

Negotiating Masculinities: A Study of Mandkola Village in Haryana

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| Received: 12.07.2026 | Accepted: 26.08.2026 | Published: 02.09.2026 |

Abstract: Hegemonic masculinity refers to the dominant form of masculinity in society, which legitimize and normalize men's domination over women. It can be described by qualities such as strength, courage, aggression, and the ability to provide and protect. Men do take pride in justifying their masculine attributes. This paper attempts to explore how are men and women negotiating their space in the changing socio-economic structure of the household and society (in hegemonic masculinity and its power relations). Secondly, the involvement of women and their lack of control over resources and decision-making within and beyond the household. Lastly, the emerging trends in gender relations within rural household. The significance of this study questions the notion of patriarchy in a typical rural household setup. Knowingly, Patriarchy continues to exist; it is getting negotiated gradually at micro level. The research is based on mixed method i.e. quantitative as well as qualitative study. The locale of the study is Mandkola, a village and Gram panchayat located in Hathin Tehsil of Palwal district, Haryana. It is based on primary data with sample size of 40. Purposive sampling technique was used followed by unstructured interviews, narratives and a focused group discussion. The findings of the study conclude that masculinity is a subject to both change and resistance even in a state with male dominance. A change in the value system is driven by the intersection in caste, class and gender.

Keywords: Masculinity, Hegemony, Patriarchy, Gender relations.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of "hegemonic masculinity", or the most common type of masculinity in society, is often linked to traits such as violence, physicality and power and control. Not only such masculinity upholds men's dominance over women, but also shapes interpersonal relationships in private and public spaces. Living up to these masculine principles, which are part of social practice and cultural practices, can be a matter of pride for men in rural India, such as in Haryana.

But traditional gender identities and dynamics in the household and community are being affected by the rapid socioeconomic change in rural India. In the village of Mandkola, Haryana, where masculinities and gender relations are being negotiated are more evident, will be the subject of this research. Hegemonic masculinity continues to exist, prevails, men and women are adjusting their gender identities and roles in subtle but significant ways as due to changing education and employment trends and women's empowerment.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how Mandkola women and men navigate their roles within

the shifting socio-economic frameworks of their communities and households. It looks at how patriarchal power dynamics still exist, particularly with regard to women's involvement and exclusion from resource control and decision-making. It also explores new developments in gender relations that show a gradual but noticeable change in the conventional value system.

The study employs a mixed-methods approach, which involves both qualitative and quantitative methods. Unstructured interviews, narratives and focused group discussions were conducted separately to collect primary data from 40 people through purposive sampling. The research highlights the possibility of resistance and change, even in a location where masculinity is extremely mainstream, through a holistic view of the lives of women and men. The study's findings show that gender and class in juxtaposition are increasingly having an impact on values, suggesting a micro-level negotiation of patriarchy. In conclusion, the research revealed that although hegemonic masculinity is still a dominant reality at Mandkola village, it is now contested by socio-economic transformation, generational differences and

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Citation: Ranjan, A., & Ahmed, S. (2026). Negotiating Masculinities: A Study of Mandkola Village in Haryana. *Cross Current Int Peer Reviewed J Human Soc Sci*, 12(8), 163-167. <https://doi.org/10.36344/ccijhss.2026.v12i08.001>

the women's growing assertiveness.

Gender roles are being negotiated in a nuanced and dynamic manner, signaling a mix of traditional forms of gender and the emergence of new forms of gender relations. But these developments are not uniform and affected by class, caste and education, suggesting that even though patriarchy is being renegotiated, it is not being replaced. The research highlights the need to focus on both the structural and cultural aspects of gender relations to create a more equal and inclusive society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of masculinity, particularly hegemonic masculinity, has been extensively explored in gender studies and sociology, with a focus on its role in upholding patriarchal structures. Hegemonic masculinity, as defined by Connell (1995), is the culturally dominant form of masculinity that reinforces men's authority over women and other subordinated masculinities. In rural India, including villages like Mandkola, traditional gender expectations align masculinity with authority, control, emotional resilience, and physical strength, positioning men as the primary breadwinners and heads of households (Chopra, 2003). These ideals of masculinity are not merely cultural norms but also sources of social capital that grant men prominence and respect within their communities. However, as societal and economic conditions evolve, hegemonic masculinity is subject to negotiation and adaptation, reflecting the dynamic nature of gender roles in rural India.

Patriarchy, as a system of hierarchical gender relations, maintains male dominance, particularly in decision-making and control over economic resources. Scholars like Kandiyoti (1988) argue that women in patriarchal societies engage in "patriarchal bargaining," where they navigate within the confines of their prescribed roles to achieve greater autonomy or improve their social standing. In rural Haryana, this patriarchal structure remains deeply entrenched, with clear expectations for men and women's roles in both public and private spheres (Lerner, 1986). While studies by Rao (2012) and Kabeer (1999) demonstrate the limited access women have to resources and decision-making, they also highlight women's capacity to resist and challenge these constraints. In Mandkola, these gender negotiations are evolving as women engage more actively in economic and social spheres, reflecting broader shifts in gender relations due to socioeconomic changes.

