

Beyond The Macho Image: A Message From Two Men To Indian Men

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It's a new year, a time for fresh starts. This year, let's look at something that affects all of us: the idea of what it means to be a man in India. We're often shown a very specific image of a hero – strong, silent, always protecting. Think of figures like Lord Rama, Maharana Pratap, or Subhas Chandra Bose.

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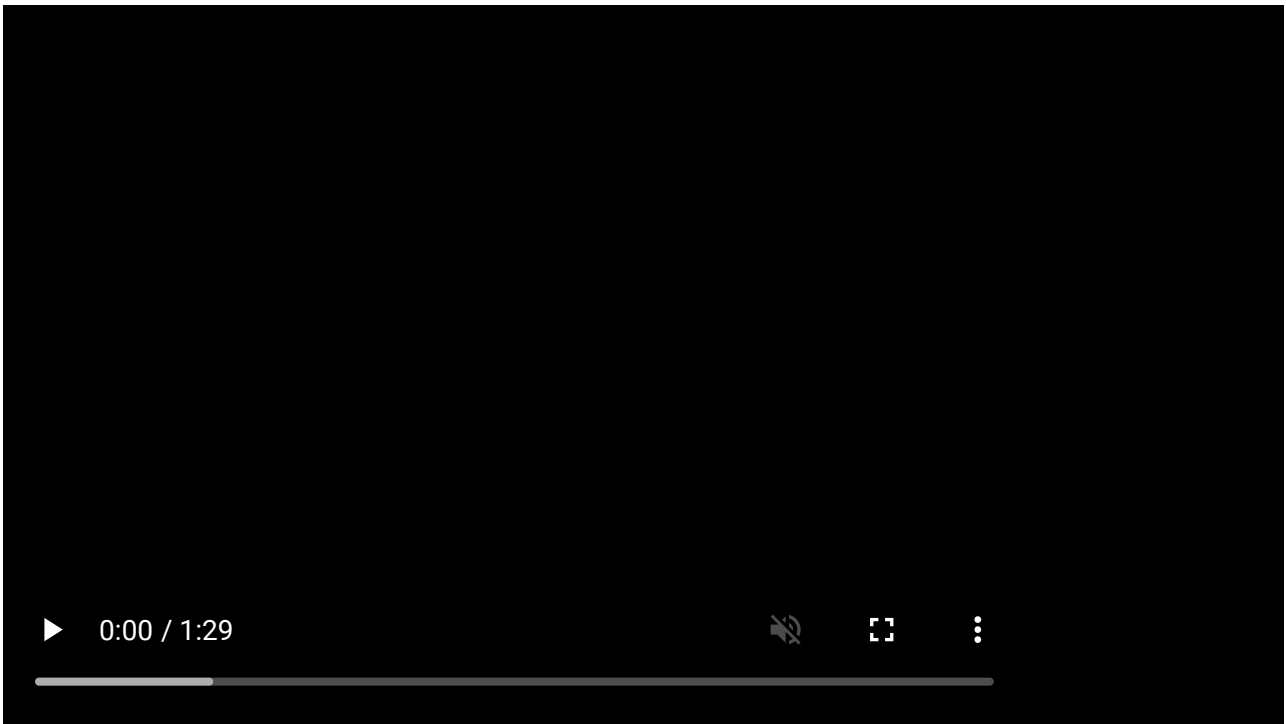
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What if being a man in India is as diverse as the country itself, shaped by our different backgrounds, cultures, and personal experiences?

