



AN ANALYSIS OF GENDER DISPARITIES IN INDIAN EDUCATION

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Abstract

Gender Disparity in India means health, education, economic and political inequalities between men and women in India. Gender disparity is largely the result of the deeply ingrained systems of patriarchy. Discrimination against women begins before birth and called this systemic subordination. Gender inequality in India is a multifaceted problem that affects both men and women. Some argue that gender equality measures, place men at a disadvantage. Education is a fundamental right that provides children with the foundation to build secure futures. However, gender inequality in education continues to be a significant barrier for many children. There are great educational disparities among girls in India. Low literacy rates and lack of education are some of the inequalities found in this demographic. Many of these girls are raised without the expectation that they will complete their education, and since they become the mothers of the next generation, educational disparities become a cyclical, intergenerational issue. Many other factors contribute to the lack of education, such as cultural values, child marriage, a scarcity of feminine hygiene products, and child labor. The continued shortage of formal education among young females leads to poverty, decreased child well-being, health issues, and increased domestic violence. Several organizations work to advocate for equal education for girls, distribute reusable feminine hygiene products, and prevent child marriage in order to close the gender gap in Indian education.

This study analyzes the influence of education level and economic freedom on gender equality. Employing descriptive statistics, Quantitative and qualitative techniques, this study examines how social background, access to learning resources, time devoted to formal learning activities, and cultural attitudes are associated with gender inequality in educational outcomes.

Key words: Education, Infrastructure, Gender equality, Poverty, Social Empowerment.

Introduction

“Give me a good mother; I’ll give a good nation.” ~ The Conqueror Napoleon.

This bond between women and society is much closer and warmer in the Indian context.

“You teach a man, you educate him. You educate a woman, you educate a generation,” ~ Brigham Young.

This wisdom resonates deeply in the context of India, where addressing the root causes of the gender gap and prioritising women's education are crucial for societal progress.

Despite the numerous challenges to equity in the education arena, many social actors have exploited science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) as tools for social transformation and economic development. The women population constitutes nearly half of the world population. Therefore, the women population also represents half of human capital, a significant determinant of economic sustainability and social development. However, men and women do not generally have equal rights and opportunities in education, health, economic and social life in many countries, but gender inequality remarkably differs among countries depending on their cultural norms, and social and economic development levels.

In the current situation, 68% of girls are still educated as their discrimination affects the country and extreme racism deprives women of justice and equality, which is only education and enlightenment can secure. Equality and equity in education are directly related to the democratic development of the society, where the purpose of education is to produce knowledge makers with the capacity of making the most profitable use of the acquired knowledge. The majority of the nearly six million out-of-school children in India are girls. Between 2006 and 2010, only 26% of girls completed high school, compared to 50% of boys. This gender inequality is most evident in low-income families. Gender disparity is evident in India's childhood literacy rates 82% of boys are literate and only 65% of girls can read and write, according to the 2011 Census of India. Statistics show that about 10% more girls enrolled in Indian high schools by 2019 compared to 2011. While this is a significant increase, much remains to be done to ensure that girls receive the same education as boys.

The role of attitudes toward the education of girls is underexplored. Female students with parents who look favorably upon the education of girls might be expected to exhibit higher educational achievement relative to those without such parents. In order to answer these questions, this paper will explore the relative contributions that social background factors, learning resources, time devoted to learning, and cultural attitudes make to academic learning.

Review of Literature

Rishabh Chauhan (2024) underscores significant inequalities despite advancements. Research highlights gaps in access, retention, and academic performance, with rural areas facing the worst impacts. Cultural norms, poverty, and lack of infrastructure hinder girls' education, perpetuating gender imbalances. Although policies like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao and Right to Education Act have boosted awareness, their implementation remains uneven. Studies emphasize the role of community involvement, gender-sensitive curriculum, and scholarships in bridging gaps. Technology integration and policy reforms show potential, but achieving equality demands sustained efforts, greater investment, and targeted interventions.

