

Perspectives on Gender Identity and its Impacts on Indian Families in the 21st Century

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Gender identity and relationships are the most important cultural factors since they have an impact on how people behave in their families, social circles, and workplaces. Due to the cultural connotations attached to being male or female, gender acts as an organising principle for society. Every element of social interaction is influenced by ideas about the masculine and feminine. These notions serve to define gender, and it is through them that each culture develops its own conception of what is masculine and feminine. However, modern Indian families have changed significantly as a result of industrialization, urbanisation, globalisation, improved educational possibilities, subsequent exposure to western ideas and traditions, and the fight for equal rights and status for women. The modern Indian family is in a phase where structural changes are taking place but are not always accompanied by psychological changes. Stereotypical ideas of femininity and masculinity have changed in some very noticeable ways. Gender awareness encourages personal development and empowerment by creating an environment where both men and women, including boys and girls, can realise their full potential. Gender awareness leads to gender equity.

Key Words: Gender identity, culture, family, feminine, masculine, patriarchy

Introduction

Gender is a socio-cultural construct that provides an implicit framework for demonstrating how various sex categories in a society generally relate to one another. The prevailing anatomical concepts support societal ideas of gender¹. This has created the idea that there are only two types of human bodies: female and male. The gender binary reinforces this notion by defining which actions and traits are considered feminine and which are considered masculine.

In very simple words, we can define culture as the embodiment of our thoughts and behaviors. It also includes things that we have acquired through our membership in the society. Every society has culture interwoven into its foundation. Aspects of culture include your way of thinking, your manner of doing things, the language you use, and the God you choose to worship. Culture can be used to describe all of humankind's accomplishments while living in social groups². The beliefs, values, and attitudes of an individual, as well as their modes of perception and cognition and activity habits, are all examples of their culture. A human-made environment is referred to as a culture, which comprises all of the tangible and intangible outcomes of collective life that are passed down from one generation to the next³. In other words, it is a consistent pattern of human behaviour and knowledge that functions as a means as well as a result of transferring knowledge to future generations. Ideas about the masculine and feminine influence all aspects of social relationships⁴. Gender is defined by these conceptions, and it is through them that a culture's unique view of what is masculine and feminine is formed.

Gender appears to be one of the most powerful variables that influence human development from birth to death, particularly in Indian society. The experiences of a person born into an Indian family are entirely gendered. The concept of gender clarifies how society creates distinctions between girls and boys, as well as between women and men. Men and women have different ways of experiencing the world. These distinctions, which are created by society and experienced by women in different ways, serve as the foundation for inequity in their relationships. The ideal and acceptable cultural role

of a woman becomes a controversial subject that is hardly measurable in a consistent manner in India, where religious myths and traditional attitudes define virtues and vices, and these in turn mould public conception to form the social culture.

Methodology

Analytical and descriptive methods were used in the research for this article. The primary and secondary sources that are considered lay the groundwork for the analytical process. Numerous books, periodicals, and other sources were used to compile the data. Discussions with my teachers and experts in the field helped in the analysis of the subject matter.

Indian patriarchal family system

The family is an institution that encompasses and reveals both actual behaviour and ideal and normative behaviour at the same time. It serves as a channel, enforces rules, and offers the chance for both continuity and change in relationships, marriage, and reorganising living arrangements in accordance with the times⁵. As a fundamental social institution, the family has long been valued as being essential to the growth of the individual as well as society and humanity. So, changes to family values, beliefs, and regulations are a major topic of discussion everywhere. Therefore, knowledge of the situation, the conditions, and the setting in which the change occurred is necessary for any understanding of these transitions. Understanding the gender concept from a socio-cultural Indian perspective will thus provide a foundation for emulation and further intervention for a healthy and happy family life.

Traditionally, it has been believed that the family plays a key role in determining social structures that affect gender relations⁶. It's fascinating to observe how a boy and a girl in an Indian family are trained with different sets of values from an early age. When it comes to clothing choices, behavioural indicators, responsibilities, and even verbal insults, parents treat boys and girls differently. This division of gender roles provides people with role models for desirable personality traits. By giving them precise instructions and demands to speak less, comply with authority figures, and repress their emotions, girls'

behaviour is regulated. For this reason, girls are unable to develop their skills or abilities to the same degree as boys.

