



Contrast between Indian Sub-Continent and Western Male Homosociality in context to Mario Puzo's *The Godfather*

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Received:- 01 September 2025/ Revised:- 12 September 2025/ Accepted:- 21 September 2025/ Published: 30-09-2025

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Abstract— The research carefully examines whether the text provides enough evidence to support its main hypothesis. It focuses on male homosociality and masculinity as a response to the crisis in masculinity caused by rising feminist movements, changing gender roles, and the capitalist nature of Western society. The novel portrays dominant male characters and the crime world, making it seem like a typical masculine text. On one side, there are strong, macho men, while on the other, female characters are submissive and insignificant. The plot mainly highlights masculine virtues and vices, while women are confined to minor domestic roles. Each male character exhibits a desire for homosocial bonding, which helps them reaffirm their masculinity, which the study suggests is in crisis. The traditional idea of masculinity and the patriarchy that supported it lost its power as the century turned, influenced by rapid technological changes and evolving ideologies. As women questioned femininity, they crossed gender boundaries and explored new territories, often leaving men feeling confused. In "The Godfather," the depiction of male camaraderie and the story of a charismatic patriarch address this male anxiety of feeling threatened.

Keywords— Masculine, Patriarchy, West, East, Homosociality.

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Male Homosociality, Masculinity and *The Godfather*:

Men have traditionally held a superior position in their relationships with women, but they often find themselves caught in complex power struggles, not just with women but also among themselves. There is a clear but unspoken hostility, along with some compassion and camaraderie among men. Their relationships shape their behavior, education, and identity. While masculinity is often discussed and desired, it has not been critically examined in terms of its evolution and the factors that influence it. Male homosociality is familiar yet complex due to the societal position of masculinity (Brid, 1996).

In Mario Puzo's *The Godfather*, male homosociality the social bonds between men is shown differently when we compare the Indian sub-continent and Western contexts. In the Western setting of the novel, male relationships revolve heavily around power, loyalty, and dominance. Men bond through competition, violence, and shared control, often excluding women from these spaces. This world is shaped by strict codes of masculinity, where men prove their strength to gain respect and authority (Oliver 5; Chiampi,80-6).

Mario Puzo's *The Godfather* explores male fraternity and modern masculinity within the crime world, focusing on the character Don Vito Corleone. This paper examines the nature of male relationships in the novel, highlighting the complex dynamics of bonding and hostility that exist alongside respect and admiration. As the concept of masculinity evolved, history took unexpected turns. The rise of feminist movements and gay and lesbian culture challenged traditional macho ideals. In response, masculinity sought to reassert itself through art and literature, particularly in crime fiction, buddy movies, and war films. These

expressions often sidelined female characters, reinforcing the idea of male superiority. In the story, Carlo arranges Sonny's murder, leading Vito to reluctantly join the narcotics business he once rejected. He ensures the safe return of his youngest son, Michael, who has changed and is now ready to take control of the family business. Michael seeks to marry his longtime partner, Kay. After Don Vito dies from a stroke, Michael becomes the new Godfather and orders the deaths of rival families, expanding his power in New York. However, Michael's life becomes complicated. He moves the family business to Nevada, promising Kay that he will legitimize it, but instead, he expands into hotels and gambling while planning operations in Cuba. During this time, he forms an alliance with Hyman Roth, who plots against him with Fredo as a go-between (Cawelti, 19). As Michael tries to negotiate with Roth, tensions rise, and Roth turns to the FBI for protection. Meanwhile, Michael faces personal struggles, including the news of Kay's miscarriage.

Despite his influence, Michael escapes legal troubles but continues to have issues with Kay, who wants to end their marriage. The family faces more challenges with the death of Mama Corleone, which brings them closer together. Connie pleads to be part of the family again, and even Fredo returns. To regain his power, Michael must eliminate his enemies, including Fredo. Ultimately, he succeeds and reestablishes his dominance.

