

XXXVI

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2021

ON ZOOM 6:00 PM – 7:15 PM (IST)

GENDER AND ECONOMIC POLICY DISCUSSION FORUM



SHIFTING MASCULINITIES IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA
AND EVERYDAY IMPLICATIONS ON GENDER
INEQUALITIES

ORGANISED BY



IN ASSOCIATION WITH

HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG
REGIONAL OFFICE NEW DELHI

CONCEPT NOTE

01

This online forum is being organised to offer critical reflections on the shifting masculinities within contemporary India and its everyday implications on gender inequalities and gendered marginalizations. The rising 'toxic masculinity' and the 'crisis of hegemonic, patriarchal masculinity' in contemporary times has made debates around gender, masculinity and power ever more pressing. Masculinity refers to the socially produced but embodied ways of being male, with manifestations including but not limited to manners of speech, behaviour, gestures, social interaction and division of tasks 'proper' to men and women (Srivastava 2012). Scholars have documented unease men are having in recent years as they adjust to the changing geographies within which their masculinity is based (Dasgupta and Gokulsing 2013). As Dasgupta and Gokulsing have pointed out Indian men who grew up around the turn of the 20th century have grown up seeing a particular form of patriarchal masculinity which is being challenged in contemporary times. Dominant masculine characteristics such as maintaining a family and earning wages are now being taken over by many women which has led to confusion about the nature of masculine performance itself (ibid). Masculinity is being thought to be in a period of flux, with the very definition of what a man is and how he is to behave being uncertain. Men are responding by often displaying aggressiveness and sexual domination as a form of masculinity, not just to prove their masculinity but to also stamp their superiority over the other gender. In particular, as the pandemic raged on, there has been an alarming upsurge of the 'shadow pandemic' of violence

against women. In this context, it becomes imminent that gender-based violence and gender justice be informed through an understanding of masculinity and its consequences for women as well as men.

The idea of men being a homogenous group of oppressors, however, is being increasingly challenged and there is growing recognition of the different forms of masculinities. Nevertheless, dominant forms of masculinity are privileged over those ways of being male that are seen to deviate from the ideal. Masculinity is, thus, often a “precarious state” demanding constant corroborations through gender-conforming performances (Bosson and Vandello 2011) and which can be easily threatened by signs of femininity such as taking up household work. For example, during the nationwide lockdown men participating in the clearly demarcated feminine trope of domestic work attracted lockdown memes and humour as it was seen to violate gender norms and jeopardise the possibility to be respected as a “real” man (Chaudhuri 2021). The performance of domestic and caring work has been popularly constructed as a negation of masculinity. Hence, there has been a muting of the figure of the nurturing father within the gendered discourse of childcare and a refusal to acknowledge any form of feminine nurturing practice in an attempt to maintain the boundaries of a male-gendered self (Radhika Chopra 2001, 2003).

Masculinity is a relationship not only between men and women but also between men and men. Dominant masculinity that systematically subjugates women also subjugates men who do not conform to the class,

caste, religious and sexual subjectivity of the mainstream. Hence, some masculinities are more honoured than others, while others such as homosexuality and queerness are flatly stigmatized and marginalized. Similarly, Dalit, Muslim and Adivasi identities become markers that subject certain men to specific discrimination under specific circumstances, for example, Muslims and migrant workers were stigmatised as they were identified as 'carriers of COVID-19' (Kumar and Mukherjee 2021, Nadeem, 2021). This calls for a more deliberate focus on the violence and stigmatisation suffered by certain marginalised masculinities in the public sphere. Therefore, masculinity cannot be fully understood without acknowledging this intersectionality and variables such as class, caste, religion, sexuality, disability, age, nationality and identity need to be explored at the intersection of policy and politics.

Over the past few decades, there has been a growing interest in engaging men and boys to ensure their role in realising gender equality. In particular, the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo (1994) and later, the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995), marked turning points in the manner in which men and masculinities were conceived and placed within the discourse of women's empowerment and gender equality (Nanda et al 2014). Previously, men and boys were often seen as part of the problem and obstacles to women's struggle for equality; rarely identified as an essential part of the solution and allies in the movement. Policies and programs are being increasingly geared towards bringing men into a shared vision of gender equality and transforming prevalent notions of masculinities to achieve gender justice.

It is within the context of these issues, along with several others, that we wish to place this discussion. More specifically, we aim to explore how men and masculinities are adapting, struggling and transforming in these changing times? What are the key norms around masculinity that are resistant to change and result in backlash, confusion, and struggle? What are the ways men and boys challenge power dynamics in their own lives as well as in their communities and societies? What are the realities of engaging men and how does the concept of hegemonic masculinity inform practical and on-the-ground work by those who try to change men's behaviour to build gender equity? What could be the non-dominant models of masculinity that represent gender equity in pro-feminist ways? And finally, how could we move towards achieving transformative masculinities and promoting gender justice in a post-pandemic world? This discussion would be structured around some of these broad questions.

References

Bosson, Jennifer K and Joseph A Vandello (2011): "Precarious Manhood and its Links to Action and Aggression," *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, Vol 20, No 2, pp 82-86.

Chaudhuri, S. B. (2021). Lockdown Humour and Domestic Work: Perpetuating Gender Roles. *Economic and Political Weekly*. Retrieved 5 November 2021 from <https://www.epw.in/engage/article/lockdown-humour-and-domestic-work-perpetuating-stereotypes>

Chopra, R. (2001). Retrieving the father: Gender studies, "father love" and the discourse of mothering. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 24(3/4), 445-455.

Chopra, R. (2003). From violence to supportive practice: Family, gender and masculinities. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38(17), 1650-1657

Dasgupta, R.K. and Gokulsing, K.M. (2013). Introduction: Perceptions of masculinity and challenges to the Indian male. In: Dasgupta & Gokulsing (eds.) *Masculinity and its challenges in India: Essays on changing perceptions*, Jefferson, NC: Jefferson Publishers, pp. 5-26.

Kumar, P., & Mukherjee, D. (2021). Subordinate and marginalised masculinities and the COVID-19 pandemic. *Economic and Political Weekly*. Retrieved 5 November, 2021 from <https://www.epw.in/engage/article/subordinate-and-marginalised-masculinities-and>

Nadeem, A. (2021, February 2). Communalisation of COVID and the Misleading Idea of 'Corona Jihad'. Retrieved June 2, 2021 from <https://feminisminindia.com/2021/02/02/communalisation-covidmisleading-idea-corona-jihad/>

Nanda Priya, Gautam Abhishek, Verma Ravi, Khanna Aarushi, Khan Nizamuddin, Brahme Dhanashri, Boyle Shobhana and Kumar Sanjay (2014). "Study on Masculinity, Intimate Partner Violence and Son Preference in India". New Delhi, International Center for Research on Women.

Srivastava, S. (2012). Masculinity and its role in gender-based violence in public spaces. L. Prabhu, & S. Pilot, *Fear that Stalks: Gender Based Violence in Public Spaces*, 13-50.