

Masculinity, Male Aggression and Alcohol use: Case Studies of Perpetrators of Domestic Violence

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Abstract: Considerable proportions of married women in India experience violence from their male partners. Gender theorists have underscored the role of masculine norms in contributing to alcohol intoxication and violence towards female partners. Though there exist a number of studies on gender based violence in general and domestic violence in particular, not many studies have focused solely on the men's account of the violence. This study attempts to examine the gender construction embedded in the selves of male perpetrators of domestic violence. The study includes case studies of 15 (Fifteen) heterosexual, married men hailing from Malappuram District, Kerala who were selected purposively. A qualitative methodology was used for the study. It was found that these men presented themselves as rational, effective and ideal models of what men ought to be. They perceived violence as a means to reproduce their gender and thereby projected their violence as an 'effective' mechanism to maintain 'order' in family. They claimed that women were actually responsible for the violence and trivialized the impacts of alcohol-related violence on women's lives.

Keywords: Domestic Violence, Masculinity, Alcoholism

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I. INTRODUCTION

Alcoholism accounts for a significant disease burden and has remained a public health menace for several centuries. Men are the major consumers of alcohol in almost all societies and often, they are encouraged or expected to drink heavily.

Studies around the globe have found that alcohol use, creation of a masculine identity and domestic violence have strong and intricate associations with each other. (Dobash&Dobash,1979). Women in India are particularly prone to experience violence within households due to the patriarchal nature of its society. A sizeable proportion of married women in India are reported to experience severe violence from their partners. The deprivation of access to economic and educational resources increases the vulnerability of Indian women furthermore (Santhya et al. 2007).

The Indian experience of domestic violence has its roots in the male dominated socio-economic, political and legal order that condones and reinforces it. The cultural and social norms embedded in the Indian society augments the construction of a violent masculinity, reinforces patriarchal values, perpetuate gender inequality and condones violence against women. (Panda,2004).

Understanding Masculinity

Violence against women, particularly in the domestic sphere, has significant associations with the conception of masculinity. Masculinities are complex and multifaceted, and the construction of masculinity varies across different cultures. The idea of what it means to be a man and a woman is inculcated in a very young age in all the cultures across the globe. The 'gender norms' are spawned, bred and inculcated to every child by various societal institutions. (ICRW,2005) The roles, attributes and behaviours assigned to the binaries of gender acts as the substratum for the construction of masculinity. The socialization received at a young age remains so deep rooted in the conscience of individuals that the subordination of women is naturally condoned. Violence against women therefore becomes justifiable and the public-private divide is naturalized (Anderson&Umberson, 2001)

For attempting to understand masculinities – and how it relates to Violence, it may be found that Raewyn Connell's notion of various forms of masculinities – particularly 'Hegemonic Masculinities' as particularly appropriate. Connell argues that masculinities are socialized, dynamic and influenced by social

groups and friendship circles. Masculinity is shaped by various social institutions such as: the Family; Religion, Communities; Education institutions and the Work place. Hegemonic masculinity is believed to be the emphasis on dominance/ leadership/control rooted in power and authority. When looking at Domestic Violence through this lens, it becomes evident that men – in typical patriarchal societies – are of the view that they ‘own’ women. Holding the norm of male dominance and control of women leads to aggression. Male dominance is manifest in women’s battered and bruised bodies. (Dobash&Dobash,1979).

Feminist analyses of male aggression entailed various discourses around male dominance and control over women’s lives. Early feminist discourses placed battery as part of a wider pattern of male dominance and control of women. (Yllo,1993). Later, many theorists made the understanding of male violence wider, by giving emphasis on women’s agency and resistance of women to the domination. The intersectionality of various social, structural and emotional forces in establishing and sustaining male control over women were also widely studied (Kirkwood,1993). However, researches critically examining the male perpetrator’s accounts of violence remained fewer.

