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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. 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 an 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 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 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 people. The paper also looks at how masculinity's 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 education from early years. Overall it presents a 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 gone through stages. In the period many historical sources show that women had a more equal place participating in learning and religious activities.. Over time this slowly changed into stricter patriarchal systems. Later colonial rule also fixed 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 promise of equality but as commonly seen among Indian people changing thinking takes much more

time than changing laws. After having progressive laws—like those supporting inheritance rights and banning dowry—a clear "Problem Statement" still exists. There is a gap between modern laws and cultural practices. While courts may accept women as equal the "community court" in society often still follows traditions. This creates a situation where India looks modern legally. 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 accessre bringing change. As India grows as a global tech centre more women are joining the workforce than before. At the time smartphones and the internet have made information easy to access. This helps both rural and urban women move beyond limits. Slowly this is changing the "Gender Contract," which's the unspoken rule about power and responsibilities in the home. Even though workspaces are becoming more open the home space still follows patriarchal ideas. This leads to what we call the " 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 " shift" at home after finishing their office work. True equality is still not fully achieved, long as housework is seen as a woman's duty and not a shared role. Progress is clearly happening. 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 traced back to the Manusmriti. The Manusmriti set roles for women and kept women dependent on male family members at different stages of life. This set up meant that women's roles were mostly confined to the home. Indian history also contains strong voices that opposed this. The Bhakti movement was a reform force. Saints such as Mirabai and Akka Mahadevi questioned both patriarchy and caste limits. Their ideas gave women a sense of independence showing that Indian tradition is not about control but also about change and negotiation. In times feminist scholars in India have offered useful ways to understand these power systems. Uma Chakravarti introduced the idea of "Brahmanical Patriarchy." The Brahmanical Patriarchy explains how controlling women's choices helped maintain purity and property systems. This shows that gender inequality is closely linked with the social order. At the time Vandana Shiva has played a key role in Ecofeminism. Vandana Shiva explains that the exploitation of women and nature comes from patriarchal and colonial roots. By showing how rural women protect biodiversity Vandana Shiva highlights that women's empowerment is important for balance. While theory explains the reasons the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) gives 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 seen among Indian people the load of unpaid care work is still mostly carried by women. Labor: Women spend much more time on housework than men whether women work outside or not. Decision-Making: More women are now part of 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 earners are slowly getting challenged. Researchers notice a kind of identity confusion among men, who are balancing expectations and modern realities. This is important because it shows that the "Gender Contract" cannot change from one side only; change, in roles is also needed for true social progress.

Methodology

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

Analysis

The change in society today shows a strong tension between old traditions and new dreams. As we all know in India 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 a phase of transition. India is now seeing a rise in women joining STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) fields and taking up leadership roles. This growth is not just progress but also very important for financial independence. When women earn their money women get "exit power," which means women can leave difficult situations and also "bargaining power" within the family. As more women enter 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 inclusive environments where talent matters more than gender. With this public progress the "Domestic Paradox" is still a big challenge. As commonly seen among people even working women continue to do most of the unpaid household work. Reports show that Indian women spend ten times more hours on housework and caregiving than Indian men. This creates "time poverty" for women leaving women with 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 " shift" after their office work.

The increase in literacy is playing a big role in bringing social change. Education does not just give job skills. Also changes how women see their own lives and future. Delayed Marriage: More education is linked to marriages. When women spend time studying, early marriages, which are still seen in some parts of India start reducing. Fertility Preferences: Educated women usually prefer families. There is a connection between women's education and lower birth rates as women focus more on health, career and better quality of life for fewer children instead of following pressure for larger families. One of

the 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. Accepted that gender identity depends on personal choice, not just biology. This legal step challenges the idea that gender is only male or female. By giving opportunities in education and jobs the law is slowly breaking the divide between men and women. This change is helping society understand that gender is a spectrum. It supports a more inclusive identity for the nation. Even though social acceptance is still growing, the base, for an open and equal future has already been set.

Discussion

One major question is why womens success at work has not brought balance at home. This "Double Burden" happens because women have entered careers and finance. Men have not equally taken part in household work. Society may praise a woman for earning. Still judges her based on how well she manages the home and children. This is commonly seen among people. Because of this many working women feel 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 control. This can be seen in ways, including an increase in reported crimes against women. Higher reporting also shows that women are now speaking up more. 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 but sometimes risky for many women. The growth of media and cinema has an important role in shaping how people think. For years only images like the "Self-sacrificing Mother" or "Dutiful Daughter" were shown on screen. These roles supported the idea that a womans value comes from sacrifice for the family. Now things are slowly changing. We see more of the "Modern Independent Woman," who has her goals and choices. These new stories help young women imagine futures but they also create tension with older generations who may see this independence as a challenge to tradition. Media not shows reality but also helps in creating a new normal. Lastly the speed of this change depends a lot on location. In 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 pressure. On the 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 womans freedom is often seen as a family matter, not a right. This explains why the "Gender Contract" is more strict in villages than in cities. Overall these differences show that India is moving forward. At different speeds, in different parts of society.

Results

The recent changes in India's 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 line. The findings suggest that even though progress is uneven some key areas clearly show improvement in redefining the "Gender Contract." There is proof that women's agency is increasing, especially in areas like reproductive health and financial independence. Women are now making personal decisions about family planning and when to have children. At the time with more women joining the formal workforce they are taking part in important financial discussions at home.

This shift, from 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 pattern in urban millennial men. In cities younger men are slowly moving toward shared parenting and household duties. Unlike 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 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 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 life is still slow. Families and workplaces may follow the rules. Real equality, in thinking is still developing. In terms the legal structure is ready but the social mindset is still catching up.

Conclusion

The journey of how men and women relate in India has changed a lot. It used to be a society where people were given a fixed "Status" based on birth. Now it is becoming a society where people shape their lives through a changing "Contract." As everyone knows in our country people used to have roles decided by birth and old traditions. Now this is. People are starting to create their own roles through education, jobs and learning about laws. In the past gender roles were. Decided at birth mostly because of old systems that told people how to live their lives. Now this is slowly being replaced by a kind of agreement, where people can choose their roles in both work and family. Even though some problems still exist, like the work women do at home and the unfair treatment the old systems are getting weaker. More and more women are taking leading positions. The law is starting to accept people who are not strictly male or female. These signs show that strict rules are being replaced by a system that's more open and fair and this is something you can see in India today. One important thing to remember is that gender in India is not an fixed idea anymore. It is now a changing range of possibilities connected with parts of life. Intersectionality: A person's experience with gender is strongly shaped by their class, their caste and where they live. Diversity of Experience: For example a woman who lives in a city and belongs to a class has different problems than a woman from a rural area who is part of a lower caste or someone who is transgender. Understanding these differences is very important for progress in society. To keep this progress going the focus should be on "Gender-education. Real change can't only happen in offices or courts. It has to start when kidsre young. When children are taught that housework, emotions and job goals are things all people have not, for one gender it helps stop bias from the start. True equality will come when the next generation sees gender not as a set of rules but as part of who they're and it does not stop them from becoming whatever they want.

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