

The Changing Roles of Women and Modern India

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Abstract:

Gender roles in contemporary India have experienced an important shift due to changes in cultural, political as well as socio-economic factors. Indian society has always been characterized by strict gender roles based on patriarchal traditions. Men dominated the public and economic sectors, while women were mostly restricted to familial responsibilities. However, changes in these attitudes have been driven by urbanization, globalization, and the impact of media and education. Despite positive changes, issues like female wage disparities, a lack of representation in leadership roles, and deeply rooted cultural prejudices still exist. This paper examines how gender roles are changing in India, emphasizing achievements, current challenges, and prospects to build an equitable society. It analyses the interplay of tradition and modernity which shapes the discourse on gender roles, reflecting a complex but hopeful trajectory towards equality.

Keywords: Gender Roles, Change, Modern India.

INTRODUCTION

Every Individual in any society experiences a change in status as a result of the universal phenomena of an evolving social structure. A shift in one area of the social structure affects other areas of society as well. The increasing adaptability and shifts in the gender roles of men and women are emerging concepts in modern India. However, while discussing women and their issues, the societal reform process is not always steady. Because not all women are experiencing change in the same way or across all domains. In the global Gender gap Report, India was placed in the position 135 out of 146 countries taken for the research. This report was based on the measures of women's health, economic involvement, career opportunities, health, survival and political empowerment. Additionally, it shows that women are still absent from Indian public spaces. The concept of equality is accepted in some sections of Indian society today, but not in others. A few years ago, domestic abuse was not considered as violence, rather it was considered a very conventional part of marriage. It was just accepted as the social norm. However, the concept and perception of violence have been changed over the years. Many women are now started confronting violence against them in their families and outside. No doubt, the Domestic Violence act of 2005 has changed the life of many women in positive way. The evolving idea of sexuality is another significant trend in Indian society. These days, diverse gender types are more visible. Important judgements have been rendered, such as the recognition of transgender people as third gender.

Indian society continues to be regulated by a particular social structure that is built on class disparities, caste hierarchy, and mandatory institutions like marriage and family. One's name, caste, status, and gender identity are all inherited from their family. It informs the individual of their place in the social hierarchy. Individual is provided with both privileges and discriminations. In contemporary India, the family can be

considered the fundamental unit that serves as the foundation for all disparities. Strict ideals about what a man and woman should do, how they should act, or how they should carry out their well-defined responsibilities form the very foundation of the family. Women who marry outside of their caste or religion are often seen as more dangerous to the existing system than men who marry outside of their society. Because it is presumed that women should preserve their family's identity. The maintenance of a particular social order that continues the traditional hierarchies, regulates women's sexuality, and enables patriarchy to preserve its power in contemporary India which is the reason of anxiety and fear. Women are expected to speak and act according to a certain code. There is a fear of retaliation when someone tries to cross that line. It makes people afraid of losing their loved ones, children or their family's honour. The goal of this study is to investigate how gender roles have evolved over the time in India. Understanding how sociological, cultural, and economic factors are reshaping gender roles in contemporary India is the main objective of the study. In the current Indian context, conventional gender norms are undoubtedly evolving, though the process is slow. The majority of educated women are now financially independent, more women are pursuing higher education, and our government has implemented more legislative changes. The dynamics of the family are now shifting. These days, women are not limited to the conventional roles of taking care of the home, the children, and the elderly. However, there is still apprehension when discussing whether or not traditional gender roles have entirely evolved. Whether women are now burdened with more roles than they were in the past? What about enduring issues like salary disparities and their potential causes, as well as the underrepresentation of women in politics and leadership roles? Have traditional gender roles been complicated by caste, class, geography, and religion? The goal of the current study is to analyse these questions. How to determine whether gender roles and responsibilities have changed in society in order to make India really a developed country. The purpose of the following section is to examine the ways in which women's traditional gender roles have changed over time, as well as the challenges and changes that contemporary Indian women confront. This is dwelled upon strong theoretical approach on gender roles.

