

Unveiling Implicit Stereotypes: The Praxis of Taming Men in Indian Households in Yadav's *The Anger of Sainly Men*

Devasika J¹, & R.L.N Raju²

¹ Research Scholar, Department of English, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore, India. E-mail: devasika.j2022@vitstudent.ac.in

² Professor, Department of English, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore, India. E-mail: raju.rln@vit.ac.in

Correspondence: R.L.N Raju, Professor, Department of English, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore, India. E-mail: raju.rln@vit.ac.in

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Abstract

Gender disparity is a scourge that engulfs the life of the vulnerable and privileges the dominant one. We are living in the 21st century with modernized thoughts of accepting and normalizing certain stereotypes that were historically marginalized. However, gender stereotypes prevail in the modernist vision. In the wake of sociocultural evolution, we welcome newly socially constructed behavior with a dynamic understanding of flipping gender roles by encouraging words such as “Strong men/women never cry”, and “I have never seen your father cry even at your grandfather’s funeral” prompt to stigmatize vulnerable men in the social spectrum. This continued notion of shutting out vulnerability has become a benchmark for achieving a high standard in society. Nevertheless, male stereotypes in today’s context superseded from being ‘aggressive’ to ‘benevolent’ which again opens a curtain for overshadowing men to act by the social labels. By employing Anubha Yadav’s “The Anger of Sainly Men” (2021), this article aims to represent vulnerable men in Indian society highlighting implicit stereotypes fed by patriarchy to men folks. Using social role theory and qualitative research methodology, this research unfolds the complexities of men’s role in Indian society. The article brings a spotlight on implicit stereotypes among men in Indian society. The findings of the research propound that voiceless men adhere to stipulated masculine norms to fit in the ambivalent society.

Keywords: Male stereotypes, social stigma, Upbringing men, patriarchy, accepted masculinity

1. Introduction

Men born in Indian households are hardwired to be aggressive, and emotionally constrained to nurture ‘strong’, ‘hero’, and ‘tough’ attributes heeding the social labels. Wrapping vulnerable men and displaying mansplaining men are regarded as ideal men in Indian society. Needless to say, the power gazing of men triggers them to retain their environment under guard. In the patriarchal hunch, boys becoming men is a ubiquitous dare. Such a challenge is portrayed by Yadav in *The Anger of Sainly Men* concerning the lives of three brothers – Sonu, Anu, and Vicky growing up in the 1990s. It sketches the inner cry of men patronizing patriarchal conventions. Her novel dives deep into the male sex stereotype in young men’s arousal of sexual fantasy, homophobia, men as defenseless beings, and the art of upbringing men in Indian families.

1.1 Background and Context

Masculine studies as a discourse stem from women’s studies. The overlooking of male socialization from the divergence of the feminism movement lays the groundwork for Men’s studies. The historical development of Men studies can be traced aftermath of the Men’s Rights movement and the profeminist men’s movement. Nevertheless, it is pertinent to recognize men’s studies as a stern discipline considering men’s gendered comprehension in the conditioned society. Harry Brod, the precursor to men’s studies addresses masculinity as ‘Superordinate studies’. According to Brod, Gender is explicit in subordinate and superordinate studies. He implies that having a concurrent understanding of subordinate and superordinate studies opens a new self-consciousness in the world (Brod, 1997). Masculinity in literature has undergone a dramatic change. Observing Filene, (Hobbs, 2013) argues,

Men have not been analyzed at the everyday level to any great extent. Criticism and history have been more concerned with what men have achieved rather than how they have lived. This means that issues such as personal relationships, health, and family dynamics have been largely neglected in literary criticism. Thus, literary masculinity studies concentrate on the depiction of private or semi-public not public arenas, and the way masculine stereotypes can restrict a character’s experience or expression. Critics attempt to open up the narrow confines of accepted masculinity; they identify negative representations of men, such as misogynists, and seek to highlight positive alternative forms of masculinity. (Hobbs, 2013 p. 390)

In "Signs of Masculinity" Rowland et al (1998) point out the complexity of masculinity in literature. While attempting to express the beneficial facets of masculinity, they contend how patriarchy oppresses men owing to historical dominance by wielding control over women in every walk of life. With the intricate system of patriarchy, men become emotional cripples loyal to the ideologies enforced by the patriarchal parent and society (Hooks, 2004). Masculinity in Indian literature is a proliferating study in the late 20th century after the rise of the feminist movement. Even in the Indian context masculinity has no pretension without the social ostracism for the deficient men.

