

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK 'BREAKING THE MOULDS'

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The contemporary women's movement was instrumental in identifying and bringing into focus gender issues affecting women in different parts of the world. Although issues like violence against women are universal, they manifest themselves differently in different societies, e.g. dowry, genital mutilation, honor killings etc. The women's movement and its academic offshoot - women's studies - not only made these "invisible" issues visible; they provided a sound, comprehensive, alternative framework for analysis of all 'human' issues. The "women's perspective" on everything from sexuality, gender relations to development paradigm and ecology was evolved through a fine blend of scholarship and experience sharing. In fact, the most serious attempt to break the dichotomy between "theory" and "action", "experience" and "discourse" came from the women's movement.

Although "women" and "women's movement" do not denote homogeneous entities or monolithic structures, the women's movement tried to weave bonds of sisterhood and address issues common to "all" women. Its emphasis has been on empowering women, providing redressal for atrocities and injustices, formulating legislations and policies for women, and asserting women's rights at various levels. It has succeeded, if not in finding lasting solutions to women's problems world over, at least in influencing the discourse on key areas like "gender", "population" and "development". So much so that gender issues, over the years, have been seen largely as women's issues not only by women's groups, but also by governments, international organizations and even by developmental activists. While all this may have often helped the cause of women's liberation, there has been a major lacuna- men, the beneficiaries, and also in a way, the victim of patriarchy - have mostly been left out, isolated and insulated from this process of transformation. Because the women's movement had no agenda to address men as a group -- to help liberate them from the shackles of patriarchal traditions and practices which impose unrealistic expectations, gender stereotypes, and unrelenting pressures upon them to perform specific roles which dehumanize them. (Attempts like Betty Friedans's "An open letter to true men" are honorable exceptions.)

In the '70s, women had only just begun discussing their own issues as women; and men, for the first time, really didn't figure – the focus of attention was **not** men. Many women activists had to engage in bitter personal and collective battles with men in their quest for equality and justice. May be, at that stage, the women's movement or women's studies did not feel the need to address men and attempt to change them as apparently it's men who are responsible for the problems women have been facing for centuries. It is men's world; a system that provides power and privileges, a form of 'patriarchal dividend' to men. Thus, many women's rights advocates felt that "men themselves are a problem." Hence, for historical reasons, the question of addressing men and involving them in the process of societal transformation did not touch the women's movement.

The real enemy

The real enemy is patriarchy, and not men. Men are like women, carriers (although “privileged”) of patriarchy. Like women, men, too, are trapped in unenviable, dehumanizing stereotypes by patriarchy. Moreover, as experience in the past few years related to men’s involvement in struggles against violence against women (VAW) shows, they can be a part of the solution too. Men can change themselves, and in the process, contribute to the change of society. Because, contrary to popular perception, masculinity is not a single, homogeneous concept. It is a social construct; and like any other social constructs, it is amenable to change. In fact, the process of social transformation cannot take place without meaningful participation of an important (and powerful) segment of society, i.e. men. While this assertion does not belittle the major role played by women in the struggle for equality, justice and liberation, it only underlines the significance of simultaneously “liberating” men from the shackles of patriarchy.

Masculinity is not a unitary and monolith construct. It is shaped by socio-cultural forces like caste/race, class, urban-rural divide, geo-political divisions, family and other environmental factors. However, certain common trends are visible across all cultures, thanks to an all-pervading patriarchy. Gender discrimination in various forms is promoted in the family through the process of socialization. Playing with dolls, helping mother - sister in kitchen or household work are projected as not a man’s arena and boys who resort to them are labeled as ‘effeminate’ not only by elderly men but also by peer group members. From a younger age, boys are taught that expressing sorrow / crying is not a trait of *real* men. The male child is conditioned not to express normal human feelings like fear, or sorrow and that is why the male mind has to banish the feelings of tenderness, rectitude, sensitivity from his mindset and create a defensive armor of audacity emanating estrangement, and loneliness. There begins his search for power and control to feel a sense of security. The race for power leads to the vicious circle of the inability to develop human relationships and then not realizing their worth.

Thus, men often become violent, aggressive, and uncaring due to patriarchal modes of socialization that moulds their psyche. Images of masculinity in society are linked to being strong and violent, and to notions that men with ‘power’ are ‘real men’. Media violence imprints the image of the male as a creature who hits, kills and abuses, and such a projection can scar minds even as young as two years. Traits of brutality, insensitivity and ruthlessness associated with masculinity are, thus, products of societal defects, faulty socialization process and a warped ideal of manhood, being systematically reinforced by all subsystems of society including education, health, family, media and law.

