



CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITIES IN INDIA

# CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITIES IN INDIA

Executive Summary



# CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITIES IN INDIA

Executive Summary



Written by Maraa, a media and arts collective

Supported by EdelGive Foundation



Written by Angarika G  
Edited by Niveditha Menon  
Research by Angarika G, Anushi Agrawal, Ekta M, Ram Bhat  
(Maraa, a media and arts collective)  
Paintings by Rumi Harish  
Design Concept by Ekta M  
Design & Layout by Ishita Debnath Biswas

# Acknowledgements

To the EdelGive Foundation, for trusting our intent and supporting this study, which we hope, will reinvigorate thinking and action around masculinity.

To our advisory board, Aparna Uppaluri, Harish Sadani, Maya Sharma, and Rekha Raj, for their guidance, conceptual rigour, and patience in reviewing drafts of the study and pushing us to think critically and innovatively.

To our co-researchers and writers, for opening up difficult and fragile parts of themselves, family histories and community contexts, in the course of investigating 'masculinities'. The research would not have been possible without their trust, generosity, and self-criticality, which has lent the study its unique vocabulary and perspectives.

To Rekha Raj, Manak Matiyani, Rahul Roy, Rumi Harish, and Sunil Mohan for pushing us to think beyond our comfort zone. They have made invaluable contributions to each section, drawing from lived experience and insights from work on the ground.

To Madhu Bhushan, Pramada Menon and Manisha Gupte for sharing valuable reflections from their respective journeys as feminists and their critical and nuanced perspectives for the future of work on masculinities.

To Nidhi Kinhal, Ketan Jain and Mohimarnab Biswas for their support in conducting interviews, collating data, critically reviewing drafts, and engaging in lively debates around the content of the study.

To Niveditha Menon for editing the study with incisiveness and precision, ensuring that the intent of the study speaks clearly and emphatically.

To Rumi Harish, whose paintings don't prescribe to the social constructs of gender, allowing us to experience different shades and textures of masculinity.

To all the organizations that were interviewed for this study, for their willingness to participate and their honest and critical reflections.

We hope this study can inform and strengthen work on the ground, and we look forward to future collaborations, toward a shared goal of gender justice and equality.



# Contents

Introduction: Why Study Masculinity	1
Existing approaches to masculinities in the development sector	7
Reimagining work on Masculinities	13
Moving Ahead	17
Constructions of Masculinity in Everyday life	24
Conclusion	35



# INTRODUCTION

## Why study Masculinity?

The motivation for this study comes from several years of work with women's rights organizations. As an arts and media collective; our work involves research and documentation; creative practice in film; theatre and radio, training and facilitation; with a focus on gender justice and sensitisation in different community contexts. We have been working in collaboration with grassroots feminist organisations who are fighting patriarchy by highlighting lived experiences and community knowledge in addition to working with the police, judiciary, health, and elected representatives to move towards a gender sensitive society. We have learnt from these experiences about inequities and discrimination on the grounds of gender, sexuality, caste, class, and religion. This has led us to pay close attention to the intersectionality between social categories. We have been inspired and humbled by the resilience of individuals and communities who fight for dignity and justice, in different ways, every single day.

In the course of our work against forms of violence and discrimination, we have observed the shift within civil society organisations from an 'immediate response' to 'prevention of violence' model. One can say that this shift has sown the seed of work on masculinities in India. Initially,

within redressal and response programs, (for example, litigation, crisis intervention, awareness programs) the “man” was largely framed only as a ‘perpetrator’. However, over time, it became obvious that the rights of women could not be secured without engaging with the power structures that surround her. Thus, within the scope of programmatic work, the figure of the man shifted from ‘perpetrator’ to an ally, and more recently, to a beneficiary of programs on masculinity. It is plausible to suggest that this pattern broadly represents the conceptual arc of masculinities in the development sector; keeping in mind that each of these approaches and shifts are much more complex and nuanced.<sup>1</sup>

## Situating masculinities within a feminist framework

The first “recognisable” framework of masculinities emerged from the feminist movement within a very specific context. In the early 1980s, the fight for women’s rights and dignity was being shaped by social and civil movements, drawing attention to the intersections of violence against women. Because the movements were focused specifically on foregrounding women’s lived experiences and creating a public discourse and debate about women’s lives, they were not necessarily focused on working on masculinities. Apart from the fact that the women’s movement often deemed ‘men’ to be a problem, (especially in the discourse centred around violence against women) they were also wary about allocating the very limited resources that were available, to work on masculinities.

At the same time, some sections of the women’s movement recognised that working with men and boys was an essential part of women’s rights and gender-based work, especially if violence against women had to stop. They strongly felt that ‘masculinity’ required a distinctive field of its own, because this could ensure a levelling of power relationships. However the discourse on masculinities has historically run the risk of being narrowly focused on a specific kind of masculinity, instead of engaging with multiple forms of masculinities that take into account the various intersectionalities of caste, class, religion etc.

Social movements such as the anti caste and the sexuality movement critically shaped dialogues around gender by questioning a ‘universal womanhood’. Based on the critical scholarship and experience of Dalit feminists, feminists from minority religions, indigenous women, and transgender activists, the imagination - of who a woman is, or what her experiences are - expanded tremendously. Through their efforts, systemic caste-based sexual violence, religious fundamentalism, wage disparity,

1. The prevailing approaches to masculinity have been discussed in detail in the main research study.

and violence against sexual minorities became necessary to include within the ambit of the feminist struggle. Slowly, conversations around masculinity also shifted away from an essentialist understanding of ‘man’ to explore the social ‘construction’ of masculinity. The intersectional nature of men’s roles and their experiences began to feature in these expansive conversations.

However, there remained a resistance to feminism which took the form of ‘men’s rights’ activism. Men’s rights activists who resisted the fundamental tenets of feminism (intersectional or otherwise), did not consider themselves to be affected by patriarchal structures, and instead felt victimised by feminist conversations around gender equality. Although recently embodied by hashtags such as #notallmen, men’s activists were actively resisting gender even in the 1990s with groups like *Pirito Purush* (The Persecuted Man) in Kolkata, *Purush Hakka Samrakshan Samiti* (Committee for the Protection of Men’s Rights) in Mumbai, and *Patni Atyachar Virodhi Morcha* (Protesting Torture by Wives) in Lucknow.<sup>2</sup> They targeted laws that sought to promote the rights of women, including laws against dowry and cruelty. These groups have historically claimed that they are fighting against the injustice done to men because of affirmative action for women.

Regardless of whether it is the men’s rights movements or feminist movements, the work on masculinities has historically overemphasised and individualised approaches to issues faced by boys and men. Although there has been a shift in moving from men as perpetrators to transforming attitudes and behaviours of men and boys, the role of power or the different ways in which masculinities intersects with other social identities has not been adequately considered.

One reason for this gap could be that work on masculinities within the development sector remains heavily indebted to the ‘Hegemonic Masculinities’ framework.<sup>3</sup> While this framework is quite useful in mapping power and in differentiating between masculinities - namely, the hegemonic and the marginal; it runs the risk of representing power as static: a simple hierarchy between oppressor and oppressed.

This static nature of power may not account for the fluidity of relationships where there is always a possibility of agency, appropriation

2. [https://feminisminindia.com/2023/06/01/the-rise-of-mens-rights-activism-in-india-a-feminist-issue-in-misogynist-garb/?ml\\_subscriber=2228279906221955180&ml\\_subscriber\\_hash=k1y9&utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=lets\\_talk\\_about\\_the\\_rise\\_of\\_men\\_s\\_rights\\_activism\\_a\\_mix\\_of\\_patriarchy\\_and\\_gender\\_roles&utm\\_term=2023-06-02](https://feminisminindia.com/2023/06/01/the-rise-of-mens-rights-activism-in-india-a-feminist-issue-in-misogynist-garb/?ml_subscriber=2228279906221955180&ml_subscriber_hash=k1y9&utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=lets_talk_about_the_rise_of_men_s_rights_activism_a_mix_of_patriarchy_and_gender_roles&utm_term=2023-06-02)

3. A theory developed by R.W. Connell which lays out a conceptual framework for the study of masculinity, with four types of masculinity, namely, hegemonic, subordinate, complacent and marginal.

and transformation. Especially in South Asian contexts, where the intersectional experience of caste, religion, geography, language, and gender, dictate social life, it is useful to produce more nuanced theoretical frameworks that speak to this simultaneity of social experience.

