Liberating the Masculine: Redefining Patriarchy through a Cross-Examination of

Popular Fiction

Dissertation submitted to Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam in partial fulfilment of

the requirement for the award of the degree of Master of Arts in English

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2020

Declaration

I, Riya Clare Paul, hereby affirm that the dissertation titled *Liberating the Masculine: Redefining Patriarchy through a Cross-Examination of Popular Fiction* is a genuine record of work done by me under the guidance of Ms. Neethu S. and Ms. Lissy Kachappilly of the Post Graduate Department of English, Bharata Mata College, Thrikkakkara and has not been submitted previously for the award of any masters or degree.

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Certificate

Certified that this is a bonafide report of the project entitled *Liberating the Masculine:*
Redefining Patriarchy through a Cross-Examination of Popular Fiction done by Riya Clare Paul
(Register No. 180011002142) for the fulfilment of the requirement for the M.A. degree in
English under Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam during the year 2018-2020.

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Acknowledgement

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the valuable guidance and assistance extended to me from various quarters during the preparation of this dissertation entitled *Liberating the Masculine: Redefining Patriarchy through a Cross-Examination of Popular Fiction.*

I thank God Almighty for enabling me to complete this dissertation successfully.

I consider myself extremely fortunate to have Ms. Neethu S. as my dissertation guide. I record my deepest gratitude to her for the timely advices and valuable guidance, for constant supervision as well as providing necessary information regarding the project and relentless encouragement in completing the thesis.

I would also like to express my thanks to all those who have influenced and supported me in the task of preparing this dissertation.

I convey my gratitude to my dear family for their generous encouragement and co-operation throughout this process.

I also thank my dearest teachers Ms. Laurita Roy and Ms. Merin Jose who has been a constant source of information as well as support in completing the project on time.

Finally, I express my gratitude to other faculty members of the Department of English, Bharata Mata College, Thrikkakkara, and all my classmates and friends for their kind support and co-operation.

Riya Clare Paul

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The Cambridge Dictionary defines patriarchy as "a society in which the oldest male is the leader of the family or a society controlled by men in which they use their power to their own advantage." ("Patriarchy") Etymologically, the term derives from the Greek 'patriarkhẽs' which means 'father or chief of a race' which is a compound of 'patria', meaning "lineage" and 'arkhǒ' meaning "rule". Historically, the term has been used to refer to autocratic rule by the male head of the family. Since the late twentieth century, however, particularly during the second wave of feminism, writers have associated it with a social system in which power is primarily held by adult men. This social reference to the term has further been developed to form an understanding of patriarchal social relations that subdued women and also to explain male dominance as a social rather than a biological phenomenon.

The formation of patriarchy was a process that took nearly 2500 years for its completion. How gender became created, defined, and established varied from culture to culture and period to period. The roles and behaviours considered appropriate for the sexes were expressed in values, customs, laws, and social roles. During the primary ages of human living, people lived by hunting and gathering. They did not plant or domesticate and relied upon nature directly for their living. The lack of private properties and minimal production of commodities made possible the relative equality of the sexes.

Over the Neolithic period, the development of agriculture fostered the inter-tribal exchange of women, not only as means to avoid impending warfare through political marriage alliances but also because societies with more women could produce more children. The agrarian societies could use the labour of the children to increase production and accumulate the surplus. Men as a group had rights in women which women as a group did not have over men. Women

themselves eventually became a resource that men sought and fought to acquire. In every known society, it was the women who were captured and enslaved in warfare while men were killed. This enslavement of women, together with racism and sexism formed the strong foundation of the class system. According to the feminist historian Gerda Lerner,

> The first gender defined role for women was that of the "stand-in" wife, which became established and institutionalized for women of elite groups. This role gave such women considerable power and privileges, but it depended on their attachment to elite men and based, minimally, on their satisfactory performances in rendering these men's sexual and reproductive services. If a woman failed to meet these demands, she was quickly replaced and thereby lost all her privileges and standing. The gender defined role of warrior led men to acquire power over men and women of conquered tribes… Men had learned how to assert and exercise power over people slightly different from themselves in the primary exchange of women. In doing so, men acquired the knowledge necessary to elevate "difference of whatever kind into a criterion for dominance (155)

By the second millennium, the daughters of the poor were sold in marriage or forced to enter prostitution to meet the economic needs of their families. According to Lerner,

> The product of this commodification of women- bride price, sale price, and children – was appropriated by men. It may very well represent the first accumulation of private property. The enslavement of women of conquered tribes became not only a status symbol for nobles and warriors, but it actually enabled the conquerors to acquire tangible wealth through selling or trading the product of the slave labor and their reproductive product, slave children (213)

For much of human history, the persistence of male domination was so much a part of the very soul of life that it has never been accepted or discussed as a separate entity or concept. The common understanding that male supremacy and dominance was "natural" was very satisfying because those who run the society- wrote the laws, the poems, the religious texts, the philosophy, history, and everything in general which constructed a society- were largely men writing for their benefit. As Jane Austin's character in *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot says: "Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree: the pen has been in their hands." Patriarchy as a concept has fallen in and out of fashion, coming into limelight during moments of feminist renewal. Though it has been central to the flourishing and acted as the key concept against which all the three feminist waves raged on, feminism began without it. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1972), Mary Wollstonecraft was clear there existed such a thing as "the tyranny of men" but it took another sixty years to adopt the term 'patriarchy' as something of social theory. It was Virginia Woolf who first pulled the notion of 'patriarchy' out of the realm of theory and into the zone of experience. In *Three Guineas* (1938) she explored patriarchy in the backdrops of her circumstances. For her, it described patterns within families like hers in which men held the economic power and authority, boys were trained for public life, and girls were restricted to their homes, refused a chance at serious education or the opportunity to earn a living. Woolf however, did not consider patriarchy as a social structure that went beyond the boundaries of the power structures of the household.

For the second wave feminists, the big challenge was to bring women into the light of the public space. Despite the increased rights that women enjoyed as a result of persistent fights and movements, they realized that women were still oppressed. They discerned that oppression could only be eradicated if it could be identified, studied, and effectively dealt with. The most useful focus for this work at first was provided by 'patriarchy'. Kate Millet, through her *Sexual Politics*,

was one of the first critics who attempted at identifying the undercurrents of patriarchy that was deeply rooted in the society. She traced the existence of patriarchy everywhere in the society, even in the most ordinary, apparently harmless social norms which were in fact tools of oppression. As the feminists of the second and third waves attempted to theorize it into systems of dominance, the concept of patriarchy sprouted many redefinitions and refinements. Radical feminists like Catharine MacKinnon even adhered to the view that men against women were the fuel that kept the society running and took the concept of patriarchy to a light that it has remained in for most of the history of liberation movements: men dominating over women and being the power holders of the society.

As it progresses into the fourth wave, the feminist movement has expanded in its inherent concepts and inclusive groups. Starting as a movement for the suffrage rights for women, which evolved parallel to slavery abolishment struggles in places like America, the feminist movement has gained momentum and has spread wide and far to include all of the marginalized groups in its strife to justice and equality. Varying in its techniques and approaches while rooted in the same ideology, the movement has focused on different aspects regarding the geographical, cultural, historical, and periodical variances. While expanding and progressing through its years of movements and fights for gender justice, it should also be noted that feminism, knowingly or unknowingly, has created a notion of patriarchy in which only one of the groups undergo continued oppression and suffering. From its very beginning when the fight was aimed at the suffrage rights of women, throughout its journey, the movement through focusing on patriarchy as its striking point has resulted in a generally acknowledged, popular notion that the masculine always remains the power holding and suppressing section. Though many critics like Millet have elaborated on the fact that the gender disparities that prevail in the society are merely social constructs and that they equally victimize and stereotype men and women, the damage that the patriarchal system inflicts on the male is more than often neglected or given little importance.

Patriarchal culture shifts its focus on "control and domination" the most because the control and domination of other men is an effective way to ensure one's safety from them. In Allan Johnson's words:

> What drives patriarchy as a system- what fuels competition, aggression, and oppression- is a dynamic relationship between control and fear. Patriarchy encourages men to seek security, status, and other rewards through control; to fear other men's ability to control and harm them; and to identify being in control as both their best defense against loss and humiliation and the surest route to what they need and desire. In this sense, although we usually think of patriarchy in terms of women and men, it is more about what goes on among men. The oppression of women is certainly an important part of patriarchy, but, paradoxically, it may not be the point of patriarchy (53)

Although oppression of women is not the point of patriarchy, a society that is male-centered, male-dominated, and male-identified will invariably value the masculine and their traits over the feminine. Such a society will surely be encouraged to treat women as beings suited to please men.