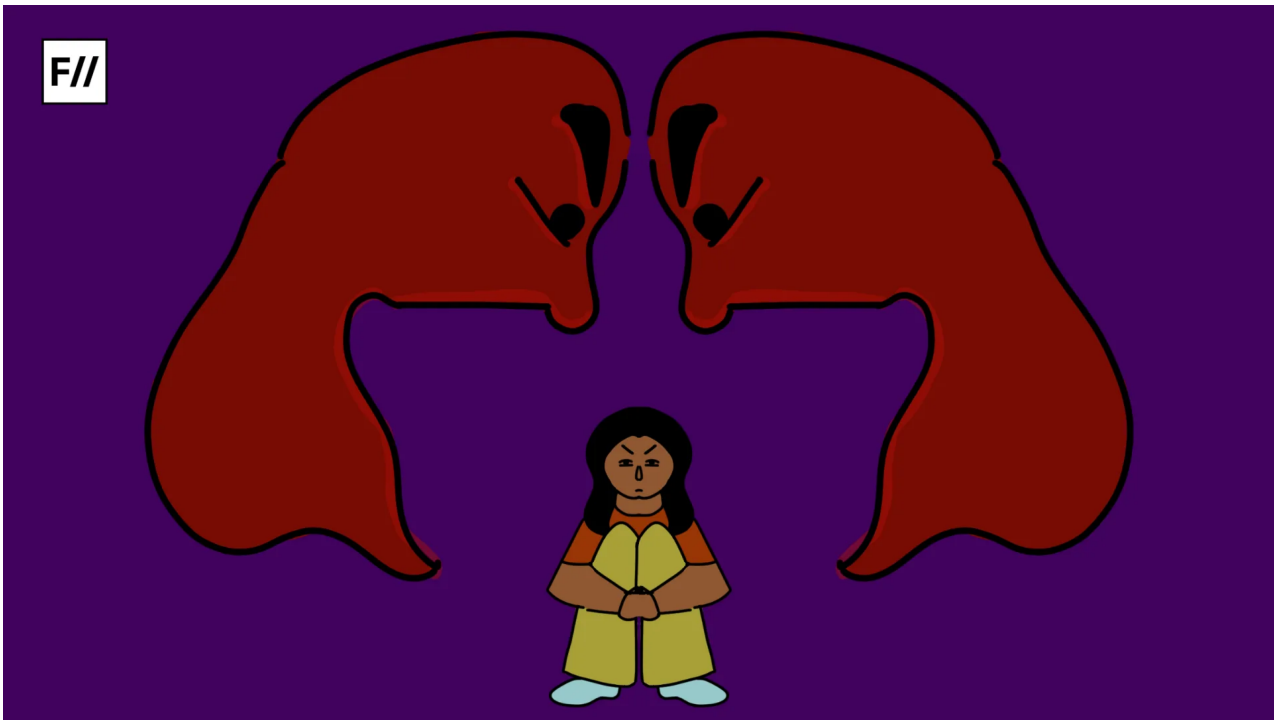
They're inspiring, sure, but these stories often create a narrow path for Indian men, a path where they're expected to be tough, to sacrifice, and to never show weakness. But what if we said there's more to being a man than that? What if being a man in India is as diverse as the country itself, shaped by our different backgrounds, cultures, and personal experiences?

The damage of rigid masculine expectations on men

The truth is, this constant pressure to be the “strong, silent type” does real damage. It forces men to bottle up their emotions, to put making money above their own well-being, both mental and physical. It's a culture where showing you're struggling, even physically, is seen as a weakness. The high number of men's suicides in India, as reported by the NCRB, is a tragic wake-up call, a desperate cry from men who feel trapped and unable to ask for help. A more open and accepting idea of what it means to be a man could literally save lives, allowing men to take care of their physical health without fear of judgment.

Breaking free: embracing a broader definition of manhood

And this narrow idea of manhood doesn't just hurt men; it has a ripple effect, harming our entire society. This is where patriarchy plays a destructive role, creating a rigid system that dictates how men and women should behave. This system feeds into a culture where women often bear the brunt of household work, have fewer career opportunities, and face a gender pay gap. It's the root of harmful behaviors like domestic violence and harassment at work, as shown by the NFHS-5 data.