There is already extensive documentation of the harm that patriarchy wreaks upon men's bodies, whether in terms of child sexual abuse, extreme forms of sexual violence, social exclusion, which cannot be neglected. Because patriarchal structures are essentially about the renegotiation of power within intersecting social identities of caste, class, religion etc., it is crucial to move from simplistic conversations of who a man is (or should be) to unpacking the diversity of masculinity and its implications as a dominant ideology.

Therefore, this requires a move away from conversations of a singular unified patriarchy that can be 'smashed' to understanding the multiple natures of patriarchy. It is even more significant to create strong counter-cultures to patriarchy that extends beyond 'engaging boys and men'. Our contention in this study is to think of masculinity not just as the behaviour patterns of a particular gender, but as an ideology – as a system of ideas, values and norms. This allows a more expansive view of power and opens up fresh ways of engaging with, and challenging dominant masculinities. For instance, how can we learn from the diverse cultural practices in our country that might offer an alternate imagination of gender? How can we observe the formation of masculinity in not just behaviour, but within language, symbols and images that mediate our everyday life? In this study, we argue that we need to go beyond existing frameworks to challenge dominant masculine ideologies.

## Structure of the research study

The research study aims to reinvigorate work around masculinity. Broadly, the study is divided into multiple sections:

- 1. Understanding the context:** Presenting the journey of civil society engagement with programmes designed around masculinities. This section traces connections between global, national, and local agendas.
- 2. Exploring the ecosystem of issues and challenges:** Learnings and challenges from interviews with programme directors and field workers from various organisations that have been working toward gender equality and justice. This includes the perspectives of organisations that have separate programs on 'masculinities' and those who indirectly engage with masculinity.

**3. Ethnographic explorations and insights:** A series of ethnographic explorations on the construction of masculinity in daily life. For the study, we commissioned eleven individuals, from diverse socio-cultural-economic contexts to trace the construction of masculinity in their lives. In addition, we conducted a set of interviews with five individuals to specifically trace the links between dominant masculinity, caste, religion, and sexuality. Further, as the primary researchers and writers of the study, we have incorporated excerpts from our own life histories, as a way of reflecting on and being transparent about our own social location, vulnerabilities, privilege, and entitlements. We have organised the chapters thematically, to emphasise the need for an intersectional approach.

**4. Diverse perspectives:** We also invited academics, artists and gender activists who have worked in the development sector to contribute to chapters in this study, as a way of analysing the material from different perspectives.

**5. Expansion of possibilities:** A conclusion that opens up possibilities for fresh ways of imagining and framing work around masculinities.

This version is an executive summary that draws from the key findings, recommendations, and conclusions of the main research study. The paintings in this report are from 'Transmasculine' and 'Transition' series, painted by Rumi Harish. They lend a way of imagining masculinities and femininity, in varied textures, free from social morality and restrictions.

# Existing approaches to masculinities in the development sector



In the following section, we undertake a review of approaches and strategies, revealing diverse patterns and assumptions, based on interviews with civil society organisations, grassroots organisations and labour unions who have been working for five plus years on these issues. While the focus has been on programs run by NGOs, our effort has been to incorporate a diversity of perspectives based on geographical location, representation of communities, and organisational structures. This review is not exhaustive, but reveals the conceptual framing of work around masculinity, strategies, as well as the challenges of working on masculinity.

## 1. Limited to ending violence against women

As mentioned above, programming around masculinities began in relation to ending violence against women. The primary assumption has been that if 'men' transform their behaviour, violence against women will reduce. While this remains true to a degree, this approach has a few drawbacks, mentioned below:

- **Reproduction of stereotypical femininities:** In focusing on a 'transformed' masculinity, this approach often measures success on

a narrow set of criteria such as men engaging in household chores or sharing decision-making. This often reproduces stereotypical frameworks of femininity and restricts the needs of women as only those emanating from their identities as mothers, wives, and daughters. Even though women are included as 'beneficiaries within these programs, they reiterate two things at once: (1) women's concerns and their role primarily centers around the home, and (2) women's needs and requirements can be articulated only in relation to men and men's activities.

- **Ignoring interdependencies:** Funding patterns over the last decade and the accompanying monitoring evaluation mechanisms appear to focus solely on behavioural change within men. In order to truly transform the social, economic, and material impact on the lives of both men and women, the renegotiation of masculinity must be addressed in relation to multiple forms of femininity and the consequences therein on the material lives of both men and women.
- **The gendered bodies of men and boys:** Most programmatic approaches, research reports and training modules map change in masculinities without unpacking the psycho-social lifeworlds of men, their social identities, or the social values that they derive from oppressive social structures; in short, they do not always engage with men as gendered beings or gendered bodies. The perils of ignoring this often translates to alternatives that are utopian, unrealistic, and essentialist. Often, these expectations fall into two broad categories which restrict the diversity of men's experiences and identities to specific caricatures:
  - a. the man as a morally upright father/ brother/ husband
  - b. the man as an ideal citizen, upholding civic responsibilities.

In short, there is a need to go deeper into the reality of men's lives; like their pressures, insecurities and anxieties, in order to broaden the field of inquiry around masculinity.

## 2. A universal category called 'Men'

A universalist conception of 'men and boys within development sector programs, ignores the social difference produced by caste, class, religion, and sexuality. Other classifications within research reports and program reports often include mention of 'rural masculinity,' 'urban slum masculinity' without in-depth explanation on how these categories are produced and what they imply.

There are a few key assumptions embedded within this framing:

- The first is that **masculinity is only embodied by men and boys**. This fails to take into account forms of masculinity that are displayed by women and/or sexual minorities, as well as masculinity as a broader ideology, especially within the cultural, political and economical field.
- The second assumption is that **masculinity is the only discourse operating/shaping the bodies of men and boys**. This fails to account for how caste, class, sexuality, religion and other social identities might shape the behaviours of boys and men.
- Finally, this category assumes that **the experience of masculinity is universal**, in spite of difference and discrimination. For example, the 'masculinity' exerted by men from upper caste and lowered caste communities is not the same. If young men from lowered caste communities groom their mustaches, ride bikes or wear watches, they are beaten to death by men from dominant caste groups. In this context, a display of 'masculinity' in the public realm takes on a new meaning, as a struggle for dignity and assertion.

Thus, in positioning 'men' as universal subjects, the discourse around masculinity fails to address the nuances of power and discrimination.

## 3. An overemphasis on the experiences of oppressed communities

Given that NGOs historically work with oppressed communities, a large part of the discourse on masculinities rests on the experiences of the working class, lowered caste, and religious minorities. However, conventional masculinity is often shaped by the norms and aspirations of dominant communities. If programmatic approaches are framed only through the experience of oppressed communities, they could reveal the following assumptions:

- That **'toxic masculinity' exists only (italics) in oppressed communities and hence there is a need to advocate for reform**. Building onto colonial narratives of "reform", where oppressed communities were first deemed 'savage', 'deviant' and 'criminal', and then blamed for their deviancy; the current discourse continues to suggest a sense of depravity attached to certain areas/places. For example, research reports often mention: 'environments rife with alcoholism, drug abuse,' 'young men exercise control over the women in their families' 'hotbeds of criminal activity' without investigating the structural conditions or imperatives for such environments to exist. In fact, even in government programs concerning the safety of women, the areas deemed unsafe are often only those populated by oppressed

communities. Thus, there is a need to build evidence on other forms and sites of masculinity. Further, this increases stigma on those communities who are actively fighting against these categories, for example: religious minorities or de-notified tribal communities.