1.2 Homosociality in *The Godfather*:

The concept of male homosociality and homosocial desire has existed throughout history, likely dating back to the early days of humanity when distinct male and female identities emerged. Men have consistently tried to assert their masculinity, while women have remained true to their nature (Cawelti, 326-44; Britton, 154-9). Although identity and self-perception have always been influenced by various cultural, historical, economic, and social factors, humanity has largely managed to form a general sense of identity that varies among individuals.

Male homosociality has been significantly shaped by ideals of masculinity, while female bonding has often embraced the "feminine mystique." This suggests that male homosociality has consistently aligned with masculine ideals, which have played a crucial role in defining male relationships with each other and with women. Historically, most societies have been patriarchal, with a few exceptions like the Amazonian civilization. Until relatively recently, men have held dominant positions, and masculinity has served as a guiding principle for them. Male homosociality has always adapted to the expectations and demands of masculinity. In the novel, we can see a trace of homophobia when there is a description of Michael as a timid man lacking the masculine virtues, "Michael Corleone was the youngest son of the Don and the only child who had refused the great man's direction. He did not have the heavy, cupid-shaped face of the other children, and his jet black hair was straight rather than curly. A worry that was put to rest when Michael Corleone became seventeen years old" (16). Vito Corleone, Michael's father and protagonist of the novel, is a traditional man with an air of masculinity around him all the time, in the ways he talked, walked and did things. Whenever there is a description of Vito in the novel there is not a single trace of feminine sensibilities. The novelist narrates, "The Don was a real man at the age of twelve. Short, dark, slender, living in the strange Moorish – looking village of Corleone in Sicily, he had been born Vito Andolini, but when strange men came to kill the son of the man they had murdered, his mother sent the young boy to America to stay with friends. And in the new land he changed his name to Corleone to preserve some tie with his native village" (192). The novel, which revolves around the lives of the Corleone family, is also a tale of friendship, male bonding, male relationship and the complex patterns of affiliations and the business that men do. For instance, in the novel, the definition of friendship comes in stark contrast with the general assumptions and commonly held notion about it, it means business in men's world not just an innocence and intimate association, "Don Vito Corleone was a man to whom everybody came for help, and never were they disappointed. He made no empty promise . . . Only one thing was required. That you can proclaim your friendship. And then, no matter how poor or powerless the supplicant, Don Corleone would take that man's troubles to his heart . . . His reward?" (14). If we take a look at the above mentioned passage, we can sense a fair degree of awe that the Don commanded on the people who came for his help and his distinct way of helping others so that he eventually has control over the person whom he chose to help. To shed blood in the name of friendship and brotherhood, and to maintain stoic endurance is an adherence to the norms of homosociality.

The novel is never short of tell-tale instances of male homosociality and men's adherence to the unwritten code of masculinity. Throughout the novel, there is not a single event that portrays Don Vito Corleone as a coward but even when he carries with him that air of superiority and inspires awe on other peoples around him, he acts 'rational' enough by not 'interfering' into his daughter's personal affair her being beat up by her husband. In one instance Connie complains to Vito about her sufferings due

to her husband. "Connie had said angrily to her father, "did you ever hit your wife?" She was his favorite and could speak to him so impudently. He had answered, "She never gave me a reason to beat her." And her mother had nodded and smiled (238).

Nevertheless, Puzo's *The Godfather* is a novel, a crime fiction to be more specific, that has spent most of its pages on masterfully depicting a god-like protagonist a masculine man and has also proved to be less generous on the elaborations and development of female characters in the entire course of story development. While the depiction of violence has earned place of fairly elaborate graphic representation, the case of women has been under shadow of violence most of the time in the novel and Puzo seems rather economical in his representation of women in his text. There is domestic violence, there is sexual predation if not illicit sexual encounters if not adventures of Sonny, Fredo and Jonny Fontane and little has been mentioned on the female's perspective, crime fiction that it is. Puzo, an American male, writer seems to take pleasure in writing about the male world of crime fraternity that can often be viewed an artist's endeavour to fortify the masculinity that has arguably suffered bruises in the later half the last century. We will not be wrong if we call *The Godfather* a protomasculine novel aiming at re-asserting masculinity.

