CHAPTER - 1

INTRODUCTION

With the success of feminist movement the world over in its eventful history of over a century, it is time now to talk about masculinity and masculism (or masculanism) as well. During the last hundred years when the feminism emerged in the late nineteenth century a lot has been said from the women’s point of view and happily it finds wide acceptance. However, at the other extreme, like women in the past, men still continue to be portrayed in stereotypes, much is being said against and a lot has been assumed for them uncritically. With the changed socio-economic and cultural scenario globally, the problems of men have only multiplied. It is time, therefore, to attend to the problems of men. There is now growing realization that it is not at all desirable that women be empowered or granted rights and privileges at the cost of men’s rights. It is imperative to avoid the extremes and maintain the fine balance the two sexes for the overall health of society. That is possible only when concepts like masculinity and femininity are studied, analysed, and appreciated in proper historical, cultural and contemporary contexts. The present research is a small attempt in this direction.

Most civilizations in the world developed mainly as male civilizations with dominant and distinct masculinity cults. Out of these distinct social and cultural set-ups different concepts of masculinity evolved and continued as such for ages. However, in modern times the advent of Renaissance in Europe in the 14th and 15th centuries catapulted MAN at the centre stage of critical inquiry. The glorification of masculinity or manhood received a fillip when the British Navy under the command of Sir Francis Drake defeated the hitherto invincible Spanish Armada in 1588 A.D. The ascendancy of ‘man’ was further reinforced by the views of the famous 16th century surgeon named Amboise Pare who propounded the view that men were a more perfect creation of Nature than women, for it was impossible to change from a man to woman, though the reverse was possible: “Nature tends always towards what is most perfect and not, on the contrary, to perform in such a way that what is perfect should become imperfect” (qtd. in Glover and Kaplan xiii-xiv).
The Augustan Age furthered the cause of masculinity as it brought in the concept of homo economics - i.e., men, and not women, were at the centre of trade and commerce. Also, the Rosseauvean concept of the Noble Savage was no more than an exaltation of masculinity.

In the 18th century Europe was visited by Industrial Revolution. It ushered in exponential rise in capital formation in England and other countries of Europe. The sudden spurt in capital impelled the English people to look for colonies in Asia and Africa to channelise their capital. Voyages to far off lands were undertaken and tales of adventure and heroism eulogizing their manliness and masculinity were produced in abundance and circulated widely. Invariably, these colonial quests were inspired by a sense of exalted notion of their masculinity. Infact, the colonial encounter is taken to be a struggle between competing masculinities of the coloniser and the colonised.

In common parlance, masculinity is taken to be a matrix of qualities and characteristics traditionally associated with men or considered to be commonly characteristics of a male. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines 'masculinity' as "the quality of being masculine" and masculine means "having the qualities or appearance considered to be typical of men; connected with or like men". Webster's dictionary defines the word 'masculinity' as "having qualities regarded as characteristic of men and boys, as strength, vigour, boldness, manly, virile". Manliness is considered as having the qualities of being strong, virile, brave, resolute, honourable. Manliness is also associated with having power and authority. Masculinity thus applies to attributes characteristic of men or to things culturally appropriate to the male of the human species and biologically distinguished from the female sex of the same species.

In reality, masculinity as a concept is multi-faceted, multi-hued, mutable and amorphous, perceived and practised different by people in different societies. It is a way to explain and describe the broad spectrum of realities associated with men and their world view at various levels. At the level of cultural mimesis, it is a cultural construct, a form of identity that shapes personal attributes and behaviour. At the social level, it is a gendered identity seen as a form of ideology which presents or embodies a set of cultural ideals that establish fixed and appropriate roles, values and expectations for and of men. Unlike the biological state of maleness, masculinity is a gender identity constructed
socially, historically and politically. It is the cultural interpretation of maleness, learnt through participation in society and its institutions. In the view of biological determinists, masculinity is men’s basic nature and as such helps to explain not only differences but also inequalities between men and women. At the normative level, masculinity stresses on certain social norms and study of stereotypes or ‘normative ideals’ which a man or woman ought to be or do. In Indian context, this view can be implacable in understanding ‘Dharma’ or ‘Jati Dharma’ as reflected in expressions like ‘Kshatriya dharma’ in classical writings and varna system in ancient India.