Source: FII

The impact isn't only about individual men suffering; it messes up relationships between men and their partners, children, and even other men, creating a culture of dominance instead of genuine connection and support. When men are unable to express their emotions freely, it creates barriers in their relationships, often leading to misunderstandings, resentment, and a lack of intimacy. By embracing a broader definition of masculinity, we can foster healthier, more equitable relationships built on mutual respect, open communication, and shared responsibilities. These changes can lead to stronger, more fulfilling partnerships where both individuals feel valued and supported.

Towards a future of inclusivity and gender equality

Fortunately, there's good news: India has always had different ideas about masculinity. We see it in our history and culture. Take **Bahuchara Mata**, a deity worshipped by the Hijra community, who shows us that gender isn't black and white or Mahatma Gandhi, who showed a different kind of strength – one based on nonviolence and compassion. These examples remind us that masculinity is not a fixed construct, but a spectrum influenced by culture, socioeconomic status, and individual experiences.

» Also read: [A New Wave Of Masculinity In Indian Cinema: Daood Hussain Aka "Gunjan" On 'Laapataa Ladies'](#)

In fact, today, we see men all over India breaking the mold: involved fathers, nurses, chefs, artists, stay-at-home dads, men who are not afraid to show their feelings. Groups like *Mardon Wali Baat* are creating spaces where men can figure out what manhood means to them, outside of the old rules. Recognising these experiences helps us create spaces where all men feel valued and understood, regardless of their background or circumstances. This isn't just happening in a few places; it's the start of something big, a sign that being a man isn't about fitting into one box.



Source: FII

So, how do we move forward? It's clear that we need to challenge these outdated ideas and create a society where every man can define his own path. This means making some real changes, like introducing strong paternity leave policies so that childcare isn't just seen as a woman's job. We also need better mental health services and campaigns that encourage men to seek help without shame. Programs like *MenEngage* and the "*Bell Bajao*" campaign have already made strides in promoting gender equality and addressing toxic masculinity, but a lot more needs to be done.

A collective effort: building a caring and equal society for not only men but everyone

Beyond new policies, we need a fundamental shift in our culture, a change in how we see and portray masculinity. Our schools need to teach kids that there are many ways to be a man, or a woman and that strength comes in many forms. Workplaces should be inclusive, so everyone can succeed, no matter what their gender. Government employees and the police need training on gender issues so that they can serve all citizens fairly.

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We need to update school curriculums to challenge old stereotypes and reward companies that promote gender equality. And, crucially, the media – from Bollywood to social media – needs to show us the many faces of masculinity: men who are caring, who show their feelings, who are human.

This isn't just about changing laws or what we see on TV; it's about each of us making a conscious choice to be part of the solution. By dismantling these patriarchal norms, we're not just helping men break free from restrictive roles, but we're also paving the way for

greater gender equality. When men are encouraged to share household responsibilities and childcare, it allows women more opportunities to pursue their careers and personal goals.

This shift can lead to a more balanced and equitable society where both men and women can thrive.

This shift can lead to a more balanced and equitable society where both men and women can thrive. This new year, let's commit to building a more inclusive and caring India. We can do this by having open conversations with the men and boys in our lives about these issues, creating a space where they feel safe to express themselves. We can support organisations like *MARD*, *MenEngage*, and *Mardon Wali Baat* that are working for a better society. We can challenge sexist comments or behaviors when we see them, refusing to be silent bystanders. We can also reflect on our own biases about gender, acknowledging that we all have a role to play in dismantling harmful stereotypes.



Source: FII

Ultimately, the path to a more inclusive and caring India, where everyone can be themselves, starts with each of us. Let's embrace the many different ways to be a man in India and build a society that truly believes in unity in diversity. This isn't just a new year's resolution; it's a promise for a better future – a future where every individual, regardless of their gender identity, feels valued, respected, and empowered to live authentically. And that's a future we can, and must, start building right now.

Help us grow the feminist movement in India

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