The Godfather with its storyline based on crime a sure-fire topic stormed the book markets and took the modern readers by their foot with its masculine themes dominating the whole plot structure. But, it is unclear whether the novel was widely welcomed and appreciated by the female readers as well as by the men. If we look at the history of arts and literature, be it in religious text or anonymous myths that have been passed from generations to generations, the story of father and sons both males that they are have always been popular and widely accepted by the readers. From the classical mythology to religious texts, traditional folklores and literatures, the father-son combination has always marked their presence and entertained people (Eisler and Skidmore, 155). We have the great Greek tragedy of fateful Oedipus destined to kill his father King Laius, we also have the traditional folk tale of fated over-reacher Icarus and cautious and wise Daedalus, or the Shakespearian story of the prince of chronic procrastination, Hamlet, and his father King Claudius and we also have father-son story in Aesop's fable. It is not just the father-son adventures that have entertained the readers throughout the history but the point that the paper intends to make is the combination has worked for notable part and size of the history of story-telling. And one common thing, if not theme, that most of the father-son adventures or stories have explored are the stories of heroism, greater passion of art and ambition, revenge, remorse and redemption, manhood, machismo and masculinity, valor, vengeance and vendetta. In *The Godfather* by Mario Puzo, we can find not a single thing to make a comparison, but one thing we all can see is after all the novel is also a story that revolves around father and son business. The story after all is about men.

Now turning back to the theories, according to Adam and Samran, the theory of masculinity that came to the attention of English scholarship during the second half of the twentieth century calls out that "the critical analysis of masculinity must be distinguished not only by its subject matter but a new self-consciousness about the theoretical and methodological assumption underlying traditional disciplinary formations (Simerka, 522)." This claim if not statement carries with it the belief that the patriarchy has long been influential in almost all areas of the studies that may cross path with the masculinity studies itself. In the same vein, they write, "Taking its lead from feminism, masculinity studies is thus dedicated to analyzing what has often seemed to be an implicit fact, that the vast majority of societies are patriarchal and that men have historically enjoyed more than their share or power, resources, and cultural authority(5)." While admitting the theoretical and methodological diversity of the scholarship of masculinity they state that the issue of masculinity is difficult to anthologize. Adam and Savran draws from Bryce Traister and writes, "because, 'masculinity has for so long stood as the transcendental anchor and guarantor of cultural authority and 'truth,' demonstrating its materiality, its 'constructedness,' requires an especially energetic rhetoric and critical insistence (7)". The idealized man of the past still influences modern ideas of masculinity, but a global understanding of change and progress is reshaping what it means to be a man today. The modern man can be a gentleman, a scholar, a comedian, a strongman, and an athlete, all while being kind-hearted. This new representation of masculinity blends both masculine and feminine traits, which, when viewed through the lens of traditional masculinity, may seem feminine.

In the novel, we can see this transformation in the characters of Don and Michael, who represent two different generations of masculinity. The younger generation feels the need to prove their manliness to the older generation, and both are connected by the patriarchal beliefs that shape their lives. Characters like Johnny Fontane and Freddie constantly feel the pressure of the male gaze, and their masculinity is questioned when they struggle to manage their chaotic lives. Among the three sons, Freddie is seen as an outsider. The family does not trust him with important tasks, and he is labeled a "ladies' man," content with his

life in Las Vegas. Neither Don, his father, nor Michael and Sonny seek his help, as he knows he is not capable. In contrast, Michael, the youngest son, is often viewed as a reincarnation of his father. However, he initially shows little interest in the family business, indicating a new generation of masculinity that rejects violence. Michael understands what it means to be a modern man and diverges from traditional expectations.