To overcome this situation, it calls for a change in the male mindset, like in the female, for which it is of great importance to make the male talk and write about his own emotions and feelings, personal life, friendship, togetherness, sexual relationship, ambitions, addictions and violence. Breaking male-stereotypes is a key factor in men’s liberation.

All humans are androgynous

At no other time in recorded history than at the present has the human male been at a crossroads, as far as defining his identity is concerned. The fact -- scientific, evolutionary or simple logic -- is that it is not one's maleness or femaleness alone that defines one's identity; it is the harmony between the two within one's perception of oneself that determines how comfortable and integrated one's identity is going to be. However, the Indian male (like his counterpart in any other part of the world, brought up on the archaic notions of masculinity and femininity) cannot accept and assimilate the fact that all human beings have within them a blend of both. "Androgyny" is not an ideal; it is a fact of life--at hormonal, physical and emotional levels. In the words of Dada Dharmadhikari, a man who theorized and practiced gender equality much before the emergence of feminist movement in India, "It is neither ethically desirable nor possible to determine which of the two sexes is superior. A complete individual is one who has both the excellences of man and woman. A man should have the excellences of woman in him and a woman should have the excellences of man in her. Then alone is either of them an integrated individual. As a matter of fact the two are not two separate halves but rather a harmonious whole."

The Indian male today cannot fathom the changes occurring around him. While he engages himself in the single-minded intellectual pursuit or the mad rat race for power and money (all supposedly male responsibilities, commitments and privileges), he finds his "booty" being whisked away by women entering and capturing all male bastions. Moreover, his "focused" approach leaves him emotionally bankrupt and unimaginative. While stereotypes of "thinking" male and "feeling" women are myths, the fact remains that a human being needs both - intellectual growth and emotional harmony. "The pursuit of intellectual growth becomes meaningless in the absence of emotional harmony, for the intellect will not then have a context to exist in. Equally meaningless is the pursuit of emotional harmony in the absence of intellectual development, for emotions will then have no purpose. It is the congruence between emotional and intellectual comfort that is going to finally determine the balanced human being, who whether male or female, experiences the 'human' attributes of identity more strongly than those traits considered gender-specific. By driving himself further away from his emotions than was necessary, the male of the species actually held back his own growth as a human being. And today he has reached a position, where he has no alternative but to back-track a bit and pay more attention to what he 'feels' than what he 'thinks'. Unless he has developed adequate mechanisms with which he understands and deals with emotional conflicts, they will just fester and explode during the next crisis he experiences.

As Vijay Nagaswami observed in his essay 'Love and Fear,' "Strictly speaking there is no masculine or feminine way of experiencing an emotion; there's only the human way. Traditionally, there is a tacit agreement that feelings are feminine - grief, tenderness, empathy, the desire to nurture and to preserve. Comfort in sharing the emotion one experiences involves a lot of communication of one's thoughts and feelings, it also means

the acquisition of a whole new vocabulary. In short, all a man needs to do to acknowledge that emotion exists, accept that the pursuit of emotions is as important as that of the intellect, get in touch with his vulnerability, experience the emotions in as pure a form as possible, share these emotions, acquire a new vocabulary to express his emotions. This process would help him in becoming a nurturing person who can be emotionally committed to being in an intimate relationship and flow between the parent, adult and child ego states that make up his psyche. However, there are no role models to help him make the shift to the thinking-feeling man. Men have to start talking to other men.” (Magazine ‘*Gentleman*’, May 2001)

It takes guts for a man to renounce obvious advantages of the male-dominated system and step down from a superior position, in order to win moral self-respect. It means to reawaken suppressed parts of the personality, to develop a greater human potential, to be able to meet women as equals, to experience children openly and tenderly, and be a positive model for them. Male emancipation process is a complicated, delicate and difficult process. However, one thing is sure; that in this process, men may lose more than their chains but they surely have a whole world to gain.

For boys today, the road to “manhood” is more treacherous than ever : drugs are more potent and easily available ; images involving sex and the objectification of not only girls and women but of boys and men have become more pervasive and more explicit ; street violence has escalated from brawls and knife fights to drive-by shootings with automatic weapons ; the number of boys growing up in homes without fathers or father-figures is on the rise.

