

Attitudes towards women among college students in urban India

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Abstract: *Indian society is known to have deep-rooted forms of gender inequality built into its structure. In Indian society, women were looked down socially, economically and politically. The socio economic and religious practices prevalent in India over time have created a wide gap between the position of men and women in the society. In the name of culture, tradition and religion women are denied their rightful place in society. However slowly and gradually women in urban India are demanding equal treatment and storming one male bastion after another. This paper studies the attitudes of college students as a function gender and religious affiliation. The study covers a sample of 100 college students using a 2x2 factorial design having 4 cells with 25 subjects in each cell and uses the short version of the Attitudes towards Women Scale developed by Spence, Helmrich and Stapp (1978). Results indicate gender differences in attitudes towards women but no significant differences between the two religious groups. Results are discussed with reference to its implications for society.*

Keywords: *Indian society, Gender disparity, Religion, Egalitarian.*

Indian society is known to have gender disparities from its early history. The most deep-rooted forms of gender inequality had been built into the structure of traditional Indian society. Women were looked down socially, economically and politically. Women became victims of the most horrific acts in the name of traditions and customs. The prevalence of Sati, child marriage and Devdasi system are examples of how women suffer in the name of religion, tradition and culture. Women have had no voice what so ever for centuries together and their role was restricted to domestic life especially kitchen work and bearing and rearing of children. She has no place in economic and political activities. Girl children were discriminated in terms of basic necessities of life such as food, clothing and shelter. In most homes women are the first to get up and the last person in the family to eat. She is the person who has to do all menial jobs and has no decision making power. The socio economic and religious practices prevalent in India over time have created a wide gap between the position of men and women in the society. In India gender inequality is a topic of interest among media, academia, researchers and policy makers of country. This gender inequality has an adverse impact on development goals and prevents the full fledged and active participation of women in socio economic and political life and hence has negative outcomes for society as a whole.

A number of factors create and foster gender inequality in India. India is predominantly patriarchal and patrilineal, so practice of patrilocality is common. A married couple lives near or with the husband's parents. When a woman gets married, she is no longer a member of her birth family and joins her husband's family. This implies that while a son continues to be a part of the family the daughter leaves the house both physically and financially. Co-residence of adult sons and elderly parents is much more common in Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa than in Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Americas (Ebenstein, 2014). Even within India, northern India is more patriarchal so gender inequality is more pronounced in the north (Dyson and Moore, 1983). Patrilocality results in sons traditionally providing old-age support for their parents in India. The continued prevalence of dowry becomes another key factor in parents' desire to have sons rather than daughters in India (Arnold et al., 1998; Das Gupta et al., 2003). In a patrilineal system, names and property pass to the next generation only through sons. In India widows traditionally do not inherit their husbands' ancestral property so they needed sons to have control on the family property and maintain their standard of living in widowhood. In addition, among Hindus it is a son who lights a parent's funeral pyre and brings him or her salvation. All these conditions result in and manifest in the form of a preference for male children and a poor sex-ratio in India.

Since religion and religious beliefs are important in India it would follow that attitudes towards women's equality would be influenced by one's religious affiliation. All world religions today maintain male social dominance within societal structures (Young, 1987). In the histories of religions, the voice of women is rarely heard, due to the patriarchal dispositions of societies in which these religions emerged. While most religions agree on the respect for women and their crucial role in family life, especially with emphasis on women as mothers and wives, they do not, advocate emancipation in the sense of total equality with men. Thus we find a paradoxical situation where women are actually restricted under the pretext of being respected and

protected especially in countries like India. The popular interpretations of Hindu mythology have very fixed views on how women should behave; things like being obedient and being a good housewife and mother. In the Ramayana, Ram is a model for how men should act and Sita is the model for women. Unfortunately, these ideas perpetuate and justify violence against women in India today. As a result women are blamed even when they are the victims of crime by saying she didn't behave like Sita so she invited trouble upon herself. At the same time rapid urbanization and exposure to mass media are also changing the mindset of youth especially young girls who are demanding equality and refuse to accept traditional ideas. Educated and financially independent women are demanding equality in all aspects of their life and are rejecting traditional ideas of femininity and masculinity.

