

Tradition, Power, and Resistance: Gender Roles in a Changing Society

Running Title: *Negotiating Identity, Authority, and Social Change*

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Abstract: *This research paper explores how gender roles are shaped by tradition, enforced through power structures, and challenged by various forms of resistance within a changing society. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research examines how cultural norms and patriarchal values influence gender expectations, the ways in which individuals and communities negotiate these norms, and how modern forces such as education, urbanization, and media contribute to social transformation. The study highlights both progress and pushback, showing that gender equality evolves through a dynamic, ongoing interaction between tradition and resistance. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, and review of cultural documents. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the experiences and perceptions of men and women across different generations. Findings reveal that traditional patriarchal norms still strongly influence gender expectations, particularly among older individuals, reinforcing a strict division between male authority and female domesticity. However, the growing access to education, economic opportunities, and exposure to modern influences has encouraged younger members of the community to question and renegotiate these roles. Women's increased participation in education and income generation leads to greater empowerment and shifts in household decision-making, although social stigma continues to restrict both genders from fully adopting non-traditional roles. The study concludes that gender roles in the community are undergoing a gradual transition, shaped by the interplay of tradition, power dynamics, and emerging forms of resistance. These insights contribute to a broader understanding of how gender identities are reconstructed in changing societies and highlight the need for awareness and policy support to promote gender equality.*

Keywords: Gender Roles; Tradition; Patriarchy; Power Dynamics; Social Change; Resistance; Empowerment; Cultural Norms; Education; Economic Participation; Modernization; Case Study; Feminist Theory.

1. Introduction

Gender roles are social constructions that define the roles, behaviors, and responsibilities expected of men and women. In many societies, these roles are rooted in traditional beliefs passed across generations. However, changing social, economic, and technological conditions increasingly challenge these norms.

The aim of this research is to understand how tradition dictates gender roles, how power maintains gender inequality, and how resistance- both individual and collective- drives change. The study focuses on a transitioning society where modern influences interact with long- standing cultural practices. These roles shape how men and women behave in family, workplace, and community spaces, influencing everything from decision-making authority to emotional expression. In many traditional societies, gender roles are rooted in long-standing cultural beliefs, religious teachings, and economic necessities that have been passed down from one generation to the next. Such norms often emphasize male dominance in public spheres and female responsibility in domestic and caregiving activities. However, rapid social, economic, and technological transformations across the world have begun to challenge these established norms. Global exposure through education, media, and digital platforms has opened spaces for questioning inequality and redefining identity.

This research aims to examine how tradition continues to shape gender expectations, how power structures reinforce

inequality, and how emerging resistance drives societal change. The study focuses on a community that is currently in transition- where modern influences such as education and employment coexist with deep-rooted cultural practices. By exploring people's lived experiences and everyday negotiations, this research seeks to understand how gender roles are being renegotiated in a world where both continuity and change operate simultaneously. Ultimately, the study sheds light on the dynamic processes through which societies adapt gender identities in response to new realities.

2. Literature Background

1) Gender Roles in Traditional Societies:

Studies in anthropology and sociology highlight that traditional societies assign gender roles based on cultural, religious, and economic structures. These roles are often rigid, favoring male dominance and restricting female autonomy. Scholars in sociology and anthropology argue that gender roles in traditional societies are strongly influenced by cultural norms, religious beliefs, and the economic division of labour. Historically, men were associated with strength, leadership, and public responsibilities, while women were linked with nurturing, caregiving, and domestic work. These roles were viewed as natural, even though they were constructed by society rather than determined by biology. The rigidity of such norms limited women's mobility and autonomy, restricting their education, property ownership, and participation in decision-making. Literature highlights that these norms are reinforced through family socialization, customs, rituals, and moral

expectations from a very young age, making deviation socially unacceptable. As a result, gender roles become a tool to maintain social order, even if they perpetuate inequality.

1) Power and Patriarchy:

Feminist theorists explain patriarchy as a system where men hold authority over women in family, social, political, and economic spheres. These power relations shape access to opportunities and resources, reinforcing inequality. Feminist theorists describe patriarchy as a structural system in which men hold authority and control over women in economic, political, and social domains.

This power imbalance shapes access to resources such as education, income, property, and legal rights, systematically privileging men while marginalizing women. Patriarchy is not only enforced through laws and institutions but also through everyday practices and social beliefs that normalize male superiority. Scholars like Deniz Kandiyoti and Sylvia Walby argue that women often “bargain” with patriarchy—conforming to gender expectations for safety, acceptance, or survival while still seeking small forms of agency. Power dynamics therefore become central in gender studies because they determine who makes decisions, who benefits from them, and whose voice is silenced. The literature emphasizes that without addressing patriarchal power, gender equality remains difficult to achieve.