World Bank (2023) studied that in the world competition, girls lag behind boys in all levels of education, in which it was estimated that the prime barrier for girls in competing 12 years of education is 15 trillion dollars and lost lifetime productivity and earning is 30 trillion dollars. Thus, poverty is the prime barrier because 72% of girls from the richest quintile families completed primary school education compared to 34% from the poorest quintile families in 24 low-income countries. Globally, 129 million girls are out of school, where 32 million are in the primary level, 97 million are in the secondary level, where South Asia comprises 46 million and 52 million are in Sub-Saharan Africa. In low-income countries, 90% completed the primary level, where 36% of girls and 44% of boys completed the secondary level. Two-thirds of the world's illiterate population are women. Learning Poverty measure showed that the average of Learning Poverty in Low and Middle-Income Countries indicates that boys are 59% compared to 55% for girls, where the difference is lower in low-income countries since the average Learning Poverty was 93% for both boys and girls.

Tzilivakis (2022) stated that Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) of the EU Commission has been working on sanctioning funds amounting to Euro 95.5 billion for research and innovation programme at higher education institutions which must have a Gender Equality Plan in place following the 2020 structural change project TARGET which introduced a reflexive policy and tools for each stage of the Gender Equality Plans such as from planning and implementation to monitoring and self-assessment.

Casad, Franks, Garasky, Kittleman, Roesler, Hall and Petzel (2020) examined that the progress toward gender equality in STEM is slow, where gender disparities worsen while the number of women postgraduate degree holders has increased in recent years. It has adverse effects on women's career advancement. The author identified three factors contributing to gender inequalities and women's departure from academic STEM fields. The factors are as follows: stereotype representation, which is less insufficient of social networks and bleak academic climates where the National Science Foundation took measures of recruiting diverse applicants (e.g., training search committees), mentoring, networking, and professional development (e.g., promoting women faculty networks); and developing academic environment (e.g., educating male faculty on gender bias).

European Institute for Gender Equality (2016) explained that the Gender Equality Plan could create (1) a structural change in research areas as well as in research organisations evaluating qualitative and quantitative indicators and with a good monitoring system implementing designed action toolbox (gender sensitive PhD supervision, gender equality workshops, project drafting and management, ensure greater visibility of women researchers, compulsory awareness-raising sessions, teaching free periods, family leave, maternity cover fund, gender-integrated leadership programme, preventing sexual harassment, gender lectureship, preparing gender report), (2) It needs legislative and policy background and key resources.

The research of Klasen and Lamanna (2008) revealed that gender inequality in education and employment generally reduces economic growth, examined during 1960-2000 through cross-country and panel regression analysis across the world's regions.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this research study is to analyze the existing gender disparities in the Indian education system by exploring the following aspects:

1. To identify the extent of gender-based differences in access to education, enrolment, retention, and literacy rates across various regions, socioeconomic strata, and levels of education in India.
2. To examine the influence of socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional factors on gender inequality in education, including parental attitudes, poverty, early marriage, and rural-urban disparities.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of government initiatives, policies, and schemes aimed at reducing gender disparities in education, such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, and Kanya Vidya Dhan.
4. To assess how reducing educational disparities can contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment in areas like employment, decision-making, and economic independence.
5. To propose practical strategies and recommendations for addressing the barriers to achieving gender parity in education, ensuring inclusive and equitable education opportunities for all.

Conceptual Framework and Research Design

This analysis will explore the primary factors of gender bias in Indian education with a specific focus on the development of literacy and numeracy skills. The preceding review indicates that many Indian girls experience lower quality school environments, are afforded fewer educational resources to support their learning, and struggle with family attitudes that do not encourage them to excel academically. Girls' time may also be diverted to household and childrearing tasks, leading to a decreased amount of time available for learning. As a population of special concern, girls from rural areas appear to have the least time devoted to learning, and have the lowest rates of enrollment, school attendance, and homework

completion. Given that the quality of learning opportunities available to girls may be fundamentally distinct from those of boys, gender will serve as a primary factor to be analyzed in this study.

