

## Foreword to the Book *'Breaking the Moulds'*

- Dr. Maithreyi Krishnaraj

This book on masculinity is a timely venture. It is the only one of its kind in our country. As the introduction says, the women's movement has been preoccupied with exposing the effect of patriarchy on women's lives and the resultant unequal status in society and unequal social and political power. Research through women's studies - the movement's academic outpost - laid out in myriad detail the day to day manifestation of patriarchies especially about violence against women. The women's movement exposed to public eye - the many forms of violence women are subjected to - domestic violence, rape, sexual exploitation through prostitution and objectification of women as sexual objects. Their attention was geared towards removing concrete disadvantages - pervasive sexual division of labour that undervalued women's work, segregated men's and women's roles in stark ways, limited their access to many critical resources that go to enhancing the quality of life, including necessities to maintain life that develop their capabilities to enhance their functioning to procure adequate leisure, freedom, and the power to make decisions on their own. Through recourse to changes in law and in institutions that sustain patriarchy, the women's movement, if not eliminating patriarchy, gained some ground. More than anything else, the movement has influenced the discourse on gender.

'Gender' as a discourse, got incorporated into the vocabulary of development for removing the disadvantages that accrued to women solely on the fact of being female. Gender stereotyping and its implication for what it meant to be a woman was resisted by women to get more space in society. The process involved dislodging the image of the 'weak' woman and making her empowered. While women moved more easily into male domains in many ways, interestingly there were always disclaimers from them that they did not want to be like men. While some feminists claimed superior nurturing qualities to be an innate quality arising from motherhood and mothering, others argued this was solely the result of mothering being done exclusively by women most of the time. Western psychologists undertook endless studies to emphasize differences in chromosomes, hormones, musculature and so on, but rarely to show similarities. When role reversals were shown, it was to create amusement - like for instance showing men becoming pregnant. The gigolo is not the answer to the call girl; men seeking the body beautiful with bulging muscles to be the alpha male is not the gateway to becoming more human for biology has reduced dimorphism in size between the human male and female unlike in many mammals where the male ( like the gorilla ) sports a noticeable gigantism. Male prostitution does not restore humanity to humans but only enchains both males and females to commercialisation and objectification. Women growing biceps may be a show of independence and 'choice'. I have always had difficulty with this word 'choice' which somehow suggests it is unsullied by any extraneous influence other than pure 'subjectivity'.

During our anti colonial struggle, the criticism of practices like sati and child marriage provoked middle class Indian male's sensibilities to preserve what they considered the sacred space of the home - where idealised conjugal relations would

fulfil the men's need for self esteem. Women became the signifier of morality and prestige of the nation.

There have been many models available to us. There was admiration for the 'virangana' - the brave fighter for a noble cause – ironically the same behaviour would attract severe censure as unbecoming of women had they fought for their own liberation. Likewise, there is approval for women 'saints' often posthumously when they crossed the tabooed order of things where their primary role is to maintain family welfare. They are welcome if they can be utilised for profit. Hugging 'women saints' like Anandmayi are, let us not forget source of much lucrative donations. Even Gautam Buddha the messenger of a humane and ethical alternative to human conflicts through peace and compassion, initially did not think women can aspire for transcendence. There is of course the well known story of Maitreyi and her dispute with Rishi Yagnayavalka about women's equal right to spiritual knowledge. We have, thus, many episodes of women's aspiration for gender equality but few of men doing the same. This is where the book makes a beginning.

Feminism grappled with notions of femininity and models of the ideal woman. However, the women's movement had no gender agenda to address men as a group.

Gender had two sides of the equation-men and women. Patriarchies no doubt privileged men. The book primarily seeks to bring home the point that men's notions of themselves which this dominance enforces on them should be taken up if gender equality has to be achieved and if polarisation has to be eliminated and if both men and women have to recover their basic humanity. Traditional dominant forms of masculinity valorize qualities like: self-centredness, being unemotional, being competitive, aggressive and sexually promiscuous. The story narrated by Abhiram Bhadkamkar in the book illustrates this agony where a young man who takes to dancing and enjoys it is derided by others for not being a 'man' like his friend who typifies the macho model of man appreciated by society.

On the other hand, there have been other models for men, too, which plead for men becoming more like women and imbibe gentleness, non-aggression and nurturing qualities. Yin and Yang which stand for masculinity and femininity exist in all humans and we need to balance the two. Scientists speak of the functions of the left and right sides of the brain which demarcate the analytical versus emotional/creative aspects of behaviour. Bhaskar Roy stresses the need for a balance of left and right among all humans. Artists in general are thought of as being more feminine with intense left side use. Gandhi for example drew women into the mass struggle for freedom by extolling the unique feminine gift for self sacrifice.

Thus, there are two views: one that all of us have masculine- feminine qualities and that social practice polarises the traits as between men and women. The other that man and woman are different. According to the pioneering study by psychologist Sandra Bem, traits such as aggressiveness or gentleness lie in a continuum, not at polar ends. Indian mythology's Ardha Nareshwar purport to depict precisely this reality. Interpretations vary on this - some hold that the image really depicts the 'containment' of 'shakti' - the female energy by 'purusha' the male energy.

