



All Things Equal: Role Reversal In Indian Marriage

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Seeing a man in a kitchen may have been social taboo decades ago, but it is becoming more and more acceptable in today's modern Indian marriage, writes SAVIA RAJAGOPAL.

A lone lady pottering around the kitchen while rolling out perfect rotis and attending to her children wasn't an uncommon sight in movies of yore. Cut to today and you'll see both men and women sharing chores equally around

the house a la "Salaam Namaste."

The sea-change in the way celluloid presents itself is a mere reflection of the change that Indian society is witnessing today. Gone are the days when women had to maintain an immaculate home, tend to the kids and serve her in-laws without any help from her spouse. In today's urban society, many men are stepping into a new world of domesticity and homeliness.

Shedding some light on this trend, Dr Minnu R Bhonsle, Consultant Psychotherapist and Counsellor at the Heart to Heart Counselling Centre, Mumbai, says "This change has been more dramatic in urban areas. It is evident in those areas of society where the woman has received higher

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education, and is in a managerial post which gives a huge pay-check and demands long working hours and travelling on the job at times. More and more women getting into engineering, business administration, the financial sector, the civil services, and other well-paying and demanding professions has been the turning point of this change in psyche. Along with this, there has been the exposure to western trends via satellite television and the internet, where the western working woman is viewed as a role model for the urban Indian woman, and this trend is slowly permeating into Indian society."

For a long time, Indian women have faced subjugation and been relegated to the confines of their house as a homemaker. The younger generation of women finds this in itself motivation to orchestrate change. A case in point being Sonia S, media professional, who states emphatically, "I have seen my mother fuss around men all her life – her husband, her sons, her in-laws! I certainly can't do it and find it unacceptable that my husband sits with his feet up while we've both had equally long, stressful days! Just because it's been the norm doesn't make it right."

It's not surprising that women are now seeking a balance through what has been their traditional area of dominance – their kitchens. It is merely a metaphor for the change that has been sweeping through the metros amongst the urban, middle class of society.

A fact corroborated by expert, Dr. Bhonsle, "Women of course are trying to seek equality at home with regard to the husband pitching into equal homemaking or sometimes even more than her." But she also mentions that there are instances where women want to be treated as equals, but also want to be mollicoddled by their husbands in a throwback to conventional husband-wife roles.



Situation like these cause confusion about expectations from the husband, as Navin Ghelani shares, "There are times where my wife wants to be treated on par and demands that there be no discrimination. At other times, she projects herself as being vulnerable and needing assistance and calls it being 'feminine!' It leaves me clueless as to how I should approach the situation." Despite this shift in balances, women continue to tread along the path of equality within their homes.

While men in previous generations pooh-pooled the idea of being involved in the kitchen, many men, now view it as an equal responsibility. There are men who are as involved with their homes as women. "My wife works long hours and works doubly hard to raise the kids. I think it's unfair to let her do it all by herself. When we both work as hard, why shouldn't both of us help out at home?" asks Sunil Nair, a travel professional. While Nair may have noble intentions, Dr Bhonsle opines that the current generation of men is coping with this change because of the dual-income scenario.

She states, "While men are far from accepting the role of 'house husbands' in India, there is a shift in terms of sharing some household chores. This shift is solely due to the couple making a decision prior to marriage to be a 'double-income' family i.e. the women bringing large pay-checks with long working hours, and the husbands pitching in at home to keep the income coming from



Single women enjoy the benefits of freedom, financial independence and the ability to prioritise their career above family. Staying single is a choice that Indian women are choosing in increasing numbers, as they refuse to settle for less than satisfying relationships. Pallavi Bhattacharya analyses why, like all other choices in life, choosing to staying single has its pros and cons.

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both sources. It is easier for men to deal with this change in their roles if they focus on the 'good life' that the 'double-income' can buy them and which they have consciously chosen."

However, she also highlights conflicts that arise due to this very situation as sometimes the focus changes from the 'good life' to times when the man likes to view himself and his wife in conventional socially acceptable modes.

No longer are roles demarcated in the traditional mode, viz. - the homemaker and the breadwinner. With roles intermingled, today's woman has far greater control over her home and professional aspirations. Also, children growing in households, where both partners contribute equally to the household in all areas, are breaking out of the traditional family roles as they are seeing both parents participating equally, undeterred by gender.

However doing away of clear-cut roles, has its drawbacks as pointed out by Dr Bhonsle who notes, "There is a confusion right now in Indian society, which is in a 'transition' phase, with women wanting to emulate the western working woman and the western family system with both genders performing both roles i.e. provider and homemaker; while simultaneously wanting to hang on to the tradition roles of man being the provider and the woman looking into all affairs related to the home. The dynamics are changing in such cases where roles are being demarcated and re-negotiated, and especially finances are under the scanner, with the concept of 'my money', 'your money' and 'our money' being discussed."

Note: Some names have been changed on request.

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Savia Rajagopal currently lives in Canada and has been with The Times of India, Mumbai as a features writer. Apart from writing on relationships and fashion, her diverse portfolio includes articles on the watch and jewellery industry, education, careers and home décor, for various national and international publications and online portals. She particularly enjoys interviews and rates meeting supermodel Linda Evangelista and film producer-director Kanika Myer as the highlights of her journalistic career. She can be reached via email at rsavia@gmail.com

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