Emergence of men’s groups

One of the most hopeful of current trends across the globe is the growing synergy of men’s groups (although still in small numbers and relatively disorganized) who reject the system that creates patriarchal values. Established in response to the women’s movement worldwide, most of them have been actively working for the past decade or two, They are trying to re-examine the concept of masculinity. They intend to go to the roots of the reasons why this concept got so perverted. Interrogating the dominant constructs of masculinity, they are engaged in critiques of male socialization and gender roles. In the process, they are attempting to develop a more sharp gender perspective on issues that have been always seen as women’s issues. The ‘White Ribbon Campaign’ which began in Canada and later has been spread to several countries, the ‘Fathers’ Incorporated’ in Jamaica, ‘Men Overcoming Violence’ and ‘Men Can Stop Rape’ in the U.S., the ‘No to Violence’ group in Australia are examples of such men’s initiatives.

As Michael Flood observed, “Men’s anti-violence activism is significant in at least two ways. First, it symbolizes the growing recognition that violence against women will only cease when men join with women to put an end to it. Second, the existence of men’s anti-violence activism demonstrates that men can take collective public action to oppose men’s violence.”

Men Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA) and Purush Uvach in India are among such groups of men who have been, over a decade, working consistently on these aspects - attempting to question traditional, male-dominated attitudes, taking a re-look at the faulty socialization process and at their own upbringing, discussing the alternate models of masculinity, and in the process, involving more sensitive men to be a part of the solution in tackling gender-related issues.

How can groups like MAVA and Purush Uvach, along with their counterparts in India and other parts of the world contribute to changing the mindset of men and to a more humane, equal and just world? Mangesh Kulkarni, a young scholar of masculinities suggests--“The traditional dominant forms of masculinity which valorize self-centred, unemotional, competitive, aggressive and sexually promiscuous behaviour require serious re-evaluation for enhancing the well-being of both men and women. The reconstruction of masculinity along emancipatory lines must therefore proceed in tandem with feminism. The agenda set up by men would include the salvaging and strengthening the fatherhood, encouragement of healthy male-bonding and mentoring to generate new forms of solidarity, defeating the ‘machine man’ archetype so as to achieve true physical, psychological and spiritual well-being and establishing a nurturing and creative relationship with nature. The promotion of an appropriate set of male values awaits the emergence of a "critical mass" of men who will wake up to the need for men to draw strength from each other, to exchange passivity for activity, and who will generate a new and credible set of roles for themselves that will complement rather than antagonize the new confidence of women ⁽⁶⁾.

An important step in this direction is the publication of Purush Spandana – Manuspanachya Vatevarchi’ (loosely translated, it means ‘Men’s Vibrations... on the Path of Humanness’), an annual magazine jointly brought out by MAVA and Purush Uvach since 1996. Published in Marathi on the eve of Diwali festival, the magazine is being read widely in the state, especially among the progressive sections of the Maharashtrian society. Widely appreciated by media and literary bodies, it has received numerous awards, right from its inception.

Both MAVA and Purush Uvach were born as a response of sensitive men to a strong women’s liberation movement in western India. Maharashtra has a very rich tradition, encompassing more than 150 years, of radical and progressive social movements on issues of caste and gender. Mahatma Jotiba Phule and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, both pioneers of the anti-caste and gender justice movements happened to be Maharashtrian men. Initiated by first generation of men supporting feminism, both these groups expanded to include men who supported gender equality and were keen to counter violence and atrocities against women.

The magazine, perhaps the only of its kind in India, was born out of the need to give expression to the concerns, feelings and analyses of men on the question of gender. It aims to provide such men a forum, a space to comfortably unwind, communicate... share their concerns, fears and insecurities, unfold their capacity for empathy, sensitivity, patience and intimacy, get exposed to new ideas and images of men and question the

notions of masculinity that dehumanizes itself by dehumanizing the other life-giving half of its own species.

Hence, it uses all forms of communication such as short stories, first-person accounts, interviews, graphics, plays, poems, along with analytical articles, group discussions, micro-studies and interviews of professionals like sociologists, psychiatrists and of activist men who have tried to challenge various aspects of patriarchy in their personal and social lives. The subjects cover a vast canvas of contemporary issues ranging from sexuality, relationships, socialization, violence against women in diverse forms like sex-selective abortions and murders of young girls by rejected men. The writers hail from varied professions and from various age groups and social strata; majority being young-middle aged educated middle class. It thus provides fresh insights in understanding men's attitudes and in ways to challenge and change them.

