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Abstract

2 Masculinity studies and feminism

This chapter explores the relationship between masculinity studies and feminism, one of the most significant contexts of gender research in contemporary humanities and social sciences. While women's studies helped us understand various aspects of power between genders, masculinity studies has foregrounded an equally significant aspect, that is, the ways in which gendered power operates through the relationship between men, as well as men and non-normative sexual and gender identities. Masculinity studies provides a nuanced understanding of the different ways in which masculinities and sexualities unfold across multiple registers – work, leisure, property, kinship, religion, and politics – in turn, defining and consolidating specific ways of being, doing, and having. This chapter explores three specific contexts – custom and religion, the 'gender of institutions', and relationships between masculinities and sexualities – in order to outline the ways in which masculinities relate to feminism as well as contribute to social analysis.

Keywords: masculinities and feminism, religion and masculinities, sexualities and masculinities

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Masculinity studies and feminism

Othering the self, engaging theory

Sanjay Srivastava

Introduction

Masculinity refers to the *socially produced but embodied ways of being male*. Dominant masculinity stands in a relationship not just to its perceived antithesis, femininity, but *also to those ways of being male* that are seen to deviate from the ideal. It is also for this reason that we speak of *masculinities* rather than ‘masculinity’. It is important, however, to remember that ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ are not simply opposite and equal categories, such that (as is frequently asserted) ‘each has its own sphere of activity’. Rather, each stands in a hierarchical relationship to the other and the ‘feminine’ acts as complement to the masculine, defined in a manner that produces masculine identity as a superior one.

It is important, also, to differentiate the linked concepts of ‘patriarchy’ and ‘masculinity’. Patriarchy refers to a *system* of social organization that is organized around the idea of the superiority of *all* men to women. Masculinity, on the other hand, is not only a relationship between men and women but also between men. Hence, we might say that while patriarchy ‘makes’ men superior, masculinity is the process of producing superior men.

In the field of masculinity studies inspired by feminist approaches to gender, male scholars easily outnumber female ones. This is true for both the global and Indian contexts. The different histories of women's (or gender) studies and masculinity studies account for this situation. The political project of feminism sought to identify, contest, and dismantle the naturalization of gendered subjectivity across diverse contexts such as labour, religion, parenting, sexuality, the state, domesticity, and creativity. The *historical* experience of being a woman has been fundamental to the project of feminism: personal experience has fuelled the politics of resistance and change that interrogates patriarchal strictures. In nuanced versions of feminist thought, the struggle against patriarchy has not been allowed to efface the imbrications of patriarchal frameworks with those that derive from, say, class and caste privilege, ethnicity, and capital. The most significant participants in feminism's project of transformation have been women since their experience of power has been both immediate and lacerating. The sites of production of counter-discourses are those where the effects of power are directly experienced.

Masculinity studies

Masculinity studies (I will refer to it in the singular) emerges from a conversation with feminism rather than either political activism that equates to feminist endeavours or reaction against the historical experience of oppression. Masculinity studies constitutes, in this way, a supplementary discourse to feminism. It is in this context that we might ask the following question: Is it possible for men – produced as hierarchically superior through the processes and institutions described in the previous section – to step outside their worlds of privilege and question such privilege? That is to say, can men as social beings take part in a 'conversation' that seeks to dismantle their

social selves? One answer to this might be of the kind that such conversations also take place across a number of registers such as caste and religion where those in positions of power seek to take part in processes of questioning privilege through engaging with the ideas of the historically marginalized. Hence, it could be argued, feminist-inspired masculinity studies is part of a broader field of political activity. This, however, occludes a significant issue in our understanding of different forms of power and the specific nature of gendered power.