The Context of Kerala

The Indian state of Kerala has often been cited as an epitome of social development. With its curious combination of low economic growth and high social development, the state has always stood apart from other states in India. Kerala’s developmental and gender related indices are highly impressive and are at par with that of developed nations. (See Table 1.1)

Table 1.1
Gender related Developmental indicators: National Average vs. Kerala

Indices	India	Kerala
Sex Ratio	940 (females per 1000 of males)	1084
Total Fertility Rate	2.2	1.6
Life Expectancy(female)	69.6 years	77.8 years
Female Literacy Rate(%)	65.46	97.9
Women with 10 years or more schooling (%)	35.7	72.2
Institutional births(%)	78.9	99.9

Source: NFHS-4(2015-16)

It was observed in a study on Gender based violence in Kerala, conducted by Sakhi Women’s Resource Centre(2004), that as high as 40 percentage of women in Kerala have been subjected to domestic violence by their partners. The episodes of violence were intense and brutal enough to cause severe physical injuries that required immediate hospitalization of the victim. Alcoholic behavior of the partner, suspicion, economic issues and dowry related arguments were found to be the major causative factors for domestic violence in Kerala (Panda, 2004).

Also, Kerala has obtained the tag of being the ‘wettest’ state in India, with the highest per capita consumption of alcoholic beverages in India (OECD Report, 2012; NSSO Report, 2011-12)The state of Kerala have declared its plans to go completely ‘alcohol-free’ within 10 years, in 2014. The Kerala State Excise department claims that 16.43 per cent of the State’s population- 31% of men and 3% of women consumes alcohol. As stated by the Thiruvananthapuram-based Alcohol and Drug Information Centre (2017), 20 per cent of those who drink in Kerala are below the age of 21, with many of them getting initiated into drinking as early as 13.5 years of age.

The study becomes particularly relevant as most recent statistics have showed the appalling results that 69 percent of the women in the state of Kerala approve of or had ‘no objection’ domestic violence from their male partners. Around 58 percent of men were also found to be backing domestic violence in some or the other form (NGHS-4 Report) Against this backdrop, it is imperative to examine how the gender constructions in the Kerala society continues to influence the male perpetrators of domestic violence, specifically. Case studies containing 15 heterosexual, married men in Malappuram District, who are addicted to alcohol, are included in the study. These respondents were purposively selected. All the fifteen respondents are habitual drinkers and are apparently violent to their partners (wives). The study is intended to document how batterers internalize violence against women while reiterating their masculine identities. It also aims at exploring the ways through which engaging in violence helps men to achieve the male gender.

Case studies containing the verbal narratives of alcohol-addicted men were analyzed in terms of the following aspects: 1. Justifying/patronizing of violence 2. Victim blaming 3. Gendered Representations 4. Positioning themselves as victims of Gender bias

II. DATA AND METHODS

Case studies were conducted with the Fifteen (15) male respondents, who were willing to share their life experiences. The in-depth interviews were in the form of an informal discussion. A good amount of rapport was established prior to the discussion when the respondents were sober and were ready to talk freely. The names used here have been changed and are fictitious.

Eight out of the fifteen case studies are elaborated here. Demographic details of rest of the cases are included in Appendix I. The case studies and narratives of the rest are quite similar in content with the below mentioned cases and therefore not elaborated.

With the intention of ensuring anonymity to the informants, fictitious names are given in the narration of all the fifteen cases.

Case 1

Viswanathan (52) is a driver in KSRTC, the Govt. owned Transport Corporation. He lives with his wife, Kumari in a frail house. Kumari goes to neighboring houses as domestic help, without the knowledge of her husband to meet expenses. The couple has no children. Viswanathan is a menacing drinker and a batterer. Usually he drinks after his long distance running duty. On off days, he drinks throughout the day, with or without the company of friends. He has received suspension orders for drinking while in duty, as well. Kumari has suffered severe injuries, such as bruises, broken bones etc. He has sold her jewelries and the cow she once fostered. He becomes furious after drinking and throws things at her. When the violence goes out of control, Kumari goes back to her natal household. He started drinking at the age of 18, when he worked in a ship, prior to the job he has now. He attributes his drinking behavior as a byproduct of the tiring job he has and the nagging behavior of his wife.

