

CHANGING NORMATIVE PATTERNS IN AN URBAN SETTING: A STUDY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO GENDER RELATIONS IN INDIAN SOCIETY

ANITA MISRA SHUKLA*

Abstract

The present paper is an endeavor to explore the changing normative patterns emerging out of men-women relations in an urban society. The study highlights the value preferences made by the population, which is residing in one of the cosmopolitan city of India. Since the city has a large heterogeneous population and is facing rapid transformation in terms of family values and gender relations, the perception towards socio cultural categories such as caste and gender is undergoing change. The study deals particularly with 'gender', and the investigations made in this regard are based on primary data, which involves random sampling and the data collected is through interview schedule method. Exploratory research design has been adopted to find out the emerging normative pattern between men –women relations, which essentially incorporates the value system adopted by the families. As it is perceived, the city life has its own pressures, and the city under investigation is a hub of modern technical jobs, which takes out much of time and energy from the person; therefore it becomes a necessity to have shared responsibility. By convention husband is arbitrary decision maker, but due to immense pressure of job(as jobs are engrossing),both partners being employed and investing equal time in their jobs, influence of peer group, spatial distance from parents, parents being less interfering etc,has diluted the arbitrary powers of males. It is stated that authoritarian structure underwent change in urban household. The inegalitarian and patriarchal household structures are transforming into egalitarian household structure, where women are becoming major decision maker. This study interestingly covers the stress, strains and conflicts encountered by both men and women and simultaneously maintaining the fair balance between traditional value system and modern value system.

Keywords

Normative change, heterogeneous population, egalitarian household, patriarchal household.

* Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Government Post graduate college, Noida, India

Introduction

It is believed that every human society is a normative society, and in all the existing human societies there are norms for each individual. These norms get established on the basis of cultural expectation of that particular society. The social structure of each society is composed of set of values and norms, and to this is attached behavior pattern for individuals. Ideally speaking, each individual is expected to behave in accordance to normative pattern, which a social system has constituted. It is the normative pattern of a society which sets design for its individuals and distinguishes between the normative pattern for men and women. As an illustration it can be cited here, initially men were basically 'hunter' and women were 'gatherer'. There was participation of both men and women in accumulation of basic things for day to day survival. As life got more settled for human being, it gradually got complicated, consequently emerged division of labour. The men took the responsibility of outside world and women owed much a role of a 'care taker' and 'nurturer'. Thus from here begins differing role allocation. The differing role allocation in any social system is a corollary to the rising inequalities. The gender theorists argue that difference between men and women emerged due to differential norms operative in society for them. "In terms of rewards of prestige, wealth and power attached to gender roles, women almost come off worst. With the rise of the women's liberation movement, the reason for sexually based division of labour and for the inequality between male and female roles have been hotly debated" (Haralambos, 1980:369). This debate gave rise to two positions. One view maintains inequality is genetically or biologically determined. Opposing to this view, other argue that inequality between sexes is a consequence of social construct. Thus gender roles are culturally determined (Haralambos, 1980:370).

Review of the literature

As the study endeavours to explore emerging pattern of norms of gender relations in an urban area; it is essential to have a kaleidoscopic review of literature. Lionel Tiger and Robin Fox state about the human biogrammar. They argue that male and female bio grammar are adapted to sexual division of labour in a hunting society. Further they say that, compared to cultural change, genetic change is slow. Thus the male and female biogrammars of a *hunting existence* continue in modern industrial society (Fox and Tiger, 1971). Thus the theory suggests, abolishing gender roles based on sexual division of labour and replacing them with unisex roles is unlikely to happen.

G.P. Murdock maintains that biological differences between men and women are the basis of sexual division of labour in society. Because of biological function of child bearing and nursing, women is tied to home; because of her physique she is limited to less strenuous tasks (Macmillan, 1949). In the similar manner Talcott Parsons too gives a functional justification for differing role allocation. He opines – "Isolated nuclear family in modern industrial society has two basic functions: the socialization of the

young and the stabilization of personalities; and the prime task of this is of women of the family. He states "In our opinion the fundamental explanation of the allocation of roles between the biological sexes lies in the fact that the child bearing and early nursing of children establish strong presumptive primacy of relation of mother to small child" (c.f., Harper and Row, 1959). Parsons further says that women's role in the family is expressive-means provides warmth, security and emotional support.

