SANAM FELLOWSHIP PROJECT

CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITY IN BHOJPURI REGIONS OF UTTAR PRADESH

FELLOW

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**Construction of Masculinity in Bhojpuri Regions of Uttar Pradesh**

**Background/Justification of the Project/Core Idea of the Project:**

Masculinities and cultural and social change in the context of young people in non-metropolitan cities: a topic that is important to explore in as much as the non-metro is still connected to the rural hinterland that the metro is not. Hence, young people in non-metro towns and cities are subject to the multiple pressures and processes of change, situated as they are between global processes encountered, for example, through the media, and ‘local’ contexts of marriage, relationships, ‘respect’ for elders etc. That are still very much part of the rural and semi-rural milieu. This project seeks to explore the meaning of masculinities in Varanasi and Ballia districts of Eastern Uttar Pradesh (popular for Bhojpuri culture and also known as a part of Purvanchal) as they emerge out of contexts of limited social and economic opportunities, changing ‘lifestyle’ aspirations, an increasing number of young women who seek career opportunities, new consumer cultures, and, the struggle for new identities on the part of young men who seek to be both part of a ‘new’ world, but also feel anxious about the changes around them. This research proposal aims to explore the processes of construction, the speciality, and the specific traits associated with the masculinities of Eastern part of Uttar Pradesh known for the use of Bhojpuri slang by youths. It is India's most populous state, and more than 80% of the population resides in rural areas. This is plagued by high levels of poverty and eastern parts of this state ranks far below average income for the state.

The situation of women is not satisfactory; their autonomy is highly restricted, as is their access to basic services such as healthcare and education. Even women elected to local self governing councils are often not allowed to participate in decision-making. Violence against women is a common occurrence, which is vastly under-reported. Women are also victimized for marrying in other castes/religions, rejecting an arranged marriage or engaging in pre-marital/extra-marital relations. Strikingly, the majority of crimes against women are committed
by family members (Govt. of UP, 2006). Strong cultural norms governing masculinity, rigid beliefs about the place of women in relation to men, and socio-economic barriers to women's autonomy all contribute to the frequency of violence against women here.

Poverty and lack of employment opportunities compel men to migrate to other cities. Situation of men living in their villages and suburbs is also not better. Since last decades a number of male farmers and weavers committed suicide when they failed to earn to feed their family members.

Moreover, masculinities of different blends can also be observed in this area. Being culturally rich for Bhojpuri films and songs (provoking sexuality, having tantalizing effect through double meaning dialogues and songs, and depicting women as passive or recipient of men’s sexuality) supposed to have deep impact on men and helpful in the construction of a feudal masculinity. Its construction is closely interrelated with caste and social class structure of the society. It is so typical and well knitted with traditional/religious rituals that it seems natural to men and women both. But there is no doubt about its negative impact on people of all gender and sexual identities. Therefore, it is necessary to study the process of construction of masculinities in this region. Furthermore, this study will broaden the knowledge base on issues related to masculinities and which can further be utilized by academics, researchers and other agencies involved in the study of construction of masculinity.

**Objective/S of the Project and Project Area:**

Main objectives of the project are to understand the:

- Socio-economic-cultural-religious attributes & influences on youths with regards to construction of masculinities.
- Impact of Mediums (folk, electronic) contributing in development of specific masculine traits.
- To explore the meanings and processes of masculine culture in Varanasi and Ballia through the following questions those were addressed to both young male and female students:
Project Activities:
It was an exploratory research study. The qualitative data were obtained in the form of narratives through two workshops. First workshop was organized from September 12 to 16, 2011. A total of fifty five students (35 male and 25 female) studying in different post graduate and undergraduate courses at Mahatma Gandhi kashi Vidyapith, Varanasi participated. The second workshop was organized during January 9-10, 2012 with twenty five undergraduate students (15 male and 10 female) of a Post Graduate College, Ballia, U.P. Participants were selected by using purposive sampling method. During these workshops detailed group discussions were done with students on the following questions/issues;

1. Whom do you admire: who are your heroes, both national and local (i.e. Both from all-India and Purvanchal area).
2. What is the khasiyat of Purvanchal
3. Are family traditions changing in Purvanchal? Is this a good thing? What are the changes you can identify?
4. What kind of marriage would you prefer: arranged or love? Arranged cum love?
5. What kind of woman / man would you like to marry? And, why?
6. Is the role of parents changing in Purvanchal area?
7. What kinds of jobs would you like to get: govt.? Private? Own business?
8. How can you define masculinity? The specific traits and positive and negative aspects of masculinity.
9. What are the risks taken and sacrifices done by men?
10. What is the media image of masculinity of Purvanchal?
11. What are the sources and sights of learning masculinity?
12. Gender based division of work.
13. The concept of sexuality.
15. Characteristics of ideal boys and girls, bad boys and girls and their social identities.

