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Men in Contemporary India: A Sociological Study of Their Changing Status and Role from Authority to Victim

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Abstract

Indian men have privileged authoritative position in Indian society due to patriarchal structure since time immortal. They have been living a life of breadwinner, protector and leader within the family as well in the society. The present paper aims to examine the changing status and role of men from authority to victim in contemporary India. Deeply rooted in patriarchal social structure and system, the Indian society has undergone many changes over the decades. It was found in the present research that the men in

contemporary India are facing new challenges in the forms of emotional and mental health issues, familial and societal pressures, victim of domestic violence, fake accusations, lack of legal protection, neglect of their human rights. A men's movement is under way to draw attention to their problems and recognize their role within the family and society, their rights, their wellbeing, etc. The paper, further, advocates the need of changing social and familial norms and establishing A National Commission for Men in India.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Gender Roles, Gender Socialization, Misandry, Authority, Men's Rights Movement

Introduction

In Indian Patriarchal society, men have been enjoying a privileged position of higher authority, financial powers and role of protector over women and society in general, due to their masculine gender. They can experience any kind of violence or gender discrimination is an illusion to many. Consequently, the issue of gender equality for men was never discussed. With times, the status and role of men have been changing and the question of their equality, mental health, violation of their human rights has arisen because of increasing crime against men within the family, work place and wider society. They have been the victim of domestic violence, sexual harassment, false accusations leading to ill-mental health and suicides.

Objectives of the Study:

The present study has the following objectives:

1. To study the status of men in India
2. To understand the challenges and problems faced by men in contemporary India
3. To assess the Indian laws for men
4. To examine the present scenario-from authority to victim

Research Methodology

The present study is descriptive in nature and is based on data collected from secondary sources like books, journals, Government documents, encyclopedias, research articles, printed as well as online reference materials.

The Concepts used and operationalized

Patriarchy

Patriarchy is a social system based on the theory in which positions of authority are mainly held by men. The various Sociological theories describes patriarchy as a system of social relations, values, norms and behavior patterns that are predominately shaped by men and give them a privileged position and status.

Etymologically, the term patriarchy means 'the rule of the father' and comes from Greek *patriarkhes* which is combination of two words –*patria* (meaning lineage, descent, family, fatherland) and *arkhe* (meaning authority, domination, sovereignty). The concept was developed to denote the male dominance as a social phenomenon rather than biological. The concept has been used to assess the status and role of men in the patriarchal society where men are first gender due to their upper social position.

Status and Role

Status and role are two fundamental concepts to understand social structure and behavior. The term 'status' refers to a socially defined position within a group and society; while 'role' is the expected behavior as per that particular status.

In Sociology, the concept of "status" is used in two ways:- 1) Social Position, and 2) Social Honour and Prestige. Status, according to Linton (1936), "is a position in a system occupied by designated individuals" and by role, he meant, "Behavioral enacting of the patterned expectation attributed to that position". In his classic work, he has classified Status in two types -1) Ascribed Status, and 2) Achieved Status. Ascribed status is based on inherited position of an individual in the society like sex, caste, age, race, etc. On the other hand, Achieved status is acquired by an individual through her/his efforts, abilities, knowledge and skills. 'Role', as Linton puts the concept, is 'Role represents the dynamic aspect of status'. An individual has to play a variety of roles which is called 'role-sets'.

The present paper aims to study the changing status and role of men from authority to victim in contemporary India.

Misandry

Misandry means the dislike, prejudice and hatred towards men. Though not used or discussed frequently, it is a real phenomenon that has negative attitude and behavior resulting in discrimination and bias against men. The paper tries to understand the concept of misandry which is reflected in form of violence against men.

Gender roles

Gender Role is a culturally and socially determined set of expected behaviors, attitudes and characteristics based on concept of masculinity and femininity. It should not be misunderstood with *Gender Identity* which refers to an individual's inner sense of being masculine or feminine or third gender unrelated to that binary or no gender at all. Invented by American Sexologist and Psychologist John Money in 1955, the term 'Gender' used to represent the individual who disclosed himself or herself as boy or girl.....

The present paper has used the concept to study the traditional as well new status and roles played by men in Indian Society.

Gender Socialization and Gender Discrimination

Gender discrimination refers to an unequal treatment of individuals based on their gender or biological sex. Also known as sex discrimination, it results in unequal access to resources, opportunities and rights. It can be seen in form of restrictions, harassment and unequal treatment in the areas of education, employment and healthcare. It emanates through gender socialization within the Patriarchal family

and social structure. This systematic discrimination is resulted in form of power imbalance within the gender relations.

The present research focuses on the gender discrimination faced by men in the family or society which was an outcome of gender based socialization.

Authority

To maintain its order, every society or organization has its own structure of authority. Authority refers to the power that is legitimized and institutionalized in a society or any social system (Weber: 1921). As a rule, authority inheres in the status itself and does not depend on personal qualities of the occupant of that particular status. Weber has distinguished three basic types of authority –traditional authority, legal-rational authority and charismatic authority. Traditional authority is the authority which is legitimized by the sanctity of traditions like men as head of the family. Authority is legitimized by a system of formal laws specifically enacted to regulate conduct rationally and achieve designated goals like a post of director or political post is the legal authority. The third type is authority is different from these two. The charismatic authority is legitimized by the extraordinary characteristics of a leader and the inspired or sanctioned nature of his mission, for example Mahatma Gandhi (Ibid). The present paper has applied the first two types of authority to study the men in contemporary India.

