



The Protean Masculine: A Study of the Male Characters in Selected Short Stories of Damodar Mauzzo's *The Wait and Other Stories*

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Abstract— Studying the female, the feminine and the feminist has been a part of literature for quite some time now but the study of men, male and masculinities is a novel field in literature which is gaining popularity lately. The idea of masculinity studies is to provide a firm platform to the masculine and male ideologies that have been relegated to the back owing to the ever-increasing feminist studies and prevalence of feminist ideologies in the field of literature. Just like the female identity, masculinity or masculine identity is a construct and mostly a probe into studies of men and male principles. Such studies reflect that masculine representations in literature are now open to ideas of alternative masculinities that do not essentially reinforce the existing patriarchal image. The fictional world sends out ideas about the existence of the protean nature of masculine and the male. It can be understood that the male identity is not restricted to the patriarchal masculine but branches into other forms like romantic masculine, lustful masculine, new masculine, and cathectic masculine. The current paper explores this concept of alternative masculinities and the protean nature of the male and the masculine as reflected in the works of Damodar Mauzzo, a Goan writer. His short story collection *The Wait and Other Stories* presents a gamut of male characters who represent alternative masculinities ranging from patriarchal to the egalitarian.

Keywords— Male, masculine, identity, protean, patriarchal, egalitarian

Studying the female, the feminine and the feminist has been a part of literature for quite some time now but the study of men, male and masculinities is a novel field in literature which is gaining popularity lately. The idea of masculinity studies is to provide a firm platform to the masculine and male ideologies that have been relegated to the back owing to the ever-increasing feminist studies and prevalence of feminist ideologies in the field of literature.

According to the socio psychological identity theory, 'identity' may be defined as "the process of the construction and revision of self-concepts that is constantly undertaken by the individual at the intersection of social interaction and individual biography". (Glomb 27) The term 'masculinity', thus, refers to the roles, behaviours and attributes that are considered appropriate for boys and men in a given society. Since the definition of masculinity is majorly based on what society expects and a male

individual's response to that expectation, therefore the definition and idea of masculinity or masculine identity, becomes fluid and is configured as per the actions and responses of male individuals to situations and participants in that societal set up. Just like the female identity, masculinity is a construct and mostly a probe into masculine studies. It reflects that masculine representations in literature are now open to ideas of alternative masculinities that do not essentially reinforce the existing patriarchal image. The fictional world sends out ideas about the existence of the protean nature of masculine and the male. It can be understood that the male identity is not restricted to the patriarchal masculine but branches into other forms like romantic masculine, lustful masculine, new masculine, and cathectic masculine.

The current paper explores this concept of alternative masculinities and the protean nature of the male

and the masculine as reflected in the works of Damodar Mauzzo. Damodar Mauzzo is a Goan short story writer, novelist, critic and script writer in Konkani. A Jnanpith awardee in 2021, he has to his credit many books and short stories that delve into aspects of human relationships and people. His latest collection "*The Wait and Other Stories*" is a collection of short stories which feature men as protagonists. His short stories are a reflection of the world of man and masculinities which assume various forms and create alternative masculinities. In an era, which concentrates mainly on feminist studies and the female gender, his work is an exhibition of the configurations of male characters displaying protean nature with distinct characteristics. His male characters are not unidimensional but manifest alternative life styles and possibility of different life choices.

The romantic male is a literary archetype referring to a character that rejects established norms and conventions, has been rejected by society, and has himself at the centre of existence. (Wikipedia). A very notable characteristic of a romantic male includes the triumph of the male over the "restraints of theological and social conventions". The character of Viraj in the short story, "The Wait" strikes a chord with the idea of a romantic male who waits patiently to unite with his girlfriend after his sister cunningly scripts their break-up. In Viraj is an atypical male personality that does not disport the characteristics of an expected patriarchal male. He exhibits a "no- aggression" attitude towards his beloved. Separated from his girlfriend, he is saddened and remains preoccupied with her thoughts for major part of the day. To him Sayali is the only girl he would marry and he finally fights with his sister and even goes to the extent of ostracizing her from his life. He says: "Shut up Didi! If a guy does it, it's a conquest. But in case of a girl, it's a scandal? Get this Didi, I will not marry any girl but Sayali. I will remain a bachelor. And further, from this day on, you will no longer be a part of my life!" (2). Viraj subscribes to the image of a man who distances himself from the chauvinistic, and hegemonic male attitude and men who have been mostly vocal and active in dominating their female counterpart.

The image of the non -dominant male is further delineated in the character of Vasudev in the story "The Next Balakrishna". Vasu Dev is a loving husband who dotes on his wife. He leaves no stone unturned to ensure that she remains happy and satiated in her life. Nothing in this world could affect his love for his wife. Such is his fidelity and compassion for his wife that he remains a stranger to his wife's brief extra marital relationship. The character of Vasu dev is very much in alignment with the concept of 'new man'. The new man functions "as alter ego to women in true sense of term. These men are non -traditional, non -

hierarchical, sensitive, understanding and supportive with an egalitarian outlook on life. They are conceived as partners to women- egalitarian, sensitive, understanding and supportive. Vasudev's masculinity goes against the traditional portrayal of men as powerful and domineering. He, in the words of Sutapa Chaudhuri,

"leaves the insensitive lordly men behind and becomes soulmate to their female counterpart as he is sensitive, understanding and even with a touch of feminine... This egalitarian trend indicates a change in the definition and portrayal of gender relationships in which from a relationship of alienation and intransitivity, women and men journey towards much better understanding of a mutual relationship".(185)

The character of Viraj and Vasudev show men freeing themselves from the bondage of the old idea of hegemonic masculinity and trying to become whole beings. The true strength of their character does not rest upon the exercise of power and authority but rather in making each other strong.