Thus, masculinity and its other equivalent like ‘manhood’ or ‘the male role’ refer to the phenomenon of cultural beliefs about and representations of men which influence the way men live, characteristics that differentiate men from women and the strategy for maintaining men’s power.

Hence, masculinity is both form of identity and a form ideology. Gender based violence, heterosexuality, misogyny, homophobia, racism and class / status / caste based discrimination are all implications of the ‘politics of masculinity’ that is associated with and deployed by men to claim power over women. The meanings of masculinity vary not only over time, across cultures, races, ethnicities, castes, classes but also with spaces. So there are multiple masculinities which reflect the characteristics of the spaces in which they are constructed.

In all religions and mythologies across cultures the divine beings are not only invested with celestiality but with masculinity as well. Sky, for instance, as a fundamental symbol of masculinity is found in almost all belief systems. Religions systems attribute height, ascendancy and transcendence to masculinity. The supreme god of North America Amotken is a celestial god who is believed to dwell in the crown of the cosmic trees. In the Tantric traditions in India, Nepal and Tibet the sublime is taken to be masculine that can be accessed by focusing and directing upward the feminine energies of the body. In Hindu religion, there are many instances when the sublime descends to the mundane world by his sweet volition in the form of avatara. Thus Lord Vishnu mercifully descended upon the earth to be born in a series of mortal forms as a fish, as a boar, as king Rama, as cowherd boy Krishna. By contrast, mother goddess manifests herself on earth but she is not credited with divine descent.
The immanence of masculine principle is manifest in the natural symbolism of the sky overlaying and embracing the supine earth. A sexual dichotomy is featured in the sky being associated with masculine and the earth with feminine and the both constituting the cosmic pair. Masculinity, thus, is widely associated with generative and fecundating powers. This association is clearly evident in one ancient ritual found in Brihadaranyaka Upanisad that enjoins the husband to unite with the wife after uttering “I am the heavens, thou, the earth”. The high god Siva in Hinduism symbolizes the creative and generative principle. Bulls are a common symbol of fecundity. Lord Siva’s cosmic vehicle is a fabulous bull, and the bull is also the form assumed by Zeus in the early Greek myth of Europa’s ravishment. Even in present times Siva is invoked for blessing in Hindu marriage rites.

Again, the phenomenon of the culture heroes, the sacred ancestors of human descent, found in all cultures, are invariably males. Their deification has also led to the development of the masculinity cult. Other attributes ascribed to masculinity are primordiality, effulgence, stability and essentiality. In world mythologies, masculine first beginnings are common. The feminine being tends to be secondary to masculine being. The emergence of First Woman follows that of the First Man, masculinity precedes femininity in all mythologies. Eve is said to have emerged out of the body of Adam not Adam out of Eve. As already stated, usually the masculine is associated with stability and essentiality and the feminine with change and materiality. The masculine constitutes the inner form—thought or structure of being, while the feminine forms its outer form—word or substance. The masculine is regarded as the potential, inactive form of being while the feminine as kinetic, active being. Further, the masculine is taken to be one and integrated, the feminine is perceived to be plural and diffused.

