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A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF MEN'S UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER EQUALITY IN INDIAN FAMILIES

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ABSTRACT:

"The roots of gender inequality lie in the structure of the family and the practices of child-rearing."
— Nancy Chodorow

This research paper, "A Sociological Study of Men's Understanding of Gender Equality in Indian Families," presents a sociological analysis of men's perceptions, attitudes, and practices regarding gender equality in Indian society. Historically, Indian society has been characterized by a patriarchal social structure in which men have traditionally been regarded as the primary decision-makers and breadwinners of the family, while women have largely been confined to domestic roles. However, modernization, education, urbanization, and the increasing economic participation of women have challenged these conventional gender roles. Despite these changes, various forms of gender inequality continue to persist within Indian families.

The study is based on secondary data and adopts a qualitative and descriptive research methodology. It draws upon books on gender studies, patriarchy, masculinity, feminist theories, research articles, academic journals, and national as well as international reports to examine men's understanding of gender equality.

The findings indicate that although many Indian men support women's education, employment, and participation in public life, such support often remains limited to "permission-based equality," where women enjoy opportunities only with the approval of male family members. Unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities, unpaid household labour, and disparities in decision-making power continue to characterize many Indian families. The study further reveals that traditional notions of masculinity and gender-based social conditioning continue to shape men's attitudes towards gender equality.

The study concludes that gender equality cannot be achieved solely through women's empowerment. Sustainable and meaningful gender equality requires a transformation in men's attitudes, behaviours, and social roles. Promoting shared responsibilities, equal participation, and mutual respect within families can contribute significantly to building a more equitable and just society in India.

Keywords:
Gender Equality, Patriarchy, Masculinity, Gender Roles, Indian Family

INTRODUCTION:-

According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2025, India ranks 131st out of 148 countries in terms of gender equality. This ranking indicates that despite significant progress in economic development, education, legal reforms, and modernization, gender equality has not yet been fully achieved in Indian society. Gender inequality in India extends beyond the economic and political spheres and is deeply embedded in family structures, social relationships, and cultural values.

Gender equality has emerged as one of the most significant social issues of the contemporary world. Industrialization, urbanization, globalization, and technological advancement have transformed Indian society considerably. Women's access to education, employment, and public life has expanded, thereby challenging traditional gender roles. Nevertheless, issues such as the unequal distribution of domestic work, unequal decision-making authority, and the double burden faced by women continue to exist.

Historically, Indian society has been organized around a patriarchal social system in which men have traditionally been viewed as heads of households, primary decision-makers, and breadwinners, while women have been expected to perform domestic duties and caregiving responsibilities. Such social arrangements have shaped the

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attitudes and behaviour of both men and women. Therefore, examining men's understanding of gender equality has become increasingly important.

Gender roles are constructed through the process of socialization. From early childhood, boys and girls are treated differently. Boys are encouraged to become strong, independent, and financially responsible, whereas girls are socialized to undertake domestic responsibilities and caregiving roles.

Raewyn Connell, in Gender and Power, argues that gender relations are fundamentally structured by power relations within society. Similarly, Michael Kimmel views masculinity as a socially constructed concept through which men are expected to exercise dominance and control. In the Indian context, Uma Chakravarti, in Gendering Caste, explains that patriarchy and the caste system jointly regulate and reinforce women's subordinate status.

Against this background, the present study, "A Sociological Study of Men's Understanding of Gender Equality in Indian Families," attempts to analyse men's perceptions of gender equality, patriarchal masculinity, and family relations from a sociological perspective. The study further explores whether contemporary social changes are genuinely transforming men's attitudes or whether patriarchy continues to exist within Indian families in new and subtle forms.

LITERATURE REVIEW:-

1. Empowering Boys and Men to Achieve Gender Equality in India

Aparajita Choudhury & Manjari Pathak

This study emphasizes that gender equality is not solely a women's issue; rather, the active participation of men is equally essential. The authors argue that patriarchal ideology adversely affects both men and women. Unless men are actively involved in the process of gender sensitization and equality, genuine gender justice cannot be achieved. The study highlights the indispensable role of men in promoting gender equality and social justice.

2. Time Use Survey 2019

Government of India

The Time Use Survey (2019) reveals that women in India spend significantly more time than men on unpaid domestic and care work. Household responsibilities continue to be disproportionately borne by women, while men's participation in domestic work remains comparatively limited. The survey clearly demonstrates the persistence of a gender-based division of labour and concludes that domestic inequality continues despite the increasing economic participation of women.

3. Oxfam India Report on Unpaid Care Work

Oxfam India

According to the Oxfam India Report, Indian women devote substantially more time than men to unpaid care work each day. Domestic labour and caregiving responsibilities are largely concentrated among women, restricting their educational, employment, and economic opportunities. The report highlights the phenomenon of the "double burden," whereby women simultaneously shoulder paid employment and unpaid domestic responsibilities. This reflects the structural nature of gender inequality in Indian society.

