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**QUESTION:** Is Gender Relations changing in the 21st century? What are the areas of change and the factors driving the change?

The scholarship on women and gender in Africa has shown that women’s political, social, and economic experiences are often fundamentally distinct from men’s. Feminist and non-feminist scholarship has found that gender is a key factor in explaining this difference (African Affairs, 2019), which leads us to gender relations in Society. Gender relations refer to relations between men and women that are socially determined by culture, religion, or socially acceptable ways of thinking or being. In the social sciences, sociocultural theory asserts that women came to be nurturers after they were assigned the tasks of child rearing (Theravive, 2020). Gender is a central organising principle, which seems to govern major aspects of society. Our societies are changing such that the gender roles rapidly change. The 21st century has seen a shift in gender roles due to multiple factors such as education, information, media,

In the 1920s, women typically stayed at home and cared for the house and children while the husband was away at work. Even till the 1980’s more than half the nations of the world could agree that the role of men was to go out to work and to be the main breadwinner of the family. While the role of women was to stay at home and look after the children and the house. Despite protests and advocacy sparking for equality in the 1950’s in western countries, only small strides had really been made. In fact, the media and entertainment industries didn’t help as Hollywood still portrayed it as a “Man’s World” (Raegan S Pechar, 2017).

Now, in the 21st century, it is not uncommon for us to have mothers that are also lawyer, doctors or even CEOs. In 2013 a study showed that only 1 in 8 people still believed that gender roles should be separated and valued the old-fashioned tradition. A tradition that has not changed much culturally, but has changed in the individual belief of most 21st century individuals.

So yes, yes I agree that gender relations have changed in the 21st century. African nations like South Africa have equally pushed hard for gender equity. In 2006, women comprised nearly 33% of members of Parliament, four of the nine provincial leaders were women, and the deputy president was a woman ([Charles Stewart Mott Foundation 2006](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2782559/#R3)). Significant progress has been made in closing gender gaps in Sub-Saharan Africa. As at 2008, there were 91 girls for every 100 boys in primary school, up from 85 girls in 1999. And at 61 percent, women in Sub-Saharan Africa had one of the highest labour force participation rates in the world in 2014 (The World Bank, 2014).

Gender roles have changed in various areas of day to day human life, one of which is the home. Both men and women now equally share responsibilities in caring for their home. Past gender roles would have expected the woman to carry out the daily household chores, cooking and cleaning. Whereas now the jobs at home are very much shared.

Even in the area of child care, the pressures of supporting a family and paying for childcare has changed unlike the past, were it was mostly the role for women, making them full-time stay at home mothers. Now most women work full-time or part-time, so that they can contribute towards the family’s finances.

**Regarding employment,** most couples will now have a full-time job and will share financial responsibilities for their home. In the past, a full-time job and financial responsibility were the role of men. Now that couples can both work, there is less pressure on finances.

 In today’s 21st century society there is even role reversal. In some families we are seeing a complete role reversal from the past where the woman is going out to work full-time and the man stays at home to look after the children and carry out the household chores.  Times are changing now and we are seeing many more men taking the paternal role and committing to being the stay at home parent while their partner goes out to work, compared to the 1900’s.

 I strongly believe that it is due to the changes in gender relations that female leaders have been able to rise within the African continent such as the 2012-2014 President of Malawi, Joyce Hilda Banda and Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, the President of Mauritius from 2015 – 2018 and even most presently, Sahle-Work Zewde, the President of Ethiopia since 2018 till date among history maker.

According to a 2014 report, ‘Drivers of change in gender norms,’ the factors that are driving change in gender relations include;

* **Economic change:** The impact of structural economic change, and in particular the entry of large numbers of women into the labour market, is one of the areas of gender relations that has received most academic attention.
* **Migration:** Migration has been classified as a drive toward change in gender relations because, when men migrate leaving their wives behind, women often take on a wider range of gender roles and increased decision-making power (Jolly and Reeves, 2005; Lopez-Ekra et al., 2011). Again, migration leads to change in gender norms is through exposure to new ideas.
* **Education:** Education levels influence attitude toward gender and social issues such as desired family size, support for gender equality.
* **Communication:** Media, information and communication technologies increase drive change in gender relations by increasing awareness on issues of gender equality through television, radio sets, computers, smartphones and other technological equipment.
* **Political and social mobilization:** Mobilisation aimed at changing laws or policies affecting gender inequality have contributed to change in gender relation. Write-ups of successful mobilisation focusing on specific gender equality campaigns, have been of massive contribution.
* **Legal change:** Considering that People who view the law as legitimate are more likely to comply with it even when it contradicts their interests. Laws enforcing gender equality have made possible changes in gender relations in societies (Rachel Marcus and Ella Page with Rebecca Calder and Catriona Foley, 2014).

In conclusion, as much as gender relations has changed over time, there is still a widespread concern regarding the failure to achieve gender equality at all institutional and societal levels. It is in such a context that state actors such as civil society groups, political parties, governments, supranational institutions, the media and individual citizens are rethinking and reimagining how to tackle and resist persistent gender inequalities. As addressing gender inequalities requires innovative and creative approaches (ACPR,2016). There are still challenges that need to be met regarding gender relations in our society.

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