- **That dominant/powerful communities are deemed to be more progressive, equal, and sensitive.** Given the rigidity of social norms, notions of honour and respectability, economic control and so on, it has to be acknowledged that there is also a need to challenge and transform masculinity from within dominant communities. While the experiences of lowered caste communities are used to construct caste superiority, practices of violence within dominant caste communities are often kept concealed. Further, as studies have repeatedly shown, dominant castes represent the majority of media, and it works in their interests to keep these stories silent.<sup>4</sup>
- Even in work on violence against women, **the interlinkages between caste and patriarchy remain unexplored.** For example, interviews with field workers across organizations revealed that the incidence of dowry deaths, female infanticide, regulation on women's mobility and sexuality is more frequent in dominant caste families whereas lowered caste women, in addition to domestic violence, are also more likely to face threat of rape, assault and physical violence at work and in public space.
- Isolating 'men and boys' from oppressed communities as the cause for toxic masculinity **fails to account for structural discrimination.** For example, lack of access to resources, education, livelihood as well as other forms of discrimination such as untouchability, lack of dignity, and social boycotting also contribute to ideas of masculinity.

#### 4. Binary and Hetero-normative approach to gender

Most programs refer to men and boys within a cis-heterosexual paradigm, thus overlooking the diversity of gender identities and sexualities that exist in the country today. Further, programs tend to focus on issues pertaining to heterosexual relationships, such as property transfer, marriage, preference for male children and so on, ignoring the experiences of LGBTQIA+ communities. This omits the historical experience of individuals and communities that could challenge a fundamental rethinking of what it means to be man and woman, male and female, and imagine

4. [https://www.oxfamindia.org/press-release/oxfam-india-news-laundry-report-90-leadership-positions-indian-media-are-occupied-upper-caste-groups#:~:text=October%2014%2C%2022%3B%20New%20Delhi,with%20no%20Scheduled%20Caste%20\(SC\)](https://www.oxfamindia.org/press-release/oxfam-india-news-laundry-report-90-leadership-positions-indian-media-are-occupied-upper-caste-groups#:~:text=October%2014%2C%2022%3B%20New%20Delhi,with%20no%20Scheduled%20Caste%20(SC))

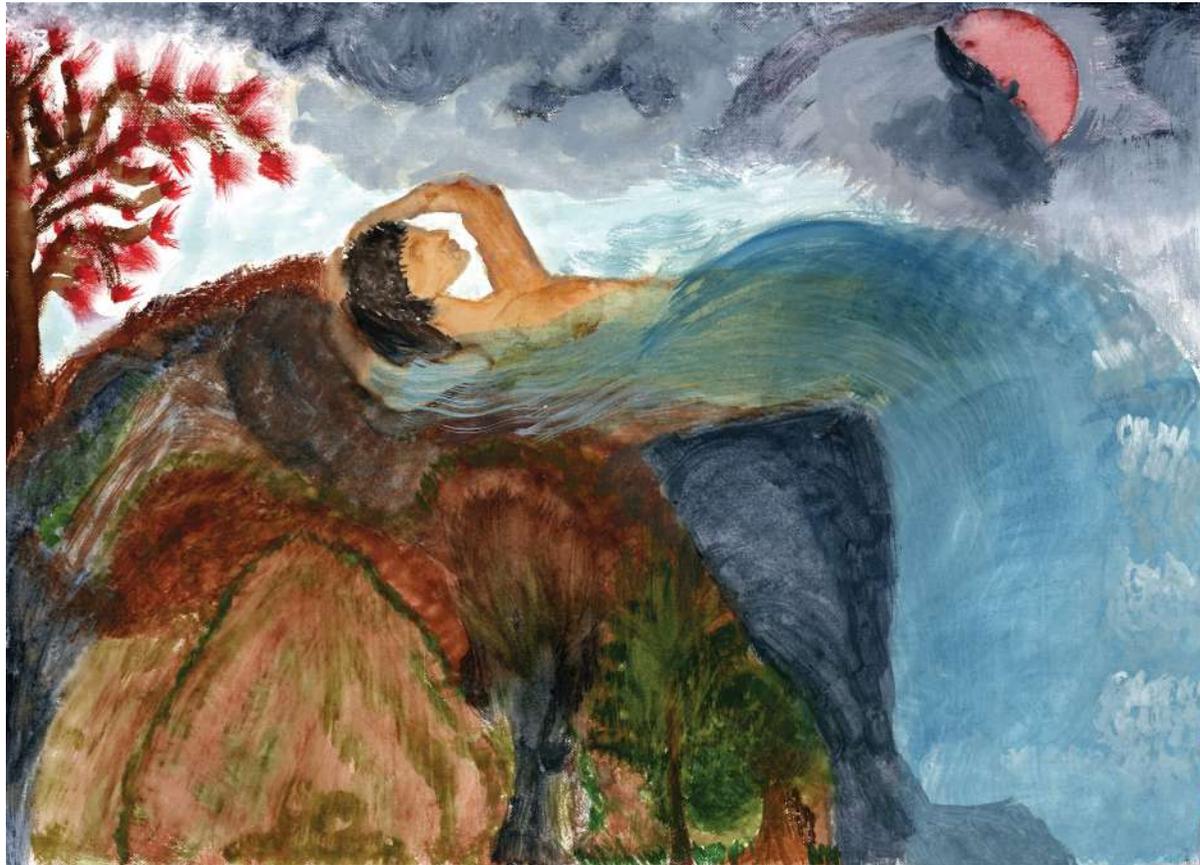
gender outside set binaries. Further, when experiences of LGBTQIA+ communities are considered, it is usually through the prism of violence, thereby not allowing for conversations on love, desire, kinship, family, and pleasure to emerge, which can complicate and enrich existing paradigms around masculinity.

#### 5. Intergenerational Gaps and shift in vocabulary

The training modules used by most organisations are filled with de-personalised and apolitical content on gender and sexuality. These do not take into account personal stories, life histories, community practices, and are most often, fixated on abuse and violence. Training modules use language that is alien to participants and is often not culturally contextual. Most training is top-down and doesn't use vocabulary or examples that relate to the lived experiences and social realities of participants. Various organisations that were interviewed for the purpose of this study revealed that they struggle to retain the interest of young people in their programs. This might partly be due to the inaccessible frameworks used in training programs that are not in sync with the habits, practices, language and aspirations of young people. For example, young people across the country still find it difficult to find spaces for conversation and information regarding sex, romance, and desire that are not judgmental. They require spaces that are free, exploratory, and dynamic to engage meaningfully.

#### 6. Disengaged with media and popular culture

Most organisations shared that they struggle to map the media habits of the communities they work with. As a result, popular culture is usually dismissed/ or patronised in training modules and reports - as a negative influence on young people. While it is true that popular culture is rife with patriarchal content and misogynist attacks, increasingly young people, including young men, find it more comfortable to share their intimate selves online. Thus, the internet/social media also offers a space for reconstructing masculinity through self-representation that is free from the bounds of family/community. A more comprehensive view and engagement with (online) media and popular culture is required in order to understand young people's experience of gender relations in an increasingly mediated world.



## Reimagining work on masculinities

We did not commence our research on masculinities with a fixed definition or a specific notion of masculinity. We chose to work with a broader understanding of gender, looking at masculinity and femininity as forms of self-expression that are produced, regulated and enabled by social order. The study sought to interrogate and challenge dominant models of masculinity and femininity that are constructed by patriarchy. We understand patriarchy to be a system that accords power to bodies assigned male at birth, parental authorities, the state, the police, and other institutions that mandate the means of social production. Here, following the Hegemonic Masculinities framework, certain forms of masculinity and femininity take on dominance, becoming aspirational ideals. As a result, some forms of masculinity are legitimised and other forms are considered as deviant, subordinate or subaltern.

In studying masculinity, we have paid attention to two facets of what it embodies:

1. The construction of gender on the basis of caste, class, religion, sexuality
2. The performance of masculinity as an expression, attitude, roles in familial life and desire, etc. which, most dominantly, is assigned to male bodies at birth and which they are expected to play out.

By looking at both, we argue that there is no homogenous idea of a “man”; there are forms of masculinity even within the demographic of cis-men; and that parallel to a performance of dominant masculinity there remain everyday subversions.

