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## Cultural Beliefs and Gender Role Perceptions: An Empirical Psychology Study in Madhubani District

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### Abstract

The present research investigates the interplay between cultural beliefs and gender role perceptions among adults in the Madhubani district of Bihar, a region known for its strong traditional ethos and cultural heritage. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study collected data from 79 randomly selected respondents through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Findings indicate that adherence to cultural traditions remains high, with ritualistic practices and religious participation continuing to shape social life. However, gender role perceptions reveal a society in transition: while support for girls' education and women's employment is growing, household labor divisions and decision-making structures remain largely patriarchal. The analysis highlights that education, age, and residence (rural vs. semi-urban) are critical factors influencing the shift toward egalitarian attitudes. Overall, the study underscores the duality of cultural continuity and change, illustrating how Madhubani negotiates modern egalitarian ideals within the framework of enduring traditions.

**Keywords:** *Cultural Beliefs, Gender Role Perceptions, Madhubani District, Patriarchy and Tradition, Social Change*

## Introduction

Gender roles and cultural beliefs are deeply interwoven constructs that significantly shape social behavior, family dynamics, and community organization. In contexts like rural India, culture provides not only the framework for collective identity but also prescribes expectations about gender-specific responsibilities, rights, and opportunities. Madhubani district, situated in northern Bihar, offers a particularly meaningful site of investigation because of its unique cultural heritage, including the world-renowned Madhubani art tradition, deeply rooted rituals, and symbolic practices. These cultural elements coexist with socio-economic challenges such as low literacy, patriarchal family structures, and limited employment opportunities for women, creating a complex environment in which gender role perceptions are negotiated.

The question of how cultural traditions influence gender roles has long occupied scholars in psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Theories of social learning emphasize that individuals acquire gender norms through cultural modeling, while cultural psychology underscores the role of collective rituals, folklore, and symbolic beliefs in embedding values across generations. In many traditional societies, cultural practices often reinforce hierarchical gender arrangements, placing men as decision-makers and women in caregiving roles. At the same time, processes of modernization, particularly access to education, employment, and media, challenge these conventional patterns and open pathways for egalitarian attitudes.

Within this backdrop, the present study seeks to empirically examine cultural beliefs and gender role perceptions in Madhubani. By employing both quantitative measures (scales assessing adherence to traditions and gender role attitudes) and qualitative interviews (capturing lived experiences and narratives), the study provides a multidimensional

perspective on how individuals conceptualize gender in everyday life. The research also explores subgroup differences by gender, education, and residence, thus situating the findings within broader debates on cultural persistence and social change in India.

The rationale for this study is twofold. First, Madhubani remains underexplored in psychological research, despite being an emblematic cultural region of Bihar. Second, existing studies on gender in India often focus on urban or pan-Indian contexts, overlooking the distinct cultural nuances of specific districts. By centering Madhubani, this research contributes to localized psychological understanding while also shedding light on broader processes of transformation in gender perceptions within rural India.

## Methodology

The present study seeks to empirically investigate the intricate relationship between cultural beliefs and gender role perceptions in the Madhubani district of Bihar, India. Madhubani, known for its strong traditional ethos, art forms, and deeply rooted cultural practices, provides a unique field to explore how cultural frameworks shape individuals' perceptions of gender roles. A systematic and rigorous methodology was adopted to ensure reliability, validity, and generalizability of findings within the defined population. The methodology outlines the research design, sample selection, tools and instruments, data collection procedure, and data analysis strategies.

## Research Design

This study employs a **descriptive and analytical research design** with an empirical orientation. The descriptive aspect helps in documenting prevailing cultural beliefs and perceptions regarding gender roles among the selected respondents, while the analytical component enables identifying correlations and potential causal linkages between

cultural orientation and gender role attitudes. Both qualitative and quantitative data were integrated, providing a mixed-methods dimension to the design. Quantitative data allowed measurable insights into the prevalence and intensity of particular cultural beliefs, while qualitative narratives captured the nuances of lived experiences, symbolic practices, and personal interpretations.

The design was further guided by psychological theories on gender role development, particularly **social learning theory** and **cultural psychology perspectives**, which stress the role of cultural practices, socialization, and collective norms in shaping gender-related attitudes.

## Sample and Sampling Technique

### Population

The target population for the study consisted of adults residing in the Madhubani district. Given the research's focus, individuals aged 18 years and above were considered eligible. The population included both men and women from diverse caste, religious, occupational, and educational backgrounds, reflecting the heterogeneity of the district's social fabric.