The arguments stated till now, advocate the theory based on biological differences. On the contrary to earlier stated assumptions and theories, the other theory establishes the view that the 'human behavior is largely directed and determined by culture. Thus norms, values and roles are naturally determined and socially transmitted. Therefore gender roles are the product of culture rather than biology. Ann Oakley argues that culture determines gender role. She attacks on the findings of Murdock. Oakley cites examples, which state that there are fourteen societies where lumbering is done exclusively by women or both sexes share. In thirty six societies women are solely responsible for land clearance and in thirty eight societies cooking is shared by both (Haralambos, 1991). She further gives the example of Mbuti Pygmies, a hunting and gathering society in Congo. Here roles of father and mother are not sharply differentiated in the society.

It is the review of the literature through which the present study weaves the background, such that empirical findings can either support or negate the above stated theories. It is in the back drop of these theories; this research work explores the operative gender norms in urban households of India. The cultural theory is a point of departure, to assess and analyse actual practicing norms in modern families.

The city –Noida (India)

The universe of my study is an urban community of Noida. It is believed to be one of the highly urbanized communities of India. The modern community is perceived to be a community which has fast changing values and norms and upholds modern value system and thereby said to have adopted modern normative system. Precisely arguing, one has to explore, whether this urban community is really marching forward from traditional community to modern community. The study conducted survey on about 400 household, in order to find out the changing normative pattern, for this exploratory research design was adopted. The household under investigation had sound educational background, and the data was collected through interview schedule and interview guide.

Redefined roles –Stress and strains

A total set of family role system consists of male work role and female work role. Both husband and wife have secondary role in their male family role and female family role, respectively (Pleck, 1977). It has been asserted by some sociologists that married woman's increased employment has induced a

partially accommodating reduction in woman's family role, but as yet no increase in husband's family role. It is presumed by the theorists, that a change is needed in family work role system prescribed tradition sex segregated and unequal division of household work and child care if when these norms breakdown, how much men can expand their family role without accommodating changes in the male work role will lead to role strain in men similar to the strains faced by working wives. It is a million dollar question how and when these norms would break and men would assume equal amount of domestic and family obligation (Pleck, 1977:417).

It is true of most of the societies, that there is much thrust on traditional roles. The city under investigation, its members also reflect similar behavior pattern. Most of the respondents favour the notion that men can take flight in their career to any extent, but women should not exceed to certain limits in their careers. They should know where and when to put break. This attitude is a reflection of a society which is in flux. As on one hand, those interviewed almost 90% verbally supported the idea of women's economic independence, but consider men essentially a earner and women's income just a supplement to it. Therefore, men who would like to discard this stereotype attitude towards men and women's earning capability may be backlashed, hence they prefer conservative behaviour.

Even today it is clearly visible in urban household, that men retain consolidated and arbitrary powers to determine the rules, judge the performance and punish their wives and children. Thus the men have the capacity to determine how their wives could and should spend their time in domestic work, in education, leisure or cultural activities and determine the terms on which they enter the public space for employment¹ (Understanding gender, 2000).

The above stated attitude may seem to be patriarchal; however, a shift in attitude and behaviour pattern is found in urban middle class men. Though they may acquire central position in the family, yet they have changed to an extent. One can say they do not resemble in behaviour and attitude to that of their fathers. As when asked to the respondent on the question of work sharing in home, out of 210 families (where wives are working) there about 40 families where husband contributed to household chores for about 3-4 hours, or lend their help whenever required. One of the female respondent strictly states – "I don't like my husband sitting and reading newspaper or watching television, while I'm doing domestic work or looking after children. He has to cooperate and he does comply. "Further she states – "Whenever he tries to escape I get angry, my argument is we should work together and spend leisure time together. "Another response was, 'gender based work segregation is not justified. It should not be hard and fast rule. They say "do the task as it comes, but in routine life it gives convenience.....women should do cooking and men should do all heavy work. This eases out many things."