Caste, religious, and class interests are paramount in the construction of dominant masculine expressions. Thus, certain kinds of masculinity take on a hegemonic value<sup>5</sup> and deviance from these norms are met with violence to varying degrees. While this typically finds realisation in the actions and behaviours of men, masculinity is not limited or synonymous with being men. In fact, the demands of dominant masculinity play out on the bodies of everyone. Further, the field of power is constantly shifting between what is considered ‘hegemonic’ and ‘marginal’. The social system of caste, institutionalised religion, and class impact this. Thus, the lived realities of masculinities are multiple, fluid and dynamic. Just as feminism has allowed us multiple ways to imagine what it means to be a woman or feminine, likewise, we try to create room for jostling definitions and perceptions of masculinities, experienced by individuals across the gender spectrum as indicated by the ethnographies in the main research study, which provides insights on self-perception, friendships, love, desire, resistance, and transformation.<sup>6</sup>

## Methodology | Toward Participatory Research

Given the experiential, contradictory and deeply personal experience of masculinities, we adopted a variety of methodological tools for the research study:

- **Literature Review:** The basis for this study was a literature review which aimed to understand the spectrum of work that has been done on masculinities within the NGO sector. The literature review had two phases: a review of global theoretical frameworks that have been used to conceptualise work around masculinities as well as scholarship on masculinities within the Indian context. The second phase included a thorough reading of reports produced by civil society organisations,

5. The notion of hegemony has its roots in the writing of Gramsci and is essentially a position of dominance attained through relative consensus rather than regular force, even if underpinned by force (Gramsci 1971). The consensus is one that is built among those who benefit from the promotion of masculinity, as well as many of those who are oppressed by it, notably women. Hegemonic masculinity is as much for women as for men a cultural ideal of manhood, which is rewarded by women's interests, attentions and efforts to replicate this ideal in their male relatives and associates.

6. The following section contains excerpts from the ethnographies. The detailed ethnographies will be available in the main study.

research organisations, and donor agencies that have supported programmes on masculinities.

- **In-depth interviews:** We interviewed program directors/managers and field staff, alongside 24 civil society groups across India, to reflect on their work on masculinities. Though not exhaustive, we have aimed to cover a diversity of geography, approaches, and scale of organisations. We felt the need to include in each organisation, responses from the managerial to the field staff, because that is often where the gaps and challenges lie, between ideas and reality.
- **Ethnography:** Given that an experience of gender is personal as well as shaped by our interaction with the world, we chose ethnography as a method that would allow the researchers to delve into their daily lives and produce detailed accounts of how masculinities manifest within themselves and in their social relationships. Rather than interviews, we felt that the researchers' own vocabularies, perceptions, and inquiries would be best reflected through written ethnographies. Researchers kept a journal and sent in their notes weekly.
- **Choice of researchers:** The researchers were selected based on a broad spectrum of social location, that is across geography, caste, class, religion, and sexuality. This was done with the intention of capturing the relational dynamics of masculinity. Given that dominant masculinity is often produced in spaces with capital and power, we felt it was necessary to account for reflections from upper caste and privileged individuals and communities as well.
- **Writing workshops:** The researchers would gather each month for a workshop where we would collectively write and share our notes. This also provided a space for the researchers to listen to one another, debate, reflect, and present their own questions and preoccupations.
- **Co-analysis:** In order to challenge the ‘researcher-subject’ power dynamic, we involved the 11 researchers in the analysis process. Each researcher produced ‘codes’ or units of analysis for their own notes, and in certain cases, the researchers also coded each other's notes. These codes formed the basis of analysis and writing for the study, emerging from the researchers' own vocabularies and perceptions.
- **Writing ourselves in:** We felt it was necessary to include the experiences of members working in maraa who have contributed to the research study. This is an attempt to speak about our own social positions and challenge the objective neutrality that ‘researchers’ often occupy within research processes.



# Moving Ahead

## Recommendations<sup>7</sup>

Drawing on the findings of the research study, we make the following recommendations, to broaden the scope of work on masculinities and to refresh our imaginations as we move toward the goal of gender equality and equity. Based on these recommendations, we are also working on developing a toolkit that can assist practitioners on initiating conversations on masculinity within community contexts.

## Revising and revisioining theoretical models

### I. A Feminist Approach:

Emphasis placed on the reformatory actions of men without necessarily advocating for a larger shift in gender and social relations runs the risk of reversing the victories of the feminist movement, by giving up space and resources to cis heterosexual men. Thus, work on masculinities requires a feminist approach, which means that it is necessary to:

- 1) understand how masculinity and femininity interact with one another
- 2) pay attention to the lived experiences across the gender spectrum
- 3) study the links between subjective experiences and material realities.

7. With inputs from Manak Matiyani

Without this approach, the work on masculinities runs the risk of reproducing hierarchies and perpetuating power and discrimination, thereby keeping patriarchal systems intact.

## II. A Constitutional approach:

Given that our constitution accords all citizens equal rights and duties, and promotes the spirit of fraternity, liberty and equality, it provides a meaningful framework within which to challenge dominant masculine ideologies. On the basis of the constitution, solidarities can be fostered across the division of caste, class and religious discrimination, which, in turn, can lead to a transformation within gender relations.

## III. Toward South Asian experiences:

The dominant frameworks for theorising masculinities rest on frameworks borrowed from the West, and a distinctly Euro-American subjectivity of gender. Within South Asian contexts, given the complexity of caste, ethnicity, religion and labour, gender takes on a distinctly different shape and form. There is an urgent need to develop South Asian frameworks for thought and intervention that reflect the behaviours, attitudes and practices contextually. This can allow for more culturally rooted and relevant work that speaks to the lived experience of communities, rather than borrowing from other cultural and political models.

## IV. Research & Evaluation frameworks:

Conversations with various organisations who have produced research around this subject, reveal the limitations of evaluation and assessment frameworks and tools, which are often instrumental, quantitative, and action-oriented, and as such, fail to capture processual change. Instead, evaluation frameworks must allow for an engagement with the more reflective, vulnerable textures of masculinity. And need to incorporate feminist frameworks of evaluation that emphasise qualitative reflection. Moreover, implementers must think about research methods in dialogue with community members toward shifting community habits and practices that are oppressive and discriminatory.

## V. Moving beyond 'Rights'

The rights-based framework, while having its advantages in certain contexts, is inadequate to capture the canvas of gender relations. For instance, many women in this country rarely relate to themselves as 'citizens' and are systematically denied their rights by family, community, and the state. Further, as the study has shown, there are a number of informal sites that exercise authority, and perpetuate masculinity, for

example, the Jati (caste) Panchayat. As such, while it is important to have an awareness of rights, training modules often over emphasise this framework, without taking into account social norms, customs and cultures that shape gender relations. In a country where customs, traditions, rituals, faith, and informal systems of authority have power and legitimacy, it is necessary to think about cultural transformation as an important aspect of challenging dominant masculinity.

## Expanding programmatic scope

### I. Reframing Masculinity

As mentioned in the study, work on gender falls into a predictable trap of focusing on women, just as work on masculinity is restricted to men/boys/violence. To delve deeper would require a revision of conceptual frameworks on gender. Thus, organisations and donors should be open to supporting programs that seek to challenge masculinity in diverse and innovative ways. This could include:

- 1) using the arts to challenge dominant masculinity
- 2) expanding the scope of curriculums to include love, sex, desire, sexuality within sexual education curriculums
- 3) offering services to young couples on pre-marital counselling that could reduce risk of violence
- 4) organising intergenerational conversations and activities to help different age groups to come together to debate social morality
- 5) creating spaces for cross-caste conversations among others.

Thus, if donor agendas around what constitutes 'programming on masculinity' are expanded, it might give organisations the opportunity to reimagine how they articulate and frame work within communities.

### II. Address power and privilege with those who hold them

For the longest time, organisations have worked only with oppressed communities to address systems and structures of oppression. For example, interventions on caste continue to engage only the oppressed caste communities, those on communal violence speak to religious minorities, and interventions on sexuality only seem to address sexual and gender minorities. However, it is essential to foster an understanding of how these structures are upheld by those it gives power to. This relationality cannot be ignored in work around masculinities, which is fundamentally about acknowledging privilege and the redistribution of power. Patriarchy

is produced through an intersection of gender and caste. Thus, work on masculinity also needs to be reflective of class and caste inequities. There is a need to engage with the production of masculinities across the caste spectrum, and across urban, peri-urban and rural areas, rather than focusing only on the experiences of oppressed communities.