### Sample Size

A total of **79 respondents** were selected for the study. The number was determined considering feasibility, resource constraints, and the representational adequacy for qualitative and quantitative analyses. While relatively modest, a sample size of 79 ensured the possibility of meaningful interpretation of cultural patterns without compromising depth.

### Sampling Technique

The respondents were selected using a **random sampling technique**. A list of households from selected blocks of Madhubani was prepared with the assistance

of local administrative records and community informants. From this list, individuals were chosen randomly to avoid bias and to ensure every member of the population had an equal chance of being included. The randomness of the selection strengthens the external validity of the study and minimizes sampling bias.

Care was taken to include both rural and semi-urban populations, as Madhubani exhibits varying levels of modernization and exposure to external influences, which could significantly affect gender role perceptions.

## Tools and Instruments

To measure cultural beliefs and gender role perceptions, a combination of structured and semi-structured instruments was employed.

### 1. Demographic Information Schedule:

A self-designed schedule was used to collect essential socio-demographic details such as age, gender, educational attainment, marital status, occupation, income group, and religious/caste affiliation. These variables were crucial to analyze subgroup differences and understand the influence of demographic context on cultural beliefs.

### 2. Cultural Beliefs Scale (CBS):

An adapted scale was prepared after reviewing existing cultural psychology literature. Items focused on traditional norms, ritualistic practices, symbolic beliefs, and collectivist orientations. Respondents rated items on a Likert-type scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." The scale underwent pilot testing for reliability in the local context, yielding a Cronbach's alpha above 0.80, which ensured internal consistency.

### 3. Gender Role Perception Inventory (GRPI):

This standardized inventory was adopted and contextualized to the Indian setting. It measured attitudes toward masculinity, femininity, household division of labor, women's employment, political participation, and educational opportunities. Items were presented in simple Hindi/Maithili language for accessibility. Respondents expressed agreement/disagreement on a 5-point Likert scale.

### 4. Semi-Structured Interview Schedule:

In addition to quantitative scales, a semi-structured interview schedule was prepared. This included open-ended questions exploring how cultural traditions (festivals, rituals, art, folklore, and kinship practices) shape participants' perceptions of gender roles. The qualitative responses added depth and interpretive richness to the statistical findings.

## Data Collection Procedure

The study used a **dual approach of in-person and online interviews** for data collection.

### 1. In-Person Interviews:

A significant portion of the sample (especially rural and older participants) was contacted through in-person interviews conducted at their homes, community spaces, or workplaces. This approach was essential in Madhubani, where internet penetration remains uneven, and face-to-face interaction fosters trust and rapport. In-person interviews were carried out by trained field researchers fluent in Hindi and Maithili.

### 2. Online Interviews:

Respondents who were younger, digitally literate, or living in semi-urban areas were approached through online platforms such as Google Forms and structured video interviews. This method proved efficient, particularly during periods of mobility restrictions, and ensured participation from diverse groups within the district.

Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants. They were assured about confidentiality, anonymity, and the academic purpose of the study. Interviews typically lasted between 30 to 45 minutes for in-person respondents and 20 to 30 minutes for online respondents.

The fieldwork extended over six weeks, ensuring sufficient time for rapport-building, revisits (when necessary), and careful administration of instruments.

## Data Analysis

Both **quantitative** and **qualitative** approaches were employed for data analysis.

### 1. Quantitative Analysis:

- Descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode, frequency, and percentages) were calculated for demographic variables and scale items.
- Inferential statistics, such as correlation analysis and independent t-tests, were applied to examine relationships between cultural beliefs and gender role perceptions, as well as subgroup differences (e.g., male vs. female, rural vs. semi-urban, literate vs. illiterate).

- Data entry and statistical analyses were carried out using SPSS software, ensuring accuracy and rigor.

## 2. Qualitative Analysis:

- Responses from semi-structured interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically.
- Recurring patterns, symbolic motifs, and culturally embedded narratives were identified, particularly those linked to rituals, folklore, and socialization practices.
- Triangulation of qualitative and quantitative findings provided a more holistic understanding of the phenomena under study.

## Ethical Considerations

Ethical compliance was central to the research process. Respondents were briefed about the study's objectives and their voluntary participation was emphasized. No sensitive personal identifiers were recorded to maintain anonymity. Participants were free to withdraw at any stage. Given the sensitive nature of gender role perceptions, culturally sensitive language was used, and questions were framed respectfully.

The research adhered to the ethical guidelines of psychological research prescribed by the **Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR)** and international protocols for human participant studies.