2) Social Change and Resistance

Modernization theories suggest that factors such as education, economic development, migration, digital communication, and globalization gradually transform social structures, including gender norms. When women gain access to literacy, employment, and financial independence, they often begin to challenge roles that confine them solely to domestic spaces. Resistance emerges in various forms—from collective activism and reform movements to subtle, everyday acts such as negotiating household responsibilities or pursuing personal goals. Scholars also highlight that men play an important role in this change; as societal expectations evolve, men may adopt caregiving roles or support women’s empowerment.

3. Methodology

1) Research Design

A qualitative case study approach was used to explore gender roles within a specific society. This method allows for detailed examination of lived experiences and social dynamics. This design is particularly suitable for understanding complex social phenomena, as it focuses on real-life contexts and lived experiences rather than numerical outcomes. By examining gender relations within a localized cultural setting, the study aims to capture multiple perspectives, reveal subtle power structures, and uncover the meanings individuals attach to their roles.

The case study approach enables in-depth observation of social interactions, traditions, and resistance practices through various qualitative tools such as interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations.

2) Data Collection:

Data for this study were collected using multiple qualitative techniques in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of gender roles and social interactions within the selected community. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals of different age groups, marital status, and socio-economic backgrounds to gather personal experiences and perceptions related to gender expectations, authority, and resistance. These interviews allowed participants the freedom to express their thoughts in their own words while still ensuring that key themes were addressed. In addition to interviews, focus group discussions were organized to capture collective viewpoints, social norms, and group-based attitudes toward changing gender roles. This method enabled observation of how people negotiate and justify traditional practices or challenge them in social settings. Participant observation was also used to closely watch daily activities, community interactions, and local events, helping the researcher understand how gender roles are practiced in real-life situations rather than only discussed verbally. Field notes were maintained throughout the observation period to record behaviors, social cues, and contextual details that might not emerge in interview responses. Relevant documents and cultural artifacts such as local customs, rituals, and community guidelines were reviewed to understand the historical and institutional background of gender norms. All interviews and discussions were audio-recorded with consent and later transcribed for systematic analysis. This combination of data collection methods enhanced credibility of the findings by allowing triangulation and ensuring that different perspectives on tradition, power, and gender relations were thoroughly documented.

3) Data Analysis

The data collected through interviews, focus group discussions, and observations were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach to identify recurring ideas, social patterns, and hidden meanings related to gender roles within the community. All audio-recorded interviews and group discussions were first transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. The researcher carefully read and re-read the transcripts and field notes to become familiar with the content and context. The data were then coded manually, where significant words, phrases, and statements related to tradition, power relations, resistance, and changing gender expectations were highlighted. These initial codes were further organized into broader categories and themes that reflected the major aspects of people’s lived experiences. Comparison across different participant groups — such as men, women, youth, and elders — helped in identifying similarities as well as contradictions in their perceptions. Patterns from observations were also integrated to validate and support the verbal data, allowing for triangulation of evidence. As themes emerged, they were continuously reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represented the participants’ views and did not impose researcher bias. Interpretation of the themes was done in relation to the socio-cultural context of the community, linking the findings to existing theories and literature on gender, tradition, and power dynamics. This systematic and iterative process of analysis helped in drawing meaningful insights into how gender roles are negotiated and transformed in a changing

world.

4. Case Study Findings

1) Historical and Cultural Gender Expectations:

Traditionally, gender roles were deeply embedded in historical and cultural contexts, assigning men and women distinct responsibilities and social positions. Men were considered the primary providers, protectors, and authoritative figures within the family and community. Their roles encompassed decision-making, resource control, and public representation, which reinforced their dominance in both domestic and societal spheres. Women, on the other hand, were expected to focus on domestic duties, caregiving, and obedience to family elders. Religious teachings, cultural narratives, and folklore often idealized male authority and female submission, presenting such roles as natural and morally desirable. These norms created a strict division of labor, limiting women's engagement in economic, political, and social activities beyond the household.

2) Power Structures and Gender Inequality:

Men held decision-making authority in households, property ownership, and community politics. Women had limited access to education, income, and mobility. Inequality was sustained through inheritance rules favoring men, societal pressure on women to marry early, norms discouraging female leadership.

