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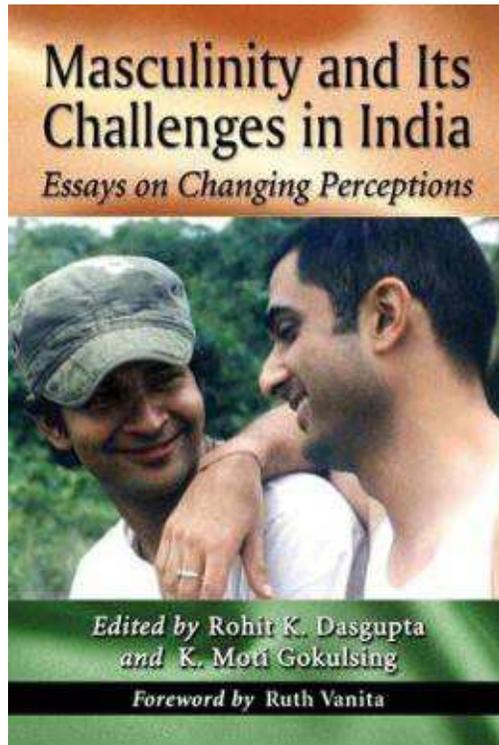
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Book Review

Masculinity and Its Challenges in India: Essays on Changing Perceptions



Edited by Rohit K Dasgupta and K Moti Gokulsing

Foreword by Ruth Vanita

Jefferson, NC: Mcfarland. 2014,

252pp.

\$45

Review by

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This book provides an up-to-date insight on how multiple male identities are made in modern Indian cultures. The interdisciplinary nature of the essays close the gap in our understanding of masculinities affected by various layers of social, political, economic and technological shifts operating within a rapidly changing, complex and fragmented cultural context. The book challenges everything one knew about masculinity in India. It delves into authentic narratives and unseen discussions of masculinity, confronting our understanding of issues such as patriarchy and colonialism on the effects of men's emotional desires and their roles as bearers of tradition –issues usually confined to debates on female sexuality in India.

A great selection of essays and writer including, Sanjay Srivasta's great opening essay on modern culture of masculinity in India, where Srivasta demonstrates how multiple and complex male identities have been shaped and constructed by the Britishness of the colonial sphere to the rise and demise of the urban twentieth century Five Year Plan (FYP) Hero. Srivasta's essay challenges our understanding of the singular

masculine Indian identity of the stereotypical colonial 'effeminate Bengali' (Sinha 1997), with the rarely discussed militant and masculine identity of the 'martial races' (Omissi 1991). Srivasta makes important arguments related to masculinity and modernity, from the representation of provincial masculinities within the metropolitan milieu of 1950s and 1960s Hindi films to the embodiment of Nehruvian and technological identities intertwined within the ethnography of the modern city.

The book challenges the homogenous nature of masculine identities in India through several essays. In Pranta Pratik's essay he reveals the reality of how fat is more than just a female issue. Pratik provides insight into the ways in which fat is a complicated issue, intersecting with the ways in which the online queer communities discriminate along the lines of class, caste, education, sexual position, region and religion. A point which leads nicely onto Mangesh Kulkarni's essay, which outlines an agenda for 'Critical Masculinity Studies' for future teaching and research to better understand homogenous and indigenous male identities, and Roshan das Nairs's essay, which takes on the intersectionality debate full on, arguing if singularity is the problem then could intersectionality be the solution?

The book strongly points out how Indian masculinities still operate within the milieu of the postcolonial habitus. Kama Mauremtoo provides a strong argument against section 377 the Indian Penal Code against homosexuality as being a colonialist intervention. And David A Ansari's essay leaves a powerful message for social change on how positive social groups amongst queer Indian men in London can help bridge the gap between sexual health service users. Aniruddha Dutta in his essay reconsiders Dennis Altman's 'global queering' thesis, with his own suggestions and insights from visibly globalising patterns of 'femmephobia' on online dating sites like Grindr. This he argues reflects an emergent alignment of 'gay' with transnational dominant discourse of gay identities across western/metropolitan and non-western/postcolonial societies. Also eye-opening to read, was Niladri R Chatterjee's essay on how the male bodily experience differs and functions when a male body speaks in his native language and when a male body speaks in English. Taking references from Christianity and Hinduism, his speculation of the English language acting as a straitjacket to the male body prohibiting same-sex tactility amongst English speaking Bengali gay male couples, forms the basis of a strong argument for the Englishing of Bengal and demonstrates how language colonises the body.

Struggles of masculinities are explored through literature, cinema and comics. Vishnupuria Sengupta through V.S Naipuls's novel *A House for Mr Biswas* unfolds how the girmitya men in Trinidad, somewhere between the imagined and the real worlds carved a niche and at somewhat lonely identity for themselves. Akhil Katyal through storytelling of Kashmiri-American poet Agha Shahid Ali's final years, and his wishes to not want to overtly disturb the net held in place by his father and his friends by writing books on 'same-sex love' or of 'gay writing', uncovers the double play and anxiety surrounding the authenticity of gay writing. Tanmayee Banerjee in her essay beautifully reflects on film director Ritwik Ghatak's trilogy *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (The Cloud Clapped Star), *Komal Gandhar* (E-Flat) and *Subharnarekha* (Golden Lining) to narrate the

dynamics of partition and its impact on hegemonic masculinities of immigrant refugees. She also argues, that these masculinities are in crisis and it is only through their relationships with women that they reach a point of resolution and assert their masculinity. Sayantan Dasgupta explores the imperial subject evident within the pioneering Indian comic book series 'Amar Chitra Katha', which arguably has been given little attention in most academic cultures of the world. Followed by Dashini Jeyathurai essay, which traces the invisible male triangle and questions the third man within the homosocial space of Bollywood and its 'Dostana' genre.

Overall, the book provides a critical selection of enjoyable and insightful reads which truly changes perceptions and move in many directions. Gokulsing and Dasgupta have opened up several little windows of exploration with this edited volume.

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