4. Seeing Like a Feminist

Nivedita Menon

Nivedita Menon argues that genuine gender equality cannot be achieved merely by providing opportunities to women; it requires autonomy, dignity, and equal participation. She views gender roles as socially constructed rather than biologically determined. Her work demonstrates how family and society often restrict women's freedom and autonomy. According to Menon, equality should be understood not as permission granted by men but as a relationship based on partnership, mutual respect, and independence.

5. Pew Research Center Report (2022)

Pew Research Center

The Pew Research Center's 2022 report indicates that traditional beliefs regarding gender roles remain deeply rooted in Indian society. A significant proportion of respondents believe that men should enjoy greater rights and opportunities than women, particularly in employment. The report concludes that despite modernization, education, and urbanization, patriarchal attitudes continue to shape public opinion and social behaviour in India.

6. Gender and Power

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Raewyn Connell
Raewyn Connell conceptualizes gender relations as power relations embedded within social structures. According to her, men are generally assigned dominant social positions, while women occupy subordinate roles. Connell also argues that masculinity is socially constructed and plays a central role in maintaining patriarchal power structures. Her work provides an important theoretical framework for understanding gender inequality.

7. Studies on Masculinity
Michael Kimmel
Michael Kimmel views masculinity as a social construct rather than a biological reality. He argues that from childhood, boys are socialized to value dominance, control, emotional toughness, and authority. In contemporary society, many men experience tension between traditional masculine expectations and modern values of gender equality. His work helps explain how men perceive and respond to changing gender relations.

8. Gendering Caste
Uma Chakravarti
Uma Chakravarti argues that caste and patriarchy are deeply interconnected within Indian society. The family serves as a key institution for regulating women's freedom, sexuality, and social behaviour. Her work demonstrates that gender inequality cannot be understood in isolation but must be analysed within broader systems of social hierarchy and power.

9. Theorizing Patriarchy
Sylvia Walby
Sylvia Walby conceptualizes patriarchy as a structured social system through which men exercise institutional and structural control over women. She identifies the family, culture, the workplace, and the state as major institutions responsible for reproducing patriarchal relations. Her theory provides an important framework for analysing institutionalized gender inequality in Indian families.

10. Modernity and Social Relations
Anthony Giddens
Anthony Giddens argues that modernization has significantly transformed social relationships and family structures. Contemporary societies are gradually becoming more democratic and participatory. Women's increasing access to education and employment has reshaped gender relations. However, traditional values continue to coexist with modern ideals, allowing patriarchy and gender equality to operate simultaneously within society.

11. The Second Shift
Arlie Hochschild
In The Second Shift, Arlie Hochschild demonstrates that employed women continue to perform the majority of household work and caregiving responsibilities after returning from paid employment. She refers to this phenomenon as the "Second Shift." Her study illustrates that despite claims of gender equality, women continue to bear a disproportionate share of unpaid domestic labour within the family.

12. Global Gender Gap Report 2025
World Economic Forum
According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2025, India ranks 131st among 148 countries in terms of gender equality. The report evaluates countries across four dimensions: Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment. It concludes that despite considerable socio-economic development, gender inequality remains deeply entrenched in India, particularly in the areas of economic participation and political representation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1) To examine men's understanding and perceptions of gender equality within Indian families from a sociological perspective.

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2) To analyse the influence of patriarchy, masculinity, and gender socialization on men's attitudes and behaviour towards gender equality.
3) To explore the impact of modernization, education, urbanization, and women's economic participation on men's perceptions of gender equality in Indian families.

RESEARCH GAP:

Although numerous studies have examined gender equality, women's empowerment, patriarchy, and the status of women in Indian society, relatively limited attention has been given to understanding men's perspectives on gender equality within the family. Most existing research primarily focuses on women's experiences, gender discrimination, and structural inequalities, while men's attitudes, beliefs, and behavioural responses toward gender equality remain comparatively underexplored.

Furthermore, there is a lack of comprehensive sociological studies that examine how patriarchy, masculinity, gender socialization, modernization, and women's increasing economic participation collectively influence men's understanding of gender equality in Indian families. The present study seeks to address this gap by providing a sociological analysis of men's perceptions, attitudes, and roles in promoting gender equality within the contemporary Indian family.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Methodology

The present study is based entirely on secondary data and employs a qualitative and descriptive research design. The primary objective of the study is to examine men's understanding of gender equality within Indian families from a sociological perspective.

Sources of Data

The study utilizes secondary sources collected from the following:

- Books on Gender Studies
- Books on Patriarchy
- Books on Masculinity
- Research Papers
- Government Reports
- Academic Journals and Scholarly Articles

Results and Discussion

The primary objective of this research was to analyse men's understanding of gender equality within Indian families. Drawing upon previous studies, research articles, government reports, and feminist literature, the study provides the following major findings.

