

*Sisting happening*

## Contemporary Gender Roles

**Gender Roles:** Gender roles are defined by the socio-cultural norms of any society. Gender affects how people perceive themselves and others and how they expect themselves and others to behave, that is, either in a 'masculine' or 'feminine' manner. These gender roles are learned and culturally and socially determined. They are also affected by factors such as education and economics. Therefore, gender roles can evolve over time. Gender roles and expectations are often identified as factors hindering gender equality. In practice gender roles usually affect women <sup>unfairly</sup> adversely in relation to many aspects of their life, such as family, socio-economic status, health, life expectation, independence, freedom and rights (gender bias).

### **Transition in Gender Roles**

In most of the societies the family systems are based on the gender roles and it is the pre-designed gender roles that help members of the family to run the family with bound responsibilities. Any disturbance in the gender role aspect may affect the smooth functioning of the easy-going of any family. But today, the modern life has very much changed the family structure and the gender roles have been diverting from the traditional responsibilities and path of performance. In fact, the gap between different genders has already melted down, creating an all equal society and more equalized families. All live together, taking decisions together, expressing opinions openly, criticizing and encouraging mutually and yet being independent and responsible. The society-defined gender roles may crash with the modern roles of family members and many families experience the <sup>a difficult situation or problem</sup> dilemma of the crashing gender roles.

The origin of gender roles can be dated back to the very establishment of the social life. Ever since man started living in societies, they differentiated between the male gender and female gender and implicated specific lifestyle, duties and functional areas for each of these genders. It was quite needed in the then lifestyle of human beings. Hunting was the only way of finding a living; thus muscular male members took the role of hunters of food suppliers and physically less fit female members took over the role of home

makers and cooks. The masculinity helped male gender to dominate the society and made them authoritative in families. But the time has grown a lot empowering female gender to almost equal status of men and today, they dare to live independent of the help of men and at times, to the extent of questioning men in different aspects. The newly gained power makes women get out of the norms and define new gender roles in the family, which may often result in clashes in the family.

### **Contemporary Gender Roles**

Children learn from their parents and society the idea of "feminine" and "masculine." Much about these concepts is not biological at all but cultural. The way we tend to think about men and women and their gender roles in society represents the prevailing standards that influences our thinking.

Gender roles in Western societies have been changing rapidly in recent years, with the changes created both by evolutionary changes in society, including economic shifts which have altered the way people work and indeed which people work as more and more women enter the workforce, and by perhaps pressure brought to make changes because of the perception that the traditional social structure was inequitable.

### **Reasons of Transition of Gender Roles**

#### **Change in Gender Relations**

Gender relations are a part of the socialization process, the start given the young by society, teaching them certain values and creating in them certain behavior patterns acceptable to their social roles. These roles have been in a state of flux in American society in recent years, and men and women today can be seen as having expanded their roles in society, with women entering formerly male dominions and men finding new ways to relate to and function in the family unit. Clearly, circumstances of family life have changed in the modern era. Industry has been taken out of the home, and large

families are no longer economically possible or socially desired. The home is no longer the center of the husband's life and for the traditional wife there is only a narrowing of interests and possibilities for development.

### **Changes in the Structure of the Family**

The change in sex roles that can be discerned in society is closely tied with changes in the structure of the family. Changes in both family structure and sex roles over the last century have produced some agitation that can be seen in society as one of the problems with the changing role of women is the degree to which society perceives this is causing unwanted changes in the family, though it is just as true that changes in the family have altered the roles of women.

As women entered the early 1990s, they faced a number of problems. Most of these problems have been around for some time, and women have challenged them and even alleviated them without solving them completely. They are encountered in the workplace, in the home, in every facet of life. Women have made advances toward the equality they seek only to encounter a criticism in the form of religious fundamentalism, claims of reverse discrimination by males, and hostility from a public that thinks the women's movement has won everything it wanted and should thus now be silent. Both the needs of women today and the backlash that has developed derive from the changes in social and sexual roles that have taken place in the period since World War II. These changes involve the new ability of women to break out of the gender roles created for them by a patriarchal society.

### **Discrimination in Provision of Opportunities**

The desperation women feel has been fed throughout history by the practice of keeping women in their place by limiting their options. This was accomplished on one level by preventing women from gaining their the sort of education offered to men, and while this has changed to a great extent, there are still inequalities in the opportunities offered to men as opposed to women. Yet opening the world of business with new opportunities for women does not dissolve much of this frustration because both men and women

continue to be ruled by their early training by the acculturation process which decides for them what sort of existence they will have. This can result in feelings of guilt when their reality and the image they have been taught from childhood do not mesh.

It would be a mistake to see changing gender roles in society as threatening only to males who dominate that society. Such changes also threaten any women who have accepted more traditional roles and see change as a threat. When women first united for the right to vote at the beginning of this century, they were opposed by women's groups who wanted things to remain as they were. Many of these women were ladies of means and social position in society.

