A Study On An Unprejudiced Nurturing And Nesting

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Abstract—The positioning of the aspect 'parenting' in Indian context denotes varied undertones depending upon the genders. Hence, the pursuit of employment is shouldered on men majorly and the responsibility of parenting naturally falls on women. This paves ways for men to be uninvolved in taking care of the households, children and themselves. The social construction of Indian motherhood as a sacred space completely overshadows all the other identities of Indian women and views 'fatherhood' only from a surface level. (Kapoor T.) These cultures bound ideologies on the gender-based nurturing and nesting in a family do not imply the actual aspect of risk sharing in parenting. Quite contradictory to such ideologies, at present, women who are married and are mothers are able to leave behind their spouses and children to build a future, completely opposed to the notion that only the males can be the sole bread winners in the families.

The researcher aims to bring forth the efforts of the considerable number of men who are ready to take up the roles of women in bringing up their children and thereby attempting to redefine the gender dynamics in the families and societies. This paper entitled "A Study on An Unprejudiced Nurturing and Nesting" examines the family dynamics, efforts and risk factors or pressures of stay-at-home fathers belonging to the coming-of-age generation face in Indian society and thereby focusses on their mental health aspects. The data is collected from various secondary sources such as books, journals, and films.

Keywords—Nurture; Nesting; Parenting; Ideologies; Fatherhood; Women

INTRODUCTION

"The point is not for women to simply take power out of men's hands, since that wouldn't change anything about the world. It's a question precisely of destroying that notion of power."

- Simone De Beauvoir

The positioning of the aspect 'parenting' in Indian context denotes varied undertones depending upon the genders. Indian feminist analysis and arguments linked the family and the economy to demonstrate how the economic power of men and their domination of production was crucially linked to, and determined by, the organization of the family and the household, thereby, the household thus emerging as an important constituent of both production and patriarchy. (Nirola, 2017) The pursuit of employment is thus shouldered on men majorly and the responsibility of parenting naturally falls on women. Therefore, a man migrating to another country for employment opportunities is considered usual and termed as a need considering the age-old patriarchal concept of men being the sole bread winner in the traditional Indian families. Migration of Indian women to other countries for job-oriented reasons can be seen as a part of advancement or a process of obliteration of patriarchy. Nevertheless, there is an impending sense of guilt attached to even the most successful women due to the inherited number of responsibilities, duties and feminine archetypes. This paves ways for men to be uninvolved in taking care of the households, children and themselves.

The social construction of Indian motherhood as a sacred space completely overshadows all the other identities of Indian women and views 'fatherhood' only from a surface level. (Kapoor T.) According to the Ipsos Global Trends Survey 2017, which surveyed 18,180 adults in 22 countries, 64% of Indians believe that women's primary responsibilities are to be good mothers and wives. (Bhattacharya, 2017)

A man stepping into the role descriptions of a woman in marriage and parenting is viewed as against the cultural considerations. These culture-bound ideologies on the gender-based nurturing and nesting in a family do not imply the actual aspect of risk sharing in parenting. Truth be told, it's a forgotten fact that a child's all-round development is based on the collective efforts of both his or her father and mother.

However, nowadays, women who are married and are mothers are able to leave behind their spouses

and children to build a future, completely opposed to the notion of Indian males being the sole providers of the households. Also, there are considerable number of men who are ready to take up the roles of women in bringing up their children.

Whilst women continue to shatter the impediments and are in the process to attain the empowerment, the researcher understood and would like to put forth the differences in the evolving family dynamics, efforts and risk factors of stay-at-home husbands belonging to the coming-of-age generation where men take up the responsibility to nurture and nest. To enhance the perspective on this, the researcher has referred the unspoken and unrecognised fathers from the history to ensure how they can be the irreplaceable base for children and their contribution to parenting.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

'Motherhood in India: Glorification without Empowerment? '(2010) by Maitreyi Krishnaraj presented an overview of the varied experiences and representations of motherhood in India from ancient to modern times. The thrust of the arguments made by the various contributors is that motherhood is an ideology that is manufactured. This is established by investigating institutional structures of society like language, religion, media, law, and technology.

The article **'Masculinity and Challenges for Women in Indian Culture'** by I. Sivakumar and K. Manimekalai focusses on the feminist perspectives on the construction of masculinity in India. It clearly describes how rapidly changing sex-ratios and increasing evidence of violence against women become the strong pointers for the wrongly interpreted gender frameworks. It stresses the need for sustained efforts to increase the involvement of both men and women to remove socio-cultural barriers, stereotypical attitudes, and violence against women for creating a gender-balanced society.