## Limitations of Methodology

Although rigorous, the methodology is not without limitations. The sample size of 79, while adequate for exploratory and descriptive purposes, limits the generalizability of findings to the entire

Madhubani population. Additionally, self-reported measures are prone to social desirability bias, particularly on sensitive topics like gender roles. Nonetheless, the use of mixed-methods, random sampling, and contextually validated tools significantly mitigated these challenges.

The methodology adopted in this research ensures a balanced integration of quantitative measurement and qualitative depth. Through random sampling, the dual mode of data collection (in-person and online), and the use of culturally adapted instruments, the study seeks to capture an authentic representation of how cultural beliefs in Madhubani district shape gender role perceptions. The robustness of the design enhances the reliability and credibility of the findings, thereby contributing meaningfully to psychological scholarship on culture and gender in the Indian context.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### I. Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 79)

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	41	51.9
	Female	38	48.1
Age Groups	18–25	17	21.5
	26–35	22	27.8
	36–45	18	22.8
	46–55	12	15.2
	56+	10	12.7
Residence	Rural	56	70.9

Variable	Categorie s	Frequen cy	Percenta ge (%)
	Semi-Urban	23	29.1
Education	No Formal Education	5	6.3
	Primary	12	15.2
	Secondary	21	26.6
	Higher Secondary	17	21.5
	Graduate	18	22.8
	Postgraduate	6	7.6
Occupati on	Agricultur e	18	22.8
	Daily Wage Labour	10	12.7
	Self-Employed	11	13.9
	Govt Service	6	7.6
	Private Service	13	16.5
	Student	9	11.4
	Homemak er	8	10.1
	Artisan (Madhuba ni Art)	4	5.0

Variable	Categorie s	Frequen cy	Percenta ge (%)
Religion	Hindu	65	82.3
	Muslim	13	16.5
	Other	1	1.2

## Discussion

The demographic profile reveals a relatively balanced gender composition, with 52% men and 48% women, ensuring both perspectives were represented. The dominance of rural respondents (71%) reflects the traditional character of Madhubani, where cultural practices are still deeply embedded. Age distribution shows a fair mix of young, middle-aged, and older adults, allowing inter-generational comparison of beliefs.

Education emerges as a critical differentiator: while 52% achieved higher secondary or above, a substantial minority (21%) reported only primary schooling or none. This educational variation is significant in shaping gender role perceptions, better-educated respondents demonstrated more egalitarian views in subsequent sections, confirming existing psychological research linking education with progressive gender attitudes.

Occupational diversity also reflects the socio-economic structure of Madhubani. Agriculture and wage labor dominate, but the presence of private sector employees, students, and artisans points to exposure to modernization and external influences. Religious composition mirrors district-level statistics, with Hindu dominance (82%) and a smaller Muslim minority. This demographic composition suggests that the study successfully captured a representative cross-section of Madhubani society, enhancing the reliability of findings.

## II. Cultural Beliefs & Practices



Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Cultural Tradition Adherence (CTA Score 1–5)	Low (1–2)	14	17.7
	Moderate (3)	28	35.4
	High (4–5)	37	46.9
Religious Attendance	Weekly	25	31.6
	Monthly	18	22.8
	Festivals only	29	36.7
	Rare	7	8.9
Participation in Traditional Arts	Yes	17	21.5
	No	62	78.5

## Discussion

Nearly half of respondents (47%) exhibit high adherence to cultural traditions, confirming that rituals and customs remain central to social life. Religious observance is also strong, with almost 70% participating regularly or during festivals. However, active participation in traditional arts such as Madhubani painting or folk performance is limited (22%). This suggests that while symbolic beliefs remain strong, practical cultural expressions are unevenly maintained.

The findings align with modernization theory, which predicts selective cultural retention: core rituals and festivals are preserved as identity markers, while labor-intensive or economically less viable traditions decline. Younger respondents in semi-urban areas were particularly less engaged with arts, indicating generational shifts in cultural transmission.

## III. Gender Role Perception Score (GRP)

Score (1–5)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Low (1–2)	15	19.0
Neutral (3)	28	35.4
High (4–5)	36	45.6

## Discussion

The Gender Role Perception scores present a striking duality. While 46% hold progressive views favoring equality, 19% continue to endorse traditional, restrictive roles. The middle segment (35%) reflects ambivalence or transitional attitudes. This distribution confirms that Madhubani is experiencing socio-cultural flux: educational expansion and urban exposure encourage egalitarianism, yet patriarchal structures still exert influence.

Correlational analysis (not shown here) suggested that gender and education significantly shaped these scores, women and better-educated respondents leaned toward egalitarianism, while older rural men were more traditional. This reinforces theories of gender socialization, whereby lived experiences of discrimination encourage women to support equality, while men benefit from preserving hierarchy.

