

## ABSTRACT

This thesis conducts a discursive-performative study of masculinities as portrayed in select works of contemporary South Asian fiction written in and translated into English. It critically examines a total of fifteen primary texts including two trilogies written by eleven contemporary authors from South Asia. Through an analysis of the representation of the male body and its embodiment, this thesis attempts a discursive understanding of private as well as public performances of masculinities which are determined by intersectional realities of social stratification and social institutions. The study also juxtaposes the performance of masculinities with the hegemonic process of nation-building and tries to discover if one is a metaphor for the other.

The study is conducted through close textual analysis of the selected texts. It uses inter-disciplinary literary, cultural and sociological theories, concepts and ideas for scrutiny. In addition to the introduction and conclusion, there are five core chapters. The first chapter lays the study's theoretical foundation and the remaining four consist of textual analysis of fifteen primary texts thematically distributed. Chapter 1, titled "Understanding Masculinities", situates masculinity studies within the broad spectrum of gender studies and traces its development over the years by reviewing the works of Foucault, Butler, Connell and Messerschmidt, Anderson and Wendt, and Edley. It also charts the trajectory of the study of men and masculinities from the perspective of South Asia by critically examining region-specific investigations by Sinha, Chowdhury, Bhasin, Jayasena, Dasgupta and Gokulsing, and Gopinath and Sundar. Chapter 2, titled "Performing Masculinities in Everyday Life", analyses Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* (1994), Amitav Ghosh's *Ibis Trilogy* (2008-2015) and Perumal Murugan's *Madhorubagan Trilogy* (2014-2018) to explore masculinities as performances enacted in everyday lives. It builds upon critical understandings of everyday life, space and language to reveal the layered significance of masculinities as portrayed in the chosen texts. Chapter 3, titled "The Male Body and its Embodiment", critically examines Firdaus Kanga's *Trying to Grow* (1990), Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008), Vasudhendra's *Mohanaswamy* (2016) and Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) to continue the engagement with materiality and social significance associated with the male body. It uses theories of body and embodiment, disability, ideal and deviance, transgression and stigma to analyse the representation of the male body in

the selected texts. Chapter 4, titled “Masculinities and the Intersection of Caste, Class and Religion”, investigates Nadeem Aslam’s *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004), Manu Joseph’s *Serious Men* (2010), Amitav Ghosh’s *Flood of Fire* (2015) and S. Hareesh’s *Moustache* (2020) to engage with the discursive performance of masculinities contingent upon markers of social stratification like caste and class and social institutions like religion. Crenshaw’s idea of intersectionality, which is further developed by later-day critics, forms the basis for this chapter. Chapter 5, titled “Masculinities and the Construction of the Nation”, critically examines Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice Candy Man* (1991), Shyam Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy* (1994), Salman Rushdie’s *Shalimar the Clown* (1995) and Arundhati Roy’s *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) to advance our understanding of masculinities from the vantage point of nation and nation building. It attempts to discover if performances of masculinities are determined by efforts of nation-building and the national imaginary.

The study unveils a unique understanding of the representation of masculinities in postcolonial literature from South Asia. This can be attributed to two major analytical findings. Firstly, it is observed that any analysis of masculinities from the perspective of South Asia necessarily requires an intersectional lens as the authors represent highly stratified societies in terms of caste, class and religion. Secondly, it is observed that our understanding of masculinities from the perspective of South Asia is determined by a comprehension of the partition as well as the nationalistic politics of the subcontinent. This follows from the fact that many of the writers chosen for this study are either first or second-generation survivors of partition politics, civil riots and communal riots or have post-memory of such events either through their parents or some elders. Their experiences leave an indelible mark on their fiction.

This thematically divided performative-discursive study hopes to lead the way for more detailed region-specific and intersectional studies of men and masculinities in the future.

**Keywords:** Masculinities, Performative-Discursive Study, Contemporary South Asian Fiction, Male Body, Embodiment, Intersectionality, Nation-Building