

Perception Of Sex Stereotype In The Rural Labour Class

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Abstract

Agriculture, the backbone of the Indian economy, sustains nearly 70% of the population. Despite their significant role, rural women face distinct and often undervalued roles due to patriarchal norms and deep-rooted sex stereotypes. With 78% of female workers in India, and 86% in rural areas, engaged in agriculture, they often remain voiceless and invisible, working without payment or being pushed out of employment. National policies have aimed to improve conditions for women, but discriminatory practices and wage inequalities persist.

This study examines perceptions of sex stereotypes among rural farm laborers through two investigations: Mittra (1992) on urban construction workers with rural background & rural base and Srivastava and Bhatnagar (2002) on socially excluded female farm laborers in Kuriana village. Using the Picture Story Test (Bhatnagar; Bhalla & Poptani, 1991), the study found strong adherence to traditional gender roles, with feminine traits like being soft-spoken and submissive, and masculine traits like independence and dominance, overwhelmingly endorsed.

These findings highlight the entrenched patriarchal mindset and the need to address power, inequality, and social change within Indian psychological research. The study emphasizes the importance of reaching out to marginalized rural populations, which make up over 70% of the population, to foster social equity and empowerment.

Keywords: Sex stereotype, rural, gender, masculine, feminine, traits

Introduction

“Agriculture is the backbone of the Indian economy” These were the words of Mahatma Gandhi and with the passage of almost six and a half decade the state of art still reflects that almost entire economy is being sustained by agriculture. Agriculture is an important component of rural livelihood. Almost 70% of India’s population depends upon agriculture for sustaining system.

Due to patriarchal system, social & religious norms, deep rooted sex stereotypes, somewhere male and female roles in rural economy are rather distinct.

Despite 78% of all female workers in India and 86% of all female workers in rural areas being engaged in agriculture, they are over represented as voiceless and invisible labour.

Besides, one half of the poor persons are women, of which rural. Women constitute 110.6 million.

National policy on farmers (2007) emphasized on the recognition and mainstreaming of the importance of women.

Despite the initiative taken by National Gender Resource Center (NGRCA) for welfare and betterment of women's conditions, discriminatory practices continue with persistent inequality in wages/pay as well as underrated work.

Besides, the gruesome reality is that rural women perform numerous labour intensive jobs viz. weeding, hoeing, grass cutting, collecting wood from fields, fetching water from remote areas, keeping and taking care of the livestock, as well as being primary caregivers for children and elderly, often they are disproportionately pushed out of employment or work without any payment.

Somewhere the deep-rooted sex stereotypes and their practice in the rural sector limit their reproductive roles.

In order to bring about a change in their mindset is imperative to explore their mindset about the sex stereotype they carry within.

Method

The present study purported to explore the perceptions of the farm labour for sex stereotypes.

Study First, (Mittra, 1992) focuses on the farm labour who in search of job and money have come to the city to work as labour for constructions while the Study Second, (Srivastava and Bhatnagar, 2002) focuses on exploring the perception of sex stereotype in the socially excluded scheduled caste farm labour females of a below poverty line.

Design

It is an ex-facto research with an exploratory orientation.

Sample

For study (Mittra, 1992) comprised of 78 adult construction labourers equally divided across gender. Their age range was 20 years to 45 years with a mean age of 32.5 years. All of the respondents had come to city in need job when it was a relatively low productive phase in the village. The sample for the second study (Srivastava and Bhatnagar, 2002) comprised of 40 female farm labourers of Kuriana village in district Lakhimpur Kheeri. The name of the village Kuriana was due to the overwhelming number of Kori (one of the scheduled caste) living in the village. They lived on the outskirts of Singhai town and were conceived as untouchables.

The two sample were matched in terms of education (zero literacy in all of them), belonging to below poverty line and deplorable living conditions.

Tool

Picture story test (Bhatnagar et al, 1991) was used to explore the perception of sex stereotype. The tool was initially developed for exploring the traits most representative of Indian male & female. This has 16 stories based on masculine traits and 16 stories based on feminine traits (most representative traits of Indian Male and Female) along with Silhouettes of Male and Female figures for each story. The final list

of the trait representative of Indian masculinity and femininity rested on through scanning of existing inventories on sex typology and sex stereotypes measures, content analysis of 25 Hindi novels, content analysis of 3000 matrimonial advertisements, trait generation of typical Indian male & female and finally the response of 500 subjects. Out of 96 traits on the list 44 of those, which emerged most dominant across all the measures were taken up for the picture story test. Traits similar in meaning were clubbed together. Thus 32 stories were made. Within each group of 16 stimulus figures, the four positions were 4 silhouette facing each other, facing away from each other, both facing right and both facing left. The figure developed by Bhalla (Bhalla 1991) had initially fourteen postures from which only four major postures of standing, sitting, walking and showing movement with hands were retained after ascertaining their neutrality on 25 students.