Gendered power is unlike other forms of power in its residual characteristic: we may, for example, eschew caste, class, or race privilege but such disavowal does not affect the advantages of gender; the social learning through we become male seem impervious to the critiques that are directed at other forms of power. Even in instances where there exists a strong relationship between gendered power and discrimination – such as against homosexual men, who might be viewed as 'effeminate' and hence inferior – those discriminated against may continue to subscribe to masculinist ideologies. Men's involvement with critiques of masculinity is, then, unlike other forms of politics in as much as it requires intellectual pessimism: it suggests that various forms of 'progressive' politics have, rather than make gendered power transparent, only served to reserve for it a special corner. This is the corner occupied by *all* men irrespective of their beliefs. The gender of the knower becomes significant in as much as irrespective of all that men do *not* share, they nevertheless share the experience of a certain form of power; while Dalit men may suffer from caste discrimination practiced by upper-caste men (and, frequently, women), the similarity of their socialization as men also engenders commonality. Further, the experience of shared power (across differing caste, class, and ethnic positions, say) makes for specific strategies of dissimulation in a manner that is not relevant for the experience of shared oppression. Hence the difficult nature of the question: Is the gender of the knower

epistemologically significant? This also, of course, raises another important question: Since all men are not equally privileged, are some men (gays and transgenders, for example) better able to engage with feminism? A straightforward 'yes' is not, however, without problems, for it assumes that sexuality is a politics in itself and does not require a detour through other forms of social awareness, such as those relating to class, caste, and gender. It is hardly a remarkable observation that gay and transgendered men, while suffering one kind of oppression, may not be sympathetic to other kinds that, in fact, prepare the grounds for discriminatory practices against them; a gay identity has never been a guarantee against misogyny.

We must, therefore, recognize , the gender of the knower to be significant aspect in the study of masculinities for at least two reasons: first, in order to avoid the intellectual conceit that power is transparent and, second, to explore the creative capacities of the recognition.

Men who study masculinities can make a significant contribution to the study of social injustice and power relations through recognition of the opacity of power, such that even as they seek to undo its effect, they cannot ever fully speak for the powerless; their task must be confined to undoing their own histories. To claim anything more is to dissimulate and assume that relinquishing power is a voluntary act and that the powerful actively seek to don the mantle of powerlessness. Male scholars, through recognition of their own impossible position as gendered beings nurtured within crucibles of power, might be able to take up a significant question within studies of power: How is power made? This is a question within masculinity studies that men – produced through power-machines such as families, schools, and religious configurations – are well suited to answer. The task of undoing masculine histories does not, however, translate into a dictate that men should not (or cannot) explore women's worlds. This would, clearly, militate against an understanding of gender as a relationship. What is important,

rather, is to explore the ways in which masculinities are implicated in the making of 'women' and that which comes to be seen as 'women's world' might itself be produced through collaboration with cultures of masculinities. This is a properly feminist concern and it is in this sense that feminist thought undergirds critical explorations of the cultures of masculinity. Masculinity studies employs insights from feminist thought in recasting analytical frameworks – on which more later in this chapter – in order to comprehend not only the making of gendered power but also the normalization of this process through *quotidian* acts of producing the universal subject of human history.

It is in this context that 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 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.

The opacity of masculine power lies in the constant making and re-making of masculine identities and which, through the processes of reinvention, masks its interest. The production of feminist knowledge will gain through critical awareness of the making of maleness on the part of those whose historical experience makes them particularly suited to the task. This is not to

suggest a 'masculinist nativism', such that men are exclusively suited to providing insights on masculinity. Rather, it is to suggest that an history of the self that arises from the critical historicization of *experience* – seeking to interrogate the structures that gender experience – can, potentially, open up a field of inquiry through a more nuanced understanding of power than the catch-all rubric of patriarchy. The latter summarizes an instance of power, whereas critical masculinity studies, additionally, open up the possibility of intervening in the *quotidian* workings of gendered power through a focus on enlisting the beneficiaries of power in the struggle against it.

Networks and hierarchies

Historian Rosalind O'Hanlon nicely summarizes the key reason for the study of masculinities. She points out that

> A proper understanding of the field of power in which women have lived their lives demands that we look at men as gendered beings too: at what psychic and social investments sustain their sense of themselves as men, at what networks and commonalities bring men together on the basis of shared gender identity, and what hierarchies and exclusions set them apart.
>
> (O'Hanlon 1997: 1)

What, then, *are* the networks and sites that sustain 'a shared sense of gender hierarchy' and how do they act to establish and maintain 'hierarchies and exclusions'? This section will outline some of the crucial areas that feminist-inspired masculinity studies could focus on. While implicitly drawing upon scholarship for other parts of the world, I will restrict my comments to

the specificities of local history and culture that call for interrogation through the lens of masculinity studies.

