

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Radhika Chopra, Caroline Osella, Filippo Osella, eds. *South Asian Masculinities: Context of Change, Sites of Continuity*. New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2004. x + 430 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-81-86706-75-6.

Reviewed by Tamsin Bradley (London Metropolitan University)  
Published on H-Gender-MidEast (March, 2005)



## Relocating Masculinity

This edited volume goes some way towards filling the gap that exists in research on gender in South Asia. To date, most research has focused on issues of femininity, in particular issues of social inequality and sources of women's disempowerment have been the primary focus. It was becoming increasingly evident to those of us working in the field of gender and South Asia that, in order to rigorously engage in issues of gender, an equal focus must be placed on understanding masculinity. Caroline Osella, Filippo Osella, and Radhika Chopra make this very point in their introduction, in which they state that, despite a growing body of work on South Asian gender and sexuality, on articulations of state and sexualities, on sexuality and violence, and recent explorations into Indian sexuality and queerness, we are only just beginning to explore masculinities as a specific issue within gender studies.

This volume convincingly highlights that gender research in South Asia has largely ignored masculinity and goes on to identify the various areas where research into masculinities is urgently needed. The editors are careful to make sure that the definition of masculinity focused on in this volume is heterogeneous. Taking their lead from the work of Lindsfarne and Cornwall in their work on *Dislocating Masculinity* (1994), all researchers in this contribution seek to unpack and document the complex ways in which various types of masculinities are both socially and culturally constructed and articulated. Also this volume examines the ways in which masculinities impact on each other forcing other masculinities to

emerge. In essence, this book pulls together work that expresses a range of South Asian experiences and a wide set of methodological and theoretical orientations.

This book opens up the space for more research into masculinities. This achievement is exciting and desperately needed. The book's approach is multi-disciplinary, drawing on researchers from a range of disciplines including sociology, anthropology, literature, and media studies. The book is simply set out into two parts. Part 1 is titled "Ethnographies of Masculinity" and consists of a collection of micro-focused studies of masculine identities in various urban and rural contexts. All articles in this section seek to portray emphatic depictions of South Asian men. The researchers balance the violence present in hegemonic masculinity with the struggles that individual men undertake in order to express their own individual experiences of personhood. This approach sensitively allows for other positive masculinities to emerge and helps counter the image of men "as the problem" common in much feminist research.

The first chapter written by Chopra has a self-reflexive tone that is refreshing and engaging. Chopra's ability to analyze the impact of her own positioning on the images of masculinity that she witnesses enables her to acknowledge that what she is able to document is determined and limited by her own gender and class. The article written by De Neve, on masculinity in the South Indian textile industry, is a useful article that can be contrasted by much written within gender and development

on women's experience of the work place.

The second part of the book focuses on "Representations of Masculinities." The emphasis in this section is placed on examining the impact of masculine film images on the identities of cinema goers (men and women). The chapter by Monti seeks to offer an interpretation of the *Narasimha avatara* that considers the interconnectedness of masculinity and femininity. In so doing, Monti emphasizes the power of myth in influencing the cultural construction of masculinity.

The final chapter by Vuayan traces the relationship between development, modernity, and masculinity

within the context of the rise of Hindu nationalism and its discourses on power and gender. This is an important chapter as so much of the literature on Hindu Nationalisms fails to analyze it from a truly gendered perspective.

The most important contribution that this book makes is in its recognition that masculinities in South Asia represent a vital area that needs further attention and more detailed, focused work. Those of us committed to researching gender must ensure that we broaden our analysis to include discussion on masculinities. I look forward to the blossoming of a new area of research within Gender and South Asian Studies

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-gender-mideast>

**Citation:** Tamsin Bradley. Review of Chopra, Radhika; Osella, Caroline; Osella, Filippo, eds., *South Asian Masculinities: Context of Change, Sites of Continuity*. H-Gender-MidEast, H-Net Reviews. March, 2005.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=10334>

Copyright © 2005 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at [hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu](mailto:hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu).