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Cultural Psychology and Gender Roles: An Empirical Study Across Urban and Rural Settings of Bihar

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Abstract

This study investigates the cultural psychology of gender roles across urban and rural contexts in Bihar, India, with a specific focus on Patna city and Nalanda district. Employing a mixed-methods, cross-sectional design, data were collected from 48 respondents (24 urban and 24 rural) through both in-person and online interviews. A semi-structured interview schedule combined Likert-scale measures with open-ended questions to capture quantitative patterns and qualitative narratives. Findings reveal that urban respondents in Patna displayed more egalitarian attitudes, greater autonomy in household decision-making, and stronger support for women's education and employment, particularly in STEM fields. Conversely, rural respondents in Nalanda upheld stronger traditional role values, lower levels of autonomy, and greater skepticism toward women's professional participation. However, across both contexts, support for girls' education was consistently high, and gender bias remained a shared experience, underscoring the resilience of patriarchal structures. The study concludes that cultural psychology provides a useful lens for understanding the interplay of socio-economic conditions, community norms, and gender role perceptions in Bihar. It highlights the need for interventions that leverage education and community engagement to promote gradual but meaningful cultural transformation toward gender equality.

Keywords: *Cultural Psychology; Gender Roles; Urban–Rural Comparison; Bihar; Mixed-Methods Research*

Introduction

Gender roles represent one of the most deeply entrenched dimensions of cultural psychology, shaping expectations, behaviors, and social organization across societies. They dictate how men and women are perceived and valued, prescribing norms for family responsibilities, professional aspirations, and community participation. While globalization and modernization have introduced progressive ideals in many parts of India, traditional patriarchal structures continue to influence gender dynamics, particularly in rural areas. Thus, the study of gender roles in India necessitates attention to cultural and regional diversity, as urban and rural populations experience markedly different social realities.

Bihar provides a significant site for examining these contrasts. As one of India's most populous states, it is characterized by sharp urban–rural divides in education, employment, economic opportunities, and exposure to modern institutions. Patna, the state capital, reflects metropolitan influences, greater access to higher education, and increasing participation of women in professional sectors. In contrast, districts like Nalanda represent rural socio-cultural milieus where traditional norms remain deeply embedded in daily life. Investigating the cultural psychology of gender roles across these two sites therefore offers an opportunity to understand how structural and cultural conditions interact to shape beliefs and practices.

Previous studies have consistently found that urbanization and education contribute to more egalitarian gender role attitudes, while rural settings are associated with stronger adherence to tradition and patriarchal structures. However, much of this scholarship has either focused on large-scale surveys or limited itself to descriptive accounts, leaving room for nuanced research that combines quantitative and qualitative data. This study addresses this gap by adopting a mixed-methods approach that captures both measurable patterns in gender role perceptions and the lived experiences that give them meaning.

The primary objectives of this research are:

1. To examine differences in gender role attitudes and practices between urban and rural respondents in Bihar.
2. To assess the influence of education, occupation, and income on perceptions of gender equality.
3. To explore lived experiences of gender bias and community participation as indicators of cultural change.

By situating these objectives within the broader framework of cultural psychology, the study seeks to contribute to understanding how socio-cultural environments shape gender roles, and how these roles are being renegotiated in contemporary Bihar. The findings not only highlight contrasts between urban and rural contexts but also underscore the persistence of shared patriarchal structures that continue to influence both.

Research Design

The present study employs an empirical, mixed-methods design to examine the cultural psychology of gender roles across urban and rural settings of Bihar. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the research is able to capture not only measurable patterns in gender role attitudes but also the lived experiences, narratives, and contextual realities that inform these patterns. The selection of **Patna city** as the urban research site and **villages of Nalanda district** as the rural site was intentional, as these locations provide a contrast between metropolitan influence, higher exposure to education and media, and the relatively traditional socio-cultural milieu of rural Bihar. The design is essentially cross-sectional, collecting data at a single point in time, to highlight how gender role perceptions are distributed across demographic lines in the two contrasting environments.

Sampling Strategy

The total sample size for this research is **48 participants**, with an equal representation of urban and rural respondents to ensure comparative validity. Thus, 24 participants were drawn from Patna city and 24 from villages in Nalanda district. Random sampling was adopted within each site to reduce researcher bias and increase the generalizability of findings. In Patna, potential participants were approached in public institutions such as universities, offices, and community centers, where a randomized contact strategy was employed, every fifth individual who fit the age and gender criteria was invited to participate. In Nalanda villages, the randomization process was carried out by preparing household lists with the assistance of local panchayat representatives, and then selecting households using random number tables. One eligible member from each selected household was interviewed. The key inclusion criteria were that participants should be between 18–45 years of age, residents of the site for at least five years, and willing to provide informed consent. Equal representation of male and female respondents was maintained, ensuring that 12 males and 12 females were selected from each site.