"She has this dirty behavior of nagging. She can tell things quietly when I am Ok. But she never does that. When I come home after running for so many miles, hungry and tired, she makes faces. That is the problem with these (women)..I hate that..Any man would hate that. No, I don't think I have created any problem for her. I have provided her what she wants, even without she asking for it. How would I create a problem? You scold them or touch them, it becomes 'sthrepeedanam' (assault to women), you become culprit. They can imprison you for it, even if it is your wife"

Case 2

Soman (39) works as a clerk to an advocate who earns about 20,000 Rupees per month. Jincy, his wife is a teacher in a private school. Every day, Soman comes home late at night, drunk and disoriented, with a friend, who drinks with him, in his autorikshaw. He picks up an issue every night and batters Jincy. When the quarrel goes out of limits, Jincy receives slaps and kicks. The couple has a 15 year old son, who studies in Class 10. Soman is calm during the working hours and behaves courteously to everyone. Started drinking at the age of 21, alcohol came as a relief to his uninteresting job. Role of peer pressure was also there. He believes he had the capacity to study more and earn a better job, but his family circumstances did not allow him to.

"I have thought of quitting it. It's there in my agenda. But nobody knows the troubles I am going through. This thing (alcohol) is the only company I have right now in my life. I go nowhere, do nothing like other men in my age do. Every man will have some or the other addiction and this is mine. I am providing for my family. I take care of them. I have built this house out of my effort. How many of these preaching men have made a decent house like this? She should be happy for it. Yes, we do quarrel like all couple do. Sometimes it is natural for a man to give his wife a slap or two. I am not referring to the big drunkards who beats up their wives. Do you think I am like that ?I am living and working for their betterment. I drink only late at night, I am causing no trouble for any neighbors. So what's wrong?"

Case 3

Saji(43, name changed) is a father of two who irregularly picks jobs such as a sales man in a stationery shop or worker in the Soda factory. Earlier, he worked at the Airport as cabin crew at the time of his marriage. Later he succumbed to pancreatic ulcer due to persistent drinking and the job was lost. His wife is an instructor of fashion technology in a Government Polytechnic College. According to him, he is in good health and continues to drink despite advices from doctors to abstain. He started drinking at the age of 16, as he witnessed his elder siblings and father already drinking. Alcohol is considered a sign of manhood in his family, even now. He says he drinks to get peace of mind as he gets frustrated with health issues, financial issues and complaining nature of wife and children.

"They (women) need to know what their position is. Loose the rope a bit and they will forget who they are. It's the nature of them. Now that she (wife) earns and has a government job, she might think she can do everything on her own. But we (men) should not allow that to happen. It is for their own good. I do the math for every single paise [she earns] ...Drinking? who does not drink? All men drink. But one should have control over himself"

Saji is a batterer who turns physically and verbally abusive frequently. He does not think it has created any psychological impact on his wife or children. He takes hold of the salary his wife receives and spends the

amount, as he likes. Nija (name changed), his wife finds it hard to meet the household expenses to be met, as Saji spends the money lavishly for drinking and hanging out with friends.

Case 4

Pramod (42) works in a gent's salon as a hairdresser. The family consists of his wife, his mother and father. Pramod's wife is a homemaker who is 36 years old. They do not have children. Pramod comes home late at night after drinking with his friends. His neighbors say that they used to hear loud noises of beating and crying from the house almost every night. He used to hit her head against the wall, kick her and slap her. He demanded more gold as dowry. She was also ridiculed for not giving birth to a child. Lately, his wife has left him and she presently lives with her parents. She has also filed a divorce against Pramod accusing him of domestic violence. In his opinion, it was essential for him to drink to get peace of mind. Financial problems, tiresome work and adverse family environment pressed him to drink, he said.