Customs, religion, and masculinities

The formation of identities through religion and cultures of masculinity is a prevalent feature of our region. So, for example, debates about 'our traditions' (and how to protect them) often sit alongside expressions of ethnic and religious nationalism based on the forging of a homogeneous cultural identity. In turn, cultural identities are sought to be defined in terms of a consensus that primarily derives from a power hierarchy where men's interests are placed above those of women as a group. Here, the 'honour' of the community becomes coeval with that of men and while both men and women might be punished for disobeying honour-codes, it is women who bear the greatest burden – sometime with tragic consequences – of upholding community honour.

Expressions of religious nationalism – represented through notions of honour, shame, valour etc., are commonly based upon appeals to mythic and masculinized histories. In this mythic past, men and women – and hence the society of which they were part – lived harmoniously since, the argument goes, they followed the rules of tradition and each knew his/her organic relation to the other; each acted in a way that was 'proper' to it, biological imperatives having solidified into social norms to produce a well-ordered social machinery. According to such narratives, social dysfunction comes about as a result of different genders (and, in particular, women) not knowing their pre-ordained roles. Hence, in these ways the politics of the household that oversees the everyday relationships between genders becomes

linked with national-level formulations of gender politics. The domestic, then, both draws upon and contributes to broader debates about gender and its manifestations. Ethno-nationalist movements and their gender politics are, therefore, significant sites of discourses of gender power in several ways. For example, ethno-nationalist movements frequently demand the implementation of 'customary' laws that have particularly deleterious effects on the position of women in society. Such movements also contain within them both seeds and justifications of violence against women – frequently organized around notions of honour and shame – as well as non-dominant ethnic groupings.

A great deal of scholarship, both for South Asia as well other parts of the world, has explored overlaps between cultures of masculinity and discourses of customary practices and religious beliefs. The most crucial insight from such scholarship is the modernity – or, recent provenance – of the overlaps. Seungsook Moon (2002) has pointed out that the post-1988 period of democratic reform in South Korea created greater space for women in various public spheres. However, just as interestingly, it 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 came to 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. This aspect has, of course, been influentially explored for the Indian context by Partha Chatterjee in his interrogation of the colonial discourse of "women as tradition" (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).

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 fulfill 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* fulfill 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 place them as inferior to men through carrying out asks 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.

In a discussion of the debate over *sati* during the colonial period (that led to the abolition of the practice in 1829), feminist historian Lata Mani has shown (1989) that, ultimately, the issue reduced to a conversation between colonial male rulers and their male subjects. So, whereas the British argued that the practice should be banned because of its ‘barbarity’, Indians responded through a defence of their ‘traditions’. Ironically, as Mani points out, this tradition was itself produced through colonial discourse. Further Sikata Banerjee (2005) has shown how “the interaction between the British and Indian colonial elite” (Banerjee 2005: 2) produced ‘masculine Hinduism’. The echoes of this continue to reverberate in our own time. These have been fruitfully explored by scholars such as Morris Carstairs (1958) and, more recently, Joseph Alter (1992 and 2011). Alter’s writings on relationships between discourses of celibacy, somaticity, health, and disease and have proved particularly fertile in exploring the place of masculinity within Indian modernity. Of course, the uses of religion and 'customary' justifications to foreground masculinist agendas is fairly evenly distributed across different contexts and the Hindu religion is not a special case.

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 sites of a variety of masculinist ideologies.

The kinds of questions we might ask here are of the following order: How is gendered 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 associations?

Legal institutions in the post-colonial state in South Asia are also significant sites for the unfolding of masculinist attitudes. 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 the 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 for India, "bring to their interpretation of the law very masculinist sex-role stereotypes while manifestly upholding the cause of women" (Uberoi 1995: 321).