Data and Methods

The data used in this analysis is from the Social Statistics Division, National Statistical Office, Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation, Government of India. According to data collected by the Indian Ministry of Education, two primary systems are used: the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) and the All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE). The purpose of the survey is to assess the socioeconomic conditions and human development needs of Indian society (Desai, Dubey, Joshi, Sen, Shariff, and Vanneman 2009). The comprehensive nature of the social, economic, and cultural variables that are measured in the National Statistical Office provide an excellent opportunity to expand the educational research literature in India by permitting the investigation of how social and contextual factors influence educational outcomes based on gender.

Literacy Rate in India by 2024

Education has long been recognized as a fundamental right with far-reaching consequences for human development and societal progress. The right to education is proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and various international covenants.

Literacy Rate is a key indicator of socio-economic progress of a country. Over the years, progress has been achieved by the country in raising literacy levels for both women and men in the country. Data on literacy rate in India shows that the rate increased from 43.6% in 1981 to 77.50% in 2023.

State-wise Literacy Rate Analysis:

Top Indian states: A detailed analysis reveals varying literacy rates in states like Kerala, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh.

Comparison over years: Tracking progress from previous data highlights improvements and challenges faced by different states.

Challenges in low literacy states: Factors like poor infrastructure, cultural barriers, and lack of resources hinder literacy growth.

Success stories: States like Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh showcase remarkable improvements through targeted initiatives and community engagement.

Gender Disparities in Literacy Rates: Gender equality in literacy is a pressing issue in India. Despite progress, gender disparities persist, with girls facing barriers to education due to societal norms and early marriage practices.

The literacy rate for individual states in India by 2024 showcases a promising trajectory towards improved educational outcomes and societal development. By focusing on state-wise analyses, identifying key drivers of literacy improvement, and implementing targeted initiatives, India is poised to make significant strides in achieving higher literacy rates and fostering a more literate society. It is imperative for stakeholders at all levels to prioritize literacy enhancement programs, leverage technological advancements, and address socio-economic disparities to ensure a brighter future for India's overall literacy landscape.

Female Literacy and Status in India

India has failed to provide universalization of education as it remains under the stranglehold of major stratifications leading to discrimination. Early marriage, social discrimination, and lack of education infrastructure have resulted in 60 million girls missing out on primary education and the gender gap remains a problem in the country. The Indian government has expressed a strong commitment towards education for all but still projects one of the lowest female literacy rates in Asia as there are almost 300 million women in India. Gender inequality persists, as social and legal institutions do not guarantee women's equality in basic human rights. It is a major area of concern at the school level and the literacy questions remain the largest juggernaut in the Indian management of education.

1. To locate the gaps and possibilities in girls education
2. To establish the link existing between education and women's quality of life
3. To propose and execute policy measures to enhance girls' education at all levels.
4. To set right the imbalance of relationships in a male-centered and dominated society, education and economic independence are imperative.

Quantitative and qualitative evidence shows a great deal of sexual discrimination, which confirms discrimination in the educational context. Women's ability to think independently and to participate equally with men will ensure gender equality and be in line with the Millennium Development Goals. The Indian government needs to identify those areas and cultural approaches that contribute to gender diversity in education.