The book **'The Sociology of Housework'** written by Ann Oakley talks in length about how women from various sectors view the domestic works. It explicitly puts forth the subject of inbuilt sexism of sociology as well. This classic work of analysis became an eye opener into the lives of women in great detail.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The feminist theories of *Gender Stratification* indicates that the gender biased unequal proportion of works at home could result in the reproduction and maintenance of the gender (Baxter, 1997) The advancements in gender stratification leads to the ineffective and un involved fathering. The disguised emotions and responsibilities of men in families eventually results in their declined state of mental health.

Gender-Role Ideology in Marriage (GRIM) inventory examine ambivalent sexism toward women, predicting power-related, gender-role beliefs about mate selection and marriage norms (Chen, Fiske, &

Lee) The traditional gender role ideology pigeonholes women to give priority to family responsibilities, while men should prioritize work responsibilities (Gutek, Searle & Klepa, 1991)

REVELATIONS BEYOND GLORIFICATIONS

1250 BCE – 1000 BCE

"He should employ her in the collection and the disbursement of his wealth, in cleaning, in meritorious activity, in cooking food, and in looking after household goods."

The excerpts from *'Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the 'Manava Dharamasastra'* by Patrick Olivelle [Chapter 9 (11)] defines the duties of a wife. Women were glorified on their sacrifices and men on their achievements. Wifehood and motherhood become glorified in the patriarchal system. Their roles are eulogized in local folk lore, in literature, and religion so that they actively engage themselves in playing their social roles and thus, contributes to the patriarchal social order. (Basic concepts: sex and gender, masculinity and femininity, patriarchy)

The ancient scriptures lay emphasis on the doctrines of dharma and karma. As for the man, his basic dharma is to provide for all of his dependent members in the family and to instil the same set of principles to his off springs (Sriram & Navalkar, 2012) The age- old 'Manusmiriti' affirms that a man should provide for his wife and children. Thus, the culture and tradition became in favour of men as they were entitled only for the limited roles in the upbringing of children and against men as their bonding with children remains questionable, compared to mothers.

3RD -5TH CENTURY

Draupadi, presumably the first paragon of a feminist heroine defied the *dharma*, challenged manhood and rebelled against the Manusmriti which subtly denigrated women. Sita, on contrary, owned an attitude of the modern Indian woman, who is intelligent, capable, and aware of her own thoughts. In the article 'Draupadi and Sita- the very essence of Nari Shakti' Draupadi chooses to stay in her marriage to raise her sons while Sita gracefully departs from her marriage with her dignity preserved and raised two boys as a single mother and nurtured them into wise, valiant young boys. (Vishvanathan)

When 'Upapandavas', the children of Pandavas and Draupadi were born, the Pandavas were in exile for 13 years as that was the wager for gambling which once resulted in the disrobing of Draupadi and thus, humiliating her. Pandavas was helpless as they lost in the game and simultaneously dharma bound. There, she questioned and insulted their manhood. While Pandavas was in vanvas, the children grew up in the maternal homes without their fathers. They did not care about the wellbeing and upbringing of the

children in the name of dharma. Lord Rama, a member of the 'Purusha Pradhan Samaj' had to oblige to the command of his father as questioning him would seemingly bring dishonour. While being an ideal son to his father, an ideal brother to Laxmana and an ideal king to Ayodhya, his tag of being an 'ideal' to his mother, other brothers, wife and to his children are arguable. Ram did not attempt to have his children's custody because he knew that in the hermitage Sita would ensure they were raised to be future kings. (Bhargava, 2014) His children grew up bereft of the father and later lost their mother. Thus, the effect of patriarchy transcended the generations (Mishra, 2020)

18TH CENTURY

Laxmibai is an incredible example of a young woman succeeding in a traditionally male role in the particularly male dominated society of 19th century India. She fought for the rights of an adopted child, a woman to rule a kingdom, women to wear the uniform in battle, the right to live and rule instead of becoming sati, and the right of every single "citizen" of her kingdom to participate in the struggle for supremacy. (Chaithanya, 2011) Though she got married at the age of 14, she gave birth to her first child only at the age of 24 since learning the ways of the land and understanding how politics worked was more important for her. (Igatpurikar, 2019)

Quite contradictory to the traditional bringing up of a child in the then society, Laxmibai was brought up by her father and the Peshwa of Bithoor as she lost her mother at the age of four. It is said that she had a very bold upbringing wherein she could read scriptures as well as handle a sword of equal strength.