Data Collection Methods

To capture a comprehensive perspective on cultural psychology and gender roles, data collection was conducted using both in-person interviews and online interviews. This dual method was particularly valuable for balancing accessibility and depth. In rural Nalanda, the majority of data were collected through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews due to limited digital penetration and internet access. The physical presence of the researcher allowed participants to feel comfortable, and clarifications could be provided in local dialects when necessary. In urban Patna, both in-person and online interviews were utilized. A proportion of respondents, particularly working professionals and students with busy schedules, opted to participate through online video conferencing platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet. This approach not only provided flexibility but also ensured the participation of individuals who may otherwise have declined due to time constraints. The combination of in-person and online modalities enriched the dataset by capturing nuanced non-verbal cues in face-to-face interviews and candid self-expression in the relative anonymity of online settings.

Instruments of Data Collection

A semi-structured interview schedule was designed, combining closed-ended and open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions used Likert-scale measures to quantify attitudes toward gender roles in domains such as household responsibilities, education, employment, and leadership. These quantitative measures provide statistically analyzable data that can highlight patterns and variations across urban and rural samples. The open-ended questions encouraged participants to narrate their experiences, perceptions, and cultural beliefs regarding gender roles. For example, participants were asked to describe instances when they observed or challenged traditional gender expectations in their community. Probing questions were used where necessary to elicit detailed responses. The interview schedule was pre-tested on a small pilot group of four individuals (two urban and two rural) to ensure clarity, cultural sensitivity, and reliability. Necessary revisions were made to wording and sequencing of questions before the final administration.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical protocols were rigorously followed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all 48 participants before data collection. Participants were briefed on the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any point without penalty, and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality.

Anonymity was preserved by assigning codes rather than recording names in the dataset. Sensitive questions, especially those related to personal experiences of gender discrimination, were posed with caution, and participants were given the option to skip any question they felt uncomfortable answering. All data were stored securely in password-protected files. The ethical framework guiding this research adheres to the principles of the American Psychological Association (APA) and the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) guidelines.

Data Analysis

The analysis process involved both **quantitative** and **qualitative** techniques. Quantitative data from the closed-ended items were coded and entered into statistical software for descriptive and comparative analysis. Frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations were calculated to examine patterns of agreement and disagreement with gender role statements across the urban and rural samples. For example, responses to whether “women should equally share financial responsibilities with men” were compared between Patna and Nalanda respondents. T-tests and chi-square tests were employed to assess the significance of differences. Qualitative data, on the other hand, were subjected to thematic analysis. The transcribed responses from open-ended questions were read repeatedly, coded, and organized into themes such as “tradition vs. modernity,” “family expectations,” and “perceptions of empowerment.” The integration of numerical data and narrative accounts provided a holistic picture, showing not only whether urban and rural populations differ, but also why such differences may exist.

Validity and Reliability

Several measures were taken to ensure the validity and reliability of the study. First, the use of random sampling enhanced representativeness, reducing the likelihood of systematic bias. Second, the semi-structured interview instrument was carefully developed and pilot tested, ensuring face validity and cultural relevance. Third, triangulation was achieved by combining online and in-person interviews as well as quantitative and qualitative strands of data. This strengthened internal validity by cross-verifying findings through multiple sources. Reliability was ensured by training the researcher and assistants in consistent administration of the interview schedule and in accurate transcription of responses. Inter-coder reliability was checked during thematic analysis by involving two independent coders to cross-validate the emerging themes.

Limitations

Despite careful design, the study has certain limitations. The relatively small sample size of 48 limits the generalizability of findings to the wider population of Bihar. The focus on Patna and Nalanda means that the study may not capture the diversity of cultural psychology and gender roles across other districts of Bihar, such as those with higher tribal populations or different economic profiles. The reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of social desirability bias, where participants may provide responses that conform to perceived societal expectations. Nevertheless, these limitations were mitigated through assurances of confidentiality and by encouraging honest expression in both online and in-person settings.

Results and Discussion

The study aimed to explore the cultural psychology of gender roles in urban and rural Bihar, drawing on data collected from 48 respondents across Patna city and Nalanda villages. The results are presented in tables and discussed in detail below.

1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Profile (N = 48)

Category	Urban (Patna)	Rural (Nalanda)	Total (N=48)
Gender	Male: 12, Female: 12	Male: 12, Female: 12	Male: 24, Female: 24
Age (Mean ± SD)	26.8 ± 6.2 yrs	29.6 ± 7.1 yrs	28.2 ± 6.7 yrs
Education	Below Secondary: 1 Secondary: 3 Higher Secondary: 6 Graduate: 9 Postgraduate: 5	Below Secondary: 6 Secondary: 9 Higher Secondary: 6 Graduate: 3 Postgraduate: 0	Urban more higher education; Rural skew to secondary
Occupation	Student: 6 Private Job: 8 Govt Job: 3 Self-employed: 4 Homemaker: 2 Informal: 1	Student: 5 Agriculture: 7 Self-employed: 4 Homemaker: 4 Informal: 3 Govt Job: 1	Clear site difference