2. Taming/Shaming Men

Saurabh (Sonu) is the eldest brother who delves deep into the shades of typical masculinity. He fears for Papa, is genophobic, and also strives for liberation from his family. Unlike his brothers, he carries a lot of secrets in his life which he decides to bury in himself after his brother Anu tells his parents about Sonu's adoption plans to Mintu Mama. Debating the emotional suppression of men, boys like Sonu were afraid to confront the sexual harassment that happened to them because of the endless mockery and shaming. Overlooking the incidents of men being sexually harassed we fail to notice how patriarchy is treating manhood. bell hooks concur,

Despite the contemporary visionary feminist thinking that makes clear that a patriarchal thinker need not be a male, most folks continue to see men as the problem of patriarchy. This is simply not the case. Women can be as wedded to patriarchal thinking and action as men. (Hooks, 2004 p.31)

Sonu was spellbound when he encountered sexual harassment from an old man unable to cope with his feelings and physical struggle.

The old man pushed me on my stomach. I felt the white flour, the brown husks against my bare stomach. He held my wrists together behind my back, sat on my legs, and pulled my trousers down. Lifting his weight a little he parted my legs further apart, still clasping my wrists with one hand. "It's ok boy, relax," he said. My face was pressed against the floor. (Yadav, 2021 p.21)

Gender polarization toward sexuality manifests exclusively for men rather than women. When it comes to biological sex, there lies a different law for women and men in the matter of sexual abuse, Non-consensual behaviors, Eve/Adam-teasing, and Human trafficking. We are still living in a state where sexual assaults are sealed in the victim's memory. Unearthing the horror of such abuse in men's lives reflects a discrete mentality which to be scorned. In *The Anger of Sainly Men* Anju, who is a cousin to Sonu got misbehaved by the same old man. But this time Sonu's mother, Vicky, supported Anju and even asked Sonu to threaten the old man. Sonu got chills even to hear them referring to the old man. He was too afraid that his secret was caught but after realizing what happened to Anju, he was ashamed feeling powerless to encounter the old man. Incapable of handling the situation, he wandered for a while and returned home boasting and lying to his mother how he bravely fixed the situation. "He said sorry and was crying." I flipped the knife between my fingers. "I told him we were calling the police. He fell at my feet Mummy (p.30). His mother slapped him for lying and got sheepish for his impotency.

The culture of taming men as protectors can be traced back to Vedic texts where the 'Bull' is metaphorically used to affirm virility (Sahgal, 2009-2010). In Sangam literature, the tradition of Jallikattu, a ferocious bull sport is practiced in Tamil culture. Jallikattu or Bull-taming, in the cultural context, serves as a display of a man's physical prowess to win the hands of the women in marriage. Conversely, men who are incapable of taming the bull will not be rewarded a bride and may confront derision for their frailty. This culture of taming a bull assures the woman's family that the man can be the perfect protector at all costs. Just like the 3 Ps of Manhood (Protect, Procreate, and Provide) men are obliged to be a protector in myth, religion, and also in society. A brave man's blood is the best thing on this earth when a woman is in trouble. You're a man, no mistake. (Stoker, 2004 p.160)

In *The Anger of Sainly Men*, Sonu was questioned when he couldn't save his brother from construction workers who retaliated against Anu for throwing a stone at them. Yadav (2021),

"What were you doing when they were beating Anurag?" (p.19)

Papa yelled at Sonu for not being responsible. He further pulled him closer holding his shirt in his fingers to remind him of his duties of being the eldest aforementioned man as a protector, the only shield to guard the family with his knightly attributes. Papa flaunts more about the masculine chores that must be performed to show society that he has indeed raised a man. Consequently, this way of life personifies the masculine to feature his individuality. While debating more about the masculine distinction, the more alarming question springs up, 'What will happen to those men who couldn't protect themselves?' As one would expect the only thing left for men who have no protection guard will be shamed if he is not tamed. This constant notion of challenging masculine identity from one who is unable to protect is a rise of embedded social culture.