Above questions were designed to elicit information about sources and sites of learning of masculinities and sexuality and major influences on these constructions. Each question was discussed in detail and participants were encouraged to express their feelings and emotions.
Research Procedure:
The first session of the workshop was introduction, the facilitator; mentor and the participants introduced themselves followed by ice-breaking activity. Then facilitator oriented participants about the purpose and the activities to be done during the workshops. Expectations from the participants were shared. Participants were given a written assignment to submit their opinion on certain issues like attitude towards working women, arranged marriage/love marriage, joint family/nuclear family/single parent family, the dress-code, types of expectations and aspirations regarding jobs, expectations of parents from boys and girls, the role model (ideal man at national and local level), and about the popular Bhojpuri and Hindi media (films). Open discussions were followed by group work in which they tried to define masculinity and its traits in their own way, identified positive and negative aspects of masculinity, sacrifices being done by men, their risks, media image of masculinities of eastern Uttar Pradesh (Purvanchal/Bhojpuri) men, concept of sexuality in this region, characteristics of a good/bad boy and girl, the social identities of boys and girls, attitude towards inter-sexed friendship, and gender based division of work.
In addition to this one group discussion session was organized with seven men (45 to 65 years of age) residents of Varanasi. The purpose of discussion was to explore their views over the peculiar aspects of masculinity of this region i.e., eastern U.P. and changes perceived by them (if any) in the notion of masculinity/sexuality and social structure of caste, family, marriage. They were also asked about the roles and responsibilities of men within the family and in society, most favourite pass time activities (leisure time) of men.

MENTORSHIP AND OTHER SUPPORT RECEIVED:
I was lucky to get mentorship of Dr. Sanjay Srivastawa, his noble mentorship was helpful for me in terms of getting conceptual insights, understanding, designing and conducting workshops, and report writing.

MAJOR OUTCOMES AND FINDINGS:

Definitions Developed By Participants Through Group Work:

- Masculinity of Bhojpuri/Purvanchali men was defined as “Men’s’ power or strength and control over women, other men and society”
- Masculinity is not only the addition of physical strength but also expression of internal qualities.
• Masculinity refers to realisation of *purushartha* (dharma, artha, kama, and moksha) a scheme of duties given in Indian scriptures for men. It is conglomerate of those qualities and abilities which equip a man to be ‘provider’, ‘protector’ and ‘procreator’. It is associated with attributes related to bravery, strong will power, and strong physical disposition.
• Masculinity is men’s perceived ego, capabilities and physical power, which helps him suppressing others and fighting for others.

**Traits or Markers of Masculinity:** A man is called masculine that is self-reliant, independent, courageous, aggressive, ardent, adamant, accept challenges, takes risks, decision maker, dominating, muscular, physically fit (do not have any sort of physical disability), fearless, provider, procreator, can dominate his wife during sex. Some of the participants also pointed out those traits which do not qualify the hegemonic notion of masculinity like, a man should be caring, helping and simple. Some of the traits like confident, tolerant, moral, accountable, responsible, transparent, follower of the principle of celibacy are traditionally associated with positive ‘non-aggressive’ model of masculinity which portrays man morally and socially superior to women.

**Identities of Purvanchali Men:** Turban on head, betel leafs in mouth, have moustache and beard, able to achieve targets by hook or crook (*sam, dam, dand, bhed*), sexually virile, timid in comparison to men of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan.

**Media Image of Poorvanchali Men:** In Hindi Bollywood and Bhojpuri movies men of eastern U.P. are portrayed as a Body builder, wrestler, Bahubali, joker, wear traditional dresses, illiterate, unskilled, traditional, weak in comparison to men of other states, such as men from Bihar are called Bada Bhaiya (big brother) while men of eastern U.P. are portrayed as Chhota Bhaiya (small brother). In many picture they are shown as violent towards women.

**Sacrifices Being Done by Men:** Men sacrifice their needs and desires in order to fulfill the needs of the family, do hard work to earn livelihood, not allowed to express their tender feelings, emotions and fears, they are challenged to prove their manhood for which they are involved in fighting, war and riots.

**Risks Taken by Men:** Indulge in crimes, alcoholism, drug-addiction, rash driving, fighting, stress.
Positive Aspects of Masculinity: Non violent, non-oppressive, unbiased, respects women, helping in nature, protect women and children, strongly committed for welfare.

Negative Aspects of Masculinity: Violent, Aggressive, complicated, dogmatic.

Perception About Sexuality: Men that are sexually potent are called real. They can have relations with several women but women are not expected to have extra marital affairs, they have to confine to their husbands. Unmarried girls have to be virgin while boys are little bit free though they are expected to follow the rules of celibacy depicted in Bramhacharya Ashram (up to 25 years of age designated for study). Male youths showed their discomforts at girls increasing access to different kinds of freedom (like increased mobility, access to education, employment etc.) due to modernization; they commented that they are becoming characterless by having more boyfriends. Girls exploit boys by using and enjoying their money and afterwards leave them. Some boys commented that the girls develop friendship with studious boys but select muscular boys as their boyfriend. Girls opposed the gender biased mentality of boys towards girl’s autonomy and asked for an urgent need to change men’s mentality around women and sexuality.