19TH CENTURY

Indira Gandhi, once was associated with a line reading, "Troubled India in a Woman's Hands" (Deccan Herald, 2010) She was never guilty about not possessing the feminine qualities in a society that was inherently patriarchal. One of her biographers said about her: She loved the men in her life—her father Jawaharlal Nehru, her husband Feroze Gandhi, her son Sanjay Gandhi—but she didn't like them and rebelled against them when they tried to dominate her. (Ghose, 2017)

Contrasting to the usual fatherly attributes, Jawaharlal Nehru maintained a healthy and friendly relation with his daughter Indira. Whenever he was in prison and she in the boarding school, he would bridge the gap or cover his absence through letters. He discussed different topics across arts, science and philosophies varying from ancient civilizations, division of labour and trade to respecting all humans (Popova, n.d.) Indira Gandhi, herself, had mentioned how those letters cultivated her maturity, understanding and contributed to her sensibilities (Pathak, 2019) The letters are the evidences of his overwhelming attachment to his daughter wherein he took up the role of a father, mother and nanny rolled into one in guiding her and shaping her virtues (Jain, 1989) It is

also overwhelming to note that in a culture where it is the duty of mothers to instil the values and to shape the character archetypes of a child, Nehru graced his roles beautifully.

21st CENTURY: REALISATIONS BEYOND THRESHOLD

In any deeply patriarchal and insistently marriage-centric culture, the risk of parenting falls mostly to mothers (Sharma) Women, the epitomes of sacrifices, often deal with the identity crises as they are culturally compartmentalised into 'woman' and 'mother'. Thus, their focus is forced to be more on serving the elders at patrilocal houses, nurturing the family and children along with the management of households. These norms restrict women from having aspirations beyond marriage. (Sivakumar & Manimekalai).

The example for the above-mentioned statements can be seen in the movie 'The Great Indian Kitchen.'(2020) The director shows the contrast of identities through several framed photos of the husband's forefathers—they're all pictured as a family unit with children whereas the framed photos at her home shows her individually, dancing.

This is because a woman is supposed to be 'submissive' to an extent where she has to seek permissions for her dreams, education and even for employment from her husband and his family members. Many people in India find it difficult to justify the fact that in a culture which worships Saraswati as the Goddess of Learning, so many girls are deprived of even primary education; in a culture which worships Lakshmi as the Goddess of Wealth, so many modern-day Lakshmis' live a slavish life of economic dependence. (Kishwar) In a culture where the energy force is attributed to the archetypes of 'Shakti', so many women have to face harassments of different types on a daily basis. Begetting off springs was an important goal of marriage, as a male progeny was believed to relieve the parent from going to hell. (Sriram & Navalkar, 2012)

The historical epochs echo with the chants of holy Sita, who is worshipped for her subjugated, obedient and submissive role and not because of her willed, strong personality tacitly constructed the foundation of our society (Tiwari, 2020) Even when women played a significant role in changing the destiny of a nation and displayed great courage and no militarist nature, they

were eulogised for their 'moral courage and quiet strength', over the centuries, in myths and histories. (Basu, 2019) In contemporary discourses on gender, patriarchy is a central concept that feminist writers have been grappling with to explain differential positions of men and women in the society. (Basic concepts: sex and gender, masculinity and femininity, patriarchy)

"Women and men make equally good political leaders," according to a survey conducted by

Pew Research Centre wherein nearly 30,000 adults throughout India participated, between late 2019 and early 2020, yet, only a quarter of Indian adults take the position that men make better political leaders than women and it also portrays how Indians view gender roles at home and in society more generally. (Evans, Sahgal, Salazar, Starr, & Corichi) These reasons pave ways to understand the significance of the cultural construction of gender in our society, how it is evolving and its implications on the members in the Indian families.

