

Sex Stereotype, Gender And The Unorganized Sector Of Labour

Prof. Pallavi Bhatnagar*

Professor

Department of Psychology,

University of Lucknow

Lucknow.

Corresponding Author

Jaya Bharti**

Assistant Professor

Department of Psychology

A.N.D.N.N.M.M.

Dr. Megha Singh***

Assistant Professor

Department of Psychology

University of Lucknow.

Dr. Anshu Gupta****

Principal

Seiko Convent Public School

Lucknow

Abstract

This study examines the persistence of gender bias and stereotypes in Indian society, particularly among the urban with a rural base. Despite constitutional provisions for gender equality and efforts by social activists and feminists, discrimination against women continues. The study highlights the paradoxical attitude towards women, who are revered as goddesses but also devalued and oppressed. The research focuses on exploring sex stereotypes among scheduled caste adults in a rural setting, using a picture story test. The results show significant differences in the perception of masculine traits between males and females, with males exhibiting more traditional views. The findings suggest that gender significantly influences the perception of masculine traits, and that males have a greater traditionality for masculine stereotypes. The study emphasizes the need for community mobilization and awareness programs to change the cultural script pertaining to gender and promote gender equality.

Keywords: Gender bias, Sex stereotypes, Patriarchy, Gender equality, Rural India

Introduction:

Women are human beings and have as much right to full development as men have. In regard to opportunities for intellectual and spiritual development, we should not emphasize the sex of women even as we do not emphasize the sex of men. The fact that we are human beings is infinitely more important than the psychological peculiarities which distinguish us from one another.”

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan

Despite such proactive advocacy for gender equality by former President of India, and the struggle of social activists and feminists to help create equality and do away with the gender bias all over the continent, the discrimination continues. The psyche of the Indian particularly from the rural belt; the representative of the masses, oscillates between the dialectics of looking at woman as Goddess (Devi) as cited in Manusmriti, “where women are revered, there the Gods rejoice; but where they are not, no rite bears any fruit.”

**Manusmriti
Verses 355-356**

Paradoxically, the woman is devalued, oppressed as succinctly quoted in another verse of Manusmriti only, “Day and night woman must be kept in dependence by the males (of) their families.”

Manusmriti, 9th Chapter

Despite constitutional improvisations ensuring equalities in terms of gender, differential treatments on the basis of gender is found right from childhood. Girls being seen as a liability have the evidence of foeticide and infanticide in different parts of India, now has been taken up seriously as a crime. The deep rooted sex stereotype and gender bias is at the base of such mindsets. Though some progress has been made economically, gender parity has not been achieved. The root cause of gender inequality in Indian society is the sociocultural fabric of patriarchy. “India ranks 141st out of 142 nations and 2062 districts in the world are categorized as gender critical when it comes to health and survival of women as compared to men. As a whole the country ranks 127th on Gender Equality Index and 114th on Gender gap in world. Gender economists call this phenomenon disempowerment of women leading to alarming decline in sex ratio.”(Kohli, 2017)

Community mobilization is at the helm of community development. The change in the state of art is possible only if the cultural script pertaining to gender undergoes a change. For that the primary intervention would not only be the schemes and programmes to enhance awareness and education but also to simultaneously explore the sex stereotypes imbibed in the minds of the masses, particularly the marginalized groups; the rural belt, those working in the unorganized sector. The present study of Gupta (1999) was a step in this direction.

Poverty and lack of work and education are the compelling forces which force countless number of people from villages to come to cities in search of livelihood and form the large proportion of the unorganized sector.

Design & Sample

The present study aims to explore the sex stereotype of scheduled caste adults.

It was an ex post facto research with an exploratory orientation.

After the initial survey, the researcher concentrated on the area of Mavaiya in Lucknow, where most of the residents belonged to scheduled caste and low socio-economic status. Their income per month ranged from Rs. 900-2500 with larger number of respondents clustered around Rs. 900-1800/- per month. Most of them had larger families from 8 to 9 people. 200 subjects were equally divided into gender selected from this locality. All of them were illiterate. Their age ranged between 20 – 45 years with mean age of 32-35 years. The males were in semi-skilled occupation as vendors (vegetable sellers from door to door or in the market), tempo drivers, laborers, cleaners, Rickshaw pullers. Few of them were in Grade IX employees working as peons in Railway departments, Most of the females were besides being home makers, working as house help or maids.

Tools

Picture story test (Bhatnagar et al, 1991) was used to explore the perception of sex stereotype. This has 16 stories based on masculine traits and 16 stories based on feminine traits (most representative traits of Indian Male and Female) along with Silhouettes of Male and Female figures for each story. The final list rested on through scanning of existing inventories on sex typology and sex stereotypes measures, content analysis of 25 Hindi novels, content analysis of 3000 matrimonial advertisements, trait generation of typical Indian male & female and finally the response of 500 subjects. Out of 96 traits on the list 44, of those which emerged most dominant were taken up for the picture story test. Traits similar in meaning were clubbed together. Thus 32 stories were made. Within each group of 16 stimulus figures, the four positions were 4 silhouette facing each other, facing away from each other, both facing right and both facing left. The figure developed by Bhalla (Bhalla 1991) had initially fourteen postures from which only four major postures of standing, sitting, walking and showing movement with hands were retained after ascertaining their neutrality on 25 students.