Well, leaving aside these various notions and their interpretations, I would like to recount an important piece of research that tried to test how men and women perceived mental health. It was undertaken by Dr. Madhuri Shah, the ex-Vice Chancellor of S.N.D.T. Women's University decades ago. A test was administered to primary school teachers giving them a list of traits. They were asked to group those that could describe a) a healthy male b) a healthy female and c) a healthy human. Surprisingly, women teachers chose what normally are seen associated with the feminine as equal to the healthy human whereas men teachers had a more confused list. Is it that women teachers did not think men were adequately human? Or men could not decide what signified a healthy human?

The controversy about how different or how similar men and women are continues. There is a perceived threat to admitting to any ambiguity. Apparently gender identity is fairly well formed by the age of two - not surprising, considering how much social effort is put in to uphold this. Each culture validates to some extent transference in behavioural modes such as modesty in dress, speech and actions; in occupying positions of power, in performing erstwhile male occupations or dressing like men.. These are superficial modes of being that may do nothing to alter the basic understanding of masculinity or femininity. The feminist movement all over the world has succeeded in breaking the barriers to entry into the male world but the opposite of males claiming female domains is still a far cry. Only in a small minority of families do men undertake household chores and child care. Man as the earner provider is a strong presumption despite the empirical evidence that nearly two thirds of families are economically supported by women. Fukuyama of 'End of History' fame observed this as a worldwide phenomenon.

It is in this context that the book is an appropriate exploration of so far unexamined recesses of the male mind, its received wisdom, its fears and its anxieties in trying to match social expectations of the model 'man.' For, in our context institutional planning to change 'gender relations' under high sounding labels have not yielded corrective transformations on both sides of the gender divide. Exogenous social processes operating through engineered policy could not induce sequential changes in those culturally embedded, self generating endogenous processes. Culture intervenes as a meta- gravitational force. Culture products cannot emerge, operate, persist in the light of social processes unless the relational nexus in the respective gamut of reciprocal relations of individuals incorporate them and bear their symbolic form. What all this means is the battle for a more humanly viable gender relationship and human enhancement, and enlightenment can ultimately only come from change of hearts and minds in both men and women. A 'Florence of Arabia' in a work of fiction set out to make a dent on that stringent Arab patriarchy but failed miserably. This is where the book helps us to understand the most critical dimension for bringing about gender equality. Men have to be mobilised to change themselves, to become gender sensitive.

Concerned with the pervasive violence against women, a group of young urban educated middle class men floated an organisation called MAVA (Men Against Violence and Abuse) in 1993. MAVA's objectives were to bring about change in traditional male dominant attitudes of men by a gamut of activities: counselling, publications, public service, legal aid, research, exhibitions, shelter homes for battered women and so on. This was an important initiative to counter a regressive

association launched by some men's groups threatened by what they saw as the erosion of their power "Purush Hakka Saurakshan Samiti" (Committee for the Protection of Men's rights). MAVA launched a magazine in Marathi, *Purush Spandana* with the sub title *Manuspanaachya Vatevarchi*. (Men's feelings on the path towards Humanness')

The present book shares with us the exploration of the difficult journey of modern post feminist, gendered man through the treacherous terrain of relationships and ideologies through the process of examining masculinity. The message of the book imparts to us a faith that men can and should join women's struggles to create a less violent, more just world, where men and women can walk together on the path of towards humanness.

A well articulated introduction gives us the genesis of the men's movement towards greater gender sensitivity and the authors point out that male dominance dehumanizes not only the suppressed but also the dominator. A fictionalised feminist heroine 'Florence of Arabia' who bravely ventured to bring feminism to Saudi Arabia - that citadel of orthodox patriarchy - failed miserably. We now know why. We also need gender-sensitive Laurences of Arabia. Women alone cannot bring change - both genders have to act together. There have been many male social reformers who stood for gender equality in our history. Maharashtra has had a sizeable share of them.

One of the interesting observations brought out by Mangesh Kulkarni in the book is the fact that masculinity is not unchanging nor is it monolithic. There are 'many' masculinities and new ones are emerging. There is the new breed of the 'metrosexual' who is inordinately fond of his appearance and goes to immense trouble to look good, assisted by the cosmetic industry and the media in the age of consumer capitalism. We also have the model of the caring father taking fathering seriously. In the West, as after divorce women get custody of children there are now organisations to promote Fathers' Rights. Moving stories abound in literature on the loving relationship between fathers and daughters. That exists here too - a book was published some time ago with the title "fathers and daughters". There are also real life stories of men's ennobling, tender intimacy with women as narrated by Adarkar in the book. The point is that real life presents many models as opposed to the standardized version - the picture of the dominant male who is insensitive to women, and is aggressive. The usual joke about presenting bangles to men who are not 'man' enough tells us our prevalent notions.

The present book's real merit lies in the way it brings to us experiences and not just high theory. You may talk of patriarchy but many men may think it is some thing that lurks elsewhere, definitely nothing to do with them. If women see men as the vector of the virus patriarchy, the vector here affects the carrier too. That is the invaluable message of the book. What I liked most about the book is the hope it brings to us that there is a tremendous possibility to all of us becoming more human than just gendered beings. Feminists have called this passage, the longest and last revolution. May be peace will then reign on this planet instead of violence.