These power hierarchies restricted women's autonomy and life choices. Patriarchal power structures institutionalized male dominance, shaping access to resources, opportunities, and social mobility. Men traditionally held authority over household decision-making, property ownership, and community politics, while women had limited access to education, employment, and personal freedom. Social expectations, inheritance rules favoring male heirs, and early marriage pressures reinforced these inequalities. Cultural norms discouraged women from assuming leadership positions, voicing opinions in public forums, or pursuing personal ambitions that challenged traditional expectations. As a result, these hierarchical structures significantly restricted women's autonomy, constrained their life choices, and perpetuated systemic gender inequality across generations.

3) Changing Social Dynamics

Modern influences are slowly reshaping gender norms which showcase that more women are pursuing higher education, increased female participation in formal employment, urbanisation reducing extended family control, Media promoting gender equality narratives. Government programs supporting women's rights. Despite progress, traditional expectations still shape daily life, creating tension between older and younger generations.

In contemporary society, social, economic, and technological transformations are gradually reshaping traditional gender norms. Increasingly, women are pursuing higher education, entering formal employment, and contributing economically to their families, which challenges the historical notion of male-only provision. Urbanization and nuclear family living arrangements reduce

the direct influence of extended family elders, providing women with more autonomy.

Media and digital platforms promote narratives of gender equality, inspiring both men and women to reimagine traditional roles. Government initiatives and policies supporting women's rights, legal protections, and empowerment programs further facilitate this shift. Despite these advances, traditional expectations continue to influence daily life, resulting in tensions between older and younger generations. These dynamics illustrate that gender roles are not static but continuously negotiated, reflecting the ongoing interplay between historical norms and contemporary change.

The findings reveal that gender roles in the selected community are strongly rooted in traditional beliefs, yet signs of gradual transformation are clearly visible. Older generations tend to follow strict division of labour, where men are viewed as primary breadwinners and decision-makers, while women are expected to handle household duties, child-rearing, and maintain family honour. Many elderly participants expressed pride in maintaining customs passed down through generations, linking traditional gender roles with social order and cultural identity.

In contrast, younger men and women demonstrated more flexible attitudes. Young women, particularly those accessing higher education and employment, reported a growing desire for independence, financial security, and equal participation in decision-making. Some young men also acknowledged the need to share domestic responsibilities, though many still felt societal pressure to remain dominant figures within the family. This generational shift highlights ongoing negotiation between traditional expectations and personal aspirations.

Another major finding is the role of power dynamics in shaping gender behaviour. Women described experiences of limited mobility, restrictions on choice, and constant supervision by male family members. However, many also narrated subtle forms of resistance, such as participating in community groups, pursuing education despite obstacles, or challenging norms through everyday decision-making. These acts, though small, indicate emerging empowerment and changing self-identity.

The study also found that economic changes significantly influence gender roles. Families where women contribute to household income showed more egalitarian relationships, shared decision-making, and increased respect toward women's opinions. Access to technology and exposure to media further encouraged questioning of traditional norms and acceptance of new gender practices.

Despite visible progress, social stigma remains a powerful barrier. Women who step outside conventional roles often face criticism, moral judgment, or pressure to conform. Men who try to adopt non-traditional roles, such as helping with childcare, may be teased or labelled as "weak." These tensions demonstrate that while change is occurring, it is neither uniform nor fully accepted.

Overall, the findings indicate a dynamic transition in gender roles: tradition continues to hold influence, but aspirations for equality and self-determination are steadily growing. The community stands at a crossroads where old power structures are being questioned, and new gender identities are emerging through resistance, negotiation, and social change.

Forms of Resistance

Resistance to traditional gender roles in the community manifests in both individual and collective forms, reflecting efforts to challenge entrenched norms and create new possibilities for equality. Individual resistance occurs when women and men take personal actions to assert autonomy and redefine expectations. For example, many young women are choosing to delay marriage in order to pursue higher education and career opportunities, thereby prioritizing personal development over societal pressures. Similarly, some men are actively participating in household and caregiving responsibilities, challenging the assumption that domestic work is solely a female domain. Young adults, both male and female, are increasingly questioning and resisting arranged marriage pressures, negotiating choices in relationships, and asserting their right to personal freedom. These individual acts, although small, cumulatively challenge existing power structures and gradually reshape social attitudes.

Collective resistance involves organized efforts that aim to create broader societal change. Women's organizations advocate for legal reforms, such as policies against gender-based discrimination and domestic violence, strengthening the structural support for equality.