## IV. Acceptance of Women's Employment

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Accept	43	54.4
Conditional	26	32.9
Disapprove	10	12.7

### Discussion

A majority (54%) unconditionally accept women's employment, signaling a significant normative shift from traditional restrictions. However, one-third expressed only conditional support, acceptance contingent upon type of work, family approval, or cultural appropriateness. This illustrates the persistence of patriarchal gatekeeping, where women's autonomy remains subject to negotiation.

The small but notable group (13%) disapproving women's work reflects the hard core of traditionalists, primarily older rural males with low education. Younger respondents, especially women, strongly favored women's economic participation. These findings resonate with broader Indian labor trends where female labor force participation is rising in urban and semi-urban areas, but traditional gender norms continue to constrain choices.

### V. Girls' Education Priority & Desired Years

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Education Priority	High	52	65.8
	Moderate	20	25.3
	Low	7	8.9

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Desired Years of Study	Up to Class 10	14	17.7
	Up to Class 12	28	35.4
	Undergraduate	19	24.1
	Postgraduate	18	22.8

### Discussion

Support for girls' education is overwhelming: 91% rated it high or moderate priority. This finding challenges the stereotype of uniformly regressive rural attitudes. However, preferences about level of education reveal stratification, while nearly half (47%) favored higher education (UG/PG), one-third preferred limiting girls' education to secondary level.

This reflects a pragmatic compromise between valuing education and maintaining traditional expectations of marriageability. Families may encourage moderate education to secure better matches but hesitate to support advanced degrees due to fears of "over-qualification" or reduced submissiveness. Nevertheless, the strong endorsement of higher studies by a sizable minority marks an important generational change and signals the influence of government programs promoting girls' education in Bihar.

### VI. Household Decision-Making & Labour Division



Variable	Categori es	Frequenc y	Percentag e (%)
Decision-Making	Joint (Spouses)	36	45.6
	Male Head	27	34.2
	Female Head	5	6.3
	Elders	11	13.9
Household Labour Division	Equal	31	39.2
	Women – High Share	40	50.6
	Men – High Share	8	10.1

## Discussion

Household decision-making patterns illustrate both continuity and change. Nearly half (46%) report joint spousal decision-making, an encouraging sign of partnership. Yet, one-third still operate under male dominance, and only 6% under female leadership, underscoring continued patriarchal imbalance. Elder-led households (14%) reflect the traditional joint family structure where authority is generational rather than gender-based.

Labour division remains the most resistant domain. Half of respondents reported women bearing the bulk of domestic duties, while only 39% support equal division. This gap between attitudes (progressive perceptions in education and employment) and practices (traditional domestic burdens) is crucial. It indicates that while public roles for women

are increasingly accepted, private household structures lag behind. This aligns with “second shift” theory in gender studies, where women engage in paid employment yet remain primary caretakers at home.

The results depict a society in transition. Madhubani’s residents strongly adhere to cultural traditions and rituals, yet are increasingly open to gender equality in education and employment. Egalitarian attitudes are growing, particularly among educated, younger, and semi-urban populations. However, traditional practices persist most strongly in household roles and decision-making, highlighting the resilience of patriarchal legacies.

The interplay of tradition and modernity defines Madhubani’s cultural psychology. Education and semi-urban exposure emerge as the strongest drivers of change, while older rural males remain the bastions of conservatism. The co-existence of progressive and traditional attitudes within the same households indicates that change is neither linear nor uniform. Instead, gender role perceptions are being renegotiated within the cultural framework, retaining symbolic rituals while adjusting practical norms in public domains like schooling and employment.

This duality exemplifies what cultural psychologists describe as “cultural hybridity”, a blending of modern egalitarian ideals with enduring traditional practices. The findings suggest that policy initiatives must not only expand educational access but also address entrenched household dynamics to achieve substantive gender equality.

## Conclusion

The present study on *Cultural Beliefs and Gender Role Perceptions in Madhubani District* highlights the coexistence of cultural continuity and gradual social change. Findings reveal that while traditional practices, rituals, and patriarchal structures

remain deeply rooted, there is a noticeable shift toward egalitarian views, particularly in domains of education and women's employment. Younger, educated, and semi-urban respondents demonstrated greater openness to gender equality, whereas older and less educated groups retained more restrictive views. Importantly, household labor division continues to place a disproportionate burden on women, underscoring a gap between attitudinal change and lived practice. Overall, the research suggests that Madhubani is undergoing a slow but meaningful cultural transition where modern influences are reshaping gender perceptions without displacing the symbolic centrality of tradition.

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