



(संविधान की बेटियाँ) Breaking Gender Stereotypes and Challenging Norms in India

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Abstract

This research paper explores the theme of “Breaking Stereotypes and Challenging Societal Norms” through the lens of “संविधान की बेटियाँ” (Daughters of the Constitution). Stereotype refers to rigid and oversimplified beliefs that describe fixed roles and expectations to individual, mostly gender based like women are always said to take care of children and household in other hand men are told to earn, men are stronger than women and only women cries not men. Indian society has historically been structured around rigid social hierarchies based on patriarchy, caste, gender, religion, class, and community, which have reinforced stereotypes and normalised discrimination with women. The Indian Constitution emerged as a transformative legal and moral document aimed at dismantling these entrenched structures and promoting equality, dignity, and social justice for “Daughters of the Constitution”. The study shows that education and economic independence play important role in empowering women and challenging unfair practices in society. The study explores how constitutional principles such as equality before law (Article 14), prohibition of discrimination (Article 15), freedom of expression (Article 19), and the right to life with dignity (Article 21) serve as powerful tools to challenge deep-rooted societal norms and stereotypes. It also highlights the role of Directive Principles of State Policy and Fundamental Duties in fostering a progressive social consciousness. Through an analysis of landmark judicial interventions, social movements, and policy initiatives for daughters of the constitution. These constitutional frameworks helps to breaking the stereotypes and challenging the norms. This research paper examines the origins and persistence of stereotypes and norms, their impact on individual and societies, and the processes through which they are challenged and transformed. Drawing from sociological theories, empirical studies, and contemporary case examples, the paper highlights how movements for gender equality, caste justice, racial equity, and cultural diversity have contributed to breaking stereotypes and redefining norms. The paper also addresses the gap between constitutional ideals and social realities, noting the persistence of patriarchal attitudes despite progressive legal frameworks. It argues that true transformation requires not only legal empowerment but also social awareness, education, and cultural change. The study argues that challenging stereotypes is essential for achieving social justice, inclusive development, and democratic participations. “संविधान की बेटियाँ” should come forward for contributing in breaking stereotypes and challenging norms for better development and empowerment for “संविधान की बेटियाँ”.

Keywords: संविधान की बेटियाँ, Breaking Stereotypes, Societal Norms, Women’s Empowerment, Indian Constitution, Gender Equality, Social Justice, Constitutional Rights

Introduction

Feminist theorists say that the gender roles are built by the society not set by the biology. Simone de Beauvoir says that “women are made, not born” and that shows how the social conditioning shapes the identity. Feminist literature shows how the power works through actions, language and representation. The power lives in the everyday. Stereotypes are broad ideas about a group of people. Sociology stereotypes turn identities into fixed categories. Stereotypes may give the mind a shortcut. Stereotypes often

cause prejudice, discrimination and social exclusion. Gender stereotypes are forms of social categorisation. In literature and cultural stories stereotypes appear as repeated character types. I see stereotypes often. The ideal wife, self-sacrificing mother, rebellious woman and dominant male authority figure are examples. Stereotypes influence perception by linking certain traits to gender.

Social norms are rules that shape behaviour in the community. I see that the formal institutions and community keep norms in place through approval, shame and moral

judgment. Patriarchy is a system where men hold the power in political, economic and cultural institutions. Patriarchy in India mixing with caste, class, religion and regional customs. The mixing makes stereotypes deep and hard to change. I see the control, over women's mobility women's sexuality and women's labour often given the excuse of honour, tradition or family values. The norms keep the inequality alive. Keep the resistance quiet by calling resistance deviance.

I see that Indian society has changed over centuries of cultural and political events. Indian society rests on norms that guide behaviour, set ideas of right- wrong and assign roles to individuals. Social norms often work behind the scene appearing as traditions or cultural values that people feel must not be questioned. Social norms that stay the longest and have the influence are the gender stereotypes. Stereotypes sort individual into fixed identities. Stereotypes shape what Indian society expects individuals to think, act and live. Even if classifications look harmless, I have seen that classifications cause exclusion. I have seen that classifications cause inequality. I have seen that classifications cause the denial of freedom.

Gender stereotype in the society have put women in roles. I see people expect women to be caring, obedient, calm and mainly in charge of house work. I see people link men to power, logic, money tasks and leadership, in life. I see the family structures, the schools, the religious teachings, the books, the folklore and the popular media keep these roles strong. I see over time people accept these roles and see these roles as natural of made up.

I noticed that stereotypes keep causing problems. The stereotypes limit the women's access, to the education, jobs and decision power. The stereotypes also put expectations on the men. The stereotypes limit the freedom, push down many identities. In the society the strict social control from the stereotypes goes against freedom and equality.

In this context the concept of "संविधान की बेटियाँ" becomes important. The phrase means women who find their identity and power, in the Indian Constitution of in social norms. The Constitution of India is not a framework, for governance; the Constitution of India is a document that tries to rebuild society on the bases of equality, dignity, liberty and justice. People drafted the Constitution after the oppression of centuries based on caste, gender and class. I think the Constitution marks a break from the hierarchy. The Constitution shows that we can leave the traditions of hierarchy behind.