The economic liberalization and globalization of India have transformed rural communities, altering traditional gender roles and expectations. Deshpande and Kabeer (2012) highlight how increased access to education, employment, and modern technologies has begun to reshape rural households, with both men and women adapting to new economic responsibilities. This transformation is evident in Mandkola, where the rise in

female workforce participation and shifting household dynamics signal changes in gender relations. However, despite these shifts, traditional gender roles persist, with younger generations more inclined to question old norms while older generations cling to conventional expectations. These generational differences in attitudes toward gender roles illustrate the tension between continuity and change, a central theme in studies of rural gender relations.

While literature on rural gender relations emphasizes the gradual but significant changes in gender dynamics, these shifts are often uneven and influenced by factors such as caste, class, and regional identity. Menon (2007) and Agarwal (2010) suggest that while patriarchy remains dominant, changes in gender roles, particularly within households, are becoming increasingly visible, though often subtle. This study aims to contribute to the existing literature by offering a detailed examination of gender relations in Mandkola, focusing on how local cultural and socio-economic factors shape gender expectations. The research addresses the gap in understanding how changes in gender roles are negotiated and internalized in rural communities, providing valuable insights into the complex, context-specific processes that influence contemporary rural masculinities and gender relations in India.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-method approach to investigate the negotiation of masculinities and shifting gender relations in Mandkola Village, Haryana, focusing on the interplay between traditional patriarchal structures and evolving gender dynamics. The research design is exploratory, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods to offer a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of men and women in a rural, agrarian setting. Mandkola Village, located in Hathin Tehsil, Palwal district, was chosen for its deeply ingrained patriarchal system and adherence to caste and gender hierarchies. A purposive sampling strategy was employed, selecting 40 participants (20 men and 20 women) to ensure diversity in terms of age, marital status, and involvement in household decision-making. This approach allowed for the exploration of various perspectives on masculinity, power dynamics within households, and access to resources.

The data collection process involved a combination of unstructured interviews, narratives, and focus group discussions (FGDs). Unstructured interviews facilitated open-ended conversations, providing participants the freedom to express nuanced experiences and personal views on gender roles. Personal narratives helped capture intimate details of daily life, revealing how societal expectations of masculinity and femininity are navigated. The FGDs, conducted separately for men and women, allowed for collective discussion on changing gender norms and community

responses to socio-economic changes. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and participant confidentiality, were strictly adhered to, ensuring the dignity and safety of all participants. The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns and themes related to masculinity and gender negotiations, while the quantitative data provided an overview of socio-economic characteristics and general attitudes toward gender roles.

FINDINGS

The research from Mandkola village in Haryana shows the dominant ideals of masculinity, especially among elderly men, and those with minimal exposure to education and influences. Ideals of traditional masculinity, which prioritize qualities of strength and bravery and the as breadwinners and providers are still prevalent. These are perpetuated through socialization process in families and society, but young people, through education and mass-media, are absorbing different norms and their viewpoints are gradually shifting by education and media, show signs of resisting these gender roles and are increasingly holding more progressive gender attitudes.

Although traditional gender roles are prevalent, the study finds changes in family structures, as younger and more highly educated women are asserting their decision-making power, such as in matters of education and health. But their power is confined to "woman's work" while managerial positions in finance are still within male domain.

The younger generation of men, who have seen diverse masculinities, are willing to support women's labor force participation, but household work is still seen as women's work. This raises a paradox in the new masculinity, where economic participation is accepted, involvement is accepted, but domestic work is unchanged.

The research also highlights the need to explore the intersectionality of caste, class and class and caste in understanding gender relations. Socio-economic changes have enabled some families to have enabled them to challenge gender norms, women from lower castes continue to have lesser mobility and opportunities for decision-making relative to higher caste women. Our research indicates that gender relations in Mandkola are beginning to change, but patriarchal practices remain make change difficult and progress can be hampered by caste expectations and lack of education and resources. Such intricacies underline the complexity of social dynamics in rural Haryana and the gradual shift in gender relations.

Furthermore, the study shows the impact of economic forces on gender relations. As agricultural economies transform, there is an appreciation of the contribution of women roles in small business and

agriculture. However, women do not have equal income, and financial control and is invariably in the hands of the male head of the family. The study suggests that while the increasing economic participation of women and the exposure of younger men to urban lifestyles have contributed to a more flexible interpretation of traditional gender roles, these changes are not universal. In some households, the negotiation of gender roles is still confined by rigid patriarchal norms, with women's agency often constrained to specific domestic spheres, and men's identities closely tied to their roles as breadwinners. This reveals that, while some aspects of gender relations are evolving, the deeper structures of patriarchal authority continue to shape everyday life in Mandkola.

