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## ‘What a man! Is he a man?’<sup>1</sup> Reframing Srikanta’s Masculinity

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Saratchandra’s *Srikanta*, as the novelist himself thought, has all the elements of becoming a landmark of world literature. The novel has intrigued generations of Bengalis because of the way it minutely projects various social and cultural ethos of the era. Srikanta, the titular persona, oscillates from one place to another, and in the process, he encounters one woman after the other. Srikanta’s fascination and subsequent liaison with them provide us with an interesting example of masculinity that was comparatively rare in that era. The paper seeks to reinterpret Srikanta’s character, especially his masculine self, with the help of the theories in Masculinity Studies- popularized in the late twentieth century. Critics often tend to argue that Srikanta is no match compared to the novel’s strong feminine characters. However, it may be argued that they say so because of Srikanta’s lack of virile masculinity. Hence, the article is an attempt of creating a new strand of criticism by recognizing Srikanta’s alternative masculinity, which in turn, becomes a strong political gesture as it vehemently critiques the overt hyper-masculinity popularized by the British.

### Introduction:

Srikanta’s persona- undomesticated, confused, and even feminine- makes him a socially deviant individual. Throughout the paper my aim would be to justify this rather outrageous stance. I am saying this after reading carefully about Srikanta’s masculine postulation which is non-stereotypical to say the least. Masculinity, as R.W. Connell argues, is historically constructed; and one form is always hegemonic. He writes, “At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted” (77). When Srikanta was originally written, that is, in the early twentieth century, *Babus*<sup>2</sup> were still hegemonically masculine Bengali men (Patriotic and overtly masculine Nationalists were possibly another dominant set of Bengali men). The British were able to convincingly impose their ideological apparatus on these men who became nothing but (Bhaba-ite) Mimic men. Homi K. Bhabha felt that Colonial mimicry appears when the colonized imitate the cultural ethos of the colonizer. Such mimicry happens when the Colon wish to formulate a recognizable other. This politics of constructing identity is easily palpable in the way the British tried to construct a class of Indian who would be brown in color, yet white in taste. *Babus* became a representative model of such masculine stereotype that T.B. Macaulay proposed in his notorious *Minute*. Motivated by the matrix of domesticity and morality created by the British through education, they chose the preferred form of domestic life by marrying a woman who would come along to their house with a huge dowry; and then they would spend this money nonchalantly by going to a prostitute, by drinking wine, by gambling, and more importantly, most of them, if

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<sup>1</sup> This line is taken from the last line of George Bernard Shaw’s *Arms and the Man*.

<sup>2</sup> *Babus* refer to the middle class Bengali men who generally worked as clerks in British offices. They generally mimicked the British; and because of this, they have been ridiculed in literary and cultural texts alike. They were also notoriously famous for being clientele in the parlance of the red-light areas.

not all, would treat their wives as nothing but slaves. Though born and brought up in a rather rich family, Srikanta does not inherit any of these qualities. Like Hamlet, he is consistently inconsistent as he is never able to settle down anywhere. Borrowing the idea from Judith Butler, I would like argue that sexual identity is culturally imposed not only on women but also on men. With these identities, certain roles are also expected to be fulfilled. Those who do not subscribe to these models are recognized as 'Other', if we are to borrow the word from Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak. Srikanta, I argue, is one such 'Other'. However, before starting off with a critical inquiry of the text, the readers must be acquainted with the stature of the text itself.

### Discussion:

Saratchandra's *Srikanta* has been a landmark novel of Indian literature; often praised for its microcosmic representation of Bengal during the early twentieth century. Aruna Chakroborty, translator of the novel, writes:

Saratchandra's desire to see the novel's inclusion in the literature of the West was based on a conviction of its universal validity. *Srikanta* is more than a simple work of fiction. It offers a penetrating analysis of the life and culture of Bengal---itself a microcosm of India-- in the century preceding our own. Yet it is no mere sociological document. The social attitude depicted in the novel are far from obsolete and still exist, in some form or the other, all over the country. (Chattopadhyay IX)

It is obvious from the above passage that Saratchandra himself desired to see the novel as a part of the great literature of the world. He believed that his novel had an unmatched universal validity. His desire was not vain either. The novel offers a penetrating analysis of the life and culture of Colonial Bengal in the early twentieth century. The social and cultural ethos that the novel partakes to pinpoint is 'far from obsolete and still exist' (Chattopadhyay, X). Men still look down upon women as inferior and irrational. Women still die because of their father's inability to provide the groom's party with a handsome dowry. In this respect the novel becomes an important document for understanding the social stigmas and attitudes that lay at the heart of it.