In the Indian patriarchal family system, males are expected to perform societal roles of dominance and control, while females are expected to perform supportive roles. In India, the oppressive conditions faced by girls and women of all ages are supported by patriarchy, the cultural foundation for paternalistic headship. Patriarchy is a set of societal norms and systems where men rule, treat women unfairly, and take advantage of them⁷. The first lessons in patriarchy are acquired in a family where the head of the household is a man or father. The institution of family is based on inequality. It serves to preserve specific kinds of private property, ownership, and lineage, i.e., patrilineal forms of property and descent, wherein property and the family name pass from father to son⁸. Males are likely in charge of the household and have control over the sexuality, employment, fertility, and freedom of women. In other words, in patriarchal civilizations, men have greater cultural, financial, and political power than women. Women are instructed by patriarchal generations to ‘not own’ themselves and to develop in the ways they are told. Denying oneself more frequently results in denying one’s real potential, which has an impact on the state of the entire nation. Within the same family, we can see girls fading and boys thriving.

Patriarchy is a cultural normative framework that pervades our social structure. Through the development of patriarchal ideologies, which are reflected in the media, educational institutions, and knowledge system, patriarchal knowledge promotes male dominance. Regulatory norms serve as the essential foundation for gender practises. These norms are maintained by social and economic structures, which determine a person’s access to resources, culture, and power. A patriarchal societal structure is created by this set of regulations, structures, and individual behaviours. Patriarchy is more than simply a system; it is also a way of life, shown in the way we eat, dress, make love, and engage in other activities. Gender is arguably the most significant component of patriarchy. It is a relationship as well as an organising principle and a basis for understanding how men and women develop into the people they are today. This interplay between the

sexes, which is mediated by ideologies, results in the distinctive and hierarchical organisational structures of our society. Gender is a way of expressing power relationships.

The formation of gender identity

Gender roles are clearly distinct in Indian families and have an impact on children's upbringing from birth. Gender identity is the gender with which a person self-identifies. One's biological sex is inextricably linked to particular social expectations and roles. Being a woman is thought to provide extra difficulties since, in society, women are not only seen as a social category but also as a felt sense of self, a constructed or culturally conditioned subjective identity⁹. Children encounter gender-based discrimination in their interactions with others, in the sharing of family resources, and in their rights to benefits associated with family membership from an early age. Men and women have different ways of experiencing the world. These distinctions, which are created by society and experienced by women in different ways, serve as the foundation for inequity in their relationships. Parents treat boys and girls differently when it comes to clothing choices, behavioural cues, duties and responsibilities, and verbal epithets. Due to this, the child can develop his or her gender identification. When the identity of female and male is established, the community starts to divide its responsibilities based on the distinct treatment each child receives. This division of gender roles offers them examples of character traits to emulate. According to V. Geetha, categorical thinking about men and women is prevalent and a part of daily life. Many of the things around us bear the effects of it¹⁰.

Individuals might further identify with a set of cultural norms and behaviours by using gendered language. Men and women have different vocabulary knowledge. We usually instruct women and girls to talk gently and in softer tones. Men frequently use language that is harsh and has overtly sexual implications in many Indian languages. These versions are well represented in our media, literary works, and films. Society accepts such aggressive language from men as natural, but when women use it, they are criticised as being uncivilised and unrefined. Because women are dissuaded from participating in

mainstream public life, where men predominate, this gendering of language has an overall negative impact on women. As a result, women are marginalised even more.

After identifying themselves with a certain role model, individuals tried to adopt the motivations, traits, and attributes of that position and incorporate them into their own unique personalities. When girls and boys move into their peer groups and interact with those who share the same self-identification, they learn from, think like, and identify with those other girls and boys. All boys and girls exhibit these socially prescribed characteristics that define them as female and male. An individual is thought to have established a gender identity and, in actuality, becomes a social animal when they begin to perceive themselves as female or male. Furthermore, it is widely acknowledged that men and women serve different roles in society. Some of these responsibilities are biological, while others are based on social, cultural, and historical factors. However, because of their unique personal experiences in these predetermined positions, men and women identify social and cultural reality differently. We can understand gender when sex differences offer people the qualities of being female or male and become a source of cultural symbolism.

Gender identity also describes how people grow psychologically and how they learn to act out their social responsibilities. Thus, we might define gender as the process of becoming a girl or a boy, a woman or a man, through learning, identity, and development. Further, it is a process of developing the traits and abilities needed to develop into gendered human beings. They are therefore also referred to as ‘social animals’ because, despite the fact that nature inherently develops both sexes, society changes people into the genders associated with femininity and masculinity.

Gender identity and contemporary Indian families

The status of women serves as the standard for judging the level of culture in any age group and across all countries¹¹. Today, it is asserted that education is a key component of women’s empowerment and the main tool for transforming women’s status. Women today are more educated and want to be economically self-sufficient .But a

patriarchal society that restricts women's freedom and forces them to shoulder the responsibility of bringing up and caring for children promotes the idea of motherhood. Generally, women are viewed as emotional caregivers and nurturers.