"How would I not drink? My situations make me drink. It's true, when I have enough reasons, I beat her. I beat her hard. People say I beat her, why are they not saying the fact that I give her food and shelter?. I haven't made any shortage in that regard. I have to run the family, take care of old parents. They are not able to work. I was not given any proper dowry or anything, but I have no complaints for it. But I have beaten her, only for her good. People are one sided, the world itself is one sided. Nobody wants to know the man's side"

Case 5

Haris (32) is involved in a home appliances business venture, in partnership with a few friends. He is a chronic alcohol addict who started drinking at the age of 20. He starts drinking in the morning and drinks during the day on and off. Rashida, his wife is a homemaker and the couple has 2 children, aged 4 and 2. He is consistently suspicious over his wife and batters her accusing of immoral behavior. He does not allow his wife to go out alone, even for a small distance. Rashida is allowed to visit her natal home, only rarely. She belongs to an economically disadvantaged family than his, and he considers that he had rescued her from poverty. He feels that she has no other issues to be worried about.

"They (women) stay at house and all they have to be worried about is children. The time has changed. They no longer have any difficulty doing the household chores. All houses have got electricity, fridge, TV and blender. We, men have to do the tough job of toiling and naturally men will go and drink. Excessive freedom will only spoil them, we hear of such news every day. Facebook, whatsapp and stuff. I gave my wife this old Nokia phone. That is more than enough. Otherwise you are inviting trouble."

Case 6

Santhosh (41) is a construction worker who is a regular drinker. He has his wife, Deepa and two children at home. He spends most evenings with his friends and returns by around 9'o clock, heavily drunk. He beats up his wife and children, calling bad words. He hits Deepa by pulling against a wall. He alleges her of having an illicit relationship with a relative. His neighbors have filed complaints against him. Santhosh do not remember the age at which he started to drink. He thinks that most men do drink, though many of them may not openly admit it.

"The court and everything are on women's side. If they decide to spoil a man's life, it is easy for them. Such kind of laws are the reason why we see a lot of immoral women in this place. I won't allow my girls go astray. If beating is needed, I give beatings, but I don't have the behavior of unnecessarily beating or making trouble. It's I who decide at home. I can't be that one who sticks to her saree"

Case 7

Abdul Nazer (39) is a daily wage laborer who does jobs like cleaning deep wells, wood cutting etc. He lives with his mother, his wife and 3 children. He is a regular drinker who quarrels with his wife almost every day. He says his reason for drinking was his father who also used to drink heavily. Frequent quarrels do not involve physical violence, although emotional violence is commonplace in the relationship. He humiliates wife calling abusive words in front of neighbors and passersby. He calls her 'karuthaval', meaning the 'black one' as he is fairer to her in complexion. He humiliates her youngest daughter also by referring to her dark complexion.

"I had many options to marry from. But I went for her. Then too I didn't get a proper financial support from her family. That was not my intention also. But you have expenses in running a family. I give these three food, clothes and everything. I do all odd jobs. In between, drinking is the only relaxation I have"

Case 8

Ramakrishnan (48) is a coolie worker, who takes up jobs such as bush cutting, cleaning wells etc. He started drinking alcohol at the age of 17. His wife, Geetha is an ASHA worker who is also involved in cow rearing. They have two sons, both unmarried and employed. Ramakrishnan drinks heavily every other day, beats, and abuses his wife. He calls, his wife and children, curse names and spends the entire money he earns in drinking. He destroys furniture and utensils and throws away cooked food. He says what he earns is his own and if the family wants a share from it, they should obey what he says.

