



## **INDIAN MASCULINITY IN POST-COLONIAL PERIOD**

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### **INTRODUCTION :**

Indian civilization did not start with Patriarchy but Matriarchy in the sense that woman was considered a goddess and worshipped as goddess. Many examples can be cited from the history and mythology to corroborate this fact. She was considered as the life-giver and worthy of worship. Even Gandhi ji was of the view that a woman should be worshipped only for the fact that she bears the pangs of birth. The Hindus worship female deities even today. It seems when men felt that their contribution in bringing life into being was quite important, the balance was shaken and it started tilting in their favour. This resulted in the worship of Adideva or Shiva, the first god according to the Hindu cosmos. Then the concept of private property and need to continue the family line or tree were culturally constructed. In this way Patriarchal social structure originated which privileged men and marginalized women in social spheres.

Masculinity is associated with valour and physical prowess. We see Lord Krishna as Purushottama or the greatest of men in Hindu mythology. Shiva too has been ascribed as having super masculinity. So these religious and moral discourses emphasized this masculinity and favoured patriarchy. Indian Masculinity kept on changing with the passage of time. It took several beatings by the invasion from across the borders. In pre-British era, Indian men felt themselves 'weak' as they couldn't protect their property, pride and women from the invaders. Britishers sought to feminise the Indian men by setting themselves up as 'Hyper-Masculine' race in the sense that they became submissive and their confidence level went down.

In post-colonial era, many factors are responsible to make Indian Masculinity problematic as well as interesting. After getting freedom from the yoke of colonialism,



they got their lost confidence in themselves on the one hand and on the other hand they grappled with many problems like poverty which robs the dignity of people, caste-system which weakens the social fabric, emancipation of Indian women which was a setback for the space occupied by them previously and above all a number of laws which were gender biased enacted by the Parliament. These post-colonial developments threw the Indian masculinity into a state of turmoil and very deep crisis which had many psychological repercussions because they were hardly prepared for these drastic changes. It gave birth to an inner conflict. It is clear from the above said facts that we should have a proper understanding of the psyche and behavior of post-colonial Indian men because without their participation and co-operation, it is not possible to achieve the equality of sexes. The Canadian novelist Margaret Laurence's opinion can be cited here because it is applicable in Indian context as well :

“I don't think enough attention has been paid to the problems men have and / or going to have increasingly because of the changes taking place in women. Men have to be re-educated with the minimum of damage to them. These are our husbands, our sons, our lovers--- we can't live without them and we can't go to war against them the change must liberate them as well .”

### **CHALLENGES :**

But the Indian approach to this subject is quite lop-sided. It lacks this inclusiveness. Men are often portrayed in black and white and stereotyped as to be violent, insensitive, emotionless and boorish. Government indulges in 'excessive legislation' which makes men more guilty of being men rather than yield any positive results. The media has reserved a large space to cover women's problems at the cost of men. It is surprising that media pays almost nil attention to the problems of men whether adolescents or adults. No newspaper or TV channel has kept space for men to give them advice, counselling or social education. All young boys grow up believing that they are unwanted and the world is unconcerned about them. The young boys and



men have no source of information or guidance for self improvement or to sensitize themselves to the needs of women around them . Either they follow the Indian films or their own instincts or copy the behaviour of men around them which may be detrimental to their personality . Thus it becomes difficult for them to develop women friendly traits in their personality . The constructed social norms and standards are imposed and they are pushed on a collision course with women

Many factors make Indian men a confused lot in post-colonial period . Patriarchy comes first . It is a hard core fact that men are also victim of this patriarchal ideology . These ideas are pushed into their minds and they get fossilized and are put into practice when the boys come of age .It is a curious fact that women, too, though unconsciously contribute to the prevalence of the patriarchal philosophy. Indian mothers encourage their sons to fight every step to dominant social positions and in the process turn them into aggressive oppressors. This behavior is cultivated in homes and remains same outside the home also. I remember an incident when my younger son put a “bindi” on his forehead and my mother-in -law scolded him saying that boys should not put a bindi on their foreheads because it reduces their power and they become weak like girls.Even the behaviour is clearly defined for the children. If a young boy behaves in a meekly manner, he is called girlish. So this thing is imprinted on their minds that they have to be strong and dominant and not submissive and weak. This thinking can be observed in their behaviour with wives, daughters and sons. Statistics are often cited to prove men as domestic terrorists. They are forced to adopt risky life style, do dangerous things because they have to maintain stiff upper lip attitude.They ignore their health and personal well being and in this process they subject themselves to tensions and psychological pressure. They suffer silently and they are accused as being inarticulate and they get alienated from their family members and lose the chances of enjoying their love. Consequently, their life span is shortened in comparison to their female partners. Next, middle class men postpone their marriage till they get set in their career. So their prime time is lost in finding a job with a