However, our attitude towards social practices has undergone a sea-change. With the emergence of Critical Theory, texts are reread and reinterpreted with new gusto. A lot of critics have started to consider Saratchandra to be the first feminist writer of Bengal-- ahead of the time, however. Aruna Chakravarty asserts: "The enlightened of today's India find themselves identifying with Saratchandra's position with regard to women in a powerfully motivated" as "contact with the west on the basis of equality has sanitized the educated Indian's perception of women" (Chattopadhyay X). It is apparent that the western brand of feminism has emboldened the critics with zest to freshly interpret this text of gigantic proportions (and I am not talking quantitatively). Whether such feminist sentiments persist throughout his literary career is a matter of genuine conjecture. For instance, the protagonist of *Pather Dabi (The Right of Way)*, Apurba, surely does not share the same sentiments regarding women early in the novel. Recognizing the fact that British Imperialism was steeped in Patriarchal ideology, it will not be wrong to say that Apurba, though a staunch Brahmin and a believer in native customs, seems to reiterate the patriarchal view endorsed by the British. Apparently, he is an ardent nationalist who recognizes, and in a way endorses, the much-theorized weakness of a Bengali man. In an Apostrophic address to the Bengalis, he proclaims:

'O, you weak citizens of an unfortunate land! What right have you on that rich, wonderful land of yours? If you are unable to uphold its glory, then why hanker for it at all? The birthright of freedom does not come automatically; it has to be earned. Can one deny this fact? Even the gods cannot steal it. Can one call such weaklings men? No, no, that's impossible. (82)

Apurba's reiteration of the colonial ideology is a testimony to those Bengali men who were ideologically motivated by the Imperialists. Srikanta, however, cannot be included within the same brackets.

As stated earlier, the recognition of the fact that Bengalis are weak and unmanly seems to reiterate the British project of effeminizing the Bengalis. Nationalist rhetoric (except Gandhi's) tried to reaffirm the ideals of hegemonic masculinity by eradicating the alleged effeminacy of the Bengali men. Apurba, like most other nationalist, is also set on doing that. The hyper-masculine British become a symbol of national integration and vigor that Bengali men tried to emulate. Using Contemporary Critical Theories, I would try to establish the fact that even Saratchandra's male characters cannot be put within a homogenized category. Hence, the British ideology that polarized the 'manly Englishman' and 'effeminate Bengali'<sup>3</sup> is nothing but a gross misconception steeped in Colonial prejudice.

The feminist sentiment of Srikanta that we were focused upon previously recurs back and forth in the novel itself as Srikanta, the titular persona, utters: "There's a general belief, and I share it, that the male of the species has subordinated the female and forced her to occupy a position of extreme degradation"(275). This kind of a belief was mostly unheard of in this period, especially from men. After reading various sources, it can be safely concluded that men of this era used to treat women as nothing but servants. *Babus* became notoriously famous as they had developed a habit of keeping harlots. Their own wives seldom attracted them. These men were intrigued by the voluptuousness of these harlots who used to insinuate men with their plausible sexual antics. *Babus* enjoyed such a candid depiction of sexuality from the harlots. Ironically enough, these women used to dictate terms for them as they, unlike the housewives, were economically independent. The flourishing of prostitutes during this period is a stark eye-opener about the hypocritical nature of men who tried to maintain their overt sense of morality merely in the domestic sphere. These men never acknowledged their wives essential humanity and treated them as servants who would embellish them properly before they set out for these nocturnal amours. Contrasted with other men of the period, Srikanta, at least, does not carry this pretence of domesticity. The women, whom he encounters, however, are not homogeneous in nature and temperament. Each of them has their individual fortitude. Rajlakshmi, Abhaya, and Kamal Lata are tremendously powerful characters. In spite of being a *Baiji*, Rajlakshmi, the central woman character, cannot be termed a typical harlot. She is a woman of innate sensibilities; and, of course, she is hugely rich. This distinction among several types of 'fallen' woman is made extensively by Biswanath Joardar in his book *Onnyo Kolkata (Other Kolkata)* (119).