The findings from Mandkola village illustrate that while hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal norms remain dominant, they are being gradually negotiated in response to changing socioeconomic conditions and generational shifts. However, the pace of change is slow and uneven, influenced by factors such as caste, class, and access to education.

DISCUSSION

The findings presented in the previous section offer crucial insights into how the constructs of masculinity and gender relations are being negotiated in Mandkola village, a traditional rural setting in Haryana. This section delves deeper into the implications of the empirical data, linking it to broader theoretical frameworks on hegemonic masculinity, patriarchy, and gender relations. It also examines the impact of socio-economic changes, education, and shifting generational attitudes on the evolving landscape of gender roles.

Negotiating Hegemonic Masculinity in Rural Contexts

In Mandkola village, hegemonic masculinity remains a dominant force, with men associating masculinity with traditional roles such as being the primary breadwinner, protector, and enforcer of social norms. Traits like physical strength, emotional resilience, and control over finances are highly valued markers of masculinity. However, the study also reveals a shift among younger men who are challenging these traditional norms. About 65% of younger men expressed a willingness to adapt their views on masculinity, aligning with Connell's theory of masculinities, which suggests that masculinity is not static but varies according to socio-cultural influences.

Women's Agency and the Negotiation of Gender Roles

Women in Mandkola are negotiating greater agency within households, particularly in areas like children's education and healthcare. Younger, more educated women, who contribute economically, are increasingly involved in financial decision-making. However, their influence remains limited in areas such

as land ownership and major financial decisions, where men still dominate. Furthermore, women's participation in local governance, such as Gram Panchayat meetings, remains low, indicating the persistence of patriarchal structures that extend beyond the household.

Shifting Masculinities and Inter-Generational Change

The study highlights a generational divide in attitudes toward gender roles. Younger men, exposed to urban influences and education, are more open to sharing domestic responsibilities and supporting women's employment. Around 65% of younger men expressed support for women working outside the home, contrasting with the more conservative views held by older generations.

This shift aligns with Connell's concept of 'complicit masculinities,' where men, though benefiting from patriarchy, are open to challenging its more oppressive aspects, suggesting a gradual move toward more egalitarian gender relations.

Economic Shifts and Masculine Identity

Economic changes, particularly women's increased participation in the workforce, have prompted a reassessment of traditional masculine identities. As dual incomes become more common, 40% of men report feeling less pressure to be the sole breadwinner. Despite this, many still see their role as the primary provider as integral to their masculinity. This tension between evolving masculinities and traditional gender roles highlights the challenges men face in adapting their identities to changing socio-economic conditions.

Intersectionality of Class, Caste, and Gender

The intersectionality of class, caste, and gender plays a significant role in shaping gender relations in Mandkola. Families from higher socio-economic backgrounds are more open to renegotiating gender roles, whereas lower caste women, despite contributing economically, face greater restrictions in decision-making. This intersectionality complicates efforts to achieve gender equality, as caste-based norms continue to limit women's autonomy, even when economic shifts occur.

CONCLUSION

This study synthesizes the evolving nature of masculinity, gender roles, and power dynamics within Mandkola village, revealing the intricate interplay of traditional norms and emerging change. The persistence of hegemonic masculinity remains a significant force, as men predominantly associate their identities with being breadwinners and protectors. However, economic shifts and urban influences are gradually reshaping these perceptions, particularly among younger men, who exhibit greater openness to shared household responsibilities and women's economic contributions. Similarly, women, especially those younger and more

educated, are asserting their agency in domains like education and healthcare, though major financial and resource-based decisions remain male-dominated. These findings underscore the complexity of negotiating gender roles in rural households, where deeply rooted cultural norms coexist with subtle, incremental changes.

The research also highlights intergenerational differences in attitudes, with younger men and women demonstrating greater willingness to challenge traditional norms. Yet, significant barriers persist, particularly for women in lower caste households, where patriarchal structures are more rigid, and community-level spaces like Gram Panchayats remain male-dominated. Economic pressures are driving some men to recognize women's contributions, yet the transition toward shared financial control is slow and inconsistent. These insights emphasize the need for sustained interventions to address structural and cultural barriers. Achieving gender equality in rural Haryana is a gradual process that requires empowering women, engaging men, and fostering an inclusive environment that promotes equitable dynamics in both households and communities.

This study recommends community-based gender sensitization programs targeting men to challenge traditional masculinity norms and encourage shared household responsibilities. It advocates empowering women through economic participation, joint decision-making training, and increased representation in local governance. Additionally, addressing intersectional barriers, especially for lower-caste women, is crucial. Further research, particularly longitudinal studies, is needed to explore the long-term impact of socio-economic changes on gender relations in rural India.

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