This paper studies the role of gender and religious belief in attitudes towards women among college students in Mumbai.

I. Method

Hypotheses

The main hypotheses of this study were Female subjects would have more egalitarian attitudes towards women than male subjects.

Hindu subjects would have more egalitarian attitudes than Muslim subjects.

Sample

The subjects in this study were 100 students (50 males, 50 females) between 18 years to 21 years of age pursuing graduation from a college in Mumbai. Among the 50 males/females 25 were Hindus and 25 were Muslims.

Research Design

The two independent variables in the study were sex of the subject and religion practiced by the subject. A 2x2 factorial design was employed having 4 cells with 25 subjects in each cell.

Tools and Procedure

The study used the short version of the Attitudes Towards Women Scale developed by Spence, Helmrich and Stapp (1978). The scale has 25 items each to be rated on a four point scale ranging from 1-Agree Strongly to 4-Disagree Strongly. Of the 25 items 12 are reverse scored. A high score indicates a pro feminist, egalitarian attitude while a low score indicates a traditional, conservative attitude.

The researcher met the subjects during class hours and explained the purpose of the study. Copies of the questionnaire were distributed and clear instructions were given. The subjects then answered the question with the researcher clarifying meanings of terms as and when required. On an average the administration took 15-20 minutes. A short de- briefing session was conducted after each administration.

Data Analysis

Total and mean scores were calculated for all the groups. Two way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was computed for the attitude score. The findings that emerged from these computations are presented and discussed with reference to the hypothesis.

II. Results And Discussion

Hypothesis 1

Female subjects would have more egalitarian attitudes towards women than male subjects.

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a significant main effect of sex of subject on attitude towards women $F = 148.396$, $p < 0.001$. Higher scores indicate more egalitarian and pro feminist attitude hence, mean scores revealed that in keeping with the hypothesis female subjects ($M=85.42$) had more egalitarian attitudes than male subjects ($M=68.12$).

Hypothesis 2

Hindu subjects would have more egalitarian attitudes than Muslim subjects.

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated no significant main effect of religion practiced by the subject on attitude towards women. However mean scores revealed only a slight difference between the two religions. Hindus had a slightly higher ($M=78.02$) score as compared to Muslim subjects ($M=75.52$) indicating that Hindu youth were only slightly more egalitarian than Muslim youth.

No significant interaction effects were noticed. The mean scores of the four groups in descending order were as follows; Hindu female subjects (M=87.76), Muslim female subjects (M=83.08), Hindu male subjects (M=68.28) and Muslim male subjects (M=67.96)

The results obtained indicated support only for the hypothesis that female subjects are more egalitarian and pro feminist than male subjects. These results indicate that while young girls seem to believe that they need to be treated equally young men do not seem to agree on equal treatment for women. This is a reflection of the essential differences existing in Indian society especially among the post globalization generation. Girls seem to storming one male bastion after the other and are asking to be recognized as equal citizens. Boys however seem reluctant to change their traditional mindset and are not willing to accord equal status. It is also a reflection of the differences in the way girls and boys are brought up.

These results in no way indicate that girls or women are treated equally in urban India. It is only indicative of the beliefs of young women that they need and deserve equal treatment. This divide between the demands of young Indian girls for equality and the unwillingness of young men to grant this equality is responsible at least partially for crimes against women in urban India. Urban India, specifically Mumbai, also has large migrant populations who are brought up in rural India with traditional mindset and subsequently move to urban areas. Such groups are often unwilling to accord equal status to women and experience a culture shock when they interact with liberated urban women. This could also be a reason for increasing crimes against women in cities. Indian boys irrespective of religious affiliation seem to more conservative in their attitudes. Thus religion does not seem to be so important to youth in urban India. Probably rural India or small town India would present a different picture.

III. Conclusions

Urban Indian women have become more egalitarian in their attitudes towards women but men seem to have lagged behind. Religion does not seem to make a difference in attitudes towards women at least in urban India.

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