Despite his efforts to distance himself from his father's legacy, Michael ultimately cannot escape Don's shadow and ends up following the path he once rejected. This change in Michael can be seen as a surrender to patriarchal authority. Sonny, the eldest son, embodies a typical masculine character who tries to make independent decisions in his father's absence but ultimately fails. His impulsive strength leads to his downfall. In this way, we can see the ongoing struggle between two worlds of men, where the new generation are challenged and questioned to prove their manhood. In one instance in the novel, we can see how this conflict has started questioning the future of coming generations:

Let me say that we must always look to our interest. We are all men who refused to be fools, who have refused to be puppets dancing on a string pulled by the men on high. We have been fortunate here in this country. Already most of our children have found a better. Some of you have sons who are professors, scientists, musicians, and you are fortunate. Perhaps your grandchildren will become the new pezzonavanti. (290)

In the above mentioned quote by the Don during a meeting with other family members of New York crime fraternity, we can sense a change of attitude and slowing down of the traditional masculinity. We can argue that he is showing concern for his people's future and in a way trying to convey the end of masculine heroism of his time. Interestingly, he is addressing to an exclusively male gathering and all he can say in the name of future generation is about his sons getting to better positions. It is interesting to note that he misses out daughters though he himself has a lovely one.

Every thing he does he does to earn respect that is why even the crimes he commits do not look like one. This whole theme of respect has, in a way, made the crime look glamorous and Robin Hood like. This lust for respect makes his look like the old face of patriarchy while the maneuver for legitimization is the new face of masculinity. In one of the dialogue between Kay and Michael after his return from exile in Italy, defends his father's stature and gives his own thought on living the life of his father:

What you have to understand is that he considers himself the equal of all those great men like Presidents and Prime ministers and Supreme Court Justice and Governors of the States. He refuses to live by rules set up by others, rules which condemn him to a defeated life. But his ultimate aim is to enter that society with a certain power since society doesn't really protect its members who do not have their own individual power. In the meantime he operates on a code of ethics he consider far superior to the legal structures of society. (369)

Michael, who use to shun the crime and violence that his father's business called for, after his return from Italy talks about his father's thought and ideologies with some degree of respect and defends his father's act. He is now conforming to the codes of ethics of the masculinity.

There is little place for women in the novel and even smaller space for their voices. In one instance when Kay is talking with Tom about Michael, it's Tom's response that weighs heavy.

Kay said, "He's not the man I married." Hagen laughed shortly, "If he were, he'd be dead now. You'd be a widow now. You'd have no problem. Kay blazed out at him, "What the hell does that mean? Come on, Tom, speak out straight once in your life. You are not Sicilian, you can tell a woman the truth, you can treat her like an equal. A fellow human being. (442)

Two messages can be traced in the above mentioned statement; when Tom replies that if he was the same he would not have survived subtly meaning that a man who is not masculine enough or a lover boy will not survive in a man's world and Tom was right in saying this because, Michael is changed man now after he killed Sollozzo and McCluskey to protect his father and his family's dignity. He became a real man of the family as he started filling up the responsibility of his father's business. But before he always hated his father's world and business and always tried to stay away from this. And Kay Adams was in love with that man who he was in the past. She only knew that Michael who used to hate violence. But now he is a changed man, a

man in the eyes of his people. Another that is mentioned in the above statement is about how a Sicilian treats women; they never include them in private matters. Women are always outsider to them in business and private matters.