Above all, in the history of human civilization the phenomenon of war is integrally and invariably associated with masculinity. Human history is an unending saga of struggle, strife and competition between groups, inevitably male, for scarce human resources such as women, movable property, the labour of subjugated populations and territory. These struggles can be described in one comprehensive term ‘war’ which without exception is a masculine activity. Since ancient times acts of valour and war have been idealized through folklores and epics like Ramayana, Mahabharata, Illiad and
Paradise Lost. In the context of war acts of valour, valiance, value, virtue and virility have been invested with great prestige and honour. Etymologically all these terms are related to the meaning “to be strong”, “be worth”, “power” and “manliness”. In all ancient world civilizations gods like Indic war god Indra, Roman God Porr (Thor), thunderbolt wielder and the heroes like Arjuna, Herakles, Arthur and Achilles promote and propagate the cult of masculinity in their respective cultures and traditions. In the same tradition, the institution of war and warriors has been associated with the institution of kingship. The source of power of the war leader is secular authority necessarily a masculine characteristic. Kingship is conferred upon the persona of one man. As an aberration, if this authority is entrusted to a woman, she is then ritually consecrated as a man. The institution of kingship unambiguously declares the centrality of man in the cosmos.

Thus, in the evolution of the human history attributes like supremacy, loftiness, primordiality, ascendancy, creative generative capacity etc. have come to be associated with the ideology of masculinity. The masculine being is regarded as the giver and upholder of permanent institutions of culture, law and morality. He is associated with stability and essentiality. He is the pursuer and knower of truth and endowed with the potential to achieve mystical heights. The male attributes of valour, valiance, value, virtue, virility, violence, power and domination as integral to masculine ideology have evolved universally in the long march of civilization. However, owing to certain specific historical and cultural circumstances certain masculine traits gain ascendancy in a particular culture. In the West, for instance, masculine ideology is usually identified with strength, leadership, competitiveness, aggression, valiance domination, independence, sexual vigour and virility, rationality, power and control. Power seems to be central to the concept of masculinity in the western world. Interestingly, in Indian culture power emanates from feminine source. Goddesses like Durga, Kali, Lakshmi, Saraswati are believed to be the fountain of creation, strength (to destroy evil), wealth, intellect and wisdom. If masculinity is synonymous with power and strength, in India it has feminine source as well. Hence masculinity and femininity in Indian context converge and coalesce. Regarding other aspects of power like aggression, competition, domination and control, Indian ethos is imbued with the spirit of peaceful co-existence, conciliation,
accommodation and submission to the Mother. The watchword of Indian culture “Vasudhaiva Kutumbkam” is the epitome of humanism, an ethos of pivotal significance in the present age of globalization.

As a concept masculinity has evolved over centuries based on human experience, cultural patterns, religious beliefs and social psychology born of economic determinism. In all religious systems and mythologies, certain attributes have been assigned to masculine beings; certain natural symbols also express the characteristics of the masculine self. These universal natural symbols are sky, peaks, mountains, thunder, rain and certain horned beasts as well as creatures of flight like eagles. Religious systems also attribute cosmic functions to masculine entities. Gods, not goddesses, are credited with such cosmic functions as creation of the mundane universe, invention of the demands of moral subsistence, and establishment of moral codes. Order, stability, discipline, permanence and essentiality are regarded as higher masculine values. These further serve as model and enjoin men and women to imbibe them for the pursuit of distinctive life patterns.

In Hindu philosophy Indra is one of the highest gods in the Vedic religion of ancient India who exemplifies / exhibits higher masculine attributes Indra is an atmospheric divinity. He is credited with rains and storms, expressive of the masculine fecunding force. Indra personifies cosmic vitality. He fertilizes the earth and makes rivers, sap, and blood alike to circulate; his retinue are the winds. He is sagacious; his power is sovereign; in iconography he wears a crown. He is the prototype of the ruler. He also exemplifies the values pertaining to the relationship of ruler and ruled.

Indian masculinity is a highly complex idea that is deeply embedded in Indian psyche and has evolved over centuries of social conditioning in a tradition-bound cultural society. The mythology of the Hindus is a vast repertoire of stories and tales which have been passed on to generations through ages from which people derive their beliefs and find role models in life. Hindu mythology is founded on the mighty triumvirate male gods – Brahman, the creator, Vishnu, the preserver, and Shiva, the destroyer. All the important mythical characters like Rama and Krishna are reincarnations of the god Vishnu caring for and unfolding the fate of the universe. Indian psyche is strongly
influenced by the mythical characters whom they emulate at some unconscious level in life.