Results

The mean scores and F value as given in Table I clearly shows, there is a significant difference between the obtained scores of Males and Females for Masculinity scale with F value of $12.41 < .01$ with 1 and 196 df.

Mean scores & F values for the two scales

Scales	Mean scores		F value
	Males	Females	
Masculinity scale	12.03	10.80	$12.41 < .01$
Feminity scale	9.82	10.81	1.02

The results clearly show that with the mean score of 12.03 males are having a greater knowledge as well as more traditional. Thus gender is significantly influencing the perception of Masculine traits. Further the means in table I clearly reflect that males have a higher mean score for Masculine traits than their counterparts which only indicates that males have a greater traditionality for masculine stereotype. These findings gain support from Kulshreshta (1993). According to her traits generally attributed to males are independence, aggressiveness, competitiveness, leadership quality, innovative, confidence and self-control.

Rice (1984) also contends that man is expected to be unexpressive and unemotional.

On the other hand feminine traits are perceived by both males and females on the same note.

These findings are supported by Best et al (1977) and Williams et al (1981) who contend that though gender related differences are sometimes found but such differences are minor relative to the general similarity among girls and boys in the learning of sex stereotypes. Basu (1991) also did not find any sex differences.

The range of 0-16 indicates that high scores reflect greater knowledge of sex stereotype. The means for both masculine and feminine scales are above the chance midpoint of 8.00, indicating some substantial knowledge of sex stereotype and traditionality.

Additional analysis was done to determine whether the subject's knowledge of sex trait stereotypes was evenly distributed across all test items or some traits are perceived more stereotypically than others. This was accomplished by computing the percentages of responses for each trait. With 60% as the cutting point, the results emerged above 60%. These traits were **Protective (89%) Strong and Robust (85.5%), Commanding (84.5%) Courageous and daring (85%), Powerful (83%), Competitive (80%), Outspoken & Straightforward (79%), Leadership & Taking initiative (76.5%), Rigid (78%), Intelligent (69%), Independent (70%), Aggressive (61%), Humorous (62%).**

For the feminine scale 12 traits which emerged are as follows-

Homely (88%), Emotional (81%), Domestic (87%), Religious (74%), Soft spoken (76%), Shy (72%), Delicate (69%), Tolerant (69%), Submissive and dependent (65%), Worrying and nervous (63%), and Adaptable (66%).

According to Kulshreshta (1993), the females are supposed to be dependent, passive, non-aggressive, noncompetitive, weak and meek, yielding, emotional and nurturing by nature. Further Kulshreshta contends that a girl is treated in society as if she has no identity, no desire of her own. She is taught to sacrifice her 'self' either as a mother or as a wife. Being treated as an inferior human being, she has to be ruled by social norms prescribed by a male dominated society as a burden on parents. She faces oppression and suppression (Kulshreshta, 1993). Besides Rani & Ramavani (1989), Koteswaraiah and Rani (1995) found in their study that men scored higher than women in assault and verbal aggression. Jindal (1989) also reported boys having a significantly higher score on competitiveness. On the other hand, Aneja & Kaur (1996) reported girls to be more submissive and dependent as well as more under parental control in comparison to boys. Findings of Sikdara & Mitra (2008) also provide support to the findings. They report that in general men are characterized as aggressive, high risk takers, decisive and autonomous (agentic attributes) whereas women are characterized as kind, caring, relational & humble (communal attributes).

Expectations and beliefs regarding traits that males and females have often are detrimental in the kind of job that they consider to be employed in. Since same jobs are defined in terms of gender, such as '**men's work**' or '**women's work**'. (Heilman, 1997)

This is more strongly imbibed in the rural masses as reported by a woman in a BPL village, "**Ab aurat ko ka chahi? Ghar sambhale, Bacchon ka dekhe, Admi aur sans sasur ki sewa kare. Aadmi hi to bahar jaye kar kami laye hai, Hamka to vo larkin naahi neek lage hain jo bahar jaye kar kamaiye. Aadmi ke saath vo kaam Karen hain jo aadmi ka kara chahi**" (Now what the woman should do is to take care of the house, looks after children, serve the in laws and husband. The man only goes out and earns, I do not like girls who go out and do work which is meant for men.)

This is also true that people; both males & females vary in the extent to which they identify which masculine or feminine characteristics (West & Zimmerman, 1987). The researchers strongly hold that Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance."

Kafi Annan

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