Theoretical Framework:

"Role theory" is another widely accepted theoretical perspective on women's employment, role and status. The "work-family conflict perspective" and the "role enhancement perspective" are two further subcategories of this paradigm. Studies on inter-role conflict is the base from where the work-family conflict paradigm got its origin. It is assumed that there is constant tension between job and family. The idea that human energy is fixed and restricted is linked with an emphasis on incompatible role demands. The "scarcity hypothesis" is a common term used to describe this viewpoint (Barnett, Marshall & Singer, 1992). Therefore, the more roles a person, usually a woman plays, the more demand there is on her energy, and as a result, she quickly depleted her supplies. Because of this, a woman usually has to deal with conflict and friction between several positions, which has a price. Psychological anguish, reduced marital satisfaction, and lower work satisfaction result from this. The term "work-family conflict" first appeared in the 1980s, when women's (including married women's) labor force involvement surged. At the time, there were fewer and fewer clear divisions between the two spheres of existence characterized as work, the domain of men, and family, the domain of women. The work-family boundary has been described as involving ongoing tension and conflict since the prevailing idea was that work and family are separate and constantly compete for limited resources like time and energy (Barnett, 1998). The "Role Enhancement" perspective, as opposed to the "Work-Family Conflict" perspective, stems from

psychological well-being research. The recognition of risk factors for outcomes related to mental, physical, and emotional health have caused the most concern. This perspective's central argument is that, generally speaking, playing multiple roles is not harmful. Instead, both men and women benefit from them. Human energy is assumed to be a potentially expandable resource. It is possible to boost one's own energy supply by playing several roles. The emphasis is on the positive connection between work and family responsibilities (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). The influence of the paid work job on married women with children is the main focus here. However, for males who are married and working, the emphasis is different, with a focus on the duties of partner and parent. This viewpoint supports the idea that having more roles lowers the amount of stress-related mental and physical well-being, in contrast to the earlier claim that having more roles equates to increased stress. Therefore, women's health and quality of life may benefit from combining the job position with their traditional roles as mothers and wives. Earning a salary, taking on challenging tasks, using all of one's skills, and having access to health insurance are some advantages of adding the employee role (Barnett & Marshall, 1993).

To examine the evolving roles of women in India, let's examine a few research and reports. A paper examines how gender norms and attitudes have changed across the 26 nations that were examined. It revealed that there has been a decrease in unequal gender attitudes and preferences of men. However, this is not equal in all the domains. For example, though there has been a significant positive change in women's economic decision-making power in families, still no such changes are seen when it comes to intimate partner violence or in case of decisions regarding reproductive goals and son preference. According to the study, although both genders are changing, men's perspectives are still less egalitarian, indicating that despite the progress, there is still a difference between men's and women's gender attitudes and roles (Kurian, 2024). In a recent survey conducted by the Pew Research Centre, about 30,000 persons from all over India were questioned about their thoughts and feelings about gender roles and gender views. Many respondents expressed egalitarian view regarding gender roles at home. Almost sixty-two percent of Indians believe that both the parents should equally be in charge of raising children. But a sizable portion of the population still adheres to traditional gender norms. Thirty-four percent of adults believe that women should be the primary caregivers for children. Similarly, although 54 percent of respondents believe that both men and women in households should be in charge of making money, 43 percent believe that males should bear the majority of this responsibility. It's interesting to note that eight out of ten people believe that men need to have more employment rights than women. Furthermore, the majority of adult men and women comprising 56 percent completely agree with the assertion. Almost 51 percent of the respondents agree that training men to respect women is an important step for improving women's safety. Not surprisingly, while 53 percent of women supports the opinion, a slight less of 48 percent of men support the same view. Another 27 percent of men believe that another way to keep girls safe is to teach them appropriate behaviour. Eighty-two percent of men and seventy-seven percent of women believe that traditional gender roles are just and correct, including the notion that men should make decisions about family finances, that sons should care for elderly parents, and that a wife should always obey her husband, among other ideas (Pew Research Centre, 2022). In another study, the sociological aspects of gender inequality have been emphasized using the Census data from 1901 to 2011 of India. It analysed the issues like differential sex ratio, sex-selective abortion, female infanticide, dowry deaths etc. the result of the research shows that gender inequality still continues which reinforces the fact that earlier beliefs and norms do not vanish altogether, rather adapt to the current societal conditions. This study contends that despite India's current image as a modern nation with economic growth and technological innovation, patriarchy

and the Hindu custom of women defining their subordination to male authority still exist in India (Condorelli, 2015).

Methodology:

"Women's Roles in Indian Society" serves as the unit of analysis of the present study. An exploratory and descriptive approach has been used to analyse the main goals of this paper. In order to ascertain the impact and offer policy recommendations, data has been gathered from secondary sources, which includes research articles published in journals, magazines, write-ups, the main gist of policy briefs on women, NEWS papers, and official documents. The following database were searched for this literature: JStore, Research Gate, and Google Scholar.