This would require investigation into the practices of dominant caste communities ; education on anti-caste struggles and movements as part of training programs ; encouraging self representation from oppressed communities ; and creating awareness on caste-class based discrimination and violence as a way of countering dominant masculinity. Narratives of prejudice, privilege, oppression need to be heard from the perspectives of dominant communities as well.

### III. Situating masculinity within its socio-cultural contexts

Just the way gender is shaped by the socio-cultural realm in which it operates, definition and experience of masculinity differs across geographical locations, language, cultures, political contexts and so on. Thus, work on transforming masculinity must take place within the socio-cultural realm. In order to understand the ways in which people experience and assert their identities, it is necessary to look beyond 'topics and themes' and immerse meaningfully in their daily lives. For example, local belief and faith practices might conceive a different and diverse imagination of gender and sexuality that can inform and enrich discourse on inclusivity and resistance. In short, challenging dominant masculinity requires in-depth community mapping that can help understand the formation and influences on gender relations in any given context. This would mean an in-depth understanding of land occupation, patterns of migration, an investigation of syncretic traditions and practices that might exist outside mainstream narratives, or even a recovery of practices and histories that can counter religious hate. The more resources that can be allocated toward supporting organisations to immerse in their 'field', the higher the degree of meaningful engagement with the community.

### IV. Go where the boys are

For too long, interventions have pre-decided what men and boys need to know about relationships, desires, livelihoods, and the like. If we are to truly "engage men", it will have to be on their terms, in their language, and on issues that are most relevant to their real concerns. Lives have moved online, particularly in closed groups on Whatsapp, Snapchat, ChatGPT. We need to find ways to understand men's behaviours and concerns as expressed in public as well as more intimate social media. The intersection

of social media such as Facebook or YouTube with politics, caste, and religious hegemony as well as gender-based violence needs to be better understood.

### V. Going beyond the Binary

The sexuality movement has broadened the definition and imagination of sexuality, thus fundamentally challenging patriarchy. In framing programs around gender, it is imperative to draw the links with sexuality, and to give space to the experiences of non-heterosexual, non heteronormative communities. In doing so, we expand the notion of gender experience and expression, thereby unsettling fixed notions of masculinity and femininity. Challenging heteronormativity would not only entail engaging with people occupying non-heterosexual, non-cis identities, but a larger interrogation of patriarchal systems and social morality.

### VI. Turning to culture as a form of justice

To move beyond formulaic narratives of gender, programmatic approaches need to engage more deeply with how communities experience their social worlds and with their own contradictions and vulnerabilities. The arts and creative practices can open a space for free expression, healing and sharing which can counter the adverse effects of various forms of cultural humiliation, cultural appropriation and lack of access to cultural resources. At the heart of cultural justice is the recognition that arts and culture is required for the empowerment of citizens and communities which are systematically oppressed. While social and economic justice is based on equality, cultural justice also refers to a recognition and acceptance of difference and diversity that can challenge the dominant framework of gender and sexuality. This can include perspectives on masculinity from the experience of lowered caste women, transgender communities, religious minorities. At the same time, there should be an effort to research the 'elite' which can shed light on the performance of masculinity within upper class/caste communities and sectors (for example, mainstream media, corporate companies and so on.)

## Funding & resource allocation

### I. Reframing donor agendas:

Organisations across contexts shared difficulties in raising resources for work on masculinities. Some organisations are of the opinion that donors do not want to invest in work with boys and men because men will be unwilling to let go of their privileges, and it is futile to involve them in

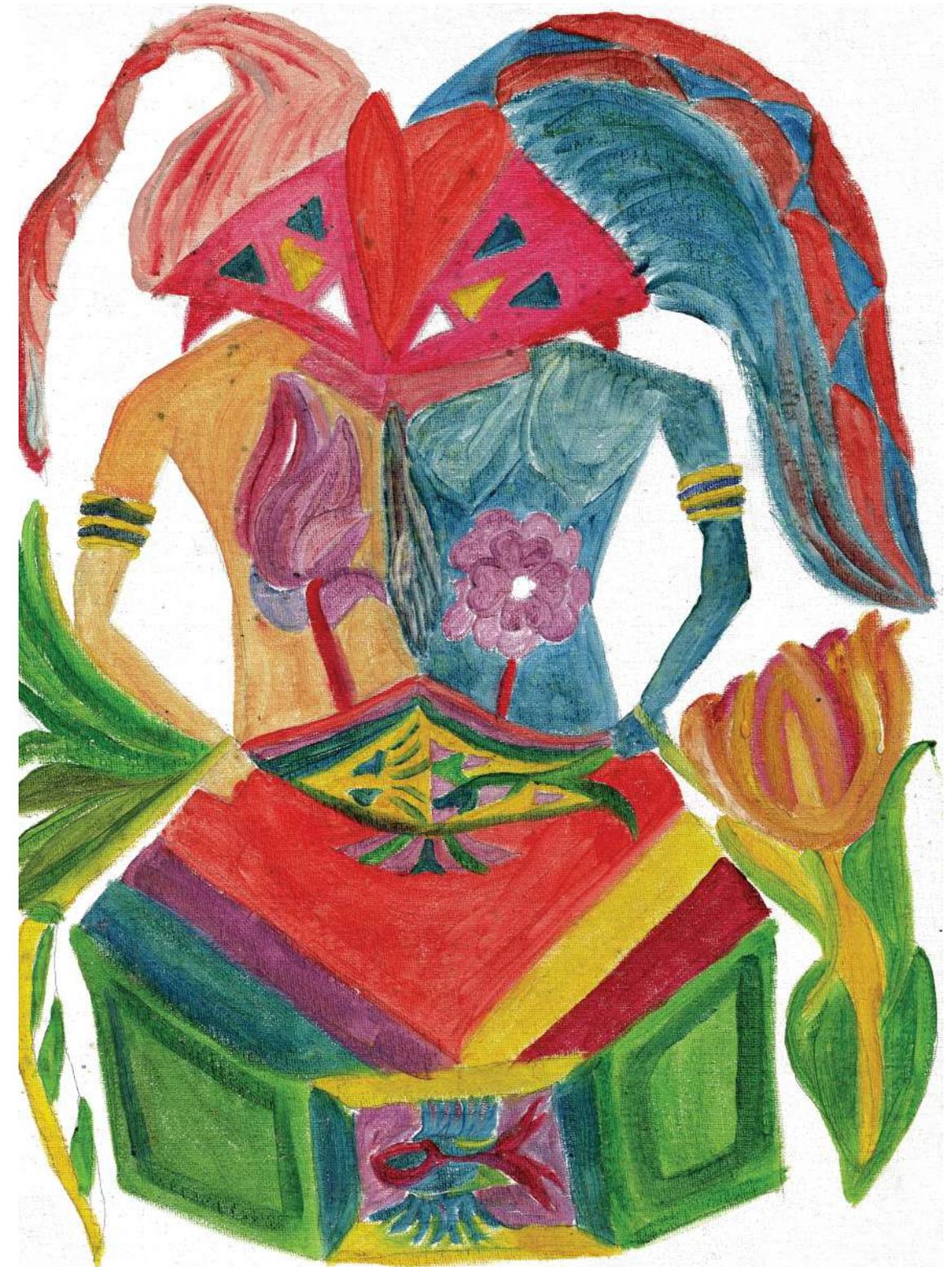
conversations around gender justice. The other concern is about the quantitative project driven frameworks that are set by donor organisations. This leads to a simplistic packaging of work, limiting it to engagements with boys and men. Donor agencies need to take into account the complexity of factors that produce and perpetuate masculinities. This would mean reorienting from project to process, from impact to a different model of evaluating change, from intervention to immersion.

## II. Address not just men but masculine frameworks:

There are very real material rewards for doing well in the competition to perform hegemonic masculinities. Can boys who imbibe gentle, collaborative, non-threatening, and caring masculinity survive as men in a system that runs on extractive, competition-based relationships of capital, labour, and production? To try and ensure personal transformation without equal work to change the structure of competitive systems of market, production and wealth will not work. Mere messaging about acknowledging or 'giving up power and privilege' ignores the structural nature of the reproduction of power. Men in specific positions of power cannot "give up power", as it is structurally bestowed and not individually owned. The sector must, therefore, aim for large-scale transformation in systems of exchange, labour production, and care within all employment systems, to challenge relationships and structures that place privileged men at the helm of global exchange.