Administration

For the first study researcher (Mittra, 1992) went to different construction sites and after seeking the permission of the contractor, collected data with individual administration of picture story test on 78 labourers.

For the second study the researchers (Srivastava & Bhatnagar 2002) collected data from Kuriana village on 40 females farm labours. Here also it was an individual administration where the respondents had to see the picture and after listening to the story had to respond in terms of indicating (among the male & females silhouettes) the figure and what the story is about. The base of picture story test was the SSM II (Sex Stereotype Measure II) of William and Best (1989).

The total time taken was approximately 30-45 minutes for individual administration for each respondent. Due to illiteracy the researcher in both the studies noted down the responses given.

Results

As it is evident from Fig.1 and Table 1 that among 16 traits of feminine scale fifteen have obtained more than 60% in terms of being seen as representative of femininity in the Indian context.

The significant aspect of the results is that 11 traits have been endorsed by almost 100% of the respondents in both the studies. These are soft spoken, religious, tolerant, homely, sympathetic and soft hearted, emotional, talkative, submissive and dependent and worrying and nervous.

The mean for Feminine scale is **12.66** for study I and **12.00** for study II with the range of 0-16, the obtained mean clearly shows a good enough knowledge clubbed in the traditional stereotypical image of the Indian female.

Table 1: Obtained percentge of responses in the two studies

Feminine Traits	Study I	Study II
Soft spoken	98%	100%
Religious	98.6%	100%
Tolerant	94.5%	100%
Sacrificing	95.6%	79%
Homely	100%	100%
Sympathetic soft hearted	100%	100%
Domestic	66%	28.9%
Loving & Caring	97.43%	42%
Emotional	98.7%	100%
Weak & Delicate	100%	100%
Shy & Meek	100%	100%
Talkative	90%	100%
Submissive & Dependent	98%	100%
Worrying & Nervous	95.7%	100%
Adaptable	54.6%	30%
Considerate & helping	75%	37%

