HIV/AIDS related risky behaviour among young men in India). However, it is important to recognize that they also affect men and boys, where privileges such as autonomy, mobility, opportunity and power create a specific set of

vulnerabilities and pressures for men (Greene 1997). This could be a distinctive vulnerability to child sexual abuse because of the perception that boys do not need to be protected and can take care of themselves or because boys are likely to minimize the impact of sexual violence experienced as a child. (Aangan, Rozan 2007 -The Bitter Truth', An analysis of 200 letters from victims and survivors of child sexual abuse in Pakistan). Other examples of vulnerability include bodily harm through engagement with work that involves risk, risky behaviour such as unprotected sex, and increased exposure and engagement with violence on the streets. How men respond to victimization is also gendered. Responding aggressively and unflinchingly to other men's physical aggression or sexual aggression can be a sign of manhood.

With respect to violence, men and women have often been seen in binaries, as victims or as perpetrators, as the oppressed and the oppressor. It is important to explore, understand, accept that each one of us has aspects of both based on the dynamics of how these other markers of power play out in our lives. So a woman can be the oppressed in her relationship with her husband but be physically abusive in her relationship with her children. What we need to understand is that power is fluid, in flux always changing always shifting. Violence, how it is defined, in what context e.g. playground, office , street etc. what it means, what are the gains for different types of men and women in behaving violently and what are the costs of giving it up need to be explored with the context of our own lives.

The price for stepping out of these rigid gender moulds is high and the society through formal (school discipline, police, customary and state law) and informal practices (peer pressure, family norms) ensures that the individual finds it difficult to step out. In addition to external forces that keep any resistance, deviation in check, there are internal expectations, images of the self leading to guilt and feelings of inadequacy that keep us from exploring aspects of our being that may seem healthier and more attractive. With women, this need to break free can be a rewarding experience as 'becoming male' is subscribing to a superior gender order although associated with censure or actual physical threat to self. For men to become feminine is associated with becoming the 'other' looked down upon gender. This becomes problematic

especially for men as often the negation of feminine traits is important to their identity as a man, and *'being feminine is the antithesis of masculinity'* and because masculine and feminine are not simple opposites but arranged along a hierarchal scale.

Within this back drop it is important to explore our attitudes and assumptions about ourselves, our abilities, people, events and the world around us and how these are coloured and influenced by our socialization. And more importantly what is the cost that we pay for being socialized with a view to our emotional or physical health, what vital dimensions of our being do we give up when we are channelled into rigidly defined gender moulds. This could range from limiting our ability to develop our capacities, skills and interest, expressions of our sexuality and ability to form meaningful rewarding relationships. Attitudes can range from deeply personal issues such as how we express love, anger, fear, frustration to more societal issues such as indifference or even participation in cruelty to others and crimes against those less powerful than us.

Many men share the vision of a gender just world- but yet it is difficult for them to travel that path as this requires them to clearly look and come to terms with the costs and benefits that they receive from the structures that they want to challenge. It requires a sharing of power and a comfort in experiencing and expressing powerlessness. Self awareness can be one path towards this. Another is sharing of these difficulties not just amongst themselves but also with women and other vulnerable groups so that we can all recognize the unique challenges that we face when wanting to understand and change; ourselves or the societies that we live in.



### III. Recommended readings/films

Five readings and one film have been recommended as part of this module. They have been chosen as they explore and analyse different areas that will come under discussion in this module.

#### 1) 'Engendering school children in Bali' by Parker, Lynette

This article explores a critical site for gendering: the school. It highlights the gendered nature of instruction, of teacher student and student to student interaction, physical settings, disciplining etc. but also challenges the sex role socialization theory as somewhat mechanistic and limiting for our understanding of how children are gendered. It argues that states '*children will not turn out like their parents; that societies will not duplicate themselves; that there will be wide variation among individuals in any one group; that some cultural notions, meanings and practices will be taken for granted and others shared, modified and argued over*'....and concludes that '*individuals, through their gendered subjectivities, and especially through their experience of relations with others, constitute their own gendered being*'. This is an important concept to explore as often when we look at gender, there is a tendency to ignore nuances of subjectivities and agency of the individuals and focus instead in commonalities which can be simplistic and in the long run misleading, as then we fail to capture or appreciate the process of socialization which goes beyond *cultural reproduction* to *cultural creation* and opportunities and sites of resistance and action.

#### 2) 'The Limits of Masculinity' by Andrew Tolson

This article is an account of the author's experience of being in a men's group and is a fascinating exploration of consciousness raising and the search for a language for men for self reflection. Can the experience of masculinity, primarily constructed around a position of domination be unpacked in the same way as women's experience, constructed from a position of subordination? These are the issues explored in Andrew Tolson's article.

3) **‘But no one has explained to me who I am now’..... “Trans” Self-Perceptions in Sri Lanka’  
by Shermal Wijewardene**

This article is based on 4 in-depth interviews with two transsexuals in Sri Lanka and presents their journey in framing their identity in a society that is violently intolerant of diversity. The focus is on the importance of *‘acts of perception for these two individuals— others’ perceptions of their gender expression as well as their self-perception of their gender behaviour*. It highlights how both are *continuously thrown back on their own imaginative resources to frame their gender difference’*. And how their own self-perceptions have served as the only resource in their lives to represent themselves with dignity in a world that has refuses to recognize them.

4) **‘Giving Men Choices’ - A Rozan project with the Police Force in Pakistan by Maria Rashid  
(UN-Instraw Working Paper Series )**

This paper highlights the experiences of working with policemen on issues ranging from self awareness, sensitization to gender and violence against women. It explains the journey that police men take in six days workshops where in an environment of trust and respect, they are allowed the opportunity to reflect on their childhood experiences, their relationship with power and powerlessness, their attitudes towards violence and women. It posits that for men to be allies or partners; *‘allowing men the space to express their own feelings, fears, deconstruct their social conditioning and ‘tell their stories’ is critical. Men need to talk to themselves, amongst themselves and to women - only then can the bridges be built’*.

5) **‘Nawabdin Electrician’- A short story by Daniyal Mueenuddin**

This fictional piece highlights the story of an ageing electrician on large land holding near Multan in Pakistan and how through tricks and ingenuity he supports his twelve daughters and comes perilously close to losing all the he has worked for. It is a glimpse how men can be pushed by their roles as providers, caretakers and their effort to meet that expectation

by hook or crook and of the relationships between men, and how they can be competitive, unforgiving and damning.

**6) 'When four friends meet'- a film by Rahul Roy**

Four boys share with the camera their secrets: sex and girls; youthful dreams and failures; frustrations and triumphs. The four friends, residents of Jehangirpuri, a working class colony in Delhi, are trying to make their living in an environment, which is changing rapidly. Girls seem to be very bold, stable jobs are not easy to come by and sex is a strange mix of guilt and pleasure.

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**Module IV:**

**PATRIARCHY, SEXUALITY**  
**&**  
**MASCULINITIES**

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**Tutors: Dr. Nighat S Khan / Dr. Charu Gupta / Dr. Abhijit Das**

**SANAM Lead: Dr. Abhijit Das**

## I. Introduction

This module explores concepts related to patriarchy, sexuality and masculinities along with their inter-connectedness. It seeks to understand the application of these concepts in the context of sexual and reproductive health and rights. The module also views the determinants of men's experiences of sexuality and the linkages between intimacy, love, sexuality, performance and power. The modes by which codes of sexual control are established and practiced in different institutional settings and the consequences of such practices on relations between men and women and between men are also dealt with.

In other words, some of the key themes that are discussed in the module include patriarchy and its origins, masculinity and its relations with sexuality, how masculinities were historicised in South Asia and what are their cultural representations. We will also touch upon Alternative Masculinity and Resistance to Hegemonic Masculinity.

Let us begin by looking at patriarchy, its origins, its connections with family and society, and how it influences gender based violence.

## II. What is Patriarchy?

Patriarchy is a system of social organization that institutionalizes male power over women and puts male interests and values at the centre of social life. Rather than a single factor, patriarchy is made up of a number of interrelated institutions and ideologies that have a pervasive effect at multiple levels of social organization. Since patriarchy is a social system, all men do not participate in or experience patriarchy in the same way. Although patriarchy is one of the most fundamental realities of contemporary social life, it is so pervasive that it is naturalized and often invisible. The concept of patriarchy has three primary meanings. First, patriarchy is a form of social organization in which the father is the head of the family. Second, patriarchy describes the cultures and social institutions that are organized around male leadership. Third, patriarchy also refers to the principles and philosophies upon which male power is based.

Patriarchy is relevant to interpersonal violence because it influences a variety of factors from the motives for violence to cultural and individual responses to it. Patriarchy is a multilayered, multifaceted social structure that extends across all levels of the social ecology, from personal beliefs and behaviour to interpersonal relationships, family organization, community norms, and cultural ideals. Patriarchy takes different forms over time and in different locations. These changes have implications for shifting patterns of violence within individual relationships and communities.

### ***II.1 Patriarchy in the Family***

Familial patriarchy is perhaps the most well known part of patriarchy. Patriarchal families are organized around a male head of household. In patriarchal families, men have more power and authority than women. Their influence may include control over decisions made within the family, the allocation of resources, household duties, and marriage and childrearing practices. Although patriarchy refers literally to the rule of the father, patriarchal authority extends to other males in the household.

Patriarchal families are often patrilineal, meaning that the family line descends through the man's side. In patrilineal families, money, class status, property, and wives and children may be passed from male relative to male relative, with women and girls excluded from inheritance rights or allowed to inherit only in the absence of male heirs. Patrilinearity is also visible in the custom of women taking their husband's name upon marriage. The family name descends through the men, while the women are incorporated under the husband's family identity. Even when women retain their own names upon marriage, the children often assume the father's last name.

The multiple forms of social organization linked to patriarchy institutionalize male power over women and contribute to women's oppression. Familial patriarchy has been linked to men's abuse of women in research on violence in married, unmarried, divorced, and separated couples. Patriarchy in the family is also related to violence by male relatives against female relatives, such as in acid attacks, dowry related violence, and so-called honour killings. These

forms of violence use women to negotiate men's status relative to one another. In this sense, women are instrumental to men's relationships with one another rather than valued as distinct entities with the same rights and freedoms as men.

## ***II.II Patriarchy in Society***

Familial patriarchy both provides a model for and reflects broader patriarchal structures. In societies organized around patriarchal families, it may seem natural that social institutions and organizations are also headed by men. Likewise, in a culture where social institutions such as religion, education, government, and business are run by men, it may seem natural for men to run the household. The pervasiveness of patriarchy contributes to the appearance of its immutability and naturalness.

Social institutions like the law, courts, government, and media are dominated by men in most places throughout the world. This domination has multiple implications for interpersonal violence. Some forms of violence are not considered illegal because of the presumption of men's patriarchal authority over women in the family. For example, wife battering and marital rape have not always been illegal in the United States and are still condoned in many countries. Even where these forms of violence are considered crimes, they are often not as aggressively prosecuted as other crimes. Men's crimes against women they know may be subject to higher standards of proof and scrutiny compared with other offenses. The male prerogative to control what happens in the family often extends to child sexual and physical abuse as well. Historically, violence by men in the family was considered a private issue that was not subject to outside intervention due to the man's position as guardian of the wife and children. Therefore, men's violence against family members was seen as appropriate or necessary to his role as leader and disciplinarian of the family. In that context, a man's violence against his own family was not considered a crime or even violence.

The patriarchal organization of society exists on the most abstract levels of culture as well as in the most intimate and internalized aspects of individual behaviour and identity. Patriarchy is linked to polarized gender roles that mandate very different and distinct behaviour for women

and men. Rigid gender roles are enforced in a number of ways in patriarchal cultures, including by the use of violence and the threat of violence. Women are not the only ones at risk for this violence. Patriarchal gender norms contribute to hate crimes such as gay bashing and violence against men by males who feel that their masculinity has been called into question, just as they contribute to rape and femicide. Men perform their gender to demonstrate their place in patriarchal hierarchies that rank men relative to one another as well as in relation to women.

Not all men experience patriarchy in the same way. Racism, class discrimination, and homophobia, all shape men's status and experiences within particular patriarchal cultures. These intersecting oppressions affect the privileges men are able to gain from patriarchy in a particular time and place. Expectations for the performance of gender vary over time as well as from culture to culture. However, research has identified men's desire to perform masculinity and defend it against threats of inadequacy as a significant factor contributing to male violence in a variety of contexts. Patriarchy can create conflict among men as well as between men and women. As men jockey for position at the top of patriarchal hierarchies, some men use violence to offset the shame they feel at not being in a dominant position. Although patriarchy literally refers to the rule of the father, it also applies to men's interactions with other men who are not family members.

### ***II.III Theories of Patriarchy***

Theories of patriarchy explain why and how families and other social institutions are organized around male supremacy. There are theories that justify this arrangement, theories that challenge it, and theories that attempt to clarify how patriarchy came to exist. Each of these theories applies to multiple layers of social interaction: personal beliefs and ways of understanding the world, expectations for interactions with others, ways of behaving in interpersonal relationships, and ways of thinking about these things in relation to the larger society.

Patriarchy has both psychological and material components. For example, patriarchy shapes the distribution of resources through concepts like the family wage that guarantees men higher



wages for work than women, since it is presumed that they are supporting a family. Patriarchy also shapes the way we think about ourselves and others through factors such as conventions of language use, observation of the media, and our personal experiences. The combination of psychological and material aspects of patriarchy contributes to its tenacity. Changes in material culture and social institutions may be resisted because patriarchal values and beliefs are internalized by women and men. At the same time, material concerns may outweigh psychological factors when it comes to people's individual decisions about how to act.

### ***II.IV Influence of Patriarchy***

As an organizing principle behind gendered identity and institutions, patriarchy is a key concept for thinking about human behaviour. An understanding of the concept of patriarchy is essential to the study of interpersonal violence because, along with other factors, it shapes human behaviour, including violence at all levels of the social ecology. This understanding should include awareness that patriarchy is not a single factor; rather, it is a principle of social organization that has a pervasive influence on human violence over time and in multiple geographic locations. This influence is present in the most personal internalized identities and gender performance to the most impersonal and structured institutions that organize social life.

While understanding women's oppression and subjugation one needs to take a nuanced and holistic picture of the influences of patriarchy, and its flexible nature that cuts across caste, class & religion, avoiding the assumption of a simplistic one to one relationship. For instance, in countries practicing socialism, the end of privatization of property did not necessarily end the suffering of women, clearly showing that there is much more about the phenomenon that needs to be understood and worked upon. We need to take into account the views of feminists like Kate Millet, who pulled institutions and ideologies into the debate, through the assertion that the 'personal is political'.

Men too are oppressed by the various manifestations of the patriarchal system but not in the same measure as their female counterparts and had that been the case the patriarchal system

would have long been overthrown. Thus though men also suffer they also definitely gain at each level of the ladder.

In the next section, we will look at the formation and formulation of concepts of South Asian masculinity and understand the different paradigms that went into construing it.

### **III. South Asian Masculinities**

Work on masculinities needs to take a very holistic understanding of masculinities as an interconnection between different structures and systems in the society- family, economy, politics, class etc- and how work needs to be done at all these levels.

The study of South Asian masculinities is an emerging field growing out of three main analytical foci: gender and nation; semen loss anxiety ('dhat syndrome'); and MSM (males who have sex with males). Meanwhile, several classic and recent ethnographies take men and men's worlds as their focus. As with other themes in South Asian research, works around men and masculinities in India dominate in the region.

#### ***III.I Gender, Nation and the Historicisation of Masculinity***

Debates on gender and nation offer excellent examples of ways in which 'race' and 'gender' become entwined in social hierarchies and work to produce and reinforce each other. Studies split into two major sub-themes: Colonial Masculinity-where historical and post-colonial studies of the effects of British dominance lead the way; and Ethnicity and Minorities, focused on relationships between the dominant majority Hindu community and the minority Muslim community.