Women play several important roles in the patriarchal system though their roles vary with class, race, and other factors. The most basic and imbibed role of women and femininity is to define men and masculinity. Men are considered men to the extent they are not women: masculine, brave, daring, strong, non-emotional, rational, and powerful. Here, real women are weak, gentle, nurturing, supportive, emotional, and empathetic. The notions of "real men" and "real women" are different in different patriarchal systems. Women are often considered as trophies, symbolizing and referring to a man's victory over another. In patriarchy, women are

expected to take care of the men who have been damaged by other men and are also supposed to accept the blame and be at the receiving end of men's disappointment, rage and pain.

For most men, women are a link to the world of emotions, particularly their own. Such links are considered important because patriarchy teaches men to repress their emotions and never to express their vulnerabilities. "[Men] often look to women as a way to ease their sense of emptiness, meaninglessness, and disconnection. However, the patriarchal expectation that "real men" are autonomous and independent sets men up to both want and resent women at the same time." (Johnson 65) In patriarchy, men are sexual subjects and women are mere objects. Women's sexuality exists only to please men. Whether a woman desires sex is irrelevant to whether she has sex because patriarchal sexuality is male-centred, male-dominated, and male-identified.

Women, though they have experienced the demeaning and suppressing powers for themselves like other marginalized groups, known it, and shared, living in a world in which they are devalued and humiliated, their experience bears no significance. Thus they have been long trained to mistrust and neglect their own experiences. Women's lack of knowledge about their long history of struggles and achievements has been one important means of keeping them subordinate. By stepping out of the constructs of patriarchal thoughts, she is risking her connection and approval of the men in her life. Men's version of history often celebrated as the "universal truth" has succeeded in portraying women as marginal to civilizations and as victims of the historical process. The truths about women who have challenged the system are conveniently forgotten and they are made to believe in the truths men have skilfully crafted for them over the centuries.

While it remains valid that the feminist movements were vital for the liberation of a large section of the society who were treated like slaves and considered inferior, changing times and

scenarios demand a deeper focus into the collateral damage that the system has been inflicting upon the seeming power holding group. Patriarchy damages men as well as women. For instance, men are hurt when they are taught and trained to repress their emotions and to deny their needs for connection and intimacy to avoid being called gentle and to maintain the control necessary to protect themselves. As the world has expanded enough to accept the widening band of gender identities, it is important to analyze the stereotyping that the society invisibly imposes upon them. While the masculine is being continually questioned and considered answerable for every violation that happens to the other genders, the victimization of the former is poorly addressed and rarely dealt with. As we hope to dawn into a gender-neutral world, it is important to primarily liberate the masculine to free the others.

The project aims at addressing the largely affected and often neglected position of men in the patriarchal society and tries to liberate men from their chained patriarchal holds. The first chapter discusses the ideas and theories of critics like Kate Millet, Reawyn Connell, and David Jackson and attempts to identify the gender binaries as mere social constructs. It also looks into various roles and strata into which the gender is classified and stereotyped under the patriarchal society. The second chapter analyses the play *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams and through the central character Tom tries to get an understanding of the struggles of men who are trained by patriarchy to conform to the societal norms and conventions attributed to the masculine in general. It delves into the inner conflicts of the central character as he is torn between the commitment of looking after a family where he is the only male and following his passion, leaving behind all of his responsibilities. The third chapter considers the novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chobsky and through a study of its central character Charlie, analyses how the mental and physical problems of men are often neglected and are not given enough of importance. It also traces the portrayal of Charlie as somebody who does not conform to the traditional patriarchal norms attributed to the masculine. In conclusion, through a

combined analysis of the theories and the chosen work, an attempt is made to redefine patriarchy as an ideology that victimizes both masculine and feminine.

Chapter 2

Theories of Gender Studies: An Analysis

The waves of feminism which began almost at the same time as that of the slavery abolishment movements in America gained momentum and spread far and wide across the continents slowly and steadily. The movement has succeeded in establishing its goal of equal treatment of the sexes to an extent. In its journey towards this, it has also succeeded in addressing a wide variety of geographies, women's groups, culturally distinct challenges, and including other marginalised communities into its focus area. Throughout its growth as a movement, feminism has also directly or indirectly stressed on the fact that its fights are aimed against patriarchy, the system which attributes superior power to men and has led to the social constructions of the behavioral patterns of different genders. For centuries, the movement remained one-sided as something which was done only by the women just for their betterment. The crucial role that the men had to play in the crusade against gender equality was often neglected and feminism, even today is more or less portrayed as a movement for bashing men. Many studies were not done on the masculine and hence no attempt was made to create a parallel between the women's rights movements.

Men's studies or masculinity studies has its origins in psychology. The first of the studies which could be said to be about men were done by the sociologists and psychologists in the Nordic countries. It has its origins in the studies done by the Norwegian sociologists Erik Grønseth and Per Olav Tiller and their classic study of father absence in sailor families and its impact on the personality development of children during the 1950s. Grønseth's views on family and sexuality were considered radical and invited many criticisms during the 1960s. His proposal to offer sex education led to massive controversies and all the bishops of the state Church of Norway as well as a massive number of housewives signed a protest petition against him.

However, most of his views were embraced by the feminist movements of the 1970s. In the Anglophone countries, on the other hand, men's studies began as a response and critique of the emerging men's right movements and were taught as an academic discipline only after the 1970s.

The early scholars of men's studies focused mainly on the concepts of the social construction of masculinity about which another celebrated work was made during the 1970s. *Sexual Politics*, which is widely regarded as one of the key texts of radical feminism was written by Kate Millet in 1970 based on her Ph.D. dissertation. Considered a classic of feminism, the book discusses the frequently neglected political aspect of sex and analyses the power structure and play that exists. The politics, as Millet discusses in her work does not refer to the parties, meeting, or chairmen. Rather, "the term politics shall refer to power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another." (Millet, 23). Millet, in her book, also throws light into the sociological aspect of the sexes and argues that the gender binaries are social constructions and that the sexes are constantly moulded by the norms of the society. The power structure that prevails between two sexes came into existence through centuries of moulding and ideological conditioning. As Millet argues,

> Sexual politics obtains consent through the "socialization" of both sexes to patriarchal polities concerning temperament, role, and status. As to status, a pervasive assent to the prejudice of male superiority guarantees superior status in the male, inferior in the female. The first item, temperament, involves the formation of human personality along stereotyped lines of sex category ("masculine" and "feminine"), based on the needs and values of the dominant group and dictated by what its members cherish in themselves and find convenient in subordinates: aggression, intelligence, force, and efficacy in the male; passivity, ignorance, docility, "virtue," and ineffectuality in the female (26)

She argues that gender binaries are a result of gradual conditioning by the society along stereotyped virtues attributed to the sexes which are enforced and instilled into the human psyche through different stages of development. She further elaborates:

This is complemented by the second factor, sex role, which decrees a consonant and highly elaborate code of conduct, gesture, and attitude for each sex. In terms of activity, sex role assigns domestic service and attendance upon infants to the female, the rest of human achievement, interest, and ambition to the male... Were one to analyse the three categories, one might designate status as the political component, role as the sociological, and temperament as the psychological- yet their interdependence is unquestionable and they form a chain. Those awarded higher status tend to adopt role of mastery, largely because they are first encouraged to develop temperaments of dominance. (26)

There are no sufficient shreds of evidence to prove that the present social distinction that patriarchy bestows upon the sexes are physical in origin. Neither can we assess the current distinction which is so culturally conditioned and induced. Millet argues that "whatever the real differences between the sexes may be, we are not likely to know them until the sexes are treated differently, that is alike." (29) She further goes on and through an analysis of the study done by Robert J Stoller, comes to the conclusion that "sex is biological, gender psychological, and therefore cultural." (Millet, 30) To quote Stoller, "Gender is a term that has psychological or cultural rather than biological connotations. If the proper terms for sex are "male" and "female", the corresponding terms for gender are "masculine" and "feminine"; these latter maybe quite independent of (biological) sex." (9) Millet comes to an understanding that through different factors like the most casual of talks, gestures, and practices, it is indeed patriarchy that bestows responsibilities and attributes to each sex. Moreover, through constant practices and renewals, patriarchy also imprints it in the psyche of each of the society