Gender Based Division of Work: During open discussion boys out rightly said that only deserving women should be allowed to job outside, there should not be reservations of seats for women. Women’s security at work place should be ensured. Males advocated that women should go for those professions that are considered as safe such as teaching and working in banks. On the question of sharing of domestic work by men both boys and girls agreed that men and women should take care of domestic responsibilities but in Purvanchal men are hesitant to work in home. That is why working women have to bear double burdens.

Characteristics Of Good Boys, Bad Boys, Good Girl And Bad Girl: Through joint group work boys and girls both portrayed good boys who respect others particularly elders, is responsible, large hearted, non-violent, reliable, non dogmatic, and nationalist while good girls are those who is a person with few words, responsible, have respect for others, takes care of family members, educated. Bad boys are that who are drug-addict, rapist, law breaker, show masculinity, corrupt, and violent. Bad girls are those girls who are characterless, loud, attracted towards rich men, have more than one boyfriend and motivate them to spend on them, do not care for true love, and do not respect others.
Attitude Towards Inter-sexed Friendship: According to boys girls can have friendship with boys but that should only be a friend not a boyfriend. Otherwise, her character shall always be in doubt. Other point is that girls should have informed their parents about their friendship and that friendship should be limited to study only. Girls should not go to movies and malls with their male friends. Girls also accepted that they introduce their male friends to their parents then parents do not object on their meeting and chatting on mobile phone. Both accepted that friendship between boys and girls are always seen with doubt.

Perception About Working Women: Boys and girls both accepted that working women are still perceived as home breakers.

Perception About Marriage: According to male participants marriage is a (sansakar) culturally sanctioned institution, that marriages can be called perfect which have been done according to the particular socio-cultural-religious norms. There were differences of opinions on the issue of love marriages. Some said that love marriages are better as there is better understanding among spouses, while some argued that love marriages not stable as mostly done due to sheer physical attraction. Some argued that love marriage within the caste and with permission of parents is perfect and stable.

Perception About Family Structure: Joint family system was always better but due to modernization and economic pressure it is converting into nuclear families. Though women were always suppressed in joint families but it was appropriate for children and older people.

Perception About Dress: Boys shown their resentment for girls wearing modern dresses, they argued that girls should prove their abilities through their education and knowledge only by wearing modern dresses they can’t prove anything. Also they provoke boys to pass comment on them, girls argued that dress has to nothing with sexuality; girls wearing traditional dresses are also harassed.

Preference for the Kind of Job: Most of the participants preferred to go for Government and permanent job.

Ideal Man: At national level the former president of India Dr. A.P.J. Kalam was perceived as ideal man for most of the participants of Varanasi and Ballia. At
regional/local level they identified some Bhojpuri singers and actors as their role models belonging to Varanasi and neighboring districts.

**Learning of Masculinity and Sources of Reinforcement:** Participant admitted that they learned masculinity through their parents and grandparents within the family, by neighbours and peers in the community. Epics like Ramayana, Mahabharata and popular folk media such as Bhojpuri films, songs and Hindi films and songs also are important sources of learning of masculinity.

**Conclusion:**

- Though inter sexed friendship was accepted but with a lot of caution as sexual purity of women is most desired trait for a woman. Friendship between boys and girls are not considered as natural and it is always much talked subject among young and adults alike. It always invites lot of attention and frowned reaction from parents and teachers.

- Though almost all the participants accepted that Dr. A.P.J. Kalam, former president of India is the ideal men for them but it is interesting to note that most of the masculine traits identified the participants do not have the consistency with the chosen ideal men.

- Muscular physical appearance continued to be a dominant and defining trait of masculinity in Eastern U.P. too. It is a source of constant concern and anxiety among men as they always compare themselves and find inferior to other men of Punjab and Haryana known for their muscle strength. Any form of physical disability in man is a question mark on his masculinity.

- A man is patriarch of the family supposed to have control over family especially women’s sexuality.

- As it is evident by the findings of the study that ability to satisfy sexually a woman (wife) is a perquisite to be a real man. Through sexual virility a man can avoid promiscuity in women.

- It was admitted that some of the Hindi and Bhojpuri films and songs cannot be viewed together with family members; however it can be enjoyed by them. It shows double standard pertaining to morality and impact of films on girls and women.
Lessons Learned And Challenges Faced During The Project Implementation:

During group discussions with youth groups it was observed that on some sensitive issues like sexuality participants were trying to give politically correct answers in order to be socially desirable. So, the facilitators had to keep on interrogating to get true responses and some of the participants were interviewed separately (confidentially). I feel that in order to get true responses on confidential issues one to one interview would be a better design.

Follow Up:

Although there are a lot of regional, cultural, linguistic variations only two districts Varanasi and Ballia of eastern U.P. were taken for this study. In order to get a complete picture of various strands of masculinities of Eastern U.P. a much bigger research project can be planned.