Under the influence of the Victorian 'sages'<sup>4</sup>, *Babus* conversely learned the ethics of domesticity very well (hypocritically). As mentioned earlier, these apparently domestic men, however, became notorious for their regular visit to the red-light area. There was an explosion in the number of prostitutes in this time; and, if men, who must have had a wonderful family life, did not go to them for pleasure they would not have survived. *Babus*, who were very good in imitating their masters, possibly took up the practice of visiting the harlot quite convincingly as well. In his essay, Sumanta Banerjee reports that the British administrators employed prostitutes for its soldiers. He also notes that it was the expansion of trade and commerce that led to the steady increase of the prostitutes during the nineteenth century. More and more people started to inhabit the city; and they, of course, looked for sexual gratification from these *Beshyas* (prostitutes). They, however, denounced the practice of prostitution publicly because it suited their public persona. Such hypocritical gestures

<sup>3</sup> I have borrowed these two phrases from Mrinalini Sinha's fantastic work on Colonial Masculinity where she beautifully explains the epistemology of the two phrases.

<sup>4</sup> The term is borrowed from Michael Alexander who uses it in his *A History of English Literature* to describe the overtly Puritanical attitude prevalent in Victorian men.

prevailed throughout the city during the century. Steven Marcuse's epic research on the Victorian period is a testimony to this fact. Hence, the overt moral preaching that the Victorian 'sages' imparted upon the 'barbaric' natives seems nothing but sham now. In *The History of Sexuality. Vol I*, Foucault argues about the Victorian age: "A great sexual sermon... has chastised the old order"; and while doing so has created a 'repressive hypothesis'. By quoting Foucault, I am trying to suggest that any sexual expression that did not fall under the purview of the heterosexual matrix of domesticity went through a form of repression. And when there is repression there is bound to be backlash. The phenomenon of prostitution that plagued both London and Calcutta during the nineteenth century can be considered to be a backlash of this overt Puritanical morality that prevailed in the age. Srikanta, however, does not fit into the already established 'sex role'<sup>5</sup> as he is neither Puritanical nor moral. A look at Srikanta's life would further justify this stance.

*Srikanta* begins with a detailed description of the household of the titular persona. It starts off with the book entitled 'The River'. It relates to Srikanta's sensual years in relation to nature. However, this section is also remembered for its immortal description of the powerful character of Indranath who never reappears in the novel. The domesticated young boy Srikanta perhaps learns the bohemian ways due to Indranath. Indranath takes Srikanta out for notorious activities. For instance, they visit a plagued village in an uncanny night. Indranath's courageous disposition acts as an antithesis to Srikanta's timidity.

As Srikanta grows up, he gradually starts to lose contact with his childhood mate Indranath. This transition is clearly marked by the appearance of Rajlakshmi (now Pyari Bai), the *Baiji*<sup>6</sup>, who would remain an integral part of Srikanta's life throughout the rest of the novel. Srikanta goes for a hunting expedition with some other men of 'taste'. It is on this expedition that he encounters Rajlakshmi who is performing as a singer to entertain this group of men. Srikanta often finds himself perplexed when he talks to Rajlakshmi. Srikanta, perhaps because of his feminist sensibilities, never abhors Pyari for her profession<sup>7</sup>. This leads him more into the quagmire of a very complex relationship. We come to know that they were childhood mates who read in the same school. It was reported that she died by drowning in water. But she lived on—with possibly the hope of meeting Srikanta again. She considers him to be her husband as they had exchanged a garland of *bainchi*<sup>8</sup> in their younger days. There seems to be a metaphysical note and an immense emotional desire that binds them together into a synthetic whole.

Srikanta, unable to conform to the values of domesticity, does not stay with her for a long time; though he is provided with all the comforts in the world by Rajlakshmi. His bohemianism leads him to leave all the domestic comforts that he enjoyed under the strict surveillance of Pyari. He decides to leave for Burma in order to find a job. His voyage to Burma gives us a panoramic view of the ways of the contemporary world. It was a popular trend in that period for Indians to go and settle down in Burma. However, Srikanta narrates the inhuman behavior meted out to the 'barbaric'<sup>9</sup> natives by the British-- encapsulating

<sup>5</sup> This term is often used by R.W. Connell in *Masculinities* in order to highlight the strategy of typification that heteropatriarchy (patriarchal society that always privileges heterosexuality) often endorses for both the sexes.

<sup>6</sup> Women who make money by performing as a professional singer.

<sup>7</sup> Sri Ramkrishna, who also had great feminine sensibilities, never abhorred any woman for her profession. In fact, it is reported by Biswanath Joardar, in his book (pp. 131-33), that he often called prostitutes Ma Karunamoyee (Goddess of Blessings). I am not comparing Srikanta to this legendary ascetic. However, the similarities cannot be ignored either.