2.1 Sexual Competence

Sexual awakening in the Indian context is always a frowned-upon discourse never attuned publicly although, people are coming out of the closet lately. When it comes to sexuality, the male is anticipated to master sex to prove themselves worthy of being a man as per the traditional social stereotypes. Men navigating the sexual drive outside the family spectrum are likely to be inundated with desires owing to the lack of sexual comprehension. In the novel, Sonu feels dejected to learn sexual lessons from his brother Anu every night. The thought of being inept juxtaposed with his brother left him sleepless. So, he decided that he would learn sex education from his friend Mailk who, on the contrary, guided him to train his potentiality with a dog.

(Yadav, 2021) "I achieved my first intentional ejaculation with Brownie. The guilt and shame came later. I forced myself on Brownie, the friendly street bitch, to experience an erection that would outlast all of Anu's erections. I imagined telling the colorful details to Anu. For once, I would have done something risky, something that would make Anu look tame, something deserving of the title of an elder brother. A man who did things." (p.87)

Upon navigating the activation of hormones in masculine roles Eagly & Wood point out that testosterone is especially relevant when, due to personal identities and social expectancies people experience social interactions as dominance contests. (Eagly & Wood, 2012 p.468)

Bell hook expresses how men are conditioned to act out crazy if they don't perform sex. She explicates,

Little boys learn early in life that sexuality is the ultimate proving ground where their patriarchy masculinity will be tested. They learn early that sexual desire should not be freely expressed and that females will try to control male sexuality. Hence the underlying message boys receive about sexual acts is that they will be destroyed if they are not in control, exercising power. (Hooks, 2004 p. 67)

Unraveling sexual tenets in Indian families, the constant denigration of polarizing sexes opens a spatial matrix for men and women. In the chapter, 'We 2 Our 2', we are introduced to Surya, the son of Sonu who made his classmate pregnant. The daughter's father claims a lakh for an abortion. Taken aback, Sonu reached home thrashing his son for impregnating a girl. Papa (Sonu's father) raises his voice and adjourns the brawl to handle it in the morning. The next day, Papa interrogates the situation only to dismiss the whole fuss as a silly mistake. He was proud that his grandson had become a man showing zero concern towards the impregnated girl. (Yadav, 2021) "Papa laughed. "You are in a hurry to be a man, are you?" Papa looked at me. "He hasn't even got his beard and look at him!" "Sonu's son is like Anu", said Papa to Mummy, amused by the details. Mummy giggled (95)

It is saddening to notice how gender disparity begins from the patriarchal parents so nefariously fixed with the cultural and social patterns. Men enacting masculinity articulate impulsive sex drive as an epitome of male power. Donning on the convention of a patriarchal culture that sees the penis as a 'potential weapon' which bell hooks describe as the psychology of rape culture, interprets further,

Boys learn that they should identify with the penis and the potential pleasure erections will bring, while simultaneously learning to fear the penis as though it were a weapon that could backfire, rendering them powerless, destroying them. Hence the underlying message boys receive about sexual acts is that they will be destroyed if they are not in control, exercising power. (Hooks, 2004 p. 67)

Patriarchy instills in men the need to be rash, and tough especially while sensing their sexual stimulation. Sonu was disheartened upon learning that his brother was a rival even while competing for sexual potency. This notion of amplifying sexual potency in equal terms with masculine identity is a sign of claiming a masculine trophy in society. However, this achievement of masculinity is projected from the parents' words and deeds. When Sonu interrogates his son's audacious behavior of getting a girl pregnant, Papa is elated with joy and renounces Sonu's son is like his brother Anurag.

Therefore, patriarchy promotes coercing sexual repression devised by the parents.