In Hindu mythology, women are mostly found as consorts to the male gods and, thus, do not have their own independent identity, with the exception of the goddess Durga. Paradoxical it may appear, but it is a fact corroborated by research studies that Indian civilization, to begin with, was matriarchal in character and principle but was overwhelmed by patriarchy in not so distant future. In the beginning woman was viewed as the life-giver and so worthy of worship and adoration. This explains the pan-Indian practice of worshipping female deities like Luxmi, the goddess of wealth, Saraswati, the goddess of learning and knowledge, Durga, the goddess of strength. The practice of worship of female goddesses is unique to Hindu religion – a practice not practised in any other major religion of the world. However, when men discovered their own role and contribution in bringing life into being, the balance started tilting in favour of men. This resulted in the ritual worship of the phallus of Shiva, the adideva or the first god in Hindu philosophy. Subsequent cultural, social developments and religious and moral discourses led to the evolution of patriarchal social structures that privileged men and marginalized women in social and political spheres and gradually institutionalized men’s power and privileges. The romantic notions of valour and physical prowess came to be associated with men and culminated in the myth or projection of the super-masculine image of Krishna who is described as purushotama or the greatest of men who had eight wives and a large but unspecified number of lovers called gopis. This mythical figure has been endowed with such super-masculinity that in the Vaishnava bhakti tradition even a male devote treats himself as the beloved or mother of Krishna and effects a sort of willing feminization of the self. Similarly, Shiva – the first god in Hindu cosmos-too has been ascribed super-masculinity.

In Indian notion of masculinity, the concept of purusha is of great significance. Purusha is a Sanskrit term which means “person”or “a man”. But the word has acquired independent meaning in the cultural history of India. Purusha, as such, also means “the first man, self” and “consciousness”. In the ultimate analysis, it connotes the concept of atman (self), and brahman (universal self), and Kretrajna (Knower). The inter-
relationships and discussion of these concepts is found in the *Upanishads* and the epics in the work of the Buddhist writer Asvaghosa, and in the texts of Samkhya philosophy.

In Yoga and Samkhya religious philosophies of India, the universe is said to be based on a polarity of two metaphysical principles, the masculine and the feminine. The masculine principle, *purusha* which means "male" or "man", is that of immanent and essential being, whose nature is immutable. On the other hand, the feminine principle is associated with *sakti*, the energy that activates the everchanging material universe. The masculine when deprived of its *sakti* is compared to a lifeless god, while the feminine principle out of balance with the masculine becomes capricious rampant and dangerous.

According to Brihadarankaya Upanishad in the beginning this world was self (atman) alone in the form of a Person (*purusha*). When *purusha* first came into existence he became aware of himself and exclaimed, "I am" (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 1.4.1). Both *atman* and *brahman* inherit the function of creation from the original *purusha*, the first man. In various creation myths the descriptions of how "one" describing to be many, multiplied itself and forming a new creation are to be found in abundance. But change and creation were not the primary functions of the concept of *purusha*. In the Indian thought system *purusha* took on other functions, while the function of creation came to be associated with *prakrti* (materiality). Thus, although *purusha* served at one time as the foundation of the whole universe, it was also instrumental in establishing materiality, an opposing concept forwarded by the Samkhya school of thought. Together, *purusha*, and *prakrti* constituted the essential entities of Samkhya. In Samkhya philosophy *purusha* became a contentless consciousness and the exact opposite of materiality. Consciousness is considered as uncaused and is not itself a cause; it is eternal, without space, without motion, without substratum, without parts, independent, differentiated and unproductive. The purpose of consciousness (*purusha*) is to lend consciousness to materiality and thus justify the very existence of materiality. By its mere presence, consciousness is the "passive witness" (*saksin*) of materiality, beneficiary of the activities of materiality and makes the ordinary experience meaningful.