The common argument is that the British in India carefully presented themselves as hyper-masculine: rational, scientific, progressive, active, martial and even bloodthirsty. They then derided Indian men as effeminate: superstitious and irrational, lacking in self-control, weak and passive, unable to defend or govern themselves. A series of oppositions supporting these constructions—such as beef-eater versus vegetarian, Christian versus Hindu—were trooped through idioms of gender. Gendered ways of viewing relative power became a plank of British

justifications—to self and other—for colonialism. Indians were seen, like women, as needing direction and governance, discipline and rule by middle and upper-class British men. The latter claimed to be shaped into superior persons by the twin highly masculine and masculinising institutions of public school and army (Nandy 1983; Sinha 1995). Mutual attraction and homosocial/homosexual desire crept, perforce, into this gendered relationship (Krishnaswamy 1998). Certain groups among the colonised were exempted from effeminacy and encouraged—through stereotypes produced in missionary and administrative writing, employment policies and so on—to think of themselves as outside of the ‘unmanly native’ category but as martial or rational—allies of empire and of the British (Caplan 1995; Luhrmann 1996).

However Indians cannot be seen solely at the mercy of British tyrants; and that it is important to understand how they- during the colonial period- were also quite active in constructing masculinities which almost became something like a national enterprise. A few examples suffice to illustrate this point:

- a. The images of the Machiavellian Lord Krishna (usually portrayed as playful, flamboyant and romancing with women) was transformed into quite hyper-masculine descriptions in colonial literature. Also a striking absence of the figure of Radha from the poetry at that time.
- b. There was a tremendous increase in print and material emphasizing celibacy and conservation of semen, whereas masturbation was viewed as a national crisis that rendered men as weak and diminished their capacity to function as men. The conservation of semen perspective was also linked in certain contexts to valorisation of Brahmacharya or celibacy which was said to engender spiritual masculine energy.
- c. There was a rise in hyper masculine gymnasium cultures portraying Hanuman as the ideal image of manhood and celibacy, as explored by Joseph Alter in his work on Akhada Culture.

- d. Scripts like Urdu and Hindi began to be viewed as feminine, with one referred to as the ideal wife (Hindi) and the other as the prostitute (Urdu).

Many writers have explored similar processes of identity formation within Indian sub-continent itself across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, trooped through progressively intensifying and congealing metaphors of race and gender in the post-independence period, after the partition of India and Pakistan (1947). Distinctions between Hindu and Muslim have sharpened, with the position of Muslims within the Indian nation becoming increasingly precarious. Historical and ethnographic studies trace how Muslim masculinity becomes demonised as rapaciously sexual, violence-prone and even criminal (Gupta 2001). Meanwhile, Hindu masculinity, self-perceived as inadequate and effeminate (whether measured against colonial or Muslim others) becomes subject, post independence, to aggressive recuperations, in the form of militant and often violent and anti-Muslim Hindu nationalism (Banerjee 2005).

### ***III.II Semen Loss Anxiety and Masculinity***

‘Semen anxiety’ has been an important theme in the study of male sexuality in India. It refers to a widely held perception—irrespective of caste and religious differences—that ‘loss’ of semen equates to a loss of masculine strength and ‘life-force’. It is *not*, however, connected with concerns over ‘premature’ ejaculation. There are folkloric measures of equivalence between a quantum of semen wasted and the amounts of energy expended. These are usually expressed in terms of precious materials such as *ghee* (clarified butter) and blood. The conservation-of-semen perspective is also linked—in certain contexts—to the valorisation of *Brahmacharya*, or celibacy, which is said to engender spiritual masculine energy. Semen has considerable significance in Hindu religious texts, and its ‘spilling’ by the gods is often represented as an act of creation. Scholars—who regard semen anxiety as a culturally specific syndrome—argue that religious texts provide the most significant basis for the belief. Hence, it is suggested that Indian popular sexological practice and advice condemns masturbation as an act that leads to weak men with inadequate sex lives as well as diminished capacity to function as men. The ‘syndrome’ has been the object of considerable, anthropological, psychological and public health-orientated analysis.

In public health work, in particular, it has taken on the form of an 'essential' aspect of Indian culture that, say, strategies against HIV/AIDS must take into account. However, more recently, others have questioned the centrality of the concept in understandings of male sexuality in the Indian subcontinent. It has been suggested that while 'semen anxiety' may well be of considerable cultural significance, it is not clear that it has as definitive a status in the lives of men as is often suggested. An understanding of masculine sexuality also requires the positioning of 'semen anxiety' alongside the cultures of consumption, globalisation and the shifting identities of manhood.

### ***Celibacy***

Many scholars have noted that brahmacharya is a concept with social, psychological medical and religious significance in Hindu society (Carstairs 1958; Kakar 1981, 1982, 1990; Obeyesekere 1981; O'Flaherty 1973; Spratt 1966), and there can be no doubt that semen retention is a theme with powerful resonance in the psyche of many Hindu men who feel that sex is enervating. While the basic theory of celibacy has been analyzed and explained in various ways by many authors, my concern is primarily with the technical aspect of the brahmachari's regimen, and with what the logic of those techniques implies. Aside from Gandhi's own writings, there is very little on the mechanics-the science-of being and becoming celibate.

The modern concept of brahmacharya clearly derives from the classical life-cycle prescriptions of dharma articulated by Manu (1886 {1964}), among others. The four-fold ashrama cycle of life stages, of which brahmacharya (initiated studentship) is the first, when understood in conjunction with the "four ends of man" -dharma, artha, kama, and moksha-clearly articulates an encompassing code of moral, civic, ritual, political, and economic conduct. The status of the initiated student defines one specific phase in the larger structure of society, and the "structured" integration of the individual into that society. Specifically, it marks the second birth of Brahman, Kshatriya, and Vaishya boys and sets them on a path of disciplined Vedic learning. In this regard, brahmacharya may be seen as a crucial phase in the articulation of difference within society insofar as the ritual of initiation defines the particular trajectory of the various Varna categories and who has what rights and duties within those categories.

Most of the rules of conduct for the brahmachari concern his religious status vis- a-vis his guru and the ritual protocol of his community. It is clearly within the ritualized contexts defined by The Sacred Laws of the Aryas (Muller 1879 [1965], Bhagavad Gita (1945), and the Ashvalayana Grihya-Sutra (1923) that the brahmachari's vow of chastity must be understood. For the initiated twice-born student, chastity in particular and self-control in general were requisite for learning the Vedas, since sex was regarded as both defiling and distracting. In this regard, chastity was a practical pedagogical principle and not a general rule of moral conduct prescribed for all Hindus. Nor was the ritual vow of chastity-as distinct from the modern concept of nationalistic celibacy-medicalised in any sense; the initiated student did not, it seems, practice celibacy as a form of personalized public health. It was simply part of his religious training.

Despite the very narrow, ritualized meaning of celibacy within the classical life- cycle scheme of the twice-born (cf. Stevenson (1920 [1971]), one is able to discern a nascent political agenda in Vedic and post-Vedic discourse on sexuality. Within the life-cycle of the twice-born male, there was most certainly a time and place for sex. However, the Vedas and other classic texts sought to regulate the nature of who, what, where, and how one might engage in sex (cf. Kama Sutra), but not sex itself as a monolithic construct that defined the moral conduct of some equally monolithic Hindu citizen. Social, political, aesthetic, and economic distinctions were all important when reckoning the moral propriety or appropriateness of sex, whereas universal standards were virtually meaningless: what was good for one was by no means good for all, particularly when it came to abstinence. In this regard, the classical authors seemed to see sex as one behavioural facet among many others to be regulated in the interest of maintaining the social hierarchy. As Romila Thapar has noted, however, the world-renouncer who abstained from sex completely was able to act as a social critic precisely by virtue of his position outside of this hierarchy (Thapar 1976).

**From Celibacy, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Gender into Nationalism in North India**  
**Author(s): Joseph S. Alter, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (Feb., 1994), pp. 45-66**

Literature on 'semen loss anxiety' by contrast takes an historical and psychological (generally Freudian) direction. From the 1950s to date, Indian male sexuality has been conventionally portrayed as immature and deviant, warped by South Asian patterns of family and gender relationships. These, it is alleged, prompt men to avoid oedipal competition with the father and instead submit to his authority, in a latent/implicitly homosexual move. Mothers are portrayed as involved in inordinately intense and inappropriately sensual relationships with their sons and as exerting ambivalent and sexualised power over boys. The result, it is claimed, is that all sexual activity for Indian men is fraught with apprehension and negativity, with mature women provoking especial anxiety. These pathologies are argued to be part of a deep mytho-cultural structure, evident in: the Hindu goddess complex—notably the fierce (castrating) mother-goddess; ambivalent portrayals of women, such as beliefs around women's qualities as carriers of pollution and inauspiciousness; widespread male anxieties about losing bodily and mental strength through ejaculation (Caldwell 1999). Despite the focus on Hindu goddesses and so on, this literature is often unclear about whether the negative complex is supposed to exist among Hindu men alone or South Asian men generally, since male anxieties about loss of semen are pervasive.

Two recent ethnographic studies focused on masculinities and heterosexuality argue both against the tendency to paint 'deep structures' of culture rooted in timeless bedrocks such as myth or religious texts, and against the wholesale pathologisation of Indian male sexualities. These are part of contemporary moves to explore ways in which contemporary sexuality is produced and enjoyed. Both books point towards ways in which men may experience (especially hetero) sexuality as part of contemporary cultures of self-making and as connected to participation in regimes of consumption, which may sometimes be drawn into domesticity and conjugality (Srivastava in press; Osella and Osella 2006).

### ***III.III MSM and Masculinity***

The term 'men who have sex with men' does not describe a single group of persons identifiable through any set of social or other indicators. Instead, men who have sex with men constitute diverse non-mutually exclusive sub-groups who overlap into each other's gender and sexuality

dominion (S. Khan 1997, Jenkins 1998, Khan and Sharmin 1998, Dowsett 2003, S. I. Khan 2003). According to existing literature, a kothi is a man belonging to a self-identifying feminized socio-sexual group. He is likely to be largely unrecognized in public settings, but visible within other cultural settings. Some kothis share collective norms and a sense of community, especially with growing work of nongovernmental groups for providing sexual health services. Some may cross-dress and some use make-up in their own social gatherings or when cruising venues to attract clients. A kothi may become a victim of teasing and stigmatization by peers or seniors due to his feminine appearance. As a result, he may try to hide his feminine gestures in public and among his family members (Khan et al. 2003).

Panthi is the name given by kothis to mixed groups of men who have sexual relations with kothis, but who self-identify first and foremost as men. Panthis may have sex with any male sex workers, whether a kothi or not. The name girziya is given by kothis to those men who look manly but who are involved in selling sex like kothis (S. I. Khan 2003). While kothis call these males gir'ya, a girzya will often call himself straight, differentiating his masculine.

MSM's sexual relationships with women identity happens from the more feminine kothis. Giriyas have less of a sense of community like that of kothis. The term doparata denotes men who practise both insertive and receptive roles with other males. Sometimes they are called double deckers. Very few men in Bangladesh lay claim to a gay or homosexual identity.

**From : Men Who Have Sex with Men's Sexual Relations with Women in Bangladesh Sharful Islam Khan, et al *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Mar., 2005), pp. 159-169**

Interesting work emerging on male sexuality shifts from policy-oriented studies (focused on HIV prevention strategies) through depth anthropological monographs and into queer theory (e.g. Vanita 2001; Boyce 2006). The category of "Hijra" has long drawn much attention beyond South Asia as a possible example of third gender/third sex. Recently, this has been considerably complicated by Reddy, who draws out the complex and variable ways in which sex, operative status (i.e. castrated or not), gender, class and religious affiliation are woven together



in Hijra circles (2005). Debate is currently raging around whether ‘sexuality’ is or is not an identity in South Asia; whether it makes sense or not to speak of a ‘homosexual’ /heterosexual’ distinction; and whether homosociality and homosexuality are related or form a continuum.

Some scholars argue that ‘sexuality’—as an identity, or understood as part of one’s ‘inner self—does not exist in South Asia outside narrow sections of the metropolitan middle classes. Sexual behaviour is focused not on an object of desire but on one’s own need for ‘discharge’; sexual behaviour, rather than identity, is what we find. Homosexual activity is framed not as sex but as ‘play’ and ‘fun’ (maasti) and sexual acts do not necessarily gender a person. Married men who seek male commercial sex workers in no way compromise their masculine status. Male sexual behaviours among MSM exist either quite distinctly from gendered identities or linked to gender in highly specific ways, and not through the terms of familiar European binaries. Instead, gendering is tied into sexuality through complex taxonomies of ‘real men’, ‘effeminate men’, ‘penetrable men’ and so on, within a clearly hierarchical structure in which the most salient gendered pair is the “Kothi:Panthi”—the effeminised male and the ‘real man’.

Others deny outright the relevance of the Kothi:Panthi or ‘effeminised male:real man’, ‘penetrated:penetrator’ models, either across the region or as the main authentically local way in which sexuality is organised. They suggest a vast range of gendered and sexual positioning among men who enjoy homosexual activities, way beyond any Kothi:Panthi binary. At the same time, they also argue for the local recognition (albeit often latent or emerging) of a homosexual—heterosexual distinction and a local concept of ‘gay’. Such claims are generally linked in to activism and to programmes (claimed as emancipatory) which promote coming out and urge self-identification of men as gay within a broad homosexual-heterosexual framework (Cohen 2005). Explorations of queerness seem to support some claims made by the first group, which refuses to tie homosexuality to gay or to identity, but instead recognises a link between homosocial structures of intimacy and affection and homosexual activity. We might then predict a greater prevalence and tacit tolerance of same-sex sexual activity in South Asia, albeit concealed under stringent heteronormativity in the form of compulsory heterosexuality via arranged marriage and parenthood. Some writers do indeed suggest this to be so. Yet the

second group may also be correct to insist that neither the figure of the Kothi, the effeminate man who takes other men as sexual partners, nor the Kothi:Panthi distinction is necessarily the most salient local configuration of male homosexuality. Research has hardly begun in this highly contested field and we may expect significant shifts as more studies unfold.

Recent scholarship highlights the historical contingency and regional/ethnic variability of styles of masculinity across South Asia. Srivastava (2004) argues that existing tropes of 'South Asian Sexuality' fail to capture the complex ways in which a variety of muted discourses shape and produce a range of gendered subjectivities, and a highly uneven array of knowledge and techniques of sex. In certain subaltern modern spaces at least, sexuality is not mere behaviour but is becoming a site for identity production, albeit in ways quite different from the modern sexual imagined by Foucault (Srivastava 2004).

A more general volume explores configurations of masculinities across ethnography and cultural representations (Chopra et. al.2004). Sexuality figures as a theme alongside broader questions: men and work; gendering of social spaces; men's negotiations of 'honour' and dominance; interrogations of the putative Hindu 'crisis of masculinity'. Contributions discussing Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan mark a useful beginning to a wider regional discussion of masculinities.

Finally, a few ethnographers have examined the production of masculinities in particular contexts. Using interviews with men in the city of Banaras/Varanasi, Derne claims that Indian men prefer to live in joint families and to have arranged marriages, while working to restrict contact between husband and wife and control women's activities. He suggests four masculine types, depending upon their expressed attitude towards cultural norms: 'true believers, cowed conformists, innovative mimetists and unapologetic rebels' (1995). More recently, Derne (2000) traces some ways in which men view Hindi films. Men enjoy films breaking conventional social boundaries, as in celebrations of individualism and romance. Movies embracing the emergence of ideas about 'love' between men and women may even re-shape certain social structures. But film also works to bolster existing structures of male dominance and even to magnify male

sexualised aggression towards women. Ultimately, male power and even violence form the bedrock of men's expectations of their relationships to women. While men enjoy watching rebellion and signs of the modern on screen, they are also antagonistic to what is perceived as negative and decadent Western modernity.