Because of our social circumstances, male and female are two cultures and their life experiences are utterly different-and this is crucial. Implicit in all the gender identity development which takes place through childhood is the sum total of the parents', the peers', and the culture's notions of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture, and expression. Every moment of the child's life is a clue to how she or he must think and behave to attain or satisfy the demands which gender places upon one. In adolescence, the merciless task of conformity grows to crisis proportions, generally cooling and settling in maturity. Since patriarchy's biological foundation appears to be very insecure, one has some cause to admire the strength of "socialization" which can continue a universal condition "on faith alone," as it were, or through an acquired value system exclusively. What does seem decisive in assuring the maintenance of the temperamental differences between the sexes is the conditioning of early childhood. Conditioning runs in a circle of self-perpetuation and self-fulfilling prophecy. To take a simple example: expectations the culture cherishes about his gender identity encourage the young male to develop aggressive impulses, and the female to thwart her own or turn them inward. The result is that the male tends to have aggression reinforced in his behaviour, often with significant anti-social possibilities. Thereupon the culture consents to believe the possession of the ale indicator, the testes, penis, and scrotum, in itself characterizes the aggressive impulse, and even vulgarly celebrates it in such encomiums as "that guy has balls." The same process of reinforcement is evident in producing the chief "feminine" virtue of passivity. (Millet 31)

Further analysing the sociological aspects of sexual politics, Millet scrutinises the role of the family in forging society. Being a mirror of the larger society in which we live, the family is the

chief institution of patriarchy. Being a patriarchal unit in itself, the family serves the multi-purpose of raising the new-borns in the stereotyped ways, encouraging its members to conform and obey the rules of the society and imposes control over the women in the family. Even in systems where the patriarchal state grants legal rights to its female citizens, the family acts as the stronger unit which exerts its control over them. Apart from all this, the chief contribution that family makes towards the patriarchal system is the socialization of its young into the stereotyped ideologies prescribed by patriarchy towards the roles of status, temperament, and sex roles. Although different families vary in this process based on the cultural background and grasp of the parents, the ultimate result is more or less the same. It is the conformity towards the system of patriarchy which is further reinforced through other social systems of schools, peers, media, and other learning sources. Traditional patriarchies have granted the access of education only to men while expecting the women to be taught and well-versed in household chores, thus smoothly attributing the responsibilities and authorities to men and grooming women to be subordinated to them. Another institution that further fortifies these ideologies is the religion which has been the strongest ally of patriarchy for centuries. Religions across the world constantly enforce the teachings of patriarchy and through their teachings, groom men to be authoritative and overpowering and women to be submissive.

One of the pioneers in the fields of masculinity studies is Raewyn Connell, an Australian sociologist best known for her concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' and her book *Southern Theory*. Connell's works are especially interesting in the fact that she considers men's studies to be something that goes parallel with and complimentary to feminist movements. She notes that in the changing times, many men have come forward stating their solidarity to the feminist movements in different ways. While some men are active supporters of women's advancement or against male violence, others, while not campaigning against gender issues have an alliance with these movements in other ways like supporting anti-discriminating laws. While

winds are indeed changing in the right direction, these men who offer their support to these movements are not in for an easy ride. They are most likely to be met with opposition and humiliation from other men who would picture them as eunuchs or queers. Many women, who are still deeply suspicious of all men out there would also act as hostile towards these men. But it is important that men join these movements and campaigns because men have got a lot to gain from the women's liberation movements which could lead to men being freed from their own rigid sex roles. (7)

Connell, in an article *Men, Masculinities and Feminism* draw out the differences that exist even among men. She argues that most men are constantly seen critical against the movements for women's liberation because what they are attempting at is a challenge to the system and to divide the power equally which is likely to be felt like an attack against masculinity. At the same time, it is also crucial to understand that all men do not benefit equally from the system. The notions of masculinities seem to differ with differences in class, economy, and race. As Connell notes, "growing up and constructing masculinity in an aboriginal community in conditions of mass unemployment and racial oppression is a different proposition from growing up in a white middle class." (8) On the other hand, the gay men, who are often economically independent, face other sorts of trouble. They have to face discrimination, physical violence, and cultural abuse because of their sexuality. She argues that among men, there are different kinds of masculinities and important gender divisions.

The popular ideology of gender assumes that "masculinity" and "femininity" are unchanging, direct expressions of male and female bodies. Male bodies are strong and dominant while female bodies re passive and nurturing. But there is overwhelming evidence, from anthropology and history that it is not so. The meaning of male and female bodies differ from one culture to another, and change (even in our own culture) over time. There are cultures where it has been normal,

not exceptional, for men to have homosexual relations. There have been periods in "western" history when the modern convention that men suppress displays of emotion did not apply to all when men were demonstrative about their feeling for their friends. Mateship in the Australian outback last centuries is a case in point. Masculinities and femininities are constructed or accomplished in social processes such as child rearing, emotional and sexual relationships, work and politics. (Connell, 8)

Connell also briefly mentions about the body as a powerful site and weapon of patriarchal culture.

Bodies are involved in all these sound processes. We do experience gender in our bodies, in the ways we talk and sit, in our skills, in our reactions of sexual arousals and disgust- but not because bodies determine social life. Rather, bodies are drawn into social relations, become social actors, become engaged in constructing a social world. It is in this social world that inequality arises, that women are oppressed, that political struggle occurs. (8)

In a paper for Pacific Sociological Association Conference, Connell analyses the role of schools in the reinforcement of sex roles. The modern school systems brought about a great change in the patterns of childrearing and child care. A huge part of this duty of taking care of the children was taken out of the families and located in specialized institutions. These institutions were under the control of the state, the church, or other new corporations, whose control were, and are, under the men. The education system developed a marked division of labour, with women teaching in nursery and elementary classes while men held power and authority in the higher classes. Broadly, the modern education system has brought the child-rearing and training of the youth under the surveillance and indirect control of elite men. The

school system provided a link between the family and the economy and gradually was associated with the gender division of labour in a wider economy. Gender thus got embedded in the institutional organisation of education.

In a patriarchal society, Connell argues, it is the powerful or hegemonic form of masculinity that embodies the currently successful strategy of subordinating women. It was understood as a pattern of practices that allowed men's domination over women to continue. In contemporary society, the hegemonic masculinity is that which is heterosexual, aggressive, competitive, and homo-social. This kind of masculinity, which is more than often associated with the traditional male role is not necessarily the reality in which the majority of the men live. Few men are seemingly successful like the corporate executives or muscular and well built like the combat heroes, sport, or film stars. There are also the subordinated masculinities, the most obvious example being the masculinity of gay men. There are also forms of masculinity found among men who are complicit in the patriarchal system. They seemingly accept the patriarchal dividend but are not directly involved in wielding power or in personal violence. It is also interesting to note that among these masculinities, there are complex hierarchies, exclusions, alliances, and oppressions.

There also exists a politics that glorify hegemonic masculinity, often by creating exemplary imageries or promoting male supremacy. Television sports, Hollywood movies, superhero comics, video games, and all similar media insist on the celebration of the physical supremacy, mastery of violence, and control over technology of the masculine. Since the private lives are as much an influential area of the patriarchy as the public life, household and sexual relations also form a major political arena in gender studies. Some men have happily been a part of the reconstruction of the domestic life: sharing the childcare, cleaning, and cooking, and importantly, decision making. Among a large group of young people, this trend has become more of a common, normal thing, a part of their lifestyle. Any claim for an upper hand by men

just because they are men is now considered grotesque. A few other men have grown beyond this and have tried to imbibe feminism at a deeper emotional level, by attempting to reconstruct their personality in total to escape the conventional notions of masculinity. This has prompted a variety of actions: being non-competitive, becoming a supportive rather than a dominating figure in groups and conversations, refusing careers and powers in organisations etcetera. But the number of men trying to exit from the mainstream masculinity in this way are very small in number and the trend also does not seem to spread far. The emotional expense at which these men are experimenting is also very high. Their practices more than often invite ridicule from the more conservative men and also is not very interesting to all women either.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity found prompt use, especially in the field of education, to understand the patterns of classroom life, especially the kinds of relations and bullying among boys. The concept has also had its application in criminology were the studies found that most men and boys chose to do more of conventional crimes, and they almost held a monopoly over the white-collar crimes. The concept of hegemonic masculinity helped in theorizing the relationship between the masculinities and the crimes across different cultures. It was also employed in studying the representation of men in media, like the interplay of sports and war imagery. It helped the media researchers in mapping the different representations of masculinities. It was also of great aid in understanding men's health practices.

Connell's concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' to show how the powerful men rule over the other subordinate masculine and women has further been developed into a term that has since then been discussed far and wide. 'Toxic masculinity' is usually referred to as the cultural norms that are associated with harm to the society and the men themselves. The traditional stereotyping of men as socially dominant along with such traits as misogyny and homophobia instils in them a tendency for violence, especially domestic abuse and sexual violence. It is also responsible for raising young boys in the patriarchal norms where they are taught to suppress their emotions and

to be brave and strong in front of society. Toxic masculinity also neutralizes and justifies the violent behavioural patterns of men from the very childhood with common phrases like "boys will be boys" with regards to instances like bullying and harassment. The term originated in the mythopoetic men's movement in America where they referred to the social pressure placed upon men to be violent, competitive, independent, and unfeeling in contrast to real or deep masculinity which was unseen in the modern world. Many other scholars, especially those associated with men's studies have further taken up the term and it has been discussed a lot.

