

Gender Roles and Norms in the South Asian Community

In South Asian communities, girls are raised to be respectful, modest, self-sacrificing, and obedient. They are taught that their worth depends on how well they serve others, especially the men in families, through chores and emotional caretaking. These values are passed down by families, communities, and patriarchal systems.

Examples include:

- Giving daughters less freedom and more responsibility.
- Expecting daughters and women to be “good daughters”, suppress emotion, and not speak up.
- Demanding academic success, professional achievement, and perfect parenting from daughters. Girls must earn love, respect, or rest through their performance. Boys are praised solely for existing.
- Mourning the birth of a girl while celebrating the birth of a boy.
- Women and girls are told not to cause trouble or be the good ones, while their brothers are excused for anger or bad behavior.
- Daughters must care for siblings, aging parents, their husbands, and children.
- Marriage comes with expectations: marry on time, stay married, have kids quickly, and ideally have a son.
- Differential rules for boys vs. girls. Boys can stay out late, date, and choose different careers.
- Mental health is a taboo topic – women often hear – pray about it, be strong like your mother, don’t talk about this outside the house.
- Marriage introduces power structures. Women must adjust even while facing abuse from their husbands or in-laws.
- Married women are told not to be too sensitive or bring shame to their families. Make it work.