Alter's study of one popular South Asian men's practice—wrestling—engages both with micro-ethnography of men's daily lives and regimes of masculinity and with wider debates about the Hindu male body and sexuality. Wrestlers, typically youthful and unmarried, build virility through diet and training to produce a body which is specifically coded as both powerful and moral through stringent semen build-up and retention. Here indeed is one social arena where the loss of semen is deplored and checked, but in a wider somatic and less neurotic (and of course highly circumscribed) context than that suggested by the wholesale generalisations and accusations made in the 'semen loss anxiety' literature. Alter's book also provides an intimate portrait of one of South Asia's segregated spaces—the masculine homosocial world of the akhara, or wrestling pit.

The field of masculinity studies within the South Asia region is only now beginning to develop and is significantly skewed towards the foci mentioned here. It seems likely that significant insights will continue to grow out of the already rich and complex literatures relating to sexuality and ethnicity. Men's economic behaviours and the relations of globalisation to masculinity are also emerging as future arenas of study.

## **IV. Types of Masculinities**

Masculinities are not a set of 'givens' and that they have no singular meaning but a dynamic phenomenon that has changing meanings and interpretations by different groups that evolve throughout historical periods.

In the next section, we will look at the types of hegemonic and subordinate masculinities that have emerged in the world and in South Asia in particular.

### ***IV.1 Hegemonic Masculinities***

The type of masculinity the dominant group performs is called hegemonic masculinity. As history changes, so does the definition of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987). Hegemonic masculinity is a "culturally idealised form of masculine character" (Connell, 1990, p. 83). Hegemonic masculinity then is the current ideal. Most men's gender performance varies to some degree from the prescribed hegemonically masculine gender role (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985). "The hegemonic model ... may only correspond to the actual characters of a small number of men. Yet very large numbers of men are complicit in sustaining the hegemonic model" (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985, p. 92). "A discourse of 'masculinity' is constructed out of the lives of (at most) five percent of the world's population of men, in one culture-area, at one moment in history" (Connell, 1993, p.600)

***Gender as a Relational Construct:*** Hegemonic masculinity is constructed in relation to femininities and subordinated and marginalised masculinities (Connell, 1987). "The white man's masculinity depends on the denial of the masculinity of blacks" (Baldwin, 1963, p. 91). Since hegemonic masculinity is thought to be superior, a characteristic of the in-group--the out-group is thought to be "feminine" or some kind of nonconforming, or even failed masculinity. "Emphasised femininity" is a kind of gender performance that accommodates hegemonic masculine interests and desires while preventing other femininities from gaining cultural articulation (Connell, 1987). The function of emphasised femininity is to please hegemonically masculine men and make them appear more hegemonically masculine--to make them feel stronger, wiser, more competent. For instance, the late Princess Diana, who was only a half-inch shorter than Prince Charles in her bare feet, was depicted as a full head shorter than him in their royal wedding commemorative postage stamp (Brownmiller, 1977).

***Characteristics of Hegemonic Masculinity:*** Hegemonic masculinity is characterised by numerous attributes such as domination, aggressiveness, competitiveness, athletic prowess, stoicism, and control. Aggressive behaviour, if not outright physical violence, is important to the presentation of hegemonic masculinity. This gender performance must be constantly validated by "proving" itself as dominant and in control of itself and others. One way to "prove"

hegemonic masculinity is to act aggressively or even violently toward what is regarded as "feminine," for example, women, homosexuals, and nerds.

A key part of the self-control necessary to present oneself as hegemonically masculine is to conform to rules of stoic emotional display. Love, affection, pain, and grief are improper displays of emotion. "Any male [or women trying to be hegemonically masculine] who fails to qualify in any one of these ways is likely to view himself [or herself]... as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior" (Goffman, 1963, p. 128)."

(From - **Marginalized Masculinities and Hegemonic Masculinity: An Introduction**  
Cliff Cheng *The Journal of Men's Studies* 7.3 (Spring 1999): p295

## ***IV.II Subordinate masculinities***

### ***Dalit Masculinities***

The description which has been gleaned from interviews and focus group discussions with dalit elders, in Thirunur (a village in Tamil Nadu, India), points to the total denial of masculine identity to dalit men in the non-household domain, because of the logic of land relations and caste. If right to exercise power, employ aggression and dispense justice index masculine identity in a semi-feudal agrarian setting, none of these attributes were available to dalit men. The public violence on dalit men deployed by Mudaliar land-holders, the institutionalised corporeal practices those ensured that dalit men supplicated before the Mudaliaras, and acute forms of untouchability signify this. On another count, mudaliar women carried out the act of provisioning food in the most humiliating way to dalit men on an everyday basis. Provisioning the household being a conventional pivot on which masculine identity revolves, the act of Mudaliar women provisioning dalit men was an act of refusing masculinity to dalit men. In addition, given their caste and class location, Mudaliar women did not respect the traditional hierarchy based on age with regard to dalit men. According to Thangavelua, 67-year old dalit, "Mudaliar women used to call Adi-Dravida men by their name even when they happened to be much older to them.".....

The dalit men's inability to protect 'their' women against the sexual domination of Mudaliar men was again an important plank on which their lack of masculinity was enacted. For instance, an elderly dalit man recollects, "In those days, when schedule caste women worked in the fields folding up their sarees, many Mudaliar men would look at their exposed thighs and pass some lewd comments like 'the land shows up well and needs to be ploughed. Some of them of course had illicit affairs with schedule caste women, which is a well known fact in the village. This is a view that was endorsed by several of the elderly dalit respondents. What we see here is a straightforward story of upper caste male privilege over lower caste women's bodies, which in turn, constructs the lower caste men as effete."

**From: Work, Caste and Competing Masculinities: Notes from a Tamil Village;  
S. Anandhi, J. Jeyaranjan, Rajan Krishnan  
Source: *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, No. 43 (Oct. 26 - Nov. 1, 2002), pp. 4397-4406**

Scholars have shown how the Indian male was constructed by the British as weak and lacking in manliness. This was further magnified in the construction of Dalit male. His body reflected the abject body of labour. There was repeated imagery of him as meek and stupid, which served a particular purpose. Since Dalit men did hard manual labour, justification for the harsh conditions forced upon them required a representation of their bodies as resilient but dim-witted. Their image as chattels reinforced their status of domestic subservience. Stereotypes of Dalit men repeatedly characterised them as childlike, inferior and unfree.

The Chamar male, for example, was often seen as docile, both in colonial and upper caste literature, ready to do hard work. The Dalit male body was infantilised, tamed and trained for practical use. They were considered as a form of agricultural machinery, valued primarily for their hard work, endurance and productive capability. They were the beasts of burden and workhorses. Their bodies were literally to be used in the fields from sunup to sundown. Numerous narratives attested to their passivity in servitude. In several gazetteers of UP it was repeatedly emphasised that Chamars were good and industrious cultivators, but were

habitually inclined to desert their holdings on a slight pretext. The settlement reports stated that Chamars were both laborious and submissive.

Many Dalits had entered the households of landlords as domestic servants. These men were stripped of their supposed predilection for unrestrained sexuality and violence and their masculinity was unmade. They were rendered powerless of their own selves, which reinforced their servile status. They were serfs and servants whose behaviour fitted them to serve the upper castes. They dared not oppose or go to the court. To justify their exploitation, high caste men and colonial authorities created the prevailing image of the Dalit male as subservient. He was an embodiment of the asexual, safe, assimilated and subordinated Dalit male; the emasculated, feeble Dalit man, who, at the same time, was capable of hard physical labour. The benevolence bestowed on Dalit men by their masters was seen as preferable to their exposure to the 'tyrannies of freedom' in the towns. The village was romanticised as a place where there was much harmony, where upper castes behaved with lower castes according to their maryada (customary boundaries) and where Chamar and Pasi men were also addressed respectfully.

Colonial perceptions strengthened these stereotypes. Dalit men were often described as dirty, short and ugly. Thus wrote Crooke, 'Bhangis have a dark complexion, stunted figure, and peculiar dark flashing eye'. Sherring remarked that Doms were 'Dark complexioned, low of stature, and somewhat repulsive in appearance, they are readily distinguished from all the better castes of Hindus'...

However, instead of a single fixed identity, there was a repertoire of images representing Dalit bodies. They were also often constructed as lecherous, criminals, violent, threatening and uncontrollable.....

However, Dalit men were not just a screen on which high caste men and colonial authorities projected their caste, racial and gender anxieties. They, too, were historical agents in their formulation of identity. They attempted to challenge the stereotypes about themselves by asserting their own masculinities in different ways, often implicitly and by conceiving a

gendered sense of self in political activities, cultural performances and demands in social-public spheres, the implications of which were often contradictory and ambiguous....

From: 'Feminine, Criminal or Manly? Imaging Dalit Masculinities in Colonial North India',  
Gupta, Charu. *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. XLVII (3), July-September 2010, pp.  
309-42.

Masculinity is not a simple concept that applies equally to all men; it also has other repercussions that the next section explores.

## V. Masculinity and Men's Health

On average men die 7 years earlier than women and surpass women in 9 of 10 categories for the leading causes of death. When indexed by race, African-American and Hispanic men have even higher mortality ratios relative to women. Winning the race to the grave is a competitive event at which men should not be eager to excel. Perhaps an even better measure of this health disparity between men and women regardless of race or socioeconomic status is "potential years of life lost." A substantial portion of men die needlessly at an early age due to accidents compared to women which contributes to the overall earlier average mortality but premature death in risk taking young men tragically occurs decades before women...

There are substantial barriers to saving the lives of men. Some barriers like violent or risk taking tendencies in young males are difficult to reverse. Others like re-tooling the mechanics involved with the delivery of health care and preventive education are more surmountable. Men visit health care providers a third less often than women. In 1999 men accounted for 135 million fewer office visits than women, and greater than 9 million men had not seen a doctor in more than 5 years. In a study published in the *American Journal of Public Health* the fact was highlighted that men are not socialized to see physicians in contrast to women who are because of their reproductive issues and as primary caregivers to children. ....

Conditioning to avoid medical care unless a severe sports or other injury occurs often begins in late adolescence when mothers no longer accompany their sons to the doctor and the culture of invulnerability begins. This pattern of women coercing men to see doctors continues throughout life, and the notion that only "the weak" see doctors or you only visit a physician



when it is a matter of life or death permeates our society and is exacerbated by lack of insurance. Indeed, it is estimated that 80% of men refuse to seek medical care until women (spouse, girlfriend) plead with them to see a doctor.....

**From : Masculinity is Dangerous to Your Health William D. Steers *The Journal of Urology* Vol. 184, 2229-2230, December 2010**

### ***V.I Men's sexual concerns / anxieties***

“Published and unpublished data from studies of gynaecological health, and unpublished data from some recent studies of males indicate, that the vocabularies used to describe sexual health problems are complex (Pelto 1999). The emerging picture suggests that both men and women recognize the concept of sexual transmission, but the same health problems that may be transmitted sexually are also thought to be caused by other factors, especially those associated with Garmi. Garmi is a generic term used to imply inner body heat, which manifests itself in the form of boils, sores, small-fistulas and so on around genital areas. The concept of garmi is also believed to be main cause of women's reproductive health problems (Joshi and Dhapola 1999).

The cultural domain of sexual health problems among Mumbai slum men can be encompassed by the general cover term gupt rog (secret illness), which is the most common term to describe sexual health problems in the Hindi speaking part of India. The term gupt-rog implies that the illness belongs to the 'secret' parts of the human body. It also suggests that the illnesses are associated with something shameful. It is however important to remember that many sexual health problems are not necessarily thought to be transmitted through interpersonal contacts. For example, excessive masturbation, thinning of the semen, wet dreams and penile abnormalities are clearly not transmitted through personal contact. In that sense they are not 'diseases' but problems which have a very different etiology than that is expected biomedically. Pelto (1996) has used the concepts of 'contact' and 'non-contact' illnesses to indicate these two broad categories of sexual problems.

## ***V.II Contact and non-contact sexual health problems***

Non-contact concerns about semen loss, including masturbation and nocturnal emission, are pervasive among young men in South Asia. They are also related to fears of impotence (Pelto 1996, Grenon et al. 1996). Contact or infectious problems are those that may indicate STIs. There are some problems, however, which might not be due to infections and yet may be perceived as sexually transmitted. For example, burning urination might not be due to infection, but may still be perceived by men as sexually transmitted (Hawkes 1998). Similarly, itching and some sores, pimples or other conditions in the genital areas are often due to fungal infections rather than sexually transmitted infections. In some areas of India, Filariasis and Hydrocele occur quite frequently, and are often reported as sexual health problems (gupt rog) by many people (Bang and Bang 1997, Collumbien et al. 1998)."

**From: Verma, R. et al (2001) – A Study of male sexual health problems in a Mumbai slum population, *Culture, Health & Sexuality, Vol. 3, No. 3***

## **Conclusion**

This module has sought to achieve the following objectives:

- To clarify concepts related to patriarchy, sexuality and masculinities along with their inter-connectedness.
- To understand the application of concepts in the context of sexual and reproductive health and rights
- To explore the determinants of men's experiences of sexuality and the linkages between intimacy, love, sexuality, performance and power
- To identify dominant and subordinate forms of masculinity
- To explore the modes by which codes of sexual control are established and practiced in different institutional settings and the consequences of such practices on relations between men and women and between men.

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**Module V:**

**RELIGION, CULTURE  
&  
MASCULINITIES**

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**Tutors: Dr. Rubina Saigol / Dr. Deepak Mehta**

**SANAM Lead: Raziq Fahim**

## Introduction

Let us begin by noting that masculinity is constructed; it rarely deals with biological attributes of manhood. Rather, it refers “to qualities and behaviours judged by a particular culture to be ideally associated with or especially appropriate to men and boys. Distinct from maleness, which is a biological and physiological classification concerned with the reproductive system, masculinity principally refers to socially acquired traits and secondary sex characteristics”.

This module will portray a theoretical picture in which culture and religion are seen as key institutional parameters that dominate the shaping of identities and relationships, attributes and worldviews as appropriate to patriarchy and masculinity. This study guide will explore the key concepts of culture, religion and masculinity, and thus help participants to retrace assumptions of gender identities, relationships and practices.

One issue that comes up constantly while working on gender issues is the common sense notion that particular kinds of gender practices are 'timeless', part of our 'culture', theologically ordained, etc. In most circumstances it becomes impossible for young activists and others to counter the logic of these arguments. We want through this module to start preparing the fellows to start a process of understanding that neither culture nor religious practices are static and homogenous. Each religious practice has multiple variants and very different worldviews on imagining the masculine and feminine as well as the relationship between the two. There is also constantly an element of conflict between actual practice and theological positions. Specifically in the context of masculinities, we would like the module to prepare them to see more clearly how religious and cultural practices are utilised to strengthen patriarchy and men's control over women's bodies and sexuality.

### **EXAMPLE 1.1**

For instance, Khap Panchayats or caste councils in particular areas of Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan in north India have become increasingly active in recent years. They legitimise their role and relevance by claiming to uphold social justice based

on the timeless traditions and customs of the area in which they function. What however, they end up doing in practise is to uphold caste-hierarchies and patriarchy, often backed by violence against those who go against their diktats.

The first thing to note is that older men usually dominate these Panchayats. “The youth (which is usually the affected party) are not allowed to voice their opinions. Women are not allowed to enter the Khap Panchayats except in exceptional cases.”