2.2 Patriarchal Father

From the evolving paradigms of fatherhood, the painting of a stoic father with a patriarchal mindset takes a subtle yet formidable challenge to tackle. The genesis of fatherhood inclines emotional suppression with an interplay of despotism often figured as the specimen of psychological violence. The undue persuasion entrenched upon the father to horrify his son anticipates pervading social norms in all facets of life. Anurag, brother to Sonu wanted to be a son, his father likes. However, he turned out to be a widower, hedonistic and playful. (Yadav, 2021)

"You feel guilt for not being the man you want to be, your papa wanted you to be. You feel," he paused, searching for a word, "like underground, underground, you feel like a rat, man!" (p.106)

The novel has four narrators recounting their life stories from varied angles. When it comes to describing Papa, though, all of the narrations are indistinguishable. Papa demonstrates authority by patrolling all the affairs of the family be it asking his son to seek medical aid for a male heir or to investigate his grandson's unlawful involvement in inseminating a girl, Papa holds the thread of the family firmly tethered by social standards. Sonu often wonders how Papa wields his masculinity to influence fear over respect, control over suppression, and protection over unveiling vulnerability. Upon inquiring about his son's unlawful actions, Sonu resents his masculinity when he couldn't be a man enough to his son, "I wondered why I couldn't terrify my son the way his grandfather did. How is it that even a beating from me didn't move him to tears last night?" (p.94). bell hooks express how patriarchal fathers weaponize violence, 'Most patriarchal fathers in our nation do not use physical violence to keep their sons in check; they use various techniques of psychological terrorism, the primary one being the practice of shaming. Patriarchal fathers cannot love their sons because the rules of patriarchy dictate that they stand in competition with their sons, ready to prove that they are the real man, the one in charge' (Hooks, 2004 p.45-46).

The silhouette of traditional fatherhood renounces the bond between a child and a father thereby leading to myriad effects on the children's psychological, behavioral, and cognitive development. Concerning social development, children with warm fathers possess good relationships with their peers (Baker et al., 2010). However, Indian fathers were deprived of this comfortableness intending to be desired and feared (Connell, 2005). When negotiating paternal involvement in families, men are more pleased with their life when

involved and aspires to be loving fathers than mere provider (Behson & Robbins, 2016). Patriarchal fathers indulging in inbound social stratification will not be magnanimous masculine. Dismantling the convention of accepted fatherhood creates an impact on how their inner masculinity is perceived.

2.3 Social Construction

Gender roles are assigned to us based on the biological determination that leads us to act in a certain way that is considered 'masculine' and 'feminine'. The social perception of gender is projected in two ways which (Bakan, 1966) labeled as agentic and communal. Men are taught to be dominant, authoritative, and homophobic which are known as agentic. Women, with kind and emotional attributes, bestow communal labels. The social role theory encompasses differences and similarities in sex that cause gender stereotypes, and physical differences in society. With correspondence bias on a whim, what Gilbert and Malone (1955) refer to as an observed behavior based on their cognitive characteristics. Gender roles are bound to socialization and social construction in society (Rangel & Keller, 2011) relating to essentialism. Drawing the spectrum of masculine stereotypes, it is vital to comprehend how men are longer an assailant but contingent and powerless. Concerning the cultural and social changes in the postfeminist era, men are viewed as the objects of the gaze of women and of other men (Nye, 2005).

Following men's issues, men are always neglected by the negative oppressions of society thereby undermining their sufferings and feelings. Rutherford and Chapman (1996) define two types of men which he calls, "Retributive Man" and "New Man". The former represents men patronizing traditional norms imbibing tough masculinity. The latter is the contemporary men with nurturing and kind qualities. Ever since the popularization of the fiction of men written by women, emotionally open masculinity started making a transition in society. Men parade women into the limelight demonstrating chivalric and benevolent personalities whilst opening doors for new socialization. Indeed, gender stereotypes have changed with the rise of women's occupational labor force (Blau et al., 2012) into every profession that offers privilege among male-dominated fields. However, it is important to emphasize how stereotypes in society have shifted differently for men and women in the modern epoch. Masculine stereotypes have been transfigured from aggressive to benevolent, while women's stereotypes have transformed from being perceived as communal to competence. As Judith Kegan Gardiner (2002) expresses, eliminating the intricate fabric of society will be a rigorous force as society is systematically layered into power structures, identity, and cultural beliefs.