In Samkhya thought, *purusha* is instrumental in achieving the highest aim of liberation. Liberation comes from the knowledge whereby one distinguishes between two entities: contentless consciousness (*purusha*) and materiality (*prakrti*) as essentially
different things. Thus in Indian thought systems masculinity in the ultimate analysis lends
to the highest mystical experience leading to Truth.

However, in Indian society the ascription of super-masculinity to Krishna and
Shiva in cultural myths led to the establishment of hegemonic masculinity over women in
the long run. We knew creation of any identity masculine or feminine – depends mainly
upon gender status and patterns of power structures that exist in a society. The Indian
male is largely exposed to a set of beliefs and practices in which male supremacy remains
unchallenged and female subjugation is taken for granted. The male identity is mainly
constructed through personal possessions and achievements and in Indian society women
sometimes figure on his list of possessions. In a tradition – bound culture like ours men
are always in a position to oppress women or exercise power over them as father, husband, brother or son. Most women too, in Indian cultural milieu are so conditioned
that they readily accept the masculine power over them without any questioning or
resistance. In Hindu tradition man / woman relationship is quite complex as the Hindu
philosophy transcends all notions of western masculinity and femininity since caste and
patriarchy have an intrinsic nexus with gender and contribute to man’s superiority and
women’s inequality. However, despite the complexity of Indian society, the Indian
concept of masculinity at operational level fits into its traditional view which equates
masculinity with domination and power.

In the context of postcolonialism masculinity is a term which touches most the
raw nerve of the colonised people. People with a colonial history react to it most
sensitively because colonialism was justified on the incontrovertible theory of the
effeminacy of a conquered people who accepted subjugation. Conquest, control and rule
are masculine, by the same logic then being conquered, controlled and ruled is inevitably
feminine. So when the colonized people threw off the colonial rule, they moved from
effeminacy to masculinity. If indeed the “empire was, at least in part, a textual exercise”
(14), as Elleke Boehmer suggests, then certainly this phenomenon of moving from
effeminacy to masculinity, so intrinsically related to the making and breaking of an
empire, is reflected in literary works as well. Hence, to Indians gaining independence
from colonial rule was more than a glorious journey from the ‘darkness of captivity’ to

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the ‘light of freedom’. It was, in fact, a journey from prostrate effeminacy to upright masculinity.

The supposed effeminacy of the colonised male coupled with his barbarity in / famously formed the cornerstone of the colonialist ideology. The non-masculine native male was declared devoid of sufficient courage, a challenging attitude or an iron zeal. And thus he was declared incapable of holding values like achievement, competition, control, sportsmanship, efficacy and service. He was deemed incapable of controlling others or protecting his own possessions. So he was needed to be ruled over and guided by the masculine white man who of course additionally brought ‘civilization’ with him. However, in the process of consolidating the white self against the coloured Other, the white man had to assume an almost stifling hyper-masculinity, which reverted back to his own society and culture with a force not always beneficial as Nandy observes: It de-emphasize[s] speculation, intellection and ‘caritas’ as feminine, and justifie(s) a limited cultural role for women and femininity by holding that the softer side of human nature [is] irrelevant to the public sphere. But this side-effect was generally ignored and considered immaterial compared to the immense material gains generated by colonialist enterprise. Moreover, it ensured for the white man an elevated position in the world where, as Frantz Fanon asserts in Black Skin, White Masks;  

He never feels himself inferior in any respect to the coloured man. His whiteness certifies his (hyper) masculinity which in turn authorises his world-wide rule. The myth of the ‘dependency complex of the colonized peoples’ is more firmly established; the emblematic emasculation of the colonized man is more thoroughly accomplished while his ruler’s complacent self-confidence is further inflated. (46)

Hence, no wonder that, at the height of its dominance and success, the British Empire should be “a global sprawl of hubris” (Boehmer 13) and this hubris undoubtedly at the same time derives from and further reinforces the white man’s hyper-masculinity. On the other hand, an assault is deliberately mounted on this very hubris, when, discarding its so called ‘dependence complex’ and questioning its effeminate image, a colonized people clamours for sovereignty. If having remained shackled in an imperialist rule confirms their effeminacy, the tearing away from that bondage to heal their wounded
self-respect after putting up a brave fight against a hyper-masculine power surely proclaims their ascent to masculinity. It goes without saying that if being controlled is being effeminate, then gaining control is certainly re-gaining not just lost liberty but also lost masculinity.