## III. Take over advocacy from the MRAs

Advocacy on issues of men and asking for public policy shifts around the same are currently the exclusive domain of "Men's Rights Activists" (MRA). Couched as equal rights champions, men's rights groups are typically anti-feminist collectives or organisations that tend to highlight and blame all and any violence faced by men as a by-product of over emphasis on women's rights and "Fake Feminism". There is a need to create different kinds of leadership and engagement within the field of masculinities. For example, it is important to build consensus and insight on how public policy, particularly within education and health, can promote positive masculinity among men and boys. This is an area with little or no history in the Indian context and one that can potentially be developed in collaboration with diverse feminist organisations in India.





# Constructions of Masculinity in Everyday life

## Excerpts from Ethnographies

To explore and investigate masculinity as an ideology, we commissioned eleven researchers from different parts of the country, to study the construction of masculinity in their everyday lives. We consciously chose researchers from a diversity of caste, class, religious and sexuality perspectives, in order to understand how masculinity is shaped, and in turn shapes, these social identities. Of course, these ethnographies cannot be taken as wholly representative of any community/identity. Neither do we wish to limit the experience of an individual to their immediate social identity. However, our social locations (geography, caste, class, religion) play a huge role in influencing our story of the world, and in turn, our stories within the world. In an attempt to delve deeper into these social worlds, we chose auto-ethnography as a method to trace the ways in which individual, personal experiences connect to larger societal formations. In the context of studying masculinity, this methodology was appealing as it gave ample room to examine the relationship between individual agencies and structural factors.

Over a period of six months, the researchers shared experiences and perceptions of how masculinity takes root in each of their lives. We began

with ourselves exploring where each of us had experienced or displayed masculinity in our own lives. From here, we moved onto experiences within the family and home, community and public space, our interaction with media and work-space. We reflected on ruptures, transformations and oppressions we experienced, prejudices and privileges we embody by virtue of our social location. Across each of these sites, we observed the performance of gender, tracing the ways in which identities break, form and constantly transform.

To avoid creating stereotypes about any one caste group, we have used the term 'Dominant Caste' to refer to caste groups that wield social and cultural dominance in a given geographical area. The operation of caste changes in accordance with geographical location. However, within the study we have used the term to illustrate the ways in which caste identity influences a performance of masculinity, and in turn, how masculinity is used to assert casteist behaviour. Likewise, our intention is not to stereotype any one religious identity. We have consciously included diverse religious experiences in order to understand how religion, faith, and masculinity interact at an everyday level.

We would like to say that the perspectives and experiences within the study are not exhaustive. We require a deeper inquiry into the relationship between sexuality and masculinity, the experiences of indigenous communities, a wider representation of geographical diversity, language and so on. Due to remote working, and differential access to internet/phone, and diversity in language, the ethnographies are not as consistent as we had hoped. Nevertheless, our attempt has been to draw attention to the everyday practices and socio-cultural realms that individuals inhabit that are often flattened within the scope of programming around masculinities. In the section below, we share excerpts from the ethnographies<sup>8</sup> that are a part of the main research study. We have included these excerpts as a way of illustrating the need for an intersectional approach to masculinity. We hope that the following section can reinvigorate thinking around the subject, and inspire practitioners to delve deeper with the intent of challenging dominant masculine ideologies.

---

8. Ramesh delivers milk in the morning, works as an insurance agent in the day and runs a theatre group in the evening. Having grown up in Indore, in a dominant caste family, Ramesh has always questioned his position in society. Never satisfied with easy answers, he is on a journey of constant reflection, of learning and unlearning. Self critical, his writing unpacks what it means to be a 'man'; through minute observation of himself and his surroundings. With a voice well suited to a radio jockey, Ramesh greatly enriched our group conversations with his curiosity and scepticism.

*"The night I got married, my wife and I were given a separate room in my house. All the children from my neighbourhood were laughing and whispering. It felt like everyone knew what was going on, except for me. When I found out I had to sleep in the same room as my wife, I felt strange, and I didn't go into the room the entire night. I was embarrassed about what my family would think—we had just gotten married, and already we were staying together in the same room! So I spent the night separately. Next day, when my brother returned home from work, he asked, "Aren't you a man? Why didn't you sleep with your wife?" I didn't know how to answer my elder brother. Four years later, when my daughter was born, I finally understood what he meant. I guess that's when I became a man.*

*Inspired by the clean shaven heroes of Hindi cinema, I have always wanted to shave my moustache. But each time I try, I face a lot of backlash from my family. They perceive the lack of a moustache to be a sign of emasculation. One of my older relatives said, "Our moustache is our caste pride. Don't shave it." "What does a moustache have to do with caste pride?" I asked. "Why do you ask so many questions? Will you start clapping now at festivals? Start wearing a sari?" This experience really traumatised me. Years later, I read about the murder of Dalit men because they dared to grow their moustache.*

*In our community, families take loans just to be able to perform rituals as per certain community standards, even if they don't know how to repay the loans. One day, my friend and I decided to protest this habit in our community. We received a call from our community leader who objected to us for not taking permission to raise funds from community members for a religious thread ceremony. When we explained our intention, they said that as younger members of the community, we should be collecting money to organise 'Shobha yatras' to showcase the wealth of our community. We argued saying that we stood against this kind of expenditure. They threatened us by saying we would be outcasted from the community. An older relative told me that I was standing against community pride and this was a mark of disrespect. Nowadays I just don't attend any of these functions. That is my mark of protest."*



Ramesh delivers milk in the morning, works as an insurance agent in the day and runs a theatre group in the evening. Having grown up in Indore, in a dominant caste family, Ramesh has always questioned his position in society. Never satisfied with easy answers, he is on a journey of constant reflection, of learning and unlearning. Self critical, his writing unpacks what it means to be a 'man'; through minute observation of himself and his surroundings. With a voice well suited

to a radio jockey, Ramesh greatly enriched our group conversations with his curiosity and scepticism.

*"I wanted to study journalism but had no money to pursue my education. I asked my grandmother who had always supported me. My grandmother took out the family jewellery that she had saved for her old age. She told me not to tell anyone in the family, as it would lead to conflict, as other people might also want to lay claim to the jewellery. My grandmother felt that one amongst us three sisters had to study, so that I could take care of the other two, and ensure they got married respectably. Even though my mother received a lot of taunts from my aunts, my grandmother never put any pressure on her, for having not had a male child. Instead she saw leadership qualities in me.*

*Looking back, perhaps it was my grandmother who displayed more masculinity. My grandmother did a lot of work, that too much faster than my grandfather. She could even operate a tractor on her own. My grandmother had some land on my name. It was transferred to my uncle's son, because he was the only male child in the family. But before my grandmother's death, she transferred the property back to me. This was the first instance in our village. When my grandmother passed away, I wanted to participate in her last rites, but my relatives didn't allow me. But at my grandmother's prayer meeting, I spoke about all she had done for me in front of everyone. This was also a first for me, because during prayer meetings, only men occupy space in this way. I feel I have inherited my spirit of protest from my grandmother.*

*I am now a journalist. I get ridiculed a lot for my work. People say I only do award-winning stories i.e. stories that will get me an award but not the 'real stories'. Recently I started my Youtube channel in collaboration with a senior journalist, who is a man. He regularly tells me that my story is only popular because he writes the headlines. These comments used to really affect me, I used to think that I have done no work, it is only because a senior journalist wrote five words as the headline that people read my article! Recently there was a case where a girl from a lowered caste community got raped, and no arrest had been made for over two months. I asked permission to go cover the story, and my editor said I could go at my own personal risk, the organization would not stand by me. I wrote the story. Soon after, a senior journalist asked who gave me permission to cover a crime story. He claimed only men can cover crime stories because female reporters are incapable. I have to work harder to prove myself, because I am a woman.*

*I am still not married. Have I shown masculinity in this decision? Recently I got another proposal. He didn't quite match my taste. His family asked*

me about my educational qualifications. I said Mass Communication. They said, that's all, why have you not done your masters? I tried to control my anger. His mother asked me if I knew how to stitch, and I said I didn't. I was being made to feel like I had done something really wrong. When we returned home, all my aunt said was that she will never look for a marriage proposal for me again, because I was disrespectful in front of the entire family. They asked, why are you kicking up such a fuss? I felt really hurt by this, and didn't say anything in response. After this incident, I didn't speak to my aunt's family for a long time. Even though I recently got engaged, she didn't show much enthusiasm."