Fig 1.: Dominant Traits on Female Scale comprising of feminine traits

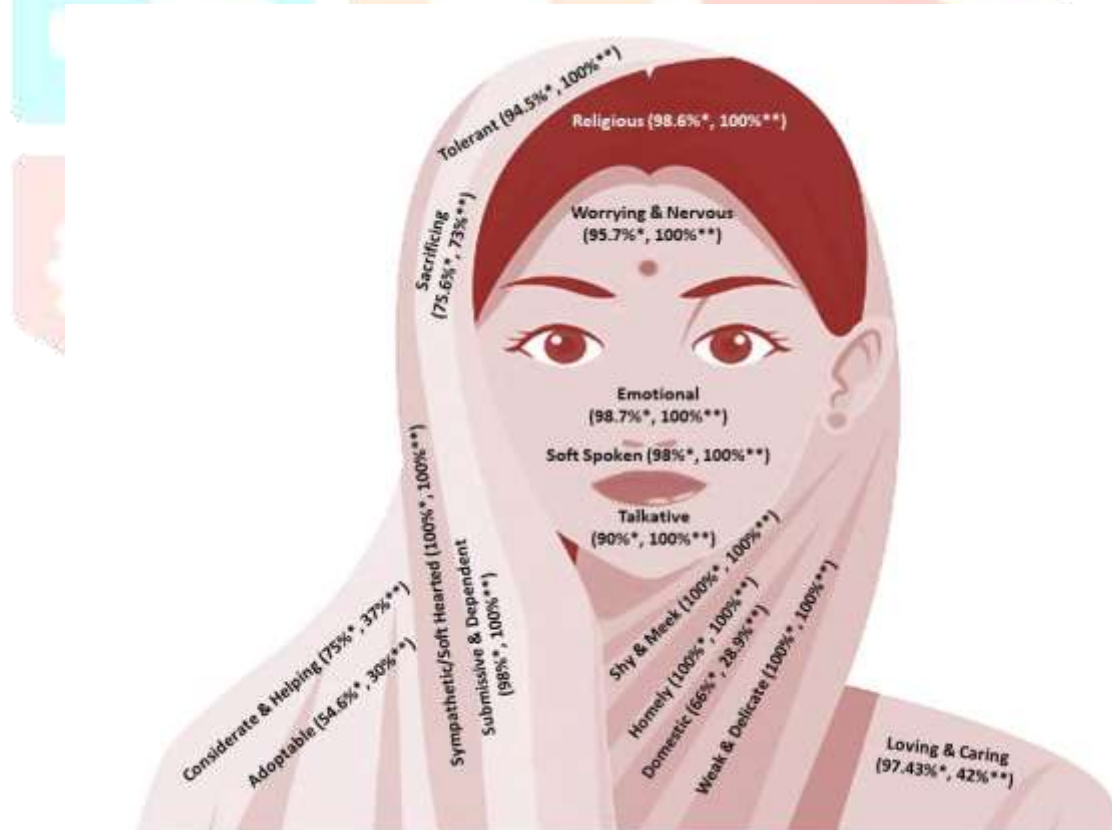


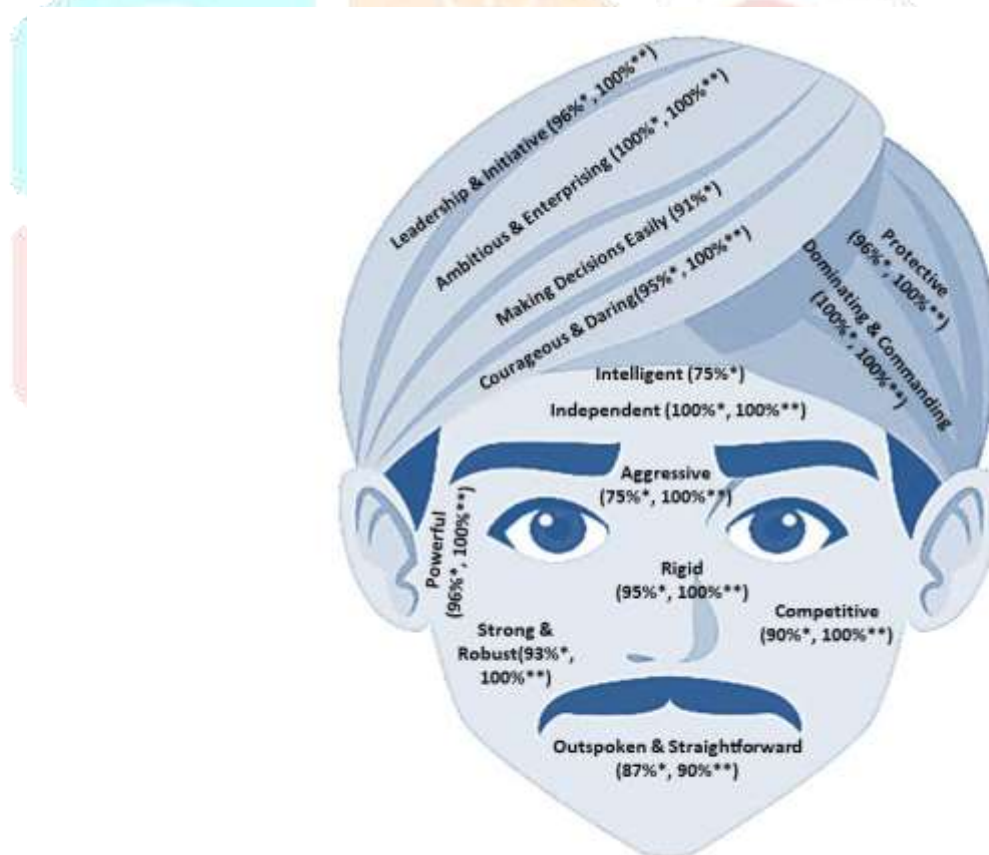
Fig. 2 and Table 2 reflecting the perception for Indian male on picture story test brings to fore almost similar findings. However, the female farm labours of Kuriana Village (study II respondents) have given 100% for 11 of the 16 traits and 90% for one that is outspoken and straight forward.

Interestingly, all the respondents of both the studies with a definite grounding in the rural sector have perceived the Indian male in nearly absolute terms as evident from the table. Humorous and Possessive however, have not been perceived as masculine by any respondent in both the studies.

Table 2: Obtained percentage of responses in the two studies

Masculine Traits	Study I	Study II
Independent	100%	100%
Possessive		
Powerful	96%	100%
Courageous & Daring	95%	100%
Protective	96%	100%
Dominant and Commanding	100%	100%
Ambitious and Enterprising	100%	100%
Humorous		
Aggressive	75%	100%
Intelligent	75%	
Outspoken & straightforward	87%	90%
Making decision easily	91%	
Strong & Robust	93%	100%
Competitive	90%	100%
Leadership & Initiative	96%	100%
Rigid	95%	100%

Fig. 2: Dominant Traits in Masculine Scale comprising of masculine traits



The traditional patriarchal system of the country reflects significantly in the perception of the Indian male who is independent, powerful, courageous and daring, protective, dominant and commanding, ambitious and enterprising, aggressive, outspoken and straight forward, strong and robust competitive, has qualities of leadership and taking initiative and Rigid.

The mean score for Masculine scale is **14.45** for study I and **12.6** for study II which clearly reflect more than adequate knowledge and traditional mindset about Indian Masculinity.

The findings of the present study is a window into the mindsets of the rural farm labour regarding Masculinity-Femininity dilemma: Davar (2003) has succinctly raised the issue that “There is an overall lack of a critical perspective in the mental and behavioral sciences in India and academic psychology has never addressed issues of power, inequality and social change directly. It has never addressed **oppression** and **resistance** and the mentalities of marginalized people who survive, cope with and overcome oppressive life contexts.”

The need of the hour is to reach out to these marginalized groups underrepresented in empirical research, and comprise of more than 70% of the population.

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