Community workshops and awareness programs on gender issues help educate both men and women about rights, responsibilities, and the value of shared participation. Social media campaigns serve as platforms for raising awareness, amplifying marginalized voices, and mobilizing support against gender-based violence and discrimination. Additionally, cultural expressions— including art, poetry, and public performances—are increasingly used to question and critique traditional stereotypes, creating new narratives that celebrate equality and challenge patriarchy. Together, these forms of resistance— both individual and collective— demonstrate that change is possible and are gradually influencing attitudes, behaviours, and norms within the community.

Consequences of Changing Gender Roles

The transformation of gender roles in society brings about a variety of social, economic, and cultural consequences, reflecting both opportunities and challenges. One of the most significant positive outcomes is increased empowerment and agency for women. As women gain access to education, employment, and decision-making roles, they experience greater autonomy, financial independence, and ability to participate in public life. This shift not only benefits women individually but also contributes to family welfare and community development, as households become more egalitarian and inclusive.

Changing gender roles also influence men's identities and

responsibilities. Men who participate in caregiving and domestic work develop stronger interpersonal relationships and a more nuanced understanding of partnership and collaboration. These changes help dismantle rigid notions of masculinity, promoting emotional literacy and reducing social pressures that previously confined men to narrow roles.

At the societal level, evolving gender roles foster greater equality and social justice, as laws, policies, and cultural practices slowly adjust to accommodate shared responsibilities and inclusive participation. Economically, women's participation in the workforce enhances productivity, household income, and national development, while diversified family roles contribute to more balanced decision-making within households.

However, these changes also come with challenges and tensions. Resistance from older generations or conservative groups can create intergenerational conflicts and social friction. Women who step outside traditional roles may face stigma, criticism, or even backlash, while men adopting non-traditional roles may be socially ridiculed or seen as weak. Furthermore, the rapid pace of change can create role strain, as individuals negotiate new expectations while trying to balance work, family, and personal aspirations.

Overall, the consequences of changing gender roles reflect a dynamic interplay between empowerment, negotiation, and tension. While traditional norms still influence social life, evolving attitudes and behaviors indicate a gradual movement toward equality, shared responsibility, and redefined identities for both men and women in contemporary society.

5. Discussion

The findings show that gender roles are deeply rooted in tradition but are not fixed. Change happens gradually and unevenly. Factors such as class, caste, religion, and age influence how individuals experience gender inequality. The coexistence of tradition and modernity creates a hybrid social landscape. While progress toward gender equality is evident, resistance from traditional institutions continues to slow transformation. The study emphasizes that meaningful change requires both structural reforms and shifts in cultural attitudes. The findings of this case study highlight that gender roles within the selected community are influenced by the continuous interaction of tradition, power, and emerging resistance, reflecting both stability and change in social structures. The persistence of traditional division of labour among older generations supports social constructionist perspectives, which argue that gender is not biologically fixed but socially created through long-established cultural practices and expectations. These norms are reinforced by family institutions, rituals, and community beliefs that define masculinity as authority and femininity as subordination.

However, the attitudes of younger participants reveal signs of transition, aligning with modernization theory, which states that education, media exposure, and economic development gradually weaken rigid cultural norms. Young

women pursuing education and employment demonstrate a shift toward self-empowerment and equal participation, which corresponds with feminist theoretical perspectives emphasizing the struggle for autonomy, bodily rights, and social equality. Their subtle acts of defiance- whether through negotiation or silent resistance- also resonate with Scott's theory of everyday resistance, where dominated groups challenge power within their daily lives without open confrontation.

Power remains a core element shaping gender relations. The community still privileges male dominance in decision-making, reflecting patriarchal power structures described by feminist theorists like Sylvia Walby. Even when change begins, social stigma acts as a mechanism of control to push individuals back into conventional roles. This demonstrates hegemonic masculinity, where society expects men to maintain dominance and discourages them from adopting caring or domestic roles.

Economic contributions by women were found to improve their status within the family, supporting gender and development theories that link women's empowerment to access to resources such as income, education, and mobility. The emergence of shared responsibilities and respect in such households shows that power dynamics are not static but can evolve when social and economic conditions change.

Overall, the discussion suggests that the community is currently in a state of negotiated change- where tradition continues to guide social behaviour, but individuals are increasingly questioning and reshaping gender norms. This tension between continuity and transformation reflects broader global patterns of shifting gender identities in a rapidly changing world.