handsome salary. One more challenge for Indian men in post colonial period is that now women are also working in cities. So men have to take care of the kids at home and share the burden of chores. In this way they have been divested of their traditional space. Further, no support system has been offered as an alternative. They do not have any framework of practical value. I am reminded of the lines by Sandhya Mulchandani in her book 'The Indian Man; His True Colours'; "Entangled in the changes that have not been at their call or initiative, forced to make changes that go against the grain of masculine tradition, (Indian) men are increasingly laughs between what they recognize as being politically correct and their own self-interest". Next problem is wide spread son preference which is the main reason for female foeticide and adverse sex-ratio in many parts of the country. This preference has its origin in Hindu- "Shastras" where the concept of "Punama Narka" is given. This means a person goes to hell or does not get his Salvation if he dies without a son. Then the social evils like dowry system and lack of social security further contribute to this preference. Then Indian society itself is full of contradiction and Imperfection. It has been conservative and rigid all through the post colonial period. Young men and women are not allowed to move freely by society. They are actively discouraged from establishing meaningful emotional relationship by the society. Indian society practices invisible "PURDAH" system which segregate men and women since their childhood itself and leads to the widening of the chasm between the both sexes. In our society women colleges, women universities and now a women bank are coming up. And the parents prefer to get their daughter educated in women institution because they are of the view that they are safe there. What can you do with such a constipated thinking? Take another example of marriage in most of the cases men and women are allowed to come together only after their marriage. Then they are asked to live happily even after. The chances to know each other, to understand, to admire, to love are gone. If a marriage which is not founded on love, and there are very thin chances of divorce, think of the situation. It will lead to domestic violence – physical or psychological in some degree. Men alone can not be held responsible for that. The entire gamut of Indian

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philosophy , rituals , morals and social and religious practices need to be re-examined and harmonized with the ethos of the age .

Much has been already written and said for women and in the interest of women . Now they are much aware and empowered in comparison to the women of last century . They are marching forward with great confidence . But much has been uncritically assumed for men . They have a right to be heard , to be understood and present their point of view . Our society has been callously insensitive to the issues related to men . For example if marriage takes place , everything is centred around the bride . Everybody is sympathetic towards her that she is moving to a new house . She will have to make adjustment in the new family , to evolve new relations etc-etc. But how the life of boy or a groom is changed is thoroughly neglected . I would like to offer some lines in Hindi to show this change vividly :

एकलड़के की शादीहोगई,  
कलकालड़काआजपति बन गया ।  
कलतकमौजकरताहरपलफब्तियां,  
कसनेवालाआजकिसीका रखवाला बन गया ।  
रोजमजेसेपैसे खर्चकरनेवालालड़का,  
आजसागसब्जीकाभावकरानासीख गया ।  
कलतकफुलस्पीड मेंबाइकचलानेवाला,  
आजबाइक के पीछेबिठलाकरहौले-हौलेचलानासीख गया ।  
कलतकतीनबार खाना खानेवालालड़का,  
आजसोईमेंमददकरनासीख गया ।  
हरपलजिद्दकरनेवालालड़का,  
आजकिसीकीहरजिद्दपूरीकरनासीख गया ।  
कलतकजोभाईबहनसेझगड़ताथा,  
वहींआजसाली-सालेसेप्यारकरनासीख गया ।  
फिरसबकहतेहैंकिलड़कापरायाहोगया,



यह बलिदान केवल लड़का ही कर सकता है

जो अपने ही घर में रहकर पराया हो जाता है।

Today their legitimate rights are being violated in routine without any regret . It seems that now society is going to the other extreme which is not good for the health of any society . The condition of Indian men can be compared to the game of chess . There the king can take one step but queen can do whatever she likes . Some days ago , I read in the newspaper about the sorrow of the king of Kosal in Chattisgarh named Balarjun . He was tortured a lot by his wives , if he dared to ignore either of them . He had heirs but no one could succeed to the throne because of the quarrel of both the queens He wrote a play in which he described his sorrowful tale . Archaeological Department of India has found these proofs in excavation of that place . His kingdom came to decline and ultimately was finished forever . There can be many examples from today's society where man is silently suffering . One day one of my colleagues was telling that whenever there is quarrel between my son and daughter , I always scold my son whether he is at fault or not , only because he is a male child . Sometimes he feels very bad and complains to me that you discriminate between us and favour my sister only because she is girl . What does it mean ? Have we come to a full circle ? It seems now we are going the other way round .

#### CONCLUSION :

One way of achieving the synthesis between both the sexes is to introduce masculinity as an academic subject . There is an acute shortage of studies on masculinity . Masculinity studies and women studies should not be to cross each other but complement each other . It should aim at developing understanding between the two sexes . Individualism can be a another solution of this problem . We can view men and women as distinct identity irrespective of there gender , but orthodoxical set up of Indian society may find it difficult to digest it because self – assertion is considered a defiance



of the tradition . So , in my view , we must widen the horizons of our mind to see both the sexes equally . Only then the progress of our society and nation is possible .

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