The male and the masculine psychology often entail need for sexual gratification. The doctor in the story "Night Call" reflects this psychological trait. He loves his wife and wishes to be loyal to her but the male psychology of sexual gratification gains upper hand. He is unable to control his carnal desire and falls for the amorous advances of a married nurse. However, his lust does not achieve gratification as the husband of the nurse appears almost unexpectedly leading to the abrupt cessation of an anticipated lustfully eventful night. It is however, to be noted that the doctor breathes a sigh of relief at this unexpected arrival as he is aware of his infidelity. He wishes not to be infidel but lacks control over his desires. According to Letita "Compared with women, men think about sex more often. They report more frequent feelings of sexual desire". The doctor's personality is a revelation of this psychological state of mind and masculine identity. His acceptance of the advances reveals the fact that his masculine identity is brought down to the mere fact of his wish to indulge in sex and the lady happens to have a good idea of this dimension of his personality. The doctor, thus is a combination of a man who values loyalty but falls prey to the male desire for sex. Mauzzo's depiction of this character highlights the nature of men which is markedly different from that of women when it comes to the assuaging of bodily satiation.

The short story "The Aesthete" projects the image of a male whose obsession with beauty is well marked and

prominent. According to Rhodes "Men and women both show a preference for beauty in general but it tends to be more pronounced in the males". Similarly, men "may place greater importance on physical beauty when it comes to mate choices". The character of Vishwesh in this story follows the masculine principle of placing external appearances over and above everything. His love for external beauty is well to the extent of obsession. He places no importance on the idea of internal beauty and the moment he finds that his wife has developed a white spot on her stomach which seems to be growing every single day, his love and loyalty for his wife vanishes into thin air. So strong is his abhor for the presence of this unwanted spot that he starts fearing what would people say when they observe this presence of spot in his once beautiful wife. He turns into a hegemonic male: unrelenting, insensitive, egotistic even masochistic who view their female counterparts as property to be disposed of, or used as they please. He removes his wife from his life in the same manner as he asked the hotel attendant to remove the painting that had turned ugly from his room. It is clear that he viewed his wife as mere property with a timeline. He belongs to the old school of masculine ideals that viewed women as mere beautiful objects to be possessed till they exude beauty and dispose them off as soon as their beauty seems to diminish.

The character of Mymoon in "I was waiting for you" is a blend of two male personalities. On one hand he shows the traits of a romantic male, head over heels in love with Mini, and on the other hand he lacks the courage and conviction of a true male who has the ability to withstand pressure and take a stand whenever necessary. Mymoon loves Mini but does not display courage to support her at the time of her ordeals. He leaves her side when she is raped brutally. He does not support her decision of fighting against the injustice meted out to her for the fear of bad name. He wants her also to remain silent on this issue. The fear of earning a bad name overshadows his love for Mini and he leaves her side. They however, happen to meet after years of separation and feelings of love rekindle in Mymoon. He nourishes the thought of getting united with Mini but Mini rejects his proposal in front of an entire audience. Mymoon's love for Mini is an example of masculinity that plays within the configurations of relation of cathexis or emotional attachment. His mental energy is concentrated on one particular person Mini. He cathects on Mini to land up in a regrettable experience at the end. We do not find any traces of a hegemonic male in Mymoon but he fails to conform the male ideology that spells out the responsible side of male gender.

The masculine and the male in Mauzzo's short stories are characters that are replete with human passions

and emotions. They display genuine and honest characteristics of human nature ranging from the capacity to love, lust, react and thus, evolve with time. They do not stick strictly to the definition of masculine identity that ascribes and advocates certain roles and responsibilities to them. Rather they display a protean nature: the ability to take up varied forms and shape up themselves as per societal demands on time. The stories reflect a sense of shifting masculine identity. Viraj, Vishwesh, the doctor, Vasudev and Mymoon are all representatives of the distinct masculine attributes. The male characters of Mauzzo do not stick to any stereotypical identity of the past that portrayed men as essentially patriarchal. The short stories rather lend a variety to the depiction of such identities and in a way trace the gradual evolution and transformation of the masculine ideologies of patriarchy, as represented through the character of Vishwesh, to a more understanding, sensitive new man represented by Vasudev and Viraj who hail the principle of equality and are more accommodating than others. In between the two extremes there are men who oscillate between and do not stick to any particular male ideology and principle. They do not fall into the category of males who are predominantly hegemonic, nor do they display characteristics of an egalitarian man. Nevertheless, they are more inclined towards displaying egalitarian attitude.

Damodar Mauzzo, through his stories, has accentuated the changing power relations in the contemporary era. The roles are being reversed and masculinity is gaining new definitions. His stories are diverse representations of masculine ideals and practices along with the generally accepted order of masculinity. He has created the male characters and has deftly demonstrated how the identity fluctuates and negotiates itself with each participant. His men are protean.

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