In the colonial context in India's case, the path to re-gain masculinity was paved by Gandhiji with an unhesitant embrace and encouragement of femininity. India's well known commentator and critic Ashish Nandy emphasizes the fact that Mahatma Gandhi, true to his philosophy of truth and non-violence, opposed the idea of competing British hyper-masculinity by imitating it on a grander scale. Instead what he proposed to Indians was to admit their femininity which was their label as a colonized people-without being ashamed of it and use it as a tool against the rulers. Thus, to use Ashis Nandy's helpful terms, Gandhiji rejected 'anti-thesis' for 'synthesis' in his fight against the colonial masters and imparted masculine dimension to the so-called femininity or effeminacy of Indians and redefined the Indian concept of masculinity in modern times. In his approach to political problems and social issues, Gandhi shows a rare perspicacity, originality and discernment and proves himself to be a purusha. In the subsequent pages Gandhi's practice of masculinity to fight injustice and brute force symbolized by the British rule satyagraha is discussed.

The practice of Indian model of masculinity by Gandhiji during colonial rule in his glorious struggle for freedom from the hyper-masculine white rule makes an interesting reading in any discussion / discourse on masculinity in postcolonical literature. He performed multiple forms of masculinity i.e. Kshatriya, Brahmanical and ascetic, in his quest for independence and also finding a proper model of Indian masculinity which was not only different from the model of imperial masculinity but also one which was based upon a rejection of effeminacy.

Mrinalini Sinha in her important work The Manly Englishman and the Effeminate Bengali argues that in the late nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century Bengali men - who had entered the system of colonial governance in increasing number after being trained in English language, culture and rituals – were represented in the British texts as “effeminate” (22). Within the colonial context of India one practical strategy through which such “effeminate” Indian males could acquire true masculinity
was by way of “westernization, modernization or Christianization”; a cultural shift that sometimes necessitated a rejection of the ‘pre-modern’, native traditions. In other words, the Indians especially the middle class elite – often opted to learn English language, manners and rituals not only to advance themselves economically within the colonial system but also “to acquire new postures of masculinity in order to circumvent the social gazes that saw them as effeminate men lacking the capital of true masculinity” (21). Indian subjects like Gandhi could acquire partial masculinity through their imitation of western manners and models.

To start with, Gandhi adopted the Kshatriya model of masculinity to take on the British. The Gandhis being Vaishnavas, were strictly vegetarians and abhorred alcohol and other intoxicants. But influenced by the anti-colonial kshatriya model of masculinity that had become popular among the anti-colonial nationalists in the late nineteenth century, Gandhi thought that Indians should eat meat in order to drive out the English: “It began to grow on me that eating meat was good, that it would make me strong and daring, and that, if the whole country took to meat eating, the English could be overcome” (21). And Gandhi temporarily became a “relisher of meat dishes”, a fact he hid from his vegetarian family members. But his fascination with meat did not last for more than a year. Also, Gandhi also took to British style in dressing and speaking. So did many other Indians to overcome effeminacy and acquire masculinity, but to no avail, in effect.

It needs to be reiterated here that at the beginning of twentieth century two models of native masculinity were available to the upper class Hindu men: first of these was the model of virile, active masculinity that represented the martial spirit of the Kshatriyas, the second highest caste in Hindu system; and second that of “self denying asceticism” which was associated with the cultural values of Brahmins, the natives of the apex caste. Ashish Nandy argues that in many pre-Gandhian anti-colonial protest movements towards the beginning of the century, the latter model of self-denying ascetic brahmanical masculinity was rejected in favour the model of virile, active, Hindu Kshatriya masculinity as they sought to redeem the India’s masculinity by defeating the British. The valorization of virile Kshatriya model of masculinity merely reproduced the same values
that were associated with the construction of imperial masculinity: domination, aggression and control by power.