"A man is not a man, but a 'pennaali' (derogatory remark for an effeminate man; a eunuch) if he does not drink. One has to keep the family under one's control, that's how you become 'Grihanaathan' (head of the

family). I depend on no one. I don't want anybody's money to drink. With god's grace, I'm in good health, far better than people of my age. What would she (wife) accuse me of? I have given her full freedom. She has this stupid job (ASHA worker) which has no returns. All she can do is wander from house to house talking 'sora' (loose talk). All women want is 'that' alone. Have I restricted her? No."

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Violence against female partners is a means by which batterers reproduce a binary framework (Anderson & Umberson, 2001)

1. Justifying/Patronizing Violence

Alcohol abusers who are also wife batterers talk about violence as a 'normal' thing, by skilfully using excuses and justifications. They construct violence as a natural response to nagging and provocation from the wives. They performed the masculine gender as rational, providing, protective men who teach their wives the lessons of the feminine gender. At the outset, half of the respondents denied that they batter their wives or do any violent action upon them. Upon further inquiries, they partially acknowledged that they have done violent actions, with the justification that the violence was negligible.

"I mean, it's nothing like what people think, the drunken man beating the wife, as you see in movies"
(Laughs)

Although they tried to minimize the violence as 'a slap or two', the real episodes of violence were much more severe, injurious and were more frequent. Injuries caused to the survivors included bruises, dents, contusions or even lacerations. The victims of violence live their lives in an atmosphere of constant threat of violence and assault. According to Dobash and Dobash (1998), Gender works as a system that structures the authority and responsibilities assigned to women and men within intimate relationships, and it supports violence against women.

One of the most repeated (11 out of 15) justification for violence was the typical 'loss of control' argument. Men who batter held the notion of violence as an 'unpredictable' thing which they are totally unable to control. According to them, they became violent under the influence of alcohol, because it was beyond their control to hold the release of accumulated frustration and the violence associated with it.

Men made overwhelming justifications to trivialize violence by saying that they battered their wives with the intention of making them 'good' or for 'correcting' their 'hysterical' behaviour.

One respondent said- *"There is a saying in Malayalam-you should not beat a woman and a dog which is in chains-I know it's right. But sometimes proverbs don't work. You, as men, will need to use it (beating) sometimes. They will realize what we did was for their own good, later"*

They constructed their gender as 'rational', 'protective', 'effective' or even 'concerned' while portraying women as 'child-like', 'frenzied', and 'reckless'. They naturalized the notion that men are the exclusive caretakers of the family and negated the agency of women. Respondents belonging to higher socioeconomic status emphasized on the material facilities they have 'provided' to their wives and claimed that they 'should' be happy for it. At the same time, economically disadvantaged men stressed more on the physical protection they provide to their wives which was constructed as 'an absolute necessity' for every woman.

2. Victim blaming

The male respondents used violence to punish female partners who fail to meet their unspoken physical, sexual or emotional needs. All the men who were interviewed expressed their discontent about either the physical appearance or the behavior of the wife or both.

A respondent said:

"Sometimes the quarrel becomes so heated. But she would not let go even for a tiny bit. She keeps blabbering and anger erupts in me from the trows. I try to control myself for a minute or two, more than that is impossible for any man".

Men put the blame on their female partners and articulated that violence was a natural response for the irritating behavior. Six respondents claimed that their wives are nagging/complaining. They also added that violence they do is blown out of proportion and they are not that 'violent drinker' but a 'family man'. Only 7 out of the 15 respondents openly admitted that they do violent actions, that too 'for their (the women) betterment'. According to them, they were at complete freedom to batter their partners, because of the fact they are married partners and they were 'men'.

The blame for addiction and violence was also imparted on the 'boring' or 'tiresome' job they had. The respondents performed the gender of 'providing' man who has to do the tough job to keep up his family while the wife only has to do the 'menial', 'easy' job of housekeeping.