Simone de Beauvoir explains that gender differences in the society make the man superior through his role as the bread winner and it gives him a position of power in the society and family (Basic concepts: sex and gender, masculinity and femininity, patriarchy). This attitude, from the past, has vividly promoted domestic abuse and the enslavement of women in India because for men, gender norms are constructed around masculinity and a man's sense of self hinges on his ability to control women (Sivakumar & Manimekalai)

Men's expression of masculinity is also closely linked to controlling women in their family and ensuring that women fulfil expected roles. Women who do not fulfil essential roles or who challenge men's actions threaten men's masculinity, often resulting in a violent reaction. Fuller (2001) found that it was always wives who triggered violent reactions, either because they didn't comply with their part of the marital contract or because they "reacted with energy" when the man did not fulfil his. (Sivakumar & Manimekalai)

A very loving Ravi showing his reluctance to live off his wife's earnings may come across as a matter of normalcy in the patriarchal world, but the film 'Ammu' implicitly explains the base of this problematic chauvinism as the character believes that a man who lives on his wife's money is not fit to be a male. (Sundar, 2022) When the mother comforts her daughter who is in an abusive marriage by making a statement that "Men are entitled to anger because they go to work" along with affirming that the daughter is not the first to go through such violence depicts how these treatments are normalised in a marriage. Three years into an abusive marriage, Hamza - an alcoholic, routinely hits his wife Badru, triggered by anything from slips in her cooking to a genuine concern for his well-being in the film 'Darlings' and it is evidently implied that his anger and frustration of being an inept

ticket examiner by profession is taken out on his quietly suffering wife. (Mithra, 2022)

Though these picturizations, at the first glance, reveal the challenges of women, when analysed in depth, brings out the travails of men too. As observed in the dialogues above, women are conditioned to believe that they need to be forgiving and understanding and would rather be in a volatile, toxic relationship than be the object of society's prying eyes (Vyavahare, 2022) Men are also conditioned in such a way that they are grappled at mind to be vulnerable or to be passive about their true identities, which could result in frustrations. Society makes it difficult for men by wrongly inculcating the notions of 'masculinity' and instilling the concept of 'patriarchy'. This does not let men handle their realities or vulnerabilities, rather they tend to escape them by taking it all out on women.

The implicit and explicit misogynism in the upbringing of a boy child misconstrues manhood by the factors such as bodily strength, superiority or dominance over women, owning the status of being a breadwinner to the family and many others. Men are taught to be the main earners of the family, protectors of the wife and children, and immune to emotions and vulnerabilities. (V, n.d.) Because of these titles, men work double the time to deal with the expenses when a child is born (Satooor, 2019)

Nevertheless, the increasing crimes against women, at present, have become a wakeup call to the rethinking of ideologies, reframing of certain gender roles, and it has evoked a need to understand certain concepts and how they have negatively affected the lives. (Sivakumar & Manimekalai) The dependent housewife model of the family is in decline and one of the questions that has come to haunt men is how they can prove their masculinity and superiority in these changing circumstances. Sociologists such as Bradley (2013) suggest that the rise of feminism together with new models of masculinity have emerged in response to economic and cultural changes. Thus, the New Man, sometimes labelled the feminized man, replacing

Connell's hegemonic masculinity has led to a moral panic about what it means to be a man at the beginning of the 21st century. (Sivakumar & Manimekalai)

ROLE REVERSALS AND ITS EFFECTS ON MEN

The label of the 'husband' and 'wife' comes with its own set of socio-cultural baggage of expectations to be met and boundaries to be kept. (Mathew & Balasundhari). Toasted to homemaker and twisted to role reversal, the film 'Ki and Ka' is an attempt to inject the sense that man must contribute equally like woman while making a home and the concept seems to be revolutionising. (Ramnath, 2016)

Industrialization and urbanisation effected in many economic reforms and paved ways for the patriarchal landscape to be different. Nuclear families and more

working women emerged into the new space. Separated from the joint families, the blurred aspect of proximity in the relationship of the married couples gained visibility with the elements of considerations for each other. When men and women interchange their dictated roles, it becomes non-traditional gender roles. The lady may therefore have a higher earning job, making her husband a stay-at-home parent. Obviously, this goes against the established gender roles in marriage, therefore some people may find this offensive.

In India, father is the lesser participant in the active parenting. Several constraints and barriers exist to men's engagement as active and caring fathers in the lives of their children at a normative, policy, community and individual level (Alemann, Garg, & Vlahovicova) India's social conditioning is such that a man should not get involved in the roles assigned to the female gender in parenting as well as in doing domestic chores. A fifteen-day paternal leave policy which would result in the women's lower workforce participation considering the pregnancy and childcare is an example to this (Satooor, 2019) Through another lens, men are considered to be incompetent for all of that. Manning the home and not being an authoritarian, disciplined, or strict father does not bring laurels to the tag.

There are different challenges that the stay-at-home fathers face. Along with the forementioned patriarchal thoughts, media often portrays and stereotypes at-home fathers as lazy and not responsible. Tagging them as henpecked or not masculine would eventually result in blaming the femininity around them. These misconceptions often bring misunderstandings among the support systems and are limiting in nature to redefine the societal construction of genders.