6. Conclusion

This research demonstrates that gender roles in traditional societies are shaped by deep-rooted cultural practices and reinforced through power structures. However, resistance—ranging from personal acts to organized movements—plays a significant role in challenging and transforming these norms.

As societies modernize, gender roles evolve, but not without tension. The ongoing dialogue between tradition and resistance defines the pace and direction of gender equality. Future research should examine policy interventions, educational reforms, and grassroots initiatives that can support more equitable gender relations.

The case study clearly demonstrates that gender roles in the selected community are undergoing a gradual but significant transformation. While traditional norms rooted in patriarchy continue to shape the daily lives, behaviours, and expectations of both men and women, the influence of education, economic opportunities, and changing social values is creating space for new gender identities to emerge. Older generations still largely adhere to conventional divisions of labour, associating masculinity with power and femininity with domestic responsibilities.

However, younger individuals show a growing willingness to challenge these hierarchies, seeking equality in decision-making, mobility, and economic participation.

Women are increasingly asserting their rights through education, employment, and everyday acts of resistance, demonstrating that empowerment often begins within small social shifts rather than major collective movements. Men, too, are slowly redefining their roles, although social pressure to maintain authority remains strong. The coexistence of acceptance and resistance highlights that change is uneven, and tension between modern ideals and cultural expectations persists. Overall, the findings indicate that the community is not abandoning its traditions, but rather renegotiating them to reflect contemporary aspirations for fairness, dignity, and shared responsibility. Gender roles here are no longer fixed; they are dynamic, evolving, and shaped by the continuous interplay of tradition, power, and social change.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to support equitable gender relations within the community. Firstly, increasing access to education for girls and women should be prioritised, as educational empowerment was found to be a major factor in challenging traditional norms. Schools and community institutions should incorporate gender- sensitisation programmes that promote shared responsibilities, respect for women's rights, and positive masculinity. Secondly, encouraging economic participation of women through skill-development programmes, self-help groups, and employment opportunities can strengthen their bargaining power within households, leading to more balanced decision-making. Thirdly, awareness campaigns led by local leaders, NGOs, and government agencies can help reduce social stigma around changing gender roles and promote supportive attitudes toward men who take part in caregiving and domestic work. It is also important to create safe spaces for women and youth to express their concerns, form support networks, and participate in community decision-making processes. Finally, continuous efforts should be made to involve men in discussions on gender equality, as transformation requires cooperation from both genders. Collectively, these measures can help bridge generational gaps, reduce resistance to change, and promote a more inclusive and just society where gender roles are based on ability and mutual respect rather than rigid traditions.

Table 1: Traditional vs Changing Gender Roles

Aspect	Traditional Gender Roles	Changing Gender Roles
Household Responsibilities	Women manage domestic chores; men as providers	Shared household responsibilities; men participate in caregiving
Decision-Making	Male-dominated in family and community	Increasing female participation in decisions
Education	Women had limited access; men prioritized	More women pursuing higher education
Employment	Men engaged in	Increasing female

	formal work; women rarely employed	workforce participation
Social Expectations	Women obedient, submissive; men authoritative	Women assert autonomy; men adopt flexible roles
Cultural Norms	Reinforced by religion, folklore, traditions	Media, globalization, government programs encourage equality

Table 2: Forms of Resistance

Type of Resistance	Examples	Impact
Individual	Women delaying marriage, pursuing education; men sharing household chores	Gradual change in family dynamics; challenges traditional authority
	Women's organizations, workshops, social media campaigns, cultural performances	Broader societal awareness; promotes gender equality; influences policy

Table 3: Consequences of Changing Gender Roles

Positive Consequences	Negative / Challenging Consequences
Women's empowerment and autonomy	Social stigma for women breaking norms
Increased shared responsibilities in families	Men adopting non-traditional roles may face ridicule
Higher female education and workforce participation	Role strain and tension between generations
Greater gender equality in decision-making	Conflict between traditional values and modern aspirations
Economic growth through women's contribution	Resistance from conservative segments of society

Figure 1: Generational Perspectives on Gender Roles

(Suggested visual; can be a bar chart or pie chart)

- X-axis: Age Groups (Older Generation, Middle Generation, Young Adults)
- Y-axis: Percentage Supporting Traditional Roles vs Flexible Roles
- Visual Representation: Two colored bars for each age group (Traditional vs Changing)

Figure 2: Sources of Resistance

(Suggested pie chart or stacked bar chart)

- Sections: Individual Resistance (40%), Collective Resistance (60%)
- Subsections of Collective Resistance: Legal advocacy, workshops, media campaigns.

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