Researchers have found that the masculine traits most consistently associated with negative mental health outcomes are self-reliance, the pursuit of sexual promiscuity, and power over women. The patriarchal insistence that men should be self-reliant is especially outdated in the modernist society where the world increasingly stresses upon and relies on interdependence and interconnectedness. The more disturbing factor is that these negative traits are more than often which encompasses what it means to be a man for many a number of people. Many believe that these traits are biologically embedded and are essential for the survival of the race. Attributes like self-reliance are of great importance for success in life because it enables one to be strong in the face of challenges. But being completely dependent on self-reliance would also make it hard for a man to seek or reach out for help in times of need. The only choice then would be to suffer in silence which would lead to serious mental problems. Y. Joel Wong of Indiana University Bloomington comments that these attitudes capture what is so problematic about the masculine norms.

People may assume that they will be looked down upon if they break out of this pattern of behaviour, even if that's not true. There's a gap between what men perceive other men believe or do and what men believe or do. There's a perception that a man will be seen as less manly for not conforming to gender norms. The irony is that a lot of men feel that way. (Hess)

Men are too afraid to break away from these norms and continue maintaining them.

Various sociologists, including Connell, had theorized that the commonly accepted masculine ideologies such as social respect, physical strength, and sexual potency would become problematic when they are set unattainable standards. Falling short of these make men and boys more anxious and insecure which further prompts them to use force to feel and seem strong and dominant. In this and similar scenarios, male violence does not originate from something bad or toxic that has crept into the nature of masculinity. Rather, it comes from these social and political settings, the details of which set them up for inner conflicts over social expectations. Connell says, "the popular discussion of masculinity has often presumed there are fixed character types among men. I'm sceptical of the idea of character types. I think it is more important to understand the situations in which groups of men act, the patterns in their actions, and the consequences of what they do." (Salter)

Researches consistently show that boys and men who hold sexist attitude are more likely to inflict gendered violence. Connell herself notes that "when the term toxic masculinity refers to the assertion of masculine privilege or men's power, it is making a worthwhile point. There are well-known gender patters in violent and abusive behaviour." (Salter) One major problem in the fight against toxic masculinity is that when we take culture as the main enemy, there is a risk in overlooking the real-life problems and instances that sustain this culture. There is a genuine danger in this perception. By keeping the focus on culture people who oppose toxic masculinity can accidentally conspire with institutions that promote it. The concept of toxic masculinity also encourages the assumption that the cause of male violence and other social problems are the same everywhere and hence the solutions for them might be the same as well. But as Connell and her colleagues have spent years demonstrating, other realities matter as well. While themes of violence and sexism recur across cultures, they show up at different places during different times. The root causes among the aboriginal might be quite different from those among the white

people. Recognizing the differences in the lives of men and boys is thus crucial in treating the toxic masculinity as well.

The various ways in which the patriarchal culture has shaped the lives of men around the globe have been happening for centuries. While these stereotyped norms claim to strengthen and liberate men as independent strong individuals, what they do is belittle their emotional and mental health and put a shackle on their development as an interdependent social being. Patriarchy puts a limit on what men can be and reduces them into mere beings of physical strength and no emotional capacity. In the crusade for equality, it is equally important for men as much as women to understand the need for liberation from the chains of the stereotyped cultural norms. It is also important for women to identify men, not as overpowering, subordinating powers, but as fellow fighters in the war against patriarchy. The winds are indeed changing as more and more people are becoming aware of the need of the time to stride together in this march. Through various art forms, literature, their deconstructions, and reconstructions, people are indeed into this war.

Chapter 3

The Silenced Male: A Scrutiny of *The Glass Menagerie*

During the winter of 1944-45, when Thomas Lanier Williams III decided to develop a short story he had written a year back into a play, he would have never imagined the fame it would bring him, or that this play would be the beginning of a career which would later mark him as one among the three foremost playwrights of 20ᵗʰ-century American drama. Developed from his short story *Portrait of a Girl in Glass*, the play *The Glass Menagerie* was a great success and took Williams to sudden fame at the age of 33. Tennessee Williams was born in Columbus, Mississippi, as the second child of Edwina Dakin and Cornelius Coffin. His father was a travelling shoe salesman who became an alcoholic and was frequently away from home. He had two siblings, older sister Rose Isabel Williams and younger brother Walter Dakin Williams. Williams had a very unhappy family with his father being a very violent tempered person and his mother, being locked in an unhappy marriage focussed her attention almost completely on her young, sick son. Many critics and historians believe that Williams drew from his own unhappy, dysfunctional family in much of his writings. Much of his earlier works went disregarded and it was only in 1944 that he finally rose to fame with *The Glass Menagerie*. His next play, *A Streetcar Named Desire* was a huge success and secured his reputation as a great playwright. Later on, though he continued his writings, their quality was deeply affected by his increasing alcohol and drug consumption. Williams was found dead at the age of 71 in his suite at the Hotel Elysee in New York on February 25, 1983.

Written in the form of a memory play, all actions of *The Glass Menagerie* are put forth in the form of the memories of Tom, who is also the central character of the play. Set in 1973 St. Louis, the play begins with Tom addressing the audience and warning them how the events of the play might not be al factual, because they are drawn from his memory. Tom lives in a dingy

apartment with his mother Amanda, a faded Southern belle of middle age and his slightly older sister Laura. Amanda constantly cherishes her days of youth as a popular belle and is always worried, especially for Laura, who has a slight limp and terrible insecurity about the outside world. Tom works in a shoe warehouse, doing his best to support the family although he hates his job. He struggles under the banality and boredom of everyday life and yearns to get away from it by spending much of his time going to the movies at night. Amanda is obsessed with finding a suitor for her daughter to secure her life for she believes that a woman has no means of decent sustenance unless she is married off well. She finds the task herculean as her crippling shyness has led Laura to turn away from the world and be in a land of her imaginations. She dropped out of both high school and another course and spends much of her time polishing and caressing her collection of tiny glass animals. Pressured by his mother to help find a gentleman caller for Laura, Tom invites Jim, an acquaintance from work home for dinner.

Delighted, Amanda sets up the apartment, prepares a special dinner, and tries to make Jim comfortable. Laura soon discovers that Jim is the boy she once loved in high school and often thought of since. In the beginning, Laura is so shy that she does not join others for the dinner excusing herself to be ill, but later, when Jim and Laura are left alone by the candlelight in the living room, they start a conversation. Jim learns of Laura's insecurities and tries to talk her out of it. They share a dance after which Jim complements Laura and kisses her. However, Jim also tells Laura that he is engaged to be married and leaves soon. The news of the engagement enrages Amanda who takes out her anger on Tom, who in reality, was not aware of it. The play concludes soon after, with Tom saying that he left home soon after the incident and that he never returned.

The characters and story of *The Glass Menagerie* resemble Williams' own life more closely than any of his other works. Williams, whose real name was Thomas has striking similarities to the central character of the play Tom with his love for writing. Amanda resembles

his mother, but the most striking similarities are between the character of Laura and Williams' sister Rose. Rose, the sickly and mentally unstable sister of Williams provides the basis for the character Laura, who is also called Blue Roses by Jim, though Laura also has characteristics of Williams himself, referring to his introverted nature. The play is a reflection of the unhappy and broken family that Williams had. Like the father of Tom who appears nowhere in the play, but in a photograph, and who, the reader knows from the conversations between the characters, left the family, Williams' father was an alcoholic who was constantly away from the family.