Above responses are the reflections of the couples, on how they look upon routine work. It is evident from responses; today men do not run away from the very idea of work sharing. They are not

strict in this regard, as their fathers used to be. There is no task which they consider demeans their status of being 'man of the house'. Though he might be the breadwinner but without any sense of ego. He has changed a lot. One of the female respondent says—"my husband always took care of my daughters when they were kids. In the night if they were hungry or bed wet, then it was my husband who used to get upyou know I was bit lazy."

In support of my finding, another conducted in Chicago can be cited. The study presents a new role of father (Griswold, 93).....with the increase in women employment, squeezed time schedule, small families, increased responsibilities, today's couple if do not sign in equalitarian terms, it would be difficult to manage too many roles, with satisfaction and without any distress and grudge². As the studies in other societies show –fathers with working wives assume 50% of the child care; otherwise promise of gender equality would not be fulfilled. The feminist perspective on the 'politics of housework' necessarily included the "the politics of childcare", and for some men the "new fatherhood" of the 70's, 80's and 90's represented a genuine effort to fulfill the promises of the liberal feminist vision (Griswold, 93).

In Indian context it can be said that a change in normative pattern in regard to gender relations is visible in urban families who have been tied to patriarchal values. There were 10 % males who regretfully accepted the fact that they have been violent in their married life. But one may not assume that all those families who adhere to patriarchal values, practice violence. It is noteworthy, that males of upper middle class have come to realize that they have to change with changing time. Their wives are no more in subservient position. Our society (Indian society) is a society based on hierarchy. There is gender hierarchy, age hierarchy, caste hierarchy, class hierarchy etc. Woman's position is more or less maintained by the members of her own creed. As almost half of my respondents were of the view that a woman perpetuates patriarchy. So this fact reveals men cannot bear sole responsibility of bringing change with regard to their female counterpart. It has to be both ways.³

Sociology of normative change in an urban setting

City is a place which experiences many forces of change. These changes are observed in some basic institution of society, like family, marriage, law. Simultaneously they constantly modernize and transform the value system and the normative system of a society. A society visualizes change in some of its institutions and association when relationships are redefined. These redefined relationships may bring state of confusion, agony and bewilderment among its members. Nevertheless it indicates progressive graph of a society. It is believed, factors like education, exposure to media and economic status to a great extent have redefined gender relations in cities, especially in upper middle class⁴. Women employment is another major factor which has changed the equation between men and women.

As pointed out here –“Women’s labour force participation is changing much faster than the household division of labour.....the labour force participation of mothers of young children is changing much faster than the availability of child care”(Ross and Mirowsky).

It is observed as a society change so do the norms change and vice versa. Cities are the happening places, where people from all walks of life reside. Interaction pattern is somewhat complex. Individuals may adopt new norms while adopting themselves to the city life, this eventually weakens those norms with which they are perhaps traditionally attached. These norms may be caste associated, gender associated and native place associated. Since there is a cost cutting of cultures in cities; they have become hub of cosmopolitan culture. This intermingling and interaction of various cultures dilute the normative pattern of original culture. Homogeneity is replaced by heterogeneity and simplicity is replaced by complexity. Thus several identities become one identity and vice versa. These new identities give rise to new norms, thereby establishing new normative pattern for those residing in urban areas. Norms in any society change due to exogenous force or exposure to mediums like globalization, massmedia. As urban centers are the hub of various cultures, there is interaction between these cultures.

These exposures and cultural interactions give rise to new folkways, which are either easily adopted by members of society or are opposed by them. Interestingly, inhabitants who adhere to those mores and folkways, with which they originally identify, get diluted in the process of cultural contact and cultural assimilation. Largely affected norms in city are those related to formal appearance, i.e. of dress, behaviour in public space, use of language, food consumption pattern, style of living. However it is found, those who cherish or like to adhere to their original culture norms may be that way traditional. So it can be precisely asserted that people might be traditional in the core but in outward appearance, they seem to be homogeneously modernized.