In his Autobiography Gandhi reveals that he rejected the values of aggression, greed and meat eating habits as he saw them linked to the model of imperial manhood and experimented with a model of manliness that was closer to the model of Brahmanic Indian masculinity with its emphasis on asceticism, non-violence and the repression of sexual desire. His masculinity became associated with a denial of sexuality a denial through which Gandhi attempted to rejuvenate the “emasculated” spirit of the Indian nation. It was in sharp contrast to the western notion of manliness in which sexual prowess is a prominent aspect of masculinity. Gandhi explains that how he tried to overcome his sexual desire through a practice of brahmacharya, defined in religious terms as the “conduct that leads on to God,” while its linguistic meaning signifies “self restraint, particularly mastery over sexual organ” (Autobiography 25). Accordingly, Gandhi writes that he took a vow of brahmacharya in South Africa after the birth of his last child in 1906, making a firm resolve of abstaining from sexual activity altogether. It has been pointed out that celibacy for Gandhi functioned as a strategy by which to restore the degenerated health of the nation, a degeneration resulting from an uncritical consumption of foreign goods, and also by an excessive indulgence in sexual activities.

In Self Restraint versus Self Indulgence, Gandhi discusses the “enervating psychological effects” of sex, and refers to brahmacharya as “the science of self control” that would regenerate the health of the nation that had degenerated into effeminacy” (63). Criticizing sexual ‘perversions’ such as masturbation and homosexuality, Gandhi asserts the need to preserve the “vital force”, a preservation that would lead to the preservation of able bodied men and women: “I have not a shadow of doubt that married people, if they wished well of the country and wanted to see India become a nation of strong handsome men and women, would practice self restraint and cease to procreate for the time being ...” (80).

A western critic of Gandhi, Steger, has argued that Gandhi’s ascetic renunciation of sexuality robbed him of his manhood, turning him into a “God’s eunuch” and that thereby linking such domestic activities like spinning to his non-violent nationalism, he
feminized the nation”. But this was not the case and such a perception derives from a projection of western notions of masculinity/femininity upon the Indian context.

Traditionally, within the Indian world-view non-violence and sexual abstinence were not associated with femininity, but was a part of model of *brahmanical* masculinity which, though different from the martial aggressivity of the Kshatriya model, represented a mode of manliness that rejected effeminacy. For Gandhi, it was a turning away from such a *brahmanical* model of sexually restrained manhood that had enfeebled the nation, resulting in “feeble physique” of Indians. To Gandhi it was necessary to practice *brahmacharya* and *swadharma* so that the nation would acquire its proper manhood, a form of manliness that would use the weapon of non-violence to drive out the British. In other words, Gandhi’s struggle against sexual desire was not aimed at feminizing himself, or at turning his body into that of a spiritual eunuch as Steger has contended, but that of building strength and manliness by conserving vital energy. Finally, for Gandhi, *brahmacharya*, which began with bodily sexual restraint did not end at that point. For him it extended to an exclusion of all impure thought – a sine qua non for spiritual liberation but also it was a practice associated with *satyagraha*, the programme of passive resistance against the colonial domination for liberation.

Thus Gandhi’s experiments with various forms of masculinity in his life were actuated by a search for a proper model of masculinity that would exclude effeminacy while stressing the values of self-restraint, rationality and moral purpose. As such Gandhi practiced the highest form of masculinity which if practiced by people can prove a panacea for all the ills afflicting humanity and make the mother earth a veritable heaven where people endeavour to be truly masculine/feminine by imbibing the highest human values of truth, self-restraint, non-violence, and love.
Works Cited