Much studies on gender have been done on *The Glass Menagerie* years after its production, but most of them analyse the characters of Laura and Amanda predominantly. The apparent, as well as underlying gender stereotypes and disparities that are visible throughout the play, can also be a reflection of both the period in which the play is set and the period in which it was written. Written during a period when the second World War was still raging on, the play may represent much of the gender roles that existed during the time in the society and which Williams experienced first hand. World War II saw a drastic change in the conceived gender perspectives of American society. With men in the war front-lines, women had no choice but to abandon their secluded life and go for outside works to look after their families. The working women, most of them mothers who had to work for daily wages were an integral part of their victory. They also challenged the notions of gender that were inscribed in the minds of many a number of Americans. While for the women the war proved to be a more empowering event, it also demanded from men the chivalry and bravery they were ideally supposed to possess. Although the image of a brave muscular GI fighting in combat became the ideal image of the American during the world war, not every man could fulfil that role. "Perhaps most removed from the idealized image of manhood were the more than 50,000 men who received conscientious objector status. Often described as weaklings, cowards, traitors, effeminate, or homosexual, these men faced great pressure to prove their bravery, loyalty, and willingness to

defend their ideals. Many of them volunteered for dangerous work fighting forest fires or risky medical experiments in an effort to prove that, while they objected to military service, they were no less than soldiers." (*Gender on the Home Front*)

This gender stereotyping and increased gender roles from the men that the war demanded has reflected in the characterization of the play. Tom who leads a life that he does not wish for, but for the sake of his family, and Amanda who struggles to secure the life of her daughter by arranging her a suitor is all a result of the societal gender stereotypes. The meagre income from Tom's work is not enough for the family to enjoy a lavish living, but Amanda tries to make sure that they live a decent life. Tom has to ensure that he supports his family by working in the shoe warehouse even if he hates it because of the embedded belief in his mind that as the only man of the house, he should be responsible and should take care of his mother and sister. This belief is also constantly reinforced by his mother. Tom is very well aware that the job he is doing holds no interest to him. However, he also is under strong pressure, both from his family and the society to take up the role of the breadwinner that he is supposed to.

One character who never makes his presence in the play, and yet, is felt throughout is Tom's father, whose name is never mentioned other than Mr. Wingfield. Although he never appears in person on the stage, his presence is felt throughout the play. He is referred to in almost all the scenes, and maintains a visual presence on the stage at all times, in the form of his picture hanging on the wall. The first instance where Tom refers to his father is in the opening monologue of the play.

There is a fifth character in the play who doesn't appear except in this larger-than-life-size photograph over the mantel. This is our father who left us long time ago. He was a telephone man who fell in love with long distances; he gave up his job with the telephone company and skipped the light fantastic out of

town. The last we heard of him was a picture postcard from Mazatlan, on the Pacific coast of Mexico, containing a message of two words- "Hello- Good-bye!" and no address. (Williams, 30)

His father represents all the inspiration and guidance that Tom looks up to in breaking away from the societal norms and setting up a life for himself. Mr. Wingfield, who abandoned his family and went away must have been once in a position that Tom experienced himself. It is clear from Tom's descriptions of his father that he never loved the job that he has been doing and that he was never content with staying with his family. What he always wanted was to get away from the everyday boredom of life and go on to explore the essence of life as it truly is, without being committed, and without being held responsible.

Tom, though he tries his best to get used to the ordinary everyday life to take care of his mother and sister, deep down he is yearning to get away from it all like his father. The constant and heated verbal war that occurs between the mother and the son is a piece of clear evidence for it. Amanda may be worried that is son might abandon them too as her husband did. She is aware that she might not be able to take care of the family if Tom leaves so she constantly reminds Tom of his duties that he has towards his mother and sister. This reminder that so often Amanda puts forth takes Tom off guard and exposes his inner desire to getaway. from it all. Tom tries to quench his desire to get away through various means like watching movies all night and reading books. When Amanda confiscates his book, Tom is outraged at being questioned about his interests.

Amanda: What's the matter with you, you - big - big - IDIOT!

Tom: Look! - I've got no thing, no single thing -

Amanda: Lower your voice!

Tom: In my life here that I can call my OWN! Everything is -

Amanda: Stop that shouting!

Tom: Yesterday you confiscated my books! You had the nerve to-

Amanda: I took that horrible novel back to the library - yes! That hideous book by that insane Mr. Lawrence [Tom laughs wildly] I cannot control the output of diseased minds or people who cater to them. - [Tom laughs still more wildly] BUT I WON'T ALLOW SUCH FILTH BROUGHT INTO MY HOUSE! No, no, no, no, no!

Tom: House, house! Who pays rent on it, who makes the slave of himself to-

Amanda: Don't you DARE to-

Tom: no, no, I mustn't say things! I've got to just- (Williams, 49-50)

In the conversation, Tom makes it clear that he does not work because of his free will to do it, but because everyone else expects him to do so. Tom also at times, makes feeble efforts to make his mother understand that he hates what he has been doing all the years. "it seems unimportant to you, what I'm doing - what I want to do - having a little difference between them! You don't think that-" (Williams, 51) however, Amanda does not heed to his words. She believes that Tom is not in the right 'condition" because he is not putting enough effort into it and is not responsible enough. In the big verbal fight that happens between Tom and Amanda, Tom finally bursts out and tells his mother that he is living a life that he does not enjoy.

Tom [wildly]: No, I'm in no condition!

Amanda: What right have you got to jeopardize your job? Jeopardize the security of us all? How do you think we'd manage if you were-

Tom: Listen! You think I'm crazy about the warehouse? [He bends fiercely toward her slight figure] You think I'm in love with the Continental Shoemakers? You think I want to spend fifty-five years down there in that- celotex interior! with - fluroscent - tubes! Look! I'd rather somebody picked up a crowbar and battered out my brains- than go back mornings! I go! For sixty-five dollars a month I give up all that I dream of doing and being ever! And you say self- self's all I ever think of. Why listen, if self is what I thought of, Mother, I'd be where he is - GONE! [Pointing to father's picture] as far as the system of transportation reaches!… (Williams, 52)

Even though Tom explain fully well to Amanda how much he has given up for the sake of his family, Amanda is not able to see them. She is only worried that her son might follow his father abandoning the family.

In the conversation that follows the next day, Amanda tries to negotiate with Tom and make him understand that he has to survive all the hard times with true spirit. For Amanda, the world is full of people having similar situations as them, and they have got to fight their way through. However, from Tom's words, it is clear to us that he does not wish to live a life that society expects him to live. It becomes clearer to the reader that Tom might soon follow his father's path.

Amanda: Why do you go to the movies so much, Tom?

Tom: I go to the movies because- I like adventure. Adventure is something I don't have much of at work, so I go to the movies.

Amanda: but, Tom, you go to the movies entirely too much!

Tom: I like a lot of adventure.

Amanda: most young men find adventure in their careers.

Tom: Then most young men are not employed in a warehouse.

Amanda: the world is full of young men employed in warehouses and offices and factories.

Tom: Do all of them find adventure in their careers?

Amanda: They do or they do without it! Not everybody has a craze for adventure.

Tom: Man is by instinct a lover, a hunter, a fighter, and none of those instincts are given much play at the warehouse! (Williams, 63-64)

During many of his monologues, Tom exhibits his love for poetry and art which he dreamt of pursuing but could not due to the responsibilities hurled upon him. Even the movies that he went to every night were a result of his unquenchable love for adventure, art, and a novelty in life. But the more he tries to adjust with the life that he has been living the lesser he can do it. At a point, Tom realizes that he cannot run away from his instincts and decides to go away from his house instead. Though he suffered a lot when his father left, he finally understands that it is essential for him to leave. It is interesting to note that the first person to whom he talks about his plans is no one from his own family, but Jim. When the latter comes over for the dinner, Tom confides in him that he is planning to leave his home soon. He realizes that mechanical life that he has been living all these years cannot satiate him any longer and that he needs to get away for his own good.

Tom: … I'm tired of the movies and I'm about to move!

Him: move?

Tom: yes.

Jim: When?

Tom: soon!

Jim: Where? Where?

Tom: I'm starting to boil inside. I know I seem dreamy, but inside- well, I'm

boiling!- Whenever I pick up a shoe, I shudder a little thinking how short life is and

what I'm doing!- Whatever that means. I know it doesn't mean shoes- except as

something to wear on a traveller's feet!… (Williams 96-97)

Tom finally realizes that there is not much difference between him and his father, that

both of them were driven by the same desires, the desire to be broken free of societal

expectations and live a free life. He says, "I'm like my father. The bastard son of a bastard! See

how he grins? And he's been absent going on sixteen years!" (Williams 97)

Soon after, Tom says that he left his home and never returned. His journey took him to

places, new adventures, and added new meanings to his life. While much of the studies on the

play have primarily focussed on the characters of Laura and Amanda, it is important to analyse

the character in the light of gender roles and their effects on masculinity. Tom is an excellent

example of how the society forges and conditions men to behave in a certain behavioural pattern

which would enhance the existence of patriarchy. As Millet rightly says in *Sexual Politics*, the

society proposed certain roles and duties to be performed by the males which would make them

integral parts in the construction and maintenance of a patriarchal society. Tom is compelled by

the world around him, and especially his mother to take up the roles prescribed to him as the

'man of the house'. His father's absence makes him the only male in the family and it is naturally

expected of him to consider the bread-winning for the family as his primary duty and to put the

rest after it. He is trained, from his very childhood as a part of social conditioning that the man

must take up the responsibilities. The dreamer in him is constantly subdued and tamed. His father is often cited to him as an example of how he should never become. Amanda reminds him more than once in the play that he should never become like his father, or rather, he should never question or challenge the gender norms. "… It's terrifying! More and more you remind me of your father! He was out all hours without explanation! - Then left! Good-bye! And me with the bag to hold!…" (Williams, 65)

While Tom is constantly told not to be like his father and to be a more responsible male, it takes him some experiences from life to realize that the path his father took was worth it, though it came with many damages. He is unable to resist the call of his mind, however hard he tries. When the society and its norms demanded that Tom be responsible, it was never what he wanted to be. He never wanted to be taking care of his mother and sick sister. It is his gender and the roles attached to it that demands of him that he must look after his family. When Amanda speaks of thousands of other men who work in factories and warehouses like Tom, she is also speaking about thousands of men who are chained by their societal roles, unable to act on their own true will. Not many among these men are courageous and daring enough to forsake their families to pursue their dreams. The conditioning that they have been receiving from childhood makes them believe that they must be working and earn a living, thus supporting their families. Their wishes and dreams are feeble before that and they eventually get used and adjusted to their lifestyle, owing to the reinforcement that they receive from their families and society.