In addition, the manner in which gender power is consolidated through a variety of institutions – such as schools, clubs, and societies – that base themselves upon and reproduce masculinist ideologies has been an important area of research. In her study of a military school in Maharashtra, Vérnoque Benei (building upon both Joseph Alter's and R. W. Connell's works) makes an interesting point regarding the life of old concepts within contemporary Indian

modernity. Hence, she says, “at first glance it could be argued that the Pratinagar military school plays the classic role of a site where young boys are initiated into the predominant constraints and expectations of hegemonic masculinity” (Benei 2008: 238) However, Benei goes on to say, “at the Sainik School . . . the body politic under construction contained more or less hidden the seeds of another potentiality, a potentiality most apparent when envisaging masculinity – and gender – in the plural” (2008: 238). Benei points out that, in fact, the version of masculinity inculcated among boys at the school is one based on *Brahmacharya* celibacy (248); hence masculinity is imagined as a relationship: that is, the manner in which maleness is defined relates also to “cultivating ‘femaleness’ ” (Benei 2008: 238).

Another significant institutional site where cultures of masculinity are established and elaborated consist of civic associations such as clubs and societies. A study that explored neighbourhood associations in Kolkata points out that “The masculinist spaces of the boy’s clubs that are part of every city neighbourhood and small locality give the city of Kolkata a distinctive character” (Chopra 2007: 194). “The all-male institutions”, as Chopra further points out, “are accorded an authorized existence; in turn, their members contribute to the collective life of the neighbourhood” (2007: 194). The clubs escape the censure that usually comes the way of ‘unproductive’ activities such as ‘hanging out’ because of the great significance attached to their role as contributors to community life. “It seemed clear”, as Chopra says, “that the entire community recognized the club as a significant institution and was willing to donate valuable resources, like land and money, to establish the club and keep it going” (2007: 198); such is the value that is placed, we might conclude, on the pedagogy of masculinity. What is important to note is that associational forms such as the neighbourhood clubs of Kolkata, though different in form from institutions such as the judiciary and schools, constitute a contiguous and overlapping

formation within which circulate mutually reinforcing ideas of gender relations and the place of men within them.

Patriarchy, masculinities, and sexualities

Since masculinity is not simply a biological state but an unstable process and a state that has to constantly be striven towards, 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. One aspect of masculine performance concerns the suppression of non-heteronormative and their incorporation into a monolithic nationalist myth of heteronormativity. The history of colonial and post-colonial modernity in the region is, in fact, one of suppression and marginalization of gender and sexual identities that did not (or do not) live up to hypermasculinist ideals that were produced through a collaboration between colonial discourse and a native elite that aspired to emulate colonial norms (Omissi 1991; Sinha 1997).

Sexual violence is another significant context of understanding masculinist identity politics. Rape, it has been recognized is more than a physical act: it is also a means of perpetuating symbolic violence that seeks to establish the superiority of masculine identity. Further, in cases of rape in situations of war and other conflict, the act also seeks to assert that the superiority of the rapist’s group over that of the group to which the raped women belong. This relates to the idea that if men are not able to ‘protect’ the ‘honour’ of ‘their’ women, then it is their own honour that has been slighted. Increasingly, feminist thinkers have argued that the manner in which we think about rape – as ‘lost honour’, for example – is itself problematic, as it

significantly draws upon *male* notions of honour. Nivedita Menon suggests that simultaneously as we seek to prevent and punish crimes of honour, we must also seek to problematize the notion that "rape is the worst thing that can happen to a woman." According to Menon, we must question the "*meaning* of rape" itself (Menon 2004: 156; original emphasis). For, she says, "rape as violation" is not only a feminist understanding, it is perfectly compatible with patriarchal and sexist notions of women's bodies and our sexuality (Menon 2004: 159). The meanings of rape that circulate among *men* significantly define the lives of those who have suffered the outrage and a significant task of masculinity studies lies in uncovering such meanings in order to supplement the feminist task of subverting their import and fracturing their power.

Finally in this context, the manner in which female sexuality is conceptualized stands in a direct relationship to the ways in which male sexuality is imagined. So, for example, 'good' and 'bad' women in Indian cinema have (though such representations are changing) historically been represented as the self-sacrificing wife and sexless mother and the promiscuous 'vamp', respectively. The man who has multiple partners is, on the hand, frequently represented as 'virile' and someone who embodies 'genuine' masculinity.