Neelam is an independent journalist reporting on issues of gender and violence in Uttar Pradesh. Neelam is from an OBC community, and she describes her community as conservative and restrictive, particularly toward women. Despite the daily misogyny and sexism within the media, she has risen to become an award winning journalist. Standing tall against societal norms, Neelam writes her own destiny.

"From my childhood, I always knew I was a boy. In many homes, there are different kinds of masculinity that get expressed and make a huge difference to the power within the family. In my family, it used to manifest in a manner that would lead to many questions in my mind. Most of the time, I would question the gender regulations imposed on me by my family and relatives. For example, they would restrict me from climbing a tree saying "you're a girl, why do you climb trees?" It was a constant reminder that I am female assigned. But I never gave it that much importance. I would question back saying, "if I can't climb a tree that is different, but when I can, why bring gender into it? They never had answers to my questions and I would continue doing things my way. Each reminder of gender restrictions irritated me and I would quickly get angry. I also did not have close friends to share my thoughts with. The reason for not having friends is obviously my choice of gender, which made me behave differently from girls around me.

Actually, the first time I felt 'I wanted to be a man' was when I fell in love with a girl. I was studying in third grade. I knew that society would not agree to me marrying a girl. That realisation was hugely disheartening. In retrospect, when I think about it now, what is the difference between 'I am man' and 'I wanted to be a man'? My initial 'I am man' was a feeling where I would deliberately ignore condescending statements around me and the social morality built around gender. At that age, the body did not matter much to me. This was till puberty. I knew much before my puberty, what would happen in a female assigned body, biologically.

That perception was leading to a clear cut demand inside me to own a body that suited my mind and was "male". I would also like to bring to your notice that it is not just due to menstruation that I wanted to be a man. Menstruation was one of the secondary reasons due to the heavy discomfort that it created.

I have known many female assigned community people who shared with me their perceptions of the journey from 'I want to be a man, to I am a man'. In fact, we would often chat about how the process of gendering starts at home, the ideals of which would often clash with the idea of being a man inside of us. This, we enjoyed secretly, but also expressed ourselves in different ways. For me, it was the game of cricket. I started playing cricket with boys in the neighbourhood streets. I would now say that the act of playing cricket was the first assertion of my masculinity. Usually it is a 'male bastion sport' according to society. For me and many fellow trans masculine people, 'Cricket' is a way to assert masculinity. My first assertions of masculinity manifested in 'working and taking roles of work' outside the four walls of home and never engaging in the kitchen. During those times, the gender binary of feminine and masculine was ingrained in my head. Looking back, it was because of social morality.



Suresh is an activist and writer, who grew up in Kerala and has spent most of his life living and working in Bangalore. With a quiet smile on his face, Suresh has systematically questioned the norms that restrict the expression of gender. Suresh identifies as a trans man, and his journey has been difficult, lonely and full of various kinds of discrimination. Through it all, he has held himself with dignity and resilience which has won him the respect of various people within the sexual minority and feminist movement.

"Our community elders say that it was during the Nizam's rule when manual scavengers were called from Haryana to clean the city of Hyderabad. The area where I live was allocated for our community. Historically, this area has been infamous for crime and notoriety. Even autos don't come here. I remember when my mother was about to give birth to my sister, no auto agreed to enter our area. She was forced to deliver at home. My family has historically been engaged in manual scavenging, and it is the women who have been the primary breadwinners. In spite of that, the power does not lie with the women. My grandfather used to take away all the money earned by my grandmother. All the decisions were taken by him. There was a lot of domestic abuse within my family. After marriage, my mother, in spite of her education, was forced to take up scavenging work because of financial difficulties.

*In our community, this is very common. There is a local saying that the children from our community grow up fighting with a sword- the 'sword' refers to cleaning toilets, which is our caste bound occupation.*

*Ever since I was in school, I was made aware of my caste. Friends in school would often ask me which caste I belonged to. I used to come home and ask my mother why we were weaker than other caste groups. If I said I was Valmiki, then they would make us sit and eat separately. So, my friends and I would lie, saying we belonged to an Upper Caste community. We knew we couldn't say we were Brahmins, because everyone knew we ate meat. So we said we were Rajputs. But we were always scared- if someone asked a follow up question, we wouldn't know how to answer. It was risky to lie about our caste position in school. One experience that remains in my mind is when I was accompanying a close friend of mine back home from school. She wanted to pick up a book from her house. As we got closer, she told me to wait outside, at a distance from her house. I remember feeling really strange. When she returned, she told me her mother told her not to be friends with me. At that time, I thought it was because something was wrong with me. As I grew up, I realised it was because of my caste. But that feeling of not being worthy, that feeling sticks on.*

*Before we moved to this area, it took us two years to find a house. Landlords outside this area don't give houses on rent to people from our community. Personally, I have always felt uncomfortable living in this area because it makes me feel defined by my caste identity. Last year, I moved out of my house and found myself a room in an area that is largely dominated by an OBC population. No-one recognizes me here. Over the years, my way of speaking Hindi has changed and so has my clothing. Without hiding my caste, I wouldn't have gotten a room here. Growing up, I was always afraid I would be made to do the work my community has historically done. I have always tried to save myself from it. Somehow I have been lucky enough to make my own future and now have the opportunity of working in an NGO.*



*Roop is originally from Haryana, but her family migrated to Hyderabad generations ago. Given the difference in language, appearance, cultural norms, she often feels like she occupies the position of an insider-outsider. She is the first in her family to resist casteism and fought to carve herself a space outside the limits of her identity. She is proud to work for a feminist organisation that fights for the rights of lowered caste and working class women and girls, in the old city of Hyderabad.*

*All the rules in my house were set by my father, who was Hindu. My mother is Christian, and I observed how difficult it was for her to follow these rules. Like a forced performance, during Karva Chauth, Diwali, Holi, Navratris. She could never relate to any of these festivals. These rituals were alien to her, but she had to perform them because she was financially dependent on my father. The difference would play out in daily practices at home. Like he would recite prayers to Hindu Gods as a way of communicating that this was the right way to practise religion. He would not eat rice with his hand, or any food cooked in coconut oil. In fact he would always claim his ways were more cultured, and my mother was made to feel like a savage, for eating idly, fish, rasam etc. The women on my father's side were very masculine and they carried pride and status about how they looked and behaved. They never accepted my mother and me, and made us feel like outsiders. My resistance to all of this was to retreat and not participate in their festivals.*



*Rita grew up in an inter-religious and inter-caste family, in Bangalore. Her experiences in childhood influenced her greatly, making her acutely sensitive to differences in social location and privilege. She works in an arts and media collective, as a facilitator, researcher and curator and is also an independent film-maker. Rita is inspired by the strong women in her family, who she always remembers as standing tall against different kinds of masculine forces. Rita feels each person holds masculine and feminine qualities within them but social norms don't allow for their free exploration.*

*I work as a facilitator in a religious institution, and conduct sessions on gender sensitization. I often face a lot of discrimination by the men who are usually the people in power. They laugh at me and say, if I continue facilitating these sessions, the number of men coming to their religious institution will reduce. When I respond, they tell me that God has ordained that I should look after my husband and children, not waste time preaching faith related issues. I am met with responses like: "sessions like this are useless for us." "Women are emotional, it is necessary for them to get in touch with their feelings." But for men, these 'psychological' things don't work. I responded by saying he needed to understand the extent of his 'male' conditioning. He responded saying that God called upon women to be mothers and wives. I told him I was a widow. He said irrespective of that, my calling can only be in regard to motherly roles. So instead of my activism, I should visit orphanages, old age homes, and teach my grandchildren about faith because that is what God has willed for me."*

On Women's Day, a priest spoke praising his neighbour who had suffered domestic violence everyday, and when we asked why she continued going through it, he said the husband was her 'pati-dev' and if he did not hit her, then who would? He went onto say that all of us women could learn from this example. On being confronted after a few days by a group of us, he saw nothing wrong in what he said. He continued telling me that marriage holds till death does the couple apart, and as religious institutions we must do everything to ensure this. He concluded by saying that women need to learn how to compromise, after all, didn't all our Gods suffer?"



