

# **Dysfunctional to Functional Domesticity: Analysis on Caring Masculine Identity**

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## **Abstract**

In the global arena, domesticity is consistently undergoing phenomenal changes which is reflected in the Indian family system as well. The lack of work-life balance, work pressure, dwindled time spent with the family members are all key characteristic features of a modern family. In the current decade, the concept of gender equality and role of caring men in the family has gained more importance in sustaining the functional domestic ambience. The conflicts that arise in a family is better combatted through gender equality initiatives. This paper focuses on the dysfunctional elements in a family and the ways in which caring masculinity plays a crucial role in resolving the same. Recent Indian literature novels are chosen to analyse and address the issue in an effective manner. Thus, the correlation between dysfunctionalities or conflicts in the family and how an evolving masculine identity like caring masculinity could provide a practical solution is discussed in-depth in this research.

**Keywords:** Dysfunctional Domesticity, Caring Masculinity, Gender Equality, Family, Work-Life Balance

## **Introduction**

There are various evolving masculine identities like positive masculinities, sentimental masculinities and caring masculinities. Such identities reveal typical characteristic features

which is considered as an alternative to existing hegemonic masculine identity. For instance, the conflicts that arise in a family setup is largely due to hegemonic masculine identity and this is exactly where caring masculinities play a vital role. The domestic setup portrayed in the novels *It's Not About You* by Ratna Vira and *The Illicit Happiness of Other People* by Manu Joseph are considered for the analysis. Both the novels are published in the previous decade and it reflects the modern Indian domestic ambience effectively. Along with evolving masculine identities, these novels also offer new perspectives in sorting out domestic dysfunctionality through the lens of gender equality (“Review | The Illicit Happiness of Other People by Manu Joseph,” 2023). Therefore, the research is carried out in order to highlight the significance of caring masculinity in modern Indian family setup.

#### **Domestic Ambience in *It's Not About You*:**

In the novel, *It's Not About You*, Samaira is portrayed as a single mother with her children Aksh and Tara. She is separated from her husband Rishi and finds it difficult to handle both work and family. There is also a huge communication gap between her and children (Vira 67). Samaira is shocked to know that her son was being bullied at school and later on delves deep into his life where she understands the lack of communication. However, her son got bullied as he wanted to save his friend from an assault. The presence of caring masculinity in Aksh and absence of caring masculinity in Rishi form the major plot of the novel. Karla Elliott, in her theoretical concept emphasizes the need for caring masculine identities. This concept is applicable to the character Aksh as he remains an embodiment of caring masculinity. The caring masculinity traits help in addressing the communication gap in the family as well as it has the potential to subvert hegemonic identities (Elliott ). The unconcerned attitude in men with respect to domestic dysfunctions can also be addressed through caring masculinity.

### **Conflict Resolution in *The Illicit Happiness of Other People*:**

The primary conflict in the novel *The Illicit Happiness of Other People* is the complicit masculine identity of Ousep, whose son Unni has committed suicide in the novel. The complicit masculinity, as defined by Australian theorist Raewyn Connell, is the identity in which men, though do not want literally to dominate other genders, they enjoy the position of being men (Connell ). Ousep, until his son's suicide does not care for his family but after Unni's death, develops caring masculine identity with which he goes on a pursuit to identify the reason behind his son's death. Unni's brother also showcases his caring masculine identity after Unni's death, by acknowledging the responsibilities which has fallen on his shoulders. Ousep, remaining carefree to a larger extent in his life, made his second son to become responsible and caring at a very young age (Joseph 96). Therefore, it is obvious that caring masculinity plays a crucial role in resolving the conflicts in the domestic ambience. The evolving masculine identities which is often claimed to be alternatives of traditional hegemonic masculinities, ensure the functional ambience of the family.

### **Caring Masculinity**

Caring masculine identity has showcased its potential in the recent past. However, there are numerous challenges involved in sustaining the caring attributes among men. First and foremost, men who align with caring masculinity traits face peer pressure from other men and fear being labelled as holding 'unmanly' traits. Such men belong to hegemonic or other masculine identities which pose a threat to evolving positive or alternative masculine identities. Thus, it is obvious that along with caring attributes, men should also possess resilience in order to combat pressure that arise due to marginalization of genders (*Caring Masculinities in Theory and Practice: Reiterating the Relevance and Clarifying the Capaciousness of the Concept - Steven Roberts, Riikka Prattes, 2024, n.d.*). The supportive nature of the society in which a family runs also play a vital role. The collective mindset of people in accepting the evolving

forms of masculinity help in positive growth of caring masculine identity in all the households. Thus, men who exhibit caring attributes play a crucial role in establishing functional domestic ambience. The dysfunctionalities that exist in the family setup can be potentially resolved through such evolving masculine identities. This also contributes towards attaining gender equality which is most important to attain development across various domains. (*Caring Masculinities*, n.d.).

### **Gender Equality and Functional Domestic Ambience**

It is proven through this analysis that evolving masculine identities like caring masculinities favor a lot in making the family functional and free from major conflicts. In addition, such masculine identities with positive traits also help in attaining gender equality (Corichi, 2022). This is primarily due to the fact that new evolving masculine identities reject hegemonic attitudes and enrich the caring trait in men. In both the novels, *It's Not About You* and *The Illicit Happiness of Other People*, the major reason behind the conflict is the absence of caring masculinity. Rishi, in the novel *It's Not About You* remained indifferent and Samaira had to handle everything all alone. Similarly, Ousep in the novel *The Illicit Happiness of Other People*, belongs to complicit masculine identity and did not possess the caring trait until the death of his son (Joseph 54). Therefore, it is obvious that men who care, play a vital role in the family setup. They help in establishing a functional family and also gender equality gap can be bridged. Thus, this study highlights the significance of caring masculinities in modern families.

### **Conclusion**

The analysis on the chosen novels clearly indicate the need to understand the potential benefits of caring masculine identities in the domestic ambience. If the family should remain functional in the domestic level, then one should ensure the presence of caring traits in men in the family. The chosen novels reflect the mindset of modern Indian family along with possible

conflicts that arise in the domestic setup. It is observed that caring masculinities help in the transition of dysfunctional family setup to functional family setup. In addition, it also addresses the gender inequality issues in Indian families. This research highlights the significance of peaceful functional domestic ambience which also helps an individual attain work life balance. Only, if the family is functional, the society would remain productive. Therefore, it is obvious that attention should be paid to growing alternative masculinities which bring a positive change in the society.

**Conflict of Interest:** The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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