Remapping Changing Roles of Women:

First, let's talk about India's traditional gender norms. In the past, women were frequently regarded as men's equals. These rights started to erode over time, and gender roles solidified. During the medieval era, women's standing declined, social rules tightened, and they were limited to household duties. Child marriage and Purdah become widespread customs. There were opportunities and challenges throughout the colonial era. introduction of new legislation and an educational system that affected women's standing in different ways. Feminist movements first started in late nineteenth century and took a speed in early twentieth century. These movements started to fight against issues such as child marriage, neglect of women's education and trouble of widow remarriage. Great women leaders such as Pandit Ramabai, Savitribai Phule and Sarojini Naidu started campaigning for women's rights and education. In post-independence India, the period of 1970s was an important landmark time when Dalit and Adivasi women's struggles came to the light. This era also saw women's awareness against gender violence across caste and class. The contemporary feminist movements go a step forward raising the question of gender inequality at workplace to unequal pay. Social media is now playing an important role in making aware of the gender discriminations at various domains of Indian society. Numerous constitutional amendments are put into effect. Equality before the law is guaranteed by Article 14. Gender discrimination is forbidden by Article 15. The Vishaka Guidelines, which address sexual harassment in the workplace is one of the historic rulings from the Supreme Court (Haranath et al., 2020).

We may conclude from an analysis of traditional gender roles that there were strict gender roles with characteristics classified as masculine and feminine. It was believed that women should take care of the home and that men should provide for basic needs. Women were viewed as men's property and the lesser sex. There was a distinct division of labour at home under the joint family structure. Men were given preference in the distribution of responsibilities and obligations. The status, role, and even position of women within society must be taken into account in any study of it. Despite historical and cultural variations, gender roles and norms are nevertheless fundamental components of all social systems in India. Taking care of the home is the main responsibility of women and girls in Indian culture. Her status is strongly tied to her roles as a mother and a wife. On the other hand, Indian males are believed to support their families financially throughout their lives (Patel & Parmentier, 2005).

Modern India's shifting gender roles and flexibility are a result of a number of causes, including shifting social structures, economic conditions, scientific discoveries, and shifting values. Individualism is becoming more and more important as the effects of industrialization and westernization, as well as the widespread acceptance of the nuclear family may be the primary causes of the gender role flexibility we

currently observe. Women have the same access to higher education that men have, and they are free to choose their own spouses and careers. According to Hussain et al. (2015), they are now transcending the conventional gender roles. Today Such a distinction is impossible in the nuclear setup. The woman is no longer only the caregiver and the man is no longer only the provider of a household.

An additional earning member is required to augment the family's primary income as the joint family's financial security has ceased to exist and living expenses are rising in parallel with the cost of raising children. The woman was not given any assistance earlier. As a result, she had to fulfil the responsibilities of a housewife and as an additional earner for the family. In contemporary India, women have gradually come to embrace the gender role of men. However, men in contemporary India are still reluctant to share or accept the role of women. In households, daughters are expected to combine their careers and become effective homemakers, even if they have equal access to education as sons and few of them achieve professional success. However, sons are largely expected to succeed in careers. The irony of gender norms is that men's attempts to share household chores are praised and supported by their peers. However, any positive work that women do in the workplace is viewed as a challenge to male dominance. To demonstrate that they are on par with men at work, they must consistently put in effort and prove themselves. There is no denying that education is changing conventional gender roles. Gender equality is made possible by an educated society, which also provides a framework for overall development. However, it is hard to consider home life without highlighting the importance of gender role flexibility. In this setting of gender role flexibility, rural society still has an extended way to go. According to some research, gender roles in various countries can be influenced by institutional elements such as family structure, religious practice, and religious organizations, in addition to the degree of modernity (Voicu & Constantin, 2014).

