

Book Review
Between Saints and Sinners: Understanding Men
by
Dr. Kamran Ahmad

As observed, the academic field of gender studies primarily focuses on issues affecting women. However, men, as a contributing, if controversial, principal part of the gender studies, are often not just ignored in scholarly literature but face usual vigilantism also in feminist circles. This obliviousness on the part of gender studies is thankfully addressed by Kamran Ahmad in his book *Between Saints and Sinners: Understanding Men*. The book is divided into five sections, comprising nineteen chapters and three afterwards. According to the author, the book is an invitation to think about things differently.

Kamran Ahmad is a clinical psychologist with decades of experience in gender issues in conflict-ridden and disaster-torn parts of the world, working for the United Nations and several country-based organizations. He is also the founding member of Islamabad-based Mehergarh, a center for learning on gender work, patriarchy, diversity and pluralism, inter-faith harmony, and democracy. The author, in his book under review and, so, his entire gender work, is based on encouraging men to engage in self (re)discovery through self-reflection on the roles men play, which, in turn, affect the lives of men and those around them.

Therefore, the book is organized as a long conversation encompassing shifting and expanding perspectives, such as those of ancient Greek philosophers, to complete the picture of the world in which we live. The purpose is to facilitate transformation. Consequently, the book is neither deliberately academic, employing theories, nor a psychological exposition of or performance of a particular gender. The author sees feminist angst against men as equally unproductive and ineffective for creating a safe society.

Expanding the discussion, the author, in section one, “Men and Masculinity”, goes on to define and deconstruct patriarchy, a hierarchical system that positions men, his work, and traits as masculine as valued higher than those of women and the feminine. Patriarchy is oppressive for women predominantly, but also for men, given the traditional socialization processes. Relating to the nature versus nurture debate, the author distinguishes certain physiologically driven violent provocations against women and the weak, which are uncontrolled among men, but are restricted by obviously controlled behavior.

Muhammad Shafique
University of Sargodha
E-mail: shafiquelava20@gmail.com

Similarly, some kinds of violence are constantly accepted and expected of men, even to the extent of killing. It is all part of the socialization immersed in patriarchal edifice, creating masculinity as a source of insecurity for men, which in turn demonstrates itself in the form of extreme ferocity. Similarly, men's diverse roles as providers are addressed in the second section, aptly titled "Men as Providers". In traditional patriarchal social settings, like in Pakistan and the larger

In South Asia and the Global South, the primary value and key purpose of a man remains being a provider for his family. Men sacrifice their emotions and family, and face the fear of risking their lives. All the hardcore jobs in human life, like defending national borders, working in conflict or disaster areas, and, in fact, the field of science and technology, are occupied by men. This is also the case in highly developed Nordic states, where women often pursue healing and caring professions such as doctors, nurses, and teachers.

Subsequently, as the author articulates, men should be appreciated for the security, support, and facilities they provide to their families and others around them. There must be a gender-neutral work environment, as the basic purpose of gender is to create space for people to have more options. Men in the form of fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons must be honored for putting others' welfare above their own.

Moving forward, section three, "Men as Lovers", goes on to ascertain the biological basis of sexuality and romance, claiming that ignoring biological realities intertwined with psychological forces ruins men if not recognized and integrated into power. Here, the author has questioned the public morality of showing affection to one's in relation to similarly immoral romance, which is also banned in public and is not allowed. Similarly, women's complaints in police stations are often dubbed as *domestic affairs* instead of *domestic violence* in traditional societies. However, limiting sexuality and carnal desires merely to the feminine inside wo(men) is an exaggerated fact which is very controversial yet debatable.

Nonetheless, the conceptualization of sexuality in men of Jungian shadow is certainly a lashing force causing harm to people. Moving along, the author stresses that men are ill-informed and confused about what they like in a particular woman, as it is fundamentally their sexual desires that need satisfaction. It is, however, a bit sparkling, then, as if it were just sexuality that made humans social? Hence, according to the author, love is, in fact, a carnal desire, and unsuccessful love is a blessing for men, reinvigorating the actual human inside an individual, reclaiming his humble individuality and energy.

In the fourth section, "Men and Violence", a purported reason for violence prevalent among many, if not all, men are sought and attributed correctly to the cultural training and socialization process. The same socialization sometimes accepts certain categories of aggression and even expects it from men. Anger and aggression are biological, emotional phenomena experienced by all humans, but they need to be channeled and controlled so they do not turn into destructive, violent behavior. Because life will always present us with various types of anger, failure, and disappointments, as these are the things that give us the sense of being alive. According to the author, emotions should add to life rather than take away from it. Violence in those societies is low where women have alternative ways and legal protection at their disposal, since men in

traditional societies like Pakistan make women dependent on themselves so that they can be made submissive or obedient.

Likewise, Ahmad notes that men do violence not just to women but also to other men. Anger is a natural phenomenon, but expressing it through physical violence is a learned mechanism in which society as a whole plays a role. Also, respect and honor are double-edged swords for men and women. The author contradicts his thesis here by writing that the whole of civilization is about learning to control natural instincts. Earlier, in section one, as he specifically values all sexual desires as want-based and not need-based, then there will be no social controls, and safeguards, and the resulting society will be an anarchist society, which has never existed in recorded human history.

As a result, in the last fifth section, titled “Men and Spirituality”, which seems strange in the book, Ahmad has traced the reasons for patriarchy in the traditional societies of the subcontinent. He is up to a certain extent right, as he writes that patriarchy is unknown in the ancient local knowledge. It is a transported stuff brought by Arians and Muslims to the Indian subcontinent. The spirituality and virtue of men are neither embedded in women’s clothes nor in their public appearance that needs to be hidden. Women cannot hide from men's minds.

Furthermore, in Afterword I, where the entire book is summarized briefly to make the lessons comprehensible, understanding men means not what men do, but why they behave the way they do. In the same way, Afterword II emphasizes that changing oneself requires courage, energy, and honesty to look inwards. The real is the only ideal. Afterward III provides us with gender-inclusive strategies for collective action, asserting that only then will men be healers in a society that has first healed.

The book essentially raises more questions than it addresses, and that is the brilliance of a best book. A slight academic tone and a global inference about the men’s studies may have made the book even more striking and revealing for both men and women. Kamran Ahmad successfully illuminates a life trail for men to reflect on themselves, think critically about their individuality and the roles they play, and analyze their behaviors to build a healthier society.