Women naturally feel more pressure to compromise on their aspirations for a work-life balance because of the disproportionate demands placed on them to maintain marriages, run households, give birth to and raise children, and pursue jobs. When we look at the highly educated women at universities and colleges, we see that they also have responsibilities for family care in the roles of mother, wife, daughter-in-law, and so on. Care giving responsibilities are always reserved for women. Career advancement in colleges and universities is based on performance, including research activities. Women frequently have a disproportionate share of care giving responsibilities, which leaves them with less time for other pursuits like career advancement and higher education. There are also cases of women quitting their jobs voluntarily because they have been socialised to believe that housework and childrearing are their primary roles. The situation is different for male teachers, though. They do not have to perform the same care giving responsibilities as women; therefore, they have more freedom and time to devote to their academic development. Work performed by women, whether it is for the family or to earn money, is not work at all. Instead, it is seen as a continuation of her duties as a mother and wife. The range of employment options is frequently limited by societal perceptions of what is and is not 'appropriate' for a woman. This describes the position of women in India and how little they can contribute to themselves and to the society.

Gender has regulated human survival throughout evolution and still does¹². Women were trained in particular *dharma*s as wives and mothers, which made it possible for women to exert power at the ideological level¹³. For women, parenthood is a more delicate experience. It deals with a woman's strong sense of self and her private experiences. A woman's body experiences motherhood in every cell of her body, to the point where the thoughts, sensations, and emotions they produce are impossible to separate from the body from which they originate. Regardless of what else they are or may

do, women believe that parenthood is their ultimate destiny. The majority of women believe that parenting is solely a female role, and that if they fail at it or don't do it well, they have failed their most important duty. Motherhood was elevated and formalised in order to effectuate the shift from devoted wife to legitimate motherhood for the purposes of societal reproduction.

However, the face of modern Indian families has changed significantly as a result of modernization, urbanization, globalisation, better educational possibilities, and subsequent exposure to western values and conventions, as well as the women's fight for equal rights and status. Family is a significant source of nourishment, emotional ties, and socialisation in India, even though it serves as a bridge between continuity and change. In terms of family values and role relationships, there are indicators of change and adaptation. The presence of women in the workplace outside the home, as well as the invasion of television, the internet, mobile phones, video culture, and rising consumerism, have all contributed to the changing of values. Although there have been significant changes in women's employment patterns, there have been few changes in how modern families understand the roles that marriage, domestic duties, and parenthood play in these contexts.

Indian families nowadays are in a phase of change, where structural changes are occurring but are not always followed by psychological changes. When both the husband and wife work outside the home full-time, it makes it difficult to define their respective responsibilities and expectations for raising young children and teenagers. The family is providing uncertainties in roles, relationships, and role models for imitation since it is in a state of change and transformation. The girls and women in the household, who are expected to play both traditional and modern roles, are most adversely affected. Indian women typically tend to move within the patriarchal framework and cultural considerations and are expected to uphold it as the 'bearers of Indian tradition', but the act of moving and economic self-reliance gives them the chance to assert their independence and redefine roles and perceptions of the patriarchal system¹⁴.

Results and Discussions

Levels of conflict between the roles and, therefore, levels of stress would be influenced by gender concerns relating to work and family responsibilities. However, the distinction between work and family life is becoming more hazy, and issues from both contexts are interacting. Stress in the workplace transcends the household boundary and has an impact on how men and women exercise power. In other words, the roles of husbands and wives within a family are influenced by the differences in education and income between men and women. Role structures and their effects on familial relationships have repercussions for identity formation, child indoctrination, and other decision-making processes. Stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity have undergone some obvious changes as a result of industrialization, liberalism, and urbanization. These changes have been seen in family structures, living arrangements, relationships with particular family members, male and female perceptions, and behavioural patterns.

Men can better understand gender by supporting and sharing with women at home, in institutions, and at work. The work of women is also recognised in this. Men and women should be included in this process for a variety of reasons, including the fact that it is time for both of them to put aside their gender identities and work together to shift the focus of gender relations from hierarchical to equal. Real changes in unfair gender relations result in significant modifications in how men and women behave and engage in activities. Gender understanding ultimately just comes down to being compassionate, sensitive, and opposed to injustice everywhere it occurs.

Conclusion

By fostering an environment where both women and men can reach their full potential, gender awareness promotes personal growth and empowerment. They will be able to live fulfilling lives by following their needs and interests. Gender equity is a result of gender awareness. To remove gender discrimination and deprivation from our narratives, we must become gender sensitive. Family units are an essential part of every Indian's existence, so every member of the home, regardless of age group, must go through an awareness journey

to overcome the long-standing tradition of treating women socially as inferior citizens of the nation. Thus, even though the change in thinking is happening very slowly, it needs to be addressed at the family level to make it happen faster and give women their proper status in the home and society at large for a prosperous future.

Endnotes

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