



Gender Roles and Changing Perspectives in Indian Society

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Abstract

This research paper looks at the changing “Gender Contract” in present-day India, and it studies the shift from traditional, status-based roles to more modern and negotiated identities. As we all know, in our country, social roles are slowly changing. By using a descriptive and analytical method based on Social Constructivist theory, the study explains how economic growth, digital reach, and new laws connect with long-standing patriarchal systems. The analysis uses important secondary data, including the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) and key legal cases like the NALSA judgment, to show a continuing “Domestic Paradox.” The findings show that even though Indian women are gaining strong agency in professional fields—especially in STEM and leadership—they still carry a “dual burden” of unpaid household work. This is something commonly seen among Indian people. The paper also looks at how masculinity is changing among urban millennials and how media plays an important role in shaping public thinking. The study finally says that gender in India is not a fixed binary anymore but a wide spectrum affected by caste, class, and region. To reduce the gap between laws and social mindset, it suggests gender-neutral education from early years. Overall, it presents a clear picture of a society in transition, where progress is happening, but in an uneven way.

Keywords; Patriarchy, Gender Socialization, Egalitarianism, Femininity, Masculinity, Socio-economic Empowerment, LGBTQ+ Rights

Introduction

The journey of gender identity in India has passed through different stages. In the Vedic period, many historical sources show that women had a more equal place, taking part in learning and religious activities. But over time, this slowly changed into stricter patriarchal systems. Later, colonial rule also fixed certain social hierarchies, and this reduced the earlier flexibility in gender roles. After independence, India’s leaders tried to change this path. The Constitution of India gave a clear

promise of equality, but as commonly seen among Indian people, changing thinking takes much more time than changing laws. Even after having progressive laws—like those supporting inheritance rights and banning dowry—a clear “Problem Statement” still exists. There is a visible gap between modern laws and cultural practices. While courts may accept women as equal, the “community court” in society often still follows old traditions. This creates a situation where India looks modern legally, but socially it remains traditional, with a strong preference for male lineage in many families. The main “Research

Question” today looks at how economic growth and digital access are bringing change. As India grows as a global tech centre, more women are joining the workforce than ever before. At the same time, smartphones and the internet have made information easy to access. This helps both rural and urban women move beyond traditional limits. Slowly, this is changing the “Gender Contract,” which is the unspoken rule about power and responsibilities in the home. Even though workspaces are becoming more open, the home space still follows old patriarchal ideas. This leads to what we call the “dual burden”: The Professional Front: Women are encouraged to study, work, and become financially independent. The Private Front: Women are still expected to manage the home and take care of the family. Because of this, many Indian women today handle a “second shift” at home after finishing their office work. True equality is still not fully achieved, as long as housework is seen as a woman’s duty and not a shared role. Progress is clearly happening, but it is uneven, with more growth in public life than in private life.

Objectives of the Study

- To trace the evolution of gender roles in India from the 20th century to the present.
- To analyze the impact of women’s workforce participation on family dynamics.
- To investigate the changing perceptions of “masculinity” among Indian youth.
- To evaluate the role of media and law in challenging gender stereotypes.

Literature Review

Many Indian social systems can be linked back to the Manusmriti, which earlier defined strict roles for women and kept them dependent on male family members at different stages of life. This created a setup where women’s roles were mostly limited to the home. But at the same time, Indian history also shows strong opposing voices. The Bhakti movement came as an important reform force, where saints like Mirabai and Akka Mahadevi questioned both patriarchy and caste limits. Their ideas gave women a sense of independence, showing that Indian tradition is not just about control, but also about change and negotiation. In modern times, feminist scholars in India have given useful ways to understand these power systems. Uma Chakravarti introduced the idea of “Brahmanical Patriarchy,” which explains how controlling women’s choices helped maintain caste purity and property systems. This shows that gender inequality is closely linked with the larger social order. At the same time, Vandana Shiva has played a key role in Ecofeminism. She explains that the exploitation of women and nature comes from similar patriarchal and colonial roots. By showing how rural women protect biodiversity, she highlights that women’s empowerment is important for environmental balance.