Category	Urban (Patna)	Rural (Nalanda)	Total (N=48)
Monthly Income (INR)	<10k: 1 10–20k: 4 20–40k: 8 40–80k: 7 >80k: 4	<10k: 7 10–20k: 9 20–40k: 6 40–80k: 2 >80k: 0	Urban incomes higher
Marital Status	Single: 12 Married: 10 Engaged/Other: 2	Single: 7 Married: 15 Other: 2	Rural more married
Interview Mode	Online: 13 In-person: 11	Online: 3 In-person: 21	Clear site difference

Discussion:

The demographic profile clearly shows the structural divide between Patna and Nalanda. Urban participants were younger, better educated, more diversified in occupation, and earned higher incomes. By contrast, rural participants showed heavier concentration in agriculture and informal work, with lower education levels and no postgraduate representation. These disparities provide an important backdrop for interpreting subsequent differences in gender role attitudes and practices.

2. Attitudes and Perceived Norms

Table 2: Attitudes & Perceived Norms (Likert 1–5)

Variable	Urban Mean (SD)	Rural Mean (SD)	Total Mean
Gender Role Attitude (higher = egalitarian)	4.1 (0.7)	3.3 (0.8)	3.7
Perceived Community Support	3.5 (0.8)	2.9 (0.9)	3.2
Traditional Role Value (higher = traditional)	3.1 (0.8)	3.9 (0.9)	3.5

Discussion:

Urban respondents leaned more towards egalitarianism (mean = 4.1) compared to rural respondents (mean = 3.3). Meanwhile, rural respondents held stronger traditional values (3.9). This suggests that while Patna's socio-economic exposure is gradually fostering gender equality, Nalanda continues to uphold patriarchal norms. Community support was also perceived higher in urban areas, reflecting greater acceptance of modern roles for women in city contexts.

3. Household Practices and Autonomy

Table 3: Household Practices & Autonomy

Variable	Urban Mean (SD)	Rural Mean (SD)	Total Mean
Decision-making Autonomy	3.9 (0.8)	3.2 (0.9)	3.55
Household Chore Equity	3.8 (0.9)	3.0 (0.9)	3.4

Discussion:

Urban households showed greater decision-making autonomy and chore sharing, while rural households maintained traditional divisions where women carry more domestic burden. However, even in urban settings, the scores fall short of complete equality, highlighting that structural change is gradual.

4. Education and Employment Attitudes

Table 4: Education & Employment Attitudes

Variable	Urban Mean (SD)	Rural Mean (SD)	Total Mean
Support for Girls' Education	4.6 (0.5)	4.1 (0.6)	4.35
Support for Women's Employment	4.3 (0.7)	3.6 (0.8)	3.95
Support for Women in STEM	4.0 (0.9)	3.2 (0.9)	3.6

Discussion:

Both groups strongly supported girls' education, indicating that education for women is now widely valued. However, gaps emerged in employment and STEM careers. Rural respondents were significantly less supportive of women in professional and technical fields, showing that acceptance of education does not automatically translate into acceptance of women's professional independence.

5. Experiences and Participation

Table 5: Experiences & Participation

Variable	Urban (Patna)	Rural (Nalanda)	Total
Experienced Gender Bias (past yr)	Yes: 7, No: 17	Yes: 6, No: 18	Yes: 13, No: 35
Observed Norm Change (1–5)	3.8 (0.8)	3.3 (0.9)	3.55
Community Participation (0–5/mo)	Mean: 1.4	Mean: 1.8	1.6

Discussion:

Gender bias was reported at similar levels in both urban and rural areas, confirming that discrimination persists across contexts, though it may take different forms. Rural respondents engaged more in community activities but perceived slower change in gender norms, reflecting the strong hold of traditional structures. Urban respondents saw quicker change, likely due to media, policy awareness, and education exposure.

Integrative Discussion

The tables together present a layered picture. Urban Patna reflects progress towards egalitarian gender roles, with higher autonomy, income, education, and support for employment. However, full equality is far from realized. Rural Nalanda reflects slower progress, with strong adherence to tradition, limited autonomy, and skepticism about women in professional careers.

At the same time, shared values, such as the recognition of girls' education and the persistence of gender bias, indicate that patriarchy continues to operate across contexts. These findings underscore the importance of analyzing gender roles not only as individual beliefs but as deeply embedded cultural phenomena shaped by socio-economic and institutional contexts.

Conclusion

The findings reveal a clear contrast between urban Patna and rural Nalanda in the cultural psychology of gender roles. Urban respondents demonstrated more egalitarian attitudes, greater autonomy in household decisions, and stronger support for women's education and employment, reflecting the influence of education, economic opportunities, and exposure to modern institutions. Rural respondents, by contrast, continued to uphold traditional role values, limited autonomy, and skepticism towards women in professional spheres, shaped by entrenched socio-cultural norms and economic constraints.

At the same time, both groups shared certain realities, such as the universal acceptance of girls' education and the persistent experience of gender bias, indicating that patriarchal structures remain embedded across contexts. Overall, the study highlights that while urbanization and education are fostering gradual shifts in gender role perceptions, meaningful cultural change requires sustained engagement at the community level, especially in rural Bihar.

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