It is also key to note how class plays a major role in this system. Had tom been a member of an economically stable family, he might not have had to undergo so much of struggle to pursue his dreams. Money remains the major problem in the household of the Wingfields. Even with Amanda trying to work as an agent for a magazine, they are able to live a fairly poor living. It is also this economic dependence that makes Amanda worry for her daughter.

Like his father, Tom is both a victim and survivor of the hold of patriarchy. Although younger than his sister, he is forced to take up the burden of earning for a family because the society expects him to do it. He has to put away his dreams and aspirations and work in a place that offers no solace to his adventurous mind. However, he tries hard to meet the expectations placed on him. His instincts take the better of him and he realizes what it took for his father to abandon his family and follow his passion. It was never an easy task for Tom to follow the paths of his father. It came at the cost of a lot of things he loved, especially his sister. From the final monologue of Tom, it is clear that even though he was able to liberate himself and travel great distances, his heart always reached out for his sister. However, it was a price that he was ready to pay to live his dreams and break off his shackles.

Chapter 4

The Perks of Being a Wallflower: A Change in the Wind

In 1994, Stephen Chobsky, then a schoolboy, had an idea that he would write a book. He wrote down the first line spoken by the narrator, "I guess that's just one of the perks of being a wallflower" and stopped. In the line, he found the kid he was so trying to find, and the idea of the book he had planned to write changed completely. Five years later, Chobsky wrote his first novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, which was unlike any other teen popular fiction of his time. The book gathered wide critical acclaim and even invited controversies for its explicit outlook on sexual matters and teenage drug issues. While most of the popular fiction for teens was aimed at girls, and boys were supposedly more interested in horror or war books, Chobsky authored a book that looked at the less trodden emotional and psychological aspects of teenage boys. The novel critically questions the general cultural norms that are attributed to boys and analyses the growing up struggles of teenage boys who are more than often conditioned to grow up in a particular way, demanded by the society

Born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Chobsky graduated from the University of Southern California's Filmic Writing Program. His first film was *The Four Corners of Nowhere* which he wrote, directed, and acted in. In 1994, he started working on his first novel, and five years later, after much research, he developed and published *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* in 1999. Many aspects of the story, including the characters were created from his memories. Chobsky has said that he relates to Charlie in many personal ways and that the book is a reminder of his high school days. The book was banned in many schools owing to its discussion of themes like sexuality, drug use, rape etcetera. The novel is written in an epistolary format, with its central character as Charlie, who writes letters about his own life to an unknown recipient addressed, "dear friend". In the letters, he discusses his first year at high school and his struggles with two

traumatic experiences: the suicide of his only friend from middle school, Michael Dobson, and the death of his favourite aunt, Helen.

Although Charlie is a quiet person, he is befriended by two seniors: Patrick and his stepsister Sam. Charlie develops a crush on Sam who later on reveals that she was sexually abused as a child. Charlie witnesses his sister's boyfriend hit her across the face, but she forbids him from telling anything to their parents. Charlie does not understand why his sister still loves the boy after being hit by him and the relationship between them deteriorates. Eventually, he discovers that his sister is pregnant and agrees to bring her to an abortion clinic without telling anyone. His sister breaks up with her boyfriend after this incident, and her relationship with Charlie improves significantly. Charlie gets into a relationship with Mary Elizabeth, which however ends disastrously when Charlie kisses Sam during a game of truth or dare. As the school year ends, Charlie helps Sam pack who is leaving for a summer college-preparatory program. As they pack, he talks about his feelings for her. They begin to engage sexually, but Charlie suddenly grows inexplicably uncomfortable and stops Sam. His sexual contact with Sam stirs up repressed memories of him being molested by Aunt Helen as a little boy. In the epilogue, Charlie slowly gets better in the hospital with his family and friends visiting him occasionally. In the end, Charlie can let go of the things of the past and finally comes in terms with his life.

The Perks of Being a Wallflower stands out among the numerous young adult fictions of its time for various reasons. Deviating from the mainstream romance and fantasy, the novel dealt with issues like psychological problems and mental health on a serious note. It portrays Charlie in the truest form, with all his confusions and repercussions of teenage. The novel is notable for its characterization of the protagonist who stands different from the societal norms of masculinity. Charlie is unlike any other boy of his age. He is strikingly different from the two men of his family, his father, and his elder brother. The most notable difference that Charlie has from the normal male characters that we see in teenage fiction is that he is a very emotional and

sensitive person. Although throughout the book, there are many instances where Charlie is told not to cry when he is emotional, he finds it most comfortable when he lets his heart out.

There are many occasions in the book where we see Charlie crying and also in striking contrast with other male characters in the novel. In a society which chastises the male for being emotional and declares that "men don't cry", Charlie proves that crying does not make him any less a man. In the beginning, when Charlie explains his trauma after his best friend from middle school commits suicide, he also remembers that his older brother came to his school, "…and told me to stop crying. Then, he put his arm on my shoulder and told me to get it out of my system before Dad came home." (Chobsky, 4) although it might be that Charlie's brother is merely trying to console him, it is interesting to note how he automatically asks Charlie to stop crying and not to let their father know that they have been crying. Also, Charlie's brother is a person who satisfies the masculine traits more than Charlie himself. He is interested in sports and is not soft like his little brother.

Another interesting instance that highlights the underlying social conditioning and gender roles is the part where Charlie describes him witnessing his father cry or the first time.

> The family was sitting around, watching the final episode of *M*A*S*H* and I'll never forget it even though I was very young. My mom was crying. My brother was using every ounce of strength he had not to cry. And my dad left during one of the final moments to make a sandwich. Now, I don't remember much about the program itself because I was too young, but my dad never left to make a sandwich except during commercial breaks, and then he usually just sent my mom. I walked to the kitchen, and I saw my dad making a sandwich . . . and crying. He was crying harder than even my mom. And I couldn't believe it. When he finished making his sandwich, he put away the things in the refrigerator and stopped crying and wiped

his eyes and saw me. Then, he walked up, patted my shoulder, and said, "This is

our little secret, okay, champ?" (Chobsky, 19)

Charlie's father finds it hard to express his emotions in front of his family because of the

social conditioning he received as a child. It is because of this same reason that he asks his son to

keep it a secret. And this conditioning that he received is eventually passed on to his offspring,

Charlie's elder brother who asks Charlie to stop crying before their father gets home. This

unwillingness to express emotions is not just limited to his immediate family. On another

occasion, Charlie remembers his grandfather crying in secret on watching his brother on TV.

And when they were leaving, Charlie goes to his grandfather and gives him a hug and kiss on the

cheek. And Charlie tells, "He wiped my lip print off with his palm and gave me a look. He

doesn't like the boys in the family to touch him." (Chobsky, 64)

There is also another instance in the story in which Charlie talks about his sister's boyfriend.

The boy who liked his sister was always respectful of Charlie's parents. His dad did not think

much about him because he was soft. And his sister, as he tells, always said very mean things to

him. One night, she was being very rude to him for not standing up to the class bully when he

was fifteen or something. They were watching a movie and the boy started crying. And Charlie's

sister taunted him saying that even Charlie, her younger brother stood up to his bully.

And this guy got really red-faced. And he looked at me. The, he looked at her.