Rachel is a feminist, writer, facilitator and mother, living in Pune. She juggles multiple roles simultaneously. She is an active part of a women's network that enables women's leadership and challenges patriarchy, sexism and abuse within religious institutions. The energy to do this work comes from her own struggles at home, fighting against conventions of being an 'ideal woman', to carve a space for herself. Her participation in this research study has helped her reflect and address the violence she has faced. Deeply emotional and passionate, Rachel always has a smile on her face, and can counter any form of discrimination with her witty one liners!

I realised I was a boy when people from my family began telling me I need to become responsible. At that time I felt uncomfortable about it. But now at this stage of my life, I am comfortable being uncomfortable. The most beautiful and unique thing about being a man is that you don't have to form your own values. Society accords value to a man based on how useful and productive he is. Society only values a man according to how useful and productive you are. This realisation is painful. Sometimes as a man you have to do things that are necessary no matter how you feel about them. It's better to be a warrior in a garden than a gardener in a war. We should be ruthlessly ambitious and we should know how to control it. Even in my peer group I have observed this.

My friend Mohan is in his 30's. After dropping out from college, he fell in with a few gangsters. Mohan grew up in a scheduled caste colony. But he is from a higher subcaste within the Dalit community. He made easy money by doing small scale robberies. Everything was going fine for him, until one day, a gang war broke out. Mohan's gang was fighting against a prominent local leader. But a settlement happened on both sides and the matter fell silent. But the political leader bribed one of the gang member's and asked him to bring the (other) gang members leader to a local bar

at a particular time. He murdered him (the leader). After this, there was a huge strike against that leader in Anekal and he had to abscond for a year. Meanwhile, since the gang broke up, Mohan lost his livelihood. He tried to find a job in DHL, Puma, Amazon and Flipkart but nobody hired him because he is local. At last a mobile box making company gave him a job. But the manager was paying very less and Mohan confronted him, at which point the line manager abused him and said, "If you want to work, work silently, otherwise you leave, there are many others like you." Mohan got angry and punched him in the face. And because he was taken to the police station- because he was previously a gang member, the police demanded 4-5 lacs for his release and threatened to charge him for murder. A local congress member came and paid Rs. 25,000/- for his release, following which they used Mohan for their election work without paying him anything. Mohan fell in love with a girl who was also working for the party, as a result of which he was thrown out of the party. Mohan found himself without a job again.

Shortly after, he met someone else who was a gambler in the IPL. Together, they got a contract to become study subjects for a medical firm where they were to be paid Rs.50,000 per session. Life was good, until the study came to a close. Meanwhile, Mohan got the contract for a drug peddler from Visakhapatnam and with the help of an auto driver, began to distribute weed in Anekal. However, the auto driver was caught by the police and the deal fell through. Now, Mohan lends money to people for small amounts of time and meagre interest. In his younger days, Mohan's family used to pressurise him to make money and make fun of him for being unemployed. They felt he wasn't a respectable man because he couldn't earn money. But I feel the reason is because no company would give him a proper job. Even though Mohan gives money back home, he still has not earned his family's respect.



Dhananjay grew up in Anekal, on the outskirts of Bangalore. The rapid change in the landscape, from agriculture to industrialization has had a tremendous impact on him. Dhananjay comes from an OBC community, he always questioned what he perceives as the conservatism and discrimination in his community. With a quiet resistance to the injustice he sees around him, Dhananjay works with a feminist organisation and spends his days engaging with young people from different community contexts.

# Conclusion



Given the feudal and patriarchal contexts within this country, we would like to acknowledge the labour of civil society organisations working on-ground that have secured rights, dignity and well-being for oppressed communities. We are inspired by the courage and creativity of social movements led by women, lowered caste, adivasi, and religious minorities. Their scholarship and work have foregrounded voices and histories that are often not heard in the mainstream. We are also deeply indebted to the vision of artists and writers whose work has engaged with gender and sexuality, forcing us to reckon with the more uncomfortable aspects of ourselves. This study rests on the shoulders of those who have opened our imagination, and paved the way for other possibilities, outside the clutches of patriarchy.

We hope this executive summary can serve as an opening to have more in-depth conversations on the field of masculinity, for organisations, donors and researchers. There are several questions to consider: What are the advantages of separating masculinity as an object of study in itself viz a vis integrating it into ongoing work on women's rights? How can programmatic approaches take into account structural conditions of discrimination without reducing oppressed communities to victims? How can intersectionality move from being just a theory, to an active part of programmatic work? How can organisations create space and

opportunities for the communities they work with, to express themselves freely? And how can each of these learnings be documented and reflected upon critically, such that we might be able to produce new frameworks around masculinities that speak more closely to the experiences of gender in India?

The recommendations of this study are by no means exhaustive or absolute. They are starting points of inquiry that could assist organisations and donors to reconsider what is meant by 'masculinity'. Diversifying the sources from which we learn about masculinity would result in richer and more dynamic programs. This would mean involving the communities we work with in research and program design, learning from rituals, cultural practices and popular culture, engaging with online and offline worlds and so on. Women and sexual minorities need to be involved in programs on masculinity. It would also require the uncomfortable and challenging task of entering into the worlds of dominant communities and questioning 'normal' ideals and conventions of masculinity. Only then can we hope to work in a relational and inter-sectional manner toward the goal of gender equality.

We live in a world that celebrates and reaffirms dominant, conventional masculinities. There are rewards and incentives to perform and perpetuate these forms of masculinity. This makes the work of transforming masculinities all the more difficult. It requires us to share and create other forms and models of masculinity and femininity, that are premised on the grounds of equality, dignity, liberty and fraternity. It requires us to recognize that people exist outside categories, and that their lived experience cannot be reduced to an 'issue'. The more open we are, the more keenly we listen, the more accepting of diversity, the stronger and more inclusive our work will become.

In conclusion, this research study emphasises the necessity to transform and resist dominant forms of masculinity towards safe, equal and balanced environments. A closer introspection can enable us to find fresh ways to think about masculinities, which can broaden the conceptual field of work and innovate new strategies toward gender equality and justice.

**EdelGive Foundation** is a philanthropic asset manager and advisory partner to funders such as individuals, HNIs, corporates, institutions and foundations—both international and domestic—with a specialisation in multi-stakeholder collaboration. Through a unique philanthropic model, EdelGive places itself at the centre of grant-making by providing initial grants and managing funding from other institutions, HNIs and corporate partners. These grants are used for both financial and non-financial growth of high calibre, small to mid-size grassroots NGOs, committed to empowering vulnerable children, women, and communities. EdelGive is committed to bring about sustainable long-term change by working with the system to enable the system. They are focused on enabling more partnerships within and between the corporate sector, the social sector, and the Government for far-reaching, sustainable impact, through collaboration, coalitions and co-creation. By supporting grassroots NGOs committed to empowering vulnerable children, women, and communities, EdelGive Foundation fosters and expands philanthropy in India.

**Maraa** is a media and arts collective, founded in 2008 in Bangalore. Registered as a public charitable trust, our work is located at the intersection of gender, labour, caste and religion. Our artistic work enhances and strengthens inherent leadership and creative capacities for marginalised voices that have been systematically oppressed and discriminated against. We believe everyone has a right to access, create and use arts and media in order to democratise and diversify its use. Our media work highlights connections between media ownership, technology and social realities through community led and open source platforms. Maraa also undertakes research and documentation, training and capacity building projects for Bluemoon Creatives.

#### About the Artist

**Rumi Harish**, a trans man and queer is a musician and writer. He has worked in social justive movements on gender and sexuality for the last 23 years. After years of being an activist and a committed musician, his therapist recommended he take up painting, as a way to express himself, during a period of transition for his voice. He started painting and formed an inseparable relationship with music and writing. Rumi is deeply involved in developing queer and trans cultures of art and culture. He is also a poet and playwright.

