

ABSTRACT

The gender identity of an individual is achieved through roles played by that individual in the society; self-fashioning through the performance of roles as a member of the society within the frame of normative gender roles assigned to different sexes constructs the gender identity of the individual. It is a collaborative construction of personal experience, social identity, and historical belongingness. Masculinity in Assamese society (the Assamese speaking community) is based on the images of the ideal Assamese man created by the cultural institutions of media, folklore, and literature which are shaped by patriarchy. On a different note, Assamese masculinity has been distinctively shaped by Assamese nationalism. Assam as a nation has been fighting real and imaginary enemies. Different factors like folklore, colonialism and nationalism have powerfully shaped the ideas of masculinity in Assamese society. Moreover, the question of masculinity in Assamese society cannot be separated from questions of ethnicity. It is also important to bear in mind that ethnic identity in turn has been powerfully shaped by ideas of masculinity. This study tries to discuss the construction of the *Ideal Assamese Man* created by the cultural institutions of media, folklore, and literature which are shaped by patriarchy.

The researcher is aware of the raging ongoing debate about who is an Assamese; there are still serious differences about whether Assamese identity should be linguistically or geographically defined. The researcher is also aware of the multiple ethnicities that constitute the state. However, in this study, the researcher propose to use the term 'Assamese' in its geographical sense (all the people living inside the geographical boundary of Assam) and all-inclusive sense to refer to the dominant cultural codes regarding masculinity. This study has tried to analyze the discursive formation of Assamese masculinity through a compilation and analysis of self ethnographic experience of the researcher and an analysis of different cultural texts. It also encompasses virtual ethnography of different social media posts on Assamese nationalism and a wide variety of primary data sources including online news published on different news platforms. It tries to link the historical formation of the masculine nature and the current manifestation in different discursive analysis related to recent political and social incidents of Assam.

It is in the historical context of Assam that the researcher proposes the term 'Dangoriya', a culturally loaded term, as the signifier of the idea of Assamese masculinity for two reasons. The word 'Bhadralok' also figures in the Assamese vocabulary. However, the term 'Bhadralok' has already gained a wider currency, notably amongst the scholars corresponding to Bengali identity;

therefore the cultural specificity of this very term in another context renders it susceptible to misinterpretation. Secondly, the researcher would like to contend that the term 'Dangoriya' is more apt to convey the sense of masculinity in the greater cultural context of Assam. The word 'Dangoriya' echoes the very reverential status that a person is entitled to in the Assamese society owing to his different set of masculine attributes that qualifies him to a revered position.

On a different note, the study is based on the researcher's auto-ethnographical account, rather than focusing on the cultural texts, the researcher's prior attention is to extract the cultural themes associated with the notion of Assamese masculinity. It foregrounds how different cultural tests hold the nature of repetition to establish a particular theme in society. As a land situated in a complex topography that is heavily dependent on an agro-based economy, life here, has been greatly influenced by the symbolic connection with the nature itself. But, before delving into such a larger question, it is our foremost duty to formulate the idea of an 'ideal' Assamese man in the village. Invariably, masculinity is dependent on the social status assigned to a man by different social practices and belief systems. Such a mechanism of masculinity construction may vary either marginally or considerably in different regions of the world. The idea of a 'masculine man in India is highly contingent on the inter-connections of gender and caste. Caste appears to be one of the significant indicators of gender disparity in India. Furthermore, this study aims to focus on the issues of gender and caste through two main perspectives. They are namely: How caste becomes an important factor in the masculinity crisis for both lower and upper-caste men? Secondly, the nature of caste in the construction of masculinity in Assam. It also foregrounds how intersectionality of masculinity and caste in Assam assigns new meanings to the study of caste. It also addresses the relationship between the legacy of Assamese nation-making project in post independence era, the socio-political question and the Assamese ideal masculine model. Based on the dynamic, chaotic and restless post-independence history and quest for a unique Assamese identity, this study foregrounds how the ideal Assamese masculinity in the post-independence India has been a mixture of a heavy amount of socio-political questions with their roots in the nation making project of Assam. There has been a constant process of re-construction of nationalist ideas and re-framing of the masculine idols. The re-framing of masculine idols has been a great deal to do with the changing scenario of socio-political changes in Assam due course of post-independence era. The questions of cultural assimilation with Pan- India, the importance of cultural Marxism project with Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) movement, the quest for a

separate identity, armed struggle, and threat of the illegal migration has impacted in a vast amount to the construction of the ideal Assamese masculine figure. It reveals the inextricability of Post-independence Assamese masculine identity in this three-fold co-constitutive relationship of history, national identity and gender. The researcher argues here a shifting of the masculine models in the period has a great deal to play with the modern historical formation of Assam state. The later part of national questions of Assam state has established nationalistic masculinity as the main emblem of masculine identity here. In our discussion on the term dangoriya and the politics behind quest for a signature term to cope up the influx of foreign identity like bhadrakok, we have discussed how the figure of an ideal man has a great role to play with the nation-making project. This chapter extends the discussion on inter-connection between nationalism and masculinity here in Assam and how the recent socio-political questions demand for remolding the masculinity idols from a folklore and rural based discourse to a militarized warrior discourse. Twentieth century Assamese nationalism has distinctly shaped different societal and gender questions of the state. In a chaotic and unrest political questions of real and imaginary enemy have manifested in different events like the Assam Movement, the rise and fall in popularity of the ULFA, implementation of AFSPA, Secret Killings, the rise of regional parties like Asom Gana Parishad, the perceived threat of Bangladeshi immigrants. These events have powerfully shaped the gender dynamics of the Assamese society. These attributes of masculinity can be seen in the respective discourses that have emanated from each of these movements. Thus, the question of masculinity in Assamese society cannot be separated from questions of ethnicity. It is also important to bear in mind that ethnic identity in turn has been powerfully shaped by ideas of masculinity. It appears to be imperative to draw upon the inter connection of nationalism and masculinity in our discussion of a chaotic and unrest land with the pertinent question of ethnicity. This study on Assamese masculine Identity is therefore an attempt to throw light on the different discursive processes and mechanism that create the masculinities among Assamese community that reflect the nation in its various phases of transition.

Keywords: Masculine Identity, Assamese, Dangoriya, Folklore, Nationalism, Lacanian Lack, Caste, Social Media.