And he wound up and hit her hard across the face. I mean hard. I just froze because

I couldn't believe he did it. It was not like him at all to hit anybody. He was the boy

that made mix tapes with themes and hand-coloured covers until he hit my sister

and stopped crying. The weird part is that my sister didn't do anything. She just

looked at him very quietly. It was so weird. My sister goes crazy if you eat the

wrong kind of tuna, but here was this guy hitting her, and she didn't say anything. She just got soft and nice. (Chobsky, 13)

His sister started going out with this boy more often after the incident. She did not want her boyfriend to be soft and less manly so he taunted him until he proved himself to be aggressive and violent, which Charlie's sister considered manly. This exemplifies how the sex roles and temperaments, as Millet says, is forged and reinforced into the society from a very young age, and how men suffer and undergo difficulties to meet the expectations of the society and satisfy them. The boy Charlie's sister loved is pushed to such an extent that he has to be aggressive to prove his manliness to the girl he adores, and his sister likes this because that is how she is raised from her childhood. She taunts the boy and is mean to him before the incident because she never considered him fit for any respect. However, after he hits her, she becomes soft and closer to him and begins seeing him more often.

The only person outside Charlie's family, other than Sam and Patrick who does not find his soft character weird is his English teacher, Bill. In his family, all Charlie sees are men who are the perfect examples of the accepted norms of masculinity. His father who is ashamed of crying, his brother who is good in sports and who asks him not to cry and his grandfather who used to hit his mother are all factors that question Charlie's idea of masculinity. All around him, he sees men who adhere to violence to gain respect like his grandfather who used to hit his mother, his sister's boyfriend who is provoked to hit her to prove his masculinity, and even his sister who finds this acceptable and even preferable. Among all these men and women who propagate the society's conventions of masculine sex roles, Patrick and Bill stand out. Bill focuses on enhancing Charlie's creative mind and tells him that he is more special than he thinks he is. Charlie feels that Bill is a person he can always trust and that is why he tells him about his sister's boyfriend hitting her. To a confused Charlie, Bill explains that it was never right of that boy to hit her. Bill invites Charlie over to his house before leaving the school and tells him how special he is. In

being kind and gentle, Bill teaches Charlie that a man can be gentle, introspective, communicative, and understanding. He turns out to be on big factor why Charlie believes in himself. Through Charlie's constant conflict and wrestling with the narrow and prescribed forms of masculinity that most men around him represent, Chobsky shows that men must choose to break free of the expected behaviour, or else be consumed by them.

While struggling to cope up with the roles and temperament that society puts forth to be labelled masculine, men go through tremendous pressure and mental traumas. Being told to be brave and strong, they don't often find any means to let out their emotions. Talking about the problems that they face are often considered as signs of weakness in them. Rebecca Ratcliffe, in an article in 'The Guardian' notes that around the globe, most of the jurisdictions lacked legal protection for boys. "it is estimated that 18% of girls and 8% of boys globally have experienced childhood sexual abuse" (Ratcliffe). However, most of the boys are not aware of how to address these issues. While the virtue and sexual purity of girls are given prime importance, these matters are not dealt with much care in the case of boys. "Social stigma, macho stereotypes, and homophobia all contribute towards boys being less likely to report the abuse."(Ratcliffe) Although it is a widespread belief that women are emotionally weaker than men, the increased suicide rate among men state otherwise. Men are more prone to be victims of depression, owing to the face that they cannot share their emotional instabilities with anyone because they believe that they have to be strong.

In Chobsky's novel, it is revealed that Charlie was sexually abused as a child only towards the end of the story. Throughout the novel, Chobsky leaves hints that the protagonist is suffering from mental instabilities. Charlie is a sad boy in the novel. In the letters he writes to his unknown friend, he constantly refers to his Aunt Helen, who was one of his most favourite people in the world. In the happiest moments that he experienced during his high school days, he always goes back to his memories of Aunt Helen. During Christmas, as Charlie gives out presents to

everybody, Sam hugs him and whispers "I love you". "And she kissed my cheek and whispered so nobody could hear. "I love you." I knew that she meant it in a friendly way, but I didn't care because it was the third time since my Aunt Helen dies that I heard it from anyone" (Chobsky, 73) Later in the book when Bill tells him to never forget that he is a very special person, Aunt Helen's memory comes back to him again. "When I was driving home, I just thought about the word "special." And I thought the last person who said that about me was my Aunt Helen" (Chobsky, 196) Aunt Helen's recurring memory is felt throughout the novel and at first, the reader thinks that it is due to the strong love that Charlie has for his aunt. It is only to the end that Chobsky reveals the real reason why Aunt Helen's memories come back to Charlie every now and then.

All the sudden mental breakdowns and panic attacks that Charlie has been having can be traced back to one single event from his childhood, the sexual abuse that he experienced from the most loved person of his life. The incident in a way influences the behavioural pattern of Charlie subconsciously. Charlie has no apparent memory of his childhood abuse which his mind must have conveniently pushed into the shadows owing to the system in which he was raised. The gender reversal that Chobsky deliberately depicts in the novel has much importance during modern times. Unlike many of the books relating to sexual abuse and mental health which portrays the lives of women, Chobsky chose his victim to be a boy. This has helped researchers in understanding how social conditioning can negatively affect the masculine and how it trains them to suppress their emotions. The childhood incident which traumatises the boy must have had a great impact on the character development of the protagonist. Charlie himself says that his Aunt Helen was subjected to sexual assault as a child and that she had been through multiple abusive relationships. These relationships and the hardships that she had to face from them eventually led Aunt Helen to do the same to her nephew. By choosing his victim to be a boy,

Chobsky highlighted the importance of addressing issues like mental health among boys and the social conditioning which negatively affects them.

The sensitive, emotional nature of Charlie must have been formed from his understanding that he had to be kind and sensitive to others unlike what most men around taught him to be. He has an understanding that most boys will eventually grow up into violent, abusive men. "I just can't stop thinking that the little kid eating french fries with his mom in the shopping mall is going to grow up and hit my sister" (Chobsky, 220). Though he has these thoughts in his bad mental situation, Charlie does not want to be like most men in his family. In an e-mail interview that she gave to Business standard, Insia Dariawala, a film-maker, and social activist tell,

> You see, the biggest barrier that needs to be addressed in fighting male child sexual abuse is the deep-rooted and patriarchal society we live in. It is ironic that patriarchy also affects men. Boys are groomed to become protectors at a very young age. Hoe then can a protector be vulnerable or weak? How can he be raped? That's the denial that society would like to live in. The day we shed this belief, we will be forced to also look at the vulnerability of men and that could damage the macho image that society works so hard at building and maintaining. Sadly, society has not provided a system where a boy is allowed to be vulnerable as a child. The deep-seated patriarchal seed, watered by women over generations, is a very big reason why men can only be seen in roles as protectors, never a victim. They can hurt, but never be hurt. (Sangheria)

Charlie never speaks about his traumatic childhood experience to anyone, not even to his immediate family. He must have also been affected negatively by the social conditioning that demands men to be strong. He even chooses to wipe out the particular memory from his conscious mind though it keeps coming back to him in other forms like mental breakdowns. In

the end, after Charlie remembers what happened to him as a child as speaks about it to his family, he is finally able to let go of it and make peace with his life. He realizes that the abuses all followed from one generation to another and that it does not make him any less a man. He understands that it's no point blaming anyone for what they have become. Rather, he understands that what is more important is not growing up like the rest of them with scarred hearts.

> It's like if I blamed my Aunt Helen, I would have to blame her dad for hitting her and the friend of the family that fooled around with her when she was little. And the person that fooled around with him. And God fro not stopping all this and things that are much worse. And I did do that for a while, but then I just couldn't anymore. Because it wasn't going anywhere. Because it wasn't the point (Chobsky, 228)

Charlie realizes that although he can never have control over what happens to him, he can always choose how to accept and react to everything, and that is the only thing that matters. Charlie will always remain a striking character in the world of fiction who will keep reminding us about the need to address mental issues and social conditioning seriously. He will remain unique as a prime example of patriarchy's degrading hold on men and their conditioning.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The recent years have witnessed many transformations in the field of gender studies. Feminism has thrived, including many other marginalised communities into its area of operation, and masculinity studies and the importance of it has slowly started appearing over the horizon. Although the deep roots of patriarchy have been recognised and are being gradually and steadily fought off by the feminist groups around the globe, the majority of the male groups are yet to fully comprehend it's command over their everyday life. The most important accomplishment of 20th-century feminist can be pointed out as the concept of gender as a social construct. The idea that masculinity and femininity are loosely defined and historically variable can in a way be analysed as taking the blame off the masculine gender to an extend. These ideologies propagated that the men were equally conditioned and tuned to behave and act according to the cultural constructs of society. While this feminist ideology of social construct of gender was made much use in the feminist movements, seldom has it come to the limelight in masculinity discussions.

