Traditional Notions of Manhood Under Pressure

- The masculinity projected by political leaders in India navigates between neo-liberal globalism and embedded family norms
- Strategies of oppression create new masculinities and affect women in Peru
- More and more young men in urban areas of South Africa resist initiation rites
- Growing community of 'harassed' husbands in India become more organised and visible
The invitational session 'Masculinities and Culture' held during the 2nd MenEngage Global Symposium 2014 — Men and Boys for Gender Justice, organised in New Delhi from November 10-13, looked at how the changing nature of the environment - urbanisation, evolving family norms, laws, work and work culture, and faith-based organisation, are altering masculinities. As moderator Rachel Ploem from Rutgers WPF, the Netherlands, put it, "We are looking at class-culture issues and also men-women and men-men hierarchies without putting these complex issues under the mat." Speakers from various parts of the world dealt with how perceptions of masculinity are being influenced by the cultural contexts and their transformations.

New Political Masculine Persona is Reconciling The Global and National
Sanjay Srivastava, Professor of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India, dwelt on what it means to be a man within the larger context that produces masculinity, be it the political economy, neo-liberalisation, the global economy, or the state. He did this by focussing on the masculinities of leaders in power who successfully manage to position their masculinity as being superior. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s masculinity for instance was a significant aspect of the 2014 national election campaign. Modi’s personality was projected as masculine - a man with a 56-inch chest.

I had an inkling of these groups 20 years ago in Delhi when someone passed around a poster about an all-India march against torture by wives,” said Basu. These were the drumbeats of the fledgling men’s movements in the late eighties when they protested against dowry and domestic violence laws. They were obviously marginal and easily mocked for their representations of greedy women and abject husbands and their persecution theories. “It didn't seem that these blatant misogynist representations could have any cultural purchase. But over the past 20 years these groups have become well organised and visible,” Basu said.
She said typically these men have been served several civil and
criminal cases for alimony, child support and domestic violence.
They are often jailed with their parents, sisters, and nephews.

The visual material of these groups is quite amazing. One of them says:

"Has there been any insanity in my family? Yes, my husband
thinks he's the boss."

They are engineers, marketing leaders, businessmen, IT workers,
academics, doctors. "Soon I came to see these men began forging
communities with each other in the face of the communal
shunning from their own," Basu said. From talking of themselves
as men's activists they talk of themselves as marriage resisters.
They are people who want to say "no" to marriage as a system.
"This seems to me an interesting conversation to be had with
feminism," she said.

GROWING OPPOSITION TO MALE INITIATION RITES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Nolwazi Mkhwanazi, anthropologist, University of
Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, speaking on what
teenage pregnancy taught her about local cultural ideas and their
impact on norms around masculinity in South Africa, focussed on a
marginalised group of poor black people who identify themselves
as Amathosa. Among Khwana-speaking people, to become a man
a boy has to undergo initiation in the bush where the rites involve
circumcision and isolation for up to four weeks. The boys are
taught their roles and responsibilities as men and once he
becomes a man, he can command respect, marry, acquire
property, perform rituals, take part in decision-making in the
household and community and become an ancestor when he dies.

For some boys this transition ends with amputated and mutilated
genitalia and sometimes, death. In the 21st century there has been
a rise in the number of such schools and the attention paid to the
rising casualties during initiation. In rural areas boys as young as
10 years old run away from home to join these schools.

In urban areas, however, more boys are challenging initiation. This
resistance has not gone unnoticed and has often resulted in boys
getting kidnapped, even with the consent of their parents, and
forcibly initiated in these schools.

One of the first organisations to oppose initiation rites was the
Planned Parenthood Association of South Africa, which labeled
traditional male circumcision as a reproductive health issue. This
was supported by medical practitioners and the ensuing
impassioned discussion around the right to health versus cultural
rights resulted in the passing of the Application of Health
Standards in Traditional Circumcision Act in 2001. Rather than
banning the practice, the legislation tried to protect the health
rights and financial conditions of the initiates. The act was
received by people such as the congress of traditional leaders as
"an insult to our tradition."

Mkhwanazi said, "These rites transmit values about social
and gender hierarchy and gender roles. Initiation is a critical
tool for preserving the power of the gendered gerontocracy
and reproduces the order which enables initiated men to
expect obedience from young men, women and children."

Young people in urban areas resistant to initiation pointed out that
in the given context having money and displaying this through
conspicuous consumption earned them the status of a man -- an
urban alternative to attaining such a status through initiation. In
this scenario, having many girlfriends was also respected. The
consequences were early out-of-wedlock teenage pregnancies
and as most young men rejected paternity, the teenage mother
and her family were left to cope with childcare. Mkhwanazi said,
"In 2013, after I had been working on the issue for a decade, we started hearing reports from all over the country that many fathers were accepting paternity and wanted a relationship with their children, a significant development in teenage parenthood."

**Rules Against Women Are 'Very Wild' in Peru**

Christian Guzman, a psychologist with Cayetano Heredia University, Lima, Peru, who is the coordinator of Men Who Give up Their Violence, a programme that started in 2004, said they are working on a challenging experiment in the island of Cusco, the ancient capital of the Inca Empire in the Peruvian Andes. In a WHO study undertaken in 1999-2000 on violence against women and the impact on their health in 10 countries including Japan, Namibia, Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Brazil, Peru had the highest incidence of gender violence. Among Peruvian cities, Cusco was on top, with two out of three women having suffered physical violence during their lives.

"In Cusco we have found that the traditional notion of culture seems to have been static since the time of the Incas," he said. "Very rigid gender roles have resulted in grave disempowerment of women and this is a position from which men do not budge." Because of this, women do not take part in communal activities. In the Andes 'culture' has to be seen in the context of the attitudes of men who work in illegal cocoa plantations and illegal medium-scale mining operations to provide for their families. There are no police stations for kilometres around, no health services and no presence of the state. The social structure is based on multiple layers of oppression and the situation also affects women. "The rules against the women can be very wild," Guzman said.