1. Social Conditioning and Gender Roles

Patriarchy is a social system in which men possess greater authority, power, and control than women. According to Kamla Bhasin, gender inequality begins within the family through the differential socialization of boys and girls. Boys are encouraged to develop independence, authority, and strength, whereas girls are expected to cultivate obedience, care, sacrifice, and domestic responsibility.

Similarly, Leela Dube, in Women and Kinship, argues that Indian society assigns distinct social roles to boys and girls from an early age, thereby reinforcing gender inequality.

The report "Men and Boys: Engaging Pathways to Gender Equality in India," published by UNESCO in collaboration with the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), further demonstrates that boys are socialized to associate masculinity with dominance, control, and authority.

These studies collectively indicate that masculinity and patriarchy are socially constructed through continuous processes of social conditioning. Consequently, the practical realization of gender equality remains limited despite growing public awareness.

2. Partnership or Permission-Based Equality

The findings reveal that many Indian men support women's education, employment, and participation in public life. However, this support often reflects "permission-based equality," whereby women are allowed opportunities only with the approval of male family members rather than being recognized as equal rights holders.

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According to the Pew Research Center (2022), nearly 80 percent of respondents in India believe that when employment opportunities are scarce, men should be given priority over women. This finding reflects the continued influence of patriarchal values and traditional gender norms.
Similarly, Aparajita Choudhary and Manjari Pathak, in Empowering Boys and Men to Achieve Gender Equality in India, argue that gender inequality is not solely a women's issue but is deeply connected to men's attitudes and behaviour. They emphasize that women's empowerment alone cannot ensure gender equality; meaningful change also requires transforming the attitudes and socialization of men and boys.
Therefore, the study concludes that sustainable gender equality requires not only policy reforms but also a fundamental transformation in social attitudes, gender roles, and masculine identities.

3. Modernization and Changing Gender Roles
According to Parimal Kumar Roy, in The Modernizing Influence on Gender Roles and Family Autonomy in India, education, urbanization, and women's increasing labour force participation have challenged traditional patriarchal family structures. Nevertheless, patriarchal values continue to shape authority and decision-making within families.
Similarly, Maitreyi Chaudhuri, in Indian Modernity and Tradition: A Gender Analysis, argues that modernization and patriarchy coexist within Indian society. Rather than disappearing, patriarchal practices often adapt to changing social circumstances.
These findings suggest that modernization has undoubtedly transformed gender relations; however, patriarchal structures and traditional notions of masculinity continue to influence family relationships and social behaviour. Thus, modernity has produced a complex interaction between traditional and contemporary values, gradually reshaping gender relations without completely eliminating inequality.

4. Inequality in Domestic Labour
The study reveals that despite women's increasing educational attainment and economic participation, domestic responsibilities remain overwhelmingly concentrated among women.
The Time Use Survey (2019) and Oxfam India Report demonstrate that women spend significantly more time than men performing unpaid domestic and caregiving work. This unequal division of labour restricts women's access to education, employment, and economic opportunities while imposing a persistent "double burden."
Arlie Hochschild describes this phenomenon as the "Second Shift," highlighting that women continue to shoulder unpaid household responsibilities even after completing paid employment.

5. Patriarchy and Decision-Making Power
The findings indicate that decision-making authority within Indian families continues to be largely dominated by men. Although women's educational attainment, employment, and public participation have increased considerably, men continue to exercise greater control over financial decisions, property ownership, children's education, and marriage-related matters in many households.
According to Sylvia Walby, patriarchy is continuously reproduced through social institutions and cultural practices, thereby sustaining structural inequalities between men and women across generations.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study indicate that men's understanding of gender equality within Indian families is undergoing a gradual transformation. The expansion of education, economic development, modernization, and increasing social awareness has contributed to more positive attitudes among men towards gender equality. Nevertheless, patriarchal values and traditional gender norms remain deeply embedded in Indian society.
The study highlights several important observations:

- Many men support women's education and employment opportunities.
- However, complete equality in domestic responsibilities and decision-making has not yet been achieved.
- Women continue to bear the greater share of unpaid domestic and caregiving work.
- Traditional constructions of masculinity continue to influence men's perceptions and practices regarding gender equality.
- Patriarchal socialization remains a significant barrier to achieving substantive gender equality within families.

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The study therefore concludes that gender equality cannot be realized solely through the empowerment of women. Sustainable gender equality requires a simultaneous transformation in men's attitudes, behaviours, and socially constructed gender roles. Men must become active partners in promoting equality rather than merely permitting women's participation.

Creating an egalitarian family environment requires shared responsibilities, mutual respect, equal participation in household decision-making, and the rejection of patriarchal stereotypes. Such changes will not only strengthen family relationships but also contribute to the development of a more democratic, inclusive, and socially just society.

In conclusion, gender equality should be understood as a shared social responsibility rather than an issue concerning women alone. Only through the collective participation of both men and women can genuine gender justice and social equality be achieved in Indian society.

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