Findings

There is a general perception that, men women relationship is based on inequality, in terms of economic, social and cultural. Equalitarianism cannot be achieved in this relationship. A sociological study undertaken after world war II suggests that there remained a clear demarcation of roles of men and women, with men having the role of bread winner, women having responsibility of day to day running of household (Slaughter, 1956, 1969; Zweig, 1952; Pilcher, 1998). Moore (1987) opined that women has been traditionally dependent on men for economic security. For women to be able to make money puts a new slant on the relationship. But the present study in Indian context slightly departs from the observations made by Moore. As it was found, working of a woman doesn’t bother the mind of husbands and their families anymore. Almost half of the respondents had an earning wife, daughter or daughter in law, but this doesn’t mean that they can overlook or escape from household responsibility.

Carrying out household responsibilities is still the prime duty of the women of a house. Almost all female respondents accept this role without any resentment. Nevertheless, men have also come in terms of accepting their role as *provider* of the family, as well as *supporter* in household activities and daily chores, irrespective of their wives working or non-working status. One can argue, roles have *changed, redefined, reformed but not reversed*. There has been no role reversal. However it has been observed, where men maintain strong traditional attitude, despite the fact of women's changing roles; these households witness much of unresolved conflicts. Beside this study, this fact has been highlighted in other similar surveys. As it has been observed, those men who support traditional normative patterns maintain that we should be clear about our work-home priorities. Many agree that we should work just as our mothers did –but our aspirations should not exceed that of our mates or infringe on our duties as housekeepers and mothers (Campbell, 1987).

Conclusion

There is one question (not rhetoric) asked frequently by all those who scan men –women relationships and changing normative pattern –Is role reversal possible through work sharing in homes? It is believed that men performing tasks at home is just like moving away from conventional pattern of roles. To find any household with woman who is full time paid worker and man as a full time domestic worker is a rarity. There are many examples which show, even a man is sitting idle, doing nothing and his wife going out for work; when she returns home, has to finish household chores. Morris (1985) explains – “Even in context of men's redundancy and subsequent unemployment strong social pressure remain, which hinder the renegotiation of the domestic division of labour.

It is quite evident from this study also that the norms related to division of labour and decision making (especially financial decision) etc. are somewhat conventional. Women do take subservient position in these issues. Domesticity is her prime concern. There is no willingness to transform roles from her side. She is contented with whatever help she may get from her husband or other members of her family. There were many respondents who considered sex segregated work justified if the wife is only occupying homemaker's role, but if she is working and has a similar schedule as of her spouse, then it becomes a problem. In most of the household, the respondents gave verbal consensus to men's participation in household chores. As verbal consensus does not fix the responsibility of getting the tasks done by the men. The ultimate responsibility falls on women and this give rise to a contest between partners. Here the modern value is replaced by traditional norm. It can be argued, on the basis of findings that women may show a kind of verbal resentment to her spouse while conducting household chores, but she is willing to take both roles, one of professional and another of housewife. The reason perhaps this willingness to keep both the feet intact in these roles is that urban Indian households have become

authority sharing households. Most of the families are nuclear in structure therefore each member fall back upon, take suggestions and has to support each other. This cooperation mitigates the chances of any resentment and conflict and establishes firm foundation of consensus.

Notes

1. Also see Campbell (1987), where men do complain when they feel pressure of assuming household roles. They may support notion of equality but simultaneously complain of not signing a work alcoholic phantom who don't take my name, won't cook my meals, doesn't need my money, won't have my baby, and would rather make love to her job than to me.
2. Increased women participation in labour force genuinely invites the participation of the men and family members in household activities and chores and if this is not seriously taken, perhaps will give rise to resentments, strains and conflict. But it is bit different in the context of India. Has India has a huge population and there is availability of labour in abundance, hence to seek domestic help from outside, defers any kind of conflict related to work sharing.
3. As it is generally assumed, patriarchy is men created and asserted value, contrary to this notion, women too perpetuate patriarchal values, as the detail study of gender relations, it was found norms which pertain either to son preferences, or observing vratas(fast),performing of last rites etc,women have been keen in observing these practices.
4. Work force participation of women has increased, simultaneously they have been socialized in a way to except gendered role behaviour. Therefore women at the peak of her career may quit job, if a need arise, but seldom find a men doing so.It is so because our society(Indian) structure is tradition based, so one finds easy adhering to traditional normative pattern. Also see Stephanic Cootz (1997) findings on American families.