While theory explains the reasons, the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) gives real data about the situation. Recent reports clearly show a gap in household work and decision-making. Even though women’s education levels are rising, as commonly seen among Indian people, the load of unpaid care work is still mostly carried by women. Domestic Labor: Women spend much more time on housework than men, whether they are working outside or not. Decision-Making: More women are now part of financial decisions, but equal control over property or health choices is still not the same in all states. A new area of study now looks at the idea of the

“New Indian Manhood.” As the economy changes and women move ahead in careers, old ideas of men being the only earners are slowly getting challenged. Researchers notice a kind of identity confusion among men, who are balancing traditional expectations and modern realities. This is important because it shows that the “Gender Contract” cannot change from one side only; change in male roles is also needed for true social progress.

Methodology

The study follows a descriptive and analytical design. The descriptive part focuses on showing the present condition of gender relations in a clear way, while the analytical part explains the reasons behind these patterns. Instead of doing new fieldwork, this method uses secondary data and combines existing studies to find trends over time. This helps in getting a wider, big-picture view of how national policies connect with local traditions, which is commonly seen among Indian people. To keep the research reliable, the study uses different trusted sources: Government Reports: A major source is the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), which gives strong data about household decisions, domestic work, and access to healthcare. Sociological Journals: Academic articles provide background knowledge and theoretical understanding. Comparative Case Studies: The study compares corporate spaces, where equality rules are more formal, with rural areas, where traditional values are stronger. This comparison clearly shows that social progress in India is not the same everywhere and changes at different speeds. The main theory used in this study is Social Constructivism. This idea explains that gender roles are not naturally fixed but are created by society through repeated behaviour and cultural influence.

Analysis

The change in Indian society today shows a strong tension between old traditions and new dreams. As we all know, in our country, people are trying to balance both sides. When we look at the workplace, home, education system, and laws, we can clearly see that India is going through an important phase of transition. India is now seeing a big rise in women joining STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields and taking up leadership roles. This growth is not just social progress but also very important for financial independence. When women earn their own money, they get “exit power,” which means they can leave difficult situations, and also “bargaining power” within the family. As more women enter top positions and research spaces, the idea of workplaces being only for men is slowly fading. This change is pushing companies to improve their policies and create fair and inclusive environments where talent matters more than gender. Even with this public progress, the “Domestic Paradox” is still a big challenge. As commonly seen among Indian people, even working women continue to do most of the unpaid household work. Reports show that Indian women spend almost ten times more hours on housework and caregiving than men. This creates “time poverty” for women, leaving them with less time to relax, build connections, or improve their skills. The home is still a place where traditional roles are strongly followed, and women are often expected to handle a “second shift” after their office work.

The increase in female literacy is playing a big role in bringing social change. Education does not just give job skills, but also changes how women see their own lives and future. Delayed Marriage: More education is linked to later marriages. When women spend more time studying, early marriages, which are still seen in some parts of our country, start reducing. Fertility Preferences: Educated women usually prefer smaller families. There is a clear connection between women’s education and

lower birth rates, as they focus more on health, career, and better quality of life for fewer children instead of following pressure for larger families. One of the biggest changes in India's gender system is the legal recognition of the Hijra and Transgender community. The important NALSA judgment by the Supreme Court gave "Third Gender" status and accepted that gender identity depends on personal choice, not just biology. This legal step challenges the old idea that gender is only male or female. By giving opportunities in education and jobs, the law is slowly breaking the strict divide between men and women. This change is helping society understand that gender is a spectrum, and it supports a more inclusive identity for the nation. Even though social acceptance is still growing, the base for a more open and equal future has already been set.