Secondly, while the Khaps claim to uphold timeless tradition, of the gotra caste system, they... “succeed in dictating decisions on the marginalised, sub-ordinate and powerless gotts while the dominant and powerful gotts get away with the breach of gotra exogamy.” Suranjita Ray p **Khap Panchayats: Reinforcing Caste Hierarchies**, (MAINSTREAM, VOL XLVIII, NO 30, JULY 17, 2010)

Thirdly, while promoting and reinforcing certain caste- hierarchies and patriarchal practises, the Khaps themselves are evolving entities, often employing modern means and methods get propagate and enforce their message. Hence, the Khap Mahapanchayat has a far more deadly hold over subordinate panchayats than in earlier times, as a result of tremendously improved means of communication and transport. Being repositories of large *vote banks*, the khaps also often use state level and national level political parties to further their cause. Thus, for example, the Indian National Lok Dal filed a notice on May 26, 2010 before the Haryana Vidhan Sabha speaker stating the need to convene a special session to take and pass the resolution that ‘the State Government may approach the Central Government to make necessary amendments in the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, to prohibit same gotra marriage to maintain harmony, dignity, high values of society and old traditions and customs’. (The Hindu, May 27, 2010: 7) While the INLD came out openly in support of the Khaps just before the panchayat elections in 2010, the Congress was ambivalent and divided over the issue.

Hence, while Khap Panchayats can, on a superficial level be seen to be ancient residues, safeguarding pristine traditions, they are actually dynamic and changing entities which both

clash with and use modernity to further themselves. As Suranjita Ray points out in her article **Khap Panchayats: Reinforcing Caste Hierarchies**, (MAINSTREAM, VOL XLVIII, NO 30, JULY 17, 2010), “caste got a new lease of life with the coming of democracy (Srinivas), and new alignments challenged the rigidity of the system.<sup>4</sup> With the economic advancement and socio-political changes, caste mobility has always been a constant threat to the status quo and traditional dominance of certain castes. The caste councils/ Khap Panchayats are opposed to the progressive, non-hierarchical, non-stratified, non-status quo, open and equal society. They are against the weakening of collective identity of the jati and the strengthening of individual identity and mobility... the caste system upholds the patriarchal values and ideology which is used to justify the dominant, hegemonic, hierarchical and unequal patriarchal structures. Caste and gender are closely related and the sexuality of women is directly linked to the question of purity of race. Ideologically concepts of caste purity of women to maintain patrilineal succession justified subordination of women. The caste system and caste endogamy retained control over the labour and sexuality of women... As repositories of community honour, women are vulnerable to killings in the name of honour which reinforces patriarchy.”

Hence, it is necessary to understand key imperatives that help to locate the theoretical descriptions about culture, religion and masculinity. This study note intends to provide perspectives to generic terminologies and identify the contextual connections between, culture, religion and masculinities, which induce and perpetuate prejudices discriminations, hate and violence.

### ***Definition of key terms 1.2***

*(Refer to Module 1 for a longer list of key terms)*

### **What do we mean by “culture”?**

When we talk about “culture”, we often mean intellectual and creative products, including literature, music, drama, and painting. Another use of “culture” is to describe the beliefs and

practices of another society, particularly where these are seen as closely linked with tradition or religion.

But culture is more than that. Culture is part of the fabric of every society, including our own. It shapes “the way things are done” and our understanding of why this should be so. This more comprehensive approach is proposed in the definition of culture adopted at the World Conference on Cultural Policies (Mexico, 1982): “Culture... is... the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or a social group. It includes not only arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs.” We will use this definition in ongoing discussions on culture and development.

### **What is Gender?**

Gender is an aspect of the social identity of *men* as well as women. Just as there are cultural norms and expectations about women’s roles, there are also cultural norms and expectations of men as leaders, husbands, sons and lovers that shape their behaviour and opportunities. Aspects of gender expectations may have costs and disadvantages for men (the expectation that they will take up arms and the defence of the nation, for example).

However, the overall pattern of gender relations favours men in the distribution of resources, opportunities and power. Men’s privileged position also gives them disproportionate power in determining the values that prevail.

These are basic questions, but they are not easy to answer because gender is an idea that has been discussed and analysed from very different perspectives for many years. Gender is both an analytical category – a way of thinking about how identities are constructed – and a political idea that addresses the distribution of power in society. Because of this, gender is an area of focus that cuts across thinking about society, law, politics and culture, and is frequently discussed in relation to other aspects of identity and social position, such as class, ethnicity, age

and physical abilities. It is also important in a range of social and political debates that are conducted differently according to the cultural context.

We learn to identify ourselves in particular ways, and in relation to wider images, codes and assumptions about gender. Importantly, these understandings of gender have an influential bearing on how people are viewed in our societies, and what kinds of possibilities are available or unavailable to them. To accept the idea of gender and the kinds of thinking that follow from it is to accept that being a woman or a man is not only a biological category of being with a fixed, shared meaning, but rather that these are categories that - socially and culturally - we give meaning to.

Analysing gender involves looking at the different ways in which socio-cultural codes of being a woman and man are understood and lived, normalised and regulated, negotiated and challenged. It involves examining femininities and masculinities as sets of ideas, definitions and practices that people inherit and use to make sense of their identities, appearances and behaviours, and in particular to make sense of their bodies' 'sexual and reproductive capacities. Analysing gender examines the ways in which apparently obvious and natural differences between women and men have been constructed socially over time, and further examines the ways in which those supposed differences have been central to relationships of power and inequality.

### **What are Masculinities?**

When we examine the ways in which gender relations have privileged men as the centre of rationality and normality, it may come as no surprise that it has taken quite a while for masculinity to be understood as a process of gender construction rather than just a way of describing how men are. Indeed the title of this section – masculinities – acknowledges that there is not just one interpretation for 'a man' to demonstrate he is 'a man'; masculinity varies across socio-cultural contexts and within groups and networks, and different men, with different experiences, relationships and pressures may perform their masculinity differently and inconsistently. As Whitehead and Barrett explain,

*Masculinities are those behaviours, languages and practices, existing in specific cultural and organisational locations, which are commonly associated with men and thus culturally defined as not feminine.*

In using the plural masculinities, this quotation emphasises that there is no one coherent set of expectations surrounding 'manhood'. Indeed, one of the reasons for the rise of studies of masculinity has been the change in traditional masculine roles in post-industrial societies. Nevertheless, while increasing attention is paid to the ways in which masculinity has been pluralized in certain contexts during recent decades, it must be stressed, particularly in a publication analysing gender-based violence, that the pressure and expectation to behave in terms of dominant codes of masculinity remains a prevalent experience for many men, with consequences for women, children and men in turn.

Cultural expectations of male behaviour, as the quotation above suggests, often centre on differentiating masculinity from the realm of femininity, where homosexuality is cast as having a particular relationship to femininity. Masculine identities, like all identities, are forged in difference and association: being a man involves not being something other than man and being like certain other men. Masculinity, seen in different contexts, involves displaying attitudes and behaviours that signify and validate male identities in relation to each other, and being recognised in particular ways by other men and women.

Such stereotyped and acculturated ways of perceiving masculinity have persisted in popular parlance and even found their way in literature. Hence, in the first half of the twentieth century it was fashionable for British and American men to call Italian males *dagos*. They were considered to be over-dandified, with slicked down hair, hot-blooded, prone to violence and uncultured, and hence did not belong to the highly revered category of *gentlemen*. In a similar vein Italians and Spaniards considered the British men to be somewhat cold blooded, non-macho and unadventurous.



'Masculinities, as argued by R.W Connell \_ (1995), exist and shift within networks of gender relationships. He argues masculinity is the "...processes and relationships through which men and women conduct gendered lives. *Different cultures, and different periods of history, construct masculinity differently. For instance, some cultures make heroes of soldiers, and regard violence as the ultimate test of masculinity; others look at soldiering with disdain and regard violence as contemptible. Some cultures regard homosexual sex as incompatible with true masculinity; others think no one can be a real man without having had homosexual relationships. It follows that in large-scale multicultural societies there are likely to be multiple definitions of masculinity...There are, for instance, differences in the expression of masculinity between Latino and Anglo men in the United States, and between Greek or Lebanese and Anglo boys in Australia. Other recent research looks at the different ways in which majority and minority youth may express their masculinity through popular culture in French, German and Dutch cities. The meaning of masculinity in working-class life is different from the meaning in middle-class life, not to mention among the very rich and the very poor. Equally important, more than one kind of masculinity can be found within a given cultural setting. Within any workplace, neighbourhood or peer group, there are likely to be different understandings of masculinity.*

It is never the case that any individual has a unitary identity. There always resides conglomeration of different facets that make us what we are. Masculine identities are never static and they will always remain an extremely fluid and dynamic entities. Certain identities make us feel apologetic at certain times and proud at other times. Men often feel the need to behave in the ways that have been prescribed to go along with the identities they have not chosen for themselves.

## **II: Religion and Ritual**

Religion is a type of worldview; a collective picture of reality created by members of a society, and exists in many forms. As time passes and cultures change, religions evolve and change as well.

The formation of identities through religion and cultures of masculinity is a prevalent feature of almost all religions. Religious solidarities are often mobilized through appeals to a shared masculinity. Here, rituals, both religious and secular, play a crucial role as storehouses of masculine cultures. There is an urgent need to understand the actual processes of the making of masculine identity linked to the religious sphere. In responding to globalization, religious symbols adapt and reinvent religious identities. Much of this adaptation is powered by large-scale violence, primarily among men.

Rituals and their association with religion may be divided in four categories, namely: it must be a repetitive social practice, it must be set off from the routines of day to day life, it must follow some sort of ritual schema, and it must be encoded in myth. Ritual often has its roots in myth and religion, tying itself to ancient practices between the divine and humans. However, a ritual does not have to be religious in nature; graduation ceremonies and birthday parties are rituals as well. Religion can be defined as concepts or ideas and the practices associated with them. These practices hypothesize reality beyond that which is instantly available to the senses.

### ***Religious basis of gender divisions***

The public expression of religious symbols is the background against which many political formations take shape. The manner of expression of these symbols prefaces the issue of gender by linking it to the gendering of the nation, i.e. how national identity and gender become linked contexts. Of special importance here is the way religion survives in the guise of new beliefs and new representations, while simultaneously expressing and reinforcing older gender norms and identities.

Religion, culture and their practice in rituals are related to patriarchy in the way that they reflect patriarchies and are used to maintain patriarchal structures. Articulations of patriarchy vary in different cultures and religions across time and space. Nevertheless, cultures & religions privilege 'masculinities' while subordinating 'femininities'. Also added, cultures and religions rely on specific masculinities & femininities to reproduce themselves which is more often than not accomplished through violence.

### ***Religiosity and the congregation of men***

A comparative understanding of contemporary religion must revolve around the question of how socio-political and gendered differences function. Contemporary religiosity, whose contours are more mobile and unpredictable than before, has revealed itself as one of the most decisive factors in the constitution of all cultural identity. The one element that this religiosity shows is the crucial importance of congregations in maintaining the religiosity and disseminating its message. Almost all these congregations (mainly communities of men) are tied together by ideas of sacrifice, martyrdom, altruistic suicide. A focus on the making of congregations could us understand how masculine identities might be constructed through ideas of socio-cultural differences, and how cultural differences inhibit the processes of socio-cultural integration.

### ***Violence and the use of religious symbols***

The nostalgia for a culturally homogeneous society, for a strict separation between men and women in the public, for a close and literal reading of canonical texts, affects not only the possibilities of public dissent, but also supplies the normative basis of cultural separatism. When allied with the procedures of the state such separatism condones, if not sanctions, pogroms against religious minorities. The move towards homogeneity is made through the vehicle of religious symbols and it becomes important to investigate the scope of such symbols.

Hate literature is one method by which people of one community are mobilised against another. Hate literature arouses public sentiments of rage and aggression, especially those of men in by appealing to their masculinity and is pivotally used in mobilizing the masses before and during communal unrest.

According to Dr. Deepak Mehta, “actions and narrative situations described in this literature do not remain fixed within the discursive boundaries of a particular text. Rather, there is a multiplication effect as stories about these books are carried into conversations, become subjects of political speeches, and are transformed into political actions of protest and sectarian slogans. This multiplication forms the bedrock of riot speech and is the linguistic

counterpart of practices of violence between Hindus and Muslims. It is not uncommon to see that even after the events around the publication of a particular book, exhibition or cartoon have lost their immediate salience, they can reappear in new contexts. This dispersion and multiplicity, both spatial and temporal, is often a characteristic of the hate literature. What is marked in this literature is the conflation of the identities of Muslim and Pakistani and the simultaneous expression of anxieties about nationalism and masculinity.”

As a circuit of ideas on and about particular groups of people, hate literature steps across various boundaries – of religion, masculinity and the nation and puts them together through a series of effects. Thus public pieces like *Vishwasghat*, *Mazhab Ka Danka*, *Saamna*, *Rangila Rasool* seemed to be texts full of history and emotional intensity, that sought to evoke notions of masculinity amongst their respective target audiences in order to awaken them to protect their masculine honour, and safeguard their religion which was in crisis due to infiltrations from the other aggressive religious entities. Common to these provocative literature pieces was a strong undercurrent of sexuality. It seemed to be the way of men to keep silent about their private women in their public writings. Instead, the enemy was made feminine, or at any rate emasculated. The complex of the women struck a sensitive note in both Hindu and Muslim authors. At stake was the purity and integrity of his woman (sister, wife, mother, motherland).

In their comments about women and prostitutes in particular, Hindu and Muslim male writers were able to find some common ground. Their shared ‘maleness’ seemed to be the soundest basis for overcoming otherwise unbridgeable religious and political differences. In the attempt to construct masculinity by asserting religious community, both Hindus and Muslims imagined the other religion’s woman as sexually available or worthy of domesticating.

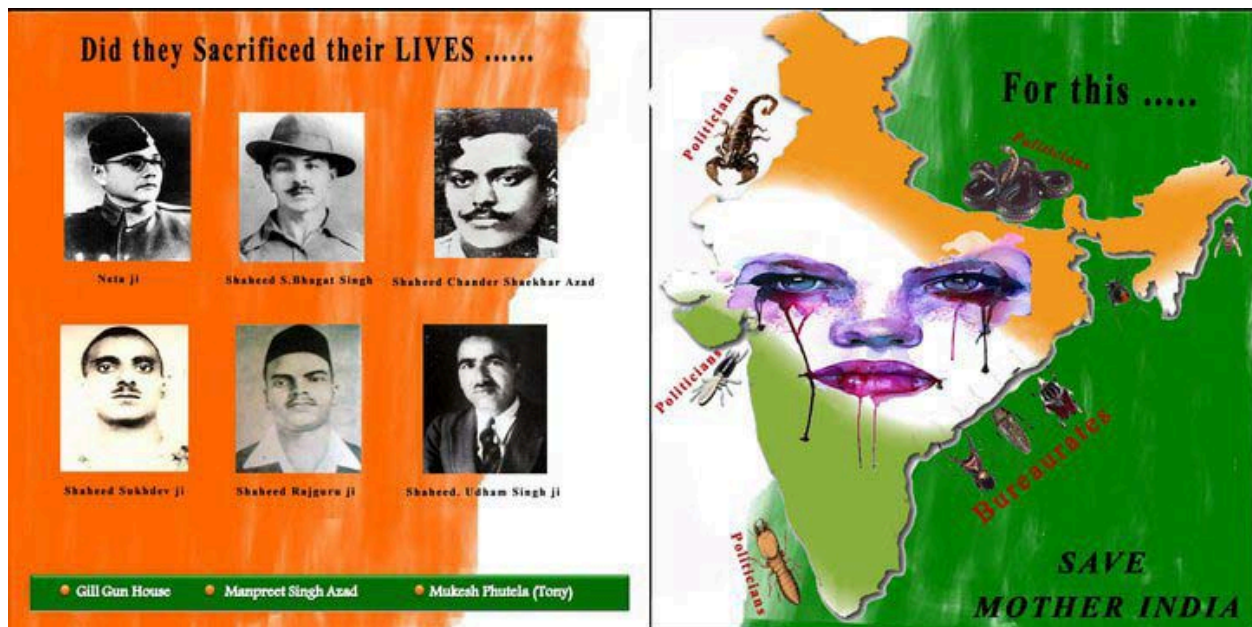
As Dr. Mehta argues, “the passions on which such literature stood and continues to stand, revealed the promise built in hatred... It has a limitless ability of provoking new rounds of discussion and conflict... rhetorical procedures of this literature were obsessed by a de-positioned address, addressor and addressee. Authors, readers and listeners were marked by an offense that moved across temporal boundaries. This was done by drawing on the resources

of the religious. In this sense, it was almost as if this literature signalled an apocalyptic sensibility inscribed in Hindu-Muslim relations.”