### **Feminist's Movements**

The main burden of their argument was that woman suffrage placed an additional and unbearable burden on women, whose place was in the home. These arguments are heard today from religious fundamentalists who believe that the women's movement is a threat to the family. The fact is that the family has changed and that the traditional family structure of homemaker, husband as breadwinner, and children bow constitutes only 10 percent of families. The role for women has expanded with more women in the workplace and with a variety of family structures with new roles for all members of the family. Business has been slow to change and to acknowledge the new family, and for all the complaints about the women's movement as anti-family, the movement has instead followed the trend of placing the family in the forefront of addressing family issues as vital to women. There is much evidence that boys and girls are treated differently from birth, and this fact has been noted in every world culture: It may never be possible to separate out the precise effects of physiology and cultural conditioning on human beings. Not only do they individually influence people but they interact with each other and with each person's unique essence to affect human behavior. To accord with the reality of this complex interplay of factors, and to accord with an increasingly complex external world, feminists ask simply for options in life styles.

Surveys have shown that identical resumes or scholarly articles are rated lower if the applicant is thought to be a woman rather than a man: "Man's success is more likely to be attributed to ability and woman's to luck." While advances have been made over the last decade, the challenge remains for the next and "as long as women constitute small minorities in nontraditional employment contexts, substantial obstacles will remain." The women in the workplace must work harder to succeed than their male counterparts, and once they have succeeded they have to deal with the envy and anxiety this arouses. Women who do not advance only confirm the stereotype for others:

The perception remains that women can't make it by conventional standards or are less committed to doing so; In either event, they do not seem to warrant the same investment in training, assistance and promotion opportunities as their male counterparts. Feminists struggled for a change in the political climate because they wanted more than just more women in office and the political arena; they wanted a new type of political thinking, one that empowers people rather than government and that addresses the issues that are of importance to men and women.

### **Constraints of Contemporary Gender Roles**

#### **Issues of Equality in Family**

The modern social structure sees both men and women as equal partners of the society with equal rights, status and responsibility. This is a sudden change of concepts of a male dominated society. In the families, people who have observed authoritarian father and submissive mothers may expect the same when they setup their own families.

The equal status may disturb the husbands as the laid-underneath superiority elements may require certain amount of time to dissolve themselves and accept the new socio-cultural setup. The aspect of equality will give rise to certain issues too. Who is to direct and who to be directed? Who is the authority in family related issues? etc., may put the family in trouble. If not accepted well and handled appreciably, the family may become like a vehicle steered to different direction at the same time by many drivers.

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### **Clash in Family Responsibilities**

Family is not just an institution of many people living together under one roof; but the union of similar minded or mutually loving people bound with certain duties and responsibilities. The gender role structure was deliberately designed by the initial social setups to help the people accept and realize the specific duties each gender bound to. But today, both the parents work and earn for the family and both father and mother enjoys equal social status and financial independence. At this point, the role of homemaker becomes no one's responsibility and both the partners may insist the other one to be the homemaker which will cause the conflicts in roles. Adjustments, understanding and empathy are the advised aspects that may help a smooth running family.

### **Kids and Gender Roles**

Traditional family system had enough time dedicated for the kids as the mother was responsible for the entire process of childcare and development, when the father had to bring in the essential food supplies. But modern lifestyle makes both the parents busy working for the family and earning the amount to meet the demands of life. Kids many a times are left with caretakers or paid nannies.

Such lifestyles may affect the families badly as children may grow unaffectionate to the parents. It is quite difficult for any parent to balance between the modern lifestyle and parenting or homemaker tasks. Kids need to be trained to cop up with the family roles. This will help them to be more understanding and affectionate to parents

### **Others**

- Although substantially more flexibility is offered to men and women today, contemporary gender roles and expectations continue to limit our potential.
- Men are required to work and support their families rather than have the same role freedom to choose to work as women have.

- Men continue to have greater difficulty in expressing their feelings and may be out of touch with their inner lives.
- Contemporary men still expect and in many cases are expected, to be dominant in relationships
- Research suggests that the traditional female gender role does not foster self-confidence or mental health: Both men and women tend to see women as less competent than men.
- Contemporary gender roles are still in flux: Few men or women are entirely egalitarian or traditional.

*equality  
of all  
people*

*progress, move*

Is Androgyny the Answer?

- In **Androgyny**, both culturally defined masculine and feminine characteristics are blended in the same person. Androgyny refers to the state of combining male and female characteristics.
- Androgynous gender roles are characterized by flexibility and a unique combination of instrumental and expressive traits. Individuals that are rigidly both instrumental and expressive, despite the situation, are not considered androgynous. Androgynous individuals and couples appear to have a greater ability to form and sustain intimate relationships and adopt a wider range of behaviors and values.