

EXPLORING SOUTH ASIAN MASCULINITIES: AN ONLINE SEMINAR

5 October to 4 November, 2008

You are invited to join an Online Seminar to discuss the theme of masculinities in South Asia. The aim of this seminar is to engage a diverse set of participants from different parts of the globe to converse on certain key areas of masculinities to enhance our understanding of how it is implicated in different social and life settings. The necessity of such an approach has been recognised by virtue of the limited understanding of the diverse range of practices that constitute masculinities in South Asia. While our focus is on South Asian masculinities, we would like to draw in participants from other parts of the world with the belief that there is much that can be learnt through sharing of ideas across cultures and countries. The seminar in fact is envisioned as being critical to various other campaigns on related issues in the South Asian Region and beyond.

The seminar will run for a period of four weeks from 5 October 2008 onwards. The discussion will cover four thematic areas:

- **Violence**
- **Sexuality**
- **Representation**
- **The Politics of Change**

Each theme will be opened for discussion for a week through introductory comments by scholars who have been involved with the seminar series. We invite you to subscribe to the seminar and contribute to the discussion.

**To Subscribe Please Send A Mail To:
SEMINARS@SOUTHASIANMASCULINITIES.ORG WITH 'SUBSCRIBE' AS
THE SUBJECT.**

Background

South Asia has witnessed in the last few years a number of campaigns, programmes and projects by civil society groups and the UN system that have focused on masculinities and contributed to building a public discourse on the theme.

We at Aakar launched the Exploring Masculinities: A Travelling Seminar (<<http://www.southasianmasculinities.org/>>) in 2002 to introduce diverse questions of masculinities and gender relations within the university system. The first series supported by UNIFEM travelled to six Indian universities and in the current

series, which has been supported by the Ford Foundation we have travelled to nine universities across South Asia. The seminars have been held at universities in Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Sri Lanka and the series is slated to visit Pakistan in 2009. The seminars comprising of academic papers, films and activist narratives gave a broad overview of the range of work on masculinities in various contexts. Each seminar was spread over two days at a university campus and comprised of conceptual papers, sociological/anthropological/historical studies, psychoanalytic perspectives, activist narratives (experiences from the field of work on gender with boys and men), personal narratives (reflexive stories of men's experience of transitions/journeys/their sexualities) and films on masculinities.

At each university the seminar was organised in partnership with social science and humanities departments of the concerned university and local women's groups. The current series has collaborated with **twenty university departments** and has had an audience of approximately **3000 students and faculty**. More than **100 scholars, artists, media practitioners and activists** from different parts of South Asia have been directly involved in the seminars as paper presenters and discussants.

The Exploring Masculinities Travelling Seminar has been conceived from the position that the study of masculinity is important in that it "is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experiences, personality and culture" (Connell, 1994:71).

An important aspect of the seminar series has been to examine masculinities in the context of the rapidly transforming economic, social and cultural environment in South Asia and the range of conflicts that characterize the region. The contexts of momentous changes and practices of conflict are related, with gender being a significant suturing principle. To put it another way, masculinities are central to an understanding of the various ways in which a rapidly transforming present affects the lives of men and women, as they grapple with new circumstances and opportunities. So, for example, change simultaneously provides the grounds for violence as a response to perceptions of threats to masculine identities, as well as opportunities for altered senses of the gendered self. Either way, it would appear that men are the central actors within the entire spectrum of violence. Why do men invariably find themselves at the centre of violence, both as victims and perpetrators?

Notwithstanding the grim reality of such a situation, emerging research on masculinities in South Asia and other parts of the globe suggests that men are not only guarantors for the representational claims of state power, but are also made in the image of such power. Alternatives in the form of gaps, openings and fissures do exist where ideas of gender equality and non-violence can find the

space to breathe within the suffocating structures of masculinities.

The seminar series has attended to this complexity and discussed the practices of both excess and restraint that are crucial to an understanding of masculinities in the region and beyond.

We are now nearing the end of the second seminar series and are keen to conclude the series with an online web based seminar that will enable the participation of university communities and activists on various themes on masculinities to facilitate more research and also a movement from research to intervention or practice.

In the last few years we have witnessed the beginnings of an engagement with the theme of masculinities in various social settings through the UN system, civil society groups, activist campaigns, artists and filmmakers. The four year UN inter-agency initiative -- **Partners for Prevention: Working with Boys and Men to Prevent Gender Based Violence (2008-2011), a regional joint programme of UNDP, UNFPA, UNIFEM, UNV and UNICEF** is a welcome addition to the ongoing efforts in the region to reduce gender based violence and further work on gender issues with young boys and men. This online seminar is supported by Ford Foundation and the regional joint UN Programme.

Yours Sincerely,
Sincerely,
Rahul Roy, Aakar

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