

Tensions in Heteropatriarchal Consensus: Men and Masculinities in Contemporary Kerala



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Chapter V

Conclusion

This thesis studied the masculinities in contemporary Kerala against the backdrop of three significant events in the 2010s—the verdict of the Supreme Court of India in 2018 allowing women of menstruating age to enter the Sabarimala Temple in Kerala, the publication of the first gay autobiography in Malayalam titled *Randu Purushanmar Chumbikkumbol: Malayali Gayude Athmakathayum Ezhuthukalum* (When Two Men Kiss: A Malayali Gay’s Autobiography and Writings [2017]) by Kishor Kumar, and the emergence of “New Generation” films — that represented the transitions in gender regimes in contemporary Kerala. It was argued that these three events unravelled the fissures in the existing heteropatriarchal consensus in the state. By studying the hegemonic heteropatriarchal masculinity at the site of its challenges, the thesis delineated major changes in the public and representative realms in Kerala with regard to masculinities. With such a study, this project also showed that masculinities in Kerala are not monolithic and static but an evolving category shaped by the changes in the overall gender order.

Highlighting the importance of inculcating the studies on men and masculinities in Gender Studies, the thesis elaborated that the question of masculinities is critical in understanding the problems of women and other marginalised groups in any given context. While centering the question of men and masculinities, this thesis also discussed some other events in the state’s recent history that influenced Kerala’s gender regimes. Examining these events within the framework of Cultural Studies, this project

demonstrated that the hegemonic heteropatriarchal masculinity, which thrives at the intersections of institutions like heterosexual families or through the channels provided by caste and religion, is constantly challenged by women and marginalised masculinities in contemporary Kerala. However, I am careful not to conclude that these challenges denote a major change in heteropatriarchal masculinity in Kerala. The attempt was to trace the tensions in the hegemonic masculine positions, necessitating to incorporate such significant developments in studying gender in the state. I further argued that the masculinities in contemporary Kerala are in a state of conjuncture where marginalised masculinities are gaining visibility while heteropatriarchy is manifesting itself in other ways to consolidate its power. Remaining cautious of the homogenisation within the category of men in Kerala, this project tried to point out the hierarchical order of masculinities where many men are marginalised in Kerala based on different factors, including sexuality, caste, religion, and others.

The first chapter of the thesis, “Introduction”, provided the context for the current study by elaborating on the developments in Kerala in the 2010s that influenced the study of masculinities. Besides underscoring the significance of the three events based on which this work was developed, this chapter also discussed the methodological and theoretical framework adopted in the project. The chapter also engaged with the scholarship on gender in Kerala, especially regarding the Kerala Model of Development and the advent of modernity and traced important scholarship on masculinities from other regional contexts of India and the West that influenced this research work. By identifying the knowledge gaps in the studies on gender in Kerala, I argued that masculinities remain an understudied category in Kerala. The last part of this chapter placed this work on

masculinities against the backdrop of the transitions in gender regimes of contemporary Kerala.

Focussing on the verdict of the Supreme Court of India (2018) allowing women of menstruating age to enter the Sabarimala temple in Kerala, the second chapter “Male Householder, Caste Patriarchy and Family: Locating Masculinities in the Sabarimala Women’s Entry Protests (2018)”, discussed the configuring of masculine politics following the decision to allow women of certain ages into a homosocial male space like Sabarimala. By tracing the historical role of Sabarimala in the welfare of heteropatriarchal families of Kerala, this chapter also argued that this rise in the significance of Sabarimala in the cultural milieu of the state in the late 20th century was not only at the cost of women but also that of subaltern masculinities. The chapter noted that the Dalit masculinities’ support to women’s entry at the intersection of the questions of caste and gender is significant with regard to studying masculinities in Kerala. Their intervention problematised the hegemonic masculine narratives of the conservatives (Right-wing/ upper caste groups), who protested against the Supreme Court verdict, and the liberals (Left political parties and the Left government), who played seemingly progressive politics while never questioning the inherent binary division of gendered roles or spaces. The chapter employed films, archival documents, court orders, newspaper and magazine articles, public statements of different community leaders, government orders, discussions on television, literary texts, and online media debates for analysis.

The third chapter, “Undoing the Masculine Hero: ‘New Generation’ Films and Fahadh Faasil’s Stardom in Contemporary Malayalam Cinema”, studied masculinity in

Malayalam cinema against the backdrop of the emergence of “New Generation” films in Malayalam in the 2010s. Focussing on the actor Fahadh Faasil, this chapter traced the transitions in the representations and notions of masculinity, heroism, and stardom in contemporary Malayalam cinema. Besides noting such shifts, the chapter also studied the challenges to the masculine and star domination within the Malayalam film industry in the last decade, especially following the notorious case of an attack on a famous actress in Kochi and the resultant formation of the Women in Cinema Collective (WCC, 2017). This chapter used films, film magazines, online/offline media interviews, newspaper reports, and advertisements as primary materials.