All the talks regarding men, women, masculinity, and femininity almost always end up in pointing out the men as predators and oppressors. Though factually, these conclusions are right because women have been the victims for most of the history and were controlled or manipulated by the men and the 'man-made' social laws around them. But most of these discussions on gender end up being failures in that they never interrogate the conditions in which men became the superior gender. That men have been equally conditioned by the social laws that taught women to be submissive is often forgotten. The simple fact that what needs a reconstruction is not the gender, but the social rules of conditioning and patriarchy in itself is not often considered, even by the most learnt critics. A reconsideration and reconstruction of patriarchy are what the society needs to lay its first step towards building a non-gender-biased world.

It is a fact that the deep-rooted cultural system has instructed both men and women on how they are supposed to lead a societal life from the very childhood. This ideological and cultural manipulation runs deep in the psyche of both genders and is not easy to get rid of. The patriarchal system has, from generation to generation, succeeded in making the men believe that they are the superior gender and have attributed qualities that would ensure their authority. This social conditioning has offered them privileges for centuries, and most have been ignorant of the fact that the privileges come at the cost of themselves and other people around them. Even when pointed out, these privileges have helped them silence the protests against it. It must be due to this exact reason why the feminist movements which demanded a society of equality were shunned by the patriarchal powers. The victory of the feminist ideologies would also mean the destruction of all the privileges that men have been enjoying for centuries.

It is indeed a herculean task to let go of the advantages and benefits for the sake of others. But the most ignored area is that an equal society would also mean breaking free from the expectations and duties that are demanded by the society from the men. The brave, courageous, arrogant pretence that most men have to make will no longer be necessary. The danger in being comfortable in the privileged position is not only the criticism that has to be faced but also the mask of masculine traits most men have to wear around. The emotional barrier that stops men from exhibiting their affections and the sense of responsibility that is expected of them causes serious mental stress and illness in most men. Men, just like women are constrained from their natural selves due to the conditioning, and only in unlearning can they attain total freedom. Men around the globe need to be aware of the emotional and physical possibilities that can open up for them in the dawn of change.

The existing norms and ideologies that are practised, the current understanding of patriarchy, and its grip over the society are so shallow and weak that no apt measures can be taken to ensure gender equality. The liberation of the masculine demands a deeper understanding of the situation

and depends on a novel approach to the area of studies. The society's understanding of patriarchy and its hold on the people are clouded by conditioned belief systems and imbibed cultural values. Even many of the feminists who have poured their hearts into bringing about equality in the world are not aware of the demands of changing times. The Cambridge Dictionary defines patriarchy as "a society in which the oldest male is the leader of the family or a society controlled by men in which they use their power to their own advantage."("Patriarchy") It is high time this definition must be put to critical analysis. The times demand a new definition for patriarchy which would also consider the conditioning that men had to undergo and take the whole blame off their shoulders. Patriarchy, in the changing times, should be defined as a set of ideologies, time-worn and outdated, that has been conditioning both the masculine and feminine, attributing social roles to each gender, thus causing the superiority of one over the other, and restricting the genders from being fully functional.

Masculinity studies have to be given prime importance and children should be educated on how to grow out of the conditioning and set structures. Media has the most important part of spreading and implementing the change. For years, media around the globe has been one of the most powerful propagators of patriarchal ideologies. Through different areas like advertisements, cinema, and literature, they have been reinforcing social roles. Advertisements and cinema set higher standards for men and women, directly proportional to their social roles and temperament. The advertisements of household items featured almost always women, who were trying to keep the family together, neat and healthy, or to impress their husbands and children with their cooking skills. On the other hand, technological advertisements were almost always aimed at men. Recent times have seen a changing pattern in advertisements, with more emphasis given on empathy, women empowerment, and gender neutrality. The media can thus easily spread a new pattern of looking at life and gender roles.

The biggest of all changes must begin from the younger generation, and that can only be attained through proper and systematic education. In most universities, gender studies, to a great extend refers to women studies. Masculinity studies are often always neglected and given little importance. The focus should be given on educating the students on both the genders. As R.W. Connell discusses in her article Gender Politics for Men, the educational system should undergo a major change. While most of the discussions about gender in schools revolve around only girls, it must be remembered that boys are gendered too. As she says,

> Educational responses to issues about boys must have two sides. They must be concerned with the impact of the advantaged group's action on the least advantaged group. (Thus the issue of harassment of girls is rightly a major concern of programs concerned with boys.) They must also be concerned with the costs paid for the situation of advantage. (Thus, the impact of harassment on boys, in the form of bullying among boys, and poisoned relationship with girls, is also a major concern.) The long-term costs to boys and men, though often hard to assess, may well be the most important. (Connell, 73)

When men are provided with narrow, models of masculinity, it tends to have a negative impact on them. The stereotypes like obsolete ideas about men's and women's work, if adopted by the boys, seriously and gravely limit their cultural experiences, choices, and expectations about future relationships. The right kind of education would not only widen the range of their choices but will also prepare them and those around to accept and respect these choices. Changes might be slow and gradual when the existing roots are deep and strong. But a change in perspectives and actions is vital as it would effectively lead to a gender-neutral, empathetic society of equality. And then, men, women, and all the marginalised groups will be able to pursue their dreams without being shackled by societal norms.

America where they referred to the social pressure placed upon men to be violent, competitive, independent, and unfeeling in contrast to real or deep masculinity which was unseen in the modern world. Many other scholars, especially those associated with men's studies have further taken up the term and it has been discussed a lot.

Researchers have found that the masculine traits most consistently associated with negative mental health outcomes are self-reliance, the pursuit of sexual promiscuity, and power over women. The patriarchal insistence that men should be self-reliant is especially outdated in the modernist society where the world increasingly stresses upon and relies on interdependence and interconnectedness. The more disturbing factor is that these negative traits are more than often which encompasses what it means to be a man for many a number of people. Many believe that these traits are biologically embedded and are essential for the survival of the race. Attributes like self-reliance are of great importance for success in life because it enables one to be strong in the face of challenges. But being completely dependent on self-reliance would also make it hard for a man to seek or reach out for help in times of need. The only choice then would be to suffer in silence which would lead to serious mental problems. Y. Joel Wong of Indiana University Bloomington comments that these attitudes capture what is so problematic about the masculine norms.

> People may assume that they will be looked down upon if they break out of this pattern of behaviour, even if that's not true. There's a gap between what men perceive other men believe or do and what men believe or do. There's a perception that a man will be seen as less manly for not conforming to gender norms. The irony is that a lot of men feel that way. (Hess)

Men are too afraid to break away from these norms and continue maintaining them.

Various sociologists, including Connell had theorized that the commonly accepted masculine ideologies such as social respect, physical strength, and sexual potency would become problematic when they are set unattainable standards. Falling short of these make men and boys more anxious and insecure which further prompts them to use force to feel and seem strong and dominant. In this and similar scenarios, male violence does not originate from something bad or toxic that has crept into the nature of masculinity. Rather, it comes from these social and political settings, the details of which set them up for inner conflicts over social expectations. Connell says, "The popular discussion of masculinity has often presumed there are fixed character types among men. I'm sceptical of the idea of character types. I think it is more important to understand the situations in which groups of men act, the patterns in their actions, and the consequences of what they do." (Sallter)

Researches consistently show that boys and men who hold sexist attitude are more likely to inflict gendered violence. Connell herself notes that "when the term toxic masculinity refers to the assertion of a masculine privilege or men's power, it is making a worthwhile point. There are well-known gender patters in violent and abusive behavior." (Salter) One major problem in the fight against toxic masculinity is that when we take culture as the main enemy, there is a risk in overlooking the real-life problems and instances that sustain this culture. There is a genuine danger in this perception. By keeping the focus on culture, people who oppose toxic masculinity can accidentally conspire with institutions that promote it. The concept of toxic masculinity also encourages the assumption that the cause of male violence and other social problems are the same everywhere and hence the solutions for them might be the same as well. But as Connell and her colleagues have spent years demonstrating, other realities matter as well. While themes of violence and sexism recur across cultures, they show up at different places during different times. The root causes among the aboriginal might be quite different from those among the white

people. Recognizing the differences in the lives of men and boys is thus crucial in treating the toxic masculinity as well.

The various ways in which the patriarchal culture has shaped the lives of men around the globe have been happening for centuries. While these stereotyped norms claim to strengthen and liberate men as independent strong individuals, what they actually do is belittle their emotional and mental health and put a shackle on their development as an interdependent social being. Patriarchy puts a limit to what men can be and reduces them into mere beings of physical strength and no emotional capacity. In the crusade for equality, it is equally important for men as much as women to understand the need for liberation from the chains of the stereotyped cultural norms. It is also important for women to identify the masculine, not as overpowering, subordinating powers, but as fellow fighters in the war against patriarchy, and help them conquer their own devils. The winds are indeed changing as more and more people are becoming aware of the need of the time to stride together in this march. Through various art forms, literature, their deconstructions, and reconstructions, people are indeed into this war.

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