Discussion

One major question is why women's success at work has not brought equal balance at home. This "Double Burden" happens because women have entered careers and finance, but men have not equally taken part in household work. Society may praise a woman for earning, but still judges her based on how well she manages the home and children. This is commonly seen among Indian people. Because of this, many working women feel constant tiredness, showing that real equality at home needs a change in the belief that housework belongs only to women, instead of being a shared duty. As women become more independent in money, society, and personal life, there is often some resistance. Experts talk about a "backlash," where traditional systems try to take back control. This can be seen in different ways, including an increase in reported crimes against women. Higher reporting also shows that women are now speaking up more, but it also points to anger from those who feel their traditional authority is being challenged. When power structures are questioned, people at the top

may react strongly to protect their position. This makes the journey toward independence brave, but sometimes risky for many women. The growth of Indian media and cinema has an important role in shaping how people think. For many years, only images like the "Self-sacrificing Mother" or "Dutiful Daughter" were shown on screen. These roles supported the idea that a woman's value comes from sacrifice for the family. Now, things are slowly changing. We see more of the "Modern Independent Woman," who has her own goals and choices. These new stories help young women imagine different futures, but they also create tension with older generations who may see this independence as a challenge to tradition. Media not only shows reality but also helps in creating a new normal.

Lastly, the speed of this change depends a lot on location. In big cities, the cost of living is high, so families often need two incomes, which leads to a more shared division of work. City life also gives people some privacy from social pressure. On the other hand, rural areas are guided by strong family ties and land-based traditions, where gender roles are closely linked to caste and inheritance. In these places, a woman's freedom is often seen as a family matter, not a personal right. This explains why the "Gender Contract" is more strict in villages than in cities. Overall, these differences show that India is moving forward, but at different speeds in different parts of society.

Results

The recent changes in India's social and economic life show that the country is going through an active phase of adjustment. As we all know, in our country, change does not happen in a straight line. The findings suggest that even though progress is uneven, some key areas clearly show improvement in redefining the "Gender Contract." There is clear proof that women's agency is increasing, especially in areas like reproductive health and financial

independence. Women are now making more personal decisions about family planning and when to have children. At the same time, with more women joining the formal workforce, they are taking part in important financial discussions at home. This shift, from simply following family decisions to actively shaping them, shows a big change in power balance within households, which is commonly seen among Indian people today. The results also show a new pattern in urban millennial men. In cities, younger men are slowly moving toward shared parenting and household duties. Unlike earlier times, they are more open to seeing childcare and housework as shared responsibilities, not just women's work. Even though this change is mostly visible in urban areas for now, it is an important break from strict patriarchal thinking. It also shows that the idea of being a "man" is slowly expanding to include care, understanding, and partnership. Lastly, the research points out a gap between laws and real-life practice. There has been strong progress through laws like the POSH Act (Prevention of Sexual Harassment) and the Maternity Benefit Act. These laws create safety and support for equality. The results show that true acceptance of these values in daily life is still slow. Families and workplaces may follow the rules, but real equality in thinking is still developing. In simple terms, the legal structure is ready, but the social mindset is still catching up.

Conclusion

The journey of gender relations in India shows a big shift, moving from a society based on fixed "Status" to one shaped by a changing "Contract." As we all know, in our country, roles were earlier decided by birth and tradition. Now, this is slowly changing, and people are starting to shape their roles through education, work, and awareness of laws. In the past, gender roles were fixed and decided at birth, mainly based on patriarchal systems that guided a person's whole life. Today, this is slowly being

replaced by a social contract, where individuals can decide their own roles in both the economy and the family. Even though the "double burden" and unequal work at home still exist, the base of these old systems is weakening. The growing number of women in leadership and the legal acceptance of non-binary identities clearly show that rigid structures are giving way to a more flexible and fair social system, which is commonly seen among Indian people today. One important point to understand is that gender in India is no longer a simple or fixed idea. It is now a changing spectrum, closely connected with other social factors. Intersectionality: A person's gender experience is strongly influenced by their class, caste, and place of living. Diversity of Experience: For example, an urban, upper-class professional woman faces different issues compared to a rural Dalit woman or someone from the transgender community. Understanding these differences is very important for real social progress. To make sure this progress continues, the focus should shift towards "Gender-Neutral" education. Real change cannot happen only in offices or courts; it must start from childhood. When children learn that household work, emotions, and career goals are human qualities, not linked to gender, it helps remove bias from the beginning. True equality will come when the next generation sees gender not as a rulebook, but as one part of identity that does not limit anyone's potential.

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