It is crucial, as Joseph Alter (2011) points out, that "the outward expressions of masculinity – personal, political and medical" is also about "an inward orientation concerning the essence of sex and sexual fluid" (2011: 3). Once we come to recognize the conjoined nature of masculinity and sexuality, we are able to explore cultures of masculinity across a number of registers of social life. This is an approach that has provided significant scholarly dividends, allowing for rich reflections on a wide variety of topics, including nationalism, heteronormativity, the politics of caste, gendered violence, and religious identities; to explore the

relationship between masculinity and sexuality is to think about ideas of masculine "self-expression and self-making" (Osella and Osella 2006: 122). That is to say:

> The construction of sexuality, and the discourses that gather around it, have a fundamental connection with the entire gamut of processes cultural, economic, political, 'global' – with which people must engage and sexuality becomes one of the many sites around which social and cultural ideas can be expressed.
>
> (Srivastava 2004: 25)

"Where heterosexuality – marriage, the normative household – is figured as compulsory, gender and sexuality", Osella and Osella point out, "may be drawn strongly together" (2006: 206). In everyday discourse, masculine sexuality has, almost axiomatically, come to be articulated through the vocabulary of heterosexuality and masculinity itself is interpreted as heterosexual behaviour. In this way, male homosexuality came to be identified as 'not really masculine', thereby producing one of the significant hierarchies of masculinity. It is this sexual hierarchy that finds play in debates over Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code of 1861 that provided penalties for 'unnatural sex'. If we consider the case of societies which "lack the category 'homosexual' " (Herdt 1999: 16), such as the Sambia of Papua New Guinea, however, the significance of the different ways in which sexuality and masculinity are imbricated becomes more obvious; the 'feminine man' may not exist in such societies in the same way that he finds representation in others where the category has taken hold (Foucault 1990).

One of the emphatic ways in which sexuality and masculinity become conjoined for the Indian context relates to the notion of 'semen anxiety', where semen is treated as an 'essential fluid' whose 'wastage' has deleterious effects upon masculine capacities. The discourse of

semen anxiety has produced its own categories of masculinity as well as narratives of anxiety about loss of manhood. The various critiques of this concept (John and Nair 1998; Osella and Osella 2002; Alter 2011; Srivastava 2004, for example) have provided ample evidence of the specific ways in which sexual notions produce gendered (masculine) selves.

I have already noted the different kinds of relationships between masculinity, sexuality (male and female), and sexual violence. The broader context of such quotidian violence needs to be located in deeper histories of modernity. It is in this vein that scholars have explored the connections between masculinity and sexuality in contexts as diverse as the making of communal politics through the figure of the lascivious and threatening Muslim male (Blom Hansen 1999; Sethi 2002; Srivastava 2004; Gupta 2005); the "celibate Hindu hero" (Chakravarty 1998); caste politics and birth control debates (Anandhi 1998); marriage, sexuality, and "social reform" (Kodoth 2003); masculinity, sexuality, and domestic labour (Chopra 2006); masculinity, sexuality, and class (George 2006); and masculinity, sexuality, and nationalism (Derne 2000).

Conclusion

A feminist understanding of masculine cultures across different registers illuminates a number of contexts interaction that, in turn, tell us something about the ways in which cultures of sociality and power unfold. Masculinity studies, thus formulated, is the site of both an examination of the quotidian processes of producing men as the universal subject of history as well as a "theory of practice" (Bourdieu 1972/1995) that seeks to uncover the consolidation of structures of power through quotidian acts. Further, it is a theory of self-practice. That is to say, it constitutes an examination of the structures of power within which the interrogators might themselves be

located. This aspect lies at the heart of the necessarily fraught – but productive – relationship between it and feminist theory and politics. The self-practice, as I refer to it, can only, however, become political practice through building upon the various scholarly and activist contexts outlined in this chapter. It is this that separates critical masculinity studies from inward-focus men's studies and the various prescriptions and exhortations for men to 'improve' themselves through discovering their 'inner' selves.

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