Inside the circus of male homosocial interaction lays the feeling of competition, competition is something that has an essentially male face. Bird writes, "Competition with other men provides a stage for establishing self both as an individual and as appropriately masculine. Competition also contributes to the perpetuation of male dominance." He draws from Johnson for elaboration, "To establish self as not female, young men seek out other men with whom to display "non-femaleness" (23). He continues that the homosocial group interactions provide feedback and support for masculinity self-conceptualization. In this sense, masculinity conceptualization is itself a form of competition. While the presence of female cannot be ignored for the assertion of male identity and masculinity as the later compliment the former, the presence of men themselves is of primary interest for the execution of masculinity in a patriarchal society. Men need men for the confirmation of their masculinity and this means the practical side of the homosocial interaction. During the opening scenes of the novel, there is an equally significant piece of conversation between the Don and his friend Luca Brasi a man fearful reputation during the wedding reception of Connie. "He stuttered over the flowery congratulations he offered and his formal hope that the first grandchild would be masculine (25). Men love men and show this feeling to join the men's club.

The Godfather with its all dominating male characters with an air of masculinity is a clear depiction of the celebration of malehood. As Kyle Frackman states for Puzo, an American male writer, seems to be taking pleasure in writing about crime world- the Sicilian mafias, and *The Godfather*, which is populated with brave men, often with a tinge of the writer's admiration and fascination. The novel is a tale of male homosociality, associating it with all the male virtues and vices with least trace of feminine virtues and company. In Hagen's word, "The Corleones' world, the physical beauty, the sexual power of women, carried not the slightest weight in worldly matters. It was a private affair, except, of course, in matters of marriage and family disgrace (60)." The males indulge themselves in promiscuity, rashness, drinking, gambling, risk taking, asserting their opinion, fighting and the conquest of women in order to constantly prove their masculinity and virility to other men and themselves, to whom they must show all signs of masculinity.

II. CONCLUSION

Homosociality, as explained by Kimmel, could be called an attitude a principle that all men, including heterosexual ones, are raised up in the culture to be more eager to please other men and seek their approval than women. Men do 'manly' things like whistling and yelling to connect to other men no just to grab female attention. And we don't find in most contemporary Western cultures men criticizing their buddies' attitudes towards women and gender as an adherence to the unwritten code of masculinity and homosociality. It is, therefore, not at all surprising and uncommon for men to be out of their comfort zone taking feminist position in all male environment given their desire for male approval.

The novel *The Godfather* explores masculinity and male social desire in a deep way. Masculinity is not fixed; it changes over time and is shaped by society (Sedgwick, 92, Gardaphé, 23). Historically, male power has dominated human history, but today traditional ideas of masculinity face challenges from feminism, modernization, and new cultural values. Despite these changes, masculinity still tries to prove its importance. Mario Puzo's *The Godfather* is a story full of strong male characters. It shows a male-only world where men prove their strength, honor, and courage. Women in the story are mostly minor and have little importance. The book focuses on male relationships where men compete but also share a special bond called "male homosocial desire." This means men support each other socially and emotionally while competing. Masculinity in the book is shown through behavior like emotional distance, competition, and seeing women as objects. These behaviors create brotherhood among men, even if they compete. Men are expected to be logical, compete for respect, and enjoy their power over women. This way of thinking divides men and women into opposites, where men feel superior. *The Godfather* portrays a world where masculinity is central involving competition, power, and male bonding reflecting traditional male dominance but also showing its complexity in changing times. In contrast, male homosociality in the Indian sub-continent emphasizes family honor, duty, and social roles within extended kinship networks. Here, men's relationships are deeply connected with family responsibilities and social hierarchy, linked to cultural and religious traditions. While dominance and loyalty are central in both contexts, the Indian model incorporates more communal and familial obligations that shape male identity. Puzo's *The Godfather* primarily reflects Western male homosociality but offers insight into how masculine power operates through patronage and patriarchal authority, concepts that can also be found in South Asian societies but expressed differently. Thus, the contrast lies in the

Western focus on individualistic power struggles and criminal brotherhood, while the Indian sub-continent's male bonds are more rooted in family, social order, and duty. Both systems uphold male dominance but through culturally distinct practices.

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