Even though the constitution promises equality the real world tells a story. The law says equality. Everyday discrimination still appears, showing a gap between promise and lived experience. This paper explores how constitutional values can be tools to fight stereotypes and unfair norms. The paper highlights women as agents of change not as receivers of rights.

Article 14: Equality Before Law

Article 14 establishes that laws must treat all individuals equally while providing protection to all people. The main objective of Article 14 exists to eliminate the practice of treating individuals differently because of their gender or social class. The law establishes that all people should receive equal treatment.

Article 15: Prohibition of Discrimination

Article 15 stops discrimination, on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. Article 15(3) lets the State create rules, for women because women have faced disadvantage. I

Articles 19 and 21: Freedom, Autonomy, and Dignity

I see that Article 19 gives the freedoms of expression, movement and association. I see that Article 19 lets the people push back against rules. I see that Article 21 makes the meaning of life include dignity, autonomy and privacy. I see that Judicial interpretation of Article 21 gives a role, in supporting women's right to choose education, employment, marriage and bodily autonomy.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse stereotypes and social norms from a political science perspective
2. To examine the role of power and ideology in sustaining political stereotypes.
3. To study the impact of stereotypes on political participation and representation.
4. To assess the role of social movements, state policies, and institutions in challenging norms
5. To highlight the relevance of breaking stereotypes for democratic deepening and social justice.

Review of literature

Gender Norms and Stereotypes

Gendered expectations and stereotypes are among the most extensively studied phenomena in the Indian social sciences.

Patriarchy and Female Subordination

Desai and Andrist (2010) ^[8] examine how gender scripts in Indian families construct marriage as a central institution in women's lives, influencing age at marriage, education, and labor force participation. Their work demonstrates that normative ideas about femininity and marital roles are deeply embedded in social practices, affecting women's autonomy.

Masculinity and Normative Roles

Connell's (1995) ^[7] concept of hegemonic masculinity has been applied in Indian contexts by scholars like Kumar (2000) ^[14] to explore how dominant gender norms position men as authority figures within households and public spheres. These norms not only privilege men but also constrain alternative masculinities.

Intersectional Gender Experiences: Chakravarti (2003) ^[4] emphasizes the intersection of caste and gender, arguing that women from marginalized castes experience a double burden of oppression. Intersectionality studies further demonstrate that gender norms are not uniform but vary across class, caste, and regional positions.

Caste Norms and Structural Prejudice

Caste-based stratification and stereotyping have been central to Indian sociological inquiry.

The Persistence of Caste Hierarchies: Scholars like Srinivas (1952) ^[12] introduced the concept of Sanskritization to explain how lower caste groups historically sought

upward mobility by emulating upper caste norms. While Sanskritization highlights social mobility strategies, Jodhka (2012) ^[10] critiques it for overlooking the persistence of hierarchical prejudice and discrimination against Dalit communities despite legal protections.

Caste Stereotypes and Everyday Discrimination: Studies by Thorat and Newman (2007) ^[13] find that caste-based stereotypes-linking lower caste identities with impurity and lack of competence-permeate educational and employment spaces, limiting opportunities and reinforcing social exclusion.

Religion, Identity, and Norms: Religion intersects with norms and stereotypes in complex ways.

Communal Narratives and Prejudice: Ahmad (2019) ^[1] trace the impact of communal discourses on Indian society, showing how religious identities become essentialized in public debates. These narratives often pigeonhole communities into fixed stereotypes, contributing to social polarization.

Secularism and Normative Citizenship: Scholars like Rajan (2004) ^[11] argue that India's constitutional secularism has at times accommodated hierarchical norms by failing to challenge prejudice rooted in everyday social practices. This scholarship suggests a disconnect between formal law and lived social reality.

Agency, Movements, and Resistance: Understanding how stereotypes are contested is central to this research topic.

Social Movements Against Gendered Norms: The global #MeToo movement sparked significant feminist scholarship in India. Scholars like Chakravarti and Correa (2003) ^[4] argue that #MeToo exposed systemic harassment while revealing persistent victim-blaming attitudes rooted in patriarchal norms.

Dalit Assertion and Cultural Production: Dalit scholars such as Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd (2010) ^[8] foreground the role of cultural assertion in challenging caste stereotypes. Dalit literature, art, and political movements reframe narratives to center marginalized experiences, resisting dominant cultural codes.

Legal Interventions and Social Change: The decriminalisation of homosexuality in Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India (2018) has sparked research on normative transformations around sexuality. Scholars argue that law can catalyse social change, but normative attitudes about sexuality persist outside the legal domain (Nagarajan, 2020) ^[11].

Media Representations and Social Norms

Media-both mainstream and digital-plays a crucial role in both reproducing and contesting stereotypes.

Bollywood and Cultural Narratives: Gokulsing and Dissanayake (2004) ^[9] analyze how Indian cinema historically reinforced patriarchal and caste-based norms by idealizing family honor, heteronormative romance, and upper caste aesthetics. These representations shape popular consciousness and normalise stereotypical roles.