### III: The notion of the nation, the state and their expressions in Religion, Culture and Ethno-nationalism

It is extremely interesting to note that the notions of the nation and the state itself are gendered notions. While the state is generally considered akin to masculinity – impersonal, detached, rational, objective, unemotional, abstract, distant, and procedural, the nostalgia for a culturally homogeneous society that we spoke of earlier finds its expressions in the notion of the nation. A nation is generally considered akin to femininity- personal, attached, subjective, tangible, and emotional, akin to kinship/family. Nations are often akin to motherland and a Nation is often the signifier of the ‘Mother’ which intends to bring about a transfer of passion.

A poster made during the recent movement in India to get the Lokpal Bill uses this concept of the nation that must be protected from impurity and corruption.



Here we can see a weeping and bleeding ‘mother India’ is beseeching the Indians of today to save her by not letting the sacrifice of the national leaders (all men) go waste. The poster is

merely one in a long line of similar posters about mother India that were used from the days of the Freedom Movement to elicit sacrifice and evoke an emotional response.

Hence, clearly in this gendered notion, nations call upon sons of the soil to protect mothers and women against enemies encouraging the stereotypes of the males as the 'Protector' and the females as the 'Protected'. Additionally, they seek to produce moral and pure mothers and valiant, brave sons willing to die defending their honour.

As Dr. Sabina Saigol pointed out in her lecture, "Morality, Culture, Religion, Honour all become fused into a whole, honourable State or superior nation, where ideas of fixed masculinity and femininity become entrenched in societies in scores of ways. It is in such societies that there is pressure on women to conform to dominant ideas of homogenized 'womanhood' mainly in private spheres and also there is pressure on men to conform to dominant conceptions of homogenized 'manhood' mainly in public spheres. And thus in societies where heteronormativity gets standardized; any deviation from socially accepted norms of 'manliness' or 'femininity' becomes an anathema. It is due to these cumulative factors that sexuality is policed and lack of adherence becomes stigmatized as 'immoral' and comes to be punished by family, society, state and nation. Hence, the diversity & multiplicity of sexuality & sexual expression is denied and penalized under the lie of maintaining the social order and social regulation. Thus all the social institutions too, i.e. Legal system (laws come to regulate sexuality); Education (segregation and appropriation of gender roles and responsibilities /good girl, good boy); Media (reinforcing the idea of binary opposites, gendered subjects in dramas, films, ads); Religion (constant reminder of 'good women', 'bad women', 'good men', 'bad men' etc) also become heavily gendered."

### ***Ethnicity and Masculinities***

A recurrent feature of south Asian cultures is the expression of ethno-nationalism based on the forging of a homogeneous cultural identity. Expressions of ethnic nationalism and linguistic identities are also accompanied with a pervasive collective violence and the cult of charisma. Without exception, the leadership of such movements draws its inspiration from an appeal to a

mythic past based on masculinised cultures. The region offers a variety of ethnic movements informed by a series of primordial loyalties. The significance and function of such loyalties can be explored through the following themes:

### ***Ethno-nationalist movements and the making of masculine identities***

The cult of the leader and the appearance of ‘big men’ are premised on the exemplary figure of a masculine identity. Such examples provide the standard by which group affiliation is maintained. For this reason it is important to analyse patterns of leadership and the relation of the leader to the mass.

### ***Ethnicity and the resurgence of customary laws***

While ethnic movements seem at odds with the secular consensus of modern states, they also force us to acknowledge that membership to a group can be premised upon an adherence to customary law. Across Asia, the resurfacing of customs that were thought to have been superseded by civil law shows the resilient character of local traditions. The earlier example of Khap Panchayats that we used immediately springs to mind here. Whatever the cultural contents and variations of such customs, the one common factor that they express is that of restrictions to be placed upon women and the role of men as arbiters. The asymmetrical effect of such custom upon men and women needs to be mapped, especially its authorizing of gender based violence.

### ***Ethnicity and the persistence of the cultures of violence:***

One of the main justifications of male violence against women is the ‘cultural rights’ argument, variously posed in the idiom of honour, shame, and the maintenance of solidarity networks. In some societies in Asia, cultural rights have been enshrined as ‘customary’ law, while in others, honour and shame have been replaced by civil procedures of restitution. To trace the complexities of ethnic violence and its persistence over time, a comparative understanding of the custom of ethnic group solidarity would be of invaluable help in delineating *cultures* of violence.



## IV: Conclusion

This module is primarily aimed to equip participants with knowledge, skills and tools that help them understand the nexus of religion, culture and masculinities. Through this they can acquire a level of readiness to re-look at and re-form different notions of their identities.

While the domains of religion and culture are separate, they often inter-penetrate. Religion and culture are not homogenous ideas but certainly are superstructures that emerge from political economies. They exist in historical time and specific geographies and are socially constructed, reiterated & elaborated. One of the most important features of both, religion and culture are that, they are both linked to power and are always articulated by the persons in power (usually men).

Both religion and culture are related to patriarchy in the way that both reflect patriarchies and are used to maintain patriarchal structures. Articulations of patriarchy vary in different cultures and religions across time and space. Nevertheless, cultures & religions privilege 'masculinities' while subordinating 'femininities'. Additionally, cultures and religions rely on specific masculinities & femininities to reproduce themselves, which more often than not is accomplished through violence.

### **This module has sought to achieve the following objectives:**

- An insight into Key concepts of culture and religion, its role in constructing masculinities and its positioning in the larger systems of patriarchy
- An understanding of the notions of identity the way it get shapes and constructs in different South Asian cultures and its nexus with muscularity
- An awareness of features of Feminine and Masculine contents in different south Asian cultures/sub-cultures
- An attainment of skills that help participants to explore their multiple masculinities shaped by culture and religion



- A provision of tools and framework that helps to gauge masculinities in order to facilitate participants to look at their self, relationships and world view being men and women
- An identification of perceptions and responses that help rediscovering plurality by acquiring a level of readiness for change.

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**Module 6:**

**MEDIA,  
GLOBALISATION &  
MASCULINITIES**

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**Tutor: Prof. Dr. Sanjay Srivastava & Said Imtiaz  
SANAM Lead: Prof. Dr. Sanjay Srivastava**

At the end of the module the following will be achieved:

- Greater understanding of the key processes that constitute 'globalisation'.
- An understanding of the broader historical background to the current phase of globalisation.
- Awareness of some of some of the key concepts in contemporary scholarly work on social and cultural change.
- Appreciation of the role of media and communication industries in the making of globalisation and trans-national spheres.

## I. Globalisation and the Media

### *Introduction*

One of the characteristics of cultural and communication industries is that they are notoriously difficult to control through physical measures (such as customs barriers). The seemingly un-fettered flow of media messages across national borders brings the role and action of nation-states into sharp relief, making it crucial to understand the relationship between national and transnational processes. As well, media and communication products – integral aspects of the current phase of globalisation – are different from, say, toothpaste and chocolates, in as much as they generate discussion and reactions that the latter goods do not. Hence discussions connected with the role of media and communication are also about a variety of contexts such as religious identity, national identity, gender, sexuality, the family, desire, the relationship between cultures, etc. The following excerpt is from an Indian newspaper, *The Indian Express* and concerns the case of a school going boy and girl in Delhi. The former had, as a 'prank', used his mobile phone camera to record an intimate moment between the two, later circulating it to his friends through MMS (Multi-media Messaging) technology. This article provides a good summary of the kinds of issues that come into play when the processes of globalisation and new media technologies come together.

### Example 1.1

#### *Cyber waves*

*Ever since it first flashed in the headlines a few weeks ago in the Capital, the MMS scandal has been a reminder and a taunt. There is a growing lag between new technologies and our ability to cope with them. The sexually explicit pictures of a school-going boy and girl that circulated through the Multi-media Messaging Service on cell phones, which then found their way to the online marketplace, have raised questions about privacy in times when unobtrusive cameras surreptitiously take pornographic pictures and circulate them without the consent of the subject. Since most recipients of these images were less than 18, what can be done by teachers, by parents, to draw the line? These are large questions. But the high-profile arrests carried out by Delhi Police, first of the CEO of Baazee.com, and then of the boy who recorded the offending images in the first place, raise a sharper question: is the police missing the point, entirely?*

*Only four years ago in 2000, India became one of the few countries to come out with an Information Technology Act to regulate and to legalise e-commerce and take cognisance of offences in the arena. But there is obviously a long way to go before the Indian legal system catches up with the world of the Internet. It is being asked, and legitimately, why the CEO of a portal should be held personally responsible for every violation of the Act or the content provider be held solely responsible for everything that is put on the website. The action against Avnish Bajaj seems even more bizarre given that the portal only provides the interface for the buyer and seller. It can be nobody's point, surely, that each and every transaction must be checked among millions of bids on the Internet. The entire episode will have done some good, however, if some long overdue attention can now be paid to these and other grey areas that specialists have pointed to in the ITA 2000, to little avail. There are issues pertaining to jurisdiction, checks and balances, intellectual property rights, and the extent of liability that wait to be addressed far more rigorously and relevantly.*

*The arrest of the teenager at the centre of the storm raises another set of questions about a system that hastens to punish rather than to educate. Punishment is a more convenient response. And, of course, it is far less hard work. In times when parents need to hire detectives to keep tabs on their children, the MMS scandal is more evidence of the yawning communication gap that may be opening up between parents and children, teachers and children. Young people are being introduced to new technologies and freedoms daily, with little or no effort to acquaint them with the norms that must mediate and regulate their use. Delhi Police's heavy-handed action is no solution. It seems more a part of the effort to avoid confronting the problem.*

**The Indian Express, December 21, 2004**

The above extract also serves as an introduction to the idea that in the global media landscape, it is important to consider the relationship between 'producers', 'regulators', and the ways in which 'global products' are consumed and used at specific sites. It is the latter that generates public discourse about the media and its effects. It is also within the latter that we come across voices that seek to counter what are seen as the negative effects of globalisation and media technologies. Usually, the adverse effects are seen from such points of view as the effect upon the family, young people, 'national culture', and the 'core' values of existing cultures.

***But, What is 'Globalisation'?***

We can understand 'globalization' in a number of different ways. The below provides Let us now look at some of the ways the current era of globalisation might be understood, keeping in mind that the headings below artificially separate processes that are otherwise interlinked.

### ***A) PHYSICAL FLOWS***

This refers to the movement of people across national boundaries. This flow may be either 'legal' (ie. state approved) or 'illegal', and voluntary or involuntary (such as refugees and other displaced people). The search for a better life and the urge to escape persecution and similar hardship is the usual context of this traffic. Of course, not all such movements are for purposes of permanent re-settlement and an important segment within them consists of groups of ex-pats, corporate executives, and other professionals who work in second or third countries (an Indonesian working for a British firm in, say, Saudi Arabia) but intend to return to their place of birth at some point. The mass migration of people from non-Western to Western countries of the past twenty-five to thirty years or so is one of the most striking aspects of the physical flows of the current phase of globalisation.

### ***B) CULTURAL FLOWS***

This refers to the objects, skills, beliefs, and practices that travel around the world both as 'cultural baggage' with people who move, as well as through other means such as being transferred through media and communication technologies. Under this heading, we might consider the following aspects:

- I. World music: Musical styles such as Cajun, Zydeco, Quawalli, Ska, Juju, Salsa, Klezmer... increasingly find audiences in localities other than their places of origin. What is of particular interest is their consolidation as an *unremarkable* aspect of the new cultural contexts where they now circulate. So, the above repertoire forms a part of the listening collection of 'mainstream' listeners, rather than being confined to fringe or 'art' circles. It is this aspect that is reflected in the fact that well-established musicians such as Peter Gabriel and Mickey Hart (the drummer from the band Grateful Dead) have become sponsors and patrons of the so-called World Music. Conversely, performances of Western music are also frequent and popular events in many non-Western countries.

- II. Food: The proliferation of non-western cuisine in the West, as well as the increasing popularity of western food in other parts of the world. We might think here not just of 'eating out', but how the home has also become a site of globalisation through changes in the cooking styles of the domestic kitchen.
- III. Religious beliefs: The establishment of congregations and places of worship (such as mosque and temples) that marks the broadening of the spheres of belief in the west. While, mosques, temples, churches, and synagogues have co-existed for a relatively long time in many Asian societies, this has only recently begun to happen in the West. In Australia, as in the U.S, for example, this has sometimes occasioned heated public debate. So, you may be familiar with arguments in the media, among residents of particular localities, and elected members of city councils over whether mosques and temples should be allowed to be established near to Christian places of worship.
- IV. Languages: This refers to the proliferation of non-English languages at a number of sites: as subjects in schools and universities, as screening of 'foreign' films, and as regular part of many people's lives, such as the SBS television channel.
- V. Clothing and body style: We are increasingly witness to different styles of clothing and their slow proliferation into the European background populations of Australia. This might include, for example, the acceptance of bright colours in to the Anglo-Saxon wardrobe, body adornment that borrow from non-western traditions (such as body piercing).
- VI. New reading habits: the popularity of so called 'post-colonial literature', for example. .
- VII. Foreign films: in particular, their increasing routine-ness in terms of viewing habits.

### ***C) INFORMATION FLOWS***

- I. The so-called information super highway: the information flows linked to the instantaneous and almost unlimited access to information of all kinds: Google search engine, online library catalogues, stock-market information, marriage and friendship websites.....
- II. The information exchanged by people in an increasingly mobile world: travellers tales/stories of immigrants when they return for a visit to their home countries.

### ***D) MEDIA FLOWS***

This refers to the proliferation and consolidation of global media empires: Star TV beams out of Hong Kong and India to many parts of Asia, and you can watch Neighbours, Friends, Frasier, World Cup Cricket, Bollywood movies, and Chinese language news and entertainment programmes.... in villages in Thailand, in suburbs in Delhi, and high rise apartments in Jakarta. However, not just ownership, but also audiences form a crucial site of analysis of this aspect of globalisation.

Think also here of the events of September 11, 2001, and the recent invasion of Iraq, and the role of the media into making these into global events.

### ***E) FLOWS OF CAPITAL***

This is linked to the above two, for the flows of capital depend on, among other things, the smooth flow of information and, of course, the multinational media empires are an obvious example of global capital flows. We are also in the era of what some have referred to as 'flexible' or 'disorganised' capitalism. There are several dimensions to this. You would have come across one of these characteristics of the so called period of flexible capitalism when you buy your Black and Decker Iron or your Sunbeam food processor, your iPod, your National Panasonic TV set, or your Adidas running shoes. For, you are quite likely to find that these are made in China or a South-East Asian country. International capital now flows to those parts of the worlds where relatively poor



governments in need of foreign revenue are willing to provide a 'congenial' work environment for the owners of this international capital. By 'congenial' is meant a labour force with minimal rights in the work place, the outlawing of union activities and the abandoning of work-place safety measures in order to save costs (and hence increase profits) for international capital. Think for example, of the events in the American multinational Union Carbide's factory in the central Indian city of Bhopal in 1984. As well, we should also remember that the availability of relatively inexpensive but advanced electronic goods to consumers in the West is also based on paying sweat-shop wages to factory labour which quite often consists of those with the least ability to demand better conditions of work: women.