References

- Abbot J (1984); *Indian ritual and belief: The keys of power*. New Delhi:45-46.
- Ackerman NW; *Behavioural trend and disturbances of the contemporary family in contemporary society* 1stedn.Gladstone International Universities Press, New York: 25-28.
- Agarwal BR; *Symposium: Caste and joint family in a mobile commercial society*, Sociological bulletin 4:138-145.
- Agarwal, Humphries et al. (2006) *Capabilities, freedom and equality: Amartya Sen's work from a gender perspective*, New Delhi: 125-128.
- Ames, Michael M; *Modernization and social structure: family and class in Jamshedpur*. The economic and

political weekly, vol.4, special no. (nos.28, 29, 30):1217-1224.

Aravamudan G (2007) *Disappearing daughters: The tragedy of female foeticide*.Penguin:64-66.

Atal, Yogesh (2008) *Changing Indian society*.Rawat Publication: 151-152.

Baeber B (1968) *Social mobility in Hindu in James Silverberg(ed) Social mobility in the caste system in India, comparative study in society and history supplement III The Hague.*

Basu S (2005) *Dowry and inheritance: Issues in contemporary Indian feminism*. Women unlimited: 101-102.

Beteille A (2000) *Equality and universality: Essay in social and political theory*. Oxford.

Bhasin K (1999) *Understanding gender*.Kali monographs,India:22-28

Bhattacharya R(2004) *Behind closed doors: Domestic violence in India*.Sage:90-96.

Bliss W(2005) *The encyclopedia of social reform: Including political economy, political science, sociology and statistics, covering anarchism,charities,civilservice,currency,land and legislation reform,penology,socialism,social purity, trade unions, women suffrage,etc Funk and Wagnalls, 1897,New York.1102-1118.*

Bolt E (1977) *Family and social network. Roles norm and external relationship and ordinary families*. Tanis tock,London.

Chowdhry P (2007) *Contentious marriage, eloping couples:Gender,caste and patriarchy in northern India*.Oxford:84-89, 207-2012.

Connell RW (1987) *Gender and power: society, the person and sexual politics*. Stanford university press: 202-209.

Coontz S(1997) *The way we really are –coming to terms with America’s changing families*.

DubeL(2001) *Anthropological exploration in gender: Intersecting fields*.Sage:99-111.

Erickson MP, Dempster D (1997) *Their mother’s daughter? The intergenerational. Transmission of gender attitudes in a changing world, journal of marriage and family, vol.59:216-222.*

Griswold RL(1993) *Fatherhood in America :A history*.240-250.

Gupta K (2006) *Adolscentgirls,urban society and family life:An analytical study*.New Delhi:54-58

Haralambos M and Heald RM (1991) *Sociology: themes and perspective*.Collins:370-380.

IndiresanJ(2002) *Education for women’s empowerment: gender-positive initiatives in pace setting women’s college*.Konark:80-87.

Levy (1949)*The family revolution in modern china*. Harvard, Cambridge: 311-315.

Morris L (1987) *Constraint on gender work employment and society*: Sage: 28-34

Pathak (1998) *Indian modernity: contradictions, paradoxes and possibilities*.Gyan:77-83.

Rubin LB (1994) *Family on the faultline.:America's Working Class Speaks about the Family,theEconomy,andEthnicity*.New York Harper Collins:69-75.

TigerL and FoxR (1971) *The imperial animal*.Holt, Rhinehart and Winston: 251-260.