Yadav illustrates the social pressures surrounding sexuality through Nikhil and Anurag's friendship. Homosexuality in Indian families leaves a disparaging look within and outside the societal terrain. Nevertheless, the mushrooming of homosexuality in India has triggered gay culture to deconstruct the lives of people to accept, support, and be esteemed for their sexual orientation. Sadly, this is not the state of Anurag. Nikhil and Anurag are hostel mates studying at IIT. Anurag decides to stay in Nikhil's home for a summer holiday. However, Nikhil harbors a strong detest for lodging at his home due to his father Murthy, a professor at IIT. The reason for his aversion is Murthy being a homosexual person. When Anurag discovers Murthy is a homosexual person, he chooses to sever all the connections from him. Fearing his friend Nikhil might also be a homosexual person, he decides to distance himself by dropping an anonymous complaint to relocate different room in the hostel. The irrational fear Anurag cultivates here is because of the labeling. He was afraid that he would be a laughingstock if anyone happened to know that he was a friend of a homosexual person. And this fear is the outcome of implicit stereotypes fed by patriarchal families.

Contextualizing cultural homophobia through Anderson's vantage point, the stemming of homosexual identity is palpable with inclusive masculinity. With the decline of homophobia and the transition in social roles, masculinity ascribes more to a feminine code of benevolence by blurring the lines between feminine and masculine attributes (Anderson, 2010). This further promotes heterosexism and homosexuality in a tangible place. With the cultural acceptance of the shift in masculine roles, inclusive masculinity still refutes stereotypes that can never be eradicated. Anderson expresses,

I desire to be clear; a culture of diminished homophobia does not necessarily lead to men's utopia. For example, heterosexual men will still maintain hegemonic dominance. Heterosexism is an independent and unrelated variable for the operation of inclusive masculinities. In other words, men can still assume one another heterosexual, while still being inclusive. (2010, p.98)

3. Conclusion

Gender studies have evolved with a myriad of resistance from feminist, queer theory, and masculinity. With the rise of transition in women's roles and the increase in occupational equity, the forthcoming hurdle lies in role asymmetries as society creates equal forums for every gender (Eagly & Wood, 2012). However, the traditional social role still imbues the preconceived notions with a fresh transgression. The apex of social justice can be accomplished with the transforming perception of masculinity from an indispensable history predominated by men solely to intensify the reconfiguration of a new society (Hobbs, 2013)

The Anger of Saintly Men has an unembellished tone of masculine characters fighting for the identity the society envisages. From expected to accepted masculinity, the deconstruction of gender has played a vital role in the shift in the power dynamics. Nonetheless, it is astounding to cognize that stereotypes towards branding men for their valor, meekness, and benevolence persist despite the social progression. Needless to say, masculine stereotypes are committed inadvertently from family circles making it difficult to promote diverse opinion that embodies the deep bedrock of ingrained culture and history. The research findings discover the duality of men oscillating between bravery and benevolence along with the coping mechanism fostered by patriarchal parents to overcome vulnerability while also reflecting the conscious perception of implicit stereotypes perpetuated by powerful biases among the gender. Although the novel faces

many other areas of victim-blaming and religious hypocrisy, this research foreshadows merely the gendered assortment of the world.

Dismantling masculine stereotypes challenges more to a nuanced expression of new stereotypes by reversing gender roles (occupational, household context) in which men are envisioned to accelerate nurturing traits such as being a protector and also as an indomitable masculine that extinguishes vulnerable and strong qualities. Women, on the other hand, are more encouraged to manifest masculine traits acquiring emotionally impaired traits such as shedding no tears to exemplify strong persona, assertiveness, chivalric, and dominance. Eagly et al (2020) conducted a public poll to examine trends in gender stereotypes in the United States by analyzing data from over 30,000 participants. The study shows that “There is a clear increase in the ascription of communion to women relative to men but a lack of change in agency. Although women also gained in competence relative to men, belief in competence equality have increased over time as well” (2020, p. 11) While dispelling benevolent stereotypes in men can be positive, it is crucial to recognize that enforcing anyone to act in a certain way promotes stereotypes universally merely endorsing an inequitable society. As the act of upbringing harbors the acquisition of behavior germinating from the implicit feeding of patterns, it is imperative to cherish masculinity in such a way that divulges a new world. Enveloping inclusive masculinity, the stronger and more benevolent manliness creates an authentic man without limiting their choices to live.

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