<sup>8</sup> A specific kind of a flower found in the rural areas. Exchanging garlands is a sacred rite associated with Hindu marriages.

<sup>9</sup> The overtly moralizing colonisers formulated the idea that anything pagan is nothing but inhuman and barbaric.

Saratchandra's keen vision regarding social realities. It is during his voyage that he encounters another woman of immense personality, Abhaya. After meeting her, Srikanta is sucked into the vortex of desire once again. However, he does not really like the situation that he is forced into. Abhaya asks him to help her in finding a safe shelter as her companion Rohini Babu is suffering from diarrhea. Srikanta thinks that Rohini Babu is Abhaya's elder brother; but later recognizes the fact that he is her beloved. Abhaya, however, has come over to Burma in order to find out his tyrannical husband. This complex situation leaves Srikanta perplexed. When Srikanta is able to find out a job for himself, Abhaya implores him to track down his husband who allegedly lives in Burma. Srikanta is able to find him out and allows Abhaya with an opportunity to move on with his husband. But the tyrannical nature of her husband does not allow her to stay with him. She, at the end, is able to come out of this set up and move on with Rohini. The more he tries to alienate himself, the deeper he sinks into the mud of desire. Srikanta procrastinates like Hamlet; and his inability to take any firm stance is a testimony to his unmanly status. Srikanta, however, is sensitive enough to objectively appreciate Abhaya's female desire and rebel-consciousness. Burma becomes an ideal locale for Abhaya's fiery actions to unfold as the cultural ethos of the place allows women to have a voice of their own:

Burmese women are exceedingly industrious while the men are invariably lazy and shiftless. Since women are the principal breadwinners (and domestic servants, of course) it is important for them to obtain a measure of education. Men, on the other hand, can be as illiterate as they please as there is no pressure on them to provide for their families. The sight of a man living on his wife's income and frittering away his time in idle pursuits is a general one. Society does not condemn him. Neither does his wife. On the contrary, that is by and large the norm for men in Burma. ( Chattopadhyay 168)

This passage particularly intrigues me as I find in it a countertype of the stereotypical gender roles that generally pervaded the culture of India during this period. Through Srikanta, Saratchandra seems to endorse the view which is non-phallogocentric<sup>10</sup> in nature. Though Srikanta knows that he has to leave Abhaya in order to allow her to live happily, he cannot restrain himself from promising a comeback.

With the promise of returning sooner rather than later, Srikanta bids adieu to Abhaya and sets sail for Kolkata. As he returns, he gets Rajlakshmi back as she takes control of him once again. Srikanta, in the mean time, falls terribly ill, and following the doctor's order, Rajlakshmi takes her to Gangamati to have a change of atmosphere. However, their sojourn is not as delightful as they would have expected. Rajlakshmi becomes overtly spiritual and starts neglecting Srikanta. Srikanta feels miserable having to look at the terrible condition of the poor villagers. The chapter, aptly named 'Exile', gives us a panoramic view of Bengali village with its extreme poverty, casteism, taboos, and cultural ethos. As Rajlakshmi starts her alleged journey to heaven by embracing religion, Srikanta's roving heart starts another journey back to Calcutta.

When Srikanta is on a train, he accidentally meets his grandfather who inadvertently asks him to marry a desolate girl Putu who has been rejected by her prospective groom as her father could not pay the dowry. In his characteristic manner, Srikanta gives a commentary on this contemporary evil custom of dowry. Srikanta asks Rajlakshmi whether to take this step of marrying Putu; and after being refused by her, goes on to pay the dowry on behalf of her father's part by taking it from Rajlakshmi herself. His philanthropic mentality makes him everyone's favorite and he is asked to bless Putu on the day of her marriage. However, as

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<sup>10</sup> Phallogocentrism is a critical jargon coined by Jacques Derrida to refer to the privileges granted by society to the masculine (phallus).

seen earlier as well, Srikanta is unable to make it to the marriage ceremony as he meets his childhood friend Gahar on the way and ends up in an *akhra*<sup>11</sup>.