Challenges and problems faced by Men in India

A) Sexual Harassment

Not only women, men too are victim of sexual violence. In it's 2022 study, National Commission for Women has found that 1.4% Indian men had reported cases of sexual harassment and 3000 case of sexual assault on men were reported in 2022 itself. In 2023, the Centre for Civil Society conducted a survey on men where nearly 18% adult Indian men were reportedly forced into sex. (Monika G. and Arun D Raj: 2024).

B) Domestic Violence

It's hard to believe for many that Indian men also suffer from domestic violence like women. In a recent survey of 1000 men by NCRB, it as found that 52.4% of men were affected by gender based violence at some stage of their lives. In spousal violence, 52.4% abuse was emotional while only 6% was physical (Ibid). Many of the cases of violence against men are unreported in the absence of supportive laws, familial –social backup and self - masculine image.

C) False Accusations

Due to misandry, false accusations against men are also reported due to general impression of men being the offenders. Based on NCRB figures, approximately 74% of rape charges filed under section 376 of IPC were found to be fake. Fake charges of dowry demand, domestic violence, molestation, adultery, etc. has resorted to the suicide by the men. More than 3500 men take their lives by suicide every year (Ibid).

D) Custody of Children

Men are again discriminated against when seeking the custody of their child after matrimonial discords like separation and divorce. The father is denied the access to his children and have to pay huge maintenance to the child and

wife. Single father is a rare sight.

E) Mental Health

Patriarchy entrust upon men the role of a breadwinner, leader and protector. Their biological masculine traits facilitate them to carry out these responsibilities very well. Men are stigmatized to seek help for their mental health issues arising from their familial, emotional, financial, personal and social surroundings. Due to lack of supportive social structure, there is rise in suicide by men in despair.

Men's Rights in India

The key Constitutional rights for men in India (they cover human rights also) comprise of;

1. **Right to Equality (Article 14):** Ensures that all citizens, including men, are treated equally before the law and have equal protection under the law.
2. **Right to Freedom (Article 19):** Guarantees men the right to freedom of speech, assembly, and movement.
3. **Right to Life and Personal Liberty (Article 21):** Ensures men have the right to life and personal liberty, including the right to live with dignity.

Are Men protected by Laws?

Indian Women and Children are fully protected by laws against any crime and social taboos. The situation is not same in case of Indian Men. Indian Patriarchal structure has put them in a particular masculine parameter which influences them biologically, emotionally and psychologically. They have to have an image of a stronger gender due to social expectation from them to a breadwinner, protector, position of power and authority. This is perpetuated by gender socialization within the family as well as society.

The men are not fully protected by law in contemporary India. The gender bias in Indian legal system is clearly visible. As of today, there are many laws to protect women in every aspect of their lives; men are not. Gender roles, gender relations and gender responsibilities within the family and outer society are determined by the society itself.

Discussions: What can be Done?

The present scenario about the status and role of men in India exhibits a dual picture of their position - traditional as well as new. They are expected to behave like protectors, leaders and breadwinners as per their traditional masculine gender authoritative roles as per the existing patriarchal norms and to remain physically, emotionally, mentally strong. On the other hand, they are supposed to accommodate with changing social structure where gender equality of women is new phenomenon in Independent India where they are expected to share the responsibility of household chores. The rising incidents of crime against men within the family and outside world is diluting their authority and making them the victims. The following steps should be taken -

A Men's movement for men's human right protection

Originated in Western countries in 1960s and 1970s, the men's movement consists of social groups and organizations of men and their allies who focus on gender issues and their activities range from self-help to lobbying and activism (Flood:2007). A men's movement is made of many small movements erupted at different time period for different

purpose. Major components of any men's movement comprise of men's liberation movement, masculinism, profeminist men's movement, herbivore men's movement, mythopoetic men's movement, men's rights movement and the Christian men's movement. All of these movements are for the protections of men's human rights. India men's movement is not different from these aims. It needed to be a strong mass movement.

A National Commission for Men is the Need of the Hour

There has been demand by numerous scholars, activists, legal experts and common men to have a National Commission for Men to attend the men's issues. A dedicated Commission could serve the following purposes -

- It would provide a platform for men to address their grievances like false accusation, domestic violence and other socio-legal injustices.
- The commission would advocate for gender neutral laws that equally protect both men and women.
- It would spread awareness about men's issues and safeguard men's human rights by incorporating them in national discussion on gender equality and social justice.
- It would advise the Government for legal reforms and policy formulation to protect men against crime against men.

The Societal Responsibility

The society should stop taking their men for granted. The societal expectation from men to remain in same traditional authority in a new changing social structure needs to be re-evaluated. The old aged pattern of gender socialization within the family and society has to be changed as per the requirement of the new social milieu.

The Legal Protection

The gender neutral or specific laws for men should be formulated to protect the men from injustice which they experience just being 'A man'.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that men in contemporary India have their status and role in the duality of tradition and newness. Traditionally they have been ruling the society while in new society their deep rooted authority in patriarchy is being challenged due to the increased gender equality of women. Consequently, the gender relations are changed, gender roles has been affected by changing gender socialization.

The totality of social change has brought many changes in the status and role of the men in Indian Society. Of late, they are the victims of domestic violence, sexual harassment, false accusations resulting in mental health traumas and abetment of suicide. The society and family are expected to change their roles to help fixing the problem. A strong mass movement for men's equality and rights can improve their position. At government level, the strict laws in favour of men and establishment of A National Commission for Men seem to be remedy for the rising crime against men.

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