Gender Inequality in Access to Education

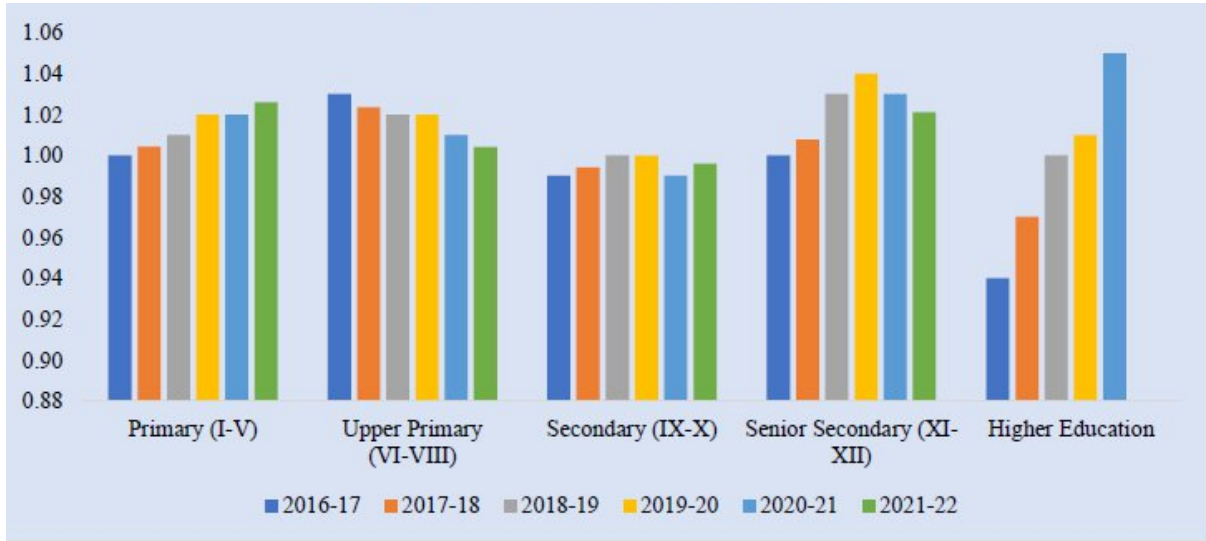
Gender inequality in education affects career prospects and equality in work opportunities. Gender gaps in career expectations are related to deeply ingrained gender-stereotyped norms about which careers are suitable for men and women. One important indicator to measure this gender gap is Gender parity Index (GPI). GPI (based on GER) which is free from the effects of the population structure of the appropriate age group, provides picture of gender equality in education.

Table 1: Year-wise Gender Parity Index (GPI) for all Categories of Students

Level	Primary	Upper Primary	Elementary	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Higher Education
वर्ष/ Year	(I-V)	(VI-VIII)	(I-VIII)	(IX-X)	(XI-XII)	
2005-06	0.94	0.88	0.92	0.80	0.80	0.69
2006-07	0.94	0.90	0.93	0.81	0.83	0.69
2007-08	0.98	0.91	0.96	0.85	0.84	0.70
2008-09	0.99	0.93	0.97	0.86	0.85	0.72
2009-10	1.00	0.94	0.98	0.88	0.87	0.74
2010-11	1.01	0.95	0.99	0.88	0.86	0.86
2011-12	1.01	0.99	1.00	0.93	0.92	0.88
2012-13	1.02	1.05	1.03	0.99	0.97	0.89
2013-14	1.01	1.04	1.02	0.99	0.98	0.92
2014-15	1.01	1.04	1.02	1.00	0.98	0.92
2015-16	1.01	1.04	1.02	1.00	1.00	0.92
2016-17	1.00	1.03	1.01	0.99	1.00	0.94
2017-18	1.00	1.02	1.01	0.99	1.01	0.97
2018-19	1.01	1.02	1.01	1.00	1.03	1.00
2019-20	1.02	1.02	1.02	1.00	1.04	1.01
2020-21	1.02	1.01	1.02	0.99	1.03	1.05
2021-22	1.03	1.00	1.02	1.00	1.02	-

Source:from 2005-06 to 2011-12, Educational Statistics at a Glance and from 2012-13 onwards, UDISE+, All India Survey on Higher Education, Ministry of Education.