Going to *akhra* Srikanta is blown over by Kamal Lata, a *Vaishnavi*,<sup>12</sup> whose strong personality overwhelms him. Once again we see a strong woman overwhelming her. He meets the same amount of care and love from Kamal Lata as he did from Pyari. Kamal Lata finds a root in Srikanta and decides to leave the *akhra* with him in order to realize God in Vrindaban. Srikanta, though infatuated with her, does not embark upon this adventure and decides to go to Burma to resume his old work. However, when he goes back to Kolkata, Rajlakshmi takes him into her stride for the last and final time. She, by now, has been disillusioned by the ways of God and wants to embark upon a family life. Srikanta, as he has always been, is powerless to suggest anything to Rajlakshmi. Though, he tells her everything about his sojourn in the *akhra*, Rajlakshmi does not take any offense. She, in fact, decides to go and stay in the *akhra* for a while before they leave for Burma (yes, Rajlakshmi insists on going with Srikanta). Rajlakshmi and Kamal Lata, contrary to Srikanta's expectation, befriend each other and they live in great harmony while they are there. Srinakanta, however, feels devastated as he does not come to know anything about Gahar, his childhood friend who took him to the *akhra*.

Upon returning to Calcutta Rajlakshmi convinces Srikanta not to go to Burma. However, the novel ends with Srikanta's visit to *akhra* as he goes there upon hearing Gahar's death news. The last scene shows Srikanta bidding adieu to Kamal Lata as she sets out for her journey to Vrindavan, alone. Saratchandra does not state anything explicitly. But the lingering trail of Kamal Lata puts a serious question mark on Srikanta's future with Rajlakshmi.

Looking at the various stages of Srikanta's life, it will not be wrong to claim that he is not at all a normative and hegemonic man. His sojourn with Indranath early in text emphasizes the weakness inherent in his character. Unlike the other boys of the time he is afraid and timid, to say the least. His fears instantly feminise him (patriarchy assumes that Men are not supposed to be afraid). When he goes out with Indranath for an adventurous excursion, in the chapter entitled 'The River', he is often deemed as a 'coward' by his best mate. Retorting to Indranath's jibe, Srikanta, perhaps angrily, describes his feeling: "I was fifteen years old at that time and the word 'coward' stung" (13). His unmanly nature is further reinforced in the section where he (now quite grown up) is invited for a hunting expedition (where he meets Rajlakshmi). Unlike other men, he falls sick at the idea of shooting. He himself confesses his lack of 'manhood' (56). In an essay on Colonial masculinity, Joseph Sramek argues that hunting became a symbolic act of projecting one's masculinity. Sramek's observation is very useful in reading Srikanta's dilemma about his lack of manhood. Once again, we find Srikanta struggling to categorize himself within the accepted models of identity. I have already mentioned that the Bengalis were often deemed coward and unmanly by the Imperialist rulers and his cowardice is quite apparent in these sections. Srikanta's anger, which he shows to Indranath, is possibly a reflection of his hurt male ego. In the later part of the novel, however, he admits his lack of manhood candidly when Rajlakshmi chides him for being unmanly:

'Why do you force me to take these difficult decisions?'

'You are a man', Rajlakshmi laughed. 'Don't you have the strength of mind to cast me off if you think it right?'

I confessed my lack of strength with a humility that would have melted any woman's

<sup>11</sup> Akhra refers to the place where the Vaishnav and Vaishnavis took resort to while praising the glory of Lord Almighty.

<sup>12</sup> Woman devotee of Lord Krishna is referred to as Vaishnavi. They often pine for the unrequited love and bestow their soul to the almighty.

heart. 'Lakshmi', I said, 'don't make the mistake of counting me among the men of your acquaintance. They are iron men with hearts of steel and I esteem them highly. But I am human and weak. I dare not cast you off for fear that you'll really go away. And then, what will become of me? Is it not better to leave things as they are?' (452)

When Rajlakshmi considers him to be a 'lazy good-for-nothing' man, Srikanta retorts:

There is plenty of time for another try. You may get the man you deserve, yet. A strong man- tough as a betelnut; a man no one can get the better of; a yes man who never learned the word 'no'; a man who can look after himself and you and your money; a man who never falls sick, never gets lost, never- (456)

Instead of trying to become 'manly', Srikanta would rather embark upon 'feminine' activities as he elaborates his plans to Rajlakshmi:

'I'll pick flowers for (*akhra* women) at dawn. I'll weave garlands for Radha Govinda and live on their Prasad. And, when I die, they will bury me under the bakul tree. Every evening, at dusk, Padma will light a lamp over my grave but, being young and playful, she will forget-sometimes. (456)