At-home fathers are mostly isolated as they are in such low numbers. Much like the mothers, to have the company of other such fathers are very difficult for them in the Indian society. Such low societal interactions and no support of the loved ones would result in them being victims to anxiety or depression. And, in cases where the conditioned male ego gets hurt, it would only complicate the process.

Also, the upbringing of girls to be the ideal wives and mothers along with wrongly instilling in them what to expect from a man would have them associated with a certain guilt. This can result in situations where even if a husband desires to be a full-time parent, the wife would not agree, thinking of being accountable to the society. Also, it might affect the confidence of such men to know that their efforts would be in vain contradictory to earning appreciation and respect.

Childbearing is an innately feminine biological process, but raising a child is not (H, 2021) The presence and absence of fathers affect their children positively and negatively. For boys, fathers are Heroes and for girls, Saviours. Fathers' positive engagement in their children's upbringing has been linked to children's improved physical and mental health, better cognitive development and educational achievement, improved peer relations and capacity for empathy, fewer behavioural problems (in boys) and psychological problems (in girls), higher self-esteem and life satisfaction, lower rates of depression, fear and self-doubt into adulthood, lower rates of criminality and substance abuse, and more openness to critically examining traditional gendered roles (Alemann, Garg, & Vlahovicova) A positive family dynamics can be established through the involvement of fathers. When a culturally denounced role becomes empowering for men, they understand the essence of it and it could lead to a greater satisfaction level among the husbands and wives where violence of any form is eliminated. Children tend to appreciate the efforts of both the at-home fathers and the working women. Fathers who are equally active in the domestic sphere and engage themselves with their children develop lesser negative health behaviour and have lower associated risks of death (Halim & Panda, 2019)

Gradually yet positively, gender roles are shifting over the globe. Today, the understanding that the fathers have about their roles in parenting is appreciable as it helps in bringing forth a positive change in the societal gender dynamics. In India, the number of stay-at-home fathers is increasing and some of them are even the major caregivers for their children. Covid-19 has significantly altered the workplace and normalised work-from-home. Mothers who have successful jobs with rising salaries are likely the major factor in the changing gender roles associated with parenthood. This gives new fathers the freedom to consider being their child's primary caregiver and homemaker. (Chakrabarty, 2022) Thus, active co-parenting promotes gender equality and health in individuals.

Regarding the remark 'The kids should be with their mother' that blindly binds the parental concerns under the legitimised roots of our social conscience, the evidence to prove it wrong is in a study conducted by the American Academy of Paediatrics, in which the outputs affirm that the involvement of fathers in the parenting practices fetch better environment for children in terms psychological aspects and health statuses (Halim & Panda, 2019) Thus, a harmonious co-existence of different genders for a much safer and secure environment can be built for the future generation.

CONCLUSION

The contemporary women's movements were instrumental in identifying and bringing into focus of gender issues affecting both mem and women in different parts of the world. Even when a woman is said to have acquired education, employment and financial independence, those that comes under the indicators for a woman's development, if she is still under the clutches of 'emotional dependency' the efforts to come out of any kind of societal confinement

would only effect to nothingness. The years of patriarchy have effectively tagged 'emotions' and 'attachments' selectively to a woman than that of a man.

There are no much researches or studies trying to understand what men feels. The misconstrued societal baggage of 'being masculine' affects the men. As it is said, men's problems should also be handled while empowering women to attain gender equality. Patriarchy and gender-based roles are deep-rooted in every individual, and it is necessary to deconstruct gender from the most subtle forms. (Madireddy)

Without improvements in men's and women's lives, gender equality will not be feasible. The reality that gender imbalances in patriarchal systems does not favour men must be recognised. The benefits of stay-at-home fathers is definitely an area where more research is needed, but the advantages are beginning to be scientifically established.

A happy marriage does not imply a space in which one spouse makes sacrifices while the other does not. (Andrews, 2014) Gender-inclusive strategies need to be accommodated to develop a mindset wherein there can be a harmonious co-existence between men and women in public spaces. In order to bring this concept into practicality, the initiation should start from the childhood, parenting to be precised. Boys and girls should be taught about sharing the responsibilities and about the aspects of mutual respects. Media is also significant as they can have amazing contents on breaking stereotypes and roles. Gender-sensitive environment should be brought up to build a gender sensitized society in the near future.

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