GPI is defined as Ratio of GER of girls to GER of boys. It measures the progress towards gender parity in education participation and/or learning opportunities available for girls in relation to those available to



boys. It also represents the level of girls' empowerment in the society. -MoE

Source:UDISE+, Ministry of Education

Figure 1: Gender Parity Index

The figure above on Gender Parity index retrieved from **Table 1** shows an increasing trend in GPI at Primary and Higher Education level, declining trend at upper primary level and mixed trend at secondary and senior secondary level over the years. In 2021-22, Chandigarh, Assam and Delhi had the highest GPI at primary, secondary and senior secondary level respectively.

Data Analysis

Current State of Gender Parity in Education

World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Gender Gap Report 2024

- Ranking:** India is ranked 129th out of 146 economies in the 2024 Global Gender Gap Report.
- Educational Attainment:** India's gender parity score in education has declined from a perfect 1.000 in 2023 to 0.964 in 2024. This drop is attributed to updated figures showing a persistent gap in literacy rates between men and women.
- Literacy Rates:** The literacy rate for women stands at 64.63%, compared to 80.88% for men, a gap of 17.2 percentage points.

India has taken a tumble in the latest World Economic Forum (WEF) report for 2024, slipping to 129th out of 146 economies in the global gender gap rankings. This dip is primarily due to setbacks in the education sector, causing India to fall a couple of places from last year.

Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE+) and All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) Data

School Enrolment (2021-22):

- Total students:** 13.79 crore boys and 12.73 crore girls (48% of school population).

2. **Preschool:** Girls make up 46.8% of enrolled children.
3. **Primary School (Classes 1-5):** 47.8% girls.
4. **Upper Primary (Classes 6-8):** 48.3% girls.
5. **Secondary School (Classes 9-10):** 47.9% girls.
6. **Higher Secondary (Classes 11-12):** 48.3% girls.

The Ministry of Education's data, collected through the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE+) and the All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE), paints a more detailed picture. The UDISE+ report for 2021-22 shows that while boys make up a larger percentage of the school population, the gender gap varies across different stages of education. For instance, girls constitute 48 per cent of the school population overall, but this figure fluctuates at different educational levels. In preschool, girls make up 46.8 per cent of enrolled children, rising to 47.8 per cent in primary school and 48.3 per cent in upper primary school. However, the gap widens again in secondary school, with girls dropping to 47.9 per cent.

Higher Education Enrolment:

Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for women: 28.5% (slightly higher than 28.3% for men).

Increase in female enrolment in higher education by 32% since 2014-15.

The trend improves in higher education: as per the AISHE 2021 report, the gross enrolment ratio for women is higher than that for men, standing at 28.5 percent among the age group of 18 to 23 years. Female enrolment in higher education has increased by 28.3 percent over the past decade. The latest data from the Education Ministry is yet to be published.

The trend of women's equality tends to improve in higher education: as per the AISHE 2021 report, the gross enrolment ratio for women is higher than that for men, standing at 28.5 percent among the age group of 18 to 23 years. Female enrolment in higher education has increased by 28.3 percent over the past decade. The latest data from the Education Ministry is yet to be published.

The AISHE report highlights a significant rise in female enrolment for higher studies, with females comprising 45 percent of the total enrolment as per the 2014-15 report, marking a 4 percent increase. Currently, female enrolment stands at 49 percent of the total population as per the latest report.

In the northeastern part of the country, female enrolment exceeds that of males, with 6.14 lakh women enrolled in higher studies compared to 5.92 lakh males in 2020-21.

The number of females opting for science is notably lower compared to other streams, with only 29.5 lakh female students choosing the science stream, while male students outnumber females by 26 lakh, totaling 55.5 lakh.

Factors Causing Gender Inequality in Education

Undoubtedly, gender discrimination in the society is a grave concern, and a host of personal, societal and cultural aspects are at the core of this development. Gender inequality in education is caused by a number of factors and some of them are discussed here.