## II. Gender, Masculinity, and Sexuality

The last sentence of the previous section should alert us to the fact that there are specific gender dimensions to globalization that we should be aware of. However, 'gender' is still mainly deployed in both popular and academic discourse as a synonym for 'women', rather than as a relationship between women, men and other genders. The landscape of gender is one that is characterised by *power relationships*, and also one where certain dominant ideals of manhood impact on women, different ways of being men, as well those identities that may not fit either gender category. This way of engaging with 'gender' is to foreground the idea that gender identities are historically produced, rather than 'natural'.

### ***Masculinity***

Masculinity refers to the socially produced but embodied ways of being male. That is to say, men learn to be men and this 'learning' is expressed both in terms of social structures as well as in the ways in which men present themselves in everyday life. So, for example, the idea of 'men's work' and 'women's work' relates to social structure whereas the ways in which men speak, behave, gesture, and interact with other men (as

well as women) reflects the embodiment of masculinity. Linked to this is the idea that some ways of being a man are better than others. These ideas about gender are produced at specific 'sites', and these might include educational systems, customary laws and regulations, the state and its mechanisms, the family, religious norms and sanctions, popular culture, and, the media. Finally, in this context, it is important to remember that in all societies there exist multiple ways of being a man, however, and that the dominant models of masculinity are always under challenge from other positions. That is to say, masculinity is not just a relationship between men and women, but also between men. So, for example, there is a particular relationship heterosexual and homosexual masculinities. Therefore, it is more proper to speak of 'masculinities' rather than 'masculinity'.

The ideas of 'making' and 'producing' are crucial to the study of gender identities, for they point to their historical and social nature. The various discourses of 'proper' masculine behaviour – in novels, films, advertisements, and folk-advice – would clearly be unnecessary if it was a naturally endowed characteristic. The very fact that masculinity must consistently be reinforced – 'if you buy this motor-cycle you'll be a real man' – says something about the tenuous and fragile nature of gender identities; they must continually be reinforced. Following from this, we might also say that masculinity is enacted rather than expressed.

### ***Sexuality***

'Sexuality' is also a much broader concept than a biological understanding of it allows.

'Biologism' is the thinking that suggests that gender and sexual identities:

- are biologically derived
- have been historically stable (i.e. the same since the 'dawn of time')
- are 'essentially' about our 'private' lives, and,
- are 'basically' the same across different cultures, and,
- are normative (ie. can tell us what is 'good' and what is 'bad')

To be critical of a biological understanding of sexuality is to suggest that the most fruitful way of approaching the topic is to think about the meanings cultures give to it: sexual meanings are cultural meanings and these differ from one culture to another. Of course, biology does play a role in the making of human behaviours and societies. However, it is important to think of it as the material that culture works upon and alongside it. As one author points out:

*The content of sexuality is ultimately provided by human social relations, human productive activities, and human consciousness. The history of sexuality therefore the history of a subject whose meaning and contents are in a continual process of change. It is the history of social relations.*

(Padgug 1979: 11)

It is important to think about sexuality alongside masculinity in order to explore the ways in which the two are linked contexts, and how each influences our ideas about the other. Media representations, in particular play upon our beliefs that the two are connected.

### **III. Masculinities in the Media**

The media has been a very significant instrument of the circulation of ideas regarding gender identities. However, the media does not create ideas about gender, rather, it represent discourses that already circulate within society. And, as these change, so do media representations. Let us begin with an early example of media representations of masculinity in South Asia.

#### *Fat and Muscle*

Consider the following images of two Bollywood stars – Dilip Kumar and Salman Khan – from different eras:



What strikes us immediately as we compare the two images of ‘leading men’ is the different ways in which the maleness is represented. So, whereas it is Dilip Kumar’s face that is the intended to be the object our gaze, it is Salman Khan’s *body* that is the focus of attention. Secondly, unlike for Dilip Kumar, for the star of the later period, *muscularity* becomes an important way of representing masculinity. What do these observations tell us about the social contexts and changing perceptions of masculinity in our time?

Firstly, let us consider the face/body dimension. Searching through photo archives for the periods represented by Dilip Kumar (1950s) and Salman Khan (the past and the current decades), it is noticeable that stars of the earlier era are mostly represented through facial shots whereas those of the latter through full body shots. Is it possible that earlier depictions of masculinity relied much more on the idea that the man’s *face* as a representation of his manhood? Further, that this might have been linked to the

class (and caste) as significant ways of representing male-hood? The facial portrait is a peculiarly elite activity. Further, Dilip Kumar's face is a 'chubby' one, hence representing that of an elite male who does not have to do physical labour. Finally, the chubby hero of an earlier period could still be identified as male through his association with masculine sciences: the hero of the earlier era was a scientist or a dam builder and hence 'masculine' through being 'scientific'. This was also true of Pakistani cinema of the period.

In the current period, globalization has had a substantial effect on representations of masculinity and it is this that is reflected in the predominance of muscular bodies in contemporary popular culture. The visible masculinity of Salman Khan is one that is linked to the global cultures of body-building and muscle toning. These, in turn relate to the rise of new consumer cultures and their circulation through transnational and national media sources.

Let us now consider some other examples.

### ***Women, masculinities and the Media***

Media images of women also tell us something about ideas around masculinities. In South Asia, media representations of women are most frequently inspired by debates between 'tradition' and 'modernity'. Hence, as one observer points out, 'Perhaps the most important role that television is playing at present is the conflation of television programming with new, globally constructed versions of "modernity" and the changing dimension of the role of community in contemporary civil society. And women are the focal point of both these changes' (Gupta 2000: 61). A key question in media representations and debates is the question: how modern should the 'local' woman be and yet maintain her 'local' identity? In other words, the non-western woman (and, this is usually assumed to be a monolithic category) is implicitly assumed to be the bearer of 'tradition', such that the most crucial battles over the maintenance of tradition in the face of perceived attacks upon it by 'external' forces are fought around representations

of women. A contemporary representation of women within this context concerns that of the 'new woman' (Birch *et. al* 2001: 135). The 'modern woman' can most be found in 'in the pages of glossy magazines which cater to the emerging and relatively prosperous urban middle and upper-middle classes' (Birch *et. al.*), as well as in television advertising and regular programming. As Sunder Rajan (1993) points out, the new woman is usually portrayed as 'attractive, educated, hard-working, and socially aware' (Sunder Rajan 1993: 131). The modern woman is also represented as independent in the decisions she makes, as well as ambitious and seeking a career path for herself. And, being a working woman, she is also a consumer. From jewellery advertising to those that promote household goods, the modern woman is ubiquitous.

While the selling of products is a crucial reason for the presence of the modern woman in the advertising, the purely commercial aspect is inadequate for an understanding of the changing nature of gender representations in the media. 'The representation of the new woman', it has been suggested, 'are also a way of reformulating masculinist ideologies which domesticate political assertions for equality by women' (Birch *et. al.*, 2001:137). For, the most significant aspect of such representations is that the woman's primary role is defined as the self-sacrificing mother and the nurturer of the family. Hence, in an advertisement for a brand of contraceptive pills in an Indian magazine, a woman is the key figure. However, it is what she says that is interesting: 'I am mindful of all the needs of my family, no matter how small' (ad. for oral contraceptive, *Meri Saheli* magazine, January 1999). Hence, simultaneously as female desire is foregrounded – through de-linking sex from reproduction – the act of using contraception is represented as responsible behaviour towards the family: one must not place a burden upon the family's resources through having more children. The possibilities of female desire are thus domesticated through pointing to her 'primary' role.

### ***The Gender of Institutions***

The historic division of social life as ‘public’ and ‘private’ has simultaneously entailed a division of *institutions* as public and private. And, along with this, there has developed a logic of the gender of such institutions. According to this logic, public institutions have been understood to be the ‘natural’ preserve of men and hence have tended to operate according to a variety of masculinist ideologies. One example of this is that the media quite often provides accounts of public women (say parliamentarians) through describing what they wear, or, how many children they have; women’s primary identity continues to be defined through an implicit understanding that public institutions possess (and should possess) a masculine identity. Beyond this, there are even more serious issues, such as the denial of equal opportunities to women through masculinity notions of what men can do and what women are capable. It becomes important, therefore, to explore the gender of our institutions in order to devise strategies if change.

### ***‘Other’ Men in the Media***

How do media represent identities that do not fall into the traditional categories of male and female? And, what media strategies come into play where representations concern those who may have been born, say biologically male (/female) but identify as female (/male)? How does a medium address this context of ‘category confusion’? We should begin with the idea that the most frequent response is, indeed, to see it as a state of confusion: that those who do not ‘carry on’ with their biologically assigned identities are abnormal across a range of registers. Media responses in this context concern both representations of non-heterosexual identities as well as trans-gender ones. In the former case, the focus is on sexual preference, whereas the latter (though sexuality is also a significant context) more immediately relates to the presentation of the self in public life; Homosexuality speaks to our senses of ‘proper’ biological behaviour, whereas trans-gendered contexts generate anxieties regarding ‘proper’ social behaviour. Media engagements with the topic reflect these currents.

The salient representations of non-heterosexual men and trans-gender identities in the media in South Asia emerges from thinking about them as either inherently comical, fundamentally villainous, and lacking in emotional depth and sensitivity with respect to inter-personal relations. Notwithstanding the long history of tolerance of hybrid gender and sexual identities in South Asia, the contemporary media landscape primarily reflects heterosexual anxieties about non-normative identities. It is, no doubt, linked to a number of contexts. These include the significance of reproductive sex and the emphasis on reproducing the lineage (ie. 'son-preference'), nationalist discourses regarding 'virile' masculine and submissive female citizens, and, the (linked) politics of 'our heritage' which speaks of the deleterious effects of 'westernization' upon 'our' culture.

Given the above, how do we understand recent programmes on Pakistani and Indian television that have trans-gender (or, strictly speaking, transvestite) persons as their hosts? Consider the following clip from YouTube taken from Pakistani television: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JUa7JVazj4w>

On the one hand, it might be said that programmes such as this lead to a broadening of representations of gender and sexuality on television. This is, indeed, a valid point, and as the following excerpt indicates, the programme enjoys great popularity:

So popular is the show that advertising rates during its weekend prime time slot are triple that of other shows in similar slots. Saleem [who acts as the Negum] is now one of the highest paid television hosts in the country and is constantly receiving offers from rival channels to bring the show to them.

During an arduous three-hour hair and make-up session before the recording of a show, Saleem was philosophical about the reasons why the show has clicked with audiences.

*"I think Begum Nawazish Ali inspires women in particular because she is a strong, glamorous, opinionated woman who is unafraid of saying what she thinks and of flirting*



*with men if she feels like it," explained Saleem. "Men, on the other hand, find her intriguing because she transcends all kinds of restrictions and plays with their imagination."*

<http://www.sajaforum.org/2008/03/in-the-mid-nine.html>

Are there other ways of addressing this apparently 'progressive' trend on sub-continental television? Staying away from conservative criticisms about 'vulgarity' and insult to Pakistani identity, what other frameworks of analysis are relevant? For example, does this programme also rely on caricatured ideas about both trans-gendered persons and women? What stereotypes are at play here regarding both categories? So, simultaneously as it might undermine the dominance of 'normal' people on television, does it reinforce existing ideas about the 'abnormals'? Or, is the impact of such representations overwhelmingly positive?

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# **Module VII:**

# **INSTITUTIONS**

# **&**

# **MASCULINITIES**

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## **Introduction: The Gender of Institutions**

The historic division of social life as ‘public’ and ‘private’ has simultaneously entailed a division of *institutions* as public and private. And, along with this, there has developed a logic of the gender of such institutions. According to this logic, public institutions are the ‘natural’ preserve of men. Therefore, they are particularly the site of a variety of masculinist ideologies. One example of this is that the media quite often provides accounts of public women (say parliamentarians) through describing what they wear, or, how many children they have; women’s primary identity continues to be defined through an implicit understanding that public institutions possess (and should possess) a masculine identity. Beyond this, there are even more serious issues, such as the denial of equal opportunities to women through masculinity notions of what men can do and what women are capable. Several studies over the last few decades have pointed out that gender discrimination is not an accidental feature of essentially gender neutral institutions that require some cosmetic tweaking but that gender is embedded in the structures of institutions, a building block that informs not only the structural features of institutions through job descriptions, methods of promotion and rewards and management strategies besides linking up with gender relations in other sectors of social life. It becomes important, therefore, to understand the gender hierarchy of institutions in order to devise strategies for change. The following discussion provides a broad discussion that in addition to South Asia, also covers other parts of the non-Western world. This will better allow us to reflect upon our own specific situations.

### **I. Masculinised Public Sphere? An Example from South Korea**

Feminist interrogations of the dichotomy between the ‘public’ and the ‘private’ have alerted us to the significance of insisting that there is an intimate relationship between the two spheres. So, feminist analyses have shown us that men and women’s participation in one or the other of these spheres is influenced by the ways in which ideas regarding gender circulate within them, as well as intersect. So, for example, if the parliament is imagined as the realm of men and the home as that of women, then each gender comes to be established as having its ‘proper’ realm of

operation (Pateman 1989, Fraser 1992). This, in turn, has significant consequences for the freedoms and constraints accorded each gender. It is in this context that this section explores the ways in which a South Korean 'masculinized public sphere' (Moon 2002) has been produced through both private and public discourses of gender.

In a discussion of Korean 'comfort women' (the euphemism for women sold or tricked into 'sex-slavery' by the Japanese military forces during World War II), Soh (2009) seeks to complicate the dominant view that the women were primarily victims of the sexual politics of Japanese colonialism. Rather, Soh suggests,

*the personal tragedies of Korean comfort women arose, in part, from the institutionalized everyday gender violence tolerated in patriarchal homes and enacted in the public sphere (including the battlefield) steeped in what I call "masculinist sexual culture" in colonial Korea and imperial Japan. Notwithstanding South Korean nationalists' homogenizing nationalist rhetoric of the comfort women as sex slaves who were deceived as volunteer labour recruits or chōngsindae, my research findings strongly suggest that most Korean comfort women survivors were not mobilized as chōngsindae....*

(Soh 2009: 3; original emphasis)

Soh's ethnographic research with surviving comfort women demonstrates that there were several contexts through which the women found themselves in the situation of 'sexual slavery' in Japanese military brothels. These included:

*cases of destitute families selling daughters into indentured prostitution, runaway daughters deceptively recruited into prostitution by Japanese and Korean traffickers, abduction by civilian thugs, and forcible recruitment by agents of the colonial state.*

(Soh 2009: 107)

What Soh's scholarship points to is the pervasive nature of quotidian masculinist and patriarchal ideologies within Korea (in addition to Japan) that prepared the grounds for the sufferings of Korean comfort women. Hence, if 'runaway daughters' were lured into prostitution, the conditions within Korean society that led young women to 'run away' are important to explore:

*Their leaving home represented a conscious act of personal resistance by daughters caught between the traditional paradigm of filial piety – inculcated by the Neo-Confucian gender ideology symbolized by “the rule of the three obediences (samjong chido) and a modern individualist aspiration for autonomy and self-actualization.*

(Soh 2009: 4)

Contemporary echoes of the 'Neo Confucian gender ideology' Soh speaks of can be found in other contexts. So, Seungsook Moon (2002) points to specific constraints to women's participation in South Korea's 'expanding civil society' (Moon 2002: 474). These include:

*1) The Confucian legacy that has masculinised the public sphere outside the patriarchal household and mediated individual access to civil society; 2) the pervasiveness of violence in suppressed civil society generated by militant antagonism between civil society and the state; and 3) the reinvention of patriarchal tradition as a way to deal with postcolonial ambivalence toward rapid modernisation.*

(Moon 2002: 474)

Moon does not suggest that the Confucian legacy is simply reproduced in modern Korea in an unchanged form, rather that 'the modern gender division of labour between housewife and provider-husband has been superimposed on the Confucian gender division of labour' (2002: 478). The manner in which the postcolonial Korean public sphere has been masculinised is also of great significance for what it tells us

about the relationship between the state, 'civil society' and gender ideologies. So, Moon suggests that the pre-1988 period of military rule, marked as it was violent confrontations between the state and organs of civil society, produced a masculinised public sphere that reflected 'the gender norms of in Korean society that associate physical violence with masculinity' (2002: 482). For women to take part violent street protests that were typical of the period, Moon suggests, would have been considered 'crazy and embarrassing' (Moon 2002: 482). Hence male-dominated anti-authoritarian movements produced gendered notions of 'proper' public behaviour for men and women.