While efforts like "Purush Spandana" were earlier ignored or even ridiculed, our focus on involving men in a meaningful way to change the gender equation was vindicated by the recent rethinking on gender issues all over the world. Lately, international agencies, donor agencies, development groups, and even women's groups have started talking of "male involvement", "engendering the male change agents" and "reaching out and communicating with men."

Groups like "MAVA" and "Purush Uvach" are springing in other parts of India and outside. On this background, "MAVA" and "Purush Uvach" strongly felt a need to reach out and share their thoughts and concerns to more and more people. Hence, we decided to bring out this **first anthology of Indian men's writings on gender** in English. Apart from featuring translations of articles from "Purush Spandana" issues of last 8 years of 20th century, it includes fresh write-ups by men on gender issues. This publication, while recording the impressions by concerned men who have questioned and in their own way attempted to change patriarchal, male-dominated attitudes in society, attempts to lay the foundation of men's movement and be a primer of men's studies in India.

Reconstructing and redefining masculinity

Among the articles selected for the book, is a lot of experiential sharing which help in breaking the myth of masculinity as monolithic construct and brings out the diversity, complexity, pain and richness of experiences of men who are attempting to break out of the patriarchal moulds. In fact, analysis of one's experiences as a male and reaching out to other men to share them are the themes underlying all the writings included in this anthology. Sanjay Pawar makes a forceful appeal to his young friends to find the real meaning of "maleness and virility" through his "A dialogue with oneself, or could be with any of you..." Rajiv Kalelkar weaves a complex tale of a person, who is a male, a Marxist, a writer, a concerned son and a father; who is physically challenged and how all these factors shape his masculinity and relationships.

Men are also feeling the need to relate to women "differently" and share their experiences of such relationships. Prashant Kothadia narrates how he "grew up" with his daughter;

while Arvind Adarkar tells a very warm, touching, endearing story of his relation with three elderly women. Abhay Kanta's journey interfacing women and his gradual understanding of man-woman relationship would enable the reader to pause and reflect upon their own experiences and interactions.

There are a few write-ups, which provide new insights on the theoretical understanding and analysis of gender issues. Samar Nakhate, while revealing the hidden meanings of the images used by the film and television media, analyses both – the medium and the message and how the audio-visual media has influenced our thinking, especially on man-woman relationship. Dr. Harish Shetty, an eminent psychiatrist and a mental health activist, calls upon men to “make love” to kitchen to win the love of their wives. He also puts forth totally innovative suggestions like “bare foot mental health workers” and “developing a relationship of trust with the local culture”. Another eminent psychiatrist, Dr. Pradeep Patkar dwells at length on the manifestation of “Andropause” in the Indian male - its socio-cultural roots and effects. Hari Narke's scholarly account of the life and works of Mahatma Jotiba Phule, who, one hundred and fifty years back, sow the seeds of liberation from caste, colonial exploitation and women's subjugation, is a step towards our attempts of discovering our “history”. An interview with P. D. Hankare reveals his undaunting spirit in his almost single-handed fight in support of rape victims. Jatin Wagle documents the history of the growth of MAVA and provides a constructive critique of its philosophy and activities. Ravindra. R. P. juxtaposes the dichotomy between “Men's issues” and “Women's movement” and makes a fervent appeal for “men's liberation from patriarchal control” as a complement of “women's emancipation” and their integration into “human liberation”. Utpal Chandawar acquaints the readers with the contribution of ‘Purush Uvach’ towards the newly emerging men's movement.

Sanjiv Latkar's short story, Chetan Datar's one act play depicting the journey of a gay person in search of his personhood, Ravindra's dialogue with Princess Diana, the “Alice in Wonderland” who lived and died in “virtual reality”, Anil Dabhade's collage of relationships in “Patchwork quilt”, Ashok Naigaonkars' satire on the educated, but unempowered women are some of classic examples of fiction from the first generation of “pro-feminist” men.

In general, the contributions included in this anthology encapsulate the thinking of the sensitive men of the nineties on the gender question. Although we have tried to make it much more representative, it essentially represents a collective thinking of men from middle and upper-middle class and mostly upper castes in Maharashtra. We have consciously avoided including original English writings and writers already well known to English-reading people. We have retained the rawness of experiences and expressions as that is, in fact, the very essence of this book. These articles were written by people who had to discover their own vocabulary. The emphasis is on experience -sharing, and hence more of first-person accounts, interviews, and fiction. The second stage - of analyzing these experiences and formulating a “theory” out of them- has just begun.