Research indicates that exposure to media stereotypes has a considerable impact on people's views and expectations regarding traditional gender roles (Herret-Skjellum & Allen, 1996). The social structure and the cultural dynamics are the most important variables in analysing gender roles and gender inequality in any society. Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen explores different types of inequality in contemporary Indian society in his famous book "The Argumentative Indian" (Sen, 2005). He is basically talking about seven types of gender inequality based on parameters such as mortality, natality, basic facility, special opportunity, professional and ownership, and household inequality. In India women's mortality is higher because of inadequate and biased healthcare facilities. This is known as "survival inequality." Female foeticide results from the preference for male children, who are typically thought to possess higher physical and mental qualities is known as "natality inequality." It is absolutely disheartening to witness girls being denied the fundamental right to life in a nation that has long celebrated women intellectuals. Nonetheless, the notion that women lack intelligence is not unique to India. Women in the United States were not granted the right to vote until 1920. The macho ego and the conservative gender orientation are the main causes of the issues metropolitan women face at work. Compared to their predecessors, men in the current generation have likely felt more emasculated. Having grown up in a traditional setting where women were expected to take care of the family, they now have to face them as their rivals in every sector. The term "glass ceiling" refers to a subtle type of subordination that has now emerged in the workplace.

Recommendations:

A fundamental structural shift in family and education is what we require. Inequality is ingrained in Indian education from an early age, not only via textbooks in classrooms but also through socialization at homes. Sexual division of labour is the basis for a structural shift in the family. Because the assumption that men

are in charge of production and women are in charge of reproduction is normalized by families. Even while many women in today's society work in production, very few men are engaged in the lengthy process of reproduction, which includes not only childbearing but also childrearing. Due to obligations to their children, many women resigned from higher positions at work. Boys and girls are socialized differently from an early age. Many girls are conscious of their limitations by the time they are eighteen. Because, to them, education is the key to finding a compatible spouse. For boys, on the other hand, achieving professional success comes first. Therefore, it is imperative that families provide equal weight to the education of boys and girls (Menon, 2023).

In contemporary India, we require multi-level discourse. It is a very effective tool for encouraging critical thinking and change in both men and women. However, equality, communication, and mutual empowerment ought to be the cornerstones of the conversation. Men must be included in the process since they contribute to both the problem and the solution. Speaking with those who have a similar goal must be the initial step in the conversation. However, the caste, class, age, and gender hierarchies should be carefully considered. As identity and duties evolve with age, it is also a significant component. The second level of communication must be with those who might be our allies. We might begin at home where there are many members who might not have considered these options. We might initiate a conversation with our parents, siblings, uncles, and neighbours who haven't considered an option. Lastly, a third level of communication must be with the state, the law, the police, or the court, which uphold a rigid social order. However, such conversation can only begin when there is aggressive behaviour. If not, it is preferable to isolate this circle and concentrate more on the second population circle (Menon, 2023).

First, gender assumptions that roles are inevitably linked to biological sex must be debunked at a micro level. The idea that a man should be the only provider for his family has to be shattered in contemporary India, where men and women are equally educated. Second, it is important to recognize the role that fathers play in sharing parental duties. Thirdly, rules that support the balance between work and family should be in place, along with flexible work schedules, child care, and transportation. Fourthly, parents should serve as role models in their families to demonstrate the flexibility of gender roles so that kids can understand that a person's gender does not define their possibilities or skills. So, the children can learn a wider variety of options for their own future. Fifth, there should be open and honest discussion regarding gender role expectations, wants, and difficulties within a marriage alliance. The spouses will become more cooperative and understanding as a result of this open opinions about their goals. Finally, it's critical to create a network of friends, family, and peers who can help families deal with gender role shifts by sharing their experiences and encouraging resilience and support amongst one another.

A Way Forward:

There is no doubt that an increased educational and employment opportunities brought about by the process of modernization and globalization have given us a chance to re-examine the role of women at home as well as outside be it office, politics or entrepreneurship. Now time has come to dismantle the stereotypes regarding women's traditional roles of housewife and care taker as there is a growing recognition of women's role in many fields traditionally dominated my men only. However, deeply ingrained gender norms still captivate public perceptions as India has been always dominated by cultural traditions. Though Indian society has changed structurally by the impact of modernization, still functionally gender-role stereotypes does not change with it. Indians are not yet ready to accept the quick changes which questions the traditional power dynamics in caste, class and gender. There are various

policies, legislative measures and movements to create a gender equality, but sadly sometimes it fails to encourage true gender parity because of the intersectionality. It is important to address the unique challenges faced by different groups of women. It is also important to address issues such as underrepresentation of women in historically male-dominated jobs, salary disparities and unequal distribution of household chores. It is a high time to start a dialogue not only about the women's achievements, but also about the trajectories to create a just society to make India a truly modern and developed country.

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