The post-1988 period of democratic reform has created greater space for women in various public spheres. However, just as interestingly, it has also led to a reformulation of masculinist and patriarchal ideologies. This may be referred to as the rise of 'traditionalism'. Following a period of rapid industrialization, 'Nostalgia for Korean tradition has mounted as material life increasingly resembles that of the United States' (Moon 2002: 485). Within such traditionalism, women come to be seen as 'repositories' of Korean culture, a perspective 'that continues to deprive them of their subjectivity as active citizens' (2002: 487) whose identities change with across time. We are back, then, to the colonial discourse of 'women as tradition' outlined by Chatterjee (1993). 'The politics of reinventing patriarchal traditions and reducing women to its mere repository is not conducive', Moon points out, 'to women's participation in civil society, since tradition dictates that women stay in their "natural" place within the household' (Moon 2002: 487). However, as we will see towards the conclusion of this essay, the relationship between the state and its subjects are not static, and the state is not an unchanging essence. For, the Korean women's movement has secured significant rights in its relatively new 'negotiated relationship' (Moon 2002: 492) with the government.

The masculinisation of the public sphere – through a combination of religious, statist, and militaristic discourses – has, in more recent times, combined with another aspect of modernity to produce a masculinised domestic space. This refers to the use of medical technology to further the cause of 'son preference' (Kim 2004).

So, on the one hand, while rapid industrialization has led to low fertility rates, this has combined with ‘the rise of the male/female sex ratio at birth (i.e. excess of male births relative to female)’ (Kim 2004: 865). Indeed, Kim suggests that ‘sex-selective abortions’ (2004: 872) have become the vehicle for realising ‘the widespread preference for small families’ (Kim 2004: 870). And that,

*as the desired family size becomes smaller, other things being equal, the effects of son-selective reproductive behaviour on sex ratio at birth for a given population is likely to be greater.*

(Kim 2004: 870)

It is, however, one thing to prefer sons but another to achieve the goal of giving birth to the desired number of sons. This is where medical technology for prenatal sex screening play a role. For, ‘Despite harsh penalties and regulations imposed for violations’, Kim points out, ‘prenatal sex-selective abortions have been widely performed’ (Kim 2004: 873). The combination of son-preferences, smaller desired family size and medical technology produced a situation, therefore, where between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s, Korea experienced an increase in the sex-ratio at birth. Unfortunately this is not a uniquely Korean phenomenon (several other countries in East Asia, as well as those in South Asia display very similar tendencies). Additionally, what these countries share is the possibility of a ‘negative health impact on women due to repeated abortions or miscarriages following prenatal sex-screening procedures such as amniocentesis’ (Kim 2004: 876).

What the above examples tell us is that economic development does not necessarily equate to changing cultural and social ideas regarding gender. Hence, while South Korea ranks well ahead of many other countries in the Asia in terms of economic indices (which may translate into rough measures of ‘standard of living’), Korean gender ideologies that connect mechanisms of the state, civil society and the domestic sphere have much in common with its poorer neighbours.

## II. Clubs, Societies; Leisure and Civic Associations

Civic associations such as clubs and societies where people (usually men) gather for leisure and social activities, are often guardians, reinforcers as well as transformers of masculinist ideologies.

How is gender power consolidated through civic associations such as clubs and societies that, either implicitly or explicitly, base themselves upon masculinist ideologies? How are the conjoined contexts of patriarchal privilege and masculinist ideals normalised through associations?

Let us consider the case of ‘traditional-modern’ masculinity as propagated by the TSM (name changed), a club for ‘physical exercise’ for young people located on the grounds of the famous Shivaji Park in the suburb of Dadar in Mumbai<sup>1</sup>. The TSM was founded in 1925, and its establishment expressed a certain tendency within Indian nationalism whereby rejuvenation of the subjugated (upper-caste, primarily male) body was understood as the precursor to regaining *Swarajya* (self-rule). It is one of many such clubs and leisure societies that have been instrumental in the propagation specific notions of masculinity through representing them as part and parcel of ‘nation-building’ and ‘character- building’.

At the time when TSM was founded, it was frequently argued that the depths to which a ‘glorious’ and ‘ancient’ civilisation’ had fallen could only be remedied through strict attention to the physical condition of the body through allegiance to a disciplinary mechanism which had become alien to it. The theme of physical exercise, masculinity, and the task of ‘nation-building’ was, of course, a common one in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in a variety of discourses in India (see, for example, Alter 2000).

In the contemporary period, the TSM makes a special claim towards preserving and promoting the ‘ancient’ physical culture of *malkhamb*, the name given to both a wooden pole and a series of exercises built around it. TSM activities follow a set

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<sup>1</sup> This discussion is based upon original field-work by the author as part of on-going research on masculine cultures in India.



pattern, routinised through the practice of many years: children lined up in their various groups (*malkhamb*, *kho-kho* [an Indian game], gymnastic, basketball, and a 'general' category), the raising of (Hindu) saffron flag, children saluting the flag and then dispersing to their activities, etc. At the end of each day's sessions, the participants line up again for the flag lowering ceremony and with the nationalist hymn *Vande Mataram* playing in the background, salute the flag, and, with a shout of *Jai Hind* ('Long Live India!'), disperse (*visarjan*).

Both boys and girls participate in the various 'physical culture' activities of the TSM, and though the girls are able to take part in almost all the activities, they do *not* perform on the pole *malkhamb*; their routines being confined to the 'rope *malkhamb*', and other exercises such as gymnastics. The proponents of *malkhamb* point out that 'certain exercises similar to *malkhamb*, can also be traced in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century Classic, *Mansolhas*' written by Chalukya (1135 A.D.). In modern times, its history can also be interpreted as tied to the emergence of Marathi Hindu male identity. *Malkhamb* was 'revived' as an organised activity through the efforts of Kale Guru. With its strong turn-of-the-century Marathi upper-caste milieu, the suburb of Dadar was fertile territory for the Mandir's establishment. And, though the TSM does not have explicit affiliations to any political or religious organisations, it has been an important site for the advocacy and elaboration of upper-caste Hindu masculinity. Here, in myriad ways the Hindu male body and society – 'Indian tradition' – are imagined as one.

For the past thirty years or so, the central figure at TSM has been Ramesh Kulkarni (name changed), a government employee whose life outside of office hours has been spent in nurturing an institution that is run on a shoe-string budget and attracts a great deal of support from the local area. Kulkarni is a very particular kind of masculine figure which has an important place in the cultural imagination of the post-liberalisation economy: the *modern* renouncer engaged in the task of 'improving' society, a task seen to be undertaken at great personal cost and sacrifice.

Kulkarni's day begins around 5 am when he leaves his house for the TSM premises in order to supervise the morning session of exercises. At the conclusion of the morning session, he leaves for work from the TSM premises itself. Then, at the end of work, he returns to the TSM, only going back home around 10 pm after attending to all of TSM business. This is his routine for the entire week. When asked what his wife thinks of this routine, he responds that 'she was informed of this before we got married', and is now 'used to it'. Needless to say, for more than twenty years or so married life, his wife has taken on the role of house-keeper, cook, budget manager, and educator of their children. Ramesh Kulkarni is, as he puts it, free to work towards the good of a society that is increasingly caught in the vices of modernity, and unceasingly attentive to its material needs at the cost of the spiritual.

The positioning of Hindu masculinity and the male 'improver' – an embodiment of *tyag* (renunciation) – within the matrices of class, caste, and politics of the 'domestic' needs to be noted here. For, quite clearly the burden of doing 'social good' that is carried by Kulkarni's wife is largely obliterated through the close association of the social – and 'Indian tradition' – with *male* agency. In middle-class contexts at least, such as the one exemplified by the TSM, we can see an outline of 'traditional-modernity' in a time of rapid social change. Among other things, it serves the very real purpose of consolidating a discourse of masculinity that seeks preservation of male privileges that in many spheres of life are being brought into question.

TSM also has some women officials, and one of these is Kulkarni's second-in-command, Meera Tendulkar (name changed). Tendulkar has been associated with TSM since the age of eight, and thirty years later is very much a veteran and respected senior member of the institution. She narrates that during the 1980s she performed on the cane *malkhamb* wearing gymnasts clothes which was quite a 'daring' thing to do, in addition to travelling to various parts of the country to perform. The only gap in her participation in TSM's activities was when for 4 years after the birth of her son, she was an infrequent visitor. One of the 'adjustments' her family has made is that she is at TSM premises every evening from 6.30 to 8 pm.

Initially there was some concern in her kin circles, but now her relatives have 'adjusted their visits according to this'.

Tendulkar has managed, she points out, to combine the roles of housewife, teacher (she is a college lecturer in psychology) and deputy to Kulkarni 'without much effort'. So, here the 'female modernity' that is permissible is that of someone who learns to combine, rather than have the option of opting out of 'feminine tasks'. It is important to remember that even where clubs and societies do not exclude women from membership, they may still be sites for the propagation of patriarchal and masculinist gender politics.

### III. Educational Institutions and Processes of Identity Formation

The other aspect to be addressed in this section concerns the relationship between education processes and gender. There are two key issues we need to explore when we think about the link between education and gender. Firstly, how does formal education at the earliest periods of life – schooling – inculcate normative gendered values and behaviours? That is to say, how do schools teach boys to be 'boys' and girls to be 'girls'? The school marks the first link between the pedagogic programmes of the family and that of the state, and, often (though not always), such programmes replicate patriarchal values. Secondly, while on the one hand schooling may be complicit in reproducing dominant values, it is also important to inquire about the ways in which it empowers those whom it educates. That is, *how* does schooling equip the schooled to effect changes in their material and social circumstance?

Lynette Parker (1997) points out that in Bali, 'Through teacher's behaviour, school curricula and institutional routines, the government assigns the genders the following goals: girls have responsibility for virtue, moral education and service, principally within the family, and boys are responsible for economic development' (Parker 1997: 502). Various aspects of the school curricula as well – books and their illustrations, class-room instruction, etc. – clearly express 'gendered social roles' (1997: 504): So, school books associated 'maleness with access to books... [and

implied that] Modern men wear modern, Western (or military) dress and, while girls may wear school uniform, women are properly packaged in traditional dress' (Parker 1997: 504). Parker describes an interesting episode to illustrate the gendering process of schooling in Bali. The event concerned a teacher admonishing students to turn out neatly at school:

*His message was that the regulation school uniform included short hair for boys and long hair for girls, but that girls' long hair should be contained. Traditional ideals of feminine beauty, of long hair, were reproduced, but as befits both a government institution and ideal Balinese womanhood, the image of girls must be one of modesty, the body contained.*

(1997: 506)

Schooling in Bali is part of the larger process of socialisation that defined feminine and masculine identities. So, as Parker puts it 'in Bali, 'girls are good; boys can, indeed *should*, be bad' (1997: 510; emphasis in the original).

However, we must remember that while schools are site for the reproduction of culture, they are also places where culture is *created*. That is to say, 'Children experience new social relations, apprehend new knowledge, technologies and entertainments, create new ways of dressing, talking and moving, and invent ways of representing themselves' (Parker 1997: 511). We should also keep in mind that while schools may reinforce gender stereotypes, there are other reasons why the schooling of girl-children may be negatively affected. So, speaking of Papua New Guinea, Johnson (1993) points out that 'Choosing to send a child to school involves an economic calculation both in the present and future terms' (Johnson 1993: 197). And that:

*Sending boys to school is less immediately costly in that while parents must pay school fees for boys, they do not lose labour, but because boys normally contribute no labour to the household. Girls, on the other hand, help their*

*mothers with gardening, providing wood and water, preparing food, cooking, and caring for younger children’.*

(Johnson 1993: 197)

Hence, when we think of the differential (gendered) impact of schooling, it is important to link the world of the school to the wider spheres of the family, society, and the economy.

While the state continues to be the dominant provider of education in Asia, it is also important to consider the role of another force in the educational sphere, viz., religion. In many countries of the region, religious education plays also plays significant role in developing and reinforcing world views. So, for example, in Indonesia, approximately 13 per cent (around 5.7 million) of the student population studies in Islamic institutions such as *madradas* (day-schools) and *Pesantren* (boarding-schools) ‘whose day to day operations are under the control of local Islamic educators’ (Azra, Afiryanti and Hefner 2007: 173). ‘In the current debate about religion in the public sphere’, Pohl (2006: 393) suggest, ‘the secularization thesis is the master paradigm’ (Pohl 2006: 393).

There are two dimensions to the secularization perspective: firstly that the significance of religion declines in societies that have achieved a high degree of industrialization and technological advance, and secondly, that the public sphere should be a secular one, with religion consigned to private belief and practice. Within this framework, then, ‘modern’ education means a secular education. Hence, ‘Islamic education, with its assertion of Islam’s central role in the curriculum [is rendered]... as “antimodern”’ (Pohl 2006: 390). It is important to remember that in recent times this perspective has gained considerable impetus from broader debates about ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ and the role of religious institutions in nurturing ‘fundamentalists’. However, for many commentators who may not be as concerned with the ‘fundamentalist’ angle, Indonesia’s *pesantren* pose other problems:

*Their education is considered substandard, underfunded, and staffed by teachers of low quality. By and large, the pesantren are deemed unfit to produce the kind of graduate capable of making creative contributions to the process of modernization and social transformation on which the country has embarked.*

(Pohl 2006: 391)

Given that gender equity is considered a significant aspect of modern life, it follows that Islamic institutions are also frequently characterised as home to 'backward' gender ideologies. However, the situation may not be as black and white as that.

It is an interesting fact that within Indonesian *madrasas* (that is, religious day schools), the enrolment of girls is higher than that of boys, roughly in the ratio of 55 and 45. However, in the general education system at the same level boys outnumber girls in the ratio 53 to 47. (Azra, Afiryanti and Hefner 2007: 180). This is due to the fact that many parents believe that Islamic schools provide a more 'secure' environment for girls, and that since the 'general' schools are 'better', boys should be sent there in order to obtain an education that will equip them better for the job market (Azra, Afiryanti and Hefner 2007: 181). So, we could say that while on the one hand, *madrasahs* allow significant opportunities for female education, the underlying gender ideology that leads to this situation is itself suspect.

However, other scholars point out that while Islamic educational institutions may function in a discriminatory environment, they do not necessarily contribute to the consolidation of discriminatory gender ideologies. Hence, Pohl (2006) suggests that many *pesantren* have not only incorporated secular topics into their curriculum but take an active part in promoting values of cultural diversity and women's rights. Their openness to change is signified by the fact that

*In their educational effort to prepare students to participate in transforming Indonesia's society, many pesantren cooperate with NGOs, thereby utilizing as well as reinforcing the creative endeavours occurring on this level of society.*

(Pohl 2006: 404)

So, the Pesantren Al-Muayyad Windan in the city of Solo collaborates with 'Rahima (Centre for Education and Information on Islam and Women's Right's Issues)' (Pohl 2006: 405) in order to contribute to the 'empowerment of women inside and outside the *pesantren* community' (Pohl 2006: 405). This is an important reminder that not all public expressions of religion need be chauvinistic and conservative in its outlook, and that the objective of 'gender justice' may also find a place beyond 'secular' contexts.