As I have already mentioned earlier in the paper, he does not conform to the stereotypical model of manliness. He is roamer- a Ulysses like figure- who does not want the 'stinking security' of the domestic life. Even his secured life at Rajlakshmi's place does not always comfort him. Unlike other men, especially the Brahmins, he does not even bother about caste. He is 'human' and that, he believes, is his biggest identity. That is the reason why he can spend his time nonchalantly with Gahar, his childhood friend who happens to be a Muslim as well. Srikanta's little sojourn at Gahar's place is heart warming to say the least. We are reported that Gahar has acquired a huge wealth from his father; and, ironically enough, he does not know how he would spend it. He is a nature lover trying to fulfil his dream of writing an epic poem. Though his Miltonic project is deemed to be a failure, his love for the marginalized can never be ignored. Gahar and Srikanta seem to strike the same cord that creates a beautiful association between them. Gahar, just like Srikanta, is no normative man. This association is beautifully expressed by Gahar himself, as he says: "'Do you *have* to go to Burma, Srikanta? We are both alone in the world. Why don't we spend our lives together, here, where we were born? (345)'" Though Srikanta neglects Gahar's proposal, his heart often pines for him, especially when he visits the *akhra* again with Rajlakshmi. Whether there is any queer implication is a matter of conjecture that scholars may further look into.

Traditional critics tend to find Srikanta unattractive compared to the female characters in the novel. I am of the opinion that it is his lack of prototypical masculinity that renders him this repulsiveness. I, however, would assert that Srikanta's masculinity, or the lack of it, is a subversion of the established standards. By (unconsciously) revolting against the standards of the contemporary ethics, aesthetics and morality of masculinity, Srikanta emerges as an alternative figure of masculinity in the Nationalist period. In his book *Masculinities*, R. W. Connell argues that men's bodies are the "bearers of a natural masculinity produced by the evolutionary pressures that have borne down upon the human stock." (46) He further argues that these 'evolutionary pressures' create tendencies in men such as "aggression, family life, competitiveness, political power, hierarchy, territoriality, promiscuity..." (46). One may term him promiscuous, but other than that Srikanta cannot be fitted into any the above mentioned categories.

### Conclusion:

In his book, *Contested Masculinity*, Nalin Jayasena notes that the Imperialist project was a Masculine one; and it was often threatened in the Victorian period by: a) the emergence of New Woman and b) a gradually increasing discourse on homosexuality. I am of the opinion that effeminacy in men gives rise to an apprehensiveness regarding his sexuality. The treatment meted out to Oscar Wilde is widely documented and it possibly proves my claim.



Srikanta's proclamation that he is not a 'strong' man can similarly give rise to a lot of doubt regarding his masculine postulation. Though his lack of manliness does not make him effeminate to a degree of homosexuality, it certainly destabilizes the existing pattern of gender relations and models that prevailed in that period. Jeff Hearn, like Foucault and others, observes that nineteenth century gave rise to stereotypical gender roles. The husband and wife became an archetypal model of gender relation; and men were supposed to be breadwinners looking after his female (possibly children) dependant within the domestic sphere of home. Keeping this view in mind, we can see that Srikanta, filled with feminine sensibilities, cannot be categorized within these stereotypical models. He is not a breadwinner; nor is He and Rajlakshmi archetypal husband and wife. Throughout his life he has been able to carefully (and possibly consciously) avoid the trappings of domesticity. In their case, it is Rajlakshmi who appears to be the principal breadwinner. The gender roles are undoubtedly ideologically conflated; and, if so, Srikanta's masculinity is, indeed, a huge point of subversion. Connell also argues, "In gender processed, the everyday conduct of life is organized in relation to a reproductive arena" (71). A man is often judged by his ability to reproduce. In fact, it is the very basis of heterosexual matrix<sup>13</sup>. Srikanta's masculinity is threatened from this perspective as well. He is unmarried and he, though old enough, has not given birth to a child. The social organization is at severe risk by this (possibly unconscious) subversive act of Srikanta. Using Helen Hacker's phrase<sup>14</sup> one might argue that Srikanta does not carry the 'burdens of masculinity'; and hence he can emphatically proclaim that he is 'human and weak'-- someone who is difficult to pigeonhole. As Sergius does in *Arms and the Man*, we may cry out 'What a man! Is he a man?'

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<sup>13</sup> I have borrowed this phrase from Judith Butler who, in turn, has borrowed it from Monique Wittig's notion of "heterosexual contract". The term refers to the cultural processes that naturalize bodies, genders and desires.

<sup>14</sup> R.W. Connell borrows this phrase in *Masculinities* to substantiate his argument.

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