3. Gendered representations

The respondents depicted their understanding of gender through a number of adjectives, evidently pointing out to the gendered socialization they have received. Men's roles were observed to be understood as that of a 'provider, protector and procreator'. Moreover, masculinity was unquestionably linked to the image of a virulent, dominant ruler of the family, to whom the women and children are to devotedly obey. Perpetrators of domestic violence reflected hegemonic notions of masculinity and femininity in their language. Female partners were ridiculed for being 'born foolish and irrational', while men were projected as rational and sane.

One of the respondents said:

"If a man hits a woman one time purposefully, she will be more or like dead. We do all the toiling in the sun outside and we are doing it not for ourselves, but for the family to feed on. My hands are calloused because of the hardwork I do. Only men will have them. They have all this problems because they don't have much work to do at home. After the morning hours, all they have to do is watch silly soap operas or gossiping. We can't sit at home like that"

4. Positioning themselves as victims of Gender Bias in Legal systems

Ironically, the men who used violence to 'teach the wives a lesson' claimed themselves to be in a 'disadvantaged' position as the law and legal systems of the state are apparently 'for women' only. Participants sometimes rationalized their violence by claiming that the legal system overreacted to a minor incident. In their opinion, women are increasingly 'misusing' the laws to take revenge of their husbands who fail to meet their 'silly and unacceptable' material demands. A respondent said;

'I have seen how my mother and grandmother behaved to their husbands. They wouldn't even come face to face with their husbands. They were happy with what their husbands brought home. Look how women behave to men these days. Sarkar (the State) is aiding this women to fight against their husbands. If the wife decides to file a case, the poor husband's life is gone. He will have to find money to give her compensation and all that'

All the respondents opined that men were victims of the law and the 'male hatred' in them. The laws, in their opinion, made the domestic sphere upset and gave women an 'unnecessary' privilege over men. They openly expressed the dissent to the feminist discourses which resulted in the institution of social legislations for women, while constructing their masculine identity.

IV. CONCLUSION

Alcohol abuse and wife battering are materialization of an underlying want for power and control closely associated with the abuser's perception or conception of masculinity. It has been established that men make use of domestic violence as a means to construct their masculinities. Nonetheless, very few studies have explored the ways and specific practices by which men perform the masculine gender and pardon the assault. The study endeavored to document the perceptions of male abusers in the Indian context, with reference to the state of Kerala.

The study concludes that men effectively construct the masculine gender using violence as a means. While doing so, they reproduced the idea of gender as dominance and reiterated that the hierarchical, binary gender construction as the 'natural' order. In other words, a family in Kerala can well be regarded as the site of construction of an inequitable, unjust structure of gender relations. Women are constantly domesticated and manipulatively used for the perpetuation of gender inequities within families.

The study is limited mostly to semi-urban areas in Malappuram District. The spectrum of respondents may not be inclusive of the wider socio-economic range of the Indian scenario, due to the middle class nature of the Kerala community. The scope for future research, therefore, lies in comparing narratives from different socio-economic realms reflective of the country.

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APPENDIX

Details of respondents

Sl. No.	Age	Religion	Employment	Education	Nature of marriage
1	43	Hindu	Irregular	12 th class (PDC)	Arranged
2	39	Hindu	Private (clerk)	Graduate	Self-choice
3	52	Hindu	Govt. servant	12 th class	Arranged
4	42	Hindu	Hairdresser	10 th Class	Arranged
5	32	Islam	Business	Graduate	Arranged
6	41	Hindu	Dailywage	10 th	Arranged
7	39	Islam	Dailywage	10 th	Arranged
8	44	Islam	Govt. servant	Graduate	Arranged
9	43	Hindu	Insurance agent	Post graduate	Arranged
10	50	Hindu	Carpenter	10 th	Arranged
11	56	Christian	Businessman	Graduate	Arranged
12	33	Hindu	Driver	10 th	Self-choice
13	45	Islam	Govt. servant	Post graduate	Arranged
14	49	Hindu	Daily wage	10 th class	Arranged
15	53	Hindu	Daily wage	8 th class	Arranged

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