The missing vocabulary

When compared with the women's writings in the formative years of feminism, the expressions of men seem to contain a lot of inadequacies and hiccups. Firstly, because, "opening up" of men is much more difficult and complex than in women. Women have a long history of sharing of experiences and feelings, backed by the socialization process. We find women sharing their innermost sorrows and anguishes even with perfect strangers in a journey. However, men would mostly talk of politics and business (and sex in a different way) with other men. Even the best male friends do not exchange their innermost insecurities and problems. Women's interest and expression on issues related to "relationships" and men's preference for "objective, dry, cerebral" topics perfectly fit the stereotypes. It may not be related to the biological differences between the sexes, but is surely related to the meanings imparted to these differences through socialization.

Let us look at the communication in the adolescent age. "Menarche" is an event. It is considered to be a defining moment in a woman's life. It might put several restrictions on a young girl's mobility and choices. The rituals 'celebrating' it (observed in some societies in India and outside) do reinforce patriarchal controls over women's sexuality and fertility. Nevertheless, at least such an event initiates some dialogue between a mother and a daughter on this topic. Again, such a dialogue may be restricting, rather than liberating. It may not allow questioning by the girl; yet it IS a dialogue. A relationship between a daughter and mother is built around it. Women do discuss menarche and menstruation amongst them. No such thing happens with men. The first nocturnal emission occurring in a young boy's life is not considered an event. It is a dark secret. There is absolutely no dialogue on this issue, either from the father or mother. A man might find that a mother to whom he was very close suddenly appears to be distant and detached, that too at a time when he needs her the most. No relationship or a dialogue is built between a father and a son. Hence, men do not have any "clean" vocabulary to describe their sexual feelings and experiences.

At a "Fertility Awareness" workshop organized for rural women in Madhya Pradesh, India, we had a strange, but revealing experience. The uneducated rural women coming from very backward area were candidly describing their experiences of menarche, and of growing up, while the men-rural and urban, including the most articulate intellectuals and activists could not open their mouths. The men had to ask for a "separate space" to help them "open out". Then, they discovered that they did not have any experience, confidence and even vocabulary to describe their innermost feelings- related to sexuality and otherwise. The male partner's inability or unwillingness to express clearly his feelings is a very common complaint in most marital discords. As long as they wear the mask of "know-all, confident" male, they might seem to be clear in their thinking and articulate in their expression. But, once they decide to remove this mask, they appear to be vulnerable, confused, groping in the dark and fumbling for words. Moreover, for a newly awakened woman, the experience is ecstatic and liberating as she feels that she has nothing to lose but her chains and has everything to gain in exchange. (The price she has to pay in terms of insecurity, societal opposition and severing of relationships based on patriarchal values and control is of course reflected in their later writings. But here we are

talking of the writings of the newly awakened, first generation feminist or pro-feminist persons.) But, for a man who rethinks on gender relations, the path is much hazy and uncertain. He has to lose his many of his privileges and advantages, while the emotional and human gains are slow to come by.

Hence, if there is a unifying theme in all these contributions, it is of restlessness, of entrapment. The men, whether adolescent, young, middle age or in the twilight zone, find themselves entrapped in suffocating moulds. They cannot make out the rapidly changing world outside, specially the relationship with the changing woman. They have not been equipped with the tools to analyze and understand this rapidly changing reality. They are expected to be “active”, “performers”, “winners”, and “thinkers”. And they can be none of these. They have no words to express their anguish, helplessness. Hence, they fumble as they search for words.

Finally, a word about the title. ‘Breaking the Moulds’ aptly describes the deconstruction of patriarchal stereotypes, while the subtitle underlines both – men’s analysis of patriarchy and also their critique of patriarchal understanding of men. The subtitle has been inspired by the title of the famous book ‘Women look at biology looking at women.’

We hope that the richness of men’s expressions in this book will not only enrich and humanize the lives of its male readers, it will also enable young impressionable boys to know and understand models of masculinity that promote gender sensitivity, better communication, joint decision-making on issues impacting their lives. It would also reveal to the women readers the more human, vulnerable and sensitive face of masculinities. The stakes are too high for us to do any less.