New Media and Counter Narratives: Emerging research shows that digital platforms have enabled alternative voices that challenge dominant stereotypes. For example, Banaji (2018) ^[3] examines how social media activism contests normative portrayals of gender and sexuality, though she also highlights issues of backlash and platform censorship.

Research Gap: Although existing literature extensively examines gender, caste, religion, media, and social movements in India, most studies focus on these dimensions separately. Limited research adopts an integrated approach to understand how multiple stereotypes intersect and influence everyday experiences across diverse social groups. Furthermore, insufficient attention has been given to the role of emerging digital spaces and youth-led initiatives in challenging entrenched norms and promoting inclusive social transformation.

Research Methodology

Research Design: The present study adopts a qualitative and exploratory research design to examine the nature, persistence, and transformation of social stereotypes and norms in India. Given the socio-cultural complexity of the subject, a qualitative approach is most appropriate as it allows for an in-depth understanding of meanings, narratives, and lived experiences associated with stereotypes related to gender, caste, religion, and sexuality.

The research is descriptive and analytical, focusing on understanding existing realities while critically examining processes of change.

Research Approach: The study follows an interpretivist approach, emphasizing how individuals and groups interpret, experience, and challenge social norms within specific cultural and institutional contexts. This approach recognizes that stereotypes are socially constructed and continuously reproduced through interaction, discourse, and power relations.

An intersectional framework is used to analyze how multiple identities (gender, caste, class, religion, region) intersect to shape differential experiences of stereotyping and marginalisation.

Nature and Sources of Data

Secondary Data (Primary Source for This Study)

The study primarily relies on secondary data, collected from credible and diverse sources, including:

- Peer-reviewed academic journals in sociology, political science, gender studies, and cultural studies.
- Books and edited volumes by established scholars.
- Government reports, census data, and policy documents.
- Judgments of the Supreme Court of India related to gender, caste, and sexuality.
- Newspaper articles, documentaries, and digital media archives.

This method ensures a broad analytical perspective and enables comparison across time and contexts.

Challenges in Breaking Political Norms

Despite growing awareness, legal reforms, and social movements, breaking stereotypes and challenging deeply

rooted norms in India remains a complex and uneven process. Several structural, cultural, and institutional challenges continue to hinder meaningful transformation.

1. **Deep Cultural Embeddedness of Norms:** One of the foremost challenges is that stereotypes are deeply embedded in India's cultural traditions, religious practices, and everyday socialization. From early childhood, individuals internalise gender roles, caste hierarchies, and moral expectations through family, education, and community life. These norms are often perceived as "natural" or "divinely sanctioned," making resistance socially risky and morally contested.
2. **Patriarchal Social Structure:** Patriarchy remains a dominant organizing principle in Indian society. Gender stereotypes portraying men as breadwinners and women as caregivers persist across class and regional lines. Women who challenge norms-by delaying marriage, choosing unconventional careers, or asserting sexual autonomy-often face social stigma, violence, or exclusion. Patriarchy also limits men by discouraging emotional expression and reinforcing toxic masculinity.
3. **Institutional Resistance and Weak Implementation:** Legal and policy frameworks aimed at social inclusion-such as gender equality laws, anti-discrimination provisions, and reservations-often suffer from weak implementation. Bureaucratic apathy, lack of awareness, and institutional bias dilute their impact. In many cases, institutions themselves reproduce stereotypes through discriminatory practices.
4. **Persistence of Caste-Based Stereotypes:** Although caste discrimination is constitutionally prohibited, caste-based stereotypes continue to shape social interactions, educational spaces, and labor markets. Dalits and Adivasis are frequently stereotyped as "inferior" or suited only for certain occupations. Social mobility is constrained by subtle forms of exclusion, making it difficult to dismantle caste norms despite affirmative action policies.

Way Forward / Suggestions

1. Promote gender-sensitive education to challenge stereotypes from an early age.
2. Ensure effective implementation of constitutional and legal provisions for gender equality.
3. Increase women's participation in leadership and decision-making.
4. Encourage positive media representation to break gender stereotypes.
5. Strengthen community awareness through collaboration between government and civil society.

Major Findings

1. Gender stereotypes continue to limit women's opportunities and participation in society.
2. Constitutional provisions provide a strong foundation for equality and women's empowerment.
3. Education and economic independence are key to challenging discriminatory norms.
4. Social movements, media, and judicial interventions have contributed to breaking stereotypes.
5. Bridging the gap between constitutional ideals and social reality requires collective social and institutional efforts.

Conclusion

Breaking stereotypes and challenging norms is a fundamentally political process that reshapes power relations, institutions, and democratic practices. Stereotypes restrict participation and representation, while transformative politics seeks to expand inclusion and equality. From a political science perspective, challenging norms is essential for democratic deepening, social justice, and meaningful citizenship. Sustainable change requires a combination of social movements, institutional reforms, and ideological shifts.

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