There is another important aspect to consider in this context. Notwithstanding the recognition of the complex ways in which education impacts upon men and women, a great deal of development related literature, policy and activity derive from the idea that there is a *direct* link between education and women's empowerment. It is important to explore the specifics of this perspective. For, 'To a large extent, this connection has been assumed rather than demonstrated' (Malhotra and Mather 1997: 600). A mechanical connection between 'education' and 'empowerment' runs the risk of ignoring those broader social and cultural factors that also impinge upon women's lives, serving to undermine policy measures intended towards empowerment. Hence as Hill and Thay (2004) point out for Cambodia, 'Despite improvements in universal access to primary schooling, reluctance to allow girls to travel is a cause of the disparity in education at post-primary level. By secondary school or *lycee* level, male enrolment levels are double female rates. (Hill and Thay 2004: 108).

A great deal of scholarly analysis that assumes an automatic connection between education and paid work and an improvement in women's position in non-western countries has been influenced by similar assumptions in feminist scholarship that has dealt with the historical experience of *western* societies. This has also proved to be a popular perspective within policy contexts. To zero in upon schooling and work as productive policy measures of women's 'empowerment' has seemed to be an easier task than incorporating the seemingly abstract and complicated nature of cultural

and factors that influence gender power. Notwithstanding this, it is important to explore the ways in which gendered power – the relationship between men and women with the household, for example – operates to stymie the best-laid plans for gender equity. Education is but one factor towards addressing gender equity, it cannot itself stand as proxy for ‘empowerment’. In other words, we need to engage with the larger social context that the ‘educated’ and employed woman encounters that can act as a counterweight to the quest for empowerment. While an educated woman may find paid employment, who decides how she may spend her income? How do norms and discourses of sexuality, marriage, and deference to ‘tradition’ constrain everyday lives of the supposedly empowered – because educated and employed – women? The fundamental aspect is to understand the extent to which women have control over decision-making processes that affect their lives. This is something that cannot simply be understood through talking of education itself as a sufficient indicator of empowerment.

Scholars of Sri Lankan society have emphasized the combination of high social indicators and poor economic status that characterise the nation. So, figures for low fertility rates, high life expectancy, almost universal schooling (with a minimal gender gap) sit along side the country’s status as one of the poorest in the world. As well, compared to other countries of South Asia, women in Sri Lanka have enjoyed a relatively favourable position within local kinship, familial and marriage systems. Hence, customs of inheritance, residence after marriage, and opportunities for education for Sri Lankan women have not been as oppressive as for other countries in the region. Further, women in Sri Lanka had enjoyed greater access to resources – educational, health-related, capital, etc. – than is the case other countries of South Asia. How does this situation translate into their role as decision makers within the domestic sphere?

Malhotra and Mather (1997) provide a valuable corrective to the notion – widely prevalent in both academic and policy literature that education and employment are



powerful indicators of the social positions employed by women. Firstly, it is important to remember that ‘Access to resources is distinct from control over them, and only the latter can be considered an indicator of power’ (1997: 604). However, even in those situation where women exercise power over a particular sphere – say in financial decision making with the household – it is not necessary that they will have a similar say in social and organizational matters. Therefore, an educated young woman in paid employment may well be able to decide whether to purchase consumer goods or not, but this does not translate into her ability to dictate whom she may marry. This is because power is ‘multilocational’: it operates in different spheres – the social, the domestic, the political, the economic – in different ways. Hence, if a woman has a say over social issues within the household (perhaps because she is an older woman), this does not necessarily translate into an ability to exercise autonomy outside it. In considering women’s abilities to take decisions about their lives it is fundamental to consider the broader social and political spheres within which their lives unfold. Hence, as Malhotra and Mather point out ‘The relevance of schooling and paid work in determining domestic power depends on the social context under consideration’ (1997: 607).

It is important, then, to remember that ‘even independent of educational and work issues, there are clearly defined cultural norms regarding the power women wield over household matters among ethnic groups and social classes’ (Malhotra and Mather 1997: 623). Hence, while education is a good starting point in thinking about the kinds of measures required to add to women’s capacities, it is not sufficient, and certainly does not take into account the historical specificities of non-western societies. Finally, ‘empowerment’ should not be thought as an individual attribute: for power does not function merely at the level of individual constraints or capacities; rather, it is exercised through collective and social means. ‘Empowerment’ should also, then, be a strategy that targets collective actions and processes.

For the majority of the population in the South Asia region, the state continues to be the most significant provider of education. The discussion above may lead to the

conclusion that the state has invariably an agent for the oppression, rather than involved in furthering the aims of gender equity. And, while it is important to maintain a critical focus on the ways in which states provision education for their citizens, we should avoid the general tendency to attribute to the state an ‘inherent “logic” of repression’ (Frankel 1983:17). This, as Frankel points out, is ‘both misleading and politically dangerous’ (Frankel 1983:17). For, it tells us little about distinct histories of formation and functioning of different states. It also ignores the perspective that ‘The state... is a site of contest rather than one of permanently fixed ideologies and interests’ (Birch et. al 2001:145).

It is true that state neglect has largely characterised official attitudes towards ‘women's issues’, however, it is just as true that pressure from activists has also affected the focus and direction of official policies. Indeed, there are enough examples of the ways in which state functionaries have actively worked with non-state actors to bring about favourable change to convince us that the state *can* be what we make of it. The Nepalese abortion law of 2002 that legalised abortion, making a contribution towards a lowering of an abysmally high maternal mortality rate, is a case in point. The amendment to the Legal Code of Nepal that legalised abortion was characterised by a situation whereby ‘ from the early stages of the process, key members of the government have played a leading role in facilitating change and guiding policy development’ (Shakya et. al. 2004: 83). As well, ‘effective collaboration and partnerships with a wide and diverse group of stakeholders to support the government in achieving the required changes have been essential’ (Shakya et. al. 2004: 83). India’s Domestic Violence Act (2005) – that provides protection in the case of both marriage as well as live-in relationships – is another example of the results of activist pressure upon the state.

A comparison of Chinese and Indian situations is also instructive with regard to the role of the state. Hence, in India the colonial tendency that favoured secondary and tertiary education (Viswanathan 1989) has tended to persist in the post-colonised period and there has been a phenomenal boom in these sectors. However, data for the same period shows sharp declines in stage wise enrolment, that is, the numbers

enrolling at primary, the upper primary and the higher secondary levels (in any one year) follow a markedly downward trend. As well, the corresponding declines at each stage are greater for girls, and for students of lower castes. It could be concluded that as students progress from grade to grade, for the vast majority of parents (or those in charge), schooling becomes a luxury, and only those whose education does not impinge upon the family's ability to earn a living are able to continue with it. In the Indian case, female children, and those from the 'lower' caste, 'scheduled tribe' and Muslim backgrounds would seem to be the first affected by the strategies of survival.

However, the case of China provides an important example of state action that has led to quite different results. Available evidence suggests that 'the adult literacy situation in [India and China] ...was very similar in the late 1940's. [And that] by 1981-82, there was virtually no difference between China and Kerala [the Indian state with the highest rates of literacy] for the younger age group, while India [as a whole] was left far behind' (Drèze and Loh 1995:2872). Drèze and Loh point to the important role of the state in promoting educational activity in China, and as a consequence, the higher rates of female literacy in that country. Differential state action in China has meant then, that , 'educational achievements are not only much lower in India than in China, they are also much less equitably distributed' (Dreze and Loh 1995:2870). Hence, while both in India and China 'poor and rural girls are the most disadvantaged in terms of participation in education...gender disparities in primary education are sharper in India than in China' (Rao, Cheng and Narain 2003: 168).

Hence, in order to understand 'development' in terms of gender roles, we must comprehend the institutions that are fundamental to all economic, cultural and social activity. These (ranging from clubs and societies to schools and higher educational institutions) provide a complex trajectory, where not all modernisation equates to 'development' and not all tradition is a repository of gender inequality. Often enrolment in institutions such as schools may open the door to better economic opportunities, but not to more equitably gendered relations. Many such

institutions are multi-faceted and cannot just be viewed in black and white terms of uni-dimensional development or static regression. The state also plays a crucial role in such development; a role that must not just be understood in terms of provision of a repressive apparatus or a progressive one, but as an arena of contest and competition.

#### **IV. The Law, Customs and Masculinities**

There are two other contexts of institutions we need to consider. These are the law and religious beliefs and customs.

Legal mechanisms of the post-colonial state in South Asia are a significant site for the unfolding of attitudes towards gender. In both India and Pakistan, ‘honour crimes’ are a significant context for exercise of control of female sexuality. Warraich (2005) notes that though the instances of ‘honour crimes’ in Pakistan – as reported through multiple sources – are on the rise, cases of conviction are nominal.

The Pakistani state’s adoption of the British Penal Code of 1860 with its masculinist and patriarchal biases, and the implicit endorsement by the contemporary legal system of customary attitudes towards women and the history of ‘Islamization’ under general Zia’s rule have both contributed to present state of affairs. So, in a case where an elderly man killed his much younger wife after finding her in a ‘compromising’ position with another man, ‘the court did not criticise the practice of marrying young women to much older men,...and failed to be appalled at the customary conduct of the woman’s own family – who had joined in the attack on her and subsequently disowned her body – rather considering this ‘proof’ of the “disgrace brought by her to the whole family by her conduct”’ (Warraich 2005: 96). Judges, as Patricia Uberoi points out, ‘bring to their interpretation of the law very masculinist sex-role stereotypes while manifestly upholding the cause of women’ (Uberoi 1995:321).

The manner in which a community's body of customs can be part of its system of gendered power can be explored through looking at the institution of guthi among the Newar ethnic group in Nepal. Guthis are 'place based associations that enable households to fulfil their social and religious obligations through group action' (Rankin 2003: 116). Household membership of a guthi is through senior male representatives and 'commits individuals to social obligations' (Rankin 2003:116) such as taking part in religious rituals and mortuary rites along with other guthi members. The guthi system is fundamentally linked to the 'honour economy' of Newar society and it is seen as crucially important that members of different guthis fulfil their obligations to each other. To not do so, would be to 'lose face'.

While on the one hand guthi membership serves to define and entrench caste hierarchy – one should only marry within one's guthi in order to maintain caste 'purity' – it also functions to institute gender difference. Hence, women cannot be direct members of guthis but are so because they belong to the household. Further, since women are seen to embody forms of 'impurity' associated with menstruation and childbirth, they are excluded 'from the highly valued ritual obligations of mortuary guthis' (Rankin 2003: 117). Indeed, women's participation in guthi-related activity is along lines that most clearly places them as inferior to men through carrying out tasks that the men are not obliged to. Hence, it is left to them to provide the labour of preparing offerings that are to be made at various guthi-related ritual occasions. So, while the 'honour' of guthi membership accrues to men, the burden of achieving guthi-obligations falls squarely on women. Being excluded from a significant ritual life of the community, the women are also kept out of the positions of political power that accrues to those – the men – who can take part in it. Further, the honour of the household – and of the rituals it takes part in – is crucially dependent upon the behaviour of 'its' women.

Hence, women must be careful not to 'sully' the reputation of the household through 'inappropriate' social, cultural and moral behaviour. This translates to a strict surveillance over their lives in order that they maintain the 'purity' of their positions as the guardians of household tradition. Hence, while the social benefits of

guthi membership accrue to men, the gender ideologies of Newar society ensure that women bear the burden of securing these benefits while themselves being excluded from them. These burdens are economic, political, as well as entailing restrictions of personal freedom. Newar 'customs' are not, therefore, neutral cultural characteristics of that society but also specific relations of gender power that privilege men over women.

### **Conclusion: Connecting various institutions**

The relationship between gender, work, and the women's income earning opportunities come to the fore not only during periods of economic expansion, but also in times of downturn. The most significant aspect in this regard is the different manner in which 'the material dimensions' of an economic crisis affect men and women in their role as workers outside the home (Silvey 2000:143). The differential effects have, in turn, significant consequences with regard to issues of gender equity and empowerment.

Export Promotion Zones (EPZs) have been a popular means of attracting foreign investment in many countries in the Asian region. EPZs have been sites of significant female skilled and semi-skilled employment. Further, 'within these zones in general, labour controls are extensive', and in some countries, such as Indonesia, 'direct controls are enforced with military intervention' (Silvey 2000:144). Indeed, it the large-scale employment of women within EPZs is directly linked to assumptions about the greater ability to police a female workforce and those 'about appropriate gender roles' (Silvey 2000:144), and women's abilities to perform certain kinds of work (such as those related to ready-to-wear clothing). Around the world, women constitute between 63 and 90 % of the EPZ workforce (Silvey 2000), and the 'feminization' of this segment of the global labour market has important consequences for the ways in which we understand the gendered dimensions of globalization, industrialization, and 'development' in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Makassar Industrial Zone (KIMA) in South Sulwaesi was established in the early 1990s as part of the process of deepening Indonesia's 'international trade ties'

(Silvey 2000: 145) and the promotion of export-led growth. The period of economic downturn in Indonesia – dating from mid-1997 – was, however, to have differing impact upon the male and female labour force of the EPZs. Rachel Silvey (2000) suggests that prior to the crisis, the young women who migrated from the villages in South Sulawesi to work in KIMA in the city of Ujung Pandang were motivated by the sense that urban life and work would provide independence and ‘freedom’ from familial control. However, simultaneously as the Indonesian state promoted industrial activity that employed a vast number of migrant young women, it also propagated gender norms within which women’s roles were primarily articulated in terms of being supportive wives and dutiful daughters. That is, ‘it implemented development policies that involved disciplining the population along gender lines’ (Silvey 2000: 146), thereby being in-synch with the patriarchal ideologies that governed women’s lives in their home-villages and families. Hence, at the very outset, young migrant women did not have access to a discourse – available to migrant men – that would situate them as ‘respectable’ bread-winners for their families. They were frequently perceived – and perceived themselves – to be doing something that fell outside the ken of idealised femininity. This was reinforced by a concurrent notion that EPZs were sites of ‘loose’ morality, allowing for free mixing of unattached women and men. Subject to the mutually reinforcing gender ideologies of the family and the state, many women chose to describe their migration decisions as a quest for finding a husband (Silvey 2000).

The most significant impact of the prevailing gender ideologies upon the lives of KIMA’s working women came, however, in the wake of Indonesia’s economic crisis. For a number of reasons, the downturn intensified the sense that KIMA – and the urban milieu itself – was a threat to its workers ‘reputation’ as ‘good’ and ‘virtuous’ women. Further, the thinking went, women’s key role – to be dutiful wives – was also increasingly at risk. The rise of sex-work as an source of supplementing falling incomes during the crisis period, and urban riots which might lead to women’s sexual victimization were specific contexts that added to the rising chorus that the only way the young female worker’s ‘sexual purity’ could be maintained was through

bringing her back to the village. Indeed, this was significant among the reasons provided by women who had returned to their home villages. Among those who remained in the city, there was a strong sense as themselves as ‘bad’ women for continuing to stay in ‘morally tainted’ KIMA. They lamented at having failed to live up to the ideals of the ‘good daughter’ / ‘dutiful housewife’.

Hence, ideas of morality, migration, and work combined upon the grounds of patriarchal and masculinist gender politics that constrained the lives and decision-making abilities of women in ways that did not apply to male migrant workers. There was no sense that men’s ‘moral purity’ might be affected by their continuing location in the city, or their liaisons with single women and sex-workers.

As this case study illustrates, gender ideology is crucial to understanding the ways in which the contexts of women’s work are constrained. A framework that explores the mutually reinforcing networks of oppressive gender norms that circulate at different social levels – the state, the school, social institutions, the family, etc. – is also crucial for our understanding of issues of equity and social justice.

**This module has sought to achieve the following objectives:**

- Understand and interrogate the ‘public’ / ‘private’ characterisation of institutions
- Understand the different characteristics of different kinds of institutions, such as schools, clubs and societies, and legal and religious institutions
- Appreciate the key processes through which the ideologies of gender operate within institutions

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