The fourth chapter, “*When Two Men Kiss* (2017): Representations of Gay Masculinity in Contemporary Malayalam Literature and Cinema”, discussed the increasing visibility of gay masculinity in the Malayali public sphere in the last decade, which troubled the hegemonic masculinity in significant ways. Centring on the publication of the first gay autobiography in Malayalam, *Randu Purushanmar Chumbikkumbol: Malayali Gayude Athmakathayum Ezhuthukalum* (When Two Men Kiss: An Autobiography and Writings of a Malayali Gay) by Kishor Kumar in 2017, this chapter also discussed the representations of gay masculinity in Malayalam literature and films, especially in contemporary short stories and contemporary Malayalam films. The chapter argued that the short story emerged as a major genre representing gay masculinity in Malayalam literature. In representing gay masculinity in Malayalam films, the significance of the film *Ka Bodyscapes* (2016) is also discussed. While there is an enhanced representation of gay masculinities in literature and films, the chapter also

pointed out the problems of such representations wherein gay men are often presented as a threat to the heteropatriarchal family and the state.

Centring on three events, each chapter has attempted to show the fractures in the existing heteropatriarchal consensus regarding gender order in contemporary Kerala. In the Sabarimala protest, women of menstruating age undertaking the pilgrimage challenge the role of the male householder and his patriarchal function within the family. In a globalised world where earlier models of patriarchal control over women are increasingly becoming difficult to exercise, religion provides a space to perpetuate such control through discriminatory practices sanctioned by faith. Women's entry into Sabarimala, in that sense, becomes an encroachment into those very few remaining homosocial spaces of male privilege sanctioned by religion. It also creates tension in the heteropatriarchal consensus regarding the roles of men and women within family and religious practices, as well as society at large. It not only reveals the fissures in the consensus regarding gender roles but also shows the multiplicity of masculine positions with regard to the gender order in contemporary Kerala. In the case of "New Generation Cinema", the alternate expressions and representations of masculinity create a fracture in the earlier models of masculinity, heroism, and stardom represented/exercised during the last decade, especially by the male superstars of the industry. Fahadh Faasil embodies those changes in his films, characters, and life as an actor/star. The emergence of women's organisations like Women in Cinema Collective (WCC) also has a role in challenging existing patriarchal control in the Malayalam film industry which in turn is reflected in cinematic representations as well. The consensus regarding the gender regime in terms of representation and roles in Malayalam cinema and industry is, in that sense, undergoing a

major tension. The increased visibility of gay masculinity in the representative realm, especially in literature and cinema, questions the hegemonic conceptions regarding masculinity. It creates tensions in the heteropatriarchal consensus, as what it means to be a desirable man changes considerably with the recognition of gay masculinity and generally with queer sensibility. The patriarchal control, which operates mainly through a strong belief in the binary division of gender, ruptures with queer visibility. The publication of a gay man's autobiography and other literary works has developed an alternate vocabulary in Malayalam, facilitating thinking beyond the binary and simultaneously leading to questioning the foundations of heteropatriarchy. The visual aesthetics of films like *Ka Bodyscapes* (2016) also challenge existing techniques of framing gay sexuality on screen and provide practitioners and spectators of Malayalam films with an alternate perspective of reading and seeing queerness.

This thesis was premised on the working of hegemonic heteropatriarchal masculinity in contemporary Kerala and how it was challenged by marginalised masculinities and women. The study also demonstrated the continuing role of films and print media in shaping the public sphere of Kerala. Besides these, I argued that the internet media also plays a dominant role in shaping the state's public sphere. While this work tried to engage with contemporary masculinities amidst these transitions, there are other significant domains beyond the scope of this research that can be studied for a comprehensive understanding of masculinities in Kerala. For instance, though masculine violence was referred to in several parts of the thesis, this was not discussed in detail. Women and other marginalised groups like Dalits and sexual minorities continue to face violence in the diverse spheres of their lives in the state. Violence is also now manifested

as cyberbullying and threats through new media platforms like Facebook and X (formerly Twitter). Women continue to face problems in their public and private lives. Various cases of dowry deaths, acid attacks, etc., are often reported in the state. The further marginalised categories, like lesbians, transgenders, and others face even more challenges in a predominantly heteropatriarchal state like Kerala. The masculinities in Kerala have to be understood in these contexts of systemic violence against different marginalised groups. While accounting for the problems of Dalit masculinities or gay men, it is to be noted that they continue to have several privileges of being men. However, violence against women can be found across all castes and communities in Kerala. Also, although the thesis acknowledges the plurality of masculinities in Kerala, it could not engage deeply with the performative aspect of masculinities across different groups of men, as masculine performance varies with caste, class, sexuality, and others.

Kerala has also witnessed an increasing penetration of digital media in the last decade. Many marginalised groups, including queer communities, are active in such platforms employing these to further their positions. The digital public also demands careful attention while studying contemporary gender relations in the state. Besides films, Malayalam literature has witnessed significant transitions in the representations of masculinity in the last decades. As an influential medium continuing to play a significant role in shaping the public sphere of Kerala, literature also requires a more elaborate study.

My thesis aimed to configure the significance of masculinities in understanding gender in post-colonial Indian contexts, especially against the backdrop of the rapid transitions due to globalisation, digital media expansion, and other shifts within specific

local contexts. It also unravelled the complexities of accounting for masculinities in the regional contexts of India, which are distinct in their own ways. The tensions in the gender regimes of contemporary Kerala have been examined closely in this project to underscore the specificities this region offers to unravel. In this respect, this work would contribute to tracing a contemporary history of masculinities in Kerala from post-2010 to the present, which the work argues is at an important crossroads.