Socio-Economic Factors: In low-income countries, particularly in remote regions, socio-economic factors play a significant role in perpetuating gender inequality in education. Issues such as poverty, socio-political instability, and lack of access to school disproportionately affect girls' ability to receive an education. It's common for families in regions facing hardship to prioritize boys' education over



girls'. While the primary school completion rate for girls worldwide is 90% compared to boys, that parity drops significantly after primary school. And in communities where people experience extreme poverty, not all boys have adequate access to education.

Cultural and religious norms:In many cultures, girls are expected to prioritize household chores and caregiving responsibilities over their education.

Poverty: Poverty stands as one of the primary drivers of gender inequalities. According to the World Bank, approximately 70% of the world's impoverished population is female. Poverty restricts access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, thereby reinforcing a vicious cycle.

Child Marriage: Child marriage is another alarming aspect of gender inequality, disproportionately affecting girls. UNICEF estimates that 12 million girls are married before the age of 18 every year. Such practices hinder their personal development and perpetuate gender disparity across generations. Lack of education is one of the key causes of gender inequality that significantly exacerbates the problem. UNESCO reports that 132 million girls are out of school globally, with less access to learning opportunities than boys. Right to education is crucial in empowering girls to make informed choices, pursue careers, and challenge societal norms.

Poor Medical Health: Poor medical health also plays a pivotal role in maintaining gender discrimination in the society. In regions with inadequate healthcare facilities, girls face higher maternal mortality rates, limited access to family planning, and health-related biases.

Lack of Awareness & Patriarchal Norms: Lack of awareness and ingrained patriarchal norms further contribute to gender inequality. When societies perpetuate gender stereotypes and discrimination, it becomes challenging to break free from the shackles of inequality. Patriarchal norms hold back many girls from striving for their dreams by receiving a quality education, medical facilities and overall awareness for their well-being. To address gender inequality effectively, we must tackle these interconnected causes of gender inequality and work towards establishing sustainable change patterns that will successfully eradicate this vicious cycle of gender inequality.

Gender-based violence:Gender-based violence (GBV) contributes to the belief that men and women can be treated differently based on ingrained stereotypes around gender roles in society.

Patriarchal norms:Traditional gender roles and gender stereotypes restrict educational opportunities for girls. Traditional gender roles in various societies also contribute to the gender gap in education. Many societies expect girls to prioritize household chores and caregiving over formal education. Also, there are many cultures that see education as less important for girls compared to boys, which limits opportunities and the independence and empowerment that come with future job prospects. Challenging these norms is a central focus in the effort to close the gender gap in education.

Lack of political representation:Women are still grossly underrepresented in government and the political process.

Textbooks:Textbooks and other educational materials often contain gender bias, portraying men and women in stereotypical roles. For example, men may be depicted as scientists, leaders, and decision-makers, while women are often shown in nurturing or domestic roles.

Conclusion and Suggestions

There is no doubt that Gender Disparity has a long history. The education sector can certainly play a vital role in eliminating this gender inequality. It is very important to make people aware of the benefits of gender equality. Gender equity in education is not just a matter of fairness; it is a fundamental prerequisite for social empowerment and sustainable development. By ensuring equal access to quality education for all genders, we create pathways for individuals to fulfill their potential, participate meaningfully in society, and drive positive change. It is important to note that the inclusion of the concept of gender equality in the curriculum and the enactment of laws to eliminate gender inequality has a significant impact on the need to achieve the constitutional goal of establishing an equitable society. Education should be used as an agent for basic changes in the status of women. Achieving gender equity in education requires collective action. Therefore, we call upon governments, policymakers, educators, civil society organizations, and the private sector to prioritize gender equity in education as a cornerstone of their agendas. Let us commit to dismantling barriers, challenging norms, and fostering environments where every individual has the opportunity to thrive, regardless of gender. Together, we can build a more inclusive and equitable society for future generations.

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